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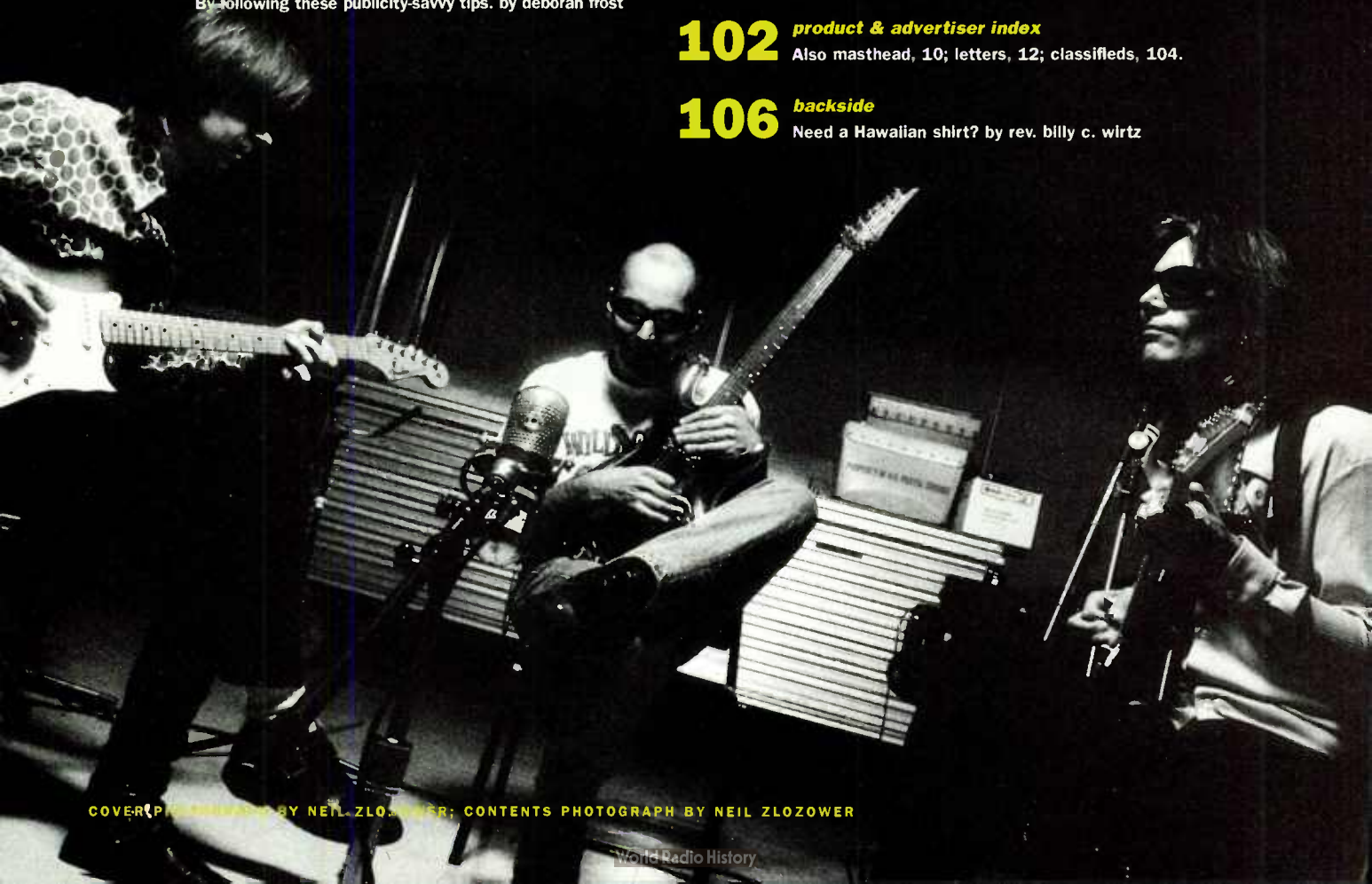

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY NEIL ZLOZOWER; CONTENTS PHOTOGRAPH BY NEIL ZLOZOWER

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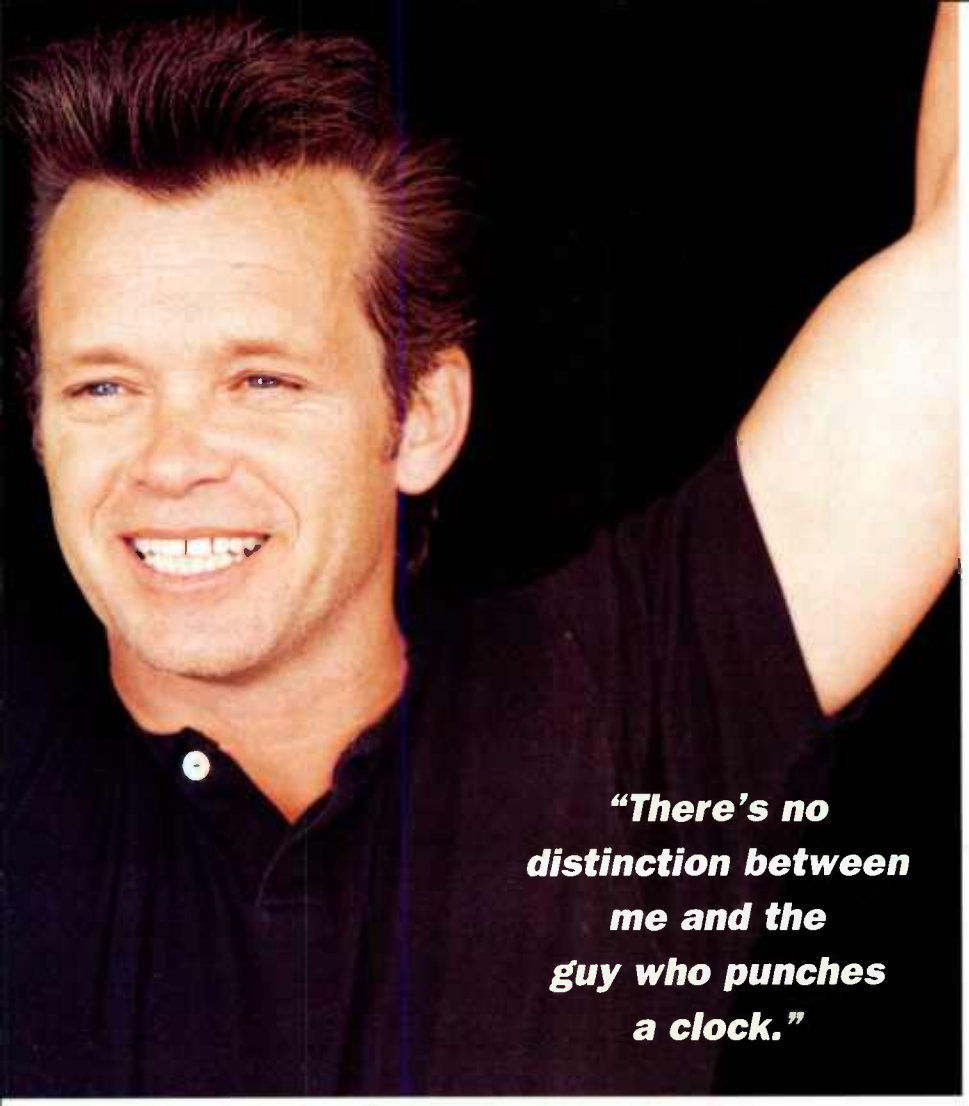


John Mellencamp

Your decision to use Junior Vasquez to produce your new album, Mr. Happy Go Lucky, *was certainly unexpected.*

What was good about it was that I don't have a firm grasp on using computers, loops, programs, and the type of rhythm that goes into the urban sound. So when Junior came in, he was like a non-musician band member who could come up with different rhythms and sounds than we ordinarily use.

The role of the producer on many records is to bring another personality into the mix.

That's true: If you hire, say, Daniel Lanois, he brings his bag of tricks and applies that to everybody. But I don't think that's good. Daniel should just make his own records, because you can always tell his sound. I don't hear records and go, "God, I want to make a record that sounds like that!" I hear *sounds* and say, "How can I do that?"

How do you lead a life that allows you to write songs, as opposed to punching a time clock for a living?

Well, to me, there's no distinction between me and the guy who punches a clock. If that guy had to write songs, he could find the same motivation from his life as I do from mine. Really, the best songs are about small things. "Standing in the shadows of love": There's no lifestyle that particularly goes with that phrase. You could be a ditch digger or the head of a big corporation, and you'll understand those words.

The clock punchers may feel the same things you do, but they listen to music because they might not be able to express those feelings.

As long as they think that, they're right. But anybody who opens themselves to the idea can write songs. Songs are sent to people—to you, to the guy on the line, to everybody. But are you open to receive the message? It's like saying, "I can't run around the block right now; I'm not in that kind of condition." Yeah, that's right: You have to run halfway around the block the first time, and three-quarters the second time, and finally you'll make it around the block.

How did you come to realize that you could write?

My problem was that it never dawned on me to try. I was in a rock band in the late '60s and early '70s, playing fraternities in Indiana, doing cover songs. Why would I write? I was a singer. Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones wrote the songs I sang. That all changed when I got a record deal. Then I *had* to write songs. It was like learning to run around the block in public. People saw me going [*pants with exhaustion*]: "I don't know how to do this!" That's why my first records were terrible; it was me running around the block for the first time.

You had notoriously messy legal problems early in your recording career. What wisdom can you pass along?

All I can say is this: Generally, the people a young guy deals with have been screwing other people longer than the young guy has been alive. It's not just music: What if you were the guy who started McDonald's? People are getting stinkin' filthy rich from your idea, and it isn't even your idea anymore. The point is, when you start being successful, the root of all evil enters the door. And when that happens, forget it, all bets are off.

—Robert L. Doerschuk

Reggie Young

A lot of great records in the '60s came out of Memphis, where you were the house guitarist at Chips Moman's American Sound Studio. Was there a big rivalry between the American, Hi, and Stax labels there?

We had all played together coming up, and I was good friends with [Steve] Cropper, Duck [Dunn], and Willie Mitchell. But in Memphis, everybody stayed in their own studios and did their own thing. Here in Nashville, it's like we're all in one huge band and the different producers pluck different people out of it to cut records. Publishers pitch songs to different artists on different labels, whereas in Memphis each studio had its own writers.

One of your most memorable guitar parts from the Memphis years was the break on "Skinny Legs and All" by Joe Tex. Where did that lick come from?

One of my best friends in Memphis was John Hughey, who plays steel guitar with Vince Gill now and was with Conway Twitty forever. John and I used to get together and work up instrumentals, and that lick might have been some steel guitar thing I got from him. When we cut "Skinny Legs" and I played that lick in the middle, old Joe hit the floor laughing.

What are your memories of the sessions Elvis cut at American in 1969?

By that point, our rhythm section had cut a lot of Top 40 records, so it was hard for us to be impressed by anybody. But when he walked in that night, we all backed up a step: "Wow, that's Elvis Presley!" He had his entourage with him, but after the first day or so they were asked to leave, except for a couple of his closest friends. Without all those people there, Elvis got down to earth and was quite enjoyable. Chips wasn't intimidated about asking him to sing a line over because it was flat or something. I don't think anybody else would have said that to Elvis, but Elvis was glad to get an objective opinion. The result was "In the Ghetto," "Suspicious Minds," and a couple of other huge records.

How much equipment do you carry to sessions these days?

I've got a box with eight or nine guitars: a gut-string, a Gibson 335, a couple of Fenders, a Les Paul, an old Fender Broadcaster that Waylon Jennings gave me, and an electric sitar. Jerry Jones made me an exact copy of that old Coral electric sitar, but it plays in tune. On most sessions I play the old Tele I used in Memphis or a '57 Stratocaster. I've got a rack of effects, but I don't use it that often. I've got a Matchless combo amp with two 12s that I use a lot. A guitar into an amp is hard to beat.

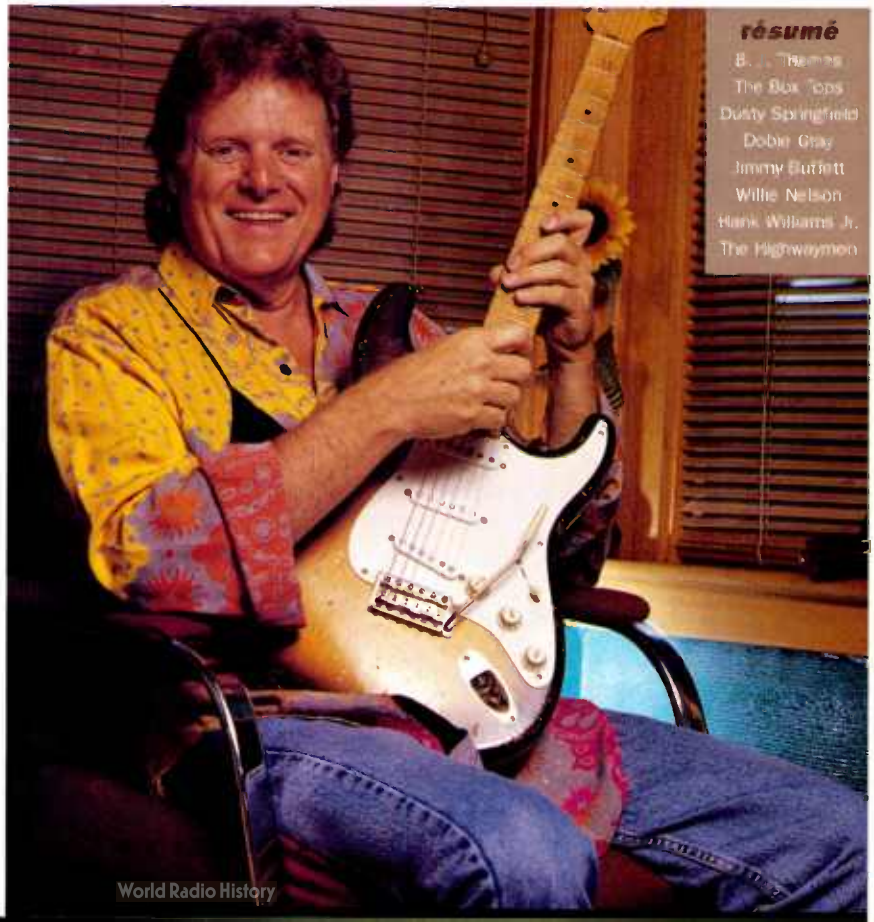
"When I played that lick, Joe Tex hit the floor laughing."

Do you still sound like you're from Memphis?

I still play that style and I still love R&B music. On the stuff we cut in Memphis, if it was Neil Diamond it was a pop record, and if it was Wilson Pickett it was R&B. But we played the same stuff on all of it. The country music they cut in Nashville now sounds like a lot of the pop music from the '60s and '70s, so I feel right at home. Actually, somebody asked me if I would go to Memphis in a couple of weeks and record with an artist there. I said, "Shoot, yes. I can get some good barbecue."

The barbecue in Nashville doesn't compare to Memphis barbecue?

Not even close. **—Rick Mattingly**



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letters

brother duane

Thank you for finally clearing up the erroneous tale of Duane's untimely demise as a result of colliding with a peach truck—hence the album title, *Eat a Peach*. I guess it's immaterial how he died, though. Barely 25, with so much to offer—it makes one wonder what could have been. What a natural talent. Thanks, Duane.

anthony anzivino, zenlunch@aol.com

Bill Milkowski's account of Duane Allman's death is inaccurate. The accident report, which is on file at the Washington Street Library in Macon, Georgia, notes that he swerved trying to avoid a stopped truck in the road. It wasn't a peach truck, by the way, but a flatbed with a yellow crane boom on the back for unloading lumber. According to Berry Oakley's sister Candace, who was following Duane in a car, he tried to miss the truck but caught part of it and flew off the bike. His helmet came off and the bike landed on him, driving him hard into the pavement. By no means was he impaled by steel rods.

Candace found Duane breathing, with no visible injuries other than a few scratches on his stomach and forehead. He was taken to the Medical Center of Central Georgia, where doctors tried to repair his damaged liver, a ruptured coronary artery, and other internal bleeding. He died at 8:40pm, three hours after the accident.

Thanks for the article, though, and for putting Brother Duane on the cover. The Allman Brothers are alive and well, "hitting the note" in a way that I believe would make Duane smile.

barron ruth, allman@netspace.org

[*Author Bill Milkowski based his account of Duane's death on a photocopy of the autopsy report, which he obtained from a contact in the Macon police department.*]

Everyone knows how great a slide player Duane Allman was, but what about his straight guitar style? His Muscle Shoals sessions convince me that Clapton got his nickname "Slowhand" only after he met Duane.

m.c.m., new york, NY

Did someone forget to mention to Arlen Roth that your Duane Allman article was a tribute? If Duane "played flat a lot," perhaps the esteemed Mr. Roth could name a slide player with better intonation. Duane was one of the best rock guitarists of all time and *the* best slide player, period. Roth should try "zeroing in" on Duane's slide tunings again, as Duane used open E on most slide tunes and standard tuning on songs such as "Dreams" and "Mountain Jam." I believe that he did use open G on "Mean Old World," though, with Eric Clapton.

charlie schack, caschack@worldnet.att.net

Regarding Arlen Roth's statement that Duane Allman played "flat": When playing conventional guitar, the player has the option of bending the string, making the note sharp. Because of frets, the player cannot do the reverse, making the note flat. With slide the fret is used only as a reference point and has no direct influence on the pitch. Duane would often drawl his notes flat, in a way that would emulate Southern speech. This was an intended, not accidental, device. Roth is also wrong in asserting that Duane played in open G. "Statesboro Blues," "Done Somebody Wrong," and "One Way Out" are done in a 1-5-1-3-5-1 open tuning inversion; both an E and D tuning fit this inversion, while G is entirely different. Duane has been filmed playing "Statesboro Blues" and finishing with a full chord on the tenth fret, which confirms the E tuning.

christopher r. rehm, miami, FL

My knees buckled when I saw Duane Allman on your cover (Sept. '96). Wow, who could have seen that coming? I applaud your effort. It takes a lot of guts to put Brother Duane on the front of an international music publication in 1996.

daryl mann, dmann@icis.on.ca

Bill Milkowski's point regarding Duane Allman's debt to Taj Mahal's arrangement of a Willie McTell number is well taken. While the fire of the Allmans' performance is undeniable, none who had first heard Taj Mahal's first release could have failed to spot their inspiration.

With that in mind, it is curious to note that Milkowski fails to mention that while the original performances of "Crossroads" and "Spoonful" considerably antedated those of the Allman Joys, it is likely that this band took their inspiration from more contemporary sources as well—perhaps from a then-current Elektra compilation, *What's Shakin'*, which contained versions of these songs by an English band of little note called the Powerhouse and a rather peppy Paul Butterfield Blues Band. Or perhaps the Allman Joys took their cues from more familiar sources.

Duane Allman was a spectacularly fluid, inventive, and emotional musician, and it would be a sin to ever try to take that away from him. The interesting fact does remain, though, that despite his age and where he grew up he was very much a third- or fourth-generation creator who received his muse through indirect interpretations.

bryan bowman, croton-on-hudson, NY

still britpoppin'

Barney Hoskyns' article on Britpop (July '96) was not the first I've read by a British scribe portraying Middle American rock fans as culturally bankrupt hicks. But there's one thing these limey automaton hacks don't quite get: If it doesn't "play in Peoria," chances are it just isn't very good. Like Public Enemy, Middle Americans don't believe the hype or the bullshit critics who try to cram it down our throats. I keep up with rock and roll on all fronts, and I honestly don't hear a great deal of British rock that moves me. Oasis? Third-rate. Blur? Lame. Pulp? Cabaret. While the hype machine deifies these self-aggrandizing morons, the really good U.K. bands, like the Auteurs, Spiritualized, My Bloody Valentine, and Primal Scream, wallow in relative obscurity—at least on this side of the Atlantic. If a band isn't succeeding here, in Britain, or anywhere else, it's probably the band's fault for not doing their jobs properly. Just, next time, don't blame me, alright?

keith koenig, kansas city, MO

no tears

Thank you for the recent writeup on Tears For Fears (What the Players Play, Sept. '96). I can't tell you how thrilled I was that a U.S. publication has finally noticed Roland Orzabal's *Raoul and the Kings of Spain*. I laugh when I read about U.K. artists having a tough time breaking into the U.S., since Orzabal and Tears For Fears have been around so long and have a loyal following in the States. I urge anyone who thinks TFF died in the '80s to pick up the album and make it to one of their shows. You will be blown away, just as I was when I caught his recent *Live Kings* tour.

renee constantinides
constanr@gunet.georgetown.edu

errata

Best Unsigned Band entrants Yolondalisa & The Technic from Columbus, Ohio, and Peking Workmen from La Mesa, California, were inadvertantly omitted from our list of semi-finalists in the September issue. Please join us in congratulating them. For this year's winners, turn to page 89.

Rafael Fuchs photographed the Steve Jordan Home Studio spread in the September issue. His credit was inadvertently left out.

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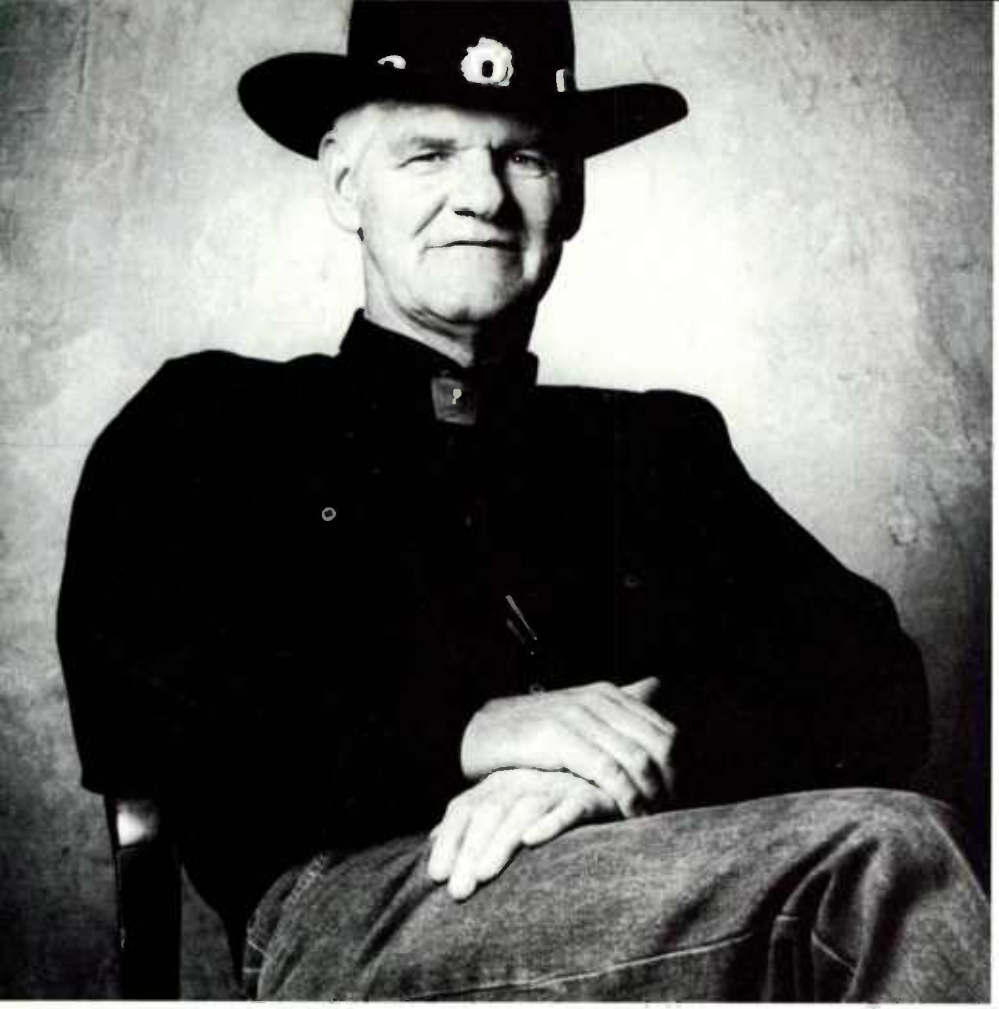


How I Wrote All Those Songs

by Harlan Howard

I hit Nashville with the greatest bunch of guys—Roger Miller, Bill Anderson, Willie Nelson. We were hanging together every night at Tootsie's, playing guitars and drinking beers. I was a ferocious writer back then; I might write three or four songs a day. But I had a frugal mentality: Why did all these songs need bridges and three parts? The bottom line would be, because you were getting musically boring: If you get boring in two sections, maybe you better put on another. I've had several hits through the years where I just went with the verse all through, like "Busted," or the kind where the first line of your title is your song, like "I Fall to Pieces," and then you make a summation of why you made that statement. I like those a lot—plus people might remember the title better. Sometimes I have to write the title down and think about it: Can you hang your hat on it for three minutes and keep coming back to it?

When I write alone, the melody comes to me as I'm writing the lyric, 'cause I like that word "bridge" between the lyric and the melody. They're supposed to feel the same, you know? I even write the chords down where I'm thinking they should go. I turn my attention totally to the music once I'm sure the words are okay. When I write with Kostas, he's a wonderful melody guy and he usually hums his way into a title or something. So everybody's different. But it doesn't matter—just get the job done.

I took the solitary road of writing as long as anybody. As the years go by, it's a lonely profession. You're looking at a blank legal pad, and it's shuffling around titles; it's not like the thrill is gone, but it's sure diminished.

Writing songs is like learning to swim: You need a lot of practice. There's nothing wrong with writing every thought that comes into your head. The bad songs are just practice. Especially when you're a trainee, you need to work on your phrasing, on your rhyming—you've got a lot of bad stuff to get out of your system. You've got to listen to the radio a lot—that's your classroom. And collect great songs other people have written, not to be jealous of but to think, "Wow, I want to be that good someday."

So there's a lot of studying and singing too much for your kinfolks and your buddies, and they're sitting there bored, drinking their beer and wishing you'd shut up, but they're humoring you. You hope they all say kind things, and of course they love you, so they do. Then all of a sudden here you are in Nashville, looking out the window and being interviewed. Isn't that wonderful? ***Interview by Mark Rowland***

résumé

"Heartaches by the Numbers"
"Tiger By the Tail"
"Streets of Baltimore"
Above and Beyond"

rou

Last month we touched a topic of potential concern to all songwriters: the division of copyright ownership between two or more collaborative composers. Here are a few more details to help give you a head start in making a fair and workable agreement with your partners.

The copyright for songs written after Jan. 1, 1978, lasts for the life of the author plus 50 years. In the case of a joint work, the copyright lasts for the life of the last surviving author plus 50 years. Legislation is now pending in Congress to extend this 50-year period to 70 years.

Each collaborator can transfer his or her copy-

John Hersey

True Jazz in the Culture of Disrespect

by Marcus Roberts

Enlightenment comes from above, not below. If we're producing trumpet players who have never heard of Louis Armstrong, pianists who can't play ragtime and know nothing about James P. Johnson or how Nat Cole led to Oscar Peterson, or singers who have no reverence for Billie Holiday, then we are not moving forward with an art form based on the highest level of achievement. And if that's true, how can we claim to be really connected?

You can look at a Beethoven sonata on paper, see what key it's in, find the main theme, analyze the development section, identify at what exact point Beethoven returned to recap the theme. In the same way, jazz music can be objectively critiqued. If you want to move forward, how can dealing with Monk—with the highest achievement in any field—hurt us? How can avoiding the highest achievement, in any field, lead to progress?

Daniel Borris

It's exactly that lineage that helped me get into and record *Rhapsody in Blue* [on *Portraits in Blue*, Sony Classical]. I had to start off analyzing it from a European perspective, learning it note-for-note. What made it possible for me to make the transition from Europe to America in my interpretation was the thematic material and rhythms that Gershwin dealt with, which leaned more toward America than Europe. That's why I changed the ways that the rhythms were played—because we have records of Max Roach, for instance. That let me manipulate the material in an organic way, not in some fake way.

When you learn music this way, it's a sign of respect. If you learn a Louis Armstrong solo, that means you respect him enough to draw from his great achievement to establish your own position. That's the first sign of morality in a musician. That's all I did with *Rhapsody in Blue*. That's what real jazz is all about.

igh mix

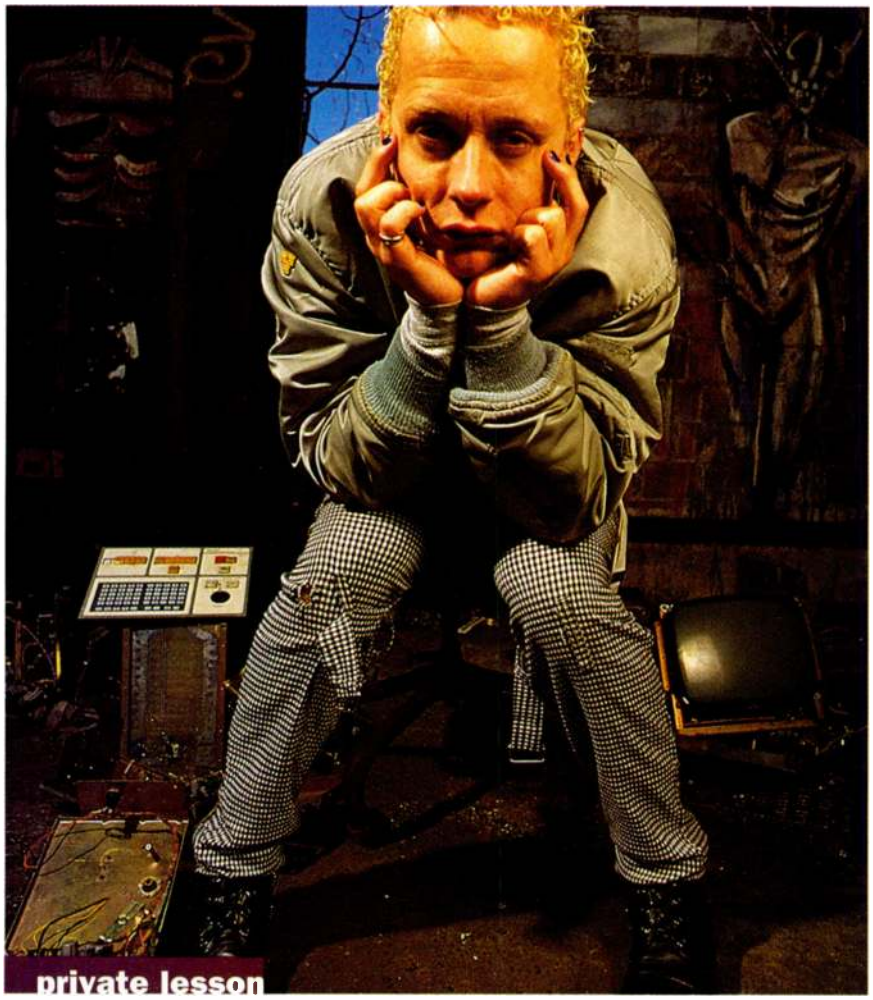
right ownership to another party, independent of the other partners. Unless one of the collaborators has been granted administration rights to the copyright by all co-writers, the new co-owner will share in the decision-making and income.

Each co-writer can belong to a different performing rights society—ASCAP, BMI, or SESAC. In this case, a share of the performance income collection would be allocated to each collaborator's affiliated organization. Since reporting mechanisms can differ from one performing rights society to another, it's quite possible that collaborators will receive different levels of writer and publishing income.

If one of the collaborating songwriters is a member of a band and the others are not, the one who is in a band will have the authority to allow the band to rehearse and perform the collaborated song in concert and to record the song for commercial release—but that co-writer will still have to account to his or her partners for their share of writer and publisher income. Most labels will want to get all co-authors and co-publishers to provide written authorization for initial reproduction of that song on recordings.

your music and the law

Ned Hearn practices entertainment law in the San Francisco area. Send your comments and questions to Ned Hearn directly at nedhearn@x.netcom.com or c/o Musician magazine, 1515 Broadway, 11th floor, New York, NY 10036 for possible discussion in future installments of Your Music.



private lesson

Tim Skold: Industrial Home Brew

by Alan di Perna

Imagine wild-eyed Swedish blond Tim Skold with an Auratone speaker duct-taped to his face, screaming blue murder into the cone. That'll give you some idea how his eponymous debut album sounds. Skold is a passionate believer in subverting the "normal" functions of music gear.

It's a belief that has served him well. Skold was signed to RCA on the basis of some demos he created in his bedroom with a very modest MIDI rig. Those recordings became the basic tracks for Skold's self-titled album, a post-industrial genre bender that combines solid, pop-inflected songcraft with manifold layers of napalm guitar, severely punished samples, and juggernaut beats.

How to record an album in your bedroom? "Avoid presets," is Skold's chief advice. "Not only actual, physical presets on synths and effects devices, but also preset ways of thinking about equipment." Acting on this philosophy, Skold was able to transcend the limitations of his modest setup, which was based around a Roland W-30 workstation (providing 16-track MIDI sequencing, a master keyboard, and some sounds) and a Kurzweil K2000 sampler. "I also had a little Portastudio, but the tape part didn't work at all," Tim adds. "So I just used the Portastudio's four-channel mixer to consolidate the Kurzweil and W-30."

Without any tape tracks, Skold hit on the expedient of recording guitars and vocals directly into the Kurzweil sampler. This proved a blessing, as Skold was able to bypass the frequency-range limitations of the four-track analog cassette format and encode his vocals and guitars directly into the digital domain. The vocals were sung into the sampler one line at a time.

"It's like doing a punch-in," Skold suggests. "Play a reference note to remind you what key you're in, hit the space bar to go into record, sing the line, store it, truncate it, give it a name and save it." The vocal lines were then triggered on cue by the W-30's sequencer to assemble a complete vocal take.

Many of Skold's slabby, quasi-metal guitar parts were recorded the same way: "Straight into the sampler with a distortion pedal," says Tim. "Then you can just resample stuff. Take the [sampler's] output, go through a wah pedal, and shoot it back in to the sampler." The resultant grainy textures were well suited to Skold's industrial angst aesthetic.

After signing to RCA, Skold dug in with co-producer Scott Humphrey and finished the album in the latter's living room on a setup based around Digidesign Pro Tools, Opcode Vision, a large Poly Fusion analog modular synth system, a borrowed Studer 24-track, and a Soundtracs console. "A lot of tracks went from tape to Tools, to tape again, back to Tools, through the Poly Fusion and back to Tools," says Tim with a maniacal gleam in his eye.

For Skold, the bottom line is to base all sonic experimentation on a solid foundation. "All the songs were completely written long before I hit the studio," he says. "Production can do a lot for a track, but it can also kill it. For any part, you have to find the right sound up front. If it doesn't work, you can tweak it till you're blue in the face and you may come up with something cool, but not necessarily appropriate. In order to tweak effectively, you've first got to find the essence of the track."

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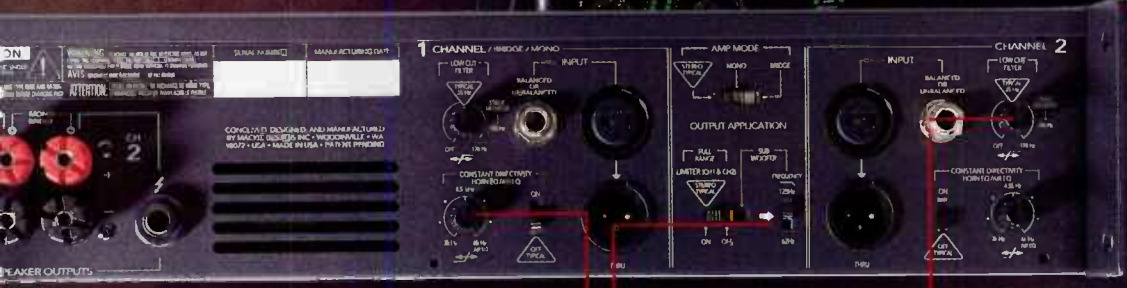

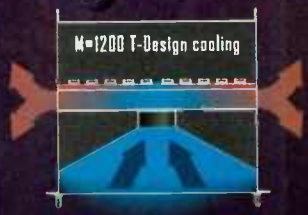

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new signing

SENSE FIELD

ALBUM TITLE: BUILDING
LABEL: REVELATION/ WARNER BROS.
RELEASE DATE: MAY 16

As a Revelation act, Sense Field was unusual—more melodic, less "straight-edge," equipped with more complex material than the hardcore bands who defined the indie label's identity. The strangest thing about this band, though, isn't their music—it's their debut album deal.

Unlike groups who get their start on smaller labels and then jump to the majors, this Socal quintet made the move in slow motion through a maze of negotiations designed to make sure that Jordan Cooper, the head of Revelation, didn't get screwed.

"Our new album was supposed to be on Revelation," says guitarist Chris Evenson. "We could have said, 'Screw you, Jordan. You're not getting this record because we're not under contract.' That just wouldn't be a good thing to do."

The result of this odd mix of decency and stubbornness is that *Building* would be released first on Revelation, then go through a period of shared distribution before reverting fully to Warner Bros. "It's a very unusual case," says Steve Martin, Sense Field's manager. "A lot of bands do feel a loyalty to the labels that took them from zero to, like, fifteen thousand; Girls Against Boys, for example, did one more record for Touch And Go before going to DGC. But the way I look at it, that creates much more of a delay than necessary in getting on with a band's career."

To Sense Field, the possibility of losing momentum collided with their commitment to fair play. By their own admission, they've never been aggressive on the business side—"We never had a master plan," Evenson admits. They cut a five-song EP late in 1990, followed by the seven-song *Premonitions* in '93; sales, mostly at gigs, were disappointing, when any sold at all.

One copy made it into the hands of Jordan Cooper, who was impressed enough to start showing up at their sporadic appearances. "We were kind of suspicious of him at first," says drummer Scott McPherson. "He wasn't the most talkative person, and we were trying to get away from the kind of sound that Revelation was notorious for."

None of this concerned Cooper: "I just loved them. They were my favorite band at the time, so I didn't really think about it like that."

Eventually Cooper began distributing the disc through Revelation. He also put up some of the money the band needed [*cont'd on page 94*]

Laura Cresta

INTRODUCING

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talent

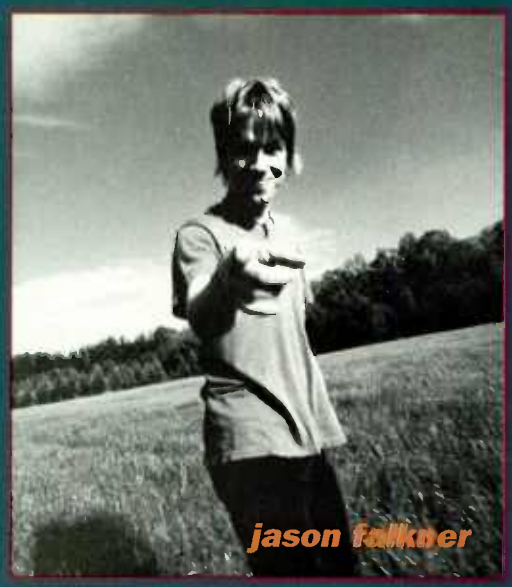
Handsome In 1993, Helmet and Peter Mengede parted ways, a messy split that ended with Mengede suing the band for withholding royalties. Broke and without a band, the Australian-born guitarist was back at square one.

"It was extremely difficult to start from scratch again," he says. "I could've joined another band, but then I would've just been an employee. So I just dug in."

After auditioning more than 225 players, Mengede went with bassist Eddie Nappi, drummer Pete Hines, vocalist Jeremy Chaterlain, and guitarist Tom Capone, and formed Handsome. The new band quickly found themselves the target of a bidding war, eventually won by Epic Records, who put out Handsome's self-titled debut. (The band was signed by Epic A&R maven Michael Goldstone.)

Although Capone used to be in Quicksand and Hines is formerly of Murphy's Law and the Cro-Mags, Mengede says Handsome is not a hardcore act. "We definitely have a heavy sound," he says. "But there are also melodic vocals. Our past bands didn't have too much of that."

As for the rumor that he named the band Handsome because HAN puts them before HEL(met) in the CD bins, Mengede pauses and says, "No comment."—***Michael Moses***



"I didn't realize how much work it would be," says **Cheri Knight** of her first solo record, *The Knitter* (East Side Digital). The singer/songwriter, who came to the fore playing bass with the Blood Oranges, brought just her voice, her songs, and her acoustic guitar into the studio. She and producer/guitarist Eric "Roscoe" Ambel, with a recording band of mutual friends, created the arrangements on the spot. "It came out really well, but the next record has to be with my own band. Take the time, play the stuff together for a year or so, have it all down beforehand, and capture that band feel."

Her songs, ranging from hard rock to pure country, are like short stories, painting evocative pictures of people, places, events, circumstances, and, of course, relationships gone bad. Their directness reflects her New England background. "I come from many generations of Western Massachusetts farmers. My mother got off the farm. It seems like I'm doing everything I can to get back to it."
—***Baker Rorick***

Jason Falkner "I was allowed to make what is basically a glorified 4-track," admits 28-year-old Jason Falkner of his solo debut *Author Unknown* (Elektra). It's a remarkable modern pop record that blends '60s psychedelic guitar with the sort of concise arrangements currently being rediscovered by artists like Eric Matthews (whose debut Falkner played on) and the High Llamas.

And a solo debut it is: Falkner wrote, produced, and played everything himself (except for some strings). While he insists he's always wanted to do this, it wasn't until a number of stints in other bands (including Jellyfish and the Grays) that he was pushed beyond the breaking point. "It just became easier to do everything myself. This way, I didn't have to worry about pissing off the drummer by telling him how to play his hi-hat."

In the end, Falkner was still able to achieve a very live, band feel. "There were plenty of instances where I could've gone back and nailed things a little tighter." he explains. "But my intention was to make it sound like a band, not some guy who's in there doing everything."—***Dev Sherlock***

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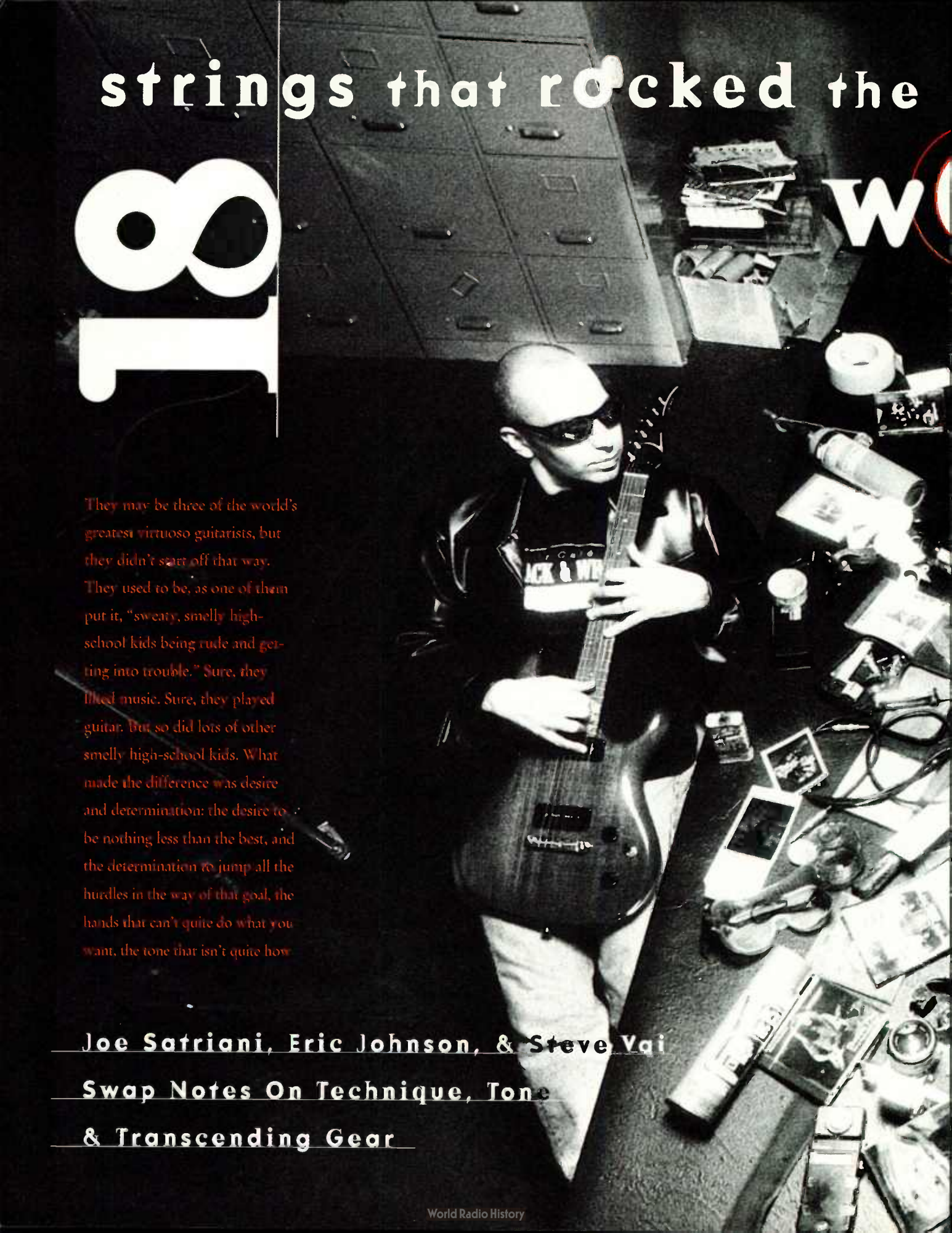
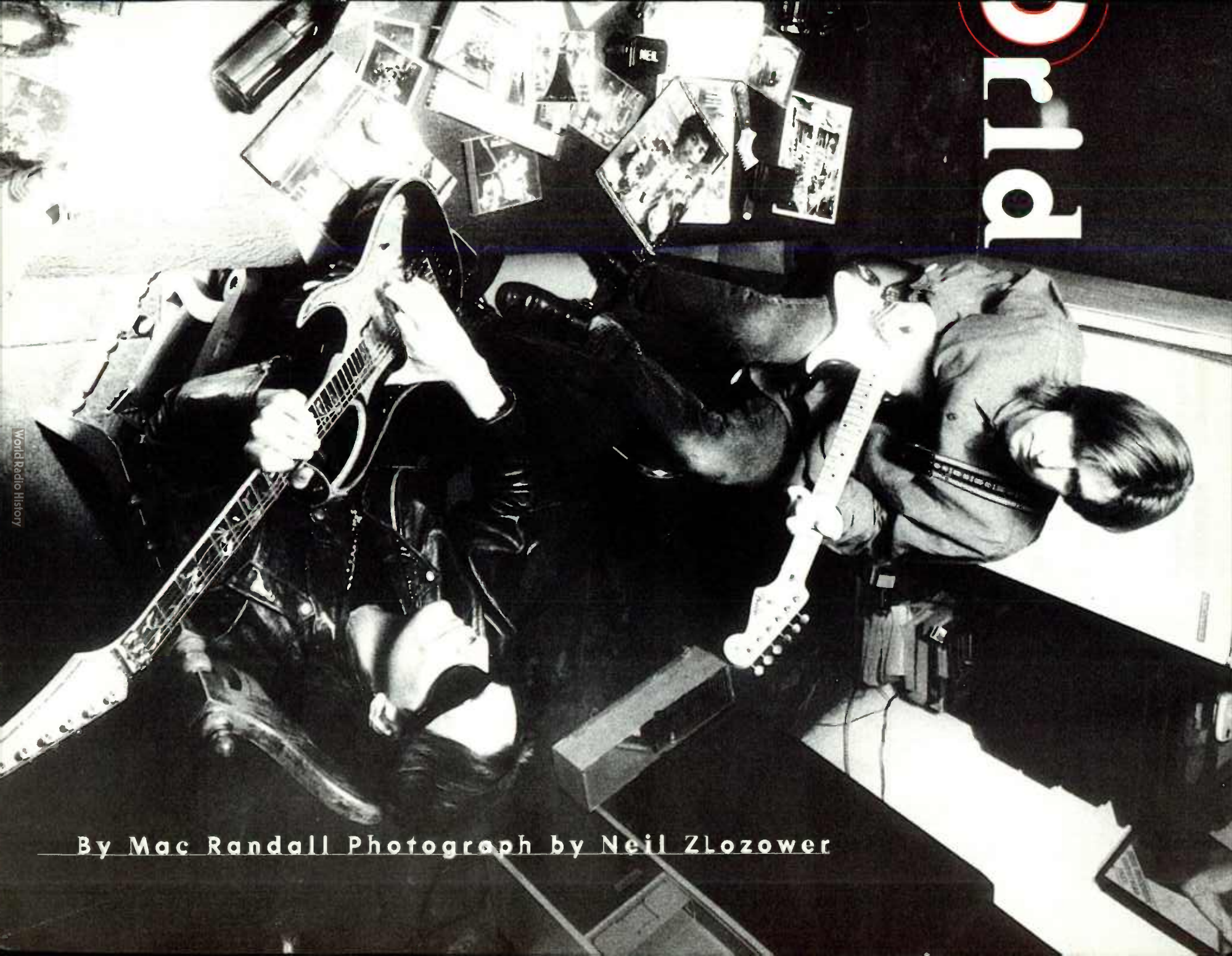
18 strings that rocked the W



They may be three of the world's greatest virtuoso guitarists, but they didn't start off that way. They used to be, as one of them put it, "sweaty, smelly high-school kids being rude and getting into trouble." Sure, they liked music. Sure, they played guitar. But so did lots of other smelly high-school kids. What made the difference was desire and determination: the desire to be nothing less than the best, and the determination to jump all the hurdles in the way of that goal, the hands that can't quite do what you want, the tone that isn't quite how

Joe Satriani, Eric Johnson, & Steve Vai Swap Notes On Technique, Tone & Transcending Gear



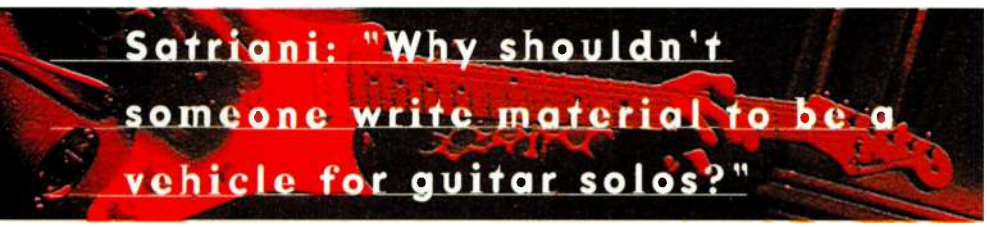
orld

By Mac Randall Photograph by Neil Zlozower

you heard it in your head, the equipment that doesn't quite work as well as it should.

Now Eric Johnson, Joe Satriani and Steve Vai stand at the pinnacle of a certain style of guitar playing, flourishing a mastery of technique and expression that few players ever achieve. But they haven't let that go to their heads, at least not enough so they can't share a stage with each other. Starting October 11 and continuing for six weeks, they'll be doing just that, on a historic joint U.S. tour. The idea was mainly Satriani's. "I wanted to be able to make sure that the people who played before me or after me were really great," he says. "When that happens, there's so much more to look forward to."

Thus this special three-way interview, conducted in late July right across the street from Universal Studios in L.A. Johnson, finally finished with his third album *Venus Isle* (only six years after the last one, *Ah Via Musicom*), is definitely the quiet one of the group; maybe it's shyness, maybe he just lives on a slightly different plane from the rest of us. His mad-scientist obsession with the polarity of cables and the tone of nine-volt batteries suggests the latter, but at least he can laugh about it. Vai, on the other hand, is closest to being the stereotypical extrovert rock star, and his music roars accordingly (check the new *Fire Garden* for proof). Yet underneath the image, he's a down-to-earth, thoughtful, likable guy. And Satriani (who'll be starting work on his debut for Epic once the tour's over) is the pragmatic philosopher, whose years of teaching are evident in everything he says, in the articulate way that he says it, and in his genuine concern for anyone who wishes to become a better musician.



So how well do you all know each other?

SATRIANI: I know nothing about him, really [*points head in EJ's direction*]. He's a total enigma. Were you born in Seattle?

JOHNSON: No, that was Hendrix [*smiles*].

SATRIANI: Oh, that's right. Someone once told me that [*laughter*].

VAI: I definitely knew of Eric. We'd met, just professionally, a few times through the years.

JOHNSON: When you were in Alcatrazz.

VAI: Yeah, earlier on. But now we're very much going to get to know each other.

JOHNSON: We're just getting one hotel room for the three of us for the whole tour. [*laughter from JS and SV, pause*] Oh no, it's not what you think. We figured we'd be like the old days, when everyone was asking, "Who gets the cot tonight?"

VAI: I remember when hotel rooms were a luxury.

JOHNSON: Or you waited till eight in the morning to check in, so you'd get. . .

VAI: . . . the half-day rate. [*laughs*]

So who is getting the cot? Or are you going to take turns?

SATRIANI: I thought we were sleeping together. I'm shocked. [*laughter from EJ and SV*]

VAI: Of course, Joe and I have known each other since I was a little kid.

JOHNSON: That's just so hip. And y'all both'd end up being these great guitarists and you live in California and you're from the same little town [Carle Place, Long Island]. . .

VAI: And we drank the same water and we had the same music teacher and we've been on the same labels. If you stood on the roof of my house, you could probably see his house. And I dutifully went to guitar lessons with him every week. Well, you know the whole story.

You said you had the same music teacher?

VAI: Well, we went to the same school.

SATRIANI: Bill Westcott was our music teacher in high school. Were you in the chorus as well?

VAI: Yeah, all through grade school.

SATRIANI: So growing up, before we were even really thinking about music, we were doing the required stuff—you gotta go to chorus, you gotta take a music course. And then our musical minds started to wake up, and there was Bill. Great, inspiring person.

VAI: And a real demanding teacher. I mean, my assignment every day in ninth grade was to write a piece of music. On paper. And it was uncanny how good his ears were, wasn't it?

SATRIANI: Yeah.

VAI: He would take the piece of music that we wrote, and he'd sight-read it and play it, and then he'd say, "Now you can play it in retrograde," and he'd play it backwards. "Now you can do an inversion," or "Now you can make it Lydian." He'd change the whole thing, and that was amazing to me. To see somebody have such a command, and he did it so playfully. I never assumed that it was possible to take everything Bill was teaching and apply it to the guitar. But when I was going to Joe, that's what he was doing.

SATRIANI: His statement to me right around that time was, "You better learn to write music independently from your guitar, because it might turn out that you're not a really good guitar player." [*smiles*] It was one of those things where you're 16 years old and you're thinking, "I'm gonna hit my teacher right now." [*laughter*] But he was very convincing and very genuine, and it was a good lesson. Because you can never play as well as the musician in your head, but it's the musician in your head that carries you through. And it turns out that sometimes the head is the path to the heart. Bill wasn't judgmental about what we did, and he didn't want us to be judgmental about it. He said, "Just write it. Get used to writing music that way, and then the musician that you become can teach that part of you that decided to be a guitar player. If you ever want to be a piano player or a trumpet player, that musician in you can tell you how to manipulate this new instrument too." It was a great lesson, and that he took the time to teach guys like us, who were just into Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin and Jimi Hendrix—sweaty, smelly high-school kids being rude, getting into trouble. . .

VAI: It's a real tribute to musical education in the schools. I don't know where we'd be musically without that fierce education that he gave us. The state of musical education in this country these days is just a shame, but we're tributes to that school of

thought that it's very valuable.

How early on did you have the idea that you might actually become a musician?

SATRIANI: Well, I started out as a drummer, and I was taking lessons when I was nine years old. My teacher was this cool jazz cat, and he was a wonder to witness. He'd sit down at my funny little drum set that had one Ludwig piece and one Gretsch piece, and he'd be [*grooves out, with appropriate mouth noises*], and he'd look at me, probably thinking, "Oh, this kid thinks I'm crazy." So that was in my head very early. You played accordion before guitar, right?

VAI: Yeah, it was one of those Long Island Italian kid things. [*JS and EJ laugh*] I was always interested in music in general. But I never made a conscious decision about being a musician. I figured I could do this or I could go into business. I did drive an ice cream truck for a while.

SATRIANI: You did? Good Humor or. . .

VAI: Dolly Madison, dude. The good stuff. I ate most of the profits. [*laughter*]

So why switch from your first instruments to guitar?

SATRIANI: Drums were too loud and annoying. My sister was a folk guitarist, so I got to witness that happening, and I got excited about the idea that you could *quietly* play music by yourself; you could be private. And I loved that it was portable. I mean, drums—the hardware, the screws, the heads—it just drove me insane.

So basically, you took the easy way out.

SATRIANI: That's what I've been doing my whole life. [*laughs*]

VAI: I was going to play harmonica until I realized it didn't have a whammy bar.

And that's what sold you?

VAI: Well, the guitar was this iconic figure for me. I remember I'd sit in my sister's room; she had this great stereo with an eight-track, and I'd put the headphones on. There was this loop of Sly and the Family Stone and Hendrix live at Woodstock, and *Led Zeppelin II*. I'd sit there for hours and hours, just imagining that I had the nerve to play the guitar, and that I could play it in front of my friends. If you focus so hard on something like that, it can become a reality.

JOHNSON: For me, it was just hearing all the bands—the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds. I started playing piano when I was five, and then I switched to guitar when I was eleven, because I saw those bands on TV. I said, "That's for me."

SATRIANI: How long have you been playing guitar?

JOHNSON: Thirty years. But piano's still

kind of my first-love instrument.

VAI: Doesn't have a whammy bar, though.

JOHNSON: No. Somebody ought to make one for it [*laughs*]. It'd have to be a big one, and you could hire somebody to stand on it. Could be operated by steam, with a big Jules Verne lever: "Okay, whammy bar now!" *Khhrrrmmm!!!* [*laughter*]

Joe's done a lot of teaching guitar. How about you?

JOHNSON: I did for a while. I wish I'd been better at it, but I don't really know enough theory; I could only approach it from "Okay, put your hand there and try this." I know theory earwise, but even though I knew a bit about reading music from taking piano, I didn't really have the aptitude for it.

VAI: I always tried to teach. Sometimes I'd just take the lessons that Joe gave me and give them to people [*laughs*]. I found that teaching can be a real education to yourself; you reinforce certain beliefs that you have, and if you have the right student, it's really rewarding. But *I do not teach anymore*. [*laughter*]

Is there a common problem that keeps aspiring players from getting where they want to be?

SATRIANI: I've never seen one. It's amazing how many variations there are of talent, lack of talent, and all the combinations in between. Half of my students weren't interested in becoming professional musicians, even though they may have practiced more than the guy who said he wanted to be a rock star. Their intent was only to liberate their hearts after work. So you gotta know that; you certainly wouldn't want to bring music industry neuroses into that kind of lesson. At the same time, if you're teaching someone who's quit school, plays in a couple of bands, and wants to be a professional musician, you feel obligated to say, "Let me tell you a few things about the music business, about how to get along with musicians."

Did you teach Steve how to get along with other musicians?

SATRIANI: I was too young. We were both really young. The only stuff I had to give to him I learned a year or two earlier. So I think we probably learned that simultaneously, because we had to get along with each other. Actually, I *still* haven't entirely

all about gear

ERIC JOHNSON's main axe is still his maple-neck '54 Fender Stratocaster, with two stock pickups and a DiMarzio HS-2 in the bridge. While recording *Venus Isle*, he also used at least three other Strats—a '57, '61 and '65—two Gibson ES 335s (a '59 and a '65), a '66 Gibson Flying V, mid-'60s Gretsch Nashville, Fender Bass VI, and a Takamine classical. On the road with Vai and Satriani, he'll be hauling a couple of Fender Vibrolux amps and assorted 50- and 100-watt Marshalls. For the *Venus* sessions, Eric's trademark three-amp rig—100-watt Marshall head through 4x12 cabinet, Fender Twin and a Dumble Odyssey—also came in handy, as did a blackface Fender Vibroverb with one 15" speaker, a '60s Fender Showman cabinet, and a relatively new Marshall cabinet that Eric, vintage nut that he is, had rewired to '66 specs. "I've been experimenting with smaller amps," Johnson reports. "Not terribly small—50-watt Marshalls instead of 100-watts, and Deluxe Reverbs instead of Twins. I did that just to get the volume down, but as a happy accident, I found that I actually liked the sound of the Deluxes better. I put these Lansing speakers in the Deluxes; they're really nice." Eric's also raving about THD's Hot Plate amp attenuator. "It works better than a master volume. You can turn up as high as you want and it still retains the tone of the amp." Johnson's favorite stompboxes include a couple of original Dallas-Arbiter Fuzz Faces, a Vox Crybaby wah-wah, MXR digital delay, Chandler Tube Driver, and Prescription Electronics' Experience pedal; other well-used effects include a t.c. electronic 2290 digital delay and 1210 spatial expander, a Lexicon PCM-70, and a vintage Echoplex. EJ's strings (.010, .013, .018, .026, .038, .050) are GHS, and he swears by Duracell nine-volt batteries.

For live work, JOE SATRIANI favors the Ibanez guitars that bear his name; at the moment, he's particularly enamored of the chrome JS-1 models with DiMarzio FRED and PAF Pro pickups. He plugs into Marshall 6100 100-watt heads powering two or three Marshall cabinets, by way of a Boss DS-1 distortion pedal (the discontinued made-in-Japan DS-1, mind you, not the current Taiwanese version, which sounds hollow to Joe's ears), DigiTech Whammy pedal, Boss chorus and digital delay pedals, Chandler stereo delay, and any one of about twelve wah-wahs (mostly Dunlop Crybabys) that Satriani carries with him. "Whichever one's working, that's the one I'm using," he says. "Wah-wahs are so microphonic—some nights you can pick up frequencies that sound just like a Moog synthesizer. I don't have numbers cataloguing the different pedals, but I do have drawings on them; I find the one with the purple faces on it staring at me most of the time." Joe's continually trying to simplify his setup: "I don't like stepping on things and I don't like having different amps onstage. If my rig gets too complicated, I start to think I should unplug all this stuff and just play like a man." Satch manfully strings his Ibanezes with .009-gauge D'Addarios, while for his more traditional guitars—Tele, Flying V, Les Paul Junior, etc.—he prefers .010s or .011s.

STEVE VAI is also an Ibanez man. For the past five years, he's been playing their Jem-777 model, with DiMarzio Evolution pickups and Floyd Rose-style bridge; though he has quite a few, the one named Ivo is his favorite. "It feels like home to me," he comments. At the time of this interview, Vai was debating whether or not to bring his Ibanez custom seven-string guitars on tour with Johnson and Satriani too. As for amplification, the 100-watt Bogner Ecstasy is Vai's choice. "It's got a bottom end that's not too tight but very thick," he says. "I don't really use the power amp section, though, because I take the preamp output and go into some effects—a Crybaby wah-wah, a Boss DS-1 distortion, a Whammy pedal, a volume pedal, and a Roland SDE-3000 delay. Those effects come out to a pedalboard, but the guts of most of them are in a rack; the pedals are just voltage controls. I like analog pedals, but I don't like what they do to the signal when you're not using them, so I've had a lot of the effects modified so that you bypass them when they're not turned on." Vai's favorite strings are Dean Markley Blue Steels; gauges vary according to how his fingers are feeling. Like Satriani, Vai is striving for simplicity in his live rig: "I want to make sure that I can achieve what I want with gear that'll fit into one suitcase. I've had state-of-the-art racks that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, but they were crap. How many different flangers do you really need?"

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learned that. [*laughter*]

Now I know you've been asked this question so many times. . .

VAI: Let's see if we can guess. How about the current state of guitar?

No, nothing to do with that.

SATRIANI: Technique versus feeling?

No, not that either.

VAI: All right, this *is* a classy magazine!

Well, we'll get to those later.

VAI: Oh, us and our big mouths.

No, the question is, why did *it take so long for Eric to finish his album?*

JOHNSON: That's the one I was going to guess. Just 'cause I'm slow, I guess. I experiment, and I'm still learning, still not satisfied with where I am. But in a healthy way; I don't mean that negatively. Joe mentioned earlier about our musical mind—I don't remember exactly how he said it, but our interior musicianship is in correlation with our exterior musicianship, and rainbowing that bridge into reality can be difficult. That's the real challenge for me: what I hear, what I'd like to write, how I'd like to sing. But I wasn't actually in the studio five years straight. It was a little under three. Still, that's a long time.

SATRIANI: But the studio can be so much fun. That first time that you hear back something that started as a ghost hovering around your head, and all of a sudden it's coming through the speakers—it's great. I could see spending 15 years in the studio, just like: "More machines! I need a bigger tape machine!" [*laughter*]

Virtuosity doesn't seem to be in great demand right now. I believe it was Ken Stringfellow of the Posies who said that in order to be an "alternative rock" band, one of the guys in the band has to suck. For example, Nirvana—in purely technical terms, Cobain was way behind Grohl and Novoselic.

JOHNSON: I thought Cobain was great, though.

VAI: Sure, you'd never hear him play the solo in "Heartbreaker". . .

JOHNSON: But what he did can be harder to do. Take the rhythm playing that Hendrix did, or that Andy Summers did in the Police. You'd search the world to find someone who could play like that. To me, Brian Jones made the Rolling Stones; he's not your great player *per se*, but you could hear how he'd think, "Okay, let's orchestrate these guitars. This is going to be in a different register with a different tone."

VAI: To a lot of people, a great guitar solo sounds like a series of Morse code. It's not what you're playing, it's the passion in it. Of course, the focus is different now. But there are going to be kids coming along with virtuosic seeds within them that need to be watered. And no genre is going to stop that. That's a burning human desire, to improve yourself at a given art. They're going to nurture those seeds, and that's when you're going to get something new, something totally different from what we're doing and different from anybody who's considered a guitar hero in this day and age.

SATRIANI: You know, when you saw Kurt Cobain playing "Smells Like Teen Spirit," he never looked at his guitar and he never screwed up the chords. And he always stepped on the pedal at the right time. You

know what I mean? He conveyed the meaning of the song.

VAI: Some people have no choice but to be walking poetry, no matter how good or bad they're perceived to be by the masses. I mean, I was so enamored with Frank Zappa; just watching him walk around the room, everything he'd do or say—it was just *right*.

Vai: "To a lot of people, a great guitar solo sounds like a series of Morse code."

Zappa must have been pretty fond of you as well. After all, you were transcribing all that wacky music for him.

VAI: He'd sum it up in one small sentence occasionally, throw you a bone [*laughs*]. One of the first things I transcribed for him, when I was 18, was this piece called "The Story of the Jazz Discharge Party Ants." I wrote down every pitch of his voice and adapted it to guitar: every breath, every scratch, everything. So I went to his house and brought a guitar, and he goes, "Let's see what you can do." I started doing this thing, and he just started laughing hysterically. I was really nervous; I wanted so much to impress him with how I was playing his music, and I thought that I was blowing it. My God, I was dying. And then he gets on the phone and he goes, "Gail, come down now! You have to see this!" [*laughter*] I'd nailed it, and he was actually really impressed. [*pause*] Then he made me double it. [*laughter*]

When you reach a certain level of proficiency on your instrument, it can be tempting to just show off. How do you deal with that temptation when you're playing?

VAI: I wait until I get to the point where it feels like too much, and that's where I start [*laughs*]. But yeah, as far as overdoing it, when you practice a lot and you have it under your fingers, it's like having a brand-new fast car; you want to get in and drive all around the mountains. But after a while, there's other things you want to do that are more fulfilling. Then the car is just getting you to the store and back.

JOHNSON: In the end, what you do doesn't matter as long as it supports the spirit of the piece.

So it's not like you're writing material to be vehicles for guitar solos.

JOHNSON: You might be writing material to be guitar music because that's what you do, but it's more the other way. You're playing guitar through a vehicle.

SATRIANI: That accusation comes up a lot, and it really bothers me. Why *shouldn't* someone write material to be a vehicle for solos? When you realize that it's just music, and the music is trying to create a response—speaking for myself, I have a feeling and I turn it into music, and it would be great if people got that feeling when they hear it, but if they get any feeling, that's still okay with me. The primary thing is that I worked it out. So if I need to construct a piece that is purely a vehicle for a solo, if that's the perfect way to fix my feeling, well then, so be it. Why should I use a song form? That's missing the point.

What about those times when the gear you're using hinders your performance? Eric, you're familiar with just about every aspect of equipment voodoo. Do you find that certain guitars, amps, etc. demand that you play a certain way, and you have to find a way to transcend that to get where you want to go?

JOHNSON: Sure. Or the silent personified stories inside the guitar—the guitar wants to tell certain types of stories, so if you go with that flow, you're going to write a certain kind of music. Your playing can be biased by the equipment you use.

SATRIANI: I could work on that problem, if you take my special course for $19.95 [*laughter*]. I think that's psychological; something that you've gone through, or the power of association, leads you to think that when you pick up the Tele, you've got to play country. If you're an analytical practicer, you'll recognize that and say, "That's a funny little quirk, I'm gonna work that out right now."

VAI: You can break down those barriers.

SATRIANI: If you're the kind of person who has just one tone in mind, that's a stumbling block. It's a hurdle, it's a brick wall, it stops you from expressing yourself.

VAI: This reminds me of a statement Joe made to me 25 years ago. I did a gig, and my distortion pedal broke, and I thought I was dead. The distortion pedal was my clothing; it covered up all the mistakes. So I went to the lesson with Joe and I said, "I really had a terrible gig. My distortion pedal broke, and I just couldn't do the gig." I'm sure you don't remember what you said, but it was like, "Look, you have to take what you have and make it work." This is when he was 16, 17 years old. You know, it takes courage. We've all been in disastrous situations onstage, but you've just got to deal with it.

JOHNSON: Yeah. My stuff has a tendency to buzz a lot. But I've found that a little thing like the proximity of equipment—it's like with a transformer, the degree of phase it's set for will vastly affect the hum of an amp. The same is true with effects. You can actually position the effects in different ways and change the hum a little bit. If you take six effects and four amps and you find the right recipe for the proximity, you can actually reduce it 30 to 40 percent.

VAI: I'm glad somebody's discerning

enough to go through all that and figure it out for the rest of us.

JOHNSON: I've gotta get out of it, though. I start feeling like I should show up at interviews wearing a lab coat. "My work, I must get back to my work!" [*laughter*]

VAI: You walk into his room, and there's all these on/off switches. . .

SATRIANI: . . .brains in beakers. . .

VAI: . . .pickups in boiling green water. . .

JOHNSON: Experimenting with my amps and guitars is a hobby that I get a lot of joy out of, to a certain extent. But have you ever seen dogs who start licking rocks? At first, it's just like, oh, there's a rock, and then pretty soon they're out of control. I go too far with it. But what spurred me on in the beginning wasn't so much that I wondered what a tone knob in a Strat was made out of. I just got sick and tired of my rig sounding incredible one night and like crap the next. I wanted to crack the nut so eventually I could have a blueprint for more consistency.

VAI: Well, with people who get into things like that, out of it comes an excellence that the rest of us can't get.

JOHNSON: But it's admirable in a way if you can just go, "Hey, it doesn't matter, I'm just gonna play."

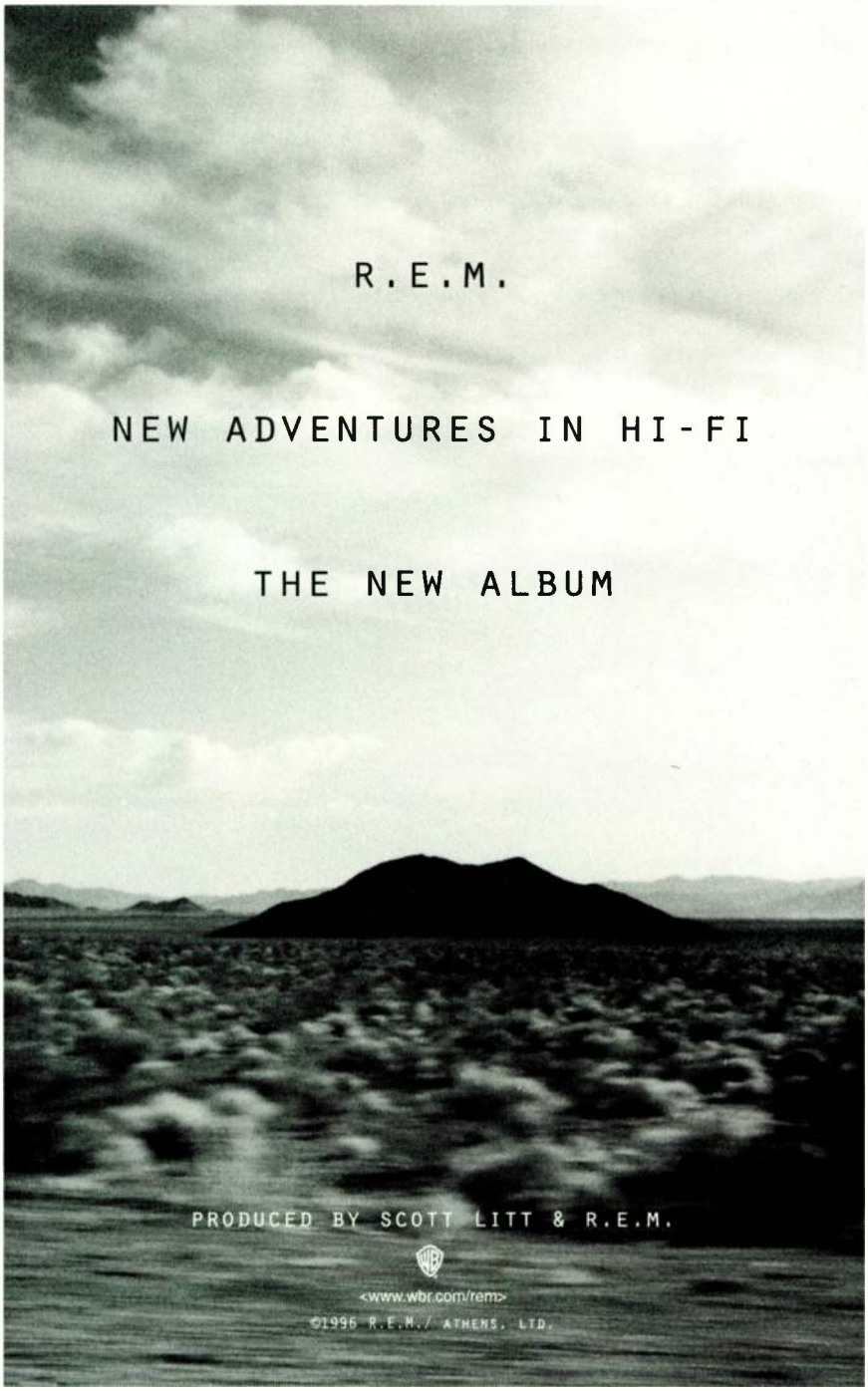
SATRIANI: Little specifics about one part of your tone are way down on the priority list, I think. The sound of your guitar, on the level that we can detect it, is not that important. It's not as important as making a great musical moment with other musicians onstage. That's reality.

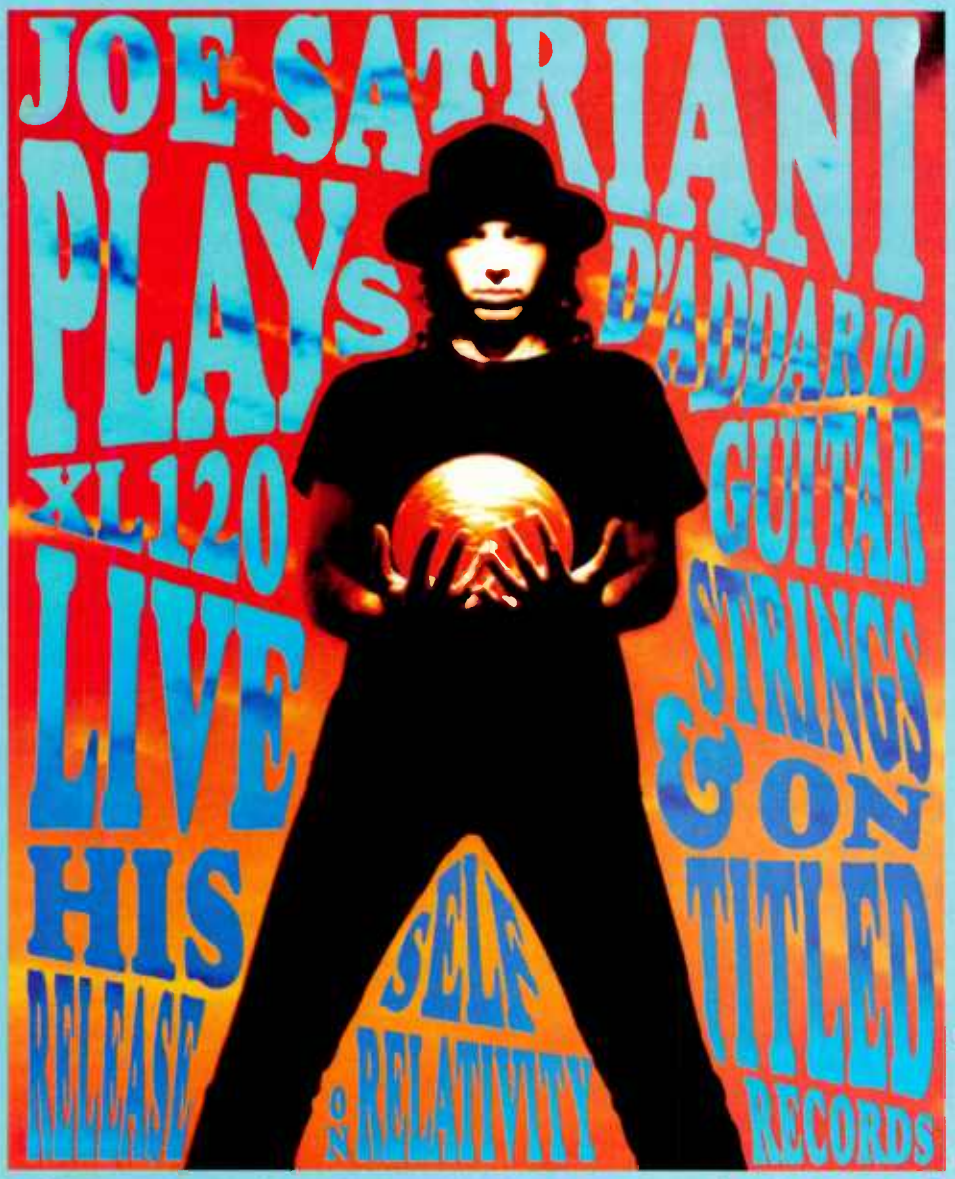
VAI: I wish I was that evolved [*laughter*]. There are certain parts of a performance that, if the tone isn't there, that moment is just absolute misery.

SATRIANI: But eventually you've got to take responsibility for what you're playing. A good way to look at the situation we're talking about is by saying, what about those nights when everything's working and you suck? Where do you point the finger then? You're the guitar player. For Christ's sake, play the guitar. *One last question. How did you guys become such gods?*

VAI: That kind of question comes up a lot, and not just from journalists. Kids come up and say, "You are my god." And we can't say, "Oh, that's just bullshit," because it's not. People feel that way. I've listened to music, some it of by people who are in this room right now, and I feel that there is a god there. When I was a kid listening to Queen, that stuff was god to me. Why do we feel that way? Because within each human being there's a spark of divinity. Sometimes when we express ourselves, that comes out. And when you do something that I see that in, I'm seeing a reflection of divinity.

SATRIANI: To take the question on a more light-hearted level: Someone's reading an article, like me when I was 12, and the interviewer asks, "How did you become a god?" The kid's gonna say, "*Oh, he's gonna tell me now, I want to know!*" [*laughter*] People want stars. People want music. Guitars are fun. There are plenty of different kinds to play. They look cool. They sound cool. Don't *you* want to play guitar?





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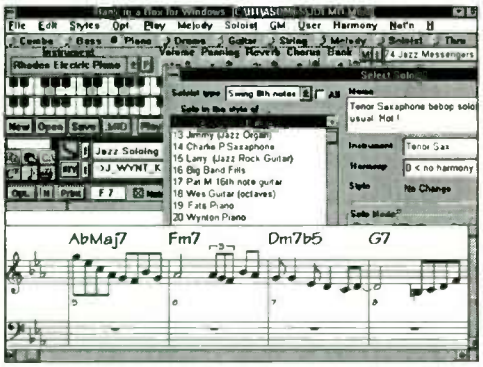

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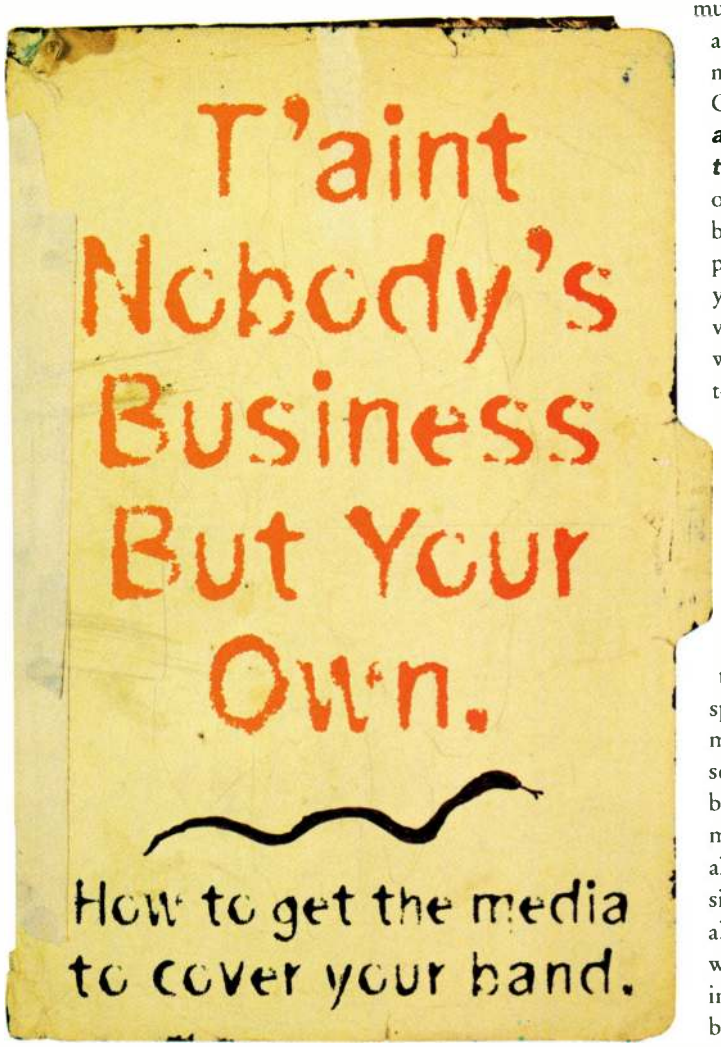
The editor of this mag called the other day, apologizing for not getting back to me sooner regarding my latest album. The hardest part of his job, he pointed out, is wading through the tidal wave of material that floods through the office gates accompanied by the phone, fax, and electronic beepings of hundreds of people insisting, some more vociferously than others, that their artistic efforts or those of the people they are paid to represent demand immediate undivided attention.

He didn't have to explain— for two of the three decades I woodshedded as a musician, I made a living as a rock journalist. I know how much is out there. Most musicians do not. My husband, who'd worked his way up to arena headline status and a few platinum albums of his own, went into shock the first time he collected the sheer tonnage of unsolicited music, info, and hype that is my daily mail. Anyway, me and the editor got to talking, and he said, well, you've probably been more successful at getting people to listen to music you've made in your living room on a shoestring budget than many artists promoted by major labels to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars. How do you do it? Are there secrets?

Well, the first secret is not exactly a secret: You do have to ***start with the music.*** It has to be music you are willing to stake your life on, music you won't make excuses for. Don't scribble your name on a cassette of arrangements or lyrics you haven't really thought through and be surprised when your Grammy award isn't expressed back to your doorstep. But you do have to present your music as flexibly, creatively, and individually as you make it. Bruce Springsteen's way of promoting himself would not have worked for Nine Inch Nails any better than his rhythm tracks or chord progressions would. Some artists depend purely on publicity or underground press, others are mainstream. But never believe an artist (or manager) who claims to have made it without *any* publicity. It's not possible.



I've probably learned as many valuable lessons from the legions of losers I've met as from the great artists. Sadly, most would-be stars are suffering from the delusion that the music business is one of adoration. They could not be more wrong. On every level, ***this is a business of rejection***—from the club owners who don't book you, to the A&R people who can't sign you to the radio or video programmers who won't play you, to the fans who may not always buy you. Those who triumph do so despite the odds—not because they're being encouraged, necessarily, but because they are unwilling to accept defeat. Despite the image they may project on stage or screen—ol' country boy, sex god, metal maniac, party punk—all superstars are obsessively driven individuals who, from day one, were not afraid of picking up the phone or banging on a door to get what they desired. They did not wait for other people to do anything for them—whether booking a gig, borrowing a van, begging studio time, or arranging interview opportunities.

Of course, at first you've got to ***cultivate an audience.*** Just as you would not expect to play in the major leagues without paying your dues in the

BY DEBORAH FROST • ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN PYLE

minors, start locally. You may be painfully shy—that's why so many of us compensate by performing in the first place. Connect with an empathetic partner (for some, it's another musician, for others, it's a manager) whose strengths complement your own, or simply accept from the start that this is part of the gig. One day it may keep you from winding up back at the hotel with a needle and a spoon, like some people who never figure out any other way to make peace with the demands of their public personas.

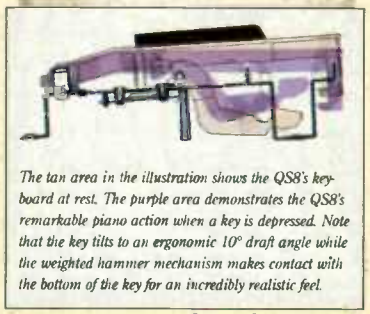
Build up a mailing list, develop a following. Play open mike nights and free shows. Hand out flyers at the gigs of bands you like. Make posters with catchy graphics. All of this is pretty labor-intensive, but that's what you have to do. Direct mail experts, working with carefully prepared lists, aim for a 1% response—that means you're going to have to send out a lot of cards if you want to count on drawing 100 folks to your show. Be prepared to stuff thousands of envelopes. Encourage people to join your mailing list by filling their name and address out on raffle tickets. Give away tapes, T-shirts, or other promo swag at your gig. Create a newsletter that keeps fans up to date about your activities and encourages feedback. ***This core of fans is essential.*** If they stick with you now, they will be with you forever—and you, not some record company or radio programmer whose whims may change with next fall's nose rings, will always know who they are and what they want from you. A decade ago Aerosmith were written off by the industry. The 5000-member fan club maintained by their handlers as bandmembers pawned their guitars and crashed on couches was the key to their resurrection. Performers who fail to maintain that primary connection aren't so lucky—they spend their lives pondering how they turned into trivia questions.

Hook up to the Internet. Get a web page. Start your own 'zine—something that's worked for many people, who manage in the process to launch other bands along with their own. There is strength in numbers. Create your own

ALESIS

The Difference is The Feel

You don't buy an 88-key keyboard because of a spec sheet, feature list, or any number of bells and whistles. 88-key keyboards are for serious players. Players who require an instrument that feels as good as it sounds, with expressiveness that will be reflected in every brilliant performance. So, when you go to your Alesis Dealer to play the new **QS8™ 64 Voice 88 Key Expandable Master Synthesizer**, the first thing you'll notice is its full-sized, weighted, hammer-action keyboard...perhaps the most piano-realistic ever implemented in a synthesizer.



The tan area in the illustration shows the QS8's keyboard at rest. The purple area demonstrates the QS8's remarkable piano action when a key is depressed. Note that the key tilts to an ergonomic 10° draft angle while the weighted hammer mechanism makes contact with the bottom of the key for an incredibly realistic feel.

The QS8 also contains an extremely powerful synth engine. With 64 voices of polyphony, thousands of authentic acoustic sounds (including our acclaimed Stereo Grand Piano), dynamic synth textures, and built-in Alesis four-bus effects, you get everything you need for a complete MIDI composition system. We even include a CD-ROM with all the creative software you could want—sequencers, editor/librarians, sample editors and more. Two PCMCIA card slots add the ability to expand your sound library to 32 MB, or even to store your own samples for instant recall. Use its ADAT™ Optical Digital Output for direct digital recording and its high-speed serial computer interface to make QS8 the center of your MIDI production and recording studio.

With its realistic feel and advanced synth features, you might be surprised to learn that the QS8 is the most affordable fully weighted 88-note synthesizer available. Get your hands on a QS8 at your Alesis dealer today.

QS8™

64 VOICE 88 KEY EXPANDABLE MASTER SYNTHESIZER

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For more information about the QS8, visit your Authorized Alesis Dealer or call 310-841-2272.

ALESIS

Jonathan Levine

Author Deborah Frost with her band, the Brain Surgeons.

community. Pool your resources, share your mailing list—as well as your gigs—with other bands. There are a lot of Internet fanzines willing to review your stuff in return for copies. It's a good place to start. So are local high school or college papers. College stations may provide on-air shots or give away passes to gigs. You're working on your craft, they're working on theirs. You can grow and learn together. And you may be pleasantly surprised when the stammering red-faced kid whose first interview you patiently endured graduates to the staff of a national news weekly or becomes program director of the biggest FM game in town.

Don't bother approaching bigger newspapers or publications unless you've got some news. The information that you are playing the Poopy Lounge on Tuesday night in Bohunk is not really going to excite the editors of *Rolling Stone*, unless perhaps your new topless drummer is the two-headed love child of Vanna White and Jenny McCarthy. But no matter who you are or who you want to excite, you can't do it the afternoon of the gig. Few things are more annoying to an editor or writer than a call from a stranger demanding they drop everything to show up at some dump that very night. That's not going to make anyone hot and giddy with anticipation.

If what you are offering is really so vital or essential, it might have occurred to you to issue something more than an offhanded invitation. Turn your gigs into events that are worth planning for. Develop your relationships with local clubs or promoters. Draw well enough on off-nights to be rewarded with a coveted opening slot for a national act. Promote your own shows. Bring bands that might not otherwise appear on the same bill together to celebrate a particular occasion or to benefit an organization or charity. You will make money for a good cause, and that organization may be more organized than you in terms of attracting attention and a new audience. Promote your own neighborhood festival or battle of the bands. Inviting local press, radio personnel, or celebs to be the judges is one way to get them to see

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Contributors: *Deborah Frost has contributed frequently to* Musician, *and books including* The Penguin Book of Rock Writing *and* Rolling Stone's *forthcoming* Illustrated History of Women in Rock. *The third album from the Brain Surgeons (Cellsum/Ripe&Ready), the band she leads with Blue Oyster Cult founder Albert Bouchard, will be released early next year.*

WANTED
Self-contained digital recorder/mixer combo as easy to use and durable as my TASCAM Portastudio. No hard disk systems, please! Allan 646-3035.

FOR SALE
Hard Disk Recording System. Like new. Good but difficult to operate. If you're a computer programmer this is for you. Mark 565-5791.

★ ★ FOR SALE ★ ★
Yamaha digital recorder. No jog/shuttle wheel, no digital out, no solo or mute and slow drive mechanism, no track outputs, not enough AUXes. Will sell cheap! Make an offer. Call Dick after 5 pm - 555-9154.

Established working party rock band seeks digital multitrack recording system with 2 AUX sends and 2 stereo AUX returns, 4 XLR mic inputs, channel inserts and individual track outputs — cue outputs are a real plus. Call Gasm Sparks 454-3651.

FOR SALE
ADAT and Mackie 8-Bus. Must sell. Looking to buy an integrated system that takes up less space and easier to use. Bill 555-3522.

WANTED
Digital multitrack system with jog /shuttle wheel for easy editing. Mickey 444-3169.

BODY PIERCING FOR BANDS
If you've got the flesh, we've got the tools. Call INTooU 258-9631.

WANTED
ADAT transports. We can use all we can get. Pinky 767-0187.

Smashed my hard disk recorder. Too many menus made me go mad. Looking for artist who can use it in an abstract sculpture, or sea captain looking for anchor. Call Trent 457-9851.

FOR SALE
Yamaha MT8X. I thought it was a Portastudio. It's not. Never was. Never will be. Best offer takes it. Gary 543-1010.

ATTENTION COLLECTORS
Priceless first edition TASCAM Portastudio. This is the multitrack recorder that revolutionized the music business and changed the face or recording. Serial number 00001. $12,000 OBO. Call 558-9651.

NEEDED
Stereo digital outputs on a low cost digital 4-track for making digital masters on DAT. Call Ken 799-0025.

ALTERNATIVE BANDS?
Looking for a record deal? Send your demo tapes for consideration. Eddy 445-8870.

Web page design & hosting for your band. Cheap. Call Scott 255-5569.

Band looking for drummer. We've been through five. Can you hang for more than a week? Roger 626-3030.

★ ★ FOR SALE ★ ★
Mirror ball, bell bottoms, platform shoes and leisure suits. Perfect for retro bands. Call Slick 247-8414.

WANTED
Digital recording system that's easy to use and uses low cost removable MiniDiscs. Call Tina 555-2598.

There's only one company that makes Portastudios. Get the details via fax 800-827-2268 ext. 7820.

Wanted. Komodo Dragon or other Monitor lizard for band mascot at live shows. Call Go-T 555-3952.

Female county vocalist wanted by songwriter to develop hit records. Have full arsenal of TASCAM recording gear. Call Willie 236-6665.

● Female lead, rhythm, bass guitarist and drummer wanted. Must be able to write music and be willing to tour. Recording experience a real plus. Janis 590-6XYZ.

• • WANTED!! • •
High Performance Digital Recording System that costs less than $1500 AND uses a non-destructive editing process — must be easy to use. Karl 778-1321.

★ GUITAR LESSONS ★
Learn those licks. Do six takes per track on a Digital Portastudio. Peter 256-5584.

Wanted By Musicians Everywhere.

The Digital Portastudio.

It's the real thing. A Portastudio. Best part is, this one's digital. And who else could deliver the best MiniDisc multitrack digital recorder? TASCAM – the only company that makes Portastudios. With more than 15 years of designing and building the best recording products, TASCAM knows recording better than anyone. The 564 Digital Portastudio has everything you want – powerful features, impressive flexibility and great sound. And at only $1499, it's worth every penny. Don't settle for anything less — because your next demo may end up a master! Find out what the 564 can do for you. Get the full Digital Portastudio story via fax by calling 800-827-2268, request document number 7820.

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6 TAKES PER TRACK?
Plus capability up to 5 song sectors, 20 indexes per song and bounce forward? Need advanced editing features! Traditional Portastudio ease-of-use preferred. Call Eduardo 777-1019.

Spike! Get well soon. We just bought a digital Portastudio. Can't wait to lay down tracks. Yes. You can do your lead 6 times and we'll still be able to use the first one — cause you know it's always your best.

DRUMMER WANTED
by signed band. Send tape, photo & bio. POB 2928, Newport, CA 92659.

Desperately Seeking Digital Simplicity. Maggie 251-4292.

Looking for a digital 4-track XLR inputs and mid range sweep EQ. Must be built by the company that invented cost effective multitrack recording. No imitators or motorcycle manufacturers. Chuck 858-6651.

USED GUITAR STRINGS
If you want them, I've got them. Some broken, some used by the biggest stars. Electronic and acoustic.Good prices. 555-0973 - Call Razor.

WANTED
Digital recording system that is self-contained and offers six takes per track. Must have random access and instant locate capabilities. Will pay cash 588-7462.

• MAKE A LOTTA NOISE •
Huge rehearsal hall for rent. Open 24 hours. Call Max dB at 555-8711.

NEEDED
Small band on the rise looking for top sound technicians. No newcomers to the biz. Top dollar paid. Sid, 556-2890.

• EQUIPMENT FOR RENT •
Top of the line recording equipment. All TASCAM components. We deliver. Rent per day, week or month. Call us 24 hr. 556-8293.

Need a MiniDisc digital recording system that does more. Will pay a little more for the extra features. Must have digital out, killer mid-range sweep. Call Pliskin 789-9511.

Techno Rap Band Seeks Digital Recorder that does everything: MTC or MIDI clock, editing effects like bounce forward, cut, copy, move. Undo capability a must. Ask for Father Flack 998-4775.

WARNING!
Not all MiniDisc systems are created equal. Don't settle for cheap imitations. Get the new TASCAM 564 Portastudio. Facts via fax. Call 1-800-827-2268. No one's ever sorry for buying the best.

you. Some of the larger music festivals, like SxSW and CMJ, are so crowded with major label acts that they may not be worth your while. But many smaller, more manageable ones are springing up around the country, like the LoudFest in Northhampton, Mass and the MacFest in Manhattan. They offer opportunities for networking and exposure. *The Musicians Guide to Touring and Promotion*, published bi-annually by the editors of this magazine, is an invaluable and inexpensive guide to these and other resources.

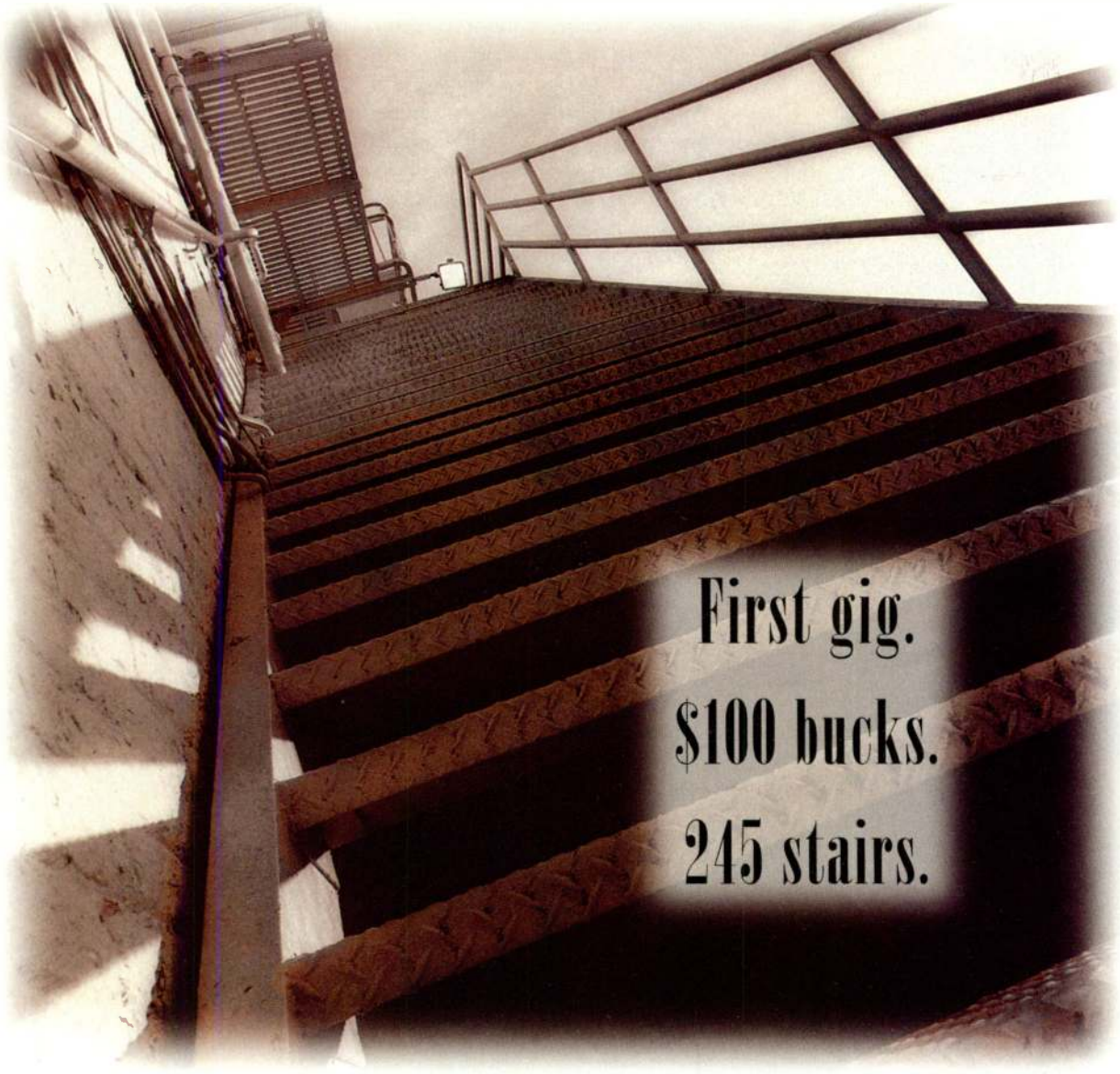
Small-town papers are often willing to accommodate their regular advertisers, so have the owner of the bar or restaurant that books you make the call or send your photo over to the arts or listings editor of the publication he does business with. In many towns, a club or restaurant owner may have a similar long-term relationship with a radio station, and be willing to spring for spots for you, where they'll use your music as a bed. Take advantage of the opportunity to arrange an interview too.

When someone does do something for you, *thank* them—whether it's the club owner, the guy at the radio station who lets you get on the mike to say hi to your mom, the editor who runs your listing, or the writer who goes out of his or her way to pen a couple of lines about you. If you've moved on to the next gig, send a card, leave a thank-you on voice mail. They didn't have to go out of their way for you, so don't take their kindness for granted. It's one thing to have a bad-ass rock attitude when you get up onstage, but chances are you won't stay there too long if you are so casual or callous to those who helped lift you there.

Don't make a record until you're ready. Since anyone can churn out a CD these days, there's a glut of vanity stuff absolutely no one wants to buy, much less listen to, and lots of worthwhile indie records are taken less seriously. But if your band is not in danger of breaking up before you receive the test pressing, and you're responding to your substantial following's demands to take home the material from the live set they know and love, it may be the right moment.

When selling records, be regional. Offer special deals to the people on your mailing list. Post on the Internet. Positive press and airplay will of course increase demand. But if you're doing it yourself, it's not only best to concentrate on a small area, it's physically impossible to do anything else. You won't be able to sell records out of your own car trunk to every store in the country. Nor will the arrival of your package be likely to excite the critic of a newspaper half a continent away. Concentrate on your immediate area and expand from there. Major labels don't expect reviews from everyone they send promo copies to—a 10% response is considered extraordinary. So keep in mind that you must send out 100 copies of your album in order to garner, in the best case scenario, 10 reviews.

Sending out advance copies may not be worthwhile at your level, but you



SOMETIMES THE DIFFERENCE between taking a gig and not taking it isn't the money. Or the exposure. But the schlep. Which is why we created the new EON Portable System. At about half the weight of any other system, it's made to be portable. Yet it gives you all the sound quality and reliability that JBL is known for. At a price that is noticeably lighter. In fact, it may be the perfect first step for any rising star who's just starting out. And plans to get to the top.

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S O U N D T H A T C A R R I E S

may want to send out a press release with your bio and photo prior to the CD. List your accomplishments. If you've been packing them in for months at McShnoogies, if you won a battle of the bands, if your lead guitarist played first base for the Yankees and trombone for Kiss, people will want to know. Maybe someone with a local reputation—your favorite sports columnist, high school teacher, garbageman—will write and sign your bio. Ask them. Perhaps their name will open doors yours can't. In any case, if you have any clippings, do a neat job cutting, pasting, and photocopying them. It defeats the entire purpose if your stuff is unreadable. Make it look good. If you don't have a clue what this means, enlist someone with a solid graphic arts background to teach you.

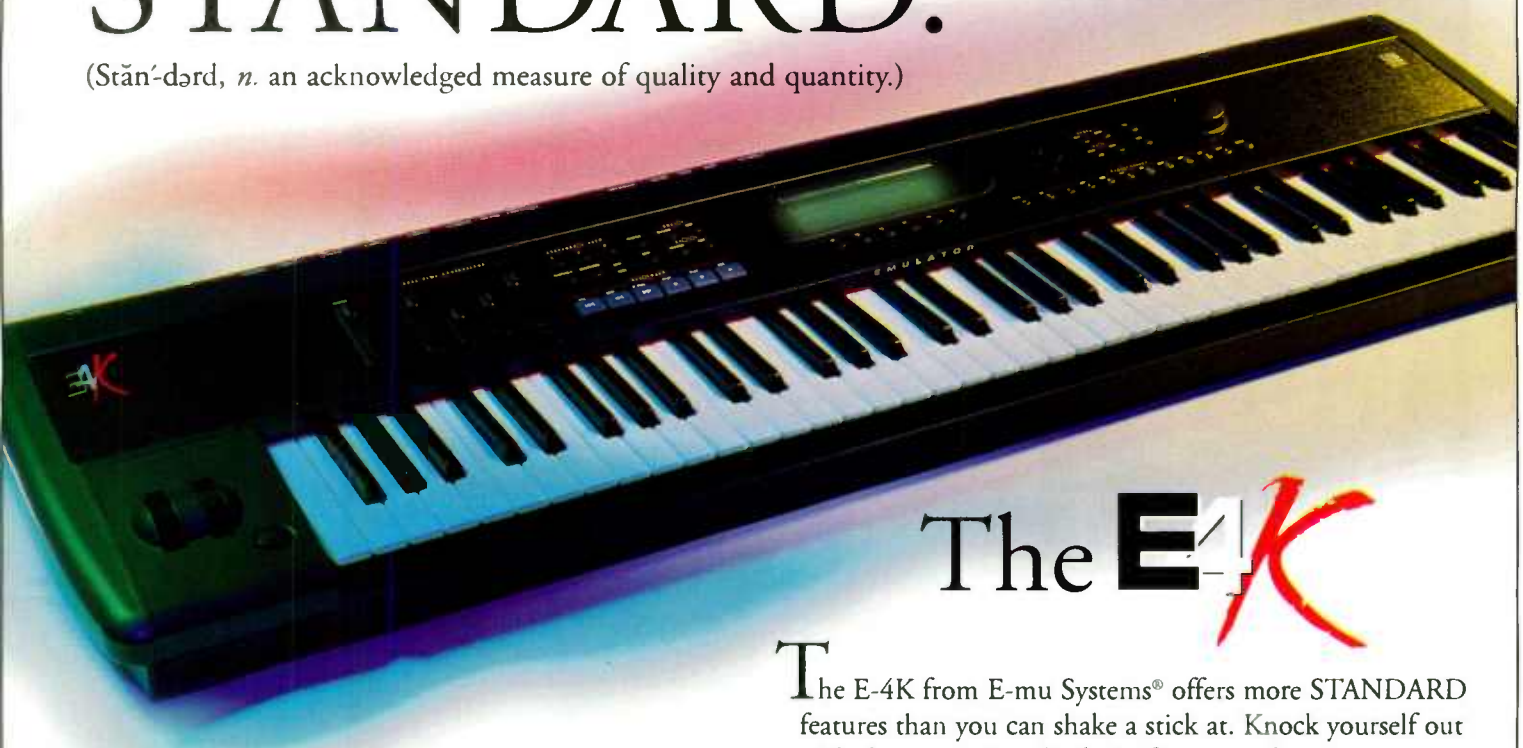
If you want the local press to be familiar with your work, you should be familiar with theirs. It will not help to strike up a conversation with the local beat writer if you have no idea what he or she has written about. On the other hand, if this writer has never displayed any prior enthusiasm for artists whose work or mindset resembles your own, don't bother. Seek out those whose taste, opinion, or style you honestly admire. Write a nice letter before you call. Spell the correspondent's name correctly. Follow up. The larger the publication, the busier this person will be. Be persistent but not obnoxious. A lot of professional publicists rely on postcards—they save time, trouble, and get your message across efficiently. You can do small band photos, show the cover of your album, list your tour dates.

Plan way in advance. Ask the writer if there's a good time to stop by the office and introduce yourself. Better yet, invite him or her to lunch. This is what the publicists at major labels do, and there is no reason you can't, either. (You may have to pay for lunch, though.) If you are uncomfortable making these kinds of contacts, you may want to eventually hire a public relations person who's devoted to building and maintaining them. Publicists also maintain mailing lists that may help you reach the media elsewhere. As your touring progresses and career evolves, you will need someone to make advance phone calls to the towns you will be visiting, set up TV and radio interviews, etc., just as you will require a larger staff to make sure your records are stocked in stores, coordinate advertising, promotion, etc. *That's* when you're ready to hook up with a larger company—because you've grown beyond what you can handle comfortably yourself. You'll also have more to offer a larger record company—a track record and bargaining position that will speak for itself.

You may find an enthusiastic publicist willing to work with you for little or next to nothing to help launch and participate in the brilliant future you so rightfully deserve. But you're just as likely to encounter one who, thanks to a previous major label career that intersected with some now dim star's upward

Sampler. Synthesizer. STANDARD.

(Stăn'-dərd, *n.* an acknowledged measure of quality and quantity.)



The E-4K

The E-4K from E-mu Systems® offers more STANDARD features than you can shake a stick at. Knock yourself out with these stunning displays of power... then see your local dealer to *hear* the honest truth!

Big Polyphony. 128 or 64 voices. What's note ripoff? We can't remember.

Sample Edit. The E4k has a very extensive sample editing engine. Time Compression/Expansion, Digital Pitch Change, Compressor, Parametric EQ. True non-destructive editing with Undo/Redo has been found to decrease stress.

Cords. E-mu's Modular Synthesis allows you to route any modulation source to any modulation destination using Virtual Patch Cords (remember synthesis?) 18 cord routing per voice. 58 Mod sources and 55 Mod Destinations. Way easy.

Sampling. Digital Sampling at 32, 44.1 or 48kHz. Resample (with effects as well as from the sequencer) at 16 or 18 bit resolution. Midi Note Event Trigger Sampling is true remote control! Auto-Truncate, Auto-Loop, Auto-Place, Auto-Gain, Auto-Cool!

18 Bit Effects. Two stereo effects processors (with reverbs, delays, chorusing, flanging and more) are standard. Effect your sound for live performance and resample with effects when the need arises!

150 MB of Free Sounds. The internal hard drive is chock full of gorgeous sounds. Pianos, Orchestral, World, General MIDI, Ambient, 100 SoundSprint Presets, a Sound Designer Toolbox and much more!

SoundSprint™. Achieve instant gratification with our new SoundSprint technology which loads presets from your hard drive automatically and quickly. Now you can not only audition samples on the E4k, but hear complete presets in all their glory. Scroll through your libraries and set bookmarks for instant retrieval of your favorite sounds.

Filters. 21 Different 6 Pole Filter Types (arguably the most powerful filters in any sampler) to edit your voices. Imagine a 32-layer-deep note (you can do that!) with independently controlled filters for each layer!

ALSO STANDARD: 4 MB of RAM, expandable to 128 MB using standard SIMMs • An Internal Hard Drive • Emulator Sampling and Synthesis engine featuring: 18 bit DACs • 24 Bit Internal Processing • Digital Modular Synthesis • Z-Plane® Filters • 32 Sample Layers Per Note • Dual 18 Bit Stereo Effects Processors • SCSI • S/PDIF I/O • 8 Outputs • 76 Note Semi-Weighted Keyboard

Graphic Waveform Editing. Zoom In, Zoom Start Point, Zoom End Point, Zoom, Zoom, Zoom! And magnify up to 8 times.

Library. The E4K reads a massive library of sounds — over 100GB worth. Also accesses CD ROM, MO, Removable Media and Hard Drives. Ahem... SCSI is standard too. Library: E-mu, E4k, e64, ESI-32, EIIIX, Emax® II, Roland, and Akai. Any sound you want...just load it.

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trajectory, can demand a retainer of $3,000-$5,000 a month (plus expenses) for the honor of instructing a sleepy intern who's never bothered listening to your record to make a couple of half-hearted calls and stuff a few envelopes. The more people you have running interference for you, the greater the likelihood that the agendas being most actively promoted are not your own.

Doing the job yourself is not always easy. On the other hand, many performers' choice to rely on other people as a buffer between themselves and the world does not necessarily make the truth, when they eventually confront it, any crueler. Many performers are terrified of criticism because they may never really have had the courage of their convictions. The more successful they become, the more fearful they are that they'll be exposed. But who wants to be Elvis? Then there's the other extreme—guys who have enough gear and guitars in their basements to open their own Hard Rock Cafe, but are so terrified of what anyone really thinks of their playing, they never even get around to putting a record out, never mind sending it for review.

It's up to you to find your focus and define your goals and often, coming into contact with people who have a slightly different view of the world and are not merely yes-men (which is not what the best critics should be) can help you do that.

So once you have established a toehold, it's time for a deeper plunge. But first, a little more research. Don't send your heavy metal opus to a hip-hop expert unless you're trying to balance the postal deficit. A computer, label printer, and software is invaluable. Doing mailings, like I do, to a couple of thousand people at a clip would be impossible otherwise. A CD-ROM with a national phone and address directory is another good investment. It's also handy for travel accommodations.

In terms of press coverage, do not aim too high unless you want to be immediately shot down. Joe Carducci, the former press representative for the indie punk label SST, devoted much of his scathing diatribe, *Rock and the Pop Narcotic*, to the failure of *Rolling Stone* and other so-called music publications to recognize the vitality of the punk scene in the '70s. What he did not understand was that by the '70s *Rolling Stone* was an institution more entrenched in its own orthodoxy than Harvard. He didn't understand how it worked, that you couldn't just blast a missile from afar; you had to curry favor by the unstated terms of the operative gentlemen's agreement.

Understand that ***the slicker the magazine, the more the people running it do not care about music.*** Many will sell your (never opened) CDs to used record stores or salesmen for a couple of dollars a pop. This actually can be a weird, if convoluted, method of distribution, and your records will eventually end up being browsed over in flea markets and record swaps in places where no one might have otherwise placed an order. If this sounds discouraging, simply consider what happens when you plant a garden; you never assume that all of your seeds will sprout.

Some smaller publications may respond to your editorial query by sending back a sheet of advertising rates. In the same way, you may find yourself laughed right out of a radio station by a program director who doesn't talk to anyone who hasn't provided payola first (although it's cloaked in all kinds of subterfuge about promotional or advertising programs, and can really only be delivered by a "consultant" who's an expert at the game). I would never accept the promise of coverage in return for an ad, because frequently all you get is your cancelled check, not the coverage. But I have, on occasion, taken an ad in a small magazine that went out on a limb to support my band when we needed it. It's a way of saying thank you. And I have done the same kind of trade-out common in other areas of the industry—for instance, receiving a magazine ad in lieu of my usual writing fee. If you or anyone in your band has a job or business where you can make a similar offer, do it. And running a mail order business makes it easy to monitor the effectiveness of an ad: The volume in our post office box tells us what works.

We'd rather devote our energies to making music than videos, but there are cable outlets that will air independent clips.

Television opportunities occasionally do present themselves to an independent band. But given the many factors that are beyond your control—chief among them the tiny sound—TV should probably be the last thing your band thinks about.

Widescale radio play is virtually impossible to achieve without the services of a paid "consultant." The more you want, the more you must pay, and you will need corporate pockets to pony it up. There are small promotion firms that will take on an independent project for programs that last a minimum of nine weeks for a few hundred dollars a week. They will promise to deliver a certain number of stations and provide reports. However, these stations may very well be 2-kilowatt outfits far beyond the reach of your record distribution. Even if your record is aired, if you can't sell it there, the results are negligible. You can do some of this yourself (once again the *Musicians Guide* is a great source for the address and formats of radio stations throughout the country), but long-distance phone calls to gauge the music directors' reaction can be prohibitively expensive. Instead, include a stamped, self-addressed postcard for response. You may want to have boxes they can check off (*i.e.*, like it, hate it, playing two times a week, never) to make it as simple as possible. A 10% reply rate is the best you should hope for. But as soon as your record begins to get some coverage, you will also begin to get queries from all kinds of characters claiming to service DJ pools, distribute records, or run radio stations in various corners of the world. Send them the minimum of 25 records they ask for (which you sell yourself for $10-15 apiece) and you will probably never hear from them again.

It's a long way to the top if you wanna rock and roll. What's really more important are what one of my true heroes, the uncompromising iconoclast Mike Watt, calls the "little victories." May you savor a few of them.

KURZWEIL K2500

THE REVIEWS ARE IN!

There has never been a keyboard like the K2500 and the K2500X in the world! Kurzweil has created the ultimate performance keyboard, with more standard features and control, more expandability, and more power than any other instrument at even twice the price! With an uncanny ability to recreate the sound of all other keyboards, the K2500 Series establishes itself as the benchmark to which all other keyboards aspire. Now that we've had our say, don't just take our word for it... read what the reviews have to say. Then visit your dealer to hear and see what you've been missing. In a world of me-too clones the K2500 stands alone... anything else is settling for second best!

ELECTRONIC MUSICIAN - MAY 1996

"There are so many enhancements in the K2500 that it would be impossible to describe them all in a single review. The K2500 is even deeper and more powerful than it's predecessor the K2000. The K2500 has one of the most powerful sequencers in any keyboard workstation today. I found it very easy to get around thanks to a logical layout. The editing functions are remarkably complete, and provide a variety of useful record and playback parameters, including quantization on input, auto punch-in and punch-out, looping, synchronization, count-off, and click options. Of special note is the powerful arpeggiator that can be used in Setup Mode. The ribbons are great fun to use. They let you play incredibly expressive vibrato and pitch bends. You can audition samples directly from disk without loading, which is very convenient. I applaud the breath controller input; it is far too rare in the synth world. The setups inspire creativity when you play them. It sounds fantastic, it's packed with useful and well-implemented features, it's lineage is impeccable, and it will continue to expand and improve. The K2500 is truly an awesome instrument. All that remains is for you to write a check!" - *Scott Wilkinson*

KEYBOARD - MAY 1996

"As a synthesizer, the K2500, like it's predecesser, is easily the deepest instrument you can buy. We couldn't wait to get our hands on one. The piano daughterboard (optional) provides a stunning stereo grand piano... you'd be hard-pressed to find a more playable instrument. It's warm, full, and responsive, and sounds equally realistic from one end of the keyboad to the other. The ribbon (controller) surface feels just right. The control over key velocity is superb. Basically, this is a serious piece of gear. The built-in sequencer has enough power to keep you jamming for a good long time. The sequencer has a much higher clock resolution than any other built-in sequencer that we know of. The K2500 is unabashedly aimed at the professional... it's a class act all the way. When it comes to overall musical muscle, this instrument really has no competition... this is the Steinway of electronic music." - *Jim Aikin*

1996 TEC AWARD NOMINEE

K2500XS

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Synthesis/Sampling/Performance
Keyboard Technology

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Brave New Guitar

Catherine Wheel, Archers of Loaf, Gastr del Sol, Reeves Gabrels, Derek Bailey: Noise & Music Collide on the Wild Frontier of Experimental Guitar

BY TED DROZDOWSKI

ILLUSTRATION BY WARREN LINN

GRAY FOG SNEAKS IN FROM the Atlantic, slowly covering the boardwalks and arcades of the aging English resort town Great Yarmouth. It enfolds the tower of the Giant Slide in the Pleasure Beach amusement park, scuttles across the four-lane highway, and slips into a cluster of old brick warehouse buildings that surround the port.

There, its tendrils mesh with another cloud: a golden cumulus of sound that seeps through the cracks of a large wooden door into a seabreeze-chilled courtyard. Swing open that door and the gold takes on a rainbow of overtones, swelling from the amps of guitarists

Rob Dickinson and Brian Futter of Catherine Wheel. The volume's high enough to give the music a surreal edge, as it swirls around the band's roomy practice space with a dynamic psychedelic intensity that identifies the group as spiritual offspring of both the Pixies and Pink Floyd.

The boys in Catherine Wheel are demoing new songs for the album to follow their recent collection of rare tracks *Like Cats and Dogs* (Mercury); at the same time, they just happen to be defining a new aesthetic for rock guitar. And they're not the only ones. Guitarists have always battled for tone and technique, for the right mix of riffs and licks that would press their own hot buttons and make listeners bark like giddy beagles. But in an era when Berklee-trained chops are passé, when just about every effect seems overused, the search for fresh reference points and inspiration that'll make those beagles sit up and yelp is prickly.

Nonetheless, mainstream radio's still-recent embrace of previously left-field turns like the lopsided grin of a guitar line that starts the Breeders' "Cannonball" has fueled the hopes of creative players bent on discovering new sonic fringes and gilding for that old surrey, the rock song. And the best among these players have one trait in common: an open mind. The rest is divergence. For Great Yarmouth's native sons Catherine Wheel, it's a matter of nature and glorious accident. For Reeves Gabrels, David

Bowie's foil and one of the most thoughtful plectrists around, it's the systematic exploration of technique and technology mated to a junkyard dog's nose for kinky stuff. For Carolina-bred college-rock underdogs the Archers of Loaf, it's a blend of broad influence and let-it-rip aesthetics. For Chicago's Gastr del Sol, it's a brainy collision of new-music and punk-rock sensibilities. And for Derek Bailey, a founding father of free improvisation, his new recordings

Contributors: *Ted Drozdowski writes for* The Boston Phoenix *and plays with the band Vision Thing.*

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Catherine Wheel's Brian Futter: "If there are less mistakes than inspiration, you've got your song."

with Japanese hardcore band the Ruins and jungle DJ Ninj are simply a matter of the times and the guitarist finally syncing up.

Catherine Wheel's frontman Rob Dickinson explains that it's all got to start with good tunes. "You can strum all our songs on acoustic, and that sets the pace for the arrangements as well. I learned to play in a very slapdash way, so I could strum a few chords and sing a tune over them. There's no need for me to be technically accomplished."

"And I've always been more of a guitarist," relates Futter, the guy all Great Yarmouth's stringbenders came to when they couldn't crack the code of some fancy lick they'd heard. "So I'm constantly having to battle against playing clichés, falling into something ordinary. I've got too many rules in my head, so I try to forget what I know."

The band's first sonic breakthrough came accidentally, when they formed some five years ago. "When we started, we played at 10, and something beautiful was going on," says Dickinson. It still is; a mesh of widespread harmonics spills from both guitarists' amps—a result of rich natural tube overdrive, relatively little damping of the strings, and the bright upper-end inclinations of Futter's Clapton-model Strat and Marshall mixed with the dense midrange and low-mid instincts of Dickinson's Clapton Strat and Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifiers. Futter and Dickinson's mid-air collisions have a percolating sonic effect that's nearly as visible as a cloud of mosquitoes, whether splayed throughout the big chords of *Like Cats and Dogs*' "Heal 2" or draped like a canvas behind the careful improvisations of the floating, exploratory "Car." It's a cloud of sound that envelops nearly all their music, transforming tunes fit to strum on an acoustic into transcendent aural trips.

"People underestimate what you can do with a real amp sound," Futter says. "I mean, I can't make it flange, but there's volume and gain; I use the Strat's tone pots a lot, the five-way selector switch. There's how you bend a string, where you stand in relation to your amp..."

And Futter prefers standing smack in front, which—with a little stepping around to find the sweet spots—allows his lead lines to hang-ten on the edge of the electromagnetic waves between his Marshall and his Strat's Lace Sensor pickups. A technique for enriching sustain that Carlos Santana perfected before

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Reeves Gabrels: "If you can hear it in a beer commercial, don't use it."

Woodstock, it's also the silver lining of Catherine Wheel's grandiose sonic clouds.

The Cecil B. DeMille-sized scale of many of the band's best songs is fed by a similar mix of craft and coincidence. Often Catherine Wheel songs will modulate up as they reach their bridge or third chorus, and the effect is to broaden the aural terrain even more. Many of Futter's best solos climb, too; listen to the simple but glorious ascending lines he plays on "Heal 2."

"I think Gil Norton taught us that trick," admits Dickinson. Norton produced 1995's *Happy Days* and 1994's *Chrome*, along with a slew of influential post-new-wave albums, including the Pixies' *Doolittle*. "Gil taught us to look at the songs as a whole, almost along a bar graph, where you have to plot out spots at which things have to happen to keep them interesting. And when you want a song to take off, the simplest way is for it to go up."

"For my solos," Futter adds, "I guess the climbing is a cop-out. You get on one string and start exploring it, moving up the neck. It doesn't seem very masterly, but it works."

But mastery obviously isn't the point for a guitarist who vows he's trying to forget what he knows. "It's a balance of mistakes and inspiration. If there are less mistakes than inspiration, you've got your song; if mistakes outweigh the inspiration, you have to record it again. But what's crucial is leaving yourself open to anything."

To **Reeves Gabrels**, that notion is God's 11th Commandment (that's one Commandment louder than 10). In a single chance incident, this world-class player found his calling as a sonic spelunker. "I was living in Watertown [Massachusetts] and playing in this band Life On Earth, and we used to rehearse in the kitchen," Gabrels recounts. "I was waiting to start the next song, and I had my harmonizer, delay, the Rat, and my compressor on. . . and the refrigerator started. The motor noise came through the pickups really strong, with the Rat and the compressor just sucking in as much sound as they could. It sounded like angels to my ears: 'Aaaaahhhhhh!' So I made the connection that whatever electromagnetic stuff went on with that motor, it had an effect on the pickups that produced a sound I'd never heard before and was better to my ear than any keyboard sound. Over time, that became the thing I was increasingly drawn to: sounds I haven't heard before."

For some sounds Gabrels has heard—but you possibly haven't—check out his

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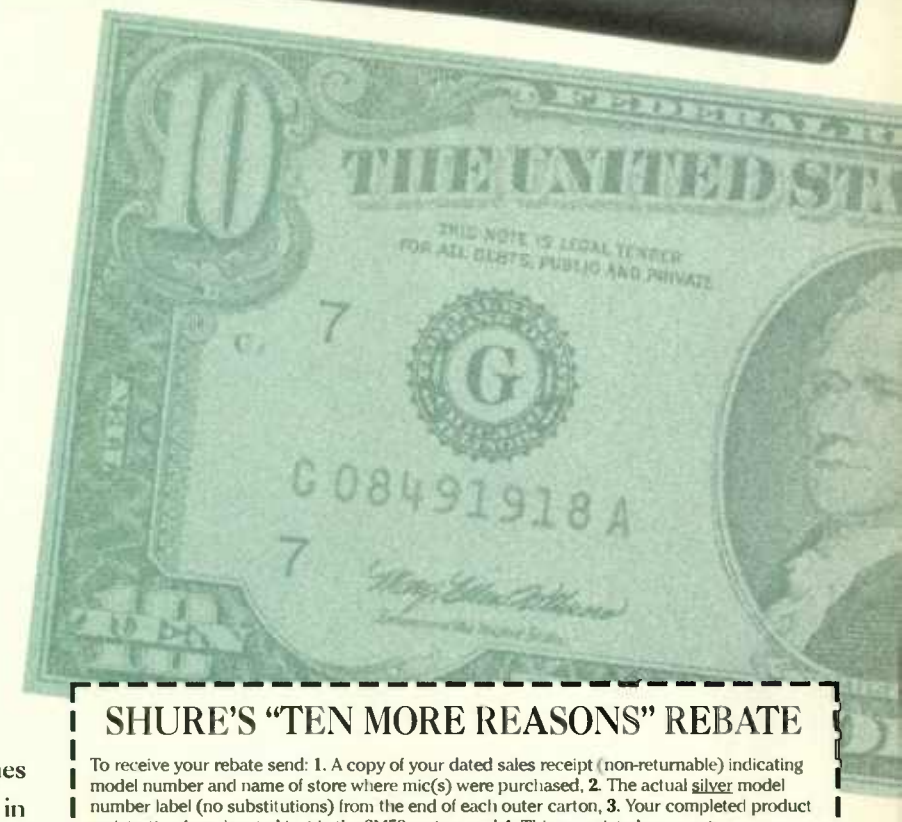

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solo CD *The Sacred Squall of Now* (Upstart), which also features vocals by the guitarist and his friends David Bowie and Frank Black. Gabrels' other recent recordings include his improv-led duets with slide guitarist David Tronzo on *A Night in Amnesia* (also on Upstart) and *Outside* (Virgin), Bowie's latest album, where Gabrels' penchant for mating the high-tech and low-rent—yep, that's a greasy old Unitron envelope filter snugged among the delay loops on "The Heart's Filthy Lesson"—bonds the CD's song cycle like Krazy Glue.

A few years after the refrigerator sang to him, Gabrels was selling guitars at a Boston music store when he found a wind-up woodpecker a child had left atop an amplifier. "If I wound it up and stuck it onto a finished guitar body, I could get it to peck the string, and I could fret out the kind of classical one-string runs that Yngwie Malmsteen had made popular at the time, just to bug the kids that came in. But I noticed that when I put the woodpecker near the pickups, the spring unwinding would make a sound like a bee when it gets too close to your ear. So I filed that away too."

Next Gabrels took on the lowly plectrum. "I read an interview with Roy Buchanan in which he explained that he saw the strings like the face of a clock. If the string was going from 3 to 9, he'd hold the pick at an angle of 2 or 8. The idea was to decrease the surface contact for more accuracy. At the same time, I read an interview with David Torn who talked about a favorite stone pick he kept because the back edge had become serrated. And he used it to scrape the strings and make noise. So I started filing my picks to a point, and I took sandpaper to make edges like the serrations on a quarter. And I found I could use that to get slide-whistle stuff if I had enough gain. Especially with a harmonizer."

You'll hear a variation on that on "Thirteen," from *The Sacred Squall of Now*. "I used the serrated edge like a bow over the frets, with my harmonizer down an octave. Also, there's some high-pitched whistle guitar, which is me playing directly above the pickups. I found just a tiny bit above one pickup screw gives me an F#; right over the polepiece of one of the humbuckers, I get a D. It's

Trace Elliot Guitar Works Tube Amps

GUITAR WORKS PLAYER PROFILE
DOMINIC MILLER / STING

Argentinian-born Dominic Miller has been contributing his distinctive guitar work to Sting's recording and live projects since 1991's 'Soul Cages' album, subsequently playing more than 400 gigs with the band that's widely recognised as defining the zenith of contemporary musical talent. Co-writer of 'Shape Of My Heart', Dominic is currently on the road again with Sting, using two Guitar Works Trident H100 3-channel all-tube amp heads and two Guitar Works 2x12" cabinets in a stereo set-up. In addition to his work with Sting, Dominic has also recently recorded his own solo album, 'First Touch'.

Pictured (left to right):
Bonneville H100 head +
G SC412A / G SC412F cabs.
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Speed Twin H50 + G SC212 cab.
Velocette 'Class A' combo.

In the case of Trace Elliot Guitar Works all-tube amplification, looks are most definitely not deceptive. Underneath all that polished chrome and hand-woven grille cloth beats a heart that's pure rock and roll. From the sounds of vintage tweed to the hard edge of British metal, these amps are dripping with pure valve tone. And with a line up that ranges from the sensational little Velocette 15 watt Class A combo to the mighty 3 channel Trident rig, there's a Guitar Works amplifier to suit all players and all pockets.

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like figuring out the notes on the fretboard when you're learning to play." The result sounds like a motorized string section, or the clank of an anvil shot through a prism.

In recent years, the refrigerator incident has paid off in yet more unconventional tone-generation methods. While making the second Tin Machine album in Sydney, Australia, Gabrels was futzing around in the studio on a day off. He'd carved a tape loop out of a rhythm track, plonked some fuzz bass atop it, and was moving in with his six-string when he realized he had his electric razor in his bag. "It sounded cool over the pickups, but it wasn't heavy enough. And since it had a one-speed motor, I could only get one note out of it."

His immediate search for a variable-speed motor led swiftly to a Sydney sex-toy shop called the Tool Box, where he purchased a few vibrators—but not until after he'd given them all a good hearing. "It took quite a while to listen to all those vibrators. But I found that when I got them back to the studio, I could get these floating industrial textures. We never used any synthesizers on that record, but there is a lot of vibrator work. You can be really accurate with the vibrator. The instinct is to get one that's big and flashy, because it gets noticed on stage and has great motor noise. But if you want to be able to play a single string at a time, the smaller ones are better because they can be held almost like a pen."

The point, says Gabrels, is to learn everything about your guitars, not just licks and scales. But at the same time, never forget the basics. Beneath Gabrels' unconventional fillips there may be a little village of effects, yet he insists that it always rests on bedrock.

"I feel like what separates me from a lot of avant-rock players is that at the core of everything I try to have a really solid and distinct guitar tone," he declares. (For an example of an uneffected Gabrels, check out his pure Mesa/Boogie variations on *Hard Row to Hoe* by Modern Farmer; it's one of Gabrels' hometown projects, on the indie label Monolyth.) "Even when I'm fully loaded with gear, I always start with a tone that's got weight. When I was growing up, your tone was like your fingerprint. Leslie West is a prime example of that, not that Leslie was ever a frontrunner of the avant-garde. Mick Ronson, Jeff Beck, Robert Quine, Richard Lloyd, Larry Carlton. . .they all had big tone.

"That said, rock guitar sounds are so completely exploited—hell, they're self-exploiting—the same way visual images are exploited by television. So no matter what I'm doing, I try to keep this in the back of my mind: 'If you can hear it in a beer commercial, don't use it.' "

Y'ain't never gonna hear **Derek Bailey** in no beer commercial. Not that Bailey wouldn't be up for it. In the 30-plus years he's been playing freely improvised music, he's sparred in [*cont'd on page 76*]

fast forwa

1 Trace Elliot Speed Twin

The "Twin" in the title of Trace Elliot's new Speed Twin line of all-tube amplifiers refers to the amps' two channels, which are totally independent of one another, with different tubes, circuitry, voicing, and EQ. Channel two (overdrive) can be further differentiated from channel one with a simple flick of the preamp-style switch, which either adds or subtracts another tube stage for more gain. The 100-watt 2x12 Speed Twin C100 (pictured) is $1999, and the 50-watt 1x12 C50 is $1699. ***• Trace Elliot, c/o Kaman Music Corporation, P.O. Box 507, Bloomfield, CT 06002-0507; voice (860) 509-8888, fax (860) 509-8891.***

2 Gibson SmartWood Les Paul

It's official: The first environmentally responsible production-line guitar is here. The Gibson SmartWood Les Paul's ($3399) top is Wisconsin maple, while the Chechen for the fingerboard and mahogany for the body and neck come from Mexico. All woods have received the seal of approval of the international Rainforest Alliance, signifying that they were harvested from sustainable sources. ***• Gibson Guitar Corp., 641 Massman Dr., Nashville, TN 37210-3781; voice (615) 871-4500, fax (615) 889-0564.***

3 Joemeek Studio Channel

Joe Meek was a wacky British producer of the '60s who designed much of his own gear; Ted Fletcher, the creator of the Joemeek Studio Channel preamp/compressor/enhancer ($949.99), was Meek's favorite technician. The Studio Channel's preamp is designed to soften clipping at high levels, while the compressor operates via a photoelectric element (rather than the usual voltage-control amplifier) to minimize distortion, and the enhancer adds new harmonics (!) to your signal. ***• Joemeek, c/o PMI, 23773 Madison St., Torrance, CA 90505; voice (310) 373-9129, fax (310) 373-2034.***

4 Cakewalk Pro Audio 5.0 software

Yes, it wasn't so long ago that we were singing the praises of Cakewalk's 4.01 version of Pro Audio, which integrates the worlds of MIDI sequencing and digital audio recording. But things move fast in the software world, and now 5.0 has arrived, including both Windows 95 and Windows 3.1 editions on one CD-ROM. Improvements include intuitive clip song structures and enhanced notation with guitar chord grids and dynamic markings. And the thing still costs $399. • ***Cakewalk, 44 Pleasant St., P.O. Box 760, Watertown, MA 02272; voice (617) 926-2480, fax (617) 924-6657.***

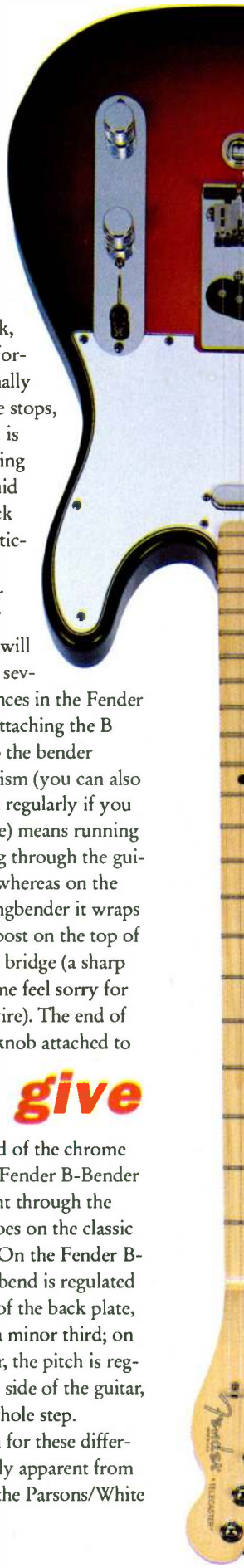
5 Clavia ddrum 4

The brain of the new Clavia ddrum 4 percussion controller ($2995) offers more than 500 different individual instruments that can be varied in up to eight ways with one touch, without altering a complete kit setup. But the biggest innovation is one you can't see in this photograph (though it does exist—just believe us): The ddrum4's pads feature real drum heads in conjunction with cast aluminum shells, offering improved tracking and a feel rivaling that of acoustic drums. • ***Clavia, c/o Armadillo Enterprises, 923 McMullen Booth Rd., Clearwater, FL 34619; voice (813) 796-8868, fax (813) 797-9448.***

6 Alesis QS8

Both a full-size master controller and a highly advanced synthesis engine, the Alesis QS8 synthesizer ($1999) features an 88-key weighted hammer-action keyboard and 16 megabytes of onboard sound ROM. The QS8's controller section includes four fully assignable real-time control sliders, plus pitch and modulation wheels; the sounds (divided into 640 Programs and 500 multitimbral Mixes) can also be tweaked with the onboard effects processor, which uses four totally discrete busses for different effects. • ***Alesis, 3630 Holdrege Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90016; voice (310) 558-4530, fax (301) 836-9192.***

Go on a Bender



▶ *A full frontal view of Fender's twanglin' B-Bender Telecaster.*

by Mac Randall

If you've kept track of our Editor's Pick column every month, you'll have noticed a preponderance of fancy high-tech gear. You know, the stuff that's dropping everyone's jaw these days—physical modeling synthesizers, editing software, digital recording machines, digital mixing consoles. Now *Musician* likes being on the forefront of technology as much as anyone, but sometimes keeping up with the jargon gets us a little tired. So this month we're going to forget about all that and get back to real machinery—the kind with gears, screws and springs. Ladies and gentlemen, the Parsons/White Stringbender.

Yes, we know the Stringbender's been around for over 30 years. And yes, we know you probably know the whole legendary story, about how back in 1965 guitarist Clarence White and drummer Gene Parsons collaborated on an invention that pulled a guitar's B string up by means of a lever attached to the strap knob to achieve pedal steel-like bends; and how later in the '60s White and Parsons both joined the Byrds, thereby drawing broader attention to their new gadget; and how over the next couple of decades loads of great guitarists have outfitted their axes with Stringbenders, from Albert Lee and the Eagles' Bernie Leadon to Jimmy Page and the guys from Metallica.

But what you may not know is that just this year the story has taken an exciting turn, thanks to two new products: Fender's B-Bender Telecaster, the first widely available guitar to come with a Stringbender already installed (yes, there's also the ESP Ron Wood model, but how many of those have you seen in your local music store?), and the Stringbender company's own Double Bender, which allows you to bend both the B and G strings, either separately or simultaneously.

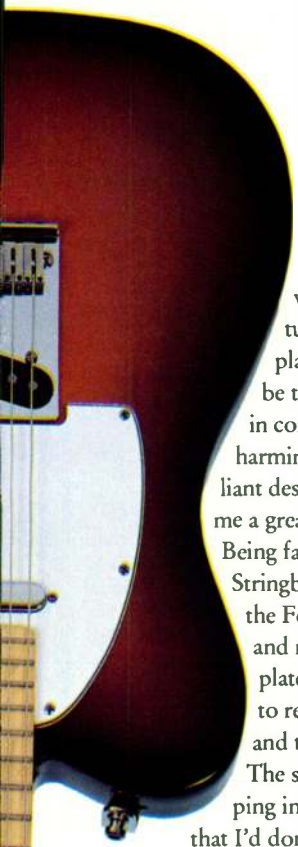
Of course, Fender's Custom Shop has been installing Stringbenders in its guitars for years (and continues to do so), but the B-Bender Tele is the company's first model with a stock bender on every guitar. Besides the bender, it's a typical American Standard Telecaster, with 22-fret maple neck, alder body, and two regular Tele-style single-coil pickups. It's available in four different finishes—black, candy apple red, brown sunburst, and vintage white—and retails for $1099, except the sunburst one, which'll run you another fifty bucks.

For those unfamiliar with the Stringbender, here's how you make it work: Make sure you're standing up and you've got a strap on. Then pull the guitar neck down and away from you. Feel the satisfying tug on your strap; that's the bender's arm (located under the plate on the back of the guitar), which is attached at one end to the top strap knob and at the other to the ball end of the B string, moving forward and increasing the tension of the string, and thus raising its pitch. The tension you feel is increased by a long spring attached to the arm, which also ensures that you won't actuate the bend by just any little motion. To bend back to regular pitch, simply pull the neck back to where you started. Though the bender works perfectly well for single-note work, it comes in handiest on formations that don't normally allow for bends—double stops, chords, harmonics—and is equally capable of handling country twanglin', languid Hawaiian licks, and quick sitar-like quarter-tone articulations.

Those already familiar with the classic Parsons/White Stringbender will quickly notice several differences in the Fender model. Attaching the B string to the bender mechanism (you can also string it regularly if you so desire) means running the string through the guitar body, whereas on the original Stringbender it wraps around a metal post on the top of the guitar just below the bridge (a sharp twist that always made me feel sorry for the poor little piece of wire). The end of the lever with the strap knob attached to it runs out of the top end of the chrome plate on the back of the Fender B-Bender Tele body instead of right through the side of the guitar, as it does on the classic Parsons/White version. On the Fender B-Bender, the pitch of the bend is regulated by a wheel sticking out of the back plate, and it can stretch up to a minor third; on the original Stringbender, the pitch is regulated by a screw on the side of the guitar, and it can only bend a whole step.

There's a larger reason for these differences that isn't completely apparent from a cursory glance: While the Parsons/White

Fender and Parsons/White give



old tech a new twist.

Stringbender is attached to the body of the guitar, the Fender B-Bender isn't. The whole bending apparatus is fastened to the plate, meaning that it can be taken out and put back in completely intact without harming the guitar. It's a brilliant design idea, but it caused me a great deal of aggravation. Being familiar with the classic Stringbender, curious about the Fender model's new frills, and not knowing about the plate mounting, I decided to remove the back plate and took off all the screws. The sound of springs snapping immediately indicated that I'd done something wrong.

When the plate finally came off, the unit was in pieces. Thankfully the problem was quickly fixed, with a little help from the patient people at Fender's R&D department. But obsessive tinkerers should heed this warning: If you must remove the back plate, take out only the eleven screws on the perimeter. Don't mess with the others in the middle. And either take the B string off entirely or restring it normally so that the string tension doesn't hold the bender apparatus in.

My brief distress during the above incident was far outweighed by the joy I experienced playing this instrument. The B-Bender Tele that Fender sent me for review is one of the most comfortable guitars I've ever played; the neck's a dream, the fingerboard's pleasantly flat, the tone is as cutting and live as you could want, and the bender works like a charm. Setting the bend range to a full minor third, as I did, means the notes in between pass by quickly—you've got to feel out where they are, and that takes practice, but the results are well worth it.

The B-bender on Stringbender's new Double Bender ($950, installation not included) looks and works just the same as the classic Parsons/White B-Bender. The innovation is the G-bender, which is attached to the bottom strap knob of the guitar and is actuated by pulling back on the neck. If you pull down and back simultaneously, both strings bend up; it's ideal for simulating pedal steel-type double stops, but also works well for eerier stuff. For example, playing an E power chord at the seventh fret with the B and high E strings open and bending both the B and G strings up and down a half step produces a lovely seasick sound.

As intriguing as this combination is, I can't recommend it to everyone. The G-bender I tried only bent up a half step, limiting its usefulness; my best efforts to make it otherwise came to nought. And the questions of when (and how) to move and not to move, already a factor for the B-bender, are doubly so for the Double. It's a lot of work to pull that G string up, and pulling it back to its original position is not as easily done as with the B-bender. My initial experiments led me to believe that the G-bender was causing tuning problems, but then I realized I wasn't always returning the neck back to exactly where I started from. Also, the act of pulling the neck of a guitar back almost automatically affects the other strings, creating the illusion that you're bending everything, often when you don't want to be. All these problems are resolvable over time, but you've really got to work with it. (Note: Gene Parsons assures me that the G-bender shouldn't be so tough to actuate and should bend at least a whole step. The reason mine didn't: It was an early version, using a weaker type of wire on the bender arm than the final model does.) Those who love the classic B-bender and are eager to take the graduate course should go for it; those who are merely curious should probably stick to the single version.

If you already have the single and want a double, or if you want the single but would like it in something other than an American Standard Tele, contact Stringbender at 44201 Caspar Orchard Rd., Box 76, Caspar, CA 95420; voice (707) 964-9538, fax (707) 961-1187. They can either do the installation for you or recommend a dealer who can. (They'll even put one in a Les Paul, if your heart can stand it.) Later this year, they also plan to debut a version of the B-bender for acoustic guitars. Sure, it sounds unbelievable, but don't laugh at the Stringbender folks—they've already pulled this off twice (pun intended).

Thanks to Gene Parsons and Meridian Green at Stringbender and Mike Lewis, Chris Gill, Dan Smith, and especially George Blanda at Fender for their help with this article.

▼ **Heavy machinery: the Parsons/White Double Bender.**

Buffalo Tom's Hon

ne Studios

Barry Berenson

Tucked among the trees and students that populate Cambridge, Massachusetts, is the apartment house that Ali McGraw and Ryan O'Neal called home in the 1970 movie *Love Story*. Today it's home to Chris Colbourn, Buffalo Tom's bassist and contributing songwriter, and his project studio. "Obviously, we're not high-tech MIDI guys," says Colbourn almost apologetically. Instead, the organic, homegrown feel of their studios is an apt reflection of the Buffalo Tom songs that are born in them—a blend of melodic balladry and impassioned garage rock that the Boston-based trio has perfected over the course of their five-album career.

Chris demos his songs on a **Tascam Porta-03** 1. His guitar of choice is a **Yamaha G-50** acoustic 2. "It's just a student model, but the nylon strings record really well," he notes. "I also have a **Gibson J-45**—which is great—but the Yamaha is better on the 4-track because it's softer and projects really well." When he plugs in, his first choice is a late-'60s **Gretsch Chet Atkins Country Gentleman** 3 that he once had to rescue from under a foot of water following a fire in his previous apartment. "This guitar has been on every Buffalo Tom record," he reveals. "It's a real classic. We don't tour with it, though, because it's too fragile and hard to tune."

The other electric he keeps on hand is an early-'70s **Fender Mustang** 4, "a pretty cheap guitar, but cool-looking," he observes. He usually plugs into his **Fender Blues Deluxe** 5 amp, "because it's got a little distortion thing built into it that I like." He's

BY DEV SHERLOCK

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also kept a **Fender Deluxe Reverb** 6 (with channel switching) that was in the fire with the Gretsch ("That's what all the marks are on it," he explains). Chris' mainstay bass is a '69 **Fender Precision**, while his pedals include a **DOD FX54** flanger 7 and a distortion pedal called **"The Attacker"** 8 ("Some cheap Japanese model," he offers). For percussion he uses a pair of **Latin Percussion Egg** shakers. Other extras include two **Hohner Marine Band Harmonicas** ("I like the blues harps," he notes). He captures everything with a single **Shure SM58** microphone 9, and monitors it on a pair of **Sony MDR-36** headphones 10. For playback, he uses a **Panasonic DS-20** boom box 11. Finally, his latest hobby is learning to play a **Kay** cello 12 that he bought in a second-hand store in Harvard Square. "I listen to a lot of classical. I also like a lot of Nick Drake stuff and there's always cello on that, so I decided to get one. But bowing things is much different from playing it like a bass. It's beautiful on the 4-track stuff.

"Sometimes the neighbors will come down, and I'll be like, 'Oh, I'm really sorry,' but they're pretty cool. They're into classical music, though, so if I'm trying to play the cello, it's pretty embarrassing. They probably think it's the cats."

At his house a few miles away, Buffalo Tom singer, guitarist and main songwriter Bill Janovitz lets out a chuckle. "Every song on Chris's last demo had a cello on it!" he guffaws. In Janovitz's meticulously soundproofed basement is Buffalo Tom's current rehearsal space (drummer Tom Maginnes keeps a kit here but also maintains a collection of exotic percussion at his home about an hour away). When it comes to songwriting, you'll find Bill strumming his **Guild JF-30** acoustic 1 either out on the porch or upstairs in his studio. "I don't come up here to write, necessarily," Janovitz says. "That's more a case of wherever the guitar is. If I'm playing and something triggers, then I'll go upstairs and record it."

His most important piece of gear is a **Sony WMD6-C Pro Walkman** 2. "I had other recorders that kept breaking or wearing out, so I finally decided to take the plunge and buy a professional one," he explains. "I use it for everything—in fact, it's way better than any cassette deck I have on my stereo or anything."

Janovitz's approach is simple. For jotting down ideas and rough demos, he sits down with his guitar and records live through a **Sony ECM-909A** stereo mike 3 into the Sony recorder. When it's time to make demos for the band, his setup is only slightly more complex: With a line out to the recorder, he runs his vocal and acoustic guitar through a **Tascam MO-6** mixer 4, with some reverb from an **Alesis Microverb** 5, "just to get a little space in there so that it's not completely dry." His other mikes include a "really old" **Shure SM58** and a **Realistic** unidirectional mike 6 that he bought "just because I [con't on page 74]

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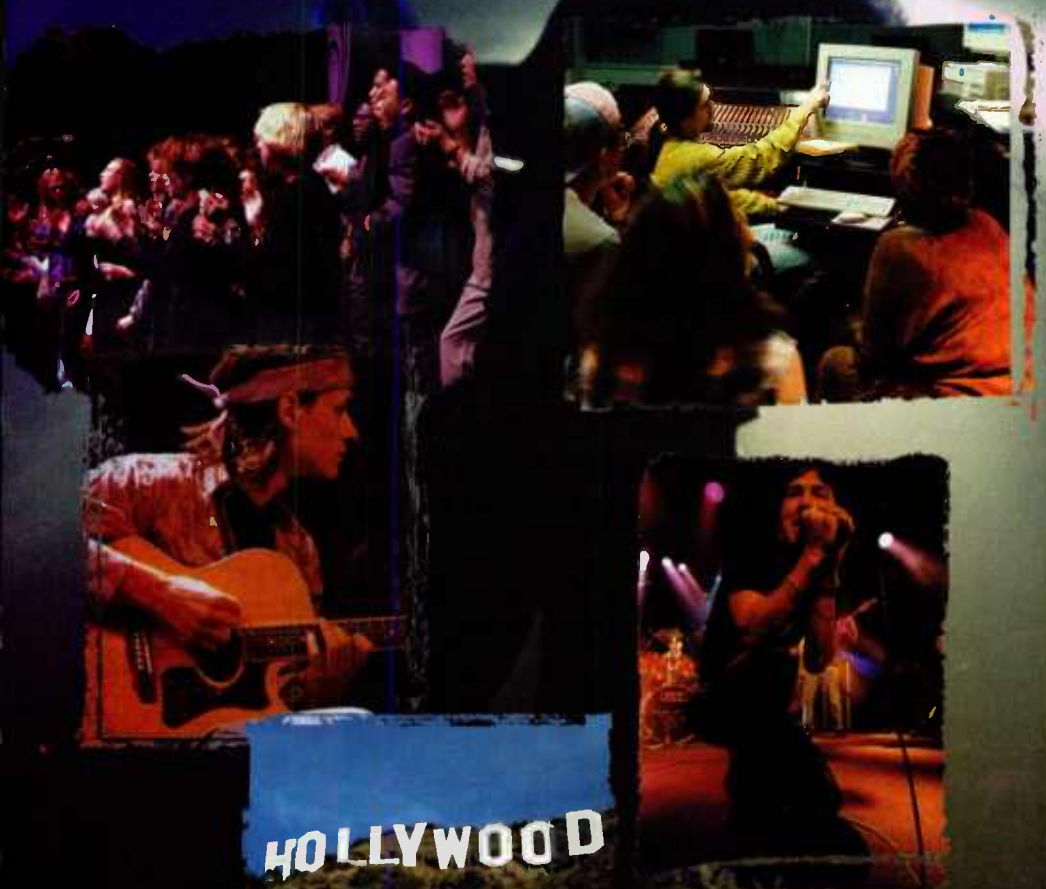

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Goodbye, CDs!

The next revolution in audio playback is coming.

by howard massey

Since this month's Editor's Pick takes a somewhat retrogressive slant (see page 64), it seems fitting that we take a peek here at a technology which probably won't even be around for another year or so—but, in its final form, will ultimately have an enormous impact on the way you'll be creating and experiencing music in the future.

This technology comes in the form of the Digital Versatile Disc (DVD for short). If a powerful consortium of manufacturers have their way, DVDs will soon make CD-ROMs, laser video discs, and even audio CDs obsolete (in fact, they may one day even place VCRs and all forms of computer media on the endangered list!). If you invested in large numbers of vinyl LPs, audio cassettes, or (God help you) 8-track cartridges before you gave in and re-purchased your entire musical inventory on CD a few years back, you may well be skeptical or downright pissed off at the idea of having yet another format to deal with. There's no doubt that the profit motive is a large factor in the development of DVD, but, just as audio CDs deliver much better sound than records or cassettes, DVDs also potentially represent a quantum leap forward in quality from CDs.

The history of the development of the DVD is also something of a primer in international corporate politics. Having conquered the fields of digital audio delivery (standard audio CD) and computer data storage and distribution (CD-ROM), various Japanese and European manufacturers began looking for new horizons a couple of years ago. The obvious Holy Grail was that of digital video. Despite the failure of the laser disc, there's no question that the video market is huge. What's more, given the limitations of the VHS format, consumers are seen as being ripe for a new medium. Initially, the biggest hurdle in creating such a product was the sheer size of the data. Although CDs and CD-ROMs have a sizable storage capacity (approximately 650 megabytes), this is not sufficient to hold more than a few minutes of digital video. This issue was eventually resolved to most people's satisfaction by the Motion Picture Experts Group (MPEG), which developed a standardized means (the latest rendition of which is known as MPEG-2) for compressing video data by omitting redundant or unnecessary bits so that much less storage capacity is required.

Prototype DVD players from Sony (above) and Toshiba (below).

With MPEG-2 in place, manufacturers began developing proposals for a second-generation CD that could store a full-length feature film and output the data in a speedy enough fashion to provide full-motion video. Having joined forces a decade ago in the development of the audio CD, industry giants Sony and Philips linked up again to launch an idea known as "MMCD" (with the "MM" standing for multimedia, natch). Determined not to be outgunned this time around, Toshiba formed their own strategic alliance with Hollywood moguls Time/Warner and introduced a competing proposal for "SD" ("super density"). Other manufacturers joined in the fray, most siding with the "SD" proposal, and for a while it looked like consumers were going to get stuck with two formats, in a ghostly echo of the VHS/Beta wars of the early '80s. But reason eventually prevailed in the unlikely form of computer monolith IBM, which acted as mediator, encouraging the adoption of a single format combining the best of both technologies to develop a medium that could both deliver digital video and also be used for—you guessed it—computer data storage.

The result of all this infighting is DVD (originally called Digital *Video* Disc but renamed in light of its consider-

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ably larger commercial possibilities). You can spare yourself the brain-numbing technical details by thinking of DVD as essentially a high-density CD (it's exactly the same diameter and just about the same thickness as a CD), but with smaller data "pits" so that more can be stored.

Unlike CDs, however, DVDs feature an optional second layer of data, and will be available in both single-sided and double-sided versions. The combination of the smaller pits and optional extra layer and side makes for much higher capacity—even a single-layer, single-sided DVD stores 4.7 gigabytes of data (about eight times the capacity of a CD), and a dual-layer DVD stores 8.5 gigabytes per side. This means that the dual-layer, double-sided DVD of the future will store a phenomenal 17 gigabytes (equivalent to 26 CDs or nearly 13,000 high-density floppy disks!). Of course, within this "blank slate," data can be stored in any number of different forms. Ultimately, there are plans to produce at least five different forms of DVD, which will probably come to market in this order: DVD-Video, DVD-ROM, DVD-Audio, DVD-WO (Write-Once recordable media), and DVD-RAM (write many times recordable media).

The first DVD players (from Toshiba, RCA, Pioneer, Philips, Sony, Hitachi, and others) are expected to be in stores this fall, with computer DVD-ROM drives to follow shortly thereafter. In order to provide "backward compatibility," these will all play back standard audio CDs and CD-ROMs—but they won't be able to read user-created CDs (those "burned" in a CD recorder), since the laser in DVD players operates at a different wavelength. This limitation should be eliminated soon with the imminent arrival of "CD-R2" recordable media, which will work with current CD and CD-ROM players as well as DVD players.

Of course, these players won't be of any use unless there are DVDs to play in them, and at the moment that's the fly in the ointment. While the original hope was that there would be a plethora of DVD-Video discs of popular feature films introduced at the same time as the first wave of players, Hollywood executives are now balking due to the issue of copy protection—after all, DVD will provide honest and less-than-honest folks alike with a nearly perfect first-generation clone of a multimillion-dollar production. Feverish talks are going on behind the scenes as we go to press, but the bottom line is that there's money to be made, so you can be fairly confident that some kind of solution will be arrived at—probably in time for the busy Christmas buying season.

The real area of interest to musicians, of course, lies in the as-yet-undefined DVD-Audio format, which is probably about a year away. The so-called "DVD Consortium" (a loose organization consisting of the top dozen or so DVD manufacturers) will ultimately determine specs, but expectations are that they'll rely heavily on the recommendations of the Japan Audio Society and, to a lesser degree, the U.S.-based Audio Engineering Society (which has set up a "task group"—read "committee"—to explore the potential of DVD-Audio). There's also an important lobbying group springing up in the European community called "Acoustic Renaissance for Audio" (ARA for short), and they've lobbied the Japan Audio Society successfully to abandon any plans to incorporate Dolby AC-3 surround sound (which uses "lossy" data compression, thus compromising audio integrity) into DVD-Audio.

The exciting thing is that, due to the increased data capacity of the medium, DVD-Audio has the potential to provide much higher fidelity sound than standard CD or DAT, which [*cont'd on page 74*]

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dvd

[*cont'd from page 72*] most people already regard as excellent. In fact, the "ceiling" established by CD and DAT (44.1 kHz sampling rate, 16-bit word length, two tracks) is pretty much the "floor" of the DVD. Like a CD, a DVD can deliver more than an hour's worth of music but at a much higher sampling rate (96 kHz is the most commonly bandied-about number), with a much longer bit length (20 or 24 bits), and more tracks (up to 8). Many of today's high-end digital multitrack recorders (such as Digidesign's ubiquitous Pro Tools) and digital mixing consoles (including the Yamaha 02R, our October '96 Editor's Pick) are capable of operating at 20 or 24 bits. In preparation for DVD, most professional and project studios are already recording at this higher bit length, and simply mixing down to DAT at 16 bits for mastering to CD. But products like the Rane PaqRat enable full 24-bit mixes to be created and stored on multiple tracks of a modular digital multitrack (such as the Alesis ADAT or Tascam DA-88) and also enhance the capabilities of MDMs so that they can record at 24 bits (albeit with half the tracks).

If you've never heard a 24-bit digital recording, you're in for a treat. The effect is subtle; it's not like the difference between vinyl and CD—more like the difference between a poorly maintained consumer tape recorder and a perfectly aligned professional tape deck. Words can't really do it justice, but there's extra "air" to the sound, extra definition (particularly of low-level signals), and much improved spatialization (that is, the stereo field appears widened and it's much easier to pick out the placement of individual sounds within that field). This is the way many recording artists are hearing their music in the studio these days, and the real magic of DVD-Audio is that it will one day enable you to hear music the same way in the comfort of your home.

Forewarned is forearmed: That great CD collection of yours will probably become as worthless as your old collection of vinyl LPs—but, on the upside, DVD will one day enable you to listen to digital audio at its very best.

You can find lots of information about DVD on the Web. Check out the following URLs:

Robert's Hi-Fi; perhaps the best DVD site on the Net
http://www.unik.no/%7Erobert/hifi/dvd/
E/Town DVD Central
http://etown.myriadagency.com/html/dvd_html/index.html
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dvd

[*cont'd from page 68*] didn't feel like dealing with my other Shures. I never do any overdubbing," he adds. "This is as sophisticated as I need to get."

His other guitar is an old **Yamaha SJ-8187,** which Janovitz has restrung using the high strings of a 12-string. "It's also called 'Nashville tuning'—it was used on 'Wild Horses,' for example—a very country, jangly type of thing. It's good for embellishment—it sounds almost harpsichord-y and cool to write on as well. My problem is, I pick up a guitar and automatically go to a C or G, and then I'm writing the same song over and over again. So it's cool to pick up this guitar, hit a G and have it sound completely different—it will often inspire different melodies. I find piano is good for that, too. I have no idea how to play it really, but I do play all of the piano parts on the record. That was the idea behind getting this"—a late-'60s **Wurlitzer** electric piano. "It's a typical, funky electric piano with tremolo," he adds. "It's becoming vintage, but I think you can still get one for cheap. I used to have a Fender Rhodes, but it wasn't the sound I wanted."

Janovitz plays the Wurlitzer through a **Sabre Reverb 1** amplifier. "That's not my writing—it's the original writing on there," he says. "It's really cool. I got it for $75 in a used shop. It has one 15 and a horn inside—really cool. Someone told me that Gibson made 'em, but I'm not sure if that's true. It makes a weird noise, kinda like a spaceship or something."

His headphones are **Sony NTR-D200s**, "probably one step above Walkman headphones." And he also has a portable GE recorder on hand, "purchased for $20 in a pawn shop in North Carolina during the last tour when the Sony crapped out—I just needed something in case I had an idea for a song." It's a pretty simple setup, but Janovitz has come a long way. He laughs, "Until a couple of years ago, I would record on a boom box in the bathroom."

Editor's Note: Just before this piece went to press, Bill Janovitz informed Musician *that he and the band had purchased a Mackie board, an Alesis ADAT, and a load of new Shure mikes for their basement rehearsal space. Welcome to the '90s, guys.*

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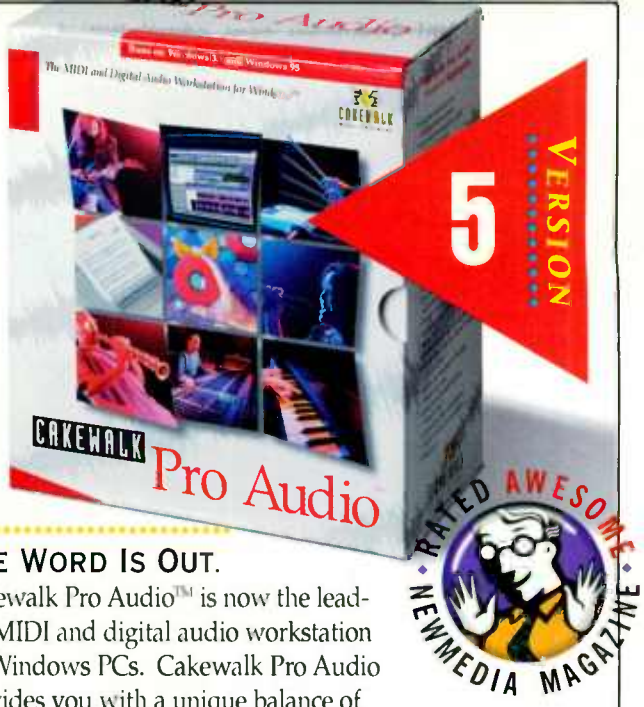

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[*cont'd from page 60*] virtually every setting: all-guitar groups, power trios, solo, nonets, duets with everything from hand percussion to trumpet. He's even got a longstanding collaboration with a tap dancer, former Count Basie sidekick Will Gaines, with whom he's made a soon-to-be-released video of improvised performances. "For me, it's all about playing something I'm not used to," the 65-year-old trailblazer explains. "I'm very attracted to unfamiliar situations. They provoke the kind of playing I'm interested in."

By way of context, Bailey is literally the man who wrote the textbook on improvisation—*Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*, first published by Penguin 20 years ago. In the '60s, he improvised with drummer Tony Oxley and other like-minded instrumentalists, and inaugurated the annual Company Week, in which he invites outstanding free players from around the world to participate in seven days of jam-a-thons. In the early '80s, he began working with New York avant lights John Zorn and Bill Laswell, associations he still continues.

Lately, the soft-spoken Londoner's been following two very current musical impulses: the drums-and-bass dancefloor music called jungle, and post-hardcore punk rock. *Saisoro* (Tzadik) finds Bailey literally flailing his trusty Gibson hollowbody on tunes like the furious "Odangdoh," producing a metal-on-metal clangor as well as the usual skitterings and plectral glossolalia that are part of his vocabulary. Accompanied by Japanese thrashers the Ruins, he gnashes out rhythmic counterpoint, trilling on strings until they become something akin to the slurred blowing of a saxophone. And his more recent collaboration with Birmingham, England, jungle DJ Ninj finds him plunking clusters of notes and seemingly random-shuffle phrases over deep drum-and-bass tracks.

"I stumbled upon the jungle thing quite by accident," Bailey explains. "I found it on a pirate radio station, and discovered it was very useful for practicing with. I was doing a series of records with Bill Laswell, and he found out I was listening to this stuff, so we had Ninj lay a tape down, and I went to New York to Laswell's studio and played over that."

What's fascinating about Bailey's collaborations with Ninj and the Ruins isn't how Bailey's playing changed to fit the dancefloor- and hardcore-derived styles. It didn't. Bailey sounds just like himself, all hopscotch intervals and tones that stick up spikier than John Lydon's hair. The interest lies in how the strength of Bailey's adherence to free-form playing—his determination to preserve his unique instrumental identity—changed his surroundings. The jungle rhythms, for example, take on a fresh context as Bailey's refusal to play grooves or adhere to metronomic slavery pulls them away from the dance floor. Bailey's playing

guitar talk

Catherine Wheel's ROB DICKINSON and BRIAN FUTTER surf the soundwaves with simple setups. They both play Eric Clapton model Fender Stratocasters, but with more conventional, thinner Strat necks bolted on. They string them with Ernie Ball .010s, or, occasionally, SITs. Dickinson slams his signal through a Bad Stone phase shifter and Boss tremolo/pan, digital delay, and overdrive/distortion pedals before it hits a Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier and a Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier Tremo-Verb model. What you hear comes out of two Vintage Rectifier 4x12s. Futter prefers the brighter Marshall JCM 900 100-watt heads with Marshall 4x12s. Occasionally he'll zap on a touch of Boss' VB-2 vibrato pedal or Metal Zone stompbox.

REEVES GABRELS plays the ultra-versatile Parker Fly Deluxe guitar. When he's running in acoustic mode (with the piezo pickup on), its signal goes to a Fishman acoustic amp and the house P.A. When he's blasting away, what he's playing first hits a Fred Christiani custom-built effects switcher ("The Switcheroo") containing a Dunlop rackmount wah, a Fulltone Soul Bender, a Fulltone Ultimate Octave, a Univox Unitron, an MXR Dynacomp, a Fulltone DejaVibe, a Prescription Electronics Experience pedal, and a Zoom 9050. From there, the signal slams a Mesa/Boogie Tri-Axis preamp, then a DigiTech IPS harmonizer and Eventide Harmonizer (both are in the Tri-Axis effects loop). Next up: a Mesa/Boogie 2.90 stereo power amp, two Marshall SE100 speaker emulators (which go to the house P.A.) and two Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier 4x12s. One more curveball: Gabrels' signal comes out of the recording out on the Tri-Axis and heads for a Lexicon Jam Man looping delay (32 seconds, if you're counting), which feeds a Roland JC-120 amp and allows him to create discrete effects loops on the fly. There's also a Yamaha MFC-2 MIDI pedal to control the Zoom, DigiTech, and Eventide; a second MFC regulates the Tri-Axis' DigiTech and Eventide effects mix. Plus on/off switches for the Jam Man and Switcheroo. Oh yeah, his strings are Ernie Ball Hybrid Slinkies, .009 through .046. Whew!

The Archers of Loaf prefer guitars with single-coil pickups, for greater feedback potential. They eschew effects, although ERIC BACHMANN does put a volume pedal between his Fender Twin Reverb and either a Reuben Cox custom, G&L Legacy or Univox Strat-copy guitar. ERIC JOHNSON's amp of choice is a Mesa/Boogie Mark IV, sparked to life by either his '64 Fender Mustang, '64 London Burns, or Reuben Cox custom. He uses a tremolo pedal and Heavy Metal pedal by Boss. And both Erics use mainly .011-gauge D'Addario strings.

You won't find any guitar on Gastr del Sol's latest CD, *The Harp Factory on Lake Street*. In fact, that album's primary instrument is an Otari MX 50/50 eight-track deck. But when JIM O'ROURKE plugs in one of his homemade instruments, it's usually strung with D'Addario .010s and run straight into the P.A. Lately, however, he's been romancing some "acoustic John Fahey-style fingerpicking" on his '70s Max Kimmell. DAVID GRUBBS plays it straighter, with a Schecter Traditional—also with D'Addario .010s—and a 100-watt Hiwatt head powering a Bag End 2x12 cabinet.

DEREK BAILEY's played his Gibson ES 175 for 35 years; that's his favorite. He usually uses .012 -gauge strings, and prefers Gibson but also uses D'Addarios. His acoustic is a custom-made Hägenbacher, fitted with medium-gauge Martin strings. "It reminds me of the Epiphone Emperor," he says.

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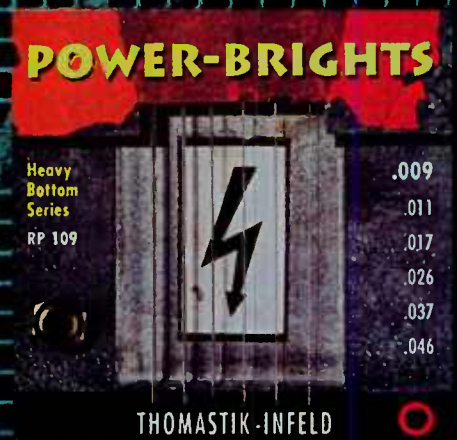

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TRADITION MEETS TECHNOLOGY

Gastr Del Sol's Jim O'Rourke: "I wanted to eradicate any trace of the guitar in my guitar playing."

pushes the envelope so completely that whatever the envelope is—jazz, rock, dance—it conforms to his contours.

Of course, not all players have the economic or creative freedom to express themselves in such a direct and insistent manner. "I wonder about these records," Bailey muses. "I expect the jungle record won't be very popular with the jungle people or with people who like improvised music. So I guess it should displease just about everybody." He laughs.

"You have to be prepared to take some risks with your musical dignity," he advises. "Dignity and music have produced some grotesque situations. You have only to look at the classical music world to perceive that."

David Grubbs and Jim O'Rourke of quiet-rock outfit **Gastr Del Sol** have recently done that, albeit within classical's new-music suburbs. Their latest CD, the nearly guitar-less *The Harp Factory on Lake Street* (Table of the Elements), is an orchestral composition performed by 10 musicians that combines studio performances with tape-assembled sequences. Like their earlier albums *Crookt, Crackt, or Fly* and *Mirror Repair* (both on Drag City), the music is all pastels—save for the discord generated by crumbling walls of horns. But even in the most abrasive sequences, there's a kind of low-volume aesthetic that makes the 25-minute piece more evocative than threatening.

Chicagoans Grubbs and O'Rourke challenge the notions of what rock can be by exploiting what it usually isn't: thoughtful, subtly voiced, free of riffs or power chords, unfettered by the demand for hooks and repeating choruses. It's not what you'd expect from the union of a veteran avant-gardist and a former art-punk rocker. Yet it's found an audience in both the American and European rock and new-music undergrounds.

"What I'm interested in is how you contextualize music," offers O'Rourke. "Rock bands tend to take the gestures of the music for granted, without considering the context. Power chords take on a significance of their own, certain movements onstage convey meanings they may or may not intend, simply because they've been so thoroughly exploited they come with a lot of baggage. I wanted the form we used to be a kind of communication, rather than have ideas communicated by context or references. So we exaggerated the form by doing things like writing a one-minute song with a five-minute coda."

When O'Rourke met Grubbs, he was well into his own musical direction. "I had gotten turned on to people like Derek Bailey and Stockhausen when I was 11; I never bothered learning things like AC/DC riffs," O'Rourke says.


GASTR DEL SOL

"When David and I met, I was dealing mostly with magnetics. I'd set up a system of objects and pickups to create certain polar patterns or tonal functions. I wanted to eradicate any trace of the guitar in my guitar playing. I would do concerts without ever touching the guitar. I would use magnets or put tomato slicers on top of the pickups, and would get this Ligeti-like cloud of sound. I even started to play it by remote control just before Gastr del Sol, and on our first record it was pretty much me on tabletop and David handling more of the 'guitar' parts."

Before Gastr Del Sol, Grubbs had been a founder of legendary indie-rock group Squirrel Bait. When the band split, he formed Bastro with O'Rourke. And when Bastro's drummer left, they both said to hell with it. Rather than replace the sticksman, they crossed a creative bridge. "Initially it was strange for me to hear just the electric guitars and bass together," says Grubbs. "Since we no longer had to cut through the volume level of the drum kit, a new range of dynamics became available to us. Because Jim's background is in composing and improvising, that range is where he started; but I grew up in rock bands. For me, I had to strip what I'd known away."

What's grown in its place is a complex songwriting architecture, and—at least for Grubbs and his Hiwatt amp—a brave new world. "I enjoy rock as sounds and as color, so if you think of it that way,

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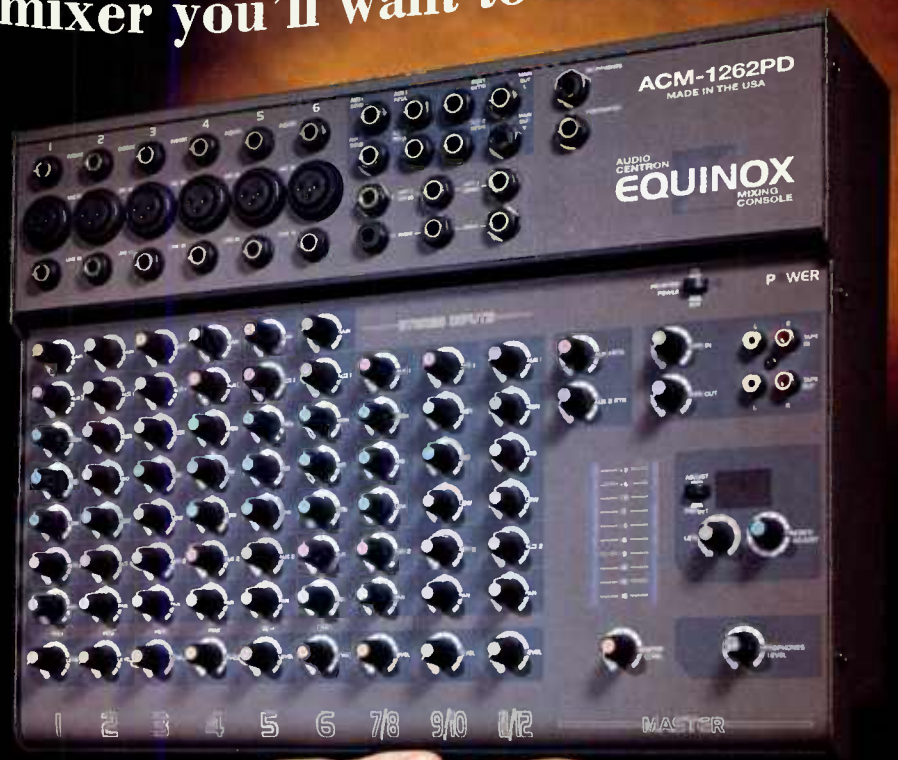

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Archers of Loaf's Eric Bachmann: "Power chords do come in handy, just not for a whole record. Yawn!"

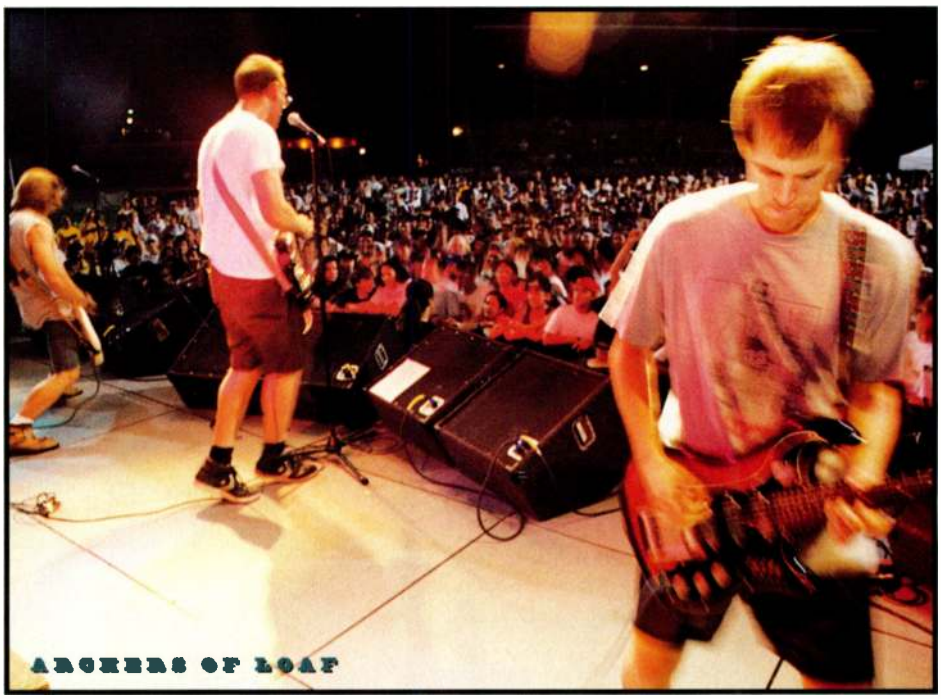
Gastr del Sol is a rock band," he explains. "To keep it fresh, I tend to look toward structure. I write on instruments other than guitar as much as possible, to avoid any habits that are too deeply ingrained. And I like to let the lyrics dictate where the music is going to go. I found it helps the music from becoming redundant, because I tend to write the lyrics in a linear fashion, without regard for choruses or hooks. I want the text to be able to stand alone, and not have its direction dictated by something like the mechanics of rock."

On the earthier but no less edgy end of the underground rock scale are North Carolina's **Archers of Loaf**. Gastr del Sol shy away from rock's signifiers; the Archers gleefully wallow in them. They play rock songs with a capital "R"—full of hooks, choruses, and shamelessly catchy guitar riffs. But on their five CDs for the indie label Alias (including the new *All the Nation's Airports*), there's also plenty of room for weirdness. The guitars of Eric Johnson (no relation to this issue's cover boy) and Eric Bachmann tryst at dissonant intervals, their riffs entering songs like a drunk pulling onto the freeway. Their instruments' voices are distinct; that's partly the result of Bachmann's preference for Fender Twin Reverbs and Johnson's predilection for Mesa/ Boogies, partly a quest for sonic survival in a very loud band.

"If you look at the roots of our songs, they are pop songs," says Bachmann, who does most of the Archers' writing. "They are I-IV-V chords—simple, basic stuff. But at the same time I am trying to get away from all the shit I hear on radio. I've put my mind to not playing these big, heavy Bush-like rock riffs.

"It's not like I'm rebelling against commercial rock," he continues. "I just don't like the way that stuff sounds. So much more interesting stuff can be done on the guitar besides blasting out power chords... although power chords do come in handy. Just not for a whole record. Yawn!"

Instead, the Archers of Loaf offer tunes like "Underachievers March and Fight Song," from their 1995 manifesto *Vee Vee*. It's based on a crooked spine of a lick, twined with a bass-and-guitars texture that's reminiscent of Sonic Youth's deliciously off-kilter soundscapes. "To be honest," says Bachmann, "it comes from a trumpet march. A little B to G thing. I put a cigarette lighter under the strings, to make a new bridge, and pluck away—simple and easy."



Johnson claims there's nothing calculated about his and Bachmann's guitar voicings, either. "I always thought the reason that happened was because when we first started playing together, it was so loud in this little room that everything was bleeding together. So I just started playing higher up to get some separation. I think we all realized that it sounded kind of cool. And ever since then, almost every song works that way.

"I guess we could have just turned down," says Johnson, "but volume opens up the harmonics. And you can definitely get more feedback noise quicker. Just turn around and face the amp and you're gonna pick up something cool. I'll mute the strings so I can get feedback on just one certain note. And I use single-coil pickups in my guitars, because I find they feed back in more control than humbuckers. For me, anyway."

And that's what's crucial—whatever works for each individual guitarist, whatever opens up the creative channels and pumps fresh life, fresh ideas, fresh sounds into the playing. Whether it's hearing new beats, like Derek Bailey did; juggling form and function, like Gastr del Sol; exploring arrangements and their effect on scope *á la* Catherine Wheel; using voicings and harmony to rise above the generic post-punk din, like the Archers of Loaf; or finding allure in the marriage of variable-speed motors and monster technique, like Reeves Gabrels.

"Ultimately," says the Archers' Bachmann, "if any of this guitar stuff helps a song, then it's great. That's the goal—to find cool parts that are gonna make the songs better."

When John Hiatt and his band go acoustic, they go by way of Fishman.

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Worried Man Blues

Pearl Jam

No Code

(Epic)

If Descartes correctly nutshelled human self-awareness with "I think, therefore I am," chances are good that too many of us probably think too much. Eddie Vedder—the mysterious, primal-throated powerhouse for Seattle's Pearl Jam—is just such a fellow. And the more he thinks, the more his mystery seems to deepen. Via visceral Anne Sexton-ish lyrics couched in classy, emotive melodies, he uses his craft like the Philosopher's Stone, and struggles to transmute everyday life occurrences into some golden greater Truths. In lesser hands, this attempt would appear trite and cloying, but Vedder—especially on Pearl Jam's new No Code tablet—makes each scribbled thought sound sincere.

The main feeling a listener gets from this Brendan O'Brien-produced disc is warmth, and an empathic sense that Vedder is really a lot like you—he just worries more, is all. Fortunately, when he ventures out on that "Why am I here" tightrope, he's got one hell of a support group backing—and musically shaping—his performance, in equally sincere co-guitarists Stone Gossard and Mike McCready and bassist Jeff Ament. Ament's hushed, watery vibrations urge Vedder along on "Present Tense," as he watches anxious friends thumb-twiddle toward the millennium and notes, "Makes much more sense to live in the present tense." The gentle cymbal-brushed jazz-blues "Sometimes," which opens the record, finds him curled in a humble, reflective ball, as "myself, my small self". Across "Hail, Hail," a big guns-blazing Pearl Jam assault, he howls like a wounded werewolf: "I don't wanna think, I wanna feel!/ How do I feel?" And as the tribal tom-toms of "In My Tree" thunder around him, he describes his ideal seclusion—"Up here in my tree/Newspapers matter not to me."

Vedder even shelves the vibrato, so prevalent in Pearl Jam's hard-rocking past, for Doors-school spoken word (on "I'm Open")and two gorgeous acoustic ballads ("Off He Goes" and the lullabye "Around The Bend"). Still, he's most intriguing when he's staring hard in the mirror, as on "Who You Are," a stunning cowbell 'n' drum processional with quasi-gospel backing vocals and a decidedly spiritual aura. Turning his attention to interpersonal relationships (and instrumentally echoing new Pearl Jam pal Neil Young), he arrives at "Smile," as close to a swooning love song as he's written. In the track's monstrous chorus comes a fleeting taste of inner peace. "I miss you already/I miss you always," Vedder practically hurrahs. Only then, as the bridge kicks in, does he hastily murmur his disclaimer. "This is how I feel."

Or to put it another way: Never put Descartes before de chorus. —*Tom Lanham*

R.E.M.

New Adventures in Hi-Fi
(Warner Bros.)

Fifteen years and 34 albums on, it must become harder to keep yourself amused, even for a band as resourceful as R.E.M. Their latest offers a promising strategy for staying fresh, featuring 14 songs generated at various studios, concerts, soundchecks, and dressing rooms during the quartet's last U.S. tour. While that may have been fun for the lads, it hasn't altered the outcome much. Thanks to the group's instinctive aversion to rough edges, and Michael Stipe's momentous gestures, the ironically titled *New Adventures in Hi-Fi* is another interesting but not great R.E.M. set. The invigorating, if polite, rockers and sodden, sometimes haunting, ballads add up to a familiar hour-plus that begs for editing.

R.E.M.'s greatest achievement remains the way they function as an actual band, not a celebrity vehicle, leavening Stipe's grand pretensions with the players' savvy pop moves. Chugging furiously, "The Wake-Up Bomb" mixes a wonderfully sardonic take on star egotism—"I practice my T. Rex moves and make a scene," he sneers—and fat, juicy guitar chords from Peter Buck and guest Nathan December. When Stipe succumbs to excessive heaviness on "Low Desert," the others counter with a gritty Neil Young groove. Tracks like the lilting "Electrolite," where versatile Mike Mills provides down-home piano for Stipe's tender hillbilly, and the delicate instrumental "Zither" have the kind of appealing glow that comes only from true group effort. Go team!

If there's no wrenching masterpiece equal to "Losing My Religion" (which is admittedly expecting a lot), blame Stipe's weakness for oblique language. While the passions of "Binky the Doormat" and "So Fast, So Numb" burn through the haze, the tangled poetry often obscures rather than enlightens, suggesting he's uneasy dealing in common emotions. To his credit, Stipe at least acknowledges the hazard of being "blue in the face from navel-gazing" on the rueful "Bittersweet Me."

Here's some suggestions for varying the routine next time: a collection of offbeat covers—"MacArthur Park" would test Stipe's skill for self-parody—a less typical producer (Dr. Dre?), or a collection of genuinely unvarnished first takes, without the polish that dilutes *New Adventures*. For now, thrill to "The Wake-Up Bomb" and hope for the best.—***Jon Young***

Lisa Germano

Excerpts from a Love Circus
(4AD)

Lisa Germano is less about raging fire than curling wisps of smoke—sensuous with ambiguity, hinting at a dangerous aftermath. She rarely raises her voice much above a gruff whisper, and doesn't need no stinking grungy guitars to deliver the goods: songs of penetrating artfulness, with a dry, kind wit that keeps her darkest thoughts from seeming like the popular art of moping.

Germano has had a brilliant, weird career on the fringes, from a long gig as John Cougar Mellencamp's fiddler to an unhappily still-born second solo album, *Happiness*, which was reborn in its full creative glory on 4AD. Then came the funkily crafted *Geek the Girl*, full of spooky introspection and chilling insight about a world in the dark. Now she's making some of the more oddly entrancing music in pop. On *Excerpts from a Love Circus*, as the title suggests, love is a drug, and a drag, as Germano dwells on tales of love gone or going sour.

Like the songs themselves, the production textures are haunting and inviting, and always with a deceptive twist. This is an album best heard on a Discman, to

Suzanne Vega Battles Burl Ives In *Nine Objects of Desire*

On an unseasonably hot Hollywood day, there is a flurry of activity within the cooled confines of Studio B at the Sunset Sound Factory. Tracks are nearly completed for *Nine Objects of Desire*, the first Suzanne Vega album in four years, and with a playback for studio brass scheduled tomorrow, producer Mitchell Froom (Vega's husband) and engineer Tchad Blake are working hard to polish their rough mixes. In the midst of the purposeful chaos, Vega is a figure of poise and resolute calm.

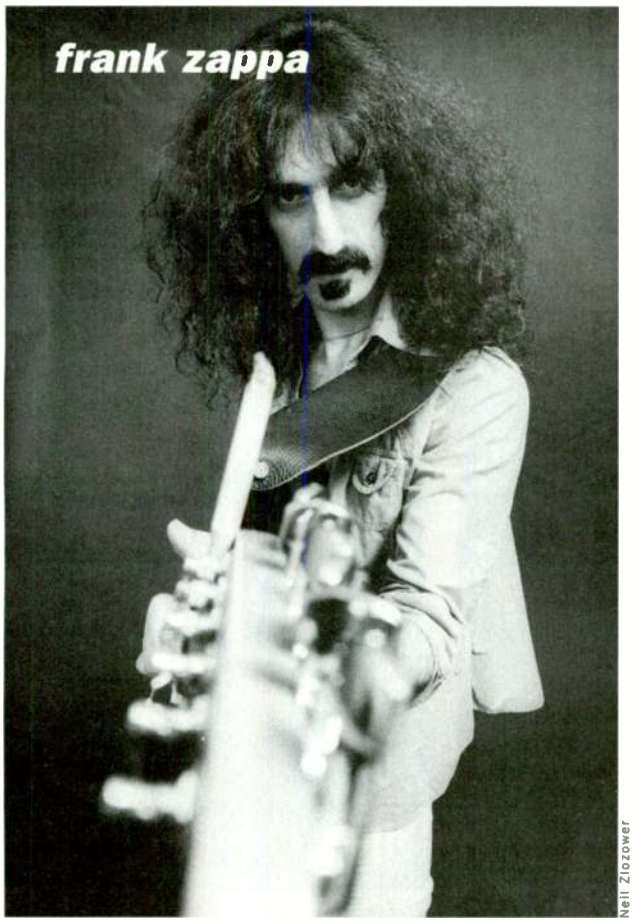
"I had such a hard time writing these songs that I'm just grateful to get anything done," she explains, taking a break from what she hopes will be her final vocal track. "It's hard to know what to make of the music this time, because we worked really fast. I was finishing lyrics in the studio, trying to hold off Mitchell and Tchad: 'Give me ten minutes and you'll have a song with better rhymes!'"

If the rough tracks are any indication, Vega's incisive poetry is in fine form, and her gracefully sensual vocals are well set atop the varied sonic pastiches that Froom and Blake have created. "Headshots" is a piece of nearly perfect pop that finds Vega closing the book on a romance of old, while the gentle melody and insistent rhythms in "Stockings" describe an odd friendship tested by nylons and gin and tonics. On most of the tunes, the precision rock drumming of Pete Thomas combines with the looser world-music percussion work of Jerry Marotta to create wide engaging grooves, while the arrangements contain everything from reggae bass loops to Indian strings to an amplified Vega exhalation.

"It's hard not to get into sounds when you're working with Mitchell and Tchad," says Vega. "They're always coming up with imaginative ideas, and if they fit the song, we use them. If I listen back and say, 'What's that horrible noise?', it's not going to stay in. They argue for twisting the song, and I argue for keeping it more straightforward. I think that's called creative tension," she laughs.

Vega hopes the result of that tension, due out in September, will get a more positive response than the one it prompted from her newest fan: two-year-old daughter Ruby. "She likes 'Caramel,' and she thinks that 'Birthday,' which was written for her, is okay. But, frankly, she enjoys Burl Ives more than anything we've been working on lately."

—***Chuck Crisafulli***



Neil Zlozower

catch the detail work. Bowed cymbals, understated drum rumbles, pre-digital keyboards, and lazily articulated violin parts contribute to the palette of Germano's artfolk, along with friendly ambient noises on the periphery. The vocal track gets aptly scruffed up on the smirking love song "I Love a Snot." The rocker's anti-anthem "Victoria's Secret" takes on sexist archetypes of desirable body types, while "Singing to the Birds" proves a clever paean to the loneliness of inspiration, amidst a violinistic swirl.

With its bounty of infectious melodies and carefully balanced layers of sound and meaning, *Excerpts from a Love Circus* quickly gets under your skin. Then it stays there.—***Josef Woodard***

Frank Zappa

Läther

(Rykodisc)

Frank Zappa intended *Läther* to be his magnum opus and farewell release for Warner Bros. Records, but the label nixed the ambitious 1977 four-LP boxed set. The ensuing FZ vs. WB legal battle ended when most of *Läther* (enigmatically pronounced "leather") turned up on four later albums and Zappa was let out of "contractual bondage," as he was wont to describe it. But now *Läther* is back; like some weird piñata that runs in reverse, it sucked its scattered goodies back into its engorged belly.

Skeptics who figure this three-disc set to be a mere resequencing of old material will be ambushed by its never-released gems and unexpected alternate versions, plus four bonus cuts to boot. (And boots were the only place fans heard these lost nuggets—a situation atypically facilitated by the bootleg-hating FZ. He played *Läther* over the airwaves, giving the people what Warner wouldn't.)

Its tracks, recorded from 1974 to 1977, are bridged in the high Zappa style of short sonic salvos and surrealistically nutty dialog. Aside from the set's rarities, it's the often jarring, new (in fact old) juxtaposition of familiar material that recasts it: The uplifting pomp of opening cut "Regyptian Strut" now segues into the twitchy neuroses of orchestral piece "Naval Aviation in Art?" Similarly, the ominous guitar-inferno of "Filthy Habits" now leads into the funky Faust-foolery of "Titties & Beer," starring Terry Bozzio as the Old Deluder (whose contract Frank is happy to sign, having seen worse).

Throughout, FZ's less-than-genteel, rocking burlesques like "Broken Hearts Are For Assholes" and "Punky's Whips" sit side by side with such ferocious, genre-smashing instrumentals as "RDNZL" and "The Purple Lagoon." Together again for the first time, the eight (original vinyl) sides of *Läther* comprise a snazzy, all-embracing showcase for the more than eight sides of Frank Zappa.—***Drew Wheeler***

Al Anderson

Pay Before You Pump

(Imprint)

Al Anderson's two decades with NRBQ make loose-limbed swinging natural expectation. But this solo disc, on a fledgling indie label from the growling guitarist's current stomping grounds in Nashville, is a date that trades bopping for rocking. After 12 go-rounds I'm here to say that his third solo album is not only his most confident, but his most bodacious, too. This is Al in the stompdown mode.

Anderson was always the most pragmatic member of the Q, so *Pump*'s relatively orthodox stance isn't a big surprise. The rows it hoes have been dug by the masters, be they Merle Travis (d'ja get that Bear Family box yet?), Johnny Little John, Prof Longhair or Elvisimo himself. But Al's forte isn't thinking up new styles, it's playing the shit out of the ones he loves, from the pithy take on rock 'n' roll's genesis ("It Came From The South") to the backseat raunch of "That Thing." Sonically, the red zone is where his band conducts its business.

Al sounds more natural pushing twangabilly than power pop, so the formality of his John Hiatt collaboration is an odd way to open the disc. He does share Hiatt's knack for plaintive soul, though: The Memphis saunter of "A Change is Going to Do Me Good" is close to Hiatt's own "Stood Up" in feeling and stance. (It's a coming-of-age tune that's "about" romance, but also contextualizes Al's split from NRBQ.) There is a more practical side to Anderson's music these days—the string of country hits he's co-written the last few years shows that his knack for hooks is a valuable commercial commodity.

But the fervor behind every tune on *Pay Before You Pump* confirms that his talent for rallying the troops is undiminished. At the disc's end, an engineer, producer, or somebody squawks, "You nailed it that time, you Connecticut hillbilly." He ain't wrong. Make sure to give the downstairs neighbors a couple tickets to the movies before you put on *Pump*—your floor and their ceiling are bound to take a beating when it gets cranked all the way.—***Jim Macnie***

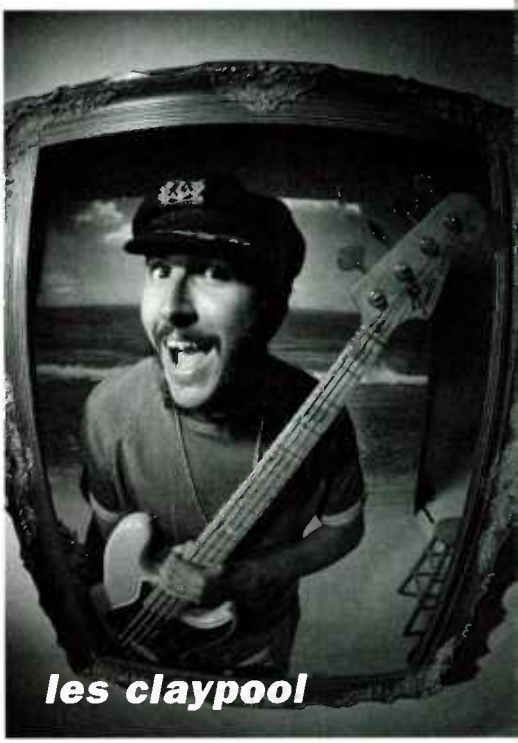
Les Claypool and the Holy Mackerel

Highball with the Devil

(Interscope)

What exactly constitutes the appeal of Les Claypool and his band Primus? Certainly not their timeless melodies; they haven't written any. Not Claypool's voice, either; his singing is continually engaged in a stormy relationship with proper pitch while redefining the word "nasal," and when he chooses to speak a song rather than sing it (which is often), his backwoods-hick persona, charming at first, eventually grates on the ears. The words he sings/speaks—generally sketches of slightly twisted, occasionally misanthropic characters—can amuse, but that's not enough to explain the band's rabid following. No, Primus' main appeal lies in their spare power-trio sound and in the thundering grooves they (led by Claypool's monster bass) create. It's grounded in funk, but a type of funk played by white men who've learned a lot of technical tricks and can't help but show it.

The same goes for *Highball with the Devil*, which is nominally a Claypool side project, but sounds almost exactly like Primus to these ears. The drumming (by either Les or Jay Lane) is a bit less interesting, and the guitar work (by Charlie Hunter, Joe Gore and Limbomaniacs' Mark Haggard) is slightly tastier, but these are minor points. Claypool's pinched-nose vocals, loopy lyrics, and wonderfully overbearing, elephantine basslines are central here. The guitar/bass/drum format and busy yet somehow spacious sound are familiar (the album was recorded at Claypool's house, as was Primus' last, *Tales from the Punchbowl*). And the slammin' grooves count way more than the threadbare tunes.



Jay Blakesberg

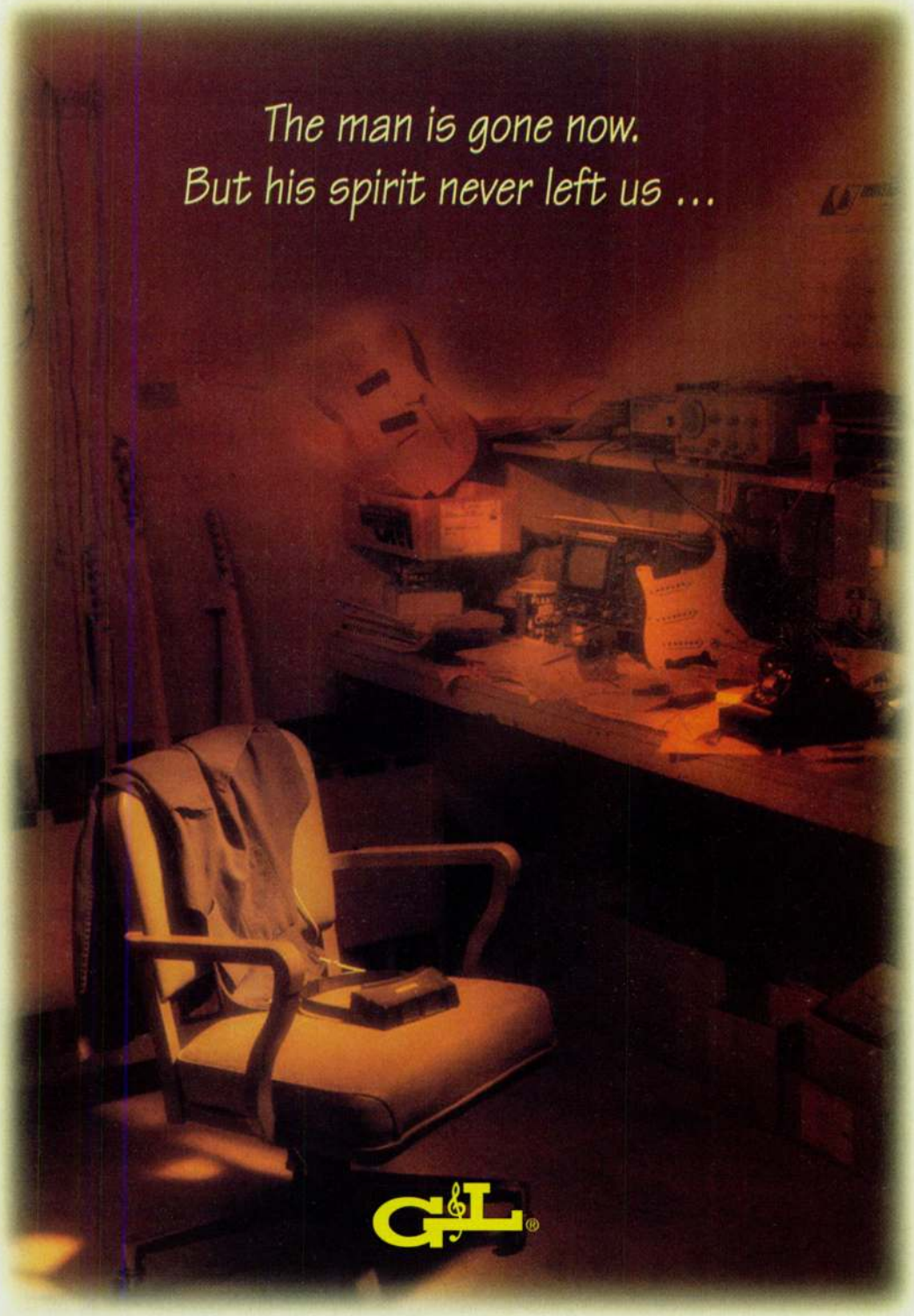
The best groove of all comes more than halfway through the album, on "The Awakening." It's an instrumental, bass and drums only, and the drums are pretty rudimentary, giving Claypool plenty of room to spew. That he does, popping and sliding all the way. For once, the emphasis is squarely where it belongs, on Les's idiosyncratic but sterling playing. And for once, the appeal is clear.—***Mac Randall***

Baby Dodds

Baby Dodds

(American Music Records)

Warren "Baby" Dodds was the most renowned of the early New Orleans drummers. He perfected his craft in marching bands with Bunk Johnson and riverboat ensembles with Fate Marable, and came to fame during the earliest days of recorded



The G&L factory in Fullerton, California seems like a throwback to a simpler and romantic past. The people at G&L – his people – still do things the way he taught them. These Californians with love, dedication and great skill slowly and painstakingly give shape, form and voice to the G&L instruments. There are no computer-driven robots popping out guitars with uniformity but no soul. At G&L, people make instruments just like the founder wanted them made. Guitars made this way have a life – a vitality in them that responds to the player like no other.

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chuck's cuts

by charles m. young

Sex Pistols

Filthy Lucre Live (Virgin)

I can't be snide about this reprise of *Never Mind the Bollocks* for two reasons: (1) Unlike Iggy Pop, the dangerous punk rocker and shoe salesman, they haven't sold any of their songs to Nike for jingles; and (1) they meant too much to me twenty years ago. To abuse the Pistols would be to abuse my Inner Child, who still has a safety pin in his cheek. Jones, Cook, and Matlock sound as devastating as they ever did. Johnny Rotten can't snarl like he used to, but what the hell, I can't either. He compensates by adding some whines and trills and this irritating, non-interrogative rising inflection at the end of too many lines—all habits he picked up in PiL. So producer Chris Thomas put him low in the mix, where almost all punk vocalists belong (except the young Johnny Rotten), struggling to yowl over the roar of the guitar. If they fall short of truly sounding like the Sex Pistols, at least they have a lot of company.

Woody Mann

Stairwell Serenade (Acoustic Music Records)

Gifted as a teacher and player of fingerstyle guitar, Mann here makes a convincing case for himself as a composer and improviser as well. Sometimes he goes for a new agey, abstract expressionism, and sometimes he goes for neoclassical concrete expressionism, and still other times he goes for variations on country blues themes. He doesn't experiment radically like Preston Reed or Michael Hedges, but he nails very complicated stuff so cleanly that optimists will grab their guitars, thinking, "Hey, that's humanly possible," while pessimists will get drunk and spread dark rumors about moral turpitude.

Social Distortion

White Light, White Heat, White Trash (Sony 550)

I used to think these guys were long on energy and short on inspiration. Either their inspiration has caught up with them or I was in a bad mood the last time I listened. Without being overly earnest, they infuse their songs with drama and demand to be taken seriously. In other words, there's nothing postmodern about them. They sing what they mean and they mean what they sing and they play chord progressions that sound good because they sound good. None of this I'm-deep-because-I'm-out-of-tune shit. Under all that growl and gravel, it's easy to miss the considerable melody that Mike Ness squeezes out of his five-note range.

Joyce Lindorff

Rossignolo by Alessandro Poglietti (Titanic)

Intended as a travelog around Europe in the late seventeenth century, this extended work for solo harpsichord has some glorious melodic passages, alternating between birdcall imitations and more traditional counterpoint with a light let's-polka-with-the-peasants feel. I like it because Lindorff is an ace on her instrument—call her the Stevie Ray Vaughan of chamber music—and because solo instrumentals help me write. Although more limited in its emotional range than the piano or guitar, the harpsichord optimally induces a state of alert contemplation, so you're aware of reality while cool stuff can float up from your unconscious. Lindorff finds that point and keeps you there.

ZZ Top

Rhythmeen (RCA)

Billy Gibbons' guitar is so low and sour that on certain notes it sounds like a bassoon or bass saxophone. Why does that make you want to shake your posterior? God only knows. Combine that with Frank Beard's outrageously sweaty beats and Dusty Hill's anchoring bass groove, and you've got a ZZ Top album that will rightly please the fans, even if they don't win converts à la "Legs" and "Sharp Dressed Man." Several guitar solos inspire awe and wonder and scrunched-up facial muscles. Riffs range from honorable acceptability to very cool but short of ultimate transcendence. Gibbons' salacious rasp still makes me laugh.

Paul Rishell & Annie Raines

I Want You To Know (Tone-Cool/Rounder)

Acoustic country blues played by a duo who sound joyous and thrilled that they woke up this morning. No drums on most cuts, but you'll still want to dance, which is how this music was originally intended. Raines plays a sassy harmonica, sings with a Maria Muldaur quaver of vulnerability. Rishell can play all the requisite tasty stuff up the guitar neck but mostly holds the songs together by riffing on and around the bass lines. Even when he's playing a cliché, he brings such enthusiasm and groove to the song that it sounds fresh. Ah, attitude—it's still everything. Their version of "I Shall Not Be Moved" has a stark power that ought to inspire a whole new civil rights movement.

Avail

4 A.M. Friday (Lookout)

If you like your punk rock heavy on the anthems and light on the brutal humor, these guys got the goods. Lyrics fall more in the category of lacerating introversion than politically aware extroversion, but the music propels you completely out of yourself and into the moshpit where you'll find your buddies chanting along as they beat the crap out of you. Fast and rhythmically interesting, which is pretty rare.

Howard Zinn

Failure to Quit: Reflections of an Optimistic Historian (Radio Free Maine)

I collect tapes of lectures by Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky like some people collect Grateful Dead concerts, and I get most of them from Radio Free Maine (207-622-6629). Recorded last June at a meeting of Peace Action in New Hampshire, this video or audio tape shows Zinn in top form. Author of *The People's History of the United States*, an astounding account of mass murder and exploitation excavated from our national memory hole, he has a comedian's sense of persona and timing, coming across as a pacifist/anarchist Columbo, absent-mindedly slipping in the devastating truth as he mocks the prospect of getting depressed about it all. Highly recommended for staying awake on your next long drive to a gig.

Jay Blakesberg

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jazz with Joe "King" Oliver and Louis Armstrong. Originally released on a series of 10" LPs by drummer/composer/jazz historian Bill Russell (a fixture at Preservation Hall in the Crescent City), *Baby Dodds* is an oral history of the man's musical philosophy, his equipment, techniques, and his relation to New Orleans jazz.

There are some fascinating aural demonstrations here, in which Dodds reveals a remarkably musical approach to tuning and tonality on his rims, toms, cymbals, cowbells, wood block, and tam-tam. These topics are further expanded in polyphonic ensemble performances with Johnson, Marable, and George Lewis. "High Society" and "Tiger Rag" are a particular joy, as Dodds orchestrates the breaks with a variety of rim shots, tonal accents, and his famous press roll. Then there are the drummer's soliloquies, holding forth on techniques and attitudes which should be branded on every drummer's backside: "I think if the average young drummer today were to feel that his part is to help the other fellow, not make him play himself to death, or not make him play something that he don't want to play. . .without a drummer that knows how to help, it's no band." Amen. (American Music, 1206 Decatur Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70116; 504-525-1776.)—***Chip Stern***

Milton Brown and the Musical Brownies

The Complete Recordings of the Father of Western Swing 1932-1937

(Texas Rose)

This five-CD, 118-track collection makes a compelling case for Western swing pioneer Milton Brown as a stylistic synthesist whose importance is probably equal to that of Bill Monroe or Elvis Presley. Brown's recording career as a leader spanned less than four years; in 1936, he died of pneumonia at the age of 32 following a car crash in Texas. But in that brief time he defined the conventions of Western swing with his band, which he formed after a brief association with Fort Worth's Light Crust Doughboys, whose members also included the young Bob Wills. It was Wills who went on to become the great star of the genre, but Brown was the music's pathfinder.

The Musical Brownies quickly became dancehall and radio luminaries in Texas, and for good reason. Their repertoire fused a wildly eclectic mix of popular tunes from the New York stage, vaudeville, and even minstrel shows (including Emmett Miller's "Right or Wrong," later appropriated by Wills), with hot jazz, blues, and hokum numbers. The band essayed "The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi" and "Love in Bloom" on the one hand, and "Garbage Man Blues" and "Sitting On Top of the World" on the other. About the only material in short supply was cowboy songs (those would come later).

This diverse music was performed by a group that excelled at jazzy improvisation. Brown, who was himself a warm, bluesy vocalist, assembled a lineup that features the Joe Venuti-styled fiddle work of Cliff Bruner and Cecil Brower, the stomping piano playing of Fred "Papa" Calhoun, and, perhaps most importantly, the manic, amply distorted steel guitar of Bob Dunn, one of the first amplified instrumentalists to record extensively. Their rounds of "take-offs" set the format for all the Western swing pickers to follow.

Texas Rose's exhaustive set, which also includes later recordings by the Brownies under the direction of Milton's brother Derwood, has been dubbed from old 78s, but with exemplary care. Cary Ginell, whose exquisitely researched University of Illinois Press book about Brown is a mandatory companion to the set, provides the notes for the accompanying 40-page booklet. All told, *The Complete Recordings* gives overdue recognition to a Lone Star visionary who set the compass for an entire branch of country and western music. (Origin Jazz Library, P.O. Box 85, Santa Monica, CA 90406)—***Chris Morris***

Marshall Crenshaw

Miracle of Science

(Razor & Tie)

Co-writing last fall's Gin Blossoms hit must have given Crenshaw a needed jolt of confidence, 'cause his latest is his most assured and consistently enjoyable outing since 1985's *Downtown*. All of Crenshaw's best qualities—melodious songwriting, dry wit, shrewd choice of covers (here ranging from Grant Hart's "Twenty-Five Forty-One" to the surprisingly durable chestnut "The In Crowd") and a resourceful vocal style that transcends his reedy timbre—are in evidence, along with a new twist: terrific guitar playing on the instrumental "Theme from 'Flaregun.'" I've no idea whether that's a "real" theme, but if it's not, somebody in TV land ought to find a show to match it.—***Mark Rowland***

Arvo Pärt

Litany

(ECM New Series)

The music of Estonian composer Arvo Pärt is a music of hushes, long sustains, and stark harmonies that sound both medieval and stunningly modern. The sense of mystical awe that his pieces conjure blends well with their frequently religious subtext. *Litany*'s title piece, performed by the vocal quartet the Hilliard Ensemble, along with the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra and Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, takes its text from 24 prayers—one

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for each hour of the day—composed by Saint John Chrysostum, the 4th-century hermit who also wrote the Russian Orthodox liturgy (though the words are sung in English). The Hilliards, as always, lend a gorgeously austere tone to the proceedings, and the choir's singing (especially a loud flourish nearly halfway through) pierces the heart.

In typical Pärt style, the music builds slowly, leading us to expect a grand finale that never quite arrives. Instead, we're left with a gradual dying away, like the high harmonics of a struck bell fading in the air. The album is rounded off with two pieces (*Psalom* and *Trisagion*) performed by the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra; although the Hilliards and the choir are missing, the music is just as ghostly and just as captivating.

If you aren't familiar with Pärt's work, you should be—he is arguably the greatest of all living composers—and *Litany* is as fine a place to begin the discovery as any.**—Mac Randall**

Love Nut

Bastards of Melody

(Interscope)

Love Nut's punchy power-pop songs are the aural equivalent of SweeTarts—crunchy bursts of flavorful hook, catchy chorus and wild guitar, short and sweet, and they're gone. Time for another. The two-chord, Kinks-ish "I'm A Loser" has a classic snotty-teen-anthem lyric ("I'm a loser/I'm nothing.../stop complaining/every hour/I'm never gonna be what you want") and a very cool solo. Guitarist Max Mueller pulls off great lines with total abandon, and often calls to mind George Harrison, especially when playing slide on the Badfinger-like "Please." With songwriter Andy Bopp's Robin Zander-like voice, Love Nut sounds like a post-punk Cheap Trick on "Touch," or Green-Day-meets-the-Beatles on "She Won't Do Me." *Bastards of Melody* could almost be a '60s singles collection; its 10 songs go by in less than half an hour, and that includes the cover of the Lemon Pipers' "Green Tambourine."

—Baker Rorick

Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Jerry Douglas

Bourbon & Rosewater

(Water Lily Acoustics)

Best known for his previous collaboration on Water Lily with Ry Cooder, the terrific Hindustani guitarist V.M. Bhatt here joins forces with Jerry Douglas on dobro and Edgar Meyer on standup bass; the results are a surprisingly seamless meld of sounds and psyches. One part of what makes the teaming work is that the sound of Bhatt's mohan vina—a kind of arched-top guitar with four drone and twelve sympathetic strings—is similar in its tone and sustain capabilities to Douglas's dobro. Another is Bhatt's apparent feeling for countryish melodies—his composition "Gypsies From Rajasthan" bears a startling resemblance to "Those Were The Days." Douglas and Meyer, as sophisticated and technically adroit a pair of Nashvillians as you'll find in popular music, hold up their end of the conversation too, which culminates in the delicate Delta blues of Douglas's "Mississippi Mud."**—Mark Rowland**

Steve Wynn

Melting in the Dark

(Zero Hour/Universal)

Don't know whose idea it was to hook ex-Dream Syndicate frontman Wynn up with Boston-based rockers Come, but whoever it was, they should be heartily commended—ol' Steve has rarely sounded better. Right from the first volcanic beat of "Why," rage is on the top of the agenda. Brutal drums and raunchy guitars dominate; even the quieter songs sound as if they might explode at any second. It all comes to a head on the closing title track, which alternates between fragmented feedback wail and trash-pop wall-of-sludge. Both the song and the album as a

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whole aim for a full cranial clobbering, and both succeed gloriously.—**Mac Randall**

George Jones
I Lived To Tell It All
(MCA)

Drunkenness, casual sex, guilt, regret: Fitting themes all for George Jones. After a couple of duet albums, Jones returns to true crying-in-his-beer form on this outing, which follows an autobiography of the same name. Although Jones claims to have (mostly) gotten off the sauce, he doesn't mind singing about it and does so with aplomb on "Honky Tonk Song," "Hundred Proof Memories," and "I'll Give You Something To Drink About," supported by a who's who of top Nashville session pickers. The album reaches its peak—or emotional depth—with a dead-on interpretation of Red Lane's "I Must Have Done Something Bad," as Jones ends the song on an almost painful note, wrenching every ounce of self-pity from the lyric. Aw, man, better make it a double. Jones' upper register isn't always what it used to be but he makes up for it with unmatched delivery and tonality.
—**Ray Waddell**

new signing

[cont'd from page 18] to cut an album. Titled *Killed for Less*, it came out on Revelation early in '94. By this time, word about the band was starting to spread. Early in '95 they signed a publishing deal with EMI; with that, the buzz was on, and Sense Field was being courted by some heavy hitters. "We didn't even want a manager until we started all these meetings," remembers singer Jonathan Bunch. "But now we knew that we needed somebody with a clear head and an idea of what goes on behind the scenes. So we chose Steve Martin."

Martin, whose day job is to head the P.R. firm Nasty Little Man, found the band "anxious" for guidance. "They were being hit up not just by Warner Bros. but by Columbia, Hollywood, Capitol—basically, everybody. All of a sudden these people were telling them, 'Don't stick with Revelation! Come with us and put out eight records!' It was overwhelming, but through it all they insisted on adhering to their loyalty to Revelation as well."

Putting these interests together kept Martin busy through around six months of meetings with Cooper and representatives from Warner Bros., which emerged early on as the band's preferred label. "Warners just wanted to buy *Building*," Martin recalls. "We had to go back and forth, telling them that the band didn't want to take it away from Revelation entirely. There were issues to deal with: royalty overrides, term of release, sales cap, when could Warner Bros. legitimately join in on promoting the band."

Did the discussions get acrimonious? Martin pauses, then says, "Yeah, there was a certain amount of that. But I don't think it's fair for Revelation or Warner Bros. to complain too much. Warners got to start the band from a really great developmental standpoint. They're learning Sense Field's strengths and weaknesses while the band is touring. They're getting Soundscan reports on the album even before they're releasing it. And Revelation is going to have this album for three months and two other Sense Field albums in their catalog forever. They're in a win/win situation as well."

As for the band, they've pulled through their contract wars with values intact. Says guitarist Rodney Sellars, "We've learned that we really have to trust each other. I don't even know if we should"—nervous laughter here—"because we don't really know what we're doing. We just know what feels right." —**Robert L. Doerschuk**

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Musician's Best Unsigned Band competition began several months ago with some 3,000 entries. These entries (2-song cassettes) were scrutinized by dozens of music writers and editors before our all-star panel (pictured below) listened to them and chose the twelve Best Unsigned Bands you see here. We all heard a lot of great music along the way, but only twelve could were going to make the cut. So please join us in congratulating this year's winners, and watch for more about these bands in future issues of Musician.

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Steve Winwood


Stone Gossard


Juliana Hatfield


Jimmy Jam


Pat Metheny


Adrian Belew


Matthew Sweet


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SEAN DRISCOLL GROUP • Boston, MA


WITHOUT RUTH • Nashville, TN


ANTIHERO • Northampton, MA

AGAZINE'S

BAND COMPETITION

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THE SHADE • Greenwood, IN

SHADES • Vestal, NY

AHMAD ALAADEEN
Overland Park, KS

COOLIDGE • New York, NY

NOSFERATU • Plainfield, IL

NANCY MIDDLETON BAND • Durham, NC

NOT SHOWN: SHABAZZ 3 • Dallas, TX (photo unavailable at press time)

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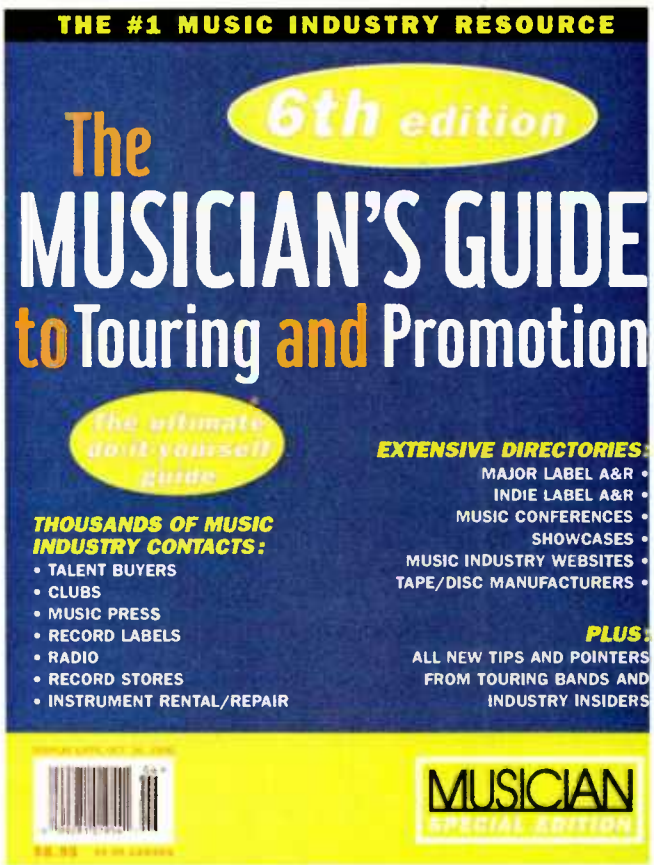

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dealer index

You Can Now Buy Musician in More Stores Near You!

MUSICIAN keeps on growing!! In the last few months we have added over 700 new dealers that sell MUSICIAN and/or MUSICIAN's Guide to Touring and Promotion. This month we are proud to announce the addition of the following musical instrument and record stores. We invite you to check out these quality stores for the next issues of MUSICIAN and other great products. This is of course just a partial list, so keep looking for this page in future issues for more new stores in your area as we continue to expand.

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product index

Here's our product guide which lists the equipment and page number where the players talk about the gear they use. Feel free to call or fax the manufacturers listed below for specific info on what the best players play.

ALESIS, 3630 Holdredge Ave., Los Angeles, CA, 90016, (310) 558-4530: QS8, **61**; Microverb, **68**

BAG END, P.O. Box 488, Barrington, IL, 60011, (708) 382-4550: 2X12 cabinet, **76**

BOGNER, 5112 Lankershim Blvd., N. Hollywood, CA, 91601, (818) 763-5200: 100-watt Ecstasy, **27**

BOSS, 7200 Dominion Cir., Los Angeles, CA, 90040, (213) 685-5141: DS-1, chorus, digital delay, **27**; tremolo/pan, digital delay, overdrive/distortion, VB-2, Metal Zone, tremolo, Heavy Metal, **76**

CAKEWALK, 44 Pleasant St., Box 760, Watertown, MA, 02272, (617) 926-2480: Pro Audio 5.0, **61**

CHANDLER GUITARS, 370 Lang Rd., Burlingame, CA, 94010, (415) 342-1490: Tube Driver, stereo delay, **27**

CLAVIA, C/O ARMADILLO ENTERPRISES, 923 McMullen Booth Rd., Clearwater, FL, 34619, (813) 796-8868: ddrum 4, 61

D'ADDARIO, 595 Smith St., Farmingdale, NY, 11735, (516) 391-5400: strings, **27**; strings, **76**

DEAN MARKLEY, 3350 Scott Blvd., Ste 29, Santa Clara, CA, 95051, (409) 988-2456: Blue Steel strings, **27**

DIGIDESIGN, 1360 Willow Rd., Ste. 101, Menlo Park, CA, 94025, (800) 333-2137: Pro Tools, **16**; Pro Tools, **74**

DIGITECH/DOD, 8760 South Sandy Pkwy., Sandy, UT, 84070, (801) 566-8919: Whammy pedal, **27**; FX54, **67**; IPS harmonizer, **76**

DIMARZIO, 1388 Richmond Terr., Staten Island, NY, 10310, (718) 981-9286: HS-2, FRED and PAF Pro pickups, Evolution pickups, **27**

DUNLOP, P.O. Box 846, Benicia, CA, 94510, (800) 722-3434: Crybaby wah, **27**; rackmount wah, **76**; MXR Digital Delay, **27**; MXR Dynacomp, **76**

EPIPHONE, 1050 Acorn Dr., Ste. A, Nashville, TN, 37210, (615) 871-4500: Emperor, **76**

ERNIE BALL, 151 Suburban Rd., P.O. Box 4117, San Luis Opispo, CA, 93403, (800) 543-2255: strings, **76**

ESP, 7561 Sunset Blvd., #202, Hollywood, CA. 90046, (213) 969-0877: Ron Wood model, **62**

EVENTIDE, 1 Alsan Way, Little Ferry, NJ, 07643, (201) 641-1200: Harmonizer, **76**

FENDER, 7975 N. Hayden Rd., Scottsdale, AZ, 85258, (602) 596-9690: Broadcaster, Telecaster, '57 Stratocaster, **8**; '54, '57, '61, and '65 Stratocasters, Bass VI, Vibrolux, Twin Reverb, Vibroverb, Showman cabinet, Deluxe Reverb, Telecaster, **27**; Clapton-model Stratocaster, **54**, **76**; 8-Bender Telecaster, American Standard Telecaster, **82**; '70s Mustang, Blues Deluxe, **67**; Deluxe Reverb, '69 Precision, **68**; Twin Reverb, '64 Mustang, **76**

FISHMAN TRANSDUCERS, 340-D Fordham Rd., Wilmington, MA, 01887-2113, (508) 988-9199: acoustic amp, **76**

FULLTONE, 3815 Beethoven St., Los Angeles, CA, 90066, (310) 397-3456: Soul Bender, Ultimate Octave, DejaVibe, **76**

GHS, 2813 Wilber Ave., P.O. Box 136, Battle Creek, MI, 49015, (800) 388-4447: strings, **27**

GIBSON, 641 Massman Dr., Nashville, TN, 37210, (800) 283-7135: ES-335, Les Paul, **8**; '59 and '65 ES-335, '66 Flying V, Les Paul Junior, **27**; SmartWood Les Paul, **60**; ES-175, strings, **76**

GRETSCH, P.O. Box 2468, Savannah, GA, 31402, (912) 748-1101: Nashville, **27**; Chet Atkins Country Gentleman, 67

GUILD, 7975 N. Hayden Rd., Scottsdale, AZ, 85258, (602) 596-9690: JF-30, **68**

HI-WATT, 2-14-26 Shimoochiai Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan, (339) 508141: 100-watt head, **76**; amp, **76**

HOHNER, 10223 Sycamore Dr., Ashland, VA, 23005, (804) 550-2700: Marine Band harmonica, **68**

HOSHINO/IBANEZ, 1726 Winchester Rd., Bensalem, PA, 19020-0086, (800) 669-8262: JS-1, Jem-777, **27**

JOEMEEK C/O PMI, 23773 Madison St., Torrance, CA, 90505, (310) 373-9129: Studio Channel, **60**

KURZWEIL, 13336 Alondra Blvd., Cerritos, CA, 90703-2245, (310) 926-3200: K2000, **16**

LACE SENSORS, 5561 Engineer Dr., Huntington Beach, CA, 92649, (714) 898-2776: Lace Sensor pickups, **54**

LEXICON, 100 Beaver St., Waltham, MA, 02154-8425, (617) 736-0300: PCM-70, 27; Jam Man, **76**

MACKIE, 16220 Wood-Red Rd. NE, Woodinville, WA, 98072, (206) 487-4333: board, **74**

MARSHALL AMPLIFIERS, 89 Frost St., Westbury, NY, 11590, (516) 333-9100: 50- and 100-watt amps, 4X12 cabinet, '66 cabinet, 6100, **27**; amp, **54**; JCM 900, 4X12 cabinets, SE100, **76**

MARTIN, 510 Sycamore St., Nazareth, PA. 18064, (610) 759-2837: strings, **76**

MATCHLESS, 9830 Alburtis Ave., Santa Fe Springs, CA, 90670, (310) 801-4840: combo amp, **8**

MESA ENGINEERING, 1317 Ross St., Petaluma, CA, 94954, (707) 778-6565: Dual Rectifier, **54**, Dual Rectifier Tremo-Verb, Vintage Rectifier 4X12, Tri-Axis, 2.90 stereo power amp, Dual Recrtifier 4X12, Mark IV, **76**

OPCODE, 3950 Fabian Way, Palo Alto, CA, 94303, (415) 856-3333: Vision, **16**

OTARI, 378 Vintage Park Dr., Foster City, CA, 94404, (415) 341-5900: MX 50/50, **76**

PANASONIC, 1 Panasonic Way, Secaucus, NJ, 07094, (201) 348-7000: DS-20, **68**

PARKER, 89 Frost St., Westbury, NY, 11590, (516) 333-9100: Fly Deluxe, **76**

PRO CO SOUND, 135 E Kalamazoo Ave., Kalamazoo, MI, 49007, (616) 388-9675: RAT pedal, **56**

RANE CORP., 10802 47th Ave. W, Mukilteo, WA, 98275, (206) 355-6000: PaqRat, **74**

ROLAND, 7200 Dominion Cir., Los Angeles, CA, 90040, (213) 685-5141: W-30, **16**; SDE-3000, **27**; JC-120, **76**

SCHECTER GUITAR RESEARCH, 6920 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA, 90038, (213) 851-5230: Traditional, **76**

SHURE BROTHERS, 222 Hartrey Ave., Evanston, IL, 60202, (800) 257-4873: SM58, mikes, **68**

SIT STRING COMPANY, 815 South Broadway, Akron, OH, 44311, (800) 258-2211: strings, **76**

SONY ELECTRONICS, 1 Sony Dr., Park Ridge, NJ, 07656, (201) 222-7669: MDR-36, WMD6-C Pro Walkman, ECM-909A, 68; DVD, 70; NTR-200, **74**

SOUNDTRACS, 575 Underhill Blvd., Syosset, NY, 11791, (516) 364-2244: console, **16**

STRINGBENDER, 44201 Caspar Orchard Rd., Box 76, Caspar, CA, 95420, (707) 964-9538: Double Bender, **62**

TAKAMINE GUITARS, P.O. Box 507, Bloomfield, CT, 06002, (203) 243-7941: classical guitar, **27**

TASCAM, 7733 Telegraph Road, Montebello, CA, 90640, (213) 726-0303: Portastudio, 16; Porta-03, 67; MO-6, 68; DA-88, **74**

TC ELECTRONICS, 705-A Lakefield Road, Westlake Village, CA, 91361, (805) 373-1828: 2290 digital delay, 1210 spatial expander, **27**

THD ELECTRONICS, 5429 Russell Ave. NW, Seattle, WA, 98107, (206) 789-5500: Hot Plate, **27**

TOSHIBA, 1251 Sixth Ave., Ste. 4100, New York, NY, 10020, (212) 596-0600: DVD, **70**

TRACE ELLIOTT, P.O. Box 507, Bloomfield, CT, 06002-0507, (800) 647-2244: Speed Twin, **60**

VOX, 89 Frost St., Westbury, NY, 11590, (800) 645-3188: Crybaby wah, **27**

YAMAHA, 6600 Orangethrope Blvd., Buena Park, CA, 90622, (714) 522-9011: G-50, **67**; 02R, SJ-8187, **74**; MFC-2, **76**

ZOOM, 575 Underhill Blvd., Syosset, NY, 11791, (516) 364-2244: 9050, **76**

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ATTACK OF THE KILLER SHIRTS

A Musician's Guide to Roadside Resources

I was watching a late-night talk show, on which a megastar was bemoaning the rigors of the road—something to do with his "duty to the people." Of course, he did have a nutritionist, two wardrobe consultants, and advance copies of all the latest first-run videos to help make his peripatetic ordeal more bearable.

I felt like kicking him in his surgically lifted butt cheeks.

For the rest of us, out here on the $500-vs.-80% circuit, reality is a bit more harsh. "Nutrition" usually means breakfast at Denny's, lunch at Whadda Helluva Burger, tepid fajitas for dinner at T. J. McFuddpucker O'Reilly's, and a late-night gastronomic rematch at Denny's, featuring greasy eggs and the scintillating company of drunken line-dancers in the next booth. And "wardrobe" comes from a biannual visit to the 50%-off table at the outlet store next to the motel, which leaves you looking like a mix of L. L.s Bean and Cool J.

After the daily routine of check-out, drive, check-in, soundcheck, dinner, shower, gig, tear-down, hunt down drunken club owner to get paid, breakfast, and call the wife, when it comes to video diversions most of us will settle for *Baretta* reruns or the occasional $8.95 splurge on *Forrest Hump* or an R-rated tidbit on the hotel's "spice channel." So while the headliners are deciding whether to have vegetarian Thai or lactose-free Mexican before the gig, here are my tips for making life in the van with four other guys a little more tolerable.

NUTRITION: Along two of the bleakest, Stuckey's-infested stretches of concrete purgatory in the South lie two of this circuit's best-kept eatin' secrets. **Grable's Rib Shack** [(912) 742-8484) is in downtown Macon, Georgia, about a mile off of I75. The tradition begun 15 years ago by C. W. Kendall, a childhood friend of Little Richard's, continues today under the auspices of the current owner, Sherman Grable. This may be the last true, down-home, cinder-block-and-picnic-bench, BBQ-and-soul-food joints left. Grable's serves every part of the hog, from ribs to feet to chitlins. They also cook the sweetest collard greens and the best macaroni and cheese your taste buds will ever slow-dance with. The chicken is transcendent, and the extra-extra hot sauce is an out-of-body experience.

Across the state and just a little south, at Exit 10 on I95 in Darien, Georgia, lies the best thing ever to happen to a shrimp. In 60 years **Archie's Restaurant** [(912) 437-4363] has hand-breaded and fried over 240 tons of the tasty critters. It hasn't changed a bit in the 30 years I've been going there: It's still simple and fast, with portions huge enough to satisfy the hungriest roadie. Archie Jr. is a congenial host, and don't worry if the locals look at you funny—they're probably just trying to figure out whether they saw you on TNN last week.

WARDROBE: Unless you're young, angry, and androgynous, nothing beats a Hawaiian shirt. Problem is, the ones at Goodwill are always too small, and those $300 L.A. originals are hard to justify when you need new tires. Fortunately, the folks at **Paradise on a Hangar** [(800) 921-3050) offer an incredible array of Aloha shirts at reasonable prices, with lots of coconuts, hula girls, and classic floral patterns all the way up to 4X for Uncle Sal in Patterson. Great catalog too—check out #22, *The Map of the Islands*. Hunka, hunka!

VIDEO: Finally, when the time finally comes to pull your eyes off the road and plant 'em on a TV screen, call **Video Vault** [(800) VAULT-66] in Alexandria, Virginia. From Russ Meyer to Ed Wood, from classics like *Shanty Tramp* to *Please Don't Eat My Mother*, if it's strange, grotesque, sleazy, tasteless, and/or obscure, you'll find it among their 25,000+ titles. With a major credit card, you can join their rental club, and they'll ship it to you anywhere on the road in the continental U.S. Start with *Spider Baby* or—if you dare—*The Honeymoon Killers*.

Take it from me, your Prince of the Passing Lane: These tips will ease your burden on the road, at minimal cost. You'll probably even be able to pay off the truck and start saving for that butt lift.

-Rev. Billy C. Wirtz

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