

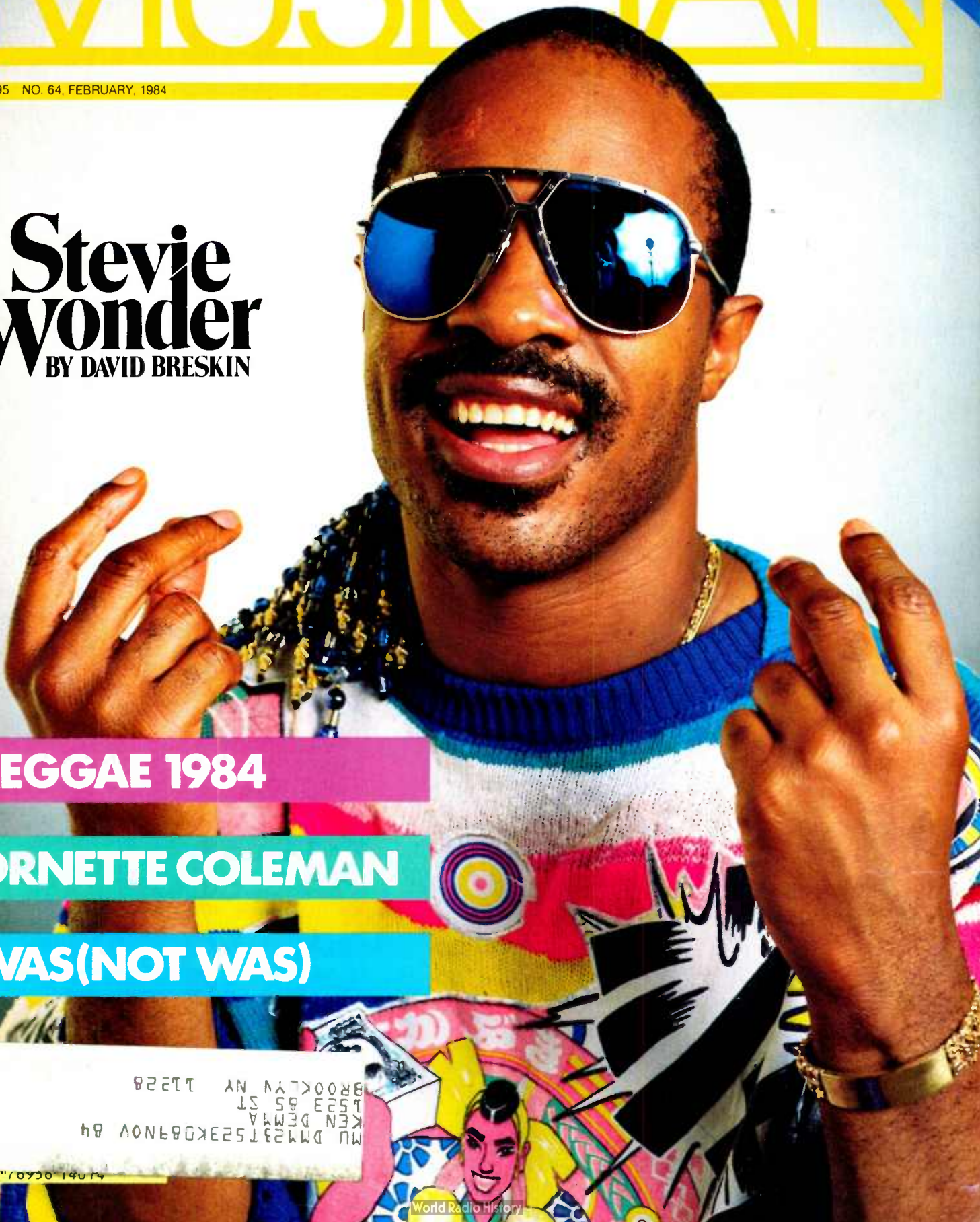
# MUSICIAN



\$1.95 NO. 64, FEBRUARY, 1984

## Stevie Wonder

BY DAVID BRESKIN



**REGGAE 1984**

**ORNETTE COLEMAN**

**WAS(NOT WAS)**

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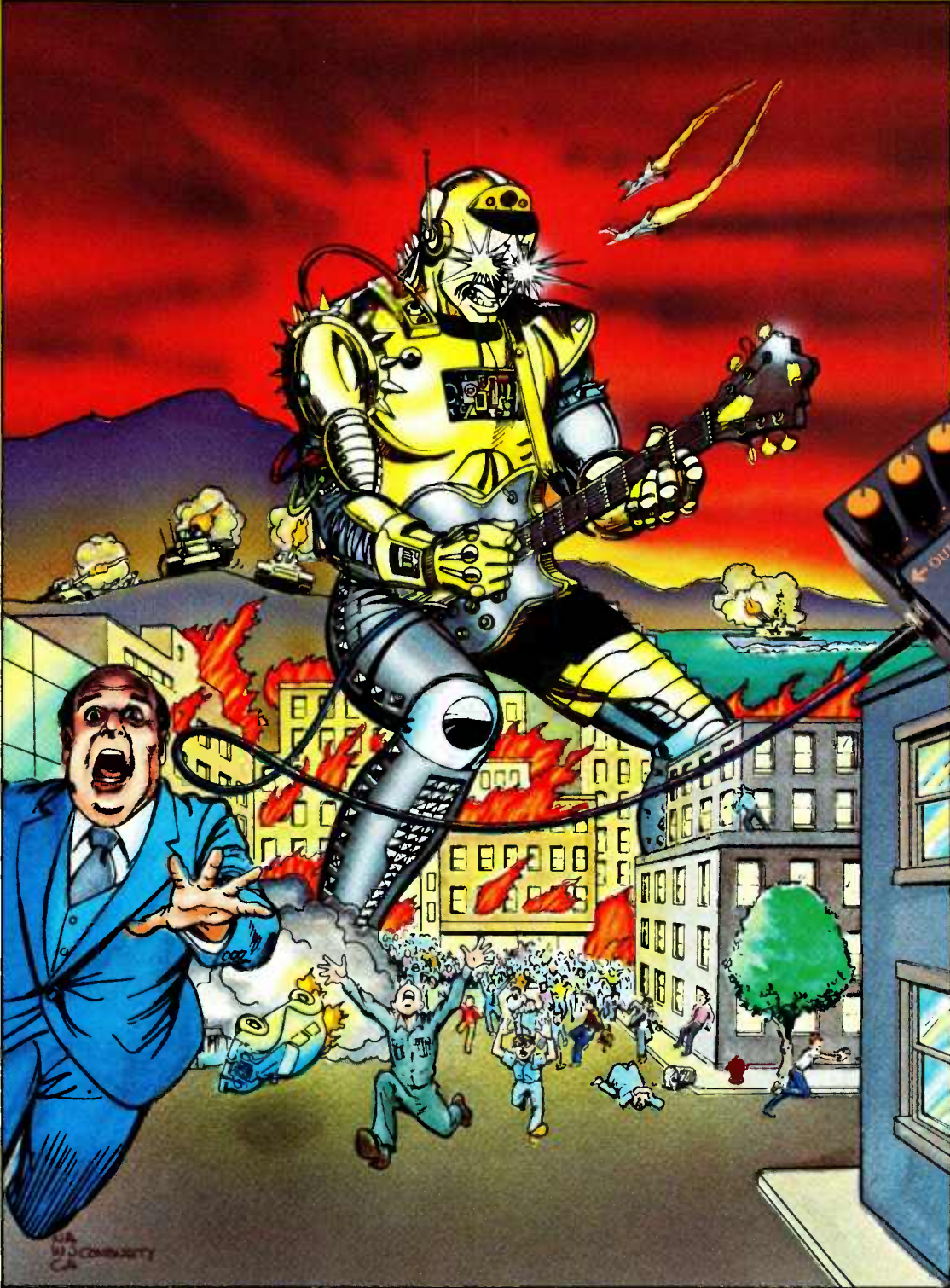
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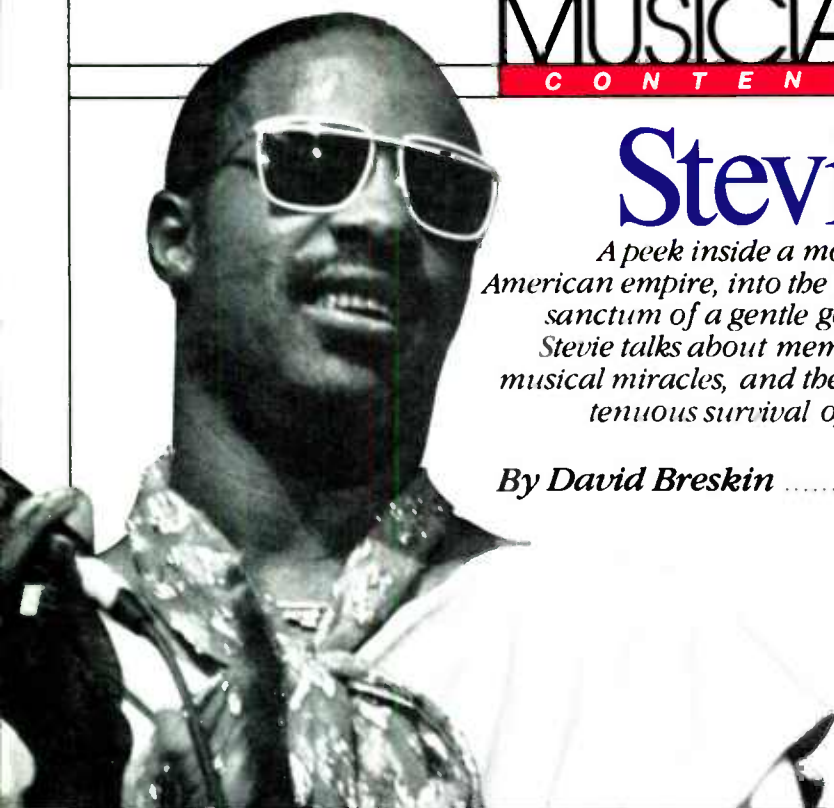
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# MUSICIAN

C O N T E N T S



## Stevie

*A peek inside a modern American empire, into the inner sanctum of a gentle genius. Stevie talks about memories, musical miracles, and the ever-tenuous survival of love.*

**By David Breskin ..... 52**



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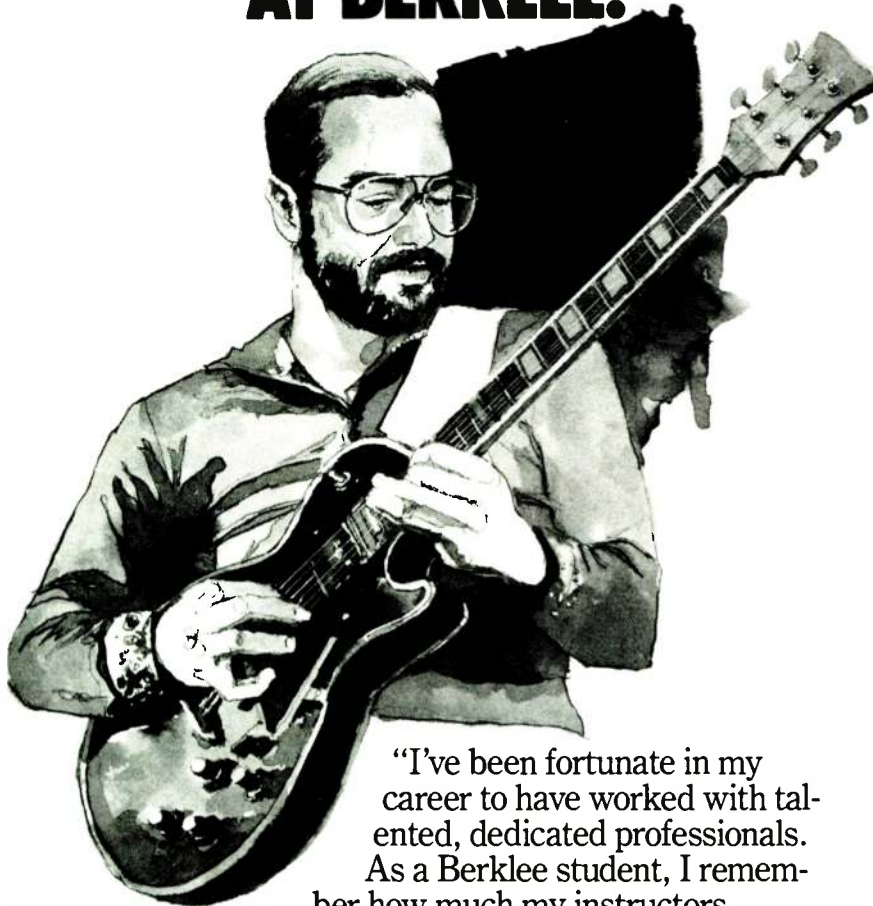
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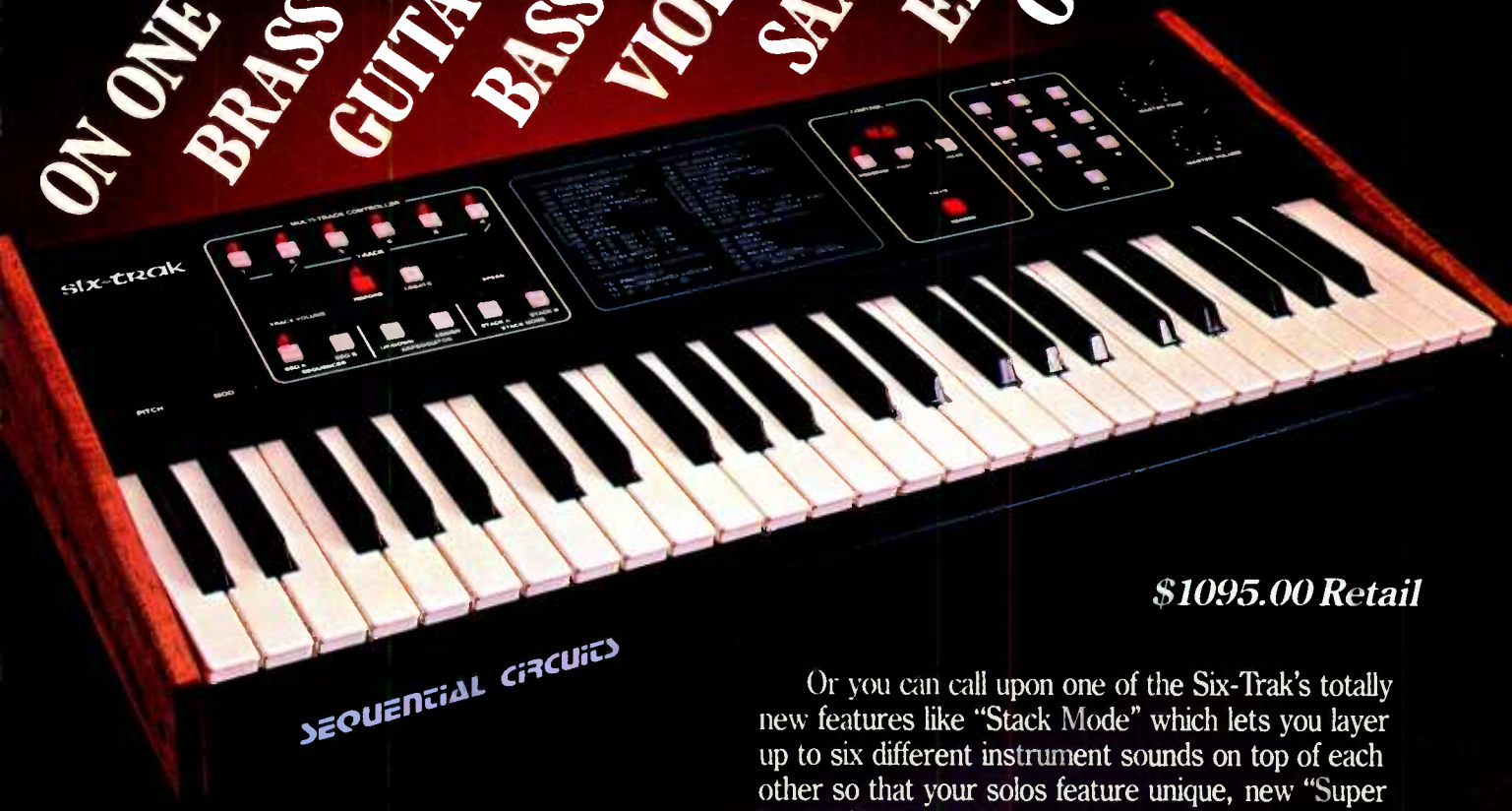
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# Letters

## GLIMMER GABBER

I must admit I was quite dismayed to receive the December issue with the shop-worn "Glimmer Twins" peering back at me. Much to my surprise, however, I was thoroughly entertained by Vic Garbarini's interviews with Mick & Keith. It was great to finally read something genuine about Keith Richards, the man of a million myths. And I was pleased to hear about two of my old faves, Godley & Creme, and be kept up-to-date on their latest lunatic adventures, be they sound or vision.

Greg Lief  
Washington, D.C.

Mick Jagger lives in a rarefied atmosphere, an insulated cocoon of giddy elitism and illusions created by his overblown sense of self-worth. For most of us, the threat of physical and psychic violence is palpably real. It accompanies us every day. Do we really need a soundtrack?

For the victims of violence, Jagger's sensationalistic lyrics and insouciant attitudes are anathema. He laughs off the horror implicit in the lyrics, and in doing so he mocks all of us. Jagger goes for the gross out, he has no sense of responsibility to resolve the violence around us. He sneers at his fans and makes us squirm instead of think.

Deborah Benedict  
Lincoln, Nebraska

Thank you, *Musician*, for getting the names right! I get tired of reading about "Mick & Keith." The proper phrase is "Keith & Mick." The preferable phrase remains "Keith," period. Just "Keith."

Lyndsay Chase  
The Keith Richards Mobile Shrine  
Detroit, Michigan

## MUST BE HIS DENTIST

I had never even seen your magazine until two days ago and I can tell right now I'll be reading it for years. Your interviews with Keith & Mick and Robert Plant were great. For once, someone showed that Keith Richards is a thinking, feeling human being. My only regret is that you didn't show Keith's whole face on the cover—I've had enough of Mick Jagger's mouth.

T. Jones  
San Diego, California

## SOMETHING ON HIS MIND

I was quite impressed when I read David Breskin's interview with Keith Jarrett. His questions stimulated Mr. Jarrett into speaking his mind...and what a mess!

I listen to electronic and acoustic music—the electronic music I listen to does not give me headaches. (I also listen to Keith Jarrett's music.) Don't tell me that musicians are poisoning me.

Michel Patenaude  
Charlottetown, Canada

In all honesty, Keith Jarrett has taken the solo piano recital as handed down by Beethoven and Franz Liszt to its highest aesthetic plane; in denouncing electronics and multiple keyboard instruments, he has completely rejuvenated the grand piano and turned it into a source of real inspiration. Hats off to David Breskin; he did a marvelous job.

Michael Lee Alexander  
San José, California

Just as any great musician can have a bad night on the horn, any competent writer can turn out occasional bad copy. Unfortunately, your senior editor must have had the week off when you set the article on Keith Jarrett, because it was sub-standard. Keith Jarrett is a genius who should be just left alone. People who want to get even with him for his own suffering should do so by not buying his albums instead of embarrassing his followers.

Ron McClure  
University of Wyoming

## ROSCOE RAVE

Just when I thought your magazine had become dedicated to the Boy George School of Music, you rekindled my hopes with the sensitive feature on Roscoe Mitchell. One tends to see and hear the colorful Moye, Jarman and Favors, or smile at Bowie's bubbly humor, but it is Mitchell's structures that define. It's just nice to see you run a jazz piece. Your name is, after all, *Musician*, not Blue Hair of the Week.

By the way, whatever happened to Rafi Zabor?

Marcel-Franck Simon  
Weehawken, New Jersey  
*He's munching cheesecake with Charlie Haden on Seventh Avenue. Details next issue. — Ed.*

## TECHNOPOP DOESN'T ADD UP

As a singer/songwriter of some worth, I view the so-called techno-pop scene as ten percent talent, forty percent hype and forty percent fashion. [With ten per-

cent undecided. Ed.]

The next true wave of music will be more mature, in the vein of Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell and Stevie Wonder.

Douglas C. Pryor  
Riverside, California

## NO STRAY CAT HERE

Well, I suspected that someone at *Musician* was down on the Stray Cats. Thanks to Doug Simmons review, I know who it is now.

Mr. Simmons, please don't be concerned about the effect of the Stray Cats on American youth. While I am a rabid Stray Cats fan, I am also a teetotaler, an "A" student and a virgin. Maybe I'm not typical; still, I've never put much stock in the theory that rock 'n' roll could single-handedly convert impressionable youth into boozing, violent, stupid, sex-crazed maniacs. As for the level of intelligence in the lyrics, there is absolutely nothing wrong with rock 'n' roll that simply entertains.

Nancy Fink  
East Hartford, Connecticut

## BUT THEY'RE NOT TELLING

I simply must take exception to David Fricke's absurd assertion that Jim Morrison's "Gloria" rap sounds like bad David Lee Roth.

David, the men don't know, but the little girls understand.

Fugi Essig  
Hollywood, California

## BASEMENT NOSTALGIA

Glenn Kenney and *Musician* are guilty of attempting to perpetuate an old-boy network of the worst sort by presenting a very biased interpretation of the history and "return" of the Feelies.

Mr. Kenney, in a humorous way, tells us that this "return" brought no new material and that the Feelies, as a group, assume confusing aliases, don't perform too often, and by at least one yardstick, aren't too successful. Why would anyone devote the better part of a page to a band that doesn't perform, record or otherwise contribute except to its own self-serving interests?

Three years is a little too soon for a nostalgic revival, but it is never too soon to finally declare and end to all this silliness. There *must* be more important things to report on than what's happening in Haledon's basements.

C. Desmoulin  
New York, New York

*Our apologies to David Brownstein's mother, who was shocked to see her son's name misspelled in the December issue.*





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# MUSIC INDUSTRY NEWS

BY MARK ROWLAND

The Union of South Africa, as Harry Belafonte has observed, "is the only country in the world where laws are used to sanction a system of racist oppression and subjugation of its people." That reality has yet to deter scores of American actors and musicians from performing there, despite an official United Nations boycott of that nation, and protests from a variety of anti-apartheid groups around the world. The U.N. Center Against Apartheid recently drew the controversy into sharper focus by formally releasing the names of foreign entertainers who have performed in South Africa over the past two years. Over eighty American artists are included on the list.

The South Africa dishonor roll comprises a varied lot, crossing over race and tax brackets as well as musical genres. It includes white pop icons like Frank Sinatra, Rod Stewart, Barry Manilow, Dolly Parton and Linda Ronstadt; black superstars like Ray Charles, George Benson, and Johnny Mathis; jazz pros like Chick Corea, Buddy Tate and Buddy DeFranco; and Curtis Mayfield, the Beach Boys, Janis Ian, the Staple Singers and Kenny Rogers, along with several lesser-known acts.

It doesn't take a genius to figure out what draws this crowd to South Africa—the government antes up money, big money, including a reported five million dollars to lure Ronstadt to Sun City. Nor does it take much to figure out why the government does it: every appearance by a foreign star buttresses the lie of South Africa's legitimacy, of its preposterous claim of separate-but-equal "homelands" like Bophuthatswana (where Sun City is located); of its "progressive" policy of allowing occasional integrated concerts there (at prices far beyond the means of most black workers). Nor does it take a seer to discern just

whose toil ultimately enables South Africa to bestow such generous financial recompense on the likes of needy beneficiaries like Ronstadt and Stewart. Many performers naturally give lip service to their personal opposition to apartheid; so far, none have vowed to use their profits to help undermine the present system.

The U.N. register is part of a campaign to pressure entertainers to desist from further collaboration with the South African regime. Belafonte, who, along with Arthur Ashe, co-chairs Artists and Athletes Against Apartheid, recently held a press conference at the U.N. to publicize the issue and also to draw attention to those artists who refuse to perform in South Africa on moral grounds, despite lucrative offers. The latter group includes Tony Bennett, Quincy Jones, Carmen McRae, the Commodores, Diana Ross, Oscar Peterson and the Jacksons.

The Black Music Association also supports demonstrations here to encourage boycotts of offending performers. That tactic has already met with some success: pickets virtually shut down a series of concerts by Millie Jackson in New York and New Jersey, according to the *Village Voice*, after which Jackson pledged not to perform in South Africa again. Others who have promised to mend their ways include Benson, the O'Jays and Jimmy Cliff. Once exposed, few performers of any stripe seem very proud about making money in a country whose dominant social currency is racism.

Six-hundred members of New York City's finest recently converged on Central Park's Tavern on the Green, no doubt to dissuade any intentions of riot by the one-hundred or so reporters, paparazzi and fans gathered there for a press conference. The event gave all assembled the opportunity to bask in the reflected aura of boxing impresario **Don King**, the corporate sheen of the Pepsi-Cola company, and incidentally, the Jackson 5, whose American tour gets underway this spring, and whose fortunes are being promoted and underwritten by King and Pepsi, respectively. With this bold stroke Pepsi enters the exalted ranks of giant Rock 'N' Roll Sponsors, joining Jovan (Rolling Stones), Canada Dry (Hall & Oates), and Schlitz (the Who). Okay, everybody sing: "We can cha-aa-nge the world...."

The Jacksons' itinerary will cover eighteen cities and forty shows, to be conducted in arenas and/or stadiums, and will kick off May 1. Cost is expected to exceed six million dollars, with Pepsi's commitment three or four

times that. An ad campaign will also feature the Jacksons and posit the slogan, "the new Pepsi generation." Close followers of the group speculate that some of the stir surrounding this enterprise may well be attributed to brother Michael, currently enjoying a relatively successful solo career.

Pull Up To The Bumper Department: **Grace Jones** is in Mexico, on location for *Conan The Destroyer*. The non-awaited sequel to *Conan The Barbarian* stars the equally self-effacing **Arnold Schwarzenegger**. Grace has the role of Zula, a warrior.... **David Byrne** has been commissioned to write music for the 1984 Olympics. So far no one has asked Brian Eno to produce.... **Tina Turner** is currently enjoying her eighth or ninth comeback with an inspired cover of Al Green's "Let's Stay Together." The single is already number seven in England, with a shimmy. Tina is slated to duet with **Joe Cocker** in the near future, while **David Bowie**, **Mick Ronson** and the **Eurythmics** have all requested similar privilege. Line forms to the right, kids.... Clash/Not Clash update: **Joe Strummer** and **Paul Simon** are reportedly in the studio putting the finishing touches on a new Clash record due in January that does not include **Mick Jones**. Meanwhile, Jones is putting together his own record with another former Clash exile, **Topper Headon**.... Talent mismatch of the year: **Larry Holmes** vs. **Marvis Frazier**. Runner up: **Dolly Parton** vs. **Kenny Rogers**. Best talent match? **Luther Vandross** to produce newly signed **Teddy Pendergrass** for Elektra/Asylum.

## Chart Action

We use the term "action" advisedly. Lionel Richie's *Can't Slow Down* still holds the fort at #1 for the second week in a row, with those old stalwarts the Police and Michael Jackson holding steady to the rear. (*Thriller*, at #3, is completing its first full year on the charts.) The Stones' *Undercover* did leap from #13 to #4, and Billy Joel is still strolling uptown at #5, as Quiet Riot silently slips down a few pegs to #6. Linda Ronstadt, Kenny Rogers, Culture Club and Hall & Oates round out the top deck. Jumps of the week go to Duran Duran, who debuted at #30 and .38 Special, who jumped fifty slots to #35. Meanwhile, X is #165 and plunging. Not a pretty sight. In Japan, Culture Club's *Colour By Numbers* is #1, the only non-Japanese entry in the top twenty. If Boy George ever decides to give up music he would probably have a bright future in Kabuki....

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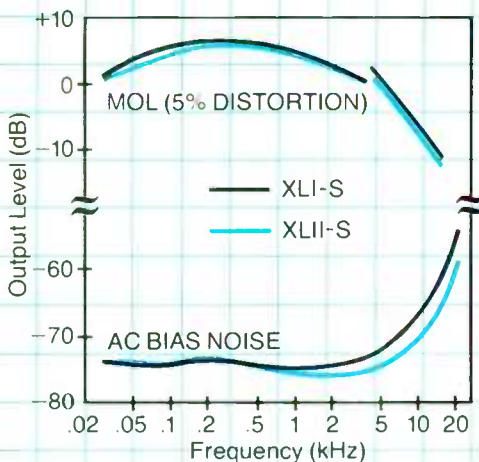
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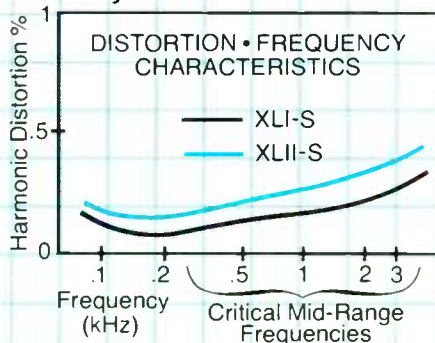


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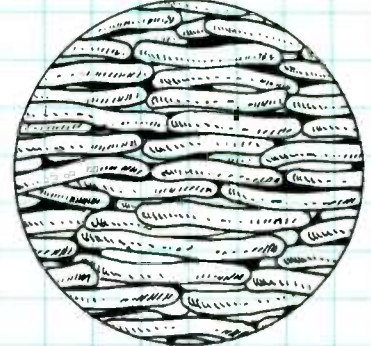
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## DAVID GANS

"When black people hear our music," proclaims Don Fagenson, "they know we're white. Even our funkier stuff. I think it happens to be a plus. I've seen black kids pause and say, 'Where the heck does *that* come from?' It's a perversion of their culture...and I think they're entertained by it."

Don Fagenson, a.k.a. Don Was, and his partner David Weiss, a.k.a. David Was, are the principals behind Was (Not Was), auteurs whose music, like their name, thrives on the tension of meeting opposites: black/white, Detroit/L.A., art/commerce, fun/funk, and even—*sacre bleu*—Ozzy Osbourne/Mel Torme. All may be appreciated in abundance on the Wasbros' second, thoroughly audacious album *Born To Laugh At Tornadoes*, an LP which has sent writers,

critics and press agents falling over their word processors in attempts to define the pair's unique melting pop. It's an approach which may well court commercial suicide, but for the moment Fagenson and Weiss have at least lent new meaning to the term AOR: All Over the Road.

"When I was growing up," Fagenson explains, "I really liked the Beatles *White Album*; never was there more of an anthology, from 'Revolution #9' to 'Martha My Dear,' and yet it made perfect sense. Our albums come from that sensibility, that this is more exciting than a band playing two singles and then eight more songs that sound like singles but aren't as good.

"My fear," he goes on, "is that if you really homogenize everything and come up with this combination that aims for mass culture, you wash out the

extremes. I would hate to have a coffee-colored thing happen—you end up with Lionel Richie and Kenny Rogers *everywhere*. I think it's much healthier to have your choice of country stations, jazz, rock, public, a news station...and they all stand for something. I like to view the radio dial as a whole."

That vision may well be the most cogent explanation for the perverse panstylism of the Was brothers' records—music which cuts across the pop spectrum from deep funk to cocktail jazz, yet never dilutes or homogenizes the "roots" music which is inefably Detroit's. At the same time, Weiss' consistently weird lyrical characterizations, fused with Fagenson's imaginative production and cameo castings (which in addition to Torme and the Oz include such Detroit homeboys as Sweet Pea Atkinson, MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer,

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Doug Fieger and Marshall Crenshaw) lend Was (Not Was) the veneer of a street level Steely Dan. "I suppose David would be more the poet and I'd be more the clown," Fagenson muses. "But it's not that defined. We grew up together, a couple of blocks apart—he's been my closest friend since we were about twelve. We've been doing this for a long time—writing music, playing with tape recorders...."

David Weiss remembers the beginning, at Clinton Junior High. "I saw him in the eighth grade talent show, playing acoustic guitar and singing 'Midnight Special' and something by Dylan. I thought he was the greatest; he was

radiating something special, and was probably a little cooler than any other of my peers."

For one thing, he had a tape recorder. "It only cost \$130," Fagenson amplifies, "but you could bounce track on it. We used it until I was about twenty, then we moved up to a Revox."

"We were doing stuff like the Firesign Theatre—skits and things—and some music, too," says Weiss, whose parents had indulged his meandering musical interest as it moved from piano to guitar to saxophone to flute. "We painted our names on guitar cases and pretended we were important," he recalls with a wink and a grin. "We were going to Mont-

real once, and the customs guy came on the bus as we crossed over into Canada, and said, 'Open the guitar case.' There was no guitar in there—only my socks and underwear. Didn't have a guitar."

For Weiss' part, "While my contemporaries were memorizing song lyrics, I was thinking that the real call of the wild was in jazz and classical. I'd blow stuff like Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and sit there crying, because I'd read that Berlioz sat on a park bench writing this stuff with no piano, crying. I identified with him sitting there, wrenching his guts out writing a symphony.

Weiss can quote German philosophers and psychoanalysts to explain himself and his partner now, but when pressed, he'll admit that "the real reason we started making records was we couldn't get girls. We'd go down to Woodward Avenue, roll down the car window, and some girls would roll down their window. You're on the spot, y'know? You just have time to get one thing out over the din of the engines.

"We had some great lines that failed," Weiss adds with a rueful laugh. "We thought of some non-sequiturs like, 'Would you like to buy a house?' Then we'd come home frustrated and make tapes."

While David was finishing college, Fagenson—having dropped out in his first year—was paying dues playing bass in a cocktail lounge and working in a Tascam-equipped 8-track studio located in what he describes as a rather treacherous neighborhood: "The studio was on top of a warehouse. The machines were mounted on shipping crates—very funky. We had a live echo chamber and a vault downstairs, and sometimes when we turned up the echo return we could hear people breaking into the building. We'd just lock the elevator and stay upstairs...."

Jack Tann, an "early patron saint" of Fagenson's (according to Weiss), got a job booking time at the Sound Suite and brought him along. "He saw Don's potential," says Weiss, "and it was a good thing, too: Don was going nuts playing in this bar and being a hack in the studio producing everybody's copy-cat sounds."

By this time both men were married, which cooled their partnership to a certain degree, and Weiss had moved to Los Angeles and gotten a job as jazz critic at the Los Angeles *Herald Examiner*. He was still sending back lyrics for Fagenson's various projects when Don's restlessness reached a crisis point. "He called me in California, desperate, saying he was totally broke and sick of cutting all these one-off, make-a-buck deals. He said, 'Let's get together and do something that counts.' Otherwise, he said, he was about to rob a drycleaner to get some money. He had

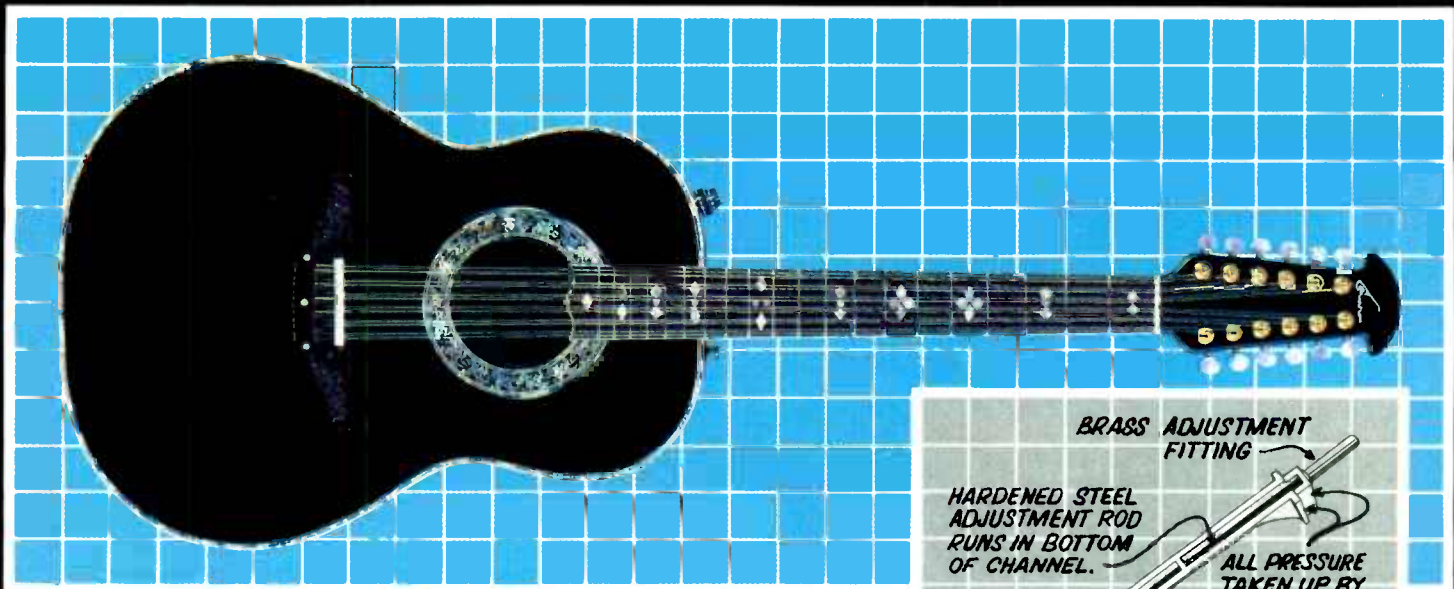
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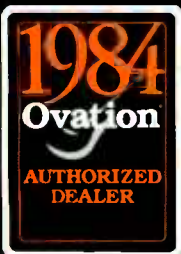
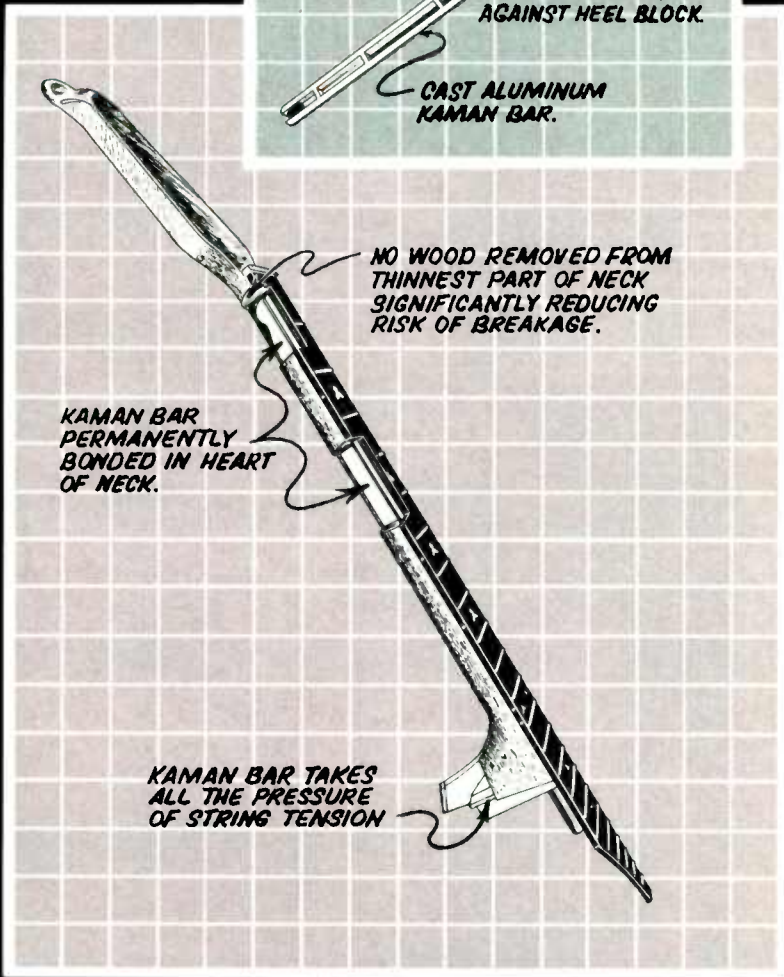
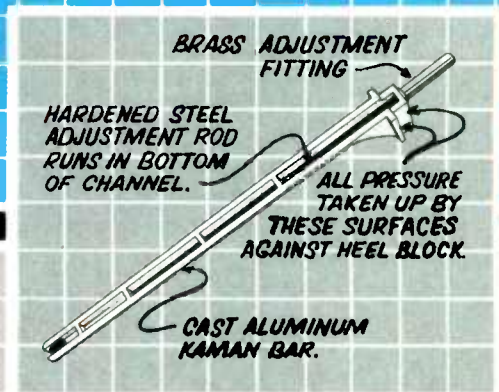
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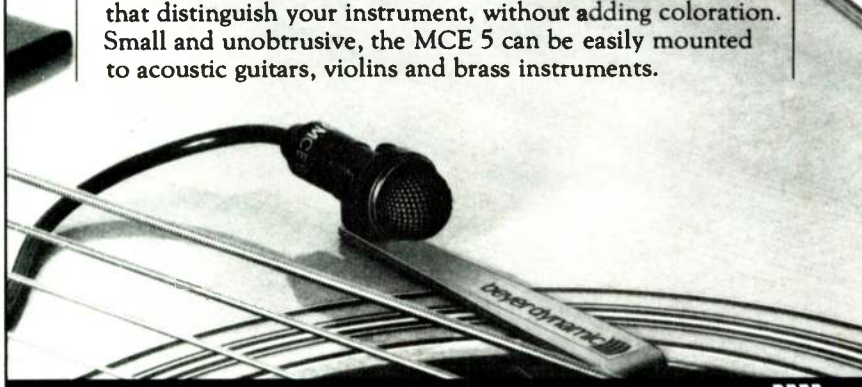
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the place picked out; there was a teenage girl at the counter.

"Here was a guy who couldn't have picked a flower from someone's garden, and he said he was going to rob a cleaners." Impressed with his brother's desperation, Weiss returned to Detroit, borrowed \$400 from his father to pay for studio time and musicians, and—"Voila! Was (Not Was). We recorded 'Wheel Me Out' and a B-side, 'Hello Operator...I Mean Dad...I Mean Police...I Can't Even Remember Who I Am,' and we sent them to Michael Zilkha at Ze Records. Michael listened," says Weiss, "and the rest is *histoire*."

The name Was (Not Was) was coined by Fagenson's son, Anthony, who was one-and-a-half years old at the time and just discovering the concept of oppositeness, according to his dad—"that something like could be and not be," says Fagenson. "He was saying things like, 'Long, not long,' and one night it just came out: 'Was, not was.'"

"The best thing about a good non-sequitur is that it *seems* like it means something," adds Weiss. "It's got that suggestive ring to it."

Fagenson is now very much at home in the Sound Suite, which he says, "looks like a bombed-out dentist's office buried in the middle of Detroit." The neighborhood is funky, Fagenson admits, "but the studio itself is really nice. It's got a great street vibe, and the room is unbelievably accurate." Fagenson works alone much of the time, and admits that if it weren't for some creative booking agreements, Was (Not Was) wouldn't be able to afford to work the way they do, recording a song at a time from start to finish. While making *Tornadoes*, for instance, Fagenson had the Sound Suite booked "from midnight on, every night. If there isn't a session booked for the next day, I'll stay in and work straight through."

"I used to worry about 'growing up' in the music business, because I hadn't learned to adapt to time restrictions," he observes. "But you don't have to do that—you can totally bypass that whole method of working." The principal players on the Was (Not Was) projects are professional musicians, but they also happen to be friends. "You pay them fairly, but it's not based on three hours going by. Most of the people who work for us hang out after their sessions are finished. It's loose—and it's fun. I can't work any other way."

Most members of the Was repertory are old acquaintances—Fagenson knows Marshall Crenshaw from the days when that songwriter was fronting a local band called Astigafa. But Fagenson isn't averse to taking a flyer either; the appearance of Ozzy Osbourne came about because he and Fagenson share the same attorney. "We were hav-

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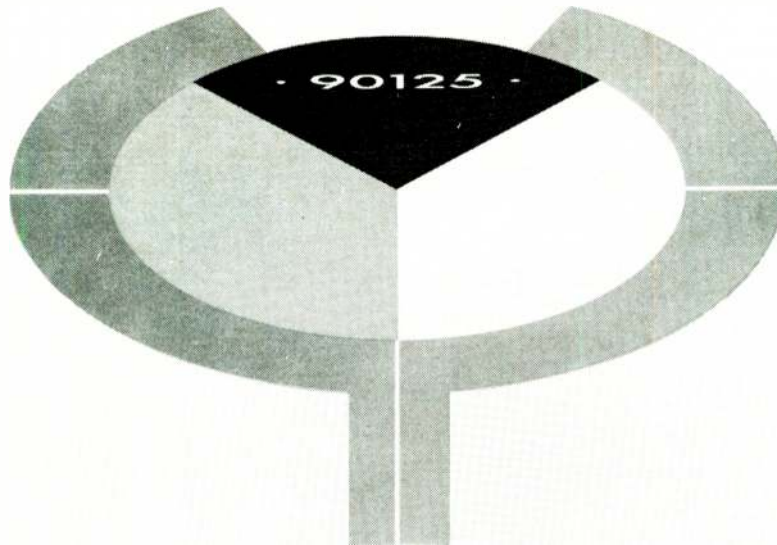
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ing trouble finding the right singer for 'Shake Your Head,' and Ozzie...it was so absurd we had to try. He was perfect! I couldn't believe it, but like any artist, he's tired of being locked into that one thing. He's definitely the real item, too," Fagenson notes admiringly. "This is definitely the guy who pissed on the Alamo."

Fagenson is an exponent of a practical, seat-of-the-pants production philosophy which he calls "Zengineering," the essence of which is that "the best way to engineer is not to engineer at all.

"People are concerned about distortion from a tape machine or a mixing

board, but the worst distortion I've ever found comes from stopping a session for half an hour to figure out whether you should use an SM58 or an RE-20 on the foot (or kick, if you're on the West coast). Stick the microphone in the drum and cut the song! As long as the feeling is there, it doesn't really matter what a record sounds like." It does matter, of course, but Fagenson says, "If it came down to a clear-cut choice—which it rarely does—I'd take a track that's distorted if it had the inherent feeling to it."

Consistent with the principles of Zengineering, Fagenson says that while he rarely wastes hours searching for the perfect place to put ambience mikes on

a drum kit, on occasion he's crawled around looking for a "stupid" place to put one. "We've dropped a mike down a garbage can and put it across the room, then had the guy play the sax facing the mirror. That was for 'Someone Could Lose A Heart,' on Sweet Pea Atkinson's album," says Fagenson. "The saxophonist, David McMurray, and I, just got sick of hearing it the same way all the time!"

Zengineering also has a lot to do with throwing the book out the window and playing by ear. "That's the only way you come onto new things." The trumpet solo on "Empire Brain Building," for example, was originally played (by Hannibal Petersen) on *Tornadoes'* opening cut, "Knocked Down, Made Small." "We wild-tracked it onto quarter-inch tape, VSOing it to match the pitch of 'Empire Brain Building,'" Fagenson chuckles. "Then we cut the middle in about thirty pieces, tossed them into the air and reassembled them at random, and bounced it back onto the new song. It was a great solo on 'Knocked Down,' but we needed one for 'Empire Brain Building.'"

But the biggest kick in making *Tornadoes*, both Was brothers agree, was getting Mel Torme to sing their cockeyed ballad, "Zaz Turned Blue." Once the song was written it was evident that the Velvet Fog was the only man to sing it, "but," says Fagenson, "we were prepared for him not being able to get into the lyric. It's clearly not his usual song—I don't think he ever sang a line like, 'Steve squeezed his neck.' And it's not something he needed to do, having won a Grammy the week before we called him. But David knows him from being a jazz critic, and they've become friends."

Torme agreed to give the tune a shot; the Was brothers sent him a tape, and "he lived with it for two and a half weeks before the session. On the drive to the studio he said, 'Tell me more about this guy Zaz.' He wanted to know everything about the situation."

Torme "found nuances—both musically and lyrically—that David and I didn't even know we'd written into the song," says Fagenson. "His accompanist, Mike Renzi, played piano and wrote the string charts. They have a great chemistry between them, and they transformed the song. It was a real thrill! He killed us on the first run-through! We cut four takes, but we ended up using the first one."

One can only imagine the looks on the faces of the Miami Beach retirees who witnessed the spectacle of two grown men—Fagenson in mirrored shades and a disreputable grey suit—walking along the sand repeatedly slapping five while their blaster played that familiar voice. "We must have listened to it fifty, sixty times," Weiss chuckles. "We couldn't believe it—'He sang it!' We saw one of the gases of my life."

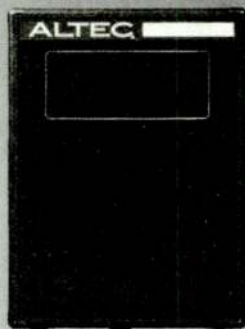
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## ROB PATTERSON

It's a warm autumn evening in Nashville, the chirp of crickets in this neat suburban neighborhood mixing with the plunk, plop and twang emanating from the split-level I've just pulled up to—not a surprising sound to hear in Music City, U.S.A. But inside, the sight is anything but Music Row. On bass, drums and guitar are the Nashville Scorchers: axe-master Warner Hodges with his jean vest, kerchief and fly-away hair; razor-cropped bassist Jeff Johnson; and on drums, looking not unlike Sting-Southern-style, is Perry Baggs. Atop two stools playing guitar and singing with Nashville's most successful new music band—grey hairs, arthritis and all—are Edgar and Betty Hodges, Warner's parents. What do the punks and the 'rents sit around playing? A little country, a little rock 'n' roll, and a little of what can only be called both.

It's a chilly October night on New York's Bowery, but a few brave souls take a "hay ride" through Loisada (the lower east side) in a pickup with hay in the back and horns on the hood. What gives? It's country night at CBGB, organized by the infamous Snooky and Tish of the Sic F★\*ks, who are also the proprietresses of St. Marks Place's seminal punk boutique, Manic Panic. While the cowboy shirts, bouffants and put-on drawls are slightly camp, the band of local new wavers, joined by guests like ex-MC5 Wayne Kramer (who plays and sings a kickin' version of "Mountain Dew"), are havin' a fine ol' time—so fine that the veritable womb of American punk is now making country night a regular event.

At a time when trends appear, infect and then recede like musical influenzas, is country music the latest style to be sanctified by the hand of new wave? One doesn't have to dig too far to find

evidence that it certainly is rearing its rednecked head. Following the lead of bands like Rank & File and Jason & the Nashville Scorchers, there's grown a strong movement of bands using country music as the soil for seeding and growing new sounds: L.A.'s Lone Justice (just inked to Geffen Records), and other local acts like Blood on the Saddle (punkish country), Radio Ranch and the Straight Shooters (new wave grandsons of the Sons of the Pioneers) and the Screaming Sirens (hillbilly); New York's Last Roundup (an urban Carter family), Ned Sublette (experimental musician turned back to his roots) and Steve Almas and Beat Rodeo (a Holly-ish pop act who revere country values); Boston's campy Rubber Rodeo, who are recording their first PolyGram LP; even England has its own new country sounds with the Orsons. Can it be that after plundering everything from the sounds of the synthesizer to rockabilly quiffs, new music has finally found that un-hippest of all musics (*ergo* hip as hell in some logics)...country? Ya bet yer motorcycle boots it has, punk!

Why country, per se? It's not just because it's the latest style on the new wave list. Though it may seem less than obvious, punk and country do have their parallels. Observes Maria McKee of Lone Justice, "Punk was this rebellion against what was established rock 'n' roll, and country, at its root, is this very raw, white art form."

And one of the magics of the music is that you don't have to be from the hinterlands to have the spirit. Says native Los Angeleno Maria McKee, "I'm not this hillbilly woman from Kentucky who sings all these yodeling songs, but I'm so inspired by the music those people made—it's so real, pure and honest."

Most of this appreciation is directed at the early root forms of country music rather than the Nashville sound, but more than one person admitted a preference for commercial country like Glen Campbell's "Wichita Lineman." What all these musicians seem attracted to is a structure and form that's not contrived—a framework which can support honest musical and lyrical expression.

"The same thing that attracts me to the country music I listen to is exactly what attracted me to punk when I was

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younger—it was raw, and it wasn't full of what I'd call crap," says Last Roundup's Garth Powell. Says bassist and singer Tony Kinman of Rank & File, the pioneers of this form, "It wasn't like we woke up one morning, thinking, well...we can play ska if we want, or there's jazz...heavy metal...country music...country music—that's something! It wasn't anything like that at all." After all, Army brats Chip and Tony Kinman grew up on the North Carolina radio they heard and the bootleg Korean country albums their dad brought home from Japan (the first LP Tony bought was a Johnny Cash record, and to this day he sings not at all unlike the Man in Black). They would later pick country songs for fun with their friend Alejandro Escovedo between their gigs in seminal San Francisco punk bands like the Dils and the Nuns. So when both bands broke up, it was a natural format for a message that's still strongly from music (and culture's) new order.

You can hear just how well punk thinking and country styling mix on Rank & File's debut LP, *Sundown*. Filled with hyper-charged, bluegrass guitar licks and a hard-bucking backbeat, its themes are love (as in any genre, of course), fashion and fads, even politics and Marxism. And the leap from the Dils' "Eat The Rich" to the anthemic wobbly worker's sentiments of the song "Rank And File" is mainly one of sophistication in both the message and the delivery. Because as anyone who's seen a hot Rank & File date can tell you, these feisty young rockers playing country are out to make a change, and they mean it, man!

Explains Tony Kinman, "We want to make it clear to people that we aren't punks making fun of country playing. We don't approach it as a formula. We see it as a means of expression. And we don't see what we do as a revival. We just see ourselves as putting our two cents into the vast melting pot that is country music today."

Rank & File's contribution to the new country cause isn't just their own music, but also their discovery and support of a band, who, as Tony Kinman says, "are putting themselves into the music they love"—Lone Justice. Formed by two young L.A. musicians from the new music scene, Ryan Hedgecock and Maria McKee, Lone Justice aren't just some smart kids with an ear for a solid style. On their Geffen Records demo, the effervescent McKee sings with a voice as winged and pure as that of Parton or Emmylou but with a youthful moxie that's sheer tonic to the ears.

Oddly enough, while younger musicians are reaching back to country to give some sophistication and form to the spirit of the three-chord thrash, one member of the progressive, avant-garde

musical scene came back from music's future to his past. Ned Sublette holds a college degree in classical guitar, and has worked with such experimentalists as La Monte Young and Glen Branca, but when he started singing the songs he learned growing up in Louisiana, Texas and New Mexico, on the New York subways, "It was a catalyzing experience, the consolidation of all I'd done." His LP *Western Classics* gathered those traditional nuggets together in a truly original setting—backed by a middle-aged "living room" band of musicians from his hometown of Portales, New Mexico. After diving back deep into his musical past, Sublette then started writing songs which would hopefully meld that base with his art-rock and avant-garde influences. And playing around New York (backed by guitarist Tim Schellenbaum and the stunningly individual steel guitar of Lenny Kaye, ex-of the Patti Smith group), Sublette injects songs like "Cattle Mutilations" and "Cowboys Are Frequently, Secretly (Queer)" with a left-of-center musical slant that scores at stuffy, arty Soho lofts and the sexually ambiguous Pyramid Club.

New Yorkers Last Roundup took the inspiration from the punkish Tier 3 club they hung out at and decided to start making music.

"Rather than us choosing country," says Michael McMahon, who plays guitar, mandolin and lap steel for the largely acoustic group, currently a foursome, "it chose us." Sparked by punk's D.I.Y. ethos and led into country by the rockabilly craze, Last Roundup started as a living room band whose sound was acoustic because: (a) they could barely play, and (b) they couldn't even afford the amplified instrument electric music requires. Their debut show at Haoui Montaug's No Entiendes cabaret at Danceteria came out with "a bizarre C&W sound," so "as we evolved, it was a natural sound to play. When you think about it, we're white, so we weren't about to start a funk or a soul band, and we had women and wanted to sing harmonies. So it fit."

After being joined by native Tennessean Angel Dean on hillbilly-ish lead vocals, Last Roundup started solidifying into a contemporary-themed Carter family-style sound, picked on guitars, bass fiddle, ukelele, banjo, fiddle and an occasional electric guitar or lap steel. While it may not sound like "Sheena Is A Punk Rocker," Last Roundup's music is built from a similar punk base—simple, effective music anyone can play.

"It is the same thing," explains Amy McMahon. "Anyone can do it." Angel Dean agrees: "Three chords and sing your heart out."

Nashville's own Jason & the Nashville Scorchers first emerged from country's



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capitol with a punkified thrashing of country classics on their *Reckless Country Soul* EP, but their new EP *Ferver* shows a band taking original songs of a country form, sung with a country twang, and making them as rock 'n' roll as, say, the very best of Creedence Clearwater Revival. Although they might be more aligned with such Southeast-bred rockers as R.E.M. and the dB's (whose Will Rigby also produced Last Roundup's demo), the Nashville Scorchers are all country-bred-and-fed, and it can't help but emerge in their music.

Jason Ringenberg, onstage and off, is the stereotypical intelligent but sensitive hick. Raised on a hog farm in Sheffield, Illinois, he was reared on the Opry but also played "Holidays In The Sun" in his high school band. "I'd always wanted to do something with some real feeling in it, with some real blood in it, so I figured the only way to get that was to go to Nashville. I've always been this country/rockabilly styled singer, and I'd always had this idea of modernizing it—making it singable to kids." With almost a rube's good luck, he met the members of the Scorchers—young rockers steeped in country—and in two short years have become the most lauded and probably successful rock 'n' roll act from Music City in recent memory, if ever.

But as guitarist Warner Hodges says, "It's still country—the chord patterns, what the songs say—it's just done a different way." That way is fierce and feisty onstage, with Jason and Warner all but slamming for stage space to shake, rattle and roll in. Yet in Ringenberg's songs (and he's *just* started writing) there's a neo-Gothic, Dylanesque feel for lyrical tale-telling topped with unforgettable stone-country choruses. "I don't want to be the greatest country-punk band," says Ringenberg, "I want us to be among the greatest *rock 'n' roll* bands. When people think American rock 'n' roll, I want them to think Jason & the Nashville Scorchers." But what makes them uniquely, even dynamically American is that musical foundation which can't be tagged anything but country.

For musicians trying to formulate an American sound for the 80s, country is proving itself to be a magnetic touchstone. In fact, one group whose inspiration is as much modern British synthesizer music as it is country, Boston's Rubber Rodeo, feels that country music adds an American stamp to their work. Says the band's "Buffalo Bob" Holmes: "We use country to flavor our music in much the same way Wall of Voodoo uses spaghetti Western music to flavor theirs. Our songs talk about American themes and problems, and we're all basically from the Midwest, where country music is a way of life. It's the background Muzak of America." Holmes admits that their attempted

resolution of country music with the style of Roxy Music "is the source of our greatest failures and our greatest successes," and the band's arty inclinations—they're all graduates of Rhode Island School of Design, the alma mater of Talking Heads—often make their country inflections sound a bit campy or kitsch. "That's probably because of our sense of irony and cynicism."

Rubber Rodeo hope to successfully meld the styles on their debut PolyGram LP. "I hope Americans will see that we are also Americans doing this kind of music, but approaching it the way the English do today. It's a gamble," concludes Holmes.

Ned Sublette backs up Holmes' contention that American music is, to some degree at least, inherently related to country. "Where I come from—America, not this asteroid city of New York, where we communicate with the rest of the world by satellite—everyone, even if they hide it, has listened to country music and probably likes some of it, too." Last Roundup's Angel Dean also cites the values she loves in country music: "It's simple, and they sing about real things."

And while most all of these acts are aiming their music at a youth audience, country's wide appeal brings other benefits. Rank & File, for instance, are thrilled by the diversity of audience they draw in their home base of Austin, such regulars as "hippies doing their *Sufi* dances, skateboard punks, country music fans, preppies, and the kind of people who go to see Jimmy Buffett on Friday night and come see us on a Saturday night," says Chip Kinman.

And at least one loyal member of the country music community thinks this potential trend is just fine, indeed. Edgar Hodges is the father of Scorchers Warner Hodges, and his life is proof positive of his love for country music and his support of the Nashville system: a former sideman with Lefty Frizzell and Johnny Cash, Ed and his wife Betty have enjoyed moderate success with their independent label records and as a touring country band through Germany's pubs and USO clubs. His views on bands like the Scorchers and their contemporaries reflect a valuable sense of perspective.

"I will say one thing—when I first walked out onstage in Columbia, Georgia years ago, my shirt down to here, doin' what I wanted to do, it was a shock to some of the people down there at the time. So I'm not so sure that this stuff is new as much as it is just fresh. And call it anything you want, I feel it's something anyone can get involved with—and she (Betty) and I do—if they just give it a chance. There's something they'll like within this whole thing. Anyone who doesn't just doesn't like music."



# STEVE GADD. HOT ON ZILDJIAN.

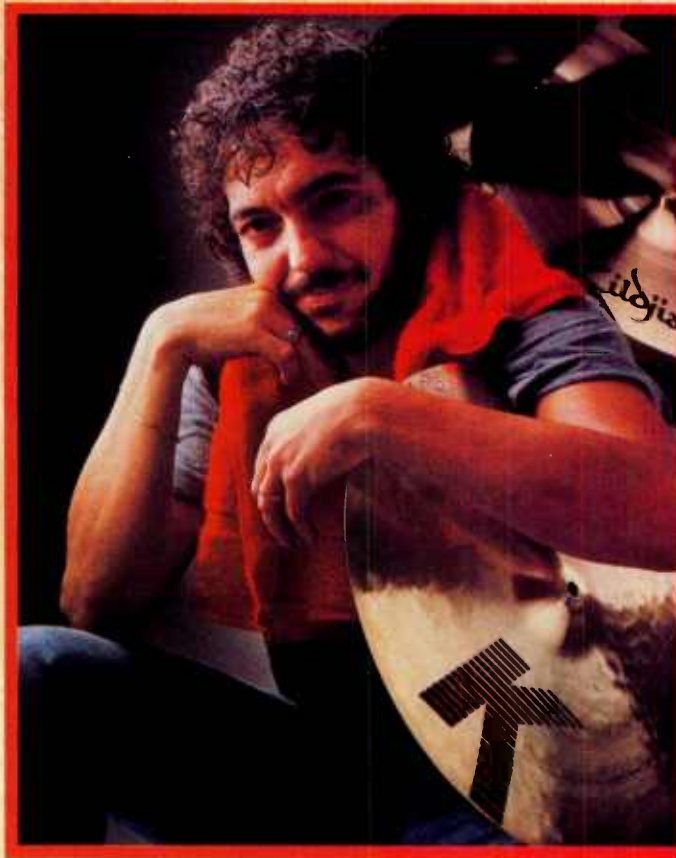
The man is hot! And he should be. No less than Chick Corea put it this way: "Every drummer wants to play like Steve Gadd because he plays great. He plays everything well. He could very well go on to become one of the greatest drummers the world has ever seen." As you can imagine, between his touring and recording, Steve's not the easiest guy in the world to pin down. But he did stop for a breather the other day and we got a chance to talk with him.

**On Practice.** "I've been playing since I was a kid. As long as I keep my muscles loose, I don't have to practice a lot every day. When I do practice, I just sort of let things happen naturally and then later on try to work it into my playing. Like on '50 Ways to Leave Your Lover... I used my left hand on the high hat for the whole section - it was a little thing I'd been practicing and it just worked out."

**On Control.** "Sometimes I use light, medium and heavy sticks to do the same drills because the sticks affect my muscles in different ways. You have to use your hand and arm muscles differently to control your playing. It's a subtle thing but it helps me tremendously."



**On Effects.** "After I graduated from Eastman, I played in a rock 'n roll band. It was keyboard, bass, drums and a lot of homemade stuff. I bought 6 big artillery shells, sawed them into different lengths and hung them on



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a rack that I built. I'd use them for the free sections in the music."

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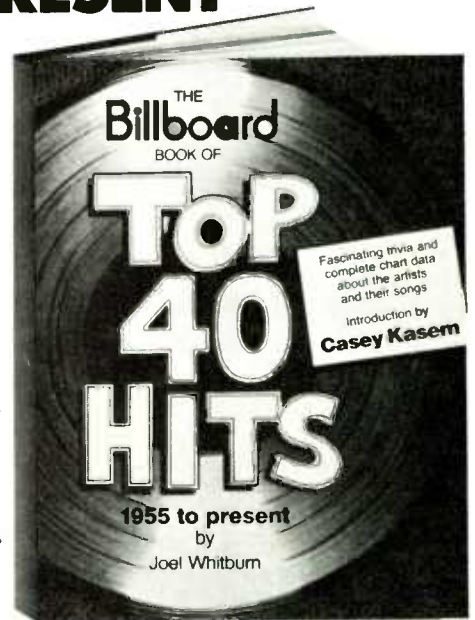
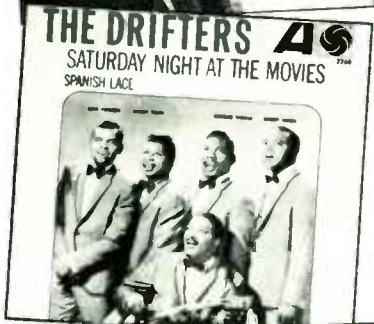
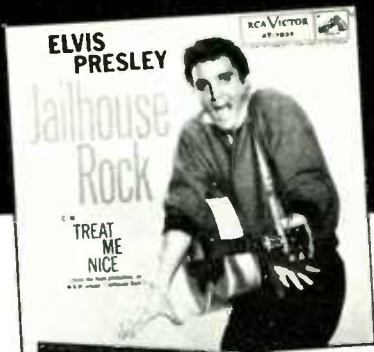
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From Caravan of Dreams' rooftop, the Cactus Research Dome, you can see four surrounding skyscrapers mark off the renovated business district of Fort Worth, Texas. The two most recently completed towers, thirty stories high and sheathed in mirrored glass, reflect the vast horizon: jets landing at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport; the metroplex growing between Big D, with its aura of wealth, power and prestige, and Fort Worth, "where the West began"—no less wealthy a town but not so obvious about it.

There's an air of competition between the two population centers just thirty miles distant, though Fort Worth is roughly half Dallas' size. The rivalry probably reaches back to a time when Fort Worth was known for its Cowtown—stockyards, slaughter houses, railroads—and its downtown was called Hell's Half Acre, where cowboys whooped their last wild cries before the long drive up the Chisholm Trail. Dallas was where bankers made deals: in the thirties, Dallas claimed it was *the* center for culture and education. "Fine," answered the fabled Fort Worth mayor, Amon Carter, "Fort Worth for fun!" He brought impresario Billy Rose to town to develop an entertainment complex, led off with fan-dancer Sally Rand, and saw things get even livelier when Will Rogers made Fort Worth his adopted home.

The black neighborhood just outside downtown is pretty much unchanged from that time—plain, frame houses, old and young people hanging out, two neat churches on a rise and a barbeque joint in the gully. But there's an apocryphal tale that after World War II some reformist administration ordered bulldozers to flatten the cat-houses, gambling dens and wide open music bars of Hell's Half Acre in a single afternoon. Now, downtown Fort Worth has a scrubbed look, street lights restored as antiques, and an enclosed shopping mall. The metroplex is the fastest growing job market in the U.S. and Fort Worth has hopes for the future, but the two gleaming towers built by the eldest son of the oil family Bass seem mostly empty. Luxury hotels



**Ornette bewilders and bemuses Fort Worth fans with his epic orchestration, *Skies Of America*.**

anchor the new Fort Worth, but guests apparently stay inside. Indeed, the only way to draw a crowd to the streets at high noon is to stage a shoot-out, as Kathelin "Honey" Hoffman did to announce the opening of the \$5.5 million performing arts center, Caravan of Dreams (funded in large part by the third son of the Bass family), and to celebrate the homecoming of Fort Worth's indisputably famous progeny, Ornette Coleman.

"I wanted an opening on the level of myth, because there's an element of that here, of Texas bigger than life," explained Hoffman. As artistic director, Hoffman has been contracted for two

years to book music into Caravan's 400-seat supper club; to book drama, dance and performance into its 212-seat theater; and to program auxiliary events, such as filmmaker Shirley Clarke's attempt to finish a vision of Coleman she began in the late 60s.

These are typical ambitions for a 60s kid whose credits include producing Keith Jarrett's album of songs by the mystic Gurdjieff, and directing her own Theatre of All Possibilities, usually based in the south of France. Actually, the homecoming dream she helped Coleman realize was too big for Caravan itself.

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all you have to do is provide the facilities," Hoffman stated. So when Ornette, composer, bandleader, multi-instrumentalist, theorist of harmolodics, decided he wanted to perform the complete *Skies Of America*, she contacted conductor John Giordano of the Fort Worth Symphony, coordinated a date at the Tarrant County Convention Center auditorium, and sent out publicity requesting "black-tie or party costumes" to stimulate the curious along with the elite.

"Coleman was sent packing years ago with his horn and his head's strange harmonies, unable to sound a chord Cowtown music lovers could readily recognize," sniffed a front-page article

in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*. Presumably, Fort Worth still preferred the Nashville acts rolling through Billy Bob's, world's largest honky-tonk with forty-six bar stations on twenty-six acres that used to pen cattle, to uncompromising jazz and blues. But Hoffman disagreed.

"The climate is right for a black from across the tracks to return as a composer of a symphony," she insisted. "One thing I like about Fort Worth is that just because people here don't understand something, and they're scratching their heads about it, doesn't mean to them it's not worthy. It just means they don't understand it."

If Coleman's idiosyncratic alto sax

style got him run out of town in the 50s, his magnum opus for ninety-six-piece orchestra and jazz ensemble—his septet Prime Time—posed an even thornier challenge to head scratchers. *Skies* comprises Coleman's esthetic ideas writ large. Though the score is noted in detail, the classically trained musicians are asked to play their parts in octaves of their choice and a few measures require the volunteers to improvise. Eight themes, massive movements and unpredictable variations (though little counterpoint) are played in alternation by the orchestra and the band, who work together only in *Skies* final moments.

Prime Time—guitarists Charlie Ellerbee and Bern Nix, bass guitarists Alber McDowell and Jamaaladeen Tacuma, percussionists Denardo Coleman and Kamau Sabir, and Ornette himself on alto, trumpet and violin—restrained their volume to match the orchestra's unamplified acoustics. Familiar riffs from the albums *Dancing In Your Head*, *Body Meta*, and *Of Human Feelings*, emerged from brass, string and woodwind parts that began as dense atmospherics, then diffused like slowly blown clouds. Giordano led his sections firmly, creating a far more compelling version of *Skies* than that recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra under David Measham's baton for Columbia in 1972 (half this length, with Ornette alone, no jazz ensemble). But inevitably, given its duration, the symphony's momentum flagged.

No matter. After the concert, the audience, in black-tie and party costumes, traipsed up Houston Street to explore the four floors of the quarter-block square Caravan of Dreams, sample its free cuisine, drink its generously poured libations and dig a hot quintet led by reedman James Clay with young guitarist Clint Strong. Revelers circled the geodesic Cactus Research Dome, which shelters hundreds of varieties of rare desert life, and peered out from the roof-top grotto bar into otherwise sleepy Fort Worth, watching cars transverse the metroplex, lights flickering in the night.

The next day's reviews were unanimously respectful, as Hoffman predicted, if not uniformly insightful. Clearly, Fort Worth's attitude *has* changed, even unto revisionism. For example, a hefty, white-haired music store owner was overheard addressing a regular customer mystified by the concert, while Denardo, unrecognized, shopped for drumsticks.

"I used to be the only redneck pecker-head in these dives, but I just had to drum with Ornette," he remembered (how accurately?), "before he ever left town. I'll tell ya, that free-form stuff he got into, it's lost on me. Thing is, it's got no structure. But I'll say this: I know Ornette

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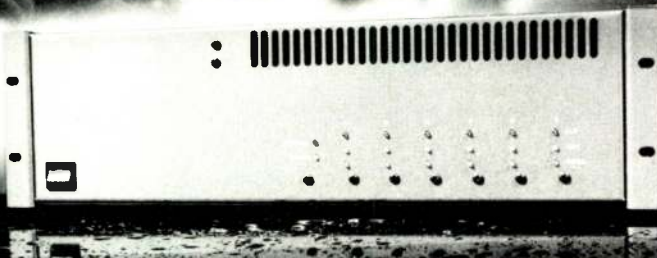


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well enough to believe he's sincere about everything he does."

Sincerity is Coleman's middle name, to judge by the modest delight he took in the attention about him. During rehearsals and soundchecks, he eagerly accommodated Shirley Clarke's film crew as they poked cameras inches from his players' faces (this is how she shot *The Connection*?). Greetings from the mayor; a plaque from his high-school class of 1948; fans in from Austin, Denton, Lubbock; critics from Berlin, Paris, Manhattan; prime time to party.

So Prime Time played four get-down sets over two nights while Caravan's staff of ninety ironed out its service routines. Murals covering the dining room walls showed Fort Worth's history of inter-racial festivity, with Ornette and his old quartet sketched into one corner—not inaccurately, since besides Coleman, his colleagues Dewey Redman, Ronald Shannon Jackson, Charles Moffett and John Carter hail from here. Yet, Prime Time is something else: seven pulsating harmolodicians.

The jumpy line Jamaaladeen starts soon collides with McDowell's walking funk. Their stuff gets knotted up in the strands of thought Bern Nix plucks, and the fringy chords from Ellerbee's wrist-quiver. Drum accents pop everywhere. Best to lean in towards Ornette at the center, hear the call he's making, his happy/sad blues. Let the rest of Prime Time wash over you, absorb it, and when the pulsating sounds of seven harmolodicians suddenly become clear, synching up in emphatic unison, shed your thoughts, snag a cactus flower, boogie 'til you drop.

That's what Caravan's customers did, loose and happy as ranch hands on payday. Honey Hoffman was bubbling—with hours of multi-track tape in the can, she was already planning to produce and release in the not-too-distant future, albums documenting the symphony, Prime Time's sets and "Prime Design," the Coleman composition for string quartet and traps drummer—Denardo—that had its world premiere during Caravan's Sunday brunch. (After the premiere, Shirley Clarke herded the string quartet, Denardo and her crew up to the R. Buckminster Fuller-designed Cactus Research Dome, where amid bristling plants they played "Prime Design" before the cameras.)

"I wrote this piece, dedicated to Fuller, after I heard him speak at a conference in France," Coleman said. "He had a three-dimensional model of his architectural ideas—he invented the geodesic dome, you know—that he used in his talk. And when he was done," Ornette's eyes brightened, "he folded it up and the sides came together without touching each other! And I thought, 'That's what my music is like!'"





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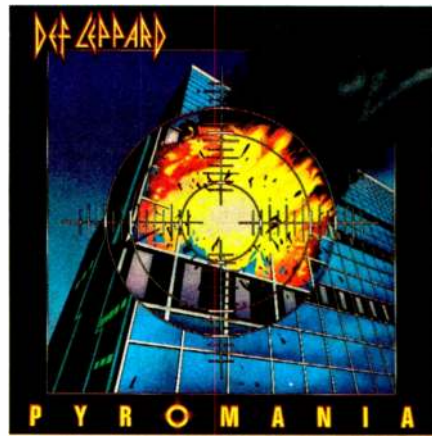
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**50 3rd Prizes:** A Musician T-Shirt

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**OFFICIAL CONTEST RULES:**

1. To enter the Polygram/Musician "Music On The Move" Contest, complete the official entry blank or handprint your name, address, zip code and telephone number with your answers to the Questionnaire on a 3" x 5" card and mail to:  
 Musician/Polygram "Music On The Move" Contest  
 1515 Broadway  
 New York, New York 10036  
**NO PURCHASE NECESSARY.**  
 2. Send as many entries as you like; one entry per envelope. Entries must be received by March 15, 1984.

3. In the case of a tie, the winners will be chosen at random. All prizes will be awarded. Prizes are non-transferrable, nor are there any prize substitutions. Odds of winning are determined by the number of entries received. Prize winners grant their permission to use their name, city and/or photograph for publication in connection with this contest and similar promotions without additional compensation. Winners will be notified by mail no later than March 31, 1984.  
 4. Contest open only to U.S. residents except employees and their families of Polygram Inc., Billboard Publications Inc., Bose Corporation and their advertising agencies, subsidiaries or affiliates. Contest subject to all Federal, State and local regulations. Void where prohibited or restricted by law. Liability for taxes is the sole responsibility of the winners.

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**QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. Identify the producers of each album.
  - a. John Cougar Mellencamp \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Def Leppard \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Big Country \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Kiss \_\_\_\_\_
2. Identify the engineer for each album.
  - a. John Cougar Mellencamp \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Def Leppard \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Big Country \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Kiss \_\_\_\_\_
3. Who designed the artwork for each album?
  - a. John Cougar Mellencamp \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Def Leppard \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Big Country \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Kiss \_\_\_\_\_

4. Identify the studio where each album was recorded.
  - a. John Cougar Mellencamp \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Def Leppard \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Big Country \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Kiss \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many songs on each side of the record?
  - a. John Cougar Mellencamp \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Def Leppard \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Big Country \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Kiss \_\_\_\_\_

**PolyGram Records**  
 .....

# FACES

## TRIO

### *Happy Minimalism*



EBET ROBERTS

Trio looks like a band that's been hit by war rationing. Drummer Peter Behrens raps on a trap set that could have been lifted from the Stray Cats; Kralle Krawinkel covers bass, rhythm and melody on a Fender Strat; and lyricist Stefan Remmler, when he's not singsonging in a less-than-profundo basso, doodles around on a Casiotone that's cheesier than aged Limburger. It's the kind of quirky minimalism Webern could love, and so, apparently, can a lot of other people. Trio's hit "Da Da Da (I Don't Love You You Don't Love Me Aha Aha Aha)," surely the most monosyllabic song title ever, topped the pop charts in countries as disparate as Czechoslovakia, Venezuela and New Zealand, as well as Trio's native Germany. In the States it provided them with at least a toehold of recognition, and

a new LP and recent U.S. tour probably helped consolidate their gains.

Onstage, Trio's demeanor is suitably wry if not altogether camp. Despite spare instrumentation they can (and sometimes do) rock up a storm; using his low E and A as a drone, guitarist Krawinkel sends waves of chordal Hendrixisms crashing against the imperturbable Behrens' seawall of on-the-beat percussion. Just as quickly the squalls subside as Stefan croons "Toora Looa Loo," an affectionate tribute to Der Bingle. Trio also likes to send up the conventions of rock performance; they announced their only encore, for instance, without bothering to leave the stage, and between numbers Remmler sauntered through rambling philosophical monologues with enough cool insight and dry wit to suggest a blend of R.W.

Fassbinder and Will Rogers.

"It's true we incorporate humor into our show," notes Remmler in accented but otherwise impeccable English. "But it's misunderstood at times. We never do parodies for example—I sing 'Toora Looa Loo' because I love Bing Crosby. Musically, our whole approach has been to strip away solo virtuosity, along with everything else that had become a rock cliché, to get down to basics.

"I call our music 'New Happiness' because it's not so relentlessly gloomy as some of the post-punk bands. We take in all parts of reality, sad and happy, and try to create something positive from that. But we are not uncritical either. Our European audiences seem to understand that more, perhaps because radio is less

specialized there, and people are more politically oriented. Which is funny, since that whole approach started with people like Dylan and Lennon."

Trio's meld of German and American roots shows up in other ways, from their choice of cover material (march time versions of "Tutti Frutti" and Lee Dorsey's "Ya Ya") to ballads like "Wake Up," which begins as a hillbilly tearjerker and climaxes as a swashbuckling *cappella* German drinking song. "'Hearts Are Trumps' is another one," Remmler offers helpfully. "The instrumentation is very Westernized, but the melody is right out of our Schlager tradition—a very German song."

Though they sing in both languages, Trio is not really part of the nationalist new wave movement that recently swept their country. "That's dead now, anyway," Remmler declares. "For a while, you know, it was a trend to sing in German, and a lot of mediocre bands got into the top ten for no other reason. But they couldn't sustain it, and now the radio is back to Rod Stewart." He shrugs.

Then why, someone asks, don't more German bands simply imitate Trio? "Ah," Stefan smiles slyly, "you see, anybody can put together a lot of noise and glitter. But to play as *little* as we do—that is not so easy." — **Mark**

**Rowland**

## JORGE DALTO

### *Salsa Werewolf*

These days in New York, Latin jazz is living a privileged moment. Not only are the giants from both sides of the Anglo/Hispanic musical border—Gillespie, Machito, Puente—still kicking ass (Machito won a Grammy last year), but the young cubs are fully grown and roaring. Check 'em out: brothers Jerry (trumpet and congas) and Andy (bass) Gonzales, who double as *sa/seros* with Conjunto Libre and *jazzeros* with Jerry's Fort Apache Band; exiled Cuban musicians Paquito D'Rivera, Ignacio Berroa and Daniel Ponce;

Mario Rivera's radical yet swinging merengue/jazz fusion; magical pianists Hilton Ruiz and Jorge Dalto; pied piper David Valentin; trumpet whiz kid Luis Perico Ortiz; traditional *sa/seros* like Ray Barretto (who have always hopped back and forth across the Latin/jazz frontier); and the whole Brazilian jazz scene, a world in itself. Europeans, who are more enthusiastic about both Latin music and jazz, have welcomed these musicians; in the U.S. their reputation is somewhat more limited.

But growing. Every Mon-

# MILES DAVIS TRIBUTE

## Saccharine & Sagacity

A tribute to Miles Davis was long overdue given his stature as a jazz musician and his contribution to American music. So with much puffery and speechifying, the Black Music Association and Radio City Music Hall presented a Let - Us - Count - The - Ways - We - Love - You night for Miles. The praise was generous and sincere, though other adjectives were equally applicable: effusive, overwrought, saccharine, sentimental, fulsome, affected. As if to remove all doubt that the four-hour program was anything less than the greatest honor in Davis' forty-year career, the event was lavish and elaborately staged. There were potted palms, recorded greetings, mobile stages, an honorary doctorate from Fisk University, a Miles Davis Appreciation Section at \$200 a seat and a host of musicians.

Between the opening—shifting, muted lights, pianist Don Shirley's lush concerto-like solo, an orchestra rising from the pit, gliding to the stage rear while performing a medley from *Porgy And Bess* and *Sketches Of Spain*; and the conclusion—a rousing set by Davis' band—came a chronological survey of Davis' music. Some performances were tributes to Davis'

leadership, some to his compositions, others to his musical tastes, and many to his sagacity. As on any program of this magnitude, not every act justified its presence on the bill.

The concert was loaded with vocalists, but only Shirley Horn's rendition of "My Funny Valentine" made use of Davis' ability to transform the maudlin into the haunting. Performances by Jon Hendricks ("Love's Lament"), Angela Bofill, the Whispers ("Milestones") and Shalamar ("Round Midnight") were exhilarating and stirring, but even with the backing of an orchestra, their relationship to Davis' legacy was in name only. Actually, the entire program was short on historical information and relevance. Excepting a brief recorded message from Dizzy Gillespie, there was virtually no mention of Davis' accomplishments, musically or socially.

The most salient, inspiring and telling performances were by some of Davis' former sidemen. VSOP turned in a thrilling example of the harmonic inventiveness that marked Miles' bands in the early 60s. For three tunes, this former Davis

*continued on page 40*



FRAN VOGEL

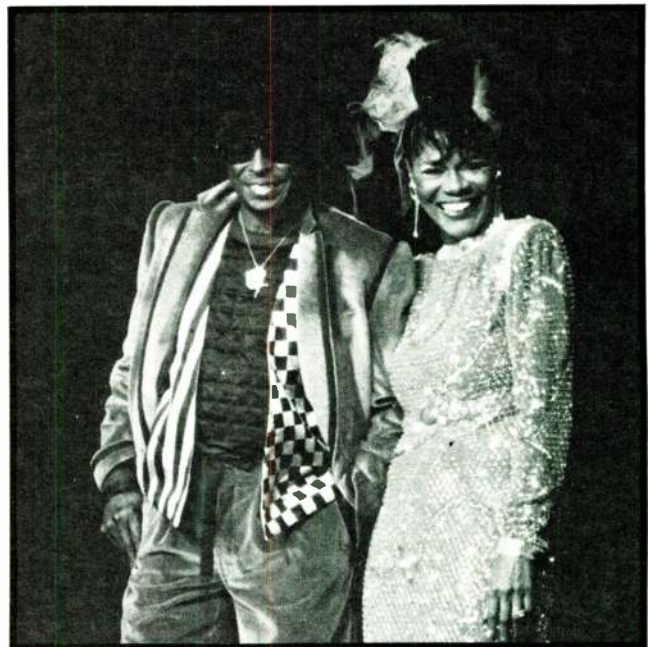
day night New York's Village Gate attracts one of the city's most eclectic publics—Latin clubhoppers, jazz heads, Nuevo Wavo boys and girls, Europarty people, Japanese *sa/seros*—to its Salsa Meets Jazz series. Two salsa bands take turns jamming with a guest jazz soloist, with musicians often sitting in with each other's bands and impromptu riffs from some of the salsa greats who are always in the house. It was here that I first saw and heard pianist Jorge Dalto; he had come onstage to sit in with...? I forget. What impressed me at first was his appearance: tall, lean, long black straight hair under a black beret, goatee, black clothes—a hipster out of his age. And how he played! He was completely at ease with salsa's aggressive danceability, as well as with the nuances and textures of jazz, and underneath it all, there was this mellow funk: a laid-back Brazilian attitude. Dalto, I found out, was Argentine, which explained somewhat why his music seemed to walk on North American, Spanish Caribbean and Brazilian territories with equal impunity.

Over the past couple of years I've heard him solo with some of the finest Latin/jazz ensembles, as well as his own Interamerican Band, anchored by the work of Sal Cuevas and Nicky Marrero—the hottest bass and timbales in the current Latin scene—and Patato, the diminutive Cuban conga master known for his *melodic* use of the drums. At the Gate recently, Dalto brought his band with some trepidation—he knew much of the public had come

to salsa on the dance floor, and he was going to hit them with something different. No problem. Dalto laid enough party grooves to cool out the house, and the rest was the triumph of virtuosity. Who could resist giving such talent one's undivided attention?

Paquito D'Rivera was the evening's jazz soloist, and he announced a number from his first U.S. album, on which Dalto performed—the tango classic "El Dia Que Me Quieras (The Day That You Love Me)." Instead of a predictably unpredictable Monday night jam, it proved a finely crafted piece in which Cuban and Argentine traveled together from the Caribbean to South America, managing to land on bebop and hitting some nasty Latin funk.

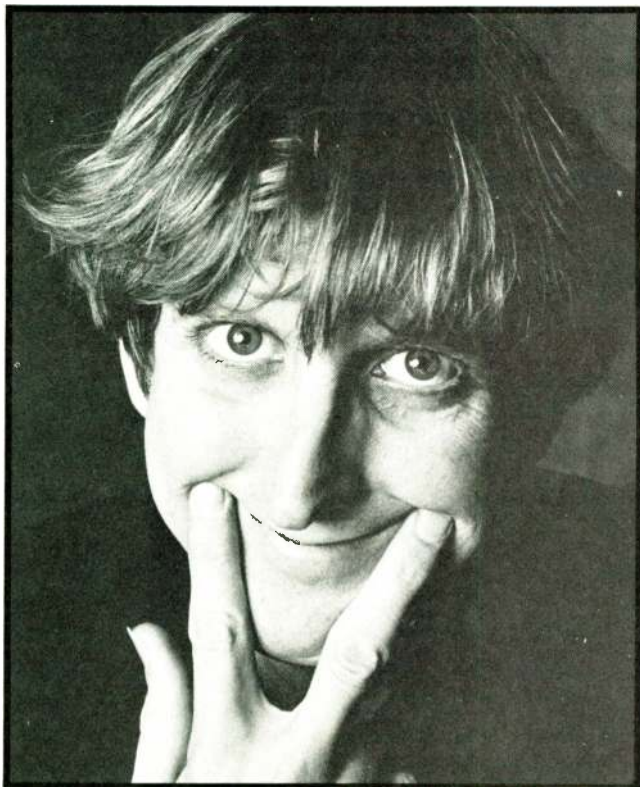
Unlike the brooding macho sounds of salsa pianists like Eddie Palmieri, Dalto's playing never stays nasty for long; quickly, the music is suffused with a riotous coloring, a joyful, sophisticated *tropicalismo*. Two summers ago, for example, at a street concert sponsored by the progressive Latin American Music in Alternative Spaces series, Dalto was seized with the urge to howl. With his black clothes and lupine features, he looked like the perfect werewolf, except there was no full moon but a full sun; this wasn't Transylvania but the South Bronx, and it was musical sauce, salsa, not blood that was running red on the improvised stage. And that's probably Latin jazz's greatest appeal: under all that big city cool and experimental attitude there's an exuberance, a celebration of the very essence of music motion and force. — **Enrique Fernandez**



GARY GERSHOFF/RETNA

# T-BONE BURNETT

*America as Fallen Starlet*



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

Perhaps the best index to T-Bone Burnett's recent performance at the Bottom Line is to look at the last thing he did—joining headliner Richard Thompson for Thompson's encore rendition of "Not Fade Away," an encore which also contained an improbably galloping version of "Danny Boy." Like NRBQ, T-Bone is only too happy to take your requests and Cuisinart them into appealing bop 'n' roll.

He'd begun his own set with "The Murder Weapon," a song about nuclear terror, from *Proof Through The Night*. Overall, he admits, *Proof* is a work in which the tragedies of various ex-starlets becomes a metaphor for America in decay. But, T-Bone insisted this night, "I'm not judging" the gallery of "whores, pimps, gamblers, thieves and debutantes" in his songs; "I'm just looking for some way of not completely turning into...a professional sufferer." Then he dove into a cover of "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood."

Though he performed some of his strongest new

songs, including "Baby Fall Down," "Pressure," "Ridiculous Man" and "Shut It Tight," T-Bone's crack five-piece band (with drummer Stan Lynch borrowed from Tom Petty and two more sidemen on loan from Andy Williams) sounded most impressive rounding the bends of "I Wish You Could Have Seen Her Dance." The lanky, lurching T-Bone obviously enjoyed cranking out the klaxonish lead lines of this paean to a rhythm-smitten dancer ("She did a pirouette, and then a kung-fu step...") he once met in Marino Del Rey. Burnett's only peer for hard-boiled songwriting is Tom Waits; they share a lunatic humor and a kinship with L.A. sleaze scenarist Charles Bukowski.

Burnett changed his intro for "The Sixties" into a lineup of names that included Squeaky Fromme, Erich Fromm, Erica Jong and Erik Estrada, then introduced Roy Head's erotic psalm, "Treat Her Right," by invoking not only "my ex-wife, Mamie Van Doren" but her *inamorata*, Bo

Belinsky. He closed his set with "La Bamba," bringing on a shaky, hirsute Warren Zevon to peck at the keyboard as T-Bone spat out the words with expert verve.

For his encore, Burnett launched into a lengthy, rapping "Gloria." If his album could portray this country as a fallen woman, T-Bone could surely make a song about a fallen woman symbolizing rock 'n' roll. He'd recognize her knock anywhere (a quick drum fill sounding, as

he pointed out, like "Al Jackson, Jr."), but when he lets her in, she passes out, pees all over the couch, and takes out her false teeth and eyeball. "She used to be so full of hope and dreams," said T-Bone, "...Wasn't gonna let nothin' stop her.... You know?" he asked Zevon, still half-frozen at the keyboard, "You know her?"

Zevon waited a couple of endless beats, then shot back a smile: "I remember the bitch." — **Fred Schruers**

## LET'S ACTIVE

### *Dominance & Sublimation*

As a youngster, he loved psychedelic music but hated the Jefferson Airplane. Later, he produced records by R.E.M. and the Bongos. When his band played Los Angeles in mid-November, they encoored with Mason Williams' kitschy instrumental "Classical Gas." And then they got in their truck and drove to Texas, all the while blaring a ninety-minute Led Zeppelin tape.

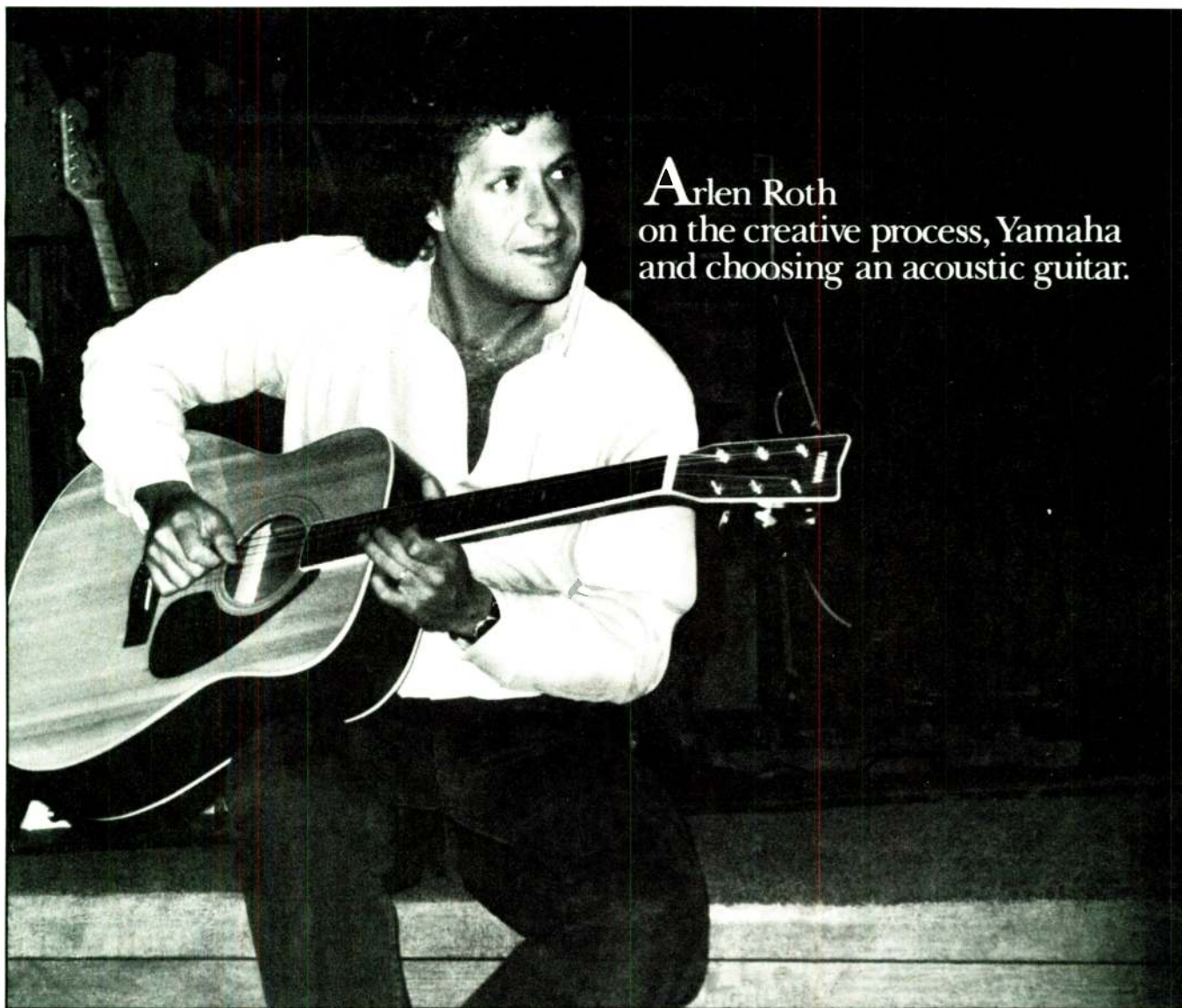
Such are the ways of Mitch Easter, a North Carolinian whose homey inexpensive studio—"Mitch's Drive-In"—became home base for some of the most acclaimed American pop bands of recent years, and who now fronts Let's Active and makes clean-lined, kinetic pop music bursting with unschooled enthusiasm, low-tech brightness and charm-

ingly nasal singing. Easter's once and future favorites notwithstanding, his music sounds not a whit like Led Zeppelin or Mason Williams and only slightly psychedelic; R.E.M. and the Bongos are likelier antecedents, but only in the occasional ultra-poppish melody, folkish rhythm guitar or twangy vocal.

By the time it hit Los Angeles, Let's Active had expanded from the trio that recorded its I.R.S. Records EP, to a quartet: in addition to Easter, the outfit now includes bassist Faye Hunter, drummer Sara Romweber and a new addition, guitarist Lynn Blakey. And contrary to appearances, Easter claims that nope, he wasn't trying to form a band made up exclusively of women.

*continued on page 40*





Arlen Roth  
on the creative process, Yamaha  
and choosing an acoustic guitar.

"The process of creativity is a big struggle. You struggle to get somewhere and, when you get there, you *drive it home*. So I'm driving home certain ideas that I've arrived at as being my life within music, within my expression on the guitar."


"When I choose an acoustic guitar, I look for a good feel with my body, a sympathetic resonance. How the instrument *feels* acoustically. I want an easy feeling neck, but not too easy. The notes have to sound like there's some work behind them, there's some emotion there. I also like evenness of tone and great sustain. Yamahas give me much more than I expected in terms of filling that bill.

"I thought craftsmanship at that level was unheard of anymore. That's why I became a collector of old guitars and worried a lot when I was on the road with them. With my Yamaha, I have

something that is really sturdy and beautiful, that's made with the same love and care acoustics were back in the 1800's.

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# YAMAHA ACOUSTIC GUITARS

**Miles Davis** from page 37  
 rhythm section of Tony Williams, Ron Carter and Herbie Hancock was explosive, sleek and exultant as they transcended the repertoire groove to rediscover and redefine the idiom they helped create. They were joined by seven trumpeters (Randy Brecker, Jon Faddis, Art Farmer, Maynard Ferguson, Jimmy Owens, Wallace Roney and Lew Soloff) for some staged blowing, but only Roney seemed determined to rework Davis' plaintive, aching sound and spacious phrasing. Other Davis alumnae appeared, but on two tunes, the likes of Jackie McLean, Pepper Adams, Jimmy Heath, George Coleman and George Benson were given one short solo each.

They never warmed up. Only trombonist J.J. Johnson's *a cappella* version of "Solar" afforded the opportunity to tribute Davis with a cogent musical statement.

It wasn't until around midnight that Davis brought his electric band to the stage. Like a ballerina using a wooden strong man as a prop, Davis bounced chilling flurries of notes off the metallic sound of the guitar and sax while the drums and keyboards created a lumpy, swirling chorus. Finally, we heard the elegance, deceptive ease, shadowy sorrow that had eschewed mawkishness and informed jazz since the 40s. —

**Don Palmer**

**Let's Active** from page 38

"They were just the people I could get to do it," says Easter, who picked up a guitar at age twelve, when everybody he knew was doing the same. "I used to have a real hard time getting people to play the songs I wrote. A lot of musicians would rather play the new Elvis Costello song." He pauses. "I just needed to find some people I could completely dominate."

Hunter breaks out laughing. "So he said, 'I know! I'll get *girls!*'"

Those girls all knew each other from frequenting clubs in the Winston-Salem area, though only Romweber had much musical experience. Easter formed the band two years ago, and supported it the same way he'd come to support himself: by producing other acts at the Drive-In.

"When I started playing, a lot of my friends said, 'Well, I'll play music now and then go to college,' and that really depressed me. I didn't want to do anything else. So I sort of got into the studio business as a way to have a job that was in the same neighborhood." When his studio suddenly became a hot item, nobody was more surprised than Easter: "It doesn't make any sense at all, us getting all that attention. I guess I was just on the right street corner to get discovered, mostly because I was lucky enough to produce a lot of good groups. And the reason they came to the studio in the first place is that none of them had any money."

With R.E.M.'s success and Let's Active's new record, Easter has simultaneously become more in-demand and less available. He'd like to produce Marshall Crenshaw, who's expressed interest, but otherwise his self-described "real crummy studio" will have to take second place to his rock 'n' roll band.

Still, he'd better find some time to produce. "We gotta figure out a way to fit it all in," says Hunter. "The band is first in Mitch's mind, and it's all the rest of us have got. But he has to do some more studio projects, because that's how he supports us." She grins. "We don't make much playing, so if he can't produce some other people we're all gonna end up broke." — **Steve Pond**

## ART

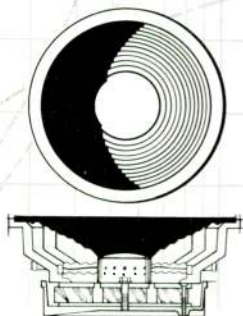


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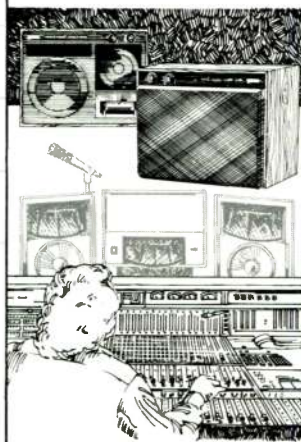
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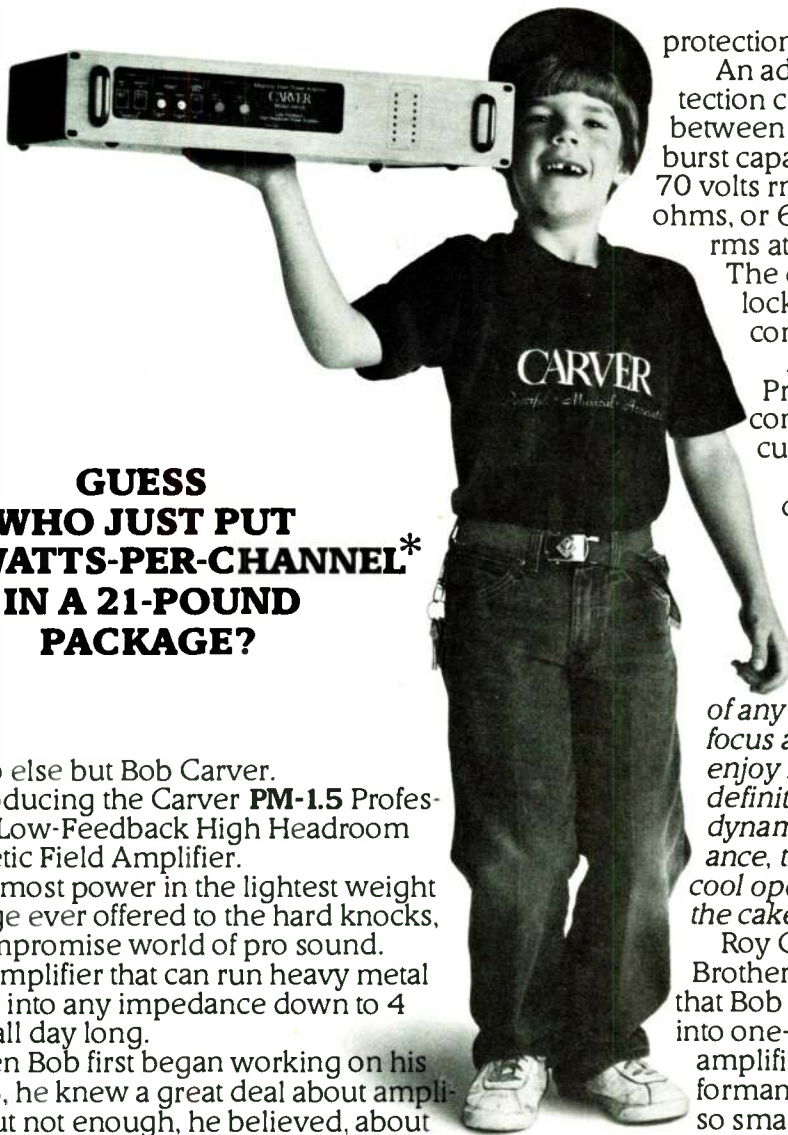
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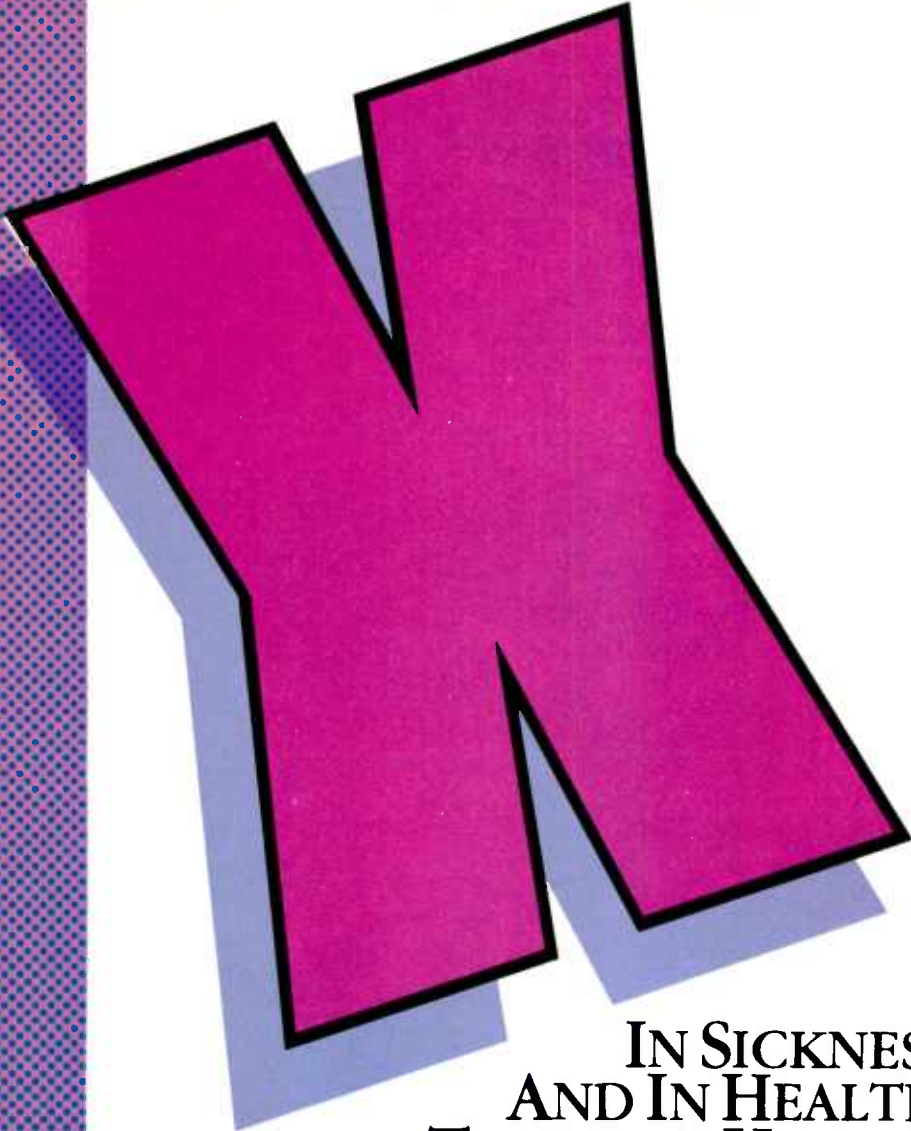
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# X

## IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH, THROUGH HIPNESS AND THROUGH WEALTH

BY DOUG SIMMONS

A homey calm dominates X's dressing room in the Agora Ballroom, Hartford, Connecticut. Singer Exene Cervenka plays penny-ante poker with Denise Zoom, guitarist Billy's wife, who handles press and publicity chores. Dinky Bonebrake, wife of drummer D.J., checks in now and then with reports of T-shirt, button and songbook sales in the booth she has set up in the Agora's coat room. Not only is everyone in X married, all the spouses are part of the business.

Dressed in a T-shirt, jeans and low-top Converse sneakers, twenty-seven-year-old D.J. Bonebrake, who has the All-American face of a choir boy, is acting shy. "I'd rather not get noticed," he says. The band's only native Californian, (North Hollywood), Bonebrake's brutal precision is essential to X. He says he runs to keep in shape, but even so, it hurts to maintain the rapid tempos demanded by the twenty-plus songs in a set. "Sometimes," he says, "you're letting out all this aggression

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DEBORAH FEINGOLD

World Radio History



just from the pain.

"In X, you have to think bigger. You can't do subtle things, like hitting the edge of the ride cymbal. No one can hear it anyway. There's a part of me that wants to know every technique. At one time, I was playing in school symphony orchestras; I was good at that and always thought I could do it professionally. But it might have taken ten years. One thing that drew me to punk was its immediacy."

The golden-haired Billy Zoom, who looks to be about thirty-five, is X's chief grouch. Offstage and on, he wears a black leather jacket, jeans and heavy black motorcycle boots. His dour expression is precisely the opposite of his relentlessly gleaming smile when performing. In one breath, he'll claim to be nineteen and that he grew up in France, and in the next, truthfully say that he's played behind the Penguins, the Surf-aris and Gene Vincent, the latter until Vincent's death in L.A. in 1971. Zoom aims his dry sarcasm as much at the band—claims he doesn't bother listening to the lyrics, for example—as he does at the world.

Exene Cervenka, twenty-seven, usually ignores the conversation, unless she overhears something that annoys her. "We haven't even seen heroin in three years," she says, when someone comments on the reputation of the early L.A. punk scene. (Though Zoom, I'm told, doesn't drink and Bonebrake only moderately, my week in early November with X bears out that alcohol is their dominant drug.) Cervenka, who has overhauled her appearance several times since X formed in 1977, wears modified Beatle boots, jeans, black sweater and a delicately trimmed top with a Harley-Davidson insignia on the chest. She also has on dark lipstick and eyeshadow, and her hennaed hair is as close to dreadlocks as Czech-Irish genes permit. Exene grew up in a small Illinois town, then moved with her family to yet a smaller town in Florida. There she dropped out of high school, moved to Tallahassee, and then to L.A. She talks very fast, which obscures her twang.

Exene shares the singing and songwriting limelight with her twenty-nine-year-old husband, bass player John Doe. He's the gregarious nice guy of X. Doe grew up in Wisconsin, Tennessee and Baltimore, the latter locale being where he tried to get a career going as a folkie singer/songwriter. Doe's mother and father are librarians, and he himself has a degree in American Lit. and writing. His dark brown hair is greased back, but it never holds onstage. Like Zoom, he also wears heavy boots and jeans, though he has a strange array of shirts and jackets which he rotates from show to show. Tonight's is a hand-painted, white, collared button-up with a drawing of a demon on the back over the outlaw biker slogan, "Born to Raise Hell." Before he puts it on, I count four tattoos, the masterwork being a rose over his left breast. The thorny stem points down towards his heart, and it passes through a crown with a name on it: Exene.

About five hundred fans are on hand when X takes the stage. Many of them bunch sardine-like right in front of the group, a movement that makes the cavernous ballroom look two-thirds empty. Still, the greeting whoops of the mob ignite the band, who blast into their newest theme song, "We're Having Much More Fun," off X's most recent album, *More Fun In The New World*. The momentum is sustained through four more numbers—"Real Child Of Hell," "Year 1," "We're Desperate" (X's first theme song) and "Make The Music Go Bang."

At first X's impact is arresting. Bonebrake wallops the backbeat. Zoom, feet spread and face beaming, tears through his encyclopedia of classic riffs and licks. Doe sings from the gut, while simultaneously playing tricky bass lines and, when not at the microphone, bounds about the stage. Exene, gently swaying at one moment, tense and grimacing the next, lets her chesty voice soar and slide. With such out-of-control passion sculpted into sharply defined structures, X is rock 'n' roll at its most exciting.

Then the moods wilt.

Something about the audience has upset Exene. The punk types scattered among the otherwise drably denimed crowd have a store-bought, new wave look; only a few appear to live the style. Many in the audience are frozen in awe; though they do wave their fists and cheer between songs, the response, in truth, is something akin to that of a heavy-metal concert.

Exene begins to pout and wander aimlessly when not singing. Finally, after the nineteenth song, "Motel Room In My Bed," she storms offstage. Startled by her departure, Doe throws down his bass, filling the room with feedback, and chases after her. Zoom and Bonebrake also exit, though they wait nearby out of the crowd's sight.

Thinking the set has merely ended as planned, the audience roars for more. But Cervenka is already out of the building and hiding on the tour bus.

"We should do an encore," calmly perturbed Zoom says. Doe darts by on his way to the dressing room and returns a moment later with his travel bag. As he leaves he says, "It's not always like this."

The club announces that the show is indeed over. There's a moaning rumble that grows into a chant: "Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you...."

Of the five X performances I saw in the middle of its three-month, sixty-show tour, Hartford's was the worst. The other four—New Haven, Boston and two in New York—ranged from good to stupendous. In X's case, though, that one failure is more telling than the successes. Only the Agora audience reasonably reflected America's rock mainstream. Despite punk extremists in attendance and even more MTV-coached new wavers, the bulk of the crowd was split between AC/DC head-bangers and the gentler type of youthful, working-class adults that rally around Bruce Springsteen. X's inability to connect with either dramatizes the band's larger challenge. Can X ever break out of its cult?

Many folks initially dismissed California's punk explosion as a localized last gasp of the Sex Pistols' demise following its San Francisco show, January 1978. But even before the Pistols broke up, there was already a different and less political scene simmering in L.A. The Damned, in fact, was the first British punk band to play America (spring, 1977), and its smash-it-up sense of rootlessness and low-rent looniness had galvanized L.A.'s underground. "Rat Scabies had flour all over his drums," recalls John Doe of the Damned's L.A. debut, "so whenever he hit them, there would be this huge cloud. That's my idea of special effects." If the Pistols were the inspiration for San Francisco's punk punks, the Damned were the model for L.A.'s punk vandals.

Dozens of bands began to form in L.A.: the Controllers, F-Word, the Screamers, the Germs, X. Beginning with the Masque, hole-in-the-wall clubs opened and closed regularly to accommodate the scene and to stay a step ahead of the L.A. police, which made no bones about their hatred of punk. Depending on the source, cops either responded to or ignited (probably both) the fights and occasional riots that broke out at many of the shows. In any case, L.A.'s punk scene developed a reputation for mindless violence.

Perhaps more than any L.A. punk record of that period, X's 1980 debut *Los Angeles* attacked California's reputation for endless beaches, endless summers, endless adolescence and, most of all, its easy and undeserved wealth. Albeit a lot of fun because of the band's roller-coaster velocity and Billy Zoom's amped-up rockabilly licks, the album argues that paradise-as-advertised is a rotten lie. Rape, prejudice, poverty and ugliness in general abound in songs like "Nausea," the title cut, and "Sex And Dying In High Society."

Only the last cut, "The World's A Mess; It's In My Kiss," hinted at the romantic streak X would later become noted for. Fueled by Zoom's stinging guitar and Doe's seesawing bass, the song is an update of the Shangri-Las' "Give Him A Great Big Kiss." Taking innocent, exhilarating music from rock's past

and marrying it to contemporary frustrations is an X trademark, but what made the tune significant on *Los Angeles* was its nearness to actually being a love song. Cervenka and Doe, who met in 1977 at a writer's workshop in Venice and who then became lovers, begin their version of "Kiss" with the lines, "No one is united/ All things are untied."

That sense of desperation was even more bluntly expressed on the record's inner-sleeve lyric sheet, where in one corner is inscribed the classic Hell's Angels acronym F.T.W. (Fuck The World). That sums up *Los Angeles*, and perhaps Los Angeles as well—probably the only city which could have inspired such a blend of punk bile, us-against-them biker morality and professional chops.

All of which made X's second LP, *Wild Gift*, that much more of a surprise. Though the debut's dark and surly passion was still intact, death-tripping hopelessness had given way to a new feeling. Now married, Cervenka and Doe—bless their poisoned little hearts—announced that they had found a reason to live, namely for each other. Songs like "When Our Love Passed Out On The Couch," "We're Desperate" (a re-recording of X's first single), and "In This House That I Call Home" acknowledge problems—among them jealousy, no dough, and trying to screw in an overcrowded crash pad—yet

discover hope in a world otherwise doomed. "Some Other Time" begins, "Let's not talk about bombs or the brain impulses of severed limbs" and ends (as I interpret it) with two lovers and a six-pack in a car parked in a secluded spot. *Wild Gift*, in short, makes a simple claim for true love. Coming from an L.A. punk band, the message was astonishing.

But *Wild Gift's* vein of romance in L.A.'s punk scene was quickly covered by the rubble of Black Flag, which released *Damaged* the same year. More than any album, *Damaged* articulates and justifies (if you accept insanity as a defense) punk's fastest and meanest strain, hardcore. The album's achievement is that it makes hardcore appealing, with lots of grim laughs and a full-throttle rock 'n' roll that expands the tuneless hit-and-run structures that are the style's standard. But for all of Black Flag's comedy, rage and undeniable sincerity, love, even soured love, is impossible to discern. X's more compassionate stance helped broaden its own appeal, even as it reinforced its title as the best group in America's rock underground. Their first two LPs sold about 100,000 copies each—unheard of figures for an indie label. The majors were impressed; late in '81 X left Slash for Elektra, who soothed matters by buying out X's contract for \$50,000.

In addition to better distribution and promotion, Elektra gave

**Pro-amateur wrestlers John Doe and Exene Cervenka, chief grouch Billy Zoom and shy aggressor D.J. Bonebrake.**



# X

## “Our music is a return to basics, to being with somebody and taking care of your friends. The world ends sooner or later and there’s no justice, so accept that.”

X the chance to record without having to worry about shoe-string budgets. (Slash provided \$10,000 to record *Los Angeles*, and about twice that for *Wild Gift*.) Furthermore, with ex-Door Ray Manzarek producing, as he has on all four X LPs, Elektra did not interfere in the studio. After all, the label is still cashing in on Manzarek’s old band. Given this freedom, X toughened its sound; last year’s *Under The Big Black Sun* and this year’s *More Fun In The New World* snarl as fiercely as the Slash albums, and with no sour notes or botched beats. Ironically though, neither title has sold significantly more than *Wild Gift*. Small label or big, X seems to have about 100,000 fans, period.

Billy Zoom is frustrated by X’s cult status. The night after the Hartford mess he’s still in a foul mood. You don’t make any money unless you can sell 500,000 records,” he says. The band, he feels, will not achieve this acceptance unless it sheds an image fostered in large part by *The Decline... of western civilization*, a 1980 documentary film which spread slam-dancing, L.A.’s answer to peace, love and pogoing, to the rest of the U.S., and which featured X, Black Flag, Fear, the Circle Jerks and Catholic Discipline. Zoom loathes the movie, “because we got associated with all those turkey-ass bands.”

“Every time you call X ‘punk,’” Zoom says, “people think of Black Flag and the Circle Jerks, and it moves us that much further from the radio.” It’s the reason X isn’t selling records and making money, Zoom says. “On this tour we have to gross \$13,000 a week just to break even. At this moment, I don’t even know how I’m going to pay the rent next month.”

In fact, \$13,000 is the most any member of X made in 1982, and Zoom says he’s sick of the low income: “If something doesn’t change soon I’ll have to quit the band and get a job.”

“I don’t feel that way,” says D.J. Bonebrake, who has been listening nearby.

Zoom replies, “Wait ten years and see if eleven or twelve thousand dollars is enough for you to live on.”

When I later repeat Zoom’s comments to John Doe, he replies, “You caught him at a bad time.” Doe doesn’t share Zoom’s gloom; “I’m really pleased about the radio exposure we’ve gotten. We have enough airplay and media attention to go out and bring 2,000 people into a show in Boston. For each record, we’ve gotten more and more radio play.”

Doe won’t deny X’s punk label, but feels it unfairly pigeon-holes the band. He admires and continues to champion Black Flag, yet thinks its audience has “turned into a bunch of morons.” Doe prefers being called a beatnik. “I like it,” he says. “I think that Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac are just great. There is a common thread through beatniks, the original hippies, and punk culture. They are all people that don’t like the norm.”

Formalizing his relationship with Cervenka, in fact, was partly a response to L.A.’s anti-romantic norm: “Exene and I got married just before it was cool to get married. We were doing it... well, not as a joke, because we took it seriously, but on the other hand, we got married in Tijuana on Easter of 1980, at the height of the punk-rock scene. The institution of marriage is bullshit, but being with somebody, being true to them, monogamous, not fucking around and stuff like that is important to me. Just recently it’s gotten a little confusing. You start wondering where the professional relationship stops and the personal relationship begins.”

But Doe says his marriage and the classic elements in X’s music are not conscious attempts to find values in a deranged and decadent society, which he’s often read in reviews. “I think we’re doing it naturally. Our kind of music is a return to

basics, a return to being with somebody, and taking care of your friends. The world ends sooner or later, so accept that fact and go out and do as many things as you can before the end comes. That’s the way I’ve always understood existentialism. Everything’s fucked. There’s no justice.”

The twenty-six-song set at Toad’s Place in New Haven is the best of the five shows I see. About five hundred people, many of them Yale students, fill the funky, comfortable bar. For all the band’s anti-intellectualism—“Don’t think too much!” Doe hollers—it’s ironic how popular X is among preppie punks and college radio stations. The hoots and hollers of the crowd add to the din of Toad’s grungy sound system. Zoom’s guitar melts with Doe’s bass and Bonebrake’s drumming into a fat buzzy juggernaut of noise and pulse that forces Cervenka and Doe to sing-shout the lyrics. Zoom and Cervenka (who wears a sweatshirt labeled U.S. OLYMPIC DRINKING TEAM) maintain their usual cool, but Doe and Bonebrake are sopping wet. John looks like Huck Finn after a bad night on the river.

Slam dancers start to fly and collide in front of the band during the third song, “Beyond And Back,” the lover’s spat from *Wild Gift*. “Now it’s five to twelve,” sings Exene. Tossing off contrapuntal bass lines under Zoom’s saucy licks, Doe joins her: “Shut up and smoke/ And I’ll go somewhere else/ No more orange nightgowns....” Without a break between tunes, Bonebrake pounds out war-path tom-tom patterns to set up “The Hungry Wolf” from *Under the Big Black Sun*, an ode to fidelity that mixes a Sioux poem with a Funny Papa Smith blues.

The slam pit is in a howling frenzy now, with its perimeter surrounded by frantic non-aggressive dancing. Zoom’s smile beams like a beacon of good will through it all, though inwardly he’s probably laughing at the slam dancers, who he considers assholes. This time, with Exene delighted by the celebration in front of her, the mood doesn’t die, but relentlessly builds.

Midway into the show, the band performs “Breathless,” the Jerry Lee Lewis hit (written by Otis Blackwell). Even more significant than its use as the title track in last year’s remake of the 1959 Jean-Luc Godard film, “Breathless” marks the first time Cervenka recorded a vocal without any backing or harmony from Doe. In the beginning of X’s career, before she started taking singing lessons, Exene could never have pulled it off. Now the way she wraps her unruly timbre around a sentiment is thrilling. When Jerry Lee Lewis sings, “And when you love me, love me right,” it all comes from the groin. When Exene sings the line, it comes from the heart and the groin.

X’s last song before encores is “Because I Do.” Locked into a close countrified harmony that flies apart here and there, just like their relationship, Doe and Cervenka ask, “What kind of fool am I?” Then harmonize: “I am the married kind/ The kind that said I do/ Forever searching for someone new.”

The band does two encores, the second of which is unplanned, and after the show, everyone on the bus is elated, especially Zoom. Before he went onstage, he had found out from the band’s accountant that the tour has finally broken even.

In the living room section of the tour bus, which has twelve bunks in the rear, Exene passes an afternoon of travel by playing Scrabble with Denise Zoom. One of the plays on the board is R-A-N-C-O-R.

“All the bands from New York and England thought that all the L.A. bands were rich and did a lot of cocaine around their pools,” Exene opines. “We were basically these poverty-stricken young kids who liked to go out and get generic beer and get drunk, just like any other kind of traditional American



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musicians."

Is Exene frustrated at X's limited commercial success?

"I think we are successful," she replies. "People just read about the phenomenal. 'Hey, the Rolling Stones just shipped platinum.' Then we say, 'Oh, we just shipped 40,000. We don't measure up.' But it's not like that. My standard of success is to do something I'm proud of for the rest of my life. I would like to do different things, less mainstream things than I already do. I would feel fine selling a million records, but I wouldn't do it intentionally. That's why we're a good band, because we're not a bunch of prefabricated assholes."

Cervenka says she writes every day; Doe reads her journal and adapts her poems to music or finds a line here and there. (Last year Grove Press published *Adulterers Anonymous*, a collection of poetry Cervenka co-wrote with Lydia Lunch.) Cervenka opens her current journal, flipping through it too rapidly for me to read her jagged printing. It appears to be part diary, part scrapbook, part poetry-in-progress and part coloring book.

"Here's a picture of a biker," she says, pointing at a pasted image before turning to the next page. "Here's American decal things, Iowa, Nebraska, ET, Smurf, Halloween, Smurf, Smurf, cocktail napkins, Smurf, go-go girls, a picture of Jesus, an Ace of Spades. All these things illustrate my life."

Later that night in a motel room, Cervenka is drinking martinis and watching *That's Incredible*. She's got crayons out and is decorating her journal. At one point, with a felt-tip pen, she draws on her arm and hands, like a bored school girl. I notice on the inside of her left forearm that she has a tattoo of the word "Temptation."

Exene confides that working with your husband can be a pain: "Sometimes you get sick of each other."

She takes the olive out of her martini. "When I was little," she says, "I used to eat the little red things in the middle and then wear the olives on my fingertips."

The all-stops-out performance at Toad's Place eases any fear that X has entered a period of creative stagnation. But it still can't be denied that John and Exene are beginning to repeat themselves. The masterful *More Fun In The New World* has a sharper, harder-hitting sound than the sloppy, gritty *Wild Gift*, but song for song, the latter is a superior LP. *More Fun*... plows through themes and notions X has already dug up. (Album two's "White Girl" turns into three's "Real Child Of Hell" into four's "Devil Doll.") We keep meeting the same drunks, demons and bums in the same bars, motels and other enclosures with blackened windows. And it's worrisome that "Make The Music Go Bang," the new album's most rousing cut, celebrates nothing so much as X's own "brilliant, shining and nasty" chops.

There's another contradiction at work here—for all their alienation and rebelliousness, X is in danger of becoming a pet band, defanged by image-conscious corporate sponsors, preppie pop fans, punks and rock critics, all eager to bask in the band's aura and to see themselves validated by the band's reflected virtues.

And why not? Here are individuals of talent and warmth, striving to create their own little world. Doe and Exene in particular have a knack for welcoming listeners into their living room and showing us their mess and how it corresponds to their lives. But while their living room can be a great place to visit, and you might want to live there, is there room for growth? Sooner or later, even X is bound to suffer from its own insularity.

When *Wild Gift* came along three years ago, its honesty and hard-fought romance was an extraordinary collision of values. Can they ever top it? Maybe it's time for X to tidy up their pad, clean the windows and take another look outside.

In New York early in the evening on November 9, hours before X's second of two performances at the Ritz, Doe, Cer-

venka and their pal, Dave Alvin of the Blasters, play an acoustic set at Folk City, a small, awkwardly laid-out Greenwich Village bar. Every Wednesday Folk City sponsors "Music for the Dozens," a showcase for challenging, generally unknown acts. Booked as the Knitters and obviously pleased to be on the same stage that once supported Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs and countless others, the Doe-Cervenka-Alvin trio go on first.

With Doe strumming an acoustic guitar and Alvin (who doesn't sing) embroidering lead lines around the melodies with his Fender Mustang, the Knitters begin the set with Cervenka's working-class drinking ditty, "The Have Nots." They follow with a couple by Merle Haggard, a couple by Leadbelly, one by Phil Ochs, and an extended version of "Skip To Ma Lou." They show a wide and deep familiarity with blues, folk and country. (At a small, informal party a few evenings earlier in Boston, for example, Doe led a hootenanny that lasted for hours with dozens of songs, ranging from Robert Johnson to Jimmie Rodgers to Hank Williams to Lefty Frizzell to John Anderson.)

But the song that excites the SRO Folk City crowd the most is "I Must Not Think Bad Thoughts," off *More Fun In The New World*. It's as if Cervenka's journal had exploded into this one song: "When is this world coming to? Both sides are right, but both sides murder. I give up. Why can't they?... My guns, my money, my soldiers, my blood on my hands, it's all my fault... I hear the radio is finally gonna play new music, you know, the British Invasion. But what about the Minutemen, Flesh Eaters, Replacements, DOA, the Del Fuegos and the Black Flag?... I must not think bad thoughts, I must not think bad thoughts."

Without the monster of amplification, "Bad Thoughts" is all nuance. Doe, who has a handsomely twangy tenor, and Exene, with her deep fragile drawl, spit out one lyric in anger, moan the next in sadness, and grunt the chorus in bewilderment. The world, "I Must Not Think Bad Thoughts" admits, has completely screwed up their heads, and every day and every song is an attempt to get a grip on it.

Fans in Folk City that night come closer to the secret of X than they do in the full band's show. Doe tells me that X's music "is not blues-based; it's rock 'n' roll-based. Chuck Berry took Jimmy Reed from 33 to 45. We took Chuck Berry from 45 to 78." And they poured in a whole lot of country & western too, he might have added; C&W faces far more prejudice among rock fans than punk does.

Following the performance, Cervenka is glowing. "In Hartford," she says, referring to her sudden exit, "I was so frustrated. It was a crummy club and we've had all these lousy opening acts. I just couldn't stand it anymore. There wasn't anyone else to get mad at, so I took it out on John." (And 500 paying customers, I think to myself.)

"When you're doing show after show," she continues, "you start taking each other for granted. But tonight at the Folk City gig I couldn't believe it. I was just staring at John and thinking, 'You sing so good. I can't believe you're my husband. I can't believe how lucky I am.'" ☐

**Billy Zoom** uses a Gretsch Silverjet guitar with a Bigsby tailpiece, plugs it into a Fender Quad Reverb 135 RMS amp (completely modified by Billy himself) and four Celestion G1280 speakers. **John Doe** uses a Fender Precision bass through a Randall RBA amp and two Randall RB15BH cabinets. **D.J. Bonebrake** uses a Gretsch red rosewood drum kit consisting of a 14x24 kick, an 18x18 floor tom, a 10x14 rack tom, a 12x15 Ludwig Classic Chrome marching snare and a 12x15 Premier marching snare (for a spare). His cymbals are Zildjian, a 22-inch ride medium, an 18-inch crash medium, a 17-inch crash medium-thin, and two matched sets of 14-inch New Beat high-hats. Drum hardware includes two Speed King bass drum pedals, two Rogers cymbals stands, two Pearl copy cymbal stands, a Pearl 900 high-hat stand, Pearl snare stand and seat and a Gretsch CR double tom holder. For sticks Don uses Promark 2Bs. All X's equipment goes into Bobadilla flight cases; all stringed things are tuned by Korg strobotuners.

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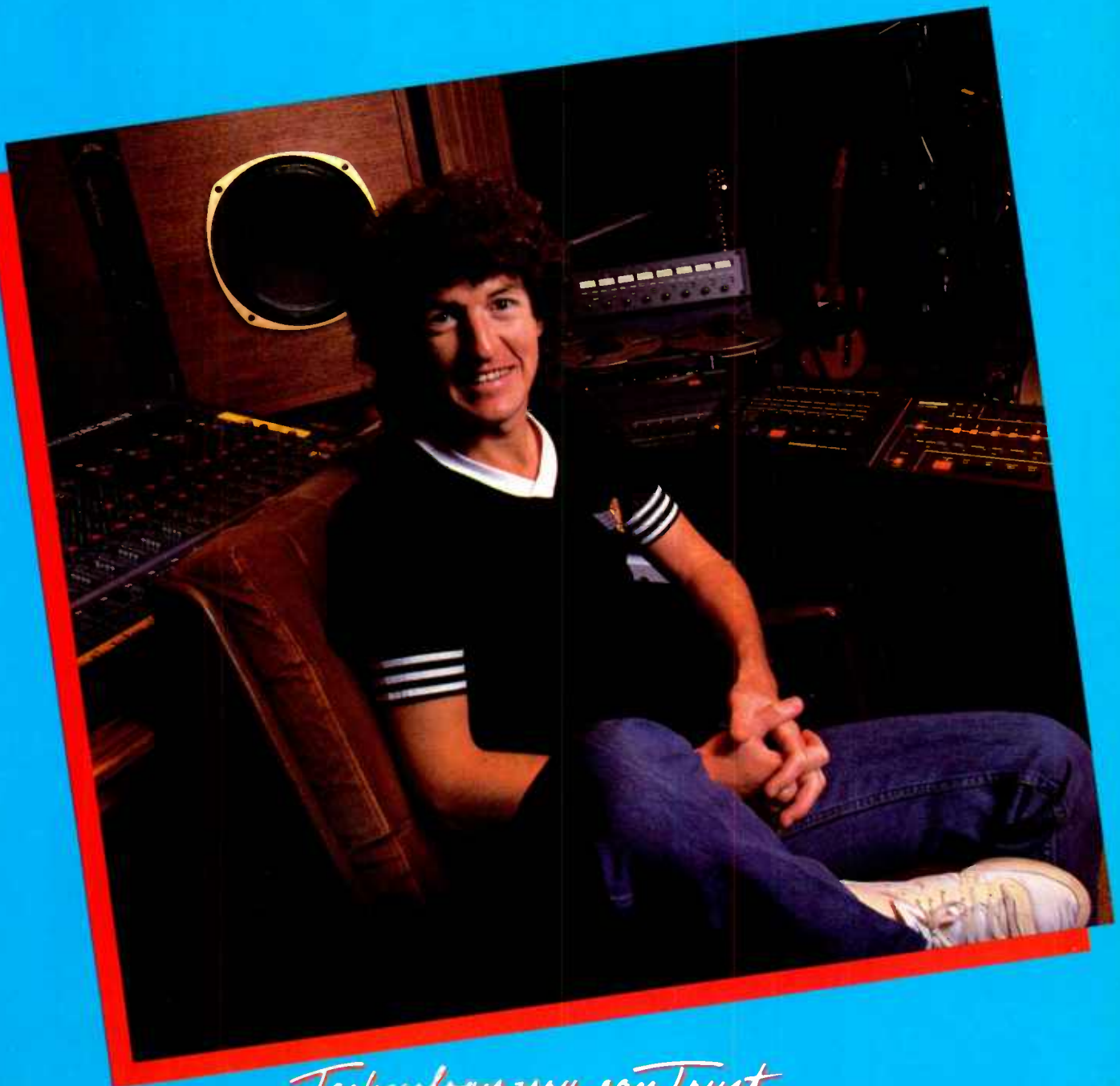
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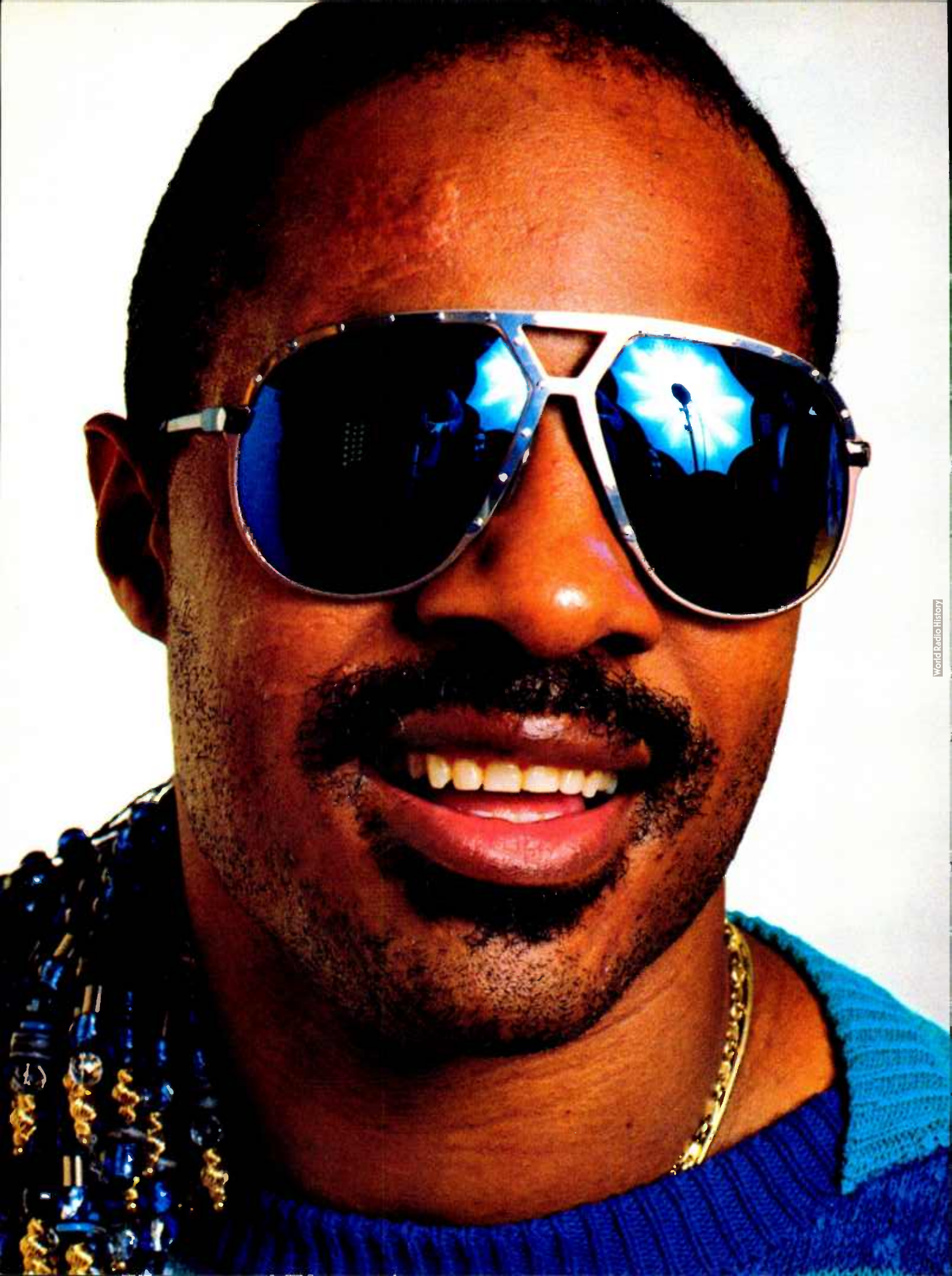
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# WAITING ON THE MAN

by David Breskin

So here we are sitting in this drab Radio City rehearsal room in hushed anticipation of a word-of-mouth press conference given by a pop superstar in honor of the birthday of a pol superstar; here we are waiting on the man, who is always late, having his own peculiar time-zone—a function of his brilliance and his blindness—and here is this gaggle of legitimate reporters and cooled-out music hounds, cyclopic cameramen and shuttering photographers, glinting security guards with walkie-talkies, professional hangers-on, members of the Wonderclan traveling roadshow, stringers, freelancers, black members of the black press and white members of the white press, black members of the white press and white members of the black press, waiting on the man.

To enhance the tedium and to sharpen the claws of our critical acumen (to stay in shape we exercise our opinions regularly), a few music hounds compare notes on the man's ongoing week of Radio City shows. Good. Fair. Surprising. Were you at one where he did a lot of talking? He's a funny mimic. Sometimes he's funny. He should shut up and play some music 'cause he ain't no comedian. I remark that the "Ebony And Ivory" routine that he's been pulling every night on the tour—a routine in which Stevie asks some black folk and some white folk to come up on stage and sing the thing together as sort of an audio-visual aid to the "point" of the song—was oddly touching, even authentic, and reduced a hardcore cynic like myself who never could stomach the simple-minded syrup of both

Stevie comes  
down from the  
mountaintop.

Photograph by Deborah Feingold

lyric and melody to bleeding heart wishfulness right there in row KK. Such is the occasional wonder of Wonder.

Also said I was sick 'n' tired of having to hear his royally tender ballads compressed into the grim fast food of medley after medley (hold the third verse, hold the chorus) and found that no amount of vocal grandstanding (assorted swoops and shouts, exaggerated melisma, dimstore dynamics in the manner of Vegas) could make up for the emotional dryness of a greatest hits configuration. No one at the gig was thrilled with the new material (including a florid ballad called "Overjoyed," and a P-Funked bottom stomp called "It's Growing") but we'll all have to sit down with the new record and give it a hard listen. Should be out by 1986. But the show was fun and pleasantly loopy (including a dancing robot "Wonderoid") and I won't dwell on it any more than Stevie dwells on his non-hits. We were all left singing "Happy Birthday" for MLK, whose birthday—in large part due to efforts of Wonder—had just

**W**e were rushing a lot back then, performing and moving a lot, but there was no direction. I hadn't expected "Superstition" to happen, or happen so quickly."

been rendered a national holiday by those enlightened slobes of self-interest down in Congress. Long overdue of course, like Mr. Wonder's records.

We were still waiting for the man to arrive and make a statement about the above happy event when I informed some colleagues I had been *promised* an interview with the man himself. Colleague A informed me that she too had been promised an interview (for *Essence*) and colleague B—a major dude of correct complexion—informed us both that he would be having nothing to do with speaking to Stevie 'cause the guy was "an asshole, a bad guy." Sacrilege! Scandal! Gadzooks! Wonder a bad guy? What about the Lovepeacecaringsharingegalitarian image? Shiver me timbers. True, two years ago I had a *promised* interview cancelled from Houston, airplane tickets hot in sweaty palms. But you figure: That's Entertainment. The guy's busy *creating*, let it slide. After all, he's Stevie Wonder and we're not.

After the press conference (in which Wonder read a prepared statement reflecting his joy and justified sense of accomplishment in establishing Dr. King's holiday) Colleague A and I met with one of the man's many assistants, who shuffled her cards and dealt them with an Attitude: "Look, Stevie's voice is really weak 'cause of all the shows he's been doing and he's promised like six covers, so you're going to have to pair up and do the interviews in teams, maybe over lunch in the next couple days. Don't call us, we'll..." Colleague A and I grumbled our way out of the building, imagining the scenario of a shared *Essence/Musician* Q-and-A:

**MUSICIAN:** *Is it true that the harmonic distortion inherent in contrapuntal digitized drum computers decays the be-bop of not only chordal but microtonal lyrics?*

**WONDER:** Uh-huh.

**ESSENCE:** *Stevie, this one's a two-parter: what do you use on your hair? And have you found you wife's G-spot yet?*

**WONDER:** Johnson products and I'm still, like, trying, man.

But don't dismay, music-heads; this reporter persevered and eventually was told that the man had narrowed his list of invited guests down to three magazines—*Musician*, *Essence*

and, hey, it's a star's prerogative, *The Muppet Magazine*. As I dutifully prepared my questions, I reveled in the awareness that I had attained the same socio-cultural standing as Kermit the Frog.

The night I was summoned to Wonder's Radio City dressing room—October 23—was cold, rainy and depressing. X number of marines in Beirut had just been extinguished (the big world) and on top of that, Stevie was coming down with a cold and feeling strange (our small world). While Stevie waits for some tea—without which we cannot begin the interview—an assistant comes in and places a PPG 2.2 Wave synthesizer on a slanting ironing board next to the table at which he sits, fiddling with an Aiwa synchro-dubbing cassette deck and a Sony with braille buttons. Stevie puts on a full range of his voices (Jamaican, Big Bopper, Munchkin, Little Girl) mimicking everything that's going on in the room. Then for a bit he and his managerial consultant Ewart Abner talk about Lebanon and the new Russian missiles in Syria and the Soviets' target practice on the KAL Flight 007, upon which Stevie had some friends. He asks me if I'm on the couch or the chair and comes to sit next to me on the couch while voicing his displeasure that a New York newspaper had misquoted his feelings about the John Bircher congressman who died on that plane:

**WONDER:** I don't have any time for enemies, number one. And number two, there is really no one that I hate.

**MUSICIAN:** *It takes a lot of energy to hate.*

**WONDER:** It really does. Really, a lot of unnecessary energy. You can definitely disagree, but it's not worth the energy to hate. Because it doesn't help anybody.

**MUSICIAN:** *Let me be boring now and take us back to the beginning, a very good place to start. What's the first thing—either musically or otherwise—that you remember?*

**WONDER:** Johnny Ace. I remember xylophones. And saxophones of some sort. Syrup and biscuits. Guitars, I guess Wes Montgomery. You know, I didn't know who it was, but the sound. This is when I was two or three. Radio. This guy used to come on this station in Detroit, named Bristol Brian, Senator Bristol Brian they called him, came on in the morning on WJLB in Detroit. I remember rain. Rain, rain would make me think of corn flakes for some reason. The "Sundown" show came later. WCHB was the first black-owned station in Detroit, and was basically a daytime station that would come on at sunrise and go off at sunset.

**MUSICIAN:** *Do you remember playing the spoons?*

**WONDER:** The spoons, very vaguely. I do remember them. I remember that I couldn't play them, that's what I remember. I loved the way they sounded. I was thinking the other day about the many different accompaniments that I've had: it was someone playing the spoons and me singing, or someone playing the guitar and me singing, or a bass and me singing, or me beating on a table or a wall and me singing. It's amazing how many *sounds* so unlike the sounds of an instrument are happening now, because of the new technology of synthesizers—and being able to sample and sequence the sampling.

**MUSICIAN:** *There are a lot of sounds found in the world that people don't hear as musical sounds, which now can be rendered "musically" through synthesizers. Having these sounds—let's say they're the sounds you hear on the street in New York—at your touch must free you up a great deal....*

**WONDER:** Yes, it's being able to sample those sounds. You can do it one time, and then you *have it*. And velocity sensitive keyboards help too. But nothing really can replace the naturalness of a sound. You are not replacing it—you're just putting it on a chip or a floppy disc or whatever. (jokes) Now let's take the sound of that bus, that would be a great sound.

**MUSICIAN:** *Are there sounds that you've had in your head for a long time that you're finally able to realize now?*

**WONDER:** Yeah, yeah. Like on *The Secret Life Of Plants*, a lot of that was different *sounds* that I wanted. The creation of the sound of the earth, and of life itself. Life has a rhythm—and as



JOHN BELLUSI/MOIRE/ETA

we did in one of the segments between "Earth's Creation" and "Come Back As A Flower," we created the sound of thunder and the crickets and the birds and other animals in *rhythm*. And that's how life is. Life is a perfect rhythm anyway... to its own time signature.

**MUSICIAN:** *When you began singing in Detroit, you describe your attitude in your fan club solicitation with the sentence, "He sang for joy, seldom thinking of remuneration." You've just sold out eight shows at Radio City and I take it you're still singing for joy.*

**WONDER:** Right. Music has consistently been a fun thing for me. And it will always be that. If it isn't I will no longer do it. And if I stop—if I eventually decide to just produce or write—it will be fun to do that. So it will never be about just being able to make money, but to do it and enjoy it. I can't say it's been a hobby, because it's been greater than a hobby. It's been life.

**MUSICIAN:** *Have you thought about not performing live?*

**WONDER:** Well, we don't do that much anyway. But eventually we won't do as many performances. But I think the neat thing about this particular tour, which I call affectionately the "You And Me" tour, is creating a whole vibe of being closer to the people and sharing with them things about me that they may not have known. And going through a lot of the music we have done, because if we do some more albums there will be things we'll no longer be able to do. 'Cause we just can't keep adding on and not take anything out of the shows. So this is probably one of the last times I'll be doing this kind of show.

**MUSICIAN:** *Radio City rather than the Garden, theaters rather than arenas?*

**WONDER:** Right. Because it gives me a chance to really be closer to the people and to share those moments....

**MUSICIAN:** *The living room atmosphere, talking to the audience, engaging in some casual interchange with them....*

**WONDER:** Yeah, I enjoy these things. It's different. It's not boring. It's fun. It has a beat and you can dance to it.

**MUSICIAN:** *Were you ever bored by performing? You've been doing it steadily since you were nine or ten?*

**WONDER:** I think maybe in '71, '72 I was bored a little bit. Partially because (*huge sneeze*), hold on.... (*Stevie walks into the bathroom and gets a tissue. As he walks back to the sofa, he says loudly, feigning virus warfare: "There's a cold 'round here and I ain't gonna catch it." Now imitating a baadd funkster, he tells himself: "C'mon now, get it together. Everybody put your hands together, c'mon." He pauses to drop some peppermint oil down his throat. "It busts everything right out." He settles back down on the sofa. Abner, who's re-*

"Life has a rhythm, the perfect rhythm, to its own time signature."

# **T**hat's what love is all about. Not just about physically making love, but creating love in the now for tomorrow, to look back on with the memory of moments."

entered the room, with cups, asks if he wants the licorice tea. "Are they capsules?" Stevie asks. Abner says yes, and opens the jar so Stevie can feel the capsules. Abner asks, "Is one all right?" "One is good," says Stevie. Abner puts one in. "But two's not bad." Abner puts in another capsule.)

You know, you're on the road and they say (now imitating a crusty, old condescending doctor) "Oh, boy, all you need is some penicillin, penicillin shot'll just knock it right out." But I never liked needles anyway. But the way to get rid of it is naturally. Walk out in the rain. We were on something....

**MUSICIAN:** We were on being bored with performing.

**WONDER:** Right, in '72. It was the same old same old same old. And there was really nothing musically happening for me. And then "Superstition" came out around October of that year, and that put things in perspective. And in '73 we had *Innervisions*. The only bad thing about this time was the accident—but maybe it wasn't bad, because the accident made it necessary for me to cool out for a few months.

**MUSICIAN:** It's been ten years since the accident (a near-fatal coma-causing car accident). Do you see it as a pivot point in your career?

**WONDER:** I think subconsciously it made me more attentive to my life. My own self, inside, more than anything that anyone could physically see. I think we were *rushing* a lot back then, and performing a lot and moving a lot. I'm not saying we were living a *wild* life, but that was the direction things were going in. There was no true direction. "Superstition" happened, and I hadn't expected it to happen, or happen that quick.

**MUSICIAN:** You said at the time that the accident made you aware of many things you had done that you wanted to correct.

**WONDER:** And those for the most part were things dealing with being out there on the road. I mean, we weren't doing anything crazy, but maybe there were some things that could have led to craziness. It gave me time to think. It was more the kind of environment than anything else: the things I could have been accused of doing. And I think there are times when you have to put a stop to any space that is not advantageous to your growth.

**MUSICIAN:** What were your memories of being out on the road with the Motortown Revues?

**WONDER:** The Motortown Revues were fun. A lot of it I could not know or participate in day-to-day because of the school curriculum I was on. When a lot of the people would be asleep I'd be up studying with Tad, my teacher. And then when they were up partying and having a good time, I was in bed. So I missed a lot of what was going down (snaps his fingers). But I was there and I loved it.

**MUSICIAN:** When did you—either consciously or naturally—feel like you had made the transition from being a novelty act to an artist, a more independent, creative musician?

**WONDER:** I never acknowledged, "Hey, I got to be this kind of artist." I always basically flowed with things and I've always felt I had something to offer, something to give. But I didn't try to burden anybody with the fact that I felt that way. I more so just wanted it to *happen*. And that's why it took from 1966 to 1969 for "My Cherie Amour" to come out.

**MUSICIAN:** I know you had to fight to get it released and when they released it they put it out as a B-side.

**WONDER:** It was just that the various people at "quality control" felt it was not the appropriate song to make an A-side. So they put it on the B-side of a song I wrote with Don Hunter, "I Don't Know Why I Love You." And that was more of an under-ground slight hit: it showed some changes, like putting the clavinet down at a low octave, and that sounded different, and the repetitious vamps started happening. It was influenced by Otis Redding's "That's The Glory Of Love." But "My Cherie Amour" was a song I had in the can—in my own little can, which is my tape bag, that I carry around—for a long time. And I played the song for Hank Cosby, who liked it a lot and came and produced it. Originally it was "Oh My Marsha" but Sylvia Moy came and changed the words to "My Cherie Amour." I had a girlfriend named Marsha. Well, we broke up, so it was a good thing they changed it.

**MUSICIAN:** But it wasn't a "Motown Sound" tune, and therein lies the rub.

**WONDER:** No, it wasn't. And I don't even think they knew what to do with me at that point. We were getting some misses and some mild hits. It was almost like, every other year we had a hit.

**MUSICIAN:** Now in your shows you tell the audience about the dry period between "Fingertips" in 1963 and "Uptight" in 1965 where the company was determining who was "overweight" as you say, and some people thought it was you. And wanted to drop you.

**WONDER:** Oh, yeah. Straight out. And probably if I were the president of the company I'd do the same thing. Straight out. But fortunately, it all worked out...to everyone's surprise, or to some people's surprise. Because some people would say things like, "Oh, that boy's gonna really be great. You don't know how talented that boy is." And the others would say (intoning superior disinterest), "Yeah, yeah, yeah, uh-huh, sure." They didn't really vibrate on me. Now James Jamerson and Benny Benjamin always said I'd be great. I had the confidence that something good was gonna happen but I didn't know when. And then...it begin to happen.

And the funny thing is when it started happening I didn't use a lot of the Motown musicians. I used Pistol, the drummer, and I think James Jamerson played on "Signed, Sealed, Delivered," but a lot of the things I was doing had, say, the influence of Stax. If Stax Records had done something with the kind of groove I liked, well...I did "We Can Work It Out" with a Stax kind of groove. And a lot of the Motown people didn't understand that. I had a desire to move out of the one little thing that the musicians were in, and that Motown was in. And I wanted to do it, hey, because I liked the groove.

**MUSICIAN:** Did you encounter resistance from the company?

**WONDER:** Well, I don't know if it was "resistance" so much as, "I don't understand what you're doing," and "Hey, it's not happening." But then it happened. Berry (Gordy) did like "Signed, Sealed, Delivered." He did like that.

**MUSICIAN:** Do you maintain a close relationship with Berry?

**WONDER:** We're fine. He's one of the nicest people I know. I like him as a *person*. I like his thoughts, his logic, and I understand it far better than I did when I was younger. That isn't to say that we always agree on things, but I don't think it would be fun if we agreed upon everything. I understand his attitude, his feelings. He is a great man.

**MUSICIAN:** Will you be at Motown ad infinitum? The thirteen million dollar contract you signed in '73 amid all that publicity was a seven-year deal.

**WONDER:** We've signed since then, again. And we will always sign again, and we will change some of the terms of the agreement. But basically I will have a relationship with them as long as there is a Motown. If it is no longer Motown, I don't know if I will do that.

**MUSICIAN:** When you signed the contract in the mid-70s,



you did so, you said, because Motown was the only "viable black-owned company." There's a tricky balance between vigilant support for your own people and heritage and your universal message about "brotherhood" and the erasure of color lines.

**WONDER:** Yes. Well, see, my thing is this: my attitude with Motown and with Berry and with it being a black company is a very simple thing. Uh, the fact is that society had written Berry out as a loser. Right? Basically. Before he was anything, he was written off. No one expected it to happen—and that's why it happened. No one ever thought in a million years that from Detroit, Michigan there would be some guy—let alone a black guy from lower middle-class, from a family of carpenters—to create this music in a place where people didn't even know music was happening. I look at them as a family. I think there is nothing wrong with being part of an achievement of your culture, particularly when there are not that many in comparison that are recognized. So I say, "Listen, for as long as our relationship is satisfactory and we are comfortable with what we do, I will be there with you, because I want to be part of that history being made." I would want someone to say, "Well, Stevie Wonder, while he was alive, stayed with a company owned by a black man for forty years." Or however many years it turns out to be.

The fact that we have to say "black" or "white"—as I say in my show—is unfortunate. But it does exist. That isn't to say that we are going to deny anybody else anything. My thing is: I love everybody. I love people. And even though I can't see, I do know colors, and I can tell people's personalities and their attitudes and the whole thing. I'm usually clear on that. But a lot of the other companies, they can get anybody they want. And that's been proven—they've gotten most of the Motown acts. And that's great for whatever that is. But I think for me, I would like to see a certain amount of stick-to-it-iveness, and just being there for those people that basically don't have anything and look up to this. They can say, "Oh, it can work."

It's like when I see a group that's been together for a long time. Like the Four Tops; and there's another group, they won a Grammy, a white gospel group. And it's just great to see it, to see that kind of unity. Now sometimes you disagree, and you fall out and whatever. And that's natural. And maybe I won't be there for the duration of Motown. But I'm almost sure I will be.

But wherever else I do go I will have demands that I will expect to be respected. For instance, lots of times I deal with different businesses, and I don't say, "You should only hire blacks." I say, "You should hire various people from various cultures to be a part of it." In our radio station in Black Bull, we've begun to hire...various people, white or whatever. Because, even though people say, "Oh, hey, what do you think we are, a checkerboard or something?" I say, "Yeah, man, you are, you are." This is supposed to be melting-pot country for lots of different people.

**MUSICIAN:** Right, like how many children did Thomas Jefferson have by his slave mistress, Sally Hemming? Not too many white people around named Jefferson and Washington. It's written all into our nation's history.

**WONDER:** Exactly. It's got to start somewhere. And if we don't start it, who will? Do you follow what I'm saying?

**MUSICIAN:** Very much so. Dr. King was an integrationist, and there were people on both sides that criticized him, especially the more radical black leaders, towards the end of his life.

**WONDER:** I don't even think he was that popular when he was killed. He was popular to those people who were really sincere. (The door opens, an assistant looks in, and closes it. Abner comes in.) Hey, tell these people not to keep coming in and bothering me. It's blowing me out of the box. Plus also, if we don't get a lot of what you need today, I'll call you on the phone and you can get some more. It's most important that you get as much as possible. So make sure you give me your number. Is it about 6:30 now? (I look at my watch; it's 6:31.)

**MUSICIAN:** I wanted to ask you about how you compose,



PAUL NATKIN/PHOTO RESERVE

Firing up the melting pot: "I love people; that's my thing."

about the process.

**WONDER:** It varies. But for the most part, I come up with the music first. The melody. And then I will come up with the basic idea for a lyric, the punch-line, and I'll put that down. And then I'll come back later and finish up the words.

**MUSICIAN:** Ever try different sorts of lyrics with the same melody?

**WONDER:** Once I have the melody I usually don't change. Oh, well, we were going to write some really crazy words for the song, "I Wish." Something about "The Wheel Of '84." A lot of cosmic type stuff, spiritual stuff. But I couldn't do that 'cause the music was too much fun—the words didn't have the fun of the track. The day I wrote it was a Saturday, the day of a Motown picnic in the summer of '76. God, I remember that 'cause I was having this really bad toothache. It was ridiculous. I had such a good time at the picnic that I went to Crystal Recording Studio right afterward and the vibe came right to my mind: running at the picnic, the contests, we all participated. It was a lot of fun, even though I couldn't eat the hot dogs—that was around the creation of those chicken hot dogs. And from that came the "I Wish" vibe. And I started talking to Gary (Olazabal) and we were talking about spiritual movements, "The Wheel Of '84," and when you go off to war and all that stuff. It was ridiculous. Couldn't come up with anything stronger than the chorus, "I wish those days (claps) would (claps) come back once more." Thank goodness we didn't change that.

**MUSICIAN:** Are you generally quick to lyricize, or does the music sit around for a while and filter in and out once you've put it on your cassette?

**WONDER:** The point of lyricizing is that I do come up with the basic idea; the basic melody and lyric idea from the feel of the song. I get that, and then it depends when I'm going to write the lyric. "Overjoyed" from the next record, I wrote the lyrics about a year after I had the basic idea in my mind. And I didn't do it all at one time.

**MUSICIAN:** In what sort of state is your stash of ideas, your storehouse of working tapes?

**WONDER:** Well, because of technology, it's changing a great



GARY GERSHOFF/FRETTA

How will Stevie play Eddie Murphy to Joe Piscopo's Sinatra?

deal. I could play a demo for you and it would sound close to the almost-finished track. 'Cause I feel you should stick with the feel you have at the beginning of something. Unless, of course, you can make it better. I keep everything right now on Betamax tape.

**MUSICIAN:** *Do you have virtually hundreds of snippets of music, unfinished business, that you keep as an aural notebook, or a refresher of where you were?*

**WONDER:** I don't do that so much, because if I have something I try to finish it up. I have some of that, though. But I want to finish it up so that it makes a complete statement, as much as I possibly can at the time.

**MUSICIAN:** *Will your recording change at all in the future, more towards the one-man productions and away from the group things?*

**WONDER:** Ummm, I think I always want to keep a balance between the two. But one record may have more of one than the other. I see a picture of a song being one way or the other. For something like "Sir Duke" I saw musicians and I just went about getting them, but for something like "That Girl" you just basically do it yourself.

**MUSICIAN:** *What's the biggest change in the last year or two as far as what information is accessible to you?*

**WONDER:** I would have to say my reading machine. I'm able to put a book inside this case that has a camera. The camera scans around the page, and converts all that information to digital information and then converts it again into voice synthesis. So I'm able to read a book, to read a printed page.

see myself going into more intense things, deeper into a lot of different progressions, but I also see doing short songs. All of it, I see all of it."

**MUSICIAN:** *So the machine will "talk" the book to you? A Talking Book if you will.*

**WONDER:** Yes, right.

**MUSICIAN:** *Can you travel with this?*

**WONDER:** I have traveled with it. But it's kind of cumbersome and it can break. It's called the Kurzweil reading machine and I think Xerox is handling it now. It comes from Boston. It takes time to get used to the voice. It's a computer voice.

**MUSICIAN:** *I want to talk to you about the simplest and most difficult thing in the world, love, which is certainly the focal point of your concerts and many if not most of your lyrics. When you say—and you have the audience chant—"Love Is The Key" I want to know what you mean by love. If you can't define it, that's fair too.*

**WONDER:** When I say "Love Is The Key," I really mean love is the key. Putting love to anything, bringing it into anything, understanding, trying to really give the positive of something—it could be a personal relationship or a business or whatever. If you deal with the spirit of God, the spirit of love in your heart, with sincerity, that's the key. That's what I mean.

**MUSICIAN:** *What's the distinction for you between romantic love and the sort of love your talking about here?*

**WONDER:** Well, they're different emotions. But they all are very emotional things. You know when a mother is breast-feeding a child, it's not the same vibe as...as... (laughter). That's a good analogy, huh? But when you're kissing your child you don't think of kissing (laughter) you know....

**MUSICIAN:** *Now there are some sick folks on the coast....*

**WONDER:** (continued laughter) When you say "I love you" to your mother, well, it's different. But it's still love in your heart. That's why I see no reason to create any kind of negative thing, even though I may say things that throw people off if they have a preconceived notion of where I'm at. It's like on television, you never see people use the bathroom so you think they must not.

**MUSICIAN:** *Because love is a unifying principle for your work, and you have, of course, very strong romantic impulses in both your music and lyrics, you've also been criticized for indulging in mawkishness, excessive sentimentality and the like. How would you respond to this?*

**WONDER:** You've got to remember—as you know and as everyone does know—that love is somewhat a sentimental thing. Love is about those moments of ecstasy... and then you wait for another one to happen. And you think, "Remember the first time we kissed," or "Remember when we went out to the zoo with the kids," or, "Remember that time when we played all night and just played and played and the band was cooking." That's the beauty of it—it is only as permanent as you make it. That is what making love is all about. Not just about physically making love, but creating love in the now for tomorrow. You have to create it for tomorrow, for that now—which you then look back upon, with the memory of moments.

So basically, when you're writing a song you're creating a short story of a love emotion. You can basically capsuleize the whole *Romeo And Juliet* story in a song, in two minutes. The play lasts for a little longer, but in your life it lasts for on and on and on.

**MUSICIAN:** *And yet for all this beauty and joy, your songs are filled with hurt, vulnerability, not just sadness but abandonment.*

**WONDER:** My thing is: the balance of it is what makes it beautiful. You cannot fully appreciate it sometimes unless you know the other side. It would be like a kid who's always had everything, and then he gets out on his own and says, "Oh, man, what's happening with this, you don't know who I am, you don't know who my family is!!" But if you got a kid with some balance, there won't be the shock of the world when he gets there. It's the same with life: you experience joy, you experience sorrow. I mean, the only reason you cry when someone dies is because you know how beautiful it's been and you know you're going to miss that emotion. So you cry. You are going to miss something you had in your life.

**MUSICIAN:** *Will you in the future rely on the short song-form to deal with all your emotions, or will you work more with extended thematic developments, as in Secret Life Of Plants?*

**WONDER:** I see both. I see going into more intense things, deeper into a lot of different progressions, but I also see doing short songs. All of it, I see all of it. No extended works are in the making right now, but it's very possible. Very soon.

**MUSICIAN:** *One thing that strikes me about your songs, especially the more romantic ones, the ballads, is that there seems to be very little separation—almost none really—between the "I" in the song and you as "Stevie Wonder." It's either the conviction with which you sing them, or the fact that they are all truly autobiographical that gives me this feeling, this lack of distance between you and your work.*

**WONDER:** Let's take the song "Lately."

**MUSICIAN:** *A good example 'cause it's in the first person—like most of the others—and it's a tear-jerker.*

**WONDER:** Okay, now it comes from an emotion that was going down that I was feeling for someone else that I thought they might be feeling. You can create that emotion in the lyric as if it were you. Or you can put yourself in that setting—which I usually do—and react to it that way. You may have experienced something enough to already know what it's about even though it's not you this time. It's like often people are explaining things to me and I say, "Yeah, I already know what you mean." You may have experienced enough to know an emotion, or a color, or a basic mood, or the vibe. What show did

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LEI/RETNA

Little Stevie testing his fingertips.

you see?

**MUSICIAN:** *A few nights ago.*

**WONDER:** Well, we did this song last night from the new album, and I wanted to create this whole *vibe*. It's called, "With Each Beat Of My Heart." So I got them to put a couch on the stage, got some wine, and got a single woman to come up from the audience. And we created the whole mood. Now I've experienced that mood before so I know how I want it to be and how to create it.

**MUSICIAN:** *You mentioned color. You sang a song the other night with the lyric, "I have the silver in the stars, the gold in the morning sun." I'm curious as to where your associations come from, your emotive feelings about the colors....*

**WONDER:** Just from knowing the colors and being told what they're like, that sort of thing.

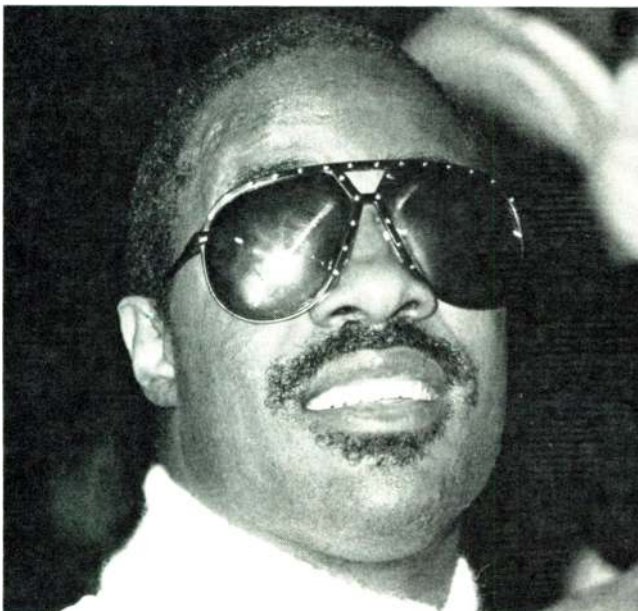
**MUSICIAN:** *When you think of silver, what comes to mind?*

**WONDER:** Shiny. Flashy. On and off. Spotted.

**MUSICIAN:** *You did an all instrumental album way back in the early days, as *Eivets Rednow*. Do you have thoughts to do something like that again, or something with very little singing?*

**WONDER:** I hope to, yeah. Maybe when I really feel more

Stevland displays diamond-studded shades.



GARY GERSHOFF RETNA

comfortable with my playing jazz I'll do that again. (By all accounts, Stevie can throw down improvisational ivory.)

**MUSICIAN:** *Do you do a lot of improvising when you're off on your own?*

**WONDER:** Yeah, yeah. When I'm practicing. On the acoustic.

**MUSICIAN:** *Are there jazz musicians....*

**WONDER:** Chick Corea I like. Art Tatum, man, as you know, is ridiculous. Keith Jarrett, a great player. Improvisations, I'm telling you. How was it to interview him?

**MUSICIAN:** *Everybody told me that I wouldn't like him, that he was a real S.O.B., but he was very straight about it. Gave it a lot of time and thought, was quite receptive. You hear so many things....*

**WONDER:** About me and about everybody else. You got to find out for yourself...I think we should continue this on the phone. I'm feeling kind of strange. I need to cool out for a second.

As requested, I gave Stevie my phone number and he told me he'd call me the next day. Dream. Over the next four weeks, I spent so much time with the phone with his publicist, Ira Tucker, Jr., that we thought we'd run an interview with Ira instead of Stevie. Ira continually tried to get Stevie back to me. One day, his secretary called around noon and told me to "Get ready, Stevie's gonna call within the hour." I wait seven hours. I finally call Ira and ask his permission to go out to dinner (feel like a grounded teenager) and he says, "Don't wait around man, go." Come back to the apartment and here's a message from Steveland Morris on ye olde phone machine, saying he'd call back in two hours. Dream.

Two days later, I get a call from Ira saying Stevie's gonna call. Stevie calls, saying he's got family business now but he'll call at 11:00 tonight. At 10:45, it's Stevie in an airport saying, "I got to introduce you to another reality." "Too much reality," sayeth I. "Got to have it, man," sayeth Stevie, "Got to have it, bay-beah. Listen, I'm in Cincinnati. I'm on my way to L.A. Listen, so what I'm gonna do is call you 9:00 my time, 12:00 noon your time tomorrow. I just wanted to let you know what was happening." I wait eight hours. No call. After another week and a half of this, Ira finally calls to say Stevie's sorry about all this and he'll call tomorrow, to do nothing else if not apologize (he doesn't).

Now the only reason anyone (meaning myself) would put up with all this is because Stevie Wonder *matters*. He matters not only because he is quite probably our greatest writer of the popular song, but because his *vision* embraces more than either the silly love song or the party rap—both of which he's also good at. In an age of song so bereft of political or social integrity that Prince's escapist fantasy, "We're gonna party like it's 1999," can be taken as the heaviest black pop *statement* of the year, Stevie Wonder matters all the more. He packages his ideas smoothly: living the myth of the Blind Seer, he subverts the status quo with melodic confection that gives you something to think about when the party's over as *well* as a serious party. (And by the way, folks, if you think plants are undeserving topic for a double album, try breathing without them.)

Stevie's rudeness in failing to finish the interview cannot be excused (and he wouldn't excuse it himself); it may, however, be explained. The man is surrounded—not by the enemy—but by his own people. And as Lennon remarked, it's the courtiers that kill the king. Stevie Wonder employs roughly a hundred people—musicians, technicians, family members, administrators, managers, publishers, packagers, talent developers, stagers, secretaries, sycophants—and he may be feeling a little uneasy in the saddle these days. He is the president of his own publishing company, his own studio, his own radio station (KJLH) and his own Motown-distributed label, Wondirection, for whom he produces records. He is also a husband and a father, a man dedicated to his family. He also also has comedic aspirations and he has also also also aspirations for

*continued on page 65*



JIMMY HASLIP  
Bassist with The Yellowjackets,  
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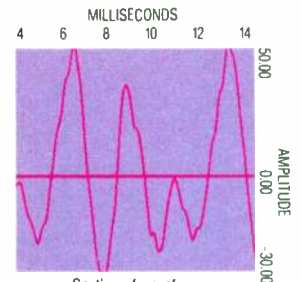
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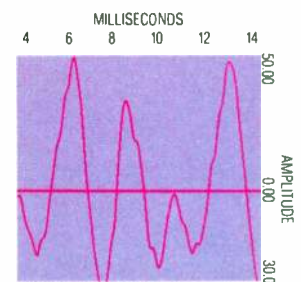
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## Stevie from page 60

world peace. When it's cold outside, Stevie Wonder does not exactly have the month of May.

In addition, he may be suffering from "The Thriller Effect." Or: where do you go creatively and commercially after Michael Jackson has just done something like twenty million copies? Wonder has always had difficulty parting with new material, and the wide-open vista for black pop in *Thriller's* wake cannot be making his creative decisions any easier. He would clearly like a record that big.

This week—in the middle of a stop-and-go tour—he dumped his entire band, some of whom have been with him for years. Under Stevie's own brand of high-finance humanitarianism, he will continue to pay them *not* to play for him. He has had to cancel gigs and he is still in the studio tinkering with the new record and rehearsing his new group. So the big question of the Christmas season becomes (drumroll please): how will Stevie Wonder play Richard Pryor or Michael Jackson's Eddie Murphy?

© 1984 by David Breskin

### The Master's Blasters

Stevie's equipment man Mick Ferren reports, "He's got a bunch of keyboards. He's into one-of-a-kind units; we got the big Yamaha GS1 synth twelve years ago when there were only nine in existence." Mick reveals that Stevie is loyal to his older keyboards; even though they may be outdated, he will bring them onstage if he can't get the sound on the record any other way. This necessitates hauling along his trusty Yamaha acoustic piano, which has been specially modified for him. Other keyboards he carried on the most recent tour are a Fender Rhodes, a Hohner D-6 Clavinet, a PPG Wave 2.2 with Wave Term computer unit and a Yamaha CS-80, plus a LinnDrum and a Dr. Click synchronizer.

Stevie programs all his own sounds, says Mick. "What we do is, we buy the unit, I show him how it works, or we'll have someone who's really qualified in that keyboard do it, and he'll just study it, put it in his computer, his brain, and he'll never forget it. He'll go home and work with that particular unit, and after about ten days, he'll be getting stuff out of it that the builders never even thought possible." Among the keyboards Stevie owns are a Fairlight, a couple of Octave-Plateau Voyetra-8s, an Oberheim OB-8 (with a DSX sequencer) and a Yamaha DX7.

In Stevie's creative process, most song ideas emerge full-grown from the womb; Mick notes, "When he starts a song, he knows exactly how the whole thing is going to finish up, bridge, chorus, the whole end product. Ideas come out of him like I'm talking to you now."

Stevie's long-time producer, Gary Olazabal, agrees, but adds that the studio is a separate process of discovery: "Generally he'll have the whole song painted in his mind, but given the nature of recording, it always changes." Olazabal says that Stevie

will begin building a song with a piano or lately a synthesizer with a special sound; he'll play that along with a drum machine, either an Oberheim DMX or a LinnDrum. Keyboard bass usually goes on soon after, just before the live drums are added. The new album, however, features strictly electronic percussion, programmed by Stevie himself.

Stevie's studio has a 3M 32-track digital tape machine and Sony 24-track and 2-track PCMs. The main board is a Neve with a Necam automation system. Gary likes to use Schoeps mikes, along with AKG C-12 and C-414s. His favorite outboard gear is Scamp equalizers and limiters, but he also has a Urei 1176 limiter. For echo he uses EMT 250s and a Sony 2000 digital delay system.

Gary has little conversation with Stevie during a session, even during the involved process of punching in new overdubs: "I never speak to him when we're working. We don't really need to talk—I know when he messes up and so does he, and he takes my judgment as far as what I think is good or bad." Olazabal will stop the tape if he hears a mistake, without being told. "Even something I don't like. Usually he's so busy singing, I'm the only objective ears."

Gary does a good deal of his work under less than optimum conditions: "There's always a lot of people in the studio when Stevie records. Part of what gets him off in recording is the performance part of it, getting feedback from people in the control room. It makes it difficult to work, but that's the way he likes to do it." — **Jock Baird**

## The digital clap trap



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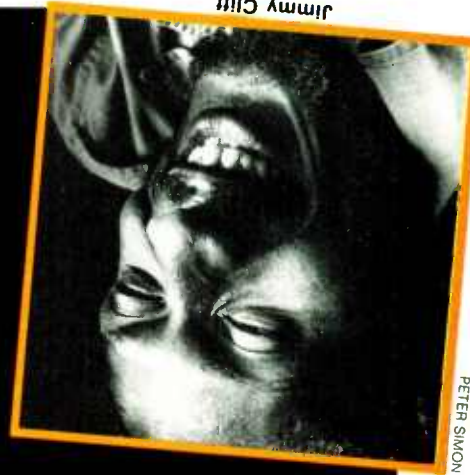
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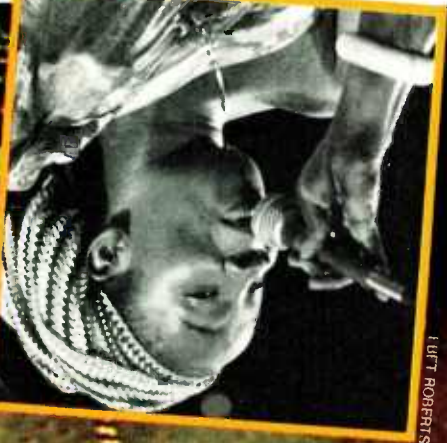
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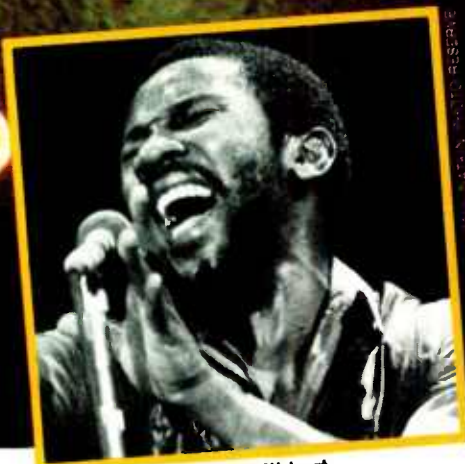
ADRIAN BOOT



**T**here are no dispassionate thoughts in the world of reggae. Once caught up in its labyrinthian runnings, there is no turning back. Opinions are voiced with a ferocity and conviction that make heads turn, and arguments inevitable. Because, in speaking of reggae, we're not talking about pop music, although it is enormously and internationally popular. We're speaking of a culture, a conviction, a determination that the wicked excesses of Babylon be demolished. Biblical furies and eternal judgments are the texts of much of reggae music, in a time when most of the mainstream has given up on commitment to content, on making music that changes lives. Perhaps this is why the crowds at reggae concerts are older: an audience peopled by folks with memories of the 60s, when music was a common bond, a universal *lingua franca* and a call to arms, people who need to embrace a spirit that, for them, has never died.

Reggae nuh deal wit' death. "Ever-living, ever-loving Jah," said Bob Marley. Now Marley himself is practically deified in some circles. Not quite a god, yet most likely a prophet, Robert Nesta Marley is the *sine qua non* of the internationalization of reggae. In the two and a half years since his passing, the music of Jamaica has seemed to lack a center, a dynamic guide forcing it forward like an ice-breaker through a frozen and indifferent river. They're still making songs down in Jamaica with titles like "Send Another Bob Marley." But how can one replace a figure of such pioneering and timeless accomplishments? Is there really another Elvis out there? Another Lennon? How about another Malcolm or Martin or Marcus? Not bloody likely. "Bob Marley was the most important black man in the world," said one longtime Kingston observer. "Of course, they had to kill him." We don't often think of martyrdom in pop—excesses and self-abuse, yes, but dying for the glory of rock 'n' roll? Just ain't worth it, partner. So in examining just who it is who might take Bob's place in the forefront of this international movement of Truth and Rights, one has to be aware of the special fears and responsibilities attached to such a position, and to know that those who seek it probably shouldn't have it, like presidential candidates. It is the mass reggae audience, as diverse and eclectic a group as one is likely to find, that will determine the new leaders. Unfortunately, the standards may prove to be too high.

Bob was not in music to make money. Marley's hopes and ears were tuned to Eternity, to the clear voice of Jah delivering His messages to a willing channel who then shared them with the world. And how the world responded! From Tokyo to Auckland, from New York to Soweto, the words and works of Bob Marley were studied, sung, debated, dissected and sloganized, uniting black, brown, red, yellow and white in one common understanding. But why? It was because Bob Marley, with his half-white heritage and a personal agenda that transcended any rock star career moves, symbolized a bold cultural bridge that spanned the modern consequences of the Creole Caribbean and the polyglot Americas, forging a dynamic bond between old sorrows and new struggles. More than virtually any other figure on the international scene, Marley



Toots Hibbert

by Roger Steffens

was the inspirational voice of self-determination. Flawed, troubled, yet generous and committed, he was also its heroic embodiment. You can't say that about a David Bowie or a Prince, much less a Yellowman.

Reggae is not a game. It is out to change the world, nothing less. It speaks to the downpressed in every race. It is simply the lack of message in the music that has caused its current stagnation. Give us another "Rivers Of Babylon" to ease us through these maddeningly immoral times. Like rock for the past ten years, reggae is in danger—it has ceased to reinvent itself.

"There is no longer the political climate for free expression in Jamaica as there was in the 70s," observes Marley biographer Stephen Davis. "The old Rasta spirit of 1976 has disappeared."

Timothy White, another Marley scholar, believes, "There's going to be a new Jamaican form with a new kind of beat, because of all the teenage Jamaican musicians who are woodshedding now. We're at a generational crossroads today, as kids of (Marley's eldest son) Ziggy's age come along with new ideas of how things should change. Listen to the phrasings in their singing: these kids are hearing it in their heads in a very different way."

Warren Smith, owner of the small reggae label called Epiphany in San Francisco, sums it up this way: "Many of our current problems are the result of the closed minds of the Jamaican artists, which in turn help close off careers." He cites "demands for too much money, and unrealistic tour requirements," as two of the major problems in slowing the forward motion of the music.

Indeed, on the island itself, it is harder than ever to make any money from reggae. While the technology itself is no mystery to even the poorest ghetto dwellers, access is extremely limited. There's only one place in Jamaica to cut a stamper now, and many producers find it cheaper to fly up to Miami for an afternoon and make their stampers there. In the glory days of the late 60s, a smash hit single could sell sixty or seventy thousand copies. Today, only a tiny number of seven-inchers can expect to sell even ten thousand. "Food music" they used to call it, meaning that the sufferah who has gone without eating properly for several weeks, maybe even been beaten by Babylon (the police) on his way to the studio, must make a song good enough, unique enough, that it will sell its way to a profit, so that the man can provide food for his family. It's a little different from forty-seven takes at S.I.R. Often an artist might cut four tracks in a hour—including the time it takes to teach the song to the band. It is not unknown for a DJ (rapping) album to be cut in real time. But what good is that speed and economy if the market is severely curtailed?

"Mass acceptance of any kind of music usually dilutes it," says Mel Cheplowitz of Berkeley's KALX, a station that programs reggae nearly twenty percent of the day and night. "If Jamaicans really want that kind of acceptance, they'll have to change." But, he warns, it will no longer be the kind of music that has won so many converts around the globe.

Reggae specialists are experimenting with a variety of styles now—everything from Latino to psychedelic, laid over the familiar types of Jamaican riddims: dub, DJ and vocal. Let's examine some of the prime movers in the field today, and peek around the corner at some who might affect the future.

One of the most interesting current developments involves a man universally acknowledged as the founding father. Clement "Coxsone" Dodd, whose Studio One gave birth to nearly every major figure in the music so far. He is so respected (on a musical level, at least) that even his own mother calls him *Mr. Dodd*. In Spanishtown, Jamaica, where she runs the Musik City record, battery and overall shop, Coxsone's mother recently told me, "Mr. Dodd has thousands of songs that he hasn't released yet." These include a legendary set of Christian hymns by Bob Marley & the Wailers, and a reported *nine* LPs by a stunning harmony group called the Silvertones. Now

Dodd is moving his base of operations to Brooklyn, and his brand new studio should be in operation by the time this article sees print. With his golden ears, Coxsone could well start a one-man renaissance of the music in the somewhat safer clime of New York.

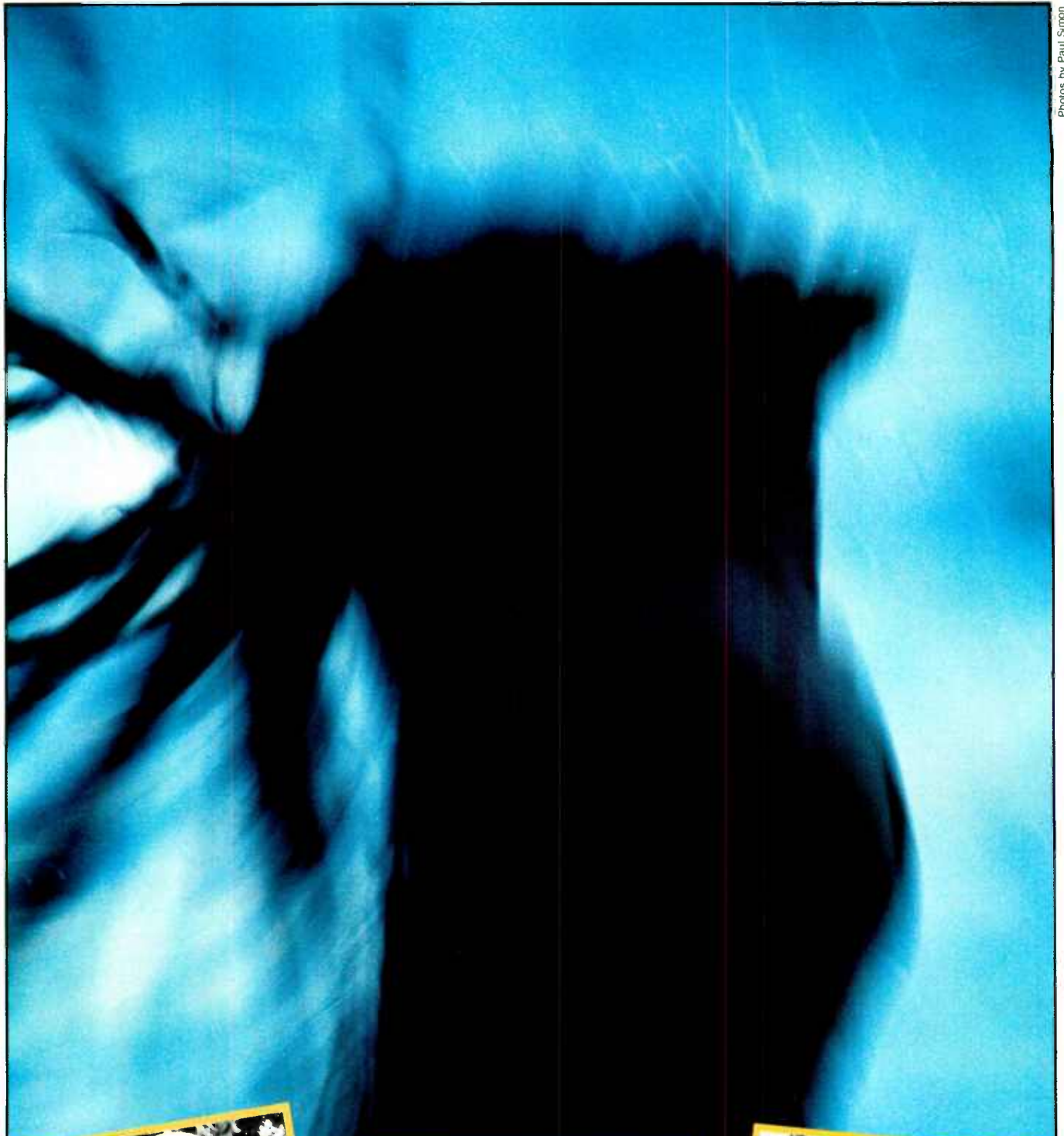
It is an ironic fact that the role Bob Marley has to play might not yet be over, for there exists in the vaults the makings of several more albums from the man who prophesied, "Them a go tired fe see me face, them can't get me out a the race." If they were to be released two or three tracks a year, in twelve-inch mixes, Bob might have a decade's worth of brilliance left. Included in these as-yet unavailable works is a raving ska-rockers version of "Buffalo Soldier" that smashes the version on *Confrontation* to smithereens. "Jungle Fever" and "Like A Wounded Lion In The Jungle" are also potential blockbusters. On top of these are eight albums' worth of uncollected oldies, most featuring the matchless blendings of Bunny Wailer, Peter Tosh and Bob Marley. Then there is the vast resource of live recordings, with astonishing performances of songs that sound, unlike the sanitized Island LP versions, as urgent as a hotline call from the Kremlin. The King is dead, long live the King!

The kind of rude, accusatory and righteous invocations of the best of Marley's music can be found in reggae only occasionally these days, mostly in the work of its "dub poets." A term coined by Linton Kwesi Johnson in the late 70s, it involves a rhythmic scansion spoken over a usually raw riddim track, that gives weight and impetus to the often angry impulses behind the poetry. A handful of artists keep the form alive, men with strange names like Mutabaruka, Benjamin Zephaniah, Oku Onuora, and one with the deceptively ordinary moniker of Michael Smith. Smith was the most controversial performer at the 1983 Sunsplash Festival in Jamaica, fighting a hostile audience all through the set. He spoke of rigged elections, and of mankind's facile forgetfulness about slavish South Africa, as the crowds screamed for him to "play music" and "get off the stage." Within weeks after his performance, Michael Smith was beaten to death by assailants alleged to have come from Seaga's ruling party, the JLP.

Among these passionate, outspoken poets, the rising star of Mutabaruka seems to sparkle most brightly. His appearance is somewhat menacing. He usually performs bare of foot and chest, and sometimes with thick slave chains connecting his wrists. His long black locks are swept straight back from his broad forehead, bisected by a thick white strip down the middle, like the foreshadowing of the Biblical mane of some latterday Elijah. His latest target is the cocaine runnings, an industry that has grown to avalanche proportions in the past three years in Jamaica. In his current twelve-inch on the U.S. Alligator label, Muta demands to know why "Johnny Drughead use your nose like a vacuum cleaner." As unhip as these sentiments might be, Muta has been favorably reviewed in such bizarre places as *People* magazine. He is definitely a figure to watch and be reckoned with.

Oku Onuora, whose original name was Orlando Wong, is a published poet who turned to the music to carry his message to a broader audience. He too has an American label, Heartbeat (a subsidiary of Rounder in Cambridge), that seems committed to releasing the best of the genre. Like his contemporaries, Onuora uses a deep-voiced, sometimes hoarse, delivery to hurl his admonitions.

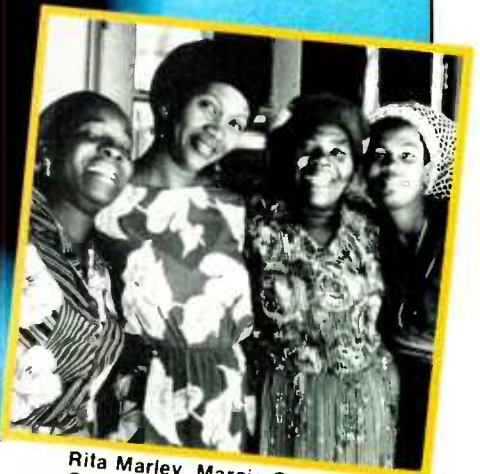
Father-figure Linton Kwesi Johnson, a black activist member of the Race Today Collective in England, produced Michael Smith's only LP, and is preparing the first album of his own work in three years, to be called *Making History*. "I write English poetry, too," he admits, "but I haven't written any in a long while. I think it's dangerous to categorize you in this 'dub poetry' bag. I coined the term 'dub poetry' years ago in talking about reggae DJs because I was trying to argue in some article I wrote for an academic journal that the DJs in Jamaica, what they are actually doing is poetry, is improvised, spon-



Michigan & Smiley



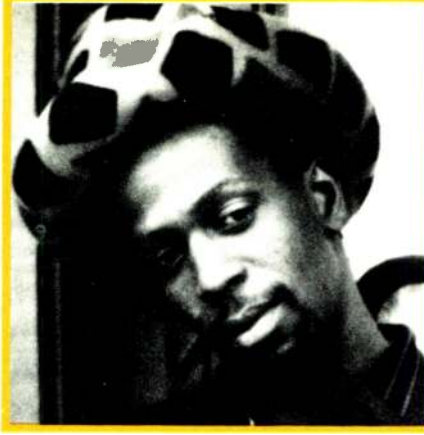
Yellowman  
World Radio History



Rita Marley, Marcia Griffiths,  
Cedella Booker, Judy Mowatt



Peter Tosh



Gregory Isaacs



Dennis Brown

taneous oral poetry."

There is little doubt that the soul of reggae resides in these brave speakers. Whether they have the ability to force the music into new markets, however, is another question entirely, especially in light of their preference for *patois*.

Their cousins, the DJs, are holding their own in the movement, although slackness (graphically lewd lyrics) seems sadly in the ascendant, especially with the engorged reputation of an albino named Yellowman. A masterful performer, Yellowman has released more than five dozen singles and albums in the past eighteen months, nearly all of them hits. But most appeal to the lowest common denominator, flaunting "sit on my cockee" verses, and deadpan boasts like, "Woman 'pon a woman that a lesbian/ Yellowman 'pon a woman that a style and fashion." At Sunsplash '82 the nail-thin toaster did a two-hour set that caused absolute pandemonium. Yellowman is just beginning to peak in the U.K., but waning in the U.S. and probably in Jamaica as well. The outright filth of much of his presentation blunts whatever moral authority he might attempt to sustain.

Pioneering a double-DJ style, Papa Michigan and General Smiley have come up with two or three anthems in their short reign at the top of the heap: "One Love Jamdown" and "Diseases." How did Smiley get his name? "Because I don't smile much." He does in his music, though, punctuating phrases with an occasional "Ribbit!" Both men are literate, and astute enough to pick up on what is most current in the crucial dancehall scene in Kingston. Their American label, Ras Records in Washington, D.C., feels confident enough in their future to have financed one of the few reggae videos ever made, of their current smash "Sugar Daddy."

It has been said that the DJs are the town criers of Jamaica, the bearers of what is really happening. Years ago, Big Youth's "Green Bay Killing" told a story that the Jamaican *Gleaner* was afraid to print, and right now dozens of young DJs are "toasting" over dub tracks with "today's news today." Kids with names like Billy Boyo are coming up, and for the first time, women are taking over the microphone stands too. Sister Nancy was one of the first, following the footsteps of her brother, Twelve Tribes' DJ Brigadier Jerry.

And what of women in reggae? Another sad but true fact is that few women, other than the producers' girlfriends, ever get recorded in the dog-nyam-dog world of Jamaican music. Most of them are already operating under several burdens, not the least of which is being baby-mother (crass Americans would say "unwed mother") to several children, and generally fighting the struggles endemic to a sexist culture. (I speak here not of true Rastas, for they respect their "queens.") It just seems almost impossible for a woman to have a career in Jamaican music, so that in looking to the future, we must scan the past. And in those sights, we find the familiar names of Judy Mowatt, Marcia Griffiths and Rita Marley—the familiar I-Threes. Together, and as soloists, they have the most impressive track records of any of their sisters, again because of the overwhelming forcefulness of their mentor, Bob Marley.

Judy Mowatt has made what, in the opinion of most reggae critics, is the finest female LP ever recorded in Jamaica, *Black Woman*. It has recently been re-released in America on the ascendant Shanachie label, out of New Jersey (which is shaping up to be the Island of the 80s). Judy's current Jamaican single, "Hush Baby Mother," has one of the catchiest melodies of the year. Her combination of physical beauty and vocal purity mark her as *the* female to watch in Jamaica.

Marcia Griffiths is also in fine form these days. A star in her own right, when Judy and Rita were still anonymous singers in 60s groups, Marcia was the unwitting founder of the I-Threes trio in 1974, when she invited the other two to be backup singers for her at the House of Chen in Kingston. Griffiths says her proudest moment in reggae came "when Bunny Wailer released my single, 'Tribulation,' on his own Solomonik label.

Rita Marley enjoyed surprising success with "One Draw," released just after her husband's passing. An innocuous paean to herbal enjoyment, the song sold a reputed 100,000 copies in the U.S. But several attempts at touring the States misfired, and Rita put a bad taste in the mouths of promoters who were left holding the bag. This spring she was the first reggae performer ever booked on the Kool Jazz Festival circuit, but unexplicably she canceled those engagements a few days before they were to take place. Under enormous pressures as an artist, mother and businesswoman, she has taken over the reins of Marley's sprawling Tuff Gong empire, and co-produced this year's Wailers' LP, *Confrontation*.

While the individual prospects of these women remain cloudy, as the I-Threes, their potential is enormous. They've released a new twelve-inch single, "Music For The World"/"Many Are Called" in the States on the Shanachie label and an album is on the way. That they will stay together is a given. It is said that Rita has had not one, but two separate visions of Bob telling her to keep the group intact.

Still another Marley woman might give reggae the odd jolt it needs right now, and that is Bob's mother, Cedella Booker. Her promising release of 1981 on Tuff Gong shows some of what she is capable of. One side is called "Stay Alive": "Son they say you're dead, but I and I know you live," announce its haunting lyrics. Side B is "Redemption Song, J" but it's not the acoustic hymn her son composed. Rather, it is a combination of hooklines and titles of many of Bob's songs delivered in a gossypily voice that indicates where Marley got much of his early inspiration. She's got an album coming up, and it is sure to be one of a kind.

Carlene Davis is an award-winning singer who has lived abroad much of her career, and those foreign influences show. Her most powerful record to date is called "No Ism Schism" and, should she decide to veer away from the more ordinary pop material she usually records, she could be a major figure. One of the most interesting artists on the female side is ironically an American woman named Dhaima, the only Rasta-woman ever to have her own TV show in Jamaica. She recorded a magnificent single on her own label, called "Don't Feel No Way," and then returned to the States. She writes fine,

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eccentric material; some smart label should sign her. Another reggae woman to keep an eye on is Barbara Paige, originally from Cleveland. Her debut album, *Here Me Now* on Epiphany, features the accomplished backing of the Wailers and, on one track, Dennis Brown. She has strong regional followings, particularly in the western U.S., and could be a breakthrough artist in the next couple years.

Although America is shaping up as a serious reggae-producing center, with seven independent labels originating material now, its importance so far is nothing as compared to England. Reggae has been recorded there since the 60s, and a whole new style has emerged, blending lush pop with roots riddims. "Lovers rock" was born there, love songs with reggae backing, so named to distinguish them from the mostly Rasta-oriented musics available in the U.K. on "pre" (or "pre-release," meaning Jamaican imports not yet issued on an English label). "Rasta music seems to have gone out about five years ago," explains David Rodigan of London's Capital Radio, the most important reggae jock in England.

Aswad and Steel Pulse remain the two U.K. groups with the greatest potential. Pulse's first three albums were released on Island, which told the group not to bother touring America because "they had no audience there." In 1982, Steel Pulse signed with Elektra, which gave them a hit album, *True Democracy*, and a wonderfully successful American tour. Their second LP for that label is expected shortly, and it is highly anticipated. Like its predecessor it should be a rock-reggae fusion of fluid musicianship and specific political lyrics. Aswad has an on-again-off-again relationship with Island, which is currently in the "on" position.

One of the most fascinating developments to come out of the British Isles lately is the groundbreaking work of a white producer named Adrian Sherwood. L.A. critic Matt Groening feels that "he has the most invigorating drum sound of anyone in the world today." His music is a response to Brian Eno's experiments with psychedelic-African combinations, unsuccessful ones, in Sherwood's opinion. In fact, one of the LPs by his "Singers And Players" studio musicians is called *My Life In A Hole In The Ground*.

Misty in Roots is another U.K. based band that cannot be counted out. Years ago English police destroyed their equipment, and Peter Townshend bought them a whole new kit and financed a record. They play a lot for radical causes, and have built up a large audience on the continent. Their best album so far was recorded live in Brussels in 1979, and they have just played a week in Poland to an average of 7,000 people a night!

But none of the above has achieved a fraction of the penetration of come-from-nowhere Musical Youth whose single, "Pass The Dutchie," has sold somewhere between four and seven million copies worldwide (depending on whether you're talking to the accountants or the manager). Youngsters from Birmingham, England, their ability to sustain a longterm career is unproven, but they do have a massive publicity machine cranked up that distributes color fan photos and their own comic book.

But it is most logically to Jamaica that we look for "the next big thing." It is not unlikely that Ziggy Marley will emerge as a soloist now that his voice is changing. As a member of the Melody Makers, he is signed to EMI, which will release the group's first LP. His recent, somber Shanachie single, "What A Plot," belies the fact that he wrote it when he was a mere eleven years old. "What a plot," say the lyrics, "dem a plot to kill I and I." He has the intimidating gaze of his father, and is capable of the same unexpected frenzy. In five years, he could be on a similar level; after all, he's been training all his short life.

Toots Hibbert is now a solo artist, having split from the Maytals and his longtime band. Island plans to release nothing but singles on him (like the superb "Spiritual Healing" of last summer) until he has an honest hit; then they'll think about doing another album. Gregory Isaacs, another master of the form, is also a sometime Island artist, who has had his brushes

with the law. His recent bust (for possession of two empty pistols) was, by his own admission, his twenty-eighth, and probably his most serious. There is some doubt as to whether his passport will be restored, and so his touring career could be over. For sheer vocal insinuation, he is unmatched, a minimalist genius who can shade a syllable and say it all. He's called "The Cool Ruler," an observation on the Jerry Butler-like way he refuses to strain. This very reticence may preclude a crossover success.

His close friend, Dennis Brown, is getting a big push from A&M, which has released three of his LPs so far. He has a trio of parallel careers going as well: dancehall, roots and pop, with uncoordinated releases in several different countries at once. With the right song....

Then there's the indefinable Eek-A-Mouse. A lanky six-foot-six, he sings like a "Chinee-Indian-Apache," and by merely throwing his shoulders back and assuming a fey matador's stance, he can elicit bobby-sox shrieks. He blends nonsense syllables with shrewd historical and up-to-the-second observations. D.C.'s Ras Records has him too, insuring that his music will get the proper American exposure.

Others on the rise include Don Carlos, a founding member of Black Uhuru, whose style seems to have been lifted by Michael Rose, its current lead singer. Uhuru itself cannot be counted out, especially since they have the crucial element of Sly and Robbie, reggae's hardest rhythm section. Ken Boothe and Jimmy Cliff are both on the comeback trail, the former recording new material for the first time in nearly a decade, and the latter experiencing a string of impressive singles and LPs. Cliff has begun to sing openly about Jah Rastafari these days, and his lead guitarist, the "High Priest of Reggae" Earl "Chinna" Smith, is presently searching for a new kind of beat, both of which could animate an even greater resurgence for a man who, like Marley, has taken reggae to nearly every corner of the globe.

But it is in West Africa that one discovers hundreds of reggae bands, some dedicated to the mid-60s style called rock-steady, others aping Marley's sound, still more coming up with a kind of Zairean-high-life-reggae hybrid that could well point the way for that long-expected Afro-Jamaican fusion. If some great African groups could ever play in Jamaica, they could change the face of that country's music forever.

Perhaps an American group might do that....Maybe Boston's Loose Caboose, whose blues-inflected reggae has been released so far only in Jamaica on an LP called *Dealers World* on Imani Music; or Baltimore's Mighty Invaders, with their dual female leads; or Washington, D.C.'s Black Sheep, who recently won top prize of \$10,000 in a city-wide Battle of the Bands; or, most likely, Kansas City's Blue Riddim Band.

Arguably America's best bar band, the constantly-touring Riddim has played twice at Jamaica's Reggae Sunsplash, and each time drawn genuine approval from the terrifically tough local audience. When their set started last summer, I overheard a dread at the back of the audience ask, "Wha' dat, Skatalites?" referring to the foundation band of the 60s, that was scheduled to play on the same evening. Such is the respect in which Blue Riddim is held.

Another way that reggae can spice itself into a new wave is by using the same techniques that *juju* musicians are employing in Nigeria. In *juju* the "roots" mean the talking drums, the basic underpinning that goes back to the 20s. In Jamaica it means drum and bass (and lots of space). But what reason is there not to overlay some unorthodox (for reggae) instrumentation, like steel guitar or jazz flute? Country music is so close to reggae that the transposition of one form into the other is immensely simple. Skeeter Davis got one of the largest ovations at last year's World Music Festival in Montego Bay—from the locals! And people like Toots and Ras Karbi have recorded unabashed country-reggae. Now if we can get the Opry to present the Maytals, we might have the makings of a whole



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new subculture.

On balance, however, the most important opportunity to bring the music to new heights of success and respect involves its founders—the original Wailers. "Yes," admits Peter Tosh, "we are definitely reforming the group." "The singers in the Wailers will be Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer, Junior Braithwaite and possibly Vision," reveals Bunny Wailer. Junior Braithwaite was a ska-era addition to the original trio, while Vision is Rita Marley's cousin, Constantine Walker, who was in the Soulettes with her, and who replaced Bob for a year in 1966 when Marley moved to Delaware to raise money for his own label. Plans are for the trio to record, tour Africa and then the rest of the world.

"We've laid tracks already," says Bunny. "I'm just waiting on Peter now to finish this leg of his (world) tour, and then he's settled, and then he start working on voicing and all of that, putting it together. Vision is a bass man and a guitarist and also a drummer. And Junior Braithwaite is a keyboard specialist. We have to get the Wailers going—the *real wailers* going."

Yet, as is common in reggae, there is currently some disension surrounding the reunion, most particularly concerning the exclusion of drummer Carlton Barrett and bassist Aston "Family Man" Barrett, the reggae-era Wailers' premier rhythm section. "The Barrett brothers, that's another sad story," sighs Bunny. "Peter and myself had proposed, just after Bob had passed, that we should bring the Wailers together again, including the Barrett brothers and the I-Threes. But somehow the Barrett brothers weren't with it. It's like they didn't want *us* to be in the group, they didn't want the original Wailers. But a Wailer is a Wailer, and a Wailer will *always* be a Wailer."

Perhaps the lack of a strong central focus in post-Marley reggae is forcing Bunny back into to the mainstream. Mysterious, aloof, reclusive, he had refused to tour or even set foot onstage since 1975, preferring to grow food against the com-

ing famine of these Last Days (in fact, he appears on one of his recent *UA* album covers driving a tractor). But a tumultuous one-of appearance at a Youth Consciousness concert in Kingston last Christmas led Bunny to launch a major new offensive. *Roots Radics Rockers Reggae*, his fine Shanachie LP, is his first Stateside release in years, and the reconstituted Wailers promise to give voice to that "celestial choir" that Tosh says reggae really is.

"My specific message," says Bunny, "is one big, small, humble word: Unity."

If this promise of unity begins in the heart, then it will surely find its way into the music; but reggae will have to rise above its current infighting in order to manage even a fresh glimpse at it. The jealousies, the greedy squabbles, the corruption, the arrogance of all the self-appointed royalty grappling for control of reggae's supposed lifeline, can only lead the music towards the sad legacy of a permanently severed connection.

In the beginning, reggae's chief exponents saw their work along deeply personal lines, longing to express themselves in the world music community. Bob Marley galvanized reggae by giving it a conscience. Soon afterwards, the money began to pour in. Bob was self-absorbed enough (in a positive sense) to continue on his creative path, but for many others in his poverty-stricken homeland, reggae was increasingly viewed as Jacob's Ladder, a quick route out of hell. The often hasty end product has not justified the means. To strive to escape the ghetto is admirable, but to struggle to rise above it requires true strength of vision.

Maybe this time around, reggae people can follow Bob Marley's example and pour their energies back into their work, enjoying the process, feeling a humble pride in the potential gravity of such self-expression, and believing that those who keep faith with themselves will reap the greatest rewards. As Bob Marley said, "When one door is closed, another is opened." That door is within. ☐

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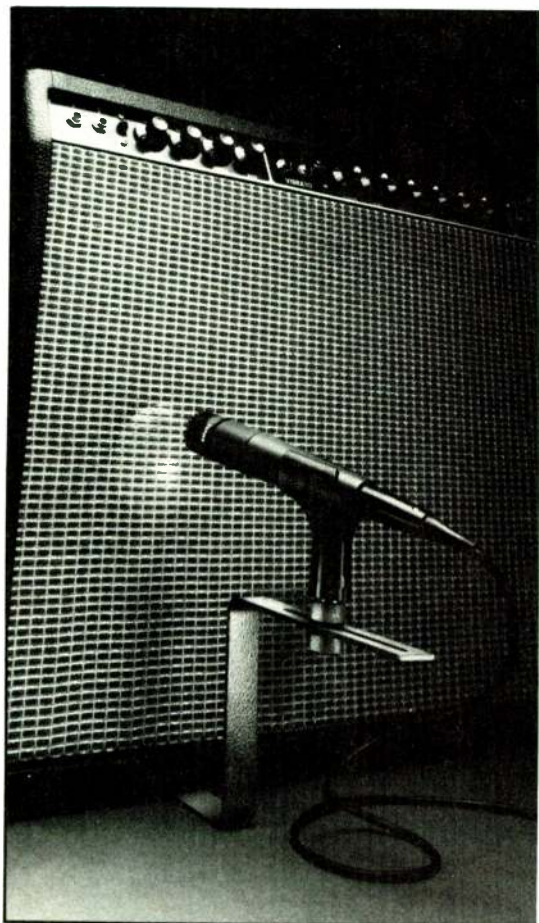
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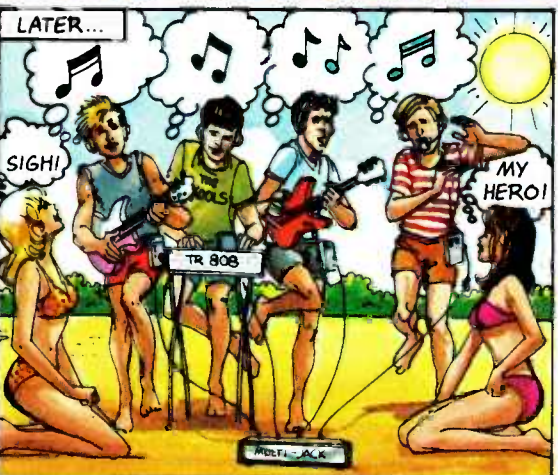
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# MUSICIAN

WORKING

## 78 ALLAN HOLDSWORTH

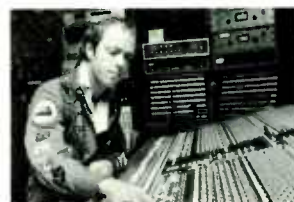
A guitar giant who fled techno-trendy persecution in his native U.K. comes to America and finds a new lease on life—and new problems.



P R O D U C I N G

## 82 RON SAINT GERMAIN, ENGINEER-PRODUCER

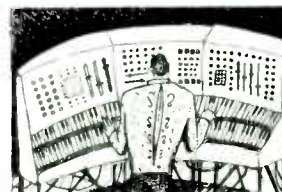
A talented jack-of-all-musical-trades finds a place behind the board producing everyone from Ron Shannon Jackson to Hendrix to the Olympics.



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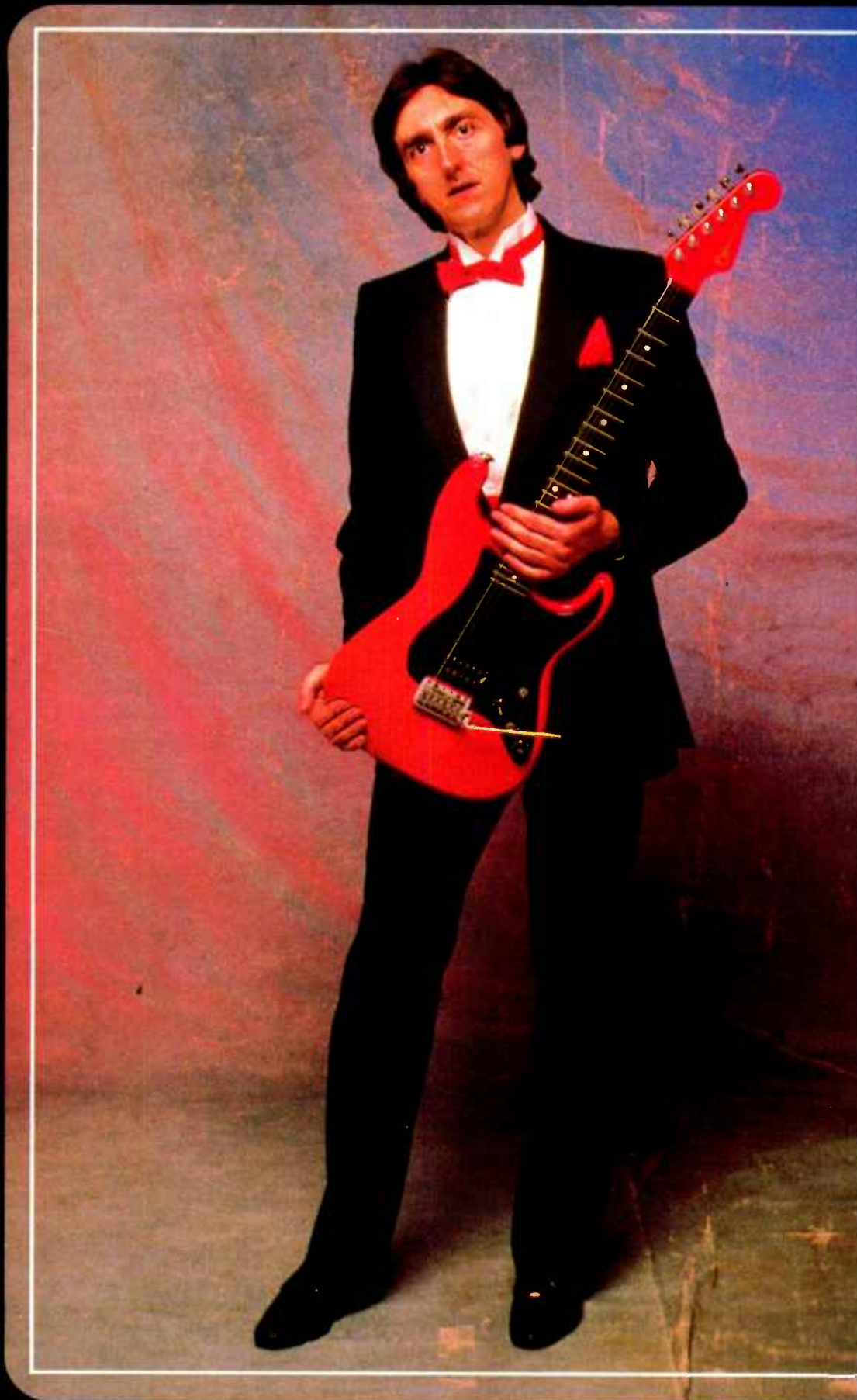


P E R C U S S I O N

## 86 ANTON FIER'S PERVERSE DIVERSITY

New music drumming for all seasons and styles, from a Feelies, Palominos, Lounge Lizards vet who's now taken to a bit of high-tech production.





Photograph By Glen LaFerman

# ALLAN HOLDSWORTH

The Innocent Abroad

by Jock Baird

**“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched guitar refugees from your teeming, techno-trendy shore; send these, the homeless haircutless, tempest-toss’t to me.”**

Thus did America beckon to one Allan Holdsworth, legendary electro-jazz guitar stylist who, by 1980, was unable to find gainful employment in his U.K. homeland, either as a guitarist or leader/composer of his own appropriately named trio, I.O.U. Holdsworth was even preparing to hang up his guitar strap forever: “I was broke, couldn’t make any living at all in music. I would’ve had to retire; in fact, I was just about to take a job in a music store. I had accumulated a lot of equipment over the years, and I basically paid the rent by selling a few things each month. Eventually, when we came to mix the I.O.U. album, I sold the last guitar I had. Then I came over to America on vacation and met someone who said she could get us gigs, so we all came over.”

Ellis Island for these gifted immigrants consisted of the Orange County living room of veteran British vocalist and I.O.U. member Paul Williams (no, not the short, geeky guy from *Hollywood Squares*), who had moved to California some time before (and whose home still serves as a drop zone for migrant British fusioners). “We were more or less all staying at his house, which probably drove him crazy. Then we did really well at the gigs. I was amazed how many people came out to see us—I didn’t know that many people knew we existed.”

Indeed, fans of Holdsworth’s dazzling playing with Tempest, Gong, Jean-Luc Ponty, Tony Williams, Bill Bruford, and, more famously if less artistically, Soft Machine and U.K., came out of the woodwork in droves and packed the small houses. Then came gigs in L.A. and suddenly Holdsworth was, if not red-hot, at least looking at a modest but nonetheless welcome positive cash flow. Even America’s reigning Emperor of Guitar, Eddie Van Halen himself, came to pay homage, telling the world Holdsworth was in fact the rightful owner of the scepter of speed. Eddie’s label, Warners, took him at his word and inked the artful refugee.

But the vagaries of language and comprehension afflict even modern-day immigrants to America, and the next eighteen months would propel Allan Holdsworth into some of the most imaginative and horrific musical misunderstandings that inhabit this wonderful, wacky record business. How could such

a talented and unassuming guy get into so much trouble? Well, the whole problem was that people saw in Allan exactly what they wanted to see and not what Allan really was. And that problem had been happening to Allan for most of his career.

Born thirty-five years ago, Allan Holdsworth was raised in the grim Northern mill town of Bradford, Yorkshire. Although he didn't pick up guitar until age seventeen, he quickly made up for lost time due to a distinguished tutor: Allan's musical tastes and later his knowledge of theory came entirely from his father, Sam Holdsworth (no relation whatsoever to the editor of this journal). The elder Holdsworth had been a professional piano player who made the ultimate sacrifice: "He was really a monster musician. He retired and went to work in a factory because he couldn't stand playing all the tunes that people wanted him to play. He made a conscious decision to only play music on his own at home, for his own pleasure. So he really put all his energy on me."

The result of Sam Holdsworth's tutelage was twofold: young Allan developed an ear for good jazz, a taste that now firmly underpins all his playing and composing; secondly, and more importantly, Holdsworth's music has a striking individuality and originality, a whole separate channel of the rock guitar river.

For all his jazz influences, Holdsworth began by playing rock 'n' roll—and God knows what else: "I first played out in local bands, doing pop music, top twenty tunes. I listened to jazz, but I couldn't play it. After a few years of that, I met Glenn South, who had a band that worked a chain of ballrooms...top forty, foxtrots, quicksteps." Despite these humble beginnings, Allan evolved quickly; legend has it that several London musicians were knocked out by a demo tape Allan had done and went to Bradford to recruit him only to discover Holdsworth working in a shoe factory. Fortunately, Allan was persuaded not to follow in his father's footsteps (at least so soon), and the short-lived but impressive Tempest was born. Soon, Holdsworth's reputation as one of the most impressive wielders of altered state electro-flash brought him into the circle of musicians that were embarking on the first fresh drafts of what would become known (and later reviled) as fusion. A valuable currency of the era was speed, and Holdsworth's ability to incorporate dissonant modes and scales into flat-out rock scronch made even his earliest recorded solos truly arresting. His enormous hands gave him a unique ability to, as he told *Guitar Player's* Tom Mulhern, "juggle the scales around. Most of the time, guitarists play the notes in a scale consecutively. I avoid that by playing



Allan fingers unusual chord voicing.

intervals that are farther apart. They're the same scales and chords, it's just that I wanted them to be juggled around more."

Unlike most speedsters who give the genre a bad name, though, Holdsworth instinctively understands the tension-release principles of soloing and possesses a strong command of melody. As Bill Bruford notes, "When I hear Allan play, I'm just left with a very warm feeling. The passionate, lyrical side of him is the stuff that particularly got to me, and I used to love trying to write slow, long melodies, which he would then embroider like crazy. I love his choice of notes. I mean, apparently he plays fast, but I don't notice that. There are terrific melodies. Things happen a little quicker in his music than other people's, which is all to my taste." Holdsworth confirms the suspicion that speed is not his real intent: "After a while, technical things are just technical things. I don't want to be involved with flash; I just want to be involved with music."

Holdsworth balanced his meat 'n' potatoes "progressive rock" bands like Gong, Soft Machine (*Bundles*-era) and Tempest (which included Paul Williams) with less commercially feasible projects like Jean-Luc Ponty's *Enigmatic Ocean*, a duet LP with Gordon Beck (*The Things You See*) and most notably, a two-LP stint with the Tony Williams Lifetime. Bill Bruford waxes, "Somehow the two of them had a spirit which just combined really well. And it is a difficulty getting Allan in a setting that he is happy with and that everybody else around him is happy with." Allan remains happier with the first of his two Lifetime LPs, *Believe It*, which was freer and less genre-fied than the subsequent *Million Dollar Legs*.

A better clue to Holdsworth's ultimate intentions came when George Benson

Allan gives finger to usual starmaker hype.



and Joe Farrell became goggle-eyed by him at a Manhattan club and dragged CTI president Creed Taylor down to hear. The resulting 1975 LP, *Velvet Darkness*, felicitously matched Allan with the tasteful but enervated Alphonso Johnson and Narada Michael Walden; though all too short, it is one of Holdsworth's best early dates, ablaze with Hendrixian fission, virtuoso precision and genuine emotion.

Having worked with the likes of Tony Williams, Jon Hiseman (in Tempest) and Narada, it seemed only logical that Holdsworth would fall in with another great drummer; he joined Bill Bruford to make Bruford's solo classic, *One Of A Kind*. The two enjoyed working together so much, Bill brought him along to help found art-rock power players U.K., something which Bruford now has second thoughts about: "It's obvious that U.K. was split into the pop half—with John Wetton and Eddie Jobson the potential Asia-type superstars—and Allan and I on the other side. I had hoped Allan would reinforce my side of the discussions, counterbalance the rock aspects of the thing. But it was a painful counterbalancing, it wasn't understood, and I kind of put Allan on the spot."

To Holdsworth, the dearth of improvisatory opportunity and compositional input (other than the song "Nevermore") left a permanent bad taste in his mouth for rock stardom: "U.K. was a pain. All I ever had to do was just solo, just waffle really, and it was a nightmare. I was just bored. I had no contribution. It was like playing with a tape; there was no spontaneity, no one would hear anything. I was the wrong guy for the band. So that's why Bill and I were fired simultaneously. We both agreed to differ. So Bill got his old band together and we agreed to do that."

Despite his affection for Bruford and his composition-based project however, Allan decided it was time for a change: "I basically got fed up with playing in other people's bands. All my life I've worked as the guitar player in someone else's band. There just came a point when I decided to bail out and do my own thing."

In search of a rhythm section to call his own, Holdsworth "met this really amazing drummer, Gary Husband, and I more or less saw it as a musical partnership with him. We tried to find a bass player—with great difficulty—and eventually found Paul Carmichael. We tried to get someone interested in the band, but we couldn't, so we borrowed the money and made the album on our own and tried to sell it. We couldn't even give it away." It was around this time that the redoubtable Paul Williams re-entered our story. Williams' long career as a rock singer/bassist included four

*continued on page 98*



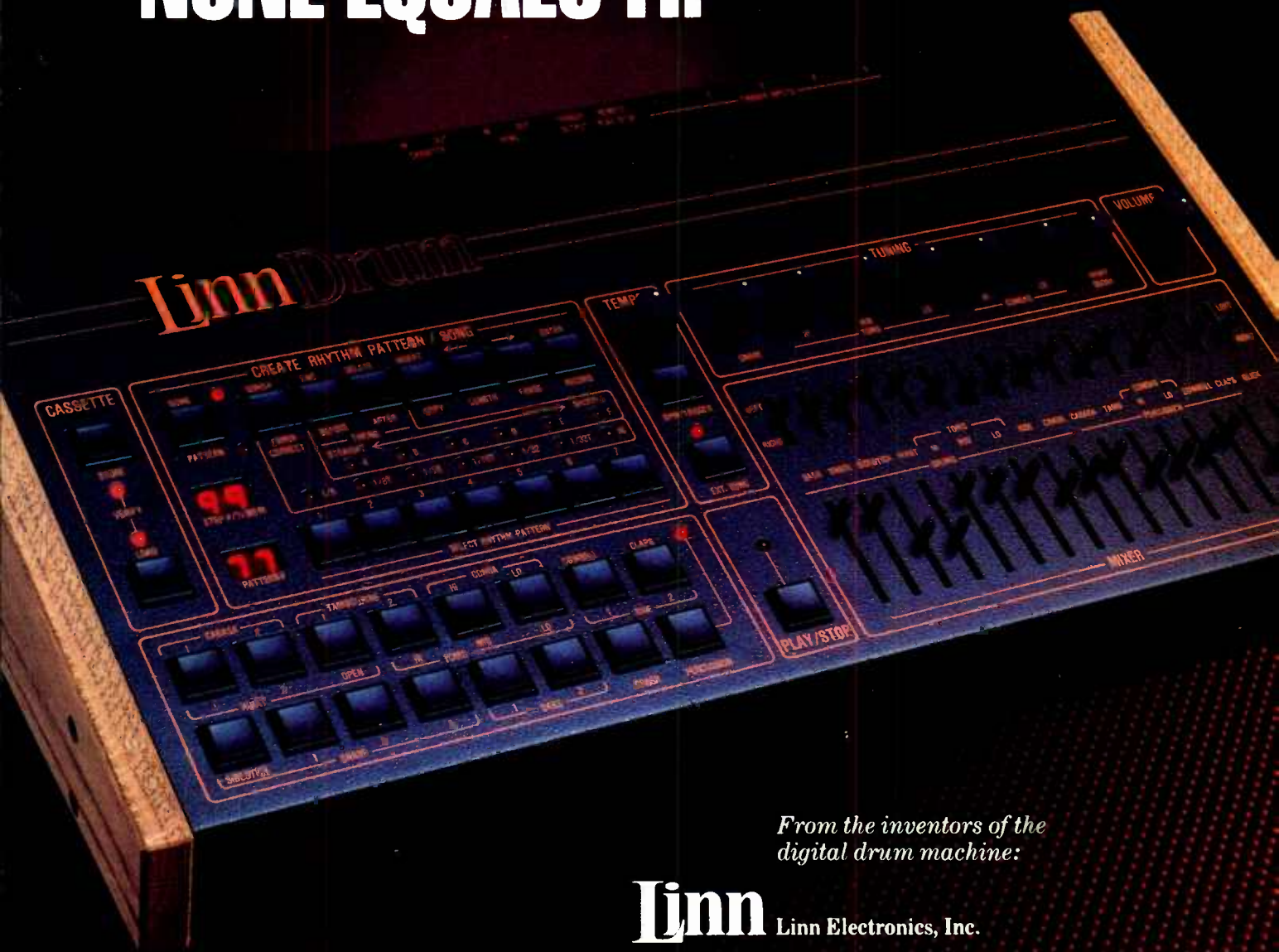
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## RON SAINT GERMAIN, ENGINEER-PRODUCER

### Up Through the Ranks, Across-the-Board Eclecticism

By Freff

There are as many different types of Producer as there are people claiming the title. These days most of them are hyphenated. There's the Artist-Producer, the Arranger-Producer, the Songwriter-Producer, the Producer-Manager and the Engineer-Producer. Now, coming up strong through the grey zone between Engineer and Engineer-Producer, there's Ron Saint Germain: a man with what is quite possibly the most eclectic

set of credits in the entire history of recording.

Exaggeration? Check it out for yourself. Ron has produced, co-produced, engineered, skydived, piloted, played guitar, acted on Broadway and in films (not to mention a soap opera), made guitars, waited tables, and handled the faders for such diverse artists and acts as Ronald Reagan, Ornette Coleman, Jimi Hendrix, A Flock Of Seagulls, the Lake Placid Winter Olympics, McCoy Tyner, Ronald Shannon Jackson, Warren Zevon and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir (though not all at the same time). Then there were the folk bands, the country bands, the Trinidadian Soka records, the five hundred-piece orchestras...

It's a rather varied track record, but to Ron variety comes naturally. He was born in Germany and grew up all over the world, going wherever the Air Force sent his father. A life like that teaches you to be a chameleon; to fit in anywhere, to get along with anybody, and still manage to enjoy yourself (three traits that have proven invaluable in Ron's studio career). It also taught him to value what was always there, no matter where "there" was—popular music.

"I knew I'd be working with music. I mean, I found Elvis Presley all over the world. Music was my unifying force, the thing that helped to stabilize me."

For college Ron decided it was time to try something a bit different, like staying in one place for four years. But after exhausting everything the theater department had to offer, and with the winds of social protest blowing across the land, he grabbed a guitar and hitchhiked north from Virginia to New York City, to see if he could find a place in the Broadway company of *Hair*. He spent a year on the Great White Way as Woof, then did a series of small films and television roles. But he wasn't satisfied. "The more I acted professionally the more I found that it wasn't to my liking. Sometimes you get what you want and you realize it isn't what you wanted, after all."

The next fateful step of the story came when Ron returned to New York to make a demo tape with his band Mercy Flight, at a studio called Select Sound. This was it, the real thing—gold records on the wall, a big recording console that reminded him of nothing so much as the cockpit of an F-16...and brother, did he want to fly it.

"Looking back now, based on my own experience, I know what was happening. The engineer we had was actually an assistant engineer, making the transition to engineer. You know, the boss said, 'Go ahead, bring this band in, make your mistakes with them, have a nice time.' It just wasn't happening. So I kind of started to produce the session, without really knowing what a producer was. By the end I was even doing some of the engineering."

Ron's been at it ever since, and it's been seven full years. His engineering credits range from handling the sound at the Olympics and the Reagan Inaugural, to mixing the posthumous Jimi Hendrix discs *Crash Landing*, *Nine To The Universe*, and *Midnight Lightning* for producers Alan Douglas and Tony Bongiovi. Bongiovi also supervised matters in the studio.

Those Hendrix recordings have been the center of a storm of controversy, not

*continued on page 92*

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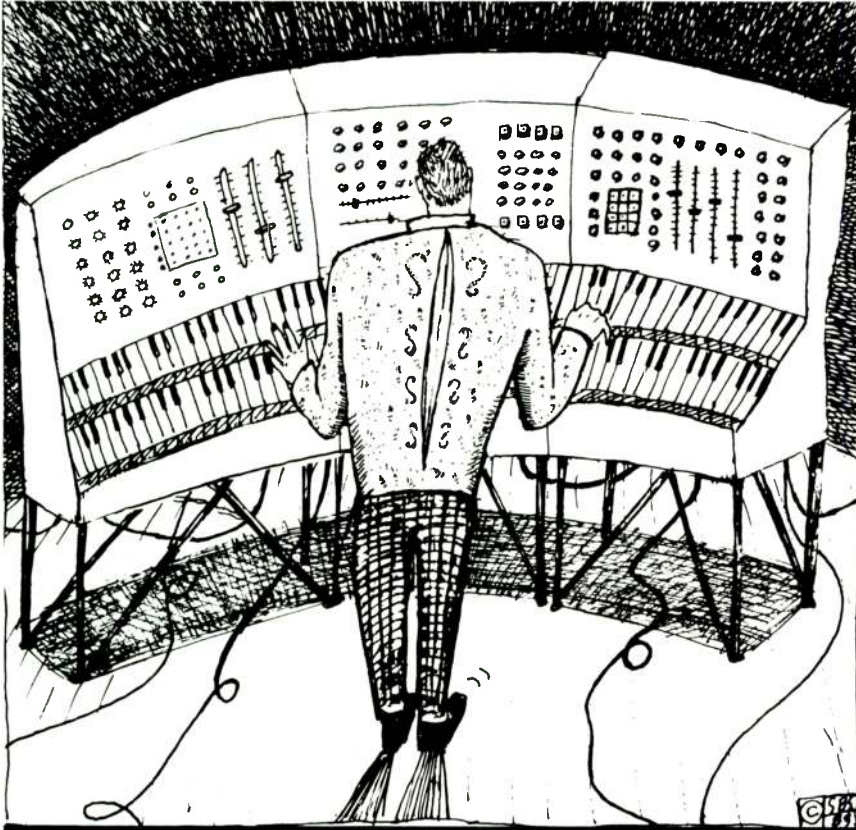
A stylized, handwritten signature of Phil Ramone in black ink.

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SUSAN B. SOUTHWORTH



Following a step behind the digital synth revolution can still yield big bargains.

# GREAT POLYSYNTHS FOR UNDER \$2,000

## Making Trickle-Down Economics Work for You

By J.D. Considine

Right now, there's a Prophet 600 sitting on my desk, exactly where my typewriter usually rests. This makes typing a mite difficult, but playing the synth a lot easier, as before this, the Prophet had been perched atop my four-drawer filing cabinet—an arrangement that made me feel like a three-year-old without a piano stool.

The reason the Prophet 600 is on my desk is that I'm trying to learn as much as I can about budget polysynths—budget meaning anything listing for less than \$2,000. So far, one of the big things I've learned is that if you're buying a synthesizer, it pays to spring for a stand as well. A minor point, perhaps, but you'd

be surprised how important some of these minor points can be when choosing between one synthesizer and another.

Choice, after all, is the name of the game right now. As little as three years ago, polysynthesis (the ability to synthesize several voices at once, allowing the instrument to play chords instead of just a single-note lead) was unattainable for less than five grand. Then, slowly, cheaper machines began to appear, and then a few more, and later still more, until the field reached its current felicitous state of clutter. In addition to the Prophet 600, there are three Roland synths: the Juno 6, the Juno 60 and the JX-3P; three Korgs: the MonoPoly, the PolySix and the Poly-61; two Yamaha digital synths: the DX9 and DX7; the Moog Opus 3; and, on the horizon, the Chroma Polaris, coming soon to a store near you. Even the folks at Casio, who made the world safe for cheap synths, have been entering the professional sphere with the CT-

7000 (at a grand) and an elaborate modular setup called the System 8000, one keyboard of which, the CT-8000, goes for around \$700.

But choice is also part of the problem—which of these wonderful machines is right for you? Or me, even? After all, synthesizers are no longer solely the domain of the keyboard professional; songwriters hoping to move into the synthpop sound are finding them essential for demos; guitarists and horn players see them as potentially profitable second instruments; and a whole lot of people in need of a keyboard instrument have begun to realize that an inexpensive polysynth is more versatile and cost-efficient than any piano or organ. Understandably, what a working keyboardist might consider to be the bare essentials might well be far more than what's needed for the fellow at home with his Portastudio.

Then there's the matter of price. Although \$2,000 makes an effective price ceiling for separating the affordables from the big boys, the amount of headroom offered by the various machines on the market now varies from a few dollars to a few hundred. Once you consider dealer discounts, that means that some of these polysynths can go home with you for as little as \$700. So part of the question becomes how much you're willing to pay for the difference between the basic instrument and the flashier models.

### The Basics

It's very easy to be put off by the look of synthesizers. I'm not talking about design (though the aesthetes among you may consider the excessive use of molded plastic on these things quite tacky) so much as the impenetrably technical appearance the instruments affect. It's all very well to go into your local music store with the attitude that a polysynth is nothing more than a Casio-tone with better genes, but the novice's confidence generally melts as soon as she or he is faced with rows of knobs and switches, columns of LCD displays and what appear to be renegade joystick sticks from the local video arcade. Squinting confusedly at the tiny hieroglyphics allegedly indicating what these appendages do, it's not unusual to hear a tiny voice deep within exclaim, "Jeepers, Mr. Wizard! How does this thing work?"

Don't worry—knowing the difference between a DCO, VCF and LFO is not essential to buying a synthesizer. There will not be a quiz at the cash register. Everything you'll need to know about the

*continued on page 92*

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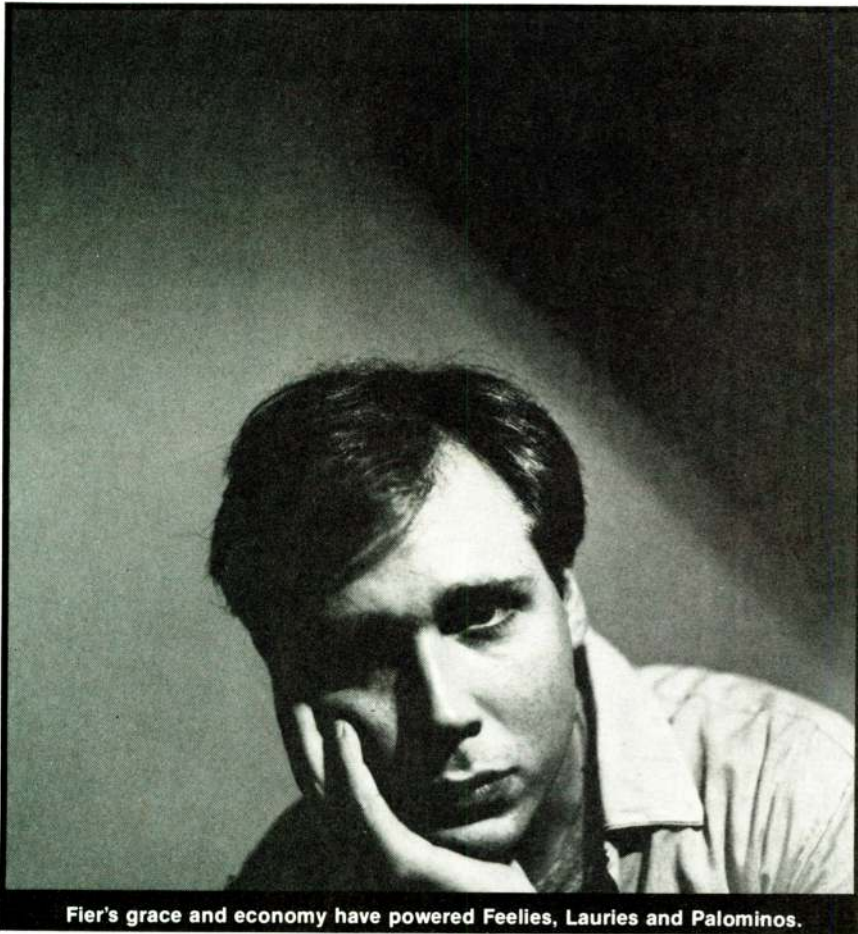
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Fier's grace and economy have powered Feelies, Lauries and Palominos.

## ANTON FIER'S PERVERSE DIVERSITY

### New Music Drums to Raise Eyebrows and Move Hearts

By Glenn Kenny

Imagine you're taking a 'new music' blindfold test, and that today we're talking drums. On our first selection, "Confuse Did," by David Thomas & the Pedestrians, a variety of percussive instruments creates a waltz-like feel, as the snare reinforces Thomas' distinct vocal phrasing—until the guitar solo, when the drum kit kicks in behind guitarist Richard Thompson's wild slide ride.

Next, follow the Feelies' "Raised Eyebrows." Here scattershot toms create a nearly palpable tension through three verses, released only at song's climax by a series of ferocious rolls and

crashes.

Now contrast that with the straight-ahead, albeit thunderous beat on the Golden Palomino's "ID." And finally, follow the drum kit as it navigates the currents of Daniel Ponce's Cuban percussion and Adrian Belew's treble-happy guitar squeals on "Sharkey's Day," a track from Laurie Anderson's new LP.

Having heard these four pieces, you might say the new music genre has produced some very inventive drummers. You'd be right, but you'd also be wrong. All those tracks feature Anton Fier, a Cleveland native who has been living and working in New York for the past five years.

To call Fier eclectic is not to claim he becomes a different person with each new gig. Certain attributes remain constant: his snare sound, among the strongest and most individual in rock (and one he claims not to have noticed);

a sense of propulsion and momentum, no matter how intricate the rhythm; and a lively taste for the unpredictable. Most important is his economy and grace. At his best, Fier never makes you say, "Wow, what technique!" so much as he actually moves you—he makes sense musically *and* emotionally. Fier terms his own style a combination of "instinct, knowledge and curiosity."

Although most of Fier's recorded work has been within rock's avant garde, he aggressively objects to being pigeonholed, and remains refreshingly free of musical snobbery. "If you looked at my records you'd see a lot of stuff that people consider schlock; but music has different functions, and it depends on what you want out of it. It's all valid. Who's to say what the proper function of music is? Then you get into fascism."

Fier's approach remains rooted to the basic tenet of drumming: "It's all about hitting. I hit things. I rarely analyze things technically before I play. Only when I'm having trouble feeling it do I analyze it." The quality of his drums on the Feelies' "Raised Eyebrows," he says, "came about from looking at the drum part as a guitar or vocal line. What I'm playing on the toms is almost a melodic line, while the guitar holds down the rhythm." Improvised in the studio, it was just what writers Glenn Mercer and Bill Million wanted, so Fier had to transcribe the improvisation in order to learn it for live shows. Fier left the Feelies in 1980 but has recently rejoined, citing the "incredible physicality" of the band: "I'm playing so fast and so intensely, it's as if I could just die right on the stage."

Following his first tour of duty with the Feelies and the Lounge Lizards (a band he helped form in 1980 and which continues today without him) Fier was asked in '81 to play on ex-Pere Ubu vocalist David Thomas' first album, *Sound Of The Sand*. This seemingly disparate group of musicians (including ex-Fairport Convention guitarist Thompson and ex-Boney M trumpet player Ernie Thornton) established an immediate rapport and produced music of consistently brilliant invention. Fier points to his composition "Confuse Did" with pride; its tight structure and careful layering of instruments are obvious antecedents of the ideas and methods Fier would later expand on with the Golden Palominos' LP. "It was all written out rhythmically. The first tracks I laid down were slit drum and castanets. On the slit drum I play sixteenth-note triplets with a 4/4 feel, while the castanets are superimposed over that with a 3/4 feel." This line is maintained through almost the entire

*continued on page 96*



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# EXPONENTIAL EXPOSÉ: HERE COMES MIDI



Roland MPU-401 MIDI interface unit.

to eight (though synths with split keyboard capabilities can act as two keyboards).

The bulk of the demonstration was provided by Canadian musician/composer Ralph Dyck using the IBM. Sitting at the HP-400 piano, Dyck first programmed a little drum part into the IBM from the TR-909. (That's right. The way MIDI works through the MPU-401, one can use a single keyboard to program all the instruments in the system.) He then played a little part, again on the HP-400, this time assigning playback to the Jupiter 6. The process was repeated, each time using the piano to program the lines and melodies, until the composition was complete, and the computer played back the various parts on all four instruments simultaneously. Tempo can be varied to any speed, without change of pitch. Music can be transposed as desired. To be included in the software will be programs for varying degrees of timing error correction, provisions for editing phrases and storage and playback of dynamics, involving not only the change of volume but of attack as well.

The hardware used in the Roland demonstration was not cheap, somewhere between \$8,000-\$10,000, but the nice thing is that it is modular: you can buy one unit at a time and add to it as necessary. What do you need for the basic system? A computer with one disc drive and a monitor (about \$1,500 for the Apple; another \$1,000 on top of that for the greater flexibility and power that IBM allows). The MPU-401 will retail for about \$175. You will need one for every four instruments in the system. Roland will, in addition, soon introduce boxes that will allow you to convert non-MIDI instruments such as the Juno 60 and the Jupiter 8 to MIDI. The DIN sync on your Drumatix will interface with MIDI and in the wings is a MIDI guitar synthesizer, allowing guitar players to join in on the fun.

In a dramatic departure from industry practice, Roland has discarded proprietary privileges and has made the MPU-401 circuitry available to all interested software writers. It is their view that some of the great creative innovations to come in the MIDI field may well come out of garages, and it's hard to disagree. The coming months will give those garages powers they never dreamed of.

## A Sneak Preview of Digital's Next Quantum Leap

By Bob Minshall

For some time now you've been hearing about MIDI, or Musical Instrument Digital Interface, the hot-line to the microprocessor that runs your synth. Sure you know that hooking it up through the MIDI to a personal computer enables you to alter the presets and exponentially expand the keyboard's capabilities. But just how exponentially is soon to be revealed, for early 1984 promises a significant number of major manufacturers introducing interfacing devices and software for linking up groups of keyboards to one central computer, making preprogrammed electronic symphonies an everyday occurrence. The Roland Corporation made the first public demonstration of a MIDI hookup on November 18, 1983, and it was an impressive one indeed. Two computers were used: the Apple IIe and the IBM personal computer. (Software will also be available for Sharp and NEC computers.) Hooked up to each computer through the new MPU-401 interfacing unit was a JX-3P, a Jupiter 6, an impressive MIDI-equipped piano called the HP-400, and the soon-to-be-introduced Roland digital drum machine, the TR-909.

Through the MPU-401 and combined with the MIDI software, the computer can store eight discreet tracks of music control information. One can only play back as many tracks as there are MIDI instruments available in the system, up

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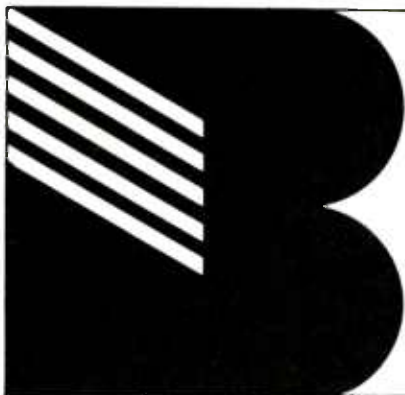
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The Ex Factor 4 extended bass from **Philip Kubicki Guitar Technology** is carved to interface comfortably with the player's body and secure an accurate balance for precise left and right-hand positioning. The glued-in fretted or fretless rock maple neck has an ebony fingerboard with abalone inlays, two adjustable truss rods and a double 32-inch and 36-inch scale. By depressing a button behind the low E fret, the bass string is released from its open E note to extend to the lower Eb and open D notes. The G string can be fretted to a high F. Regular long scale strings can be used.

The lightweight alder body features two custom humbucking pickups with full coil splitting and integration capabilities which are controlled by two mini switches and dual concentric tone and volume pots. Philip Kubicki Guitar Technology, Box 40110, Santa Barbara, CA 93103. (805) 963-6703.

The V220 Tremolo by **Carvin** offers a radical shape, and the Kahler locking tremolo system, fast becoming known as one of the best tremolos made, will give you the "Dive Bombing" effect without going out of tune. The V220 comes with one standard M22 pickup in the neck position and a M22SD at the bridge, giving maximum power and sustain for lead playing. Dual-to-single-coil switching is also used to get the thin or fat sound. A brass nut is standard and the tuning keys are Schaller M6 Minis. The V220 is available in five durable polyurethane colors and is priced at \$549.00 with the Kahler tremolo or \$399.00 with a standard bridge. Carvin, 1155 Industrial Avenue, Escondido, CA 92025. (800) 854-2235, California (800) 542-6070.



**DOD Electronics** is now shipping its new R-908 Digital Delay, a full function, PCM digital signal processor with up to 900 milliseconds of delay. The R-908 features a selector switch panel for fast and easy settings including flanging, chorusing, doubling and echo. Great attention has been given to the design, so that it will work equally well in the studio, onstage or in the rehearsal hall. The sweep width of the R-908 is 10 to 1, making it ideal for all flanging and chorusing effects. Also, the sweep and filter circuits are engineered so there is no "dropping out." Suggested retail price is \$399.95. DOD, 2953 S. 300 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84115. (801) 485-8534.

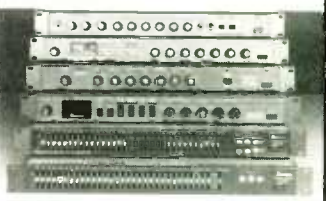


**Crown's** new Delta Omega 2000 power amp now includes electronic circuitry that significantly reduces distortion problems caused by the interaction between power amp and speaker voice coil. The Omega circuit allows the amplifier itself to evaluate the effects that speaker cables, crossover network and speaker coils have on your sound. This is an amp that demands accurate speaker performance and can deliver flawless amplification on even the most difficult music signals. Crown, 1718 W. Mishawaka Road, Elkhart, IN 46517, (212) 294-5571.

**Oberheim Electronics** has introduced optional drum sounds and retrofitable new features with expanded memory for the DMX Programmable Digital Drum Machine. The DMX has been expanded with new software and more than double the memory capacity. The new software allows for over 45 new features, including: 5,000+ event internal programming capacity, 200 sequence patterns, 100 songs, programmable tempo displayed in frames per beat, song and sequence length displayable in minutes and seconds, and selective cassette interface for loading single sequences or songs from tape. The retail price of the DMX remains at \$2,895. Current DMX owners should contact their nearest Oberheim Service Center for the new DMX memory expansion update. The charge for the update is \$150, including installation. Oberheim, 2250 S. Barrington Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90064 (212) 473-6574.



**Ibanez Electronics** has entered the professional audio market with its innovative line of single rack space signal processors. The HD1000 Harmonics/Delay along with the DM500, DM1000 and the DM2000 digital delay lines have broken new ground in price-performance processing as have the two new single rack space graphic equalizers, introduced at this year's AES show. Hoshino (U.S.A.) Inc., 1716 Winchester Road, Bensalem, PA 19020. (215) 638-8670. Chesbro Music Co., 17421B E. Gale Road, City of Industry, CA 91748. (213) 964-1153.



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## St. Germain from page 82

surprising, since the original backing tracks were all scrubbed and replaced with new work by Los Angeles session players. But according to Ron, there's more to the story than that. "A lot of the music was eighteen- or twenty-minute jams, inside of which was some extraordinary playing by Jimi. You could see him developing his ideas...he'd set up a rhythm pattern and wait until the drummer and bassist picked up on it and then once he had them going, he'd start playing lead lines against them. And then he'd play what was clearly intended to be a harmony to his own lead, the kind of thing he'd have gone back and overdubbed later if this had been a straight studio recording...and it just went on like that; you could see the logic of his ideas in the music. But a lot of it was fat. To get the cream together, to make it flow, we had to edit it down to preliminary rough mixes and work from there. By the time that was completed, the original bass and drum tracks—done by folks who were struggling to keep up with Jimi in the first place—made no sense at all. So they had to be redone. But still, by keeping Jimi out in the forefront and making everything and everybody else work to him, we stayed with what was important about it. I only wish we'd had the computer stuff then that we have now...."

Jimi Hendrix—and Ornette Coleman as well—are two musicians whose music I've worked with that I could never disguise, no matter what I did to them. They have a certain sound with their instruments; and it comes through anything, even bad engineering. Those Hendrix tapes...any song you pick, it was like a textbook example of how *not* to record. There were limiter level and eq changes going straight to the tape, and the pops of things being plugged in and out, people moving microphones... and all this while tape was rolling! You know, Jimi left over nine hundred hours of music as a legacy. He'd just go into the studio, turn on the recorders and start playing. I'm sure it freaked out the engineers, trying to keep up, but that sort of thing has got to be approached like it was a live date. That's what I tried to do."

This kind of engineering dedication and skill is quite remarkable, and highly valued by the musicians Ron works with. I watched him do a damned near impossible edit on Ornette Coleman's *Skies of America*, in which he seamlessly raised an entire symphony orchestra a half-note in pitch at Ornette's request (thus fixing a massive error on the part of the symphony's original conductor). And then there's the simple and eloquent testimonial of Ronald Shannon Jackson, who considers Ron the only person who has ever captured his drum sound.

"Well, of course that's done with the

normal close miking of all the drums and cymbals," explains Ron. "But what's special, what's really critical in getting that sound is the placement of the ambient mikes. A lot of young engineers think they can put a mike on everything and balance it out later, one track for every drum. But they never learn to balance things out right in the first place, as if they were doing a live gig. And as a consequence, they get all kinds of strange phasing problems and odd, unnatural balances. You have to *start* with the balanced sound, and then bring the close mikes into it."

Ron Saint Germain is still looking to make the full transition from Engineer to Engineer-Producer. "Engineers have been pulling producers out of the hole for years," Ron points out, "and the record-buying public has no awareness of it. It's kind of like the situation with cinematographers and film editors, who are sometimes a lot more responsible for how a movie comes out than the director is."

And then, of course, there's the Catch-22 of demos. Lots of engineers try to make the transition to producer by finding and grooming bands, and making demos of a quality high enough to interest a record label. But once the deal is signed, the record label decides that the engineer isn't a big enough name, no matter how good the tapes sound, and go with someone else. It's a frustrating process, and has happened to Ron more than once. He's optimistic, though.

"This is the time, I think, for the Engineer-Producer. With the incredible explosion of synthpop and studio wizardry, it's perfect for people who can walk both roads—who can hear tracks from a recording standpoint *and* from a musical standpoint. The studio is a tool. I'm past being enthralled with all the goodies and the toys, so I can bring an efficiency to production that somebody else might not be able to. I remember one producer I engineered for who couldn't make up his mind about how a certain snare drum should sound. We spent a week on that. It was a classic example of not being able to see the forest for the trees...that snare drum cost \$80,000, and in the end it wasn't any better than it was in the first three minutes."

Ron still smiles somewhat wryly over the day he had to spend nine hours on two drum overdubs—bass and snare—just to get the drummer to play in time with the drum machine that had already been recorded. Ironically enough, this lack of musicianship did not prevent the tune from becoming a top ten single; but it *did* underscore one of Ron's most strongly-held beliefs about producing.

"You have to bring economy to production: economy of movement, of time in the studio, of the money. This is some-

thing I've developed working with so many jazzers. I really like the less-is-more approach.

"The thing about producing that's really important to me, is expanding contact with a group beyond the recording phase, getting involved in the pre- and post-production. Choosing the material is absolutely critical. If you don't have the song and you don't have the arrangement, what have you got? A record. But not *the* record." ■

Part and parcel of working in so many different studios, with so many different kinds of music, is learning to make the best of what's available. But that doesn't stop a fellow from having preferences.

Mixing boards? Ron puts Solid State Logic's 6000 and 4000 series at the top of his list. "They're the space shuttles of mixing boards. Just give me any SSL with total recall and the latest mixing software. (Not surprisingly, three of Ron's favorite studios are SSL rooms—Studio C at the Power Station, Soundworks, and Right Track, all in New York City.) A lot of people argue about the sound of the equalizers, but I have no problem with them at all. And I can always patch in more eq when I need it. There's such an array available, from Neve to Pultec, from Orban to API...I can get anything I can imagine with this setup."

He is also a great fan of Neve mixing consoles ("I like the way they sound.") and Studer tape recorders.

For mikes, anything available will do, but he favors keeping as much available as possible. AKG 414s, Neumann U-87s and various PZM mikes are all commonly used.

Other favorite gear includes a British product called Scamprack, with Autopan, which lets you automatically set the time it takes for something to pan from one speaker to another, the old Fairchild and Teletronics LA2A tube limiters (because of a special "warm" sound they bring to vocals and bass guitars); and a wide variety of delay and echo systems, including the AMS digital delay line and AMS digital reverb, the Lexicon 224X, the EMT 250 digital reverb, and the EMT stereo 140 plate reverb. "A good EMT stereo 140 is indispensable. And I also dearly love the reverb we get from the Power Station's ladies' room and stairwell."

## Polysynths from page 84

initials and mystery squiggles printed on the control panel will be in the owner's manual.

Instead, what you should pay attention to is the way the controls are laid out. As a rule of thumb, it's safe to assume that the more you have, the better off you are, because, as with amplifiers, every extra knob, switch or slider means that much more power you have to fine-tune the sound. (Be sure that you're looking at the whole thing when you check, by the way: the Roland JX-3P comes with an add-on programmer that may not be attached to the machine in

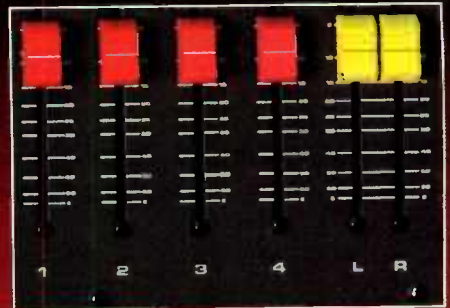
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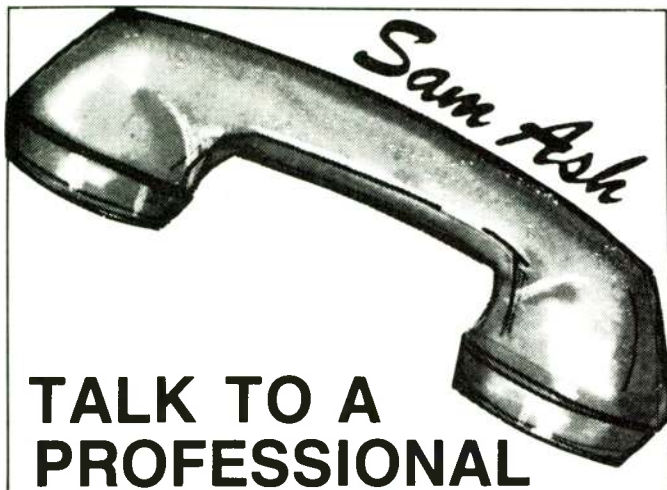
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your store.)

Also take note of how the machine you're looking at needs to be controlled. Although most synthesizers retain versions of the knob-and-switch setup dating back to the early days of Moog, there are exceptions. The Korg Poly-61 uses extensive LCD read-outs for its programming parameters; the Roland Juno 6 and 60 use mostly sliders as does the Moog Opus 3, while both the Chroma Polaris and the two Yamaha digital synths make heavy use of contact switches and slider combinations. What's the difference? Largely, it depends on what sort of jiggling makes you the most comfortable. A lot of players, particularly those who have been using synths for some time, claim that twisting the knobs "feels better," no doubt because it allows for a hefty dose of fiddling; other players opt for sliders.

That's jumping ahead of the game, though, as custom-programming, much less back-up systems for preserving those programs, isn't an immediate concern. What you'll want to do while standing in the store is hear how the machine sounds, and for this you go straight to the pre-sets. (Except, that is on the Roland Juno 6, the Korg MonoPoly and the Moog Opus 3—none of these machines have pre-sets, although the Opus 3 does have certain brass, organ and string voicings built in.)

Keep track of how many of the pre-sets actually strike you as usable. It's almost a given that you won't get one hundred percent utility from any machine (although the Roland JX-3P strikes me as practically perfect in this regard), but less than fifty percent is reason enough to look askance at a keyboard unless it has sounds you can't find elsewhere (for many, this is the great strength of the Yamaha DX7). The number of pre-sets is important too, because that will tell you how many different programs will be available without having to resort to some sort of back-up. The variance is pretty wide—the Chroma Polaris, when it hits the market, will be the league-leader, with 132, followed by the Prophet 600 with 100; the JX-3P and the Korg Poly-61 with 64 each; the Roland Juno 60 with 56; the Korg PolySix and the Yamaha DX7 with 32 (although the DX7 also has a 64-voice cartridge that can be annexed onto the memory, which is almost cheating); and the Yamaha DX9 with 20 brings up the rear.

(A brief footnote to the latter synths: Yamaha has recently cautioned buyers that DX7s and DX9s built to foreign market specs are being directly imported by American dealers trying to meet the big demand. Not only are these machines not covered by warranty and have no accessory package like their American cousins, but the voltage

Pearl's **Distortion, DS-06**, is the "nuclear warhead" of "Heavy Metal"! Our unique "Spectrum Control" creates those heavy-metallic sounds and provides better "explosion" you desire. Take a "ride" on today's "Heavy Metal" Pedal for only **\$99.50**.

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requirements of foreign-made DXs, even with converters, are unsuitable for use with U.S. 120 V.; they also have no U.L. listing or other safety testing approval. In short, they ain't the bargain they seem.)

### The Hard Stuff

Sound won't be your only consideration, though, since most polysynths have been outfitted with additional gizmos to make them more attractive to the average consumer (that's you, Bub). Depending upon the type of playing you plan on doing, some of these features may prove as important in deciding on a particular machine as sonic characteristics.

Most polysynths in this price range—all, in fact, except the Opus 3, the JX-3P and the two Yamahas—have arpeggiators, but so what? So do most Casios. The Prophet 600 has the only one to crow about, because it's assignable, meaning instead of going straight up, or up and down the chord you've given it, it will play the notes in the order you enter them. So if you've got a Cm7, you can hear Eb-G-C-Bb, or any other pattern you think up. A nice feature.

Of course, sequencers will do that too, and plenty more. The question is what kind of sequencer do you want? The Prophet 600 has a non-volatile (meaning you can turn the machine off, and the sequencer will still remember what you told it when you turn it back on) real-time sequencer capable of holding a total of 400 notes, spread between two memory banks. Because it's a real-time operation, it acts rather like a tape-recorder—you just play the segment on the keyboard and it goes straight into memory. Although that's as easy as it gets, those of us who could use a little work on our time may find the stored sequences embarrassing now and then. The sequencer's memory is merciless.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the JX-3P, which uses a step-sequencer requiring the user to feed in the melody first, and then the time value. (It's essentially the same process as on the Roland Drumatix or Bass-Line.) Although far more tedious, it manages to by-pass human frailties.

More powerful by far, if you can take advantage of it, is the MIDI, or Musical Instrument Digital Interface. This is essentially an electronic port that allows you to connect your synth to a personal computer.

The advantages to MIDI are tremendous: computers give you random access memory, which means instant call-up of stored material instead of the wait you get with cassettes; sequences can be laid to the point where you've essentially got multi-track recording; computers can process and print out scores; and so on. But there are limits to this genie. Aside from the fact that only

the JX-3P, the Prophet 600, the DX9 and DX7, and the Polaris have MIDI capability, there's the additional problem of dealing with software. Assuming it's available for your synthesizer, it may not quite do everything you want, and furthermore may be written for a specific computer (as the Prophet 600 MIDI software is for the Commodore computer) that's not the one you own.

Which no doubt has those of you who came into this article hoping for some straight talk about polysynths holding your heads and moaning softly to yourself. I don't blame you, but it's not going to get better. As the electronics industry makes inexorable progress, more and more is going to be available for less and less. A year ago the Prophet 600, with its built-in sequencers and one hundred program memory, was far and away the hottest synth on the market; now, the Polaris, which has a sequencer with six times the Prophet 600's memory and the ability to remember pitch-blend, modulation and velocity sensitivity instead of just the notes, is the frontrunner. And Polaris has the ability to split the keyboard at any point to provide two separate sounds, along with mind-numbing programming and editing features.

Nor is the Polaris the only polysynth about to enter the field. No sooner did I finish this article than news of new products began pouring into this office. Korg has upped the ante considerably with the Poly 800, which ought to be available within weeks of you reading this. It's an 8-voice polysynth with extensive sound layering ability, a 256-step sequencer, 64 presets and a size that would allow a player to strap the sucker on and join the guitarists at the edge of the stage. Seiko (that's right, the watch people) are bringing out a modular system that will combine Casio-style preset ease with four programmable synthesizer settings and an amazingly versatile sequencer capable of acting like a 5-track recorder, all with completely digital sound. Unfortunately, it's impossible to tell more about either as we go to press.

If you've got the bucks to keep up with the latest engineering, there's no telling what you'll be able to get for \$2,000 in the coming years. But there's an advantage for the rest of us too, since every time a synth player upgrades, another used synth comes onto the market. If you don't mind marching a step behind the vanguard, that's not a bad way to buy synthesizers.

Just be sure you go out and get a stand for the thing. ☐

### Fier from page 86

song; while on top Fier hammers piano strings, the bass follows his patterns and the snare drum accents the vocals. The guitar solo, meanwhile, was recorded with the standard bass and drum kit

rhythm section and later spliced into the song. The total effect is dizzying; a deranged merry-go-round about to blast out of this world.

Since the David Thomas LP, the project closest to Fier's heart has been the Golden Palominos—a unique hybrid of funk, rock and avant garde. Their debut LP (composed and co-produced by Fier), features vocalist/guitarist Arto Lindsay (ex-DNA, Lounge Lizards), bassists Bill Laswell and Jamaaladeen Tacuma, horn player and noisemaker John Zorn and percussionist David Moss. Though one might be tempted to call them Soho's idea of a supergroup, the Palominos manage to avoid the ponderousness and pretense which have plagued other bands radiating such a panoply of talent. Instead, the record is distinguished by its buoyancy and brightness. From the exuberant squeal of Zorn's game call that kicks off the fun on "Clean Plate" to the minor-key violins fading on "Two Sided Fist," the Palominos constantly challenge, yet never alienate.

"I intended to make a rock 'n' roll record using non-rock 'n' roll elements. Bill and I are the biggest rock elements, and I wanted to use musicians like Moss and Zorn in a way they've never been used before, and for people to hear them in different ways," explains Fier. Nor does he use the record as a star turn; rather, he conceived his rhythmic input as a catalyst and a focus for all the other music activity surrounding it. In composing the songs—or, rather, building a structure for them—he concentrated on coming up with rhythms that would supply the most durable foundations for everything he wanted to put on record. "I wrote on a Tascam 3340 four-track, using drums, bass and rhythm machines—an Oberheim DMX, LinnDrum, a Roland TR808 and the Boss Doctor rhythm. It was really weird, having Bill and Jamaaladeen—two of the greatest bass players in the world—playing these ultra-simple bass parts. Of course, they added a lot to them.

Of special importance to Fier was ensuring that the vocals fit the rhythmic structure. That involved going over each lyric line by line. Fier called that "the most complicated process" regarding his interaction with other musicians. In some cases though, Bill Laswell for example, the musicians "automatically heard what was necessary and played it."

In order to achieve that pile-driver beat on "ID," Fier used equally unorthodox techniques, both as drummer and producer. "The first track laid down was the bass drum and snare drum. We added a Lexicon digital delay to that. So I actually *play* only half as many beats as you hear—the others are from the delay. Then we made a tape loop of that track,



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World Radio History

and I played live a *surdo* (an African bass drum) over the tape loop. And then I overdubbed the tubular bell. So the whole percussion track was done in different stages: none of it was done with the band in the studio. I did it that way for power *and* precision; also I like the live feeling of the *surdo*."


Fier describes the frenetic "Cookout" as his only "indulgence" on the record; it was done entirely with a drum machine. To do it, he wrote out the rhythms he wanted, then spent twelve hours straight with a DMX figuring how and where to put them together. He finds the machine a useful tool, and doesn't feel at all threatened by it. "They're interesting in that they open up possibilities. You can do things on them that you'd never think

of doing on a real kit, and they haven't got the physical limitations. But they don't do what I do. You're never going to get a drum machine to sound the way I sound."

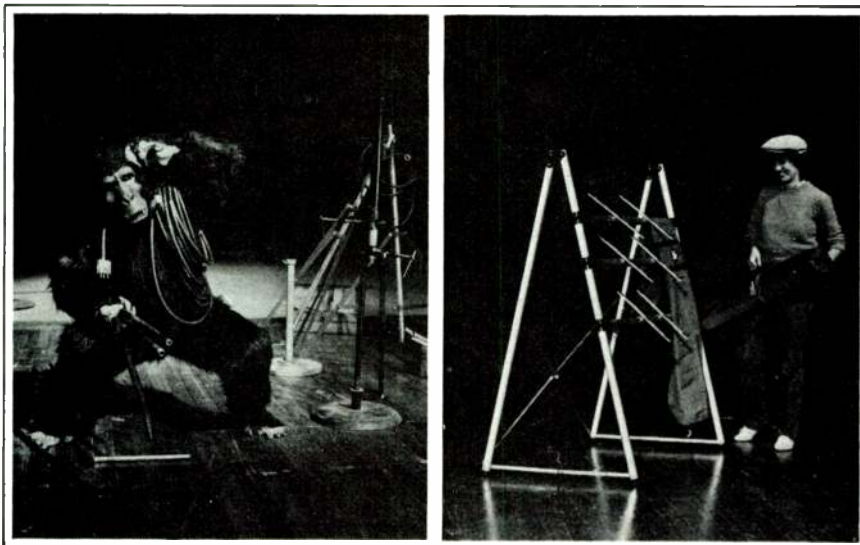
Laurie Anderson, a long-time admirer of Fier's, sought him out to play on "Sharkey's Day" because she liked what she calls the "metallic" sound of some of Fier's playing on the Palominos' LP. On "Sharkey's Day"—an unusual cut for Anderson in that it uses "all the instruments I swore I'd never use—electric guitar, bass, etc."—Anderson brought in Fier to augment Daniel Ponce's *shikare* and bells with a "harder" sound. "Anton really listened to what was going on, and he was very inventive; he was really wonderful."

If any other drummer immersed himself in such increasingly diverse projects, he'd be spreading himself thin. Even now, though, Fier is eager to do more. He does appear on David Thomas' new *Variations On A Theme*, and plays with Arto Lindsay's new band, the Ambitious Lovers. *The Naked Shakespeare* is the name of Peter Blegvad's new EP; Fier calls it "definitely the best record I've ever played on" but unfortunately it was unavailable for extended discussion at press time.

"I definitely need to play different styles of music," he explains. "No one band I've ever played in has played all the different kinds of music that I want to learn and play.

"The most comfortable time of day for me is when I'm sitting behind my drums; then my life makes sense. It's not like a choice I made, to be a musician; it's just that from a very early age, that's the only thing I had any interest in. I do have other interests—I read books, do other things. But my main motivating force in life is music. And it's hard to imagine anything else." 

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### Holdsworth from page 80

years in the trenches with Andy Summers in Zoot Money's Big Roll Band and stints with Alan Price, John Mayall, Aynsley Dunbar, Juicy Lucy and, of course, Tempest, where his work sounded noticeably like Cream-era Jack Bruce ("Well, maybe he sounds like me...", rebuts Paul).

That first I.O.U. album was done mostly in one take, but Holdsworth maintains, "I came out smiling. It was the only real time I had control over the music." Rather than a self-indulgent display of his coveted technique, Holdsworth used a bank of digital delays to create glistening chordal swirls, then darting into concise lead passages which at times barely resembled guitar.

I.O.U. then made their fabled emigration and Americans greeted the band as long-lost old friends, which at that point they were starting to feel like. Still, for all the buzz, they were unable to interest anyone in the LP, so they decided to put it out themselves, pressed it and worked it as best they could. It was then that Holdsworth was "discovered" by Eddie Van Halen.

Edward had actually met Allan in the *continued on page 110*

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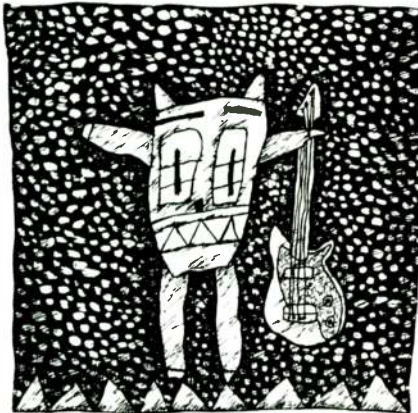


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# RECORD

R E V I E W S

## The Paisley Underground By Chris Morris



As the folks at K-Tel might say, remember those fabulous 60s? A lot of young rock musicians in Los Angeles obviously do, even though a number of them were scarcely out of the crib when psychedelia reared its multi-colored head. The members of the bands lumped together under the generic heading "the Paisley Underground" are presently pirating the hotter licks of the 60s with knowledgeable relish. The best of the lot—the Dream Syndicate and the Tucson transplants Green On Red—have connected with the bristling emotion underneath the brazen guitars and wheezing Farfisas of the period and have delivered noteworthy original work of their own. Others in the pack, however, are still edging toward a distinctive sound.

The least-heralded group in the pack is probably the one closest to producing a non-derivative style. At first glance, **the Long Ryders** may appear to be simple clones of the Flying Burrito Brothers and the *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo*-era Byrds. After all, lead singer Sid Griffin, a Jim/Roger McGuinn look-alike right down to the granny glasses, has penned an unpublished Gram Parsons biography, and guitarist Steve McCarthy's steel playing recalls the whizzes and cries of Pete Kleinow's pioneering work. Yet the band writes sharp originals, ranging from the country stomp of "You Don't Know What's Right, You Don't Know What's Wrong" to the Stonesy title

number. The Ryders aren't shackled by their influences on their debut EP; given a little more time, they could develop a fairly seamless country-rock synthesis.

On the other hand, **the Three O'Clock** have virtually attached a paisleyed ball and chain to their legs. Originally known as the Salvation Army, the quartet has always relied on the studio trappings of the psychedelic epoch, cluttering their previous album and EP with phasing, backwards guitar tracks, ambient sound effects and other sonic goop. They can be an attractive, hard-rocking live band, but they are apparently unrepentant about their love for multi-track chicanery, as their new album *Sixteen Tambourines* sadly demonstrates. Even the best original song, such as the storming "Jet Fighter" and "Fall To The Ground," are cluttered with all manner of baroque George Martinisms; the worst of the tracks, "A Day In Erotica," is an exercise in self-parody, grotesquely over-produced by Earle Mankey. Singer/songwriter Michael Quercio is at last writing a few tunes that don't rely on anachronistic flowers-in-the-rain imagery, but he and his three colleagues should stash the Anglo vocal mannerisms and the outdated gimmickry in the closet, unless they want their discs filed under "Time Warp."

**The Rain Parade** are homing in on something unique in their debut LP, *Emergency Third Rail Power Trip*. The quintet revels in syrupy medium tempos which betray the influence of Syd Barrett's Pink Floyd and "Expecting To Fly"-period Neil Young. Yet they never topple over the abyss into Flashback Valley, thanks to intensely focused lyrics and a soaring, Tom Verlaine-like twin guitar attack. A set of the Rain Parade's drones can be trying in a club setting, but the sustained, looming mood of the LP works fine in the living room late at night. Excise some studio tinsel and a few head-trip passages, and you've got a solidly wrought, rigorously conceived first shot by a band that's getting there rapidly.

**Rainy Day** is an extracurricular project produced by the Rain Parade's David Roback. Various members of the

Rain Parade, the Bangles, the Three O'Clock and the Dream Syndicate collaborate on covers of songs associated with Bob Dylan, the Byrds, the Buffalo Springfield, the Beach Boys, the Who, the Velvet Underground, Jimi Hendrix, and 70s interloper Alex Chilton. This loose, roughly carpentered album has the feel of a summer camp sing-along. The recorded results range from exquisitely pretty (Bangle Susanna Hoffs' "I'll Keep It With Mine" and "I'll Be Your Mirror") to the execrable (Roback's excruciatingly solemn reading of "On The Way Home" and a fatiguing jam on "Rainy Day, Dream Away" by Michael Quercio and Dream Syndicate guitarist Karl Precoda).

*Rainy Day* is more often than not awkward and uneven, but it does demonstrate the affection and respect that the young L.A. band members have for their stylistic predecessors. It's now up to these youngsters to harness their passion for the 60s to a fresh vision of the 80s. Without it, some of these groups will be driving on a freeway headed straight for the boneyard.

## Charlie Haden/Carla Bley *The Ballad Of The Fallen* (ECM)

CHARLIE HADEN  
THE BALLAD OF THE FALLEN  
CARLA BLEY

DON CHERRY  
SHARON FREEMAN  
MICK GOODRICK  
JACK JEFFERS  
MICHAEL MANTLER  
PAUL MOTIAN  
JIM PEPPER  
DEWEY REDMAN  
STEVE SLAGLE  
GARY VALENTE

No jazz album caught the turbulent climate of the 60s better than *Liberation Music Orchestra*, the first collaboration between bassist/bandleader Charlie Haden and arranger/composer Carla Bley. This explicitly political tract was a dizzying montage of, among other things, Spanish Civil War ballads, American spirituals and free-form blowing extravaganzas, all filtered through the controlled anarchy of Bley's writing, a style that joined the worlds of European art music and Ornette Coleman and found a common blue note. Rearing about were unbridled solos by such post-Coleman wildmen as Don Cherry, Gato Barbieri and Roswell Rudd, solos which made perfect sense in the philosophical context of the album. *Lib-*

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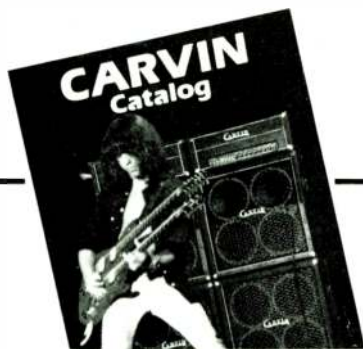
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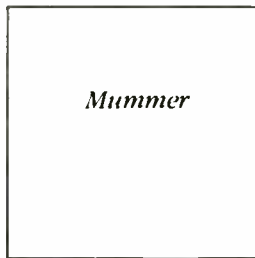
eration Music proved that open-ended improvisation could remain the path of self-expression and still be compatible with structured arrangements.

*Ballad Of The Fallen* is also very much of its time. Haden and Bley's hearts are still in the right place—*Ballad* was inspired by the Central American miasma—but the bursting-at-the-seams spirit of the old orchestra has been replaced with an 80s (ECM inspired?) professionalism. Bley's charts are now played for precision rather than feeling. The earlier woozy freedom may be missing, but then the concerns of this new project are different.

This time around Haden and Bley create a reflective mood piece in place of an inspirational paean. An extended composition, *Ballad* is orderly where *Liberation* was confrontational. With less risks taken the stakes are lower, but ultimately *Ballad* does pay off. Bley's attractive Iberian swing sounds like the soundtrack Nino Rota might have written for Luis Bunuel. The ensemble work is sympathetically rendered, with Don Cherry, Michael Mantler, Dewey Redman and Paul Motian among the members of the first Liberation Music Orchestra still on hand, and Bley associates like Steve Slagle, Jim Pepper, Gary Valente and Mick Goodrick among the able replacements. The solos are generally of high quality, with highest honors going to Haden's tragic bass soliloquies and Cherry's fiery but never frantic trumpeting. Still, it's difficult not to be disappointed. *Ballad* is merely an excellent album; *Liberation Music Orchestra* was an event. — **Steve Futterman**

### XTC

*Mummer* (Epic)



*Mummer*

In their crusade to make the entire musical world safe for pop, XTC's new album must be counted as a major conquest. Taking off from their last foray, *English Settlement*, XTC here take on even more potentially arcane musical themes and production techniques and beat them into accessibility. The result is a lot more than the whacked-out art-pop which usually pigeonholes the band. By now their empire embraces art-funk-rock-jazz-reggae-tribal-British traditional-pop-folk and psychedelia, all mixed into a completely unself-conscious brew.

On their first four albums, XTC's big trick was to make odd music that never seemed willfully so. Instead of coming off as weird-for-weird's sake, they made

their hyper-quirkiness seem like a committed life philosophy. Their nervous little hooks came like rabbits out of hats—unexpected and magical. On *English Settlement* they used a greater variety of instruments and smarter production techniques to shake things up even more. Colin Moulding switched to a jazzy, fretless bass, Terry Chambers (since departed) picked up primitive African and British traditional percussion and Andy Partridge employed a sharp acoustic guitar—given special upfront prominence by the 3-D production tricks of Hugh Padgham.

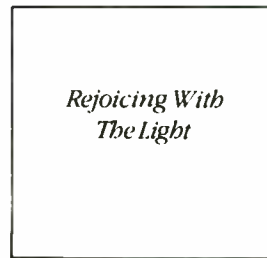
On the new LP (produced by Steve Nye) the sound has less separation but each instrument still retains its own voice in the joyful clutter. There's a distinct sax honking in the background of "Great Fire," along with some tongue-in-cheek strings. In "Human Alchemy" there's a reggae guitar and art-rock voices-from-heaven tossed in with "new technology" drones. The fun part is, you never know what you're going to hear next. "Deliver Us From The Elements" begins with cartoonish boinging springs, picks up some mellotron along the way and culminates in a windstorm of sound distortion that is, in its own way, *catchy*. "Ladybird" is the sneakiest and most surprisingly memorable jazz-pop concoction this side of Steely Dan's hits. "Love On A Farmboy's Wages," with its lovely acoustic guitar, may be XTC's prettiest hook ever. And in "Funk Pop A Roll" there's the sputtering guitar and full drum kit of their earlier days.

Today, XTC are making more "progressive" music than ever with nary an ounce of unworthy pretension. For them, the future is wide open. — **Jim Farber**

### Muhal Richard Abrams

*Rejoicing With The Light*

(Black Saint/PSI)



*Rejoicing With The Light*

Here we have yet another example of Muhal Richard Abrams' expansive compositional vocabulary. Some of us may be more inclined

though, to cuddle with his more traditional creations (like this album's "Bloodlines," dedicated to Fletcher Henderson, Don Redman and Benny Carter) than to embrace abstract dramas like "The Heart Is Love" and "I Am," it must be conceded that Abrams has thoroughly digested his many influences to create music in his own image. His references to the past are never strictly verbatim; pieces like "Bloodlines" contain delightful twists and cross-references that reverberate in the voice of a modernist.

# TOUGH CHOICE.



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And if Abrams' exploratory pieces reflect elements of the European avant-garde openly and unashamedly, their structures and aesthetics are more closely aligned with black traditions as old as Ellington and Morton.

I have some difficulty with the aforementioned "The Heart Is Love," with its highbrow soprano voice theme, but the problem could be mine. And the rest of the album is chock full of gripping, highly sophisticated writing for abbreviated big band. Abrams' fascinating techniques for achieving propulsive motion make the title track *hot*, and on "Blessed Be The Heavens At 12," he coaxes some of the most stunning clarinet ensembles I've ever heard, from a five-member woodwind section playing a full spectrum of clarinets. It's always worth giving Abrams the benefit of the doubt. The Greeks had a word for those who, unlike Abrams, refuse to open themselves to the free interchange of ideas. That word was *idios*...and we all know what that evolved into. — **Cliff Tinder**

### ABC

**Beauty Stab** (Mercury)



What hath Roxy Music wrought? A plague of Bryan Ferry imitators, that's what! Crooning tenors with pothole vibratos (heartbroken lyrics optional) may have existed before Roxy's Ferry applied a *soigné* sheen; but his influence is unmistakable, from intonation to phrasing, among a cadre of latter-day Lotharios.

Martin Fry seemed one of the more creative Fry followers on *The Lexicon Of Love*, ABC's 1982 debut album. While cultivating the requisite languidness, Fry wrapped himself in a real string section to deliver his views on modern love. Remarkable songs and overt theatricality raised ABC above the level of faceless British fops and white funkateers.

To their credit, ABC have struck out in a different direction on *Beauty Stab*. Unfortunately, they may have just struck out, period: the band has sacrificed original traits for derivative ones. Starting with the thunderous backbeat of the opening "That Was Then But This Is Now" (I wonder), the blatant Roxyisms fairly hit the listener over the head. In the forefront of the anti-synthesizer backlash, ABC now downplays keyboards in favor of a hard guitar/saxophone attack. Even the rhythm section of bassist Alan Spenner and drummer Andy Newmark comes straight off Roxy Music's *Flesh And Blood* album. Can Fry be blamed for plunging headlong into Ferry impersonations?

Well, yes. When the string section makes a rare appearance, on "By Default By Design," Fry is still carrying on like Ferry's younger brother; the vocal mannerisms and spurned-love theme are vintage Roxy.

*Beauty Stab* has a deeper problem, however: too many songs abandon clear-cut romantic problems for willful obscurantism. "Bite The Hand" and "United Kingdom," two separate references to Russians and Americans (in "That Was Then" and "Hey Citizen?") glimmer with social concern, but little more. The album is redolent with empty images and glib phrases used for the sake of rhyming—an unwelcome revival of "poetry" in pop lyrics. And a line like "She's vegetarian except when it comes to sex" would make anyone gag.

For all that, *Beauty Stab* is far from a disaster. The mostly mid-tempo music packs a wallop. Mark White's guitar shrieks and gurgles on "Love's A Dangerous Language," and intermingles with strings on "Bite The Hand" to cataclysmic effect. "Unzip," source of the unfortunate vegetarian reference above, is a driving throb anchored to a one-note bass. Like most of the album (and pop in general), "Hey Citizen!" sounds fine as long as you don't think about it—although its acoustic guitar bridge threatens a "progressive-rock" revival.

What a pity, then, that ABC couldn't match music to meaning more often. In "King Money" the lyrics finally connect with a solid theme (greed). Fry sings as if he meant it, over typically tightly-wound riffs. *Beauty Stab* upsets ABC's lifetime average, but it shows there is plenty of promise still left for the future. — **Scott Isler**

### English Beat

**What Is Beat?** (I.R.S.)



The English Beat's break-up earlier this year wasn't surprising. This band from Birmingham, England, arose in 1979 with the

Specials-led ska revival, and sank as a pop group without a big enough audience to justify the title. As put by David Steele, the twenty-two-year-old fellow responsible for the band's goosey bass lines: "I always think if nobody buys your album, you're crap."

The Beat weren't crap, as amply proved by *What Is Beat?*. Although an excellent introduction to the band, the thirteen-song anthology is also designed to grab the dollars of established fans, who should be aware that the cassette version contains four previously unavail-





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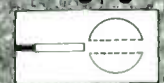
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Last year's *Special Beat Service* all able titles that the album doesn't. Except for the toasting exuberance of Ranking Roger on "Psychedelic Rockers," though, none of the new stuff is outstanding.

As for the unconverted, I would argue that you skip this quasi-best-of in favor of the Beat's 1980 debut *I Just Can't Stop It*. Seven of its fourteen songs dominate *What Is Beat?* and the missing titles are vital. Led by the sultry saxophone of the fifty-year-old-plus Saxa and anchored by veteran reggae drummer Everett Morton, *I Just Can't Stop It* tore off the stifling ska label and showcased the frustrations of four punks. It's a satisfying clash of fury and finesse, especially the cover of Andy Williams' "Can't Get Used To Losing You," which drenches the original with heart-melting soul and glistening pop licks. This album, which went to the top of England's charts, was the last pop success the Beat had.

The '81 follow-up, *Wha'ppen?*, stiffed in England, probably because it had none of the first LP's heavy rhythms or upfront anger, except for the dole-snarl "Get-A-Job." With its rapturous melodies, *Wha'ppen?* perfected the band's pungent blend of Ranking Roger's deep, liquid toasts and Dave Wakeling's chameleon vocals. His voice is so rich and phrasing so lively that he has you reaching for Van Morrison comparisons.

but abandoned the British audience in a do-or-die attempt to conquer America's radio. (To make good on this attack, the band exhaustively toured the U.S. three times.) The album pushed even further into pop/soul terrain. Although the Beat were never a raucously radical band, until *Special Beat Service* they had always been closer to the Gang of Four than to Hall & Oates. This compromise led to dissension within the band, especially when it didn't pay off. Still, the album is a handsome blend of American pop and Third World rhythms. *What Is Beat?* may include B-sides and previously unavailable live stuff, but as an anthology it shortchanges the Beat's second and third LPs.

The commercial failure of the band, sad to say, is easily explained. The Beat's exotic pulses combined with its heartening black-and-white unity to make a commercial choke chain. Too poppy for reggae's market, too rootsy for uptown disco, and too in-between for the mainstream tastes, the Beat were stuck in America's new wave college-radio nurtured market, which wasn't enough to foster a career for a British band who had alienated the support of its homeland. Another reason they didn't score big in America is that they lacked the sharply focused glamor of the Police. Maybe *What Is Beat?* will bring them belated recognition, but even if not, I can't imagine a well-rounded modern

record collection that doesn't include at least their first album. — **Doug Simmons**

**George Clinton**  
**You Should Nuf Bit Fish** (Capitol)



For more than a decade George Clinton has been mingling sci-fi symbolism, technopop textures, topical satire and shake - yer-

booty funk into a personal cosmology as exotic and original as Sun Ra's. His discography—which includes over a score of records released under various rubrics (Parliament, Funkadelic, Bootsy's Rubber Band, Eddie Hazel, etc.)—remains similarly obscured, and that's misleading. After all, Clinton's innovations have directly influenced everyone from Prince to Rick James to Zapp to Gap to Rap to synth-pop to England to MTV to corporate boom psychology. He's Detroit's subterranean link between this era's dance fever and the 60s psychedelic funk of late Motown, Miles and Sly—in other words, he just might matter.

Now the time is ripe for Clinton to reap his due; it's no accident that last year's *Computer Games* and the current *You Should Nuf Bit Fish* are the first LPs he's released under his own name. And while neither packs the street wallop of, say, *One Nation Under A Groove*, both are idiosyncratic, conceptual marvels that can cut it on the dance floor and reward repeated listenings. Mostly co-written with long-time sidekick "Bootsy" Collins, Clinton's music typically assumes the proportions of giant aural cartoons (his album jackets invariably provide the visuals); razor guitar riffs and accented syndrums feed Bootsy's thick bass bottom, while on top Dr. Funkenstein fizzles everything from dub to scratch to pop song parodies to DJ patter to bizarre vocal fills, including some high-pitched gremlins (they sound like George speeded up) whose balloon-head asides are masterstrokes of barbed acuity. Yet the overall concoction never seems busy or cluttered.

*Fish* abounds with sly wit; "Nubian Nut," for example, is a rap about an ancient black paradise led by a charismatic showman ("the natives called him the Nubian Tut"); about halfway through, the song shifts focus to the Nut's spiritual heirs, coincidentally a bunch of incorrigible funksters who like to cruise the streets of Detroit and boggie down at United Sound. Other tunes, for all their raffish humor, have more sober undertones. Both "Quickee" and "Stingy" are light-handed but firm rejections of promiscuity in favor of committed relation-

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ships, while Clinton's clever hipster jargon sculpts the title track into a telling metaphor for our latest go-round of nuclear insanity. None of which should surprise anyone who has followed Clinton through his various aggregates recognizes in him a natural clan patriarch with a keen sense of familial duty, as well as a prophet who preaches faith in the funk as the way to achieving higher consciousness. When he's on a roll this hot, why doubt him? — **Mark Rowland**

**Kiri te Kanawa**

**Canteloube: Songs Of The Auvergne**  
(London Digital)

*Canteloube: Songs  
Of The Auvergne*

Music to faint by, levitate by, change into a large butterfly by, die, dissolve, transcend. This album is so gorgeous and so far beyond

conventional romantic excess that it's positively avant-garde, as if a radical sensibility looking for a first principle of construction had bypassed (yawn) repetition and settled instead upon a ravishing and impermissible beauty.

Joseph de Canteloube (1879-1957)

collected the folk songs of his native Auvergne in five volumes but set them as Parisian high art. His orchestration at first sounds Platonically lush but closer examination reveals that he achieved his lyrical ends with surprising economy of means and a personal, though typically French, mastery of part writing for woodwinds and strings. The melodies themselves are often quite simple—some of the best of them are spun almost entirely of birdlike embellishments of a single note—and Canteloube understood perfectly how to lend them variety and atmosphere without spoiling the purity of their native expression.

But what makes the album soar is the unbelievable singing of Kiri te Kanawa (a Maori name). She sings like an angel, like a delirious bird, like water flowing from a spring, in a voice that seems to have arrived directly from the empyrean, unmarred by the rigors of transit. Her technical command is flawless and wholly subordinated to the expressive task at hand, which is not to project the hyper-romantic emotions of 19th century opera but to represent a sublime instrument's surrender to the immeasurable beauty of the world.

I'm less interested in the quicker, dance-based tunes than the nearly tempoless evocations of an earthly paradise—even a song whose lyric runs (I compress), "Hey, Anthony, let's go to the fair and buy a cow together; when we get back I'll take the cow and you'll get the horns." It sounds like a hymn to the greenest *arrondissement* of Eden, perhaps because the Auvergnat used to leave the region in winter and return only when spring did, to an always paradisaic home. The music registers the experience in full. Canteloube came from the Auvergne, te Kanawa from New Zealand, but she sings in Auvergnat. The album's masterpiece is called "Bailero." London's digital sound is stupendous. Obviously, perhaps too obviously, I can't recommend the album highly enough.

— **Ralf Zabor**

**Ray Parker, Jr.**

**Woman Out Of Control** (Arista)



Ray Parker, Jr. is a riddle. He's a black, crossover auteur who writes, produces, arranges and pretty much performs everything on

his records, claims Motown roots that go back further than Michael Jackson's, infuses his lyrics with enough pro-feminist agprop to make Marvin Gaye sound like a pimp and has cracked the top ten more often than Prince and Rick

James put together. For this he gets about as much attention as Ray Parker, Sr.

It's no accident. Despite, or rather because of, his mastery of and affection for AM craft, Parker's always been more parts perfectionist than dare-devil, the consummate studio pro who'd rather sail the mainstream than test his limits in new waters. He's inadvertently courted anonymity, first by penning others' hits, then with the phantom band "Raydio," a sly claim to fame that only further diffused his own identity. Coyness is no recipe for superstardom.

But the real problem for Ray, Jr. is more fundamental—the guy is just too smooth. First there's that voice, which even in its moments of emotional turmoil sounds like he's still yawning after a good night in the sack. Then there's his relentlessly bourgeois image, a kind of soft-focus Valley Guy (like Christopher Cross, he uses record jackets to pose with his furniture). And finally there's his music, which punctuates eminently tuneful melodies with disco-fied, in-the-pocket drumming, subtle but funky bass and sinuous synth counterpoint—a pop formula every bit as 'horizontal' as Lee Abrams' brain scan.

But Ray's more than just the king of soul muzak. His LPs, of which *Woman Out Of Control* is the most refined example (he gets even smoother by increments), work by trading off tension between his mellifluous sonic backdrops and his gently menacing vocal imprecations. "In The Heat Of The Night," with its tumbling brooks of congas, chiming keyboards and lugubrious Eric Gale-style guitar, plays like a sugar plum fantasy; which is doubly ironic, since a line like "Though you know it's jive/ At the time it's what you want to hear" is as fittingly addressed to gullible fans as gullible lovers. On the other end, the title track, a stylistic sequel to "The Other Woman," congeals thumping rock guitar progressions with Doobies' falsetto harmonies and a cool synth/saxophone call and response into an irresistible dance mix, even as Parker croons his world-weary indictment of nymphomania.

Despite characteristic understatement, Ray's musical lexicon is as broad and cheerfully shameless as Nick Lowe's, and a lot more contemporary. "I Still Can't Get Over You," "Electronic Lover" and "N2U2" tastefully plunder the Police, Prince and George Clinton respectively (he even sings "with every breath you take" along the former). Of course, Parker doesn't *have* to thief—his own composing credentials are as sturdy as those peers. But that's part of the point. Prince, Sting and Dr. Funkenstein, egoists all, merely wish to dominate the "raydio"; Ray Parker, Jr. wants to own it. — **Mark Rowland**

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**Holdsworth** from page 98

U.K. era, so he came down to the Roxy to catch I.O.U. After a post-gig chat, Van Halen was invited to come to sound-check the next afternoon and they had "a bit of a blow." For an encore that night, they worked up one of Eddie's tunes, which went over big; very big. Van Halen immediately began working on his producer, Ted Templeman, and his label, Warners, to sign Holdsworth. What exactly was understood between Holdsworth and Van Halen was never pinned down, however. Allan logically assumed that Warners wanted the I.O.U. band. Paul Williams maintains that during all the negotiations for the deal, no one at Warners corrected that impression: "When Allan signed the contract, we had a band. Then they turned around and said to him, 'Well, we don't want the band.' But as it happened, the band changed."

Indeed, Paul Carmichael and especially Gary Husband were unable to get used to living in a very foreign land. As Williams relates, "Gary was having trouble dealing with his own head, so to speak. He wasn't very well; his father died and he was suffering a lot, so it was affecting us. So he went back to England." Holdsworth filled their chairs with journeyman bassist Jeff Berlin and Zappa alumna Chad Wackerman (great name for a drummer, eh?).

Meanwhile, Ted Templeman and Van Halen had very different plans for the upcoming album. Williams reports, "They wanted to put all stars on it, change the music completely, do a guest artist trip. It was like an arm-twisting situation, as far as I could see. Eddie really admired Allan, had gotten him on the label, and said, 'I want to play with Allan!' And Allan said, 'Well no, not on this record, because I'll just be selling Eddie Van Halen and I want to do my own thing. Maybe on the second record....' So of course Eddie got very upset, basically sulked, I suppose, and that's when it started falling apart, immediately after that. Well, you know, Allan's an artist. He doesn't like to be told which way to do it, and I think they would've torn the whole concept to pieces."

What began then was a determined war of nerves. The plan called for Van Halen and Templeman to co-produce, but scheduling a time when both were free became insurmountable; for month after month, Allan was left hanging. "They were obviously busy people. First of all it's really difficult to get hold of either of them; I can spend weeks just trying to reach one of them on the phone. That gets to be a nightmare!" Finally it seemed Christmas of '82 was it, but it got postponed again. Then an April date was set, but two days before, Templeman had to cancel. Says Allan, "That was it for me, the old steam whis-

tle, with the lid open at the top of my head. I couldn't cope with that; I just said, 'Forget it, let's not even bother.' Then, after a bit of hemming and hawing, they called back and said, 'Okay, do it on your own.' As far as I was concerned, I would've had a walking stick and crutches before the album came out!"

Holdsworth must have by this point been regarded as the trouble-making type.... "I'm not a trouble-maker!" cries Allan. "I just want to be left alone. But you're right, that's probably how I'm visualized."

With Holdsworth in command, a whole new set of problems began: "As soon as the record company found out they weren't involved, it turned into a little story—'oh shit, shall we let this guy do this, is he going to hang himself or what?'" Paul Williams continues, "It was a constant hassle; everything had to be approved, everything was going along in steps. Ted would pull us out of the studio and say, 'You can't have any more time until I've heard the material,' and then they'd put us back in again. It was driving Allan crazy!"

Despite Holdsworth's victory in keeping his band and the material, Templeman insisted Williams could not sing on the album, surprising since Paul had not only written the words, but the melody lines of the songs, making him one of Allan's first real collaborators. "Ted didn't want me. He never gave Allan a reason for it. It got really ridiculous, down to the fact that he told Allan he hopes he never sees me in the street. It's a bit sad; it just made me sick."

Thus began the search for a Famous Person to sing Paul's songs. Says Allan, "The famous people they were suggesting I just didn't want. It would've made us sound more like anybody else. I hate fashion, so I said I knew someone who just might fit the bill, who also happened to be someone that I loved: Jack Bruce."

Considering how it came about, it is nothing short of a miracle that *Road Games* sounds as good as it does. A fine variety of jazz-rock styles make up the six-song "Maxi-EP" (a way for Warners to cut its losses?), from the Metheny-esque impressionism of "Three Sheets To The Wind" to the metal of the title cut to the cinematic, street-scene textures of "Tokyo Dream." The three vocal tunes lend an accessibility to the record, with Bruce's familiar passion articulating ambitious, soaring melodies.

Still, the breathtaking quality and economy of Holdsworth's solos are more compelling to the "blow me away" psychology of the pop audience than the subtlety and chordal sophistication of Holdsworth's compositions. Holdsworth himself is well aware of the blow-me-away factor: "Those are the kind of things I like, three triads at once over a given chord, unusual harmonic things

heard as a color when they're played very fast. That way it's a striking kind of thing, like 'Wow, what was that???' I like the idea of making people want to pick up the needle and put it back to the solo."

Holdsworth's current lead work is especially unusual because although his tone is as fluid and nimble as a synthesizer, he uses virtually no signal processing at all (he did use a Scholz Rockman for the sax-like bite of "Three Sheets To The Wind"). "I've noticed for a long time that lighter bodied guitars always seemed to sound better. [Charvel's] Grover Jackson was unbelievable, going to all lengths experimenting with different woods. We finished up using bass wood; it's a little bit like alder, but it's lighter, very resonant. Grover made four Charvel guitars for me. He also widened the neck dimensions, more like a Gibson. The bridge is an aluminum DiMarzio and the pickups are Seymour Duncans, similar to a P.A.F. but with two rows of pole pieces so that both bobbins are absolutely symmetrical; it makes the magnetic field more uniform." For strings, Allan uses .009 Kaman Performers. His favorite amp for lead playing has been a Hartley-Thompson with an occasional Fender.

On his chordal accompaniments, Allan has been striving for a more "orchestral" sound, using layers of delays to get shimmering, pulsating textures from his sophisticated fingerings. "For my rhythm sound, I've designed a setup where all the signal processing is driven from one master board; I put each effect into one fader." His digital delays are two ADA STD-1s, two AMS units and a Yamaha E1010. The whole rhythm setup is run through a Yamaha PG-1 instrument pre-amp, some P2200 power amps and S412 speakers. The mixers are a Yamaha M406 and a M516). Allan also has an Ovation '83 Collector's Series acoustic and a Chapman Stick.

Will *Road Games* rekindle Holdsworth's legend, or will his insistence on pushing his own compositions to the forefront invite a whole second generation of self-deputized advisors to counsel, "Stick to soloing and leave the writing to hitmakers and geniuses." Allan doesn't really care at this point. He's not going to take the advice in any case. After all, he's given the whole knotty problem a good deal of thought: "You make decisions at certain points in your life as to what you want to do. Things have been offered me where I could've done something commercial and earned a lot more money—and been really miserable. I'd rather be broke and happy than miserable and rich. So all I'm trying to do is get by, just the musician's dream really: to be able to play what I'd like to play and be able to survive. That's my dream." ■

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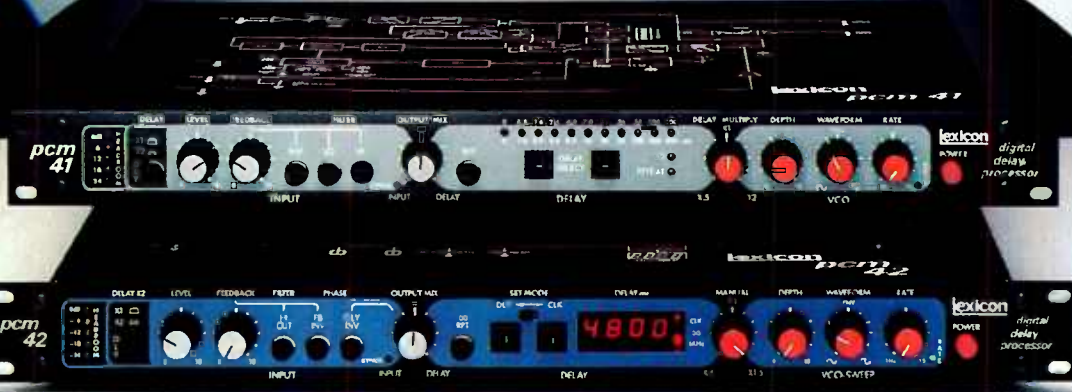
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# ROCK

## S H O R T T A K E S

**Kool & the Gang** — *In The Heart* (De-Lite). The band's pop instincts have become so ingrained that, despite the dependable groove, there are times when it seems as if their major ambition is to become the Commodores. That's not a complaint when you consider the ease with which Kool & the Gang put across a ballad like "Joanna," but it's not much of a compliment if you remember the fire that once burned behind hits like "Hollywood Swinging."

**Stewart Copeland** — *Rumble Fish: Original Soundtrack* (A&M). Copeland and Stanard Ridgway (ex-Wall of Voodoo singer) may not be anyone's idea of a dream duet, but "Don't Box Me In" is one of the most delightfully quirky pop tunes of the past year. All tart melody and wry humor, it ticks and hums and slithers along like a wind-up iguana. As for the rest of this otherwise instrumental album, though the pieces may be too oblique for casual listening, they go a long way to proving that Sting and Andy aren't the only melodic players in the Police.

**JoBoxers** — *Like Gangbusters* (RCA). Although the title overplays it a bit, the JoBoxers do come on strong in this debut. Frankly, I'm not entirely sold on their swing-fired fusion of Motown hooks and new music muscle, but it's hard to argue with the energy and heart-felt enthusiasm they've put into it. Particularly if they keep coming up with songs as snappy as "Just Got Lucky."

**Let's Active** — *Afoot* (I.R.S.). With its anglophilic melodic sense and garage band drive, Mitch Easter's own band has a lot in common with his better-known recording clients, the dB's and R.E.M. Although Easter's adenoidal vocals tend to grate, the consistent quality of the writing (and occasional singing by bassist Faye Hunter) gives this EP the sort of edgy excitement that keeps the listener coming back for more.

**Earth, Wind & Fire** — *Electric Universe* (Columbia). Despite the title and Maurice White's hyper-compressed production, the energy-level here is strictly low-wattage. "Magnetic" sounds like an EW&F hit to fake its way onto the charts; and "Spirit Of A New World" indicates what the band can do once it shakes off a few layers of formula, but on the whole,

you've heard it all too many times before.

**Various Artists** — *New Music From Antarctica* (Antarctica). Sorry, this isn't music from a real penguin cafe; "Antarctica" is "a new concern...dedicated to the proposition that video and music are created equal." Not so equal that you can't buy the music without the images, though, much less enjoy it in but a single dimension, and if you want a quick introduction to the Lower Manhattan new music mafia, it's hard to think of a better album. Or funnier one, given the dry wit of Jill Kroesen, "Blue" Gene Tyranny and Peter Gordon. (New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York City, NY 10012)

**Duran Duran** — *Seven And The Ragged Tiger* (Capitol). Adventure! Romance! New haircuts!

**Yes** — *90125* (Atco). Thanks to producer Trevor Horn, Yes has sublimated its desire to flaunt instrumental proficiency into a sturdy array of production tricks, resulting in their most danceable (!) record ever, if not their most listenable. Of course, they may still turn into Asia by the next LP, so enjoy the new sound while you can.

**The Raybeats** — *It's Only A Movie* (Shanachie). Although surf instrumentals may not seem too difficult a genre to subvert, artistic expansion is another matter altogether. Yet the Raybeats continue to prosper, whether through such formula-rethinks as "Jack The Ripper" or "Buddy Lonesome" or by co-opting contemporary dance music technology to rescue whole new worlds from cliché, as "Instant Twist" ably proves. (Dalebrook Park, Hohokus, NJ 07423)

**Neats** — *Neats* (Ace of Hearts). The Neats manage a more successful hybrid of pre-punk integrity and post-punk intensity than any band in America, which is one of the reasons this album is so exciting. But the more important reason is that the Neats can work a melody into a rave-up more effectively than anybody this side of the Ramones. (PO Box 579, Kenmore Station, Boston, MA 02215)

**Simon Townshend** — *Sweet Sound* (Polydor). It probably means something that Simon Townshend sounds more like Paul Weller than older brother Pete,

especially when it's Pete's production. Unfortunately, any resemblance ends with the vocal tracks, as the rest of *Sweet Sound* is so blandly competent that it would never be taken for music as lively as Weller's. Maybe Simon should form a supergroup with Chris Jagger and Mike McCartney....

**Pete Townshend/Ronnie Lane** — *Rough Mix* (Atco). Concert for Lane earning so much press, it's nice to see that Atco has brought this forgotten gem back into print. Nice to hear as well, especially as "My Baby Gives It Away" and "Till The Rivers Run Dry" find Townshend working out his country-rock impulses far more successfully than on *The Who By Numbers*. Don't miss out a second time.

**Paul Rodgers** — *Cut Loose* (Atlantic). In which Paul Rodgers not only proves that he can play guitar, bass and drums, but demonstrates why he should never be allowed to do so again.

**Debbie Harry** — "Rush Rush" (Chrysalis 12-inch). Working once again with Giorgio Moroder, Harry comes surprisingly close to duplicating the chemistry of "Call Me." The vocals are cooler by far, but given the subject matter—Brian DePalma's cocaine mobster, Tony Montana—it's entirely appropriate, and Moroder's trademark electronics keep things percolating nicely. A welcome comeback.

**Ozzy Osbourne** — *Bark At The Moon* (CBS Associated). I know his batting average (no pun intended) hasn't been too high outside the heavy metal camp, by Ozzy has a lot to offer beyond roaring guitars and lurid theatrics. Well, okay, maybe not a lot, but relatively speaking, this is semi-quality stuff, with melodies and everything. (Some melody, anyway.) Still, how can you dislike somebody who dresses up as a werewolf and ends up looking like a cocker spaniel?

**Brian May & Friends** — *Star Fleet Project* (Capitol). Despite the fact that the friends include Eddie Van Halen and Phil Chen, these three jams are so loose and directionless—or, to be polite, *spontaneous*—that only the extremely curious need bother.

**Wendy & the Rocketts** — *Dazed For Days* (A&M/Oz). There are flashes of

*continued on page 116*



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# JAZZ

## S H O R T T A K E S

**Ronald Shannon Jackson** — *Street Priest* (Moers Music, available from New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York City, NY 10012). Although its virtues have passed largely unnoticed in the hullabaloo attending the release of *Barbeque Dog*, to my way of thinking, this German import, recorded in 1981 but just released last summer, is the definitive Decoding Society LP because it's the one that strikes the happiest bargain between funk's slink and precision on the one hand, and free jazz's improvisational sprawl and frenzy on the other. I thought that's what harmolodics was supposed to be all about in the first place, no? And when I say this is the hottest record the drummer has recorded so far, take for granted I'm talking about the playing, not the mix.

**Oregon** — (ECM). The cyclical motion of the opener shows they've been listening hard to Philip Glass, and the last song boils up a blobby, Turkish-sounding boom-chitty-boom riff that's kinda square but just won't quit. In between, the usual pantheistic attitudinizing results in the usual rhythmic stasis, although Ralph Towner's brand-new Prophet 5 brings the collective improvisations some of the body and warmth (but not the body warmth) they've lacked in the past.

**John Surman** — *Such Winters Of Memory* (ECM). The first two cuts are titled "Saturday Night" and "Sunday Morning," but his tussles with drummer Pierre Favre notwithstanding, the British saxophonist is no longer one of the Angry Young Men. And whatever heat he does retain is effectively chilled here by his star-gazing electronics, Karin Krog's distant rumble and Manfred Eicher's yawny, music-of-the-spheres production.

**Continuum** — *Mad About Tadd* (Palo Alto). Amid all the justified praise for Dameron's reclamation of Tadd Dameron as Composer, it's worth remembering Dameron's compositions owe some of their charm and durability to the fact that they're excellent blowing vehicles too—a point nicely reaffirmed here by Slide Hampton and Jimmy Heath (both of whom contribute bright, unfussy arrangements), together with

Kenny Barron, Ron Carter and Art Taylor. (And how wonderful it is to hear the most underrated of all post-bop drummers again!)

**Charles Bobo Shaw & Lester Bowie** — *Bugle Boy Bop* (Muse). Above all else, Bowie is an intensely rhythmic player, and duets with drummers as resourceful as Shaw have a way of unleashing all his spunk and caustic vitality. But exciting as they are in places, these duets suffer their ragged moments as well, and for a far more convincing demonstration of the rhyme and reason the trumpeter can wring from this setting, I recommed his *Duet* with Philip Wilson, still available for a pittance in many cut-out bins.

**Count Basie** — *Me And You* (Pablo). It suffers its bouts of inertia just like any other institution, but Basie's remains the big band all other big bands must be measured against. This is a period of rejuvenation, judging from this vibrant album which divides time equally between the big band and a septet drawn from the ranks. In both settings, the most telling factors are Basie's quick counter-punch and rhythm guitarist Freddie Green's...let's just call it his *je ne sais quoi*.

**Teo Macero** — *Impressions Of Charles Mingus* (Palo Alto). Impressions that rarely capture their subject's likeness. I doubt Mingus would have tolerated the bubbling electronics or the Kentonish brass bombast. And I know he'd have done a better job of spotlighting the improvisatory talent (Lee Konitz, Al Cohn, Pepper Adams, Ted Curson, Larry Coryell, John Stubblefield, etc.) in the assembled multitude here.

**Shochabilly** — *Greatest Hits* (Red/N.M.D.S.). Reverb, a love of the spartan, and a compulsion for the edge are all scratch music, rockabilly and power trio heavy metal have in common, but it's enough to make this EP a howler of an art joke. If yours is the sort of pop sensibility that hears "People Are Strange" as stylistic heir to "Sixteen Tons," you'll love this. And if you're a devotee of flash guitar, you'll want to discover Eugene Chadbourne in any case.

**Ira Sullivan** — *Does It All* (Muse). Including some things I wish he wouldn't, like a droning "Amazing

Grace" and a meandering "Dolphin Dance." But jazz's most ambidextrous multi-instrumentalist redeems himself with a silken "Prelude To A Kiss" (on flugelhorn, with pianist Gary Dial), and a frisky "Together" (on alto, with Red Rodney on trumpet).

**Alberta Hunter** — *Look For The Silver Lining* (Columbia). There have been countless better blues singers and better cabaret singers, too, but few singers have been so successful in evoking both the barrelhouse and the boite, and none have been as durable. On her latest, she's favored by material that shows off her interpretive range, and sympathetic backing from pianist Gerald Cook and an entourage of veteran horns, including Doc Cheatham, Vic Dickenson and Budd Johnson.

**Jim Bartow** — *Ritual Love Songs and An American Poet's Songbook* (both Blues Blood/N.M.D.S.). At his dokiest, this black troubadour sounds like someone you would have found leading a hoot in 1963. But ultimately, he wins you over, first with his quivering vibrato, then with his rustic, all-embracing vision of America which recognizes the music in the verses of Dickinson, Frost, Dunbar and Cummings, and the poetry in the muted and plungers of Doc Cheatham, Vic Dickenson and Benny Morton.

**Doc Cheatham** — *It's A Good Life* (Parkwood, Box 174, Windsor, Ontario, Canada N9A4H0). Speaking of Cheatham (for we seem to be), the seventy-eight-year-old's longevity is inspiring, and so are his serrated trumpet lines, and his frayed and fluttering singing voice, both displayed to handsome advantage here.

**Joan La Barbara** — *As Lightning Comes In Flashes* (Wizard/N.M.D.S.); **John Zorn** — *The Classic Guide To Strategy* (Lumina/N.M.D.S.). We pay a high price in return for the wonderful trend that dictates the contemporary composer be a performer as well. Gifted performers are encouraged to envision themselves as composers, which can result in the raw materials of compositions being passed off as the finished product. What we have here are instruction manuals for two provocative new instruments—La Barbara's vocal extensions and Zorn's various saxophones

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and game calls. It remains for a composer of greater vision to put those instruments to viable use.

**Bob Mover** — *Things Unseen* (Xanadu). Heard here in a variety of settings (solo, duo with pianist Albert Dailey, trio, quartet, and quintet with tenorist Steve Hall), altoist Mover is a hard blower who likes to gnaw away at changes, and the neglected standards he's chosen are all very meaty indeed.

**Joe Thomas & Jay McShann** — *Blowin' In From KC* (Uptown). Time has eroded neither the roguish showmanship nor the raucous swing of the seventy-two-year-old Thomas, tenor star of the great Lunceford Orchestra. This festive LP reunites the lively little jump band Thomas led in the late 40s; Donald Sickler's transcriptions capture the bouquet of the vintage without drinking in the nostalgia, and there are witty interjections from the ringer on the piano bench.

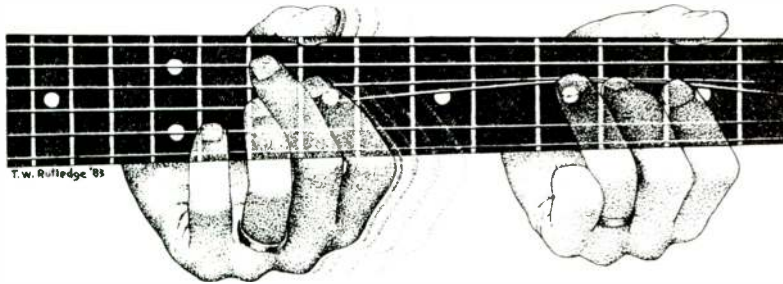
**James Marentic** — *Nimbus* (Discovery). The Kind of Record They Don't Make Anymore, though fortunately enough, one or two seem to sneak out each month and probably always will. Undiluted hard bop, with no frills writing; vigorous soloing from trumpeter Tom Harrell, trombonist Slide Hampton and the tenorist leader (a newcomer to me); and a fierce rhythm section captained by pianist Larry Willis.

**Sunnyland Slim** — *Sunnyland Train*; **Mama Estella Yancy** — *Maybe I'll Cry* (both Red Beans). The pianist's fingers sometimes trip him up when he tries to chase the diesel down, and it's painful hearing the singer aim for notes no longer there. But both of them still have the feeling, and blues is still a medium where the feeling counts for a lot.

**Hampton Hawes** — *Recorded Live At The Great American Music Hall* (Concord Jazz); **Bill Evans** — *Time Remembered* (Milestone). Posthumous releases serving as reminders of how sorely these pianists are missed. The Hawes is uneven in the extreme, but it gives you the pleasure of hearing Hawes delight in his own discoveries—no one in the audience registers as much surprise or satisfaction at the detours in Hawes' logic as Hawes does himself. The Evans double is a reissue of *Live At Shelly's Manne Hole* with the bonus of eight characteristically pellucid unissued tracks.

**Rock Shorts from page 112**  
 native wit and clubland intensity that periodically illuminate this debut, enough to have made a fairly exciting EP. But Wendy Stapleton gives in too easily to the hoariest of heavy rock cliches, with the end result that she and the Rocketts sound like second-hand Heart far too often.

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# PICK HITS

# 83

Now that 1983 is safely behind us, we once again asked some of our critical shock troopers to comment on these parlous times. Each victim was asked to list: (1) the Top Five Albums, (2) the Best Singles or Album Cuts, (3) the Best Music Video or Film, (4) the Rookie of the Year, (5) the Hype of the Year, (6) the Most Underrated, (7) the Dance Record of the Year, (8) the Best Reissue, (9) the Biggest Disappointment and (10) the Best Live Show or Concert.

## VIC GARBARINI

**ALBUMS:** Talking Heads — *Speaking In Tongues* (Sire), the Police — *Synchronicity* (A&M), Midnight Oil — *10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1* (Columbia), Bob Marley — *Confrontation* (Island), Juluka — *Scatterlings*, (Warner Bros.), "This Must Be The Place."  
**SINGLES/CUTS:** Talking Heads "This Must Be The Place," the Police "Every Breath You Take," Scandal "Goodbye To You."  
**VIDEO/FILM:** Juluka — "Scatterlings" and "Umbaqanga Music"; *Yo!* soundtrack; Stewart Copeland's music for *Rumblefish*.  
**ROOKIE:** Midnight Oil, Divinyls, Green on Red, Los Lobos.  
**HYPE:** Bob Dylan — *Infidels*. Topicality is not transcendence.  
**UNDERRATED:** Kate & Anna McGarrigle — *Love Over And Over* (PolyGram); the Dream Syndicate, and every L.A. band on Slash. **ZZ Top**. Scandal.  
**DANCE:** the Gap Band "Party Train" (PolyGram).  
**REISSUE:** Pete Townshend and Ronnie Lane — *Rough Mix* (Atco).  
**DISAPPOINTMENT:** In spite of the so-called "new music" revolution, radio continues to run on fear and greed, rather than challenge and discovery—and will continue to do so as long as computers and flow charts rather than humans run the show.  
**LIVE:** Charlie Haden and the Liberation Orchestra — 7th Avenue South, New York City. The Police at Shea Stadium.

## TIMOTHY WHITE

**ALBUMS:** the Police — *Synchronicity* (A&M), Paul Simon — *Hearts And Bones* (Warner Bros.), Bob Marley — *Confrontation* (Island), David Bowie — *Let's Dance* (EMI), Bunny Wailer — *Roots Radics Rockers Reggae* (Shanachie).  
**SINGLES/CUTS:** ZZ Top "Sharp Dressed Man," Michael Jackson "Human Nature," Van Morrison "Higher Than The World."  
**VIDEO/FILM:** Billy Joel "Tell Her About It" — *An Innocent Man* (Columbia), Juluka "Scatterlings" — *Scatterlings* (Warner Bros.).  
**ROOKIE:** Paul Young — *No Parlez* (Epic), Native — *New World* (Jamaica Records/Roulette).  
**HYPE:** the Stray Cats  
**UNDERRATED:** Rickie Lee Jones — *Girl At Her Volcano* (Warner Bros.), Randy Newman — *Trouble In Paradise* (Warners)  
**DANCE:** Eurythmics — *Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)*, (RCA), Lionel Richie "All Night Long (All Night)" (Motown).  
**REISSUE:** the Beach Boys — *Rarities* (EMI), Various Artists — *Best Of Studio One* (Heartbeat).  
**DISAPPOINTMENT:** Bob Dylan — *Infidels* (Columbia)  
**LIVE:** Randy Newman, Avery Fisher Hall, New York City

## DAVID FRICKE

**ALBUMS:** Talking Heads — *Speaking In Tongues* (Sire), R.E.M. — *Murmur* (I.R.S.), Midnight Oil — *10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1* (Columbia), T-Bone Burnett — *Proof Through The Night* (Warner Bros.), Celibate Rifles — *Sideroxylon* (Hot Records, Australian import).  
**SINGLES/CUTS:** Robert Wyatt — "Shipbuilding" (Rough Trade U.K. reissue), Elvis Costello — "Pills And Soap" (Demon U.K. version), Lyres — "I Want To Help You Ann" (Ace of Hearts).  
**VIDEO/FILM:** Michael Jackson — "Billie Jean" and "Beat It."  
**ROOKIE:** the Violent Femmes  
**HYPE:** The second US Festival — an overpriced Silicon Valley Woodstock.  
**UNDERRATED:** America's new "Paisley Underground" scene.  
**DANCE:** New Order — "Confusion (rough mix)" (Streetwise/Factory).  
**REISSUE:** Jerry Lee Lewis — *The Sun Years* box (Charly).  
**DISAPPOINTMENT:** The 1983 New Music Seminar.  
**LIVE:** Neil Young (solo acoustic and electronic), Universal Amphitheater, Los Angeles.

## MARK ROWLAND

**ALBUMS:** Junior — *Inside Lookin' Out* (Mercury), Midnight Oil — *10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1* (Columbia), Ganelin Trio — *Vide* (Leo), NRBQ — *Tapdancin' Bats* (Red Rooster), UB40 — *Labour Of Love* (A&M).  
**SINGLES/CUTS:** R.E.M. "Radio Free Europe," Bob Dylan "Sweetheart Like You," Michael Jackson "Beat It."  
**VIDEO/FILM:** Donald Fagen — "The New Frontier."  
**ROOKIE:** Los Lobos  
**HYPE:** the "new" David Bowie  
**UNDERRATED:** John Abercrombie  
**DANCE:** George Clinton "Man's Best Friend"  
**REISSUE:** Big Maybelle — the Okeh Sessions (Epic)  
**BIG DISAPPOINTMENT:** no laws passed banning duets with Paul McCartney  
**LIVE:** Jack DeJohnette at the Village Vanguard (with Keith Jarrett)

## J.D. CONSIDINE

**ALBUMS:** R.E.M. — *Murmur* (I.R.S.), Los Lobos — *... And A Time To Dance* (Slash), Police — *Synchronicity* (A&M), Divinyls — *Desperate* (Chrysalis), Steve Arrington's Hall of Fame "T" (Atlantic).  
**SINGLES/CUTS:** Indeeep "Last Night A DJ Saved My Life" (Sound of NY), Kurtis Blow "Party Time," Grace Jones "Nipple To The Bottle."  
**VIDEO/FILM:** Michael Jackson "Beat It," "Say Amen Somebody"  
**ROOKIE:** Roddy Frame  
**HYPE:** Big Country and Windham Hill Records  
**UNDERRATED:** Divinyls and go-go style funk  
**DANCE:** Run—D.M.C. "It's Like That/Sucker MCs" (Profile)  
**REISSUE:** the Yardbirds (Epic)  
**DISAPPOINTMENT:** Marc Almond did not make his retirement permanent.  
**LIVE:** King Sunny Ade, Wax Museum, Washington, D.C.

## BRIAN CULLMAN

**ALBUMS:** Assorted Artists — *Zulu Jive* (Earthworks Records), U2 — *War* (Island), the Beat — *What Is Beat* (Import) Talking Heads — *Speaking In Tongues* (Sire), Fleshtones — *Hexbreaker* (I.R.S. Records)  
**SINGLES/CUTS:** the Beat "I Confess"; T-Bone Burnett "Baby Fall Down"; Prince "Little Red Corvette."  
**VIDEO/FILM:** *Time Stands Still* by Peter Gothar and *The Mirror* by Andre Tarkowsky  
**DANCE:** Orchestra Jazira "Love"  
**REISSUE:** *Music Of The Pygmies of AKA Central Africa* (Ocara) and R&L Thompson — *Four Down Like Silver* (Carthage).  
**DISAPPOINTMENT:** death of Muddy Waters  
**HYPE:** Grenada  
**ROOKIE:** T-Bone Burnett  
**UNDERRATED:** Fleshtones and "Cool It Reba"  
**LIVE:** the Dirty Dozen Brass Band and Talking Heads



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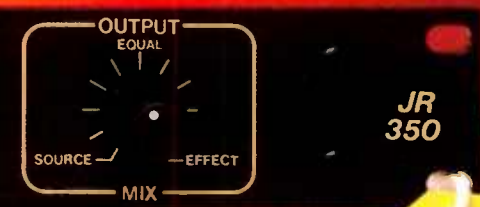


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