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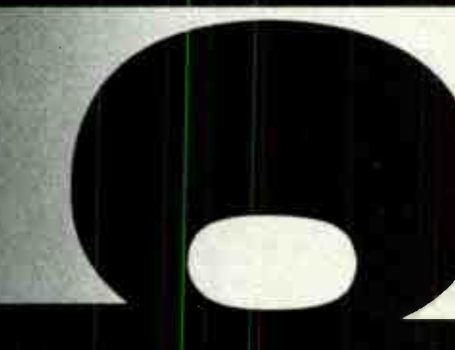


AND PROUD OF IT.

CONTENTS

New Music CDs p. 27

Musician Magazine • November 1991 • Issue No. 157

7 Front Man **Luther Vandross**
The rest of the world can do what it pleases—Luther will go on being perfectly Luther.
By J.D. Considine

20 Galactic Cowboys They harmonize like a heavenly choir but their music is heavy as hell. A new band to fuse your synapses.
By Ray Trakin

22 Jean Luc Ponty The jazz violinist blasts back with a new album of unexpected energy. It's the magic of Africa. By Gene Santoro

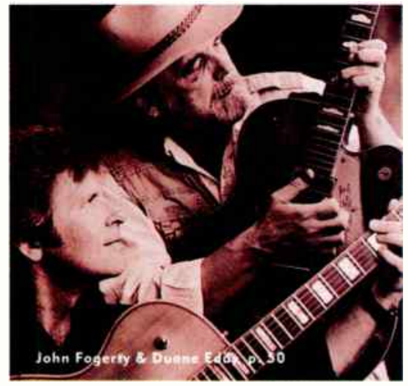
26 Young M.C. The college-student-turned-rap-master has been engaged in the sort of business battles you don't learn about in school. By Ray Trakin

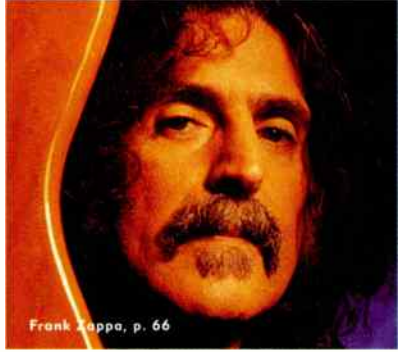
32 Jimi Hendrix in His Own Words
At the Jimi Hendrix Information Management Institute in Illinois, *Musician*'s **Scott Isler** pored over tapes of foreign radio interviews, TV shows, obscure underground newspapers—and came up with an oral autobiography of the great guitarist.

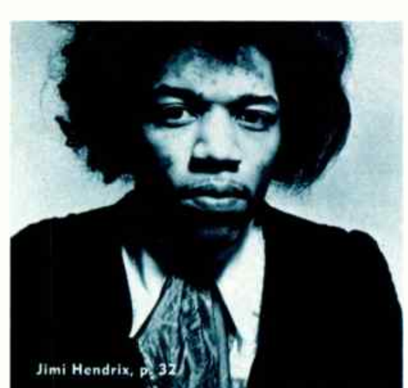
50 John Fogerty Meets Duane Eddy
In 1960 the kids who would become Creedence Clearwater Revival worshipped rock's first guitar hero. In 1991, John Fogerty engaged his idol in four hours of *Musician* interview.

60 Primus in Its Prime
Matt Resnicoff hangs with a head-banging, stage-diving, body-slamming, punk/thrash band with the mutant chops of fusion heroes.

106 Backside: The Ramones An Academic Interpretation
By George Kalagerakis


John Fogerty & Duane Eddy, p. 50


Frank Zappa, p. 66


Jimi Hendrix, p. 32

Primus, p. 60

Working Musician

66 Frank Zappa Teaches Us a Lesson
The man, the maestro, the misanthrope. Zappa unloads on record companies, studio musicians, rock critics, backstabbers and players who value success over music.
By Matt Resnicoff

79 Drums **Stewart Copeland**
A few concrete tips on how to get that airy, open sound. It's simpler than you think.
By Gene Santoro

82 Piano **Johnnie Johnson**
Chuck Berry's co-pilot on slipping in the sharps and flats to multiply your boogie.
By Jon Pareles

86 Bass **Roly Salley**
Roly had developed a unique approach playing with Woodstock folkies—but it was all wrong for Chris Isaak's band.
By Peter Cronin

88 Gig **Breaking into the Big Clubs**
You know how great your band is, but how do you convince the top club owners to give you a shot?
By Dan Daley

92 Developments
Gibson's new Classic Gold Amp, the Kawai GB-2 Session Trainer, Andrew Barta's Sansamp and more...
By the Musician Brain Trust

Departments

10 Letters Birthday Stingers
13 Faces Dave Alvin, B.A.D....
18 Charts Meat Loaf for all
90 Performance MTV Video Awards
94 Recordings G 'N' R, Public Enemy
98 Short Takes John Lee Hooker, J.J. Johnson, more
Also: Masthead p. 8, Reader Service p. 105

Cover: Michael Ochs Archive. **This Page** (from top): Mark Tucker, Michael Grecco/Outline, Michael Ochs Archive, Catanzaro & Mohdessian.

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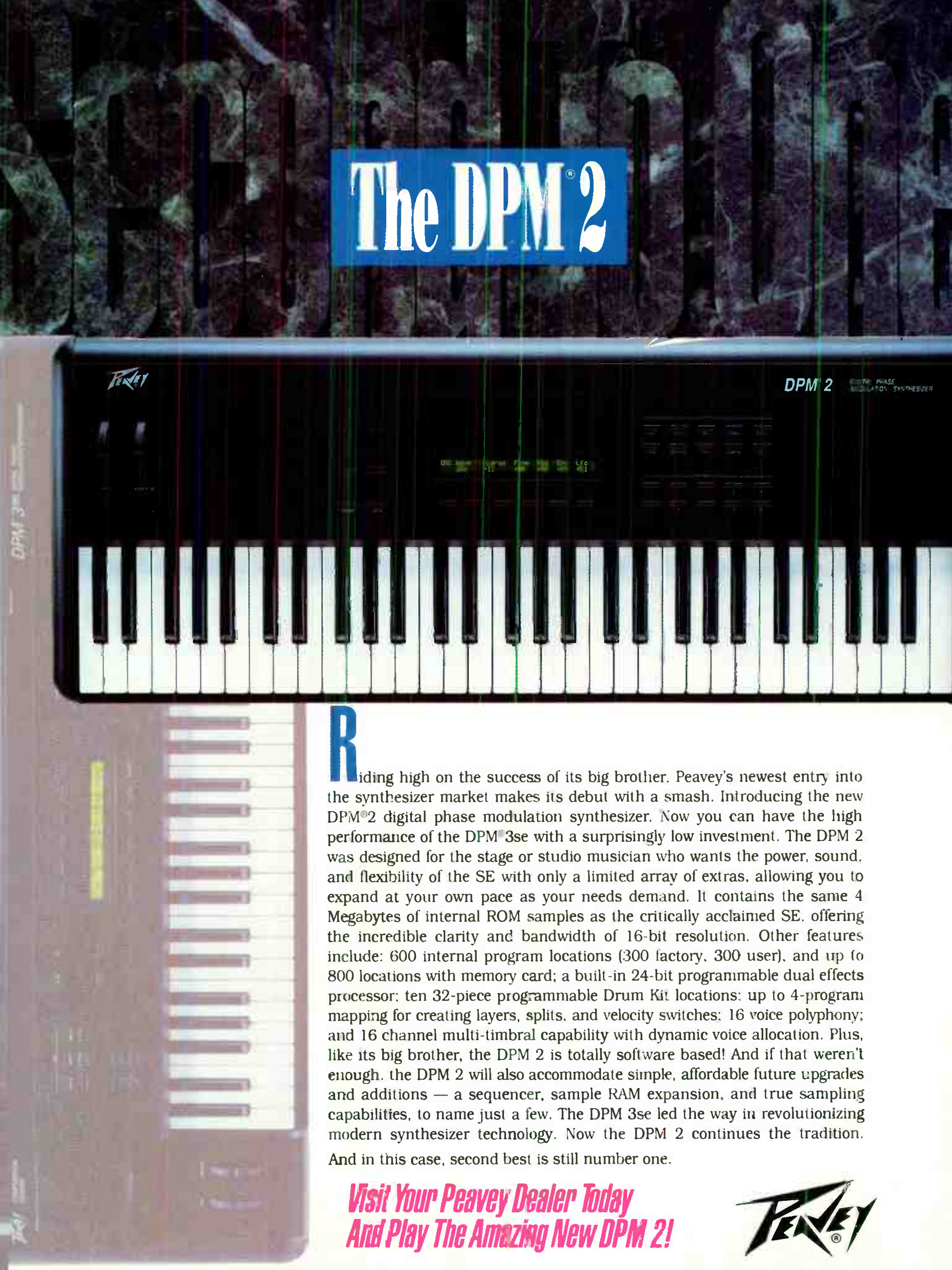
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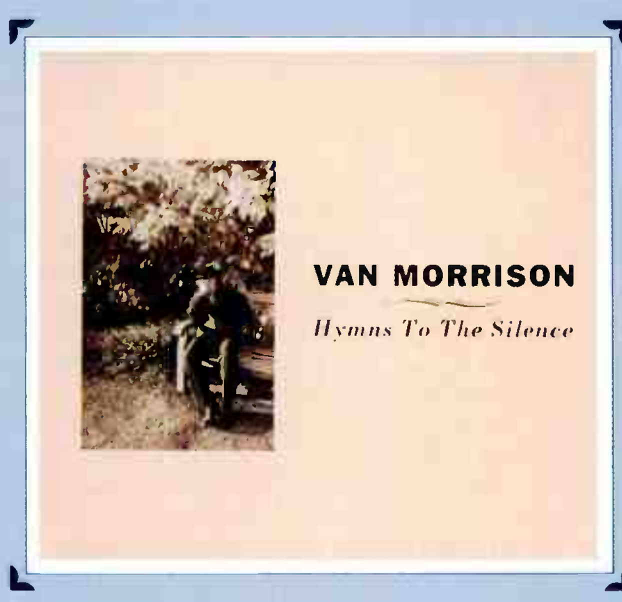

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Luther Vandross

Marcus Miller said it was amazing how clearly you conceive your recordings, that not only would you know how you'd want a harmony part voiced, you'd know exactly who you'd want singing each note.

I see it the same way a casting director might see casting for a particular project. I know when Cissy Houston is the right soprano for these songs, I just know it—and when she walks in, and the distance between what I imagine and [what I hear] when she starts singing with the rest of the singers is zero. It's exactly like I knew it would be. It's amazing to see a song get built and built and layered and layered. I love it!

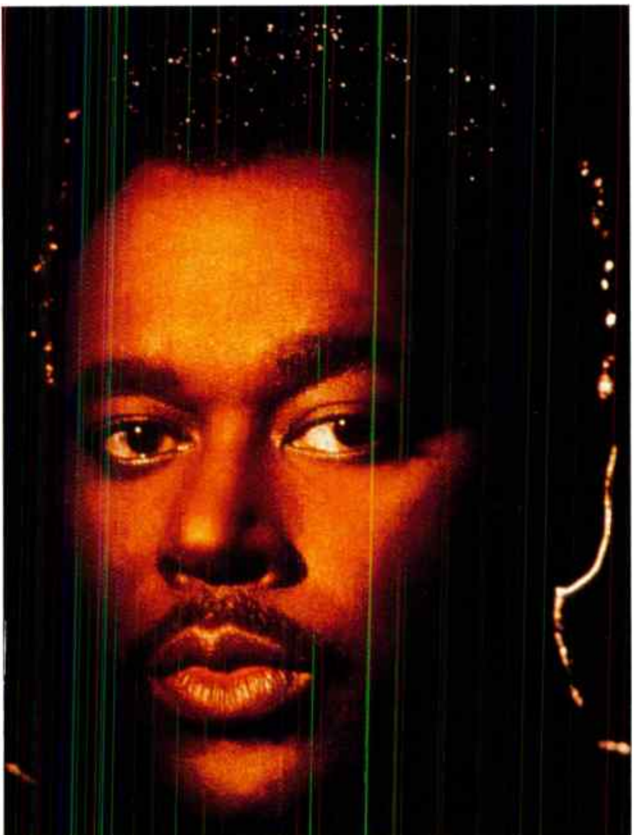
I was a recording buff from the early days. I was a background singer and a jingle singer. So I learned to love the studio and love the microphone in the studio. For me, there's nothing like it being four o'clock in the morning and you're standing there singing, "I Who Have Nothing" or something like that, and there's no one in the room except you and the engineer. All the lights are on, and you're just singing and the echo in the headsets is killing you and—oh, it's great.

You don't have trouble finding listeners, but I wonder if you ever have people saying, "Hey, Luther, maybe some of this new jack beat on your songs would appeal more to the younger people."

You know what? That's really not the case. First of all, if it was the case, I could not succumb to that type of pressure to keep up with the Joneses. If you are successful at what you do, why try to be like one of your peers? If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

I enjoy that new jack stuff, and a lot of it I could fit into. But I don't feel obligated to do anything other than make sure that I'm happy at the end of a recording project—because that's when I find that the listener is happiest.

True. But so much of the industry seems to be oriented to the business end, and forgetting that it's the music that should matter most. Obviously your records are about music.



"I don't have to jump from tables or do splits. I'm not Gerardo. Leave Gerardo to the Gerardos."

Exactly. But then there's also the question of delivery. You've got to consider who I am and what kind of delivery I want to have. I don't mind being called a ballad singer, but if anybody thinks that I'm *only* a ballad singer, that would unnerve me a bit. I mean, "Never Too Much" and "Stop to Love" and "Give Me the Reason" are all uptempo material that did very well. The ballads stick because they touch a different place, and people tend to want to see you do that. But you've got to think of the big picture too. When you go to concert you can't just sing two hours of ballads.

On the other hand, I don't want to jump around. I don't want a career based on anything where I have to jump from the table to the chair, and do a split and then come up. I'm not Gerardo, please. Leave the Gerardo to the Gerardos.

Video has given the visual aspect of performance much more prominence, though. Does that seem like a good thing, or does it detract from the music?

Video has introduced a new perspective, but I don't think it sets the rule for everybody. Why do I make videos? Because they tell me that making videos is a good way to help the record. That's why.

My first love is not the camera. There might be a bunch of singers—who will remain nameless—who have a deficiency in the vocal department and thank their lucky stars that the visual medium came up. They can fling it at the camera, and with 80 percent camera work and 20 percent vocal ability, they get a stunning career.

But when I grew up, the only time we got to see Aretha Franklin or somebody was an occasional appearance on Clay Cole or whoever it was, or the Supremes on Ed Sullivan. Basically, they had to really be able to bring forth their musical talent. But now it's a different balance. Now, you can have less vocal ability if you have the right looks and the right moves.

And actually, there's nothing wrong with that. I just worry that you'll never get to have an "Alfie" and "Respect" and "Chain of Fools" and "Stop in the Name of Love" to listen to now and look back on, like I have from my childhood. I wonder what my 10-year-old niece is going to have? **—J.D. Considine**

Photograph: Mathew Rolston

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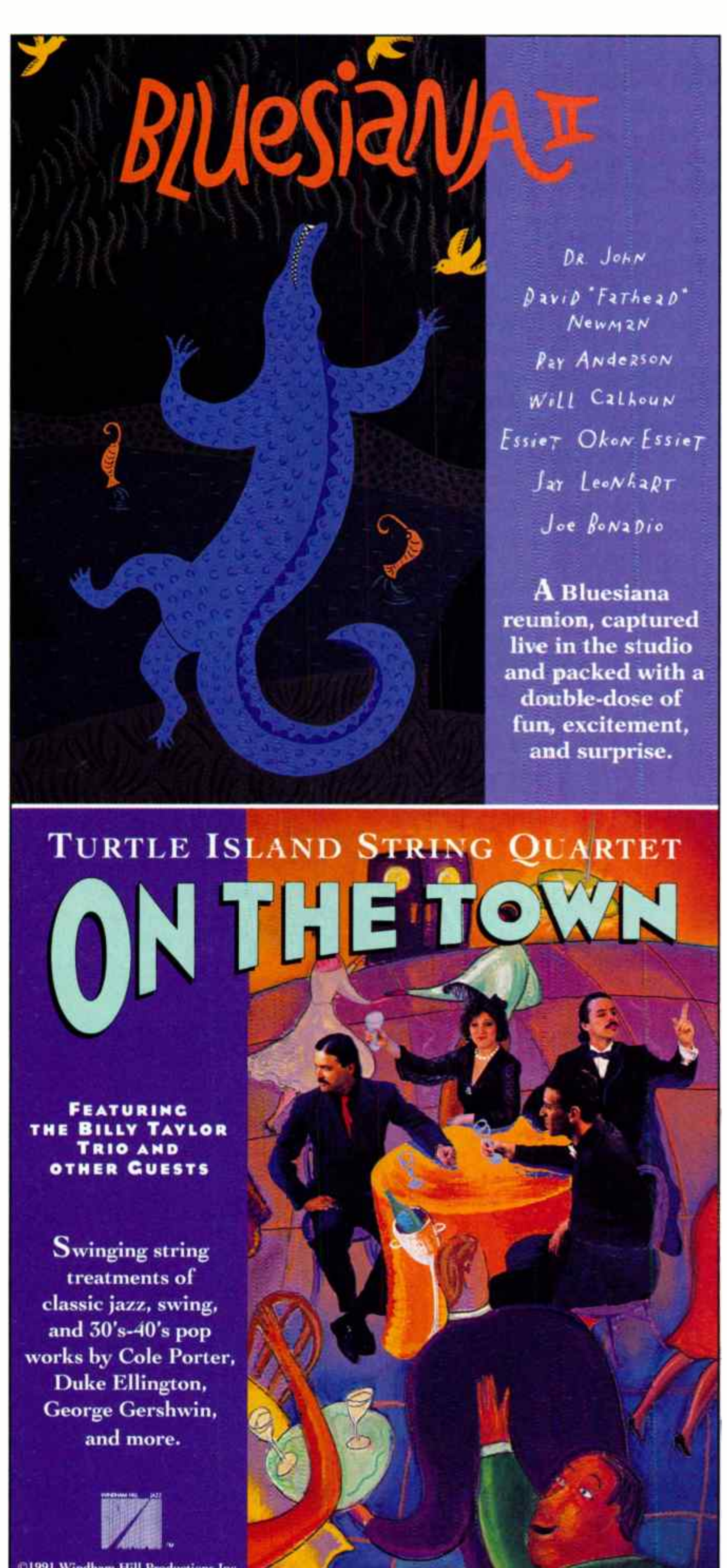

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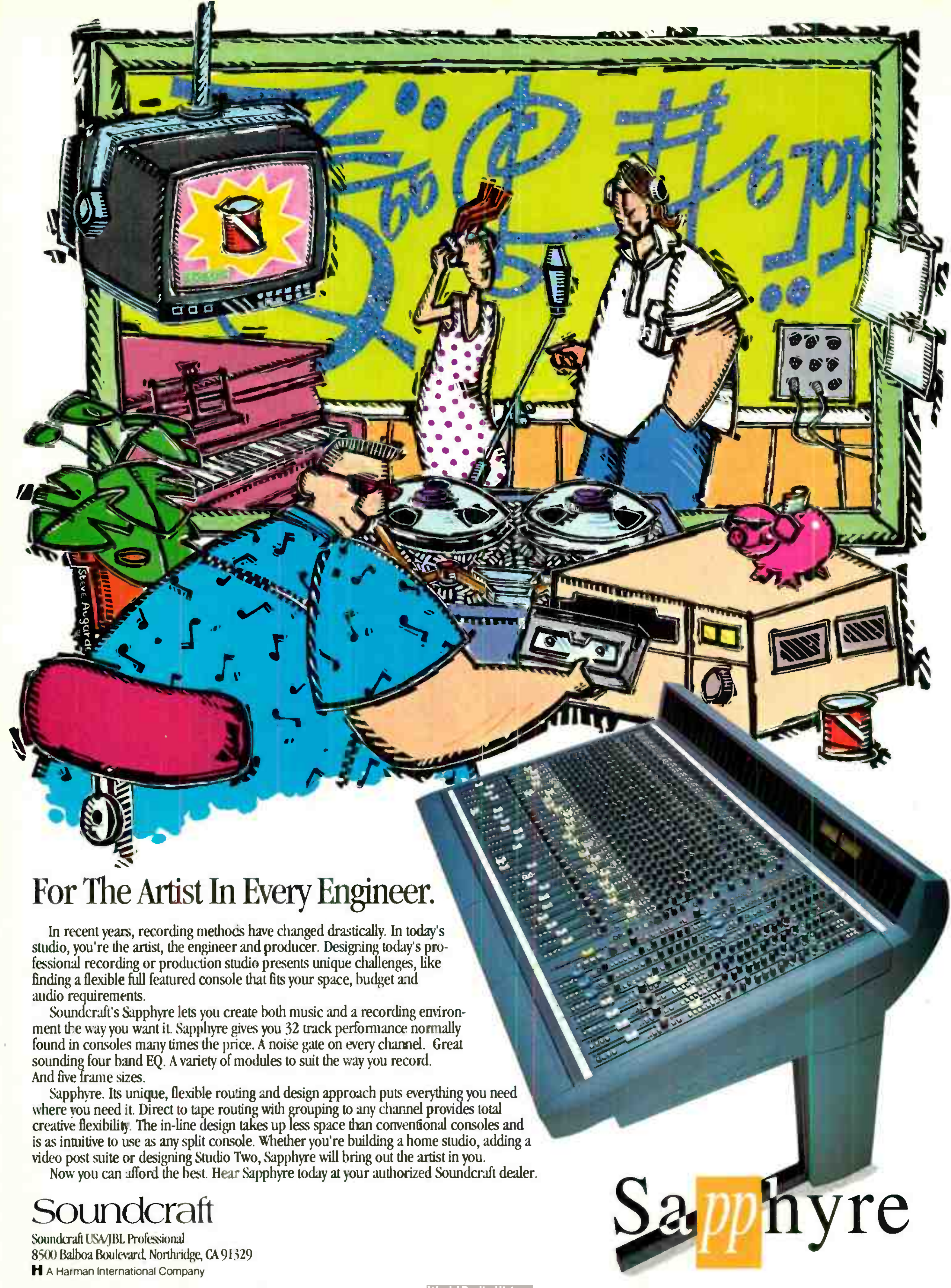

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LETTERS

Birthday Cards

CONGRATULATIONS ON 15 YEARS OF *Musician* (August '91). But bigger congrats for hitting on something I've believed for years: that writing about music is a helluva lot less interesting than listening or playing.

Still, Charles M. Young is right: *Somebody* has to write it! Yeah, Charles, we do have to read about politicians, too. Actors? I agree: 98 percent of them have nothing to say outside their work, assuming even their work is worth our time.

Why does a 43-year-old out-of-work newspaperman and part-time drummer keep reading *Musician*? If it's a jazzman—or woman—I read it. If it's about a performance or playing, I read it. If it's about the music business, I read it. If it's a record review, I read it up to a point. If I'm told what the record is about, I keep reading. If I'm told Sam Phillips has created "a small, circumscribed shelter from the storm," I skip to someone who remembers the purpose of reviews.

Oh yeah: If it's about Sting? I skip it!

Stuart "Penguin" Faxon
Finksburg, MD

STING IS A MAN WHO HAS BEEN referred to as being arrogant and rather eccentric. Nonetheless, I believe he is a man who is "being what he came here for," and in his role as a musician, he focuses his attention upon human-kind, human rights and even human destruction. The messages hidden in the lyrics of his inspirational compositions are full of peace and love. If people like Sting dedicate a great part of their time trying to make this world a better place to live in, even though it's not up to him, but up to all of us to solve this problem, then we should agree with Shakespeare's advice: "If music be the food of love...Play On!"

Sandy Thrush
Panama City, Republic of Panama

HOW NICE IT IS TO SEE STING'S SENSE of humor as he covers up the images of his erstwhile bandmates with his fingers! And did anyone *else* notice his index finger pointing to the words "The Pretenders"? This is nearly as good as scrutinizing a Beatles record cover!

David Hakes
Sunnyside, NY

WOULD YOU PLEASE TELL STING TO move his hand? I want a better view of Stewart Copeland.

Sharon Goggans
Oklahoma City, OK

THANKS FOR A VERY LONG, VERY informative article on Sting—wow! What a guy! It's so refreshing to see a person applauded for being wise and truthful—and not for turning out the same old bull for the screaming masses.

V. LeBlanc
New Orleans, LA

HAPPY BIRTHDAY! I'VE BEEN A HAPPY reader (most of the time) for about six years. I've always said that you guys were for real and the others were just pretending.

While reading the piece about your covers (*Backside*, August '91), I realized that you have skipped over by far the most important and influential artist ever: Bob Dylan. How can this be? Jimi Hendrix has been dead for 20 years yet he's been on the cover three times. Slash has been on twice and just what the hell has he ever done? But at least you had the honesty to admit that you put certain people on the cover to sell magazines. As Uncle Bobby said many years ago, "Money doesn't talk, it swears."

Marty Revels
Smyrna, SC

IF YOU WANT TO SELL *MUSICIAN* YOU can put Miles Davis on the cover. Ted Nugent on the cover. John Coltrane, Mark Whitfield, Glenn Phillips and Frank Zappa on the cover—but never Phil Collins.

David Sexton
Jacksonville, IL

Primo Rush

WHEN I READ J.D. CONSIDINE'S review of Primus' album (August '91) I was alternately laughing and throwing things. As both a lifelong Rush fan and a new Primus fan I was really caught off guard with his comparison. Basically he said if you take away what makes Primus different then they sound like someone else. Well, *duh*! The same could be said about anybody. As Laurie Anderson said, "Talking about music is like dancing about architecture."

Darrin Morphis
Jackson, TN

STRIP AWAY ALL THE TALENT AND creativity of an experimental and fun band like Primus and all you're left with is an ignorant critic who can't differentiate between *Rush* and Pere Ubu. How sad.

David Talento
Philadelphia, PA

Money for Nothing

OVER THE YEARS I'VE SEEN MANY SIGNS telling me the music industry is no longer about music but only about money. But your "Phantom Zone" article (August '91) really spelled it out for me. To see a band like the Silos be dropped from their label makes me want to put down my guitar and quit writing songs.

Dan Patscot
Milwaukee, WI

Old Duck

BEING A 40-YEAR-OLD MUSICIAN, IT'S good to read that the people like "Duck" Dunn that inspired you 25 years ago are still around and kicking.

Bart Rollins
Brentwood, TN

Sounding Off

PROBABLY THE STRONGEST EDUCAtional lesson to come out of your *Sound Off!* column is to confirm what I already knew but which, unfortunately, many Americans still seem to forget: Fame does not equal wisdom and rock stars are not necessarily any more qualified to speak on important political issues than anyone else. I have been disappointed by the inane and childish way musicians have "lashed out" against "censorship." Truth in advertising is not synonymous with censorship—or McCarthyism. Some intelligent and open-minded people view Parental Advisory labeling of "explicit" material (*not* labeling it "obscene") as a responsible tool in our society's unprecedented state of barrier-free consumerism and family fragmentation.

So I was grateful to see an essay by Peter Himmelman in the September *Musician*. His rebuke of the rock establishment for claiming moral authority simply because of the political correctness of this issue was right on target. The solemn preachiness of many of your guest columnists barely covers the spoiled squeals of defiantly irresponsible self-centered "artists" who suddenly find their extravagant "freedoms" trimmed just a tiny bit. Such "Whine Offs" may not justify censorship, but they certainly add to the credibility of the other side's stereotypes of us.

Thank you, Mr. Himmelman. I hope lots of people—on both sides—read your column.

Paul A. Seaman
Bethesda, MD

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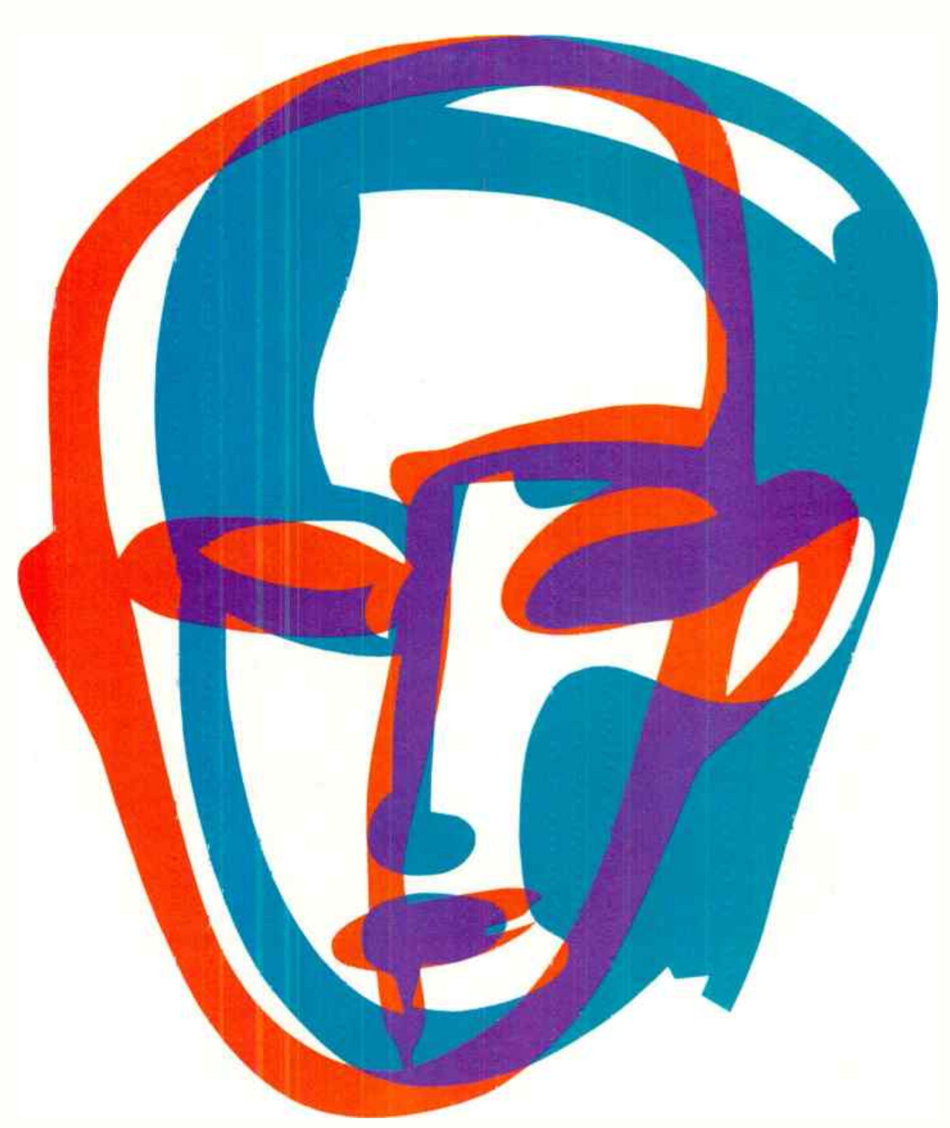

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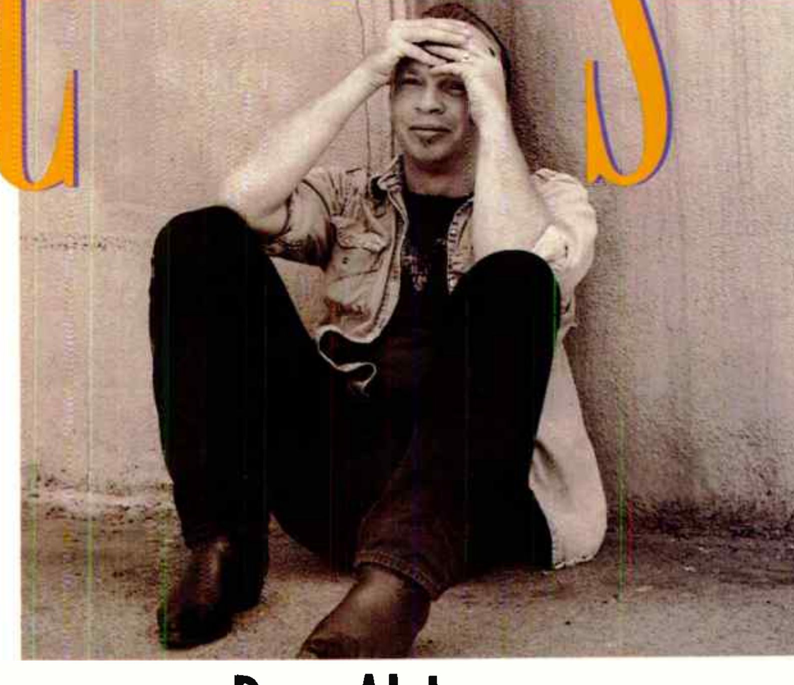


Mick Jones

ANOTHER B.A.D. CREATION

THE CLASH'S "REMOTE CONTROL" CONTAINED INCISIVE sarcasm toward rock's high-tech leanings ("Push a button, activate..."), but a lot of twains are meeting under the rubric of dance rock, and these days Mick Jones is just as adept with samplers and other digital gizmos as he is with his Les Paul. So if you hear the leader of Big Audio Dynamite II waxing effusively about De La Soul's "genius," or see him shaking a tail feather at a rave, don't be too surprised. "I go out to the clubs, yeah," says Mick Jones. "I like that underground scene because it's not exclusive, it tries to build a community where a plumber can be the hero on the dancefloor. In that way it's similar to punk."

The deployment of beats and samples on B.A.D. II's *The Globe* is done with the freewheeling audacity and wry humor that have marked Jones' work since "Jail Guitar Doors." While it's currently très chic to braid elements of black and white cultures, B.A.D. has been attempting to upend the clichés of hiphop and rock since the mid-'80s. "What you can do with the two is endless," says Jones. "The mix-and-match process allows you to never play the same song twice."

Speaking of twice, the "II" designation on the band's moniker is due to the dissolution of the original group; new members, including S.S. Sputnik drummer Chris Kavanagh, have replaced Jones' longtime partner Don Letts in a split that "wasn't particularly amicable.

"It's a different band," Jones says, "and it may be a puzzle to find the songs in between all the DJ and sequencer stuff, but they are there, I assure you." **JIM MACNIE**

Nick Hawkins, Mick Jones, Gary Stonadge & Chris Kavanagh

Dave Alvin

OF COMETS, CADILLACS & COMEBACKS

EX-BLASTER AND EX-X MEMBER Dave Alvin knows what it's like to fall between the cracks. After all, some of his idols are obscure pioneers like Skip James and Ramblin' Thomas. "I just hate it when people go, 'Whatever happened to so-and-so?' in a derisive way," he says.

People might ask the same thing about Alvin. It's been four years since his solo album, *Romeo's Escape* though he's kept busy playing and touring with the Paladins, Syd Straw and the Pleasure Barons, and collaborating with directors David Lynch and John Waters. The composer of such classics as "Marie Marie" and "American Music" went through some hard times, too, suffering from spinal meningitis and the misunderstandings of his previous record company, where he was signed by the Nashville division.

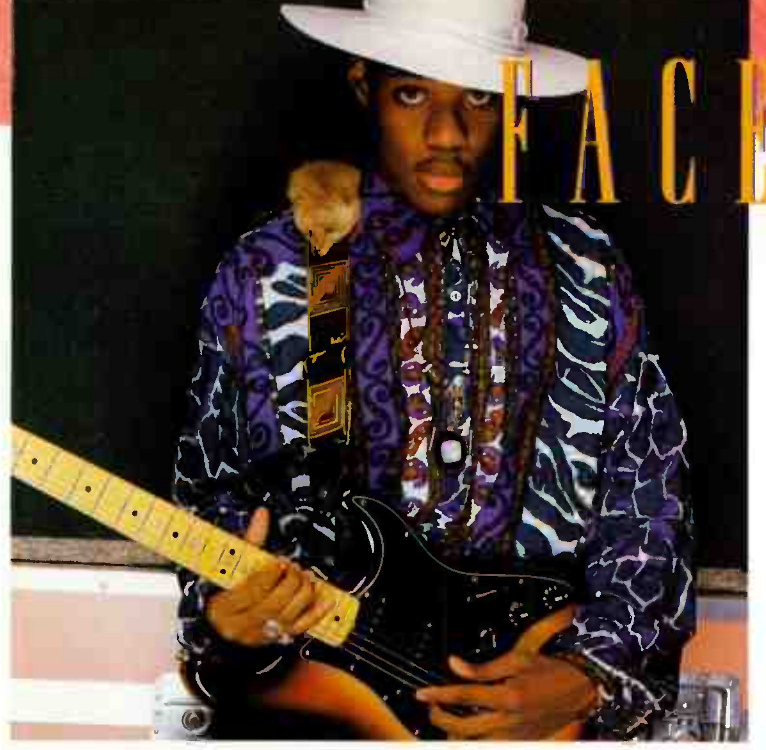
"I respect and love country music, but I'm not a country artist," he says. "As soon as you say Al Green or Muddy Waters, you lose that audience. It's not a racial thing as much as a genre thing."

Dave's new album—recorded with royalties from Dwight Yoakam's hit cover of his "Long, White Cadillac"—is American roots music. "Andersonville" is the record's set piece, based on letters Dave discovered in the family attic, written by an ancestor in a Confederate prison during the Civil War. "Haley's Comet" tells of Bill Haley's final days, and sums up Alvin's feelings about celebrity. "He'd walk up to strangers in coffee shops and ask if they knew who he was," says Alvin, who insists fame and fortune have never been his guiding forces.

"If I had finished *Hit Men* before I did this record, I probably wouldn't have done it," he laughs. "I don't want to get bogged down in business. This is still fun for me." **ROY TRAKIN**

Photography: Susan Goines (top)

World Radio History



Eric Gales Band

THE NEXT BIG TWANG

THE ERIC GALES BAND IS MAKing their first national tour, but you get the impression you've been part of this scene before. Could it be the guitarist, Fender Strat in hand, powering choruses of explosive blues-rock through Marshall amps while grinning shyly under the wide brim of a black felt hat?

"People say, 'You look just like Hendrix onstage,'" Eric admits. "Or Stevie Ray Vaughan. My main influence these days is Eric Johnson, even if you can't hear it. I try to tie them all into my own sound. But I can learn something from the worst player in the world. I never think, 'I'm bad, now I can stop learning.'"

That's encouraging, as Gales is 16 years old. And at times his band's self-titled debut does reveal youthful infatuation with the aforementioned masters. But Eric is also a natural performer whose emotional style and ease of command mark him as a player worth watching.

The same could be said of his band, whose direction owes as much to brother Eugene Gales, 30, who plays bass and sings. The oldest of five boys growing up in Memphis, Eugene was wild for Albert and B.B. King, a trait he passed on to his siblings (another brother, blues guitarist "Little Jimmy King," was recently signed by Rounder). Eric, the youngest, began picking guitar melodies at age four, and taught himself keyboards, drums and sax.

With Eugene's pal Hubert Crawford Jr. on drums, the trio took shape about four years ago. They jammed a lot but played out sparingly, mostly covers. After winning a talent contest the band was offered a record deal—provided they come up with original material—so Eugene wrote an album's worth of songs the following month. "We're raw, it's no secret," Eugene says. "Everything's not all slicked up and perfect. But it's real." MARK ROWLAND

Francesca Beghe

DOES IT HER WAY

IN AN ERA WHERE PRETTY GIRLS AND PRETTIER BOYS GET instant record deals because they have the right look and package, singer/songwriter Francesca Beghe got hers the old-fashioned way. As a teen she hung out in the jazz bars of her native New York, joined a few terrible rock bands, got fired for refusing to do Top 40 covers and, yes, waitressed. In other words, she *earned* it.

Her self-titled first album is the kind of stunning, poised debut they don't make anymore. The record's tough, tender but no-nonsense style was influenced, she says, by the diversity she found in the Apple. "Just in my neighborhood we have Haitians and all kinds of Hispanics—Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans. I open my window and I've got Haitian music and salsa blasting all the time."

The music those influences created in her is a bit more adventurous than most. "I never thought of my music as mass appeal. It's a little more complicated than regular pop, even though I love pop and I love hooks." It might sound like the rose-tinted assessment of someone who's just a little full of herself, but it's not. One listen to Beghe's album is enough to convince cynics that the lady is a find. LEONARD PITTS, JR.

N E W S

NICHOLAS SCHAFFNER, 1953–1991: Few music journalists are as well-known as their more glamorous subject matter. Nicholas Schaffner's reputation, though, was as high in his field as the (invariably British) pop stars he wrote about were in theirs. In 1988 Musician had him cover Pink Floyd's ongoing world tour. That experience went into Saucerful of Secrets, Schaffner's authoritative biography of the band, published earlier this year.

Sad to say, it is Schaffner's last book. He died, aged 38, on August 26 of AIDS-related illnesses. Nick was a pleasure to deal with, from his soft-spoken but witty demeanor right down to the printed page. He will always be a pleasure to read; other books include The Beatles Forever, The British Invasion and The Fool's Journey, a volume of poetry. As a musician he released the album Magical Kingdoms. He will be missed—not least by his editors. SCOTT ISLER

Photography: Scott Bonner (top); Aldo Mauro

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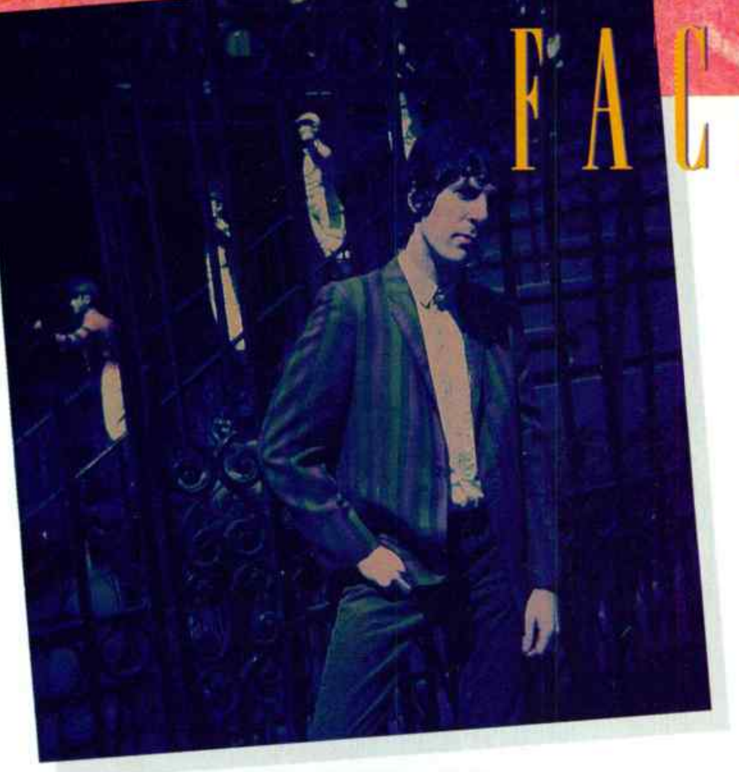

Richard X. Heyman

HEY MAN! STOP LIVING IN THE PAST

I'M ADOPTING A NEW, POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE MUSIC scene," Richard X. Heyman announces. "After 15 years of being ignored, you become real negative and jealous of successful people. I'm just coming to terms with that now." The obscurity should end with *Hey Man!*, a collection of jangling guitars and rich melodies that reflects his love for the Beatles, Beach Boys and Phil Spector. Heyman plays almost all the instruments himself, but unlike many overdub junkies, he's got kickin' rhythms, too. "My drumming was the reason I felt I could pull it off," he explains. "With most one-man bands, drumming is secondary—it was the foundation of my record."

In fact, Heyman was good enough behind the kit to back guitar god Link Wray in the late '70s before setting off after stardom. What awaited, mostly, was dreadful day jobs. "I worked in a head shop on MacDougal Street for three years, and didn't even know what some of the things I sold were for," Heyman laughs. "Later I was an audio technician for a phone-sex service. That's how I financed my independent records." He released the EP *Actual Size* on his own, which led to the indie-label *Living Room!!* and then *Hey Man!*, co-produced by Heyman and good ol' Andy Paley, on Sire.

There's more to Heyman than catchy power pop. An animal-rights advocate, he plans to open a cat shelter if the LP makes money ("Monica," on the new album, is about his kitty). And what's the deal with the X? The soft-spoken Heyman says it's short for nothing. In the army, his father admired a general named Xavier, but didn't want to saddle his Jewish son with that. So simply X it became.

"When I was a kid, I was unique, but in the late '70s every other new-wave group had an X in the title. Today, though, I feel like I'm the one true X."

JON YOUNG

Ali Akbar Khan

ALL IS BLISS, ALL IS BLISS

NO ONE HAD THE NERVE TO ASK ANY QUESTIONS WHEN ALI Akbar Khan—Khansab to students and converts—opened the floor and folded his hands. Then one gentleman started speaking, in a thick Indian accent. "Khansab is more than a maestro, he's a mystic," he said. "At the end of the world, God goes to sleep. God is bliss. The quiet bliss begins to bubble and he wakes, celebrating his wakening by dancing. The dance is bliss and expansion of bliss. We all are the expression of his bliss. The sound is Indian music."

Khansab had just performed for an invited audience at Cello Music Systems to benefit the Ali Akbar Khan College of Music in San Rafael, and for the first time in 15 years he played *alap*, uncushioned by tabla drumming—the most demanding setting the form offers. To prepare, Khan spent the afternoon listening to attendee Bob Ludwig's new remasterings of his early Connoisseur Series recordings, and his new *The Journey*. Hoi polloi watched portions of classes videotaped at the college. "It's an experience beyond anything I can put into words," one student said onscreen, "though I might be able to put it into music."

Lips pursed, head tilted, Khansab hammered his sarod deep inside the studied rhythms his students say are passed along by feeling, by understanding. "It takes 20 years to properly learn a raga," commented another, "and a raga is about life. When we listen to a musician, we want to hear someone with something to say." Khan nodded. What he spoke in unamplified English was incomprehensible; what he played was ineffable.

MATT RESNICOFF

Photography: Aldo Mauro (top); Jay Blakesberg

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THE MUSICIAN CHARTS

Presented by

Top 100 Albums

The first number indicates the position of the album this month, the second its position last month.

This Month	Last Month	Artist	Album/Label
1	1	**Natalie Cole**	*Unforgettable*/Elektra
2	5	**Bonnie Raitt**	*Luck of the Draw*/Capitol
3	71	**Color Me Badd**	*C.M.B.*/Giant
4	11	**Boyz II Men**	*Cooleyhighharmony*/Motown
5	2	**Van Halen**	*For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*/Warner Bros.
6	4	**C&C Music Factory**	*Gonna Make You Sweat*/Columbia
7	9	**Michael Bolton**	*Time, Love and Tenderness*/Columbia
8	3	**Paula Abdul**	*Spellbound*/Captive
9	—	**Metallica**	*Metallica*/Elektra
10	7	**R.E.M.**	*Out of Time*/Warner Bros.
11	13	**Soundtrack**	*Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*/Morgan Creek
12	8	**Garth Brooks**	*No Fences*/Capitol
13	15	**Amy Grant**	*Heart in Motion*/A&M
14	17	**Extreme**	*Extreme II Pornograffitti*/A&M
15	31	**D.J. Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince**	*Homebase*/Jive
16	35	**Soundtrack**	*Boyz N the Hood*/Qwest
17	12	**The Black Crowes**	*Shake Your Money Maker*/Def American
18	10	**N.W.A.**	*Efil4zaggin*/Ruthless
19	6	**Skid Row**	*Slave to the Grind*/Atlantic
20	22	**Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers**	*Into the Great Wide Open*/MCA
21	14	**Mariah Carey**	*Mariah Carey*/Columbia
22	20	**Scorpions**	*Crazy World*/Mercury
23	29	**Heavy D. & the Boyz**	*Peaceful Journey*/MCA
24	25	**Queensryche**	*Empire*/EMI
25	19	**Luther Vandross**	*Power of Love*/Epic
26	18	**EMF**	*Schubert Dip*/EMI
27	41	**Candy Dulfer**	*Saxuality*/Arista
28	21	**3rd Bass**	*Derelicts of Dialect*/Def Jam
29	85	**Seal**	*Seal*/Sire
30	33	**Firehouse**	*Firehouse*/Epic
31	50	**The Geto Boys**	*We Can't Be Stopped*/Rap-A-Lot
32	16	**Another Bad Creation**	*Coolin' at the Playground Ya' Know!*/Motown
33	39	**Rod Stewart**	*Vagabond Heart*/Warner Bros.
34	73	**Trisha Yearwood**	*Trisha Yearwood*/MCA
35	26	**Jesus Jones**	*Doubt*/SBK
36	37	**Travis Tritt**	*It's All About to Change*/Warner Bros.
37	28	**Roxette**	*Joyride*/EMI
38	61	**Soundtrack**	*Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey*/Interscope
39	23	**Wilson Phillips**	*Wilson Phillips*/SBK
40	34	**Anthrax**	*Attack of the Killer B's*/Megaforce
41	40	**Ricky Van Shelton**	*Backroads*/Columbia
42	53	**Lenny Kravitz**	*Mama Said*/Virgin
43	27	**Alan Jackson**	*Don't Rock the Jukebox*/Arista
44	—	**Marky Mark & the Funky Bunch**	*Music for the People*/Interscope
45	42	**Garth Brooks**	*Garth Brooks*/Capitol
46	24	**Soundtrack**	*New Jack City*/Giant
47	36	**DJ Quik**	*Quik Is the Name*/Profile
48	44	**Madonna**	*The Immaculate Collection*/Sire
49	75	**The KLF**	*White Room*/Arista
50	30	**L.L. Cool J**	*Mama Said Knock You Out*/Def Jam
51	43	**Ice-T**	*O.G. Original Gangster*/Sire
52	32	**UB40**	*Labour of Love II*/Virgin
53	70	**Clint Black**	*Put Yourself in My Shoes*/RCA
54	57	**Hi-Five**	*Hi-Five*/Jive
55	56	**Reba McEntire**	*Rumor Has It*/MCA
56	46	**Alice in Chains**	*Facelift*/Columbia
57	47	**Cher**	*Love Hurts*/Geffen
58	55	**Marc Cohn**	*Marc Cohn*/Atlantic
59	68	**Original London Cast**	*Phantom of the Opera Highlights*/Polydor
60	65	**Michael Bolton**	*Soul Provider*/Columbia
61	49	**Aaron Neville**	*Warm Your Heart*/A&M
62	—	**Tanya Tucker**	*What I Do with Me*/Capitol
63	64	**Dolly Parton**	*Eagle When She Flies*/Columbia
64	48	**Steelheart**	*Steelheart*/MCA
65	62	**Alice Cooper**	*Hey Stoopid*/Epic
66	78	**Huey Lewis & the News**	*Hard at Play*/EMI
67	59	**Enigma**	*MCMXC A.D.*/Charisma
68	60	**Various Artists**	*For Our Children*/Walt Disney
69	51	**M.C. Hammer**	*Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em*/Capitol
70	54	**AC/DC**	*The Razors Edge*/Atco
71	97	**Bonnie Raitt**	*Nick of Time*/Capitol
72	—	**Paul Simon**	*Rhythm of the Saints*/Warner Bros.
73	—	**Bob Seger & the Silver Bullet**	*The Fire Inside*/Capitol
74	—	**Kix**	*Hot Wire*/EastWest
75	66	**Soundtrack**	*Dying Young*/Arista
76	—	**Siouxsie and the Banshees**	*Superstition*/Geffen
77	91	**BeBe & CeCe Winans**	*Different Lifestyles*/Capitol
78	52	**Gladys Knight**	*Good Woman*/MCA
79	—	**Van Morrison**	*The Best of Van Morrison*/Mercury
80	81	**Yanni**	*Reflections of Passion*/Private Music
81	45	**Vanilla Ice**	*Extremely Live*/SBK
82	—	**Carreras-Domingo-Pavarotti**	*In Concert*/London
83	58	**Slick Rick**	*Ruler's Back*/Def Jam
84	77	**Chris Isaak**	*Heart Shaped World*/Reprise
85	—	**Young M.C.**	*Brainstorm*/Capitol
86	72	**Warrant**	*Cherry Pie*/Columbia
87	63	**L.A. Guns**	*Hollywood Vampires*/Polydor
88	76	**Nelson**	*After the Rain*/DGC
89	—	**Bell Biv DeVoe**	*WBBD—Bootcity! The Remix Album*/MCA
90	—	**Soundtrack**	*Terminator 2: Judgement Day*/Varese Sarabande
91	74	**Gloria Estefan**	*Into the Light*/Epic
92	80	**George Strait**	*Chill of an Early Fall*/MCA
93	92	**Harry Connick, Jr.**	*We Are in Love*/Columbia
94	38	**Stevie Wonder**	*Music from "Jungle Fever"*/Motown
95	—	**Don Henley**	*The End of the Innocence*/Geffen
96	83	**Eurythmics**	*Greatest Hits*/Arista
97	—	**Lorrie Morgan**	*Something in Red*/RCA
98	—	**Peabo Bryson**	*Can You Stop the Rain*/Columbia
99	67	**Whitney Houston**	*I'm Your Baby Tonight*/Arista
100	69	**Vanilla Ice**	*To the Extreme*/SBK

The Musician album chart is produced by the Billboard chart department for Musician, and reflects the combined points for all album reports gathered by the Billboard computers in the month of August. The concert chart is based on Amusement Business Box Score reports for August 1991. All charts are copyright 1991 by BPI Incorporated.

Top Concert Grosses

#	Artist / Venue	Gross
1	**ZZ Top, Steve Miller, Eric Johnson, Extreme** *Spartan Stadium, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA*/August 10	$1,033,097
2	**KMEL Jam: T. Kemp, J. Guy, Oaktown 3-5-7, Heavy D. & Boyz, Gerardo, others** *Shoreline Amphitheatre, Mountain View, CA*/August 3–4	$1,026,849
3	**Rod Stewart** *Worcester Centrum, Worcester, MA*/August 23–24	$705,894
4	**Lollapalooza: Jane's Addiction, Siouxsie & the Banshees, Living Colour, others** *Starplex Amphitheatre, State Fairgrounds of Texas, Dallas, TX*/August 22–23	$661,747
5	**Lollapalooza: Jane's Addiction, Siouxsie & the Banshees, Living Colour, others** *Lake Fairfax Park, Fairfax, VA*/August 16	$636,610
6	**Lollapalooza: Jane's Addiction, Siouxsie & the Banshees, Living Colour, others** *Central Florida Fairgrounds, Orlando, FL*/August 20	$613,874
7	**Jimmy Buffett & the Coral Reefer Band, Fingers Taylor & the Ladyfinger Revue** *Blockbuster Pavilion, Charlotte, NC*/August 10–11	$568,284
8	**M.C. Hammer, B Angie B** *Grandstand, California Midstate Fair*/August 3	$472,820
9	**Rod Stewart** *Citadel Hill, Halifax, Nova Scotia*/August 17	$462,799
10	**Michael Bolton, Oleta Adams** *Jones Beach Theatre, Wantagh, NY*/August 27–28	$458,438

The Unstoppable Mr. Loaf

Soon after inaugurating its new charts a few months ago, *Billboard* started separating older, ie. "catalog," product from current, thereby robbing the Top 100 of its least likely denizen. I'm talking about Meat Loaf. The Texas-born shrieker's *Bat Out of Hell* went quadruple platinum 13 years ago, when gigantic Meat and his eardrum-shattering tenor erupted on the scene like a huge overripe zit, alternately grossing out and amazing concert audiences everywhere. Jim Steinman's songs merged baroque excess with locker-room prurience; Todd Rundgren's kitchen-sink production sent operetti like "Paradise by the Dashboard Light" way over the top.

Meat Loaf's four followup LPs stiffed, he broke up with Steinman and filed for bankruptcy. But *Bat Out of Hell* never really stopped selling. And by the mid-'80s, with Meat under new management and back on the road (colleges, mostly) and with classic rock radio firmly entrenched and blaring out "Paradise" almost as regularly as "Stairway to Heaven," *Bat* quietly began a resurgence. Today, there's real cause for worry: every week in the USA, 20,000 people plunk down 10 bucks for the midline CD. According to George Gilbert, Meat's co-manager, the album's moved 20 million copies worldwide; Sony, *Bat's* distributors, say 12 or 13 million. There it is every week on *Billboard's* new Catalog chart, crowding the top ahead of stuff like the Eagles' *Greatest Hits* and Floyd's *The Wall* and *Dark Side*. After Michael Jackson's last three and Boston's first, *Bat* is Sony's fifth-best seller, ever.

"It's a classic record," says Gilbert. "It's transcended its initial popularity, and epitomizes a time and place." I'm not exactly sure what place Gilbert means, but he might have added "state of mind"—horny adolescence. In any case, Meat and Steinman are finally reunited and hatching a sequel right now for MCA, *Bat Out of Hell II: Back Into Hell*. Will it be on the charts in 2005? —T.S.

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SHAKE ME UP

MORGAN CREEK

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MANAGEMENT: PETER ASHER MANAGEMENT

Galactic Cowboys

A thrash band with heavenly harmonies

By Roy Trakin

GALACTIC COWBOYS COME from Houston, by way of outer space. The foursome's speed-metal-blues-goes-pop sound has been variously described as "Metallica meets the Beatles" and "the Partridge Family on acid."

"That's acid taken from the Latin text, meaning twisted or skewed," explains the band's drummer and co-founder Alan Doss.

Well, what did you expect from a band whose self-titled debut opens with a cow mooing, glass breaking and flamenco strumming? Or ends with a cocktail-jazz interlude climaxed by a straightfaced recitation of an "all-star" high school cafeteria lunch menu?

"It's not any particular menu, but a composite of memories of all the school lunches we've ever had," notes bassist and chief songwriter Monty Colvin.

Colvin met Doss in college in Missouri. The pair followed another Springfield band, King's X, to Houston, where they formed the rhythm section for a power trio called the Awful Truth. From a desire to go beyond that band's "heavy sound," they found Texas-bluegrass vocalist Ben Huggins singing cover tunes in a local bar, then added guitarist Dane Sonnier, a cousin of Cajun country star Jo-El Sonnier. The result is a quintet that mixes thrash power chords with lush vocal harmonies.

"More than anything, there seemed to be a chemistry," Colvin says. "Even personality-wise we seem to bounce off each other well. When we first joined in four-part harmonies, it was an exciting moment." "That was when it came together," Huggins agrees. "Monty came up with the melody to 'Why Can't You Believe in Me?' At the chorus, we all grabbed a part and started singing without any music. Then we knew this was going to work."

l. to r. Dane Sonnier, Ben Huggins, Monty Colvin and (bottom) Alan Doss

Less than three months later, they were thrust into a support slot on the King's X tour. The Cowboys were forced to hone their chops in public. "People were just gaping at us," Huggins recalls. "wondering what was going on. It takes three or four songs to get into it."

Three months after that, they were signed to DGC Records the night before a showcase for more than a dozen labels. A performance at South by Southwest seminar sent the Fab Four-on-metal comparisons flying.

"Frankly, I'm not amused," deadpans Huggins, quoting one of the band's song titles, which also expresses their feelings about heavy metal's relation to Satanic imagery. Like King's X, Galactic Cowboys don't hide their Christian values, though they never actually proselytize in their music. "I don't believe in labels, but we do think of ourselves that way," Colvin says. "It affects our lives, so it's bound to affect the music."

Once you absorb the novelty of their approach—thick rhythmic slabs of Wagnerian metal *sturm und angst* mixed with lyrical acoustic passages—you realize Galactic Cowboys are less the successors to Metallica and Megadeth than the latest example of prog-rock in the mold of Yes, Rush, even Led Zeppelin. The group's saving grace is their sense of humor and aw- [cont'd on page 24]

Photograph: Karen Miller

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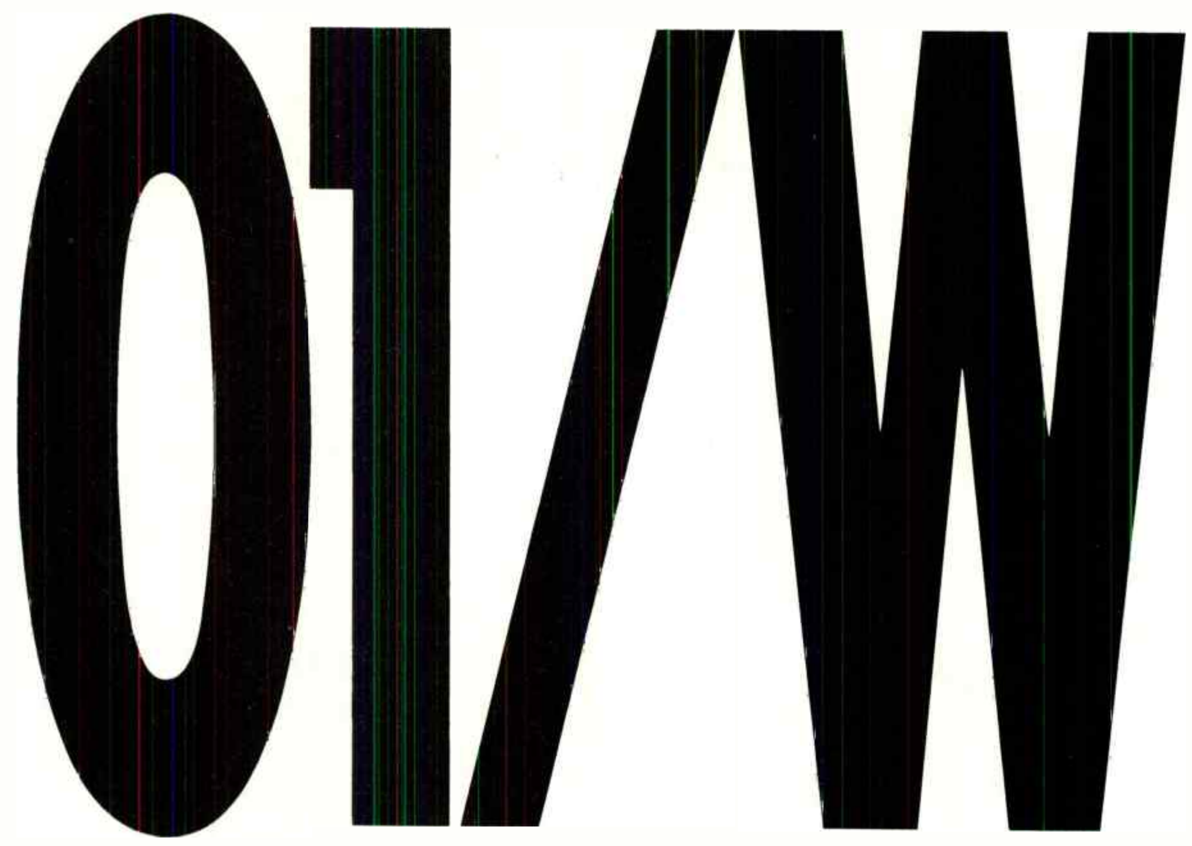

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Jean Luc Ponty's Excellent Adventure

French fusion fiddler finds, uh, roots

By Tom Cheney

JEAN LUC PONTY HAS BEEN RELEASING records almost every year since the mid-1970s, answering the annual prayers of flash-worshipping international fans. But to others, the nimble-fingered violinist's sorties epitomize all that has made fusion a dirty word: Ponty's safe-sex soloing took few risks and offered fewer challenges. So when word arrived that the Normandy native had recorded an African album, it was like hearing Skid Row had switched to samba. The results are just as startling: *Tchokola* is a graceful, sensitive and rootsy foray into world musicianship.

From the comfort of his home studio in Santa Monica, sea breezes wafting through the garden foliage outside, Ponty recalls his journey. In 1988 a French journalist asked if he was aware of the African scene percolating in Paris. Ponty jotted down a few names, and a year later, while vacationing in Paris, began making inquiries. "First I discovered the singers," he says, mentioning Salif Keita and Mory Kante. "I was very impressed by their phrasing, the quality of voice, the melodic aspect of the music. I'd been unaware of the richness of African music in that sense—I was more aware of the rhythm."

After a record-buying spree, it dawned on Ponty to play this vibrant music himself, especially if he could take it further with instrumental versions. Producer Wally Badarou put Ponty in touch with Brice Wassy, a Cameroonian drummer/producer based in Paris who has played with Keita, Miriam Makeba and Talking Heads. Wassy told Ponty that several African musicians were already fans of his work and that he would fit in. "He heard me play some plucked violin through a synthesizer," Ponty explains, "and thought it was reminiscent of the *balafon*, which is one of the basic instruments of West Africa. So he saw a connection I didn't know existed.

"My initial concept was to cover African material, not to be involved as a writer at all," he goes on. "But when we did our first jam I realized how well they could improvise. They explained that I could write melodies and they could do the arrangements, or vice versa. I improvised the melodies for the *makossa* ('Mouna Bowa') and the *bikutsi* ('N'Fan Möt') too." The *Tchokola* band—which includes guitar, bass, percussion and drums—recorded live in the studio in four days. "N'Fan Möt" was done in one take. "I couldn't believe these guys," Ponty shakes his head, "how good they really are.

"'N'Fan Möt' was tough because of where they place the accents. I have done a lot of polyrhythms with triplets in the past, but never like this. I really had to concentrate." More difficult was the primal *balafon*- and percussion-driven title track, a variation on the *man-ngambeu* and *danzi* rhythms of West Cameroon. "I really needed the help of Brice [who'd penned the tune]; he had to tell me, 'This is not the feel at all.' The beats are not played, it's all in the accent syncopation. You have to feel it in four. That's the hardest thing of all."

At one point, the Africans started to follow Ponty too much and began to sound frighteningly like his own band. Ponty had to plead with them to play the way they usually do. "They said, '*Autoroute*, the freeway, you just

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keep the groove.' So I started eliminating my [soloing] impulses, the patterns that come back all the time. I tried to leave some air so that the rhythms breathe. And it felt so free, so good. Like a bird I would go to one [rhythm] and then pass to another. I wasn't really sure where the 'one' was.

"Their music is so happy, despite how much they have been repressed, through colonizations and their own regimes. It's amazing how much these less fortunate people can give of this gift of joy and happiness."

Bowed Over

PONTY tried both electric and acoustic violins in every piece on Tchokola. He plays his Barcus-Berry on "Tchokola," "Bamako" and "Rhum 'n' Zouc." "Sometimes the electric [Zeta] has a bigger, broader sound, and also I have a low string—a low C—that extends my range to play unison with the guitar." Using no amp, he plugged his MIDI Zeta direct into the board, without processing.

GALACTIC COWBOYS

[cont'd from page 20] shucks demeanor. "Kaptain Krude" deals satirically with the Exxon Valdez oil spill. "Kill Floor"'s about a guy who goes crazy working in a slaughterhouse. "Pump Up the Spacesuit" tells of an astronaut caught outside the space shuttle without oxygen trying to get someone to "pump him up."

"There's something here for everyone," Colvin observes. "Thrash fans will love the thrash and Top 40 fans'll dig the vocals."

What if the opposite is true?

Colvin nods gravely. "I wonder about that myself."

Space Cowboys

DANE SONNIER plays a Fender Strat Plus through Marshall amps, tweaked with a Furman parametric EQ; he strings with GHS Custom Lites. MONTY COLVIN has Hamer 12- and Kramer eight-string basses strung with Ken Smith Slapmasters, and runs Marshall guitar heads with Ampeg SVT heads and cabs. BEN HUGGINS puts Black Diamond strings on his Kay acoustic. Drummer ALAN DOSS pounds Tama Royal Stars and Paiste cymbals with ProMark 747 Rock sticks; his snare is by Ludwig, heads by Remo.

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Young M.C.'s Move

Boom or bust?

By Roy Trakin

A YEAR AFTER HIS DOUBLE-PLATinum debut album *Stone Cold Rhymin'* and its Top 10 single, "Bust a Move," Grammy-winning rapper Young M.C. was suing his record company Delicious Vinyl. For Young M.C., who'd also penned the smashes "Wild Thing" and "Funky Cold Medina" for label-mate Tone-Loc, the issue went well beyond dollars or sense.

"I wasn't respected artistically," he says, still sounding a little amazed. "Even when it came to the production of my own album, there was stuff on the final mixes I'd never heard before."

Sitting on a couch in the offices of his new management, Young M.C. looks and talks like a college intellectual defending his position. It's hard to believe he could be this naive. But for all his rhymin' savvy and theoretical chops, the 24-year-old rapper discovered that his degree in economics from USC was small preparation for the hard realities of the record biz. And the family atmosphere propounded at Delicious Vinyl, he says, made his further education that much more painful.

"Because I wasn't looking over my shoulder and being paranoid, they were able to take that much more advantage of me," he claims. "But I got to the point where I began to learn about the business and recognize my true value. Delicious Vinyl may have discovered me, but I'm wholly or partially responsible for every goddamn platinum record they have. The point is, we tried to negotiate with them before any of this started, and they basically laughed and spit in our faces. I couldn't take it anymore."

Eventually, Delicious Vinyl head Mike Ross, who'd co-produced *Rhymin'*, agreed to an out-of-court settlement which allowed the rapper to record his latest album, *Brainstorm*, for Capitol Records. "He resented that we brought him out of nowhere and helped him become a big star," Ross says. "His goal was to be independent and in complete control of his career and we didn't want anyone here who didn't want to be here. I think he was listening to advisors who were telling him what he wanted to hear."

If the parting was bitter, Young M.C. does a good job of hiding it on his new, self-produced disc. "I don't need to air my dirty laundry," he says softly. "I have no hang-ups. This is the first time I get to be me, and I think it shows." Although the bass-heavy, thwacking drum machine beats which characterized the first album's production has been replaced by a more organic, real-instrument sound that touches on such unlikely influences as Creedence Clearwater Revival and CSN&Y, Young M.C. remains a listener-friendly story-teller and advisor whose songs offer practical advice on issues like succeeding in business ("Keep Your Eyes on the Prize"), safe sex ("Keep It in Your Pants"), mind-body dualism ("Inside My Head"), peer pressure ("Use Your Head"), relaxation techniques ("The Um Dee Dum Song") and the vagaries of romance (the first single, "That's the Way Love Goes"), along with name checks that range from Barney Rubble to Hüsker Dü.

"The lyrics fit the music," he says. "This

Photograph: Mark Scott
Makeup: Doil Jarnegan for Crystal

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PROCOL HARUM
TEXAS
URBAN DANCE SQUAD

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record *is* more socially conscious. Delicious Vinyl wanted me to be more party-oriented, more of a caricature. There was a tendency for them to overdo things, and that's something I didn't want to go through again. This is like my first album."

On the remarkable "Inside My Head," Young M.C. (whose real name is Marvin Young) goes through a checklist of his innermost traumas as a form of hip-hop therapy. "It's been very liberating to take my anxieties and fears and put them on a record," he says. "Because then they're not just personal demons anymore. The idea is to show that what I go through is similar to what everyone else is going through and thinking, but might not talk about. If people can see there's a greater commonality in the human experience than we've led ourselves to believe, that's got to help. You can't be overly concerned with your own problems if you realize everyone has the same ones."

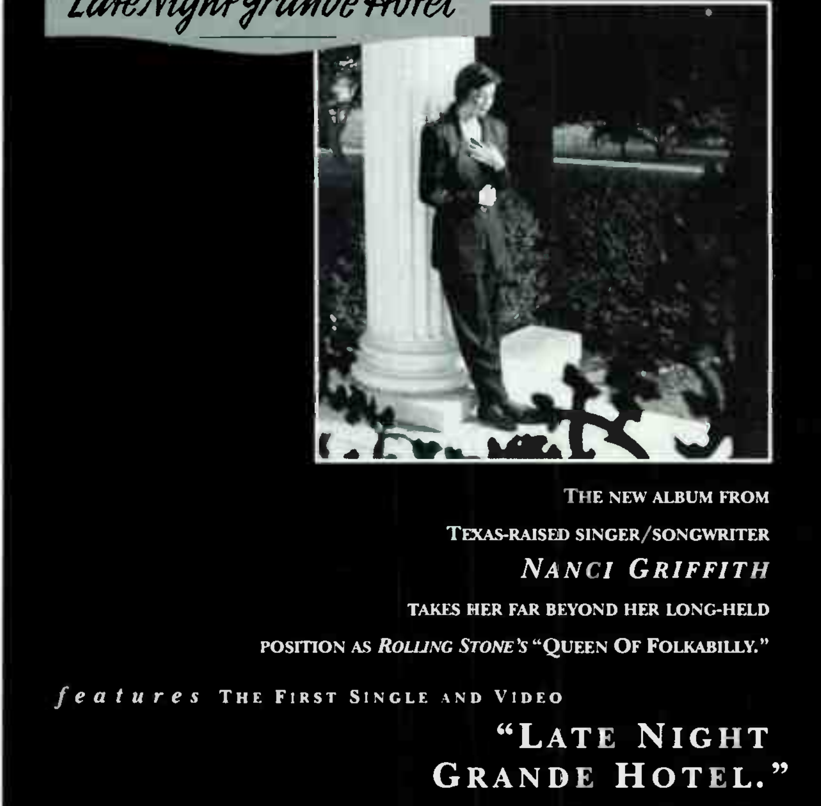
While Young M.C. insists he doesn't smoke, drink or do drugs, he is careful that his songs don't come off as moralizing. On the cinematic, first-person narrative of "Life in the Fast Lane," he plays the role of someone from a nice family caught up in the world of dealing crack, who ends up having a heart attack. "I didn't want to glorify drugs or violence," he says. "I wanted to play a part because it was the only way people would take it seriously as a story. I wanted to get across things I was feeling and thinking about without coming across too preachy."

With more emphasis these days on hardcore rap with a militant street edge, it might seem Young M.C. is yesterday's news, especially since his last album was released over two years ago. A middle-class guy from a very bourgeois neighborhood in Queens that produced breakthrough rappers like Run D.M.C., L.L. Cool J and Davy D, he defends his crossover appeal.

"I try to pull things from culture and human experience that people can identify with," he points out. "Every rapper has the right to do what they want. That's why we're here in this country. I just don't choose to rap about some of the things they do. Me being black and an artist means I'm going to be making music black people can identify with. It's just that simple. I don't gear my records towards a white audience. I'm not going to limit myself."

Young M.C. knows it's no coincidence some of rap's biggest stars come from Hollis. "You had a lot of people who could afford to buy the turntables and equipment," he says. "There were always crews around doing block parties and jams at the park. The scene was very competitive. When I was 11, all the other M.C.s and D.J.s were 15 and 16. I was always learning. All I know is, I make my music in the way I feel comfortable. It's appropriate to my upbringing, background and experiences.

"I've taken rap to places it hasn't been, and I'm going to take it to even more. This is my second chance, so it's put-up-or-shut-up time."



Rhymin' Machines

YOUNG M.C.'s Brainstorm was recorded using an Akai MPC-60 MIDI Production Center, which samples drum machines and sequencers while controlling all other instruments on the basic master. Young also used an E-mu Emulator, an SP1200 drum machine, a Proteus One keyboard module and a Steven Paul microphone.

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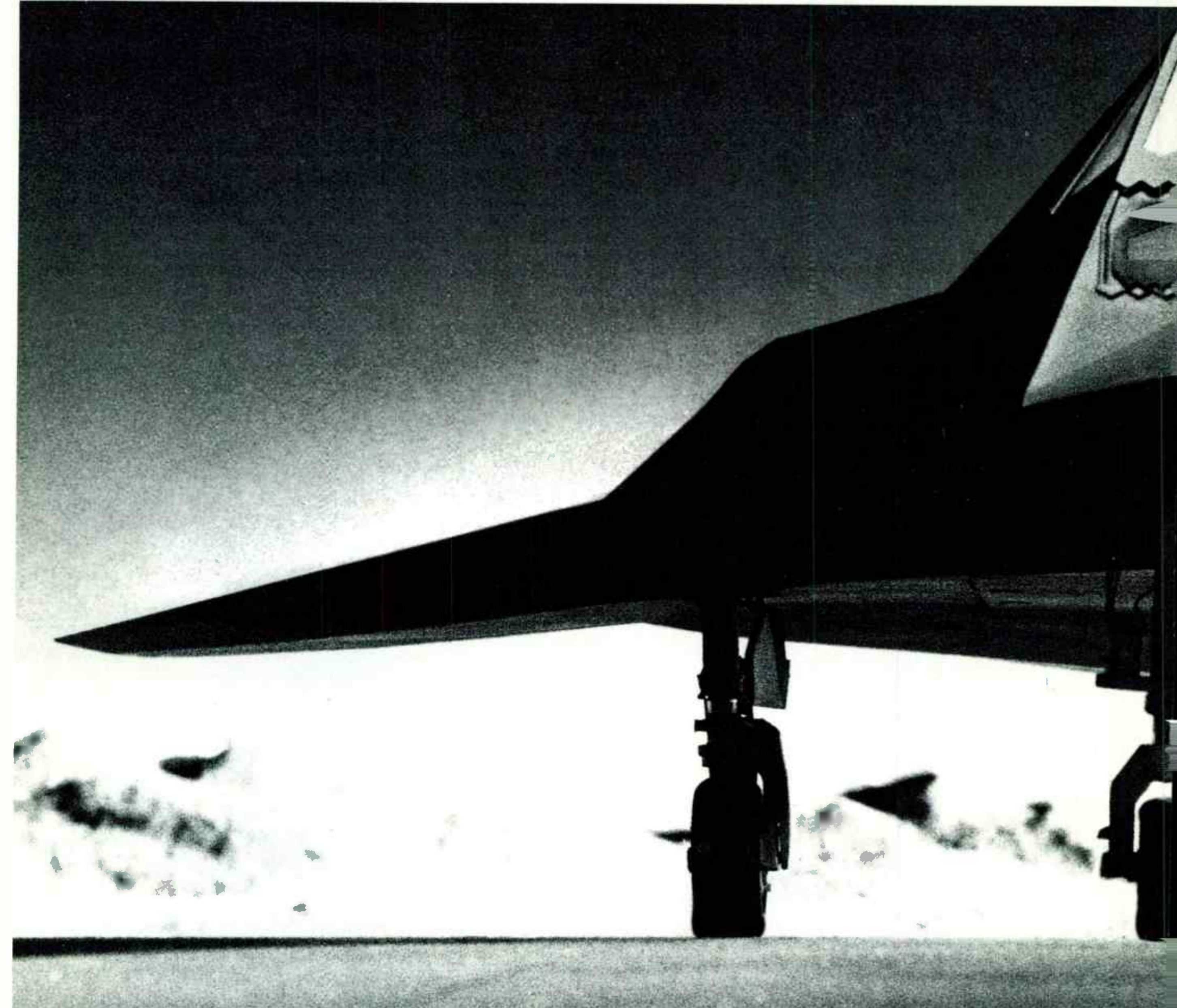

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"I HAD ALL THESE IDEAS AND SOUNDS IN MY BRAIN."

SOMETIMES YOU JUST FEEL LIKE talkin', sometimes you don't," Jimi Hendrix said before his first album was released. Two years later he clarified that comment: "I can explain everything better through music."

If Hendrix had lived longer, left more music—if he were still around, not yet 49 years old—maybe we wouldn't be so desperate to seek out his every utterance.

Pop stars come, pop stars go. Some of them even die tragically young, to be forgotten by a fickle public or rediscovered by a later one. Hendrix is different. In the decades since his untimely death, he has simply never fallen out of fashion. Bands record his songs; guitarists (try to) imitate his sound; Prince raids his wardrobe. We can't miss Hendrix because he won't go away, and we don't want him to go away.

Although Hendrix lived in the

JIMI HENDRIX IN HIS OWN WORDS

navel-gazing years of hippie journalism, he was still bombarded with interviews. He seems to have suffered the most stoned-out or ill-informed of reporters—and even

Photograph: Michael Ochs Archive

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Dick Cavett—with graciousness and good humor. Harry Shapiro and Caeser Glebbeek, the co-authors of a 700-page biography called *Jimi Hendrix: Electric Gypsy*, have picked through many of these for the valuable first-person testimony in their book.

But there's more. A house in the Chicago suburbs is the unlikely headquarters of the Jimi Hendrix Information Management Institute (Box 374, Des Plaines, IL 60016). JIMI founder Ken Voss maintains a file cabinet packed with magazines, newspapers and photocopies of articles about his hero. Hendrix spoke to the British pop music weeklies; major U.S. publications, to whom he was a freak blip on the cultural sonogram; just-emerging "countercultural" mouthpieces like *Rolling Stone*; and local newspapers in whatever town the Jimi Hendrix Experience happened to be playing that night.

The following quotes are drawn mostly from Voss' collection of printed and audio interviews with Jimi Hendrix. They do not duplicate (as far as this exhausted writer can tell) any material in *Electric Gypsy*. So move over, Rover; let's let Jimi take over.

—Scott Isler

"I feel guilty when people say I'm the greatest guitarist on the scene. What's good or bad doesn't matter with me."

I. Early Days

As a very young boy I started my musical career playing drums and bass around Seattle... • I started digging guitars—it was an instrument that always seemed to be around. Everybody's house you went to seemed to have a guitar lying around. I was about 14 or 15 when I started playing guitar and I remember my first gig was at an armory, a National Guard place... • I learned guitar from records and the radio. I never had any lessons. When I was 17 I got a group together. I've never worked in offices or anything.

At school I used to write poetry a lot. Then I was really happy, like, in school. My poems were mostly about flowers and nature and people wearing robes...and then I used to paint a picture of, say, a really pretty mountain, then write about four lines of poetry about it. I don't hardly get a chance to paint now.

I figured I'd have to go [into the Army] sooner or later so I volunteered to get it over with so that I could get my music together later on. And when I joined I figured I might as well go all the way so I joined the airborne. I hated the Army immediately.... I was lucky to get out when I did. Vietnam was just coming up. But if there was a full scale war I think I would volunteer again even though I hated it.

I started playing around the South where I heard the blues.... I played in Nashville with a guy called Gorgeous George. He got me on some tours with B.B. King and Jackie Lewis. • I just traveled around. I played with different groups from Nashville to Los Angeles, Indianapolis and Florida. I was trying to play my own thing but I was working with people like Little Richard, the Isley Brothers and Wilson Pickett and they didn't like too much of that feedback. I was always kept in the background but I was thinking all the time about what I wanted to do...I used to join a group and quit them so fast....

Bad pay, lousy living and getting burned—that was those days.

I had all these ideas and sounds in my brain, and playing this "other people's music" all the time was hurting me. I jumped from the frying pan into the fire when I joined up with Joey Dee and the Starliters.... After sucking on a peppermint-twist salary I had to quit and began playing with a jukebox band, and finally quit that too...

I can't tell you the number of times it hurt me to play. The same notes. The same beat. I was nothing but a guitar in the background. Top 40 music's okay, but it was wrong for me. • The first real group I got together on my own was back in Greenwich Village. That would be around 1965, I guess. I changed my name to Jimmy James and called the group the Blue Flames—not exactly original, was it?

I played in a group in Greenwich Village and we were very popular. We played a blues style. Then I met Chas [Chandler] who asked me to Britain. He seemed like a pretty sincere guy, so I came.

II. Inexperienced

We set out to be a trio; that's the reason we are like this. We tried the organ for about 15 minutes and it didn't work out. It made us sound like just anybody. But it isn't ideal that it's a trio. It just happened like that. • I was thinking of the smallest pieces possible with the hardest impact.... If you want to do something it's best to do it yourself, right? So I figure that if you have a rhythm guitar player or even a lead guitar player there's going to be some things that are going to slow down the whole thing 'cause you have to show him exactly what you want yourself, as far as guitar comes in.

I don't really think we'll achieve as much success [in the U.S.] as we have done [in Britain]. We have been told that we'll do well but I'm not sure that we will be as accepted as readily.... In America people are much more narrow-minded than they are in Britain.

III. "Hey Joe"

We all dug "Hey Joe" as a number, that was in October [1966], so we put it down on record. • "Hey Joe" is a traditional song and it's about 100 years old. Lots of people have done different arrangements of it, and Timmy Rose was the first to do it slowly. I like it played slowly. There are probably 1,000 versions of it fast by the Byrds, Standells, Love and others. • The record is really a cowboy song. The ap-

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proach is R&B but that's just the way we happened to feel it. • In the States, the disc-jockeys stopped playing "Hey Joe" because people complained about the lyrics.

IV. "Purple Haze"

We cut "Hey Joe," and then we cut "Purple Haze" and we made it, man. You know, because we had our own thing and it really was our own thing and nobody else's and we played it just like we were feeling... • We had one little record and I'm just wondering how people are going to take the next one, because it's so different from "Hey Joe." I think everyone will think we've used different instruments on it, but it's still two guitars and drums—at one point the guitar sounds like a flute. I recorded it exactly as we do it onstage. Everything we do on record we can do exactly onstage.

You shoulda heard [the unused lyrics], man. I had it written out. It's about going through this land, this mythical—I like to write a lot of mythical scenes. Like the history of the wars on Neptune.... They've got Greek gods and all that mythology. Well, you can have your own mythology. • "Purple Haze" was one step on the way to getting our own personal sound.

V. Are You Experienced?

It has about two rock 'n' roll songs. And it has a blues. And it has a few freak-out tunes. • I don't want people to get the idea it's a collection of freak-out material. I've written songs for teenyboppers like "Can You See Me" and blues things. "Manic Depression" is so ugly you can feel it, and "May This Be Love" is a kind of "get your mind together" track. It's a collection of free feeling and imagination. Imagination is very important. There's one lyric line—"Let's hold hands and watch the sunrise at the bottom of the sea"—that's just pure imagination! • I want the album to show how we play in person. I don't necessarily want it to be perfect.

When it all comes down to it, albums are nothing but personal diaries. When you hear somebody making music, they are baring a naked part of their soul to you. *Are You Experienced?* was one of the most direct albums we've done. What it was saying was, "Let us get through the wall, man, we want you to dig it."

On "Foxey Lady" we just started playing, actually, and set up a microphone, and I had these words. • "Foxey Lady" is about the only happy song I've written. Don't feel very happy when I start writing. • I wrote "Foxey" so long ago, what we are doing today is as different from that as night from day. Our music is getting uglier.

["Third Stone from the Sun" is] about these cats coming down and taking over the earth. But they find out they don't really see anything here that's worth taking, except for chickens.

Some people have told me that the first album sounded the same all the way through. But there wasn't time. It was a first one, a quick one, you understand, for a new group.

"I'm going to have a jam, not a funeral; a lot of blues. Roland Kirk, Miles, if he feels like it. For that it's almost worth dying."

VI. Axis: Bold As Love

You know how love can change your whole world, right? It can turn it upside-down like the axis of the earth. It's that powerful, that bold. People kill themselves for love, but when you have it for somebody or something, an idea, maybe, it can beat anger and time and move the sea and the mountains. That's the way it feels. I guess that's what I'm trying to say.

Some feelings make you think of different colors. Jealousy is purple—I'm purple with rage or purple with anger—and green is envy, all this. This is like you explain your different emotions in color towards this certain girl who has all the colors in the world, you know. In other words, you don't think you have to part [with these emotions] but you're willing to try.

["If Six Was Nine" is] just a straightforward song. How you feel at a particular time.... [T]hat was a completely jam session that we had and did that and then put the words on that.

There's nothing else I wanted to say to ["Little Wing."] Keep it just like that.

To people who are not listening very much, [*Axis*] will put them to sleep right away.... Two of the songs on it are a year old: "If Six Was Nine" and "She's So Fine." We recorded this album right after the first one. It was the next session after the first. It represents us then, but we've got prettier songs. • In this one there are more gentle things, more things for people to think about, if they want to. I think we're getting less rebellious.

I wanted to make it a double LP, which would be almost impossible.... The record producers and companies don't want to do that. I'm willing to spend every single penny on it if I thought it was good enough.... This one song I wrote named "Eyes and Imagination." It's about 14 minutes long. Every two sentences tell a completely different story. It starts out with this baby crying—a brand-new baby's been born. Then you hear these bullets in the background. It's nothing but imagination, and every sentence tells a different story. It goes in about four major movements.... There's so many songs I wrote that we haven't even done yet that we'll probably never do. Just because, uh, a lot of things around here that's really bad. We must be Elvis Presleys and rock 'n' rolls and Troggs. You must be that. There'll be no smoking in the gas chamber.

VII. Electric Ladyland

All the tracks are very personal.... I don't say it's great but it's the Experience. It has a rough, hard feel on some of the tracks. Some of the things on it are hungry.

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We wanted a particular sound. It got lost in the cutting room because we went on tour right before we finished. I heard it, and I think the sound of it is very cloudy.

It could have been so much better but we were working all the time [touring] and couldn't spend the time in the studios that we needed. That's the trouble with this business. • You'll have a whole planned-out LP and all of a sudden they'll make, for instance, "Crosstown Traffic" a single, and that's coming out of nowhere, out of a whole other set. See, that LP was in certain ways of thinking—the sides we played on in order for certain reasons. And then it's almost like a sin for them to take out something in the middle of all that and make that a single, and represent us at that particular time because they think they can make more money. They always take out the wrong ones.

"When I turn my back to the audience, it's to get a certain thing out. I have to show my feelings as soon as they're there."

[Regarding the British album cover photo of nude women:] It's not my fault.

VIII. Onstage

[First U.K. tour:] The bosses of the tour are giving us hell. The organizers don't give us a chance to tune up before we go onstage. They say we are obscene and vulgar, but we play our act as we have always played it everywhere else, and there have never been complaints before. We refuse to change our act, and the result is my amplifier sometimes gets cut off at the funniest times. I wonder why? But I don't let them hang me up. I play to the people and I don't think our actions are obscene. We just get excited by the music and carried away.

The one thing I really hate is miming. It's so phony. So far the only thing I was asked to mime was a Radio London appearance and I felt guilty just standing there holding a guitar.

It's true we're one of the loudest groups around. It can be a fault to be too loud. But we don't mean to play loud. In fact we do play softly as well. You've got to have dynamics in songs. We just have so much trouble with amplifiers.... I think this group will stay around. The music is free form, and it has variety. I just wish I could sing really nice, but I know I can't sing. I just feel the words out. I try all night to hit a pretty note but it's hard. I'm more of an entertainer and performer than a singer.

Before I go onstage my road manager says to me: "Jimi, you scruffy looking git, you're not going on looking like that tonight, are you?" And I say: "As soon as I've put out this cigarette—I'm fully dressed." This is how I like it. I feel comfortable like this.

I play a Fender Stratocaster guitar. You can take the back off, a small plate, and you can tap the springs back there and make these weird little sounds.

Most of the time everybody's playing the way they feel towards the other notes that they're hearing.

When I don't say "Thank you," or I turn my back to the audience, it's not against them, I'm just doing that to get a certain thing out. I might be uptight about the guitar being out of tune or something. Things have to go through me and I have to show my feelings as soon as they're there.... [T]hese two guitars I have now...just don't stay in tune. They might slip out of tune a bit right in the middle of a song, and I'll have to start fighting to get it back in tune. We tune up between every song because it's not a Flash Gordon show—everything all neat and rehearsed—it's not one of those kind of things. It's important for us to get our music across the best way we can.

Top 40 stuff is all out of gospel, trying to get everybody up and clapping, shouting, "Yeah, yeah." We don't want to get everybody up. They should just sit there and dig it.

I like after-hours jams at a small place like a club. Then you get another feeling. You get off in another way with all those people there.... It's not the spotlights, just the people.... You don't forget about the audience, but you forget about all the paranoia, that thing where you're saying, "Oh gosh, I'm onstage—what am I going to do now?"

What can you do on a tour? People scream for the oldies but goodies. So you have to play the oldies but goodies on your show instead of some of the things you want to get into. Plus we don't get a chance...we never practice...we've practiced about three times since we've been together. And then we jam, we get a chance to jam sometimes...that's the only thing...we're not able to play with each other except onstage.

Sometimes, no matter how badly you play, people come up to you and say: "You were fantastic." And that really hurts, especially when you are trying to progress.

I hate compliments—it's so embarrassing sometimes 'cause you know really the truth.... I don't really live on compliments. It has a way of distracting me. I know a lot of these musicians and artists, they have these compliments, they say, "Wow, it must have been really great." They get all fat and satisfied and they get lost; and they forget about the actual talent they have, and they start living in another world.

As long as people come to listen rather than to see us, then everything will be all right. It's when they come to expect to see you doing certain things onstage that you can get hung up.... The trouble was audiences took it [playing guitar with the teeth] as something they must see or they didn't enjoy the show. So I don't do it much anymore. We don't do too much of anything anymore, except play music.

The main thing that used to bug me was that people wanted too many visual things from me. I never wanted it to be so much of a visual thing. When I didn't do it people thought I was being moody.... I wanted the music to get across, so that people could just sit back and close their eyes and know exactly what was going on without caring a damn what we were doing while we were onstage.

I got the feeling maybe too many people were coming to look and

Photograph: ©1991 Michael Montfort/ Michael Ochs Archive

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not enough to listen. My nature just changed as well and I went and hid for a while. I started cutting my hair and losing jewelry, ring by ring, until I had none left. The freaky thing was never a publicity hype—that was just the way I was then. If I felt like dressing up, I did. If I felt like smashing a guitar, I worked up some anger and smashed. The anger has dissipated and I don't feel the need to dress up so much now I see others doing it.

[On playing at Woodstock:] It's pretty hard with the sound, the guitar, all those people. It's such a big crowd. If we had a smaller crowd you could really get next to them more. It's just too big. You know you're not getting through to all of them.

[On the Isle of Wight festival:] It was dark. I couldn't see everybody. If I could see the people instead of lines of bonfires...

When [audiences] feel and smile with that sleepy exhausted look, it's like being carried on a wave.... We can play violent music, and in a way it's like watching wrestling or football for them—it releases their violence. It's not like beating it out of each other, but like violent silk. I mean, sadness can be violent.

People make sounds when they clap. So we make sounds back.

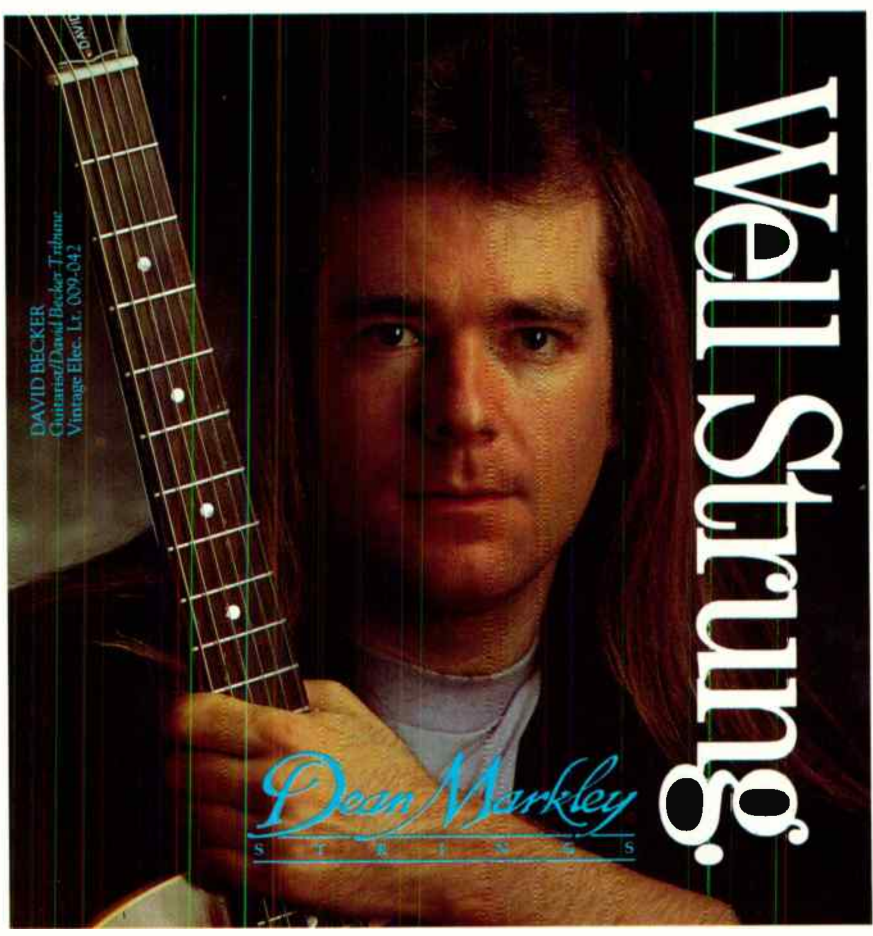
IX. The Pop Life

The only ones holding it up at the moment, coming through in any way, are the solid performers like Tom Jones, Dusty [Springfield], Spencer Davis and all that. The Troggs and that scene just aren't solid. [Troggs singer] Reg Presley writes songs and all that—they have a lot of hits—but a group like them will never really get any respect.

There's an outfit called the Chicago Transit Authority [later Chicago] which could blow a few minds... • CTA. In person, listen, that's when you should hear them.

Sly. I like his beat, I like his pulse.

We were in the studio and we were really into some groovy things. Some really funky little things. And we were snatched out of the studio within a day of knowing nothing. There we were, thrown into the Paris scene, the Olympia Theatre, and we found ourselves waiting for two hours in the London airport. Then we found ourselves in New York, lost in the street. All these within hours of each other. Then they had a press conference and here you are thinking about these songs. You have these songs in your



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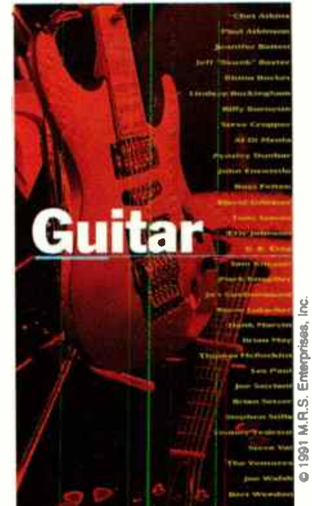

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mind. You want to hurry up and get back to the things you were doing in the studio, because that's the way you gear your mind. And then we were thrown into the Fillmore; we wanted to play there, quite naturally, but you're thinking about all these tracks, which is completely different from what you're doing now.... [I]f people only knew what state of mind we're in...

It's best not to sign anything too soon.

X. The Aesthetics of Jimi

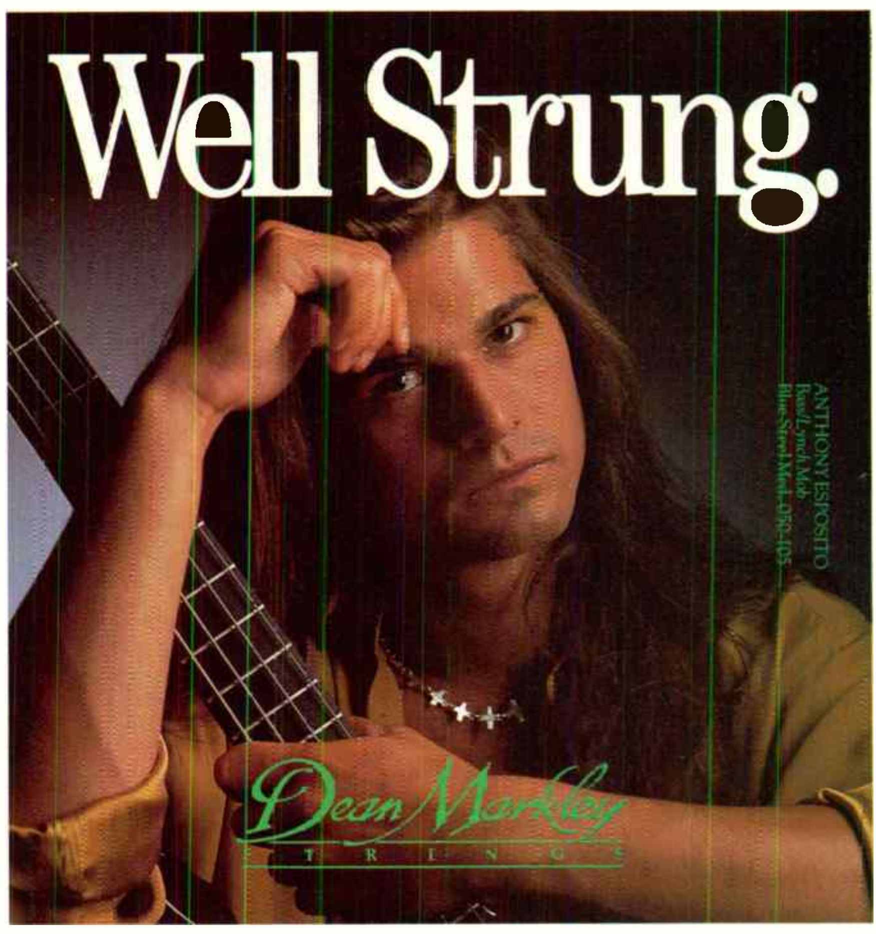
When I first started I liked anything from B.B. King to Muddy Waters and Bach to Eddie Cochran. But I didn't try to copy anybody.... My own thing is in my head. I hear sounds and if I don't get them together nobody else will.

I get influenced by everything...really, everything all around you. Sometimes you can listen to a bad group—you know, you go to a club you've never been to before, in a strange town. And while the group plays you say, "Oh, what is this, this noise I'm hearing?" And then you might hear one little thing and say, "Hey, that's kind of nice." Right there, you know.

You can't expect deep feeling to come out of music put down on bits of paper with arrangements. I feel everything I play—it's got to be inside you. • What we do sometimes is lay down what I might have written by day in my mind, all the changes and all that. So we go out there and do a take of it, regardless of how sloppy, then we go back and listen and take the best cuts and talk about what you want to do with it. But this is only when you don't have a solid scene. • We mostly build on bar patterns and emotion. Not melody. • What we play is straight from us. I don't ever want to have to bow to commercialism.

I feel guilty when people say I'm the greatest guitarist on the scene. What's good or bad doesn't matter to me; what does matter is feeling and not feeling. If only people would take more of a true view, and think in terms of feeling. Your name doesn't mean a damn, it's just your talent and feeling that matters. You've got to know much more than just the technicalities of notes, you've got to know sounds and what goes between the notes.

There is a new meaning music is taking. Definitely. It's getting to be more spiritual than anything now. Pretty soon I believe they're going to have to rely on music to get



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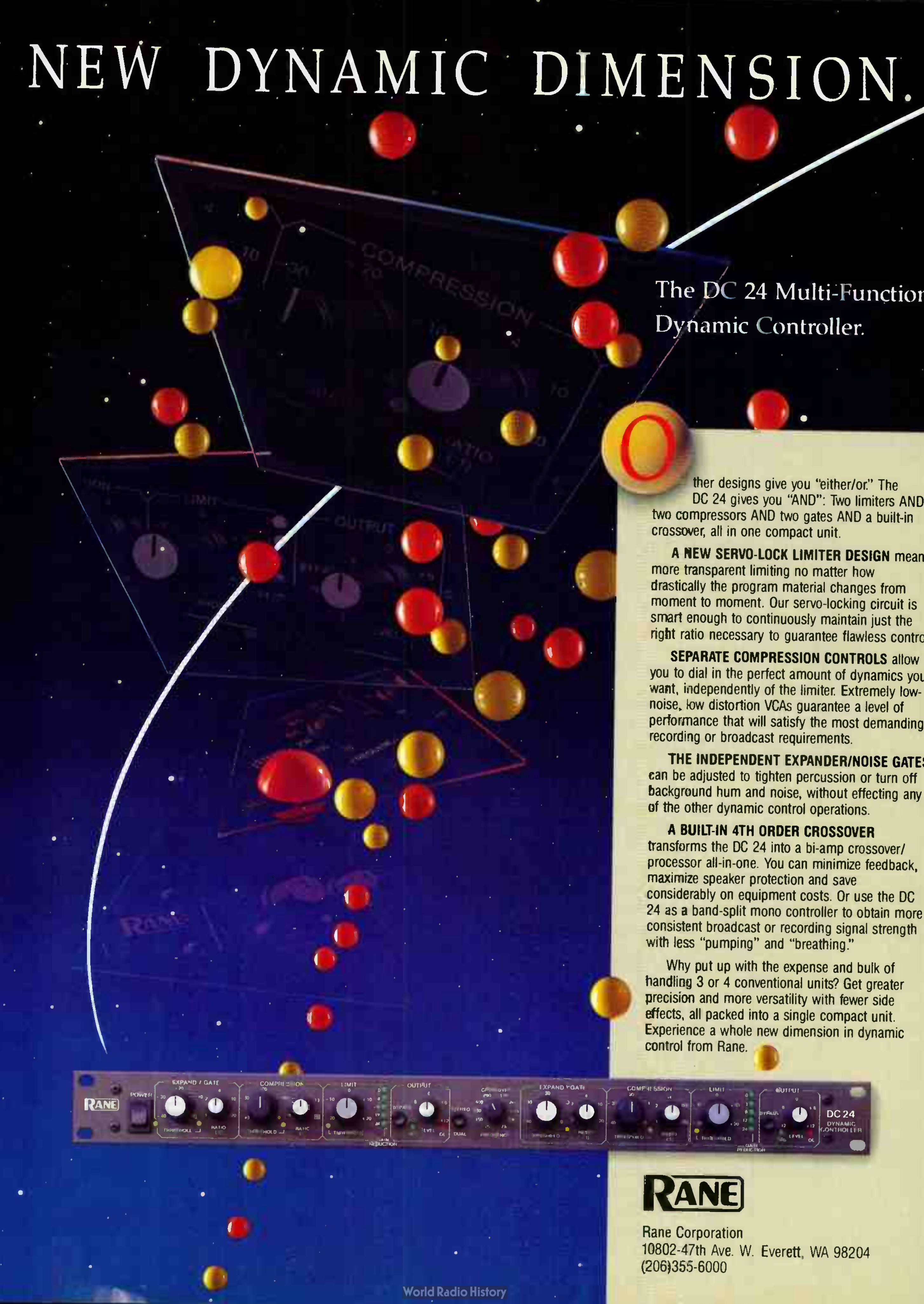

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some kind of peace of mind, or satisfaction, direction actually, more so than politics.

There are basically two kinds of music—the blues is a reflection of life and then there is sunshine music which may not have so much to say lyrically but has more meaning musically. You don't have to keep screaming "love" in order to convince people it's necessary.

The wah-wah pedal is great because it doesn't have any notes. Nothing but hitting it straight up using the vibrato and then the drums come through and that there feels like that, not depression, but that loneliness and that frustration and the yearning for something. Like something is reaching out.

There is one thing that I hate about studios usually and that is the impersonality of them; they are cold and blank and within a few minutes I lose all drive and inspiration. • I want to have stereo where the sound goes up and behind and underneath. All you can get now is just across. • You can get 16 [recording] tracks in the States, but who needs 16? You need only four really if you're going into something straight. Only occasionally do we need more, like some of the things we did on [*Electric Ladyland*]. That's what I call expression music.

I'm trying to use my power. I could buy myself a house in Beverly Hills and retire, but I just want to go on trying to communicate...

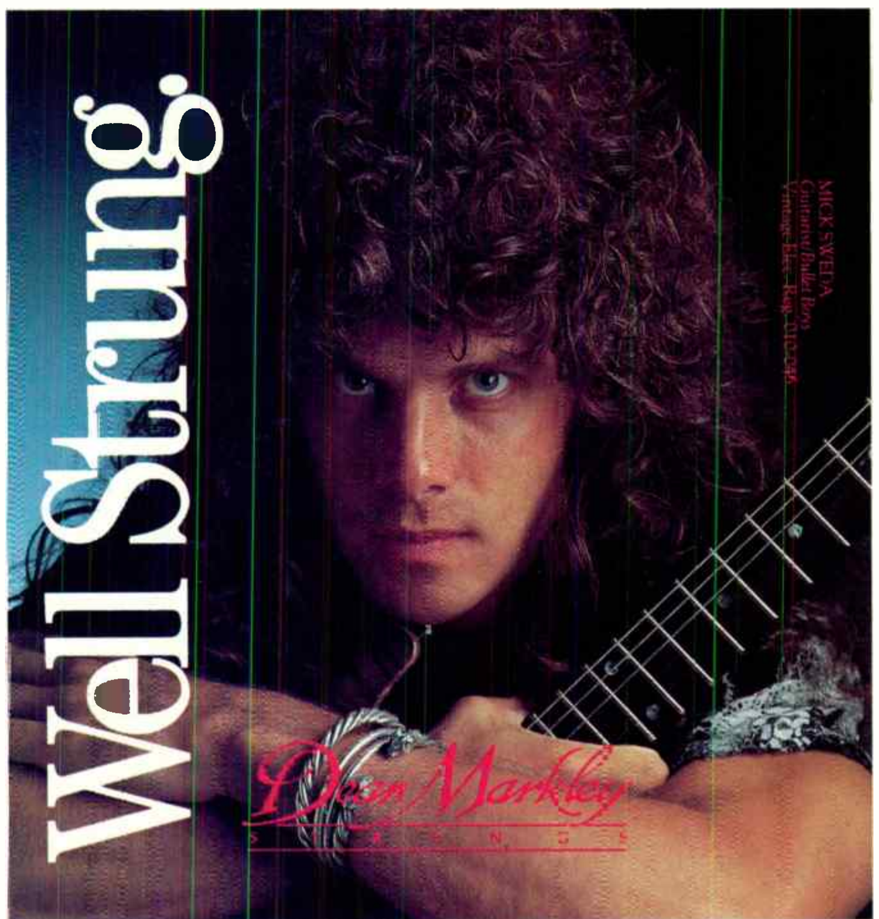
What I don't like is this business of trying to classify people. Leave us alone. Critics really give me a pain in the neck. It's like shooting at a flying saucer as it tries to land without giving the occupants a chance to identify themselves. You don't need labels, man. Just dig what's happening.

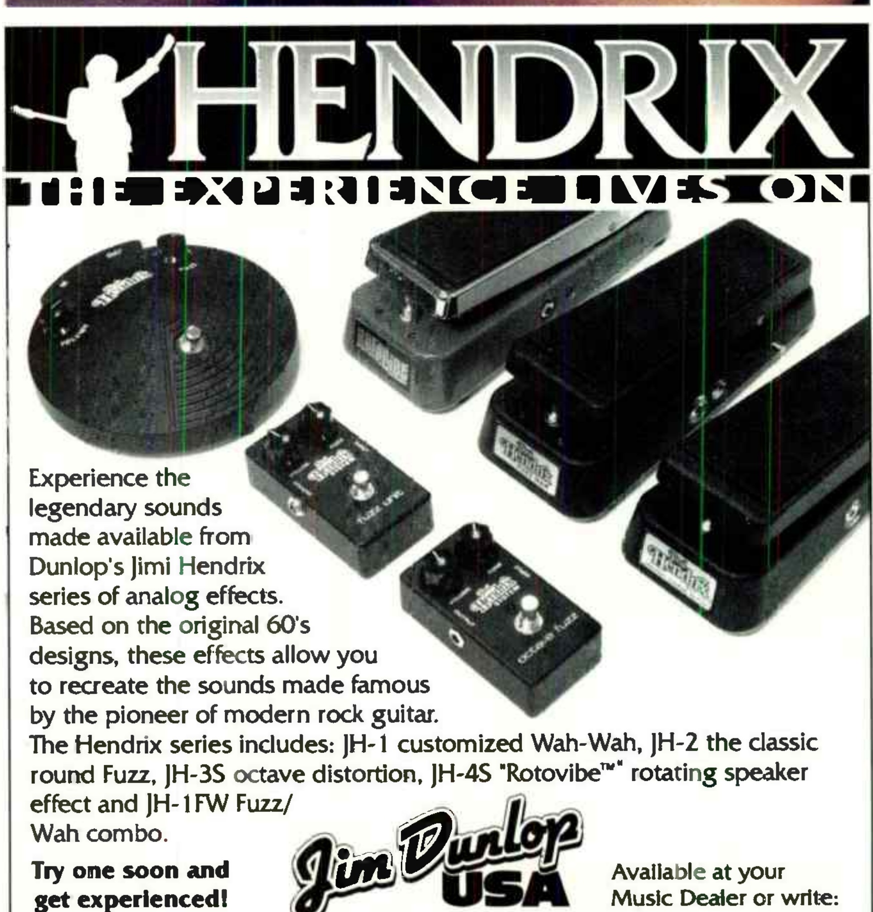
As long as I'm playing I don't think I'll ever reach a point where I'm satisfied. • You can't go on doing the same thing.

XI. Songwriting

You don't plan songwriting. You don't get in a certain groove to write a song. You dig? You can get inspiration for a song any time, any place. It's just what you feel.

Some songs, I come up with the music. Most of them that I do come up with the music, then I could put the words so much easier that fit the type of music that it makes me think of...[T]here's no certain patterns I go by 'cause I'm not actually—I





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don't consider myself a songwriter. Not yet, anyway.

A lot of times you get an idea from something you might have seen...you know. And then you can write it down the way you might have wanted it to happen or the way it could have happened. • You don't mean for the lyrics to be personal all the time but it is.

Sometimes you get wrapped up in the words and forget the music—in that case I don't think the song can be completely successful. • I just keep my music in my head. It doesn't even come out to the other guys until we go to the studio. Sometimes, if I have a new song, or if the guys want to take a vacation or something like that, maybe I'll go to the studio by myself and have an acetate made and have a rough idea about the drums, guitar, bass and vocal. Then, other times, I'll just come in banging away on the guitar and be singing and say, "This is a new song."

I think of tunes, I think of riffs. I can hum them. Then there's another melody comes into my head, and then a bass melody and then another one. On guitar I just can't get them out...

I want to write songs about tranquility, about beautiful things.

XII. Jimi on Jimi

I know that people think I'm moody, but that's only because I'm thinking of music most of the time. If I suddenly clam up it's because I've just hit on an idea.

When you first make it, the demands on you are very great. For some people, they are just too heavy. You can just sit back, fat and satisfied, or you can run away from it, which is what I did. I don't try to live up to anything anymore.... I couldn't possibly take a year off. Even though I am very tired. In reality, I might get a month off somewhere but there's no way for a year. I spend a lot of time trying to get away but I can't stop thinking about music. It's in my mind every second of the day. I can't fight it so I groove with it. • I'm a schizophrenic in at least 12 different ways, and people can't get to it.

Damn...I always mumble.

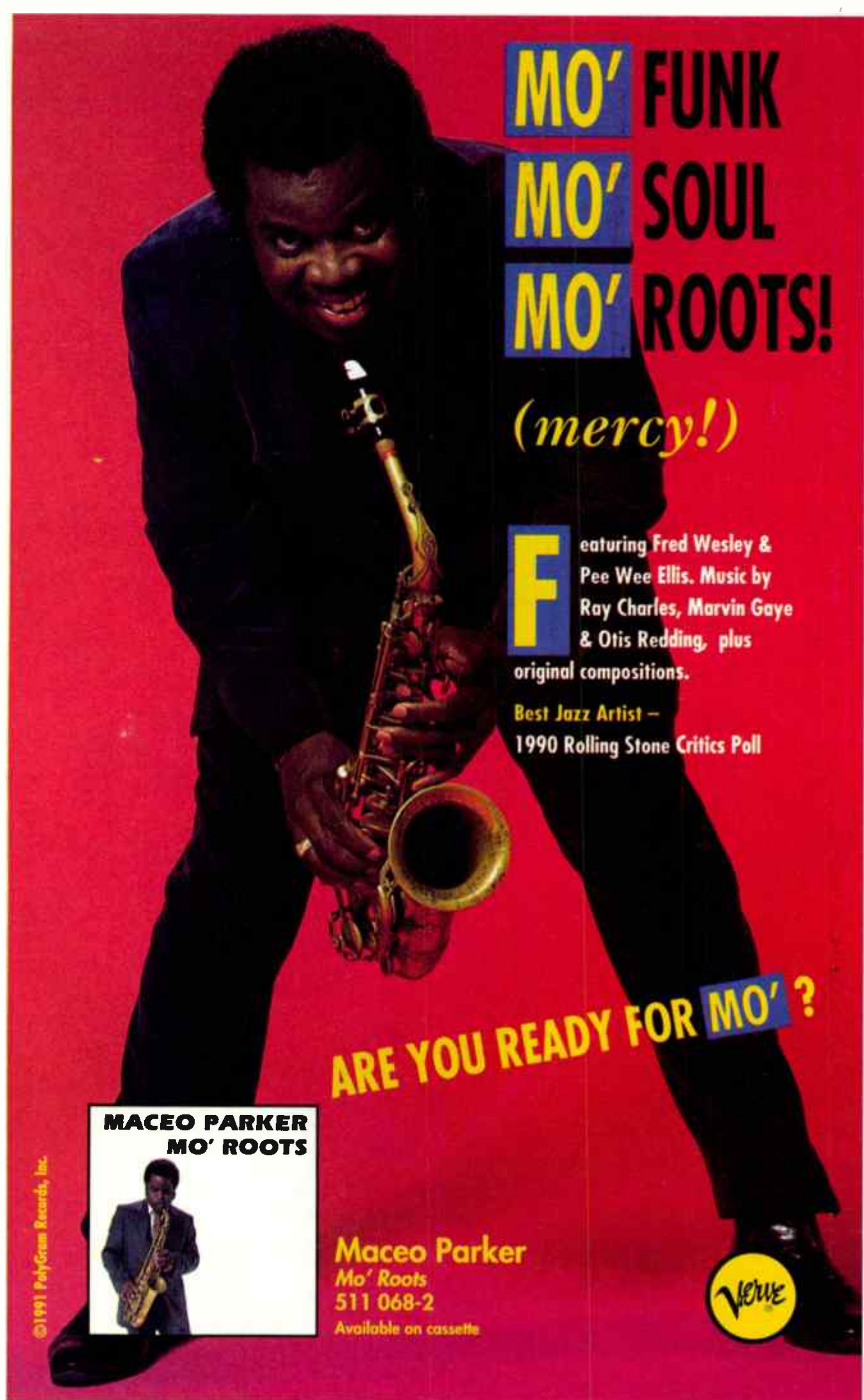
What I want is to rest completely for one year. Completely. I'll have to. Maybe something'll happen and I'll break my own rules, but I'll have to try. It's the physical and emotional toll I have to think of.

I like to treat people fair until they push me around. You can be terribly honest these days, but this tends to bring out a certain evil thing in people. Sometimes I'd like to tell the world off, but I just can't because it's not in my nature.

If I'm free, it's because I'm always running. I tend to feel like a victim from public opinion. They want to know about these girls, kicking people in the ass, doing the power-to-the-people sign. I cut my hair—they say, "Why'd you cut your hair, Jimi?" It was breaking up. "Where'd you get those socks?" "What made you wear blue socks today?"

Then I started to ask myself questions. Did I take too much solo? Should I have said "thank you" to that girl? I'm tired. Not physically. Mentally. I'm going to grow my hair back, it's something to hide behind. No, not to hide. I think maybe I grow it long because my daddy used to cut it like a skinned chicken.

I don't know, sometimes everything makes me uptight once in a while. What I hate is society trying to put everything and everybody into little tight cellophane compartments. I hate to be in any type of compartment unless I choose it myself. The world is getting to be a drag.



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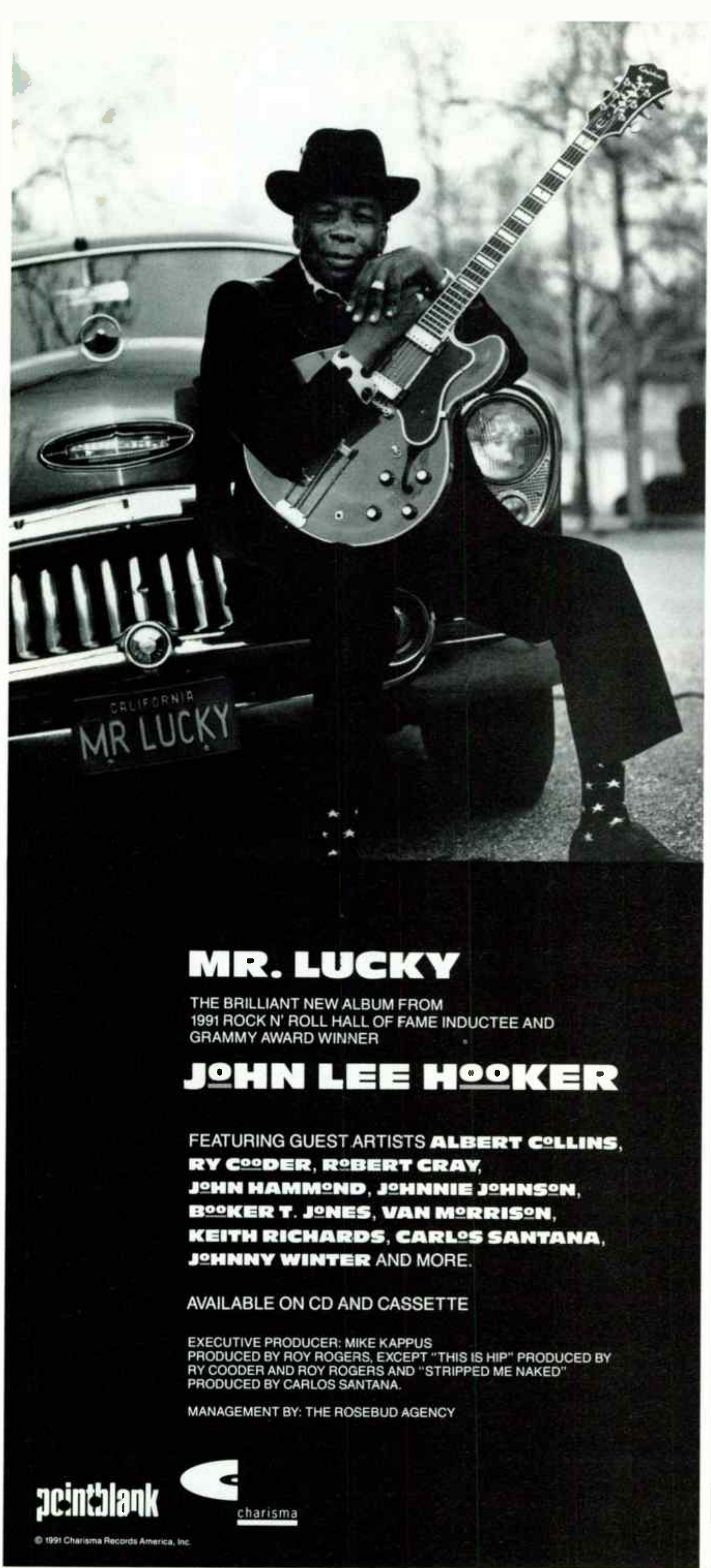

XIV. Politics

I just want to do what I'm doing without getting involved in racial or political matters. • I'd even play South Africa as long as there wasn't any physical violence, and if they tried to get at me in other ways I just wouldn't take much of it. Anyway, they can only call you names.

There's all this violent thing in the States. It's really a clash between the new and the old. They make black and white fight against each other so they can take over at each end. If they can get Black Panthers fighting hippies—who are really young whites—then we will all be right back where we started 20 years ago. This, it seems to me, is what they are trying to do. It bothers me that some black people can't get into our music right away because they are so hung up about other things.

Politics is really an ego scene. That's the way I look at it, anyway—it's a big fat ego scene. It's an art of words which mean nothing, you know.

I don't any longer dig the pop and politics crap. That's old fashioned. It was somebody's personal opinion. But politics is old hat. Anyone can go around shaking babies by the hand and kissing the mothers and saying that it was groovy. But you see you can't do this in music. Music doesn't lie.

There's a great need for harmony between man and earth. I think we're really screwing up that harmony by dumping garbage in the sea, and air pollution and all that stuff.

XV. Infinity

Everybody shouldn't get hung up when it's time to die. All you're doing is just getting rid of that old body, the single body you've been having for about 70 years.

It's funny the way most people love the dead. Once you are dead you are made for life. You have to die before they think you are worth anything. I tell you, when I die I'm not going to have a funeral. I'm going to have a jam session.... I won't have any Beatles songs but I'll have a few of Eddie Cochran's things and a whole lot of blues. Roland Kirk will be there and I'll try to get Miles Davis along if he feels like making it. For that it's almost worth dying, just for the funeral.

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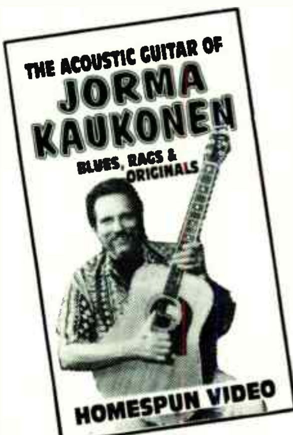

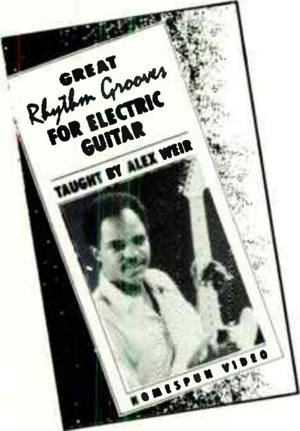

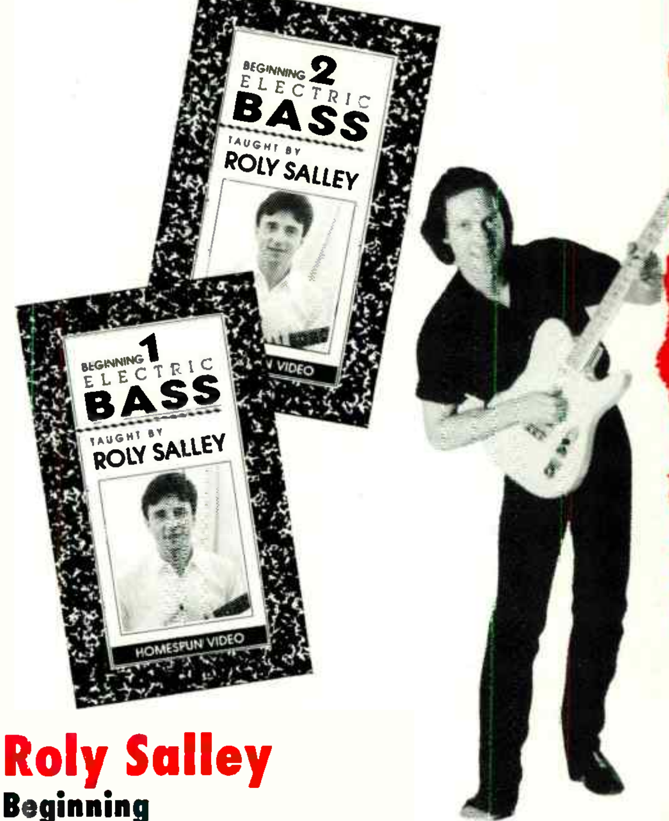

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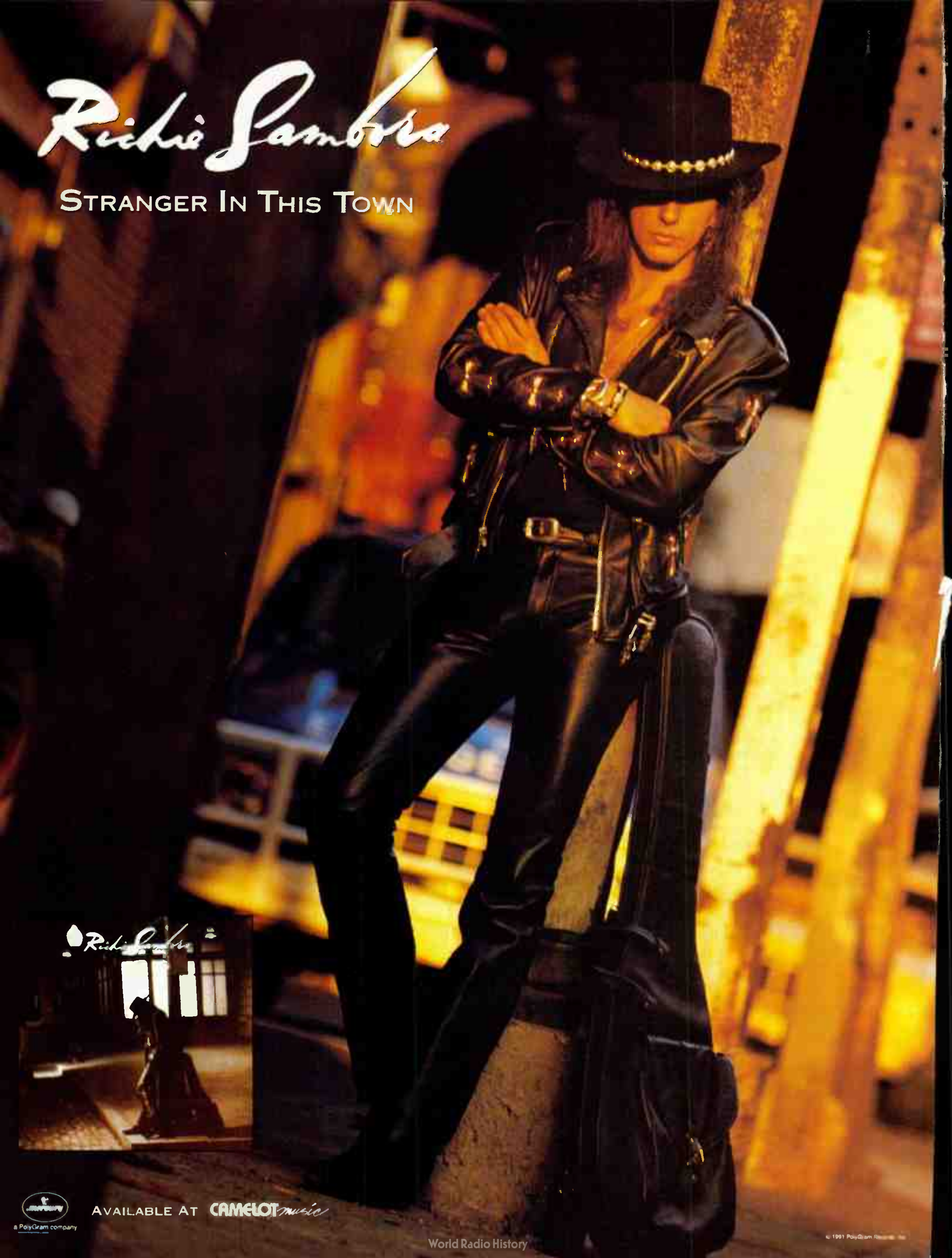

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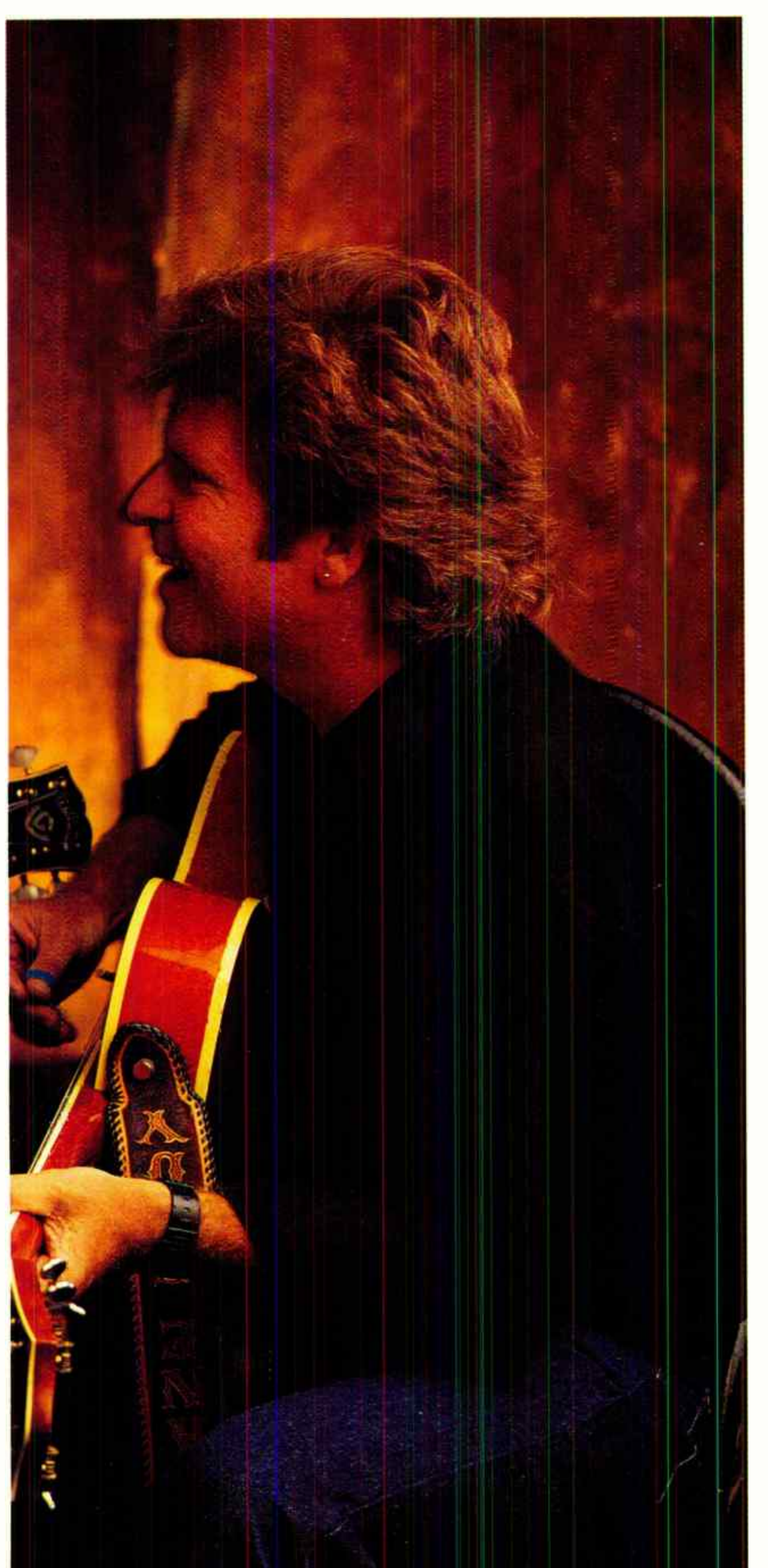
YEARS OF BAD ROAD



JOHN FOGERTY MEETS DUANE EDDY

IN 1959, WHEN JOHN FOGERTY FORMED A band in northern California later known as Creedence Clearwater Revival, a Duane Eddy record occupied the U.S. Top 10. "Forty Miles of Bad Road," it was called, the sixth of 15 Top 40 instrumentals that Eddy would score between 1958, when a record entitled "Rebel Rouser" made his cool name for him, and 1963.

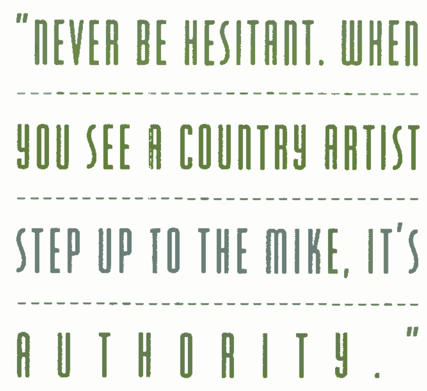
Whether offering soulful teen ballads or, as is often the case with pop instrumentalists, catchy theme music (1960's much-lifted "Peter Gunn" was another hit), Eddy always saw to it that his "twangy guitar" sang with the sonic abandon of the first rock 'n' roll and the uncut confidence of a honky-tonk singer. And then, of course, there was his own singular flair: Fond of musical freedom

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK TUCKER

World Radio History

and experimentation, hankering for hits, he and his band the Rebels came up with a studio pop music of uncommon force underlaid by a genuine sense of humor. Eddy was a twanger with his own very specific vision, and his sound and approach can be heard everywhere from the Beatles to Ennio Morricone to U2.

John Fogerty, as he explains, was an Eddy convert before "Rebel Rouser." When he heard "Movin' and Groovin'," from Eddy's first session in Phoenix, Fogerty heard one of the seminal rock 'n' roll guitar recordings, and none of his enthusiasm for it had faded last July, when he traveled with his wife and stepdaughter from the West Coast to Nashville, where he sat down and talked to Duane.



"I want to say what an honor this is for me to be able to interview a guy who did so much for rock 'n' roll," Fogerty said. "It's certainly my opinion that he stood at the crossroads of rock 'n' roll and transformed things by putting the musician out front. Up until then all we ever saw were what I call the face men. Duane came along and was a real musician and was in front. And for kids like me, it was a big inspiration. I started out with the idea that I wanted to be a musician in a band. I didn't necessarily think of being the guy in front. In fact through the years I've still thought of myself that way. I get the biggest kick being a guy in a band. I got to play with Bruce Springsteen several months ago. I told him that and he didn't believe me so I had to tell him a couple of months later that it wasn't a joke. I meant it. I love to play. And it really all started for me, in rock 'n' roll with Duane Eddy."

Fogerty, who says he currently is "trying to get some writing done," first worked with Eddy on songs that appeared on *Duane Eddy*, an excellent 1988 Capitol album done in the wake of the guitarist's international success with "Spies," produced in the U.K. by Art of Noise. This interview in Nashville, though, wasn't anything like work for Fogerty. Finding Eddy back home after performing throughout Europe for eight weeks with the Everly Brothers, Fogerty was never at a loss for questions. For the better part of four hours, he talked with the man whose instrumental ways he adapted to the ensemble power of Creedence. It was, for Fogerty, purest pleasure.

—James Hunter

FOGERTY: When I first heard "Movin' and Groovin'" I was struck by how *big* everything sounded. Did you realize at the time that there was some sort of an extra edge to the sound of that record?

EDDY: Yeah, because I knew we had to have something that counted, something that was big. I knew the bass strings recorded better than treble strings and with "Movin' and Groovin'" I had a little bit of both. But it wasn't just one treble string by itself, it was a riff, you know? And yeah, we did go for a big sound. I have to give a lot of credit to Lee Hazlewood. He mixed things for AM radio in those days so that they would come rockin' out of the radio. When we mastered we'd add a couple of dBs above normal.

FOGERTY: You mean to the tape?

EDDY: Yes, we got it as high as we could, level-wise, because if you were being played on radio in those days, a lot of records were going by, but you always noticed Pat Boone would come along and he'd boom out. It was because of the mastering. So we wanted to do the same thing and have a little more *apparent* level, at least.

FOGERTY: You realize they call that tape saturation.

EDDY: I didn't know that.

FOGERTY: Another thing that started with "Movin' and Groovin'" was that the arrangement was separate from the production values of the recording. The arrangement left room for each of the instruments to do their thing. It was only a few instruments in the first place and your guitar played liked a vocalist. Therefore you needed a backing. So there was room for a backbeat, drums, bass. I'm not sure what the other rhythm instrument in that case would have been. Did you use a rhythm guitar?

EDDY: Yes, we used a couple of rhythm guitars. We had two acoustic rhythms and we had an upright bass and an electric bass. Now we may not have had basses on "Movin' and Groovin'," actually. As I recall we didn't. With "Rebel Rouser" we had both.

FOGERTY: You actually used both at the same time?

EDDY: Yeah, electric bass for the click sound. There was this steel player Buddy Wheeler. We didn't use steel, so Buddy got an electric bass so he could work the sessions. It was a matter of economics. He had a double amp that he'd made from scratch, his own power amp, two 15 JBLs and a tweeter in the middle. And he ran this electric bass through it which gave it a lot of click when he hit the notes. So we had both tone and a click. And we had an upright too. Jimmy Simmons was the upright bass player.

FOGERTY: "Movin' and Groovin'" came on when I was in my bedroom supposedly doing my homework and I know people say things like, "It changed my world" but there was definitely more there, something bigger than what some country guy said. The big sound got me more than the lick or the tune. When "Movin' and Groovin'" became a success, was the rest of what became *Duane Eddy* already in your mind? I'm speaking of when things became melodic, rather than riff-oriented.

EDDY: No, the rest came after "Movin' and Groovin'" and "Up and Down" started climbing the charts. In about early February '58 we went over to L.A. and did a rock 'n' roll show at a movie theater. I just came out and played that one song, "Movin' and Groovin'," then I'd go off. I did that for a week, about five times a day. Then we went back to Phoenix and cut "Rebel Rouser." I sat down that morning in the studio with the guys, had the drummer play a backbeat and I just wrote it at the session. I'd worked a week on this show, so now I knew what I wanted to do. That's why the intro of "Rebel Rouser" is like it is. I thought it would be cool just to have the spotlight hit it. And by the time the band kicked in I'd be out in the middle of the stage.

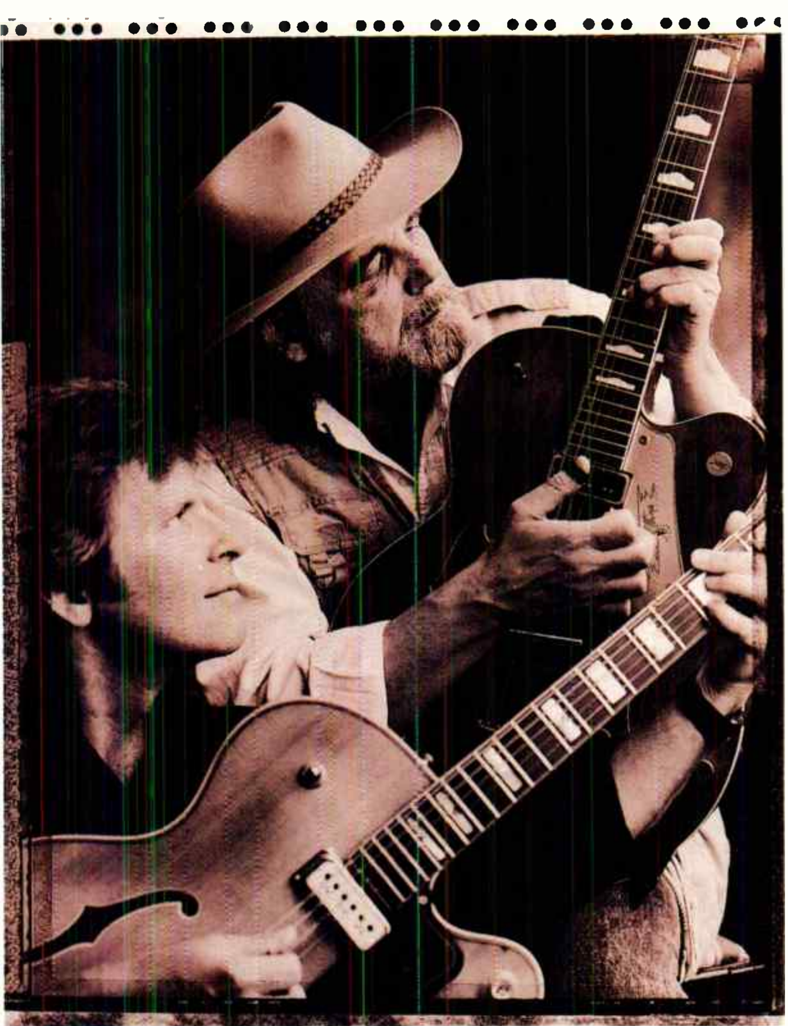
FOGERTY: Of course you realize this is pure genius. You're thinking like a manager or some sort of promoter, or even a movie director. I've read all these intellectuals from the East Coast talking about the passage of time in a record, how you set things up. The late '60s is

World Radio History

when they really intellectualized everything and that's why albums started costing half a million dollars. But that simple little thing, because you had just recently been on a stage, put that in your mind.

EDDY: Right. And the other thing that I was picturing was a gang walking down an alley toward me, out on the prowl.

FOGERTY: So rebel, in your mind, was like in *Rebel Without a Cause*? I pictured a guy in the Confederate army. The music was a fusion of everything then; the kids were juvenile delinquents and they were always upto no good. And gangs then meant quite another thing than in Los Angeles now. And the music was all part of it. "This devil's music." This bad rock 'n' roll. But I never realized you were tuning into that. I thought you were tuning into Southern and "rebel" meant "Johnny Yuma," because the feel, the melody seems somehow country.



EDDY: It is very much. I discovered later where I actually "stole" that from. Tennessee Ernie Ford had an album out, *Songs of Our Lusty Land*, or something like that, with a song that went [*sings*] "Who's gonna shoe your pretty little foot, who's gonna glove your hand?" Remember that?

FOGERTY: But it's not anywhere close.

EDDY: The melody is.

FOGERTY: No, the chord changes are slightly influenced, but it's not the same melody at all. "Movin' and Groovin'" was one stage, this sound, but you leaped to full stride on the next record. "Rebel Rouser" is for the ages. You became Duane Eddy then. All those easy quotes: "All he did was play the melody on the low strings." Oh, right. Well, a million guys could sit down and play the melody on the bass strings and it wouldn't be Duane Eddy. In fact a million have tried.

A lot of times when I read articles, writers don't quite say it like I feel it, or I think other players feel it. The point is that these are choices of *personality*, your personality, that we're talking about. And you're much too humble 'cause I'll read you saying something like, "Well, I had these certain strings on there and I use this amp and turned it to that setting and I used this Gretsch guitar and that's why it sounds like Duane Eddy." Well, baloney! That's all! To me it's whatever it is in the mind that makes one individual different from another—that's what happened. You made some choices, some of which went back your whole lifetime. You were using that guitar 'cause you chose that guitar over 20,000 other guitars, and those strings with that guitar, for a lot of reasons. Those settings, all those things suited you. But then when you came to do a song, you didn't sit down and say, "I'm gonna write a monster for the ages." I'm sure you weren't that self-aware. But you made some choices that were very pivotal, and one of which is you kept the melody simple yet it's a rhythmic thing that carries the force of the beat along, i.e. you can play the first verse—meaning the melody—all by itself and it works, you know? You're humping along there and there's nobody else playing, it's just the guitar. And when everybody comes in, it's like—falling off a cliff, "Oh my God—bang!" And it seems so easy. But if that had been me or a bunch of other people, we probably would have said something like, "The intro's too long, let's have a little bass come in," then add a little brush and pretty soon it's turned into something else. You made the right choices. The other thing I wondered about is modulation.

EDDY: Well, after we'd done three or four verses as we were writing it and putting it together in the studio it had to go somewhere and it did not require a bridge, it was complete within itself. And we knew we were going to put the sax on later. I never thought about it. It just seemed like the thing to do.

FOGERTY: I doubt Fats Domino or Elvis or Chuck or any of those people ever modulated once. I did once in my life, in "Lodi." It was country, I went up two steps.

EDDY: I did it because it was because it was the right thing to do, to give it a lift. That worked but then we had to get out of it. Where you gonna end? You can't end in F#.

FOGERTY: Why?

EDDY: Well, because it's...

FOGERTY: Not quite G?

EDDY: It's not quite G. [*laughter*] It's not a major stopping place.

FOGERTY: I guess what I'm getting at is the choice of your personality. You know what I would have done? I would have had the one

World Radio History

verse, two, three, added the sax and then I probably would have said, "What can we do now?" My eyes would have crossed—"We'll do a bridge!"

EDDY: Well, it's like taking a trip. You stop and eat in a major city, you go to F. F# is a village. G's another major city, it's a destination. That's the way I looked at it. We had to get out of that so we just went quickly through F and F# and then settled down in G and finished.

Rock 'n' roll was wide open. There was nothing you couldn't do. I'd had a very country-influenced background although I did get exposed to blues. The Sharps [Eddy's backup singers] took me down to Watts, to the World of Five, or Hundred and Fifth, some barroom down there. You're sitting there with your party, just a little bit woozy from the cheap Thunderbird wine, which is horrible but gives you a good feeling, and they say "Yeah, get up and play!" "Oh no! I can't play with these guys, I don't know what they're doing!" But you get up there, pretty soon you feel what they're doing and they're looking at you, "Yeah, yeah, go!" You know? And you capture that feeling and you start playing. Just the same as country only different licks. But the fire's still the same, even more so.

FOGERTY: You grew up, I think, mostly in Arizona? There was no blues station?

EDDY: No. Well, there might have been but I didn't know about it. After 1958 I jumped in with both feet.

FOGERTY: You said that it was wide open, but on the other hand, there was definitely stuff that was true to rock 'n' roll and other things you wouldn't do. And you were helping to write the rules. I actually don't believe it was wide open, because when people would step over the line, you knew it. The audience knew it. Used to say, "You can't fool a kid." I have had a word associated in my mind with you since 1958 and the word is "cool." Starting just with your name, Duane Eddy, wow! Everything was cool, the sound was cool, the songs themselves were cool, and above all else, perhaps, the names of the tracks.

EDDY: That old expression: What's in a name? I think everything's in a name.

FOGERTY: Yeah. Robert Hilburn once asked me, "What's the most important thing in a hit record?" I said "The title," and I had you in mind. I took particular notice that your records all had great titles and yet this is instrumental music, there wasn't one lyric. When it came time for me to write songs, I used that lesson I had learned from you. It was simply, if the title can mean so much without lyrics, the title must be important. If you can have a cool title like "Ramrod," or "Rebel Rouser," or "Forty Miles of Bad Road," "Heartbreak Hotel," "Honky Tonk," "Bad Moon Risin'" on top of everything else, you're really setting off in the right direction.

EDDY: Well, that sets up the whole image doesn't it? A concept. Don Robertson, a songwriter, and I were sitting in his office one day flipping through things and he had all these songs he'd never pitched anybody and I said, "I bet I could find one that's a hit here just by looking at the titles." I saw "Ninety Miles an Hour Down a Dead End Street" and I said, "Let me hear this, that would be great for Hank Snow." So he sent it to Chet Atkins, Chet cut it with Hank and Hank had a hit with it. What's in a name? It sets up a whole image. Like "Forty Miles of Bad Road." We were standing in line to see a movie one day and just sort of monitoring the conversations around us, and we heard these old Texans talking about their evening before, how much fun it was. They were kidding each other and laughing and suddenly this guy says, "Well, that girl you were with, boy, she wasn't so hot either." And the other guy says, "Well she was better 'n yours! Yours had a face like 40 miles of bad road." We looked at each other and just cracked up laughing. We realized it would make a great title for a song.

"DUANE IS MY KIND OF PLAYER — ONE LITTLE NOTE, OR TWO, TAKE UP THE SPACE OF TWENTY."

FOGERTY: It described a picture and the picture that was actually better than the anecdote. One of the songs on that first album was "Three Thirty Blues," which my little band of guys that eventually became Creedence memorized every note of and played over and over.That was one of our staples, a pillar of our band. We played six or seven songs on that first album, but we always wondered about "Three Thirty Blues." We'd sit around and go "You think they wrote it at 3:30 in the morning? Is it three minutes and 30 seconds long?"

EDDY: It's three minutes and 30 seconds long.

FOGERTY: Is that all there is to it?

EDDY: Yeah, but it also sets up the image again, of being 3:30 in the morning. That's the first thing you think of.

FOGERTY: Does it say that on the record?

EDDY: No, it doesn't explain it.

FOGERTY: Three of us from the band came to the Oakland Auditorium to see a show that you were in. Probably '59, it wasn't much later than that. We had to show up at four o'clock to make sure we could be in the front of the line for an eight o'clock show. One of the things I remember about that show is you playing "Three Thirty Blues" exceedingly well. For one thing, you were better than I thought you were, you know? And I already had you up here. There was more fire, more something, I don't know how to explain it. But I came back to the school yard the next day and "Gosh, you know, Duane's really a good guitar player! It's not just the low notes or something, this guy really plays good!" Your fingers were flying, you were doing some stuff. It was hip. And it's a great memory for me.

EDDY: Well, I'm glad to hear that and I'll tell you why. Because I remember that show. A well-dressed black man comes into the dressing room afterwards and he says, "Duane, I loved that 'Three Thirty Blues.' I loved it so much I want to give you a hug." And he did. He says, "And I loved it so much I want to kiss you on the cheek." So he kisses me on the cheek and I said, "Oh, thank you very much." And he steps back and says, "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't introduce myself, I'm B.B. King." I just went, "B.B. King! Oh my God!" I'm made, you know? He liked my blues. That just blew me away, and that was that show.

FOGERTY: I'll interject a story here. I go hunting every year up in Oregon and my hunting pal is about 20 years older than me. We're

World Radio History

sitting there, probably listening to a football game, it's after dinner and I'm relaxed. And on comes this sound, it's a guitar and I turn to my buddy and I say, "That's Duane Eddy," and the guy goes, "Yeah." I go, "No, no, that's Duane Eddy!" And he goes, "Yeah, so what?" I go, "Heck, you don't understand! They always make movies and commercials and they have these little parts where the guitar is *trying* to be Duane Eddy. But that *is* Duane Eddy, I'll betcha!" It was a Chevy commercial. I tried to explain to him how remarkable this was because we have heard a thousand imitations, people who have been told, "Do Duane Eddy," and they at least passed the producer's muster. But I knew instantly. A year or two later I met you and it turned out that indeed this was the real Duane Eddy.

It was so distinctive and so real, even after so many attempts by other people. And I say it's not the equipment and all that other stuff, it's something between the brain and the fingers and...

EDDY: It's like fingerprints. Everybody has their own style and approach to the instrument, the touch, thinking. In fact I can spot you a mile away when you play.

FOGERTY: Well...yeah, well, no one ever asks somebody to play like John Fogerty, you know? Some people through the years have put down your sparseness, especially the arrangements, as being simplistic or corny. All I can say is: they don't get it. It's like people that watch baseball and say, "Gee, baseball's boring." "Movin' and Groovin'" and "Rebel Rouser" stayed pretty much where they started. The melody, additional instruments, didn't suddenly freak out. It stayed true to the beginning, to the set-up, the intro to the song. I learned a great lesson from that. Less is more. Simple is more powerful than complex. Much more powerful. You end up telling any drummer, "Don't do all that." Which is what all the beat-box guys know now. Especially at an amateur level, you're trying to tell guys who are basically kids to not play all that junk. It doesn't sound right. Calm down, play it simple. And it was very hard for them. Nine out of 10 musicians wouldn't understand it.

I once had a dream when I was up hunting, I had a certain drummer in mind. We were trying to get across this creek and there were these rocks sticking up out of the water. We didn't want to get our feet wet. And so the rocks were the beats, the down beat, the back beat. I kept saying, "Step on the rocks," and the drummer kept getting his feet wet because he was missing the beats.

I get passionate about this subject. The apparent simplicity of it is one of the reasons why it is so great. To make it more complex would degrade it, if you do that enough you'll wreck it. To keep it simple and understand that it is in its glory being simple like that. I prefer to hear harmony like the Five Blind Boys of Alabama as opposed to, say, Take Six.

EDDY: Actually it's much more difficult to keep it simple. I've bit my tongue many times. You can just throw in the coolest lick right here, and I wanted to do it, but I didn't because it didn't fit, it would change the mood.

FOGERTY: And it's also harder, intellectually, to come up with something that is valid that is not so scattered. You end up having three or four notes in this space, rather than 27; therefore it's actually more intellectually difficult to make those three or four the right ones. Can you imagine if some guy took "Rebel Rouser" and started going [*makes wild guitar sounds—laughter*]. It's just obnoxious! Saxophone players tend to do that.

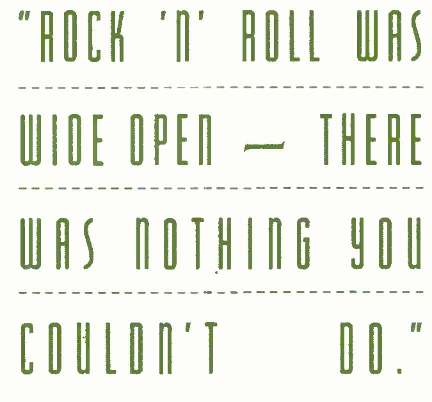
EDDY: I read the greatest thing in *Readers Digest* one day that just summed it all up for me. They talked to this oriental painter that painted vases. And he would paint this pottery with intricate designs, just beautiful. And then over here you have one that just had like an S design, very simple. Now the intricate one was priced much lower than the one with just the one line on it. And they ask him why, he says, "Well, when I paint the intricate things, I do so much, you can't tell where I've made a mistake. When I do that one simple line, it has to be perfect, any mistake I make would glare tremendously and stick out and I'd have to start all over again." And that's true. That stuck in my mind. It was a great way to explain simplicity.

FOGERTY: The musicianship on *Have Twangin' Guitar, Will Travel* is still very much alive. I've listened to it maybe two months ago. I'm amazed now that you were so young. You picked it right there. It wasn't a fluff, didn't just fall into it. It was so amazing, like concrete, this huge sound in exactly the right spot. It still blows my mind. And I've been playing a while.

EDDY: I learned that lesson from country people, that authority. Never be hesitant. When you see a country artist step up to the mike, it's *authority*. George Jones, especially Buck Owens, he knows no fear. It doesn't matter if they have to sing tenor to a dog whistle, as they say, they'll do it, they don't care. There's no back-off. I was very influenced by country. We used to say we were just making country records with drums.

FOGERTY: One of the songs that my band played was "Ramrod." I learned it in B. A couple of years ago we were sitting down to play and you played it in A, like all those guys I'd seen in bars, and I went, "No, no, no, it's in B!" Why did that happen?

EDDY: We cut it in A. We were trying to get a deal, this was in 1957 before "Movin' and Groovin'," just bass, drums and guitar. And in those days we'd press up a few records and send them out, try to get a deal that way. With a little note saying, "This record's breaking out in...Texas...Kansas...you really should listen to it, it's a great record." And nobody did, nothing happened, so we forgot about it. Later that year we cut "Movin' and Groovin'," put it out in January or February '58. We went back and did "Rebel Rouser" in April '58, right around my birthday, I'd just turned 20. We went back to do the "Dick Clark Show." Loaded up my '56 Chevy, hooked up a U-Haul. I did "Rebel Rouser" on the show, and he said, "It would be nice to have something for an opening, live, like 'Movin' and Groovin'.'" So we worked it out for the opening of the show. Then he said, "Well, we need something for closing. Got anything else?" I said, "Well, we could do 'Ramrod,' a thing I cut last year and never did anything with." So we ran it down and Dick said, "That's perfect, great." So we did it to close the show, the credits. And Monday morning there was



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orders for 150,000 copies at the record company. They called me Tuesday, panicked, said, "They want a record right now, they've got orders." So I said, "Well, I'll cut it again, why not? That track is terrible." He said, "No." They wanted it so we had to do it. I wanted to hear it first, but of course I didn't. They were in that night, overdubbed it, mixed it, spliced it together, speeded it up and that's how it came out to be in B. It might have been a little sharp when we cut it in A but he must have sped it up a tone.

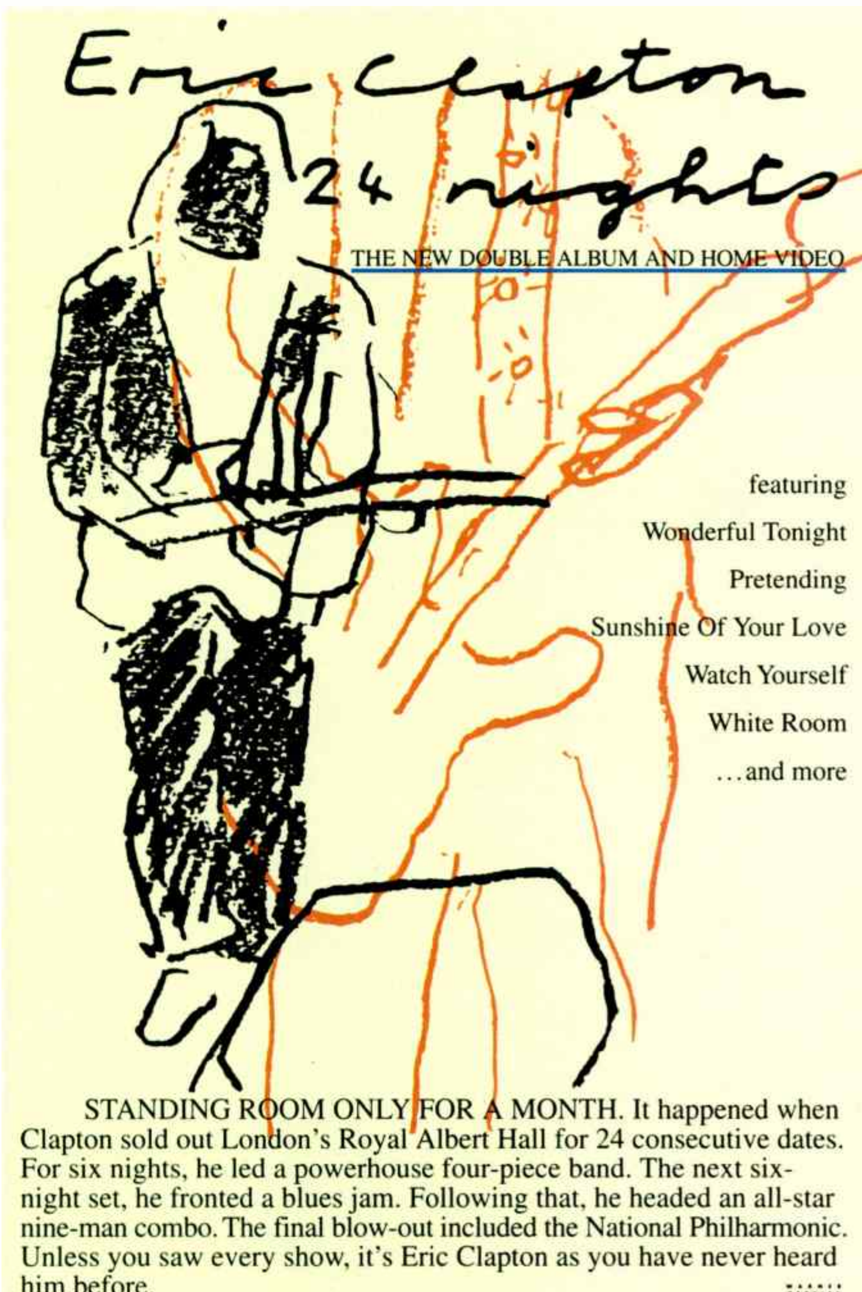
FOGERTY: A whole tone. He didn't speed it to B-flat. See, your songs are always in guitar keys, none of this weird stuff.

EDDY: "Peter Gunn" had to be in F. I played it, I tuned up a half tone for that and played it in E. Of course onstage I played it in F.

FOGERTY: I've learned to play slide in the last few months. For years and years I always thought that was pretty abstract. The idea of open tuning..."Gee, how useful is that? You're stuck." But, I started going down to Mississippi the last year for the first time in my life, researching where all these guys came from, visiting Clarkesdale and down into the Delta. I mean the old guys, Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, Son House, most of them are gone. And all their old records have that thing on it. I have a bunch of these slides that I'd bought years ago and started figuring out a way to do it with normal tuning, normal guitar, normal strings, nothing different. I've been having a kick with it, fun.

I was playing with George Harrison. I had never met him before, I met him in L.A. at the Palomino Club. They got up onstage and I thought, "Hey, I ain't missing out, give me the guitar!" Everybody played a few songs. Somebody finally says, "Well, play something, George." And he rips into "Honey Don't." Up until then he'd been the quiet Englishman—suddenly that came rippin' out of that guitar. I mean, it was big! All the synapses—he's played that for 30 years, it was like breathing to him. Those guys had been imbibing a little, looking a bit funny, then suddenly that came out, like...*Shut up.* God, I just looked at him in wonderment.

There are studio musicians—I'll use myself as an example, to avoid talking about someone else. I've gone through periods in my life when I actually doubted my own musicality. And I'd get around other people, especially L.A. studio session people, with these big reputations, and I literally forgot myself, I got lost in it. These guys get all this



Who'll Stop the Twang?

JOHN FOGERTY likes his Kubicki Strat copies strung with nickel-wrapped GHS Gus series; also on hand are a Washburn Eagle, some Les Paul Customs from his Creedence days. He also likes how his pal DUANE EDDY's axes are so immaculate and well-maintained. Duane's got a Gretsch 6120 Country Club, the Guild D500 Duane Eddy Model and a Danelectro longhor, all with GHS Boomer mediums, down to a .054 low E for twang. (Tenderfoot Fogerty used to substitute a second high E for his B.) Duane powers up a Peavey Session 400 amp with a JBL 15 or two 12s—no tweeters—and a Fender amp that Paul Rivera loaded with tremolo. "We go for a big sound," Eddy says. "You know who did the first fuzztone ever?"

Fogerty guesses, "Maybe Marty Robbins with the bass thing on..."

"Right, Grady Martin played guitar on that: 'Don't Worry 'bout Me.' Not many people know that."

World Radio History

money to play for Lionel Ritchie or someone like that and I always think of myself as some guy behind a plough, to tell you the truth. I went through kind of bowing to their technique. They're fast. I almost laugh saying this now but I believed it then: "Wow, these guys are so great and I'm just this plunky old guy that does that thing I always do. I wish I could grow up and be like Heavy Harry over there." I finally came out the other end of that because there are at least two kinds of musicians. Those guys are fine, what they're providing is a service and that's great. Some guy walks in the door and says, "Play this, now," and in two takes they've played it.

There's other people in the world, some who may have technique here and some whose technique may be rather common. I fall somewhere in between. I'm not Eddie Van Halen. I'm not in the gunslinger sense a great guitar player, or musician, because it covers all my music.

EDDY: It's the difference between an artist and a musician.

FOGERTY: Well, that's kind of where I'm leading. I finally realized, all by myself years later, I sit down and play the guitar and this is what I do. And I like it, right? I could get all those guys in here and say, "Do this," and not one of them would do it. I would have to keep saying, "No, no, hit it a little harder before you bend it." Explaining, explaining, explaining and the guy wouldn't get it.

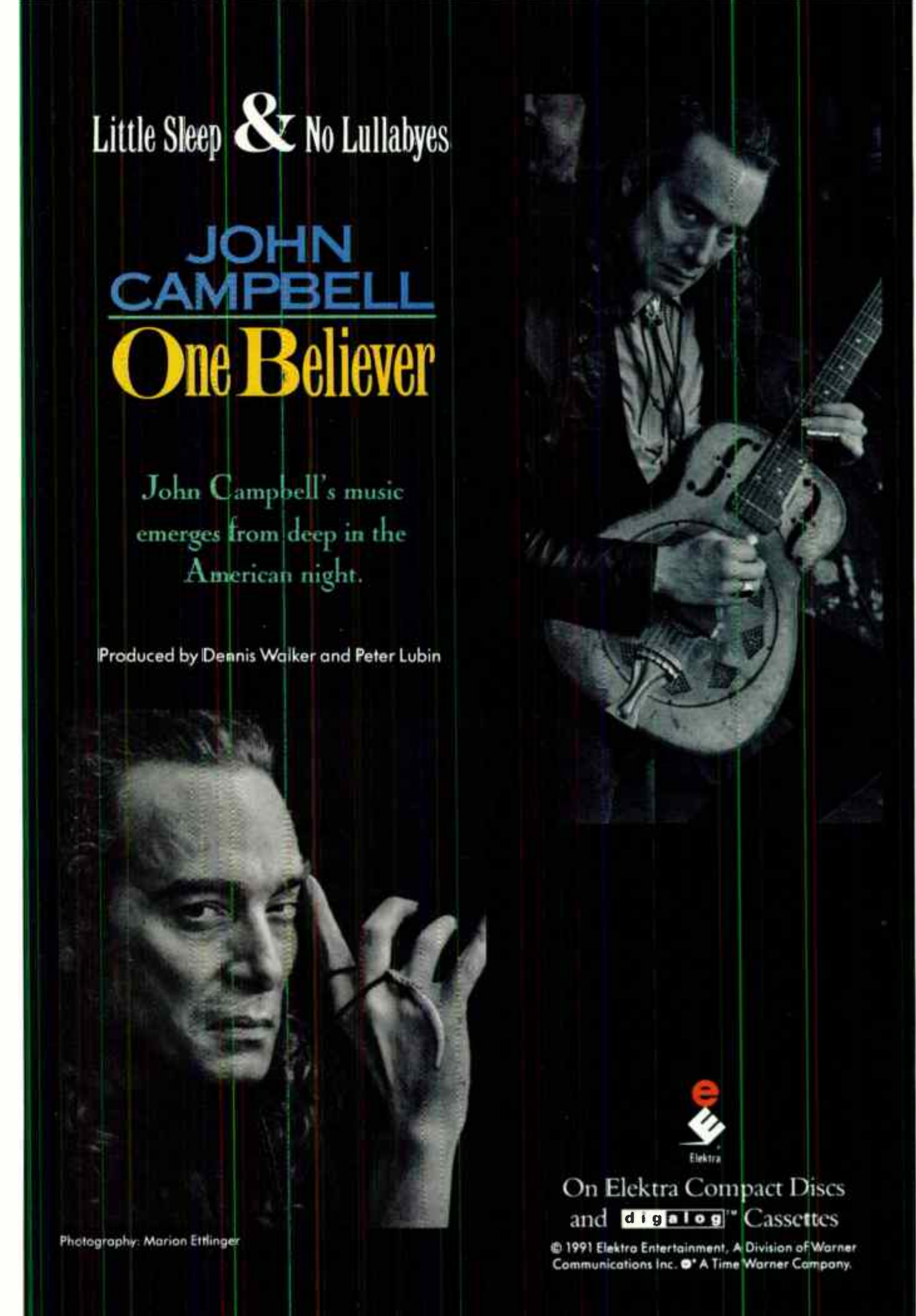
Duane Eddy is my kind of guitar player, in the sense that, one silly little note, two notes, is real important and it takes up the space of 20 notes.

EDDY: Session players are great, they are wonderful. They can play what's on the paper and they can either play it with fire or they can just play it straight. I know exactly what you're talking about because I just do my *dow dows* and play my simple sound and melody and these guys are wonderful.

Those very same guys were the ones that got me through being inhibited, saying, "Jeez, I'm going to sit over here and turn my back to these guys so they can't see how bad I play." One day I ran into Tommy Tedesco—this guy is a very skilled reader. He was the top session guitar player in L.A. for many, many years. Movie scores, everything. The most difficult stuff? Flyspecks, he could read. He came into the studio and he boomed out, "Duane Eddy. Come here!" He gives me a big hug and he says, "I just got one question for you." And everybody's sitting and looking and he says, "Has anybody ever asked you to play like Tommy Tedesco?" Everybody cracked up. Because for years they'd been saying to him, "Do a Duane Eddy here." So that helped. We're talking about skill here. Their skill as musicians far superseded mine. Now when it came to artistry, my skill far superseded theirs. They didn't know how to sit down and make an instrumental.

FOGERTY: It's harder to play with feeling in the right places. I never got to ask you—how does it feel to wait a few years and see all these seeds you threw out, people like me? I gratefully acknowledge where my stuff comes from. The way we did "Heard It Through the Grapevine" and I'd switch the riff around, put it down on the low strings, is right out of the Duane Eddy songbook. What's that feel like? Is that a dumb question?

EDDY: No, I don't think so. Because that has been sort of a highlight these past few years. It's taken the place of money I should have had for having the career in the first place. It's a payback. Knowing that I was influencing you and whoever else is an un-



World Radio History

expected bonus. It makes me feel more important than I otherwise would. It's a confirmation, many years later, that it was the right thing. And we had no way of knowing at the time. We got confirmation in the fact that the records were hits. That's the first big joy. But after that it dies down and people forget you and you're just working the odd tour here and there. Then suddenly somebody comes along and says, "You started me in this business, you are responsible for this, that or the other." I'm sure you must be getting this by now?

FOGERTY: I've heard some of that talk. I will say that there are hits and then there are hits. You're in an exclusive club. Years later your stuff is still cool, which is a lot better than being in fad like disco, or bubblegum. People still like you and think it's cool. God forbid if Creedence had made it as the Golliwogs. As I heard David Letterman say to Pee Wee Herman one night, "Gee, Pee Wee, just think about this, you're going to have to dress that way for the rest of your life." [*laughter*]

EDDY: If I had a mentor it would have to be Hank Williams Sr. Everybody I've talked to from Elvis to Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry, all loved Hank Williams. Dion and the Belmonts. Bill Haley came along and made a record almost like "Move It on Over"—which was a Hank Williams hit in about 1949 or '50—and called it "Rock Around the Clock," which I considered to be the first rock 'n' roll record. He had a couple more and then it was Elvis after that. He took the ball and ran with it. Bill opened the door but Elvis walked in the room.

FOGERTY: I think they don't want to lend that much oomph, let's say, to Bill Haley. I don't know why. Actually the very first record I ever bought was the Bill Haley album.

EDDY: They were both doing the same thing. He and Hank Williams and Bob Wills were influenced by big bands. Listen to how they phrase things. The steel guitar on Hank Williams records phrases just like a horn section. But they were doing it with five pieces and they were doing it country. "Rock Around the Clock" was just an offshoot of "Move It On Over," I think.

FOGERTY: I totally agree. Nobody got sued over that one! Bill Haley doesn't get quite the respect that he should. Bill Haley was not controversial. He was kind of, if not stodgy or square, at least he wasn't upsetting anyone. He made these great records, but Elvis was James Dean. And that's what rock 'n' roll wanted to be. It kind of invented itself and Elvis reinvented himself.

EDDY: Elvis put the humor into it. If you look at his early films, he'll do something and laugh at himself for doing it. That whole leg shaking bit and everything. He was having fun with that. It really hurt his feelings when they wouldn't show him from the waist down, he told me that. I met him in '71 in Vegas. Had a four- or five-hour talk with him and he said, "You remember when they showed me on the 'Tommy Dorsey Show,' they wouldn't show me from the waist down? The other day I went to the White House and the President of the United States told me what a great influence I am on the youth of the nation. Isn't it great how things turn around after all these years?" He was actually very hurt that they wouldn't show him. Because he was just doing that to have fun with it. He thought it was silly, fun.

Did you ever see films of those people? There's people standing there saying, "We're not going to have this rock 'n' roll in our city, it's music of the devil!" And I mean, somebody like that who's 50 years old, looks 80, the

World Radio History

squarest looking, dim-witted person you could imagine standing there saying this. Of course it's fun to be a rebel against something like that! And it's harmless. I don't think we were really rebels as such. We were musically, but we weren't taking drugs, weren't raping young girls, weren't pissing on the stage. These are things that came later.

FOGERTY: Well, they ruined Elvis' records. We mastered Creedence's stuff from the tape to the vinyl at RCA. I was mastering *Green River* and I kept hearing Elvis music. "What's going on?" "Oh, they're re-mastering Elvis' stuff. They're turning it into stereo." It was all the old stuff, "Heartbreak Hotel," "My Baby Left Me," "That's All Right, Mama." I got curious. It was almost like at a library, and I see the tape going by. It just went from one song to the next song, all the settings were the same, just running it through. I thought, "Doesn't anybody care? Listen to that echo." [*sings*] "Well, that's alright mama..." I couldn't believe it, there wasn't even a human being watching, it just ran right through. That wonderful Sam Phillips slapback that he'd probably experimented with for hours to get it to hit just right? It was totally gone.

EDDY: He wasn't like you and I. He didn't go down and watch over all the process. That's terrible that they did that.

FOGERTY: Now they've made it right again. To think that most of his millions of fans know him from the Las Vegas era on, the jumpsuit era...

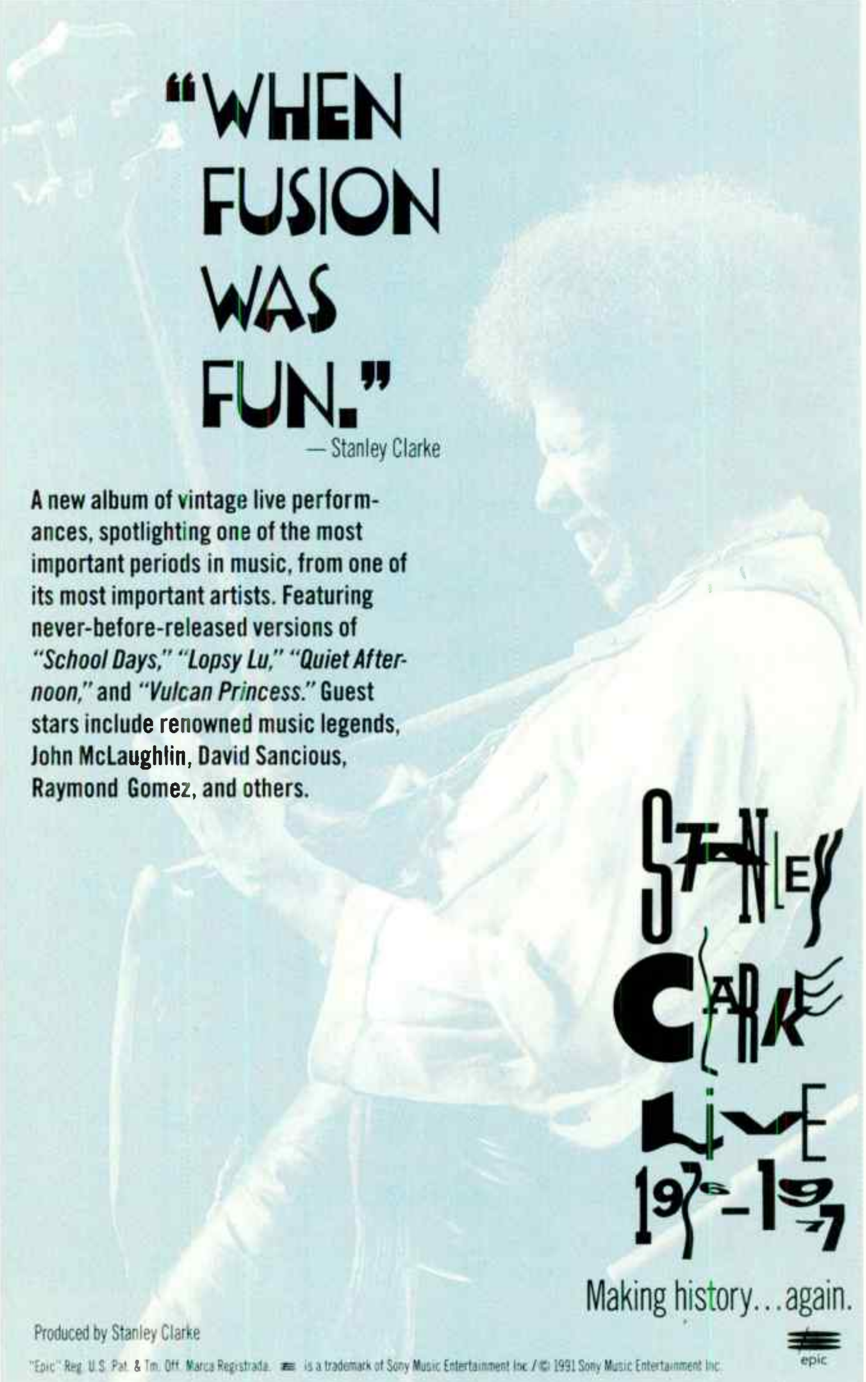
EDDY: The Coasters had a great sense of humor and made fun records, I thought. Bobby Darin the same thing. Until "Mack the Knife," then he switched and got very sophisticated.

FOGERTY: I like "Mack the Knife" but I have to admit it pissed me off at the same time. The record before was "Dream Lover" and then boom, here comes this. And "Somewhere Beyond the Sea." I thought, "God, why do they always get to a certain age and they sell out. They go to the nightclub and they learn how to move the lower jaw?"

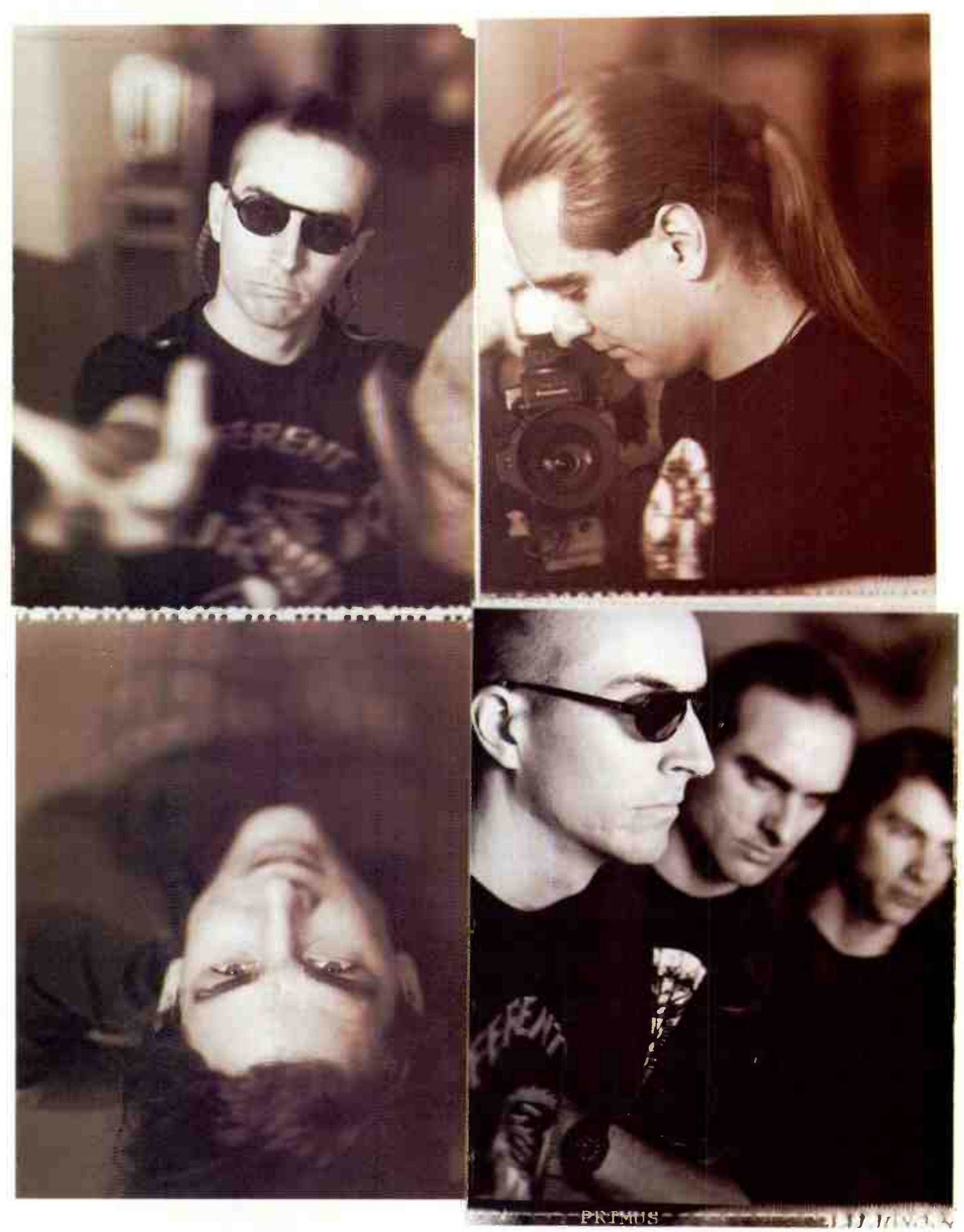
Last night I was thinking of listening to Duane Eddy records in my bedroom with just the light of the player on. And it came to my mind that, besides the big giant sound and these cool titles, the thing I got out of it was—I think you'd have to call it *dignity*. And I don't know where it came from. I don't even know if it was thought out at the time. But when I was buying those records and listening to them, here was a guy who took the musician and put him front and he did it with all this grace and dignity. And last night as I thought about it, I thought this is like Joe DiMaggio. It was that same grace. He was a gentleman. It was cool. That was all he had to do, just do what he did.

EDDY: You know, the only time they played instrumentals was going into the news. They're not going to play a full record because they've got to fade out half way through and that pisses people off. But with an instrumental they figured it didn't matter, so we did the ultimate one for them one day. We did "Some Kind of Earthquake" which is one minute and 17 seconds long. "Here's your record for the news." It said everything you could possibly say with that particular song in a minute and 17 seconds. We did have those rules to go by: A ballad couldn't be over three minutes and an uptempo song would be ideally around two minutes.

FOGERTY: But that's like me saying I'll get in the ring with Tyson for three minutes; it's only three minutes, what the hell. [*Duane laughs*] It's remarkable how two minutes can change your life.



World Radio History



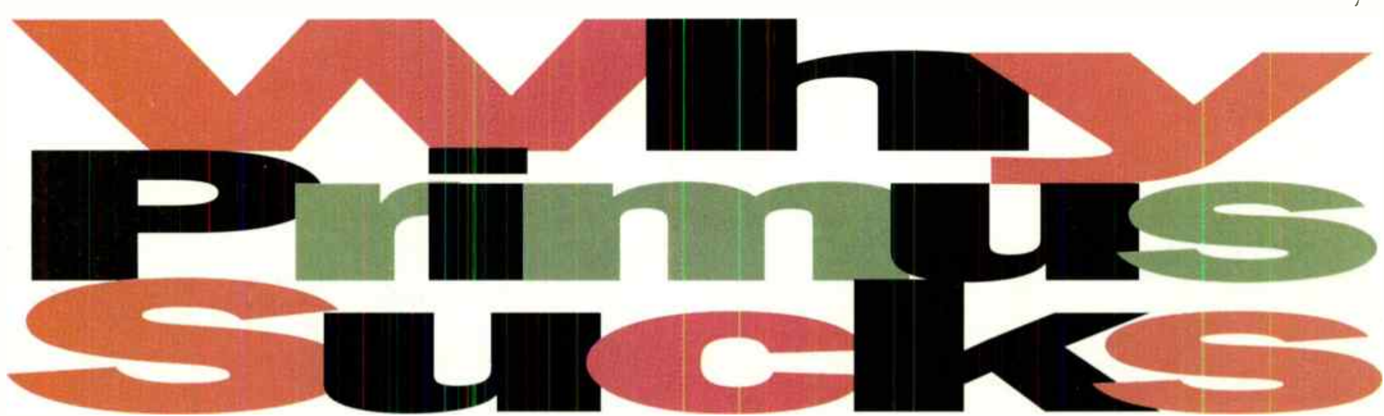
Tim (Herb) Alexander, Les Claypool & Larry (Ler) LaLonde (counter-clockwise from top right)

World Radio History

A broken faucet spat steam all over a guy who couldn't believe he found his wallet and five feet away a dark-skinned man stood with hands on slightly bent knees, looking straight down, catatonic; he'd leapt from the stage into a sea of parting hands and got a faceful of wet wood. Pot smoke filled this room, the corridor and the main area where the musicians played and the audience was flying like trout against rocks: up, against the stanchions, slamming into one another in clumsy pairs.

Once the opening act was cleared away—equipment, garbage, human bodies kicked back into the heaving, shirtless stink—some pushed their way outside to shiver and puke, and others pushed closer to the stage, grunting up into air that seemed too thick even for sound. The chant began softly and grew powerful, then annoying.

Primus sucks! Primus sucks! Primus sucks!



Stanley Clarke Got a Mohawk & They Called It Funk 'n' Roll

By Matt Resnicoff

WELL, THEY SAID IT ABOUT disco and that came back, just a bit more studio-slick and in more fashionable disguise, but as disposable as ever. So why *not* punk? Why not a Mohawk backed up with some talent, inspired by the same bourgeois restlessness, and powered by a real, human groove in which to jam observations on the inconveniences of squalor, unemployment and post-adolescence? Somewhere between Louis Prima and Prince—both in alphabetical record bins and outlook—lies the answer. Bassist Les, guitarist Ler and drummer Herb play out these cartoons as Primus, a San Francisco–based power trio determined to shake its thrash image by playing too well; Primus is from the "me" generation of musical accomplishment. And they're determined to dispel their funk reputation; Primus is funky, but probably throw up more than they throw down.

What Primus is mostly is ugly, a bunch of mutated bastards who don't mind that characterization—initiate it, in fact—and who came up in a culture so antagonistic that solitary acts of self-fulfillment replace sex, hard drugs, even fighting, as the standard for catharsis. Les barely pushes air when he speaks, which is only slightly more frequently than the rest of his band, at least the morning after performing. He seems even remotely plaintive only when talk turns to gaffing a sturgeon, the ugliest of all shallow swimmers. They look like dinosaurs, he says. "My uncle caught a 300-pounder when I was a kid," he recalls, his smallish head bearing sunglasses and a tattoo of the mosquito that appeared in the liner of the band's *Frizzle Fry*. "He had a mid-size economy pick-up, and the tailgate was down, and this fish had his head on the tailgate and his tail went up the side of the cab."

The most creative hard rock bassist since Geddy Lee and Iron Maiden's Steve Harris, Les writes around intricate finger-tapped or plucked figures, and "sings" clipped phrases in a garbled whine that complements his ridiculous duckwalks around the stage; Ler seems to move with the rumbling of the floor. They'll stick in the riff from Neil Young's "My My, Hey Hey" between thrashed-out bass-drum unisons that tie together their songs, and the place can't contain themselves. Primus makes an effort to channel energy through song, though their crowds appear to have their own designs on peace. The strangest thing is that the wall of security forces—the blue-collar, thick-necked tweekers they sing about—are the only protection the band seems to have from its audience. Even before they went on tour with Anthrax and Public Enemy, things were getting increasingly out of hand.

"We did a show in Tijuana," says Les, "and the clientele is kids from

Photography by Catanzaro & Mahdessian

World Radio History

San Diego that aren't old enough to drink *there*. People were diving from the third tier, like 30 feet in the air, just straight down; it was like Acapulco cliff-divers. I thought someone was going to break their neck, jump off and bounce off the top row of PA speakers, do the ol' rebound off there, into the crowd. It was insane."

And in Tempe, someone threw fireworks inside Herb's drums—this is the response Primus typically elicits, but Les is comfortable with it. At the first Metallica show he attended, the fans were packed so tight there were people crowd-walking on heads. "I'm not comfortable with people *throwing* stuff," he clarifies. "I have no tolerance for spitters. Every so often you get some drunk asshole out there who decides he wants to become one with the band, and hacks a good looch at ya.

"All that stuff just sort of happens," Les chuckles. "It's gotten to where if it *doesn't*, we go, 'We didn't have a very good show, did we?'"

KIRK HAMMETT WAS A REAL FREAK BROTHER at DeAnza High in '78, five years before he joined Metallica. "*Hey*, Clayypoool," he'd mutter next to Les in algebra class, showing off pictures of guitars he wanted, playing Hendrix on a very crummy tape machine, and inviting the young would-be musician to come over after school to sing "Sunshine of Your Love." Back then it was no problem for *any* bassist to find a group; everybody wanted to be Ritchie Blackmore, so Les decided to blend the roles. "Geddy was the guy," he says, "and Chris Squire, but that was more progressive. The term 'metal' was not used until Kiss' *Destroyer*, but they were so popular I didn't want to like them. The *Heavy Metal* movie came out—look at the songs in that movie, like Sammy Hagar!

"I freaked out after Larry Graham," he says. "Herbie, Ronnie Laws, the Dregs, Louis Johnson—I was way into anything with intricate bass. I remember seeing Larry open for the Isley Brothers, and I have yet to see a more amazing show." He started some Dregsian fusion groups and played with Blind Illusion when Larry "Ler" LaLonde was in third grade, watching TV.

Les didn't abandon his loves, just dragged them through the soil of his new experience. Primus' debut *Suck On This* came out on their independent label, Prawn Song, with tailored logo—envision the proud wingspan of Icarus as shrimp. Local support for the record nailed the band as leaders in the Bay Area thrash/funk movement, a label Les feels is misapplied. "People hear someone thump a bass and think, 'Must be funk!' It's just a technique of playing, just terminology coming around the bend."

"You mean Crimson isn't a funk band?" Ler jokes. "I saw Tony Levin slapping!"

Ler recorded with Possessed while still living with mother; he wasn't even old enough to hate. "The only thing he's ever *done* is play music," Herb says. The band went right into the studio; Ler was 16, but too far into Steely Dan, Zappa and lessons with Joe Satriani to be nervous about formulating an approach to death metal. He's glad to have that music behind him, despite its recent commercial upswings. "It was so easy, but if I'd stayed, I would have killed myself by now."

"At least you didn't have to work," Les tells him. Les is on the phone all day today

World Radio History

trying to rework his video concept for "Tommy the Cat," an old song cut again for *Sailing the Seas of Cheese* to feature a grizzled vocal by Tom Waits; the singer was called away just prior to shooting the Primus clip.

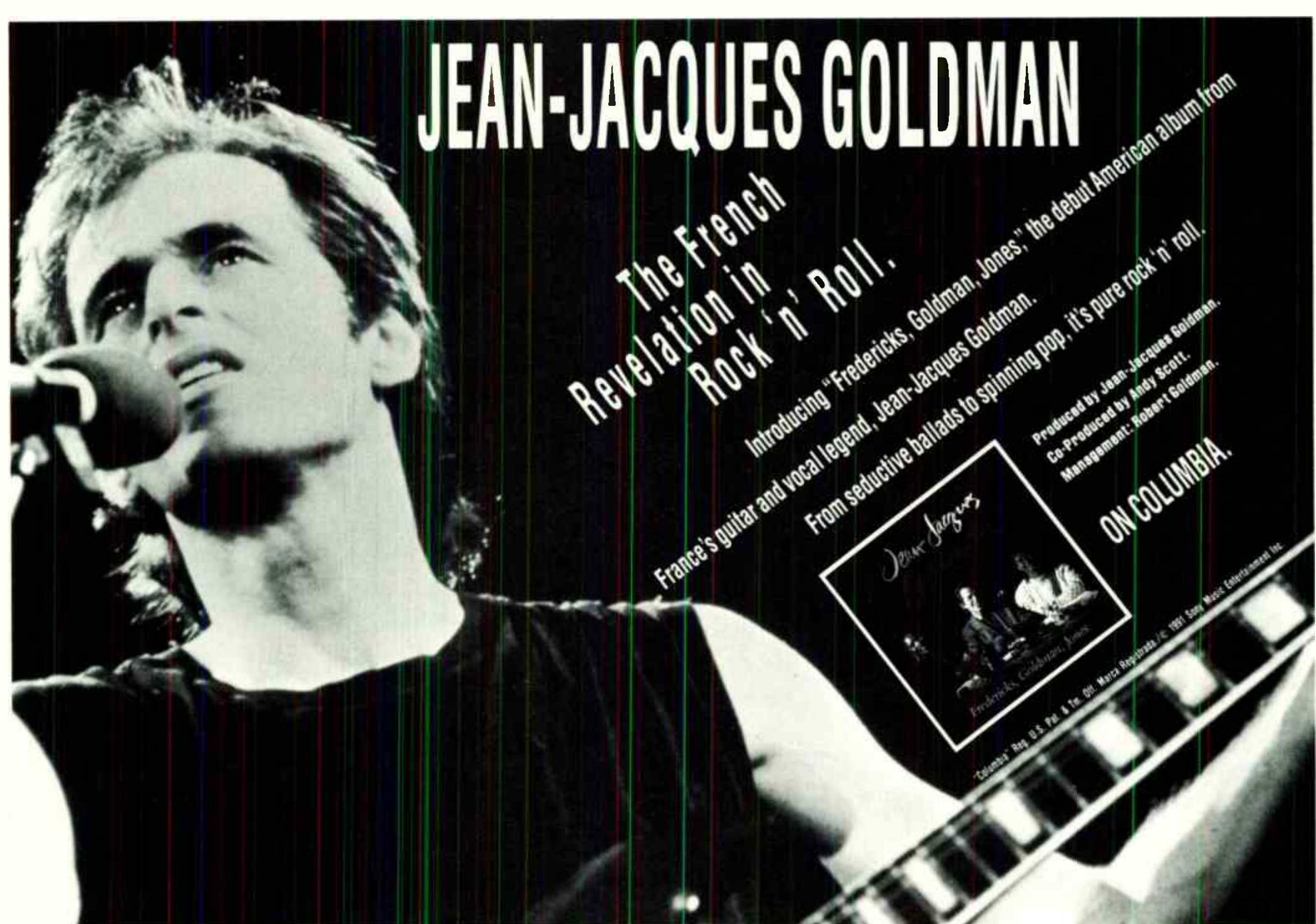
Ler and Les live together in one half of a two-family house in Berkeley, so most of their equipment is in storage, including their drummer, who lives in Oakland and seldom materializes when not touring; as a consequence they never rehearse, which tickles Les and clearly irks Herb. Tim Alexander is a landlubber who cares little for funk, never sees Les and Ler socially and doesn't much like being called Herb either. At 18 he joined Major Lingo, an eclectic band mixing steel guitar, performance-artists-turned-bassists and worldbeat rhythms. While working as a counter man at the Edible Complex, Tim heard a Primus tape and was told their drummer was leaving. He jammed with the band on Rush songs and Les called with an offer the next day; the *next* day Les called with news that guitarist Todd Huth was quitting. Ler came in for some tentative rehearsals where he and Herb were "just copying from the previous guys," the drummer remembers, to prepare for an impending show that couldn't be cancelled.

The Roquefort Files

TIM "HERB" ALEXANDER plays Porkpie Percussion drums. He's got a small 18"x18" kick, but Bill Detamore's working on a 20"; the bearing edges, where heads meet shells, are designed for volume and tone. He uses Zildjian and Muhan cymbals and Vic Firth SD1 Generals. **LER** plays Ibanez guitars through Marshall half-stacks, a Yamaha SPX900 and an ADA MP-1 preamp. A veritable punk Patitucci, **LES CLAYPOOL** has thoroughly sweat-stained the "Stradivarius of the bass": Carl Thompsons, a fretless six-string in particular, and a four-string that Herb broke into two shortly after joining Primus. Les uses ADA MP-1s and MB-1s, the latter for his old 1930s Kay upright.

"Les was worried that losing two-thirds of the band would change the sound," Herb says. "Jay Lane, the drummer from before, was real funky. I'm more into weird stuff from all over the world, and I use a lot of toms and keep the beat while finding different ways to accent it. That's just now coming in. We've been playing these songs a long time, and me and Larry have slowly been incorporated. But one of the first things I ever said to Les was, 'Are you sure you want this guy?'" he laughs. "Because he looked really young and wasn't sure what he was playing."

Most of Ler's parts *are* collected errors, random ideas that sit as textures atop Claypool's jabbing, flyshit parts. Les doesn't keep things simple, but compositionally natural, especially when writing melodies over those complicated meters. "'Tommy the Cat' is an old song now, but at first it was syncopated parts and I was like, 'Whoa, they bounce off each other!' But I find it a lot harder to do other people's material than to throw lyrics onto a riff, because you can play off it. Even the simplest thing, like that Neil



Young riff we did—we can play it, but I haven't tried to sing it and fluctuate the lyric. I'd have to sit with it a couple of hours, but once it clicks.... If you can play and sing it without thinking about it, it works."

In many ways the more metallic, undulating *Frizzle Fry* is a better document of the ugliness and energy that is Primus, though *Cheese*'s pristine presentation captures its own space in a world where saying something sucks is like a love tap. The newer themes are darker, though the songs are older. Les worked in the trades for years. He grew apart from that background, but doesn't believe "Those Damned Blue-Collar Tweekers" was written as an intellectual musician's perception of how middle-American industrial society works its way along. "One thing I encountered is this competitiveness," he says, "older guys getting amped up to make them work longer, harder and faster and keep up with the young guy...and how much these people are running America. 'Keep America strong,' the working force. It's sort of a rally song for the working man, I guess."

It doesn't sound like a rally song for the working man; it sounds like intellectual, geeky musicians watching working-class America grunt its way along. Many of Les' songs take note of illusions like the American dream—a homeless veteran unmotivated to rebound, the apathetic society around him—but it's unclear from which angle he aims his contempt. One certainty is Claypool's acknowledgement of privilege, and his indifference about its trappings; when he and Hammett returned to Les' hotel and learned that a Claypool impersonator had gotten a key and raided his room, he was more revulsed by Kirk's suggestion that he begin registering under a pseudonym than by the loss of his notebooks and clothes.

"Most of my stuff has a serious undertone, even though it may be presented as a guy fishing; trying to explain it is like trying to explain the punchline of a joke. I tend to be satirical, but I like to tell a story." Ong, from "American Life," is someone he actually worked with at an audio plant: "He worked on a production line, wearing this little paper mask, dipping circuit boards into a vat of molten solder—a toxic cloud goes up each time you do it. That was his job. And I remember him taking pictures of himself in his shop coat in front of the tech bench to send to his family, as if he was a technician. He was living with who knows how many other immigrants who chipped in for a house, in the living room with five other guys. In Thailand he used to run guns and cocaine and *people* over some river, and got shot once swimming across. Most of those guys were Laotian refugees; one was a bigwig in the army and had to flee for his family's life. They were the warmest people. 'Oh, I have killed many communists. I was in the mountains four years without seeing my family.' This guy had been shot four different times and showed me his scars."

LER, LES AND HERB HAD FINISHED A SHORT trip through Los Angeles, and late one evening after their last show in the area, decided to unwind on a Santa Monica beach. They parked on a hillside and made their way to the water, got unwound, and returned to find their van's door wide open. Vomit covered the ground. Les looked inside and told the others their equipment hadn't been touched, but their luggage was gone. The three musicians climbed the hill to the highway, squinted up and down the

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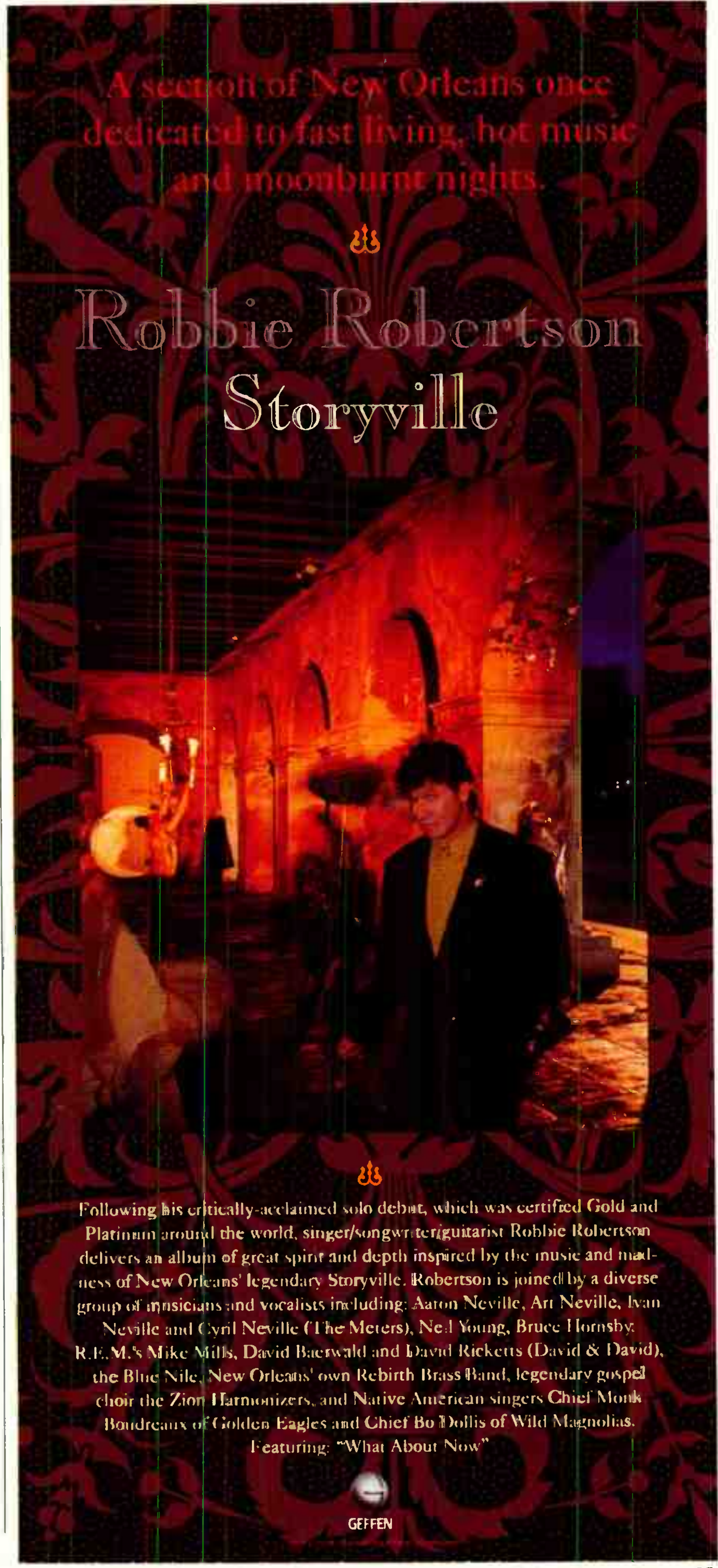
dark road and saw nothing. Then their eyes adjusted and Ler noticed curious discolorations on a nearby incline—a group of large camouflage tarps. They infiltrated the perimeter; clothes hung from a rope in one area, an empty United Airlines flight bag swung in the breeze. Les assumes they were Viet Nam veterans, but whatever they were, they were a small community, living off tourists' carelessness and smoking Primus' pot.

Writing songs when you're a young man can be a chest-pounding exercise; why talk about the impulse to defy the laws of tradition when you're *doing* it? "When you're a younger band and you haven't established yourself, you *have* to say it," says Les, "because nobody knows what you're about. Definitely my older stuff is more in-your-face, and I'll look back and go Jesus Christ, what was that shit I wrote in 1991? I can look way back to high school and find something Billy Idol might write!

"In the early days we felt we had to make a statement," he says, getting serious. "'End apartheid,' 'We have to focus,' and I just found that's not me, to preach social ideas as music. I'm putting down observations, and sometimes it may just be crap. I did an interview, and the guy said our focus seems to be nonconformity; I was like, 'Cool!'" he cackles. Nonconformity for the sake of nonconformity—about as meaningful as trying to explain the punchline to a joke. "But I don't really see that as much as we're just three individuals with some unique characteristics. It sounds a bit cheesy: 'Hey, we're just doing our thing,' but a lot of it is what keeps us content musically. I couldn't write a song because the record company said Pepsi would pick it up; I couldn't play it and have a good time. And that's what will keep Primus together.

"We'll probably get stranger before we get more mainstream," Les continues. "We were leery handing this album to the record company because we thought they'd go, 'Oh, this is a little weird, boys,' and it's become a lot more popular than we had suspected. Our promo guy jokes that we're thrash/funk, and put into this promo video, where it doesn't look like a joke: "Hey, here's Primus, the San Francisco kings of thrash/funk!" he laughs. "I guess we're in the fruit section as opposed to the vegetables."

"I'm not stuck in an approach," says Herb, rubbing sleep from his eyes. "I'm just bouncing off the bass player." Ⓜ



World Radio History

POETIC JUSTICE

Frank Zappa Puts Us In Our Place • By Matt Resnicoff

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL GRECCO

We usually celebrate artists for their accomplishments rather than for the traits that make them creative. These, we'd just as soon crucify them for: their single-mindedness, retentiveness, mortality. The very best of human nature. All this and more lies just past the studio booth whose welcoming sticker reads Corporate Rock Still Sucks, past a wall of videotapes holding every breath of CNN Desert Storm coverage, and a morass of reels marked with recognizable titles, and a few unrecognizable. In a small chair past all this, in a dim receiving area, Zappa sips tea to nurse an uncharacteristically hoarse, weak voice.

Zappa's artistic standing remains respectably constant, though his celebrity fluctuates in almost strategic sympathy with the needs of his brisk little family business. In the weeks prior to organizing and releasing 14 hours and 53 minutes of newly unearthed music, his presidential candidacy went under judicious evaluation (he hasn't yet tossed in his hat), he booked a fact-finding trip to Prague (after being kiboshed as trade rep by a politician's PMRC wife) and was diagnosed by journalists as having cancer ("You can put me on a torture rack," he says, "and I won't discuss my health").

Two hours after arriving, I know what Frank Zappa thinks, though I can't really say how he feels. His art is, always has been, a distorted window; he's probably never written a song in the first person without assuming the voice of some character he was looking to crucify, often for those very same traits that make him an artist. But what a character. We'd only spoken once before, and he says he remembers my face. I tell him our conversation took place on the telephone. Frank points to his head, smiles an uncharacteristically warm, avuncular smile, and says his memory is *that* strong....

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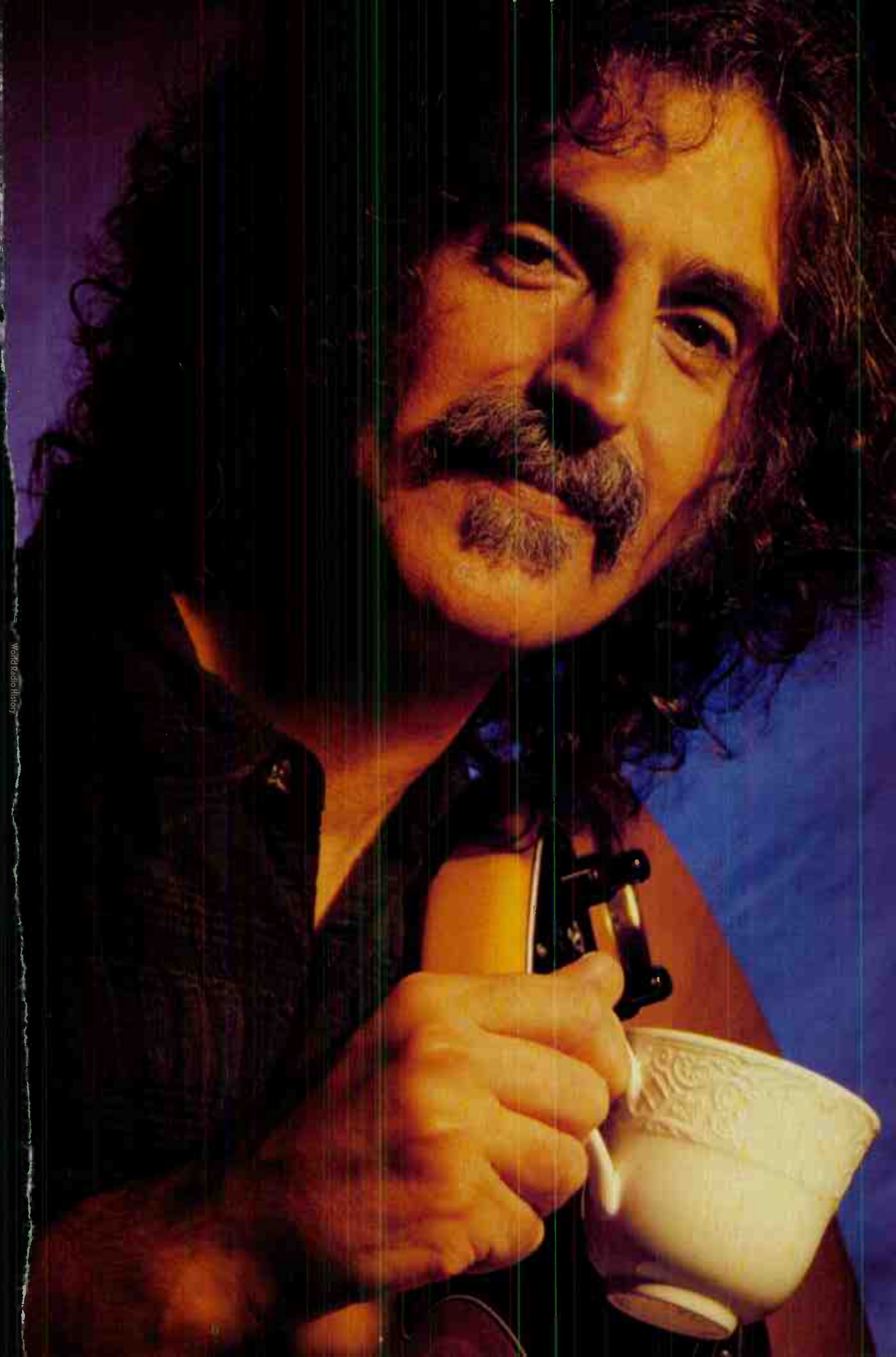

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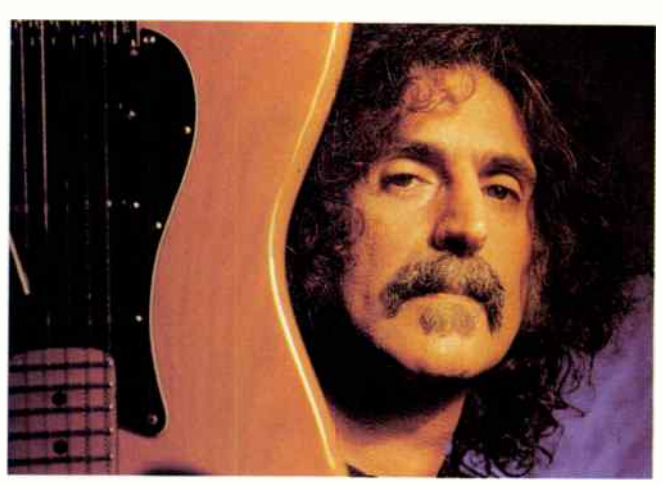
MUSICIAN: *You don't miss playing guitar?*

ZAPPA: Not really. I'm faced with a bit of a dilemma which is going to smack me right in the face on Thursday. I'm going to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and I've been invited because they're having big celebrations. The last Russian soldier leaves Czechoslovakia on the 24th and Hungary on the 30th, and they want me to bring my guitar over and play. And I haven't touched it for *years*. I don't have any calluses! I don't know what to do with that fucking thing. And if I don't take it along with me I know a lot of people will be disappointed, but I know if I plug it in they're going to be even *more* disappointed, [*laughs*] 'cause I can't *play* anymore.

MUSICIAN: *Your guitar solos have a healthy disorganization to them, uncharacteristic of what's going on in guitar right now.*

ZAPPA: I make them up as I go along. People now, they practice their fuckin' solos! Most guys who go onstage are going to replicate the solo that was on the record because the audience must hear that in order to think the guitar player is good. "Can he play exactly what he did on the record? Okay, he's good." "Did he play it faster or louder than he did on the record? Boy, he's better than I thought he was." You know? I make it up as I go along. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not, but.... If I had to play exactly what I did on any record, I'd have been out of the business a long time ago.



"Esteemed gentlemen, based on advice received from hip magazines that tell you what's hot, reshape American musical culture in their own pinhead image."

MUSICIAN: *I don't want to insult Los Angeles, but it just strikes me that...*

ZAPPA: Go ahead, insult it as much as you want. *I* always do.

MUSICIAN: *All right, the most improvisational occurrence in Los Angeles city limits is when someone farts. So I'm surprised that since you hardly deal with record companies other than the one you own, and with a fax machine you could live wherever you want, you live in a town that offers no live music.*

ZAPPA: But I don't participate. I have *no* link to the cultural life of Los Angeles. The closest I'm going to get to anything that is official L.A. cultural life will be when I go into a rehearsal hall that's being provided as a courtesy by the L.A. Philharmonic to this German organization who are sending 25 musicians over to rehearse some of my music for a festival—they sure as fuck ain't doing it for me. Let me give you an anecdote: About a year after I did that concert with the L.A. Philharmonic in 1970, they said they would like to have me write a two-piano concerto and they would give it the world premiere. I said, "Oh, that's really very nice of you." They said, "Yeah, but we want you to *buy* us two grand pianos." And that was the last I had to do with the L.A. Phil, okay? Why pick on me? 'Cause I'm in rock 'n' roll? What, you think I should go out and spend $100,000 to get you a pair of Bösendorfers, so that you'll do two rehearsals and play my two-piano concerto? Go *fuck* yourself. So this town offers me nothing in the way of live music or cultural anything. I get excited if I find a good restaurant and my wife and I can go out every once in a while and get some decent food. And *they're* few and far between. I stay home. All my stuff is in the house. This is a self-contained cottage industry: Editing here, storage in there, studio in there, another vault under the front yard with 10 times this amount of stuff stashed away. A little office up above my bedroom. A bed and a kitchen. And I don't need to participate in the so-called cultural life of this city, because it's just like you said: If somebody farts, that's as improvisational as it gets. The only other improvisation that could occur is if somebody adds a little bit extra rosemary to the sauce that they put on a fucking dumpling or something that they give you in one of these nouvelle cuisine restaurants. It's very freeze-dried here. It's *pathetic*. And that's the reason why it's so sad what's happening in New York now, because I always thought, "What an unbelievable place New York was."

MUSICIAN: *Soloing, you favor certain modes, and most go over less intricate vamps. For some players that means more pressure to come up with something interesting. You often emphasize the nine and mixolydian ideas in your solos—do you have target notes? Is it conscious?*

ZAPPA: They're aesthetic decisions, sure. I mean, some people like to play on II-V-I changes and can bebop themselves into a frenzy, and there are other people who even like to *listen* to that sort of thing. I can't stand it myself. I pretty much *loathe* chord progressions. [*chuckles*] Look at Indian musical culture: They don't have too much in the way of progressions, and that's some of the most interesting, beautiful music ever. You don't need changes to play great lines. All you need is a tonic and a 5th and away you go; sometimes you don't even need the 5th. That's the aesthetic principle that I go on. But if your ear hears a harmonic foundation of *something*, then the interest of the solo is the theoretical difference you perceive on a note-by-note, nanosecond-by-nanosecond basis of what the improviser inflicts on the established tonality. In other words, if you hear in the bass a C and a G, you know, "You're in the key of C, buddy." You are anchored to a tonality, and when a soloist comes along and plays the C#, he's sending you a *message*. And where that C# *goes* is part of the adventure of playing the solo. And if he's playing a B natural or an F# against those notes...they're like ingredients in a stew. I mean, there's a right way and a wrong way to stick a C# on top of a C-G groundbase. If you play all notes that are part of the C major scale, the recipe you have just prepared is oatmeal, know what I mean? So it's like the difference between eating oatmeal and eating salsa.

Outline

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Nothing puts the sting in a Scorpion like Nady Wireless.

Photo: Ross Pelton

Matthias Jabs of *The Scorpions* uses Nady. So every performance is a killer.

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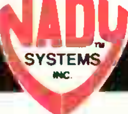

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MUSICIAN: *Steve Vai uses the human speech pattern as a source of phrasing. "Andy" has that dynamic.*

ZAPPA: People don't talk in a straight up-and-down rhythm. You're used to hearing conversation with pauses, inflections, different kinds of accelerandos, ritardandos in the speech, so why shouldn't you just play the same way? Because if you're playing a solo you're talking to the audience, aren't you? Or you *ought* to be, unless you're Milli Vanilli.

MUSICIAN: *Steve also mentioned the most valuable lessons he had learned coming from the "school of Zappa"; one was to keep your publishing. And by listening to five seconds of his improvisations you can hear the others. What would you hope musicians bring to their own careers after working with you?*

ZAPPA: *I* don't know. I mean, that's up to them. If they had signed up for a school and were paying me to teach them, that would be a good question, but I don't think it applies. In fact, it's a very *bizarre* situation, because I'm paying *them* to learn. How sick is that?

I don't think the people who came into the band did it because they wanted character development. Generally, if they had a unique musical ability, they knew that if they went in *any* other direction, they would never be able to be unique. What is Steve Vai going to *do*? As a young musician, how do you get to *be unique*, when a record company doesn't want to sign unique people? The easiest gig for a unique person is a format where uniqueness is acceptable. Bruce Fowler's highest practical note on the trombone is an E flat above the treble clef, which is the same highest note as an alto flute—fairly unique guy. How often do you get to use that if you're a trombone player? A drummer like Vinnie Colaiuta is capable of playing all these unbelievable polyrhythms, but if he gets a studio gig, that's the last thing in the world they want to hear on their record: You know, "Just give me that fuckin' fatback." So a lot of these guys were auditioning just because their musical alternatives led them into situations where they wouldn't have the chance to do anything challenging. But then a strange thing happens when they get in the band: They *complain* about being asked to do things that are hard. And then after they *leave* they brag that they were in the band!

MUSICIAN: *Virtually everybody I've encountered who's worked with you has spoken reverentially. That's not necessarily a function of being in an employer/employee relationship.*

ZAPPA: Well, everybody's got different motivations, but there have been certain trends that I've spotted, since I've hired maybe 115 guys over the last quarter of a century: They *all* are different when they leave, for better or worse, and what they leave with depends on what they wanted to get while they were *in* there. Because I've never withheld any information from any of them.

MUSICIAN: *But you still show signs of contempt for a system that creates a musician capable of meeting the requirements you demand as a bandleader. "Yo Cats" from* Mothers of Prevention *suggested that maybe the mechanization of studios was poetic justice for those unmusical people who became sight-reading cretins.*

ZAPPA: Well, a "Yo Cat" is *beyond* being a sight-reading cretin. A "Yo guy" is part of this special species that popped up in Hollywood studios—the A-team mentality. You have an A-team mentality in the New York studio business too, I'm sure. A handful of guys get all the work. That's the A-team. And they do it day in, day out, three sessions a day; they grind it out. And one must ask at the end of the day: "Was it music?" "Did they care?"

MUSICIAN: *You sort of indict Berklee in that song.*

ZAPPA: Well, let's look at the motivation for going to Berklee. Do you go to become a musician because you love music, or to get another credential? "I've been to Berklee, I can play fast! That means I'll get a studio gig!" Then so *what*?! I like music. I like music as a living, breathing art form, whether you're doing it with a machine or your home Casio system or in a band. I like the idea that human beings can create music. And when they're serious about it—when they're interested in *music* rather than careers or stardom or lip-syncing—then it's a beautiful thing. And anything that works against that, I hate. I really hate it. I do not indict Berklee for creating people with skill; all I say is, what is the skill ultimately going to be used for? Why do people go there? The only *good* reason you should do anything is because you want to do it *right*, not just for money, not just to be famous, not just for bullshit reasons. And whether you go to Berklee, or Juilliard, or you take a part-time job in a gas station so you can practice at home, whatever it is—if the motivation is to play music, to make capital M, Music, something that's part of your personality, you're contributing that to the overall global world

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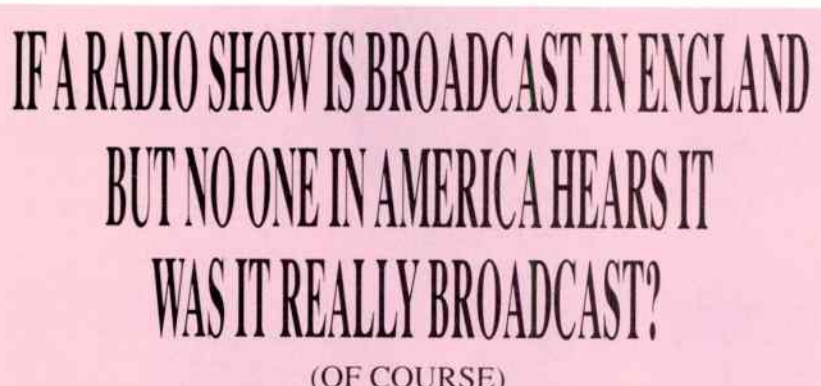
of music, that's good. The record business is *not* good. The touring business is *not* good. The TV music award-show business is not good. This is all shit. And I *hate* it. And unfortunately, as a *bandleader*, you have to deal with people who come into the band and use it as a stepping stone, and think if they can just survive that *one* tour, they can go out and say they were in the band. Then it's like a Berklee credential. Well, more power to 'em. If that gets them a job someplace, fine. But it's just sad. You know, I look at what Dweezil is going through now. He's got a good album, he's a good musician, he really loves music, and now he's finding out, as a young man, what show business is really about: It's depressing.

MUSICIAN: *That hadn't already trickled down from you?*

ZAPPA: It's different. I can *tell* him, "Yeah, this is the shit." He just finished his first *tour*. Now, that's where you find out! [*laughs*] He just did a couple of weeks in Europe and a couple in the United States and I said, "Okay Dweezil, you see how you feel"—I mean, he came home *beat*. "You see how you feel, don't make the same mistake I did; I did it for 25 years. Don't do it."



MUSICIAN: *But most of your recorded output—your bread and butter—has come from that work.*

ZAPPA: But see, I did it at a time in American musical history when you could get *away* with it. And I established a franchise for a certain clientele that happened to enjoy that particular service provided by me. I don't think in a world of MTV, fake awards shows and massive beverage sponsorship for mega-tours which rely more on stage lighting than musical artistry—today's world—that anybody could manage to do what I did...and survive. Couldn't do it. Because when I started, *nobody* knew what the fuck they were doing—there were no rules. You made it up as you went along and whatever worked worked. And if you just kept doing it long enough you could stay in show business. I refused to stop doing it, and that's the reason I'm still here.

MUSICIAN: *It's discouraging to see the way things have developed, compared to what I hear about the '60s.*

ZAPPA: Well, I have never been a fan of the '60s, but one thing seems perfectly clear at this time: Sociology and politics aside, it was easier for an oddball something-or-other to get a record contract *then* than it is now. Not with a little label, but with a major label. You could *do* it because there was an upheaval in American music: when the British Invasion occurred, and *millions* of albums were flying out the door, the work of people from another country who didn't look like U.S. musicians—we had surfers, and they had people who had long hair who sang and played their own instruments. It was a different thing: self-contained bands. The U.S. music business went, "What the fuck is that?" So they were starting to issue contracts to anything they could get their hands on they thought might sell. That's how we got in. Not because somebody said, "Oh, this is great." They just said, "Okay, we'll try this shit."

MUSICIAN: *Is there a significance in the revival of Faces-era rock that bands like the Black Crowes are now purveying, as opposed to something that isn't so directly derivative? Like R&B, or some of the music that you grew up by and glorified even on your stranger albums?*

ZAPPA: Well, the idea of setting yourself up as a derivative band is a road that leads nowhere, because what you're hoping to do

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in recycling a previous fad is to revive that fad, and that's giving you a very short shelf-life. Your "revivalist band" will be useful as an entertainment device only if the trend resurfaces in a general way, and will only be viable as long as that trend is regurgitated by the pop press. And *if* it catches on with clothing manufacturers and they choose to support it with a style that re-evokes that era; then you can be a "thing," but a short-term thing. What's that got to do with music? That's got more to do with how to make a buck, and I think it's a dubious way. I'm not trying to cast aspersions, because I've never heard the band you're talking about, but as a general concept, revivalist groups are at a disadvantage because they limit their audience and their shelf life.

MUSICIAN: *Really arcane or avant-garde music kind of experiences the same thing.*

ZAPPA: What do you mean, arcane? If a guy creates something new and original, is that bad?

MUSICIAN: *Not at all. I'm not using the word pejoratively, but more like something...*

ZAPPA: It's something you never heard before.

MUSICIAN: *Something that's frighteningly...*

ZAPPA: Original?

MUSICIAN: *Yeah.*

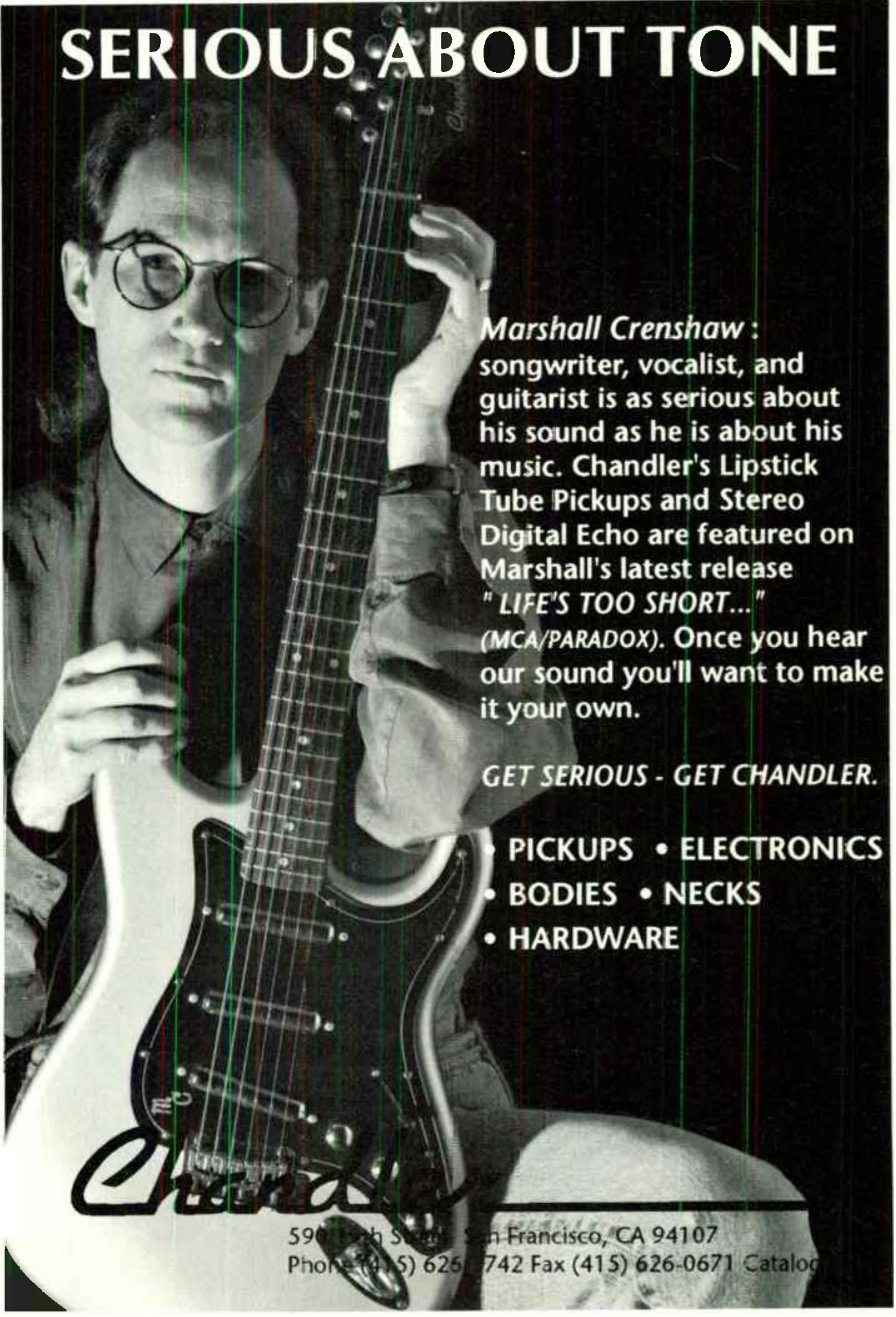
ZAPPA: I want the frighteningly original *all* the time. I want *those* guys to have a chance, to be able to say and do something that is new. Not like a new group that plays faster than the *last* group that was imitating a certain trend, but now with better hairdos, faster fingers—or a lead singer who sings higher with a raspier voice. I mean, [*chuckles*] there's *really* no aesthetic future in that. There's always a commercial future in it because the entertainment mill will most assuredly grind out more products like that.

MUSICIAN: *But once something becomes stylized, it becomes rigidly marked by the public. The notion of a "guitar solo" has preconceptions placed on it, even if it's Allan Holdsworth who does it, no matter how amazing or how frighteningly original; people automatically refute it because it's supposed to be self-indulgent or "for musicians." It's almost like things become iconographic and somehow lose their value for outsiders.*

ZAPPA: Well, whose fault is that? That's what *writers* do. Musicians don't do that. The average person doesn't sit around thinking about the "iconographic problems of a guitar solo." You're talking about a sociological, emotional phenomenon associated with the need of a writer to earn a living by describing something which is very difficult to write about: music. And the *hardest* thing to write about is *that* kind of music, when it's really personal, when a guy is really trying to do something, which I think Allan Holdsworth is. He's a brilliant musician. And when you start digging the thesaurus out and delving into things like "iconographic" and tacking shit like that onto stories about guitar solos, well, [*laughs*] then the problems begin! A guy might listen to it and go "I like it" or "I don't like it," but to have it explained to him by a writer that "we now have an iconographic problem," that's another can of worms, wouldn't you say?

MUSICIAN: *Well, you might be putting the cart before the horse. I don't know if writers are the sole cause for certain music being shunted off by the mainstream of the industry.*

ZAPPA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Sure. How do you think taste is *made*? See, it works like this: A guy's writing in a magazine which some insecure record company executive has been told is hip by his secretary that he's try-



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ing to get to blow him. She says, "This is a hip magazine," so in order to get that blow job, he's gotta read a few paragraphs. And in this magazine he'll read this: "There's an iconographic problem with Allan Holdsworth's guitar solos." And a trend is set in motion where the next person who bears these dangerous iconographic tendencies comes to get a record contract from this guy and might be refused. In the hands of insecure record company executives, A&R men and pootheads, the writer's article can be a dangerous force in shunting off certain types of expression, just because it is no longer *hot* since it would seem so from this fountain of information, this special hip magazine—and we know how many hip magazines there are that determine these things. The minute somebody says, "Iconographic—No Longer Hot," you're dead. Because you're dealing with real mental pygmies in these record companies. Not to cast aspersions on any *pygmies* in the audience, [*laughter*] but these guys do not have musical priorities. Their priority is, "Keep my job, keep my job." They get up in the morning, look in the mirror, spray their hair, say, "I'm going to *keep my job*. And I don't care whose dick I have to suck, I don't care how many Milli Vanillis I gotta sign, I'm keepin' my job." And they do. They recycle from one company to another. They get fired, because, oh, they made a mistake, they signed the wrong Milli Vanilli and they got caught. They'll wind up at another record company. These guys never go from record company to *gas station*; they move *sideways*, from record-world company A to record-world company B. The top executives just rotate. Now, how did they earn the *right* to be the gods of the record industry? These fuckers came from the shoe business, a lot of them. And they are the ones who finally make the decision of who gets the zillion-dollar contract, the big tour, the big push, the big endorsements, the big hosejob on MTV. These esteemed gentlemen, based on advice received from hip magazines that tell you what's hot, will then reshape the size and texture of American musical culture in their own pinhead image.

MUSICIAN: *I don't want to leap to the defense of the press because I don't respect a lot of it. On the other hand I wrote an article recently in which I suggested that Edward Van Halen might have stagnated with his band, and his manager called me and up and called me a "no-good motherfuckin' kike."*

ZAPPA: Oooh! Nice man! I hope you ran *that*!

MUSICIAN: *We did, and we received a lot of mail. Not that I needed any more convincing, but that was a confirmation that...*

ZAPPA: People are listening! I'm telling you, that's the influence.... The worst thing

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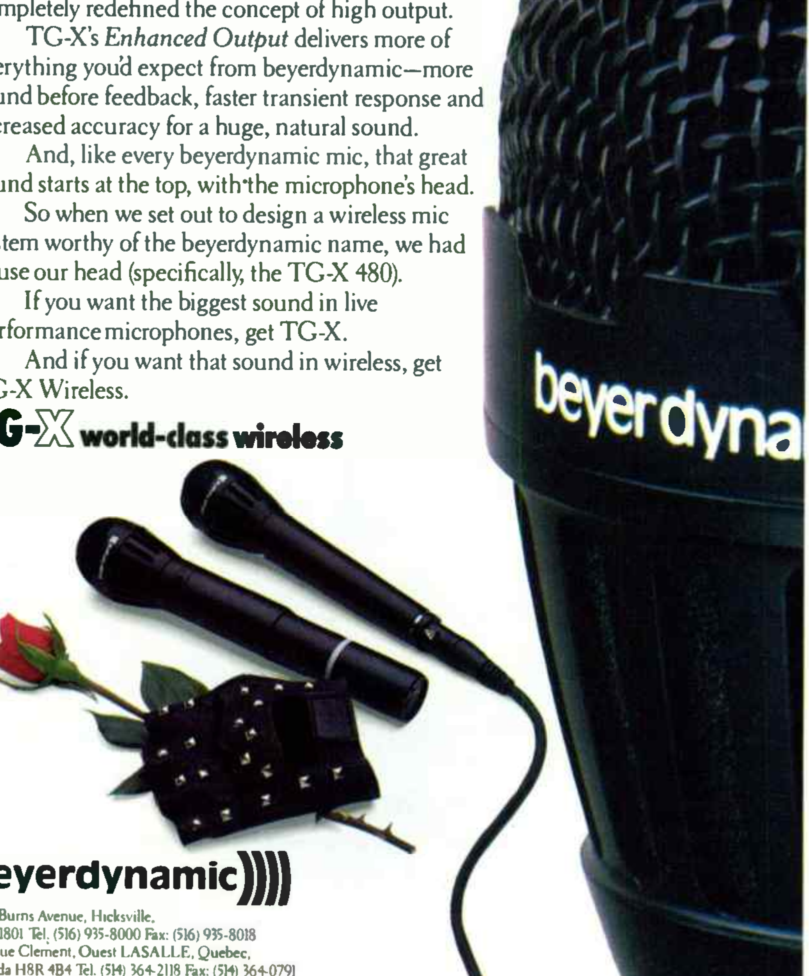

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Cosmic Debris

ZAPPA barely plays his Performance Strat copy anymore; though he's bowled over by son Dweezil's Zoom guitar processor, he's far more into the Synclavier and promises some ridiculous harmonic excursions by next year. "Imagine a machine that gives you two software updates a year, each empowering you to do something you couldn't do the year before," he says. "If I want to write a composition with 200 tracks of sequencer material and 16 tracks of direct-to-disk material, with each track being an hour long, I can do it now. It's too fucking expensive, but definitely impressive."

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that can happen to a person who is an MTV-size "star" is for somebody to write they're not hot. I mean, [*smiling*] stagnating is not very hot. And that's a career-crunching thing, especially to apply to somebody who's playing hot guitar solos. To even *imply* that—you can imagine the manager going, "My 15 motherfucking percent, it's goin' up in smoke! That little kike! The motherfucking kike! I gotta call him now!" [*laughs*] I don't even *know* this guy, but I just hear that ratchet going.

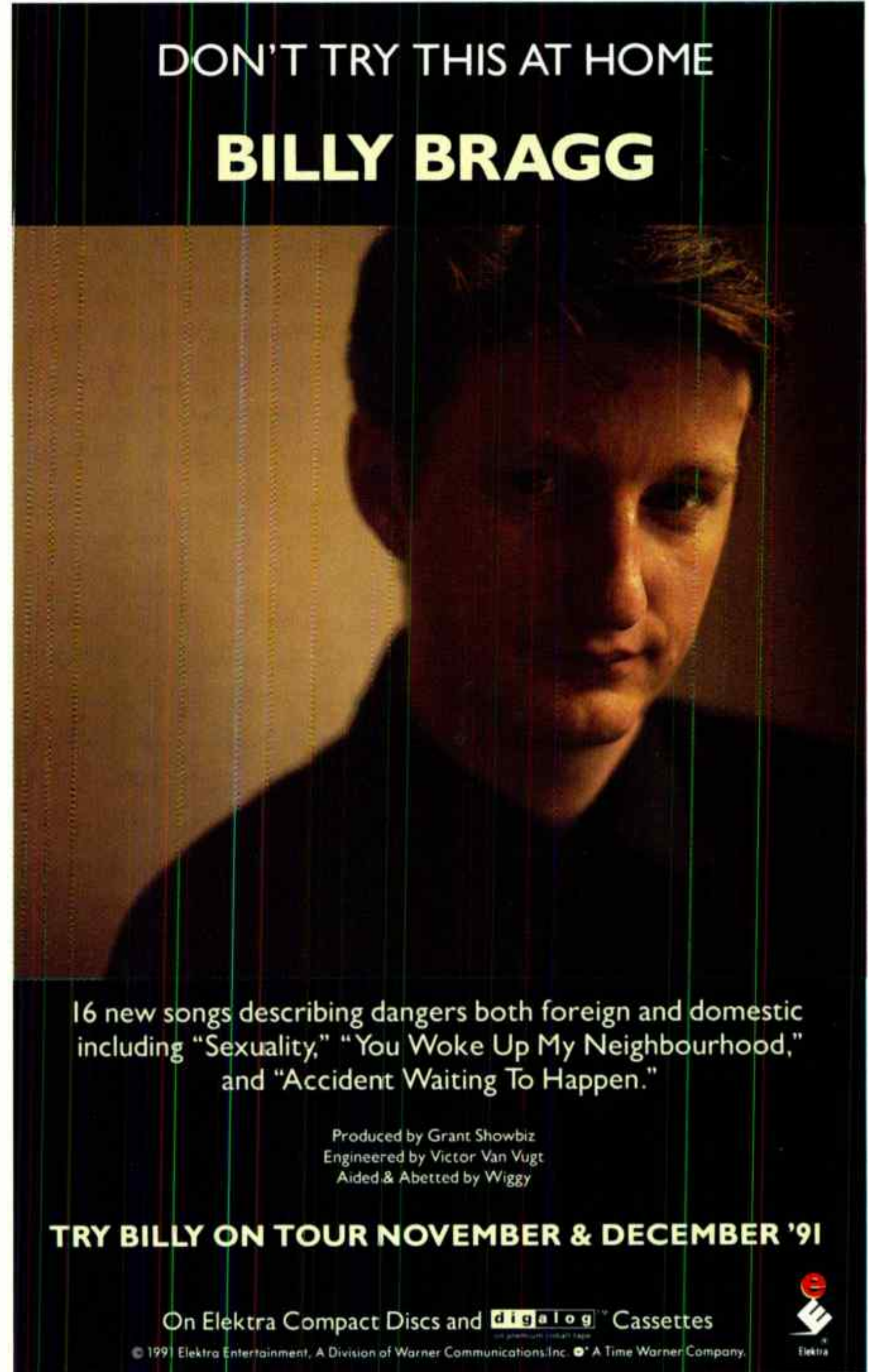
MUSICIAN: *Now, how culpable is the press there? I feel it's that Edward Van Halen is being constricted by somebody who would rather not see him go off and do a progressive power-trio record.*

ZAPPA: Well, let me set you straight on a couple of things that I see slightly differently than you do, partly because I'm 50 years old and you're not—and I don't want to sound like grandpa. But to reinforce the negative side of the activities of the press: I lived as an entertainer through one era of rock 'n' roll where the rock press was *absolutely* the blowboy of the industry. In the '70s, when corporate rock really blossomed into this stinking apparition it became, companies were giving cocaine, girls, money, junkets and all this stuff to famous rock writers, just greasing them from one end to the other so they would write nonstop, *wonderful* glowing articles about groups that needed to be promoted. It was *pure grease*, okay? I detect from the way that this interview is going that you have a little bit more integrity—a *lot* more integrity—and more of an intellectual edge to what you're trying to do than the people I had to talk to in the world of rock in the last 25 years. I mean it as a compliment, I'm not trying to stroke you or anything. I find it refreshing to talk to anybody connected with a music magazine—whether he's a little motherfuckin' kike or not [*laughter*]—who has an idea of the relationship between music, the industry and the real world. Because most interviews you do, people are just talking about...nothing. No-thing! I put up with that for too long. And it wasn't until 1985, when I went to Washington to testify in front of the Congress, that I started having the chance to talk to people in the press who were not from rock 'n' roll, just regular writers, who were intelligent, normal human beings. I started doing fewer rock interviews, and my attitude toward the press changed at the moment where I didn't have to do so many conversations with the people who determined whether or not you were *hot*. The world of hot—I don't give a *fuck* about the world of hot. And that's *all* they care about in that world, okay? So I wouldn't be too quick to defend the rock press because of its rather...checkered past. And it may have evolved, and it may have matured, might have even been *perfected* by now, who knows? I don't *read* it any more. But if you're any example of what's out there in terms of rock interviewers, I'm gratified. Especially if you're going to get a call like that from Eddie Van Halen's manager, you must be doing something right.

MUSICIAN: *I don't want to keep harping on Vai, but he was talking about the experience working with you that brought him through a really weird period after he left, where he was seeing things with a relentlessly cynical perspective, but wasn't balancing it with your sense of humor. Were you aware this was happening?*

ZAPPA: What, that he was getting more cynical?

MUSICIAN: *Well, to the extent that he was throwing himself into fitful depression and*



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nearly lost his mind.

ZAPPA: I didn't invent Steve Vai's mind. All I did was sign his paycheck, and I had no idea that was going on with him. I saw him a few times sick onstage, but that was physical, not mental. We played a gig in Salt Lake City—he was a real soldier, he was puking into a bucket on the side of the stage, but we got through the show. I always saw him as a thoroughly professional, on-the-case, totally talented, fabulous musician, and you couldn't ask for a better guy to be in your band. It was great. And I had no idea that he had these fits of depression because suddenly he found himself to be cynical, but I mean, how bad was that? Is he doing badly now? I think if he's doing well it's because he *did* have at least a *passing* acquaintance with cynicism. You can't just go into rock 'n' roll and think, "Oh, now the world is really wonderful," because boy, will *you* be disappointed.

MUSICIAN: *You told me you didn't want to tour anymore, but I read it was because of your bass player, Scott Thunes.*

ZAPPA: Scott has a unique personality. He also has unique musical skills. I like the way he plays and I like him as a person, but other people don't. He has a very difficult personality: He refuses to be cordial. He won't do small talk. And he's odd. So what? They're *all* odd! They should *tolerate* each other. Unfortunately the real world doesn't work that way, and I don't want to name who got this thing started, but it turned into a personal vendetta against Scott Thunes. A couple of guys in the band were the ringleaders and were doing such petty stuff. On the last of 11 dates in Germany the promoter was going to give us a big cake onstage and had all the guys in the band's names on it, and one of these assholes who didn't like Scott sneaked backstage and scraped his name off the cake. It was *nauseating* stuff, and it had gotten to where we had done two months in the U.S., two in Europe and were supposed to have a short break and do good-paying, large-scale outdoor things all over the U.S. And by the end of the European part of the tour, things were going astray rather badly and I started taking a poll of different guys in the band: "Do you hate Scott Thunes so much you wouldn't go onstage with him for these gigs in the summer?" and they all said, [*gremlin voice*] "Yes, we hate him, oh, we hate him. He's *bad*. He's a bad person. He can't play the bass." They were so convinced this guy was the loser of all time that I had no choice. If you replace *anybody* in a band that has rehearsed for four months, you've gotta go back into rehearsal. I couldn't replace Scott to assuage everybody in the band who hated him. There's no bass player who could have done that job. The repertoire was so large, the workings of the show so complex, you had to know so much—there was no way. So I had to lose the income of all those dates because the band refused to go onstage with Scott Thunes. That's why I put out *The Best Band You Never Heard in Your Life.*

But let me give you the final payoff to this: The band realized they provided for themselves total unemployment. Everybody on that tour got paid but me; I lost $400,000. And within six months I was hearing, "Man, we made a mistake. Scott's not such a bad guy." And the same people who hated his guts

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were running into him in restaurants and saying, "Oh, Scott, I'm *sorry*, I don't know what got *into* me," this kind of stupid, stupid shit. It was just like little children ganging up on a kid at a boy's school. It was really P-U.

MUSICIAN: *Poetic justice...*

ZAPPA: Well, I'm not interested in inflicting poetic justice on anybody, remember? I like music, and if that band had stayed together all this time, not only would it be the most outrageous touring band on the planet, but I'd still be playing guitar and I wouldn't be forced with my dilemma going to Prague and Budapest.

I pay people to rehearse, so in order to change *anybody*, I would have to rent a sound stage, which is $2000 a day, stick the band in there and pay them to learn to live with another bass player. And I would resist doing that simply because I don't like the idea of having a whole band ganging up on *me*, forcing me to get rid of a bass player I *liked*. I *enjoy* playing with Scott. So, what's the fucking deal? And one of the most egregious things: One of the sax players who'd been complaining that Scott didn't give him enough support on his solos—after he heard *Best Band*, he came over here and said, "Oh, he sounds *good*, man." [*laughs*] Stuff like that makes me sick.

MUSICIAN: *Eccentricity's got to be an offshoot of being an excellent musician, because you've excluded things for the sake...*

ZAPPA: If you're highly motivated to be a spectacular drummer or guitar player or whatever, other parts of your life will suffer. People looking at you living your life will go, "He's weird," not realizing you don't *give* a fuck about those other parts of your life 'cause you're focused on something else. The person might say, "Why does he behave like that?" And the answer is, he just doesn't care as much about that other incidental shit as you do. That doesn't make him a bad person; the same thing is true of computer programmers, scientists, painters. When you care so much about one thing, maybe some other stuff slides, like your personal appearance, your breath, your teeth, your wardrobe, your hairdo, your complexion, your desire to engage in small talk, whatever. And then other people who really care about things like, "Are you hot?"—hot in terms of acceptability—worry about total acceptance all the time for everything they do.

MUSICIAN: *Mercer Ellington once said that Duke was not necessarily a good father, but he was a good man. Do you ever think that the two things might be separable?*

ZAPPA: Well, let me put it to you this way: I happen to think I'm a *great* dad, and I think any of my kids would confirm that. Whether I'm a good man, I don't know, that's pretty subjective, but I think the empirical evidence is on my side that my kids turned out okay, and they like me and I like them. And we get along fine.

MUSICIAN: *Have there been parts of your life that you've neglected because you've been as absorbed as you are in your music?*

ZAPPA: Well, what am I missing? Do I regret not going horseback riding, or learning how to water ski? Well, no. I don't want to climb mountains, I don't want to do bungie-jumping. I haven't missed any of these things. If you're absorbed by *something*, what's to miss? Ⓜ

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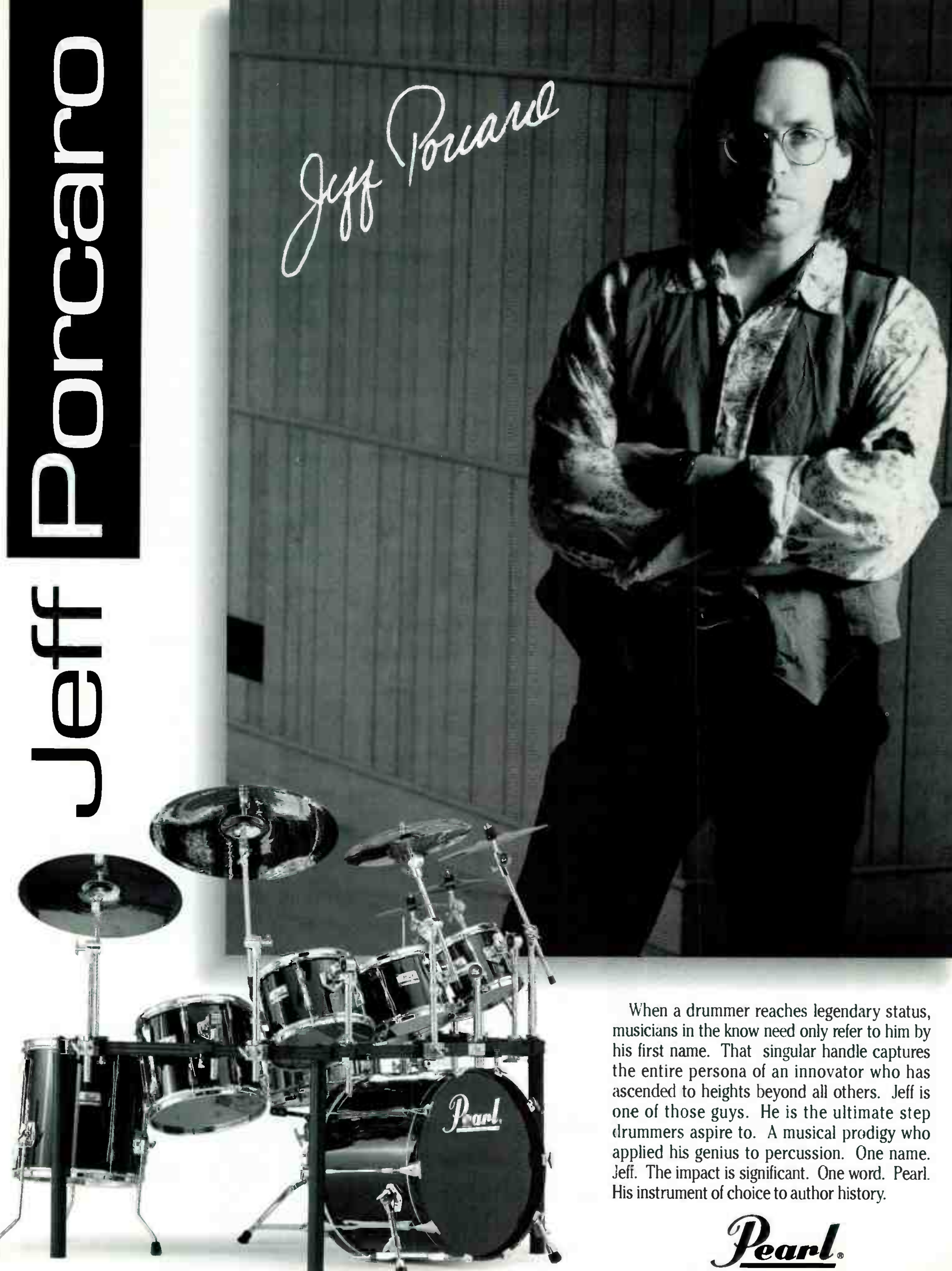

When a drummer reaches legendary status, musicians in the know need only refer to him by his first name. That singular handle captures the entire persona of an innovator who has ascended to heights beyond all others. Jeff is one of those guys. He is the ultimate step drummers aspire to. A musical prodigy who applied his genius to percussion. One name. Jeff. The impact is significant. One word. Pearl. His instrument of choice to author history.

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Drums

Stewart Copeland: A Lesson in Logic

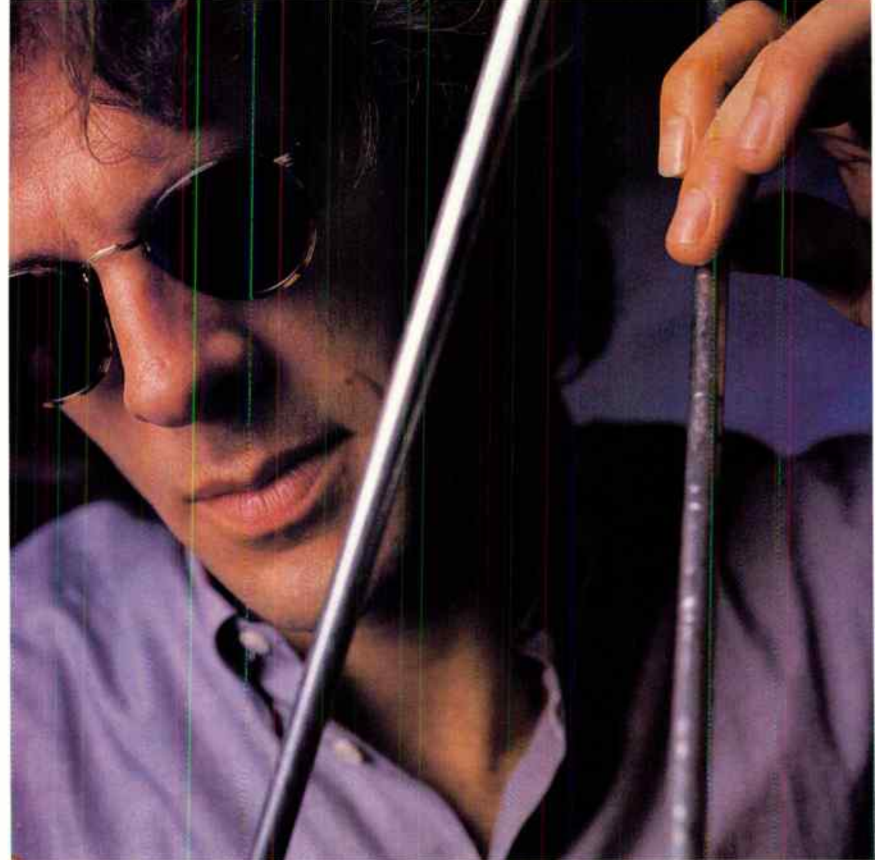
Tripping up the listener ❖ *By* GENE SANTORO

"MY SIBLING POSITION AS THE youngest child meant I was lacking power, and drums were a means of at least *sounding* powerful," smiles Stewart Copeland from behind his sunglasses. He's already been through the talk-show mill for Animal Logic's release, *Animal Logic II*, so he's clearly pleased to refocus on the subject of this discussion. "When I became a professional," he deadpans, "I realized I'd made the wrong choice. It's the guitarist who always gets laid."

Stewart's first axe was the trumpet. "My father was a jazz player before the war," he explains. "He played trumpet with the Dorseys and Glenn Miller. So I was raised on jazz. But then I discovered the power in the drums at the age of 12, and my father started me listening to Buddy Rich. He immediately hired drum teachers, so I've been deeply rooted in orthodox technique from a very early age. Kids in rock bands figure out guitars or bass or drums themselves, but orthodox technique is basically the most economic and efficient way developed over generations to work your instrument. So I learned music, the exercises, all that."

His older brothers exposed him to a lot of rock, but this percussion colorist's first real discovery was that fulcrum of post-'60s rock and sonic exploration, Jimi Hendrix. "Mitch Mitchell was amazing. And of course Elvin Jones, with his avoidance of easily traceable patterns, and Ginger Baker." In fact, as Copeland readily agrees, you can hear some of the offbeat spatial conceptions of those earlier drummers—as revolutionary now as they were 20-odd years ago—echoing through his own keen sense of silence and cunning.

Take Copeland's use of cymbals. "The hi-hat is the most fun, expressive aspect of the set, but it's ignored by most drummers. You can hit the snare drum several different ways. Same with the other cymbals, of course. But you can control the sound of the hi-hat by opening and closing *and* hitting it several different ways. It's like the top line, the melodic aspect, of the rhythm. I concentrate a lot on that." Listen, for instance, to how Copeland uses hi-hat paradiddles to punctuate shifting pat-



Photograph: Aldo Mauro

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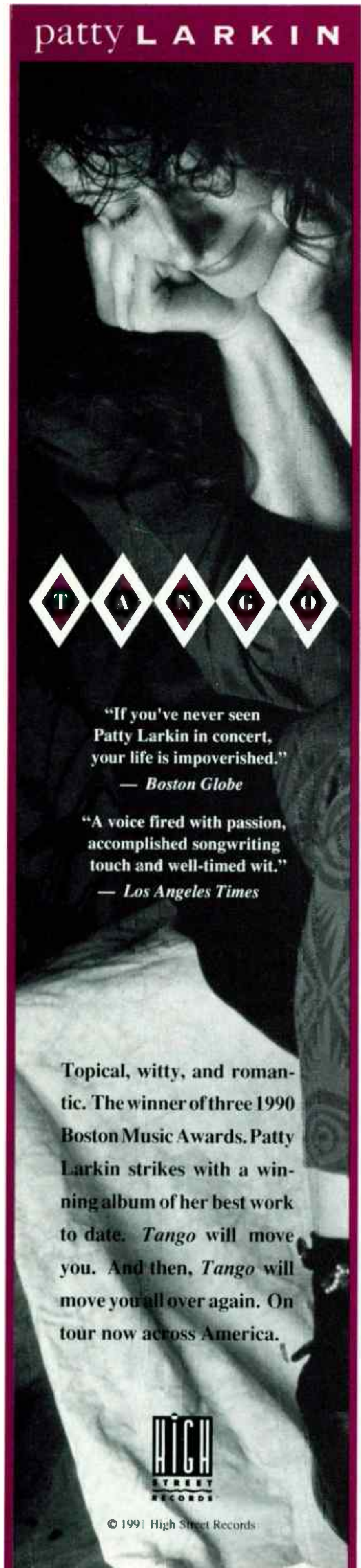

terns on the Police's "Walking on the Moon."

Or the way he avoids cluttering up "De Do Do Do De Da Da Da" with the heavy-metal fills many rock drummers would have pounded into every crevice. "That's easy enough," he grins. "I suppose the inspiration came from reggae, where they turned the rhythm backwards—the kick line is where you'd expect the snare back-beat. Where's the 1? You can move to it, you can feel it, but where *is* it? I couldn't believe that the kick and the backbeat landed together on 3.

"But once you break that barrier of expecting the snare on 2 and 4 every time, in every song, there are a lot of other options. Space becomes a big consideration. Music, art in general, is all about creating tension and releasing it. The drums are mostly release, the forward momentum, but they can participate in the tension-release equation. You create an expectation of something; then, when you withdraw it, there's a hole into which the listener falls—and for some reason enjoys it.

"Here's an example. Most rock drummers think in terms of short phrases—a couple of bars, maybe. But there are ways to move around even within that constriction. If you've established a good solid rhythm so you know where the 1 is, you can hit on *and*—the eighth note—and you leave a hole on 1. So, as we said, you have people falling on 1; then when they're falling you hit them on the back of the head."

Copeland uses similar withdrawals on his ride cymbals. "Instead of just keeping a regular series of 16th notes as evenly as you can, you can find a lot of room for expression within them: accents, not hitting every 16th, and so on. It's a mechanical thing that's possible to learn. Most drummers hang their playing off the 16th notes emanating from their right hand. As long as that's down, they know where to subdivide the rest of the rhythm. It's complicated for them to not have that 16th-note top line telling them where they are all the time. But you have to have your own built-in metronome; the repetition of that 16th cannot be your metronome. You have to divorce yourself from that. Then you have a forward momentum that's coming from your—well, your soul. And everything becomes free.

"Drum teachers talk a lot about independence of limbs. Most drummers usually have one of the aspects held down—either the backbeat or the right-hand 16th—and the others they explore. But if you have a completely internalized momentum, you can avoid that. Very often my right hand lies limp at my side while the other things do the work. People wonder why there's so much air; the reason is, there's nothing going ting-ting-ting-ting-ting. Even better, you can achieve great musical effect with that space."

Copeland notes that this is all post-playing analysis: "At the moment you're playing, you don't think about it. It's all internalized. The intellectual part of the brain is wondering whether the restaurant is going to be open when you get back to the hotel; it's not really a part of the performance. But when you hear a tape, you start to think about what you did that may not be effective. Or people tell you about what you do, and then it's up to you to think of reasons why.

"Musicians ask me how to be original, which is a strange question if you think about it. The only answer is that you should expose yourself to sources no one else is hearing. My getting into reggae when I was the program director of my college radio station, with Bob Marley's first album, is an example of getting into a rhythmic concept no one else I knew was into. There are a lot more things like that out there. *Rai* music, for instance. The African music of the cities—which is where all the really interesting stuff has been happening of the last 20 years. One of the things I picked up during *The Rhythmatist* was four-to-the-bar on the bass drum, 32nd notes on the hi-hat and no backbeat at all. I really took that to heart."

As you'd expect, Copeland's equipment reflects his unortho- [cont'd on page 84]

Animal Traps

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Johnnie Johnson, Right-Hand Man

How to let it slide ❖ *By* Jon Pareles

"THERE'S REALLY NOTHING TO IT," says Johnnie Johnson, cruising through a lazy G-major blues. But while the stubby fingers of his left hand play a smooth walking bass, his right is splashing notes all over the place. There are tremolos, jazzy 7th and 9th chords and rippling barrelhouse arpeggios that roll through the octaves and would seem to call for at least a few extra fingers. He slows it down for me, though, and suddenly I can see where the extra notes come from; Johnson is sliding off black keys to white keys, from B flat to B and from E flat to E. His timing makes it sound like every note is being hit directly.

One thing he can't show me is the inspiration that strikes when someone else is laying down rhythm chords. On his own, Johnson is a first-rate blues pianist. But put him next to a rhythm guitarist and he gets even better, playing off-the-wall filigrees and flourishes that dance around the beat like St. Elmo's fire.

That wild gift caught the world's attention when Johnson, now 67, backed up a guitarist and songwriter he'd originally hired as a sideman: Chuck Berry. They started working together on the New Year's Eve before 1953; by 1955, Berry was the bandleader and they were recording for Chess Records. Johnson's piano puts the anarchic spirit in some of the cornerstone songs of rock 'n' roll, like "Johnny B. Goode" and "Sweet Little Sixteen." "It was just something I heard in my mind," he says, "and I put it in my fingers."

Johnson learned everything "the hard way"; he is entirely self-taught. "My mother, she just said I had a gift for music," he says. "She never forced me and she never stopped me. But that was my desire—to play music."

He cites Avery Parrish, Oscar Peterson and Earl Hines as favorite pianists, and his repertoire includes jazz standards as well as the blues. "I have a heck of an ear—I can get a tune in mind and hold that tune for a week, or however long it takes for me to get to a piano. You just have to get it off a record, sit there and play it over and over again."

Johnson grew up in Clarksdale, West Virginia, soaking up what he calls "hillbilly music," and moved to Detroit in 1941. He played piano in a Marine big band after joining the corps in 1943, and then moved on to Chicago. In 1952, a short visit to St. Louis led to gigs and records with bluesman Albert King, and then he made the Berry connection, which may have been bolstered by Berry's own country leanings. They were together until 1973, when Johnson got tired of flying.

But while leading his own groups, he'd still play the occasional job with Chuck, like the recent hit documentary *Hail! Hail! Rock and Roll*, which brought him out of the discographical shadows. Johnnie released two albums in 1991: *Rockin' Eighty-eights*, an album he shares with fellow St. Louis pianists Clayton Love and Jimmy Vaughn, on Modern Blues Recordings (Box 248, Pearl River, NY 10965) and brand-new *Johnnie B. Bad*, on Elektra-Nonesuch.

As a self-taught player, Johnson cheerfully acknowledges his limits. He can read chord symbols, but not notation: "If they put music up there in front of me, it's like reading Greek." And he only plays solos in certain keys. "The key of G is more of a favorite than C for blues, and then C and then F," he says. "For jazz, I like E flat.

"Most guitarists like to play in A, E natural, sometimes F sharp, and those keys I can just chord in, I couldn't take no solo in them. No solo whatsoever. When I was

Photograph: John Soares

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Getting a Foot in the Stage Door

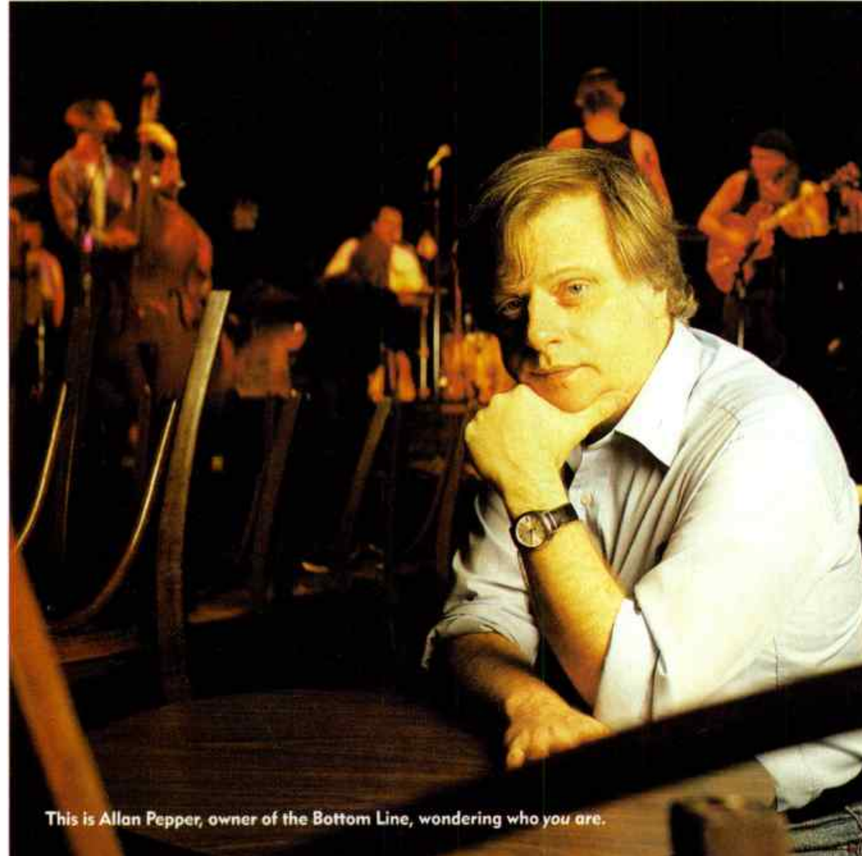
The first date is the toughest ❖ *By* DAN DALEY

LANDING A FIRST DATE AT A CLUB is a curious and intricate pas de deux. The relationship between musicians and club owners is a complex one—it's both mutually beneficial and mutually antagonistic. But there are ways that you can accentuate the positive in this sometimes weird alliance.

First, let's put the relationship into its most fundamental form—economics. The people on either side of the fence have their own motivations. You, the musician, look at clubs as showcases and stepping stones, or perhaps as your four-or-five-nights-a-week bread and butter: your nighttime day gig. The club owner might be the type who takes a certain pride in nurturing a local music scene, or the type who figures a live band is going to sell more beer, period. Regardless, everyone is out to at least break even and hopefully do better than that.

Look at things from the club owner's perspective. In most markets the number of clubs is limited, the number of bands that want to play them virtually unlimited. Free market principles—that's right, supply and demand—apply even if you wear leather pants. I've been in club offices where the cassettes were stacked up to the ceiling waiting to be listened to. So if you don't get a fast response, or get no response at all, it might be because whoever is doing the booking is simply swamped and not intentionally ignoring you. In the face of this, the club owner tends to go with what he knows works in his place. To get into this loop, you've got to form a working relationship.

Start by finding out who actually books the room. Owners often have neither the time nor inclination to do this dirty work, in which case the club is probably booked by its manager. A club employee can usually get you the name. This is not a conventional business, so everyone's hours are different. Ask when the manager is in during the afternoons or evenings and try for a personal contact first—a face behind a name makes a big difference. If you have to go the phone route, be prepared to leave a concise, detailed message explaining who you are, the band's name, the fact that you're calling about a booking (don't leave vague messages hoping to circumvent the booker's usual M.O.—it just pisses them off) and where and when you can be reached. This almost always takes a lot of chasing but if you don't get a fast response don't automatically take the attitude you're getting the cold shoulder; remember what we talked about a minute ago. Be persistent but not obsessive.



This is Allan Pepper, owner of the Bottom Line, wondering who *you* are.

Once you make the contact, find out how auditions are held. Via cassettes? Live? Let follow-up questions about the club and about gigs wait for a later conversation, and in the case of a band, have the same person contact the manager consistently to avoid confusion.

Money. You may not want to make an issue of this just yet, at least until you or your tape gets listened to. But it's good to keep in mind that some clubs have set fees for bands, others negotiate night to night. More and more clubs—given the fact that in many markets they have the upper hand by virtue of Darwinian economics—don't guarantee nothin'. Rather, they provide you with passes to distribute and pay you a set amount—usually a buck or two—for each pass received at the door the night you play. Some use a combination of all three approaches.

A few managers or owners turn out to be tough nuts to crack: Maybe they're simply flakes, maybe they're on a power trip. If the club is really one you want/have to play, more inventive measures may be called for. If you can't get to them on the

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who has access—does your girlfriend know his girlfriend? Do you have a friend in another band that's played there, knows him and would do you a favor? New York singer/songwriter Greg Trooper, a recent signee to PolyGram's publishing arm, says when he hit town from Kansas in 1980, he checked the local clubs to find ones whose lineups would be compatible with his style of music. Then he talked to the musicians playing in those rooms about who he should approach about gigging there. "You had to be a real bar rat," he says. "But the people who know who's really in charge are usually the musicians who work there on a regular basis, so I just went up and talked to them."

Another possible strategy: If someone other than the owner books the club, the owner may have more time to listen to tapes and might even be more approachable. However, handle this last scenario with care; don't make it appear to whoever does do the booking that you've gone over his head.

Which leads to your overall style of approach: Never be obsequious. If you weren't good you wouldn't be doing this, so don't feel like you have to bow and scrape to get a gig. At the same time, don't cop an attitude yourself, even if you get pushed a bit. It's a fine line between aggressive and assertive—and the latter is far preferable. If you come off like a pro, you have a better chance of being treated like one.

What do club bookers respond to? It varies. Don Hill, manager of the metal-heavy Cat Club in Manhattan, says he prefers it when someone comes down in person to hand off a tape. He is particularly incensed when bands call up and say they have "label interest" and try to get a gig. "A band that has label interest I'll know about," says Hill, "because the label will call me up and say, 'Do us a favor and give them a date so we can see them.'" Hill also says that good, eye-catching packaging of tapes and bios gets his attention. So does a list of who's playing in the band. Having a local hero or two backing you up definitely raises your desirability with club bookers.

Allan Pepper, co-owner of the Bottom Line in Manhattan, says that your tapes should be representative of what the act is. You should be able to [cont'd on page 103]

Performance

Enter: Sound Bite

By Mark Rowland

MY DICTIONARY PROVIDES ONE DEFINITION OF "ARSENIOUS"—"OF, RELATING TO, OR CONTAINING ARSENIC." I would like to suggest a few others. Arsenious: 1) to simulate the atmosphere of a party; 2) to convey false feeling, e.g., to hug without meaning; 3) to triumph style over substance. These definitions are inspired by the genial talk-show host Arsenio Hall, whose effect on intelligent conversation is roughly equivalent to MTV's effect on intelligent music-making. Which is to say, such things can happen in their presence, but it's never really the point.

WHAT *1991 MTV Video Music Awards*
WHERE *Universal Amphitheatre, Los Angeles*
WHEN *September 5, 1991*

The point of this year's MTV awards show, hosted by Arsenio, was self-congratulation. And why not? In 10 years, MTV has evolved from a diversion for cable insomniacs into the unofficial central government of the music business, delivering more prosperity to its far-flung republics than, say, the Soviet Union, and deriving considerably more allegiance in return. Which is why so many of this year's tix, at $150 a pop, were swallowed up by record companies eager to please Big Tube. Or why Metallica, whose #1 album was only selling half a million copies that week, was willing to interrupt a European tour to play on the program. Or why those N.W.A. meanies read their lines off cue cards with such compliance you'd think they were still at a Republican Party fund-raiser. Hey, if it wasn't for the wife of Jane's Addiction's Perry Ferrell drunkenly slobbering an acceptance speech for Best Alternative Music video, there wouldn't have been one moment of unscripted bad taste. Then again, Slash and Duff weren't around.

Prince

"Arsenious" Hall

But give the show credit for hipness: Unlike the Grammy Awards people, who still aren't sure if they should really pay attention to this rap stuff, MTV at least keeps pace with its critics. This year's dozen acts were required to perform without prerecorded tracks, with some good results. The presence of a live band certainly juiced C&C Music Factory's dance routines, and the horn section behind L.L. Cool J helped underline the harmonic links between rap and James Brown-styled funk. On the other hand, Queensryche laid it on rather thick by hauling in a tuxedo-clad orchestra. Good Moody Blues impersonation, guys, but next time bring the Mellotron!

As for the others, well, you've seen them on MTV replay about 50 times now. Metallica's "Enter Sandman" was the musical highlight, as much for the band's emotional conviction as their talent. The lowlight was Don Henley, though his torpid version of "The Heart of the Matter" did an excellent job of driving a crowd into the theater lobby, the better to discuss the impending arrival of Prince.

Paula Abdul

As usual Prince delivered, wriggling that notorious Purple Butt as his band dug a trench-sized groove on "Gett Off" amidst a hilariously over the top mise-en-scène of flaming Roman decadence. It was a true MTV moment, at once kitschy and entertaining, while only incidentally showcasing the musicality of the most influential pop figure of the last decade. The audience gott off as well, rising to their collective feet for only the second time the entire evening. The first, of course, was a prolonged standing ovation to greet the surprise appearance of Pee Wee Herman.

Memorable moments, both of them. The rest was mostly Arsenious.

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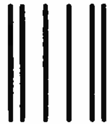

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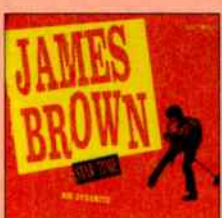

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BACK ISSUES

8. VSOP, Jarreau, Mingus
13. McCoy Tyner, Freddie Hubbard
15. Chick Corea, avant jazz, Big Joe Turner
21. Brian Eno, Talking Heads, Weather Report
24. Bob Marley, Sun Ra, Lydia Lunch
33. The Clash, L. Buckingham, R. Shannon Jackson
34. Tom Petty, Dave Edmunds, Wayne Shorter
36. Grateful Dead, Zappa, Kid Creole, NY Dolls
37. Black Uhuru, Bill Wyman, Rickie Lee Jones
45. Willie Nelson, John McLaughlin, the Motels
64. Stevie Wonder, X, Was (Not Was), Ornette
67. Thomas Dolby, Chet Baker, Carl Perkins
70. Peter Wolf, King Crimson, Sly + Robbie
71. Heavy Metal, Dream Syndicate, Tina Turner
77. John Fogerty, Marsalis/Hancock, Los Lobos
79. Jeff Beck, Alison Moyet, John Hiatt–Ry Cooder
93. Peter Gabriel, Steve Winwood, Lou Reed
94. Jimi Hendrix, The Cure, Prince, 38 Special
101. Psychedelic Furs, Elton John, Miles Davis
102. Robert Cray, Los Lobos, Simply Red
104. Springsteen, The Blasters, Keith Jarrett
105. John Coltrane, George Martin, Replacements
108. U2, Tom Waits, Squeeze, Eugene Chadbourne
112. McCartney, Stanley Clarke, Buster Poindexter
113. Robert Plant, INXS, Wynton Marsalis
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/Shorter, Vernon Reid
120. Keith Richards, Depeche Mode, Steve Forbert
121. Prince, Steve Winwood, Randy Newman
122. Guns N' Roses, Midnight Oil, Glyn Johns
123. Year in Music '88, Metallica, Jack Bruce, Fishbone
124. Replacements, Fleetwood Mac, Lyle Lovett
125. Elvis Costello, Jeff Healey, Sonic Youth
126. Lou Reed, John Cale, Joe Satriani
127. Miles Davis, Fine Young Cannibals, XTC
128. Peter Gabriel, Charles Mingus, Bob Mould
129. The Who, The Cure, Ziggy Marley
130. 10,000 Maniacs, John Cougar Mellencamp, Jackson Brown/Bonnie Raitt
…Jeff Beck, Laura Nyro, Billy Sheehan
…32. Don Henley, Rolling Stones, Bob Marley
…33. The '80s, Daniel Lanois, Syd Straw
…34. Grateful Dead, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Paul Kelly
…Aerosmith, NRBQ, Richard Thompson, Max Q
…37. George Harrison, The Kinks, Abdullah Ibrahim
…38. Tom Petty, Lenny Kravitz, Rush, The Silos
…Paul McCartney, Cecil Taylor, Kronos Quartet
…0. Robert Plant, Suzanne Vega, Soul II Soul, Drums
…Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, Bob Clearmountain
…Sinéad O'Connor, John Hiatt, World Party
…Steve Vai, Michael Stipe, Malmsteen/McLaughlin
…INXS, Neville Bros., Lou Reed/Vaclav Havel
…Jimmy Page, John Paul Jones, Stevie Ray Vaughan
…Slash, Replacements, Waterboys, Pixies
…obert Johnson, Bruce Hornsby, Soul Asylum
…nk Floyd, Neil Young, Art Blakey, Black Crowes
…E.M., AC/DC, Top Managers, Jim Morrison
…die Van Halen, Fishbone, Byrds, Chris Isaak
…evie Ray Vaughan, Morrissey, Drum Special
…onnie Raitt, Tim Buckley, Sonny Rollins
…ing, Stevie Wonder, 15th Anniversary Issue
…ul McCartney, Axl Rose, David Bowie
…ire Straits, Jesus Jones, Paul McCartney
…est of the Beatles and Rolling Stones
…asters of Metal, Metallica, Def Leppard, more

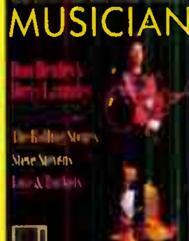
33
The Clash

115
Stevie Wonder

130
10,000 Maniacs

151
Van Halen

142
Sinéad O'Connor



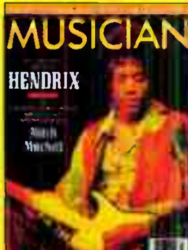
132
Don Henley

104
Bruce Springsteen

122
Guns N' Roses

128
Peter Gabriel

112
Paul McCartney



141
Jimi Hendrix

150
R.E.M.

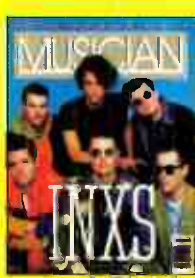
117
Jimmy Page

118
Pink Floyd

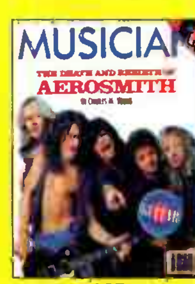
113
Robert Plant

127
Miles Davis

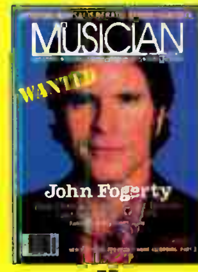
134
Grateful Dead



144
INXS



135
Aerosmith



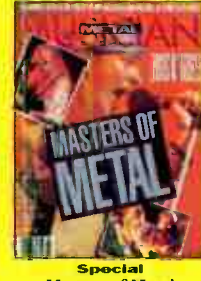
77
John Fogerty

105
John Coltrane

123
Year in Music

143
Steve Vai

Special
Beatles & Stones



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120	121	122	123	124
125	126	127	128	129
130	131	132	133	134
135	137	138	139	140
141	142	143	144	145
146	147	148	150	151
152	153	154	155	156

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Gibson's New Gold

CLASSIC, NOT STUFFY

THE LOOK IS VINTAGE, BUT THE GIBSON CLASSIC GOLD GUITAR AMP IS ACTUALLY A HYBRID OF VINtage virtues and modern design ideas. Vintage amps don't have effects loops or balanced and unbalanced line outs—amenities that modern guitarists have gotten hooked on. No snob item, this amp's a working player's pal.

The engine itself is a hybrid: a two-12AX7 tube front end with a solid-state power stage that pumps 85 watts into a Gibson Gold Tone 12" speaker. Common wisdom says that solid-state output stages are cold fish. But this amp's got tons of big warm bottom end—not too tight and not too floppy. There's a responsive feel to the Classic Gold that nicely approximates tube power-stage behavior.

The all-transistor clean channel is crisp and functional. But the party really starts when you switch to tube overdrive. The three-band active EQ on this channel's got a midrange control that's tuned to all the right frequencies (200 to 900 kHz, to be precise). You can cut (or boost) a whopping 15 dB at any of these, which means you can emulate the midrange dip of anything from a Marshall to a blackface Fender to an AC30. And that's another thing: Real vintage amps tend to be one-trick ponies, whereas the Classic Gold gets a multicolored cross-section of cool sounds. Plus it's *so* nice to have a real spring reverb. This is one hip little amp.

ALAN DI PERNA

Sound Bites

Korg have a new, expanded version of their Wavestation synth. Called the Wavestation EX, it adds 119 new sounds to existing ROM, plus eight new effects algorithms including vocoders, pitch shifting and a stereo compressor/limiter with gate. The EX comes with a program card containing 50 new Performances, 35 new Patches and 32 NEW Wavesequences. Any existing Wavestation can be upgraded to EXhood.... The sequels keep coming as Yamaha unveil their newest SY synth, the SY99. Like its forbear, the SY77, it can blend PCM samples and 6-op FM synthesis interactively. What it adds to the deal is...ta-da!...extra sound memory: eight MB of ROM containing 267 preset waves. Plus there are five memory-expansion slots tucked away underneath the Yamaha logo on the back panel. The SY99 has 76 keys out front and 16 tracks in its onboard sequencer. A unique feature is its ability to store Syx Ex data for other MIDI instruments, thus streamlining configuration of rigs.... Not to be out-sequeled, Akai have their new MPC60 II, a redesigned version of the MPC60 workstation. How about a 99-track/60,000-note sequencer, user sampling, velocity- and pressure-sensitive drum pads, 11 audio outs, 64 MIDI channels and seven different sync modes (including SMPTE and MTC) all for $3499.95?

Photograph: Susan Goines

World Radio History

Prefab Practice: Kawai GB-2 Session Trainer

WHAT THE GB-2 IS FOR, FIRST OF ALL, IS HOME PRACTICE. EITHER THROUGH headphones or speakers, it plays any of 48 preset rhythm patterns; you've got control over pitch and tempo. The presets are versions of pop tunes like "Purple Rain" and "Dude Looks Like a Lady," plus a bunch of generic riffs: bossa nova, big band, bebop, techno-rock; they each consist of drums, bass and two chordal voices. There are 10 programmable channels: Using the preset rhythms and pushing buttons to get any of 552 chords (46 chords in 12 keys), you create your own songs. RAM (empty) and ROM (preset-filled, with Beatles, Led Zep, Clapton, etc. songs) are available. The ROM cards cost 79 bucks, the RAMs $120 (room for 63 songs) or $80 (room for 31).

Now, the thing *is* a fairly neat practicing tool. I plugged it into my stereo speakers and played my acoustic to it; with headphones, you can plug in an electric (it's got a distortion wheel) or a keyboard. Jam as long as you want, to as simple or difficult a progression as you want: It's a Music Minus One, but with controllable tempo and key. You can also do utterly fun things like program "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" as a reggae song, or "Take the A Train" as funk. This is the truly addictive aspect of the box. I actually woke up in the middle of the night, realizing I'd been programming songs in my sleep. One more use: According to Kawai, solo giggers are using the GB-2 as accompaniment in solo club dates. I'm not sure I would; the sounds are a little too standard, the sonics not so fantastic. It's loadsa fun—as addictive in its way as any electronic box—but I'm not quite sure I'd spring real dollars (list: $349) for it. According to the company, it's selling briskly, so maybe not everyone shares my reservations.

Practicing guitar, I'll sometimes tape a chordal riff of my own and then play over it. That way, you learn more about a D flat min6flat9 than you do by just pushing a button for it. Learn more about playing rhythm, too. On the other hand, the GB-2 gives you a whole band for backup; it makes home solo jamming more fun. As such, it can be a really useful, chops-expanding practice tool. It's just a little too paint-by-numbers for players who want to learn from the ground up.

One last thing—it's tiny. I stuck it in a knapsack, took headphones and happily solved commuter train boredom for a week.

TONY SCHERMAN

Sansamp: Love Me Like a Rockman

I had a real love/hate relationship with my Scholz Rockman. On the one hand it kept me from getting thrown out of my apartment by allowing me to get a screaming guitar sound at 3 a.m. without an amp. On the other hand all my demos took on a fast-food sameness because of the Rockman's four-sounds-only capability. And now along comes Andrew Barta with his Sansamp. Barta (company name, Tech 21) is a man obsessed with getting the sound of tube amp into a stomp box–sized unit. And although, to these ears, he doesn't quite succeed, he comes amazingly close. The Sansamp is a very Rockman-like device. The difference can be summed up in one word that I just made up—tweakability. Barta's sample settings do call up pretty close replicas of those beloved Fender, Marshall and Boogie tones, but the real fun began when I started futzing with the four knobs and eight microswitches on the face of the unit. Suddenly the pickup switch on my Strat took on awesome new powers, resulting in some truly cool guitar sounds that translated beautifully to tape. It also added a tube-like warmth to my direct-in bass. With a list price of $295 the Sansamp is a fun, useful box that should send Tom Scholz running back to the drawing board. (Tech 21 Inc., 1600 Broadway, New York, NY 10019)

PETER CRONIN

Photographs: Susan Goines (top); Linda Covello

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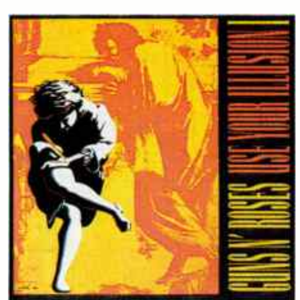
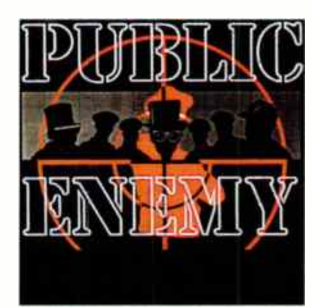
Illusion and Apocalypse



Use Your Illusion I and *II*
(Geffen)



Apocalypse '91: The Enemy Strikes Back
(Def Jam)

I THINK THE REASON THAT AXL ROSE IS SO ENDlessly fascinating is that he's honest. He's honest, he's made a towering pile of money, his singing talent is prodigious, he's completely out of control. Who could be surprised that American high schools are regularly swept by rumors that he or someone else in Guns N' Roses has died? No one with those black marks on his permanent record can be allowed to live. It's the American way.

Honesty comes in many forms, of course. Axl's predilection is for emotional truth, which music conveys better than any other art form. He seems incapable of not speaking his mind, and when his mind is full of hate, he uses hateful terms. With relief I note that the words "nigger" and "fag" appear nowhere in 2½ hours of music, so maybe all the criticism he took for "One in a Million" convinced him that

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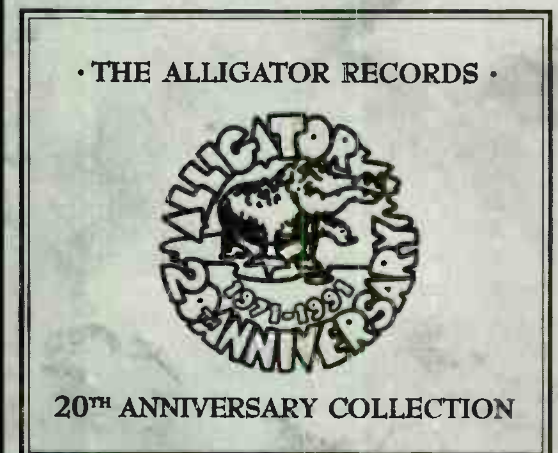

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some words are unfairly and inherently cruel. Then again, maybe it didn't, because he really, really enjoys snarling "bitch," a word that makes me squirm in most contexts. A high proportion of the 30 songs here concern losing your temper at a female ("Back Off Bitch"). A smaller proportion are about being in love with a particular female ("Don't Cry") and here Axl shows his sensitive side, which you appreciate a hundred times more than you would in some sensitive singer/songwriter type, because Axl has so enthusiastically exposed himself as a cantankerous pain in the ass.

The music is richly detailed. If there's a more riveting guitar tandem out there than Slash and Izzy, I'd like to know who they are. The rhythm section has good taste and big muscles. The songwriting ranges from mini-symphonies like "Civil War" (their first stab at political truth) to several comparatively formless rants-over-riffs. I like rants over riffs, but I did occasionally feel I was getting too many words and not enough anthemic hooks, à la "Paradise City."

Regarding journalists, Axl's attitude is typical of show biz, though more vehemently and publicly expressed. I call it "libertarian fascism"—that is, if I do it, it's okay; if you do it, I'll kill you. Take "Don't Damn Me," for example: "Don't damn me when I speak a piece of my mind/'Cause silence isn't golden when I'm holding it inside/'Cause I've been where I have been/And I've seen what I have seen/I put the pen to the paper/'Cause it's all a part of me." Then take "Get in the Ring," a song directly addressed to certain music journalists who also—let us remember—put pen to paper and speak their minds: "Antagonize me motherfucker/Get in the ring motherfucker/I'll kick your bitchy little ass/Punk."

Public Enemy also suffers from libertarian fascism. More than any other popular rap or rock group, they have placed their rage in a political context. On *Apocalypse '91*, they continue their indictment of white racism, economic exploitation, alcoholism among the oppressed. It is difficult to disagree, both because they are right and because they bang the table with such vehemence. Their energy and sonic imagination are relentless.

Then we come to "A Letter to the NY Post." A very good case can be made that the *Post* is a wretched newspaper, even by the wretched standards of American journalism. Its editorial page is jackboot rightwing, its news columns so biased and sensationalized that they are useful only as a reflection of what our rulers want us to think. Public Enemy touches on these points, but what really annoys them is the *Post* publicizing the recent arrest of Flavor Flav (William Drayton) for wife beating. Flav doesn't deny doing it ("I smacked that girl"), he just feels he's entitled to beat his woman in private because "She's the mother of my children that I took around the world." If Axl Rose has the right to tell ugly truths about himself, so does Public Enemy. And so does the New York *Post*. And I have the right to look to someone else to lead the revolution. **—Charles M. Young**

Barbra Streisand

◆

Just for the Record...
(Columbia)

IF BOB DYLAN HADN'T ALREADY USED IT, *BIOGRAPH* would have been a perfect title for Barbra Streisand's lavish, four-CD retrospective. More than any other boxed set to date, this plays like a musical autobiography. Streisand co-produced the collection with her long-time manager, Martin Erlichman, and wrote the illuminating notes for a 92-page booklet that accompanies it.

Just for the Record... illustrates what a daring and idiosyncratic talent Streisand has been since she launched her career in 1960. Urged early on to perform more standards, she instead made her first TV appearance singing the obscure "A Sleepin' Bee." Asked to perform the rousing "Happy Days Are Here Again" on a 1962 TV show, she chose to interpret it ironically, as a downbeat ballad. Needing a box-office hit in the early '80s, she instead fulfilled a long-held dream to tell the story of *Yentl*, a girl in turn-of-the-century Eastern Europe who dresses as a boy in order to study Talmud. *Ghostbusters* it wasn't.

Streisand's determination not to take the easy way out extended to the compilation of this album. She left off numerous hits and studio recordings to make way for lesser-known songs, outtakes, demos, audition tapes and live, film, TV and home recordings. Her decision to exclude much of her studio work is the source of the set's greatest appeal ("Unreleased Streisand!") and its chief weakness. The constraint doesn't detract from the two brilliant discs covering the '60s, when Streisand was an active multi-media performer and there was an abundance of material from which to choose. But after 1973, when the TV specials and live performances became less frequent, the set becomes somewhat uneven. The bias against studio recordings means that some of her best work from the '70s and '80s—"Pieces of Dreams," "Memory," "All I Ask of You"—isn't included. Instead, we get two outtakes from the lambasted *ButterFly* album, a TV performance of the Israeli national anthem and *three* demos from *Yentl*. Oy vey!

Still, this collection is a feast for the Streisand-phile. The sprawling, 4½-hour set encompasses pop ballads, rousing show-stoppers, torch songs, comic novelties, standards, blues, rhythmic pop-rock and Sinatra-style swing and saloon songs. It adds up to a frequently enthralling look at a career that, at its peak, crossed generational lines and transversed media in a way that hasn't happened since and may not happen again.

The audio bites from old TV appearances and Streisand's liner notes provide revealing glimpses into her personality. In a 1962 performance at the Bon Soir nightclub in Greenwich Village, Streisand wonders, "Am I out of the spotlight?" before quickly adding, "I'll *never* be out of the spotlight." Accepting an Emmy in 1965, she pointedly reminds the audience of her youth (she had just turned 23) by beginning: "When I was a kid, I mean, a *younger* kid..." But such was the brashness of youth. Recalling her legendary 1963 TV appearance with Judy Garland, Streisand remembers: "As we sang together, she took my hand and held on tight. I remember that her hand was shaking in mine. At the time I thought, 'Why is she so frightened?' Now, many years later, I understand..." **—Paul Grein**

Metallica

◆

Metallica
(Elektra)

SAD BUT TRUE: 40-YEAR-OLD MUSIC WRITERS don't come home to whip up a vegetable stir-fry with brown rice, pop the cork on some white wine, kick off the old shoes and toss on the latest Metallica. Then again, as a deputized officer of the counter-cultural court (and the parent of a 17-year-old), it sure oxygenates the blood to jump headfirst into some good old-fashioned, unrepentant rock 'n' roll angst.

How so? Well, just to date myself more, when this bucko gets really dark and melancholy, the call goes out for the Robert Johnson of "Stones in My Passway" and "Hellhound on My Trail." And as a devotee of modern jazz and classical music, when I first heard bands like Cream, the Hendrix Experience and Led Zeppelin, the marriage of jazzy group improvisation, roiling rock intensity and too-fucking-loud blues made a believer of me, and I've been listening to it ever since.

Of course the aforementioned groups sound like Mozart compared to most of their literal descendants. But Metallica's brand of metal is not only very musical (and too fucking loud, with nary a drum machine or synthesizer within pissin' distance of the

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stage), but the most thoughtful, humanistic brand of thrash I've encountered. On "Nothing Else Matters," rather than depict relationships in the familiar me-Tarzan-you-Jane manner, all thoughts are of sharing: "Trust I seek and find in you/Every day for something new/Open mind for a different view." Methinks Metallica are sheep in wolf's clothing.

The characters depicted in their songs are frantically tossing about, having bad dreams, looking for a reason to believe and not finding much, save in each other. Echoes of Public Image reverberate through "The God That Failed," contrasting a pure image of the Christ with the God that's since been corporatized through the licensed franchises of salvation. The adolescent experience rings true throughout songs like "The Unforgiven" ("With time the child draws in/The whipping boy done wrong/Deprived of all his thoughts"), and such telling portraits of self-victimizing youth as "My Friend of Misery" and "Holier Than Thou."

So it's easy to see why Tipper Gore and the anti-humanist yahoos feel so threatened by music like this. Or more accurately, by music that sounds *like* this, which is what makes Metallica so subversive. Because there's nothing particularly prurient or demonic to fixate on; no sexist twaddle, no happy hedonism, no kill-your-parents cheerleading, no half-baked sci-fi escapism. Pretty existential stuff for teenage boys and girls, all in all, though the tone of songs like "Of Wolf and Man," "Through the Never" and "Enter Sandman" are closer to the figurative imagery of Stephen King than to Sartre or Melville.

"Enter Sandman" emblemizes Metallica's style, balancing aural bluster with frequent interludes of art-rock finesse, putting me more in mind of the Sex Pistols and King Crimson than Van Halen or Guns N' Roses. Librettist/rhythm guitarist James Hetfield likes to put an extra dose of exorcist mange in the old larynx for that authentic hounds-of-hell delivery. Lead guitarist Kirk Hammett answers with steamroller chords and soaring leads, while drummer Lars Ulrich and bassist Jason Newsted dance over the backbeat like the 800-pound gorilla. Yet for all their bluster, jeweled details abound, like the "America" fandango that sardonically introduces the sentiments of "Don't Tread on Me." Similarly, Metallica's message is one of righteous indignation tempered by a keen sense of personal responsibility and direction. You've got to admit, the kids are alright.

—Chip Stern

John Mellencamp

Whenever We Wanted
(Mercury Records)

THIS IS JOHN MELLENCAMP'S ELEVENTH ALBUM, and its songs remain true to the heartland rock recipe which catapulted him to stardom in the early '80s. Like Bob Seger and Bruce Springsteen, Mellencamp specializes in working-class narratives that celebrate the nobility of hanging tough in a dead-end existence; like Bad Company and the Stones, he favors big, classic rock riffs; like every small-town teenage boy who ever dreamed of roaring away on a Harley, he's got angst and attitude to burn.

Attitude, in fact, is the dominant motif in Mellencamp's work, and if you don't buy into that posture his music probably won't cut it for you. I've always found the Mellenshtick mannered and vaguely unauthentic—he makes a little too much show of his allegiance to the working class, talks a little too often and too loudly about things like integrity and his hatred for "the system" (at 40, he hasn't figured out that we all are the system). Rife with macho rhetoric, Mellencamp speaks with the frustrated bitterness of a middle-class teenager, though he's now far from that. He's always had a chip on his shoulder, but it's a chip that serves him less well as he ages.

Whenever We Wanted finds Mellencamp singing in standard-issue tough-guy growl, slurring his lyrics for cool effect (it took several listenings of a tune called "Melting Pot" before I figured out he wasn't saying "mail pie"). Several songs are variations on the theme of "the world's out to get me," while others trade on erotic fantasy. (The hot chick presented in "Crazy Ones," for instance, is a wealthy groupie with a backstage pass whose central charm is that she's impossibly clingy and unattainable.)

[cont'd on page 102]

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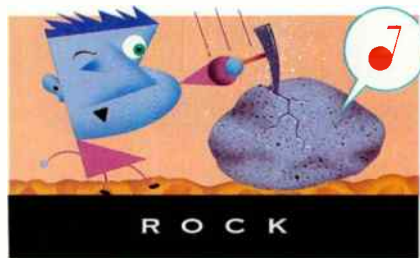

BY J. D. CONSIDINE

JOHN LEE HOOKER
Mr. Lucky [Charisma/Pointblank]
Instead of simply flanking the great bluesman with stars eager to pay tribute, this album one-ups *The Healer* by using its confluence of talent to push the music in new directions. And the further afield it gets—taking "I Cover the Waterfront" into the mystic with Van Morrison and Booker T. Jones, say, or working up a blues/fusion groove with Carlos Santana on "Stripped Me Naked"—the more exciting the music becomes.

BOB SEGER
The Fire This Time [Capitol]
Instead of the rock 'n' roll nostalgia he's sold since *Night Moves*, Seger now thinks more about what could be than what was, and if that doesn't completely reinvigorate his sound—adding real heat to "The Fire Inside" or putting a breathless edge to "Take a Chance"—it comes damned close. But not as much as when he tries something like Tom Waits' "New Coat of Paint," a tune so out-of-character it verges on re-invention.

MARKY MARK AND THE FUNKY BUNCH
Music for the People [Interscope]
...who think Vanilla Ice invented rap.

BLACK ROCK COALITION
The History of Our Future [Rykodisc]
If you know that "black" applied to "rock" is an unnecessary modifier (if not downright redundant), then this collection will likely leave you with mixed emotions: joy at hearing bands as ferociously imaginative as the Good Guys, JJ Jumpers and PBR Streetgang; anger at an industry so color-conscious that it could be blind to such obvious talent; hope that someday soon we'll hear more than one song each from these bands.

FOLLOW FOR NOW
Follow for Now [Chrysalis]
As players, these guys are good enough to skip from psychedelic blues to ska to acid funk without missing a beat. They're also smart enough to know how each style relates. Which may be why they succeed where others merely flail, whether by nailing the '70s soul-pop groove Lenny Kravitz lusts after ("Mistreatin' People") or updating aspects of Sly Stone that Fishbone never caught ("Fire 'N Snakes"). All of which begs the question: "Follow *who*?"

LITTLE FEAT
Shake Me Up [Morgan Creek]
Perhaps their most low-key recording since *Dixie Chicken*, this one finds the Feat doing what they do best: working a groove. Which is why, from the Stax-style "Things Happen" to the stately country funk of "Livin' on Dreams," the band sounds better than ever.

A TRIBE CALLED QUEST
Low End Theory [Jive]
It's one thing to observe, as Q-Tip does on "Excursions," that rap recalls bebop, quite another to make that connection concrete. Yet Quest does that here, grounding the rhythmic extrapolations of its wordplay with live drums and none other than Ron Carter on bass. That's not to say they don't sample too, but by mixing it up, the Tribe produces a sound that's fresh in every sense.

THE GOLDEN PALOMINOS
Drunk with Passion [Charisma]
Less a band than a free-floating recording project, it almost goes without saying that the Palominos' sound changes from song to song. Yet even as that style shifts from the genial twang of Michael Stipe on "Alive and Living Well" to Bob Mould's firestorm in "Dying from the Inside Out," the music remains focused and affecting.

BILLY BRAGG
Don't Try This at Home [Elektra]
What makes Bragg a folk singer isn't his fondness for roots but his sense of humanity; even at his most political, his songs are always more concerned with people than ideas. That not only explains why it's so easy to warm up to songs like "Sexuality" or "Moving the Goalposts," but how this album, for all its full-band clangor, still sounds as intimate and personable as his solo recordings.

THE GRAPES OF WRATH
These Days [Capitol]
Most bands mining the psychedelic pop vein pioneered by the Beatles seem to miss the point, emphasizing embellishment at the expense of the songs. Not the Grapes of Wrath: Despite the aural detail layered into each arrangement, what you notice first about these songs is their lush, languorous melodicism. That makes the bulk of this album utterly irresistible.

BY PETER WATROUS

J.J. JOHNSON
Standards [Antilles]
This falls under the category of "if it worked before, do it again." Johnson's second live recording from the Village Vanguard, featuring Ralph Moore, has the band running through standards like "See See Rider," "My Funny Valentine," "Misterioso" and more, and they've all been rearranged; "Sweet Georgia Gillespie" has Johnson working a duet with the drummer, for example. But what's really extraordinary is that Johnson imbues the sound of sadness into everything he plays. Just the first few notes of his solos on "See See Rider" are loaded with pathos.

RICKY FORD
Hard Groovin' [Muse]
Few studio records capture the intensity of a live performance; the audience is everything, and it's a lot easier

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playing without the weight of history on your back. *Hard Groovin'* gets a real blowing feeling, and gasp, the improvisational tumult is sorted out by some decent small-group arrangements. The band—Roy Hargrove on trumpet, Geoff Keezer on piano, Bob Hurst on bass and Jeff Watts on drums—kicks up a fuss, with the rhythm section grooving hard and in general acting empathetic. Hargrove plays a series of perfect solos while Ford, one of the forgotten men in jazz, chops out rough and hurtling improvisations.

GEOFF KEEZER

Here and Now [Blue Note]

At the grand age of 20, Keezer has become one of the more fascinating and experimental pianists. Though he clearly has put in time studying—listen to the Ellingtonia and Harold Mabernisms in his playing—historical accuracy isn't his goal. One composition has Keezer and vibist Steve Nelson soloing at the same time, creating detailed skeins of sound. The young avant garde has been reluctant to experiment structurally; this record suggests that that reluctance is beginning to crack.

JIMMY LIGGINS & HIS DROPS OF JOY
JOE LIGGINS & THE HONEYDRIPPERS
ROY MILTON & HIS SOLID SENDERS

The Legends of Specialty Series [Specialty/Fantasy]

While Woody Guthrie landed on the radio singing hillbilly music, several of his fellow Okies performed in the after-hours joints that ran along Central Avenue in L.A., from City Hall south through Watts. As Joe Liggins, a former singer and arranger for big bands in the Southwest, put it: "We had no name for the thing, but girls loved it; they flocked 'round my piano...and I heard my drummer say, 'He's a sweet man—he's a honeydripper!'" An instrumental built on saxophonist Willie E. Jackson's swing band horn riffs, "The Honeydripper" sold over a million copies, proving, as would Roy Milton's "RM Blues" in 1945, that R&B had appeal far beyond the West Coast.

In many ways, West Coast R&B was similar to bebop, both born out of the death of swing. In fact, Roy Milton's 1949 hit "The Hucklebuck" was derived from Charlie Parker's "Now's the Time." But R&B was deliberately less cerebral, more danceable and more interested in popular success. Within the idiom, only Louis Jordan rivaled Milton's string of post-war hits.

Today, this music is often identified as a precursor to rock 'n' roll. Certainly, as Stax/Volt learned from the horn lines of "RM Blues," so Chuck Berry seems to have studied Jimmy Liggins' "Cadillac Boogie" ("It's all reet, solid streamlined/Ah, joy's jumpin'; Cadillac's on time!"). But these reissues show the music was only transitional in retrospect. At the time, it was the living pulse of after-hours joints across L.A.—sustenance and good times for the thousands of black Okies who never made it into *The Grapes of Wrath*.—*Daniel Wolff*

CIRCUS MAXIMUS

Circus Maximus [Vanguard]

They said it couldn't be done (*Faces*, Dec. '89) but here it is: the CD of Jerry Jeff Walker's 1967 bid for rock stardom. Don't be put off that Walker wrote and sings less than half the songs; among the other compositions is that "jazzy" AOR staple "Wind." Although *Circus Maximus* isn't consistent enough to be great, its high points are too good to be forgotten.—*Scott Isler*

PETER WALKER

Rainy Day Raga [Vanguard]

The trippiest album of the '60s doesn't have one electric instrument on it. Walker spins out modal guitar solos like spiderwebs. Occasional musical embroidery—tamboura, Jeremy Steig's flute—emphasizes the indebtedness to the Indian classics. This is the quintessential *Music to Watch Incense Smoke By*, and it still works.

—*Scott Isler*

QUICKSILVER MESSENGER SERVICE

Sons of Mercury (1968–1975) [Rhino]

Marketing this two-CD set in separate jewel boxes makes perfect sense. Give the second CD to your pesky kid brother (after taping "Edward, the Mad Shirt Grinder") and keep the good stuff on disc one for yourself. You'll still have the entire first QMS album less one song ("Too Long"); over half of *Happy Trails*; both Quicksilver contributions to the otherwise useless exploitation film *Revolution*; and, as they say, more! You won't miss the rest.—*Scott Isler*

JOHNNY OTIS

Creepin' with the Cats [UK Ace]

Otis' own record company, Dig, didn't last two years in the mid-'50s, but tape recorders must have been running around the clock. Half the 22 Dig tracks here (10 of them previously unreleased) are instrumentals showcasing Otis' tough, tight little R&B band. If you thought Bug/Capitol's 1989 compilation was too glossy, check this one out. Check it out anyway. (48-50 Steele Road, London NW10 7AS, England)—*Scott Isler*

VARIOUS DEAD PEOPLE

Nipper's Greatest Hits 1901–1920 [RCA]

The Victor Talking Machine Company had no serious software competition in the early years of this century. That doesn't mean you'll recognize many of the names herein. The 20 selections, though, hold up a hazy mirror to an era that might as well be 180 as 80 years past. And some of these songs (heavy on the George M. Cohan) are still in circulation. Beware some incorrect recording dates in the track listing. Sound quality is variable but could be worse. Mercifully little dialect humor.

—*Scott Isler*

LAURIE VOCAL GROUPS

The Doo Wop Sound [UK Ace]

Laurie isn't a gal but a record company. If none of these

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21 acts achieved anything like labelmate Dion's fame, it wasn't for lack of vocal chops; this CD is filled with cantabile singing and knee-weakening harmonies lingered over at dreamy tempos. Vito & the Salutations' "Hello Dolly" sounds a bit desperate, but *The Doo Wop Sound* proves the style lasted a lot longer than some people think. As usual, kudos to Ace for quantity (30 cuts) and quality (excellent transfers from mostly prime source material). (48-50 Steele Road, London NW10 7AS, England)—*Scott Isler*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Joe Meek Story: The Pye Years [Sequel]

Sure, it's decadent to listen to recordings for the sake of production values. So consider *The Joe Meek Story* a wonderful alternative view of '60s British pop. The Honeycombs' "Have I the Right" is the only track (out of 48) Americans may recognize, but who cares about familiarity? The prolific Meek, active from the mid-'50s through the mid-'60s, was the first "name" British pop producer. This selection indicates he covered the spectrum from schlock to glop. His flair for going over the top means that among some classy and undeservedly forgotten sides glitter loony gems like "Cha Cha on the Moon" and "Hurt Me." There are easily enough musical riches here to score the next two John Waters films.

—*Scott Isler*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Best of Excello Records Vols. 1/2 [Rhino]

Based in Nashville, the late, great Excello label (1952–67) and its Nasco subsidiary apparently released anything except mainstream country; the company's catalog is a monument to vernacular U.S. music. Rhino's two individual CD collections break down vaguely along stylistic lines. Volume 1, *Sound of the Swamp*, includes torpid classics like Slim Harpo's "Baby Scratch My Back" and "Rainin' in My Heart," and Guitar Gable's (original) "This Should Go On Forever"—but also two vintage rockabilly sizzlers, some uptempo R&B and piano triplets almost everywhere else. *Southern Rhythm & Rock* has some blues, doo-wop, a palpable hit ("Oh, Julie," a goofy ode to teen frustration), and some *sui generis* oddities. Lamentably few tracks come from master tapes—atypical for Rhino—but who's complaining. No choice; you need 'em both.—*Scott Isler*

THE SMALL FACES

Ogdens' Nut Gone Flake [Sony Special Products]

HUMBLE PIE

Town and Country [Sony Special Products]

When Steve Marriott died a few months ago, nobody said much about it. It may be that his memory's forever exiled to the British Invasion's minor leagues, as most people recall the Marriott of arena excess and dubious vocal ability in '70s Humble Pie, forgetting that his earlier group, the Small Faces, was the quintessential '60s mod band. These albums show us what Marriott could do in his heyday: *Ogdens'* is simply one of the finest British pop records of the '60s, equal measures aggression and whimsy (courtesy of Marriott and co-writer Ronnie Lane), while *Town and Country*, Humble Pie's second, has classy material, Peter Frampton's tasteful guitar work and a surprisingly intimate, reflective tone that would never surface again. Considering the erratic quality of the original recordings, the CD versions sound as crisp and clear as anyone could rightfully expect. Check out the riotous "Afterglow" (*Ogdens'*) or the quivering vocal on "Cold Lady" (*Town and Country*): This, not mindless boogie, is what Marriott should be remembered for.—*Mac Randall*

THE SOFT MACHINE

The Peel Sessions [Strange Fruit]

The treasures from the BBC vaults keep coming. The Soft Machine of this period (1969–1971) were the pinnacle of English progressives; their exploratory improvisations and dabblings in then-current technology were complex and often powerful, but at the same time displayed innocence that's still fresh today. The big find on *The Peel Sessions* is the only known recording of the seven-man Soft Machine (keys-bass-drums plus four horns). As you might expect, the focus here is on the band's instrumental ability, and there's plenty of it. It's too bad not much room is left for the real draw, Robert Wyatt's quirky singing; the hilarious lyrics to "Esther's Nose Job" (from *Soft Machine Volume 2*) are excised here in favor of a tricky horn arrangement. More disturbing is the fact that "Out-Bloody-Rageous" and "Eamonn Andrews," listed on the cover, don't actually appear on the disc. But what *is* here is worth the time of anyone who appreciates the sound of breaking boundaries. (Dutch East India Trading, Box 800, Rockville Centre, NY 11571-0800)—*Mac Randall*

DAVID BOWIE

Low, "Heroes," Lodger [Rykodisc]

The cause of much critical consternation and more consumer indifference upon their initial release, Bowie's "Eno Trilogy" makes its return orbit to our world via Rykodisc's reissue program, and as one might've suspected, its influence is now undeniable—from the Human League synth-pop of the early '80s to the techno-soul fusion that relaunched Tina Turner to the Third World rock hybrids that showed David Byrne and a host of others that yea verily, they too could make dance music. On its rerelease, *Low* gleams like a polished meteorite, with George Murray's bass and Brian Eno's electronics framing Bowie's baritone on classics like "Breaking Glass" and the Eno-ized four-chord ballad "Always Crashing in the Same Car." Two previously unreleased tracks are in the same vein as the album's longer meditative pieces. *"Heroes"* sounds as dark as ever with Bowie shrieking and the Fripp/Eno musical subversion; a new instrumental "Abdulmajid" takes things a step further into the gloom. *Lodger*, on the other hand, has all the charm of a lark that succeeded; "Red Sails" is still the great single that never was, and the bonus track "I Pray Ole" is equally infectious and silly. All recommended for listeners who don't consider terms like "catchy" and "bewildering" to be mutually exclusive.—*Thomas Anderson*

ERNEST TUBB

Country Music Hall of Fame Series [MCA]

Lacking the lyrical imagery of Hank Williams—no whippoorwills or wooden Indians—or even his vocal prowess, the Texas Troubadour was never one to transcend the genre. Instead he defined it. What you have

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here is nearly 25 years' worth of pure honky-tonk—death, adultery, patriotism, hard drinking and music of inestimable importance to rural America. A solid if not perfect collection (where's "Blue Christmas"?) that includes classics like "Walking the Floor Over You" and gems like the previously unreleased "Love Lifted Me," this should be required listening for aspiring working-class heroes everywhere.—*Thomas Anderson*

BERT JANSCH AND JOHN RENBOURN

"Jack Orion" [Vanguard]
Stepping Stone [Vanguard]

These two mid-'60s albums trace the evolution of an aesthetic. Scottish-born guitarist Jansch is top-billed on *"Jack Orion,"* almost entirely a collection of traditional ballads with occasional fills from fellow acoustic guitarist Renbourn. You can bet Jimmy Page heard Jansch's versions of "Black Water Side" and "The Gardener." The mostly-original instrumental duets in a variety of meters on *Stepping Stones* are alternately swinging and folky, but always elegant. The next logical step would be to add acoustic bass, if not form a band. They did: Pentangle. Both releases could have fit on one CD. At midprice, though, who's complaining?—*Scott Isler*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Golden Throats 2: More Celebrity Rock [Rhino]

Rhino has tested the waters of bad taste for so long it's easy to overlook this second installment in their Celebrity Rock line. Until you hear it, that is: if this disc had an odor it would gag a dog off a gut wagon. Of course, there's something perversely fascinating in hearing Phyllis Diller crack jokes during her version of "Satisfaction," and Sebastian Cabot's recital of "All I Really Want to Do" is funnier than "Saturday Night Live"'s been in years. But once you hear Cassius Clay wobble his way through "Stand by Me," you realize it's just plain perverse.—*John Floyd*

FABIAN

This Is Fabian! [Chancellor/(UK) Ace]

Even in a post–Milli Vanilli world, the most radical pop revisionists may blanch at the thought of a Fabian revival. But hey: The guy is on his own records, and he knew he stunk. So that leaves us (in this case) with 26 Ramones-length samples of the handsome, tone-deaf wonder coping with various rock 'n' roll clichés. The anonymous guitarist's solos are good; the recombinant songs sound as if they were ground out with complete contempt for pop culture. No wonder this stuff is fun. (46-50 Steele Road, London NW10 7AS, England)

—*Scott Isler*

MINUTEMEN

Double Nickels on the Dime [SST]

By now we should realize that this thorny manifesto from '84 contains a whopper of a world view and fights the power as articulately as, oh, Public Enemy, Allen Ginsberg or Susan Sontag. But beyond the trio's poet rhetoric stands their unquestionable capability to free yr ass with their jag riffs and shard beats, the clout of which got lost a bit when Mike Watt futzed with the original mix for the CD release a few years ago. The ever-honest bassist 'fessed up to rupturing their masterpiece, and has rectified said mistake by reissuing *Nickels* again, this time with the superbly flat original sound. Look for the sticker that says so, and play it disturbingly loud. Punk rock, as they say, changed our lives.—*Jim Macnie*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Del-Fi & Donna Story [UK Ace]

A previously unissued Ritchie Valens alternate take might make collectors salivate. The star of this 30-track (and one radio jingle) compilation, though, is the frenetic Chan Romero, whose "Hippy Hippy Shake" made him the godfather of Merseybeat. Other delights include two polished songs from boy contralto Johnny Crawford (of TV "Rifleman" fame); an impassioned Dick Dale vocal (!) on an acoustic-guitar rocker; a blackmail-worthy 1964 surf novelty from David Gates and the mock-nostalgic "When I Did the Mashed Potato." (46-50 Steele Road, London NW10 7AS, England)—*Scott Isler*

RECORDINGS

[*cont'd from page 97*] Musically, Mellencamp is as competent as the next guy. But his writing suggests the same Peter Pan affliction that strikes down so many rock stars. He's not a boy anymore, but you'd never guess that here.

—Kristine McKenna

Massive Attack

Blue Lines
(Virgin)

DANCE MUSIC HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN extremely challenging field, tough to stay abreast of and more resistant to commentary than, say, singer/songwriter rock or country music. Of course, the manifold styles, which change nightly, encourage standard charges of trendiness. And the insiderish verbal codes and frequently non-narrative lyrics—compositional responses to an imperative *beat*—foster impressions of meaninglessness. But great dance music has always rendered such biases moot. And now with hip-hop and international beats offering the devices of everyday dance-pop a cool new edge, even air guitarists cut a rug as they scowl.

But the nemesis of dance during the past several years hasn't been rock or even technophobia. It's been house, the bullish style that throws away the melodies and harmonies of mainstream dance-pop. House has never translated well beyond the clubs for which its endless streams of rhythm tracks were designed. But Massive Attack—a songwriting/production consortium from Bristol of three veteran DJs who call themselves 3D, Daddy G and Mushroom—do more than streamline the stark spaces, the melodramatic tones, the hot rhythms of house on *Blue Lines*, their debut. Going beyond even a workable fusion, Massive Attack come close to redefining the pop as well as the house side of their top-drawer soul explorations.

Although this triumvirate rap up a nicely controlled storm on *Blue Lines*' title piece—and, with Sly & Robbie–like authority, nail another tune called "Five Man Army"—they give the bulk of their songs to excellent dance singers like Shara Nelson and Tony Bryan. Both communicate well the accessible mysteries of the Massive Attack thing. Nelson gets a moody showcase on "Unfinished Symphony," which profits from a dead-serious string arrangement; she floats stray phrases through the air on "Daydreaming," which sounds like Vanessa Williams as produced by Steve Coleman and Five Elements looking for a hit. There's more straightforward stuff—"Safe from Harm," the current single, or the delicious cover of "Be Thankful for What You've Got." But it all includes the essential edge and weight that Soul II Soul just never managed.

—James Hunter

Salif Keita

Amen
(Island/Mango)

Baaba Maal

Baayo
(Island/Mango)

TOO OFTEN, THIRD-WORLD MUSICIANS HAVE A troubling choice to make. To be recognized abroad they must hook onto a foreign technology or style, and in the process risk losing what makes them special. West African composers Salif Keita and Baaba Maal learned their craft from the griots, and both sing in a high-pitched Mandingo style noteworthy for its lengthy Islamic phrasing. But as their recent records show, each has very different ideas about how such traditions fit into the contemporary global village.

Keita's *Amen* is Malian music, Quincy-Jones style. Or more accurately, that of Joe Zawinul, who produced this dreadfully smooth concoction, featuring synth lines that have more in common with western rock than with the sounds of the kora or balafon. One wonderful cut, the majestic "Lony" (meaning "knowledge") remains elegant in its simplicity, recalling Keita's work with Les Ambassadeurs during the '70s. Its grave rhythms feel precisely calculated to convey the shifting nature of knowledge and its costs—a warning that could apply to the rest of this disc. Keita, after all, is known as the Golden Voice of Africa. That superb, reedy instrument, with its hints of rasp and effortless musicality, makes *Amen*'s many production touches as obfuscating as the ivy that overgrows fine architecture.

Although conservatory-trained string player Baaba Maal leads an electric band, he remains more committed to traditional music. His approach is doubly impressive for retaining the harmonic shifts that traditional music dictates for particular themes, as well as the tone colors specific to each instrument. *Baayo*'s characteristic sound is the delicate harmony of a string band, which here includes hoddu, riti and xalam along with acoustic guitars. On "Dogata"

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("never run away") they strum together like a harpsichord. Contemporary technology is employed in a manner that's spare and effective, as on the eerie, echoing "Diahowo" ("the traveler"). An unforgettable song ranging in subject from passage to the next world to Maal's lament over his mother's grave to the transitory nature of happiness to an honorary list of Senegalese villages, "Diahowo" is patterned after chants said to enable the Fouta to call fish from the water. It also suggests that, musically, there's magic in the old ways as well as the new.

—**Celestine Ware**

Marty Brown

◆

High and Dry
(MCA)

As NASHVILLE'S NEW TRADITIONALIST movement peters out (it's hard to believe Randy Travis once seemed a progressive presence) and the city's studios have returned to cranking out assembly-line countrypolitan mush, the arrival of a genuine traditionalist like Marty Brown is a major event. A pungent and confessional performer in the style of Hank Williams and Lefty Frizzell (his obvious heroes), there's nothing restrained about Brown, and some of the songs on his debut record *High and Dry* have the feel of instant honkytonk classics.

Brown presents himself as someone who grew up believing that the dark tales of Hank and Lefty were the essence of real life, then brought his own life into line with those visions. His heartbreak songs (particularly the brutal "Honky Tonk Special," a child's poison-pen open letter to his father's lovers) spring directly from emotion, without a craftsman's shaping. Such artlessness makes even the sexist lyrical clichés of several compositions ring believable. Among Brown's contemporaries, only Dwight Yoakam sounds as formed by a lifelong faith in the icons of honkytonk country.

Yet *High and Dry* only hints at Brown's potential. The arrangements here are by turns wonderfully spare and wildly inappropriate. For every ideal setting—especially the ballads "High and Dry" and "Indian Summer Blues" and the marvelous country-rock "Every Now and Then"—there are lapses like the ersatz Dixieland settings that swat down "Ole King Kong" or the western-swing rhythms that toss too much baggage on "Honky Tonk Special." *High and Dry* is a collection that demands to be put across as simply and directly as possible. At its core stands a ferocious talent, one who should be allowed to express himself with nothing to block his way.

—**Jimmy Guterman**

BOTTOM LINE

[*cont'd from page 90*] accomplish that with four or five songs, not 20. And make sure the tape is of sufficient sound quality. "Never give anyone a tape whose sound quality you have to apologize for," says Pepper. And another thing, Pepper adds—make sure you know what the club wants. Not all clubs play all kinds of music.

There are other, more eccentric approaches to getting gigs. They've worked, too. Don Hill tells of Kevin Dubow, former lead singer of Quiet Riot, who sent dwarfs to deliver the tapes for his band Little Women. Allan Pepper, who's gotten requests in packages of pastries and on matchbook covers, recalls the time one persistent female singer sent a postcard inscrawled with "Who do I have to take my clothes off for to get a gig?" "I'm happily married, thank you, and I know she meant it as a joke," says Pepper, "but it did get my attention." And, he adds, she got the gig.

A few other things bookers appreciate: Your band might offer to take out an ad in the local music paper—it displays a certain level of commitment they respect. References don't hurt either, as long as they carry some weight with the manager. If you've got a friend at a record company or agency who's willing to give you a plug, take advantage of it. And keep in mind that club managers change pretty frequently, so every gig at a club might be your first with a new one. Try to keep up to date with these changes and ask the outgoing manager to recommend you to his successor.

If there's an aphorism to be drawn from all this advice, it might be that a combination of ignorance *and* arrogance will get you nowhere. Nice guys supposedly finish last, but a good attitude and some preparation on your part will produce better results. Allan Pepper recounts the time someone called him wanting to play the Bottom Line because, the caller said, it was the last place Jimi Hendrix played. Pepper pointed out to the caller that Hendrix died in 1970, while the Bottom Line didn't open until 1974. The caller proceeded to argue that Pepper, who co-founded the club, was wrong. "I don't think I'll be taking any future calls from that guy," says Pepper. Ⓜ

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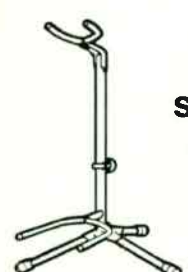

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Alesis—P.O. Box 3908, Los Angeles, CA 90078 (213) 467-8000 ... 45
Anvil Cases—P.O. Box 1202, La Puente, CA 91747 (818) 968-4100 ... 64
Audio-Technica—1221 Commerce Dr., Stow, OH 44224 (216) 686-2600 ... 23
Back Issues—33 Commercial St., Gloucester, MA 01930 ... 91
Berklee College of Music—1140 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02215 (617) 266-1400 ... 24, 84
Beyer—5-05 Burns Ave., Hicksville, NY 11801 (516) 935-8000 ... 74
Bose Express Music—The Mountain, Framingham, MA 01701-9323 (800) 233-6357 ... 99
B.U.B.—33 Commercial St., Gloucester, MA 0193083
Carver—P.O. Box 1237, Lynnwood, WA 98046 (800) 443-CAVR ... 62
CD Sampler—33 Commercial St., Gloucester, MA 01930 ... 27
Chandler Industries—590 19th St., Unit #1, San Francisco, CA 94107-3135 ... 73
D'Addario—210 Route 109, E Farmingdale, NY 11735 (516) 454-9450 ... 37
Dean Markley—3350 Scott Blvd., #45, Santa Clara, CA 95054 (408) 988-2456 ... 39, 41, 43
DigiTech—See DOD Electronics
DOD Electronics—5639 South Riley Lane, Salt Lake City, UT 84107 (801) 268-8400 ... 107
Dunlop Mfg.—Box 846, Benicio, CA 94510 (707) 745-2722 ... 43
EMG—P.O. Box 4394, Santa Rosa, CA 95402 (707) 525-9941 ... 41
Ensoniq—155 Great Valley Parkway, Malvern, PA 19355 (215) 647-3930 ... 70-71
Gan-tone—Carnegie Hall, Studio 1105, 881 7th Ave., New York, NY 10019 ... 85
GHS Strings—2813 Wilber Ave., Battle Creek, MI 49015 (616) 968-3351 ... 58
Hartke Systems—PO Box 9068, Hicksville, NY 11801 (516) 932-3810 ... 15
Homespun—P.O. Box 694, Woodstock, NY 12498 (800) 33 TAPES ... 47
JBL—8500 Balboa Blvd., Northridge, CA 91329 (818) 893-8411 ... 9, 89
Korg—89 Frost St., Westbury, NY 11590 (516) 333-9100 ... 21
Kurzweil—13336 Alondra Blvd., Cerritos, CA 90701 (213) 926-3200 ... 54-55
Maxell Corp. of America—22-08 Rt. 208 South, Fairlawn, NJ 07410 ... 30-31
Music Business Seminars—2 Roland Kimble Road, Freeport, ME 04032 (800) 448-3621 ... 97
Musician Wear—33 Commercial St., Gloucester, MA 01930 (508) 281-3110 ... 81
Nady Systems, Inc.—6701 Bay St., Emeryville, CA 94608 (415) 652-2411 ... 69
Oberheim—13345 Saticoy St., N. Hollywood, CA 91605 (818) 503-0631 ... 84
Pearl—549 Metroplex, Nashville, TN 37211 (615) 833-4477 ... 78
Peavey—711 A St., Meridian, MS 39301 (601) 483-5365 ... 5, 35
Ramsa/Panasonic—6550 Katella Ave., Cypress, CA 90630 (714) 373-7277 ... 2
Rane—10802 47th Ave. W., Everett, WA 98204 (206) 355-6000 ... 42
Shure Brothers Inc.—222 Hartrey Ave., Evanston, IL 60202 (708) 866-2200 ... 29
Songwriters Evaluation Service—30879 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 205, Dept. I, Westlake Village, CA 91362 ... 103
Taylor Guitars—9353 Abraham, Santee, CA 92071 (619) 258-1207 ... 40
TDK Electronics Corp.—12 Harbor Park Dr., Port Washington, NY 11050 (516) 625-0100 ... 17
Trace Elliot Limited—P.O. Box 507, Bloomfield, CT 06002 (203) 286-0498 ... 76
Yamaha—6600 Orangethorpe Ave., Buena Park, CA 90620 (714) 522-9011 ... 108

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thə 'präp-ər 'gab-ə 'gab-ə

SEARCHING THE RAMONES' UR-TEXT FOR MOTIFS · BY GEORGE KALOGERAKIS

IN THIS 15TH YEAR OF THE RAMONES' RECORDING OEUVRE, few would dispute the band's profound effect on rock 'n' roll: 1) They brought punk music to England. 2)They...well, they certainly brought punk music to England. Yet when people speak of the great songwriting teams, it's always Rodgers and Hart, Lerner and Loewe, Leiber and Stoller, Lennon and McCartney—never Ramone and Ramone and Ramone and Ramone.[1] Why? Because although the Ramones' *music* is universally celebrated, scant attention is paid their words. *This will change.* Some smart publisher will bring out *Onetwothreefour: The Collected Lyrics of the Ramones*, John Updike will rave about it in the *New York Times Book Review* and the cry will go up: Roll over Lorenz Hart, and tell Cole Porter the news. Until then, brief appreciations must suffice. So: Why will Ramones lyrics stand the test of time? Because they...

A. HAVE A SIMPLE, DIRECT ELOQUENCE.

I don't wanna walk around with you
I don't wanna walk around with you
I don't wanna walk around with you
So why you wanna walk around with me?
I don't wanna walk around with you.
("I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You," 1976)

Message understood? (Note: Some scholars consider this the Ramones' "answer" to the old Gershwin-Arlen-Harburg tune "Let's Take a Walk Around the Block." Others disagree, citing the absence, in the Ira Gershwin lyric, of the line "So why you don't wanna take a walk around the block with me?")

B. AREN'T AS CRETINOUS AS THEY SEEM. "D-U-M-B/Everyone's accusing me" notwithstanding. On their very first album the Ramones used "perhaps" when they could just as easily have used "maybe" ("Judy Is a Punk"). And by 1978 they had successfully rhymed three polysyllabic words (aggravation, imagination, desperation) in a single song ("Don't Come Close"), tossed off the exceedingly smart-sounding phrase "it's generally known" (ibid.), and begun to experiment with adverbs ("Questioningly"). Yet they remain figures of mirth, whereas the supposedly highbrow Gershwins, who wrote a song called "Do, Do, Do" and another one called "Blah, Blah, Blah," are deified.[2]

C. ARE UNBURDENED BY IRRITATING METAPHORS AND SIMILES. When the Ramones sing "Hanging out on Second Avenue/Eating chicken vindaloo" ("I Just Want to Have Something to Do," 1978), you can be sure the lyric isn't *really* about acid rain, or the Immigration Act of 1964, or U.S. meddling in the Third World. Ramones lyrics are not oblique. In this example, the band is in fact singing about eating spicy Indian food on Manhattan's East Side.[3]

D. NEVERTHELESS CONTAIN ENOUGH RECURRING THEMES TO KEEP THE SCHOLARS HAPPY. There's madness ("Teen-age Lobotomy," "Gimme Gimme Shock Treatment," et al.) and drugs (the Glue Cycle), of course. There's also fast food. "I met her at the Burger King.../And everything's gonna be real fine," they sang in 1977 ("Oh Oh I Love Her So"). But just a year later: "I don't like playing Ping-Pong/I don't like the Viet Cong/I don't like Burger King" ("I'm Against It"). Burger King, once synonymous with romance, is now presumably rife with too-painful associations. Have we encountered this theme in popular song before? You bet. In a sense, what the Ramones have written here is "These Foolish Whoppers Remind Me of You."

E. ARE ABOUT LOVE. It's a mystery why Sinatra has overlooked "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World." (Imagine: "Now I'd like to pay tribute to Mr. Ramone and Mr. Ramone and Mr....").

F. ARE ABOUT ISSUES. The Ramones' catalog contains knowledgeable (and danceable) allusions to pesticides, child abuse and U.S. presidents who visit Nazi cemeteries. Does Irving Berlin's?

G. ARE ABOUT ONE MINUTE AND 43 SECONDS LONG. "Oh, don't let them begin the Beguine," goes the interminable Porter classic, and it's clear why. Brevity is best. The Ramones' "It's a Long Way Back" (1978) contains just nine words, apart from the ones in the title. Can you name them?[4]

To sum up: The Ramones once sang, "I don't care/I don't care/I don't care/About these words/I don't care" ("I Don't Care," 1977). Nonsense. If the Ramones have any failing as lyricists, it is that they care so very much.

[1] In 1978, Ramone replaced Ramone. He was in turn replaced by Ramone in 1983, but only until 1987, when he (Ramone) rejoined. [2] It's a common error to assume the Ramones are lyrically deficient. But even a couplet as aggressively dim-sounding as "You're a girl/That I once may have knew," for instance, is very probably an homage to Bob Dylan, another songwriter who has indulged in grammatical slumming (i.e., "The light I never knowed"). [3] In contrast, who can keep Cole Porter's metaphor-riddled "You're the Top" straight? ("You're the top/You're a...a Whistler sonnet—no, wait/You're the nose/On—uh—Mahatma Gandhi/You're the cellophane on the feet of Fred Astaire/You're something something/You're Durante's mother/You're, um, Camembert!/Dammit"). Had the Ramones written it—"You're the top/You're the top/You're the top/Hey hey you're the top" seems a likely possibility—life would be simpler. [4] all, alone, by, Germany, phone, the, to, you (twice).

Illustration: Tim Gabor

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