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MUSICIAN

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World Class Act Returns to Rock. By Scott Isler

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The Darker Side of Success

By Timothy White

John Lydon

What Made Johnny Rotten?

By Charles M. Young

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Roland

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GARY GERSHOFF/RETNA JOHN BELLISSIMO/RETNA

JUNE 1986 NO. 92
A BILLBOARD PUBLICATION

Cover Photograph of Joe Jackson by David Stewart, Bob Seger by Aaron Rapoport, John Lydon by Davies and Starr—Make-up Maggie Baker, Hair—Fraser Francis.

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Circulation Director
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Musician (USPS 431-910) is published monthly by Amordian Press, Inc., P.O. Box 701, 31 Commercial St., Gloucester, MA 01930. (617) 281-3110. Amordian Press, Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of Billboard Publications, Inc., One Astor Place, 1515 Broadway, New York City, NY 10036. Musician is a trademark of Amordian Press, Inc. © 1986 by Musician, all rights reserved. Second class postage paid at Gloucester, MA 01930 and at additional mailing offices. Subscriptions $20 per year, $38 for two years, $54 for three years. Canada and elsewhere, add $8 per year, U.S. funds only. **Subscription address: Musician, Box 1923, Marion, OH 43305. Postmaster send form 3579 to above address.**

Current and back issues are available on microfilm from University Microfilms Intl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Billboard Publications, Inc., **President and Chief Executive Officer:** Gerald S. Hobbs; **Executive Vice President:** Samuel S. Holdsworth; **Senior Vice President:** Ann Haire; **Vice Presidents:** John B. Babcock, Paul Curran, Martin R. Feely, Rosalee Lovett, Lee Zhito.

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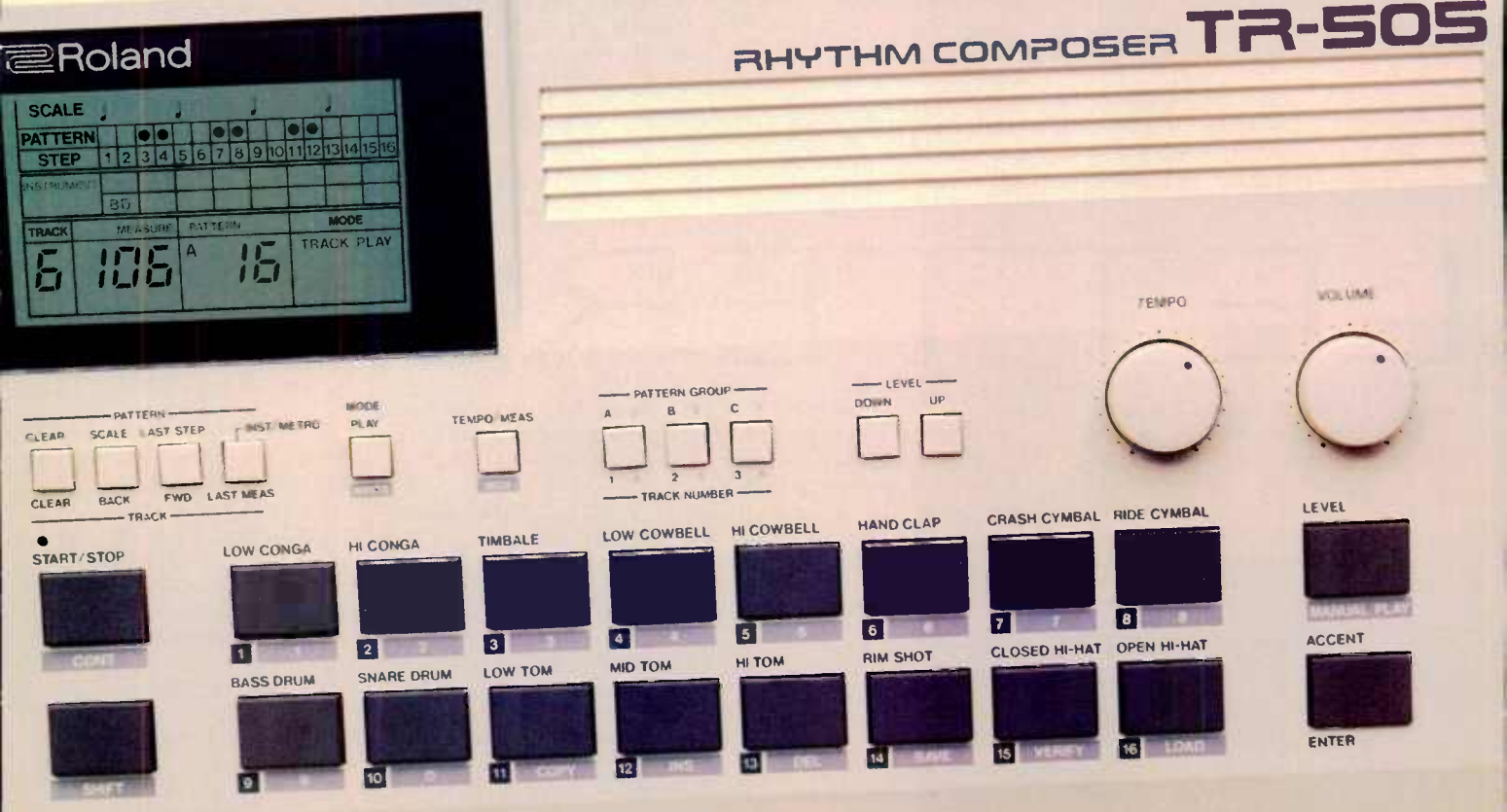
TR-505



LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT

Weighing in at only 950 grams (that's 2 lbs. 2 oz. to us), Roland's spunky new TR-505 Rhythm Composer sports a winning combination of traditional drum-kit and Latin Percussion instruments. But don't let its small size and modest price fool you—the TR-505 boasts heavy-weight digital PCM samples of kick, snare, toms, handclaps, high hats, cymbals, timbales, congas and cowbells—16 voices in all to give your rhythm tracks, rehearsals or live performances a punchy professional drum sound and feel. Behind all this brawn is a sophisticated computer brain with more than enough smarts and memory to make this drum machine your ally in the fight against boring drum programming. Program 48 of your own drum patterns (in real-time or step-time) or take advantage of 48 useful preprogrammed patterns—either way you're off and drumming right away. The large LCD display helps you keep track of every beat and performance parameter. But that's not all, our new champ still has a few moves you haven't seen. The TR-505 is a thoroughly modern MIDI instrument loaded with MIDI features and controls including an ability to respond to dynamic drum parts. Battery or AC powered, the versatile TR-505 scores an easy Technical Knock-Out over the competition. But don't say we didn't warn you—this little powerhouse will knock your socks off!

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World Radio History

LETTERS

McManus Attack

Bill Flanagan deserves a raise. He is continuously writing excellent articles and "The Last Elvis Costello Interview" is his best yet. Elvis Costello is one of the best songwriters of this day and age and his lyricism is superior. Keep it up!

Gregg La Gambina
Wilton, CT

I was extremely saddened to read about the departure of Elvis Costello from the musical world. I thought Rockpile breaking up was depressing, but this really hurts! Personally, I've never enjoyed *any* artist more than Elvis (my wife and I even

named our female cat Elvis—has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?—a cat named Elvis).

His songwriting talents evoked emotions in me I didn't think I had, and more importantly, he helped get me through college. I just hope all his albums are released on CD's—my vinyl is wearing thin. I, sniff, I'm afraid, sniff-sniff, I have to go now before I...Wah wah waaaaaaaaaaahhh.

John Puffer
Milwaukee, WI

Even if he changed his name to Paul Simon, Elvis Costello couldn't write a song like "American Tune."

Patrice Margaret
Mansfield, OH

I was really depressed by your Elvis Costello interview—it sounds like he's abandoning all of the songs he's written. Elvis/Declan may feel like he wasted all those years, but I think that he's produced many wonderful songs. However, I do understand his bitterness over having to be someone he isn't for over eight years, so bring on the Costello Show featuring Declan McManus, and wave a sad goodbye to Elvis Costello & the Attractions.

Karl Hendricks
Port Vue, PA

I am so tired of Elvis Costello criticizing everything he ever wrote. Why doesn't he just put a disclaimer on all of his albums, saying he was just too drunk or stoned or whatever it was that prevented him from producing the ultimate work of art that I'm sure he feels he is capable of producing.

Trent Delomore
Los Gatos, CA

Why would you want to waste thirteen pages of your magazine interviewing such a worthless character as Elvis Costello? His comments regarding Led Zeppelin as "charlatans and thieves" are as one-sided as his depthless pop songs. I for one am glad this is the last Elvis Costello interview.

Wade Coleman
Kingsport, TN

It appears that Elvis, I mean Declan, has the typical, put-your-old-work-down syndrome. If it doesn't mean much to him anymore it still does to us.

Carol A.R. Spencer
Victoria, BC

Stu Remembered

I should have known that *Musician* would be the one publication to appreciate Ian Stewart's musical contributions, both to the Stones and to others such as Ronnie Lane, Led Zeppelin and Rocket 88. I will miss his playing, both on record and in concert, and his intelligent and gracious perspective at the times when the Stones hit the height of craziness. To me, a die-hard fan of twenty-two years, there always have been and always will be six Rolling Stones.

Susan Jelcich
Wood-Ridge, NJ

I was lucky enough in 1983 to be in London and catch Ian Stewart, along with Charlie Watts and some other jazz-blues buffs, playing a set of their beloved boogie-woogie blues at the 100 Club. It was an experience I'll never forget and unfortunately, will never get to repeat. Thanks again for the article which brought back the memory of hearing them swing that night.

Robert Francis
Houston, TX

Different Drummers

Thanks for your special percussion section in the March '86 issue of *Musician*. I'm a drummer-singer with the Ohio-based, country-rock band Silver Wings, and I found the special section to be very informative.

Mike Gladden
Johnstown, OH

About the Dave Van Tieghem article: Here's a few extra percussive hints. Don't forget the diehard spiral bound notebook and the almighty album cover. I'm sure we've all tapped a finger or two on these items during our youth.

Roscoe
Bloomington, IN

J.D. Considine's comment in the recent Tony Thompson article that "John Bonham's mighty thump seemed rather puny next to the Power Station's drum sound" is rather casually stated, but indicates a lack of musical awareness amongst many of today's listeners. Bonham's drumming transcended any technique or apparatus used to record him. He sounded gigantic because of how he hit the drum, the balance he played them in, his tuning, and most importantly, the pocket, the time relationship, the groove. There is not a single drummer I've heard who approaches John Bonham's "sound," and even though there are many technically superior drum sounds out there today, recording technique is no substitute for feel.

Danny Caccavo
New York, NY

Al's Soul

Count your blessings, subtract your problems, and go out and apologize to your raccoon. Thanks to Al Green for his insight. It makes a lot of sense and it's easier to remember than most sermons.

Eric Stevens
Ottawa, ONT

What's the big deal? When Al Green sings gospel, he's respectable, and when Stryper, or Amy Grant, or Bruce Cockburn, or Dylan sing gospel, it's a cheap gimmick. It's the same old story. You press people think gospel music is the black culture's private turf, and anyone else who touches it is insincere, perverted, insane or worse.

The simple truth is that Stryper and Al Green sing about Jesus for the same reasons. Granted, Green is an immortal genius and I'm not trying to put him and Stryper on the same artistic pedestal, but for Christ's sake (and I mean that in the most reverent sense), stop this nonsense about gospel being exclusively black music. Gospel is a *message*, not a style.

Dwight Liles
Mt. Pleasant, TN

No More Calls Please....

Congratulations to Girl's Night Out of Boston, MA. and Visions of Cleveland, OH. Both bands have tied and won the fourth and final round of the MUSICIAN/JBL "Best Unsigned Band" contest. Each group will receive over $6,500 worth of JBL Professional sound equipment. Tune in to next month's issue for the announcement of the grand prize winner and the complete contest wrap-up. Film at eleven.

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THE FABULOUS THUNDERBIRDS

BY J.D. CONSIDINE

FROM RIB JOINTS TO MOVIES, THE T-BIRDS MAKE IT TOUGH ENOUGH

One of the problems with life in movieland is that things are never what they seem. When Paul Schrader's *Light of Day* finally hits the theaters, audiences will see one sequence in which the Fabulous Thunderbirds perform their big hit "Twist It Up" before a rabid crowd in Cleveland. So far as can be gleaned backstage during the shoot, the idea behind the scene has to do with the contrast between the big-time cool of the T-Birds and the small-time hopes of the struggling top-forty band built around the brother-and-sister team of Joan Jett and Michael J. Fox.

In reality, Cleveland is being played by Chicago, the fans are being played largely by kids who'd never heard of the Fabulous Thunderbirds, while the band members themselves are playing a tune they hadn't really learned yet. "That's because I'm just playing the song for the second time," explains guitarist Jimmy Vaughan. "We wrote it in Australia four or five days ago."

Granted, that's not the way the T-Birds usually do things, but everybody makes exceptions for the movies. The band had been contacted a few days before the shoot, while in the midst of an Australian tour, and asked to produce a cassette demo of a new song for the film.

So they sat down that afternoon and wrote one.

"We were playing in a hall, and we had the day off," explains bassist Preston Hubbard, "so we rented the hall to work the song up." He adds, "We haven't had much time lately."

Still, you wouldn't have guessed it from watching them. By the time the cameras begin to roll, the T-Birds look as if they'd been playing the song for years, from singer Kim Wilson's gruff, offhand charisma right down to drummer Fran Christina's rock-steady beat. It isn't just acting, either. These guys play together as if they were born for that very purpose.

Not that they get mystical about it or anything, but there does seem to be a little more than chance in the way in which these four guys wound up in the same band in Austin. Jimmy Vaughan, the only native Texan in the bunch, was the first on the scene, arriving from Dallas in 1969.

Why Austin? "You were less likely to get the shit beat out of you in Austin as you were in Dallas or Houston," he explains in perfect deadpan. "I mean, I knew when I moved down there that I could get a gig playing. They wouldn't let me play what I wanted to in Dallas. I'd wanted to play with a harmonica, and do Slim Harpo and all that dirty stuff. They'd say, 'Who are you?' and 'What's that?' in Dallas.

"So I said, 'Okay, I'm going to Austin. I know I can at least play in the hippie clubs, or something.'"

Vaughan did well enough in Austin, forming a well-regarded band called Storm. He also had a group called Cobra, which featured his little brother Stevie Ray. But it wasn't until 1974 that Vaughan heard the sound he was waiting for. "I was playing in this barbecue

STEVE MARSEL

Wilson, Christina, Vaughan & Hubbard with Neptune & Venus.

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World Radio History

place and Kim came in. I heard him play, quit my band, and got a band with him. That's about it."

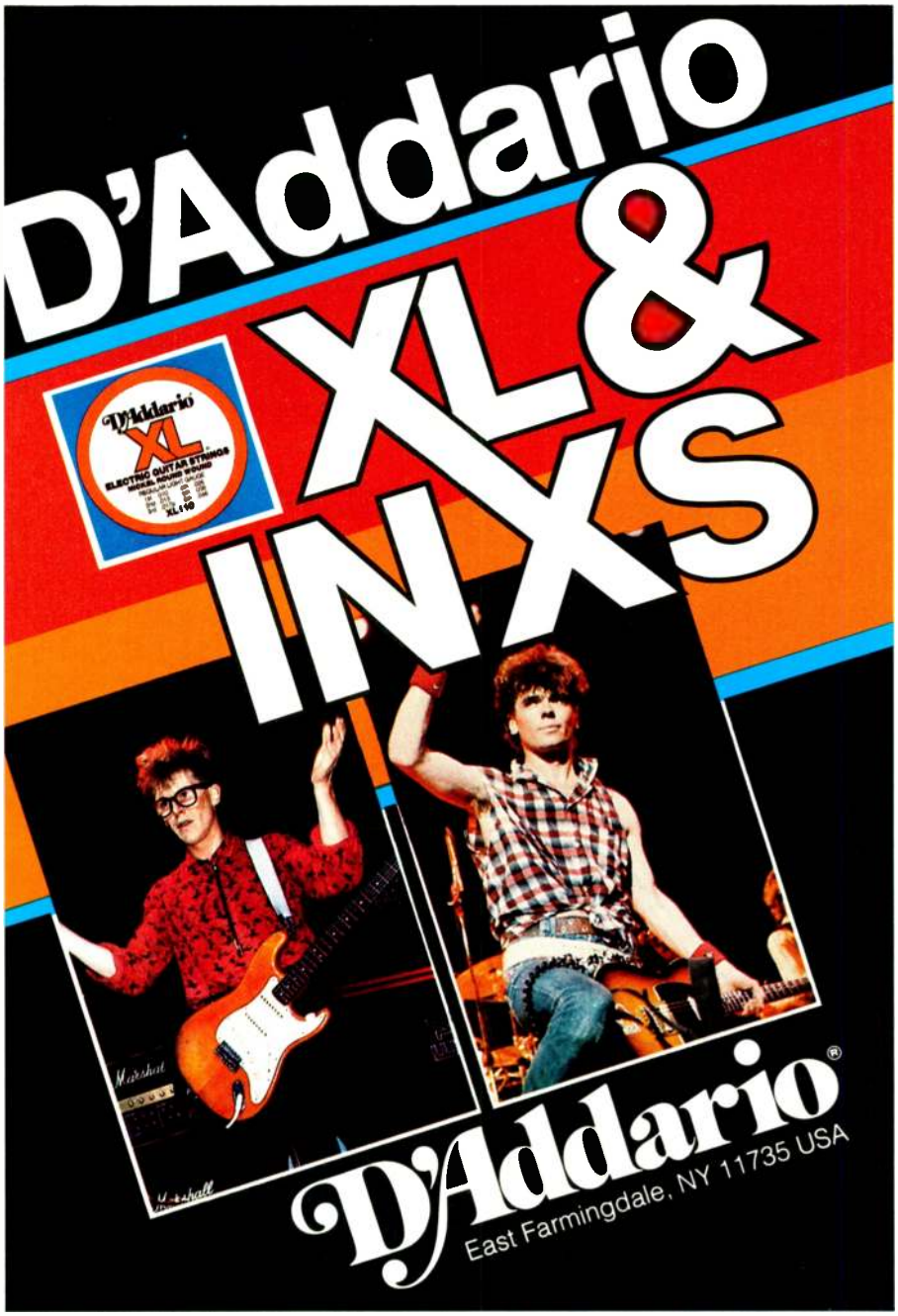
Kim Wilson remembers things with a little more detail. The California-born singer/harmonica player had only been in Austin a few days when he met Jimmy. "A lady in Austin had offered me a little business deal that had to do with a record label, production company, all this kind of stuff," he says. "I was living in Minnesota at the time, and I made her buy me a round-trip ticket, because I'd never met her before. I was down there for about a week, and she took me everywhere. She took me to this rib joint called Alexander's, outside of town. Jimmy was playing there in a band called Storm.

"At the time, I really didn't listen to him that much, because I was too interested in whippin' up on the harmonica player that was there. But I do remember one thing, and that was 'Everything's Gonna Be Alright' by Little Walter. That's something that, for the guitarist, is tough to do right, and he played it [perfectly]."

Wilson sat in with part of the band during a break, and "the crowd loved it. It was great. I met Jimmy, shook his hand. Then I left, went back up to Minnesota, because the business thing didn't seem to be happening. A month later, Jimmy gave me a call and said, 'Hey, I'm coming up there.'" Needless to say, Wilson was a bit taken aback by such enthusiasm on the part of a guitarist he'd barely heard, but the more he heard Vaughan play, the more he was convinced that Austin was the place to be.

Still, there were a few problems with the band's line-up. The drummer, for instance, turned out to be less-than-enthralled with the rigors of roadwork. "He had never been out of Texas before," laughs Christina. "He got up to Boston with them, and just totally freaked out, took off in the middle of the tour without telling anybody he was going."

A mutual friend recommended Christina as a replacement. "He said, 'Well, I know this guy, but he's in Canada and hasn't got a telephone.' I had thought I'd get out of music for a while, so I moved



THUNDERBIRD PARTS

I've always liked Fender guitars," **Jimmy Vaughan** insists. "Just basic, straight Stratocasters or Telecasters. Either way. I don't care if they're old, or those vintage ones." Despite his loyalty to Fender, Vaughan also has several Robins. "Robins are like mutated Fenders. They just look a little different." His effects include an ADA multi-effects with echo and a doubler, and he also uses an old Fender Leslie cabinet along with the more traditional reverb and tremolo. His amps are "almost always" Fender. His strings are D'Addario, a customized set he describes as being "basically just a light gauge, starting with a .010." He also uses a Danelectro six-string bass he got from Dave Edmunds.

Kim Wilson plays Hohner Marine Band harmonicas. He also has a 64-Chromatica. He uses an Astatic JT-30 mike with a stand-by switch drilled into it for his harps, and sends the signal through a MESA/Boogie amp. His vocal mike is a Beyer or a Shure SM57.

Preston Hubbard carries an old Kay double-bass on the road, "because it's very sturdy, very road-worthy. It can take all the knocks, and my good bass can't." Thus, his best instrument, a German carved bass, stays at home. His pick-up was custom-built by Charlie Helpinstill. For his electric work, Hubbard uses a '65 Fender Jazz bass, plus a Robin bass. His rig is all Peavey, with a Mark VI amp and Dietz cabinets, which are custom-made in Austin, with two or four 15-inch speakers. His strings are Tomastic Spiracore for the double-bass, and Fender medium flats for the J-bass.

"I was always a big fan of old Slingerland Radio Kings," says **Fran Christina** of his drum sound. "I designed a kit that would hold up on the road, and have the right sound for being miked." The resulting kit boasts Yamaha tension casings, Premier ribs, Pearl stands and Sonor pedals. His snare is extra deep and wooden, because "I like the more woody sound, but it's got to have the projection." The heads are usually straight-coated Remo Ambassadors or Emperors, and he prefers double heads. His cymbals are Avedis Zildjian, except for a K. Zildjian crash, and he prefers Hann's hickory rock sticks.

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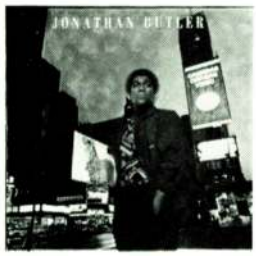

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to Nova Scotia, where I have a little farm. I was living in the sticks—no running water, no telephone, no nothing.

"What they did was call the Canadian Mounties. And the Mounties always get their man. I was out working with the horse, and the Mounties came up. I'm standing there, wondering, 'Oh, no! What did I do?'"

After learning that he was not wanted for a crime but for a gig, he set off to meet the T-Birds in London, Ontario, hitchhiking across Canada. "Finally, I'm standing outside of the gig when they pull up, and it was like, 'Uh...are you the Thunderbirds?'" Christina, who laughs that he "looked like a lumberjack back then," didn't exactly inspire confidence. "They said, 'Are you the drummer?' I said yeah. And we looked at each other like, 'Hmmmm, what am I getting into?'"

Things worked out, though. "There was no time for rehearsal or nothing. We went into this club and played, and it was like we had played with each other all our lives."

Two years ago, bassist Keith Ferguson was replaced by Hubbard, formerly of Roomful of Blues, but even this switch seemed blessed. After all, the T-Birds and Roomful first learned of each other through Muddy Waters.

Part of what makes the T-Birds tick is their common taste. As Jimmy Vaughan puts it, "I think that we all learned to play from the same guys that our heroes did." Each musician learned out of love for the music, and an almost fanatic curiosity about the way it worked.

"See, we're all self-taught," explains Hubbard. "We all learned from records. None of us went to school, none of us went to Berklee. I think it's better. You learn by listening to the guys you love, and playing in dives. You can go to Berklee for four years, and come out churned out, sounding like a Berklee guy. You can go join Maynard Ferguson's band, y'know?"

"They can't *teach* you how to do this," Vaughan agrees. His training came from slaving over his favorite records or from "just watching" other musicians. "I learned a whole lot from a band called the Nightcaps," he says. "It was one of the first albums that I bought. They were like a blues/rock 'n' roll band from the early 60s. They sat around and drank wine, and they were real weird....I learned how to play lead guitar, rhythm guitar, bass lines and halfway how to play the drums off of that record."

Similarly, Christina "was just infected by the music," and decided to take up the drums. Trouble was, "I set the drums up backward and upside down. I'm left-handed, but I play a right-handed kit. I didn't know; when I sat down to play the drums I just set 'em up, and played whatever came out."

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Because Christina puts all his energy into the groove, he avoids flashy playing. "Al Jackson was my idea of the perfect drummer," he says. "He laid down these simple, great backbeat things with just the tastiest doo-dads in there, but driving, solid. You had no doubt.

"We worked with Booker T. on Santana's *Havana Moon* album. We started playing this shuffle thing, and during the cut Booker kept giving me these looks. I thought, 'Oh, Jesus, I'm screwing up.' After it was over, I said, 'Booker, something's bothering me. In that song, you kept looking at me. Was I screwing up?'

"And he said, 'No, no. It was great. I kept closing my eyes and hearing Al Jackson. You're the first guy I've played with who reminded me of Al Jackson.' I almost had a heart attack. That's the best compliment anyone could've given me. I could've died that night, and wouldn't have worried about a thing."

Perhaps because they've never been saddled with rules about how the music should be played, the T-Birds are able to go by sheer instinct, just as their blues-playing idols did. Take their version of Rockin' Sidney's "You Ain't Nothin' But Fine," from their *What's The Word* album. Unlike the subsequent Rockpile recording, the T-Birds' rendition perfectly preserves the chorus' pattern of two bars of 4/4 followed by one bar of 2/4. "Well," laughs Vaughan, "that's because the Englishmen can't understand that crazy Louisiana stuff.

"No offense!" he adds to the tape recorder.

"It's American stuff. You have to be here to really understand what it is. I grew up listening to that kind of stuff. It was in the street, all over the place. I don't sit there and count, 'One bar, two bars, okay, it's time to change.' You just kinda go for it. I'm not thinking about how many bars I'm playing."

He shrugs. "It's like the water. You got different water or something over there, it makes everybody act different."

For all that, there seems to be something uncannily universal about the T-Bird sound. Despite the fact that the Thunderbirds have no interest in making their sound more "marketable," their popularity is growing steadily; "Tuff Enuff," the title track from their newest album, is featured in the movie *Gung Ho*, and has done well enough to land the band on *Solid Gold*.

"It's very appealing," Christina says of the Thunderbirds sound. "That's why it's always there. People can't help but get hooked on it. It may not be something that radio wants to play, but people still get off on it. And that's what's kept us going."

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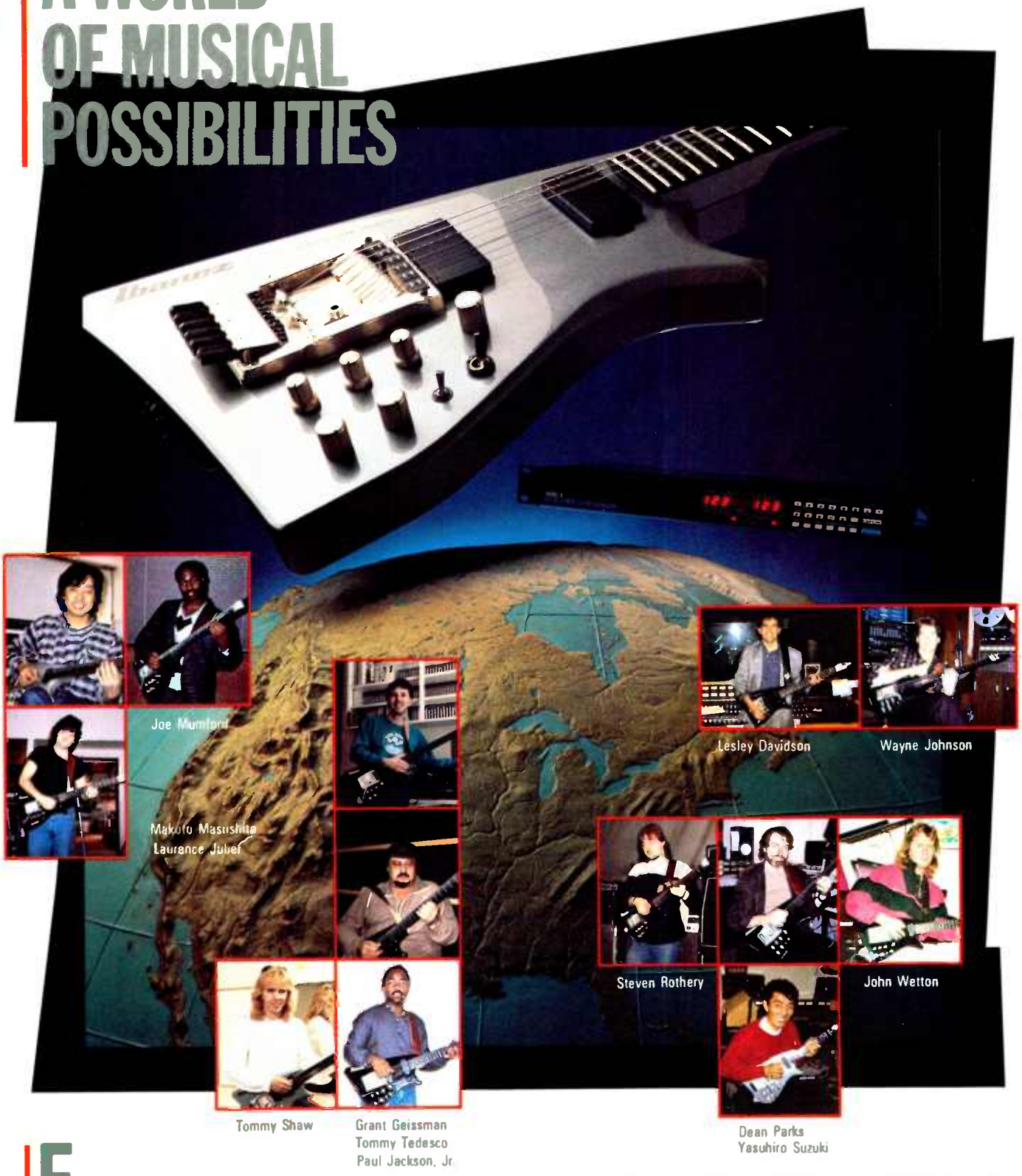

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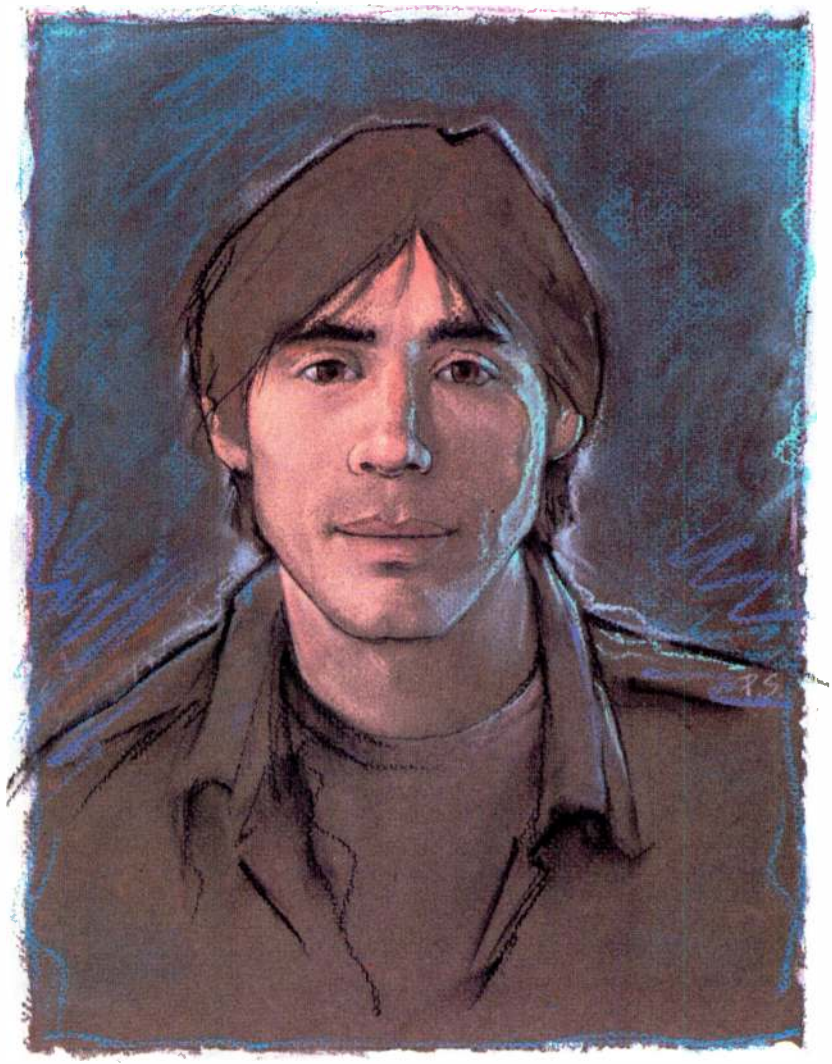
JACKSON BROWNE

BY VIC GARBARINI



PUTS HIMSELF THROUGH CHANGES: MUSICAL, LYRICAL AND POLITICAL

When Jackson Browne finished the title song of his latest album, *Lives In The Balance*, he knew he'd crossed a threshold of sorts. After twenty years of writing soul searching, introspective narratives about his inner life, he felt the need to shift his perspective from personal to social issues—specifically, our growing involvement with the crisis in Central America. On the one hand, he didn't want to churn out two-dimensional propaganda exercises, while on the other he was concerned about violating the sensibilities of the very people he was trying to help. So Browne resolved to play *Lives* for a cinematographer friend who'd served in Vietnam to get some feedback. "I wanted to know if I was treading on any raw nerves in talking about these things," recalls Browne. "He basically told me that, if anything, he could handle a lot more of the kind of questions I was posing. For instance, the image of 'There are shadows on the faces of the men who send the guns / To the wars that are fought in places where their business interests runs'—that image disturbed him. He wanted to illuminate those faces. He said, 'I want to see who they are....'

"I realized he was right, and so I wrote the third verse with those lines about 'I want to know who the men in the shadows are / I want to hear somebody asking them why.'"

Brown realized a while ago that if he wanted to infiltrate radio he'd have to check his tendency to write lengthy, rambling tunes. "At one point I was going to name my publishing company Long Songs, because it seemed they were all over six minutes long," he jokes. "But I found that musically it's more exciting for the form, though not necessarily the song, to be shorter.

"I wrote so many songs with two verses before the chorus, and then another verse, and then the bridge, and then *another* chorus and bridge. And each verse, being in iambic pentameter, was pretty long in itself. It gives you a long time to form a thought, but it's a less powerful form. I once played a song for a producer and when it was over he said, 'I hope you won't mind my asking, but did any of that repeat?' And nothing did! In 'Sleep's Dark And Silent Gate' nothing repeats till the last line, even though it's only three minutes long."

A former folkie, Browne also realized he'd have to come to grips with synthesizers, drum machines, sequencers and all the other electronic exotica utilized in modern recording. Inevitably, there were a few kinks to work out: "The song 'Lives In The Balance' came as a few words and a riff, as I was playing with my DX7 when I first got it, with my Fostex and a little Doctor Rhythm. Later I put the DX on a sequencer. That rapid, plucking passage came to me while I was trying to do something else. I played the whole thing almost the way it is on the record and left it on the sequencer. A couple of days later I tried to find it, but the Linn machine had latched and erased, and I couldn't remember it all. There was a period of time, before they got the disk drive, that the Linn 9000 would occasionally do that. So you had to always interrupt your thinking and dump everything on a cassette." Browne resolved the crisis with a little help from the world's oldest computing device: "The next morning I about six a.m. I woke up with some music playing in my head—and it was that thing that I'd lost."

But the real surprise is that *Live*'s first single, the bitter but hopeful "For America," has become a smash commercial success, lodging in the AOR radio top five. That's no mean feat in an era when Springsteen's "Born In The USA" is misconstrued as a jingoistic anthem. Browne's last LP, *Lawyers In Love*, was a tentative foray into topical songwriting. Perhaps a little too tentative.

"Not that many people *got* 'Lawyers In Love,'" laughs Jackson. "When my

PAUL SCHULENBURG

World Radio History

friends started calling me up and asking me what they should say when people asked what the song was about, I thought, 'Uh-oh, I'm in real trouble.' One DJ even ran a contest, 'Guess the secret meaning of the song....' The song isn't about lawyers, it's really just a metaphor for yuppies and their mentality. So I began reading everything I could find about Central America and U.S. foreign policy, and then when I was asked, 'Why pick on lawyers, why not go after Reagan?', I couldn't think of any reason not to. Of course, it's very difficult to go after Reagan, because in a way he's not there. It's like the Wizard of Oz, a large projected image but behind it there are just a bunch of sweaty technicians putting together what they want you to look at. And the worst part of it is that people accept it."

Browne visited Nicaragua with his friend Steve Van Zandt, hoping to learn first hand about the people and their culture. He found it a moving and enlightening experience. "For a country that's invaded Nicaragua eight times in the past hundred years we have no idea what their culture is about," Browne says. "They're down there drinking Coke and playing baseball and have the same aspirations we do. They're an impoverished nation struggling so valiantly to implement their ideals, which include their own concept of free enterprise. Let them define their own cultural needs. Who's to say that our brand of capitalism's going to work in Central America? They have a mixed economy down there, they refuse to call themselves anything but Sandinistas. You can't say that Nicaragua is following the Soviet example. They have free enterprise, and how many communist governments do you know that have priests as ministers in the government? How pleased could the Soviets be about having to support that? They [the Reagan Administration] project onto their imagined enemies all their own very worst traits, and go around actually behaving the way they're afraid the communists will behave. Let's fight communism with democracy—not with fascism. I can't figure out how this present policy works," he continues, his voice choking with barely suppressed anger. "There are *people* underneath those bombs, people who are trying to forge something good for themselves. People like us. It's not a bunch of clones of our most feared enemies. That's what I wanted to say on *Lives In The Balance*. And not only are their lives at stake, but the lives of our soldiers."

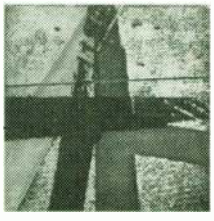
Once he knew what he wanted to say, Browne was faced with the problem of how to put across songs dealing with global policy with the same kind of immediacy and depth as the self-reflective material he was known for in the 70s. He was hobbled by his own legacy. On 1974's *Late For The Sky* Browne spoke from a place so beyond pretense and artifice that he set an almost impossibly high standard. Could he bring that degree of illumination to material dealing with public issues? "My answer," says Jackson, "was to deal with external things in the first person. I think action is appropriate after reflection. Introspection—as opposed to introversion—is a very good thing. I don't want to wax cosmic on you, but it's a bit like breathing: There's a time to breathe in and a time to breathe out."

Despite his fervent political convictions, Browne is in no way blind to the foibles and failings of the left. "The left went nuts when Joan Baez spoke out against some things that North Vietnam was doing," he sighs. "Governments are governments. I've never seen such dissension and inability to come to accords as I have in the peace movement. Some of these people are projecting their individual problems onto society. No wonder some conservatives think they're a little out of control." M

SEE READER SERVICE PAGE 35

JOHN ABERCROMBIE
FEATURING MARC JOHNSON AND PETER ERSKINE

GUITARIST JOHN ABERCROMBIE HAS BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC FOR MORE THAN A DOZEN YEARS. ON CURRENT EVENTS, ABERCROMBIE UNVEILS HIS STRONGEST SET OF ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS EVER AS WELL AS THE NEWEST ADDITION TO HIS PROLIFIC ARRAY OF GUITAR VOICES, THE GUITAR SYNTHESIZER. CATCH UP ON CURRENT EVENTS WITH JOHN ABERCROMBIE, BASSIST MARC JOHNSON AND DRUMMER PETER ERSKINE.



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SIGUE SIGUE SPUTNIK

How to Succeed in Business...

Great white hope or the latest rock hype from the UK? Well, if Billy Idol can be raised from the gutter to the cover of *Rolling Stone*, then his old guitarist from Generation X, **Tony James**, certainly rates his own chances at superstardom. He's pinning his hopes on Sigue Sigue Sputnik, the glitzy band of "beautiful-people-and-would-be-superstars" he's gathered around him and told to act as though they were a real pop group...you know, arrogant, smug and as though life were one big party!

EMI Records was convinced of the band's commercial potential enough to sign them, if not quite for the $5 million Sigue Sigue Sputnik claimed. The result, "Love Missile F1-11," is a horrible, insistent, disco-mash of 80s synthetic rock. It was a hit in England even while creating a split among rock fans—rather in a similar way to the Sex Pistols.

This is exactly how Sigue Sigue Sputnik (and James in particular) planned it. Everything surrounding the band is designed for maximum outrage and minimum durability. They flew into orbit with all the glamour and media attention of *Dynasty*, and the same artistic merit.

The members look like extras from *Blade Runner* cross-bred with mutants from a rock 'n' roll zoo: wild hairstyles, exaggerated facial make-up, space-age costumes and a love of technology and, more importantly, of fun. "We felt like we were the greatest group in London before we could play," James says, "before we even had any of our own songs! We knew it was just a matter of time!"

James' attitude could change when the kids on the street get fed up with cartoon characters masquerading as musicians, or when the band attempts to progress beyond their current simplistic manifesto of sex, soft-core military romanticism and funny hairstyles. Will Sputnik then crash to earth?

"This band could blow apart tomorrow," James agrees with a sly, mischievous grin, "but that sort of tension and unpredictability is what makes great rock 'n' roll. A band should go on until it explodes."

– Johnny Waller

JANE SIMON/S I N 1985

FACES

Rockbusters II

Remember last fall's sitcom, *PMRC: The Washington Wives*? It was about a bunch of bored housewives (married to politicos) who want the record industry to censor its purported calls to drug, sex and devil abuse. The show got pretty good ratings until it fizzled out.

A spin-off, however, didn't do as well. On April 1 Maryland's Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee killed a bill that banned the sale of obscene discs and tapes to minors. The committee vote was seven-to-four; the bill had previously passed Maryland's House of Delegates by a 96-31 vote.

The proposed legislation had received bad advance notices: The committee chairperson called it "the worst bill this session." The Recording Industry Association of America and the ubiquitous Frank Zappa lobbied against it. Maryland already outlaws the sale of obscene books to minors; that could possibly be used for music as well. The defeated bill would have applied to ads and covers, as well as lyrics, describing or depicting "illicit sex."

The bill's sponsor said she would file a revision of it next year. You can't keep a good idea down.

NEWS STORIES BY SCOTT ISLER

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KLYMAXX

A Long Time in Coming

All they wanted was a hit. Certainly, Klymaxx wouldn't have turned down a triple-platinum certification from the RIAA, or maybe a Grammy or two for that bare spot on the mantel. But it's safe to assume that, after two previous LPs that were DOA on the charts, the band would have settled for just your basic, garden-variety success. Instead they got what the record company has taken to calling "the album that would not die."

Meeting In The Ladies' Room, released over a year ago, has been something of a wonder. The initial singles, "The Men All Pause" and the title track, were bits of swaggering female braggadocio that became big hits in the R&B market. Then came "I Miss You." That ballad, with lead vocals by bassist **Joyce "Fenderella" Irby**, is a throwback to the fluffy confections of the Delfonics and the Stylistics—not exactly the kind of song that crosses over to the top of the pop charts these days. But that's exactly what it did.

"We are surprised," admits drummer and group leader **Bernadette Cooper**. "We had no idea the record was going to get as big as it did. It sounds a lot like Michael Jackson. Fenderella sounds a lot like Michael anyway; she's not trying to pattern after him...she just sounds like Michael Jackson."

Top ten chart success and Michael Jackson comparisons are pretty heady stuff for a band whose main claim to fame just recently was the fact that they were the world's only female funk outfit. Now, faced with the unenviable task of crafting a follow-up that will prove *Ladies' Room* was no fluke, the group has turned to a rather unlikely pair of producers: George Clinton and Burt Bacharach.

"George has been a personal friend of mine for about fifteen years," Irby says. "We're into a lot of funk stuff and he's the number one funk cat. And 'I Miss You,' with its pop success, attracted Burt Bacharach, who writes tunes that are very similar to that."

One or two other female funk bands are now whispered to be warming up in the bullpen. Cooper says the threat of competition doesn't bother her. Klymaxx is even willing to contribute songwriting and production to the upstarts—as long as they remember which band is the founding "mother" of it all.

– Leonard Pitts, Jr.

LARRY BUSACCA/RETNA

RUN-D.M.C./AEROSMITH

Two Great Legends! Together!! Live!!!

Heavy metal upstarts Run-D.M.C. acknowledged a spiritual debt this past March: They asked the elderly but still quite active **Joe Perry** and **Steve Tyler** of Aerosmith to join them on a re-recording of the classic "Walk This Way."

For the twenty-year-old new traditionalists from Hollis, Queens, it was a dream come true. "A long time ago, back in '80, we used to rap on their tracks, and 'Walk This Way' was one of them," says **Run** (Joseph Simmons), eager to show that his roots are both sincere and *authentic*. "[DJ Jam-Master] Jay would scratch the beat, and we would rap over it. This was before rap records were made, so you had to find beats off of other records."

At the New York recording studio Perry sits alone, pensive, a guitar in his hands, a trademark stack of amplifiers by his side. His exposure to hip-hop has been limited to what he hears from his thirteen-year-old stepson, but he says he likes Run-D.M.C. "I can't really name any of their songs off," he admits, "but what I hear I like. 'Cause they're using electric guitar. I'm really honored that they want to do this song."

Tyler also feels honored, but adds an old master's ornery insistence on getting his due: "If you took Aerosmith music and stripped everything off except the drums and vocals, it would be rap music, right? We do rap music, but we do it with rock 'n' roll, which is exactly what D.M.C. is doing now."

As the historic session proceeds, with Tyler rapping, and Perry playing guitar and bass, one is tempted to ask these living legends the age-old question: Just what *is* the metal? But it isn't necessary. The answer is in the tracks. *This* is really the metal.

– John Leland

World Radio History

ROSS MARINO

JESUS AND MARY CHAIN

Unlearned and Unashamed

Precious few bands this decade have inspired anywhere near the volume of journalistic dissection (much of it fairly perceptive) as the Jesus and Mary Chain. This scruffy outfit from Glasgow has rattled rock 'n' roll's cage with an elegantly simple concept: fetching pop melodies sung with aplomb and smothered in a psychedelic maelstrom of fuzz, feedback and echo. The resulting cool chaos is on *Psychocandy*, a brilliant self-produced debut that finished second in *New Musical Express*' 1985 readers' poll. While hardly revolutionary, the album advances art-pop aggression to a whole new level.

Despite the attention paid to their current sonic approach, singer **Jim Reid** is enthusiastic about structural alternatives. "People get terribly snobbish about what instruments you use. I want to make good records; I don't care what I use to get it." "Cut Dead" and "The Hardest Walk," he muses, "would have been great with strings." So what happened? "We didn't know how to get strings on a record," he admits. "Is there a company you phone up?"

Reid, twenty-four, co-writes the songs with his older brother William. The trio includes a bassist but no steady drummer. Onstage, a stand-in stands up to pound on a tiny kit with no cymbals; guitarist William crouches in front of a squealing amp; Jim sings and blasts sporadic white noise from an untuned guitar. "We've built on our lack of technical ability," he says with pride.

"I don't agree that a rock 'n' roll show has to be an hour and a half. Even if it's your favorite group, half an hour is enough." Some legendary Jesus and Mary Chain shows have run ten minutes. "A gig doesn't have a time limit—you play as long as you feel. But if people are forking out a lot of money you have to consider that." He's also dead-set against encores.

The secret to their sound? "Shinnei fuzz pedals. They're Japanese; you can't buy them at all anymore. We've got the last five in the world."

– *Ira Robbins*

Speed Wars

You say that record you bought doesn't sound the way it did on radio? At least one program director has admitted increasing the 45 turntable speed three percent, so music will be "brighter" than the competition's. This situation is bound to escalate. If you have a very deep voice and/or play very slow music, now is the time to make records. You may end up with the only listenable product on the airwaves.

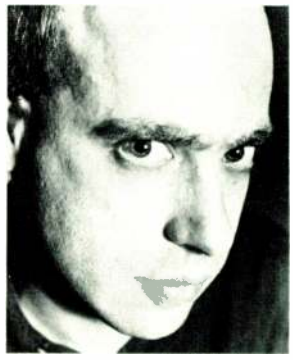
PETER GORDON

From Downtown to Midtown

I think there's some tradition of American music that I fall into, somewhere between pop and serious music—the same pigeonhole that musical theater in its heyday would fall into, or the same one that Gershwin or Harry Partch or Frank Zappa would fit into."

Move over, Stravinsky, Copland and Glass: Peter Gordon is out of the dugout and into the big leagues. Best-known as the honker whose brass blats have added offbeat spice to Laurie Anderson's work, Gordon is now coming into his own—with a CBS Masterworks contract. On the mostly instrumental *Innocent*, his first time at bat with a major label, Gordon's all-star teammates include Anderson, Elliot Easton of the Cars, tinkertoy percussionist David Van Tieghem, Tony Levin (late of King Crimson) and gospel singers the Five Blind Boys of Alabama.

Not that Gordon has been playing batboy all this time; he's worked with David Byrne, the Flying Lizards, and his own Love of Life Orchestra. The softspoken, Telly Savalas-coiffed saxophonist also scored *The Birth Of A Poet*, a multi-media collaboration. Regardless of context, Gordon's tightly-



meshed, rat-a-tat lines are instantly recognizable in New York's downtown scene.

Electric eclecticism has always been Gordon's calling card. "My band, the Love of Life Orchestra, has really been about people from a wide range of backgrounds playing together," he asserts. His tenure with Laurie Anderson, for example, has been mutually influential. "I was around her when she really began to come into her own as a musician, '76 through '80....I've learned quite a bit from Laurie—certain things about pacing, words, use of material.

"There's a problem with a lot of music now; the song, in combination with MTV, is over-literalized. So maybe it's a break for instrumental music." *Miami Vice*, watch out.– *Mark Dery*

MARCIA RESNICK

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Photograph by Michael Going

World Radio History

Chick Corea's Alternating Currents

Last spring's Queen Mary Jazz Festival was an odd setting to hear jazz. Framed by the Long Beach marina and the leviathan, landlocked vessel turned tourist haunt, the acts were somehow failing to communicate. Steps Ahead was frustratingly glib, Miles was coyly translucent. As a saving grace, Chick Corea came onstage under damp gray twilight, swinging, spiking and counterpunching phrases with drummer Dave Weckl and bassist John Patitucci. These guys were thoroughly *having it all*, in the venerable jazz tradition. Though the tune structures were sketchy and Corea wasn't taking full advantage of his wraparound keys, the playing was ecstatically and definitively electric. Great volume, great technical ferocity and uncaged fun were rampant.

A year later, after extensive touring/woodshedding, adding guitarist Scott Henderson and recording in his own Mad Hatter studio in Los Angeles, Corea has completed his first album for the GRP label and is headlong into a new chapter in a career which has yielded nearly forty albums (not including sideman dates) in twenty years. A potent sense of homecoming marks Chick's return to electricity a decade after his Return to Forever band generated a level of mass audience huzzahs normally reserved for pop artists. RTF ventured from town to town in grand, raucous style, leaving throngs of jazz and rock fans panting from adulatory exhaustion. But Corea wasn't one to ride the gravy train. Carrying the fusion challenge beyond its increasing superficiality as the decade progressed, Corea bowed out of the pop/jazz game and *branched* out into special esoteric projects—orchestrations for strings, a set of Satie-like children's songs, duets, a free trio...everything but that which would insure large volumes of record sales.

It's not that Chick Corea thinks big, exactly. He thinks *wide*. He envisions music on a lateral, elastic plane of creativity—a sort of boundaryless wavelength of style. He's not a rootless eclectic, exactly, just someone with an ample headful of composition and a handful of chops for which the jazz, Latin, rock, neo-classical

By Josef Woodard

World Radio History

nomenclatures are too imprecise and confining. Corea remains ever curious, furiously creative, eager for collaborative efforts, game for new technologies, uncowed by the atypical jazz condition of making large sums of money.

Paralleled to the Corea band of a decade ago, the new unit conveys an attitude that validates Chick's decision to coin a new spelling for the term—the dialectic—electric. Spinning old RTF records reveals its musical aging process; what once sounded propulsively progressive and deliciously complex now sounds a bit like rococo exercise, fragmentary in form and overstated in content. Evoking a latter-day maturity, the new tunes comport themselves sleekly and without excess, lent a handsome taste of restrained intensity by the players.

The young second-generation fusion lions on-board serve Corea's elektrik outlet beautifully. Drummer Weckl reverses Lenny White's gregarious attack, instead positing a subtle

"Mozart's music is not simple. It essentially kicked my ass."

buoyancy of pulse. Unlike Stanley Clarke, Patitucci adheres his warm tone and unified lines to the center of the music, rather than prancing along the top of it. Henderson, veteran of bands led by Jean Luc Ponty, Jeff Berlin and his own debut record project, epitomizes the second wave of disarmingly fluid fusion plectrists.

And leader Corea seems to have found his own unique path on freshly unpacked equipment. At forty-five, Corea is old enough to be a father to Weckl and Patitucci, but his outlook is as a new recruit, obviously reeling from current synth possibilities. Chick has gone elektrik.

When I first caught up with him one evening last January, he was in a strange, chameleonic transition. In the control room, Corea's longstanding engineer Bernie Kirsch was busy putting mixing touches on the epic tune, "Silver Temple." Corea, his lobes working overtime as usual, was in an antsy mood. He shuffled back and forth between eyeing the track sheet and dashing into the practice room to work over his score for a new piano concerto to be premiered in Tokyo.

When he finally settled down to an extensive interview a few weeks later, the grand piano had been safely wrested from his musical conscience. Before me, behind an officious oak desk, was one of jazz's most prodigious offspring who had come full circle and embraced, yet again, the power of alternating current in music.

MUSICIAN: *Judging from the volume and variety of your output, it would seem that you thrive on perpetual motion.*
COREA: I thrive on a lot of production. As you grow, I feel you can either get better and expand or get worse. Improvement has something to do with expansion. Conditions never remain the same, even if you do nothing. If you do nothing, conditions usually get worse. You maybe think things are in a normal state, going on unchanged and, in actual fact, things are atrophying. Unless you're continually creating in life, creating new things, turning out new product, things will go down. So there are only two directions in life—better or worse. It's kind of simple.
MUSICIAN: *What gave you the urge to go electric again after having almost renounced it?*
COREA: I think since I put my first band together in 1970, I began to develop an affinity for electric sounds—keyboards, guitars, basses and audio systems, making music with those kinds of tools. There are two reasons for that: They're very flexible tools in that I can realize a real cross section of kinds of music and emotions and communication; and they're very standard tools. It's my wish to communicate very broadly. I want to find ways to do that.

But I'm coming at it from another direction. I started out as more of an esoteric musician, from jazz and experimental music into wanting to become a more broadly communicative musician. So now, I'm having to learn new techniques—the technique of songwriting, the technique of production and orchestration to make the music meet the technical standards of record making. And still I have to retain my own fun and games with music.
MUSICIAN: *But it seems like you've had a real roller-coaster attitude between communicating on a broad basis and doing personal projects that reach a smaller audience. Ideally, would you like to have both aspects simultaneously?*
COREA: My criteria now is very simply how valuable and how much of an emotion can I stir in people. My experimental music can be looked upon, in a certain way, as research: ways to find new techniques and resources within myself, ways of expression. There's probably a way to organize it so that I can continue to move forward with my main communication and then have my experimentation and expansion done in such a way that I can also put it out on this main line. But I haven't been completely successful at doing that. The way I've approached it is the truth of your observation—like a roller coaster. First it seems like I'm being a chamber music musician, then it seems like I have a jazz trio, then it seems like I have a band, then it seems like I don't have a band, then it seems like I'm a producer, then I wrote a piano concerto.
MUSICIAN: Return To Forever *had a brute, rock 'n' roll energy level, though on closer examination there was much more going on. Do you want to maintain that in this new band, or do you feel that you've matured beyond that?*
COREA: Well, that aspect of rock 'n' roll that we borrowed, which was high energy and volume—real intensity in playing—is not something which is either good or bad or fine or coarse. It's something which should be used. It's one of the things on the palette of emotions for me, and one of the more important ones. It's a rousing point of communication, it's a point of waking up. There's something very nice about being

DARRYL PITT/RETNA

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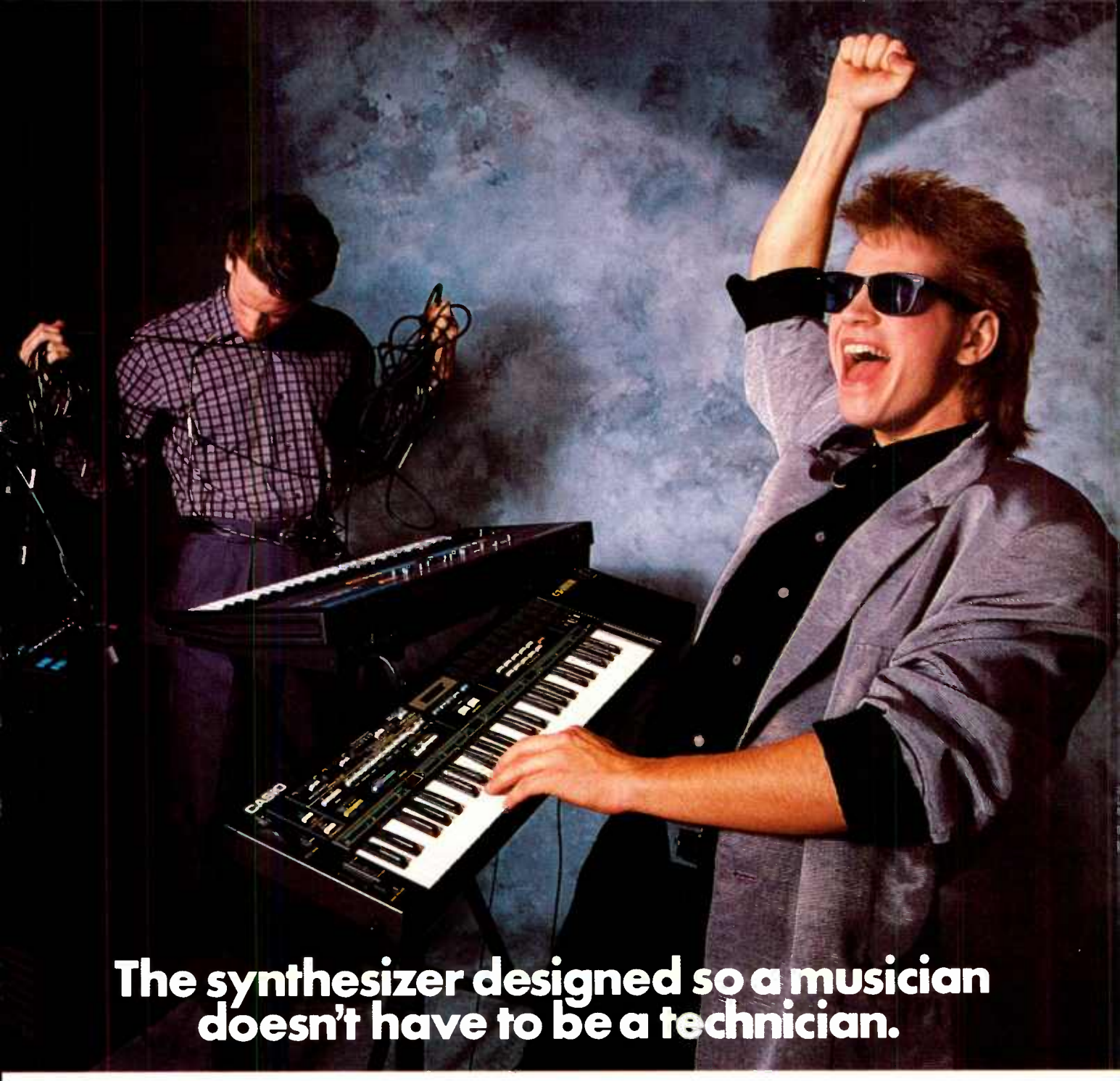

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able to experience life intensely. I think there are aspects of that on the record.

It's hard to capture that on a record, on vinyl. When people are listening to records, they're in different frames of mind, even when they're sitting listening alone. That kind of intensity is really stuff for live performance. And live, definitely everyone in this band is ready to blow. I may have to be the one to cool it down—the old man to say "whoa," because Dave and Scott and John are ready. I know that.

MUSICIAN: *How do you put together a band like this? Did you snoop around for players with the right simpatico, or did you know these guys beforehand?*

COREA: John Patitucci I knew somewhat. Gayle [Moran], my wife, came back two or three years ago with a glowing report of some young bass player she had heard at a jam session at Chuck Mangione's house, and from around town, I heard John's name mentioned several times. So I actually called him and asked if he was interested in putting together a tape for me of snatches of his various playing. Which he did, and I

CHICK'S TRICKS

MUSICIAN: *Is the Electric Band an extension of Return to Forever and the things you were doing in the mid 70s?*

COREA: In the sense of having a steady band. In the sense of having an electric music band, and in the sense of me playing the same or similar roles—as bandleader and musical director, composer and arranger. Of course, it's different musicians. It's a different time. It's different music.

MUSICIAN: *And not to forget, different equipment.*

COREA: Definitely a different technical atmosphere. With my old electric bands, the guys in the band—especially Lenny White—would always urge me to orchestrate my keyboard parts. I played mostly on the Fender Rhodes, and only used synthesizers as sweeteners. Lenny would say, "Hey, man, why don't you get some *sounds*." I'd say, "Yeah, I'd love to!"

But it wasn't so easy back then and I never did find the time to get into it—both of those factors. Plus I never really thoroughly learned the basics of synthesizers, which I'm now beginning to correct. But I can't just take a year off and study a DX7 manual. Now I have Rory Kaplan and Bo Tomlin help me program my synthesizers.

The Rhodes was always more of a bridge for me from the acoustic piano because of the touch—the fact that I can dig in and be expressive with my fingers, like I am with an acoustic piano. So when they came out with a MIDI'd Rhodes, that was a good bridge to other synthesizers. It's a staple, a central point of my set-up. It gives me time to develop my synthesizer playing on its own, so when I take my hands off the Rhodes and go to another synthesizer, I can begin to develop techniques that will come up to the degree of expressiveness that I really want to have.

For instance, an instrument I would love to master and get right, is the strap-around Yamaha KX5. I love it. It's a dream of being able, finally, to get up and play a lead line. I've learned from horn players as much or more about jazz than from pianists. The jazz style I developed was a very horn-like one, a Bud Powell, Horace Silver style—where there's a melodic line.

MUSICIAN: *What else do you use?*

COREA: I've got two racks of Yamaha TX816s—like two racks of eight DX7s. I have a J.L. Cooper MIDI box—a switch box which allows me to select which modules are being controlled by which keyboard controller. I also use the Synclavier, and an old Yamaha GS1 which I like. It's a preset instrument, with very rich, DX-like sounds. There's a Linn 9000 which I use to sequence the TX816s and also to trigger the Synclavier sequencer. That's about it. So synthesizer-wise, the TX816s and the Synclavier are the basic instruments. I'm going to add to it at some point, but I've got all I can do to deal with these right now.

MUSICIAN: *When you trigger a TX816, do you create compound sounds, or just slight variations on each sound? How do you take advantage of the module arrangement?*

COREA: You have to use your basic sense of proportionate sound with these things. If you have a sound and you add the same sound to it, all it does is either wipes out the first sound or doubles it in volume. It does nothing to the timbre. That's if it's exactly the same sound. So you quickly find out that the game here is to build timbres by varying the sound of one module against another. There's an infinite number of things that you can do, both with varying timbres, different kinds of sounds added together to make a more complex sound or you can use one module, for instance, to get a sound in the low register and another to get a sound in the upper register. At first, the tendency is just to mash things together. All you need is four of these and three of these.... Forget it! Until you begin to know what you have and how to combine them and be able to actually hear the result, it takes a while of experimenting with it.

MUSICIAN: *Has your Mini Moog then been rendered obsolete by now? There was a time when that was a signature axe of yours.*

COREA: The Mini Moog slipped out of the system because it was non-touch responsive, but nothing has really replaced the sound of it. I don't think anything ever really will; it is what it is. I've gotten a couple of sounds on the modules that approximate the kind of expression that I used to like to have on the Mini Moog. But it's really a new game with a Yamaha KX5 around my shoulder and the KX88, to try and articulate like the Mini Moog. I haven't been able to do that.

The DX7 keyboard is much better to use to articulate like the Mini Moog, because it's a lighter action. The KX88 action is heavy, like a piano is and can't really fly like I did on the Mini Moog. Rory Kaplan still has a great affinity for the Mini Moog—he did a maintenance on it and he encourages me to use it. We used it on one of the overdubs on the record. It wasn't the timbre of the instrument, but the feel of it that you can't really duplicate. Also, I have a slight aversion to just piling up keyboards in my system.

MUSICIAN: *How integral are you here at Mad Hatter Studios? Do you actually do a lot of hands-on collaboration with projects that come in?*

COREA: The recording studio was a naive thing, because when I first built it, I thought, gee, I'm going to have my own studio because I make one or two records a year and I like to do experiments and we'll have this great studio upstairs from the offices. Everything will work great. We built it, and I let my contract with Warner Bros. go. That was right after *Three Quartets*. I started playing chamber music and I never made a multi-track recording up there until the Elektric Band. I did a few projects up there, but they were one- or two-day projects, so the studio was atrophying. It was up there dark and not being used. It turned out to be a misestimation of effort for me.

So then I contacted Ron Moss and said, "Look, can you take the studio over, manage it and make it a place where people can use it?" He did. It took him a year to do it, but he put it on the face of the L.A. studio map. Now it's real nice; we've got musicians and producers coming by using it. We're getting ready to move it up to the next level, with a computerized board and upgraded equipment. It's got the best pianos in town.

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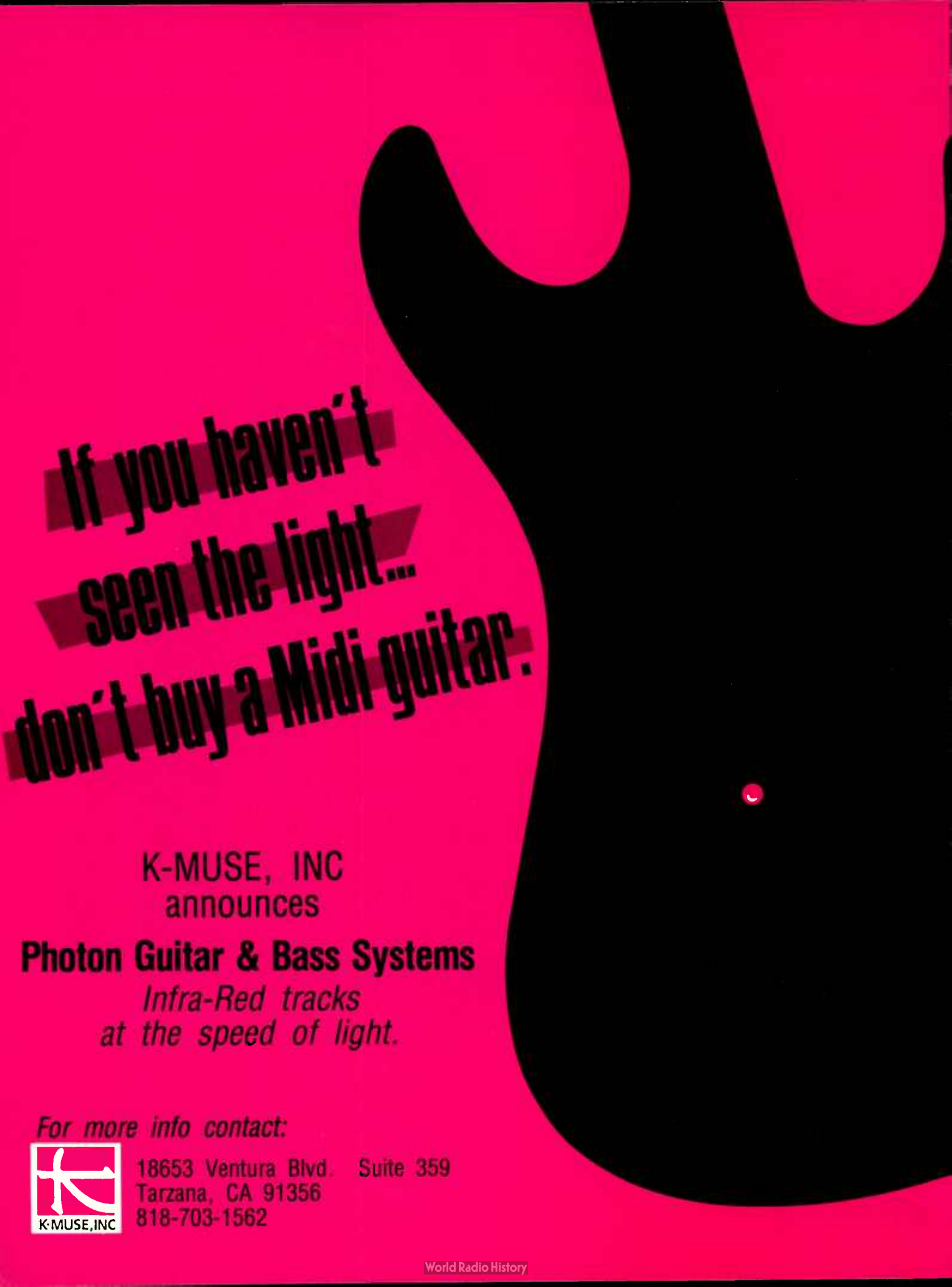

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By Alan di Perna

BEYOND SOLO: MERGING MIDI TRAFFIC

How to Get More Than One MIDI Musician into the Same Fast Track

BRUCE CROCKER

Musical solipsism. That's been the least healthy side effect of MIDI's power to turn a single, ordinary instrument into the London Philharmonic. It's not hard to see how MIDI has tended to cut its devotees off from the communal/collective side of music making. Chances are you've been through it. The eerie feeling that you, Mr. MIDI Hobbyist, are the only musical being that really exists. That the outskirts of musical reality itself lie just beyond the four walls of that spare room where you keep your MIDI gear. A ghost and his machines.

It's not that MIDI musicians are a bunch of solitary wankers by nature. The limitation lies more in the equipment itself. Most MIDI sequencers, tone modules and the like only provide one MIDI In jack. This tends to restrict the equipment to use by one person at a time. Sure, two or more people can take turns inputting riffs to a sequencer; but that's hardly the same thing as playing together. And, as you may recall from your playground days, turn-taking usually leads to squabbles once everybody starts getting excited.

You may have noticed, however, the growing number of MIDI merging devices on the market. Giving several players simultaneous access to a sequencer or tone module is only one of many applications for these helpful little boxes. But it's one of the most exciting. A MIDI merging device may be just the gizmo you've been looking for to let the fresh air of collaboration into your own spare-bedroom Fortress of Solitude.

MIDI Merging: What It Is and What It Ain't (A Crash Course in Semantics)

Here's the trouble. There are so many MIDI accessories out there that it gets harder and harder to appreciate all the distinctions between a MIDI merging device and, say, a MIDI switcher or MIDI thru-box. And to make an even bigger muddle of things, the term "merge" is used in several different contexts in the post-literate world of MIDI and computers. Then there's yet another little wrinkle: The merging boxes we're talking about here are sometimes called MIDI mixers as well (but they're not to be confused with the upcoming new breed of mixing *consoles* that can respond to MIDI data). Thoroughly perplexed yet?

Actually, the type of MIDI merging we're talking about here is very simple in theory. It's a little like genetics and the reproduction process, really. (Anything to work a little sex into the article.) As you may recall from your junior high science class, two DNA molecules combine and the resulting structure contains all the genetic information of each individual DNA chain. It's the same thing with MIDI merging. You take two or more 16-channel MIDI lines and combine them to form one MIDI line that contains all the data from all the lines that have been merged.

Most of the MIDI merging devices on the market give you either two or four MIDI In jacks. The two-input devices include the Kamlet MIDI Merger, J.L. Cooper's MIDI Blender and the

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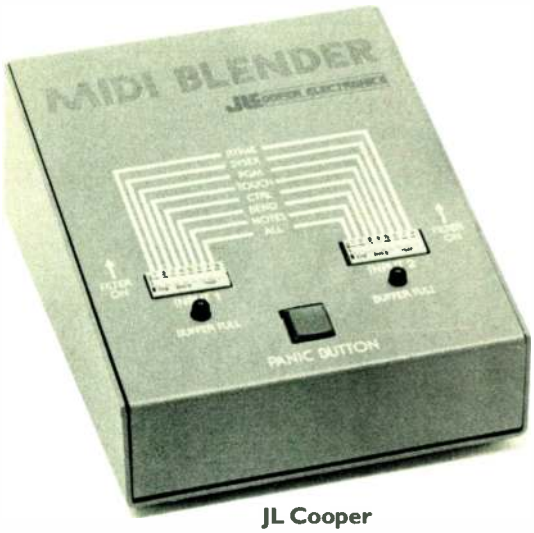
SynHance M1X and M1X+. Among the 4-input merging devices are the MIDIMIX 8 and MIDIMIX 9, the Garfield Electronics Traffic Controller (which can also be set up to operate as two independent 2-input mergers) and the forthcoming Southworth Systems Jam Box.

Note that merging (again, in the sense that we're using the term here) is what happens to MIDI *lines*—not individual *channels*. The data on several lines is merged onto one line, but each data byte retains its original channel identity. (And of course, just as you always end up with forty-six chromosomes in human reproduction, you always end up with the standard sixteen MIDI channels no matter how many lines you merge.) So say you're merging four MIDI lines, and all four lines have data on Channel 3. All of that data will still be on Channel 3 of the merged line



JL Cooper
MIDI Blender: note panic button

that's spit out of the device. In other words, MIDI merging is not the same thing as rechannelizing.

As it turns out, though, some of the merging devices mentioned above also offer rechannelizing capabilities. Garfield's Traffic Controller includes a rechannelizing switch that takes incoming channel data and "bumps it up" by one channel number. When the switch is on, what comes in on Channel 3 goes out on Channel 4; what comes in on Channel 16 goes out on Channel 1. The Kamlet MIDI Merger goes several digits beyond that by letting the user bump up channel data by one, two or three places.

Our friend the MIDI merging box is often mistaken for yet another type of device: the MIDI switcher (or patcher). Superficially, mergers and switchers have a lot in common. With both, you get multiple MIDI inputs that can feed a single MIDI output. Both are used by keyboardists who want to employ two controllers—say a master keyboard and an around-the-neck auxiliary keyboard—to drive a single tone generating rack.

But the difference is this. A MIDI switcher—just as its name asserts—is a switch. You can have Input A connected to the output or Input B connected to the output. One or the other. Either/Or. Not both. A MIDI merging device, on the other hand, is analogous to a Y connector. Input A and Input B are *both* sent to the output. So if you have two keyboard controllers driving a single tone rack, both controllers will be on line all the time. There's no need to throw any kind of switch as you move from one controller to another.

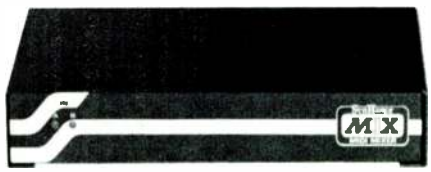
A Thousand and One Uses

We started out by mentioning how MIDI mergers can ease the loneliness of MIDI sequencer and studio-oriented work. But they're very useful for real time/performance applications too. MIDI drummers can use merging to multiplex a whole kit's worth of trigger pads, enabling them all to trigger a single MIDI sound module. In a similar vein, Jim Cooper recently told me how he used a network of his MIDI Blenders to custom-MIDIfy a vibraharp.

Most merging applications revolve around the same basic principle: multiple controllers on a single sound source or data storage system (i.e., a sequencer). But there are a surprising number of possible variations on this theme. (Think of all the ways you've used a Y connector over the years.) The fact that merging allows all controllers to be "online-all-the-time" has all kinds of interesting ramifications. For instance, it means you can use your best velocity sensitive keyboard as your main controller while simultaneously using a favorite pitch wheel on another of your synths and the breath controller from yet a third machine.

It also means that a band can communalize its store of MIDI sound-generating gear. Even in the most futuristic groups (those which have MIDI guitarists and a MIDI drummer as well as a MIDI keyboardist) each band member tends to stick to his own pile of sound generating gear. Only usually, the bulk of the wealth is unevenly distributed on the keyboardist's side of the stage. Thanks to merging, though, it's theoretically possible for each band member to have continual access to every sound-generating device on stage. True collectivism! *Everyone* controls the means of sound production. This, of course, presupposes some careful rehearsal and a little diplomacy on the band's part. If five guys all try to jump on the same oscillator at the same time, there could be trouble. But hey, who said socialism was perfect?

It's when you're working with sequencers and tape, however, that you really begin to appreciate what a pal your MIDI merge box can be. All kinds of irritating problems stem from the fact that



SynHance MIX merger

most sequencers give you only one MIDI In jack. Say, for instance, you want to sync your sequencer to tape and record a new passage into the sequencer via your MIDI keyboard. Without a merging device, you can't do it. If you use the sequencer's MIDI In jack for your MIDI sync input, then you can't connect your MIDI keyboard. Connect your keyboard and you can't sync to tape. But if you merge your MIDI sync input and the MIDI line coming from your instrument, you're in business. To make things even easier, the MIDIMIX 9 gives you an analog clock input which can take various tape and drum machine sync codes and output them as MIDI sync. The Southworth Jam Box will provide similar facilities plus SMPTE In and Out jacks.

But, as we said above, true "live-to-sequencer" recording is the most exciting possibility opened up by MIDI merging devices. We're talking about MIDI guitars, keyboards and drum pads all inputting data simultaneously. Or in simpler words, wailing away together just like they did in the good old days. Use a sequencer that lets you switch off the quantized error correction, and you can achieve a true interactive feel between players—just like recording live tracks on tape. Of course, the advantage of doing it with a sequencer is that you can go back and edit the performance—changing notes, reassigning voices, etc. in ways only sequencers allow.

That Pesky Time Lag Again

Right now, you can merge the MIDI lines from two or three keyboard instruments and set up a "live-to-sequencer" situation on a modest scale. But MIDI technology hasn't *quite* reached the point where you can enter a full-blown MIDI guitar/bass/drums/keyboard take all in one pass. For one thing, the tracking and time delay bugs are still being worked out of guitar controllers. And then we come up against that perennial MIDI problem: data bottlenecking.

You know, being a MIDI musician can

continued on page 46

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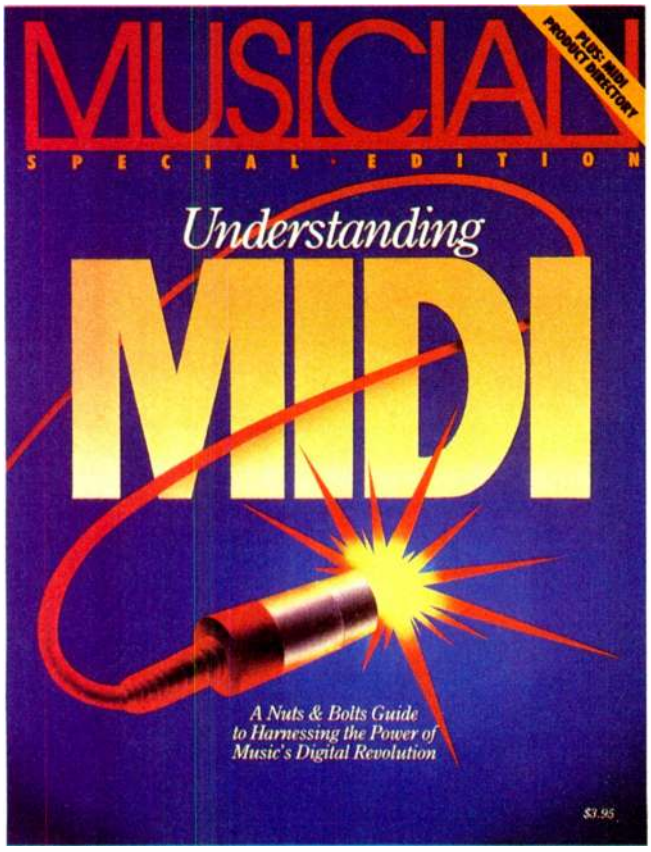

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The Birth, Growth and Simplification of Britain's Best Funk Band

By Rob Tannenbaum

MARK KING'S LEVEL 42 GOES BACK TO BASS-ICS

"When we began in 1979, it was very much as serious musicians," says Mark King, bassist, singer, and hyperactive mouthpiece for Level 42. "We had a lot of scorn for pop music. We thought it was mindless crap. We were much too snotty and loudmouthed about it, and considered ourselves to be way above that. We knew what we were doing. *We could* play fast if we wanted to," he says, blue eyes glinting wide with self-mocking glee.

Although they're as close to unknown in the United States as any seven-album veterans can be, Level 42 have long been the most popular funksters in the U.K. With a style King describes as "Mahavishnu Orchestra meets the Osmonds," they'd reached a comfortable position on the continent: every year, *Blues and Soul* magazine named them Best British Group; their singles regularly placed in the top of the pop charts; wherever they played, fans popped thumbs against belt buckles in imitation of King's Gatling-style technique; and King could have paid for several semesters at Berklee with the session offers he refused. But being the Best Funk Band in England is a modest honor, like being the convent stud or the White House intellectual. What was their competition, Shakatak and the Style Council? As the gregarious, compact King explains, Level 42 realized they had to elude their reputation—it was time to get into some mindless crap.

"We sat down at the beginning of last year and decided it would be nice to shift the emphasis away from individual virtuosity to strength in songwriting. At the end of the day, writing great songs is more worthwhile than being respected as a great musician. Of course I love it when people in Europe say, 'I think you're a great bass player.' But it doesn't reach as many people as a good song does. Everybody sings. But not everybody understands that the root bass I'm playing is C# below the E."

The result was *World Machine*, which King considers "our first American release" even though they've already had two LPs released here. Indeed, the album represents a new approach for the band: As with latter-day Police, Level 42 now use their prodigious ability in a crafty, collective compound of rhythmic and harmonic subtlety, and pop narrative. By halving their efforts, Level 42 have doubled their assets. And if the political subtleties of their new songs seem muddled, that completes the comparison with the Police. *World Machine* rose to number three on the British charts. Now that "Something About You" is storming the American top forty, "Hot Water" is in heavy dance club rotation and a national headlining tour has been arranged for this spring.

MALCOLM HEYWOOD RETNA

"God we were serious! Over six years you start to parody yourself."

If Level 42 get any bigger, they could put the Isle of Wight on the rock 'n' roll map.

There are, Mark King insists, more worldly places to grow up than that small island off the southern coast of England. "It wasn't all goats and shepherds strolling around with lutes, but getting records was pretty hard. In fact, discovering Miles Davis and Return To Forever was very much a mistake of misorders by the record stores. I'd see these records and they had the magic word *jazz* on them." Although he began playing drums at the age of nine, it was John McLaughlin's guitar playing which fascinated King. There wasn't much demand for *Bitches Brew* on a holm of about 200,000, so King's interest inevitably lead him to brothers Phil and Boon Gould, who lived on the other side of the isle. Boon, a guitarist, shared King's fascination with McLaughlin, but because Phil was also a drummer, the trio never played in the same band. Still, Phil and Mark became good friends, spending time immersed in what King calls "that sort of moronic drummers' talk." ("You know the joke, 'How many session drummers does it take to screw in a light bulb?'" King taunts. "Three: one to screw the bulb and two to talk about how Steve Gadd would have done it.")

King continued to play the drums throughout his teens, supporting himself by working as a milkman. "I was always convinced I was gonna be a great drummer," King continues, "the best in the world. But the main experience you get on the Isle of Wight was playing cover versions in holiday camps for English families that couldn't afford to go

World Radio History

away on proper holidays. Occasionally there were London session musicians there, old farts that were just about at the end of their tether, and they'd reel off frightening stories: 'Oh wait 'til you get to London, matey, it's terrible. Buddy Rich playing drums in one window and Phil Seaman playing drums in another.'

"My hero at the time was Lenny White of Return To Forever," King continues, barely stopping for breath. "I wrote to him in New York saying, 'Can I come play drums in your band?' How stupid! He wrote back to me and gave me lots of real good advice. Unfortunately, he put his address on the letter. I thought, 'He's obviously giving me a sign.' So I went to New York and knocked on his door. He invited me in and let me spend a couple of days around his house. It was too much for me; I kept rushing off to the toilet to have a quick cry. At the end of the week, I'd seen none of New York. At the airport on the way home, I bought a Clint Eastwood hat and a replica Colt .45 pistol in a holster, and I wore them back on the Isle of Wight during my milk rounds. 'Make my day, punk. Order a pint of cream.'"

In contrast to the caveats of various old-fart-vacationers, Lenny White advised King to move to London. "I thought there were gonna be so many brilliant musicians there. I was staggered to find out they they were all useless and there wasn't a famous guy to be seen. Unfortunately, the only job I could get was in a music shop that didn't sell drums. So I lied and said I could play bass. Because there was nothing else to do during the day, I'd pick up the bass and start drumming on it, doing the thumb-snap thing. It was a benefit, not having a teacher to show me what you're supposed to do."

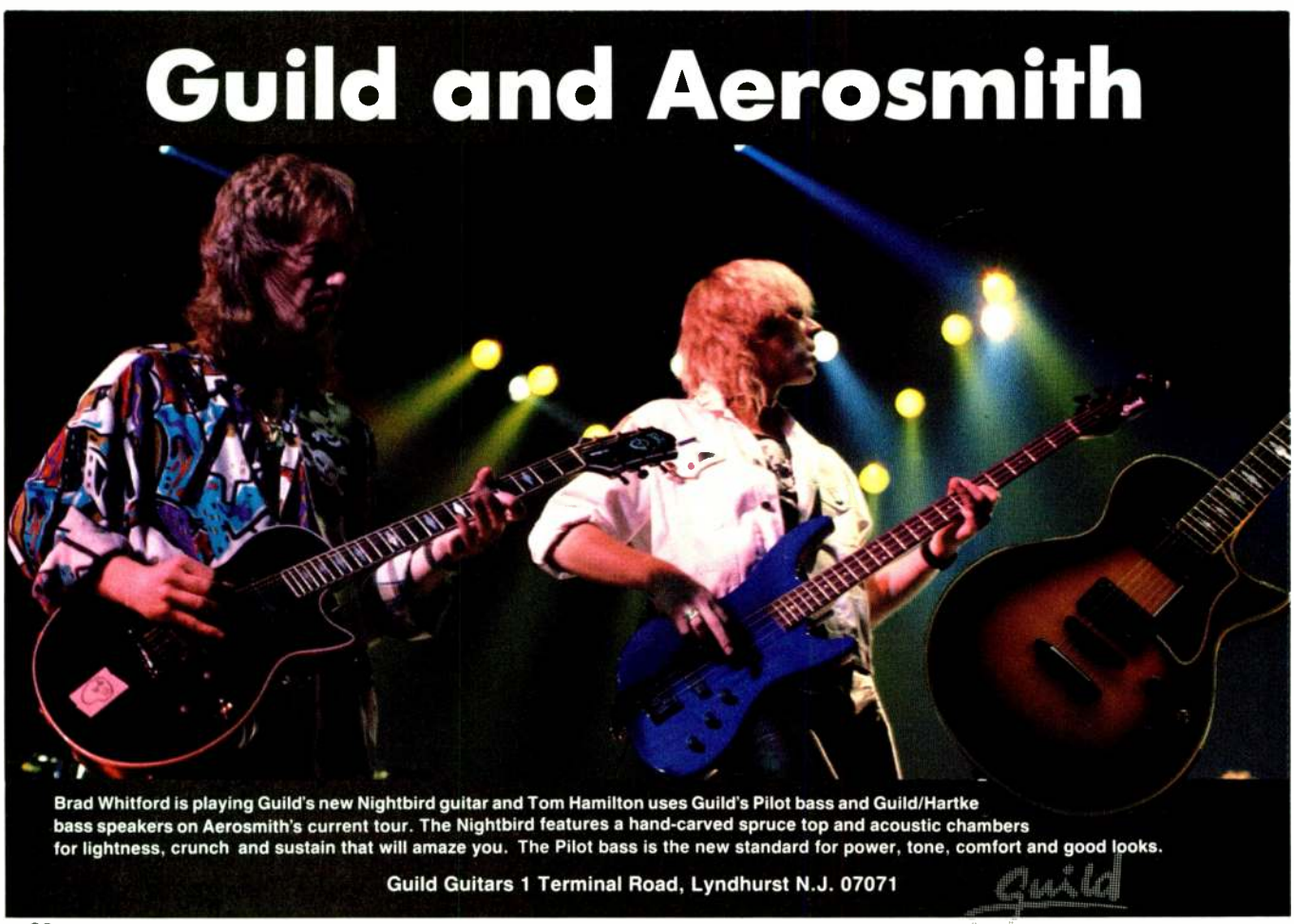
With such fusion landmarks as Mahavishnu's *Birds of Fire* and Carla Bley's *Escalator Over The Hill* more than seven years gone, it was a difficult time for Mark King to be looking for a band. Few things were less hip in late-70s London than fusion. King eventually became the drummer in Reflex, which had some success in '84 with "The Politics Of Dancing." But before long, King rediscovered Phil Gould, who was studying at the Royal Academy of Music. Boon Gould was in London as well, and he'd met a keyboardist named Mike Lindup at the Guildhall School of Music. Rather than recruit a bassist, King took the job and continued his unique drumming technique. They also met keyboardist Wally Badarou, who became a fifth member, recording with the band and overseeing rehearsals, but not touring. "We all liked Miles and Herbie Hancock and Stevie Wonder, so we started jamming together. It was all instrumental, very jazzy and Latin, lots of pentatonic scales. God, we were serious."

In 1980, the Gang of Four was the closest thing England had to a funk band. But when Mark King's quartet began playing on the outskirts of London, using borrowed equipment and calling themselves Level 42 after a key passage in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, they became part of a transi-

continued on page 48

KING'S SCEPTERS

Mark King's home studio is anchored by a Tascam 38 8-track tape recorder, a Studiomaster 16-8-2 desk with semi-parametric eq, a Sony PCM 701 2-track, and Tannoy monitors. Toys include a Linn 9000 drum machine, a Yamaha DX7 synth and a Roland Juno 60 ("which is useless, if you're listening"), a '59 Fender Strat, and an Ovation acoustic. His basses include five J.D. Supernatural basses, a pair of Status graphites, two Pangborns (one sterling silver and one 18 karat gold), a Moon bass with Alembic electronics, and a four-string made by Joe Zon of New York. He favors six Trace Elliott AX 500 amps in 4x10 cabinets, with a GP 11 graphic equalizer. And what would Mark King use for strings except Mark King Strings, the Superwound Funk Masters named for him? "It's a very light gauge—.30 .50 .70 and .90, with a piano winding. They sound very bright."



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LEVEL 42'S ELEVATORS

Phil Gould plays Tama acoustic drums; his kit includes four rack toms, a floor tom and two snares. Gould also uses a Ludwig and a Pearl snare. His electric drum kit is a Simmons SDS7 with an SDS1 module on the side. His cymbals are K. Zildjians.

Boon Gould plays two Gibson Les Pauls through two big Dean Markley amps. His strings are Super Wound Selectras from Rotosound. He uses a custom effects rack which includes Korg Distortion, Octaver, Heavy Metal and Booster boxes, a VCA, and Roland SDE-3000 digital delay and SRE-555 chorus/echo.

Mike Lindup's keyboard stack includes a Sequential Circuits Prophet 5, an Emulator II, a PPG Wave 2.3, a Yamaha DX7 and a Fender Rhodes 73. He uses a Studiomaster 8 x 4 mixer to direct traffic to his effects rack, which consists of a Roland Vocoder and SRE-555 chorus/echo and a Yamaha D-1500 digital delay. Lindup uses a Korg MIDI Link box to MIDI up everything, sequences on a Roland MSQ-700 and has a Yamaha TX816 DX rack he keeps at home. He records with a Pete Cornish DI unit.

Wally Badarou, who contributed production and keyboards to *World Machine*, loves his New England Digital Synclavier system, but augments it with a Minimoog, a Prophet 5, a Yamaha DX7 and TX816 rack. He also uses a Linn 9000

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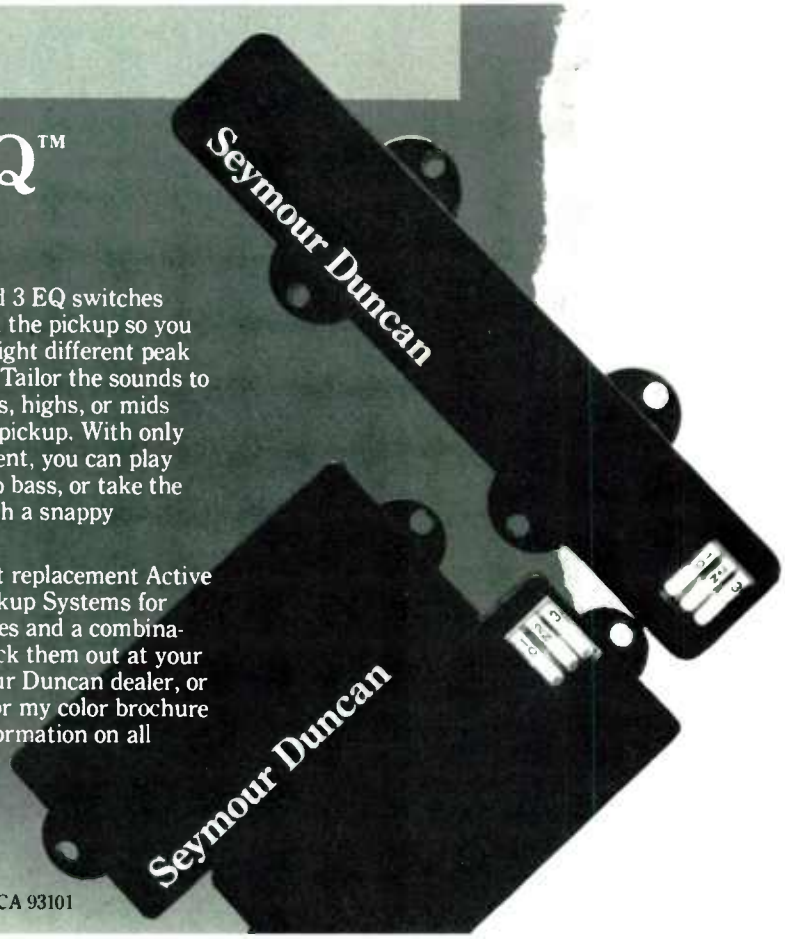

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World Radio History

A British Producer with a Hot Hand and Cool Ears Offers Some Good Sonic Sense

PRODUCING

By Richard Buskin

SMOOTH OPERATOR: SADE'S ROBIN MILLAR

Robin Millar is not too enamored with the current trend of recording with an overly bright sound: "When I say I don't like something that's too bright, I mean artificial brightness," clarifies the producer. "I mean e*qualization*. The savage eq on most modern mixing consoles is just an excuse to make a mess, and the hard high frequencies end up being added to absolutely everything.

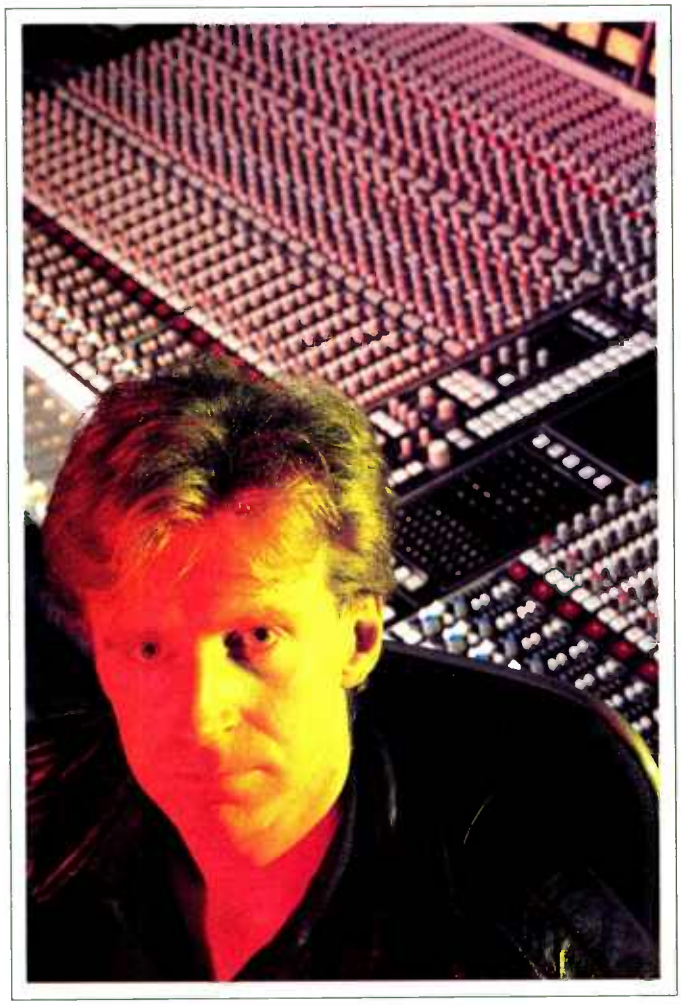
"The result is that at present—particularly in America—everything is trying to sound brighter, louder and more 'go for it' than everything else, including the singer. The poor old singer is wheeled in to sing over this track where the bass is as bright as a bloody lead guitar, the bass drum sounds as if it is being shot, the snare is like a car crash, the guitars come out of an Emulator and sound as if they're just throwing up every now and then, and someone shoves some razor blades in your ear and that's the high-hat! So the singer has no choice but to just stand there and try to scream over it all from the back! You know, 'Shout a bit louder dear, we can't hear you over all this!' So everything is a belter, everything is 'go for it'.... 'Scream and Shout!'"

Robin Millar's singers don't have to scream and shout—unless they want to. Sade Abu, for example, has parlayed Millar's applied theory of smooth tape operating into two smash albums, *Diamond Life* and the recent *Promise*. Both are exhibit A in Millar's crusade to make the world safe for human ears: "No one can understand how *Promise* has smooched its way to the top and settled in at number one in the British charts with nobody really making that much noise at all," Millar says pointedly. "Everyone seems to get beguiled by this, but to me it's obvious: The "go-for-it" trend has got to stop, because Synclaviers, Emulators and the like, with their fantastic bandwidth and frequency response, make it so easy to get things harder and brighter without hiss or noise, and the poor old public is just going to have to keep turning the treble down and down on their amps!"

Millar has not come quickly to his radically conservative production views. A law graduate of Cambridge University, he first garnered favorable attention in France in the 70s for his work as a composer and performer, and as producer for French bands Extrabel and Weekend. In 1981 he acquired Morgan Studios in northwest London and changed its name to the Power Plant. Since then, Millar has produced a steady stream of young lions like the Kane Gang, Pale Fountains, Everything but the Girl, Fine Young Cannibals, Working Week, Tom Robinson, Blue Max and the Big Sound Authority. And his latest clients are Big Country (a project Millar admits is "pretty bloody noisy") and Paul Weller's Style Council. But it is Sade that has put the Power Plant irrevocably on the map, and Millar is all too happy to explain his part in shaping the "Sade Sound":

"I heard demos of 'Hang Onto Your Love,' 'Smooth Operator,' 'When Am I Going To Make A Living' and 'Should I Love You' (which was a B-side), and they were stylistically fairly similar to the way they ended up on *Diamond Life*. They were of course rough and ready, not only because they were demos but also because the group had never been into a studio of any kind before.

"What *wasn't* there was percussion of any description, and so I introduced this element as a fundamental part of the group's music as I felt that in a loose sense it evoked the right sort of mannerisms for the style of songs that Sade imagined she was writing: 60s and 70s soul-based music. This was the most definite way of maintaining the track's momentum in a forward direction without cluttering it up with extra instrumentation. Her voice seemed to need air around it to hear the way she started and ended words.



"Everyone's trying to sound brighter, louder, more go-for-it."

BARRY MARSDEN

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The good thing about percussion is that because it doesn't constitute notes, thick chords or continuous dense music, it can be featured quite prominently without detracting from the vocalist too much."

"Another thing they didn't have was the doubling of acoustic grand piano and traditional Fender Rhodes. At the time Andy (Hale)—the keyboard player—was playing on a Wurlitzer electric piano, and that was the basis of his sound. So I introduced the notion of doubling two separate performances on the acoustic grand and the Fender Rhodes, which gave a slightly different effect to that achieved by the Forte MIDI Mod which is currently very voguish [*a MIDI interface allowing the acoustic piano to trigger a synthesizer*].

"I also introduced sketched-out brass parts in place of individual sax solos, and along with percussion this helped enhance certain sections, to give rises and falls. I also wrote and introduced simple string lines, which became more elaborate on *Promise*. In addition I provided some of the musical punctuation and sound sweetening of certain rhythm sections, and gave the band the notion of *creating space*, since recording with great clarity and impeccable performance can often allow you to get away with a lot less. Things don't have to get cluttered.

"This even applied to the vocals themselves: Sade is full of ideas for these, and during a song she always provides an answer for every question that she asks in the form of a kind of ad-libbed backing vocal. Almost like the later part of the traditional Motown scene where you had the likes of Al Green and Diana Ross doing questions and answers in duet form, except Sade tends to duet with herself. Sometimes, as on 'The Sweetest Taboo' and 'Never As Good As The First Time,' it can be a very good thing, but at other times it can be unnecessarily jumbled, stating the obvious and not leaving anything to the imagination of the listener. 'Your Love Is King,' for instance, started life with a good many ad-libs, and I weeded a lot of those out to leave a little space and a bit for people to ponder on.

"Vocally, however, it would be absolutely unfair to Sade's natural quality and ability for me to say that I created some sort of voice out of something that wasn't there, like a traditional pop producer would do with studio effects; we don't use much in the way of effects on her voice. All I did was choose different sounds that had both the right emotive quality for that song, and that also ensured her voice would sound the same within different contexts.

"Sade has more than one voice: She has a way of belting things out in a very loud and abrasive manner, and this can cause certain microphones to go into compression and rather enhance that nasal harshness which isn't her prettiest sound. So for those sections we would switch to a microphone that would avoid doing this, and for other parts where she sings very breathy and very quietly and you need to bring out as much as possible of the tone in the voice we'd use a valve microphone like a Neumann 67. Other tracks, such as 'Sally' on *Diamond Life*, demanded a very unstudied performance, and so we used what I would call a performance microphone—in that particular case, a Shure SM58. It seemed to be responding in the right way as she hurled her head back and sang.

"Sade has a very good sense of objectivity, which is one of the things that makes her a great singer. She's a good learner, so as the two albums progressed, my job really became easier and easier. She doesn't have great technique or facility for singing difficult things—but she knows she has an agreeable tone to her voice and she knows how to use it.

"Like most people, Sade has a problem tuning when singing with headphones, so we set up a system with her at the back of the control room, with a

continued on page 86

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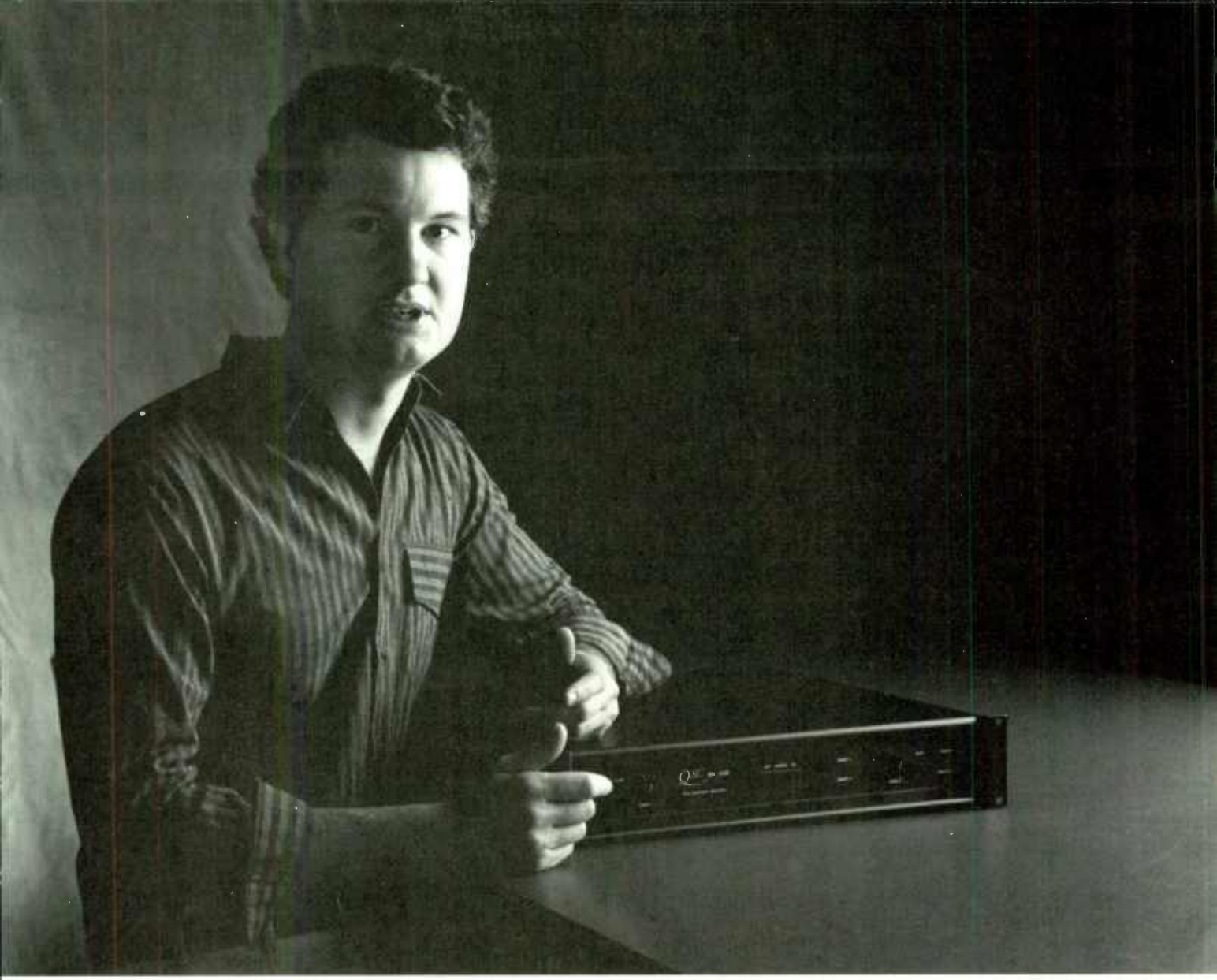

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SOFTWARE CITY

I recently bought a $50 program for my IBM-PC called **Sidekick** that a lot of PC users are agog over. It stays in the background of whatever program I'm running, and then pops up out of nowhere when I want a calculator, scratch pad, phone directory/auto-dialer or apppointment calendar. So what has the desk-top utility boom got to do with music?

Well, assuming you've got your sequencer up and pumping, do you really want to have to save everything and exit the program just to change voice banks in your Yamaha DX7? Hell, no! To the rescue comes a little $140 memory-resident DX7 librarian from **Bäcchus** called **Voice Manager**. By hitting Alt-Y (Yamaha, natch), you can instantly access any of seventy banks of thirty-two voices each (that's 2240 voices, by my pull-down calculator) on a single double-sided disk. Note that this is not voice editing software—it won't help you program the sounds, but it'll save them, shuffle them, and redeal them any way you like.

Voice Manager handles either whole banks or individual voices; it can download single voices, move them from bank to bank, rearrange them within a bank. It's quite fast, especially at paging through the voice banks, doesn't use a hodge-podge of key combinations to do simple things, and is very clear-cut about loading from and saving to disk, something Sidekick is pretty bad on. But above all I like the straightforward way it's laid out on a single menu page, with help screens and prompts easily at hand. And all memory-resident programs have one other big hurdle to clear: since if they jam up they also take down the foreground program, they have to make big allowances for idiots—this is called "user bulletproofing." Believe me, I did my level best, but I couldn't make it freeze up. Call 213-392-1906 for details.

Of course, if you want to set up patches for more than a DX7, may we suggest the **Octave Plateau Patch Master** for IBM-PC. This does what Voice Manager does for up to thirty-two instruments, be they drum machines, synthesizers or synchronizers. It recalls whole setups, so you can save and load in system-wide patches, including MIDI channel assignments. There's also HELP available on call, 32-character patch naming, and automatic auditioning of sound. No, it's not memory-resident, but O-P has plans to integrate Patch Master with Sequencer Plus so you can run them both simultaneously.

Charvel's MIDI Guitar, Ursa Major Goes 68000 & Electro-Percussion News

By Jock Baird

DEVELOPMENTS

Ah, competition! Multi-national Goliaths mixing it up with American Davids...the breakthroughs, the blunders, lives and careers hanging in the balance.... No wonder tech writers are having so much fun these days. Take, for example, the MIDI guitar wars, covered extensively in these pages. Just in time to combat post-NAMM letdown is a new $1400 guitar-to-MIDI converter from **Charvel** called the GTM6. Hoo hah, looks like tag-team Wrestlemania all over again!

Charvel GTM 6

This new rack mount brain and pick-up/tremolo package does make a certain amount of sense. It's the well-pedigreed fruit of the recent marriage of **Jackson/Charvel** guitars with **Akai** MIDI smarts, and it's designed (so far) to work only with new Charvels. The tremolo unit has six individual piezo pick-ups right on the six bridge feet, which cuts down on tracking problems caused by string cross-bleed. The pick-up connects via a standard ¼-inch stereo phone plug to the central unit, which uses what Charvel calls "computer digital multiplex circuitry" to convert voltages to key-on, key-off, key-velocity, pitch-bend and program-change MIDI info. The pitch-recognition system samples at 2 megahertz and has 16-bit resolution; the pitch recognition time is six milliseconds or two vibrations. Each string has its own sensitivity pot on the front panel, and you can assign each individual string to a separate MIDI channel for extreme multi-timbral jollies.

The GTM6 has substantial program memory—the combination of three different program chains can yield up to seven thousand presets. Will that do you? Just to sweeten the pie a tad, the GTM6 throws in a 2000-note on-board sequencer and functions as a high-resolution tuner. It also comes with a detachable remote control unit to run the sequencer, program changes and MIDI assignments, and the change between the three pitch-bend modes (step, quantized or bend). There's also a three-button floor pedal for stagefront control. Contact Charvel, 1316 E. Lancaster, Ft. Worth, TX 76113; (817) 336-5114 for details.

If you've been keeping up with computer hardware developments, you know the number **68000** is more than the number of shoes owned by Imelda Marcos. It's the microprocessor that gives the Macintosh, the Amiga and the Atari 520ST their 512K leading edge. **Ursa Major** decided all that power shouldn't just go to micro-computers and used the 68000 as the basis of their new **Aurora** digital effects unit, the Model ADR-68K. It'll handle reverb and special effects, sample for eight seconds, equalize, slice, dice and do windows. Bandwidth is 20kHz, analog-to-digital conversion is 16-bit, there's full MIDI implementation and a removable RAM cartridge for doubling parameter memory. There's also some cool design tricks like a 2-in/4-out feature that splits the Aurora to run two programs at once, or the ability to take two different samples and run them through two different effects programs. And since the whole unit is software based, there'll be new programs and sounds long after you buy it. In fact, the first hundred bought will get free software updates for life! Not for hobbyists at $4000 list, but a lot of hardware for the dollars.

Some good news in electronic percussion: First, the **KAT** Expandable MIDI Percussion Controller. It looks a bit like one octave of a marimba, with twelve pads per module—the modules can be strapped together to make sev-

Ursa Major Aurora

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MIDI from page 34

sometimes be like having asthma or a bad sinus problem. As soon as you start having fun, the old passageways start getting clogged up and you have to stop. That's how it is with our "live-to-sequencer" application. All those simultaneous inputs make for a heavy flow of data. Then, suppose four players all hit four-note chords at once. That could very well stop up the pipes for good.

Knowing that their equipment would be dealing with situations something like this, the manufacturers of all the MIDI merging devices we've mentioned have taken steps to streamline the data flow as much as possible, restoring free breathing in your MIDI cables. All our merging devices have some provision for filtering off data that might not be needed in a given application. Most of them let you filter off some form of keyboard velocity information, which can generate quite a lot of MIDI bytes that go to waste if velocity data can't be processed on the receiving end. Many mergers let you filter off System Exclusive data as well. This too can be very useful, as the MIDI Spec says that System Exclusive data must go through uninterrupted. It can even take precedence over MIDI clock bytes, making things very awkward if you're dealing with any kind of timed, synchronized application. At the far end of the filtering spectrum is J.L. Cooper's MIDI Blender, which lets you mix everything from aftertouch commands to *all* MIDI data coming into the device.

Good data management also helps minimize flow problems in MIDI merging devices. In the course of merging and rechannelizing incoming MIDI data, all merging devices have to keep careful track of those all-important MIDI status bytes—the data packets without which no other types of data would make much sense. If you know your MIDI theory, you'll recall that status bytes come down the line before data bytes and identify what type of information the data bytes will be conveying. You may also recall that when a whole bunch of identical data bytes come down the line, there is provision in the MIDI Spec for something called Running Status. Rather than sending a fresh status byte for each identical data byte that's transmitted, one status byte can serve to identify a whole stream of identical data bytes. Cutting out the redundant status bytes helps decongest the data flow quite a bit. Recognizing this, the designers of the Kamlet MIDI Merger wrote their software in such a manner that normal-status data is automatically converted to Running Status wherever possible.

Another route over the time lag hump is to provide the merging device with a speedier alternative to the standard MIDI baud rate. The MIDIMIX 9 offers one input/output pair that operates at double MIDI speed. And on a more ambitious scale, we have the Southworth Jam Box, which is still in development at the time of this writing. Although it will work with other equipment, the device is being designed around Southworth's Total Music software for the Apple Macintosh—a program which includes a 1,584-track (!) sequencer. The company is considering two possible schemes for picking up the pace in the link between the Jam Box and the Mac. One option would be to use a SCSI (Small Computer Standard Interface) parallel interface, which would greatly exceed the speed of the serial MIDI interface. And even if they stay within the serial domain, says Southworth spokesman John Carr, they can still step up the speed to four times the MIDI baud rate. Either way, the device will still operate on the standard MIDI baud rate when outputting to any other MIDI device.

Although they're relatively modest in appearance and price (most retail somewhere between $200 and $400), MIDI merging boxes seem like one of the more useful MIDI accessories to come down the pike in a while. A MIDI merger might not help you write better songs, but it can make it easier for you to get another musician in to help with the job. So those walls of solitude are already starting to crumble. Now, if there were a MIDI box that could settle royalty disputes and arguments over songwriting credits.... Ⓜ

Developments from previous page

eral octaves. The rubber surface has a softer feel than a typical drum pad, and the MIDI implementation is very thorough. Not too cheap at $900, with expanders for $500, but this may be the MIDI controller top percussionists have been praying for. (413-567-1395). The nifty little Model 2020 Krash Pad from **Barcus Berry** isn't as elaborate, but for its $80 price tag you get even sensitivity all over the pad. Barcus Berry's new clip-on electret cymbal mikes and drum triggers are also well worth a look-see. **Pearl** did a nice job showing their new Syncussion electronic percussion module at NAMM—good sounds! And in the acoustic realm, **Paiste** has come out with an affordable line of cymbals called the 400s younger (read "poorer") players will want to investigate. There's an excellent selection of high-hats, splashes, crashes, power crashes, chinas, rides and power rides. A basic high-hat/crash/ride set goes for $285.

Next month, more MIDI guitar madness, this time from a small Berkeley, California company called Zeta Systems. Ahh, more competition.... Ⓜ

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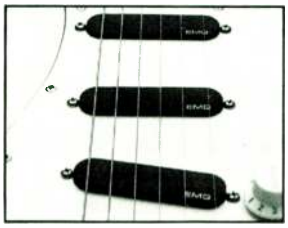
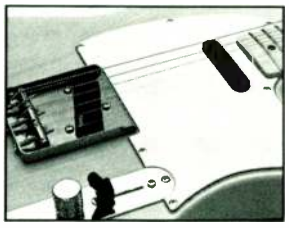


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Level 42 from page 38

tional atmosphere. "Punk had finally been nailed and new wave was fizzling. Suddenly, after all the anarchy and negativity, it was hip to dress up and go dancing. There were lots of clubs and bands. They called us Brit-funk."

The qualification *Brit*-funk is important, because Level 42's early music was far too genteel to qualify as more than a drop in the gutbucket. It was a tinkly, mellow sound, with lots of hotel-bar piano solos and a light beat that could bore even George Benson, a style perfectly described by titles like "Wings Of Love" and "Woman." But the numerous independent labels that had sprouted needed bands to record, and in the summer of 1980 the owner of Elite records offered to produce a 45 for Level 42.

This required two things Level 42 lacked: a singer, and some words for the singer to sing. The latter was provided by Phil Gould, with inauspicious results. And Mark King was selected as the band's vocalist. "It wasn't because they said, 'You sing all right,'" King confesses. "Everybody was cringing when I auditioned, but we just had to get on with it."

"Love Meeting Love," the 45, garnered considerable club play, and the band was signed by Polydor in England. With their 5,000-pound advance, they bought their own equipment and a van to transport their bounty. Their first album, *Level 42*, cracked the British top twenty in the fall of '81. "Without trying too hard, we achieved a crossover. The songs were poppy, and in the middle the band could fly around a bit. The press always said we were serious musicians, because that's what we'd told them. And the BBC used to play our stuff, whether it was horrible or not."

Their next record, 1982's *The Pursuit Of Accidents*, was their first American release, although King says PolyGram "made the mistake of trying to promote us as a rhythm & blues band."

By the next year, Level 42 had switched to A&M and Earth, Wind & Fire veterans Larry Dunn and Verdine White were called in to produce *Standing In The Light*. Although King thinks of Level 42's early work as Mahavishnu meets the Osmonds, their fourth album was more like Yes meets the Blues Brothers. All that acclaim at home only encouraged the band's bombastic tendencies. "Over six years, you start to parody yourself," King confesses. "Between vocal lines I'll pull out a few fast bass licks and the audience goes *ayyyyy*. It's like getting slapped on the back by three thousand kids at once. So then you find yourself doing it more and more. Before you know it, you're top-

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Bob Seger Forgives, But Doesn't Forget

By Timothy White

Somewhere tonight,
Someone's packin' up and someone's really leavin'
Someone's not quite sad—only disbelievin'
someone's walkin' out the door....

"Somewhere Tonight," by Bob Seger, 1986

Every morning, Bob Seger wakes up to the image of a ghost. It sits on his nightstable, a creased and ashen photo of a broad-featured man in a smart suit and vest, his thick hair brushed into an upswept pompadour. The impish, wounded expression on his craggy face calls to mind a playful James Cagney or Victor McLaglen; the phantom holds a ukulele in his hands in a strumming pose, but the jaunty gesture does not convince—his dark eyes are stark in a haunted cast. The ghost, it seems, is a specter even to himself.

"That's him, that's my father," murmurs his graying but still indefatigably boyish son, smoothing his silver-streaked beard as he squints at the small, battered snapshot. "I suppose I should do something to preserve that picture, especially if I'm gonna have it along when I'm away from home. I don't really have all that many memories of my dad as it is."

Indeed, Bob Seger was ten years old when Stewart Seger, a former bandleader and failed medical student-turned-Ford Motor Company medic, abandoned his family in Ann Arbor, Michigan and lit out for California.

"I was never too close to him, unlike my first-born brother George," says Bob, indicating the nearby framed portrait of a successful business executive and his own family, "and then I only saw my dad three times between the time I was ten and about twenty-four, my age when he died."

Bob Seger, forty-one, slim and fit, leather jeans and black boots, is ambling restlessly through his rented canyon-top Bel Air hacienda, an expansive pool-and-patio-encircled complex located several miles and nearly two decades from the site where Stewart Seger met his demise. Toiling as an itinerant male nurse in Los Angeles, the senior Seger had been assigned to keep an alcoholic patient sober, but actually was sharing drinks with his charge. He perished while apparently intoxicated in a freak fire in his apartment house.

"When my father died, my mother had never divorced him—and they were separated fifteen years," says Bob, shaking his head in puzzlement. "During the 1930s, when they courted, it was traditionally accepted that you were married for life. My mom is seventy-two years old, and she still wears his wedding ring. The memory of love is a powerful thing; it's a tangible possession in and of itself, and I guess that's been a theme running through my whole personal development as well as my career. Nothing can ever correct and make right the stunt my father pulled; you have to forgive him for it and *then* you have to live with it."

Bob Seger is but a few days past okaying the master pressings of *Like A Rock*, his fifteenth album and the most wrenchingly wrought (three probative years in the process) of his solid quarter-century in rock 'n' roll. Among the most difficult tracks to realize was an epic five-and-a-half-minute ballad entitled "The Ring," which he cut and recut on four separate occasions since spring 1984 (in Michigan; Muscle Shoals, Alabama; Miami, Florida and Capitol Studios in Hollywood) before deciding the last version was a keeper.

"The original song was eight minutes long," he offers, "and I guess it was real special to me. It starts out with a guy totally in love with his wife and what they share, but by the middle of the second verse the story has shifted to her point of view, and she reveals how she came to give up all her youthful dreams during the course of accepting her fate. When you're in a relationship, you're always surrounded by a ring of circumstance—joined together by a wedding ring, or in a boxing ring."

He lights a cigarette and takes a deep, deep drag. "It's so scary to commit to one person, to depend on or rely on someone in particular, because you can end up mighty disappointed. I'm by myself now," he allows bluntly, referring to the breakup in 1983 of his eleven-year bond with lover Jan Dinsdale as well as the recent denouement of another two-year romance. "Odd thing is, for the first time since I was

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in this foolish, impulsive marriage back in 1968 for one day short of a year, I would definitely consider marrying again.

"The most important things in my adult life have been my commitments to certain women. I always tried to put them first. And in every relationship that lasts a long time, someone always has to give up more than someone else."

This rueful sentiment could hardly be more directly explicated than in the gripping verse ultimately deleted from the finished recording of "The Ring":

He came on so strong

He hit her full force

Like a storm raging out of control

He touched something deep in her soul

She gave in, and let herself go....

"Sooner or later, we all sleep alone," Seger rules with a hesitant grin, "and it's my turn. Music means a lot to me, and people close to me have told me—with a certain amount of uneasiness in their voices—that *Like A Rock* is the most intimate and soul-baring album in a pretty candid stretch of work. But I can't help it, 'cause for me everything flows from my relationships, and I've come to believe that, creatively, to make yourself totally open is the bravest and, hell, the best thing you can do. I learned that from what happened with my parents," he says, nodding to himself. "They became for me a life-long model of what *not* to do."

The freshly inaugurated John F. Kennedy was plotting the Bay of Pigs debacle and Moscow was preparing to put the first human in orbit on the frigid evening in 1961 that Robert Clark Seger took his own first bittersweet shot at immortality, cajoling a kindly DJ at Ann Arbor's WPAG radio into spinning an acetate demo of his song, "The Lonely One." The primitive guitar, bass and drums treatment of the awkward ballad had been recorded in the basement of one Max Crook, then gaining notoriety as the nimble keyboardist responsible for the skedaddling Musitron solo—"It was the first rock synthesizer riff," Seger maintains—on Del Shannon's fleet-selling chart-topper, "Runaway."

As his song seeped out of the dashboard console of a car aimed down Stadium Boulevard, fifteen-year-old Seger gulped a Hamm's beer and let his mind gallop with a peculiar longing. But Bob Seger quite pointedly had no designs on thrilling the lilywhite crowds at the Walled Lake resort clubs where Jamie Coe & the Gigolos performed for jammed weekend hops, and where a generation earlier, the thirteen-piece Stewart Seger Orchestra had been a featured post-war attraction. The otherwise introverted father had been a skilled swing clarinetist in the classic Benny Goodman mold, but his mounting insecurities at the bandstand found expression in too-frequent trips to the beer gardens and jealous rages with his attractive wife Charlotte, a coquettish ballroom dancer whose outgoing nature at his gigs he came to detest.

When Stewart Seger walked out on his wife and his sons, he pulled the rug out from under their middle-class existence and submerged them in a world of seedy studio flats to which they were virtual rent slaves. Radio was the only escape available to the mortified boy, the sole source of accurate solace.

"Living on the poor side of town, I not surprisingly had *greaser* tastes," he recalls with the vibrantly husky haw-haw that is his version of a chuckle. "So after my mom and brother turned in for the evening and the Michigan stations had shut down or reduced their power, the 50,000 watts of good ol' WLAC in Nashville would come beaming through on my teeny transistor earphone. I'd listen to John R. the Horseman getting down with James Brown & the Famous Flames, or Garnet Mimms & the Enchanters doing "Cry Baby." Then Ernie's Record Mart from Gallatin, Tennessee would urge you to mail in $1.25 for any single ever pressed anywhere, or Music City Songcrafters would do their pitch about sending in a poem that they would write a song around!

"It was my R&B and raunchy rock 'n' roll obsessions that pushed me off the Honor Roll after tenth grade, really, but maybe it was the Songcrafters that got me into writing all that poetry in English class. I discovered I had a natural gift for rhymes that weren't dumb-sounding. My main thing schoolwise was cross-country, and even though I was a big smoker I cleared 5'6" to place third in the high jump at the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti High meet—which was my biggest non-musical moment as kid. I needed to blow off all my general resentment any way I could."

Seger's track and field prowess also came in handy when he and his well-to-do friends from the upscale side of the Michigan college town began breaking into the exclusive Barton Hills country club. There were other incidents of petty hooliganism and flirtations with the shadowy side, among them a memorably delinquent 1961 Detroit weekend in which he and six other chums took turns (his less successful than some of the others—"a pretty *nasty* scene") plying their inaugural night moves with an unflappable black hooker.

It was the entrepreneurial preppie scion of a prosperous Michigan produce distributor who introduced Seger to a world beyond the borders of cheap adolescent thrills. Eddie "Punch" Andrews first collided with Seger during University of Michigan Delta House frat blowouts fueled by Bob's three-piece Decibels band. Andrews and partner Dave Leone had

AARON RAPOPORT

"Creatively, to make yourself totally open is the bravest and, hell, the *best* thing you can do."

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seen the overnight boom of British Invasion-instigated teen bands as a potential gold mine and begun renting a network of halls dubbed "Hideouts" in suburbs like Harper Woods and and Southfield. They charged underage Beatles and Kinks fans a buck admission to sip Cokes and frug to the top forty repertoire of fledgling combos.

As the bands improved, so did their commercial potential, and the five Hideouts' receipts funded the launch of the Hideout and Punch labels, whose early releases included sides by Brownsville Station, a Glenn-Frey-led act called the Mushrooms (whose record "Such A Lovely Child," was written and produced by B. Seger) and something called Bob Seger & the Last Heard.

"The Last Heard"—*whooo* what an awful name that still is!—were formed from remnants of the two post-Decibels bands I was in, Doug Brown & the Omens and the Town Criers," says Seger. Most hardcore Seger fans are aware that Bob's 1965 "Gloria"-derived "East Side Story" was picked up by Cameo-Parkway and became the calling card that led, by a tangled route, to a deal with Capitol.

KEN SETTLE

Seger hammering it out in 1964 with the Town Criers

"But most people don't realize that I was almost signed to Motown as one of their first white rock artists! The band that originally cut 'East Side Story,' the Underdogs, they got a Motown deal and then the label was pursuing me. Motown actually offered Punch more money than Capitol, but he had friends at Capitol and was unsure how much exposure we'd get with the Supremes, the Temptations and all those other acts taking off. Also, I don't know if 'Ramblin' Gamblin' Man,' my first Capitol hit in '68, would have fit on Motown. It was more in a Wilson Pickett rather than a Smokey Robinson vein."

And how about "Sock It To Me Santa," his sizable 1966 Midwestern holiday hit on Cameo-Parkway?

"Haw!! You know that tune! Shit, what a riot! Listen, I want you to know that single came out a *full year* before Mitch Ryder's record; plus I had a nice little tribute to James Brown with the line, 'Santa's got a brand new bag!' And on the flip side was 'Florida Time,' where I praised the Florida surfing scene out of sheer gratitude for that state being my only loyal market outside of Michigan. I was giving everybody the best of both climates!"

Seger is in stitches, howling so hard he begins gasping for air. "Whew! All that stuff will always come back to haunt you. I also had a track Punch put out on the Are You Kidding Me? label in '66 called "Ballad Of The Yellow Beret." I did it under the pseudonym the Beach Bums, and it was catching on with college kids when Sgt. Barry Sadler sent a telegram threatening a lawsuit. I guess we were lucky Capitol was willing to take us on."

Well, yes and no, if you consider the initial behind-the-scenes identity problems Punch Andrews, still Seger's manager after twenty-one often lean years, had with what he used to call "the Lettermen Factor."

"We love Capitol, they're like family now," says Andrews, "but at the time they were quite conservative. In fact, everytime I asked for anything they would tell me, 'The Lettermen don't get that, and so *you're* not about to get it.' They were the standard at the company, and you have to remember that Capitol was forced by EMI to take the Beatles; that signing was dictated by the mother company.

"So in the beginning it was the Lettermen, the Beatles, the Beach Boys—and us. And we seemed like fucking cuckoo birds. When I brought the "2 + 2 = ?" anti-Vietnam thing in, I conveniently didn't reveal what it was about until it hit the stores. They literally threw me out of the office when I told them it was questioning an illegal war and they half-suggested we should be thrown into jail! Of course, it was immediate curtains for the single.

"The period around 1972 when he left Capitol for [the *Smokin' O.P.'s, Back In '72* and *Seven* LPs on] Reprise and then got dropped was the hardest time. Nobody knows this, but Warner Bros. rejected *Beautiful Loser* outright and Bob and I were dead broke. I had to find a way to borrow $1,000 to remix the tape to play it for Capitol at a time when I had $4,000 worth of $3 bounced-check charges against me. Nobody also knows this, but after Capitol welcomed us back for *Loser,* they turned around and rejected *Live Bullet*, thinking it was a cheap excuse for *Frampton Comes Alive*. It was a long, long argument."

But all's well that ends well, eh?

"Not exactly," says Andrews, "because after *Live Bullet* hit, Capitol rejected *Night Moves*! I hope I don't get into trouble for revealing this, but they thought it wasn't as exciting as *Live Bullet* had been!! No wonder Seger has so much heartache these days deciding whether he's got a finished record or not."

"Which is the gospel truth," Seger concedes sheepishly as we leave the restaurant, heading for friend Don Henley's ranch house compound in the coyote wilds high above Mulholland Drive. "I wouldn't even let the Capitol execs hear a note of anything until late February, and they were *concerned*. I wrote twenty-five songs for *Like A Rock*, had a series of false starts in Miami and Muscle Shoals, and threw out a whole heap of interesting songs—'Wildfire,' 'Star Tonight,' 'Days When The Rain Would Come,' 'Living Inside My Heart.' I had an anti-drug song called 'Snow Today,' which I shelved in favor of 'American Storm' and I'm glad I put 'Storm' out as a single.

"I'm not saying I'm a saint but I've never had a drug problem. Yet I saw the cocaine thing become this insidiously destructive juggernaut in the lives of friends. When I thought the whole coke mess couldn't get worse in the late 70s, that's when it exploded as a hemispheric plague, wrecking govern-

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ments in South America and threatening to ruin a generation here. Next, I pick up *Newsweek* and read about grammar school kids buying crack with their allowance!

"Somebody has to let them know that it's not hip anymore to do drugs, that there will always be pressures and times in your life when you'll need answers, but that coke and the rest offer nothing—no outlet, no information. And, believe me, you're only as good as your information."

While Henley shaves and gets dressed for dinner, Seger cannot resist a short testing of the handsome grand piano in Don's splendid modern adobe living room, and he plays an abbreviated rendition of the poignant "Star Tonight," an ambition-versus-ardor adult lullaby that actor Don Johnson has requested for his forthcoming solo album.

"It's an interesting thing about love," Seger mulls. "You have to choose who you want to love, because you get a lot of different chances. My mother made her choice and I think a lot of her for sticking to it. She's had some health troubles with her heart in recent years and I almost lost her in '85...." He doesn't finish the sentence. "She's still full of spunk and optimism."

Henley appears, playfully chiding Seger about his irresolute dating habits—"Don't make any hasty decisions now, Bob!"—and then it's off to a meal at Helena's, a chic private supper club in a remote pocket of LA. On arrival, it's discovered a number of the regular patrons have stopped by to take in "Tango Night," an evening of lessons being offered on Helena's dance floor by Argentinean experts. Actor Harry Dean Stanton, a kindred spirit, shifts his meal over to the Henley-Seger table and sparks a semi-whimsical discussion of what could constitute superior "tango rock." "'Hotel California' is something you could do the tango to," Seger muses. "The Eagles had a bit of tango potential on that one."

Stanton concurs and Henley grins, ordering another round of beers by way of thank you and asking a lovely raven-haired wallflower at an adjoining table if she'd like to join the glowing gentlemen for a drink.

"Did I hear somebody mention Eagles!" she says in a shrill Italio-Spanish brand of broken English as she plops herself down. With that, the Eurotrash social butterfly launches into a ringing denunciation of all things American, but particularly rock 'n' roll and the Eagles. Both Seger and Stanton look to Henley with embarrassed apprehension...but he's beaming.

"Well, if you knew more about American culture, madame," says Don, "you'd know that the Eagles were not a big group here. Like most people in rock 'n' roll, they all became junkies and died in pathetic obscurity." The woman snaps her tresses over one bare shoulder and eyes the speaker suspiciously.

"You toy with me," she decides coolly. "Are any of you rock 'n' roll?"

"Him," says Henley, patting Seger on the shoulder. "Why, many years ago, he used to do it as a hobby, an outlet."

"But I eventually changed all that," says Seger, lifting a glass of chilled cerveza. "And now, I'm proud to say"—a toast, followed by a slow, satisfied swallow—"that I do it for a *living*."

Stepping out into the Hollywood night, Seger leads the way to his siren-red Stingray. He tucks a cassette of Jackson Browne's *Lives In The Balance* in the car's deck and we head onto the freeway. "I used to actively dislike the past," he says, "because the memories of struggling were always so painful, I wanted success and legitimacy so badly it was tearing me apart. The first 1975-76 compositional trilogy of albums, *Beautiful Loser*, the *Live Bullet* collection and *Night Moves*, took that on. But when I gained some ground publicly and in my own mind, I was a little terrified of losing it. I had an almost crippling dread about the idea of growing old in rock 'n' roll. Then the two anxieties got intertwined, as if they were the same threat, and they became the undercurrent of the material I wrote for the second 1978-83 trio of LPs, *Stranger In Town*, *Against The Wind* and *The Distance*.

He's reminded of the chorus of "No Man's Land," the song that was supposed to be the title track of *Against The Wind*: "The haunting and the haunting / Play a game no one can win / The spirits come at midnight / And by dawn they're gone again."

"It was spooky stuff," he affirms. "Then I tried to confront the aging process in 'Can't Hit The Corners No More,' my baseball player-inspired allegory about a publically acclaimed phenom who's faced with the private *instant* when he suddenly doubts he still has his peak faculties, his power edge. I was in that head when I was saying goodbye to the days of the original Silver Bullet Band with the *Nine Tonight* live set of 1981.

"I almost put a new version of 'Corners' on the flip side of the 'American Storm' single, but instead I now suspect I may

continued on page 97

YOU'LL ACCOMPANY ME: BOB'S HORIZONTAL BOPPERS 1986

Bob Seger has oftened threatened to do away with his beard and disappear into the madding crowd—"There's not a soul who would recognize me, I'd be home free!"—but if and when he ever should, he'll remain best-known for his sublimely lacerated larynx and jackhammer style of industrial-strength rock. After the *Nine Tonight* live LP (1981), he said a fond farewell to gifted Silver Bullet lead guitarist **Drew Abbott** and steady ashcan-school drummer **Dave Teegarden** and began to experiment on record with new personnel and guest artists. Building on the bedrock unit of horn man **Alto Reed**, bassist **Chris Campbell**, and **Craig Frost** on keyboards, Seger invited veteran Silver Bullet guest star **Bill Payne** ("He's been contributing wonders to my records since 1978; I love the smooth way he and Craig collaborate and interact") to participate, as well as the unfailingly articulate drummer **Russ Kunkel** and guitarist **Dawayne Bailey.**

"But the crucial new players on *Like A Rock*," he insists, "were **Rick Vito**, who's been a standout feature on recent Jackson Browne albums, and **John Robinson**, who played great stuff on Michael Jackson's *Thriller* and toured with Glenn Frey. When John came into the studio with us in LA in July, 1985, that was the turnaround moment for the entire project."

Seger stresses that *Like A Rock* is the closest he's yet come to achieving a sound "identical to what I imagine when I write, which I thank the patience and care of co-producer **David Cole** for. Also, I ultimately decided to emphasize a live band sound, with as many live solos and live vocals as possible. The 'Like A Rock' vocal is live; we cut 'Miami,' which is about the Cuban boat people, on the fourth take; 'Sometimes' was a wrap on take three we had 'Aftermath' on take five; all of the piano solos are live.

"As for writing the record, I did the spade work on guitar and keyboards, using either my Ovation Adamas acoustic or my Fender Thinline Telecaster with the acoustic portion on top and the Humbucker pickups. I used the Telecaster a lot in the studio with Dean Markley electric medium-gauge strings and either sent it through a Roland JC-120 or a Mesa Boogie amp. I sometimes use a Roland RE501 chorus/echo.

"For keyboards, I pounded stuff out on my Yamaha PF15 electric piano or on the classic Bosendorfer I've got at home in Michigan. It's a twenty-four-year-old, 6-foot-11-inch ebony grand with a one-piece acoustic bridge, and it brought 'Like A Rock' and 'Somewhere Tonight' into the world. I purchased the piano in 1970 out of a bankrupt Detroit studio; it was a $40,000 beauty that cost me just $8,000 and I'd say it's priceless now—certainly to me.

"But there's one more secret weapon on *Like A Rock*. I spent four solid months mixing the album and one of the reasons was that I wanted to hone the limiting on the mix so that it would leap out of the compression of the average car radio like a *monster*. No matter how good anybody's stereo is at home, I think they'll marvel at how remarkably *there* it will sound in a car. And that also goes for 'Fortunate Son,' the completely overdub-less 'American Storm' B-side I took from a live 1983 encore tape, and Dylan's 'I'll Remember You' from *Empire Burlesque*, which I cut with Roy Bittan of the E Streeters at Kenny Rogers' Lion's Share Studio as the B-side for the second single. Hope the folks like these little bonuses. I'm planning more, too!"

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By Scott Isler

How Joe Jackson learned to stop worrying and love pop music.

Weekday afternoon, Manhattan, Chelsea district. Joe Jackson enters a sparsely populated low-tech restaurant, cases the joint, turns around and leaves. Not suitable for an interview. "They all recognized me," he explains. "They'd be eavesdropping."

First reaction: rockstar hubris. Second reaction: maybe he's right. Jackson may not be Don Johnson material, but he *is* recognizable. His babyish features under a bulging forehead and retreating hair (severely cropped) make him a caricaturist's delight. Put this head on a six-foot frame, drape with baggy clothes, and you've got quite a distinctive human being.

Jackson's true distinctiveness has nothing to do with physical appearance. Over seven years and eight albums, this thirty-two-year-old Englishman has provided some of the most thoughtful, tasteful and tuneful offerings to be tossed into the cultural compactor that is pop music. Even on his first two albums—when Jackson was still considered a byproduct of Britain's punky new wave—his compositional skill separated him from his Rousseauvian contemporaries. A reggae-influenced third album, *Beat Crazy*, was his declaration of independence from the rock treadmill. Since then he has dabbled in 40s swing (*Jumpin' Jive*) and reaped his biggest commercial success with the elegant, cosmopolitan *Night And Day*.

Jackson's new *Big World* album seems like a step back. For the first time in six years he is using a simple guitar/bass/drums back-up, and exhuming four-four rhythms redolent more of blue jeans than white tie and tails. But Jackson is no musical apologist, and *Big World* is a typically willful project: a three-sided double album recorded live direct to two-track digital recording equipment in front of a paying audience. There can be no remixing, overdubbing or changes of any kind save splicing segments of different performances. "It's 'back to the future,'" says longtime Jackson producer David Kershenbaum. Other terms that come to mind are "bravura," "foolhardy" and "hazardous to your emotional health." It's pure Joe Jackson.

And the music is only partly recidivous. *Big World* is a bounty of delights, fifteen numbers embracing an appropriately ecumenical range of influences. Jackson's *real* revivalism is not in playing "rock" but in fashioning long melodic phrases regardless of rhythmic context. In the age of beat-box riffs, this guy is still writing *songs*. At least his lyrics reflect an up-to-date jaundice. *Big World* includes Jackson's most pointedly topical attacks yet, among other dour reflections on life and love—and even one or two wistful tries at being upbeat.

The album is a triumph, and Jackson knows it. You won't find him resting on his laurels, though. A month after wrapping *Big World*, he is in a New York recording studio with guitarist Vinnie Zummo, drummer Gary Burke—and two flautists, a clarinetist, a soprano saxophone player, eighteen violinists, six violists, six cellists, three double bassists, a percussionist and a boy soprano. The Joe Jackson Symphony Orchestra (actually a pick-up group) is taping half of his *next* album, consisting of four instrumental pieces. One of them, "Solitude," is a fantasia on a theme by Duke Ellington. Jackson stands behind the mixing console with a look of intense concentration. Occasionally he makes curt, softspoken comments to the players ("The dynamic there is *mezzopiano*.... Can we get a harsher sound out of the soprano and clarinet?"). The music is impressionistic, sinuous, carefully scored and, naturally, unlike anything Jackson has done before. Moral: Don't ever try to pin this guy down.

"He's certainly a character," the tactful Kershenbaum says by way of description. Guitarist/bassist Graham Maby, the one link on all Jackson's records up to *Big World*, is more direct: "He's his own worst enemy. He can get very unapproachable." (Jackson asked Maby to play on the *Big World* shows. The latter, however, took Jackson at his word that his previous tour was his last; in the meantime he'd joined Marshall Crenshaw's touring band.) Others have had to deal with his apparently sullen, taciturn personality. His record company can't be too happy about his refusal (post-*Night And Day*) to make promotional video clips for moral reasons.

Yet the crustiness may mask suspicion and defensiveness rather than outright misanthropy. After finding a diner without eavesdropping customers, Jackson proves to be quite talkative between sips of cream of mushroom soup washed down with a vanilla milkshake. The setting sun through the window highlights his green eyes and blond stubble only slightly shorter than the peachfuzz on top of his head. Jackson shields his face from the rays; after sunset he continues to shield his face—from snooping pedestrians on the sidewalk outside? His coastal British accent, mild enough to begin with, has withered further during residency in his adopted New York. He smiles frequently.

Jackson deserves to be proud of his achievements. He has never compromised his musical ideals, and even had a couple of hit albums in the process. He is an accomplished musician who writes his own charts and scores—an ability he credits more to cabaret experience than three years at London's Royal Academy of Music. A few weeks after the interview Jackson remarried in England. Maybe

Photograph by David Stewart

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domestic bliss will soften his hardboiled behavior and song lyrics. But don't bet on it.

MUSICIAN: *What was the thinking behind the* Big World *recording project?*

JACKSON: There are several reasons why I wanted to do that. One is that I always felt my best performances have been live in front of an audience. I've always found it hard to really be inspired and do a great performance in a studio. To me, a recording studio is a very uninspiring place: a soundproof room with a lot of microphones and cables. And I really think it worked. I think this is by far the best I've sung on a record, definitely. I actually listen to it and think, "This sounds okay!" [*laughs*] I never have before.

I could never understand these people who lock themselves away in a studio for months on end and tinker around. I'm more interested in direct communication between artist and audience. I feel so many artists now are hidden behind a sort of smokescreen of carefully crafted image on video, and carefully crafted records which are all done with drum machines and synthesizers; the real star of the record is the engineer or producer, a lot of the time. There's a big gap between artists who are kind of fantasy figures, and people on the street who see them on MTV. It makes me uncomfortable. It's almost getting like Hollywood in the 30s, big untouchable stars that are up there on the screen—the average person goes there to escape from the troubles of life. That's kind of what the music scene's like now, in America more so than other places. I never believed in escapism in any kind of art or entertainment. I want to understand life better and experience it more fully. I don't want to escape from it.

What I try to do in my music is communicate between me and the listener, share human experiences, share impressions of what's happening around us all. It's trying to see life from different angles, trying to appreciate areas of it you maybe didn't appreciate before, trying to learn things. It's very satisfying for me to learn something that opens my mind in some way. You don't get that from escapist entertainment. I'm not even talking on the level of "high art" here. Just on a basic entertainment level, things are always better when they touch you in some way, when they move you. I don't particularly like movies which are one blockbuster special effect after another. It has a real parallel with the music scene: Everyone wants to come up with new, more outrageous LinnDrum sounds. It's kind of missing the point.

I wrote all the *Big World* songs in quite a short time. What happens is, I write two or three songs; by the time I get to the fourth or fifth an overall concept starts to emerge, and one song starts to influence another song. A couple of themes go through this record. A lot of songs complement each other, they're in pairs or threes. "Big World," "Fifty Dollar Love Affair" and "Shanghai Sky" are all about travel and exotic places and, to a certain extent, about the romance of travel, looking at it from different angles. Other songs are political or social-awareness songs, like "Right And Wrong," "Wild West," "Forty Years," "Tango Atlantico." I just feel at this point in the history of the world—I mean, we are in 1986. The world is a tense and dangerous place, and it's no longer good enough to be concerned only about what's going on in your own back yard. People have to become aware of each other's cultures, be more open and respectful toward different cultures and different ways of thinking. I suppose that's one of the ideas behind quite a lot of these songs.

MUSICIAN: *Have you changed your mind, then, about music not being able to change anything?*

JACKSON: No, I still pretty much think that. But I write very much from the heart, and whatever I experience, the way I feel about things, is going to come out in songs no matter what. People are telling me this album is more obviously political than the earlier stuff I've done. There was no conscious decision to do that. It's not a manifesto. If that's what's happening in my head, it's going to come out in the music, that's all. It comes from a lot of things—being British and living in America, for instance. It comes from having traveled quite a bit. It comes from just having the sort of brain I have, being curious about what's going on. I don't like to see things in black-and-white and make quick judgments. So when Ronald Reagan comes on TV and says, "We're giving so many million dollars to contras of Nicaragua, and this is not a political issue, not a question of right versus left, it's a question of right versus wrong"—to me that's really disturbing. This whole thing of, "If you don't go along with that you're un-American"—God! It's getting more and more frightening. I'm writing about it more 'cause I'm thinking about it more.

MUSICIAN: Beat Crazy *was a political album, in a sense.*

JACKSON: They're *all* political albums in some way or another. Unless you only write love songs, which a lot of people do; unless you just write songs about being on the road with a rock 'n' roll band, or "we're gonna party tonight, dance till dawn"—I don't do that. I write songs about whatever I have any strong feelings about. If you work that way it's inevitable that at some point it's going to be political. Politics is just about people in society, and the way societies relate to each other. It's not a conscious decision to make political statements.

MUSICIAN: *Did the charity records of last year affect your thinking on music versus politics?*

JACKSON: Bob Geldof is a great guy. It's not very hip to be positive; it's much more hip to sneer and not show any feeling or commitment. I like the fact that someone doesn't give a damn about looking hip and just tries to do something. But beyond that, to me, especially with USA For Africa, I really feel it's a reflection of how conservative the country is right now. It's such a safe thing. All those people who did that knew it would just make them look wonderful.

MUSICIAN: *Would you have turned it down?*

JACKSON: They didn't ask me; if they had, I would have thought about it. I don't know what I would have done. I just feel it was such a great way for people to look like wonderful, concerned human beings—to look like they're making a statement without being controversial, without rocking the boat, without taking any risks. I don't think I'm that cynical, really. It's funny: I get told I'm cynical and I also get told I'm an idealist.

MUSICIAN: *Most cynics* are *idealists.*

JACKSON: You probably are right. [*laughs*] I like to think I'm pretty realistic about things. It just seems to me to be very ironic that people are saying how rock is getting a social conscience back, rock is becoming political again, and there's no element of challenge in there. If Lionel Richie sang about what's happening in *his* country, what his President is doing and what's happening to farmers, to old people—*that* would be a political statement. We have a very conservative climate right now, it's very materialistic—this thing comes along and it's like, great, here's a way to really look good without making any waves. There's a good side to it as well. I question more the way it is being interpreted and talked about than the motives of the people who performed.

MUSICIAN: *So the* Big World *songs came together in a short time?*

JACKSON: A few months. I didn't write anything for a year. "Taking a year off to relax" sounds like I lay on a beach somewhere [*laughs*]. I had to take time off. I really didn't relax much. By the end of the *Body And Soul* tour I didn't know what I was doing anymore and I needed some time off. One of the things confusing me on that tour was I just felt that what I was trying to do musically was so wrong for the settings we were trying to do it in. We were starting to play bigger and bigger places. I couldn't see any way out of that. I got into a real catch-twenty-two in my head about playing live because I really can't see playing hockey stadiums. Also I couldn't see

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"Is this going to be perceived as rock 'n' roll? Am I going to be associated with all those people I don't like? Am I going to have to compete with people I don't feel I should be competing with?"

playing small clubs at this stage of my career. I just can't see being on the road for—the *Night And Day* tour was eleven months! With *Body And Soul*, the idea was to do a short tour; we still ended up on the road for six or seven months. The shows have to suffer. I'd rather do less shows and make every one special. I just can't tour for months and months on end. At the end of that tour I was saying, "That's it, I'm not going to tour anymore." At that point I really believed that. I was exhausted and I couldn't see any workable way of doing it. Now we have a compromise all around. I feel it's better than not doing anything.

MUSICIAN: *What if* Big World *hadn't been in the can after those five live shows?*

JACKSON: I was wondering about it myself! I just wasn't going to allow that situation to happen. If it did, I guess we would have had to go somewhere else and do it again. It was pretty intense. We did do a couple of pick-ups; in between the two shows on Saturday we got one song down we were getting worried about. When I got the idea to do the thing live and direct to two-track everyone was saying, "Oh, but of course you'll run twenty-four-track at the same time as a back-up." And I'd say, "Nooo." "Oh, of course you'll mix it afterwards. Why don't you run it two tracks of a twenty-four track? So if you want you can overdub or something." I said, "Nooo." To me, if you have a goal in mind you have to go for that and not give yourself escape routes. Otherwise you'll use them.

MUSICIAN: *Who chose the Roundabout theater?*

JACKSON: David Kershenbaum and I went around to a few theaters. That just seemed to be the best one. We were very lucky to get it. We could only get in there for six days. We had three days to get everything set up and sounding right, and three days to do the actual recording. We really could have done with another couple of days. But we did it! When you have to do something, you do it.

MUSICIAN: *Isn't it perverse to invite people to shows and tell them not to applaud?*

JACKSON: We didn't tell them not to applaud, we just asked them to be quiet during the music. I don't think that was such an unreasonable request. It wasn't really that we were recording a concert; they were invited to a recording session. I'd do it again. It's a really great way to record. I'm *really* pleased with this record. I can't remember the last time I felt so enthusiastic about something. I actually still like it! Normally, by the time I've finished a record, I've been mixing it for weeks, I can't hear it anymore, I don't know if it's any good anymore, I'm sick of it. *This*, we never went into a studio; we just played to people. It's probably my least perfect album and yet it's the one I'm most proud of. It has all kinds of little things wrong with it—there are mistakes here and there, sometimes things aren't quite balanced right—but it has a really spontaneous feel. It sounds very fresh to me, different to most of the obviously-pieced-together-in-the-studio records that are what you're hearing these days.

MUSICIAN: *Could you go back to conventional recording after this?*

JACKSON: Maybe. I think one should have options. You use

LAURA LEVINE

World Radio History

FOUR GUYS, TWO TRACKS

On *Big World* guitarist **Vinnie Zummo** switched between two Steinberger Trans-Trems—one converted to a three-pickup—and a regular Steinberger six-string, outfitted with LaBella strings. Zummo's effects rack includes an Ibanez harmonizer, Delta Lab Super Time-Line digital delay, and Yamaha R-1000 reverb unit; on the floor he's got a Boss Chorus, DeArmond volume and Rat distortion pedals. He uses a small Roland line mixer and Hush 2C noise reduction. Amps are a Seymour Duncan Convertible into a Seymour Duncan 4x12 cabinet, and a Gallien Krueger 250RL into two Guild/Hartke 4x10 stereo cabinets. Zummo also plays an Ovation Adonis acoustic guitar. He uses Manny's heaviest small oval picks.

Rick Ford has two custom five-string basses (one fretted, one fretless) from Bass Shops in New York, and is adding a six-string on tour. Strings are LaBella 760RMs with a low B. His floor pedals are a Boss Chorus and Octaver, and DeArmond volume. Ford's amp is a Trace-Elliot AH500 plugged into two Trace-Elliot 815 cabinets.

Gary Burke's old Gretsch kit includes three tom-toms—a 9x13, 10x14 and 16x16—and a 14x22 bass drum. He has a 1930 brass Super Ludwig 5½x14 snare. Cymbals, all Zildjian, are 14-inch high-hats, 17- and 18-inch crashes and a 20-inch ride. Burke uses Pro-Mark 808 sticks.

Joe Jackson's taste in eighty-eights runs to Yamahas ("but sometimes they sound a little too hard") and Steinways; "it depends on the instrument." He plays a Yamaha C-3 on *Big World*; he owns a Yamaha baby grand, a DX7 and a Sequential Circuits Drumtracks drum machine. He demoed *Big World* by running these into a Tascam four-track. He set aside saxophone to concentrate on writing—"I was getting too clever"—but his reedwork gave him insights on scoring for horns. Jackson also used to play violin; other items in his arsenal are a twelve-bass musette, Hohner melodica and recorder of unknown manufacture. One instrument that continues to stymie him, though, is guitar. "In ten years I've learned two chords, E and A. It's always been a bloody mystery to me."

Thanks to multi-tracking, J.J. can be both organ grinder and monkey.

JOHN BELLISSIMO/RETNA

the way appropriate to the project. I'm not saying I'll never go into a recording studio again, but I would do it [live] again if it's right for the project. I'd like to see other people do it.

MUSICIAN: *Do you anticipate, or dread, people telling you you've gone "back" to rock with the three-piece on* Big World?

JACKSON: You know what? I really don't care what they say anymore. It used to really confuse me. There've been a couple of points in my career when I've really gotten lost on this. *Beat Crazy* was one, *Body And Soul* was another, where I really floundered a little bit, didn't know which direction to go in. It's partly because I have this love/hate relationship with rock 'n' roll. Sometimes I really feel I don't want to have anything to do with it. I was feeling that way around the time of *Body And Soul*; especially when we were touring I began to feel like, "What the hell am I doing up here on this stage?" But I really do enjoy performing. It just gets confusing sometimes. Over the last year or so I got my priorities straightened out. I realized it was important for me to do the music I wanted to do. I shouldn't keep thinking, "Is this going to be perceived as rock 'n' roll? Am I going to be associated with all those people I don't like? Am I going to have to compete with people I don't feel I should be competing with?" All those things were driving me nuts. I forgot about all that. The album came out as something which I suppose *is* a bit closer to rock 'n' roll than the last two. It's just the way it came out when I stopped worrying about it. I felt the last two albums were very multi-textured and multi-colored, and I wanted to do something which was more bold and simple.

Rock 'n' roll's associated with so much decadent bullshit. I really hate a lot of the so-called culture that goes around it and which is perpetuated for profit and constantly sold to a new generation of fifteen-year-old guys in the Midwest! How long has heavy metal been going? It never changes! And it's *still* being presented as rebellious and anti-establishment, and it's just big business. I'm not saying it's a bad thing; but it's just the way these images are built around rock 'n' roll and marketed—I just hate it. Every time I see a new heavy metal band I partly want to laugh and partly want to puke. I don't mind heavy metal, but the thought of taking it seriously is what's weird to me.

MUSICIAN: *Who do you learn from?*

JACKSON: Everyone. I sound like I'm trying to be clever saying that, but it's really the only answer. I don't want to get too influenced by one particular thing, get locked into it. I try to learn from as many different things as I can. It's all related in some way or another; that's the interesting thing about it. *Big World* and this instrumental record, when it comes out, will have a lot in common. It's still music and it's still me.

My tastes haven't really changed since I was fourteen. Any idols I have in music are people that are dead, and some of them have been dead for a long time! Beethoven, Mahler, Shostakovich, Sibelius. Carl Nielsen is very underrated, I like him. You know, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker—the giants.

MUSICIAN: *No pop performers?*

JACKSON: Well, Elvis was pretty good when he was young, wasn't he?

MUSICIAN: *You don't hear anybody now whom you respect?*

JACKSON: Who cares, really? I'm not trying to be uncooperative. It just seems to me every interview I ever read with anyone, they ask, "Who do you like? Who are your influences?" I just can't be bothered with it! But if you really want to know, okay, what do I like that's out right now: Prefab Sprout, the Pogues, Tom Waits' last album, Joni Mitchell's new album—there's never an awful lot.

MUSICIAN: *What do you think of "new age" music?*

JACKSON: If I was one of those artists I probably wouldn't like having that label put on me. If you mean George Winston, Kitaro and those people, I don't really like it. It's wallpaper to me; I like music that involves your brain a bit. I haven't heard a lot of it, so I don't want to come across as being too opinionated. But George Winston to me sounds like what I could do if I sat down in a mellow mood and noodled on the piano for a while. It might sound nice to someone who doesn't play piano, so I can't complain about that. It just doesn't mean that much to me.

MUSICIAN: *Your music is sometimes criticized for being too controlled.*

JACKSON: How does one "let oneself go" in music? You just get onstage and scream? Does that result in good music? I don't understand that way of thinking. People have a naive and idealistic view of the artist, of someone getting onstage

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and something happening by magic. The magic can happen just as much with something completely written, arranged and controlled as it can with spontaneous improvisation. I want to write music that's good every time you hear it! I have a vision of what I want it to be, and I want it to be right, that's all. It's really puzzling to me when people find fault with that. I remember reading an article in *Musician* by someone who was amazed that I had actually written out charts for some songs—like, "Wow, why doesn't he let the band rock out?" It's this rock 'n' roll way of thinking: "We'll just get together and get blasted and we play, man, and what comes out, that's the music, man." To me, that's like fucking hippies high on acid in the 60s. It's so stupid to me! I wrote out the parts 'cause I knew what I wanted! It's my music, why shouldn't I? No one ever criticized Beethoven for writing all the parts out. You want to hear jamming, go to see a band that jams. Jamming is very boring. That's one of my complaints about jazz. There are very few players whose improvisations are going to be good every time. I don't like the battle of egos that goes on with a lot of improvisatory music. I prefer a composer's music. Sometimes I feel people have this impression of me as a schoolmaster or something—"You've *got* to play this and you've *got* to play that"—it's so *unfair* of me. I just don't get it!

MUSICIAN: *Do you ever wonder if people want to hear what you have to say in your lyrics?*

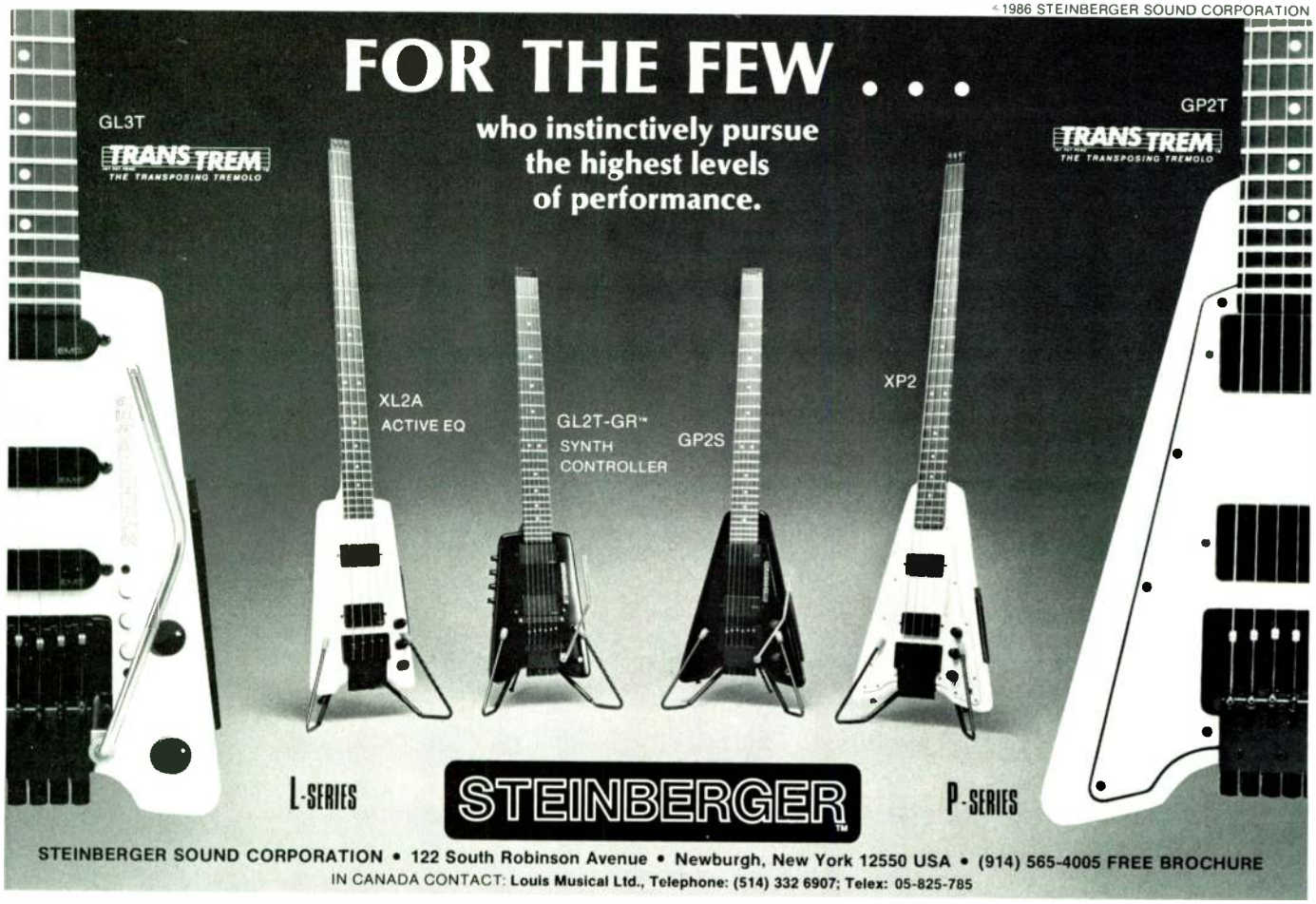
JACKSON: Sometimes, in between writing songs, I reflect on it. I get that dreadful writer's block. For a long time, when I was taking that time off, I didn't write anything. I didn't know what I was going to write and I thought maybe I'll never write anything again. When I go through that I very often think, "What can I possibly say that's going to be worth hearing? Who am I to put my opinions in a song and broadcast it to the world?" But then I'll get an idea for a song and stop thinking about it, stop trying to justify it. Around the time of *Body And Soul* I was thinking too much about, "How is this going to be perceived? And is it really rock 'n' roll?" This time I just said, "To hell with that, I'm just going to do what feels right." "Rock 'n' roll" doesn't really mean anything now anyway; I just would like people to enjoy it. I don't see why I shouldn't like Beethoven and the Ramones.

As far as what I can do as a musician, what people are aware of is like the tip of the iceberg. I don't want to sound arrogant, but I really feel there's so much more I can do. I haven't even started yet. That's why this instrumental record is going to be a big step forward. Whatever I do, I apply the same principles: a desire to make something of quality. There's not a big difference between the songs and the instrumental pieces, but I'm a bit confused about doing both. That's another thing I was trying to sort out during my year off.

MUSICIAN: *Were you disappointed that* Body And Soul *didn't do as well as* Night And Day?

JACKSON: Yeah, but what the hell. I think *Night And Day* was better, and that sold better. I always do the best I can at the time. When I did *Night And Day* I was well rested and I had a real strong idea of something I wanted to do. That wasn't really the case with *Body And Soul*. But I still think it's a good album. I really didn't expect *Night And Day* to do well, and it's my most successful album. I remember when I was recording it, thinking, "God [*laughs*], maybe my mother will buy a copy."

The only way I know how to write is to be honest. People can say I'm full of shit. But I would hope that from listening to the different musical influences on my work and also listening to the lyrics, maybe it will stimulate people to have more open minds. What I hope to achieve first and foremost is good music, a good work of art, whatever you want to call it. I don't make a distinction between art and entertainment—it's the same thing to me. I just want to do it well. As for messages in songs, I'm just sharing my feelings, my views with people who can either accept or reject them. I want what I do to be nourishing. The kind of stuff I like is nourishing. M



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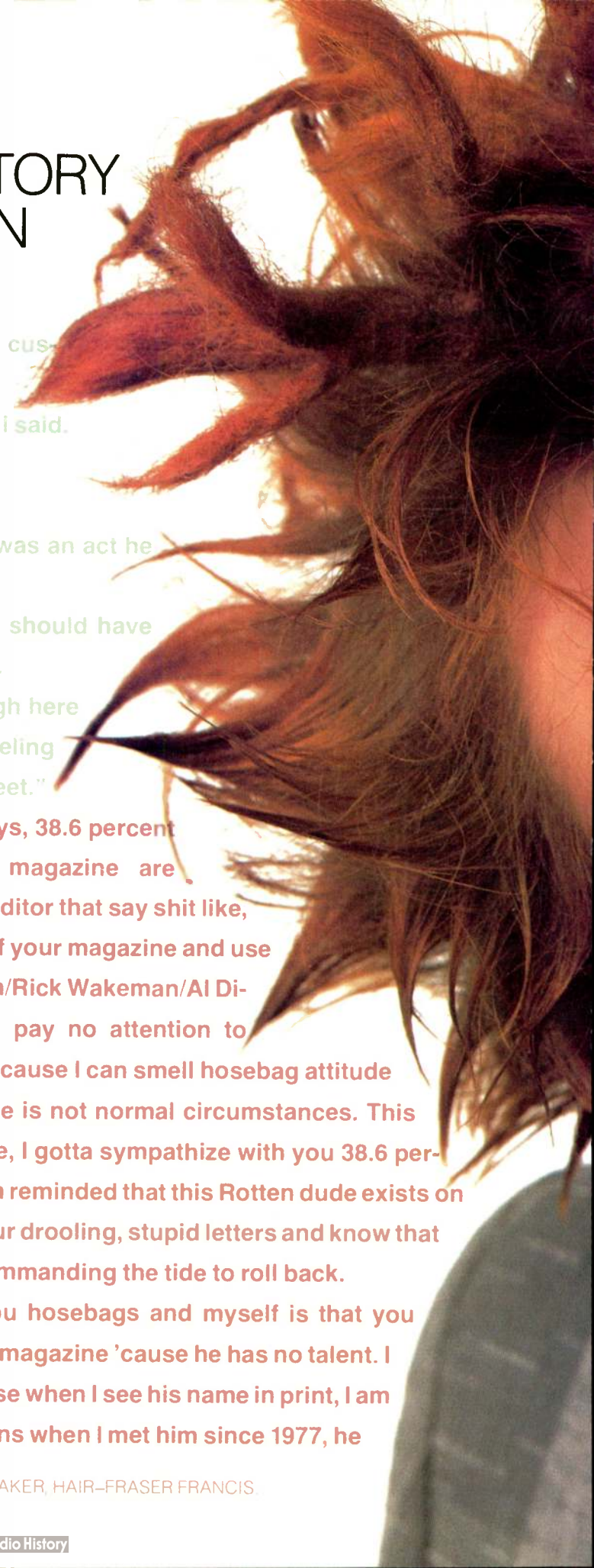
THIS IS THE *REAL* STORY OF JOHNNY ROTTEN



"Wha is your business in rit t cus-
tom o ficer wan ed to ow
' 'm o'ng to interview Johnny R t i said.
"Oh. he smiled ' That will e fu
'No.' I s id 'It won t.'
"Really?' he said "I always thought it was an act he put on rather tha a character defe t
'That's not an either or propo tion ' I should have said. As it was I opted for characte defect.
'Well, ' he aid, I aw h m come t r ugh here once on his way to America. He w s t aveling with his mother, I thougnt it was rather sweet."

According to the most recent surveys, 38.6 percent of the people who read this magazine are hosebags who write letters to the editor that say shit like, "Why don't you guys live up to the name of your magazine and use that space for a real musician like Phil Lesh/Rick Wakeman/Al Di-Meola?" Under normal circumstances, I pay no attention to hosebags, don't even open their letters because I can smell hosebag attitude right through the envelope. But this article is not normal circumstances. This article is Johnny Rotten. And this one time, I gotta sympathize with you 38.6 percent hosebags: I also get unglued when I'm reminded that this Rotten dude exists on the same planet. So go ahead and send your drooling, stupid letters and know that I ache for you as I ache for King Canute commanding the tide to roll back.

'Cause, see, the difference between you hosebags and myself is that you hosebags think Rotten shouldn't be in the magazine 'cause he has no talent. I say he shouldn't be in the magazine because when I see his name in print, I am reminded that on five of the seven occasions when I met him since 1977, he

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVIES & STARR MAKEUP MAGGIE BAKER, HAIR–FRASER FRANCIS

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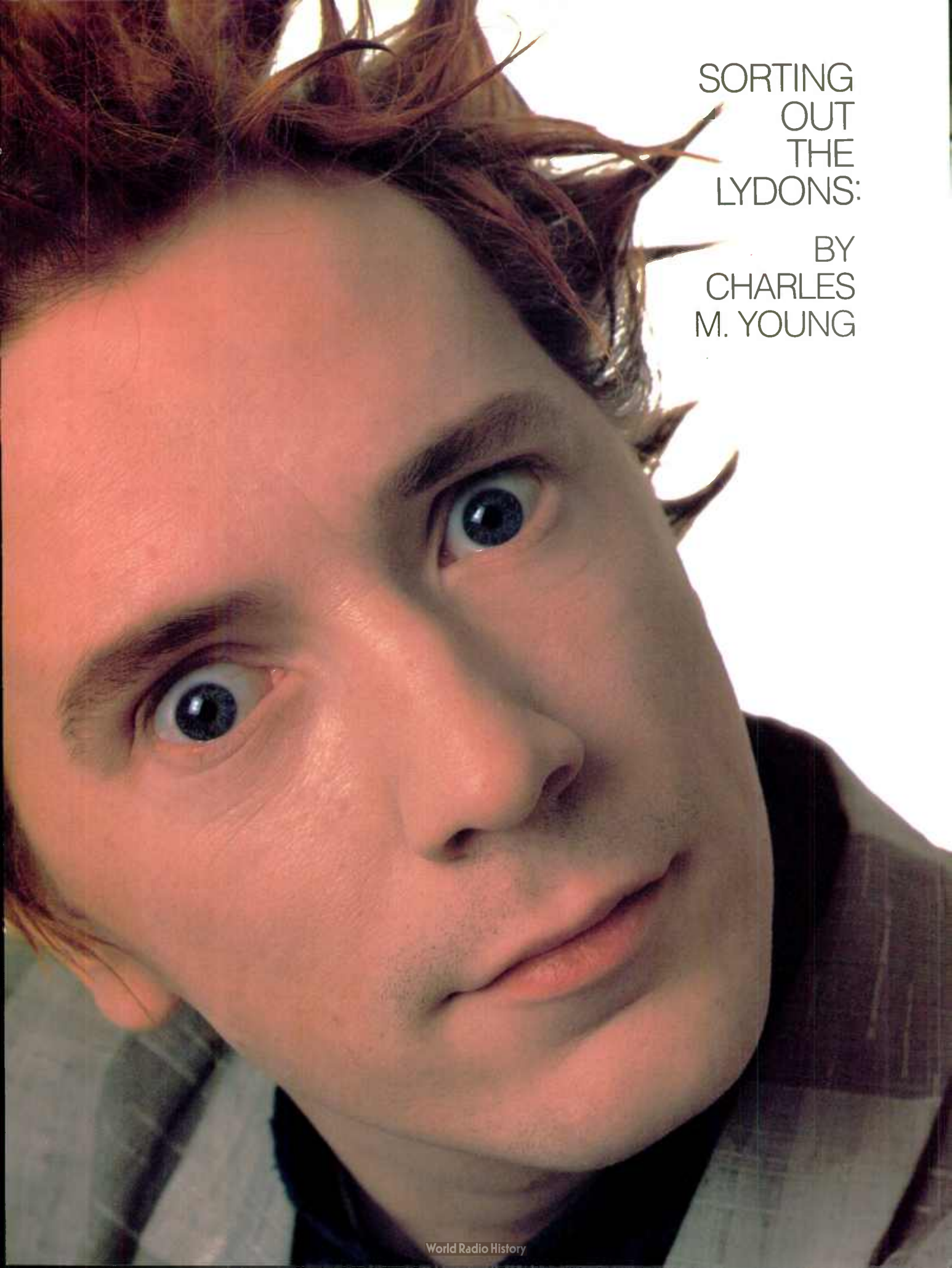

SORTING OUT THE LYDONS:

BY CHARLES M. YOUNG

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came within a hair of giving me a nervous breakdown....Yeah, yeah, I know: tough job I have, flying around the world interviewing rich and famous people. But the next two years are gonna be tough on me and on all you hosebags. *The Sex Pistols* are coming back. A docudrama (apparently) centered on Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen is due out. It's directed by Alex Cox, who did *Repo Man*, the best fictional treatment of punk on film ever. *The Great Rock & Roll Swindle*, the Sex Pistols' own sort of autobiographical movie, is finally going to get released in the States. And there are a number of books in the

THEIR WILLIE UP MY BUM!!!"

Then he todders off to take a leak. This woman he's been putting the moves on—she's got dyed black spikey hair and is wearing a Rodeo Drive designer punk outfit in black and dayglo pink and has a skeleton earring—leans over and asks, "Who is that guy?"

"John Lydon," I say.

"Who's that?" she asks.

"Johnny Rotten."

"Who's that?"

J. Lydon, Sr. on J. Lydon, Jr.: "We were digging out cesspits and they were full of rats...John would chuck them off with an axe."

works, not the least of which I'm hoping will be my own *Blowin' Chunks: Punk Passage and Beyond* (Doubleday/Dolphin), a skewed social history of punk in which the Pistols figure heavily. And then there is the matter of Rotten's own new album *Album* (*Cassette* in cassette, *Single* in single), which to universal surprise is listenable and interesting and—if his reputation with radio programmers doesn't sink him again—somewhat commercial.

Let us furthermore recall why the guy is important aesthetically and historically: He changed singing. No one sounded like him before him, and thousands have tried to sound like him since him. No band has ever declared itself to the world with such force and rage as when Johnny Rotten announced

"He sang for the Sex Pistols....You never heard of the Sex Pistols?"

"No."

Young people today, they got no respect for tradition. They don't deserve to know who this John Lydon/Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols/Public Image, Ltd is. Fuck 'em. On the other hand, I want lots of young people to give me their money when my book comes out, so I'll lay out a portion of my stuff.

First of all, Johnny Rotten is one of the least informative interviews this side of politics. Inteviewers tend not to notice they are getting nothing, because he is such a difficult personality that they are overly grateful or overly resentful of any small tidbit he tosses their way. I plead guilty on both counts.

J. Lydon, Sr. on Jimmy Lydon: "They jumped him. Cut the eye clean out of his head. You've never seen anybody fight like Jimmy. Since he lost the eye, he's terrific."

he was the anti-Christ on the Sex Pistols' first single "Anarchy in the U.K." No band did more to spawn the still flourishing punk subculture than the Sex Pistols. Although it never broke the *Billboard Hot 100* and radio programmers still loathe it, *Never Mind The Bollocks* remains one of the most influential albums of the 70s, maybe *the* most influential if you count punk influence in other art forms.

And let me recall last summer when I met Rotten in a Los Angeles saloon to get some information for my book. In two hours, the guy drinks ten screwdrivers, several of which are doubles, and, having asked every question I can think of, I figure I better get him home before he pulls his usual Jekyll and Hyde. He, however, wants sushi.

"I answered *all* your questions," he snarls.

Maybe food will sober him up, I'm figuring as I drive to Sushi On Sunset where he eats about two grams of fish and pours down six or seven 21oz. Sapporos, growing ever more belligerent over a question I'd asked hours before. See, certain types of punks are homophobic and like all Americans, they love to believe their heroes are homosexuals. I asked Rotten about certain rumors concerning him, which he denied (he's had a girlfriend for years), saying what difference did it make anyway? Fair enough, but as he gets drunker, he wants to deny it some more, getting increasingly irritated with me for asking in the first place, and flirting with all these women at the sushi bar to show how heterosexual he is. And he's getting louder and *louder*, really stinking out the joint for anyone interested in eating and he's ordering numerous Sapporos for all the women he's trying to flirt with *on my tab*. I'm tellin' ya, I was hoping for botulism in my tuna roll, or maybe in his tuna roll. Course, the bastard wouldn't have eaten it anyway.

So finally he stands on the bar and announces—nay, screams—to the entire restaurant: "NO ONE EVER STUCK

His first impulse is not to reveal but to calculate how much to reveal and/or provoke. He almost never volunteers information if you bring up a general subject in hopes that he'll ramble for a while and drop a few factoids on you. He rarely tells anecdotes, mostly just throws thunderbolts of judgment.

One of the tricks of interviewing is to shut up for a moment and let the interviewee rush to fill up the silence. Try it sometime: Conversation abhors a vacuum, and people will say *anything* to fill up those uncomfortable pauses. Rotten is the only person I ever interviewed (excluding a couple of lawyers) who is smart and sadistic enough not to fill up those silences. He loves to look haughty as I squirm and stutter to formulate the next question out of the absolute minimum of information he has revealed.

There is also the problem of what to do with one's eyes when talking to Rotten. To return his glare is to be blasted with two laser beams of contempt; it is to know you are in the presence of someone who is quite sure you are ridiculous. If you look elsewhere on his face, you are confronted with massive, deep, red, poisonous zits, the sort you could squeeze until you cry and still never pop the root infection. His scalp is piled with hairballs so vile they would get any stray dog euthanized immediately as a public health hazard. And his body, these days, is bloated.

The biggest problem, however, is figuring out when he is telling the truth. The first insight I had into the guy's character came in 1977 when I was interviewing Sid Vicious for a cover story on the Pistols. Vicious had attended Kingsbury College (a "college of further education," that is the equivalent of American high school) and recalled that John had once skipped school and returned with the excuse that he had piles so

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long they were hanging out his pants and he had to cut them off with a razor. The teachers had *believed* him, even sent him flowers. Rotten confirmed the story in 1977 (describing himself as an "atrocious liar") and again in 1986. Like any good politician, he learned early that the most outrageously absurd lie, if propounded with enough emotional force, will be believed. At the same time, his life has been so strange that you

wouldn't tell me, because I would bring him back to school and sort it out. 'Cause if the master called him a liar in front of me, I'd smack him in the mouth."

You didn't actually smack the schoolmaster in the mouth, did you?

"But I would have. 'Cause I've been in pubs with John and I've had me jacket off more than once. All the time. I used to

Young John – once he was somebody's baby.

cannot dismiss anything out of hand. One of the early stories about Rotten was that he once had a job as a rat killer in a cesspool. To the extent the story has been repeated, it has been assumed to be part of the Sex Pistols' hype, a lie calculated to build their legend. But he really was a rat killer in a cesspool.

"He used to work with me in the crane when he was young," says John Lydon, Sr. "He used to spend his holidays as my banksman. We were digging out cesspits and they were full of rats. When I would chuck out the dragline, the rats used to grab the rope and climb it back towards me. We had an agent there sometimes and he used to shoot them. But John would chuck them off with an axe."

The elder Lydon appears to be a robustly healthy man of fifty-four, his complexion ruddy and weathered by years of working the oil rigs in the North Sea. Margarite Byrne, Mr. Lydon's girlfriend and widow of his first cousin, divides her attention between the interview and the English version of *The Dating Game* on the living room telly. I tell him the story of John's piles.

"I didn't know this, you see," he says. "Even if it was true, he

sort out all the problems in the pub. Whenever there was a row, I was the first one in it. Well, you know Irish people. They have a temper."

You would fight over John in Pubs?

"Regular it used to happen. In the pub across the street. We used to go there and you'd have girls come in and a girl would say, 'Hallo, Johnny darling, can we have your autograph?' And then her boyfriend would call him a wanker. Then the punchup started. I've had all me knuckles broken fighting there. John will tell you that himself. I've had three fights in one night."

Over John?

"Yeah, it's jealousy, isn't it? If anybody is famous at all, some girl wants to kiss him. Especially in the pub. That's where it all starts. When he comes home, we go to the pub. If there's a problem, we sort it out between us. We just have a go. Win or lose, what do you do? That's what life is all about, isn't it?"

Seems like it would make life difficult.

"No, not really. I'm hot-tempered, you see. I drive a heavy goods lorry in the city, and when you drive a truck down a narrow street, everybody is going like this to each other." Mr.

LISA HAUN

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J. Lydon, Jr. on his family: "They're such raving loonies, the lot of them. They don't mind going out and scrapping with anybody or anything."

Lydon makes what I always interpreted to be a "V" for victory sign but which means "up yours" in London. "And that's it then. I have sort-outs in the streets every day. Every day I have a punch-up. Well not every day. Most days I have a punch-up."

Mr. Lydon tells a long story about throttling another lorry driver who sneaked in front of him at a construction site and ended up bleeding in the gutter ("I don't see why I should let him slip me the mickey") for his affront. Sheba, the family dog, a muscular cross of Labrador and Doberman, grows restless and Margarite shoos her from the room.

"The dog has one fault," says Mr. Lydon. "If we take her out, she'll be walking along the green, calm as can be, and for no reason out of the blue she'll chomp on someone. All of a sudden she's just got someone in her teeth, and she's got some teeth. Like a tiger. We just have her to keep the blacks away. Something about them that dogs don't like. I don't know what it is. Maybe it's the color of their skin."

The Lydons live in a two-story flat—the same in which Johnny grew up—in a housing estate (project) in the Finsbury Park section of London, a working-class Irish neighborhood that has in recent years become racially mixed. Of the four Lydon sons, two have been seriously hurt in fights, according to their father, with blacks.

"Jimmy was almost as famous as Johnny," says Mr. Lydon of his second eldest, standing proudly next to his pretty young wife and baby in a snapshot. "He had his own band, the 4" Be 2", you know. But he married a school teacher and she put the block on it. He's quite content now, painting and decorating."

One of Jimmy's first projects was his living room, which he redecorated like a pub in the green and gold colors of Ireland. Various aspects of his handiwork are displayed in the photographs, but it is hard to keep from looking at his face. His right eye socket is a grotesque mass of red scar tissue.

"He lost his eye about five years ago. He was at a stag party on a Friday night. He came out of the pub carrying a wedding present at half past three in the morning. When he got to the corner, he met nine darkies. They said, 'What have you got in the bag?' He said, 'Aw, go away.' So they jumped him. Two of them picked up bottles and they both got him in the eye. Cut the eye clean out of his head. You've seen guys fight, but you've never seen anyone who could fight like Jimmy. Since he lost his eye, he's terrific. He's got the method, and he never loses, not now. If somebody cut your eye out, they'd never do it again to you, you'd make sure of that, wouldn't you?"

Bobby, the third eldest (the youngest Martin works for John as a roadie), has a semi-circular, almost glowing red scar from just below his right earlobe to the corner of his mouth.

"It was August a year, a year last August. He was coming in at midnight and there was two colored guys playing their radio down there. And he sleeps in the front room, over the

SIDEBAR

Energy has been missing from music for so long," notes John Lydon, "particularly in England, where it's all nail varnish and Nancy-boy keyboards, which people have been trying to break away from for some time." Clearly, the PiL leader sees *Album* as just such a breakaway, one which he feels returns to "my own little mine" of the Sex Pistols and first Public Image releases in terms of pure rock energy.

Having established a "brilliant" working relationship with Bill Laswell on "World Destruction," the Afrika Bambaataa/Lydon 12-inch, Lydon again tabbed Laswell to co-produce *Album* under a shared "umbrella theory." Explains Lydon, whose goal was an "uptempo, non-disco"-sounding record, "We both like to cover a lot of musical ground," and Laswell indeed brought his customary far-reaching world-view to the project.

Noting that the recording was "well thought out in advance" and "definitely organized but with room to improvise," Laswell says that the finished product was a team effort guided by specific musical "reference points." For the record, the musicians enlisted were Ryuichi Sakamoto, keyboards; Bernie Worrell, organ; Nicky Skopelitis, six- and twelve-string guitars; Steve Vai, guitar; Malachi Favors, acoustic bass; Bernard Fowler, background vocals; L. Shankar, violin; Ginger Baker, drums; Tony Williams, drums; Aiyb Dieng, percussion; Jonas Hellborg, electric bass; and Steve Turre, didjerido. As for the reference points, Laswell names Led Zeppelin for its "sound and attitude," as well as Zulu music, Joujouka, and other North and South American musics, while Lydon singles out The Stooges' *Fun House*.

"There was a definite plan to make a more rock-oriented record, more direct and musical than past PiL records," continues Laswell. "But even though we were dealing with a simple beat and chord changes, we didn't want to use just rock clichés. And while there was a basic direction, the musicians were given a lot of freedom. I think that the total sound shows the personality of the individual musicians."

The recording process itself, says Lydon, was "very quick," taking three weeks of one-take recording time "in every studio in New York" and one week of mixing. "We were determined to get the best drum sound we could, but that doesn't come cheaply. We had an awful budget. Ridiculous. Arcadia gets $800,000, and we had two-sixteenths of that. Outrageous!"

According to Laswell, the drums were recorded at The Power Station by Jason Corsaro, who also mixed the entire album there. "It was necessary to record the drums with a particular engineer with a big drum sound," explains Laswell, who adds that Vai's guitar was recorded at Electric Ladyland because of its "historical resonance and good larger room sound on a live amp." Additional recording was done at RPM Sound Studios and Quadrasonic Sound Systems, Robert Musso engineering all but the drum tracks.

"It was like the good old days," says Lydon of the swift recording pace. "We went for high energy and instant reaction. I could play the master before editing and it sounded perfectly finished."

Laswell now looks ahead to forming a musical "continuum" using the same musicians and stylistic relationships established in *Album*. "It's the beginning of something that you'll hear in future projects," he says, noting a commitment by the PiL collaborators to work together again and solidify their initial undertaking. Reporting that his most recent production of a forthcoming Motorhead album continues in his current harder rock direction, Laswell says that there may even be a Ginger Baker solo album using many of the PiL players. – *Jim Bessman*

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It's better to burn out than to fade away. My my hey hey.

front door, and he said, 'Go away, it's a bit late to be shouting outside the door.' One went inside and the other said, 'What did you say, man?' Bobby said, 'You heard me. Piss off.' And as he turned around, the colored guy stuck a Stanley knife in his neck. Just nipped the jugular. When he come in, his head was hanging off him. You could see into his neck. We almost lost him, he lost so much blood. He's very lucky. Tough to control him afterwards because he wanted to get the guys. He couldn't get the bloke who did it, because he's inside. Got three years. But Bobby got five of his mates. Caught them at the chip shop and gave them a good hiding."

Born in Galway, Ireland, Mr. Lydon moved to Scotland on his own at the age of fourteen, supporting himself on the pipelines and eventually working his way down to London. He met his wife there, the former Eileen Barry of Cork, at an Irish dance club.

"She was so quiet. It was funny: My son has a wife and she's exactly the same as mine is, Jimmy's wife is. And all she lives for is the baby and him. Nothing else in the world. And my wife was exactly the same. She idolized the children. Never wanted to go anywhere, just the children all the time. Except church. She was a really good Catholic. If there was a church that said mass twice a day, she'd make you go twice a day. She was a great Catholic. And as the lads grew up, they could never do anything wrong in her eyes. Anything. She backed Johnny all the way."

It was up to you to whack him when he got out of line?

"She'd never let you hit him. No way. You'd say, 'I'm going to give you a smack on the ear,' and she wouldn't let you touch him, no way. She'd say, 'Go away with your Irish temper and leave the lad alone.' They got on very well together, all the kids. But Johnny was more attached to her than anybody. It was always mum and John. She was so calm, she would sit down and talk to him for hours and hours. He wouldn't go nowhere without telling her. He wouldn't go outside that door without telling her where he was going. Maybe it was the meningitis that he got to depend on her so much.

"Johnny was eight years old when he had meningitis, you know. And he was in the hospital for months, I'd say three months. It's water on the brain, meningitis, isn't it? He kept getting pain in the back of his head. He used to have these lumbar punctures, you know, big needles into the spine, and they would draw the fluid. I used to have to hold him down on the bed when they gave him the lumbar punctures. He wouldn't let them give him the lumbar punctures unless I was there. And he forgot everything in the hospital that he had learned in school. Lost his memory completely, couldn't remember who he was. And she taught him everything again herself. She was a genius at math, you know. You could have a calculator and she could do the problem in her head, and she could beat you to the answer. I'll be damned if I know where she learned it, but she could beat accountants with A-levels in mathematics."

When Johnny returned home, he lived mostly an indoors existence, reading books and listening to music alone in his room. There is a football (soccer) pitch right outside their backdoor, but even when he could be coaxed onto the field, he would refuse to kick the ball, just sort of waft his foot at it if it rolled directly to him. He was equally resistant to his formal education, getting expelled from Catholic school at the age of fourteen.

"It was a silly old master there, kept dictating to him," says Mr. Lydon. "Johnny had a bit of an accident, twisted his ankle one day. I took him up to casualty and they gave him a little card saying he'd been there. The master said he didn't want to hear any bloody excuses, didn't want to see it, it was all lies. They almost had a punch-up, you know what I mean, and he got expelled over it."

Johnny was standing there with a sprained ankle and a card from the hospital and the master wouldn't believe him?

"More or less called Johnny a lyin' *b*, and he got expelled."

Despite Mrs. Lydon prevailing on the Bishop of London to pay a surprise visit one Sunday morning ("I felt bad about it because you can't let the Bishop see you with a hangover, can you?") and promise to reinstate the lad, John transferred to Kingsbury College and fellow student Sid Vicious was soon a regular visitor to the Lydon home.

"My wife used to feed him here. She thought as much of Sid as she did of John, and Sid had never had nothing, really. I'd come home and if I'd had a few drinks, I'd say, 'Who's that wanker?' And she'd say, 'That's Johnny's friend. Leave off.' And she'd be pushing me out the door. I used to be a bit wild, you know. Martin, I'd pick him up and sling him under me arm. But she wouldn't let you do that. Even a colored person. If a colored person passed the door and he was hungry, she'd bring him in and give him a meal. She was that type. Me, I'd shoot him. The difference in people, it's unbelievable, isn't it?"

John and Sid went on to make history, causing hysteria on both sides of the Atlantic with the Sex Pistols, John getting thrown out of the band for being an asshole at the end of their brief American tour, Sid more or less murdering his girlfriend and committing suicide. The biggest blow to John, however, came in the fall of 1978, just after a trip to America with his mother to discuss plans for a solo career.

"She thought she had a tummyache from all the parties and food and drink. They couldn't find anything at the hospital, but she got bad and they opened her up and they discovered she had malignant cancer. He took it really bad. Because he was really attached to her, you know. He adored his mother. Really. From the meningitis. He set there all the time with her, day and night he set in the chair. The way he felt at the time was he thought it was all his problems that was causing this to her, his punk rock, you know what I mean. But it wasn't. Cancer is a disease, and there's nothing you can do. We talked to four experts and they all said not even a miracle could cure her. He wouldn't believe the doctors couldn't do anything. I don't think he's trusted them since."

Wasn't he also mad at the priest?

"He was alcoholic. Before she died, she wanted to be annointed, and he was dead drunk at four o'clock in the afternoon. We'd been calling him all morning. Someone who goes to church every Sunday, and you can't get the priest to come

SUZAN CARSON

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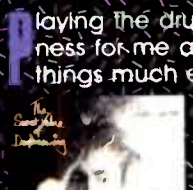

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World Radio History

when she's dying. She'd already been annointed four times because they expected her to die. They were giving her so many injections in trying to keep her alive that they were killing her. It seems like you could save people from suffering some of that agony and misery, but they won't let you."

Sheba the dog trots back into the living room looking for a little affection and Mr. Lydon gives her a pat on the head. "Only one bad habit our dog has," he says. "You mention the word black and she'll smash up against the window, trying to attack whoever's out there. She's prejudiced. She doesn't like colored people."

Johnny Rotten's solo career, it seems to me, can be characterized as a lot of thrashing around looking for someone to blame for his pain. It has often been musically adventurous, but not very listenable unless you are into narcissism, despair and scapegoating. Unlike his work with the Pistols, there is little funny about it. In his personal life, he has left many of his friends behind, angry and embittered and full of accusations that he lies. He seems more comfortable holding on to his enemies, like the Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren, always the mongoose to John's cobra, and recently John's victim in a court suit in which he and the surviving Pistols and Sid Vicious' mom won complete control of Glitterbest, McLaren's management company, and Matrixbest, McLaren's movie company. After a disastrous first album for Elektra in 1984 (a half-million dollar advance and 30,000 copies sold) and an equally disastrous tour, Rotten is again selling albums with *Album* and is going to assemble yet another version of his ever shifting band, Public Image, Ltd. for a tour.

"I honestly didn't think this album would be commercial in any way, shape or form," he says, sitting behind the desk of some absent executive at Virgin Records in London. "I thought it would be perceived as absolutely preposterous for me to delve into that kind of music, particularly using those guitars. I thought it would drive people against me but it's done the exact opposite."

The first time I heard it, I thought you'd brought in Eddie Van Halen for the solos.

"He couldn't play that good. He'd have beaten it to death. Hah, hah, hah. I wanted to make a jolly good rock album, and that appeared to be the best way. I've worked with Bill Laswell [the producer] before and we're a good team."

It's getting quite a bit of play in dance clubs, especially the single "Rise." When I heard the chorus—"May the road rise with you"—my first thought was what's this guy doing in a good mood.

"Hah, hah, hah. I deserve to be. Hah, hah, hah. What a thing to say to me: 'You have no right to be happy. It's against all my preconceptions.'"

It is against all my preconceptions. Preconceptions based on getting verbally eviscerated, physically threatened, thoroughly embarrassed in previous meetings, recently hearing that you hit a friend of mine over the head with a beer can and shot blanks from a submachine gun at bystanders on the set of the video for "Rise" and....

"Got any cigarettes?" Rotten burps. "No? I'll go get some."

Upon his return, I tell him I talked with his father.

"What lies did he tell you? Did he get out the family snapshots?"

Some.

"My God. Was he currently in jail, or just getting out, or what?"

No, but all his stories were about giving someone a good hiding. He seemed proud of it.

"I know."

I got this vision of you as a small child in a house like that.

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"Hah, hah, hah."

Obviously you know what I'm getting at.

"Yes. No comment. Hah, hah, hah. I definitely decided that was not going to be my lifestyle."

Another thing he talked about was the blacks who live in the estates.

"Oh, the race hate nonsense. I can't stand that. Most of the working-class people here have that problem. It seems to be the only thing that unites them, their hatred for each other. It's outrageous. If it isn't against blacks, it's against people who live on the other side of the Thames, or Northerners and Southerners. It's just on and on and on. I am my own person. I wouldn't allow any of that nonsense to infiltrate my sensible brain, thank you."

A small child doesn't have a choice about that.

"It does, you know. I cannot be easily swayed. I've always felt what was right and what was wrong."

From the beginning you felt your father was wrong about black people? Or was there a single incident that turned your mind around?

"I don't think violence is the answer to anything," Rotten says but doesn't answer. "Never have, never will."

Two of your brothers were carved up by blacks.

"More coincidence than anything else. They're such raving loonies, the lot of them. They don't mind going out and scrapping with anybody or anything. I'd rather not talk about it. It depresses me, as it happens."

I found it kind of depressing, sitting there.

"I know—wondering when someone is going to turn on you."

I change the subject to meningitis he contracted at eight.

"I blame it on the pork chops. I haven't eaten pork since. I was in a coma for a long time. I don't remember too much about it."

Your father held you down while you had your spinal shots?

"Yeah, that was bad. Every fucking six hours. That was torture. You can't imagine that thing."

Every six hours for how many days?

"For months. For about six months."

Every six hours for six months you got a hypodermic needle up your spine?

"Yeah. I nearly died."

Your father said that you'd forgotten everything you'd learned in school.

"That's true. I had to start all over again."

Your mother taught you your schooling?

"No, I taught myself. I'm self-taught."

At this point, Rotten whispers something to himself which I don't catch during the actual interview. Two weeks later, I play the tape back twelve times and Rotten is distinctly saying, "Don't you listen! I'm bored! Don't you listen!" For this I see three possible explanations: 1) He is possessed by Satan, who is not a fan of psychoanalysis; 2) He is commanding himself not to listen because questions about his mom are painful; and 3) He thinks *I* don't listen and finds the entire interview a snore. In any case, his manager, perhaps by extrasensory perception, seems to pick up on Explanation #3 and interrupts with a suggestion that we finish, which I do by asking if he's seen his family lately.

"They're doing all right. They're still fighting."

It's a hell of a way to get through life.

"You can't change them. They won't have it. They're self-righteous about it."

What I'm trying to figure out is why you're different.

"I can fight if I'm pushed into it. I've had very good training."

Yeah, but your face is not a mass of scar tissue.

"And it won't be." M

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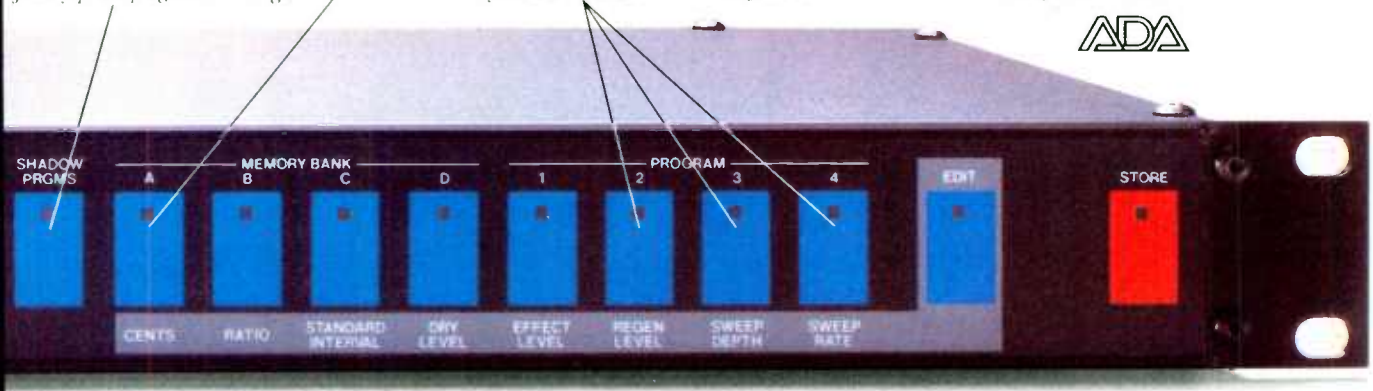

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POST-LOBOTOMY VAN HALEN GO ON WITH HALF A MIND

VAN HALEN

5150
(Warner Bros.)

The war of words between David Lee Roth and Eddie Van Halen has become the best show biz feud since Jack Benny and Fred Allen. Unfortunately, their schism also figures to be the most commercially disastrous move since Peter Wolf was freeze-framed out of J. Geils. Poised on the verge of crossover mass success, *5150* plunges Van Halen back into Dante's third circle of metal hell, with David Lee's devilish *bon mots* replaced by Sammy Hagar's red-neck leering. Who's the more obnoxious? Only their minoxydyl dealers know for sure.

So for those who believe (a) David Lee Roth is a closet cabaret buffoon, (b) "Jump" was a sign of creeping senility and/or calculated sell-out or (c) Eddie Van Halen is God, well, yeah, *5150*'s the ticket. For the rest of us, who came to appreciate the old Van Halen through the band's self-deprecating sense of humor, the new Rothless model no longer evidences the capacity to laugh at its own reflection. Like the Atlas model on the cover, *5150* is more musclebound than muscular.

5150 does boast the ever-inventive fretwork of guitar*meister* and bi-monthly *Musician* coverboy Eddie Van Halen, whose sonic creativity seems less leashed playing off the competent, vulgar stylings of journeyman Hagar. "Jump's" blatant synthpop is here refracted onto the "Baba O'Riley"-like strains of "Dreams" and "Love Walks In," with hooks firmly anchored in place by dense, overlapping guitar harmonies. But the obvious single, "Why Can't This Be Love," sounds like a clunkier version of Foreigner's "I Want To Know What Love Is," (Mick Jones co-produced it). And familiar sexist dreck like "Good Enough" in which women are compared to sides of beef, and "Summer Nights," another of Van Halen's patented riffing fillers sans David Lee's tongue-in-cheekiness, is hardly redemptive. "Best Of Both Worlds" and "Get Up" are interesting only for what they reveal about the band's recent ego squabbles. "Inside" dabbles in some modern funk-rock grooves, but by then it's too little, too late.

The dynamic creative tension between David Lee Roth's ebullient toastmaster general and Eddie Van Halen's isolated, chain-smoking guitar junkie had everything to do with lifting Van Halen above the metal masses. Now that that friction has been traded in for more musical compatibility, Van Hagar is just another rock 'n' roll band, boasting one brilliant musician and one boring frontman. In other words, square one. – **Roy Trakin**

STEVE MARSEL

World Radio History

CHARLES MINGUS

The Complete Candid Recordings Of Charles Mingus
(Mosaic)

Charles Mingus' early-60s quartet featuring Ted Curson, Eric Dolphy, and Dannie Richmond, was as viscerally exciting as jazz gets; the first five tracks on this set, including "Folk Forms No. 1," and "What Love," are among the finest jazz performances ever put on record. Mingus' meticulous control over structural detail—tempo variations, combinations of instruments, time changes—and his prescient understanding of how traditional New Orleans and church expressionism could mix with modernism lends these records an aura of godliness. Add the political ramifications of the group's brash virtuosity and they become integral to any recounting of that era. For without Mingus' innovations, the high points of jazz in the 80s—Threadgill, Murray, Dara, etc.—simply wouldn't exist.

This set collects three sessions originally released in scrambled form on four records—*Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*, *The Jazz Life—Various Artists*, *Mingus*, and *Newport Rebels*; five then-unissued tracks are also included. "Bugs," an unpolished near-masterpiece Mingus never recorded again, is hobbled by occasionally lethargic soloing—Mingus was only allowing one take per tune. "Reincarnation Of A Love Bird," like all the material on the set, features the telepathic rhythmic interplay that characterized Mingus and Richmond at their best. A final session, which included Roy Eldridge, Jo Jones and Tommy Flanagan, forks up "Body And Soul," with a slow Roy Eldridge solo opening the door for a double-time Dolphy outing.

As the sessions are ordered chronologically, it's possible, for instance, to hear all the tracks with Roy Eldridge together. Another benefit is hearing Mingus' influence in retrospect—listen to "Lock 'Em Up" and hear David Murray. Several of the unissued tracks unearth powerful solos by Eldridge, Dolphy, and Booker Ervin, making this more than just a collector's thrill. It's classic music made easily available; every home should have it. (Mosaic Records, 197 Strawberry Hill Ave., Stamford, CT 06902). – **Peter Watrous**

LOU REED

Mistrial
(RCA)

It's got a beat and you can stomp to it—but that's not the best way to take a Lou Reed album. On *Mistrial* the Godfather of Punk continues serving up a metallic musical brew to wash down his dryly delivered observations. He thinks of himself as a writer, and his music bears that out, cushioning lyrics rather than vying for attention.

Not to imply that *Mistrial* doesn't sizzle instrumentally. Reed provides his own screaming guitar solos on "Video Violence" and "I Remember You." The rest of the compact band—essentially bassist Fernando Saunders and drummer Sammy Merendino—uphold Reed's belief in tastefully aggressive guitar-based rock. (No keyboards within hearing range.) As usual, the songs stick to the most elementary structures and chord changes. Reed could be a bar band's dream; if only his lyrics weren't so idiosyncratic.

Oh yes, the lyrics. What's been on Reed's mind lately? Well, love, though not the Hallmark-cards variety. "Outside" desperately celebrates and/or ridicules the escapism of romantic bliss; "No Money Down" is a slightly obscure limning of hopes and responsibilities; the plaintive "I Remember You" may or may not be directed at a former lover. "Mama's Got A Lover," on the other hand, is vividly specific: "He says he's into dirty rotten essence of urban decay," Reed deadpans in his gum-chewing way. Urban decay itself crops up in the streetwise narrator of "Mistrial," the Burroughsian scenario of "Video Violence," and "The Original Wrapper"'s paranoia.

There's a slight sense of Reed repeating himself: The apologetic woman-beater of "Don't Hurt A Woman" and the conditional clauses of "Spit It Out" both recall tracks from his preceding *New Sensations*. But even if *Mistrial* marks a holding pattern in Reed's artistic development, it's a charming one. The funny mouthfuls of verbiage in "The Original Wrapper" make clear that rapping is the only way Reed's ever been able to sing; and the concluding "Tell It To Your Heart" is a pleasant throwback to an earlier era of songcrafting, with harmonies that (for Reed) are positively baroque. *Mistrial* is oddly moving in the best Reed tradition, the artist giving almost against his will.– **Scott Isler**

SPARROW

A Touch Of Class
(B's Records)

That burgeoning crowd of socially sensitized American rockers could still learn a thing or two about fashioning political pop from Trinidad's Mighty Sparrow, and a lot about fashioning a beat. For three decades Sparrow has reigned supreme over the calypso scene, and this latest effort shows why: The guy has an effortlessly captivating voice, deceptively incisive lyrics and a band that melds the freneticism of merengue with a relaxed calypso groove.

As the LP's title and cover shot indicate, Sparrow enjoys his regal role, but that doesn't dissuade him from addressing topical issues from drug abuse to Aids to apartheid. He's no milquetoast moderate either; on "Invade South Africa" Sparrow suavely suggests that a U.N. army rid that nation of it's "blood-sucking vipers" and that a lynch mob string up Pik Botha—all to a great dance beat, naturally. He frames "Ah Fraid de Aids," in terms of honest fear instead of pious moralizing (calypso singers tend not to be keen on calls to celibacy), and elsewhere proffers the advice that "Coke Is Not It." Sparrow pretty much relies on one standard musical arrangement, but it's a great one, with punchy horn fills, rich background choruses, and a relentless percussive drive. Trinidad's calypso tradition is every bit as rich and varied as reggae's, so if you're looking for a place to start explor-

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ing, this record should boot you on your way. (B's Records, 1285 Fulton St., Brooklyn, N.Y.)– **Mark Rowland**

JOE JACKSON

Big World
(A&M)

What's notable about most live albums these days is the chilling sound of contractual obligations being met. Fear not, Joe Jackson's *Big World* isn't just another aurally air-brushed career move. Like Jackson Browne's *Running On Empty*, it's an album of original material that just happens to be performed in front of an audience, and recorded direct to a two-track digital master. As a result there are no overdubs, no mixing, no applause, and, thanks to audience sobriety, no requests for "Free Bird."

All of *Big World*'s audio ambience would be for nought had Jackson not delivered the goods. But over the course of these three sides (the fourth was left blank), he reclaims all sorts of lost territory: the herky jerky power chords of *Look Sharp*, the slightly Dada reggae rhythms of *Beat Crazy*, the jazzy jokiness of *Jumpin' Jive*, and the ultra-smooth FM Gershwinisms of *Night And Day*. Lyrically, Jackson sounds like he's been wearing out his passport (or at least, as he joked during one of the shows, "spending a lot of time in Tower Records' International section.") With wit and occasional venom, he casts an eye on Americans abroad ("The Jet Set"), the Falklands ("Tango Atlantico"), post-World War II politics ("40 Years"), and Reagan's reductive world view ("Right And Wrong"). The most powerful song here, however, is "Home Town," as emotionally direct as any Jackson has written.

Joe Jackson doesn't always get the credit he's due, perhaps because he refuses to play the hype games of the "pretty boys and material girls" he puts down on "Soul Kiss." What other male rocker would have himself portrayed as a balding Tintin on his own album cover? But if Joe is willfully unsexy he's also savvy enough to personalize the political, and still make us dance. Excepting Elvis, he's turned out to be the best thing England's new wave has washed upon these shores.– **David Wild**

CHERRELLE

High Priority

S.O.S. BAND

Sands Of Time
(Tabu/CBS)

What has Prince wrought? Legend has it that songwriting and production duo Terry Lewis and James "Jam" Harris III, a.k.a., Jimmy Jam, were fired from the Time by His Purpleness for missing a gig. That shouldn't have caused them much concern: "Just Be Good To Me" became a huge hit for the S.O.S. Band. After that Harris and Lewis enjoyed modest success with "Just Be Good To Me" sound-alikes.

Two singles have recently changed all that: Janet Jackson's sly "What Have You Done For Me Lately" and Cherrelle and Alexander O'Neal's "Saturday Love," a chipper duet with an unforgettable days-of-the-week hook. Now Lewis and Harris appear poised on the brink of a career that could rival the likes of Gamble & Huff. You could say their—ahem—time has come.

Which brings us to Cherrelle and the S.O.S. Band. For the latter, Jam and Lewis have been instrumental in transforming a Southern one-hit wonder (1980's "Take Your Time [Do It Right]") into a powerhouse of black radio. Despite the presence of an outstanding lead vocalist in Mary Davis, the group's vapid live performances only emphasize Harris and Lewis' role in the studio. Slow rolling funk with chiming percussion and Davis' soaring vocals have become the band's trademark sound, and on *Sands Of Time* they play it for all it's worth. The Time's influence is very much in evidence on "No Lies," and there's another obligatory "Just Be Good To Me" copy via "Borrowed Love." But the LP's first single, "The Finest," suggests that Lewis and Harris' songwriting and production experiments are still reaping their share of rewards.

The Time connection also figures heavily on their production of Cherrelle's LP. "You Look Good To Me" and "Oh No It's U Again" feature the clever keyboard licks and clicking percussion that were once that band's stock in trade. And while there's a lot of variety here, "Saturday Night Love" is clearly Lewis and Harris' triumph to date. A hook that needs to be heard but once is a songwriter's ace-in-the-hole, and on "Saturday Love" Jam and Lewis draw a full house.

For those who pine for the days when songwriting and production expertise made Motown hitsville, Stax the sound of Memphis and Philly International the inner city groove, Jam and Lewis sound like renaissance men. It's time for New York and Los Angeles to wise up: Minneapolis is calling the shots.

– **Fred Goodman**

HASIL ADKINS

Out To Hunch
(Norton)

Good lord. Hasil Adkins is best known, if at all, as the composer of "She Said," a whacked-out monologue recorded by the Cramps. But that performance will not prepare you for what's concealed inside *Out To Hunch* a gathering of Adkins recordings made between 1955 and 1965. Although innocently packaged as yet another compilation of vintage (if obscure) rock 'n' roll, this stuff is to that era's chart fodder what white lightning is to Tab.

Billy Miller's liner notes present Adkins as a West Virginian noble savage from a musical Twilight Zone. This is a universe of irregular phrase measures and primitive home-made recordings; of out-of-tune whistling and jumbled lyrics; of shrieking falsetto and maniacal laughter. Adkins accompanies his yowling and rubber-drone electric guitar strumming with his own drum work. Nobody else could follow his peculiar rhythmic elisions.

With the exception of a relatively un-

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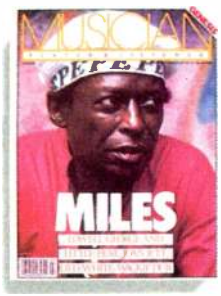

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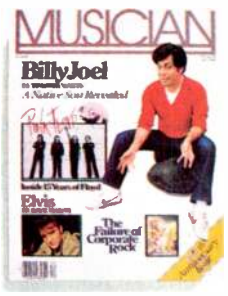

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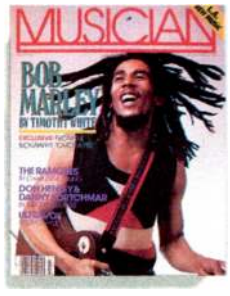

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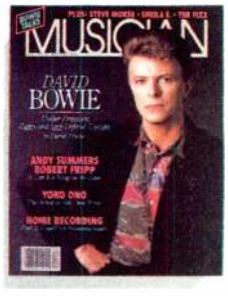

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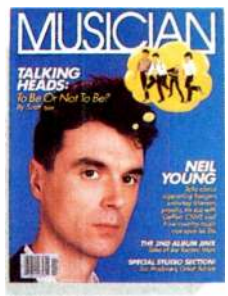

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Stones,
INXS, Bangles

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mangled version of Chuck Berry's "Memphis," virtually everything here is a twelve-bar blues structure, or bizarre permutation thereof. Adkins compresses "Rockin' Robin" and distends Jerry Lee Lewis' "High School Confidential," but his original tunes are the real draw—and a psychiatrist's field day. "I want your head," he drools, "to hang on my wall tonight." (Now there's an angle the Stones haven't covered.) That motif, from "No More Hot Dogs," returns more menacingly on "We Got A Date" and "I Need Your Head," where Adkins sounds like a ghoul out of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Lousy recording quality adds to the creepy effect.

Elsewhere, though, all is sweetness and light: Adkins bawls out "I'm Happy," the album's acoustic country number, and introduces those dance crazes "The Hunch" and the "Chicken Walk." His own version of "She Said" makes the Cramps sound accomplished. This record has to be heard to be believed. (Norton Records, Box 646, Cooper Station, New York, NY 10003) – **Scott Isler**

CULTURE CLUB

From Luxury To Heartache
(Virgin /Epic)

Culture Club's attempt to rebound from the commercially disappointing *Waking Up With The House On Fire* finds Boy George and crew as jumpy as cats on a hot tin roof. Signs of distress aren't confined to the title: The clenched-teeth edginess of dance tracks like "Gusto Blusto" complements the paranoid tendencies of "I Pray" and "Too Bad," while producers Arif Mardin and Lew Hahn heighten that tension by piling on enough percussion, synths, and backing vocals to cause a splitting headache. And you thought this was light entertainment.

Despite the neurotic overtones, *From Luxury To Heartache* reaffirms Culture Club's mastery of breezy pop-soul. Though nothing matches the instantly appealing "Karma Chameleon," plenty of tunes have that hitbound sound. "Move Away," the first single, soars

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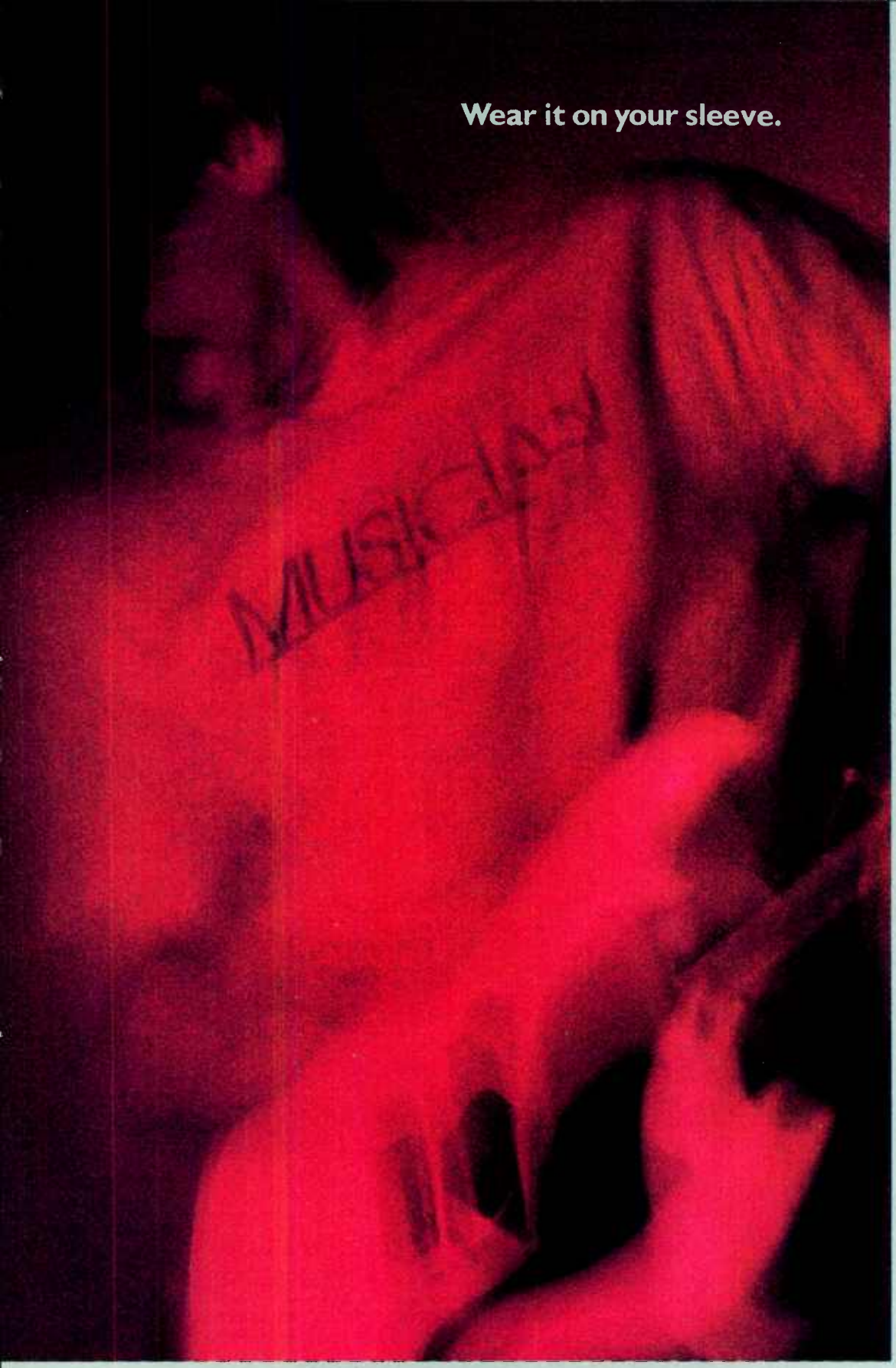

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gracefully on the wings of Philly-style strings and gospel voices; "Work On Me Baby" could be a great lost Supremes song in modern drag. "Sexuality" toys with George's exotic image while "Gusto Blusto" equals the manic energy of the Bee Gees' disco smashes.

These good grooves could have been better had the producers given the material—and the Boy—more breathing space. Smokey Robinson he ain't, but George can make nasty lyrics seem sweet ("Move Away"), teach a melancholy waltz to swing ("Come Clean"), and stand his ground against powerhouse female singers Jocelyn Brown and Ruby Turner. Only thing George can't handle here is the cloying "God Thank You Woman" (probably to his credit).

Maybe *From Luxury To Heartache* will sell truckloads and allow Culture Club to stop trying so hard. Maybe Boy George will quit playing a cool jerk and let more people appreciate his talent. Maybe the group will settle down and finally make a great album. Maybe they'll call it *Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's Culture Club*. – **Jon Young**

JUNIOR

Acquired Taste
(London/PolyGram)

Junior's music may be an acquired taste, but it's hard to know why. From all evidence, Junior is a major pop talent whose songcraft suggests Stevie Wonder's and whose blissfully poignant vocal style rivals Boy George. Perhaps not coincidentally, both peers are sort of represented here, Stevie on drums and the Boy via producers Arif Mardin ("Somebody") and Steve Levine ("Together"). Indeed, this record sports five different producers, which means Junior's record company is either deeply committed to showcase his impressive range or as abjectly confused about his failure to chart as I am. Well, the music here certainly sounds high-tech enough, but the question lingers—will fans still make passes at black pop singers who wear glasses?

Junior's last LP, *Inside Lookin' Out*,

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was a wonder of confessional writing and understated arrangements, and it bombed miserably. Maybe that's why the production values on this one so often translate into production numbers to rival MGM's. The true triumph here is "Oh Louise," a sunny romantic ballad replete with gospel choir that shows off Junior's exciting falsetto—you can practically hear him skip for joy amid the warmly embracing vocal choruses. At the other end of the spectrum is "Somebody," a heard-it-through-the-grapevine weeper that's overwhelmed by Mardin's powerful but all too calculated dance/scratch mix. Junior's personality seems too whimsical and sophisticated to survive such a sonic assault—he's much better crooning seductive grooves like "Not Tonight," the Stevieish "Look What You've Done For Me," or melodic confections like "Together." These songs are at once tasty and tasteful, the kind of polished pop that gives MOR stations reason to live. But will they discover the guy? Stay tuned.

– Mark Rowland

Corea from page 30
immediately had that feeling.

With Weckl, it was slightly different, in that I started asking some musician friends about drummers. I asked Michael Brecker, "Who's the best drummer in New York now? I'm putting together an electric band." He didn't hesitate at all and said, "Oh, Dave Weckl." Then after the gig, I went over to Tania Maria's loft in the city. Her husband played for me a tape of a young keyboard player's band, to see what I thought. I went, "Who the hell is that drummer? He's *happening*." We were getting ready to leave town the next day and Gayle spotted in the *Village Voice*, Dave Weckl appearing with the Billy Connors trio at the Bottom Line. It was this series of coincidences, so we stayed over an extra day and went down to hear him. He was great. He sounded like the record [*laughs*].

Dave, besides his great abilities as a drummer, has this great drum sound. It's incredibly rich, with an accent on drums and de-emphasis of cymbals. He uses cymbals for effects and rhythm. The kind of cymbals he has don't swell up, develop and last a long time; they hit the effect and they disappear. It's the drums that are featured. So we played a few gigs just to see how it felt and it snapped from the first rehearsal. Dave and John met and they locked into a groove on the very first tune.

MUSICIAN: *I notice a Steve Gadd-like quality in Dave's approach.*

COREA: Steve is a strong influence, I think. The thing I like about Dave is that, even at the young age that he is, his musical conception is his own. Gadd was one of the first drummers I'd ever heard—him and Tony Williams—who organized their drum rhythms in a way that was almost like a composer. Before that, jazz drummers used to get a rhythm and a roll going, but they'd never be able to repeat themselves and play the same thing twice; it was a continually varied rhythm. It wasn't until Gadd and Tony that they began to study their playing enough so that it became a very controlled thing. For a composer, it's a dream to have the drummer play the same thing when that part of a composition rolls around because that's what's required.

I always used to think it was kind of unfair that I would go to a rehearsal, give the written part to the bass and to the guitar player or horn player, and I'd even have my own written part, and the drummer was left free. I'd have to say, "Well, no, a little more of that, less of that." The drummer was the last one to learn to read music.

MUSICIAN: *You've been a very prolific composer yourself and yet there are a couple of cases—with your Mozart work and the Monk album—that you focused on other composers. How do you view those side trips?*

COREA: They're not side trips at all. It's just great music that I really want to play.

continued on page 88

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Level 42 from page 48
ping last night by doing it faster and longer." "The Sun Goes Down (Living It Up)" went top ten in England, but Level 42 lost their American contract.

Mark King took some time off to record a solo album, a "self-indulgent, improvised album of very 'muso' stuff" which also gave him the chance to play drums again. But King also feels the solo venture gave him valuable production experience, and when Level 42 began recording a new album in 1984 with producer Ken Scott (fresh off success with Missing Persons), they began to stress melody over pomp. The results were encouraging enough that PolyGram took a chance with them. Then, while writing material for their next album, "we felt that since we were changing, rather than alienate our following completely, we'd give them something to remember us by. 'Thanks for your support over the last five years. Here's how you'll always remember us.'" The double live album, called *Physical Presence*, includes much of Level 42's hit singles, as well as generous solos from all the band members.

Mark King wisely applied the lessons he'd learned to the next album, beginning his songs with a strong vocal melody, rather than a clever bass riff. And the entire band played with newfound restraint. On a few songs, King's langorous bottom approaches the spareness of reggae. "If you look at the way I play bass on a ballad like 'Leaving Me Now,' it wouldn't do for me to slap away like a maniac. It doesn't want that." King's vocals also improved, and Mike Lindup adds eerie falsetto parts. Not only did "Something About You" become a hit, but the band began to receive good reviews at home, with the usually-hostile *Melody Maker* declaring the album "the best that Level 42 has made."

In addition to recording eight albums in less than six years and playing at least a hundred shows a year, Mark King has done sessions with Nik Kershaw and Midge Ure, and turned down scores of other offers. "I don't feel keen about blatting my sound all over everybody's records," he shrugs. Other extracurricular activities include producing Leisure Process and remixing Robert Palmer's "You're In My System." "Whoever produced Robert at the time wasn't overly tidy, and there were lots of burps and coughs and farts all over the tape. Of course, I thought it was great. I was whapping them all over the remix."

For all the acclaim, King claims he's "not a big fan of the bass. I wish I could take more credit when people compliment me, but I've got to say it's been really easy." Although he pays homage to a few bass legends, including Stanley Clarke, Jaco Pastorius, Jack Bruce ("the live version of 'I'm So Glad' is absolutely ridiculous"), Doug Rauch of Santana, and Alex Blake of Billy Cobham's band, King says "a player like Jan Hammer makes my hair stand on end. A synthesizer can be as individual as you are." He pauses for one of the few times this afternoon and frowns. "That sounds like an ad for underwear."

Except for one show in New York in 1983, the spring tour represents Level 42's American debut. "Please come," is King's message. "We're gonna try like hell. I'll give them money, free beer." Doesn't the world's fastest bass player feel ambiguous about embracing what he once dismissed as "mindless crap?" "There's a plus and a minus with everything," King muses. "We'd be stupid to just get up onstage, like, 'It's been six bloody years and now we're here. Christ, you're gonna pay for it.' It won't be like that. But it would be nice to meet Madonna and squeeze her bum." Ⓜ

It's not often you get twenty-five ultra-hot drummers together to discuss technique, setups and playing philosophy. But **Simmons** has managed it in a nifty little book entitled *Twenty-Five Drummers Who Electrified the World* that's a steal for $5.00. Send check or money order to Simmons Group Centre, 23917 Craftsman Rd., Calabasas, CA 91302.

Millar from page 42
corrugated, anodized aluminum screen providing live reflection about nine inches in front of her. The corrugation splashes back the sounds in different directions without any howls on the microphone, and the rear of the screen was damped down with a blanket. Immediately behind this was a mono speaker playing the backing track, and this was set out of phase with another speaker which had her vocal coming out of it quite loudly. This helped immeasurably, and the results speak—or sing—for themselves!" Ⓜ

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Most of Robin Millar's taste in recording technology is reflected in the equipment at the Power Plant, as exemplified by his favoritism for Harrison consoles: "They are sweet musical desks with a lovely clear sound to them. I love the eq—even on the cruder desks. It never takes away before it adds—when you press the eq in, you don't feel that you've stripped your sound down to a bare minimum. On many boards the eq is either very hard or it sounds like a blanket has been thrown over the sound.

"Operationally I find the Harrisons fiddly and unnecessarily complicated—one button does twenty-seven things depending on how you set up the desk—and people can be easily confused by them, as opposed to something like an SSL which really is almost completely idiot-proof—apart from the computer. But as with a favorite guitar or a favorite car or a favorite woman, the eccentricities almost become endearing after a while. If you can't kick and cuss at something every now and then, it ceases to have a personality! I'm generally less happy with the new style generation of mixing desks, and I find some of the complexities of the modern computers extremely irritating. I use an Audio Kinetics Master Mix computer on the Harrison—you put in a disk, press a button and pretty well ignore it."

Millar puts a lot of stock in his boards because that's almost all he uses: "I could take 'Smooth Operator,' put the faders up in a straight line and run off a mix, and I bet I wouldn't be asked to remix it! That's not because everything's at the same level; I'm not that good! I don't record everything so I can mix in a straight line! But it would be okay because it would just sound like you're in an ordinary room except for some reverb and a few other touches, in addition to some eq on the overall mix as it sounded a bit dull. You should never worry if you're mixing and the whole thing sounds a little dull. Just mix it together, and when you think it's right put some eq on it and fiddle around until you're got the relative frequencies that you like. Remember you can do anything you like on the eq, unless the drums are brighter than the vocals which in turn are brighter than the saxophone or whatever; then you're in trouble. It's no good making one thing ten times as bright as everything else."

The Power Plant consists of three separate studios. The first has a Harrison Series 24 36-channel desk, Studer A-18 and B-62 decks and Urei 813B monitors powered by a Studer A-68 amp. As for mini-monitors, Millar favors AR 18S's ("flat and uninteresting but true") and Yamaha NS10s. Outboard gear includes EMT 140 and Yamaha R-1000 and REV-7 reverbs, a Bel 8-second sampling delay, Drawmer noise gates, Urei and dbx compressor/limiters, Urei equalizers, an AMS phaser, a Bynaflange and a Marshall Time modulator. A Hammond organ and a Steinway with Forte MIDI Mod are on hand.

Studio two uses an SSL 4000D computer automated desk, with Otari MTR 90/2 and Studer A-820 analog decks and a Sony PCM 701 digital recorder. In addition to much of the equipment found in Studio 1 there's an AMS RMX16 echo and an AMS stereo delay, Pye compressor/limiters, a Gain Brain, a Vocal Stressor, a Scamp rack with parametric eq, Meyer noise gates, a Roland chorus/echo, an Eventide Flanger and a Yamaha DX7. Studio 3, known as the Gallery, boasts a Harrison MR3 44-channel console, a Studer A-80 deck with Dolby noise reduction and a Sony F1 to master on.

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Corea from page 84
When I sit down and put the repertoire of a project together, I use composition as a vehicle. Usually I'm composing my own music and playing it, but there are times when the combination of the musicians I'm working with and the environments I'm working in, plus my playing desires, come up with something like the Monk record.

Years and years ago when I started listening to Monk and studying his tunes, I was also into the likes of Bartok piano concerti, string quartets and orchestral music, as well as Stravinsky and Edgar Varese, and various other composers—mostly twentieth-century composers. I thought, "How interesting that Monk's music is not considered as a similarity to these composers, simply because his music is not an orchestrated music." In actual fact, it *is* an orchestrated music. If you listen to Monk's records or Wayne Shorter's records, you find this great composition, only taking the form of a different style, a jazz form, a form of improvisation.

I thought to myself, gee, we have a heritage and legacy of music here right under our nose that's not regarded in the same light as classical music, but it's actually classic. So I began to approach playing Monk's music as I would approach playing Mozart. When I sit down with Mozart, I regard the score, listen to what else has gone on before with this piece—where is the culture at with this piece? Then I come up with my way of playing these notes and my origination on it. Similarly, with the Monk trio record, I took the pieces and played them with a lot of love and reverence for the composer. I hope it sounded like Monk's music. I think it did. It didn't copy Monk's playing.

MUSICIAN: *I didn't hear many minor seconds.*

COREA: Although it didn't sound completely *un*like Monk either. I tried to keep some of the voicings and some of the angularness. That's an expansion for me, when I can find another composer's music to involve myself in as a performer.

Up until about five or six years ago, I never really thought about myself as a pianist or as a performer. My mind was always into being the composer, being the one who put the tunes together. I would think of my playing as a tool to use to realize these compositions—a composer's playing. I thought, "Gee, I'm a pianist too. Why don't I develop that?" Inspired by certain pianists and composers, I started to do that. One of the ways I did that was to get into Mozart.

MUSICIAN: *How did you land on Mozart, as opposed to Bartok or one of the more jazz-oriented composers?*

COREA: That's an interesting story, because before I did arrive there, I sort of heard classical music—the music of Beethoven and Mozart and on back—it had the sound to me of syrupy simplicity and I never got too deep into it. I didn't dislike it, it just never really grabbed me the way the modern composers or even the romantic composers did.

But an interesting thing happened to me when I involved myself in this piano festival in Munich. I had an opportunity to play with Friederich Gulda. He's very well known as a great interpreter of Beethoven, Mozart and Bach. But he's also a jazz musician. The first time I saw him play was in the early 60s, where he had a trio at Birdland. I didn't know he was a classical pianist then and I thought, "Wow, what a fantastic technique this guy has!" I'd never seen a jazz pianist with a technique like that.

So when I played this festival with Gulda, he had his solo part. He improvised for a while and then landed on a G pedal, made a dramatic pause, and played this classical music in C major. It went on for twenty minutes, three movements—fast, slow, fast. It captured me. It just took me unaware. I think it did to me what he intended for it to do to an audience in that context. There was all this improvising and freebag playing going on and an occasional bebop change. All of a sudden—*boom*—classical music, delivered with impeccable clarity and ease of rhythm. I loved the music—the orderliness of the composition, its pure beauty and simplicity.

After the concert was over, I jumped all over him and said "Gulda, what was that? That so so gorgeous." In a rather bored way, he said, "Oh, that was a Mozart piano concerto." I said "Gulda, you've got to teach me a little bit about this area of music." A month later, he sent me a mini score in the mail of Mozart's Double Piano Concerto in Eb, for two pianos and orchestra. He said, in a teacherly manner, "In eight months, you and I will play this piece at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam with Nicolaus Harnoncourt conducting the Concertgebouw Orchestra. You take the second part." I naively accepted the challenge. I thought, well, gee, Mozart is easy. It's not as hard as Bartok. I can whip this off and it will be some good experience for me. That's how I got into it. The Double Piano Concerto was my real entrance point into Mozart.

I totally fell in love with Mozart as a composer and I also found out that the music is not simple to play. It essentially kicked my ass for eight months. I arrived in Amsterdam with my knees knocking, but was taken under the loving wing of Gulda and the most incredible musician—Nicolaus Harnoncourt. They both just tried to show me what they thought and felt of Mozart in a couple of rehearsals. I took in what I could, did it and made a record which I'm very proud of.

MUSICIAN: *Having sort of delved into the heart of Mozart, do you think you've been influenced by his ideas, harmonically or structurally?*

COREA: Impossible not to have been. How it will show itself is going to be a matter for whoever is interested in comparing. While I was practicing the D Minor Concerto, which I'm playing with the Philharmonia Virtuosi, I took a break and wrote a song which I feel had a Mozart flavor. It's on the record. When you listen to "All Love," see if you can hear Mozart.

MUSICIAN: *Could we cover your background a bit? I understand you're from the humble town of Chelsea, Massachusetts. Was that anything of a musical hot spot?*

COREA: It was a musical cold spot. But my dad was a musical hot spot. He got me going. He had a band, was a musician all his life and made an atmosphere with his life and around the house that just made being a musician the thing to do. I owe a lot to him in getting me going on the road to making music.

MUSICIAN: *Were you classically trained?*

COREA: A little bit when I was eight years old, after my father had showed me some changes; I had listened to Charlie Parker and I could play "Perdido" on the piano. Then I studied with Salvatore Asualo, a Boston pianist who was real great for me at the time. He introduced me to classical music. I never did much with it until after high school; I spent a year practicing a set of classical pieces as a Juilliard entrance examination. I went to Juilliard for a year and then opted to not be in school, but go on the road. But that was the extent of formal training. Everything else was records and intense hours at home with my instrument.

MUSICIAN: *Were you pretty obsessive about playing as a kid?*

COREA: I wouldn't call it obsessive, implying something insane about it. When I was young, I felt that I easily made a pact with myself, deciding that I wanted to be a musician. I just loved playing. When I was real young, my dad used to encourage me to practice every day and I was out on the streets. But after I was nine or ten, I started to get more interested. Later on in high school, when I discovered Horace Silver records, that was a turning point. I started to spend hours transcribing Horace Silver records. From that point on, the number of hours I spent with music increased, until it was twenty-four hours a day. And it still is.

MUSICIAN: *Does that mean that you*

continued on page 97

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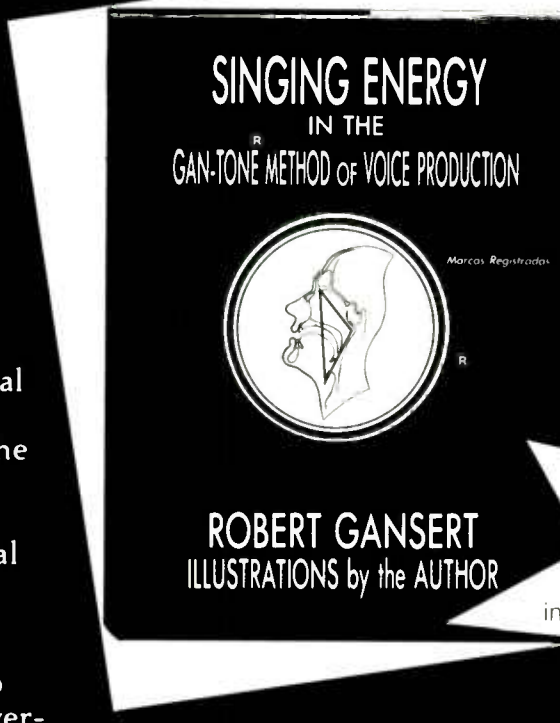

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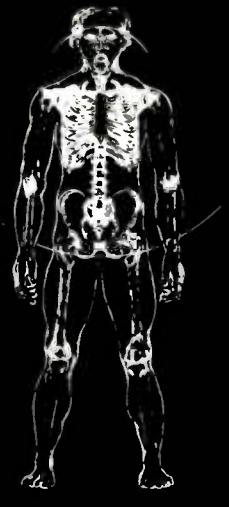

About the Author:
Robert Gansert has been a performing vocalist for over twenty years, and has been featured in numerous concerts and recordings. His work has been internationally acclaimed. He is currently a noted instructor at the Carnegie Hall studios.

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World Radio History

SHORT Rock TAKES

The Del Lords
Johnny Comes Marching Home (EMI /America)

Good instincts don't always guarantee great music, but they don't hurt, either. The Del Lords want so much to capture what rock 'n' roll means to them as fans that their own songs often force the issue. But just as the Del Lords seem about to tumble into pretension, their instincts save them, mixing grit into Neil Geraldo's polished production or underscoring the Guthrie-esque "Dream Come True" with real feeling instead of literary allusion. Which is far truer to rock's spirit in the first place.

Paul Brady
True For You (21)

Considering that he sings like Van Morrison and plays guitar like Mark Knopfler, it's hard to imagine why Paul Brady remains a cult figure at best. Maybe some of it is that his roots are in Irish traditional music, not rock (though that hardly compromises the bluesy grooves behind "Helpless Heart" or "Trouble Round The Bend"). But between the perceptive wit of the writing and the warmth and charm of his performances, it's hard to imagine any listener not becoming a fan.

Models
Out Of Mind, Out Of Sight (Geffen)

At first hearing, you may find yourself wondering why the world needs another INXS. As the Models insinuate themselves, though, doubtless you'll feel less cynical. This is a great groove band, smart enough to sync up a sequencer pulse, canny enough to rock out on top of it. Add a couple strong songs—the title tune, "Stormy Mind" and "I Hear Motion"—and the Models end up more addictive than derivative.

Ministry
Twitch (Sire)

Speaking of grooves, Ministry deals in the industrial-strength variety; muscular, monolithic megastomps that stop just short of the danceable noise dished out by Cabaret Voltaire. It's a far cry from the mannered synth-pop of *With Sympathy* (their last major-label release), but no less hookish; if anything, Alain Jourgensen has moved beyond melody to the pleasures of sound itself. Not exactly top forty, but better for it.

Laurie Anderson
Home Of The Brave (Warner Bros.)

This is very much Anderson's "rock" album. Not only are there old ideas in slicker sonic settings, but session player professionalism and ready references to the artist's burgeoning celebrity as well. Not for nothing is the most repeated lyric here "Look at me!" Next time, how about including a poster?

Let's Active
Big Plans For Everybody (IRS)

Mitch Easter's music can be annoyingly deft. It isn't that he plays too much too well, or even the overwhelming glibness with which he resurrects his Beatleisms. What really galls about this album is its sense that facility is enough to sweeten the nasty notions underlying the likes of "Fall" and "Talking To Myself." Love isn't just a matter of chord changes, y'know.

Translator
Evening Of The Harvest (415/Columbia)

This has always been a capable band—good singers, solid players—but the best songs here finally put all that craft in context. They're still a little mushbrained at times, flailing at feelings with all the subtlety of a Care Bear convention, but they usually manage to soft-sell the sentiment or rock out at the last chorus. This is a vote for the latter.

Roky Erickson
Don't Slander Me (Pink Dust)

Still crazy after all these years? Maybe so, but it takes a lot more to seem weird today than it did when the 13th Floor Elevators were the talk of Houston. The real lesson here is how much Texas psychedelia relied on basic blues. Take out the Arthur Brown overtones and add a boogie beat, and it's amazing how much Erickson recalls that Gibbons fella.... (1750 E. Holly Ave., Box 2428, El Segundo, CA 90245-1528)

The Fall
The Fall (PVC)

This five-song collection of B-sides and other oddities does more than save a few bucks off the imports, for the Fall presented here is less intimidating, though equally bracing, than the usual album version. Credit in part the novelty of hearing Mark E. Smith carry an actual melody through "Rollin' Dany," and Brix Smith's resilient pop for the rest. (3619 Kennedy Rd., So. Plainfield, NJ 07080)

Julian Lennon
The Secret Value Of Day Dreaming (Atlantic)

At least he got his father's looks.

Humpe Humpe
Humpe Humpe (Warner Bros.)

Imagine if Conny Plank had created Abba, and you've got a sense of this German girl group. They're a bit more subversive—could Bjorn and Benny ever have been so frank about sex as on "3 Of Us"?—and their sound is more heavily synthesized, but the pop appeal remains about the same. Slightly higher, if you count the Japanese joke behind "Yama-ha" as a hook.

The Art of Noise
In Visible Silence (Chrysalis)

They've got "Legs," but do they know how to use 'em? Not really; all the sampling and synth tricks seem just a better grade of sound effect this time around. Though it's nice to hear Duane Eddy again, it would've been even nicer had he had something to play.

Judas Priest
Turbo (Columbia)

An all-digital metal record, *Turbo* sounds super, but the album seems lacking in fury. Granted, there's a sort of gothic splendor to the title tune and a few others, but "Parental Guidance," Priest's protest against the PMRC, warrants only a "B" (for "boring") at best.

BY J.D. CONSIDINE

World Radio History

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If you haven't heard JBL's new generation of Studio Monitors, you haven't heard the "truth" about your sound.

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CONSEQUENCES: "Universal" monitors, those not specifically designed for a precise application or environment, invariably compromise technology, with inferior sound the result.

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CONSEQUENCES: When pushed hard, most tweeters simply fail. Transient detail blurs, and the material itself deforms and breaks down. Other materials can't take the stress, and crack under pressure.

TRUTH: The Frequency Dividing Network in each 4400 Series monitor allows optimum transitions between drivers in both amplitude and phase. The precisely calibrated reference controls let you adjust for personal preferences, room variations, and specific equalization.
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CONSEQUENCES: Conventional magnetic structures utilize non-symmetrical magnetic fields, which add significantly to distortion due to a nonlinear pull on the voice coil.

TRUTH: 4400 Series monitors also feature special low diffraction grill frame designs, which reduce time delay distortion. Extra-large voice coils and ultra-rigid cast frames result in both mechanical and thermal stability under heavy professional use.
CONSEQUENCES: For reasons of economics, monitors will often use stamped rather than cast frames, resulting in both mechanical distortion and power compression.

TRUTH: The JBL 4400 Studio Monitor Series captures the full dynamic range, extended high frequency, and precise character of your sound as no other monitors in the business. Experience the 4400 Series Studio Monitors at your JBL dealer's today.
CONSEQUENCES: You'll never know the "truth" until you do.

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World Radio History

SHORT JAZZ TAKES

L. Subramaniam
Mani & Co. (Milestone)

This brilliant violinist wasn't going to pay the rent in L.A. on the box office proceeds from South Indian classical music. So like his brother Shankar, he's made accommodations; but whereas Shankar's moved from Shakti to a kind of new wave, Subramaniam's moving towards jazz. With the help of ringers like Maynard Ferguson (well cast in the role of a Mexicali wailer), Bud Shank, Larry Coryell/Tony Williams (who show a predilection for Eastern ragas and tonal rhythms) and a very sensitive keyboardist named Mark Massey, Mani fashions a curiously Californian sense of the Southwest, with Indians (American, that is) and Spaniards hovering round the border. Subramaniam's synthesis is a lot less corny around the edges than on earlier efforts, and when he brings you past all the familiar geographical terrain to the doorstep of his own culture ("Let's Talk," "Vision In White," "Motherland"), his "neo-fusion" is mesmerizing.

Bobby Hutcherson
Color Schemes (Landmark)

An appealingly swinging cross-section of mainstream moods by one of jazz's premier mallet voices. The absence of a horn centers more attention on the rapport between Hutcherson and Mulgrew Miller, to special effect on their duet "Rosemary, Rosemary," as Hutcherson's log-drum like tonalities on marimba seem to linger in the air (quite a feat given the marimba's inherent lack of sustaining qualities). The title tune is a fantasia for Hutcherson's multi-layered tintinnabulations and Airto's subtle Brazilian colorations, while the matrix of crossing rhythms on "Second-Hand Brown" showcases the vibist's firm sense of time even when laying cunningly off the beat (amply grooved by John Heard and the delightful Mr. Billy Higgins). No surprises or revelations here—just the truth.

Dizzy Gillespie
Closer To The Source (Atlantic)

This'll probably get lost in the shuffle because jazz crits'll be ashamed to belly up to its sensual fusion of R&B and jazz for purely theological reasons, while radio programmers will miss the point. Dizzy's forgotten more about modern jazz and the trumpet than is even worth mentioning, and these slick settings for featured vocalist aren't trying to be hits—they are hits. With cats like Marcus Miller, Buddy Williams, Branford Marsalis and Hiram Bullock (and some de-vinely serpentine Stevie Wonder harmonica on "Closer To The Source" just in case you didn't get the message) that sound is built into the mix...ah, but politics. With the sly reflective wisdom of an old long distance runner, Birks haunts the silences, blurs, airbrushes his line (the affectionate Milesish nod on "Could It Be You") and retells his story in contemporary jazz/pop settings. Don't shrug it off.

Ahmad Jamal
Rossiter Road (Atlantic)

Having ventured into more ambitious realms on some recent works, Jamal returns the focus where it belongs—to the clear, colorful, dynamic strains of his own piano. The combination of Manola Badrena's Latin percussion, the full reverberant sound and firm swing of the bassist and drummer point out the vagaries and string-like quality of Jamal's touch; the contrasts of balladic and blues feeling within a single chorus (so influential on Miles' pianistic conception in the 50s along with his distinctive blocked voicings); the shifting harmonic sensitivity which extends the vamp-like structures into lovely, mysterious directions. Oh, yes, it grooves like hell.

Jane Ira Bloom/Fred Hersch
As One (JMT)

I know comparisons are odious things we crits use as frequently as II-V-I progressions, but this intimate set of duets suggests to me the poignant otherworldliness of Shorter and Zawinul on "Blackthorn Rose." Bloom's pursed, contemplative voice pirouettes lightly about Hersch's brooding impressionistic chords like a helium-filled dancer.

Kenny Burrell Trio
Live At The Village Vanguard (ARO)

When I was a geekish young man, growing up green-eyed and impressionable in Plainview of Hicksville, L.I., my blood required a high octane rating where guitarists were concerned. I was never sure whether Kenny Burrell wanted to be Johnny Smith or Charlie Christian and so I spaced on these sides. To paraphrase Mark Twain, it's remarkable how much sweeter and hotter Burrell's warm, understated lyricism has grown in a decade, what with his glowing blue tone, relaxed stealth of line and plangent swing. Buttressed here by a scorching rhythm team of Richard Davis and Roy Haynes, Burrell's subtly probing sound contrasts nicely on tunes like "Will You Still Be Mine," "Just A Sittin' And A Rockin'" and "Well You Needn't." They don't make 'em like this no more. (Street Level Trading Co., 5298 Valley Blvd., L.A. CA 90032)

Dave Grusin/Lee Ritenour/Diane Schuur/Dave Valentin
GRP Live In Session (GRP)

Nouveau quiche jazz for yuppies who've considered suicide when MOR was not enough. Pristine production values, clear MIDI-induced keyboard textures, a good rhythm section and a singer who should seriously consider an Apex training course in welding. Surprisingly enough, I found myself wafting along on this inoffensive magic carpet of adult contemporary, and can in good conscience recommend this for people more naturally inclined toward it.

Chick Corea
The Chick Corea Elektric Band (GRP)

This is a likable, bouncy record: John Patitucci and Dave Weckl are one of the best of Chick's recent rhythm sections; Carlos Rios has a taut, Holdsworthish tone and a sweet, concise lyricism. Chick's textures are provocative without being gaudy, his harmonies suggest positive aspects of dance, and his wretched excesses are limited to the sci-fi balderdash on the inner sleeve to which I can only say thank you L. Ron Hubbard, wherever you are.

BY CHIP STERN

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SHORT Indie TAKES

The Neighborhoods
...the high hard one...
(Restless Records/Enigma)

About five years ago, when every top band in Boston was signing record deals, the Neighborhoods wouldn't touch a contract that wasn't perfect. When the Boston gold mine caved in, the 'Hoods were left without offers. Suckers? Those other bands are history, and the Neighborhoods are better than ever. When David Minehan's guitar is most Ramones-like, the vocal harmonies go Lennon/McCartney. When, on "Arrogance," his voice becomes abrasive with fury, his guitar rings like a bell. The Neighborhoods understand how to balance power and melody. They're a great American rock band. (Box 2428, El Segundo, CA 90245-1528) – *Bill Flanagan*

Soul Asylum
Made To Be Broken (Twin Tone)

Now that Hüsker Dü and the Replacements have stepped into the big leagues, the Guys to Watch from the Twin Cities are Soul Asylum. *Made To Be Broken* is the gut-ripping sequel to 1984's *Say What You Will...*, and the disbanded-and-recently-reconstituted quartet toss around huge chunks of ultra-dynamic geetar noise on their second Bob Mould-produced disc. Lead vocalist/guitarist Dave Pirner bellows signature from the Hüsker songbook; elsewhere he suggests George Jones fronting the MC5, 445 Oliver Ave. South, Minneapolis MN 55405.– *Chris Morris*

Pedro Aznar
Contemplacion (Interdisc)

On his solo debut *Contemplación*, Argentinian percussionist Pedro Aznar plays everything (including idiomatically perfect bass), does a mean multi-layer wordless vocal, and even jazzes, samba-style, with former employer Pat Metheny. The two group exchanges are juicy, but the focus is on Aznar's own not-just-pop creations. These basement tapes, circa 1982-84, bear the stamp of a fresh and sometimes melancholic personality. An ever-ascending vocal chorus on "Para Acunar A Leila," and the duck-and-weave intervals of "23" are indicative of Aznar's sense of snowballing motion. – *Tom Moon*

Otis Clay
Soul Man—Live In Japan
(Rooster Blues)

The vamps journeyman soulster Clay slides into at the end of a couple tunes on this two-fer excite as hard as anything I've heard on a live album. Behind the standard gospel genuflections, Clay knows how to supercharge standards like O.V. Wright's "A Nickel And A Nail," proof that words aren't as important as emoting. Hi Record's studio band (Al Green's ex-back-up band) piledrives behind Clay; the silence between notes rings out, Clay preaches, pleads, the band shouts back. Soul ecstasy. – *Peter Watrous*

The B-People
Petrified Conditions 1979-81 (Enigma)

Now that Jesus and Mary Chain have made feedback trendy again, meet the formal no-wavers who did it earlier and better. With a singer who out-Vegases Spandau Ballet's while playing guitar solos that out-atmosphere Romeo Void's, a suitably sleazoid saxophonist and a coiled rhythm section smart punks should kill for, the B-People were clearly prophets without honor, and the most unlikely L.A. ensemble since Captain Beefheart relocated to the desert. Be the first on your block to rediscover them. (1750 East Holly Ave., Box 2428, El Segundo, CA 90245) – *Mark Rowland*

Irma Thomas
The New Rules (Rounder)

Not much new under the sun here, and thank the lord for that. Irma Thomas' first release in seven years goes a long way to reestablishing her cachet as a New Orleans soul chanteuse par excellence, and while her home-grown band kicks up a sweet fuss on the title tune and "Thinking Of You," as always it's the ballads that matter. Irma delivers "I Needed Somebody" with such elegant restraint her longing seems ever more poignant. Buy. (One Camp St., Cambridge, MA 02140) – *Mark Rowland*

Count Basie
Swingin' At The Daisy Chain (Affinity)

When big-band dinosaurs roamed the earth, none stood taller or packed a greater wallop than this 1937-38 edition of the Basie orchestra, brimming with superstars and yet, as the liner notes put it, "swinging as one man." This tasty collection includes the honeyed voice of young Helen Humes, notably on Cole Porter's "My Heart Belongs To Daddy." Groove to a surprisingly silky arrangement of "Cherokee," a hard-pumping "Honeysuckle Rose," a classic "One O'Clock Jump"...hey, don't just sit there! Order now from Street Level Trading Co., 5298 Valley Blvd., L.A., CA 90032. – *Mark Rowland*

Kahondo Style
My Heart's In Motion (Neto/N.M.D.S.)

Sandwiching short, crystalline improvisations, *My Heart's* written pieces—a Russian sing-along, a Japanese pop song, a 60s film score pop romance—drip with irony. Comprising British improvisors and one half of a Japanese sort-of avant twosome (Frank Chicken), the ensemble plays everything from bouzouki and accordion to saxophones and guitar. They're for humor and control, and they pull it off. (500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012) – *Peter Watrous*

Various Artists
Live At The Continental Club (Profile)

Twelve, count 'em, twelve Austin-based groups recorded direct to two-track one hectic day in a local institution. The music is a catholic mix of blues (the Leroi Brothers, the jazzy Sarah Brown), Tex-Mex (Joe "King" Carrasco), post-punk (the Kill, with Charlie Sexton's kid brother, and Wild Seeds), neo-country (Randy Banks, Butch Hancock) and various hyphenated stops in between. Special honors to the reunited Bubble Puppy, whose "Hot Smoke And Sassafras" is timely again. How are things in your town? – *Scott Isler*

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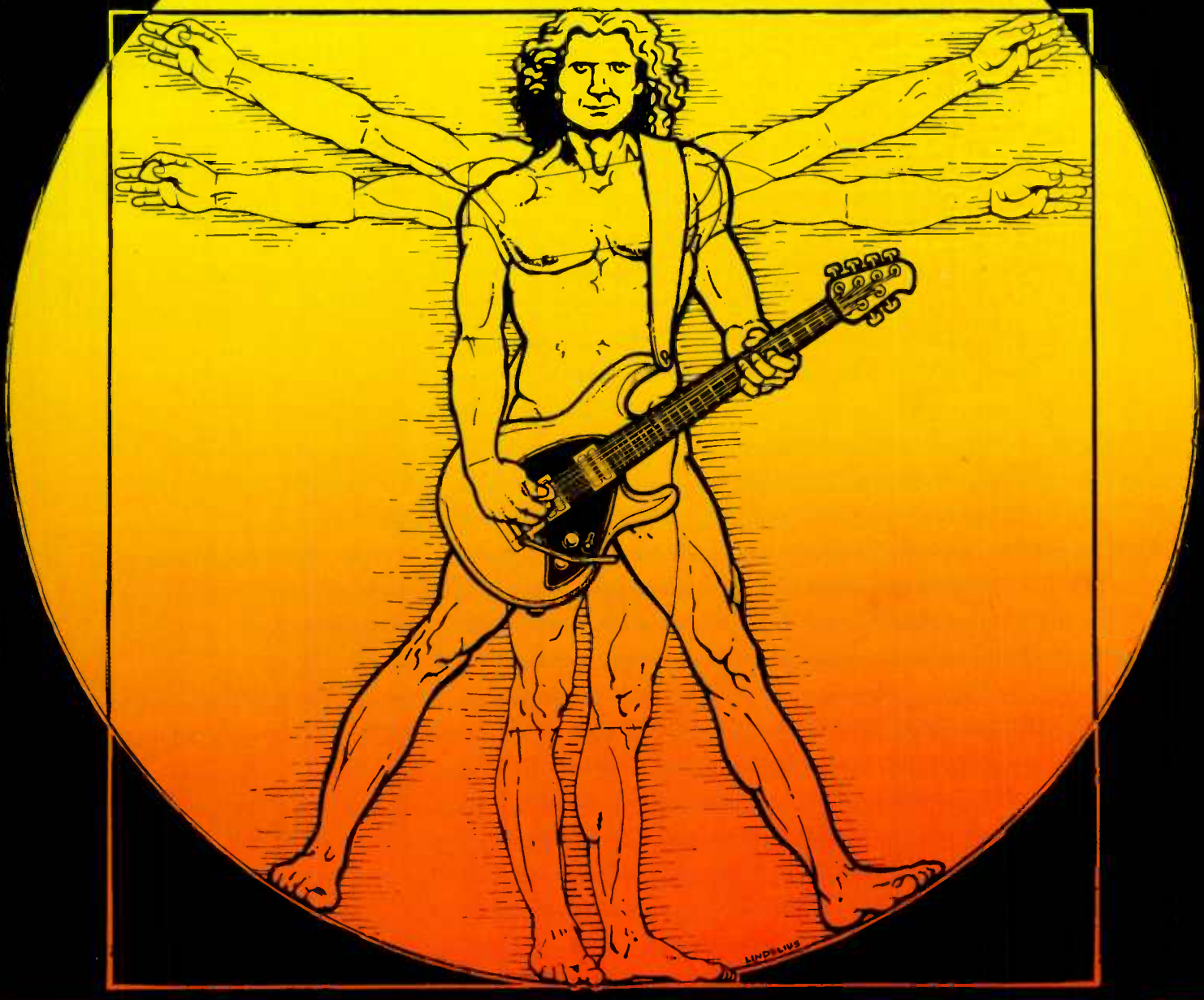

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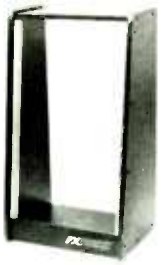

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Corea from page 88

were somewhat ostracized from the normal rounds of kid behavior?

COREA: No, I wasn't ostracized—I had good friends. But I think, in retrospect, I missed out on a few things. I don't regret it, although when I look at it again, at the age of forty-two I'm beginning to study rock 'n' roll and R&B whereas I missed that when I was young. My school friends were really into Elvis Presley and later on the Beatles came around. I completely missed both those waves of music. I mean, they were there on the radio, but I never got interested in it until much later on; when I had Return To Forever I started getting into rock 'n' roll and pop music.

Now I'm very interested in pop music and rock 'n' roll and the history of the blues especially. I'm sort of studying these musics in the way, when I was younger, I studied Charlie Parker. It's a funny turnaround. When I ride in the car, I always put on rock 'n' roll stations to see if there's anything I like. On the way over here I heard something, a tune called "Kyrie," with a group vocal thing. Sounded nice.

MUSICIAN: *I was just listening to the* Circle, Paris Concert *album. That's an amazing artifact, and quite removed from the sort of public Chick Corea. How do you reflect back on that project?*

COREA: An incredible point in my life. It was actually the first point of my stepping out of being a sideman into a leader's capacity with Dave (Holland), and putting out into the world what we felt strongly about. And it was a strange music to feel strongly about because it was so experimental. But I think we played it with so much conviction that it had a communicative point about it. The band lasted about a year and a half. There are some other records floating around with Circle, too.

MUSICIAN: *How did you make that large stylistic leap into Return To Forever?*

COREA: It was quite quickly. We got into this kind of music that we were making and it ran a cycle for me. After a year and a half, I began to want to move through the experimental part and do more composed music, to present it more to people. I think Dave and the others wanted to continue to involve themselves with free improvisation, so there was a point when we needed to go separate ways. That was the point I founded Return To Forever.

MUSICIAN: *Did you have any inkling of the impact the band might have? It seems as though RTF and a few others spearheaded the fusion movement. In hindsight, did you feel the sense of leading a pack, historically?*

COREA: I didn't at first. But then the environment was so bubbling in the concerts we were playing, and with the music other bands in the genre were playing—Mahavishnu, Weather Report and Miles—there was a sense of a renaissance of some kind happening. We did several concerts with Mahavishnu that were very exciting.

There was a moment, with Return To Forever, that I know Stanley, Lenny and Al will remember. Especially Stanley, because he and I started the group and played these gigs at the Vanguard opening up for Roy Haynes.

Then we built up the group and kept going. That was in 1970, and then in '74, there we were standing on the stage in Central Park, playing our own concert to 15,000 people. We got a tear in our eyes, because we remembered playing in the Vanguard to thirty people. It was a great trip.

I don't know, to this day, exactly what occurred, except that what's happening now amongst bands in the jazz area has a similar flair to it. The formation of Wayne's band, the reformation of John McLaughlin's band, Gil Evans put a band together; lots of bands are being formed in this genre of music. Bill Connors and DiMeola have been putting bands together. Stanley Clarke's been going around with a group. Plus younger guys, like Stanley Jordan and Wynton Marsalis, who have great groups. It feels like a good time to me. M

Seger from page 54

give it to [director] Martin Scorsese for his soundtrack for *The Color of Money*, the Tom Cruise vs. Paul Newman film sequel to *The Hustler*. But the point is that I wrote that paranoid tune about cashing it in back in 1979—*seven years ago!* And look at me now, I feel a greater sense of renewal than at any previous time in the last decade!"

So what's all this got to do with *Like A Rock*, much less the new Jackson Browne record?

"Well, both are about the loss of innocence regarding ideals and what you make of it. 'Rock' was the song I wrote in the spring of 1984, several months after the *Distance* tour ended. It was a reexamination of my unguarded days in this business, the time when no stroking mattered, and when ten years of a $7000 annual salary and a lifestyle of travelling a hundred thousand miles in a station wagon were something I just enjoyed doing instead of a conventional day gig.

"I played bump-and-grind joints, where the stripper genuinely had a goddamned horse in her act, dockside dives in New Orleans where the owner got a .357 Magnum stuck in his stomach, and an underground cave in Festus, Missouri in '72 where I fronted a band called Julia on a bill with Ted Nugent. The cave was foul, with water drip-

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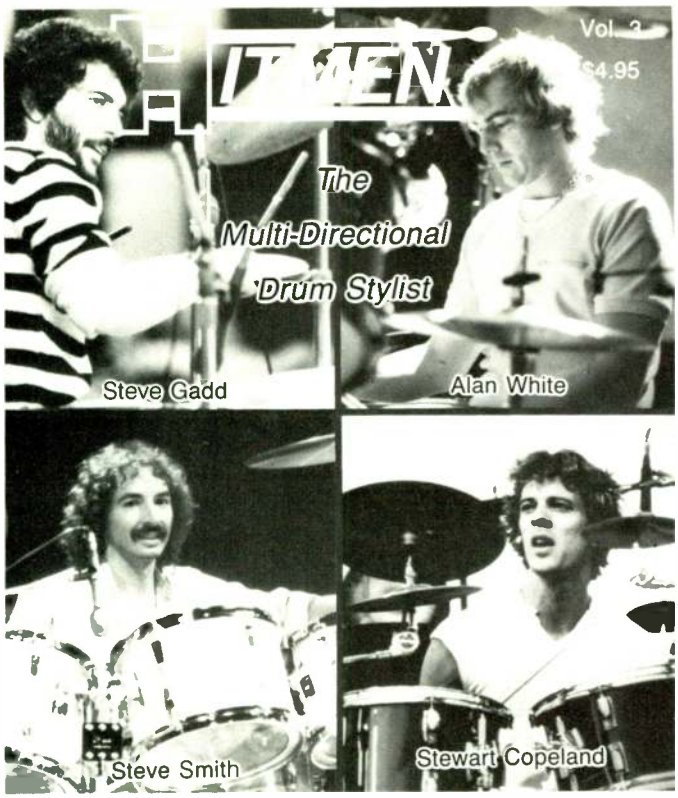

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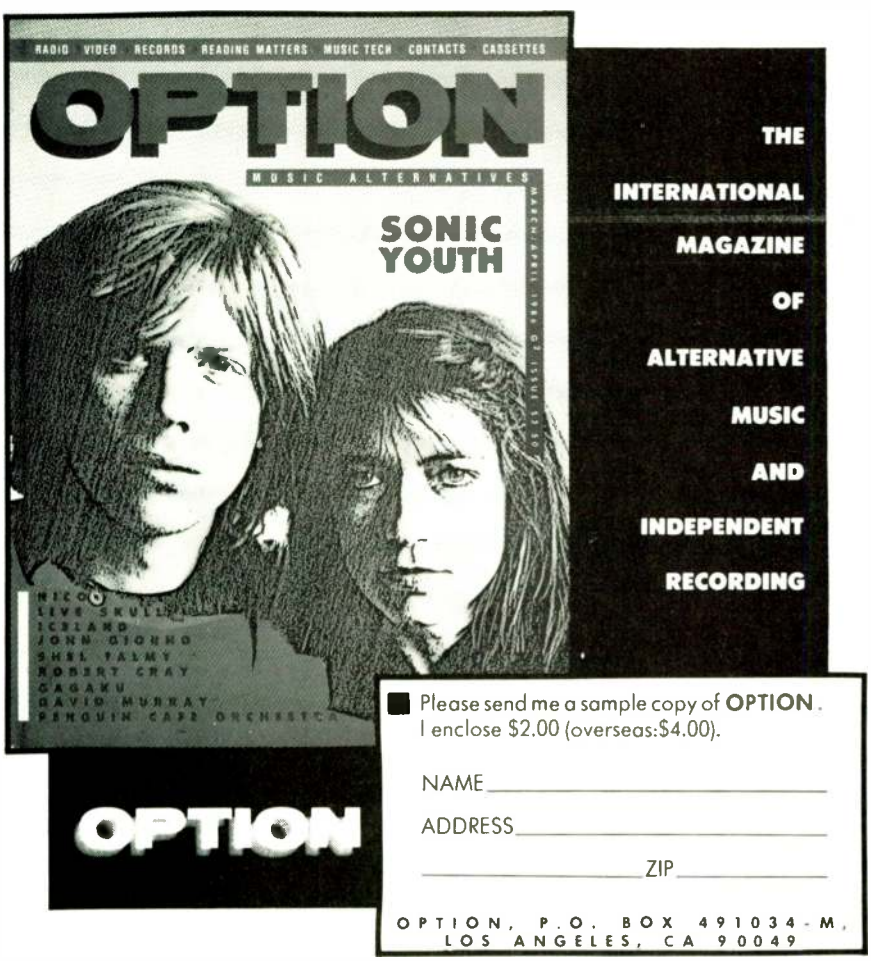

ping through the fissures shorting out the amps, and I was freaking out backstage when an infuriated Nugent walked in and barked, 'Shit or get off the pot, Seger! No crybabies allowed in rock 'n' roll!' I never got better advice.

"Unfortunately, the phoniness you more regularly get showered with colors you, or at least creates a big wariness, and in my tune I'm singing about 'the weight of all the hustlers and their schemes,' the industry types who urge you to 'stay confident' about your success when what they're really saying is 'keep working fella, and stay available to us.' The vision of that fresh and bold beginning also has a ghostly quality to now, but I can draw strength from the musical contribution I've made and the bit of influence I've had."

But what about real or perceived competition from matriculants of the Robert Seger Heartland School of Rock Knocks who have since earned their own distinguished post-graduate degrees?

"Aww, I know what you're saying," he admits as he guns the Corvette through an upward spiral of hairpin curves. "People talk about me, Springsteen, Tom Petty, Don Henley, Glenn Frey, John Mellencamp, Jackson, a few others, as being part of a family tree in a sort of modern American rock heritage. And I definitely like the idea of being a prime link, just like I enjoy giving enormous credit for my growth and approach to James Brown, Otis Redding, Mitch Ryder and most especially the master himself, Van Morrison.

"What I try to do, which is a very American thing I guess, is to dig in and try to find the truth in an idea. And if others like Bruce, Tom and John also try to do that with maybe a tiny trace of me in mind, I'm incredibly flattered. But as for right now," he asserts, punching up Browne's "Black And White" on the tape console, "nobody is playing, singing or saying what I'm driving at this very minute with more eloquence than Jackson!"

And as the gorgeously ominous track resounds through the canyons, Seger can't help but sing along robustly on his favorite portion of the plaintive lyric:

And the high ideals and the promise
That you dressed the future in
Are dancing in the embers with the wind
Time running out time running out
For the fool still asking what his life is about.

"So if you *don't* have to ask that question," Seger finishes as the song subsides, "then you've at least come to realize that, in experiences, nothing gets wasted. I'd like to think that it all goes to good use, it all has the chance of making the rest that's coming along better." M

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