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# MUSICIAN

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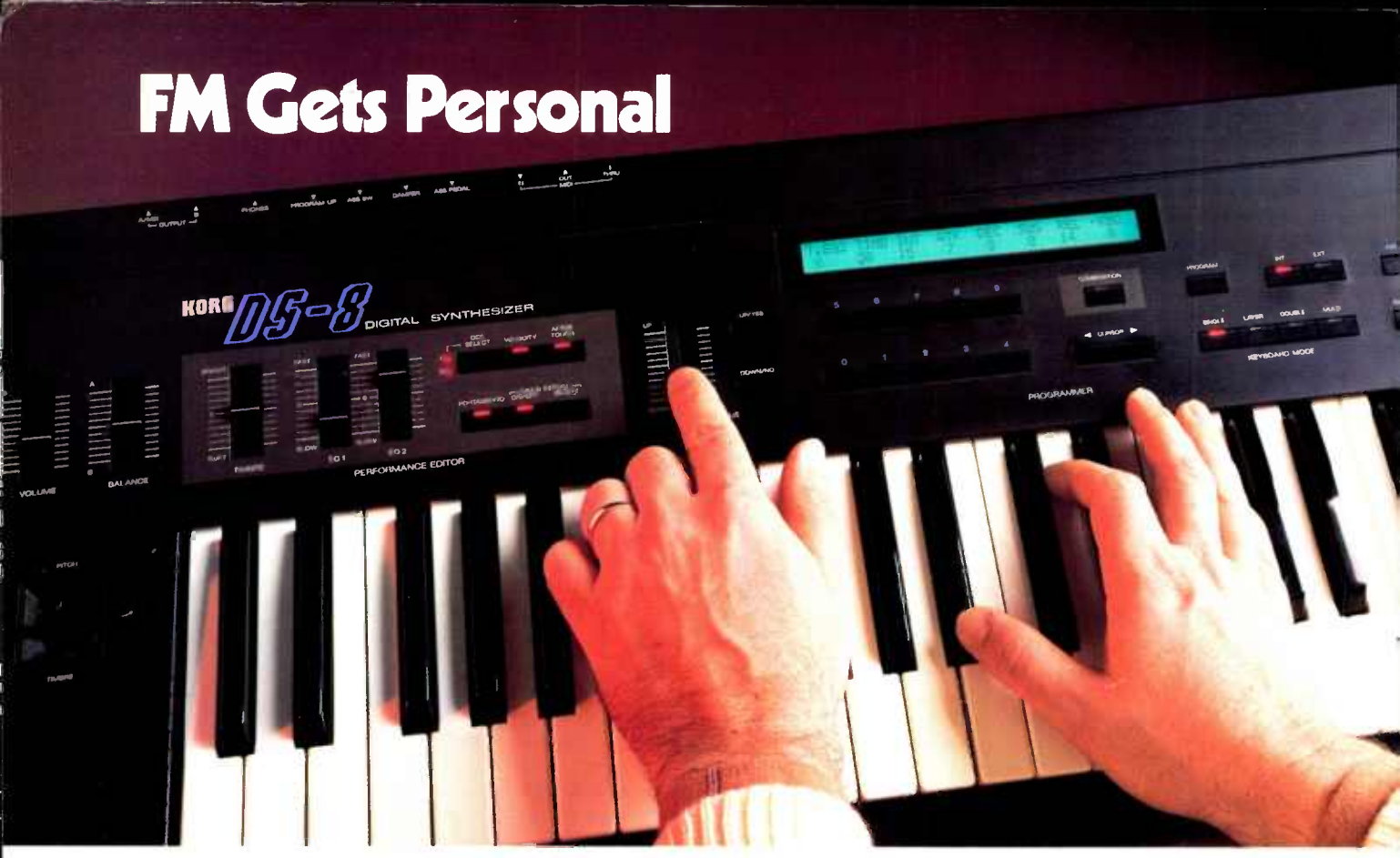


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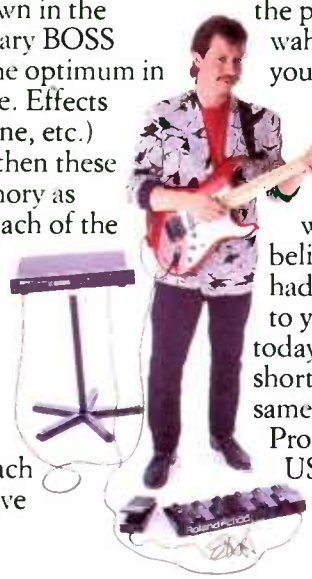

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SEPTEMBER 1987 NO. 107

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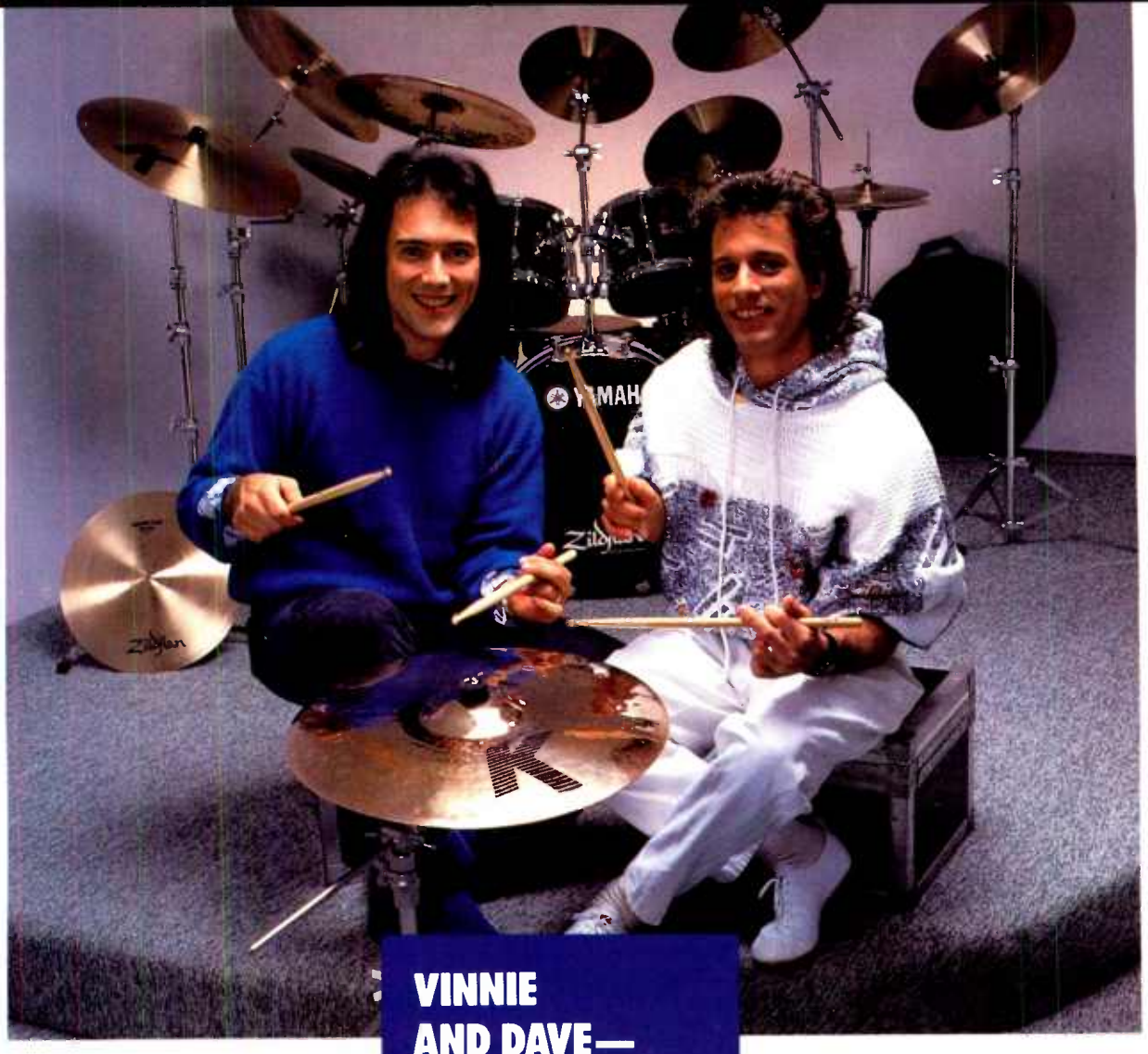


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"Zildjian is really tuned in to the needs of the drummer. Their people are out in the field listening and doing research, asking drummers what they want in cymbals," says Vinnie Colaiuta, L.A. studio drummer who's played with Frank Zappa, Joni Mitchell, Gino Vannelli, Tom Scott, Chaka Khan and The Commodores.

Dave Weckl, currently with Chick Corea, explains. "I told Zildjian I wanted the perfect ride cymbal for all occasions. One that had just the right amounts of brilliance and attack, but not too pingy. Sort of a dry definition that would allow me to carry out the emotion of the music."

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"The K Custom is a nice, warm, musical ride cymbal with a clean bell sound, yet it's not too clangy. I can turn around and crash on it without having to worry about too many uncontrolled overtones. It blends perfectly," says Colaiuta.

Zildjian continues to play an instrumental role in shaping the sound of modern music—by working closely with leading-edge drummers like Vinnie and Dave.

"I'm always looking for new sounds and so is Zildjian. In fact, that's how we came up with the idea of mixing a Z bottom and K top in my Hi Hats. The K gives me the quick, thin splash characteristic I like. And the Z provides that certain edge. They really cut through," says Weckl. "Which is important because of all the electronics that I use.

"Zildjian's really hit upon a winning combination in terms of delivering new concepts. They're creating cymbals that have a musical place and make a lasting impression," claims Colaiuta.

"Zildjian is as sensitive to the needs of drummers as the drummers are towards their instruments," concludes Weckl.

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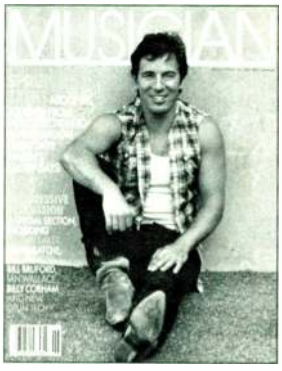
# LETTERS

### 'Steen-age Crush

I am so fed up with your worship and adulation of Bruce Springsteen (June '87) that I no longer look forward to receiving your magazine. As far as I am concerned, Springsteen is the most overrated performer in the history of recorded music. Please don't waste any more space on such a banal and superficial subject.

*T.M. Hennig*
*Vernon, TX*




As one of the first to write about Bruce Springsteen and among the few to have interviewed him in the 80s—and one of the fewer still who has not turned those interviews into a book—I was surprised to find in your excerpt from *Glory Days* a 250-word quote that Dave Marsh lifted verbatim from my *USA Today* article without proper attribution. In another recently published excerpt he also quoted from that article, this time identifying it only with "as he told *USA Today.*" After fifteen years in the business, and seven books, I'm certain Dave Marsh is well aware of my byline.

*Bruce Pollock*
Guitar
*Port Chester, NY*

*Bruce Pollock received proper credit in the bibliography of Dave Marsh's* Glory Days. *– Ed.*

Look, I know Brucie has some talent, but it's as a poet, not as a musician. The name of the rag is *Musician*. Write about musicians.

*Denis Morrissette*
*Albuquerque, NM*

The problem with Dave Marsh is that—like everybody else in America—all he *really* wants to do is sleep with Bruce Springsteen.

*A. Budd*
*Bronx, NY*

### Bobby's in the Basement

I just want to thank whoever was responsible for laying the newly discovered basement tapes on us Dylan freaks ("Albert Grossman's Ghost," June '87). Garth Hudson's comments suggest there's more tapes laying about somewhere; yes, we'll have those too! And why can't Columbia Records give us quality tapes of Dylan's classic live shows? There's much more to be had than the wonderful slices on *Biograph*.

*Michael Ecker*
*Trenton, NJ*

### Ginger Rails

Hype hype hooray! Ginger Baker (June '87) doesn't want to be reminded of his past with Cream, and then spends an entire interview bitching and moaning about it. Maybe you could say Jack Bruce was the heavy Cream, Eric Clapton the light—and now Ginger seems a little like sour Cream.

*Jeanne Quintile*
*Clinton, NJ*

Here's something I came across a couple weeks after reading Ginger Baker's interview, where he said: "Time moves itself in four..."

From Rudolf Steiner's *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone*: "Regardless of man's relationship to rhythm, all rhythm is based

on the mysterious connection between pulse and breath, the ratio of eighteen breaths per minute to an average of seventy-two pulse beats per minute. This ratio of 1:4 naturally can be modified in any number of ways; it can also be individualized. Each person has his own experience regarding rhythm; since these experiences are approximately the same, however, people understand each other in reference to rhythm. All rhythmic experience bases itself on the mysterious relationship between breathing and the heartbeat, the circulation of the blood."

*Dennis Darrah*
*Montpelier, VT*

### Rich and Famous

Kudos to Billy Cobham for his stirring tribute to the late Buddy Rich (June '87). A virtuoso of the first magnitude, Rich will be mourned by the world-wide jazz community for many years to come.

From the time Rich joined Joe Marsala's band in 1937, and all through his years of bouncing around to Bunny Berigan and Artie Shaw, and then to Tommy Dorsey and Harry James, Buddy fought off fierce competition at his instrument by simply stating, musically, that "I am the best at what I do."

That was a confident attitude, and all you had to do to understand that veil of arrogance was hear how he would move the band. Buddy Rich was a drummer's drummer!

*John Geis*
*Asheville, NC*

### Triumph of the Joe?

I thought record reviews were supposed to be about the record, not about a personal dislike for a musician because they've changed or done something different. I am speaking of Kristine McKenna's review of Joe Jackson's *Will Power* (June '87).

To compare *Will Power*, a classical album, to "It's Different For Girls," a seven-year-old pop song, shows only that McKenna wants Jackson to go back to writing pop songs she can understand. It seems to me she had a dislike for the album before she heard it.

This is music very much worth hearing and understanding, not whimpering about like a dog cowering in the corner afraid of the dark.

*Andrew Cinko*
*Middletown, NJ*

### Letter *from* the Ed.

*This is an unabashed pitch: More letters! We know our readers are an intelligent bunch, and we want to give you the chance to prove it. We also want a cheap source of entertainment—only fair, since we break* our *backs month after month bringing you folks fascinating reading.*

*So c'mon, people: feedback! We want to hear more about what you love, adore, respect, look forward to, or maybe even don't like (maybe) in* Musician. *Don't hesitate to send your comments, recipes, gifts, etc. to Letters,* Musician, *1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. We guarantee each published letter will include the writer's name at no extra charge. – Ed.*

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# FACES

## NEWS STORIES BY SCOTT ISLER


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## HUGO LARGO

### *Pretty Rad: Minimum R&R*

Bands formed by supercilious rock journalists have ranged from insignificant efforts to grand failures, with only a few surprising successes along the way. Observers of such affairs know a relevant rule of thumb: Passionate, aggressive, disrespectful critics tend to play much the same way. So what is **Tim Sommer**—onetime *enfant terrible* champion of hardcore punk and merciless tilter at trends—doing in the delicate, percussionless Hugo Largo?

According to him, it's no big change: "What we're doing is as much on the edge as the Buzzcocks or Wire were in 1977. As quiet and as subtle as Hugo Largo can be, as delicate and pretty, it will always be to me a real fierce rock 'n' roll band, albeit a very different one."

Sommer was first in a New York punk band, then played with Glenn Branca while keeping his day job in the MTV news department, all the while planning a truly nonconformist musical venture. Downtown bands, the bassist notes, were reaching for radicalism with cacophony and lyrical repugnance. "But being loud or offensive is too obvious. I wanted to do something that was just as weird and edgy, so we made it really quiet—minimal as opposed to maximal."

The concept—two bassists and a singer—might have died a brave experiment were it not for the presence of Mimi Goese, a dancer and performance artist who had never vocalized onstage before Hugo Largo's debut in early 1984. Her controlled but unpredictable singing kicks the band's airy, moody pieces away from the fringes of new age and closer to the sublime rock realms of Kate Bush or U2. After a shaky first year, bassist Adam Peacock replaced a departing member, and engineer/electric violinist Hahn Rowe, another Branca alumnus, made it a foursome. Hugo Largo declined a Warner Bros. offer, ultimately releasing *Drum*—three early demos and four new tracks produced by R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe—on Relativity early this year.

While no pretender to the Pet Shop Boys' crown as the best-selling ex-rock-journalist group of all time, Hugo Largo is talented, original and visceral in a way few bands that don't use volume as a weapon can be. Hell, they might even sell a few subversive records to unsuspecting yuppies.

– *Ira Robbins*

## Divided City, Divided Audience

**The term "captive audience" took on new meaning to East German rock fans in early June. They gathered on the right-hand side of the Berlin wall while—four hundred yards to the west—an open-air festival presented David Bowie, the Eurythmics and Genesis on three successive evenings.**

**If the sightlines were bad, the mood was worse. On June 6, while Bowie (a former Berlin resident) was performing, the East Germans scuffled with police, threw bottles and chanted anti-wall slogans. The following night the violence escalated as East German troops appeared and police made an estimated forty arrests.**

**On June 8 the youthful crowd, now about 4,000 strong, chanted the name of**

LISA LAARMAN

**Soviet general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, whose cultural liberalization policies are way ahead of the East German government's. (Rumors that the crowd rioted because they could hear Genesis are probably exaggerated.) The shouting was audible at the shows. These fans' requests, though, are unlikely to be granted for some time.**

## Buddy Holly Triumphant

**An attempt to rewrite the rock history books ended in defeat this April for three brothers who claimed that Buddy Holly's "That'll Be The Day" copied their own unrecorded song of that title.**

**Al, Art and Allair Homburg brought suit against Paul McCartney's MPL Communications, Inc., which owns the Holly song catalog, in 1985. The brothers charged they had publicly performed their song around September 1956, and registered it for copyright shortly thereafter. Holly's song was copyrighted in April 1957; "That'll Be The Day" hit the charts four months later.**

**Unfortunately for the Homburgs, they apparently didn't know that Holly and his Crickets first recorded the song (with a painfully high-pitched vocal) in July 1956. Holly's co-writer/drummer Jerry Allison and guitarist Sonny Curtis both testified that the song was inspired by and written a few days after the three of them saw the film *The Searchers*—in which John Wayne uses "that'll be the day" as a catch phrase. Local newspapers showed that *The Searchers* played Holly's Lubbock, Texas in late May and early June 1956. Several witnesses, found via a Lubbock newspaper ad, said they saw Holly do his song that June.**

**The Homburgs withdrew their suit. Now does anyone have a recording of the 1956 *Big D Jamboree* radio show in which they claimed they performed *their* "That'll Be The Day"?**

# EDGAR MEYER

## *"Wildwood Flower" Meets "Requiem"*

Can geography shed insight on art? Trying to speak with Edgar Meyer, I called Telluride, Colorado; he was performing in a bluegrass fest there. We didn't connect so I thought about trying Santa Fe, New Mexico; he participates in a classical string trio there. I guess I should've just played it smart and called Nashville, where he lives, teaches and records.

"Yeah, I'm running around right now," the elusive bassist/composer drawls from a closet in an Arizona rehearsal space (the only quiet spot in the building). "I finished writing my last piece for violin, cello and bass on the plane to Santa Fe. I'm getting real nervous."

Despite all the activity, the new *Dreams Of Flight* doesn't sound antsy. It's a low-key dip into contemporary acoustica (*not* snooze age), whose melodic pieces embrace classical music as often as they do melancholy offshoots of bluegrass. The balance isn't strained; this "Wildwood Flower"-meets-"Requiem" stuff flows.

"The Bach/Mozart/Beethoven type of deal is my standard," Meyer, twenty-six, laughs. "If I'm confused, I'll look to them as a source.

But in the last six years I've learned worlds and worlds about country music from hanging out with Sam Bush, Mark O'Connor and Jerry Douglas. You can pick up neat things from other places."

Basses run (walk?) in the Meyer family. Edgar is really Edgar, Jr., and pop played the big one too. "I heard it all around the house. There'd be jazz and classical music everywhere when I was growing up. That was my education. These days I don't know how to categorize myself.

"Within a couple years I'm going to have to do a hardcore classical LP to establish more credibility there. But with Sam and Mark I've learned how to use the bow for improvising bluegrass style. And I like to combine the ideas: groovin' with the bow, yeah." – *Jim Macnie*

# REGINA BELLE

## *Been Somewhere and Going Places*

The two most obvious comparisons for Regina Belle's singing are Sade and Anita Baker. But as Belle points out, although she's a fan of both women, "I don't necessarily think that I sing on that side, because to me, they sing on the dark side of the music."

Indeed, Belle's singing *is* lighter and somewhat more accessible than Baker's or Sade's, while still encompassing the sensibilities and sophistication of jazz. In other words, Belle is a singer who could conceivably appeal to the Lisa Lisa crowd, although she also sounds like she's played a smoky bar or two in her time, sounds like she's *been* somewhere. Yet get this: The lady only just turned twenty-four.

"I started singing professionally when I was twelve," she says. Upon entering Rutgers University, she added jazz to her repertoire. "I was singing gospel and blues before I got to college, but jazz seemed like a foreign language to me." Belle says she learned that language on the local circuit playing not only the smoky bars but also "the hole in the hole in the wall."

Jazz did not provide her only musical education. Besides gospel and blues, she says she studied opera in college, and is a fan of the reggae group Steel Pulse to boot. As she puts it, "I have always considered myself as a vocal musician. Instead of being someone who mimics the instruments, I am a student of the *music*."

The "student" was apparently a prize pupil. *All By Myself*, her debut album, is an uncommonly assured first outing, highlighted by the jazzy "So Many Tears" and the stately ballad "After The Love Has Lost Its Shine."

Columbia Records has slapped a sticker on the LP gushing over its new find whose vocal stylings and delivery are "mature beyond her years." Record company hype-writers aren't exactly known for scrupulously honest advertising, but this time, miracle of miracles, they're telling you the truth.
– *Leonard Pitts, Jr.*

# ERASURE

## *Patience Rewarded, or Second Time Lucky*

After racking up a string of quick successes with Depeche Mode, Yaz(oo) and the Assembly, synth-slinger **Vince Clarke** formed Erasure with singer Andy Bell and immediately experienced something new: downward mobility.

"I think the first album educated us to the ways of the world," Clarke says of last year's *Wonderland*, which fizzled critically and commercially. "Everything I'd been involved in before seemed to be successful really quickly."

The wait must have been excruciating—all the way to the second album, *Circus*, a much more warmly embraced release. But for a guy who's demonstrated a Midas touch while continually giving synth-pop a good name, the success probably *was* slow in coming. One problem may have been the confusing similarity between Bell's husky, soulful vocal style and that of ex-Yaz singer Alison Moyet. Another problem, Clarke speculates, was his history of successful but short-lived associations. "It's only now by playing live, I think, that we've gained credibility."

Playing live has yielded not only credibility but an intriguing study in contrasts: Backed by two male singers onstage, Clarke presides over his machines looking glum and vaguely disconnected, while the flamboyant, constantly moving Bell practically redefines camp.

The pair's musical differences are just as sharp, which Clarke—not one to collaborate before Erasure—finds a creative boon. "When writing a song, there were always certain things I felt would work. I'd very rarely go astray of those ideas. But now Andy comes in and he's got no musical background or training, so his melody ideas and ideas for sound are completely alien to me. It's made me aware that basically any sound's possible—any*thing*'s possible. It's been a real education." – *Duncan Strauss*

# MOE TUCKER

## *She's Sticking with V.U.*

You gotta admire Moe (Maureen) Tucker. Not only has the legendary Velvet Underground drummer recently released the rockin' *MoeJadKateBarry* EP, but she did it while working full-time at K-Mart, taking care of five kids, and living in an isolated little burg in southern Georgia. Tucker, plus Half Japanese's Jad Fair and guitarists Kate Messer and Barry Stock, bucked those odds and cut five songs' worth of grunge-o-rama guitars and drum pummeling for the independent 50,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 Watts label. "Yeah, it was these people's garage which they had set up as a very small studio," she says, "and they had never recorded a band before—they had recorded commercials—so it was a learning experience for all of us."

The keen observer will note that three of the EP's tunes are V.U. related: "Guess I'm Falling In Love" (with lyrics!) and "Hey, Mr. Rain" are both Velvets tunes; "Why Don't You Smile Now" is a pre-Velvets Lou Reed/John Cale collaboration. "We only had four hours," Tucker explains. "We'd never played together and decided we'd better play some songs we all knew. Those three are relatively simple and relatively obscure, and are songs that I really like."

While Cale was touring and V.U. guitarist Sterling Morrison penning *The Velvet Underground Diet*, Tucker played a few shows. Morrison, Tucker says, was "really amazed that I would go out—now—with a band and sing some songs. But he doesn't understand that people just want to see you. If you put on a decent little show and do your best, that's fine."

– *Thomas Anderson*

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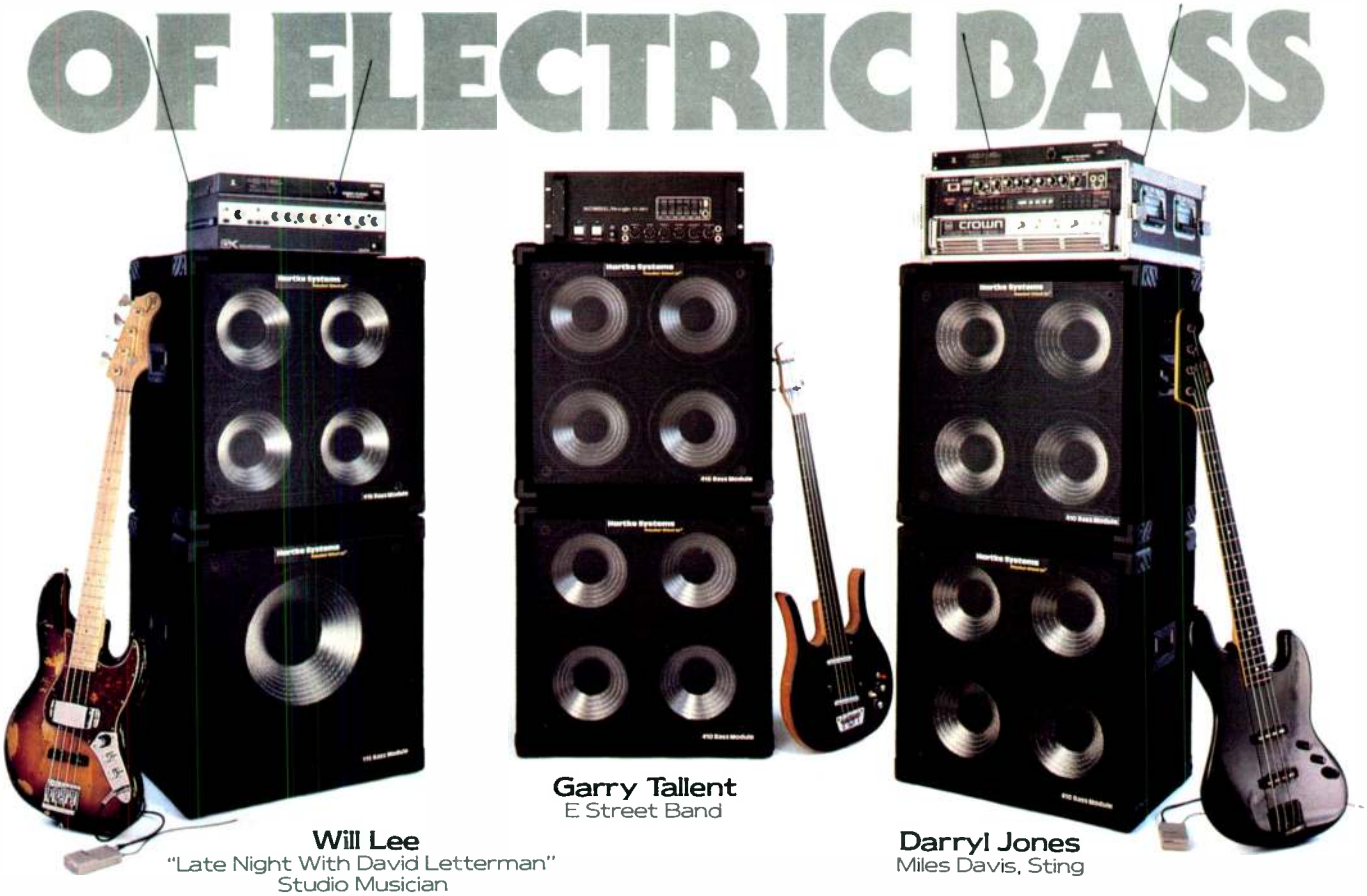

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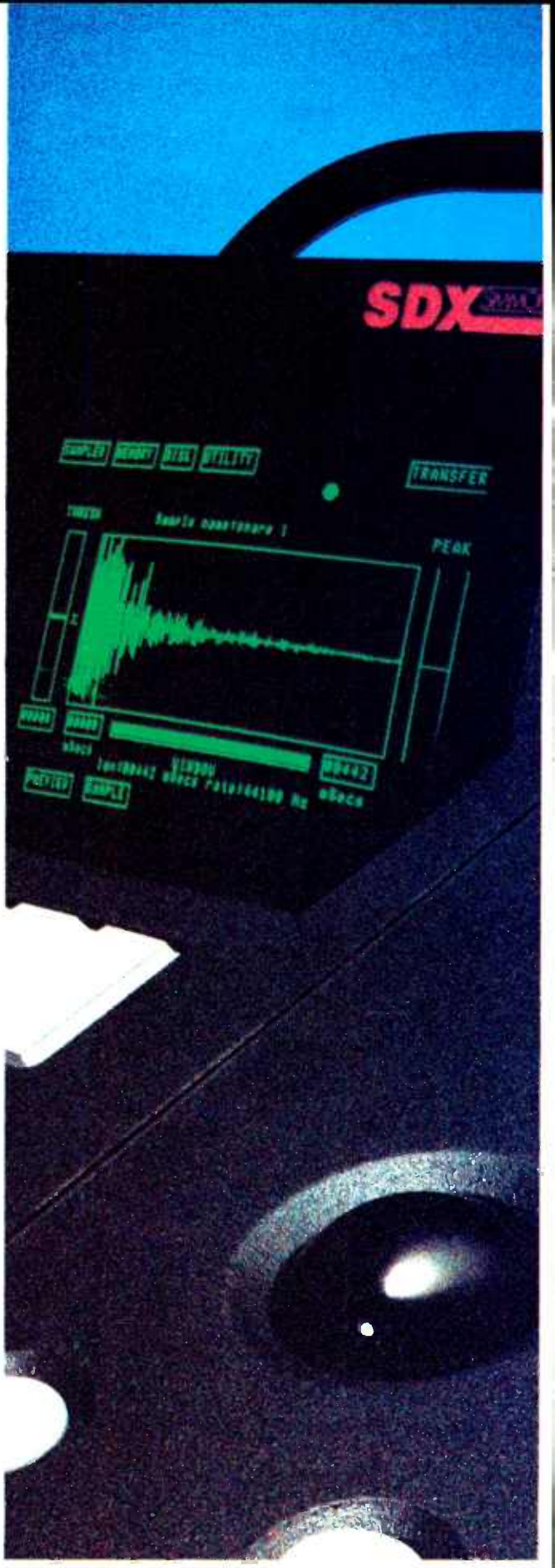


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# CHARLIE WATTS

BY SCOTT ISLER

## NEWS SUMMARY: STONES DRUMMER DENIES BREAKUP

For Charlie Watts, meaningful conversation deals with his wife's horse-riding activities—or getting a pair of reading glasses—or a knowledgeable discussion of Derek Jacobi's acting style—or (especially) post-war, pre-"free" jazz. For Charlie Watts, as for many people, meaningful conversation deals with just about anything except his job.

Unfortunately for Watts, his job has assumed paramount importance to ridiculous numbers of humanity: For nearly a quarter-century he has occupied the drum seat in the Rolling Stones. No doubt he is grateful for the role history has thrust upon him. But that doesn't mean he's willing to surrender the privacy that seems incompatible with such a privileged position. Consequently, Watts has been the most reclusive Stone—the group's strong, steady heartbeat who's there when needed and invisible when not.

In late 1985, though, Watts took an unprecedented step into the spotlight with the debut of his very own thirty-two-piece orchestra playing mostly jazz standards of the 40s. This bigger-than-big band gigged in a London jazz club, videotaped itself in concert before an invited audience, and even made it across the Atlantic for a handful of dates. They returned this June for a more extensive cross-country tour. More remarkably still, Watts gave interviews (reportedly for the first time in nineteen years) to promote the events—a brave move from a guy who doesn't even like to answer the phone.

"Nobody wants to talk to anybody else [in the band], y'see," he explains ingenuously. "They generally say, 'How did you get the idea?' The other one is, 'What are the Rolling Stones doing?'"

Ah yes, the Rolling Stones. Since Watts premiered his band, the Stones themselves have released *Dirty Work* and apparently dissolved amid upcoming solo albums from Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. But not according to Watts. He says the Stones have always been a very open marriage: "together for weeks on end" when working, completely out of touch with each other when not. He doesn't sound worried.

**"I could never be a leader. I'm not Duke Ellington."**

Then again, worrying in public isn't his style. *Being* in public isn't his style. Watts, forty-six, is only two years older than Mick Jagger but seems to accentuate the contrast between himself and the Stones' fashion-conscious, age-defying singer. The day of his big band's concert in New York's prestigious Avery Fisher Hall, Watts wears a double-breasted navy blue blazer, a blue button-down shirt, a conservative striped tie, grey trousers, black alligator loafers and turquoise socks (a rakish touch). His all-grey hair was surprisingly long during his band's appearances late last year; now it's trimmed. He has a bald patch. Stones bassist Bill Wyman called him "dog-faced," but Watts' creased features have taken on noble contours over the years. His soft, muzzled voice ignores initial h's and glottalization in general.

He's in an Indian restaurant, but he's not eating. "I don't eat on the road very well, ever," he says. "I ate last night for the first time in four days."

Is that healthy?

"No. Being on the road is not healthy. I don't usually do this"—he points to a cigarette, half-smoked and extinguished, in an ashtray. "I don't smoke if I'm not working. When I started rehearsing I was on a pack a day. Three days later I was down to what I do now: a pack every two days. You smoke, you drink and, uh, everything. 'Cause you're just waiting to do something. That's what I'm doing now, waiting to do the next thing. And when you've done that you go somewhere else. Your time's not your own. It's not hard, but it's not your own. Everything is geared 'round these two hours that you're showing off. I find it quite wearing. It's a real drug, playing. There's nothing like applause. Especially if you're having fun doing it. I've been very lucky with the Stones. They're a very easy band to play with. Likewise with these."

Watts' orchestra came as no surprise to anyone familiar with the drummer's

ANDY FREEBERG

musical tastes. "When I was thirteen I wanted to play with Charlie Parker in New York and do all—I read what he did, not knowing what it ever meant to be drunk, to take—to jack up and all that. But I thought, god, what if! Imagine standing up there with a gold saxophone; it's like being Frank Sinatra to me."

Although England was then experiencing a trad jazz boom (soon to degenerate to skiffle, and from there to rock 'n' roll), Watts didn't like banjo rhythm sections. The first instrumental he remembers liking was Earl Bostic's "Flamingo," which his big band now plays. His well-intentioned but misguided parents bought him a banjo. Watts removed the neck and used its body as a drum. Nine years later, he had progressed, self-taught, to playing in Alexis Korner's pathbreaking Blues Incorporated. Then the Rolling Stones asked him in. You might know the rest.

Or maybe not. "He seems to live in his own world," says Tony King, a business associate who's known Watts since 1965. "He's always lived outside of rock 'n' roll." A twenty-three-year marriage keeps him at his country home in England. He has a nineteen-year-old daughter. She's with him in New York, and trying to attend a Duran Duran concert. "She saw them in England," Watts chuckles. "But there's nobody here of her age who would want to go see them!"

Reclusiveness has its drawbacks. It allows rumors to breed in the absence of proof to the contrary. Given Watts' longterm membership in the notorious Stones, *and* affinity for jazz—he wrote a children's book about Charlie Parker (!) in the early 60s—speculation inevitably grew about his own drug use. Watts says he's been "very lucky. I don't really take drugs like that, know what I mean? I'm not saying I haven't taken them; I'm saying it was not a way of life with me. You've seen guys like that, or you've been into it—it's like living hell. It's very hard to get out of. You could stop and step back, which I've always been lucky enough to do, 'cause I've always had a home to go to."

Watts grumbles about how even this sixteen-day tour has taken him away from home. He acknowledges, though, that "if you're a drummer, you have to play with people. And to play with people you have to travel. It's worth it when you've had nights like we've had."

The orchestra has received mixed notices, mostly because of its size: Seven trumpets, five trombones, a dozen reeds, two vibraphones, piano, two double-basses and three sets of drums can be overwhelming. Watts delights in all the British talent he's assembled. "It's so big!" he says gleefully. "It is an incredible thing to see, isn't it?" The band's size is a result of Watts' inability to exclude any of his favorite musicians. Several are free-jazz players; trombonist Annie Whitehead, an exuberant soloist, notes, "It's good discipline, reading the charts."

Their first visit to New York drew Stones fans expecting—what? A Keith Richards guest shot? The Blood, Sweat and Tears arrangement "Symphony For The Devil"? (For all its bulk, Watts' band has no vocalists.) This time around, the rockers are more polite—or perhaps just staying away. The Washington, D.C. date was downscaled from a theater to a club. "The audiences are marvelous," Watts says, "but it's the amount." He frets that the band may not be popular enough "to sell hall to hall.... I'm *sure* they don't promote it; they *can't* be."

These responsibilities are new to Watts. In other respects, the band is his in name only. "I'm not the bandleader," he admits. Saxophonist "Bobby [Wellins] is the bandleader. He's respected, he didn't mind doing it, and he has all the

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terminology. Songwriters like Mick and Keith will say, 'Oh, we'll do that bit again.' If there's a musical term and you talk to thirty people and they've got it all written out, they've got their pencils to mark that. They use words like—I mean, I know them, I've just never used them. If there's a discrepancy in how it should go, they'll just say, 'What do you think?' I'll say what I think, or 'I don't know.' But I could never be a *leader*."

Watts' reticence extends to the Stones as well. He is definitely not a studio creature; he lays down his tracks and gets out. Asked what he considers to be his best drumming on record, he laughs. "I never listen to them. The only time I like listening to them is if I get in a car and it's on the radio. But I could never play them. I can play anybody else, but I can't play my own."

Such modesty approaches self-effacement. "I'm not important enough to write about," he says. More than one associate sums up this quiet, shy person as "gentleman"—an impression reinforced by Watts' dress, bearing and amount of leisure time. Forty-six may not be the median age for a rock 'n' roller, but it means nothing in a jazz career. Watts, though, citing laziness, has trouble dealing with his self-proclaimed "retirement." "I don't know what to *do*!" he says in a rare introspective moment.

*continued on page 26*

## CHARLIE'S M.I., DARLING

Ask Charlie Watts to describe his drum kit and he'll say "Gretsch." Ask for more detail and he'll repeat himself. So instead we turn to Chuch Magee, Watts' drum technician for the last twelve years, for this breakdown: His "jazz kit," used with the big band, consists of a 14x6 snare, 9x13 ride tom, 16x16 floor tom and twenty-inch bass drum with a felt beater on an old Speed King pedal. Yes, they're all Gretsch; Watts particularly prefers the late 40s/early 50s vintages. His cymbals are a twenty-inch riveted sizzle China and twenty-two-inch riveted thin sizzle, both by Zildjian, and an eighteen-inch flat ride. High-hats are a set of old fourteen-inch Rogers. For the Stones, Watts uses the same drum sizes but removes the flat ride cymbal and adds a twenty-two-inch cast (unspun) cymbal, a riveted Chinese bell cymbal and a small ice bell cymbal. His sticks are Joe Morellos, his brushes old-style round steel Ludwigs. Don't dare utter the phrase "electronic percussion" in Watts' presence; he hates the stuff. "We tried syndrums when they came out," Magee sighs, but they were "just not" Charlie.

# ADVERTISING INDEX

# MICHAEL BRECKER

BY TOM MOON

## A SESSION ACE SWEARS OFF SAFE SAX–FOR NOW

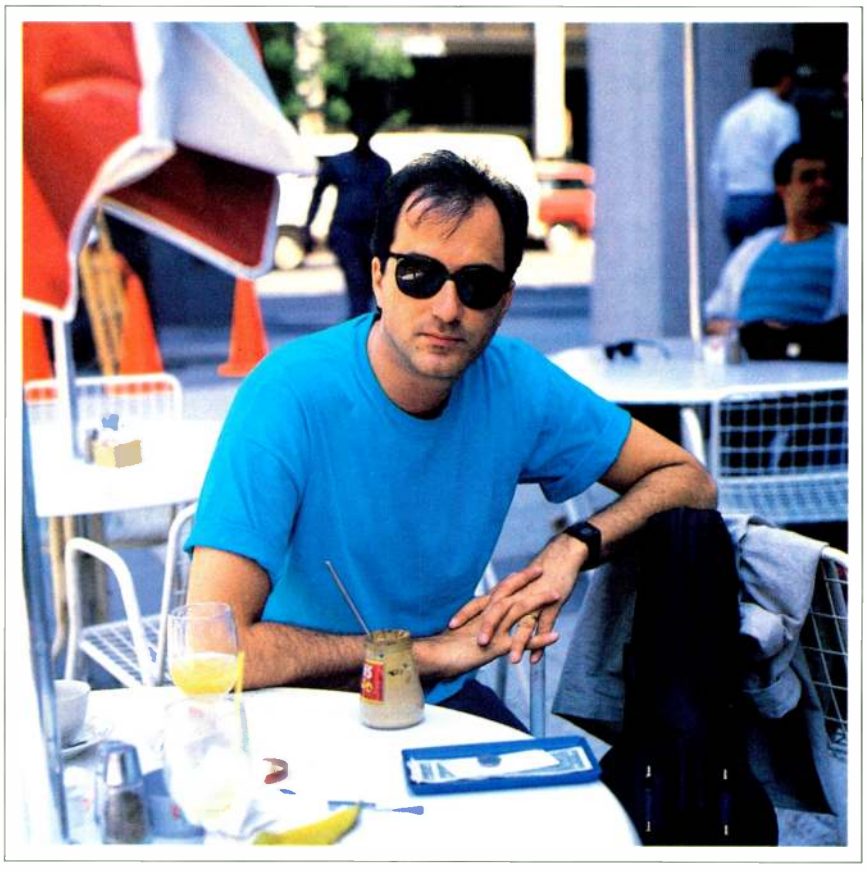
Michael Brecker, consummate saxophonist under pressure, wants to explain why he's waited twenty years to make his first statement as a leader. The pauses between his thoughts hang in the air of his Bowery loft unresolved, like courtroom drama.

"I was scared. Simple?" he finally blurts, releasing the tension in the room. "That's the truth. I always had buffers, cooperative groups that were shelters. I finally felt okay with my playing, finally felt I could do it."

So the interval-crunching titan of contemporary tenor saxophone is human. That's nice to know, because Brecker's more often viewed as a hired gun, perhaps the best in the business—a supremely adaptable, technically unrivaled asset to nearly any production. He gives the people what they want. He is macho-chopso. He plays sleek, he plays gutsy, he flutter-tongues, he growls—you know the sound in a heartbeat. Heard it on records by James Taylor, Cameo, Eric Clapton and Donald Fagen. Call him and he'll lay down eight bars of his soul for your next hit song.

But who is he? With the exception of a few experimental projects, Brecker has rarely revealed more personal music. As a professional collaborator, he's sharpened his saxophone skills and exploded his blues-funk bag into a whole genre, bringing the angular, quartal-harmony-based "Brecker lick" to a baroque level of refinement. But technical mastery does not an individual make; his presence had become at once ubiquitous and transparent. The time came for Michael Brecker to put his balls on the block.

Brecker assembled an elite group of jazz musicians for the occasion, including guitarist Pat Metheny, bassist Charlie Haden, keyboardist Kenny Kirkland and drummer Jack DeJohnette. Other friends (guitarist Mike Stern, pianist Don Grolnick, who acted as producer) helped hatch compositional vehicles for Brecker's brand of improvisation—sweeping modal pedal-points punctuated by changes in rhythm and texture. He avoided drum machines and funk grooves, elements of his recent output with Steps Ahead. At home in the world of endless overdubs, he made *Michael Brecker* almost entirely live (though adding his new toy, the Electronic Wind Instrument synthesizer, afterwards).



**"I realized that I don't really like things that *perfect*."**

The studio-savvy Brecker found live-to-tape recording difficult. "One of the dangers doing studio work," he discovered, "and there's a lot of them, is the tendency to make things neat. I realized this time that I don't really like things that *perfect*. On my favorite jazz records, there are quirks of personality, mistakes, whatever, that make them great. The challenge was to *not* repair things."

Brecker runs down his primary influences as if reading a recipe: "Wayne [Shorter], Joe [Henderson], Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Miles, Sonny, 'Trane. Weather Report was a huge influence on me—you'd have to put Zawinul in there, too. Piano players—Herbie, McCoy, Wynton Kelly, Chick—and trumpet players and drummers." Asked about Stevie Wonder, whose harmonica solos are marked by a lyricism not unlike Brecker's own, he bursts out, "God yes, he's a big influence. What can you say about Stevie?"

In other words, as Pat Metheny points out, "he loves all kinds of music. You hear him with Dire Straits and he's not just playing for the bread. The reason I think it's taken him so long to make his own record is that he's been given the opportunity to play so many different styles, been exposed to the range of possibilities. It's got to be a heavy decision what to pursue."

What emerged was a blowing record, though not quite like the blowing records Brecker has played on in the past, the Hal Galper sides and Horace Silver's *Pursuit Of The 27th Man*; the Mike Nock explorations or the Chick Corea studio date *Three Quartets*. There's more attention to mood, almost an obsession with the development of peaks and valleys. There's also a hint of the open-ended ensemble writing that best served Steps Ahead, employed here as a spring-

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board for more spontaneous exchanges. The arrangements are minimal (à la Metheny's tumultuous *80/81*) but essential—make or break road maps.

Brecker acknowledges *80/81*, which also paired Haden and DeJohnette, as a turning point. "The beauty of playing with these guys is that they are experts at spontaneously creating a mood. There was something that came out of that record, and the European tour we did. The way I played was more me. It was the way I had been playing all along, but I never had the chance to do it on record."

Says Haden: "We all knew Michael's work before *80/81*, but none of us were prepared for the tour. We would be amazed, nightly, at the constant inventions, the freshness. He's the ultimate saxophone player."

But it's also significant that *Michael Brecker*'s most striking saxophone work occurs when there's little—or nothing—going on around him. Ever since his King Curtis blues cop opened the first Dreams record back in 1970, he's been a cadenza specialist. He can conjugate the whole history of the saxophone with a two-minute solo workout on "I Got Rhythm" changes. Like a prodigy crossing lost languages, Brecker binds an internalized post-Coltrane harmonic concept with the phrasing of Lester Young, the rhythmic jumbles of Joe Henderson, the lucidity of Steve Grossman and the lyricism of Stevie Wonder.

When he begins to truly improvise, however, he sounds like jabbing, roiling, instant-on Michael Brecker, whose solo chops came together by playing duets with drummers. "I love the combination of saxophone and drums. When I was learning to play in Philadelphia, I would get with this drummer, Eric Gravatt, and just play. Eric used to set the clock for an hour; we'd play non-stop. So I wanted to do that with Jack.

"I play drums myself," he continues. "I learned so I could reverse roles, thinking it would teach me what drummers like to hear from a saxophonist."

Brecker has always been conscious of what people want to hear from him. Until now, his path has not been an evolution so much as a parade. He's grown, but more significantly, the scenery has changed. Ever the chameleon, he changed with it.

Born in 1949 in the Cheltenham suburb of Philadelphia, Brecker learned the basics of music from his father, a lawyer and part-time jazz pianist. His earliest musical memory is of his father playing Clifford Brown records. He enrolled as a pre-med student in college, but in less than a year was following his brother, trumpet player Randy Brecker, to Indiana University's music school. Another year, and Michael was following his brother to New York.

He calls Randy's influence "enormous. He was three years ahead of me, so I'd always check out what he was listening to. He'd come home on breaks and we'd get together and jam. It was a great education."

Manhattan was good to the brothers. There were Randy's tours with Blood, Sweat and Tears, scattered jazz gigs and Michael's three-a-day sessions. Then there was the time Michael popped a vein in his neck from playing too hard; his doctors told him to change careers. (Brecker still wears an elastic support when he plays.) Dreams, built around the improvising horn section of Michael, Randy and trombonist Barry Rogers, recorded two jazz-meets-rock albums for Columbia. This spread the word: From 1973 on, the Breckers were in demand for pop horn sections as well as jazz.

Recording as the Brecker Brothers in 1975, they perfected a slick, uptown-funky show band concept. "We've always been very close musically," Michael explains. "We have that telepathy that

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seems to accompany brothers."

Following a string of successful albums, the duo invested in a Greenwich Village nightclub, Seventh Avenue South. "I learned my lesson," Michael says bitterly, though he acknowledges a void in New York's club scene, particularly for fusion, since its demise. "I don't intend to get involved with any more jazz clubs. For eight years it was financially just a disaster. By the end we were up to our necks in alligators."

He talks reluctantly about other studio projects, those bread-and-butter guest spots that have spread his name throughout the music world. He's only proud of a few guest solos—those recorded for James Taylor, Cameo, Carly Simon, Donald Fagen and Dire Straits. "I get very involved with musicians of this stature. I really try to compose a solo; it depends on what's needed. There are times I really feel like I can't come up with what's needed—especially when it gets into that Clarence Clemons area."

But Brecker's studio work has been colored by intermittent challenges—notably his work with orchestration genius Claus Ogerman on the *Gate Of Dreams* collection and as featured soloist on Ogerman's ambitious *Cityscape*. Brecker considers that album one of two career high-water marks. (The other is the Brothers' *Heavy Metal BeBop*.) "I always like playing with strings, particularly when they're arranged like that," he declares. "I was concentrating on lyricism, on the emotional parts. That music had a life of its own."

Journeyman work continued: Brecker played in the *Saturday Night Live* band for a season, then hooked up with vibraphonist Mike Mainieri for a series of live gigs and a double-album called *Blue Montreaux*. That led to Steps Ahead, yet another collective. Brecker says he spent whole chunks of the past two years working on the third domestic Steps Ahead release, *Magnetic*—an effort he concedes "quite possibly might have been a little overproduced."

If Brecker's self-criticism seems circumspect, so is his confidence. His new direction is like a work in progress, he suggests, one that may take several albums to congeal. But there are signs he is making a commitment: "I really want to restrict my activities," he says, allowing that he'll be more selective about future studio work.

And he feels he's in the right place to do that. "The Impulse label has strong associations for me. It was almost overwhelming at first—they said, 'Make a creative record,' and I talked with [MCA jazz division president] Ricky Schultz at length about it just to make sure I wasn't hearing the wrong message. My formative years revolved around Impulse records. It's really a privilege to record for Impulse. We tried to do something in that tradition, but do it in a way that is meaningful to me now. It brought out something in my playing which I haven't often captured." M

## SAX AND SYNTH

Michael Brecker says that learning the EWI Steinerphone, a wind-driven synthesizer invented by Los Angeles trumpet-man Nyles Steiner and now manufactured by Akai, is like learning a new instrument. A rectangular box about the size of a dime-store kaleidoscope, it's fingered somewhat like a saxophone, with one dramatic difference: Instead of one octave key there are ten.

Brecker also MIDIs the rack-mountable EWI to an Oberheim Xpander, Akai S-900 sampler and Yamaha TX modules.

Brecker still plays a Selmer Mark VI tenor saxophone, of course, and uses a Dave Guardala handmade mouthpiece with a tip opening equivalent to that of an Otto Link #7, with La Voz medium reeds.

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## WATTS from page 18

"I don't know if I like being on the road, with a suitcase. Two-and-a-half weeks is enough for me. God-damn."

He denies thinking about aging, but admits its effect. "I don't play records as much as I used to. If I do, I tend to go for Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington or the Four Tops—which is another sign of age, I think."

The big band gets his juices flowing, but in a curiously distant way. "I feel responsible for things going right," Watts says. "Other than that, I don't look upon it as my project at all. You just sit there and be paid, instead of paying, to listen to people like [bassists] Ron Matthewson and David Green. For me it's totally self-indulgent. I'm not Duke Ellington. I don't really know where to go with it, either.... Everybody in this band has got so many other things to do, even outside of music. It's quite relaxed in that respect. Which takes that 'going for it' edge off it. I was never like that, anyway. The dynamo of that was Mick and Keith. I'm not that sort of person."

At the Fisher Hall sound check that afternoon, the Charlie Watts band is a motley assembly of T-shirts, sport shirts, slacks, blue jeans and running shoes—all except the natty Watts. Between run-throughs he sits placidly behind his drums, twirling his sticks. That evening the band has donned their customary formal wear—except Watts: He wears a vest and no tie, and removes his jacket before sitting down at the drums. (Whatever he says, he *is* the boss.) The 2700-seat hall is less than half full. As the band kicks into Charlie Barnet's "Skyliner," Watts breaks into a grin that rarely leaves his face when he's surrounded by this behemoth of talent. Playing with this group, he looks like he's having the time of his life.

And he doesn't have to say a word. M

## ACOUSTIC from page 56

"That's when it's really fun to stretch the acoustic sound and see what you can do with it. It's such a rich sound to begin with. There's so much body, such nice low end, and round, pear-shaped mid-range and high tones. Electric guitar can be so Cro-Magnon. Onstage I'll run the acoustic guitar through a digital delay and stretch it. I'll feed long pedal tones into a long delay program and then hold them, and we can play around those like you might play around a tambura drone. Give me a drone and a twelve-string and I'm happy." M

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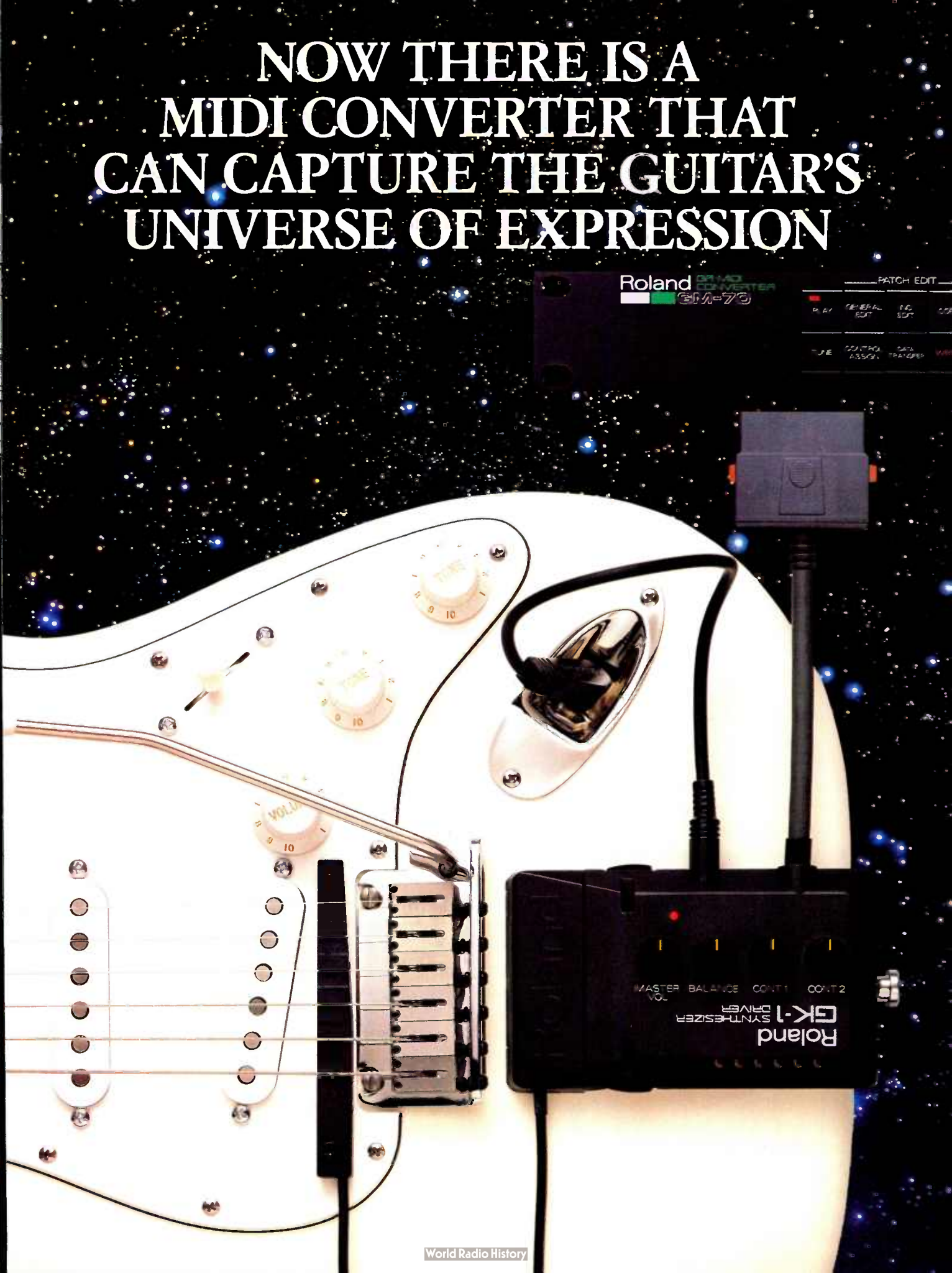

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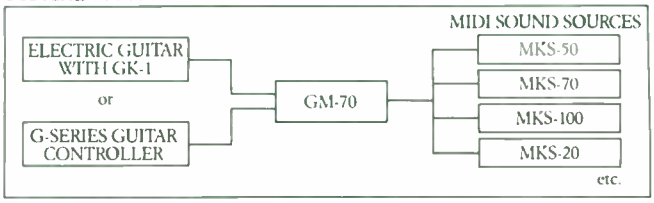


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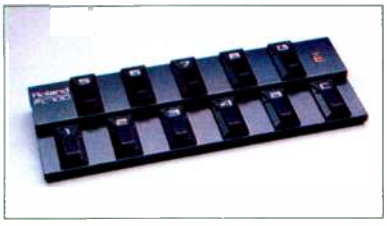

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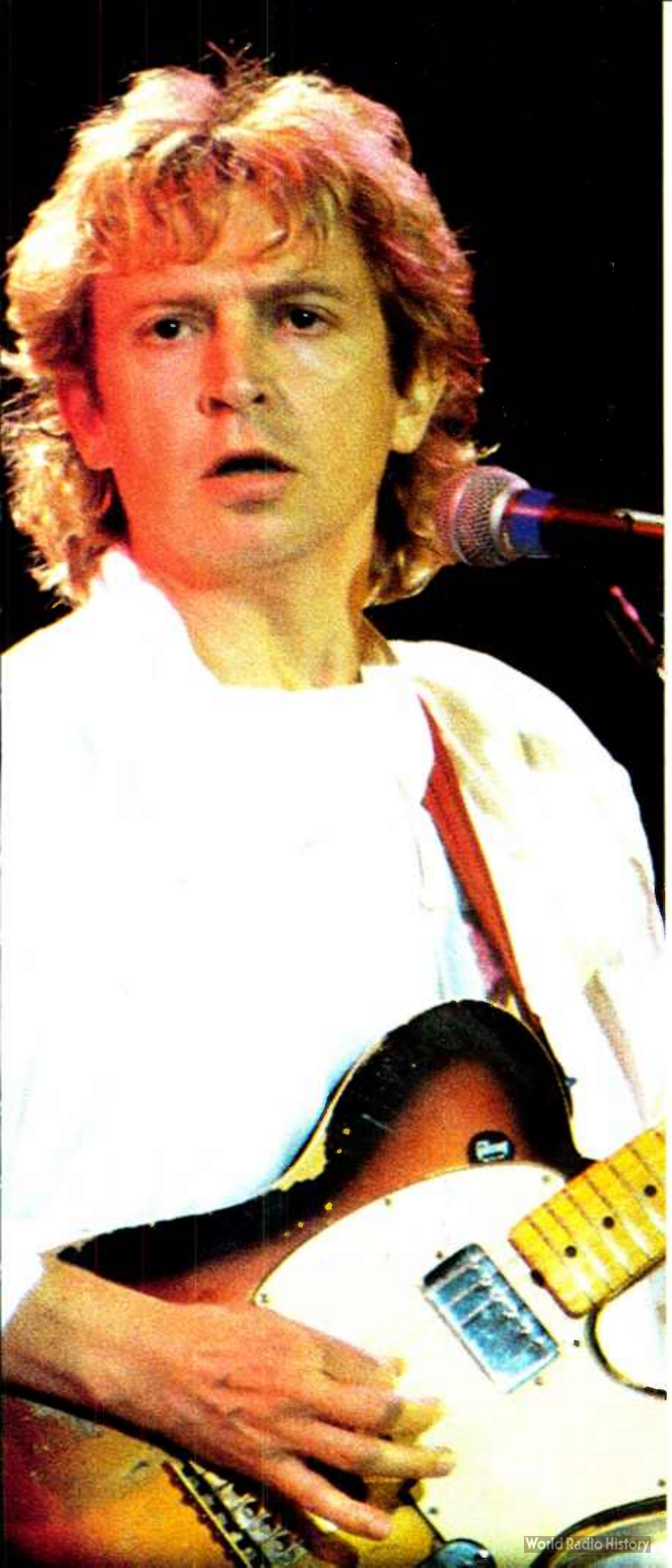
# ANDY SUMMERS MOVES ON

**The Police's guitarist, now running his own private security force, wants to make a point about the past.**

By Jock Baird



It's a sweaty evening at Manhattan's Studio Instrument Rentals, and Andy Summers is putting his new touring band through its paces in the main rehearsal room. Summers stands and delivers at the vocal mike at stage center, earnestly singing tracks from his new solo LP, *XYZ*, and then pulling away to tear off ringing, stinging guitar solos on his cherry red Strat. It's a tight little band cooking behind him, and the journalist leans over and asks Andy's personal engineer/techie Dennis Smith who the players are. Smith readily complies: "The drummer's name is Aaron Amun, the bassist is Alan Thompson, the keyboardist is Tom Eyre, spelled E-Y-R-E, and that guy in the middle, singing the songs," nods Smith, indicating Summers, "his name is spelled S-T-I-N-G."

An idle jest, perhaps, until Summers kicks into "Nowhere," which reprises his much-admired riff from "Message In A Bottle," and follows with a punchy version of the Police classic "I Can't Stand Losing You." For a guy who seldom opened his mouth onstage during the last years of the Police, Andy Summers is doing one hell of a good Sting. Not everything in the show or on *XYZ* is so clearly cop-related, but the album is rich with just the kind of adventurous pop atmospherics that fueled the Police's best work—especially its early work.

It shouldn't amaze anyone that Summers would be able to evoke that same feeling instrumentally—after all, as he vigorously maintains, he *was* an important contributor to the Police's success—but it's very surprising that he would take on the role of lead writer and singer as well, and even more surprising that he could pull it off so convincingly. Two years ago he was intent on putting as much distance as he could between himself and his Police duties, culminating in the second of his off-the-cuff guitar duet LPs with Robert Fripp, *Bewitched*. Back then he was functioning first as the loyal opposition, later as the guerilla opposition. A track like "Mother" could only have been added to *Synchronicity* by a troublemaker. Now, with the release of *XYZ*, it's almost like Summers has formed a government in exile.

"Wonderful! You've given me a good theme to start on," smiles Summers, joining our table at a chic Village pasta palace. "Let me comment on your comments. Since Sting was obviously the principal writer and wrote the pop songs, there was no point in competing with him. He didn't want to sing anyone else's songs anyway. So my only tactic was the more off-the-wall stuff. Also there has to be a certain amount of astringency, and I was the one who provided the lemon juice,

**PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY GERSHOFF/RETNA**

in that sense. Otherwise we might have become a little too rich and sickening. It was the dryness my stuff provided, even going into the way I played guitar, the more astringent harmonies and the space. We weren't a fat and juicy group, we were lean and hard musically.

"In terms of rejecting my role in the group, I guess that's something that's always been with me. I never wanted to be lost in any kind of movement or group that I didn't think was special. So I guess a lot of those things were crystallized in the Police with that tendency to want to flick off on my own. And one of the reasons to do that kind of music was so that there would be no confusion between my solo work and the Police. It would've made no sense to get into opposition with myself. But throughout all this, I had always carried the idea that one day I would do a vocal record and be the leader and write all my own songs. Even before the Police, I was sort of primed to do my own thing. I would've liked to have gotten this album out the first year after the Police, but it's taken a bit longer."

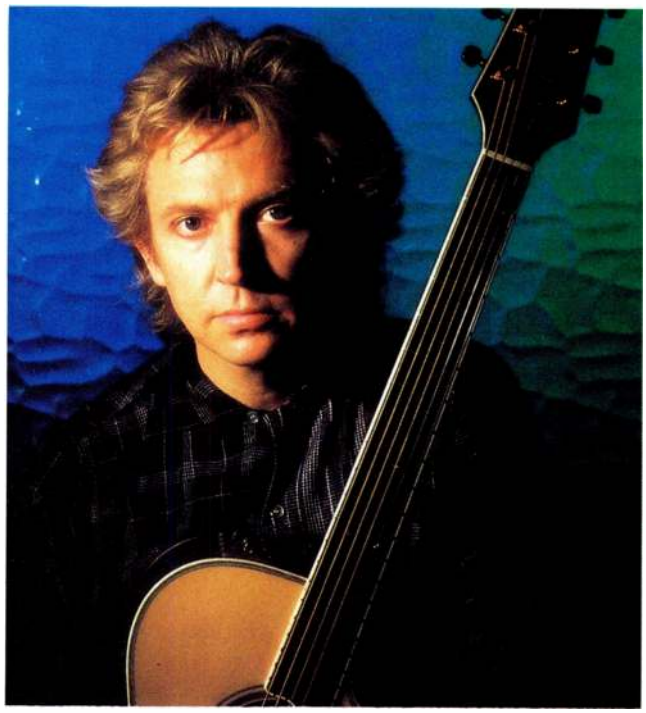
Summers got sidetracked by soundtracks, aided and abetted by his taking up residence near Venice Beach in L.A. His first encounter with Hollywood was *2010*, for which he did a synth-funk remake of the *2001* theme. Summers saw it all as a fairly cold-blooded proposition, but got highly involved nonetheless. "They wanted to get a rock star to do the theme, and see if they could get a video on MTV. They came to me and paid me a lot of money and I did the track. Then, of course, they heard it and tore their hair out that it was too late to put it in the film. It was a piss-off, because I worked hard and did a very good version of it, and they should've ended the film with it."

The sadder, wiser Summers hit paydirt on his next big film project, *Down & Out In Beverly Hills*. Introduced to director Paul Mazursky, Summers pulled out some of his prime home-studio demo tapes and hooked him on one in particular. Summers worked fairly closely with Mazursky in adapting the track to *Down & Out in Beverly Hills* and producing variations, but even so, Summers' musical contributions seemed pretty far down in the mix of the actual film (though prominent on the soundtrack LP). "The politics are intense. It's such bullshit—it's Hollywood. Actually the biggest problem you have to face writing for film is they put in what they call their temp track as they're editing the film; they put in all this bullshit, anything. But they get so used to it that when you compose fresh, new music they can't make the adjustment over to the real stuff."

Summers took full advantage of the windfall profits, though, purchasing a $100,000 Fairlight III to anchor his SMPTE-ready home studio setup. He's now something of a hot property in Hollywood and has another film score out late this summer, but recording *XYZ* put a detour in Andy's road to riches. The hardest part was saying no: "Everyone was calling me and I was turning down hundreds of thousands of dollars. *Tough Guys* was one, *Nobody's Fool....*"

In one respect, the long-deferred solo LP was the direct result of his soundtracks: They had been the first non-photographic work he'd presented to the public that had no collaborator. "It was down to me to put all that together. I had people around me to help, like the engineer and film editor and keyboard player, but I was pretty much on my own."

In a sense, seeking out elite collaborators was a kind of crutch for Summers: "I think back on my career and my life and it's amazing how much has this incredible insecurity with it. But I think a lot of artists are the same. It's a search for where you belong in this great field of music. So you try a bit of this, then this is more me than this, no, I can't do that, it's not me at all. So I was very careful who I chose to play with, because they would be a reflection of me as well. I was very snobby about



**"I wanted to get back to that cool, stripped-down approach."**

that. I'm not sure if I feel that way now. I'm getting very strong ideas of my own."

Thus did Summers throw himself into the making of that elusive solo record, enlisting producer/programmer David Hentschel and working at Devo's studio in L.A. There was no shortage of material: "I keep a sort of catalog of my musical ideas as I go along—when I have time. I always have things on cassettes and I have a notebook in which they're all charted in a weird sort of cryptic code that probably only I can understand. So I had a backlog of stuff that I could dip into."

Summers does indeed have a SMPTE-compatible home studio based around a Fostex 16-track, a Q-lock synchronizer and Sony U-matic mastering machine, but he's never been a big fan of homework: "I'm not too keen on demos. I've always preferred to go to the studio, going to this new framework, psychologically: 'Right, there's the engineer, now I've got to do it.' That works better for me. I'm not one of these guys who can sit around and work away in his living room. It's not my thing." (His Fairlight is too expensive to be taken so lightly, however, and is at a studio where it can be rented during Andy's down-time.)

Finally, Summers decided "the time was right to make the real commitment to time. It's scary, because it can take a lot of time to do one song which may not work out. But you have to take the plunge. And fairly early on, I was up for the idea of getting a great drummer and bass player to see if we could pull off the tracks that way. So I got two very famous guys, very good players, but the problem—which I'd encountered before—was that they couldn't really get the songs, and they couldn't understand the *conception* of the songs the way I did. They seemed to lower the material—I tried for three days with these guys and they just added their licks to what I was doing and it made no sense to me. They didn't seem to be able to play something simple. The drummer in particular...really, I was very angry because there was an attitude I didn't like.

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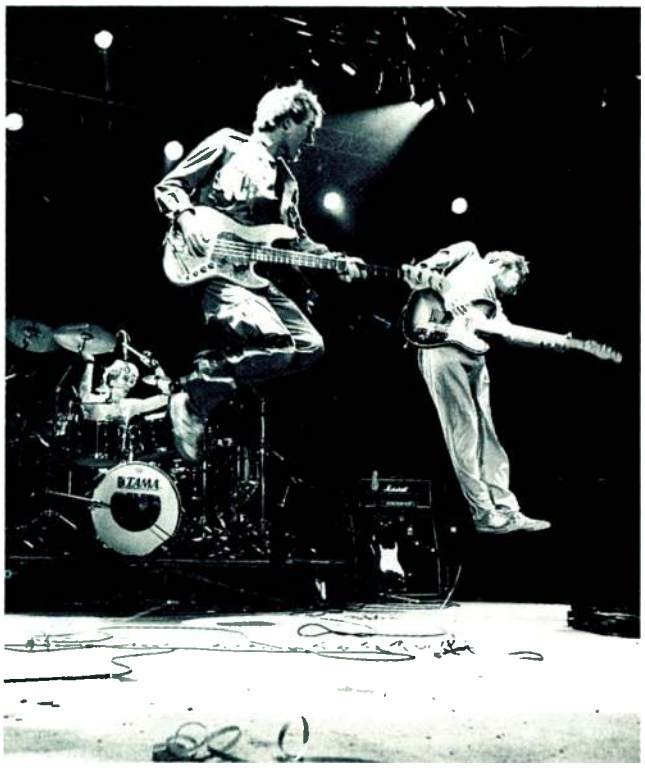

**"I'm just not interested in *fighting* for things anymore."**

"So after that weekend I said, 'No, it's not gonna work. Let's go back to doing it with drum machines and samples,' which I'd already gotten into doing for the film work. David Hentschel did all the programming. He's actually played drums a little bit himself, so he had that advantage." So Hentschel came up with those little Stewart Copelandesque touches like the off-beat snare on "Love Is The Strangest Way"? "Well, Stewart made an impact, let's face it, on anybody who's into drumming."

This was a radical reversal from Summers' previous habit on the Fripp-Summers records of "putting a lot of paint on the canvas and peeling it away." Now he was building it up, adding only what worked. Sort of like the early Police albums, before all the sax overdubs, synth washes and whatnot took hold. "I wanted to get back, yeah. I was always sad that the Police.... You know I wasn't the only one in the group; Sting certainly had his say, obviously, and he'd go through certain fads and if he wanted saxophones on a song, there wasn't a lot I could do about it. But I was never into that—I was much more into the real cool, stripped-down approach. I tried to keep this record as light as I could."

Could it be that Andy's contributions to the Police recipe became more "astringent" because the records became gradually sweeter and sweeter? "True. The difference between the first Police album (*Outlandos d'Amour*) and the fifth one (*Synchronicity*) is incredible. You see a big progression. I probably prefer the first one myself. It's very joyful and spontaneous. The fifth one is, in a sense, more cynical, much more polished, a different thing altogether. It's more controlled, which I enjoy less."

Summers surely didn't set out to recreate the early Police mood and sound, but made no attempt to avoid it, either. "I had a set of concerns when I went in that I was going to try to achieve, but I wasn't sure exactly how to achieve them. But I knew, having been in the process, that as you go along, things start to reveal themselves. You see a path come up and you go down it and find the way. So my concerns were first that this is a vocal album, so I have to make a convincing vocal and the material has to work as songs. So in a sense, I didn't really care if they sounded exactly like the Police or *not* like the Police. It could've gone either way, but I knew I would do the right thing if I just served the songs."

As it happened, the resulting LP, initially called *Quark* and ultimately *XYZ*, went both ways. Although the first single, "Love Is The Strangest Way," and "Nowhere" hit most of the cop cues, other pop vehicles like "Scary Voices" and the sleeper track "Eyes Of A Stranger" show Summers fully capable of off-the-force activity. He gets a lot of his measured vocal performances, shifting ranges and tonalities without obviously showing his weakness. For the opening rehearsals of the tour, Summers seemed slightly more tentative at the mike, but by the first dates was laying on with a will. Overall, each side of the record gradually develops from pure pop into more ambient excursions, the second side concluding with three ambitious and related pieces, "XYZ," "The Only Road" and "Hold Me."

Of ten selections, only a brief one is instrumental, so we're not talking about the kind of ambient excess the Fripp-Summers excursions specialized in. Still, naming the album after that instrumental must at least raise the question that Summers loves that form best and sees the pop format as, at best, a necessary evil. "No, I love pop music. I don't have a cynical view of it at all. I'm not like someone who's yearning to be a jazz player and doing this because his manager told him to. I don't feel that way at all. There's far more prejudice amongst jazz players than rock players; that's my experience. They're far more snotty and I don't see why, because pop music at its best is definitely equal to jazz, I think, and is probably more creative. There seem to be less clichés in it."

One of the noticeably different traits of Summers' album and his stage show is a renewed interest in playing lead guitar, not just atmospheric texture creation, but rip-roaring, scene-stealing raunch. Is it that he enjoys being more direct now? "Probably." It's almost as if Summers were a closet ZZ Top fanatic.... "I *love* ZZ Top! I think they're the best live band in the world. They're wonderful!" Summers is also more frequently seen jumping into jams with guitarist's guitarists—just last week he got into a "total drunken shambles" of a jam with Eric Clapton, Ringo Starr and John Martyn at Island Records' twenty-fifth anniversary party. But most telling is the way he plays live with his touring outfit, with commanding presence and clarity on the grooves, and real charisma on his solos. You forget until you see him play how deeply he's absorbed the experiences of his twenty-three years in rock 'n' roll.

Andy's pre-Police gigs are generally listed as Zoot Money's Big Roll band, the Soft Machine (yes, he was there during Robert Wyatt's tenure; he even lived with Wyatt for a time) and the New Animals, in which he worked with Eric Burdon. But Summers has been in quite a few other bands. He worked with U.K. pre-punk psychotic Kevin Coyne, one of Summers' Blue periods: "Back then, in the early 70s, I was doing a much heavier blues thing, with a lot of slide guitar. It was what a lot of rock players did, but I was a student of it. I went all the way and learned this incredible country blues stuff. I like it all, and I like bringing it all together and making it my own."

There was a stint with Tim ("Walk Me Out In The Morning Dew") Rose, Jon Lord, ex-Soft Machinist Kevin Ayers and

MICHAEL PUTLAND RETNA

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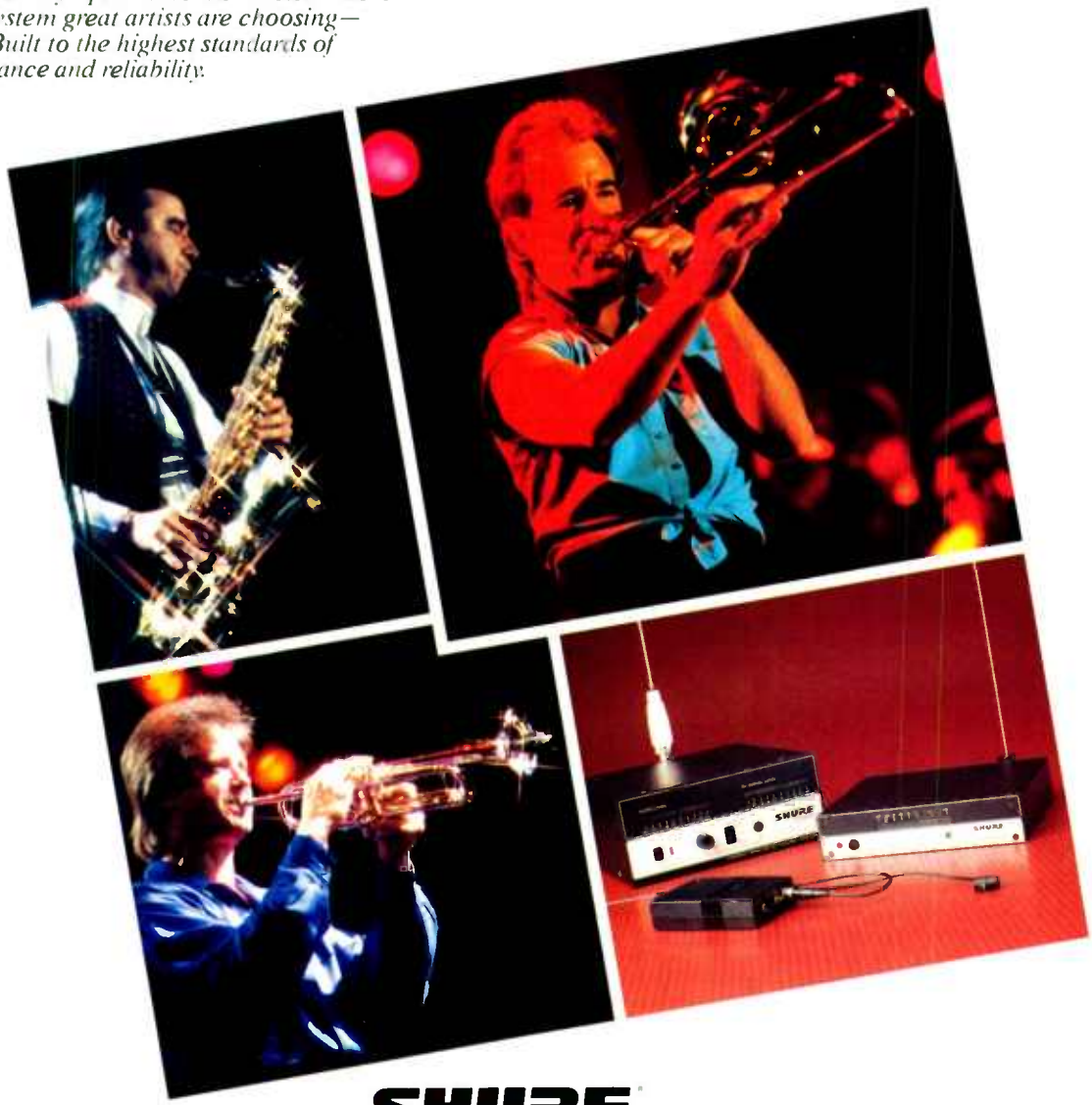


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even Neil Sedaka. Good lord, Andy, Neil Sedaka? "Actually, I met Neil after I came back from California [where Summers had studied classical guitar at Northridge], and I had no money at all, just one guitar. I said to him, 'Can you give me 300 pounds to buy an amplifier?' He'd never heard me play or anything, but he gave me the 300 quid and I went off and bought a Fender Twin Reverb. After he gave me the money he sort of had to give me the gig, so there I was in the deep end. The first gig was at the Royal Festival with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and I was like...*Jesus Christ!* So I toured for four months with him and it was great fun."

It was about 1977 when Summers hooked up with Stewart Copeland and Gordon "Sting" Sumner, both of whom were decidedly unsatisfied with guitarist Henry Padovani. Although the pair hit it off immediately with Summers, they were a bit reticent to give Padovani the boot. Andy had no intention of sharing the guitar chair, however. "I said, 'The only way I'm going to be in this group is if it's a three-piece group, and that's how I see it.' I was very clear about my terms for joining, and I wasn't gonna play with another guitar player, especially if he was inferior to me. His days were numbered anyway—Sting told me he was very unhappy with the situation, and we'd been rehearsing a lot and there was a very strong musical rapport. The Police came to life when I joined."

The Police also worked their billy clubs off: "We didn't stop for seven years. We never stopped. It was incredible how much work we did. It was relentless, the years. We wanted to be successful. Obviously we were making money, and the group was building; every time it went up a little more. We were trying to conquer America. And that's really what it takes. I can see that now."

With his present band, Summers is returning to many of the venues the early Police once played, but in one sense he feels he can never go back to the times when the band simply toured in a station wagon: "It's a different era. I mean, all we had was one small guitar amplifier, a small bass amp and a kit of drums. It's not like that now. You weren't expected to reproduce a modern, state-of-the-art recording. The whole thing has gotten a lot more complex. It's costing $20,000 a week to keep this new band on the road." Summers adds that he fears he may be touring too quickly upon the release of *XYZ*, and may put all but the East Coast dates on hold.

By 1978, Summers was bringing more than a guitar amp to Police gigs; he began working intensively with an Echoplex, using the repeats to form rhythmic textures. It was one of the first rock uses of delay not simply as a coloration, but to generate actual compositional elements: "That's right, they were part of the song. You couldn't write or play the songs without them." Gradually, Summers began to explore more and more combinations, "experimenting with echoes within echoes, reverbs inside digital delays and all that. Very orchestral. And you've got the hold button, where you can hold beats and keep playing forever over it. But still you're creating a sound, a big envelope of sound to go with the vocal. It's slightly different now, because when I'm singing I can't get too complex. But there are still the solos and big areas when we just play, so there are things I can do."

Until recently, Summers stuck by his trusty Echoplex, declaring it sounded better than any digital delay, but he has finally joined the digital and the MIDI age. It's a stack of eleven rack units all controlled from a MIDI effects patcher and pedal designed by Bob Bradshaw, and Summers is ecstatic over it. "What I've achieved with this setup is a real absolute clarity of sound with no extra noise. It's very inspirational to play with, not like the old days when to get a lead sound you had to turn up all the way and have the whole place rumbling with it. It's made me think twice."

It's certainly made Summers think twice about guitar synthesis—he's so thrilled with his new setup he's put his Roland system in the closet indefinitely. "I'm not into guitar synthesis that much anymore. I don't think they make it. I suppose I shouldn't be saying that because I've been known for using them—in fact, *Guitar Player* has just put out a book with me playing one on the cover. But frankly, I thought the last one I had was dreadful. And what about the Stepp guitar? They're selling for half-price in London—you can't get rid of them. I tried that and didn't like it. It doesn't feel like an instrument. My own electric guitar setup is so fantastic, I don't feel I need a synthesizer."

What are the Police songs that Summers remembers most fondly? "I like 'Message In A Bottle.' 'Roxanne''s important because it put us on the map. I always used to like 'Secret Journey,' which wasn't one of our most popular ones. And I also liked 'Tea In The Sahara,' which is a tune we're now playing, but I don't sing. I let [backup vocalist] Nan Vernon sing it. It's kind of nice, just this big, cloudy, sort of backwards echo." Summers has also revived the reggae-ish "So Lonely" and "Omega Man" for his show, in addition to his rousing rendition of "Can't Stand Losing You."

One Police song that some fans—this one definitely included—felt should not have been revived was "Don't Stand So Close To Me," released last year as part of a greatest hits package. Combined with reunion performances for the Amnesty tour, the hope that new material would emerge from a joint studio effort momentarily flickered, but was quickly dashed by a flat remake that was nothing short of sacrilegious. "I think you're right in a way. It was a little bit sacrilegious. Stewart was particularly miffed about having that version come out—he didn't think it was anything like as good. I'll tell you what the real truth is: It was just laziness. We got together last summer to assemble our greatest hits...."

Wait, wasn't it rumored the band would try to record a new album? "Yeah, we were gonna record an album. It was very political and difficult to deal with, and I can't get into it. I'm not going to put myself, in terms of that situation, on the line anymore, like *fight* for things. 'Cause why should I? To me, it's

*continued on page 114*

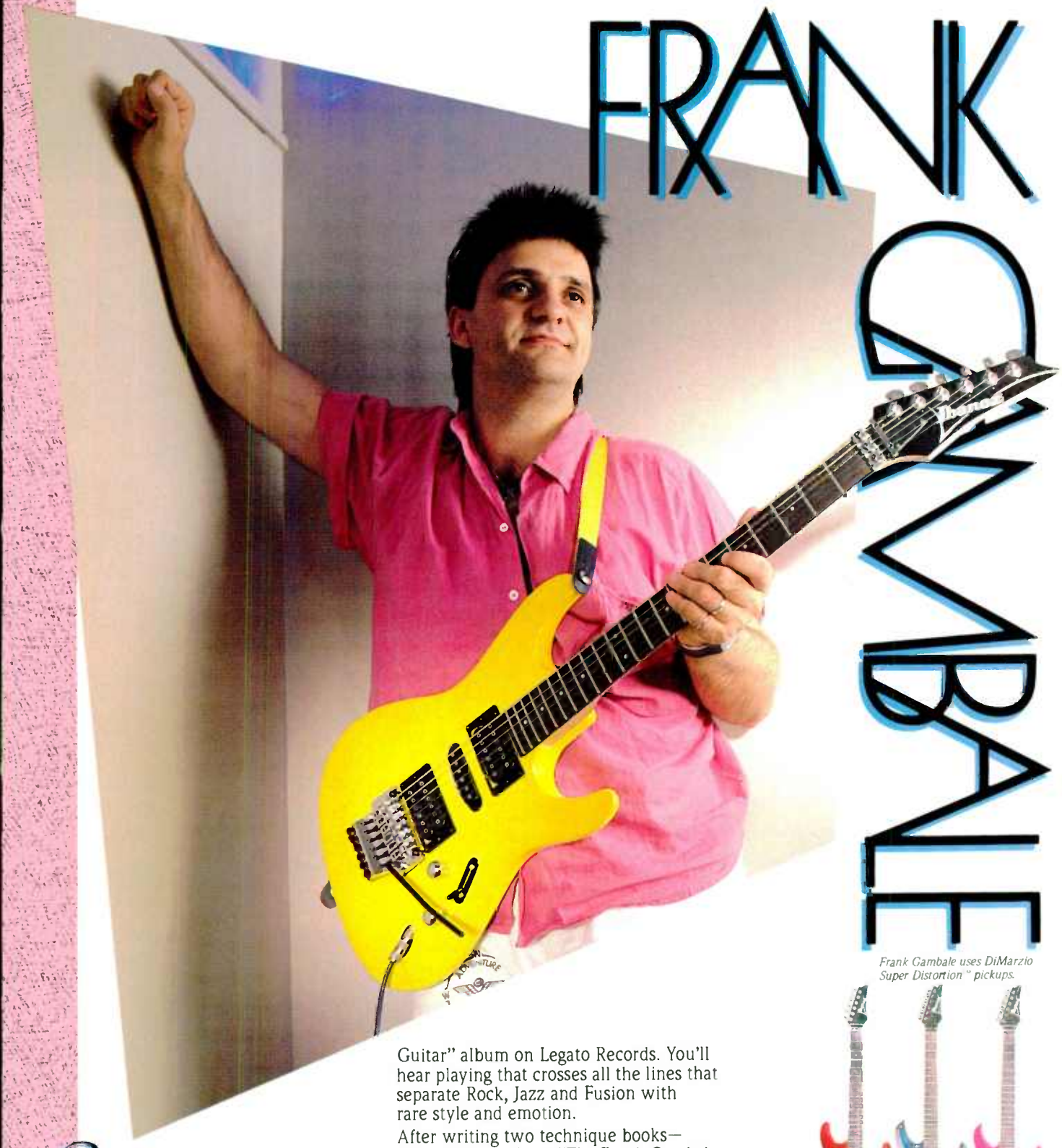
## SUMMERS' STOCK

Andy's pretty much sticking to his '61 red Fender Strat, downplaying the '63 Telecaster he used in the Police. He also has a pair of Gibsons, a '64 175 and a '58 ES-335, plus an old Martin D-28, a Coral electric sitar and a Steinberger bass. The super-effects rack Bob Bradshaw cooked up for him includes a Lexicon PCM-70, a Yamaha SPX90 and two D-15s, a Roland DEP-5 and SRV-2000, a Dytronics CS-5 compressor, Rane PE-15 eq and a Rocktron Hush III and RX1. He uses Marshall amps piped through MESA/Boogie M-180 bottoms.

Drummer **Aaron Amun** plays Pearl drums, Zildjian cymbals and a Roland Octapad MIDIed to an Akai S900 sampler. Bassist **Alan Thompson** pumps a Yamaha RBX bass through a Roland Dimension D and Yamaha SPX90 into a Crown amp with JBL speakers.

Keyboardist **Tom Eyre**, who used to work for Wham!, has a humongous MIDI pile consisting of a Roland MKS-1000 motherboard, an E-mu E-max, Yamaha TX7 and DX7II, Roland MKS-20, JX8P and PG-800 programmer, all mixed through a Soundcraft 200. Star of the setup, though, has to be a real, Leslie-equipped Hammond B-3 organ. Onstage, Tom also runs the Roland MC-500 sequencer, which drives some of the above, plus Roland 727 and 707 drum boxes.

# FRANK GAMBALE



Chick Corea, John-Luc Ponty and Jeff Berlin all share one thing, besides of course, being at the very pinnacle of their craft—the services of guitarist Frank Gambale. Growing up in Australia, no one told Frank that there were any boundaries or limitations to the guitar. He developed a style that grew from what he heard in his head. Not what was considered safe or acceptable. Just listen to Chick Corea's Elektric Band "Light Years", Jeff Berlin's "Pump It" or Frank's own "Brave New Guitar" album on Legato Records. You'll hear playing that crosses all the lines that separate Rock, Jazz and Fusion with rare style and emotion.

After writing two technique books—"Speed Picking" and "The Frank Gambale Technique Book Part I", plus teaching at G.I.T. in Hollywood, Frank is readying his second solo album—"A Present For The Future", for release. Pretty impressive stuff. Frank's choice of guitars? Ibanez—also pretty impressive stuff. Check one out at your nearest authorized Ibanez dealer.

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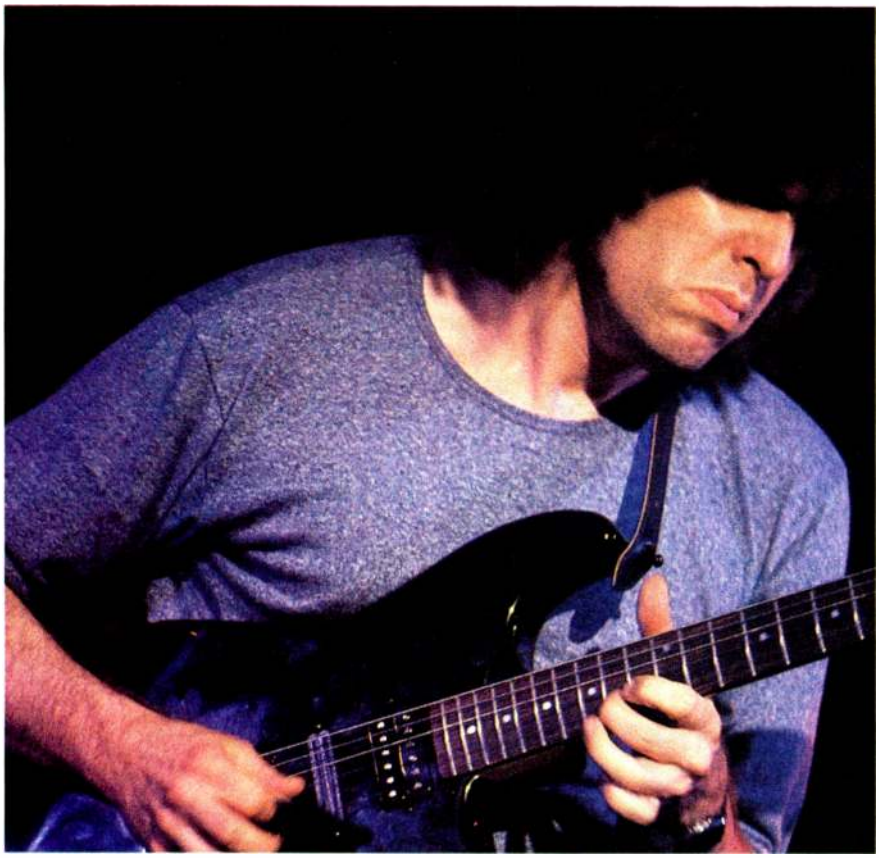


# Mike Stern's Either/Or Fusion Philosophy

**Miles smiles when Stern steers to extremes of pentatonic wailing and hard bop chromaticism.**

**By Josef Woodard**

INCHING TOWARD THREE A.M. ON a spring Thursday, most of the world is in the arms of Morpheus. At the tiny 55 club in Greenwich Village, Mike Stern decides it's a fine time to break into the bop classic "Donna Lee" at a tempo designed to separate men from boys and dilettantes from diehards. The guitarist issues some swift, spidery chops to the delight of a guitar-intensive crowd who probably 1) heard Stern blow fretwork steam with the first 80s Miles band, 2) sopped up the sleek electrified fusion of *Upside Downside*, Stern's first real solo album that he'll claim pride in, or 3) saw Stern's picture on the cover of a big-time guitar magazine.

Having recently bucked a mean chemical dependency and emerged afresh as a major figure in the current jazz guitar scene, Stern seems especially adroit and alert. But even *he* has his limits. Trying to fend off the encore-hungry throng, he shrugs to the crowd: "Please," he says with a genuinely contrite grin, "I have to get up at seven tomorrow morning."

Stern doesn't mind being an early bird at the moment, now that he has a new lease on physiological and artistic life. His sights are set on self-improvement as a musician, on trying out new ideas and chiseling his technique to a fine art. This is where his long-standing gig at the 55 comes in handy. "That's why I do it," he laughs. "It's not because of the beauty of the place. We know it as 'the dump.' But it's great to have. To have a regular gig in New York City is pretty amazing anyway; you can't find a street corner nowadays. Wherever I am, I love having a place to try things out and practice. When I first started playing there they never advertised, so it was like two drunks drooling at the bar saying 'turn down' or calling out, 'Play "Melancholy Baby."' The place doesn't take much to make it look swamped."

Two months later and 3,000 miles away, Stern is the lauded guitar player in saxist Michael Brecker's first band as a leader. The guitarist sits down for an interview after a burning set at Oscar's in Santa Barbara, California. Stern played guitar alongside Brecker in Steps Ahead, but, as opposed to that aggregate's poppish tint, this line-up draws a sterner line to capital-J jazz. It strikes me that Stern is a champion of the modern jazz guitar because of a certain *either/or* musical ideal. No, we're not talking about the philosophical tenets of Kierkegaard, but the case of jazz/rock versus *jazz-rock*. Avoiding the middle ground of fusion clichés, Stern steers to the extremes of pentatonic wailing or hard bop chromaticism; he screams out bent notes on his Tele with the overtone-rich beefiness of Roy Buchanan or Albert Collins, only to unwind heady jazz phrasings on the next tune.

"I come by that honestly," he offers, "because of influences I've had—from Hendrix to Jim Hall and Wes and B.B. King, as far as guitar players go. As for music in general, I like both. I've got to go with that. Some people say, 'Well, you should play one way or the other.' That's changing now; there are more groups who are getting frustrated with just one or the other."

Stern is no stranger to the New York scene. His work with bassist Harvey Swartz, for instance, on record and onstage, is a case of happy interaction. At one time Stern played trio guitar gigs with his wife, Leni, and the ever-enigmatic Bill Frisell (who appeared on Leni's *Clairvoyant* album last year). "We did that a couple of times a couple of years ago in New York at another club at 55 Grand Street." What is it with the number 55 and Stern? "It seems to keep

CLAUDIA THOMPSON

appearing. I don't know why. I'm starting to get nervous." Stern gets a bit more serious with the memory of rough waters. "We did some stuff and I can't remember it very well; some of those years escape me. About three years ago I finally just had to cool out completely, as far as alcohol and drugs."

It was during his dark phase that Stern cut his debut album, *Neesh* (as in Monty Python's "neesh"-spouting knights). The recollection is hazy, the vinyl artifact an unsavory reminder for him. "It's weird. I did that while I was out there; I literally wasn't *there* in the mix. I can't be objective about it. Whenever I hear myself on tape, I'm one of those people who can't be objective and usually I just don't like it. Although you have to listen to learn, usually I'm overly critical. There are a couple of people interested in rereleasing it, but I just nixed it. I want to remember that period, but not too much," he grins amiably. "Just enough so I don't go back and do that again—not too much, not in my face."

If ever there was a case of artistic vindication, it is Stern's Atlantic debut of last year, *Upside Downside*, a supremely tasteful fusion excursion which gave new hope to those who thought that electric jazz had gone the way of *Miami Vice*. The record's alternately edgy and elegant surfaces show none of the strain that went into its conjuring. "I don't know why, but it's difficult sometimes to do records. It is for everybody, but, for me, it's like," he cops a grimace, "*yeeeee*. You have to listen to it over and over again. There are some people who just walk out of it; they do their soloing and split. But if you're doing your own record, you can't do that. I just figured, well, it's time to not be so precious about it and just do it.

"It gave me an excuse to get into writing again. I figured if I'm going to do it, I'm going to try to write all the music, which is the way it turned out. I like the way it came out, actually. We didn't have that big a budget, so we had to do the basics a little fast. I would have liked to do less overdubs. It's a live-sounding record, but I'd like it to be more so.

"It was therapeutic, painful. Sort of like castor oil," he laughs. "It's good for you, but watch out. I'm making it too

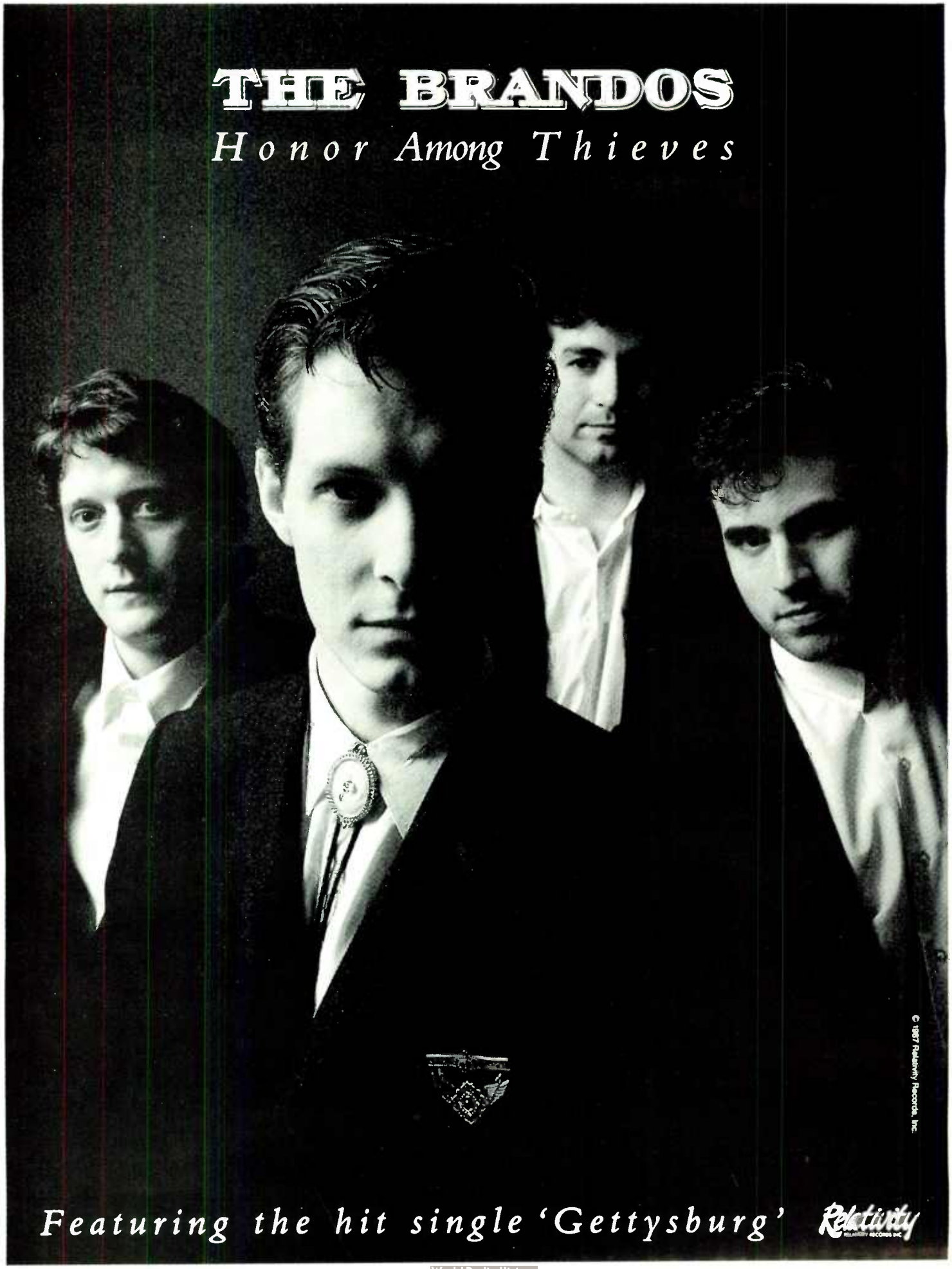


## STERNER STUFF

Stern's axe of choice is a Telecaster, hardly a common tool of jazz players. He became smitten with the Tele sound by virtue of an inspiring model that he once had—previously owned by Roy Buchanan and subsequently heisted. His current Tele was built by the Boston-based Michael Berenson (who once ran Michael's Pub, where Stern played a fateful gig with Bill Evans that led to his Miles connection). It sports a Broadcaster neck and pickups by Seymour Duncan and Bill Lawrence.

Part of Stern's signature sound results from his use of bi-amping, creating a composite tone that incorporates varying shades of hard and soft, clean and dirty timbres. "I've been doing that for about ten years. I don't like playing through just one amp. I like the chorus effect and the bigger sound. It's very hard to get dynamics out of a guitar, especially on a big stage. This makes it easier, not so much for volume; I use it more for sound. But you've got to be careful; with two amps, you can blow out everybody and melt down half the club."

Most often these days, Stern mates a Yamaha G100 212 amp (with JBL speakers) with a stack—a Peavey aluminum head and Hartke or AMP speaker cabinet on the bottom. "Between the two of them, it's real clear and it's still warm sounding. It's not a wash of notes at all. At the same time, it's not real caustic, for the picking legato sound. When I want to go into a more rock, sustain sound, I use this Boss distortion unit. That's it."



dramatic. It was a lot of fun, too."

Suddenly, Stern had to put on the unfamiliar shoes of bandleader, guiding a group that included bassist Mark Egan, *wunderkind* drummer Dave Weckl and keyboardist Mitch Egan. "The first time doing that is difficult. It is for Michael over there, too," he points to Brecker, perched in the corner of the dim-lit club. "He never seemed it, he seems so natural. The way he likes to run a band is the way I think of it; that you're working *with* people. Ultimately, you've got to call the shots because it's your music, your project, and you've got to pull people's coats or just give them direction. Otherwise they don't know. It's kind of scary."

As a writer, too, Stern shows great promise, belying his modesty. The twining melodic turns of "Scuffle," the abidingly sweet flavor of "Little Shoes," or the thornier harmonic turf of "Choices"—from the *Michael Brecker* LP—paint a hale picture of compositional instinct. "I'm relatively new at it," Stern says of writing. "Even playing, I'm relatively new at in a way. I've done that a lot more, but I'm approaching it very differently than three years ago, since I've cooled out. I'm more focused now, more serious. I'm starting to ask myself questions like 'What do I really want to say?' It's not so much just trying to do the job; I'm trying to focus in a little bit more on my own voice and trying to figure out what that is.

"A big influence—both in writing and for playing—is Pat Metheny. His music is very convincing, very honest. Some of it sounds real melodic. Some of it's not too dissonant, but he can *do* that. That's some dissonant stuff on the recent album he did with Ornette. Even the out stuff, in a weird way, is very melodic—the outest lines have a method to them."

It was in Boston in the mid-70s that Stern first encountered Metheny, with whom he shares both a penchant for lyricism and a consuming ear-to-ear grin. The relationship was a student-teacher one in the beginning; the rock-weaned Stern sought harmonic wisdom at Berklee, where the precocious Metheny was dispensing knowledge. "He was about eleven," Stern chuckles. "No, he was nineteen and I was twenty-one. He heard me play and said, 'It sounds good to me.' I was playing all the wrong notes, but I guess he liked my style. So he said, 'Well, we'll just play.' He would suggest things and finally he kind of pushed me out of Berklee."

Through Metheny, Stern landed his

*continued on page 113*

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Glenn Branca: Taking cues from Aerosmith and Varèse.

JOHN SUAREZ

# Gonzo Guitarists & the Big Whack(o) Attack

BELLS ARE RINGING. LOUDLY. A celestial choir screams in epiphanic ecstasy. And the wings of a thousand hornets cut the air with their nagging ripsaw hum.

Relax, it's only a symphony. Nine electric guitarists are putting the white knuckles to their oddly-tuned axes, wringing out chords that swell into a tsunami of sound that threatens to topple the old oaken-walled theater, but breaks into a soundtrack for the apocalypse. No mirrors. No curtains. No synthesizers. It's just the magic of meshing overtones, stock-in-trade for composer Glenn Branca and his ensemble.

Welcome to the world of wacked-out guitarists. It's midway between the rock/jazz underground and the boho art scene, filled with composers and soloists with a decided bent for the decidedly bent. They're sophisticated noise-makers who dabble in weird tunings, anarchic improvisations, exotic genre-blending, homemade instruments and alien compositional techniques. Stone serious about their music, they mess around, but they don't mess around.

Many have crept out of lower Manhattan's diverse noise noir scene, which embraces bands like Sonic Youth and the Swans, cranks like Lydia Lunch and Jim "Foetus" Thirwell, composers like Branca and Rhys Chatham, and avant-gardists-about-town like Fred Frith and Elliott Sharp. Way out west, the L.A. and San Francisco areas have spawned a slew of free-thinking stringslingers: Henry Kaiser, ex-Black Flagger Greg Ginn, the late D. Boon of the Minutemen and Joe Biaza, co-boss of free-form poetry/jazz/rock outfit Saccharine Trust, among others.

They're all dedicated boatrockers, but this year Branca, Kaiser, Sharp and Ginn are making some of the biggest waves in this stormy sea of sound. Branca recently debuted his sixth full-length symphony, "Devil Choirs At The Gates Of Heaven," and plans to record it this fall. Kaiser's penned a dozen albums into his calendar, crammed between blitzkrieg tours of Europe and Japan, and his day jobs scoring local television shows and teaching underwater scientific research at U.C. Berkeley. Sharp's just put out two records that are atypical even for him, and he'll unveil an opus for thirteen musicians at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in November. And Ginn, with his bands Black Flag and the all-instrumental Gone *kaput*, is writing new music and spearheading an effort by SST Records—the label owned by him and ex-Black Flag bassist Chuck Dukowski—to issue a proliferation of albums by wire-walking guitar players, including Kaiser, Sharp, Biaza and rocker Glenn Phillips.

That said, pretend it's mid-June. Glenn Branca's been a madman all week, rehearsing, rethinking and rewriting the movements of his new symphony before its two-night stand at the Sanders Theater, a gloomy old hall on Harvard's Cambridge, Massachusetts campus. "I'm crazy, the way I work," he says. "I hate to finish anything." But finish he does, more or less. After a shaky premiere he makes a battery of adjustments to compensate for the Sanders' boomy acoustics. The piece finally unrolls like a blistering juggernaut, spiked with scalding tempos and a latticework of overtones and textures that conjure voices, horns, violins and cathedral chimes from thin air. Three hundred years earlier Branca would have been hanged for witchcraft by the Commonwealth's governors. Today, he's underwritten by a state grant. Times change.

"Much of my work has to do with what I call 'acoustic phenomena,'" Branca explains. "It's what happens when you start to hear things other than guitars.

NAOMI PETERSEN

**Henry Kaiser: Making contact with the great musical unknown.**

Things like strings or brass or voices, or sometimes screaming or chanting and other non-musical sounds that are still penetrating in a really musical way. What I'm trying to do is put that in a bottle, so I can make it happen anywhere."

Branca's a self-taught guitarist, a trained thespian and an instinctual

**Glenn Branca, Henry Kaiser, Elliott Sharp and Greg Ginn have madness in their method.**

**By Ted Drozdowski**

rocker. Most of his pieces carry a kick-ass beat. And he's as likely to take cues from Aerosmith as Edgard Varèse. It all started in 1974, when Branca took his degree in stage direction and started the experimental Bastard Theater in Boston. Needing music for his plays, he dusted off the guitar he'd shelved as a kid and started composing. That led to experiments with tapes, synthesizers and electronics. "Eventually," he says, "I couldn't hold down the urge to start a rock band."

So Branca hustled his troupe to New York in 1976 and led two early no wave bands, the Theoretical Girls and the Static, on the side. But it wasn't until the 1979 Easter bash at Max's Kansas City that he laid the groundwork for his natty guitar symphonies. "The Theoretical Girls were invited to play, but I wanted to do something different," he recalls. "I had written a piece called 'Instrumental (For Six Guitars).' One section that worked let chords overlap in a sustained fashion. I was just letting the piece resonate, generating a continuous field of sound. It sounded amazing, and within six months I'd dropped everything else I was doing."

He'd discovered pearls hiding in ringing pig piles of overtones. So Branca began fiddling with tunings based on the harmonic series, guitars with every string set to the same note, and full-cranked amps to up the aural ante. Next came a spate of homespun gizmos geared to generating harmonics: mallet guitars, electrics modified with a middle bridge that are struck with sticks or hammers; refretted guitars; the harmonics guitar, a plank with three bridges and pickups that's played with a slide; and the charming Geigenwork, a harpsichord-like instrument that uses motors, strings and leather discs to generate delicately sustained overtones.

Branca's happy obsession with harmonics has yielded fourteen short works, his half-dozen symphonies and four albums; he's hit the road for lectures, and taken his ensemble across the U.S. and Europe when he's found willing listeners and benign patrons. At home, Branca's monolithic chud has inspired noisemongers like the Swans, Sonic Youth, Live Skull and Rat-At-Rat-R. "My music," he offers, "is part of an ongoing process. My compositions are just where I've come to a stop at a given point in that work. So in a strange way, I've been writing one piece of music for ten years and I still haven't gotten it right."

Don't expect such a methodical m.o. from Henry Kaiser. The Oakland, California-based guitarist, composer and skindiver has the musical metabolism of a rodent, chewing through project after project. In December he finished Crazy Backwards Alphabet's debut album, a good example of what would have happened if Captain Beefheart had kidnapped Little Feat. Then there was *Live, Love, Larf & Loaf*, a giddy collaboration between Kaiser, Fred Frith, Richard Thompson and ex-Beefheart drummer John French. He's recently released a record of Synclavier pieces wrapped around an adaptation of Daniel Pinkwater's children's story *The Devil In The Drain*, and now he's off to Italy to play a week of gigs and cut wax with the granddaddy of free jazz improvisers, Sonny Sharrock. When he gets back, it's more of the same with Bill Frisell, Korean composer Gin Hi Kim, comic strip artist Matt Groening and his old buddies in Invite the Spirit, drummer Charles K. Noyes and Sang-Won Park.

Altogether this eclectic eccentric's crammed fifty records into his resume, and often at a moment's notice. Take the first Invite the Spirit album: "Charles K. Noyes and I have always been big devotees of traditional Korean music. I was with Charles in New York in 1983 when we found out that Sang-Won Park, one of the finest kayagum players in the world and a big hero of ours, was in the city. So we called him up and said, 'Hey, do you want to make a record?' He thought we were crazy, and when we said, 'We'll just make it up in the studio,' he thought we were really crazy. So we met and recorded it without ever having played together before. And to me, it's a real special record."

Kaiser has a knack for squeezing into musical tight spots and the chops to burn his way out. He blends Eastern tonalities and scales with the downhome earthiness of a delta bluesman, and he's a master stringbender. "What I learned from the blues players and the East Indian and Asian players is that how you play a note is just as important as what that note is," he says. "Listen to someone like Albert Collins and he's got a million ways to bend a note. In traditional Chinese music, they have fifty notated ways to attack a note. That's where a lot

**Elliott Sharp: A composer in combat boots.**

of expression is, and that's real important to me."

So are his instruments. Kaiser assembles his own Fender-style mongrels with Modulus Graphite necks and Bartolini or Alembic pickups. They run through frequently overdriven Howard Dumble amps. "I try to get sort of what the studio guitarists in L.A. would have: the cleanest, most versatile-sounding guitar that I can play easily with medium-gauge strings and relatively high action. I want the most color and sounds I can get out of the pickups, and I want to be able to bend the notes as much as I can.

"I guess I'm really a technique-oriented player in that I work hard on developing new kinds of chops, keeping them up and getting new ideas," says Kaiser. "But then I'm really big on random input and taking chances, too.

ANDREAS STERZING

Originally I considered myself a free improviser in the tradition of people like Derek Bailey and Eric Parker coming out of England and Europe in the late 60s and early 70s. My style really just reflects my listening. I grew up here in California during the late 60s when free-form radio was just getting going. I heard a very wide variety of musics from free jazz to Indian music to twentieth-century classical and blues. When I started teaching myself guitar in 1972 in the middle of college, I wanted to play the same things I'd been listening to, so I did.

"I just keep going, looking for new territory, and for me that quest, that process, is an exciting thing. Another exciting thing is that when you're on that quest and you're a musician, you have a relationship with an audience, and you can share that contact you have with the great musical unknown or whatever. You can function as a medium or a shaman between that world and the audience, and that's fun."

Elliott Sharp's got his own notion of fun. He plays the numbers. That is, he often uses tunings based on the mathematical ratios in the Fibonacci Series (which runs 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, etc.) and other number systems. It's part of his passion for overtones. With other techniques like just intonation, this composer in combat boots says it's easy to produce clear harmonics, especially those pesky thirds and sixths that skulk in the background of standard tuning.

Riffing, rhythm and 'rithmetic have been Sharp's Three Rs since 1968, when the then-teenager won a National Science Foundation grant that plopped him in a Carnegie Mellon University lab for the summer. "I spent most of my time designing better fuzzboxes and playing with a multi-head tape deck they had," he confesses. "By the end of summer, I no longer wanted to be a scientist."

From psychedelic blues bands to late nights listening to Karlheinz Stockhausen and Inuit Indian singing, Sharp set off on an odyssey that's taken him through an astonishing variety of musics from around the globe. He's had long, nasty bouts with academia, and a rewarding association with Roswell Rudd at Bard College that refined his improvising skills. Described by friends as "frighteningly facile," Sharp's adept on trombone, bass, soprano sax, mandolin, clarinet, a slew of stringed Third World instruments and jerry-rigged gee-gaws like the tubinet (a bass clarinet with a tuba's mouthpiece) and pantar (a kitchen pan with a neck, strings and a pickup). But his mainstay is a mutant guitar/bass double-neck, a hybrid of Fernandes, Fender, Seymour Duncan and DiMarzio parts that Sharp says "gives me all my favorite basic guitar sounds."

You'll find none of those sounds on Sharp's two recent records. One's a collection of string compositions called *Tessalation Row*. The other's *In The Land Of The Yahoos*, a post-hip-hop collaboration with a string of singers that's heavy on synthesizers and sampling. Not too surprising, since Sharp's association with bands like Carbon, I/S/M, the Hi-Sheriffs of Blue, Mofungo and Semantics puts him at the epicenter of the soundquake that's been shaking New York City since the mid-70s.

Yet Sharp's music has shown a sophistication foreign to many of the Naked City's noisemakers. Take his 1981 opera *Innosense*: completely improvised against eight channels of prepared tapes and organized in Fibonacci numbers to form a bell curve-shaped palindrome. Or *Larynx*, the work for thirteen musicians he'll debut at the Brooklyn Academy this November. "The title came out of my interest in Mongolian and Tibetan throat singing," Sharp says. "It's an exploration of the throat as orchestra, or, in this case, the orchestra as a throat."

Both are lofty projects that trumpet Sharp's polished, wiz-kid background. In contrast, Greg Ginn is a gut puncher. He started seminal West Coast punk outfit Black Flag in 1977 and shepherded its rise to a national institution despised by parents and adored by their skateboard-toting, skinheaded kids. In the process, Ginn's china shop bull attack became the model for a generation of hardcore and speed-metal stringsmackers.

"What a lot of people don't understand about Black Flag is that we practiced all the time," says Ginn. "When we were at home, we played more than we did on tour. It was really intensive, and I think that caused a lot of personnel changes. But I felt that we should always work on new stuff and practice several hours a day. When Henry [Rollins, the band's charismatic mouthpiece] was going more into movies and poetry and other things, I felt it was getting too distracted. Instead of making Black Flag a part-time thing, I didn't want to keep going."

But before Black Flag folded, it changed enough to alienate many diehard fans. The music grew more complex, the lyrics more penetrating. And while the *Family Man* album offered a side of Rollins' barechested poetry, the all-instrumental *The Process Of Weeding Out* violated punk's long-standing taboo on virtuosity.

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ALESIS

"When Henry began doing poetry readings, the rest of the band still wanted to play intensively, so we started performing around L.A. as an instrumental group," Ginn says. "I had always been into improvised music, but Black Flag was the first band I'd ever played with. So it took quite a while before I was good enough and the right people were in the band to play long abstract pieces. Then the group changed again, and the new people weren't as interested in developing the instrumental side."

That's why Ginn formed Gone, a roaring distillation of Black Flag and the Mahavishnu Orchestra. Through two albums and a few fast tours, Gone was a showcase for Ginn's furious fretwork: a blend of dizzying chromatic scales, raw dissonance, modal leaps and metal thud—all screaming through an Ibanez guitar synth jacked into 1500 watts of solid-state sound.

"There were more obvious jazz influences in Gone, but I think that older and freer jazz has always been a big influence on me...Coltrane, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker. The Mahavishnu Orchestra really hit me, too, because I first heard it on a rock station and it was so strong. But the ground Mahavishnu broke didn't move in the direction I'd have liked. I wanted to see more freedom, more territories being opened, as opposed to just a form that's sellable, like fusion. That's what Gone and Black Flag instrumental was about."

Gone's gone now and Ginn's laying back: writing more material, working at his label and waiting for the right playing partners to come along. "I know that this kind of music is difficult listening, and with today's crack-induced attention spans it's not necessarily fitting with the mood of the times," he opines. "But I don't care. As long as I can do it and there's enough interest to pay for the recordings, that's undeniable success at a certain level. That's enough for me." M



## WHACKED AXES

**Glenn Branca** and company used seventeen guitars for the premiere of Symphony No. 6: a Telecaster, a Strat, a Les Paul and an armada of Harmonys and other pawn shop specials. For amps, it's Fender Twins and Super Reverbs. No effects, thanks.

On the other hand, **Henry Kaiser** augments his custom guitars and Dumble amps with an Overdrive and two Steel String Singers, and a rack loaded with a Chandler Industries tube preamp, a dbx 160X compressor, a Lexicon Super Prime Time digital delay, an ADA Pitchtraq harmonizer, tc's 2290 digital delay and "some kind of reverb. I use a Lexicon 200 reverb in the studio that I sometimes take with me." He's also got a Synclavier, mostly for film and TV scores, and speaks highly of Zeta Systems' MIDI guitar.

**Elliott Sharp**'s double-neck was made by N.Y.C. luthier Ken Heer, but Sharp was solely responsible for yanking the frets out of his Vox, a Norma and a cheesy Strat copy. He plays a real Stratocaster for rock gigs, and uses a Kramer MIDI Guitar Interface with an Ensoniq Mirage sampler when he's inclined to synthesize. For guitars, it's a Fender 75 amp with an Ibanez Tube Screamer. For basses, Trace Elliots or Ampeg SVTs are his choice. His newest acquisition is a Fender six-string bass.

**Greg Ginn** also uses his Ibanez MIDI guitar to program bass lines, and he's got a Linn 9000 sequencer drum machine to help build those grooves. Since the first Black Flag record he's used solid-state amps and favors a setup that includes either Yamaha or Roland preamps, a 1500-watt Carver power amp and a 1500-watt monitor for the Ibanez that was built by Rat Sound of North Hollywood. He has several basses, but his current fave's a Fender stereo Precision Elite.

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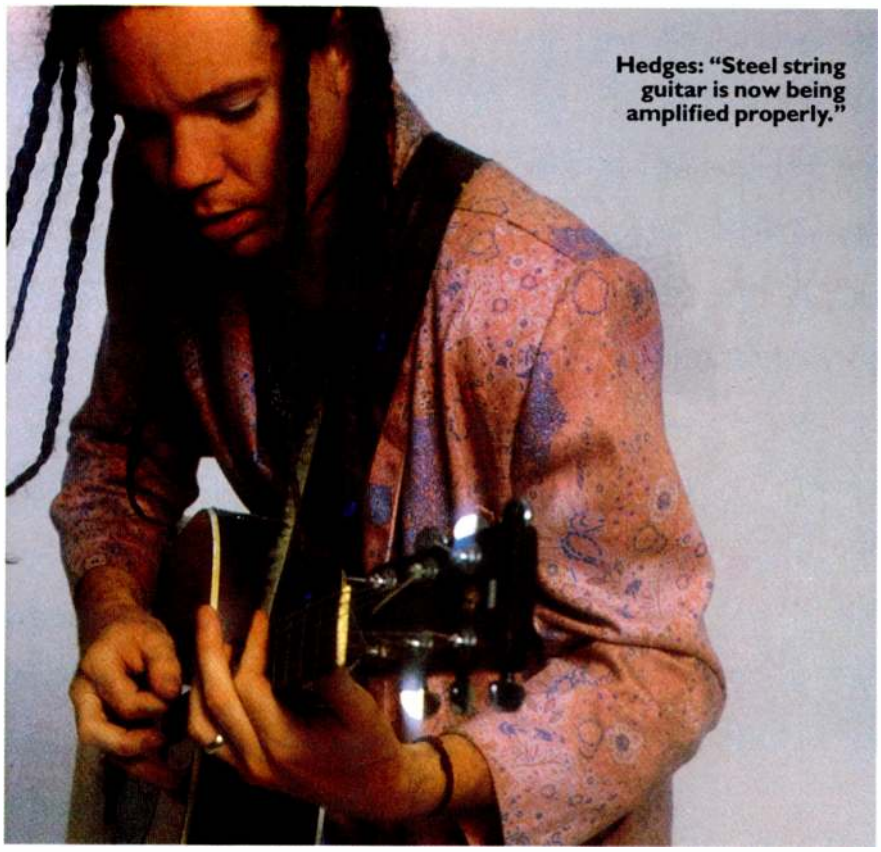

Hedges: "Steel string guitar is now being amplified properly."

**Who would've thought that in 1987 acoustic guitar would make a big comeback? Michael Hedges, Alex de Grassi, Steve Tibbetts and Leo Kottke, to name a few.**

# Acoustic Rebirth: The Wooding of America

**By Josef Woodard**

When John Fahey spawned his Takoma label in the late 60s, his aim was true. The elliptical sage of the solo acoustic guitar was a square peg with no place in the holes it took to fill the music industry. So he created his own home. Takoma embodied the Thoreauan tenets of the then-embryonic finger-style guitar scene—a small-but-feisty company, the little company that *could*, on its own humble terms. The acoustic guitar was as much a part of the post-60s American dream as the electric; every other living room had one, and a Martin D28 is infinitely more conducive to playing by Walden Pond than a Stratocaster.

Little did Fahey know how the scene he fostered would develop, and that twenty years later the acoustic guitar would enjoy a full flowering that would take it from Walden Pond to Carnegie Hall. There, fingers would coax pleasant sounds under the Windham Hill banner to the delight of, well, the masses. It's been a strange gestation period; what began as a cottage industry for a cult following has become a certified phenomenon in the 80s, just when you'd assume technology had rendered such things obsolete. Who can figure it?

The market today is rife with goods. Preston Reed's *The Road Less Traveled* (Rounder), is a fine example of finger-style, Travis-picking expertise. Jorma Kaukonen has been on the acoustic case for years, with Hot Tuna and on his solo LPs on the Relix label. ECM has done its share, even before the current gold rush; Pat Metheny's *New Chatauqua*, Bill Connors' *Swimming With A Hole In My Head* and Bill Frisell's import dark horse *In Line* belong in any serious acoustiphile's collection. So do records by George Cromarty, Pierre Bensusan, Stefan Grossman, John Renbourn and Bert Jansch. The acoustic guitar archive, once sparse and the stuff of specialists, has truly become a viable entity.

A sort of mutual admiration society seems to exist among the figures in the acoustic revolution. Just as Leo Kottke went to Fahey in a sort of pilgrimage almost two decades ago, young Floridian guitarist Richard Gilewitz sat at Kottke's feet, swapping licks and jokes. Gilewitz' album of guitar solos, *Somewhere In Between* (Hacker Backer, P.O. Box 320383, Tampa, FL 33679) includes tunes by Jorma Kaukonen, Fahey and Kottke. Kottke remembers that Gilewitz traveled great distances to watch him concertize, and the elder guitarist repaid the honor by recording the haunting and luscious "Echoing Gilewitz" on his Private Music album, *A Shout Towards Noon*. The success of that record (produced by fellow acoustic-minded weirdo, bassist Buell Nedlinger) is another shot in the arm of Kottke's long career. How does it feel jumping on a bandwagon for which he built the chassis? "It's only helped me, that's for sure. I never thought that instrumental music of any kind would ever get a place in the market. It's always been so tough for record companies to sell it, and especially to get them to promote it. So I'm happy to see it."

Of the deans of the steel string school, Kottke has had the most resilient gig. Young players still seek him. "Michael Hedges told me about the time, before he was recording, that he came to a show about thirteen years ago. He was going to come backstage, but a security guy kicked him out. That's flattering stuff."

This winter, Kottke plans to tour with Hedges: the veteran meets the upstart. "It seemed like a natural combination,"

IRENE YOUNG

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Hedges explains from his home in Mendecino, California. "Leo used to be a guitar hero of mine. I loved him because he was a true composer on guitar. He wasn't one of these guys who did fancy licks because they want to do fancy licks. He came from the heart. When I got a chance to tour with him, I jumped at it. I feel like he's my big brother."

Of the younger crop of guitarists, the 80s breed, Hedges is generally considered the king of the hill (and the Hill). He's both an accessible and innovative musician not content to play the instrument properly. Why merely pick at the strings, Hedges figures, when you can strike them, squeeze out other-worldly harmonics, pound the body in mad flamenco fashion and otherwise render the guitar into expressive silly putty?

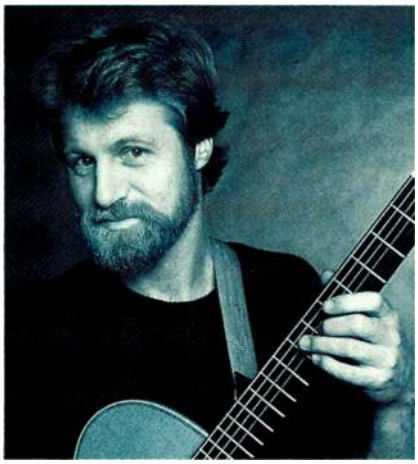
Unlike his more dedicated folky peers, Hedges pursued an academic route at Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, after growing up in Oklahoma, and found himself attracted to contemporary classical music. Frustrated by the strictures of the classical guitar program, he felt more at home with composition. "I think it's one of the main things that really got me going my own way on guitar, because I'm more of a composer who plays the guitar rather than a guitarist who studies all the guitaristic things. People ask, 'How did you develop your style?' I don't really think in those terms. It's mostly me composing, and new techniques or whatever comes out will be because of what I've been thinking musically."

At the same time he was analyzing tone rows and learning Sor etudes, Hedges was leaning more and more towards steel string guitar. Earlier, he, too, had contributed to the pile of demos in Fahey land. "I sent a demo to Takoma when I lived in Oklahoma. I didn't know how to groove then. The tunes were there, but the rhythm wasn't."

One of his early role models was David Crosby, whose first solo album was a seedbed of open tunings. Recently Hedges lived out a dream by laying down tracks for a sober Crosby's *second* album. "Crosby was the guy who really started doing the off-the-wall tuning bit. He, in fact, got Joni Mitchell started on it. When I heard his solo album I went crazy because he was using different voices. That got me going in that direction more than anybody—even Leo Kottke or Neil Young. But then Joni Mitchell took it even further.

"When I was at Peabody, I was becoming very interested in electronic music. You can hear evidence of this on 'Spare Change' from *Aerial Boundaries*, which has a lot of backwards sounds and funny splices on it. It was all *musique concrète*, no computers. It took about one-hundred hours to make. That's what brought me out to California."

Specifically, the computer music facility at Stanford (then steered by digital waveform pioneer John Chowning) is what lured Hedges westward. It was computerese by day and Neil Young tunes by night as he played guitar at local spots. Then came an invitation from the Hill. "Will Ackerman heard me at one of these bars, and I've been on the road and recording ever since."



**Windham Hill renegade de Grassi feared becoming too predictable.**

Apart from his free use of extended techniques—tapping and unorthodox tunings—Hedges makes a distinctive use of the Dyer harp guitar, with an appendage neck of five extra strings to expand its range. "So many guitar tunes you get tired of because they're either in A or E or D—that's when the low or high E are dropped down. That's why I started experimenting with different tunings. But still, you always want an extra open string for that chord you want to sound full. That's where the harp guitar comes in handy."

Lyrical though Hedges most often is, he can muster an aggressiveness that borders on acoustic rock 'n' roll; on his drawing board, in fact, is a rock band. "I've always loved rock music. I listen to Todd Rundgren, Peter Gabriel and Kate Bush just as much as I listen to Irish music just as much as I listen to Stravinsky as much as I listen to ECM stuff. Guitar, to me, is something that works with anything."

Hedges also stresses some more obscure tastes: Eugene Chadbourne is one of his favorites, and he has worn out the grooves of the Zappa/Beefheart project *Bongo Fury*. "I'm telling you some of this stuff because I don't want you to think that I'm this California native who goes on rafting trips and lives in the mountains and writes guitar arpeggios."

Pondering the question of why acoustic guitar has flowered in this decade, Hedges has a technical rationale. "One thing is that steel string guitar is now being amplified properly. One reason people come to hear me play is that my guitar sounds big and intimate. It takes a big Halliburton case and a couple of thousand dollars worth of processing gear to take me on the road. It's not just a guy and a guitar anymore."

Hedges is one of Windham Hill's prizes, popular on both the critical and commoner fronts. Overall, the label has garnered a press reputation that has gone from glowing to bad to worse—corresponding with their ascending tax bracket. The stigma won't seem to let up, nor will the public's fiscal embrace. As guitarist Steve Tibbitts jives, "Windham Hill is almost synonymous with bad keefer now."

What must be remembered about the label, however, is its noble beginning on the kitchen table of Will Ackerman, who, like Fahey before him, wanted to put his guitar inklings on vinyl. A decade later Ackerman had a major distribution deal with A&M and a successful concept suddenly being aped all over the industry's heathen town. With the success of Windham Hill came the inevitable formula. Ackerman says with a snicker, "I remember one fellow from EMI once told me, 'Look, we don't really need you. All you gotta do is get some guitar player and put a lot of white around the picture.' I say, 'Yeah, you've got it. You've nailed down all the subtleties.' It really bespeaks the cynicism that the industry has always treated the buying public with—that they can be easily duped."

But even at Windham Hill, typecasting can occur. One of Ackerman's assumedly diehard label mates—his cousin Alex de Grassi—has recently abandoned ship, releasing *Altiplano* on RCA's new Novus subsidiary. "I didn't want to become too predictable as a musician," de Grassi explains. "I thought also that the label was becoming known for itself, for a style of music, almost for a philosophy. I didn't feel comfortable with that. I had the good fortune to link up with Windham Hill in the beginning. It was very well directed; there was a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of clever marketing. We were working with very little resources in the early days, getting

IRENE YOUNG

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people's attention. Later, I was part of this big hazy entity called Windham Hill and I felt like I was losing my identity."

On *Altiplano*, de Grassi sets his acoustic guitar in arrangements that often include a band featuring the fusionary likes of Mark Egan, Danny Gottlieb and Clifford Carter; the effect is redolent of McLaughlin's Belo Horizonte band, minus the blinding scalar runs. "I spent a lot of time in '85 and '86—instead of going out and doing tours—practicing and listening to other kinds of music, opening myself up to other possibilities.

"When I started doing the solo guitar thing, I was infatuated with the microcosm of the world of guitar—acoustic guitar in particular, and even more particularly the world of open-tuning acoustic guitar and all its idioms. Now I'm getting more interested in music at large. That's reflected in this record."

Still, he won't deny his roots in the folk tradition. "I've always been a big fan of folk music in its biggest sense. Even when I was doing strictly solo guitar music, I always had in my own mind a sense of 'This tune reminds me of British Isles music—almost an influence of bagpipes or some kind of pipes.' Some tunes on my early albums utilize a drone element and a repetitive rhythmic riff, off of which I would play different modes. I felt I was influenced by Indian music—with artistic license.

"When I was learning to play the guitar, folk music meant Woody Guthrie, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. When I say folk music, I mean more world music. I'm cautious in using labels in general." And the $64,000 label, of course, is New Age, a term which has stuck, to the chagrin of many of its supposed champions. DeGrassi wonders what it's all about.

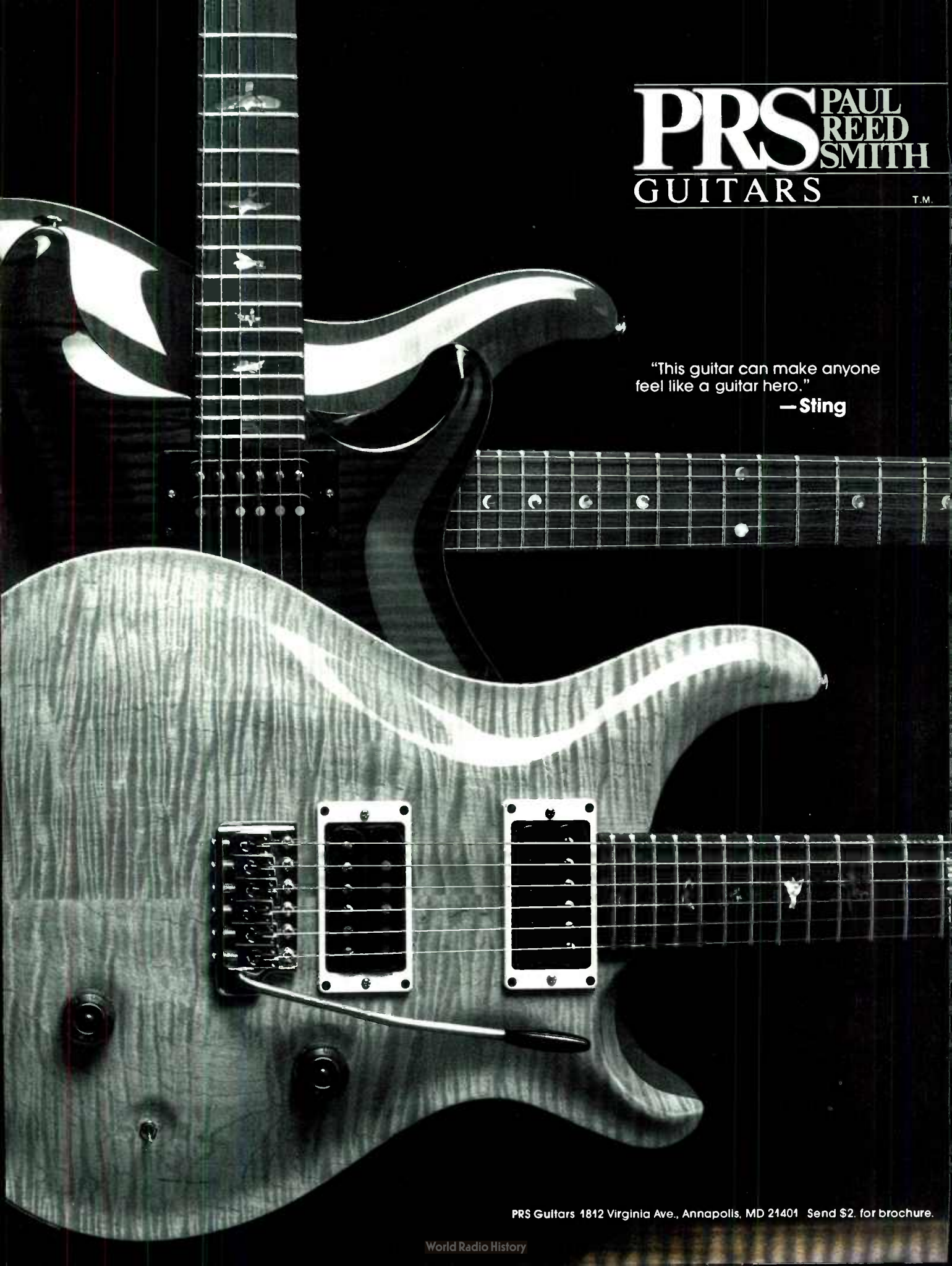
"You could have called John Coltrane's music new age; he was a jazz musician, but he was into mysticism. Or you could call Sun Ra new age. The term is very confusing. It doesn't mean much to me."

Few would call Steve Tibbetts' music new age. Tibbetts was born to be in a studio. You can catch him any day at his, in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he has recorded most of his expansive, gothic-impressionist folk-jazz. "It's very much like a painter's studio." Tibbetts says. "It's also like a dormitory and a hospital. I have a whole wall of tapes that are failures. Basically, for me and Marc (Anderson, his percussionist collaborator), [composing is] like flying through fog and seeing little points of light here and there."

As on all of Tibbetts' recorded work, the ringing acoustic guitar sound of his latest ECM release, *Exploded View*, plays an ideal foil for squealing electric guitar elaborations. "I think the acoustic and electric both have the same power, but with the acoustic guitar, it's a little bit more covert. It takes a lot of passion and heart to make an acoustic guitar resonate with as much feeling as an electric guitar. It's really easy to make an electric guitar stand up and shriek and demand your attention. But, at the same time, it can wear thin really quickly. 'Listen to me, listen to me.' It's tempting to turn your back on that.

"If I'm laying down a piece of music that has an acoustic as its core, as the trunk of the tree, my inclination is not to fool with it too much. As far as adding additional acoustic guitars, banjos, dobros, sitars, kalimbas, whatever happens to be laying around the studio, that's when I start turning on the harmonizers, the digital delays and so forth.

*continued on page 26*



# What's New in Guitars and Other NAMM Action

THIS IS THE BIG GUITAR ISSUE, OF course, and one of our worst fears was that the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) show in Chicago would be jam-packed with unbelievable products that would push all the new guitar gear into the shadows. Relax, everybody. Yes, there was certainly a number of undeniably worthy new M.I. entries, but we're not talking about the mind-numbing breakthroughs that have characterized recent NAMM shows. Oh sure, attendance was adequate and lots of dealer orders were being written, so we can assume that the industry's Era of Good Feelings was no mere Anaheim illusion. But as far as we tech typists were concerned, it was basically sleepy-time in Chi-town. This means that we can get right to what's a relatively high amount of guitar activity—in fact, if you want, skip right ahead to the guitar hotline. But aren't you even interested in our pick for Best New Product? Egads, you are a guitar nut. Well, see you in about twelve inches.

I know we're gonna hear some groans when I say the winner is a keyboard stand, but think about it.... We've basically been dealing with variations on the Tinker Toy for this entire Keyboard Decade. Now from **Ultimate Support** comes a genuinely artistic solution to that boring old problem guitarists never have: how to hold your instrument up. It's a spectacular, minimalist flying wedge of a system called the APEX Column that sets up in around thirteen seconds, holds two keyboards—at NAMM it supported a behemoth Yamaha KX88 with nary a shudder—and holds all its parts inside itself. I especially like the triangular motif worked into all the parts. Not bad for $200. Maybe only at a NAMM show like this one could something with no electronics whatsoever take the top prize, but let's give credit for originality and graceful design where credit is clearly due. Nice job, Ultimate.

The runner-up, and winner of the coveted Buzz of the Show award, is a drum machine. Now I can really hear the mutterings. A goddamn drum machine? We send you to Chicago for four days and you come back with that? I'm sorry, but it was a *great* drum machine. It's from **Alesis**, is endowed with 16-bit (that's what I said, 16-bit) real drum and percussion samples, a swell sequencer system written by one-time Sequential star Marcus Ryle, and costs but $445. Hah, that got your attention. The thing, which is actually named the HR-16, sounds just wonderful and has 48 onboard sounds assignable to its velocity-sensitive pads. Its 100-pattern and 100-song memory holds output mixes and panning, there are individual outputs to process voices of choice, and it does Sysex dumps, and reads MIDI song position pointer and FSK. What, no SMPTE?

On paper, the Trend of the Show was the boom in MIDI wind instruments—in addition to Akai's EWI, mentioned last time, there was **Yamaha**'s WX7 and the flute-shaped Sting from **Music Industries**. There was also a MIDI trumpet from **Akai**, the Electronic Valve Instrument, and the **Artisyn**, profiled here a few months back. Maybe if there were more horn players around all this would've generated greater heat.

The most important trend I saw in Chicago, however, was the appearance of the "do-it-all" multi-timbral MIDI expander box. These are 16- and 24-voice units packed with samples and synthesized sounds. What it means is that you'll just buy a master keyboard and one of these boxes and have most of the sound sources you'll need for quality sequencing. The most flexible of these is the **Korg** DSPM-1, but the **Roland** 220 and the **Kurzweil** 1000 PX are also eminently useful. The latter is Kurzweil's ambitious bid to put the sounds in its $15,000 250 sampler into a play-only unit for $2500, and you gotta hear it to believe it. There's also a lot of activity on the home piano and organ front from companies like **Technics**, **Casio** and **Roland** that pays great multi-timbral dividends to pros. I'll be more specific in October's column, so don't buy a MIDI expander unit till you hear from me.

Okay, here we go, guitar buffs. Fasten on your strap, set volume controls to eleven and finish up those warm-up exercises. It's show-time.

The generally accepted road to success in selling guitars has been through star endorsements, which can run the gamut

**Best New Product: Ultimate's APEX column**

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**By Jock Baird**


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from token or non-use (the M.I. industry's ugly little in-joke) all the way to a completely artist-designed instrument. **Ibanez** was this year's NAMM ballclub looking for offensive punch, and it says a lot about guitar-hero turnover that they picked up **Steve Vai**, former Zappa transcriber and lately David Lee Roth sideman. It also says a lot about Vai that he wanted to not just do one model, but work as part of their regular design team. And talk about changing fortunes—anyone who a year or two back recalled seeing the eminently friendly Vai demoing for **Grover Jackson** all day, every day would've loved the sight of Vai being mobbed by well-wishers at his brief announcement ceremony.

For most of the first day, Ibanez kept the identity of its new super-endorsee under wraps—quite literally: The display was a large monolith covered by a tarp and sporting a security guard. Finally, as a crowd gasped in recognition, the monolith became a giant vertical billboard of Vai holding a new Ibanez guitar, dwarfing the real Vai standing below next to four new guitars. He seemed momentarily stunned by one of the lime fluorescent paint jobs, declaring it "the ugliest color for a guitar in the world." Vai then proceeded to give a ringing endorsement, pointing out that Ibanez had been very open to his input and adding that "they work fast and hard, and I feel the quality of their instruments is superb." A heavy-metal star who writes his own copy? No wonder they had to have him.

To completely underscore the fact that the first Ibanez guitar Vai designed is not the end of the story, Ibanez has requested that we call it the Jem 777 and not the "Steve Vai Model." In a way, that's for the best, considering the guitar; it has some definite innovations, but overall it's a love-it-or-hate-it kind of axe. I mean, a handle through the body? Okay, that's so Vai can do his acrobatic "monkey grip" while he does left-handed hammer-ons and pull-offs, but is it me? Better is the deeply routed-out area behind the Edge (Floyd-Rose-type) whammy bar, so you can pull it as far back as you gotta go. Better still is the hinged bridge/tremolo cover—who *does* want to look at a whammy bar's guts all night? And scalloping out the top four frets is also something I'd take. So there *are* good ideas here—and it does play well—but this guitar isn't for everyone. Many will violently disagree and go out and buy the Jem 777 for $1300, or the autographed limited edition custom $1600 version.

Less spectacular (not designed by Vai and not sporting a security guard) was another new Ibanez guitar that appealed to me more. (Am I getting too subjective here? Yes, but that's what guitars seem to be about.) This is another new line called **Maxxas**—which, given the tremendous cutaway and radically reduced neck-joint, probably is a crunched version of "maximum access." The best thing about the designed-in-the-U.S.A. Maxxas, officially numbered MX2H and costing $1100, is the original but ungimmicky body design. Even the details have been carefully considered. The knobs are modern without being Gobot; the recessed plug-in jack is particularly nice. Or, as Bill Cosby recently said, "Bold, yet artsy-craftsy." Okay, I'll forego the art criticism and stick to pickup configurations (two humbuckers)

## EVEN *MUSICIAN* GETS THE BLUES

*Musician*'s annual NAMM party, which this year took the form of a blues guitar blowout at Chicago's Limelight club on June 29, provided further evidence of the much-touted resurgence of the blues. The place was packed to the rafters for the show, which featured a trio of guitar heroes courtesy of Chicago-based blues label Alligator Records: seminal blues rocker Lonnie Mack, long-overdue-for-stardom Texas shuffle maestro Albert Collins and regal axeman Johnny Winter.

Mack, who recently finished a tour opening for Huey Lewis, kicked the evening off in an easy, satisfying groove. The low-down, swampy strains of "Satisfy Susie" and "Hound Dog Man" from his 1985 LP *Strike Like Lightning* were offset by the wrenching blues of "I Found A Love," one of Mack's showpieces. Of course, Lonnie couldn't get away without a rendition of his 1963 instrumental hit "Memphis," which he whammed out on his trademark red '58 Flying V (serial number 007). "I bought it because it was the weirdest-looking thing I'd ever seen," Mack said later. "It had good tone and sustain, like an old Les Paul. Gibson's talking about making a special edition Lonnie Mack Flying V."

Albert Collins was up next and, despite a set plagued with technical glitches (specifically, amps that kept blowing out), managed, as he invariably does, to get the too-crowded room to forget its discomforts and boogie its brains out. The "Master of the Telecaster" set a frisky pace with his sinewy, plain-spoken picking, in a set highlighted by his signature tune "Frosty" (in which Albert made his traditional foray into the audience, heedless of life or limb). Collins has been attracting more attention of late via his appearance in the Disney movie *Adventures in Babysitting* and his cameo in Bruce Willis' latest wine cooler commercial; if fame 'n' fortune are close behind, they couldn't come to a more deserving soul.

Johnny Winter closed the show with the steamiest set of the night, backed by longtime band members Jon Paris on bass and harp and Tom Compton on drums. The moon-white-haired guitarist and his mean little black Lazer guitar were in ferocious form as he tore through a set that included numbers like "Don't Take Advantage Of Me" and "Third Degree," as well as Winterized favorites like "Jumping Jack Flash" and "Johnny B. Goode." Winter's technique never ceased to astound, but it wasn't merely flash—the man's got soul to burn.

The hoped-for super jam between the evening's headliners (who'd never appeared on the same stage) didn't materialize, but no matter—those fortunate folk in attendance witnessed a trio of most memorable performances. – **Moira McCormick**

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if you promise to at least try one.

In general, this seems to be a time when guitar makers aren't afraid to make an instrument a bit nicer and charge more for it. Not necessarily a *lot* more. Take the new custom version of the **Peavey** Impact—this should be subtitled "true luxury at $800." It's wonderfully smooth and playable, has a lovely, human-contoured Strat variation of a shape, maple neck through the koa body, alnico pickups, five-degree headstock cant....I won't dwell on it further, but this is a winner. The new model is not the Impact 1 or 2, incidentally; look for the little ramp taken out of the headstock to identify the custom version. If you prefer a more metal, trendy styling, Peavey's also doing a limited edition custom version of the Nitro, an equally well-put-together instrument with gold-plated hardware for $1000.

Guitar refinement mutterings are also coming out of **Fender**, which is preparing a new pickup invented by **Don Lace**. Mr. Lace's background is said to include "semiconductors, lasers, solid state electronics, motion optics and computer magnetics," and Fender announced he's discovered a method of "interpreting the complex vibration patterns of acoustic devices of any type." This is all by way of introducing the Lace acoustic emission sensor (AES) guitar pickup, soon to appear on the Strat Plus. Could this be overkill? Will Larry DiMarzio lose sleep? Will Don Lace's next invention be an SDI satellite-killer? God, these NAMM shows are exciting—can *you* wait for Anaheim?

As indeed they promised, **Guild** has followed up its Ashbory bass with a spate of new electric and acoustic guitars. Call it the involvement of **George Gruhn** or call it Nashville hoodoo, but these guys are taking the basics—with relatively few new wrinkles like their own whammy bar—and just running with them. A case in point is their Strat-inpired Liberator, which goes for $1145. No unusual features, but the guitar had to be literally ripped from my arms. Their T-250, a swell $800 Tele-type, and a finely wrought $1245 version of a Paul were also show stoppers. Guitar makers get very nervous when you use someone else's guitar to describe theirs, but sorry guys, that's what they look and play like.

Sometimes guitarmakers get nervous when people use their *own* names. Consider the case of **Wayne Charvel**. Back around 1978, Charvel sold his company to Grover Jackson, who later sold a portion of *his* company to Fort Worth's International Music Corp.

KURZWEIL™
Music Systems

# RANDOM SAMPLING

Volume I | Notes and News from Kurzweil Music Systems | Issue No. 3

**MORE OUTS IN SOON**...Announcing an exciting new **Separate Output upgrade** for all **Kurzweil 250's**—with **12 direct monophonic channel outputs** to let you **separately EQ sounds** played on the 250...**load out individual instruments** in real-time...and **record multiple tracks** from the 250's sequencer in **one recording pass!** Look for it around

November. The Separate Outputs upgrade will be strictly an option—**not a standard feature.** So why wait? Get your Kurzweil 250 now. **GOOD NEWS**...We've filled all back-orders for **250 RMX's,** so you should have yours by now. Don't have one? Now's the time to see your Kurzweil dealer! **KURZWEIL 250 ON THE TUBE**...on "BW5" on PBS later this year. All the music was written by **Lou Garisto** and performed entirely on a **K250.** "Kurzweil has revitalized my interest in more serious music," says Garisto, who's been in the business for more than 20 years. **IS IT REAL OR**...as the tracks for "BW5" were being mixed, the engineer said to Garisto, "It's such a pleasure to hear live music again." Surprise! ROBOTS ON THE ROAD...**ROBOTS and Beyond: The Age of Intelligent Machines** starts a new gig at **Science Museums of Charlotte** in **North Carolina** on October 3, 1987. Hear a computer-composed piece on a **Kurzweil 250**...and see where artificial intelligence is really going! **CONCERTO FOR ASTRONAUTS GOES CD**...Written by Russian emigre **Emile Sichkin** and released by **New Frontier,** the opus uses a **Kurzweil 250** for at least 50% of the music. The tape sounded great, but the new CD is incredible. **SOUND ADVICE**...in the new **Kurzweil 250 User's Guide.** Re-discover your 250. Available now from your Kurzweil dealer for $25.00. **SOUND OFF...AND ON**...with the new **Kurzweil 250 Sound Libraries 5 and 6**—additional disc-supplied sounds for your 250. See your Kurzweil dealer. **NEW 150 FS DESIGN**...features a more readable LED and is designed for more efficient use of rack space. **SPEAK TO US!**...we want to hear from you. Write to: **Kurzweil Music Systems, Inc., 411 Waverley Oaks Road, Waltham, MA 02154.** See you next month.

Recently, Wayne Charvel has been cooking up new designs for **Gibson**, and three of his latest creations, said to be heavily influenced by Wayne's hot rod tastes, were due to be unveiled at NAMM. Attorneys for I.M.C. had different ideas, however, and obtained a ten-day temporary restraining order against Gibson's showing the guitars. The legal fireworks were short-lived, however, as sources now say a settlement is in the works that will allow Charvel to continue working for Gibson. The removed guitars may become collector's items. Reminds one a bit of Leo Fender's post-Fender tribulations.

In the realm of acoustic guitars, the last frontier seems to be the semi-hollow electric acoustic that sounds really full. One of the best new solutions is the **Yamaha** APX series, which uses two pickups, a contact inside the guitar for a warm, wood-like tone, and a hexaphonic on the bridge for the highs. A balance control between the two gives you a remarkable range of sounds. Stereo versions also allow you to assign different string combinations to different sides, for an even bigger sound. The necks on the steel-string version of the APX, as opposed to the two nylon-stringed models, are actually a tad more like electric guitar necks. If you're more into the traditional acoustic neck, try the new **Guild** Songbird, another excellent thin-line acoustic-electric in the $1000 range. And if you want something with a little more flash, especially for your next rockvid, may we suggest the **Ovation** Thunderbolt, complete with lightning-shaped sound hole. We'll be seeing plenty of this one on MTV, I think.

I suppose I have to talk about MIDI guitar now, although I've been putting it off. I just have a bad attitude about it. Even the fly-by-night MIDI software community provides no more blatant example of vaporware than in MIDI guitar (vaporware is the showing of products that are perpetually "ready to ship in sixty to ninety days"). How am I going to tell you with a straight face that **Beetle** and **Passac** and **Zeta** will soon be marketing MIDI guitar converters? The Zeta one is the most plausible—after all, it was shown a year ago. But Zeta seems to shrink from the enormity of having the only under-$2000 fret-switched system and has instead worked at the edges, MIDIing up violinists and at this show unveiling an especially broad-banded bass pickup. More disappointing was the tracking of the Mirror 6 instrument itself, which seemed not significantly better than an average pitch-to-voltage

system. I'm still rooting for the Zeta system because I think we must have an affordable fret-switched alternative, but it isn't yet at hand.

Of the other two, I can only report that the MIDI guitar system from Passac is said to use a pitch detection technique that's "not specifically pitch-to-voltage"; it instead consists of six piezo pickups in a Kahler bridge. Now forgive me if I'm stupid, but if you're using a piezo pickup, that seems to me to be pitch-to-voltage. Passac also claims to have a "delay neutralization technique" that detects when the note is hit instantly, and can actually track the pick's direction and the location of where it hits the string. A year ago I'd pass that along with a straight face, but this is 1987. Ditto with the Beetle. This one supposedly works on radar, and a lurid story is going around about an Indian genius recruited by the U.S. government to work on developing radar systems. The story is false, says Beetle, but their system will cost $1000—with guitar—and does indeed work on radar. Ready in, ah...sixty to ninety days. With case. Can I play it? No.

See, bad attitude. Especially if the Beetle Quantar winds up the hottest product of 1988.

Why is the game all-but-over for these would-be empire-builders? The **Roland** GM-70. It has taken pitch-to-voltage conversion about as far as it can go, removing the great dissatisfied masses which all these new start-ups need. No, unlike an extraordinary number of guitar players I know, I am not blown away by the GM-70. It still has problems in the low end for me, the Achilles heel of all P-V systems, and I can never feel completely connected to the instruments I was MIDIed to. But it is pretty damn good. I've had a Roland GK-1 hex pickup on my Les Paul running into the GM-70 for two months now, and can tell you it's the first system I've been given to review that I felt was genuinely usable. Does this end the MIDI guitar competition? Hell no. But it may put an end to the pitch-to-voltage competition.

One major company thinks not. **Casio** has decided to go after the GM70 using a more simplified concept, correctly judging that many guitarists are intimidated by the sophistication of the Roland unit. The Casio approach is to get a nice electric guitar and put everything in that—yes, besides the regular phone jack, the only output is a MIDI plug. The programs are chosen by an ingenious use of the frets: Hit a dip switch and then pick one of sixteen frets on one of six strings. Voilà, ninety-six programs. It can put different voices on different strings, change channels, do pitch bends and most essential functions, but has no whammy bar and doesn't seem to be able to save system setups. The Casio MIDI guitar will go for $900, which isn't bad at all since the guitar itself is a decent one.

And what of the **Photon**? Actually, it took all the time between Anaheim and Chicago just to get the deal between **Gibson/Phi-Tech** and **K-Muse** signed. This could mean humans like us could try one for more than three minutes. Keep your fingers crossed, but beware vaporware. Okay, let's head down the home stretch to amps and effects.

You wouldn't think distortion would be a growth item in 1987, but it was in Chicago. Not the sixty-dollar stomp box variety, but complex rack-mounted MIDIfied preamp units with either tube simulators or actual tubes. Top of the line is the $700 **ADA** MIDI preamp, which holds 128 programs. Basic con-

*continued on page 114*

# How to put a

If you have some bright ideas about making music, we have a place you can develop them.

The new MT2X multitrack recorder/mixer.

With the MT2X, you can record separate parts on separate tracks, one part at a time. Then combine tracks to hear all the parts together as a complete musical work.

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One that comes with four recording tracks, two tape speeds, six input channels, and endless possibilities.

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# band together.

And speaking of effects, you can also plug in digital effects units like our SPX90II. And add dramatic stereo echo, reverb, chorus, etc.

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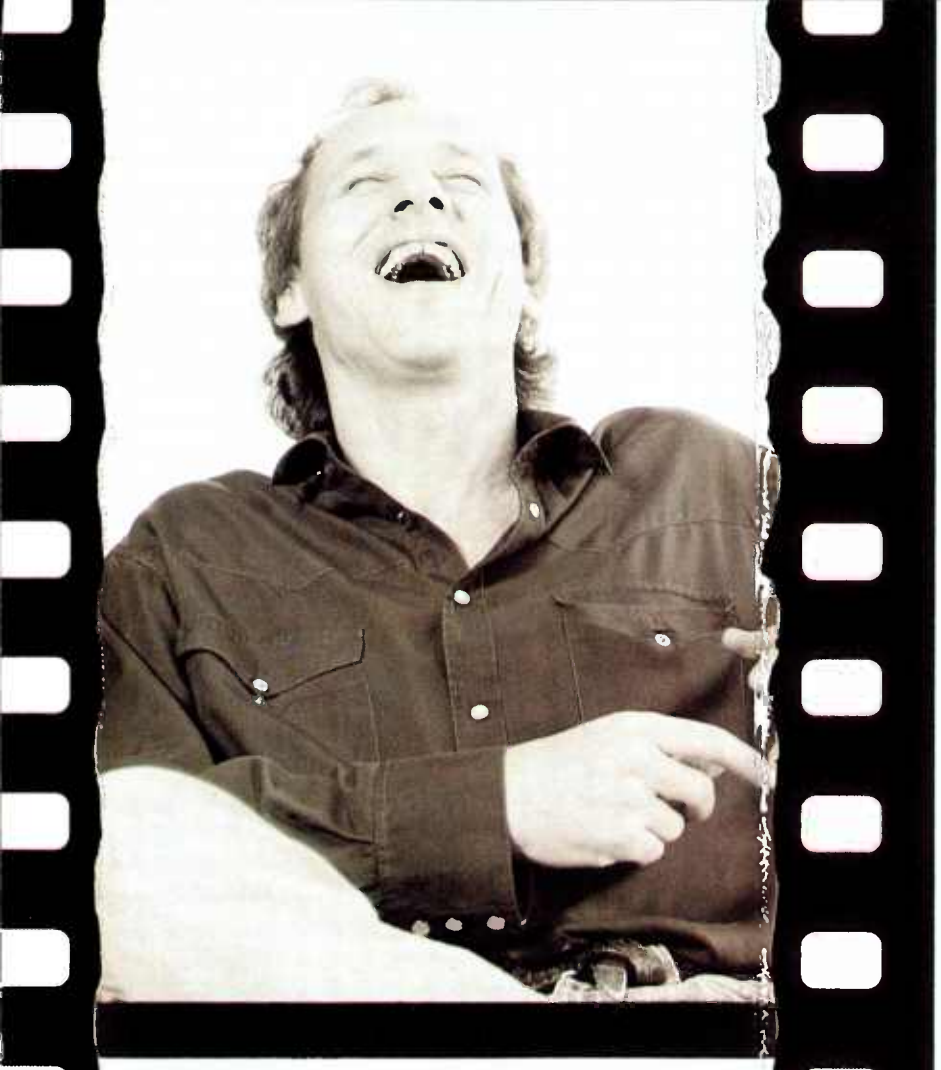

# First let's kill all the drummers...

"We're working twelve hours a day, six days a week," Mark Knopfler smiles. It's his idea of a good time. Knopfler is sitting at a mixing console at A&M's Hollywood studio, synching bits of instrumental music to bits of film. On top of the console is a TV monitor running a scene from Rob Reiner's new movie *The Princess Bride*. Suspended above that is a second screen filled with computerized lists of the musical cues. Behind Knopfler is a great keyboard at which sits Dire Straits' Guy Fletcher. Knopfler runs the film for what must be the fiftieth time and signals Guy when to punch in which pre-recorded section of music. It's tricky because the movie is cutting back and forth between a wedding scene in a castle and a battle raging outside. The music has to cut as quickly as the camera or the mood (actually the effect caused by contrasting two moods) will be blown.

Knopfler, Reiner and everyone connected with *Princess Bride* are pushing to get the movie scored, edited and released in two months. To this end, they have three different recording studios simultaneously working on the soundtrack. Knowing Mark Knopfler's penchant for creating under pressure, the tight deadline is not surprising. What is surprising is the fun everyone in the room is having. They've stared at this same bit of film over and over, and yet each time it's wound back they laugh at the gags as if they were seeing them for the first time.

## By Bill Flanagan

Photographs by Chris Cufforo

# Mark Knopfler conspires with T-Bone Burnett

Cut to evening in a hotel elevator. Knopfler finds himself riding down to the lobby with George Benson. The two don't know each other, but Mark quickly finds a reference point—their common friendship with Chet Atkins. Now if you go into your neighborhood record store you'll find Mark Knopfler in the "Rock" section, George Benson in "Jazz" and Chet Atkins in "Country." That's how marketing departments and radio stations categorize them, too. But these guys don't box themselves that way. They are guitarists, they are musicians, they are artists. They'll leave the label-licking to libraries.

Which has a little bit to do with why Knopfler's soon driving down Sunset Boulevard, following scribbled directions to T-Bone Burnett's new ocean-view apartment. Knopfler and Burnett are acclaimed singer/songwriters who have refused to be limited by the rules of an industry that says to talented performers, "You just keep coming up with the material, kid, and leave the thinking to us." Between their own albums they play sessions, produce other artists and score movies. Since finishing Dire Straits' *Brothers In Arms* tour last year, Knopfler has produced tracks for Tina Turner and a whole new album for Willie DeVille. He just toured Europe in Eric Clapton's backup band. *Princess Bride* will be his fourth soundtrack album (following *Local Hero*,

*Comfort & Joy* and *Cal*). Not bad considering that in nine years he's made only five studio albums with Dire Straits.

T-Bone Burnett's third and most acclaimed solo LP, *Proof Through The Night*, is now four years old. Since he finished it he has toured extensively, released a British EP, scored a film (*In And Out*), directed a play for TV and produced fine albums for a whole list of deserving artists, among them Leslie Phillips, the Bodeans, Peter Case, Marshall Crenshaw, Los Lobos three times and Elvis Costello. Last winter T-Bone toured in Costello's band and released a one-shot, live-in-the-studio country LP on Dot Records. All of which left fans wondering if he'd ever get around to making another rock 'n' roll album.

## Mark: "One time I came offstage and lost my temper and really told them what I thought of the performance. It was sabotage. It was deliberate.... It's blatantly obvious when T-Bone says, 'You're fired, you're fired, you're fired,' he's got the right idea. Because he's achieved that workable situation far earlier."

Tonight he's got it done. T-Bone greets Knopfler at the door and admits that he's a little nervous—this will be the first time he's played anyone *Talking Animals*, the record on which he's worked so hard. It's the big one: his first for Columbia and the album that's expected to deliver on all the promise of his warm-up projects. That aside, between the time Knopfler steps into the living room and the time they get to the couch, T-Bone has recruited Mark to play guitar on the Roy Orbison album he's now producing. These guys don't quit working for a minute. The Orbison arrangements settled, T-Bone cues up the tape.

Now, Mark Knopfler has many fine qualities, but the ability to be polite about mediocre music is not among them; the guy is a real tough critic. So there's a little tension as the first song begins. "The Wild Truth" doesn't really sound like anything else—but there is something of John Lennon and the Attractions there. Lyrically, T-Bone still spits out epigrams like chewing tobacco: "Science fiction and nostalgia have become the same thing," "I get the feeling as soon as something appears in the paper it ceases to be true," "Mercy is like the wind; it goes where it will." A big smile breaks across Knopfler's face. "It's great, T-Bone," he says. "It's really great." Each cut gathers more praise, and by the end of the second side both men are laughing and raising celebratory whiskeys. Eventually someone remembers to turn on the tape recorder, which continues to roll as alcohol loosens tongues and evening gives way to early morning.

**MUSICIAN:** *Mark, why don't we kick off with your reaction to T-Bone's record?*

**KNOPFLER:** After *Proof Through The Night* you think, "Oh, please why can't there be more?" You have a feeling there's not going to be. And here there is more, *better* than that. Trying to avoid superlatives, I just think it's a wonderful thing.

**BURNETT:** Did you see Jack Nicholson at the Celtics/Lakers game on Thursday?

**KNOPFLER:** I was there.

**BURNETT:** On television somebody interviewed Nicholson, and said, "Jack, do you think the Celtics have the leprechauns on their side?" He said, "I think the Celtics need the witches of Eastwick, which is my new movie, opening June fifteenth."

**KNOPFLER:** Okay, keep plugging this record.

**MUSICIAN:** *All through the record, I heard interesting guitar sounds. Often in your productions you use guitar where other people would use keyboards.*

**BURNETT:** Whether I do that or not, I've just always had a question: What is a *keyboard?* Do you ever get this feeling that there are guys that went out and learned how to play piano, they went to school, and then they come to sessions and it costs you about three hundred dollars just to get them to bring their equipment. Then they set it up all through the control room so you can't even breathe or move, and then producers spend eight hours with them, going "Now what was that other sound? Wait a minute, a minute ago you made this other sound, this [*makes wild squawk*] kind of sound. What was that?" "Oh, that was the Prophet." They spend eight hours getting this sound, and then this guy who's gone to Juilliard and spent ten years learning how to play the piano, when it's finally time to do the take, after nobody can even think anymore, walks over and uses one finger [*laughter*]. And I have this feeling they must feel enormously guilty about being called *keyboard* players.

**KNOPFLER:** That whole thing's so elastic. It's developing to the stage where there is no distinction. It's *playing*. With synth guitars and synth keyboards you can play trumpet all day if you want to, or anything. Nobody knows anymore whether these sounds are made by guitar players or keyboard players. On the piece I'm doing now, Guy is playing a classical guitar sound on the keyboard, because it happens to be immediately more convenient. It's just whatever's appropriate for every piece.

**BURNETT:** Some writer once asked Bob Clearmountain, "What mike do you use on the drums?" and he said, "What difference does it make?"

**KNOPFLER:** A lot of drums are going down on keyboards, now. A lot of everything is. It's all becoming one, just as all art is

one. It's very exciting to me. I've spent a great pile of dough on upgrading my Synclavier to the point where the studio's almost redundant. I can record direct to disk. And I can get better results than I can with digital tape machines. It's not error correction but it's just beautiful, beautiful sound. Got a whole orchestra in there. At the moment I'm doing half on my acoustic guitar and half on a keyboard, to use that word.

**MUSICIAN:** *Well, the technology that makes all these choices available in turn is going to spur new ideas. When you made* Proof Through The Night *did you imagine anything that sounded like* Talking Animals *or is this album a result of being in the studios a lot, hearing new sounds?*

**BURNETT:** The thing that helped a lot was I spent three years producing other people's records. They helped remind me what was important and what was not.

**KNOPFLER:** Especially when you got home at night, by yourself, after those sessions. You were probably reminded that you're a songwriter, too. You're a songwriter trying to help somebody else realize *their* dreams; it's an interesting position to be in.

**MUSICIAN:** *Is it hard to separate your vision of where it should go from that artist's vision?*

**KNOPFLER:** I think that just depends on how good a person you are, how true to them and to yourself you can be.

**BURNETT:** I think that's true, and I think it's also how good a person they are.

**KNOPFLER:** Absolutely. And how mature they are. For the young person you can make allowances, but...

**BURNETT:** There are some producers who live through the artist they're working on, and they think of it in some way as *their* record, which it's not, really. Ultimately it's the person singing the song's record.

**KNOPFLER:** Now that can be brought home to you either violently—not physically violently, thank heavens—

and suddenly a record comes out based *around* your roughs. You see the thing as you know it, but you also see the thing from somebody else's point of view. You realize it is somebody else's thing, and they have done with it what they will.

**BURNETT:** That's a little rough. I've never had quite that...that's disarming.

**KNOPFLER:** It's still good in some ways. There are some first-rate things, "License To Kill" comes to mind.

**BURNETT:** I think *Infidels* is brilliant.

**KNOPFLER:** Yeah, but I've got roughs that were unbelievable.

There are so many variables all the time with a piece of music. The song, the people involved, the tools you have available. I know how hard T-Bone's worked on his new record, but I also know that things happened because there were certain people there, and because a thing sounded good at the time.

There comes a point where you have to stop, too, because the vocabulary is so great. When something makes you happy, then you have to leave it.

**BURNETT:** I like to have the idea of limits. I like to have definite borders. I watch my kids crawl right up on the stove. They want to know what their limits are. See, a person who's mad doesn't know his limits. He doesn't know the difference between himself and a chicken. I really like the idea of working with a *band*: "We're not going to use another drummer. Our drummer's not any good, but that's my story and I'm sticking to it."

**KNOPFLER:** It's exactly the same when you're talking about classical composers of the past. Their limits were the range of the instruments of the orchestra. But it goes without saying you need a tremendous harmonic sense.

**BURNETT:** To work within those borders.

**KNOPFLER:** This film that I'm doing now is actually turning out to be that sort of a thing. Even though there are scenes where

## T-Bone: "In the first place, the drummer's always bad. There are only about three drummers left in the world who can actually play with the demands made of a rock 'n' roll record."

**BURNETT:** Or physically violently.

**MUSICIAN:** *How was it brought home to you? Can you think of an example?*

**KNOPFLER:** Yes, I can think of an example. [Bob Dylan's] *Infidels* comes to mind. I knew how it could have been, had I been allowed to finish it. I had to go on tour, and so there was a little break. I thought I could come back and mix it. And CBS told Bob he had to turn it in.

It's a very weird situation. But he had to press ahead and get the thing out. You carry a vision of possibilities with you. And you share it with your like-minded engineer. And what I was working with was roughs, which were beautiful, and so it comes as a bit of a surprise when things are resung, when another engineer is brought in, and certain overdubs are made you can use a hundred-and-ten pieces, it's amazing how the thing itself seems to start to dictate the tools that you bring to that particular job.

To create the illusion of ease is everything. All the people who are the best at what they do make it look easy. In some sense—this is where it gets complicated—because it *is* easy, and in others it's just not.

There's no formula. I've said this now for however long I've been doing interviews. There is a kind of a person around who insists on going through life trying to understand creative processes by this approach: "Tell me what the trick is." It's just not like that. I'm sorry to disappoint you, it's just not like that. There is no trick. There are so many aspects to it. There's no trick to conceiving, drawing, building and realizing a cathedral.

You don't go up to the guy who did that and go, "What's the trick, man? How do you do that stuff, man?" You don't say that. So don't say it to me. Don't come to me with a microphone and say, "Just tell me how you do that stuff." My father was an architect. When I was a child I asked him if he ever built a cathedral. He said, "I never would—because my faith's not strong enough."

**BURNETT**: It's about inspiring people and moving people and giving people the chance to feel more real, more a *part*. There was a time in my life, maybe I was seventeen, when I wanted to be a rock 'n' roll star. There was this feeling that came of it, which is like getting on a moment. There were many times in my life, especially with women, where I would be able to be very *large*. But lately I've begun to identify this as almost a Hitlerian feeling, of being able to be larger than others. And what goes with that is then being cowed by it. That's the flip side of it. And lately I don't like it. Whether it's with one woman or one man or one band, I don't like that heavy feeling of "I'm in control of this situation." I much more like the feeling of sitting on this beach and this is the sand, and over there are the trees, and overhead are the birds...And I'm a creature made by God who's *part* of this thing that's going on. You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

**KNOPFLER**: Absolutely.

**BURNETT**: There's something going on way beyond anything that I can conceive of, or definitely control. I'm just a part of it, I don't *want* to be Hitler. I don't want to be a rock star. Many people have said that Hitler was the first rock star, and that's a truer statement than any of us who ever said that could really conceive of, because it goes on in every moment of a person's life. You have lots of chances to be Hitler, or a rock star.

**MUSICIAN**: *But obviously somebody has to run the show, and you have to take a certain responsibility. If you produce an album or lead a band into an arena for people who paid seventeen bucks to see you, isn't it necessary to the job that you put aside the part of yourself that wants to be one more pebble on the beach?*

**KNOPFLER**: But there's a difference, I think, between a man singing a song about his real feelings to an audience, a big audience with a lot of fists up in the air, and what I would call jackboot rock—a series of devices aimed at some kind of musical Nuremberg. You've got to be reasonable with your audience and treat people with respect and reason. One of the things that really pissed me off recently was seeing wrestling on the sports reports. Because that's not baseball or basketball or football. All of a sudden the sports report, and the news, has become show biz. So I called up the network, and said, "I don't want to see wrestling on the sports report on the news." And some guy said, "Thanks for your call."

**MUSICIAN**: *You're talking about not wanting to have genuine athletic competition insulted by putting it in the same place as something predetermined, where they know who's going to win in advance. Which relates in music to the difference between putting out your genuine feelings and getting a response from the audience, and having a preplanned series of effects that you know will produce* this *response from the crowd.*

**KNOPFLER**: I really think in the end that people understand that, that people really feel that, people can sense it, so I wouldn't worry too much about the potential damage. Provided you feel that you're basically the same as your audience, or at least that there's some kind of sensitizing, there is some kind of inspiring process going on, that you're leaving people *up*, that you're leaving people enriched. That you haven't resorted to some kind of rabble-rousing. Talk to people who work in these places. People leave some shows in a very destructive, very anti-social mood. Other times people leave saying [*whispers*], "Yeah." One of the nicest things that ever happened to me was some guy came up to me and said, "I was feeling suicidal. I was dragged out by my mates and I was really at the end of my tether and I just want you to know that I feel great, I'm going to go on out there." So, hey. The thing works in mysterious ways. Sometimes it's a fairly fine line.

Another area that is quite interesting is audience size. I don't think that working musicians who are popular should make it their day-to-day business to play in football stadiums. I just don't think that is a good idea.

**BURNETT**: It's definitely not.

**KNOPFLER**: I think that there's got to be a reasonable limit. In London, I just didn't want to play in Wembley Stadium....

## T-Bone: "The truly great songs are *huge* songs. I challenge anyone to make a bigger statement than 'You Are My Sunshine.' Lennon had that genius, that gift for saying, 'Help!' 'All You Need Is Love,' 'Imagine.' Bono has that gift."

**BURNETT**: You played [the smaller] Wembley Arena, right? Ten nights or something?

**KNOPFLER**: Yeah, it's better to do a lot of nights in a smaller place. It means that you've got to work harder to get to the same amount of people who really want to see you, but I think it's more civilized. I think it's better for the people who come. It's not better for you, really, because you've got to do it ten times instead of doing it once.

**BURNETT**: I agree. I think there are very few people out there who should do it. I don't know what it is—let's call it power. Springsteen did not have that power. I saw him play in Wembley to 100,000 people. To me there was one really

brilliant moment, when he did "I'm On Fire" just as the sun was going down.

**KNOPFLER:** Well, that's a great song. I think "I'm On Fire" is one of the best songs written in the past twenty-odd years.

**BURNETT:** I would agree. I would say that Springsteen is one of the great balladeers of our age. In no way to demean him, I don't mean this to put him down, but even Springsteen didn't have the power to put across what he does to 100,000 people. Elvis Costello's one of the great songwriters of our time, and he couldn't do it. It makes no sense for Baryshnikov to dance in Giants Stadium.

the first song globally broadcast. And that's fitting. Whereas "I'm On Fire" wouldn't be fitting, globally broadcast. It's a mind-boggling concept to say something to everybody on the globe at the same time.

**MUSICIAN:** *Did your mind boggle at Live Aid, Mark?*

**KNOPFLER:** We were right in the middle of playing across the parking lot, so we just walked across and played. But at the same time when I see these pomp rock...I can't get into it. I'm always outside the crowd. I'm always apart from it. I can't get myself involved. Never have been able to. You could make fun of it, but I think it's something that goes a bit deeper than that.

## Mark: "There's no *trick* to conceiving, drawing, building and realizing a cathedral. You don't go up to the architect and say, 'How do you do that stuff, man?' So don't say it to me."

**KNOPFLER:** I just think it becomes another thing, it's like saying, "This is cultural." And so instead of it being a performance, it becomes an event. And it actually affects your playing, because we've had to do these things a few times in different countries; the only place to play is the football ground or whatever. And it affects the way you play.

**BURNETT:** It does. Because it has to be grander. I think U2, for instance, actually has the power. I would say they are the only band that would have the power to play a football stadium. And that is a very personal opinion. I just think Bono has the genius...You know what genius means? Gift. Talent. I wouldn't say in Bono's case it's a skill; it's actually a gift, knowing Bono. Of anyone I've ever met in my life, he is able to stand up and do things I would really be humiliated and embarrassed to do. He climbs up on top of the scaffolding and waves a white flag, which is a brilliant, beautiful, poignant, true and grand statement. If I did that I'd fall off the scaffolding to my death.

But he has that gift for making a grand statement. And if you're playing for 100,000 people, you have to make it really grand. One of the things I realized about songwriting recently is the truly great songs, the songs that people will sing in a hundred years are really *huge* songs. "You Are My Sunshine" at first glance might seem like a very meager song, but just look at the title. "You Are My Sunshine." Well, I challenge anyone to make a bigger statement than that. Lennon had that genius, that gift for saying "Help!" "All You Need Is Love." "Imagine." He had that gift for making huge statements. I believe that's why the Beatles were the Beatles. And Bono has that particular gift for making a ridiculously huge statement and somehow pulling it off. Springsteen is brilliant at what he does, but he makes much smaller statements, really. He doesn't come anywhere within a thousand miles of saying "You Are My Sunshine." When he got into that dimension of 100,000 people, somehow his statement would go out and it would diffuse. By the time it got to where I was it was very meager. "All You Need Is Love" is bigger than all of us. Whether you agree with what it's saying or not, it's big. It's worldwide. And that was

It's not just that I don't particularly like going out on Saturday night. It's something else. And it's an instinctive mistrust of the whole thing. When you are in that position I think you have to be prepared to take responsibility for what you do. For what you write or sing or the way you behave, the way you treat your audience.

That's art, people who create things, even things which you think, "God, that's great," and then you see that the guy is irresponsible, you see that the guy isn't committed to what he's doing, doesn't stay with it, has other people turn it out for him; you realize that's art without responsibility. You realize as you get older that art without responsibility is bullshit.

**MUSICIAN:** *What if you go in to produce somebody else and there's one guy who just doesn't have it, who can't cut it? You get in there and you're helping them channel their vision, but the drummer is just terrible. You cannot get this drummer together. At what point do you just say, "Can the drummer."*

**BURNETT:** In the first place the drummer's always bad. Right? I mean there are only about three drummers left in the world who can actually play with the demands that are made of a rock 'n' roll, pop record.

**KNOPFLER:** [*Grins and nods*] I can't *tell* you what it is to hear that. I can't tell you.

**BURNETT:** I'll take the heat. I'll say that. I don't need anybody to back me up on that [*laughter*]. But the thing is like...this is such a long discussion...

**KNOPFLER:** Drummers, T-Bone.

**BURNETT:** Let's murder 'em. With the advent of drum machines, when any twelve-year-old kid can put a rhythmically perfect track together, drums have become increasingly important to the point now where they're totally important and totally unimportant at the same time. Drums don't matter anymore, because they can be perfect with the touch of a few fingers. To find a drummer who can play a completely unimportant part in a really important way is a rare thing, so you're not ever going to get a band from Waxahachie that's gonna have a drummer that's equal to the task that's required

of a drummer today. So then one has to decide, just how damned important *are* the drums in this? Well...the song is what's important, make that song live, so the producer is the servant or midwife. You're either going to kill it or give it life. Most of the time these songs are killed. Almost every time. A song is something that you let go of, you let fly. Singing is not giving all the notes, right? Singing is just ripping off your clothes and running through the park.

**KNOPFLER:** Are you trying to find out how *ruthless* a producer must be? I'm a very slow learner in that sense. And I insist on feeling optimistic about people's limitations. But I'm changing, and the older I get the more I realize there isn't the time. I've less time now for something that's bullshit, that's not working. I've had to be shown that. Having wasted so much time in studios, I would be far more ready now to give the golden elbow. I've gone through hell with people who couldn't cut it.

**BURNETT:** That's what I just did...I agree. I was just doing work with Kris Kristofferson, who I think is one of the great songwriters. He's written two of the five songs that have been played the most on the radio in history. He's a great writer. Okay, he's got like this seven-piece band, and every one of the musicians is brilliant in his own right. And they would play the song through, and I would walk through them and say, "You're fired," "You're fired," "You're fired," "You're fired."

**KNOPFLER:** You wouldn't have done that how long ago?

**BURNETT:** A year ago.

**KNOPFLER:** There you are. That's a better example of what I was trying to say.

**BURNETT:** You just get to the point where, "This is the song, you sound good on it, you sound good, and all the rest of it is extraneous. Go sit down and listen."

**KNOPFLER:** I think I might have always been impelled to act as a producer without realizing that was what I was. I remember on *Slow Train Coming* for instance, Bob Dylan and I did run down the songs before, but then [producers] Barry [Beckett] and Jerry [Wexler] sort of got stuck into them, with the band and everything. Then this song turned up and Bob was singing it with the piano and I remember just getting up off my stool and got everybody off the floor and said, "Just sing it with the piano, that's it, and that's the song." So I suppose that is being a producer before you realize you are a producer.

A producer is a way of saying, "You're fired," "You're fired." I fired myself, I fired everybody. That's just a sense of what's appropriate. But what is interesting is how much you're prepared to act on it. How ruthless are you prepared to be in pursuit of whatever it is?

**MUSICIAN:** *What happens if you just end up trapped in a situation? Each of you has had the experience of getting into something with all good intentions and enthusiasm that became an unpleasant experience. Mark, you said to me, "Once you get into it, you have the obligation to see the thing through." How do you keep on the track? How do you keep your judgment clear?*

**KNOPFLER:** Musical things, things keep happening between you and the other musicians that keep making it all right, in spite of the fucking artist.

**BURNETT:** When there's an unhappy situation, well, I believe...What really matters is that what's behind it gets across. And if you do it this way and it gets across, fine, if you do it that way and it gets across, fine.

**MUSICIAN:** *But that's assuming that you can get it across in spite*

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**BURNETT:** If you can't get it across, then you just do the best you can. And if it doesn't get across, so be it. Who says that everything we do is supposed to work? Where is that written? Everything we do is supposed to connect? In my case there was the band here and there was me here and there was this other guy who was playing both ends against the middle, and he was completely the fly in the ointment. The band and I got along great.

You watch people going through completely unnecessary emotional problems and you say to yourself, "I choose not to go through these when I have to do *my* work."

**KNOPFLER:** You try to make it better next time. For whoever.

**BURNETT:** And if it's my own record, then I'll try to make that better. But at least I know. I know what it's like to stand by the microphone in the studio and try to sing a song that I wrote in my bedroom three months ago with the same conviction and emotion that I felt at the time that I wrote it. I know that there's a problem. When I wrote it in my bedroom it was perfect. It was complete; it was real. And now I've got to involve this guitar player and this drummer and this bass player, in this process, and I'm going to sing you this song and if you play one damn note before I finish this song and you know what this song is about, I'm going to go for your throat. You've got to involve them. You've got to allow them their humanity, their problems. You've got to allow them their fight they just had with their wife and the flat tire they just had on the way over to where you are. You've got to say, "Okay, here we are, now listen to this." The first audience you have to get over with is this drummer, bass player and guitar player. They have to somehow feel what you felt when you were in your bedroom. And you have to allow them to say in the song what they feel about that.

**MUSICIAN:** *When you produced Elvis Costello, you always first gathered the players around and had Elvis sing the song to them and tell them about it. I thought that was a real ballsy thing to do. Mark, have you had the experience in Dire Straits of having somebody in the band no longer...*

**KNOPFLER:** I have. I probably will again. And I don't even know what you were going to ask.

**MUSICIAN:** *...that maybe somebody at one time does get off on your songs and say, "Yeah, that really hits me," and then at a certain point maybe he and the* songs *aren't connecting anymore. He cannot play the thing with feeling because he's no longer feeling what you do.*

**KNOPFLER:** It depends whether you're talking about recording or performance. Sometimes when you play a song live a lot of times, you can be a little bit detached from what you're doing but it's still working. That's a wonderful, charitable, marvelous thing about the creative act. It's not absolutely essential to get inside every song every night on a tour that lasts for a year. I do try, I think everybody really tries incredibly hard. That's the gig side of it. Recording is tricky. I think you're a lucky man if you can get inside it every time. I somehow manage to. I'm just dead lucky and think everybody who's ever played for me has really given their everything. I think you can tell when somebody's standing apart from what they're doing. You can tell. They know. They're guilty. After the event they know themselves that they've done a disservice.

**BURNETT:** I went up onstage one time. I was singing a really

*continued on page 86*

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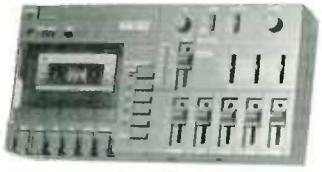

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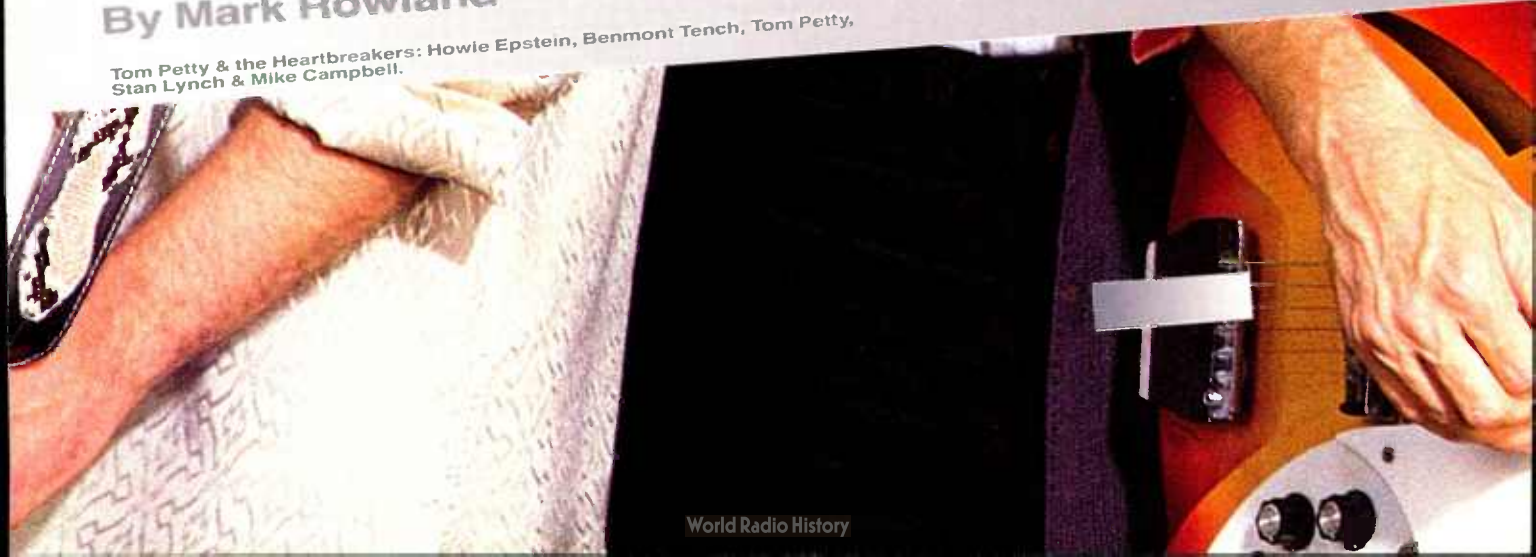
# Heartbreaker Straight Ahead!

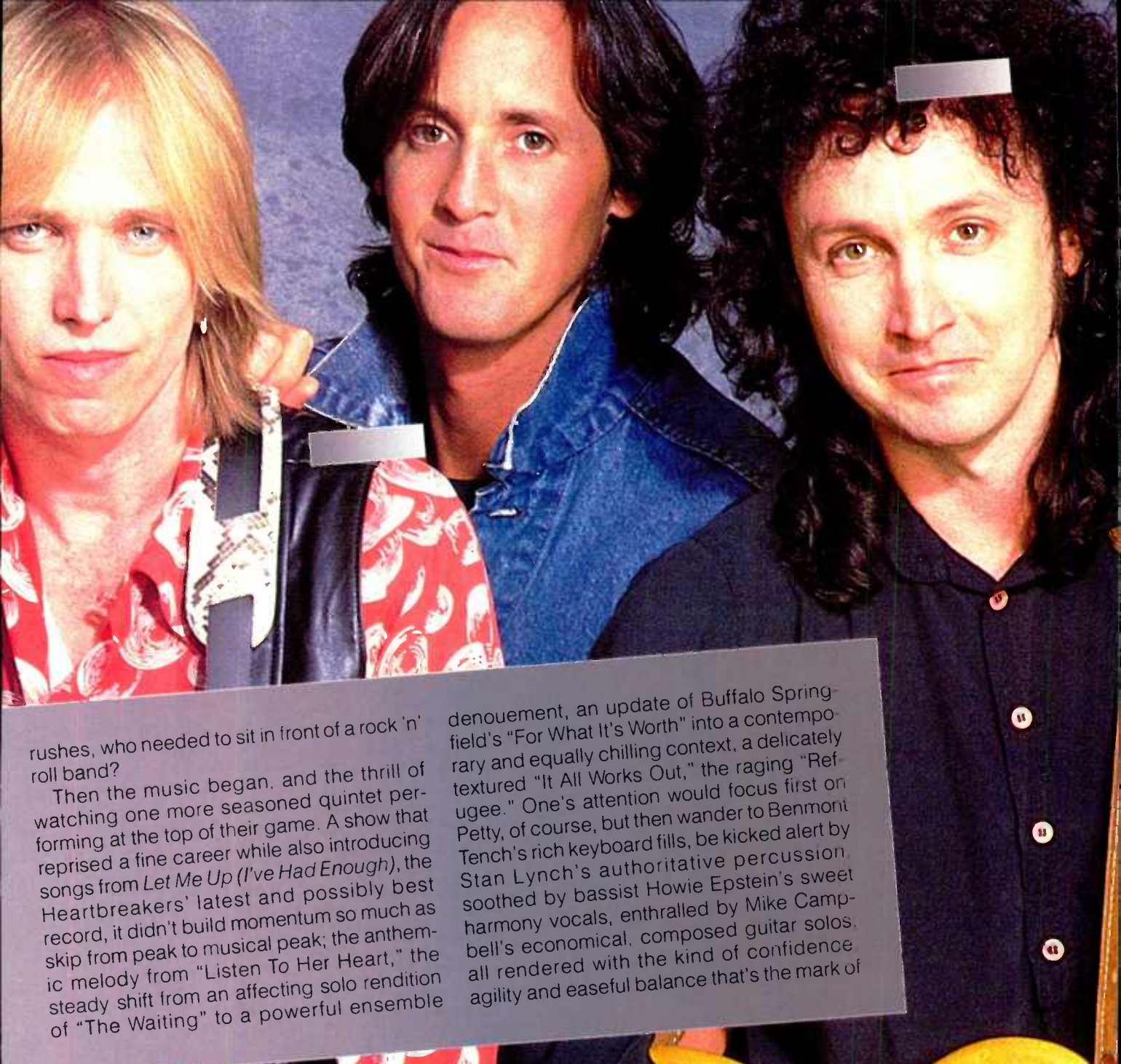
## Tom Petty stops jamming and speaks his mind.

By Mark Rowland

The night Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers arrived at the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles coincided with the fourth, pivotal match for the NBA championship between the L.A. Lakers and Boston Celtics, a thrilling and exhausting spectacle. As a result I arrived too late to catch the opening sets by the Georgia Satellites and the Del Fuegos (being from Boston, the Fuegos might understand), and burdened, upon entering the hall at intermission, with a sense of approaching anticlimax. After four quarters of adrenaline

Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers: Howie Epstein, Benmont Tench, Tom Petty, Stan Lynch & Mike Campbell.





rushes, who needed to sit in front of a rock 'n' roll band?

Then the music began, and the thrill of watching one more seasoned quintet performing at the top of their game. A show that reprised a fine career while also introducing songs from *Let Me Up (I've Had Enough)*, the Heartbreakers' latest and possibly best record, it didn't build momentum so much as skip from peak to musical peak; the anthemic melody from "Listen To Her Heart," the steady shift from an affecting solo rendition of "The Waiting" to a powerful ensemble denouement, an update of Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth" into a contemporary and equally chilling context, a delicately textured "It All Works Out," the raging "Refugee." One's attention would focus first on Petty, of course, but then wander to Benmont Tench's rich keyboard fills, be kicked alert by Stan Lynch's authoritative percussion, soothed by bassist Howie Epstein's sweet harmony vocals, enthralled by Mike Campbell's economical, composed guitar solos, all rendered with the kind of confidence, agility and easeful balance that's the mark of

# "I remember seeing *A Hard Day's Night* and thinking, 'Well, you've got farming over here, and on this side, the Beatles.' "

a great team.

It hasn't always been this way. Like Petty's songs, which so often transpose melodic thrills with tales about a variety of guys named Loser, the Heartbreakers have frequently ridden a rollercoaster disguised as a success story. In Petty they have a leader who is an odd mix of political progressive and cultural cracker, a deceptively down-home guy who's responsible for launching almost as many lawsuits as albums. The making of his last one—record, that is—took nearly three years, during which Petty broke his hand; the result, *Southern Accents*, is even by his account something less than a pop triumph. A few rock bands as good as the Heartbreakers—and let's face it, there have only been a few—have broken up over less.

Instead, the Heartbreakers hooked up with Bob Dylan—one character whose ability to defy category exceeds even Petty's—for a rejuvenating tour last year. They bookended that experience in the studio, delivering the goods for *Let Me Up*, an album as relaxed and accomplished as *Southern Accents* seemed belabored. Dylan and Petty collaborated on the LP's first single, "Jammin' Me," and the Heartbreakers were ready to embark on what promised to be a tour triumphant. But a few days before its commencement, Petty's house was set afire. The blaze spared his family (he's married, with a young daughter) but psychic scars remain. "I still don't know why it happened," he said. "It's a very weird feeling. It's one of those things that's very hard to accept. I still can't accept it." The concert tour is now as much refuge as celebration. As Petty puts it, "I was really glad to have someplace to go."

In the office of his management, he speaks quietly, but never idly, about the Heartbreakers' musical renascence, Dylan, lawsuits, salad days, and, in general, a remarkable career. He sports a pallor that couldn't look more out of place in Los Angeles, his home for ten years. His occasionally acidulous insights are leavened by dry, deprecating humor. He's the kind of guy you wouldn't mind meeting in a bar, not because he knows how to rock so well, but because he knows himself.

**MUSICIAN:** *It seems like every other record you take side trips from your foundation, which to me is classic pop songwriting, and then you return.*

**PETTY:** It does seem that way, doesn't it? Even after the first album I remember being very conscious of not wanting to repeat it. So we try to veer, however subtly. I guess that means I have to do another weird one now.

**MUSICIAN:** *Does your confidence about songwriting veer as well?*

**PETTY:** It comes and goes. I felt very confident and relaxed on this record, and Bob probably had something to do with that. Simply because we were so caught up in the tour when the break came, we felt confident by instinct. Which won't always get you home, but luckily....

**MUSICIAN:** *Dylan tends to work quickly and by feel.*

**PETTY:** I think he probably did instill some of that with us, if that doesn't sound too pretentious. He wouldn't preach it or anything, it just happened by playing together so much. And we'd already hit a new level of playing on the *Southern Accents* tour. "Mature" is such an awful word to use, but we did get better. Bob showed up at the end of that tour, so instead of going back into the cave, which had been our pattern, we kept playing, which was the best thing that ever happened to us. We do feel fairly renewed now.

**MUSICIAN:** *On* Let Me Up *the band is tight, but the sound is very relaxed, offhand.*

**PETTY:** Well, it is very offhand. We didn't tinker with this record as much. Most of the overdubs we put on we later took off. In the original burst of recording sessions we did thirty titles—not all are great—but when we started weeding them out we were real excited about a lot of them. I was dragging people home, asking, "What do you think?" I never asked people's opinions so much. Of course nobody could agree. But there's two or three songs I'll use on future albums.

**MUSICIAN:** *If they're not sold to Lone Justice first.*

**PETTY:** Nah. We're getting real stingy these days.

**MUSICIAN:** *It sounds like the record came without struggle.*

**PETTY:** We made a rule this time, without saying so out loud, that when we'd even approach struggle, we'd just abandon ship. The way we worked, we'd come together around seven in the evening—the Heartbreakers don't track too well in the day—and we'd set up so we could all see each other in one room. It was comfortable surroundings, the same studio we'd recorded *Torpedoes* and *Hard Promises*. We'd play a set of about four or five songs, and maybe play "Wooly Bully" or whatever came to mind. Then listen to that, and go back out for another set. If your mind is only on one song, you see, it gets to be a little like *work* after a while; this way you get a feel of the album. If the groove was good I'd start singing lyrics off the top of my head. Only with your friends can you do that—it's *very* embarrassing. But I can't do much to embarrass myself with them I haven't done already.

**MUSICIAN:** *You'd never worked like that before?*

**PETTY:** Not really. But we'd been stuck in studios so much, we were trying to avoid the agony. It wasn't all simple. But I basically went for feeling. There's no overdubs at all on "Self-Made Man." Mike was singing harmonies in the middle of the room, so when he comes in the whole band comes up.

**MUSICIAN:** *Why did the songs keep pouring out?*

**PETTY:** We didn't even want to talk about it, we were so afraid it would stop. Mike and I had kind of a quasi-religious thing about it [*laughs*]. Our engineer, Don Smith, would say, "You've got twenty tunes, maybe you should go back and finish some of them." But we wanted to break ground every day. And some days nothing happened until maybe the last hour of the session; I'd get an idea, and here came a song. It was really fun.

**MUSICIAN:** *But didn't you need all your experience to achieve that kind of spontaneity?*

**PETTY:** You couldn't do your first record that way! I'm yelling, "E, A, go back to the first verse"—later I had to take all that out. If you listen to "Self-Made Man" you can hear some—we couldn't get it all. "How Many More Days" is the only time we've played that song. At the end you can hear everyone just stop playing. Nobody was taking it very seriously.

I don't mean to sound flippant about it, 'cause we also tried things that didn't work. We recorded up to the day we had to leave for the tour.

**MUSICIAN:** *Did the novelty of playing backup band with Bob*

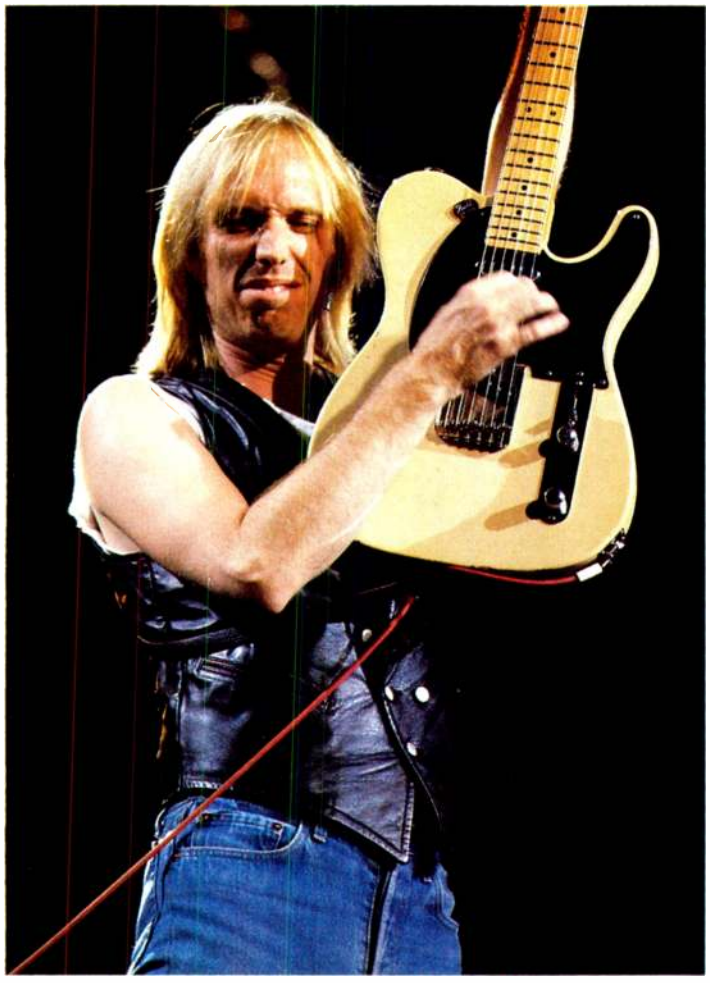
*Dylan wear off?*

**PETTY:** No, because there was room for our stuff. He was more than generous, and anyway I love all those songs. The great thing about playing with him is that he'll come up with different sets of changes all the time. You have to keep your mind open.

**MUSICIAN:** *Did you feel forced into competition?*

**PETTY:** It can be intimidating when you first get together, but I think we all knew it wouldn't do any good to get caught up in that, and there was never a moment when we hesitated to speak our minds. Dylan is someone everybody is trying to prepare for. He's really like you and me. As a person I mean. As an artist, he's pretty amazing.

Personally and musically, we got along instantly. I was a little



**Petty: "I don't think I'm all blissed out or anything."**

nervous at first. I didn't know Bob very well, and he's a hard person to know. He turned out to be a good friend. Some of our best times were on the plane rides. He's a fascinating guy and a great musician—a really instinctive musician. Instinct is everything with him, I think.

**MUSICIAN:** *You both seem comfortable traveling and performing after all these years, living a kind of troubadorial life.*

**PETTY:** I think that's something we have in common—not feeling like we're living unless we're going out there and playing to somebody. I probably like being in the studio more than the band does. But if we didn't have records, I think we'd play in the garage, and I think Bob would too. I mean, is this really so bad?

**MUSICIAN:** *Success can wreck a band as well as failure. What accounts for the Heartbreakers' relative stability?*

**PETTY:** I hate to say it, but this goes *way* back. People don't realize we've known each other since high school. That's not the secret to why we're a good band, though. I don't know if there is one key. The main reason I keep on is that I believe the music will keep getting better. We're not the kind of people that kid themselves very well; we're pretty hard on each other. Bring in a bad song and, boy, you'll pay! [*laughs*] "This is shit!" you know, or "No, I'm not doing another take because this song sucks." They're very blunt people.

**MUSICIAN:** *Does that intimidate you, as a songwriter?*

**PETTY:** Oh yeah, it scares the hell out of me. I don't know if you ever get over that. I'm always scared to play somebody something I've just written. But they're my first jury, 'cause if they're interested, I feel confident others will be.

Mike Campbell's the same way. I have to go over to his house and listen to everything he's done, because he won't offer up. And I've found some great songs. He wasn't hiding them, he just didn't think they were worth enough.

**MUSICIAN:** *Do you fight over the inclusion or placement of particular songs?*

**PETTY:** We argue about what songs go on an album—especially with Benmont. On the B-side of "Jammin' Me" there's a song called "Make That Connection" that was supposed to end side one. But I couldn't find a format. I could have tacked it on as an extra cut to the CD. But I think that idea is just so honky. It's not clever at all.

**MUSICIAN:** *Before* Scarecrow, *John Cougar Mellencamp would deny there was any significance to his lyrics. Did you go through a similar process?*

**PETTY:** Yeah, I know what ol' John means. His record was almost like watching him grow up in public. With us and with most writers, I guess, you start off writing fairly simplistic love songs. Then you hit your late twenties and for some reason you start to give a shit about the world you're leaving behind—maybe you figure you're gonna die now [*laughs*].

The most important thing to me about a song, beyond the subject matter, is that I believe the singer. And the quickest way to attain that is simply to sing the truth. A lot of singers go years without figuring that out. They have this great tool, but can't figure out how to be honest.

But your subconscious is always working; maybe John became aware of the farmers and really felt it. And, not to capsulize it too much, it's the same with us. These days it's hard to write songs and not say anything about what's going on. Some shred of consciousness about the point the world is at now has to creep in—hopefully, with a sense of humor.

**MUSICIAN:** Let Me Up *sounds upbeat, but the sentiments are consistently dark. There's humor, but it's gallows laughter.*

**PETTY:** Sometimes all you can do is laugh, or you'll cry. Dylan gave us songs that made you laugh while informing you. It makes the medicine go down a little easier. Political songs can date themselves quickly, but with humor and the right metaphor, they work. I'm not a political guy, but more and more that's what's on my mind.

You look up and what is there to believe in? The preacher is fucking his secretary while they take hundreds of millions of dollars off sick, arthritic people—the ugliest kind of crime. You can't go to a McDonald's without fear of being mugged. I know, you look at newspapers in the 20s and they're filled with talk

KEN SETTLE

## "The most important thing is to believe the singer. And the quickest way to attain that is to simply sing the truth."

about the end of the world. But now we can't kid ourselves—they *can* blow us all up. I have to take exception to that.

I saw Dylan getting criticized in Australia by this guy who was saying, "Your new songs aren't as relevant as your old songs." And Dylan said, "Well, I'm out here writing songs—what are you doing?" You know, like a whole generation is out there driving BMWs and trying to be lawyers, and at least I'm trying to do something. I thought *that* was pretty relevant.

**MUSICIAN:** *On "Think About Me" you take the role of a loser, bitter about a rival who's got a fancy car and a CD player. But you probably do have a nice car and a CD player.*

**PETTY:** Yeah, I'm probably like the guy he's criticizing. But

**"What! Go out with the Dead?"**

emotionally, I feel I understand exactly where he's coming from. And that's an example of how you slip things under what on the surface might be just a love song....

**MUSICIAN:** *That kind of character is so familiar in your songs—the hard-luck lover, the guy in the trailer. Do you ever think, "That's me but for the grace of God"?*

**PETTY:** Oh yeah. I'm one lucky mother, let me tell you [*laughs*]. I'm grateful for that. That never leaves.

**MUSICIAN:** *So you keep common ground with your audience.*

**PETTY:** You must! Or why even sing? It's hard to write songs about Malibu Colony—for me, there's nothing to cover. It's real hard to write songs with any attitude at all. If I wanted to think about all the things I'm talking about now, I'd be too petrified to play a chord. I write better caught up in the stream of things, or the atmosphere in the studio with the band. Lately that seems to key me up better than going into a room.

**MUSICIAN:** *How did "Jammin' Me" come about?*

**PETTY:** Bob came over one day and I played him the album. He liked this one song a lot, I think it was "The Damage You've Done," so he said, "Let's write a song." I think the title was his line; we lifted the other stuff out of the newspaper. It's the only time I've ever worked like that. But it was great fun; one person starts a line and the other finishes it. The Eddie Murphy verse was just about the pictures on the entertainment page that day. It wasn't an insult, at least as far as I know. We wrote a lot of verses, filled up the legal pad real fast...Of course we hadn't spent much time on the music [*laughs*], but Mike came through with a chord pattern. I don't think I'd ever collaborated on lyrics in my life.

**MUSICIAN:** *Can you effectively give an audience answers, or even a point of view?*

**PETTY:** You can't give an audience answers. The best thing you can do is just point things out, get their minds to work. And how that's done, I have no idea. Sometimes it happens without intent, sometimes you try and nothing happens. How songs inspire is so intangible, which is why songwriting is so attractive, I think, and magical. You can't make rules that always work. But I remember when I was a kid hearing the Stones and thinking, "Great, they're pissed off about the same things I am."

**MUSICIAN:** *How did you begin writing songs?*

**PETTY:** It came fairly naturally. I was writing songs even in my teens. The trouble was, you couldn't play them at shows—some clubs even had rules about it. So we'd say, "Here's a song by Santana" and play one of our own, and no one would know. It took me a while to get good at it, but I felt I should be writing, because of the Beatles, Stones, Kinks.

I remember seeing *A Hard Day's Night* and thinking, "Well, that's obviously the way you go," you know; you've got farming over here, and on this side, the Beatles...We were going to form a band, and I was trying to convince my mother to buy me this guitar out of the Sears catalog, one of these dollar-down, dollar-a-day jobs. She said, "What songs are you going to play?" and I said we were going to write our own songs. She burst into laughter: "You want to write songs, and you can't even play an instrument yet!" But I just thought, "They can do it, why can't I?"

From the time I got the guitar, I was more interested in making things up than learning, which may have been to my detriment as a musician. Once I learned to play a twelve-bar—I think "Wooly Bully" was the first—I figured out there were a million songs I could make up. I viewed that as cheating for a long time, though. Like I should really be learning how to play "A Day In The Life."

**MUSICIAN:** *It amazes me that great pop songs still come out of that three-chord format.*

**PETTY:** It's the greatest thing about rock 'n' roll. It's one of the purest forms of folk music, because almost anyone can do it, even if you can't play an instrument. Especially in this day of tape recorders. I think sometimes, "If I had a cassette deck when I was fourteen..." 'cause I still do that now, write a song on the ghetto-blaster. I have two. They face each other. I sing the song in one, and as I play it back I sing harmony into the other, and that's it. That's my test. I have this big 24-track studio, and I never go in there. It bugs some people.

# WHICH PLAYS HOTTER?

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**MUSICIAN:** *Do you listen much to the radio for groups that are coming up?*

**PETTY:** I think there are a lot of good ones, but they don't get much exposure. You know who I think is good, is this guy in Timbuk 3 [Pat MacDonald]. I'm crazy about Crowded House. I love the Georgia Satellites. And then there's a lot of bad stuff too. Even in the 60s there was bad stuff—*even in the 60s* [*laughs*]. We had Ed Ames—nobody remembers that. It's a shame everyone's hung up on old stuff, on the radio. It's like....

**MUSICIAN:** *Tyranny of a generation?*

**PETTY:** That's what I say in one of the songs—"this generation didn't even get a name." I mean, they've got 50s diners and 60s records to buy on TV. What are they supposed to identify with? This generation can be as exciting and vital as any other, if they get the chance. But the baby-boomers, of which I'm a part, I'm afraid, seem to act like they're the only thing that's valid. You live in the present. You appreciate the past, but God, nostalgia can get very boring.

**MUSICIAN:** *How do you react to the Georgia Satellites and Del Fuegos, bands you're touring with, that draw some of their musical influence from the Heartbreakers?*

**PETTY:** It's a great compliment. I'd feel worse if the bands people say we influenced were all bad. But it's the best thing I can hope for, to make some mark in music. It's kind of strange, though. I try not to think about it, it makes me nervous.

A lot of my favorite stuff is the early Chess records, and if it weren't for the early Stones I might never have known about them. That music was right under my nose. But it didn't come on the radio or get marketed in a way that could reach me.

**MUSICIAN:** *What are the possibilities like for new songwriters in the record business?*

**PETTY:** A new band coming to town will probably go through as much shit as I did. All I can say is, "Try to be as aware as you can, and hold out for as much as you can." People think we fought over "artistic control." It wasn't that. We just wanted to be paid fairly. We didn't know about publishing rights, and I'm not sure anyone is going to hip you to that stuff if you don't know it. It's an awkward situation when you're starving and a guy says he'll buy you all the amps you want, just sign this. And then maybe you've got a hit record and a bunch of amps and he's got all the money.

I can honestly say money never motivated me for music, but boy, it sure hurts to see someone else getting what's yours. So those were the kind of battles we had.

**MUSICIAN:** *But after all those battles you re-signed with MCA.*

**PETTY:** When I re-signed there wasn't anyone left from the time I was fighting them. The company had been turned over to Irving Azoff, who I'd known for years, and he brought in a new staff. Otherwise I never would have done it. Now I'm treated very well, but people are gonna treat me well, because they see some money in it [*laughs*]. So that doesn't have much bearing on a new artist. Hey, just don't take any shit.

**MUSICIAN:** *A lot of bands now are selling their songs for commercials. But you wouldn't give B.F. Goodrich the right to use "Mary's New Car," and when they tried to use it anyway you sued them. So you don't really shy from controversy.*

**PETTY:** I have nothing against the tire company, I'm sure it's a fine product. And to their credit they withdrew the ad. They just couldn't understand that someone would object as a matter of conscience. "What's wrong with you, kid?" you know. "We're gonna pay you!" Well, maybe if I was hungry and my child needed an operation, I might do it.

I read that article in *Musician* by Chuck Young, who's one of my favorites—but don't tell him. He probably still owes me money. He was giving some people a hard time about that [see *Musician* #99], and I have to admit I was chuckling along with him. I do think you sell yourself out. So now "I Heard It Through The Grapevine" means dancing raisins. I don't like it. That used to mean enough to me that I found it offensive. I don't really judge anyone by it, though. Money has always had a devastating effect on people. But I'd feel a little cheesy.

**MUSICIAN:** *It's hard to hear a song the same way after it's been sold into slavery.*

**PETTY:** Yeah, like "Revolution"—what a song to pick! Out of the entire Beatles catalog. But hey, any idiot can see through that. That ain't gonna beat Reebok. You know you got trouble if you're buying Beatles songs in the first place [*sighs*]. Ahh, I'll probably get sued now.

**MUSICIAN:** *You've lived in L.A. for ten years. Is that hard to reconcile with your "Southernness"?*

**PETTY:** Only when I'm down South [*laughs*]. They tend to be a little suspicious of L.A., and I don't blame 'em. But all my relations are Southern, and so is the band, except Howie [Epstein]. I do like L.A., but if I weren't in this business I wouldn't be here.

**MUSICIAN:** *For a songwriter, it's a great observation deck.*

**PETTY:** Yeah, a redwood deck. You can sit there and watch East L.A. come west. You know, you won't feed them or pay them, and Beverly Hills is right here, and you think by going up into the hills it won't get you.

Shelter Records [Petty's first record label] was way over in Hollywood, next to a liquor store and across the street from a porn theater; coming from Gainesville, Florida, there was shit going on like we'd never seen. [Shelter's] Denny Cordell was real important to this group. I spent from '74 to '76 at his side. He made those great Leon Russell records. I used to live in Leon's house.

**MUSICIAN:** *What was that like?*

**PETTY:** Crazy. I was living in Hollywood at the Winona Hotel—kind of a hooker's place. The phone rings and it's Leon. He'd heard a song I'd written—which finally came out on a Don Johnson album ["Lost In Your Eyes"]—and he wanted to know if he could record it. I didn't know where tomorrow's rent was coming from. He said, "Do you feel like writing?" And I said, "Yeah, buddy! I'm ready right now!" He came over to the Winona in a Rolls Royce. I got in the car, thinking, "Whoa, shit!" as we're driving through town.

He was a pretty cool guy, Leon, and he kept me on salary as a lyric writer. There was a 40-track studio in the house—really advanced—and all these people used to hang out, Gary Busey, Roger Linn...and we'd sit around waiting for Leon to make records. If he needed lyrics, I was the guy. I never got credit—I didn't know about *that*—but it was a great education. For a while he was trying to make each song with a different producer, so George Harrison would be there one night, and then we'd see Brian Wilson, Bobby Womack, Terry Melcher, a long list of people, and I'd watch them work.

**MUSICIAN:** *For all your L.A. experience, you've hardly gone Hollywood.*

**PETTY:** You mean like the parties and all that? I lost interest very fast. Well, I sure tried it out. But we're lucky there; I know people who drifted toward that side of life, and it just never pays off. I've been kind of crazy for about ten years, but I've managed to lead a pretty normal life.

**MUSICIAN:** *You seem more settled these days.*

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## PETTY from previous page

**PETTY:** Well, I don't think I'm all blissed out or anything. I'm happy if people like the records. That's all I care to do, and I'm grateful for that.

**MUSICIAN:** *So that's your motivating force—to write songs, refine your craft?*

**PETTY:** The great challenge is to improve the quality of my work. My "work" sounds awfully serious. But we've made a certain sound and I'd like to expand it. And just keep playing in the band. That's the worst thing—we know we're stuck with each other [*laughs*]. But we've got a band. And I wouldn't know how to act if I didn't. I'm not qualified for anything else. I don't know what I'd do. Ⓜ

## BURNETT/ KNOPFLER from page 76

passionate song, it was a song requiring real anger. Right in the middle of the song I turned around and looked at those guys and they were all giving me not even perfunctory performances. And I thought, "Don't you realize I'm up here, being *really angry*?" What is this? I walked offstage. It ended up being a very embarrassing moment for me, because I walked offstage in the middle of a song. But it was the most honest thing to do at the moment. If these guys aren't going to be with me while I'm doing this, then why even do it?

**KNOPFLER:** One time I came offstage and really lost my temper and really told them what I thought of the performance. It was sabotage, it was a deliberate, "I am apart from these proceedings, this is the way I'm going to play it and to heck with the rest of you." That's what he was doing. He was out to sabotage the situation.

This song was going so slowly that it was almost standing still. This was just sheer bloody-mindedness, and it was just too much to bear. English are very stoic types, you know, we soldier on. We don't go out and say you're fired, you're fired, you're fired. We go through blood, bullets and mud.

It's blatantly obvious when T-Bone's out there going, "You're fired, you're fired, you're fired," he's got the right idea, because he's achieved that workable situation far earlier. Be as patient as you can for as long as you can and then get down to business.

**MUSICIAN:** *Both of you produce other artists, play on other people's records. So in all the time between your own albums, you help create an environment in which the songs that you write have a chance to be understood better, because a little bit of what you do and feel has been spread around.*

**KNOPFLER:** It's like a kid learning the language. I think you learn new words and you use more words. So eventually you get to the state where, like T-Bone, you can use "prognosticate" in a song.

**BURNETT:** But only in a very advanced state [*laughter*].

**MUSICIAN:** *When* Truth Decay *came out there wasn't an environment for that album to prosper. Even though* Talking Animals *is much more advanced and in some ways much more far out, there's a better environment for it, largely because you've been actively affecting the musical landscape with your outside projects. You've created a context in which people are more ready to receive this T-Bone Burnett album.*

**BURNETT:** In everything I've done, my constant aim was to create an environment for the acceptance of the next T-Bone Burnett record. Ⓜ



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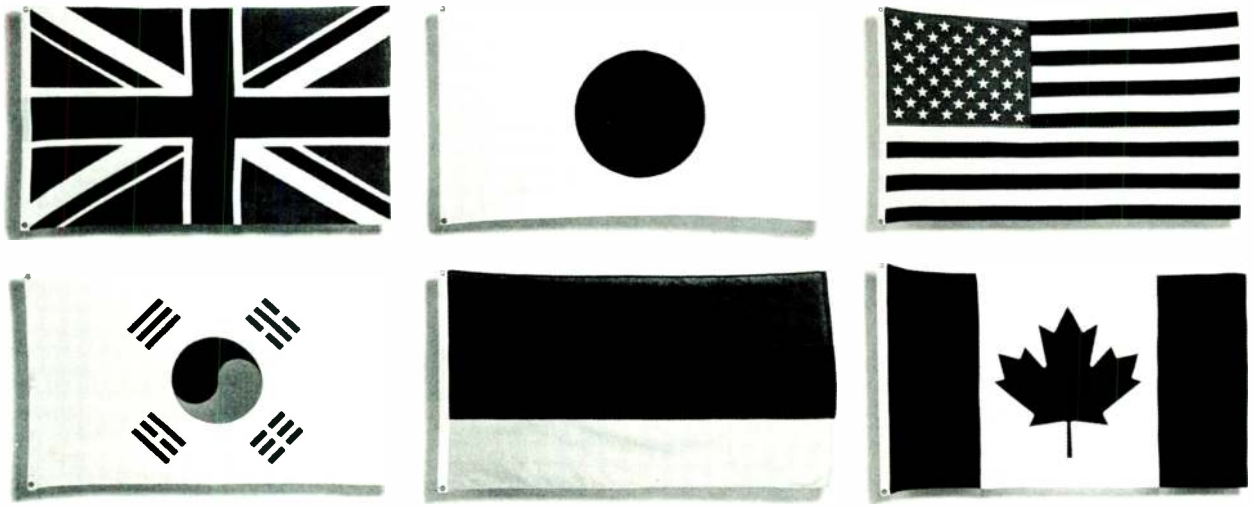

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YOUNG CHANG

# The Return of Robbie Robertson

## A decade after *The Last Waltz*, the Band's leader comes out of retirement to make his Big Statement.

By Bill Flanagan

I never said, 'I'm not going to write songs for a while,'" Robbie Robertson says. "I just didn't have the *lure* to get in there, sit down and suffer. And I enjoyed the sense that I didn't have to do it. After I did *The Last Waltz* I thought, 'This kind of redeems me a little bit. For a little while.'"

Robbie Robertson isn't offering excuses—he's just running down the facts. As guitarist and songwriter for the Band, Robertson was one of rock's most important voices from 1968—when *Music From Big Pink* appeared—till 1976, when the Band said goodbye with their *Last Waltz* concert. Robertson's charisma in the 1978 film of that concert almost led to a movie career—but after starring in one movie (*Carny*), Robbie decided he didn't really want to do that, either. So he helped his friend Martin Scorsese with some motion picture soundtracks, and laid low here in Los Angeles. For *ten years*.

"I wasn't so sure I had something to say," shrugs Robertson, forty-three. "And I heard a lot of people making records who had nothing to say, either. I thought, 'I don't know if I want to do that. I don't know if I want to just make records. Maybe I'll do a movie, maybe I'll score a film.' I enjoyed very much experimenting with

Photograph By Chris Cuffaro

the score for *Raging Bull*. It made me feel good. I thought, 'God, I've always been thinking of things to say, I've always been showing up. I'm just going to hang around the house for a while, talk to my kids.' I wasn't sleeping, but I just didn't want to make mediocre moves. I looked around me and it seemed like everybody was. It was like an epidemic of *medium* out there. I'm grateful I wasn't motivated to just get it over with."

It's an admirable attitude—but not completely unique. John Lennon and John Fogerty are famous examples of rock legends who left for years to recharge. Simon, Dylan and Morrison have had their long vacations, too. What really sets Robertson apart is that (a) he said goodbye before he left, and (b) he's coming back with an album as powerful as the best of his old stuff. "Starting Over" wasn't exactly "Strawberry Fields," and "Rock 'n' Roll Girls" wasn't "Run Through the Jungle," but Robertson's new record has songs that you could put right beside "The Weight." Here in California in June he's wrapping up work on the still untitled LP he hopes will make it to the record stores the last week of September. The album has the dignity and depth Band lovers expect, but it ain't *More Cahoots*. Co-produced by Robbie and Daniel Lanois, and utilizing back-up musicians such as Peter Gabriel and U2, Robbie Robertson's first solo album fits the aural space between *So* and *The Joshua Tree*. With the bonus of having tunes by one of the five best songwriters of the rock era.

"Daniel Lanois wanted to do it basically because of the songs," Robertson explains. "But one of the things he prides himself on is bringing new inspiration to the party. When we got into it, it all started changing. We'd be recording a song in the studio and I'd go upstairs to my workshop and he'd come in and go, 'Oh my God—what is that you're doing? This is what we've got to pursue!' We're already in the middle of the river with the first thing and all of a sudden we're off on another mission. It was exciting; it kept the sparks flying."

Robbie Robertson's impeccable. He walks into an expensive restaurant overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Santa Monica; the hostess and the waiters all know him, other diners send over drinks, he asks lots of follow up questions about the wine. The guy's obviously got it. He's completely on top of things. He was on the cover of *Time* magazine at twenty-five, he hangs out with Antonioni. The guy's impeccable. But the funny thing is, under the smooth exterior he's also the ex-carny, the kid who quit school when he turned sixteen to go on the road with rock 'n' roll wildman Ronnie Hawkins. Everybody else in this plush restaurant is squeezed at little tables. But not Robbie. He made reservations for one extra person so he'd get more room. As the waiters bring bread and more free drinks get sent by anonymous Band-lovers, Robbie continues to pretend that his friend must be just running late. He eventually says we'll order some hors d'oeuvres while we're waiting for our pal, and finally, when he's good and ready, he tells the waiter, Okay, we'll order our meals and let him catch up later. And you've got to think—this guy's immaculate. The bourgeois system is not set up to deal with articulate carnies in expensive clothes who use imaginary friends to get the big table.

There's always been some hint of that sort of thing with the official histories of the Band, a suggestion that those five guys had a lot more going on than ever got in the papers. And that maybe the story that did appear in the papers had just a little spin on it. It's like those biographies of Lyndon Johnson that repeated a life story gleaned from other biographies back to Texas newspaper articles that it turned out were based on lies told by Lyndon. Not that the Band told lies—their records were so good that there was no need for hype at all. No, the Band had sort of a wall of myth around it, and writers kept raising it higher.

So what do we know? That Robertson, Levon Helm, Garth Hudson, Rick Danko and Richard Manuel came out of Ronnie Hawkins' backup group to support Bob Dylan when he went electric. They played tumultuous concerts in Europe and America, with folkies booing and rockers screaming. In 1966 Dylan was waylayed in Woodstock, New York and the Hawks moved up there, too. With Dylan they recorded a bunch of demos that later became famous as *The Basement Tapes*. In 1968 Dylan released *John Wesley Harding* and the Band, as they redubbed themselves, knocked the rock world on its ear with *Music From Big Pink*. A year later they put out *The Band*, the brown album everybody's gone through three copies of. It had songs like "Up on Cripple Creek," "King Harvest" and "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down." They played Woodstock, they got that *Time* cover. (The magazine called them the first rock band to match the excellence of the Beatles. The Band might have been more impressed if they'd said Willie Dixon.) In 1970 they released *Stage Fright*, which contained some of Robertson's best writing, and in 1971, *Cahoots*, which was a little tired. Then there was a long filler period—a live album, an LP of oldies. In 1974 there was the big Dylan/Band tour—Bob's first in eight years and the biggest rock tour ever to that point. Something like four percent of the population of the United States mailed in money for tickets. That tour produced another live album, but the next real Band record, *Northern Lights, Southern Cross*, did not appear until 1975. It was quickly followed by *Islands* in 1976, and that was quickly followed by *The Last Waltz*.

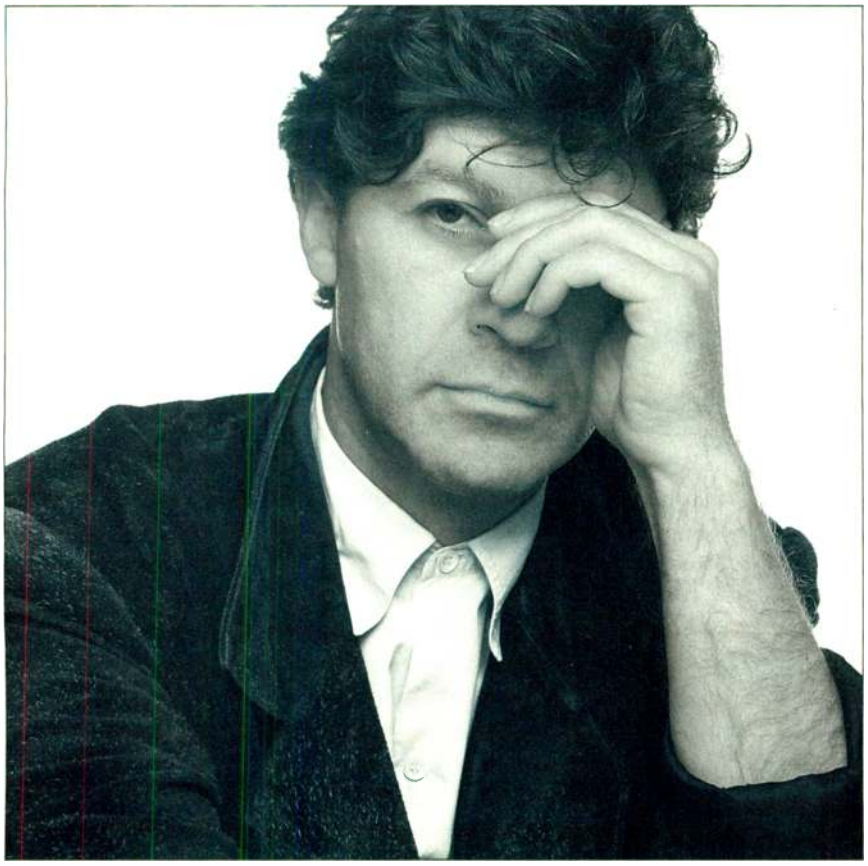
All in all not a very busy career. And there were gaps between tours almost as long as the gaps between LPs. Yet the story put forth in *The Last Waltz*, and repeated by writers ever since, is that the Band lived on the road and had to wrench themselves away from it before it killed them like it killed Jimi and Janis and Elvis. "We never even played a show until after we did our second album," Robbie admits with a laugh. "It seems like we played everywhere but we weren't out there," he smiles, "like maybe the imagination implies."

One bit of mythmaking that did come true, though, was Robbie's dire prediction about the fate of the Band if they stayed on that endless highway. His four cohorts reunited without him a few years ago, and in early 1986 Richard Manuel died in a Florida hotel room. That tragedy implied that Robertson's motivations for breaking up the Band were based on justified fear.

"It went through cycles of danger," he says slowly. "And one element of danger surpassed the others until it was just frightening. We didn't know what the next day might bring. There were times when we were just scared to death of what would come out of this monster that had seeped out of the woodwork. And we saw it happen to everybody around us. You don't learn from it: it just sucks you in. We started playing together when we were just kids—sixteen, seventeen years old. To see people teetering on the brink constantly.... Richard scared us to death. We scared ourselves to death. These things become the priority, that's what rules your existence.

"We're talking about living a dangerous life. One thing equals another whether it's drinking or drugs or driving as fast as you can or staying up for as long as you can. That way of life seemed very fitting. At a certain age you don't think, 'This is insane!'"

"I came up with the idea of *The Last Waltz*. I thought it would be a very soulful move. I said to the guys, 'Listen, we don't want to travel town to town anymore. We should evolve to the next stage. I think we should do this and do it in a very musical fashion. Gather together people who represent different



"I was embarrassed by the self-indulgence of songwriters saying, 'Here's a little song about *me*.' If I started out a song that way it'd make me puke all over the piano."

spokes of the wheel that makes up rock 'n' roll.' And everybody said, 'Yeah!' So we did it and it was over with. But you forget when you're doing these things that people have *in-bred* music, in-bred road. It isn't like all of a sudden they can say goodbye. So it turned out after a while that everybody didn't feel the same way I did about it."

Robertson wasn't offended by the various combinations of his ex-partners who billed themselves as "Band Reunions." "That's when I realized it was in some people's blood," he says. "They couldn't say goodbye. It was too much a part of their past. I didn't feel strange about it, but it wasn't anything I related closely to. I didn't feel like, 'This is a big lie for you guys to do this.' I just felt like if *I* did it, it would be a big lie."

So Robertson, the man who wrote, "I'll spend my whole life sleeping" and other odes to enlightened laziness, took the high road and watched his three kids grow up. The Band had signed to Warner Bros. just in time to break up, and eventually that label realized they weren't going to see a Robertson solo album. Meanwhile, a young Band fan named Gery Gersh had gotten a job in A & R at EMI. He convinced Robbie to sign with that company, although Robbie was only half interested and EMI thought he was probably a great songwriter who couldn't sing (the price for Robbie passing most of the Band's vocals off to Rick, Richard, and Levon). When Gersh moved over to Geffen Records he got that company to buy Robbie's contract from EMI. Robertson did a lot of label switching for somebody who wasn't going near a recording studio. Finally, Gersh set out to convince a dubious Robbie that he really should write a bunch of songs and make an album.

"I think he wanted to do this really badly," Gersh says, "but didn't know how to go about it. And I wanted to do it really badly and didn't know how to go about it. So we just started getting into a series of very intense discussions of what we wanted to do. I didn't want to do it if he wanted to make another Band record, and he didn't want to make another Band record, so we hit it off immediately. We started searching for rhythms, for keyboard programs. We wanted to make the album mostly a guitar record. A lot of strings and swells that add color were done on guitars instead of synthesizers." Gersh and Robbie have some ambitious notions—including evolving a series of Robertson films with corresponding albums. But for now they're taking nothing for granted. "We're making the best Robbie Robertson record we can make," Gersh says. "If the public enjoys it as much as I think they will, it'll be fantastic. If they don't, I'll hold my head up very high. It's weird that this is Robbie Robertson's *first* solo album. I mean, if it's really well-received does he get Best New Artist?"

Work on the album began in June of 1986. Robbie and fellow Canadian Dan Lanois hit it off quickly—they both love experimenting with *sounds*. They also both like to get a lot of interesting sonic options on tape—and use the mix to choose between them, but not to alter the sounds themselves. Work began, but Robbie's pal Scorsese was after him to do the soundtrack for *The Color of Money*. Robbie kept trying to say no, and Scorsese kept calling him with one more problem, one more question, one more idea. "I told him, I can't do it. I've really got to give this album my full attention. He just ignored everything I said. He said, 'You know, when we get to this scene...' We were in the water! He's one of my best friends in the world and finally he said, 'Let's cut the crap—you've got to do this.'" So Robbie agreed to do the damn movie. "I thought it was not an ideal move at all," he shrugs. "I haven't made an album in a while and all of a sudden with my left hand I'm gonna be doing music for this movie? To work with guys like Martin

and Gil Evans is a gift from heaven, but the timing...Daniel wasn't crazy about the idea, but he kind of put up with it. Then he had to go over to Ireland to finish up U2's album."

So the Robertson project was put on hold. Lanois, back up *The Joshua Tree*, got Robbie to promise to come over to Dublin to do some recording with Band fans U2. But first Robertson had to sort through the songs Scorsese was considering for *The Color of Money*. One was a tune Eric Clapton had submitted. "Marty said, 'I don't think it's going to work in the movie, but it's got something. There's a couple of lines that I like. I'm going to tell Eric to call you and you just straighten out with him what it'll take to make this song work in the movie.'" Robertson laughs at the memory. "So I thought, well this is some strange predicament. Eric's an old friend I hadn't seen in a while. He called me and said, 'Okay, what do we do?' I said, 'I don't know. Let me think about this thing, see if I can come up with something.' I just kind of copped out of the situation, put it out of my mind, and went on with scoring the movie. So a couple of days later he called me back. I said, 'Look, Eric, I've gotta be truthful with ya, you're catching me at a bad time. I've gotta score this movie and I'm in the middle of making an album...' He said, 'Don't tell me about a rough time for you! I'm in the waiting room where my girlfriend is about to have a baby! Don't tell me about timing!' I said, 'Well okay, you win this round—call me back in an hour.' Then I said, 'God! I've got to think of something!' So with all I could I just went into this zone of trying to figure out how to make this song work, how to shift it on the track for Marty. I said to the musicians I had in the studio, 'I'll be back in a minute—I've got to go upstairs and deal with something. Go ahead, you're doing great.' I went and this is one big disaster in the making here.' I'm taken to this house, I don't know where I am, I don't know what I'm doing. All I know is, *I don't have any songs*! Everybody's real nice and it's like another world, a twilight zone I've entered in a storm. I am so delirious from the work I've done in New York I can't even feel the predicament I'm in. I know I've got something to do, but I don't know what it is. They see I'm a hopeless case and send me up to some bedroom on a back floor. With great relief I go up there to try to rest and think, 'Maybe I'll write something while I'm up here!' I jotted down a few ideas. I had thrown two tapes in my bag. One was a horn chart I had done with Gil Evans that we weren't going to use in the movie. I thought maybe I can play this for them, maybe it'll inspire something. And I had this other little cassette of me playing a guitar riff and a tom-tom. Not much to go on. But while I was in the bedroom recuperating I actually got a few ideas. So the next day comes and it's time to deliver on this. Daniel plays the first tape for the guys. They hear this guitar riff, this tom-tom. Bono says, 'Let's go.' I'm thinking, 'Oh, God, let's go *where*?' I'm pulling scraps of paper out of my pockets. We start—and these guys jumped right in the water. They did something! I thought of a word idea, Bono thought of something. We recorded this song and it was twenty-two minutes long! We listened to it and said, 'That's pretty good!'

"Then somebody comes in and says, 'Eric Clapton's on the phone!' He said, 'Listen, you've only given me seventy percent of the lyrics on this thing. Where's the rest of them?' I said, 'Eric, could you call me back in an hour?' He said, 'No, no! We've been through this! I'm in the studio singing the song and my voice is about to give out! What are the rest of the words?'

**"Richard (Manuel) scared us to death. We scared ourselves to death. These things became the priority, that's what rules your existence. We're talking about living a dangerous life. One thing equals another whether it's drinking or drugs or driving as fast as you can or staying up as long as you can."**

did this thing out of *desperation*." An hour later when Clapton called back, Robertson sang into the phone, "It's In The Way That You Use It."

Robertson held his breath and waited for Clapton's reaction. "I finished singing it, picked up the phone and I could hear him laughing like mad. I said, Okay, let me hear the joke. He said, 'Oh, this works! This is fantastic! Read them off to me so I can write 'em down.' So I read off the lyrics to him and I said, 'I'm not completely done with it, but this is what I've got so far.' He said, 'Oh great, see you later.'"

From there, Robbie flew to New York to work on *Color of Money* horn charts with Gil Evans. "We're really under the gun time-wise, people are pulling their hair out, going nuts. We finish up the last piece of music for the film, I play my last guitar fill, and I grab my bag, run down to a taxi, and catch this plane to Dublin to try this musical experiment with U2. It's been set up that we're going to try mixing worlds together to see what happens. Those guys are in a very rootsy period. So anyway, I'm on the plane flying over there and I realize I have nothing written. I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm thinking, 'Oh, I'll write something on the plane.' It's the biggest lie I've ever told myself in my life. On the plane I've got the perfect guy sitting beside me—he has a million things to say about everything and I can't stop him. We get to Dublin and they're having a hurricane! The plane barely makes it. I'm driving into town and cars are floating down the street! I'm thinking, 'Boy, So I had to run back up to my little room and sort out what I could. I called him back and I guess in an hour that record was done. I appreciate his patience and understanding. He kept saying to me, 'Where *are* you? What are you doing *there*?'"

Robbie went back into the room with U2. The song they had cut—"Sweet Fire of Love" was terrific. Robbie and Edge trade guitar fire while Bono, singing higher than normal, and Robbie, singing lower than normal, rail at each other like Gabriel and Lucifer. "Didn't we cross the waters?" Robbie sings, "Didn't we break the silence?" He sings of coming through the storm. If "Sweet Fire" were on a U2 record, you'd say the song was apocalyptic, but knowing that Robbie entered Dublin through a hurricane, it becomes literal. The Gil Evans horn charts evolved into a track called "Testimony," and then, two gems under his arm, Robbie got some sleep.

"We just threw the chips into the hat and mixed it up to see what would come." Robbie says. "Edge and I got into this guitar thing that I love. I love guitars screaming at, talking to, each other." In Edge, Robertson saw a guitarist like himself, more concerned with total effect than flash or solos. "It's whether it's musical." Robbie nods. "That's all it takes. It doesn't have to be complicated, it just has to speak to the soul of the issue. If it does right by the song you've made the right choice. In this day and age I have trouble telling one guitarist from the other. With Edge I hear three notes and I know it's him. The *sound* was always way up front for me. Look at Miles

**The Last Waltz: Manuel, Danko, Robertson, Hudson and Helm.**

Davis! People would play a thousand notes; Miles would play one note, I could recognize him, and it would break my heart to boot. One reason I wanted to try this experiment with U2 was because I was very impressed by this group as a rhythm section. Larry Mullen has incredible rock 'n' roll instincts, and he and Adam, the bass player, do something that feels fantastic. When I'd listen to those guys I'd think, 'This is the real item.'

"Bono and I talked about lyrics. How when you're writing lyrics for a band you have to express it on *our* behalf. When you're writing for yourself you don't have to do that." So Robbie's new songs are more personal than the Band's Americana?

"They're personal in the sense of playing the character of the storyteller. The songs are not, 'I was born by a river...' I take the view of a character who zooms in on aspects of life and tells it through his words. Some of it is first person, some of it is on behalf of a story—but it's different than I was ever able to do with the Band."

That seems like an odd statement. If it's in the voice of a character anyway, you think, why couldn't he have done it with the Band? But listening to the new songs, one character and set of images emerges that, sure enough, the other guys in the Band would not have been qualified to give voice to: an American Indian.

Robertson has an office—he calls it a workshop—at Village Recorders in Santa Monica. "It's great that it's in a recording studio," he smiles. "That way if I get an idea and I need a microphone, I can call downstairs and borrow one." There's a carved wooden table Robbie uses as a desk, a couple of couches, and a painting of an American Indian on the wall. Tonight Robbie wants to go to a Native American art opening at a chi-chi gallery in Venice. One of the artists is Darren Vigil, the Indian who did the painting in Robbie's workshop and who's now working on a Robertson portrait. The gallery itself could be the brunt of a Woody Allen skit—they hand out Tootsie Rolls as entrance tickets—but the work is wonderful. Robbie passes through the crowd like he was born in a beret, greeting local artists by name and then offering succinct critiques: "That's Andre—he's doing great. His stuff's a little mathematical but I like it a lot." (Trivia buffs will recall Bob Dylan's famous assessment of Robbie Robertson as a "mathematical guitarist.")

A lot of the paintings mix up the serious and playful. Darren Vigil's paintings are crammed with images and information—but there's a punch line: He paints little cracks in the claustrophobia through which peek starry skies. Robbie's studying a painting when someone suggests that the Indian unity between spiritual and physical—sort of combining high mass and a cookout—has a parallel in African art.

"Yeah," Robbie says, "but I know a lot more about Indians. My mother was born and raised on the Six Nations Indian Reservation above Lake Erie." Wait. Back that up. Robbie Robertson's mother is an Indian? "Yeah. And my father was Jewish. How's that for a combination?" Born to wander, one supposes—or as Jimmy Iovine puts it: "The Six Nations met the Six Tribes." Robertson's father was a professional gambler named Claygerman who married an Iroquois woman, took her to the big city of Toronto, and died when Robbie was a small boy. His mother eventually remarried, to a man named Robertson.

"Every summer she would take me to the reservation," Robbie says. "It was like a time warp. My uncles and aunts had lots of kids. I had all these cousins who could tell things from listening to the ground. They could sniff the air and say when it was going to rain—tomorrow. These guys didn't *climb* trees—they could run up a tree. I'd run to the bottom of the tree, come to a halt, and say, 'What happens if you fall?' It was just a different way of life altogether. A lot of music, though. They all played something—mandolins, fiddles, guitars. That's where I started playing music."

Robbie's Indian heritage is more obvious on his new album than on anything he did with the Band. "Broken Arrow"—a fragile mood piece full of longing and melancholy—might be the most beautiful song he's ever written. And this guy wrote "Out Of The Blue," "All La Glory" and "It Makes No Difference." "Broken Arrow" is more about Indian summer than Indians—unless, like Robertson, you spent childhood summers on a reservation. It's a song that makes hardened session drummers cry. You better hear it for yourself.

"Hell's Half Acre" is on the opposite end of the totem pole. It's a savage rock song about an Indian boy who is drafted and loses his soul in a meaningless war. "I thought of the whole idea of sending kids off to some foreign land to fight for something they don't understand," Robertson says. "The ultimate rape was to do it to an American Indian. That, to me, showed the picture more vividly." The pain of the song—a decent comparison is U2's "Bullet The Blue Sky"—whips out from the electric guitar. It was cut with the album's basic quartet: Robbie on lead and rhythm, Tony Levin on bass, Manu Katche on drums, and Lanois ally (and by coincidence ex-Ronnie Hawkins sideman) Bill Dillon on ambient guitar sounds.

The Native American art opening is packed, but Darren Vigil eventually finds Robbie. They slip out to Darren's car, where the artist has slides of new paintings. Robbie consumes them. He's knocked out by a Matisse-like painting of an Indian woman in sunglasses. Then they decide to take their Tootsie Rolls and head to a disco where a bunch of the Indian artists are having an opening night party. The place is dark and loud and crowded. The P.A.'s blasting "I Want You Back" and "Low Rider." People are dancing and drinking and pinching each other. As the owner leads Robbie to a booth some people shake his hand and some whisper to friends, "You know—*Last Waltz*, take a load off, Fanny, that guy..." A drunk comes up and starts

pushing across that barrier between tipsy enthusiast and pain in the neck. Robbie just smiles. The drunk wants Robbie to come over to his house. Maybe. The drunk wants to come over to Robbie's house: "Where d'ya live?" The drunk wants to buy a round of drinks for Robbie's table—"What'llya have?" First guy: a beer. Second guy: a Coke. Robbie Robertson: "I'll have a bottle of champagne." He's polite but serious. This shakes the drunk. "No—really..." "Bottle of champagne." The drunk wavers and then says, "Awright—Robbie Robertson wants a bottle of champagne, I'll get him one." The guy pushes through the crowd up to the bar, gets quoted a price and does a double take. He snakes his way back to Robbie's table and says, "Look—I'll buy ya one drink. You want a beer or something?" Robbie turns and looks at him and says firmly, "A bottle of champagne." Champagne arrives, drunk is gone. Darren Vigil says, "Don't feel bad for that guy—he owes me fifty bucks." Three allegedly Native American women come to Robbie's table and fan their hands over their mouths going, "Woo woo woo woo woo!" Robbie pops the cork and surveys the dance floor, which is getting wilder by the minute. "These Indians," he says. "Not supposed to drink."

Three weeks later, Robbie Robertson is back in Woodstock, New York. He's standing in the doorway of Bearsville Studios, the legacy of his late manager Albert Grossman. When mixmaster Bob Clearmountain suggested Robertson move the album to Woodstock for the home stretch, he was reluctant. "At first I really didn't want to come up here to do it," he says. "It was like, 'Oh no! I'm starting over!' But it's been great. I'm really glad we came." Twenty years after the basement tapes, he admits he isn't sure exactly how to find Big Pink. (He never lived there. Rick Danko and Richard Manuel did.) That whole basement tapes thing got mythologized a little too fast. People are still bootlegging outtakes and goof-offs and things Dylan and the Band did once and forgot about. "But," Robbie smiles, "none of those bootlegs have 'See Ya Later, Alan Ginsberg.' They don't even know that one exists!"

Moving into the larger of Bearsville's two studios, Robertson cues up a track called "Fallen Angel," a tribute to the late Richard Manuel, the Band's piano player and saddest voice. The song begins:

*I don't believe it's all for nothing*
*It's not just written in sand*
*Sometimes I thought you felt too much*
*You crossed into the shadow land*

In the 80s Richard Manuel, Rick Danko and Paul Butterfield blew around the Northeast bar circuit playing musical (and probably chemical) roulette. Sometimes they were so brilliant you couldn't believe it and sometimes they were so awful you'd get depressed. But Danko, the hyperactive, fidgity, fast-talking, song-calling, grinning ringleader seemed the most in danger of flying off the side of the Earth. Butterfield seemed sullen and Richard quietly intent. Then Richard hanged himself and Butterfield dropped dead. Suddenly Danko looks like the tail gunner who's lost both his wing men.

"No," Robbie insists. "Rick is just very vivid in his ways. So you get the impression, 'Holey Moley! What a firecracker this guy is!' But he's just a very animated person. Richard was a big drinker and he stopped drinking. Just before he died he started drinking again. That disease comes back like a sledgehammer. And it drove him crazy. People were telling him, 'Oh, I'm so disappointed in you' and all this stuff." Robbie sighs. "I think he just scared himself to death."

"Fallen Angel" shares with the other tracks—loud and soft—a haunted quality. Robbie calls it "the voice of a true American mythology." He doesn't see "true mythology" as a contradiction at all. "A lot of it's based on mixing fact and fiction together," he says. "We know these places exist, we know these people exist. I don't know who they are, but I know it's out there somewhere."

Robertson the songwriter has walked a very fine line, a line almost unique in rock. He writes in the voices of characters—the Confederate Virgil Cane, the migrant Cajun in "Arcadian Driftwood," the Indian draftee in "Hell's Half Acre." But he writes these characters with an almost confessional direct-

## THE SHAPE I'M IN

I have an old Broadcaster that I use quite a bit," Robbie Robertson says. "It was made around 1948. With a lot of new guitars you plug 'em in, adjust 'em for an hour and maybe they sound pretty good. This you plug in and it sounds good. I've had this souped-up old Stratocaster quite a while. It has 'Number 254' on the back. You can tell it's old 'cause the neck's a little thick. Before I used it in *Last Waltz* I had it bronzed, like baby shoes. That gave it a very thick, sturdy sound. A Stratocaster has three pickups; I had the one in the middle moved to the back with the other and tied them together. They have a different sound when they're tied together, and I don't like having a pick-up in the middle, where you pick. I've got a Washburn whammy bar on that guitar. I have a 1959 Les Paul with flat-wound strings on it that I use if I want a thicker, fatter sound. Those flat-wound strings are nice for slide playing.

"On the wall in the studio I have four amps: a little 30-watt Vox, a very old Bassman, a Roland Jazz Chorus and a Fender Reverb with a souped-up tremolo. I have a switch so I can use any or all of those amps, and I use a slow gear pedal a lot. I also use these tiny old Fender Princeton and Harvard amps on some things.

"I have two cheap little Korg keyboards I used on the record; I don't even know the numbers—Daniel Lanois bought them for me one day. And I used a Yamaha piano/keyboard writing the songs.

"And I have an old Rickenbacker lap steel—I like the way it *looks* more than anything about it. These things were made in the late 30s and there's a pickup on it that *wastes* any pickup anybody has on any instrument now. Amps start weeping at the very sound of the power this pickup puts out! I talked to Seymour Duncan on the phone a few months ago—I wanted him to come down and help me suss out this pickup. He said he'd come down and I never heard from him again. Maybe he was afraid I was gonna tell him this story..."

Uh-oh—if you readers have gotten this far in the blue box hold on to your hats—'cause Robbie just might be persuaded to tell us the previously unrevealed *Seymour Duncan Story.* Waiter, a couple more cocktails! "I met Seymour Duncan a long time ago," Robbie begins. "I didn't really remember the circumstances. One day I'm reading a magazine and he's telling how he got into pickups. It says that he met me in this place near Atlantic City where we were both playing, and we stayed up all night and played and he said, 'Geez—the sound of this guitar of yours—what have you got in it?'"

Robbie turns conspiratorial: "Now this was a style of playing I had learned traveling around the country with Ronnie Hawkins. People asked me about it a lot and I got bored so I used to make up stories. I'd say, 'I soak my guitar strings in hair oil,' or 'I cut swastikas in the speakers with razor blades.' So Seymour Duncan says to me, 'What have you done to your guitar to make it sound like that?' And not being able to think of anything better I said, 'I've got more windings in the pickups.'

"So anyway, I'm reading this article years later and Seymour Duncan says, 'Robbie Robertson told me about more windings, so I've put more windings in my pickups and I've gone on to make The Seymour Duncan Pickup!'" Robertson lets out a laugh. "And this whole business is based on a big lie! It never existed! I couldn't think of anything else to say!" Robbie takes a drink and smiles. "I never told this story before. I wonder what he's gonna think." So do our ad guys, Robbie.

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ness. Now this was common in pre-rock 'n' roll songwriting, but rock has tended toward either character writing *in extremis* or the appearance of autobiography. Most rock 'n' roll character writing is "Midnight Rambler" or "Money For Nothing," Randy Newman's bigot or Lou Reed's rapist. Created characters tend to be cartoons. The other style, the first-person I love you/ I hate you/ I can't get no satisfaction style used by everybody from the Beatles to the Sex Pistols, maintains at least the illusion of being autobiographical, of being a true emotional statement. Robbie Robertson is the rare rock songwriter who gives obviously fictional characters as much compassion as other songwriters lavish on "I."

"I don't feel like taking the part of characters to outrage," he says. "That's a bit of...*a trickery* to me. This has to be a *true* American mythology, as opposed to just whatever I could think of. Does it break my heart, does it give me chills, does it conjure up some kind of spell in me that I'll never get over? That is more interesting to me than a song on behalf of a bigot. I have nothing against that—but it doesn't have a valid place in *this* picture.

"And I was embarrassed by the self-indulgence of 'me me me.' 'Here's a little song about me.' If I started out a song that way it'd make me puke all over the piano." He is quiet for a minute. Then he says, "Everything you write is personal, y'know? You maybe try to disguise or hide what's *real* personal about it. What is 'Out Of The Blue' if it's not personal? Or 'It Makes No Difference'?"

Yet "It Makes No Difference," from *Northern Lights*, is the perfect example of a Robbie Robertson love song. It's downright stoic in its stiff-upper-lipness: "There is no love as true as the love that dies untold." There's a truly strange distancing device in the bridge. Here is this heart-breaking song about soldiering on in the face of unbearable loneliness and suddenly the singer goes, "Stampeding cattle, they rattle the walls." Now what is that if not a way for Robertson to distance himself—a way to say, "This is getting too close to the bone, I better stick in a distraction so people will think it's a song about some other guy, some old cowboy." Where the hell did the cattle stampede come from, Robbie?

"When I was writing that song," he says and interrupts himself: "It's nonsense that you think of these things but nevertheless you go through them—I'm writing and I'm thinking, 'Is this maybe getting a little too legitimate?' So I got to the bridge and I thought, 'Here's where I'll shuffle the deck a little bit.' I do remember at that point thinking, 'Here's where I get to make this song not just traditional, here's where I get to stir up some dust.'"

And how better to stir dust than with a stampede?

"I remember people saying for years, 'Y'know, I was thinking of recording that song but when it got to that line I didn't know what to do. I didn't know if I could deliver that.' But although I was looking to break out of that mood for a second and then come back to it, I wasn't at all saying, 'What can I say outrageous?' I wanted to shatter the silence. And the loneliest thing and this feeling that you're going crazy in this room—what could be stronger than stampeding cattle inside the wall? So in a kind of Luis Buñuel philosophy of images it made all the sense in the world to me. I just wanted to feel more of a rumble in the earth. Things were too still for me. I didn't want it to just become *sad*. I've always appreciated the *violence* in desolation as much as the helplessness."

Geffen's Gary Gersh is in Woodstock, with aide de camp Judith Haenel. Clearmountain is trying to figure out Lanois' random methods of storing different sounds on each track. Mixing these things isn't half as hard as finding where the information's stashed. There's a problem with a song called "What About Now." It's a march with a fine rhythm, nice synth parts and a solid verse. But the chorus is sounding like Up With People—a little too *rousing* for this LP, a little too jolly. The obvious problem is the backing vocals—hyperpro Hollywood studio singers with all the right notes and all the wrong feeling. Robertson wants to wipe those backgrounds and replace them with something more offbeat. That something turns out to be Lone Justice singer Maria McKee. Maria pulls up at the studio door with her manager, Jimmy Iovine. Yeah, Jimmy is a hotshot record producer, but not today. Today he's just along to look after his client (although he and Robbie joke about sending Lanois a snapshot of Iovine "fixing" Lanois' tracks).

Maria has just flown in from a European tour and she's pooped. But Robertson has a gift for making people relax, feel no pressure and work twice as hard. Robbie engages Maria in conversation about Paris, about touring, about headache remedies. He suggests that before they even hear "What About Now," Maria take a listen to "American Roulette," a song that needs a woman's voice on its chorus. Robbie explains that it's about America's way of creating stars to destroy them, that one verse is about James Dean, one about Elvis Presley and the third about Marilyn Monroe. The Bodeans sang on the Presley section (Robertson likes them because they sing like guys in a band who step up to the mike on the chorus—not like session pros). He wants Maria to try the chorus coming out of the Monroe verse. Maria understands what the song needs, and rather than go for the obvious harmony, she and Robbie try for a high, airy sound—a bit like Monroe's little-girl gasp. It works pretty well, but it's hard to get the exact balance between phrasing, pitch and sexy character. Through all the tries Robbie exudes easy confidence. "Maria," he says, hitting the talk-back button, "it's just getting better and better."

Iovine—sitting on the couch and trying really really hard to not be a producer—finally says, "Why don't you slow down the tape a bit so she can have time to get that phrasing right." Robbie looks at his guest as if Jimmy just suggested they all paint themselves blue. "*Slow down the track?*" he laughs. "But won't she sound like Minnie Mouse when we take it back to normal?" Iovine says try it, and they do, and it works. Then Iovine goes back to being a manager.

It's obvious watching Robertson record that he gets twice as much out of musicians with compliments as other producers do with threats. He goes to the other room to hear Clearmountain's mix of a track called "Showdown At Big Sky." "That's *terrific*, Bob," he says. "The way Bill's guitar comes up there is great. It makes me wish it started to happen even sooner!" Now another producer might say that as, "The guitar comes up too late!" Robertson's execution is a lot more dignified. Around guys like Clearmountain and Iovine, who are in their early thirties, and Maria, who is in her early twenties, Robertson seems like a great high school coach: He's patient and he emphasizes good values and he works the kids to death. But they feel good about it. (Robertson may retch when he reads that, but it's true.) Of course, the method could only work with people like Clearmountain and McKee, who can do a part twelve different ways on demand. In Maria's case the shorthand gets pretty funny, with Robbie calling, "No—too Linda Rondstadt"; "The last note of that one sounded like Joan Baez"; "Not so much like Kate Bush—more like the Ennio Morricone things."

In the other room, Clearmountain and Gersh are working on "Showdown At Big Sky." "The more echo you add, the less they sound like the Bodeans."

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Gersh wanted Tom Verlaine to come up and play a guitar part on another song but nobody can track him down. "What do you think of getting Todd Rundgren in?" he asks Clearmountain. Bob's face lights up. "Yeah! That'd be great!" Then he admits, "Well, actually I haven't heard that song. I'd just love to watch him work." They figure since Todd engineered *Stage Fright*, it would be fitting.

By two a.m. Maria's asleep on the floor, the staff has gone home, Iovine's nodding—and Robbie is sitting at the mixing board with a weary Clearmountain—rocking away.

The next morning at about eleven Maria answers the phone at one of the guest cottages. "Jimmy!" she yells to Iovine upstairs. "The power's gone out at the studio!" Iovine says, "I guess we have plenty of time for breakfast," and turns on the TV Contragate hearings. A few minutes later Clearmountain raps on the door and gets the word from Jimmy. Real bad news for Bob—a power loss could mean the samples he worked on last night are lost. Clearmountain, Iovine and McKee head to a Woodstock natural food joint, where they bump into Gary Gersh. Jimmy asks where's Robbie. "At the studio," Gersh says. "Already?" "Robbie's *always* at the studio."

Two hours later workmen are fooling with Bearsville fuseboxes, Clearmountain is firing up safety copies of his samples, Iovine and Gersh are doing business on studio phones, and Robbie is at the piano, working out harmonies with Maria. Robbie is the oldest of this group by ten years, under the most pressure by ten tons, and the most relaxed by ten miles. At about two-thirty Clearmountain plays him the final mix of "Showdown At Big Sky." The track sounds great. Yesterday the song spent a long time ending, shifting back and forth between two sections without rising or fading. Now the excitement builds right through—and when the tune ends you wish it would keep going. This isn't a result of any cutting—it's a result of

*continued on page 113*

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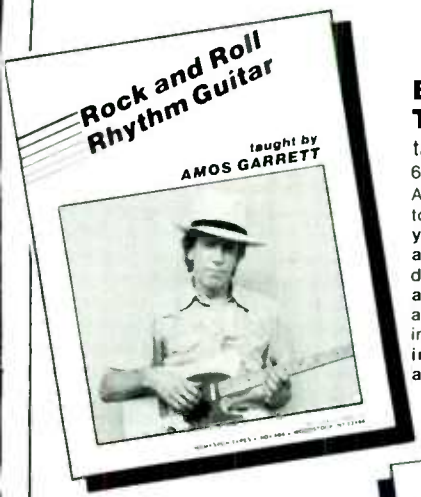


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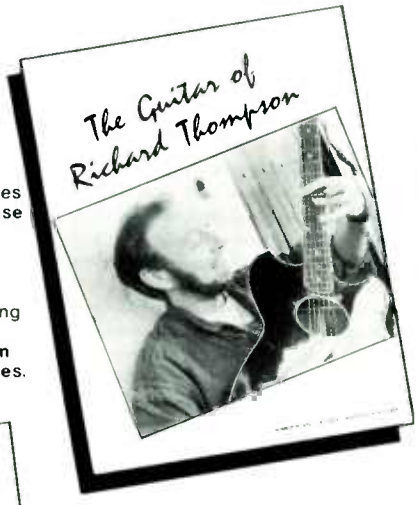


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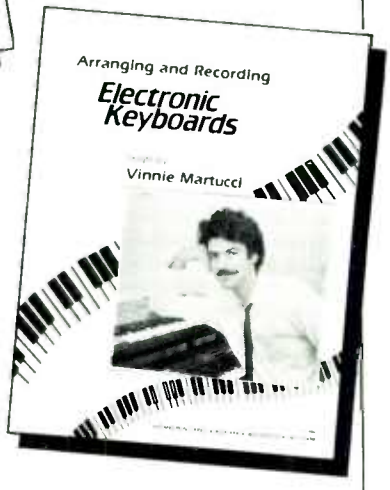


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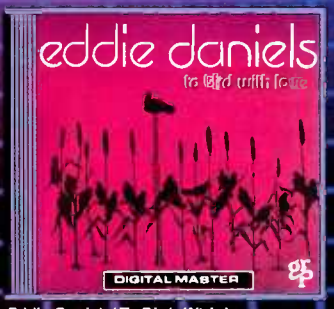


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# EVERYTHING I GOT IN THE MAIL ON JUNE 17, 1987


When I was in college, I took this aesthetics course where the professor was very big on everyone being an artist. Self-expression was where it was all happening, and I saw implications for democracy breaking out in this country if we could just dismantle this false dichotomy between artist and audience. What I didn't realize at the time was that we already had an art form where the dichotomy between artist and audience had dissolved. That art form was poetry. Everyone wrote it, no one read it. No one *could* read it. Yet it was taught every semester, and published in small magazines that even the contributors didn't bother with, aside from their own contributions.

Well, I have seen the future of rock 'n' roll, and it is poetry—that is, all production and no consumption. If the number of albums being released keeps increasing at the present rate, and the radio playlists keep shrinking so that baby-boomers never have to experience the pain of assimilating a new idea, my calculations indicate that by the year 2003, everyone in the United States will be in a band, and one song will be played over and over on all radio stations—probably "Touch Me" by the Doors. I further predict that my future is rotten. In a mere sixteen years, me and about five of my friends are going to be the entire audience for 300 million people with home studios making albums. I mean, right now, in my apartment, I have two hundred albums in various stacks that I haven't listened to yet, and another twenty-five or thirty that deserve another listen either because they sound almost good or I have an intuition that the bass player will be elected president someday and the album will suddenly be worth millions. Every time I look at these stacks of albums, and I look at them every minute of every day, I think, "Here are all those nice people who want to make a living in rock 'n' roll, they sent *me* the album into which they put as much effort as I've put into my career, and they expect some feedback. I owe it to them."

And then the doorbell rings and the mailman, usually irritated, hands me another pile of albums, and I think, "Should I listen to these, or should I kill myself?"

My criteria for wanting to review a record are: 1) If it's a big band, there has to be something I respond to in any direction; or 2) if it's a small band, I have to love it, because if it stinks, why add to the misery of people who have no talent and can't even get a six-pack from the club-owner when they've wangled a rare gig? That leaves about eight records a year I want to review and about four thousand to feel guilty about. So, in the interest of not killing myself, I have decided to change my critical criteria. I have decided to review a typical cross-section of everything, selected as randomly as random gets—by post-office delivery. Herewith is everything I got in the mail on June 17, 1987—twelve records, eight hours of music—an average day in the life of a record reviewer.

**Brilliant Orange,** *Edge Of America* (Invasion)—Pleasant meld of acoustic and electric guitars, R.E.M.-like, but vocals mixed higher so you can catch the words. Neil Young potential if they get better, America potential if they get worse. Need to undergo at least eight horrible and/or degrading experiences to get rid of the creative writing influence.

**Marillion,** *Clutching At Straws* (Capitol)—Potential audience of fifteen-year-old virgin males who relate to *Dungeons and Dragons* better than to girls. Halfway between Yes and Jethro Tull.

**Icicle Works,** *Icicle Works* (RCA)—Halfway between Marillion and Gary Puckett. Is that Leo Buscaglia I hear in

DAVID COWLES

the chorus?

**Silencers,** *Silencers* (RCA)—Singer has slightly nasal quality reminiscent of Paul Williams, but has spent more time listening to U2. Good chime, production and arrangements. Goes to my one-more-chance-before-the-trash pile.

**ABC,** *Alphabet City* (PolyGram)—I've hated these guys since 1982, and I still do. The sort of rock band Rex Reed would call "a delightful entertainment."

**Dead Milkmen,** *Bucky Fellini* (Enigma)—Anyone who's ever been repulsed by a club scene needs to hear "You'll Dance To Anything," a nasty and accurate denunciation of status-seeking artsy-fartsies. Drum machine is hilarious. Nothing on rest of album with enough melody to stay in your brain, except maybe "The Badger Song," but enough energy and yocks that this is a keeper if you dig rock and satire.

**King Diamond,** *Abigail* (Road Runner)—Thrash metal opera about a stillborn baby who is actually Satan. Makes even less sense than *Tommy* but pretty well executed if you can stand the wailing falsetto, which is apparently the sound of a dead fetus. Highly recommended for driving your parents out of the house.

**Judas Priest,** *Priest...Live* (Columbia)—The first time I heard *Alive!* by Kiss, I thought, "Wait a minute! These guys are supposed to suck." So I went back to listen to their first three albums and indeed they sucked. But those same songs, given grandeur and adrenaline and sweat, were terrific in a live show. Much though I used to mock Kiss, I thought then and I still think *Alive!* is a great album. Did I experience the same revelation with Judas Priest live? No.

**Glenn Medeiros,** *Glenn Medeiros* (Amherst)—The Donny Osmond of Buffalo. Connoisseurs of gratitude will appreciate his thanking "the Heavenly Father up above for all He has given me," plus many earthly beings, but he needs more effusiveness lessons to compete with Whitney Houston.

**Tirez Tirez,** *Social Responsibility* (Primitive Man)—Medium tempo art pop. Sense of riff is hypnotic in places. With a fat, gruff manager, they could follow Timbuk 3 or Talking Heads from college radio to MTV. I'll listen again to see if the hooks have grown or shrunk.

**Crucifucks,** *Wisconsin* (Alternative Tentacles)—Guitarist has more moves than Dead Milkmen and achieves proper balance between chaos and tightness. More of a diatribe against imperialism and corporate capitalism than against my homestate. Calls for revolution, LSD and blowing up factories are highly reminiscent of 1968, the last good year. Most current psychedelic revival bands seem to have forgotten that feedback once seemed *politically* radical. Refreshing to hear guys who hate themselves for being white. They hate you too.

**Big Black,** *Headache* (Touch & Go)—T&G is probably my favorite small label, containing, as it does, the Butthole Surfers, Scratch Acid, Die Kreuzen and Killdozer. Big Black is sonically as vicious as anything this side of pure industrial noise, even if they lack the production value of the Buttholes. They also lack the laughs of the Buttholes—there's nothing to let you off the hook. Love to see a gig with these guys and the Crucifucks. Not, however, without beer.

Next month: everything I got in the mail on June 18, 1987. – **Chuck Young**


## THE GRATEFUL DEAD

*In The Dark*
(Arista)

Ironic that within weeks of *In The Dark*'s release come compact disc versions of the Grateful Dead's earliest and best records, *The Grateful Dead, Anthem Of The Sun* and *Aoxomoxoa*. End result: A band that's been relegated to simply being there gets a chance for critical re-evaluation with '87 ears. Point being, I suppose, that any take on *In The Dark* has to deal with those of us who think the Dead peaked with *Live/Dead*, perked up with '75's *Blues For Allah*, and have otherwise murked out with respun *Workingman's Dead* for more than sixteen years. And we'll buy the CDs to prove it. Meanwhile, Dead theorists who hold that superpsych keyboardist Tom "T.C." Constanten emblemized the Dead at their best get a chance to re-think what seemed a Dead issue, maybe by listening seriously again. Right. Well, fact is *In The Dark* is a damn fine album, sort of, and not much has changed, sort of, and the Grateful Dead as a recording entity live again, and it's great.

*In The Dark* proves (surprise) that the heart and soul of the Dead remain within guitarist Jerry Garcia, whose four contributions with lyricist Robert Hunter provide this LP's three best tracks. "West L.A. Fadeaway," "Black Muddy River" and especially "Touch Of Grey" work less on their originality than on emotional resonance for those who've followed Garcia's recent personal/medical travails. "We will get by/ We will survive," sings Garcia, totally lacking corn, on the AOR radio hit "Touch Of Grey" (which might mean a tad more had Gloria Gaynor not sung likewise a decade ago). "West L.A. Fadeaway" features high-tech vocal/synth textures of the sort Stevie Wonder might have used during his "Superstitious" days, not to mention a virtually identical riff. And "Black Muddy River" may elicit a tear of nostalgia from Band fans. "I will walk alone by the black muddy river," sings Jerry, omitting the word "veil" for kicks. But however derivative, each song connects by contemporary *and* Dead standards, a coincidence that hasn't occurred for years.

Elsewhere, Bob Weir still irks, singing of bikers and his utter manliness; keyboardist Brent Mydland still annoys, with his rinky-dink pianer so completely at odds with Constanten's former Ra-like sprawl. Mydland's dopey "Tons Of Steel," with its Springsteen/Cougar line and Velveeta synth, doesn't belong anywhere near this album. But overall, *In The Dark* is as personable upon first listening as *Workingman's Dead*, and the dual Garcia/Weir guitars and Bill Kreutzmann/Mickey Hart drums reveal a musical telepathy that only twenty years—*twenty years*—could possibly provide. This is a very hot band.

*In The Dark*'s sheer hummability, its steep production advances over 1980's snoozefest *Go To Heaven*, its unexpected fineness, all point to this inescapable fact: The Dead, man. The faster they go, the rounder they get—but, like, now they get remixed digitally.

– **Dave DiMartino**

## BOY GEORGE

*Sold*
(Virgin America)

Boy George probably never knew what hit him: One minute the toast of the town and his biggest problem is picking the proper party frock, the next minute he's just another junkie in jail. Such is the stuff

# It was 20 months ago today...

...that we first invited unsigned bands to play. So, let us reintroduce to you the opportunity you've waited for all year– the return of MUSICIAN's Best Unsigned Band Contest.

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Contact name

Submitted song title

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of which albums dealing with the theme of rebirth are made, but the Boy, to his credit, had the taste not to use the recording studio as a confessional. Not that *Sold* is any great shakes on a musical level—but then, Boy George's music has never been more than marginal at best. His singing is adequate, his subject matter pedestrian, and the instrumentation, arrangements and production of his records go strictly by the whatever's-currently-hip book.

George himself is another kettle of fish, though, and for a while there he had the makings of a genuine star. Fashioning himself into a sideshow kewpie doll, he had the humor, the appetite for adoration and the sheer guts to really make a spectacle of himself. But like Edith Piaf, Judy Garland and the other star-crossed songbirds who preceded him, George just couldn't resist dragging himself through the mud.

The squalid secrets of George's private life having been plastered across the front pages of sleazy tabloids around the globe, one might've expected the repentant lad to wash off the makeup and hang his head in shame. But in first-class Mildred Pierce style, *Sold* finds him squaring his shoulders and marching into the wind, still tarted up to beat the band. Nor does *Sold* signal significant shifts in his music, offering as it does George's usual pleas for love and understanding along with ambiguously political songs lamenting England's economic dead end. George packages these themes in frothy Europop with an underpinning of soul (he co-wrote four of the eleven songs here with Motown legend Lamont Dozier).

Typically, the one cover song included here—a reggae restyling of the moldy Bread crust "Everything I Own"—has emerged as the album's hit single. It's no secret that people gravitate towards what they already know, and that's a big part of the reason the public took to Boy George so quickly. As intrinsic to America's psychic landscape as Mickey Mouse, Boy George is an archetype, a Liza Minelli for the New Wave crowd. He will survive. – **Kristine McKenna**


## LA MONTE YOUNG
*The Well-Tuned Piano*
(Gramavision)

At first I gagged at getting through this ten-sided boxed set—"Please, no, anything but one note for five hours"—but by the end of the first side I was mesmerized. By the third I was addicted. By the sixth I'd started to snooze out, but was at least having fantastic dreams.

Often called the Father of Minimalism (and the sire of the Velvet Underground and Brian Eno-like acousticians), La Monte Young has been evolving this work since 1964, when he retuned a Bösendorfer Imperial to the rational harmonic of a single basic tone—an E flat ten octaves below the bottom of the instrument. That means this fundamental note can never be played, but it's sensed—like Harvey the Rabbit—as a deep, underlying drone. This kind of tuning spawns unearthly intervals that are sad and often sour, as if you crossed a torturous tritone with a lonely fifth and a melancholy minor third. But because Young repeats chordal patterns ad infinitum, these almost primeval intervals start to telegraph very personal meanings. The set's twenty-four-page brochure delineates Young's various themes, but what really makes his live improvisations so accessible is a phenomenal pianistic technique: You can feel the precise passion of every attack, and you can nearly see him sculpt those tones out of an inner silence cultivated through meditation. At least *he's* never bored.

By blending melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre into the same dimension, Young cuts through the illusion that tone is distinct from time. In fact, tone here takes on the texture of light, becoming diffusive, rather than effusive. Because of his "unnatural" tuning, clouds of chords—and even rhythms—which are not being directly produced through finger action hover "over" the primary notes like phantoms. Although Young never moves from the bench, the piano itself sounds plucked, chimed, gonged and bowed. He plays that Bösendorfer like the Gyuto Tantric monks and the Harmonic Choir play their voices.

Listening well to La Monte Young demands similar rigor—learning to listen to foreground, background and above-ground simultaneously. But no matter what kind of music you listen to, this album is the quintessential ear wash. For only fifty bucks, you'll never hear the same again. – **Pamela Bloom**


## DAVE ALVIN
*Romeo's Escape*
(Epic)

Possessing a voice made up of gravel and sand, Dave Alvin couldn't turn in a slick performance if his life depended on it—every line sounds like the prelude to a sore throat. Why on earth, then, would he leave the safe confines of first the Blasters and then X, where all he had to do was pen killer songs and play wicked guitar, to risk life as a solo artist?

One encounter with *Romeo's Escape* answers the question. The jump from supporting player, even a major one, to leading man can be daunting, but Alvin makes the transition seem long overdue. He emcees this stirring program of rootsy tunes with the easy confidence of a bar-band vet who knows how to put an audience through its paces. Still a perceptive observer of everyday folks' hopes and heartbreaks, Alvin swings expertly from reckless raveups (the title track) to plaintive acoustic ballads ("Brother On The Line") to bluesy laments ("Long White Cadillac"), missing nary a beat. And his subpar voice? It just happens to be the glue that holds everything together, a more passionate, expressive instrument than that of a thousand more accomplished singers.

Alvin provides an easy yardstick by which to measure his efforts, recutting a number of his greatest tunes (can't call 'em hits, unfortunately). He audaciously

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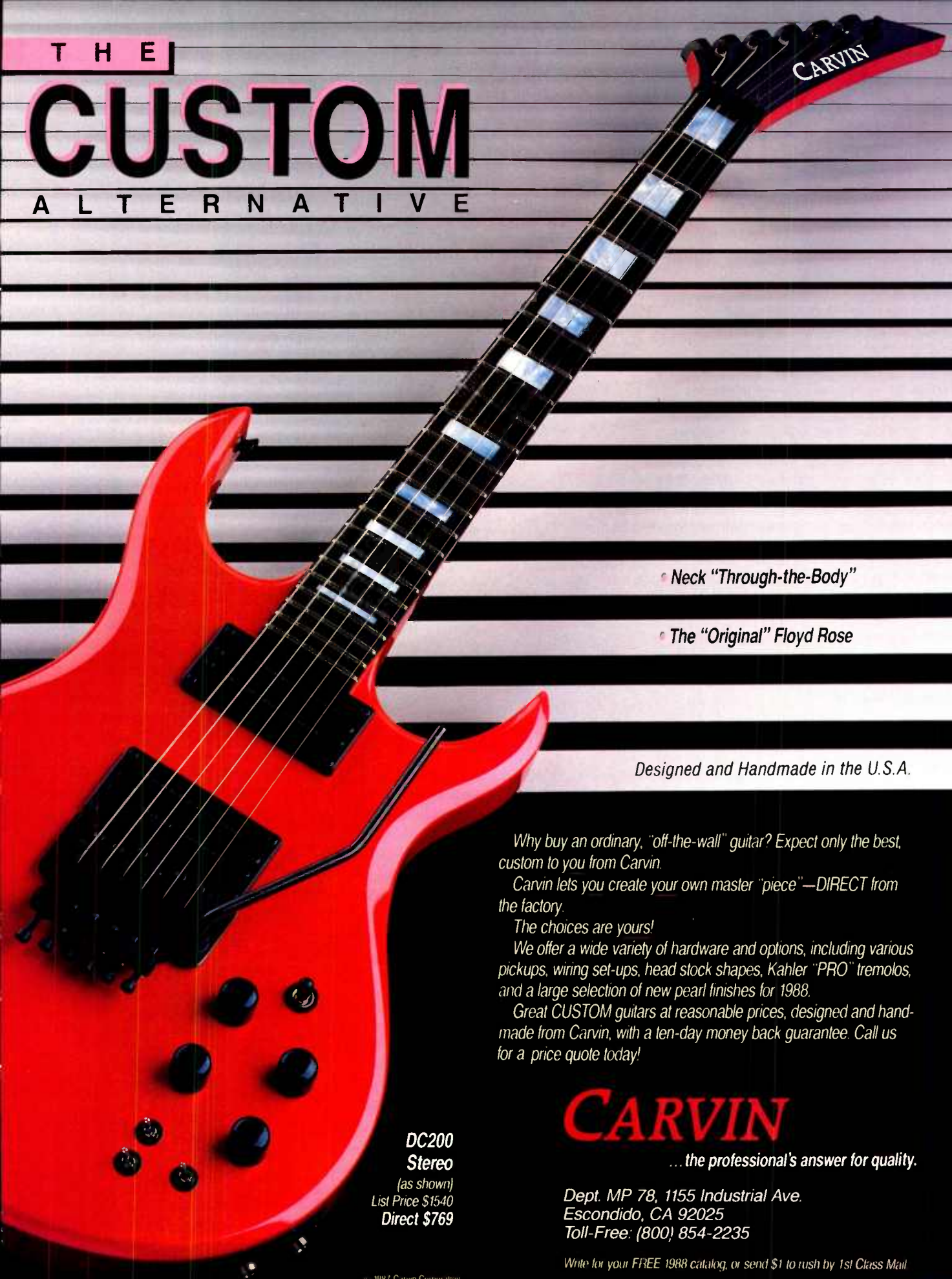


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opens the LP with "Fourth Of July," the final triumphant note of X's recent *See How We Are*. Sung by John Doe and Exene, the song is high romantic tragedy; Alvin brings it down to earth with a raspy countrified reading that makes the misery almost palpable, helped here and elsewhere by Greg Leisz's lonesome lap and pedal steel. While both versions work, Alvin's makes the other seem somewhat overblown. The contrast is even more striking on two numbers originally recorded by the Blasters. Although the stylistic shifts aren't so sharp, "Long White Cadillac" and "Jubilee Train" gain impressive depth from these grittier renditions.

Alvin's not just reliving past glories. His new songs have the familiar resonance of classic blues and country tunes, capturing troubled moments in ordinary lives. "Brother On The Line" pits a striking union man against a scab friend; the raucous, seemingly sarcastic "New Tattoo" masks a heartbroken plea for reconciliation. In fact, an aching longing provides the emotional punch of all of *Romeo's Escape*, be it the twangy "I Wish It Was Saturday Night" or "Far Away," a wistful, perceptive look into the workings of a child's imagination.

Dave Alvin lacks some of a solo artist's instincts, mostly the bad ones. He rarely showboats on guitar, preferring to spotlight the tight ensemble work of his hot band, the Allnighters, and guests like Los Lobos' David Hidalgo and Steve Berlin (co-producer with Mark Linett). But an album as thoroughly satisfying as *Romeo's Escape* can only be the result of an exceedingly talented artist following his inspiration to its logical conclusion, without distractions. We should all sing so badly. – **Jon Young**

## JONATHAN BUTLER
*Jonathan Butler*
(Jive/RCA)

Execs at Jive probably took one glance at Jonathan Butler's sculptured good looks (a cross between Harry Belafonte and Johnny Nash), heard his muscular voice and knew they had a potential crossover sensation. Their response was this heavily hyped two-record set which, like most hyped two-record sets, could have been pared down to a single disk without losing much.

A self-exiled South African (though apparently not for political reasons), Butler is a facile, melodic writer who sings in an accomplished if not distinctive


manner—the kind of talent top-forty radio drools over. But listeners may have difficulty distinguishing him from every other Billy, Gregory and Freddie out there. Like those contemporaries, Butler comes on as the suave romantic, crooning love songs designed to melt the most reluctant of hearts. Appropriately, he's teamed with Billy Ocean producer Barry Eastmond, one of the more proficient arrangers of sophisticated soul. Eastmond knows just where to punctuate the bass and horns and where to slide in the strings, which results in the nagging feeling that he used a produce-by-numbers set. The songs bear a too striking resemblance to Ocean's. And Butler, a strong-voiced singer in search of a style, borrows copiously from vocalists like Gregory Abbott and George Benson. Even when he steps out a bit by scatting over his guitar leads (now where'd he get that idea?), he repeats a familiar trick. It's a shame that Butler's abilities have been polished to such a dull sheen. You suspect he'd shine more if he could get out from under the waxy build-up. – **David Konjoyan**

## MILTON NASCIMENTO

*A Barca Dos Amantes (Ship Of Lovers)* (Verve)

A musical legend in Europe and his native Brazil, Milton Nascimento enjoyed his first U.S. chart success with last year's *Encontros E Despedidas (Meetings And Farewells)*. Suddenly jazz musicians weren't the only Americans aware of Nascimento's soulful melodies, with their rich harmonies, Iberian hues, African cries and South American folk textures. Or his voice—strong, sensuous, soaring in wordless flights to create a wholly original musical landscape.

*A Barca Dos Amantes*, his twentieth LP, is a celebratory live album and a fine introduction to a luminous talent. Recorded in April 1986 in São Paulo, the performances are spirited and technically sharp, with Nascimento backed by Brazilian masters such as Nico Assumpção (bass) and Robertinho Silva (drums and percussion). Musically and thematically the LP cuts a wide swath, from rapturous ballads ("Nos Dois," "Amor De Indio") to political anthems like "Lágrima Do Sul" (a tribute to Winnie Mandela) and "Louvação A Mariama." The latter is an uplifting cry against oppression and servitude from *Missa Dos Quilombos*, the remarkable 1982 choral work written by Nascimento, poet Pedro Tierra and Catholic bishop/liberation theologist Pedro Casaldáliga. "Pensamento" and "Tarde" are spare and moody, the cries of a singer struggling to escape solitude.

Nascimento sang "Tarde" on Wayne Shorter's *Native Dancer* LP, and the latter returns the favor here, adding sublime saxwork to "Tarde" and two other songs. By no means distilling the essence of a twenty-one-year career, *A Barca Dos Amantes* should further expand Nascimento's American audience and—let's hope—induce Verve to release the best of his earlier LPs, such as *Sentinela*, *Geraes* and *Anima*.

– **Chris McGowan**

## PLATTERS THAT MATTER

**1. Green,** *Green* (Ganggreen, 1716 S. Linden Ave., Park Ridge, IL 60068)
**2. Louvin Brothers** – *Radio Favorites '51-'57* (Country Music Foundation)
**3. Wire Train** – *Ten Women* (Columbia)
**4. Sex Clark Five** – *Strum & Drum* (Records to Russia, 1207 Big Cove Rd., Huntsville, AL 35801)
**5. Eugene Chadbourne** – *Vermin Of The Blues* (Fundamental, P.O. 2309, Covington, GA 30209)
**6. Geoff & Maria Muldaur** – *Pottery Pie (reissue)* (Carthage, P.O. Box 667, Rocky Hill, NJ 08553)
**7. Monkees** – *Missing Links* (Rhino)
**8. Hank Williams** – *Hey Good Lookin' (December 1950-July 1951)* (PolyGram)
**9. Binky Phillips** – *Binky Phillips* (Caroline, 5 Crosby St., New York, NY 10013)
**10. Loudon Wainwright III** – *More Love Songs* (Rounder)
**11. James Carr** – *At The Dark End Of The Street* (Blueside, 225 Lafayette St., Suite 1109, New York, NY 10012)

– **Peter Cronin**

# SHORT Rock TAKES

**The Isley Brothers**
*Smooth Sailin'* (Warner Bros.)

**Isley Jasper Isley**
*Different Drummer* (CBS Associated)

After the Isleys 3+3 went their separate ways, neither the Isley Brothers (the older 3) nor Isley Jasper Isley (the younger 3) seemed able to recapture the magic. That's not the case with *Different Drummer*; Ernie Isley's drum kit has a muscular stomp, and his guitar is back in all its Hendrixian glory. Where the songs once smouldered, they now burn, and burn brightly. The heat is on again for the older Isleys, too. After losing brother O'Kelly to heart disease, Ronald and Rudolf found a new third in co-producer Angela Winbush and sharpened their sound accordingly. Ronald's voice is typically impassioned and powerful, but it's the context, from the stone funk of "Everything Is Alright" to the anguished balladry of "Send A Message," that makes the difference.

**Whitney Houston**
*Whitney* (Arista)

Houston could go gold on the basis of *Whitney*'s cover-photo alone, so the fact that this is a better album than her debut is a bonus beyond reasonable expectation. Credit minimal schlock for part of the improvement, and a keener pop sense (mostly the work of Narada Michael Walden) for the rest. The only complaint is that Houston never quite cuts loose, reining her gospel instincts for pop palatability. You were expecting a miracle?

**Dwight Yoakam**
*Hillbilly Deluxe* (Reprise)

Having gone from hillbilly innocent to Nashville slick in two albums, it's only a matter of time before Yoakam winds up in front of Billy Sherrill's string section. That's not the tradition we had in mind.

**Mötley Crüe**
*Girls, Girls, Girls* (Elektra)

Who'd have thought *these* clowns could sound so credible? Yet this not only delivers the sonic punch its predecessors barely presumed, but the writing matches that muscle with hook-studded heavy-poppers in the best Kiss tradition. Granted, the lyrics are still mind-numbingly jejune, and the Crüe does close with a cretinous run-through of "Jailhouse Rock," but on the whole, it sounds like these guys may actually have something here. Hope it's not contagious....

**Heart**
*Bad Animals* (Capitol)

Some bands are born to slickness, others achieve it, but Heart had slickness thrust upon them. Or so it seems after the band's second round with Ron Nevison. That's hardly the way it's supposed to go in rock 'n' roll—raw spontaneity and unadorned simplicity are the cardinal virtues, right?—but this studio-smart approach works rather well, playing off the group's flair for the dramatic, while exquisitely framing the voluptuousness of Ann Wilson's voice.

**Original Soundtrack**
*Beverly Hills Cop II* (MCA)

As with the film, lightning once again refuses to strike twice, leaving this collection long on names but short on depth. That doesn't deprive it of pleasures: "Shakedown," nasty work from a happily snarling Bob Seger, is delightful, while George Michael's "I Want Your Sex" is a better Prince single than anything on *Sign 'o' The Times*.

**Alison Moyet**
*Raindancing* (Columbia)

Unlike its synth-smart predecessor, *Raindancing* lacks the instant appeal of Swain & Jolley's intellectualized dance music. But though the performances here take a bit more patience to appreciate, they're no less rewarding; if anything, Moyet's interpretive gifts have grown, and Jimmy Iovine's understated production takes pains not to get in the way. Which is why the likes of "Sleep Like Breathing" or "Weak In The Presence Of Beauty" hold such lasting allure.

**The Bears**
*The Bears* (P.M.R.C.)

As is typical of an Adrian Belew project, *The Bears* is blessed with an engaging array of aural oddities, tricky time-changes and off-hand wit. That all of the above fit nicely into a convincing set of catchy, consistent pop songs is what surprises. Tellingly, though, the best tunes—"Fear Is Never Boring" and "Trust"—are by Belew's bandmates.

**David Sylvian**
*Gone To Earth* (Virgin)

Sylvian's always been a bit of an aesthete, but that's frequently more of an affectation than a vocation. Here, though, his fondness for moody, electronic atmospherics pays off in a big way, as he and his all-star art-rock crew (Robert Fripp, Bill Nelson and Kenny Wheeler, to name a few) generate an electro-acoustic soundscape as lush as anything on *Another Green World*.

**Steve Earle & the Dukes**
*Exit 0* (MCA)

On the one hand, these ten tunes tend to prove that Earle's perch between country and rock traditionalism is no fluke; he and the Dukes play that way with an enthusiasm too deep-seated to have been faked. On the other, having a solid playing style still doesn't guarantee good songs, and though Earle's basic instincts seem sure in that department, his execution verges on the hackneyed.

**Mel & Kim**
*FLM* (Atlantic)

In the grand disco tradition, Mel & Kim are interchangeable, nearly anonymous females who exist to deliver a melody over a Stock/Aitken/Waterman electro-beat. So how come this is so catchy? Two reasons: First, the songs—especially "Showing Out" and "Respectable"—would be winners regardless of treatment; and second, as singers, Mel & Kim aren't as forgettable as you'd expect, boasting voices making up in personality what they lack in lung power.

**BY J.D. CONSIDINE**

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# SHORT JAZZ TAKES

**Art Tatum**
*20th Century Piano Genius* (Emarcy Jazz Series)

Reissued in its most pristine, unabridged form, this is one of Tatum's purest final statements on the state of solo piano in the American improvising tradition. The intimacy of these private party tapes, and the encouragement of his Hollywood supporters, make for a remarkably personal document. Tatum's sweeping harmonic gestures, riveting tempos, eccentric modulations and reorchestrations might startle solo piano fans raised on more modal fare. He is the Rosetta stone of virtuosity on the piano.

**Zakir Hussain**
*Making Music* (ECM)

A very pretty distillation of the Shakti concept, highlighting this grand drummer's innovative use of melodic percussion and rhythmic cycles. John McLaughlin sounds more at home here than on his recent electric outings (good as they've been), and no rhythm machine or sequencer can hold a MIDI to the natural blaster box patterns he weaves with Hussain. Hariprasad Chaurasia's wafting wooden flutes and Jan Garbarek's mysterioso saxes lend an earnest melodic dignity to these trans-cultural compositions.

**Max Roach**
*Bright Moments* (Soul Note)

Roach's concept of the double quartet (one part jazz quartet, one part string quartet), serves both to revitalize the notion of "jazz" strings and to invigorate his core grouping of players. Tyronne Brown, on Banchetti Electric Upright Bass, has the tone, time and overpowering drive to inspire the drummer like Art Davis used to, and to translate the earth tones of Roach's drums to the elisions of the Uptown String Quartet. The renewed emphasis on writing better spreads around the spotlight, which often placed too much focus on Cecil Bridgewater's dryness and Odean Pope's voraciousness (and imparted a certain sameness to their accomplished solos). The color, swing and melodic directness of this band are sublime. And Roach be the coach—his drums simply sing.

**Duke Ellington**
*In The Uncommon Market* (Pablo)

This new batch of vintage Ellington illustrates Norman Granz's unwavering dedication to the jazz continuum. Granz has culled some of the cream of Duke's 50s/60s touring band (with Sam Woodyard on drums) in a beautiful set of piano trios, along with his every-night/one-nighter features for Ray Nance's violin, Johnny Hodges' alto and Paul Gonsalves' tenor. The roaring backgrounds (dig those mothers in the trumpet section) on "E.S.P." supercharge a breathless harmonic wild west and rodeo show by Gonsalves that is so overwhelming it ought to frighten some of today's automatic pilot tenor stars back into the caves to practice—and fast.

**Michael Brecker**
*Michael Brecker* (MCA/Impulse)
**Jack DeJohnette**
*Irresistible Forces* (MCA/Impulse)

Good opening shots in the post-fusion genre, from jazz stars with something other than bebop on their minds. Brecker's modal flights make up in warmth and drive what they lack in richness; still, having gotten his feet wet with his first "straight-ahead" album, Brecker's melodic power suggests how this music might grow if the vamps were more expansive. DeJohnette's album is more subject to misunderstanding. An all-around musician in his first post-Compost reach out, DeJohnette's made creative use of MIDIed rhythm boxes and sequencers to keep things grooving when he sits down at the keyboards, and his rhythm team of Lonnie Plaxico and Mick Goodrick (with special guest Nana Vasconcelos) generate graceful heat. The emphasis here is on building moods, not on blowing, though Greg Osby is a most promising reed player when given the space to shout. A clear, concise statement about ethnic rhythms, funk and ballads in the electronic age.

**Jo Jones**
*Our Man, Papa Jo* (Denon Compact Disc)

With the legendary drummer's last recording, Jo Jones entered the digital age and intuitively recognized the compact disc's potential for a vivid "live" sound. The listener's stereo perspective is right in the cockpit, on the drum throne with Jo facing out at his featured players (Major Holley, Hank Jones and Jimmy Oliver) gathered in a circle about him. You get the lush sound of an acoustic ensemble with a minimum of miking, immense bass presence and clarity, plus the true color and dynamics of Papa Jo's kit and cymbals. Jazz standards and Ellingtonia are programmed like the club sets of his time, with a maximum of swinging interplay and plenty of solo features for his collaborators. Witty.

**Tania Maria**
*The Lady From Brazil* (Manhattan)

Tania Maria is the diva with a difference, an exotic equatorial star ready to claim her place at the pop. Listening to how her style has gestated from the horn/guitar carnival of her pace-setting Concord-Picante albums to the multi-keyboard glitter of this Manhattan debut makes one hopeful that progressive artists can sweeten their appeal with a bit of fructose rather than corn syrup. All the studio paladins and usual suspects are here (producer George Duke on three airplay grabs, plus Steve Gadd, Eddie Gomez, Anthony Jackson, Buddy Williams), and though the surface is slick, it ain't scrubbed; Maria's harmonically rich vamps are swinging and percussive, her vocals smoky and elliptical.

BY CHIP STERN


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## STERN from page 44

first major job, playing with Blood, Sweat and Tears. There, he first played with Jaco Pastorius—in his pre-Weather Report days—an association that has lasted through the years and the personal travails (Pastorius' mellifluous slink can be heard on "Mood Swings" from *Upside Downside*).

By the mid 70s, Stern had acquired, by default or divine intervention, a style to call his own. "I came by it not directly, but by some kind of a fusion between [rock and jazz]. It wasn't by directly copying someone like John McLaughlin. I wasn't listening to that then. It's weird, but I wasn't. It was *either* B.B. King *or* Wes Montgomery. Now I listen to *all* of it; McLaughlin I love. But still my favorite is one or the other." It's the either/or aesthetic rearing its head.

Stern, to many jazz observers, was the man with the guitar who helped usher the Man with the Horn out of hibernation. In 1980, Miles Davis had stayed away from music for too long and was looking for a few good men to call his band. Guitarist Barry Finnerty didn't work out, and at saxist Bill Evans' suggestion, Miles gave a listen to Stern, then playing with Billy Cobham. Stern made the grade. At Miles' urging, Stern leaned hard on the distortion-laden rock immediacy he's capable of, leading some to believe that Miles had hired a heavy-metal bebopper.

"That was great, a real learning experience," Stern says of the job, which lasted through three albums, their subsequent tours, and more touring just after his successor, John Scofield, left the group. "Comping-wise, it was really a challenge. There was no keyboard, which shocked the shit out of me when I joined. [*In a gruff, Miles voice*] 'Okay, go ahead, you got it.' He'd suggest things and then let the musicians let it grow independent of what he might have actually wanted in the first place."

Adding to Stern's ability to throw off the scent of his influences has been his study of other instruments. "Sometimes when I use a lot of sound, it's a matter of trying to get the sound of a sax—a more legato, distorted sound. For guitar, that translates more: that screaming tenor saxophone quality. I listen to a lot of tenor, a lot of alto sax, a lot of piano."

At times, his playing is openly pianistic. "A lot of that I learned from listening to Jim Hall, who is the master at it. He knows how to listen to piano and edit what he can't play on the guitar, but still sound more pianistic. Also, Mick Goodrick is great at those amazing voicings and some knowledge of classical music. He's got that independent stuff happening—different voices. Sometimes when he comps, he plays one or two lines instead of chord forms, which are easy to fall into on guitar. There are books about it. You never see that with piano."

Having weathered the inward tumult of his recent past, Stern feels a sense of renewal in his playing, and in his real life. "In terms of my priorities, they're a little more defined. Music is definitely high on my list, but it's not my first priority. The first things are my wife and my life. I just don't think music makes it completely. It's nice to be really passionate about it, about anything. But when you get obsessed with any kind of work that you do, you start spinning circles. I'm still a serious practicer; I shed all the time. But I'm a lot more balanced."

A reflective Stern snuffs out his last cigarette. "Also, I've got to say just being sober has helped me. For me, dipping and dabbing just didn't make it. I would dip and then, whoo, the dab wasn't even there. That's really helped me become more focused. It's starting to become a lot more fun." M

## ROBERTSON from page 98

Clearmountain's laborious fine tuning and Robbie's football coach guidance.

Robertson steps out of the mixing room and plops down in a chair. He looks tired, but he also looks real confident: the pride of a man who did great work, quit when he was ahead and has come back ten years later with something that can stand with his best. Days earlier he mentioned a thread that ties his songs together. Asked about it now, he says, "All it is for me is the sense of an American mythology. You'll hear it in the song we're going to mix next—'Somewhere Down The Crazy River.' In my mind there's this mythical place in America where *the storyteller* lives. And he tells stories based on this place and people who've come through, and his experiences. That's why all the Indian stuff is there, because that's the birth of American mythology. It does something to me; it pushes a button in me. I don't know if it means anything to anybody else, but God, I know that place is out there somewhere." Robbie looks away—like he has one eye on this shadow land already. Then he says, "I've never been, but we all know it's there. And you'll recognize it in bits and pieces. You'll recognize it the way the storyteller tells it." M

## NAMM from page 65

trols include bass, mids and treble, a presence control and a voicing circuit that allows you to bring up different stages of gain, either concentrating on clean tubes, dirty tubes or even solid state. It also has an effects loop and an *analog* chorus. Did I say the thing sounds absolutely killer? ADA has also done something cool with their $200 MIDI foot pedal: In addition to regular MIDI gear, it will address pre-MIDI digital effects so you don't need another pedal for that favorite SDE-3000.

**Peavey** is also entering the MIDI preamp waters, although they brought out the first MIDI amp, the Programmax 10, a year or so ago. Their new $600 MIDI Programmable Preamp sounds fantastic, with all kinds of new wrinkles in the distortion circuit. It too has a programmable effects buss and, like the ADA, allows internal remapping of the parameter numbers. Peavey also has a nice $389 MIDI multi-effects called the Addverb that has recording specs at guitarist prices. Peavey has a bunch of MIDI units on the way, including mixers and patchers, and has already laid to rest the myth that its only power base is guitars, amps and PAs.

Not all the preamp action was MIDIfied. At a more accessible $250 was the **Chandler** Tube Driver, which actually has a good old 12AX7 tube on board. It uses a bias control to make the tube run hotter or cooler, giving a present, tight American distortion, all the way to a loose, dangerous British scream. It also allows the guitar's volume knob to control how much distortion you want. Even better, it has fully buffered line outputs, so it'll serve as a preamp and allow you to run it straight into a power amp.

Also non-MIDI, but more complex, is the 2000CPL Stereo Guitar Preamp from **Gallien-Krueger**. This baby combines channel-switching, 4-band eq, compression, noise reduction, stereo reverb and stereo chorus. If that ain't enough, there's an effects loop. Toss in a mess of outputs and a five-button foot controller and you're pumping.

While **Tom Scholz** and Boston were packing 'em in on the road, **SR&D** was awash in new RockModule units. There was a 12-band graphic eq, a stereo chorus, a stereo echo and a distortion generator. No MIDI, but great specs. Elsewhere, there were new attempts at combining effects, led by the Roland GP-8, which takes eight underrated Boss effects and adds full MIDI programmability. Then there's the t.c. 2290 from the Danish firm **t.c. electronics**. This one has five digital effects, including 32 seconds of sampling, 20kHz frequency response, MIDI implementation and an interesting Dynamic delay feature that eliminates delay notes when they conflict with real-time notes. Not cheap at $2000. And **Latin Percussion**, who have been making some creditable non-percussion electronic forays, unveiled their Sound Studio 19, which packs 6-band eq, stereo chorus and delay, distortion, compression and two effects loops into 100 programmable patches. You even get a 440 tuning tone. No, no MIDI on this one.

We'll close with a hot technology from five or six years ago: wireless. Companies are still trying to develop the ultimate wireless guitar setup, as witnessed by **Sennheiser**'s impeccable VHF2G. It's hard to see how much more dynamic range and working distance you could ask, but at $3425 you may have to have as many hit records as endorsee John Entwistle to afford one. Mere mortals like us dropped our jaws when Nady offered a real true diversity system for $300 (the 201 VHF), a high-band non-diversity unit for $200 (the 101 VHF) and an entry-level unit for an astounding hundred bucks. Well, that's summer NAMM in a microcosm: not a lot of hot-copy-generating ideas, but a steady progression toward better, cheaper gear. We could do a lot worse. M

## SUMMERS from page 36

like lowering myself to start fighting, like are we gonna do this, are we gonna get back together? I'm just not interested. If somebody else wants to do it, then good. I'm there and I can play, fine. But I'm not going to go around *groveling* to do it. But I was prepared to go there and help assemble this live album.

"They wanted basically for the group to go in and write two or three tracks, and by the group they meant Sting. But you know, he's a solo artist now and he's doing his own creating, so any songs he's writing he wanted to keep for himself. So he wasn't about to write any new songs for a Police record when the group didn't really exist anymore. So the compromise was to come up with a new version of 'Don't Stand So Close To Me' to put an added interest in the album, which I think is terribly cynical."

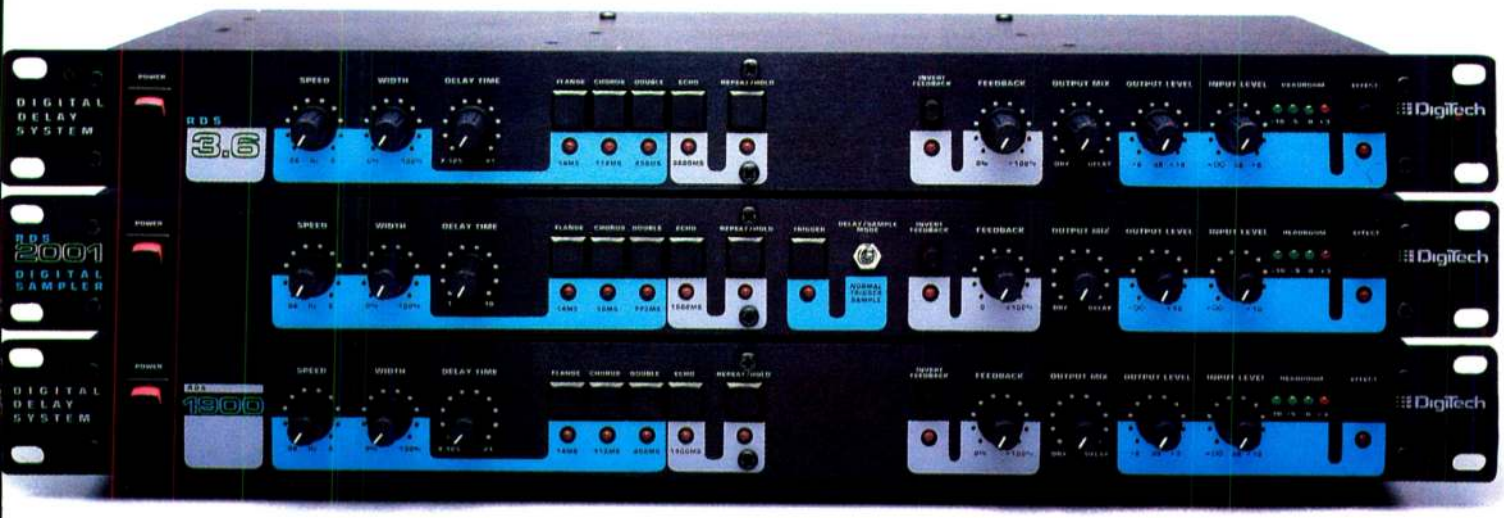
Perhaps understandably, Summers is no big fan of Sting's superstar-sidemen approach: "I saw the show and it was so disappointing. Dreadful to me. It was so cold, I just couldn't get into it."

For hardened Police fanatics, the most inexplicable part of Sting's new modus operandi is turning over the bass chair to Daryl Jones when Sting's clearly a more interesting rock bassist. "Funny you should say. I kind of agree. Kim Turner—he's Sting's sound man—was saying to me recently that one day Sting actually picked up the bass at soundcheck and played, and Kim said it was incredible. It was the first time in months that they heard the bass, a real bass. It was like there had been no bass, ever, just that fucking bullshit that they do," says Summers, miming the playing of lots of notes up high on the neck. "'Cause Sting is good. He's not a virtuoso, but what he plays is right and it's simple and it's perfect in the Police. They're real bass lines.

"I sympathize. It's very hard playing with other musicians who play in lots of groups and do sessions. It's very hard to get them to do the right thing, 'cause they come in with this mind full of licks and attitudes. And for them to try and sort that out and not make a musical cliché is really hard. So I really sympathize with Sting, because I've gone through it as well, and he's told me as musicians they've all got great names, but to try and get them to play simply and not play clichés was really difficult for him. They don't lack ability on their instruments, what they lack is *concept*.

"In a way, I sort of resent all these references to Sting. I have to be absolutely honest; I don't think about that stuff at all. At this point it's something I did. I'm on to other things, which have a much greater influence over me. You must remember, you keep mentioning the Police, but a lot of the Police was down to me. I was a big part of that group. The drums are one thing and the singing's one thing, but the way it actually sounded, that was me! The guitar—I filled in all the music. Some people say, 'Wow, this record opens up a lot about the Police. We didn't realize.' And this makes things clear to some people.

"I think this album is as good as any of the Police records, better produced and more worked out. It wasn't knocked off. It was a labor of love and a great pain to pull off. Of all the options I had, this was about the hardest thing I could have done, and the most expensive. It was the most chancy option, to put a band together, to try and overcome comparisons with my past and the view people have of me. I think I can say that in all honesty." M

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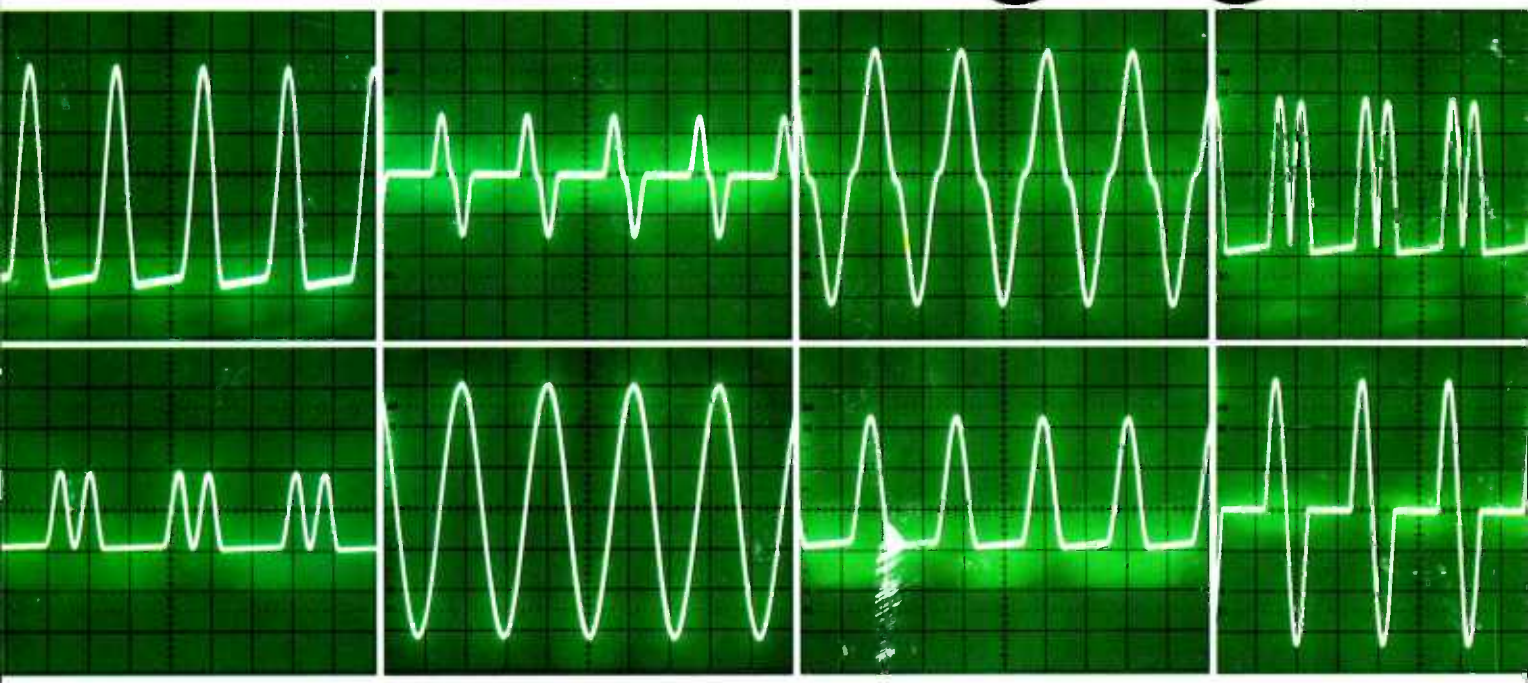

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