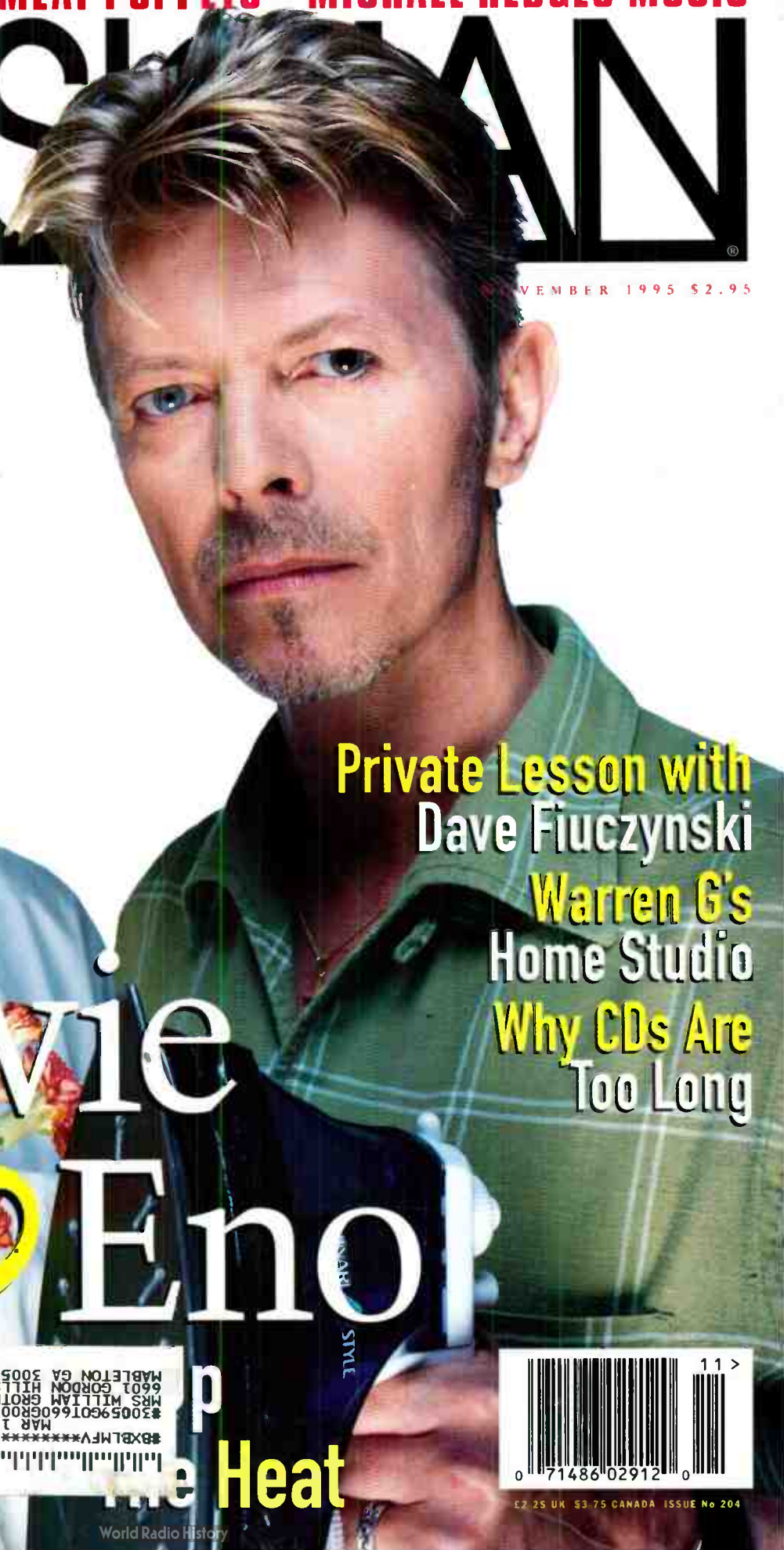
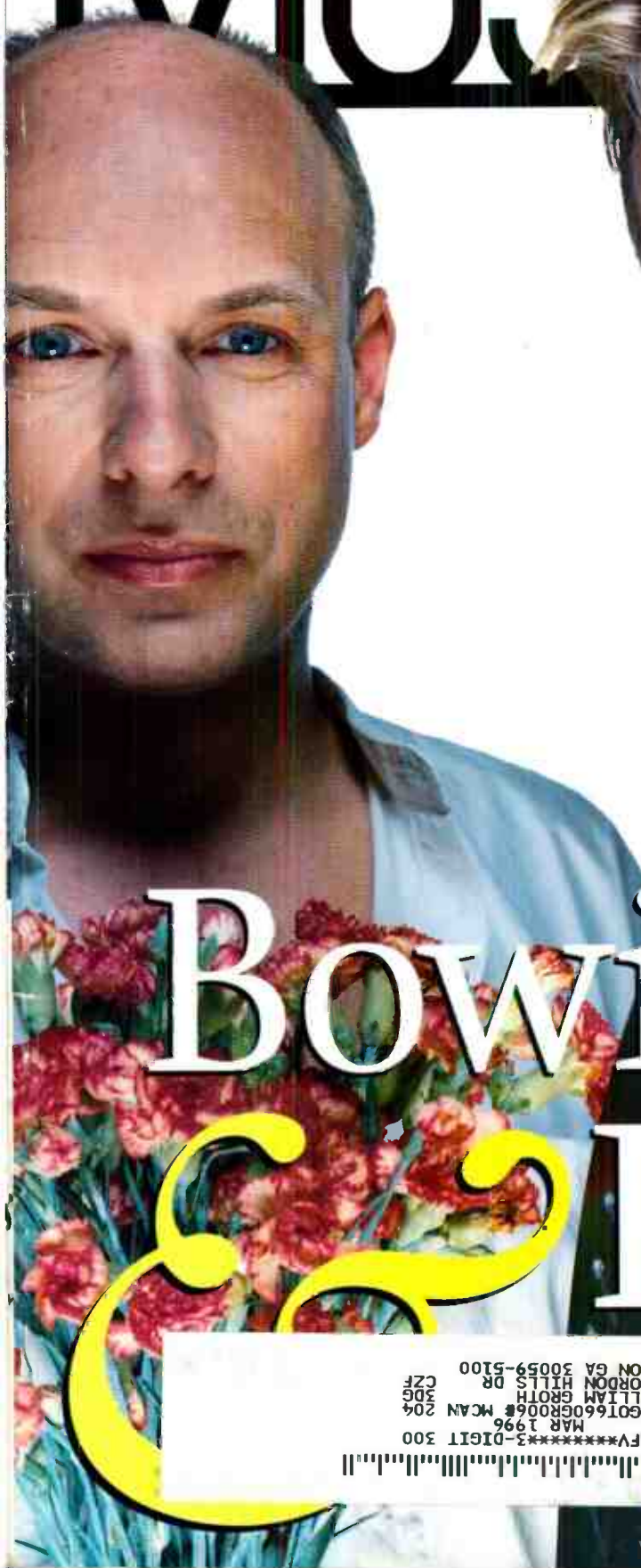


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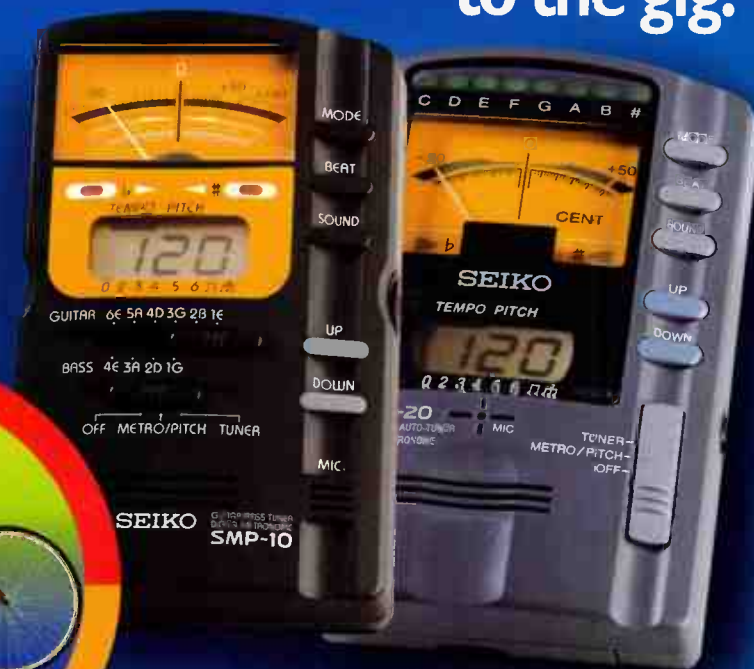
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the Stones in Montpellier, in the south of France. I began to realize those words fucked me up more than my first acid trip. Everyone thinks acid is

industry has everyone, in a Pavlovian way, in the same slot. "Here comes the new record, ding, ding, ding," and your mouths drool. —CHRIS MORRIS



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# LETTERS

## U2: THE END

I've never liked bands that used their music to deliver their personal agenda. U2 (Aug. '95) was one of these bands; however, I would have traded all my Frank Zappa recordings for the chance to sit with Bill Flanagan and watch U2, Eno, Flood, and everyone else create music for music's sake. I'm not going to rush out and buy the U2 catalog, but I'll already have read *U2 At The End Of The World* by the time this letter reaches New York.

Dave Farrell  
Ephrata, PA

Whatever happened to a band jamming together, figuring out the songs themselves and doing it that way? What is this crap about everybody else leaving and Flood staying in the studio all night to make a recording sound like he wants? Why analyze everything right down to the bone? Give U2 a 4-track cassette recorder and see what they could do. What would it sound like if everything was left up to the band? Who knows? Give Adam a coke for me.

Jon Milavec

T-Bone Burnett should change his name to T-Bonehead Burnett. I've read some stupid quotes before, but his takes the cake (July '95). Bono is nothing but an egotistical, pretentious buffoon who fronts one of the most overrated bands in the history of rock 'n' roll. And to compare Bono and U2 to John Lennon and the Beatles is absolutely ludicrous. U2 is hugely successful, but their music will never stand the test of time. Twenty years from now a song like "All You Need Is Love" will still be cherished whereas a song like "I Will Follow" will be nothing but an embarrassing moment best forgotten.

Hill@polisci.sscnet.ucla.edu

## THE READERS SPEAK

I don't know what's wrong with Jeremy Sale (Letters, Sept. '95) that he has to be told this rather than feeling and hearing it for himself, but I'll oblige. Charlie Watts is a god. Always has been, always will be. Your friend who disagrees obviously suffers from such a lack of coordination and sense of rhythm that he must poke him-

self in the eye every time he goes to pick his nose. Be more careful in choosing your friends, Jeremy. Now go get a copy of *Exile On Main Street*, put on the headphones, crank up the volume, and stop wasting time with foolish questions.

Susan Jelcich  
Wood-Ridge, NJ

Jeremy Sale in the September letters needs a tie-breaker about Charlie Watts. I've been drumming nearly as long as Charlie, so here goes. Charlie's time is terrible. He slows down and speeds up and has for years. What Charlie has is rhythm. Charlie swings and makes the Stones

like that. Thank you all for showing up for a great interview.

John E. Butwell  
Naugatuck, CT

Bill Flanagan's Steve Earle interview revealed pure talent that comes up the hard way and, against all odds, won't quit. Steve Earle was packing clubs in Philadelphia where cowboys from South Jersey showed us how to line dance and everyone knew the words to his songs. He doesn't fit the formula that has become "country"—thank the lord—and we can't wait for him to hit Philly again.

Susan Schulman  
Philadelphia, PA

A special thank you to *Musician* for their article on U2 in the studio (Aug. '95). It was much needed during their long and painful hiatus. I have been a die-hard U2 freak since 1983. I have

always loved reading about U2 and learning anything I can about them. Your Issue No. 201 with U2 on the cover was a long time coming. Your focus on the technicalities of working in the studio and how songs are harder to put together than they make it look was excellent. I was able to get an excellent picture of Edge collaborating with Flood or Brian Eno about laying down tracks or overdubbing solos.

With a great deal of the music today seemingly angry or hostile, it is refreshing to see that U2 is not following the same pattern. Their music comes from hard work, long hours, and pure genius. This is something the real fans knew all along. Keep up the good work.

Alexander Munoz  
Bryn Mawr, PA



## ROCKIN' NICHE MARKETS

Really enjoyed the article on the old rockers ("Guitar Gods Get a Life," Sept. '95). Alvin Lee and Ten Years After were tremendously influential to me as a teen coming up in the '60s. As for Oasis and the term "lad," I'm sure they confused this with the word "lugnut."

Longboard Jim  
Imperial Beach, CA

I found it refreshing that these old warhorses are continuing to make music that pleases them. And as for the reason stated by Michael Schenker: "Well, having fun is the big picture for me right now"—yeah Michael, me, too!

Bob Little  
Eaton Rapids, MI

swing. Ideally a drummer should have rhythm and great time. But it's better to swing and waver a bit than to be metronomic and not swing. Once in the early '70s a guy told me I sounded like Charlie. That's the best thing a drummer can hear.

Penguin Faxon  
Tucson, AZ

## VAN ZANDT & STEVE EARLE

Yeah, that Russian roulette story is believable (Aug. '95). But you see that big smile on Townes' face? Well, it's quite possible that the firing pin was filed down or some crazy thing

## R A T A H

In Michael Cooper's "Drums on Tape" (Sept. '95), the three polar pattern diagrams were misidentified. Fig. 1 is the Shure SM57, Fig. 2 is the Sennheiser MD 441-U, and Fig. 3 is the Neumann KM150. Also, Cooper's name was traded with Julian Colbeck's in the table of contents.

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## Fareed Haque

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Tenor saxophonist **Javon Jackson** takes a bold step into the future of jazz with *For One Who Knows*. The band is a who's who of creative young talent: **Jacky Terrasson**—piano, **Fareed Haque**—acoustic guitar, **Peter Washington**—bass, **Billy Drummond**—drums and **Cyro Baptiste**—percussion.



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## How We Wrote That Hit Song

by Gary Baker and Frank Myers, composers of All-4-One's "I Swear"

**B**AKER: IT WAS JUST LIKE any other song, in the sense that you write it and you hope somebody will cut it.

**MYERS:** Gary was actually working on another song, with another title. I don't remember what the title was, but in the bridge it said something like, "blah, blah, something, I swear."

**Baker:** I knew I had something, but it wasn't strong. So I told Frank one day that he should listen to what I had and kick it around a little bit.

**Myers:** Gary lives in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, which is about a three-hour drive from my house in Nashville. So on the way down to his place, I wrote the chorus, singing into a little hand-held recorder.

**Baker:** This was five or six years ago, so I don't remember if he had the whole thing down, but he had a lot of it. When he came in and played it for me, man, we went to town, and it fell right out.

**Myers:** I had the whole chorus written. The melody just came out. Obviously, when I'm writing something, I have the rhythmic feel in mind, and I'm aware of how the words flow, where they lie and where they rhyme. So I thought, "I swear' . . . by what? By the moon, and the stars, and the sky." That's how the first line came out. Then I knew I needed something to rhyme with "I swear," so I thought, "I'll be there."

**Baker:** That's the biggest part of the song, the way those two words are sung. What's cool is that it translates into every genre there is.

**Myers:** That's right. John Michael Montgomery made it a number one hit on the country charts for four weeks last year. Then All-4-One's version came out right after that.

**Baker:** The key is to find the coolest melodic hook you can. Of course, if you don't have a lyrical hook you don't have anything, and we had both with "I Swear." Once you've got that, well, there are only so many chords in the world, and they can only be put together in so many ways. I know there's a million other I-VIm-IIIIm-IV-V songs out there, but this one happened to catch the right words and the right melody at the right time.

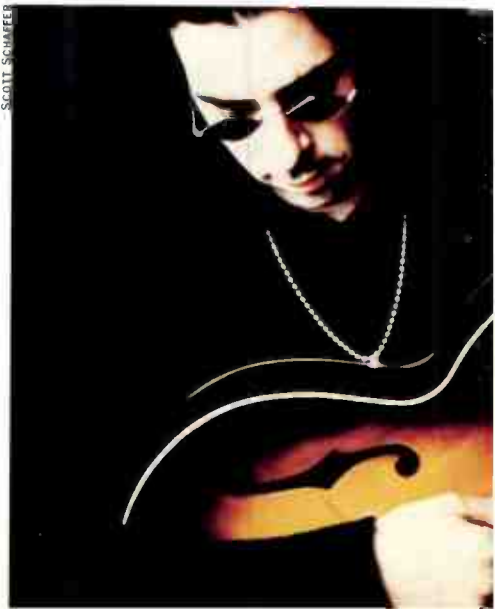
**Myers:** We wrote "I Swear" to flow in a way that my band at the time, the Shooters, could cut. We knocked it right out on two guitars, although it translated incredibly well to the keyboard on David Foster's production for All-4-One.

**Baker:** We're always just trying to write the best songs we can, although we don't write any negative tunes. I don't know why we don't do any "cryin' in the beer" stuff, but that's the way it is. I guess we're two happy guys.

*Baker and Myers, who have also written hits for Alabama, Marie Osmond, Restless Heart, and Eddie Raven, will release their own debut album on October 1, 1995 on the MCG/Curb label.*

# ROU

SCOTT SCHAEFER





## Building a Mix in the Clubs

by Brad Madix, Sound Engineer, Queensryche

The challenge of mixing live arises from finding creative and pragmatic ways to present a band's sound in various acoustic environments. Acoustic response is concurrently the greatest influence on sound, and the factor you can least easily affect. While arenas differ mostly in degrees of "boominess," clubs present a special challenge, coming in countless configurations. If you are the resident engineer of a club, you may have defeated some of the bass traps and flutter echoes. If you're blowing through town, though, and haven't had the pleasure of mixing at Joe's Bar 'n' Grill before, you must build a sound from scratch. You can bring racks of equalizers and reverbs, but—short of loading in twenty couches and nailing futons to the walls—you won't alter the acoustics of the room. Allow me to offer a few suggestions for handling these hairier venues.

1) Don't try to defeat the room. It always wins. You spare yourself great heartache adopting this frame of mind. Tailor the P.A. and mix to fit the environment, recognizing that no amount of knob twirling is going to

remove standing waves and slap-back echoes. Take comfort knowing that the best treatment for a problematic acoustic space is to fill it with human bodies, which is ideally what happens when the doors open.

2) Manage your stage volume. This does not always mean "turn down." There are times when some stage volume is needed to support a weak P.A. I have stood in front of the stage listening to the balance, and told guitar players to turn their amps up! They've looked at me like I had two heads, but haven't been shy about doing it. Assuming the level of the loudest acoustic instrument (*i.e.* drums) is fixed, you can achieve equilibrium with the rest of the band right from the stage, evenly filling the

club with leeway for enhancement.

3) Use a sound system's capacity wisely. I often allow minor bumps in frequency response to get by because I believe an overly equalized P.A. sacrifices [cont'd on page 94]



JAY BLAKESBERG

# JGH MIX

### RECENT SIGNINGS: BILLY MANN

Some improbable advice for musicians looking to get signed: find a stairwell with nice acoustics. It was on a flight of stairs in a midtown Manhattan apartment building that multi-platinum producer Ric Wake stumbled on singer/songwriter Billy Mann.

"When you don't have an effects module," relates the 25-year-old Mann, "a stairwell can come in handy. I used to look for buildings that had good stairwells where I wouldn't get caught." Which brought him to a friend's steps one day. "I'm playing a song and this real friendly guy comes in and he says, 'Do you mind if I listen?' I say, 'No. Are you in a band?' And he says, 'Yeah, kind of.'"

Wake, who has produced hits for Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey and Hall & Oates, picks up the story: "I was going to see another band, and I heard this guy playing in the stairway. So I went to check him out, and a few things struck me imme-

diately. His voice was really soulful; he could really put it across. And his songwriting hit me right."

"Anyway," Mann continues, "the next thing you know I'm sitting in the middle of this state-of-the-art studio and there are platinum records on every wall, everywhere. It's like a Frisbee factory."

Demos in hand, Wake shopped the Philly native around to a handful of major label heads, eventually landing in the office of A&M chief Al Cafaro. "I was terrified," says Mann. "I did one of those Bruce Springsteen auditions where you go into the president's office with your guitar. The room was so dead—I could find more reverb in a corkscrew than in Al Cafaro's office. You can't hide at that point."

Fortunately, Mann didn't have to. "It just clicked. Al wasn't the scary caricature of a record company CEO that you would imagine. He got it."

It certainly sounds that way, speaking to Cafaro. "Billy is a unique and remarkable talent," says the [cont'd on next page]



# ROUGH MIX

label president and CEO. "He's also a great guy." Cafaro signed Mann to A&M as the first artist on Ric Wake's new DV8 label; his first album will be released in early 1996.

Along the way, Mann has chalked up some experience as a songwriter. His songs have been recorded by Diana King and Chaka Khan, among others, and he's had other tunes put on hold by some impressive names. "If I could say anything to anybody trying to make music their business," says Mann. "I'd say write songs. You can have the voice and the act and you can have your vibe, but ultimately, you have to have those songs."

A little luck doesn't hurt, either—but don't rely on it. "I'd also say never underestimate the stranger in the audience," offers Mann. "The luck element is a crap shoot. But I think it also depends on how available you make yourself to the roulette wheel."  
—Nathan Brackett

ANNAMARIA DiSANTO

## OTHER RECENT SIGNINGS

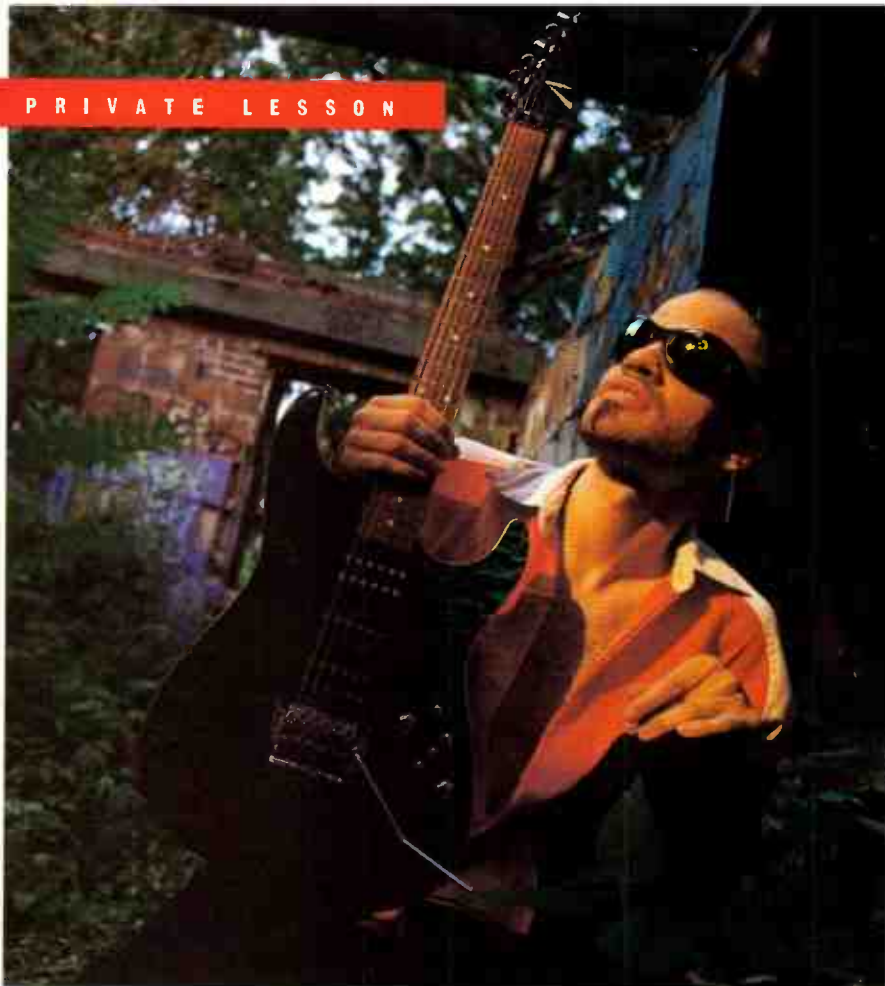
- Girls Against Boys**—DC-based indie rockers go major. (Geffen)
- Plexi**—"Dense, slightly psychedelic" L.A. trio taste the latte. (Sub Pop)
- Self**—Murfreesboro, Tennessee one-man show finds a home. (Zoo/Spongebath)

◆ Matt Mahaffey of Self



## PRIVATE LESSON

JAYNE WEAVER



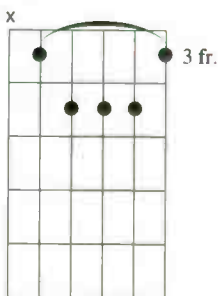
## DAVID FIUCZYNSKI: CHORDAL CLINIC

He may have written a book on the subject, but Allan Holdsworth is by no means the only guitarist searching for the uncommon chord. Just ask David Fiuczynski of New York's Screaming Headless Torsos. On their self-titled debut (Discovery), the Torsos filter their melange of hip-hop, jazz, reggae, and alternasludge through an advanced harmonic sensibility, much of it provided by Fiuczynski's chordal know-how. Fuze puts it simply: "I'm into grooves with extended chords."

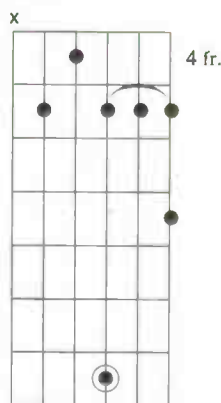
Many of those extensions are fairly daunting; several sound right out of the school of composer George Russell, a longtime champion of the Lydian mode (a Lydian scale is a major scale with a raised 4th). "I'm working a lot with Lydian sharp 9, Lydian diminished and Lydian augmented modes, and trying to use them in chords," Fiuczynski says.

"'Quest' [on *Lunar Crush*, Fuze's 1994 collaboration with keyboardist John Medeski] starts on a C Lydian #9, then goes to E Lydian #5. Later on, there are a few symmetrical chords like G13b9 and Bb13b9. Harmonically, I'm just trying to fill in the gaps with rarer chords. For example, a min/maj7#11 chord isn't used that often, but it works with Lydian diminished and harmonic minor modes." Ex. 1 fits the key notes of a C min/maj7#11 (C, F#, B, D# and G) into a familiar structure: basically a 3rd-position C with the middle three fingers moved [cont'd on page 94]

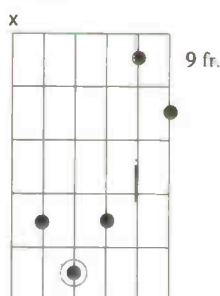
Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



Black dots = left hand  
Circled black dots = right hand

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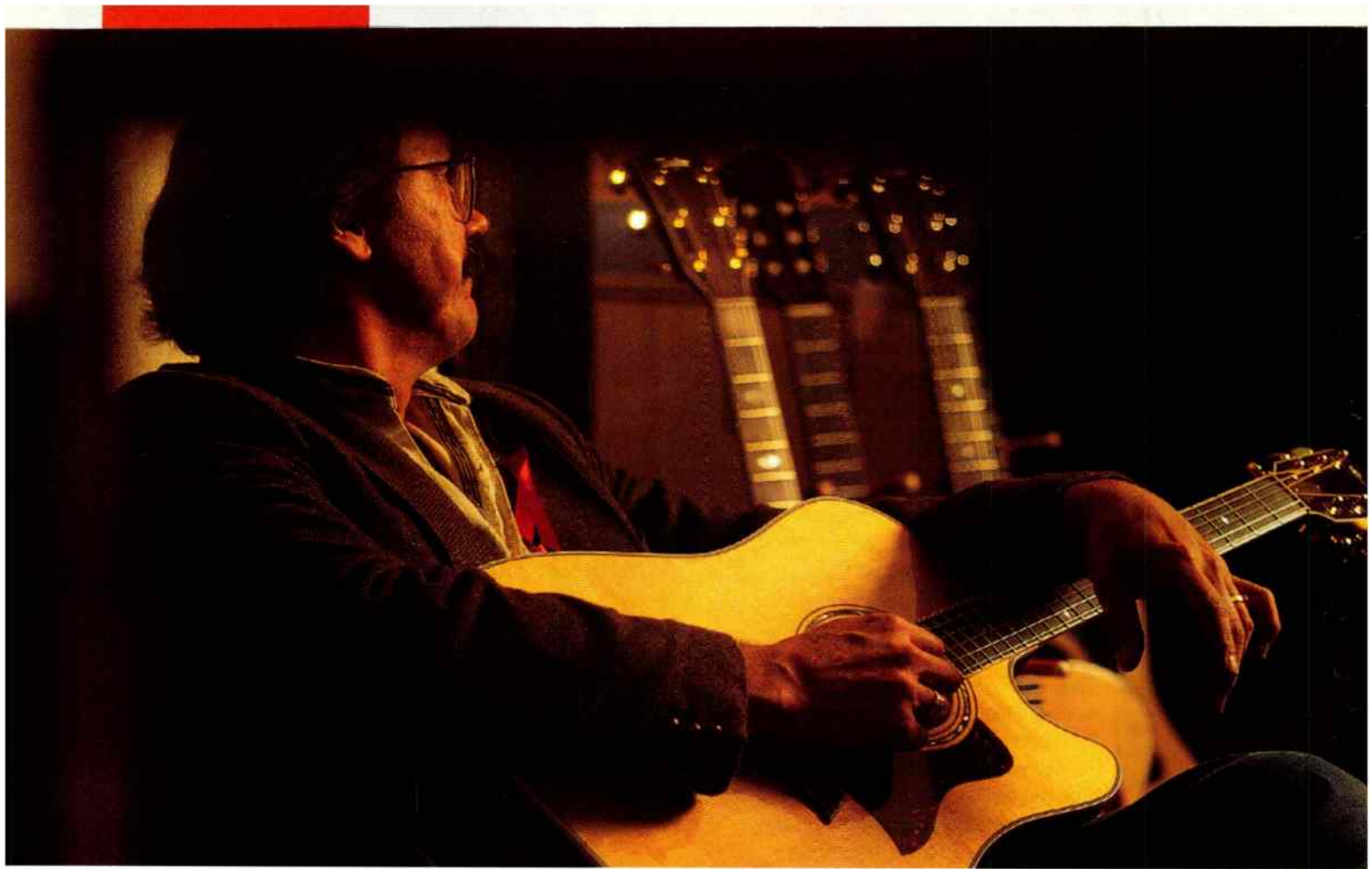
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Well, Scott pleaded, then insisted.  
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tell their story to you readers, Scott was  
excited. Al just said, “Be sure to warn ‘em.”





# arizona dreams

## The parallel world of the meat puppets

**f**lashback, 1994: It's mid-morning in Vancouver, and the sun shines brightly over the crisp, clear October sky. Not that you'd notice, if you were Curt Kirkwood. In a darkened room at the Georgian Court Hotel, the guitarist sits, dourly smoking pot. "We're back in that same old Meat Puppets land," he says. "Strange fuckin' *nowhere*. Every time we reach a new plateau, we seem to find the ether in it."

The plateau of which Kirkwood speaks isn't just the product of an imagination sunbaked by the Arizona desert. Things have never been better: His quietly remarkable band is in its fifteenth year together, a year marked by unprecedented success. First came a late 1993 guest appearance on Nirvana's much-airod *Unplugged* set, then the full-fledged success of *Too High To Die*, which bore an actual radio hit ("Backwater") and eventually, unexpectedly, went gold. In June, as the album reached its chart peak, the band hit the road second-billed to the Stone Temple Pilots, playing venues holding audiences of 20,000 and more.

Still, sitting directly across the street from the Georgian Court Hotel is the very large Pacific Coliseum—an arena the Meat Puppets had played with the Stone Temple Pilots a few months earlier. They won't be there tonight. Their upcoming headlining show had been

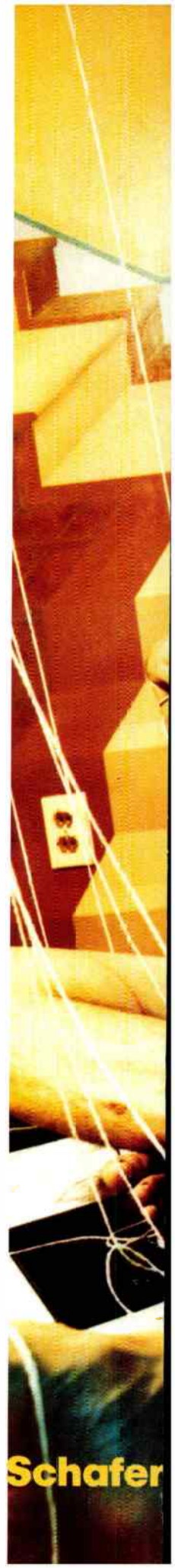
scheduled at the Commodore, a large local theater, but slow ticket sales have instead bumped them to the Town Pump, the same small bar they'd been playing in the days before *Too High To Die*. It's enough to drive a guy to ether.

"I'm supposed to go over and play my hit song on the radio station here," Kirkwood says morosely, "and the thought of it makes me want to barf. I could do it real easily, but it ain't gonna help. Tonight's a bomb."

The guitarist holds a match over the homemade pipe he's made of an empty soda can, then inhales. "I don't really care that much, as long as I don't have to humiliate myself by going out and trying to scrape together heads to come to the damn thing. It's like standing out in front of the place going, 'Come see the naked ladies!'"

MUCH CAN happen in a year's time, and the Curt Kirkwood I see strolling up to the entrance of Chaya Venice is noticeably lighter in step than the one bonging away in Vancouver several months before. Part of that lightness may stem from where he's just been: at a meeting with a longtime friend who happens to be the Hollywood dealmaker who just set up actor Jim Carrey's spectacular \$20 million back-to-back film deal. The same agent, it happens, who's now repping Michael Jackson's film interests as well. "He's got the gnarliest brain-to-

By Dave DiMartino Photography by F Scott Schafer











## CHRIS KIRKWOOD: "I'm an epileptic and compulsive behavior is typical of epilepsy. After the seizures, my drawing became more complicated."

mouth coordination," raves Kirkwood about his pal. "He's a genius, he's an artist, and he thinks he's just a paper pusher. Something comes across his table, and if the spirit moves him, he can make it happen."

Whatever plateau Kirkwood thought the Meat Puppets had reached last year, it's been elevated. "We live in a newer place than we did for a dozen years," he says, sipping from a bowl of garlic soup. He's referring to *No Joke!*, the Meat Puppets' new album, but he's also talking about the year that preceded its making.

Most remarkable to Kirkwood was the success of "Backwater." "There's just blind faith behind a hit song," he says. "You get blind faith from people you walk by on the street—all of a sudden it's something 'everybody knows.'" Concurrently, the decision by Geffen Records to release Nirvana's *Unplugged* session suddenly gave songwriter Kirkwood a three-song presence ("Lake of Fire," "Oh Me," and "Plateau") on one of the hottest albums of the '90s. Unlike some of the Meat Puppets efforts, it won't be going out of print any time soon.

Is the money starting to come in?

Kirkwood looks up. "In the last year I had four really big songs," he says, still amazed by the fact. "I had a hit song, which paid me off largely through BMI, and then I had three songs on the Nirvana record, which I own the publishing on, lock, stock and barrel. So, go figure."

SO WHAT'S he feeling from his label these days?

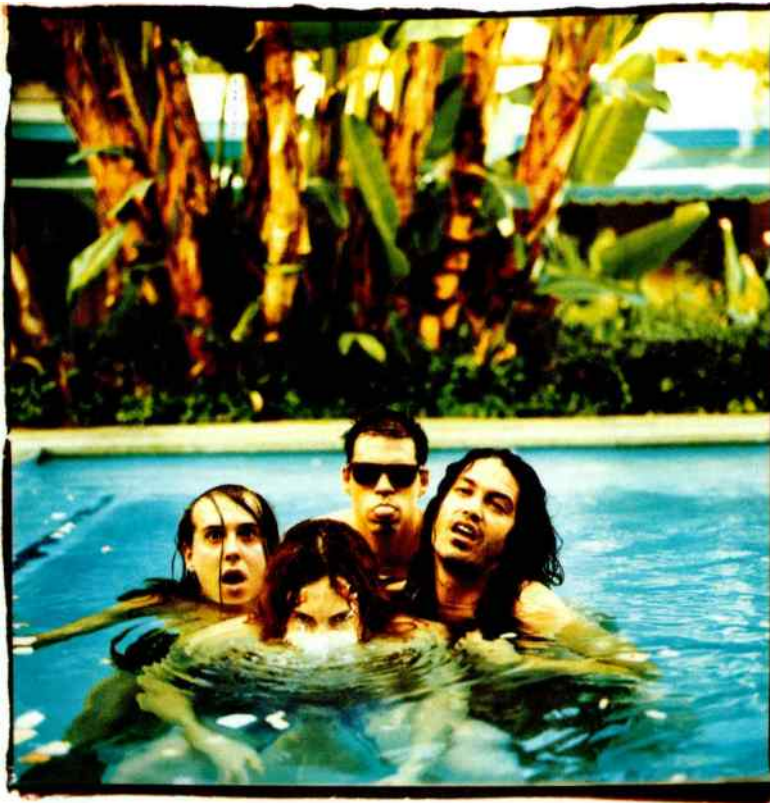
"Hero worship," says Kirkwood. "Totally. It's from beyond. And it's well deserved, because this record rules, in my book. Because it's everything I wanted out of it and then some, by a long shot."

Meat Puppets melodies—as Kurt Cobain clearly knew—are one of the band's greatest strengths, and *No Joke!* contains many of Kirkwood's finest songs. Consider the extended "Nothing," which amid shrieking guitar harmonics and interlocking riffs boasts such cheery lyrics as "You see it, I'm nothing, I'm nothing"; or the restrained, dis-

tinctly odd "Head"—featuring dubbed cellos (courtesy of John Hagen from the Lyle Lovett band), piano (from Joey Huffman, lately with Soul Asylum), and the divinely romantic lines, "As the head falls off the table/Crashes to the floor and shatters/Dust and glass are blowing everywhere/Down there." Who else is writing stuff like this?

"I just did it the same way as always," Kirkwood grins from across the table, "but this time everybody was very considerate about getting the right stuff together."

Further making the past year an emotional rollercoaster for Kirkwood was his mother's battle with cancer. She's now fully recovered, but it was rough going for a while, says the guitarist. "Through the whole recording session my mom was fighting it," Kirkwood says. "They told me she was going to die, and they didn't even tell her, because it was that bad. We've had quite a year. She lost a kidney to it—which oddly enough is the same kidney that I lost when I was four years old. But for some reason the gods were smiling on me—and



this record is as strong as fuck, and they know it."

ANYWAY YOU slice it, life as a Meat Puppet has been full of unexpected ripples since the Kirkwood brothers and drummer/punk fan Derrick Bostrom joined forces in Phoenix back in 1980. As one of the true heavyweights of the early SST Records roster—alongside Black Flag, the Minutemen, and Hüsker Dü—the trio helped formulate the concept of American indie rock while playing crappy bars, traveling cross-country by van, and recording full albums in mere hours. Many of them sounded that way, but at least two—1984's *Meat Puppets II* and 1985's *Up on the Sun*—were no less remarkable for it. The Meat Puppets were offering something new, an acid-etched version of countryish rock filtered through ZZ Top, the Grateful Dead, and the lyrical vision of Don Van Vliet. Yet it wasn't until 1991 that they made their major-label debut on Polygram/London, with the ironically-titled *Forbidden Places*. Long gone was Spot, producer of *Meat Puppets II*

# Which comes first

The guitar or the guitar strings?

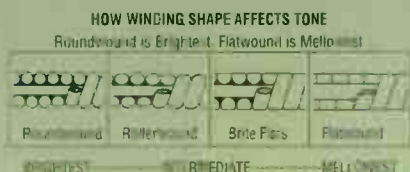


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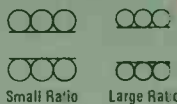
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**Q How does cover wire shape affect tone?**  
Cover wire shape affects the brightness of the string tone. The four common cover wire shapes are shown in the diagram.



**Q How does string "geometry" affect tone, tone life, volume and flexibility?**  
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In the course of eight albums and 30 billion live gigs, CURT KIRKWOOD has used one guitar pick—a quarter—and, predictably, countless guitars. These days he most often plays an '83

Les Paul reissue and a brand new Gibson Hummingbird acoustic, for which he foregoes the coinage and fingerpicks. Also onstage with him occasionally is a new 1960 Gibson reissue. For effects, he feeds his guitar through a CryBaby wah-wah, Chandler tube overdrive and Morley chorus/echo, then splits the signal to both a 50-watt Soldano and 100-watt Marshall amplifier. Both are connected to a Scholz Rockman; a Yamaha REX50 digital effects device then also feeds the Marshall. "It has some real crazy noise," says Kirkwood of the discontinued Yamaha unit. "That's where I get my flange and phase shifter stuff."

Touring guitarist TROY MEISS now uses both a '76 black deluxe Les Paul Pro and a '60s reissue Les Paul Custom, either of which is run straight through a Marshall JCM 900 half-stack 4x12 cabinet. Other vital playing components, says he, are "beer bottles, drumsticks and my rectal hairs."

Bassist CHRIS KIRKWOOD primarily uses an '86 Japanese P-Bass with EMG pickups in both the P-

Bass and Jazz Bass position. "It was all done for me at Precision Guitar Specialists in Tempe by Rich Beck, our guitar tech, who's always done our stuff," says Chris. "It's got a Badass bridge on it, with a brass nut." He uses Ken Smith strings ("The manly gauge, as Billy Sheehan once said") and plays through a Gallien-Krueger 800RV into 8 EV10s. On hand occasionally are a couple of Steinberger basses. "I used to have a Music Man, that I smashed like a retard at the Peppermint Lounge," he adds sadly.

Drummer DERRICK BOSTROM now plays a Yamaha Rocktour Custom set, with an 8" maple snare, a 12", 14", 18" tom array and a 22" wide, 18" deep kickdrum. He plays Sabian cymbals. "Right now I'm using 14" hi-hat cymbals," says he, "a 22" ride cymbal, which I play to the left of the hi-hat, and then a 17" splash, a 17" or 18" china cymbal and another 18" splash." Bostrom adds that he plays the hi-hat with his left hand rather than right—and though not left-handed, he plays with a matched grip style. He also uses Promark drumsticks. "It's not the same set I was quoted as using during our last *Musician* article," he helpfully adds, "which came out in '88 or '87."

and *Up on the Sun*; instead, the Pups were making records with Dwight Yoakam's producer Pete Anderson. It wasn't as comfortable a pairing as it might've been, but it was by no means a sellout.

What exactly is a sellout? Curt Kirkwood is sharp enough to ponder whether the term

itself now has any true meaning. "I just think it's a matter of people perceiving you a certain way because of the legacy," Kirkwood observes philosophically. "Suddenly we are able to sell out, rather than just come into it and be accepted on all those levels. This is another of those weird gray areas for us. A

lot of the people at alternative stations came up through college radio and have known us for a long time. And when they saw us get played at AOR, they just kind of bailed—on the level of, 'Well, they're a big band now.'

"When I see these other new bands come in, and they get played on both AOR and alternative—since they have no legacy, there is no way they can possibly sell out. And so they're accepted on both levels; both stations discovered them. Whereas alternative really discovered us. And I'm just sitting in my own isolated position with one hit song that I'm starting to look at as being my 'In the Summertime' by Mungo Jerry. But I have no idea about this stuff. I'm still just trying to keep my band afloat."

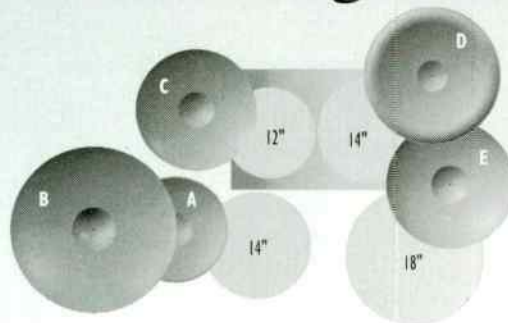
FLASHBACK, SEATTLE 1994: Chris Kirkwood is 34, intelligent, hyperactive, funny. When I tell him the vocal harmonies of sibling performers—the Everlys, the Roches—are, to me, almost unnaturally sublime, he seems to agree. "It would be a lot easier for me to sing if I wasn't forced to smoke so much pot," he declares. "By the government."

Chris seems that curious oddity envisioned by Timothy Leary years ago: A fully functioning, socially adept acidhead. His conversation mirrors his runaway train of thought: Why bother with points B, C, and D when it's just as easy to go from A to E? Talking a mile a minute, the bassist drops song quotes into the dialogue whenever vaguely appropriate: an a cappella rendition of Todd Rundgren's "Elpee's Worth of Toons" pops up during our

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discussion of what he calls “the business side” of being a Meat Puppet. Likewise surrealistic are the many bizarre sketches he regularly produces.

“I draw compulsively,” Kirkwood explains. “I’m an epileptic and compulsive behavior is typical of epilepsy. I started having seizures about four years ago. It came out of one of those friendly knocks Curt gave me on the noggin or something. After I started having seizures, the drawings got a lot more complicated. I had the ability to make them a lot more complicated.” He leans back in his Travelodge chair and considers.

“I won’t pound him,” he says about fights with his brother. “He’s never had a kidney, he had his kidney taken out. I grew up being told, ‘Never hit your brother, you’d kill him.’ Plus, I don’t want to hit him. The whole reason the band has been together this long comes from, like, the dodo wisdom of why not get along? It’s not that hard.”

An especially memorable milestone in the band’s career?

“Easy,” says Chris Kirkwood. “Derrick’s first tooth.”

AS IT happens, it’s the day after Jerry Garcia died, as I sit talking to the man whose band has more than once been called, however appropriately, the Grateful Dead of punk. Our dinner is winding down, and Curt Kirkwood notes Garcia’s loss with surprising passion.

“Jerry’s my biggest hero,” he says. “It was a totally indescribable loss to me. Him, John Lennon, and George Jones. But Jerry is the guy. I wouldn’t be in my own band if it hadn’t been for the Grateful Dead.”

What made Garcia so special to him?

“He was a voice I could really relate to,” says Kirkwood. “And I found a dialect that I could understand. I mean, I’m not way into a lot of guitar players. I loved James Burton, and I loved Grady Martin, who played with Marty Robbins—there probably wouldn’t be a Jerry Garcia if there hadn’t been a Grady Martin. But it’s really a lineage. There’s a lot of supposed things like that—from Phish to Blues Traveler, we’ll name names here—but there is no other guy, nobody even comes close. Nobody picked up on that dialect.”

I point out to Kirkwood that when we’d last spoke he barely mentioned liking other guitar players. He was way more into songs.

“It’s the truth for me,” he repeats. “I love so many different kinds of music. I still love Michael Jackson, I listen to rap, I listen to opera, I listen to anything.”


“And I listen to the Grateful Dead—and I won’t let anybody sit there and from their naive standpoint tell me that they don’t like the Grateful Dead, because they don’t know. If people tell me, ‘Oh, I hate the Grateful Dead,’ I’ll go out of my way to say, ‘You just didn’t know, you didn’t see ’em live, you didn’t see ’em on a good night.’”

“I’m just dying to hear some right now,” says Curt Kirkwood. “I wanted to hear ‘The Wheel.’ I don’t come out of the closet hard very often; I’m pretty nonchalant by and large. But hell, the fucker died.”

The conversation lightens up. Garcia had Rick Griffin; Curt Kirkwood’s own daughter designed the cover to *No Joke!* “She just drew this little guy and wrote *No Joke!* on it,” he tells me. “I have no idea. We got a picture of a guy with worms coming out of his eyes and nose, and holes in his face. . .”

He looks down at my plate—the remains of pasta with squid cooked in ink sauce—looks at my face, and then decides to sum up the interview.

“Hey Dave,” he says. “You’ve got ink on your lips.”



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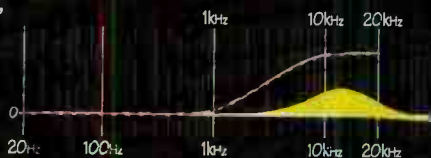
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was adamant about wanting to make a shorter record too. "In fact, we almost did just nine songs, which would have been perfectly fine with him," says Ocasek. "We ended up doing ten or eleven, but not because of any pressure to make it longer; it was just that the songs were really good and it would have been hard to keep them off."

For veteran engineer/producer Denis Degher, president of the Burbank-based Red Zone Studios, records are getting sloppier as well as longer. "We used to edit to cut out waste; now that's not even a consideration," says Degher, who has worked with such bands as Pharcyde and Thermador, an alternarock supergroup featuring members of Pearl Jam, the Chili Peppers and Rob Rule.

"People used to try to keep vinyl records under 20-25 minutes a side to avoid the loss of low-end levels, because of the low-frequency excursions of the grooves. Of course, you could always turn the level down to get more on each side, but with the CD, none of those considerations are even applicable. You can put as much bottom end on as you want now without having to thin them out.

"With the lengthening of records, musicians have the same amount of money to spend and not as much time to spend perfecting what they record. So there seems to be a loosening of standards for what's considered an acceptable release in terms of production

values. Records are rougher these days, which may well be because of the grunge and rap movement, but they are a lot looser than they were five years ago, performance- and editing-wise. People are letting things slide they might not have let slide before.

"There is a bit of laziness, too. People are just letting things run longer without restricting themselves in any way. Editing is an important element which is being overlooked right now. People are leaving things a bit more raggedy. You hear more trash-can endings on songs these days. People just let it fall apart. Which I see as a rebellion against some of the '80s technology, with all that tight dance music, British house and American R&B. Once drum machines came in, people expected perfection, and I think you're really starting to see a rebellion against that in today's recording studios. It's a melding of high tech and low tech."

"Digital and keyboard equipment has gotten so clean these days," agrees Ocasek, who has also recently produced post-punk albums by Bad Brains and Maverick recording group Johnny Bravo. "The technology's so much more available. When the Cars were making records back in '86, the Fairlight was the newest keyboard. Now, you can buy a digital 8-track Tascam for \$3000-4000, record on it, and it'll sound just as good as being in the Record Plant."

Each advance in recording technology and software, though,



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comes with the inevitable extinction of something once held dear. While the vinyl vs. CD battle is basically over, many CD buyers lament the loss of analog's "warmth," two-sided vinyl and album cover art.

"A lot of low end is lost in the translation to CD," says Degher, who started out in the business as a disk-cutter and mastering engineer. "Where we used to filter the low end to get more time on vinyl when I was mastering, nowadays we actually go for an exceptional bottom end because people are pushing that to compensate for the loss of that range on CD. Where I would have rolled off some lows in the past, I just let it all rip now... and maybe even add some."

Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong says he misses the "geography" of the old two-sided album, and since his band still releases its records in vinyl versions, that's still a consideration in recording.

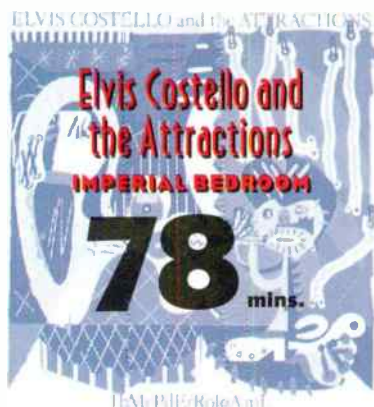
"I always think of taking it side by side, but that doesn't become an issue until after the recording is done," says Billie Joe between sessions at L.A.'s Ocean Way for the band's follow-up to their 8-million seller *Dookie*. "The last thing we deal with is the sequence. It's not like I'm thinking, 'I'm now writing the third song on the record.'"

"I still buy vinyl records," says Capitol's Aberle. "I still

get off on holding the piece o'art in my hand and looking at the liner notes. That's part of the experience of getting into a band. It's like sitting at the breakfast table while you're eating your cereal and reading the box to find out how much riboflavin is in there. The artwork is too small on a CD. It doesn't work.

"People don't even listen to albums all the way through anymore. Songs become numbers and all you have to do is program your favorite cuts. Before, you had to get up and physically pick up the needle and place it back down to skip a song. There was an effort to picking out the right song. CDs make it too easy."

"I love the accessibility of CDs," insists Rick Rubin. "If you want to hear a track again, bam, you hear it. But having that option, you're more likely to focus on the stuff that catches your ear on first listen and skip the rest. You don't spend the time getting through it all and having different songs become, at various points, your favorites. It's just too easy to get to the songs you like and so hard to get through the whole body. In the case of *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, there might have been songs that didn't get the attention they deserved. The same goes for Tom Petty's album *Wildflowers*, which we narrowed down from 30 finished songs we really liked to *only* 15. More for listenability than



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for time.”

Adds ICE's Howard, "The dynamic of a side one and side two was a subtle, hidden experience we didn't realize was there until it was taken away. The second halves of CDs are listened to much less than the first halves, a phenomenon which is much more prevalent than when you had LPs, where you could just drop the needle on side two."

Capitol's Matt Aberle laments, "People don't know song titles anymore. They refer to them as 'Track

7' or 'Track 3.' Something is lost because it's so damn easy. There's no effort involved with listening to music anymore."

Increased CD capacity has provided obvious advantages in certain formats, such as compilations and reissues. And we've come a long way since 1984, when Columbia squeezed Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* onto a single disc by chopping off several of the fades, enraging fans. These days, niche companies like Rykodisc have repackaged the catalogs

of David Bowie, Frank Zappa and Elvis Costello by adding on to the original albums almost as much unreleased and live material culled from the same time period. Ryko's reissue of Elvis Costello & the Attractions' *Imperial Bedroom* has nine new tracks, resulting in 78 minutes' worth of music, a boon for fans and collectors alike.


"On the up side, in the days of vinyl only, there were a lot of great B-sides which were lost that are now appearing on CDs," says Howard. "The down side is, probably a couple of songs end up staying on albums that should have stayed off."

Of course, B-sides themselves have become an anachronism in this day of single-sided CDs. And some CDs may be endangered by the possibility of downloading music and graphics directly into your home computer or TV.

"That will probably be the next phase," says Ocasek. "Everything is being geared towards buying from your TV or computer without even leaving the house. I don't particularly like it, though. I'd rather go to a record store and look around. I don't know if we need another reason to sit in front of the TV all day."

"It may be important to the middle-to-upper demos that grew up on the experience of handling records and buying them in stores," says Howard of the retail record environment. "But for our children, who have nothing to compare it to, a line will be drawn. Maybe the convenience of getting music directly into the home via fiber-optic lines will outweigh any of the things which will be missed."

And for those who still want to hold something in their hand, enhanced CDs, CD-ROM and CD-Is, which turn album graphics into on-screen images, will surely be an option. Will they eventually replace today's music-only CDs?

"That's the \$64,000 question," says Howard, perhaps adjusting for inflation. "It's entirely possible that all the accompanying graphics will emerge as an important element of the musical experience itself, or it's equally possible that the music will remain the thing. It will be fun to see where it goes. It's what's in the grooves," he concludes. Or rather, what's in the binary code. 

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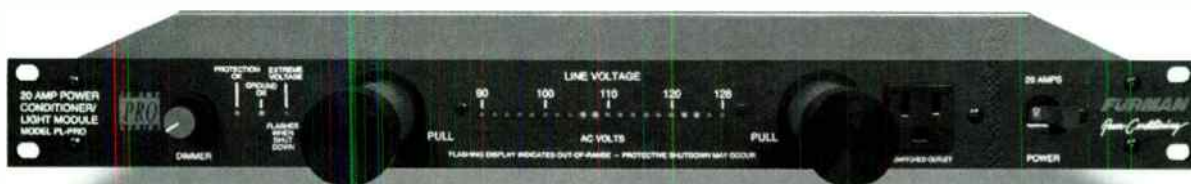
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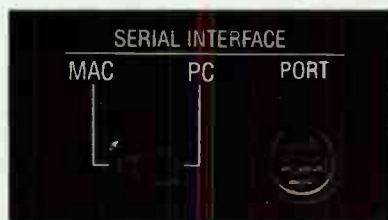
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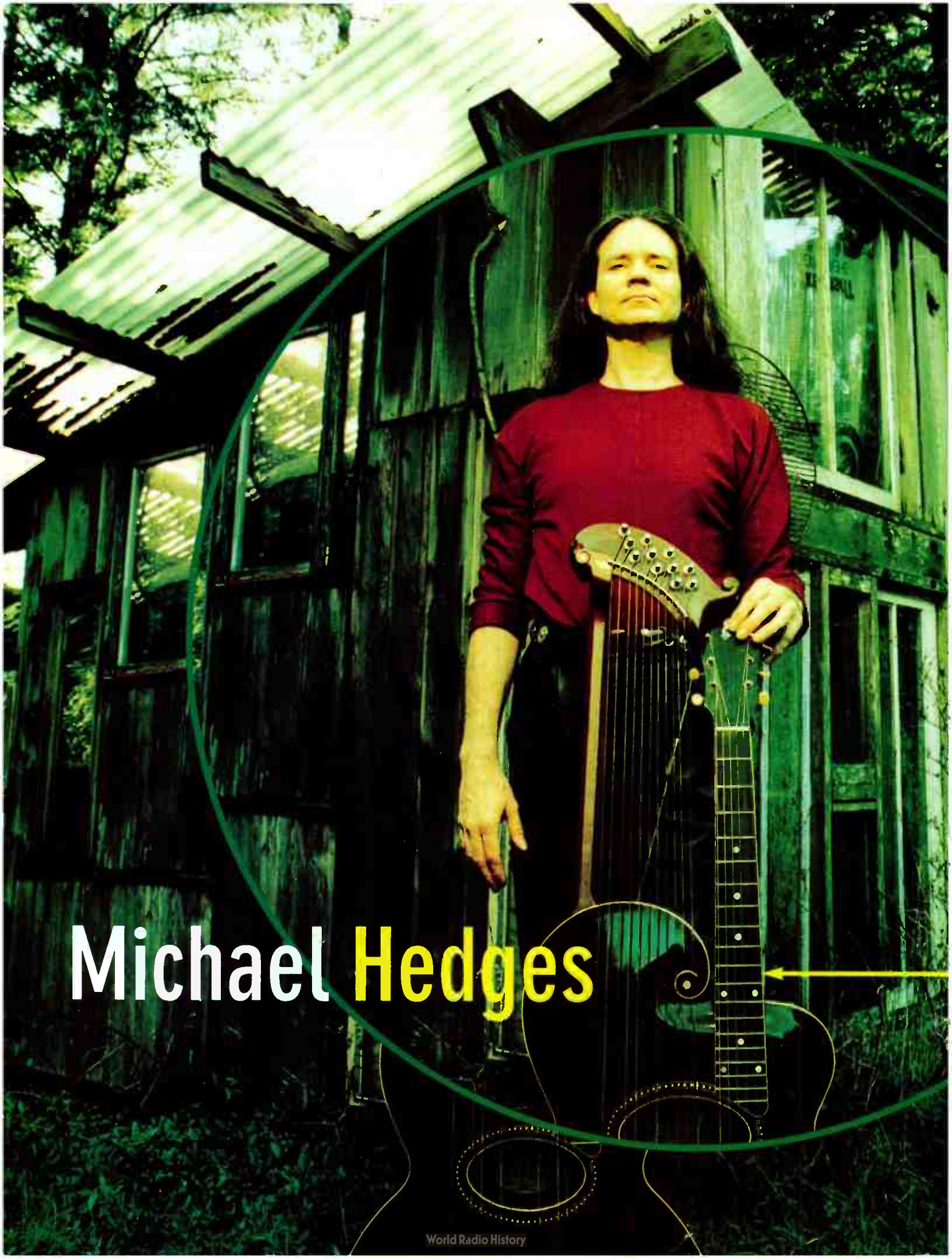


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# Michael Hedges



# Goes with the Flow



A HUGE female peacock shook off the rain from another of Northern California's eternal storms, one that's kept most of the seaside villages wet since the year began. The flapping hissed through a misty silence outside Michael Hedges' studio—over a garden, through a tangle of trees and past a dilapidated school bus permanently backed up to the stairs of his recording complex. Inside, seated in the middle of the hardwood floor with one ankle lodged behind his neck, Hedges let out a loud hiss of his own; in a Taoist yoga exercise, he exhaled a day's worth of pent-up *chi*, or energy.

"All the trash musicians and computer operators do repetitive motions, where they build up muscles in a limited range, and the energy gets caught," he said dreamily. "This yoga releases that energy. My problem is the right side of the neck, because on tour I really play hard. I work on releasing the shoulders so the energy flows throughout the whole system." He motioned to his stomach and inhaled again. "When I think about my *chi*, which starts here in the 'stove,' and I breathe out, I press all this energy out. If I do enough *chi kung* to get my *chi* to flow, I looser up and my rhythm improves. Sensitivity increases. So there you go—anything that'll help my musicianship, I'm gonna do it."

BY MATT RESNICOFF

Hedges unraveled himself and stepped outside into the moist, dusk air. As he leapt from the studio porch into the open rear of the school bus, he stepped to explain the presence of a waist-high wooden box, apparently either a small oven or a mammoth glove compartment.

"It's my sauna," he said, "the womb sauna."

He wasn't persuaded by the argument that a loaf of rye bread would be claustrophobic in such confines. "It's completely dark," he responded, "so it might as well be the biggest space."

Such a cosmic defiance of obstacles—from transporting an interstate steam bath to fingering the most uncommon chord—has put Hedges in a creative space of his own. Contortionism is, after all, a helpful skill for a musician whose unearthly compositions have fomented a disfigurement of conventional techniques. He's spent at least ten years as the acoustic guitar's most important innovator since Leo Kottke (who has said he *wishes* he could play Michael's "Hot Type"). The revolution hasn't been quiet: Inventing tunings to extend his harmonic range, using brutally percussive slaps and chiming, piercing textures, and filtering it all through an open-eyed fascination with music from AC/DC to Schoenberg, Hedges has advanced his craft beyond classification.

For all those accomplishments, he isn't exactly bullish on agendas. Every so often he likes to make a beautiful vocal record, like 1985's *Watching My Life Go By*, or last year's turbulent confessional *The Road to Return*; he has no problem letting his muse win out over the high boardroom demand for guitar spectacles like *Aerial Boundaries* and *Taproot*, an album whose title somewhat incongruously graces the license plate of his moon BMW in

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIM STRINGFELLOW



## EIGHT UP, EIGHT DOWN



**O**CTAVE DEVICES—effects that produce a tone an octave above or below the note you're playing—have long occupied an obscure corner of the stompbox pleasure dome. This is a little surprising. After all, Jimi Hendrix used an Octavia octave fuzz, and virtually every other piece of gear he plugged into became a sonic icon. Nevertheless, just a few years ago, the market was nearly devoid of octave boxes.

That's all changed with the arrival of grunge and the ensuing demand for sick 'n' twisted tones. Now music stores are awash in octave dividers, octave fuzzes, subharmonic generators, and

**From top: DOD's Meat Box, Dunlop's Blue Box, Voodoo Labs' Proctavia, Prescription Electronics' Experience**

mutants of distortion like DOD's Buzz Box and Dunlop's reissue of the MXR Blue Box. Here's a quick guide to what's out there.

Octave fuzzes generate a tone an octave above the note you're playing. Their advantage over a regular fuzzbox is that the high note adds clarity to an effect prone to either muddiness or what Carlos Santana once called a "frying hamburgers through the amp" tone. Their sound recalls that circa-'69 era when "heavy" wasn't necessarily synonymous with "metal"; think early Stooges.

Lower-priced units like Voodoo Labs' Proctavia (\$120) and Dunlop's Jimi Hendrix Octave Fuzz (\$124.99) handle leads best; both tend to blur when used for fast rhythmic chording. (Voodoo Labs recommends using the Proctavia for lead lines on the neck pickup.) But what you lose in chordal clarity you gain in single-note intensity and presence. Both work well for riffs like the Stooges' "TV Eye" or Hendrix's "Hear My Train A-Comin'," or for transmogrifying light arpeggios into a hefty wall of sound (example: Mudhoney's "In My Finest Suit"). The Proctavia has more gain, the Octave Fuzz is a little brighter.

The rhythm dilemma can be resolved for a bit more money. Fulltone's sunburst-finish Octafuzz (\$189) puts out a well-defined buzz and doesn't blur even under barre-chord onslaughts. Their Ultimate Octave (\$219), which adds a tone control and octave-off switch, is the sweetest-sounding fuzz I've ever played. I had a migraine when I checked it out and still wanted to hear more.

Fuzztones in general teeter between tuneful abrasiveness and pure noise; these two are distinctly musical. Roger Mayer's reissued parabolic-spaceship-shaped Octavia (\$225) also handles rhythm well, but has a more brittle tone.

Prescription Electronics' Experience (\$199.95) redefines "heavy." Even at low settings, power chords sustained forever. Its distortion is euphonious, its tone control wide-sweeping, and it also has a "swell" switch for bowed and quasi-backwards effects. Their Clean Octave Blend (\$159.95) takes a different approach, blending the clean guitar signal with a distorted octave. It sounds especially fine through a moderately dirty amp; I got a fabulously trashy Chicago-blues sound with a Telecaster and a Fender Twin and a majestically roaring Hank Williams weeper with a Gibson SG and a Marshall JCM 900.

Note: All seven of these pedals lack post-1980 stompbox conveniences. You have to take the back



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**BY STEVE WISHNIA**

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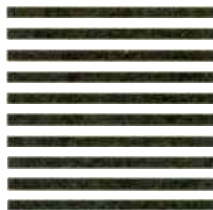
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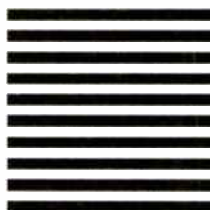
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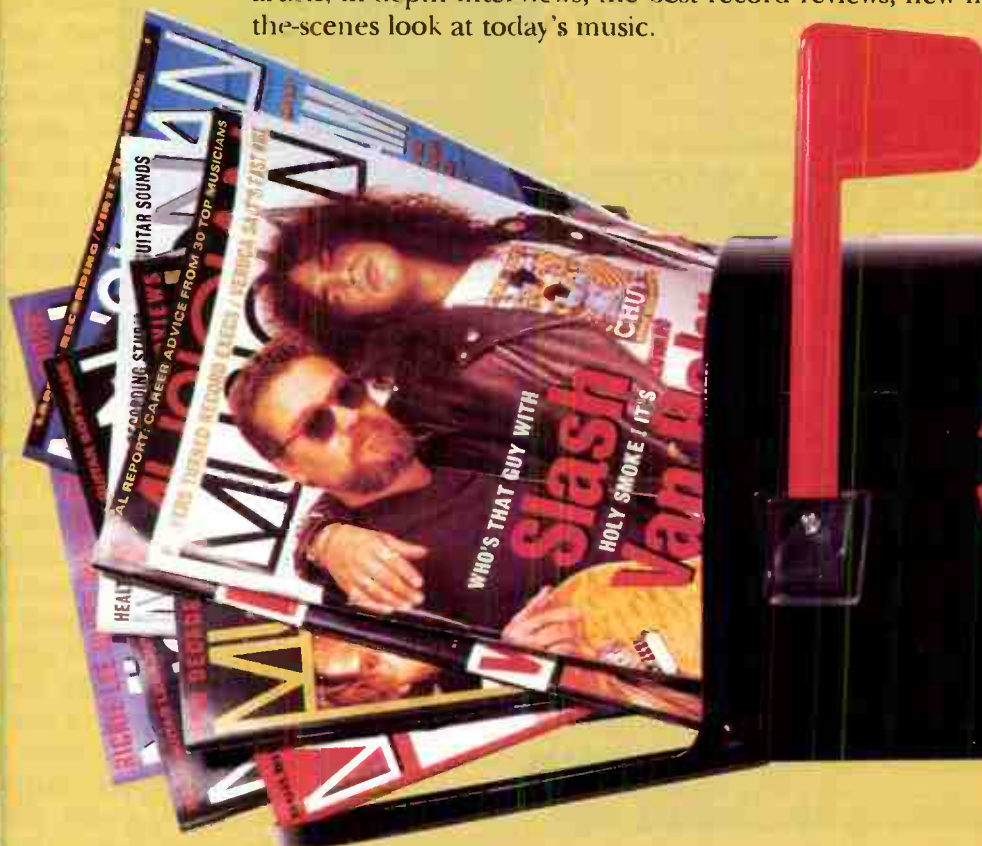
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# GOODBYE, JERRY

## Tribute from a friend

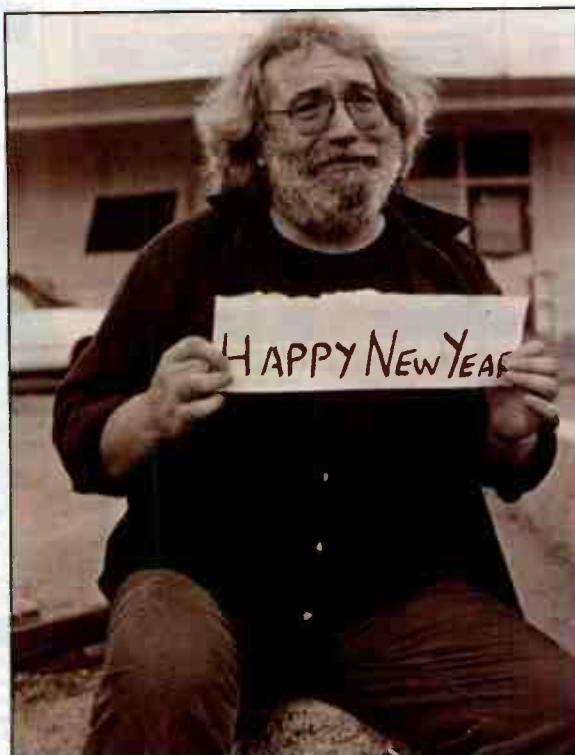
The death last August of Jerry Garcia ripped the veil that shielded Deadheadism from mass media scrutiny. You never saw Garcia's furry face on billboards or butting Madonna's mug for a place on the cover of pop-cult rags. Yet the news of his passing shook the world and forced the likes of Peter Jennings to grope for enlightenment from hastily recruited spokesfolk from the Deadlands. Musicians, though, understood what it all meant. No matter how you feel about Garcia, his band, and their constituency, their uniqueness is beyond dispute and now (perhaps) a matter of history.

Many thousands "knew" Jerry Garcia from the vibe he emitted through his beatific ways and silvery, singing guitar lines. Fewer were privileged to know him close-up, as a musician and a friend. One was Merl Saunders, keyboardist and leader of the Rainforest Band. He was already a pedigreed jazz and studio musician, with credits including Miles Davis, B. B. King, Lionel Hampton, and dozens of other top artists, when he took a session date one day in San Francisco with a guitarist he had never heard of before.

—Robert L. Doerschuk

"I had just left New York and come back home to San Francisco in the early '70s to be a bachelor father. Nick Gravenites heard about me, so he called me to do this session for Warner Bros. with the singer Danny Cox. I came to the date, and here was this guitar player sitting in the corner, with a beard and a big smile. As soon as we started playing, we had this chemistry happening. If I made a mistake on keyboards, he made the mistake with me on guitar. And if he made a mistake, I made it with him. So, really, from the first time Jerry and I played together, there were no mistakes. I was like, 'Damn, this hippie is a mother! He's just like Eric Gale: He understands feeling, he understands what air is in music.'

"I was kind of middle-class in those days, with my alpaca sweater and my pumps with pennies in them. I looked like I had just walked out of Yale. But when we started to play together at



the Matrix and then at Winterland, people began to see me change. They saw the beard and the hair grow, the tennis shoes come. It was like *The Body Snatchers*. That came from Jerry. He taught me that it's not what you wear that matters. What matters is that you love music like I love music. Forget about the rest of that shit. Forget even about the money. Let's just play.

"All the years I knew Jerry, he never stopped wanting to learn. If there was something he didn't understand, he wanted to do it. He'd say to me, 'What's that tune you're playing, Merl?' I'd say, "'My Funny Valentine.'" And he'd immediately say, 'I want to learn it.' It would take him a couple of months to get it together. Then we'd start

playing it out, and it was incredible. Another time he asked me, 'That run you did on that song. What was that?' I said, 'That was an Art Tatum run,' and I played it for him, very slowly. Then, maybe a week later, as he was taking a solo at this gig, he turned around, looked at me, played that same Art Tatum run, up-tempo, and smiled at me like, 'Yeah! Thank you, man.'

"When I wrote songs, he understood them right off the bat. He'd say, 'How about if I do this?' and play a line. And it would be perfect, exactly what I was thinking. We wouldn't see each other for two or three years, but when I'd call him to come to the studio, bang, he'd hit everything there on the first take. Some of Jerry's finest playing was on *Blues for the Rainforest*, and we hadn't seen each other for three or four years, but every cut was a first take. We had two days to do the album, but we played through everything with no hassle and spent most of the time just hanging out and talking.

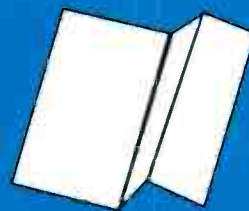
"Sometimes we'd play things together that were so unbelievable that we'd just start laughing onstage. Or we wouldn't be playing anything, and he'd turn around, strike one chord, and we'd take off, on the same song. Or, when we'd be playing a stadium gig, he'd point to the top of the highest row, then he'd hit this note so clean that you could actually see it bounce off that row like a home run. Man, he blew me away. He was a superstar."



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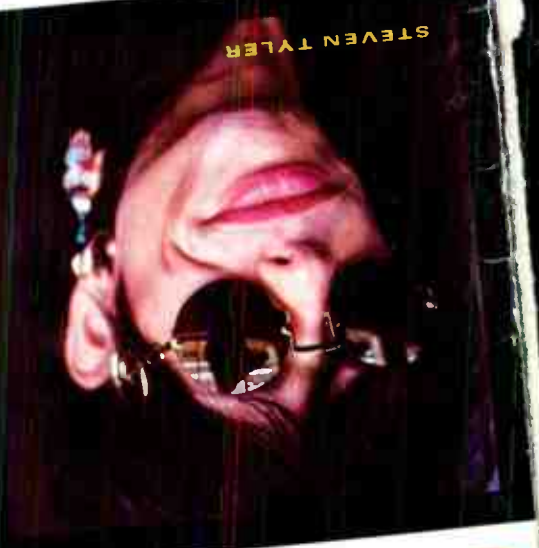
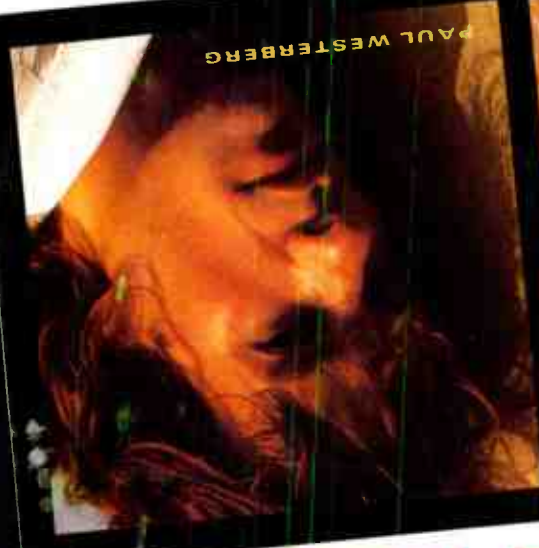


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“I’m  
interested  
in things  
that are a  
long way  
from  
reality.”

A couple of years later Threadgill shifted the personnel and instrumentation of the Sextett, creating the larger-sounding Very Very Circus. When their debut disc *Spirit of Nuff...Nuff* hit the CD player, there in the middle of the program was the eerie tune from the shower. It was unmistakable, even though the strains were webbed in a thicket of percussion and guitars. The title, as usual, gave little clue to its inspiration: “Bee Dee Aff.” The guy who received commissions from all over the world had created one of his pieces bare-assed, with a wet head and a bar of Irish Spring in his hand.

“Yeah, yeah, I think you’re right,” concurs Threadgill as he recalls the scene from a six-year perspective. “I write a lot of music that way—waiting on a subway or something. ‘Bee Dee Aff’ was written right around that time, so it could have been it. Or...” he adds with the cagy grin and twinkling eye that are a usual part of his countenance, “maybe that shower song was ‘Dangerously Slippery.’”

Sly humor, like innovative music, comes quickly to the 51-year-old. Out in front of De Robertis Bakery in the East Village (“one of the oldest coffee shops in New York,” he assures, “Spike Lee and Woody Allen have both used the inside to shoot parts of their movies”), Threadgill is mugging for a photographer, swearing—

absolutely testifying, in fact—that for a week or so he’d like to live inside the snow-laden wonderland that graces the patisserie’s front window. “I’d get that choir to sing my stuff,” he says, pointing to a gaggle of cherubs with sheet music in their hands, “and maybe get those guys over there with the sled to play a bit of something. Yeah, I could do that for a week or so; it’d give me a new perspective.”

Plumbing a variety of vistas has been the modus operandi of Threadgill’s distinguished career. He’s a diverse composer and the makeup of each of his many ensembles has been specifically geared toward the demeanor of his latest music. In the late ’70s, the trio *Air* was quixotic, treating their notes as wholly malleable suggestions. The short-lived octet that made *X-75 Volume I* was a stringcentric band made up of basses and reeds; it applied classical motifs to African pulses. The massive *Society Situation* was euphonious and phunky, and the celebrated, seven-piece *Sextett* was a portorchestra whose book gave mysterious laments and glorious fanfares equal play.

Recording-wise, the latest addition to the canon is *Carry the Day*, featuring a heavily augmented version of *Very Very Circus*. It’s Threadgill’s debut on Columbia, the second major domestic label to offer him a home. Though promiscuous in its use of global influences, it’s also pure Henry, utterly convincing in its distillation of far-flung styles. Past turns have demonstrated that he sounds just as natural reworking Kurt Weill’s “The Great Hall” as he does honking bawdy R&B licks with elemental bluesman Left Hand Frank. Like its predecessor, *Too Much Sugar for a Dime*, the new album’s expansive view is subordinate to the emotional essence that defines the composer’s distinct character.

“The latest stuff is geared toward the current reality of American life,” he says definitively inside the coffee shop, “especially urban American life. Everything’s constantly changing and I’ve always wanted my music to reflect that. I turned down Second Avenue last week, heading toward Hester Street—I used to drive by there all the time—and the Vietnamese shops that lined the row are all Chinese now. The whole block has been revamped. It goes to show that constant cultural shifts are unstoppable. People all over the world are in motion, and I definitely consider that when I’m writing.”

Threadgill, too, is on the move. A little over a year ago he established residence in India, ostensibly to have a new set of societal vibes infiltrate his psyche. Today he’s packing his instruments, sheet music and personal effects, getting ready to head back for a spell. But given the amount of European work he’s been doing, the gurgle of the Ganges has been seldom in his ear. He’s always on the move, traversing the borders of countries as often as he strolls through musical styles. Threadgill has spent years practicing multicultural integration. The desire to be inclusive is part of his attempt to employ a comprehensive world view and to concoct a music of what he fervently calls “fantasy.”



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“How  
can I  
applaud  
the young  
guys  
when they  
don’t take  
risks?”

“I like cartoons,” he bursts. “I watch them and get ideas. I’m interested in things that are a long way from reality. It’s nothing to reproduce what’s around you. Go see a love story and make a song out of it; what the hell’s that? I got that in my house. No imagination there. Is that the best they can do? Replicate life as they see it? That’s mundane shit. I don’t want to thumb my way through an encyclopedia of life in the name of art. It’s already been done.”

At the same time he’s sure that the seeds of composition can flower at the most mundane moments. “Hey,” he says, harking back to the shower inspiration, “ideas can come at any time. I wrote a tune on the bus and finished it walking the two blocks from Third Street over here.” Threadgill points back to his apartment while lighting a Commodore on the corner of First and Tenth. “Went right into the house, sat down at the piano and played it out.” The multireedist admits that his keyboard prowess is meager, promising that he would never try to play the piano in public. “No, no, no. Real pianists would cut me up and down. I’d be nothing but bones when they were through.”

**T**HREADGILL DOESN’T live or die on his soloing abilities. It’s one of the things that accentuates the breach between the musicians that came out of the imaginative environs of the ’60s Chicago scene (Braxton, Abrams, the Art Ensemble, et al.) and those

talented acolytes of hard bop who have prevailed over jazz for the last decade. The cream of the younger dudes can blow—that’s certain—but in general (Wynton Marsalis being the notable exception) their writing skills have yet to mature.

In a nondivisive tone, Henry elliptically shares his thoughts on today’s history-smitten jazz scene. “New Yorkers had Coney Island; in Chicago we had Riverview. I loved to go out there on the rides, that ghost house always did scare me.” He smiles. “I wish I could applaud the young guys, but how can I when they don’t take risks. I don’t have to like the music. If they did something different that I hated it would be fine, because it would still be an attempt to get past what we already know. But damn, this vibe today feels like death. Get the flowers ready!”

Dissatisfied with the conventions of bop and resolute in his trek toward tomorrow, Threadgill marches on, forging what’s long been assumed to be a correlation between Crescent City polyphony and free jazz collectivism. But as the topic shifts to the duties of journalists, he makes a puss and straightens out a dominant critical consensus. “They used to say that my stuff was born from New Orleans dirges,” he says while an incredulous look slowly blossoms on his face. “Brass bands are fine with me, but they certainly had nothing to do with what I put together structurally. I’ve never been to Louisiana in my life. And dirges? I don’t know nothing about dirges. If music of a sad nature is automatically called a dirge, well...that’s not even close. In Chicago I played in polka bands, blues bands, marching bands and Mexican bands and lots of bop. But New Orleans—I don’t think so. The closest I got to any music down there was Kansas, the boogie-woogie and ragtime piano players out of Kansas City like Jay McShann. That’s the stuff. As far as today goes, well, there’s almost no Western music I pay attention to.”

*Carry the Day* is a testament to that. The title cut’s a rave, full of the enthusiasm found in Colombian cumbias or Kenyan benga tunes, teeming with bravado. Chanting, accordion, rhythmic grids, at least two entwined melodies, implications of a third theme darting from the leader’s acerbic alto—uniting disparate pools of music, Threadgill’s literally resourceful on the new record. He says that he named the band Very Very Circus not because of allusions to the big top, but because his music has so many things going on at once. A prayer here, a party there, and you’ve got a complex opus by a guy who holds dear all things kaleidoscopic.

“Purism and fundamentalism,” he says with a pained look, “is a death wish. That type of thinking is incestuous, dangerous even. When things get that way, they start to regress, but deform. It’s one of the negative manifestations of orthodoxy.”

This makes sense coming from the man who once described one of his tunes as being “designed as a challenge, the way an air show should be. You don’t want to see the planes do rehearsed stunts, you want to see them



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take risks." Over the last few years, Threadgill's music has been getting riskier and riskier, dense with the maneuvers of an oddly configured medium-sized group: two tubas, two guitars, a French horn, reeds and trap set. *Carry the Day* amplifies the action, even as it simplifies the sound. If there's any such thing as measured mania, it's found a home; the record is as thick as any Public Enemy disc. On a stormy frolic like the new record's closing "Jenkins Boys, Again, Wish Somebody Die, It's Hot," the structure taps the brakes so that playing-wise the ensemble can

veer as deep into the danger zone as it feels necessary. Like the commas that separate the individual notions in the title, Threadgill's score preserves the logic that might otherwise crumble into cacophony.

**S**OME OF THAT stability has to do with the knowing ear of Bill Laswell. He produced *Too Much Sugar for a Dime* and *Carry the Day* as well. A vet at making thick records boast a fierce eloquence, his insightful take on Threadgill's music nudges it into a heretofore unreachable zone of clari-

ty. "Bill has definitely helped piece it together," Henry assures. "There's a bit more order to everything."

"I think recording-wise some people aren't versed in the sounds, extremes and dynamics that Henry is going for," explains Laswell at his Williamsburg studio. "This music needs to have a genuine impact. Clarity and separation must be there, but retaining the punch is just as crucial. Most rock stuff lacks a bottom or top—it's all midrange. Here, the low end has to be a real bottom, and we caught it. You hear phrasing the way it's phrased, not just notes thrown together. Henry's work takes conventional instruments and reverses their roles or mixes their characteristics. Maybe a horn plays something a string usually plays. It lets an instrument establish new areas.

"We did both records fairly slowly, so that there's not a lot of that overcooked feel. Sometimes people can get tired of playing, and you can hear that vibe on the tape. Anybody can tell it's not happening if they're focused, and honest. You roll the tape when you know exactly what the story is. Some have lost the ability to listen, because the brain is working too hard."


"The problem was that we used to go in and make these records in one day," explains Threadgill, "and that's a lot of pressure to be under, frankly. There's no consideration of the human element. When a brass player's chops get tired, they get tired. If you want to get the best out of people, you've got to take your time. This new record got a bit closer to the way it should be. It let us relax a bit more, figure things out while we were there."

One assumes that most of the music is sculpted and buffed before the tapes start rolling, but the bandleader assures that there's a seat-of-the-pants quality to almost any performance. "I've got an open-ended way of dealing with the group. If we've got our sights set on interpreting a piece one way, and we go in to record and it's not happening, well, it's time to change that initial point of view. Or choke someone," he laughs.

"Everything's actually shifting all the time, which is also true for a stage performance. Directions are established that aren't anticipated, and to be honest, I like it more that way. That's when music is really living."

The ability to deal with contingencies are what he brought to the usually fastidious realm of classical music back in the spring of '93. With Dennis Russell Davies conducting, the Brooklyn Academy of Music debuted Threadgill's *Mix for Orchestra*, an extended

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work that featured Max Roach. The program never mentioned anything about jazz, citing Henry as a "seminal figure in the vanguard of contemporary instrumental music since the early 1970s." One gets the feeling that the "J" word is to Threadgill what garlic and crucifixes are to Dracula.

Davies recalls his collaboration with Threadgill: "It was unique because as Henry finished parts of the piece, he'd come in and go over the way it played out. He also did some improvising with the musicians in the style they were going to use. We were breaking new ground and we all wanted to know what we were getting into. Improvising doesn't mean just doing whatever the hell you want to. He had many cogent comments on their procedure. It was beneficial for both sides.

"What was ultimately memorable about the piece was the textures. A lot of avant-garde classical music starts out with certain givens, meaning the orchestra sounds best doing a certain thing. An example would be that most composers use the cellos, basses and the lower woodwinds like bassoons in a unison situation. Well, Henry wasn't particularly interested in that. The cellos had an independent line from the basses most of the way through. There was sort of an octave separation of the sound structure, which can actually be something beautiful, but surely isn't standard practice in orchestration. Following his own ear, following his own inclinations, he gave the orchestra a fresh approach."

Years ago, Threadgill had lamented that transcending the persona of a jazz player was almost impossible. Recent works with theater and dance—disciplines he's fascinated with—have been part of his global schedule for the past few years. Threadgill says it's still hard for some listeners, especially "in the States," to dissolve such designations. "If they say you're a donut," he frowns with a nod toward the dessert display, "then you're not a jelly roll or a bismarck, you're just a donut."

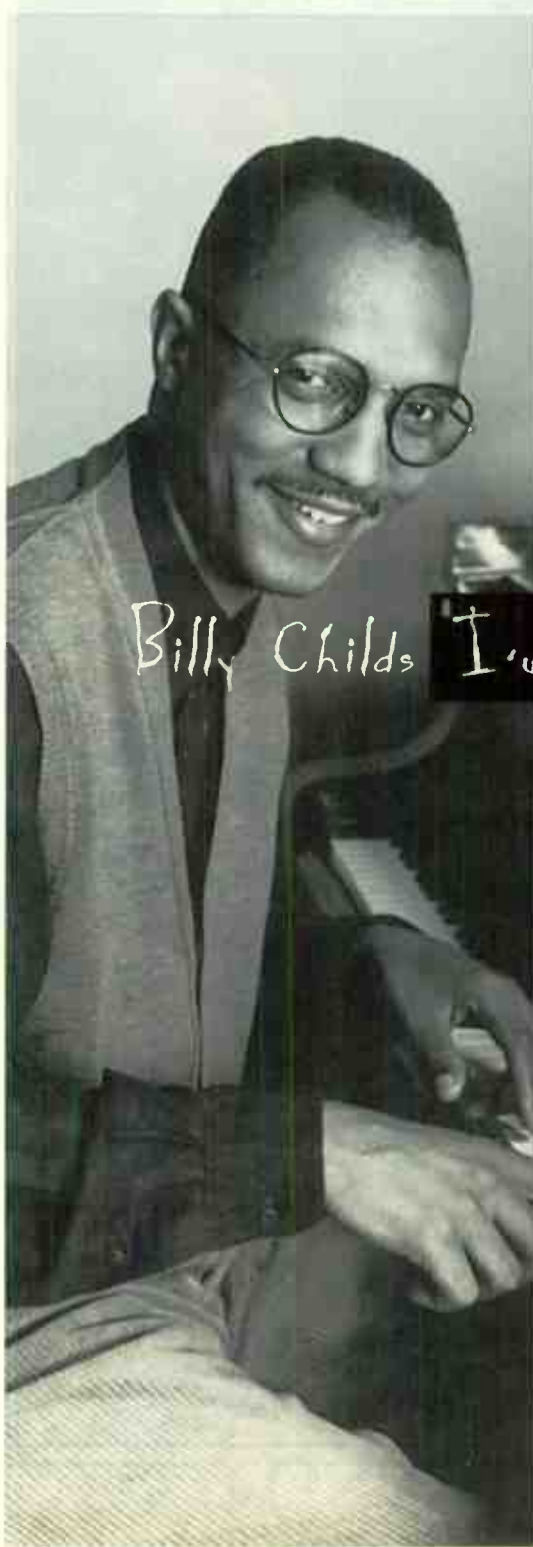
**A**T A GIG at New York's Knitting Factory Threadgill does a little conducting of his own. The sound of his six-piece group centers around the Hammond organ of his longtime associate Amina Myers. It is the kickoff week of the club's semi-posh new location and there is a buzz in the air. The band slips and slides a bit at first, but catches the groove as Myers' B-3 does the leader's bidding on a theatrical piece that, to para-

phrase another Threadgill tune, drives the audience slow and crazy.

Myers' two-fisted approach follows Threadgill's coaxing; the body language of the boss helps conjure an aural scenario equivalent of Black Bart strapping Sweet Nell to the railroad tracks with a locomotive barreling down. The room doesn't breathe until the band, with Henry's horn at the helm, swoops in to save the day. It doesn't sound like any other music—jazz or otherwise. It doesn't even sound like any other Threadgill group—part church service, part veil dance.

"People aren't used to the breadth of instruments," he says, explaining the organ's effect. "Someone says we've got a jazz quartet coming in and their precepts are formed immediately. We got an organ, but we don't sound nothing like Jimmy McGriff, right? That's why I like playing to people who have never seen us before. When the Circus toured the heartland a couple years ago, most audiences hadn't a clue as to what we were about, yet they dug it."

The band at the Factory was rounded out by Ted Daniel on brass, Ed Cherry on guitar,



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# JAN HAMMER'S HO



"I DON'T want it to look like I'm using 17 computers at once," Jan Hammer quips, switching on his new **Macintosh Quadra 650** and **Sony Multiscan 17** monitor **1**. True, not all of the computers in his studio are currently in use—one **2** controls an out-of-date **Fairlight II**, another **3** automates the **Sound Workshop Series 34** console **4** and his **Mac IIx** **5** now belongs to the kids—but Hammer's workshop in rural upstate New York includes more gadgetry than many pro facilities.

The Czech-born keyboardist has always made electronics sing, whether trading incendiary Minimoog licks with John McLaughlin, Jeff Beck or Neal Schon during the '70s, scoring "Miami Vice" during the '80s or concocting film scores and solo records. For the latest, *Drive* (Miramar), he teamed up again with Beck, shipping his jazz-tinged instrumentals to and from London on 24-track reels recorded on an **Otari MTR-90**.

"I gave him a reference mix of my MIDI tracks," Hammer explains. "He overdubbed guitar on most of the tracks. Then I transferred everything into Macintosh and assembled his performances." Using **Opcode Vision** software for sequencing and **Digidesign ProTools** for Beck's tracks (as well as sax solos by Michael Brecker and Hammer's own drumming, miked in an adjacent room) provided more flexibility than traditional multitracking. "I could move things around if I changed the form," he says. "You're not stuck with it like you are with tape. It's wonderful." He monitors through **Yamaha NS10Ms** **6** and **JBL 4333s** **7** powered by a **Yamaha P2100** amp, and mixes to a **Panasonic SV-3700** DAT deck.

The core of the system, tied to the Mac via **Opcode Studio 3** and **Studio 5** **8** MIDI interfaces and a **JL Cooper Synapse** MIDI switcher **9**, is a collection of Kurzweil and Korg modules: **Kurzweil K2000** **10**, **Micro Piano, 1000PX, 1000GX, 1000SX, 1000HX**; and **Korg 01R/W** **11**, **Wavestation A/D** **12** and **X3R** **13**. These are augmented by a **Roland D-550** **14**, **MKS-20** **15** and **MT-32** **16**; **E-mu ProCussion** **17** and **Proteus/3** **18**; **Kawai K1m** **19** and **K3m**; and an **Oberheim Xpander** **20**. A **Korg Wavestation EX** **21** and **01/W** **22** serve as controllers, with help from an **Oberheim Cyclone** arpeggiator **23**. An **NEC MultiSpin 3X** CD-ROM drive **24** feeds sounds to the K2000. Vintage instruments include a **Fairlight III** whose 16 outputs are submixed through a **Hill Multimix** **25**.

All of which leaves out innumerable processors, including a **Rane SM82** line mixer **26**, **Ibanez SDR 1000** reverb **27** and the **ART Power Plant** that makes Hammer's lead lines scream. But screaming lead lines and the gear used to play them, he points out, are only as valuable as the underlying ideas. "Technique is not so important," he states. "If you need a complex part you can always create it with the sequencer. The ideas are more important."

BY TED GREENWALD

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARC ASNIN



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# On the Button

**S**ILVERFISH"—A DECOROUS WALTZ ADORNING *King*, the sophomore disc from Tanya Donnelly's brainy band, Belly—follows a pop pattern so simple it could be charted on a graph. Beginning with a tissue of acoustic guitar strumming, it builds into a cymbal-crashing crescendo of a chorus, replete with operatic choral swells; it sounds like a sure-fire Top 40 hit. But that's about as obvious as this astute album gets. Donnelly pens songs like a good magician performs tricks, palming her pretty hooks, letting the suspense mount, then releasing them with a dove-flap flourish. The rest of *King* is a stunning exercise in oblique strategy that grows more impressive and delightful with each successive listen.

Some of the arrangements here are positively jaw-dropping. How did Donnelly decide to spike her somber ballad "Red" (the tale of a boy kidnapped in a spacesh

) with a chihuahua-hyper bridge of repeated yelping? The first time you hear her and bassist Gail Greenwood singing, "Red! Red! Red!," it sounds like "Whooot! Whooot! Whooot!" and grates on your nerves. A couple of spins later, it makes perfect sense. "Seal My

**BELLY**  
*King*  
(SIRE/REPRISE)

Fate" opens with tropical tom-toms and Donnelly's breathy little-girl-lost melody line, then suddenly shifts into vibrato-fueled overload on the chorus, and Belly, no longer lazing on a beach somewhere, becomes a fine-tuned power-pop instrument. And while Donnelly may play the waif at the microphone, she doesn't go in for any Barbie-doll, woman-as-victim semantics. "Baby I can't take it/I'd like to see you naked," she purrs on the title track, chanting the word "naked" until it's dripping with lust and as forceful as a demand.

*King* isn't a record for green-haired "alternative rock" dabblers. This is serious, smartly-fashioned music, meant to be appreciated and, ultimately, thought about with a certain modicum of intelligence. Throughout "The Bees," Donnelly warns potential sycophants to "Beware of me/If your heart is not on my side/You're not on my side anymore." Enhanced by the crystalline production of the legendary Glyn Johns, the message is remarkably clear—this lady is nobody's Cosmo-cover girl, nobody's A&R-crafted phenomenon. Cross her and she'll slap you down. —Tom Lanham

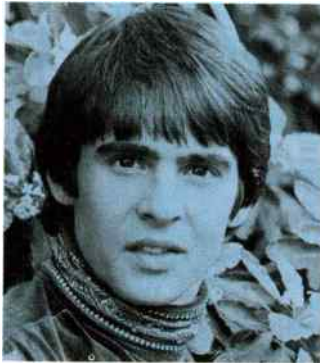


# MR. JONES— A SQUARE'S LIFE

When future archeologists are trying to piece together the rock era from the scratched 45s and faded album covers of our time, they may come to the conclusion that the catalyst for the entire rock 'n' roll canon was a fellow named Jones, whose ups and downs mirrored the culture that spawned him.

When first glimpsed in the 1950s in the Coasters' "Along Came Jones" the very qualities for which Mr.

Jones would later be mocked—his steadfastness, earnestness and virtue—were praised. No matter what went wrong it was all okay when "slow walking, slow talking" Jones showed up. The 1960s, however, saw Jones and



his conservative values blasted from their heights. In "Ballad of a Thin Man" (everyone knew who the title referred to—the chorus of the 1950s song celebrated "long lean lanky Jones") Bob Dylan sneered with contempt at the square who didn't understand what the cool people were up to. "You know something is happening but you don't know what it is," Dylan snarled, "do you, Mister Jones?"

Who do you think then stepped in to kick Jones when he was down? The Beatles themselves. In "Yer Blues" John Lennon screamed, "Feel so suicidal, just like Dylan's Mr. Jones!"

If the rebellious '60s were a bad time for Jones, the hedonistic '70s were even worse. In Billy Paul's smash "Me and Mrs. Jones" the world found out—though the poor cuckold did not—that Jones' wife was cheating on him. "We both know it's wrong," her new lover sighed, but made clear

they had no intention of stopping their infidelities.

Poor Mr. Jones tried to get with it. He began *dressing* like his tormentor but it did no good. In 1972's "Garden Party" Rick Nelson sang, "Over in the corner, much to my surprise, Mr. Jones hid in Dylan's shoes wearing his disguise."

Clearly Jones had fallen about as low as a once-proud man could go. In the punk days he was even spit on by the Psychedelic Furs, who sang, in their "Mr. Jones," "Here's another 9 o'clock and here's another day/Wonder how the weather is and what the people say/Mr. Jones is all of you who live inside a plan."

The Reagan era saw an upturn for conservatives generally and Mr. Jones was no exception. He had stuck to his out-fashioned values through the dark times of the '60s and '70s and was now being rewarded with some trickle-down



prosperity. "Mr. Jones, he's doing fine," the Talking Heads sang in the 1980s. "It's a big day for Mr. Jones! He is not so square. Mr. Jones will stick around. He's everybody's friend!"

In the 1990s Mr. Jones, older and wiser, had regained some sort of equilibrium; if he lacked the

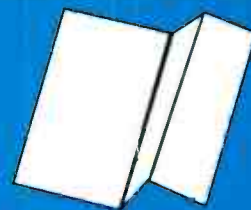
youthful confidence he had displayed in the '50s, neither was he the loser of the '60s and '70s. When last spotted he was out for a night on the town with Counting Crows, bar-hopping and trying to pick up girls. "I want to be Bob Dylan," the singer tells him and it's no surprise that Mr. Jones, who suffered such derision at Dylan's hands, disagrees.

"Mr. Jones wishes he were someone just a little more funky," Counting Crows tell us. Well no kidding. We've known that for years.

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