

November 1980  
60p \$2

# SOUND

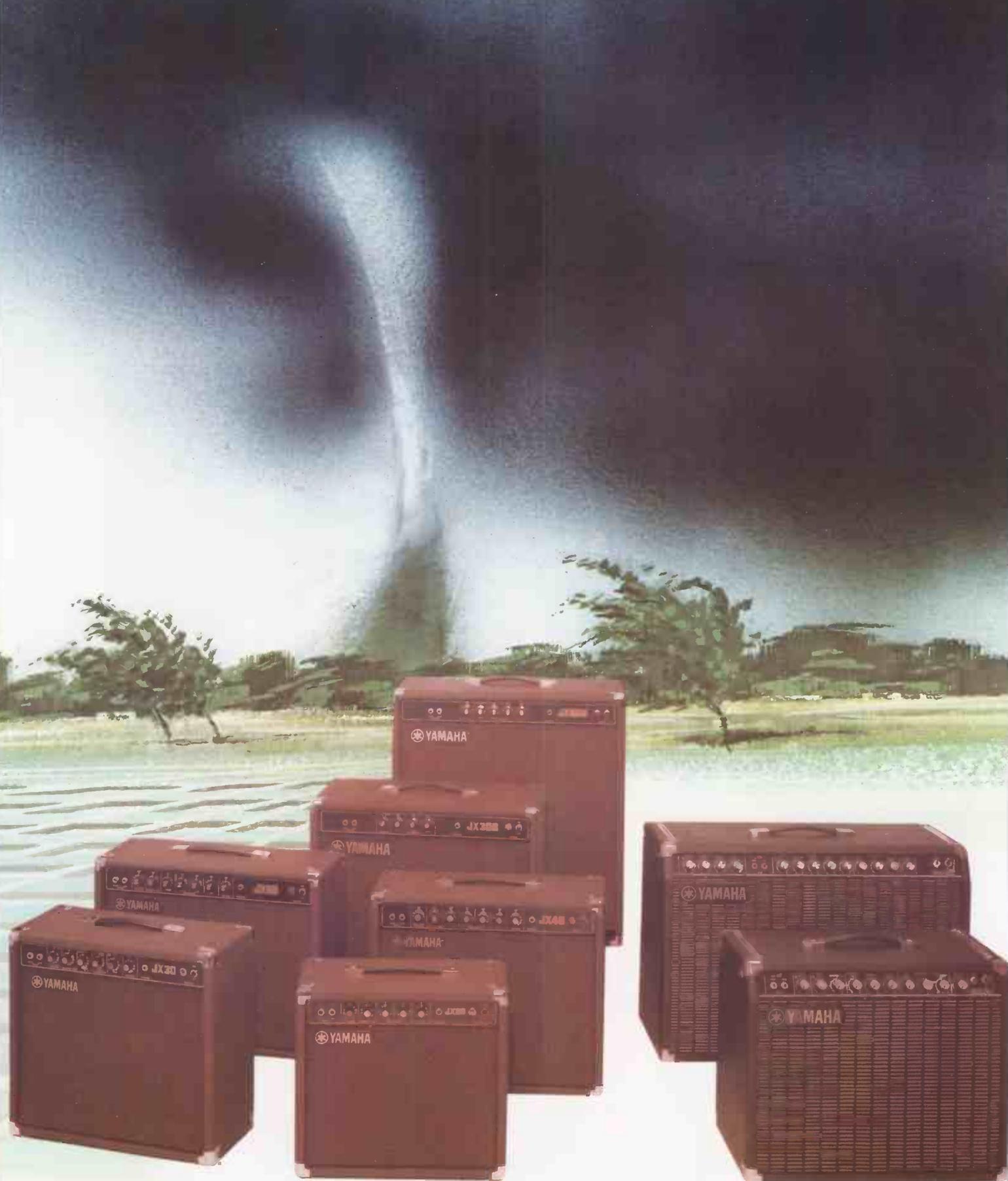
## International

*incorporating* **BEAT**  
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# XTC



**Reviews: II/II P73 piano · SDS V Electronic drumkit  
Yamaha YSS62 sax · Aria Loco amp · lots more**



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musicians since 1887.

## 22 Sound Advice

Yes, it's the page that tells you just what to do with that missing fret, that malfunctioning PA, the date of that obscure Japanese mandolin or where to get Newcastle Brown after 11pm. Gary Cooper dons the *SI/BI* Marje Proops wig, and licks his pencil...

## 27 XTC



Xylophone-playing Top Cat? Xenophobic Tourist Catchers? Xyloid Tree Constructions? Nah... just one of the best British bands to emerge in, oh, months. Well, years. John Morrish braves the Swindon air to probe the ecstatic pluckers.

## 39 Wonderlove



Not a new brand of soggy, pre-packed bread but the band that provides the musical backings for the very wonderful Stevie Wonder. Ralph Denyer talks to guitarist Ben Bridges, singer Shirley Brewer and trumpeter Larry Gittens.

## 47 Keeping Joanna in trim



Now just look at that old piano sitting in the corner. Wouldn't you like to make it playable? Well, read Josh Benn's fascinating tour of the upright and grand piano and YOU could mend YOUR piano with YOUR OWN hands! Self-help at a stroke.

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Just to keep you on your toes (or other available appendages) and to stop you from getting up to whatever it is you get up to on these cold, dark evenings, we here at the fun factory have devised some INTERESTING NEW FEATURES to get the printer's ink sloshing around the next few months' issues and to get the old stimuli sloshing around yer brain's neurones. Currently, then, people chatter away about The Recession: for most of us, though, it has a more immediate meaning – less spare brass in't pocket. So, from next month we'll have a regular *Second-hand Index*. This'll be a listing covering a different category of instrument or allied equipment each month, and will gather together the prices asked for various popular brands and makes from the weekly rags and our own *Exchange & Mart*. Thus you'll be able to assess quickly a 'target price' for any instrument you want to buy or sell on the second-hand market, and thereby save time and, hopefully, lucre. Good, eh? There's more to come as we march stridently into 1981: a regular series on PA, for example, will for once demystify this rather confusing area. And it won't be an over-the-top, big-name-band-uses-more-equipment-than-you've-had-hot-gigs extravaganza, but a detailed, informative voyage into all aspects of Addressing the Public, from the bottom to the top. There's more on the way, too: tell you next month.

Tony Bacon

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NEWSLINK

ROLAND

# Patrick Moraz

## Expanding his music with Roland

Swiss-born Patrick, pioneering musician/composer and Grand Master of multi-keyboards has made a unique contribution to contemporary music as a member of Refugee, Yes, and (currently) the Moody Blues, as well as by his prolific and imaginative work as a solo artist. He can and does do gigs solely on piano although if the gig is recorded he's liable to treat it electronically in the studio later. Under normal circumstances, however, he takes to the road with a collection of around fifty instruments and effects — and has a whole lot more back at his personal studio in Switzerland. When you glance across this awesome display of musical electronics, one of the most noticeable themes is the recurrent Roland 'R' insignia on the fascias of equipment from the sixteen or so rack-mounted products to the Jupiter 4 and SH-2 synthesizers that play such a major part in his solo work.

Patrick is an architect of sound. He builds with noises. He maintains 'Noise is the basis of any kind of rhythm or music *before* the harmony or the melody. The noise structures provide the *necessary breathing* of a piece'. As a musician whose technique depends on building, mingling, and mixing sounds Patrick's commitment to Roland's versatile and adaptable gear is not surprising. Since he is tireless in obtaining the exact sound he requires, Roland scope is invaluable. Because 'instant composition' is an important part of

his work, Roland ease of operation is essential.

His all-Roland rhythm set-up is a case in point. Based on a Jupiter 4/SH-2/CR-78/CSQ interface circuit, but often with a number of additions, it dramatically illustrates what Roland interface can mean. 'What I'm doing' Patrick explains 'is I'm setting up a master clock to control all the sequencers' (he's beginning to experiment with several CSQ-600's and CSQ-100's synchronised together) 'and all the instruments, so that they will all be perfectly synchronized in tempo, although they'll all be playing different patterns'.

He was inspired to do this by sessions in Brazil with up to 16 percussionists all of whom played in time, but with different patterns and 'colours'. 'At the moment I'm using either the Compurhythm or the CSQ-600 as the master clock depending on what I'm playing'

he says. He's not imitating the Brazilians, but using Roland electronics to develop the style and produce something as vivid, as intricate, and as 'alive' as came out of his Brazilian sessions.

Why choose Roland?

'I've seen a lot of different devices, and Roland was the first brand of instrument that exactly met my requirements for what I want to do. Also they have very good patching on the back of each instrument — they're really well provided to cope with the kind of situations I use them in'.

Practically speaking, he counts still more points in Roland's favour. 'They're very compact, they're very good to start with and build up with. For some of the sounds I use you don't need an extremely complicated synthesizer — two oscillators will often suffice'. Indeed, the SH-2 synthesizer plays a central part in Patrick's 'sonic environ-

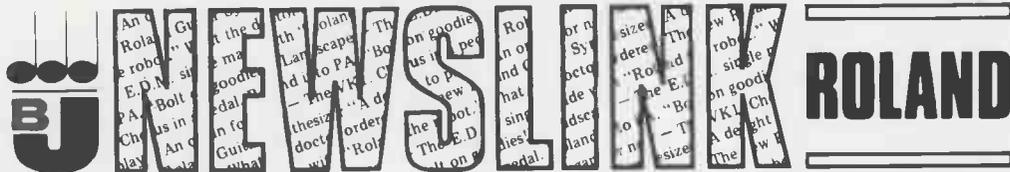
ment' building. The Jupiter 4, which with the collaboration of a Brazilian percussionist he has programmed for an amazing repertoire of 'conga' and other percussive effects, is also important. Two forthcoming albums, *Co-Existence* and *Future Memories*, show the system and Patrick's creative imagination at their breath-takingly atmospheric best.

Patrick's work has the rare characteristic of pushing musical frontiers back without losing touch with the critical discipline that prevents anarchy. Much of the gear he uses, like the SH-2, the CR-78 the Roland digital sequencers, is priced within reach of the serious musician, so has he any recommendations as to how its other users can expand their own 'sonic architecture'?

'Go out into the street. Music is about noise, and if you go out into any street — the busier the more interesting — you can train your ear to *select* noises, to pick out the interesting patterns and rhythms.' This kind of training, Patrick believes, develops the sensitivity that makes a really creative multi-keyboard player. He dismisses purely imitative use of the equipment. Gesturing at the Roland set-up he states: 'You can do almost anything you want — if you command it right. Machines can't make errors, so the only real limits are in the guy who plays it and I haven't got *any* limits on my imagination or creativity'.

Have you?





# Roland~The Multi~Keyboard System

Basic keyboards/sequencing/rhythm equipment as used by Patrick Moraz and other leading professionals. Most other Roland units will interface with these and the creative possibilities are infinite



## The new CSQ-600 is Now Available to Audition for Your Band

Developed from the popular CSQ-100 Roland's new electronic virtuoso takes the concept of 'Real Time' composition even further. It has an amazing 600 notes capacity on four separate channels — sufficient for intricate stage sets, and ideal for recording major works in studio. For pioneers, a DIN socket is provided to connect extra CSQ-600 units — a whole new area remains to be explored with two or more CSQ's working in tandem.

Other features of the CSQ-600 include improved editing/composition facilities: for example portamento can be programmed on selected notes when loading, and Forward and Backward Steps enable individual notes to be corrected. An integral power cell that re-charges every time the unit is plugged in means you don't lose your programme when you switch off or unplug the unit (intentionally or accidentally!).

To synchronize with the CR-78 there is a 'rhythm clock out' socket which means the CR-78 rhythm is controlled by the CSQ-600. With the previous digital sequencer the CR-78 controlled the rhythm meaning that the user was restricted to the 8-step, 16-step, or Preset patterns provided by the CR-78. Now, as in general with the CSQ-600, there is more creative freedom.

## The Roland Rack~ it's still Mounting

Four new products are to be added to the ever-expanding Roland Rack system. The SRE-555 is simply a rack-mounted version of the RE-501 professional Chorus Echo. It is fitted into the rack via its own subframe which enables it to slide out for tape replacement. The SEQ-315 and the SEQ-331 are respectively Stereo and Mono Graphic Equalizers. The SEQ-315 has 15-band Eq on each of two channels, and the SEQ-331 has 31-band Eq. The SMX-800 Line Mixer is an 8 into 2 mixer with panning on each channel, balanced output Cansons, and attenuator pots on the input and the output stages.

## The CSQ-100 Digital Sequencer

The beginning of the future of music. A micro-computer controlled sequencing device which takes its programme from a synthesizer and has a memory capacity of up to 168 notes on two channels. Commonly used with CR-78 Compurhythm.

## Jupiter-4

Flagship of the Roland synthesizer range — a 4-voice polyphonic instrument with an amazing repertoire, used by many top professionals.

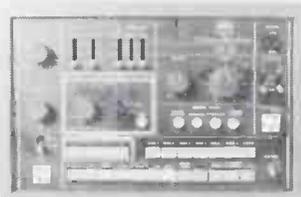


## The SH-2 Synthesizer

A dual-VCO synthesizer with studio features which has become one of the most popular general purpose instruments. The two VCO's with sub-oscillator give a very full sound, and the SH-2 also features multiple waveforms including sine wave output, delayed vibrato, and auto-bend. Additionally, the SH-2 is *the* system synthesizer — it operates to the standard Roland voltage-to-pitch ratio and its full specification makes it ideal for use with digital sequencers and other equipment.

## The CR-78 Compurhythm

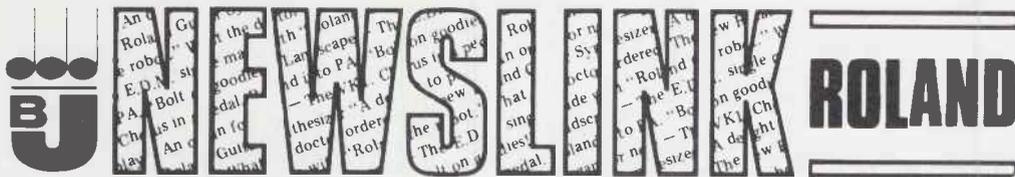
Programmable rhythm with 34 preset rhythms. Full instrument sounds, tempo, range of accent, and measure controls plus extras such as variation for 'breaks' and rolls. An excellent rhythm unit in its own right and the ace drummer of Roland's electronic band.



## WS-1—\*NEW\* Programming Control on CR-78

Our CR-78 is now even more versatile. By using the WS-1 switch a given rhythm can be programmed into it by pressing the 'beat' and 'rest' buttons on the switch to give the desired rhythm sequence, just as the DR-55 is programmed. This by-passes the normal rhythm programming on the CR-78 which is done by tapping the 'program' button to the desired rhythm — a sound method but one that requires you to be rhythmically accurate in pushing the button.





## Why a Guitar Synth?

Many guitarists dream of synthesizer versatility, but to give most guitarists the average guitar synth would be analogous to presenting a man who's been playing a Steinway all his life with a complicated keyboard synthesizer. Unfamiliar with the technology, he would be daunted by the necessary playing techniques. However, the GR-300, Roland's latest guitar synthesizer, is a revolutionary instrument because it gives a complete synthesizer sound range while allowing standard guitar techniques.

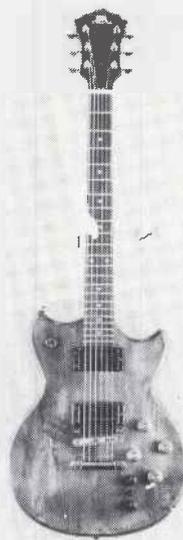
With the GR-300 you are *not* talking about a conventional synthesizer sound with the guitar as a mere anonymous 'controller'. Even in the hands of its greatest exponents, the sound of an ordinary synthesizer tends to betray its keyboard origin. By contrast, the GR-300 deliberately exploits the unique effects produced by combining guitar and synthesizer. If you are a guitarist you will probably have spent considerable time mastering such techniques as note-bending, hammer-on, finger-vibrato, chopping or 'piglets', and even bottle-neck. All other guitar syn-

thesizers eliminate these from the final sound. The GR-300 is definitely the guitarist's guitar synth, and all those virtuoso touches remain in the shape and character of the synthesized note producing effects that even the most advanced keyboard synthesizer could not duplicate.

The guitars supplied with the GR-300 are the standard G-303 or the deluxe Neck-through-Body G-808, and Roland invite comparison between these *as guitars* and the best instruments available. Combined with the synthesizer unit, they open up a new dimension. Compression, VCO

Vibrato, Pitch Shift, String Selector, and the amazing Hexa-Distortion, plus LFO and VCF controlling attack time and sensitivity give a vocabulary and a capacity for articulation which is at once the realisation of a guitarist's dreams, and a challenge for him to expand his ideas yet further. All major synthesizer functions are foot-pedal controlled,

So if you want not a synthesizer sound but a *guitar* synthesizer sound, so the GR-300 is surprisingly simple to operate and the controls on the guitar are comprehensive and clearly arranged.



### STOP PRESS

Andy Summers of The Police has recently been experimenting with the GR-300 Guitar Synthesizer and has announced he will be using it on the forthcoming Police album and probably on stage as well.

one that will complement and extend your hard-won skills as a guitarist, the GR-300 is for you. Try one out at any Roland dealer, and you'll see what we mean!

## The VK-1~an Organ with Guts

What is the true organ sound of Rock? Most musicians would say it's that gutsy, heavy, massively resonant sound of the '60's tone-wheel organs — a sound linking R&B, hard rock, and melodically based rock. Pushed through a good valve amp these instruments produced a tone that could be equalled only by the most sophisticated (and large, and expensive) modern studio organs. Until the Roland VK-1 came along.

Now the same sound — the same solid power at the low end and the same searing, screaming notes in the solo registers — comes in a neat £650 package with Roland solid state reliability thrown in as an extra. This is a purpose-built instrument, uncompromisingly designed to reproduce the tone-wheel/drawbar repertoire of sounds. It neither attempts nor aspires to develop new sounds, but instead is intended to make freely available an effect that previously was highly prized and sought-after. You've heard it and you may have used it on albums — but now you can take it on tour without danger of your roadie breaking his back!

The VK-1 has already made a hit with many of the accepted exponents of the tone-wheel sound — Duncan

Mackay of 10CC, for example, comments: 'The sound is everything Roland say it is. Astounding. I'm using one on my new album'. And naturally, it's right up front in the current blues revival. The VK-1 has a 61-note keyboard, 8 drawbars, three presets, a percussion section, and a Chorus effect that beats a rotary speaker section for resonance and projection. Expect great things of this little organ — you won't be disappointed!





NEWSLINK

ROLAND

## How to Multiply your Cubes

The Cube-20, Cube-40, Cube-60 and Cube-60 Bass are professional quality, super-efficient combo amps in the 20, 40, and 60 watt range. They are characterised by their advanced loudspeakers, their compact size and individual appearance, the massive sound that they deliver, and their extremely low noise.

Cube amplifiers are very popular in the studio and many bands that regularly use them for recording have become so enthusiastic about the sound that they have been using it on stage, stacking the amps in pairs or in groups of four to get the weight of sound required for a back-line.

An arrangement that has found popularity is to put four Cubes together to give a 4x12 (Cube-60) or a 4x10 (Cube-40) speaker cabinet with individual baffles. Alternatively, the four combos are sometimes separated into two pairs at different positions on stage, and the guitar or instrument



signal split by either a Roland CE-1 Stereo Chorus Pedal or a Roland SBF-325 Stereo Flanger. Result: a stereo back-line set-up delivering 80 or 120 watts a side of precisely controlled power. And the whole lot fits into the front seat of a mini!

## RE-501 Making the Best Echo Better

Some pieces of equipment are so right for a particular purpose they become almost standard. This was the case with the RE-301 tape echo. It offered a fully controlled echo/reverb/chorus system that seemed unbeatable for sound quality. Now, however, it has been updated as the RE-501. There are several improvements. First, it has additional XLR balanced inputs making it suitable for operation with a wider range of professional equipment. Second, it has an even better signal/noise ratio than its predecessor — which is an achievement by any standards. Third, it has faster-reacting, reliable LED input metering in place of the standard VU system in the RE-301. Fourth, it has sound-on-sound facility with *instant* play-back.



Four major improvements in an already comprehensive unit. Like the RE-301, the RE-501 is equipped with a sophisticated effects mixing system, has Chorus, Echo, Sound on Sound and Reverb sections that are mixable and fully adjustable for level, employs an Echo Repeat Rate adjustment and separate manual control with time delay variable from 550 msec to 1.8 secs, and uses a special high-response long-lasting tape loop.

The RE-501 is a result of Roland's continual policy of striving for improvement even on their greatest successes, but unlike many improved models in the music industry, this professional echo unit has one feature that stays unchanged: its price. The suggested retail price is identical to that of the new discontinued RE-301. The improvements that have been made are offered to the music world by Roland — with their compliments...

## EP-09~A New Arrival in the 09 Family

The 09 suffix to a Roland code number has come to have a very definite meaning in the minds of many musicians. It means, first of all, unmatched value. Roland have scaled down many features from their prestige lines to go into the 09 keyboards, but under no circumstances have they scaled down the engineering quality

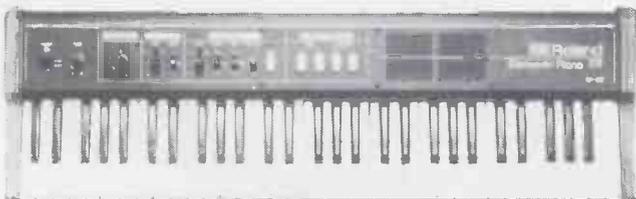
that is the Roland hallmark. This is important because of the second major feature of 09 units: they are fully interchangeable — and they often play a part in even the most complex Roland systems, used by professional musicians in conjunction with other synthesizers, sequencers, and rhythm units. The EP-09 is a compact elec-

tronic piano with full 61-note scale; a complete stage instrument that is being marketed for less than £400. There are two mixable piano sounds, so that the EP-09 will give a remarkably faithful interpretation of any acoustic piano from the 'honky tonk' to the grand. There are also two harpsichord sounds, which are mixable with one another or can be mixed with the piano sounds for various intermediate effects, making an extremely versatile keyboard.

The EP-09 also features an arpeggio mode which operates on a chord of any number of

notes, and can be used on the whole keyboard or with the keyboard 'split' so that the arpeggios sound on the lower section while you play a melody on the upper notes. Set the switch to Sustain One, and individual notes are sustained. Set it to Sustain Two, and the entire arpeggio carries on repeating until it gradually fades away.

Other EP-09 features include sustain pedal socket, master volume and tune controls, and its own built-in amplifier-speaker system, delivering sufficient power for home practise.



All enquiries to Brodr. Jorgensen (UK) Ltd., Great West Trading Estate, 983 Great West Rd., Brentford, Middlesex. Tel: 01 568 4578 Telex 934470



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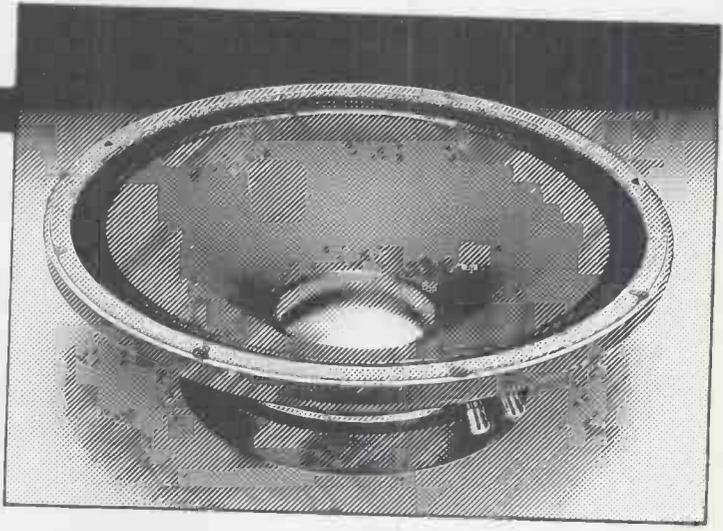
Because they're built to be smooth and responsive. With cones light enough to keep pace with the fastest changes, but strong and rigid enough for the thrashing they'll get when you're playing full blast.

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of an unpredictable response. The new 'E's are predictable. Always. So guess work is out. With the new 'E's the audience is going to hear what you want them to hear. Whether you're giving it to them straight. Or distorted.

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The split keyboard allows for bass or piano to be played on the lower 2 octaves while playing vibes or piano or both on the treble side. The bass section also has its own volume and sustain controls.

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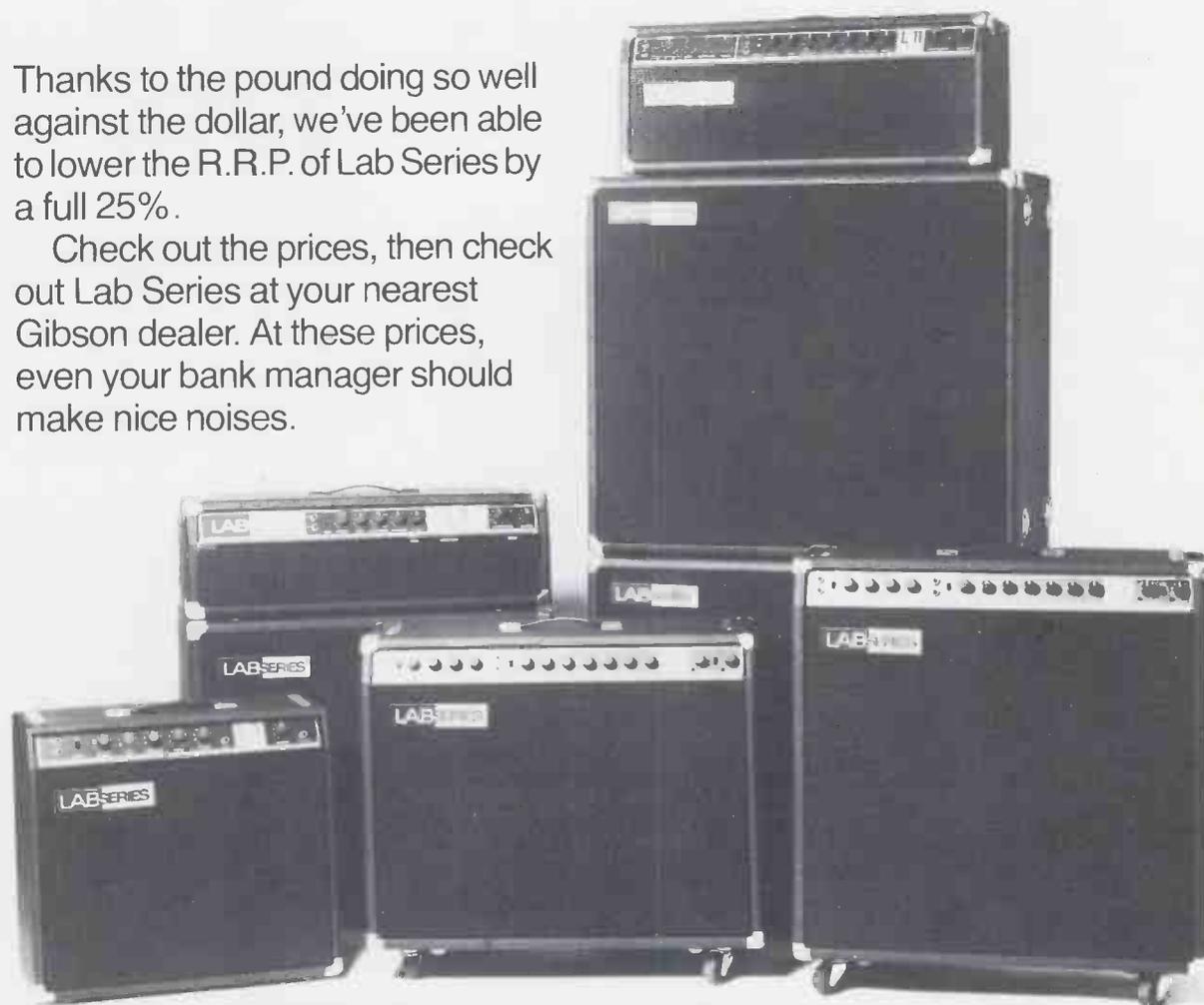
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**SOUND INTERNATIONAL**

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*SI/BI is a sustaining member of the Audio Engineering Society.*

**Casio In Calculated Keyboard L(a)unch**

September 3 was launch day for the Casiotone range of keyboard musical instruments – as those of you who read the tabloid dailies at the time will know. It wasn't the usual display-ad-in-Melody-Maker job that most companies seem content with these days. No, Casio are convinced that they are going to capture a large proportion of the electric keyboard market, so much so that they took quarter page ads in many of the national daily papers. And there's more to come, as we found out at a west London 'do' that same day. Casio intend to promote the two initial keyboard products with networked TV ads, including prime slots, such as during *News At Ten*. 'So what?' you ask. Well, this approach is going to set the music industry on its head. With a massive publicity drive such as this, especially in a period of recession as we seem to be stuck in, many other companies are, I think, going to be forced to follow suit to retain a market share. This is going to affect us, the buying public, because we are eventually going to have to pay for this type of advertising. But perhaps I'm letting things run away a bit from the present.

Those of you who read our June '80 issue will have seen the review on one of the new Casiotone keyboards, the 201. This review prompted more enquiries than any other we have run; it seems that a great many of you really wanted to get hold of a 201. And I don't blame you, as it boasts excellent design qualities, at a very reasonable price (£285 inc VAT). The 201 can best be described as a four-octave polyphonic keyboard with 29 preset voices and integral amp and speaker. Casio have also (now available in the shops) a smaller 2½-octave polyphonic keyboard with four presets, also with amp and speaker, but battery powered and weighing only 3½lb, known as the M-10. It sells for £79!

Casio is a big company: it sold 35 million calculators last year, almost half of the world's requirements. They have a turnover of £200 million pa (which is more than Kiss), so when they do something they don't mess around. At the launching of the instruments, Casio had arranged for the Dooleys to do a presentation. As they have two keyboard players and enjoy across-the-board appeal, they were a pretty good choice. Casio also intend to feature this group in their TV ads. (*Wonderful. Can't wait – Ed.*)

Casio have a lot more to come, of that I'm sure. I do know of the 301 model which should shortly be upon us, and which is aimed more at the Home Organ people as it has a built-in rhythm unit. There is more, but I've been sworn to secrecy (ie I've forgotten), so keep your eyes on this space. The effects of the alcohol should eventually wear off.

Dave Crombie

**And More Bloody Keyboards ...**

Last month, Tony Bacon outlined some of the guitars, drums and stuff shown at the Olympia show in London in August. Surprisingly, there were several new instruments of the keyboard variety too, and I'll run through a few that interested me this month. The H/H electronic piano, code name P73, was the big one, but that wasn't at Olympia but down the road at the Kensington Town Hall. The piano is dealt with in great detail on page 75 of this fab issue.

**Electronic Dream Plant Ltd**, the people who brought you, whether you wanted it or not, the Wasp synthesiser, had two new products that seemed to be keeping visitors to the exhibition well amused. Firstly there was the Keytar, a keyboard controller that is worn around the neck rather like a guitar, and is used to drive an existing 1 volt/octave synthesiser. This instrument has been around for a while now but in a different guise: the more fanatical keyboard followers amongst you may remember that a certain Rick Wakeman pranced around the stage with one a couple of years back. Well now EDP Ltd have restyled it and the Keytars will be in the shops in the very near future. Also from this Oxfordshire-based company comes the Wasp Deluxe. Yes it's true, they've upgraded the Wasp so that it has a mechanical three-octave keyboard and a smart wooden case. The instrument is mains powered and is going to sell at £295. The Keytar will also be around that price, but don't forget it's only a controller and you need another synth to generate the sounds. Incidentally, the Keytar won't work with the Wasp or Wasp Deluxe, as they use a digital keying system. Funny that.

Our good friends John Hornby Skewes & Co Ltd have a couple of new instruments, one of which was mentioned in my Chicago NAMM round-up in the September issue. This is the Roady, an electronic piano made by Crumar. In case you are

wondering (I always used to), John Hornby Skewes are distributors who handle the electronic pianos that Crumar build, and Trevor Daniels & Co Ltd handle the organ and synths from Crumar, though they (Trevor Daniels & Co – Trevor is TV magician Paul Daniels' brother) hope to be changing their name to MTI, that's Musical Technology Inc, not Music Trades International the British trade magazine. Simple, isn't it?

Anyway, back to JHS who rightly seem to feel that the Roady is going to do well for them. I must say I like the Roadrunner and Roadracer electronic pianos, which were the forerunners (and foreracers) to the Roady, and this new piano seems to keep the sound and quality of construction of those two pianos as well as providing extra facilities such as a Vibes voice. We'll be reviewing the Roady in the near future. The Harmonizer was also making its debut at the British Music Fair. This instrument is in fact made by Logan in Italy, but is marketed in England by John Hornby Skewes under their own house name, JHS. The instrument offers, for less than £500, strings, organ, electronic piano and yes, for all Max Jaffa fans, accordion (they'll be getting this one in at Macari's). The Harmonizer has a four-octave keyboard, and will play up to six notes simultaneously. Quite a nice 'budget keyboard'.

Hohner had little new to show us, save the Planet M, a posh Planet T, ie they've stuck it in a nice wooden case and given it a stereo tremelo, stereo amp and speakers. It looks good and sounds good – that is until you learn that it's twice the price of a conventional Planet.

Apart from these few items there weren't any new products that we haven't already mentioned in our US and Frankfurt trade show coverage. Sorry.

Dave Crombie

**John Bonham 1948-1980**

Just as we were going to press for this issue, the news of the untimely death of John Bonham – Bonzo – was announced.

It's very hard to know what to say about Bonzo's loss, he was most certainly the most recognisable drummer in the World – who could ever have mistaken that curious heavy shambling style which was unique to him? No doubt the success of Led Zeppelin is attributable to that very uniqueness behind Robert Plant's vocals, Jimmy Page's guitars and John Paul Jones' bass. More so than is true of most bands, Led Zeppelin's drummer was a vital force; no-one sounded like Bonham and, quite probably, no-one ever will, he was unique.

It would be nice to be able to say that Bonzo founded a whole school of British heavy drumming (certainly

many drummers we've interviewed have cited him as a major influence) but it would not be true. Bonzo was alone, even the other great heavy drummers like Cozy Powell, Bill Ward, Carmine Appice, were not at all like him.

Where Bonham's style came from is anybody's guess but one perceptive writer on a weekly music paper defined it as coming from the village blacksmith, a title which, we're sure, Bonham would have appreciated. His drumming was both primal and very pagan.

Bonzo's loss is a tragedy for his family and the band – to all of whom we send our heartfelt sympathies – but it is also a tragedy for rock music as a whole. We'll miss him.

Gary Cooper

# Teleprinter News...

Gigsville, UK distributors of Aria guitars, amps and other bits and pieces, are looking into the possibility of making their own amps, loosely based on the Aria Loco (see review elsewhere in this issue) principle of small speakers in small combos. They've been working on the idea for about 10 months now, and the current



Gigsville amp prototype.

version - very much a prototype - is a 70 watt amp driving four 4in speakers which can handle 30 watts each. The Foster speakers used are the same as those in the Aria Loco amps. GV are presently trying to decide on whether to use a four-in-a-line or two-underneath-two arrangement, or in fact whether the top should be separate, sitting on a cab containing eight of the Fosters. All very interesting - we'll keep you posted... Peavey's US headquarters inform us that they've recently acquired two new premises: one (still to be built) will be a 49,000 sq ft printed-circuit-board manufacturing plant and the other (the building of which already exists) will be a 52,000 sq ft factory enabling better facilities for shipping of product (or 'transport of equipment', if you prefer the jargonless version). All this means that Peavey will have over 575,000 sq ft of total floor space down in 'il ole Meridian Mississippi. Cripes!... Syco Systems, Bath-based company who already bring the decidedly expensive Fairlight CMI and Synclavier II into the UK, have recently acquired two new lines: the Kobol mono digital/analogue synth and the Polykobol polyphonic digital/analogue synth, both of which are made in France by RSF Synthetiseurs. Syco claim that these 'carry on where the Minimoog and Prophet-5 left off, and foresee prices of £780 ex VAT and £2950 ex VAT respectively. Again, we'll be letting you know more later... A grand idea is the Arts and Live Music Association based in South Shields, south Tyneside. They are currently negotiating to buy the old Customs and Excise building on Corporation Quay for the princely sum of £1 - but it'll cost £40,000 to put it in order! The plan is to present live music

as many nights as possible and with as wide a variety of music as possible. The ALMA is now looking for members, so if you'd like information on exactly what the association's all about, contact Tim Anderson at 12 High Row, Stargate, Ryton, Tyne and Wear, Tel: 0632 781204 (office hours). Meanwhile you may like to know that regular events are currently being staged by the ALMA at the New Crown Hotel in South Shields - November 19th sees Rhythm Clicks, formed by ex-Penetration guitarist Gary Chaplin, performing... The Performing Right Society have a useful booklet out called *What Is PRS?* giving you lots of information on, er, what PRS is. So if you didn't know that PRS is an association of composers, authors and publishers of musical works established in 1914 to administer on behalf of its members certain of the rights granted to them under copyright legislation, write for a copy (we dare say they'd love an SAE) to Performing Right Society, 29-33 Berners Street, London W1... Those bastards what nick fings have been on the loose again (so who said they'd ever gone away?): Gong-person Pierre Moerlen had a Brenell Mini-8 tape machine half-inched recently, the serial number of which is 000382/L8. Info on this object to Mr G Lawson at Listenfine Ltd, Tel: (01) 359 0411, or (01) 840 3444. Other recipient of a disappearing personal property scenario is wonderful guitarist Peter Green, who had a Fender Jazzmaster nicked back in August from a London studio. It's a 1957 (or thereabouts) model, with a special cream fingerplate engraved with an eagle's head in the top right-hand corner, Gibson humbuckers and a varnished, natural wood finish. Info please to PVK Records on 0494 36301 (who are 'more interested in seeing the guitar where it belongs than in taking action'), or to Holborn police on (01) 725 4212, or (01) 898 8998. Good luck, Peter... The Trustee Savings Bank - TSB to you, mate - are sponsoring the National Schools Rock and Pop Competition, designed to 'encourage music-making and musical appreciation in schools throughout Britain by providing an exciting stimulus to both pupils and teachers'. Sounds all right, really. All pupils aged between 13 and 18 can enter: groups and soloists must submit two songs on tape before 31st December 1980, one of which must be original, the other a version (dub version?) of 'an existing pop song'. Entries will then be sifted for regional finals, with a national final taking place in London some time in March 1981. What can you win? Mercenary pig, you. OK then: winners get £2000 worth of travel, and awards for 'outstanding performances' total a further two grand. Send your C30, C60, C90 (version of?) to: The National Schools Rock and Pop Competition, Syston Publishing Company, 12-14 Hill Rise, Richmond Hill, Richmond, Surrey TW10 6UA.

# Mel Lambert tells you and pieces for the small

For many years now, the APRS exhibition held each June at the Connaught Rooms in Holborn has been regarded as the show at which to examine the latest in pro and semi-pro recording and PA hardware. In recent years, however, there has been growing dissatisfaction amongst visitors and exhibitors alike regarding the suitability of the Connaught Rooms as a venue for such an important exhibition. Certainly it is not the easiest of places to find your way around, and the lack of any decent demonstration facilities - most visitors would obviously like to have the opportunity to listen to a console/tape machine/effects unit for themselves - is somewhat bizarre for a sound-orientated show.

More power to Batiste Exhibitions, then, for organising an 'alternative' exhibition in early September at the West Centre Hotel in Earls Court, London, where some 70 companies were able to display their wares in a single, spacious hall. During the exhibition's three days, visitors also had the opportunity to try their hand at remixing 24-track session tapes in the fully-equipped Turnkey and Allen & Heath Brenell demonstration rooms - complete with special effects - or hear a comparison of several monitor loudspeaker systems in ATC's special demo area. Batiste had even laid on an interesting series of lectures, covering such diverse subjects as PA sound systems (by Dave Martin of Martin

Audio), sound-reinforcement mixers (Graham Blyth of Soundcraft), effects units (Don Morris of MXR), electronic music (John Lewis of Electrophone Studios), and recording techniques (Richard Elen - ex-supremo of *Sound International* and now editor of *SI's* sister magazine *Studio Sound*). And for those of you interested in recording a live gig, or laying down an album at your country retreat, *Mobile One* and the *Rolling Stones Mobile* were open for inspection during most of the show.

Of the newer gear to be seen at this year's Prosound '80, I was surprised at the number of low-cost mixing consoles being unveiled for the first time. AC Electronic Services brought along a Model SM24/16/2 24-input/16-output group desk, destined for imminent delivery to Hologram Studios in Manchester. Of modular construction, the SM Range can be expanded to suit your particular needs, and features mic/line input, sweep EQ on three mid-frequency centres, pushbutton routing to 16 groups and/or the stereo remix/monitor buss for subgrouping, plus a row of LEDs beside each channel fader to give warning of possible input overload. A separate digital readout on each input and output/monitor module displays the relevant channel or group number, and is turned off whenever a module is muted. Each group module is also equipped with a

Below: Turnkey's 900 quid Portastudio package: a Teac 144, stereo amp, three Accessit boxes, pair of Auratones and your very own patchbay. Record where you like... Below that, our Gordon mucks about with Trident-recorded tapes in Turnkey's demo room at Prosound.



## about some useful bits and home studio shown at Prosound '80

pair of LEDs that show the particular mode of operation: red for recording and green for remix. Other useful facilities include no less than 16 echo or auxiliary returns, plus built-in test oscillator and talkback facilities. Featuring a particularly clean and uncluttered front-panel layout, with easy-to-find and well-labelled operating controls, an *SM24/16/2* will set you back a very reasonable £3000. Well worth checking out.

A name new to me is *Trackteck*, the logo gracing a range of PA and recording desks manufactured by **Music World Marketing**, and being exhibited at Prosound by **Lake Audio**. A variety of input/output formats can be supplied, ranging from the 12/4 desk on show (£2000) to a mighty 24/16 (£3500). Each input channel offers mic/line selection, a three-band sweep EQ section, four auxiliary sends (selectable pre-/post-fader for foldback and echo), separate monitor/remix level, pan and solo controls, plus channel cut. The use of different coloured knobs and silk-screened legends makes it particularly easy to lay your hands on the correct control or switch in a hurry – handy when working in dim lighting conditions of a darkened control room or at a gig.

**Pace Musical Equipment** was showing a pre-production version of its new microprocessor-controlled *DM-Series* of PA/recording consoles. Now available with a durable plastic front-panel covering, together with restyled control layout, the *DM-Series* can be supplied in 4- and 8-track configurations, with up to 32 input channels. Prices range from £688 for an 8/4 version, to £1500 for the 32/8 format; remarkable value for money by all appearances. Track assignment is controlled from a central keypad, enabling up to a total of 16 'patches' or input/output designations to be stored in the console's internal memory. Level monitoring is provided by means of a novel system of LEDs mounted at the top of each group/monitor module. I understand that Pace are currently working on a second-generation system, which will offer microprocessor-control of fader level, EQ and foldback, and possibly an interface for lighting desks; watch this space for further developments.

Talking of automated consoles, **Brødr Jørgensen** was demonstrating the remarkable new **Roland CPE-800 Compu Editor** system, which enables 15 channels of fader positions to be memorised during a remix session. The *Compu Editor* costs just £3000, and is designed to be inserted between the line outputs of a 16-track (or an 8-track, giving several spare inputs for echo returns etc) and the tape returns to your mixing console. A data track recorded on (usually) track 16 of the multitrack enables the unit's internal memory – in other words, where you are in a particular mix and what fader levers to increase or decrease – to be synchronised with the corresponding audio tracks. Each channel offers

'write' (to record mix data), 'read' (to allow a trial mix to be 'replayed' through the *Compu Editor*), 'manual' and mute switches, plus a pair of LEDs to allow the actual positions of each input fader to be matched with those corresponding to the memorised mix. Since the *Compu Editor* will only hold one complete mix in its internal random-access memory, a special interface has been provided for dumping data on to ordinary cassette tapes. Alternatively, the data can be recorded at the front of your multitrack tape, and then reloaded into the unit's memory before each mixdown session. And of course the *Compu Editor* also has many possible applications in live mixing – for example to pre-mix a bank of keyboards. A 'run/halt' switch enables a variety of memorised balances to be altered during a number by simply pushing a button. Ingenuity personified.

**Allen & Heath Brenell** unveiled the good-looking *Model 1642* sound-reinforcement and 4-track recording desk, which comes built into its own

for the foldback output. Turnkey has also devised a package system for the **Teac Model 144 Portastudio**, comprising an armoured flightcase, built-in power stereo amplifier, three *Accessit* signal processors, a pair of **Auratone Cube** monitors, and a small patchbay. Ideal for making quick demos or working out arrangements while on tour, the self-contained system is small enough to be set up in a hotel or dressing room and the asking price of the package is around £900.

Talking of package deals, **Studio Equipment Services** was displaying a 16-track combo, consisting of a 20-input **AHB Syncon B** console linked to a **Teac 85-16** 1in multitrack, complete with dbx noise-reduction. Price for the complete system is a very reasonable £12,900 – a considerable saving on purchasing the mixer and tape machine separately. Ian Downs of **SES** also drew my attention to an **Alice 1248** mixer which, at only £1400, packs a remarkable amount of features into such a small space: 12 input channels, four output groups,

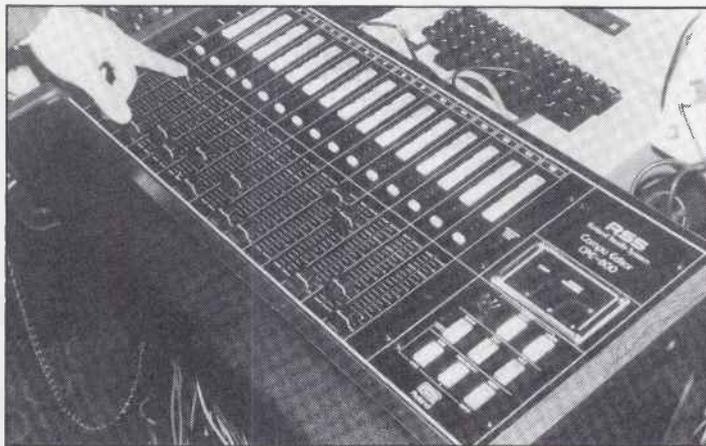
offer very good value for money: the *CM-4* costs £93.50, the *TM1* £75.26, and the *CUE1* £53.

Other interesting items that caught my eye at Prosound '80 included a new range of very robust, self-powered PA/studio/on-stage monitoring loudspeakers from **Red Acoustics**, which feature no less than five built-in amps driving a pair of 8in bass drivers and a single 1in dome tweeter via a custom-designed crossover unit (£675 each); two new modular signal processors from **Rebis** – the *RA212* mic/line preamplifier (£97) and *RA211* timer (£95), plus a flight case unit and rack-mounting power supply for portable applications; a new range of processors from **Unit 8**, including the 8-20 stereo 10-band and 8-27 mono 27-band graphic equalisers, and the 8-23 stereo 2- and 3-way active crossover with built-in limiters and level controls for each frequency band; and **BEL's** restyled *BA20* stereo flanger being shown by Don Larking, and which now features a built-in noise reduction circuit to retain a respectable 13kHz bandwidth at all delays, silent bypass switching via a footswitch, a front-panel mix control, plus a handy turn-on delay on the reverse sweep setting. (Mike Barnard also tells me that sales of his **BEL** noise reduction units are going very well; during the last nine months some 80 8-track rack systems have been sold to satisfied clients.)

The crew from the **Rolling Stones Mobile**, Mick McKenna, Arnold Dunn and Pete Stevens, were kept busy explaining to prospective clients what all the knobs and buttons inside the truck were for. Mick and the lads recently completed a gruelling fortnight of rock concerts at the Nottingham Playhouse Theatre, and were due to vanish into De Lane Lea for a – hopefully – shorter series of remix sessions. **Mobile One's** Barry Ainsworth tells me that his leviathan has also been busy over the last few months, recording several concerts with Rush, The Kinks, Barclay James Harvest (in Berlin), Dr Hook and Genesis (including subsequent remix in the truck for Capital Radio, *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, and John Peel's Radio 1 show). **Mobile One** will be off the road for a few weeks in the near future, while its present **MCI** desk is replaced with a 52-input **Harrison** console (46-track recording, and all that).

I understand from Prosound '80 organiser Harold Schneider that **Batiste** already has plans for another show next year. The venue will probably be the new **Barbican** centre in the City of London, and the date sometime in mid-November. Next time around, the organisers hope to put on a more comprehensive series of lectures and/or seminars on various aspects of recording and sound-reinforcement, as well as providing more space for companies to demonstrate their wares. Sounds like a good gig.

Mel Lambert



Roland's new *Compu Editor CPE800* – three grands' worth of memorised fader positions.

toughened plastic flight case. Rather than being provided with hinges or securing clasps, the top half of the flight case is designed to slide over the mixer, and is also provided with a hinged end-piece to keep out moisture, dust and similar nasties. All 16 inputs and six main outputs (four subgroups plus left and right) are fitted with both XLR and line connectors. Each input channel features shelving bass and treble plus sweep mid-frequency EQ, a pair of foldback and single echo sends, PFL and 90mm long-travel faders. Built to withstand a hard life on the road, the new *Model 1642* is nevertheless light enough to be carried by just one person; good news for you or your road crew. Price: just £800.

Amongst the selection of sonic goodies being shown by Turnkey was a new 12/2 mixer made by **Star Sound Dynamix**. Costing around £330, the mixer features a four-band EQ section (treble, two mids and bass), PFL and two auxiliary echo sends on each input channel, plus a useful – albeit simple – EQ and master control

and full 8-track monitoring during recording and overdubs.

And if you're reasonably adept at wielding a soldering iron, a couple of new modules being shown by **Progressive Electric Products** should be right up your street. Since my review of the basic *CM-1* channel and *GM-1* group modules in the March 1979 issue of *Sound International*, **Steven Gutteridge** has been hard at work on one or two improvements and additions to the **PEP** range of DIY mixer modules. The new *CM-4* input module features switchable phantom powering for capacitor mics, parametric mid-frequency EQ, an EQ in/out switch, and improved 8-track routing pushbuttons. Two other types of modules are also available from **PEP**: the *TM1*, which offers pushbutton selection of monitor output (stereo left and right, auxiliary sends one through four, and PFL), plus talkback routing; and *CUE1* which, as the name suggests, provides master output controls for a pair of auxiliary send busses and the PFL output. As with previous **PEP** products, all three new modules

# Why there isn't a Westbury in Peter Haycock's guitar collection.

To the rock world, **Peter Haycock**, guitarist with the Climax Blues Band, is a skilful and imaginative player of international status.

So you can imagine our enthusiasm when we discovered that the guitar Peter uses for both studio and live work, was a Westbury, (a Custom II, gloss black actually), quite a modest guitar pricewise, for a musician of his standing.

So with almost indecent haste, we tracked him down and asked him over the phone if he'd tell us why he chose and used a Westbury.

And could we put it in an ad?

'Sure' he replied, 'as long as you mention the Climax Blues Band's new album coming out shortly on the Warner Brothers label'.

It was a deal, and the conversation went like this:

*Peter, why Westbury?*

I think because it's such a versatile guitar, yet so easy to use... I can still get a lot of widely differing sounds quickly.

*You're obviously happy with the sound.*

Yeah, it's great, as I said, it's very versatile... used with a variety of amps you can get anything from a screaming humbucker sound to a really slicing single coil sound.

*I understand you collect guitars.*

Yeah, right, I've got sixteen so far... including an ES355 - a gift from the Marshall Tucker Band, a black Les Paul Custom and a Veleno which has a weird aluminium neck.

*And yet you use the Westbury to the exclusion of the others?*

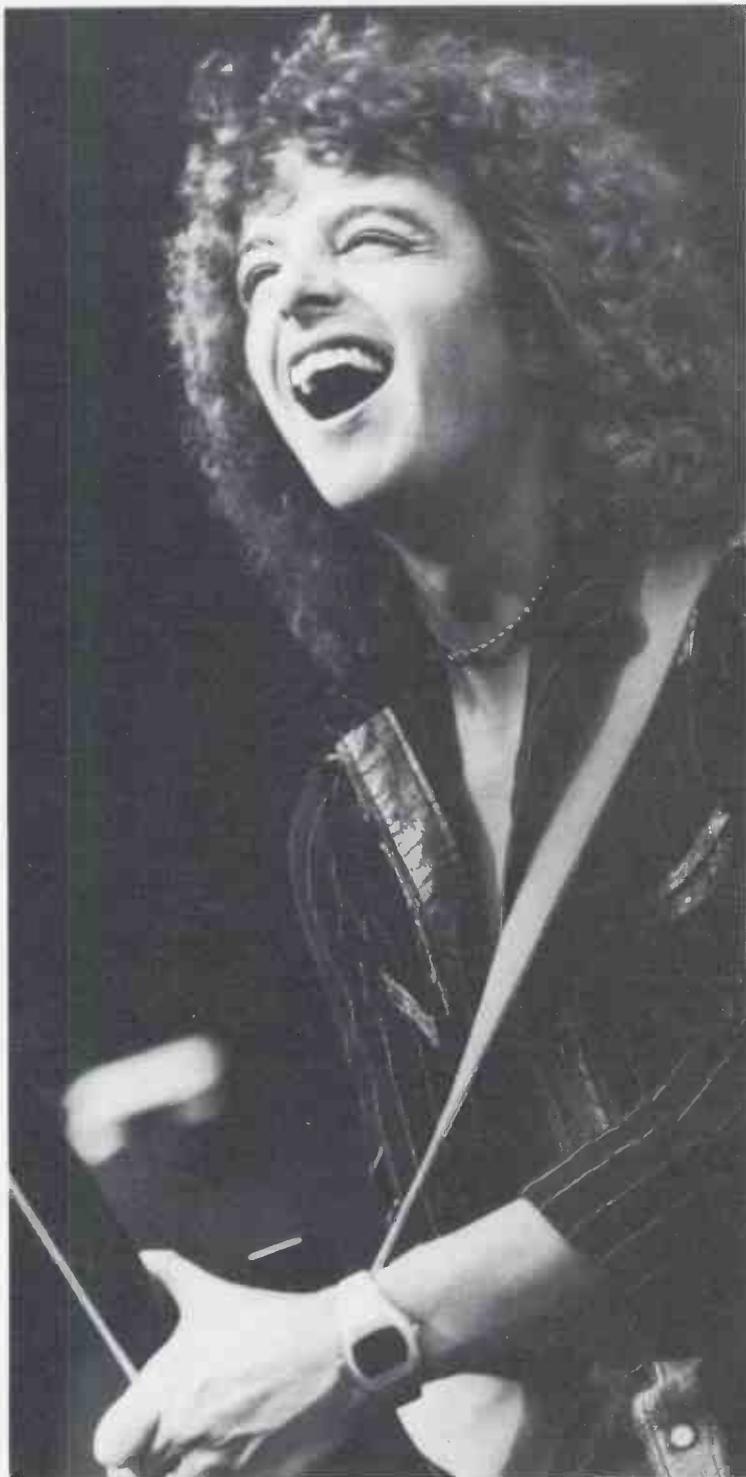
Right, I've now got a room full of guitars, just collecting dust.

*What about the old adage - you're not a guitarist till you've owned a Gibson?*

It's nice to own one... I would say try a Westbury first... you'll be pleasantly surprised... you can, over the years, spend a lot of money trying to find the right guitar... starting with perhaps a second hand Fender... through the Les Pauls, 355's etc. You'd be far better off buying a versatile one like this, as they certainly aren't a lot of money. In fact I'd say that a Westbury is a short cut to finding the ideal guitar for stage and studio work.

*Did you know the Westbury range starts at £135.00 including VAT?*

Really? That's amazing, they look and perform more like £400 guitars.



Dear Rose-Morris, If what Peter says is anything to go by, Westbury seem to have a great range of guitars. Please send me the full story.

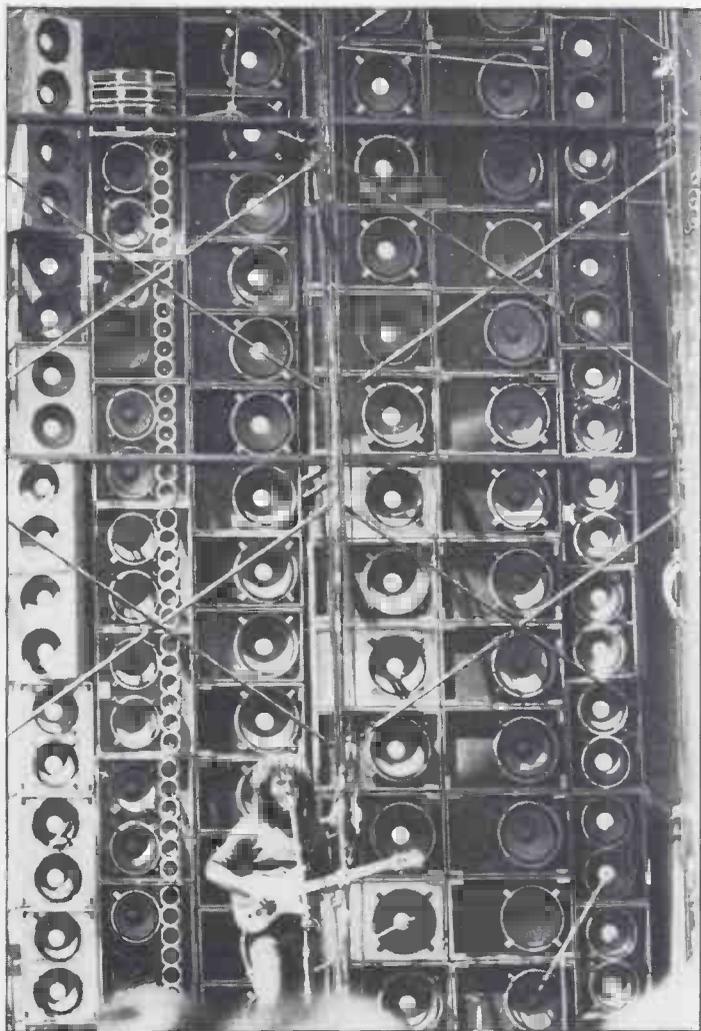
Name .....

Address .....

Rose-Morris & Co. Ltd.,  
32-34, Gordon House Road,  
London NW5 1NE  
Tel: 01-267 5151

**Rose-Morris**  
*Westbury*





No speaker problems for Mr G Dead seen here gigging at the Dog's Armpit in Mitcham. (Pic reproduced from Tom Wheeler's *The Guitar Book*.)

## Speaker's Corner: Are Dirty Sounds Infinitely Baffling?

I don't know whether you've had any dry rot in your speaker cabinet lately, or a nasty case of woodworm, but if you have had the inclination to tear the back off and prod around inside, did you bother to check who was responsible for your speakers? The time was when the UK market was more or less carved up between two British speaker makers, Goodmans and Celestion. Imported amps may have sported Jensens or some other American brand, but our amps over here usually had one or the other of these two illustrious names.

These days, the market has broadened out considerably. Right off the top of my head I reckon that I could think of at least nine or ten speaker makers in this country, many of them turning out 12in speakers capable of handling around 50 watts at a 'to the trade only and then only in bulk' price of around £15 each.

Needless to say, the pressure to reduce speaker cab costs in recent years has been great and the industry has responded healthily by splitting off from itself, like breeding amoeba, to spawn many new companies who seem capable of feeding the seemingly insatiable gaping hole which is the British amplification market.

The question of speakers in combos and extension cabs is an interesting one as, to a far greater extent than was previously true, the sounds produced by, say, one 4 x 12 may now be very, very different to that produced by another. Factors like efficiency, sensitivity and such relative arcana as stiffness of cone and heat dispersal can have a tremendous effect on the sound you get out of them. But there is now the question of whether a good design is actually desirable!

Much of the sound sought after in the late Sixties was due to overloaded amps – yes, I'll admit that. But a fair proportion of that sound (especially with old Fender amps and AC30s) was due to the relative appallingness of the speakers used in them. There's a story going the rounds that some early Sixties bands used to slice the cones of their AC30 speakers with razor blades and then Sellotape them back together again – all in the quest for a rough sound! Now I'd hate you to take one of Wilkinson's finest to your JBL 12in, but it raises an interesting question: How far should you go in paying the earth for a good speaker, especially if you are after a dirty lead guitar sound?

Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying

to say that good speakers are bad (1984 is still a few years off), but I'm not sure that the perfect speaker for guitar use is the same as the perfect speaker for PA or even bass. A few years back Marshall, to name just one, went into the higher quality speaker market by fitting Celestion *Powercells* into some of their guitar cabs. As far as I could tell from players who'd tried them, though, many seemed to prefer the relatively poorer-standard Marshall Celestion speaker – it just broke the sound up in a more pleasant way.

Nevertheless, the quality of the average speaker in the average combo and extension cab seems to be improving all the time. In a way this is probably a good thing as some of the lesser brand speakers of ten years ago were highly undesirable properties. But the newer speakers from people like Fane, McKenzie, Formac and others seem to be getting better all the time.

Voice coil sizes seem to be getting bigger and frameworks stronger. Edge-wound aluminium coils are the in thing, along with metal speaker domes; but is this a move in the right direction? At present things are still probably reasonably healthy. A 12in speaker handling 100 watts is quite common these days – 20 years ago you were lucky if it wouldn't fall apart at a true 25 watts. Sound Pressure Levels for a given input are rising (in other words speakers are tending to be more efficient these days) and as costs are now lower due to the highly competitive nature of the market, the trend is still a healthy one.

If it were to go much further, however, with every speaker capable of performing like an ATC/ElectroVoice/JBL/Altec or whatever (and some of these smaller makers are reckoned to be in that sort of league already), won't it mean that we may be in danger of losing the desirable results of relatively undesirable specifications?? It's a horrible thought but, if you look at the transistor versus valve controversy, it's not impossible!

The point of all this, however, is not to suggest that development should stop (even I'm not that much of a Luddite!) but strongly to advise readers who are buying speaker cabs to try several when buying a new head and not just assume that every 1 x 15 will sound the same as every other. That might have been true even as recently as ten years ago but it won't be true nowadays. Find the one which you like the sound of, even if it is made by someone quite different from your amp maker. Furthermore, don't even assume that one cab from a manufacturer will use the same brand of speakers as they are using in another format. One major amp maker that I know of is using speakers from at least four different sources – carefully picking what he regards as the best value for money and the best sound for each cabinet design.

One final thought might give you a laugh. A major supplier of speakers for many companies currently slugging it out in the market place is H/H, whose own speakers are becoming particularly highly regarded by companies who would, you may think, have been seen as rivals. Not so. H/H are set up to produce a quality speaker in large numbers at a good price. What I've heard of them thus far would suggest that they are excellent. If you don't happen to like their sound, however, don't necessarily assume that you'll dodge them by buying somebody else's 4 x 12. It's not impossible that they'll be using H/Hs too!

The moral, as never before, is to shop around when buying speaker cabs and don't necessarily assume that replacing your old, tatty-looking Celestion G12s or Fanes with high cost, high efficiency, high sensitivity speakers will give you a better sound. What you might get for your troubles is a higher audible volume but a sound which is (as JBL fairly imply in their ads, I believe) the sound of the instrument and the amp – no more, no less. Curiously, you might not actually like what you hear!

## Read This Out Loud To Your Roadies

You can stuff yer AA handbook mate, will be the exultant cry of all roadies and touring bands come January next year when, it is hoped, a 'roadie's bible' to be called *Music Business Knowledge* will be published.

The author of the book will be Hazel Griffiths who has been working in the music business for some years now, frequently having to answer such panicky questions as, 'azel, where can I score a roll of Gaffer tape at free in the morning in Kirkcaldy?' Learning the answer to some of these questions, Hazel realised that a bible was needed and is currently in the process of compiling it. And this is where you get a look in, sunshine.

The book, thus far, will break down into various sections telling you, for example, which hotels will take bands, how much they cost, how to fill in a carnet, where you can hire gear, rehearsal studios, demo studios, get

equipment repaired on the road – all that sort of thing.

What Hazel is hoping is that all you industrious *SI/BI* readers who offer such services will contact her and let her know what you are up to. There's no charge for editorial entries (which is nice to know) and the book itself is planned to cost around £3 which seems pretty fair these days. As I say, the more information you can get to Hazel the better the book will be, so out with the felt tip pen and headed notepaper and drop her a line at 'Knowledge', 33B Brook Drive, London SE1.

Needless to say, a review of said tome will grace these pages when the work is done and we'll be telling you where you can get hold of it. Here, hang on, that's an idea. How about a book telling you where you can get books on where to get Gaffer tape at 3 am? Top that, *Reader's Digest*.

# Why Amcron is demanding protection money.

Over the years, Amcron has earned a peerless reputation as a pioneer in professional sound.

Amcron built the first solid-state four-channel tape recorder back in 1962. Then they developed the first stereo amplifier with direct coupled input and output.

In 1977, they introduced digital logic to the pre-amplifier and achieved another first.

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The PSA-2 power amplifier is self-protecting.

A Self-Analysing circuit employs an analogue computer which constantly monitors the performance of the amplifier's critical stages.

Should the power transformer begin to overheat, an output transistor fail, or a short circuit occur, then the amplifier will automatically shut down to its 'stand-by' mode without damage to itself or to external equipment.

The protection circuitry also safeguards the PSA-2 against 'chain destruction' and damage caused by mis-matched loads.

As Dr. Mark Sawicki observed in his

review of the PSA-2:

"When reading reports of systems used by The Who, McCartney and Genesis... the Amcron name appears frequently... Why?

Well, reliability and outstanding performance are the answers.

Overall, the performance of the PSA-2 amplifier... is excellent."

Now. Given that you're spending a lot of money on a power amplifier (arguably the most crucial piece of equipment in your system), doesn't it make sense to spend a little



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Which is why we went all out to win the sole British agency for the PSA-2. And, indeed, the whole range of Amcron audio equipment.

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Watchin' TV in the Buzz mobile...

## Sabs And Motorhead Elbow Welsh National Opera In Buzz Mobile Queue

Considering that it's only been on the road since last December, **Buzz Music's** 8-track mobile – in reality a 14ft converted caravan towed behind a Transit van – has been having quite a busy time of it over the last few months. Owner Mark Thompson tells me that the mobile's been used to record demo sessions for Motorhead and Simple Minds, plus the *Quartz Live* album with (who else?) Quartz, a *Brum Beat* compilation album, and *Children Of The Sea*, B-side of Black Sabbath's last single *Neon Lights*. UB40 even recorded their *Food For Thought* single and part of their new album with gear borrowed from the mobile. And, by way of a change, Cardiff Broadcasting also booked the mobile to record a recent series of Welsh National Opera concerts.

Housed within the acoustically-treated caravan (the handiwork of Sound Enclosures) is an impressive array of hardware. A 16/8 Studiomastr console can be hooked up to either a Teac *Tascam 80-8* eight-on-jin multitrack with dbx, or Brenell *Mini-Eight* 1in machine, dependent on your particular preference. (And whether you intend to take the tapes away for remixing elsewhere, or wish to use the mobile.) Mastering is handled by a trusty *Revox B77*. The well-stocked effects rack includes a *Bandive Great British Spring* reverb, *MXR Pitch Transposer*, *Eventide Harmonizer*, *Pace* and *Klark-Teknik* graphics, *Roland 555* and *202 ADT* and echo units, plus a collection of *Rebs* sound benders. A good collection of microphones, stands, splitter boxes and headphones can be supplied, including a *Neumann U87*, *Electrovoice RE20* and a couple of radio mics for energetic vocalists. A black and white television monitor and camera is also available for providing

visual communication between the mobile and stage or recording area. Other outboard gear, such as delay lines, flangers and similar effects, can also be hired from Buzz Music's retail shop, at 50% off the normal cost.

Hire charges for the mobile depend on your chosen track format. Half-inch will set you back £65 per day (24 hours) or £325 a week; 1in charges are £75 and £375, respectively. Both multitracks are built into flight cases, and can be hired out separately for £25 and £35 a day each. (Barclay James Harvest and Keith Emerson recently borrowed the *Mini-Eight* for demo sessions.) Resident engineer Simon Dawson, who has worked previously at Rockfield and Banana Studios, is also available for £20 per day, or you are free to bring along your own magic-fingered expert.

By the time this issue of *SI* hits the news stands, work should be well underway with refitting the mobile's gear into the back of a larger Mercedes van. The Studiomastr desk will possibly be replaced with an *Ame/TAC 24/8* console. Buzz Music are also planning to move to new premises in the near future, where sufficient space may be found for a purpose-built studio housing identical hardware to that provided in the truck; the idea being, of course, to enable tapes to be remixed in a similar environment to that of the mobile. Mark Thompson foresees the truck being in regular use on the road following the rebuild, with little time available for mixdown sessions. Sounds like rather a good idea to me.

For a full breakdown of hire charges for the mobile, contact Mark Thompson or Jill Currie at Buzz Music, 65 Widemarsh Street, Hereford, Tel: 0432-55961/52016/51831.

## Small Studios

### 1 Airship Sighted Down In Bognor Regis

**A**irship Studios is a new and, by all accounts, well-equipped 4-track (soon to go 8-track) studio based in sunny Bognor Regis by the sea. Studio manager Richard Sharples tells me that most of the money has been spent on sorting out the studio's acoustics, which has left little over for recording hardware. He's not too upset, however, since what gear he has gathered together is sufficient for the mainly classical sessions he specialises in at the moment. And, as he points out, better to put a decent proportion of your available funds into getting the acoustics right, rather than trying to patch it up later. When the soon-to-be-installed MCI 8-track arrives, Richard hopes to take on more demo sessions with local bands.

The 14ft x 12ft control room presently houses a customised 12/4 Soundcraft *Series II* console, complete with parametric EQ on all input channels, linked to a pair of Teac A3440 4-tracks and a Studer A80 reduction machine. Monitoring is via Tannoy *Ardens* powered by H/H amps. Outboard gear includes an EMT *Gold Foil* reverb, *MXR Auto Phaser* and *Flanger* and *Court Acoustics* graphic equalisers. (Stephen Court was also involved in setting up and testing the acoustic treatment at Airship.)

Instruments available free of charge in the 16ft x 12ft studio comprise a Yamaha grand piano, Roland *SH1000* synth, *Hohner String Performer*, Logan string machine, plus several violins and acoustic guitars. Richard and the other two engineers who work regularly in the studio are all musicians themselves, which should help to establish a better rapport with prospective clients. Studio acoustics have been left reasonably live for classical recordings, but ought to be equally suitable for other types of session work. Rates are a very reasonable £7 an hour, with no surcharge for overtime or late-hours working.

The studio also co-ordinates record production and pressing for its own Airship label. At present Airship releases around half a dozen budget singles and albums a month. Recent acts passing through the studio include Maria Barton (winner of last year's *Melody Maker* folk contest), who has just released her first album *Rainful Days*, The Three Macs and a local band called Park Avenue, whose comedy single *The Billy Bulb Song* has attracted a lot of attention in the area.

For full particulars of these and other facilities offered by the studio, contact Richard Sharples at Airport Studios, 1 Argyle Road, Bognor Regis, Sussex PO21 2DU, Tel: 0243-822554.

### 2 Goggles Off For Fair Deal In Hayes

**I**t's not very often that you come across a studio that changes its name one month, and then decides to change it back again soon after. But that's what Stuart Johnson at Fair Deal in Hayes, Middlesex, has done. Recently, Stuart started to use the name Goggles, preferring this to the studio's original title which, after nearly 13 years in operation, he felt sounded rather 'square'. It seems most people like to stick with a name they know, hence the change back to Fair Deal. (Which just goes to show, doesn't it!?)

Whatever it's called, **Fair Deal/Goggles** sounds pretty nice indeed. Track-laying hardware in the 'compact' 12 x 6ft control room centres around a 22/16/8 custom-built console, hooked up to an Otari *MTR-90* 16-track complete with dbx noise reduction. Mastering machines include an elderly, but perfectly respectable, EMI *BTR4* with home-built electronics, plus a *Revox A77* and *B77* for back-up and copying duties. And the studio isn't short of sound benders. The inventory includes an EMT 140 plate echo, *MXR* digital delay, *Eventide Harmonizer*, *ADR Scamp* rack, dbx 160 compressor-limiter, and *MXR Auto Flanger* and *Phaser*. They even have a rack-mounted *Clap Trap* for special effects. *Lockwood Academy* and *Auratone Cubes* powered by custom-built amplifiers provide control room monitoring.

And there's an equally impressive collection of instruments available free of charge in the studio, which measures 16ft x 12ft and includes a purpose-built drum booth. You have the choice of a Weber acoustic piano, *Elka String Rhapsody*, *Fender Quad Reverb* amp (don't see many of those around these days), Orange combo, Pearl kit, and a Dave Simmons drum machine. Studio rates are £12 per hour for 16-track; there's no additional charges for late working.

During the last year The Ruts have done one or two sessions at Fair Deal, along with Breeze for Polka Dot Records, Peter Fox on Clubland Records, and a dozen or so albums of traditional Indian music for the local community. Fair Deal also involves itself in record production and pressing through its own in-house labels, Ambulance and Off Street Records. Stuart can even arrange a package deal of a day's recording time and pressing of 1000 singles for a total price of just £500. (It's then up to the bands to promote the single themselves, or work through distributors such as Rough Trade.)

Anyone wanting further details of such budget-priced package deals should contact Stuart Johnson at Fair Deal Studios, 1 Gledwood Drive, Hayes, Middlesex, Tel: 01-573 8744.

## Of Stravinsky And Shane Fenton

Essex, in fact. The photoger and I, safely strapped into the hurtling Escort, abandon the motorway and lurch into The Rodings. We agree that the map must be wrong, or that the strange and powerful forces of the countryside have been toying with the signposts. The A414 has moved.

On cue, a local rustic type, leaning casually on a fence, confirms our worst fears. 'The forces are angry: you'll be finding the noisy...' he hesitates and, gesturing toward a building on the corner, spits out the word with a man-sized wad of baccy: 'group in there.' And so it is that we locate the village hall wherein Rapid Eye Movement rehearse. I pinch myself to be sure that I'm not dreaming.

REM comprise Dave Stewart, raconteur, wit and keyboardist (still) with Bruford ('Not another group, Stewart,' chorus Kevin and Sylvia from Much Hadham. But the impression is of a chap with plenty music to get off his chest, one way or 'o'other); Pip Pyle, Stewart's partner-in-drums from previous projects like Hatfield And The North and National Health; Rick Bidulph, the bassist who Played The Bass Line John Greaves Couldn't Manage on *Dreams Wide Awake* from the Health's *Of Queues And Cures*; and Jakko M Jakszyk (thankfully referred to by all as just plain Jakko), ex-64 Spoons guitarist and singer and, as Mr Stewart elucidates, brought in to give the ageing group 'a bit of teen appeal'.

Pip enlarges on this theme with relish (and a frothing swill of beer, I might add): 'The reason that we formed this group was at my wife's instigation. She said: You're getting a bit old, you are. Can't you get a nice young lead guitarist in the group so he can come round and rehearse? So Dave knows this bloke called Jakko, he's s'posed to be quite a good mover, right, so we got this group based round 'im. So she's been getting all these young girls round. You get a young fellow like Jakko round, they all come to my house and attack him! So really, we're just keeping these people employed, just a sort of stud fam. It's a really good job: you've got tennis courts, food and fucking. All human life is there.'

Stewart decides enough is probably enough, and injects some seriousness into the cacophony. In fact, 'Seriously,' he begins, 'did you hear Jakko's band, 64 Spoons? He sent me a tape about



Rapid limb, sorry Eye Movement display pyramid situation in countryside scenario: Jakko, Pip, Dave 'n' Rick.

three years ago and I thought, this is all right. It's about the only tape that any musician has sent me of Their Band that I've enjoyed listening to. Most bands, it's the same old dutiful jazz-rock, sort of limp solos and tricky bits. You can see it all laid out like multiplication tables. From the moment you hear the first note you can see the vista of cubes that the music is going to fit into,' the composer describes floridly.

'But 64 Spoons had a bit of life in it,' Dave continues, 'very tight and very well played. At that point I thought, his singing reminds me of Richard Sinclair, his guitar playing reminds me of Allan Holdsworth. So I thought, if ever I get any new songs, I'll get Jakko to come along and sing them. About six months ago I made this single, a remake of *What Becomes Of The Broken Hearted*, and I needed a singer to do it and rang Jakko up, and we started working then. He sang on the demo of that, although on the final thing (released on Rough Trade), Colin Blunstone did it. The seeds of the group were sown then,' he adds dramatically.

It transpired that Dave Stewart was about to disembark from a Bruford tour of the USA. No sooner had his boots touched Blighty than the multi-keyboard person was planning voyages a-new. April 1980 saw Dave and Pip decide to get, in the time-honoured phrase, a group together. 'This group existed in everyone's head for ages, and it wasn't until last week that we started rehearsing,' claims Pyle somewhere in September.

Meanwhile, Dave reminisces, 'We first met, and were being interviewed by Chris Welch. And he's saying (adopts high-pitched, urgent voice): Well Dave, what musical direction do you think the group will be going in? And I said: Well I'll answer that in a minute, Chris. Oh, by the way Pip, this is Jakko, Jakko this is Pip. Well Chris, we're very tight, we've been rehearsing for a few months now...'

Rapid Eye Movement intend to play 'anything we like'. Straight songs, indeed, as well as 'the funny old music'. Dave suggests, 'I want to be in a band where the overall climate isn't so much people struggling with instruments, trying to make some notes come out of them, but where you can do a song, a fairly straightforward proposition, and can get it sounding like a song quite quickly so we can get on to the sort of production stage, dance steps... no, a group where you could think more about the overall presentation and kind of contrast between bits, rather than if we had *Son Of God's Breakfast Part 129* and *We Have To Play It*. That's like the song's playing you.'

What about Rick then, I hear you cry? 'I've had the grave misfortune to know these two for a long time,' announces Mr Bidulph, indicating Messrs Pyle and Stewart with long fingers that for nigh on 15 years have been wrapping themselves around the neck and body of a Jazz bass. 'I've spent many hours with Pip under the back seats of vans,' he recalls, eyes moistening. Rick, it turns out, used to drive National Heath about in their upholstered limousine, in between bouts of deafness induced by attempting to salvage the band's live sound. Rick and Dave launch into two-part (near) harmony: 'But in his heart, one day he knew that he'd be on *The Stage* with *The Boys*.'

And so it is. Rick even contributes a

tune to the set: D Stewart gives five or six, there are three of Pip's and two of Jakko's (these figures correct at time of interview, 18/9/80). 'It's very democratic in my favour,' estimates Stewart. Shane Fenton's *Cindy's Birthday*, with its memorable couplets and incisive musical diversions, turns up in the set, along with *Share It* and *Fitter Stoke Has A Bath* from Hatfield days and newer songs like *Seven Sisters* ('a long one'), *Cathedral Park* ('a duet between Pip and Dave that sounds like a whole orchestra'), *Matching Green* ('mainly quiet, but with a loud bit in the middle'), and *Bismarck City* ('a tale of nine weeks on the road when the road crew begin to eat the furniture in the hotel lobby').

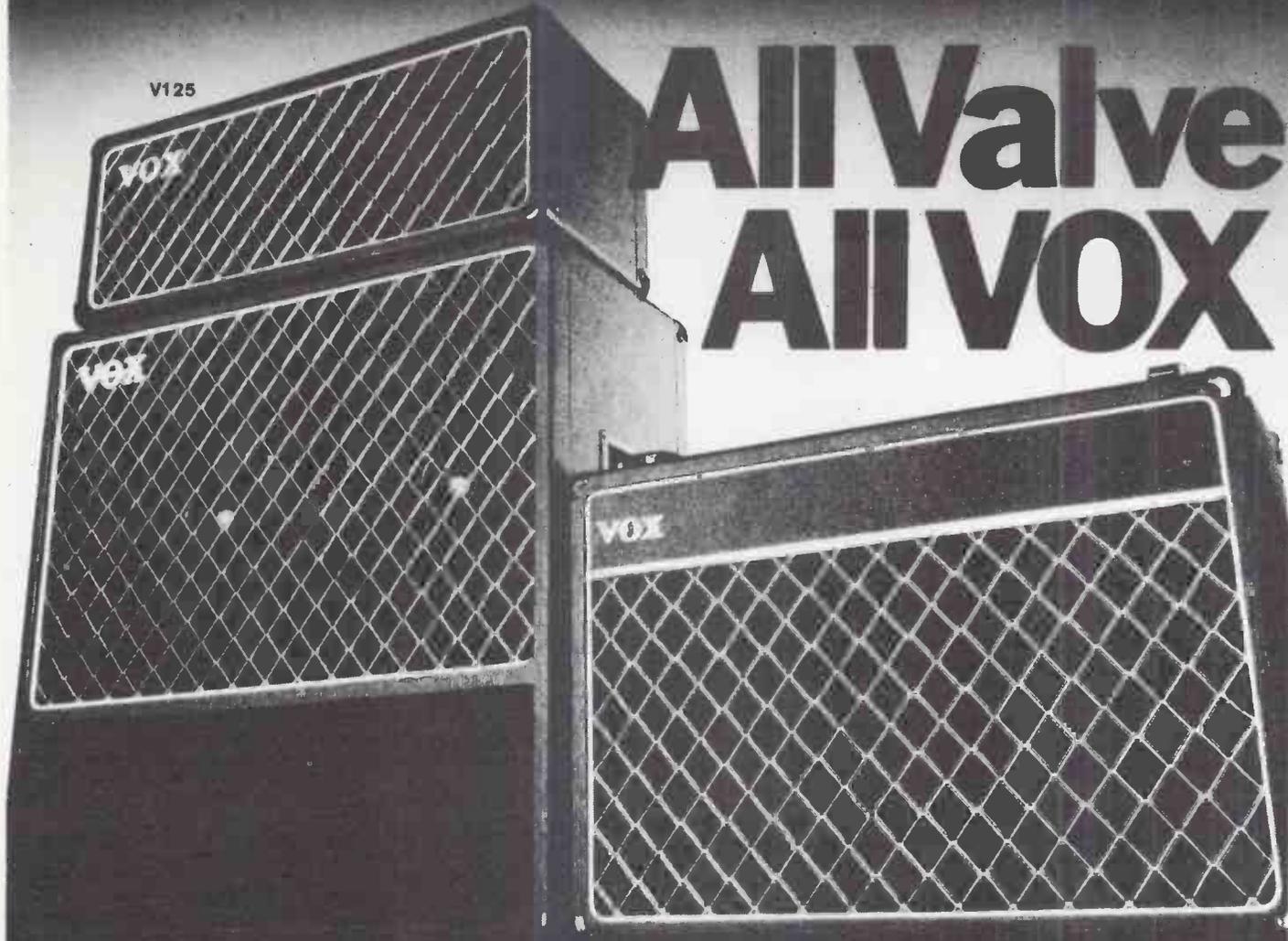
Emboldened by the odd stiffener, we trek back to the village hall and the Movements shuffle into a couple more: Pip's (*Listen To The Mensa Membrane*, notable for its loping 9/8 'reggae' bit that is posing alternatives in rehearsal, is, they admit, 'one of the more difficult ones'), and Jakko's relatively straightforward *One More Time*. Although it's difficult to reach a solid judgement on a clearly experimental session, what with amplification problems (ie no PA) and Pip's games with the new Simmons electronic drum kit (see page 59 for his unexpurgated findings), it's obvious that REM are a band whose intentions are good - but don't let them be misunderstood. Despite Dave's promises of a *Prophet-10* soon to join his artful *Prophet-5* (he apparently completed a demo for Sequential Circuits while in California on the Bruford tour, of 'bits and pieces of *The Rite Of Spring*'), and proves this allegiance with Igor by demonstrating his *Prophet-5's Petrushka* button), Rick and Jakko's set-ups are reasonably restrained, Rick's old Jazz going via various effects into an amp that I'd never heard of called a Craft, while Jakko's white, be-horned John Birch six-string receives amplification from the new-ish Roland *Bolt-30*, the Japs' apparently successful dabbling with valves.

'If *Beat Instrumental* have incorporated with the magazine you're gonna have to end it: Well, I can see that, whatever else happens to the band, they're going to GO FAR,' explains Dave. 'All *Beat* articles used to end like that: There's a bright future for Clint if he just keeps up what he is doing.' Let us be thankful that Clint is intent on keeping up what he is doing, in whatever guise seems appropriate. Rapid Eye Movement are poised to deliver dreams, wide awake.

Tony Bacon



# All Valve All VOX



V125

VR212

V15

The all new Vox V15 Combo is the product of Vox experience and the needs of the 1980 musician. It's all valve, of course, for that unique warm overload sound. The twin speaker design is unusual in a 15 Watt Combo, but essential to fully express the potential of the amplifier design.

It's size is only 63 X 46 X 22 X cms but well balanced for portability, and weighing in at around 14 kilos it won't need much carrying! However nothing is sacrificed in construction and quality — the V15 remains true to the Vox tradition!

The all valve design features a classic Vox 'push pull' output stage using EL84 valves, and draws on years of AC30 experience. It will easily exceed 15 Watts RMS, bettering 20 Watts Peak Power. The preamp is all valve too, with preamp volume control, master volume control, and three band passive equalisation — bass, middle and treble.

Tremendous care and patience went into this design. Top rock musicians played prototypes and gave their suggestions — the result a combo for you, the 1980 Vox enthusiast.

New for 1980 is the Vox V125 Lead Stack. It's powerful, versatile, portable and Vox. The styling draws on the classical Vox tradition. But 1980 innovations in the design bring to the musician such features as active equalisation in a valve design.

The Vox V125 is a true concert amp being powerful enough for the loudest of bands. It will easily produce 125 Watts RMS before distortion, and will run 180 Watts Peak, and that's not flat out!

But not every gig needs enormous volume potential. So the Vox V125 includes a master volume control to limit that powerful output stage to the level that suits you. You can still overload at any volume by using the preamp volume control to wind up the valve front end.

The preamp has another original control — sensitivity. The difference between a cheap pickup and a Di-Marzio X2N is enormous. This new sensitivity control allows you to custom tailor the amps sensitivity to your guitars output — any guitar can drive the Vox V125.

The tone circuit is pure Vox magic. Five bands of active equalisation — the sort only previously found in the best recording studios. With these tone controls you can boost certain tones and cut them — conventional amps only cut. The benefit is incredible tone versatility. You must hear it.

One of the problems of creating an amplifier with such an exceptional performance is to find a cabinet that can do it justice and Vox abandoned traditional 4 X 12 designs as being inadequate for the V125.

The folded bin design of the VR212 provides the full frequency response the V125 needs. Two 12 inch Vox drivers, each rated at 80 Watts, deliver both direct radiated middle and treble, and bass frequencies enhanced by the ported construction. Further advantages are the compact dimensions and light weight when compared with conventional 4 X 12's.

Check out the new Vox V125 Stack and the V15 Combo. We know you'll like them.



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Telephone: 01-267 0702

Please send further details on VOX Amplifiers

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

SI 11 81

# Sound

## ADVICE

edited by

Gary Cooper

Only published letters will receive replies.

### Treble Trouble For Geezer Fan

I am a bass player, albeit an amateur, in a rock'n'roll band, and play a Columbus Jazz bass through a Carlsbro Stingray amp and a 15in reflex cab. I have one problem with this set-up, namely that I can never quite get the driving bass sound so reminiscent of my idols (Phil Lynott, Geddy Lee, Geezer Butler). Just when the sound has neared the point I want, it becomes too trebly.

I have come to the conclusion that I need a better guitar, but, as I'm still at college, I can't afford one, so I'm opting for what, in my opinion, is the next best alternative: new pickups.

What I'd like to know is, would it be possible to put a DiMarzio P-Bass pickup on to my Jazz bass in the rhythm position, and if so, could I get hold of a Jazz bass scratchplate cut out to take a P pickup, and what the cost would be.

I would also like to know if it is possible to get hold of the Aria Mb 1 pickup, and if it would be compatible with a Jazz bass treble pickup.

Thanks for a great magazine, good luck in the future, and roll on rock!

PS: I use Rotosound Swing Bass strings and play with a thin plectrum – should I change my strings and/or method?

From: David Smith, Newark, Notts, England.

Firstly, David, thank you for giving me so much information to work on. It's impossible to answer questions about something as tenuous as sound without all the information possible. And, as you'll soon see, everything you've told us will help with an answer.

Yes, you could fit a DiMarzio to your Columbus Jazz bass but you would, obviously, need to cut away some of the wood to accommodate it. The P-Bass model you mention is a split pickup and will not fit directly into the existing hole. Why not opt for a high-output Jazz bass pickup instead? It sounds like you're asking for a higher output, and a DiMarzio or similar Jazz-type pickup would give more output, without the need to carve your axe about.

However, if you really are in search of that sound you love, you may have to go further than that. The Carlsbro Stingray is one of the best solid-state bass amps that I know of and I would feel that this can be left alone. The speakers, however, may not be quite right. 15in reflex housings are fine for certain sounds (I've often used them myself with valve amps) but they do tend to reproduce exactly what is put into them. You might try borrowing someone else's 4x12 and see if that helps.

Maybe the most helpful idea of all,

though, could be to examine your plectrum gauge. The fact that you have bothered to mention it seems to imply that you may have a sub-conscious suspicion about it – and you could be right. If you want to play bass with a pick (and I can't see why anyone shouldn't, whatever the purists may say), then a heavy gauge would be a better choice. Personally I like Gibson heavy gauge for bass but anything similar would do. This would certainly give your playing a better attack which is probably missing from your sound. The strings are OK of course – you could hardly do better.

If you decide to go ahead and fit a P-Bass pickup anyway, you may find that it is a little too dirty for your tastes and will need running below capacity to cut out excess distortion – a Jazz-type may be better. However, scratchplate material is made by DiMarzio and you simply have to buy some, measure it up and cut it to fit – an easy job. Your local DiMarzio stockist (so I am told) is the Carlsbro Sound Centre at 39 Radford Road, Nottingham, Tel: 0602 26976. The manager is Rob Bradley.

Finally, as far as I know, Aria pickups are not available separately. Try the DiMarzio first, along with a heavy gauge pick and then, if that still doesn't work, have a bash at someone else's speaker cabinet. Let us know how you get on, won't you?

### Pipping Orange Snags

With reference to Gary Cooper's article on the collapse of Orange in *SI* of June 1980, I am pleased to say that I can now offer a full service to the poor owners of Orange gear. We have access to all spare parts and would also expect to do some modifications to certain equipment where spares may be in short supply, although this will take a couple of months to get to know the gear really well.

We are assured of all the help we can get from ex-Orange staff, and since we have been building studios and maintaining gear of many types for a few years now, we feel we could offer a good healthy service.

From: K. Brown, Cindy Electronix Ltd, 56 Westmoreland Drive, Sutton, Surrey, England, Tel (01) 661 9380.

I can't personally vouch for these people but you may want to give them a try. Thanks for letting us know about your service. Anyone else who can help?

### Strat Man Spots Frets

A fair while ago I went to see Rainbow in concert. When I finally came out of the trance induced by his brilliant playing, I noticed that Ritchie Blackmore seems to have taken a small amount of wood out from between the frets of his guitar. Now if I am correct, in theory the consequent raising of the frets due to the now slightly lower playing surface of the fingerboard would produce a better 'slide' when string bending and also perhaps improve sustain.

Could you please tell me if I am right, and if so how would I go about doing this to my own Fender Strat, or would it be wiser to get it done professionally? If so where, and how much would it cost? Thanks for a great mag, keep it up.

From: Roy Summers, Sandon, Essex, England.

You could see Blackmore's fretting from the auditorium? Must get my eyes tested! Well yes, you could have this done to your axe – if you insisted. The reason why Blackmore does this is simply to make it easier to bend the strings, there's just that much more leverage with this concave dip between the frets.

However, Ritchie rarely plays full chords, mostly three-noters and suchlike, and so he doesn't have the problem which many guitar players would – that you have to have a touch like a feather to play full chords due to the strings now hovering over a yawning chasm between the frets. It's great if you only really play lead and a few power chords but forget any really subtle stuff, unless you have his enormous depth of technique.

If you still want to go ahead don't whatever you do, try it yourself. I checked with ace repairman Peter Cook, who told me that he would tackle a job like this for about £25 plus VAT. Peter has done this job for a few people and reports that it is usually requested by players who don't like having low frets but do like bending. You can reach Peter at 17 Perimead Road, Perivale, Greenford, Middx, Tel: (01) 998 3101.

### First Strummer For Drummer

I am at heart a drummer but it has been my intention to play the guitar as well. I read your acoustic guitar test (*SI* August '80) with interest and being largely ignorant with regard to buying a first guitar I found it quite enlightening. There are, however, one or two questions in my mind concerning first time buys. I get the impression that it would make far more sense paying out

something in the region of £200 for a decent instrument straight away rather than on a 'cheap and nasty' one – is this the case? I don't mind laying down a hundred quid or so if it's money well spent and obviously even if I did purchase a cheaper guitar the time would come when I wanted a better one.

The test, as I understand it, catered much more for the fellow who has been playing for a few years and wishes to upgrade his instrument, but it is more difficult for the first time buyer who isn't quite sure what to look for when the guitar is laid before him, and who wishes to buy a good instrument from the start that will last for a longer time, saving him in the long run time, effort and money. Could you list possible guitars that may suit a first time buyer like myself? I realise such factors as personal taste are difficult to take account of but I am looking for general advice.

From: David Bishton, West Huntspill, Nr. Bridgewater, Somerset, England.

The danger with buying any first instrument is that you may shortly tire of it, and wish you hadn't bothered in the first place. For this reason it is very dangerous to buy an expensive acoustic guitar which will, should you get bored and give up with it, lose money on its re-sale value.

Although in the test we may have seemed very disparaging of laminated-topped guitars, they are perfect for beginners. Avoid like the plague all those anonymous nylon strung 'Spanish' (ie Japanese or Korean or Taiwanese) acoustics unless you really want to play classical guitar. If you do, then go to a proper specialist dealer, accompanied by a classical guitarist: don't get palmed off with one of these monstrosities unless you really want to waste your money.

My suggestion would be to try and find a decent secondhand steel-strung acoustic from Ibanez, Epiphone, Antoria, Aria or one of the other good Japanese makers. Get a friend who plays to check the action, intonation, straightness of the neck and the body for cracks. Pay about £50 and start learning. If the secondhand market doesn't appeal then many of these makers (and a fair few others) offer cheap, decent beginners' guitars at £100 or less (in some cases far less). The golden rule is to take a knowledgeable friend with you when you buy. A more expensive instrument could be a serious waste of cash if you got bored with it. A new guitar costing less than about £50 is unlikely to be good enough unless you are very lucky. The secondhand market will give you access to instruments in the £100 region at considerably less and, provided you are well advised, you should be OK.

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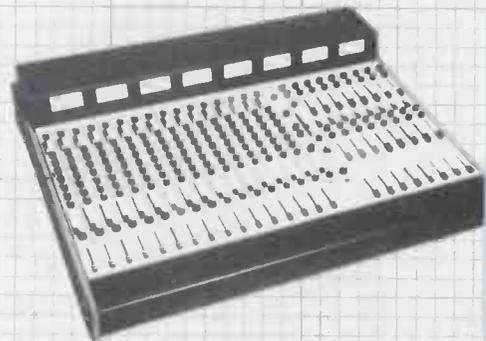
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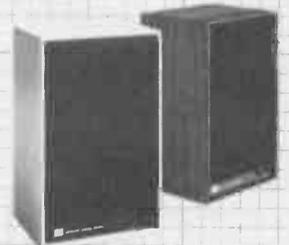
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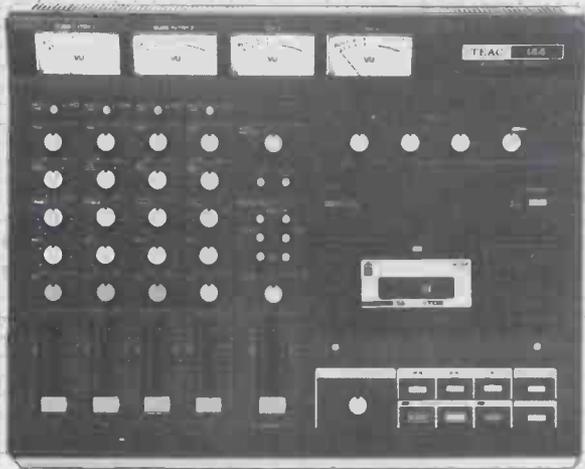
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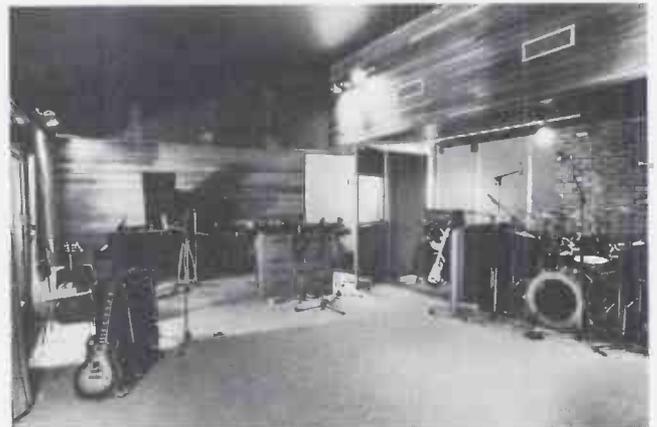
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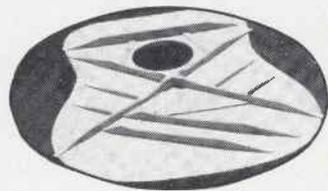
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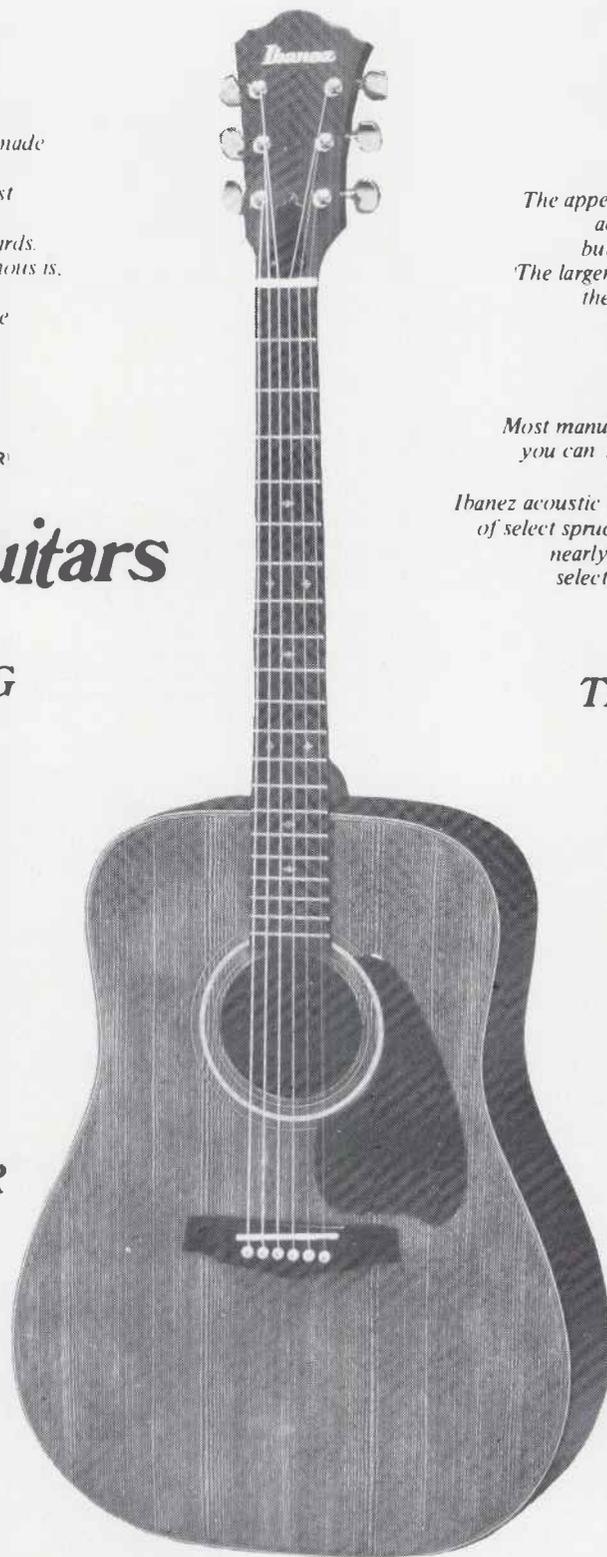
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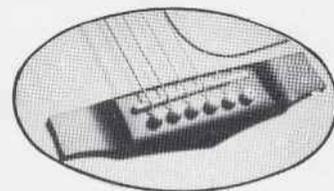
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**John Morrish listens to tales of drums and Y-fronts and decides XTC are excellent; modern; pop; and a group.**

Pic John Morrish

# XTC

It is a moment that every music journalist dreads. You are two minutes into an interview when the band's spokesman turns to you and says: 'I must ask you a question.' Gulp. What is it to be? The 'Haven't-you-got-any-better-questions-than-that?' humiliation? The 'What-right-have-you-got-to-come-round-asking-us-things-like-that?' harangue? Luckily, none of these. 'Do you know anybody,' asks Andy Partridge, 'who gets their winkle out through the Y of their Y-Fronts?'

XTC are a wonderful band. That is true of a lot of the music they make both live and on

record, and it also goes for them as a group of people. But let us not confuse the two. Last year was an exceptional year for new records, but despite all the competition there was no doubt in my mind that XTC's *Drums And Wires* was my favourite album of 1979. What made it all the more surprising was the fact that I had previously dismissed the Swindon popsters as part of a category labelled 'too clever by half. Perhaps you have made the same mistake. Although it seemed like a huge change, a great leap forward, closer observation reveals that *Drums And Wires*, though

warmer in tone and more explicit in its moods, is still identifiable as part of an exceptional series of records stretching right back to that *Annus Mirabilis*, 1977. *Drums And Wires* is the key that opens up the back catalogue.

It was always clear that XTC were never a punk rock band, despite coming to public attention under that umbrella. While others were concentrating on shaking up rock 'n' roll with pace and aggression, XTC were issuing neurotic little musical packages bristling with wit and sparkling with cold intelligence. How



strange their 1977 *3D EP* sounds alongside something like *Pretty Vacant* or *White Riot*. Andy Partridge's *Science Friction* might have a straightforward riff and a shoutalong chorus, but otherwise it is plain that the personalities involved are working in very different areas to most of their contemporaries. For a start, there is Andy's idiosyncratic vocal style, his uniquely inventive guitar-work, and Barry Andrews' flamboyant atonal organ solo. And the lyrical concerns are hardly typical of the year: 'Science friction burns my fingers/Electricity still lingers/Hey, put away that ray/How do you Martians say/I love you?'

Andy's view of those days is refreshingly honest, if a little controversial: 'We just had to surf on the scum, that's all there was to it, just a tidal wave of scum that we surfed on for a year or two. I don't feel any shame. A lot of the people that are going to be reading this interview will know that a couple of years back they were pinned and chained to the hilt and they were calling themselves The Electric Vomits . . . and nowadays they've probably all got moustaches and woolly hats and are calling themselves soul boys. Search your hearts, people out there! I was a long-haired twerp, I was stack-heeled shoes and glitter, I admit to anything: but I know there's a lot of farts out there who wouldn't.'

The lack of a convenient label for their music did not worry the band so much as it probably worried Virgin, their record company. With hindsight it's perhaps most accurate to call them the first 'new wave' band, of the same generation as the punks but more musically adventurous. It's a description that fits their first album *White Music* quite happily. This is a patchy collection with some excellent songs (*Statue Of Liberty*, *Radios In Motion*, *Into The Atom Age*) but with a harsh, crystal clear John Leckie production that does nothing to dispel the band's aura of cold cleverness. The album's most important track was re-recorded and issued as a single, and it became a sort of manifesto for the band, their own self-definition: *This Is Pop*. Carried along on suspiciously jazzy guitar and piano chords, the message is plain: 'What do you call that noise/That you put on?/This is pop.'

XTC claimed then, and claim now, to be a pop band. They use the word not as a label for a specific kind of music, but in the traditional sense of being popular. Popular, but on their own terms. And there's the rub. XTC's music is a little weird, and the farther back you go, the weirder it is. And while Andy Partridge may put up a convincing argument that 'Abba are no weirder than The Residents, the Kinks are no stranger than Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band', it is not an idea that is likely to cut much ice on the Woolworths record counter. By clinging to 'pop', XTC are really asking to be accepted as part of the broad spectrum of popular music: 'Bringing back pop would only be like smashing all the categories that so often suffocate groups. It's sort of the negation of all categories.'

So far XTC have missed out on the massive popularity that the pundits have predicted for them, although the success of last year's single (*Making Plans For Nigel*) and album brought them a lot nearer. No doubt the new album and singles will win new friends. But it is not difficult to see why the old XTC were a cult taste only. The second album, *Go 2*, has plenty of strong, accessible material, and their single from the period, *Are You Receiving Me?*, is a classic pop 45. But the band retained an

intimidating exterior. Barry Andrews' spiky piano and organ meanderings must take a lot of the responsibility for this, although he was capable of delicious subtleties: listen to his cunning medley of marital themes running through *Battery Brides*, for instance. But too often discipline was lacking: with two such idiosyncratic players as Messrs Partridge and Andrews in one band it was easy for the structure of the material to get lost, especially live. I can vividly remember turning off a BBC2 live XTC special, repulsed by the seemingly random, anti-melodic nature of some of the playing.

That is all in the past, however. The arrival of guitarist Dave Gregory just before *Drums And Wires* marked the beginning of a leaner, tighter, more direct XTC sound, built on classic 'two guitars, bass and drums' lines. Add to this Colin Moulding's newly developed ear for the commercial melody and you have the recipe for a single hit and world-wide album success. 'It was great, it opened the rest of the world up for us phenomenally, you know, Canada, the States, Germany, Australia, New Zealand. Places like that it really did open up, whereas the other albums didn't do a light . . . I think the world caught up more than we made a drastic change,' says Andy.

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... you'd need an actual artie truck  
full of Jewish violinists' chin  
hankies ...

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There would surely have been a second British hit single from the album, but Virgin failed to decide which track to issue, and ended up without issuing anything. 'Virgin have this kind of whole-earth policy where they ask the badge presser and the man who sweeps up, and Richard Branson, Simon Draper and Al Clark and all the other stooges all put their heads together . . . and they're all too nice people to say, "Look, you're all arseholes, my decision's the best." So they're just too nice for their own benefit really, when it comes to deciding, anyway. They're nice people in any case. I don't think they'll mind me saying that,' he adds conspiratorially.

*Black Sea* marks another step in the popification process, although that suggests a deliberate ploy rather than the natural tendency XTC's history represents. It is a very consistent album. Andy agrees, 'There's not the . . . some would call it diffuseness, or nebulosity, so it's a little more "staunch", it's a bit more solid.' Things are a little simpler than *Drums And Wires*, and the songs tend toward the pessimistic and the cynical. The album was written, rehearsed and recorded in the space of two months earlier this year, at the height of the new cold war, and the lyrics tend to reflect that. 'Living through another Cuba,' sings Andy. 'Generals and Majors always seem so unhappy 'less they got a war,' sings Colin. Thankfully, not all the songs are that gloomy. One of the best numbers is *Rocket From A Bottle*, an extravagant and infectiously happy love song, complete with a delightful soaring guitar break sounding like some hyper-active Steve Hillage.

Like *Drums And Wires*, *Black Sea* is another Steve Lillywhite/Hugh Padgham job, and reflects their preferences in its rich bottom-endy sound. Andy has no complaints: 'I just like really big drums, drums that really say "LISTEN TO ME I'M PLAYING". I can't stand

these drums that sort of say "Excuse me". I believe in everything working to optimum, well-synchronised, forceful, positive, so the character of the music is that sort of character.' At the same time, the sound of the album is still fairly spare. XTC are wary of doing anything they can't reproduce live, for instance using strings: 'It would be no good us taking around a couple of dozen old Jewish session violinists for one number, it's just not economically viable. Also think of the hankie laundry bill, for the hankies that go under their chins when they're playing,' muses Mr Partridge. 'It would be phenomenal, you'd need an actual artie truck full of Jewish violinists' chin hankies.' I tend to write for four instruments and a synth.'

Having seen one gig on XTC's recent European tour (see last month's *Sound Reviews*) I can report that as a live attraction they are in very good shape indeed. Dave's rhythm guitar and Terry's remarkable drumming hold things together properly while the other two do their stuff on guitar, bass, and vocals. Andy Partridge particularly is a flamboyant performer and his singing and playing tend to start where the records leave off. So much the better: but things are never allowed to get out of hand. At the moment the band are in America once again, and then they're coming back to Britain for a full tour in December. They are not to be missed.

One of the best things about XTC is that they are a real band in a way that few bands seem to be these days: they have that sense of sharing a past, and a home territory, and a local mythology. They still live in Swindon, for solidly practical reasons, or so they would have me believe: 'Piss-poor wages, that's what it is,' says Colin. But beneath the cynicism, the affection for the group ideal remains. Recalls Andy: 'I just wanted to be in a group like the Monkees or the Rolling Stones, a group that could turn up at any venue, plug their guitars into the wall with a three pin plug, sound just like the record, all live together in one house, and drive around in a car with your name on the side of it. But I rapidly discovered that it is not so.'

The Beatles are another model: 'I like very much the group feeling, I always have. I also like the romanticism of personality, you know. Everyone knew what Ringo was like, everyone knew how Ringo played, everyone knew what George was like, how he played, what sort of things he liked. It's that, four personalities who are inseparable as a group, I find that really exciting.'

I see that in the current batch of XTC reviews people are once again comparing them with The Beatles. Indeed, there is a certain superficial Beatlish-ness about some of their songs and some of their arrangements. But XTC are not The Beatles. They could not be: that was in another time and things have changed. They are, however, an excellent modern pop group, and in that neat formula, each element is of equal value: excellent; modern; pop; and a group. That will have to do for now.

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**Dave Gregory: 'Rhythm guitar and backing vocals, me.'**

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Mild-mannered Dave Gregory only joined XTC early in 1979 after the departure of the idiosyncratic keyboardist Barry Andrews, who went off to play in Iggy Pop's band and thence to work with Mr Frapp in The League of Gentlemen. Dave is rather different to the rest

of the band. He is what you would call nicely-spoken, lacking the pronounced Swindon burr of the rest of the band. He is polite and fair-minded. He is exceptionally modest.

Everybody has their own version of why and how Dave came to join the band. 'He's the only devil that would play Barry Andrews' old licks world-wide,' offers Andy. Colin suggests an even more practical reason: 'He's a sucker for piss-poor wages, that's what it is.' Andy again: 'I mean we need a real cornerstone, and seeing as he has the personality of a large piece of teak, he was the obvious choice to come in and prop the rest of us farts up. We're just three plimsolls looking for a shoebox,' he adds by way of further explanation.

Dave's view is typically self-effacing. 'I think the thing was that Barry and Andy were both sort of soloists, liked to think of themselves as soloists, and maybe it was like a sort of Brian Jones/Mick Jagger situation in the Rolling Stones,' he notes with a smile. In those days the band suffered from 'the two of them experimenting at the same time. And they used to get really carried away, the bottom used to fall out on occasions'. Now the stage is left clear for Andy's excursions, because Dave is perfectly happy as a supporting player: 'The thing is, while he's creating it does need a stabilising influence in the lower register. I think that's why I'm here, because you know they've known me for ages. I suppose if I played keyboards I'd be here, if I played saxophone I'd probably be here. They just wanted to keep the band together.'

Like the rest of the band Dave is a Swindonian, and as he says, he has known the band for many years. Andy recalls watching him playing guitar in 1968 at the famed Penhill youth club in a band called (wait for it) Pink Warmth. Just before joining XTC Dave was playing in a noisy R&B combo called Dean Gabber and his Gaberdines, and it is there that his musical roots lie. He is an exceptionally fluent rhythm and lead guitarist, but in a traditional rock style far removed from the idiosyncratic meanderings of Mr Partridge. The result is a nice contrast of styles, brought out especially live, where the band's resident engineer Steve Warren chooses to split the guitars in stereo, with Dave's warm-toned rhythm work to the left, and Andy's scratchy, wiry lines to the right. Sometimes Dave will take a solo, in *Real By Reel* for instance, but more often he sticks to rhythm: 'I get self-conscious playing solos, because my solos don't usually fit into the sound of the band, you know, the quirky, hurky, jerky sort of sound. There's only one Andy Partridge and I'm not his clone. I've got a lot of respect and admiration for his talent, but at the same time I can't ignore my roots. I've got to remain true to my own feelings, and so far it has been compatible.'

Unlike the rest of the band, Dave is enthusiastic about instruments and has an extensive collection of classic American guitars. 'I find that I get attached to a guitar and I feel it's part of me, that's the approach I've always had. I don't very much care for new guitars, I must admit, I do like an old guitar, one that's been played in and of course one that's been made from quality materials, which of course the new ones aren't, despite what the manufacturers will tell you.' Surprisingly the guitar he takes out on the road is a brand new Telecaster. He bought the heaviest one he could find, removed the Fender pickups and replaced them with some new ones made by Seymour



Pic Roger Phillips

Partridge sports silly mug, spectacles and scarf while Moulding attempts half-hearted guitar heroics.

Duncan: 'He's a fanatical American who is obsessed with these old vintage guitar pickups. He's been to Gibson's and Fender's and stolen pickups or had them given to him and he's dissected them and reproduced them faithfully as they were made in the Fifties. And they're very good too, the one I've got in there is what they call a *Broadcaster* model, it's the original 1949 Fender pickup. It's very, very bright and it's got a really lovely twang, a really beautiful twang especially with new strings on.'

Apart from the Telecaster, Dave is the proud owner of a '63 Stratocaster, a '64 Gibson SG which is his second guitar on the road, a '62 335, and a '66 Firebird acquired on the band's last American tour. As far as amplification goes, Dave's favoured amp used to be a 69-70 Fender Tremolux which he used with his Strat in the studio for *Drums And Wires* and his contributions to the most recent Gabriel album. Now he uses one of the new H/H Performer combos and he declares himself pleased with the sound and especially the versatility of the foot-switchable twin channel system. I should also mention that Dave contributes occasional keyboards both in the studio and on the road, where he uses a battered Minikorg 700S. The perfect sideman.

So delighted is he to be pursuing his hobby as a full-time job that Dave even enjoys touring, despite the inevitable privations of mini-bus travel: 'I'm a real tourist, actually,' he admits. But he doesn't take anything for granted: 'I just think, well, it's going to end tomorrow, just make the most of it now. I don't see that it's going to provide my pension but it's just great fun to be able to do it now, and the longer it goes on the happier I shall be.'

### Terry Chambers; 'I just do what I'm told'.

Perhaps it was something I said, or maybe I just caught him on an off-day. Either way I got very little out of Terry Chambers. Reputedly the most outgoing and talkative member of XTC (and past interviews bear that out) the drummer seemed quite happy to let others do the

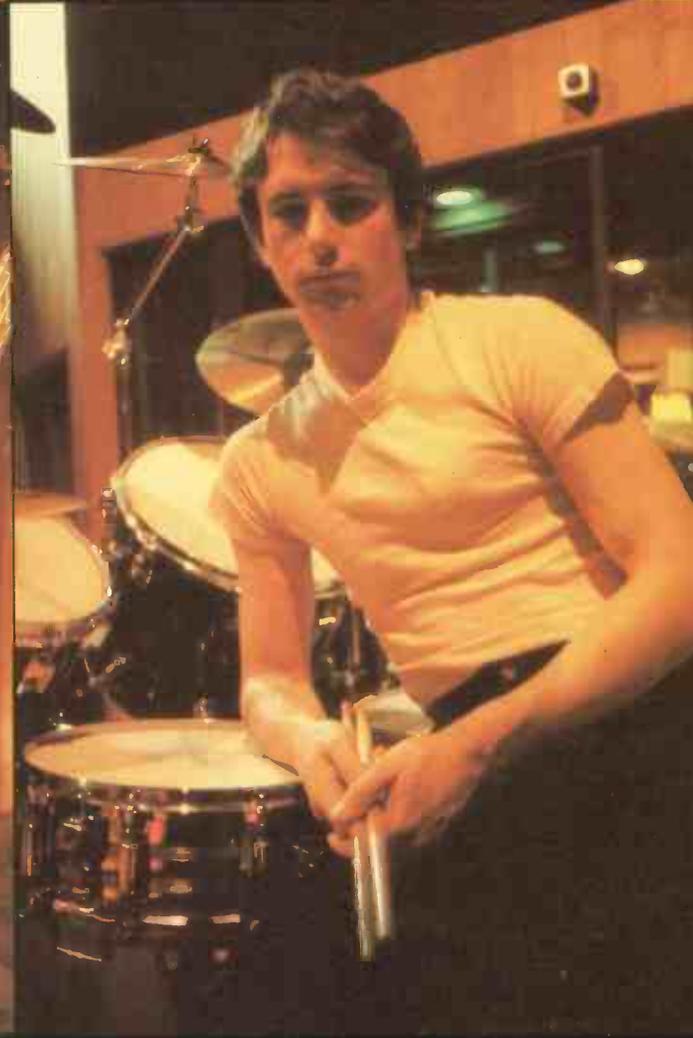
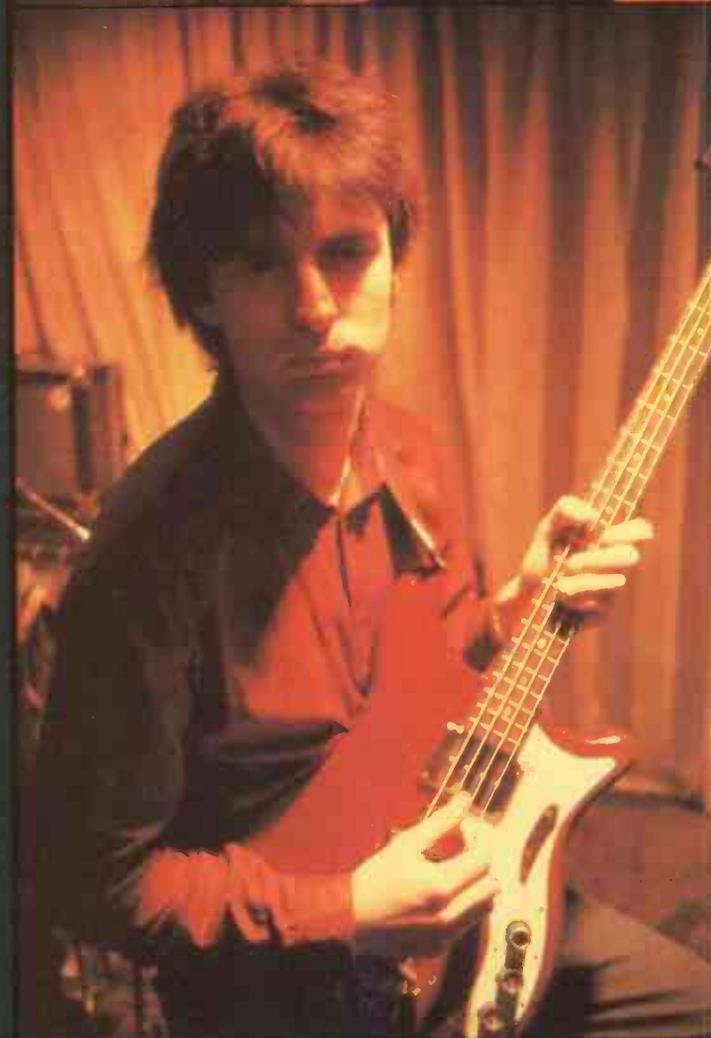
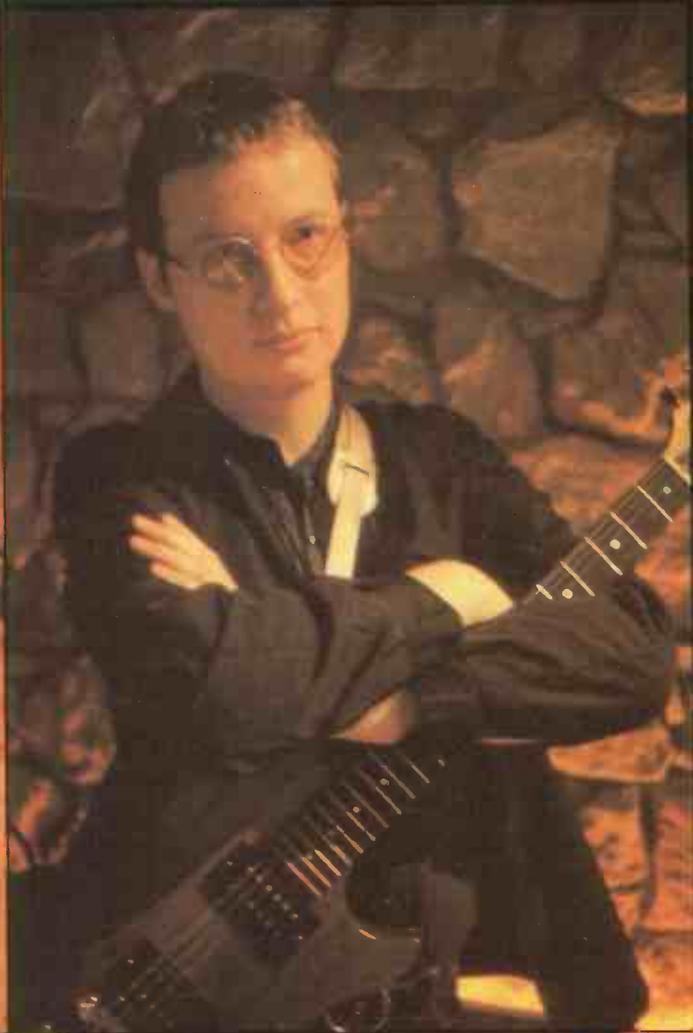
talking on the two occasions I met him. No doubt he had his reasons.

For those who are interested in such things I managed to ascertain that Terry uses a standard Tama kit with Paiste cymbals. On the new album and tour he is also using from time to time a Tama Spyder drum synth to give a bit of extra depth to the snare: *Love At First Sight* is the obvious example. Of this item he says with admirable candour, 'I was given it actually, other than that I don't think I would have gone into the world of electronic drumming at all.' Since the drum kit arrived by a similar route he is not inclined to criticise it, preferring to reserve judgement until the tour is over, although he did volunteer the information that 'it's pretty roadworthy stuff, so I shall definitely get it sounding reasonable'. Other than that I can only tell you that Terry does not listen to other drummers: 'I don't. None at all. Ever.'

### Partridge: 'Our time-keeping is pretty rank, all of us, mine as well'

Still, despite his reticence, Terry Chambers remains one of my favourite drummers. His playing is precise, crisp and exceptionally musical. His drum parts are highly arranged to fit the construction of each individual song and to mirror its mood. On record he delights in simple circular patterns or in coaxing out of snare and hi-hat new tinges of funk and reggae. Live, his is the pulsebeat underpinning the extended dub-style explorations in songs like *Real By Reel* or *Scissor Man*. XTC will never be one of those hyper-tight bands like The Jam, their individual personalities are too diverse for that, and they tend too much towards spontaneity. Andy Partridge admits, 'As a group our time-keeping as a whole is pretty rank, all of us, mine as well.' This affects the band's confidence more than it does the audience's enjoyment, so it is unfortunate, but not so damaging as it might seem. A quartz-controlled XTC would undoubtedly be lacking in other qualities: in perfection is no humanity.





All pictures: Tim Bishopp

Clockwise from top left: Dave Gregory, Andy Partridge, Terry Chambers and Colin Moulding.

**Colin Moulding: 'If people are looking for another Sting they're not going to find it in me.'**

Colin Moulding is very shy, and wary of talking to strangers. You have to speak to him for quite a while before he opens up at all, and then when he begins to communicate it is like being given a glimpse into some bottomless well. There is much more to Colin than meets the eye. The past seems to weigh heavily upon him. But that's enough amateur psycho-analysis.

Colin, Andy and Terry were in bands together for years before they became XTC. In those days Colin was just a bassist, and the bands would perform Mr Partridge's material. It was not until the fledgeling XTC signed with Virgin that Colin decided to write some songs and sing them himself. Even so, his first numbers show him still in the shadow of the loquacious guitarist. *Danceband*, on the 1977 *3D EP* is an exception, sounding like the later, poppier Moulding, but generally speaking Colin's early songs have swallowed whole the discordant, rhythmically jerky nature of Andy's music and the elliptical approach of his lyrics and reproduced them in exaggerated form: *Crosswires* is a good example. Similarly his vocal style. Not that this internal influence was necessarily a bad thing. It meant that the early XTC had a very strong identity of their own, right from their first record release.

Colin's identity as an individual writer and singer starts to become clearer on the second album *Go 2*, with songs like *The Rhythm*, and, finally, he triumphs on *Drums And Wires*, where he contributes four excellent songs including the band's insidious hit single *Making Plans For Nigel*. The curious thing about Moulding's progress is the way he has crossed over from writing the band's weirder and more obscure numbers to creating direct poppy songs seemingly tailor-made as singles. The turning point in this process was *Life Begins At The Hop*, the band's first single with the new line-up, a direct, traditional pop record with a pronounced Sixties feel.

Colin puts this down to a change in his own listening habits ('you'd probably find more Paul McCartney stuff in my collection now than you would three or four years ago') and to the final exorcism of the Partridge influence: 'Now I feel I can write without any influence at all. But I feel you need that sort of influence at the start.' Similarly Colin has developed a distinct vocal style of his own which he describes as 'a sort of Englebert Humperdinck sound'. Lyrically too Colin's work has matured: he has thrown off wilful obscurity in favour of direct, considered expression: 'Clock in my head/Clock on the wall/And the two of them/Don't agree at all/Friday is heaven,' he sings in *Day In Day Out*.

For material Colin looks back at the past, at childhood, at family pressures and at work: 'I suppose the last day-job I had was June '77. That was a sort of gardener's job, cutting the grass and all the rest of it. I hated it, I've always wanted to do this ever since I left school, and I feel privileged that I am doing it, when three parts of the world are doing jobs that they don't want to do, they're just doing it for a living. It's pretty sad.'

Today Colin's job is to sing and play bass guitar in a pop group. He does it very well and very conscientiously, with no attempt at self-display: 'You've got to do what the songs warrant really, you can't just do your own

thing,' he observes. 'It's all down to the song. If a song comes up where there's a good bit for me to do then I'll do it, but if it requires just very simple sort of one note basic playing then you've just got to do it, or else the song's going to suffer for your ego. That's the way it is with me, the song comes first.' Admirable sentiments.

As far as instruments and equipment go, Colin is somewhere between Dave's enthusiasm and Andy's absolute disregard. He has had a fair number of basses, ranging from a '62 Fender *Jazz* that he 'more or less gave away when I got it because I didn't like it, couldn't get on with it' to a Dynelectron (like a *Dan-Electro* but different) fretless which he found completely unplayable until the versatile Mr Partridge had painted him on some frets. Generally he has a prejudice towards short-scale instruments ('ladies models' he calls them) and away from the Fender sound towards the more lumpy Gibson sound. His current favourite fits both these criteria. 'I used to play Fender basses and I just thought they lacked a bit of character, it was the same old sound, the same old Jean-Jacques Burnel sort of sound. So I got fed up of that so I thought I'm going to go out and buy myself an antique. So I went out, walked up Charing Cross Road, saw that and thought that's the one, I don't care what it sounds like, I'm going to buy it, at least it'll be something different. It's an Epiphone *Newport*, made at Kalamazoo in the Gibson factory. I'd like to stick another pickup on it, a DiMarzio.' 'You ought to stick a lighter on it, not more pickups,' remarks Andy, adding that he would be glad to see the bass 'floating down the Thames with a mast on it'. The instrument is not popular with other members of the band, it seems.

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*I have a fear of playing like a guitar player . . . I'd rather sound like a piano or a saxophone or a set of drums.*

---

Nor, for that matter, with engineers. Adds Dave Gregory, 'Hugh Padgham didn't like his bass sound at all, he claimed he couldn't record it.' Colin protests, 'I think Hugh was more worried about his credibility.' Dave agrees, 'Yes, he was . . . he wanted to work again!' So who won, I ask. 'Well, it's not a case of winning,' says Colin. 'They were well pissed off with me using it, and I don't like people to be pissed off about things like that . . . but, yes, I won.'

On the other hand Colin is less than delighted with the amplification he is using at the moment. An H/H user since 'the days of HP' he has just invested in that company's new *Performer* bass combo. The first time I saw him was before the tour, and he told me it had gone wrong twice in the studio and he was worried about taking it on the road. The second time was two gigs into the band's European tour and Colin's worst fears were coming true. He told me he would not be too upset if the new amplifier were to fall out of the van on route to the next stop. So much for progress.

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**Andy Partridge: 'He's what my mum would call a handful.'**

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'He's a very clever guy,' says Dave Gregory. 'It's a bit annoying really, because he's so good at so many things. Like he could make a career

as a cartoonist with no trouble at all, or a comedy scriptwriter. He's just so creative, anything remotely artistic he can turn his hand to. A great sense of humour as well, as you've obviously gathered.'

Ah yes, it will be a long time before I forget Andy Partridge's sense of humour. He has a highly developed sense of the absurd, and verbal wit to match. A casual remark can send him off into a completely spontaneous but hilarious comic monologue: one I particularly remember was on the subject of revivalism, taken to an extreme with the idea of a Pictish revival. Without prompting, Andy assumes the role of the young neo-Pict being interviewed for some bland *Nationwide* exposé of this 'frightening youth cult'. He stays in character without a break for some 15 minutes, the whole ludicrous idea held together by a mad logic and the closest attention to detail: 'It's no good wearing any old woad, it's got to come from the right place' or 'We hate Vikings, it's their long greasy hair we can't stand. If we find one we kick his longship.' By the time he finally winds down, the English speaking members of the company have laughed so much they are exhausted.

Andy's rampant imagination and his seemingly limitless creative energy make him shattering company, but they are great assets both to him and to his band. He is a true original. His guitar playing, his vocal style and his songs are quite unique. Take his guitar work: brash but considered, discordant but melodic, aggressive but melodic. The only person he sounds remotely like is David Byrne of Talking Heads, and then the resemblance is not close. So what is the source of these dazzling, anarchic note-clusters? 'Everything I've ever listened to,' he says, and reels off a list of names like Rory Gallagher, Sonny Rollins, Jimi Hendrix, Charlie Parker, before becoming more specific: 'Jerry Garcia I learnt all my scales from because he plays so slow you can sit down and play along with the records, like 'Jerry Garcia's *Freak Out In A Day*'. Our old man taught me how to go jim-jip, jim-jip, C, G, D and F, that was it. I learnt how to play G minor from early Pink Floyd albums; picked up E minor from a Grateful Dead live album; picked up how to make notes squeal from the first two Taste albums; picked up the joy of playing in no key from the first two Patto albums, and also from some early albums on the Polydor and Sonet labels, jazzy albums; picked up the joy of not playing at all from Miles Davis and Sonny Rollins, especially from *East Broadway Rindown*, that's an early Sonny Rollins album; and the joy of turning up and letting rip from *Electric Ladyland*.'

This learning process was all over by 1973, he says, and his style formed. Certainly it is remarkably consistent throughout XTC's recordings. Now he never practises the instrument: 'I can go months without picking a guitar up, and I usually find that's better for me, when I come to the guitar I've had things stored up that I can release.' And those explosive single-note bursts are not built up from scales: 'I work from my hand, the shape that my hand wants to do, it needn't necessarily be in the right key, and it frequently isn't. I must admit that I do not know the keys of some of the songs we play, especially Colin's.' I can only conclude from that that his hand must be a very different shape to most people's, so strange are his solo breaks, and I tell him so. He owns up: 'I'm in fact a dolphin, I'm not a human being: it's just a



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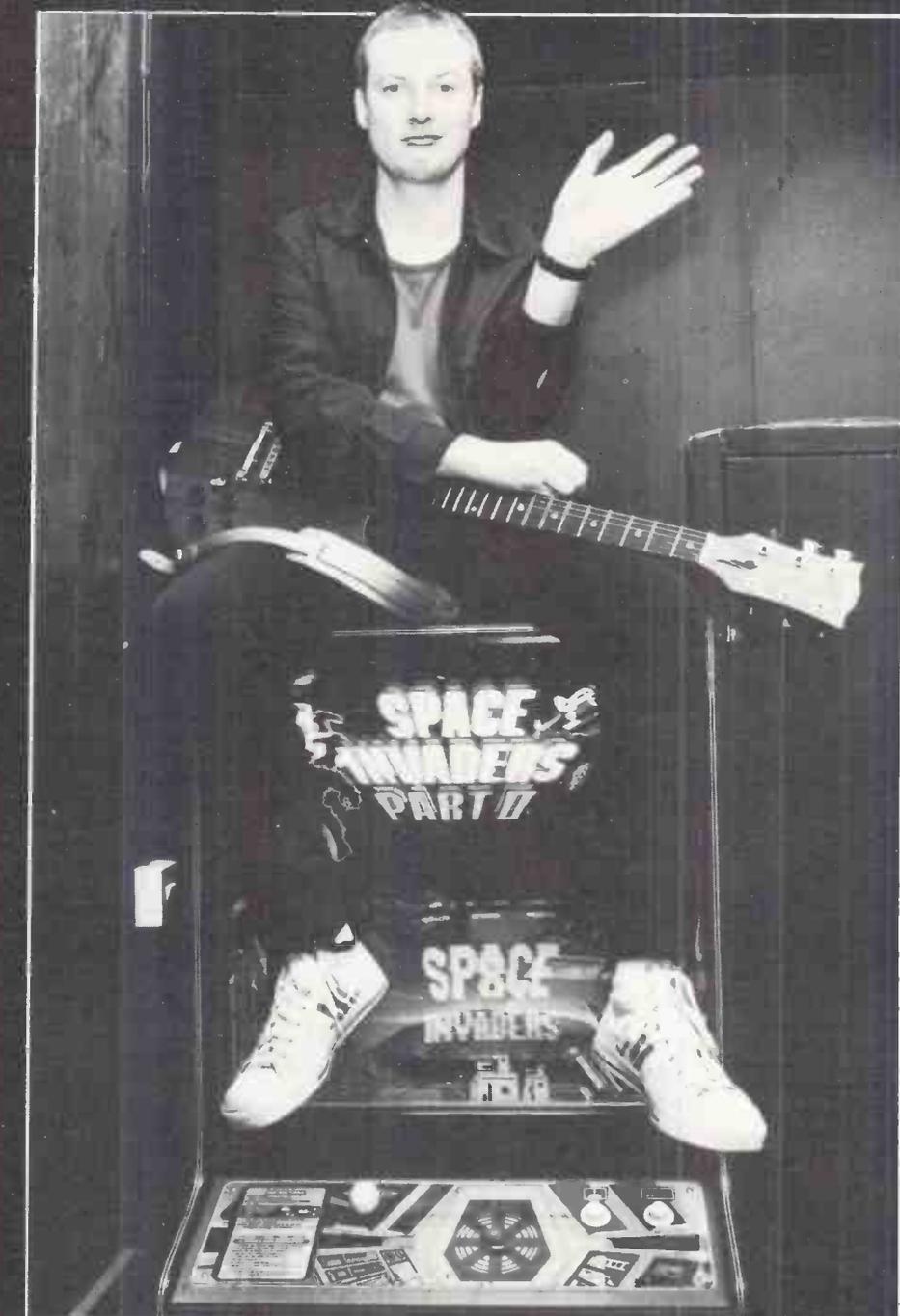
huge slippery grey flipper. It's great for doing slide work,' he adds helpfully. 'I think I've got a fear of playing like a guitar player, that's what it is. I'd rather sound like a piano or a saxophone or a set of drums.'

As far as equipment and instruments go, Mr Partridge is a man of simple tastes. On stage his playing is rather more unrestrained than in the studio. 'I have fun,' he says, 'so I have a Marshall amplifier which can usually handle all the having fun that's to be had. Then guitars... I like guitars that have got flattish fingerboards, short scale, with schizophrenic pickups, one deep one and one high one and a pickup selector that is up here on top.' Now he uses an Ibanez *Artist* and for spare a Gibson *The Paul* that he describes as a 'plank'. In the past he has had such gems as a *Suaylee Golden-Tone* and a leopard-skin *Futura*. One of his favourites was stolen: 'A £90 Guild with one pickup on it, it was really a very spunky guitar, you know. It had one purpose in life and that was to do it. It went ARGHHH!'

But if his guitar playing is unique, his vocal style is even more so. Somewhere between hiccupping and yodelling, it is a barbaric yawp that once heard is never forgotten. 'I was so afraid of not having a voice. You know, you put a record on and you can tell if it's Mick Jagger, you can tell if it's John Lennon, some of these people have such distinctive vocal sounds. So I thought, well, I can't sing, so I'll do what I enjoy most which is like sort of scat singing, hiccupping it's been called. It was what I felt good doing, and luckily it became synonymous with the XTC sound.'

Unfortunately, one of the big drawbacks of the style, at least on the early albums, is the fact that it renders Andy's lyrics virtually indecipherable. Which is a pity, because Mr Partridge has a lively verbal imagination, a gift he puts down to premature immersion in the works of one William Burroughs: 'The first books I actually read all the way through were *Soft Machine* and *The Naked Lunch*, so I came in on literature from rather the wrong end and obviously that had a profound effect on my thinking.' When he's writing, Andy invariably starts with lyrics, and usually with a title: 'It's a bit like a school essay where they say "OK children, half an hour, The Ruined Station, go", and you've got to write. That's the way that I can work, I think of a title and think "great title, that would make a nice title for a song", and that sort of knocks over a jar of atmosphere which hopefully will soak into the song.'

It is a common complaint about XTC, and Andy Partridge in particular, that 'there is less there than meets the eye', that they are not serious enough. It is not a view that I take. He has always had a sharp analytical eye for the particular situation, from *Into The Atom Age* on the first album to the cynical *Respectable Street* on the new one: 'As they speak of contraception/And immaculate receptions on their portable/Sony entertainment centres.' This is linked to a real instinct for the political nature of everyday life, and a unique sense of humour. Who else could write a song called *Jumping In Gomorrah*, with lines like these? 'Bring your horn of plenty/Gold caves if you've got 'em/We'll get stuck in history/All aboard for Sodom.' But Andy Partridge is progressing. The new album is more obviously serious in tone (check out *Travels In Nihilon* for example) and more straightforward in its strategies. He has started to adopt a narrative stance, 'Explaining almost like a story line, and



Picture: Roger Phillips

also using notes together that sound like singing rather than lots of different barking and verbal acrobatics. I'll probably end up as a musical Bob Dylan, lots of rambling thought but quite melodic. Or Terry Riley singing a dictionary.'

So boundless is Andy's energy that he always has a number of projects on the go outside the confines of XTC. An obvious example would be his experiments with dub, surfacing recently on his album *Take Away/The Lure Of Salvage* which consists of revised versions of various *Drums And Wires* tracks. 'I booked up two weeks in a cheap studio in London, and I know John Leckie's got a good head for obtaining sounds. If I say to him "make the drums sound like a ferret scratching around in a Bata shoe-box" then he will, or "make the guitar sound like it's being played at the bottom of a municipal swimming baths" he can do that. We just went in and pulled the songs to pieces for the sake of like a musical anatomy lesson.' Personally, it is not an experiment I find 100% convincing, but there is some fascinating stuff going on there, and of course the techniques learnt in the process are already reflecting back into XTC's material.

Andy has just done a session on a solo album by Ryuchi Sakamoto, keyboard player of the Yellow Magic Orchestra, something he found very stimulating. 'He never gave me the titles of the songs, he gave me some guide notes, things like "Schoenberg and Mahler" or "South-East Asia, areas of conflict in that part of the world", things like guide sentences... I was allowed a free hand, without fear of having three other people to think about.'

Like many creative people, Andy is a little careless about what happens to his work after he has completed it. Some of his best work only turns up on give-away free singles (*Chain Of Command*) or on B-sides (*Don't Lose Your Temper*). And there is a whole series of short experiments floating around, things like *The Somnambulist* allegedly put down in a spare couple of hours after a *TOTP* recording session, or his incredible contribution to Morgan Fisher's *Miniatures* album, a 20 second history of rock 'n' roll. That has to be heard to be believed.

Whatever becomes of XTC, whether they ever achieve massive popularity or not, I am sure we are going to hear a lot more from Andy Partridge. And I, for one, can hardly wait. ■

# Letters

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

## Mixing With The Beat

Yes, at the moment the mixture you have poured in the bread tin is right. I like the format as it is now, I think articles like *Shozygs*... (Sept) are of greater use to the musician than who's got the latest in new machines, ie the Gibson *Les Paul Artist* review in the same issue. It is better to review such instruments with the multi-review method that you have frequently used, eg the *Copy Guitar Test*. If you really want to help the musician, avoid wasting space on articles which merely act as a sounding board for bad products, equipment or for musicians to hype bands etc. In the past many magazines have fallen foul of this; it comes in two forms: 1. Advertisement pressure. You see, a single review can be 'rigged', ie a prototype instrument which will be better than the one in the shop, or a shop instrument given a short sharp 'clear up of specs' treatment. That is why your *Copy Guitar Test* back in 1978 ended the free-for-all pickings of the 'shark' manufacturers who for a long time have been ripping off the young player (guitarist). For many years people like me have seen the makers of so-called musical instruments shove poor, useless, rubbishy machines into the hands of duped novices in the art of filling the cup of music with silence, only to end up with the wine tasting turgid and rotten to the core of its fermentation. In other words, poor product plus novice musician equals total chaos.

2. The other type of pressure is that of the duped novice who is now in the hands of the 'shark' manufacturer, being tricked into thinking that all his/her heroes use the same gear, eg Gibson, MXR, Marshall etc. When the novice hears this, he is tricked into the idea that if he buys a product it will sound like the star's. It will not – not only that, he will not sound like the star, for musicians are different and so are instruments. You can try to make a *Lucky 7* into a Gibson but it will never look like one. What your *Copy Guitar Test* did was to show up this market of sham and put the tricksters into view, to give the novice some idea in finding a good guitar. Now I want you to teach him something else in the art of making the god-given form known as music – teach him with articles like John Morrish's, Sue Steward's, Adam Sweeting's, Ralph Denyer's (who does useful articles on top artists which are not like those in *MM*, *MO* and other tabloid trash) and Dave Crombie's as well as the rest of your trusty bunch of 'fellow conspirators in the camp of the Save The Journalist charity. In other words, better, more informative

magazines and more articles on self help – eg your DIY studio article and Sue Steward's prospectus on home-made instruments which will have by now given me at least a couple more devices to use. Articles like these will help many a musician at this dark point in the history of music – also, let's have more articles by Robert Fripp. From: Martin Naylor, Wembley, Middlesex, England.

## Automatronics

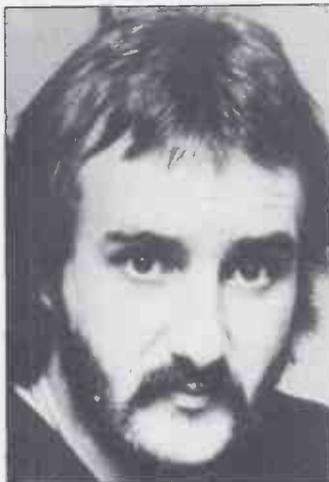
It is good that Fripp is optimistic about the ability of music to change human nature (or 'realise a qualitative shift' as he puts it). Our (Deleted Records) policy is based on this belief, and would be futile otherwise: free music, no-profit products.

Robert's comments about bootleggers (*SI* June '80) carrying out their business for the sake of personal gain (a criticism of greed presumably) is undermined by his desire to receive royalties. Ho hum. I don't agree with his convoluted statement about the 'quality of attention required...' – if I understand it correctly, it seems to me that the recording of a live performance permits the repeated application of this attention after the original event. When the band I am in finally get our gear sorted out (and it's a slow process when you're averse to making money) there will be a facility for members of the audience to plug their cassette recorders into an extension multi-out on the mixing desk. This (a) liberates us from the necessity/temptation of releasing live material, (b) gives the audience a souvenir and (c) makes the bootlegger (who's trying to sell the inferior recording of the same gig) look like the brainless bread-head he really is.

We make no claim that anyone will actually want to record us... our music is as it is and we're not moulding it to suit an audience or anyone else. Enclosed is a copy of our debut EP which lasts 16 minutes and costs 50p. I think we belong to the bottom end of the Garage Level in Fripp's categorisation (*SI* Jan '80) if anyone's interested. The record is mostly mono cos the chap that mixed it, Kif Kif, had just read *The Abandonment Of Centre as a Concept In Stereo Mixing* (*SI* Feb '80). It's 33rpm but sounds great at the wrong speed. Perhaps I should shut up.

From: Protag/Martin Neish, The Instant Automatons, Deleted Records, Scunthorpe, South Humberside, England.

Tony Bacon replies: You'll be pleased to hear that Mr Fripp is back in our pages from next month.



Akkerperson peers into letters page, attempting to hypnotise *SI* writers into long-overdue feature.

## Akkerman? Buchman?

Have you lot never heard of Jan Akkerman or Roy Buchanan eh? Right then! Let's get thy finger out and get a couple of good features OK? Please, please...

From: Philip Ramsey, Lawnmarket, Edinburgh, Scotland.

## Tull Wonders How Much?

Sorry to see the demise of *BI*, but I hope that the new combination with *SI* can continue all the helpful, informative articles that we've had in the past.

A nice effort on the first edition, fairly cross-section musically, and an excellent article on the Revox A77, a machine that most people in the biz know and appreciate. Musicians that is, as the industry is now becoming top-heavy with people whose knowledge of music could be written on the back of a postage stamp, and still leave room for their name and address. The record industry is now showing the results of such policies, and they deserve it.

I digress, however, so back to your first issue. More pages, but no mention of the price increase! Did you presume that would be taken for granted or maybe not noticed? I hope we won't hit the magical 75p slot too soon. I think the equipment price guide in *Beat* could be dropped to a quarterly feature as I think most musicians, pro, semi-pro etc, usually check the music paper columns for discount and secondhand prices and it would give you ten more pages. How about a readers' hints and tips page as well as the *Sound Advice* page, as very often

we (the readers) have a lot of information to pass on to others. Maybe a few less Ed comments or wisecracks with the articles (Who me! type of thing), and whatever you do, don't let the book turn into *Studio Sound* mark two. Thanks for bearing with me.

From: Ernie Tull (a *BI* reader since 1964), Sutton Courtenay, Nr Abingdon, Oxfordshire, England.

Tony Bacon replies: Oh god yes, another mistake! For ex-Beat readers, yes the price did go up. For ex-*SI* readers, no, the price remained the same. So we sort of... didn't notice, yes. Sorry! We will be going up to 70p next month, I'm afraid, but then we are the best musicians' monthly in the cosmos...

## Slanguages an' at

Sitting here, out in the wilderness of the Swedish countryside, where studio life must be considered as quite Madame Tussaudish as compared to London and its area and where music life is quite vivid, if not as hectic as I presume it is in your surroundings, both *Sound International*, *Studio Sound* and *Hi-Fi News*, and earlier, *The Tape Recorder*, have done a good job of keeping us informed on what happens in the world. Undoubtedly, the most important parts of the studio and modern music world lies within the UK and the USA. That is one fact that to some extent can give you the right to call your magazine *Sound 'International'* instead of *British & US Sound Journal*, which is a more adequate name.

For, linguistically speaking, your magazine is not in the right sense 'international'. Not only does the content concern British and US matters 99%, you use your own mother tongue. We, international readers, have to struggle and learn your language for many years to be able to follow the text in your magazine. But that would be OK if not – to quote professor Higgins, and bend his statement – 'in *SI* it even disappears'. What I mean is, that many of your writers use a very nice 'slanguage' which is sometimes quite impossible to understand! My English knowledge is insufficient for this; it might be convenient to mention that I have a degree in teaching of the English language, which probably is unusual among *SI* readers? I am not opposed to the use of slanguage, as long as I understand it...

Of course, the only really internationally undiscriminating way to get out of this dilemma would be to write



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# Letters

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

the whole magazine in the International Language, Esperanto, but, of course, in the meantime, the months where your readers study the language (and you, too, of course!) would perhaps be sort of a down-period, business-wise, for you as well as your advertisers! But I only wanted to make you aware of the fact, that neither your language nor your magazine is international on an equal basis.

As the content seems to be guided by your advertisers, and as the most interesting items to sell seem to be the new electronic toys more than ordinary musical instruments, it is, of course, quite natural that most of your magazine contains reviews of these instruments and talks with people using them. How relieving, was it not, to read your article on how to get your saxophone repaired some time ago! For, reading magazines like *SI*, one usually gets the impression, that Ronnie Scott's of England have been deported somewhere! You have a big responsibility, editing such a magazine, that the new *SI/BI* is intended to be: 'the only musician's monthly that's worth reading'; don't forget all those musicians, who still play natural musical instruments! Don't forget the unelectronic musical styles, either! When did I read an article on jazz or jazz musicians in *SI*? This is just to take an example of one kind of music, which is quite near the kind you mainly 'work' with in *SI* up to now. But so (almost) totally forgotten! What I mean is, that your task is also educational, not only to follow the current interest of your present readers but also, little by little, widen their compass to less obvious areas.

That's for the musical side of your contents. Now to the technical side! Your promises for a widened section for 'the little man' do I find most honourable! You certainly know how much need there is for those of us who do not have enormous funds to take care of needs and ideas on upgrading of the technical quality as well as, consequently, the resultant sound quality, but have to rely on a sometimes very limited budget.

How about having a readers' tips department, where we, the readers, give each other hints on how we (by accidental idea, collision or by sheer thinking) solved that problem? Some radio amateurs' magazines run such columns and, in the long run, long after that new equipment reviewed on the same page is obsolete, just this hint can be valuable to a reader who saves his copies! If you can only get us to cooperate, I tell you this column would be a winner!

From: Kaj Stridell, Surahammar, Sweden.

**Tony Bacon replies:** *I'm afraid that if we issued a directive to all our wonderfully witty and knowledgeable writers tomorrow requesting that they cut out all the slang, as you so beautifully describe it, the magazine would read like a cardboard cut-out. Perhaps other European readers, with degrees or without, could let us know if they also have trouble wading through the soup desperate for a lump of meat? I'd also like to point out to Kaj that our content is not 'guided by our advertisers', but is guided by the needs of our readers. Articles on non-electronic music (to use a very vague term) have included Shozygs . . . (September), video section (October), a sax review (page 62), etc. etc. The readers' tips department idea has been suggested by many readers - any further ideas, you lot?*

## Crombie thrills man

I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on producing what I consider to be the finest and most consistently interesting and informative music magazine I have come across. I am not grovelling here because, to be honest, I cannot find fault with your superlative mag. But may I make a suggestion: Many, if not most of your readers are probably quite experienced musicians who have got between them a wide range of musical instruments, some cheap, some costly, some mass-produced, some custom-made. They may have used their equipment on the road, in the studio, in their front rooms - and I'm sure they could easily 'review' their own equipment pointing out the good and bad points, things they'd like to see changed, or just pass on a few tips to others about their own instruments. After all, they've possibly had them a few years, not a few days or weeks like maybe your resident reviewers have with demo models supplied. If you were to open up a guest reviewer's spot in your mag I'm sure it would be of great benefit to everyone. I know when I was buying my Mellotron I would rather have read a review by someone who'd had one for a few years rather than a review of a brand new one 'handpicked' especially for that review.

I hope you think my suggestion a valid one. No doubt you have visions of semi-illiterate rambblings pouring in, but I'm sure there would be worthwhile things. Don't get me wrong, I wouldn't like to see your resident, highly-paid privileged reviewers done out of a job - indeed I thrill to the words of Dave Crombie!

From: Steve Howell, Rhiwbina, Cardiff, Wales.

## Fan, Pa

Although I receive other magazines, *Sound International* is our favourite, not only for the studio scene, but also for all new instruments and group information. Your magazine is placed for display in the main office of Temple University Campus so that any professional people of any background in any musical field can have access to it - and my honest opinion is that they like it very much. By the way, my oldest son bought a new drum set after we read an interesting article in one of your issues. Wishing you and the publishers the best on your new *Sound International* incorporating *Beat Instrumental*.

From: Alfredo Rodriguez D, Head of Technical Services, Audiovisual Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA 19122, US.

## A Pox On Your DIYs

I have been regularly buying your publication *Sound International* for the last few months, but on reading the August issue I was disappointed to find that your regular article *The DIY Studio* was missing; nor was there any mention as to why. This article is at the moment my main interest in *SI*, and while I am pleased with its apparent progress in incorporating itself with *Beat Instrumental*, I am hoping that this is not to the detriment of such articles for the more technically minded.

I realise the problems involved in changing the format of an established magazine, but I think you should have taken the trouble to inform readers like myself why the article was not included, especially since there was no hint of its impending absence in the previous issue. I sincerely hope that this series will be continued.

Otherwise, congratulations for the best magazine of its type around.

From: Issur Maitland, Smithincott, Nr Cullompton, Devon, England.

**Tony Bacon replies:** *Sorry, you're absolutely right, but by now you will have seen that the DIY Studio article was continued in the September issue. The feature will now continue (with luck) at two-monthly intervals, simply because we now have so much stuff to cram in every month. Part four would have appeared in this issue, but for a severe bout of chicken pox for poor old Morrish . . .*

I received the first copy of the new *Sound International* and would like to make a plea for those more interested in the studio side. In the past while I have noticed the magazine has tended to move towards the instrumental, PA areas. This move now seems to be complete. There is only one article of interest, by that I mean direct interest, to studio owners.

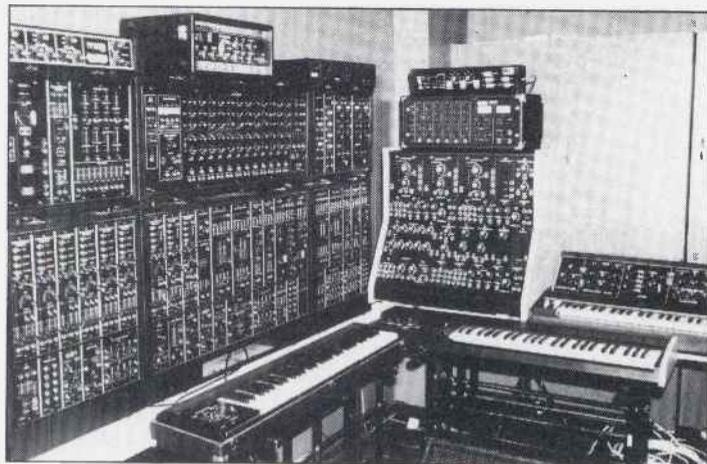
I think you have a very important part to play in supplying articles of less technical complexity than *Studio Sound* but you seem to be moving away from this. I hope this letter will perhaps correct that bias.

From: Robin Morton, Temple Records, Midlothian, Scotland.

**T**ellex: Hello, this is -IC- and Klaus Schulze Productions. In your May '80 edition on page 42, the photo 'Moog Modular System' shows not Moog but Roland, Korg and Polyfusion, beside very little of Moog.

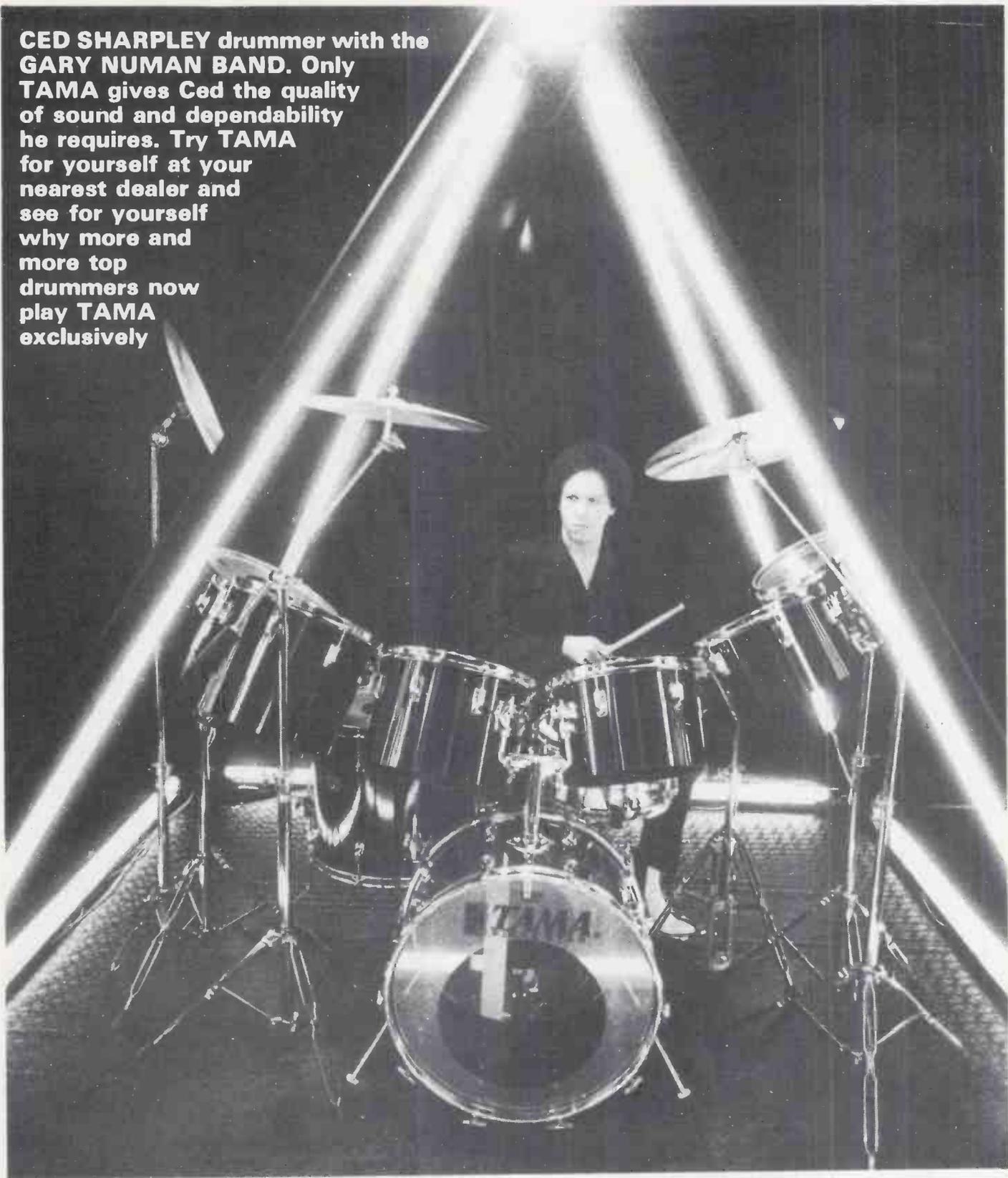
From: K D Mueller, -IC- and Klaus Schulze Productions, West Germany.

**Tony Bacon replies:** *You're absolutely right. The mistake occurred because the day we made that page up there was this really funny smell in the office . . .*



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# Wonderlove

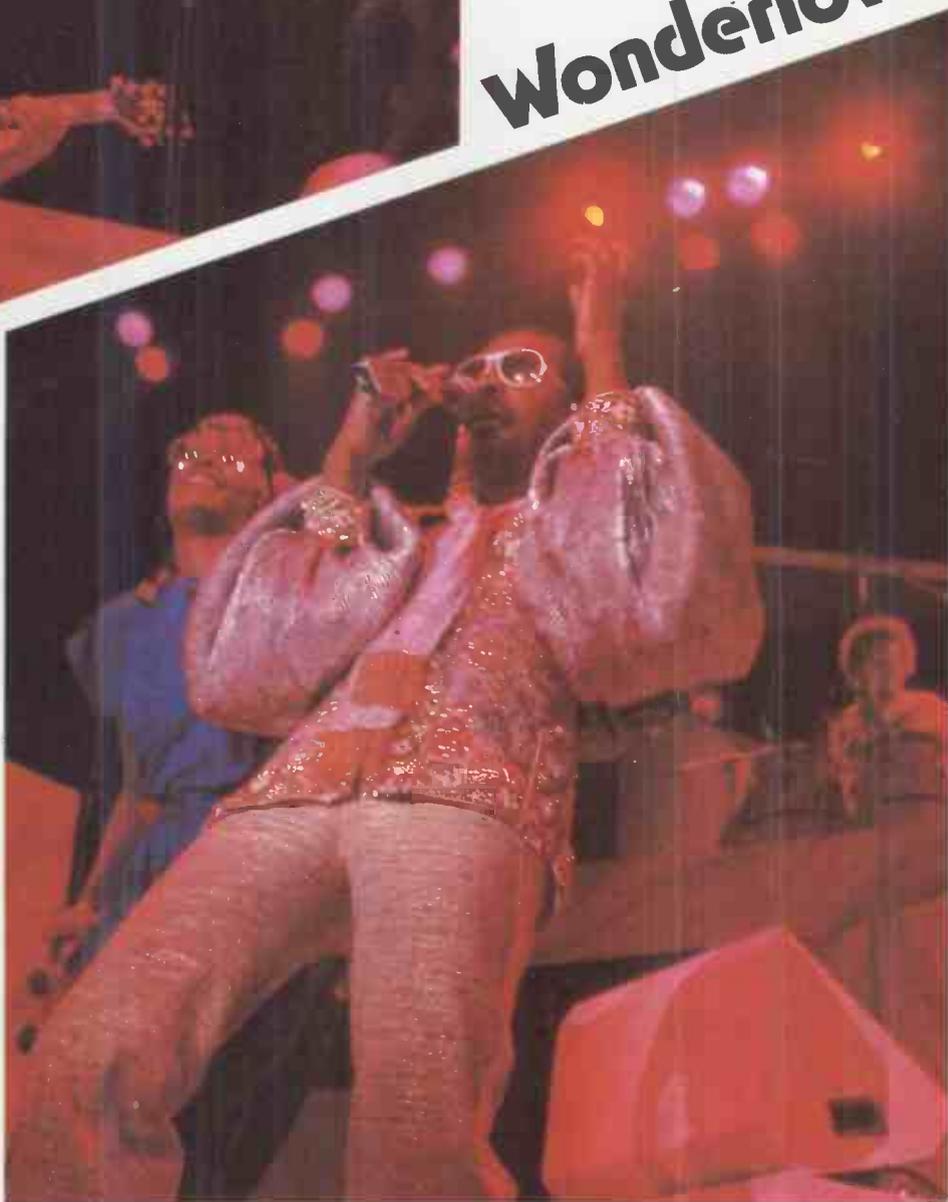
## Wonderlove

**Ralph Denyer finds out what it's like playing behind Stevie Wonder**

When Stevie Wonder appeared at Wembley Stadium for a week of concerts at the beginning of September under the banner *The Hotter Than July Picnic* he brought with him a very different group of musicians than were with him on his last visit to the UK in January 1974. On that previous occasion he had been backed by a small group and had played very loose and improvised music a great deal of the time. In fact one night he stopped off on his way to his keyboards to play a 20-minute drum solo. Then he played about a 60/40% combination of material from his albums and improvised music. He would start playing a keyboard and calling out chord sequences to his group who at times looked perplexed but did a remarkable job of staying with him.

This time around, Wonder had put together a totally different show. Last year he toured America. The first half of those shows was devoted to material from his *Secret Life Of Plants* double album and the second half was a journey through his back catalogue. Wonderlove were augmented by a 50-piece orchestra. The concerts were precision timed and the arrangements skilfully crafted. So when it came to putting his current show on the road, he had a nucleus of musicians who knew his arrangements and had played quite a few of the original parts on the records.

Several of the musicians have worked with Wonder on record and on tour for five or so years and therefore are adept at



Top left: Wonderlove guitarist Ben Bridges. Above: Mr Wonder and singer Shirley Brewer.

following him when he does choose to improvise.

That 'nucleus' consists of Hank Redd (sax), Nathan Watts (bass), Larry Gittens (trumpet), Ben Bridges (guitar) and Shirley Brewer (vocals). The rest of the regular Wonderlove line-up consists of Dennis Davis (drums), Earl DeRouen (percussion), Isaiah Sanders (keyboards), Rick Zunigar (guitar) and Wendy Barnes, Melody McCulley and Alexandra Brown Evans (vocals). The regular line-up is augmented currently by Nolan Smith (trumpet) and Bob Malach (sax).

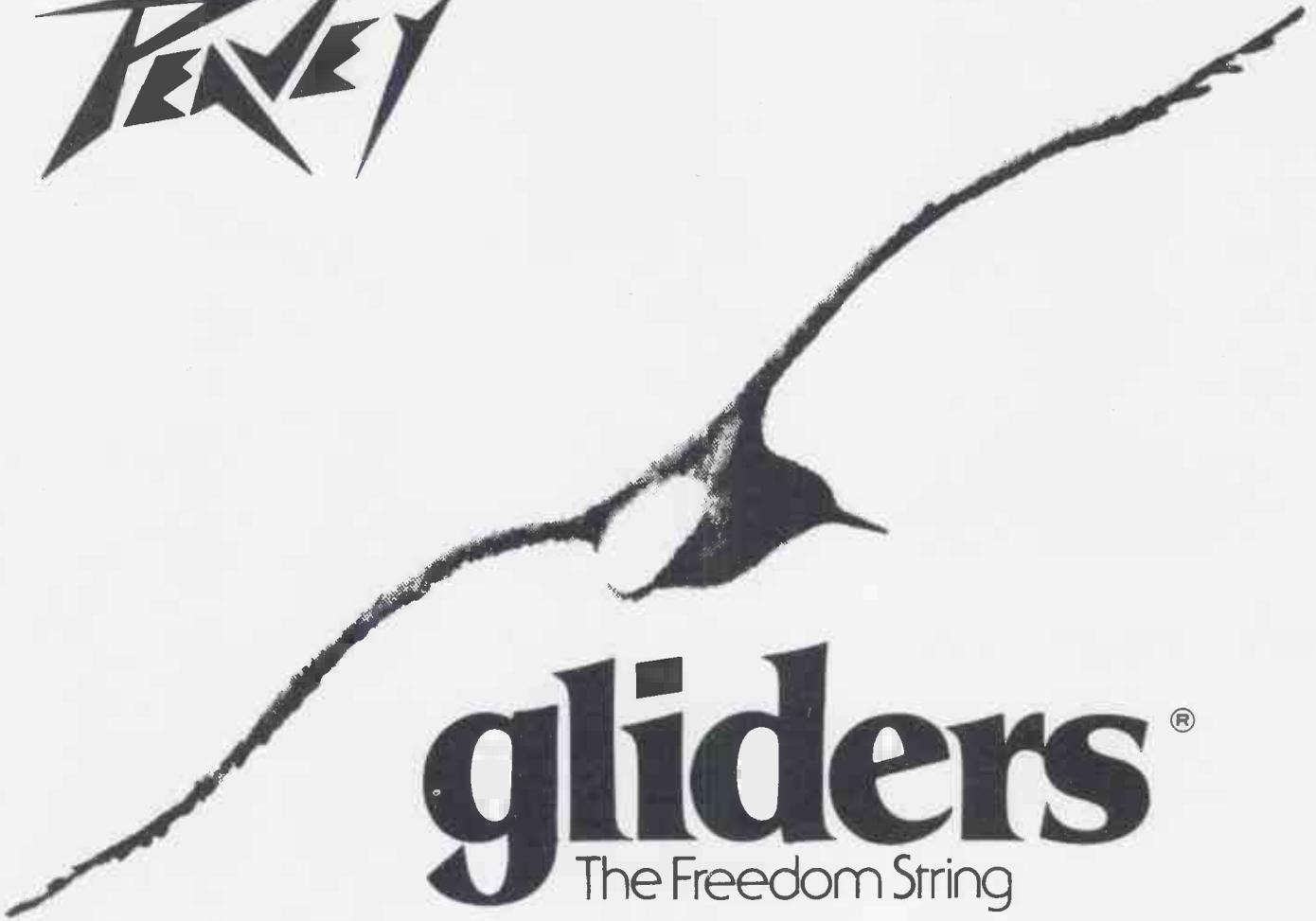
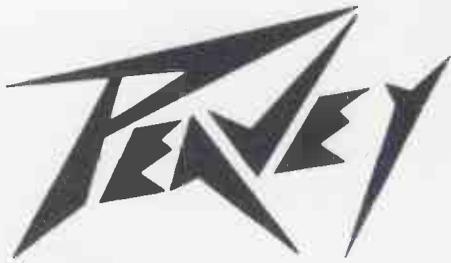
During the week of the Wembley concerts I interviewed Shirley Brewer, Ben Bridges and Larry Gittens.

While driving up to Wembley for one of the shows, Dennis Davis had told me he

was around the 50th drummer auditioned by Wonder for the current line up of the band. Only Wonder could succeed in getting Bowie's drummer to audition. But the gig has given Dennis a dilemma. Does he stick with Wonderlove working within the Wonder/Jermaine Jackson/Wonderlove circle or stay with Bowie? He has after all played on all of the thin white duke's recent albums and tours. Still, Wonder finishes touring soon and Bowie is not due out on the road until the new year so maybe he can do both.

Holding down the drummer's gig in Wonderlove is no small achievement. Though I would have to say that I regard Steve Gadd as the best drummer playing today, Wonder is my own personal





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favourite by far. He has rarely used other drummers on his last six or so albums because he usually tracks drums on himself after keyboards. His drumming has such personal feel which is integral to his music that I would never have expected his stage drummers to match his own studio performance. Yet the first night that I saw the show at Wembley, Dennis was fitting in like the gig was made with him in mind. When I spoke to Larry Gittens it became clear to me that the long standing members of Wonderlove were both relieved and overjoyed to have Dennis in the band.

'Oh boy, did we go through drummers before we got Dennis. Oh man, we went through drummers all right. When Dennis joined we had been through – as near as I can remember – easily 25 drummers or better. Dennis is a real player. He keeps the fire going. He's a wild guy, he keeps us going. And vocalists, we've had a lot of vocalists as well,' explains trumpeter Gittens.

He went on to explain how new band members are recruited. 'Steve screens everybody. I've been with him for about four years now and the people that have come into the group during that time, he screens them in a way. He wants to see what their vibe is, what kind of attitude they have, their character and of course their musical ability. And that's about it.'

Larry was with Kool And The Gang when his chance to try out for Wonderlove came along. He and guitar player Ben Bridges had played in a jazz-based band together around 1975/6. Ben was already in Wonderlove when the trumpet seat became vacant.

Larry continued, 'I'd done albums with Kool And The Gang and I was hanging in there pretty nice and all, but Stevie's always been my idol. So Ben called me up and told me Steve was auditioning for trumpet players for Wonderlove. Ben told me to come on out to them, see what I could do and that he was sure I could handle the job. I flew right out there and you know, had my chops up and I was ready and Steve hired me.'

And so it was that Larry found himself playing trumpet, hi-hat and singing the first line of *You Are The Sunshine Of My Life* (which was sung by Jim Gilstrap on the record) for a living.

Larry and sax player Hank Redd are the band's regular horn section which is augmented by two additional players when they are touring. Currently, those extra players are Nolan Smith on trumpet and Bob Malach on sax.

There is a basic programme for Wonder's standard two to two-and-a-half hour concerts though he is quite likely to draw from his recorded repertoire of around 300 songs or the 100 or so 'new' songs that are floating around somewhere between Wonder's mind and recording tape. There again, he may do something like ask Shirley Brewer to sing Burt



Trumpet player Larry Gittens on Wonderlove: 'It's a groove, I love it. I'm as happy as I can be.'

Bacharach's *A House Is Not A Home* – as he did on the Saturday at Wembley.

Still at least – I suggested to Larry – no horn player alive today would have any excuse for not knowing the riffs to tunes like *Sir Duke*. 'He has to be pretty much on it because there are some tricky fingerings. Most horn players – I don't know if you know it or not – most jazz guys on sax or trumpet are used to playing in easy keys like B $\flat$ , G, F, D and things like that. Most of Steve's tunes are written in pretty difficult keys like B and F $\sharp$  and the fingerings are pretty difficult on trumpet and sax. The lines he sings you to teach you a tune may sound pretty easy but if you're not fluent in all your keys you can get tricked up. Some of his parts are

pretty difficult to hear, you've got to be right on it.

'On stage his cues are different from any other artist I know, you've got to be right into the spirit of it with him because sometimes he can throw it up any way at all, and he'll want you to be on it. Most of the time we're pretty much on top of it. It's a groove, I love it. I'm just as happy as I can be, he's a beautiful guy.'

By the time I was watching the Wembley show for the third time, by half way through I was waiting for Stevie's version of the song he wrote with Lee Garrett, *Let's Get Serious*. They wrote the song for Jermaine Jackson for the album which Wonder produced. The song was a



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huge hit for Jackson. Take a look at the credits on the *Let's Get Serious* album and you see that musicians listed on the title track and two other songs are Jackson, Wonder and the various members of Wonderlove.

'Yeah, just about everyone in Wonderlove played on *Let's Get Serious*. In fact one of the strange things is that Hank and I were on the horn tracks and there were a few other guys but they didn't get credits on the sleeve. But Hank and I are on that. But most of Wonderlove did that album, that's pretty much the Wonderlove sound. Pretty hot, huh?'

Pretty hot indeed. And if I had to choose one song that I had heard performed live in recent years which encapsulated most of what I consider to be good in music, it would be Wonder and the band doing *Let's Get Serious*. It is a killer.

Wonder's early success was as a live performer rather than on record. Twenty years ago at the age of 10 or 11 he caused a sensation as an opener on the Tamla Motown Reviews for big acts such as Marvin Gaye. In fact on more than one occasion, Gaye had difficulty in following 'Little' Stevie Wonder. So it was that when Wonder was 12 and had been in the business for too long without a hit (three singles failed to chart substantially) the astute Berry Gordy took the unprecedented step of recording Stevie live in concert. In 1963 the move was unheard of for a new artist but the net result was the album *Recorded Live, Twelve Year Old Genius* and a USA hit single *Fingertips Pt II*. These days Stevie is seen onstage sat behind a bank of keyboards most of the time. But to open the second set at the Wembley concerts he goes through a whole routine – offered with his tongue at least partly in his cheek – recreating the days of 1963 when he was a child performer. Wonderlove strike up the vamp intro to *Fingertips* while sax player Hank Redd does a good job of simulating the introduction on the record finishing, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome Little Stevie W..O..N..D..E.....R!' Stevie is then led on stage to do a standup version of the song featuring his harmonica playing dressed in a red stage dinner jacket.

'Isn't that a gas?' said Larry when I mentioned the routine. 'The first show I did with Steve when he did that, Oh man, he just took me out because I didn't know he was going to come out wearing all that stuff. I remember seeing him as a little boy with the glasses and all, but when he came out on stage I couldn't believe it. And that special effect on his voice, isn't that great? The whole thing really gets us groovin' for the second set.'

The effect Larry mentioned was to put Stevie's voice through a *Harmonizer* which takes the pitch back up to the heights of pre-puberty. By the way, although Wonder's voice is a marvellous musical instrument spanning several oc-

taves, the high voice was achieved by the use of the *Harmonizer* and was not 'his voice capturing each minute falsetto inflection of the original' which the reviewer in *Black Echoes* told the world he could 'only gape at'.

In 1975 Ben Bridges was doing a driving job in Philadelphia and playing guitar in a 'wedding band' at the weekends. He wasn't exactly getting his rocks off at the time and says with a chuckle that he 'started praying a lot'. Within his circle of friends and musicians was a girl who knew Mike Sembello who played lead with Stevie Wonder. Sembello told the mutual lady friend that Wonder was looking for another guitar player to cover acoustic and rhythm work. The lady was quite sharp and before putting up Ben's name for the gig she asked a drummer who knew him if he could hold down the job before she passed Ben's phone number to Sembello.

Ben came home one day to find a note on his door saying that he could try out for Wonder's band if he wanted. 'When I saw the note I was elated, I couldn't believe it. A couple of days passed and then I met Mike Sembello who came down to Philadelphia for the weekend. We got together for a couple of days and we hit it off right from the beginning. So we went to New York and I auditioned. You can't imagine what it is like to audition for Stevie Wonder when you are not familiar with a lot of famous people. I didn't say

**'Stevie as a boss? You couldn't ask for a better job as far as him being a boss, from a musician's point of view anyway. He pays us a steady salary which most musicians never get in a life!'**

too much, we just played a lot going through every style of music. So I got the job. I just couldn't believe it!

'On the night of the audition I recorded on *Saturn (Songs In The Key Of Life)*, you know that one? It was a small part but I was scared to death doing it!'

The only time when Ben had been on a session prior to *Saturn* was many moons before when he'd played sax as part of a horn section. Ben's grandfather was a guitarist and that was from whom he caught the bug. He picked up sax and clarinet while still at school. Ben first got an electric guitar in 1973 but his study and technique has always been around acoustic and folk styles. In fact he hadn't bent a string up until the two days before the Wonderlove audition, at which point he started to try the technique.

On stage with Wonderlove Ben uses a Fender *Stratocaster*, a Gibson *Les Paul* and a Takamine acoustic with a built in pickup or transducer.

'Takamine is a Japanese make and the guitar is a copy of a Martin *Dreadnought* but on stage it sounds excellent. I've

played them through amps and everything and they sound exactly like acoustic guitars with a mic in front and that's why I really like them. Whereas Ovation – not to put anyone down – I found did not give me that acoustic guitar sound. Ovations sound like Ovations.'

The Takamine sounds like an acoustic guitar going through a mic. It also has a volume and tone control right on the side of the guitar so that you can shut it when you're using another guitar on stage so that takes care of a lot of problems: 'I'm still looking for the perfect acoustic guitar for stage use if anyone out there has anything to show me.'

Does he find the other main problem with acoustic guitar on stage is EQ? 'Yeah, really, especially when the whole group gets going because for some reason the EQ seems to change when you have a lot of different instruments coming through the monitors. With the system we're using now there aren't any (individual) amplifiers and right away that causes a lot of problems for a guitar player. We go direct through the board and the whole general power (PA) system. Then we each have our own individual monitors on stage and we can request any mix of the other instruments behind our own. So it creates problems because as we go through the night with each song we get more and more excited and on the loud tunes everything in the mix tends to go berserk because everyone is putting different effects on their instruments. There is no perfect system but the one on this tour has been excellent so far. I have a pedal board which I built myself and one of my favourite pedals is my Ross flanger.'

And how about Stevie as a boss? 'Stevie as a boss? You couldn't ask for a better job as far as him being a boss, from a musician's point of view anyway. He pays us a steady salary which most musicians never get in their life! And it's kinda like going back to the baroque era then you would have a sponsor who has given you what you need to live and in turn you can create better and better music. In other words, he hires people who love music and love to develop and gives them a great environment to do that in. That's why I think it is just great working for Steve.'

'As a friend sometimes he can be a little crazy. I know him as a friend and as an employer but we're all a little crazy. But as an employer I'd say he is great, for a guitar player in this day and age to have the materials and the time to work is just great.'

Now that Wonderlove is developing into an entity of its own is it a problem that the group is in a way a shop window for talent? Are they fated always to have problems because of changing personnel when individual members receive tempting outside offers?

'I don't know, I can only speak for



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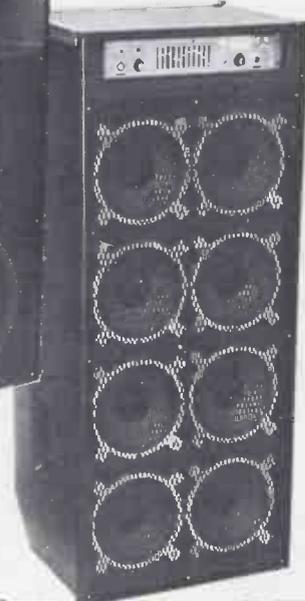


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myself. I've seen a lot of things in this industry that drive people absolutely bananas.

'You see a lot of really messed up people because this is a tough business if you're on your own. If you are out there and you are trying to keep up to a bunch of contractual agreements you've made, there's a lot of pressure and problems. A lot of things constantly going wrong and you really have to have your head together in order to maintain some kind of sanity. Otherwise you give way to all the peer group pressures and all the other pressures and typical problems. Alcoholism, drugs, things like that. So to me what I'm doing now is the best way for me to go. To organise our group as a corporation and work within that structure. If I want to produce people, there's no problem with that. Because our eventual aim is for Wonderlove itself to be an entire recording corporation complete with promotion departments and everything'.

Of the four women singers in Wonderlove, Shirley Brewer has been in the group the longest. She sang on *Tuesday Heartbreak* and *Lookin' For Another Pure Love* on the *Talking Book* album and has contributed to all his albums since. Though she doesn't actually appear to be in charge of the vocal quartet, she does seem to be the one who knows what to do and when to do it. Off stage she is quietly spoken and unassuming.

'Well, I was 19. I had gotten out of high school in Philadelphia a couple of years before. At high school I was the singer with the jazz band and through my music teacher I knew Ira Tucker (at the time a Wonder aide). He called me one Sunday and told me that Steve was looking for another girl singer. I didn't go up to New York until about three days later because I was with a group and didn't want to leave them just like that. I went up there - he

was recording *Superstition* at the time - and after a little while I auditioned and got the job. So I've been working with Steve ever since.

'I've learned a lot since I've been with Wonderlove. I've learned that there's something really spiritual about working with Steve. I don't know too many other entertainers personally to compare him with but Steve's concern for his people is one of the things that has kept me here. And the music... musically he inspires me and I'm sure that goes for everyone else in the band. He's totally into his gig and totally into music. And I've always been a devoted person, just tryin' to hang in there, you know? We've been to so many places and done so many gigs, it's been really beautiful. I've had my ups and downs. I have a daughter who is 10 so I'm tryin' to work it out with her. I just try to hang in there and do what I can.'

When Shirley is not working with Wonderlove she either spends her time with her daughter or writes songs. She appears to have little or no interest in the show biz lifestyle. Obviously when you work with Wonder your musical reputation goes up several points and since joining the band Shirley has also recorded with Jerry Butler, Bette Midler, the late Minnie Riperton, Syreeta Wright and a whole lot of Motown artists.

She is excited about the fact that Wonderlove have contributed more than before on Stevie's new *Hotter Than July* album. As a complete band they play on around half the album and then individual members of the group play on other tracks. Also the Wonderlove album produced by Stevie is nearing completion.

'Steve has always recorded Wonderlove, we'd always be doing new tunes in the studio for a project. However because of the time thing, because Steve is a perfectionist, he moves very slowly. Some people get in (the group) and get

out again very quickly. It's sorta like a stepping stone for young vocalists and musicians who come in and stay for a year to get that name and experience, 'cos it does do something to you when you work with a musical group that is totally into music. That is good in one way and bad in another. We get a chance to see where people are really coming from.'

It is obviously quite natural for the women who work in Wonderlove to start thinking: Now here I am singing with Stevie Wonder so I must have some talent. Maybe I should try it on my own solo like Syreeta did? Whatever the reasons, Shirley has to deal with working with a lot of different singers at different times in Wonderlove.

And does a certain amount of responsibility fall on her shoulders? 'It does, sure it does because I've been in the band for a long time and I know what to do if - for instance - there is a change in the schedule. Also when people are new they need moral support which I try to give. I've worked with some beautiful people and I've worked with some types... ' Shirley stopped herself from lapsing into bitchery, seeming to decide that discretion is the better part of being interviewed. She continued, 'I just try to hang in there, you know?'

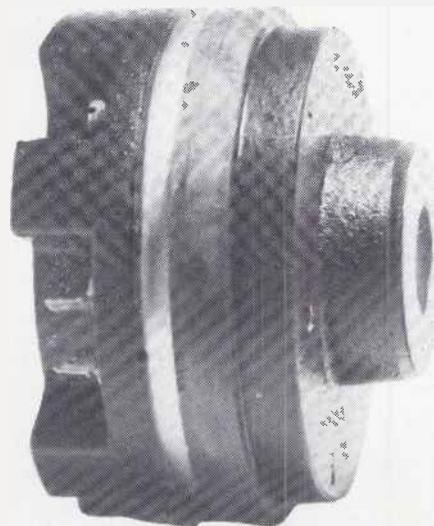
'I'm really looking forward to finishing our album and getting *out there* on our own as a group because I really have been leaning on Steve. I kinda feel that because I've never really had the nerve - even when we've had time off - to kinda kick it out on my own. I've always fallen into more of a domestic thing being as I have a daughter and I'm a family person anyway.

'I've always wanted - and always prayed to heaven to be - part of Wonderlove. Whenever that album does kick off, to be there and be part of the nucleus with Nathan, Hank, Ben and Larry, we've really been supportive to each other.' ■

# ADAM HALL

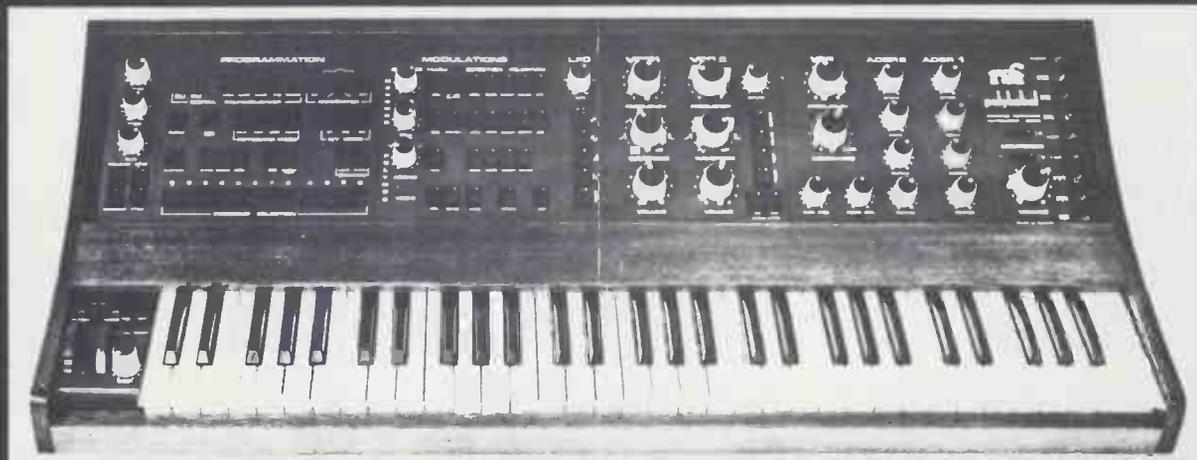
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If you're a musician, you are probably more interested in playing the piano than dismantling it. Nevertheless, an understanding of its workings and maintenance can lead to a greater appreciation of its many qualities. Getting your piano into good working order should be a priority – and I hope this article can help you to help yourself to help your piano.

Tuning/maintenance is a highly skilled job requiring many years' training. At the last count (early Seventies) there were about 1200 tuners in the UK, and that number is probably only a couple of hundred higher today. These 1400 tuners have to look after an estimated two million pianos, and a quick calculation gives the untidy sum of one tuner per 1428.5714 instruments. In practice, a quarter of these pianos are never tuned at all, and of the remaining 1.5 million, half are probably tuned only once a year.

When it comes to the piano's repair the simple maxim is: 'If you don't understand – don't touch.' Call a tuner – you may well be saving yourself money in the long run and gaining the experience of watching and talking to a professional at work. You're very unlikely to be ripped off by tuners, as they're all a pretty good bunch of people (interesting too!) who charge very reasonable rates for their work.

I am not in any way attempting to undermine the good work they do, but merely outlining simple repairs and maintenance that are well within the capability of everyone.

## REMOVAL OF THE ACTION (Grand, Upright)

Before you can start cleaning and maintenance you must know the correct procedure for dismantling the casework and

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removing the action – even if you're only doing it for curiosity's sake.

### Upright Casework

- (1) Remove top and bottom front panels – the catches for the top panel are under the lid at either end, and those for the bottom panel are on the underside of the keyboard.
- (2) Remove the keyboard lid – this should just lift from its mountings, but it may have catches.
- (3) Remove the strip of wood which runs across the middle of the keys. (This is called the nameboard but, curiously, the piano's name often appears on the keyboard lid.) Again, it should lift free, but it may be screwed in at both ends.

### Grand Casework

- (1) Remove music desk – this normally slides out over the keyboard.
- (2) Remove keyboard lid – unlikely to have catches, so it can be lifted out when the lid is half open.
- (3) Remove the blocks that are at either end of the keyboard. These may be

secured by a recessed finger-bolt located underneath the keyboard.

- (4) Remove the strip of wood (the 'key slip') that runs in front of the keys. This may have catches but probably just lifts out.

### Upright Action

The action will have a catch at either end plus one or more bolts along the top action rail. Undo the nuts and catches and tilt the action forward off the bolts; then lift it gently, using only the main action rails as handholds. Following removal, place it upright on a flat table *not* on its side or end.

### Grand Action

Now that the casework has been removed you can slowly slide the action out. One serious word of warning: *never* depress the keys while you are doing this. The hammers may snag on the pinblock and snap off. I recommend the help of another person to lift it on to a table, as it's heavy and awkward to carry.

### Removing the Keys (G,U)

Make sure that the keys are removed and replaced in exactly the same order. They aren't interchangeable although they may look it. Each key should be numbered, but if not, number them yourself with a piece of chalk.

## CLEANING THE PIANO (G,U)

Apart from the obvious benefit of a thorough dusting, cleaning also serves two other purposes. Firstly, it will improve the tone. Any dust (especially on the



soundboard of a Grand) will tend to deaden the tone. Any dust or grit in the strings' windings will also lead to a degradation of the overall sound. Secondly, any action parts, later discovered to be missing, may well be found while cleaning – they don't walk off on their own!

### Cleaning the Casework

Wipe the casework with a damp cloth or with a light solution of water and vinegar. Try to avoid using aerosol spray polish, as – if it contains alcohol – it may damage the lacquer finish. Never sand down the casework as you could get a shock when all the veneer comes off!

### Cleaning Inside

If you can use one of those flexible hose vacuums, so much the better. You might try attaching a piece of garden hose for getting into awkward corners. Other useful cleaning aids include a toothbrush, a soft bristle sweeping brush and a dusting cloth. On an Upright, start at the top and work down, using the toothbrush for the tuning, bridge, and hitch pin areas. If you wish, rub a piece of wire wool gently over the strings to clean them. On a Grand, start at the back and work towards the keyboard end.

### Cleaning the Keys

A damp cloth will do for all types of key surfaces. Don't try to bleach them white – it doesn't work.

### Cleaning the Action

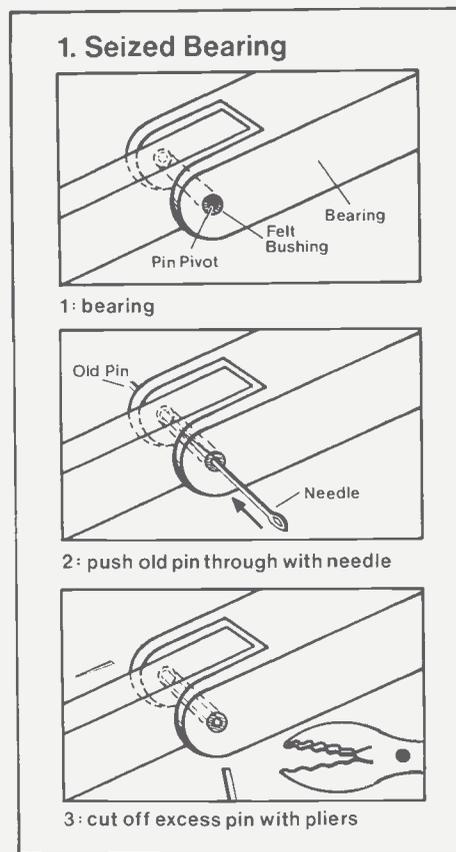
Don't use the vacuum cleaner for this part – you might suck all the damper felts off! The Upright action should be firmly supported while cleaning, as it's unstable when freestanding. Don't unscrew bits to clean them. Dust the action as it is as best you can.

### REPAIRS (G, U)

Before the action can be regulated pro-

perly the piano must be in the best condition possible. To this end I have outlined below some of the more common faults and their repair which should be carried out before regulation (see later) begins.

### Seized Bearing (G, U)



Most of the bearings in the piano consist of small metal pins (pivots) working inside a lining of felt (bushing). They provide a noise-free and smooth operation. In the case of a seized bearing two things may be at fault. The bushing may be old and mouldy (likely in damp climates), or the wood surrounding the bearing may have swollen through dampness and locked the joint. The first step is to remove the

affected joint from the action and give it a couple of gentle flexes. If it still feels tight try replacing the pin with one of a smaller diameter. This can be accomplished by pushing the old pin through, using an ordinary sewing needle, leaving the needle in and chopping its ends off with side-cutter pliers. If the wood is damp, place the removed bearing in a warm dry place overnight. In the event of loose and wobbly bearings the answer is to replace the pin with one slightly larger using the same technique.

### Broken String (G, U)

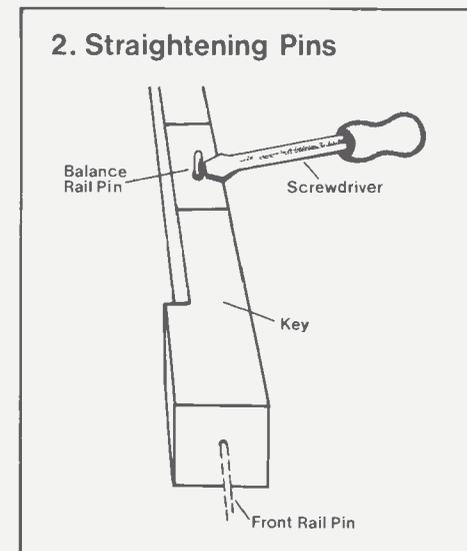
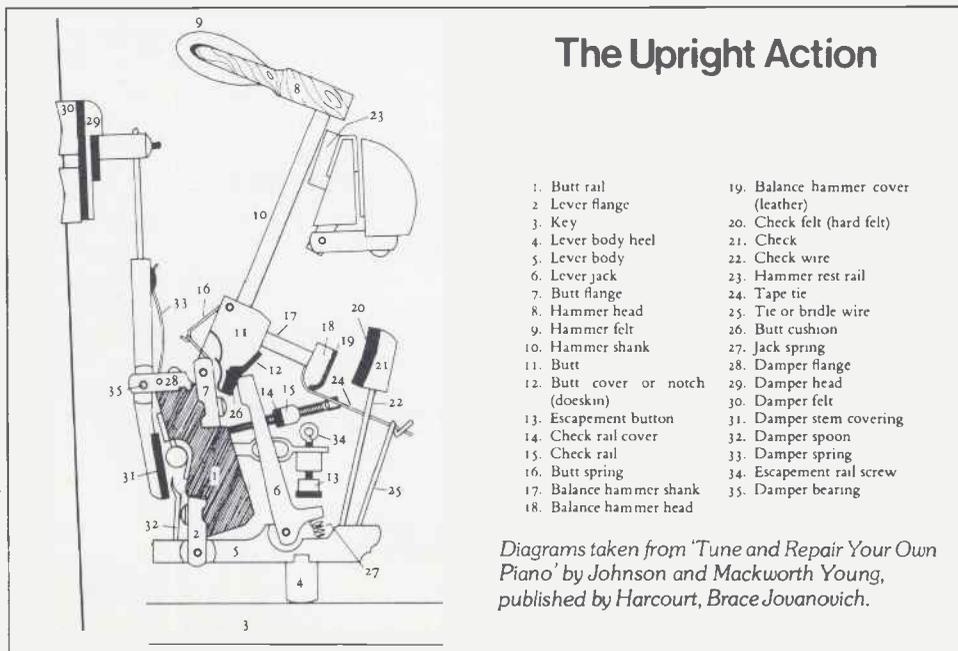
The most obvious remedy to this problem is replacement, which should be done as soon as possible. Playing with missing strings can do harm to both the action and hammers. Replacement of wound strings is not always desirable because, although a new string may sound better, it may be out of place on an old piano, having a much brighter tone than the others. Therefore, salvaging the old string is sometimes the better option. Strings breaking frequently are a sign of age and neglect. Complete restringing, being so expensive, is rarely worthwhile. Replacing a string can be done by yourself, if you have the correct tools and wire, but it is better to get the tuner to do it.

### Jack Spring Missing or Broken (U)

The loss of a jack spring shouldn't cause too much concern as it can easily be replaced – as a stop-gap measure – with one from either the top or bottom notes which are used relatively infrequently.

### Jammed Key (G, U) (see diag 2)

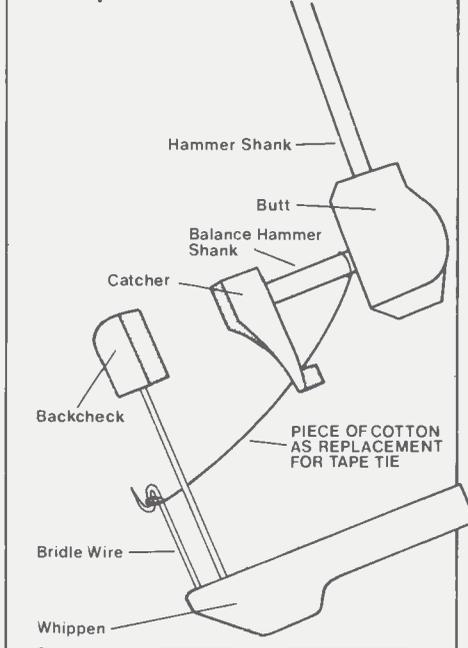
If the action is not at fault then the key itself may be jammed. Most probably one of the front or balance rail pins has become bent. To adjust the front rail pin the key will have to be removed, as the pin isn't normally visible. The application of a pair of pliers to the base of the pin should straighten it. If the balance rail pin is bent, a screwdriver head can be placed on the 3 or 4mm of pin which is visible, and with





gentle taps with the palm of the hand it can be re-positioned.

### 3. Tape Tie Broken



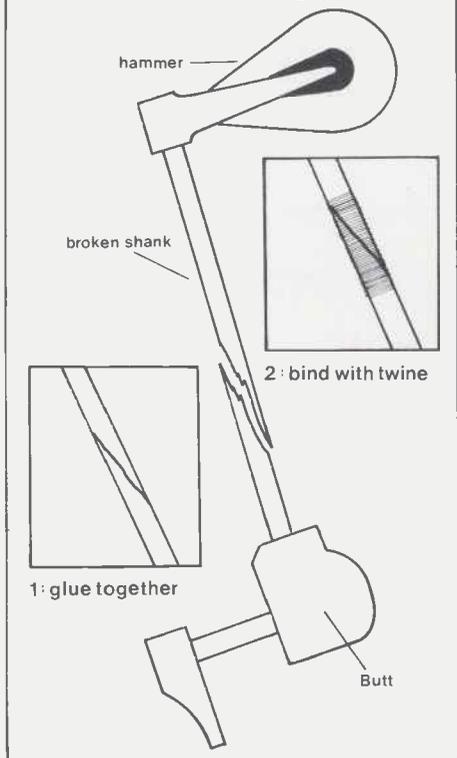
### Tape Tie Broken (U) (see diag 3)

Unlike the jack spring, the tape tie can't be replaced by one of its neighbours. As a temporary measure you can tie a piece of cotton around the balance hammer shank and secure the other end to the bridle wire. Make sure it's the same length as the adjacent ones or it will prove ineffective.

### Repetition Spring Broken (G)

This shouldn't be replaced by one from the top or bottom or any other note, although with a bit of careful bending and twisting, either a piece of stiff wire (piano wire) or even a hairpin can be used. Model it on an adjacent one. Of course, this can only be a temporary solution.

### 4. Broken Hammer Shank



## Broken Hammer Shank (G, U) (see diag 4)

If the pianist is heavy handed this sort of breakage can occur. If the two pieces have split cleanly in the middle, remove the hammer assembly and glue the bits together with a strong adhesive. Then bind the joint tightly with twine and leave it for 24 hours to dry. If the shank has snapped at either end, then a dowel of the same diameter can be used to replace it. Getting the broken hammer shank pieces out can be achieved by softening the glue over a steaming kettle. Don't steam the hammer felt as this will damage it.

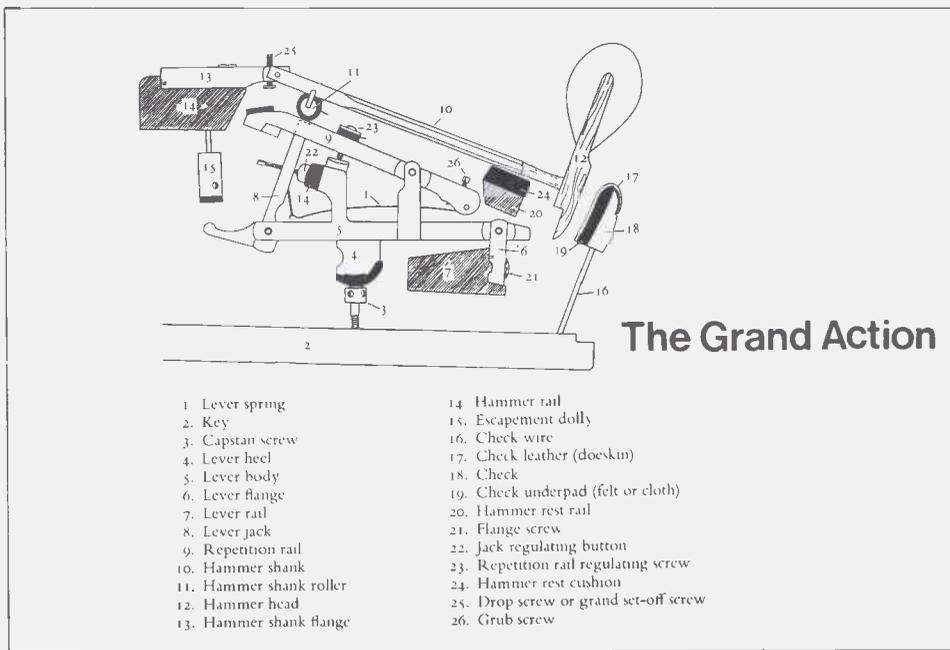
## TUNING (G, U)

To a pianist this is the most important part of the instrument's adjustment. Any musician should be able to tune the odd couple of notes on his or her piano. The real difficulty and expertise comes when tuning the whole instrument from scratch and having to judge intervals on the basis of the notes' beat frequencies. Electronic tuning aids on the market are not really suitable for piano tuning as they exhibit two basic faults. Firstly, they lack the human touch. Piano tuners don't tune strings in a unison to exactly the same pitch. It is by the use of their professional judgement, and not through any lack of skill, that the resulting slight 'mistuning' contributes to a more pleasing sound to the ear. Secondly, electronic aids don't take imperfections arising from piano strings into account. I won't go into wonderfully complex explanations about partials, inharmonicity and equal temperament. Suffice it to say that tuning electronically will leave the treble flat and the bass sharp. Piano tuners use a technique known as 'octave stretching' to



overcome this problem. But as the electronic aid can't itself calculate and compensate for this phenomenon, its user will, with tiresome regularity, end up with disappointing results.

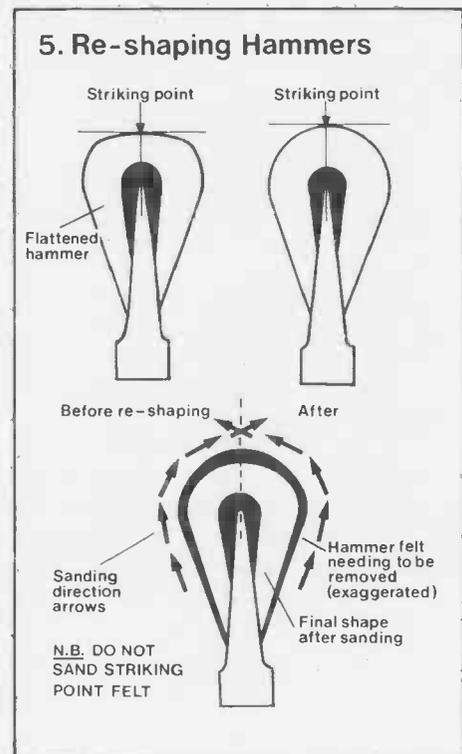
A better investment (especially for emergencies) is a tuning lever. They cost about a fiver and are well worth the expense. The technique for its use is always to use small, smooth movements. Even tiny adjustments will produce quite



large changes of pitch, the more so the higher the note being tuned. It's best to take the action out when tuning unisons and to pluck each string. Be careful, however, to make sure you are tuning the note being plucked. With 230 tuning pins it's easy to get confused. If you want the whole piano tuned get a professional.

## REGULATION (G, U)

Regulation is the fine adjustment of the piano's mechanical parts. The order in which regulation takes place is important, as some adjustments have a direct effect upon others. By carrying out the procedure as follows the amount of adjustment can be kept to a minimum. For a beginner it may well take a few hours to complete, but do your best to persevere and follow it through to the end. For reasons of space I have had to leave out a few adjustments, but the following sequence wouldn't really be altered by their inclusion.

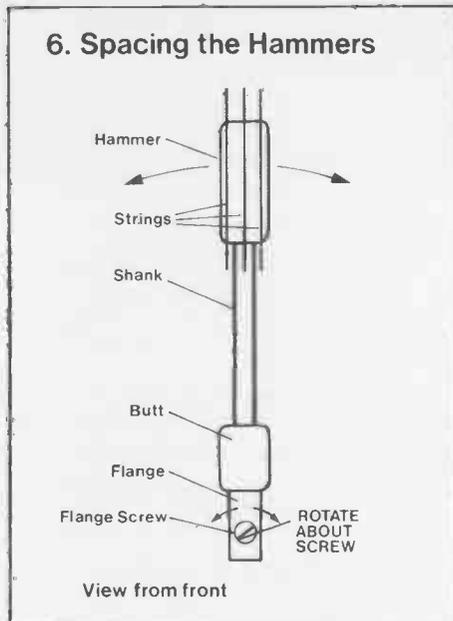


### Re-shaping the Hammers (G, U) (see diag 5)

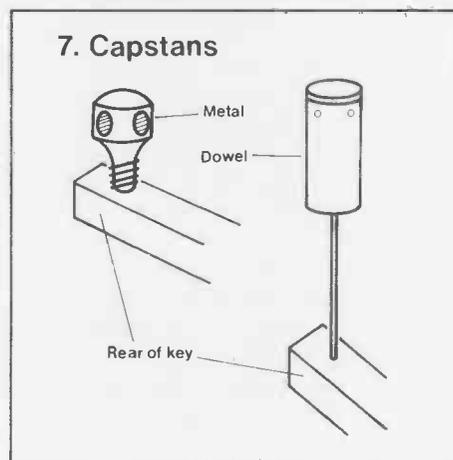
This is really a job for a professional and I wouldn't advise you to attempt it on a good instrument until practice had been gained on a piano of poorer quality. After a long period of use the hammer felt becomes indented with string marks. Before hammer re-alignment can take place, the top layer of felt has to be sanded away to bring the hammer back into shape. If you're doing the job yourself, don't file the extreme treble hammers as they have little felt to spare.

### Spacing the Hammers (G, U) (see diag 6)

It's important that the hammers are cor-



rectly spaced so that they hit all the strings of a note squarely and make proper contact. Any deviation from the correct alignment could lead to premature or uneven wear of the hammer felt. Adjustment is made by rotating the hammer butt flange around its securing screw, ie from side to side.

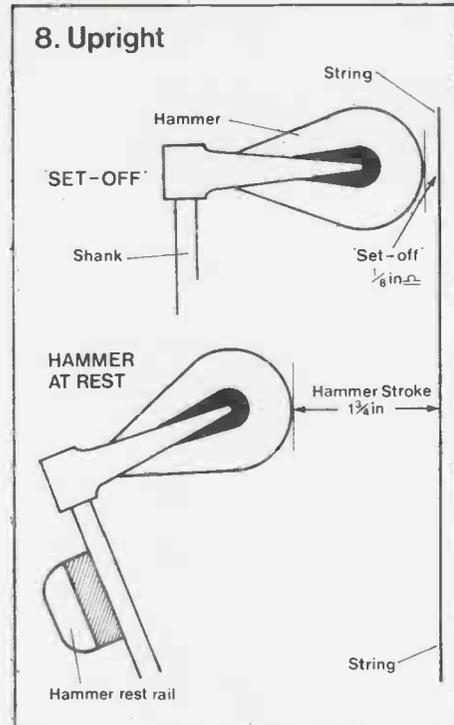


### Lost Motion (U) (see diag 7)

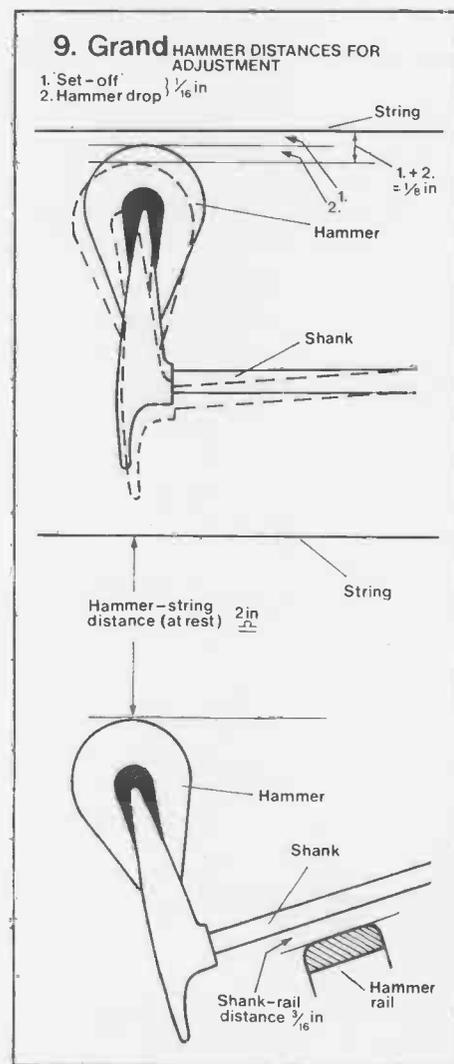
When any key on an Upright is depressed the action should also move simultaneously. The amount the key moves before the hammer itself moves is called the 'lost (ie wasted) motion'. Adjustment is made by turning the metal (or wooden dowel) capstans using a knitting needle: anti-clockwise to reduce lost motion. After this adjustment has been made to every key the hammers should all be resting on the hammer rail. To check that this has been done properly, pull the hammer rail back slightly and all the hammers should move back with it.

### Set Off Point (G, U) (see diag 8, 9)

If you depress a key slowly the hammer will reach a certain distance from the string and stop moving. The distance by which it fails to reach the string is called



the 'set off'. Generally it should be around 1/8 in for an Upright. If this set off is too large the hammer may fail to reach the string; if too small, the hammer may fail to disengage from the string. Adjustment is made by turning the set off screw clockwise to increase the distance. On the Grand piano only, when the set off point is reached the hammer will drop back slight-



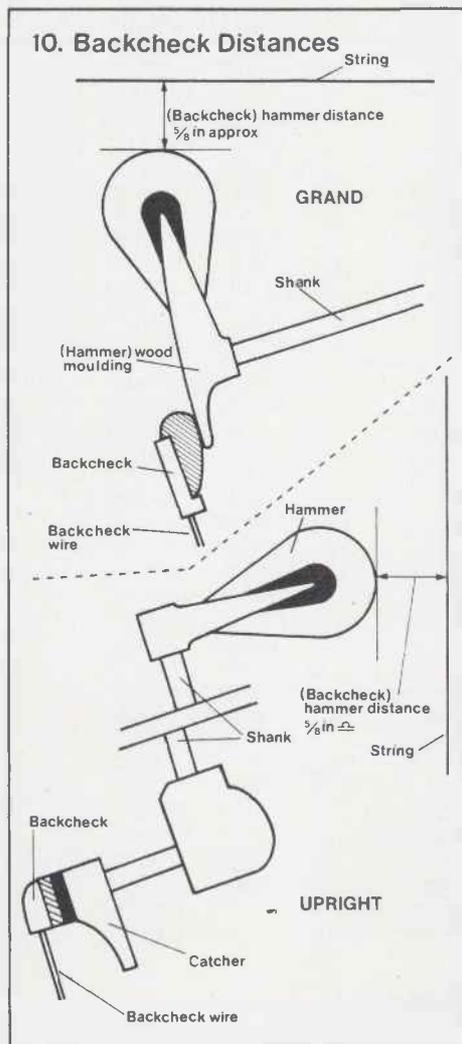
ly (hammer drop). This distance plus the set off distance should equal about  $\frac{1}{16}$  in (ie  $\frac{1}{16}$  in each). The hammer drop is adjusted by the drop screw. Turn it clockwise to decrease hammer drop.

## Hammer Height (G) (see diag 9)

When at rest the hammers should be just under 2in from the strings. Adjustment of this distance can be made by turning the metal capstans at the rear of the keys using a knitting needle. All the hammers must be in line as the distance the hammers have to move from rest to striking is directly proportional to the loudness and quality of the tone. Turn the capstans anti-clockwise to raise the hammers.

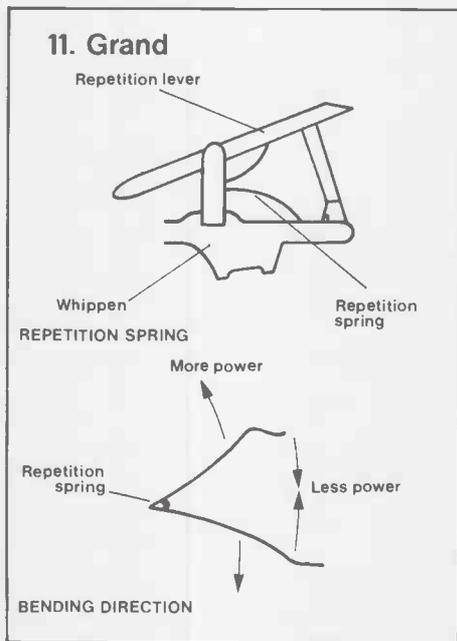
## Hammer Rail (G) (see diag 9)

The hammer rail is only used to cushion the hammers' rebound from the strings when the backcheck is not used. Adjustment is made by moving the whole rail so that there is about  $\frac{3}{16}$  in gap between the hammer shanks and the rail.



## Backcheck Distance (G, U) (see diag 10)

Undoubtedly this is the most infuriatingly difficult adjustment to make, especially for a Grand piano. This is because the distance the hammer is from the strings after being caught by the backcheck varies enormously according to the strength of the initial key depression. As uniform touch can rarely be applied enough times to obtain an exact setting, this adjustment can only be approximate – about  $\frac{1}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{16}$  in. When bending the backcheck's wire, to ensure that the hammer hits it squarely, you must be careful not to break the whippen.



## Repetition Spring Tension (G) (see diag 11)

Press the key and allow the hammer to be backchecked. If the key is now slowly released the hammer will rise a short distance. If it doesn't rise at all, the repetition spring is too weak; if it jumps, the spring is too strong. Remove the spring and bend it whichever way is applicable. Be careful to relocate it in its proper slots afterwards.

## Damper System (G, U)

As you will see, not all the notes have dampers, simply because their use in the treble section is superfluous: the sound dies quickly anyway. If none of the dampers is working the problem is probably in the pedal/action link rod, which may have become disengaged. You may have experienced this problem when removing and replacing the action for the first time. Regulation of the dampers is relatively simple, the only two requirements being that the dampers must not interfere with the strings when not in use and must damp the string quickly and quietly when needed. Adjustment can generally be achieved by bending the damper wire.

This will also usually cure that most infuriating of faults: the dreaded damper 'buzz' (which is the result of a mis-seated damper).

## Doping, Voicing and Ironing (G, U)

These are all skilled operations carried out by tuners to alter the tone of the piano by changing the consistency of the hammer felt. Doping is the application of lacquer to the felt to harden it slightly (don't start reaching for the hair-spray!). Voicing is the process whereby needles are inserted into the felt to break down the fibres and so soften, say, an overly bright instrument. Ironing (not really like the domestic kind) employs the use of a curved piece of hot metal that is rubbed over the felt to dry damp hammers, or to brighten up a piano of dull tone. Its effect, though, is somewhat temporary. If you think your instrument might benefit from any of these treatments ask your tuner about them.

## General Piano Care (G, U)

Having got your piano into good working order the next thing to do is keep it that way. For both Grands and Uprights it's advisable to keep their lids closed when not in use, to prevent dust build-up. Various devices are on sale that will keep the humidity inside a piano constant. They are effective, inexpensive to buy and cheap to run. Keeping the piano at constant temperature will also help keep it in tune. Regular visits from your tuner are a must. The tuner should visit and tune your piano about four times a year minimum for a regularly played instrument. Make a note of any faults that develop in between visits and tell the tuner before s/he next calls.

Pretty heavy stuff so far, and I wouldn't be surprised if you thought that this has all been rather tough going. (I've had to read it through a few times myself!) But I haven't subjected you to all this for nothing. For the simple truth is that the care and maintenance of your own piano can be very rewarding and even enjoyable. You've got to take it step by step. When you gain confidence in your own ability to improve your own piano you'll be surprised at how quickly your new skills can develop. Put in the effort – and you'll soon hear the difference. Whether you're a professional or amateur – male or female – pianist, composer, songwriter – in the music business or not – piano maintenance and repair will change your musical life. ■

*Once again, if there are any points you wish to make – such as where to get spare parts, or any other info – drop me a line care of Sound International.*

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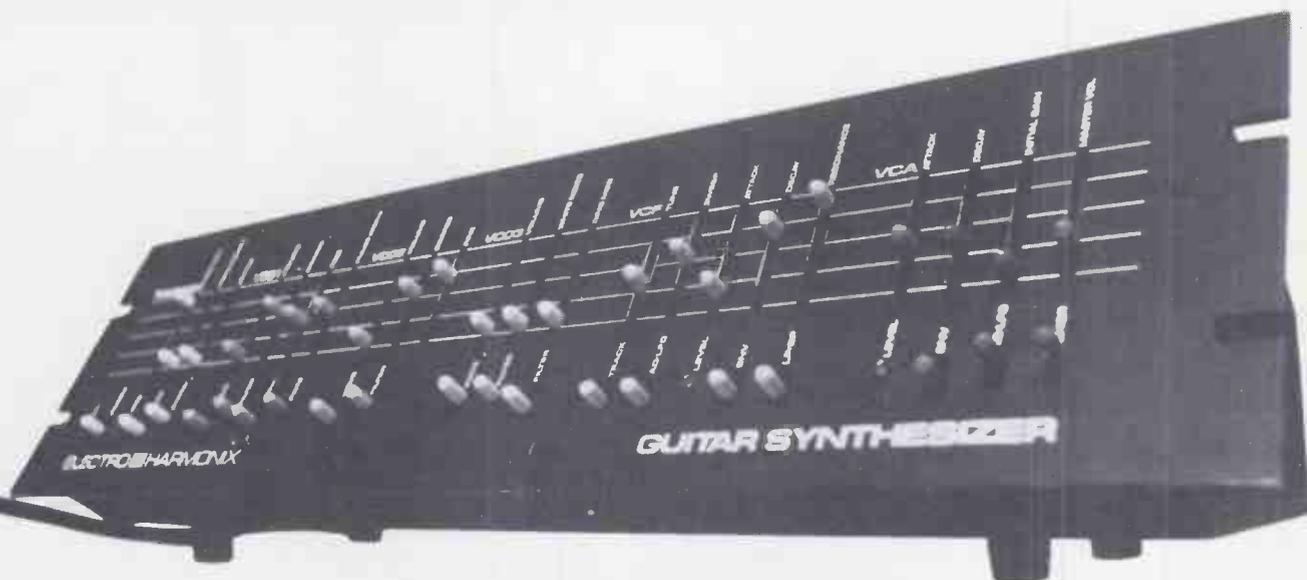
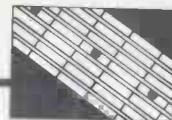
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# Electro-Harmonix Guitar Synthesiser

Robin Millar

Before you shudder at the thought of all those VCA-Zs, ring modulators, filters and other such electronic complexities which baffled you on your brief attempt to control a *Minimoog*, HALT! I too am a guitarist. I too watched all those keyboard players masterfully sliding and tweaking their way to Albedo and beyond, and thought them genii, controllers of destiny and Mensa IQ level all.

I know the article on H/H looks up to *SP*'s usual fascinating standard, but if I tell you that after only two weeks with the E-H synth, I am making contact with other galaxies and making Tomita sound like the Dooleys maybe you'll realise that here is a tool which any other guitar player with no knowledge of sound processing technology can use and control to great effect.

When I was told – sorry, asked – to review this device, I shuddered with a mixture of a fear of my own inadequacy and my inbuilt, bigoted, purist aversion to things that turn bad players into good ones. My inadequacy took the week off, my prejudice went back where it bleedin' well came from and my horror of the amateur's mask was cured by hypnotherapy.

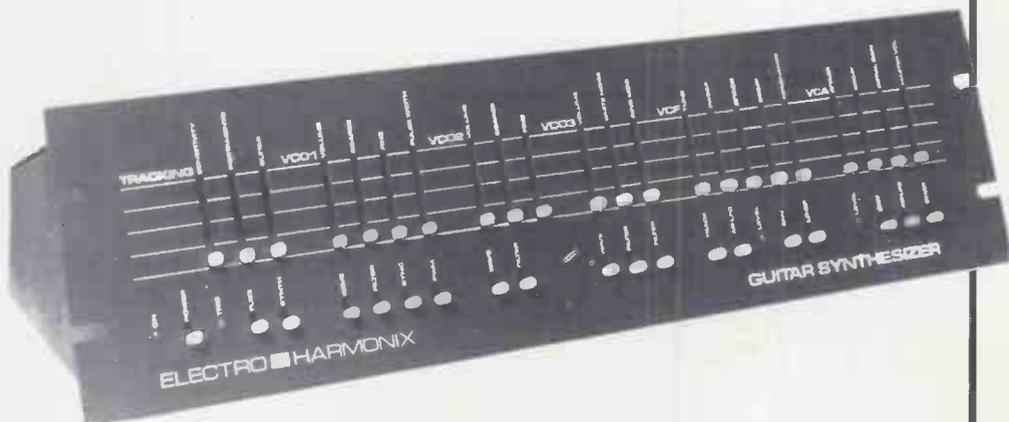
There is no space, and indeed no reason to explain more about this

machine's technology than is necessary to make it perform for you, and that is very little. So I intend to go simply through what you have to do to make a noise, what else you can do to change it, what sort of noises it makes and how you control it.

I must say the synth is excellently designed in several respects. Firstly, it sits neatly on top of the smallest combo or amp top with the back panel gazing up at you at an inviting angle. Secondly, the controls progress very logically from the left, which controls input signal, through different basic sounds, across more detailed changes of those basic sounds and finally, on the right, to control of the output signal.

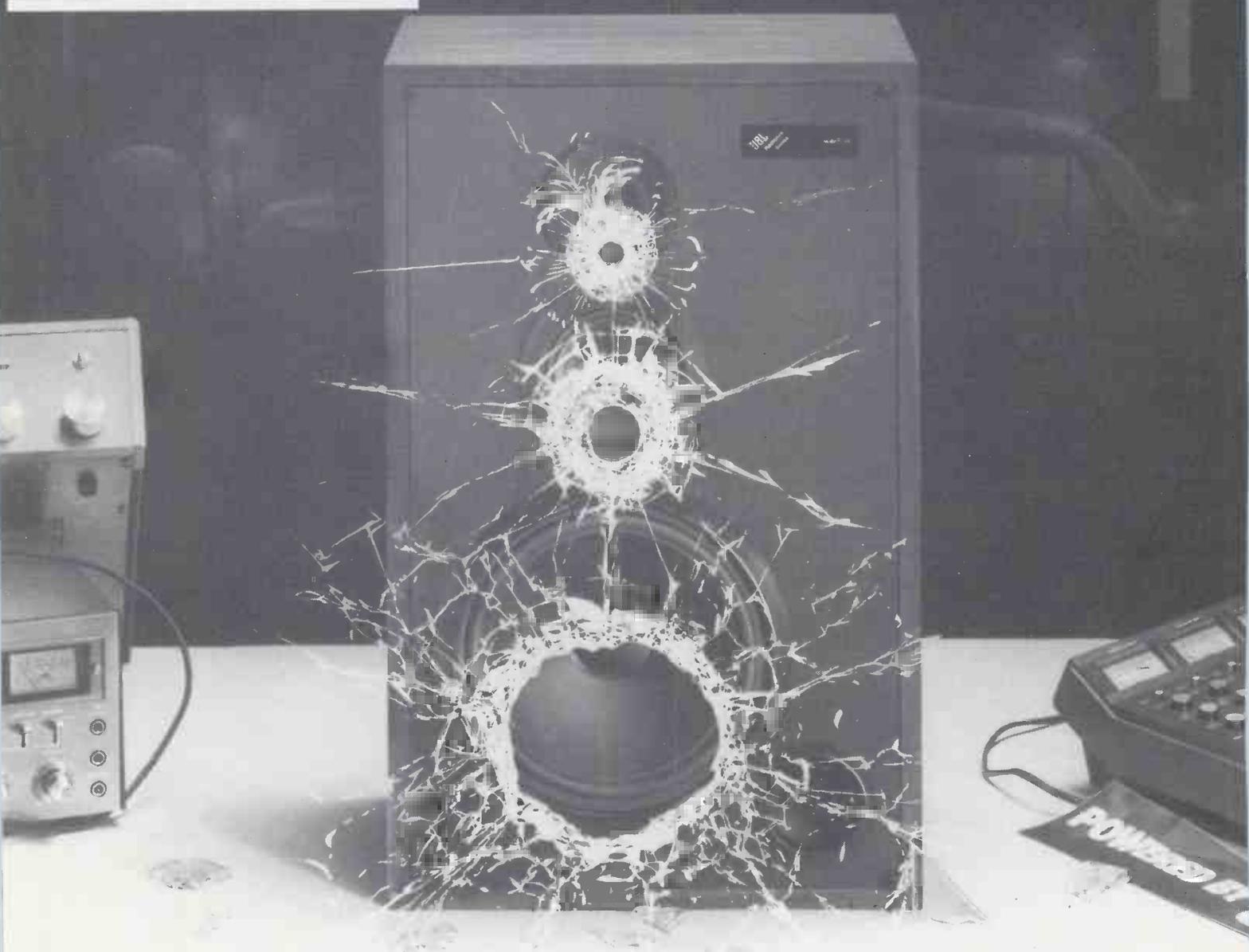
Each of these areas has colour-coded faders and switches for instant location on stage and the position markings are nice and bold. It has 22 faders, rather fewer switches and a couple of LED indicators.

So here we go. Plug the guitar into Guitar (if anyone is already confused, may I suggest this week's *Dandy*, a steal at 14p), take a jack from the Synth output to your amp and switch on. Throw the extreme right-hand fader, Master Volume, up, and any of the volumes on the three VCOs (voltage-controlled oscillators) and you can now get the input signal you want. The Sensitivity control on the far left is to be thought of as 'input volume'. What the



*Robin Millar is big in France with his band Extraballe, and we suspect he may be slightly potty, too.*

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synth does is pick up voltage from your guitar, anywhere from a few millivolts to several volts, identify the pitch and convert that pitch to a stable voltage which the synth can understand – just a translation from one language to another.

So the Sensitivity control adjusts the synth's hearing of your guitar. On low, it will pick up the initial loud attack of a plucked note, but loses interest as soon as the note starts to decay. Result – a short, sharp cut. Increase the sensitivity and at maximum it will pick up and translate the last, dying embers of your guitar. Result – long, sustained sounds. Of course, since the translated note is stable voltage, the volume of the synthesised note will not decrease as on the guitar but will remain at constant amplitude like a keyboard synth. Incidentally, my *Les Paul* on full volume with the sensitivity on max could only keep the synth going for about five seconds per note played. So I plugged a linear power booster between guitar and synth and matters improved enormously.

Next comes the Portamento, or glide – simply the time taken to go from one note to another adjustable from almost instant to a very long, slurred glissando. An optional footpedal is useful to turn this function on or off for that Jan Hammer-type whoop in the occasional solo passage.

The last of your input controls is great. It allows you to adjust the blend of a synthesiser note at the output with clean, unaltered guitar sound, so that you can go from pure synth sound with no trace of your guitar right up to the point of almost all guitar with just a shadow of synth sound behind.

You can also route the guitar sound alone to the filter (which is really the effects box) by flicking a switch, so making your guitar itself sound more startling or strange. This too can be controlled by an optional footswitch.

Next in line are your three VCOs. These are your three basic sounds. VCO1 is a string synth sound with volume, coarse and fine tuning and a pulse-width fader to harden or soften the sound. A flick switch gives you two different basic sounds (wave-forms) on this VCO and another allows you to route this sound to the filter section (as with the Guitar Blend control above). The last switch allows you the option of synchronising the pitch of this VCO with VCO2, giving you one note but with a rich tonal colour.

With the sync off and VCO1 alone, you get your two nice stringy sounds and you can adjust the pitch anywhere up to two octaves above or below your guitar note. So by blending this with your guitar on the Blend fader, you can get octaves, fifths, sixths or anything else you want.

VCO2 is a more brassy sound and is

controlled exactly as VCO1, with volume, pitch, filter option and two wave-form options. When used in sync with VCO1 the sound is rich and orchestral, but of course when the sync is off, you effectively have another instrument playing. So by playing, say, top E on the guitar, adjusting pitch on VCO1 to the A above and the pitch on VCO2 to the B above that, and blending the three with the Guitar Blend and the two VCO volume controls, you play a major chord in whatever key the guitar note you play is in.

VCO3 is pitched automatically one octave above the guitar, so it has no tuning controls. It has a two wave-form option and filter-routing option like its brothers. In addition you can fade up white noise – you know, dentist's drill – and/or ring

modulation, which is that clanging bell-like overtone which, used in conjunction with the other VCOs can produce amazing, spacy effects. So obviously if you set up as above, adding VCO3 can complete your chord to a four-note octave span. Even more magnificent is pitching VCO1 two octaves above the guitar, VCO2 one octave below and blending VCO3 with it one octave above, giving you a 24-note, 3-octave span outburst when plucking a single note. Real Lew-Grade-epic stuff. Interesting too are the discords and harmonics outside the 12-note scale, which are easily obtained.

Now the fun starts. The filter, as I have said, can be switched in to affect either your original guitar sound, VCO1, 2 or 3, or white noise, or any number of these



*The headless synthesist demonstrates the changing fortunes of the guitar synth: this is the original Roland G500, launched in 1977, which had a good deal of the controls mounted on the guitar itself. The guitar was an integral part of the instrument, ie you had to buy a module and a guitar. Roland's updated guitar synth, the G300 (launched this year) moved most of the controls to the module, but still you have to buy their guitar too. Some companies are now beginning to offer the pitch-to-voltage modules like the E-H guitar synth reviewed here, which you plug your guitar straight into. The only early guitar synth to offer own-guitar use was the ARP Avatar, which came with a special 'hexamphonic' pickup to attach to your axe. What next?*



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together. The filter is the most important part of shaping the sounds you produce. By adjusting the various faders and switches I soon got the hang of moving swiftly from excellent, pure flute sound, through percussive Hammond sounds, to a whole range of *Star Wars* stuff. The filter basically introduces harmonics and overtones above the original note fed in, and these harmonics can be adjusted for tone (from mute to very harsh), for their distance from the original note (up to an octave), and have adjustable sweep to dictate the time taken for these harmonics to (a) rise up and (b) fall down again to the original note. This sweep can either be tracked to the guitar note, which means they are triggered as you play, or they can be set to sweep regularly at adjustable speed (as with a simple phase pedal). A marvellous envelope follower can also be switched in, and this is good news for guitarists. It increases the pitch change of the sweep the harder you play, so that by blending a suitable filter sound with either your guitar sound, or with a VCO sound, or both, you can really squeeze excitement out of this beast. Using note-triggered sweeps in conjunction with the white noise gives a terrifying Hurricane Betsy impersonation. The filter's oscillators can be made to resonate, or feed back, by adjusting a fader on the right of this section, and what with one thing and another, sounds and effects bearing no relation to the guitar notes played are easily achieved.

Finally on the right are the output controls, which are quite simple. They control the initial attack and decay of the final sound produced, from instant hard attack to a long, ten second fade up, and the same variation on decay. There is a fader for initial gain, which is simply how loud the note starts, and a master volume, which speaks for itself.

Also in this section is another switch for the great envelope follower, but this time by-passing the filter section, so you can sweep your pure VCO sounds at this stage without having to change their tone via the filter. Last, but by no means least, is a superb preset Chorus switch, which is such a nice, straight Chorus effect on the guitar alone, I'd have this machine just for that. It also enriches and orchestrates all the synthesiser sounds, as it effectively doubles the instrument. I soon found I was using it constantly.

Well, that's how you work it, but I should tell you how to play it. The synth is monophonic – it only accepts one note at a time, so it is purely for single-string



Korg X911 guitar synth: some good features at a good price. E-H take note?

playing. Strings have to be picked cleanly, without accidentally setting off other strings, otherwise the synth starts sounding exactly like Sweep after Sooty's just bopped him on the nose with his magician's stick. Also, there are certain places in many guitars where notes tend to decay quickly, and so get cut off short by the sensitivity gate. These are usually found on the low frets of the B and G strings, and I had to learn to automatically play these notes on other strings further up the fretboard. But I soon got used to that.

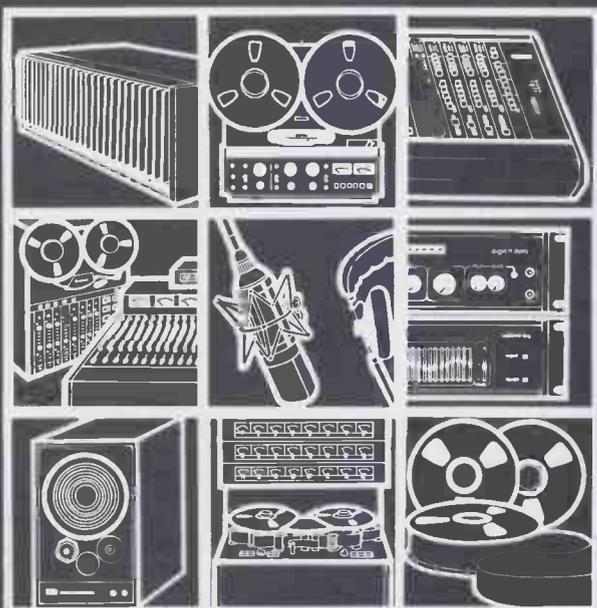
The great beauty of this thing is that, being pitch-to-voltage controlled, you can plug anything that delivers between 3 millivolts and 10 volts in and get the synthesised results. I succeeded with sax, voice, acoustic piano, cymbal, snare drum, recorder and harmonica (all via mics), and only stopped through lack of time. I took this device along to a mixing session and conducted a very interesting experiment. By taking a line out of a channel on the mixing desk from an already recorded sax, voice, guitar solo or whatever, and feeding it into the synth, you can instantly 'double' the input sound with any of the synth sounds. Tracking (the speed and accuracy at which a synthesiser follows the input notes) is very fast – much quicker than, say, the Roland or Korg – and so very fast passages, as long as they are cleanly played, can be made to sound like two or three genius musicians playing in unison or in chromatic harmony. King Crimson, eat your heart out! (*Surely some mistake here – Ed.*)

After all this fulsome praise I think I should make a couple of observations to E.H. Firstly, although the instructions given for obtaining violin, trumpet and flute sounds are clear and the results

excellent, Messrs Korg have managed to provide presets for these and other 'basic popular' sounds in a guitar synth (the Korg X911) at nearly half the price of this object. How about it? Much easier for stage. Another good Korg feature is a footswitch which, when depressed, locks in the last note played to carry on *ad infinitum*. Since synths are often useful for such long effects at beginnings and endings of numbers, this control avoids the risk of those Sooty and Sweep yodelling contests that could easily embarrass you on stage.

By the way, there are separate outputs for the synth sound and direct out from your guitar. For some reason, however, by the time the direct guitar gets out of the back of the synth, it has been amplified exactly three times. OK for DI, but a disaster for your amp, especially if, as I have said, you need to boost your guitar lineally (?) before it reaches the synth.

But after all, when you consider that you don't need to buy a special guitar to use this synth, that it is easy to use and that the oscillators have a very good and expensive sound, that it costs a little over £500, and that it is endorsed by Steve Howe and Metro, whose guitarist gives it not surprisingly ecstatic reviews in a weekly rag sometimes unfortunately confused with this magazine due to a pluralised titular similarity, I have got to say that this is a good and useful tool. After the last few years of keyboard players trying to put guitarists out of work, maybe now we can start to get our own back. □



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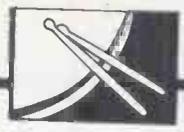
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# Simmons Electronic kit

Pip Pyle

I think I was about 18 when a friend of mine named Tony Wilks, a fellow student at the Cambridge College of Art, invited me around to his 'pad', I believe they were referred to as then (it would have been around 1968), enthusing about a synthesiser he had built which could, among other things, ape a jazz rhythm section gone slightly banana. Rather sceptically, I went to lend an ear. I knew for a fact that this person was something of an electronics genius and so on, but considered it more likely that he'd taken rather more Clear Light or Purple Haze or whatever than was good for him and that he probably could have imagined the London Symphony Orchestra playing Stravinsky's *Rite Of Spring*, *allegro fortissimo*, in the comfort of his own living room if only he concentrated hard enough. At any rate he looked rather out of it, but after hours of swearing and seemingly lashing himself to the floor with jack leads, then staring vacantly out of the window, there finally emanated from this most peculiar machinery a noise resembling Elvin Jones playing a crazy wire brushes snare drum pattern, with highly polyrhythmic interruptions on a sort of bass drum, and Jimmy Garrison playing a demented bop 12-note serial music on downers. Amused and confused as I was, I had to admit that it *did* sound something like a rhythm section, and to this end I was most impressed. Especially realistic was the brushes sound, which Tony told me was produced by adding something miraculous called 'white noise'. (I thought this was probably some sort of drug he'd laid his hands on, and settled in for an enlightening evening.)

Although the sounds weren't entirely realistic, I thought that one day they might have interesting applications, and since then I've listened with interest to people like Tony Oxley experimenting with electronics on his kit, to considerable effect, and more recently to the advent of 'synth' drums, to considerably less effect. (These are the drums that you can hear on loads of hackneyed old disco records nowadays.) I remember spending most of an afternoon once in a New York drum shop, with a salesperson dribbling superlatives about how far-in, fashionable and versatile they were, but no matter how hard I tried I could only get them to go GOOOING GOOOING! or BAWONNNYINGGGG (you know what I mean?) or as Don Martin might have it FERRRROONN. Anyway you can take it from me that it looks far more impressive written down on paper than it actually sounded.

I was thoroughly disheartened by this, and it seemed to me that people like Tony Wilks' madcap experimentation had hit a *cul-de-sac*, and it was with some trepidation that I agreed

*Among the people behind whom Pyle has drummed are Gong, Hatfield & the North, National Health and Carol Grimes.*



to listen to and review the SDSV. However, I had heard some favourable things about the SDSIII, an earlier Dave Simmons effort, and I have myself been using one of his excellent *Clap Trap* (see *SI* July '80) electronic clap and percussion boxes with Dave Stewart in our new group Rapid Eye Movement (see page 20). This is a neat little job, controllable from either footpedal (I gaffa mine to the heel plate of my hi-hat pedal) or by contact mic on the snare, or by simply pressing a button on the box. Dave and I both own one of these, and have great fun applauding each other's jokes.

So anyway, Jeff Howarth from Musicaid, the manufacturing company, turns up at my house in Essex with Dave Simmons' new brainchild in tow, and proceeds to set them up in my tiny studio out the back of my garage. The drums are extremely futuristic in appearance, hexagonal in plan shape, about the depth of a frying pan, with red 'shells' or sides with stainless steel rims and a plastic pad on the top. You can, however, have the drums made in any shape or size you like. The actual playing surface itself need only be 2in in diameter if you like, the drums themselves are purely cosmetic. So, if your band is called, for

example, The Purple Hearts, you can have Dave Simmons make you one that is of such a design. I often have nightmares about playing a gig at Madison Square Gardens and realising after the first bar that I am playing a pizza pie kit. Well with a bit of ingenious synthetic pizza pie design a group called 'The Dagos' could actually do it and get away with it. Hmm. Anyway, this kit looked bizarre enough for anyone. One of the drums was larger than the rest and was fitted with enormous spurs, and this assisted me to remark intelligently that this must be the bass drum. The rest of the drums are identical in size and design, and you set them up in much the same way as you would a conventional kit. As 'drums' is a peculiar word with these things, I will hereinafter refer to them as 'pads' (a far better description of these than of apartments). This in fact is how they are described by Dave Simmons. He's obviously a product of the Sixties, too. The stands supplied with the kit are Pearl, which are pretty solid and chunky, but if you prefer, as I do, to use a Ludwig bass drum pedal then that's no problem, all accessories being interchangeable. Okay, we've set up the kit, that's nothing





extraordinary, you do that with conventional kits, but that is where convention ends rather abruptly. The rest is perhaps the most interesting innovation in the evolution of drums and drummers since Dave Clark, or maybe even earlier!

Right, now we plug them in! (Way hey! DI the kit, boyo!) Each pad has a Cannon plug output, to a control box, which I'll describe in technicolour in a minute, and this connects to your PA system/monitoring system/amplifier or whatever. (Unfortunately these are not supplied with the kit.) At this point, the pads cease to sound like table tops but turn into a larger than life drum kit (honest).

I found words like 'lumme' spring to mind at this point.

The kit itself consists of a snare pad, a tom, a floor tom, bass drum, and believe it or not, a hi-hat. At present, Musicaid are working on the blueprints of an entire cymbal range, a task that I would imagine to be even more daunting than the 'drum' range. Their efforts, on the hi-hat, to start with, indicate that they may be on the right track, although of the whole kit, this is the least realistic sound. The actual footpedal sound, controlled by a wah-wah type pedal is pretty good, and I actually quite like the sound of the sticked pad sound of the hi-hat, but would prefer to think of it as an interesting sound in itself rather than a facsimile of a real hi-hat. What is good however is that when you open and shut the footpedal, the 'pad' hi-hat opens and shuts in its decay tone. But the drums themselves are quite something else.

Before I go into the details of the pads, let

me explain the control box to you. Each pad connects to this, and it consists of a rack containing up to seven modules, one for each drum. (The kit I reviewed had only five, as it was a smaller kit.) Each pad module has four main push-button controls. The first button will activate the factory preset sound of each pad. The snare drums and bass drum are real killers. The tom tom presets I thought were very impressive but could be improved by control 2.

Control 2 cuts out the factory preset and activates control of six potentiometers that affect the characteristics of the drum. For your information I have set them out below, with the approximate effect of each: (a) Hiss Pitch - controls the aforesaid white noise, which is like the top part of the sound of the snare for example (I'm still a bit vague about this stuff). (b) Tone Pitch - controls the overall tuning of each pad, like tuning screws. (c) Bend - controls the amount of drop in the pitch of the pad after it has been struck. (d) Decay - obviously the length of ring of each pad. (e) Balance - between (a) and (b). (f) Click Balance - controls the amount of stick noise or the initial percussive sound.

As you can see, the sound possibilities here are pretty large. Buttons 3 and 4 make them even larger. With buttons 3 and 4 you can trim the sound of each of the pots to a fine tune and store this sound in the memory bank. In this way, before a gig you can program special effects on each pad, unleashed at the touch of a button. Much fun here. A fairly normal tight tom tom sound can suddenly become a huge timbale, a disco bass drum can suddenly become like an enormous 28in military bass

drum for one beat then back again. The snare drum can be factory preset, tight and crisp, and then trimmed to be a slack disco sound or very ringing or perhaps more interestingly tuned to a definite pitch, sounding like a percussive *Clavinet*. I had fun with this, tuning the drums to different pitches and playing fast single stroke rolls on them. By using each of the four main controls, you are in fact getting the equivalent effect of having four different percussion rigs on stage at the same time, and this kind of sonic flexibility (pardon us) is for me probably the most attractive aspect of the SDSV, and undeniably one that a conventional kit, all fitting between the knees as it were, does not have. Of course, if you feel so inclined, and sadly some of you will, you can go right over the top with this, emulating the obliteration of Dresden in the middle of your 'goes down a storm in the States' type drum solo performed by most savage beating groups of our time.

I suppose some of you more advanced electronic boffins will want to know how this kit really works, whereas the rest of you would trust in Tommy Cooper. Well, I'm a bit out of my depth here: the initial electrical signal is set via the shock-sensitive pad head, and this is synthesised by two or more oscillators controlling either white noise, tone and stick click. (This is getting a bit of a yawn, why don't we slip off down the pub and talk about shagging and football and how the National Health crew handcuffed an 18-year-old schoolgirl to the S-bend, or hold mindbending quizzes on the subject of the middle eight of Helen Shapiro's follow-up to *Walkin' Back To Happiness* . . . Schtum, here comes 'Big' Tony Bacon . . . 'Stick to the point lad, I can get a tired old hack drummer like yourself or Sandy Nelson to write this review anytime!' 'Sorry guv.') Well, you see each module is in itself a polyphonic synthesiser with three memories, with any combination of tone, pitch, decay, percussion etc.

At the point of turning on the electrics, one experiences an extraordinary audio/physical hallucination (hello, he's off again). Acoustically, of course, this kit is much like a practise kit, with no tonal or physical response. But when you turn them on (because of the tone of the drum, especially the tom toms), they 'give' a bit and drop off in pitch, and consequently it appears that the playing surface of the drum has a genuine elasticity. This is almost unnerving, but in fact it does help to fool you into a feeling that you're playing a 'real' drum. In spite of this, Musicaid are manufacturing a special rubber-tipped drumstick to give a more natural feel to the pads, although I reckon most drummers could acclimatise themselves very quickly to the playing surface.

The pads, incidentally, are not the only way to trigger the modules. They can also be triggered by microphones or contact mics on conventional drum kits, thus modifying the sound of the kit, keeping some of the acoustic sound and adding electronic effects as well. This may well prove to be interesting, and I'll be looking into this soon. Also, you can trigger the modules from a tape source. This obviously has far-reaching applications in the studio because you can, say, take the snare and bass drum tracks of the kit and doctor the sound for various sections of a piece. Sounds like an



interesting idea. (Personally I think the whole group should go through a bass drum module.)

Well, having played around at home for a bit on the kit, I decided to give it the acid test of a rehearsal with real humans. Rapid Eye Movement were rehearsing for impressive debut gigs, so I took the kit along and tried it on some of the more savage tunes. Generally, things went well, but I had to share Dave Stewart's Prophet amplification, and since he plays at crazed football hooligan volume most of the time, some of the upper register of the kit got a bit lost, emphasising the need for either single channel monitoring or your own really good amp and speaker set close up to your ear for real quality and clarity. Out front, out the PA of course, no problems.

The price, by the way, is fairly modest. The whole shebang: kit, control box with seven modules, leads and all costs £1,250, not much more expensive than a fairly good acoustic kit, forgetting the cost of drum mikes for stage use. If you use an existing kit, but modified by the use of the synthesiser plus contact mikes you can save about £250. As yet, though, I can't vouch for results.

So, what's the significance of the SDSV? Immediately, I suppose the most attractive and obvious advantage is being able to turn up and drown out the macho lead guitarist who already has his amp turned to 10 as he does a backward lean into his 300-watt Marshall stack: revenge for the downtrodden 95lb weakling tub basher.

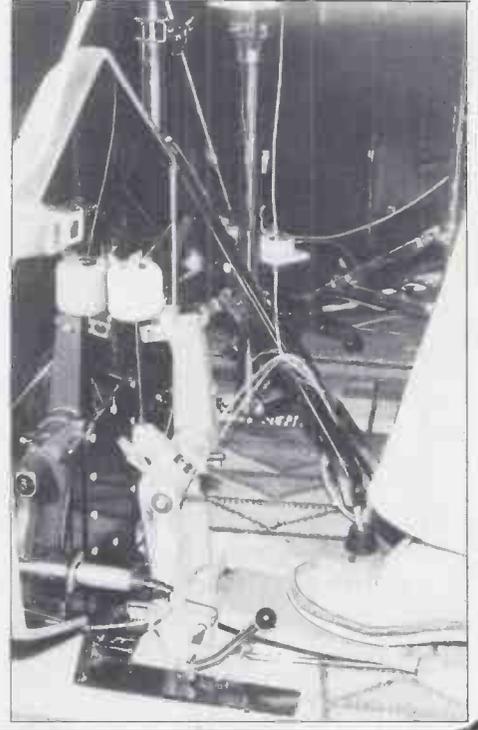
I suppose you could draw a parallel to the advent of the electric guitar in this respect anyway, although I'm not forgetting that most drummers get a considerable din out of the kits

acoustically. But there's hardly a band nowadays that doesn't mic up the kit on stage anyway, thus rendering it something that can't really be called an acoustic instrument. In this, the SDSV is an obvious winner, since there is no need for mics either on stage or more importantly in the studio. More than this, for a sound mixer to get a good sound for the band in question is simplicity itself. Here the SDSV is a real winner. For a start, as I've said, there's no need for mics, either on stage or more importantly in the studio, and you don't have to decide which sort of mic is best for each drum or where the most effective position is for it. The effect of adding EQ to a drum from a mixer is startling and extreme in effect. A turn of the treble control can completely alter the snare drum sound, for example, and of course you can easily add effects like flanging, echo, harmonisers, etc.

I expect that there will be a lot of controversy raging about this kit, again not unlike the furore surrounding the advent of electric guitar, especially in rock music, with cretins saying: 'Well, it's not a real instrument is it? I mean you just hit it and it plays itself.' Well of course, the SDSV is just as hard, if not harder, to play than an ordinary kit. I suppose it's likely at first that a lot of pop futurist android bands will put the kit to a rather gimmicky effect, people like Gary Numan and so on. Well, this is inevitable: I suppose you might say that Duane Eddy and Les Paul were gimmicky to some extent, but pop music thrives on their innovations, crass or otherwise, and invariably learns from it. You'll find that in the end something of lasting value will evolve from it.

Immediately, I found it particularly effective on fairly simple and savage rock'n'roll, and also

for more textural sounds while improvising 'clever shit'. I'll probably be using it on a few gigs in the future, but I don't envisage playing it for the whole set, at least not until I fully master the controls. Anyway, in conclusion, I'll give Dave Simmons full credit for a fascinating new development, ten out of ten for effort, and after this glowing review, you better give me several sets quick, so that I can demonstrate with consummate ease to the world at large exactly how they should be played. □



# Who's the biggest name behind the big names?



## Premier and Harvey Mason.

THE PREMIER DRUM CO. LTD. L1CESTER ENGLAND.

# Yamaha YSS 62

From being a nation of great imitators, the Japanese have transformed themselves into a nation of great innovators. It wasn't so long ago that Japanese was synonymous with shoddy. But this has changed, especially so with regard to Yamaha musical instruments, and in particular with regard to saxophones.

Not far back, about 12 months ago, Yamaha hit the world with the YAS 62, a professional quality alto that marked a great development for the Japanese company, as it established them in the forefront of saxophone technology. They've been manufacturing horns for years, sure, but this particular horn lifted them out of the realm of middleweight also-rans and put them ahead of the established giants, Selmer. Especially when you consider that around the same time the latter company had launched the *Mk VII* to a very lukewarm reception.

Yup, Yamaha had secured a very firm beachhead in the musical markets of the west. So, after the alto, everybody awaited with bated breath the onset of the rest of the saxophone family from Yamaha. The soprano, the YSS 62, is no disappointment.

Using the same technology that produced the superlative YAS 62, Yamaha have produced probably the best soprano in the business. Yamaha take micrometer-tolerance tapered tube, check it for resonance and measure in a test chamber, draw it and shape it in high powered presses, and measure and indicate hole positions on it with the aid of computers. The prototype is given to Eugene Rousseau, the foremost saxophone technologist in the world, and he advises on the ergonomics of the key positions. The resulting effect is shattering.

Feedback to Japanese companies is taken note of with frightening speed. Accusations of fragility have been levelled at Yamaha product in the past – the new product comes back with thicker walls, and with posts soldered on to straps and plates that in turn are soldered on to the body. These items appear to be of quite hefty manufacture as are the rest of the components. All the keywork, including

*Steve Brennan has played sax in bands since he was 15, though frankly, we've never heard of any of them.*



**Steve Brennan**

the rods, rollers, tubes, springs and guards, display the same quality of manufacture. Corks, felts and leather pads are expertly made and fitted, with no overlaps or shoddy assembly. The tubes around the transmission rods are a precision fit, with none of the play you find in cheaper horns, and in general the entire assembly is a taut and responsive device.

To ensure that the YSS 62 stays this way, Yamaha have incorporated steel pivot screws at crucial junctions for adjusting key action as wear sets in. These have been standard on flutes for ages; it's about time they began to appear on horns. It cuts out the time-consuming business of fiddling about with sandpaper and cork, and on an expensive instrument this sort of facility should be expected by professional musicians.

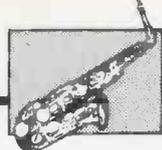
The keys are all forged to ensure strength. Castings can easily snap, so Yamaha have done away with this process completely. The left hand side assembly of D, E and F levers is extremely comfortable,

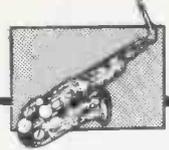
as is the G#, B $\flat$ , C# assembly for the little finger of the left hand. Both of these assemblies are a direct copy of the alto works, to aid those horn players who double a lot. Every key on these two clusters is in exactly the right place, with easy and fluid action. Similarly, the right hand side keys are comfortable and fall naturally into place, in particular the remote high F# key, slotted between the main E and F keys, is a cinch to reach for the third finger right hand. The top F key, situated just above the top B key, is another well-thought out and easily reached item. The main keys are a good fit on to the fingers, and the action of the horn generally is a bit more than great, a little less than fantastic. In fact, it is seductive, and entices a player to go well beyond his/her capabilities. When you first blow it it's startlingly easy to produce a helluva noise. Continued blowing brings home the fact that here is an impressively responsive horn. It's also extremely easy to play, and is very forgiving. Its major contribution in this area is to reduce considerably the gap between the artist and the expression. The easier an instrument is to play, the more easily the sounds in your head can be manifested. Naturally, a great advantage.

With the mouthpiece provided, the horn can be blown from top to bottom. The Yamaha plastic 4C mouthpiece (equivalent to 1.2mm tip opening, 19mm lay) has been designed to be all things to all men, and I found it easy to blow the middle register of the instrument. From top D to F#, however, was a different story, with the tone sounding all thin and wheezy, with a tendency to break. A little judicious experiment with mouthpieces could prove fruitful. I have heard that Selmer *Jazzes* work well.

Some nice touches include an adjustable thumb hook, and an angle put on the low B $\flat$  key. The latter has always been a bit of a difficulty with horns, because you've got the heaviest action being manipulated by the weakest digit – the little finger of the left hand. Any help in this area is welcome.

With the design and relationship between the mouthpiece and the body being as computer-exact as you'd expect Japanese gear to be, then it's hardly surprising that tuning is spot on. Perhaps the tone of the





instrument may be a little harsh for a few tastes, but in these days of huge PA systems a degree of brightness is necessary if a horn player is going to compete with electric musicians on equal terms. But don't let that blind you to the acoustic virtues of the instrument. Tom Scott uses a Yamaha soprano, after all.

The big advantage of Yamaha is their ability to produce consistently good instruments. European and American makers appear to have difficulty in producing two horns off the same production line that blow the same. Modern developments at Yamaha mean that a Yamaha soprano that you buy in the shops is going to be as good, virtually identical in fact, to the one we received on test.

Not everything is hunky dory with the YSS 62. For example, the engraving is slightly shoddy, inexpertly designed and poorly executed. And on some of the surfaces that aren't readily apparent to the naked eye, like around the sides of some of the keys, the finish is pitted and grainy. In addition, some of the soldering shows through the lacquer. Overall, though, form follows function in this case, and under stage lights the Yam soprano is beautiful to behold, like most other saxophones. The gold lacquer used on the

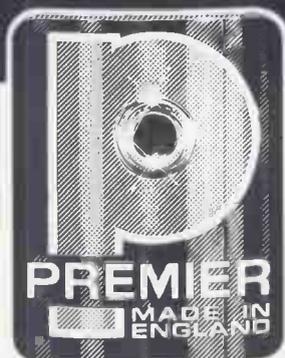


top-of-the-range 62 is quite attractive, and is reserved exclusively for this professional model. The cheaper models utilise various clear and silver finishes.

As far as price is concerned, the YSS 62 is competitively marked up. It's cheaper than its closest rivals by at least a hundred quid, and it's a superior horn to boot. How do these Japs do it? □

Price £558  
 Key (compass in concert pitch): B $\flat$  A $\flat$ -e3).  
 Auxiliary Keys: High F# Front F.  
 Adjusting screws: I. F# G# aux B $\flat$  II. A, B-C. III. D, E, F-F# IV. G. V. Low C# VI. Low B-Low C.  
 Keys: Power forged brass, gold lacquered.  
 Key finger buttons: Pearl.  
 Post mounting: Ribbed and flanged.  
 Bell diameter: 89.4mm.  
 Neck guard ring: Yes.  
 Annealed treatment: Yes.  
 Engraving: Yes.  
 Right-hand thumb hook: Adjustable.  
 Pivot screws: Nylon tipped, tapered.  
 Key guard: felts: Adjustable.  
 Supplied mouthpiece: Yamaha soprano 4C.  
 Mouthpiece cap: Brass gold lacquered.  
 Ligature: Brass gold lacquered.  
 Net weight: 1.2kg.  
 Finish: Gold epoxy lacquer.  
 Test model supplied by Bill Lewington Ltd, 144 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2.  
 UK distributors: Bill Lemington Ltd, Shaftesbury Ave, London WC2.

# Who's behind Elton's piano?



**Premier and Ray Cooper.**

THE PREMIER DRUM CO. LTD., LEICESTER, ENGLAND.



# Morley Chorus/Flanger

Roger Phillips

If you think this reviewing business is all fun and games, I'm afraid you're wrong. Wipe that smile off your face, sonny and pay attention while I'm talking to you. If you're under the impression that I'm going to write one of those drivelly, irrelevant intros to this piece, you're sadly mistaken. No jokes, no funny stories, no feeble attempts at clever-clever journalism, just a straightforward, serious review, got it?

Yes lad? Yes, you with the acne and the Doris Day hair cut. What? Why this sudden change of heart? How dare you question me you snivelling little tick, go to my study at once and remove your trousers - I'll deal with you later.

However, it may interest you to learn that it was my very good fortune, the other day, to meet a very serious young representative of the musical instrument manufacturing fraternity, and I have it on very good authority, from him, that this music business is definitely NOT fun. I repeat, NOT fun, so stop shuffling under the desk, Ferret Minor, and put that picture of Kate Bush away immediately.

This very serious young representative drew my attention to the licentious load of dross that appeared in the pages of the *Sound International* journal on the subject of a very serious piece of equipment called the *Clap Trap*. Rubbish, it was. Absolute piffle. 'Too much FUN in it,' said the young man, 'the *Clap Trap* wasn't meant to be FUN.' Quite right, too.

So very sorry indeed, Trevor Newman and all your cronies up there at Rosetti (EMI) Ltd, but if you think I'm going to enjoy reviewing your new Morley Chorus Flanger, you've got another think coming.

Like most Morleys, the Chorus Flanger is housed in the usual 10½in x 6½in x 2in chrome-plated steel chassis with the serated rubber-covered treadle mounted on top, and four rubber feet glued to the base. It's mains powered, and sports 8ft of three-core power cord, a mains on/off switch (situated on the top surface of the chassis just above the treadle), and a mains indicator light on the front panel.

Morley use opto-electronic circuitry in their controls and treadle operation, thus eliminating noisy crackles and doing away

with the old rack-and-pinion gears and potentiometers of conventional pedals. However, the Morley does have two very conventional footswitches mounted on the top panel, either side of the treadle base. The one to the right is the effect by-pass switch and is connected to an LED indicator light that pulsates at the same rate as the sweep speed. Moving the treadle from nose-up to nose-down alters the sweep rate from once every 16 seconds to 15 times a second, and the light pulsates accordingly.

The footswitch to the left of the treadle selects between CH (Chorus) and FL (Flanger), and has no less than two LED indicators that light up according to which effect you have switched in at the time. Obviously with an eye to the facilities being offered by some of their cheaper competitors, the manufacturer of Morley pedals, Tel-Ray Electronics of North Hollywood, have built a stereo capability into this particular Morley. Each of the two output sockets can be used separately to give a mixed effect/direct signal, but when both outputs are connected (either to separate amps for stereo effects, or to the same amp with different EQ settings on each channel), the Stereo Amplifier output becomes direct signal only. The other output socket, and the instrument input, are labelled Amplifier and Instrument respectively, and all three sockets are positioned on the right side of the chassis. Also on this side is a two-way switch labelled Harmonic Coloration which gives different tonal effects when switched up or down - an operation that can just be carried out by foot, as long as you're not wearing an example of the Lewisham patriotic jack boot.

To the left of the chassis are the three all-important rotary controls that set the actual sound which the treadle operated sweep acts upon. These rotaries are located in identical position and share exactly the same terminology as similar controls on the Morley Pro Phaser and Pro-Flanger pedals. The instruction booklet (which, incidentally, is a little more comprehensive than previous Morley efforts) says that the 'Phase Travel control determines

the amount of Flanging or Chorus ... the Center control selects the mid point of the sweep', and that the Harmonic Emphasis control 'regulates the amount of signal recirculated'. So you could say that they are equivalent to the Depth, Manual and Regeneration controls to be found on most Flangers. The instruction booklet also suggests that you might like to start with all three controls set at 12 o'clock, and it's as good a place as any to start.

There's an inherent problem with any pedal incorporating sweep effects (ie Chorus, Phasers, Flangers etc). When the sweep rate is increased it's generally necessary to reciprocate with a reduction in the depth of the effect, if you want to avoid excessive modulation of the sound. On a pedal that offers total foot control of the sweep rate this problem is even more pronounced.

On a normal hand-operated Flanger/Phaser/Chorus pedal with a rotary speed control, you're pretty well bound to settle for one sound that you like, rather than spend the evening grovelling about on the floor altering the controls, but to make best use of a pedal like the Morley you will want to use the treadle to change the sweep rate while you play. This means that an extreme setting on the depth control (Phase Travel) will result in excessive modulation at a high sweep rate, even if it sounds OK at slow speed. So, if you want to make full use of the treadle



Roger Phillips writes, plays keyboards and sax, takes great pics, you name it.





you will need to set the depth (Phase Travel) control to a reasonably low level. In fact, I found that anything above that 12 o'clock position on the Phase Travel dial produced too much pitch deviation at fast sweep rates on both Chorus and Flanging modes. Bit unfortunate really, cos the slow speed Chorus sound was definitely better with the Phase Travel turned up to around 3 o'clock.

The advantage that the Morley has over more limited pedals, however, is that it offers you a choice. You can either go for one particular extreme sound, or you can use a more moderate setting and change the sweep rate at will during the course of a gig.

Pedals that offer the facility of a footswitch for changing from one effect to another quite often suffer from another kind of problem – the settings for one effect are often quite inappropriate for the other. Morley have overcome this, to some extent, by allowing the Regeneration control (Harmonic Emphasis) to affect the Flanging sound only, so it's possible to keep the chorus effect quite subtle while having a fairly extreme Flanger sound on tap, at the click of a footswitch. In fact the *Chorus Flanger* footswitch merely introduces the effect of the Harmonic Emphasis control when it is switched to Flanger mode. With the Harmonic Emphasis control turned off

(anti-clockwise), the sound on both the Chorus and Flanger settings is identical.

A vast range of Flanging effects can be obtained from this box, from subtle slow sweeps and vibratos, through jet sounds and tremolos to strange reverb effects on extreme settings that sound like a flanged guitar being played in a sewer. But again, for stage use, and bearing that speed changing treadle in mind, a more moderate positioning of the controls is more useful. For both Chorus and Flanging effects that 12 o'clock setting suggested in the instructions seems to give the most usable sounds throughout the speed range, when applied to the Phase Travel and Center controls. But for a bit more emphasis on the Flanging sweep, the Harmonic Emphasis control can be turned up to 3 o'clock without the faster speeds becoming too over-modulated.

I couldn't find a use for the fastest sweep speed (treadle in the full nose-down position) on either Chorus or Flanging: it was far too fast for a conventional vibrato effect and produced a very metallic, ringing sound on everything bar the lowest control settings. It would be more useful to have a usable vibrato effect at the end of the pedal's travel so that you could find it easily.

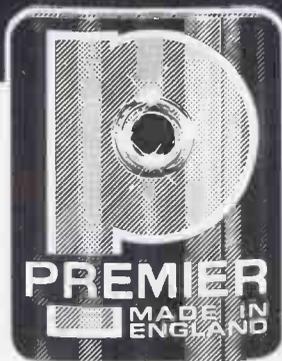
The Harmonic Coloration switch affects both the Chorus and Flanger modes and gives a slightly fuller (bassier) sound

on position 1 (up) than on position 2 (down). The effect is minimal on slow speed settings, but when the treadle is pushed down to a vibrato speed the Harmonic Coloration becomes more noticeable. In the Flanger mode the Coloration switch makes the sweep sound more pronounced when set to position 2.

Morley pedals could be said to be a bit on the bulky side compared to a lot of their competitors, and perhaps the standard Morley chassis could be trimmed down a bit. But I guess a foot-operated pedal is always going to be foot-sized – you can't miniaturise your plates of meat, can you? Morleys tend to be a little large on price too, and at £189 inc VAT the *Chorus Flanger* is no exception. Whether it's worth that amount or not is really up to you to decide. What you're paying for is Morley's unique approach to foot-operated FX units, and there's nothing else quite like them on the market.

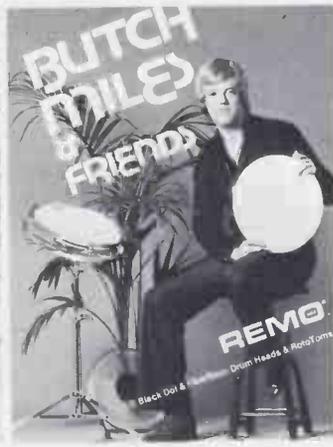
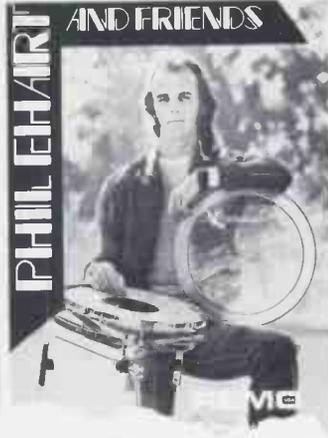
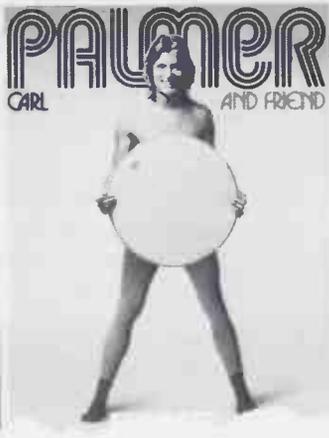
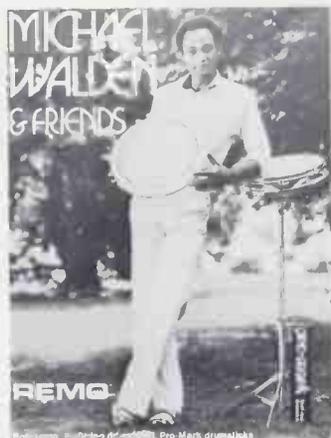
Well, there you have it. No silliness, no lewd references, just a good straight-forward, informative review. That's the stuff to give the troops, what? Should keep those manufacturing Johnnies quiet for a while eh young Mackie? MACKIE! Wake up boy, and get on with your subbing, or it's no football for you next Saturday □

# Whose rims can take the most stick?



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# Aria Loco 4102 and 0251

Gary Cooper



The 4102 rests casually atop its partner-in-sound, the 0251. Romantic, huh?

That the Japanese have a marked facility for miniaturisation is beyond doubt. In the past 20 years or so they have shrunk just about everything from cameras to hi-fi to the European economy; now they are turning their attention to amplification. Thus far (if it is at all fair to judge a nation's products as one, which I think in the case of the Japanese it may well be) their efforts have been only patchily successful. Some of the Japanese valve amps have been good, as have a very few of their transistorised amps. By and large, however, they have failed to mount a serious challenge to the major producers of Britain and America.

One might have expected any worthy challenge to have come from one of the major Japanese electronics houses. But curiously, the subject of this month's

review, the new Aria Loco 4102 and its matching 0251 extension cabinet, come from a company whose guitars are possibly the most consistently fine of any Japanese manufacturer, Aria. And a challenger it certainly is, both in terms of its specification and price.

Despite a relatively minute size (the amp measures about 14in x 7½in x 9in very roughly) the Aria Loco delivers a rated 40 watts RMS into two on-board speakers which each measure 4in diameter. This effectively, then, is a combo amp giving a decent sound pressure level on a par with, say, a normal large 30 watt tranny combo (or bigger, perhaps) yet measuring the size of about half a 100 watt Marshall valve head.

Its size alone makes the Loco almost quaint; it has that lovable quality which is

intangible yet unmistakable. You sort of can't help yourself liking it for what it does in spite of its physical size – like a *Mini Cooper* or an *Olympus Trip* camera.

Given the size of the amp, its facilities are pretty good too, although there are a few small areas lacking which I shall try to point out as we go through. On the back panel you have a captive mains lead, a metal on/off switch, a fuse holder, jack outlet for an external 8Ω speaker and a 0dB outlet and inlet arrangement of two jacks which you can use for either recording or as an effects loop to obtain the maximum signal-to-noise ratio. This loop facility will also free you from having guitar leads and effects snaking all over the stage, if you want.

Everything else that actually does anything is on the front panel but, just before we leave the back, one small plea. Could not Aria's designers consider switching (sorry!) to a plastic mains switch? The Yanks may not mind metal ones but I'm none too keen on them for fairly obvious electrical reasons.

The front panel features twin input jack sockets, one marked HL (high level) for use with low output instruments and the other marked LL, for high output guitars. Confused? You should be.

Next is a channel volume control and then comes a three-stage equalisation section offering low, mid and high pots. The brochure seems to imply that these are active, but I wasn't sure. They work well enough, but we'll come to that later.

Finally you find a reverb pot (yes, this diminutive baby even sports its own internal spring-line reverb unit!), a headphone jack which cuts out the on-board speakers and finally an LED on/off light. That's your lot, which isn't at all bad, again considering the amp's size.

What is missing, I would suggest respectfully to Aria, is a footswitch socket for the reverb control. Sort that out and fit a plastic mains switch and I'm with them 100% on what you get on this unit.

The amp itself is well made of good, thick wood and is covered with excellent quality, imitation leather-type vinyl. It looks excellent and has both substantial rubber feet and metal protectors for the corners. The speaker grille is removable via a tiny plastic tag which is stapled on to the bottom of the wooden speaker grille frame. Tug this and the front comes off to reveal the minute 4in twin speakers with their gleaming metal domes. The grille material itself is an extruded foam in block patterns, not unlike that used by JBL on their domestic *Centuries*. It looks really fine.

In use, the amp is quite exciting. You'd have every right to expect the sound to be



The 4102 naked and (relatively) unashamed. Yes, 4in speakers . . .

pure transistor radio with speakers this small, but no, someone at Aria obviously plays the guitar and has bothered to go into more than the mere ergonomics of amplifier size. The unit is topky, yes, but not objectionably so. The bass end can be extended quite fully if you play around with the tone controls and the sound is quite remarkably rich, full and warm. All right, it's patently obvious that this is no 15in reflex housing, but it isn't just a gimmick. The Loco sounds very convincing and would be fantastic for use in clubs and pubs where its size makes it more than useful in the transportation department and its sound makes it perfectly suitable for cabaret and jazz type playing.

For all the resolute use of transistors within, however, the Loco 4102 doesn't sound too harsh, either. You might have thought that transistors, plus the tiny speakers, plus the almost perverse decision to use metal-domed speakers would have resulted in a harsh trebly din. But no, the amp is warm, responsive and a lot of fun to play around with.

My sample certainly needed adjustment in its sensitivity, however. Used with even a high output instrument, the amp persistently refused to even approach an overload point. Even with the channel gain up to maximum and the master volume hovering around 2, the amp stayed almost totally, doggedly clean. Aria's distributors, Gigsville, tell me that this has been pointed out to the Japanese and that corrections to production samples will be made. One wonders, however, to what extent this overload correction will be possible. Driven at full volume the Loco is almost crazily loud for its size – but it is not a particularly attractive sound. It's here that the harshness creeps in, that old familiar transistorised square wave syndrome with all the odd harmonics emphasised and that grating sensation in your ears. If Aria in Japan are

to make this into a real rock amp then they are perhaps going to have to do more than alter the sensitivity of the Loco. They might be able to squeeze a better sound out of the unit by overloading the front end, I don't know, but if the total overall distortion is much to go by then this will not challenge even a fairly modest valve amp and, I regret to say, I have heard better solid state overloads in recent years.

This, however, must not be taken too much to heart. Until I see a full production model it is impossible to say what Aria's engineers can do. As it stands, the amp has a fantastic clean sound and not all guitarists want or even like distortion. For jazz and club use one would be hard pressed to find anything which sounded a great deal better – and nothing that I know of which is as portable.

The reverb was reasonable, although I personally found that it tended towards that type which makes its effect most apparent after the note has died away – know what I mean? Still, yet again bearing in mind the size of the amp it's pretty clever and a nice enough sound.

I also borrowed an 0251 extension speaker cab with this Loco. It's an interesting beast to use in conjunction with the combo, and the consequent lowering of the impedance down to 4Ω gives a total power output of 50 watts, the brochure claims. I assume that this must be an RMS figure but, either way, it certainly adds a lot of balls to the sound and gives more volume. The 0251 carries a single 10in metal-domed speaker and is fitted into an equally well made cab covered with matching material. The foam block speaker grille is also removable and, piggy-backed together, the two look a bit like an undernourished 100 watt stack. Don't be fooled, though. The power output of this combination is little short of staggering and the meat added to the overall sound stew makes this a very

pleasant combination. One particularly thoughtful delight provided by the 0251 is the provision of a removable back panel. This means that you can either use it with the panel in place, to give a tight, funky attacking sound, or unscrew it and leave it off for more top end, and, maybe, more sound pressure level. That's a nice idea and it goes with the overall impression that someone out there in Japan is really thinking.

The lid flies off the whole thing when you realise that the combo retails at a very, very low £123.90 including VAT and the extension cab retails, similarly Vatted, at only £73. When you consider that these are being imported from half way across the world, it makes you think! Value-for-money has to be a major consideration alongside performance and you can only rate the Aria Loco amp as truly excellent in this department. It competes with a lot of much bigger units and offers similar sound levels with this wonderful portability bonus.

I think that we can take the provision of service and after-sales care for granted with this one, by the way. Gigsville have possibly the best reputation in the business from this angle and you can be reasonably sure that their retailers will be equally conscientious as they operate on a franchise-only basis. You won't find this Loco discounted by a halfpenny, but you can be sure that Gigsville have got it as low as they can.

So, on balance, how do I rate this unit and its extension? Well, as yet, until they get the distortion side really sorted out, I wouldn't recommend this amp to a pure heavy metal freak (hang on, how can you have a pure HM devotee??). I would recommend it, however, for home practise, pub and club gigging, home studio use and rehearsals for any guitarist who likes a small, well-made amp with a really pleasant warm sound and a nice bit of bite up the top end (which can be very painful if your Y-Fronts are too tight). Probably ideal for the pub and club merchant would be the purchase of both this, for smaller gigs and rehearsal-cum-practice, and an extension for larger venues. Armed thus you can imagine session players and gigging guitarists literally being able to get to venues on the bus.

You won't think that the Loco is capable of anything like its potential when you first see it. Try one and a new world of possibilities will open up to you. Now all they have to do is lick the overload/distortion problem and they've got something which could really have the other manufacturers worried. In the meantime they have created a brand new market for themselves. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is very, very clever! □



# Four Stereo Tape Machines part two

Reviewed by Mel Lambert

Last month Mel looked at the Teac 32.2 and the Revox B77. This month, he concludes with the Neal/Ferrograph SP7 and the Otari MX5050.



## Neal/Ferrograph SP7

While the more up-market Neal/Ferrograph Studio 8 has always struck me as being a particularly attractive and well laid-out machine, I've never got the same sort of vibe from the cheaper SP7 and its near relation, the soon to be discontinued Logic 7. One wit to whom I showed the machine offered the opinion that the SP7 looks as if it had been designed by a committee. I think I know what he meant. Several switches, controls and pieces of metal give every appearance of having simply been bolted on as an afterthought. And the colour scheme doesn't even match. The top half of the metal front panel is finished in dark blue, the lower in grey-blue, and the band running across the centre is brushed aluminium. To make things worse, grey paint has been used for lettering on the aluminium panel, which quite often makes it very difficult to read.

But aesthetics aside, the SP7 does boast some rather bizarre operational habits. Below a tape counter and three-position switch for selecting tape speed (on the review machine: 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ , 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  and 15in/s) there is a small red LED labelled 'check'. This lights whenever the right-hand tension arm isn't being supported by tape – in effect an end-of-tape sensor, which also drops the transport into stop and turns off the capstan motor. All fairly straightforward I suppose.

You cannot help but notice, however, that very little space is provided between the

capstan shaft and pinch wheel. Which is where a lever labelled 'load' and 'release' comes into its own. Parked in the upper (release) position the tape – once threaded – will run normally. But pull the lever down to the load position and the pinch wheel moves back to allow tape to be threaded, and also locks up the right-hand tape tension arm. All this strikes me as quite a performance every time you want to relace a tape – during a protracted editing session perhaps – doubly so since the load/release lever is rather stiff and cumbersome to operate.

The second funny concerns the absence of any movable lifters in the tape's path across the headblock. During rewind and fast-forward, this means that tape is always in contact with the heads – a mute switch has even been incorporated to prevent the VUs winding themselves around the end stops, and your getting deafened from high-pitched squeaks and chatter. Neal/Ferrograph claims that having tape laced up all the time doesn't significantly shorten head life. I must say that I have great doubts about this, especially if you intend to shuttle tape backwards and forwards during repeated sound-on-sound sessions.

Transport controls comprise an unusual combination of reverse, mute, stop, cancel (which simply turns off record mode without stopping the tape), wind, pause, run (play) and record. The wind button operates in conjunction with a knob which, when turned clockwise, sets up fast forward and, anticlockwise, rewind.

While this may allow tape to be spooled at different speeds (a slow wind results in a smoother packing of tape on a reel), it takes quite a while to get used to. Perhaps that's why Neal/Ferrograph included a reverse facility which, as the name suggests, simply swaps the direction of spooling while it is held down. Beside the wind knobs is a preset control for selecting vertical or horizontal operation (to compensate for changes in spring tension on the end of the tape sensing arm), and large/small reel tape tension.

The rest of the front panel is remarkably free of controls. Apart from three pairs of presets for adjusting line-level sensitivity, line output and bias level on each track, plus a central track select switch (confusingly labelled upper instead of left, lower instead of right, and stereo), all that's provided is a pair of dual-concentric controls for the headphone socket (and optional built-in amplifiers and loudspeakers), tape/source output on each track and a central bias switch.

I need to point out, however, that the machine supplied for review was a rather basic model, and hadn't been equipped with optional microphone inputs. Also, at no additional cost, Neal/Ferrograph says it will install proper knobs on each preset input and output control, which starts to bring the machine's front-panel features more into line with the other three machines tested here. (And which also starts to make the SP7 look more and more like its close cousin, the ill-fated Logic 7.)

To record on just one channel at a time you need to insert a screwdriver blade into the upper/lower/stereo preset slots and select the required position. Although this is rather inconvenient, without a dedicated sound-on-sound facility, a certain amount of repatching between line inputs and outputs has to be carried out anyway. One extra control to fiddle with isn't exactly going to slow things up a great deal.

Using the cancel button to drop out of record mode results in some nasty clicks being put on to tape; better to use the stop button which doesn't produce such glitches. Also, for rapid starts, pause should be selected first to start up the capstan motor; subsequently pressing play, or record and play, gives a remarkably fast run up to proper speed. The transport logic proved totally reliable otherwise, and handled tape smoothly and gently.

The bias switch enables bias level of each track to be displayed on the respective VU meter. Set up correctly for the recommended Agfa PEM368 tape, each VU should read zero. If and when the machine is re-aligned to suit another brand of tape, you should still have a guide to the optimum amount of bias required. Periodically checking bias before each recording session to monitor any significant changes



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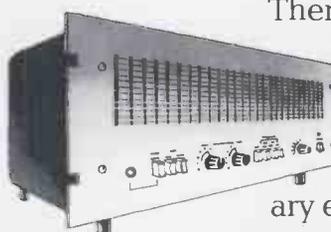
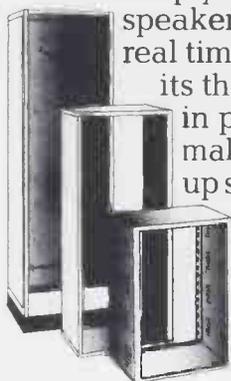
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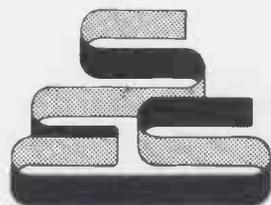
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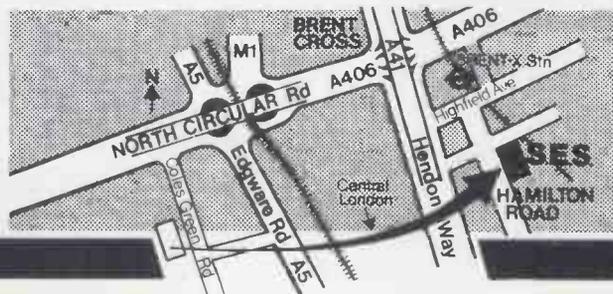
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in level, lets you know when it's time to get out the screwdriver and test oscillator. A useful extra, and one that lets you keep a rough 'n' ready check on the machine's state of tune – bias being almost certainly the one adjustment that needs to be regularly tweaked. (Gaining access to the other relevant presets, however, is quite a performance. You need to undo no less than 22 screws to remove the combined back and bottom cover, beneath which lurks the row of preset controls on a small sub-chassis.)

All high-impedance input and low-impedance output sockets (unbalanced jacks but with balancing transformers and/or XLRs being available as an option) are to be found on the top panel, together with the IEC-style mains socket and four clearly-marked mains and DC power fuses. Also provided is a 14-way socket for the optional remote control unit, located beneath a pull-out carrying handle.

It's very difficult to be too critical of the Neal/

Ferroglyph SP7. After all it is made in this country – and how many British machines are there around these days? – but compared to the other decks under review I cannot help but think that the SP7 is rather antiquated in what it offers. To be fair, its makers possibly wouldn't pretend that the SP7 has been designed with the small studio and demo market in mind. With preset line input and output controls it could be considered to fall into the 'idiot-proof' mastering machine category. Nevertheless, since microphone inputs are available as an optional extra, somebody at Neal/Ferroglyph must surely have thought it could be used as a self-contained deck for making the occasional demo. Unfortunately, the SP7's rather unconventional layout and somewhat strange operational features do take a lot of getting used to. I have doubts about it being able to stand up to competition offered by the other machines reviewed here.

track to be monitored off the record head in perfect sync with material being recorded on the second track. (And which, to prevent nasty howlround, automatically disables record mode on the track being monitored.)

Beside these switches are provided a row of presets for record bias, EQ (low- and high-frequency) plus level on both tracks. Otari has even built in a 1kHz test oscillator, the output from which, when selected via momentary pushbutton, is automatically routed to the line input of each track. Adjacent to the line output controls is a switch labelled SRL (Standard Reference Level), internally calibrated to provide a fixed level to each VU meter and output socket (more on this later). Provision of a built-in oscillator and fixed output level means that quick checks of operating level and bias can be made of the machine using just the VU meters.

As soon as the record safe/ready switches are depressed, a red LED beside the record button begins to flash. When both the record and replay buttons are subsequently depressed, record mode is entered and the record LED remains lit. Dropping out can now be achieved by simply pressing the play button, or by releasing the safe/ready button. To start recording again at a new drop-in point, all you need do is hit the record button a second time (provided the record safe/ready switch has already been depressed). A well thought out logic system, and one that produces completely click-free recordings. Full marks to Otari.

The lack of a dedicated sound-on-sound switch means that a certain amount of re-patching is required. However, since this only requires one additional XLR-to-XLR connecting lead (such as found on most mics, but which shouldn't be too difficult to wire up for yourself) I don't consider it to be too much of a hardship.

The rear panel also contains a multitude of connectors and switches. Unbalanced mic and line inputs are provided with 3-pin XLR sockets, as are the balanced, low-impedance line outputs. Three slide switches select high or low 'standard' output level (–10dBV or +4dBV for a OVU meter reading); NAB or IEC record/replay EQ, and high, medium or low recording level. Once properly calibrated this latter switch offers the following selections: set to low, recording level for OVU corresponds to Ampex (185nWb/m) operating level, medium to MRL level (250nWb/m), and high to BASF or MRL/IEC level (320nWb/m).

It is hence a simple matter to switch recording levels to take full advantage of high-output tapes. For example, you may like to use Ampex 406 for 'routine' recordings and 456 Grand Master when you want to record at higher levels. Since the bias requirements of both these formulations is identical, switching from low to medium operating level will give just under 3dB of additional dynamic range, by moving further away from the tape's inherent noise floor. Also provided on the rear panel is a multiway socket for an optional remote control unit, which provides duplicate transport controls.

Finished in black painted metal with



### Otari MX5050

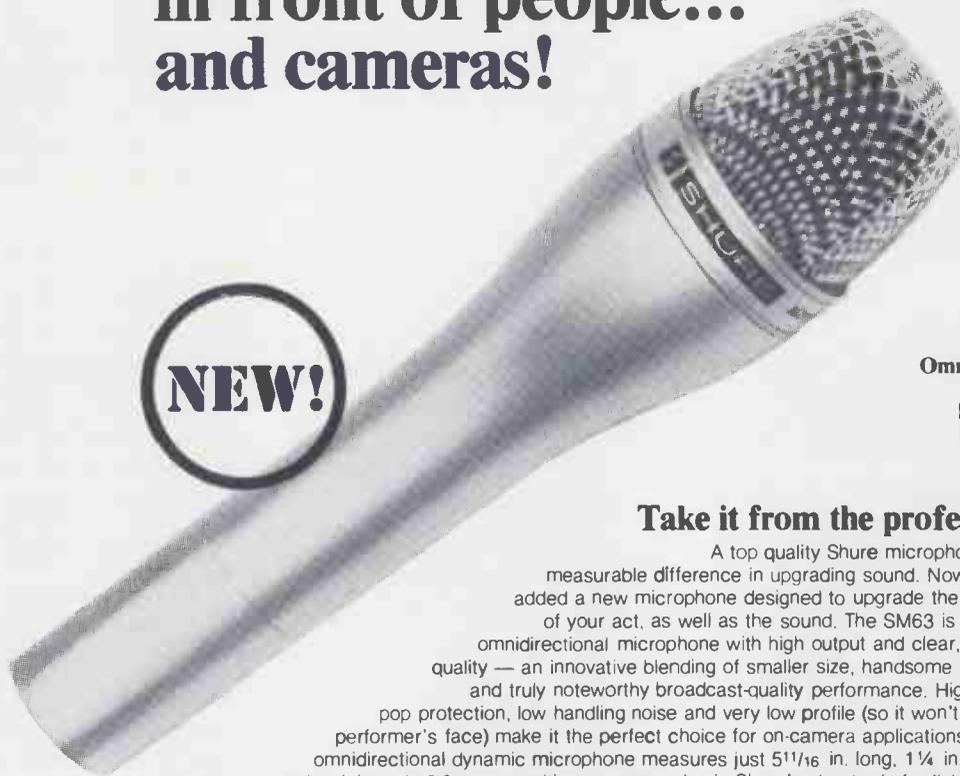
Despite the fact that the MX5050 is the most expensive machine I looked at, it really does bristle with useful facilities – it even comes complete with an extra stereo  $\frac{1}{4}$ -track head for playing back tapes recorded in that format. (A switch built into the rear of the headblock selects normal  $\frac{1}{4}$ -track or  $\frac{1}{2}$ -track replay.) A pull-on/push-off vari-speed knob and associated red LED – nice to have some visual indication that you're recording or replaying at a non-standard tape speed – can be continuously adjusted between  $\pm 80\%$  of the nominal  $7\frac{1}{2}$  or 15in/s. The 4-digit tape counter has a selectable stop-at-zero facility, which operates in rewind mode only. Tape path is easy to follow and can be laced up very quickly,

while a hinged head cover makes for easier head cleaning and gives improved access to the heads during editing. The right hand tape tension arm also functions as an end-of-tape sensor, which automatically stops the transport and turns off the capstan motor.

Other front-panel features include a cue lever; 'edit' button that turns off the take-up reel motor for dumping unwanted tape during editing; pairs of dual-concentric level controls for mic and line inputs and output; individual tape/source switches; self-illuminated VU meters with built-in peak overload LEDs (set to flash at +9dB over standard Ampex operating level); and separate record safe/ready switches for each track with associated red LEDs. In addition, a pair of sel-sync switches enable one

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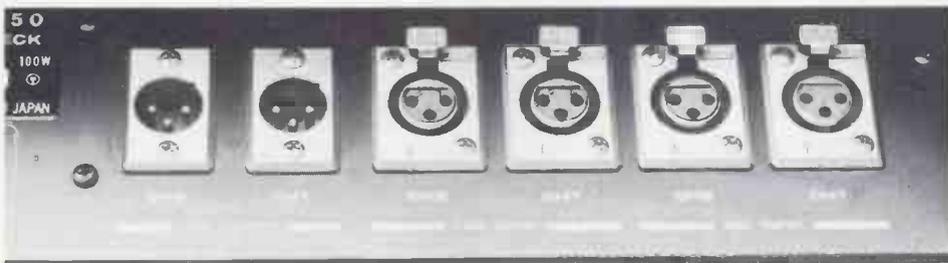
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matching wooden side pieces, the *MX5050* is a very sturdy-looking piece of hardware, and seems capable of withstanding a fair amount of abuse. Carrying handles have been built into each side panel; although at 53lb I for one wouldn't want to have to cart the machine very

far single-handed.

I can best sum up my impressions of the Otari *MX5050* as: 'You get what you pay for.' Its price may be rather high, but it does come complete with a great deal of useful facilities not found on the other three machines.



### In a nutshell

Rather than run through all the good and bad features of each machine once again, I have drawn up a table that summarises these and gives one or two overall opinions. Apart from a couple of reservations about the Neal/Ferrograph *SP7*, each reel-to-reel I had the opportunity to fool around with proved easy to use and does just about everything one could ask of budget-priced reel-to-reel. With regard to overall value for money versus useful

facilities for the small studio and musician/home-recording market, my vote goes to the Revox *B77*. While the Teac *32-2* may cost less, its inability to record on separate tracks loses it quite a few marks. And, to my mind, the Otari *MX5050* is just a wee bit too pricey for the budget-orientated user. It's still a very fine machine, however, but more suited, I would have thought, to the studio user or somebody who can make full use of its exceptional facilities.

Features:	Teac 32.2	Revox B77	Neal/Ferrograph SP7	Otari MX5050
Sound-on-sound	No	Yes	No	No
Varispeed	Yes	Optional	No	Yes
Sel-sync	No	Optional	No	Yes
Test Oscillator	No	No	No	Yes
Stop-at-Zero	No	No	No	Yes
Operational Gradings:				
Tape threading	*****	*****	**	*****
Front-panel layout	****	****	***	****
Ease of operation	*****	*****	**	*****
Transport logic	****	****	***	*****
VU metering	****	*****	***	*****
Access to heads	*****	***	***	*****
Versatility	****	****	**	*****
Carrying handles	side	top	top	side
Dimensions (WxHxD in)	17x18x10½	18x16½x8	20x17x10	17x20½x11
Weight	44lb	37½lb	58lb	53lb
Price (ex VAT)	£434	£630	£611	£845
Value for money	****	*****	**	****

\* Top Score: 5 stars

### Prices and Availability

The **Teac 32-2** costs £433.91 plus VAT. Optional extras include the *RC-90* remote control (£34.70), *DX-2B* dbx unit (£303.48), *RM-10* rack-mounting frame (£21.74), *CS-606* rolling trolley (£65.22) and *TZ-550* dust cover (£19.13). Full details from: Harman UK, St. John's Road, Tylers Green, High Wycombe, Bucks HP10 8HR, Tel: 049481-5221.

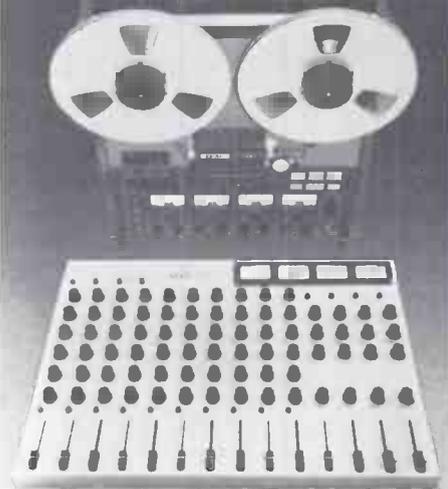
The **Revox B77** costs £600 in 3¼/7½in/s format, and £630 for 7½/15in/s (factory set for either NAB or IEC record/replay EQ). Optional varispeed costs £61.20, remote control £78.48, dust cover £18 and NAB reel adaptors (not supplied) £5.40 each in plastic, or £27.36 (sic) in metal. Built-in sel-sync adds an extra £30 to the cost of a basic machine. Further details from: FWO Bauch Ltd, 49

Theobald Street, Boreham Wood, Herts WD6 4RZ, Tel: 01-953 0091.

The **Neal/Ferrograph SP7** costs £611 for the basic line-in/line-out version, available with a choice of either IEC/CCIR or NAB EQ, and three operating speeds from 1½ to 15in/s. Optional extras include remote control (£47), Dolby *B* noise reduction (£118), mic inputs (£28 per machine), balanced inputs and outputs (£35.50 per connector), rack-mounting kit (£40) and built-in amplifiers and speakers (£47 per channel). Full details from: Neal/Ferrograph Audio Ltd, Simonside Works, South Shields, Tyne & Wear NE34 9NX, Tel: 0632-566321.

The **Otari MX5050** costs £845 for a 3¼/7½ or 7½/15in/s machine, while a remote control costs an additional £54. Full details from Industrial Tape Applications, 1-7 Harewood Avenue, London NW1, Tel: 01-724 2497. □

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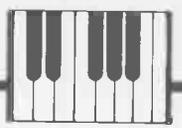
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# H/H P73 Piano

Dave Crombie

## The Company

It is rare these days to find a successful British manufacturing company. H/H is one such rarity. Since their inception back in 1969, the company have boasted an unbelievable growth rate of 80% each and every year during the Seventies, and their annual turnover has reached over £5 million. H/H is divided into two sections, both physically (there are two separate factories, though they are only a hundred yards apart), and by product. H/H Electronics is responsible for the amplification business and they claim to be one of the top three amplification manufacturers in the world. They also now handle the H/H keyboards. H/H Acoustics deals with the production of loudspeaker units, both for the products in the H/H Electronics range and also for any other customers who require brand named loudspeakers – so you may be using H/H speakers without even knowing the fact (see also page 17). H/H Acoustics are probably the only company to offer design facilities to customers for them to tailor the speaker's performance to their specific needs. At a time when Fane have been known to put staff on short-time, and with Celestion also (H/H claim) having problems, the H/H order books are full, which must say something for the product.

H/H have an advantage over many amplification companies. In Britain, and most European countries, they supply direct to the retailers. Products such as Marshall go through distributors who, obviously, take a slice of the price we the public pay for the item. H/H incur the cost of the distribution themselves, hence there is only one 'cut' to take instead of two. This all means that H/H can either produce products that will sell at a lower price in the shops, or else offer a better

*Dave 'Receptions' Crombie plays keyboards and then writes about them, usually in that order.*

product for similar sums of money. One only has to see the H/H factory and it is obvious that they have opted for the second choice: their products are made with a considerable amount of care, and are thoroughly tested at every stage to ensure that the final product is going to have that reliability and quality.

## The Policy

As you will probably know by now, H/H's big new product this year is the *P73 Electronic Piano*. The news of this instrument had been kept very secret prior to the August British Music Fair, the intention being that of maximum impact. It certainly had that, and was helped by the lack of any real new products from the bigger names. But why an electronic piano? It seems that H/H wanted to spread its wings somewhat, and also didn't want to put all their eggs in one basket (*writes our Farmyard correspondent*). It would seem logical for a company who specialise in amplification equipment to move into manufacturing instruments that create the sounds to be amplified: there's obviously a limit to innovations possible in amplification terms, and with all the expertise gained in the music industry, instrument manufacture was an obvious move.

A keyboard also offered the most possibilities and would make the most use of the facilities available – circuit board plant, board assemblers, electronic technicians etc. But why go for an electronic piano in preference to, say, a polyphonic synthesiser which would be far more versatile.

Stan Wilson, the head of the piano's design team, answered this question thus, 'The market for pianos is vast. The *P73* is an instrument that could be used in a variety of different environments, and because of that the market is potentially

larger than for something like a polyphonic synthesiser.' Personally I wonder about this.

But Stan went on to express the designer's point of view for going for an electronic piano, as distinct from this hard commercial standpoint. 'The design of an electronic piano represents the most challenge in every respect, in that we had to get a keyboard action sorted out, we also had to have true dynamics, that's dynamics that vary the timbre as well as the loudness of the note, and the waveform synthesiser itself; we had to get four distinct and relevant piano sounds based on what is popular.' I wholeheartedly agree with Stan Wilson on this point: reconstructing the sound of an acoustic or electro-mechanical piano, electronically, is an almost impossible task, and complex control circuitry is required to achieve this simulation. Hence the *P73* uses a micro-processor for this degree of control.

## The Market

Having decided to go for an electronic piano, the H/H design team's work was only just starting. It was almost 18 months ago that the *P73* received the green light, and from that point on various decisions had to be made. Primarily, it had to be agreed to whom this piano would appeal. It was decided that the *P73* would be aimed at the pros and semi-pros who find that they need a wider range of 'piano' sounds from an instrument than the existing electric/electronic instruments offer, combined with a portability that some of these instruments lack. For those of you who missed our June '80 issue, and who are a little confused regarding the differences between the two aforementioned types of piano, I shall explain. An electric (or electro-mechanical) piano uses a vibrating medium, eg a metal rod or



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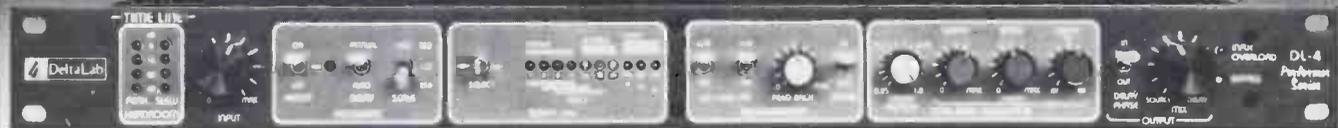
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strip to generate the basic sound. This vibration is converted into an electrical signal by a pickup, and is fed on to an amplifier and speaker. Prime examples of electric pianos are the Fender Rhodes (employing rods or tines) and the Wurlitzer EP200 (metal strips). The main problems with this type of instrument are that they are usually quite bulky, they are prone to tuning problems and usually only offer one basic sound.

Electronic pianos use electronic circuitry to generate the basic sounds, which are in turn filtered and amplified. The only moving parts in an electronic piano are the notes of the keyboard, and hence these instruments are normally less bulky and usually have very stable tuning. The only problem is that the sounds produced are often quite unpleasant, and at best fair simulations of acoustic instruments. Many electronic pianos use what is known as a master oscillator system, whereby all the pitches for the notes are derived from one high-frequency oscillator, and as a result all the notes have the same phase relationship, giving the instrument a very flat sound.

The P73 aims to capture the benefits of both these types of instruments in one piano – it is, however, still an electronic piano. Have they managed it? Well, I think so, but at a price – the H/H P73 Electronic Piano is destined to sell, when it appears in the shops in December, at the sum of £1200. That's a lot of money for an electronic piano, no matter how good it is. But let's first take a closer look at the instrument.

### The Piano

Visually, there is nothing particularly remarkable about the P73 – two chrome leg assemblies support the main console of the instrument. These legs and the dual footpedal fit neatly in the lid of the instrument and the whole piano folds up into a 47½in(W) x 24¾in(H) x 11½in(D) case weighing 143lbs, with two heavy-duty carrying handles on the top. One person can just about manage to carry the unit and set it up, but I reckon (true male chauvinist that I am) that most women would find it impossible to accomplish the said feat without assistance.

Okay, we've got it up on its stand and the detachable Europlug lead is interfacing the piano with the Central Electricity Generating Board, and the audio sockets are hooked up to a new H/H MOS-FET amp (the instrument can be run mono, but obviously as it has a stereo output the best results will be heard in this medium). The first thing that strikes you, apart from the now-obligatory illuminating company logo that comes on with the power, is the keyboard. It is a 73-note job (hence P73, in case you were wondering), based on an

E to E scale. It is British-made, and feels pretty good. I'm so glad to see that H/H haven't copped out and used a ghastly Italian keyboard, but have spent that bit extra on getting a quality keyboard that doesn't feel like disposable cutlery. This one is, in fact, made out of Canadian bass wood, whatever that is. The manufacturers of the H/H keyboard are well-known for more traditional keyboards for acoustic pianos, so it should be good. Anyway, the keys are square-ended and use a weighted action which helps considerably to get the best out of the instrument's excellent dynamic qualities.

Before we go any further, I feel that I should point out the P73's major limitation – it can only play eight notes at a time. Now, it doesn't mention anything about

labelled P1, P2, P3, P4 and Clavichord and are selected (individually only, no combining of presets) by merely brushing the desired touch pad. A small LED (Light Emitting Diode) indicates which preset is activated at a given time; this LED is, however, a bit tricky to see from the side, and under adverse lighting conditions it is difficult to see which preset has been selected.

The leaflet (the owners' manual wasn't available at the time of writing) describes P1 as a straight, unhurried sound. Now I've been trying to work out what this means and for the life of me can't see how a voicing can be described as 'unhurried'. But it certainly is a pleasing and fairly accurate upright piano voicing. There is, of course, a lot of room for improvement,



Pic Dave Crombie

The chaps responsible: H/H mainman Mike Harrison (left) with Stan Wilson and Bill Hardman of the piano design team. Smile, Mike!

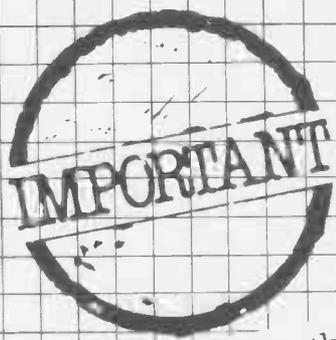
this in the promotional leaflet, which is a bit naughty, especially when the leaflet is so detailed in other respects. But I suppose that to sell units you don't advertise the weaknesses of a product. Some of you may feel that an eight-note capability isn't much of a limitation. Well, to most players, eight notes is usually adequate. But consider what happens if you play a long sustained run up the keyboard; by the time you reach the upper octaves the bass notes will have been cut out (or robbed). Again, in most situations this won't be noticeable, but for studio work particularly this may prove to be quite an annoyance. With a £1200 price tag, one would hope to avoid such problems.

Having drawn attention to this weak link, it must be said that there aren't any other major compromises to contend with. The control panel is very simple, and clearly laid out. Five touch-pads are used to select the particular voicings. These are

and no way could you fool a musician that this was an acoustic piano. But P1 did feel to me as a piano does, ie the amplitude and tone of the note did relate to that of a piano when played with varying strength. The keyboard dynamics of the P73 are determined by the velocity of the key, unlike the piano where it is a combination of velocity and strength that affects the sound, but it was noticeable how the character of the note changed as well as its volume, when played faster. P1 was well balanced right across the range of the keyboard, and is one of the best sounds I have heard from any electronic piano.

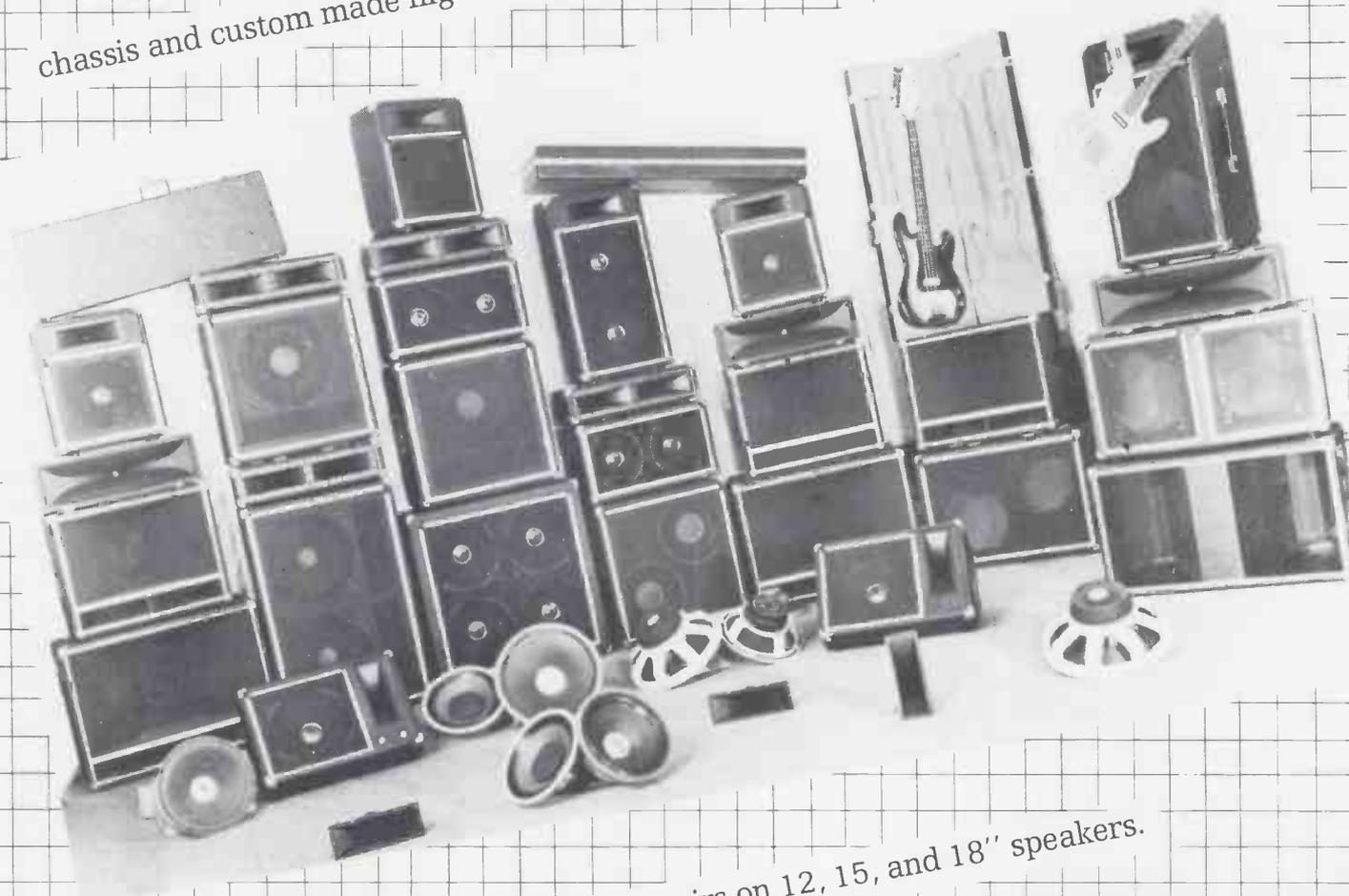
P2, although H/H don't say so in so many words, is a Rhodes copy. It's unmistakable. Unfortunately, on the instrument I tried the top end wasn't quite right, but I was assured that they intend to boost the level in the higher octaves to get the





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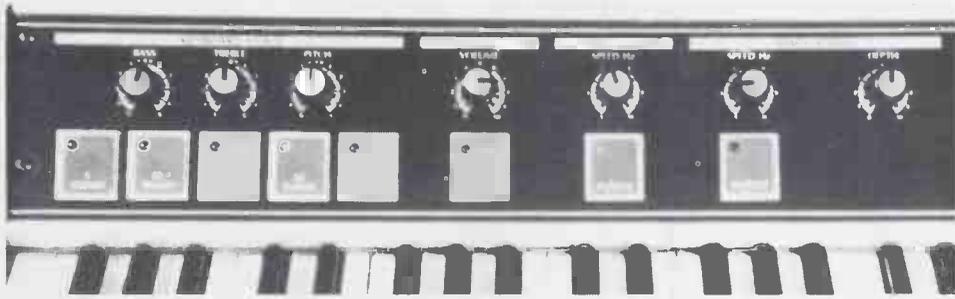
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Controls and presets on the P73, explained in detail on this and previous page.

sound more balanced. Otherwise a very good sound, which tends towards that overdriven sound if played hard – just like a Rhodes.

P3 is Wurlitzer. Again, there's no doubt about it, but with the P73 you don't have to worry about the reeds breaking every five minutes, and the blessed thing going out of tune at every gig. The P73 doesn't quite capture that almost ring modulated-type sound that the Wurlitzer has down at the bottom, but it makes up for it in having 73 notes to play with and a much better touch response.

P4 is a bit of a strange one. I reckon that it captures the sound of a Rhodes when the tines are set against the pickups so that the fundamental is lost and only harmonics are picked up. In fact it is almost identical to P1, but an octave down with almost all the bass filtered out. It is, though, a useful sound, and will probably find itself used more often than the other presets (in a rock idiom anyway).

The Clavichord is different to most voices to be found with similar names on other instruments. The effect is one of light, clear, delicate sounds combined with a certain richness. I must say that I really liked this preset, but I did find, as it was so much brighter than the other voices, that it did ring out quite a bit louder than the ordinary piano presets.

In addition to the voice touch-switches, there are three further effect and modifier buttons on the front panel. Firstly there is the Solo Boost feature, above which is the master rotary volume control. The Solo Boost gives an extra 10dB volume to the piano which can either be selected manually by touching the button or by depressing the left footswitch. The purpose of this feature is to give you that extra level instantly. This, the manufacturers claim, is very useful in a live performance when you need to take a solo. Personally, I could live without this bonus, but some may wonder why no-one has ever thought of it before, and find it most useful. The master volume control is notched, I don't really know why, but I found it pleasing and very reassuring. Funny isn't it?

To the left of the volume control is the master tune knob,  $\pm$ one semitone around an A440Hz, and treble and bass controls,

$\pm$ 12dB at 2kHz, and  $\pm$ 12dB at 100Hz respectively. I think that the tone controls could have been made somewhat more effective: a  $\pm$ 12dB range isn't quite enough.

The Stereo Tremolo is set at an optimum depth, but there is also a rotary speed control the function of which is obvious. Whereas the stereo tremolo of the Fender Rhodes is very jumpy, ie the sound jumps back and forth from left to right, with the P73 the effect is much smoother (I would say it was almost sinusoidal, but I don't want to appear too flash). Anyway, the effect is that of panning the output across the stereo picture at varying rates. Obviously, this works best with the Rhodes soundalike, P2.

The final effect is the Space Tremolo, which has an On/Off touch-pad, rotary speed and depth controls. The effect is midway between that of a chorus and a phaser, but it is particularly quiet in operation and doesn't cut down the high frequencies so much as those devices tend to. It also gives the sound an overall increase in depth and richness. I'm told that it doesn't employ conventional circuitry techniques – no delay lines or comb filter, so I was interested to know exactly how it worked. But they wouldn't tell me.

The mains switch and headphone socket are also located on the front panel; otherwise, that's it. The connector panel is located on the right side of the piano, and houses the mains socket, voltage selector, fuseholder, XLR footswitch connector, two stereo jack outputs (100mw into 10kohms), and a mono jack output (similar). The footpedals are well made and provide control over the Solo Boost (already mentioned) and Sustain, which is preset for each voice.

Also available, but at an as-yet-undetermined price, is the MOS-FET keyboard combo, which sits neatly under the P73 and provides two channels of 50 watts amplification. The combo's console is almost identical in size to the piano and houses two DC65LW 12in speakers and the two 50 watt amplifiers. I would have thought, as with the Fender Rhodes, that the piano with combo amp will be less popular than the piano on its own, but it's good to have the option.

I have left one of the most interesting aspects of the P73 to last because at the moment it's damn all use. If you look down the left side of the piano, you will see a small panel on which is mounted a 25-pin D-connector. This is an interface to a digital sequencer (probably polyphonic) which isn't available yet. When it is, the P73 will take on a whole new lease of life.

## Conclusions

This is the first of many keyboard products that will be coming out of H/H in Cambridge. Of that I'm sure, but I'm not so sure that they will be selling many of this P73 piano. The trouble is that, although this is a good electronic piano in terms of performance, it just isn't going to sell at £1200. I think that H/H would find it hard to sell at £995, which in fact may be the price this instrument ends up at if the discounters get going. Perhaps the only comparable piano on the market is the ARP Piano 16, which you can get for about £1400 and boasts 16 voices.

The H/H piano certainly lives up to the H/H name in terms of quality and design innovation, and as such it represents a good firm basis on which to build a range of keyboard products. But I will be very surprised if this model sells in anything approaching large numbers.

Servicing is simplicity itself. There are basically just two circuit boards with easy access, but considering the care with which H/H assemble and test their products, I'm sure that servicing problems will be minimal. The aspect that I find most appealing about this instrument is that it puts the control back into the hands of the musician, that is to say it is the keyboard that is responsible for the character of the sound. The touch dynamics are excellent, and therefore the piano can be really 'played' by a pianist without having to rely on constant knob-twiddling. I think that it is clear that I consider this an excellent musician's instrument. But it's just too expensive. □



# Sound REVIEWS

## Jazz Washes Whiter

The 1980 Montreux Jazz Festival presented a programme varied enough this year to almost warrant the replacing of the word 'jazz' by music, which, in view of the ever-increasing number of jazz festivals that are taking place in Switzerland, can only be for the good. Not that jazz buffs were left out in the cold (and it was, too, at times!) though it was refreshing that this year Montreux was relying less and less on the old familiar faces. The other impression that I had was that the programmes seemed less charged and personally feel that this is a trend to be applauded. As has been remarked in the past, a programme that is too long is too long no matter how good the artists.

The festival got off to a good start with the first evening entirely devoted to Santana, who were two-thirds of the way through their European tour. For this evening the Santana crew used their own mixing consoles and monitor system in conjunction with the installed Electro-Voice PA. Six Turbosound bass bins were also used as sub-woofers and though no-one would dispute that they perform very well, at times the low bass was overpowering, especially underneath the balconies. Overall, the balance and sound was better than what one is normally used to with good definition on all of the instruments. The onstage discipline of the band is very evident as was shown at the afternoon sound check, which passed with a maximum of politeness and a minimum of hassle – the only important thing being to get monitor levels and the overall sound right and not pamper egos. The programme consisted naturally enough of selections from the latest album, *Marathon*, though with a programme of easily three hours there was opportunity enough to include old favourites such as *Soul Sacrifice*, *Oye Como Va*, etc. The old fire is still there though the original roughness that was part of the charm of Santana has been honed (as one would expect, I suppose) and the stage performance would indicate that the flirtation with the 'disco sound' has not left any permanent injuries. No small part in the more driving sound displayed by the latest version of Santana is vocalist/rhythm guitarist Alexander J Ligertwood, who brings a well run-in rock approach to the music and helps turn the wheel full circle back to the latin-rock sound that first made Santana famous. The evening ended in true Montreux tradition with the ap-



Claude Nobs, Al Jarreau, Alex Ligertwood and Carlos Santana join forces.

pearance of a 'surprise guest' in the form of singer Al Jarreau and festival organiser Claude Nobs and harmonica interpreting the blues song, *Shake Your Moneymaker*. Leaving you to guess what the 'moneymaker' is, the main comment is that it was a pleasure to have an organised number – even though it was kept fairly loose – rather than the all too often disorganised jam where it is a case of 'get your lick in now' and hang the rest. All in all, an evening of good music with just the right balance of professionalism.

The next evening that I attended was 'Rock and France', which can best be described as a mixture! Originally the programme was to include Patrick Moraz and his group, French singer Nicolas Peyrac and French-Canadian singer Diana Dufresne. For various reasons the programme dwindled until we were left with Mille Dufresne, French pianist Georges Rabol and two groups who were booked to play on the casino terrace for the free afternoon concerts but found themselves elevated to evening concert status. The concert opened with Georges Rabol who in his short set of about 20 minutes demonstrated that he is a pianist of considerable talent and finesse and that we could have done with a longer performance. Next on were the French group from Lyon, Electric Callas. Whether the tag would be new wave, punk or whatever is irrelevant, the fact is that they are just not ready for events such as Montreux. True to the general predictions of the stage crew they disappeared after about the fourth number under a shower of whistling and general abuse from the audience. The kindest thing one could say is that it resembled amateur night at the youth club! Here the point is not that the group were terrible (with six months on the road and considerable rehearsal, who knows?) but how such an act could find its way into the concert hall? Surely France has something better to offer Montreux, or are they completely indifferent? Next into the arena were the Swiss group Tenter Hook from Lausanne who improved things considerably. Heavily inspired by people such as Uriah Heep with funky overtones, the group showed

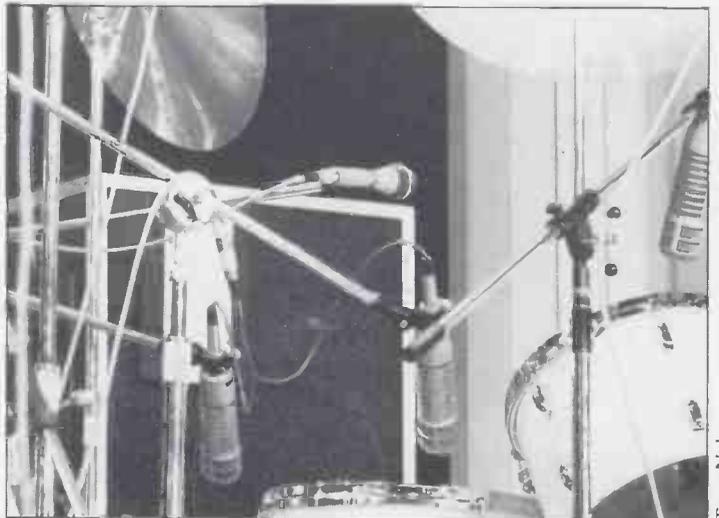
themselves to be very competent musicians but that their music is somewhat lacking in strength. However, the promise of better things is there. At this point it was evident that if the price of a ticket for the evening was to be justified, something special was going to be needed and happily for the concertgoers this was provided in the form of Diane Dufresne and her musicians. Here we were back into the international class in terms of musicianship, presentation and performance. An incredible voice coupled with an overpowering stage presence had the audience on their knees and clamouring for more. When it looked as though the public were there for the night even after the encores, Mlle Dufresne came out to sing them an unaccompanied lullaby so that the hall could finally be cleared!

The next day was Big Band Night II with all bands exhibiting a high level of musicianship. What can you say about big bands: you either like them or you don't. But the Japanese band, the Aichi Swing All Stars, gave added interest with the mixture of modern instruments and Japanese traditional ones with the Koto solo drawing a standing ovation. Also worthy of note were the Rodger Fox Big Band from New Zealand, for whom Montreux represented the culmination of three years' hard work and scrimping and

saving.

The following evening was placed under the jazz sign with the Gloria Niemann quartet; the Mel Lewis Big Band swinging away happily in a variety of moods including Herbie Hancock compositions; the Albert Mangelsdorff trio – an unusual combination of virtuoso trombone, string bass and drums with even more unusual music; and the highlight of the evening, the Didier Lockwood quintet. One of the original members of the French group Magma, Didier Lockwood continues the tradition of great French jazz violinists with influences ranging from rock and blues to jazz and Coltrane. With musicians no less than Jan Hammer on synthesiser and Bob Malach on saxophone, the set displayed virtuosity combined with a music that was both fresh and exciting and ranging over a variety of moods. Some might call it jazz, some rock or even fusion (the dreaded term); however, I prefer to just call it good music!

The festival closed with the tribute to New Orleans in which the principal contenders were Champion Jack Dupree (who also does good business each year with his food stall!) and Fats Domino. Above all this sort of programme means good fun and, to coin a phrase, a good time was had by all! Champion Jack must be the youngest



New E-V drum monitor lurks among the mics at Montreux.

Darryl Pitt/Encore

Terry Nelson



over-70 around and his brand of humour coupled to his music is just what's needed to get things moving. With a band consisting of five saxes, two or three trumpets, two guitars, bass and drums and himself on piano, Fats Domino proved that his style of Louisiana blues has lost nothing of its appeal or the audience it's enthusiasm! All the hits were there, *Blueberry Hill*, *I'm Walking*, *Blue Monday*, *Walking to New Orleans*, etc, delivered with the easy Domino style and backed by a band that swung like mad. Highlight for the amateurs of showmanship was the version of *When The Saints Go Marching In* where Mr Domino thumps the grand piano from one side of the stage to the other while playing.

With record attendances this year's festival can certainly be qualified as a success. Whereas for some people there may not have been enough jazz for their liking, I personally feel that the formula was an improvement. There were obviously other good nights but as I was not there for them it is a bit silly to write about them. However, as the stage crew are a pretty unbiased lot I can pass some of their comments on! Stanley Clarke was far too loud and a bit too showbiz. Elvis Costello disappointed. Steve Hackett shone musically and professionally but the material is a matter of taste. Jimmy Cliff was bloody good (with Australian accent!). Do the Specials always climb on to TV cameras? The other comment that is worth noting is that a good percentage

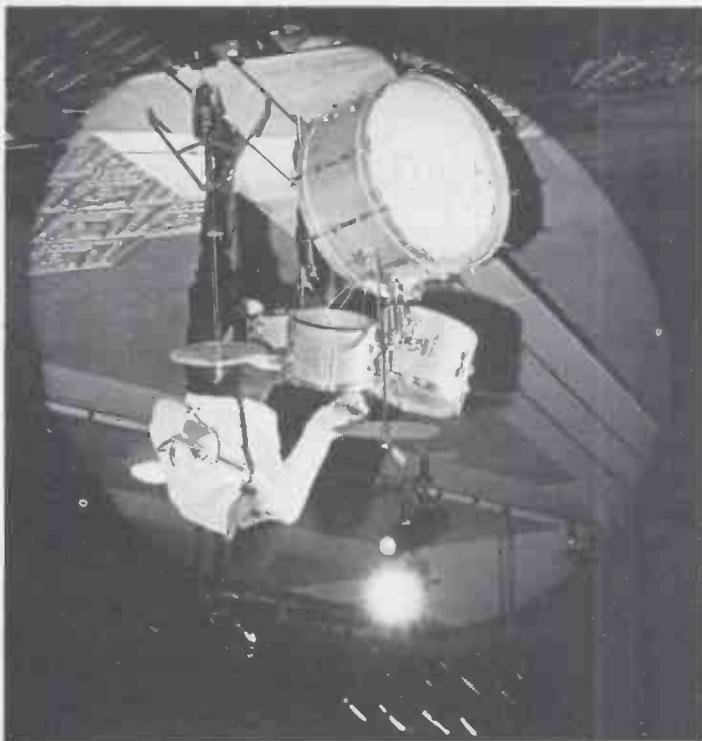
of the artists tend to be playing more for the live recording that is being done than for the audience, or in other words, that they are 'playing it safe' and not taking musical chances. Perhaps it might be an idea to remind performers that Montreux is not a TV show or a recording session but a series of concerts before a paying audience, not an invited one. The dates for next year's fest have already been fixed and are 3-19 July, 1981. See you then.

Terry Nelson

## Records Received

**E**cho And The Bunnymen *Crocodiles* Korova KODET Vocalist Ian McCulloch asks 'Is This the blues I'm singing?' on the distinctly Doorsian *Rescue*. Well, no, it isn't. But what is it? A big beefy sound ensues from co-workers. Will Sergeant (gtr), Pete de Freitas (dr) and Les Pattinson (bs), and the group builds on past references, constructing a music of their own which manages to be urgent and reflective by turns. It will be interesting to see what further experimentation by the furry-eared Liverpudlians produces - meanwhile this is one of the more interesting debuts of the year. **Any Trouble** *Where Are All The Nice Girls?* Stiff SLLZ 25 Can this four piece apple of Stiff's eye withstand the dubious acclamation of a front page hype by the aged and faltering MM? Certainly Any Trouble are already a well-honed outfit with a carefully worked interplay of rhythmic drive and melodic hooks and their 60s-sounding songs are obviously commercial. They are a find in debut terms. But the songs - as opposed to the hooks - refuse to stick and the end product is curiously rushed at times and ultimately disposable. **Frankie Miller** *Easy Money* Chrysalis CHR 1268 Recorded in New York with an all new band once again. *Easy Money* suggests Frankie really has to settle down with some regular musicians. Sadly anonymous backings reduce the great singer to easily the poorest first side in his recorded history, though side two brings some more appropriate Miller material, notably in *Cheap . . . Thrills* and *Gimme Love*. It's hard to think of anyone else this good live who is done so little justice on record: obvious answer - a live album. **The Long Riders** *Original Soundtrack* Warner Bros K56826 Of obvious interest as this is Ry Cooder's first full work for film, and who better to abet a chronicle of the James boys and their chums in the 1870s. It would be foolish to expect another *Bop Till You Drop* - especially when Cooder gets saddled with actor singers here and there, but Cooder assembles some wonderful acoustic bands and works out some traditional arrangements that would have stopped a Pinkertons man in his tracks, while leaving in more rough edges than usual. Meanwhile hope you saw the man in England in October. **George Duke** *A Brazilian Love Affair* Epic EPC311 A potentially corny idea - letting George and a few chums loose in Brazil to create 'a blend of Brazilian musical concepts with the diverse musical ideas of my mind' as the Duke puts it - works ridiculously well to result in this lush, consistently good, easy record. Don't worry about vague

recollections of Edmundo Ros (who? And three, and four . . .) because, despite what Brazilians might think of it, this LP is disgustingly pleasant. **This Heat** *Health And Efficiency Piano/Rough Trade* THIS 1201 The Heat's new one is a 12in single with self-confessed international potential: *health and efficiency* itself is mostly man-made music, an interesting industrial experiment with Hayward's drums, brittle and gymnastic on the vocal preamble, leading, via rolling milk bottle, to a layered, rhythmic section boasting guitar-like guitar and noises off. Overleaf is *graphic/varispeed*, mostly machine-made music. The machines include those of the title; the music is a long, rather boring, variably toned monotony sounding something like a cross between a Hoover and a pipe-organ. Efficient, yes. Healthy? **Various Artists** *Repeat Performance* Charisma BG1 As odd a bunch of tracks as you're likely to come across on one platter: Charisma's double-platinum things Genesis are, of course, well represented with *I Know What I Like*. Peter Gabriel's *Solsbury Hill* and Steve Hackett's *Every Day*: beyond that it's a bit strange, really. You liked Chris White's *Spanish Wine*? You need Link Wray's *It's All Over Now*? You remember Rare Bird's *Sympathy*? Only odd-ball worth having, for rarity's sake, is a live-ish take of the Nice's *America*: what an incompatible collection, though! **Flora Purim** *500 Miles High* Milestone M9070 Re-release of the superlative Purim's performance from the '76 Montreux festival, backed by Ron Carter on bass and Airtio on drums, amongst others. With a relative upsurge of interest in Brazilian music recently, this record should prove once again Purim's remarkable vocal talents - her range alone is quite breathtaking (not for her!). Highspots are the title track, and the drawn-out, demonstrative *Jive Talk*. **Janis Joplin** *Anthology* CBS 22101 With the recent passing of the tenth anniversary of Joplin's untimely and wasteful death, this definitive collection makes all the right noises. The coverage is wide: from Big Brother And The Holding Company to Full Tilt Boogie, Joplin is magnificent if raucous, letting what one can only assume was a frayed, hectic and distraught lifestyle come right to the fore of her interpretations. Favourites like *Piece Of My Heart*, *Kozmic Blues* and *Mercedes Benz* are here, and there's a whole side of live material to close, including tracks recorded a few months before she died. You may argue that Joplin was a victim, a 'rock casualty', but her music here celebrates the passion of the moment: *Get It While You Can*. **Dusty Springfield** *Memphis Plus* Mercury 6381 023 A classic album, *Dusty In Memphis*, recorded in 1969, plus four US-only A-sides from '70, '71 and '76. *Memphis* remains pure pop music: a very close-up Dusty sings succulently over apposite backings, the whole sounding fine. *Breakfast In Bed* begins to imply Scotty and Lorna's later reggae cavortings, while our Dusty even manages to make the dreadful old *The Windmills Of Your Mind* sound like a half-decent song. Some achievement. Good on Mercury. ▶▶



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The record attempt began at 7am when the theatre doors were opened to the public. Coffee and croissants were provided by the sponsors, The Billy Hyde Drum Clinic, and 2SM, the local rock AM station. 2SM had rigged up a land line to the theatre, and with the aid of a radio mic Toll was able to chat with the DJ during the record attempt. The old record of 17 minutes held by a Californian was smashed during the 8am news by Toll, who went on to complete just over 20 minutes of upside down percussive lunacy, suspended 40 feet above the craned necks of an astonished audience.

You gotta see this one for yourself?? Well, Circus Oz are currently touring on the continent and will arrive in London to play the Roundhouse between November 5 and November 22. They'll also be in Chichester during December.



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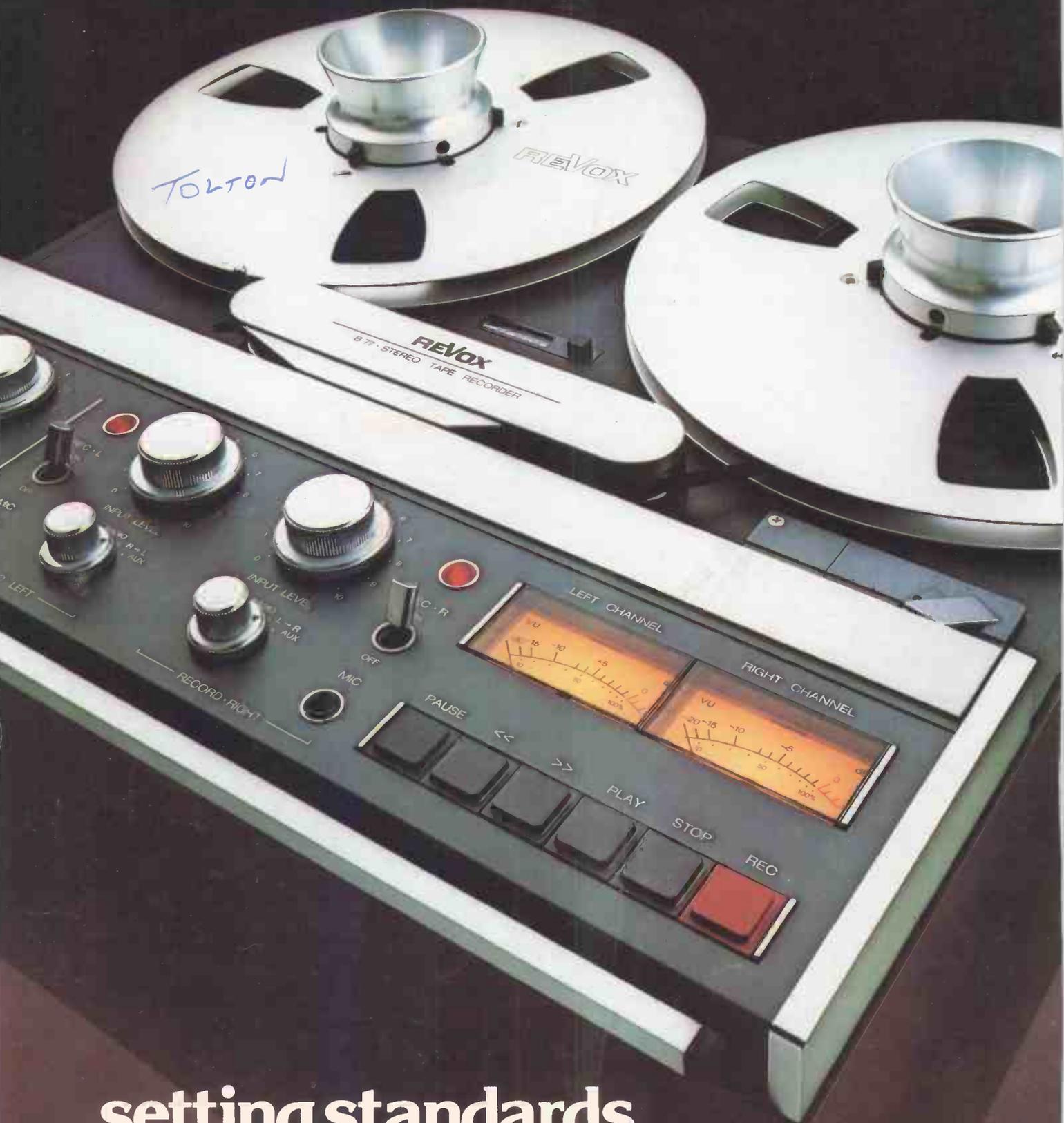
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