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The Cure



April 1981
70p \$2

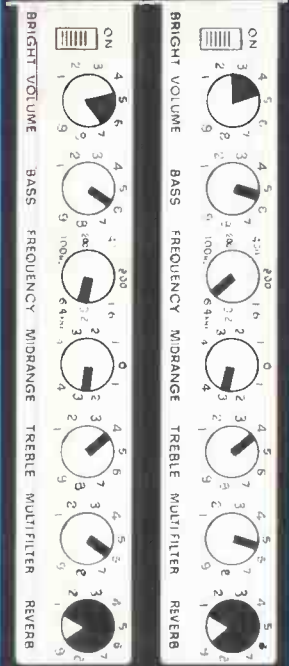
On test: Gibson Sonex guitar; Lab Series L5 combo; Moog Opus keyboard; Echo FX footpedals. Second-hand index on drums. Vox vintage guitars. Frankfurt and Anaheim show reports. +more

OF



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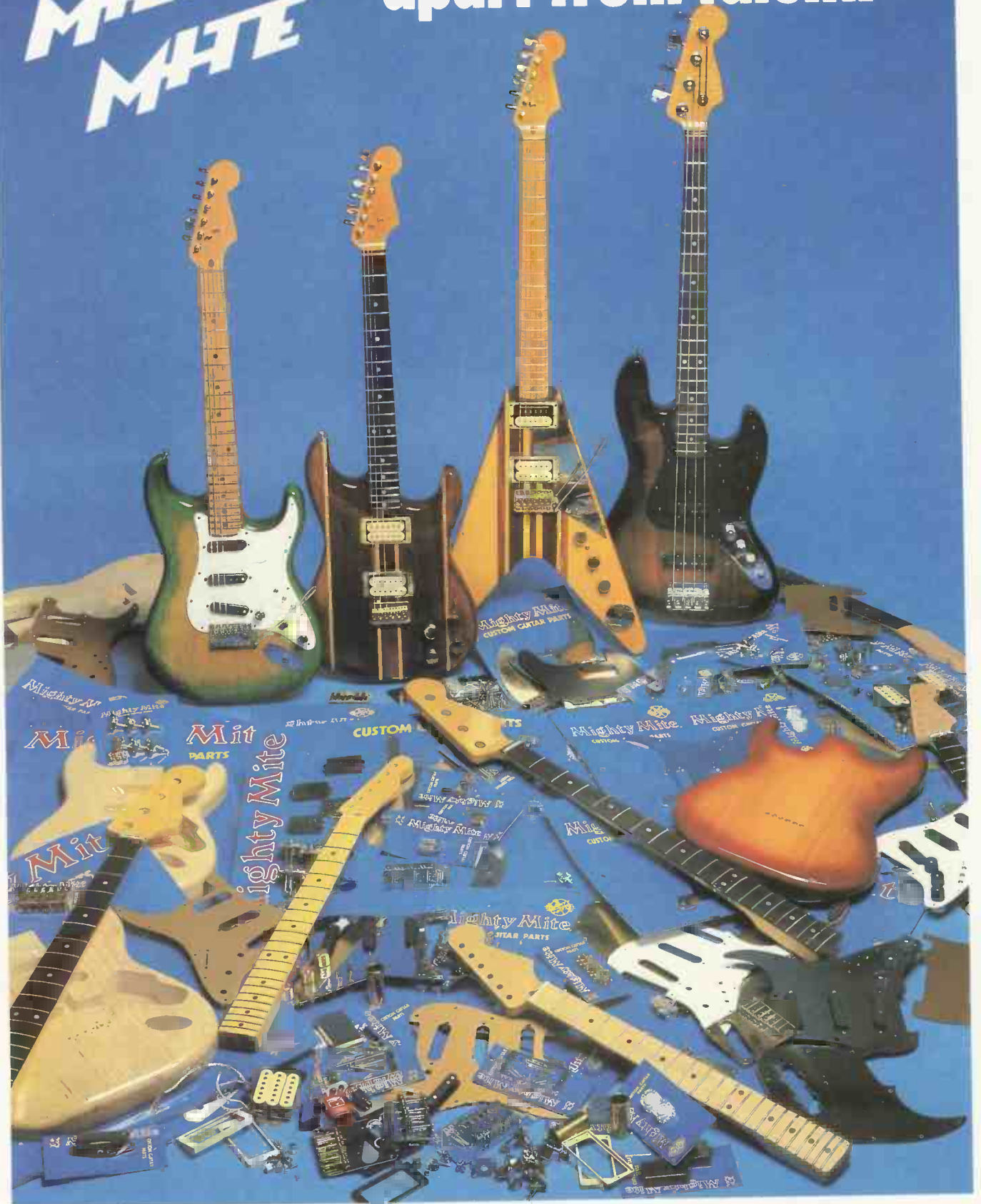
Four



**Also inside: Rainbow
Yellow Magic Orchestra · Japan
After The Fire · David Vorhaus
Rough Trade · News & Reviews**

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Fresh from the pages of medical journals like Titbits, an expert medical practitioner examines the delicate undertones that enable you to get the best out of fourplay, and aid the entertainment quotient of your life. Yes! men. It's Gang of Four.

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Ritchie Blackmore, whose history stretches back to such esoteric historical extravaganzas as Screaming Lord Sutch and Chislehurst Caves, explains his philosophy of life: 'I don't like paying anybody and most players want to be paid. So they leave.' This week's band members also have their say.

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Big In Japan, the Yellow Magic Orchestra

brave the long flight west and incarceration in a room with Tony Bacon, in an attempt to spread their message to strange Meat-and-Two-Veggies west of Suez.

44 Three Keyboardists

Our occasional series which looks at three instrumentalists of differing styles arises from an ongoing phoenix situation as Dave Crombie drags himself from his own keyboards and keeps three better players from their work - David Vorhaus, Richard Barbieri and Memory (Pete to you) Banks.



Geoff Travis ponders (left), Cure's Lol wonders about Gang of Four T-shirt (right), half of Yellow Magic Orchestra exist (top). And they're all in this issue.

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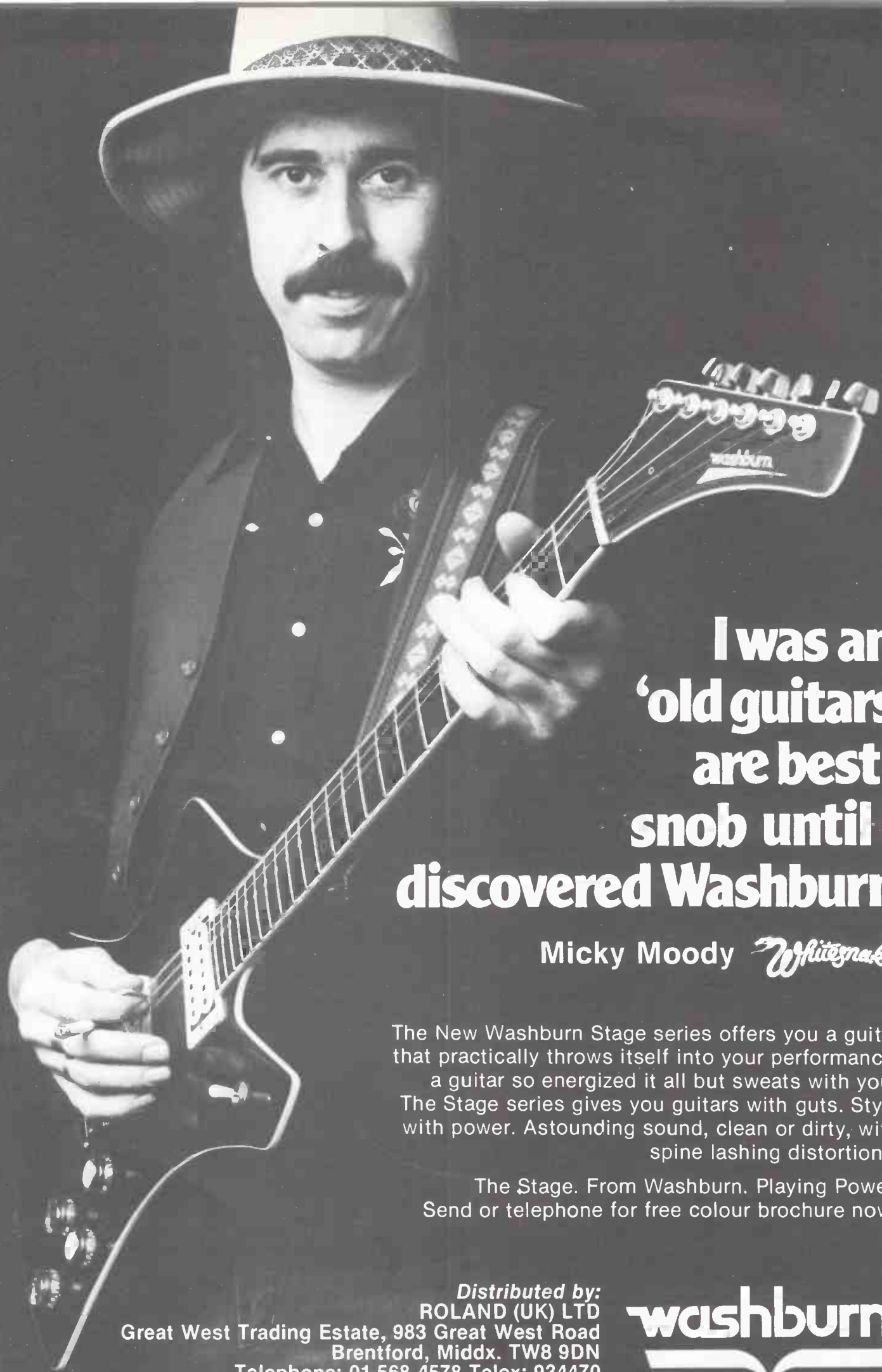
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On page 14 of this issue is a letter from reader David Fury who, far from being furious, makes some pretty interesting points, not least that of whether *SI* should concentrate on the instrumentation ('a complete gear list' as Mr Fury describes it) of bands and artists featured in interviews, or whether we should ensure that the 'gear is there to serve, not rule', to borrow once again from David's letter. So what do other readers think is more valuable - the *How Do You Get That Fantastic Sound* and *What Gauge Of Strings Do You Use* approach, or the *You Must Tell Me More About Your Politics* and *What Inspires You To Write Songs* tack? Both have their merits of course, but it could be argued quite convincingly that the likes of *NME* and *Sounds*, for example, give plenty of the latter kind of interviews. I would imagine - and back me up on this one boys and girls - that *SI* readers are more interested in hearing about the experiences of other musicians in creating sound. This doesn't of course mean a 'complete gear list', and in fact we've never really gone in for this sort of thing. No doubt the reference being made is to the kind of interview where you get the fabulously successful guitarist going on about, 'So then I bought another '58 *Strat* and hooked it up to the DDL in my new studio and played it back through 13 Marshall combos linked together, via my custom-built pedalboard...' etc, etc. This is patently rubbish, and our writers are trained to dump such stuff in the bin. *SI* aims at constructive information for the musician. Is that how it seems to you?

Tony Bacon



**I was an
'old guitars
are best'
snob until I
discovered Washburn**

Micky Moody *Whitesnake*

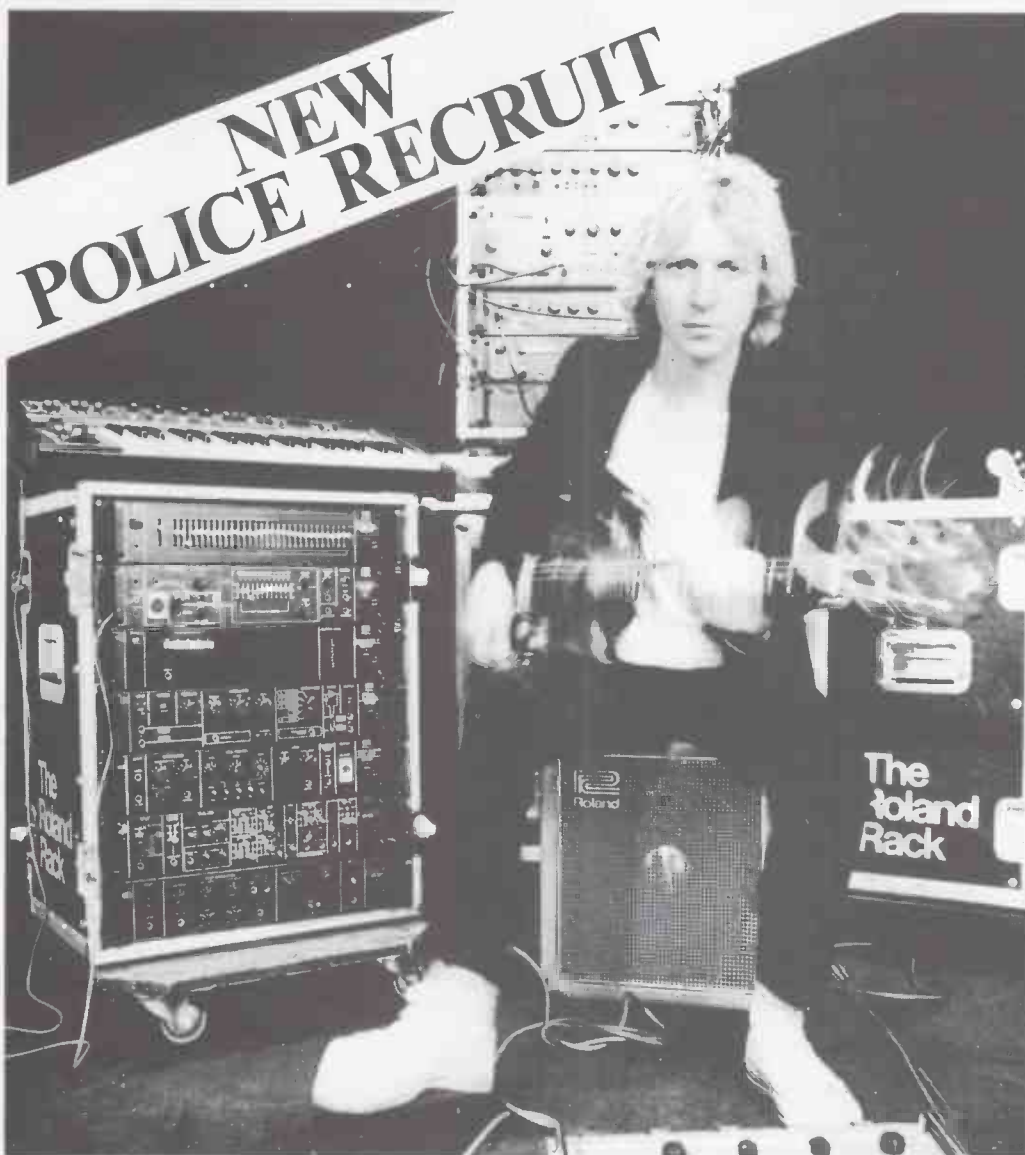
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Roland NEWSLINK



Police have been largely responsible for renewed popularity of the three-piece line-up over the last couple of years. They have shown that, used with imagination and technical expertise, the line-up can produce a full, exciting sound capable of putting over really interesting material. Plus a tight performance that might be lost with a larger number of musicians.

But how to grow, develop, and expand the possibilities of a 3-piece band? Andy Summers has one idea that may prove very influential. Both on stage and in studio he alternates a conventional electric guitar with the Roland GR300 guitar synthesizer.

'I've been using it on stage regularly' he states; 'I would say it's still the only workable guitar synthesizer for the touring musician. What I needed was a unit that would provide a wide range of effects without tying me down to a mass of complex controls. The GR300 is it. I use it in conjunc-

tion with a Roland rack — I've been playing with that combination for six months now and I'm still discovering new sounds and new techniques.'

And in the studio?

'Listen to the new album. It's a way of expanding and extending our sound that retains everything that's distinctively Police.'

Andy does not feel the new guitar synth has signalled a radical change of direction for himself as a guitarist. Like many GR300 users he would agree that if you have your own guitar style you have a guitar-synth style ready made.

He finds the guitar controller very playable ('even in the plain 'guitar' mode it's an interesting alternative to my Tele'). But its most important role is that instead of the conventional guitar which gave Police only one melodic instrument, Andy plays something with potential for a whole variety of melodic sounds — including some interesting unison effects.

'*Zenyatta Mondatta*', now available on the A&M label, shows how the GR300 performs in the hands of one of its most accomplished exponents.

'WHY I BUILD GUITAR SYNTHESIZERS'



Ikutaro Kakehashi, President of Roland and the mastermind behind the company's hyperactive R & D programme, explains the thinking behind the products that have given Roland the lead in the guitar synthesizer field.

'We look upon an electronic guitar as the logical and natural step forward from the electric guitar. It's a natural and logical step if the electronic guitar can do *everything the conventional guitar can do plus a lot more*. The Roland Guitar Synthesizers are the first fully developed electronic guitars.'

'In five years' time, the solid electric guitar as we know it may be obsolete'.

'They are designed to supply the needs of serious professional or semi-pro guitarists who may have spent years developing a sensitive and individual technique. We can't tell such musicians that their time has been wasted because the techniques they've learnt can't be used with a guitar synthesizer. So we've developed the guitar synthesizer as an instrument on which all conventional guitar techniques can be used.'

Continued on next page

Roland
Roland
Roland

GR-300—THE GUITARIST'S SYNTH

'WHY I BUILD GUITAR SYNTHESIZERS'

continued from previous page

An instrument which requires only that extra co-ordination which the user of foot pedals has already acquired.

'Through not seeing the guitar synth or electronic guitar as a stage of the evolution of the guitar, some other manufacturers have developed the 'synthesizer' part at the expense of the 'guitar' part. I have always specified that the guitar for our synth systems must equal the best solid guitars in craftsmanship. Each of our controllers will interchange with all present and future synthesizer units, or can be plugged direct into an amplifier for conventional guitar sound. We have a good standard system and we're encouraging other manufacturers to use our plans and make compatible equipment.

'The guitar synthesizer is not a hybrid between two instruments. It's tomorrow's guitar'.

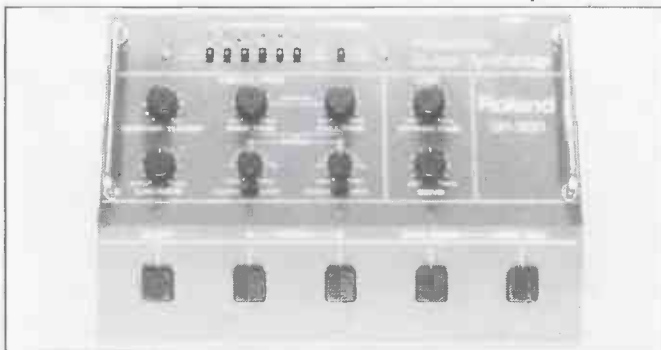
Ikutaro Kakehashi

A year since it was introduced, the GR-300 utterly dominates a rapidly expanding market. The reason is that while advancing technology provides an overwhelming temptation to make a dauntingly complex instrument, Roland have opted for the greater challenge of combining versatility with simplicity.

The Roland GR-300 with its associated G-303 and G-808 guitar controllers is based on special six-way pickups lined with six VCO's. This gives a full polyphonic sound and unlike systems that trigger the synthesizer unit from the frets

of the controller, the guitarist is free to use all his accustomed playing techniques. Compared with other systems such as those that merely provide the means of interfacing a conventional guitar with a synthesizer unit, the GR-300 24-way connector can carry an immense amount of information. This means more controls are placed on the guitar for ease and speed of operation. And the commitment to simplicity has resulted in a synthesizer unit whose main functions are footpedal controlled — the GR-300 is an instrument, not a machine!

More and more guitarists are changing to the guitar synthesizer. It's so easily done!



THE WORLD'S FIRST TRUE BASS GUITAR SYNTH

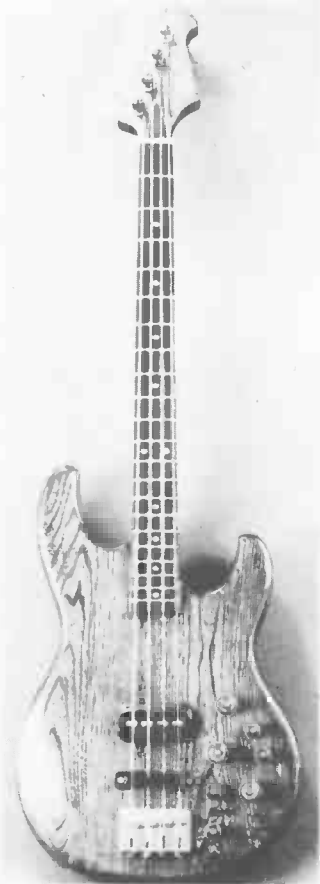
Until now, so-called 'bass synthesizers' have essentially been effects units. There has been nothing comparable either in terms of operating ease or playability with Roland's GR-33B.

The new Bass synthesizer gives bass players what the Roland guitar synthesizer gives guitarists. A choice of guitar controllers is comparable with the best 'through neck' (G-88) and

fixed neck (G-33) bass guitars available. Pitch, Volume, Envelope and Filter are controlled by foot pedals, their parameters being pre-set by rotary pots on the body of the synthesizer. A conventional single coil pickup plus the special four-way pickup for the synthesizer mode provide alternative outputs so the guitar can be used as an ordinary bass when required. Other features include active 2-band eq

(normal guitar mode), Touch Plate Vibrato (one plate for continuous vibrato, another for vibrato only as long as the plate is touched) and Latch/Unlatch switch (turns footswitches from switches for continuous effect to switches that give the effect only as long as they are held down). String select switches will turn any string 'off' so that it produces only the normal bass guitar tone.

In playing terms, the GR-33B allows the bassist to use all his familiar techniques, but gives him a whole spectrum of sounds from string bass and bass guitar effects right through to dramatic pipe organ sound. The GR-33B can quickly be mastered by any bass player, and could revolutionize many small bands by giving a more creative role to a member who has previously remained in the background.



ROLAND AT FRANKFURT '81

land
PROGRAMME '81
Roland

THE MAGNIFICENT EIGHT!

The Jupiter 8 Programmable Polyphonic synthesizer is the spearhead of Roland's programme of continually expanding and refining the possibilities of the keyboard synth. A 61-note C-scale instrument with 8 voices, a huge electronic 'memory' and unique computer-assigned keyboard, the JP-8 is the most versatile 'super-synth' yet produced.

Whether you use a large polyphonic synthesizer on stage or in the recording studio, as a solo instrument or as part of a multi-keyboard system, your creative limits will be largely defined by how many sounds you can produce accurately at a moment's notice. Unless you're going to rely on scraps of paper or have a photographic memory, this means programming. The JP-8 has the most capacious memory banks in the business. Just set up the controls for the sound you wish to store, route it to the memory, and re-select by pressing coded buttons. With the memory slots availa-

ble you can store 64 different settings or eight pairs of Patch Presets: that is, presets that include not only the settings of the sound controls but of the voice groupings and keyboard assign modes as well.

The computer assigned keyboard is an important feature of the JP-8. Four unique 'assign modes' alter the way voices are applied to individual keys. In the Solo Mode the JP-8 becomes a monophonic keyboard for lead work. In the Unison Mode all 8 voices sound if a single key is pressed, four plus four sound if two keys are pressed, and so on. This way, solo lines or riffs have the same power and weight as chord work. Poly-1 Mode assigns one voice per key for a natural sound and lets each note reach its normal release length. Poly-2 Mode assigns one voice per key but 'shortens' notes in mid-line for a more punchy effect, permitting only notes at the end of a phrase to sound at full length. This contrasts with the 'flowing' Poly-1 sound, in which each note can 'carry over' into the next.



The JP-8 opens up new patterns of playing possibilities through techniques that exploit the keyboard-splitting facility. The five octave keyboard can be used in three modes: whole, dual and split. The effects available from creative use of

these modes can be augmented by the sophisticated JP-8 Arpeggio sequencer, which will give automatic arpeggios of either chords or single notes, over the full keyboard or the lower section only.

COMPARISON GUIDE

	Roland JP 8	Oberheim OB X	Sequential Circuits Prophet-5	Yamaha CS 80
Keyboard	61 Key C-scale	61 Key C scale	61 Key C scale	61 Key C-scale
Form	8 Voice Separate Mode: 4 Voice x 2 Dual Mode: 4 Voice x 2 Sound Source 16VCO-BVCF-BVCA	8 Voice Optional: 4 Voice 6 Voice	5 Voice	8 Voice Sound Source 2-channel
Sound Memory	64 Patch Preset 8	32	40 Patch Preset 1	16VCO-16VCF 16V Preset 22 Manu. Memory 4
Tape Interface	0	0	0	X
Compu Tune	Button	Button	Button	X
VCO 1	Wave Form A/A/P/P/L/L Range (16/8 4' 2') Cross Mod	Wave Form A/P/L/L Frequency Cross Mod	Wave Form A/P/L/L Frequency P.W.M. Sync	Wave Form N/P/L/L Feet: (16/8 /5/4/2/1/2)
VCO 2	Wave Form A/P/L/L Noise Frequency Fine Tune Audio Freq Low Freq Synch	Wave Form A/P/L/L Frequency Detune	Wave Form A/P/L/L Frequency Fine Tune Low Freq Pulse Width	Wave Form X Detune CH 2
VCO MOD	FM: LFO Depth ENV-1 Depth Destination (VCO-1/Bend/ VCO-2) P.W.M. PWM Depth PWM Source (LFO/Manu/ ENV-1)	LFO Depth Destination (VCO-1/VCO-2/ VCF)	VCO-2 Depth ENV-1 Depth Destination (VCO-1/PW/ VCF)	LFO Depth P.W.M. PWM Depth PWM Speed
Mixer	Source Mix: (VCO-1 VCO-2)	VCO-1: ON/OFF VCO-2: OFF/HALF FULL Noise: OFF/HALF/ FULL	VCO 1 VCO 2 Noise	None
H P F	Cutoff Freq (F1)	X	X	Cutoff Freq Resonance
VCF	Cutoff Freq Resonance Roll off (12dB 24dB) ENV MOD ENV Select (ENV 1 ENV 2) LFO MOD Kvbd Follow	Cutoff Freq Resonance ENV MOD	Cutoff Freq Resonance ENV MOD	Cutoff Freq Resonance LFO MOD
LFO	Wave Form ~ / P / N / Random Rate Delay Time	Wave Form ~ / P / S / H	Wave Form A / P / L / L	Wave Form ~ / N / V / L / L / Noise EXT Speed
VCA	Level LFO MOD	Reset	Release ON OFF	VCF Level LFO MOD
Manual MOD (Bender)	Bend Lever Sensitivity (VCO Bend VCF Bend VCO MOD VCF MOD) Switches (VCO 1 Bend VCO 2 Bend VCF Bend VCO MOD) LFO MOD Button LFO MOD Rise Time	Bend Lever to VCO MOD Lever to VCO VCO-2 Only SW	Bend Wheel to VCO MOD Wheel Source Mix. (LFO - Noise) Destination (VCO-1/VCO-2/ PW-1/PW-2/VCF)	Slice Control
Arpeggio	Mode (UP/DOWN/USD/ RANDOM) Range 1/2/3/4 (Oct.1) Rate	X	X	X
Key Assign Mode	Poly 1 Poly 2 Unison Solo	Poly Unison	Poly Unison	Poly Only
Porta mento	Time SW OFF ON Upper Only	Time	Time (Unison Mode Only)	Time Ports - Gtss
Split Mode	0	X	X	X
Dual Mode	0 4 Voice	X	X	0 8 Voice

ROLAND AT FRANKFURT '81

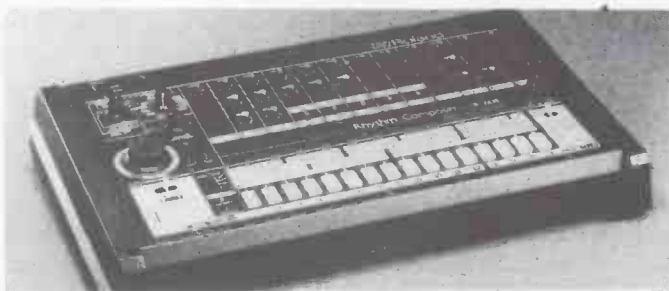
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TR-808 — THE RHYTHM KING

Roland's most sophisticated and versatile programmable rhythm unit yet — and that means the world's greatest. The TR-808 can be used to compose percussion parts of 64 measures (one measure containing up to 32 steps) on each of 12 channels — giving a total memory capacity of 768 rhythm measures. It is programmable to give a 'technique' far more elaborate than a human drummer could achieve, and it can be used

creatively (both with the set rhythms and the manual/auto 'fill-in') to generate as much excitement as the most spontaneous percussion man. You can even programme an entire drum solo!

The TR-808 features twelve amazingly realistic percussion sounds from the basic 'kit' sounds to Maracas and Hand-clap. Tone, Decay, Level and Tuning controls modulate the sound where appropriate. For recording use a 'multi-output'



allows panning between different tracks on a multi-track machine. Naturally, the new Rhythm unit is fully interface-

able with existing and future sequencing and 'composition' equipment.

MIXDOWN BY COMPUTER

The Roland CPE-800 Compu-Editor is one of the most dramatic studio developments to have come on to the market in recent years. It takes a part of multi-channel recording that has in the past been complex and often tortuous, and makes it simple, precise, and controlled.

Essentially the Compu-Editor is a 15+1 channel sub-mixing desk in which each channel is linked through a microprocessor to a computer memory. Using the faders on each channel and the 'manual', 'read' and 'write' modes with their associated controls, the CPE-800 can be used in all editing, mixdown, sound-check, and even stage lighting operations. It can be used with any mixing desk and is equipped with an SMPTE time code generator for compatibility with the synchronization system that is standard in the audio, video, and film industries.

The central feature of the Compu-Editor is its 32 bytes or 100 hours on-board memory facilities (programmes can also be 'dumped' on good quality cassette or open reel tapes). Feed up to 15 channels from tape machine or other source (if required channels can be used as effects sends/returns) through your mixer and into the CPE-800 via the VCA-800 audio adapter. Once a rough mix is achieved the speed and precision of the computerized play/halt/return/edit system

can be used to get exactly the right mix. Continual revision and error correction are a simple matter of touching the right buttons (no memory 'lag' to confuse synchronization). There are outputs for connection to any X Y oscilloscope to present a visual display of all 15 fader positions for easy reference.

In the studio the CPE-800 reigns supreme over mixdown, overdubbing, and the many special effects that can be achieved at this stage. Its on-board memory gives it powerful advantages over an automatic system whose only memory is a tape.

Outside the studio, it is still versatile. It can handle lighting programmes as well as sound programmes, and for the band with a very tight 'set' there's no reason why the CPE-800 should not produce a complete

sound and light mix for an entire evening's performance. The ease of operation which proves invaluable in studio mixdowns can also facilitate soundchecks, and of course any information required can be stored on tape. With its own built-in clock, the Compu-Editor can also be used in some 'real time composition' systems — it can even function as a 1-shot 15-channel sequencer in its own right.

The Compu-Editor is a sophisticated piece of studio equipment, but Roland have not forgotten that there is a very large potential market for this kind of product, and the price is pinned as low as possible. Further information is available from the sub-distributors, Turnkey, 8 East Barnet Road, New Barnett, Herts. Tel: 01-440 9221 (ask for Andy Bereza).



BOSS PHASER PLUS RESONANCE

The successful Boss PH-1 phaser pedal is now additionally available as the PH-1R, incorporating a resonance effect to control feedback and thus produce a stronger sound.

CLIP-ON AMPS

Two new voices from BOSS are the MA-1 Mascot Amp and the FA-1 Compact Pre-Amp. Built into pedal-sized packages these products apply BOSS quality and precision to two very important fields. The MA-1 is a loud, clear mini-amp ideal for practise, last minute tune-ups before going on stage, and even busking! With an MA-1 you can take your electric guitar anywhere, and it has a handy belt clip for playing convenience. The FA-1 is also equipped with a belt clip and provides a versatile pre-amp ideal for use with transducers that require one.



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Just up the once-fashionable end of the universe is a small, hot planet called Anaheim. Peter Cook, luthier extraordinaire, went there, and here tells all.

Whilst most of the British music industry and press were flocking to the Frankfurt Trade Show I had the enviable task of checking out the NAMM winter market in Anaheim, California. Due to an advance-planning cock-up the two shows were running at the same time: still, this had its compensations for winter in Frankfurt is much the same as ours but in California, would you believe, it was 70°.

First stop was the **Mighty Mite** stand where the lovely Mrs Mighty Mite (Sarah Zacuto) was holding the fort while her husband Randy was likewise in Frankfurt. The display of assembled guitars was stunning, for although Mighty Mite basically market the parts separately, complete guitars can be ordered as specials. I think it is true to say that out of all the 'parts people' in the US Mighty Mite has been slightly more adventurous in body designs, for although they market a wide range on the Fender theme other types based on Gibson and original designs are available.

Down the road a little I bumped into **Ken Smith** on Bill Lawrence's stand, where he was displaying his bass guitars. Ken is a session player from NY and has designed his bass from years of experience: Stanley Clarke is among his customers and friends. The Smith bass is not unlike an Alembic in concept, the active pre-amp system has high and low band-pass and notch filters, an adjustable 'Q' and frequency control plus an envelope follower. Presets are also installed for personal adjustment of attack levels, and red, green and amber LEDs indicate the various settings. The pickups are by Bill Lawrence, body and neck are constructed of birds eye maple or rosewood, and the bass boasts a 34in scale with 24 frets. It looks, feels and sounds good and I believe Soundwave of Romford are considering importing them to the UK.

Bartolini had a nice display of guitars using their pickups, like Turner, Moonstone (more about these two later) and a Stanley Clarke special. Bartolini might be a new name to some but in fact Bill Bartolini was responsible for the Alembic pickups and has marketed his *Hi-A* pickups for some time. The range includes all the usual Fender replacements but in addition there is a very interesting Gibson-type humbucker with a built-in pre-amp which it is claimed will give wide tonal variations and up to x12 the output of a standard humbucker. But the *pièce de resistance* had to be the replacement pickups for, would you believe, the **Ricky 4001** bass - there is even a pickup to replace the damping pad, so making it a three-pickup bass.

I spoke to Randy Curlee (SD Curlee) briefly before he flew off to Frankfurt and he seemed well pleased with the way things were going for our home grown Hiwatt amps which Randy has been distributing in the US, for the last couple of years.

An interesting feature of the Anaheim show is the inclusion of small organisations and, indeed, one-person operations. One such is Californian luthier **Steve Klein** who showed me a rather eccentric guitar called *The Bird* which boasts a cast bronze birds-head with Mexican fire opals for eyes on the top horn and, as is obligatory in that part of the world, a stash compartment on the bottom horn.

Wandering over to the **Schecter** display I was confronted with dazzling brass and staggering wood. Like Mighty Mite, these guys have really got it together - quilted and birds eye maple, rosewood, koa, ebony ... the list goes on. I am sure most of us have heard of Schecter by now, but not many I reckon have seen such a selection of wood laminations and configurations at any one time.

Still on the theme of replacement bodies and necks, **Phil Kubicki** has now marketed his own range and although this is a new venture for him Phil has all the qualifications - he was heavily involved in R&D at Fender. I really wanted to have a chat with Hartley Peavey, but each time I arrived at his stand he was surrounded by interested dealers, for one thing Hartley passionately believes in and loves to talk about is the value-for-

money approach of **Peavey** products - and who can argue?

Some interesting new strings on the market called **Slicks** caught my attention - apparently they feature a new winding technique that twists the winding in tight, giving the feel and reduced 'squeak' of a ground string without honing. Even more interesting were matched valves: **Groove Tubes** market valves or tubes that have been measured and matched. Aspen Pitman (Mr Groove Tube) worked closely with Dan Armstrong developing a technique to grade and test valves - mismatched valves can, of course, cause erratic sustain and microphonic ring. Each valve is graded in a hard or soft category and is then further rated from one to 10, the lower numbers delivering far tighter, clean sound, working up to a number 10 which is easily overdriven. Dan himself is just

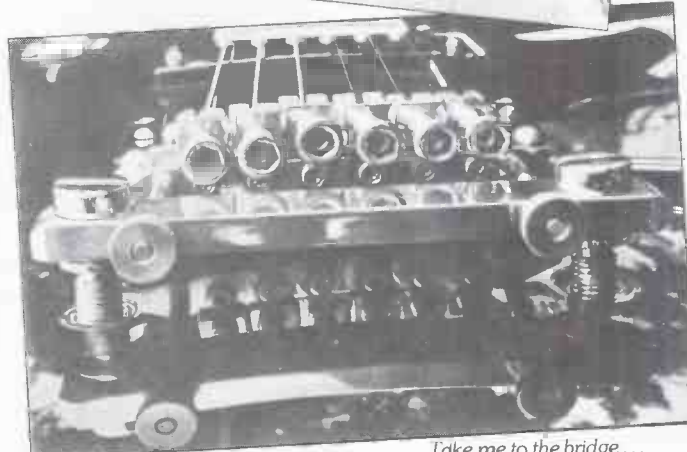
about to launch a new pickup.

We all know about **BC Rich** guitars, and apart from new finishes (which include pink, sea green and a whole multitude of other noticeable colours), nothing has really changed although Rich guitars and basses now have their own bridges which can be bought separately. The guitar bridge unit is quite useful as it is basically a Gibson-type combined-bridge-and-tailpiece with individual string height and length adjustment. An irrelevant but interesting point: BC Rich posters seem more popular than the guitars.

Once again, the man himself Mr Leo Ferder graced the show with his presence. But he wasn't on the Music Man stand (because of a disagreement, the nature of which no one will disclose at this stage due to legal proceedings). Leo parted company



G&L vibrato



Tripp Suspension bridge

Take me to the bridge ...



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SOUND INTERNATIONAL

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with Music Man some nine months ago and has formed an alliance with some of his chums from the early Fender days, George Fullerton and Dale Hyatt. The result is the G & L range. Though they are by no means a clone of Music Man, it's pretty obvious that these were at one time destined to be the second-generation Music Man instruments. One of the really outstanding features of the six-string guitar is the vibrato unit which is smooth as silk, returns easily to pitch and shows no sign of the infamous Fender deadspot. Maybe it's not quite as abusable as the 'Floyd Rose' system, but it's certainly less complicated.

Amp and speaker cabinets in natural hardwoods adorned the exhibition in fair abundance, but standing tall in appearance and sound were Legend. An all-tube amp with four-band equalisation cased in a solid oak cabinet with a genuine cane grille – if this amp does not make a big impact, you can eat my hat! (See also Chicago NAMM report, *SI* August '80.)

The Music People had a nice selection of goodies from a *Tri-Stand* (a compact stand for three guitars), *Hot Wires* (leads that always lie flat on stage and glow in the dark), a good range of easily installed on-board guitar electronics, and *Tune Up*, a real boon for acoustic pickers. *Tune Up* is a portable strobe light that is placed under the strings and compares the string vibration against a stroboscopic flash. The slower the apparent vibration of the string, the closer to concert pitch it is – it seems easy and is great for all guitars including nylon-strung classicals.

Guitartech, part of the Kramer group of companies, had a complete range of brass parts and replacement necks and bodies. But, more worthy of note, they seem to have as far as I know the only *Strat*-style bridge that has been modified for the string spacing of a humbucker. Also they are producing original-style tweed guitar and bass cases.

I've a feeling that a future hot potato could well be **Modulus Alembic**. I'm pretty sure that most of you will have heard of Alembic: they are the guitars and basses which blazed the active electronics trail at Rolls Royce prices and have become a cult name – although few players have ever seen them, let alone played them. Modulus Alembic is a spin-off from the original concept and is based entirely on graphite necks. Although complete instruments are marketed with exotic wood bodies, necks for *Strats*, *Precisions* and *Jazz* basses are available separately, although the price is not for the squeamish. Prior to the show I must admit I was not entirely convinced about graphite necks, but after a long discussion with Modulus president Geoff Gould (grand title but a nice bloke), my reservations have been substantially reduced.

What is a graphite neck? Well, the neck is moulded from graphite webbing, not unlike fibreglass, and is hollow, making it reasonably light. But graphite – which, incidentally, is a product of the space race – is absolutely stable due to its continuous molecular structure. It still does not

feel like a wooden neck but it certainly has some advantages. Rick Turner, who was one of the original Alembic team, has his own instruments on the market. Rick felt that he had gone as far as he could, design-wise, with Alembic so in 1977 he set up his own operation. The result – an Alembic-type guitar in its electronic concept and price but very different in appearance. One feature that leaves itself open for discussion is the choice of a *Tripp* suspension bridge. Only Fender *Super Bullet* strings can be used with the *Tripp* as the string never actually passes over a saddle but is literally suspended and is adjusted by altering the string length. The manufacturers claim this system increases sustain, volume and string life. Interesting – but not everyone likes *Super Bullets*, and other strings apparently sound awful because of the end-winding. The *Tripp* suspension bridge is available for Gibson- and Fender-style guitars.

It was nice to meet **Donald Brosnac** again, especially as he showed me his new book *Guitar Electronics – A Work Book* and, surprise surprise, there is a chapter about me in it.

Just across the way but almost out of this world were **Moonstone** guitars. You've got to see them to appreciate fully the beauty of these guitars which are made from the burls of the big leaf maple. My favourite was a 335-type carved top fitted with Bartolini pickups. Models are also available with graphite necks by Modulus Alembic – and Moonstone scratchplates for Fenders and *Les Pauls* should prove to be popular.

I am always being asked about electric violins so I made a point of searching some out and I found an interesting example called the **Lectrolin**. Basically, these instruments are custom-built by traditional craftsmen but using solid bodies restyled for lightness and fitted with a pickup. I'm no fiddle player so I had it demonstrated for me and it certainly sounded good; even when wound up it showed no signs of feeding back, but as with all custom jobs they cost big bucks.

Probably the most exciting thing to come out of the show was the **Zeta Hex** pickup which, when combined with a **Zeta Polyfuzz**, converts your favourite guitar into a synthesiser without affecting the normal function of the instrument. The **Zeta Hex** pickup is in fact a direct replacement bridge unit with each saddle containing its own pickup and pre-amp, thereby ensuring good string separation. This could open up a whole new world for guitarists as it eliminates the need to use a special guitar which might not be suitable for straight playing or indeed might not even be playable. I heard it on a *Les Paul* and it was good. Unfortunately at present only a Gibson *Tune-O-Matic* replacement is available, but others will follow.

A really useful addition to the Leo Quan *Badass* range is a fully adjustable saddle that converts a *Bass II* bridge to an 8-string version. It is nice to report that the show was buzzing at the return of a British product: **VOX**.

Peter Cook

The Yen To Make A Mark

Meanwhile, on a small cold planet called Frankfurt, the local aliens (contradiction?) show off all manner of acoustic and electric (not forgetting electronic) hardware. Tony Bacon beams back to bring you the up-beat low-down.

Lee Ritenour was to be found on the Ibanez stand at Frankfurt this year, demonstrating, along with Bobby Cochran, 'Ibanez guitars and effects,' as the sign on the side of the soundproof booth announced daily. Ritenour is, of course, related in most players' minds with the Gibson 335 semi-acoustic guitar, so it was a surprise to see him sporting a 335-style guitar with Ibanez on the head. After one of the day's loose jams with Cochran in the sweaty cupboard-cum-demo-room, Lee spoke to *SI* about the story behind his change – and not without getting in a plug for his new album, released in March in the US on Elektra and called *Rit*.

'Well,' says Rit, 'I went through quite a few changes with equipment in the last few years. I have no allegiance to any company, to anybody other than if it's a good guitar. And if Ibanez hadn't come up with a good guitar, we wouldn't be here – to be very frank, they came up with one incredible guitar which I have at home in Los Angeles, I played that for a year before I even got involved in any consideration of signing with the company. They said, "Are you interested in having a signature model?" And I said, "Well, not for the sake of having a Lee Ritenour guitar." Because if there's a *Les Paul* guitar or a *George Benson* guitar, it's not the name that sells the guitar through the years, it's the quality. The name may sell a few copies for a while, but that's about it. So I said, "If you can better my 335 and I can honestly say that I would play your guitar rather than my best 335, then I'll be interested in dealing with you." So they had to build a guitar before we sat down and talked. They came up with three or four actual dogs. They were bad. And then one day...

So what was wrong with the early prototypes? 'Bad pickups; uneven sound; necks that didn't feel good to me: too bulky, too thin; very thin-sounding guitars on top: bad wood; bad finish. They were just trying their best: they're in the commercial guitar market and they hadn't really built anything up to my specs. So, they kept changing things. Traditionally, the problems with Gibsons, or almost any guitar, especially in the semi-acoustic type, was that some maple necks are real stiff. And that was sort of a problem with my old 335, my dot, it was maple and it was very hard to bend strings: past the seventh fret it was very easy, but below the seventh fret it was very stiff. It just didn't feel incredibly warm to play, even though it was a great Gibson. It always lacked a little something, so I went through

extra pains to try to get more sound out of it.

'Mahogany is a little softer wood and it's more flexible in the neck, but sometimes the mahogany is too soft and it makes it go out of tune real easy – so I suggested a combination of mahogany and maple and that turned out to do the trick. The guitar just fell together from that stage on. It's just unbelievable – the sustain, the warmth and everything just beats my 335. A few problems have arisen since – they haven't been able to duplicate it, and I heard that the same 15 people who built the *George Benson* were gonna build mine, but so far the production models they've come up with are not up to the specs of the original. There's another prototype – the one I'm playing here – which is still handmade, and it's very close to the original: not quite, but very close. I hope they get the production together – I don't think they'll let the guitar out till they do. Hopefully I'll be able to keep control of it. I don't have the time to check every guitar so I just hope that when they do get the production process down they'll keep the quality there. And they do seem serious about trying to do that.

'The other thing is that I don't want my name on it. It'll be called the *LR10*, my initials. The reason I didn't want "Lee Ritenour" is that it's the quality that sells it – I want everybody to buy this guitar so if some players are Jeff Beck fanatics, Larry Carlton fanatics, Al DiMeola fanatics, they wouldn't buy a "Lee Ritenour" guitar, cos their hero is not Lee Ritenour. I don't want that to stop them. There's a great story where Joni Mitchell bought five *George Benson* models to have for different tunings on stage, and she ended up taking *George's* name off the guitars! I don't know that for a fact – but that's what I was told.

'Yamaha and Gibson were also very interested in having me work with them – I had worked with Yamaha on a non-official basis for some years, but when they finally came up with their 335-type, it wasn't really close. When we'd got to the prototype stage we all said, "Yes, this is fantastic, go ahead and make this one." The next thing I know I see some in the store, and it wasn't the same guitar. So I don't want that to happen, nor will I let it. Gibson had the same kind of problems – any company, I guess. You know, it's like making an album – your 24-track tape sounds like one thing, and then when you go and buy a mass-produced little piece of plastic it sounds like something else.

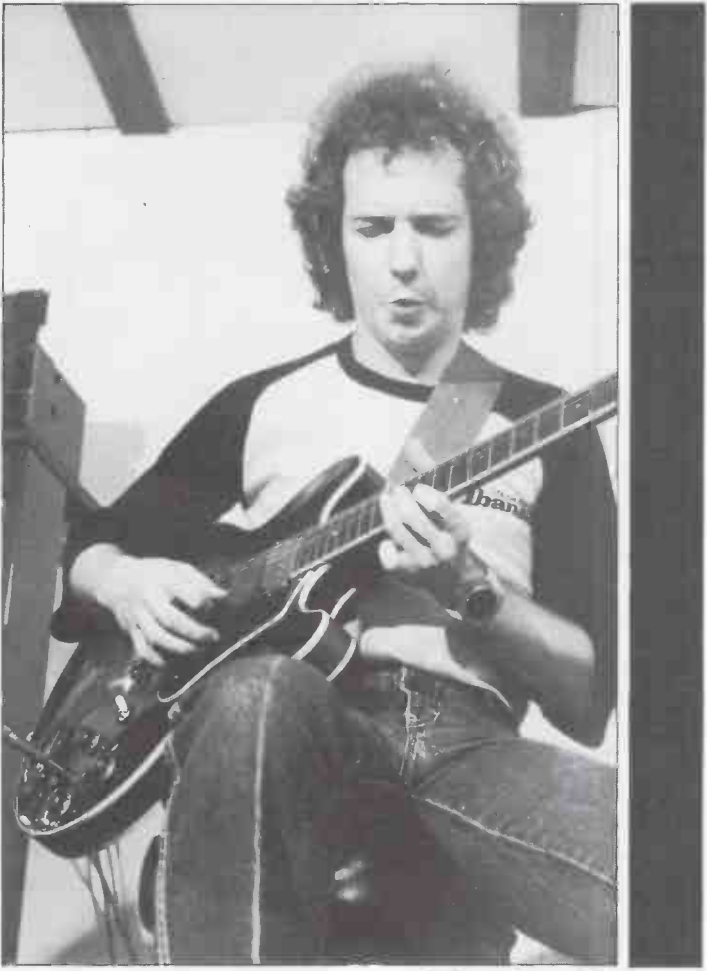
'We negotiated with Gibson. Yamaha and Ibanez – Gibson were

US Synthesiser Manufacturer Drops Best-Known Model In Bid For Technological Supremacy



Big news from Moog at Frankfurt was that they are to drop the *Minimoog* – production has in fact already ceased, and it is to be replaced by the *Moog Source*. The front panel of the *Source* is nearer to the *Minimoog* in actual layout (though it only uses two oscillators), but there the similarity ends. A ‘membrane’ touch-panel enables the player to select functions which are displayed in the digital readouts on the left and are stored in the instrument’s memory, which can store and recall 16 presets. These are factory-preset, but can, of

course, be changed by the owner who can store more programs on cassette if necessary. Three built-in sequencers and the first Moog to feature Attack, Decay, Sustain and Release envelopes mean that the *Source* looks as if it’s going to prove very popular when stocks become available some time later in the year, probably in the autumn. Even more interesting is the fact that Moog reckon it’ll sell for less than the *Mini*. Progress indeed. A review will appear in *SI* just as soon as we can get hold of a production sample.



Top: Ritenour demonstrates the Ibanez LR10 – production models will not have ‘Lee Ritenour’ on them, as does this prototype.

third on the list for what they were offering, and that is traditional with that company, they don’t get too much into sponsoring. I’d rather see a bigger interest. They have their system as to what they do – plus all I would do with them would be to change a traditional 335 slightly. I might have tried similar things that I did with the Ibanez: a combination of spruce, mahogany and maple. That’s the major change, it runs all the way through the block. Also, the acoustic guitar-type kerfing is used round the guitar – kerfing is the sliced material that joins the sides and the back and the top and makes acoustic guitars sound very nice, it’s what gives them their sound. So I said why don’t we try that on an electric? We did, and we created a lot more resonance. It was a good idea – so that’s included. The guitar is stuffed to cut down feedback and the pickups are a little different also, I would have changed that with Gibson: output a little higher and the curve of the eq is a little different. The pegs are the best made today, they’ve an 18:1 ratio which beats Gibson’s and Yamaha’s. The guitar may not be out for a while, maybe as much as two years, but I

think I’d rather wait to have them come out right. The Ibanez people are a little afraid: they’re saying, ‘We’re not sure if we can make it better.’ And I say, ‘You have to try!’



Kakehashi: ‘So many possibilities...’



Roland President Ikutaro Kakehashi (left) and Roland UK boss Brian Nunney.

Ikutaro Kakehashi is the president of the large, successful Roland Corporation in Japan, and he spoke to *SI* at Frankfurt about some of the new Roland products on show there and some of his plans for the future. Firstly, he talked about the new Roland electronic guitar – the *GR100* – which, though suffering some technical problems at the Frankfurt demos, offers a controller (ie guitar) and floor-standing control module, like the current guitar (*GR300*) and bass (*GR33*) synthesisers from Roland. ‘Over 40 years ago the acoustic guitar became the electric guitar,’ explained Kakehashi, ‘in almost 40 years, no change. But musicians have improved their playing technique, and drawn almost all the possibilities from the electric guitar. So musicians improve and develop new

sounds – then they start to use pedals to expand the possibilities. Guitar only is not enough, so that’s why people start to use pedals – but the pedals have sound limitations, the variety of sound is limited. Acoustic to electric; electric to electronic: it’s a very natural step. ‘From now on there are so many possibilities. Guitar is the perfect six-voice polyphonic instrument – but up until now we use guitar as a mono instrument. One pickup takes the six sounds, impossible to expand. That’s why the electronic guitar uses six polyphonic sound sources. The musician can control each sound source by finger, directly, by picking. So the musician can express his emotion. It’s a very flexible instrument. The most

All Frankfurt pix Tony Bacon

difficult point in development was the separation of the six signals. From the string vibration, we must pick up *only* the fundamental – very difficult. The GR500 (original Roland guitar synth) took two years to develop before its appearance about four years ago, and another three years to develop the hex pickup that we're now using – a separate, discrete pickup for each string.

'A guitar musician does not need to change playing technique with the electronic guitar. Most guitar players work with keyboard players already – in the early stages of synthesiser. keyboard players found it very difficult to understand so many knobs, but in six or eight years, they gradually understand. Now, no problems for keyboard players. But guitar players are already frustrated, they have had help from electronics already. Musicians are ready to touch – but the keyboard players in the beginning stages hesitated to touch. Now, musicians want to touch! It's a big difference! So, I think, no problems. I think we need some explanations, maybe some clinics, but it'll be much easier than with the keyboard players.'

And what of Roland's rhythm machines? 'Almost 16 years ago, I developed the first electronic drum machine called the Rhythm Ace. Rhythm machines had always been preset rhythm machines, and the musicians can only select. But that's

not so musical. So we tried to supply a useful rhythm machine for musicians, not just an accompaniment. Now with the new machine (the 808), the musician can play all rhythms by himself. So it used to be that the rhythm machine was not to *play*, you just pushed a button. But now the musician must play, make his own program – we have no preset program at all, so it's a completely different approach. The name is the same as before – rhythm machine – but it's a completely different concept.'

Kakehashi then went on to explain that he has 'almost 100%' involvement in the development of new products, that the Roland R&D department consists of about 70 people (15% of the workforce), and that the new line of excellently-priced Roland Spirit combos, previewed at the show, were 'general purpose' amps and in this sense a first from Roland. 'If you look at their specification,' he said, 'they're not so different from the average – but we must give quality at a reasonable price.'

And finally, a typically romantic Japanese description of home recording and its relevance to Roland: 'Tape recorders and cassettes are a very reliable, inexpensive canvas. Synthesisers are a kind of paint, so with paint and brush we can make pictures on the canvas. We want to concentrate on the brush and paint side, not the canvas side.' Indeed we do.



Roland's brand new Spirit 30W combo: it'll sell for just £125

Casiotone: Balancing Research and Development

The Casio Computer Company have been making some timely yet coolly calculated advances in the keyboard field of late – time enough for the name Casiotone to prick up the ears of keyboard players who care to keep themselves abreast of interesting developments (that is, keyboard playing *SI* readers). At Frankfurt our roving reporter met Yasuo Mochizuki who is involved with the Research and Development department of Casio situated in Hamura, just outside Tokyo. Between 40 and 50 people work there in the three R&D sections: circuit design, electronic design and ideas. It's in the last section that Mochizuki works, where team members overlook all the various stages that a new product goes through, from idea to production instrument.

The new Casiotone 202, which was shown for the first time at Frankfurt this year, should be available in the UK in the early summer at around £295 – it boasts 49 preset sounds including some synth simulations, an 8-note polyphonic C to C four-octave keyboard, pitch control, and a generally 'professionalised' update of the original 201. Mochizuki explained: 'The 202 took about a year of development before production. We recorded natural sounds to make our digital system,' he said, referring to the use made of the recording studio and laboratory facilities at Hamura to which the R&D team for Casiotone have exclusive access. 'The most difficult thing to do is to "make" the

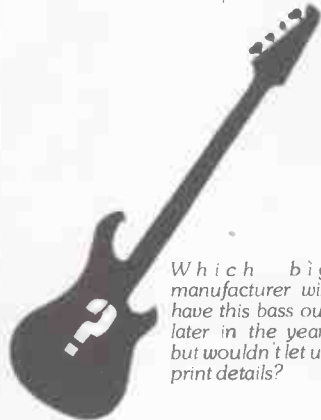


Yasuo Mochizuki from Casio R&D

sound,' he continued, 'not to design the circuit.'

The development team for Casiotone continue to select and analyse sounds, looking far ahead to instruments which will combine existing features with many further, still-growing ideas. The team's ideal, they reckon, is to make a Casiotone sound like a Steinway piano. Will they pass a sweaty Strat poking through a cranked-up AC30 on the way? We shall hear.

Other Pix Dept



Which big manufacturer will have this bass out later in the year, but wouldn't let us print details?



Strange Frenchman with stranger guitar



Prophetman aka Bob Styles demos new Pro-One synth



And how many of Hondo's new Danelectro-inspired double-neck would you like, sir?



For a music which is ostensibly connected with revolution, change and rebellion, rock has a funny habit of being almost entirely conservative. Bands who try to change their styles fall from grace unless they are particularly fortunate. And look at the line-ups, for heaven's sake; bass, drums, guitars, vocals, synthesisers; bass, drums, guitars, vocals, synthesisers etc etc ad nauseum.

It may be argued that the aforementioned instruments are the only ones capable of producing rock at all and, I'll admit, tin whistles, accordions, trombones and what have you somehow don't conjure rock immediately to mind (although they have their uses, of course).

However, even if we stay within the fairly limited context of guitars, keyboards and drums, there's a hell of a lot that could be experimented with that isn't.

Several years ago John Mayall used to get some interesting sounds out of a nine-string guitar (and was even rash enough to use a harmonium to some considerable effect on his *Bare Wires* album). Others too have played around with guitars featuring either less or more than the seemingly inevitable six strings.

And, while we're talking about guitars, whatever happened to the 12-string? After a brief renaissance during the Sixties, led by Jim McGuinn and George Harrison, the 12-string has now virtually disappeared. Rickenbacker still make them but Gibson don't (at least not unless you get one made to special order) and Fender, after a brief foray into the field, have dropped theirs. In fact, apart from Rickenbacker I can only think of Shergold as a company who make any standard 12-string guitars, although

it's not impossible that one lurks unseen in the massed ranks of one of the Jap manufacturers.

I wonder why? The 12-string has a beautiful sound for rhythm guitar and, notwithstanding the difficulties of keeping the brutes in tune, they have led to several distinctive 'hit record sounds' as they used to be called.

That's part of it really – the old belief among Sixties record producers that a gimmicky sound would automatically sell records. It may be that they were over-optimistic but I'd guess that an unusual sound might still help a single stand out from the crowd – especially when going before the jaded and bored ears of radio station programmers, not to mention the record buyers.

But 12-string guitars aside, what about basses? Fender used to make a six-string bass, the *Bass VI*, and it has had its proponents from time to time, including a brief spell with Jack Bruce and another with Graham Gouldman. The Fender six-string which they were both using was not a particularly inspired example but more can be done with it, witness the Shergold model (again) which was launched a couple of years ago. Fender did a five-string version too, don't forget.

One idea which might just make it the eight-string bass. Easier to play than the six-string for conventionally-bred bassists, there are now some excellent types on the market including models from Washburn, Kramer, Ibanez and (yawn) Shergold. This last company must be praised for at least trying to get away from convention. The point about the eight-string bass, though, is that its place tends to be buried away beneath a thunderous riff from a heavy band. Two examples of players who've used them, John Paul

Jones and Lemmy, might illustrate my point – you'd have to listen hard really to tell the difference if you were the average record buyer.

Leaving aside guitars for the present, much the same can be said about keyboards. Despite a million different combinations of possible settings and brands, many synthesiser players do sound awfully similar – if I hear one more Jan Hammer pitchbend merchant I'll scream! And what's happened to the beloved old Hammond valve organs? A friend of mine who has one reports that his is, sadly, left sitting in his spare room – 'it's not a fashionable sound now' he reports.

Harpichords, harmoniums (harmonia, one wonders?), *Clavinets*, all manner of new and possibly diverting sounds await the touch of the interested finger ('ere, that's a bit risqué, innit?), and yet the same old sounds continue to drone on from record to record.

Yes, and you needn't skulk out of the classroom either, drummers, you're just as bad. Apart from a brief foray into Latin percussion instruments when you tried to play disco/funk, when did you last try anything different? One wonders, for example, if the new Simmons drum synth will be too different to succeed? When drummers did get their hands on the hideously repetitive Syndrum all they could do was imitate one another's sound with that inevitable 'deeeow' sound that was all the rage a year or so ago? Didn't the damned things have another setting?

As soon as someone does come up with a new sound, like phasing or flanging for example, everyone seems to queue up to copy. And yet that sound is often the keynote to a successful hit record which would otherwise have sounded like any other currently occupying sales success. You note, just in passing, that I am not talking about music for its own sake here? I'm assuming that money might talk louder than artistry – it usually does!

If you look back at the really great players of the past 20 years or so, you'll find almost without exception that they were not characterised solely by their abilities as players. In other words, how they sounded was almost as important as how well they did whatever it was they were doing that was making them rich. I wouldn't want to trespass on Mr Fripp's ground for an instant, but isn't there something about music being a means of self expression and, if that is so, doesn't the awful similarity between players' styles and their sounds tell us something unpleasant about the way we are all going?

Right across the musical instrument spectrum the same phenomena apply. If someone does use something different then the immediate reaction is to copy. How long before the average band sports a Noddy lookalike with monstrous euphonium or whatever it is that Mr Flowers persists in making such a twit of himself with?

From a purely commercial point of view, then, and quite regardless of

philosophical virtues, I would have thought that it might have paid any new band to give some thought to this subject. Rather than trying to copy some new musical style which is often only briefly successful, why not look for a new sound? And if looking for said miraculous cure for your financial ills, what about a new instrument to produce that sound with? It may only be a different type of guitar or a different keyboard setting but, if nothing else, there is at least variety to be got from it!

But enough of all this business of established electric instruments with odd numbers of strings or whatever – is it not possible that more could be done with older existing instruments? After all, the Sixties' flirtation with Indian musical instruments may sound exceedingly twee to our ears now (I tried listening to an Incredible String Band album the other night – it was, er, an experience) but at least there was some attempt being made to break away from convention.

Folk music has traditionally thrown up (I use the word advisedly) some odd instruments: harps, bagpipes, squeeze boxes and so on, but these are usually damned from the outset by the finger-in-the-ear-ethnic-chic buffoons who play them. Might these instruments be usable in rock music – has anyone out there tried?

ELO have used strings rather interestingly (and commercially) and jazz rock has its violinists like Eddie Jobson and Jean-Luc Ponty, but maybe more could be made of the musical instruments of the past if we ever sat down to have a look at them.

The reason for doing so is twofold. On the one hand I think that rock is in some danger currently of painting (or rather playing) itself into a corner. One funk record sounds much like another, ditto for 'new wave', heavy metal, reggae – in fact all the current musical styles seem to be intellectually constipated in the new ideas department. This leads to the double-headed monster of artistic and, eventually, financial decay. Music is usually not made for the appreciation of other musicians – one wishes to reach a wider audience than that, one which might not care a fig for the subtle differences between one funk outfit and another. People like, and probably need, novelty in most things and their interest will go if all our music sounds the same. Commercially, then, it makes sense for a band to experiment with sounding different. Artistically the same is true. An art form which does not progress, dies. That can happen to rock the same as it is happening to opera and other established musical forms which are strangling themselves with a fear of innovation.

I'm not saying that the sounds made by bands are inherently more important than the music they make but that the two are inextricably linked and that new instruments and new ways of getting different sounds out of the old ones might help to increase commerciality and satisfy artistic needs at the same time. After you with the nose flute, Clive.



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The Electric and Acoustic Creative-Aid Non-Offensive Nutritional Sensibility Test

It takes nothing more than a good idea ... and a little ingenuity

Every once in a while you come across a concept that is so straightforward and downright useful that you cannot help but wonder why nobody had thought of it before. That this particular idea is alive and well and prospering in Los Angeles, rather than, say, London, Birmingham or Glasgow, only means that, unfortunately, the British music biz hasn't yet seen the light of day. Because there is absolutely no reason why a place like Creative Space - for that's the name of this new venture - couldn't prosper anywhere that musicians need to spend some time working out arrangements, sorting through a few titles before going into the studio, or simply trying out some rough ideas before deciding on a song's final form.

The concept of Creative Space is really quite simple. Co-owners Tom Lubin and Dean Thompson wanted to set up a pre-production workshop in which musicians, songwriters and composers could work without the

time or budget pressures imposed by a full-blown recording studio, and where such people would be able to get down to creating their music without the sort of interruptions normally found at home. To this end Tom and Dean have converted an old-fashioned boarding house into seven self-contained recording areas. Each room comes complete with all the necessary equipment to produce a simple demo tape of a song or arrangement. An easy-to-use rack of hardware houses a 4-track Teac Model 144 Portastudio, cassette deck for mastering, spring reverb, headphones, Auratone monitor speakers, and a handful of microphones. Also provided in each area is a Yamaha P-202 acoustic piano and CR-78 Compu-Rhythm programmable drum machine. Home-brewed acoustic treatment and separate air-conditioning ensure that nothing finds its way on to tape that shouldn't be there, and that it's possible to work for as long as you like in comfortable surroundings.

Each room has been designed specifically for recording acoustic instruments and vocal. Any electric instruments - lead or bass guitar, Fender Rhodes, synthesisers, effects boxes, and so on - can be direct-injected into the Portastudio, thereby doing away with the need to carry heavy amps and cabinets with you. Foam seats open up to form a bed (great if you need time to think in a horizontal position) or, more realistically, can be used to build acoustic screens around an instrument or vocalist.

Creative Space places greater emphasis on the atmosphere and immediate working environment of the place, however, rather than simply making a big thing of the recording hardware. While, with proper care and maintenance, the gear should live up to every expectation, it's equally

important, Tom stresses, to make visiting musicians and composers feel at home. Almost every room has a view of the garden or conservatory - albeit through a double-glazed window. A large central lounge/reception area can be used for band meetings; Tom also plans to organise a series of seminars covering the often complex legal aspects of copyright and song publishing. Creative Space even has its own real-time copying room where high-quality cassette or reel-to-reel tapes can be produced at reduced cost. In addition, music charts, typewriters, copyright forms, strings, stationery and just about everything else that an artist could possibly need are available in house - including, as they say in their brochure, 'food that will not offend your nutritional sensibilities'.

Tom Lubin and his crew at Creative Space feel that composers and songwriters face greater pressures these days than in the past. Years ago, he says, a composer would simply sit down at his piano, work up the lyrics and a basic chord structure, and then draw out the charts. However, with the advent of multitrack recording, a songwriter now needs to structure a song more closely, and is often working with many more musical elements than a simple lead vocal and backing rhythm. Without access to even the most basic of multitrack facilities - and a Portastudio can be used to build up relatively complex layers of sound - a writer really cannot begin to understand how a particular arrangement will sound when the band gets into a studio.

And there are other related areas in which Tom foresees Creative Space fulfilling a much-needed role. Having recorded your basic rhythm tracks at a large studio, a rough mix can be transferred to cassette, and then vocal

and instrument solos tried out until you're happy with the result. (All of which might save a lot of expensive 16- or 24-track recording time). And, with studio rates being what they are these days, many music publishers and record companies are somewhat reluctant to spend very much money on producing demos of new signings. Here again, an organisation like Creative Space can enable such people to show what they can do, without running up large studio bills. (Incidentally, Creative Space has vowed that it will never set up an in-house publishing company, simply because of the compromising situation in which such a close working relationship could place prospective clients.)

Rates at Creative Space are a very reasonable \$12.50 per hour (about £5.30); daily rates - a full 24 hours without any restrictions - come out at \$125.00 (£53.30) during the week, and \$150 at weekends. And if you feel like a full week's exposure to a really pleasant working environment, it'll set you back \$800.00 (a mere £340.00). Every new client also receives a free half-hour of instruction on how to use the recording gear. (Tom and Dean are currently preparing a series of short video cassettes on recording and production techniques, including basic miking and special effects.)

Should any Sound International readers ever find themselves in Los Angeles during a tour, and want a few hours/days/weeks of peace and quiet to work on some material for their next single or album - or just try out one or two ideas - they could do a whole lot worse than paying a visit to Creative Space, 135 North Parkview Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90026. Or call Janis Thompson, the workshop's general manager, on: (213) 384-3704.

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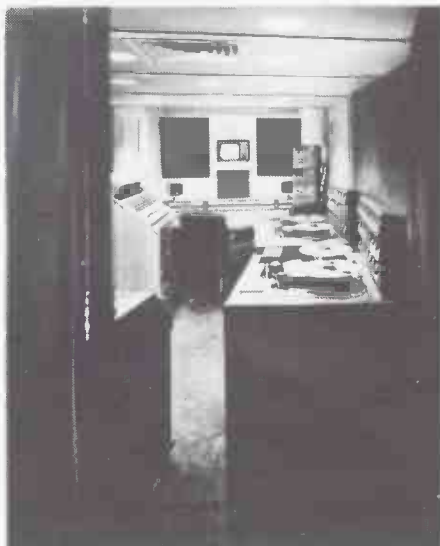
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PAUL DAY on... VOX

The Vox name has, of course, been in the forefront of the music industry for many years and origins of the company can be traced back to the very beginnings of the so-called beat boom. However, it's always been the distinctively-styled Vox amplification that has attracted most of the attention, the instrument side maintaining a comparatively low profile. Obviously there has never been any shortage of Vox amplifier endorsees, while The Beatles, Rolling Stones and Hollies can be counted among the more illustrious Sixties users of Vox guitars.

The first Vox solids appeared in the early Sixties and these bore remarkable styling similarities to models produced by Hohner and Fenton-Weill, possibly indicative of some product connection or perhaps general lack of original design inspiration. This early range comprised the *Stroller* and *Shadow* models (strictly beginners' fodder), plus the slightly more up-market *Soloist*, *Duotone*, *Ace* and *Bassmaster* models. In fairness, however, all were pretty basic and obviously aimed at the lower end of the market, like so many other brands produced around that time – these being formative years for many manufacturers and players.

However, by the mid-Sixties the range had expanded considerably, encompassing most price ranges and model types: this was a boom time for interest in the electric guitar, and Vox attempted to meet the needs of both aspiring and experienced players, with a varied range of instruments, some weird and wonderful, others more weird than wonderful. By this time the early instruments had been revamped, the model names being retained, and as such they still represented the budget end, while up-market came the *Super Ace* and the *Dominator*, followed by the *Consort* and *Soundcaster*. By now there was a strong Fender influence noticeable in Vox guitar styling, most apparent in the *Soundcaster* and the *Symphonic* bass which were definitely among the first obvious Fender copies. Coincidentally, the Vox manufacturing concern, Jennings Musical Industries, also imported Fender products at that time, thus neatly covering all bases (no pun intended).

It was in late 1963 that the most original, distinctive and probably the most famous Vox solids appeared. These were the *Phantom* models, boasting a trapezoid shape based on a styling commissioned from the Design Centre team in London. The appearance was obviously very different and visually quite attractive, although totally impractical for playing the instrument when seated. Thus these, and the later 'teardrop' *Phantoms*, were essentially poseurs' guitars, although their distinctly unaggressive styling meant that the effect of such posturing



could be more comic than phallic. The original *Phantom* guitar and bass models were later joined by a 12-string version, used to good effect by many of the leading bands at that time. All were essentially hand-made, as was the Gretsch-inspired *Victor* which was the first Vox semi-acoustic (also available in bass version).

The Vox range continued to grow and 1964 saw the introduction of the *Phantom Mk III* series with an equally distinctive teardrop-shaped body styling, available in equivalent model versions. Both *Phantom* ranges proved very popular – surprisingly so considering the resistance to new shapes usually displayed by the notoriously conservative 'average' guitarist. However, these were flamboyant times! The *Phantom* shape in fact inspired various copies as the British musical invasion took firm hold around the world.

Other additions at this time were the *Bouzouki* 12-string, featuring distinct Fender styling: a complete range of semi-acoustics including the *Challenger* and *Lynx*, plus the *Escort* and *Cougar* basses. Down-market came the *Apache*, somewhat akin to a half-sucked pear-drop in appearance. Another weirdo, albeit at the opposite end of the price-scale, was the *Scorpion*, a really over-the-top style available in both 6 and 9-string versions. It's now a real rarity, which is probably just as well.

A major introduction was that of virtually the first commercially practical *Guitar-Organ*. Based on the original *Phantom* styling, this sported

an impressive array of controls, with a neck featuring touch-activated frets governing a bank of tone generators and other built-in goodies. A veritable monster of an instrument, it proved somewhat temperamental in operation (like others of its genre), but when working it was a very impressive machine. There was a companion bass version, something of a mind-boggling prospect and now also a very rare beast.

By the latter half of the Sixties even more new models had appeared, some on a very limited production basis as new ideas and avenues were explored. Many innovative designs were produced, some more successful than others: one such venture was a metal-bodied bass, an experiment in increased sustain from solid mass. The *Escort* was a *Telecaster*-based design, as was the later *Marauder*, this model featuring various on-board effects, including distortion, repeat percussion etc. The novel *Winchester* was a minuscule-bodied solid, virtually all neck, which was unfortunately more gimmicky than practical and it met with limited success, with production figures to match. Another new series was a semi-acoustic design, based on the teardrop *Phantom* shape. These models were designated the *Spitfire VI*, *Spitfire XII* and *Wyman* bass, the latter being endorsed by Bill Wyman, of course. Also introduced was the *Mando-Guitar*, a novel, very short-scale 12-string solid, used by George Harrison among others.

By this time Vox equipment was proving very popular in America,

GUITARS

being synonymous with the British sound and image. The American Thomas Organ Company took on the actual manufacture of Vox guitars and amplifiers for the US market and this independent production gave rise to new models, plus revamped, re-designated versions of existing instruments. The American catalogue included the *Harlem*, *Spitfire*, *Hurricane*, *Meteor* and *Tempest XII* solids; the *Bobcat*, *Tornado*, *Wildcat*, *Typhoon* and *New Orleans* semi-acoustics, plus the *Panther* and *Violin* basses. The *Phantoms* were still prominently featured, of course, the range now even boasting a 12-string stereo version. A liaison with the American Mosrite guitar concern produced the *Vox Bulldog* with strong Mosrite overtones. This model also appeared on the British market, albeit in slightly different form, being introduced at the same time as the new VG series of semi-acoustics. A later addition to the American catalogue was the range of 'electronic' guitars, complete with built-in distortion, bass and treble boost, wah-wah, repeat percussion and E or G tuner.

By the Seventies, Vox instruments were beginning to suffer from a definite lack of product identity, due in some part to the fact that there never had been a readily recognisable Mr Vox on the guitar side, unlike many other manufacturers. I consider this lack of an identifiable figurehead to be rather important – at least at that time. Since then, the Japanese seem to have succeeded very well without such luxuries – traditional attitudes have obviously changed somewhat. Vox guitars had in fact been produced by quite a number of outside contractors over the years, even the G-Plan furniture company had a hand in production at one time! During the Sixties some models were made by the Italian Eko concern, including the *Phantom* series and this, plus the American production, obviously aggravated the Faceless Image Problem still further. Popularity dwindled rapidly and production ceased completely, the only guitars bearing the Vox name being a range of imported *Les Paul* copies (a definite case of 'If you can't beat em, join em!').

During their heyday the better Vox guitars were renowned for being novel, distinctive, good working-instruments. Their image, regardless of origin, was very American-flashy without being too class – an ideal compromise for the rock'n'roll business.

SECOND-HAND INDEX

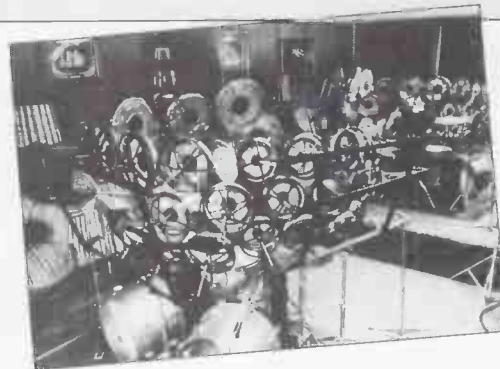
I'm afraid you've guessed it again, it's another *Sound International* second-hand index, this month on the smashing subject of drums. How do we do it? Well, it's rather fun actually. What we do is go through the last four or five weeks' worth of 'well-known weekly music newspapers', as our lawyers would put it, and sort out all the prices for a certain section of instruments into a filing system, and attempt to come up with an ordered list.

You shouldn't take this as a fixed price list, of course. That's not what it's intended to be: it's a *guide* to the sort of prices that were being asked in the papers we checked out. Obviously some items offered for sale by shops and dealers will have crept in, but it's hoped that the second-hand index provides a guide to private sale prices.

Second-hand Index No 5 Drums

ASBA congas +std £450
ASBA 5-drum kit + cys, Asba fts £575
AVEDIS ZYLDJIAN 18in crash £38
20in ride £60
BEVERLEY 5-drum kit +stds, css, h-
h, 2cys £225
6-drum kit +stds, css £395
+stds, cys, css £390
GON BOP congas +std £190
GRETSCH 14in, 16in concert tms
+std, cs £130
GRETSCH 6¼in snare wood-shell
£75-£80
GRETSCH 4-drum kit Prem fts £250
GRETSCH 13x9 tom £40
HAYMAN hi-hat comp +bag £38
HAYMAN *Showman* 5-drum kit
+stds, css £300

HAYMAN tom 13in £40
HAYMAN *Vibrasonic* 5-drum kit
+cys, stds, css £315
KENT 5-drum kit +Zyl cys, stds £175
LATIN PERCUSSION congas
£320-£325
LUDWIG concert toms four £200
LUDWIG 4-drum kit +AZ/Pst cys, css
£400
LUDWIG 6¼in snare £80
NATAL congas +std, cs £200
F/gls, +std £100
PAISTE 22in heavy gong £190
24in heavy gong £190
PAISTE 602 cys 20in med £75
14in h-h £75
17in med £60
20in heavy £60



Is this man mad? Is there a man there? Yep, it's Randy Seol – you know, ex-Strawberry Alarm Clock drummer now with his own band Live Octave. About 40 Rototoms here, actually in three banks of seven different sizes. Popular with Octopuses, apparently.

PAISTE 2002 cys 20in ride £45
PEARL 5-drum f/gls kit £320
+cys, stds, css £475
PEARL 9-drum kit £650
PEARL *Full Dimension* 7-drum kit
+stds, css £500
PEARL *Syncussion* 2-channel £130-
£170
PEARL/MAXWIN 5-drum kit £250
+cys £295
PREMIER *Silver Seven* concert kit
+css £650
PREMIER 4-drum kit +AZ cys, css
£275
+cys, stds £200
PREMIER 5-drum kit +cys Avg £250
PREMIER 6-drum kit +cys, css £350
PREMIER/OLYMPIC 5-drum kit
+cys, stds £275-£300
REMO *Rototoms* 6in, 8in, 10in, 12in
+bar, stds, cs £175
12in, 14in +bar £60-£100
8in, 10in, 12in +bar £70
ROGERS tom 14in £40
12x8 £30
13x10 £35

16x18 £50
ROGERS 9-drum kit +stds, cys £675
SHAFTESBURY 7-drum kit +cys
£300
SLINGERLAND 6¼in snare £60
SONOR 5-drum kit +css, stds, cys
£695
SONOR 15in concert tom +cs £60
SONOR 16in flr tom +Ev-R hd £50
TAMA tom 6in, 8in £60
TAMA 7-drum kit +Pst cys, stds, cys
£800
YAMAHA 90005-drum kit £500

KEY

Brand and model are given in **heavier** type: one price if one instrument has been offered for sale; a range (eg £275-£300) for two or three instruments; and an Average price (Avg) if many instruments have been offered. Any words in 'quotes' are seller's description.

Letters

Write to: Sound International, Link House, Dingwall Avenue, Croydon CR9 2TA, England.

A Bit Crawling

I have read and thoroughly enjoyed you magazine ever since the first issue and I thought it was about time to drop you a line.

I am a first-year electronics student at UMIST in Manchester and my interests lie in all spheres of live and recorded music. My main instrument is the clarinet (I haven't played for months!) but I also play the guitar (badly – who doesn't) and synth (I have successfully built the Powertran/ETI transcendent mono synth – this is excellent value/money/sound, why not a review sometime?). Other constructional escapades have been a PA system (Mother hates it) and now defunct guitar amp. That's enough of me, now a few thoughts on the magazine.

The balance of the mag is excellent, appealing to the true musician and not to empty-headed technology fiends (as does *IM*). We must remember that technology is here to help us with our act, and not to ogle over and be slaves to. In this respect, *SI* does well in explaining technology to the layman/musician – this sounds a bit crawling, but I mean it, honest! I am thinking particularly of the PA series and the Build Your Own Studio articles

(although these are getting a bit long).

Your reviews of music and equipment vary in quality, the best instrumental reviews being the comparative tests (copy guitars, pianos, phasers, etc) and the musical reviews being nicely unbiased (due to the variety of writers). However, I do wish that in the group/musician features, you would lay off the complete gear list side of things, cos this game's about originality and not getting the X sound, where X is big pop star. As I've said earlier in this letter, the gear's there to serve, not rule!

Robert Fripp's essays in Frippian philosophy are very enlightening, and if read carefully and the musical references changed to more general ones, are a guide to living in a modern world free from repression and ignorance (continued *NME* page 6...).

More generally then, the magazine gives a good, wide, unbiased range of news and ideas about what's going on in live music.

PS: More constructional articles and news on the do-it-yourself cassettes scene.

From: David Fury, West Didsbury, Manchester, England.

See Editorial on p3 for discussion of this letter.

For Mellotron Read Novatron

Referring to your *NEWS* item *Beatles For Sale* (Dec '80). As manufacturers of all Mellotrons since their inception in 1963, we were very interested to read about the sale of the Beatles' Mellotron at EMI, Abbey Road Studios on the 16th October. May we correct the impression given by Mike Oldfield that this type of instrument is no longer made. Our company is still manufacturing the Model 400SM and Mark 5 versions, although these are now marketed under the name of NOVATRON due to the original name not now being available to us. We can still supply tape frames and spares which will fit both MELLOTRONS and NOVATRONs. From: N. E. Bradley, Director, Streetly Electronics, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, England.

Atlantic, I enjoy getting a different perspective on the music scene both from a performance and equipment aspect. It is nice to see some humour in a magazine; most of the US publications are dry as dust. Kudos to your equipment reviews as it is nice to see a piece of equipment get panned when it should. All the US reviews give high praise to everything, even to gear I've used and would call 'cheap and nasty'.

One minor criticism about *SI*: how about providing the addresses of manufacturers of equipment when mentioned in articles or reviews? The US publication *Guitar Player* does this and is quite helpful to us equipment freaks wanting to keep up with the latest toys. Believe it or not, some of us are more concerned with equipment than making music!

From: Neil T Slade, Arlington, Va, US.

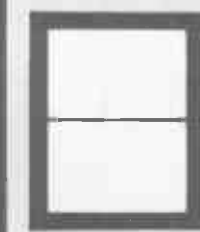
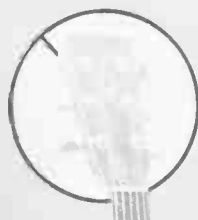
Tony Bacon replies:

Well thanks for writing Neil – ages since we had one from Virginia. Yeah, we'd noticed that some of the American mags are a little, er, dull. Equipment reviews do seem to be a rare commodity in these US rags, so *SI* is usually well received among the clued-up colonials. But then, in a few words' time the page will end.

Mags Across The Water

I've been receiving *SI* for some time now and I must thank you for putting out such an enjoyable publication. Being on the other side of the

Sound ADVICE



Norwegian Would: 1

Could you please tell me the name and address of possible companies in England, on the Continent or in USA who have experts with practical experience in building-up sound reinforcement systems.

From: Terje Stensholm, Country Snakes, 1800 Askim, Norway.

Not knowing either the Continental or American PA scenes too well I'll stick to UK-based companies. It all depends really on what size or type of PA that you want. If you are looking for a small and relatively simple system then a package as produced by some manufacturers might be the best bet. I'm thinking here particularly of the new H/H equipment which is excellent for its purpose. For a bigger system you might like to try Mega who are at Westwood House, Great West Trading Estate, 979 Great West Rd, Brentford, Middlesex, England. They are also on Telex (8952532) and on the 'phone at (01) 568 1141. Another possibility is Martin Audio who are at 54, Stanhope St. London NW1. Their telephone number is (01) 388 7162. H/H are at Viking Way, Bar Hill, Cambridge, England. Their Telex number is 817515, their telephone number is (0954) 81140.

On the other hand you may wish to assemble components and build your own system from various sources. Frankly your best bet is to write off to manufacturers who advertise and then buy what seems best from each range shown. If you need advice and want to buy components from one source you could try writing to Buzz Music at 65, Widemarsh St. Hereford, England. Their telephone number is (0432) 55961.

Norwegian Would: 2

I'm a drummer 20 years old. I've been playing with a band daily for a while but I'm looking for a professional future. I want to study jazz drumming but I don't know any schools that I can join. Please be kind enough to help with finding a good school in England that I can join. I'm ready to come to England to study.

From: Emad Bassili, 2800 Gjøvik, Norway.

Hmm, seems to me that we've got ourselves a lot of readers in Norway if

our letters are anything to go by this month – great. Well to answer your letter, no there are no schools in England that I would recommend as such. I don't really think that they are such a good idea anyway for anything other than classical musical training and I'd much rather recommend you to a source of private tuition which is likely to be less formalised and more personal. Your best bet is to write to Henrit's Drumstore at 112, Wardour Street, London W1. Their telephone number is (01) 734 7121. They currently recommend an American drummer who is resident over here, a guy called Joel Rothman and they'll put you in touch. Good luck.

Trouble at Miller

I'm having a lot of problems with bass strings and wonder if you can help? I use a Fender Precision through a Bassman set-up and not only don't I get a very good sound but I'm also having trouble with intonation. Can you help?

From: Chris Miller, Thornton Heath, Surrey, England.

Actually, you've not really given me much to go on here. Chris – would any readers who want to write in try and give me all the details they can think of, otherwise I have to be very general in my answers. You say that you aren't getting a decent sound, but what do you mean by that – no sustain? Too topky, middley, bassy? Either way you have such an orthodox amp/guitar set-up there that I can't see how your problems can stem from that side.

You also say that you are having intonation problems – but what kind? It could well be that your bass is faulty, the neck might have moved a bit in which case it needs adjustment and you should take it to a repairer for attention. If, however, you're pretty sure that the neck is straight and that the bridge is OK it could just be that you are being very critical indeed and are noticing minute fluctuations of pitch. You could try a different brand of strings and I'd be reasonably happy to recommend Superwounds to you – I've tried them and they do seem to work well particularly in the intonation department. They sound good too.

If you don't like them you could always try Rotosound or Picato, two brands which I like a lot and which



have seemed accurate enough to me – although there's a lot of disagreement about string brands among players. Try a new set of strings as suggested and then see a reputable repairer.

Rising Sunbursts

I wonder if you could recommend a decent acoustic guitar to me, mainly to be used for recording at home, backing tracks etc. I haven't got the bread for a Martin or a Guild but I do want that sort of sound, under £300 if possible, but not something which sounds terrible. Any chance?

From: Peter Hale, Sheffield, England.

The land of the rising Sun's your only hope here as I don't think that you could get a Fylde at the sort of money you're talking about and that might have otherwise been an obvious choice. Going back to our acoustic multi-test in the August '80 issue it seemed generally agreed that the Mugen range is pretty excellent for the money. These are handled by Rosetti and Co who will, no doubt, supply

details of them if you contact 138/140 Old St. London EC1. Telephone number is (01) 253 7294.

Another excellent acoustic which didn't feature in that test but which I have personally used a fair bit is the Aria Paul Brett, details here from Gigsville Ltd, Phoenix Way, Heston, Middx. I think that these may retail at around your price bracket and they're a pretty nice guitar with a good live sound for the money.

Author Stumped

Please can you help me? I am very interested in becoming a session singer and I wonder if you could send me the addresses of a few agents who might be able to help me?

From: Susan Harlow, Bolton, Lancs.

Wow, that's an odd one. I really haven't the faintest idea how anyone breaks into that market. I print this letter, then, in the vague hope that someone out there may have an idea about how to get into this difficult field. If you have, please drop me a line and I'll print the letter.

ETCETERA

Cajun Cookin'



Cajun music and the closely-related Zydeco are largely familiar to European audiences through the regular rowdy visits from Rockin' Dopsie's Cajun Twisters (see review *SI* Sept '79) and Clifton Chenier's Bayou Blues Band. 1980, too, saw a place on that circuit for Queen Ida and the Bon Temps Zydeco Band, after their two previously successful tours and the release of their second Sonet album. *This Is New Orleans*. That record pushed Sonet's enterprising Cajun catalogue to 16 and coincided with the publication of their chatty, informative newspaper *This Is Cajun Music* – packed with news, interviews, culinary secrets (from Rockin' Dopsie in 'How To Cook Cajun'), as well as graphic details of 'How To Dance Cajun'.

Cajun and Zydeco music is – and always was – dance music: a mix of waltzes and two-steps pumped out for hours at one of the numerous dance-halls dotted across the watery Louisiana landscapes, or at small, private *fais dodo*'s where the adults dance in one room while the kids *fais dodo* (go to sleep) in another.

Although both musics have irresistibly catchy tunes and an insistent, pulsating, rhythmic base, the differences between them are significant: Cajun music is slower than Zydeco's up-tempo, syncopated beat, and places more emphasis on the melody. Cajun is the original form, descended direct from the fiddled dance music of the first French 16th century emigrants who settled in their new 'Acadian lands' (now Nova Scotia). A brutal persecution by the greedy and barbarous British colonisers led to the rarely mentioned 'Grand Expulsion' of 1755, and the Acadians – later condensed to Cajuns – fled south to the hospitable Louisiana lands, taking their fiddles and two-steps with them. Waltzes arrived in the 19th century with a waver of German migrants, whose button accordions soon replaced the French fiddles as the

main rhythm source and became the trademark Cajun instrument.

The explosions of R & B drifted up the bayous in the Fifties to beget a new strand of Cajun music threaded with blues: Zydeco was born, and became the music of the black, French-speaking descendants of the first Afro-Caribbean slaves.

'Zydeco,' says Al Lewis, the Bon Temps' lead guitarist, 'is a fusion of Louisiana good-time folk music, composed of Cajun and Creole roots, Latin and Caribbean rhythms, as well as country-swing two-steps and waltzes, sung in French and played on a German-made accordion.' Add to that the inevitable instruments of rock music and you have the country-zydeco line-up of Queen Ida's band, who lived up to their good-time name on a freezing night late last year in a London canal-side venue – a far cry from the steamy bayou-side dance-halls to which they are accustomed, but through songs like *Back On The Bayou*, *Bayou Blues* and even the specially-adapted *London Zydeco* they managed to thaw the night and transport everyone with their special brand of non-stop dance music.

Queen Ida (above), a *femme du doigt*, dictates via the accordion the stutty rhythms which Wilbert Lewis echoes on washboard or triangle (which he pitches by moving his fingers up and down the 'hypotenuse'). Lewis, sandwichboarded inside a gleaming metallic washboard vest (or *frottoir*) emblazoned with sequined treble clefs, beats out sharp, jangly rhythms as his hands roam across his ridged chest with two metal spoons. This garment-instrument was invented in the Thirties when corrugated iron became popular for roofing! Al Lewis doubles as lead guitarist and exuberant MC (leering at the 'tite filles' in the audience, or swapping hats with a nutter who couldn't keep off stage or on his feet), raps in incomprehensible French patois

('Franglais'), or tries without success to get the audience singing along with *Right On!*

But Lewis' guitar playing exonerated him from all that – paired with guitarist Betty Lena (Lady Zena), their mournful, country wailings were reminders of the most recent mergers of Cajun with country music which easily and inevitably revived the fiddle through Jimmy Newman's and Doug Kershaw's music.

The Texas oil-finds drew Louisiana men to work, and musical crossfusions began in earnest. Until then the 'French triangle' – as this marshy wedge of Louisiana, west of New Orleans, is called – had remained quite impervious to American 'progress'. Then, country music and rock 'n'roll seeped up the bayous and irreversibly took a grip. As with any kind of music, many social factors lie behind the changes: migrations between the New Orleans region and the Caribbean are well documented, with salsa, arriving from Cuba, just one example. Listening to the distinctive hiccupping rhythms of Queen Ida's fast zydeco two-steps – particularly the song *C'est La Vie* – it was impossible to ignore the similarity with the stutterbreak of the ska dance beat. Early Skatalites and Maytals (as the Vikings) tunes, on the excellent ska sampler *Volume 2*, substitute the melodica for the accordion and you find yourself dancing the same steps!

With music so central to Cajun life, it's disappointing that a recently published book, *The Cajuns* by William Faulkner Rushton, devotes so little attention to it: a thin chapter entitled 'French Accordion Folk Music' is all he offers, with just one paragraph about the 'Cajun-influenced music called Zydeco'. The chapter is built around a profile of an old-timer who is using a cassette recorder to chart permanently the old Cajun tunes of his youth, long-forgotten and never played, as his superb accordion style comes without a knowledge of music to chart it. Faulkner touches on the intrusion/incorporation of country music, the treks to Nashville and melds that ensued – but compared to his well-researched, fascinating and emotive detail of the history of the Cajun people, it is disappointing that he takes just a cursory glance at their music.

A whole chapter is devoted to 'Reconstructing The Cajun House', telling how they coped with the unstable watery foundations and used local weed (Spanish moss, imitating the Indians) for just about everything from torches to stuffing chairs and weaving horse-blankets. There is an obligatory chapter on cooking Cajun, complete with recipes for gumbo and chowders and jambalayas, for the crawfish (which literally teem in the bayous), for the African speciality okra, and of course the hot spices which characterise the food (and lend every music reviewer helpful comparisons). This is an interesting and informative book, then, which is hard to put down and is written in a quirky, colloquial

style. But when I'd read it, the music gap made me want to know more about the music. By reading a selection of record sleeves from amongst the excellent samples of Cajun music available at the moment – including Rounder Records' usual thorough treatment in a 23-page booklet which accompanies *Zodico: Louis Creole Music* (1967) – a fuller picture of the span of Cajun/Zydeco can be obtained, along with a sense of its great vitality, and the changes which are still occurring within the old and new cross-currents.

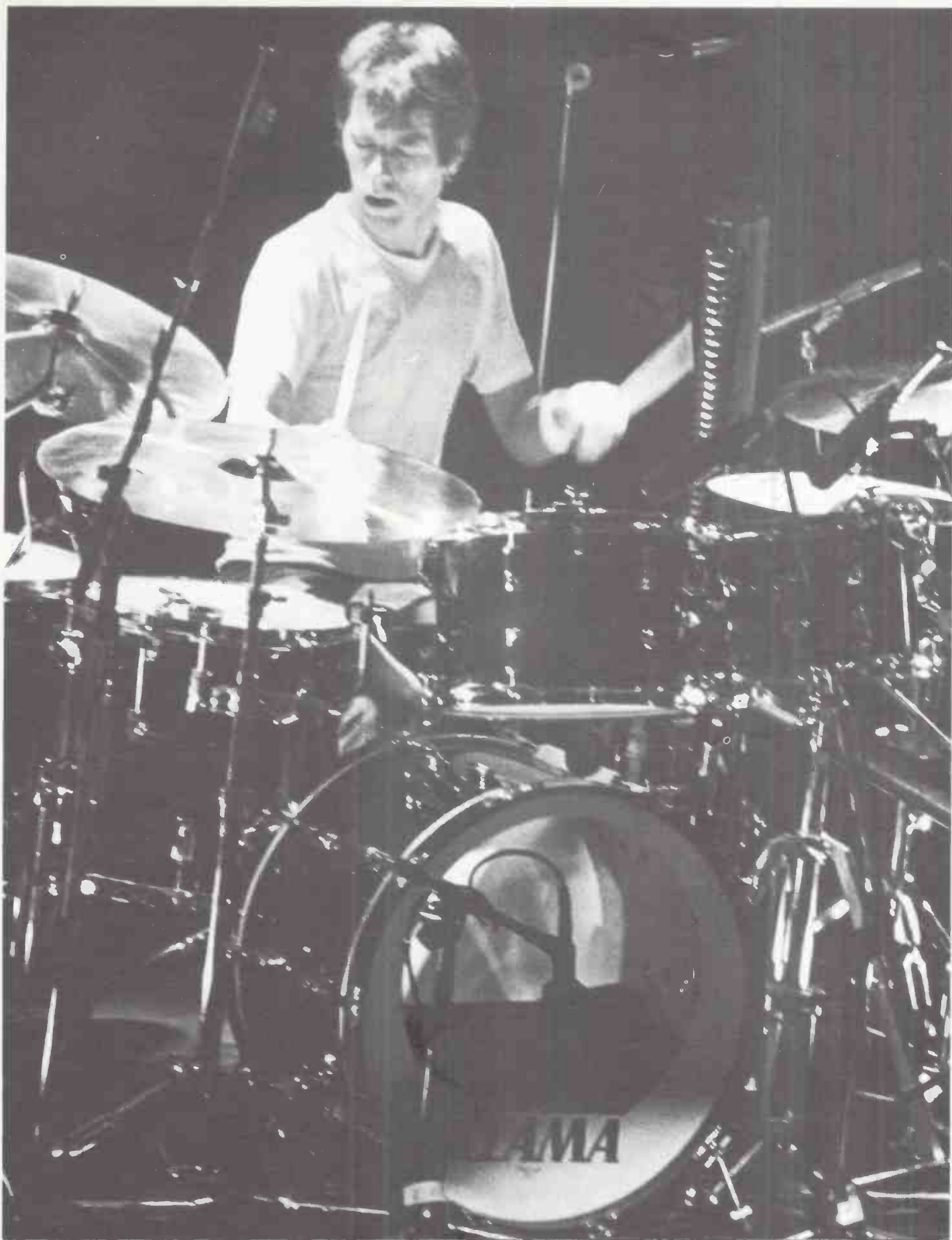
Several samplers serve as an excellent introductory guide to this irresistible music. Try Arhoolie's *Zydeco*, just one of the many variations of this word whose meanings vary with who's using it. Early roots are offered on this record by the legendary accordionist Amade Ardoin, the surprising Lightnin' Hopkins in 1949 substituting organ for accordion, Leadbelly in 1947, and Clifton Chenier's first recordings (1950) of *Clifton's Blues*. Charlie Gillett's first release for his Oval label, *Another Saturday Night*, is now sadly out of print, but is on the way back. It mixes Sam Cooke and Fats Domino tunes with blues-based Zydeco classics, and on the title track Johnny Allen belts it out, giving a peek at a local seam of blues-based, good time music.

Sonet's *Cajun Cruisin' Volume I* and *Volume II* offer a broad selection of songs which peaked during the Fifties boom of local record labels, being played at local dances and on the numerous local radio stations. Alas, these are long-gone days – with national control over everything worth wringing for its worth – but the records offer a fine selection of songs and dances. The one surviving local Cajun radio station in Mamou holds an open-house every Saturday morning when folks gather from miles to drink, dance, join in and play and listen to the music, French-spoken ads and fun in a small studio run by Revon Reed. This is captured on Sonet's *This Is Mamou Cajun Radio*, complete with audience participation.

Of the many locally-recorded players, Clifton Chenier probably holds most respect, and his personal roots of R&B are reflected on *Bayou Blues*, a collection of previously unreleased songs. Jo-el Sonnier is on another limb altogether – he recorded in Nashville with the ubiquitous steel guitar player Pete Drake and a band of Nashville talents, but places his accordion central while playing traditional Cajun tunes by historic players like Iry Lejeune and Nathan Abshire ('a Cajun James Dean who died young' – Faulkner Rushton).

These records really reflect my main beef with William Rushton (no relation)'s book – there is so much variety to Cajun music, united in its charming and exhilarating rhythms and catchy tunes. Seeing a group like Queen Ida's play live tells more about this vital music than a visit to the local museum.

Sue Steward



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17,000 Seconds with The Cure

Curing the Masses: checking the progress of the Cure, Ralph Denyer talks to the standard-lamp, the fridge and the vacuum cleaner.

The Cure have their third album released through Fiction Records shortly. Ralph Denyer finds them an interesting band for several reasons, not least of all for their uncompromising music which they have stuck by and which has brought them a strong following in many countries. The Cure sell moderate amounts of singles but they tend to be airplay trailers and samplers of the albums. Their most successful single in chart terms was *A Forest* which made it to around the 30 mark. They have toured extensively since 1979 and their second album is now just nudging a sales figure of 200,000 worldwide – 40,000 albums having been sold in the UK.

Instrumental in the success of the band is one Mr Chris Parry, owner and instigator of Fiction Records. The first Cure album *Three Imaginary Boys* was also the first release on Fiction and marked Parry's departure from Polydor Records where he had helped to get the Jam as well as Siouxsie and the

Banshees on to vinyl. Now his involvement with the Cure has become total. He has tried to get people in to Fiction to allow him to delegate without success. His much publicised 'dumping' of the Passions was in fact simply the end of a verbal agreement to allow him to concentrate fully on the Cure. The Associates have also left Fiction though Parry does maintain an interest in the group.

The Cure started life in 1976 in Crawley, Sussex as a five-piece called Easy Cure. By the time of their first single *Killing An Arab* they were the Cure and down to a 3-piece consisting of Robert Smith (guitar vocals), Lol Tolhurst (drums), with bass player Michael Dempsey who is no longer with the group. *Killing An Arab* attracted considerable attention and soon after its release they signed to Parry's Fiction label and he produced their first *Three Imaginary Boys* album.

Robert had the idea of not presenting potential listeners of the album with any pre-conceived starmarker images of the band. Hence they did not appear

on the album sleeve which instead featured a photo of an old standard-lamp, fridge, and vacuum cleaner. Some interpreted the sleeve as a coy attempt at creating a false *mystique* around the group. However the Cure were being talked about and the record was bought in reasonable quantities.

The Cure gained momentum as a hard-working live band but after their first visit to the US a crack appeared and Dempsey left the group to be replaced by Simon Gallup (left) Keyboardist Matthieu Hartley joined at the same time, just prior to the recording of their second album *Seventeen Seconds*. But Hartley left within the year leaving the current line-up of Smith, Tolhurst and Gallup. A week or so after *A Forest* made the charts, *Seventeen Seconds* cruised into the albums Top Twenty. That was in April of 1980. On November 18 of the same year a gig at Cardiff University completed a six-month world tour consisting of 121 live performances in thirteen countries plus seven TV shows and eight radio shows.

When I met them at Morgan Studios in February, the Cure were just completing backing tracks for their third album. I asked Lol about the general feeling within the group that they prefer the advantage of not being a hit singles band. 'We never really wanted to be a hit singles band as such. We never aimed for that because the most annoying thing about playing regularly – doing regular tours – is coming to the point in the set where it is time to play your single and everybody expects it and then you may be playing it again in the *encore* or something like that. So we've consciously gone out of our way *not* to make a hit singles syndrome. When *A Forest* came out and got to 32 in the charts or something, there was the immediate pressure on us to release another single about a month later to capture the influx of interest created. But we stuck to our guns and said no, we wouldn't do it. It has worked well for us and I'm sure Chris Parry has understood that and it hasn't done us any appreciable harm. It has done us a lot more good really because people accept us for all the different songs and everyone has their own personal favourites so it makes it a lot more balanced to play live. Obviously our singles are better known but our set is a lot more even that way. I think the type of people we want to like us would appreciate that anyway, they're not very interested in people having a run of four or five hit singles.'

Three Imaginary Boys and *Seventeen Seconds* both come across well as albums as opposed to just being two collections of songs. 'Oh yeah, the first one by its very nature – a band's first album is always a collection in a small way. Usually the songs are taken from the period from getting them written to getting them on record. They tend to be more of a collection because the songs are written over a period of time. I think we've always tried to make our albums have a continuity in some way because there's nothing more annoying than listening to one track and then suddenly being jolted into something else so we generally try to have a line or thread going through our

albums. There are threads from *Three Imaginary Boys* that carry on through *Seventeen Seconds* and will be on the new album as well.'

I mentioned to Lol that I was interested to see that the writing credits on both of the group's albums are equal between whoever was in the band at the time: 'Yes. I think that is basically because we are friends. Our band is very close, we are all each other's best friend. So in that way we share everything anyway. The basic bits for the songs usually come from Robert, he's good at starting things off with little tunes and little bits and pieces. Then we'll all build from there, add bits and expand the idea if you like. The words come from all of us, Robert mostly because he's got to sing them and if you've got to sing them you've got to have conviction behind what you're singing. Also you know the limitations of your own voice. So if you can't grasp a particular phrase or it's bad to sing then obviously it's not going to work. What usually happens is that we have about 10 sheets of words for each song and we tend to sort out the best possible sheet from the whole lot.'

'Very few of our songs are written straight off complete, with words and never change. *10.15 Saturday Night* and *Killing An Arab* were I think, but nowadays we seem to have a situation where we are piecing bits together, that's how we work really. Now we try to leave things a bit more open-ended, but before we tried to have a definite beginning, middle and end in our songs which perhaps is a hangover from rock songs or country-and-western songs which have a beginning, a happening and then an end. We try to detach ourselves from that approach and be a little more open so that several connotations can be put on the same thing.'

Both the personal and working relationships between Mike Hedges and the Cure have worked well and developed through time. Hedges' initial involvement with the band was brought about by Parry who saw Mike as a young up-and-coming engineer who was willing to involve himself in a new approach to

music. Parry predicted that the combination would work well as has been proven. Mike engineered the first Cure album and co-produced the second with Robert. I asked Lol if they called on Mike for artistic decisions as well as for technical ones.

'He is artistic in his own way. In his own bludgeoning way (laughs). No, he'll hate me if I say that. He's very good. Basically he has the same attitude to music as we do. When we first met him he was a bit of an old BOF but he's gradually changed and we've changed as well. I think we've become more attuned to the fact that you don't have to do a song and *not* do an overdub merely because it is not totally ethical. When we record something we do try desperately to do it in such a way as to be able to do the song like that live, so that there are as few gaps as possible, so that the sound is full. There is nothing as disappointing as hearing a record and then going to see a group and they don't sound anything like the record, just the bare bones of a record – your favourite little bit of melody bits on top don't really stand out or something.'

'So we try to be able to do everything we do in the studio on stage as well. But Mike is really good because he's got a lot of ideas. He knows desks inside out and that helps us to be creative if you like. That's the best way to say it. He helps us do it, he's got the right ideas.'

'So it was just one of those happy unions, we never knew him before but Chris said, "Let's try it." For the first album Mike was the engineer and for the second album he came into his own as a contributor of ideas as well. Now on this third album we have a perfectly amicable relationship: we work well together and it is fine. A lot of other people are interested in him, I mustn't say who at the moment but other people have seen that there is some kind of empathy between us which I think is a real good thing. It hasn't happened to us yet but it must be horrible to be in the studio with someone at the controls who a) you don't trust,



b) you've got nothing in common with and c) doesn't like you. It must be really awful, counter-productive and totally negative. I'm sure that happens to a lot of people which is unfortunate because as a result, some of the great albums of the decade never come out.'

Simon Gallup played in a band local to Crawley – home of the Cure – and therefore not surprisingly knew Lol and Robert. Simon was in a group called Magazine Spies with keyboard player Matthieu. 'Robert and Lol came round to see me, I think it was one night after I'd finished work. They played me a rough tape of the chords and the songs for the second album and asked if I liked them. I said I did and they asked me to join the Cure.'

The reason for bringing in Simon on bass was simple. The group's original bass player had moved further and further away from Lol and Robert in terms of general direction. The group's first *Three Imaginary Boys* album displayed distinguishing features common to the class of 77/78 with a feel typical of bands emerging at the time. At the same time the songs and presentation were slightly off-centre giving the group a haunting and wistful appeal individual to them. As far as I could gather, Dempsey was more interested in the initial manifestation of punk and the new wave with all its freneticism than the direction that the group began to take as they approached the recording of their second album. Differences of opinion became acute and soon a personal crisis developed. So Dempsey went his own way and was replaced by Simon.

At the same time as bringing Simon in to the Cure, Robert and Lol also recruited Matthieu Hartley, the keyboards player from Magazine Spies. Simon explained: 'The whole idea of adding keyboards was to add a texture, not a keyboard embellishment as such but a texture. A mood. Eventually we parted ways with Matthieu because of – it sounds clichéd – musical differences. When the musical differences came they became personal as well. I think Matthieu preferred to be a keyboards player rather than someone who was just adding a texture to the songs but we didn't want embellishments. It was fine at first but after about nine months of touring and things like that he just got fed up. He wasn't really playing a secondary role but he was less up-front than he would like to have been – which is

understandable – but there you go. I think he might have had a bit of a complex about it or something.'

Nonetheless the second album *Seventeen Seconds* was recorded while Matthieu was still content with his role in the Cure. The album was adventurous with a wider appeal than the group's first album. Simon agreed that *Seventeen Seconds* had worked well.

'Matthieu and I had only been in the band 2½ months when *Seventeen Seconds* was recorded so it was all fresh. Our aim was to create a mood. Not a series of moods but just different aspects of one mood and I think it worked. There are things that we now think we could have done better but at the time we were 100% pleased with it cos it fulfilled our aims.'

By the time I talked to Simon I had spent some time talking to the group and watching them at work in Morgan Studios. I didn't have to be a genius of observation to notice that the Cure have a close personal and working relationship. Simon continued: 'Our relationship – don't take this in a funny way – but it's like a boy and girl relationship if you know what I mean. We don't get upset about things that

the medium. It transpired that Simon liked her *Army Dreamers* video promo, but that wasn't all he liked.

'It's funny you should mention her because that's all I ever listen to at home, Kate Bush, honestly. The only thing I don't like about her records are the backing vocals that her brother does, all that deep stuff. I just listen to her albums, I think her songs and her singing are really good.'

And what else does he listen to? 'Nothing really, her albums are all I listen to. Tell a lie, I did record an Adam And The Ants album the other day. That's all right. I listen to things every now and again but I dunno.

'I like the idea of listening to music, I can get up in the morning and think it would be really nice to put on a record. Then when I get home at night after rehearsing all day I think: God, I can't put on a record now, I'm fed up with music. I just want to watch telly or go down to the pub or something. I see all the names of loads of bands in the music papers and everything. People ask me if I've heard so-and-so who are really good but I never get round to listening to them which is a shame really. It's



Robert Smith with large recorder, Mike Hedges the recorder, Lol Tolhurst in the shadows.

boys would normally get upset about. We can swear at each other. If it's serious I might sulk for a while thinking they're not my friends anymore and things like that and feel really down. Then a few minutes later it's all blown over. I think we're really close which is good because I don't think that I could work in a band that wasn't personally close. I'd hate it if we were a band that only saw each other when we were playing. When we're on tour we see each other all the time because we want to. As soon as we've finished playing we all either go out *together* or we don't go out at all. We only go out as a group and it's good like that.'

As we went on to talk about presentation through various media Simon told me that they were not against making promo videos and the like. In fact they had made a promo for a couple of the tracks on their last album but they found the film crew booked by Polydor to be unsympathetic to the group and the results were 'just like a film of any band playing in the same old way!' Next time they make a video they intend to be more careful about who they work with.

During this talk of video and such things I mentioned Kate Bush as a prime exponent of

good to see what other people are doing and get ideas. Since joining the Cure I never get the time.'

Much of the Cure's creative momentum emanates from guitar and vocals man Robert Smith. There is plenty of bouncing ideas round between the three members of the group but more often than not, initial inspiration comes from Robert. Much of that inspiration is a result of his approach and philosophy. Part of his philosophy is that the message is far more important than the medium and that his motives are far more important than end results.

I asked Robert about the group's relationship with Chris Parry and the fact that having him in the group's corner is a huge asset. 'He really likes us as people as well as liking our music which helps a lot. We don't have a written management contract with him as such but because he is our record company and he is also our publisher – as it were – then it is also in his interest that we get things done. So there's no need for a management contract – though Chris would argue against that – we are our own managers, we make the decisions now for the Cure. Anything and everything that

is done now has to go through us now, which is a very good position for us to be in. There are very few bands in our position.

'And the good thing is that Chris generally agrees with what we say anyway. We might have a dispute over the release of records in Canada or something like that but they are very minor points. There are no policy decisions made except for those made by the three of us. It's nice that he allows us that type of freedom. As long as we are happy we are going to be doing things that we like and if we like what we do hopefully other people will as well. So it cuts well for both parties. If he was trying to pressurise us to fit into a formula - like other people have tried - it wouldn't work. We'd just close up, we're that type of group. It's nice to have a buffer between us and Polydor and things. (Fiction Records are distributed by Polydor.) So yes, it is good to have Chris there, it's very secure, knowing we have someone like that.

'Obviously we have to sell records to survive and otherwise we couldn't do things outside of music as well as within. At the same time we've retained enough ideals - well, I have - despite what we've been through. The way that we do things is more important than the actual outcome of things. I still feel that. Like the follow-up (to the single *A Forest*) in Holland. We sell a lot of records in Holland and the record company over there wanted to release *Play For Today* off the album (*Seventeen Seconds*) as the follow-up.

'We refused because we never wanted more than one track to be released from each album as a single. It just seems unfair. I've always thought that, I think it's a really cheap way out - "let's capitalise on the single". The Dutch record company told us that it wasn't like that in Holland, people over there don't think like that, they told us. But people who like us in Holland are the same as anywhere else, so we said no. When we went over to Holland the time after that nobody from the Dutch record company would come to see us. They thought we were mad and just doing things for our own benefit and that it wasn't worth anyone trying to do anything for us because we were intent on getting nowhere and staying in our own little niche. But we don't think that way. We're not mainstream and we never will be - unless *Lo! Tolhurst: 'Our band is very close'.*



the mainstream changes to us - and if we get nowhere over the next two years I won't care and start thinking it's time we had a hit single. We can convert people along with other groups that I admire like PiL and Siouxsie and the Banshees and groups like that. If people could realise there is as much in what groups like that are trying to do, instead of just going out and buying Abba and stuff, then there would be a new mainstream and no-one would have to change.

'There is an undercurrent around that is really starting to worry a lot of people. The fact that there are quite a few good singles. Like the Passions, I'd rather hear them on the radio than 90% of other people.'

In the early days of the Cure, Robert adopted a decidedly anti-technical stance very much in tune with the ideals of the time. He played a Woolworth *Lucky Seven* guitar, one of three that he bought in a junk shop. Now things are a little different. He co-produces the Cure's records and is taking more than a passing interest in sound engineering. For the recording of the new album the studio was divided into three sections by sound screens. In Robert's section he had a gleaming new Peavey stack, two old Fender *Jazzmaster* guitars, an Ovation *Deacon* guitar and a Fender *VI* six-string bass. He also uses various effects pedals.

'I play an old Fender because I prefer it to any other guitar I've ever played, not because I'm heavily into the myth of old Fenders. "My God, are they pre-CBS pickups?" and all that. If it sounds right for me then it's all right. If it wasn't then I'd use a new Fender. It's really just the whole attitude towards the way we do things and it's just like a continual re-assessment of the way we do things. That's all it boils down to - the way we work inside and outside the studio - it's just that.

'Really we're back to discussing the validity of what we're doing as a group, doing it with enough personal commitment to come out of the other side even if we get nowhere. At least we did try another way. Maybe we'll come out of the other side and everybody will be doing it our way. Or maybe we'll never come out of the other side.'

Was there anything else he had to say which he feels is relevant with regard to instruments or equipment? 'We do take an interest, expanding to have varied sounds or at least to have the opportunity to have varied sounds. We've just changed over from Roland amps to Peavey. The Roland amps are really good studio amps but we've found that they don't really perform well on stage. When we started playing bigger stages we found that the throw of the Rolands just didn't seem to be there even when we put JBL speakers in. This is getting technical, isn't it? But it still doesn't give that kind of sharpness and clarity that I really want. Roland amps are great in the studio, quiet and well-defined. And the adjustment is good. But the thing about the Peavey amps that we use now is the built-in graphic which is really good. With a slight adjustment you can minimise the risk of feedback to virtually nil.'

What are the extra pickups fitted to both *Jazzmasters*? 'They're just Woolworth *Top Twenty* pickups off the *Top Twenty* guitar I used for the first album, just there as a memento. They are wired up but I very rarely use them, they are there as a back-up in case there is a pickup failure. I can look down and just remember my roots really so that I don't get too carried away.' ■

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Fourplay: A Doctor Writes

Two years after the startling *Entertainment!*, the Gang of Four gang up again for a belated second album modestly entitled *Solid Gold*. Dr Adam Sweeting taps his stethoscope and listens to their kneecaps.

My headline for the review of our album in *Sounds* is *Solid Shit*, predicts Jon King, who's the singer with Gang Of Four.

It's been the best part of two years since the Gang released their debut album *Entertainment!* It was a confirmation of the electric excitement of the band's live shows and the promise of their vinyl debut, Fast's *Damaged Goods* EP.

Now, having been hailed as oracular figures capable of delivering an instant *précis* of the history of western thought along with the more usual boogie, the Gang have unleashed their second album on a waiting world. Called *Solid Gold*, it portrays an older and wiser Gang, prepared for the slings and paper clips of a fickle music press (see opening sentence) but

who have also faced up to the fact that they must evolve in their own way. The strengths of *Solid Gold* are not as sudden or startling as those of *Entertainment!* and they take time to reveal themselves. But they're there all right.

'Why get rushed into a second album like everybody else?' asks drummer Hugo Burnham rhetorically. 'Conceptually, *Solid Gold* is like our third album.' What Hugo means is that the Gang have tried to avoid, firstly, repeating themselves endlessly by rehashing the sound and stance which initially brought them to prominence. And secondly, he and his cohort hope to avoid a media backlash by reappearing in the UK after a lengthy absence having made some positive progress. Hugo points out, rather irritably, that

though the Gang have been labelled as lazy piss-artists by such organs as the world's largest circulation music weekly (thank heavens for magazines), they made three trips to the States during 1980, plus trips to Spain and other parts of Europe. As soon as you vanish from sight in the UK for a while, he notes peevishly, the press write you off pronto.

The scene is EMI's picturesque high-security HQ in London's Manchester Square. Andy Gill, guitarist, is on holiday in Venice ('See what a street-level band we are?' asks Hugo), but the remaining Gang Of Three are assembled, more or less on time. Jon King, under his motorcycling leathers, is wearing a rockabilly bootlace tie, while his legs are wrapped in what look like Light Brigade trousers – dark blue,



sharp creases, red stripe down the sides. Blimey. Bassist Dave Allen stumbles in last, looking as though he's spent the night up a tree somewhere. Somebody's stolen the seat off his motorbike. Mercifully no jokes are cracked about Mrs Mao or Williams, Owen and Jenkins. After all, it is 11 am.

I remind them that when I'd interviewed them before (*SI*, October '79), there had been some talk of the band investigating more jazz-orientated musical areas, though this was mere speculation. None of them remember saying it, but Hugo volunteers the following hypothesis: 'Well, possibly what one was meaning was that at that point we were at the stage where it was like "What will we do next", which was before the outside things of "What will Gang Of Four do next if anything?" It was like, "Either they become obscurist jazzy types or they go the other way and become more of a rock band." In other words, either we become more like Pere Ubu or more like The Clash.' It is generally agreed that they've done neither.

What about a number of press reports to the effect that you were having difficulty writing material for the second album? Jon King: 'We weren't actually having problems of writing stuff. We wrote lots of things, but we were having problems of actually liking what we wrote. I've got loads of tapes with loads and loads of ideas, but they were like rewriting album one all over again.' *Solid Gold* eventually took shape after a stint of preliminary sessions at Mount Pleasant studios, then the real thing was laid down (man) at Abbey Road with Jimmy Douglas as engineer and co-producer. Hugo: 'Some of the ideas we had lying around we went back to shortly before we went into Abbey Road. In fact some of the stuff on *Gold* was written well into last year which we discarded but then picked it up again, reworked it, or took the idea or the genesis of an idea. We might think "it would be good if we did it like this" or "Oh, we're looking for something to go with this, that would work".'

One song, called *Information*, had been planned as a single for January 1980, but the Gang decided they all hated it and dropped it as a single. 'We've sat down in the last 12 months trying to rework it and we've come out with probably four more songs,' explains Hugo. Jon: 'We wrote *He'd Send In The Army*, *Why Theory?*, *What We All Want* and *History's Bunk*.' The first three of those now nestle snugly on *Solid Gold*. *History's Bunk* made an appearance on the B-side of the Gang's last single *What We All Want*, being the original bass/drum track from *Information* plus extra layers of guitar, vibraphone etc. One snag with *Information* was that it was in 9/8 time, which

meant that not only did the Gang have trouble playing it but audiences couldn't dance to it without twisting an ankle.

But the new album, whatever the creative pains which went into it, is obviously a step or three away from starkly provocative material like *Armalyte Rifle* or *Love Like Anthrax*. Jon ripostes: 'I think *Armalyte* was one we were least happy with in many ways, with the lyrics, cos it didn't actually say much. It was like sound and fury signifying nothing.'

Hugo: 'There's no progression if we just carry on writing songs that are a very surface thing. It's like singing a record which has words like 'Unemployment' or 'Love blacks' or 'Hate blacks', or something that just orally has an immediate effect but has nothing beneath it. That's what *Armalyte* is.'

Dave. Dave? Dave! 'I think *Army* is as biting and straightforward. We've obviously matured musically.' It was a deliberate policy not to include a lyric sheet with *Gold*, and also the lyrics aren't nearly so prominent in the mix as they were on *Entertainment!* 'Which isn't to say the lyrics are less good or less important,' says Hugo. Dave: 'We did take care in producing the album that the whole sound of the album is better. We made sure you can still hear the words.'

However, it was felt strongly that reproduc-



ing the lyrics in full on the inner sleeve of the first disc had put inordinate emphasis on them, to the neglect of the music. Similarly, it meant that press interviews with the Gang turned into seminars, especially in America. Jon: 'Every time we did an interview it would go to absurd lengths. They'd ask "Are you Hegelians? Really you seem to be adopting a sort of Marxist approach . . ." The music on the first album was totally ignored, as though it was nothing. The music for *Ether* or *Anthrax* was absolutely brilliant.' Still, none of this prevented *Entertainment!* from picking up rave reviews almost everywhere. 'Imagine having that under your fuckin' belt when you go to record another one,' adds Dave.

What, then, of *Solid Gold*? There's no *Damaged Goods* or *Essence Rare*, which jumped off the first album and pinned you to the walls by your ears. But there's the darkly dramatic opener *Paralysed*, the singalongaGang of *Cheeseburger*, the alertly bouncing *A Hole In The Wallet* and the brutally simple *He'd Send In The Army*. *What We All Want* is unashamed industrial funk, and indeed the funk feel is all over the album.

At the time of the interview, I'd been in the middle of getting to know the record, and had observed to Hugo that *Army* hadn't made much impression on me. Jon King presented

the case for the defence. 'With a lot of music you need to get into a groove and carry on with it. The thing about something like *Army* is that it sets up a theme and then stops. It's got two stop times in it really, hasn't it? I think that makes it pretty difficult for a lot of people to get on with. Stop times in songs always make it difficult, but that song is built around emptiness.'

The metallic crunching noises which introduce the song, incidentally, aren't treated handclaps as I'd assumed but a lump of metal being bashed on an old spin-dryer lid. There's a bit of cymbal added on top. King continues: 'When you're listening you expect to hear layers, of if not layers, people expect to hear a theme established pretty early on. Then you go through various permutations and come out at the end. But what *Army* does is it sets up an idea, breaks it down to practically nothing . . . Often I feel there's something that doesn't quite click on the record but then it does, it really takes off at the end - it's really exciting.'

'But it works brilliantly on stage. It's a very theatrical song. Andy will be looking like he's gonna play guitar. Last time we played it I had a hammer in my hand and I was banging an old metal chair, and it was a most ridiculous looking scene in a way.'

Hugo: 'It's gone from both extremes. When we did it at the Rainbow last year, Andy was standing there pretending he was about to play guitar. People were watching him play and waiting to hear the sound. You could have heard a pin drop, the tension was amazing. Then we played it in New York at New Year, when Jon was sort of on his knees at 3am, hacking away at this chair. They took a video of it with Jon going like this and one of our road crew holding the chair, crying with laughter.'

Jon: 'I think if people see us do *Army* live it makes sense, cos it's one of those songs where you need a sort of picture in your mind. But it is very theatrical. There's these two voices at the beginning which is me and Dave, then I stop and Dave goes 'Allo boys!' So he plays this sort of drunken corporal type, screaming.'

I have to query some of the lyrics, though - in particular the lines 'The army has its uses in times of civil crisis'. Isn't this a bit of an easy image to use, for effect? It evokes instant 1984. Jon: 'Well, originally there were two sets of lyrics which were married together, and it was like the army is all sort of terrible and stuff - which is isn't. I mean the army does have a function. That was just an attempt to say we're not just saying the army is by definition appalling.' I find myself amazed - King really does mean the army has its uses in times of civil crisis. 'It means what it says really,' he claims. >>





'For example I used to live in a little village in Kent, and there were big floods and the bridge was washed away. The army sappers came in and built another bridge. That's what the words meant, I don't mean... Strikebreaking? Fucking 'ell, no.' But I thought it might have been intended ironically. 'Oh no, it wasn't actually meant to be ironic at all. That line, like the whole of the song, is amazingly straightforward. But I suppose when we're straightforward a lot of people think we're not. It's like the *Entertainment!* album cover, "the cowboy smiles, he is glad the Indian is fooled", blah blah. There were people asking "Are they talking about EMI" and stuff like this, "Are they the Indian?" In fact it is absolutely straightforward. It is meant to say exactly what it says. There's nothing wrong with ambiguity, but...'

Like it or not, though, one does tend to expect oblique angles from a band like Gang Of Four, who have evolved a convincing line in intellectual engagement. Simultaneously, it's not always clear which side the band are taking, or which persona they're adopting. In *Paralysed*, Andy Gill recites: 'Wealth is for the one that wants it, paradise if you can earn it... I was good at what I did.' It's a story of a man afflicted by an unspecified trauma. But was it something the Gang members experienced personally, or just an observed set of circumstances?

'It's a theatrical idea,' Jon King explains, 'but it was a bit like saying, "We'll make a song and we'll have a character and he's going to talk about his life." That's the idea of a lot of the stuff we worked on. One group I think we've all like a lot in terms of what they sang about was The Band.' (Band chronicler Greil Marcus is a fan and friend of the Gang, incidentally.) 'At the beginning of *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down*, they go: "Virgil Kane is my name..." This is who I am. I think it has a dramatic effect, and *Paralysed* is very sort of melodramatic, isn't it?

'In that case, the music was finished completely without any lyrics being on it. It sets up a whole set of expectations, the way the chords go, it's sad. I was listening to the music of it and I was talking to Jim Douglas who was co-producing with us, and we thought it sounded like a very sad, nostalgic soundtrack to driving in a car - a movie soundtrack. You can imagine driving in great empty spaces with that music in the background, and we thought of it as an instrumental almost. Then we thought we could bring that out a bit more, with the idea of this sort of totally melancholic character. Originally we pictured a guy who'd been made redundant or something, y'know, feeling he'd

been kicked in the teeth having gone along with everything. That's not made explicit in the song, but it's like you go along with everything and then it collapses round your fucking ears and you think oh my God, why is it happening to me? It's like in *Coronation Street* when Bert was made redundant. It was brilliant, that. I think *Coronation Street* is such a superb programme because it puts across in a very simple way the disasters that happen in ordinary people's lives. I think *Paralysed* has got this sense of drama which is meant to be a real drama, not an invented *Diamond Dogs* kind of drama.'

The door opens unexpectedly to admit the dishevelled figure of Dave Allen. Cheering breaks out in the small EMI hospitality room. And you thought he'd arrived ages ago, didn't you? It just goes to prove the miraculous potential of time-lapse journalism. Heh heh...

Leaving aside this small fragment of real-life drama, multiple conversations are suddenly and inexplicably underway. Firstly, Dave, Jon and Hugo were pouring brief but concentrated scorn on the David Byrne/Brian 'Brainy' Eno project, *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*. This leads on swiftly to a debate concerning the relative merits of Talking Heads' *Remain In Light* opus. And you thought the English faculty at Cambridge had problems? Abruptly, the room is filled with a crossfire of voices.

Jon

I bought a stereo on

Saturday, Dave. I got

30 watts per channel

Wharfedale/Hemdale

speakers, a direct-

drive Sony deck with

strobe tuning and a

Marantz amp. I got it

second-hand for 160

quid, amazing. It's got

piezo horns instead of

tweeters.

Hugo

I really like it but I think

it lacks trousers a bit.

There's a lot of bits and

pieces. When I saw

them at Hammersmith

Palais I really enjoyed

it, but I thought,

they've got all the

good people in to do

this type of music for

them. I'm not demean-

ing their contributions

but... Chris Frantz is a

very nice guy but a very

boring drummer. All

the real intricacies and

all the real interest

come from the other

people. I just think it

doesn't quite get there.

Day of shame

Gang Of Four confessed today they've hired well-known music biz publicist Alan Edwards to publicise their out-of-London dates on their British tour, which commenced March 13. Asked if this wasn't a little like the big time, self-styled 'drummer' Hugo Burnham said: 'We're not paying him very much money so it's not that big-time.' (Reuters)

Part of the problem is creeping disaffection with recording megalith EMI, which (it is alleged) hasn't lifted a finger to help the Gang since they failed to alter their single *At Home He's A Tourist* for *Top Of The Pops*. They won't even pay for a video to be made for singles such as *What We All Want*, which, natcho, the band aren't happy about at all. Regarding tour publicity, Dave Allen has this to say: 'Somebody at EMI might be able to do it, but because they're paid by EMI they don't have to do it that well. It doesn't matter, unless we complain bitterly. But if you get someone outside, it's like going from the public sector to the private sector.'

Hugo: 'As long as EMI are in charge of

getting our name put about, nothing will happen.' Jon: 'Our original reason for signing with EMI was like let's not be a minnow in a pond, but get in there so this big animal which is EMI spreads you out over the country so everyone knows you exist. It's complete bollocks, because since we didn't promote ourselves, that was the end of it. We'd have been just as well off in this country if we'd been on Rough Trade'. Hugo: 'Better off financially.' Jon: 'Probably better known in fact, because Rough Trade seem to pay for videos which EMI refused categorically to do for us.'

Hugo jumps in to point out that the Gang signed to EMI to work with specific individuals in the company who have since left - A&R man Chris Briggs, for example, who signed them in the first place. Their relationship with the company has, therefore, not improved. Hugo quizzes himself. 'So are we going to leave EMI? Put it like this - if we stay it's gonna cost them a fair few bob, and if we go we'll be very happy.'

This seems to be a different kind of tension for the Gang. But there's not doubt they're pleased with the way *Solid Gold* turned out. Perhaps Abbey Road suits them better than The Workhouse in the Old Kent Road, where they did *Entertainment!* This time around, they were able to take more time and pick and choose the best takes of songs, whereas with the first album it was more a case of 'if we can play it through without any mistakes, we'll use it'. Jon: 'For the first LP we were very uptight emotionally about the whole thing. It was very difficult to get a good take.'

Plainly, they've learned a thing or two about the music industry, record companies, the press and the like. Do you, I ask, think you were naïve before, in some of the things you were writing? 'No, not at all,' reply Jon and Hugo simultaneously. 'I think *Naïveté* is always a very easy way of saying you don't approve of what someone says,' adds Jon, as Hugo recalls that Richard Jobson (Skids) accused the Gang of political naïveté. Hugo understandably becomes increasingly annoyed as he recalls the remark.

It's a new phase Gang Of Four, as they re-emerge into the UK limelight. It seems ages since the latter phases of 1979, when they were the hot political property and Jon and Andy Gill were brutally attacked outside a Leeds club one night. Jon King sounds a cautionary note. 'I think anybody who speaks their mind is at risk in a country like this. Anyone who exercises their democratic right to free speech is a target, aren't they? Because it's the one thing everybody pays lip service to but doesn't actually do.'





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RAINBOW

Niels Hansen takes you back to Copenhagen late last year to talk to Rainbow, as they recorded their *Difficult To Cure* album. All except new vocalist Joe Lyn Turner, that is, who joined after the Danish sessions. Turn up the volume, and read on...



Ritchie Blackmore

'I first started when I was 11 years old. It was because of Tommy Steele, a rock'n'roller at that time. That made me do it: he'd got a lot of excitement. I took classical guitar lessons for a year. That was starting on the right foot, and I learned to read as well as I could. Also, which is very important, I learned to use my whole hand. It may sound strange, but many guitarists don't use all their fingers. I think if you're self-taught – and I've said this before – people tend to use just their three fingers, but in classical (guitar) music you have to use all four of them ... also the little finger. So luckily I got into that and learned basic lessons like scales and things.

'I followed people like Django Reinhardt at first, then Wes Montgomery, Les Paul, and in rock'n'roll Duane Eddy, Buddy Holly. Up until the age of about 17 I used to play in a skiffle group. I played a thing called the dog-box, a piece of string you plug on a broom handle, and we used to play down Chislehurst Caves. They used to have a traditional band, skiffle groups, rock'n'roll bands, about 11 bands playing in the caves all at the same time, so you'd walk 100 yards and you'd see another band. And of course dark caves are very interesting ...

'I was playing single notes then, I was never one for chords. About the age of 13 I looked in a chord-book and saw how many different chords I had to learn – so I thought I'd better stick to single notes. I was very lucky because I had two very good teachers after the classical side: Jim Sullivan was a neighbour, living down the road, he was brilliant and still is. He taught me a lot of things and inspired me to play. The

other guy was Roger Mingay, who's now living in Australia.

'So I was lucky in the sense that I had two very good guitarists around me, whose high standards I had to try to come up to. I was always playing lead more than rhythm when at 17 I went more professional, joining Screaming Lord Sutch and the Savages with Matthew Fisher, who later joined Procol Harum. I played with Jeff Beck back in 1964 just before he joined the Yardbirds and he was already very good then. We did a couple of sessions with Jimmy Page producing. That was the first time I met Jimmy. I was still playing with Lord Sutch; Jimmy was with the Crusaders. I used to do sessions with a group called the Outlaws back in 1960, but nothing was released then. I did a lot of sessions starting from 1961 and they were for various people ... half the time I didn't know who it was ... as a studio musician, just on leads and solos.

'I don't know ... I just play, I don't really think about "What style". I've probably got my own style because I could never pick up what anybody else was doing – which is good if you write your own songs, but bad if you're doing sessions and people'd ask you for a particular sound. I always went, "Well, how do you get that?" I just knew how to get my own sound. I was never that good to pick up ideas listening to records, either. If I heard something and tried to play it, I'd end up playing my own solo because I couldn't pick up what the other person had done. James Burton with Ricky Nelson used to be one of my idols, and I used to try to pick out what he was doing. I never could – but apparently James was using banjo strings, that's how he got that slurring effect.

'My sound hasn't changed much throughout the years. It's like my food – if I find something I like to eat I eat it all the time. I'm not very adventurous, when it comes to sounds. Some people try to talk me into trying other amplifiers, *etcetera*, but I'm very satisfied with the sound I've got, so I don't change it. Some people call it not being adventurous, I call it knowing what direction I'm going in. I used to use Vox amplifiers, which are very good. But I know Jim Marshall personally so I went to his factory and asked if he could build me something that sounded just like that amp. I'd then play my guitar and say: "No, a little bit more bass" or "A little bit more treble" while his technicians would actually solder resistors and

things together. Meanwhile I was playing very loudly, and all the people who work in the factory were holding their ears and complaining. I have a lot of treble on my amplifiers. They're very highly tuned ... like a Ferrari.

'I play Fender *Stratocasters* using .010, .011, .013 (or .014), .028 (sometimes .026), .038, .048, a standard Picato set of strings (from Wales). The plectrums I use are very peculiarly shaped – I can't use standard plectrums. Tuning is standard – again, I'm not very adventurous. I use the tremolo-arm very much, all the time. I use some *Taurus* bass pedals sometimes for ideas on stage. I might be playing a weird progression to accompany myself for a particular piece of music. And I often write a lot of music like that, improvising on guitar with a bass drone going. I don't know anything about keyboard music or keyboards, and I can't relate to a keyboard instrument which is why I have the notes written out in big bold letters on the *Taurus*.

'I've always used controlled feedback. The tape recorder I use was one I had lying around the house, and rather than doing nothing with it I felt I had to utilise it in some respect. So I converted it into a kind of echo machine which gives me more of a delayed echo effect than a reverb. I think the tape echo is much better than any type of reverb or *Space Echo*. Besides, I can control the distortion, the input and the output, which means I can be very quiet with a dirty sound, or *vice versa*. So it almost works like a little controllable fuzz box. Some people think, when they see the reels turning, that I'm just miming to a solo, but it's tape delay.

'The first person to smash up a guitar on stage was a guy called Pete Phillips, back in 1964. He was with a group called The Creation. Pete Phillips was an innovator – he used to play his guitar with a bow, play it against the microphone stand, and break it. So you can see from that person where everybody else got their ideas. He used to do the arm that Peter Townshend's got. Townshend was the first major person to break up his guitar, and then Hendrix did it. I used to break proper *Stratocasters*, but it's kind of dangerous because they're very heavy and you can't throw them around easily. I do occasionally, but with copy guitars I have a good excuse for breaking them up. It's just a natural thing you get into. If you're that excited you need to break it cos it's

all good fun...

'I have to be honest - if I see 200 people in the audience I'm not really interested in playing... unless it's a club and I'm jamming. But if that's what people've come to watch I enjoy it. Most of the time we have a fixed stage act - sometimes we elongate the whole thing, changing some of the solos, making them longer or do them more freely if the audience is good. But we don't change the actual compositions. I don't think you can be that free when people have paid money to see you.

'I always use relative minors. I have a hang-up about minors rather than majors. I've written in minors the last 12 to 15 years. I think the only thing I wrote in major was *Woman From Tokyo*, but that's about it. Majors are too bright and happy. Writing is always done in the studio - it has to be done that way. Rock'n'roll is very peculiar music. Hard rock usually comes out best in intense pressure situations. You can't sit by the fireplace with an acoustic guitar - it has to be played loudly. You have to be with the drummer, playing very loud, have to burst, improvise, and come across with a few riffs. I have a habit of putting in a lot of chords and I always find that I take them out again. Rock'n'roll is more effective with less chords. You can't be too melodic, otherwise it spoils the whole thing.

'My best solo I think is probably on *Gates Of Babylon* (1977/8) and *Weissheim* (1980). I don't like working too much - I like making one LP a year. In Deep Purple the record contract said we had to make three a year, and I found I was playing anything just to get it on record. With Rainbow I can do whatever I want... and it suits me. I don't ever see an end-result in advance. I just think if the initial riff and progression is worth following up... no preconceived ideas. It's best just to come to the group with an idea and say: "What do you think of this?" And if they like it you follow it up and finish it off and see how it sounds, and then I consider if there are possibilities as far as the vocals are concerned. I never do demos, but if I do and it's not finished I'll burn it. We had the same policy with Deep Purple, because we knew that one day maybe the managers would come along and try to sell off the secondary tracks, like they're doing with Jimi Hendrix. I do about six or seven run-throughs of a solo. Then we select the best one of them, and just sometimes ping-pong between tracks.

'I'd like to work with Ian Anderson - he's a good friend but I haven't worked with him. I admire him very much. Also I'd like to work with Paul Rodgers... I like singers, violinists and organists. Violinists, I find, are much more disciplined. I don't have much interest in guitar players. Everybody seems to be repeating everything that everybody has done before. Randy Hansen is an up-and-coming guitarist, though. He does a tribute to Jimi Hendrix on stage and acts and dresses and plays just like him. The family has sort of adopted him as their son. Anyway, I've played with Randy once. That guy has class, finesse and poise. He's the only person that's made me sit up in the last five years.

'I looked up the other day and was thinking: "If the stars could actually play..." If there was a sound they could emanate, I'm sure it would be one of Bach's Brandenburg concertos. I'm sure that he would be the one played throughout the universe being the representative of our world.'



Don Airey

'I remember seeing Ritchie with Purple while I was still a classical piano student at Manchester music college. Keyboard players can have a hard time understanding guitarists, but seeing him really changed me. I got aware of rock'n'roll, sort of. In college I was into jazz, wrote music for theatre and shows, arranging, and was with a band that did regular broadcasts. I travelled the world playing cabaret clubs for about three or four years and joined Cozy Powell's Hammer when I came back in 1974. The band was only together for a year, then Cozy joined Rainbow and asked me to come along, but I decided to form Colosseum along with John Hiseman and Gary Moore. In May '79, however, I joined Rainbow.

'The basic keyboard with Rainbow is the Hammond B3. My old Hammond that used to belong to Alan Price got smashed in a car accident when I was with Colosseum, but it was the best I've ever played. Anyway, I got a CS80 which I still have, and some other gear from those days: an ARP *Odyssey*, *Minimoogs*, Hohner *Clavinet*, *Rhodes* (but not on stage), and also some *Taurus* bass pedals, an *Orchestron*, a vocoder and a sequencer. Eddie Jobson uses a sequencer, but not too many others do. It's marvellous, and you discover things it can do that you never thought possible - particularly on solos, people kind of wonder how I do it. I do lots of live sound effects - no tapes - it takes quite a bit of getting together. I use the sequencer plus a repeat thing on the ARP and an old ring modulator for like a spaceship landing.

'Mainly I'm just using chords and a good strong sound to supplement Ritchie. I haven't got much time for string machines, lots of echo, weird flanging or quacking synthesizers. I think the *Minimoog* is one of the finest synthesizers of all. On recording I try to keep the overdubs to a minimum. Besides, in the kind of music we play, effects like harmonisers really don't come across because we're so loud. However, I'd like to try a stereo flanger on the output of the CS80 on the album. On stage you don't hear it anyway.

'Chick Corea is one of my heroes. I met him once, and he said a simple but very important thing: "If you're gonna write, you're gonna sit down and write every day. Set a time, and don't let anything else get in your way." So, in a year, there might be 360 pieces of rubbish, but at least six good tracks. Organise your life and get direction. There's no quick way into the business - if so, it gets to your head. A true hit comes down to people on the street and what they feel, what's in their hearts and what they remember. I think there is a lot more to rock'n'roll - and music - than people think. I think we're actually playing a kind of music that's going to last.'



Roger Glover

'I'm playing an Ovation *Magnum* bass. I used to use a Rickenbacker a lot in Deep Purple, and just after I left I found a Gibson *Thunderbird*. But I like the Ovation - it's good for rock because it's heavy. It's not the best bass guitar in the world, but I think a lot depends on your style. The best-made bass guitar is probably the Alembic, but it's too funky for my style. I tend to play very hard, and I can hammer away on the Ovation and it still sounds clean. I've always played bass... for about 20 years now. I don't do very much customising. I used to put Fender pickups on my Rickenbacker, but I really don't get involved technically.

'I buy records as a record-buyer, not to listen to the bass or the production side of it. If there's an instrument I listen to its drums, they're the key to rock music. I think there's a slightly different approach on our new album. We have a different drummer, and I think that it's going back to the more bluesy roots... it's a bit harder rock. *Down To Earth* was my first album as producer with Rainbow. Towards the end of the recordings I joined as bass player with the band. There was a definite policy on that album, in order to make it worthwhile, to sell more albums, and since we don't naturally write commercial singles ourselves we asked Russ Ballard to write *Since You've Been Gone*. We got some criticism that the album was a bit too light, and although I don't really listen to criticism that much it's nice to know what people think. *Down To Earth* sold twice as many as any other Rainbow album, and you can't ignore things like that. This new album we've approached more or less the same way, but I've got a feeling that the hard rock ought to be just a little more predominant.

'In terms of this band, mainly Ritchie writes the music and I write the words. *Mainly*. But everyone sort of contributes a little bit. I think Ritchie probably gets ideas in his hotel room. He's got a lot of ideas, and we just get together and bang them out. We write in the studio. Hard rock can't be written at home as homes are designed for comfort and hard rock isn't comfortable music. You know that time is clicking away and money is being spent - so there is a kind of pressure and tenseness that makes your adrenalin work a bit faster and you come up with stronger ideas. In home environments you tend to come up with funky, melodic kind of things.

'My first studio experience was with a group called Episode Six at Pye studios, London, in 1965. I managed to get Rupert Hine a record deal with Purple records, and as there was no-one else who could do the producing job I did it by accident and found that I liked it. The album was *Pick Up A Bone*. At that time I didn't know where a producer sat nor what he did, so although I would find it interesting to watch



some other producers while they're working, I just work the way I know. It seems, anyway, that everyone has their own totally different ways of doing it.

'I used to like Spector a lot. He's so individual and strong because he's very unique. Also, Todd Rundgren - but I like him for everything, his songwriting and ideas. I like all kinds of music: reggae, punk, new wave, smoothie songs except muzak and certain kinds of traditional jazz. As a producer I've used symphonic orchestras a lot. I've done two solo albums of my own, one of them with quite a classical approach. The kind of mixing depends on the song, the band and the occasion. In general I don't like gimmicks and go for a fairly straightforward recording. I'm not some sort of bring-back-mono merchant, and I try to do stereo as strongly as possible. But in rock'n'roll there is a strength about having one sound coming at you very strongly that dissipates if you spread it too much.'



Bobby Rondinelli

'I'm the baby in the band: I'm 25, but I've played the drums since I was 11. I used to be with some local bands in New York - club bands playing original rock. I used to do a lot of demo work which of course gives me some experience. Basically I'm just using a regular double set - a gong, cymbals, and so on, but no synthesised drums. We don't do any dubbing in the studio, but try to get it right off so it has the energy. I feel Sonor drums resonate the best. Mine are wood, as opposed to flexiglass

or fibreglass, and I feel it's a warmer and fuller sound. I don't go for making the sound big in the control room by equalisation - the drums have to have it right there from the kit itself. So we'll just have to see what it'll sound like when we get all the tracks filled up with everything else (smiles).

'I don't muffle anything at all. When it's tuned right and you use the right skins on the right drums, the sound should be perfect. I have skins on top and bottom. Sound is a hard question to put into words, but the drums have to be tuned with the right amount of "ring". A lot of times people think if you just leave both skins on all you get is ring. Well, if they aren't tuned right, all you get is ring. You know, it's easier to stick a blanket in the bass drum to avoid ringing, but tuning is what you should do. When you put a hole in your drum skin, all you're doing is letting the pressure inside escape and making it harder to control your bounce, plus you get more punch with less sustain and resonance.

I don't tune to any notes ... only by ear. Usually the bottom skins are a bit tighter than the skins I hit. Sticks are of course a personal taste, but the Regal 5B seems to be heavy enough for power, but they're still light enough for playing fast with technique. The lighter the stick, the faster you play, yet the lighter it sounds. My left bass drum is usually tuned slightly higher than my right. I use my right the most. The sizes are 14x24, and tom toms are 9x13, 10x14, 16x16 and 16x18. Cymbals are Paiste. The other kit I have is a 40-year-old

Slingerland *Radio King* with animal skins. I find that older drums are usually better. It's beautiful.'

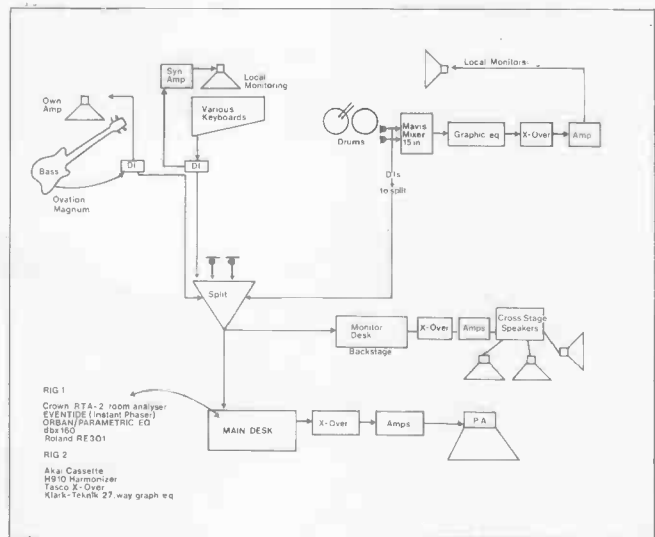
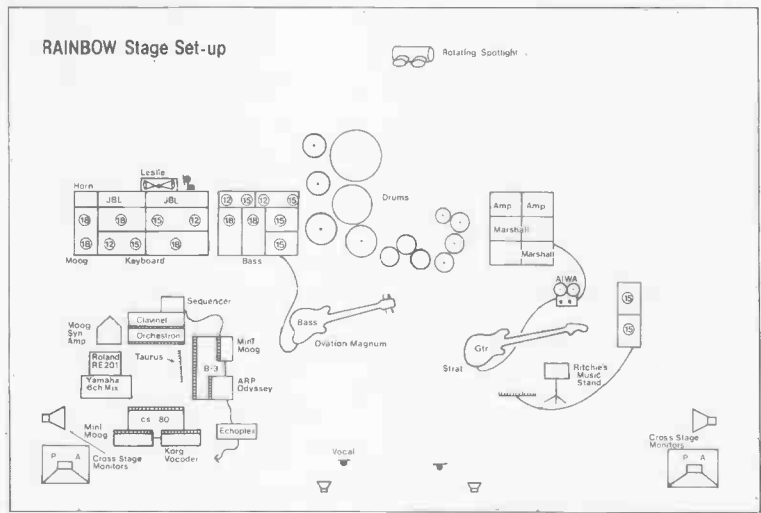
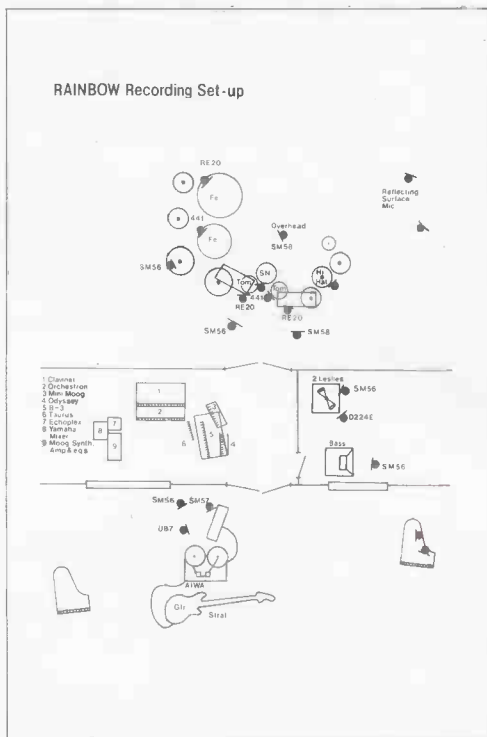
Live

Very often, stage acts can be kind of dull - just some sort of decorative set and musicians shaking their heads back and forth. But the Rainbow show radiates excitement and action.

'I can't deny we are a loud band,' comments Roger Glover, 'not that loud on stage actually, but mostly PA. It's like a tradition. Deep Purple used to be the loudest band in the world according to the *Guinness Book Of Records*. They came and measured us once in London and got 119dB. We always try to use power in Rainbow to get a good sound as opposed to a loud sound. So we used the Harwell/TASCO set of PA cabinets. I get turned on by loud music, so it's obvious that when we're going to perform we should try to turn other people on in the same way.'

Ritchie says: 'I love drama. My music is the same. I like definite brought-out statements, not insipid little wishy-washy things - which at times can be a drawback. I like to make a statement, that's why I've got the stage act as such very definite.'

Sound engineer David Kirkwood has been on the road with Ritchie ever since the days of Deep Purple, and he's teamed up recently with David Needle, Charlie Lewis and 'Bogie' (the engineers in charge of instruments). In case of equipment breakdown, Ritchie carries a



double set of standard Marshall 4x12 guitar cabinets, each driven by a modified Marshall 200 amp. The *Stratocaster*, which has been polished and shaped in between the frets for note-bending and sustain reasons (see *SI* Nov 80, p22), is hooked up to an old Aiwa tape recorder along with a German phasing unit. His *Taurus* pedals are fed to two 15in bass cabinets plus a 2482 JBL mid-horn. Microphones consist of Sennheiser 441 (bass drum) and 421 (Leslie and toms), C451 (overheads), AKG 224E (snare), Shure SM57 on Ritchie's guitar cabs and SM58s for vocals.

An AKG D12 functions as a spare on bass which mostly, along with keyboards and Ritchie's pedals, is fed to the main desk directly, through DI boxes. The keyboard and bass cabinets were developed and built by Mad John and Simon (Pirate Sound, LA) about five years ago, and are all driven by Crown DC300 amplifiers. The cabinets contain 18, 12 and 15in Gauss speakers and, on top of that, JBL horns.

Don Airey manages to create a full sound, helped by his Sequential Circuits sequencer. The unit, which is connected to Don's old *Minimoog*, is programmable, and capable of holding a total of 256 notes, in 16 banks of 16 notes each (see review *SI* Aug '80).

Studio (see diagram opposite)

The soccer game finally ended, and everybody came rushing into the studio. It's 4 o'clock in the afternoon and Roger has been working on a new number, humming over a Fender *Rhodes* in the control room. For tax reasons, Rainbow always record in Europe. The International Concert Organisation set up the



arrangement with Sweet Silence, a big studio in Copenhagen equipped with a Triad board and a Lyrec 24-track tape machine.

Ritchie's gear was set up in the front studio, miked with an SM57 just 4in from the Marshall amp, plus an SM56 about 5ft away and a U87 about 2ft away. Any kind of combination of these mics allows the sound engineer to get Ritchie's characteristic guitar sound on to tape.

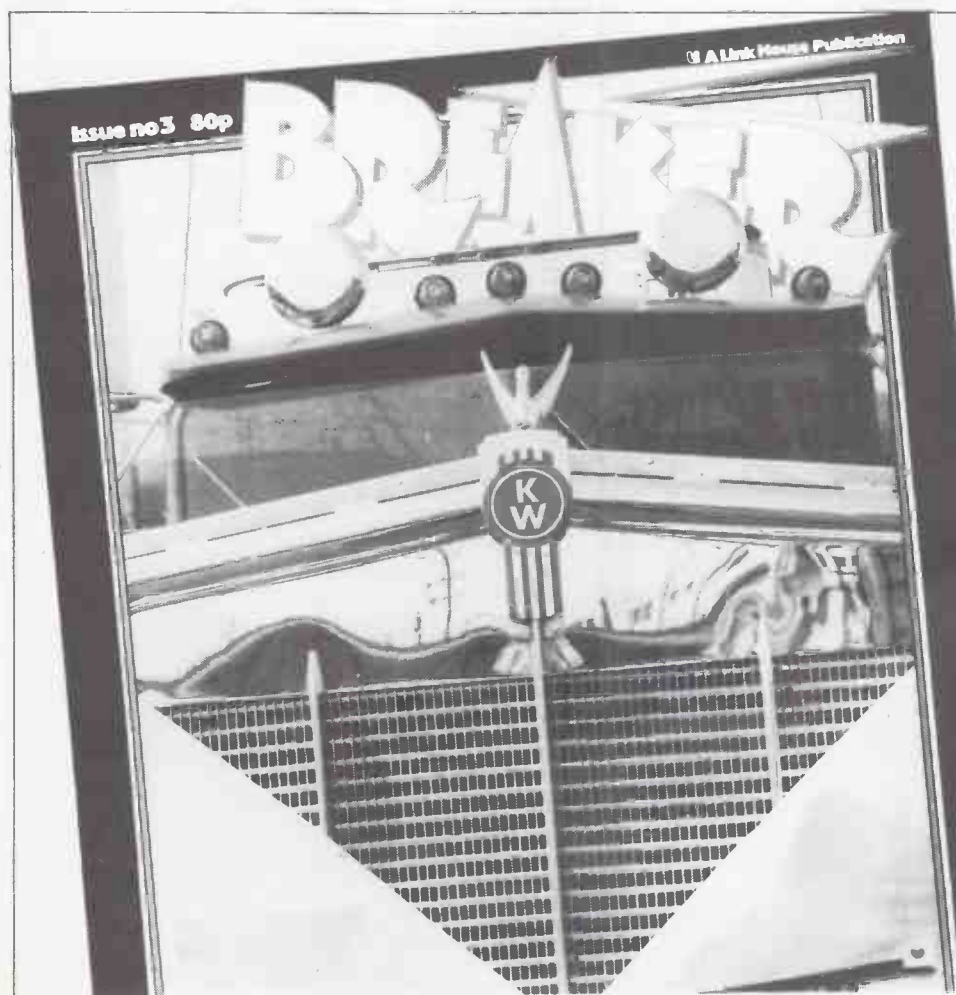
There are two pianos in the front studio: the one at the live-end area was played by Don for some of the tracks, but mainly his equipment was stacked in a separate room fed directly to the Triad console. The two Leslies and a bass cabinet, picked up by an SM56, a D224E and an SM56, were located in another booth and the drum kit placed in a big storage hall behind the studio itself, for separation reasons.

Prior to the recording, the band rehearsed for about two weeks. The studio was booked for a little over a month during September and October 1980, and mixing and final overdubbing was done in December. The recording

process varied greatly. At times all four of the band would be putting down a track simultaneously – at other times Don would make the sequencer repeat a bass pattern and then later, along with Bobby, do some keyboards and drums. After that, Roger came along with a bass line. Then Ritchie with some guitar. More keyboards – and so on. Ritchie says: 'Same old sound, but always different players on the albums. I don't like paying anybody, and most players want to be paid. So they leave.' A little smile indicated that no-one suffers. The new vocalist, Joe Lyn Turner, overdubbed his voice in London.

While everybody was watching video, eating, sleeping or whatever, Roger at one stage was sitting by the console getting things together. Once all the gear and microphones were set up, it remained exactly the same from day to day as Rainbow had booked the whole studio for the period. As Don says: 'It's probably not saving us any money recording in Europe, but what's important is that it's part of making an album. You all get together, concentrate, meet different people, different atmosphere, and it adds something to an album that doesn't make it like "just another product".'

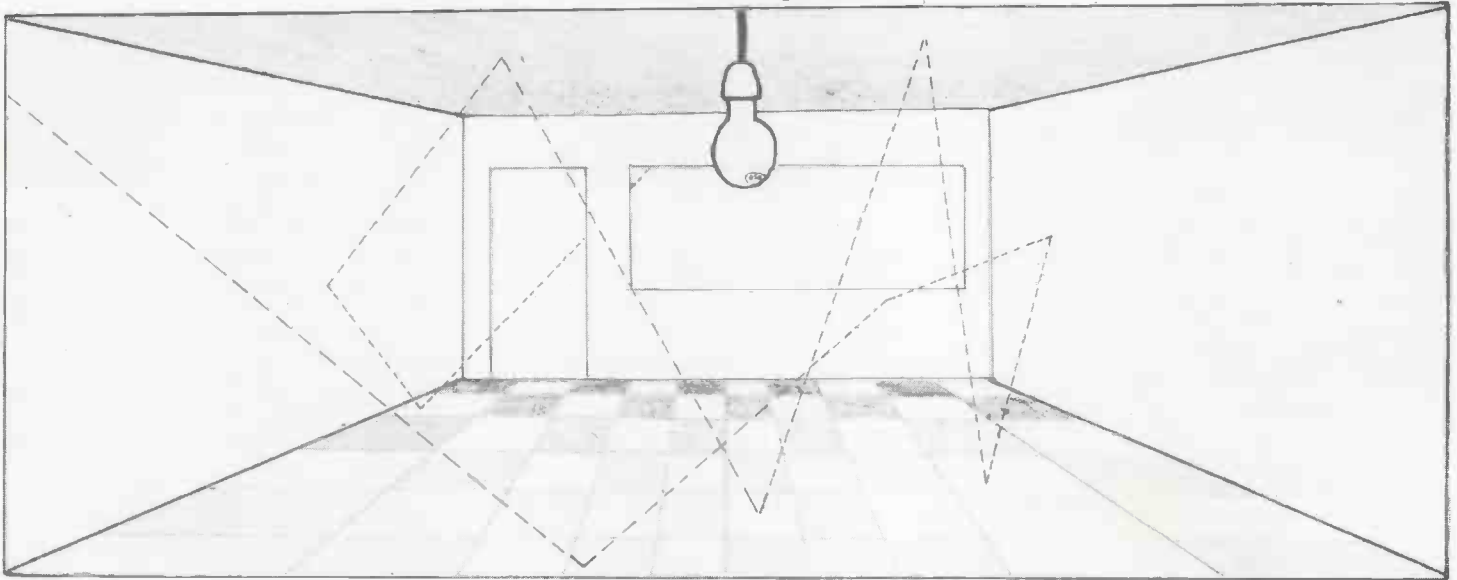
A fast-fingered engineer assisted Roger in getting the tracks filled, and the album slowly took shape. All equipment functioned as it should. Being a loud band, I'd wondered whether the monitoring level would reach the 119dB we'd heard of earlier. But Roger put me right: 'No, I keep it at a fairly constant level. Sometimes it's very quiet. If you're listening to music over and over and over again like you do in the studio, you can't take that volume.' ■



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The DIY Studio – Part Six



For those of you who managed to understand what Ritchie Blackmore was on about, here's Exercise Two as kindly John Morrish leads you through such simple matters as the average absorption coefficient, Sabine's Method and Eyring's Formula – all part of our continuing story of everyday studio-building folk.

So far in this series we have designed a closed box, with the intention of keeping our sounds in and other peoples' sounds out. But a box only becomes a recording studio when the sound heard inside the box fits the requirements of the musicians and engineers who use it. This month we consider *acoustic treatment*.

If a sound source is placed in an enclosed space together with a microphone, the sound picked up by the mic will be a combination of direct sound, passing straight from the source, and reflected sound, coming via the walls of the enclosure. If we wanted to observe the nature of this reflected sound, we would produce a short burst of sound and record on a chart recorder the way the waves of reflected sound fell upon the microphone. The direct sound would be followed by several discrete reflections, some milliseconds apart, and then the reflections would start to arrive so close together that it would be impossible to separate them. At the same time the sound field would gradually die away as energy was absorbed with each reflection.

If the room was big enough we would hear separate echoes, followed by a prolonging of the original sound as the reflections start to merge together and fade away. This part of the reflected sound is called the *reverberation*. Reverberation plays a very important part in traditional classical music because the instruments used were originally built to sound pleasant in particular type of acoustic environment. For this reason reverberation time and quality are crucial factors in the design of auditoria and studios used in the performance and recording of this type of music, as they are in drama. For multitrack recording the requirements are different.

The basic nature of multitrack recording is that instruments are recorded in a theoretically 'dead' acoustic, without natural reverberation. The dead acoustic means that what goes into the control room is a 'bare' sound that can be modified by equalisation and artificial reverberation as required. It also helps to prevent leakage between two or more instruments which will probably be going on to different tracks. The acoustic treatment reflects the 'active' nature of the multitrack engineer's role, whereas the design of acoustics for traditional music studios reflects the 'passive' role of the engineer in that field, whose task is to achieve 'the closest approach to the original sound', to quote a well-known hi-fi advert.

In practice, of course, a truly 'dead' acoustic is neither feasible nor desirable, outside the anechoic rooms used in loudspeaker design and other research. Indeed, there has been in recent years a trend back more towards 'live' acoustics in studios, or, best of all, towards studios with various types of acoustic available to choice. But however it is decided to shape the studio's final sound, the first task is to control the natural acoustics of the room, and that may not be easy.

In small rooms, reverberation manifests itself not as echo or a prolonging of the original sound as *colouration*, an unnatural boosting of certain frequency bands, audible as 'bathroom-sound' or 'boxiness'. In any enclosed space, natural resonances occur in the air between the various surfaces. These resonances, called *natural modes* or *eigentones*, occur at frequencies where the distance between the surfaces is equal to a half wavelength of the sound, or multiples of a half wavelength. The most prominent modes come between parallel reflective surfaces, and are called *axial modes*.

They cause a prolonging of the reverberation time at the frequencies where they occur. Now, if two or more of the dimensions of a room are the same, or if one is a simple multiple of another, then two sets of axial modes will coincide, with consequent extra resonance at those frequencies.

One particular problem with small studios is that the lowest and most troublesome resonances in the modal series (fundamental, or half-wavelength, first overtone or whole-wavelength, second overtone or $1\frac{1}{2}$ wavelengths) tend to coincide with the vital frequencies around the human voice, where colouration is most easily detected (Fig 1). And another problem is that the treatment needed to cure these problems takes up space that a small studio can ill afford to lose.

Probably the most obvious and most common problem associated with these modes is the 'flutter echo', which sounds exactly like its name suggests, and is found between parallel surfaces, even of very small area in an otherwise heavily treated room. Fortunately it is not difficult to cure, as we shall see.

The first steps in acoustic treatment must be taken at the design stage, when the studio's size and shape are considered. Irregular shapes are best, rectangles in which the side lengths are in simple relationships to one another are less so, and cubes are to be avoided. Gilford's *Acoustics For Radio And Television Studios* tells you how to work out room dimensions so that the natural modes of the three pairs of surfaces interlace with one another rather than coinciding. Angling the walls will not remove all the modal problems, but it is an effective defence against flutter echoes, albeit an expensive one in

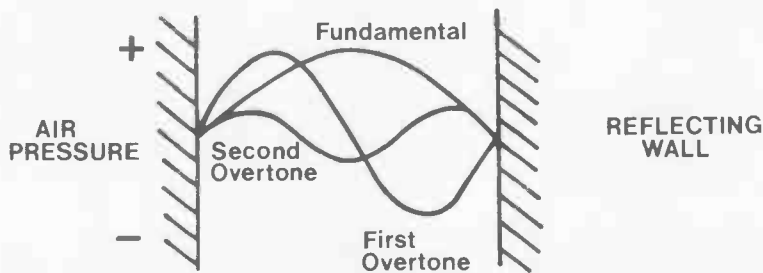


EXPRESSION



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FIG. 1. The three lowest modes of air resonance between parallel reflecting walls



building costs and space.

The term used to quantify reverberation is the *reverberation time*. This is the time taken for a sound to die away to a millionth of its original intensity, that is to drop through 60dB. Reverberation time is dependent to a large extent on the distance a sound must travel between reflections so it increases with room size.

In designing studio acoustics, the selection of a reverberation time is of fundamental importance. The time chosen must be suitable for the nature of the recording method and the 'subject matter'. All the texts on studio acoustic design were written with the demands of broadcasting in mind, and mostly date from before the multitrack era. They concern themselves largely with the recording of 'classical' or 'serious' music by distant microphones. For this purpose a large studio of more than 10,000m³ is required and depending upon the volume of the room, the instruments to be used, and the nature of the music, reverberation times of between one and two seconds have been found most suitable.

Radio drama studios usually comprise a cluster of rooms with acoustic treatments designed to give different effects, indoors and outdoors for instance, with the differences indicated by different reverberation times. An outdoor room would be very dead, that is it would have a very short reverberation time.

Talks studios are usually small, and reverberation therefore tends to manifest itself as colouration. It could be argued that a talks studio should be as dead as possible, so as to use the reverberation of the *listener's* room to give the impression of someone speaking in that room. In practice it has been found that speech sounds more natural if it is recorded in a very slightly resonant acoustic. In BBC practice, reverberation times range from 0.3s for a very small studio of about 60m³ up to 0.4s for a large talks studio of about 150m³, with a reverberation time of 0.35s and a volume of 100m³ considered optimum. Because of the small volumes involved, and the short reverberation times, designs for talks studios can be a useful starting point for the builder of a small multitrack music recording room, but only in the absence of more suitable published material.

One area in which broadcasting and multitrack practices are comparable is in the acoustic design of control rooms. In both fields, control rooms need to satisfy two possibly conflicting objectives. In the first place they need to provide a suitable acoustic environment for judging the quality of programme material, and for making very subtle adjustments to it. Secondly, they need to bear some

resemblance to acoustic conditions in the average listener's listening room. Theoretically the first would tend to call for a very dead acoustic, while the second would demand around half a second of reverberation time: try clapping your hands loudly in your living room and see how long it takes for the sound to die away.

The BBC's answer was to make a statistical analysis of the discrimination and judgement of their engineers in different listening rooms. They arrived at a reverberation time of 0.4s up to 250Hz, falling steadily to 0.3s at 8,000Hz. This curve is similar to the reverberation performance of a typical living-room, so by its use both design objectives were fulfilled.

British commercial recording studios have traditionally followed BBC practice in control room design, but with the advent of multitrack other factors have come into play. Some studio designers have opted for standardisation, so that a tape recorded in one room will sound the same when it is remixed in another somewhere else in the world. To achieve this end they opt for a 'flat' frequency response all the way from monitor amp to the sound in the room. Any deficiencies in monitor speaker or room response are shown up by tests, and corrections made by electronic equalisation. Some people swear by such flat rooms, others swear at them, but for a studio of the type we have been discussing in this series they are probably not a good idea, and almost certainly too expensive, unless you envisage your tapes being whisked off to Sweden for Bjorn and Benny to remix. The BBC's compromise between accuracy and compatibility with domestic conditions would seem to be a good starting point for your own experiments.

All the reverberation times mentioned above come from material produced by the BBC's famous research team of Burd, Gilford and Spring during the Sixties, when real multitrack was little more than a twinkle in George Martin's eye. Their material is comprehensive and rigorous, the result of painstaking research and statistical analysis, and it is based on actual studio practice. But it is a little thin when it comes to the 'dead' pop music studio. Nevertheless, what they do say is more useful than anything else available before or since. For studio volumes of between 60m³ and 300m³ they talk about reverberation times of between 0.2s and 0.35s. In practice, the lower figure would be the goal: indeed it represents the shortest time that is likely to be achieved, requiring very extensive (and expensive) treatment if it is to be maintained across a wide frequency range.

Reverberation time in any enclosure varies with frequency, depending on the size and

shape of the enclosure and the behaviour of any absorptive elements inside it. Some older books may suggest differently, but the best research shows that for optimum quality in a studio environment, reverberation times must be the same across the whole audio frequency range, with a slight rise at very low frequencies permissible but not recommended. This aim should be borne in mind when we consider the use of sound absorption to adjust reverberation times to our requirements.

Reverberation has been the subject of extensive scientific study in this century. In the early Twenties a man called Sabine worked out a method of calculating reverberation time, based on the fact that it is a function of volume and the amount of absorption that the room contains. He said that

$$T = \frac{\text{constant} \times V}{\bar{\alpha} S}$$

where T = reverberation time; V = volume of the room; S = surface area of the room; $\bar{\alpha}$ = the average absorption coefficient.

If you are working in feet, the constant is 0.049; in metric, which I intend to use, it is 0.161 (some books say 0.162). To find the average absorption coefficient you add together all the different items of absorption in the room (found from tables) and divide by the total area.

This formula is easy to use, but it only works for large rooms with a very low level of absorption. It was improved upon by Eyring in 1930 whose formula looks like this:

$$T = \frac{0.161 \times V}{-S \log_e(1 - \bar{\alpha}) + 4mV}$$

The $4mV$ is put in to account for air absorption which is significant at high frequencies in large rooms and is found from tables. As for the $-\log_e(1 - \bar{\alpha})$, that takes the place of the simple $\bar{\alpha}$ in the first equation. My Modern Maths 'O' level wasn't quite up to working that one out, but the better-educated amongst you (or those with expensive calculators) should be able to handle it. I was, however, able to get hold of a document called BBC Monograph No. 64: November 1966, *Data for the acoustic design of studios* by Burd, Gilford and Spring. Apart from details on the absorption coefficients of just about everything, this paper gives a useful table for finding $-\log_e(1 - \bar{\alpha})$ when you know $\bar{\alpha}$. Unfortunately, this essential source of useful knowledge is out of print, and no, the BBC Publications shop don't have any in stock. Short of besieging the BBC with demands that the thing be reprinted, you'll have to find a way of getting in to a University library, or even the British Museum library, if you want to see a copy.

Of course, once you have heard the major problem with these methods of calculating reverberation time, you may decide not to bother. They don't work properly with rooms in which the dimensions are comparable with the wavelengths of programme sounds. As we discovered earlier on, natural modes are created in small rooms which lead to a boosting of sound energy and a lengthening of decay times at certain frequencies. The Sabine and Eyring formulae work on the basis that in an untreated room, sound decays at approximately the safe rate irrespective of frequency. This is true of large rooms but not of small ones. In treating a large room, it is simply a case of discovering the reverberation time in its untreated state, deciding the desired reverberation time, and then just putting in



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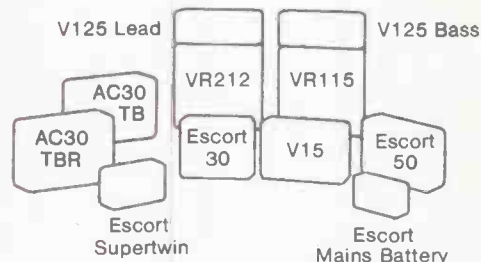
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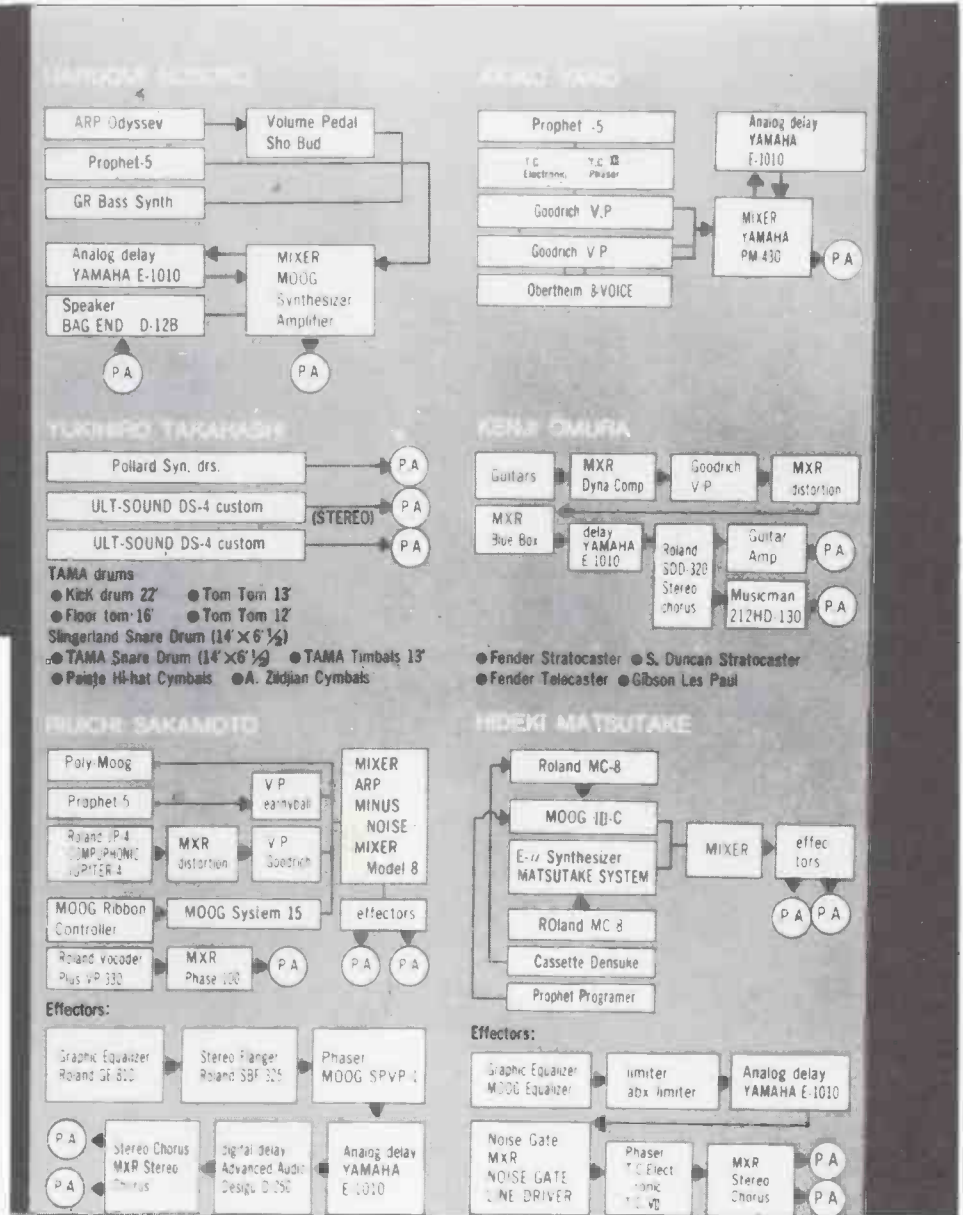
Late '78, three Japanese studio musicians get bored. Yellow Magic Orchestra is formed. November '78, their first album of the same name is released. On their world tour late '80, Tony Bacon hears the three founder members (Haruomi 'Harry' Hosono – keyboards, bass synth; Yukihiro Takahashi – percussion; Riichi Sakamoto – keyboards) talk – mainly in Japanese – about maniacs, computers and some incomprehensible stuff that we've left out. The services of a translator make it necessary that we do not identify who's saying what below – but you'll get the general drift.

Maniacs

'Our background is Mount Fuji. Two-and-a-half years ago, we made an album (*Yellow Magic Orchestra*) and it didn't sell in Japan at first – it just sold to some maniacs who always seek something new. It kind of stirred up some excitement in those markets.'

Competition

'The latter half of the Sixties saw the psychedelic movement come in: there were and there have been a lot of Japanese rock bands who tried to make a similar kind of music. They belong to that generation who'd started to play rock music and they listened to American and British rock music. There are not many Japanese rock bands playing like Yellow Magic Orchestra: it costs a lot of money (laughs)! Most groups are strongly influenced by British rock'n'roll music, and also Japan has a strong market for American 'fusion' music. We cannot divide ourselves completely from what is happening in the rock scene in Japan – everything is related. We've been in the business for more than 10 years and done radical things: new things in new directions. Now, stimulated by what we've developed, there is that growth scene with young people who've been influenced by our music – so you see there is a relation.



fashion, or graphics – have started to hold the instruments and they've started to deal with the music. Some of the Japanese bands we consider good are: X, they have great energy and sound like a Liverpool band; Plastics, the members of which used to be designers, they can appeal visually to the audience, though they haven't reached the standard yet as musicians; and Anarchy, we don't completely agree with what they're doing but they have some good parts and we'd like to see their growth.'

Japanese bands using electric instruments is that we involve Roland MC8, which is a computer. We consider the computer as part of the group, we've been using it since the beginning. Now we are also using an American instrument, the E-Mu. We compose based on the fact that we're going to use the computer in our music: if we didn't have MC8 the music could not reproduce what we have in mind.'

Brains

'It all comes in our brains! In your brains, there is no limitation to the rhythm or to the melodies – in the brain the fast notes can be played. If we are to reproduce what we have in the brain by hands, then the limitations come in. With the help of MC8 it is possible, and that's the method we compose.'

Commerce/Technology

'We use Prophet-5, Polymoog, ARP Odyssey and Oberheim 8-voice synthesisers. We used to use Korg, and we've used Roland. Yukihiro is working with Ult, a Japanese company, on a drum synthesiser so that they can improve on the basic synthesisers they have. Roland have

There are no other rock bands in Japan that can sell as many records as we sell. There is a band called Godiego, a soft-rock/pop band, they've sold quite a few records but not so many now. One of the things we're attracted to is that young people who used to be designers –

Computer

'We originally had the idea of adapting electronic music into what we do. Electronics isn't anything special now, all of the rock bands use synthesiser and electric guitars and it's nothing special anymore. What makes us different from the other

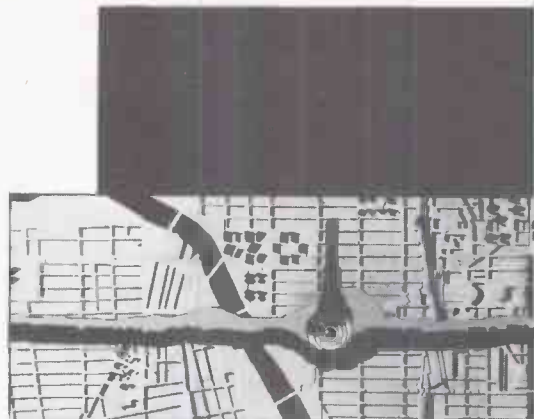
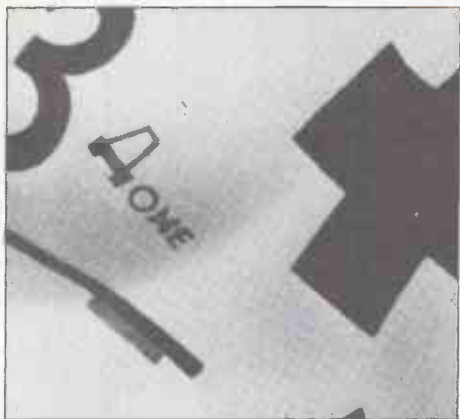
contacted us for suggestions, but we don't have any exclusive deals. Roland and Yamaha, they seem to like western musicians more than they like Japanese musicians. When we were not famous, companies did not contact us, then we've become so big and they've finally come to us, and that's irritating. They've paid attention to outside musicians and now they've come to Yellow Magic Orchestra. So we said no.'

Jigsaw

'In the past, there were periods when we had certain influences; now we've done everything. Every influence has been put together now.'

Data

'The computer programmer we have on stage, Hideki Matsutake, has been the assistant to Tomita for a long time and so the methods and techniques that they both developed have been employed with Yellow Magic Orchestra too. We don't consider Matsutake and MC8 differently: Matsutake equals the MC8. MC8 is an inevitable factor to our music; therefore on stage MC8 and Matsutake are inevitable. We need it. For each song the data is different, so he has to input all the data to the computer and then he has to decide which one to use while turning the knobs - for each song there is different data.'



YELLOW MAGIC ORCHESTRA

Stage

'We use drums, synthesisers, bass and voice. We use harmoniser, flanger, delay, chorus, vocoder. All the lines come back to our monitors, and then we get the sound by choosing which of the eight channels we would like - the six players each have their own monitor-mixer.'

Tape

'We would like to build a studio. The Japanese studios are very sophisticated: well-equipped and well-facilitated, very Americanised, all-round studios. We would like to build a studio of that kind. Sound is very important and we would like to have control over the sound. Sometimes we go into the studio with complete scores; other times we go into the studio and just discuss ideas we have and do it in the studio. We have all been studio musicians, morning 'til night, some years ago. That's boring, you have to be a complete player and you're not supposed to have any good ideas, you just have to play what you're asked to play. So it was a good decision to form Yellow Magic Orchestra.'



Japan only

Yellow Magic Orchestra Alfa Records 1978
Solid State Survivor Alfa Records 1979
X00 Multiplies 10in Alfa Records 1980
Public Pressure live Alfa Records 1980

International

Yellow Magic Orchestra A&M 1979 (remixed)
X00 Multiplies A&M 1980 (tracks from *XM*, *SSS* and *YMO*)
 Also: Riuichi Sakamoto *B-2 Unit* solo album Island 1981.

RECORDS

THE DAILY SLOG



Egalitarian to a fault, Geoff Travis claims he is not Managing Director of Rough Trade. He is, however, responsible for a lot of the constructive energy behind the new wave and here he explains to Didy Lake how he does it.



I usually get in here between 9.30 and 10 and get out not much earlier than 8pm and anytime up to midnight. The first thing I do is listen to all the new records that have come in the post that need distributing, about six to eight a day, and I either phone or write back. I spend a large part of the day pulling the wholesale orders that come in. I spend a lot of time taking orders on the telephone and pulling those orders, taking them off the shelves, and that usually takes up the bulk of my time - if I haven't got anything else to do I do that.

I listen to about three or four demos tapes everyday. The tapes are filtered for me by a man called Mayo Thompson (Pe're Ubu and ex-Red Crayda) who comes in one day a week to listen to demos and anything he thinks is good he passes on to me. A lot of people come in through the door every day with a tape and we listen to it on the spot and give our opinion about it. Either they come in wanting to be on the label or they want distributing. There's not usually more than about five or six every day but it is important to do that.

I usually spend quite a lot of time in the studios and I've produced a lot of records, or helped in the production. At the moment we're in the process of mixing Red Crayola's album and I've also been in the studio helping Scritti Politti with their new LP. The studio we use most at the moment is Berry Street in north London, also Studio 80, Denis Bovell's studio. I've recently spent a lot of time doing a cassette in conjunction with the *NME* which is going to be 81 minutes long and sold to people for £1.50 and it's mostly going to be special things that people are recording for the cassette. I've

been making decisions about who is going to be on the cassette, asking people to record, getting little 100-word biographies from them or pieces that they want to write that are going to be printed in the *NME*. It's gonna be really good, it's got some good people on it, Robert Wyatt, Scritti Politti, the Raincoats...

Then a lot of people come in every day from all over the world, basically, who want to buy records or distribute records, or they have records that they've put out in their countries that they want us to distribute, so we try to listen to them as much as possible.

Thursday evenings we have a meeting for anyone at Rough Trade who wants to come. Also members of bands are welcome to come. That's the one fixed meeting but there are lots of internal meetings, lots of departmental meetings. Rough Trade works on a very informal basis, we don't sort of lock ourselves into committee rooms to make decisions, we make them as we run around all day long and we have these meetings continuously. Things that you can't decide simply or quickly don't seem really worth talking about on the level that we operate. It seems to me that you only have protracted long meetings with people when you can't agree what to do. It's happened about four times that we've said something like, well, Cabaret Voltaire are here, there is a lot of serious talking we need to do with them so I want to take them out to supper, give me £15. I don't have an expense account. I do spend a lot of time talking to groups about what's going on, about their music, but that happens a lot on the telephone and when people come in.

For the last two years we've been

snowed under every day but it's become a way of life. We're used to it. We're getting out of it in a way. We've been in this new building about four months and we moved here because of pressure of space. Rough Trade seemed to be worthwhile almost immediately in that people came to the shop but it started to take off with the advent of punk music. We started it as a reflection of our own taste, a lot of reggae, ethnic music and what we considered to be the most adventurous kinds of the current style of music at that time, New York Dolls, Stooges, Dan Hicks. A lot of people think Rough Trade's taste is very narrow, but I would like to think it is very broad.

The shop became a clearing house and information centre for a lot of things to do with the new wave, we carried a lot of fanzines and gave a lot of help to Mark P with *Sniffin' Glue*, physically helping with folding copies etc. We were very deeply involved because we loved the music, we went to all the gigs and got to know everybody. People were making their own records in opposition to the idea that the only way you could make a record was to sign to a major record company. From that moment on Rough Trade was more than willing to take these independent records and sell them through the shops and out of that the distribution and record label grew quite naturally in that people were bringing tapes to us that we thought were great. Since no one else was going to release them we thought we should do it ourselves. All that happened without any grand design.

The independent distribution network is becoming day by day more efficient and it is a network that's able to sell where necessary and when wanted as many records as CBS's network and just as efficiently. I think it is crucial and very important for the power of independents that they are able to have that access to shops that a major has. If they don't get to that point then there will always be an argument to say your principles are all very well but in reality you can't get the records to the people who want them.

I think the independent network is proving itself all the time - it's been proved with Joy Division, with UB40. That is the single most important change that has happened in the record business for the last few years and that is what we have worked for.

I don't care about the majors, they just don't exist for me on my horizon. I think it is a waste of energy to compare

what we do to them, they are in a different orbit. We are in the same market place, very much, we recognise that, but we don't see ourselves competing. We just get on with our work.

The majors have got a lot of problems. The most astounding thing to me is their blatant hypocrisy. It does shock you to find out that people have been lying. We used to be compared an awful lot with Virgin. They never had an equal pay structure like us, there was always a really rigid power structure and that's the big difference. I also think there's a lot of ideology in Rough Trade in a way that there wasn't so much of at Virgin. I don't see the need for any of their kind of pretentiousness. There are some people at Virgin who I like and respect, but I'm not at all enamoured with their business practice.

The way I see my job, my main concern is what happens here. My two main jobs are to work in distribution and wholesale, what I do is buy the records that wholesale sells. I'm also in charge of A&R so I decide which records go on the label. The relationship with artists is based simply on an agreement to do one particular project at a time and there's room for both parties to say they don't want to continue the relationship. They can have one record made without having to be a part of anybody, being signed to anybody, put themselves into a relationship which is very often a slave relationship to a record company.

I don't travel very much. I went to San Francisco because we have set up a shop and distribution there. We've put out six albums in America. And I went to Japan because some good friends of ours wanted to licence our records there, so I went out to organise that. It is important in terms of our own artists not earning a living for the records that are sold just in this country, that they are available in other countries. I hope we'll be able to make a living for the artists that are involved with us, I think that's the most important thing but I don't see myself travelling around the world from meeting to meeting. I really hope it doesn't get to that. It's more fun here - you see we play music really loud all day long!

I was on a radio show with Ken Maliphant who is head of Phonogram. He said he hasn't heard any good music for the last three years. For someone to say that is extraordinary. In this country there's far too much great music, it constantly amazes me. I think the record industry is at its healthiest ever state. □



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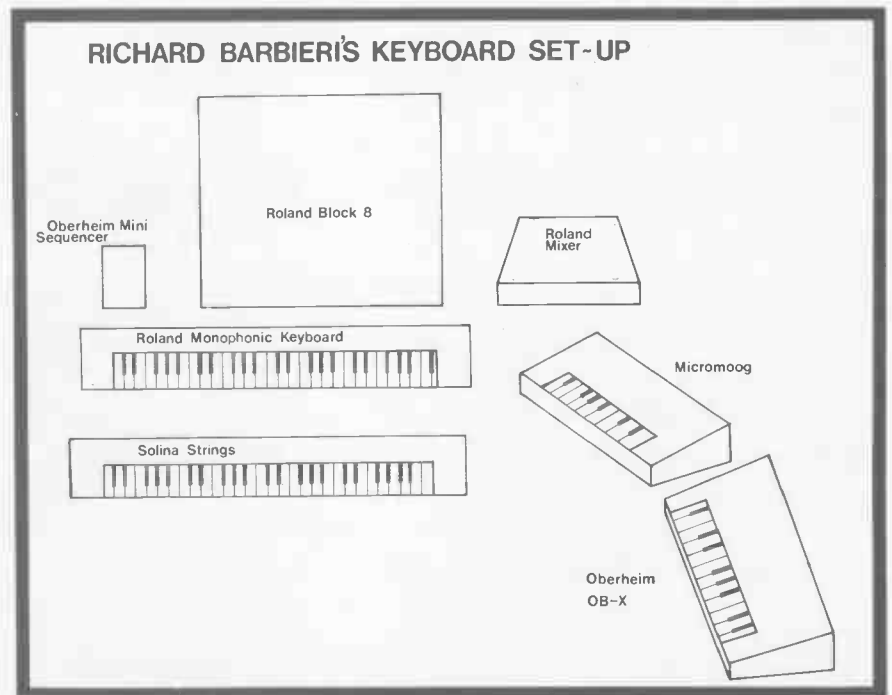
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On *The Dave Crombie Show* this evening, I have a man who is more familiar with an alphanumeric keyboard than a musical one and who isn't known as 'The James Galway of the computer', Mr White Noise himself, David Vorhaus. You'll also meet a man about whom it has been said but never proved, Mr Memory Banks. But may I introduce my first guest, a man from Japan who is also a native of that fabulous town Lewisham, Mr Richard Barbieri.



Richard Barbieri is the synthesist of the ever-successful band, Japan. He doesn't consider himself a conventional synthesist, but sees his role in the band as creating, or as the New York electronic music set would have it 'realising', the desired atmospherics in the band by means of layering both melodic and percussive electronic sounds.

Japan is Richard's first band. 'It started a long time ago, when three of Japan were at school, and I joined them. I just used to play conventional keyboards, which I never felt very comfortable with, I still don't really. It was only when I started playing synthesisers that I really started to get confidence.' This was in Catford - a town whose main claim to fame has been its excellent dog track.

In a town like Catford there wasn't much hope of finding someone to teach synthesisers, so Richard was of necessity self-taught. He seems pleased to have had no formal musical training, citing that this lack of 'moulding' allowed him to progress, and to evolve his unique music style.

'The rest of the band were initially influenced by Tamla Motown and funk things, but it was only synthesisers that I was interested in. I was subconsciously influenced by a lot of things, many that I didn't necessarily like, but they still have their effect on you. I tend to be more influenced by places more than actual musicians, though I've always admired Eno, and probably he was the one who inspired me most.'

Dave Sylvain writes the majority of the band's number's. 'He gets the basic idea for a song, the title and the lyrics, and then he comes along to us and starts playing some

chords, and plays as little as possible really, though he knows what he wants from a song, in order to give us a lot of room. He used to write on guitar, but more recently he's gone over to keyboards.'

On the last album (*Gentlemen Take Polaroids*) Sakamoto, from Yellow Magic Orchestra, co-wrote one of the songs. 'We are great friends with the Yellow Magic Orchestra. They are one of the few bands we have any contact with, though our bass player is currently working with Gary Numan on his next album.'

Inevitably, the subject of Japan, the country, cropped up. 'A lot of people thought we called ourselves after the country for obvious commercial reasons, but the name was ages, maybe 10 years, ago, long before we ever knew there was a market in Japan, we were just thinking of a lot of names - we had a gig coming up, and it just sounded nice.' Japan are one of the few bands that can lay claim to the well worn rock cliché of being big in Japan. They most certainly are. Their earnings from the Land of the Rising Sun have to finance most of their other 'western' projects, ie album costs, touring, make-up, and other necessary living expenses. 'This eastern popularity was sparked off by a series of "fashion" photographs which appeared in a high-gloss music mag (the Japanese love pictures) and it seemed to mushroom when they got the product.'

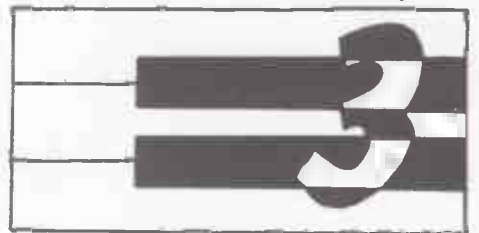
Richard, along with most other electric keyboard players, started off his gigging career playing a Hohner Pianet (a low price, but very useful electric piano) However his current live set-up (illustrated) is much more adventurous. His playing style is very emotional, and he

relies a lot on percussive sounds.

'Dave (Sylvain) has a *Prophet* synthesiser, but I personally prefer the *OB-X*, it seems to have a more percussive sound.' The rest of his keyboards are older and tried and trusted. He does however experience tuning problems with the *Roland Block 8*, and *Micromoog*. 'They are both great instruments, but the scaling of the Roland keyboard seems to be out, and the Moog just seems to drift, so the Korg tuner is wired into the mixer so that I can easily check the tuning. We normally set things up long before the gig, so it can often be four hours before we come on during which time the synthesisers are all out of tune with each other. The Oberheim though is as steady as a rock. The only problem that we've had with it is that a note stopped working, so that every eighth note that I played didn't sound, but the makers have a switching system inside which means that that voice can be switched out, making it a seven-voice instrument and it will then work quite normally.'

Richard seems to have shares in MXR. 'I have a flanger on every one of my instruments and use the mixer to control all these effects.' If you listen to their latest album you will notice a lot of flanging, but it isn't overdone, and it fits well into the overall picture.

'On the album we use a lot of sequenc-



ing effects. I'm very interested in using several sequencers that aren't running in time with one another but that will come together at certain points. Sakamoto uses a Roland MC8 micro-composer, and I would like to get into that. It is impossible for me to create all the keyboard tracks on the album when playing live, it would take three hands, or necessitate getting another keyboard player, so we use backing tracks quite often. Our drummer is fed a sync track and we therefore know that if we are in time with him, everything is sounding together.

'Japan are a very emotional atmospheric band, consequently it is important that we have a good "on stage" sound; if it doesn't feel good to us on stage, the music is impossible to get into.'

Richard Barbieri seldom listens to other bands, or keyboard players, consequently his approach to the playing of keyboards is purely his own, and, he admits, Japan doesn't have an indefinite future. 'I reckon about two or three more years, so I'm looking for other avenues to explore. I would really like to get into doing film soundtracks, I think I would be good at that.' I asked him if he'd seen *Kagemusha*...



David Vorhaus is one of this country's leading exponents of electronic music, and although he may not be a household name, most of your households will have been graced with the strains of his music. He has a considerable number of TV advert scores under his belt, as well as working on several major film soundtracks, including *Superman*, but probably his main claim to fame is a series of albums under the name of White Noise.

When I first contacted David with regard to doing this interview, he was somewhat reticent, proclaiming not to be a keyboard player at all, but he did admit to using keyboards quite considerably in his work, and especially so since his recent purchase of a Fairlight CMI (a computer

based instrument that will set the purchaser back around £13,000), so he is both a musical keyboard player, and one of the very few musicians to master an alphanumeric keyboard (like that of a typewriter) as a musical control parameter. I must add at this point that on my way over to David's Camden studios, I got nicked by the boys in blue for what was in my opinion a minor traffic offence (they reckoned otherwise), consequently I wasn't at my best when I arrived at the Kaleidophon studios.

The world of electronic music is a tricky and expensive one to get into. David Vorhaus' introduction to it came whilst he was at college. 'I was playing double bass in the college orchestra and the conductor, realising I was doing a postgraduate degree in electronics, drew my attention to a lecture in electronic music. So I skipped along to that, and it turned out that it was by Brian Hodgson, Delia Derbyshire and Peter Zinovieff. Brian and Delia ran the BBC Radiophonic workshop, and Peter was running EMS, and we all got together after the lecture, and got on like a house on fire. This was back in 1969, and they let me use some of the facilities at the Beeb in the middle of the night. I had this song *Love Without Sound*, that I had written after leaving school, so I suggested we try playing around with it, and together we came up with a good version of this song which we took to a couple of record companies.

'Decca wanted to release it straight away, whilst Chris Blackwell, at Island, said that we had to do an album. This threw us somewhat, we knew that we couldn't get away with doing a whole album at the Beeb, so we said "No, we want a hit single first." Chris of course knew that this wasn't singles material - we were totally unaware, thinking that a single was just a short album - however eventually he managed to convince us that all you earned from a Top 10 single in those days was around £3000, so he wrote us out a cheque, then and there, for £3000 saying, "Here, you've had your hit single, now go away and do an album. It was an offer that we couldn't refuse, so that's how things got started."

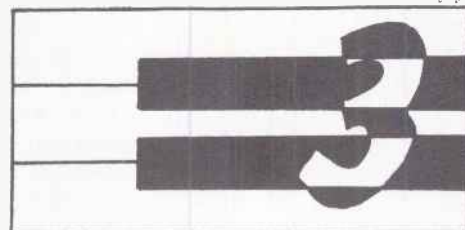
Not many 'unknowns' get such a start in the music industry, so I quizzed David further on the recording of the first *White Noise* album. 'We built this studio (Kaleidophon) especially for the album. We used four 2-track Revoxes run in parallel as an 8-track recorder. In those days, electronic music was tuning your audio generator to the desired note, recording a fraction of a second's worth of signal, then making an edit. I imagine that an average tune would have around 100 notes per minute on each track, so that's a hell of a lot of editing. It took six months to put the studio together, so we were just about ready to start recording the album when the final master was due to be delivered. Altogether the whole thing took about a year, though even with today's

computer technology it would take much the same period.

'We got a letter from Island, after 12 months, saying that unless they got the tapes within 24 hours they would begin legal proceedings to recover the advance. Well we were only half way through side two, so we had to pull out all the stops. We set up a drum track on the tape loop, and got the drummer to play with the loop whilst we let fly with every effect we could muster, and we managed to get it finished, though I would like to have made that 10-minute track much shorter, but we had to fill the album. Unfortunately, when Island heard the tape (Chris Blackwell was away at the time) they all had heart attacks, they were horrified, and refused to give us any advertising budget. Consequently the album sold about 200 copies in the first six months, though from then on it has sold more and more, and I think that it has now gone well over the 100,000 mark which can't be too bad'.

David Vorhaus went on to record a second *White Noise* album, *Concerto For Synthesiser*, by himself, this time for Virgin, and the third album *Re-Entry* has just been released by Pulse Records. 'What seems to happen in this capitalist system that we live in, is that you get a small company, like Island was 10 years ago, and like Virgin five years back, who are keen to get new and interesting music heard, rather than concentrating on commercial stuff. However, when one of these interesting areas is latched on to by the public, the company starts to grow and it becomes very business-orientated and seems to drop acts that aren't going to produce hit singles, or sell a large number of albums. That is what seems to have happened with my associations with Island and Virgin, so now I'm on another small label, Pulse.'

David Vorhaus hasn't just sat on his backside in between these *White Noise* albums, it is often possible to identify his playing style on certain scores to adverts, one of his most recent being the Alka Seltzer commercials which were on the box last Christmas. It was an animated film, and as David told me, he used his latest acquisition the CMI on it. 'I daren't tell you how little time that ad took, or the company will think that I've ripped them off. The film was of a space ship that looked like a turkey, and there were these Alka Seltzer-like meteors, so I thought why not use the sound of a turkey as the source material, and turn it into a zooming sound with the doppler effects etc using the CMI; so I was using the sound of real turkeys with the CMI, and giving it the



whooshing treatment as though it were a noise source. I just sampled the sounds, and typed in the music – you can either play or type the music with the *CMI*, and this was locked by the computer to the individual frames of the picture, so it was synced exactly, no need to even work out timings per bar and all that.'

David's other project, also called *Kaleidophon*, is a synthesiser ribbon controller that he hopes to market soon. As his musical roots lie with the double bass, he developed a stick controller that has four strings (ribbons) that produce a control voltage corresponding to where on the 'fretboard' a certain ribbon is pressed. The production model of this device was shown at Frankfurt, and we shall be looking more closely at the *Kaleidophon* in a later issue. This is a strangely differing state of affairs to *Memory Banks'* dealings in the musical instrument industry. *Memory* was forced to give up his PA company because of the pressures of working with a band, whilst David's instrument wouldn't have been possible were it not for his involvement in the record industry.

David and myself went rabbiting on for ages about musical instruments, the *CMI*, and the state of the electronic music of today such that it wasn't until I returned to my little white car that the sickening feeling returned as I remembered my earlier driving offence. I went home to await the recorded delivery.



Memory Banks isn't his real name of course, but he felt it more in keeping with the image of the band, than his real name of *Memory Lane*. No, I jest, the angular Mr Banks' first name really is *Pete*, and I must say that I felt a lot more comfortable calling him such. The band as I'm sure you are all aware is *After the Fire*, one of the most hardworking bands that I have ever encountered. They have been gigging since 1974 with little chart success, save the single *One Rule For*

You, which just crept into the top 40; *Memory* reckons that was only because CBS did a good job getting the single into all the chart return shops.

Memory began his musical career as a guitarist, 'I got into music on six-string, but later transferred to organ. I found that I was thinking along guitar lines whilst playing keyboards, I would play octaves with my left hand, and block chords with my right. All the melody and lead lines came later. I had no formal musical training; sometimes I find that I can't do something that I want because I don't have the training in technique, but on the whole I don't really worry about not having had lessons – in fact it has probably been an advantage.'

I commented on his very precise playing style. 'Yes, well I like to be as accurate as possible, if there is a tricky phrase, or something, I will spend hours making sure that I've got it right. There's very little improvisation in the band, so I know what I've got to play, and I make sure that I can do it.'

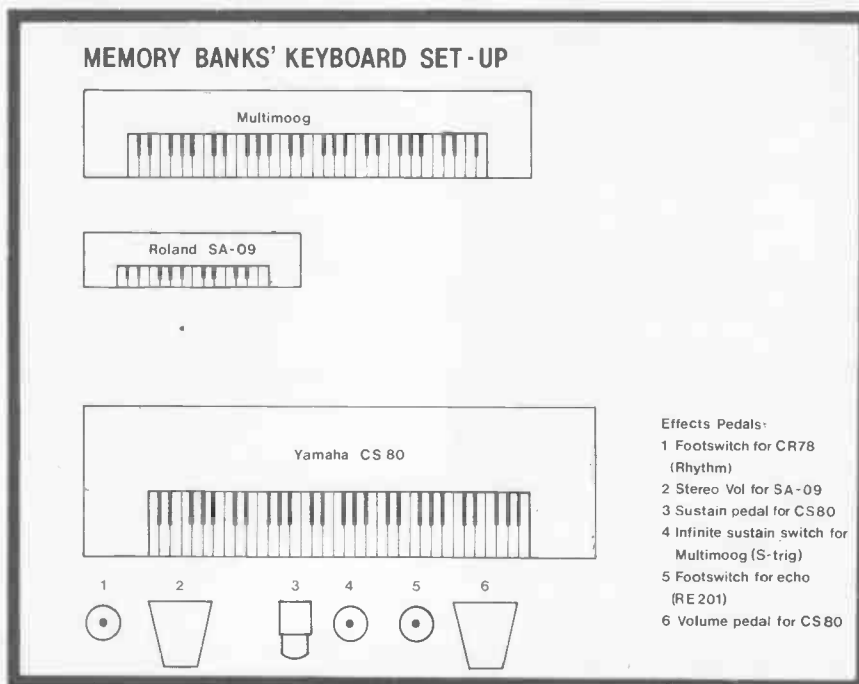
Memory's first keyboard was a *Hammond T102*, 'A nice piece of furniture,' I ventured. 'Yeah, it was in immaculate condition. I bought it in 1971 from some second-hand shop, I used it with a *Leslie* and it was really great. I had that organ for years, and only quite recently did I sell it, and I got more than I paid for it.'

I asked about his PA manufacturing company *Epicentrum*. 'Ah yes, this was a

had to decide whether *Epicentrum* or *After the Fire* was going to come first. *Epicentrum* had by then grown a lot and was at the stage where it would be necessary to go to all the big trade shows like *Frankfurt* to do justice to the business, but really this wasn't on, especially since we'd struggled so long to get a contract. So *Epicentrum* was sold off, and we concentrated on the band. The company is now run from *Ireland* I think, and though they have had to redesign a lot of the units as a result of the demise of *ATC* (the speaker manufacturers), I understand that things are still going well for them.'

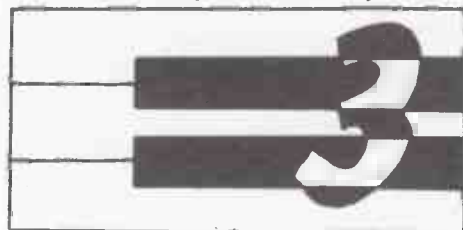
After the Fire have gone through a fair number of musical changes over the years, 'We were labelled a Christian band when we first started, and that label seems to have been with us ever since. People used to think we were going to be like the *Joy Strings* or whatever they're called, but we were a rock band who just happened to be Christians, anyone hearing us play would be unaware of any Christian involvement. I suppose that this categorising helped us in the beginning, but now we seem unable to shake it off.'

Synthesisers seem to have played a large part in the band's musical development. 'I bought a *Minimoog* in 1975, and sat down with the instrument and the owner's manual, and I worked through that book from cover to cover. It was amazing, I learnt so much from that one



sort of a parallel industry we used to run alongside the band. We built and designed a range of PA equipment, we did it all ourselves, and in fact it helped to finance the band. I designed a few cabinets and things took off from there. *Epicentrum* did very well for us and fitted in nicely with our band activities; funnily enough it seemed to do better when things were slack with the band, and not so good when the band was busy. About the time we signed with CBS, we had reached the stage when we

little booklet. It was written by *Tom Rhea*, he does all the *Moog* manuals, though he seems to have adopted a more question and answer approach recently. But I



learnt almost all I needed to know about synthesisers from that one manual.'

The accompanying diagram shows Memory's current stage set-up. It is very tidy and simple without going over the top as many keyboard players seem to do these days. 'I got the CS80 at the end of 1978, and I love it. The keyboard is both velocity sensitive and touch sensitive; by pressing the keys harder after they are played, you can further modify the sound. It is this facility that I find particularly useful. In fact it was the touch sensitivity that prompted me to switch from *Minimoog* to the *Multimoog*. Here I use the touch facility mostly for modulation effects, and only occasionally for pitchbend. I think that the *Multimoog* has a different sound to that of the *Mini*, not so rich; the *Minimoog* seems to sound a bit out of date these days.'

The keyboards are mounted on an Ultimate Support Systems stand. (Further information on these stands can be obtained from Roland (UK) Ltd.) Memory has had the stand modified so that the CS80 can be played at any angle tilting down away from him. 'If you stand up to play, as I do, you have to bend your hands back if the keyboard is flat; by tilting the keyboard I find it more natural and more comfortable to play. We have to support the CS80 on blocks because of its rather excessive weight, but the blocks also serve to form part of the pedalboard. Although the CS80 can produce a great organ

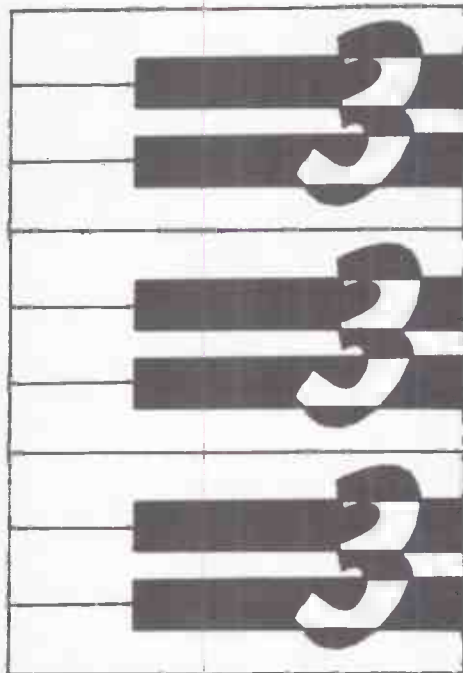
sound, I find that I use the Roland SA09 primarily for an organ voicing. I have a rack-mounted amplification system which also contains a mixer, the Flanger/Chorus, *Space Echo*, and a CR78 rhythm unit, and I have a special patching system so that I can mix my keyboards after they've been sent off to the desk. It gives me a greater control of my stage sound, and I can easily pick out a certain signal if, say, I just wanted a CS80 on stage.'

The subject of songwriting then cropped up. 'I like to use the rhythm unit when writing stuff, I find that I either get a rhythm and work a melody into that or else start off with a tune, and play around with the rhythm till I get something that fits. I've got one of those *Portastudios* which I use with a Revox, so that I can work out a whole arrangement for the band, this way I can express more clearly my ideas of how a song should go. Of course everything changes when you have proper drums etc, but I think that it is helpful to have a clear idea of what you want, and to be able to easily communicate it to the rest of the band.'

'We did the last album originally with Tony Mansfield as producer, he was the man behind New Musik. However things didn't seem to work out quite right, so we re-recorded some of the numbers with Mack which helped a lot. He has shown me a whole new direction to take with the CS80; there is just so much you can do with the ring modulator. I was thinking

about buying a *Prophet* or an Oberheim OB-X, but now that I've found out that I can do so much more with the Yamaha, I'm really content to keep my set-up as it is. I have, though, been thinking about buying a sequencer; I read your review of the new...'

At this stage the interview took a rather unusual about-turn, and it seemed that I was having to answer Memory's questions on various new pieces of equipment. Well I suppose it's only fair.



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Gibson

Sonex

Custom

Robin

Millar

It takes a good deal for Rugby Union to hold my attention at the best of times. Under the circumstances in which I found myself trying to concentrate on the England v. France International last February, diversion was inevitable. Firstly, the studio couch upon which I slouched sagged alarmingly in the middle. This, I surmised, was a battle scar. The furnished flat in the heart of Paris' unfashionable 13th was where the record company with whom I had unwittingly become involved normally dumped their foreign musicians, and I think an endless stream of *vin ordinaire* and French groupies had taken their respective tolls. Also, you may have already noticed that rugby commentators are significant in having, to a man, unusually strong dialectic accents.

I retreated to the loo, the only room in the flat without windows, and in which a man could be at peace with himself and act out his wildest fantasies in an atmosphere of civilised obscenity. However, on this occasion all my imagination could cope with was the three-day-old issue of the *Daily Mirror* in which I had wrapped my glass bottlenecks. My eyes lit upon a small by-line 'Joy Adamson dies in Kenya.' I chuckled, not because I was not saddened by this news, but because the way this by-line was worded it sounded like she did it all the time, or at least the second Monday of most months. However, sad to relate Joy, star of *Born Free* – remember Matt Monro, all you Cool Cats? – had been well and truly Black and Deckered by one of her favourite pets. I began to dream of the jungle, and of Cecil Rhodes, and of parrots, and of scorpions, and of Rudyard Kipling and so on. I began to wonder what on earth I was doing surrounded by all this horrible mechanised noise from which there seems no respite, purely in order to spend my evenings running around the stage making lots more mechanised noise, the way one does from time to time. I was also thinking how absolutely ludicrous it was that we all seemed to be going hell-for-leather toward the computer-chip gold rush, and yet would only buy a jar of jam or a bottle of shampoo if it came packaged as though it were made 60 years ago. Had I, at that moment in my life, in that little bog in that unholy place, been given the brochure on the new Gibson *Sonex* guitar, I might well have sighed out loud, 'There! look at that, you see?'

If ever there was a hybrid, then this is it, but to say that it is neither one thing nor the other would be grossly unfair on what has turned out to be quite a revelation and, I think more importantly for Gibson, quite a revolution. For

although the top of the range, well-known Gibson stalwarts were certainly still being made as well as ever, the compromises that Gibson had made thus far to get into the less pricey market had quite honestly appalled me. An amateur musician friend of mine had gone out proudly to buy his Gibson guitar with limited resources and had plumped for a brand new budget model undeservedly bearing the SG legend, and had given it to me to see if I could improve on its performance in any way. I got as far as removing the two pickup covers to see what was underneath, hastily put them back on again and handed the guitar back to him and said quite simply, 'There's nothing I can do.'

Now, at last, it seems to me that Gibson have sat down along with a few musicians, and really had a good long think and a good long chat. The result is a hybrid in the sense a) it is made partially of natural, and partially of man-made materials; b) to look at, feel and play it is a strange yet comfortable mixture between old-fashioned and new-fashioned guitar; and c) most importantly of all it really is rather like a very good Gibson and a very good Fender got married and had children.

The particular example that I have been reviewing has been round the world several times with the excellent Dave Roberts (Gibson demonstrator) and was therefore in less than pristine condition. Because of this I can't really comment on the quality of the finish of these guitars except to suggest that Dave ought to go out and buy himself a proper cricket bat. So, as I suspect Gibson rather hoped I would, I give them the benefit of the doubt. I am sure that a new *Sonex Custom* is up to Gibson's usual high quality of finish. I had the all-black model – it is also available in white. Actually I rather liked it tatty, but I daresay it looks pretty smart all new and shiny. Our editor thought it was a bit boring and plain, but then he's the sort of person who used to stick silver sellotape-x around his bicycle pump, and who thinks that Jan Leeming has got good taste in clothes. The only thing that did disappoint me was that the mother-of-pearl Gibson logo on the head had been replaced by a gold-leaf transfer. I was more than disappointed, I was horrified. Not only that, but I would have thought that after all this time 'Gibson' would say quite enough about the guitar, but this gold transfer tells you that your guitar is a product of 'The Gibson Guitar Company USA.' The result of having to cram all this above the machine heads is that the whole thing is skew-wiff and definitely looks like a bit on the naff side. But at this stage I feel I

should point out that what we are talking about here is a guitar that, including its case and the iniquitous VAT, retails at under £300, and at that money it's a bargain. So what do you get?

The templates from which the body and neck are made are obviously based very closely upon those of the *Les Paul* range. Familiar single cutaway body, and a neck that even with your eyes closed you would know off by heart. But what's this? My acute powers of detection have discovered a difference. The heel of the guitar – the point at which the neck swells out where it meets the body – has been shaved narrower than on other Gibson models making the journey up to the top-most frets a good deal easier. There are several other ways in which I think this is a significant improvement upon a traditional Gibson, and which I think would reflect the kind of effort that I referred to earlier. I intend to talk about these and to appraise the guitar as an instrument from now on, and I do not intend to dwell too long upon all this 'a totally new concept in guitar construction' business, or of body sandwiches, unique this, significant that *etc, etc*, but partly because you can read all that for yourself in the adverts that festoon most music papers and magazines at the moment, and partly because I don't think all that sort of stuff is very important to you or me: quite frankly it doesn't matter whether the guitar design was used as the basis for *Voyager II's* second stage booster design if the thing sounds like a heap of junk.

Niggles

No other surprises in the head or neck. Schaller-like machine heads, presumably made under licence for Gibson nowadays, work very effectively. Rosewood fingerboards and (I suspect) maple neck perform sensibly and sensitively from top to bottom, and make you feel very confident very quickly. Moving downwards I come to the first of the traditional Robin Millar Niggles. I have a *Les Paul Custom* of my own upon which I have performed several major operations. One of the most useful of these was scything out the cutaway a little closer to the neck so that access to the top frets is comfortable and easy. This has done no damage whatsoever to the stability or strength of the guitar or of its joints: nor does it affect the aesthetic appearance of the guitar (provided it is then re-finished, of course). Why not, eh?

Now at this point the guitar begins to look much less like any Gibson you'll have seen before. The top is flat and bevelled on its upper edge like a *Strat*. Covering all bar the outside

half an inch or so of this top is a black plastic scratchplate with white revealed edge à la Telecaster, only more so. And, horror-of-horrors for Gibson, the two humbuckers, each with one black and one white coil, are supplied without covers. Tune-o-matic bridge and Gibson tailpiece as you would expect.

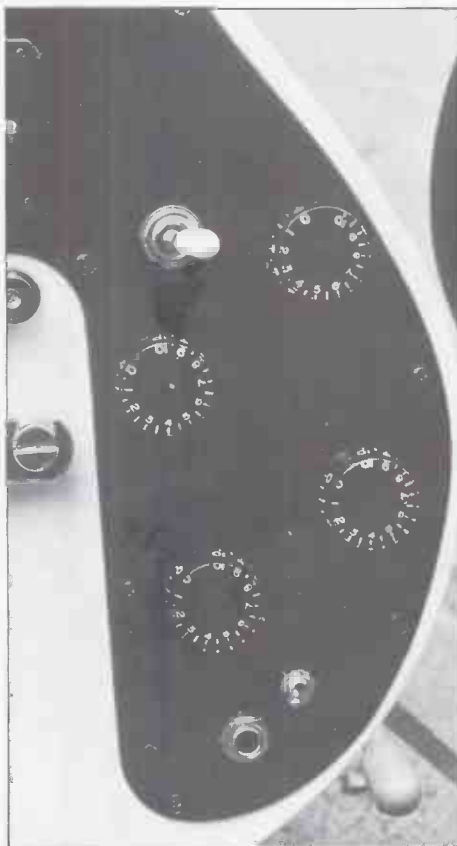
And so we arrive at the knobs where things get quite interesting. Another 'at last' here. Gibson have finally listened to all the people who have been telling them for years that their volume pots were wrong for their pickups. Pretty well every Gibson you will have ever picked up will have had one thing in common: the volume at 10 is twice the volume at 9 and the volume below 5 is so insignificant as to be irrelevant. You would therefore have always been as well off with a three-position switch: full, half, or off for volume for each pickup. I think several small component companies must have been kept in business over the last few years by the number of Gibson owners who have changed over those pots for more realistic ones where a full turn from 0-10 provides an even curve of a volume increase. Gibson have finally done it themselves on the Sonex. Full marks.

The tone controls, too, are significantly different from those normally found on passive guitars. What you generally expect from a passive tone control is a treble cut. In the case of the Sonex it is quite evident that what these tone controls are cutting is both high and low frequencies, gradually wittling down the extremes of tone. This makes these controls far more useful in terms of achieving workable sounds on the guitar: in fact, it's rather bizarre. Gibson seem to have copied all the things that I have done to my *Les Paul*, and incorporated them into this new model. Hmmm. For, at last (yippee etc), just below the two tone controls lurks – yes – a coil tap. After all my cajoling it seems that Gibson have suddenly realised that their own humbuckers are ideally suited to single coil or humbucking. More yipees and cheers from the back row as we spot the jack socket on the front and not on the lower edge of the guitar. Walk with new confidence! Friends will be amazed! Girls will want to be seen with you! No more solos castrated as you leap on to the bassist from the top of the PA stack. Last good point on the controls is that the normal three-way pickup selector switch is down by the volume controls where I think it should be.

So, £295, eh? How do you sound, young man? Purdy damn good. The humbuckers in question on this guitar are the Gibson *Dirty Fingers* model. I suppose that comes from too much picking. They are significantly louder than normal humbuckers and even on the double coils have considerably more bite to them. With the tone controls set on about 7 they sound pretty much like you'd expect a Gibson humbucker to sound, but cranked up to 10 on each tone control they definitely cover a greater frequency range. I was already getting excited about this, as you will know as well as I that one thing that has always been a bit of a problem with Gibsons is to stop the damn things sounding too mellow and classy. In the single coil tap mode the guitar produces a very sharp tingling sound not exactly like a *Strat*, but fulfilling the same sort of requirements with its own individual flavour. The one thing that is

rather regrettable is that Gibson, having bothered to put on one coil tap, could not have put on a second to allow one for each pickup. I have done this on my guitar, and I find that the various combinations thus available make the guitar supremely versatile as a workhorse. Even so, with the highly responsive pickups and useful passive tone controls I think it is very possible for players to get their own sounds on this instrument.

It is here that I should like to point out quite the most enjoyable and alluring aspect of this guitar. It is quite exceptionally responsive to individual touch. I realised this fact quickly after just a few experiments playing first with fingers and then with picks at various distances from the bridge, and I was so fascinated by what I heard that I made a point of allowing several other guitar players to have a go on this instrument. Although I always expect individual players to be able to make their mark on whatever guitar they are given, I have seldom heard on a solid electric instrument so significant a change under the different hands of the various players. This is where I am prepared to accept at least some of the Gibson bump with guarded seriousness. They claim that the body, which is a sandwich with a wood filling surrounded by *Resonwood*, provides a very good combination of good sustain and excellent harmonic response. *Resonwood* is evidently some sort of glass fibre or plastic compound, but whatever it is the result certainly seems to be a guitar with a lot of very interesting acoustic and dynamic properties. If using *Resonwood* allows Gibson to produce this sort of effect at such a low price, then it's fine by me. Sustain is certainly very good, and what I particularly liked was that even at the tail end of the decay the death was not sharp, but smooth. This I suspect is as much due to the good waveform provided by the Gibson humbuckers as from any revolutionary body com-



pound: Gibson, however, will show you little diagrams with clocks next to them saying that the very body itself contributed significantly to this sustain. I am prepared to believe that in terms of pure duration, but in terms of the quality of sound from beginning of the note to its death I'd put my money on the pickups. In view of this, I would like to point out that Gibson currently make two versions of the Sonex guitar: the *Custom* and also the *Deluxe*, which seems different only in that it does not have the coil tap switch and has standard Gibson humbuckers rather than the *Dirty Fingers*. Well, quite honestly, I would pay that bit extra if you can as both those features seem pretty significant to me.

So here is our crossbreed sitting squarely on the price bridge between Fender and Gibson. It feels sure, secure and solid the way a Gibson – and any good guitar – should feel. Playing the neck is exactly like playing a *Les Paul*, except that access to the top is rather easier. The range of sounds available is very much the best of both worlds between Gibson and Fender, with an individual flair, and still several thousand miles away from the brittle, uncompromising Japanese approach. Definitely un-Gibsonlike inasmuch as you feel like picking this guitar with your fingers as well as with a plectrum, and it certainly responds beautifully to both. It's as good a guitar to pick as an Ovation electric (and looks a little like the *Preacher* as well, come to that). It's certainly the most important guitar Gibson have brought out for several years, in my opinion a lot more important than the active electronic models in terms of Gibson's future.

The best way I can describe the guitar to you is like this: if you are two-thirds of the way through your UK or European tour and all your guitars are ripped off from the van/dressing room/hotel/brothel and the record company say OK you can go out and buy a new one, but you've only got £300 then I would unhesitatingly say go out and buy this guitar. You will get the sound that you want, and you will sound like you playing it. I am very pleased that this guitar exists, as I was beginning to wonder whether Gibson were becoming slightly anachronistic and snobby in their old age. I think they may well sell a lot of them. I shall certainly consider parting with my *Les Paul* and getting hold of one of these guitars. The money I save will go towards a plane ticket to Kenya.

I suppose by now you've forgotten the cryptic comment I made about four or five paragraphs ago concerning life as we know it today. Well, it's silly, really, but Gibson have produced this half-wood, half-synthetic guitar. They've called the synthetic bit *Resonwood*, which sounds a wholly plausible substance to me; just the sort of stuff that the Adamsons would have made the oars for their coracles out of; whereas for some extraordinary reason they have called the only bit of the body which is actually made from wood *Maple Tone*, which sounds to me like one of those second-rate department store organs with buttons that allow you to play chords with your left hand. I looked it up in my I-Spy book and I couldn't find a *Maple Tone* tree anywhere. Bring back Eddie Waring.

Tested on: Vox AC30 and Roland JC120 amplifiers. □

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Moog Opus 3

Dave Crombie

I was going to start this review with a dictionary quotation, you know the sort of thing: o'pus: n (pl opera). 1 Musicians composition, or series of compositions of any kind (used esp in citing it from among his works by number usu indicating order of publication)...

I was going to, but if I remember correctly Moog did exactly the same thing to one of their ads when they decided to launch this new instrument at the NAMM show last summer. Anyway – dictionary quotations are right *passé* (though I didn't realise that opera was the plural of opus, you learn something new every...)

Right. Despite what it says in the owner's manual, the Moog *Opus 3* is a polyphonic ensemble type of keyboard, offering three prime voicings – Strings, Organ, and Brass. The recommended retail price is a mere £699, so it is quite a bit cheaper than the Korg *Trident* (see review last month). However, this is quite a different instrument, and whereas the Korg was a top line machine this Moog is aimed considerably more down market, much that I wouldn't expect a band with unlimited resources to use an *Opus 3*.

The *Opus 3* is housed in a pressed metal casing around which is some particularly nicely coloured wood – a sort of dark rosewood. Somewhere along the line Moog have switched the type of keyboard they use, because the *Opus 4* octave (C to C) keyboard is rather nasty. It is physically noisy, and plasticky. I know that nearly all electronic instruments' keyboards have plastic keys, but some feel more so than others.

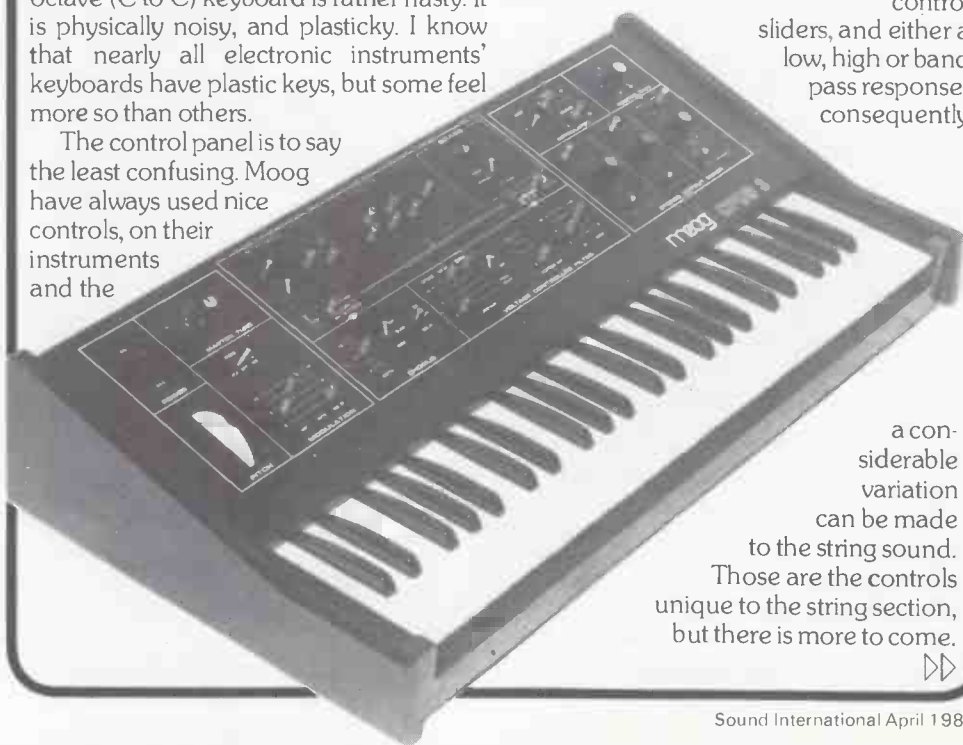
The control panel is to say the least confusing. Moog have always used nice controls, on their instruments and the

Opus has followed this tradition; the sliders are very sturdy, yet smooth to operate, and they are fitted with sensible knobs that don't fall apart (or come off) in your hands (ARP please note): the toggle switches are positive and their status can be seen clearly while playing; and the rotary knobs are intelligently shaped so that the setting of the knob can be felt, ie the knobs are shaped so that they incorporate a pointer, instead of just having a white line painted on the control, as do many manufacturers.

Moog have adopted a colour coding system as an aid to making the front panel easier to follow; even so, this one's a bit of a bastard to get to grips with. If you refer to the block diagram accompanying this text, you may find it easier to fathom things out. So, let's consider the three sections individually.

1 The String Section (Red)

The String Section derives its basic timbre from sawtooth waveforms. The *Opus* is a fully polyphonic instrument so a sawtooth waveform has to be generated for each of the 49 notes. In addition the voicing can be pitched at 8', 4', or a mixture of both. As an alternative to the basic tone control Moog have incorporated a single channel parametric equaliser to vary the character of the string voicing. This is a filter with variable cut-off frequency and resonance control sliders, and either a low, high or band pass response. consequently

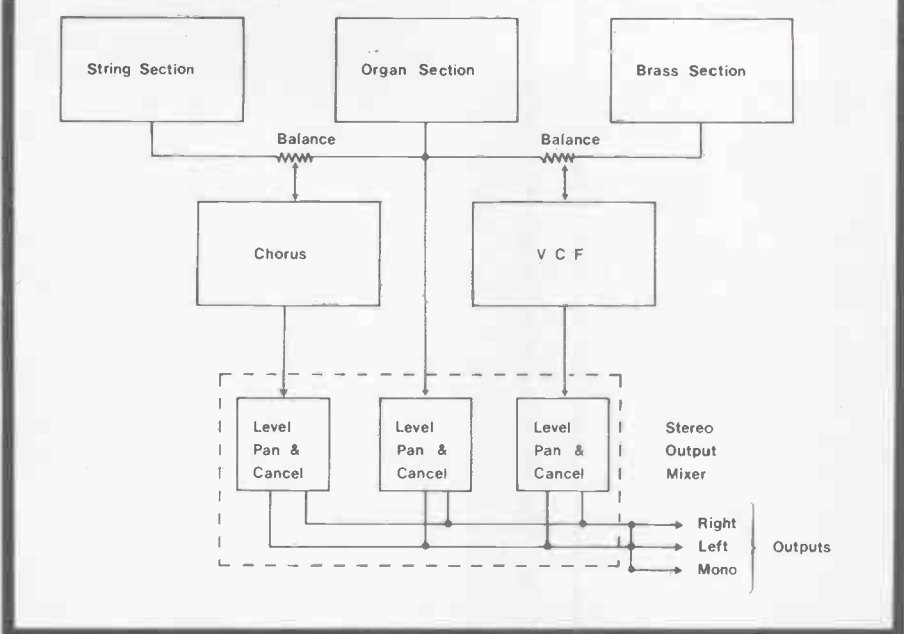


a considerable variation can be made to the string sound. Those are the controls unique to the string section, but there is more to come.





Figure 1: Block Diagram of Moog Opus 3's Voice Production Circuitry



2 The Organ (Green)

Five sliders introduce square wave signals at the following footages: 16', 8', 4', 2', and 1'. In addition there is a master tone control, a two-pole (12dB/octave) variable low pass filter, which can be used either to create a bright percussive organ voicing or a mellow warm sound. It seemed a pity that there was no odd harmonic ie 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ ', but I suppose it would have necessitated quite a considerable increase in price. The use of square waves as the basic fundamental pitches for organ voicings is somewhat suspect. Ideally these should have been sine waves, however price dictates square and the resulting sound is quite acceptable.

3 The Brass Section (Yellow)

As with the string section, the brass voicings are constructed from sawtooth waveforms. These can be pitched at 16', 8', or 4', but not mixed with one another. Now, as you would expect, there is a single filter that is used to give the brass voicing its typical warm sound. Moog have used a voltage controlled 24dB/octave low pass type for this purpose, and this can either be switched to preset mode, whence the section will produce a lively clear and rich brass sound, or to variable mode in order to create a specific effect. We shall deal more with this aspect in a few paragraphs.

Those are the three main sections, now comes the tricky bit. There are two horizontally mounted slider controls situated beneath the three voicing sections, and they determine what sound goes where. The options are as follows: The first control sets the balance between strings and organ, which goes into the

Chorus unit, and on to the Chorus channel of the output mixer. The second slider sets the Brass-to-Organ ratio, which is fed into the VCF (voltage controlled filter) and on to the VCF channel of the output mixer. A final channel exists on the output mixer that provides a direct signal from the organ circuitry, so it is possible to have direct organ, chorus organ and filtered organ simultaneously available on different faders of the output mixer – that is if you want it! The chorus unit gives the strings and/or the organ a deep full sound. It is possible to get a fairly good rotating speaker effect with this circuitry, as well as the rich orchestral string voicing. The depth can be varied, and the rate adjusted. The voltage controlled filter (when the Brass VCF mode switch is in the Variable position) has separate cut-off frequency and resonance controls as well as an ADS (attack decay sustain) envelope generator with amount control for sweeping the filter cut-off frequency automatically. All the controls that aren't specifically related to an individual section are represented in white.

When it comes to the amplitude shaping of the various sections, things can become a little more confusing. Moog have a section labelled 'Articulator', which relates to the control circuitry for the individual voltage controlled amplifiers, and their envelope generators, in this case of the AR (attack release) types. There is a Mode switch for the Articulator that takes some fathoming, but after many minutes experimenting with the Opus I can reveal all – in Mode 1, the envelopes of the individual notes are cut short every time a new key is played; this can be useful if you are employing long sustained chords that

can clutter things up if left unchecked during a key change. If the Organ and Brass voices are being fed through the VCF, then in Mode 1 the attack time for these sections is independent of the Articulator, and will always begin as the key is depressed. Also if the VCF mode is in the preset position, the Articulator's release slider will have no effect either – I told you it was confusing. Mode 2, which Moog call the 'overlapping' mode, doesn't result in the cancelling of the decay of the previous notes every time a new one is played; however, because there is only one VCF, a retriggering effect occurs with this section, which can be either really pleasing or, if you change key, somewhat discordant.

The performance controls consist of a pitchbend wheel, which can 'bend' the sound up or down a perfect fifth, and modulation sliders that can be used to introduce triangle wave modulation (not sine I'm afraid) to the pitch of the instrument – ie vibrato or to the voltage controlled filter.

One of the nicest features of the Opus 3 is the Stereo Output Mixer. It is very simple consisting of just three level knobs, three panning sliders, and three cancel switches, but it facilitates quick and easy changes to the sound, and the stereo option, particularly useful for recording, gives the instrument a whole new dimension. I found that instead of using the stereo outputs in a conventional way, ie with a stereo amp and speakers, it was much more useful to put an effects unit (eg a reverb or echo unit) on say the left channel, so that the effect can be quickly patched into the required section directly from the instrument's control panel.

Overall the quality of the sound produced by the Opus 3 is excellent; the Moog filters give the instrument a warmth that is lacking in many of the other polyphonic ensembles available. I found a lot of the control parameters confusing, and although the colour coding of the different sections is in essence a good idea, under low, or coloured lighting conditions, the graphics are difficult to make out (though good players should be able to familiarise themselves with the instrument to such an extent that they needn't look down at the controls at all). But, the question I kept returning to is whether the Opus 3 is a useful instrument, and does it adequately fill any hole in the market? Personally, I don't think the Opus has much new to offer the keyboard player, save that the sounds are fatter and warmer than much of the competition. It is very well priced at £699, probably a lot lower when the discount boys get going, but for today's market, I don't think that Moog have quite come up with the goods. □



Lab Series L5

Gary Cooper



Due ostensibly to the weakness of the US Dollar against the oil-fed Pound Sterling, Norlin have recently announced some interesting reductions in the prices of their Lab Series amps. I say ostensibly because there may also be other factors in this sudden and unusual cut in price, namely Norlin's determination to make this series sell rather better in Britain than it has done thus far.

That is not to say that the Lab Series range has been a sales failure since its introduction (although until the company's rather memorable Lab Test promotion last year it hadn't exactly set the world on fire). It's more, I suspect, that Norlin find themselves in the unpleasant position of having a product which *they* know is generally speaking good, which has been well received by the press, but which isn't reflecting that in its overall sales position.

The reasons *why* the Lab Series has thus far failed to lead the market is probably to do with several factors, not many of which are normally considered by amplifier purchasers (*ie* you) but which actually influence our buying decisions rather more than any of us suspect.

A lot of people buy things at least in part on image. This is particularly true of amps for the rock field. Walking on stage and plugging into a Marshall stack or a Music Man set-up looks OK on the principle that if a top player uses it it's pretty cool for us to follow suit. In other words nothing

succeeds like success. And who'd heard of Lab Series anyway?

If big endorsements had followed the launch of Lab Series, then customers might have been swifter to follow – hence the recent adverts featuring Bernie Marsden and Allan Holdsworth. Oh, and while we're on the subject of that advert I feel I've got some explaining to do. About 18 months ago I reviewed the 4x10 L7 combo for the trade magazine *Music World*. I was very favourably impressed and duly said so. Norlin called me and asked if they could use a quote or two from my review. I said yes. The fact that glowing praise was extracted and trumpeted at the top of the ad was, I maintain, not my fault *guy!* And for any of you, out there in wonderful reader-land no, I was not paid for the kind words – not even a packet of strings or a free Gibbo plectrum.

Anyway, this month I'm going to have a look at the L5, the 2x12 combo Lab Series which is now selling at £348 inc VAT whereas it used to sell at £464 – some reduction! As ever, I shall review without prejudice, so don't be put off by the adverts which make it seem as if I'm second in command at Norlin's advertising department.

The L5 is a 100 watt combo, quite simply laid out without much in the way of gimmicks. It's fairly well made, if rather suffering from giving that impression of relative weakness which many American amps seem to. It's *not* particularly fragile,

I'm sure of that, but it shares a lineage and inheritance of old Fenders, Ampegs and the like, a styling approach so often found in American products which just looks rather rudimentary and bare compared with the European equivalent.

The L5 rides on four decent castors, and has an open back with twin 12in speakers of unidentified origin within. These speakers look pretty cheap and cheerful. They have no finish at all on the back of the magnet covers, they are pressed-steel and generally would not pass muster from even one of the lowest grade British makers for cosmetics. But, as Norlin's PR man said to me when I mentioned this to him, 'But it's how they sound that matters,' and he's right of course. But why do Americans often feel that appearance doesn't count?

Inside the bottom of the cab lives a spring reverb and then a little higher up the back is a really silly piece of cheap ply covered in black vinyl which passes for a cover over the amp's guts. Notwithstanding this you can still get your fingers inside with no trouble, exposing your nerve ends to the mains transformer and two other dirty great components. Now this is not unsafe as such, it's just that I hate to see the insides of an amp and hate even more to be able to touch them. I know fully well that this is *acceptable* in guitar combos but I think it shows a lack of awareness of how badly stuff can be treated on the road and that *all* components should be *totally* guarded.

The back panel features a neon on/off switch, a major change from early Lab Series models which had an abortion of a pressbutton job which was screamed at by all reviewers in general and me in particular. It's gone now and the new arrangement seems safer and quite acceptable. There's a 2-amp line fuse, a reverb jack socket for a footswitch, a pre-amp out and a pre-amp in (useful) and an outboard connection via a jack plug to the speakers. That's yer lot.

The front of the amp looks much nicer. The speaker grille cloth is a woven type of good transparency potential (I assume) and the combo is well protected with satin-finished comers. The carrying handle is a fairly flimsy strap which is not too bad as this combo doesn't weigh a great deal. I'd still prefer to see something a bit more hefty on top though, or maybe two end-handles *à la* Burman.

The Lab L5 features two channels, both with 'Hi' and 'Lo' inputs, and a bright switch. Channel one has only four pots: volume, bass, midrange and treble – not much, but enough. Channel two offers the real attractions, having a volume, bass, two-stage midrange (sort-of-parametric, treble, multifilter (upper mid?) and reverb.



There is a final section consisting of a compressor LED indicator, its on/off switch and a master volume pot. Just for the record the midrange offers two pots, one giving the frequency range (from 100Hz to 6.4kHz) and a cut and boost control.

A final word concerning these pots is that I don't like the feel of them. They're plastic-moulded with white indicators and are a bit sharp to the touch and a little too close together – approach with caution for a quick twiddle, otherwise you'll get scraped fingers. Yet more American lack of attention to detail I'm afraid (my God, am I getting prejudiced in my old age, I wonder?). Either way I'm sorry, but it's just so typical of American amps to get little things like this wrong when everything else is right – as it is in this case, as we shall see.

To give the L5 a good thrashing I used two guitars, my own trusty Fender Jag and a superb Gibson 335S, one of the new solid-bodied Gibson extrapolations of the old semi-acoustic 335 designs, and a killer of a guitar at any price. Oh yes, I also hammered it for a while with an Ibanez AR100CS. With each of them I got a really good sound – so let's get on to that.

First off came the Gibson, and here I came upon my only serious quibble with the sound of the L5. Firstly, let me say that the basic sound with the 335S was fantastic. This amp really *does* sound like it's got valves inside it if you use the channel gain to overload it and play around with the midrange frequency boost. There's no doubt about it, Norlin have got this amp right internally. It can be driven to produce a totally convincing valve sound – unless you have bat's ears or something – and I take my hat off to them and throw it into the air with glee. The only problem is that the L5, with its two 12in speakers, is just a *shade* too bassy with a Gibson driving it to produce maximum treble for slicing lead solos. For those I'd prefer to use the 4x10-equipped L7 model (mp £365 these days) which has the edge (ha, ha) for that sort of sound. This would seem to me to be a little bit more suitable for rhythm work than lead although I understand that not everyone agrees with me (thank the gods).

With a Fender it's fine, of course. The natural clang of one of those machine-made brutes will actually make the L5 honk if you tweak the guitar too hard. I had to slacken off the guitar a bit to offset this jarring edginess which I was driving it into. The L5 is a fine amp for Fender users, let it be said, those axes delivering all the extra bite that a Gibson/Lab Series L5 combination may be felt to be lacking by some. Another thing is that the L5 will accommodate even the lowest output axes and take them up high for distortion-

cum-overload with few difficulties. It really is well designed from that point of view, having one of the best transistorised sounds that I've heard.

The effects on the other hand are a bit of a mixed bag. The reverb isn't particularly stunning and I can't see why. Matt Mathias (who understands such things and whose Matamps feature superb use of the Accutronics spring delay line) tells me that the secret is in the driving, and it may be that they are harder to drive with solid state devices – I'm not sure. This one is all right but not much more than that, a bit feeble low down and a bit too springy up high if you know what I mean.

The compressor on the other hand is totally lovable. Using it whacked up full it's capable of producing some thoroughly despicable dirty lead sounds at astonishingly low volumes. Unlike a straight master volume set-up, you see, the compressor gives you extra sustain (and extra is an understatement). If you play around with it a bit you can also get some great feedback effects at low volume and no, aunt Ada, I'm not kidding. It works because the compressor is holding back the picked notes but cuts out eventually so that the feedback can come swooping in when the note has died away – great fun!

So, the L5 is a bit of a mixed bag. I could live with what seem to me to be some ghastly detail/finish points to get the sound that this baby will produce. It's a fine, fine amplifier for rock'n'roll and blues playing but I wish I didn't *have* to. I wish that Norlin would tart up the details and put the guts of this amp into a good, more substantial-looking combo that I couldn't get my fingers into and which I'd be terrified of letting my roadie drop (if I had a roadie, that is).

I also wish that I didn't have to fiddle around with those nasty knobs on the front panel. For all that, though, I concede defeat. I'd buy one of these quite possibly if I wanted a studio 100 watt combo and wasn't over-bothered about the slight loss of absolute top-end performance. If I was I'd just spend a little extra and get my mitts on an L7 with the four 10in speakers inside.

I think that anyone looking for a 100 watt combo for professional or serious use who didn't look at this and its L7 brother would be a bit soft in the head – it's got to be a contender, especially at the new low price. You may be less bothered by the cosmetics and ergonomics than I am (and even I wouldn't be swayed too far by them) and find it a near-perfect amp. Either way, considering that it is a tranny amp it has a very, very good sound and should prove to be reliable and a lot of fun to live with. Don't overlook it on your shopping list – demands some careful thought and a fair chance. □

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Echo Footpedals

Roger Phillips



I'm beginning to get highly suspicious of echo footpedals as a breed. Prices and quality seem to vary widely when compared to analogue boxes or tape machines, both of which tend to start off cheap and cheerful and end up expensive and excellent. The prices of echo footpedals make little sense at all, especially when I would assume that a foot pedal FX unit should be a cheap alternative to a box or rack type. True, the three units tested in this review are imported from the US and are therefore more expensive than the home-grown counterpart, but when compared to similarly priced Japanese analogue boxes it's difficult to see just what you're getting for your money.

As for quality, well there's little sense to be made of that either, when products costing around £100 or so produce cleaner and more accurate effects than items at more than twice the price, and some mid-priced units are so appallingly noisy you wonder if the manufacturers have ever bothered to listen to them. However, slightly different criteria can be used to judge footpedals as opposed to other echo devices. It's reasonable to assume that they're designed specifically for use with guitars rather than for vocals or keyboards so the accuracy of the delayed signal is not necessarily of such prime importance – and just as well in some cases.

But, believe it or not, price and quality are not my main gripe. The thing that worries me most about echo footpedals is reliability. It's a fair assumption that footpedals, by definition, will receive rougher treatment in the course of their working lives, than box or rack FX units,

and consequently need to be better built. However, the opposite would seem to be true. I have yet to have problems while testing an analogue box or a tape machine, but in the July/August '79 echo box feature I reviewed the Electro-Harmonix *Memory Man Deluxe* and the first unit they sent packed up after half an hour. Same thing happened this year with an *Analogue Echo* foot pedal from Bell Electrolabs, it worked OK for an hour or so, then the echoes stopped coming. When I returned it to the manufacturers I was told there was nothing wrong with it, and I must have had it set up wrong. Having tested something like two dozen echo units of varying complexity over the past couple of years, I doubt that, especially as the Bell is an extremely simple unit with only three controls to worry about. My suspicions were further aroused when the second unit they sent me made the most appalling humming noise when switched on, which paled into insignificance when compared to the pneumatic drill impersonation that issued forth from the speakers when the Mix control was turned up. In both cases I tried the units with different amps/instruments/leads/locations etc but to no avail. This is not a downer on the company concerned 'cause I had nothing but good to say about the Bell *Automatic Double Tracker* (*SI* September/October '80), but the *Analogue Echo* I'm obviously not so sure about.

However, having read a review of the Ross *Stereo Delay* in a now defunct musicians' weekly I found that they had similar problems with that particular pedal. If test items for magazine reviews prove to be this unreliable,

what sort of problems are you having? Seriously, if you are experiencing problems with FX unit reliability and quality let me know. Perhaps things aren't as bad as I think, or perhaps they're worse!

Dod Analog Delay 680

Price: £130.39 Ex VAT. **Size:** 5x7½x2½in. **Weight:** 2lb. **Controls:** Remote mix, local mix, repeat, delay time. **Construction:** Die-cast zinc alloy finished in blue. **Distributor:** Strings & Things Ltd, Sussex.

The Dod 680 must be a pretty cheap analogue delay footpedal in Reaganland if it retails for only £130.39 ex VAT over here. This is even more impressive when you consider that not only does it have separate stereo outputs, but it also boasts a Mix control for each of those two outputs. Add to that the sound status light and mains on/off rocker switch/light and this pedal would appear to be reasonable value for money. However appearances can be, and often are, deceptive and it's a bloody good job that us guys at *SI* give these pieces of equipment a good going over before reporting our findings to you.

With its two Mix controls turned right down (7 o'clock) the resultant direct signal sounds fine, but with the Delay Time set to its maximum delay of 330mS (7 o'clock) and either of the Mix controls turned up to around 9 o'clock you begin to hear the delay circuitry hissing away in the background. This hiss is much quieter on shorter delay times, even with the Mix controls full up (5 o'clock), but you can still hear a sound rather like a distant band-saw when the Repeat control is turned up half way. On full Mix and full Delay Time the background noise is just plain ridiculous and sounds like you've turned on your tranny at the end of a successful symphony concert on Radio 3. Applause, however, is one response that this pedal is most unlikely to earn as it definitely takes the booby prize for being the noisiest FX unit of any type that I've ever tested.

To be fair, it's most unlikely that you'd use this box with all the controls turned up full in mono. Should you want to use the stereo facility, however, it's likely that you'd use direct signal from one output, and delay only from the other. This means that the Mix control on the Remote output is likely to be turned up full for delayed signal only, and the hiss from that output would be absolutely intolerable. Shame really, what I could hear of the delayed signal beneath all that mush sounded pretty good. Surely a bit of compander circuitry wouldn't have increased the price that drastically.

Like all Dod pedals, the 680's case is sturdy but rudimentary, and the controls, which share the top surface with the effect bypass footswitch, are not recessed. The two Mix controls are to the left with the relevant output sockets directly behind them on the back of the box. The Repeat control is next in line with the Input socket directly behind, and to the right is the Delay Time which gives a delay range of 20-330mS.





Ross RSD 3 Stereo Delay

Price: £187 Ex VAT. **Size:** 6x6½x2½in. **Weight:** 2lb. **Controls:** Remote mix, delay, recycle, local mix. **Construction:** Cast alloy finished in orange. **Distributor:** John Hornby Skewes & Co Ltd, Leeds.

Like the Dod, the Ross has stereo outputs with separate Mix controls for the Remote and Local sockets, but happily, unlike the Dod, the Ross does have some noise reduction circuitry, so at least I could hear the sounds this pedal makes. Mind you, at first I wasn't too sure that being able to hear the sounds was such a good thing. If you judge the quality of the delayed signal from this box with the same criteria you'd use to judge an echo box for vocal use, ie clarity and accuracy of delayed signal, you can't fail to be disappointed. In terms of accurate delayed reproduction of the original signal this is by far the worst echo box I've ever heard. Add to that the fact that the delayed sound has absolutely no attack and you begin to wonder why they expect you to pay out £215 inc VAT. Well, there's no way whatsoever that I can give you any information that will justify that price tag, but I can tell you that when you plug in a guitar (presumably the main purpose for which this pedal was designed), things do take a slight turn for the better.

Accuracy of reproduction of the original signal seems to matter less for guitar than it does for vocals or keyboards (pause for moans of dissent from committed strummers everywhere). Seriously though, the kind of muffled effect that an analogue delay produces doesn't sound so bad with guitar as it does with other applications, and that lack of attack that the Ross is guilty of can, in some circumstances, be an advantage. It's almost like an automatic Wah effect, and on quiet numbers it helps to cut out that repeat thud you sometimes get with echo boxes when you hit a string a bit hard. In other words the overall effect of this box is soft and mellow and is definitely more suitable for jazz/soul/funk applications than for music of the head banging variety.

The Ross does offer a good range of delays (from 25-500mS) for its exorbitant price and there's also a double footswitch facility which allows you to select or cancel the delayed signal at either output without affecting the

other. All sockets are positioned on the sides of the box, and the controls are partly recessed and set away from the sloping footswitch panel. One other good point about all Ross pedals is that the operating instructions are stamped on the base of the unit, so it's impossible to lose them.

On the minus side, there are absolutely no lights on this unit, either for mains power or for the two effect bypass footswitches, and I can find very little reason for paying out such an enormous sum for the facilities that this pedal offers, especially when the excellent home-grown Carlsbro *Echo* footpedal reviewed in our July '79 issue is available at a much lower price.

Morley Echo Volume EVO-1A

Price: £260.83 Ex VAT. **Size:** 17x7x6in. **Weight:** 11lb. **Controls:** Echo speed, multiple echo limit, echo volume limit, echo/volume footswitch, stereo/monaural footswitch. **Construction:** Chrome-plated steel with wooden base. **Distributor:** Rosetti (EMI) Ltd, London.

This is truly the Rolls Royce of echo footpedals - large, expensive, and ostentatious, but manufactured to a very high standard of construction and sound quality. The *Echo Volume* really is enormous and because of its size and weight it's got a built-in carrying handle attached to the front end. If you have some idea of the appearance of a normal Morley pedal, just imagine one bolted on top of a 17x7in wooden base, with a box measuring 5x6½x6½in planted in line behind it. It's that strange little black box that makes this Morley pedal so intriguing. For a start, there's an illustration of the screaming Morley man printed on the top complete with Morley pedal feet, and striking a typical guitar hero pose. A comment in itself I think - Morley pedals are definitely designed to add as much machismo to a guitarist's image as they do to his sound, but what really fascinates me is the contents of this box of tricks. A peep through the black metal grille which makes up the four sides of the box reveals a cylindrical drum that has the appearance of a dynamo - very weird. As a well known music scribe once said to me, 'If there's an easy way to construct a unit to do a particular job, Morley will find a way to make it more difficult.' After all, the conventional

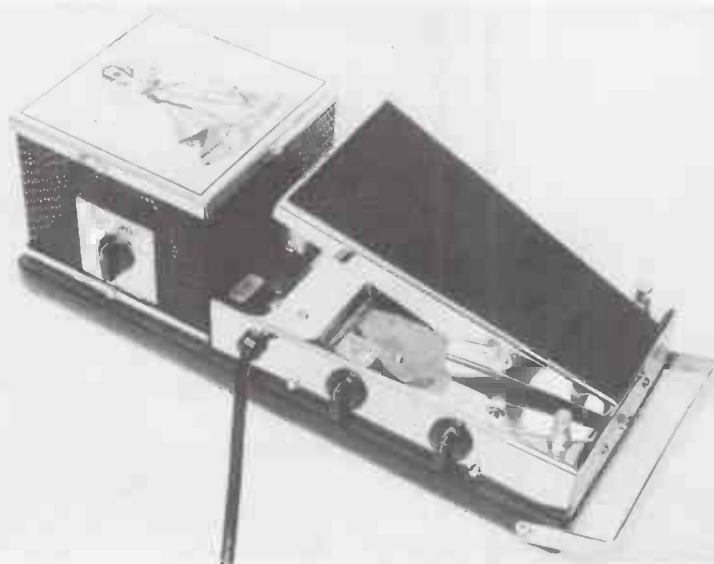
Morley pedal is plenty big enough to house the necessary electronics to produce an analogue delay. Still, perhaps they've got their reasons, so let's plug it in and see.

First thing that happened when I flicked the mains switch on was that the cylinder in the box began to turn, making a noise like a reasonably quiet fan-heater. I immediately reached for the rotary control marked Echo Speed, situated on the left of the box, assuming that this would alter the speed of rotation of the cylinder, but I was disappointed. Yet somehow (and it would take a far more qualified scientific Johnny to tell you how) it does alter the delay time of the echo. Morley neither describe the method that this bizarre machine utilises nor do they impart what range of delays is on offer, but by comparison with other devices I estimate it to be somewhere in the 60-350mS bracket. It's also interesting to compare the sound of the Morley with the effects produced by the analogue footpedals. As previously mentioned, analogue delay devices are not renowned for the accuracy and clarity of the delayed signal, but a quick listen to the quality of sound produced by the Morley gives some indication as to what was in the minds of those Californian boffins at Tel-Ray Electronics. How that echo generator works I still don't know, but the fact is it produces a far superior delayed signal to any analogue delay I've ever heard. So good, in fact, that although obviously designed for the guitar, it sounds just as good with vocals.

Two other rotary controls on the left side of the chassis regulate the Multiple Echo Limit (repeat period), and the Echo Volume Limit of the delayed signal. The Echo Volume Limit sets the maximum volume of the delayed signal from nothing at 7 o'clock to slightly louder than the direct signal at 5 o'clock, and this is where the foot-operated treadle comes into its own. When the Echo Volume footswitch (to the right of the treadle) is set to Echo mode the treadle increases the volume of the delayed signal from nothing, in the toe-up position, to the maximum set by the Echo Volume Limit, in the toe down position. Kick that same footswitch into the Volume mode and the treadle becomes a conventional volume or expression pedal - very useful. One gripe though, there's no status light to tell you which mode you're in, in fact there's only one light on this unit, and that's the mains on/off indicator on the front panel of the chassis.

To the left of the treadle there's another footswitch labelled Stereo-Monaural, which allows you to select between a mono or stereo effect when the two output sockets on the right of the chassis are used. You can select to have a mixed signal coming from both outputs, or you can have direct signal from one, and echo only from the other. This means you can either use the treadle to bring up the echo sound on a separate amp/mixer channel, or you can use it to bring in an equal delayed signal, on top of the direct signal, on both outputs.

So, a fairly versatile machine with a degree of foot control over the delayed signal that few other echo machines can match, and despite that inflated price tag the facilities and quality of signal offered probably make this machine reasonably good value for money - if you can afford it. □



Sound REVIEWS

The Noise of Sound

Cabaret Voltaire, etc.
London Lyceum

The thought of the industrial managerie taking over London's disco air-hangar was too wild to be true. On the night the unsuspecting throng witnessed five degrees of fetish at the luxurious Lyceum. Stage set one, for occasion and environment Throbbing Gristle presented their more obscure and inaccessible side, parading in lengthy discipline, there was unease. Post-Throbbers chatter revealed Zev, stage two, an American percussionist of some merit. Sporting heavy trousers, bare chest, industrial gloves and boots, Zev proceeded to wield sheets of metal and sundry around the stage, bludgeoning the audience with a crescendo of steel.

Mass confusion ran rife from the altar to the bar, relief at the altar was in the shape of Sheffield's Clock D Va, off-beat, earthy and soulful, with reference to their excellent *Thirst* album. Obviously more accessible, but still offering a variation of technique, experimentation and risk. Next were, or should I say was, Non (for he is one, Boyd Rice). In this case the technique came first, a series of delay devices, layers of sound. As each delay disintegrated a new layer was added, attack and decay through 20 minutes.

Finally, Cabaret Voltaire. After the ICA false start, this was entertainment, this was fun. By-passing their material stock on the whole and concentrating on more elongated pieces, this was the fitting climax to an evening of alternative fetish.

Dave Henderson



Bagging The Beat

In April '71, Bagism was Big in Beat. Alan Bown was playing something described as 'free music' and was described by a *BI* hack as being 'reluctant to be bagged', while a few bands such as 'Mark-Almond, Continuum, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, T Rex etc have been creating new bags for themselves.' Then there were Bumin' Red Ivanhoe: 'The Ivanhoe style is very much in the freedom-of-music bag.' Meanwhile, deep into a poetry bag in the depths of Pye studios, a Mrs Harold Wilson was laying down her first long-playing platter. Nor were people in ads entirely free from the spreading threat of Bagism. 'It's in the bag', proclaimed Peter York concerning his Avedis Zildjian set-up. What he was trying to say frankly eludes us.

But before we get stuck in a bags bag, on to more serious matters. Dave Swarbrick of cover stars Fairport Convention was beyond even a freedom-of-music bag. 'The single we're doing now (*Sickness And Disease*) was a gas doing it, mainly because of the freedom,' he explained to a *BI* scribe, - 'the ability to fart as loud as you want'. Thank you, Dave.

Then there were Pink Floyd - weren't there always? - who were busily assembling their armoury of special equipment. Ten years ago they were having a special quad mixer built, and already owned the Azimuth Co-

ordinator and a Putney VCS3 synthesiser in the studio-workroom. Yet drummer Nick Mason claimed, 'Until recently we were in acute danger of dying of boredom.'

In an ad bag, things looked a mite interesting too. Feldon Audio Ltd were busily inviting you to the *Minimoog*. 'not another electronic organ with added gimmicks', but offering 'the basic synthesizer functions so widely in demand by avant-garde, jazz, rock and pop musicians'. So for a mere £650 you could really widen your bag, man. Elsewhere, Vox were pushing their *Continental 300*, 'a new Vox portable' organ, two-manualled and going for £353. 'Bev Bevan uses Shaftesbury drums', p46 tells us, and John Birch could knock you up a single-neck guitar or bass for £150+£15 for a case, or £270 for a twin-neck with case. Pick up your bags and play...

The true horror was of course if your bag was a straight bag. Alan Bown admitted 'Our previous bassist lost all interest in what he was doing, sold his bass, and, last I heard was doing a straight job.' A sad state indeed, quoth *BI*. 'The very stuff of our darkest dreams'. Hmm, wonder what the unemployment figures were then.

Records Received

[An Dury & the Blockheads *Laughter* Stiff SEEZ30 Wherein Mr Dury leaves his back and his balls to the nation. The nation

however seems a good deal less eager to take up the offer than they were last year and has not pounced on album or singles with any great fervour. This is only a partial surprise: for all the excellence of words, ideas, personality and playing on *Laughter* the whole simply doesn't demand a place on the turntable - there's not a lot here for people who like a nice tune. With the exception of the 'terrace anthem or bust' track 'Fuckin' Ada, there's nothing here that a chap finds himself whistling while waiting for the 68 bus, and it was odd to see the band virtually passing over the new album in a determinedly greatest hits stage show just before Christmas. Expensive bands need hits to keep them on the road, unfortunately. Still, loved *Over The Points* with Ian the Existential Train. Millie Jackson *I Had To Say It* Polydor 2391 495 The ever-prolific Ms Jackson has been getting too prolific for her own good lately. There seems no reason for reviving *Louing Arms* and the good songs are few and far between this time with far less than usual punch all round: a rush job? *Basement 5 1965-1980* Island ILPS 9641 The category into which these have been lumped is the non-existent one of black punk. If this sounds both glib and unlikely, listen to the record. *Basement 5* are as direct, punchy and righteously sloganeering as any collection of '77 white boys and the dub influences here are only marginally more apparent than they were on yer average pogo shouters. The 5 are better in small doses though - they tend to monotony and the decision to print the lyrics on the sleeve was not a good one. Not all their followers will agree that, 'England is under female rule, that's why we're turning ruddy fools.' *The Roches Nurds* Warner Bros K56855 The Roches are deFripp'd for their second outing but still hit with weird harmony ideas, songs from the diaries of odd girls, and a little Cole Porter and Irish trade thrown in. Not quite as charming as their first, but still the authentic sound of rules being broken.

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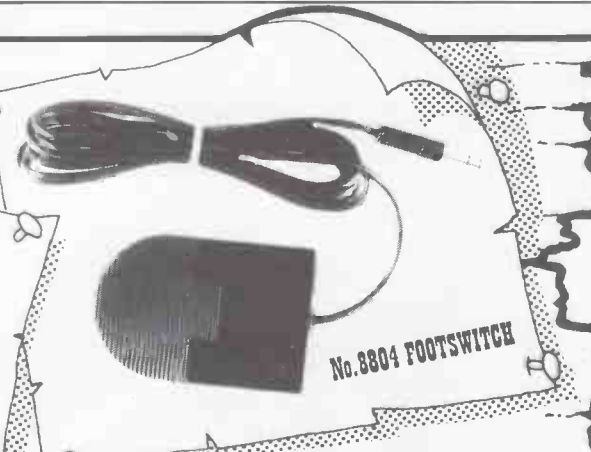
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