The Musician Interview

Joni Mitchell
on what's wrong with pop music

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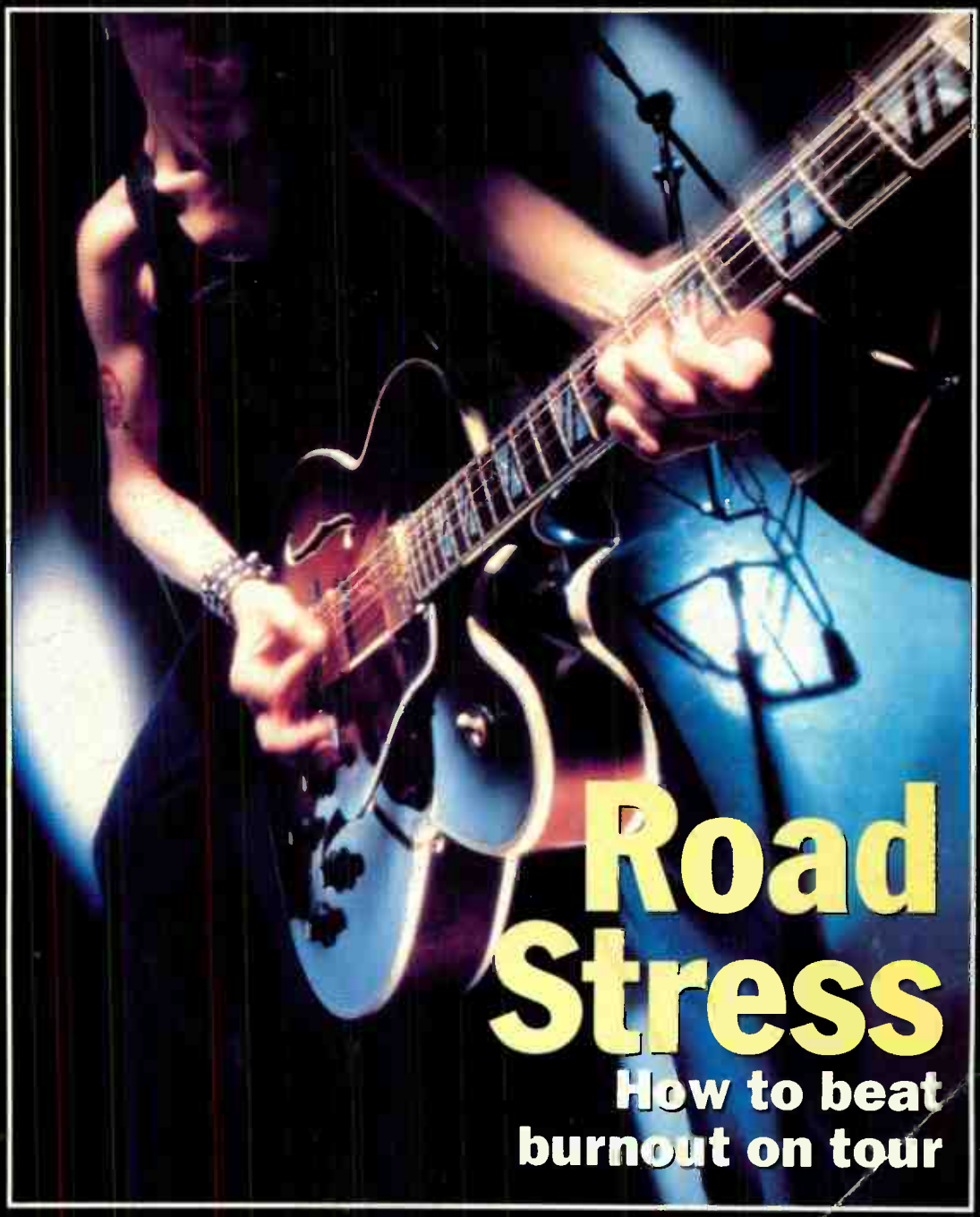

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rare Mitchell club appearance in '97 to the pallid vegetarian Morrissey to the ruminative Elvis Costello, the haunted Tori Amos, the snarly Billy Idol . . . all these creative types join hands around the Mitchell maypole.

Why this ecumenical appeal? Maybe it's because she is our muse of idiosyncrasy, doing what so many artists aspire to and so few actually achieve: originality, without compromise. For thirty years now she has been dipping into the well of her own music, coming up again and again with something fresh, something provocative, yet always something that is patently hers. Others sell their souls for a hot sample and a purloined drum loop; Mitchell picks from all the trees on the landscape, drawing juice from the fruits of jazz, world music, jungle rhythm, even artwork and literature—all of which only strengthens her unique and formidable identity.

"Those Gershwin things, they're one-mood songs. You're either happy or you're sad. My songs...are more like Shakespearean soliloquies."

On her latest album, *Taming the Tiger* (Reprise), Mitchell maintains her high standards for composition and performance while continuing to stretch her choices of subjects and her approaches to writing about them. There's no nostalgic mold on the skin of her songs; "Lead Balloon," with its empowered, confrontational stance, is as contemporary in our time as "Woodstock," "Both Sides Now," and "The Circle Game" were a lifetime ago.

Mitchell's work is an exercise in consistent excellence; her history is evidence that persistence, honesty, and good ol' talent can be enough to sustain a career throughout a lifetime. For those who would set their vision somewhere beyond the horizon of next week's gigs or next year's album release, her words—spoken over a pasta lunch one gleaming afternoon in Brentwood—have the ring of gospel.

Without pointing fingers at anybody, how do you assess the state of pop songwriting today, as opposed to the Sixties, when it seemed that the most successful writers were those who had the most distinctive styles?

If you go back and listen to that era, everybody had their own sound. If you go back even further, there was a story—I think it was about the Benny Goodman band—where the trumpet player cracked his lip, and they had to rewrite his part for clarinet the next night, and in that manner this band found its sound. So an individual sound was part of the criteria in Forties music, in Fifties music, and in Sixties music. But it isn't any longer. It's now the terrain of producers who slot artists into markets, dictating down to the degree that if it's a sampled-drum genre, you use this drum and you have it this hot in the mix, so that the bottom end of the music sounds the same from artist to artist.

I sat in a restaurant the other day where they were playing a tape from the black pop genre, and even though there was a diversity of grooves, and the colors of the drums and the artists kept changing, the volume of the lead singer and the background singers all seemed to be identical from artist to artist. I'm sure they all had different producers, but the formula was so settled in! Now, the dancer in me liked that groove, but the artist in me, when I woke up and stopped being the dancer and started to scrutinize it, was offended. You can't say that they weren't great singers, although maybe they over-embellished for my taste, or great players. But . . .

. . . *you hear the same FM Rhodes sounds again and again.*

That's it. There was a palette of four or five drum sounds, generally the same bass sound. There was one transparent strings-but-not-trying-to-simulate-strings sound—very thin, so that the voices came up with a lot of space between them.

But it was a formula. It was about conforming to something, rather than exploring new things.

Yeah. It wasn't *music*. But the way it is now, being premature in music is worse than being late, because hip lasts for a while, so the latecomers can still enjoy success. As a matter of fact, the innovator gets kissed off as weird, and then the copycats get the glory.

Well, one must have faith that innovation in music will somehow be rewarded.

But history doesn't necessarily correct things. You have to correct it yourself, even if it seems like you're arrogant or blowing your own horn. If nobody's picking up on it, you've got to do it yourself. Basically, I was kissed off after *Court and Spark*. I cut my players some slack on *Hissing of Summer Lawns*, and they reverted to jazz harmony. Without me harmonizing them, they applied some jazz licks and chords against my harmonies. A lot of people didn't like that. Prince fell in love with it, but generally that was the beginning of my fall from grace.

Didn't that free you to say, "Screw

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To read more of Robert L. Doerschuk's interview with Joni Mitchell, visit Musician Online at www.musicianmag.com.

it, I'm gonna do what I want"?

I always did! But knowing that you're out of vogue, yeah, I chose to take that as further liberty.

LYRICS

What about lyrics? How do you rate pop music as a vehicle for creativity in writing words?

Well, folk music is still the best format for telling a story, with long lines that give you more space. I stopped being a folk singer in 1965, when I began writing my own songs, but I've kept that from the folk tradition. When Dylan came along—[*imitates long, incomprehensible Dylanesque whine*]—you can make quite a statement in that much space, as opposed to [*sings Gershwin fragment*] "Embrace me, my sweet embraceable you." The melody is fragmented into little sound bites in that kind of pop music. You can't tell a story with those pauses. Those Gershwin things, they're one-mood songs. You're either happy or you're sad. On my songs, singing has to be sacrificed for drama, because they're more like Shakespearean soliloquies. You've got to go through intricate emotional changes, sometimes within one sentence. You have dramatic options, as to whether you want to overstate or understate. At this particular time in my life, I have no stomach for melodrama, so the vocals on my new album are, for the most part, way understated. A song like "No Apologies," for instance, has a heavy text, and if you get all emotionally engaged, like I did on my earlier work, it sounds like you're slapping the wrists of boys, you know what I mean?

"[Contemporary sample-based music] is the art of the channel-changers, where its intent is as chopped-up as the minds that perhaps it appeals to."

You recorded some Gershwin songs for the new Herbie Hancock album, with Wayne Shorter and Stevie Wonder. How was it to shift to that classic style of pop lyrics?

It wasn't that challenging. You know, "I'm waiting for my man to come"—that's like, I'm alone and sad, or I'm alone and happy. You can just float and sing. It's like, I was thinking about Ella [Fitzgerald] and Billie [Holiday]: Ella had perfect pitch and time, but she didn't shade lyrics very often. Her dramatic approach was monochromatic, whereas Billie had *so* much warmth! She could sing the heaviest, darkest thing with so much heart, and lay into every word, and emphasize the right ones, and really dig the text out so that you knew what she was singing about. Ella was more like Mariah Carey: You'd just follow the sheen of the line.

Of course, she sang a lot of scat too.

And I love that. It's a pleasure when I do it, because I get to be a singer instead of an actress.

There's one song, "Stay in Touch," on the new album where the lyrics fit the structure in the folkish tradition you've described, but at the bridge suddenly there's this torrent of words, as if there's a lot to say in a limited space. It's like a selective placement of urgency.

Because of the melody! If you're working with melody first and words afterwards, you'll have to get the gist, and then you've got to contemplate it, and then you've got all these chords! It's a complex puzzle because your shading comes in first: From here to here it'll hold an ironic statement, but over here it lightens up and you almost have to tell a joke.

A lot of your recent work seems driven by political or social issues, as opposed to the more personal concerns of your early years.

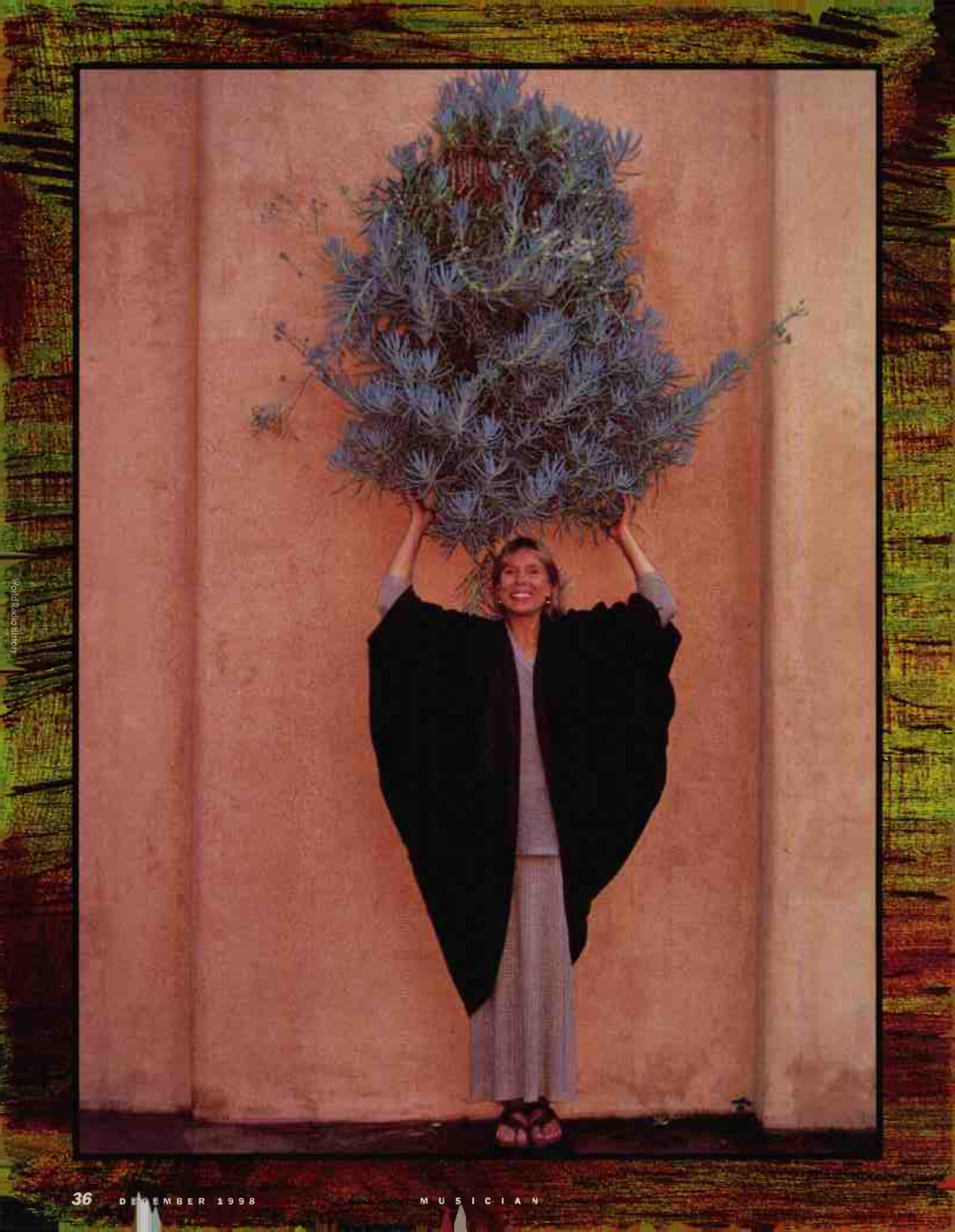
I was working through my psychological trauma [*laughs*]. See, the way I view my role is, I'm a witness before the backdrop of the times. And it's a compelling backdrop. I mean, "Javex bottles on the tide/I took my dream down by the sea" [from "The Banquet"]. That's an ironic image, these plastic bottles lapping up in your dream. You don't even have to comment on it; it makes its own comment. It's like a telling detail in a film.

When you're delivering issue-driven lyrics that you write almost as a list of concerns, how do you handle that as a singer?

They're never complete lists, though.

Well, when you've got lyrics like "lawyers and loan sharks are laying America to waste" as the refrain of the chorus in "No Apologies," doesn't that pose an interpretive challenge?

That was a funny one. That melody, played at a slightly brighter tempo, is like King Sunny Adé: It's full of joy. I had no intention for the lyrics to go that way, and I was pissed when they did. It's just that I got really disturbed by the news when this general, given so many chances by the Japanese to do the right thing, refused. This lack of honor and nobility in the armed forces, the degeneration into barbarism, the fall of the noble warrior—it opened a lot of questions. Every culture is corrupt, but here was a man of high position, representing America in a foreign place, and all he could say was, "The soldiers erred in judgment. They should have hired a hooker." The fact that he didn't think it was disgraceful to gang-bang a civilian girl and didn't see any reason to hang his head, that's a new element since World War II.



You did something unusual in that song, by ending it with a repetition of the first line.

"The general offered no apologies."

Right. You ended it as you began it, but you varied the melody by letting it drop down from the tonic. Were you aware of doing that as you wrote it?

No, but I can think of two films that I love that do that: *Amacord* begins and ends with "In the season of the flying fluff," and *Time of the Gypsies*, which borrowed a lot from Fellini, begins and ends at a wedding. So again I've taken visual ideas and worked them into songs.

SAMPLING

The new album has some other unusual twists, including the non-musical samples you use on the opening cut, "Harlem in Havana."

The thing that's sampled there, mixed into the intro, is kids on a roller coaster. But I placed them in a musical way. See, that song came from a sound on the Roland VG-8 ["virtual reality" guitar] that intrigued me—a glassy little marimba/hammered percussion sound. I had to play it in standard tuning, so I came up with the main guitar part in the way it starts, which starts African, and then the choruses have a very Argentinean harmony, almost a tango pattern. Brian [Blades, drummer] and I jammed it up. There was no text in sight, but when we listened back to it I dubbed it "Zulu Tango"—that was its title as an instrumental. We lived with that for a while, until I had a memory flashback from early teenhood of *Harlem in Havana*, which was a carnival revue that came to my home town. That was my introduction to live black music, and as you stood listening to it, the Caterpillar engine was behind you; it had its own generator. The double Ferris wheel was adjacent to it; *it* had its own generator. Next to that was the Bullet; *it* had its own generator. So the sonic roar in that corner, and the screams of people, and everybody shouting to be heard over it—that was something I wanted to capture. So the first two songs on the album are tone poems: The music illustrates the memory.

Is there a danger that using something like a sample might encourage you to rely more on effect than on lyric to bring a song to visual life?

I wouldn't use it capriciously. I just go on my own enthusiasm and ideas. When I got this roller-coaster stuff, it was sampled from a perspective where it comes screaming by, then there was a Doppler effect: As the voices subsided, the latter part of the wheels hits across these wooden struts. The tempo of that sample matched beautifully into the tone of Brian's drums. The combination made sixteenth-notes, so it was a musical decision as well as just dropping something in for effect.

You were using a sample to augment rather than to disrupt the flow of the music—an approach that differs from a lot of what we hear in sample-driven discs today.

But it's not the idea of doing that that's appalling. In fact, I was one of the first to do it, with the Burundi drummers [on "The Jungle Line"], when you had to *labor* to do it because the technology wasn't there to take something off a record and build on top of it. I made that loop by copying and gluing and copying and gluing. It was a lot of work. But that loop contains the rhythmic seeds of Bo Diddley and just about every rock & roll groove there was. This was the origin of rock & roll: a Burundi war dance. So I've experienced the temptation to do that, purely out of love.

Maybe [contemporary sampling artists] are doing it purely out of love. I think it depends on the spirit with which it's entered into. If it's just *snip, snip*, nice picture, it'll sound like that in ten or fifteen years. It's kind of Dada, but that wasn't really an important art movement; it was more of a reactionary thing. It's the art of channel-changers, where its intent is as chopped-up as the minds that perhaps it appeals to.

That raises the question of innovating within a certain style. Obviously you've been through innumerable changes in your music, yet from your first recorded note to what you're doing today, it's clearly all your music. The way you process your guitar sound today doesn't make it any less your guitar sound than it was years ago.

"When people hear [my] acoustic guitar, it's like: Folk singer. Rhythm guitar. They don't *hear* Duke Ellington block-chord orchestral movement."

Yeah, but finally you can hear the voicings! I kept thinking, when I got this guitar [the Roland VG-8], it would be like Georgia O'Keefe's flowers: She said, "I'm gonna paint 'em big, because if I paint 'em small, no one will notice." The problem is, when people hear acoustic guitar, it's like: Folk singer. Rhythm guitar. They don't *hear* the Duke Ellington block-chord orchestral movement that's going on with it.

It's clearly a guitar, though. You're not emulating a big band.

Mitchell in 1979 with Pat Metheny, Michael Brecker and Pastorius (from left).

But at least the voicings are balanced and even. Mixers still have a tendency to bring the voice up and shove the guitar in the back and tweak it down. This sound is such that you can build a wall with it, and even if I'm singing feathery I'll still go through it. The point is, this is the orchestra. Don't put the orchestra in the other room, please!

You overdubbed a lot of your very early acoustic guitar parts.

I remember [David] Crosby saying to me on the first album, "Do you think you could play that twice?" I remember actually feeling nigh on to smug, because that whole album is doubled! I couldn't do that now: I don't play like that anymore, it's completely foreign to me. But you couldn't tell that I was doubling until the second album: I heard this one tiny little flam and I realized, "Oh, *that's* how I got that guitar so fat [*laughs*]!" Then in *Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm* [1988], I played the guitar part 24 times in trying to see how many times I could double it before they could take one part out and I wouldn't notice it. Well, at 24 I could still hear it, but there was no point in smothering another reel. Most of that album is either sixteen guitar parts as written or, on some tracks, 24. That gives it the fatness. Nothing really gave it to me like that instrument, which is a modified Strat with some chorus and reverb on it.

Though your early overdubbing functioned as a chorus effect would function today.

Well, you know, Roland has always been good to me. I went to [Westwood Music's] Fred Walecki back then and said, "Is there a gizmo yet that'll make one guitar sound like two?" I had to play with Jaco [Pastorius], so I was looking for a fatter sound to balance him out. He ran it by a Roland representative; they didn't have it, but they came back five months later with the prototype of the Jazz Chorus and gave it to me. That came specifically from my need.

JACO

Jaco's fretless bass quickly became an integral part of your sound.

Oh, well, Jaco was irresistible. See, at that time, I didn't understand the bass. You noticed I didn't play with bass players for years, right? Every bass player who'd come in would disappoint me. I'd tell them to do this and that, and I'd end up offending them, so I'd just leave it off. Bass players didn't change their strings back then; dead strings were the vogue. And the bass sound was always back in the mix, although, with the female ear, I was always digging to hear it. Everybody would say, "That's not the point. The bass is just supposed to anchor the song." But I couldn't understand why I could always have choices with high-end harmony—I could stack voices up and up and up until I had no air there—but I couldn't have choices on the bottom. Maybe this is because I'm an uneducated musician, but I refused to accept that the bass merely played the root of the chord, even though I was told this again and again and again. I mean, I would ask bass players to play something, and they'd say, "No!" "Well, why not?" "It's not the root of the chord!" "Okay, what's the root of the chord?" They'd play it, and I'd say, "That sounds boring. Couldn't you just play this other note?" *"I won't play it!"*

It's almost like, what do you need the bass for, if all it does is play the root?

Yeah! People would say, "Man, I played with James Brown, and this little lady wants to tell me how to play my axe!" I was also trying to get this sound from them, which was the sound of the juke box at the Avenue A swimming pool as heard from two blocks away. I loved that sound: The high end would be eaten off, and the bass would just come booming at you. The problem was, by the time we hit the Sixties, I couldn't hear the bottom end on records. People would go, "Great bass player!" And I'd be concentrating,

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it up, and I couldn't hear it. But that was the you could not get any of those guys to buck it.

isn't just a question of tone or prominence in the mix—so brought the idea of a legato bass line into your music.

hat's what I wanted it to do. I wanted it to be capable of choring *and* counter-melody. I could always say, "*This* has to be anchored." If you anchor it from here all the way up to here, it's connect-the-dots, and that's gonna drive me crazy because it doesn't allow the music to float.

How did you connect with Jaco?

This frustrated bass player who wouldn't do what I was asking him to do finally snarled at me and said, "There's a kid who plays with Bob Hope and Phyllis Diller in Florida. He's really weird. *You* would probably like him." Then he walked out. So I sent for Jaco, sight unseen. I thought, okay, if he's weird, maybe he's the guy who will do this. Now, I don't know whether he had already found his way into Weather Report, but I did bring him to town before anyone knew of him, on the basis that he was weird and I liked him [*laughs*]. It was a long shot, but I figured I'd take him in rather than battle with one more bass player.

"When I was seven, I loved minor chords. It's like how can Mondrian paint with just three colors? Primary colors are like three major chords—and that's all you're gonna use for the rest of your life?"

What did you think when he showed up?

He kind of blew my mind. He was incorrigible and difficult to deal with, but I was so excited that someone was doing what I had been asking people to do. Here was a kindred person, thinking as I did about the bottom end. Only Jaco—and Stevie Wonder, with his Moog bass—were doing that odd mix of pop grease and melodic fills that I wanted to hear.

THE HARMONIC LANGUAGE

You've always played in alternate guitar tunings. How did your very distinctive harmonic language evolve?

When I began to play folk music, I got a Pete Seeger *How to Play* record and I tried to do "Cotten picking"—picking in the style of Elizabeth Cotten. The easiest thing in the world, but I could not learn it! My thumb would not navigate between the fifth and sixth strings; instead, it laid down in its own funny way on the sixth, which is part of why my style is so eccentric. It's like my thumbs are Latin and my other three fingers are black [*laughs*]. So I gave up, and my own thing grew from that: a slow left hand and a very articulate right hand. And I always loved wide chords. The chords I use are outside of the harmonic movement of jazz too, so some jazzers get offended by them and tell me they're wrong.

The intriguing question is whether the chords you play were already in your head as a child, or whether you developed them as an outgrowth of not knowing standard tuning.

It's more like I developed my own system for viewing music, so you see patterns and layers in a more painterly way. Chords, to me, depict emotion. Now, I've had a really strange life, okay? A lot of childhood disease, a lot of confrontation with death. So when I was seven, I loved minor chords. Loved 'em! And you don't get minors right away. They don't start you out with minor chords, but I could hardly wait to get to them. It's kind of like Mondrian: I always thought, how can he paint with just three colors? How boring! Primary colors are like three major chords, and that's all you're gonna use for the rest of your life?

The point is to be adventurous and exploratory in your work, at least before the critics dis—or lionize—you to the point of doing damage.

Well, I had my playground damage early by having the wrong threads in grades three and four. By the time I was in grades seven and eight, I was a trend-setter. I manipulated fashion all through my teens. Then by the time I was eighteen, I was sick of it. After that I had enough strength that you couldn't get to me on whether I was hip or not. I knew that was an advantage in this game, because everything is manipulated by hip.

I met a DJ from a small town in the east who confessed to me that he loved my music, but somebody had caught him playing me during one of my unhip periods. They said, "You're still listening to that old stuff?" And he replied by yanking my CD out! He had been manipulated by hip. It's just like I hear DJs saying now, "I know we're supposed to hate Sheryl Crow, but I love this record."

They're even beginning by exonerating themselves. "I know we're supposed to hate this" means that they're hip enough to know.

But who says we're supposed to hate anything? I've heard a lot of X'ers say, "I know we're supposed to." I hear that phrase a lot, and I think, who's the dictator? That's the question I would ask these days.

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RULES

To enter the Musician magazine "Best Unsigned Band Competition" send a completed entry form (or photocopy), or print band/artist name, contact name, name/address of each musician in band, as well as daytime phone number on a 3x5 card, along with a 2-song cassette of original material and a $19.95 non-refundable processing fee (check/money order payable to Musician magazine; U.S. funds only) to Musician/BUB, 49 Music Square West, Nashville, TN, 37203. All entries must be postmarked no later than 12/31/98. Musician not responsible for late, lost, misdirected or illegible entries. Eligible entrants must be amateur/professional musicians not currently signed to a recording contract by an established, independent or major label. Artists retain all rights to their material; however, tapes cannot be returned. If selected as a winner, artists are responsible for final mix and photographs appearing on "Best of the B.U.B.'s" CD. Inclusion on "Best of the B.U.B.'s" CD does not demonstrate any contractual relationship with Atlantic Records. "Best of the B.U.B.'s" CD is not for sale and will not generate any royalties. Six (6) winners will each receive extended coverage in Musician magazine upon completion of the competition, inclusion on Musician magazine's "Best of the Unsigned Bands" CD, one (1) Musician's Guide to Touring and Promotion ($10.95 a.r.v.) and one (1) Musician magazine T-shirt ($15.00 a.r.v.). One Grand Prize winner chosen from the six final winners will receive a prize package consisting of: one (1) custom Drum Workshop drum set (includes: 18x24" Bass Drum, 8x14"Snare Drum, 10x14"Rack Tom, 16x16" Floor Tom, 16x18" Floor Tom, 9300 Snare Drum Stand, 9100 Throne, 5002AH Delta Double Bass Drum Pedal, 5500TH Delta Hi-Hat, 9999 Single Tom/Cymbal Stand, 3x9700 Straight/Boom Cymbal Stands, UFIP Bionic Series 14" Hi-Hats, 16 and 18" Crash Cymbals) ($9,987 a.r.v.); a choice of one (1) Stump Preacher Guitar from among the following: Stumpy V6, Teardrop V6, Straight 6 ($950-$1,250 a.r.v.); one (1) Shure Beta Series microphone of each of the following: Beta 52 dynamic kick drum mic, Beta 56 supercardioid swivel mount instrument microphone, Beta 57A supercardioid dynamic vocal and instrumental mic, Beta 58A supercardioid dynamic vocal mic, Beta 87A supercardioid condenser vocal mic ($1,837.50 a.r.v.) ; a 1,000 CD duplication package from Healey Disc (includes: two panel/4 page color insert and tray card -4/1(color on the outside of booklet, black and white on inside) separations, full graphic setup, CD's with two color silkscreen and jewel cases with shrinkwrap.) The winner will be responsible for the shipping and handling of the final product ($2,164 a.r.v.). Open to all unsigned artists except employees (and their families) of Musician magazine, VNU USA, IBPI Communications Inc., Stump Preacher Guitars, Shure, Healey Disc, Atlantic Records, Drum Workshop and their respective affiliated entities, dealers, agencies, officers, directors, agents, independent contractors and licensees. This contest is subject to all federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and is void where prohibited or restricted by law. No substitution/transfer of prizes permitted except by the sponsor(s). Taxes are the sole responsibility of the winner(s). The Grand Prize winner must execute Release, Grant of Rights, and Affidavit of Eligibility and Prize Acceptance forms prior to receipt of prize(s). Noncompliance/return of prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and alternate selection. All judges' decisions are final. All winners will be announced in Musician magazine's '99 issue(s).

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ADVENT IN CONSIGNM

How to get your CD into record stores—and make sure that it sells once it's there.

BY DAVID JOHN FARINELLA

"We knew we had a band that was good enough," says Brian Bullen, manager of the Negro Problem. "If people could hear it, they would buy it." The question that Bullen—and nearly every other aspiring musical outfit that has spent many late nights recording and mixing an album's worth of material—kept asking was just how he was supposed to get the music out there. Sure, they sold their discs at shows around their L.A. home base. Sure, they sold it direct to people on their mailing list. But there were thousands of other potential fans who had never seen the band live or even heard of them.

Bullen, at least, has found an answer: Sell the release through consignment deals at such L.A. independent record stores as Aron's and Rhino, as well as at Tower Records and the

Illustrations: Brad Black

Virgin Megastore on Sunset Boulevard.

What is consignment? From a band's point of view, it involves delivering a number of CDs to a retailer for the store to sell at a set price. Stores may ask for as many as ten discs and as few as three for an unknown band. Although in most consignment arrangements the band stipulates how much it would like to make off of each CD sale, it's generally up to the retailer to set the price as well as the number of units they will carry and for how long.

This may sound like an unusual opportunity—your albums in Tower, Blockbuster, or wherever—but in fact chains and independent record stores look to the consignment rack as a service to the local music community. It's not rocket science, store managers say, to get that album you're so proud of into their stores. "We try to carry as much as possible in the interest of having more local stuff and encouraging more people to get their recordings out there," says Dana Belson, music manager for Borders Books and Music in Emeryville, California. "We offer it as a service because we know it can be really difficult for struggling bands to try and break in, especially with the corporate structure, and so the company tries to encourage us to help these bands get around it."

Selling the discs once they're in these stores is a bit more difficult. The key to making sure your discs aren't dust storage racks at the local store boils down to one simple philosophy, says Bullen: "You've almost got to be like a musical evangelist.

"IF YOU WANT TO DO WELL, YOU HAVE TO CONVERT PEOPLE. YOU HAVE TO BE LIKE THE JIMMY SWAGGART OF INDIE ROCK."

—BRIAN BULLEN, THE NEGRO PROBLEM

If you want to do well at this, you have to convert people. You have to be like the Jimmy Swaggart of indie rock."

Part of that conversion, Bullen believes, involves getting your name out there and working as hard as you can. "The reason this band did well was that everybody involved worked his butt off," he explains. Not only did they play shows around Los Angeles—they played in stores, they had people poster the town, and they were proactive in giving the Negro Problem's debut album, *Post-Minstrel Syndrome*, to people working in the stores.

Tina Schlieske, who made her name around Minneapolis before getting signed to Sire with her band the B-Sides, agrees.

Over a three-year period, her group sold more than 35,000 copies of three independent releases through a combination of word of mouth and hard work. As she explains it, there wasn't any other way to do it: "I knew from the start that I would be the type of artist that wasn't going to prick up the industry's ears by the way of one-hit wonders and everything, but if I stuck in there long enough I would get their attention. In the meantime, I figured I wasn't going to wait around. I wanted to do it on my own."

Before establishing her own label, Movement Records, Schlieske decided to find out all she could about the music business from the inside out. So she worked jobs at record stores and at Navarre Distribution's Minneapolis offices. "I wanted to know how records were distributed, how they were bought and sold, and all that," she says. "It was very exciting. I knew the knowledge I was obtaining I could use to my benefit if and when I got signed, which was the ultimate goal. Then when I did get signed I was wishing that I'd just stuck to it and done the Ani DiFranco thing."

With her own label and the "van-selling type of distribution," as she describes it, Schlieske was able to supply her music where it was in demand. Using consignment deals and small direct sales, she found local record stores that were willing to carry her album when the band was traveling through to play a show. "Record stores are pretty cool," she says. "They'll take just about anything. So we'd make sure we had extra time when we'd go through their town, and we'd make a stop at the record store and give them their order and a bunch of stuff, like posters. Any time we went through town again, we made sure they knew we were playing at those clubs, either for them to come down or, if they wanted, to place another order."

Though Bullen didn't have to travel throughout the Midwest to carry the Negro Problem's message, he did drive all around Los Angeles, delivering the band's release. Along with handing out the standard promotional kit (bio, photo, and clips), Bullen believes that bands or their managers should try to get the store's manager or indie buyer excited about the music itself. "The more excited the person at the store is about your band, the more records you're going to sell," he points out. "I used to work in record retail. People came in all the time and said, 'What's good?' You're right there, and you can tell them about the record. Also, the more excited they get, maybe they'll let you put up a little display in the store, maybe they'll let you put up a little box on the counter, and you'll sell more records than if it's just sitting in the bin. You have to go meet people, you gotta get 'em on your side, because if they like it they'll fight for you and be your best sales people. Major labels can't even pay people to be that enthusiastic. People love to help the underdog."

More than just mobilizing managers and buyers, Bullen had to come up with a few innovative twists to get the band's albums in major retail outlets. He managed to get the

manager of the Virgin Megastore in L.A. interested in setting up a listening-post display of a box set of 7" singles that the Negro Problem had released prior to *Post-Minstrel Syndrome*. The problem was that there was no way to put that kind of a presentation together with vinyl releases. What to do? The band members put on their thinking caps, found a friend with a CD burner, and transferred the music to disc. "It sold a lot of records," Bullen says. "Bands just need to be creative. Once they get their music into the stores, they need to think of ways to make sure it sells. Even if you sell five copies a week, which doesn't sound like much, and you're on consignment, they're going to take notice and think, 'Wow, what's going on here?' If people notice things selling, you can use that as ammo to get into other stores."

Bullen points out that creating other marketing opportunities doesn't have to be a high-tech proposition. In fact, at the independent record store Aron's, Bullen built a counter-top display with a couple of colors and a bit of desktop publishing wizardry. The laminated sheet that he put behind the box of CDs includes a color photo of the album cover, a color shot of the band, and a couple of album reviews. "That cost maybe five bucks to put together," Bullen explains. "If it helps sell three more records, you've more than broken even. Things like that—making posters, having some T-shirts made up, working the press, developing a mailing list—can help. You really have to bang people over the head with that kind of stuff, at least in L.A. It's a very media-savvy town."

Though the point-of-purchase presentation is important, unsigned Oakland-based R&B singer Erica Berry believes that a professional-looking package is just as critical. "If [store] managers can see that your product is professional and it sounds good, they're more willing to take a chance. It's just like anything else in life: You can't come in looking sloppy. You've got to put a lot of love and care into what you do. If you look like a major label, if you act like a major label, people will think, 'Oh, this looks like it's gonna be a success. Let me buy this before it gets hot.'"

"BILLBOARDS ARE A LOT CHEAPER THAN PEOPLE THINK. THEY'RE ALMOST CHEAPER THAN PRINT."
—TINA SCHLIESKE, THE B-SIDES

Clairdee, another Oakland artist, agrees that presentation is half the battle. "I've been doing this a long time, and I'm very much a business woman as well as an artist, and I know that presentation is everything. If you don't have a package that looks good, people aren't bound to listen to it or even open it."

Along with presentation, Berry and Clairdee believe that in-store performances have stimulated significantly their consignment sales. "We focused on a grass-roots level," says Berry. "We knew that in order to succeed, we either had to have a lot of money or a lot of hard work. We determined that the best thing to do is for people to see me live. The only way for people to see me live and buy the album at the same time was to do a lot of in-stores. So we focused on doing live performances at night, just to get new customers to see me."

Some up-and-coming artists will augment their in-store presentations with approaches to advertising that are more traditional yet innovative at the same time. Bullen bought print ads in both the *L.A. Weekly* and *BAM*. Schlieske took the more extreme step of renting a billboard in the uptown section of Minneapolis. "Actually, billboards are a lot cheaper than people think. They're almost cheaper than print," she says. "We would put the release date or the album cover on this billboard, and it would be up there for a month. You'd get a month's worth of advertising for under a grand."

The key for any band publicity, just as with any other product, is copy that's easy to read and clear, punchy graphics. But that alone isn't enough: It's just as important to capture that elusive quality that's reflected in major-label products. In addition to looking good, your introduction to the public has to look professional.

The Negro Problem, Tina and the B-Sides, Erica Berry, and Clairdee, different as they are in their music and the audiences to which they cater, have a couple of important traits in common: Each began building their careers through consignment deals with record stores, and each received a call from a major label because of the buzz they created on their own. In fact, Schlieske believes that her indie success was the critical ingredient in winning attention from Sire.

"What it did was get our name out there everywhere," she notes. "Eventually the ears of A&R heard it in different companies. Then it was such an extra great bonus to be able to tell a label, 'Yeah, by

word of mouth in our own little area, we sold 45,000 units.' That makes them go, 'Oh, my God!' They love that."

Bullen believes that consignment success proves that a band is on a roll that could lead to hit records and money in the bank. "It kind of makes it so that even if they'd like to ignore you, they almost can't," he insists. "Also, if you have something out and it starts to do well, then the *L.A. Times* is going to do an article about you. At a certain point they have to, because you will have become some kind of a phenomenon, like TNP."

Though Bullen used consignment as a building block to selling over five thousand copies of *Post-Minstrel Syndrome* with the Negro Problem, he believes that bands should plan to move beyond consignment as quickly as possible. "You should use it as a tool to get into a store, and then you've got to work your butt off to sell those records. Once you've proven yourself, don't do consignment anymore, because it's a pain—although it's a *worthwhile* pain, because you need it in the beginning to get in the store.

"I hate to say this," he continues, "but sometimes consignment is like a loss leader. At that point, it's more important to get it into the store and have people able to buy it, rather than to think of it as a money-making venture. Really, if you're on that level, you're promoting your band. You'll never get rich selling records on consignment, but it'll make it possible for you to get your band exposure and to give your potential customers a place where they can buy what you do."

For her own albums on her own Movement label, Schlieske survived and emerged from the consignment world by working from the assumption that Movement *is* a major label. "I pretended I was Warner Bros. and that no one was unreachable as far as having the right people master my album, the right people manufacture my album, and to have my product look as much like a real record release as it could," she explains. The key was to "read and research as much as possible, and to not be afraid to really dig in deep to every aspect of it. One thing I've found is that labels don't know everything. I thought they did, but in fact they don't at all. The more you know about your career and how you can distribute your own CDs and manufacture them and print the artwork, the more successful you'll be."

In fact, she adds, to a certain extent those early consignment days were the most satisfying of her career to date. "It's fun to have control over your career and the immediate feeling of when you sell a copy and you put that money right back into your company, or you put it into your band and you're able to drive your career. We were like a steamroller when we had our albums and such a great following in Minneapolis."

Morcheeba lines up (L to R): Paul Godfrey, Skye Edwards and Ross Godfrey.

CALM & GET IT

With a new album and old school work ethic, Morcheeba tell how they make their garden grow.

BY MICHAEL GELFAND

Is your band looking to become the "next big thing?" If so, your best bet—aside from regularly praying to your own personal god—would be to look at other bands that have met with the success that you're hoping to have. You don't want to follow in the tracks of all of those other supposed "next big things" who arrived with a flash and then disappeared without a trace a few weeks after releasing their long-awaited-but-disappointing follow-up record. No, you're too smart for that. You want to have a career—one just like Morcheeba's.

Hailed as "the it band" in 1995 on the eve of releasing *Who Can You Trust?* (their debut for China Records/Sire), Morcheeba backed up all the hype that had been slathered on them by delivering an enticing collection of songs built on ingenious sample loops, trip-hop beats, insidious instrumental hooks and cool-jazz vocals. Perceived as the flag-bearers for a new generation of electronic-based bands, vocalist Skye Edwards and brothers Paul [samples and programming] and Ross [guitars/keyboards] Godfrey were courted by artists like David Byrne and George Michael, praised by the international music press, and championed by clubgoers worldwide, and for good reason: They

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had clearly mined into a sound that people were hungry for.

Recognizing the need to capitalize on their growing popularity, Morcheeba returned home from an aggressive touring schedule during the winter of 1995 to immediately begin work on a new record, and the results paid off. That record—*Big Calm*—celebrates the band's penchant for trip-hop, reggae, pop, and soul, but a new infusion of blues and country reveals a band whose artistic vision has expanded to accommodate their desire to couple mass appeal with eclectic self-satisfaction.

So how do these self-professed stoners manage to stay so focused on the prize? To find out, I caught up with the band while they took "a day off" from a six-month tour of the U.S. and Europe to perform on *Late Night With Conan O'Brien*.

How have you grown as a band from the last record to this record?

Paul: I've gotten a lot fatter.

Skye: I have too.

Paul: We introduced chords on this record—chord changes—and the harmonic structure has become more uplifting. It isn't so monotonous.

Was that a conscious decision?

Paul: We got bored with playing the same chord at the same tempo for a whole song.

Ross: We'll write songs where the chord stays the same but the bass line moves and puts a different reflection on the chord that's above it. So then you've got more ability to make it sound nice in an easier way rather than trying to add loads more sounds. Then to arrange the strings on top of that gives it a real nice counter-melody and structure as far as the embellishments go. It makes us sound like we're a proper band rather than just [hearing] these beats and dubby sounds going on in a linear fashion.

Also, we don't use sequencers live, so there's not such a hypnotic quality. Using a lot of chord changes helps you write fatter melodies that float across the music better. The changes are riffs that go across two bars—they're not specific chords. You'll have a bass line and then the chords over the top of it. It's more about riffs and the movement underneath the vocals rather than changing just for the sake of it.

Is this something you consciously decided to do on this record? Did you sit down and say, "We need to do this?"

Ross: The songs with chord changes on the first album are generally the better songs. It was kind of a process of elimination.

Paul: But the *real* reason is, on the first record, I was basically controlling how the music was going. I'd come from a hip-hop background, with loops and that kind of thing, and for the mood that I wanted to create for the first record, I didn't want chord changes; any chord changes sounded too happy or cheesy to me. I wanted it to be more dark and Wu-Tang-like. But as soon as we had done that, we were suddenly bored by that sound. That record was finished and we immediately started writing this record, *Big Calm*, and we just wanted to blow away the competition song-wise, so it meant Ross studying more classic songs.

Ross: People like the Rolling Stones and Neil Young. Cat Stevens' album *Mona Bone Jakon* (A&M)—that was a big influence.

Paul: I took my hands off on this record and let musicians do more of their thing, and it became more musical and more organic, rather than just sitting there like a Fascist with a sampler.

Ross: The next record, we're talking about making a real straight soul record that sounds like Al Green, you know, and it's gonna be straight Booker T and the MGs with a scratch DJ and Skye singing. That's a reaction against the really diverse way we've done this last record. And it comes naturally to us—if we thought about getting the soul of Marvin Gaye with beats of EPMD and the guitar of Steve Cropper and the vocals of Nina Simone, it wouldn't come clean. We just do it and the performances are true to the corners of the musical genre we're trying to create.

Paul: We're just finding a balance. We're such a young band, both in that we've only been together for three years, and also age-wise we're very young, so we're pushing all our boundaries like moody little toddlers finding out what we can get away with and what we can't get away with.

Paul just mentioned competition a minute ago. As a band, are you very aware of the success other acts are having? Has it changed the way you've approached touring and recording?

"I took my hands off and [the music] became more organic. I let musicians do more of their thing, rather than just sitting there like a Fascist with a sampler."

Ross: No, not really. We came back out straight-away after touring *Who Can You Trust?* It was a quick turnaround, and I think that was because we needed to keep our heads above water. To become successful, we had to just keep working at it. It was something in the back of our minds. Most of the time it was just because we loved doing the music and wanted to get it out quickly, but now I think we've set ourselves up with a good

foundation, so we're not really worried about competing.

How's the tour working out?

Ross: We got a new keyboard player and we only had two days of rehearsals before the world tour, and he'd never played any of the songs before, which is quite fun. But it's pretty simple music as far as it goes; they're all at the same tempo and all in A minor. You can't really stray far off that.

Why are all your songs in A minor?

Ross: Because I don't know any other chords.

Paul: It's the *sweetest* of all chords.

Ross: It kind of depends. A lot of melodies that we write in the E pentatonic scale are really nicely framed within Skye's best sounding range, as far as A minor goes. We can do it in F sharp and it's a similar kind of effect [*laughter from bandmates*]. What? It's true, because it's the relative minor, and it's the scale . . .

Paul: It's all foreign to me. Skye just sounds good in those keys.

Skye: Whatever.

Have you always written that way?

Ross: You mean always played in A minor? It's the easiest key on the keyboard. It's all the white notes [*laughs*].

Paul: No, he used to always play in E because it's the easiest to play guitar, but we've been writing on keyboards more. He's just lazy, that's all it is.

What's changed over the past year to help you further develop as a band?

Paul: Emotionally it's changed. Lyrically, it was all about my journey from feeling like shit to feeling good, so I'm at about midpoint now. Things are definitely much better and I've found more of a balance, but the first record was very much in the unbalance. It's become a more uplifting sound.

Skye: We've been places as well. We hadn't been anywhere before. We were out in America for three months last year, and it helped to experience a bit of life.

Ross: To see the audiences, as well.

Does it come through in the music as it is on the record, or does it come through more in your live presentation on stage.

Ross: It comes through in both ways, really. Our first record was very American-sounding, and we specifically did that because most of our musical references are American, with hip-hop, blues, soul, country, and folk.

Paul: Which is funny because all the Americans are trying to sound European right now.

Ross: So that's another thing that we're reacting against, as far as making quality records that are pop in the general term, but at the same time, they're credible records, and it's very easy to be weird—like Tricky, who can just make a lo-fi record in two hours and say, 'This is arty.' He makes a good record and then he just makes an absolute shit one.

Paul: That's subjective, though.

Ross: Yeah, I guess so, but there doesn't seem to be much quality control. We're always trying to put our records on the table for everyone to see, and it doesn't mean that we compromise how we write and record. It means that we're trying to communicate to a huge, wide-ranging, multi-generational, multi-racial audience, and to do that we have to make our music very accessible.

How do you balance that out internally between the three of you? You can't all be on the same page all the time.

Ross: No, we're all reading different books, in fact, and that's why it works.

Skye: But they're all good books.

Ross: We're from such different ends of the rainbow that it just flows together when we work.

Paul: Different ends of the rainbow . . . mmm.

Ross: And then there's this big arch of colorful light that is our music.

Paul: It's almost like, *it was raining, and now the sun has come out* [*laughter*].

Ross: Because the musical differences between us are so big, it's very easy to collaborate. If we were closer, we'd be stepping on each other's toes. We're all completely in our own corners, and the music that comes out isn't forced and flows along nicely.

How do you work that out? What's a productive rehearsal like?

Paul: I come up with some concepts and then it's up to these fellas to create the mood within that concept.

Can you point to a specific song on Big Calm *where this applies?*

Paul: On "Over and Over," I had this

idea of it sounding like a West Coast record, so then we go acoustic with some harmonies, and accomplish our goal. And then we have another record [the title track] where we work with the rapper from New Kingdom, Jason [Furlow], and its gonna be like an Electric Ladyland track—contemporary—with heavy drums and rapping and stuff.

So you take it from that concept and the three of you get together and say, "This is what I'm thinking?"

Ross: Sometimes it's like a relay race. Paul might have done a guide beat with a few loops, and I'll go into our studio with Pete [Norris], who's our coproducer, and I'll lay down some guitars, and I'll be off, and Paul will come in and sample a load of guitar bits, and put them together, and I'll come back the next night and do the bass track, and Skye comes down and puts down some melodies that eventually fit around the lyrical ideas. We don't all necessarily sit down and say, 'We're gonna write this song and it's gonna be like this.' It just develops in a very natural way over a period of about a week or two.

When we recorded the album, we did one song a day, or even two different songs in a day and developed them at the same pace. There's never a case where one song's finished and the rest of the album is in some semi-recorded state. It all comes forward at the same pace because it's more interesting to keep flipping songs—it keeps your passion for each song alive and you don't get sick of listening to the same song all week.

Are any particular songs off this record more difficult to bring to a live stage than the rest?

Ross: "Shoulder Holster" is almost impossible because of the sheer amount of electronic sounds. We only have one synth on the road with us, and then there's the sitar. It's one of those songs where if I was to bring a load of samplers and MIDI equipment, then that would be the perfect song to get the crowd to rock, but because we've taken the Booker T and the MGs with a scratch DJ approach, it's just really hard to do. So we don't do it, and we do the more sort of folk-rock side of what we do.

Do you have trouble dealing with the fact that your live shows don't sound the way you're used to hearing the music in your head?

Ross: No, it's all about energy, really. And the audience is generally into the visual aspect of things.

Skye: If we wanted it to sound the same, we could just stick on a DAT and then mime to it.

Paul: It's better live than on record.

Ross: The amount of bands that I've seen that are just so static onstage because they're relying on their equipment and the technology more than their ability to actually entertain an audience makes us not want to go anywhere near that road—unless we get to the point where we can have a big production tour where we can take [trucks] of stuff on the road, we might end up incorporating some of that.

Paul: Never any sequencing though. When you get shit like that off your mind, it gives you the freedom to go to that spiritual place where you just meditate on the music alone and let yourself go. As soon as you start having anxieties at all, it all starts to fall apart.

That's almost a contradiction when you say that you want to make sure you're entertaining the crowd but at the same time you want to get meditative.

Paul: But I think you do entertain a crowd when you're in that place because, it's like watching David Byrne perform live. He'll just go crazy and let himself go, and that's really the most entertaining anyone could be. He's just in that place and he's going for it.

So you've never considered breathing fire onstage?

Ross: Actually, we sit backstage before we go on and have a couple of drinks, glasses of wine, and a spliff, and Paul shouts, "*What are we gonna do?*" really loud, and then everyone screams, "*We're gonna fucking chill 'em out*," in unison. That's generally the sort of paradox that our live shows entail, that kind of energetic mellowness.

You have to get excited before you go onstage because so many of the songs are so mellow, so it's good to get out a lot of the aggression before you get on there so that when you get on stage, you just do what you do.

NO MO
Road
Stress

Illustration: Kurt Lightner

How to save your band from the ravages of tour burnout.

BY DAVID WEISS

Someday, when people can teleport from place to place, going on tour won't be so tough. Instead of stuffing a van with five musicians, a sound person, a tour manager, twenty hamburger wrappers, and an unlimited supply of methane to get to the gig, everyone will simply zap themselves to the stage. When that day comes, musicians, like other traveling salesmen, will breathe a huge sigh of relief. Until then, we're stuck with the road, a blacktopped promise of opportunity spiked with hidden hazards.

Touring can be dangerous, depressing, financially ruinous, and creatively stifling. But working musicians, managers, road crew, and other experts suggest that if you plan against the pitfalls, you can emerge from a grueling tour not only in one piece, but one step ahead.

At the center of every tour, of course, are the shows themselves. But whether you're playing in clubs, theaters, or arenas, the stage has its own set of traps. To John Hipple, Ph.D., senior staff counselor and associate professor of education at the North Texas State University, most concert venues are about as healthy as a mine shaft. "Musicians work in a hazardous environment," he points out. "A club has smoke, alcohol, maybe other drugs. Because of all the tension, stress, and boredom, you can end up doing unhealthy things."

Fighting the temptation to overeat, overdrink,

and/or overdrug often requires more than will power: Bands need to make rules. Hipple points to groups that mandate a strict diet of orange juice and bananas onstage, or spring water instead of beer. One successful band bars alcohol consumption until the beginning of the last set. "They're full-time, making a living," Hipple says. "If you can't [follow their rules], you can't play with them."

Too many martinis or too much marijuana is one problem, but so is too many milkshakes. Rod Marsden, tour coordinator for Manage This!, a New York firm that represents such groups as Cibo Matto and Guided by Voices, sees fast food as a potentially ruinous habit for touring musicians. "Eating well is a big thing, but baby bands don't start out paying attention to that," he says. "They don't have the time or the money. In the long run, though, quick and convenient food isn't helping them."

Besides keeping fast and fatty foods off the menu, there are plenty of ways to maintain your body—and your head as well. Robert Cray, a two-time Grammy winner who spends up to two hundred days on the road each year, puts on his athletic shoes specifically to battle mental fatigue. "Boredom is the biggest problem [with touring]," he warns. "You do a lot of waiting around. Exercise relieves the boredom—getting on a treadmill, walking around the town. Get a change of scenery, because hotel rooms can drive you nuts."

Finding the energy to do that is another matter. After all, the basic business of a band—setting up, doing soundcheck, playing the gig, tearing down, then driving three hundred miles to the next show—isn't exactly a day at the beach. And on top of that, to remain competitive in a crowded field, today's bands often have to take on a raft of promotional activities as well.

"The agent and manager have to be very mindful of the exhaustion or burnout factor due to overwhelming scheduling," says Carole Kinzel, a booking agent at Creative Artists Agency (CAA) with a client list that includes Tina Turner, Björk, and Radiohead. "Bands aren't just doing concerts: They're promoting, doing interviews and in-store appearances, going to radio stations, and doing meet-and-greets. I saw one artist do so many interviews that when it came time for him to go onstage, he had laryngitis! You have to allow enough time off to do all these activities and still be able to perform a successful concert."

"Experienced bands will tell you from the get-go, 'If I'll be on the road for three weeks, I'll need one off, or three days on and one off, or I can't do press on the show day to save my voice,'" adds Rod Marsden. "Once you've got that time off, try to think of as many fun things to do on the road as possible—little diversions, the odd museum. That way you

can enjoy the city you're in."

But there's a dark side to days off, during which precious savings are spent rather than scavenged. Is this an argument for not taking any vacation time on the road? Not at all—in fact, most bands can't afford *not* to have some down time. If you're booking a tour for your act, you've got to honestly assess your physical limits and plan accordingly. If a manager or an agent is handling these responsibilities, you need to clearly communicate your boundaries to them.

Besides finding empty rooms within a safe driving distance of each other, tour routing is a complex craft. "There are nuances you normally wouldn't think about," Kinzel says. "Be aware of things like *Monday Night Football*: Who's playing who? In what city? What places are good to play on Thanksgiving, and what places are ill-advised? We have to know the touring schedules of every artist in the country: Who's in town the same day or week that could attract a similar audience?"

Also, be aware of how careless routing can affect fragile psyches. "Don't make a band drive through the same city four times and not play it," advises Debbie Gordon, who has served as road manager for Natalie Merchant and God Street Wine, among others. "If you're doing that, you're not a happy person, because you're not progressing. You're just passing through Cincinnati four times."

Clearing the Air

If clear communication is important in a tour's planning phase, then it's critical once the trip begins. "Touring looks so neat, but it's a hell of a lot more stressful than people on the outside think," notes John Hipple. "You're only as good as your last performance, and you're *always* auditioning. What if you do a pretty big gig, and you blow it? There goes your press, which causes infighting and tension. People start to get snappy, and there's no time or space apart from each other. That's why bands have to be able to talk to each other as they go along. But this is where musicians have a problem, because often it's 'Don't talk, just shut up and play.' Bands spend all that time to make their music ready, but they're not spending the time necessary to make a team or a family."

Hipple sees parallels between touring bands and corporations, where planning, re-planning, and post-execution debriefing give people a regularly scheduled opportunity to air ideas and concerns. "It's talk and more talk," he says. "Talk about the itinerary, who leads the soundcheck, who loads in and

who loads out. Take the time to debrief crises. Divvy up responsibilities, so that one person isn't more overloaded than the others—otherwise, people fill their bag full of shit and never talk about it, and then it gets dumped in one fell swoop."

By adopting a positive frame of mind, a band can use close quarters and rigorous schedule of touring to improve their musicianship and their music. For New York's Thin Lizard Dawn, long tours present an opportunity to polish their craft. "When you're playing together constantly, you don't have the distractions of your life, and the band gets great," observes TLD guitarist Howie Statland. "You have the chance to get inside each other's heads a lot more, and understand each other."

By sticking together, Statland's band grew more focused as their tours went on. They also learned that when trouble inevitably surfaces, the appropriate responses are: (1) don't panic; and (2) find the silver lining. The problem, in their case, was a string of sparsely-attended gigs. "We like to think that we play like every night is our last night," Statland says. "But when you're on the road and there's a series of dates with no one there, you lose sight of that. Even though that's a drag, it's important for a band to go through these experiences together; it makes the band tighter. Another good thing is the people that you *do* play for are the loyal fans who are going to support your band over the long haul."

To Hipple, this upbeat response to problems is more than just good business, it's the key to good mental health. "A lot of musicians are in an extremely competitive, perfectionist, mistake-driven environment," he explains. "It's not, 'What did I do well?' but 'What can I do better?' If you're focusing on your mistakes, then you never look back on your strengths. I always like to ask, what is a true, reasonable expectation for yourself? As a band and a player, if you have a reasonably positive base, it's harder to get anxious, uptight, and depressed."

Romance vs. the Road

But even if the life on the road can bring your band closer together, it can totally trash your love life. Protracted time apart, opportunities for infidelities, and sheer physical distance are more than enough to turn the experience of touring into an emotional wrecking ball. "I believe that the number of failed relationships as a result of touring is statistically higher than fifty percent," Rod Marsden says. "You have to be very honest with your mate so they understand what's involved in the career you've chosen."

To Hipple, the answer, again, is communication. "I really like to have significant others actively involved in the tour," he says. "If husbands, wives, boyfriends, and girlfriends know the tour schedule, there are no surprises." Example: Rather than rely on cell phones, whose long distance charges can wipe out whatever profit you're able to salvage from your gigs, share itineraries with your loved one; having phone numbers of all hotels and nightly stops not only saves on cellular charges, it also eliminates a lot of the guesswork that can cause friction between couples.

"In an ideal situation, your mate is someone who also has travel in their lives," says Marsden, "so that they're not constantly the person who's left home alone, with the vacuum of your absence. But if you're on a tour that has the potential of running for a full year, and you have to pay to fly someone in, then that's what you do."

If a spouse, girlfriend, or boyfriend does join the trip in midstream, keep in mind that they are there to have a stabilizing, rather than a disruptive, effect. "Treat significant others with respect," Gordon urges. "Acknowledge that they're useful people. When I meet a musician's girlfriend, I make sure that I'm very respectful. Don't treat her like she's useless or a bimbo, just because she's taking a vacation from her job to hang out with her boyfriend."

The Supporting Cast

The road crew, ultimately, can make or break a tour. "They are the controlling piece in the picture," Marsden says. "Band members are the key pieces, but you don't have much control over their selection; it's everyone else [on a tour] you get to pick. Tour managers are the iron men and women of the road. They have to have a high pain threshold and a very high breaking point."

Hipple points out that the same qualities that make a good musician are essential for the road crew as well. Look for people with great technical skill, a willingness to set goals, flexibility, creativity, good communication and problem-solving skills, the ability to stay calm under fire, and a strong work ethic. That's a tall order, but it's the job of management and/or the agency to find people who meet these qualifications. If a band doesn't have that luxury, then it should network to find a dependable and available friend who at least has some technical experience.

Once the support is in place, be sure to treat all the personnel like equals. Or, as Gordon puts it, "don't be an asshole to your crew. They can make you sound worse than you've ever sounded, and the lighting guy can make you look horrible." While the applause for a great performance will go to the band, it's up to the musicians to give strokes to the more anonymous crew. Road personnel might not even want a moment in the spotlight, but like everyone else they do appreciate getting a compliment for a job well done.

All this seems like a lot to handle. How do you keep the crew on your side, stay healthy, enjoy a happy love life, get along with your colleagues in the band—and still find time to make music? It all boils down to keeping a realistic perspective. "Touring becomes its own world," Gordon observes. "People can get really stressed out on things that, if they took half a step back, wouldn't matter. Nobody's going to die if soundcheck is half an hour late, or the food sucks and you have to go get a meal."

Without that perspective, it's easy to forget the reason for logging all those miles in the first place: that magic time when you plug in and perform. "It's like, what's all this other stuff?" says Robert Cray. "I just want to play my guitar!"

Contributors: David Weiss plays drums with the New York-based group Uvula. His articles have appeared in Alternative Press, Drum!, *and* Musician.

The ABCs of TM

How to protect your band's good name—with a trademark.

BY MARK CHEUVRONT AND ANDREA I. BRAUER

"Godzilla" was a stage name used by a large lizard named Eddie Dreeb. But when Dreeb neglected to properly register and protect the name, a Japanese auto manufacturer claimed legal rights. Dreeb was enjoined from using it as the title of his new blockbuster film, so the name of the movie was hastily switched from *Godzilla* to *Edward Dreeb*. But it flopped, and so did the lizard's career. He moved to a seedy Hollywood residence hotel near the corner of Vine and Afton and took to drink. His scales rotted off and he died. Such is the power of a name.

Okay, we made this story up. But we did it to make two points: A performer's name is an asset of incalculable value. And that name—and its value—can be lost forever if not properly protected.

The music industry is unique in that its most valuable product, the music, is often marketed under the name of a band. The band's name is nothing more than a made-up title that's shared by a group of individual artists. But as a band's fortunes rise, so does the importance of keeping control of that name, because without it they've lost their identity as a band—and possibly their career. So artists have a vital interest in making sure that can't happen.

In the eyes of the law, the name of a band is no different than other commercial trade names such as "Toyota," "Taco Bell," or "The Hollywood Afton Apartments." For this reason, a band has the same right—and need—to protect their trade name as would any successful commercial operation. Fortunately, a limited degree of protection *is* conferred by simply using that name at performances, in promotional material, or on CD labels. Such use will provide a band with

"common law rights" to the name *in the geographic area* where they normally do business.

The key word here is limited. Under the common law, a band in New York, for example, has exclusive rights to that name in New York. But a band in California can choose the same name and have exclusive rights in California, assuming no one in California has heard of the New York band. The problem begins when both bands want to play in Ohio. Here is where the common law breaks down and trademark law, specifically trademark registration, takes over.

Why Register?

If you never want to succeed beyond playing your local bar, you can probably stop reading here. Assuming that you form a band to gain fame and fortune on a national or even international level, however, your band's name is best protected by registering it as a trademark with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (the PTO, in insider parlance). Logos which depict the band's name may also be registered as trademarks.

"Registering a band name involves filling out forms and other loathsome activities. Is it worth it? The short answer is yes."

As registering the name with the PTO involves filling out government forms, paying filing fees and other loathsome activities, one tends to naturally ask: "Is it worth it?" The short answer is yes. The fundamental advantage of formal registration of a band's name is that it gains the band "statutory" rights in addition to the common law rights discussed above.

Statutory rights are rights set forth in a statute that somebody sat down and drafted to solve an immediate and well-defined problem. Common law rights, in contrast, arise haphazardly over the course of centuries as courts ponder whatever case happens to wander in through the front door. The methodical process of drafting a statute results in more clearly defined rights and, more importantly, a set of specific remedies designed to ensure that those rights can be enforced in a rational manner.

The most valuable right conferred by proper registration of your name is the exclusive right to use that name in all "unclaimed territory." A band, or any other business, "claims territory" by using a name in a given area in their day to day business. So "claimed territory" is the area where the band has legitimately used the name. This is the area where the common law will probably give you exclusive rights to the name. "Unclaimed territory" is everywhere else in the country. The common law gives you *no rights* to use your name in these areas. But proper registration of the name guarantees your band exclusive use of your name in both the claimed and unclaimed territories.

There are other good reasons for trademark registration. For example, while attorney fees are normally not available to collect under the common law, statutory rights do allow the winning party in a lawsuit to collect attorney's fees from the other side. This is a tremendous benefit, as lawsuits to stop an infringement of your name can be extremely expensive and might otherwise result in nothing more tangible than a court order telling the other party to stop using it, leaving you in debt. The statute will at least make the guilty party pay your attorney's bill.

The statutory rights conferred by registration also allow you to collect what are known as "statutory damages." Under the statute, you are presumed to be damaged by the simple wrongful use of your name. You *may* collect a sum of money in compensation. Under the common law, you must prove that you actually lost money because of the unauthorized use of your name. This can be a difficult task, as courts rarely allow you to "speculate" what you "probably would have made" if your name had not been misappropriated. But those pure souls with validly registered trademarks can quickly obtain a court order telling somebody to immediately cease using their name, and for very little money. And while an opposing party has the right to challenge that court order by means of a formal trial, this rarely occurs in the real world. If a band legally owns its name, injunctive orders almost always stop the offending conduct.

A Tale of Two Chihuahuas

Let's concoct another story to show how this works. Suppose that on January 1, 1998, a band formed in the Hollywood area and chose the name "Afton Chihuahuas." Unbeknownst to the Los Angeles group, at precisely the same instant, another band formed in New York and also took the name Afton Chihuahuas. Neither band registers the name with the PTO. Both bands develop a strong local following. But for a time, geographic distance prevents conflict and the bands don't know about each other.

Now suppose the New York Afton Chihuahuas get a record deal, and their CD receives national airplay. Management plans a nationwide promotional tour, showers the band with perks, and begins to talk about a truly lucrative long-term contract. Almost as an afterthought, the management registers the Afton Chihuahua name with the PTO. After a typically long bureaucratic delay, the trademark registration issues.

At this point the Hollywood Chihuahuas surface and note that *they* have been using the Afton Chihuahua name in Southern California territory for quite some time. Based on this use, they claim common-law rights. Their name is their livelihood and they are unwilling to give it up.

To prevent further encroachment by the Hollywood Chihuahuas, the record company enjoins them from using the name anywhere but the southern California territory. The record company can do this because, when the trademark issued, the label received the rights to the Chihuahua name in all unclaimed territories—*i.e.*, everywhere except Southern California.

Having screwed up the Hollywood Chihuahuas, the record

Having screwed up the Hollywood Chihuahuas, the record company also re-evaluates its position toward the New York Chihuahuas. Because the New York Chihuahuas cannot play or sell records in Southern California, they have lost their value to the record label. The company decides to drop them. The New York Chihuahuas move to a seedy hotel in Queens, take to drink, and die.

But because the Hollywood Afton Chihuahuas are enjoined from using their name outside of southern California, and because they plan to make it big someday, the name is no longer valuable to them either. They decide to change their name to "Lizard Breath."

Lizard Breath plans to tour the Midwest, but this time the band decides to take steps to protect their name before they use it. The band tries to register "Lizard Breath" with the PTO before they play their first gig.

Oops: The PTO rejects the application, noting that a name cannot be registered until it is (1) actually in use, and (2) has been used in interstate commerce—*i.e.*, in business conducted in more than one state.

Remember, at this point, the band has not yet used its "new" name, and for patent and trademark purposes that name might not be "used in interstate commerce" until the band plays its first live engagement out of state. (Out-of-state live performances always count for "interstate commerce." Mailing promotional material across state lines, or radio airplay in other states *might* satisfy the requirement, but there appears to be no direct case on point.)

Anyway, Lizard Breath cleverly circumvents this rejection by filing an Intent to Use Application (ITU) with the PTO. The Intent to Use Application is exactly what it sounds like—a type of application that states you intend to use the name at some future date. Once the name is actually used, the ITU converts to a regular application and the trademark is eventually registered in the normal manner. The ITU allows Lizard Breath to expend money promoting their name in preparation for their tour without fear that someone will swoop in and steal it at the last minute.

The day after the band files their ITU, an ice cream salesman founds a company called the "Lizard Breath Environmental Music Company." The company pipes the warbling, out-of-tune music which traditionally tinkles from ice cream trucks into offices and elevators. The company doesn't bother to register the "Lizard Breath Environmental Music Company" name with the PTO.

By the time the trademark on the name "Lizard Breath" issues to the band, the Lizard Breath Environmental Music Company is piping ice cream truck classics into elevators and offices in Kansas and Missouri, driving people crazy with an uncontrollable urge to eat ice cream. When Lizard Breath the band arrives to play its first gig in Kansas City, angry office workers attack the musicians with sawed-off popsicle sticks. The similarity of names and products has caused these workers to confuse the band with the environmental music company.

Believing the Lizard Breath name to be sullied, the band members seek to enjoin the environmental music company from further use of its name. They successfully force the environmental music company to cease using the name in all territories.

But the environmental music company argues for common law rights to the name in Kansas and Missouri because, when it began using the name in those states, there was no valid registration by the band. The music company argues that the ITU was merely a *pending* registration.

The judge disagrees, noting that, in this situation, the band gained exclusive use of the Lizard Breath name in all territories which were unclaimed on the date that the band *filed their ITU*. Recall that the ITU was filed prior to the time the environmental music company began its business. Things would be more complicated if the environmental music company had been using the name *prior* to the time that the band filed the ITU—as we shall see.

Swirl: Adventures in Real Life

A local Seattle band named Swirl recently became embroiled in this second type of controversy. (This one is a real story, by the way.) The Seattle band was using, but had not registered its name. Later, another band filed an ITU on the unregistered name.

The Seattle "Swirl" formed in November 1995 as a legal Washington State Partnership. By January of 1996, Swirl had: (1) engaged a manager, (2) received a promotional endorsement from a guitar string company, and (3) solicited national recording acts for inclusion as an opening act on various tours. So the band was arguably using the name by this time. In February 1996 Swirl dedicated an "800" number for use as a nationwide "Swirl Hotline." In March 1996 Swirl entered an agreement with a guitar amplifier company whereby the band would use and exhibit the company's products at live performances. This probably constitutes further use of the name.

On March 17, 1996, the band performed their first live engagement, a concert in Seattle, Washington. For a musical act, a live performance is indisputably a use of the name. With this performance, the band almost certainly established common law rights to the name in the Seattle area.

"Before attempting to register a name, one should always Make a comprehensive search for prior use."

Shortly after this concert, and unbeknownst to Seattle Swirl, a second band formed in Florida. This second band, unaware that there was already a band named Swirl in Seattle, also took the name of Swirl. Prior to performing anywhere, but *after* Seattle Swirl had used the name, Florida Swirl filed an ITU on the name.

In July and August of 1996, after Florida Swirl filed the ITU, Seattle Swirl gave live performances in California, Arizona, and Washington State. As a result they obtained national press coverage. They also received airplay in approximately twenty

states. Again, this all occurred after Florida Swirl filed the ITU.

On September 9, 1997, the trademark on the name was issued to Florida Swirl. In May 1998, Florida Swirl, armed with the newly issued trademark, filed a Federal suit in Los Angeles County seeking to enjoin Seattle Swirl from further use of its name. Florida Swirl claimed the exclusive right to the name in all territory that was unclaimed on the date the ITU was filed.

As Florida Swirl filed their ITU prior to Seattle Swirl's major promotional efforts, it seemed at first that Seattle Swirl might be left with nothing more than a marginal common law claim on the Seattle territory, that based upon its single public performance on March 17, 1996.

Figure 1. A relatively innocuous Office Action, which musicians can address without resorting to professional help.

Drawing does not match specimens

The drawing displays the mark as hyphenated. However, this differs from the display of the mark on the specimens, where it appears without a hyphen. The applicant must either:

(1) submit a new drawing of the mark which agrees with the specimens; or

(2) submit substitute specimens which show use of the mark shown in the drawing.

37 C.F.R. Section 2.51; TMEP section 807.14. The applicant may not amend the drawing if the amendment would materially alter the character of the mark. 37 C.F.R. Section 2.72(a); TMEP section 807.14(a).

If substitute specimens are submitted, the applicant must verify, with an affidavit or a declaration under 37 C.F.R. Section 2.20, that the substitute specimens were in use in commerce at least as early as the filing date of the application. 37 C.F.R. Sections 2.59(a) and 2.72(b); TMEP section 905.10. If the substitute specimens include any names other than that of the applicant, the applicant should explain the relationship between the applicant and the party designated by each name, whether that party has any rights in the mark, and how the applicant controls any use of the mark by that party. 37 C.F.R. Section 2.38; TMEP section 1201.03 et seq.

But since Seattle Swirl had been legitimately using the name prior to the time that Florida Swirl filed its ITU, Seattle Swirl could continue to acquire territory between the time the ITU was filed and the time that the trademark issued. This meant that Seattle Swirl could continue to use its name in all the territories where it had already played prior to the date that the trademark issued. As it happened, by the time the trademark had issued to Florida Swirl, Seattle Swirl had played gigs in Washington, California, and Arizona. So Seattle Swirl had a strong common law claim on the name in these large and valuable territories.

Also, Seattle Swirl had received airplay in twenty states and had distributed promotional material on a nationwide basis prior to the September 9, 1997 date of issuance. So it was possible that the court would recognize their first use of the name in all the states where they had received airplay and/or where they had mailed promotional materials. This would give Seattle Swirl common-law claims to the trademark in these states as well.

These facts tilted the negotiating strategy in favor of Seattle Swirl. As Seattle Swirl's live performances gave it strong claims to the use of the name in Washington, California, and Arizona, a court battle would, at best, only give Florida Swirl an exclusive claim to the name in the remaining 47 states. A national recording act simply cannot operate this way. Worse, a court battle might result in Seattle Swirl being granted all twenty states where it had received airplay. Given these possibilities, and that the cost of the court battle could exceed $100,000, Florida Swirl capitulated and changed its name.

But victory did not come without a price for Seattle Swirl. At least $6,000 was spent on attorney fees to defend their name. Filing fees, phone and fax bills, and travel added to these costs. There was also the burden of simply collecting and organizing the information to defend the suit. In a typical lawsuit, this can require hundreds of hours from a defendant. There is an emotional toll as well; every lawsuit involves a great deal of frustration and can generate incredible amounts of stress. This matter was resolved in a round of preliminary hearings; a trial would have greatly compounded the overall costs.

The point is that the entire controversy could have been avoided if Seattle Swirl had either registered its name with the PTO at the start, *or* if Florida Swirl had performed a more thorough investigation into the availability of the name prior to filing its ITU. Before even attempting to register a name, one should always make a comprehensive "search" for prior use.

Registration Basics

The requirements for registering a band's name are as follows:

1. There must be no prior use of the name. One checks to see if the name is in use by performing what is known as a "search"—*i.e.*, a formal and comprehensive check of various records to confirm that nobody else is using the name. The application for trademark registration requires you to swear under penalty of perjury that you have investigated the name and that you are reasonably certain that nobody else is using it. A proper comprehensive search will enable you to affix your name to this form without serious inner turmoil.

2. The band must legitimately intend to use the name as their trade name. The Patent and Trademark Office will not allow you to lock down a collection of cool sounding names for the purpose of later selling them off.

3. For a full-fledged application, the band must be currently using the name in their general business. If the band intends to use the name at some future date, an ITU application is appropriate. A performance by the band under the name to be registered usually satisfies this "use" requirement. The mailing of demos or advertisements, or radio play time *might* satisfy the "use" requirement, provided the activity is sustained and part of a normal business activity. One mailed flyer, or one minute of airtime, might not do it. (Logically, mailing demos or radio airtime *should* satisfy the requirement, but there appears to be no clear-cut case law on this point.)

4. The name must not be generic or descriptive. "Reliable Auto

Repair" or "Sweet Scented Soap" are descriptive as they simply relate an aspect of the product or service. In contrast, Apple Computer or Tipsy Tulsa Soap are not descriptive, as one would not normally associate these words with one unless one had been exposed to these products. This rule prevents businesses from depleting the stock of commonly used adjectives by locking them away as trademarks. Unless you are attracted to names such as "Four-Piece Rock-and-Roll Band" or "Horn-and-Keyboard Jazz Ensemble," this rule should pose no problem.

5. For Federal Trademark Registration, your band's name must have been used in interstate commerce. This is not as formidable as it may sound. For example, a New York band appearing in New Jersey, or a demo mailed across state lines, can satisfy this requirement.

6. The name cannot be so similar to another existing trade name that it (1) confuses or misleads an average consumer, or (2) dilutes or disparages the impact of the existing trade name. This final requirement attempts to keep a new trade name from cutting into the favorable business reputation built up around an existing trade name. It is the heart of trademark law and analysis in this area can become quite complex.

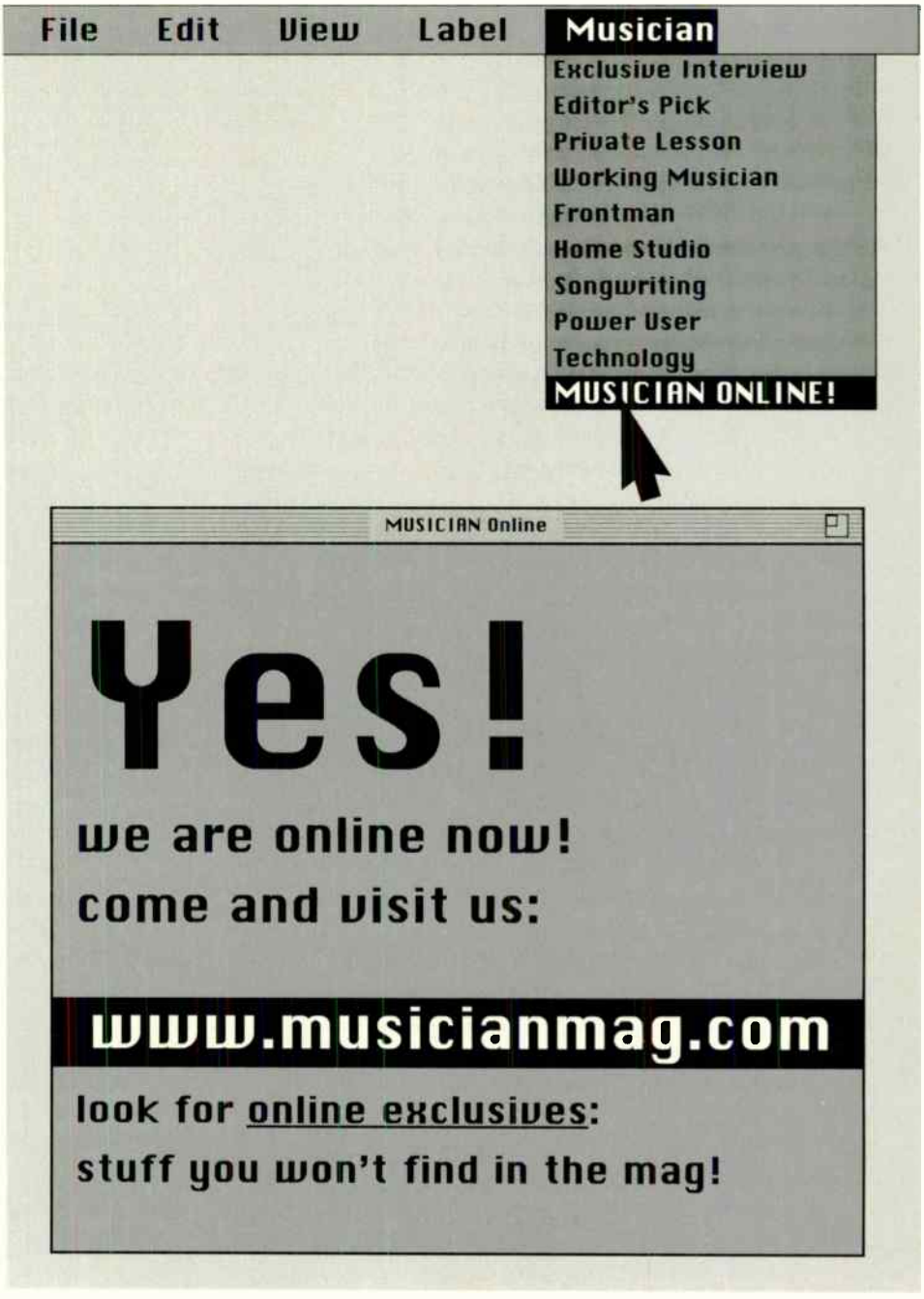
For example, suppose a leather band forms in Hollywood and calls itself Marquis de Sade. They protect their name by registering it with the PTO. After the trademark issues, a lawnmower repair shop opens in Arkansas and calls itself "Marquis de Sod." The band pounces but is unable to stop the lawnmower shop from using the name. The difference in services provided negates any inference that consumers will confuse the band with the lawnmower shop.

But what if the lawnmower shop decides to record and distribute a bunch of CD-ROMs that illustrate the growth and maintenance of a lawn, and they included a heavy metal accompaniment in the production? In this scenario, the band could prevail, since the CD-ROMs might constitute a sufficient similarity in products.

You can register a name with the PTO on your own or you can hire an attorney to do it for you. Although registering a trademark is nothing that a careful layman cannot handle, the process is more complex than registering a copyright and an error could result in the loss of your filing fee (currently at $245.00).

No matter what you do, we suggest that you read a book on trademarks prior to proceeding. At the very least, this will protect you from getting skinned by an overcharging attorney. Any large chain bookstore can direct you to several good self-help books on this subject. These books set forth detailed instructions for completing the registration process. Several come with collections of tear-out forms.

Remember that nothing is more important in the registration process than conducting a thorough search. Searching the trademark data bases to find pending and existing registrations is not enough. At the very least, a thorough search of



the Internet is required, as even a local band will probably pop up on the Internet in some context.

But even the Internet might not reveal all possible conflicts. In truth, the best and most comprehensive searches are performed by commercial search firms. The better search firms have comprehensive databases with millions of names derived from phone books in every locality and hundreds of newspapers and magazines. A search of this caliber usually runs around $350 per name searched. Searching for potential conflicts with an accompanying logo doubles the price.

Because of the high price of a proper search, it is wise to submit a name that has a reasonable chance of passing the search. In our experience, a name that consists of a single word, even if very weird, usually has been used by somebody somewhere. For example, an amazing number of bands, music publishers, and production companies have tried to use the name "Handkerchief." In general, a simple name has probably already been used. The more complex and original your name, the greater your chance of success.

Figure 2. An Office Action that presents a more complex question, for which professional advice is highly recommended.

A PROPER RESPONSE TO THIS OFFICE ACTION MUST BE RECEIVED WITHIN 6 MONTHS FROM THE DATE OF THIS ACTION IN ORDER TO AVOID *ABANDONMENT.* *For your convenience and to ensure proper handling of your request, a label has been enclosed. Please attach it to the upper right corner of your response. If the label is not enclosed, print or type the Trademark Law Office No., Serial No., and Mark in the upper right corner of your response.*

RE: Serial Number XXXXX

The assigned examining attorney has reviewed the referenced file and has determined the following.

Refusal: Descriptiveness

The examining attorney refuses registration on the Principal Register because the mark is merely descriptive of the identified goods. Trademark Act Section 2(e)(1), 15 U.S.C. Section 1052(e)(1); TMEP section 1209 *et seq.* Moreover, based on the attached evidence gleaned from the NEXIS database, the term Afton Chihuahuas appears to be a generic term for a category of candy products. As such, the mark is incapable of identifying the applicant's goods and distinguishing them from those of others. *In re Gould Paper Corp.*, 834 F.2d 1017, 5 USPQ2d 1110 (Fed. Cir. 1987); *In re Pennzoil Products Co.*, 20 USPQ2d 1753 (TTAB 1991). Under these circumstances, the examining attorney cannot recommend an amendment to proceed under Trademark Act Section 2(f), 15 U.S.C. Section 1052(f), or an amendment to the Supplemental Register.

If the applicant chooses to respond to the refusal to register, the applicant must also respond to the following informalities. . . .

Filing for a trademark consists of little more than conducting a search and filling out an application form. But the application must be accompanied by a $245 filing fee. You can obtain an application by calling the Trademark Assistance Center at (703) 308-9000. If you are lucky, the process is complete when the application and filing fee is mailed off to the Patent and Trademark Office.

If you are not lucky, your application will be returned with a document known as an Office Action. The Office Action tells you that an examiner has reviewed your application and made a preliminary determination that there is a problem with it.

The problem could be very simple and minor. As shown in the example of Figure 1 (see page 62), the examiner may simply want to know if the name is customarily spelled with a hyphen. In this type of case, comply with the instructions and see what happens.

On the other hand, the objection can get very technical, as shown in Figure 2. If you are serious about getting a trademark on the name, and if you receive an objection of this sort, you should immediately abandon your do-it-yourself notions and seek professional assistance. The answers to these sorts of objections can be complex and may involve many hours of professional research.

The Office Action will give you the name of the examiner and his or her direct telephone number. If you don't understand the objection, you can call the examiner for further clarification. Trademark registration is a relatively non-adversarial process and the examiners are usually helpful.

The receipt of an Office Action is not a cause for panic. If you don't immediately understand the examiner's objection, or if you cannot immediately formulate a response, or if you don't know if you should turn the matter over to an attorney, you will have plenty of time to resolve these questions. Trademark registration is a leisurely activity, and you will have at least six months to respond. Further extensions of time are possible.

If no Office Action issues, or if you satisfactorily respond to the Office Action, your trademark registration will issue approximately two years from the date of application. The PTO is backlogged as there has been an explosion of trademark registration from the multitude of new businesses on the Internet.

The retention of a registered trademark is governed by a "use it or lose it" philosophy. In general, if you don't use the mark "in commerce" for a period of two years, then the mark is considered to be abandoned and others may begin using it. For a band, "in commerce" probably means live performances and the sale of CDs or other items displaying the mark.

As with other areas of trademark law, this two-year rule is only a general guideline, and a great many qualifications and exceptions apply. Generally, the rule seeks to kick genuinely abandoned marks off the registration roll. The rule can usually be circumvented if there is a legitimate reason for not using the mark, such as illness or bankruptcy.

Trademark registration is usually handled by intellectual property law firms. This sort of firm can be located by looking under "patent law" in the Yellow Pages or by calling the local Bar Association. Attorneys fees can vary wildly, however. Before committing to a particular attorney, be sure to get several quotes and shop around.

Contributors: Mark Cheuvront is a musician and an attorney in Hollywood, CA. Andrea Brauer is an attorney in Los Angeles specializing in music law and intellectual property.

The Four-Track Phenom

The Fostex FD-4 offers hard disk recording at a bargain price.

by howard massey

Like it or not, we're living in the midst of a technological revolution—an era dominated by computer-based electronic doodads (gotcher cell phone and laptop yet?) and high-speed global communications (your choice, sir, cable TV or Internet?). Today's noteworthy products either extend the envelope of technological achievement or lower the bar in terms of price/performance. The Fostex FD-4 falls firmly into the latter category, bringing four tracks of hard disk recording to the average musician for little more than the price of a multitrack cassette deck—an incredible $599, to be exact.

Truth be told, the most innovative thing about the FD-4 is its price, though it is surprisingly full featured. One thing that's not included, however, is a hard disk. The FD-4 will work quite happily with most fixed hard drives (external SCSI or internal IDE, though IDE drives have to be special-ordered or installed by a Fostex-approved service center) as well as popular removable media such as the Iomega Zip and Jaz and SyQuest EZFlyer, but Fostex leaves the choice up to you. This will add anywhere from $150 on up to the basic cost, but the FD-4 is still a phenomenal bargain, any way you look at it.

The FD-4 certainly looks high-tech enough, with an impressive array of low-profile buttons, knobs, and faders adorning its rounded, white plastic chassis. My sense, though, is that its construction is not solid enough to withstand the rigors of the road. But the bottom line is that FD-4 sounds a whole lot better than any analog cassette-based system out there—there's no hiss and no need for any kind of noise reduction—and tracks you record on it can easily be ported to higher-end systems.

Despite an owners manual that leaves much to be desired, the FD-4 is easy to understand and use. If you've had any kind of recording experience at all, you'll be up and running in no time; even if you're a novice, you won't need more than a day or two to get familiar with the key functions. The first decision you'll need to make is how you want to format your hard disk. This is easy—unless you're really tight on disk space, go for "Master" mode (uncompressed CD-standard 44.1 kHz audio), since it sounds better than "Normal" mode (where data is compressed and recorded at just 32 kHz). If your hard disk is fast enough, you'll be able to format it in "Master 1" mode, where you're given the benefit of two additional "virtual" tracks in addition to the four "real" tracks. These can be used for the storage of data but cannot be played back in real time—to hear them, you have to swap them with one or two of the real tracks, using an edit function called TRACK EXCHANGE. Slower hard disks can be formatted in "Master 2" mode, which delivers

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MUSICIAN BACK ISSUES

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146 12/90 **Slash,** Replacements, Waterboys, Pixies
147 1/91 **Robert Johnson,** Bruce Hornsby, Soul Asylum
150 4/91 **R.E.M.,** Top Managers Roundtable, AC/DC
151 5/91 **Eddie Van Halen,** Fishbone, Byrds, Chris Isaak
152 6/91 **Stevie Ray Vaughan,** Morrissey, Drum Special
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201 8/95 **In the Studio with U2,** Steve Earle/Townes Van Zandt, Buddy Guy
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203 10/95 **Collective Soul,** Dionne Farris, Frank Zappa
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(continued from page 65)

precisely the same sound quality but is limited to just the four tracks. You can store as many songs (called "Programs") on a single hard disk as you have room for, but you can only connect one hard disk at a time to the FD-4; even if it has an internal IDE hard disk installed, it can only access one drive at a time.

Familiar tape-recorder-like transport controls (PLAY, STOP, RECORD, PAUSE, REWIND, and FAST-FORWARD) allow you to carry out basic operations, and up to six auto-locate points can be stored, either on the fly or set manually. One or two tracks can be recorded simultaneously, and there are dedicated record-arm buttons for each track. A jog dial allows you to scrub through your data, sort of—instead of smooth, true scrubbing, you're played short bursts of audio, but these are generally good enough to locate to specific points. By holding down a SHIFT button, you can use the dial to shuttle through the recording at up to 64x speed, kind of like what happens when you hold down the PLAY and REWIND or FAST-FORWARD buttons simultaneously on an analog deck. There are also all of the familiar manual and auto punch-in and punch-out procedures, including a rear-panel footswitch input for those moments when both hands are otherwise occupied. You can create an internal tempo and meter map, and the FD-4 can even generate a click for you to record to, although this uses the output of track 4 and so makes it temporarily unavailable for playback and recording.

The MIDI implementation of the FD-4 is also impressive. Not only will it transmit MIDI Time Code (MTC) and MIDI Machine Control (MMC), it will also, unusually, receive both of these messages, allowing it to serve as either master or slave in conjunction with a MIDI sequencer. (Most low-end hard-disk recorders can act only as master, limiting your options.) You can even record to the FD-4 while it is slaved to another device—a real rarity, and a real plus.

The weak link in the chain is the FD-4's onboard mixer, which is purely analog. Though it has an extensive set of features (such as separate in-line monitoring, three-band equalization per channel, inserts and balanced XLR inputs on two of the channels, and two sets of aux sends and returns) and can be used both for input signal (during tracking) and output signal (during mixing), its preamps are all too easily overloaded, and it does tend to somewhat degrade signal passing through it. Perhaps in recognition of these limitations, a separate stereo RECORDER input is provided; this bypasses the mixer section altogether, routing signal directly to whichever tracks are record-armed. Signal input this way does sound considerably cleaner, though one drawback is that if plugs are inserted into these connectors, the FD-4 ignores signal arriving via the four front-panel channel input jacks, meaning that you can't leave it permanently connected if you ever intend to record through the mixer.

Even via the RECORDER inputs, the signal is slightly colored by the FD-4's analog-to-digital converters, which tend to make the sound somewhat thin. This is no big deal if you're planning on using the FD-4 solely as a scratchpad, but if you're going to be laying down tracks that may end up on a CD, you might want to instead use an external converter (such as the one in your DAT) and the FD-4's optical S/PDIF digital input, which allows you to bypass the mixer as well as the A/D converters. Signal input via this connector is recorded without any coloration whatsoever and sounds every bit as good (pardon the pun) as any other CD-quality hard-disk or MDM system out there. There's also an S/PDIF output (also optical), which allows you to send your mix to DAT in the digital domain and/or to archive your data to DAT, two tracks at a time. If your DAT deck or other digital audio devices have their S/PDIF I/O on the more commonly found coaxial connectors, Fostex make an optional bi-directional coaxial-to-optical S/PDIF converter (the COP-1, list price $95).

Having "only" four tracks may seem like a limitation, but all this really means is that you have to make some decisions early on in the process instead of at the final mix. With a little forethought and careful planning, these tracks can go a long way, as I discovered when putting the FD-4 through its paces. Using a SyQuest EZFlyer formatted in Master 1 mode, I started by creating a basic tempo map and, to the FD-4's click, I recorded a rhythm guitar part on track 1, followed by bass and keyboard overdubs on tracks 2 and 3. Then I turned off the click and, using the built-in mixer, premixed the three tracks down to track 4, working in glorious mono. (Hey, if it was good enough for Phil Spector . . .) Next, I strapped a compressor across one of the FD-4 channel inserts and took four passes at recording a lead vocal (on tracks 1, 2, 3, and one of the two virtual tracks), using the FD-4's TRACK EXCHANGE, MOVE, COPY, and PASTE edit functions ("Move" is actually what the rest of the world calls "Cut") to compile a composite "best-of" track, which was ultimately placed on track 3. Once that was done, I still had tracks 1 and 2 free for backing vocals, which were duly filled.

Now it was time to add drums, even though I had run out of "real" tracks. No problem. I fired up my MIDI sequencer—one which, fortuitously, has the ability to output MIDI Time Code—and connected its MIDI output to the FD-4 MIDI input. Then, once the FD-4 was set to Slave mode, it was a simple matter to create a sequenced drum track, routing the stereo output from my MIDI tone module to one of the FD-4's two Aux returns. By keeping the tempo the same as the one I originally used, there was no sonic degradation even when slaved, since the FD-4 wasn't having to constantly varispeed in order to stay locked. (I did, however, find that the best sonic results were achieved using S/PDIF as the master clock; I took an output from my DAT for that purpose.)

Finally, time for mixdown. I wanted to be able to add a little reverb to the vocals, so I connected one of the FD-4 Aux sends to the mono input of a basic reverb unit and connected the reverb's stereo output to the remaining FD-4 Aux return (the one not being used by the MIDI tone module). When I was satisfied with all levels and fader moves, I recorded the mix simultaneously to DAT (using the FD-4 S/PDIF output) and to the two virtual tracks. I could then listen to the final result either by playing back the DAT or by using TRACK EXCHANGE to temporarily swap the virtual tracks with two of the real tracks—both mixes sounded absolutely identical. Finally, I used the FD-4's SAVE PROGRAM function to save the data from all six tracks onto DAT, allowing me to go back to just about any point in the process from the premix onward.

Doing this kind of complex, yet high-quality recording on a $599 box would have been absolutely unthinkable just a year ago. Fostex is to be commended for breaking the price barrier and putting hard-disk recording squarely in the hands of musicians everywhere.

Special thanks to Phil Celia and Daniel O'Connell.

1 Audix CX-101 and CX-111 large capsule studio mics

Home and project studio owners have been clamoring for more affordable—yet still high-quality—studio mics, and with meritorious mics typically priced at $1,000 and up, who can blame them? Audix is addressing this market with the CX-101 ($499) and CX-111 ($599, far right) large-diaphragm studio condenser microphones. The CX-101 has a one-inch gold vapor diaphragm, a rugged brass housing, and black satin finish. The CX-111 utilizes an identical capsule, but is equipped with a -10dB pad and a bass roll-off switch. Both mics come equipped with a shock-mount stand adapter and an aluminum carrying case. A two-channel phantom power supply is an optional accessory.

➤ ***Audix, 9400 SW Barber St., Wilsonville, OR 97070; (503) 682-6933; www.audixusa.com***

2 Schecter A-7 seven string electric

The 7-string is becoming increasingly popular among guitarists, as evidenced by the fact that more and more manufacturers are introducing 7-string models and string sets. The extra string is a low B, by the way. Schecter recently added a new line of guitars and basses called the Diamond Series, which includes the A-7 seven-string. The A-7 ($749)—as well as all the other Diamond models—features Seymour Duncan-designed pickups and Grover tuners. The list price also includes a custom Schecter gig bag and a limited lifetime warranty. ➤ ***Schecter Guitar Research, 1538 N. Highland Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90028; (323) 469-8900; www.schecterguitars.com***

3 Epiphone Korina Flying V Bass

The Flying V has traditionally been a shape only available to guitar players, but Epiphone is letting bass players in on the fun with its new Korina Flying V ($699-EB, $799-NA). The 30.5" scale bass features—you guessed it—a korina body, rosewood fingerboard, glued-in mahogany neck, dot inlays, and gold hardware. Additionally, there are two volume controls, one tone control, a three-way toggle switch, and two high-output humbuckers. The Flying V is available in both black and natural finishes. ➤ ***Epiphone, 645 Massman Dr., Nashville, TN 37210; (615) 871-4500; www.gibson.com***

4 VOX Pathfinder

The 15-watt Pathfinder ($150) is a compact guitar practice amp with a classic look that recalls the amps of the Sixties British rock invasion. Measuring 15.5" W x 14.5" H x 7.5" D, the Pathfinder has Volume, Gain, Treble, Bass, Tremolo Speed, and Tremolo Depth controls that feature pointer-style knobs. Additionally, there's a Gain Boost switch and line, headphone, and external speaker outputs, plus a dual footswitch control over the Boost and Tremolo functions. The Pathfinder is covered in basket-weave vinyl with VOX diamond grill cloth and contains an 8" VOX Bulldog speaker.

➤ ***VOX Amplification, 316 S. Service Rd., Melville, NY 11747; (516) 333-9100; www.korg.com***

5 Washburn D200SK and D250SK acoustic guitars

Washburn is clearly looking to appeal to the professional guitarist with its new hand-crafted dreadnoughts. The D200SK ($1,549.90) and D250SK ($1599.90, bottom) both utilize the acclaimed Buzz Feiten tuning system and feature mahogany necks, rosewood fingerboards, solid spruce tops, rosewood pickguards, and Grover tuners. Accounting for the price difference between the two models, the D200SK is made with flamed maple sides and back, while the D250SK has rosewood sides and back. Additionally, both guitars come with a deluxe hardshell case and Washburn's lifetime warranty. ➤ ***Washburn Guitars, 255 Corporate Woods Pkwy, Vernon Hills, IL 60061; (847) 913-5511; www.washburn.com***

6 Ludwig Padded Gig Bags

Ludwig's padded gig bags are the newest addition to the company's expanding accessory line. The bags are made of a dark gray nylon material, and have a half-inch of foam padding and a vinyl fleece inner lining. One-inch black nylon binding tape is used at all seams and the "Weather Seal" heavy-duty black nylon coil zippers have silver pulls for quick access. Other features include metal snap hooks and rings, and double stitched webbed handles with black rubber tubing comfort grips. Bass drum bag sizes range from 14 x 18" thru 16 x 24", floor tom bags range from 14 x 14" to 16 x 18" and tom bags range from 8 x 8" thru 14 x 15".

➤ ***Ludwig/Musser Industries, P.O. Box 310, Elkhart, IN 46515-0310; (219) 522-1675; www.ludwig-drums.com***

The Power

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You are a troubadour. You travel light. Armed only with your voice, your guitar, and your ideas, you win over the hearts and minds of audiences everywhere. You are... Acoustic.

It's a nice image. But before you can win your share of hearts and minds, you've got to reach their ears. And unless most of your gigs take place in a parlor or an intimate song circle, you'll have to do this by amplifying your guitar and voice. If you've ever played at an "unplugged night" at your local headbanger bar, you know there's a lot more to getting your acoustic to come across than just plugging into the sound system. At best, a poorly amplified acoustic guitar loses its subtlety and dynamic character. At worst, it sounds like a feedback-blasted buzz fest, fully deserving of any tomatoes, beer bottles, or other debris discriminating listeners see fit to hurl.

Fortunately, acoustic pickers have more options available to them than ever before, from pickups to preamps to specialized amplifiers. In fact, the sheer number of choices can lead more to confusion than enlightenment, especially if you don't consider yourself a gear head. One thing, though, is sure: Simply walking into a club and telling the sound tech "all I want is a good natural sound" is no guarantee that you'll get it. Like it or not, you're going to have to take control of your own sonic destiny.

Phil Ciganer, proprietor of the Towne Crier Café in Pawling, New York, one of the top acoustic music venues in the East, believes that to produce excellent acoustic sound onstage, you must maintain the idea of enhancing—not overwhelming—your instrument's natural sound. "With acoustic music, good sound reinforcement should be just that: reinforcement," he explains. "You want to enhance what's already there and let the audience feel like they're hearing the instrument, not the P.A."

Unfortunately, the opposite scenario, in which the sound onstage actually distracts from the music itself, is a common fact of acoustic musical life. According to Ciganer, if you want to improve your sound, the first thing you need to do is to learn how it gets to the audience. "The most important tool in achieving good stage sound is your own set of ears," he insists. "If you know what you want, and if you have some understanding of the signal path and its components, your own ears will tell you if you've gotten there."

the signal path starts with you

Your pickup (or the microphone onstage) is actually the *second* element of your signal chain. The first is your guitar. "Players need to get good tone on their own before they can sound good through a stage system," Ciganer says. "Don't get hung up on gear. A great player can make a bad guitar sound good."

While it seems obvious that your instrument should be in good working order for every show, reality often paints a different picture. Ever see a player hit the stage with a $2,000 guitar, an elaborate pickup system, a fast-action capo, and a bottle of designer homeopathic H_2O—then wonder why his guitar sound won't come across? Well, for one thing, buddy, your strings are deader than Elvis. Regularly changing the strings ensures that your guitar will offer optimal tonal balance, stay in tune more reliably, and be easier to play. String changes also give you an opportunity to clean the guitar, check for problems, and do chores, such as changing preamp batteries (many models require you to reach inside the guitar to get at the battery) and recovering lost picks. If you worry that new strings will sound too bright and metallic, leave a couple of days between the string change and the performance; one or two vigorous sessions will take the edge off the strings. And remember that it's relatively easy to smooth out excess detail and brightness with an EQ; it's much more difficult to artificially add clarity.

pickups and microphones

Pickups come in three main flavors: bridge-mounted piezos, magnetic soundhole pickups, and body-mounted "microphone pickups." Which ones are best for you? Ciganer provides a general answer: "If you know what you're doing, just about any pickup or microphone can sound good." Beyond that, a bit of attention to detail can give you even more of a head start toward a great acoustic sound.

Piezos are the workhorses of acoustic guitar amplification. Almost every manufacturer offers piezo-equipped instruments, and even if your guitar didn't leave the factory with a pickup, piezos are a relatively affordable after-market add-on, though installation should be left to a qualified repair person.

Using a piezo offers several practical advantages. Because they reside under the guitar's bridge saddle, they're unobtrusive visually and physically. In addition, they capture a relatively wide frequency response and can reproduce much of the high-end detail that's so important to an acoustic guitar's character. Piezos also capture some body resonance but translate only moderate body noise. Another advantage: Most sound

by e. d. menasché

f Acoustic Sound

gig—if you know enough to control your own amplification.

techs deal frequently with piezos; they know how they're supposed to sound. Since piezos can cut through a mix and survive high volume, they're a good choice if you're playing acoustic guitar in a rock band.

On the downside, even a good piezo can produce a nasally and artificial tone unless carefully treated. Many guitars come with an onboard preamp that includes built-in EQ. (Outboard floor and rack models are also available.) Gently rolling off some of the midrange can improve clarity without introducing noise. Boost only if you must, and then exercise caution: Over-enthusiasm can introduce noise and induce feedback. Many preamps also offer a feedback-fighting notch filter, which is an EQ designed to drastically cut a very narrow frequency band. If possible, choose a preamp that lets you bypass the EQ section with the flip of a switch. At a recent show, I spent about ten minutes tweaking a guitarist's onboard EQ, with poor results. Finally we turned it off altogether, and—magic!—it sounded like music. While some piezos can run on phantom power, most require batteries. Like your strings, batteries should be kept fresh: Weak batteries can diminish output and distort the signal.

After falling out of style in the late Eighties, **magnetic acoustic guitar pickups**—the ones that fit across the soundhole—are making a comeback. Magnos are inexpensive and highly resistant to feedback, and they can sound excellent. Plus, they're user-installable, and you can use one pickup on several different guitars. Most magnetic pickups are passive, so you needn't worry about batteries. There are several good choices available from Dean Markley, Seymour Duncan, DiMarzio, Lace Sensor, and others. In any experience, magnetic acoustic pickups are a little like electric pickups in that each model offers its own sonic character. While some models come with a volume control, many don't; for these choices, you'll have to add a preamp or amplifier if you want to tweak your sound.

Since soundhole pickups are easily swapped, it's a good idea to try before you buy—especially if you have a smaller guitar. The soundhole of my Martin 000-18, for instance, is too small for many soundhole models.

Microphone pickups—small condenser mics that reside inside or just on the surface of the guitar—can do a great job of capturing the body and resonance of a guitar's tone. They tend to cost more than either piezos or magnetic pickups, and they are prone to both feedback and body noise. Like any microphone, they are sensitive to positioning; an incorrectly placed mic pickup can yield a dark and boxy sound. Many of these mics can run off of phantom power or a supplied combination power supply/preamp.

The combination of mic pickup and piezo, though relatively costly, offers the best of both worlds. You get the cutting power and feedback resistance of the piezo and the body and natural resonance of the mic. Excellent systems are available from L. R. Baggs and Fishman Transducers, with preamps that allow you to optimize the relationship between the two pickups.

Traditional stage microphones can offer excellent sound if they're handled correctly, but therein lies their main disadvantage. Mic placement is crucial, and stage mics can often feed back in inexperienced hands. Ciganer likes to use condensers at times, but he also gets results with a Shure SM57. "Never point the mic at the soundhole," he cautions. "Point it at the bridge or at the neck, and"—again—"use your ears."

Microphones are a good option for solo performers who don't need to compete with the din of a rock band. A good microphone will pick up the nuances in your style—such as percussive body hammers or string snaps—better than most pickup systems. You can control your dynamics easily too, by moving in relation to the mic. If you're playing a venue with good mics and a good sound staff, setup can be easy and unencumbered. But if the crew doesn't know how to mic up an acoustic, or the mic looks like it was stored in a bowl of day-old oatmeal, you're in trouble. If you plan on purchasing a mic, you'll have to balance your decision between optimal response (a quality condenser) and feedback rejection (a tight-pattern dynamic, such as a hypercardioid).

it's all in the delivery

"A good mic or pickup is useless unless the sound system can support it," says Ciganer. Unless you carry a system and crew to gigs with you, you're at the mercy of the venue's sound system. Clubs that specialize in acoustic music often house systems designed to enhance an acoustic guitar's natural sound without overwhelming it. Rock clubs are a different animal: In the quest for volume before feedback, the nuances of an acoustic guitar can be lost. "Some sound techs tend to ignore the instrument's natural sound," Ciganer warns.

(continued on page 72)

(continued from page 71)

"People who specialize in rock can be prone to get a tinny sound from an acoustic guitar."

One of the ironies of acoustic performance is the fact that players often trust their most personal voice—the sound of an acoustic instrument—to a total stranger who may or may not be sensitive to their sound. Ciganer advises calling ahead and interviewing the sound tech whenever possible. "They like to be included in the process," he explains. "Asking a few intelligent questions and tactfully explaining what you're looking for will get you where you need to go."

You can regain some control of your sound by using an amp or preamp onstage. Again, if you plan to feed the house with the signal from a preamp, make sure you talk to the sound crew first. Extensive EQ, compression, or other effects emanating from your stage rig might tie the sound tech's hands when it comes to getting a good house mix. Preamps can also induce noise.

Since his goal is to capture as natural a sound as possible, Ciganer generally disdains outboard effects, save for mild reverb and other subtle touches. "If you can hear it as 'reverb,' you've put on too much," he says.

Acoustic guitar amps—which are essentially mini-P.A. systems designed to reproduce an acoustic guitar's entire frequency spectrum—give you direct control over your sound. Most acoustic amps can handle a variety of pickups and microphones; many allow you to mix two or more signals and come with built-in digital effects. You'll frequently find a line-level output on these amps, which is useful because the amp may need to be augmented by the house system. By splitting the signal, you can get a comfortable mix onstage while directly feeding the house an uncolored signal, which the sound tech can then shape. Of course, if you bring your own amp to the gig, you're throwing away the carefree acoustic troubadour lifestyle for the electric guitarist's heavy schlepping ethic.

problems & solutions

Aesthetics are only one part of excellent sound. If you share the stage with electric guitars and drums, achieving volume before feedback can be a nightmare. There are two kinds of feedback. The first, electronic feedback, can be caused by facing an open mic at a monitor or turning the house system up too loud. Careful positioning and/or notch filtering can solve this problem, as can commercially available "feedback eliminators" offered by Sabine and other companies. Careless EQ can increase feedback, so use caution.

The second variety, resonant feedback, occurs when the guitar's body resonates at a certain frequency, which causes one or more strings to vibrate freely. You can identify the offending frequency by the note that resonates—for example, open A is 440Hz. Again, notch filters can come in handy here, but so can dampers; I've even heard of players using a piece of tape up by the nut.

If you're playing regularly in loud venues, you might want to use a less resonant guitar. Some acoustic electrics—several models from Ovation, Takamine, and Yamaha come to mind, but there are others—are designed from the ground up to be amplified. These instruments are a bit less resonant than a traditional acoustic guitar, and if they sound somewhat subdued acoustically, they're also easier to control at high stage volume.

Improper levels and impedances can also be a source of noise or distortion. Make sure you can supply the house with a proper signal, whether through a direct box or via a preamp. Send as hot a signal as possible without overloading the board's preamps, and you should be okay.

you are the final word

No matter which technical approach and equipment configuration best fits your current gig, remember that you are responsible for your own sound. "When people like Leo Kottke and Tuck Andress do a soundcheck, they always bring a long cable or wireless system, and they walk out into the house and listen," says Ciganer. "They know exactly what they want to hear, and they trust their ears in making an evaluation. They know how to make the instrument sound good [with their hands], and they know what it's supposed to sound like in a room. So get to know your instrument's frequency range. Get to know sound. Don't be intimidated. Remember, it's your show."

Contributors: *E. D. Menasché co-owns PM Productions and performs acoustic and electric music regularly in the New York City area. His goal is to be heard.*

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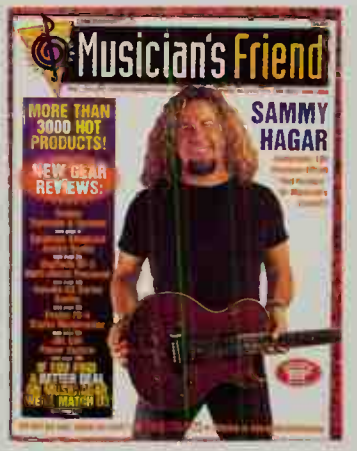

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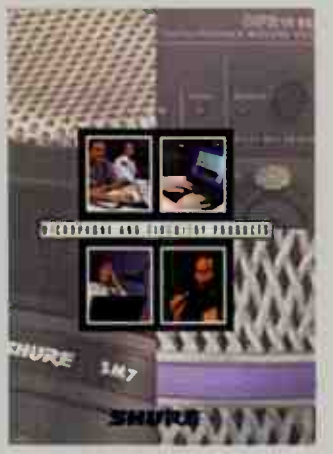

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Production tips galore from a classic golden-ears producer

by howard massey

Keith Olsen is fighting a heavy cold. But it takes more than a hacking cough and low-grade fever to stop this veteran producer, best known for his ground-breaking work with Eighties megastars Fleetwood Mac, Pat Benatar, Starship, Foreigner, Heart, and others. On the day of our visit he's wrapping up a mix for an as-yet-unnamed band out of Philly. They may not have a name or a record company-manufactured image yet, but there's no mistaking the trademark Keith Olsen sound that permeates the track: slick, humongous, with whomping guitars and hooks galore. Olsen is also a master at keeping things loose in the studio—with a gleam in his eye, he confides that the secret to his success is actually an aerosol can labeled "Bass Erase." (Legend has it that one gullible visitor actually began spraying it on a master tape—nearly ruining it in the process—before an alert engineer intervened!)

So what's the best way to catch the ear of a Keith Olsen? "There are three things that make a record and three things

FIRST TAKE

Keith Olsen

Photo: Brian Paumier

that get you noticed," he replies. "Song first, performance second, then sound. And sound is last, definitely last. A lot of artists may confuse that issue, but if you think of the acts that are out today that actually have a shot at being around tomorrow, you can see that they are all song- and performance-based. Look at the phenomenon of Alanis Morrisette: great songs, performed really well, with good arrangements." And most of it was recorded at home on ADAT. "Exactly. It doesn't matter, it really doesn't matter. She had the right songs and the right attitude, at the right time."

The secret to getting the best performance possible isn't just mood lighting and joss sticks. "It's important to have a great-sounding headphone, because what you hear in your cans when you're singing is gonna be directly proportional to how you're singing—the feel and the emotion that you drive into your vocal. I think the AKG K141 is the most amazing headphone known to man. It's loud, it's studio-tough, and you can hear just enough acoustically around you so you're not relying 100 percent on foldback—you can hear yourself pitch correctly without having to wear the headphones halfway off your ears, which kind of limits you."

What are the other vital pieces of equipment? "Make sure you have an adequate console, one that sounds pretty much the same on the output as it sounds on the input. Mackie makes wonderful-sounding gear that's really simple and easy to use; so do a bunch of other companies. Add a couple of Audio-Technica mics, a good compressor, and one or two good effects units, and you can probably do everything you need to do."

"Three things make a great record: song, performance, then sound. And sound is definitely last."

Why two mics? "Simple," explains Olsen. "Every mic has its own characteristic, just like every speaker has its own characteristic. If you always use the same mic, you'll have the same coloration on every instrument." And then there's the all-important topic of mic placement. "Remember that a microphone is not like our ears; it cannot differentiate between a wanted and an unwanted sound. So you have to think about what the microphone is going to hear, and use your head. If you put an amplifier/speaker on the floor and put a microphone a foot away, do the geometry: You have the direct versus the reflective sound, and so you have time delays. If you want to get real technical about it, you can calculate what frequencies are going to be out of phase, by measuring the distance from the speaker to the microphone directly, and then the angle down to the floor: angle of incidence, angle of reflection, and then see how much longer one is than the other, figuring the speed of sound on a standard day."

Amazed, I ask Olsen if that's something he actually does. "Of course not!" he laughs. "But you can, that's the point. And that's the stuff that happens, so you have to think about it when you're setting up an amp. Leo Fender put those legs on the sides of the Fender Twin, and he did it so the guitarist in the orchestra could hear himself when he was playing soft. But the other reason is that when you put a mic up against an amp tilted that way, the angle of incidence changes and you don't get phase cancellation problems off the floor and wall." Now Professor Olsen is on a roll: "Let's take it one step farther. Let's lift that speaker cabinet off the floor and put it up on something that is stable enough to be able to give the speakers a platform to work from. Now, when you close-mic it at an angle, the reflected sound is going to be so far down in volume to the direct, it's of no real consequence.

"A guitar sounds only as good as what's coming out the speaker at the guitar amp," Olsen continues. "If you have a great-sounding guitar and a great-sounding amp, all you need is a piece of wire and a mic in front of the speaker, somehow, somewhere. It's just personal preference as to how many mics to use and where to place them. I've found that one mic on a good-sounding amp sounds twice as good as five mics all over the place. But if there are two speakers, I like to use two mics, both close. I'll pick a couple of speakers that sound good and I'll mic them closely. Doing that will actually combine the coloration of the speakers so that you get more of the sound of the guitar instead of the sound of each individual speaker."

Getting the bass right can also be a challenge for the home recordist, but here again Olsen has a simple solution. "Use a good bass, then record it through a good D.I. and a good compressor. You should compress the signal on the way in, and depending upon the player, you may also want to compress on the way out again. Use ratios of no greater than 3:1—even 1.5:1 will work well—with no more than 8dB of gain reduction. There are a couple of pretty darn good inexpensive compressors out there—for example, the Behringer Composer, which only costs a couple hundred bucks a channel."

For treating final mixes, Olsen recommends using the TC Electronic Finalizer. "It's just a phenomenal piece of gear. Run signal through it, use one of their presets, and the output almost always sounds better than what you put into it." He cautions, however, against getting heavily involved in programming the Finalizer, pointing out that TC put a lot of time and care into developing their presets. "Just let it do its thing. Don't try to get too creative with it, 'cause some of the presets sound really good."

Olsen casts a wary eye towards tube gear. "A tube is a wonderful device—its distortion curve is similar to that of the human ear—but you have to remember that anything you do with a tube today, it's gonna sound a little different tomorrow when you turn on that power supply. And six months from now it's gonna sound *way* different. Turn a tube guitar amp on and off forty times and play the same E chord each time, and you'll hear what I'm talking about—if you can still hear anything forty tests down the line!"

Olsen productions are renowned for their big, almost gargantuan sound. Is there any way of getting a big sound out of a little room? "Sure. Just make sure you don't have parallel walls and don't put a lot of soundproofing in; just put in enough to stop reflections. Don't do all the walls and the ceiling—do alternating surfaces. Get a really good windscreen and sing up close to the mic, and all of a sudden the room means nothing. An omni would be a good idea, unless you want to have that real rich sound—then use a cardioid and use the proximity effect to best advantage. Always keep the proximity effect in mind, also the ratio of

wanted to unwanted sound. The closer you get to the mic, the less the room has to do with it. The farther away, the more the room has to do with it. If you have one room and you want room sound on everything, then you've basically got to put every sound in its own box and then start stacking boxes on top of each other in the mix. If you can keep stuff dry and free of ambience, that way the room doesn't come into play and it affords you more choices later."

Reverb and other effects can also help, but they need to be used judiciously, according to Olsen. "Effects are usually overdone on the demos I hear. When you have a limited number of tracks and a limited number of pieces of gear, the tendency is to print them when you're recording. And as you do that, the tendency is to start using them a little too much, and at the end you wish you had things a little drier—but you can't go backwards." He does, however, have a number of specific recommendations for effects boxes: "For a home studio, the Alesis Midiverb is really good; the Yamaha SPX90 also sounds great. Hopefully you're not going to use that many effects. Turn up the drums, turn up the bass, turn up the guitar, check for phase, and you're there."

So where exactly is the dividing line between demos and masters? "Well, there is a time in your life when you have to decide, okay, I'm going to be an artist now, I'm going to cut my demos and try to get a deal. In the home studio, you're afforded an infinite amount of time. You can either get your stuff down on tape in a timely manner and get it out to the record companies to see if you have a shot at being an artist or you can spend an infinite amount of time at home developing your art in a demo state, where you almost never get it out to the record companies. Or," he laughs, "two years after you start, you finish it, and you think, gee, it used to be timely when I started it, but musical styles have changed!

"Sometimes," he adds, "there's a certain amount of magic that happens when you're doing a demo at home quickly and you don't over-analyze, you don't pull everything apart. Then you get in the studio and you say, I don't want that mistake in here, let's do it again, and you end up doing it until it's sterilized. It's up to the producer to make sure that doesn't happen."

Time is running short and his cough has gotten noticeably worse, but Olsen has one last insight to share before returning to his mix. "Every musician should remember that this is their life's work, if they're serious about it. There's no such thing as an overnight success, 'cause an overnight success is six, seven years developing your art and two years learning how to market your art. Then, all of a sudden, you're an overnight success!"

by greg sandow

It's All in the Wrist

Synth whiz John Pahmer perfects the art of live tweaking with his Nord Lead.

Keyboardist John Pahmer never owned any of the famous old analog synths, so maybe he's an unlikely customer for the Nord Lead. The Nord uses physical modeling to recreate those vintage analog sounds; as Pahmer puts it, "All the old guys are going crazy because it sounds like the old stuff." But he bought it for a simpler reason: The synth he was using wasn't doing the job.

Pahmer has worked with Ian Astbury of the Cult and Terence Trent d'Arby, and he's currently playing keys for Lily Haydn, who's been opening for Robert Plant and Jimmy Page. One of his jobs is to play the bass part on some of her songs, and Haydn—a classically trained cellist who plays bass herself, along with drums, keyboards, and guitar—didn't like the sound he was using.

Enter the Nord, which, says Pahmer, with a smile, "changed everything. Lily and I had been trying to tweak my part, but as soon as I got the Nord, everything worked without any tweaks."

What made the difference? On the Nord, Pahmer could get a deeper, smoother sound, with more punch in both the high and low frequencies. That helped the band in many ways. "Lily's music has a classical tinge, but it also has a techno feel," Pahmer notes. "The Nord has us doing more and more of that."

But there was more than sound that earned the Nord its place on the Haydn tour: It's also covered with knobs. Pahmer points out—knobs that control almost everything the machine does, from the attack, decay, and sustain of each sound's envelope, to the oscillators that produce the sounds and the LFOs that shape them, along with four separate arpeggiators.

"These knobs can change everything," Pahmer enthuses. "And they're right there. You *will* turn them." He certainly did: The Nord, he grins, "became my fun keyboard."

Sometimes, for instance, while sustaining a chord with one hand and waiting for something to happen in the midst of a Haydn performance, Pahmer would reach with his other hand for a knob or two, and perhaps change settings for a filter. Suddenly the chord would come alive with a resonant filter sweep.

He also uses the knobs to change the balance between two sounds. One would be, he says, "a real mellow, unobtrusive pad," and the other "a glisteny, sparkly kind of sound, much more animated." Both are layered together in a single patch, and as Pahmer plays, he turns a knob to bring the sparkle in or out.

With a little forethought, he can even change more than one parameter at a time. For this, Pahmer explains, he'll use a feature called "morphing," which lets him choose things he wants to change (as well as the amount and direction of the change), and then trigger the process with the mod wheel.

As an example, maybe he'll take the pitch of a sound and set it to sweep up and down. Then he'll set the rate of an LFO to increase or decrease, changing the pulse of a beating effect in the sound. Next he'll vary the depth of the LFO, strengthening or weakening its impact. Finally, with just one twist of the mod wheel, Pahmer will raise the pitch and goose the LFO, making the note gliss higher and higher while, at the same time, beating faster and faster, with the beats getting stronger and stronger. Think: helicopter out of control, aimed straight for your head.

And *still*, Pahmer says, we've only just begun to plug into what the Nord Lead can do for the real-time keyboardist. Don't forget that he's got four separate arpeggiators to play with, which is, he says, "kind of crazy . . . and kind of cool. You can layer different waves to create a sea of motion. You think a pad is static until you realize when you listen that it's programmed with microscopic motion. You hear an almost subliminal effect."

Bottom line? "Just when you think you've tapped this thing pretty deep," he concludes, "you realize it's just the tip of the iceberg."

Photo: Sonja Pacho

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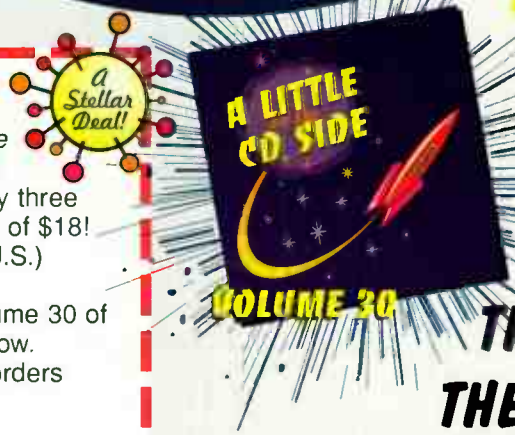

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Sheryl Crow

The Globe Sessions

(A&M)

With so many pop stars showing the creative lifespan of fruit flies, it's a pleasure to report that Sheryl Crow keeps getting better. On her last album she made smart, taut pop that rendered her softer debut obsolete. This time, Crow still graces crisp melodies with her attractive salt 'n' honey voice, but the emotional weight of her songs has multiplied tenfold. Dominated by sob-in-your-beer, first-person stories of heartache, *The Globe Sessions* has the harrowing regret and resentment of deep blues and country—and it's

catchy as all get-out to boot.

Crow gets lowdown on the opening track, the languid "My Favorite Mistake." Supported by cool tremolo guitar from writing partner Jeff Trott, she captures the futility of a relationship where everything stinks yet it's impossible to quit, as the title suggests. Never content with one-dimensional melodrama, Crow mines situations for real-life complexities. In the twangy "Anything But Down" she portrays a doormat, only to exclaim angrily, "You wish you were never wrong./Well, I got some wishes of my own." Highlighted by dramatic Jimmie Haskell strings, "Am I Getting Through" builds slowly like an approaching storm, then erupts into a blazing rocker as Crow threatens to avenge all slights, snarling, "I'm gonna make 'em pay and pay and pay."

Why the new directness? "I felt like it was time to make a more personal record," she explains. "I was listening to old country music: the Louvin brothers, Wanda Jackson, George Jones and Melba Montgomery, Hank Snow. I don't know if those influences surfaced literally, but lyrically these are straightforward, down-home songs about heartbreak."

She wrote this material on her Fifties Kay bass, which she hails as "the most rad bass on the planet! Although I'm a keyboard player, I've never written on keyboards, since you tend to go for what is familiar and comfortable. Writing on bass encourages the best melodies because it forces you to be economical about chord choices."

Crow recorded in a studio of her own creation. "Midway through touring last year, with the help of Bill Bottrell I put together a studio to take on the road, including [Alesis] DA88s and great vintage outboard gear like a Neve Sidecar, API Lunchboxes, and vintage 1176 and LA2A compressors. Later I found I had a lot of what constituted an actual studio, so I went ahead and added a Neve console, an Ampex two-inch, and a Fairchild compressor, plus some good basic mics." Crow located a New York City space, and Globe Studios was born.

As for being her own boss, Crow notes, "I find my vocals are the hardest thing to produce. I get attached to the feeling of an original take, and it's difficult for me to go back and make it a listener's vocal, so quite a few songs were first takes."

The gut-wrench power of these performances validates her instincts. Animated by Lisa Germano's autoharp and Crow's own harmonica, "It Don't Hurt" combines a dreamy backdrop with her earthiest vocal ever: Though she couldn't sing it off-key if her life depended on it, Crow's desperate rasp has the chilling resonance of a primal scream. Then there's "Crash & Burn," an embarrassingly frank confession that suggests an unguarded moment rather than a recording session.

Among the fun moments, the rollicking "There Goes the Neighborhood" boasts Stonsey Bobby Keys saxes, and the breezy "Mississippi" is a fine new Dylan song. But it's Crow's soulful eloquence which carries the day. Best of all, good as *The Globe Sessions* is, it sounds like she's just hitting her stride.

—Jon Young

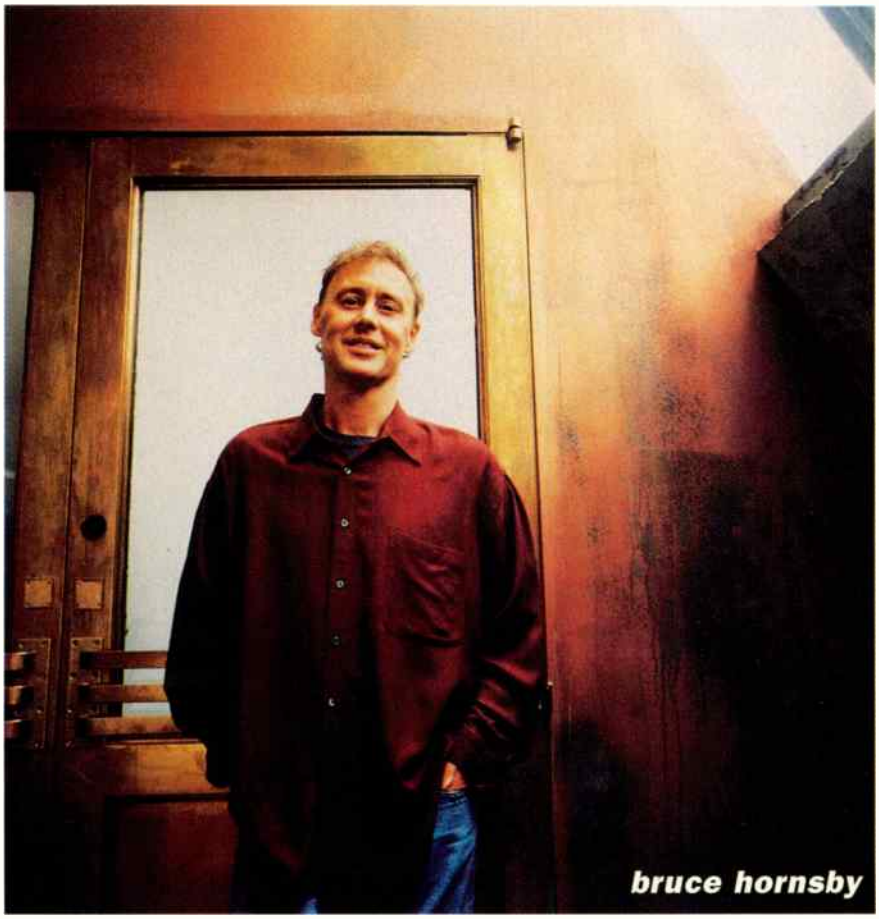

Photo: Danny Clinch

Bruce Hornsby

Spirit Trail

(RCA)

Like Joni Mitchell, Bruce Hornsby possesses a harmonic language so distinctive that you can hear it in one chord. On *Spirit Trail* he takes his trademark a step forward: Where on earlier albums he tended to spell out voicings with strong comps, here he introduces an ostinato-driven left-hand technique unexplored in pop music, or even in jazz, since Lyle Mays' astonishing solo on "Ozark" with the Pat Metheny Group some eighteen years ago.

"In the three years since my last record, I recommitted myself to the study of the piano," Hornsby explains. "I developed some areas I had never dealt with before, especially independence of the hands. I decided to go back to the practice regimen I had in college, which was six or seven hours a day—although now that I have a career and a family, it was hard to find that much time, so I wound up doing from three to five hours a day instead."

The fruits of this labor are obvious throughout much of *Spirit Trail*. Hornsby solos liberally, especially on the first of these two CDs, often in passages that sound much simpler than they are; his eloquent cruise through a 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2 rhythm on "King of the Hill" flows into the ear like a smooth 4.

The piano, though, is only one element in Hornsby's music. His singing has always been strong, and it remains so here as well. His band, augmented by a few high-profile guests, meets its own high standards of digging into the material and bringing Hornsby's instrumental sound—lots of space around the keyboards, an active bass line, a deep and steady groove from the drums—to life.

The results are more mixed in the area of songwriting, due in part to the amount of material—twenty songs—offered on *Spirit Trail*. The strength of Hornsby's performance, and the uniqueness of his sound, can also compromise some aspects of his composition. The chorus hook on "Sad Moon," for example, is classic Hornsby: catchy, a bit poignant, with jazzy undertones. By comparison, the melody of the verses, limited in range and not as developed as we would want for a voice as expressive as Hornsby's, doesn't stand up.

In fact, there are places on *Spirit Trail* where the melody truncates into short, rhymed fragments, whose repetitions clearly function as a tension-building device; you hear this on "Sad Moon" and, more prominently, "King of the Hill."

goo goo dolls: dizzy up the noise

Nothing exceeds like success. After ten years and five albums together, the Goo Goo Dolls struck platinum on *A Boy Named Goo*, selling more than a million records and then going on the road for a staggering twenty-two months. And after it was over, recalls singer/songwriter/guitarist John Rzeznik, "I was like, I don't want to do this any more.

"It's funny, I wasn't comfortable doing well," he relates, "because you get so passionately involved in the struggle, you finally reach this ledge and have a chance to sit back and take a breath, and you go, 'God, what do I do now?' So I didn't write for almost a year."

Still, you don't play your way out of the Buffalo bar scene with the kind of driving, hook-driven rock & roll that draws favorable comparison with the Replacements by wallowing in self-pity. So Rzeznik recovered his sense of purpose enough to pen the gorgeous anthem "Iris" for the film *City of Angels*—and when that single went through the roof, the Goos were back in business. By the summer of '98 Rzeznik and his musical partner, bassist/songwriter/singer Robby Takac, were holed up in Burbank's Track Records studios, putting the last touches on their band's much-awaited new album, *Dizzy Up the Girl*, and agreeing that when it comes to making records, success also has its privileges.

Time and money, for instance. "We're not spending a million bucks, but we can spend a little more time than usual without the financial restraints," Rzeznik observes. "Like three months instead of six weeks."

"We've always had to go in and do a record as fast as we could," Takac says. "On our early records we had, like, one Marshall amp. So it generally consisted of putting up a guitar sound, a drum sound, a bass sound, and then ripping through the record. It got sort of formulaic."

Rzeznik and Takac credit producer Rob Cavallo—who's also their A&R rep at Warner Bros.—for helping them break with the formula this time around, both as a guide ("He's honest enough to say 'this sucks,' so he's like a real coach") and as a source for lots of great guitars and amps. "Rob has twenty or twenty-five guitars here," Rzeznik says gratefully, "so you can get a '58 Les Paul Junior and a Fender Bronco amp, or a [Vox] AC30 with a [Fender] Mustang. This baritone guitar," he says, picking up a vintage Veillette, "I didn't even know that such a thing existed before." As a result, Rzeznik says, the band has been able to give each song "a bigger palette of sounds to choose from" than previous discs literally afforded.

Yet the overall sound of *Dizzy* also boasts more of a live feel than previous albums. "We wanted to get away from that over-compressed sound you hear on every rock record," Takac says. "We wanted a record that could breathe." *Dizzy*'s engineer Ken Allardyce was happy to comply. "That's pretty much what I do anyway," he says. "The old mics are by far the best. Tape sounds better than digital tape. In my estimation, a lot of the old consoles, like the old Neves and APIs, blow away a lot of the new ones, in terms of getting that organic, natural sound."

The band began by recording drummer Mike Malinin's tracks at Studio One in L.A.—"It's a great room and it has a great microphone collection," notes Rzeznik. Their next stop was Track Records, at which point Rzeznik and Takac worked out their guitar and bass parts song by song. The day we spoke, Rzeznik was getting ready to cut all his vocal tracks in one continuous stretch, which may work to the advantage of his powerful, grainy timbre: "You blow your voice out singing every day for three or four hours and it's a good thing."

Now that he's over his dose of writer's block, Rzeznik figures he's growing as a songsmith, both in terms of maturity ("I'm 32 and my life is different now") and perspective. Composing "Iris" for a film soundtrack, he figures, "was really good for me 'cause I can step out of my own character. I asked Don Was, 'What do you do when you don't have anything to write about?' And he said, 'Score films—or pretend you are.' It was good advice."

Still, Goos fans will be pleasantly un-surprised to hear the band rocking tasty new tunes like "Dizzy" and "Slide" in their familiar balls-out style, albeit with cooler gear. "We did more shows in the past two and a half years than we had in the ten years before that," Takac says dryly. "You can't help but get better when you play that much."

—Mark Rowland

Photo: Phil Feersmith

"I've always done this live," Hornsby explains. "I make up words on the spot a lot live, and whenever I hear live tapes, I always get a kick out of that aspect of my performance. So I decided to do that a little bit on the record."

The impact is evident: Amidst the Americana references that color Hornsby's work, these passages roll like the cadences of a country preacher. But they also take him further from the long lines and panoramic imagery that he brings to his best work. With several exceptions—most notably the gorgeous "Fortunate Son," with its inspired resolution to the I chord at the *beginning*, not the end, of the chorus—the melodies on *Spirit Trail* don't linger as long as the hooks which frame them. And more often than we might hope, the words fall short of what Homsby has accomplished in the past: Lines like "Tellin' a bad joke may make you feel good/But you never know who you hurt with your words" nag rather than enlighten.

The album ends with three impressive, intertwined tracks. "Song D," one of two lovely solo piano performances, features an ecstatic trilled figure that's echoed in "Swan Song," with its well-placed bass line in the chorus (played by Hornsby, on his knees, at a Hammond B-3 pedalboard) and an enigmatic benedictory lyric. But just as the tune fades, the final cut, "Variations on 'Swan Song' and 'Song in D,'" takes off. It's a bracing improvisation, with Hornsby blowing over the drum tracks John Molo had cut for "Swan Song." "But it had nothing to do with the song," Hornsby laughs. "It's just random. So if you hear Molo play some inexplicable cymbal crash in, like, beat three of bar seven, it's not his fault!"

Much of *Spirit Trail* is about Hornsby exploring his performance side. The trick on his next project may be to bring other elements up to the level he's reached as a player. We're betting he'll pull it off.
—Robert L. Doerschuk

P J Harvey

Is This Desire?

(Island)

Like lots of songwriters, Polly Jean Harvey is a devoted four-track user; a few years back, she even issued a whole album of nothing but four-track home recordings. Also like lots of songwriters, she's probably had that head-scratching experience where you go into a "normal" studio and come out with versions of songs that sound a thousand times better but miss that indefinable atmosphere of the original demos. That would go some way toward explaining her working method on *Is This Desire?*, which involved transferring all her four-track demos to 24-track tape, then adding and/or subtracting parts on top of the original tracks as needed.

One of the providers of those new parts was keyboardist Eric Drew Feldman, who, along with such colleagues as guitarists Mick Harvey and Joe Gore and drummer Rob Ellis, entered the sessions with few advance instructions from his employer and was mostly given free rein to add whatever he wanted—at first. "The skeptic in Polly knows right away what she doesn't like and has a hard time containing herself from quickly nixing ideas that she doesn't like, which is of course how it should be," says Feldman. "I got the impression that she was trying to keep a low profile during some of this laying-down of ideas, and so she waited until later to edit or reject them." And when editing time came, Harvey enlisted the aid of co-producer Flood, who had worked with PJ on her previous album, *To Bring You My Love* (1995) and who Feldman credits as being "great at encouraging an experimental approach."

Perhaps the most surprising feature on *Is This Desire?* is its frequent use of electronic percussion loops, as heard most obviously on the subtly spooky "The Wind" and the raucous "No Girl So Sweet." While the loop on the former song was added relatively late in the recording process, the latter was an original part of the four-track demo. "I believe Polly had someone make her a cassette full of loops to help her write with," Feldman recalls. It would be a stretch to say that PJ goes techno, but these loops play a big role in its psychotronic ambience.

What about the music? There are a few moments of raise-the-roof clatter, but on balance there's a greater serenity here than on *To Bring You My Love*, at least in terms of volume. But turning the amps down only reveals deeper levels of creepiness in Harvey's already unsettling work. Brilliant arrangement touches, like the mega-distorted bass lines on "My Beautiful Leah" and "Joy" (produced, Feldman reports, by running a Yamaha QY20 through a fuzzbox) or the slowing down of Harvey's lead vocal on "Catherine" add to the chilling effect. Lacking the overt drama that distinguishes its predecessor, *Isn't This Desire?* isn't an immediately engaging listen. But given the benefit of some time, it can be a dandy house-haunter.
—Mac Randall

Photo: Guzman

Hole

Celebrity Skin

(DGC)

As the creative team behind one of the year's more anticipated rock sets, Hole's Courtney Love and Eric Erlandson shouldered a hefty burden of expectations while recording *Celebrity Skin*. Their previous outing, *Live Through This* (1994), earned several album of the year accolades, and the years since have seen Love blossom into a much-criticized glitterati debutante. As time went by, the pressure built to come up with something to confirm Hole's short but substantial legacy. It turns out to be the kind of pressure this band can handle: *Celebrity Skin* is an album full of fiery performances, great songs, and killer melodies.

But it sure didn't happen overnight. Guitarist Erlandson says he worked on the album from April 1997 to July 1998, with only a week off. "The other albums were intense, but not like this," he says. Following the tour for *Live Through This*, he recalls, Hole rented a house in New Orleans to write material for the sequel. "We came up with a few good ideas," Erlandson says, "but we ended up setting the house on fire." The band broke up while Love made *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, then reunited in Los Angeles with

producer Michael Beinhorn (Soundgarden, Chili Peppers, Soul Asylum) in the summer of '96. But the songs still weren't ready.

Enter Billy Corgan, who co-wrote with the band for just under two weeks. "The Billy thing was a catalyst that pulled the project together," says Erlandson. "We already had good ideas from rehearsing, so when he came in, he just made them better."

The result is a huge step forward in craftsmanship, as *Celebrity Skin* goes places *Pretty on the Inside*-era Hole never even insinuated. On songs like the tense, acoustic "Northern Star," the jangly "Awful," and the dramatic "Petals," Love is in astonishingly fine voice, her vocal lessons having apparently paid off well, while songs like the classic-metallic title track and the R.E.M.ish "Boys on the Radio" bear witness that Hole doesn't look too bad cloaked in colorful pop. And Erlandson, who plays all the guitar heard on the album, serves notice that he may be one of modern rock's unsung instrumental heroes.

"In the studio I tried to pretend to be different guitar players," he explains. "I'd try to lay back sometimes and then be pushy at others." On the eerily quiet "Dying," for example, he threw down a guide guitar progression, thinking he'd go back and polish it up later; that guide track wound up being the only guitar on the song. Conversely, the turbulent breakdown in the middle of "Hit So Hard" follows the kitchen sink approach: "Some of it is a guitar through a synthesizer for a grunge thing." Erlandson points out. "Courtney sang a vocal through a Walkman; I looped it and ran it through a synth patch. The program takes two hours to run, but it melts the voice and a melody with the tone of your choice." On top of that are keyboards, a bad acoustic guitar, and three different electric parts filtered through Digidesign Pro Tools and blended into one guitar track—all for just twenty seconds of music. "It's a big mess, meant to be Beatle-y psychedelic," he laughs.

Erlandson's tireless, monomaniacal guitar wizardry gives *Celebrity Skin* its gorgeous textures and resonant power. While past Hole recordings largely kicked melody out of the way with brute sonic force and punk emotion, *Celebrity Skin* finesses its songs with a skill and vibrancy only the best bands display. It's that rarest of rock triumphs: a hyped-up record that's worth the wait.

—Bob Gulla

Herbie Hancock

Gershwin's World

(Verve)

On this remarkably ambitious album, veteran keyboardist/composer Herbie Hancock recasts the work of George Gershwin, using it as a base camp from which to launch daring musical expeditions. But not only does he lead Gershwin into unfamiliar territory, Hancock also places the celebrated composer into historical context by including interpretive pieces by W. C. Handy, James P. Johnson, Maurice Ravel, and Duke Ellington, towering figures who either influenced Gershwin or whose own music was shaped by his style.

Straight-ahead Gershwin this is not. From the percussion-laden strains of the "Fascinatin' Rhythm" snippet that opens the album through a masterful eleven-minute orchestral version of "Lullaby," Hancock defies convention and challenges listeners to hear Gershwin's music in a new way. On "Lullaby," for instance, he creates a sort of improvised jazz concerto: The Orpheus Chamber Orchestra states the dreamy melody simply, then as the piece develops, Hancock makes his piano part increasingly chromatic, filigreed, and overtly jazzy. On a performance of the second movement to Ravel's *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in G*, Hancock improvises even more boldly, demonstrating the connection

between Ravel and Gershwin and then advancing into a more modern sound canvas.

Several guest appearances work well, even if they tend to lean more toward the identity of the performers than that of the composers. Stevie Wonder lends his harmonica and vocals to a funk-blues version of Handy's "St. Louis Blues," which in spots sounds like a cut from Wonder's coolly jazzy *Journey through the Secret Life of Plants*, though spiced up by Hancock's bubbly B-3 organ licks. A two-piano pairing with Chick Corea on James P. Johnson's "Blueberry Rhyme" is less effective, with a certain messy virtuosity winning out over the tune's natural organization. Perhaps the most surprising and rewarding contribution comes from Joni Mitchell, who delivers a wonderfully smoky rendition of "The Man I Love," her voice framed by Wayne Shorter's playful sax flourishes and supported by one of Hancock's more carefully controlled piano parts. Though Mitchell has always infused her work with jazz elements, this track seems like a real arrival for her.

Producer Robert Sadin and Hancock took pains to fine-tune the sonics, and it shows. Most of the album was recorded on an early Neve console with vintage 1073 Neve preamps, and most mics were vintage Neumanns. Other than a couple of orchestral tracks, which were mixed to Sony optical, the album was mixed to half-inch analog tape on an Ampex ATR. When mastering, everything was kept in the analog realm as long as possible, to the extent of resending a track from analog rather than make digital gain changes with Sonic Solutions.

Because the fall of 1998 represents the centenary of George Gershwin's birth, numerous tribute albums will be coming our way, and most will likely present his work as we've always known and loved it. With *Gershwin's World*, however, Herbie Hancock displays the many facets of Gershwin's brilliance by filtering it through some genius of his own.

—Bob Remstein

Junior Wells

Blues Hit Big Town

(Delmark)

Jimmy Dawkins

Fast Fingers

(Delmark)

The recent deaths of Junior Wells, Jimmy Rogers, Luther Allison, and Johnny Copeland confirm that we are losing that generation of musicians who learned directly from the fathers of electric blues. But the spark that passed between those pioneers and their inheritors is preserved on reissues like Junior Wells' *Blues Hit Big Town* and Jimmy Dawkins' *Fast Fingers*.

It's a sound rarely heard with the drop-dead clarity of *Blues Hit Big Town*, a landmark album that compiles Wells' first two sessions as a leader, in 1953 and '54. The set is a torch-passing, with Muddy Waters, dirty slide king Elmore James, and piano genius Otis Spann joining the then-nineteen-year-old harmonica ace in the studio. Wells would eventually be influenced by James Brown to forge a more rhythmically dynamic approach, but here you can hear him blowing the Delta dust out of his instrument as the normally explosive James and Waters restrict themselves to fills and chunky support. They ride the barbecue-fed straight-four heartbeat of the rhythm section, which is headed by guitarist Louis Myers and his bassist brother Dave and joined by drummers Fred Below or Odie Payne.

Yet it's Wells who brings hold-your-breath intensity to this disc. His reedy voice rings with twists like swallowed syllables, howls, and stretched vowels that turn numbers like "Please Throw This Dog a Bone" into paradigms of want and pain. His harmonica doesn't yet match his vocal performance, but the playing is nakedly soulful, emulating his tightly-pitched chirp in its best moments.

That every breath on this mono album is so tangibly expressive speaks to the superiority of both Chicago's old Universal Recording Studios and engineer Bill Putnam. "The studio was used a lot by Mercury, Chess, United, and Capitol," says Bob Koester, head of Delmark. "It was Duke Ellington's favorite. There wasn't anything we could do to improve the sound: The old tape on acetate didn't stretch, so when you play it the outside stays on. We have more trouble with tapes that were made ten years ago: They have to be baked for twenty-four hours at a hundred degrees or the oxide will separate. And we can't use whale oil as an adhesive anymore. There was a theory at the time that if you ran a virgin tape across the heads in record mode before a session, you'd set the molecules so you got better quality and perhaps less tape hiss. These sessions were so perfectly recorded—there was no EQ—I wouldn't screw with them."

Another kind of perfection ripples through Dawkins' *Fast Fingers*. The guitarist's white-hot six-stringing and singing on these '68 and '69 sessions will startle even fans of the high-energy CDs he's made since his Nineties comeback. But Dawkins was already an established heavyweight around Chicago in the Sixties, when he was backing Luther Allison and Jimmy Rogers and headlining on his own dates. You can hear why on his dragster-paced picking throughout "Triple Trebles" and the demon vibrato he wrings from his Fender Jaguar and Super-Reverb on "It Serves Me Right to Suffer." Add his mastery of cry-and-moan vocals and a nagging question sets in: How could a musician every bit as fiery as his contemporaries Otis Rush and Buddy Guy have so thoroughly evaded fame?

Racism is Dawkins' answer. "In the music business, a nigger have a place," he says. "When you start your own publishing company and tell people what's right and wrong, then you're a smart-ass. I slipped through the cracks mostly,

though, because of not touring. I did not Uncle Tom to the booking agents and club owners who told me that if I didn't have an all-black band I wouldn't play for them.

"I'm not bitter or angry. I'm just trying to tell the truth as I've seen it for more than thirty years. For people like me in this business," the 62-year-old Dawkins continues, "recognition comes after you're dead." *Fast Fingers* challenges listeners to prove him wrong. Right now.

—***Ted Drozdowski***

Fatboy Slim

You've Come a Long Way Baby

(Astralwerks)

The songwriting world divides into two camps: those who sweat and toil until they give birth to a well-polished gem, and those sloths whose laid-back work ethic is interrupted by an occasional spurt of inspiration, which earns them a smash hit and fifteen minutes of fame. Norman Cook, a.k.a. Fatboy Slim, belongs to the latter camp. His Big Beat surf hit, "Rockafeller Skank," with the delightfully dumb hook "Right about now, the funk soul bravuh," is a lesson in lazy-boy gratification.

"Some of my best songs are the ones I put the least amount of work into," Cook admits. "Like with 'Rockafeller Skank.' First I had the vocal, which dictated the tempo of the beat. Then I tried some northern soul rhythm grooves with those surf guitars, then the other filtered guitar bit, which sounds like someone singing—and that was it. It all fell together as soon as I heard the hook—the vocal working with the guitar and that twangy noise. Tracks that I've agonized over for hours often don't end up as good."

The follow-up to last year's *Better Living Through Chemistry*, *You've Come a Long Way Baby* is a fat-bottomed, goofy funk fest, replete with the booming sci-fi breakbeat of "Right Here, Right Now," the Detroit electro tribute "Acid 8000," a Stax-styled fatback sendup called "Gangster Trippin," and a lewd track featuring DJ star Freddy Fresh, "Fatboy Slim is Fucking in Heaven." Cook actually did some work on this one, sampling a vocal pattern over a funk loop. Over chunka-chinka guitars and an elastic Seventies funk backbeat, Fresh's line "fucking-in-heaven" is looped *ad infinitum*, turning coarse profanity into street-smart mantra.

"Freddy and I were gonna do a track together, so we made a DAT out of the same samples, but we didn't listen to what the other one did," Cook explains. "He put an intro on the front of his DAT, saying, 'If I could have a remix on my new album by Fatboy Slim I would be fucking in heaven.' So I turned his words into a rhythm and put it over this loop, and it sounds like he's singing. Things like that are quite complicated, because every syllable of the word has to be a separate sample on a separate sequencer key. That takes a long time. Other stuff, you just loop it up and it sounds great."

Cook's Brighton studio holds all the standard

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gear: Technics 1200, Akai S950 sampler, Atari ST1040 computer running Creator software, Roland TR-303 bass machine, SE1 Midi Moog, and a collection of twelve thousand LPs. Cook recorded *Baby* over six months, working two days a week. "I don't like to work hard," he shrugs. "I'm very lazy. And I don't care if people are listening to this music in five years. I want them to listen to what I'm making *then*, in the year 2002. It's sad, but true."

The massive success of "Rockafeller Skank" shows that people—even musicians—just want to have fun every now and then. Who says you have to slave for hours over scales or rudiments? DJ gear has come a long way, baby, and there's no turning back.

—Ken Micallef

Baxter

Baxter

(Maverick)

Strange as it may seem, every now and then a band gets signed purely on the strength of their music. Such was the case with Baxter, a Stockholm-based trio who managed to get the attention of about a dozen U.S. labels simply by sending around a self-produced promotional CD. Admittedly, none of the band members is a music biz naïf: Programmer/mix engineer Carl Herlofsson heads his own independent label in Sweden (Primal Music) and has produced more than thirty albums, while vocalist/guitarist/lyricist Nina Ramsby spent five years as lead vocalist and guitarist for the rock band Salt, and programmer/lyricist Ricky Tillblad operated a dub/reggae club in Stockholm. Their collective résumé offers a clue both to the excellence and the direction of *Baxter*'s overall sound.

Though programmed sounds and dub, drum 'n' bass, and hip-hop beats define the foundation of their music, Baxter doesn't rely solely on these elements. Rather, the album's strength lies in the quality of its instrumental and vocal melodies. And the sounds that initially inspired these songs aren't necessarily even evident in the final product. "Some of them started from loops taken from records," says Herlofsson, "though it might not have ended up being what we used in the end. There are no samples on the album, but there have been some samples in the process." The tempos were also frequently altered between conception and recording: "A lot of them were slow and moody at first. 'Television' was originally conceived at half-tempo. Then we sped things up a little."

Though *Baxter* was recorded over the course of a year, "the actual studio time spent was two months," Herlofsson admits. "All the writing and recording were done sporadically. We did it in our spare time—a day here, a day there. Most of the songs were written and recorded in a matter of a couple of days. The only thing we did that was really concentrated was mixing, which took two weeks."

That kind of spacing left plenty of room for experimentation and happy accidents. Apart from an Akai S3000 sampler and a Studio Electronics F81, "we used stuff that was lying around the studio," claims Herlofsson. The heavy guitar tone heard on "Fading," for instance, "came about when Nina and Ricky were recording guitar ideas on a Portastudio and then brought the cassette into the studio. I put it in the cassette deck and played it out through the speakers, miked it again and sampled it . . . and that's the guitar sound. Now people go, 'Where did you get that bitchin' Marshall sound?'" Now you know.

—Jason Zasky

Photo: Peter Gehrke

Susan James

Fantastic Voyage: A Double Album

(Red Letter)

In a field of starry-eyed, post-Lilith female folkies (and you *know* they're out there, gathering in little 'I'm sensitive too, dammit' camps across the country), it's getting harder to scythe the wheat from the chaff. Which is why this latest entry from crafty Californian Susan James comes as such a brow-wiping relief: It doesn't whine, it doesn't jangle, it doesn't mask vague Naomi Wolf-isms in vitriolic hyperbole. Instead, it slithers along on its muscled Gothic belly, via murky Joy Division/Echo and the Bunnymen chords, confident straight-from-the-heart vocals, and metaphors plucked from everyday existence, not some snooty college textbook. Divided into two less than pastoral segments ("Lovesick"—the songs; "Stranger Bedfellows"—the instrumentals), *Fantastic Voyage* feels as familiar and comfortable as a five-year-old Lazy-Boy recliner. No extra effort required: To hear James is to like her.

James produced both discs here, and admits she's coming from a slightly sinister sonic angle. "My stuff is a weird combination of happy, upbeat rhythms and this weird underlying melancholy," she explains. Employing an acoustic Martin and an Alvarez, as well as a handful of various electrics, she relies a great deal on alternate tunings to contour her sound. "There are a few songs on the record that are standard tunings, but I generally use about three or four completely different ones. On 'Manna' and 'Blood Of Experience,' I used D-G-D-G-A-D, sort of a mutant form of D-A-D-G-A-D, a popular one with folk performers in the British Isles."

"Thematically, *Fantastic Voyage* sums up my bittersweet life, because it's all about growing up and having these wild ideas about how things are gonna be, like 'Gee, if I'm a really good musician, people are gonna reward my efforts!' But that's not necessarily the case in the real world, so you have to rely a lot on yourself, your own beliefs about why you're doing this." Indeed, even when James, against the New Order-styled backdrop of "The Blood of Experience," slips into a cornball sentiment like "This waiting 'round for you/Is as painful as giving birth," she belts it so convincingly that she elevates the material, putting a nice poetic topspin on pedestrian thoughts.

James says she included the instrumental disc, every bit as grim-sounding as its companion, because she felt that listeners "who enjoyed my vocal numbers would enjoy my musical ones just as well, and vice-versa." But that portion of *Fantastic Voyage* does drag in places, as on the special effects-laden "Magic Hour" and the monotonous bombast of "Drone." Her specialty remains the loved-and-lost-and-now-I'm-gonna-kill-him ballad; the wonderfully eerie "Falling Waltz" suggests Marty Robbins riding slowly through outlaw territory with his trembling six-shooter drawn. "I'm not a victim/And I'm not a fool," James murmurs, with the faintest hint of threat. That's enough right there to set her apart from most of her femme-folkie peers. James isn't here to bill and coo: She's here to hurt.

—Tom Lanham

productindex

This product guide lists the equipment and page where the players talk about the gear they use. Feel free to contact the manufacturers for specific information on what the best players play and tell them that you read about them in *Musician*.

AKAI, 4710 Mercantile Dr., Fort Worth, TX 76137 (800) 433-5627: S950 sampler, S300 sampler, **89**

AKG, 1449 Donelson Pike, Nashville, TN 37217 (615) 399-2199: K141 headphones, **77**

ALESIS, 1633 26th St., Santa Monica, CA 90404 (310) 558-4530: Midiverb, **77**; DA88, **82**

AUDIO-TECHNICA, 1221 Commerce Dr., Stow, OH 44224 (330) 686-2600: mics, **77**

AUDIX, P.O. Box 4010, Wilsonville, OR 97070 (800) 966-8261: CX-101, 111 large capsule studio mics, **60**

BEHRINGER, P.O. Box 9031, Syosset, NY 11791 (516) 364-2244: Multicom processor, **28**; compressor, **77**

CASIO, 570 Mt. Pleasant Ave., Dover, NJ 07801 (973) 361-5400: 210 keyboard, **28**

DEAN MARKLEY, 3350 Scott Blvd., #45, Santa Clara, CA 95054 (408) 988-2456: magnetic pickups, **67**

DIGITECH/DOD, 8760 South Sandy Pkwy., Sandy, UT 84070 (801) 566-8919: Studio Quad V2 effects processor, **28**

DIMARZIO, 1388 Richmond Terr., Staten Island, NY 10310 (718) 981-9286: magnetic guitar pickups, **67**

E-MU, P.O. Box 660015, Scotts Valley, CA 95067 (408) 438-1921: E-6400 sampler, **28**

EPIPHONE, 1818 Elm Hill Pike, Nashville, TN 37210 (615) 871-4500: Korina Flying V bass, **60**

FENDER, 7975 N. Hayden Rd., Scottsdale, AZ 85258 (602) 596-9690: Bronco amp, Mustang, **83**

FISHMAN, 340-D Fordham Rd., Wilmington, MA 01887 (978) 988-9199: microphone pickups, **68**

FOCUSRITE, 200 Sea Ln., Farmingdale, NY 11735 (516) 249-1399: dual mono voice box, **28**

FOSTEX, 15431 Blackburn Ave., Norwalk, CA 90650 (562) 921-1112: D-90 hard-disk recorder, **28**; FD-4 hard-disk recorder, **63**

KORG, 316 S. Service Rd., Melville, NY 11747 (516) 333-9100: 700 analog synth, **28**

L.R. BAGGS, 482 N. Frontage Rd., Nipomo, CA 93444 (805) 929-3545: microphone pickups, **68**

LUDWIG, P.O. Box 310, Elkhart, IN 46515 (219) 522-1675: Padded Gig Bags, **60**

MARSHALL, 316 S. Service Rd., Melville, NY 11747 (516) 333-9100: amp, **83**

MARTIN, P.O. Box 329, 510 Sycamore St., Nazareth, PA 18064 (800) 345-3103: 000=18 guitar, **67**

NEUMANN USA, 6 Vista Dr., Old Lyme, CT 06371 (860) 434-5220: U-47 vintage mics, **86**

NORD LEAD, 15251 Roosevelt Blvd., #206, Clearwater, FL 33760 (727) 519-9669: keyboard, **71**

OVATION, 20 Old Windsor Rd., Bloomfield, CT 06002 (860) 509-8888: guitars, **68**

QUANTEGY, 800 Commerce Dr., Peachtree City, GA 30269 (800) 227-8443: ATR, **86**

ROLAND, 7200 Dominion Cir., Los Angeles, CA 90040 (213) 685-5141: PC-2000 keyboard, JV-880 synth module, **28**; TR-303 bass machine, **89**

SABINE, 13301 Hwy. 441, Alachua, FL 32615 (800) 626-7394: feedback eliminator, **68**

SCHECTER GUITAR RESEARCH, 1538 N. Highland Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90028 (213) 469-8900: A-7 seven string electric, **60**

SEYMOUR DUNCAN, 5427 Hollister Ave., Santa Barbara, CA 93111 (805) 964-9610: magnetic guitar pickups, **67**

SHURE BROTHERS, 222 Hartrey Ave., Evanston, IL 60202 (800) 257-4873: SM57 microphone, **68**

STUDIO ELECTRONICS, 18034 Ventura Blvd., Ste. 169, Encino, CA 91316 (818) 776-8104: F81, **89**

TAKAMINE GUITARS, 20 Old Windsor Rd., Bloomfield, CT 06002 (860) 509-8888: acoustic guitars, **68**

T.C. ELECTRONIC, 709-H Hampshire Rd., Westlake Village, CA 91361 (805) 373-1828: Finalizer, **77**

TECHNICS, 1 Panasonic Way, 1C-8, Secaucus, NJ 07094 (201) 271-3348: SL-1200 turntables, **28**; 1200, **89**

VOX, 316 S. Service Rd., Melville, NY 11747 (516) 333-9100: AC30, **83**

WASHBURN, 255 Corporate Woods Pkwy., Vernon Hills, IL 60061 (800) 877-6863: D200SK, D250SK acoustic guitars, **60**

YAMAHA, 6600 Orangethrope Blvd., Buena Park, CA 90620 (714) 522-9011: NS-10 monitors, **28**; SPX90, **78**; acoustic guitars, **68**; QY20, **84**

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ad index

A Musician's Guide to Music Stores

The key to buying new gear? Bring money and stay focused.

Okay, you're about to walk into your friendly local music store, with a fistful of cash and a headful of questions. All that's standing between you and feeding your gear jones is that sales person behind the counter. Sure, he or she wants to make you a happy customer, but differences between how you and they approach this common goal can lead to miscommunication and even kill the deal. What to do? Just follow these suggestions....

1. People who work in music stores are musicians, just like you. But unlike you, they don't have much time to play, study music magazines, or trawl the 'Net for the latest gossip. Their job demands a broad but thin veneer of expertise. So don't expect expert advice as a matter of right. And don't be intimidated.

2. The function of specs is to impress, not explain. Trust your ears, your fingers, and your friends.

3. The money you save on a deal is most likely the money the store saves on service.

4. The smart time to buy is when you've got the money and you're standing in a music store. Don't be trapped into waiting for that next piece of cheaper, better, smaller/bigger piece that's coming next month.

5. Are you actively shopping, browsing, or just killing time? All are okay, but honesty will get you better treatment.

6. There's something wrong with every instrument—except maybe a '52 Broadcaster, or a Fender Rhodes fitted with Raymack tines, active EQ, and a major action overhaul. Don't look for perfect. Go for suitable but challenging.

7. A store can only recommend what it sells. No one, not even Sam Ash and Guitar Center, sells everything.

8. Be aware of "spiffs." It's not uncommon for sales staff to receive a cash reward—a spiff—from the manufacturer for each of their products that get sold.

9. People who work in music stores hear "Stairway to Heaven" and "Jump!" a thousand times each weekend. They would prefer you play something else.

10. If you value the music store experience, don't shop for ideas in a store and then buy from a catalog.

11. Specials: Are they a manufacturer (a) dumping a lame product? (b) dumping a product that's soon to be discontinued?, or (c) deciding it's about time they gave some money away? (Pick any two.)

12. Just because a product is about to be discontinued, that doesn't mean what's coming next will be better. Bargains *can* be had.

13. If an instrument looks simple, it is. If it looks complicated, it is.

14. Don't just ask about tech support. Call up the manufacturers on your short list *before* you buy and see what grisly level of music-on-hold/voicemail hell they're dishing out.

15. Buying a piece of musical equipment doesn't qualify you for a lifetime of free instruction. Assume some responsibility. You'll learn faster and get better service next time.

16. The only good upgrade is a dead one. Equipment should be released in good working order, capable of doing what it says on the box. A manufacturer that trails upgrade features is generally a manufacturer who can't—or won't—get it right the first time.

17. "Open-ended architecture" is often a fancy way of saying "We'll fix all the bugs later."

18. A deal—or a customer—that seems too good to be true, probably is.

—Julian Colbeck

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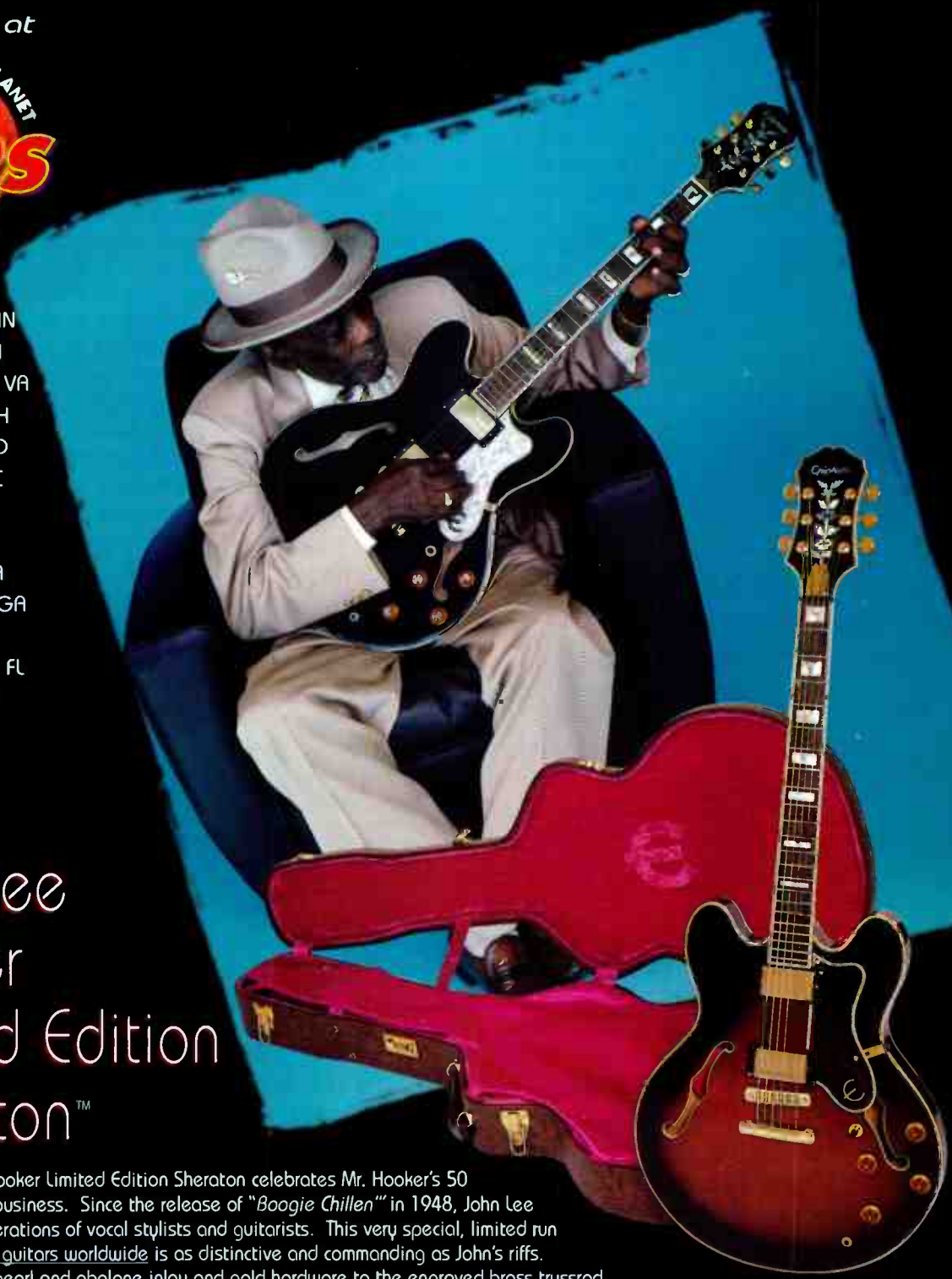

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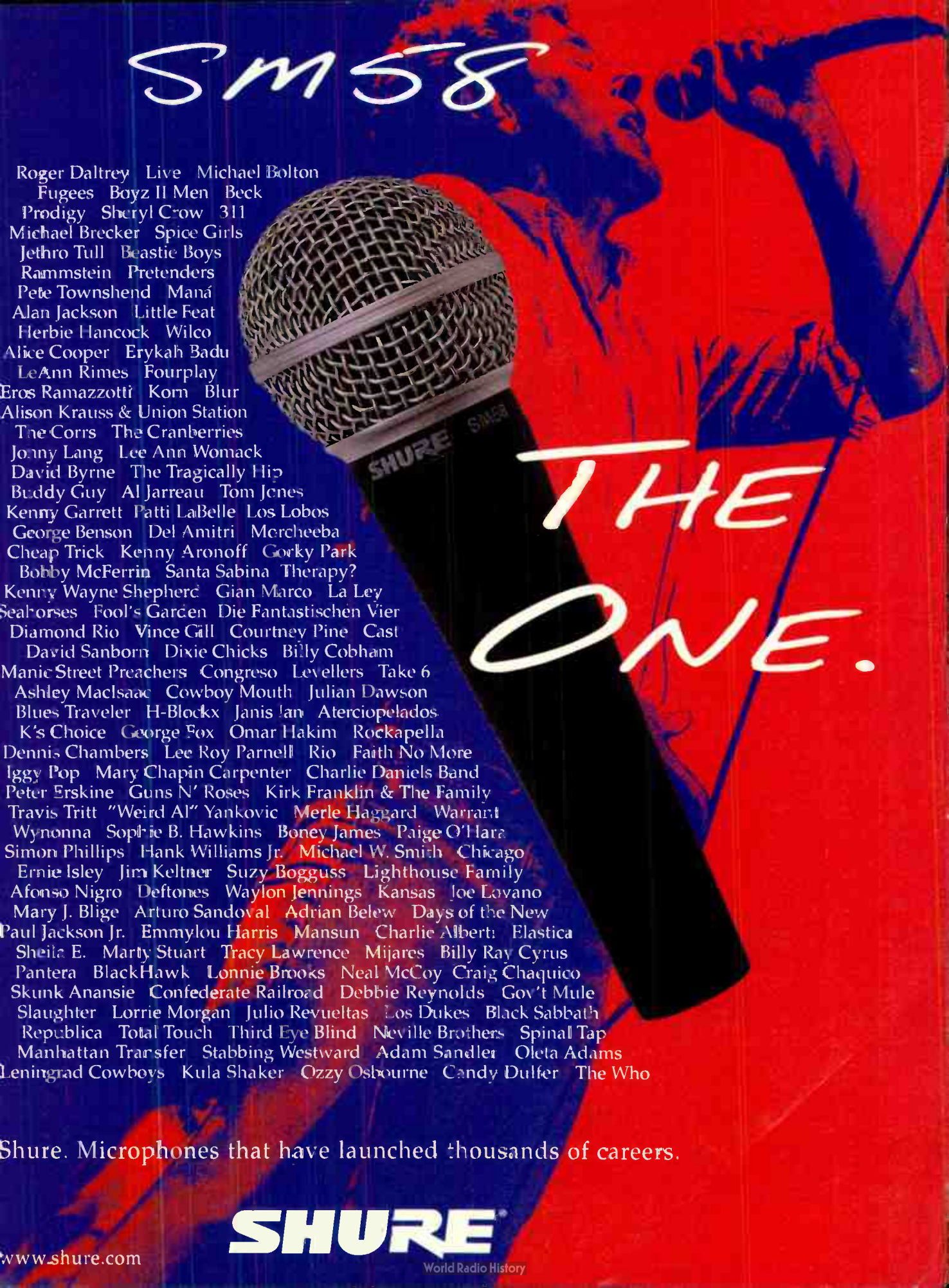

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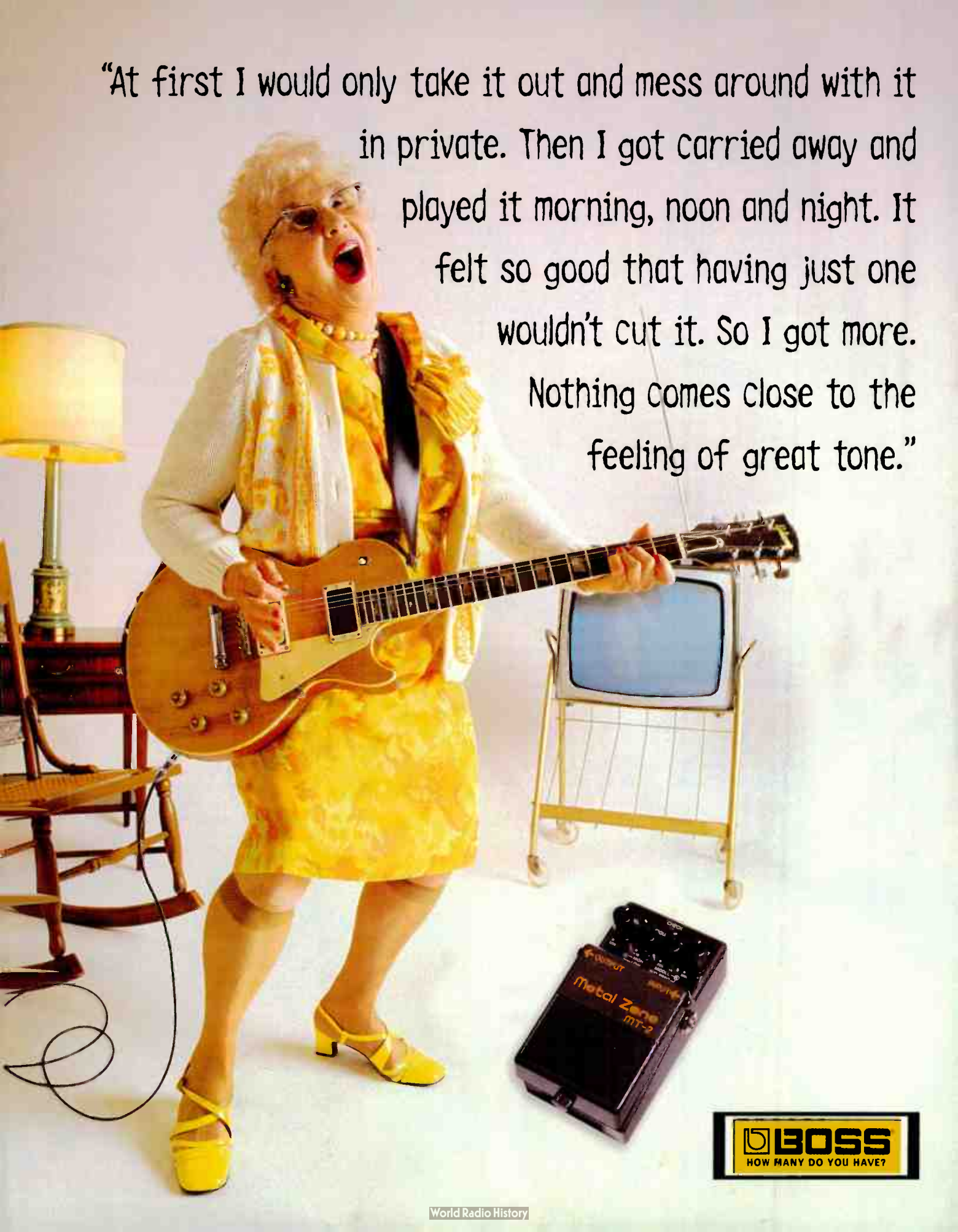

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HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE?

81

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December 1998/Issue no. 241

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letters

the lyrical art

I recently became a subscriber, and the two *Musician* issues I've seen so far have covered exactly what we musicians and songwriters want to read about. I was especially impressed with your excerpt from the Jimmy Webb book, *Tunesmith* (Songwriting, Oct. '98). His words rang true about the importance of the work involved in finding the right words to use for each song. Thank you so much. I'm looking forward to a long life of reading *Musician*.

lisa st. germain-grimes
aurora, CO

elliott smith

When I opened my Oct. '98 issue of *Musician*, I saw *red* as I gazed at Elliott Smith's comment at the top of the Frontman page: "I only have to sing well enough to sing my songs." Smith, along with dozens of other so-called professional singer/songwriters, seems to believe that "the kind of singer who's totally slick and nails every note" is somehow uncool and unoriginal. This is the sad equivalent of suggesting that an instrumentalist with great chops is probably too "slick" to be musical. Give me a break! As a singer, songwriter, and voice teacher, I can only say this: The better your voice is, the broader your choices.

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vintage perspectives

In "The Vintage Advantage" (Technology, Oct. '98) Brett Ratner quotes amp tech Richard Koerner as saying that a Fender Vibrosonic is "essentially a Twin Reverb, but with a 15" JBL speaker." While I cannot claim to have seen every Fender amp ever made, I can say that I have never seen a Vibrosonic that was more than 40 watts, which would make it more properly a cousin to the Super Reverb or Vibrolux, both in the 40-watt family of amps. If a player expects to get the low-end power and 85- to 100-watt thump of a Twin Reverb out of a Vibrosonic, he or she will be sorely disappointed.

jeff jourard
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songs for the big screen

In "The Song is Out There" (Backside, Sept. '98) David Was writes, "The last thing a director . . . wants from a song is a direct torpedo hit on the theme of the film." In most cases he is probably correct, but not always. For example, I always thought it was cool how Carly Simon incorporated the title of the James Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me* into the song she wrote as its theme, "Nobody Does It Better."

In 1995, I heard that my favorite filmmaker, Brian De Palma, was making the film version of *Mission: Impossible*. A few days later, a song came to me as I was driving. Called "Self-Destruct," it had a chorus that played on the theme of the tape that self-destructs at the beginning of every *Mission* episode. Taking my cue from Carly Simon, I incorporated the show's title into the lyrics and, utilizing my knowledge of De Palma's recurring themes of conscience, guilt, and betrayal, created a song that the director might want to use in the film. I also knew from watching his films so often that when De Palma does use a song, it almost always comments on the film at hand, either directly or ironically. So I sent to the song to De Palma's and Tom Cruise's agents. Not surprisingly, I never heard from either of them.

Postscript: De Palma's new movie, *Snake Eyes*, ends with a Meredith Brooks song called "Sin City," which she wrote specifically for the film after meeting with De Palma. The lyric features actual lines from the script, and the song fits the Nicolas Cage character to a T. Now if only I could find a buyer for my new song, "I Know What You Did Last Summer" . . .

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correx

Apologies to JBL for running an image of an LSR32 monitor—flopped—in our Oct. '98 Fast Forward writeup about their LSR28P monitor.

from the editor

I'd like to roll out the red carpet and extend a couple of welcomes this month. The first is to the newest member of the *Musician* staff, our managing editor **Jason Zasky**. He's been contributing to the magazine as a freelancer for several months; his Headlines feature on tribute bands, which ran in our Sept. '98 issue, reflects the high standards of insider knowledge, helpful career information, and entertaining presentation that *Musician* sets and Jason meets.

Jason's musical chops are strong. He's a graduate of the Musicians Institute of Technology and a member of ASCAP, and he's done serious time as guitarist and keyboardist with Black Velvet Flag. For more than two years he toured with this internationally acclaimed band, recording two albums, and playing nationwide. Looking back on it all, Jason laughs over the fact that his group won *Rolling Stone* critic's poll as the best unsigned band in America at approximately the same time that another magazine proclaimed BVF's indie label debut "the worst album ever made." (Clearly, I made the right move in assigning Jason to write a story on how to deal with reviews—negative *and* positive—for an upcoming issue of *Musician*.)

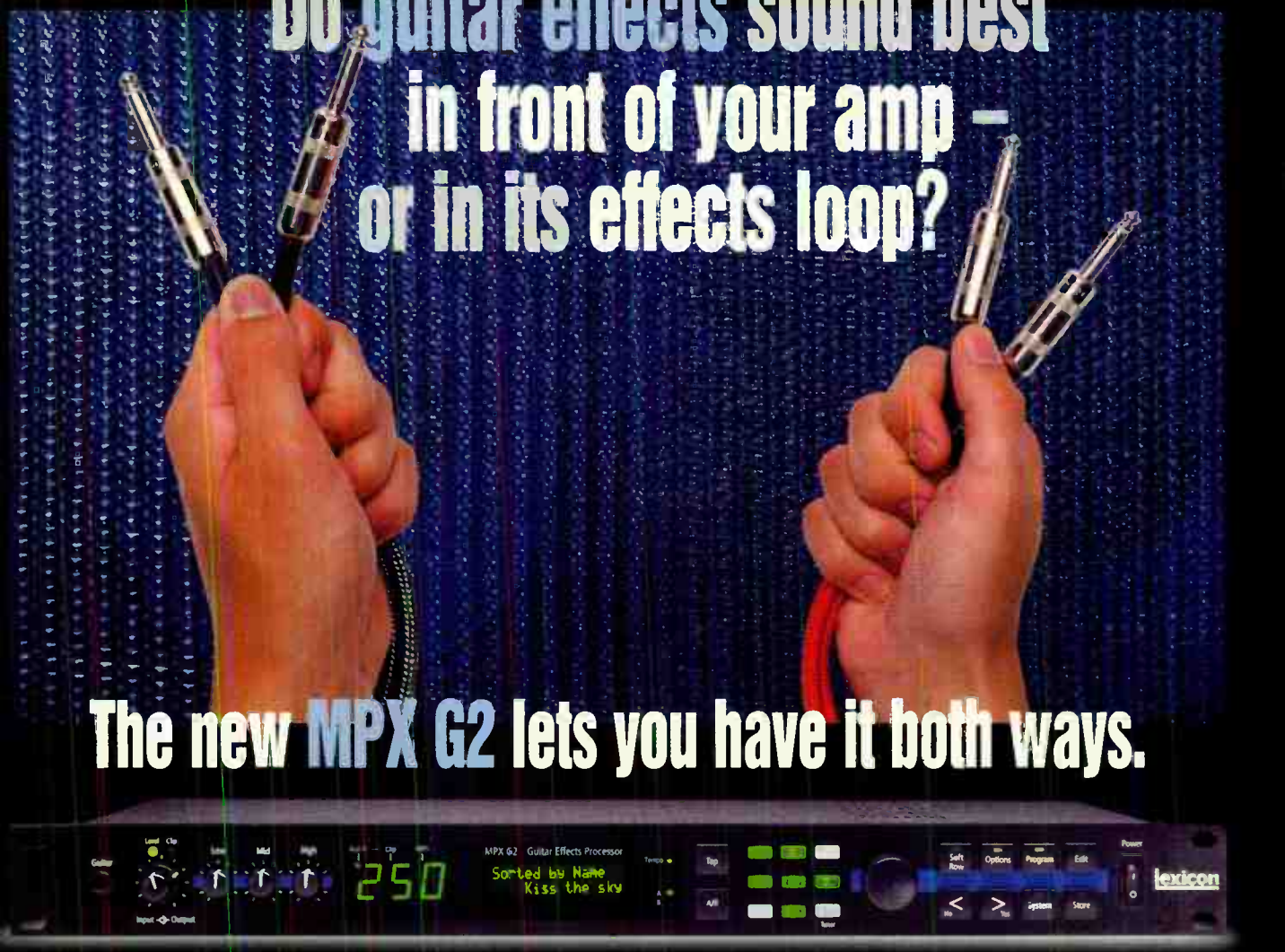
Which brings up his writing chops. Just about every magazine with the word "guitar" in its title has carried stories with Jason's byline. He's also held staff positions at *Guitar* and *Guitar Shop*. His articles range from artist interviews (his favorite was a thoughtful encounter with Michael Hedges) to product reviews. In other words, he's just right for *Musician*, with high cred as a player, a composer, and a writer. As Béla Fleck has said about Victor Wooten, we're glad he's on our team.

The other welcome goes to our new **Catalog Connection** section, a part of the magazine devoted to making it easier for you to learn about new gear and buy the products you need. All you need to do is check out the catalog listings, which begin on page 73, note on the attached coupon which ones interest you, and send the coupon to us. We'll contact the manufacturers, and they'll send you a full product catalog ASAP. What could be easier?

That's it for now. See you next month.

—Robert L. Doerschuk, editor

Do guitar effects sound best in front of your amp – or in its effects loop?



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Frank Black

The music on Frank Black & the Catholics *(spinART) was originally intended to be a demo. At what point in the recording process did you realize that it was going so well?*

The second day in the studio. We recorded over three days, and I'd say by the second day we were sort of crossing our fingers and saying, "Hey, this sounds pretty darn good."

Recording to two-track seems to have paid off for you. Do you think you'll be sticking to this formula on future albums?

Yeah, I can't imagine going back to multitrack recording at the moment. It just feels like I rocked out for the first time in my life. Once you do it, when you and your band pull it off, you feel really good. You feel proud. You feel like a real musician.

The record sounds like you guys were really bashing it out.

Yeah, it's all 4 A.M. takes. It's very corny, but it's very rock & roll. I don't know why it took me so long to do it like that. You know, you start making records in the Eighties and you have so many people telling you, "You do it like this." And to be honest, when you start doing records, being able to be psychedelic, or like "Hey, I can sing my vocal track ten times," that stuff is really fun. It's liberating. . . . Actually, I don't know if liberating is the right word, but when you're in the studio for the first time, it's like, "Wow, I can do anything," you know? And you do—you waste a lot of time.

In what way?

"We've gone from 24-track to 16-track, but two-track is far superior. This is fuckin' Bill Haley and the Comets!"

You do all kinds of goofy stuff that doesn't work out. Then you get away from that and you start to realize that you gotta play good, you gotta practice, you gotta write good songs, and more and more you concentrate on those aspects. Then finally one day, here I am, ten years after I started, going, "Hey! What the fuck am I doing here? We've gone from 24-track to 16-track, but this is far superior. This is *two-track*. This is fuckin' Bill Haley and the Comets! This is the real thing." And you become incredibly proud of that.

Did the process make you lead the band more than normal, or did you just show them the songs and let it all fall into place?

Well, the rhythm section [bassist David MacCaffrey and drummer Scott Boutier] is a real rhythm section, and because of that and because they've played in other bands together, I don't have to tell them anything. They like what I do, and there's a lot of unspoken camaraderie there. We just play. I've got a new chord progression, or maybe it's a song. I show it to them, we play it until we're satisfied and we feel good. We might have the occasional discussion about this or that, but it's amazing how much of it is unspoken. We know we have to make good rock music, and they know I'm the singer/songwriter guy at the core of it, and they've been doing it for a while too. They don't have aspirations necessarily of being frontmen. They're a mature rhythm section—they don't even need me! They play with me because they like me. If they didn't like me, they wouldn't be there.

—Michael Gelfand

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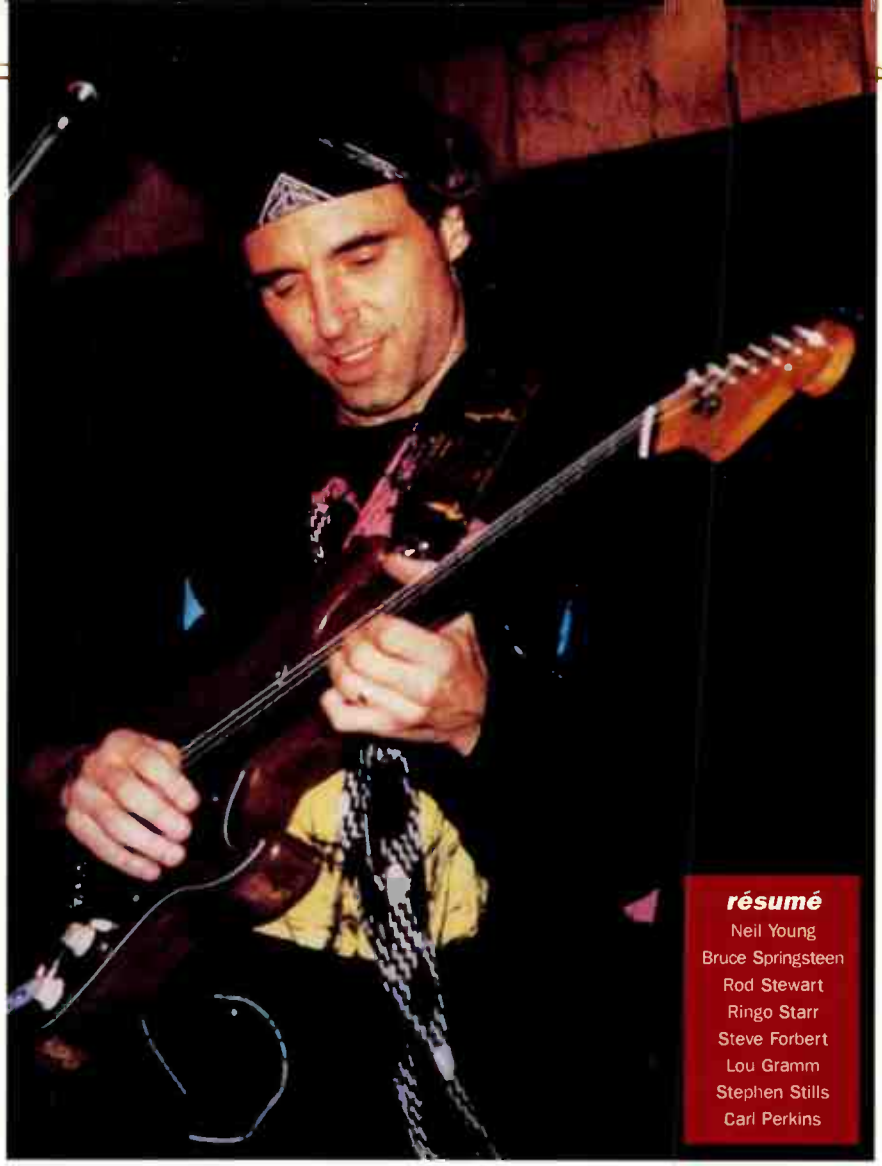
To read more of Michael Gelfand's interview with Frank Black, visit Musician Online at www.musicianmag.com.

Photo: Lisa Johnson



résumé
Neil Young
Bruce Springsteen
Rod Stewart
Ringo Starr
Steve Forbert
Lou Gramm
Stephen Stills
Carl Perkins

Nils Lofgren

"I'm probably the only guitarist alive who's worked with both Cab Calloway and Bart Simpson."

You've just released an album, Acoustic Live. *Does being a songwriter and a performer in your own right make you a better accompanist?*

I think it does. My approach has always been from the songwriter's point of view. I just tend to stay out of the way more than your average player who doesn't write—which means I focus a little more on the song and the lyric, and my instincts are to play less rather than more. Of course, when you're with people who write like Neil Young or Bruce Springsteen, it's almost like you can't stay out of the way enough.

Are you less pressured on a sideman gig than in trying to make something of your own?

In my thirty years in the business I've never gotten that big hit record. I'd love to have one, so there's the pressure of wanting to achieve more as a record maker. But I feel like I came into my own as a player a long time ago, even though there's always room to grow.

Still, after years of promoting yourself and your own music, it must have been a relief to say, "Okay, I'm just gonna jump on this stage, play 'Dancing in the Dark,' and have a good time."

When I worked with Bruce, he completely removed that whole other animal of making records and competing in the commercial world. I got to take a break from the constant thing of "What am I gonna do now to get better as a writer?," trying to please myself while attempting to find my way through this commercial hell-maze to where I could get on the radio. And that pause let me come back to my own music refreshed, feeling like my batteries were recharged, and ready for the next round.

Did you ever look at the adulation that Neil and Bruce were receiving and think, "I'll take a chunk of that"?

Like anybody, I'm certainly sensitive to that. But most of the best growing I've done has been onstage as a guitarist. A lot of time, me and Tommy [Nils' brother and fellow guitarist] will be out driving, loading, unloading, everything—it's exhausting. By the end of an eighteen-hour day I'm thinking, "Man, I must really love this." And the answer is yes. The audience doesn't care about what chart position I don't have, what format I don't fit into, and I thrive in that kind of environment. I can just do what I do and put my heart into it. That's a success I can get onstage every night that I can't get in the commercial world.

Name a favorite memory from doing a sideman stint.

On *After the Gold Rush* Neil had me play "Tell Me Why" on an old D-18 Martin of his, which was actually the first time I'd ever done any real acoustic guitar work. Then at the end of the session, he gave me the guitar as a gift for helping him make the record. I was eighteen, and I went running off a mile into the deep woods of Topanga Canyon, got lost, and just sat there with this gorgeous guitar, thrilled out of my mind that Neil Young had just given me his Martin to keep. Totally in the clouds.—***David Simons***

Photo: The Right Stuff

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the time is now

Two years ago ***Nashville Pussy*** was in the same position that any new band finds itself in: Singer Blaine Cartwright, his wife and lead guitarist Ruyter Suys, and their six-foot-three Amazonian bassist Corey Parks were starting from scratch. But in an age of Internet websites, major-label showcasing, and slacker cool, Nashville Pussy took a decidedly old-school approach to its career by touring and touring and touring, creating a high-impact, hard-rocking live show, going through three drummers, and finding a producer (Kurt Block) and manager (Peter Davis) along the way.


Nashville Pussy

"We crammed five years of work into two," explains Parks. "We never took tour support or waited for anyone to send out posters. Ruyter and I did all of that shit—making phone calls, sending out flyers, doing stickers and T-shirt designs."

It worked. In February the band released its indie debut, *Let Them Eat Pussy* (Amphetamine Reptile), which sold thirty thousand units—"punk rock gold"—even though the label's national distributor, ADA, refused to carry the disc because of its title and cover art. Just six months later, the now Georgia-based foursome was gearing up for the Mercury re-release of *Let Them Eat Pussy*.

"We wanted to put a record out like crazy," is how Suys explains the band's rapid rise. "Epitaph was talking to us and saying, 'Well, in four months we'll have a deal lined up so we can put out a record.' And we were like, 'Fuck. Four months? We want to do it *now*.' We didn't care about money. We basically wanted to lay down our live show as quickly as possible. We wanted a record to tour behind. We had major labels snooping around, but that takes too long. Time is accelerated on the road. One year is like seven; everything intensifies. We were getting so much done that it was embarrassing having to be involved with slow people."

Nashville Pussy may have been in a hurry, but they played it smart. They only signed a one-off deal with AmRep, leaving them free to sign to a major, and having already sold thirty thousand units without national distribution put them in a much stronger bargaining position when it came time to talk to the majors.

"Nobody told us that we would have to tone things down," says Suys. "Blaine stood in the office of the president of A&M and said we were going to call our next record *Fuck Me* or *Nice Girls Don't Jack Off Horses*, just to see what they would say. And they were like, 'No problem, Mr. Cartwright.'"—***Matt Ashare***

time to quit the day job?

Every serious musician has wondered when to make his or her part-time musical activities a full-time reality, but knowing *when* to ditch that distressing day job depends on both luck and timing.

For drummer ***Susie Ibarra***, who works on New York's free-jazz turf with folks like tenor saxophonist David S. Ware, pianist Matthew Shipp, and bassist William Parker, stems—not sticks—were her daily routine; she had worked as a florist in Manhattan's flower district, but after three years flowers gave way to frustration.

"Around Valentine's Day I was fired from this modern Chinese opera I was doing, and I didn't get paid from my florist job," she says. "I was so depressed. I knew it was a sign that I needed to get out of doing that. Everything said it was time to go for it."

Ibarra was already working regularly as a musician, though for little money, but her connections kicked in, and within two weeks she was hired by Ware. "It was timing. It was fate. My getting a gig with David was just the natural course of things.

"You have to decide what you want to do with your music," she says, retrospectively. "That may mean putting your own music out there and not playing weddings anymore, but someone with their own music may rather work a part-time job if it lets them concentrate on their music. It depends on the person, but it you are focused and committed you'll know when the time comes."—***Ken Micallef***

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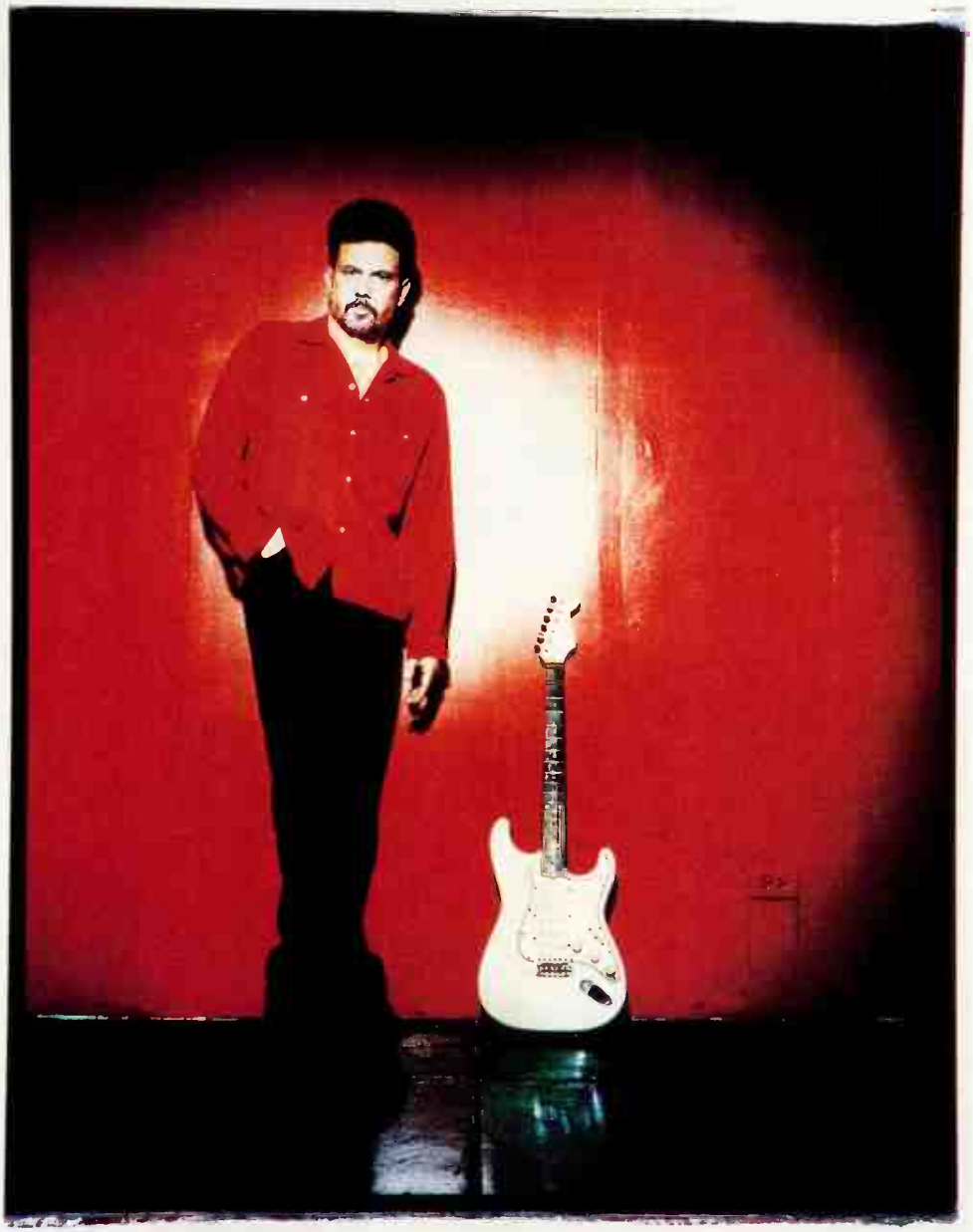

Chicken Pickin' the Blues

by alan di perna

"Although I'm considered a country player—and I've had huge success playing country—I'm really a blues guitar player," confides Pete Anderson. As Dwight Yoakam's producer and lead guitar man, Anderson has long been one of country music's most valuable players. But he's right at home anywhere in musical America. He's produced records for everyone from k.d. lang to the Meat Puppets, from Roy Orbison to Michelle Shocked. And several years back he launched Little Dog Records, on which he's released two solo albums—*Working Class* and his latest, *Dogs in Heaven* (Little Dog/Mercury). Not surprisingly, both recordings take in a broad range of American roots styles.

"I love that hybrid aspect," says Anderson. "I suppose that's my style. I remember on the second Dwight album, laughing to myself when we did 'Little Sister.' I played a straight B.B. King lick on country radio! In a way, that same kind of juxtaposition created Chuck Berry's music: Chuck shuffling while Johnnie Johnson played straight eighths. They created this hybrid sound that just defines the United States."

Growing up in Detroit, Anderson got heavily into the blues as a teenager and had his first gigging experiences with jug bands. While staying with a relative in Phoenix during the late Sixties, he fell under the sway of that city's many country radio stations and the plentiful country TV programming seen in those parts back then.

"Country is such guitar-based music. To a young kid who had been playing blues and rock, it just seemed so different and cool. Once you figured out you were shifting from a minor pentatonic to a major, a whole new world opened up. Around

Photo: Nicholas J. Scaturro

Pete Anderson wraps six strings around the sound of America.

that time, the Flying Burrito Brothers were coming up, and things like Taj Mahal's 'Six Days on the Road.' So it seemed a natural progression."

Anderson's solo albums give him ample opportunity to cross stylistic boundaries, freely mixing his favorite musical idioms. One hallmark of his style is the unique way he incorporates country string bends into bluesy contexts. "I used to sit in with these guys from New Orleans," he recalls. "They'd be playing New Orleans grooves and I'd solo over them like this. . . ."

Cranking up his Telecaster, Anderson plays a series of harmonized licks in A major, utilizing the high E and G (first and third) strings. He then illustrates a few of his stock string bends. One is a double bend at the seventh fret that involves bringing both the G and high E strings up a whole step, so that the high voicing moves from the second to the major third while the low harmony glides from the fourth to the fifth. He'll often employ this as the opening of a lick that might resolve to the fifth fret position, where the first string sounds the tonic while the third step is bent a half-step from the minor to the major third.

"That kind of bend is imitating a pedal steel," Anderson notes, "being able to hold one string down while you're bending another. Most of the country pedal-steel bends are half-step bends. They're not romantic; they're real mechanical [*i.e.*, they imitate the pedal-steel's lever device for string-bends]. Whereas blues is something else." He plays a similar string bend, but adds finger vibrato. "You're putting a vibrato on it or you're playing a blue note."

For an example of how all these theories sound in practice, check out "Sherry" from *Dogs In Heaven*. Anderson's instrumental version of the old Four Seasons song recasts it as a Jimmy Smith-inspired organ trio shuffle. He plays the melody lines straight, but punctuates them with down-home country string-bend licks that take the song into a whole different dimension.

"That style of playing is all about melody," he says. "I think Jeff Beck really taught us something on *Blow By Blow* and *Wired*. You can play something really wacky, do anything you want, but you're hanging it all off this really beautiful melody. That's what he did with 'Goodbye Porkpie Hat,' 'Cause We've Ended as Lovers,' and all of those. And that's what I'm trying to do with 'Sherry' or 'Our Day Will Come' on *Working Class*. That one's got every kind of technique I ever learned, pretty much. Steel licks, over-rings, harmonics, some B.B. King-style playing—it's all in there."

Anderson's picking techniques are another key to his distinctive style. He started off as a fingerpicker but later switched to hybrid picking—*i.e.*, picking with the three smallest fingers while the thumb and first finger grasp and utilize a plectrum. But there are still occasions when he's just gotta ditch the plectrum. One of them is for that essential country guitar move: chicken pickin'.

"First you have to learn how to palm the pick," he says, illustrating how the plectrum can be held unused in the palm of the right hand, freeing up the thumb and index finger for action—these two digits are used to pluck the string when chicken pickin'. "It's pretty much a two-finger technique, allowing the meat of the thumb to stop the note."

The heel of the picking hand also comes into play in muting the strings to create that characteristic "clucking" effect. Subtle variations in the amount of muting used on each note allow a skilled chicken picker to achieve astonishing levels of barnyard realism. Anderson adds that it's far better to mute with the picking hand rather than the fretting hand. "Specifically with chicken pickin', you need a good length of string to give you some sort of harmonic richness. Muting with your right hand, you've got a good fourteen or fifteen inches of string producing the tone, if you're playing up on the lower frets."

Chicken pickin' might seem one hundred percent country. But Anderson points out that the intro to Howlin' Wolf's "Rockin Daddy" is pretty close to a chicken pickin' lick. "I mean, that's not far away at all," he asserts.

"It's like colors on a palette wheel. You can play something in bluegrass, in blues, or in all kinds of country, from Western swing to Albert Lee's poppy fast stuff. Learn all these styles and you'll never be a one-dimensional guitarist."

Lately, Anderson has been working on an instructional book and video. Both projects were inspired by the guitar clinics he hosted between dates on his *Dogs in Heaven* tour. "I had such a good time showing everyone all my tricks that I wanted to leave something more permanent," states Pete. The technique-oriented video (available in January) is tentatively entitled *Roots Rock Work Shop* (Warner Bros. Publications), and features Anderson demonstrating steel licks, chicken pickin', and hybrid picking. The guitar tablature book (scheduled for a spring '99 release) details his most famous solos from the Dwight Yoakam albums. But the underlying message of the book concerns the ethereal and is more difficult to define. The text portion attempts to explain what was going on in Anderson's head when he originally played the various solos. "Anyone can copy a solo," sniffs Pete. "The important thing is to know why the solo was played like it was."

Contributors: *Alan Di Perna is a widely-published music journalist and halfway decent keyboardist/guitarist/harmonica player. His latest book is* The Guitarist's Almanac *(Hal Leonard).*

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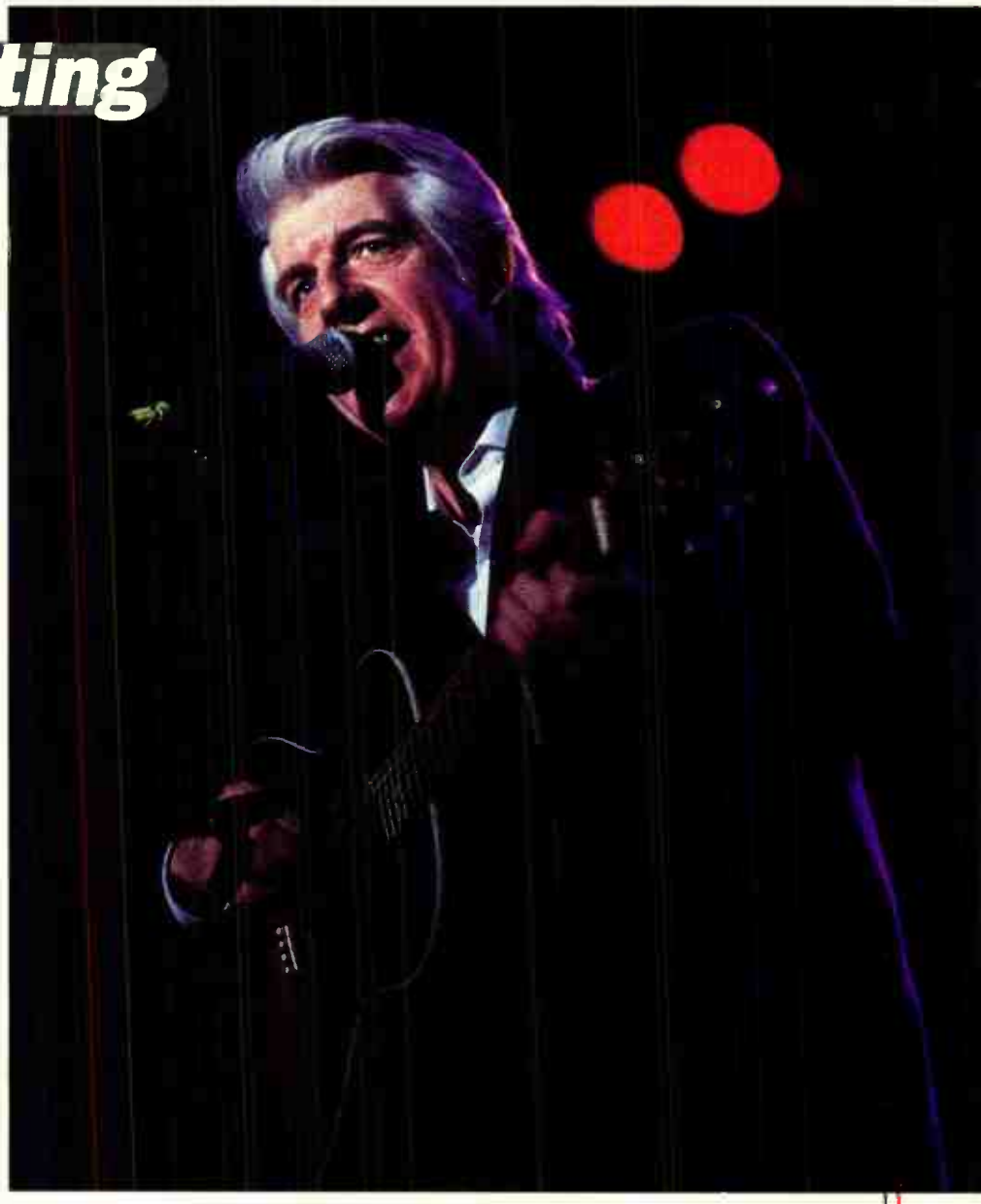


The Nick Lowe gospel: "Pop songs ain't poetry—they're words to a tune."

Lowe and Behold

by michael gelfand

Just about everyone knows that Nick Lowe writes great songs, but if you stop to think how long he's been doing it, you may be shocked. He began in the late Sixties, when classic rock was beginning to crumble under the weight of its own bombast. He was doing it as punk rose from the wreckage of disco, and he was plying his trade as the new romantics battled with hair metal bands on MTV. Lowe continued polishing his craft as grungers and shoegazers trudged the slacker path, and he still does so today, even as DJs define the grooves of the new millennium.

Throughout it all Lowe has defined his own special niche by writing songs that reoresent all that is—and all that has ever been—sacrosanct about rock & roll. From his early pub-rock days in Brinsley Schwarz on through a solo career that's occasionally been mothballed while he pursued gigs as a member of Rockpile and Little Village, Lowe's command of country, soul, rockabilly, and "roll" (as he puts it)—and lots in between—has made him a songwriter's songwriter.

So if you don't know him already for penning such classic songs as "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding" and "Cruel to Be Kind," or for his work as producer with artists like Elvis Costello and Graham Parker, you can make up for lost time by checking out his latest record, *Dig My Mood* (Upstart), a potent package of clever hooks and evocative lyrics

(continued on page 22)

Photo: Tony Nelson

(continued from page 21)

whose timeless quality reflects the best of Lowe's work. We wondered how he makes all this seem so effortless.

You've been writing songs for quite a long time. Does it get easier to do, or is it even more difficult for you now?

Well, it's not difficult. It's more elusive. When I was younger, I used to force the thing into a box. I'd get an idea for a song and go, "Oh, I know how that goes. It's this sort of thing." And I'd force it into a box—but sometimes I'd force it where it didn't want to go. [Now] I'm much more interested in letting the idea become fully formed. I'm much more into letting the song say where it wants to go and making sure that it can actually mean something as a fully formed thought more than I used to.

"If you're going to have two middle eights, don't do the first one again. Think up a different one."

When you say "letting the song say where it wants to go," how do you hear that voice now as opposed to in the past?

We're talking about something from the point of view of my era, which is "verse-verse-middle eight-chorus-verse-out," or whatever it was. That's what I do: I'm a songsmith. But sometimes a second verse wants to go on a little longer or have another little bit tied onto it, whereas before I'd think, "You can't do that. It's got to be the same thing as the first one." Now I think, "No, no, no—that's fantastic! It almost sounds the same as the first verse, but it doesn't." I never wanted to do that. I used to try to tidy that up. And sometimes you have a different middle eight. If you're going to have two middle eights, don't do the first one again. Think up a different one. The song really tells you that.

When I've got my songs going, I go to this little dance hall that's quite near to where I live. I rent this place out in the afternoon, I go in there, and I sing my songs over and over and over again. I sing them out into the roof. It's not so that I find one definitive way of doing them; it's quite the reverse. It's so that I get to know the songs so totally that I almost think I'm not singing one of my songs and that I think I'm singing a cover song, and therefore a song that you feel you can take liberties with and it'll take any kind of abuse. You can sing it fast, slow, extend it a bit—it doesn't really matter. Conversely, with the songs that I want to do that are written by other people, I think I've written them in a way, and that's what attracts me to them.

How important is that ambience as you write? You come up with a kernel of a song at home, in the car, or while out walking, and you bring it to this room to hash it out. Is the catalyst in that room, or could it happen anywhere?

The actual putting the thing together, getting the construction, building the framework, as I say, can be done absolutely anywhere. The thing with going to that little village hall, that's when I first bring it forth. That's the first time I hear it loud, actually in sound, as opposed to being in my head, because when I'm home I sort of hum away, but when I go to this place, that's when I actually say, "Let's *hear* it!" That's the first time I actually hear it breathe. And sometimes I'm horrified: "Oh, no, no, it doesn't go like that. I know that's how it went in my head, but I hear it now." But it can also be like, "It's got to go *there*. That's what it is. And that stupid thing? Leave that out. It's much easier than what I had imagined."

Your latest album seems strongly influenced by country music.

A tremendous amount, really. I started to get interested in country when I lived in Germany. My dad was in the [armed] forces in the Sixties, and we used to listen to AFN. We could hear real country and hillbilly music, which I thought rocked really wild. That's when I heard Conway Twitty, for instance, who I thought was really fantastic back then. And Johnny Cash, of course. Then

I had an obvious connection to the Cash clan when I married Carlene.

So you hear soul music, which sounds like country music, and country music sounds like soul music. Suddenly you realize that it all joins up. When you're young, you tend to think one thing's fantastic and everything else is shit: "This guy is great. *He* is the *guy*." You imitate him and learn him, and the first songs you write are all just rewrites of his songs—sometimes five of his songs in one of yours. Eventually you exhaust that and you move on to another one. Suddenly this *other* guy is great and that guy before? Later for him. And everything else is shit. You do the same thing with him, and so it goes, and you move on to all these different people, and you suck it up and absorb them until one day you make a connection with the first bloke that you thought was great, and then suddenly you start to see a pattern in your songs—and that's when you start getting your own style and you stop being an imitator. But no one can get to the source of it all. Not even Ray Charles or Bob Dylan or Johnny Cash—you know, the signpost artists. They got it from someplace else. It goes back and back and back. Everyone's just doing reruns of their own influences.

"If you play in unusual keys, you hear melodies that you wouldn't normally go to."

How do you avoid repeating yourself as a songwriter? How do you move on while still retaining your own identity?

I don't understand how that happens. The older I get, the more of a mystery this thing becomes. To write a song, you've got to actually say, "It's going to be in this key, and the words are going to be this." In other words, there's got to be some structure. But at the same time, you want it to be a very loose, amorphous thing that isn't structured and sounds like it came along, and how that happens I don't know.

I'm a sucker for songs in G or drop D tuning. How about you?

Yeah, I'm a G fan, but I also do quite like doing them in really odd keys, like Eb and F, because the voicings are different. Now, I'm not a really fancy tuner. I've never been able to figure that out, really. But sometimes, if you play in unusual keys, like horn keys, the voicing can sound unusual and you start to hear other little melodies that you wouldn't normally go to.

Can you give me an example from Dig My Mood*?*

I know that "What Lack of Love Has Done" is in F because the long strummy bit that starts it off sounded just right in F. If it were in E with all those open strings, it would have sounded out of control. It needed that tension. And the G would've been too high.

But when you talk about it being just right, does that mean you already know where you want to take the melody as you're picking the key?

No, but it can be a start—an inspirational little hook to tie yourself to, I suppose.

Do you start with phrasing at that point, or do you have lyrics and try to apply them?

That's when I jump into my car [*laughs*]. I do all that stuff in my car when I'm driving along and I see if I can get it so that it sounds as if I'm saying it, and I also try to get it to rhyme. I know that [the argument over whether] to rhyme or not to rhyme rages: If you get good rhymes, that's the craft of it, but sometimes you have to remember that pop songs ain't poetry—they're words to a tune. And sometimes if you get a rhyme it can sound a bit trite, so if you put on a real big clod-hopping non-rhyme it makes you feel good. There really aren't any rules about that.

You're renowned for your restraint as a bassist, but do you try to apply that same idea of restraint as you write a vocal melody?

No, not consciously. Again, I try not to do anything consciously. That's really what I'm getting at: I try and let it come unconsciously.

It's a Que

Crowded Houseman Neil Finn believes in shoving through the barriers to the heart of creativity

by tom lanham

It wasn't easy, but he did it. Neil Finn, leader of legendary New Zealand pop combo Crowded House, finally threw in the towel on his group a couple of years ago and announced plans for a belated solo career. Good news or bad news? Fans weren't sure. How do you say "g'day mate" to a band that's given the world such sing-along standards as "Something So Strong," "World Where You Live," and the oft-covered signature "Don't Dream It's Over"? But Finn chose a curious post-House path: He took up painting. He built a home studio in his native Auckland. He stowed his guitar and began experimenting with keyboards, both high-tech (samplers, computers) and low (Optigons, Chamberlins). And he gradually pieced together a shimmering solo document, the aptly-titled *Try Whistling This* (Work/Sony).

All the Finn trademarks are present on *Whistling*: gentle, warm-timbred singing; chiming, unforgettable hooks, perfect for whistling; and melodies that follow an oblique, sleight-of-hand strategy. The guy's so shrewd, he could make even the most confident composer feel like a foolscap naïf. But what makes him tick? Surely he can't follow any ordinary rules of writing, any regulation verse-chorus-bridge regimen? Sipping a caffe latte in his hotel restaurant, Finn—eyes twinkling—was far from cagey about his secrets. From his early efforts with brother Tim in Split Enz (recall the quirky "I Got You"?) to newer marvels like "Sinner," "Last One Standing," and "She Will Have Her Way," all it's taken, he swears, is a good deal of blinders-on determination.

Have you ever tried, just as an experiment, to stop all those beautiful songs from coming out?

I haven't tried it as an experiment, but I've tried it out of necessity a few times. Occasionally, when I'm having a few days in a row where I can't get anything down, I'll say, "Okay, I'm gonna take two whole weeks where I don't write." It's reverse psychology: If I say I'm not allowed to write, then usually I'll slip down and find myself playing music for pleasure.

But the songs keep on coming, no matter what you do.

They don't seem to come often enough, because when you think about it, I only write maybe thirty or forty songs a year, at best, and they're not all finished. That means that there are 320 days when I'm *not* writing, so to me it feels like they're rare gems that come through every now and again. Yet over a period of time, people think that I'm quite prolific.

A couple of serious Australian songwriters have gone on record saying they believed that Crowded House compositions should be taught in school.

Ha! That's hard for me to comment on, except that I think what's actually taught in school is pretty crappy and not very useful for most people. So whether it's myself, the way I write, or the way other people

Photo: Zoren Gold

stion of Will

write, I think it would be quite good if kids were encouraged to think they could write from the age of five onwards. Because a lot of it is just will, force of will, thinking and believing you can. I think a *lot* of people could probably write. And actually, I'm relieved that not many people write songs, because it gives me a job. But I've got a feeling that a lot more people could do it than think they could, except because of their conditioning they're brought up to not see it as a possibility. Whereas by the time I was eleven or twelve, my brother was already in a band and I sorta thought it was a natural way to live your life. That kinda gets you over a big hump. Obviously, a little bit of musical ability doesn't hurt either, but a lot of it is just that sheer force of will—I honestly believe that.

In your new song "The Sinner" you say, "The closest I get to contentment is when all barriers come down." Wouldn't a better form of contentment come after you've nailed a really great song?

Well, yeah. In some ways, it's the same thing, really, because every time you write a song, you've gotta break down the walls, the guard you put up, the layers of rational thought that stop your subconscious from flowing. So it's a good reference to the art of songwriting. It's not exactly what I was *intending*. Actually, the image I was thinking of when I wrote that line was from when I was a kid. I was brought up in a reasonably tight Roman Catholic environment. But when there were parties on the beach at Christmastime, all the priests would come 'round and start having drinks, and everyone would start to get a bit merry. All our friends and family and relatives would be there, and the kids would be running around. By about 10:30 at night, there were no rules. We could steal whatever food or drinks we wanted, and the whole thing got really loose. And music was the catalyst for that, to some degree. There'd often be this guy playing the piano, Colin O'Brien, and when he started and the drinks were flowing, suddenly you'd find Catholic priests flirting with your auntie. So when I was writing that line of "all the barriers come down," I was kind of imagining that scenario, which is sinful and innocent at the same time.

So how content do you feel after finishing a stunner like "Don't Dream It's Over"?

I can't remember how I felt about that one, exactly. But it's always a spectacular feeling. Generally, I get the feeling of great joy after I've committed it to tape in some form—even if it's just a rough demo done with acoustic and vocal, and I listen back to it and I decide that it's sounding pretty damn good. But usually what I'll do is put a few things down in rough form—a couple of guitar tracks, a couple of harmonies. I'll create an atmosphere, and that's when I know I've got a song. "Sinner" was a good example: Immediately, there was a deep sense of atmosphere in the track. What often happens is, I'll play it back to myself about twenty or thirty times at the end of the night and just luxuriate in the feeling—the feeling of having brought something into being.

Some composers will say that songs are pre-written, just floating around in the ether, waiting to beam themselves down on a clear and inspiring night.

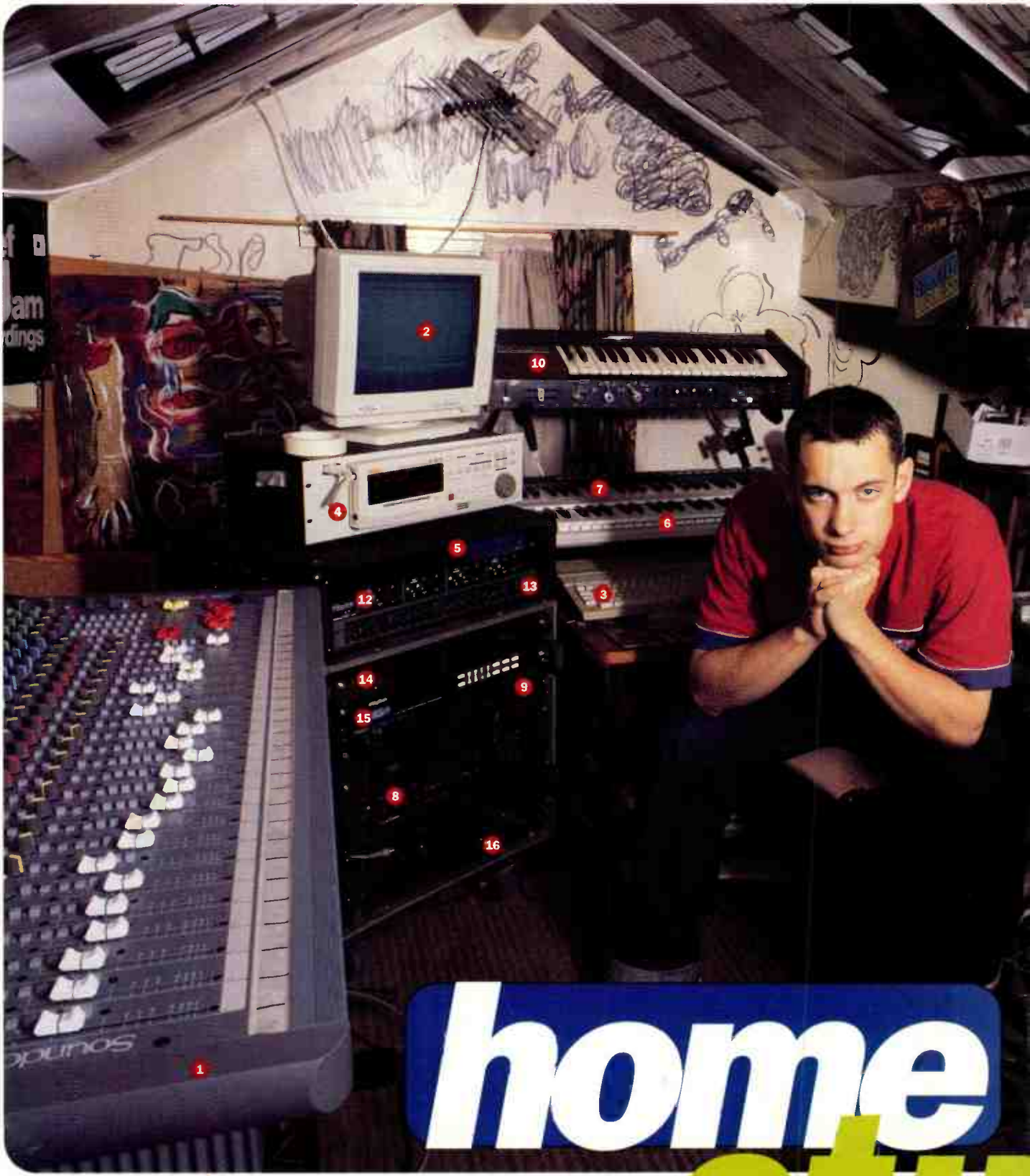
I've never really subscribed to that theory. I don't like to put too much ethereal, cosmic stuff behind it, because I feel like that could abandon me far more easily than my own subconscious could abandon me. I tend to think that you take in information, and it's the way you process it back out again that gives you your character. You take all this stuff into your brain, and then—if you don't think about it properly—it comes back out in an interesting way. And if you've got musical ability, it'll find its form. But I think everything is sitting in the subconscious, and maybe that's the same place as the ether for other people. Maybe we're talking about the very same thing. But I would prefer to think that it all comes from within; that seems much more dependable to me.

How do you tap into this?

If you put the hours into it, you'll suddenly click into a space where you're not distracted by things. Part of it for me is not being distracted by anything earthly. I try and make sure that I've paid all the bills and I've answered all my calls when I'm going into a writing session. It's weird what can undermine your ability to write. There are so many distractions—somebody you haven't spoken to who you've been meaning to call. So I try to round up all those loose ends and then give myself a week or two of undistracted moments. Than I'm able to just dream—it's like daydreaming, it's like *doodling*. The best description for me is, you're on the phone and you're not thinking about it, you're just drawing something. You get off the phone and you see that you've drawn something that resembles a face, so then you try and make it look like a face properly. The first phase of songwriting for me is that not-thinking-about-it phase, where you're just letting things form, letting notes run together, letting sounds come out of your mouth. If you've got a tape recorder running or you're quite conscious, then you'll recognize something in it at some point. Then you try and sculpt it, and you start thinking about it a bit more consciously.

Does nature ever play a role in the process? After all, you do live in one of the most beautiful locations in the world.

The sound of nature and the way the light hits the hills and the way the surf pounds the coastline is part of what you take in, part of what I was talking about before: the images and sounds you take in that come out. You feed your mind by exposing yourself to those things. I get out to the beach every few days, just to stand there. I can't point to a song where it comes out in an obvious way, but it underpins everything.



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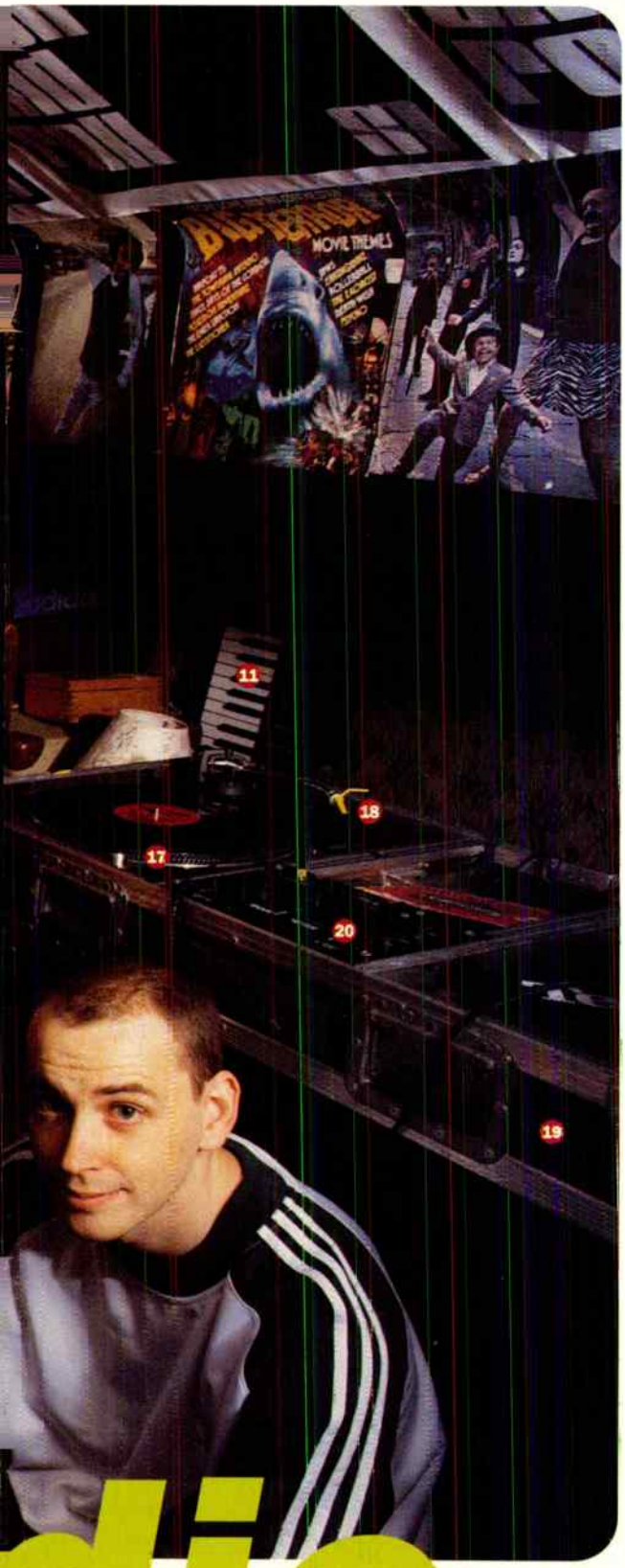

dio

by scott rubin

photo by jonathan mark

Space Monkeys

Most successful DJs are accustomed to spinning all night, but when that last beat resounds through the rafters. they usually consider their work done for the night. Not so with Tony Pipes. As the DJ/sample programmer/keyboardist for the Space Monkeys, Pipes usually finishes his gig in the early morning hours and then goes to work writing and producing songs for the band.

Not that his dedication mattered to most people in the band's hometown of Manchester, England. In fact, it was only recently that the local media there started paying attention to the Space Monkeys' distinctive hybrid of straight rock & roll, house beats, hip-hop samples, electronica, and pure pop. But Pipes' workaholic approach helped keep the band moving in a positive direction and garnered all sorts of homegrown affection from the Mancunian DJ community—the band's name derives from a term used to describe Manchester's club kids.

Along with a strong work ethic, Pipes cites the band's ability to successfully meld together a laundry list of eclectic influences from the rock, rap, and reggae genres—a practice that's strongly evident on *The Daddy of Them All*, their Interscope debut—as a major reason for their recent success.

"[Vocalist/guitarist] Richard [McNevin-Duff] turned me on to pop and rock stuff from the Doors, Bob Dylan, and the like," says Pipes. "At the same time, he got into Digital Underground, Public Enemy, Eric B. & Rakim, and the stuff that I was listening to. Our tastes couldn't have been more different, but that's one of the reasons things have worked for us."

It's worked well enough that the band found itself touring America for the better part of 1997. But upon finishing, Pipes, McNevin-Duff, and brothers Chas and Dom Morrison (drummer and bassist, respectively) scrambled back across the pond to Rebel Base—the *Star Wars*-influenced name for the loft apartment that doubles as the band's pre-production studio—to begin hammering out songs for their sophomore effort.

"We have the best of both worlds out here," says Pipes, referring to the flat that he and McNevin-Duff share. "We turned the attic into a studio space, and we aren't more than a few minutes from downtown Manchester, and yet we're still in the suburbs at the same time."

Since the attic has only so much space, the band uses Rebel Base to concentrate on writing and pre-production, as opposed to full-out recording. "We worked out this routine where one of us will put some basic ideas together and make a cassette of it," says Pipes. "Then he'll pass it around to the other guys, and so on. We'll all add something to it, hopefully turning it into a song. I love the fact that I can go into the studio at any time, flick on the power, and put down the ideas I have in my head. There's nothing like waking up in the morning, going upstairs, and starting to work."

While Rebel Base is barely the size of some large vocal booths in major recording studios,

Pipes and crew have assembled just the right amount of gear for them to be as creative as possible. The centerpiece, of course, is a **Spirit By Soundcraft Studio** console ❶. This desk, a 24x8 configuration, uses Yamaha NS-10 monitors (not shown) for referencing. All the sequencing and programming is entered into an Atari 1040ST computer (monitor ❷, computer keyboard ❸). "For multitracking we use a **Fostex D-90** ❹ hard-disk-based recorder. I love the flexibility it gives you for editing and arranging," Pipes points out. And with hundreds of samples stored on an **Iomega** zip drive ❺, he can call up any number of kicks, snares, loops, or sounds.

Interestingly, Pipes chooses not to enter his drum programming on a common drum machine/sampler. Instead, all the band's beats, samples, and keyboard sounds are triggered or played from MIDI controller keyboards. Using both a **Roland PC-2000** keyboard ❻ and a nameless MIDI keyboard ❼, he can trigger beats and samples stored in his **E-mu E-6400** sampler ❽ and his **Roland JV-880** synth module ❾. "I've got so many keyboards and triggers lying around my pad," he admits. "I just don't throw them away."

One such keyboard is an old **Korg 700** analog synth ❿, whose sound fits perfectly into the structure and texture of Space Monkey creations, thanks to the tweezing capabilities of its filtering and EQ sections. In contrast, an unused **Casio 210** keyboard ⓫ collects dust behind Pipes' DJ rig.

Rebel Base's size demands that signal processing gear be kept down to a minimum. Thus, a four-channel **Horizon** rack-mount direct box ⓬, a four-channel **Behringer Multicom** compressor ⓭, a **Focusrite** dual mono voice box ⓮, a **DigiTech Studio Quad V2** effects processor ⓯, and a Roland GX-700 guitar effects processor (not shown) round out this aspect of the setup. All the units nestle in **Calzone** road cases ⓰.

Pipes' DJ rig in Rebel Base is simple, yet classic: Two **Technics SL-1200** turntables ⓱ fitted with **Ortofon Banana** cartridges ⓲ are housed in a "DJ coffin case" from **Calzone** ⓳, and a **Gemini PMX-18** ⓴ is his scratch mixer of choice.

Contributors: *Scott Rubin is a freelance music journalist and vice-president of production for Reach Music International. Send email to srubin522@aol.com.*

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From left: Dan Hoerner, Jeremy Enigk, Jeff Palmer, and William Goldsmith.

Sunny Day Real Estate

***Artist interviewed:* Jeremy Enigk**
***Home base:* Seattle**
***Style:* Emo-rock**
***Latest album:* How It Feels To Be Something On (SubPop), released September 22**

How can you save time and money when recording?

The best way to save time is to record live with everyone playing together, and that will be really quick and save money. We did that for *Diary*, our first album, but we don't do that anymore. Personally, now I think it's important to be relaxed and feel like you're home. Spend as much time as you need in the studio but utilize the time as best you can. These days we do things in chunks. We'll all play live to lay down the drums, and then we'll do the bass over, then the guitars and then the color and the little pretty things to deliver hooks, and then the vocals. I think it's important to be able to relax in the studio, but at the same time you want to get things done.

What's the secret to successful touring?

Doing short tours and taking it easy. Doing a few short tours as opposed to doing a two month tour. That's the approach that we're taking for *How It Feels To Be Something On*. We're doing a nice, mellow tour. We're doing three weeks and then taking a couple weeks off and then we're going out again for three more weeks. We learned from our first tour, which was two months. We hated each other at the end; we did not want to be in the same band anymore. Also, having a crew is important, so if things go wrong technically you have help. As far as having successful live performances you want to be as prepared as possible. Be really hardcore about practice and get tight beyond the point of tight, to the point where playing the songs is second nature and you don't have to think about the lyrics or playing the riff. It's important to have backups too; if you're a guitarist you should have at least two guitars.

How do you write a song that works for your band?

Dan [Hoerner, guitarist] and I will come up with concepts, and that's usually free flow. I'll be sitting in my house when nobody's around and just come up with a riff that comes out of nowhere, and then I'll bring that to Dan, and he'll jam on it and we'll come up with a concept that we'll bring to the rest of the band. Or Dan will come up with an idea and bring it to me. When we were writing *How It Feels To Be Something On* we had so much information pouring through us. We would just instantaneously come up with something pretty. We could have written five albums worth of material.

What's your most indispensable piece of equipment?

My tuner. For a long time this band didn't have tuners, and they really help to speed things up on stage.

How do you know when to quit your day job?

It might depend on how much you can take. For someone who's working and trying to do music I wouldn't want to quit a job until I had a record contract that supports you, or unless you were playing a consistent amount of live shows that earned enough to pay your rent. I was very fortunate in that I was in this band right out of high school and within three months we had a record deal and we got enough support to get us by. We didn't have a lot of money and we still don't have a lot of money, but we scrape by. If you're young and you don't care what happens you can just live for the now. I had a lot of faith in what we were doing. I just wanted to play music.

—Jason Zasky

Photo: Karen Mason

IT'S ABOUT GETTING SIGNED

"Thanks for all of your help, we couldn't have done it without you!"
- Frank Craig of Tribal Dogs

"Your web site has been a great service."
- Amy of Phoenix Rising

"I just found out they chose my vocal track for the 'Route 66' jeans commercial. You have made it possible for us to get seen and heard."
- Orville Davis of The Howlettes

...AND IT'S HAPPENING AS WE SPEAK

"We are currently talking to Aysher Entertainment about doing the soundtrack for the next Highlander series due out this fall. We have signed contracts for our first music video. Also we had a live on-air interview that really was a boost for our overseas exposure."
- John Conan of Corporate Mass

"Being voted as the #1 of Top Ten unsigned artists resulted in press we never would've received, which led to more performances...a few labels have expressed interest in the group. So, I guess BTN is like having a bunch of promoters on hand 24 hours a day." - Peter Ferrell of Wooster Sang

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EMBRACE THE TIGER

Lessons in surviving pop culture conformity, from Joni Mitchell.

BY ROBERT L. DOERSCHUK

Sure, she told *Billboard* that she has a "prejudice against popularity." But that hasn't stopped Joni Mitchell from touching countless listeners and a long list of artists who have almost nothing in common but their reverence for her work. From the Artist up in his Minnesota aerie to the irascible jazz genius Charles Mingus to a histrionic Chrissie Hynde whistling and yelling at a