Bonnie Raitt & Jackson Browne, One on One

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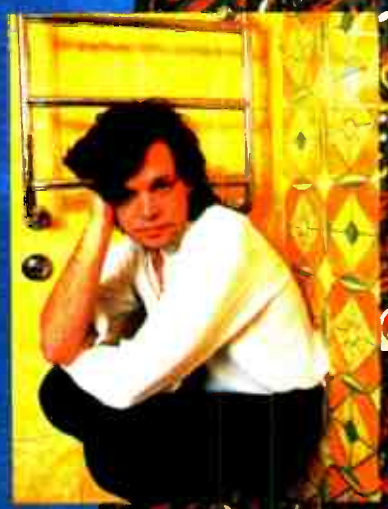
10,000 Maniacs Face Sex Worship, Backstabbing and Big Bucks

Bad News from John Cougar Mellencamp



BEST UNSIGNED BAND PAGE 103

Natalie Merchant

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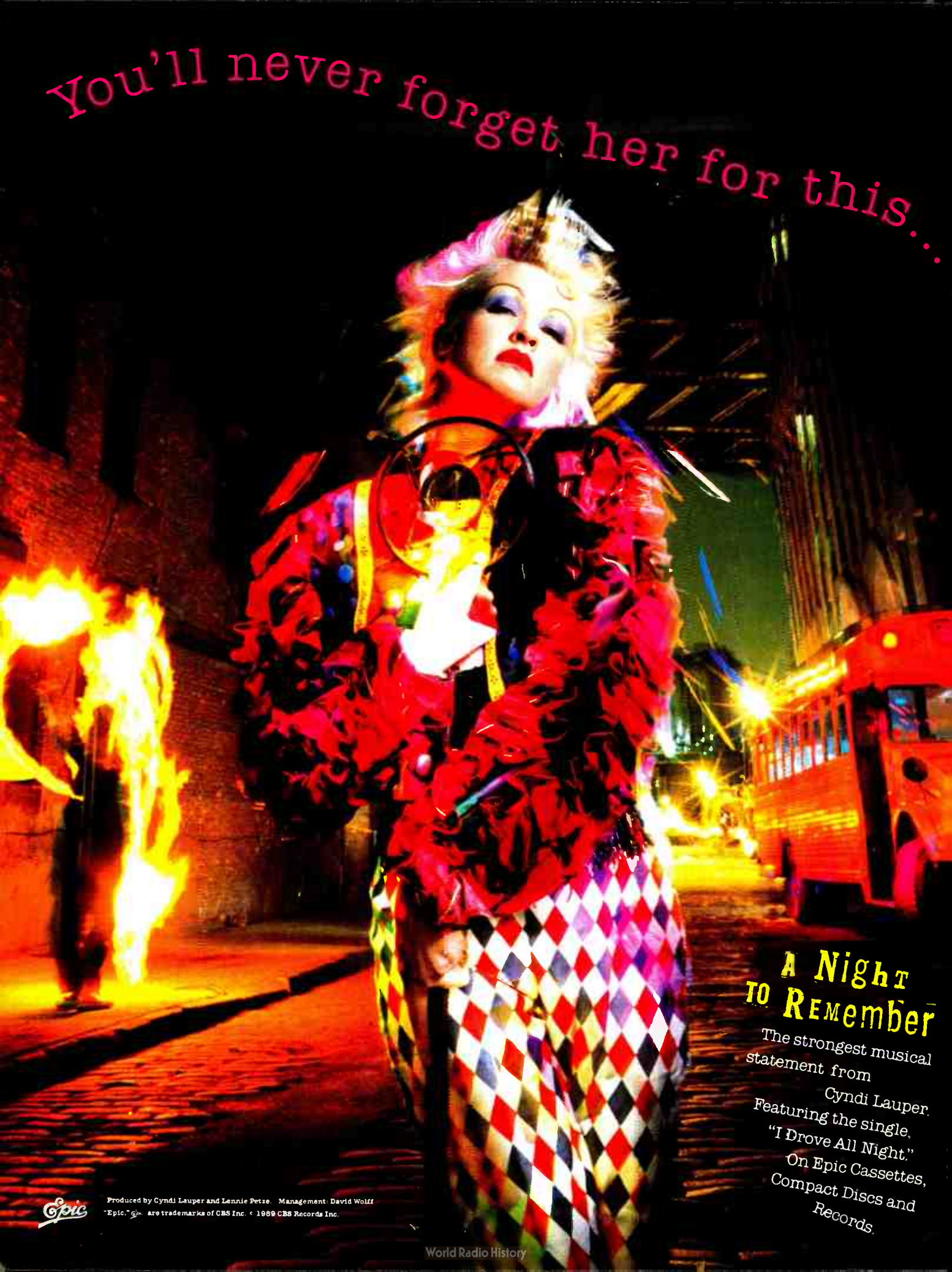

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Why this man won't tour and "can't do another record."
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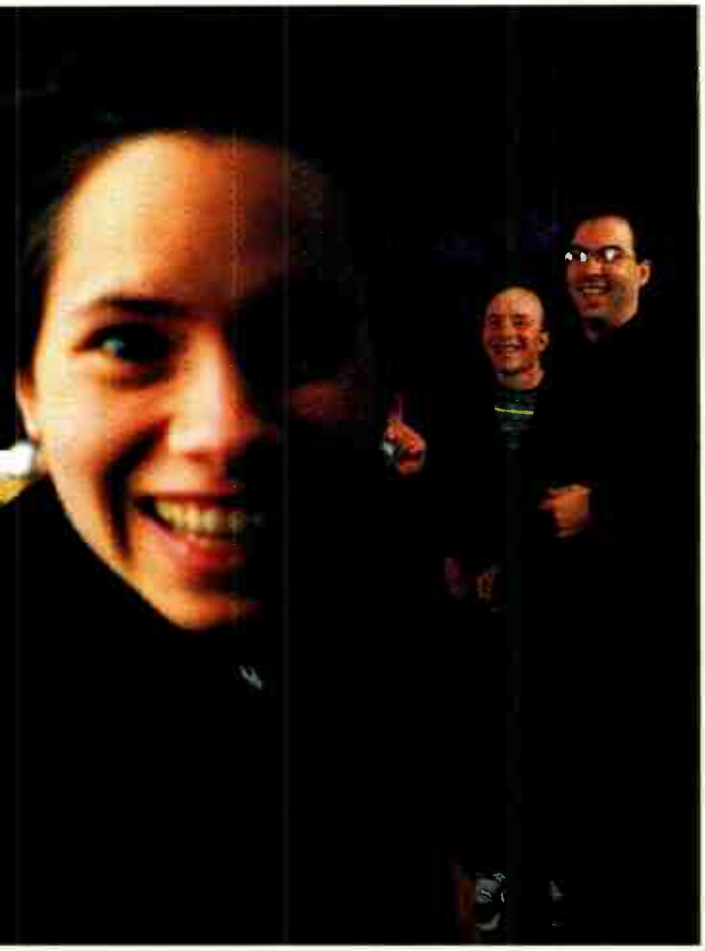

Will Natalie Merchant become larger than life? 44

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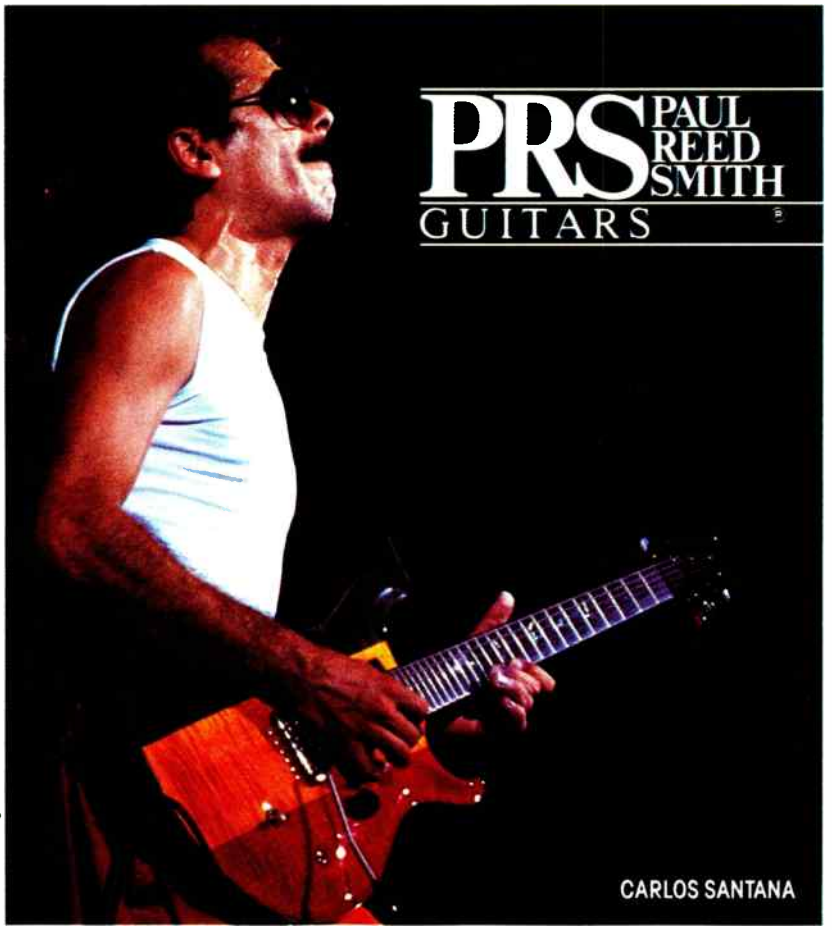

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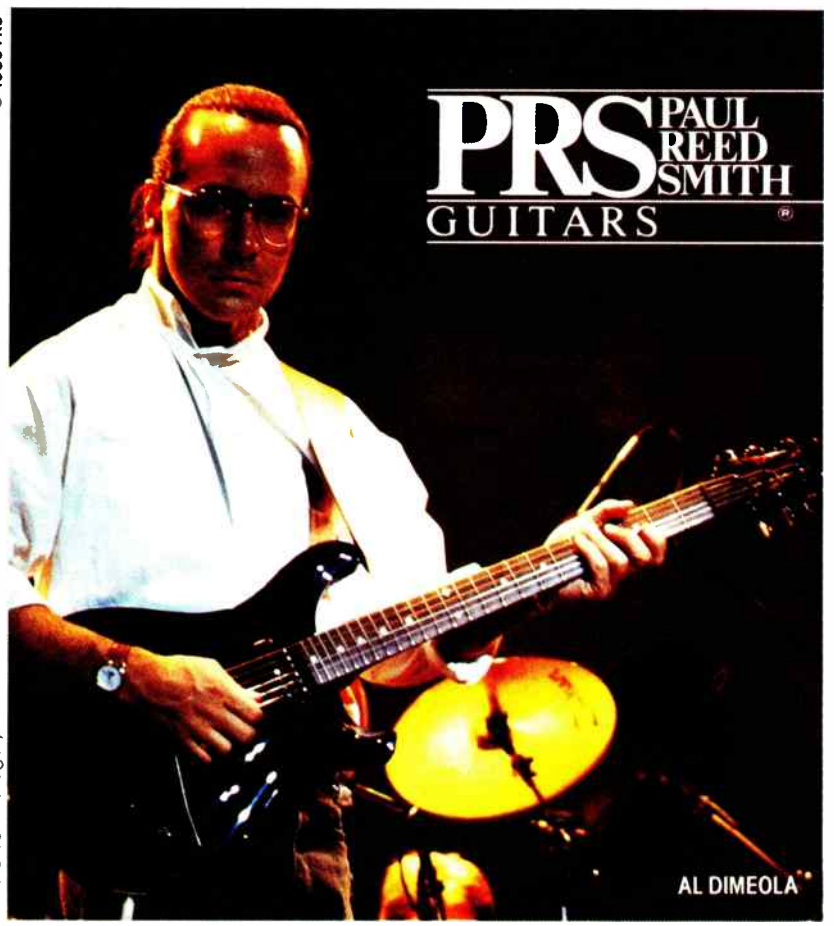

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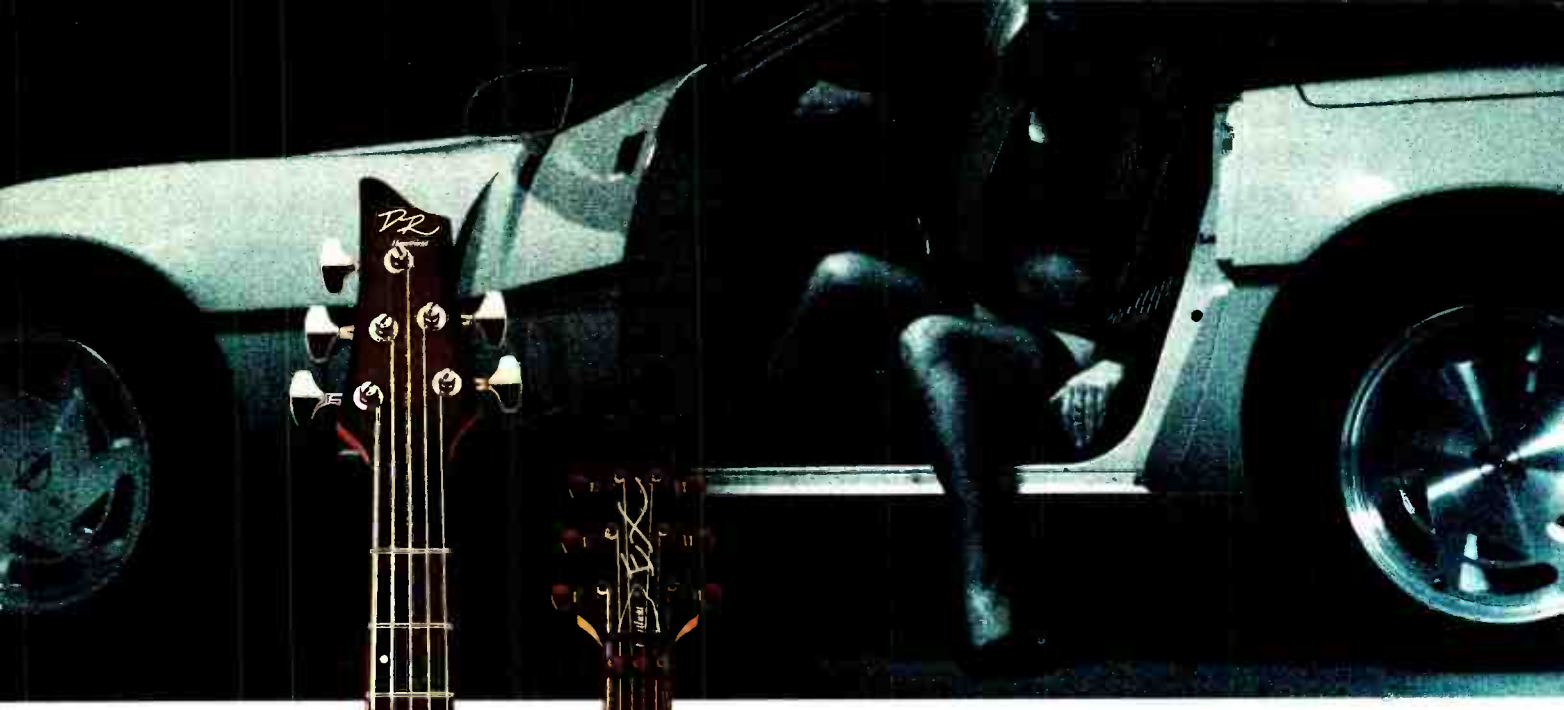

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LETTERS

MILES TO GO

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR the article on Miles Davis (May '89)! It's not very often that I see anything written about him in any detail except in your magazine. I appreciate you keeping track of the most important trumpet player in history (in my opinion anyway).

Selena Mead
Mt. Desert, ME

I AM A 19-YEAR-OLD STUDENT who is just now being introduced to Davis' legendary music. I'm glad to see *Musician* put such a remarkable and talented person on their cover.

Michael Gray
Nashville, TN

MILES HAS NEVER BEEN KNOWN for his politeness, but when a man spews out trash like Davis did across your own pages, it appears to me that something's amiss: "Bitches are vicious... women are bitches," etc.

Davis rightfully complained throughout his interview that the U.S. gives no respect to its artists. But why should a "man" who gives women no respect garnish any?

John Pietro
Brooklyn, NY

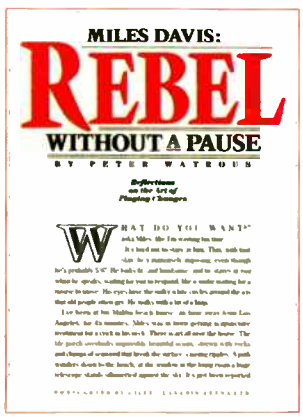
XTC OK

MANY THANKS TO *MUSICIAN* and Scott Isler for the smart, informative (and overdue!) XTC story (May '89). Andy Partridge is a truly interesting, talented, multidimensional artist. He's also very engaging, and his band complements him perfectly.

I only wish he might reconsider a small U.S. tour, sometime, on his own terms. I'm sure it would be a mutually rewarding experience!

Nick Salatino
Chicago, IL

IN THIS AGE OF EARTHLY delights like video, is it not a shame that the *Oranges and Lemons* rehearsals were not videotaped for those of us


MILES DAVIS:
REBEL
WITHOUT A PAUSE
BY PETER WATROUS

who care enough to pay the price of admission? Then Andy and the Partridge family wouldn't be bothered to go on the road. Hell! I don't blame the guy. His sense of misanthropy is probably what attracted me to XTC in the first place.

David Hawker
Jamestown, NY

IT'S WONDERFUL TO SEE A BAND that deserves respect for their talent rather than their lifestyles, clothing, proficiency with hair mousse or MTV-ability.

Joe Lynn
Evanston, IL

I WAS UNABLE TO FINISH READing "The Dukes of Swindon" because of an uncontrollable urge to punch XTC's Andy Partridge. I was sickened by the quote, "mankind is [not] smart enough to control itself... I totally distrust mankind." If you don't like it, leave the planet.

John Brackett
Waterville, NY

QED, huh? – Ed.

DIFFERENT DRUMMERS

IN THE FINE YOUNG CANNIBALS article (May '89) by Scott Isler, David Steele states, "I like the sounds... of drum machines.... Who wants a real live drummer? It sounds worse!"

He is putting down a lot of accomplished percussionists who work very hard at their craft. It's fine not to want a drummer, but to put them down as not being legitimate is in bad taste.

Derek Cavin
Fenton, MI

I WOULD LOVE TO KNOW ANDY Cox's (of Fine Young Cannibals) choice of drummers since only "three or four drummers in the entire world" have a worthwhile "feel." Open your ears, Mr. Cox. There are great drummers all around that could add soul to your tunes—even though you aren't the third or fourth most groovin' guitarist in the world.

Michael Tittel
Cincinnati, OH

HISTORY LESSON

DAN HEDGES' *FACES* ARTICLE on Laibach (May '89) states that "Laibach" was the Third Reich's name for Ljubljana. This city was also known as Laibach as early as the 1700s, when one million German settlers emigrated to what now is known as Yugoslavia.

Willy Rapp
Haddon Hts., NJ

THE SOUND OF MUSES

THANKS FOR CONSIDERING Throwing Muses in *Musician* (May '89). They are America's future in "new music." And they don't sound like R.E.M.—which is a plus for them!

Terrell Berry
Philadelphia, PA

NO RUNAROUND

THANKS FOR THE ARTICLE ON a true original. Dion (*Faces*, May '89) has recorded a lot of great music that many people have never heard. Perhaps the Arista album will get people's attention.

Doug Schenker
Annapolis, MD

BYRNING AND LOOTING

IN RESPONSE TO CHRIS McGowan's ill-advised rhetorical question (*Records*, Apr. '89)—"what rock star has ever before presented a sampler of foreign music?"—please inform McGowan that David Byrne is not the first to commit this particular form of theft.

Apparently nobody remembers *Brian Jones Presents the Pipes of Pan at Joujouka*—perhaps because it was released posthumously, perhaps because the winners/survivors got to write the official history, which largely obliterates both Brian's role in the Stones and his breadth of musical interests. Granted, Jones himself obliterated his promise with excess, but he should receive his due.

As a secondary issue, why should I bother with the opinion of a critic who knows less than I do?

L.A. Sniarowski
Cincinnati, OH

Please send letters to: *Musician*, 1515 Broadway, 39th floor, New York, NY 10036.

FOR

Pete Townshend

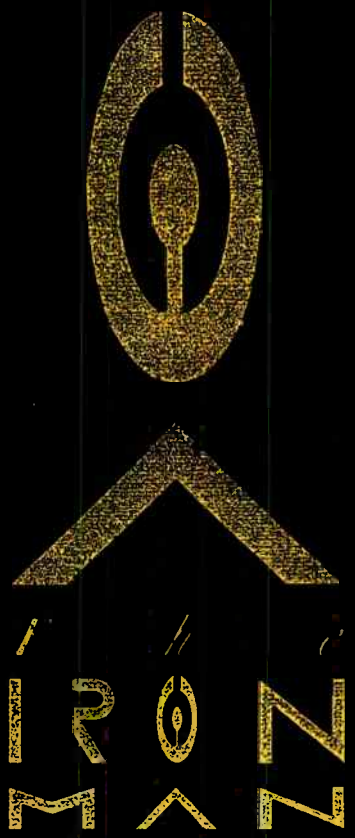
WRITING A NEW ROCK MUSICAL WAS CHILD'S PLAY.

"Ted Hughes' story provides me with a perfect fairy tale on which to hang modern songs...My intention was to write a modern song-cycle musical in the manner of TOMMY!" Thus Pete Townshend describes The Iron Man, his eagerly anticipated new album.

Based on English writer Ted Hughes' children's story, the rôles in The Iron Man are sung by Townshend, Roger Daltrey, John Lee Hooker and Nina Simone. In addition, the album features The Who on two songs: "Dig," an all-new Pete Townshend composition; and a unique remake of Arthur Brown's "Fire," produced by Peter Wolf.

The release of The Iron Man coincides with the summer's most talked-about tour: the return of The Who. Selections from The Iron Man will be performed live in concert for the first time on the tour.

The Iron Man includes the single "A Friend Is A Friend" as well as the songs "I Won't Run Anymore," "I Eat Heavy Metal," and "Fire."



Produced by Pete Townshend

Contains two new songs by THE WHO, "DIG" and "FIRE"

ON ATLANTIC RECORDS, CASSETTES AND COMPACT DISCS

ATLANTIC

MAN VS. MACHINE

ROACHFORD

"PRUNES?! YOU WANT A *PRUNE* cocktail?!" Andrew Roachford contorts his rugged features into an expression of prim repulsion as he imitates a Midwestern waiter caught on the wrong side of the "prawn" (U.K.)/"shrimp" (U.S.) language barrier. The emerging sentiment of Britain's hottest R&B sensation is that it's the simplicities of America that are the most difficult to suss out.

Boasting a muscular crunch that harks back to the Foundations and Eddy Grant's old band the Equals, Roachford (the man and the band) is touring behind the *Roachford* album and lightning-pop single "Cuddly Toy (Feel for Me)." Now he has about 200 miles to go before crossing the finish line of a three-week cross-country charge, and the tired fellow is still trying to separate the theory from the reality of the American approach to music marketing.

Theory-wise, Roachford has enough education to choke a horse. Uncle Bill Roachford, a sax player on London's club circuit, provided the most terse counsel: "He said, 'Take the money and run.'" Yet it was Roachford the younger's tenure as a Rhodes scholar that really opened his eyes. Mind you, the Rhodes in question was Bernard Rhodes, manager of the Clash, with which a teen Roachford had an apprenticeship of sorts.

When a Roachford demo wound up at the CBS London office, another media wiz—Terence Trent D'Arby—heard it and took up the cause.

"Yeah, he gave it a big push. He's the kind of person who doesn't rave about anything new. At all." Besides giving Roachford the opening spot on his last European

F A

SERIOUS FUN

TOO MUCH JOY

SO HOW DOES A BAND END UP calling itself Too Much Joy?

"It's a typical rock 'n' roll story," explains singer Tim Quirk. "The first time I took mushrooms, I had a pad of paper handy to put down all my wonderful thoughts. But when I woke up in the morning, the only thing written on it was 'too much joy.'"

Not much else about this Scarsdale, N.Y. quartet is typical, though. As heard on *Son of Sam I Am*, Too Much Joy deftly mixes bright rockin' melodies with not-so-sunny lyrical concerns. "Making Fun of Bums" drives home the lament of a newly homeless teen with the punch line "Making fun of bums/Bad karma thing to do." Without tears, the breezy "Kicking" follows a day in the life of a young cancer sufferer.

Too Much Joy's flip exterior has inspired misconceptions. Bassist Sandy Smallens notes, "Some people want to say we're part of a They Might Be Giants/Dead Milkmen trend. It makes more sense to me to compare us to somebody like Randy Newman. Our songs are both kidding and serious."

Noting their fondness for misfits, he adds, "We want everyone who feels how we did in high school—like outcasts—to realize it's okay to feel that way."

That classic teen alienation sparked the formation of Too Much Joy in the early '80s. Recalls Quirk, "On weekends we'd raid our parents' liquor cabinets and walk around town, saying we were gonna smash street lamps. We were too wimpy for that, so we wound up sitting on the swings at the elementary school. Eventually we formed a band."

Beginning as the Rave, they specialized in Clash songs before developing their mixture of bitter and sweet. The sometimes-rudimentary *Green Eggs and Crack*—Quirk likens it to "a retarded kid"—showed plenty of promise. *Son of Sam I Am*, another title from Dr. Seuss, finds 'em hitting the target more often than not.

However, growing acclaim for the album and enthusiastic audiences probably won't spoil the group that sings, "Every great band should be shot/Before they make their *Combat Rock*." In his best aw-shucks manner, Quirk laughs, "We're paying our dues and there's a lot of hard work, but it's not supposed to be this easy. I still feel like we're just screwing around. I'm waiting for everything to fall apart." – *Jon Young*

tour, D'Arby also provided a living lesson in how to refract the glare of the spotlight.

"Well, Terry used to be a journalist." Say no more. But when Roachford hit the studio for a one-off recording with Jeff Beck (a neo-"Train Kept A'Rollin'" for the *Twins* soundtrack), he found himself face-to-face with the man he assumed to be the prototype for *Spinal Tap*'s Nigel Tufnel.

"That's our real inspiration," Roachford smiles, putting on shades to fend off the glare of corporate chrome. "You can't take it seriously. When we reissued 'Cuddly Toy,' everyone came up to me and said, 'Oh, great, *much* better than that first version.' And it was *exactly* the same." – *John Walker*

Vinyl Curtains

They say some people still listen to records—you know, those big black things—but the evidence is getting harder to find in the music industry. What used to be the only retail prerecorded medium looks like it's getting a double death blow from more upscale compact discs on one side and more popular cassette tapes on the other.

A Recording Industry Association of America report found that combined vinyl LP and EP unit shipments fell almost one third in 1988 from the previous year. LPs and EPs contributed less than 10 percent of 1988's total prerecorded units shipped. By contrast, CDs outsold vinyl albums better than two to one; with cassettes the figure was over six-to-one.

On April 12 executives at Hauppauge Record Manufacturing Ltd., the U.S.'s largest independent record pressing plant, announced they'd be closing down in 60 days. HRM pressed vinyl for RCA, PolyGram Arista and Profile, among others.

The Long Island, N.Y. plant dates from the early '60s. HRM, formed in 1981, had pressed as many as 100,000 albums daily. At the time of its shut down announcement, HRM's output was less than one third that amount. The closing leaves four major U.S. record pressing plants still in operation, down from a peak of 15.

Record stores—sorry music shops—have also got the drift, emphasizing cassettes and the more profitable CDs. In one sign-of-the-time move, the 149-store Record Bar chain is phasing out vinyl albums entirely and changing the stores' names to Tracks. According to Record Bar CEO and president Barrie Bergman, vinyl had trickled down to two percent of the stores' sales.

Is there no hope for the turntable enthusiast? Probably not in the long run. But as LP records switch from mass medium to esoterica, they're forging some strange alliances. Formerly CD-only companies like Rykodisc and Dunhill now supply LPs of certain titles. And audiophile-oriented Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab, which got out of the vinyl biz two years ago, is getting back in with limited-edition LP runs of classic-rock albums the company's been selling as gold-plated CDs. Capitalism abhors a vacuum. – *Scott Isler*

C E S

PUTTIN' ON THE BROGUES

PROCLAIMERS

GIVEN THE FOLKSY FEEL OF their albums, it might seem that Proclaimers Craig and Charlie Reid spent their childhood listening to little more than the traditional tunes of their native Scotland. After all, *This Is the Story*, the duo's debut, is unassumingly acoustic and thick with brogue, while songs like "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)," from the recent *Sunshine on Leith*, boast precisely the sort of vigorous, sing-along choruses that must be the result of growing up with great folk tunes.

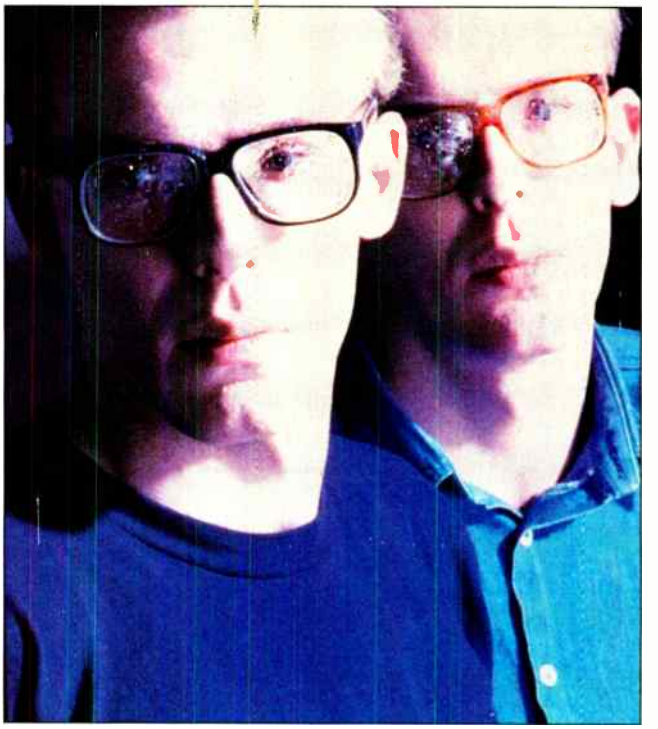
Except the Reid twins didn't.

"I don't think either of us were particularly interested by folk," admits Craig, the non-guitar-playing Reid. "It wasn't something that we grew up with. All the records we listened to generally were American records, either R&B or country or mainstream rock 'n' roll."

So why don't the Proclaimers try to sound more like American rock or R&B? "Because we wanted to do our own songs," Craig says, "and when you set out to imitate an American sound, all you ever do is imitate. Even if you get very, very good at it, you're still doing an imitation.

"If you try to express yourself," he adds, "ignore the influences you have and try to do something that's primarily about your own experiences, that's a lot more challenging."

Ironically, that belief in self-expression, not some deep-seated folk-music fetish, is responsible for the Proclaimers' rootsy sound. "If you do write about something you know a lot about, and you're truthful about that," Craig explains, "then it's going to feel authentic."



Still, the Proclaimers may yet become Americanized—by the touring process. "If you want to keep coming here year after year," Craig says, "and you keep doing a lot of work here, then because the place is so extreme, if you like it at all it's definitely going to influence you.

"I'm sure that it will happen. I just hope it broadens us, rather than make us a bit more narrow."– *J.D. Considine*

JUICED ON THE WAGON

PETER STAMPFEL

FOR 25 YEARS PETER STAMPFEL has been the godfather of weird-beat. As a founder of the legendary Holy Modal Rounders in the early '60s, he helped pioneer "acid folk"—a genre that lives on through the twisted sounds of Eugene Chadbourne and Camper Van Beethoven. Yet Stampfel himself has remained the definition of a cult figure, recording and touring infrequently and plagued by drug and alcohol problems.

Now, Stampfel says with a conspiratorial air from his New York loft, "That's all gonna change." Sworn off hallucinogens and newly enrolled in AA, he and his democratic band the Bottlecaps (formed in 1984) are turning up the juice. A new album, their first for Homestead, is due this summer, with two more planned for next year. Stampfel wisecracks with a beatific smile, "Hopefully by jamming all of these records into the public's face over a short period of time, the throng of Bottlecap fans will become a *mob.*"

People's Republic of Rock 'n' Roll, the new Bottlecaps record and a surprisingly rocking set, spoofs arena rock and supermarket tabloids but can also get sincere and humble. Such endearing loopiness is the legacy of the Rounders, who, with Stampfel and Steve Weber leading the way, went through dizzying personnel changes—playwright Sam Shepard was a drummer—and record labels.

Stampfel, though, doesn't wax nostalgic when discussing the band; he's "embarrassed" by the woozy quality of their classic albums and regretful of his bitter post-Rounders years. But the idealism of that era shines on.

"Ideally," he says sarcastically in his crackly voice, "what I'd like the songs to do is change everyone that heard them irrevocably for the better by a factor of 10 or 20, thereby saving the world."

Stampfel—at 50, more wiry and jumpy than people half his age—is more determined to take control. But don't think he's gone careerist: He gets song ideas in his sleep and plans to write a batch of sci-fi country songs. Meanwhile, his one-time label Rounder (named in part after his former band) is planning a Stampfel anthology and a live Stampfel-Weber record taped in 1981.

"There's fights onstage, and we blow tunes in the middle, and we take seven times to start this one tune," he says of the latter, smiling proudly. "Really *great* stuff!"

– *David Browne*

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BIG COUNTRY

BLUE RODEO

JIM CUDDY HAD NEVER PLAYED country-rock before forming Blue Rodeo in his native Toronto with longtime songwriting partner and bandmate Greg Keelor. Judging from *Diamond Mine*, the group's follow-up to 1988's *Outskirts*, Cuddy still doesn't—not, at any rate, country-rock without jazz expansiveness, pop clarity and soulful balladry. "We try to let the song speak for itself," Cuddy says. "But everybody tosses in his bits."

On *Diamond Mine* Blue Rodeo's songs kick up dust, stretch out or hew closely to absorbing melody lines; they engage with U.S. places and politics, or stare down that old international concern, romance. The band encourages and reacts well to the thoughtful, sometimes improvisatory jazz-blues stylings of their keyboardist Bob Wiseman. Cuddy and Keelor swap lead vocals; the latter's gruff, somewhat Randy Newmanish delivery contrasts with Cuddy's lucid command of ballads.

As singers, they're flip-sides of one another, blunt and smooth. Cuddy thinks the differences in their voices mask a more important similarity in the way Blue Rodeo's music looks at the world. "There's a certain melancholia, and tinges of bitterness, that run through all our songs. We share that vision. Country music has always been a tonic for sadness."

For this group, though, country songs yanked to '60s rock grooves may lead anywhere. "It's kind of like the difference between Dwight Yoakam and Steve Earle," Cuddy says. "Dwight Yoakam tries to preserve a tradition, and Steve Earle uses as much of it as he wants. I don't think we try to preserve any tradition. It's just, 'Hey, that's it—I love those "I Walk the Line" guitar lines, so let's throw one in our song.'"

Blue Rodeo doesn't stop there. – *James Hunter*

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MARIA McKEE

Lone Justice Singer Goes It Alone

BY JEAN ROSENBLUTH

"I thought that to get people's attention, I just had to explode."

LYNN GOLDSMITH/LGI

MARIA MCKEE IS BEAMING. After six years in the public eye and ear as the whirling-dervish lead singer of what was perhaps Los Angeles' most beloved homebred band of the '80s, Lone Justice, the artist has finally been recognized by one of her favorite periodicals.

"It was right there in the *Star* that [U2 drummer] Larry Mullen, Jr. and I are engaged," she says with a big grin, pointing to the tottering stack of gossip rags in her otherwise sparsely furnished West Los Angeles apartment. "It was quite a thrill for me because I read every one of those magazines and believe everything in them. All my friends were calling and saying congratulations."

To the possible disillusionment of *Star* gazers everywhere, however, the Mullen-McKee match is nothing more than not-so-idle gossip that sprang from a fashion shoot the two did together. "We've never gone out, nothing like that," says McKee. "He has a girlfriend who I know and is my friend."

In fact, rather than forging unions during the three years since the release of the second and final Lone Justice album, *Shelter*, McKee has spent the time settling in on her own, both personally and professionally. Her self-titled debut effort has just been issued by Geffen Records, and its almost relentlessly doleful songs about lost love and loneliness constitute the first record McKee has made that "I'm really gung-ho about because it's true to myself at a particular moment in time." For *Maria McKee*, the 24-year-old assumed almost all of the songwriting duties, whereas on *Shelter* and 1985's *Lone Justice* hardly a track appeared that wasn't a collaboration with or the work of the other bandmembers or such friends as Little Steven, Tom Petty and assorted Heartbreakers.

"If I'm going to make a Maria McKee album, it has to be coming from me and not anyone else," she says. "I figure that maybe I'm not a great songwriter yet, but I intend to be, so I have to keep doing it. I have to keep writing and putting out songs that maybe not everyone thinks is the song for breaking me or whatever, but nonetheless is a song that I wrote at that time in my life."

If the songwriter sounds a bit defensive, it's not without cause. Her material for the solo debut was initially greeted by Geffen with only slightly more enthusiasm than a box of returns from a record store. "The record company challenges me because they want what's best for me, but it's hard because I'm in a vulnerable position," says McKee. "When I finally got a bunch of songs together, everyone said, 'Okay, these songs aren't really commercial, we need you to write some more normal-type, conventional songs.' And I said, 'Well, I don't know,' 'cause I tried to write hit songs for the first two albums, but I think those songs have to fall out of you, be natural. It's not something you can calculate. I mean, I listen to the radio and it baffles me. 'Hit' is just a word that I don't understand."

Ultimately McKee had her way. Songs she wrote with Steve Earle and a few others at Geffen's behest "were good, but I ended up not using them. At the end, [Geffen] gave me so much freedom that I almost feel guilty." The only collaborations that wound up on *Maria McKee* are "Nobody's Child," to which labelmate Robbie Robertson lent a hand lyrically, and the music to "More Than a Heart Can Hold," "This Property Is Condemned" and "Breathe," on which McKee got help from some Lone Justice cohorts. She also covers Richard Thompson's "Has He Got a Friend for Me?"

The participation of some former Lone Justice members on her solo bow—particularly keyboardist Bruce Brody, who appears throughout—supports McKee's claim that the dissolution of the band was amicable. "It wasn't that we didn't get along or anything like that. It just got too hard for me to keep a band together. I felt like I wasn't getting any creative work done, and I wanted the freedom to take the time I needed to

write with whoever I wanted to write with and to get whatever musicians I wanted." Those recruited for *Maria McKee* include Richard Thompson, Tony Levin, Jim Keltner and Alex Acuna.

After Lone Justice disbanded in late 1987, McKee took up residence in New York City for a year to write and demo her solo debut. With Brody, she spent nearly every day in a tenth-floor "warehouse space" at the Record Plant studio. "It's a real cool room, all torn apart with construction and sawdust and junk lying everywhere," recalls McKee. "Patti Smith, who's a serious idol of mine, had rehearsed there for *Easter*. So we set up our little four-track and our drum machines and our guitars and everything, and we'd just turn the tape on and mess around." The resulting demos were given to producer Mitchell Froom by Geffen with the approval of McKee's manager, Jimmy Iovine, who had produced the two Lone Justice records, the latter with Little Steven.

McKee was only vaguely aware of Froom's work. She had been a fan of Boston's Del Fuegos during the period he was producing them, and Crowded House's "Don't Dream It's Over" was a radio favorite—but she was anxious to work with another producer since her friendship with Iovine "had gotten to the point that he could no longer be objective about my music."

Geffen arranged a meeting between Froom and McKee in a company conference room. To hear her tell it, their working relationship was almost over before it began. "We didn't get along at all. He just thought I was completely ill-focused and not paying attention to anything that was going on around me, and I thought he was kind of indifferent and sort of apathetic." The two decided to meet again in less formal surroundings—McKee's apartment—"and it was like night and day. It was as if somebody clicked a button, and every idea that he had I was like, 'Oh yeah, that's it! That's exactly what I want to do!'"

She credits Froom with conceiving most of the album's intricately developed arrangements, like the Salvation Army/New Orleans feel given to "This Property Is Condemned" and the "Appalachian/American Indian/medieval folk art sort of hybrid" applied to "Breathe." The nearly inaudible gospel underpinnings of the two Lone Justice albums have been brought to the fore throughout, burying practically all traces of the singer's once-hyped country roots and smothering most of her mainstream rock 'n' roll tendencies as well.

"There was one song, 'More Than a Heart Can Hold,' that was meant to be our gospel song," says McKee. "But the more I listen to the album, it all sounds very gospelly. That's just a part of me, although sometimes it's more unconscious than others. I grew up listening to that music. I learned how to sing to gospel records. I sang in church, because I come from a very religious background, and my music is very spiritual because it's something I depend on."

The plaintive, frequently languorous air of the music on *Maria McKee* and the record's disconsolate lyrics make for a mood far removed from the effervescent

WAYS TO BE WIRED

I'M not a musician—I don't really play anything," says **Maria McKee**. "I can tell you what kind of eye cream I use." Nevertheless, when called upon to do so, the singer strums a Gibson Hummingbird and a Guild F45CE. She uses Herco picks and D'Addario J16 Phosphor Bronze strings, playing through a Peavey Classic Chorus amp.

Bruce Brody's array of keyboards includes a Yamaha CP70 piano, Korg M1, Korg CX3, Hammond B3, Casio FZ-1, Ensoniq ESQ-1 and Dynacord CLS222, channeled through a Peavey KB400 amp and 3020HT speaker cabinet.

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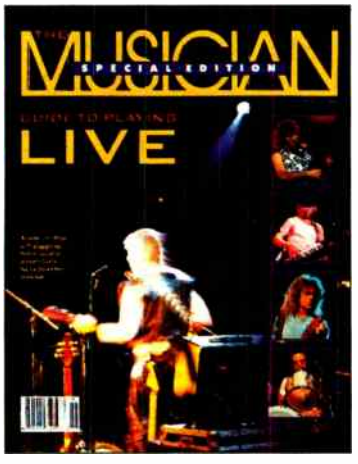

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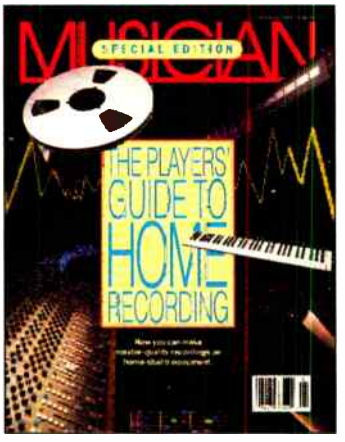

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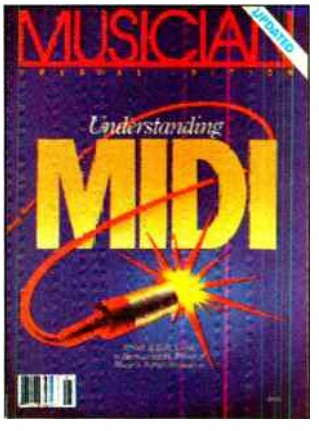

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spirit that pervaded the country-rock of Lone Justice. The album's melancholy music is also in sharp contrast to McKee's own spritely, warm demeanor. "I usually try to have a good time, but there are certain things you don't deal with 24 hours a day," she explains. "I have my moments of being down, and there are certain times when you open yourself up to deal with those things, and when you do that you usually end up expressing yourself in some way creatively if you have that talent. Sometimes I put myself in a position to write a song that's not a position I would like to be in all the time."

Though her recent lyrics would lead one to believe that McKee's heart has been broken and scarred beyond repair, she says, "I don't have much experience in the field of romance, I really don't. I use love as a metaphor; it's a convenient form in songwriting. You can use it in a lot of different ways and it can mean a lot of other things, from loss of identity to disillusionment, stuff like that."

Even McKee's vocals have changed with the new record, refined from the wild abandon of old. The singer contends that she's lost little of her power with the progression from a scream to a whisper. "I think you can be just as wild, push the envelope just as much, by singing while barely moving and breathing. I think in some ways it's even more effective than going 'Waaaaahhhhhh!,' which is what I had always done. I thought that in order to get people's attention, to prove my point, I just had to explode."

There are few eruptions onstage these days from McKee, who is traveling the country with Brody presenting "as close as you can get to an acappella tour" in small clubs and venues. Though she's happy with the "focus" and "maturity" she says her music has these days compared to the garage-band chaos of Lone Justice, she turns wistful when discussing life on the road. "I remember we did this gig in London at the Marquee, one of our last shows. It was just packed, with wild kids churning. They were sweating and hot, and we were playing really loud and frantic. They were just so into it. And I can remember at the end I just sort of did a Peter Gabriel and fell into the crowd, and they carried me around above the fray for about five minutes. And they didn't touch me unfavorably or take my clothes off or hurt me. It was almost supernatural." Pause. "Stuff like that I'm really gonna miss."

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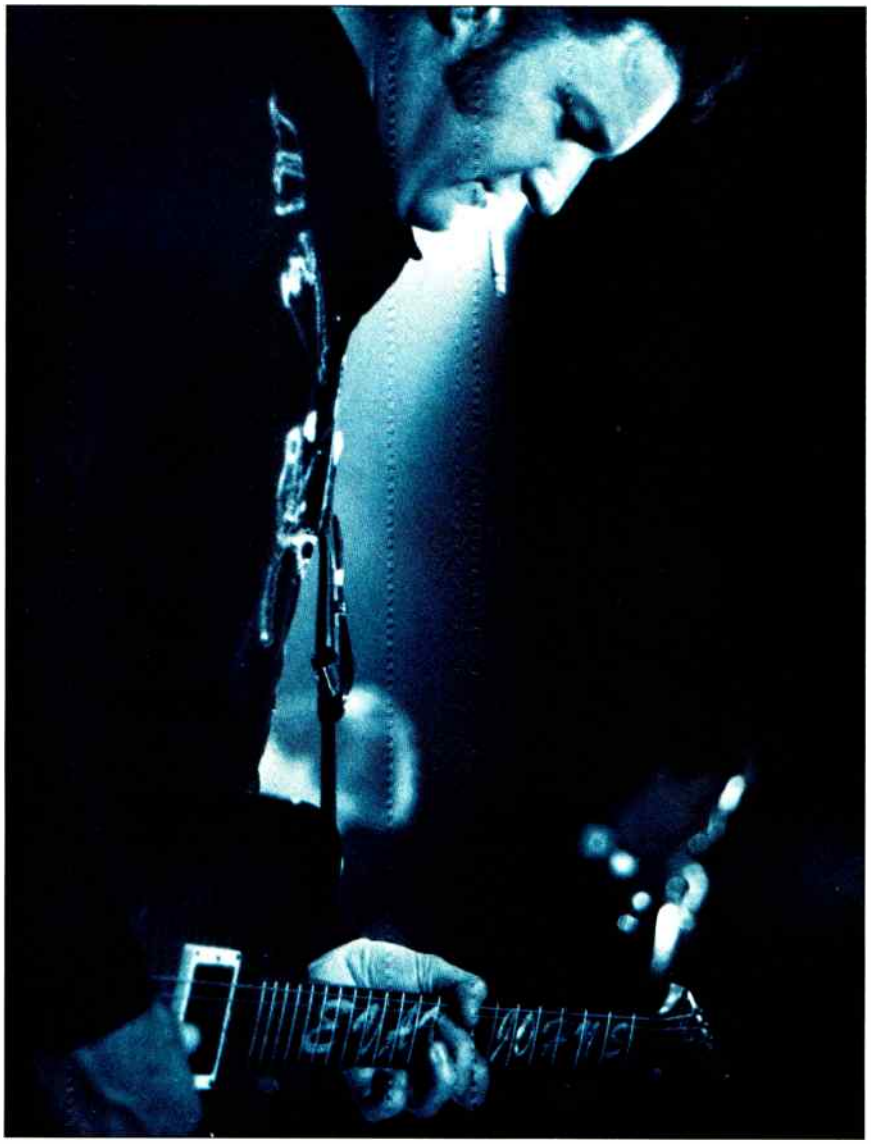
EVAN JOHNS & HIS H-BOMBS

Love 'em or Leave 'em, They're Happy with Themselves

BY JIM MACNIE



Evan Johns keeping the roll: "I'm not for nothin' stiff."

DENNIS STEIN

HEY JIM. if I wasn't havin' a good time doin' this, I'd have to be out of my mind, man." Evan Johns is at a Motel 6 in Troy, New York. It's Friday, about 6:30 p.m., and he's laughin'. It's a gig night, of course (just about every night is), and Evan just finished shaving. He and his band, the H-Bombs, are hanging out, getting psyched to have their totally loco raunchabilly smash some K-Rations at a Troy watering hole. A Boston date is next. "Yeah, let's make sure we connect tomorrow, man."

Johns wants to connect because his new record, the ridiculously rockophonic *Bombs Away*, has just come out on Rykodisc. I've been blasting the tape around the neighborhood for the past six months. Evan's a major-league hot shit, but you don't need to converse with him to find that out. You can do it the easy way: Go to an H-Bomb gig. Once there you'll find beer being spilled and rear ends being shaken. And you'll see something that's just as important to Johns' music as his unstoppable chops: his wideass grin.

"Hey," he rasps backstage in Boston the next night, "to play music the right way, you've got to be loosened out. I'm not for nuthin' stiff. A lot of this music nowadays...it's not much fun. I know there's social commentary—I'm not against that. But it's hard to find someone playing what I call rock 'n' roll, meaning that there's still some *roll* in it."

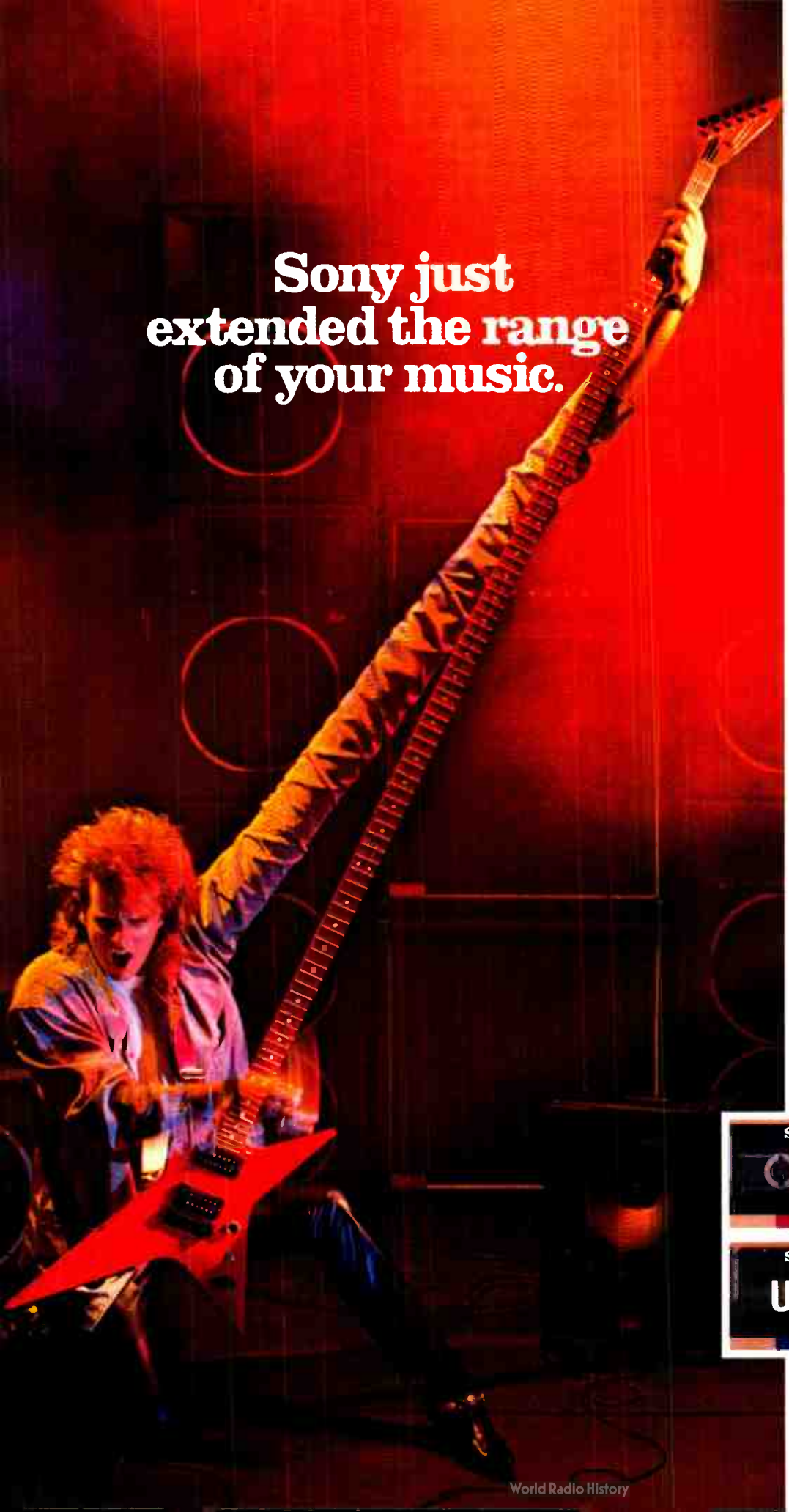
The 'Bombs are true-grit American rockers. Guys who hightail it to the gig in a van, let their dirty laundry sit around too long, rub the bags under their eyes, visit Robert Johnson's grave and chuckle at the site of Bonnie and Clyde's last stand. They drive by Chuck Berry's house for fun. They're keepers of the roll.

Despite tons of blather about the rejuvenation of roots rock, no working band—T-Birds, Omar, Tailgators, Anson, Alvin, Nighthawks—comes close to the kinetic drive that the 'Bombs get out of the infamous I-IV-V chord progression which has made this nation famous. Admit it, most of these bands play like the 10 Commandments of the blues are written in stone. Granted, the H-Bombs purvey the past too, but they've had their myopia corrected. They refuse to take their riff rock too seriously; consequently, it coincides with the music's original spirit of energized abandon.

"I'm not like a blues guy," Johns sighs in his instantly amicable drawl. "I can't whip off a verse like T-Bone and then one like B.B. like some of the others. I don't want to do that; I don't feel a part of it. I like the Ramones, Link Wray. So I end up doing a convoluted version of it all. There's nuthin' new under the sun, and all those blues people can only take it up to a certain point. It's all acquired."

The 32-year-old Johns picked up *his* musical point of view growing up outside D.C. As a kid, he'd thumb to the city and hand out Lucky Strikes to genius street buskers Mance Lipscomb, Gary Davis, John Hurt. "I wasn't gettin' lessons or anything, I was just intrigued by their personalities." Yet his ear for the blues proved useful; he once floored a folkie-smitten high school teacher with a proficient picking of Hurt's "Candyman"; it knocked two days off a detention sentence. Between cross-country thumbing trips, Evan went to work with D.C. hero Danny Gatton and his rep began to swell.

"Yeah, I knew what I wanted to do by then; I really swung toward the guitar."



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He put together the H-Bombs, worked the band for a while, but put it on hold in '84 for a stint with like-minded pals the Leroi Brothers. The collaboration worked okay, but Johns' hyper personality was being subjugated. After participating on a Grammy-nominated jam called *Trash, Twang and Thunder: Big Guitars from Texas*, the 'Bombs were back on line.

"I definitely like doing things my own way," he says firmly. "That's why I have my own band. There are responsibilities and trouble, but ultimately it's been the best way to go." This pride recalls "Done by Me," a tune from *Bombs Away* which says, "This rocking ain't no way of life, but at least I can say it's done by me." You believe Evan when he sings; his Ajax-soaked voice wins your trust. Add that to the fact that he can scream, "Watch it now, watch it!" just as well as Sam the Sham and you've got a heartfelt party dog.

"Musicians want to be successful, and go through all sorts of changes to get there," he muses. "That's what used to irk me about the new-wave rockabillies. Well, love me or leave me, I am the way I am. The reason I get away with the stuff I do is because at the very least I'm happy with myself. Ultimately the only thing I have for sale is the fact that I'm the only Evan Johns in the world. And believe me, if you're in Altoona, Pennsylvania or Oxford, Mississippi and you've got 20 people in the house, you better entertain yourself or you're sure not going to entertain anyone else.

"We make a lot of last-minute decisions—in football they're called audibles. On certain songs nobody knows what's going to happen, not me, not them. If it comes out right, you know it's a good night. We only have about six or seven beats we use, but we mix 'em up all the time. The other thing we do is totally annihilate the tunes. It's fun that way. If I was going to use a set list, I might as well be playing lead guitar in someone else's band and sleeping late most mornings. We reserve the right to trash 'em."

But even though much of the band's public persona is built around ripping it up, Evan can take his boys—bassist Dan McCann, drummer Jim Starboard, essential right-hand man Mark Korpi on guitar—and point toward a lyrical unity. The Boston set contained an instrumental ballad called "Misery Loves Company" dedicated to the two late Roys, Buchanan and Orbison. Wrenching emotion out of the top of his guitar, Evan's powerhouse solo came off as surprisingly poignant.

"I don't preplan anything. In fact I like to have solos keep getting hotter and hotter, until, oh man, I better start singing again because I can't take it no higher. If you went over the top, it'd be like wizzing on a flat rock—don't make any sense." Bits of Western swing, New Orleans shuffles ("music center of the universe," he says), Hound Dog Taylor-esque boogie and Tex-Mex excursions fill the H-Bombs' three LPs. Johns understands the difference between the party atmosphere of a club date and the cogency needed for an LP to stand up to repeated listenings.

"That's all Garry Tallent's doing," admits Johns. Tallent, who has been in Evan's corner for years, produced a few tracks on an '86 release and did all of the new record. "I never used to think producers were necessary," the guitarist quips, "and they're not in certain situations. But Garry showed all kinds of things that, frankly, were a pain in my butt. In other words, he showed me the right way to do things, like write 20 songs. I said, 'Ah can't write no 20 songs, man,' but he knows me. Out of the 20, there were 13, 14 good ones."

Evan's tunes contain a John Fogerty pragmatism. "Lessons That Burn" is forthright about divorce and business

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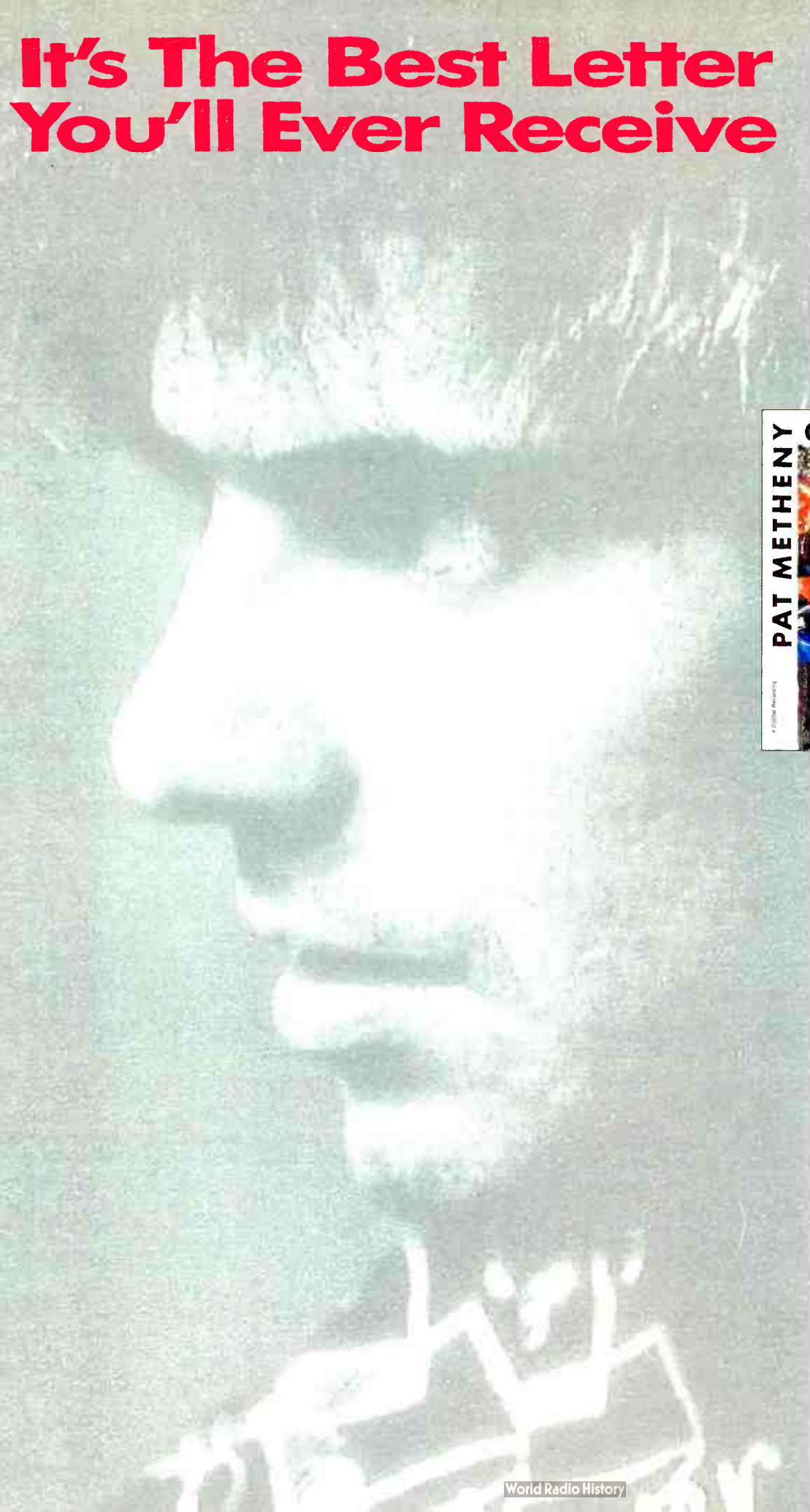

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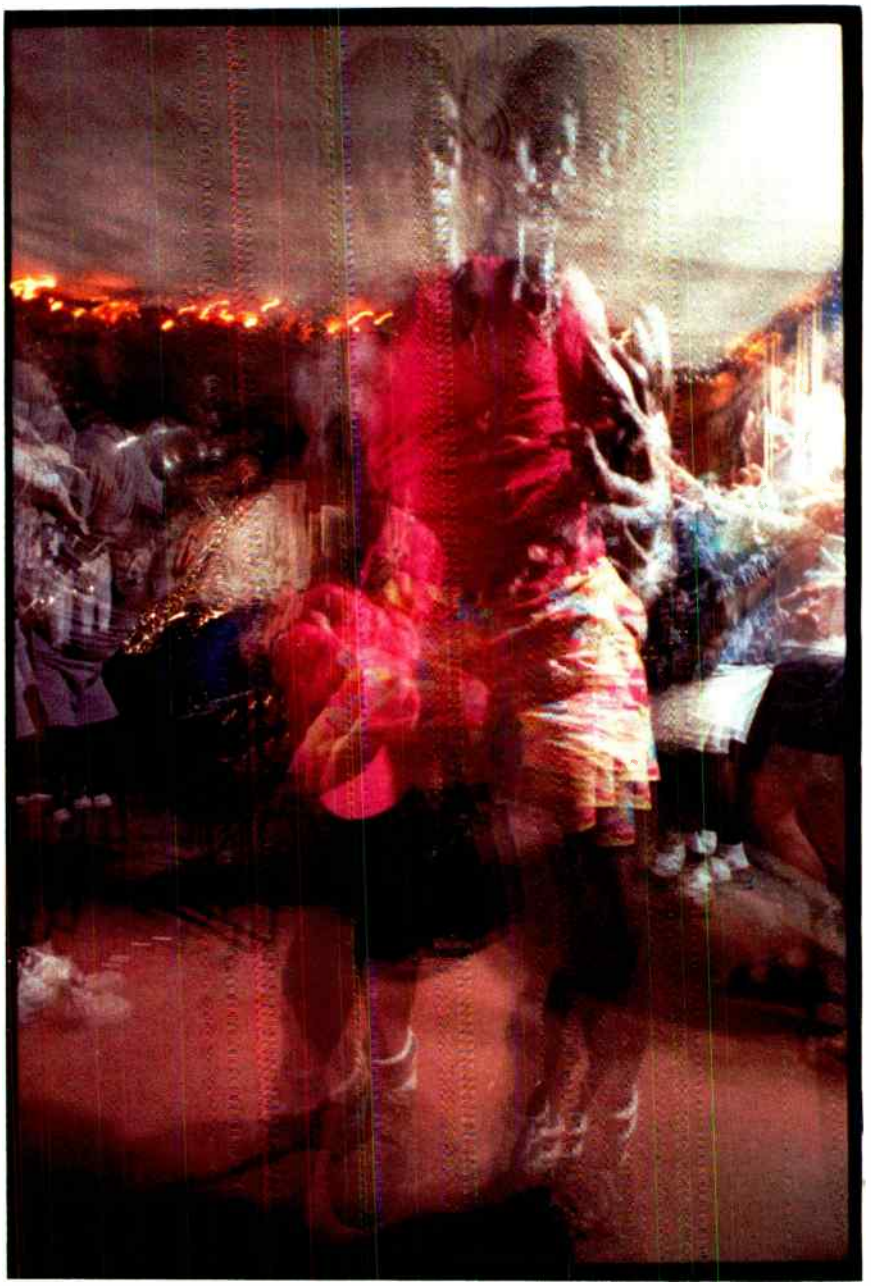
BY BEN SANDMEL



Second-line strutters on rocket fuel: "With this group there's constant motion."

MARK POKEMPNER

"I LOVE NEW ORLEANS music," says Greg Davis, leader of the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, "I absolutely love it. But I like a lot of other types of music, and I'm going to play what I like. People come up to me sometimes and they say, 'You're not playing real New Orleans music.' And I tell them, 'I'm glad you noticed!'"

Such an exchange might puzzle the growing legions of Dirty Dozen admirers outside the Crescent City. After all, isn't this the band that's revitalizing New Orleans jazz? With a unique blend of raucous funk and disciplined finesse, the "Dozen" have stimulated that city's musical traditions with distinctly modern accents. As one consequence they've become an in-demand horn section for the likes of Elvis Costello, Daniel Lanois, Buckwheat Zydeco and the Neville Brothers. David Byrne credited the Dirty Dozen's approach with inspiring his solo effort *Music from the Knee Plays*. More recently, the band released its major-label debut LP, *Voodoo*, for CBS Records, with cameos by Dizzy Gillespie, Dr. John and Branford Marsalis.

Back in New Orleans, the music community is happy to see some of their own make good in the world, though not without some purist grumblings. This is a town that reveres its heritage, after all, and when it comes to traditional jazz, the Dirty Dozen Brass Band is definitely a hybrid. Their innovations include faster tempos, intricate and daring arrangements, a broad repertoire (from bebop to R&B to the theme from "The Flintstones") and a liberated attitude about horn solos. Trumpeters Davis and Efrem Towns, saxophonists Kevin Harris and Roger Lewis and trombonist Charles Joseph are free to play sweet, raunchy or completely "out," as the mood dictates. They're anchored by Kirk Joseph's agile sousaphone, which he plays more like an electric bass, and the one-two punch of bass drummer Lionel Batiste and snare drummer Jenell "Chi-lite" Marshall.

The results offer ample stimulation for serious listeners, but, this being New Orleans, they're presented by the Dozen as street-wise dance and party music, with the wildest possible reactions encouraged. "I've seen women take off their underwear right there in the club!" Davis says, shaking his head. "When I'm playing my trumpet down in their crotch, like on that slow blues 'Meet Me with Your Black Drawers On,' there's no telling what might happen. Just because we mostly play concert venues now doesn't mean we've tried to adapt the music to fit. If we play a supper club like Sweet Basil, I don't want to just be the dinner music side-show. I don't feel that I've done my job till I've disrupted the customers' meal."

Davis' recipe for culinary cacophony is in fact based in traditions which date back over a century to the post-Reconstruction era. At that time New Orleans' black community was legally disenfranchised, and a support system of benevolent societies arose to help meet commercial, recreational and essential-service needs. Similar to such contemporary organizations as the Moose Lodge, many of these groups aptly called themselves Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs.

miss it in a way. I miss playing neighborhood bars like the Glass House, which was our first weekly gig, too, because we could experiment there. You can't do that at a concert hall, when people have paid big money."

The band's progressive sound evolved naturally; everyone simply played what they liked. "I was a music major in college," Davis says, "and I listened to a lot of trumpeters—Dizzy, Fats Navarro, Roy Eldridge, Freddie Hubbard, Miles. Kirk and Kevin listen to a lot of Weather Report/fusion stuff. Roger, who was with Fats Domino for years, and still works with him sometimes, he came up in the rock/R&B era, with Dave Bartholomew and all of them, so he has a lot of that influence, from sax players like Lee Allen and Herb Hardesty. Roger organizes a lot of the rehearsals, but whoever suggests a tune is responsible for writing out the arrangement and teaching it to the rest of the guys. Efrem listens to a lot of Freddie Hubbard. I don't know who Charles' influences are, other than his dad, 'Frog' Joseph, who was a big influence on J.J. Johnson, and who is still one of the best trombonists in the city. I don't think that the drummers had any training, beyond watching other cats—but Lionel is one of the best bass drummers I've ever heard. We've had people like Art Blakey just watch those guys in amazement."

"I have a lot of authority as far as keeping time," sousaphonist Kirk Joseph adds, discussing the Dozen's rhythm section. "Much more so than the drummers, really, 'cause I also have to deal with the chord structures. The tunes are too complex to lay back with a typical tuba part, which is usually limited to passage tones. With this group there's constant motion, and I'm watching everybody. I'm feeding and pushing the drummers and the horn players all at once. It's like I'm the middle man, in a combustion chamber with both sections of the band."

The rhythmic intensity of the Dozen and their disciples have also inspired a new school of dancing known as "buck-jumping," which fits their faster, difficult-for-second-lining tempos, and is executed in triple time to the already break-neck music. Buck-jumping is done in large, all-male groups; neither women nor specific dance-partners appear on the floor. It's a frenzied spectacle which sometimes borders on possession—especially in the wall-to-wall confines of local joints like the Glass House, which have nurtured the young brass-band scene. "A whole other dance style came out of our music," Davis comments, "and it's on the street today. Those guys dance by themselves, and they can hang with it. If we had copied the traditional thing, then the traditional dances would have fit. But we didn't."

All these influences and contributions can be heard on *Voodoo*. The selections range from second-line R&B with Dr. John ("It's All Over Now") to avant-garde jazz (the title track), raunchy blues ("Black Drawers"), scat-singing with Diz ("Oop Pop a Dah"), bop with Branford (Bird's "Moose the Mooche"), an original message tune "Don't Drive Drunk" and the saxophone showcase "Gemini Rising," written by local reedman Tony Dagradi. Band members and guests are in fine form throughout; the only critical complaint is with the album's somewhat flat mix, but this doesn't diminish either the fine performance or its infectious danceability.

Under these circumstances, and the career jump that *Voodoo* is apt to stimulate, the "New Orleans or not" debate seems to fade in importance.

"A lot of people couldn't adjust at first, and they disapproved of us," Kirk Joseph remembers. "They thought we were abolishing our heritage. But then they got into it. And someone else will come behind us, and expand it even more." M

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JOHN MELLENCAMP'S BRUTAL HONESTY

What has he got
to be bitter about?
His whole life.

By Steve Perry

NESTLED in the lush greenery and private estates just outside Hollywood proper, the Bel Air Hotel is part of a world most people never see up close. It isn't even a hotel in the usual sense: It includes several private bungalows to ensure the comfort and solitude of well-heeled guests. The staff does its job with hushed efficiency, the grounds are impeccably maintained, the air even smells different from the air a few blocks away on Sunset Boulevard. Going there is like visiting a castle surrounded by a moat of money and privilege.

Secluded in the outermost bungalow of the Bel Air, John Mellencamp probably doesn't even know a wedding is taking place in the garden at the heart of the compound. But as synchronicity would have it, he's talking about his own daughter's wedding the week before, back in Indiana. "Yeah," he recalls with a smirk, "I walked her down the aisle. She was so scared I thought she was gonna pass out. I was sad about it all at first, because she got real edgy about the whole thing. But the next day, she was about the happiest I'd ever seen her."

His daughter Michelle is just 19, which probably accounts for the vague misgivings you can read on Dad's face. "Don't forget, I have been making records since this kid has been alive, just about. And I have been successful ever since she was an adolescent. I never even thought about what growing up

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK HAUSER

"I can be like a jukebox up there some nights. Or worse, a cheerleader."

in Bloomington must have meant to her. I guess she's been real guarded about her dad, and real worried about kids hanging out with her just to be able to see me. That kind of shit. I was working, I didn't even know it. If I had a new kid now, I'd know just how to deal with it. But at 23 I didn't."

A few minutes earlier, when I arrived, a modest boombox perched on a looming marble mantle had been playing "Will the Circle Be Unbroken." The palatial suite nearly swallowed the song, making it even more lonesome and plaintive than usual. The scene suggested a contradiction, but most everything Mellencamp's going through right now does. He's a family man estranged from his family. He's a star who rails at the machinery of stardom—though he's in town to make a video. He's an artist who's just released his best record, *Big Daddy*, and yet senses himself at a creative dead end. And he's a restless, ceaselessly active man who can think of nothing but his own futility and immobility.

On top of it all, he's one of those no-account Mellencamps—a man whose father was once turned away from a car dealership back in Vincennes, Indiana, because the dealer said no Mellencamp could afford one of his cars—staying in the biggest suite at the Bel Air Hotel.

Staring out the window at the midday rain, he makes a sound part way between a cackle and a groan. "We are our parents," he says. "You can't help it. You're a sperm and an egg, and then boom, you grow up. You may say, 'I'm never gonna be like the old man. I'm never gonna do that!' Well, you may not do the exact same things, but you're them. As much as I hate to look in the mirror at 37 and see my old man's face, it's like, goddamn, it turned out to be true."

Generations come and go but it makes no difference. This is the first line from a passage in Ecclesiastes that Mellencamp made the epigraph for his last album, *Lonesome Jubilee*. The passage is double-edged; it's a lyrical affirmation of the steadfastness and continuity of the human family, but it's also an admonition about the ultimate vanity of human effort. *The rivers run into the sea but the sea is never full, and the water returns again to the rivers, and flows again to the sea.* Taken one way, it amounts to the title of his second record: *Nothin' Matters and What If It Did?* He fights authority; authority always wins.

In the Church of the Nazarene, which Mellencamp attended every Sunday until "I was old enough to say I ain't going to church *or* staying home and cutting the grass," self-renunciation of this sort is an article of faith. Born of a schism within the late-nineteenth-century Holiness movement over the issue of speaking in tongues—something the ascetic Nazarenes just couldn't abide—the Nazarenes are a stiff-necked, single-minded bunch, known for their zeal, their Biblical literalism and their abstinence from worldly pleasure and artifice. "No dancing, no makeup, no jewelry," he remembers. "Women can't cut their hair, and no going to movies. They were tough on a young kid. I was beat over the head with it—the whole time totally rejecting it, but something sinks in."

So it does: The periodic, fitful rejections of pop glitz that have marked Mellencamp's career are not really so far removed from the Nazarene contempt for the excesses of secular culture. Just look at the recent "Pop Singer" video if you doubt it; its flashing-lights-and-fleshpots imagery speaks of a loathing for mammon. Sometimes when he speaks, you can

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squint and see a country preacher in action, discoursing obsessively about distinctions between reality and worldly appearance, good faith and bad faith.

His dissatisfaction cuts deeper than complaints about the packaging and marketing of his work. John Mellencamp wants desperately to find the one true way to live, though for him the quest is less tied up with divinity than with finding a way to balance family and career, and hold his personal demons at bay. To complicate matters, he's caught between a fierce desire to make moral sense of his world—it's the impulse that gave shape and drama to his last three records—and the characteristic Nazarene conviction that nothing he can do will matter much anyway.

"There's a hopelessness in my life that I have dealt with from birth," he says quietly. "The realization that you probably have, and the people reading this article probably have, that at the end of the day, we've lived here 80 years if we're lucky, and there's millions of years ahead of us, and there's millions of years behind us. And once your kids have kids, you're just a grandfather. And what did it mean? What did you do?" He pauses, but no answer is forthcoming. "And that's reality."

One source of Mellencamp's depression is his recent separation from his wife of seven years, Vicky. The catalyst was an affair he carried on during last year's *Lonesome Jubilee* tour. His friends tried to tell him at the time that he was fucking up, he admits now, but he wouldn't listen. "This is me blaming something other than myself; I realize that. But I kinda want to blame it on the road, because that's easier than to look at my own personal mistakes. Know what I'm saying? 'Well, I only did it because I was on the road.' Or 'In the music and entertainment business, people get divorced all the time; it's the job.' And there's something to that. You walk out onstage every night, and you feel like you gotta give $50 worth to everybody. When I come off the stage, I don't want to have a conversation about what color we might want to paint the bathroom. I can be really mean about it: 'Can you tell your story *walking*?' I say those kinds of things. I have no compassion for anybody but myself.

"You forget it's just this little world, this little circus traveling around. 'Cause in this circus, you're King Kong. The truth is, it's because you got the dough to pay these guys; that's the reality of it. So it's all false. But after a year at a time of it, it becomes your life. And I've seen it kill people. It isn't just me. I look at my contemporaries, and... worse things have been done by better men than me.

"It's easy to blame it on the road, but I think somehow you can live free and above-board. I've felt it. And if there is something to this life...." He pauses, searching for a clarity that eludes him, then picks up a different thread. "You know, I talk about hopelessness, the ultimate and final doom. You're okay if you know that at the end of the day, it don't matter. But you also have to remember that today it *does* matter. Today what I do affects this person and that person, not just myself.

"I think that's what's good about *Lonesome Jubilee*. There is a certain hopelessness in the songs, but at the same time the person realizes, okay, what I do matters *today*, even if it won't mean anything a hundred years from now. I think that's good. I think that's what I gotta get back to. Just quit looking at the big fucking picture, and deal with today. But recently I don't want to think about this, I don't want to think about that; I just want to be left alone. I don't want to make no decisions. It's like that Joni Mitchell song, 'Free Man in Paris,' you remember that? I didn't really understand what the fuck it was about until two weeks or so ago."

Still, you could shout into the void from less pleasant vantage points than the Bel Air Hotel—or the upper reaches of the album chart, where *Big Daddy* currently resides—and Mellencamp hasn't entirely lost sight of that. On the way out to his car after the interview, he's greeted by a middle-aged bellman who may or may not even recognize him; the guy is ass-deep in garment bags that are falling all over the place. "How are you today, sir?" the bellman manages with a smile. "Better than you, I guess," Mellencamp chuckles quietly, bending to help corral one of the bellman's many bags.

Leaning on his rented BMW seconds later, already two hours late for a video post-production appointment, Mellencamp shakes his head and reflects on the many rounds he's fought with himself. "I don't know," he says, "sometimes I feel like I need to kill the kid inside myself. All these fucking ideals. Where do they get me?"

> "We got Live Aid and Farm Aid. But who are we really doing it for? For the farmers? For Africa? Or are we doing it for ourselves, to pat ourselves on the back?"

MUSICIAN: *You think it's fair to say that what you've been looking for on the past three albums is a code to live by—a means of feeling true to yourself and contributing something to the world at the same time?*

MELLENCAMP: I don't know about the last part, but I'll take the first half of that action. That's the great thing about being a songwriter: You have time to think about all these things that most people don't even think about. But it's damaging, too. I think that's why guys like Chet Baker end up being heroin addicts. But if you can take that and run with it, I think it'll pay off in the long run.

For me, individually, I have finally come to the realization that I'm not like my audience anymore. I stay at the Bel Air Hotel. Ten or 15 years ago, I stayed at the 8 Days Inn. Now I have the dough to treat myself to something like this. And as much as I might like to think, 'Well, it really doesn't matter,' it does. It bothers me quite a bit. I wonder if everything I'm singing and saying is false to them.

MUSICIAN: *The only time in the past five years I've listened to one of your records and thought I was hearing something false was on the second side of* Lonesome Jubilee. *It seemed like you were trying to write a particular kind of populist anthem for your fans, but your heart wasn't in it.*

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MELLENCAMP: "Hot Dogs and Hamburgers" was one of my least favorite songs that I ever wrote. Somebody told me when I was making it, "John, you're not gonna like this song in a year." Course that set me off. I said, "Oh yeah?" That was enough to make me put it on the record. I'm just like that.

I started painting recently. At first, out of personal pride, I'd say I didn't need a model; I didn't need anybody to sit for me. I could make it up. But as time goes on, I realize I can't paint from photographs, and I can't just paint from my mind. I need a model. That song was just completely made up. There's not one thread of reality in it. Only words that I thought sounded good together. So it taught me a lesson: You need a model. You can lie about it and change certain parts of the story, but you gotta have an experience to start from. I have got to learn to write for myself more, and forget about the audience. Get that baggage about how it's going to sell and what they're going to think out of the way.

> "I delivered *Big Daddy* and the first thing the record company said was, 'How many singles are on the album?' 'How much money can we make, man?' 'Is there a money song?'"

MUSICIAN: *That has its dangers, too. Through the years a lot of rockers, up to and including Dylan, have lost track of who they were singing to. And most of them never found a way back.*

MELLENCAMP: That's a tough thing. See, commerce ruins this business. You make so much dough that you don't give a fuck anymore. You think showing up is enough. "What do you mean, you want me to put my heart and soul in these songs? I showed up, isn't that enough?" That ain't no good. During the last tour, there were cities I'd go in, and I'd be asleep 20 minutes before I went on. I don't like that. I don't like seeing that in myself.

MUSICIAN: *How did you get to that point?*

MELLENCAMP: I don't know. There's a big wall between every artist and his audience. You get on the road and it becomes a whole different world. I can be like a jukebox up there some nights. Or worse, a cheerleader. In my upbringing in this business, I have come to believe that it's my responsibility to entertain these people, above and beyond anything else that goes on: This is their big night out, this guy's got his girlfriend or his wife with him, he's paid $40 to get in here, probably bought a T-shirt and a couple beers. He's got $50 on the line, and it's my responsibility to do this. But the fact of the matter is, a human has only got so much energy. Some nights you can't really do it. And you know that. So you pick and choose your jabs: "Okay, tonight I can be lazy." In some third-class city, like where I'm from, that's where you loaf.

MUSICIAN: *You said you're not going to tour now because you'd become "just another song-and-dance man." What do you mean?*

MELLENCAMP: It's just a realization that I've come to. During 1984, '85, '86, I really fell into this place where I thought it was like the '60s again. We were gonna change some shit. But it was an illusion. I say it in one of the songs on the new record: "We got Live Aid and Farm Aid and all kind of hand grenades to help us get along." But who are we really doing it for? For the farmers? For Africa? Or are we doing it for ourselves, to pat ourselves on the back and say didn't we do a good job?

Anyway, it's ineffective. It doesn't work. Those two things right there are proof that this shit doesn't work. There's a guy calling me up right now to go to D.C. and play a show against censorship of records. [*snorts*] I'm not gonna do that. Go into a fuckin' auditorium with a bunch of other bands and play to a bunch of kids who are just there to see music, and play a couple of my songs to stop censorship? That auditorium is not where that issue is happening. It's going down in a Senate subcommittee that's a million light years away from that hall. And quite frankly, they don't give two shits about what we're doing. I have sat on these Senate subcommittees. I've talked to these guys. They ain't with us.

MUSICIAN: *A friend of yours told me that one of the issues that obsesses you is finding a way to rock gracefully into middle age.*

MELLENCAMP: Well, it is. It's tough because I grew up in the '60s. The fight song was "My Generation." "Hope I die before I get old." How many times has that been said?

MUSICIAN: *Do you feel closer to an answer with this record?*

MELLENCAMP: No, I'll tell ya—I'm farther away than I've ever been. Right now I don't know nothin' about nothin', no how, nobody. I'm not open to anything, I'm not interested in new ideas. I am really in a place where I hate to be. I don't want to look back and I don't want to look forward. I just want to sit here. And I want to paint.

It's very confusing. This middle-aged stuff, there's something to it. I kinda thought I'd just coast through it. It's like I say in one of the new songs, "Mansions in Heaven." "I'm not an old man, but I'm not young anymore." Here's a poor fuckin' guy trying to justify his life through dying. When I wrote that song, it scared me. "And the angels will be descending to wrap me up in red velveteen." Ooof! What a horrible thought. Sad, don't you think? It was for me. I didn't like that I wrote the song. I thought, where's "Hurts So Good" when you need it?

I'm not really stuck. I can pick up a guitar and write a hundred songs about the space I'm in now, about being lost. But I'm not satisfied at all. I can't do another record.

MUSICIAN: *Why not?*

MELLENCAMP: Well, I could; I kinda did with *Big Daddy.* I did a lot of songs like that. But I couldn't do it again. As soon as I do that, it's *Lonesome Jubilee III.* Anyway, the last few months since I got this record done, I haven't wanted to deal with it. I'm just trying to run away from it, I guess. And I don't even mean my career. It's just me. Sometimes I get so sick and tired of myself. I get tired of the way I look, the way I wear my hair, the shit I say to people. You wonder why you even bothered saying it in the first place. But that's okay. I'd rather be here than trying to justify something I don't believe in anymore.

MUSICIAN: *Had you been doing that?*

MELLENCAMP: I've done it in my life. I know what it's like.

MUSICIAN: *You give your band special disciplines or exercises prior to every record. You all came together for a marathon 16-day session to write and record* Uh-Huh, *you made them learn a lot of '60s songs prior to* Scarecrow *and new instruments before* Lonesome Jubilee. *And this time you made it a point to record everything on first or second take. Why the gyrations?*

MELLENCAMP: I don't want to repeat myself. Let's face it; there's a formula to a lot of this music. And once you do it and have a hit with it, it's easy. Me and you could go in the studio, and you could do the vocals, and we could do a song like "Hurts So Good," 'cause I can write that kind of song just like that.

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I don't want the guys in the band to become complacent, and to think they know the parts they're gonna play. Kenny [Aronoff] plays on a lot of records now; he's like the drummer of the day. But when he plays with me, it ain't gonna be, "Okay, Kenny, gimme lick number 17." I don't want that; that's on the Jefferson Airplane's new record. So I'll say, "Hey, Kenny, no sticks this time. Use brushes." "Huh?" "Yeah, that's right, and let's not use cymbals at all." I even made him change hands: "No, Kenny, we don't want you playing high-hat with the right hand; play it with the left."

You just turn it around, so he's in a space he's never been. Because when you're in a space you've never been in, you make up shit to try to get by. I think you always have to put yourself in a space you're not familiar with. If you get too used to things, it's like living in the same house for 20 years. You don't notice the furniture, you don't care whether it's messed up.

I want my room to be clean. I want everything to be new. I want to challenge the band, and challenge the people who listen to my records. And myself. If we're not sitting there in that little studio in Indiana going, "Hmmm" [*looks quizzical*], then I figure the people listening to the record are not going to be going "Hmmm."

MUSICIAN: *Of the three character songs that close side one of* Big Daddy, *only Martha seems to be moving forward at all, and she does it by using her anger to motivate herself—and to hold people at bay. Is that about you?*

MELLENCAMP: No, no. Not about me at all. It may be more about my spouse than I care to admit. My wife, when I met her, was 19 years old and I was 25. And I was married and she didn't know it. So...take it from there. She's not a little girl anymore. She's 30. And somewhere along the line, I forgot to respect that. You can say crazy things, and for a long time a person will believe them—for passion, or love, or whatever reason. But you start talking about someone who's mid-life, they can be hard. It's the old thing—some people will just get as hard as old folks' toenails. So in the hardening of living with John Mellencamp, she's become just as pigheaded as I am.

But she wasn't. I helped make her that way. It's like, "If you wanna hang around here, baby, you gotta be tough." That's something I always preach to everyone around me. "This ain't no fuckin' picnic. I ain't here to have a good time. We're here to learn something, and to push each other till we blow up! If you ain't gonna do that, we're not playin', 'cause with me it's all or nothing." Young girls like that, you know? Older women don't. And I can't blame 'em, 'cause I don't like that anymore.

So I gotta find a way to live. That's why I say I don't know nothing. I gotta find a way to live. I don't know how. I've done everything like I'm supposed to, I think. I've pretty much lived the American Dream, and found at the end of the day that there wasn't nothing, except maybe you better make up your own dream.

MUSICIAN: *"Pop Singer" is about rejecting a certain set of show-biz values. But you claim in it that you never wanted those things. That's not true, is it?*

MELLENCAMP: That's true and that's not true. There's a little truth in it, but the reality is that I always wanted to be a rock 'n' roll singer. There ain't no place for rock 'n' roll now. What? Where? What rock 'n' roll band can you name today? There ain't no rock 'n' roll bands today. I hate to say it, but Led Zeppelin on *Houses of the Holy*, that was a rock band. There was no pop there.

The Rolling Stones, they used to be a rock 'n' roll band. Today, they have to deal with the same thing all the rest of us do. CHR radio is programmed to pop music. When I delivered the *Lonesome Jubilee* record, they just said, "We don't want to play white rock 'n' roll records. Period." And no matter who you are, you have to think about that. Look at how far Mick Jagger's come. "Let's Work." And I don't like that, but I understand it. If you're gonna make records, you've gotta communicate somehow. If you're gonna make a record and sell 20 copies, why bother? I can call up 20 people and sing it to 'em without having to go through that process.

So I think this is something we all have to deal with. That's what I mean in "Pop Singer."

MUSICIAN: *You dedicated* Scarecrow *to your grandfather, who'd just died. Was there a connection between his dying and the changes you made in your career around that time?*

MELLENCAMP: Well, yes and no. Let's go back to the hopelessness. I admired Grandpa Mellencamp a lot. Don't even know why, really, other than he was my grandpa, which is not a good reason to admire anybody. I just did. And man, I was there when he died. And we're in Seymour, Indiana, and we're in this hospital. It was five stories high, at best. And I'm looking out the window, and there's Grandpa, dying. Somebody in the room said, "So, this is how it all ends, huh?" Looking out some crummy hospital window at some town he never got out of, looking at the roofs of buildings that he tarred in his life. And that's it. He's done, he's dying, and this is what it amounted to. That still bums me out. That's proof—not proof, but justification, for hopelessness.

> "When the Rolling Stones delivered their record to CBS, it was given back to them. Dylan delivered a record they weren't gonna put out. You think they'd do it to me? In a heartbeat."

As for it changing my career, it's a good story, and I'd like to say it's true, and it probably is, subconsciously. But I never once had that thought. I just needed to evaluate where I was at. All of a sudden, I wasn't the younger generation anymore.

MUSICIAN: *What did that make you decide?*

MELLENCAMP: To have a little responsibility in my life, more than I had. Because during *American Fool* and before that, I was like—pfft, you can talk about that responsibility shit if you want to, but not me. I'm too wild to play that game! When he died, it kinda made me bring my life into better focus. But I hate to say I consciously made that decision. I didn't. Like I said, it was generations changing hands. I had to step up to the table and take charge of some things. It's easy to stand in the back of the room and throw rocks and make noises and not have to justify what you say.

MUSICIAN: *Here's the $64 question, I guess: What is it about reaching your magnitude of success that makes it so easy to become as disaffected as you're feeling now? You're not the first rock 'n' roller to go through this.*

MELLENCAMP: Well, you grew up in a small town, too, and you

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know—this sounds horrible to say, but a lot of times your closest friends are your biggest dream killers. When you decided to become a writer, what did they say? Did they encourage you? They said, "Don't quit your day job," right? They said that to me, too. You, for some reason, said, "Fuck it, this is what I'm gonna do." But if you let it, that response will kill you.

When you're young and strong, and you come to the realization of what your vision is, what you want to do with your life, it's real disheartening to find out that at the end of the day, it all boils down to money.

MUSICIAN: *For who?*

MELLENCAMP: For me! It's not about quality! It's about money.

MUSICIAN: *I understand that's a fact of the business, but why does that have to dominate your thinking if you don't believe in it?*

MELLENCAMP: Well, I can look outside and say, "Aren't those pretty blue leaves?" And you'll have to say, "John, they're green." The reality is, they are green, even if I think they're blue. It's a matter of walking that line between what's true and what you want to believe. [*voice drops to a whisper*] Ideals are for teenagers. Those leaves are green. That's all there is to it.

I might want to think I'm doing this and doing that in the business, but the people around you don't want to hear it. That's not their reality. I delivered *Big Daddy*, and what the record company said to me first thing was, "How many singles are on the album?" What? Do they want to know how much they're gonna be able to turn on the radio and enjoy my songs? No: "How much fuckin' money can we make, man? Is there a money song? Is there blood money here?"

Now I might say, "Who cares? You wanna hear the album or not?" But it really kills you. It really hurts when that happens.

MUSICIAN: *But you've got the steadiest album audience out there. Four million copies each of the last three times out. You're relatively secure.*

MELLENCAMP: No matter what you think—and this is a true thing—when the Rolling Stones delivered their first record to CBS, it was given back to them. Bob Dylan just delivered a record to CBS that they weren't gonna put out. You think they'd do it to me? In a heartbeat.

"It's not about quality, it's about money... It's a matter of walking that line between what's true and what you want to believe. Ideals are for teenagers."

There's no way you can get around it. That's why I never wanted to be a pop singer. At one point I said, "Goddamn it, let's get serious about this. Let's be positive, and try to make records that"... I said one time, "I don't ever want to write another song that's gonna bum somebody out." I wanted to write songs that maybe made 'em think a little bit in between dance steps. That's what I thought my job was. But when you get down to it, it's about how many hit singles you have on the record.

That hurts everybody, that pop mentality. Here I'm just going through a separation with my wife, I pissed off everybody I knew, went through all this shit, and at the end of the day made it into some songs. Made something positive out of it. And they turn around and say, "How many singles on the record?" [*incredulous*] "What? I just ruined my *life* over this record." That's not quite true, but those thoughts come into your head.

MUSICIAN: *Okay, but what I don't understand is why you have to dwell on what people in the business think. Why can't you draw satisfaction from the positive things fans take from your music?*

MELLENCAMP: I don't see the fans. They don't call me up. And the ones who write me letters... God bless their hearts, but I've seen it before, you know? "This is the first letter I've ever written to a rock star." Oh, yeah. Right. So you get cold to that. With Bruce, it's gotta be worse than with me. He's huge! What contact does he have with his fans? The only people we talk to, man, are the people who say bottom line all the time. You're the closest thing to a human being I've talked to in days—that's a compliment—because I'm out here doing videos. People are always gonna talk charts and money to me. I'm in the business.

MUSICIAN: *But on one level, isn't all this just another way of saying that you fight authority and authority always wins? That you're screwed, and you can't do anything about it?*

MELLENCAMP: No, I'm not saying that. [*pause*] Now, let me tell you. There's more to life than this fucking music to me. A lot more to life. This is my job, right? We can all act like it's a big fucking deal, but what I do in my job does not mean what kind of man I am. To me at 37 years old, I'm finding that I should have been kinder to a lot of people. I should have given more to my kids. Like I said before, if I had a new kid now, I'd know how to treat 'em. But I got a daughter who's 19 years old who just got married, and I didn't do a very good job with her. She seems perfectly normal, but I look in her eyes and I see unhappiness in 'em.

Hey, man, I've Sammy Davised out. I did it my way. Big deal. They don't give me no medals at the end of the day. That's truth. That's the reality. Nothing is it, nothing is forever. I mean, I hope you and your wife go on forever, but let's face facts: You may not. The better a guy can deal with the fact that nothing is it, the better off he'll be in the long run, I think. Anyway, don't think this is forever. They told us it was. They also told us that if you do your job and earn a lot of dough, it validates you as a man. It doesn't.

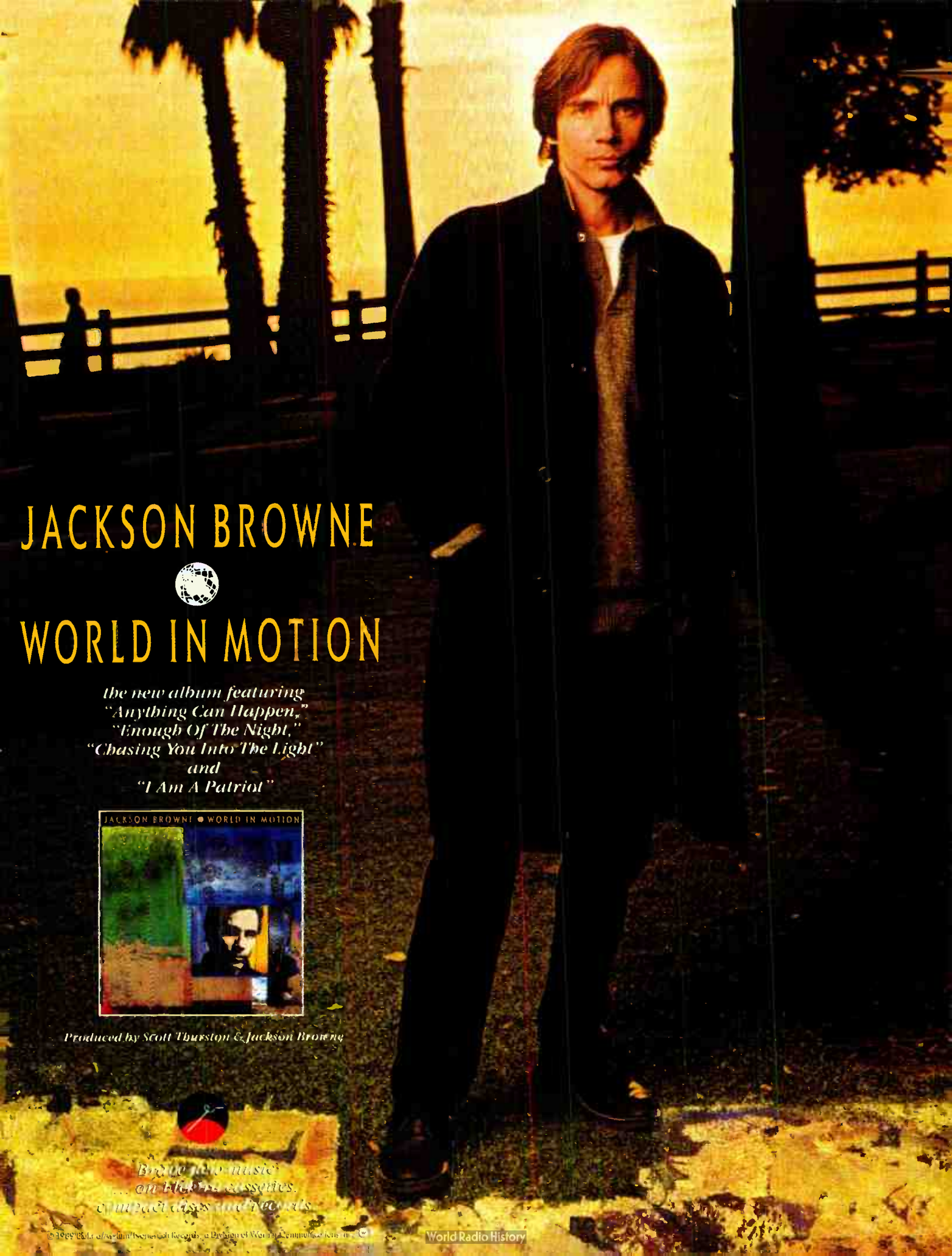
I should have been more awake. I should have heard things that my wife was saying to me, but I wrote 'em off because I was in the middle of a recording session. [*loud, shrill, fast-talking voice*] "Baby, I'm out there making these records and playing every night, and you got a brand-new car and the kids'll go to college!" But you get right down to it, and it don't mean shit if you don't know how to act. I don't know how to act.

I've gotta learn how to have a family. I try the same methods with my family that I do in business: "Don't ask me to do that! Don't ask me to sell a fucking beer! Get out of here!"

And at home: "Uh, John, would you like to have chicken for dinner?"

"Don't ask me that! I don't give a fuck!" I don't always do that, but I have done it. So have you. Think about it. The little things that we fuck up. And I guess if I'm confused or unhappy, it has more to do with me and my personal relationships than my business career. 'Cause the reality is, I'm doin' okay that way. I'm bitter about a few things, like I don't own my songs.

But there's more to life than my records. When I was 18, 19, there was nothing more important, 'cause I bought into it. I believed what they told me. It was not true. It's another lie. It's another Eiffel Tower. The Eiffel Tower looks great in pictures, but did you ever see it in real life? Ugly as hell.



MUSICIAN: *What are your priorities for the next year?*

MELLENCAMP: To paint. To stand in front of that canvas and learn how to do that. And hopefully... my relationship with my wife may be beyond salvageability. I don't know. So I'm not even thinking about that. I just talked to her this morning, and it was great. But I'll talk to her tomorrow, and she'll be calling me a dirty son of a bitch, and I'll be doing the same.

I just don't know, 'cause the things I've got to say to make it real, I can't say. 'Cause I know they're not true. The same with her. So I don't know. I don't even look at it as a possibility at this point. But just in case it ever happens again, I want to be a little better-prepared than I am now. I just want to learn how to live. Be able to breathe, and get this monkey off my back, whatever it is.

MUSICIAN: *Is part of the appeal of painting just how private an activity it is?*

MELLENCAMP: Yeah. There's nobody looking over my shoulder, and if I get done and it's no good, that's okay. I'm probably never gonna be a great painter, and I know that. But it's better than golfing.

I started painting when I got off the tour last time, and it was pretty crummy. Paul Simon was funny as hell. When I first started, he was over at my house. I don't know why, but in those days I thought I had to paint these great big paintings, right? I didn't want to use a little brush; I wanted to paint with broad strokes. So I had this great big painting of an Indian. Bigger than those closet doors, and not even a real Indian. She had blue lips, all these weird colors. And this painting is huge, and it's awful. Simon's standing there, and I say, "Well, what do you think, man?" And he says [*gets a very deliberate look on his face*], "I didn't know they made canvases that big." I just fell down laughing. He had to say *something.*

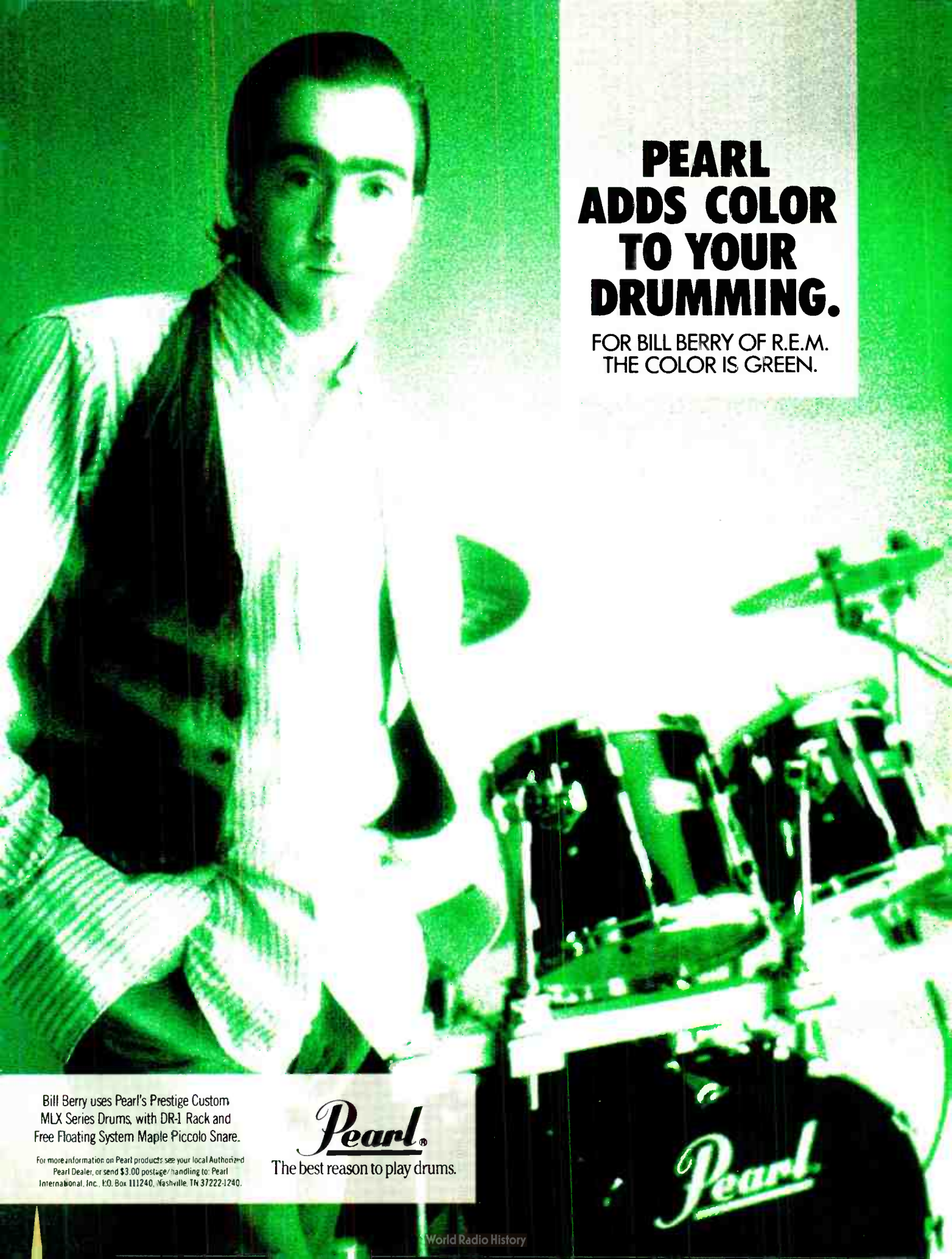
But I painted one I really like a while ago. I don't know for sure what I'm gonna call it. It's this friend of mine, and he's standing there with a smile on his face, and he's got a beer in his hand. There's two girls behind him, and I painted it so... I mean, it's him, but it's him in about 40 years. He looks real old. And sad. So do the girls. And vaguely, in the background, it's got an American flag. I may call it "A Better Generation," because we thought we were gonna change the world in the '60s. And here we are. Drunk, and alone. M

PAINTER'S PALETTE

JOHN Mellencamp is often seen strumming one of two black Fender Telecasters, one shiny and new, the other completely beat up. He also has a Gibson acoustic with a sketch of an eagle on it. His mikes are generally Shures.

Okay, bring on the guitarists. **Mike Wanchic** uses '57 and '61 Fender Stratocasters cranked through Howard Dumble and Mesa/Boogie Simulclass amps, with an occasional Dobro and National steel thrown in. His strings, like everyone's in the Mellencamp band, are Dean Markleys. **Larry Crane**'s guitars are a Telecaster, a G&L Broadcaster, a Gibson SG and an old Mosrite (for "special effects"—don't ask). His amps are a Mesa/Boogie, a Marshall 100-watter and an Ampeg V7. **David Grissom**, who guested on the *Big Daddy* album, played '50s Teles, '60s Strats and '80s Paul Reed Smiths through '60s Marshall amps. Other acoustic guitars on the album were custom-built by Nashville, Indiana luthier Ron Volbrecht, except for an Alvarez Larry used.

Kenny Aronoff pounds a Tama kit and Zildjian cymbals with Vic Firth sticks. **John Cascella** plays "an accordion" and a teensy bit of Yamaha DX7-II for the organ sound. **Lisa Germano** uses "a fiddle." Remember, you saw that here first.



THE JOURNEY OF 10,000 M

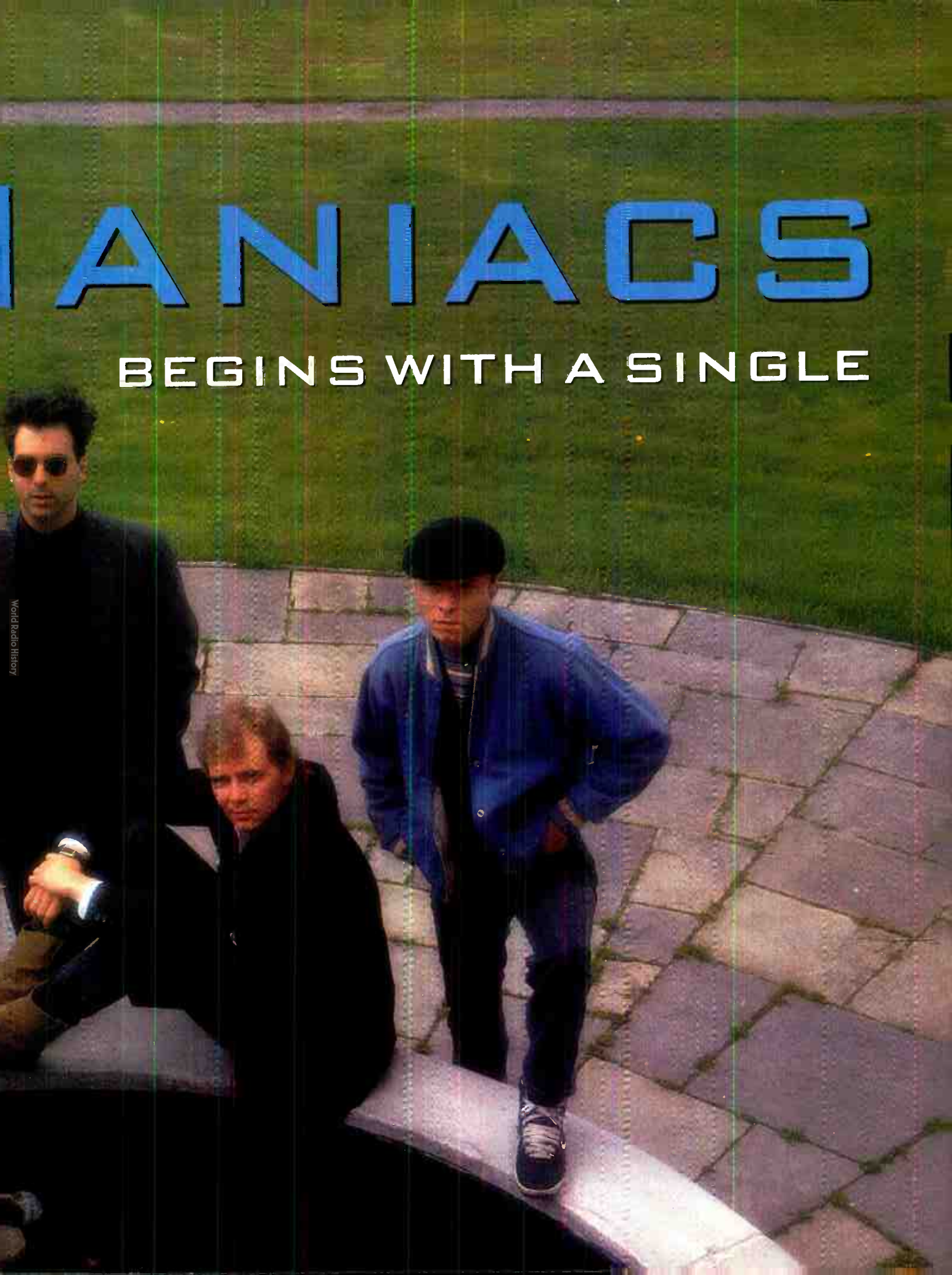
Can five people with nothing in common find one voice?

BY JON PARELES

NATALIE MERCHANT, the voice of 10,000 Maniacs, is sitting at her kitchen table telling me about her latest songs when she notices an ant crawling along her green jeans. "I've got ants in my pants!" she says with a smile. Carefully, she nudges the insect into her left hand, carries it across the room, opens a window and sends it off into the night. "Tell all your little friends that there's nothing in here. Everything is closed up, and there's no food," she says hopefully.

This gentle soul is about to step back onto the rock treadmill with the release of *Blind Man's Zoo*, 10,000 Maniacs' third

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE MARSEL



Elektra album (following an independent EP and LP). In the next 48 hours, she'll rehearse with the band, pack for a month-long European tour, drive the three hours from the band's home in upstate Jamestown, New York to Toronto, meet the Canadian press, then fly on to London to hit the road. "The boys," as Merchant calls the other Maniacs—Dennis Drew on keyboards, Rob Buck on guitar, Steve Gustafson on bass, Jerry Augustyniak on drums—will meet her there.

Blind Man's Zoo and the United States leg of that tour should firmly establish 10,000 Maniacs as the second most famous performers ever to emerge from Jamestown (Lucille Ball grew up there and got out fast).

"I KEPT SUGGESTING WE MAKE THIS A DARKER ALBUM. MAYBE IT WAS A KIND OF TYRANNY...I DIDN'T WANT TO WRITE CHEERFUL LYRICS."

The band went national with *In My Tribe*, released in 1987. That album stayed on the charts for month upon month while 10,000 Maniacs toured, first as an opening act (notably for R.E.M.), and then as a headliner. By the end of 1988, when the band went back into the studio, *In My Tribe* was a gold album, and by now it has probably reached platinum—an unlikely achievement for a set of elliptical songs about illiteracy, Jack Kerouac's mother, militarism and child abuse (among other topics) in a Fairport Convention folk-rock style that most A&R men thought had reached its commercial peak by 1975.

Audiences, it turned out, didn't care about the band's lack of trendiness. Once 10,000 Maniacs reached the concert circuit, after years of playing biker bars and rock discos, Merchant's serene, smoky voice and the band's stately, ringing guitars won listeners over. So did Merchant's abstracted onstage demeanor, as she whirled and twirled in old-fashioned dresses. The songs' exact meanings might be elusive on first hearing, but the tunes were substantial, and a growing number of fans were willing to tap their toes and puzzle things out later.

With their formula-defying songs, their bookish lead singer and their unhurried timing, 10,000 Maniacs were in full command of their eccentricities and, at long last, so odd they were in. The combination of the unworldly-seeming Merchant and her down-to-earth band had jelled, but behind the assurance were years of false starts and a major shakeup. *Blind Man's Zoo*, band members say, was made with an attitude new to the band: confidence.

"There's one rare and odd style of thinking...
the small step and the giant leap takers
got the head start in the racing toward it"

"Back O' the Moon"

"I'VE GOT EVERYTHING, somewhere," says Dennis Drew as he leads me into his basement. Sitting on the concrete are cardboard boxes with folders full of Maniacs and pre-Maniacs memorabilia. "I kept pretending I was going to file it all," he says. One box yields the Jamestown Community College newspaper that Drew and Gustafson ran, including the issue where Drew interviewed Ken Kesey. Another has an early band press kit, circa 1982, including a chapter called "Blind Man's Zoo." "No charming stage banter distracts the listener from the basic message," reads the kit. "No boy-meets-girl lyrics pander to the lowest common denominator. This is, in fact, serious stuff."

There's the receipt for the show that yielded $51 for a night's work at a Philadelphia joint called the East Side Club in June 1983, along with gig posters and old, silly posed photos, back when 10,000 Maniacs were Jamestown's arty underground. There's a clip from the Associated Press wire describing 10,000 Maniacs as "a critically noticed band." And there's a barely decipherable postcard from BBC disc jockey John Peel, written after he received the independent album *Secrets of the I Ching* in 1983: "This is by way of being a fan postcard. Think your LP is the best I've heard this year."

Drew, clearly, is the band's packrat, and perhaps its biggest fan. On the walls of the keyboard player's house are the gold album for *In My Tribe* and various band posters, including one the band asked its fans to sign when they showed up to get albums autographed. In the closet of his office, a room that also holds an upright piano and a four-track portable studio, he finds a computer printout from the week *In My Tribe* went gold. "Here's the projected sales," he says, pointing out a column of numbers. "And here's a region where we sold 240% of what they thought we would. Now, those poor bastards who sell our new record have to go out with these figures and do better."

Drew also has stacks of videocassettes, tape cassettes and reel-to-reel tapes, including songs-in-progress, rehearsal tapes and live shows. "Here's a lesson to the wise," he says with a groan; "label your cassettes."

In its early days, Drew was the band's prime business mover and road manager. He was the one on the phone to clubowners, explaining that no, the band didn't have 10,000 members and would leave the place standing. Didn't he ever get tired of the band's much-misinterpreted name? "Never in the whole world would I ever change the name," Drew says. "I knew the name was unforgettable. I would call bars that wouldn't book us, but they always remembered us—'Oh yeah, you're the Maniacs.' To me, the name is like a poster or a video, neither of which has much to do with the music. It's strictly a commercial tool to get you noticed. If we'd have been the Blue Daffodils, good luck, man."

By now bassist Gustafson has arrived. He and Drew compare their newly substantial bellies—"I always said we'd be huge," he says with a chuckle—and pop open the first of a series of beers as Drew chooses some tapes and videocassettes to jog memories.

At the turn of the 1980s, Drew and Gustafson took over their college radio station. They were post-punk Dead Heads. "We got in and kicked everyone out, as we have a tendency to do," Gustafson says. "Everyone hated us at that school because we were playing the Cure and Gang of Four mixed with Grateful Dead; the people who liked the Cure hated the Dead, and the other way around. They wouldn't even play the station in the student union."

One day Merchant, who was 16 and had just moved back to Jamestown with her mother, walked in with her Roxy Music and reggae records, hoping to get them played on the air. Gustafson encouraged her to get involved with the station, doing artwork for posters and ads. Drew and Gustafson, who had a fledgling band called Still Life, got the idea of creating a

MITCH ROSEN

Steve, Dennis and Rob jamming at home.

New Wave coffeehouse, and as it got under way two other local bands were falling apart. One included Rob Buck on guitar; the other was led by John Lombardo, a slightly older local guitarist and songwriter who had a warehouse rehearsal space.

"I said to Natalie, 'We got this neat rehearsal spot,'" Gustafson recalls. "'Why don't ya come down and jam with us?'" In summer of 1981, the new aggregation did its first—and last—gig as the Burn Victims. On Labor Day, the first lineup of 10,000 Maniacs (minus Buck, who rejoined soon afterwards, and prior to Augustyniak, who joined in 1982) made its debut.

"Steve and I harbored ambitions of being owners of a radio station or film producers," says Drew, "but the music kind of fell into our laps."

"It was like a mistake waiting to happen," Gustafson says.

"Tension makes a tangle
of each thought
becomes an inconvenience
sound as it never penetrates
as servile edges
break and
feint"

"Tension Makes a Tangle"

IN THE EARLY 1980s, the American aftershocks of punk-rock were creating an alternative rock circuit where punk's do-it-yourself ethos met bohemian ingenuity and the remnants of collegiate hippiedom. The people who were aware of U-Roy or Delta 5 or R.E.M. gravitated to one another, united by non-mainstream tastes. Music, art, homemade films, booze and reefer energized hipster undergrounds across the country, among them the one 10,000 Maniacs and friends created in their rented warehouse. Drew gets a fond smile when he recalls performing on a weekend night at the warehouse, hanging out afterwards, then gathering with the band and a bottle to play back the soundboard cassette until dawn.

The Maniacs started out covering Gang of Four songs, and expanded the repertoire to anywhere two-chord vamps were found—reggae, punk, Earth, Wind & Fire. But they didn't stay a cover band for long. Except for Buck, they weren't highly proficient musicians, but Merchant's verbal gift led them to start writing songs. Then as now, "the boys" would write music and give it to Merchant; if she was inspired by it, she'd come up with lyrics. As the stack of original songs grew, Merchant emerged as the band's lyricist and the now departed John Lombardo as chief composer.

Lombardo, who had the band's largest record collection, began exposing the group to music they wouldn't hear in the clubs. "Rob liked bluegrass, Natalie really liked folk music, Dennis and Steve liked reggae," says Lombardo, 36, who now lives in Buffalo and leads a new band, the Hopheads. "Later, Jerry really responded to the pop stuff, like old Big Star. I tried to expand each of the areas they were already inclined to like."

Lombardo also introduced the band to the British folk-rock of Fairport Convention, an influence that would transform 10,000 Maniacs. "We'd never heard of Fairport Convention," Drew says. "I thought they were Harper's Bizarre."

For a year, the band played the Jamestown area's colleges, bars and clubs, sleeping on friend's floors. "Our biggest goal in those days was to play Buffalo," Lombardo recalls. Soon after

STEVE MARSEL

In Jamestown, getting ready to trade Mayberry for Babylon.

Augustyniak joined on drums, they made an EP, *Human Conflict No. 5*, then rented a leaky 1975 Dodge Traveler, formerly a school bus, and hit the road from the Eastern states north to Ontario. On rainy nights, a wave would roll from one end of the bus to the other. In September 1982, they drove to Atlanta, where they had heard about a burgeoning scene. The band rented a house and got to know the Athens bands (including R.E.M.), but after about three months went back to Jamestown to, as Drew puts it, "sponge off our parents."

"Going south was good for the band," Lombardo says. "We were playing for strangers all the time, and there wasn't that kind of hometown support, where everybody pats you on the back. The money was terrible—I remember one night we played in Atlanta and split $32 with another band. But all along there was just enough encouragement. Even if only 10 people were there, at the end of the night all 10 people wanted to buy our record or have us stay at their house.

"At the time it was becoming very obvious that Natalie was the show," Lombardo added. "In the early days, we sang a lot of duets together, but now it wasn't even a question of my ego being bruised. She was a genius. She could improvise lyrics off the top of her head that were better than songs by people I considered great lyricists. We started to acquiesce to just about anything she wanted."

"The music was pretty abrasive-sounding, and my stage persona wasn't the most friendly," Merchant recalls. "I turned my back to the audience almost all night. That was shyness, mostly. I would go in the audience and dance a lot, too, when John would sing. Sometimes I'd be the only person on the dance floor. We'd be in a club, and people didn't have the vaguest idea who we were, they came to the bar to drink, and we were something happening in the corner, so we'd have the whole dance floor to ourselves. I must have looked absurd.

"And sometimes I would scream, just scream in the middle of a song. It was anger, I think, and now it's channeled into words instead of screams."

With free recording time at State University of New York's Fredonia campus studio for an engineering student's senior project, 10,000 Maniacs recorded *Secrets of the I Ching* in 1983. Later, they had reason to regret the arrangement: While *In My Tribe* sat in the charts, the engineer bootlegged copies of *I Ching* and the band had to take legal action to stop him.

Give or take some very white-sounding reggae and a production understated by its budget, on both EP and album the band sounded like a slightly sped-up, slightly cluttered version of the 10,000 Maniacs to come—enigmatic lyrics (although slightly more future-shocked than later efforts), rich guitar countermelodies and all. *Secrets* brought the band to the attention of John Peel and BBC-1. Suddenly, they were local favorites—in London, where "My Mother the War" reached the independent singles charts.

That brought the record-company scouts, and the Maniacs signed to Elektra. Working with Joe Boyd, who'd made Fairport's best albums, the band lived in London's Muswell Hill section for a month while recording *The Wishing Chair*. Three songs were remakes from *Secrets*, and with Merchant's newer songs made up an American dreamscape of characters and situations from small-town homebodies to victims of history.

A major-label release didn't mean major-league acceptance. Although 10,000 Maniacs began landing a better class of

STEVE MARSEL

opening-act slots, Elektra didn't push the album too hard. Boyd had captured the band without any glossy overlay, and perhaps the label couldn't think of songs about sitting around a cemetery ("Lily Dale") or Indian genocide ("Among the Americans") as hot commercial properties.

Meanwhile, tension grew within the band. "There were a lot of arguments," Gustafson recalls, "and John's political ideas were far from ours. Dennis is a pretty hard-core right-winger, and I consider myself pretty capitalistic, while John was very socialist, but for a socialist he was always so paranoid about money. Artistic arguments would lead to financial arguments, and then John and Dennis actually got into a fistfight before a gig here in town. We all loved John, and we had a lot of laughs and great times. But he just saw the band going in a different direction. Push came to 'fuck you,' and he left."

"The record was getting really good reviews, but the audience wasn't expanding," Lombardo says. "We had reached kind of a plateau, and in my naïveté I thought it was the material, the approach. In retrospect, I think the record company was skeptical, not really behind the record.

"But here we were on a major label, a dream of my entire life, and we had no money to show for it. We'd come off a tour opening for R.E.M. and be another $5000 in debt. I was frustrated. We'd hired a sound man who was making three times as much as anyone in the band, and a roadie making twice as much. I also thought it was ridiculous staying in first-class hotels with what we were making.

"In my last three shows with the band, opening for the Cure, I looked into that sea of trendy people staring at us with blank faces. I never thought we could connect with that large audience, never connect beyond the college radio crowd, the guys with glasses who sit in their rooms writing love songs to Natalie.

"The last straw was after we had finished our set and I was standing offstage, watching the Cure play beautifully. One of the guys taps me on the shoulder and says, 'Are you ready to leave?' I thought, to go back to Jamestown—what the fuck is in Jamestown? I had lost my faith. Some of these people aren't even fans of music, or of other bands. I thought, 'If that's what's going on in their heads, they're on a very dark road.'

"The next day, I got tears in my eyes and said I wasn't having any fun playing anymore, and I left. I waited just for a phone call, saying, 'John, why don't you come back to rehearsal?' But the phone call never came.

"It's been an emotional nightmare for me, the last year and a half," he adds. "I'll be in a bar talking to a girl, and someone will come up to me and give me a Maniacs update or start asking me about them. For a long time I didn't listen to the music, because it made me sad. But recently I made a compilation tape of all the songs I'd written with Natalie, and I think some of them can stand up to anything around."

Last year, at a benefit for a friend in Jamestown, Lombardo sat in with 10,000 Maniacs, and talked things out with his ex-bandmates. "It's weird now," he says. "It's like running into an old girlfriend—after she won the lottery."

"Now for the tricky part" "Hey Jack Kerouac"

WITH THEIR MAIN COMPOSER GONE, 10,000 Maniacs faced a nervous record company as well as their own uncertainty. *"In My Tribe* was a make-or-break album," Drew says. "The question was, was John right or wrong?" Elektra kept asking for more demos, unwilling to commit itself to the songs, until finally the band got a tape to Peter Asher, known for his meticulous folk-pop productions with Linda Ronstadt and James Taylor. "He said, 'This is great, they've got enough songs,'" Drew says. "And Elektra said, 'Uh, okay, go ahead.'"

Where Boyd had been what Lombardo called "a Zen producer," Asher was an activist. He was used to working with lone singers backed by studio pros; 10,000 Maniacs was his first production of a band, and he changed some of their work methods. Since the band no longer included Lombardo's rhythm guitar, Rob Buck had to cut back his spacier lead-guitar excursions and play more rhythm. Asher also refused to let him use his arsenal of effects in the studio, instead recording the guitars cleanly and adding effects later. Jerry Augustyniak, a solid drummer onstage, didn't have the rock-steady timekeeping Asher wanted in the studio, so some of the album's drum tracks were programmed on a Synclavier.

"WE WERE ON A MAJOR LABEL AND HAD NO MONEY. THE SOUNDMAN WAS MAKING THREE TIMES AS MUCH AS ANYONE IN THE BAND."

In My Tribe also included 10,000 Maniacs' first recorded cover, Cat Stevens' "Peace Train." (After Stevens endorsed the Ayatollah Khomeini's "death sentence" against novelist Salman Rushdie, Merchant said the band would no longer perform "Peace Train." "I wish we could take it off the album," she says.)

The songs had become more open, less involuted; there were fewer riddles and more stories. Merchant treated large problems on a personal level, her voice knowing and soothing as she sang about alcoholism ("Don't Talk"), illiteracy ("Cherry Tree"), child abuse ("What's the Matter Here"), poverty ("City of Angels"). Merchant has made an effort to make her writing clearer and less self-indulgent. "At first, I was playing private games with words, and I wasn't even playing with other people," she says. "I think my desire to communicate more vividly, more directly, more clearly, happened with *In My Tribe.*" Both melodies and beat had come into focus; instrumental and vocal sounds had a new luster. In some ways it was a more conventional pop record, spotlighting vocals and hooks against a strict beat, but it didn't sacrifice ideas in order to connect with a larger audience.

The band had also found a new equilibrium. "I started to face the audience when *The Wishing Chair* came out," Merchant says. Now she was facing listeners and twirling across the stage. "Spinning, my trademark," she says. "I don't know why, I just did it, it just became sort of a meditative thing to do. That's going to sound like a hippie when it's in print. But it felt... I guess I could make up a reason for it. But it was something I was already doing.

"I wore ankle-length full dresses, patterned after the Amish ladies who would come to town. They wore very heavy boots, dark clothing down to their ankles, and I found their dress

STEVE MARSEL

really beautiful. There was something about this uniform style of dress that hadn't changed for 200 years, the way it was always stark and dark and long, long sleeves coming all the way to the wrist. So I was wearing these kind of clothes and I was spinning, and that's the way the Sufis are, these men wearing long dresses and spinning, trying to imitate the motion of the world and reaching this transcendent state. I could get to the point where I wouldn't see objects in the room—they would become bands of color."

Meanwhile, it had become clear that Merchant was not one of the boys. "She probably liked us at first," says Drew. "And then after hanging around with us 24 hours a day every day of the year, she probably got sick of us. After we realized that, we just tried to give her as much space as possible."

"I certainly understand how obnoxious we can be," Gustafson says. "Sometimes we're like high-school boys, and she's not into being obnoxious like we are, for fun. We don't have anything really in common with Natalie except this band."

Michael Stipe of R.E.M. had sung on *In My Tribe*, and as the two bands toured together Stipe and Merchant became constant companions. "They were two peas in a pod," says Gustafson. "They really helped each other. And they're both in the same situation—the rest of the people in both bands are just normal."

"It was really important for them to be together and discuss what they do," says Drew. "They both really reinforced the fact that they thought what they were doing was important enough to give themselves to the audience. They're both really shy people, and very literate—they're both also really sensual people, and they have the ability to exude sensuality without being blatant about it."

The audiences grew; the band stayed on the road, moved to the top of the bill, and the tour kept stretching out. It ended, eventually, when Merchant fell ill last year. Her brother had had spinal meningitis, she says, and she believes she caught it at the same time. But she was unwilling to endure the pain and possible complications of a spinal tap for testing.

During Merchant's two-month layoff, the rest of the Maniacs had a chance to step back and relax for the first time since the band started. The gold record proved they were on to something, and they were financially solvent, though still not flush. "You'd be surprised at how little the artist actually makes from a gold record," Merchant says. "If you took everything we've made from the band and averaged it out over the time we've been together, we'd be under the poverty line every year." Now, they were ready to consolidate.

"Barking commands
loud and simple
we could all obey"
"Maddox Table"

ROB BUCK AND JERRY AUGUSTYNIAK are the band's out-of-towners; Buck moved to Albany to be with his girlfriend and Augustyniak still lives in Buffalo. They've driven to Jamestown today to talk to *Musician*, rehearse and do a photo session.

A casting director would pick the big-boned Buck as the drummer and the slighter, quieter Augustyniak as the band's keyboardist or manager. Driving through town to a favorite restaurant, they point out their own Jamestown landmarks: the Rusty Nail, where they played too many gigs; the Hotel Franklin, where they worked regularly; Lucille Ball's childhood home. During the break between albums, Buck bought a new amplifier, his first since 1982, and worked on scales; Augustyniak practiced with a metronome, steadying his beat before the next recording sessions. "I could think about having hobbies, too," he says. "Two years ago, that would have been an impossibility."

The break also made romance blossom; by the end of 1988, all the band members had found mates. Augustyniak's girlfriend convinced him to stop wearing the wigs he had used to cover his baldness.

The original line-up. Top row: Buck, Gustafson, Drew. Bottom row: John Lombardo, Merchant, Augustyniak.

For *Blind Man's Zoo*, 10,000 Maniacs worked with Asher again, but in entirely different circumstances. *In My Tribe* was recorded in Los Angeles, Asher's usual stomping ground; *Blind Man's Zoo* was recorded in a former church outside Woodstock, New York. "Rather than live in L.A. and record in a place where you might see Jackson Browne," says Buck, "we went to a place in the middle of nowhere where you might see a woodchuck."

This time, 10,000 Maniacs hoped to capture the impact of their live shows. Asher had only seen them perform twice before working with them in 1987; now, says Buck, "he got the gist of the live performance."

The band worked quickly on *Blind Man's Zoo*; bass and drum tracks, Augustyniak says, were laid down in three days, "with a lot of first takes." Buck used his own effects, and working with a new engineer (Frank Filipetti, who had engineered Foreigner and Pat Benatar) the band got the stronger sound it wanted. The album is pushier than any of the band's previous recordings, and—as Merchant wanted—considerably more somber.

"Trouble me, disturb me with all your cares and your worries"
"Trouble Me"

MERCHANT HEADS FOR TORONTO tomorrow, but instead of packing she has been puttering. She's poring through a book she found in an antique store—a 1920 quasi-medical tome called *Sex and Sex Worship*. And in her kitchen, where an upright piano sits by the stove, there are two projects on the counter—a pair of antique candlesticks she has reglued to give to friends, and an old oak holder with a scroll that shows the Stations of the Cross. "I've been trying to fix it, and as often happens when I do, I made it worse," she says.

She has also been working on a more modern audiovisual display. For the last few days she has been re-editing the video

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clip for "Trouble Me," trying to get the right, swirling rhythm in images of Merchant and old women gamboling on the grounds of a Victorian resort hotel. "I wanted to counteract what most people would assume the song is about," she says. "It can be about a man and a woman loving each other, but at the same time it's just about friendship and caring and trusting and love, things that I think so many people in the world want and need but don't have, or they want and need to offer to somebody else. Why exclude people who are old from this kind of love?"

Christian imagery shows up regularly in Merchant's songs, and her apartment holds the odd iconic artifact, like a statue of St. Anthony; the band's publishing company is Christian Burial Music. But Merchant does not consider herself a Christian.

"I'm still too selfish to be a Christian," she says. "People who work in AIDS hospices and people like that, those are Christians. Whether you consider Jesus a myth, or a person, or a prophet, or a saint, or the son of God, he lived his beliefs. He had no possessions, no home—he lived in the world, and mankind was his family. It's amazing to think that something that started as such pure theology has been turned by some people to such wicked ends. That's what 'Jubilee' is about, that sense of religious fanaticism that makes people think they can decree a death penalty for someone else."

Merchant thinks a lot about responsibility. She wanted to have the album cover printed on recycled paper, an idea vetoed by Elektra; it bothers her that "everything I make is on plastic." On her last trip to a video store, she said, she was almost in tears at seeing shelf upon shelf of exploitation films and horror movies, full of images of sexual violence. "I can't imagine being an actress portraying a woman enjoying a rape,"

WHAT'S THE SETUP HERE?

Jerome Augustyniak plays a Sonor drum kit, with a Drum Workshop high-hat and pedal and Avedis Zildjian cymbals. He programs one-bar patterns on a Korg drum machine. "And I practice in front of the mirror with a discontinued Robin guitar."

Rob Buck plays a custom Hamer guitar "without a funny heavy-metal headstock. It has a one-piece hardwood body, triple-coil and double-coil pickups and a seven-pound solid bridge with no goddamn whammy bar, no obtuse angles." For bluesy parts, he uses a Robin guitar that he calls "a cross between a Stratocaster and a Telecaster."

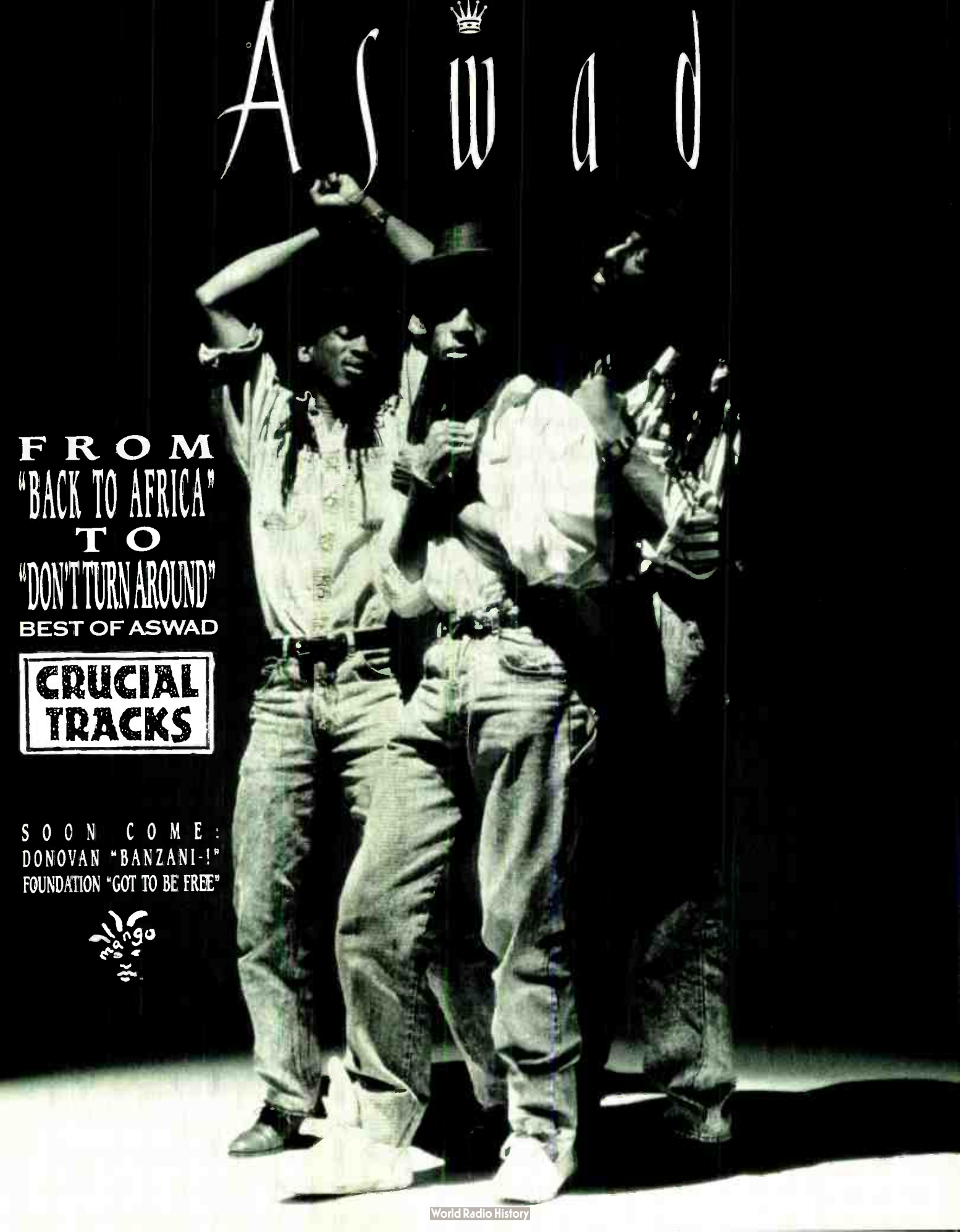
His effects include a Roland SDE-1000 digital delay, an Alesis MIDIverb, an ART Multiverb and a Yamaha SPX90. "I use about two delays and three reverbs, and I shut off the reverbs on the amps." He also uses a Roland GP-8 multiprocessor, an E-bow and a volume pedal. It all goes into Roland JC-120 and Fender tube amplifiers, and into two Marshall cabinets with four 12" speakers each, one of JBLs and one of ElectroVoices. "It's MIDI-programmed with a Yamaha foot-pedal. I step on a switch and get the perfect sound. I use reverb the way a lot of other people use distortion. For me the idea is to take all those effects and make it sound like a guitar, only bigger. There's nothing better in the world than just the sound of a pick hitting a string."

Dennis Drew uses a Steinway piano in the studio. Onstage, he plays a Roland 300 digital piano directly through the P.A. system, and a Korg CX3 with MIDI retrofit, MIDIed to a Roland D-50. All that goes through a Roland JC-120.

Steve Gustafson usually plays a Robin bass, and occasionally a Hamer Chapparal, through a dbx 150 compressor/limiter, a Groove Tube preamp, a Carver 350-watt amp and clamshell-design speaker cabinets by KK Audio.

Natalie Merchant uses "female Caucasian model 1963 vocal cords, with natural vibrato and sustain."

Aswad



FROM
"BACK TO AFRICA"
TO
"DON'T TURN AROUND"
BEST OF ASWAD

CRUCIAL TRACKS

SOON COME:
DONOVAN "BANZANI-!"
FOUNDATION "GOT TO BE FREE"

mango

she says. "In a way, it's worse than prostitution, because it's so widely seen and distributed."

With 10,000 Maniacs now in the mass media themselves, Merchant is determined to send messages she cares about. "I kept suggesting that we make this a darker album," she says. "Maybe it was a kind of tyranny. Every time someone would come along with a cheerful song, I didn't want to write cheerful lyrics, so I requested that we write a song that had more power and more depth to it. Maybe the next album, we'll write a whole album of 'My Sister Rose' songs, maybe it will be the time to write something more uplifting. And maybe I was being very selfish. But I felt that I wanted a consistent album."

Her message doesn't always get through. Someone who heard "Eat for Two," which opens *Blind Man's Zoo*, told Merchant she was being trendy since so many yuppies were so in love with having babies. "They didn't understand the song is about an unwanted pregnancy," she says. "You know, women's reproductive rights are a major battleground now, but that's not why I wrote the song. It's about a young girl who wants love and gets sex instead, and her whole life is changed: 'She couldn't stand the way he begged and gave in.' It's about children having children. Maybe I was too subtle."

Does she think about motherhood herself? "I don't know," she says. "It seems like such a hard world to raise a child in now, different even from when I was growing up. I wouldn't want to have a child who was filled with fear, but I understand that now a child has to know about things like sexual abuse and people touching them in the wrong places. It seems so sad that a five-year-old has to know about rape."

Is she hard to work with? "I work alone," Merchant says, and pauses. "But I'm very hard on myself."

Blind Man's Zoo is coherent and anything but cheerful. Aside from the comfort of "Trouble Me," it offers troubles: pollution in "Poison in the Well" (inspired by the Love Canal toxic-waste disaster), teen pregnancy in "Eat for Two," Nicaraguan contra atrocities and American complicity in "Please Forgive Us," Vietnam in "The Big Parade," hard times in "Dust Bowl," colonialism in "Hateful Hate," religious fanaticism in "Jubilee." The music is somber, more connected to the lyrics than before. And while the songs threaten to become preachy, they don't; Merchant finds the details to make her vignettes stories first, social comment second.

"I don't feel like I'm improving my craft if I force myself to write. I write a lot in places like airports and trains, places where I'm surrounded by activity and people. Then I can come home and summarize journals, retype them and extract what's important in them. I don't do anything final away from home, but that's where a lot of the initial writing takes place.

"If there was any specific artist I learned songwriting from, it was probably Lennon-McCartney. My mother was real young when she had her first child, only 19 or 20, and she was still buying Beatles records when she was having kids. She played them over and over, and we learned those songs very young. One of my first memories was learning to sing 'I Want to Hold Your Hand' when I was three years old."

Although she is only 25 years old, Merchant seems like a throwback to an earlier, more rural, more literary generation. "One of my favorite memories is running, as a child, through the cornfields next door," she says. "I know it doesn't seem like much, but it was an incredible sound, in the leaves, and incredibly beautiful, especially at night

CONTINUED ON PAGE 114

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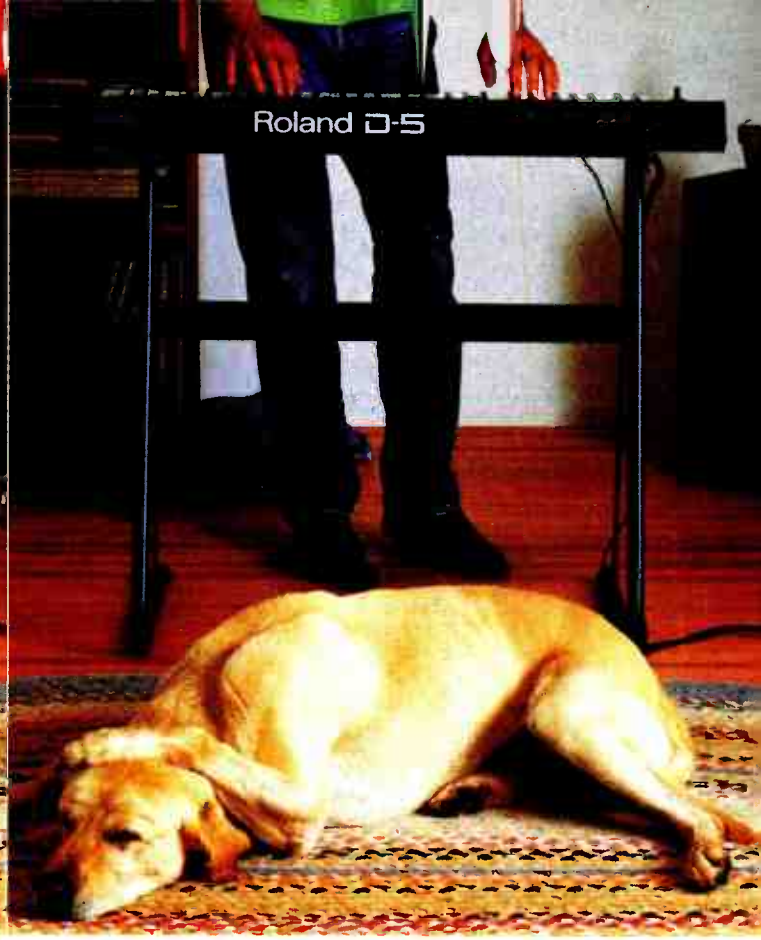

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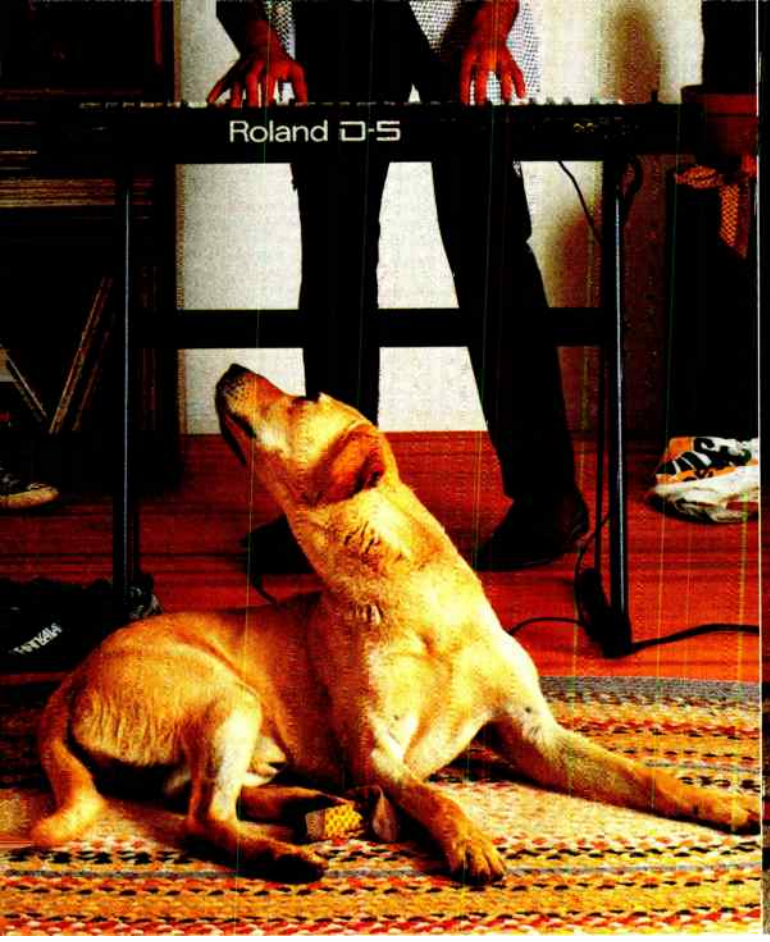

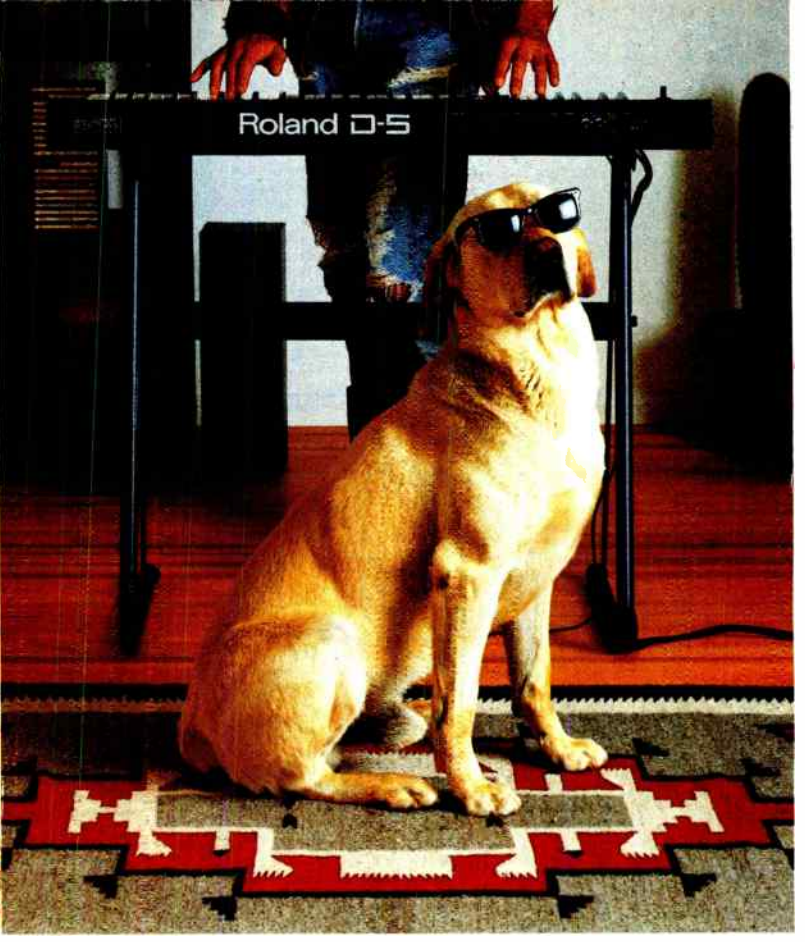

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Life Lessons

Jackson Browne and Bonnie Raitt find hope in a hard world.

by Mark Rowland

OUT IN THE San Fernando Valley on this hot, dusty day there's a rehearsal studio done up in a gaudy cowboy motif, like something out of *Westworld.* Musicians and roadies are wandering around, checking out the lights and sound for David Lindley's band El Rayo-X and the band of Lindley's old pal Jackson Browne. They're touring together this summer, the latest chapter in a musical association that dates back to the '60s, when a teenaged Jackson watched Lindley perform at the now-legendary Ash Grove folk club in Los Angeles.

Bonnie Raitt, who also grew up around here, is chatting with Lindley in the parking lot. He mentions one or another of the zillion stringed instruments he plays with such effortless mastery, and Bonnie, ever flirtatious, cracks, "Gee, I wish we were married so you could play *me.*" Then Bonnie starts to rave about Jackson's new album *World in Motion*—she contributes harmony vocals on the title cut—and Browne, as if on cue, wheels into the lot, his tape deck blasting a song from Bonnie Raitt's new record *Nick of Time.* And you thought musical lovefests ended with Woodstock.

They've been friends for a while. You don't think of Jackson Browne's and Bonnie Raitt's careers dating 20 years, but they do. Raitt had cut a reputation in blues circles well before her debut album, featuring Chicago bluesmen Junior Wells and A.C. Reed, and songs co-written by Bonnie and Sippie Wallace, appeared in 1971. Browne played with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and with Nico—who recorded Jackson's "These Days," written when he was 16—and was well known as a songwriter by the time his first album appeared in 1972.

Soon after that both performers were living in L.A. and hanging around the Troubadour, part of a loose family of singers and songwriters that included Lowell George, Tom Waits and Linda Ronstadt. Browne eventually became a superstar, his ability to pare problems of romance and identity to their introspective core engendering unusual devotion among fans. Raitt was the nonpareil interpreter of bluesy pop and ballads who could get more out of a song than the person who wrote it. Collectively, the Troubadour crowd went a long way toward directing the currents of popular music through the '70s—at least until the punks got up to present their agenda, which included driving a stake through the heart of sensitive singer/songwriters.

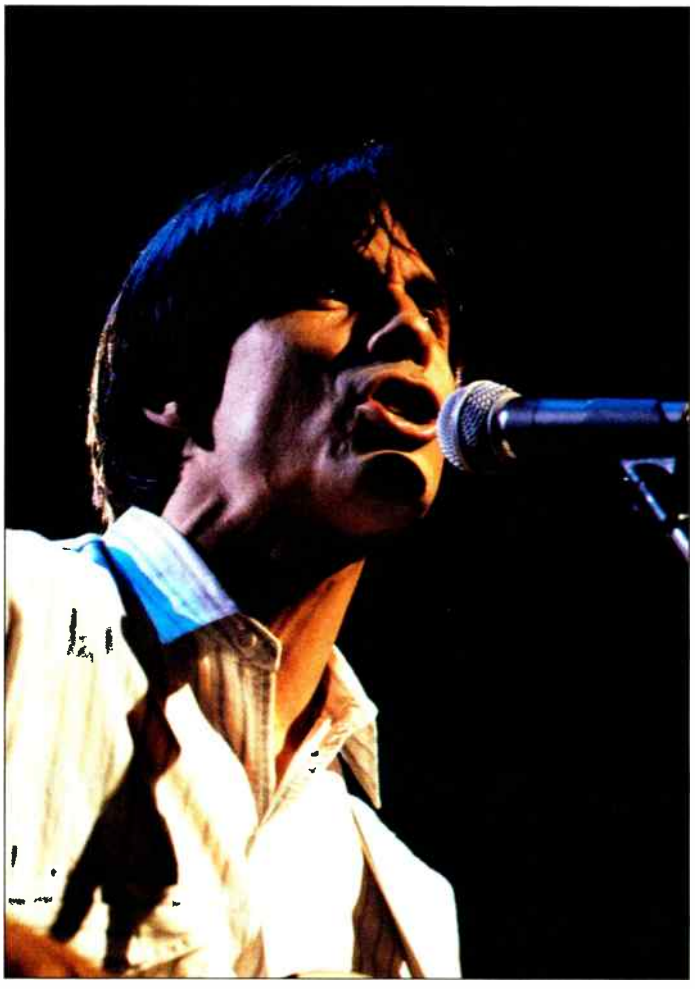
"I didn't really understand during the late '70s and early '80s to what extent the punk movement was an expression of no faith in the status quo," Browne observes in retrospect. "It was a reaction against complacency." What's interesting is that, these days, he could say the same things about himself. Of course Jackson Browne's sound—the steady bottom, ringing guitar leads, melodies contoured to support well-crafted verses—remains familiar, conventional pop-rock. But for the last several years—from *Lawyers in Love* to *Lives*

Photograph by Peter D. Miller

in the Balance to *World in Motion*—he's put that sound in the service of the most overtly political music by a major pop figure this side of the Clash.

Browne has backed up those sentiments with activities ranging from his organizing of the "No Nukes" benefit in 1978 to arrests for civil disobedience to more recent forays into Central America to help counter human rights abuses and to expose the U.S. government's attempts to wage a proxy war against Nicaragua. "My Personal Revenge," one of the best songs on his new record, is from a poem written by Nicaragua's Minister of the Interior Tomás Borge.

Though she's not a prolific songwriter, Bonnie Raitt's politics are no less overt. Another of the "No Nukes" organizers, she performs frequently for progressive causes; as a singer, guitarist and bandleader who's kept her career going by constant touring despite periods of critical and corporate indifference, she embodies for many of her fans a kind of feminist ideal. The daughter of actor and singer John Raitt, Bonnie's musical palette is as varied as Browne's is monochromatic, absorbing traditions as far-flung as country, Stones-era rock and Tin Pan Alley into a pop sensibility that still gets its lifeblood from the blues.



"Jackson had to embrace maturity and responsibility a lot earlier, as a songwriter, a parent, a husband."

For all her talent, that's not always a great formula for selling records, and in 1983 Raitt was dropped by Warner Brothers, re-signed again for one album and then dropped again. Prince offered to produce a record for her, but after working in the studio for two days he took off to Europe to fortify his own sagging career. For Bonnie there were also personal problems to contend with, including a romance that ended badly and too many nights with the bottle. "The '80s were not a good decade for me," she says.

But Raitt has a resilient soul, and she doesn't lack admirers. It says something that she's worked with producers as disparate as Peter Asher, Prince and most recently Was (Not Was)'s Don Ferguson, who helped sculpt *Nick of Time*, Raitt's recent debut on Capitol Records. Bonnie called on pal Dennis Quaid to spice up the video of the LP's first single, an inspired take of John Hiatt's "Thing Called Love," and... *voilà! Nick of Time* is the biggest hit of Bonnie Raitt's career. Maybe good taste is timeless after all.

Jackson and Bonnie share a lot of memories—among other things, they toured together in 1973 and 1974—and a lot of friends. In conversation together, Jackson tends to focus on himself through the world, Bonnie on the world through herself. They act a lot like sister and brother, though it's hard to say who seems older. Maybe that's because both artists, after all these years, haven't let go of the future.

MUSICIAN: *Do you remember when you met?*
BROWNE: We met about a year before we both made a record.
RAITT: It might have been in Syracuse, right? At the Jabberwocky. And you played "Song for Adam," which continues to be, if I had one song... you know you get asked to do these desert island discs? I'd have to have "Start Me Up," "Tail Dragger" by Howlin' Wolf.
BROWNE: Right, and "Song for Adam." [*laughs*] Well, I remember seeing this girl that was this sort of teenage Mae West holding forth on the stage. I remember that gig well.
MUSICIAN: *You already knew of Jackson's songs?*
RAITT: In the folk community. 'Cause I was still in college and kind of steeped in hanging out with older blues people. I was at Harvard for three years...
BROWNE: You were at Harvard?
RAITT: Yeah, I majored in African studies.
BROWNE: Harvard, that's pretty impressive. It's hard to get in there, isn't it?
RAITT: Well, it was four guys to one girl. That was what appealed to me. Plus you didn't have to take gym. Anyway, I had heard about Jackson through the Newport Folk Festival/East Coast axis of people talking about him, 'cause he had been in New York with Nico and all that stuff.
MUSICIAN: *But you both grew up in L.A. Why did you leave?*
RAITT: I couldn't stand L.A. when I was growing up here. My family is Quaker, and I spent every summer on the East Coast, with counselors from Swarthmore and all the colleges that were active in the peace movement, civil rights and the folk music revival. I always wanted to be part of that culture—Joan Baez and peace marches—and not the quasi-beach bunny/Goldwater aspect of L.A. which was running rampant.

I lived on top of Mulholland by Coldwater Canyon. Being a girl and not driving, and stuck on top of a mountain where you can't see your friends, was a good thing and a bad thing. It made me play the guitar a lot and listen to records, and also wish I was back on the East Coast with a bunch of would-be beatniks and folkies. If you were a young guy, and you could drive wheels in L.A. and go to folk clubs like the Ash Grove, you could have been part of a really cool scene here.

My older brother had a car and could go anywhere he

JOHN BELLISSIMO

wanted. I remember thinking, "When I get older I'm not gonna let anybody stop me from staying up as long as I want. I'm gonna do everything guys can do and twice as hard." And I did! I'm still doing it! [*laughs*]

BROWNE: That's really who I met, the night I met Bonnie—twice as funny, twice as dirty—it was ridiculous! [*laughter*] But when she'd sing these ballads, she'd sing incredibly tenderly, this kind of half-Appalachian, half-blues. I always thought that people like Bonnie that used to sing blues got a hell of a lot out of a song. Besides enjoying blues, if they sang a song with great lyrics and with a melody, they could take it twice as far. Gregg Allman was another one who sang a ballad really well.

But I asked Bonnie once why she played the kind of music she played. She said it was 'cause her parents were touring singers and players, and every time her parents would leave, the maid would show up with her boyfriend and kids and they'd sit around playing Jimmy Reed until the parents got home.

RAITT: Or Ike and Tina Turner. To me there really wasn't that much difference between the raw, funky soul music that was being played on those stations and the blues I heard later. I never liked "pop" music—but I loved the Beatles.

BROWNE: I liked pop music, but I didn't want to do anything until I heard folk music. It didn't occur to me. Living in Orange County, there were all these clubs along the beaches and in little mini-malls. They were really like "Kingston Trio" clubs, or the New Christy Minstrels. There was this one club, though, that had Ramblin' Jack Elliot, and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. It was run by these two funky guys from the South and you'd hear all this blues and bluegrass. It was called the Paradox—and it *was* a paradox, 'cause it was right in the middle of Orange County. A friend and I took Sonny and Brownie out after a show once and ran into some shit at a diner at two in the morning. Orange County is very racist. In Anaheim, there was a lot of Klan activity.

My sister was two years older than me, and she hung around with these guys who wrote songs and did a lot of civil rights stuff. I started hanging around with them and writing songs when I was 15. We gravitated toward Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger kind of stuff. This is 1964, '65. The school I went to had been built in a new suburb that used to be orange groves. It was called Sunny Hills, out by Fullerton. And Fullerton was funky, but out in Sunny Hills it was just sterile; in those days you'd say it was "plastic." There was a uniform, basically, and a certain car to drive, a certain club. Well, I didn't belong to any of that shit. But I couldn't exactly hang with the "vatos" because they were more Mexican than the guys I had known when I used to live in Highland Park. In Orange County the racial divisions were much more pronounced.

MUSICIAN: *This may be a leap, but do you think that your background may have made you particularly sensitive to the injustices you work against and write about in Central America?*

BROWNE: I was just raised to believe it was wrong to be prejudiced. That was the word then. But really what got me into the Latin American issues was Vietnam, because the parallels are inescapable: It's the same forces, the same military-industrial complex and the same basic unawareness on the part of the voting, tax-paying population that allows that to take place. And it's also the desire on the part of the military establishment to make up for what they feel is the disgrace of having lost in Vietnam. Like Rambo says, "Are they gonna let us win this one?" But I don't know if it helped me more as an individual, I can't really answer that.

"People like Bonnie who used to sing the blues got a hell of a lot more out of a song. They could take it twice as far."

You have the feeling that if you could just tell people, they would do something about it. When we were doing the first year of planning "No Nukes," I remember feeling like, we have to tell someone about this.

RAITT: That all we'd have to *do* was tell them...

BROWNE: And then a month or two before we announced those concerts, *The China Syndrome* film came out and Three Mile Island happened. So we shifted the whole focus of our event from a kind of Paul Revere ride through the night saying, "Oh Jesus, somebody do something about this quick!" to what you really can do about it.

RAITT: I think that would be a good video for you, riding through the night as Paul Revere. [*laughter*]

BROWNE: It's surprising how many people are aware of what's going on. What gives the impression that nobody knows or cares is that the media pays so little attention and is really unwilling to present two sides of any political question, as if they feel it's disloyal to make mention of the fact that the president might be completely snowing us or might not know even a little bit of what he's talking about. Until two years ago when it became evident that Reagan was just reading this stuff off cards and really knew very little, the media would act as if you were being disloyal to bring it up. Then these White House correspondents would sort of shift from foot to foot and say, "Yeah, I kind of thought he was a little unversed on the

LYDIA CRISS

issues"... These guys are basically a conduit for government policies and don't do the job of journalists at all, to ask questions. And even when the *New York Times* catches a lie, it's not a headline of "Government Misrepresents Truth," there's no outcry or demand for apology.

MUSICIAN: *I think it's ironic that so many rock musicians devote their energy to saving the planet, while our "responsible" political leaders are routinely exposed as liars and drunks.*

RAITT: It's still Us vs. Them. We're just the older version of Us. Now the generation that grew up in the '60s is franchised a little in the news and entertainment industries. But you still have this situation where a cause gets covered when a celebrity lends their name to it. Otherwise it doesn't.

BROWNE: But even that gets completely misrepresented.

RAITT: Like, "Do you think this is hurting your career?"

BROWNE: Or, "Isn't it a shame that more people don't care about this?"

RAITT: It's lip service, buzz words. But I think there's a lot more potential these days to get information out, because of satellites and CNN. Maybe it hasn't gotten to all the houses on stilts in Louisiana, but it'll get there soon. And I think the groups on MTV now, there's more political content in the songs than there used to be. The fact of Tracy Chapman having a hit around the world is an amazing breakthrough, to get politics to that level of kids. I doubt people of Elvis' age in the hinterlands are going to be changed much by any of this. I sing to the same people that have been listening to me for 20 years, so I'm not cutting any new ground. Though the kids of the parents who were kids listening to me in college are coming to the shows now. That's pretty neat. They give me incense. [*laughs*] They weren't around for Janis Joplin, so I guess they think I'm cool.

MUSICIAN: *What's it like for you at a moment like this, as your record is coming out?*

RAITT: For me it's great, 'cause I'm on a new label and I'm getting attention for a change. It's gratifying to see that, even though radio's tighter than—well, we can just imagine what that metaphor would be—still the fact that Tracy Chapman, Suzanne Vega, Robert Cray are on the radio, and John Hiatt got some critical acclaim and exposure even if he didn't have a hit record, that that crop of women singers gave credibility and opened things up for someone like me or Phoebe Snow to come back with records that are getting some attention. And we probably did influence Melissa Etheridge, I've heard her say that, and Wynonna Judd and some other people. And if I have a successful record then I can open a door for other people who also do songs that haven't been getting that kind of attention.

BROWNE: I think values are changing and people just want to hear real playing...

RAITT: And not slick production, and real content to the lyrics. There is a certain amount of pendulum swinging; you go from Toto to R.E.M. But when *Rain Dogs* gets to be number one, that production style, then I'll know that change has come.

Jackson, what's your sense of it? Hearing your record or John Mellencamp's being so raw—I see a real difference in being able to convince record companies that it's okay—for me anyway—to make a record that doesn't sound slick.

> We didn't want to conform to society's standards of what 'adult' meant. I didn't want to be in mainstream America. I didn't want to go to sleep!"

BROWNE: I've got a record company that's trying very hard to keep from making slick records. I mean, they don't worry about making a slick record with Anita Baker—there's certain places where that's right. But with me the guy from the company—and I'd never really dealt with an A&R guy before—kept saying, "Let's just make sure the arrangements don't get in the way of the songs, don't obscure what you have to say by putting in a lot of stuff you think you need to compete or to get it on the radio." I mean, there had to have been a subtle pressure—you always had to have something that was up-tempo with a lot of drums to get on the radio.

RAITT: But that's our own pressure. People would say, "Warners tried to make her sound like Linda Ronstadt." Excuse me, but I had an independent production deal and I'll take responsibility for the arrangements and the producers and everything else. It's kind of a back-handed compliment, like they're trussing her up like a turkey. [*laughs*] I wanted to make a record to sound as good as my peers who I did like.

BROWNE: Bonnie's friends have always had an opinion about what she should do. I suppose people have had an attitude about me too. But I remember when we would sit around talking about Bonnie's records. And there was something everybody wanted to hear that you weren't always getting.

RAITT: I agree.

BROWNE: They were great records. But we spent so much time sitting around rooms with you, playing with you or hearing you play acoustic...

RAITT: Yeah, or talking about what was wrong with the record for six hours. I needed to get sick of making records I was making before I could make a "raw" one. I wasn't always happy with the way they ended up being mixed, but at the time I thought we were doing the best job. And I'll take complete

EBET ROBERTS

responsibility for those. Nobody forced me. The Peter Asher record *The Glow,* which got a big backlash when it came out in 1979, that was done on first and second takes. As far as I'm concerned that mix of songs is about the same as I always do. I wanted it to punch more, but I don't hear it being so "clean" like everybody else does. And Warners thought *Green Light* was too raw and didn't promote it.

The thing is, I go back and forth making records that I like, and then watching, kind of cynically bemused, as people shred it for being too much this way or that. I do feel with this latest one that by being forced and enabled to do acoustic concerts—because I couldn't afford to take a band out—I fell back in love with that format and that intimacy. And realized with maturity, and sobriety and clarity, that what I do was different. And that not that many people can just sing and play and pull the song off. So that's what I should do. I don't think I'm gonna make a slick record again.

MUSICIAN: *Can we talk a little about the sorry end at Warners?*

RAITT: It's business. I wasn't selling records. I re-signed with them in '79 and in '83 they wanted to trim some fat. It was the day after I finished my album. I had a whole tour lined up. I would have liked some advance notice so I didn't have to spend my own money, which I did. They wanted to get out of the record deal 'cause it was too big for what I was bringing in. I didn't ask them to give me the deal, I didn't get any money to sign years ago, and then when I renegotiated after "Runaway" Columbia wanted me with them. And James Taylor had done the same and had a big hit album at Columbia, and I was with Peter Asher, who had made *JT* a hit; Warners didn't want the same thing to happen, so basically they matched Columbia's offer. That ended up penalizing me because radio wasn't playing my stuff.

Was I bitter? Yeah. But it's business. People get traded to other teams when they're in a slump.

MUSICIAN: *Were you concerned that musical fashions were leaving you out?*

RAITT: They've always left me out. "Runaway" got Top 40 airplay but it wasn't a hit record. I'm not in this to make hit records. The problem is when you close out FM progressive radio, then I'm out of a forum. Aside from my live tours, there's a point where someone who's marginal like me gets bumped off. And frankly, if my records were great, they would have sold more. I like my records, but I guess other people didn't.

MUSICIAN: *Jackson just mentioned how everyone has their ideas for what a Bonnie Raitt record should be.*

RAITT: Well, I have my ideas about everyone else too. My fans love my records. Some critics have this idea that I should be some sort of blues purist that I never was in the first place. I just make the music I like in the way I make it. That's what being true to my music is. Warners never told me to do one thing. I could have made a record with just my voice and a bass. People think I was "forced" to move to L.A., forced to work with Peter Asher, forced to do these songs that are so eclectic or unfocused. Well, too bad, that's where my taste is at. You either like it or you don't.

My art is finding great songs, and after 20 years I know some pretty great songwriters. Producers and publishers help, though I wasn't produced by in-house A&R producers at Warners, which was probably part of the problem. Warners is a pretty cliquey circle; if Ry Cooder doesn't sell that's okay, because he's in the circle, but... basically, I don't have a big management push, I don't have that "look," and the kind of music I do has never really been in fashion. Though there was stuff on *Green Light* and *Nine Lives* that was radio-playable. But it wasn't followed up on. And it's not why I made them.

> It was a very different person who got up and sang these songs than the person who wrote them... And at one point there was a murder: The writer assassinated the one who'd been standing there smiling and singing and taking all the credit for it."
>
> – Browne

BROWNE: Before Bonnie made this record with Don Was, a lot of people had been listening to her shows and saying, "Why doesn't she just make a record like this?" I mean her and [Raitt's touring bass accompanist] Johnny Lee Schell? And I think on this record you've got songs that satisfy on that level, as well as all kinds of wonderful surprises. The production is minimal but it's deep, it's right.

RAITT: But first of all I don't get "produced." I know who I want to have play on it, and I know the songs. Producer in my case is someone who will agree to my vision. I read reviews of this record: "Don has wisely chosen to not cloud her...." Well, where the hell was I in all this, fixing my nails? We both agreed. First of all, we didn't have a budget that allowed us extra time to think about it. I wanted to make a simple record, but we also were financially limited. So it wasn't a big risk that we took. We did seven tracks in four days. And there is something liberating about knowing you don't have the time.

BROWNE: Maybe I ought to try that. Maybe I'll get the chance.

MUSICIAN: *Jackson, are you concerned that you're releasing your third record in a row that's so infused with politically-charged songs? In terms of relating to or holding your audience?*

BROWNE: I don't have any choice about this. I don't care to be a pop star in a society where nobody gives a shit about anything. And sit around and be rich...

RAITT: [*cheers*] Yeah!! That's the Jackson Browne I love!

BROWNE: People who think there's nothing in the world they have to do will be very surprised to see 14-year-olds with Uzis coming through the upstairs window for the family jewels.

Look, I don't have any choice about what I'm talking about. It's what concerns me. I think this album has love songs as well as songs overtly political. To me the challenge was to make a record that was really integrated. Because if you don't love

anybody, if you don't have any love to give, then you would also think there wasn't anything worth saving. Those things accompany each other: an idea that you could do something that matters in other people's lives and your own, and the idea that you have something to give to another individual.

MUSICIAN: *You chose to put two songs on this album that you didn't write, Little Steven's "I Am a Patriot," which you've been performing in concert for a while, and "My Personal Revenge," which is from a poem by Tomás Borge. How did that come about?*

BROWNE: I heard that song in Nicaragua and a friend said, "Oh, you like that song. I was there." And he told me the story: During the Somoza regime, Tomás Borge was a political prisoner who was tortured by the National Guard. After several months he was released from prison and he told the jailer who had been torturing him, he looked at the man who had done these inhuman things to him and he said, "I'm going to be back for my revenge." And the guy, you know, laughed or kicked him or something; he obviously didn't believe it.

But about three years later the Sandinistas were in power and Borge went looking for the guy, and he found him, in this dark prison where all the National Guardsmen were being held. He says, "Do you remember me?" The guy says, "No." He's looking down. So Borge makes him look at his face again. "You remember this face, don't you?" And the guy still says no. Eventually he won't look up. So then Borge starts to speak to the guy. And he says, "I told you the last time I saw you that when I saw you again I would have my revenge."

And he says to him: "My revenge will be that our children will get to go to school. My revenge will be that even though you tortured these hands, I give them to you and show you that you have been unable to take away their tenderness..." You know, many people don't understand that the Sandinistas abolished the death sentence. They didn't line people up against the wall and shoot them: It was very unlike the Cuban revolution or the Russian revolution. So here's this guy who's supposed to be our enemy and he's able to say, "My personal revenge will be to show you/The kindness in the eyes of my people/Who have always fought relentlessly in battle/And are generous and firm in victory."

Tomás Borge is the Minister of the Interior in Nicaragua, where it is not unusual for a person in government to also be a published poet. This is his most famous poem and it typifies the Nicaraguan experience, and especially the point of view that, "What's done to me I'm not going to repeat and do to others." So while this guy is thought of as a Marxist and a "threat" to the United States, he's written this song that is really an embodiment of Christian ideals and those strengths of character that we really like to attribute to ourselves.

It's very Christian. It says that somewhere the cycle of violence has to stop, and at the same time it's a song of victory. I thought it would be a good song for Americans to hear. It's one of the best ones on the record, that and "I Am a Patriot." I think "Patriot" is one of the greatest songs. People are maybe very conscious that I'm willing to criticize U.S. policy, but there's a prevalent belief that it's somehow disloyal. It needs to be said that to be a patriot you have to work. You can't just shut up if you love your country. You take responsibility.

RAITT: It's like if a friend is doing drugs and threatening to kill himself, you have to tell him, "You can't do it."

BROWNE: You have to interfere.

MUSICIAN: *It's interesting how the first songs on each of your albums, your "World in Motion" and Bonnie's "Nick of Time," kind of complement each other—about finding your place in the world, on a social and a personal level, and also realizing that there's only so much time to do something with it.*

BROWNE: When Bonnie came in to sing "World in Motion"—which is about the most fun I had making the album—before we sat down to work she said, "I want you to listen to this." And then she played us "Nick of Time" and it just killed us. What's great about that song is that there's nothing in the way, nothing obscuring the thought. It's really warm and in a very compelling, naked way. What you're saying about looking at your parents...

RAITT: I remember we were driving somewhere and my dad was asleep in the car next to me. He's this big, handsome, powerful guy—he still is, he's 72—and he'd just sung "Oklahoma" in Minneapolis and blown the roof off the place. And you know how when people are asleep they're kind of vulnerable. But to see this magnificent lion of a man, kind of more...

BROWNE: Mortal.

RAITT: Yeah. It was not devastating, just very resonant. It made me aware that all that stuff's going on now, as this generation, my generation, ages and has children, and a lot of us are having to say goodbye to our parents, either literally or getting prepared for that. There's a feeling of mortality and an evaluation of your life. "I'm 40 and have I made something of my life so far? Should I have children? Should I leave?" It doesn't have to happen to you for it to be poignant, you know?

MUSICIAN: *Both songs speak to that—that we're a generation that's at a crossroads of decision making. And what will we do? I wonder if those songs would have been written or heard by us 10 years ago, or if that's a perspective that only comes with time.*

BROWNE: I think the generation that came up following all the social activism of the '60s assumed that "it goes without saying" we're for justice, for peace, for racial equality. And that's a mistake. Because it does not go without saying. But I think we felt that for a long time: "Of course I'm for justice and peace, listen to this love song. Nobody could mistake me for a person that condones acts of repression or violence."

It's really not enough. Because all during that time, our

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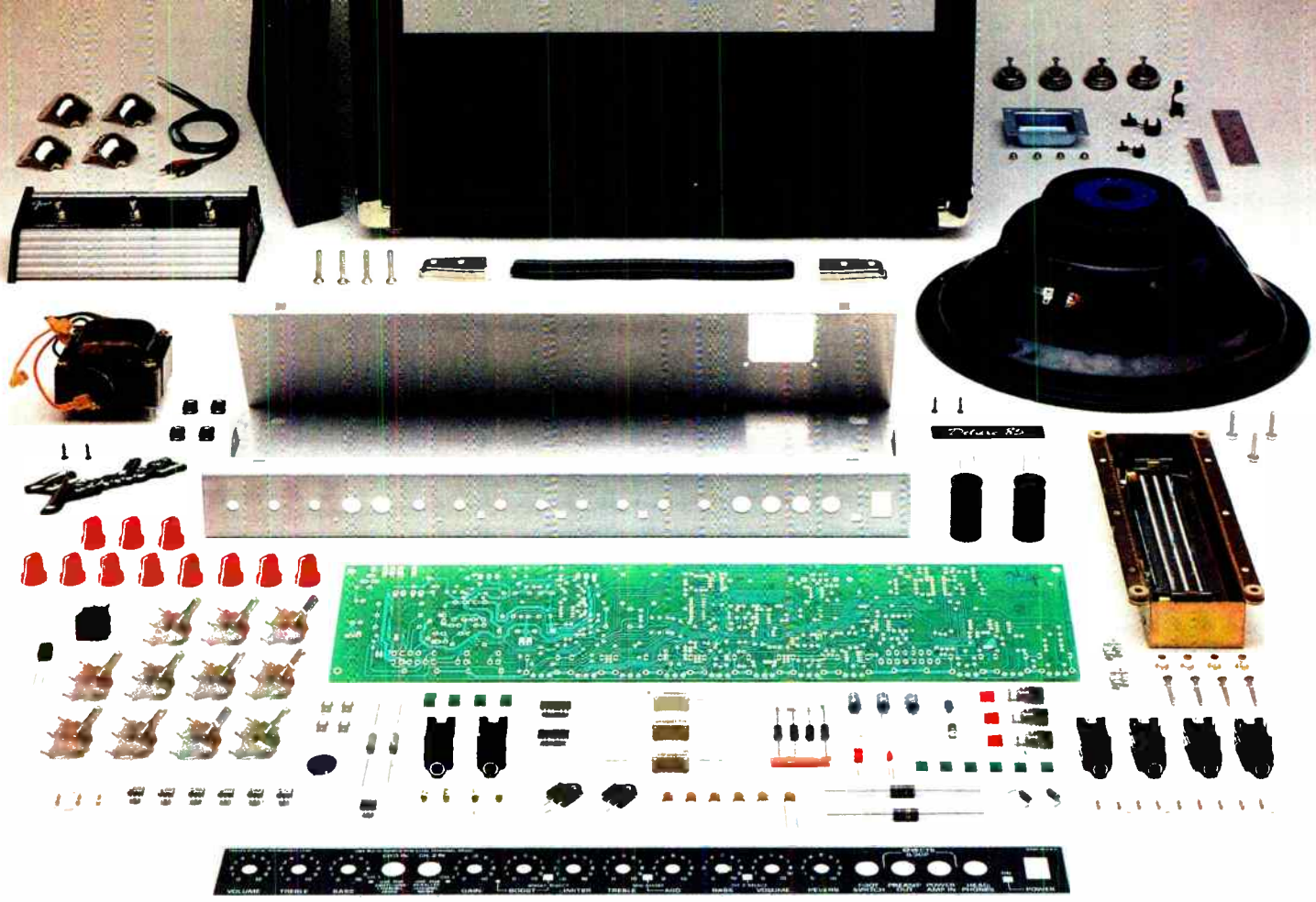

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government was involved in acts of repression and violence in other countries. It's because you have the feeling that no one knows or will do anything about these things that you feel that you have to say something about it.

RAITT: I'm heartened by the fact that there's such great political music out. A baby songwriter like myself, it's a goal of mine to get better and let a little of that come through more. I'm not saying that defensively; I don't have a need to make an overtly political song. But there are some things I relate to on a personal level: a lot of women who are divorced, alcoholics, their kids are turning on them and they don't understand, and there aren't a whole lot of movements for them to be joining. I'm saying there's a certain line where there is no difference in our lives between a personal and political quest. At some point with all the things that are wrong in your life, you have to find some inner strength to go to. And not, "If I could just find another man, everything will be all right." Or "If we just had a Democrat." I think there are issues that have to do more with inner strength. I think it'll be interesting to see what kind of things we all come up with in the next 20 years to write about.

MUSICIAN: *It surprises me to hear you self-described as a "baby songwriter." I think "Nick of Time" is the best song on your record. Do you edit yourself a lot?*

RAITT: I didn't listen to what I had to say, I was so busy talking. I've only recently begun to inhabit this being that I'm in. I have a strong heart, and it didn't really have a car to ride in. I don't know if it's judgment I'm talking about... I'm just saying that I think I had an extended adolescence. When I was a teenager I really had my nose to the grindstone; I wanted to save the world and was completely committed to the blues and to social causes and I was gonna be in the Army of the Righteous. And in my 20s I just kind of got off and had my adolescence, you know? My 30s too. Now I feel like I'm 21 years old and settling down to my life's work. It's interesting to be embracing maturity and responsibility. Jackson had to do it a lot earlier, as a songwriter and as a parent, a husband.

BROWNE: I kind of did. I mean there was always a lot of need for me to grow up. That's why I decided to go ahead and do it—I mean recently. I understand what Bonnie's saying, though, 'cause for some reason [*laughs*] I spent a lot of time, from '72, '73 to '82, '83, having a hilarious time and avoiding certain kinds of responsibility even though I did have a kid to take care of. You can look at what I did and say that I became responsible—but only I know to what degree I didn't. Especially when you have kids early, there's a part of you that really rebels. Nobody decides, "Okay, time to grow up" and then just does.

RAITT: Hey, we like doing this for a living. We're outlaws. We didn't want to conform to society's standards of what "adult" meant. I didn't want to be in mainstream America or mainstream music, mainstream politics... and I didn't want to get married and I didn't want to settle down, I didn't want to go to sleep. And I lived life really passionately. Sometimes that meant doing things to excess. And I don't regret a single minute of my "adolescence."

But you know why change happens? Because you don't have a choice. People don't change until they're pushed to the point where it hits their pocketbook, or it hits their backyard or it hits their pride, their sense of what's right.

MUSICIAN: *Speaking of adolescence, you both began your careers in the crucibles of rather remarkable scenes: Jackson with Nico and the Warhol Factory in New York and Bonnie with some of*

the great blues artists of an older generation. How do you see those experiences in retrospect?

BROWNE: Well, I wasn't part of the Factory scene. I was just hired to play guitar for Nico. She'd asked Tim Buckley to do it and he didn't have any intention of becoming her accompanist; he could get all kinds of gigs himself and had records out. And I was flat-out starving. So for a month or two I was accompanying Nico in the midst of this scene that I really never understood or trusted. I met Lou Reed and Paul Morrissey...and after about two months I got the hell out. I was pretty frightened, to tell you the truth.

In the circles I hung around in, Cambridge was like Mecca, that was where you were supposed to go. When my friend Steve Noonan got drafted, he was a conscientious objector and he went to the Lower East Side of New York; to me he was that much closer to Cambridge, so that's where I went. But Cambridge was where the folk music was happening.

RAITT: That's why I went to Harvard—and then they closed the Club 47 the year I was a freshman! I was so depressed I took a leave of absence and went to Philadelphia to hang out with Dick Waterman; he managed all these bluesmen, like Fred McDowell. Then when I was 20 there was an opening on the Rolling Stones tour, and there was room for me to go, as Buddy Guy and Junior Wells were the opening act. I was 20 years old and Waterman asked me if I'd like to go along. I said, "Oh, let me check my schedule." [*laughter*]

So I went along, and because the tour went past registration I had to [leave school and] get a job and that's when I got on a bill with Fred McDowell at the Gaslight. They wrote an article about me and I ended up getting a record deal. Literally, if I had gone back to school I probably wouldn't be doing this.

The blues community is like the political community, really friendly and familial. I got to hang out with Son House and Big Arthur Crudup and people that were my idols. Howlin' Wolf—unbelievable. Saying goodbye to all those people and watching them die was really hard; it was like saying goodbye to 10 or 15 of your grandparents. I miss them a lot. But you have to live in the moment, and I was grateful for the time I had with them. It's people like Lowell George leaving that I wasn't prepared for.

I decided to move back to California so I could work with Lowell in '73. That was an incredible scene. Tom Waits and Emmylou and Linda and J.D. and Jackson—you didn't have to call anybody, you could just show up at the Troubadour bar and know you would run into five or six friends. It was the way you'd want to spend your 20s.

MUSICIAN: *What do you think of the re-formation of Little Feat?*

RAITT: I think the album's really strong. To not have Lowell there is sad, but it's also wonderful to hear his songs again. I think they do a killer job with them. After Lowell, you know, our lives will never be... you know what I'm saying.

BROWNE: He was a very funny guy. Like Freddy Tackett said, "Lowell sort of taught us all the meaning of being cool." He was the coolest and at the same time he was incredibly warm and generous. He'd tell you the truth to your face in a second...

RAITT: And usually at the time of the night when you couldn't handle it. [*laughs*] I remember coming over to your house when you guys were working together and thinking, "Oh God, I'd give anything for a reason to be here."

MUSICIAN: *But it's kind of odd that Little Feat play so many of Lowell's songs now, since the schism over whose music to play basically led to the band breaking up.*

RAITT: I wouldn't say that. They do all their songs from the new album and "All That You Dream." They do the greatest hits. Is it the same as with Lowell? No. Is it as good? Who knows, it's a different band. People who live in the past are making a big mistake. I don't live in mine.

MUSICIAN: *Well, that's an art too, to let something that's wonderful have its moment and then let it go.*

RAITT: Sometimes things happen and you go into a slump. You cry and you grieve. I was crying for my lost youth, or lost opportunities. The thing that's great about coming out of that is that you appreciate everything that is given to you, what a gift every breath is. I've been on the mend and straight over two years now. In my case, it was terrifically liberating and enlivening. My whole generation of friends has pretty much straightened out, and it's great to go through that together. I don't regret not stopping sooner. I just realized that... you can't control everything. You have to let some things go.

You can't worry and take it personally. I did and that's what got me messed up. Eventually I broke down from it. People break down in different ways, they abuse themselves or their wife or their parents or their talent or their past. In my case, I beat myself up... I mean, how many records can you have come out and be ignored? And after three or four love affairs, and there's a messy breakup at the same time you're being dropped by your record company and your political hopes are being dashed.... It was a pretty depressing time. So I stayed out on the road and partied and avoided dealing with it. I tried to hide by getting loaded. Thank goodness I didn't kill myself.

It takes work not to be discouraged and to have confidence. In my case, I never felt I was as worthy of success as some people who were more talented and are saying more important things, to my mind, and in a more original way. And there's a lot of blues people who never got their proper due, while I got attention right away. My dad started getting called Bonnie Raitt's father—that still pisses me off. So I pushed away a lot of opportunities. I didn't think I deserved them.

MUSICIAN: *Do you think you've inhibited yourself from recording more of your own songs?*

RAITT: No, I've only got a couple that I haven't put on records. I don't write very much. I talk a lot. [*laughter*] I wanted to write something for this record because I needed songs and it's harder to find songs that say what I want to say. They're already being covered by the songwriter. I'd like to write more but it's like learning tennis at 39; you have to practice and take lessons before you can get good enough to enjoy it.

MUSICIAN: *Jackson, do you feel more tentative about performing than songwriting? You've been performing for a long time now, but I'd say songwriting is still your strength and your essence.*

BROWNE: I remember thinking at some point that it was a very different person who got up and sang these songs than the person who wrote them. And I don't feel that way now. It's real difficult to me to write on the road and I would literally have to come off the road for a year before I could remember how you write a song. Because the person who wrote a really introspective song was not the same one who could get up there and perform. And at one point there was a murder that took place. The writer who had been writing these songs assassinated the one that had been standing there smiling and singing these things and taking all the credit for it.

About the time Bonnie and I toured together [1973], the tour before that I just began to drink all the time. By the time the show was over, I was willing to stand around an extra hour and

talk to a bunch of people and then leave. And so most of the interviews were done in a state of the exhilaration of doing a show plus being fairly loaded. And everyone's telling you how great it was... you know, right after a show your critical evaluation of yourself is at an all-time low. The suspension of disbelief, you love everybody you're working with and you feel great and so to do a serious interview after the show, I've done some really damaging and stupid interviews sitting up all night talking into a microphone when I should have been under a cold shower someplace. When I was really loaded before, [*laughs*] I could have talked to anybody, it wouldn't have mattered. "I'm so glad to meet you, and this reminds me of a very interesting and phony story." I never understood to what extent I was really uncomfortable in these rooms of people.

MUSICIAN: *Which I imagine all came out of the fact that you were a reluctant performer.*

BROWNE: Exactly right. I wasn't reluctant, but I come from singing on really small stages where there's an intimacy that you could value if you could achieve onstage, and one of the ways you got it was by being so friendly [*laughs*]—'cause you're drunk! I was drunk, that's all.

RAITT: As much as my friends know me as someone who parties a lot, I would never like to have that feeling onstage. Plus it would mess up my throat. But going back to doing these acoustic concerts, isn't it great to get that feeling back again? Though your shows never lost that for me.

BROWNE: Well, playing arenas there would be times where I'd start to talk to an audience and there'd be some guy in the back saying, "Shut up and rock!"

RAITT: Even at your shows?

BROWNE: Frequently enough that it really bugged me. I used to get that all the time in clubs when I first started. Anyway, to go back to the question, I think the part of me that writes and the part of me that sings feels more united, or less schizophrenic. But now, instead of being just off the road and not being able to remember how I wrote, having made this record I can't remember how I'm supposed to do these shows. How am I supposed to string these songs together, and gee, isn't some sort of jubilant welcome required at this point? And after three songs I say something friendly and local.

But you probably don't have to say anything and you shouldn't say anything that you don't really feel at the moment. You try not to repeat the same thing over and over. I remember going to see a friend of mine play two nights in a row. The first night was really good, he said a few funny things. And then the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

LOW ROADS & HIGH WIRES

BONNIE RAITT plays a 1929 National wood-body guitar, Taylor and Yamaha acoustics and whips out her Fender Stratocaster for slide work. Her nimble fingers pluck only GHS strings. Right-hand man **Johnny Lee Schell** plays a Strat and a Telecaster. Bonnie and Johnny both plug into Jim Kelly amps. Hers has one 12-inch JBL speaker, while his uses Electro-Voice.

Hutch Hutchinson holds down that old Freebo bottom with Modulus Graphite basses and—to impress you—a Music Man five-string bass. Bonnie's carrying two keyboard players this time (the record's a hit...), **Walt Richmond** and **Marty Grebb**. They tickle a Roland D-50, two Yamaha DX7s and a Roland MKB-1000 controller with a 300 piano module. Sometimes Marty jumps up from that piano and blows a King tenor sax.

WORKING MUSICIAN

Larry Carlton's

Bendo's faced death, Steely Dan, the WAVE and 15 sessions

Hairpin Turns

a week. What will he do for an encore? By Josef Woodard

COMEBACK is the buzzword of the '80s, but the recent hairpin turns in Larry Carlton's career have given new meaning to the term. Things began decidedly looking up for Carlton when, in 1986, the consummate studio guitarist turned pop-jazz artist had a surprise hit with the all-acoustic album *Alone/But Never Alone*—made on a lark for MCA's Master Series. Suddenly Carlton's solo career, which had stalled since the guitarist was dropped by Warner Brothers after 1983's *Friends*, was going great guns. It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.

Last year, with his second acoustic album *Discovery* having cemented his newfound public visibility, Carlton became a victim of ruthless, random violence, felled by a gunshot wound at Room 335, his private studio outside of Burbank. It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.

Back in 1987, a lifetime ago, Carlton sat down for an interview in Room 335, a facility downstairs in his hillside home. Like a studio musician avoiding overplaying, he spoke amiably but cautiously. Any traces of his former workaholism were undetectable in his cool, relaxed demeanor. "It may sound funny, but my life is a jazz life. Meaning it's very impromptu, off the cuff. I don't plan my week for every hour. It's like, what do I feel like doing today? That kind of approach." In the corner, a director's chair sported the name "Bendo," the string-bending ace's nickname.

Two years later, the Bendo chair sits in the outer room of the studio and the

Photograph by Glen La Ferman

steady-as-she-goes Carlton is apparently none the worse for wear, despite his traumatic moment of truth. "It just happened and it was a drag and I'm on with my life. It's not this big blown-out-of-proportion deal that the media portrays." On April 6, 1988, Carlton was preparing for a session, chatting with his secretary in the front office, and had seen a dog and two boys in the carport. He stepped outside, and in a flash he saw one boy aiming a .357 Magnum. "I leaned around the door and he went *pow.* It was just that stupid.

"I never lost consciousness. I thought I'd been shot in the arm, but I was hit in the throat. Because of the way the bullet path went, it traumatized all the nerves and he'll play his guitar again.' They guaranteed I'd play; but I wondered if it would be back to my standards.

"It's still healing. Nerves regenerate at the rate of an inch a month. It's 36 inches from my shoulder to my fingertips, and it's only been a year. My thumb is still hypersensitive. In a couple of years, my arm will be completely recovered. But it's back enough now that I can function fine."

The shooting came at midpoint in the making of *On Solid Ground,* Carlton's new album. At a time when L.A. Jazz—the faceless, poppy variety perpetrated on WAVE formats everywhere—has come to represent an odious brand of music suitable for defaming, Carlton's

Carlton as session superman: "Be in the right spot, playing the right thing."

to my left arm. After the initial split-second of the bullet hitting and then me looking at the guy as he ran off, it felt like my arm was just hanging. I thought I'd been shot there, because it was all bloody and it felt disconnected."

The bullet severed Carlton's carotid artery on the left side, his left vocal cord was incapacitated and the nerve structure in his left arm was debilitated. Did he ask the proverbial question, "Doctor, will I ever play the guitar again?"

"I didn't. When the doctors found out that I was a celebrity guitarist, they examined all of the nerves that work my left arm. They came out after surgery and told my wife, 'If he lives through the next 24 hours, he'll be fine. The nerves aren't damaged, they're just in shock. It will be a long process, but he'll be fine

album offers new hope to a sometimes dubious genre. He judiciously mixes originals with such crowd-pleasing covers as "Josie" (in tribute to his status as Steely Dan session man emeritus) and "Layla."

It didn't come easily. "The very first guitar part that I did after the shooting, on 'The Philosopher,' I overdubbed by myself down here [in the studio]. I punched in every four bars, because my hand was too weak. The night we'd recorded it, I hadn't really solidified the melody, so I came back in and recorded that one night, and hurt. But from there on, the more I played, the better it got. It quit hurting as much."

After his unexpected—and lucrative—detour into the acoustic field, the new album is a headfirst leap back into the realm of the electric guitar, Carlton's first love. His playing is up to par, if not graced with an added lust for life. Can we read autobiographical references into "All in Good Time," "The Philosopher," "The Second Chapter"...? "Exactly," Carlton nods. "The first chapter of my life ended," he laughs a bit nervously. "It almost closed the book. It's true."

Musicians' private studios are creative playpens where ideas are given long leashes. Carlton has met his muse in Room 335, named for his Gibson ES-335, since 1978. After he closed the book on a whirlwind studio career of over 3,000 sessions between 1970 and 1976, it was crucial that he have a Room of his own. "I was the first studio musician in Los Angeles to build a complete 24-track studio," he comments. "Jay Graydon did it a year-and-a-half after I did. To have it down here, for a guy who's as versatile as I am and plays a lot of instruments, you couldn't ask for more. I couldn't do what I needed to do on a Portastudio. I had too much music in me."

During the '70s, Carlton's fluid electric guitar style was making a quiet storm in the music world. Though rooted in blues and jazz, his phrasing and tone epitomized lyrical smoothness. L.A.ed back? Yes, but lined with supple intelligence and chops to spare. While gracing countless pop records, it was his work with Joni Mitchell, as an honorary member of the Crusaders and especially with Steely Dan that validated Carlton's studio-honed instincts.

After several solo albums, *Larry Carlton, Strikes Twice, Sleepwalk* and *Friends* (at about 65,000 sold, impressive by jazz standards), Carlton was dropped by a supply-side Warner Bros. He went fishin', and not for a label. He got one anyway, in the form of MCA's acoustic-minded Master Series. With its silken, Earl Klugh-like textures and unthreatening ease, *Alone/But Never Alone* helped to kick off a new chapter in Carlton's life. Armed now with an acoustic, Carlton was playing the soft-edged songbird and the public was biting big. There was always something slightly inappropriate about the guitarist's late-blooming neo-new-age fame, but you can't argue with a hit, and the cool-headed Carlton is not one to argue in the first place.

"I've played the electric guitar all my life," he confesses. "I've only played acoustic guitar when somebody asked me to for a record. I never played rhythm or fingerpicked. I never soloed on the acoustic guitar. I didn't choose to do that. So I would say I'm an electric guitar player."

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As co-founder and leader of the legendary band Weather Report, Zawinul earned a reputation for creating innovative sounds. On the new album, "Black Water," The Zawinul Syndicate—which includes guitarist Scott Henderson, Gerald Veasley on bass, Cornell Rochester on drums and vocalists, Lynne Fiddmont Linsey and Carl Anderson—draw on American jazz, South African rhythms and musical cultures from all over the world to create a sound that celebrates life and liberation.

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To Brazilians, Milton Nascimento is a national treasure. The beauty of his songs and the insight of his lyrics have brought him international acclaim as The Voice Of Brazil. The music on his new album, "Miltons," combines pop, jazz and native folk influences with a vocal style that communicates the full power of Milton's extraordinary passion. Featured players include Herbie Hancock plus many of Brazil's top musicians.

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His acoustic lark put him at the zenith of the *Billboard* jazz charts, but live, it was another story. Apart from a token few acoustic tunes, Carlton and his band stretched out on older material and aced blues scorchers or jazz standards. The schism was made official with the '87 live LP *Last Night*. Blowing was its raison d'être, pure and simple. Vintage Miles Davis charts, rock vamps and blues changes were the entrees, solos the hot sauce. Any Carlton acolyte curious about his acoustic foray was reassured: Bendo was alive and well.

"We had been playing those tunes for 10 years. When we'd do small clubs, 'So What' and 'All Blues' would show up very often in the course of working. We recorded two nights at the Baked Potato [a club in Studio City]. The second set of the last night, [*L.A. Times* jazz critic] Leonard Feather was in the audience. John Robinson came up to me before the set and said, 'Let's play some bebop. Leonard Feather is here. He's going to hate it, but we know what we're doing. Let's go have some fun.' And the majority of *Last Night* was taken from that one hour-and-a-half set, because it had a certain attitude to it."

Unlikely WAVE star: "I only played acoustic when somebody asked me to."

That certain attitude is the result of a life centered around his axe. Growing up in Los Angeles, Carlton became a guitar fanatic at a tender age. In his teens, the natural hormonal attraction to rock 'n' roll was only the tip of the iceberg. Absorbing the stimuli of Joe Pass, B.B. King, John Coltrane, '60s pop session king Louis Shelton and others, Carlton was a gifted minor with huge ears. "Because I started playing so young, I was afforded time in each bag that I got excited about. I was in no hurry because I didn't know what to hurry for. I was just a kid. So when I was playing country music, I played country music—not trying to get someplace else with it.

"When I heard jazz, I got real excited about it and lived and breathed that, but was working pop gigs Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 14 and 15. I was playing contemporary radio music but, at home, learning changes. In normal club settings back in those days, the first set was always a very easy set, so you got to play some standards. I spent time with each style, but they were all overlapping. When I see the 18- and 19-year-old players of today, they've pretty much rooted themselves in one thing, because they started later. So they're real strong in rock 'n' roll and they want to get a little jazz. By the time I was 19, I'd gone through four or five different bags and it had all been working together."

For all his catholicity of guitar angles, though, Carlton never had much affinity for the fusion boom of the '70s: "Didn't enjoy Mahavishnu at all, Chick's band—never liked it. I come from a melodic point of view and, for me, it was too technical. Anyone who sits down and works out that much music is just foreign to me, so I never listened to those records, never went to those concerts, didn't get into it at all.

"I like to *go* for it, but I like the structure to be much looser. One of the identifying marks of those bands in the '70s was that ensemble, rhythmic, high intensity"; he imitates rapid-fire fusion licks. "To sit at home and learn those things and then go play them on the gig, for me, is not fun."

But wasn't there an oats-sowing period—during which he felt the urge to cast restraint aside and let fingers fly? "That would be right out of high school, playing in clubs with my own trio and my quartet. You want to use what you know when you're young. I was wild and crazy and did it. People were flashed away. I'm glad I got that over with before I got to work with the real good professional people, because then your priorities change. I had a chance to sit next to experienced studio guitarists from the far left—meaning they had no taste at all—to the very far right, where it was the ultimate in taste. It wasn't just guitar players, but drummers would play a date and do a fill wrong. Those things became obvious to me. So I started leaning towards the things I liked.

"A good example to me was when I would play on some records in the early '70s. I'd hear them on the radio some months later and the guitar would just be going on in the background. With Louis Shelton, who played guitar on dates, his guitar would be right here" (he puts his hands in alignment). "Every time he played it was in the right spot playing the right thing. You'd hear him on the radio all the time, with the Jackson 5 hits, the Barbra Streisand hits. He's there, contributing to these records. Awareness is always the first step."

As Carlton 's name and sound filtered around town, he found himself pulled further and further into the seductive, compulsive session world. For first-call players, density was an occupational hazard. "I was 22 when it started to happen. That would be around 1970. I was still young enough not to recognize oversaturation. It was just an exciting new world to me, so I took every call that came in. Over the course of the first couple of years in the '70s, all of a sudden I was getting 30 or 40 calls a week and taking 15, just bumping from studio to studio, five or six days a week."

Straight session work may be an anonymous, journeyman gig, but Carlton got a creative break when he happened into the working laboratory of Donald Fagen and Walter Becker, a.k.a. Steely Dan, during the making of *Katy Lied* in '75. "They had almost finished the project and I got a call to do an overdub for them. I went to ABC/Dunhill and when I

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got there, they said, 'We need a rhythm guitar part and we'll be real honest with you—we've tried everybody in town and so far we haven't come up with something that fits.' The obvious strength of that musical marriage between myself and Donald and Walter was molded that night, because the first thing I played they loved. It fit and we were out of there. After that they asked if I would help arrange the sessions."

Carlton's role on the next year's *Royal Scam* was exponentially more integral, as he created some of the most inventive and inviting pop guitar work of the decade. "We just cut great basic tracks, and when it came time for the solos, nobody had an idea as far as sound. It was just my Fender Deluxe and my 335. They said, 'We need solos,' and we started going for it."

One of the flagship solos from that project was the neatly-sculpted take on "Kid Charlemagne." "It was done in two

CARLTON'S BAG OF TRIX

WHILE he almost single-handedly popularized the Gibson 335 in the '70s, Carlton swapped the semi-hollow body for custom solid body models made by Valley Arts Guitar, equipped with EMG pickups. "It just got heavy to me. My ears started liking that more focused sound of a solid body, rather than that tubby sound. For its time, that was the most expressive instrument I had found. Then Valley Arts started building these guitars; I could express myself just as well and stay clean and condensed. But that's my 335 on 'Josie.'" His acoustic, however, is also a Valley Arts custom.

In an age when guitarists must decide what effects racks or pitch rider to use along with string gauges, Carlton sticks by the cleaner-is-godlier ethos. "As far as effects go, I'm more of a purist than most guys. To play a guitar with all this crap on it doesn't feel as good to me. I can't play a solo with a chorus on it. It's too wide. I can play chords and sounds and a few licks, but if I'm going to really stretch out, I don't want all this stuff going on. It's not focused enough for me." He gets focused through Howard Dumble amps and Electro-Voice speakers, and effected with two Roland SDE-3000s.

As for the rest of Carlton's band, keysman **Terry Trotter** takes onstage a Yamaha KX88, a Roland digital piano and Yamaha TX modules. **John Ferraro** belts a Drum Workshop kit and Zildjian cymbals. **Albert Wing** plays a flute, tenor sax and an Akai EWI, MIDIed to E-mu E-Max and Akai S950 samplers and Korg M1R and Oberheim OB Expander synths, plus an ART Multiverb and a Yamaha MV802 mixer. Bassman **Jimmy Earl**'s main axe is a Warwick, but he also plucks six-string Ken Smiths and an old Fender Jazz through a Gallien-Krueger GK-800RB amp with Electro-Voice speakers, a dbx 160X limiter and a Yamaha SPX90-II.

parts," Carlton remembers. "I played the first half of the solo and then something happened that didn't work, so we punched in from there. That finished it to the end. Just as the last section is fading, at the bottom of the fade, I'm playing real high and I broke a string and the guitar goes a little sharp.

"You mentioned 'Everything You Did.' I remember coming up with the guitar line for the intros. They just had the chords and it was a matter of finding things that worked. That happened live on the date. There was enough spontaneity to keep those records from being sterile. It was just a matter of capturing the feel and having the right casting. They were so sensitive to that. Once they had the right casting, it was a matter of finding the magic."

Perhaps it was an attraction of opposites—he the mellifluous operator as a foil for their more cynical imaging. Carlton went on to lay tracks on every subsequent Dan-related project. Had session work offered more such creative rewards, Carlton might have kept at it, but even triple-scale pay can't soothe a weary soul. "By the time 1976 came around, I was burnt. I wasn't enjoying it as much and wouldn't look forward to the gigs as much. My philosophy at that time was, rather than to stay in it and continue to make a living and know my heart wasn't in it—which meant I wouldn't do as good a job from my point of view—to just discontinue it and start producing, stretching out in other areas. When I discontinued dates and the Crusaders and I ended our relationship, I really had eyes on being a producer, not a solo artist. I was really burned out on the guitar. I had played it so much."

Did his years in the studio trenches prove damaging to his musicality? "Technically, yes, in the sense of just playing the guitar quickly. But, on the other hand, it was invaluable for developing taste, playing the right thing at the right time. If I had to choose, I would take the taste and then add the technique, as opposed to someone who has all the technique but never learned how to phrase and come in and out right.

Carlton's apathy for the guitar was broken after he heard young Robben Ford playing at the North Hollywood jazz club, the now defunct Donte's. The flame was reignited as the two swapped licks and grins. "He was just a young go-for-it cat with great things to play. I was having a growth spurt because I got excited about somebody else's playing."

Carlton has acquired a reputation as being the chief ambassador for the West Coast sound. Cleaner and less harsh, and less colored by hard bop or modal playing than his East Coast counterparts, Carlton's style exudes a pacific state of mind. What that translates to specifically, though, is a vague issue. "My ear tells me there's a big difference," he ventures. "I've never sat down and analyzed it, but we sound different. I remember an Aretha Franklin record with," he sings in his soft-toned, creamy blues voice, "'all the king's horses, all the king's men.' Cornell Dupree played on it. That captured my heart. Great song—Aretha singing gospel. Nobody on the West Coast played like that. There is a major difference."

On Solid Ground is like a logical follow-up to *Friends*, except that this time the machinery of marketing is in place, and Carlton's now a valuable commodity. Does he feel a taste of sweet vindication in seeing his music—his *electric* music—making headway again? "No," he says with customary tact. "I was a victim of the times. It had nothing to do with the integrity of the music. I know that and the record company knew that. It just wasn't time for instrumental music yet."

Now, however, is. In late May at the Coach House, a prominent Southern California showcase dinner club, Carlton eagerly takes to the stage for his first full-fledged set in well over a year. He is all grins. But then, he always has been. "I know this could be awkward," he tells an especially warm, SRO crowd. "Everybody knows what happened to me. But forget about all that stuff and we'll play." With his able bandmates, including his longstanding keyboardist Terry Trotter, Carlton runs down a healthy set of songs spanning his early Warner Bros. discography and his current music.

His near-death encounter makes the coming-out dates poignant, but Carlton eases the tension by broaching the topic with humor. When someone yells out requesting the early, high-intensity Carlton tune "Point It Up," he cringes, saying that he never liked to play the tune live. "They couldn't kill me, and I can't kill that song," he laughs.

Carlton's crowd has changed considerably over the years. Mostly, this neatly clad bunch doesn't care how many sixteenth-note runs or short stacks of arpeggios he pulls off. "You're just normal, everyday people who like music," Carlton compliments them, little realizing the irony of his analysis.

From guitar-obsessed teen to studio caveman to humble guitar hero to solo

CONTINUED ON PAGE 114

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The Sons of Jellybean

Unheralded heroes from the next generation of remixers

By Rusty Cutchin

IT'S A HOT AUGUST SATURDAY night in New York, and everywhere people are looking for ways to make it hotter. Inside the Palladium a couple of thousand of them are succeeding. The air-conditioning is a joke, but nobody cares. They've come here to experience a world of sensual bombardment more akin to Epcot Center than concert halls or discos of the past. In the godhead booth that towers over the teeming hordes, Scott Blackwell surveys the reaction to his own remix of Debbie Gibson's "Shake Your Love," and one thing he knows for sure—tomorrow lots of these people will try to recreate Epcot Center at the record store.

Scott Blackwell plays the Palladium: "It's definitely a challenge to not have this cookie-cutter attitude."

If the experience inside a top New York dance club these days owes more to Steven Spielberg than to Berry Gordy, Jr., Scott Blackwell is one of the reasons, as are the other descendants of DJs-turned-producers Arthur Baker and John "Jellybean" Benitez who now control the nightly maintenance of the new music testing ground. DJs like "Little" Louie Vega and Freddie Bastone, remixers like the Latin Rascals, Andy Panda and the team of Sergio Munzibai and John Morales—all have extensive remix credits on big-name records; some are paid consultants to record labels and a few keep in touch by continuing to spin (for serious fees, of course) every Saturday night at New York's biggest and most ephemerally popular clubs. And all hope to follow in Jellybean's footsteps by translating club beginnings into full-fledged production careers. Already they have an enormous impact on how songs are mixed for radio as well as clubs.

The particular legacy of disco is the 12-inch dance record. (DJs haven't figured out how to "scratch" a CD—yet.) The longer form, initially attractive to club DJs, created a new wave of creative competition: how to excite the audience with segues from one cut to another and how to manipulate the multi-track recording to emphasize those elements that dancers dig most: bass, drums, percussion. So while audiences of the '80s

PETE KUHNS

were transfixed by video, club DJs were solidifying their special talents by making records more exciting than the original producers. They did this with a variety of production techniques based on new digital technology: reverbs, samplers, MIDI. Busy keyboard parts were thrown out. For that matter, sparse keyboard parts were thrown out. New sounds not previously easy to manipulate (like orchestra hits and fractions of vocal parts) were made commonplace by samplers, and emphasized in the mix. Suddenly musical knowledge was only a first step in making a hit record. By the mid-'80s many new pop artists were broken on the dance floor, and the DJ with his remix was as important as the original producer. Remix budgets grew, and DJs hired musicians to re-record records that were already released, in the process adding the remixer's particular vision. Some remixes, like Natalie Cole's version of Bruce Springsteen's "Pink Cadillac," retain nothing but vocals from the original arrangement, creating, in effect, a whole new record.

Keyboard remix specialist Mac Quale "just sort of spread around like a disease."

The new generation of remixers are experts at analyzing a production's danceability. Working in a recording studio with a multi-track tape which the original producer has completed, a dance remixer listens to various combinations of tracks (just as the original producer did for his mix of the song) and decides what he wants to keep and what needs to be replaced or re-recorded. The goal often is an attempt to cast the song in one of three dance music styles popularized in different sections of the country: "hip-hop" and its offshoot "Latin hip-hop" (the Cover Girls' "Show Me"), which evolved in the Bronx and is closely associated with rap; "house music" (Marshal Jefferson's "Move Your Body"), the sound of Chicago, identifiable by its flowing eighth-note bass lines; and "go-go," the reggae-tinged heavy shuffle beat (Club Nouveau's "Lean On Me"), which made its big splash in Washington, D.C. Once a basic arrangement is settled on and the parts are right, the remixer edits the song into several different versions ("radio edit," "club mix," "dub version"), which the club DJ or radio programmer can play with.

The casual listener may hear a confounding number of these versions on the radio. After all, not only are there sometimes four or five edits of a track on a single 12-inch record, radio stations playing a dance format (dubbed "Crossover" last year on *Billboard*'s new chart) in big cities like New York routinely hire remixers like Freddie Bastone, a DJ at the club Merlyn who's also an A&R consultant to Epic, to make a "hot mix" just for the station itself. But there are really only two distinct versions a remixer goes after, according to David Darlington, a popular New York MIDI programmer and producer who's also an accomplished bassist and arranger. "There's always a Latin hip-hop version, which involves a Latin foot pattern and a fifths-oriented bass, and then they do a 'house' version, which involves a straight quarter-note foot pattern, eighth-note feel bass and lots of stick parts. First they do a 'dope' version of what's on the tape. Stripped down and hard as they can make it. Sometimes they change the bass line within the pop version. Like Whitney Houston's 'Love Will Save the Day' bass line [on the 12-inch] is the same as the seven-inch. [Producer] Rick Wake did his own remix with his own bass line. But he made it a harder sound." Occasionally a "go-go" mix is done, after the shuffle feel made popular by D.C. acts like Trouble Funk, "if the song lends itself to it," Darlington adds. "Some people actually take 'go-go' and turn it into 'house' but it doesn't work too well."

What dance music has come to mean for the session keyboard player in New York is the need for a thorough knowledge of MIDI and sounds as well as chops, plus the right attitude about working for producers who may not know a D-50 from the D train, but know when 2000 people are rocking the house. Besides overcoming communication problems (just remember that "stupid," "dope" and "def" mean "good"), top-flight synthesists in the world of 12-inch dance records know that, like keyboardists Robbie Kilgore and Fred Zarr, they too can control their own destinies with one trend-setting hit like Shannon's "Let the Music Play" or Gibson's "Only in My Dreams."

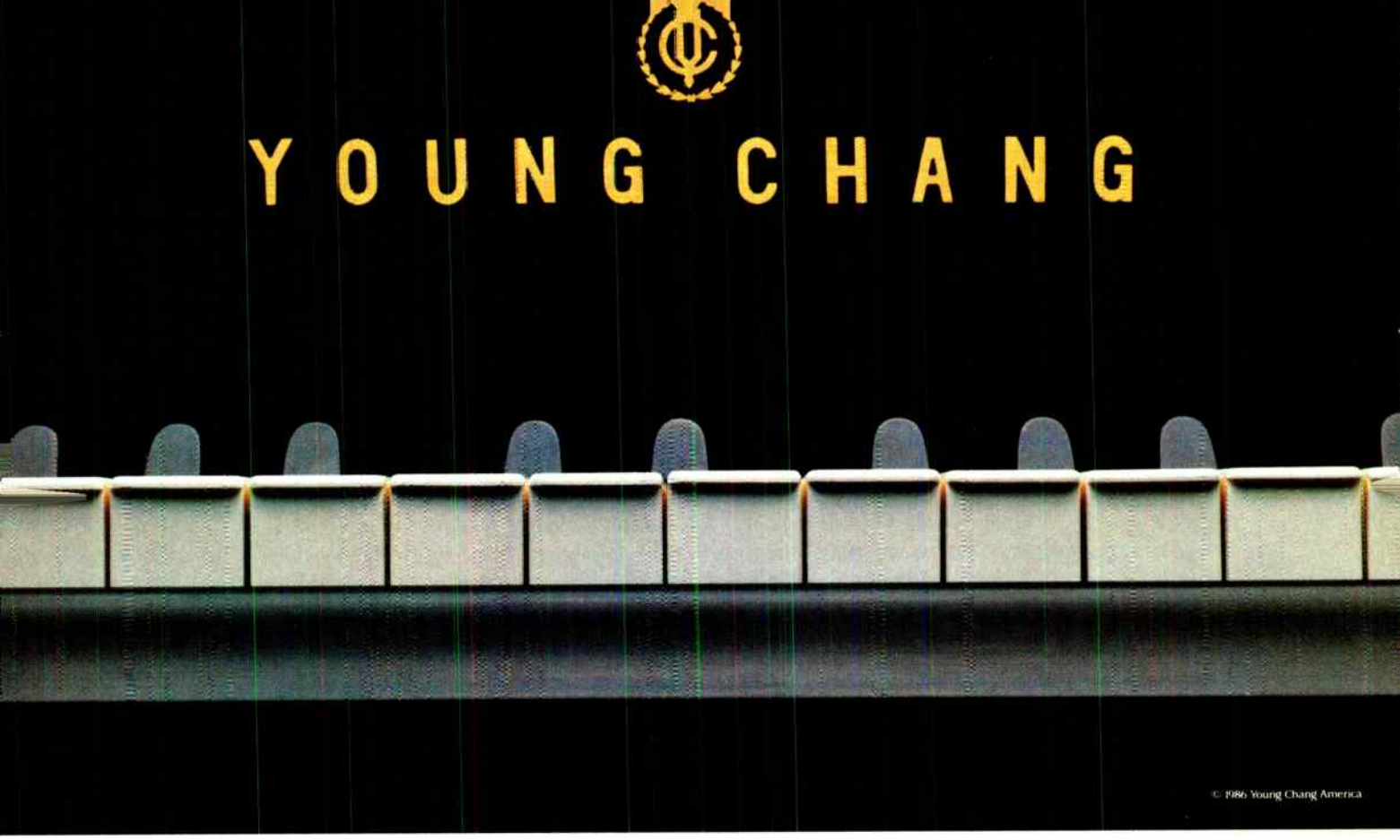
The relationship between DJ/producers and the keyboardist/programmers they hire can sometimes get sticky. "Occasionally the vibe gets bad," Darlington says. "Occasionally the keyboard player doesn't deliver what they want, and other people have to dive in." But not every DJ looks to a specialist. Bastone, who has done "hot mixes" of tracks by Natalie Cole, Michael Jackson and Rick Astley for New York's Hot 103 (now Hot 97), also intends to become an artist soon. The son of a jazz musician, Bastone wants to set himself apart from the other DJ/contractors. "I'm not gonna do what some guys do and hire everybody to play and arrange. I write and I sing my own music."

Some DJs have already become artists, in record-company nomenclature at least. Jellybean has followed in Quincy Jones' footsteps literally and figuratively, not just to the studio to "juice" Patti Austin and James Ingram for the dance floor, but by releasing under his own name records which feature performances by hired hands. "Who Found Who," "The Real Thing" and "Jingo" were massive hits last year from Jellybean's solo *Just Visiting This Planet*. The Latin Rascals also scored in 1988 with "Arabian Nights." And Arthur Baker, who was a prime force in making hip-hop legitimate in the clubs back in 1983 with "Planet Rock," is finishing up his first solo LP.

Producer Fred Zarr: "Changes, sections, melodies...they take all that out."

Keyboardist-turned-producer Fred Zarr collaborated with Baker and re-

PETE KUHNS



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cently worked on album cuts for Samantha Fox. Zarr made the jump from session player after the surprise success of Gibson's album, on which he produced or co-produced six of the 10 cuts. (Gibson's LP and its companion 12-inch mixes represent a dance music Who's Who, involving Zarr, the production team of Munzibai and Morales, Blackwell, Vega and Gibson herself.) After adding parts to numerous remixes, including cuts by Jody Watley and Madonna, "Debbie was the first project I was actually asked to produce," Zarr says. "And it's opened a lot of doors." The great irony of dance music production landed on him early in the process, however. He was hired by "Little" Louie Vega to do keyboard overdubs on his own production, "Only in My Dreams," when the song was being remixed for clubs. The same thing happened with Blackwell for "Shake Your Love." None of this took Zarr by surprise, however. "Often they'll make the bass line very repetitive. The songs that I've produced so far are mostly pop. That's the direction I've been going. You know, they have changes and sections, and they're melodic. They usually take that all out," he laughs. "So as a keyboard player and a musician, even when I was doing remixes I found it distasteful at times, to just make a bass line repeat over the bridge, which had really different chord changes. But I got used to it and realized it was necessary to make it work in clubs sometimes."

Zarr's not changing his approach to production because of his remix experiences, though: "I usually go for the best pop tune. And I might throw on a couple of tracks that I don't use for percussion or some other ideas that I don't use on the pop [mix] that might be used in the remix. But my intention is to go pop and make it a solid hit—top five. I prefer to stick with the album version. These days remix budgets are practically the same or more as production budgets. To remix a song is almost like re-doing a song. It's real involved. When I hear a song and decide that I want to do it, I get an idea of how I think it should be and I get real focused on trying to pull it off and make it that way. To try to hear it a different way isn't that easy for me. I prefer that people who specialize in that do it."

Mac Quale is the man with the hands when the Latin Rascals (Tony Moran and Albert Carrera) need a keyboard player on a remix, and the team worked together extensively on the Rascals' first full LP. Quale hit New York as an NYU music student four years ago, became disenchanted with the program and began working as an intern at a studio with one of the first MIDI rooms in New York. He decided to go freelance when he found himself doing more programming than playing. In late '87 he met Tony Moran when the Rascals booked a session but couldn't get their regular keyboard player. It was love at first byte, and Quale wound up the Rascals' main man. "After that I just sort of spread around like a disease," says the 25-year-old Quale, who wound up writing or co-writing all the songs on the Rascals' LP. He's also played on remixes for Noel, Tina B, Alee (the former Exposé lead singer) and the Fat Boys' version of "The Twist." "Most of the people I work with," Quale says, "Tony, 'Little' Louie Vega, Andy Panda, David Morales, Arthur Baker—if they're gonna program the percussion they do it. And then I start in with the bass line and the keyboards."

"Mac has a really conscious way of adapting to people's work habits," Moran says. "We've worked with a lot of people in the past—all the hottest people. After a while they become very frustrated, and at the same time they have a sort of superiority complex. Mac just has a way of going with you. Sometimes it's very difficult for us to exactly describe the kind of sound that we want. Mac's able to absorb what you're saying

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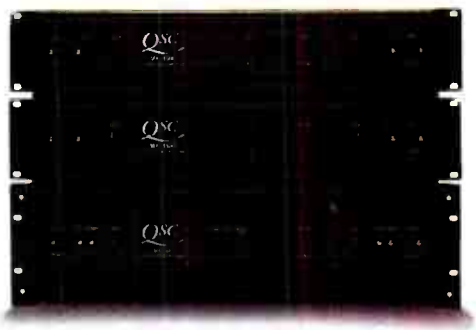

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and come up with the sound. All of a sudden he comes up with these multiple rhythms out of nowhere, and you say, 'Stop! That's it!'"

Back at the Palladium, Scott Blackwell is finishing up a 15-minute master mix featuring various "house" grooves cut by snippets of Michael Jackson, samples of everything from industrial tools to famous speeches, even live bass lines and percussion by invited musical guests who play on the arsenal of toys Blackwell brings to the gig. He is an anomaly among the current spate of jock/producers, rising to prominence not through block parties in the Bronx but as an import from the Sun Belt. A real live Texas good-ol'-boy, Blackwell developed his show in Dallas and Ft. Lauderdale before joining his employers in New York and becoming DJ at some of the city's best-known spots: Visage, Private Eyes, 4-D and finally Palladium. Then he took off for full-time production work in L.A. He was one of the first to bring his own keyboards (notably an early Ensoniq Mirage) into the DJ booth and program samples and other live sounds into the night's mixes.

Blackwell is probably the most technically gifted of remixers. He studied studio engineering while doing club work in Florida, and had begun a successful video career in New York, even winning a *Billboard* award for Best Independent Video for his accompanying solo 12-inch "The Blackwell Project" in 1986.

Some elements that could be important ingredients in '90s music are part of Blackwell's club mixes: a wide-open sonic free-for-all grounded by a single constant, the unreconstructed disco

CONTINUED ON PAGE 113

THE DEFFEST BOXES

JUST as remixers lock into one bass line for a 20-minute ego-mix, MIDI and pre-production rooms across the Big Apple are locking into compatibility that would make IBM and Apple blush with shame. "In a lot of the places that we work," says **Mac Quale**, "there are standard keyboard setups." In other words, if you're not working with the right sequencer, sampler and SMPTE, well, you just ain't dope, homes.

The Yamaha DX7-II emerged as the keyboard controller of choice in a recent informal survey. But Korg seems to be edging out FM as the M1 (and M1R rack unit) emerge as the most popular workstations among dance and pop arrangers. The E-mu SP-1200 wins the drum box popularity contest, although lots of remixers have made up their favorite kits in the Akai S-900, and everyone has a Roland TR-808 or 707 for those one or two percussion effects that can't be sampled accurately. Roland has also put a D-550 in every rack for those ominous-haunting-spooky pads that no dance party can be without these days. The Yamaha TX-81Z (or FB-01) and the new Oberheim Matrix 1000 are also standard choices for extra multi-timbral synths. And the Akai S-900 is the favorite among samplers. The Latin Rascals pooled two of theirs with two of Mac Quale's for pre-production on their solo LP. "You can't have too many S-900s," **Tony Maran** says. **David Darlington**, independent producer and owner of Bass Hit Productions, which has become one of the busiest MIDI rooms in the city, boasts an S-1000, with its 12 seconds of full bandwidth stereo sampling, and an S-900. Nevertheless, there are still a lot of Emulator IIs out there.

With sequencers, there's more diversity in the ranks. **Fred Zarr** uses the Creator for the Atari ST. Quale prefers the Roland MC-500 for tracks. Darlington prefers Performer for the Macintosh. "Most independent projects really come in with just a disk of Performer," he says. "The remixers, if they bring their own programmer, usually use Performer or the MC-500." Roland's SBX-80 is the most widely used sync box for SMPTE.

Of course everybody has a unique inventory of classic synths close by. Zarr uses his trusty OB-8, Minimoog, Prophet 5 and PPG when he wants their distinct sounds. And Quale's warhorses (like his namesake Dan) are ready for active duty at any time. They include a Roland Juno 106 and Juno 60. "Those are the greatest for getting really thick bass sounds, unless you can get a Minimoog or something like that."

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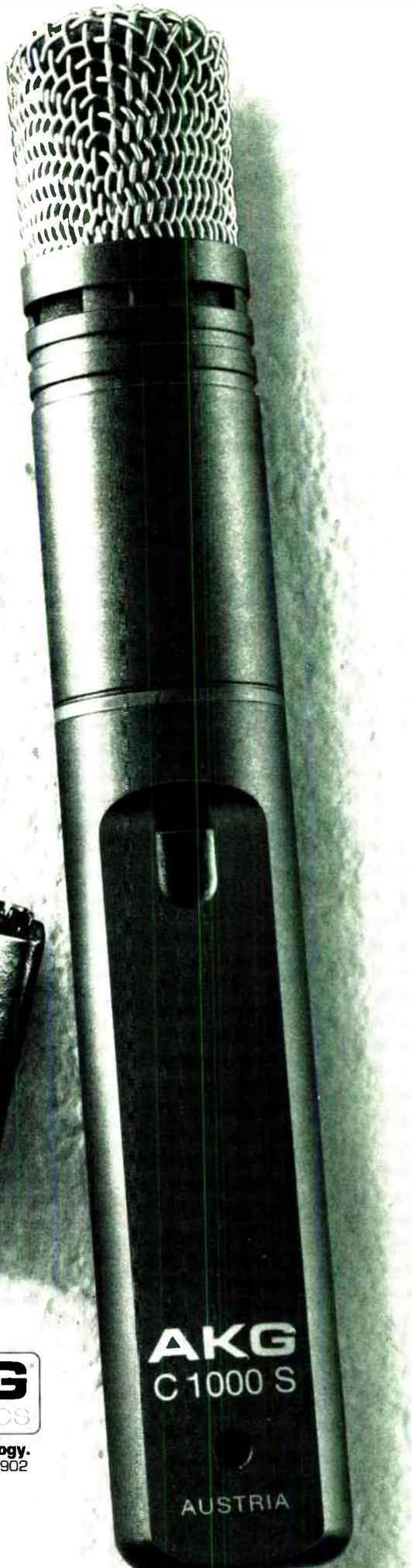

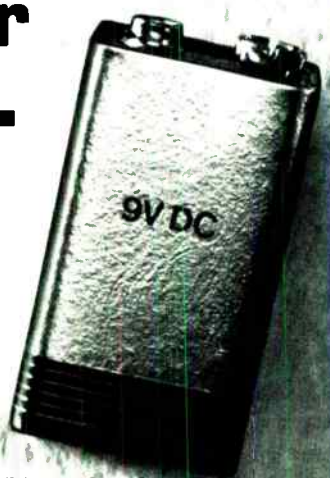

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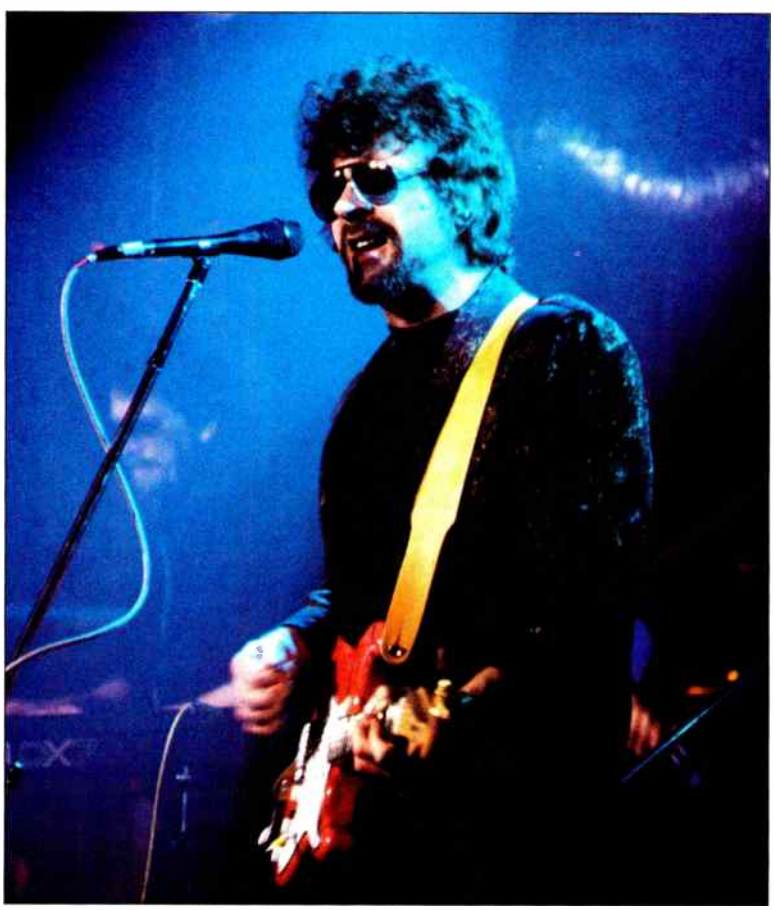
Jeff Lynne's Guitar Craze

A Wilbury explains why Tom Petty's solo album sounds the way it does

By James Hunter

TOM PETTY'S *FULL MOON Fever* is a guitar record for the album's co-producer and multi-instrumentalist Jeff Lynne. Although Traveling Wilburys George Harrison, Jim Keltner and the late Roy Orbison added parts to the sessions, the core band consisted of drummer Phil Jones, co-producer and Heartbreaker Mike Campbell, Petty and Lynne.



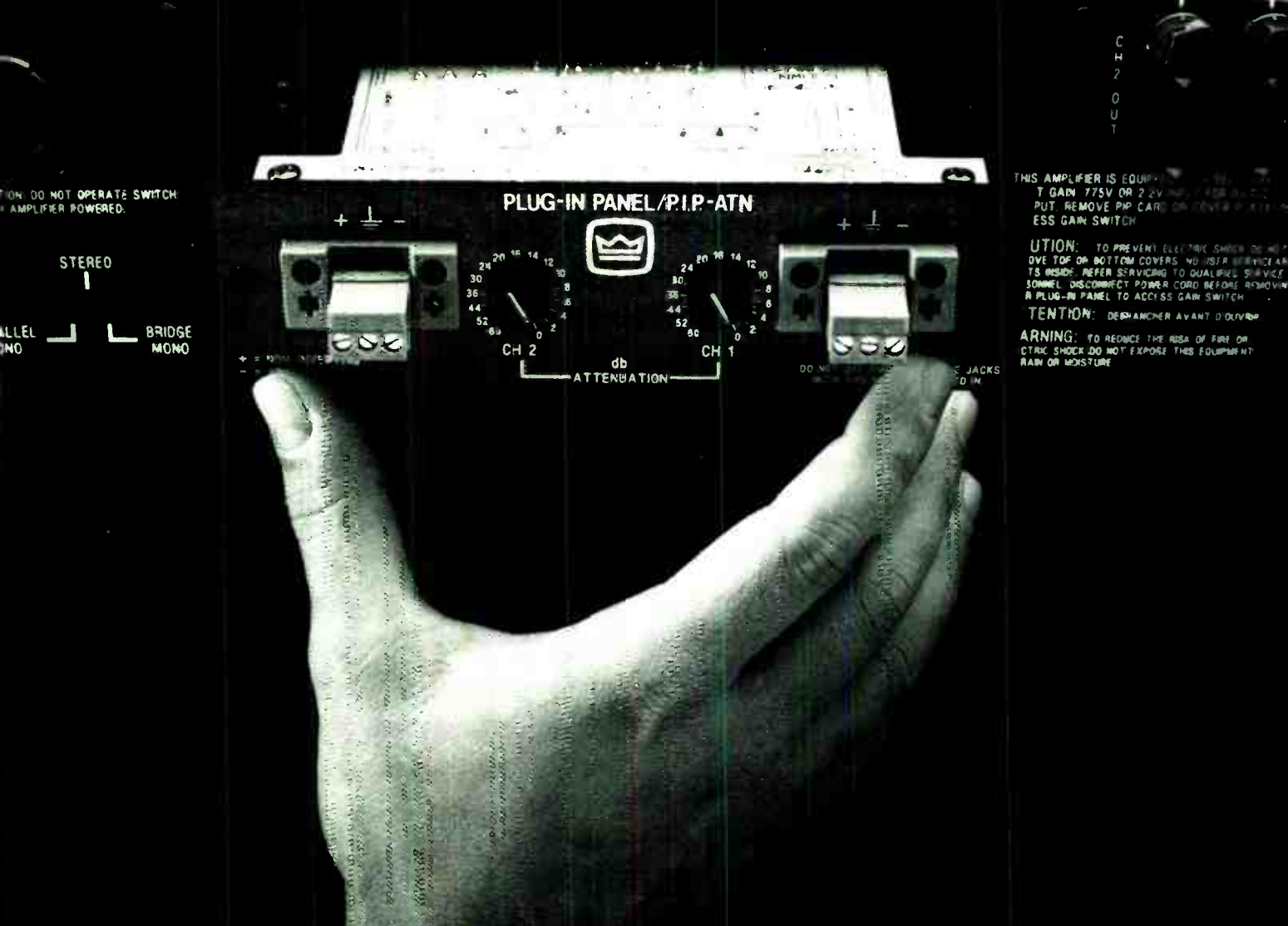
ILPO MUSTO

That makes three full-time guitar players. "Maybe it was some learning for me," says Lynne, in London, where he's about to begin work with an all-female Danish band named Misbehavin'. "I've never made records, really, with lots of guitar fellows. I had a great experience recording Eric Clapton and George Harrison doing their duet on [Harrison's] *Cloud 9*. That was a good introduction to doing guitars again. Not that I haven't ever done them—I've played them myself, on my own stuff. They've always been sort of okay. But I've never featured them in my own work very much."

Still, Lynne contributes a strong passage right away to *Full Moon Fever*—on the album's opener "Free Fallin'," the first of seven songs he and Petty wrote together. Picking up and developing notes that already appear at the end of a chorus, Lynne's electric guitar comes out of the blue near the end, a brief staccato stutter mixed as prominently as Petty's vocals. "It was just an idea," says Lynne. "To go completely different for a few seconds. I like things that change, and then you go, 'What happened?' It's hard to do them, because sometimes they can sound totally out of place. But when they work, it's really good fun."

As Lynne maintains, guitars cover *Full Moon Fever*, but Campbell's electric especially rages through "Runnin' Down a Dream"; before it's over, he breaks out and solos, seemingly unchecked. Lynne says that guitar did, in fact, profit from some production. "It's not as hard and screaming as it could have been," he says. "I tried to make the sounds not that sort of school of big reverb, but more like it would sound if you used a Vox amp in a club, rather than two million Marshalls in a stadium."

Campbell's playing sounds dangerous and controlled at the same time. Lynne doesn't take that quality for granted. "It's quite a hard thing to get," he says. "One of the most dif-



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ficult things to record is a guitar that has loads of balls to it, but that isn't distorted. They used to be able to do it in the old days, when they made records where the guitar wasn't actually very loud, but it was still full and rich-sounding. It's so hard to do. You get lucky sometimes."

How, on "Runnin' Down a Dream," did the luck run right? "It was a small Ampeg amp, not an enormous thing," he says. "It was turned up just enough—and probably a bit of direct as well, turned up through a Groove Tube-type thing—so it's not screaming *and* it's not soft. You can play with amps all day in the studio, never really happy with them: 'I've got to do something else to this guitar,' you think. But at the end of this particular day, it was just a recording from a mike pretty close to the amp, just a few feet away. And Mike playing some really good guitar.... If you've got a good guitar player, that makes it a lot easier."

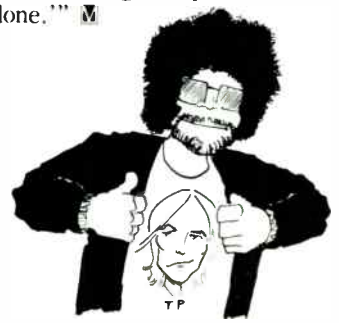
Full Moon Fever also had a great singer, whom Lynne thought should be heard. "When you produce yourself," he says, "you always tend to mix the voice down, into the track more. It's normal paranoia, I suppose. But I wanted to hear Tom up loud, because on all his other records I could never quite understand some of his words. Given that this was his solo album, I thought that his vocals needed to be big and out front. Luckily, this time he agreed."

To effect this, Lynne—an analog holdout—fell back on some of his biases. "Everybody wants to put reverb on everything—except me. I don't like reverb, especially on vocals. I like more a repeat echo, rather than just a big bland reverb. As soon as you whang that on everything, it all ends up getting lost. There's no longer any definition. What I like to do is have a voice singing as it really is, so it would be like a live performance, as opposed to some contrived electronic one. That way, it's like a voice singing in your ear."

Lynne and Petty are friends who appreciate one another's work. They started on *Full Moon Fever* last April, before *The Traveling Wilburys, Vol. 1* got going, around the time the E.L.O. leader and the head Heartbreaker wrote some songs that ended up on Roy Orbison's *Mystery Girl*, an album Campbell also helped write, play and produce. Petty's record was done at Campbell's studio in L.A., which Lynne says "is actually a garage. You just whip the cars out and get in there and sing. It's a lot of fun to work that way."

Before he ended an 18-month sabbatical to produce Duane Eddy in 1987, Lynne's own work was far more cluttered than his collaborations are now. "I was in that funny no-man's land, where I really didn't know what I wanted," he says. "But working with Tom and everybody, things became much easier. You could get to the point of the tune quicker." He thinks writing songs with people he likes and respects is "a luxury: All the bits you can't think of, they think of. And if they can't think of them, then hopefully I can."

Lynne says he finds nothing wrong with sizeable instrumentations or complex arrangements; it's just that for Harrison, the Wilburys, Orbison or Petty, neither seemed appropriate. "Restraint is what I've learned a bit more lately," Lynne says. "It's hard, though. It's so easy to go in and say, 'Let's put this one here, and that one there, another 93 grand pianos and we'll be done.'" M



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Multitrack Cassette Fever

'80s Recording Republican Style: Home Studios Get the Power

By Alan di Perna

BACK IN 1979, TWO EVENTS of momentous international import were unfolding. Ronald Reagan was gearing up his presidential campaign machine and Tascam was unveiling the original multitrack cassette machine: the Portastudio 144. Was there a connection? Well, the design concept behind the original Portastudio was a lot like our beloved ex-leader: powerful, yet extraordinarily simple. For the first time in the course of human events, the humble musician could own a self-contained recording system—all the basic components for tracking and mixing, there in one box, prewired and so easy to use even the Great Communicator himself could probably have figured it out... maybe.

Tascam's MIDIstudio 644 includes an automated muting and routing system (right).

But suddenly the vast video screen of history goes as blurry as presidential recollection. Dissolve to 1983, when Japanese and American synth manufacturers joined hands over the MIDI protocol. And with MIDI, as we know, came virtual tracks—drum parts, bass lines, keyboard vamps, etc., all of which didn't need to be printed on tape because they could come live-and-direct from sequencer-driven MIDI instruments themselves. But for the multitrack cassette recording system it meant an embarrassing deficit of inputs—those onboard four-track mixers were fine for four tape tracks, but there was no way they could balance a complex '80s mix, with disgruntled drum machines, synths and samplers all clamoring for more inputs... MORE INPUTS!!!!

But today a new decade is dawning. And with it comes a rising new breed of multitrack cassette systems. They promise to be kinder... gentler to the MIDI masses, as is Tascam's newest, the **Midistudio 644**. Tascam have linked one of their four-track cassette decks with a heavy-business mixer that has MIDI snapshot automation capabilities and enough inputs for a full senate of synths. The price, $1495, sounds like some Reaganomic fairy tale. But unlike Ollie North's initial testimony, this is a true story.

Let's examine the secret microfilm blueprints for the 644, secured at great personal risk by one of our agents. The deck itself is fully compatible with prior Tascam four-track Portastudios, having two speeds (3¾ and 1⅞ ips) and dbx noise reduction. Its microprocessor transport functions include firm favorites like autopunch and auto-locate. The mixer section, though, is where the 644 begins its radical departure from all porta-predecessors. Without hyperbole, it is the biggest mixer ever to share a chassis with a four-track deck.

It's best to think of it as two mixers in one. The main mixer consists of eight channel strips, each with the usual conga line of knobbies: trim pot, three-band EQ with sweepable mid, pan pot, level fader and sends for two effect loops. But then, the 644 has a *second* mixer, called the Dual section. It provides eight additional inputs, each with its own level and pan controls. The Dual section can be used to

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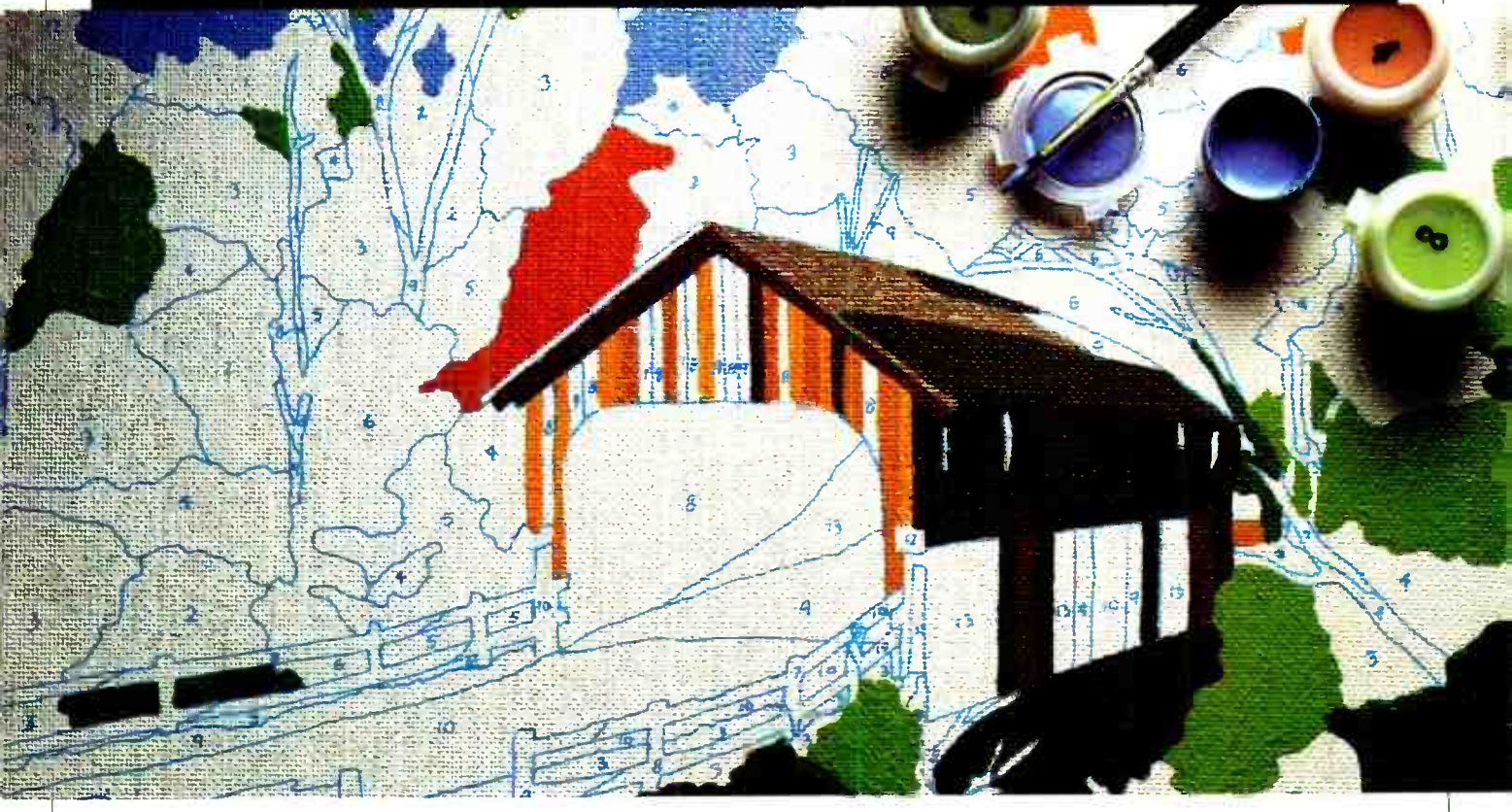

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build a monitor mix, independent of the main mixer. Or it can be used in tandem with the main mixer, its eight inputs joining forces with the eight main mixer inputs to make the 644 a 16-input mixer. And, as a final option, Dual can be used as an extra stereo effects send.

But let's zoom back to that lineup of known channel strip knobbies. You may have noticed that there are no mute buttons lurking there. Or switches for selecting either tape or a mike/line input as each channel's sound source. Nor, for that matter, do we see any buttons for routing each channel strip to an ultimate destination—either a tape track or output buss. Oh no... what is this? Post-Reagan attrition? The big cutback?

Relax, there are no buttons for these functions because they're all performed electronically. And that's much better than having buttons. Why? Because every routing assignment and mute status on the board can be saved in memory. And there are 100 different memory locations. This, in essence, means the whole board can be entirely reconfigured in a matter of milliseconds... 100 different times. Say you're mixing a tape, for example. And you decide you can no longer live with the way you slopped up the bass re-entry on the third chorus. Ordinarily, you'd have to unplug everything to set up for a punch-in. With the 644, though, you just call up the memory location that holds the board's overdubbing configuration.

And because mute status is also in digital memory, you can do some snapshot-style mix automation too. Just have your sequencer send MIDI program change commands to the 644, telling it to switch memory locations. Ah, but how does that sequencer get synchronized to tape? Again... relax. There's also a

Notes from the MIDI Corner

Hands on the Casio VZ-1 synth and the Kawai Q-80 sequencer

NOT EVERYONE WANTS their synth to be the currently reigning Flavor of the Month. If you're looking for a keyboard with a little bit of character on its own, you might want to check out the **Casio VZ-1.** Priced around $1300, it's still very much a pro instrument, not only by virtue of its major-league sounds but in its pinpoint editing and performance capabilities. Essentially the VZ-1 uses a tone-generation system that's akin to FM in conception, but which specializes in thick, furry analog-style warmth.

The VZ-1's iPD system has eight "modules," which have very simple sine, sawtooth and noise waveforms. Two modules are paired in one of three ways: a simple mix, the two ring-modulated or with one modifying the other (just like a carrier and modulator in FM). Then this pair, known as a "line," can be used to phase other lines in all manner of master/slave combinations. This forms the basic "normal" voices, with which the VZ-1 is 16-note polyphonic. Then these are combined in pairs or fours (reducing polyphony accordingly), and it's in this combination mode the VZ-1 really shines sonically.

There's a big LCD display just like the one in the Casio FZ-1, and the VZ-1's patch-editing section takes full advantage of it with a graphic editing system that isn't surpassed on any synth. Making good use of Casio's familiar eight-step envelopes is vastly easier with graphs of the envelope—complete with zoom—and gives you all kinds of control over when these different modules kick in and out. Graphic editing also speeds up things like keyboard splits and crossfades, key follow, vibrato/tremolo and velocity scaling. There's also plenty of non-graphic access to get at all those MIDI continuous controllers like aftertouch, pedals and the two onboard mod wheels. It'll also divide its 16 voices into eight multitimbral "areas," and even lets you ration out how many voices each area will get. Overall, while the graphic editing setup is quite impressive and very intuitive, some of the pure digital functions of the menu and cursor/data entry system are a bit clunky and take time getting comfortable with.

The VZ-1 is not for everyone: Because its technology is somewhat unique, it tends to do certain things better and is somewhat less versatile than its competition. Above all, it's a pure synth, something of a rarity in this wavetable synth era. A walking tour through the 64 internal patches and another 128 available in two Casio ROM cards (don't worry, they also have RAM cards to write to) may turn up more than the usual number of string pads and organ sounds, but also reveals some remarkable and compelling sound textures unique to the VZ-1. Were it to sell for half again as much as it does, it would still be a legitimate contender to get into any pro's keyboard stack or home studio. At $1300, it's really worth a listen.

Another piece of MIDI good news for the financially handicapped is the **Kawai Q-80** hardware sequencer. Priced at $850, it's a well-considered attempt to get in below the Roland MC-500 Mark II, which it resembles. The Q-80 has a 3½-inch disk drive, holds 26,000 notes in as many as 10 songs at a time, and keeps that data in RAM even when it's turned off so you can plug it in and go right to work. It handles its own simple tape sync chores, has full editing capabilities, and—get this—it packs 32 tracks.

If using a hardware sequencer is like driving a tank, the Q-80's 32-character display is a pretty decent window to see through, with most of the relevant info fitting all on one screen. Without going into excruciating detail, the way it organizes some of its basic operations can get a bit fussy at times—it'll do what you want, but with one or two keystrokes too many. Since the 32 tracks share eight buttons (in four rows), it can get confusing keeping track of them all when things start happening fast. And the way it deals with MIDI channels is at times aggravating. Still, there are user-friendly little bonuses like all the "Sure?" prompts, a foot pedal punch-in feature in addition to auto-punch and a nifty "monitor" section that flashes what MIDI channels messages are arriving and leaving on—great for troubleshooting.

Doing bar and event editing is pretty painless on the Q-80. It certainly handles all the copying, shifting, quantizing, transposing, merging and whatnot you'll need to do, with all sources and destinations possible, be they different locations, tracks, songs, etc. Unfortunately it only goes down to the bar, not to beats within a bar. For more tight crops and clean-ups, the note-editing scheme is really a delight. One screen shows you the MIDI event's exact location and its duration, pitch, velocity or value; then you either delete, insert or replace it, the last by dialing in new values and hitting

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synchronizer built into the 644. It'll read MIDI timing data from your sequencer and translate it into an FSK sync tone which gets striped onto track four of the tape. On playback, the synchronizer reads FSK and sends MIDI timing clocks out to your sequencer or drum machine.

But hold on—what about those four tracks on a portastudio cassette? When you team them up with a MIDI rig, one of those tape tracks must always be dedicated to some sort of sync code to keep the MIDI gear clicking along in time with the music on tape. And in a world where four tape tracks are barely enough, having just three tracks for musical parts can put you below subsistence level. Maybe a six-track home relief program is what's called for. **Sansui**, as we recently reported, have put six tracks on cassette in their WS-X1. They've also gone boldly forward with the concept of the self-contained recording system by adding a stereo mixdown cassette deck and a built-in effects processor to the WS-X1. At a downright populist $1949, it's a real New Deal.

The X1's multitrack deck runs at the same 3¾ ips speed as most four-track cassette machines. The six heads, however, are arrayed in a straight line, rather than being staggered as on Tascam and other multitrack cassette decks. Sansui claims their head configuration cuts down on alignment problems. And to keep the noise menace at bay, the multitrack deck has defeatable Dolby C. The X1's mixer section provides separate sync inputs and outputs which let you print sync code on track six and send it out to your external MIDI gear minus the noise reduction.

The deck's automatic transport controls include the usual return-to-zero button and the ability to set up a rehearsal loop. Punch-ins are accomplished by plugging in an external footswitch (not included) or engaging the record button during play. On the unit we tested, the punch-ins were...ahem...less than flawless. And to complicate matters, the monitor buss is muted for a quarter of a second every time you punch in. The purpose of this is to prevent adjacent-track feedback, but the net result is that you don't know if you've made the punch successfully until you've played it back.

The X1's onboard mixdown machine is a stereo cassette deck operating at the standard 1⅞ ips. On this deck, you get a democratic choice of Dolby B or C, or no noise reduction at all. The mixer's stereo output buss is routed directly to the onboard two-track deck. But if you prefer to use an external mastering machine, the stereo buss also feeds two RCA jacks on the X1's back panel.

The X1's mixer section is one of its stronger points. Signal routing options are plentiful and adaptable. It starts off with eight input channels. There are unbalanced ¼" inputs on channels one through eight, with balanced XLRs also on seven and eight. On each of the channel strips there's a trim pot, a two-band EQ, a pan pot, solo switch, channel fader, a send for the built-in effects processor and another for a mono-out/stereo-in effects loop.

Along with this, there's a cue section which lets you build a separate monitor mix of the six tape tracks and route it to a cue output jack. But perhaps the best thing about the mixer is that it gives you a whomping pile of extra inputs, including three stereo aux ins, which can be routed directly to the main stereo buss or brought up on channels seven and eight. And there are also two sets of processor outputs and inputs, routed directly to the stereo output buss.

At times though, the WS-X1 is strong on concept, but weak on execution. Take the channel EQ, for example. Its 12 dB of cut or boost are only at fixed frequencies (100 Hz and 10 kHz). The built-in effects processor is called a reverb, but on the unit we received from Sansui, it

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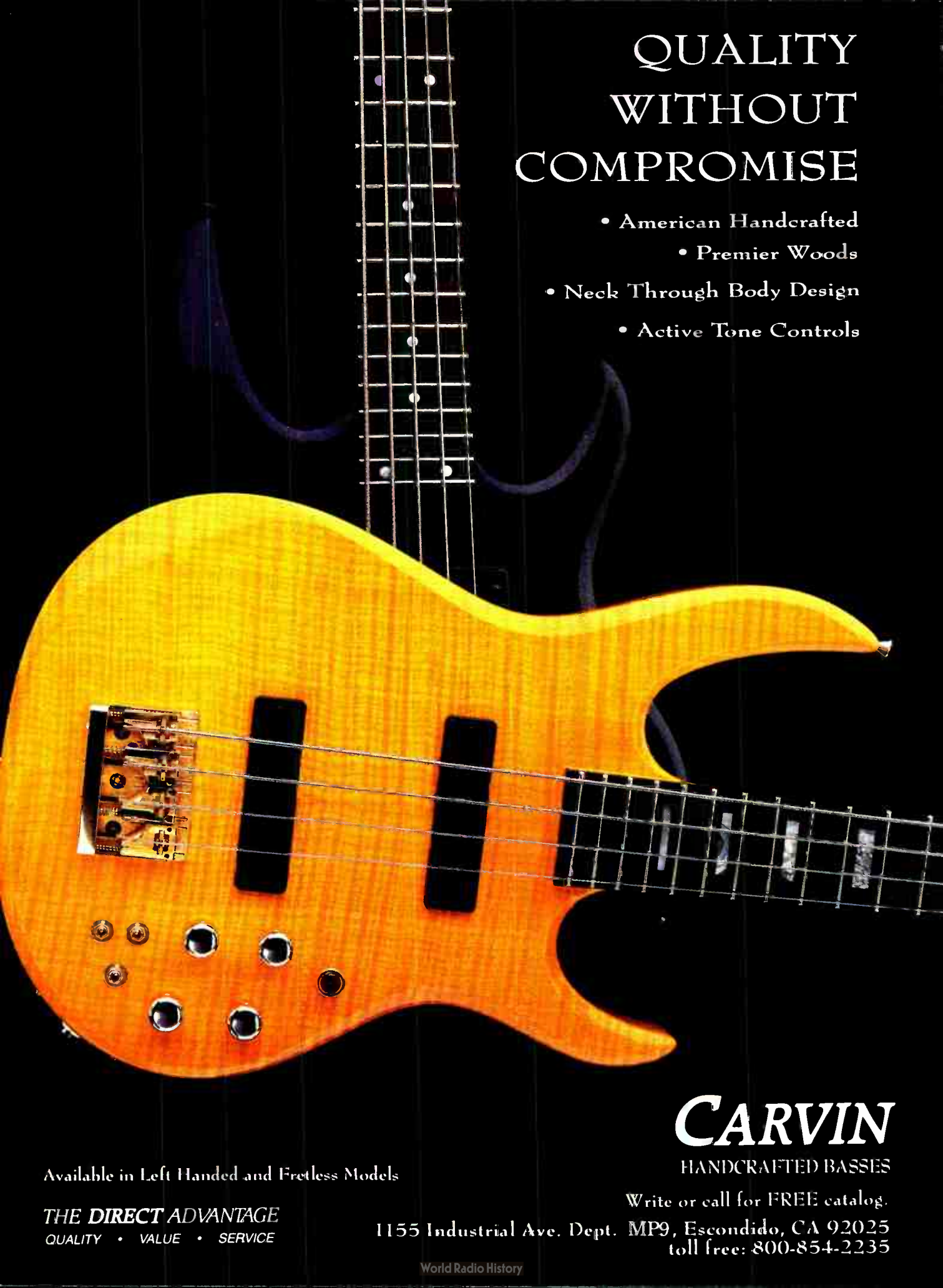

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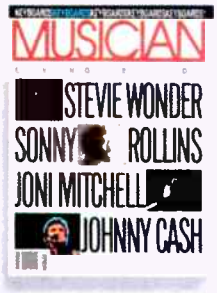

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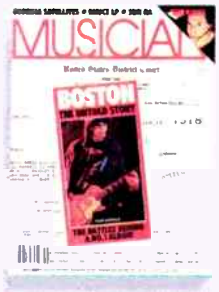

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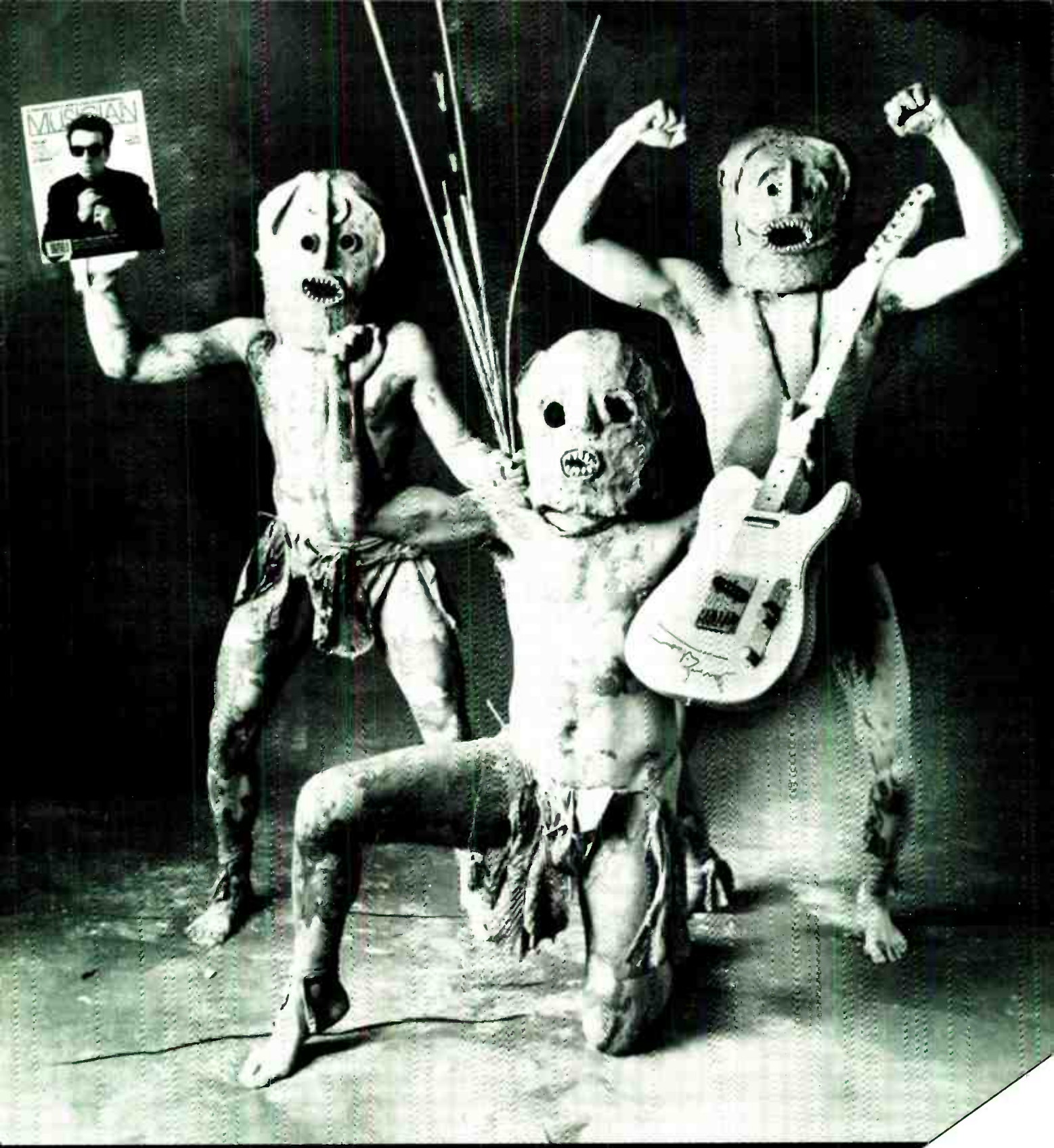

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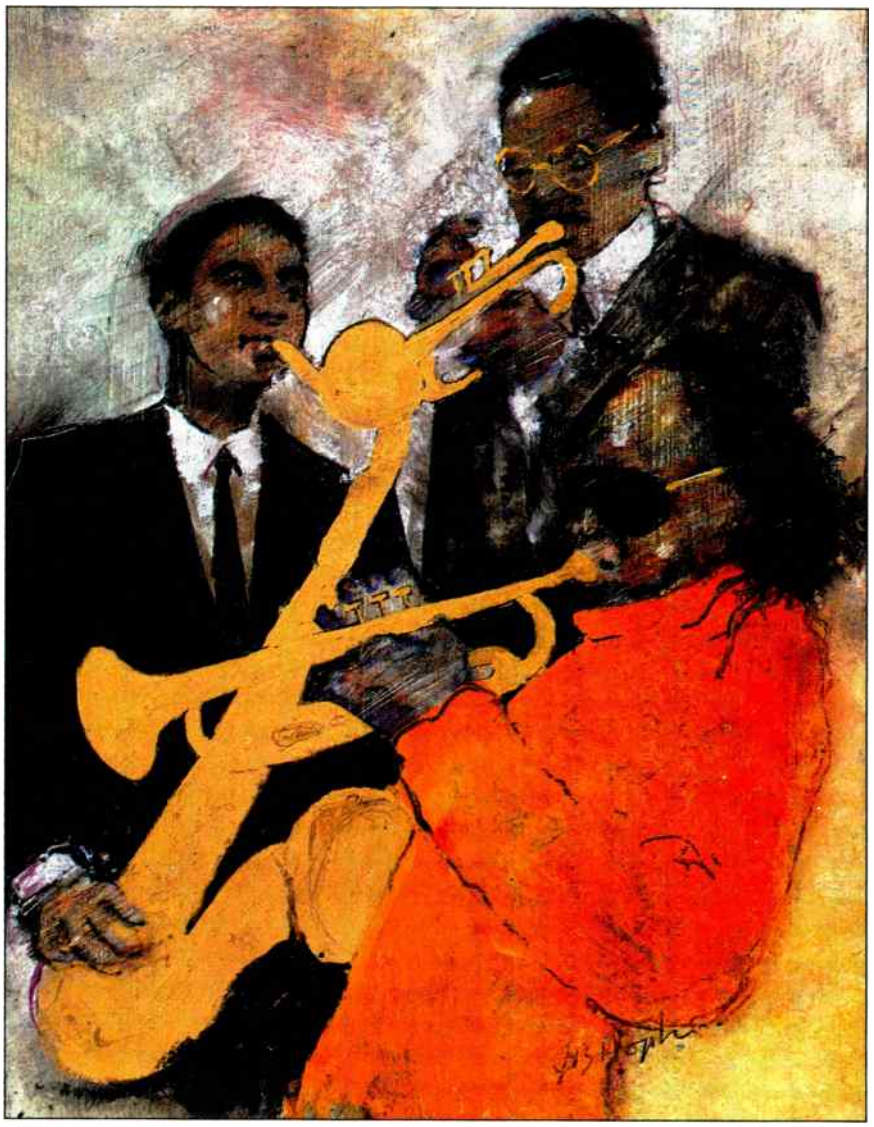
HANDS ACROSS THE JAZZ GENERATIONS

MILES DAVIS
Amandla
(Warner Bros.)
WYNTON MARSALIS
The Majesty of the Blues
(Columbia)
BRANFORD MARSALIS
Trio Jeepy
(Columbia)



WHEN THE CULTURAL mullahs denounce Miles Davis' post-1969 output as worthless, I think, gee, that's like the snubs today's cognoscenti heap on Wynton Marsalis when they say he has no soul. All Miles wants to do is to change, to move forward, to die with his boots on. Which is basically what young talents like the Marsalis brothers aspire to as well. What's curious is that the Marsalis brothers are forging new alliances with an older generation of players, while Miles still seeks out younger musicians to make fresh, contemporary sounds.

On *Amandla*, he's expanded the studio stylings of *Tutu* and *Siesta*, developing a lyrical dimension to his '90s sound, and a sense of ensemble interplay that's been largely missing from recent recordings.

Producer and multi-instrumentalist Marcus Miller's canny arrangements help propel the rhythmic thrust of Miles' modal settings without bogging down into noodling or redundant vamps. Contrapuntal use of synthesizers gives each chart the call-and-response flavor of a big band, eliciting one poignant, muted melody after another from the trumpeter; echoes of "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" enunciate his links with the past on the elegiac "Mr. Pastorius." Those hoping Miles will don a white shirt and skinny tie and blow bebop changes should know better by now; those looking for a more natural consolidation of vintage and electric Miles will be pleasantly surprised.

As I was, when first tuning into Wynton Marsalis' *The Majesty of the Blues*, a grand evocation of the New Orleans tradition. At last, I thought, he's getting away from that overworked '60s Miles milieu and is finally digging *his* roots. While the trumpeter's new band lacks the fiery overdrive of his *Blues Alley* group, saxophonists Wes Anderson and Todd Williams and the Crescent City rhythm team of Marcus Roberts, Reginald Veal and Herlin Riley have a more supple, understated kind of second-line cohesion. And while a more overt use of harmonic and rhythmic shifts would keep his song structures from bogging down into endless solo choruses, the warmth of Wynton's Hot Seven-styled arrangements and his imperial blues timbre—like the Basie and Ellington brass sections rolled into one—should finally put the kibosh to those who gripe that his cool, diffident style is devoid of emotion.

Unfortunately, Wynton still can't resist the opportunity to lecture his audience, this time by plopping in a long and tedious "sermon" by his minister of propaganda, Rapmaster Stanley Crouch, during side two's suite "The New Orleans Function." Crouch, of course, has long inveighed against that Great Satan, Miles Davis, in a series of critical jihads (pausing only to reload and strafe other

JB HOPKINS

Katia and Marielle Labèque Bring New Excitement to "West Side Story"

The distinctive style of Katia and Marielle Labèque is captured on their CBS Records debut recording of *Symphonic Dances and Songs* from LEONARD BERNSTEIN's *West Side Story*, arranged for two pianos.

Katia and Marielle Labèque. A dazzling debut. Produced by John McLaughlin.

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rivals like Sam Rivers, Cecil Taylor, Steve Coleman and the AACM). In his various manifestos, Crouch portrays life as a series of macho heroic encounters from which a noble victor must emerge; in his written notes here, he cites Hemingway's *Moveable Feast* as an affirmation of Wynton's artistic development (and, presumably, his own). But this latest emission of stale, windy bosh is so bloated with lofty claims and hackneyed posturing it owes considerably more to Don King.

Fortunately, brother Branford lets his music do the talking on *Trio Jeepy*, a step up in weight class for the gifted young tenorist after a series of workmanlike LPs. The format is a trio in the Sonny Rollins mode (rock-steady bassist, interactive drummer), with a lush variety of tempos and moods, from the free abstractions of "Doxy" to the charming bounce of "Makin' Whoopee."

The lightning rod for it all is that grand old man of the bass violin, Milt Hinton. Hinton represents all that is lasting in jazz: His mastery is touched by warmth and wisdom, a deep feeling for the blues and the flexibility to adapt to any environment. The way engineer Delfeayo Marsalis has captured the unadorned power of Hinton's acoustic bass should be a revelation to young listeners unable to fathom life before the advent of the bass guitar. On "Three Little Words" drummer Jeff Watts lays out entirely, so as not to obscure Hinton's rambunctious, swinging slap-bass rhythms. Later, on "Gutbucket Steepy," Watts and Hinton lay down such a slow, radiant blues groove that Marsalis produces one of the most pithy, eloquent sax solos I've heard in years. I'll be listening to *Trio Jeepy* long after this deadline has passed. It's the most mature and assured statement to date from any of today's young jazzmen.

– Chip Stern

P E R E U B U

Cloudland
(PolyGram)

PERE UBU, CLEVELAND'S pataphysicians of punk, established themselves as leaders among America's avant-garde rockers 11 years ago (hardly seems possible) with their first LP *The Modern Dance*. Four albums, four compilations and a six-year layoff later, Pa's back, tougher and tighter than ever.

Cloudland offers a more focused picture of the band's current sound than last year's return *The Tenement Year*. As the new record's title indicates, the group continues to work in the same rarefied air. But, while Ubu's music broils, bubbles and yelps (thanks largely to the childish catarrh of David Thomas' voice and the post-industrial groanings of Allen Ravenstine's synthesizers), many of these tunes can pass for slightly dented pop numbers. Pere Ubu's skewed approach no longer gambols with self-indulgence, as it often did on its late-'70s and early-'80s exercises (most of which were recently released on CD by Rough Trade).

The most bracing music on *Cloudland* is propulsive, compulsive, but not abrasive; tracks like "Breath," "Race the Sun" and the obsessive "Love Love Love" would not sound out of place on

some conventional rock radio formats (no kiddin'!). "Fire" almost reads like a David Byrne-styled soul-funk number, while "Nevada!" toys with the lyrics to "Sloop John B." in its mutant replay of a Reno divorce. Singer Thomas still mutters and babbles his way through the group's hermetic lyrical scenarios, but his style has calmed down and now seems almost pensive. His instrumental colleagues (Ravenstine, guitarist Jim Jones, bassist Tony Maimone, and drummers Chris Cutler and Scott Krauss) are likewise careful about where to drop the errant dissonance or the random offbeat.

Whether one credits the work of such co-producers as dancemeister Stephen Hague and electrowiz Daniel Miller or the band's burgeoning wisdom, one reaches the same conclusion: *Cloudland* offers listeners a Pere Ubu that has matured to the point where pop savvy is now a surprising part of the game plan.

– Chris Morris

N E N E H C H E R R Y

Raw Like Sushi
(Virgin)

THE SAMPLE FROM Malcolm McLaren's "Buffalo Gals" isn't the only thing McLarenesque about Neneh Cherry's hit "Buffalo Stance." Like the cheeky Malcolm, Cherry is a connoisseur of attitude—street attitude, if you please—and *Raw Like Sushi* is a veritable crash course in the prevailing creed

of today's Beautiful Young Things, determined to conquer the world and look damn good in the process.

The step-daughter of jazz musician Don Cherry has compiled quite a résumé for a woman of 25, both professionally—Neneh sang backup for feminist punk group the Slits while barely in her teens—and personally (she's the mother of two children). Maybe that explains the somewhat schizophrenic feel of this record: Cherry's music seems caught up in the giddy pleasures of youth while commenting on them with the jaded detachment of a woman who's already been around the block. This Lolita's primer in sex and freedom is shot through with wit, and a trace of coarseness Nabokov would love.

Musically, *Raw Like Sushi* is a slickly produced melange of Madonna, Michael Jackson, hip-hop and late great anarchist popsters Bow Wow Wow. Cherry's punk past shows in her lyrics, which are infused with an audacious and vital streak of defiance. Though *Raw Like Sushi* has all the earmarks of a rap record, Cherry is a capable singer; when she really cuts loose she evinces an aching power evocative of Chaka Khan's. Mostly, however, this uncommonly happy record is a dance dream, sliding from one irresistible groove to the next.

– Kristine McKenna

S T E V I E N I C K S

The Other Side of the Mirror
(Modern/Atlantic)

STEVIE NICKS may be the foremost guilty pleasure of the last two decades. With the appearance of each solo album, writers get in line to pronounce her a peerless space-case. But disappointed grumbles replaced the giggles when the recent Fleetwood Mac's *Greatest Hits* was released and failed to include collectors' gems from

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the Nicks canon like the radio favorite "Silver Springs."

Over the years Nicks' dusky reveries have influenced acts as diverse as Martha Davis and the Motels, Tiffany and Grace Pool. Yet the nature of Nicks' allure remains a puzzle. Whether observers perceive her phantasmal rock as prettified tale-spinning or costumed

narcissism, the fact is, in a callous and cynical world, Nicks concentrates on the mystery and value of inner experience.

The Other Side of the Mirror is basically the story of how Nicks pulled herself back from a self-abusive precipice, saving her life and career, but it spares us the diary excerpts and goes for the emotional gut. The sturdiest songs here are power ballads with the steady tempos and strangely syncopated singing that characterize the best of her work with Fleetwood Mac. The themes, however, are those of predatory love, grievous illusions and self-indulgence of the sort that digs graves. On the climactic "Ghosts," she simultaneously curses her "escapism"—a startling moment on a Stevie Nicks album—and exhumes every wrong turn and blind stab at happiness that drew innocent blood. Her most vibrant vocals in years relate this album's core self-realization: "It's the ghost of the past that you live in/It's the ghost of the future that you're so frightened of."

Because she dares—if just for one dramatic song—to begin dismantling her own fairytale, Stevie Nicks shows she's bridging the chasm between a daydream believer and a seeker of truth.

– Timothy White

PETER CASE

The Man with the Blue Postmodern Fragmented Neo-Traditionalist Guitar
(Geffen)

"SOME OF THESE SONGS are really bleak," says Peter Case in the bio accompanying this record, "but I think this is like the happiest album I've done." That's one way to look at it, if you think songs about shock treatment, lobotomies and the ultimate worth o' life are any kind of major grin.

The real story here isn't that Case's current work stands a million miles away from his poppy Plimsouls days. It's that this fine, mature album is the latest example of a burgeoning rock sub-genre: Grim Self-Realization with a Beat. *Blue Guitar*, as we'll call it, joins John Hiatt's *Bring the Family*, Neil Young's *Tonight's the Night* and, in a way, Jackson Browne's *Late for the Sky* in its exploration of the big black maw awaiting us when we die, redeemed or condemned, and are thrust naked into the Pit of Souls. Not a barrel of laughs, in other words, nor a subject easily explored via three-minute pop songs.

Credit the joint production of J. Steven Soles, Larry Hirsch and Case himself—along with a musical cast including Ry Cooder, David Lindley and Los Lobos' David Hidalgo, among others—for making the medicine go down easy. Following the low-key trad opener "Charlie James," *Blue Guitar* heads for a sonic territory between *Sweetheart of the Rodeo, Dr. Byrds & Mr. Hyde* and Ry Cooder's last album. Lyrically, "I Shall Be Released" may be the better comparison; snippets like "there's a hole in

your soul where the wind blows through" and "the worst disease is to be unwanted" are par. "Put Down the Gun"—the album's first single, no less—isn't about water-skiing, either.

The payoff in the Grim Self-Realization stakes is, as usual, redemption. "The vast black mouth that conquered me was coming back for more," Case sings on "Hidden Love," "'Til I turned and found the angel at my side." Maybe the angel he's singing about has wings (Case says he became a Christian when he realized the "complete groundlessness" of his situation) and maybe that angel is actually his wife. Part of what makes this album great is that it really doesn't make a difference. Case history or case history, *Blue Guitar* ultimately rings loud, clear and affirmatively, which is the biggest payoff of all.

– Dave DiMartino

BEASTIE BOYS

Paul's Boutique
(Capitol)

HIDE THE SILVERWARE. Put the vinyl slipcovers back on the furniture. Turn Mom's picture to the wall. Those eager-to-offend Beastie Boys are back at the mike. If *Paul's Boutique* doesn't boast the immediate shock value of *Licensed to Ill*, maybe that's because vulgarians Mike D, King Ad-Rock and MCA did their job too well first time. Lord knows it's not for lack of trying.

Having left Def Jam and dispensed with the services of studiomeister Rick Rubin, the Beasties were under pressure to show they could flourish outside the nest. And they have! Dense and relentless, *Paul's Boutique* is a pop-culture explosion, spewing out worthless trivia helter-skelter. The louts namecheck everyone from Chuck Woolery to Bernhard Goetz to Jerry Falwell in their tour of the modern wasteland, highlighted by enough violent encounters for a Dirty Harry movie. Happily, a broad sense of humor keeps "Looking Down the Barrel of a Gun," "High Plains Drifter," et al. from being totally distasteful, as long as you're willing to laugh at lines like "Pulled out a pair of pliers and pulled the bullet out of my chest."

Like an old *Mad* magazine drawing with a thousand things going on at once, *Paul's Boutique* features a slew of unexpected samples. Besides expected bits of James Brown and fellow rappers, the Beasties cop from Johnny Cash, Loggins and Messina, the *Psycho* soundtrack and who knows what else: Call back in a year for a full list of sources (maybe). Can't overlook those bodacious beats, of course, with "Shake Your Rump" guaranteed to do the same, and "Hey Ladies" a surefire houserocker.

Despite de rigueur celebrations of drugs and booze, and execrable, predatory sexism, a social conscience (!) tempers the bragging. "Johnny Ryall" profiles a homeless man, observing, "There ain't a damn thing funny," while

CONTINUED ON PAGE 110

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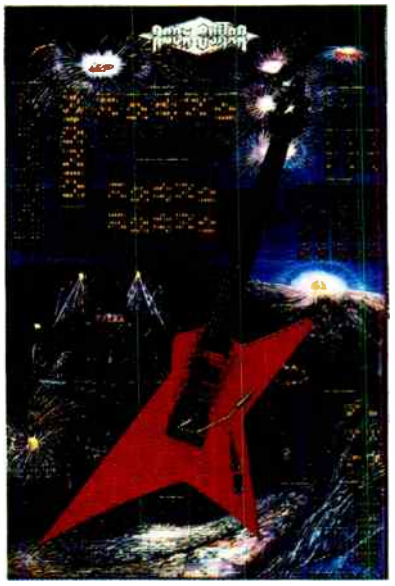

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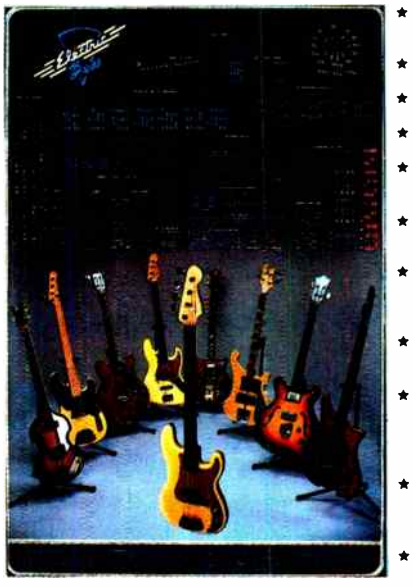

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SHORT Jazz TAKES

DAVID MURRAY

Ming's Samba (Portrait/CBS)

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME COMING, BUT MURray's super-charged squawk, which has been at the apex of the now-established freedom swing movement for the last 10 years, has finally been issued by a domestic major. And the tenor player and his corporate bosses did it right: No lack of daunting aggression (for vets), while the bright, energized mix reaches out and grabs you (for first-timers). Murray searches for nada; it's authority that defines his solos. That's cool, because the tunes lend themselves to invention, as does the quartet. Ed Blackwell has never left a beat alone in his life, and as he chases the leader, pushes bassist Ray Drummond and glides with pianist John Hicks, you know the other reason this date chomps down hard: They're a band. I hope Portrait realizes that Murray's got several others.

NEW ORLEANS BRASS BANDS

Down Yonder (Rounder)

JUST LIKE ZYDECO, BRASS BAND STUFF needs to be recorded live. But to maintain its engulfing impact, it also needs to be somewhat clean. The Rounders play it both ways on this comp, which brings together four notorious splat/oommpa/rattle posses from the Crescent City neighborhoods: Rebirth, Dejan's Olympia, the Chosen Few and (for insurance?) the celebrated Dirty Dozen. The impish eclecticism that the double D's have brought to the form has spilled over onto their fellows: Rebirth tackles Miles' "All Blues" with a mid-tempo gait, sticking it with bop phrases. The Dejan's way of smoking comes in the form of loose-limbed swing (they do a damn fine strip tease too). Because this is the ultimate social music, the laughter and conversation that spill out of the background are as essential as the raucous gospel shouts that the bands provide.

TERJE RYPDAL

The Singles Collection (ECM)

COMING OUT OF THE ECM HAZE HAS AIDED the attack of Jack DeJohnette and Bill Frisell's latest records; perhaps label perennial Rypdal wanted to assure that his stab at hot, hot, hot licks wasn't lacking in sonic clout as well. How else to describe the change of LP tone (for the better), and his foray into drastically shorter pieces that rip and tear (where his past work ooooozzed). But this "contemporary" turn finds Rypdal somewhat faceless. It would be easy to confuse the band's sound (pumping bass, power drums, chip-happy synclavier) with a number of fusionoids kind of prospering these days. Plus, regardless of hot licks, there's still something icy about the Norwegian guitarist's tone. Power Tools this ain't.

SUPERBLUE

Superblue (Blue Note)

LIKE MANY OF THE CLASSIC BLUE NOTES this done-in-Jersey-for-Japan jam session takes its cues from, it's an arranger's date. That's basically trumpeter Don Sickler's department. His rhythmic sense is hip, and if you forgive his like-minded harmonic structures (and busy charts), you've got another old Blue Note standby to get into: solos. Washington, Miller, Pierce, Lacy, Hargrove: This is a who's who of young mainstreamers, and they're just waiting for their hole to open. When it does, Bobby Watson chirps, Bob Hurst bounces, Mulgrew points direction. Plus, you've got to respect any record that kicks off with Tina Brooks' "Open Sesame."

JOE MORRIS TRIO

Human Rites (Riti/NMDS)

BEANTOWN GUITARIST MORRIS WARRANTS a looking into by anyone interested in the turn of six-string events. He sounds like no other player working today. Although his rounded tone figures into his very idiosyncratic persona, it's the methodology of his blowing that casts the longest shadow. Flurries sweep by, but the individual notes account for themselves completely (little wonder that he dedicates the record to Jimmy Lyons). His band works like Air did: camaraderie and unity, even under the most open circumstances. Proof positive that NY doesn't own all the smart improv turf.

ELLEN CHRISTI

Star of Destiny (NYCAC/NMDS)

THIS RECORD SEEMS OLD, AND THAT'S NOT necessarily a dig. It's a late-'70s NYC thing, I guess; Christi is a vocalist who's put in her time on the scene, and the lineup of Roy Campbell (trumpet), William Parker (bass) and Tom Bruno (drums) lets her flit through wordless improvs that pander in menacing coos and rise-to-fall dynamics—her voice is intriguing. But the indie economics dictate the record's quality. Produced all wrong, it sounds like a loft gig: The mood bounces everywhere, the focus flounders. (500 Broadway, N.Y., NY 10012.)

STRATA INSTITUTE

Cipher Syntax (JMT)

FRANTIC AND COOL, EMOTIONAL AND steely, resolved and questioning, Steve Coleman, Greg Osby, guitarist David Gilmore, bassist Bob Hurst and drummers Tani Tabbal and Smitty Smith go acoustelectric to propagate the notion that a mystery groove is what keeps us all on the inquisitive side of thangs. Some parts are gorgeous, some parts are mind-boggling (go Smitty!) and some parts get down better than Big Daddy Kane. This shit is still unfolding.

SATO MICHIHIRO

Rodan (hat ART/Tower)

MICHIHIRO'S SHAMISEN, A JAPANESE FOLK music instrument that sounds like a two-string banjo, doesn't have an unlimited amount of timbre options, so his music's personality is often dictated by context. On *Rodan* the personality is ceaseless, because he leaves the settings to producer John Zorn, who whistles once and brings in 75 percent of downtown NYC's finest characters. Even though these are formal improvs, structure is maximized; several of the 23 curt pieces boast an all-encompassing control over the material. No fray here is void of lyricism: The organic sound of the shamisen has delicacy in any context.

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SHORT Rock TAKES

TIN MACHINE

Tin Machine (EMI)

DESPITE HIS EVER-CHANGING IMAGE, the most genuinely chameleonic thing about David Bowie is his ability to blend in with his surroundings. Build a formalist chill into his backing tracks, and he becomes a Bauhaus balladeer; plant him in front of a funky rhythm section, and he turns into Soul Brother No. 2. Now throw him in with a flash guitarist and a formerly punky rhythm section, and he becomes—the art-rock Henry Rollins? Bowie has his moments here—"Crack City" surges with an intensity unheard since *Ziggy Stardust*—but without Reeves Gabrels' shrieking, incendiary guitar, this *Tin Machine* would be little more than scrap metal.

STAN RIDGWAY

Mosquitos (Geffen)

AS THE INSTRUMENTAL "HEAT TAKES A Walk" shows, Ridgway knows his way around an orchestra. Yet what stands out are the words. Ridgway's writing is deceptively simple, telling stories so well that the verse/chorus arrangement seems almost transparent, and framing each phrase so carefully that the music just drifts along behind the plot—until you think back over the best parts of "Lonely Town" or "Calling Out to Carol" and realize you're humming them.

CYNDI LAUPER

A Night to Remember (Epic)

BEING A GOOD SINGER AND MAKING GOOD records are by no means the same thing, and navigating that difference has always been the challenge stardom posed for Cyndi Lauper. But where her previous output seemed willing to sacrifice songs to the flame of Lauper's voice, *A Night to Remember* wisely refrains, reining the singer in so that it's the overall sound that dominates. And it works; letting her ride the edge of "I Drove All Night" is infinitely more effective than blunting it with vocal overkill, while her reserve puts some perspective into the retro-rock of "My First Night Without You." A memorable album, indeed.

DIANA ROSS

Workin Overtime (Motown)

CONSIDERING HOW MUCH HOUSE MUSIC EMphasizes the beat at the expense of the singer, it seems more than a little odd to find Motown's longest-reigning diva marking her return home with an album of basslines. Has she really become that self-effacing, or is her comeback jones so intense that she'll try anything for a hit?

THE JACKSONS

2300 Jackson St. (Epic)

ANYONE UNABLE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN Jackie, Tito and Randy when Michael was out front won't have much luck now that the other brothers are out on their own. Even Jermaine seems afflicted by aural anonymity, since little of what he contributes stands out among the state-of-the-art earwash here. Were it not for Randy's ability to imitate Bobby Brown on "Nothin' (That Compares 2 U)," *2300 Jackson St.* would be a package marked "Return to Sender."

SIMPLE MINDS

Street Fighting Years (A&M)

IS IT JUST ME, OR HAS JIM KERR BEGUN TO sound uncannily like Bill Murray?

SWING OUT SISTER

Kaleidoscope World (Fontana)

DESPITE THE URBANE ALLURE OF "WAITing Game," with its sparkling, retro-cool arrangement, only those whose fondest memories of '60s rock center on the Fifth Dimension are likely to love this.

PIXIES

Doolittle (Elektra)

MUSICALLY, THE PIXIES DON'T DO ANYthing that hasn't already been done by punk groups now old enough to be their fathers (well, spiritual fathers, anyway). So why bother with them? Because these four young Bostonians are blessed with a melodic sense that goes beyond the pleasures of grunge and feedback, and because they play with a freshness and innocence that makes even their hoariest tricks seem new again. Who says punk was better the first time around?

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN AND DOUBLE TROUBLE

In Step (Epic)

LIKE THE BLUES GREATS WHO INSPIRED him, Vaughan understands that artistic growth isn't a matter of change so much as refinement. That's why the best thing about *In Step* isn't his guitar-wiz chops but his clarity of vision, whether manifested in the stripped-to-basics funk of "Crossfire" or the Hendrix-style blues of "Leave My Girl Alone."

TODD RUNDGREN

Nearly Human (Warner Bros.)

...AND DAMNED CATCHY, TOO, PERHAPS the purest pop Rundgren has delivered since "Hello It's Me." Credit the company he's keeping for some of it—a Bobby Womack cameo is a good sign on any album—but mostly be glad that he's foregone his techno-wizardry for a get-it-live studio sound that's almost Spectorian in its majesty.

BLUE RODEO

Diamond Mine (Atlantic)

FROM THE GENUINELY DYLANESQUE "GOD and Country" to the bittersweet two-step that fires "Now and Forever," these young Canadians understand American music as well as any band since the Band. Rather than laboriously mine well-worked ground, Blue Rodeo takes a modern tack, stressing ambience and understatement to such an extent the Cowboy Junkies seem loud by comparison. A wonderfully subtle album.

BY J.D. CONSIDINE

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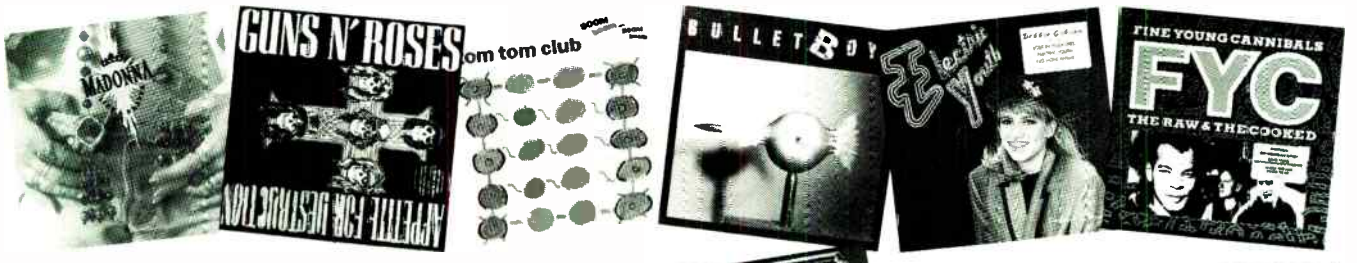

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"What Comes Around" notes, "With two black eyes your girl ain't that pretty," going on to ask, "Why you wanna treat your girl like that?" Scoring in a largely black genre may have given 'em pause as well. "Egg Man" interrupts its slapstick to say, "You made the mistake/You judge a man by his race/You go through life with egg on your face." Later: "Racism is schism on the serious tip."

So give 'em a hand. The Beasties have delivered the beef a second time, when it would have been easier to disappear after one classic LP. Having demonstrated staying power, they now face their greatest challenge yet: preserving that hard-earned outlaw image in the wake of shockingly positive statements. Could be tricky. – **Jon Young**

MAUREEN TUCKER

Life in Exile after Abdication
(50 Skadillion Watts)

FORMER VELVET Underground drummer Maureen Tucker is a genuine rock 'n' roll hero. With the deck stacked against her—a single parent with a bunch of kids, working nine to five in a Georgia backwater—she's kept her hand in the game with a series of consistently interesting solo records. This one is her best.

On *Life in Exile* several of Tucker's rowdy friends come by, including Lou Reed, Sonic Youth, Half Japanese's Jad Fair and Austin cult-oddity Daniel Johnston. They make quite a racket while Tucker sings/chants/shouts about hard times on the lower rungs of the executive ladder ("Spam Again" and "Work") and old friends ("Hey Mersh!" and "Andy"). She also turns in stunning covers of Leadbelly's "Goodnight Irene" and the V.U.'s "Pale Blue Eyes," which features an achingly sustained guitar solo by Reed. An eight-minute instrumental called "Chase" finds Sonic Youth sounding a bit awestruck in the presence of one of their mentors, subduing the noise a notch while Maureen mallets the toms à la "European Son." Fair and Johnston's "Do It Right" closes the album with the charm of an "After Hours" or "I'm Sticking with You."

It's worth noting that Tucker plays more guitar than drums here, but her approach is pretty much the same—primal and rock steady, with an occasional nod to Bo Diddley. The Gunslinger's namesake song gets covered here, a curious move as Maureen opened her 1982 album *Playin' Possum* with it. The version here gets the nod, due mainly to fuller sound. Then again, Tucker recorded *Playin' Possum* in her living room.

Recording an album in her living room is one testimony to how much determination this woman has. *Life in Exile* is glorious not only for its no-nonsense, heartfelt music, but because it's the sound of someone whose life is *still* being saved by rock 'n' roll.

– **Thomas Anderson**

PUBLIC IMAGE LIMITED

9
(Virgin)

IF THERE IS ONE happy constant in this sad old world, it is the fine Irish rage of one Johnny Lydon, rock 'n' roll poet and rebel. Though it's been a dozen years since the Sex Pistols came spewing brimstone onto an unsuspecting pop scene, Lydon has kept the edge of his outrage rapier sharp, long after other icons settled into pudgy middle age. "Who gets the mansions, we get the ruins," this electric tower of babble-on snarls on the death disco of "Same Old Story." One is hard pressed to refute him. Has anything really changed?

Still, while Lydon's complacent, slow-moving targets have grown larger and more omnivorous—and his pisstake on it all remains appropriately unkind—his music has evolved in ways that, while still tense, anthemic and nasty, are also fundamentally uplifting. I mean, I was rather taken aback by my advance cassette when I first slipped it on as background music for other more pressing labors. Johnny Rotten goes soul man? A tight, funky rhythm section? Female background singers? Poptones? Had my man been pensioned off to the English countryside?

Not hardly. Lydon has simply arrived at a more focused vision of how he wants to orchestrate his soliloquies, an ongoing process that was most satisfying in his all-star *Album* collaborations with Bill Laswell and continued apace with 1987's *Happy?*

9 seems a by-product of Lydon's refined musical vision. He's brought down the swampy SVT bass that dominated previous Public Image recordings in favor of a clearer, more funkified bass sound, and mixed the dual guitars, keyboards and drums in a Spectorish manner, compressing the balance to achieve a more organic sound. There's greater attention to danceable grooves and textural detail, without negating his trademark rhythmic thrust and yawping declamatory style. A tune like "Sand Castles in the Snow" bristles with proto-funk drive, while the macho send-ups of "Warrior" suggest a more vinegary King Crimson (not really, but it is sort of gothic).

A fascination with Near Eastern modalities animates the band's punk-funk drive, nowhere as powerful as on the satanic verses of "U.S.L.S. 1," a chilling portrayal of an airline bombing replete with menacing power chords, left-right channel chants and Frisell-like ambient counterpoint. Lydon observes the dissipation of post-Reagan society on "Brave New World," while the ultimate betrayal of friendship ("Disappointed") and the ambivalence of relationships ("Like That") underscores Lydon's keen eye for mannerisms and affectation.

Which is to say that John Lydon is still the failed romantic railing against empty poses and cheap emotions, distilling his rage with cathartic dance grooves and the type of elemental humor that marks him as the Samuel Beckett of rock. Long may he wave. – **Chip Stern**

CHABA FADELA

You Are Mine
(Mango)

RAI MAY BE every hipster's exoticism of choice, but what stands out about this album isn't how foreign it seems, but how familiar. Hear how the Arabic vocal interplay between Fadela and duet partner Cheb Sahroui is intercut with blues guitar; or the way Fadela's plaintive singing is nudged along by a droning, Middle Eastern synth beat. It's a taste worth acquiring. – **J.D.C.**

Q-80 from page 94

enter. Controller data, pitch bends, program changes, channel pressure, system exclusive and even MIDI mode changes can be accessed and edited. The Q-80 also has some regional editing tricks, like the ability to set note ranges to split up a single track or shift only certain pitches. And who wouldn't prefer real note values to enter in step-recording rather than obtuse numerical durations?

Yes, it's a continuous, tape recorder-type sequencer rather than the chaining variety. But part of every song is a separate one-track pattern section called Motif; not only does it let you record in a looped overdub mode, but you can build songs out of these chained pieces and save memory. The Q-80's Motif concept is implemented in a slightly quirky way but really streamlines song construction. Other nitpicks? Resolution is only 96 ppqn, it could use some filters to strip certain data, the countdown is always two bars long and the manual is pretty slim. But let's get real here—the Q-80 is coming in against units costing twice as much and doing the job. What more could you ask of a sequencer? **– Jock Baird**

RAITT/BROWNE from page 69

second night—I was amazed! He said the same things. He'd written down a little routine that worked. That blew my mind.

MUSICIAN: *Was it difficult to create intimacy with a large audience?*

BROWNE: No, I'm talking of a time when Bonnie and I were doing seven or eight shows a week. We really worked a lot. It was four shows a night if you count both of us. And the thing was, any one of those shows would have earned you a day off, except there was no day off. We all got on the same bus...

RAITT: Me and 13 guys. I really hated that tour.

BROWNE: And it was a matter of getting up to do it again the next night. I mean no one was gonna get up in the morning and go jogging. We lived kind of hard.

MUSICIAN: *So what made you decide to give up that kind of life? Was it hard to change?*

BROWNE: It wasn't difficult at all. The really self-destructive stuff that I did, it's easy to stop once you stop deluding yourself with alcohol. I used to think it was the coke that was doing all the damage. But it was the coke that allowed me to drink far more than anyone should be able to. If you don't do that, you're not really interested in staying up and talking all night long. You'd rather spend some time alone, or see something of the town that you're in before you leave.

RAITT: I changed because I didn't have any choice. Plus I like being alert, you know? It's got its own high to it. It's great not to worry about what you're going to say or how you're going to feel and understand that, oh, this is a headache and I didn't even cause it!

I've already known from being on the road that I've inspired a lot of women my age that have lost their way. 'Cause I really am a walking advertisement for how to get help, and I'm sure there's a lot of women out there who feel really alone, and don't like the way they look and drink too much. Blues singers tend to go through their problems in public. If a beautiful model singer gets fat and drinks too much, she's out of a career. If I do it my fans just love me more. [*laughter*] I'm really anxious to be as old as Sippie Wallace was and making records. She was 88 when she died. But, you do have to put out good music.

Now whether I have a hit record or fall in love, it really doesn't matter to me. I accept my job and I love my life, and I'm grateful to be around. I think the relationship I have with the people who understand what I do is one that's really lasting. My audience may not be as big as Madonna's but it's as valuable, and I think that record companies and radio are getting hip to that. M

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JOHNS from page 24

naïveté. "Tired of Trash" worries about making "greenback dollars" and saving only "laundry dimes." "I'm a Little Mixed Up" is an oldie that the Stones tried to wax but couldn't pin down. Onstage the H-Bombs kill it dead. For a finale, Evan hands his guitar around to the sweaty revelers in front. About 24 hands reach out to collectively clang the evening to an end. That wideass grin returns to his puss.

"I've kicked up more dust with my live dates than my records," Johns concludes, "but Ryko digs what I'm up to; I think this might work. Good songs are the ticket, and the ability to make people dance. I've made my living in beer joints, and it's been cool with me so far." M

BOMBERS

YOU don't have to look hard to recognize the leader of the H-Bombs up onstage. He's the one with EVAN JOHNS emblazoned on the neck of his guitar. It's a custom-made job, by a Greensboro "master" named Roscoe. "He kinda bullied me into buying it," laughs Johns. "He said, 'Lemme make you one; if you don't like it, I'll make you another one.'" Roscoe did wind up making two, but only because the guitarist loved the first one. It's a maple-top Telecaster with a mahogany body and Bixbie pickups. "I gotta have the Bixbies," Johns drawls bluntly. He also plays a '55 Les Paul, Jr., a '68 Les Paul Custom and a white three-pickup SG Custom. There are Fenders floating around his house, but he uses Gibsons "by preference."

Evan screeches pretty well on the lap steel too. Some of them are "as old as water," but the one he's into these days is a 1930 all-metal Rickenbocker "with an 'H' not a 'K,' so you know it's old." Another down-South pal helps him find new steels. "He's into bottle rockets, and I usually bring him some; we got a trade going," says Evan.

The H-Bombs maintain their garbage/garage sound via a Vox Super Continental. The band's keyboard wasn't around for the recording of *Bombs Away*, so Garry Tallent borrowed one from the Springsteen camp. "It was rickety, so we had to work it manually," Evan chortles. "Garry reached inside and held the innards down for three minutes on 'Love Is Gone.' His hand was blue by the time he pulled it out."

REMIXERS from page 86

four-on-the-floor. Blackwell creates a dark tundra of sexual tension, inviting and alienating. By combining bass lines from one mix with solo vocals from another he makes the term "segue" obsolete. Suddenly an innocent girl's major-key pop vocal becomes an exercise in Locrian intimidation—Debbie Gibson and Mrs. Hyde. The lines from song to song became so blurred as to make a six-hour show feel like one continuous opus.

As a remixer, Blackwell understands his own limitations as well as the needs of the dance floor, and he chooses keyboard players accordingly. "It just depends on what I'm looking for for that particular production," he says. "Some are better for arrangement parts, some are better for solos, some will always have ideas when you hit that wall that we've all hit. You always know that there's a certain set of parameters that you have to work with in producing these dance mixes, because certain things work in the dance market, and certain things don't.

"Unfortunately," Blackwell offers, "a lot of the dance product is all based around the same drum sound, the same drum pattern, the same changes, relatively similar keyboard IDs; and so it's definitely a challenge to try to not have this cookie-cutter attitude."

But which came first, the cookie or the cutter? Blackwell doesn't deny that remixers fall back on stock devices to rearrange a song for the clubs, even when an original production may not need it. But he draws the line at the suggestion that DJs have polluted popular taste with lots of "unmusical" sound effects and monotony in records like "Pump Up the Volume." "The DJs that put together these sample records [may be] musically illiterate, and I think there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. All they have to relate with or move people in a way that an astute writer or performer would is by putting these samples together. But it's the ability to put those 100-150 records together within the six minutes of their piece that makes it something else." M

RECORDING from page 96

was actually a lamentably rudimentary delay line. This granky ddl will supposedly be replaced by a higher-quality multi-effects chip—reputedly from Roland. A final peeve is the headphone buss, which puts out a constant, loud and nasal drone. For apartment-dwelling

Trevor Horns, confined to their cans, this could induce severe manic-depressive symptoms. On the positive side, though, the clarity and frequency range of the WS-X1's six tracks are comparable to four-track cassette. Apart from the headphone buss, the on-board mixer is reasonably clean. We got good results using the WS-X1 as a self-contained system, and even better results with an external mixer and mixdown deck.

What mixdown machines did we use? **Panasonic**'s two DAT recorders, the SV-250 and SV-3500. Both are quite impressive, especially now that Panasonic has dropped the price on them. The SV-250 is a portable DAT which can run on a rechargeable power pack or mains power. It lacks a digital input and has fewer programmable playback features than its running mate, the SV-3500. Yet, at $2900, it sells for $400 *more* than the 3500. While you ponder that one, we'll mention that the 250's stereo analog inputs are on balanced XLR connectors that use Panasonic's MASH A-to-D conversion system and operate at a sampling rate of 48k. And you *do* get a coaxial digital output, not to mention a good old analog stereo output on RCA jacks.

The SV-3500 has a digital input *and* output—again coaxial interfaces. The digital input can accommodate a number of different sampling rates between 32 and 48k. The analog input facilities offer a choice of 48 or 44.1 kHz sampling. According to Panasonic, the 3500 turns analog to digital via four-times-oversampled, quasi-18-bit conversion—a different system than the 250's MASH scheme. The analog stereo inputs and outputs are balanced XLRs. The 3500's transport can fastwind at a maximum velocity of 200 times play speed (whew!), as compared to the 250's comparatively pokey 60 times play speed. This, combined with its slick provisions for playing back songs in any order you program, could make the 3500 ideal for artists who use tapes onstage.

But let's cut to the big question: What do the things sound like? Well, Panasonic says the 3500 specs out slightly better on paper, but we could hear no real difference between the machines. Both sound great—with clear, bright transients and excellent stereo imaging. Of course there's a noticeable lack of low-end woompfffff; but hey, that's why they call it digital. Since the sound of the two units is comparable, the SV-3500 seems the better buy. It's hard to argue with more features for less money. Jeez, even the Gipper could grock that one!

Speaking of versatile, essential home studio gear, let's not overlook that unsung hero, the compressor/limiter. We had an opportunity not long ago to check out **JBL/UREI**'s recently released Model 7110 compressor/limiter. Now we wonder how we ever got along without it.

The front panel includes threshold, attack, release, ratio and output level controls, plus a rotary detector pot which lets you set the 7110 to react to momentary peaks in input gain or to longer-term, average signal levels. The threshold control is extremely responsive, allowing very precise settings. The ratio knob covers the full range of compression and limiting ratios, from 1.8:1 to infinity:1. One useful feature is the auto switch, which sets the detector, attack, release and ratio controls to preset factory values, disenabling their front-panel knobs. If you're in a hurry, you can use auto as a quick, all-purpose compression setup. It also provides a helpful "instant reference point" as you're making your own settings.

Also quite handy is the 7110's detector input, which lets you pull swell stunts like frequency-dependent compression. Finally, there's a link feature which lets you strap two 7110s together for stereo operation without level discrepancies between channels. Ever since the now-mythic LA-2A, Urei compressor/limiters have been lauded for their musical, "smooth-knee" response. (Too many Eric Rohmer films, no doubt.) The 7110 is no exception, and at $475, it's a deal.

What, then, are the long-range implications of all this new equipment? Well, it's obvious. The whole thing smacks of a rogue operation to funnel power into the hands of the rank-and-file *contra* musician. Almost as much clout as the NRA, or a whole caucus of rabid pro-lifers.... Isn't democracy wonderful? M

10,000 MANIACS from page 54

with a full moon. One time we were at a motel next to a farm, and I wanted to do it again. Jerry and I went running through a cornfield, but he ran into a stalk and lost a contact lens."

Her mother unplugged the family television when Merchant was 10 years old, and until a few years ago, she says, she wrote letters regularly to a dozen friends.

"I think it's really therapeutic to write," she says. "People used to write letters, but most people now, if they write a telephone message down, a few checks a week, that's all the writing they do. It's rare to get a birthday card or a Christmas card with anything more written on it than 'love.' Maybe writing all those letters was practice for writing songs." Merchant has file cabinets filled with black-and-white composition notebooks and folders of her writing, some of which will eventually turn into songs; her television, a recent acquisition, sits in a closet. "I told my friends that when I start watching 'Mr. Ed' reruns, the television goes," she said. "So far, I haven't."

Somehow, she manages to stay immune to the temptations of rock-star vanity. In recent years, she changed her onstage costumes from $1-a-bag thrift-shop specials—"I got tired of clothes that smelled like cat piss and mothballs, and that had to be sewn up every night"—to discreet modern copies of the old dresses she likes. At one point, she let herself be outfitted by a full-fledged fashion designer. "People told me I looked like a bombshell," she says, grimacing. "That was the end of it. Being a bombshell doesn't have anything to do with this music."

Despite Merchant's genuine concerns and the band's seriousness of purpose, for the moment 10,000 Maniacs seem immune to the dreaded syndrome whereby musicians start to see themselves as prophets and pretend world leaders. Rob Buck, who took guitar lessons around Jamestown not so long ago, says the hometown reaction to 10,000 Maniacs' success has been rather muted. "People who've known us come up and say, 'It's great you guys made it, but you suck. But that's okay—I think it's great that someone can make it and suck.' Well, what can you say?" M

CARLTON from page 78

artist to crime victim and back to solo artist—Carlton's path has defied easy plotting. "I think it's coming around to my original concept," he surmises. "In my late teens, I wanted to be a Joe Pass or a Wes Montgomery. I considered them world-class guitarists playing the music they played best for the people who wanted to hear it. I actually had an aversion to studio playing. I'd had some experience when I was 16 with some of the best studio players in Los Angeles. They were all pale, drawn, studioed out. They played great. As a young teenager, I thought, 'I don't want to do this.' They looked all beat up in this sterile room making these records. It didn't appeal to me, but that's obviously not what was intended, because I ended up the other way, going from the studio process to doing what I do best—making my music for people who like to hear it." M

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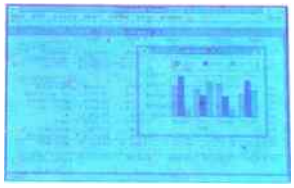

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