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IN HIS OWN WORDS

MUSICIAN

Nov 90

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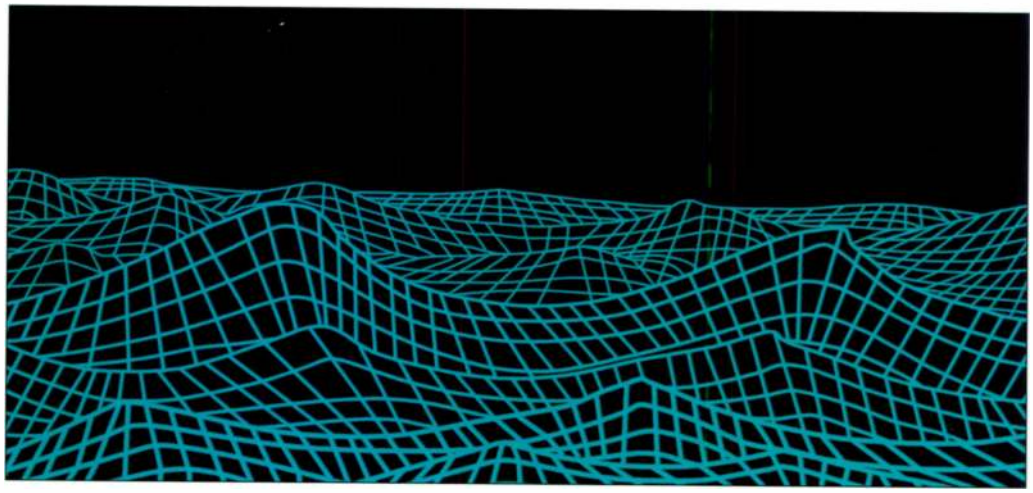

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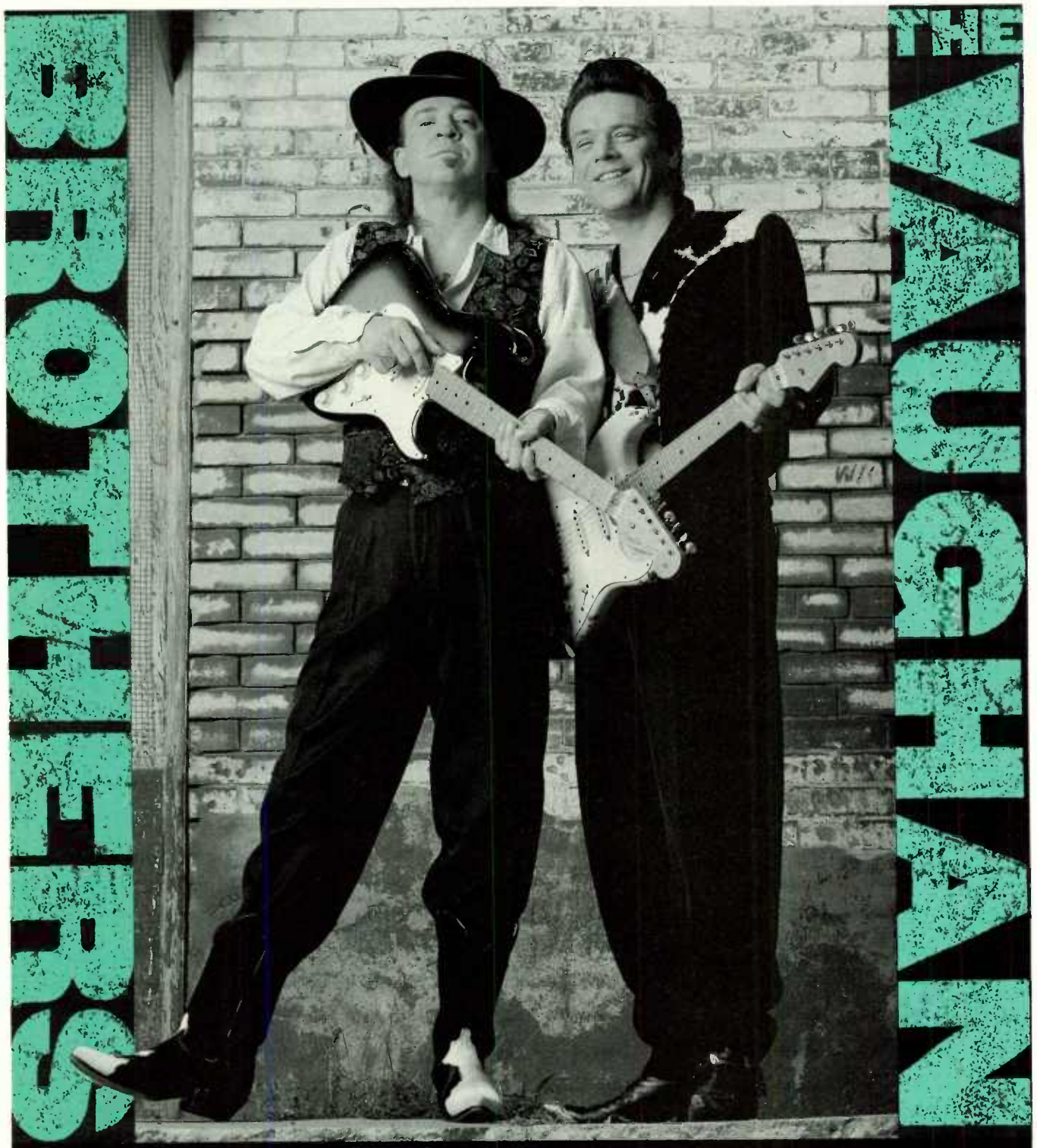

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INSIDE

Musician • November 1990

A Billboard Publication

7 **Front Man: Billy Gibbons** ZZ Top's new album is a return to their roots. Will the MTV generation get it? ..... *By Tony Scherman*

20 **Branford Marsalis** A few words about crossover, the relative intelligence of jazz and rock musicians, and reverse racism. ..... *By Geoff Ossias*

26 **Aztec Camera** Roddy Frame takes a long time between records, but each one's better than the last. ..... *By Scott Isler*

30 **Muhal Richard Abrams** After 30 years of breaking barriers, the composer is making music without borders. ..... *By Jim Macnie*

36 **Gear Daddies** A small town band moves to Minneapolis with no trendy snottiness and a whole lot of unhip heart. ..... *By Steve Perry*

40 **Johnny Van Zant** Lynyrd Skynyrd's younger brother steps into those big shoes. ..... *By Jon Young*

42 **Island Records' Mike Bone** A hard rock fan takes over the most esoteric label. ..... *By Fred Goodman*

48 **Jimmy Page: My life in Led Zeppelin** In a rare retrospective mood, the reclusive hard rock hero sits down in London to recount his years in Led Zep, his musical tricks, his guitar secrets, and his hopes for the future for the band that will not die. ..... *By Matt Resnicoff*

51 **John Paul Jones: Presence to Present** The Zeppelin who *never* talks tells stories to beat the band. ..... *By Matt Resnicoff*

66 **Stevie Ray Vaughan in his own words** Some losses will only get worse with the passing of time. *Musician* had a long relationship with Stevie Ray. Here is his story as he told it to us over the years. ..... *By Tony Scherman*

76 **The Mekons** While other British punk bands rose, prospered and fell apart, the Mekons slowly got better and better. Now they are one of the best rock 'n' roll groups anywhere. Let's go over to their house. ..... *By Jon Pareles*

84 **The MC5's holy spirit** Speaking of great punk bands, these guys were mixing radical politics, proto-thrash and hipster consciousness while Led Zeppelin was still tuning up. Now their frontman is back from a 20-year detour, ready to rejoin the battle. ..... *By Dave Marsh*

146 **The Hell with "Cop Rock"** Lets make "L.A. Law" an opera instead! ..... *Backside*

Working Musician

92 **J.J. Cale** Way, way after midnight, J.J.'s content to sit on the porch and play his guitar. ..... *By Dave DiMartino*

100 **Vocals: Classical singing tips** Pop stars study opera techniques. ..... *By Joe Donovan*

104 **Bass: Stu Hamm** Private lessons from Vai and Satriani's bassist. ..... *By Alan di Perna*

108 **Drums: Eddie Bayers** Nashville favorite comes back from a bad break. ..... *By Rick Mattingly*

110 **Guitar: Marc Ribot** The method in his madness. ..... *By Ted Drozdowski*

114 **A&R: MCA's black powerhouse** Bobby Brown is just the first step. ..... *By Jock Baird*

118 **Producer: Maurice Starr** Creator of New Kids always knows the next hit. ..... *By Rory O'Connor*

122 **High Tech** In the '80s, synths promised the world. What went wrong? ..... *By Craig Anderton*

126 **Performance: Paul Simon** Simon shows off new stuff. ..... *By Gene Santoro*

128 **Developments** Yesterday's guitars, today's P.A.'s, tomorrow's acoustics. ..... *By Alan di Perna*

74 **America's Best Unsigned Bands** Lyle Lovett, Branford Marsalis, Lou Reed, Vernon Reid and Robbie Robertson select the winners.

Departments

Masthead 8

Letters Sinéad mail 10

Faces Judas Priest 15

Charts 18

Sound Off Little Richard! 139

Recordings Living Colour 132

Short Takes 138

Classified 144

Reader Service 145

Cover photographs: Neal Preston; (inset): John Barry; contents photographs (left to right): John Barry, Luciano Viti, Ken Shung

THE FIRST SOUND IS RHYTHM. THE RHYTHM OF THE SAINTS.

PAUL SIMON ◆ THE RHYTHM OF THE SAINTS

Once in a very great while, an album *hits home*. The music is correct and complete; it descends upon the soul, and resonates—it *hums*. Paul Simon's *The Rhythm Of The Saints* is such an album.

Following his hugely successful *Graceland*, Paul Simon's latest work further melds his unmistakable song styling with the music of three worlds: Brazil, West Africa and America. Recorded in Brazil and New York, *The Rhythm Of The Saints* features guest artists as diverse as Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Milton Nascimento and J.J. Cale.

"I believe in the future/we shall suffer no more/maybe not in my lifetime/but in yours I feel sure..."

Paul Simon's music spans three decades. His voice is universally known and loved; his critical and commercial accomplishments are seldom rivaled. Unencumbered by his successes, and in true artistic spirit, Simon now brings you *The Rhythm Of The Saints*.

Produced by Paul Simon/Engineered by Roy Halee. Featuring The Song "The Obvious Child." Available Now on Warner Bros. Cassettes, Compact Discs and Records.

Billy Gibbons

Did you ever play with Stevie Ray?

Of course. [ZZ Top's] Frank and Dusty grew up with him in Dallas, and just this morning we were talking about the time they went over to see Jimmie. Stevie came in, about age 10. He'd learned his first song and wanted to show it off to Jimmie, and Frank and Dusty sorta went, "Wait a minute—where'd *he* come from?"

We played at a club in Dallas called Arthur; this was when not disco, but disco*thèque*, was emerging. '68, maybe '69. Stevie was just begging to play. He got up there, and performed Freddie King's "Hideaway" in a fashion that was just remarkable: a 14-year-old kid doing this great version of some great Texas blues. Everyone in the house said, "Well, there he goes."

We were all in Houston when we heard about it. The phone started ringing about eight or nine in the morning, friends of ours trying to piece together all these stories that were coming in. It was just one of those dulling days. We love him and it's a sad, sad thing.

ZZ Top's new album, Recycler, *sounds much bluesier than the previous two.*

Well, I'm glad you're hearing that. We've spent the last half of our career recording in Memphis and there's something about the town, I don't know if it's a now-embedded part of its tradition or what, but you show up and you just start doin' it.

But you cut Eliminator *and* Afterburner *in Memphis too.*

True. There was just something this time about being there in the summertime, with the heat. For us, this recording marked a definite return to roots, with some bark and leaves as well, as Frank [Beard] put it. Heavy on the roots. This album has been labeled polyrhythmic perversity.

I'm wondering if you guys, having sold millions of records in the last few years, felt freer to go back to the blues.

Definitely. There was also quite a bit of addressing the longstanding ZZ Top fans who prefer their plate filled with more of a rootsy approach. ZZ Top, people say, went from being a garage band to being a techno-garage band; now we're back to being a garage band-garage band. We feel good about it and we're gonna have fun playing the music.

Did you want to prove to critics that you weren't only thinking about selling records, but had the balls to play the harder stuff?

Yes. Yeah. I mean, if we hadn't, we'd probably have had to become a rap band. I don't know if that would've worked for us.

But it would be unfair to jump on that whole recent period of ours. Even though we've chosen to maybe sidestep it, technology has not been ignored and abandoned. Probably four out of 10 tracks on *Recycler* have electronic keyboards. The fun part about modern music is that technology has gained a speed in which *no* one can keep up with how to operate the stuff. If you can approach a machine with total naiveté... Frank Zappa said, "First throw the manual away, then turn the machine on and see what happens."

"THE BLUES IS MAKING ITS WAY INTO BMWs. I GUARANTEE YOU: YOU WILL HEAR ROBERT JOHNSON'S ALBUM AT FRAT PARTIES, I MEAN, THIS IS GONNA BE THE NEW DEFINITION OF COOL."

We all approach the monolith with somewhat of a comical sense. Like three chimpanzees twiddling knobs. Three chimps and three chords and we're alright.

Do you have a keyboardist onstage?

Umm...there's a great furor right now about what's being labelled "canned music." We did our fair share of experimenting with different sequencers and with different approaches to just being entertainers, and I don't think the jury's back in on that one yet. Certainly with this new record we're freer to just go out there and bash. And slammin's always been ZZ's forte, anyway.

But you'll have the keyboard stuff on tape?

Yeah. Last tour we got lucky because the compositions were simplistic. Dusty [Hill] generally handled the keyboard work. We prefer to do it live. It's no different than being an auto mechanic. If the tire jack breaks, you can't fix the tire. If the keyboard decides to blow a fuse, you can't do it. But as long as the equipment's there, we'll take a stab at it. I guess we would lean toward the Fairlight, which can be set up to be triggered by the drummer. You make the sequencer a slave to the band rather than vice versa. We haven't fully decided what we'll do. I just wanna make sure the tire jack doesn't break when we're tryin' to fix the tire.

Might going back to a bluesier sound alienate those who were turned on to you by the last two albums?

Absolutely not. Things like this [holds up Robert Johnson's *Complete Recordings*] are making their way into BMWs. I guarantee you: You will see this at frat parties, I mean, this is gonna be the new definition of cool. Within our own generation we've seen an about-face to where this can be a prized possession. And that's good.

ZZ Top are proud members of that eccentric group that attempts to interpret this art form. The best we can. Muddy Waters once said to us, "You don't have to be the best one, just be a good one." And at this point, that's just what we're tryin' to do.

—Tony Scherman

Photograph: Dave Lewis/LFI

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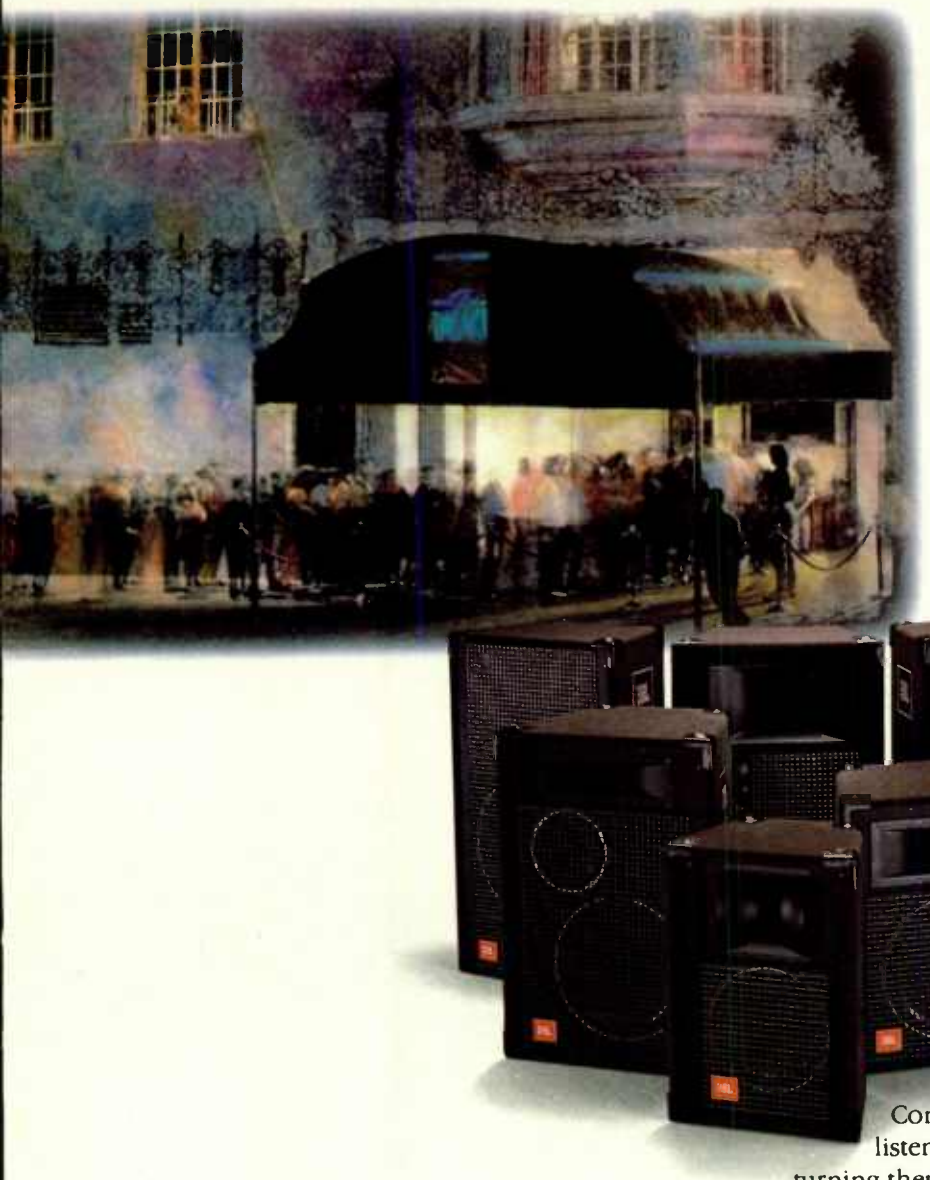

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LETTERS

Empress' New Pose

SINCERE THANKS for publishing such an outstanding interview with Sinéad O'Connor (Aug. '90). Bill Flanagan talks of the undefinable electricity from the likes of a Who concert, and yet here's the same excitement generated from a magazine article!

Caris Arkin
Brooklyn, NY

SINÉAD O'CONNOR is appealing not only because of her startling beauty and her versatile voice, but because she has never given anyone reason to believe otherwise, as so many "rock stars" do these days with their likenesses scattered throughout every shopping mall in the country: dolls, buttons, bracelets, watches! Give me a break! These have nothing to do with music!

Anya Marina
Cupertino, CA

I WAS SURPRISED by Sinéad O'Connor's statement on how an artist does not make money from CDs, but from vinyl and cassettes. And the companies want to outlaw vinyl! I say ban the CD! Box and all!

Mike
Detroit, MI

I'M 37 YEARS OLD. Sinéad O'Connor isn't 37 years old. I've been playing on the New York City streets and subways for 13 years. Sinéad O'Connor played on the subway maybe two weeks. Sinéad O'Connor played the Beacon Theatre in New York last year. I played in front of the Beacon Theatre when she played. She made I don't know how much. I made 10 bucks. Sinéad O'Connor doesn't realize the record companies behave arrogantly because of people like me, not people like her. The best thing that ever happened to me was when I did the lead vocal on the new Hawaiian Punch commercial. Sinéad O'Connor would never do a Hawaiian Punch commercial. She says, "They [artists] should tell the record companies to go fuck themselves. They'll get dropped. So what? There's *always* a better deal to be had somewhere else." Oh yeah? You ask, where would the record people be without us? *Us* is part of the problem. There is an oversupply of us. Unsung and unsigned talent is common. You are someone with the right stuff, with the right goods at the right time. To say, "There's always something better out there" is naive. Some people don't have so many options. So record execs, when Sinéad O'Connor tells you to go fuck yourselves, call us up!

Charles Telerant
New York, NY

IF SINÉAD O'CONNOR doesn't want to be treated like a rock star, then she ought to follow these simple steps: 1) stop making records; 2) stop making videos; 3) stop giving interviews to *Musician*.

L. Johnson
Lancaster, CA

IF SINÉAD O'CONNOR is so reluctant to pay the price of fame, why has her face graced the covers of almost every major music magazine over the last few months? She reminds me of the old saying—"everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die."

John Kirby
Boone, NC

SINÉAD O'CONNOR is just another example of naiveté disguised as art: an updated definition of a "haircut act." Her pontificating about the music industry shows that she cut more classes than just music theory.

John Casolary
Shingletown, CA

IF SINÉAD O'CONNOR *really* believed in what she professes, she could have a far-reaching impact on the bloated recording industry—she could make the heroes of her own nation very proud. The ball's in her court.

Mark Kemp
Brooklyn, NY

POOR BABY! If we don't stop treating her like a rock star, Sinéad O'Connor threatens to stop making records. Maybe I could help get her a job at my favorite bar. Hey waitress, where's my beer?

Terry Bollknight
New Ellenton, SC

Hiatt Report

I HAD NEVER listened to John Hiatt or Sinéad O'Connor when I read your August issue. Hiatt impressed me with his integrity and intelligence, while O'Connor seemed self-righteous and callow, completely lacking a sense of humor, but with plenty of silly crybaby polemic to spare. I bought their latest albums, and...well, I'm listening to a lot of Hiatt these days.

Yilew Azad Mott
Ellerbe, NC

ALTHOUGH IT IS inspiring to read about anyone's recovery from addiction, I must point out that Alcoholics Anonymous is based on anonymity. If John Hiatt goes out tomorrow and gets drunk, if would be easy for the public to conclude that it doesn't work. Also, David Crosby stating "I hear you went through AA" is misleading. Recovery is a lifelong process. One does not "go through AA" and somehow graduate and get a diploma.

Peter F. Sosnoski
Warrenton, VA

YEARS AGO Columbia ran an ad for Bob Dylan with the slogan "Nobody sings Dylan like Dylan." The same might be said for John Hiatt. Though many artists have tried (Nick Lowe, Dave Edmunds, Ry Cooder et al.), none of these have the fire that Hiatt brings to his songs.

Tim Goodall
San Francisco, CA

ONLY ON JOHN HIATT'S last three albums did I wake up and notice what great music this man puts out. It's nice to see you too are waking up to his fine talent.

Kevin McGauley
Manchester, NH

Hey, that was our fifth *John Hiatt article.–Ed.*

Let Love Rule

WHILE YOUR ARTICLE about World Party gave me an excellent insight into one of my favorite new bands, I was a little bothered by Karl Wallinger's negative comments concerning Lenny Kravitz. Kravitz is not a neo-hippie and either is Wallinger. Besides, Wallinger is the one who chants "L-O-V-E" in one of the tracks on *Goodbye Jumbo*—if that isn't "neo-hippie" fashion, I don't know what is.

Scott P. Collins
Matteson, IL

Errratta

The June Robert Plant cover photo was taken by Ralph P. Fitzgerald.

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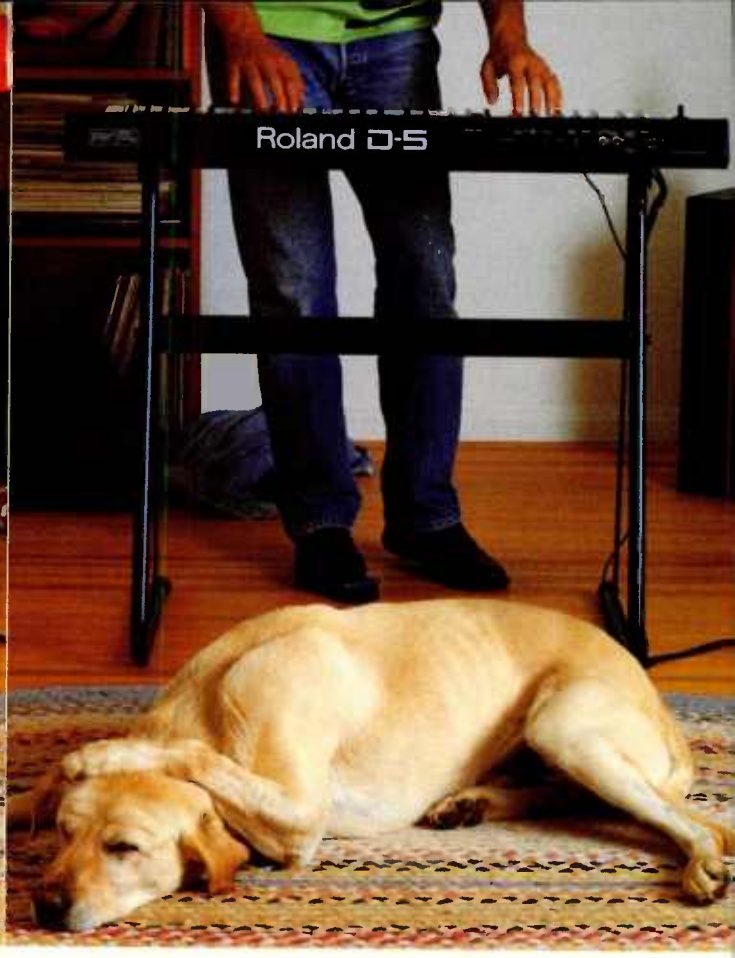

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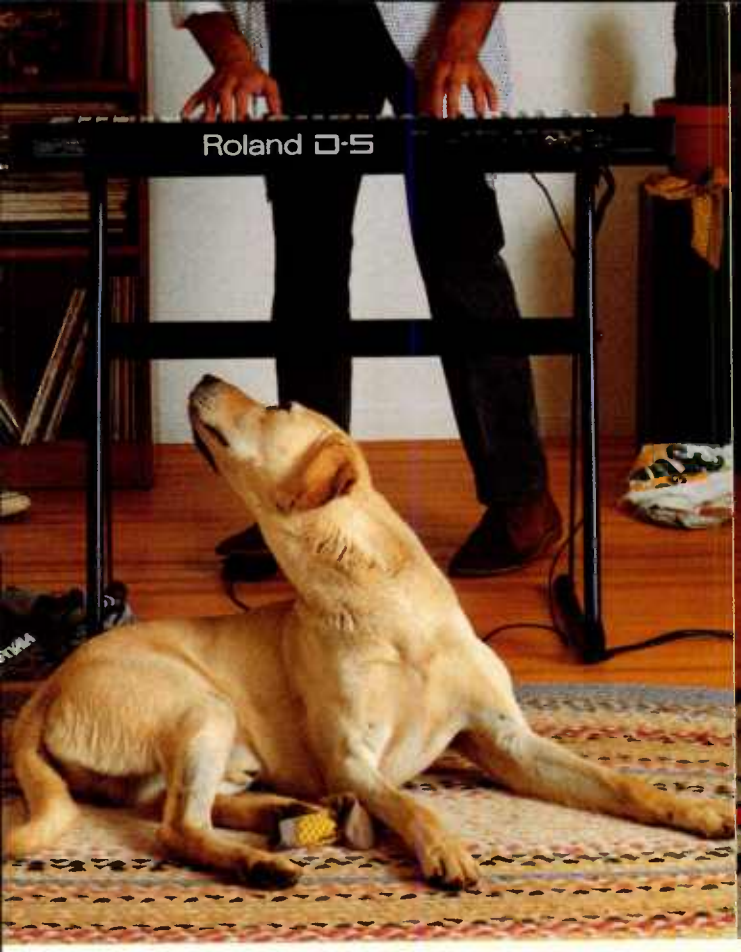

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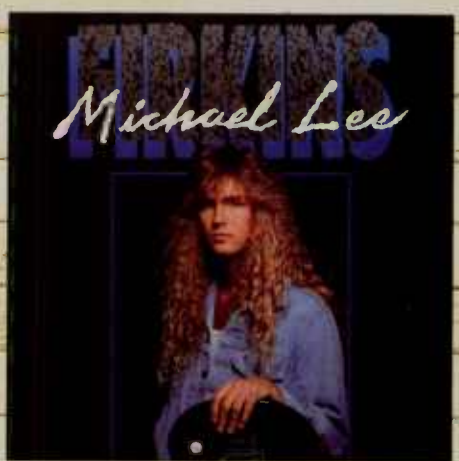

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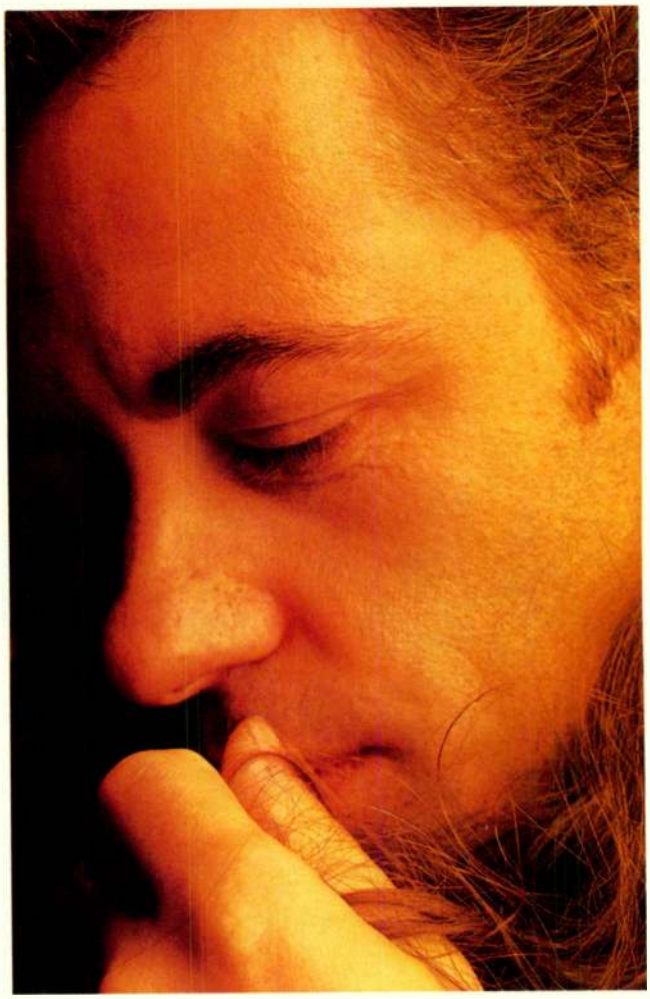


"I'M REALLY SORT OF thrilled with myself, he said immodestly, because it seems to work," volunteers Bob Geldof, proclaiming and mocking his enthusiasm for *The Végetarians of Love*. Those expecting the Boomtown Rats revisited will be surprised by Geldof's new groove: Leading a crew that includes members of the Penguin Cafe Orchestra and fellow ex-Rat Pete Briquette, he turns in a loose acoustic set distinguished by rough edges, rather than the electric pop of old.

"They're simple songs, because I was making them up as I went along," Geldof notes. "You can hear me call out chords; 'middle eight, coming up' actually got into the lyrics of one track. And if something didn't work after three takes, we'd move on to something else."

This desire for spontaneity, not to mention the fiddles and accordions, followed a visit to Bayou country, where Geldof dug Cajun dance bands. "What struck me was their exuberance and joie de vivre. I wanted to do something with that same spirit."

He admits *Végetarians* was also a reaction to the dour, overproduced sound of his previous album, *Deep in the Heart of Nowhere*. "That was my first time without the Rats, and after more than two years of working on Live Aid, I wasn't sure I could do music anymore. It sounds exactly the way I felt: frightened, tired and confused."

Speaking of Live Aid, Geldof observes, "John Lennon once said you can be benefited to death. I wouldn't use the medium of the giant concert again, because I feel it's been devalued through overuse. But there are other ways to use rock to focus attention on an issue." For the moment, Geldof's most interested in focusing attention on *Végetarians*, "in the desperate hope that radio will play it. Maybe I'll change my name to Def Geldof or Led Geldof."

—Jon Young

MAZZY STAR

Hermit meets introvert

WHEN SONGWRITER/GUITARIST David Roback met Hope Sandoval, he recalls that "she was one of those people who hang around in the shadowed corners of a club, watching the band intently. Just a set of eyes, like a cat."

The quietly mysterious Sandoval was also half of the folk duo Going Home, for which Roback produced an album in 1984. Now Sandoval is his partner in the college-chart-topping Mazzy Star. An unlikely success not only because their delicate blues, country and psychedelic-derived music has an almost spiritual ring, but because Roback had given up rock 'n' roll bands twice before.

He'd been a founder of Rain Parade, which helped spark Los Angeles' so-called paisley underground. Roback left to chase his electric demons when Rain Parade took a folkie turn. Intent on becoming a musical hermit, he moved to Berkeley and helped found Opal, a group whose gently-fuzztoned sensibility burnished Roback's rough edges. When Opal ended in 1986, Roback planned to return to painting, but was drawn back by Sandoval's writing. Two years of collaborating resulted in Mazzy Star's *She Hangs Brightly*, a collection of songs that dart between sweetness and frustration, sung in Sandoval's slight Southern twang. Roback builds the arrangements, played live by a quintet, around Sandoval's sincere alto and his own painterly guitar.

"It's nice to work with somebody who's completely into what they're doing," Roback says of Sandoval, an introvert who shuns interviews. "She writes songs that are part of strong moods in her life and I think our music is very honest."

—Ted Drozdowski

Photographs: (top) Chris Carroll; (bottom) Ebet Roberts

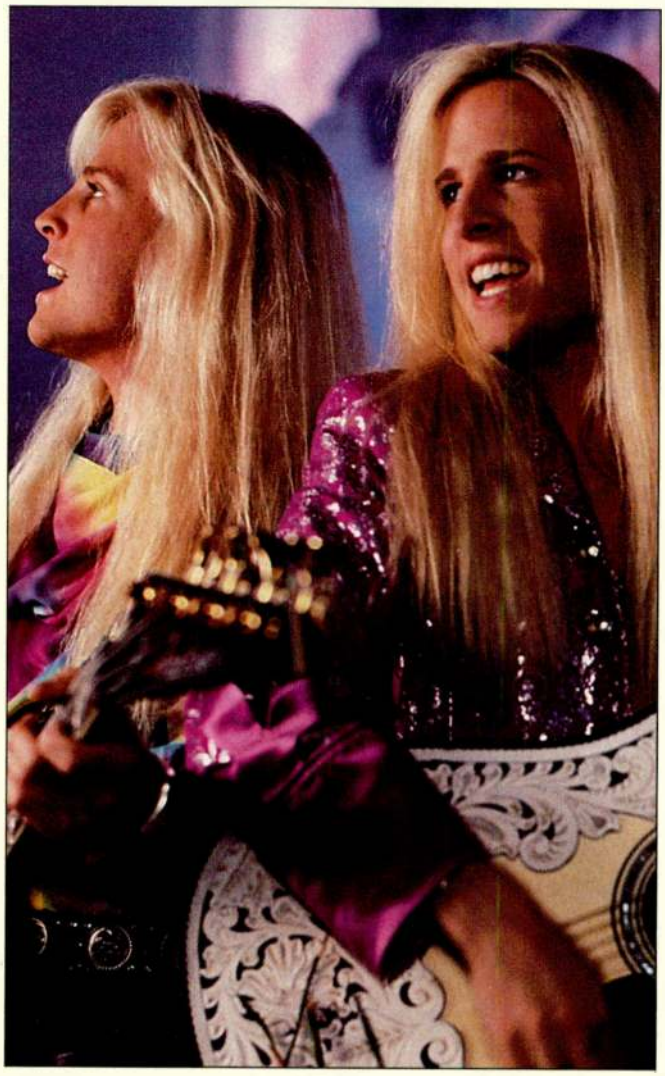
TWO FULL NELSONS

Ozzie's grandsons rock

IT'S AN INTERVIEWER'S nightmare—identical twins at either end of the table. Now let's see, Gunnar's the one with the long blond hair braided and stuffed inside a purple baseball cap, while his older brother (by 45 minutes) Matthew is wearing an Axl Rose–style bandana and lets his similarly colored mane flow over his shoulders. The late Ricky Nelson's 22-year-old sons, whose new album is called *After the Rain*, say they don't mind the confusion.

"We have enough differences in our personalities that we not only complement each other but manage to keep our sanity," says Gunnar.

The Nelsons have been playing in bands since they were 10 years old. "Fortunately, we started at an early age, so we had a lot of time to warm up," says Matthew. "When our father died, we had to grow into men real quick. We learned life was not something you took for granted."



It was a lesson instilled in them by their dad, who learned the hard way about living up to the public's expectations.

"He was a symbol of people's youth, their lost childhood," adds Matthew. "And they didn't want to give that up."

"The Nelson family has been through an awful lot of shit," adds Gunnar. "And we're the first generation that won't take it. The one thing Pop taught us with 'Garden Party' was, you can take a negative situation and turn it into a positive."

The Nelsons essay a melodic AOR sound whose only relation to their father's country-rock is in its vocal harmonies. They're more into Boston and Queen than the Eagles and the Flying Burrito Brothers.

"The Nelson family goes back seven generations of entertainers," explains Gunnar. "Our father did rhythm and blues after *his* father was a big-band leader. But, you're right, there are no country harmonies in our songs. After all, this *isn't* Wilson Phillips!"—*Roy Trakin*

PRESUMED INNOCENT

THE PAYOLA TRIAL of independent promotion man Joe Isgro was unexpectedly thrown out of federal court on September 4. Judge James M. Ideman blasted federal prosecutors for misconduct in concealing evidence from Isgro's defense team. The judge dismissed the charges "with prejudice"—which means that the flustered feds have almost no chance of winning a new trial.

THE GODFATHER, PART II

MEANWHILE BACK AT Black Rock, CBS Records boss Walter Yetnikoff startled friends and enemies by abruptly quitting his job. Yetnikoff, the industry's most flamboyant bigwig, engineered the 1987 sale of CBS Records to Japan's Sony Corp., and was believed to have convinced the Sony shoguns that he was essential to the success of the record company. Yetnikoff (like Joe Isgro) had been bloodied by the bestselling new book *Hit Men*, which tells wild stories about record biz hardball. In late August the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Yetnikoff had signed a new contract with Sony, which gave him two more years at the label—after which he would step down. Yetnikoff denied that report, saying he was in for the long haul. The next week he quit. Rumors flew from coast to coast. Was Yetnikoff depressed by the news that an ex-girlfriend was writing a book that would make *Hit Men* look tame? Was he playing out a secret masterplan to make a fortune in the Sony sale and then get out? Did Sony always intend to suck out Yetnikoff's knowledge and then discard him? Did David Geffen orchestrate the greatest raid since Entebbe? Did Yetnikoff lose a clandestine contest with industry superlawyer Allen Grubman—a contest in which friendships with CBS superstars Michael Jackson and Bruce Springsteen were the chessmen? And what was the role of Yetnikoff's friend, protégé and second-in-command Tommy Mottola? Gossips portrayed Mottola as a) saddened but ready to step into the top spot, b) a lame duck, c) Brutus.

What's the truth? Don't kid yourself—we'll never know.

Photograph: Greg Allen

THE WINANS

Let us cross over

IT'S EASY to criticize the Winans. More gloss than emotion, their jazzy sound seems to reject the best of the powerful black gospel tradition. But it's also easy to understand how they got there. "There's a stigma that goes with gospel," is the way Ron Winans puts it, and considering the meager attention gospel receives compared to its immense influence on popular music, that's an understatement.

The Winans' solution has been hip arrangements, sophisticated harmonies and hot producers. When the four brothers began singing at their grandfather's church in Detroit, their father wanted them to practice the traditional "hard quartet" style like Sam Cooke's Soul Stirrers. "But that was more the music of his day," according to Ron Winans. "Mom was into the softer-type music. So we took the best of both."

The result owed a big debt to Andrae Crouch, one of the few crossover gospel performers during the '70s. "Half his audience was white, half black," according to Winans, "and everybody felt serviced! He had an unsegregated band that was kicking!" With that inspiration, the Winans produced a string of contemporary gospel hits, the best of which was the funky anti-apartheid hit "Let My People Go."

Their latest album, *Return*, continues the crossover search. The first single, "It's Time" (produced by Teddy Riley), is perhaps the first example of gospel hip-hop. "I'm not really interested in rap," Ron Winans admits. "I heard 2 Live Crew and I was flabbergasted! But we had to realize that if we weren't careful, our music would be dated."

Are the Winans still taking flak? "Sure," says Winans. "But we're used to it by now. Long as our inspiration stays intact, there isn't any music we can't use."—*Daniel Wolff*

JUDAS PRIEST WINS SUICIDE SUIT

JUDAS PRIEST guitarist Glenn Tipton's two kids are playing on the set of a video shoot for the band's new album *Painkiller*. It's a family atmosphere that belies the fact that the group just emerged from a $6.2 million lawsuit brought by parents of two teens who killed themselves while allegedly under the influence of Judas Priest's music.

"There are country & western bands which sing about far worse things than Judas Priest," says an indignant Tipton. "Our fans aren't any more fanatical than those for Frank Sinatra or Elvis Presley. Unfortunately, heavy metal is put in a bag by people who are ignorant about it."

The much-publicized Reno, Nevada case concerned the presence of a subliminal message in the song "Better by You, Better Than Me" (not even written by the band) on Judas Priest's 1978 *Stained Class* LP which supposedly urged the listener to "Do it!"—a command taken quite literally by 18-year-old Raymond Belknap and his 20-year-old pal, James Vance, who shot themselves in the heads with a 12-gauge rifle. The parents of both boys filed product liability suits against CBS Records, charges that were dismissed despite the judge's observation that subliminal messages, though inadvertent, could be heard—leaving the door open for further action.

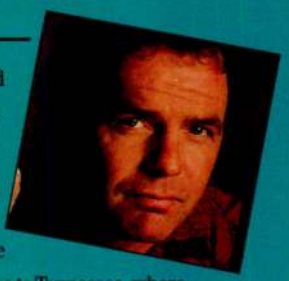
"Yeah, you could hear the sounds," acknowledged lead singer Rob Halford, whose testimony suggested they were the sounds of his breathing. "But the problems were within the family. I feel the parents were coerced into this suit because they genuinely believed it was a way of passing on some of the guilt they felt."

Halford acknowledges Priest has sung about individuals who have no way out, "but we don't say there's no light at the end of the tunnel. Of course, life is cruel and it brings people problems and pain. But we certainly don't advocate suicide as a way out. You have to do whatever needs to be done, but in a sensible, legal way.

"Once you're forced to censor yourself because of some wacko, right-wing group, we're all headed in a terrible direction. You've got to be free to think, write, film, talk or sing about anything. That's the wonderful thing about artistic creativity."

—Roy Trakin

PAT MCLAUGHLIN: Down but not out in Nashville



PAT MCLAUGHLIN'S Capitol debut album was my favorite record of 1988. His second, *Get Out and Stay Out*, is of the same caliber: witty, tuneful and soulful, John Hiatt without the mannerisms. Unfortunately, you may never hear it. The album's title was a portent of McLaughlin's tenure at Capitol—along with some two dozen other artists, he was dropped when the label's leadership changed hands last year. McLaughlin limped home to Tennessee, where he's piecing things together.

"I was lost in that Capitol shuffle. I doubt if anything'll happen to my record. It's very disheartening; I'm just at square one." Between gigging in Nashville and opening on the road for the Subdudes, he's cutting new songs with engineer/producer David Ferguson, hoping to shop them around. As for the ill-fated *Get Out and Stay Out*, "It's weird, not knowing if anything'll ever happen to it. I feel like I can't get too attached to it, like I should put it in the past." A pity—it's great music.—*Tony Scherman*

Photograph (top): Ron Wolfson

THE MUSICIAN CHARTS

Top 100 Albums

The first number indicates the position of the album this month, the second its position last month.

1 • 1	**M.C. Hammer**	*Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* Capitol
2 • 2	**Wilson Phillips**	*Wilson Phillips*/SBK
3 • 25	**Poison**	*Flesh and Blood*/Enigma
4 • 10	**Mariah Carey**	*Mariah Carey*/Columbia
5 • 13	**Anita Baker**	*Compositions*/Elektra
6 • 4	**New Kids on the Block**	*Step by Step*/Columbia
7 • 7	**Bell Biv Devoe**	*Poison*/MCA
8 • 6	**Keith Sweat**	*I'll Give All My Love to You* Vintertainment
9 • 5	**Soundtrack**	*Pretty Woman*/EMI
10 • 3	**Madonna**	*I'm Breathless*/Sire
11 • 12	**Michael Bolton**	*Soul Provider*/Columbia
12 • 8	**Johnny Gill**	*Johnny Gill*/Motown
13 • 9	**Depeche Mode**	*Violator*/Sire
14 • 16	**Faith No More**	*The Real Thing*/Slash
15 • —	**Winger**	*In the Heart of the Young*/Atlantic
16 • 15	**Phil Collins**	*. . .But Seriously*/Atlantic
17 • 14	**Heart**	*Brigade*/Capitol
18 • 11	**Sinéad O'Connor**	*I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got*/Ensign
19 • 19	**Aerosmith**	*Pump*/Geffen
20 • 44	**The Time**	*Pandemonium*/Paisley Park
21 • —	**Luke Featuring the 2 Live Crew**	*Banned in the U.S.A.*/Luke
22 • 31	**Slaughter**	*Stick It to Ya*/Chrysalis
23 • 18	**Billy Idol**	*Charmed Life*/Chrysalis
24 • —	**Jon Bon Jovi**	*Blaze of Glory/Young Guns II* Mercury
25 • 20	**En Vogue**	*Born to Sing*/Atlantic
26 • 21	**Janet Jackson**	*Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation* A&M
27 • 64	**Nelson**	*After the Rain*/DGC
28 • 24	**Mötley Crüe**	*Dr. Feelgood*/Elektra
29 • 23	**Bruce Hornsby & the Range**	*A Night on the Town*/RCA
30 • 17	**Paula Abdul**	*Shut Up and Dance*/Virgin
31 • 34	**Soundtrack**	*Days of Thunder*/DGC
32 • 40	**Snap**	*World Power*/Arista
33 • 22	**Steve Vai**	*Passion and Warfare*/Relativity
34 • 47	**Harry Connick, Jr.**	*We Are in Love*/Columbia
35 • 29	**Jeff Healey Band**	*Hell to Pay*/Arista
36 • 36	**Taylor Dayne**	*Can't Fight Fate*/Arista
37 • 28	**Don Henley**	*The End of the Innocence*/Geffen
38 • 26	**Lisa Stansfield**	*Affection*/Arista
39 • 27	**Ice Cube**	*AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* Priority
40 • 33	**Digital Underground**	*Sex Packets*/Tommy Boy
41 • 37	**Bad Company**	*Holy Water*/Atco
42 • 30	**Bonnie Raitt**	*Nick of Time*/Capitol
43 • 42	**The Sundays**	*Reading, Writing and Arithmetic* DGC
44 • 45	**Van Morrison**	*The Best of Van Morrison*/Mercury
45 • 51	**The Lightning Seeds**	*Cloudcuckooland*/MCA
46 • 38	**After 7**	*After 7*/Virgin
47 • 52	**Damn Yankees**	*Damn Yankees*/Warner Bros.
48 • 54	**Garth Brooks**	*Garth Brooks*/Capitol
49 • 41	**The 2 Live Crew**	*As Nasty as They Wanna Be* Luke
50 • —	**Cheap Trick**	*Busted*/Epic
51 • 35	**Public Enemy**	*Fear of a Black Planet*/Def Jam
52 • 58	**Clint Black**	*Killin' Time*/RCA
53 • —	**Boogie Down Productions**	*Edutainment*/Jive
54 • 48	**Tony! Toni! Toné!**	*The Revival*/Wing
55 • 32	**Soul II Soul**	*Vol. II—1990—A New Decade* Virgin
56 • 93	**Concrete Blonde**	*Bloodletting*/I.R.S.
57 • 71	**Allman Brothers Band**	*Seven Turns*/Epic
58 • 75	**The Black Crowes**	*Shake Your Money Maker*/Def American
59 • 39	**Eric B. & Rakim**	*Let the Rhythm Hit 'Em*/MCA
60 • 56	**The Kentucky Headhunters**	*Pickin' on Nashville*/Mercury
61 • 53	**New Kids on the Block**	*Hangin' Tough*/Columbia
62 • 50	**Gloria Estefan**	*Cuts Both Ways*/Epic
63 • 46	**Paula Abdul**	*Forever Your Girl*/Virgin
64 • —	**Vixen**	*Rev It Up*/EMI
65 • 100	**Bonnie Raitt**	*The Bonnie Raitt Collection* Warner Bros.
66 • 62	**John Hiatt**	*Stolen Moments*/A&M
67 • 57	**Soundtrack**	*The Little Mermaid*/Walt Disney
68 • 70	**New Kids on the Block**	*New Kids on the Block*/Columbia
69 • 99	**Kid Frost**	*Hispanic Causing Panic*/Virgin
70 • 72	**Eric Clapton**	*Journeyman*/Duck
71 • 43	**Milli Vanilli**	*The Remix Album*/Arista
72 • —	**Bob Marley & the Wailers**	*Legend*/Tuff Gong
73 • 63	**Basia**	*London Warsaw New York*/Epic
74 • 49	**L.A. Guns**	*Cocked & Loaded*/Vertigo
75 • 91	**Billy Joel**	*Storm Front*/Columbia
76 • —	**Soundtrack**	*Ghost*/Varese Sarabande
77 • —	**Vince Gill**	*When I Call Your Name*/MCA
78 • —	**D-Nice**	*Call Me D-Nice*/Jive
79 • 86	**Stevie B**	*Love & Emotion*/LMR
80 • —	**Maxi Priest**	*Bonafide*/Charisma
81 • 73	**Linda Ronstadt (fea. A. Neville)**	*Cry Like a Rainstorm, Howl Like the Wind*/Elektra
82 • 61	**Various Artists**	*We're All in the Same Gang*/Warner Bros.
83 • —	**Various Artists**	*Nobody's Child—Romanian Angel Appeal*/Warner Bros.
84 • 83	**World Party**	*Goodbye Jumbo*/Ensign
85 • 78	**Troop**	*Attitude*/Atlantic
86 • —	**Prince**	*Graffiti Bridge*/Paisley Park
87 • 65	**Andrew Dice Clay**	*The Day the Laughter Died*/Def American
88 • 69	**Alabama**	*Pass It on Down*/RCA
89 • —	**Kyper**	*Tic-Tac-Toe*/Atlantic
90 • 60	**Babyface**	*Tender Lover*/Solar
91 • —	**The Neville Brothers**	*Brother's Keeper*/A&M
92 • 59	**George Strait**	*Livin' It Up*/MCA
93 • —	**Special Ed**	*Legal*/Profile
94 • 85	**Tyler Collins**	*Girls Nite Out*/RCA
95 • 55	**Soundtrack**	*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*/SBK
96 • 77	**Mellow Man Ace**	*Escape from Havana*/Capitol
97 • —	**Whispers**	*More of the Night*/Capitol
98 • 68	**Lita Ford**	*Stiletto*/RCA
99 • —	**Jane's Addiction**	*Ritual de Lo Habitual*/Warner Bros.
100 • —	**Iggy Pop**	*Brick by Brick*/Virgin

The Musician *album chart is produced by the* Billboard *chart department for* Musician, *and reflects the combined points for all album reports gathered by the* Billboard *computers in the month of August. The record company chart is based on the top 200 albums. The concert chart is based on* Amusement Business *Box Score reports for August 1990. All charts are copyright 1990 by BPI Incorporated.*

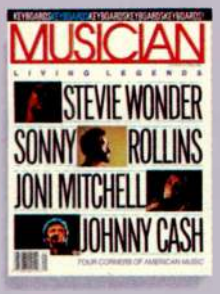
Top Concert Grosses

1 Billy Joel *Giants Stadium, East Rutherford, NJ*/August 18 & 19	**$3,390,000**
2 Depeche Mode, Electronic, Nitzer Ebb *Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles*/August 4-5	**$2,408,750**
3 Eric Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughan & Double Trouble, Robert Cray Band *Alpine Valley Music Theatre, East Troy, WI*/August 25 & 26	**$2,026,630**
4 Phil Collins *The Spectrum, Philadelphia*/August 22-25	**$1,617,275**
5 New Kids on the Block, Rick Wes, Perfect Gentlemen *Astrodome, Houston*/August 20	**$1,085,675**
6 Phil Collins *Palace of Auburn Hills, Auburn Hills, MI*/August 16-17	**$1,026,950**
7 Janet Jackson, Chuckii Booker *Capital Centre, Landover, MD*/August 10-11, 13	**$1,019,473**
8 Phil Collins *Meadowlands Arena, East Rutherford, NJ*/August 10-11	**$969,261**
9 Phil Collins *Montreal Forum, Montreal*/August 13	**$926,719**
10 Phil Collins *Richfield Coliseum, Richfield, OH*/August 19-20	**$921,575**

Top Labels

1	**Columbia**
2	**Capitol**
3	**Atlantic**
4	**Arista**
5	**MCA**
6	**Virgin**
7	**Elektra**
8	**Sire**
9	**DGC**
10	**RCA**
11	**Epic**
12	**Warner Bros.**
13	**Chrysalis**
14	**Mercury**
15	**SBK**
16	**A&M**
17	**Geffen**
18	**EMI**
19	**Enigma**
20	**Luke**

33
The Clash
Ronald Shannon Jackson



115
Stevie Wonder
Sonny Rollins, Joni Mitchell, Johnny Cash

99
Boston
Kinks, Year in Rock '86

84
John Cougar Mellencamp
Bryan Ferry, Maurice White

105
John Coltrane
Springsteen, Replacements

104
Springsteen
Progressive Percussion

109
George Harrison
Mick Jagger, Crazy Horse

71
Heavy Metal
Dream Syndicate, George Duke

118
Pink Floyd
New Order, Smithereens

BACK ISSUES

37... **Reggae,** The Rolling Stones, Rickie Lee Jones
45... **Willie Nelson,** John McLaughlin, the Motels
64... **Stevie Wonder,** Reggae 1984, Ornette Coleman
67... **Thomas Dolby,** Chet Baker, Alarm, Marcus Miller
70... **Peter Wolf,** King Crimson, Bass/Drum Special
71... **Heavy Metal,** Dream Syndicate, George Duke
77... **John Fogerty,** Marsalis/Hancock, Los Lobos
93... **Peter Gabriel,** Steve Winwood, Lou Reed
94... **Jimi Hendrix,** The Cure, 38 Special
99... **Boston,** Kinks, Year in Rock '86
101... **Psychedelic Furs,** Elton John, Miles Davis
102... **Robert Cray,** Los Lobos, Simply Red
104... **Springsteen,** Progressive Percussion
106... **David Bowie,** Peter Wolf, Hüsker Dü
108... **U2,** Tom Waits, Squeeze
112... **McCartney,** Bass Special, Buster Poindexter
113... **Robert Plant,** INXS, Wynton Marsalis
115... **Stevie Wonder, Sonny Rollins, Joni Mitchell, Johnny Cash**
116... **Sinéad O'Connor,** Neil Young, Tracy Chapman
117... **Jimmy Page,** Leonard Cohen, Lloyd Cole
118... **Pink Floyd,** New Order, Smithereens
119... **Billy Gibbons,** Santana/Shorter, Vernon Reid
120... **Keith Richards,** Steve Forbert, Crowded House
121... **Prince,** Steve Winwood, Randy Newman
122... **Guns N' Roses,** Midnight Oil, Glyn Johns
123... **The Year in Music,** Metallica, Jack Bruce
124... **Replacements,** Fleetwood Mac, Lyle Lovett
125... **Elvis Costello,** Bobby Brown, Jeff Healey
126... **Lou Reed,** John Cale, Joe Satriani
127... **Miles Davis,** Fine Young Cannibals, XTC
128... **Peter Gabriel,** Charles Mingus, Drum Special
129... **The Who,** The Cure, Ziggy Marley
130... **10,000 Maniacs,** John Cougar Mellencamp, Jackson Browne
131... **Jeff Beck,** Lauro Nyro, Billy Sheehan
132... **Don Henley,** Rolling Stones, Bob Marley
133... **The '80s,** Studio Special
134... **The Grateful Dead,** Stevie Ray Vaughan, Paul Kelly

117
Jimmy Page
Leonard Cohen, Lloyd Cole

112
McCartney
Bass Special, Buster Poindexter

86
Joni Mitchell
Simple Minds, Hall & Oates

114
John Lennon
James Taylor, Robyn Hitchcock

116
Sinéad O'Connor
Neil Young, Tracy Chapman

135... **Aerosmith,** Acoustic Guitar Special
136... **Eric Clapton,** Kate Bush, Soundgarden
137... **George Harrison,** Kinks, Abdullah Ibrahim
138... **Tom Petty,** Lenny Kravitz, Rush
139... **Paul McCartney,** Cecil Taylor, Kronos Quartet
140... **Robert Plant,** Suzanne Vega, Drum Special
141... **Jimi Hendrix,** David Bowie, Bob Clearmountain
142... **Sinéad O'Connor,** John Hiatt, World Party
143... **Steve Vai,** Michael Stipe, Guitar Special
144... **INXS,** The Nevilles, Lou Reed/Vaclav Havel

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134 135 136 137
138 139 140 141
142 143 144

MO' BRANFORD BLUES

The Elder Marsalis Doesn't Fit Easy Slots

By Geoff Ossias

BRANFORD MARSALIS, SANS SAXOPHONE, blew gently into a bottle of pineapple orange seltzer, playing along with the soft jazz on the radio. The 30-year-old horn player was lying on a plush leather couch in the slick offices of his Broadway publicity agency, talking about his two latest endeavors, *Crazy People Music* and the soundtrack for Spike Lee's *Mo' Better Blues*. He was dressed casually, a sneakered step down from his impeccable onstage spiff. He could have been any muscular street kid, in red basketball shoes, a baseball jacket and waterproof porkpie hat nattily pulled down below his eyes. The sax man wasted no time in jumping into the fray, lambasting jazz musicians who water down their music just to cash in on a population of uninformed taste buds.

"Certain jazz musicians who turn to pop try to combine the two, which is total bullshit. Don't pull the toils of 80 years of musicians down into the drudgery just because you want to make money...I play 'em both. One requires a very different level of intellect and musical skill. Which is not to say you don't have pop musicians who have that intellect. Peter Gabriel is a perfect example. But then again, Milli Vanilli is a perfect example of somebody who intellectually could never be a jazz musician."

As a bandleader, Marsalis has released six jazz recordings, five since he broke away from his brother Wynton in 1985. He's also recorded *Dream of the Blue Turtles* and *Nothing Like the Sun* with Sting, a Grammy-nominated performance on *Digital Duke*, an album of easy-listening classical pieces, and dozens of session gigs with everyone from Dizzy Gillespie to Tina Turner to Sonny Rollins to the Grateful Dead. Add to the mix three Spike Lee soundtracks, a few bit parts in Lee's films and a significant role in the comedy *Throw Momma from the Train*, and Branford Marsalis turns into one complex creative brew.

Marsalis was born and bred in New Orleans, where his father, a jazz pianist, still lives. The Marsalis brothers, Wynton, Branford and Delfeayo, a producer, are a musical dynasty. Branford, the oldest by a year, moved to Brooklyn in the early '80s. He's leaving his brownstone for a house in Westchester, but the city's been good to him. It hasn't been that long since a 22-year-old unknown playing with Art Blakey stunned the crowd at the Village Gate. It was one of Blakey's best bands, including Branford, Wynton and pianist Kenny Kirkland.

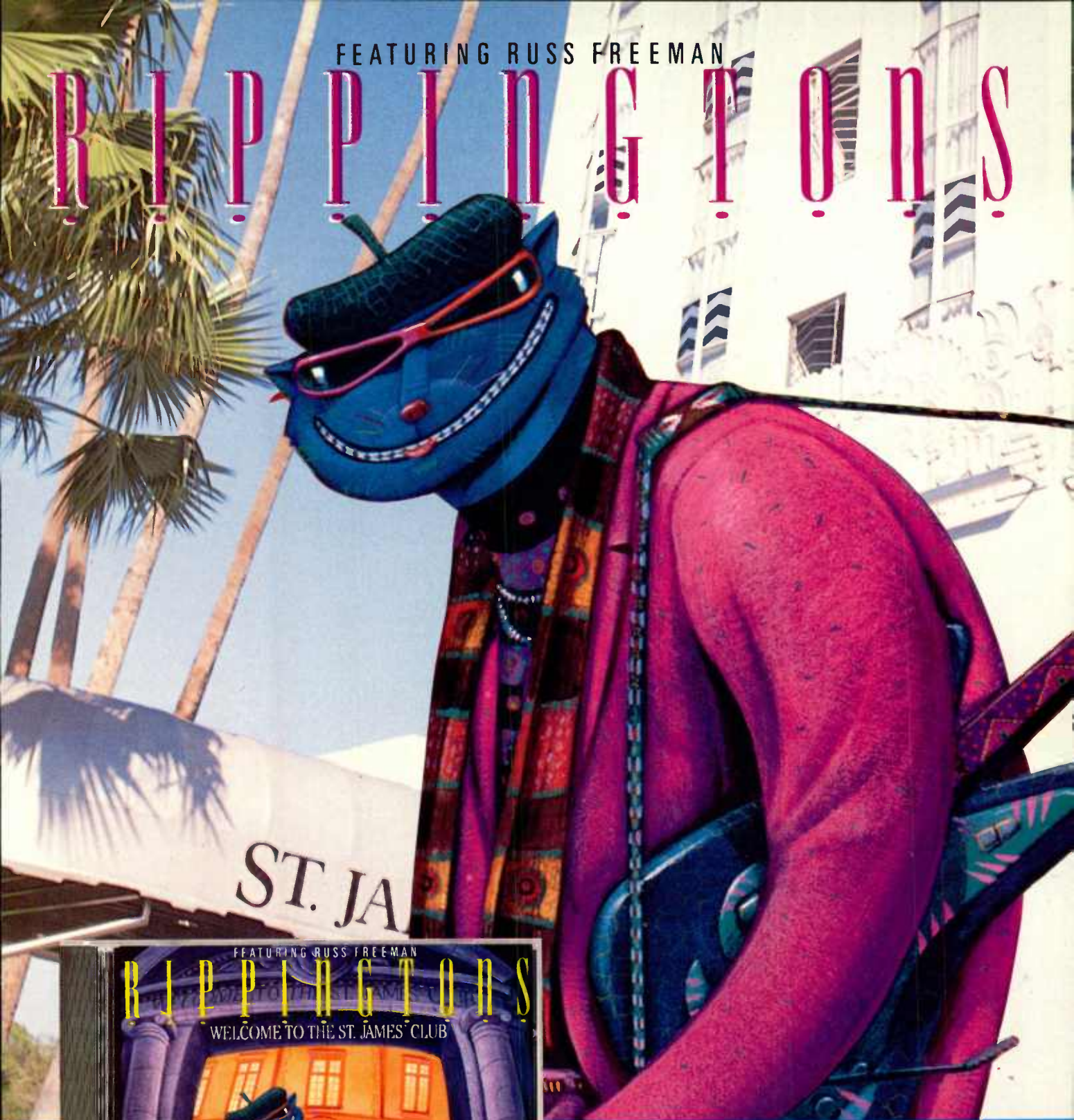
Crazy People Music is the first solo album Marsalis is truly happy with. His smooth, melodic tenor lines tap into the tonal lexicons of a roll call of sax greats: Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane and Wayne Shorter. Backed up by Kirkland, bassist Bob Hurst and childhood friend drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts, Marsalis said he felt the groove as a unit. "Finally I got a band that can play the music I like to play," he said. "On none of those [earlier] records, with the exception of *Random Abstract*, did I have a working band. A studio record always sounds different. Band records are much tighter, more melodic and rhythmically inventive. The performances are much more cohesive. There are a lot of flaws on *Renaissance*, there are a lot of flaws on *Trio Jeepy*. My playing now is a hundred percent better."

Next, Marsalis plans to resurrect the

Photograph: Ken Shung

FEATURING RUSS FREEMAN

RIPPINGTONS



WELCOME TO THE ST. JAMES' CLUB

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blues. He's recording a stylistic retrospective with planned tracks featuring John Lee Hooker, B.B. King and Betty Carter. "I don't like what blues has become. It's like pop music now; very formulated. All the songs are like shuffle blues. There are certain grooves, tempos and experimental feels that are gone now; nobody plays 'em anymore. I'm not Mr. Blues Expert. But listen to John Lee play one of those wild solos; no one's ever taken the time to learn that stuff. The closest for me in terms of feel is Stevie Ray Vaughan. Stevie Ray's slick, but he's got the groove down." Marsalis hooked up with Hooker at the Free Jazz Festival in Brazil. "I heard him and said, 'Jesus, man, this is a style that's almost out of the box.' Then I started copping blues records, bought all his, Bo Diddley, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Little Willie John, Son House, Blind Lemon Jefferson...this is an experimental album on many aspects of the blues tradition, not just bebop. Shuffle blues, delta blues, field songs, slave songs, there's all kinds of stuff you can use."

As a jazz musician, Marsalis said he gets nothing out of pop or soundtracks, even though *Mo' Better Blues* consisted mostly of original jazz tunes written by Marsalis and Lee's father. "It's easier to write a soundtrack," he said. "You know that you're doing music for simple people. The one thing you don't want to do is bombard them with the kind of stuff that we have on *Crazy People Music*. You want to make it so that the average moviegoer that likes *Raiders of the Lost Ark* can come to a movie about a subject they're unfamiliar with and not get totally swamped. So you lighten up the music. You make it simpler, happy-sounding. All the music on *Mo' Better Blues* is happy-sounding. That's probably why it sold 100,000 records so fast."

Oddly enough, "Pop Top 40," the movie's jazzy salute to sex, has a flavor reminiscent of "Scenes in the City," the title track from Marsalis' first solo release. "It could," he said carefully. "Denzel Washington's voice is very similar to the original voice in Charles Mingus' version. But Charles Mingus' version was a jazz version. This version had acoustic instruments, but the beats weren't jazz beats. I got the drum beat from a De La Soul song called 'Daisy Age,' and the bass line was the upside-down version of the bass line on 'Inner City Blues.' So, if you get jazz out of that, it's like CD 101 is jazz..."

Lee and Marsalis are Brooklyn neighbors. Marsalis said working with the Prince of Bedford Stuyvesant is "good, no different from any other working relationship I've had." He admitted that Lee wanted him to play "Shadow," the tenor man in *Mo' Better Blues* whose desire to cross over leads to battles with Washington's purist trumpet player. Branford denied that the film was based, even loosely, on his relationship with Wynton. Marsalis' friendship with Spike Lee

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has grown over the years since *School Daze*, Lee's second flick and the first involving Branford. The sax man respects the filmmaker deeply, but there are a few sticking points. For one, he doesn't appreciate what he sees as Lee's one-sided attitude towards racism.

"There's racism on both sides. That's a fact. But it's so convenient to harp on white America's guilt about black people. I'm not doing that. The shit happened and it was a drag and that's unfortunate, but life goes on. That's the same way I feel every time I see another movie about the Holocaust. Life goes on. I don't think people should forget about it. How often do I need to be reminded is my question. Man will continue to make the same fuck-ups. Man is greedy by nature; history has proved that. I'm saying let's be fair. There's racism on all fronts, so if we're going to talk about racism let's talk about all of it and not just the portion that makes us feel good about ourselves. The biggest problem I have is whoever happens to be in the strongest political position at a given time pushes forth their views and their views solely. So if it's Spike Lee, he'll sit there and say, 'Black people are fucked over, black people can't be racist,' and all these kinds of statements, which I find are very irresponsible. I mean, that kind of shit only perpetuates racism. I don't think I'm a moderate. I just tell the truth. I'm not going to take the typical black position of saying, 'We were slaves; you owe us something.' Hey man, life's a bitch. It happened. Move on."

So Marsalis plays with Sting, the man who told fans to set their loved ones free. But isn't that a jazz man's horn peeping out from behind Public Enemy's call to arms, "Fight the Power"? And listeners can thank Marsalis for the funkiness of "Jazz Thing," *Mo' Better Blues*' prophetic hip-hop history of jazz and the struggle of the black musician, a piece which falls somewhere in between the British bumblebee and the black bombardier. Can Marsalis really endorse all these attitudes at the same time?

"I endorsed what music was being played on them, yes," Marsalis began, clearly pleased by the possibility of a trap. "The words mean nothing to me. They never have and they never will. If a song sounds good, I will play to the best of my abilities, but don't ask me about the words."

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AZTEC CAMERA'S SLOW BUILD

Singer/guitarist Roddy Frame takes the high road

By Scott Isler

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT RODDY Frame? Over the last 10 years he's released four albums of strikingly original songs. The only constant in a "group" called Aztec Camera, Frame writes 'em, sings 'em and plays 'em; even his guitar solos are listenable. He's clearly got talent to burn, and should be in no danger of burning out: Despite a decade in the biz, Frame is all of 26 years old. So why isn't he bigger?

"I think I'm very, very lucky," Frame maintains. "Most of the people I went to school with probably don't get an opportunity to have a nice room overlooking Central Park and lead this kind of lifestyle and travel around and meet people. I know that sounds like what every Miss World contestant wants, but I've got to do that for the last eight or nine years, which is amazing. So I think I'm in a really privileged position."

Frame is indeed in a nice hotel room overlooking New York's Central Park—thanks to his record company. A soft-spoken, wispy-looking Scot, Frame is aware he isn't always an accountant's dream: "I find it really hard to think in terms of a career. I don't seem to make the right career moves all the time, which I'm sure is frustrating for the people I work with. They want to see me be the next big thing, the next Bob Dylan or something. I just glide through."

He's been gliding gracefully since he was a teenager. A native of East Kilbride (just south of Glasgow), Frame didn't waste any time on higher education. Leaving school at 15, he apprenticed in a local band before assembling Aztec Camera as a vehicle for his songs. He'd been playing guitar since he was 10, when he was "completely obsessed" by David Bowie and Mick Ronson, Bowie's flashy guitarist. Three years later Frame's musical allegiance switched to the punk-rock movement then sweeping Britain. By the end of 1978 he was writing his own music—"really naive, toe-curling, cringing political punk songs. They were called things like 'Town Planners.'"

Aztec Camera, which debuted at the beginning of 1980, was originally a "kind of Joy Division pseudo-existentialist band." Frame sang in a "deep, West Coast–American/Mancunian accent going on about how depressing things were." The band's loopy name was inspired by the 1960s psychedelic groups Frame had been soaking up.

A year later they'd evolved a more distinctive sound. Frame's songs took unusual harmonic turns; upbeat rhythms belied the lyrics' somber rush of images; and tremulous vocals earned the band the dubious title of wimp-rockers. ("We're not wimps," Frame protested in 1982. "Just romantics.") First signed to an independent Scottish label, Aztec Camera was seen as spearheading a new generation of musical talent.

A continuing series of personnel upheavals have diminished the band's identity but not Frame's. Although not a prolific songwriter, he's progressed steadily from dazzling cleverness to the emotional directness typified by the title of the last Aztec Camera album, *Love*. This year's *Stray*, Frame says, "is the most spontaneous album I've ever made. A lot of songs I didn't even demo. I would just play them in rehearsal or in the studio; we'd change them as we went along, and then put them down."

Unlike the high-concept *Love*, *Stray* strays both topically and musically. "I really wear my influences on my sleeve this time around," Frame notes. He calls the jazzy ballad "Over My Head" "my tribute to Wes Montgomery." The protesting "How It Is"

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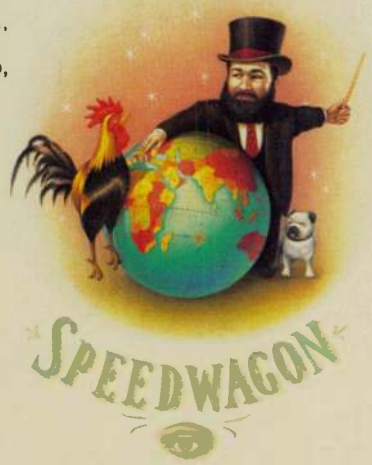

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has a cowbell/guitar kick-off more than reminiscent of the Stones' "Honky Tonk Women." "The Gentle Kind" is a neo-soul showpiece. And if "Good Morning Britain" sounds like a Clash song, it doesn't hurt that former Clash guitarist/singer Mick Jones duets with Frame on the track. "I found out afterward I'd stolen half of the melody line from [the Clash's] 'Rudie Can't Fail,'" Frame admits sheepishly. "I hope [Clash singer/songwriter Joe] Strummer never hears it!"

"Good Morning Britain"'s look at Frame's homeland is clear-eyed but optimistic—much like Frame himself. He had a British hit single off *Love*—eight months after the album came out—but in this country Aztec Camera remains a cult for the cultivated; *Love* sold 70,000 copies, according to the record company. Frame looks at the bright side: "It's quite heartening to see we're getting towards the top of the alternative charts. Although what we're the alternative to, I'm not really sure—the alternative to those successful bands!"

Like his hero Neil Young, Frame is capable of both finely crafted songs and raucously frenetic guitar solos. Come to think of it, Young's is no model career trajectory either.

"I've always felt slightly out of step," Frame says. "And that's okay, it kinda suits me fine. Commercially, and from the record company's point of view—and maybe if I was sensible and ambitious, from my point of view too—it's not a good move.

"Something in me wants to upset the apple cart. I've always had this sense of contrariness. It's a bit childish, I suppose, but there you go, it keeps me going."

FRAMEWORK

RODDY FRAME tries to have it both ways: Most of the time he uses a 1959 cream-colored Stratocaster. Since his favorite guitar *shape* is a Telecaster, though, he also has a modified Schecter Tele with three Seymour Duncan Strat pickups for an out-of-phase sound "but it's not quite the same." On *Stray*'s title cut he played an Ovation stereo six-string, on the ballad "Over My Head" his red Gibson 355—the very same one, trivia fans, Rick Derringer apparently used on the McCoys' "Hang on Sloopy." For amplification Frame boasts that he has "the loudest Marshall 100-watt head that has ever been invented." In recording *Stray* he used it with a Power Soak; "I couldn't hear the track if I was doing an overdub." Onstage he uses a reissue Vox AC30 and, "for the heavier stuff," a MESA/Boogie combo. He thinks he's probably using Ernie Ball strings on this year's tour; Frame isn't a string fetishist, though he breaks more than his share. "The guitar roadie tells me I've been using .010s. They don't bend as well as the light ones but they're harder to break." He's not too big on effects either, confining himself to Boss distortion, Super-Feedback and compression. For his acoustic-guitar sets Frame uses a small Takamine; "it still feels like I'm carrying a bathtub around with me," but he loves the sound. For recording, his acoustic is a Masano, a Japanese Martin copy. At home he has a Yamaha DX7 and Akai S-900; on this tour he has access to a D-550 module and Korg piano, all of which he plays badly. He's also been singing ideas into a Sony microcassette recorder. Home recording equipment includes a Tascam 388 eight-track and pair of Yamaha NS-10 speakers. The latter haven't been the same since Frame's nephews poked them in. "I actually pulled them out with a vacuum cleaner attachment. But they're a little rough."

MUHAL RICHARD ABRAMS' ABSTRACT BLUES

His head is in the sky, his feet in Muddy Waters

By Jim Macnie

MUHAL RICHARD ABRAMS GIGS INFREQUENTLY, avoids interviews, operates in the shadows. Well, you might say, what else would you expect from a middle-aged musician whose work has been perceived as sitting dead center in the jazz avant-garde for the last 30 years? Well, I might say, his music may be heady but it's also hearty, its abstractions anchored by concrete foundings, with a somewhat cosmic facade that belies a very personal earthiness. Musically, Abrams' contexts are boundless: extended solo piano rhapsodies, octets playing slap-and-tickle R&B tunes, trios that inject profound blue notes into chamber music settings. He may call his musical partners "entities," but he treats them as pals, providing them with an opportunity to play some of the most intriguing compositions of our time.

Abrams' talents as a provocateur have been making their mark since mid-'60s Chicago. There, along with partners like Roscoe Mitchell, Anthony Braxton, Leo Smith and Joseph Jarman, Abrams helped propel the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), whose thoroughly original notions scrambled standard definitions of jazz. The effects of the AACM's experimentation continue to resonate in the smartest, most resourceful of today's jazz.

Including Abrams' own. *The Hearinga Suite*, his latest release on the Black Saint label, is so finely detailed, so expansive in its reach and so meticulously carried off, it makes a case for being the consummate Muhalian album. Wholly American in tone and deportment, its grand scheme is carried out by a conglomerate of musicians—including reedists John Purcell and Marty Ehrlich, string players Fred Hopkins and Deidre Murray, brassmen Cecil Bridgewater, Frank Gordon and Dick Griffin, drummer Andrew Cyrille—who have participated in Abrams' music for a decade or more. Each is allowed a curt passage or two to widen the warmth of Abrams' sophisticated voicings. Over the years the composer has refined his notions, clipping away swollen areas, yielding to romanticism...the result is a series of pieces whose expressiveness is palpably stunning.

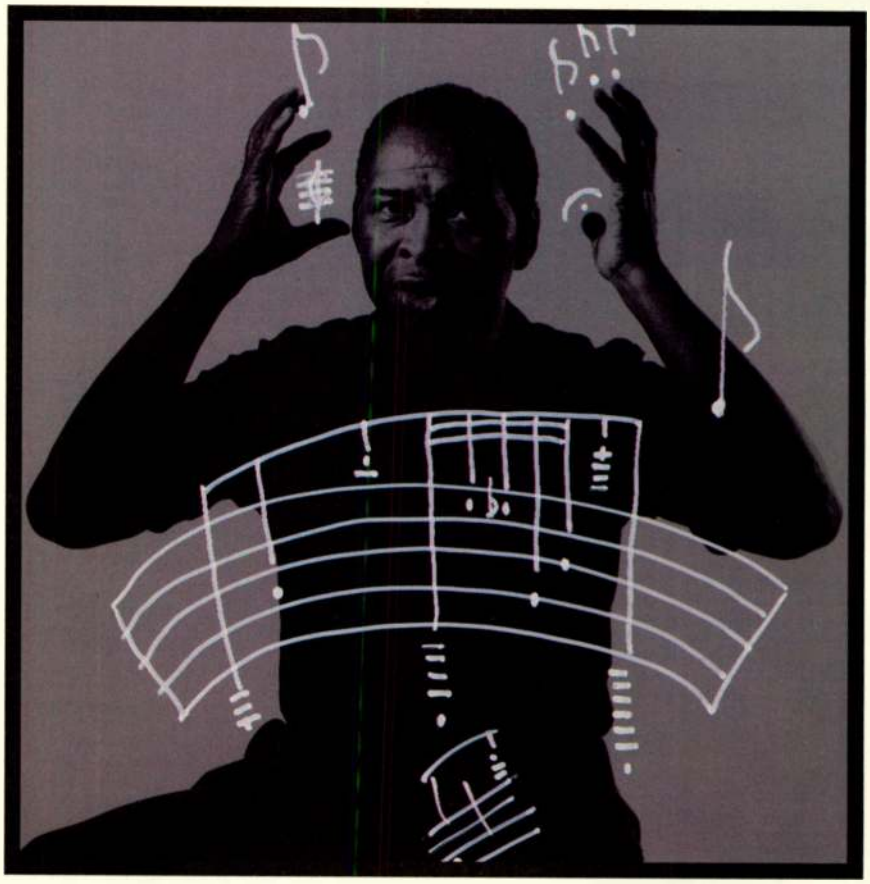
So it was a bit surprising that Abrams, when initially approached, was hesitant to talk about his work. He insists that he has little to say, while citing the past, or "anything historical," for that matter, as taboo topics. Then, sitting on the veranda of his midtown Manhattan apartment, he explained, mused, prompted and straightened out misconceptions of his work. It turned out there was plenty to talk about.

MUSICIAN: *In the '80s, you have been able to maintain a somewhat steady group of players to work on your orchestral music. How has that affected your writing?*

ABRAMS: Certainly I'm stimulated by the fact that I have people who can interpret the music very well. It's encouraging. But I write music the same old way. My contention is that I should write to the fullest limit and then seek out the musicians. Fortunate, yes, that they were close at hand on a regular basis; I'm eternally grateful to them. But nevertheless I would've written the music the same way.

MUSICIAN: *What's the difference between what's in your mind at home while composing and what you hear on the bandstand as a leader?*

ABRAMS: I like to be surprised all the time. At home I usually just sit at the table and write the music down. If I want to hear



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some special, particular chord, I might go to the piano. But I don't use the piano to write per se. Writing, especially when it's geared toward orchestration, has a lot to do with structure. And that's something you can feel—it's not abstract. After a time you begin to get an appreciation for envisioning shapes and colors without hearing them. There's a skill to that. Now, to come to the bandstand, I'm constantly surprised, because a lot of the music, I haven't actually heard it for what it is. So when I finally do, I hear things I like and things I don't. If you listen to yourself you learn a lot about yourself.

I never change the music, though. Once I write it down it stays—no erasing. Because there's a certain process to listening. The things I didn't like the first or second time through I might catch up with. Maybe it was a little bit too advanced for me to like in the beginning—and the things that I did like are not really up to the standards of the other stuff. It often reverses itself. That's why I don't discard anything, or reject it.

MUSICIAN: *The earlier work, "Things That Come from Those Now Gone," "Young in Heart, Wise in Time"...did any of that not fully present itself to you in the late '60s?*

ABRAMS: A lot of it didn't. I think that is consistent with most musicians who seriously study on a constant basis, whether they can see it or not. And when I say study, I don't necessarily mean out of a book, but someone who applies themself on a regular basis.

MUSICIAN: *Did it bother you that people found the music befuddling back then?*

ABRAMS: I didn't meet those people. I met people who liked it. I think that art has to bring the abstract world into a much clearer view to the viewer or listener. That's part of what we do as artists. There are a lot of people in the category you're speaking of that like a lot of those works today. It's the same kind of process we just spoke of. Something new is rejected, but I think that has to do with one's personal psyche. People enjoy the familiar and they have to wait a bit to enjoy the new. There are plenty of unshaped ideas in the mind, and if you went around spouting them, people would ask, "What's wrong with that guy?" But as an artist I can bring out shapes from the subconscious. Or at least a bit of it. That's our work. Music itself is an abstract in the sense of the subconscious. You hear it, but you can't see it.

MUSICIAN: *Do you still paint?*

ABRAMS: Not a lot, but when it's necessary. It's all connected. One thing inspires another. Music goes on a record, then it needs to be extended into paint in order to be finished off. Like these flowers. I'm fascinated by them. In fact I'm going back upstairs to get my camera and shoot these huge bowls.

MUSICIAN: *Do you hear the past of jazz improvisation in your music?*

ABRAMS: It's definitely an extension of the past. I never leave the roots. Never. See, there's a wide latitude for dealing with musical forms, and it depends on whether one chooses to expand or contract. But both are connected to what I see as my upbringing in music.

MUSICIAN: *Some moments are fairly overt: "Bloodline" and "Down at Peppers."*

ABRAMS: Sure. Those are almost literal... those things are dedications to some root position, know what I mean? The blues. Benny Carter's a good friend of mine. I learn a lot by listening to those people, and I just want to express my thanks.

MUSICIAN: *You went to see Muddy Waters?*

ABRAMS: Oh yeah, Muddy Waters, Little Walter. But remember in the early days of this music, everything got played: blues, bebop, stuff for dances. Ellington, I saw him a fair amount. There was plenty of access because those bands played often in the black neighborhoods, because they were restricted. So we mingled together.

MUSICIAN: *One of your fortes is that you can communicate blues feeling without overtly employing traditional blues structures. Especially in a piece like "Mama and Daddy." You know what I'm saying?*

ABRAMS: I think so. But remember, the blues is more than just a certain kind of form. The first set of circumstances that was called the blues didn't necessarily have 12 bars. It just had a feeling and a sound. A funky sound. A cappella things, field hollers, they didn't have the form, but they were the blues. The intervals I used to write "Mama and Daddy" are precisely the same sort of intervals that are used in the church, and a lot of folk music around the world. Most folk music has a form of pentatonic scales—France, Sardinia, whatever—with a blues type of thing in it. You need to know about the basic ingredients that make the blues what it is, then you can strip it of the styles that have been imposed upon it. But you don't strip it of itself. That's why people are able to construct so many different types of

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MUSICIAN: *What do you think when you read critiques of your work that claim European sources as inspiration?*

ABRAMS: I think that's a device people use to express their personal knowledge. Because if you take the history and evolution of black music, it comes from people who were forced to concoct their own way of doing things, and the things that they were exposed to were taken and rhythmatized in a manner that suited their purposes. Slaves were surrounded by many cultures, French, English, German—they had to superimpose themselves on these other situations. So when someone says "European influence" that almost seems misplaced. Are they trying to separate one music from another? We've always had great black classical musicians. Freed slaves who were fortunate enough to gain access to educational institutions. Basically, we're musicians. I've written for symphony orchestra. It's music. You appreciate your roots and you express them, but you're not limited by them. Because the process of music is a growth process. There's nothing in this country that remains exactly as it was when it got here. Germans come here, they become German-Americans, Irish, French, Asian. In music it's the same thing. Everything's influenced by everything in America. Classical music today is influenced by pop music and vice versa. Music will not let one factor isolate itself.

Jazz actually is the first world music because it has everything else in it in some form or stage: Chinese scales, Latin rhythms, whatever, are added to the African base. You have people saying that they play European jazz, they can say that because they're incorporating how they feel. But we taught them that, and our music is unique in the annals of history. One of the purposes of this music is to give the world a feeling, some information about ourselves, a spiritual message. It's a mission of sorts: dance and things that have to do with rhythm are what we deal with, and it reminds others about certain things within themselves. By the same token, others have things they express that remind us of ourselves. And so we learn from each other.

MUSICIAN: *That's a key aspect of the American experience.*

ABRAMS: Yeah, because it's changed the world.

MUSICIAN: The Hearinga Suite *sounds wholly American. It also sounds like you've synopsized much of what your music's about.*

ABRAMS: I'm controlling it, of course.

MUSICIAN: *Is improvising taking a lesser role in your work?*

ABRAMS: No, it's always there. I've been through stages where I've had completely open playing with musicians. But also I have moments where I want to express compositional situations. Don't get the impression that one thing is being discarded because another shows up in abundance. But when I'm writing for musicians that improvise, I always give them an expression area.

MUSICIAN: *Did any of the AACM ideas stem from the collective playing heard in New Orleans?*

ABRAMS: It had nothing to do with New Orleans, it had to do with Chicago, period. Unless you're speaking of the whole history of our music. I know, it sounds strange, but as time goes on people are beginning to see it's not against anything, it's *for* everything. For the health of humanity. Or at least it appears that way to me. Ⓜ

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THE GEAR DADDIES' SMALLTOWN BLUES

COMPARED TO RECORDS BY OTHER MINNEAPOlis bands from the post-Replacements/Hüsker Dü era, the Gear Daddies' *Billy's Live Bait* is an anomaly—a throwback to straight-ahead guitar rock cut with an entirely unironic affection for country tearjerkers, rootsy raveups and singer/songwriter confessionalism. An odd mixture of influences, but that's liable to happen when your musical reference points are gleaned from older brothers and sisters and smalltown radio stations.

Not to mention J.C. Penney's record department. In the band's hometown of Austin, Minnesota (pop. 20,000), "Penney's was the only place where you could buy records while I was growing up," remembers songwriter/frontman Martin Zellar. "And it was real slim pickings at that. I think the first alternative band I ever found was the Clash, when I was a senior in high school. I was a real radical for liking the Clash. But the first two concerts I ever went to were Sha Na Na and Sha Na Na, 'cause nothing ever came through Austin."

Zellar decided he needed to get out, but like any smalltown kid, he found the thought of moving to the city pretty daunting. "Growing up in Austin," he laughs, "our idea of coming to Minneapolis was getting a hotel room and staying in the hotel the whole time. One time we came to see *Life of Brian*, which they wouldn't show in Austin. There were protesters all around the theater. We had to sit across the street and think about it a while before we got up the nerve."

Zellar moved to Minneapolis after graduating in 1982; he was followed over the next few years by high school bandmates Nick Ciola, a bass player, and drummer/songwriter Billy Dankert. Guitarist Randy Broughten, 37, who met the other three when he was substitute-teaching at Austin High, finally moved north and joined the band in 1985. They gigged around town for a couple of years, and in 1988 released an indie album, *Let's Go Scare Al* (just released by PolyGram).

Al drew considerable acclaim for its graphic portraits of smalltown desperation; the characters on the album were forever drinking and messing up and dreaming of escape. An air of guilt and regret pervaded the music, palpable as the backbeat. It was very much an Austin record. "One of the first things I noticed when I moved up to Minneapolis," says Zellar, "is that you can go in a bar and not see a fight. If you go out in Austin on a Saturday night and *don't* see a fight, it's really strange. People tend to sit and get shitfaced drunk and just stare. They don't have a lot of fun. And the idea of moving away doesn't even seem a possibility to a lot of people. Even after the Hormel strike in '85, when the jobs just weren't there, people still didn't move."

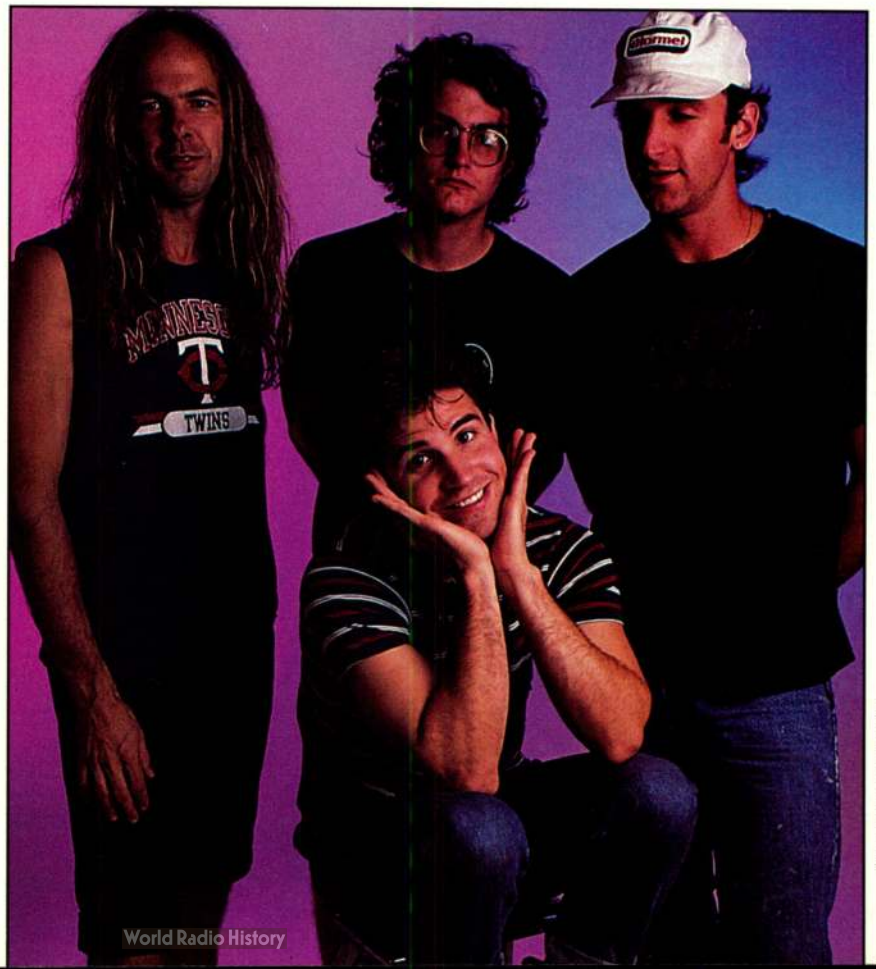
Drinking, messing up and dreaming of escape

By Steve Perry

The songs on *Al* also amounted to a very personal catharsis for Zellar. "I felt like smalltown Joe Blow when I was writing that stuff," he says. "Way too average. And I was frustrated—school wasn't happening, the band wasn't happening, nothing was happening. I was completely unsure of what I was gonna do. And I was drinking a lot." With most of the Austin ghosts exorcised, *Billy's Live Bait* is a more varied record, musically and lyrically. The same sense of guilt is evident in several songs—"I guess I've just got a guilty personality," shrugs Zellar—but the smalltown setting is gone.

"Back there," says Zellar, "the bands all had their outfits, they came out and did their stage patter. They were completely accommodating in the way they played to the crowd. We always had that sort of work ethic about us: You are out there to entertain the crowd."

Dankert agrees. "Most of the bands who



Photograph: Robin Kaplan

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come from Minneapolis aren't too concerned about the audience. If they like it, fine; if they don't, fuck 'em."

"Down in Austin," adds Broughten, "you can't start out like that, you'd never play anywhere."

Before signing with PolyGram, they all worked on the side: Martin was a nightwatchman at a recording studio, Billy clerked at a record store, Rick worked construction and Randy cooked at a group home for the mentally retarded. Not anymore. On this particular Friday afternoon they're hanging out—the record's been delivered, and they're waiting to head east to play the New Music Seminar and join Bob Mould as the opening act on his East Coast tour.

It's not so different from before, says Zellar, except for one thing. "I used to really look forward to weekends. Now there's nothing special about Friday and Saturday night. They're like every other night. I *do* still get terrible Sunday night depressions, though. That's been true for as long as I can remember. A disproportionate number of my songs are written on Sunday nights."

Why Sundays? "I really hated school. I was a good student, but when I was a senior I got to hate it so bad that I was skipping classes and coming in late."

Now, on the eve of the Gear Daddies' major label debut, Zellar has a bad feeling about it. A *guilty* feeling. "I've always thought it was gonna catch up to me. I was gonna get caught, and it would all fall on me. I'm afraid someday they're gonna call me up and say, *Hey, wait a minute—we've been going through these pink slips from '82, and there's a problem...* And there goes the career."

DADDIES' GEAR

MARTIN ZELLAR plays a Telecaster and a Stratocaster through a MESA/Boogie amp; RANDY BROUGHTEN has "a Fender Esquire, a '56, which I run through a '64 Fender reverb unit and a '68 Marshall. Until recently I played an Emmons steel guitar, and now I have a new Williams." Drummer BILLY DANKERT plays a kit constructed by a friend, along with Zildjian cymbals. NICK CIOLA plays a Guild Pilot bass, with a Fender Precision as backup.

The Judds at Poplar Creek Music Theater, Hoffman Estates, Illinois.

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IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

Johnny Van Zant grabs the spotlight with a walk down Brickyard Road

By Jon Young

"THIS STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN BUSINESS JUST brings it all back for me. People on tour assume everything will be all right, that you're somehow above it all, but accidents do happen. You need to be as careful as you can."

Speaking a few days after Vaughan's death, Johnny Van Zant doesn't need to say much more about what's on his mind. Thirteen years ago, this mild-mannered Southerner lost big brother Ronnie when Lynyrd Skynyrd's plane went down. But family ties were in his thoughts before this latest tragedy: On the poignant title track of the recent *Brickyard Road* LP, he sings fondly of the times when the Van Zant boys— Ronnie, Donnie and Johnny— shared each other's company, concluding, "We'll all be together again some day," in the finest gospel tradition. (Ronnie lived on Brickyard Road in Jacksonville, by the way.)

Family affairs played a pivotal role in getting Johnny Van Zant's music going in the first place. "I never wanted to be a front man, because I was shy. I started by playing drums. But after watching Skynyrd practice in my parents' living room, then seeing Donnie do the same thing with .38 Special, I decided to give it a try when I was 16. My first gig was a battle of the bands at the Woodstock Youth Center in Jacksonville," he laughs. "Our band was called Austin Nichols, a name I got off the top of a Wild Turkey bottle, and we played everything from the Little River Band to Ted Nugent."

Four years later, in 1980, Van Zant broke into the major leagues with the *No More Dirty Deals* LP, produced by Al Kooper, who'd also done the honors for Skynyrd. ("Al and I were friends, but musically we couldn't get along," he recalls ruefully.) Rushed onto the scene for his name value, no doubt, Johnny never found a comfortable niche. By the mid-'80s, after four albums and only middling success, he called it quits.

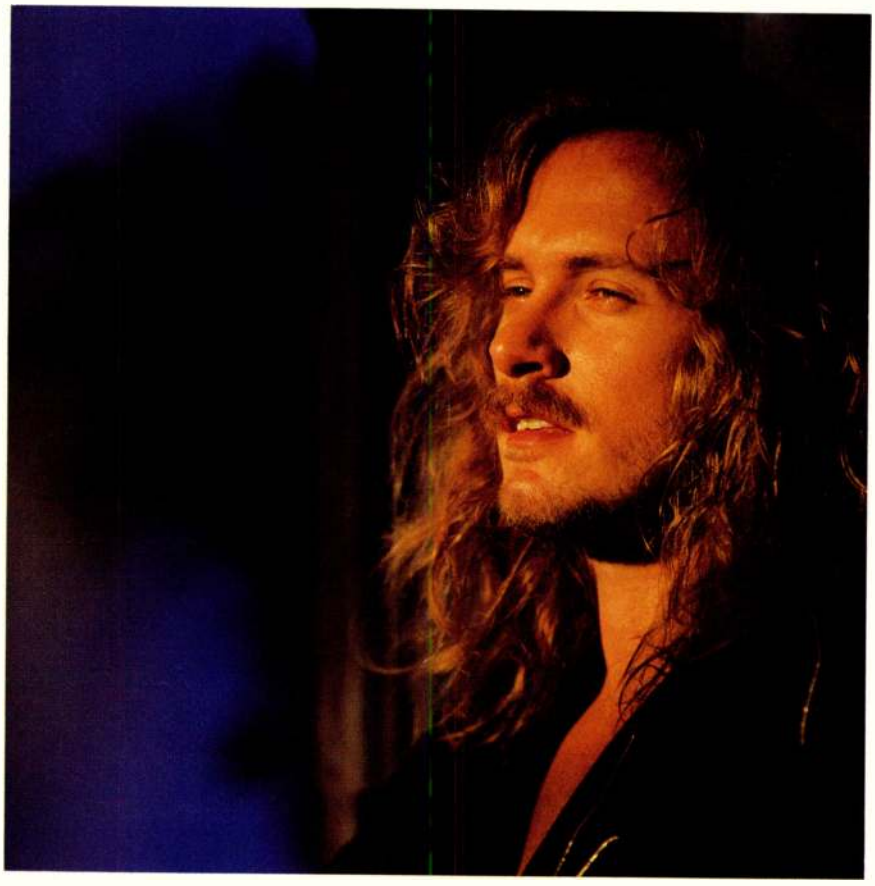
"I got out of music for about a year and a half because the music *business* was so much bullshit! I'd made records that weren't bad and records that weren't great, but all of 'em should have done better. I wasn't getting any younger and I had to stop and ask, 'Am I fooling myself?'"

Instead, Van Zant concentrated on running his small trucking business, biding time until the bug struck again. Three years ago, he made a demo tape that eventually got the thumbs-up from Atlantic's Ahmet Ertegun. And he received a job offer from an unexpected source when the Lynyrd Skynyrd survivors asked him to front the band on a reunion tour featuring their classics.

Conceding his initial misgivings, Van Zant notes, "It took me two months to decide to do it, 'cause I wanted to talk with my parents, my sisters and my brother Donnie. They all felt Ronnie would have approved. Then I had a meeting with the guys in Jacksonville. Seeing them all together, there was no way I could refuse."

After a hundred or so live dates with Skynyrd, Van Zant headed for Nashville to begin recording *Brickyard Road* in September '89, wrapping the project early this year. Though the title cut draws on his history, the rest of the set proves he's not a rerun of Ronnie or Donnie. As produced by Brian Foraker and Robert White Johnson, whose recent credits include Peter Wolf's *Up to No Good!*, the swaggering AOR rockers and big power ballads suggest Paul Rodgers (an acknowledged fave) or John Waite more than a refried good ol' boy.

But Van Zant doesn't have any intention of abandoning his roots. In between solo dates supporting *Brickyard Road*, he's rehearsing with Lynyrd Skynyrd for a studio album of new songs, admittedly a risky venture. "The tribute tour was one thing, but to put out new material is [cont'd on p. 145]



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ISLAND'S MIKE BONE

Breaking obscure artists as a military operation

By Fred Goodman

YOU WOULDN'T EXPECT TO FIND A SELF-PROfessed heavy metal devotee who used to wear a bone around his neck running Island Records. After all, this is the company that brought the world Bob Marley, Steve Winwood, U2, King Sunny Adé and Robert Palmer.

But then again, maybe it makes perfect sense. For 28 years, Island Records has led the music industry in the fine art of unpredictability. Its laid-back, boutique style of doing business masks a company that releases more records than A&M and Elektra combined, and a massive catalog featuring popular and ethnic music from the world over.

Begun in London in 1962 by Chris Blackwell, Island initially focused on selling Jamaican pop music to the West Indians living in Britain. The following year Blackwell demonstrated both his resourcefulness and flair for crossover when Island scored a huge international pop hit, "My Boy Lollipop," with Millie Small, a maid working for Blackwell's parents.

In the late '60s the label moved into rock, signing Jethro Tull, Cat Stevens, the Spencer Davis Group, Traffic, Free, King Crimson and Spooky Tooth (since there was no Island in America, those acts were licensed to other companies here; Island debuted in the U.S. in 1973). Since then, Island and its subsidiary labels—including Antilles, Mango, 4th and Broadway, Great Jones and Pow-Wow—have continued to handle rock, pioneered the commercial acceptance of reggae and African music, released zouk, soca, go-go, hip-hop, soul, R&B, blues, jazz, Mardi Gras music, zydeco, folk and just about anything else left of country and classical. The sale of Island to PolyGram Records last year for nearly $300 million will not affect the label's musical direction—it continues to be under the supervision of Blackwell.

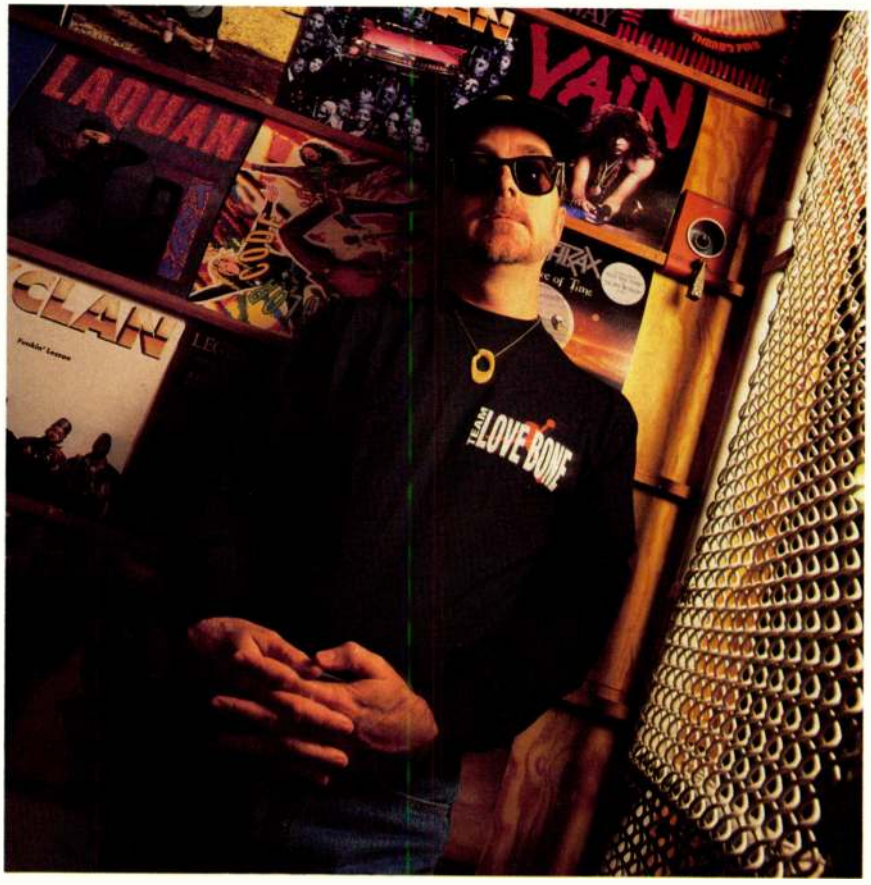
By revitalizing the careers of Tom Waits and Marianne Faithfull, Island has demonstrated that it can succeed with the kind of artists that other labels give up on. "We think these are records that deserve to be put out and that there is a market for them," says U.S. label president Mike Bone when asked about Island's penchant for picking left-field artists and obscure musical styles. "We are here to maximize their potential. Putting out records on people like Allen Ginsberg or William Burroughs or Evan Lurie or the Royal Macadamians—I don't know if anyone else would have released them but they deserve to be out. I don't expect them to do huge amounts of volume, but I'm proud they're on Island."

Bone's own background is suitably unlikely. Growing up in Georgia he managed a high school band featuring future Atlanta Rhythm Section vocalist Lonnie Hammond. His first real record industry job was with the tiny GRC label in Atlanta, but the company was owned by a man Bone describes as the world's largest manufacturer and distributor of pornography; when the owner was arrested, GRC also went into the tank.

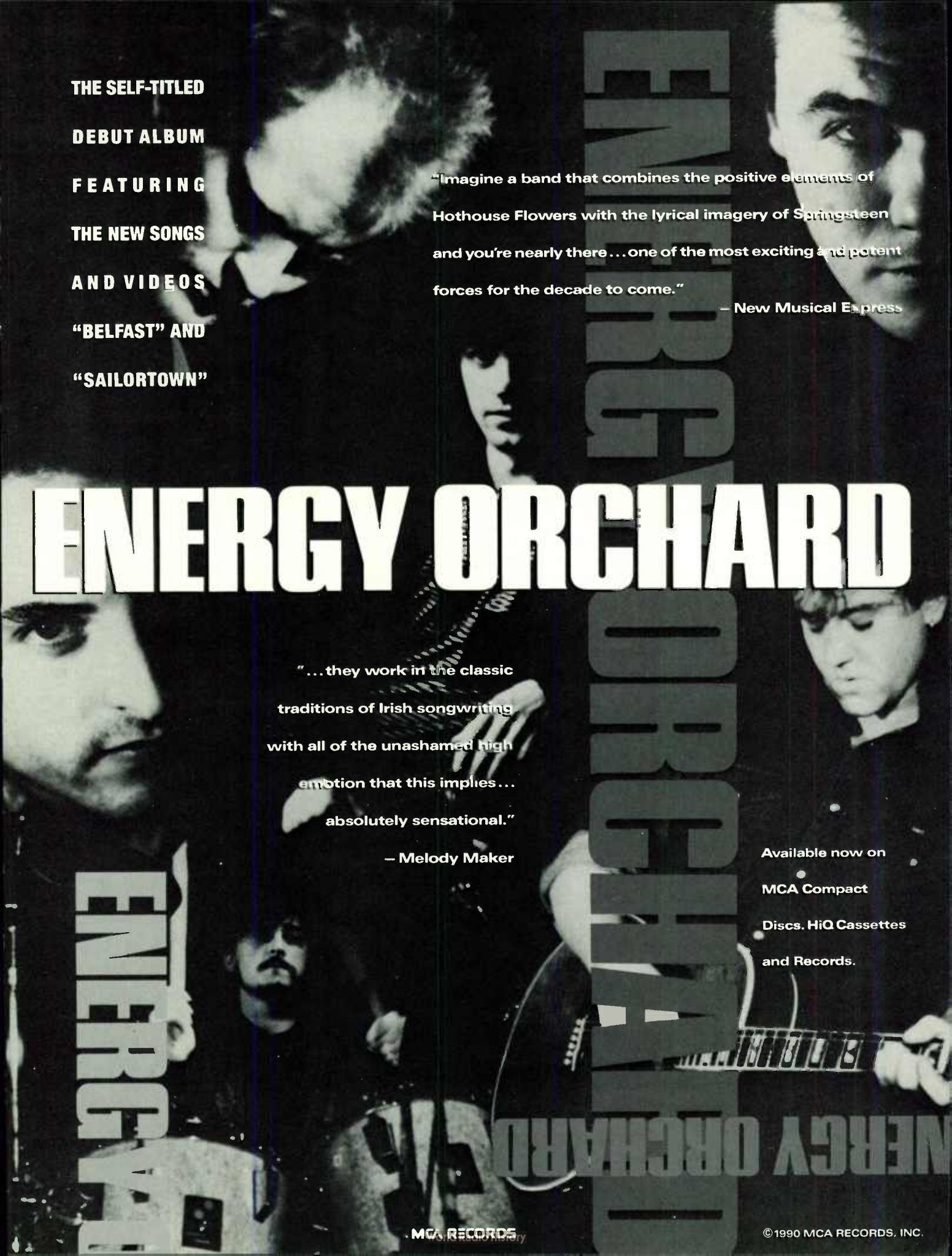
Bone joined Mercury Records as a promotion man, eventually moving to Arista where he became known as the pop label's "metal guy," talking Arista into signing Krokus.

"I loved hard rock—still love hard rock and heavy metal," he says, adding that Rush, whom he worked with all those years ago at Mercury, is still one of his favorites. "A great band," he says.

Bone continued his climb up the ladder by moving to Elektra, where he was first the head of promotion, and later the head of marketing as well. In 1987, he became pres-



Photograph: Larry Ford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ident of Chrysalis Records, a post he held for two and a half years.

At Island, Bone tends to emphasize his skills in promotion and marketing. "Everyone at Island is in the artist development business," he says. "My job is to take not only the artists but the executive team from where they are to where they can go."

When asked what he thinks is missing on Island's roster (other than three more acts that sell like U2), Bone shows his roots. "We need more hard rock acts," he says, "and more acts that are touring." Indeed, Bone says the kind of hard-touring philosophy that helped his beloved Rush achieve stardom can still work—even though it costs a fortune.

"I'm especially happy with the situation we have with Drivin' n' Cryin'," he says of the Atlanta band. "They worked about 200 shows last year and they're able to do that totally self-supportive. Their situation reminds me of the early days of the Allman Brothers because they were able to go and tour and tour and tour, self-supporting. And everywhere they play they sell records. The last album sold 80,000 units and the next one we're gonna put through the roof. I think of breaking a rock band like an infantry war," he adds. "You're more interested in taking territory and holding on to it. What they've done is worked their circuit out and it keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger. Now they can play from Dallas to Miami to Norfolk. They've got the Southeast and we've got to work on the Northeast and Midwest."

One of Bone's other priorities is to secure a hit single for Melissa Etheridge. Bone, who says Etheridge has already sold four million albums worldwide, believes a CHR hit is the only missing ingredient in making her a bona fide star.

"Melissa headlines 5000-seaters as a solo act and she's playing Red Rocks [a 9500-seat amphitheater in Colorado]," he says. "She does merchandising business, she gets airline play, she gets VH-1 and MTV play. She sells 3500 albums a week. The only thing missing is a hit. I don't care if it kills me, we will have a Top 40 record."

Although Island is so eclectic—"We have everything from Anthrax to the X Clan," says Bone—the final say over who gets signed still belongs to the man who started the label. "The A&R department at Island is run by Chris Blackwell, period," says Bone. "If he wants to put out a record, it comes out. If he wants to sign an act, we sign them. And if he doesn't want to do it—we don't."

Having the founder of the company firmly behind your release is certainly reassuring, but it's no guarantee that a record will be a hit. Witness the dance group Banders, which features former members of the Miami Sound Machine: Their 1989 debut album was a priority for Blackwell, who was personally involved in its recording and marketing. Yet the silence which greeted its release was deafening. Equally disappointing was Blackwell's mid-'80s attempt to interest the rest of the world in Washington, D.C.'s go-go scene.

"If he could hit them out of the ballpark every time he came up to bat, *he* would have bought PolyGram," says Bone. "I don't think anyone is going to be right 100 percent of the time. Everyone's had a record they signed that didn't happen."

At least at Island that's not the final measure of a recording's worth. Ⓜ

Backside photographs from top (L to R): Alice S. Hall; Chuck Pulin; Charles William Bush; Andy Freeberg; NBC Photo; Paula Parisi; NBC Photo; Gary Gershoff; Charles William Bush; Michael Putland; NBC Photo; Photofest; NBC Photo; Todd Kaplan; NBC Photo; Barry Talesnick; NBC Photo; Larry Busacca; NBC Photo; Chuck Pulin; NBC Photo; Tim Jarvis; Charles William Bush; Steve Granitz

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In Through t

JIMMY PAGE GOES BACK TO LED

"THERE WAS DEFINITELY A LOT OF CONSCIOUS BREAKING OF rules," says Jimmy Page, carefully peeling away the outermost layer of mystique surrounding Led Zeppelin. "Right from the first album, having sections of guitar before the drums came in. Like 'Babe I'm Gonna Leave You.' That's a good example of drama, of light and shade and everything. It was 'Stairway' that finally came down to what I'm getting at, because that *definitely* broke the rules. For a start, it speeds up to get this whole crescendo thing coming through. That was one thing you never did. Musicians don't speed up! There was a definite conscious game plan to this."

Today Led Zeppelin's music is everywhere, won't go away, and most likely never will. The band created a rumbling soundtrack for the contemporary condition, echoing everything from howls of youthful discontent to the lurching rhythms of urban living. You couldn't pick a creative fulcrum more suitable than Page, the almost-tragic rock guitar icon, falling and stumbling and primping but always catching himself at the last second—just like his playing. Page always got the job done, proving that it was possible to be macho and clumsy at the very same time. Maybe that's what makes him a great artist—he's never lost his gift for turning a mishap into a groove.

What the legend doesn't let on is that even after all he's weathered and wrought with Led Zeppelin, Jimmy is an affable chap with a good deal more verve than the stagger would suggest. He's careful, genial, and not the least bit resentful of the intrusion remastering 54 Zeppelin tracks for a new box set made on the assembly of his second solo album, which is two-thirds written. Page explains his attention to the anthology this way: "During the years of Zeppelin I went to the whole mastering process, right through to checking the white labels on the discs and cassettes. But when Atlantic put out the catalog on CD, I wasn't brought in at all. In fact, it was only when somebody told me the CDs were out that I was aware that they

he Out Door

EPPELIN · BY MATT RESNICOFF

had happened. I knew, right from the kickoff, that a far better job could have been done. I heard some horror stories of what happened at the time, 'cause now everybody's trying to pass the buck. They hadn't put any effort into it at all—they'd just run the tapes and that was it, no EQing. I was keen to get a better sound quality for the CDs." He laughs. "It wasn't too difficult, I can assure you!"

Among Page's enthusiasms is the prospect of a Led Zeppelin reunion with John Paul Jones and Robert Plant. While Plant maintains his distaste for the idea—"Stumbling around football stadiums in the U.S.," he calls it—the rock market is begging the boys to have another go. Page is ready. Zeppelin's long absence has made his heart grow fonder. "There were times when we knew we'd done things which were real milestones," he says. "'Stairway to Heaven,' 'Kashmir.' We knew we'd done something really good. It was obviously rewarding." The changes go on forever, but the song remains the same.

MUSICIAN: *The new* Led Zeppelin *box contains four previously unreleased tracks. "Travelling Riverside Blues" sounds like a live broadcast.*

PAGE: "Travelling Riverside Blues" was something which kept rearing its little head when I was in the States on the *Outrider* tour. Radio stations there had it and everyone thought it was an outtake from the second album. Could've been, but it wasn't. It was just a radio broadcast, recorded live in the studio. That particular one didn't have an audience. I was given the opportunity to make overdubs on it, and unfortunately the engineer sort of whacks the fader right up for the guitar intro solo part, and that's a bit disturbing, but as a historical piece there seems to be a lot of interest in it, so we decided to put that on. "White Summer" is from a live broadcast, in front of an audience, but you don't really get to hear any of the audience. They're not rustling candy papers and things.

MUSICIAN: *It sounds like the germ of "Over the Hills and Far Away" is in that song somewhere.*

Photograph: Globe Photos

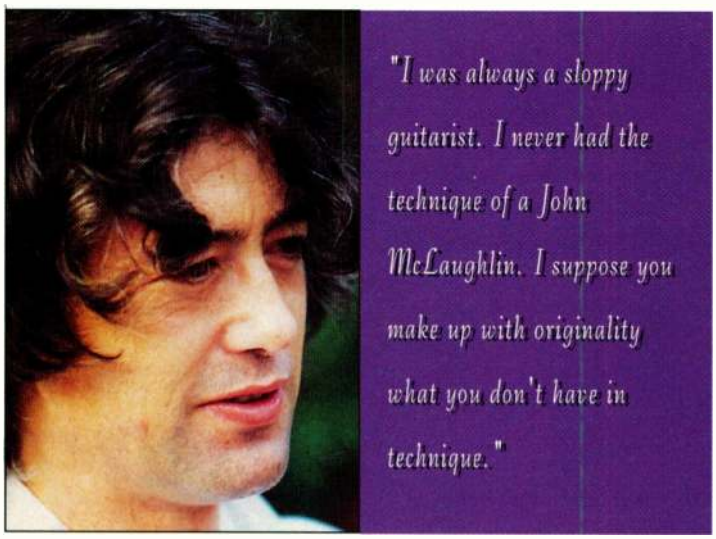
PAGE: Well, it *could* be, because it's what I call a C.I.A.: It's Celtic, Indian and Arabic influences. I guess my Celtic roots come out in that "Over the Hills and Far Away" type of thing.

MUSICIAN: *Was that before* Houses of the Holy?

PAGE: Oh, good lord, yeah, this was way back in 1970. It was a piece that I'd played in the Yardbirds and it just kept expanding, really. In fact, "Kashmir" came from playing that number and that tuning. It's DADGAD: Let the first string down to D, let the second string down to an A, the G, D and A stay the same, then the low E goes down to D.

MUSICIAN: *Did you delve very deeply into Indian music?*

PAGE: I certainly did. During the time when I was doing studio work, recording dates, I got fascinated with the whole science of it. It eventually became too complicated because of the divisions between a semitone. They can break it down into so many, 22 or something. But the main thing that I did get from the ragas was the timings: They do things in sort of sevens and elevens. However, I can't discount the allap—I'm talking about sitar basically here. The allap is the first movement, which is the very slow, freeform sort of movement. It's quite an emotional thing and I could equate blues, bending and everything to that. Whether I should or I shouldn't have, that's the way I tended to receive it and I guess that all went into the melting pot.



MUSICIAN: *The credits on "Bonzo's Montreux" listed you as providing "electronic treatments" to Bonham's drums. Did he record acoustic drums for that?*

PAGE: On the original "Bonzo's Montreux" he did the actual basic kit and then it was overdubs on that, with everything but the kitchen sink. I'd just got a Harmonizer and that's where the steel-drum thing comes into it. That's actually going through a Harmonizer. So that was done way back then.

MUSICIAN: *Now you've edited that track together with "Moby Dick."*

PAGE: When it came to the track selections for this, John Paul and Robert sent in lists of what they wanted. Part of the exercise was to see what they *didn't* want, really. Everyone agreed on what they basically wanted. There was certainly "Moby Dick" and "Bonzo's Montreux" and I didn't want to leave one out, so I had this sort of brainwave that it could possibly be done. I didn't have any proper recording equipment at home, but armed with a metronome I checked out the two things; the tempos seemed pretty similar. Certainly the first edit is simple, going out of "Moby Dick" into "Bonzo's Montreux," but to interlace the riff afterwards was like, "Let's hope it works!" But it did.

MUSICIAN: *It's uncanny how you can almost hear the "Moby Dick" riff implied in the "Montreux" solo.*

PAGE: It's incredible, isn't it? I just thought it would work. We were very fortunate, given the time scale that I had over there and doing all the mastering as well. We went into Atlantic and just put it into the Synclavier and laced it on that way.

MUSICIAN: *Was that the only track that required the Synclavier?*

PAGE: Oh yeah, yeah. I suppose everyone will go, "Why didn't they remix them?" But if we had started remixing all that stuff, it wouldn't have been out till well into the 2000s [*laughs*].

MUSICIAN: *Which tracks required the most EQing, the ones you were most dissatisfied with in their original form?*

PAGE: I used Sonic Solution on a couple of things. I must say, considering we're talking about tapes that go back to 1968, 1969, the quality was very, very good. However, there was the occasional nightmare where you'd find that there was something that appeared at the time to be coming out of just the monitor amp but in fact was going on the tape, that type of stuff. Wherever possible, I went right back to the studio masters. Unfortunately some of them have disappeared along the way. I must say about 80 percent of it is the original ones. However, where we couldn't find them we had to go to pre-production EQ copies and that's where the problems appeared. It was quite satisfying that the original tapes held up pretty well.

MUSICIAN: Led Zeppelin II *sounds like it has a lot more bottom than the first album.*

PAGE: Yeah! It could have been better EQ available at the time. Olympic, where we did the first album, certainly didn't have the sophisticated EQ that we had on the second album. Mind you, we'd all sorted our sounds out a lot better. I was playing through a little tiny Supro amp with a 12-inch speaker on the whole of that first album, with a Telecaster and just a couple of pedals. By the second album I had much, much better equipment. The same with John Paul Jones. If you're getting a good sound, it's easy to record it, innit?

MUSICIAN: *At that time Led Zeppelin was primarily a live band in the studio; you recorded most of the first album live.*

PAGE: Yeah.

MUSICIAN: *But as things moved on and you became more experimental, the music seemed to become more and more a product of your vision, and the basics something to be laid down quickly by the band and then augmented through your own painstaking orchestrations and guitar ideas. Is that an accurate appraisal?*

PAGE: Well, you've hit the nail on the head with the first album, because we'd actually been doing some live shows with that, so it was easier to go in and do it. However, there were always overlays on the tracks. Once the tracks were done, I just used to, as you say, orchestrate them. There might be a guide voice on the original and sometimes we used some of those, depending on how Robert felt about them. Or he'd come in and redo them. Once all this structure was going on, I suppose that made that more comfortable. And more inspirational. And then usually I'd end up putting the sounds on at the end.

MUSICIAN: *On "You Shook Me," the vocals and slide guitar do a*

John Paul Jones: "Led Zeppelin was the air between us all."

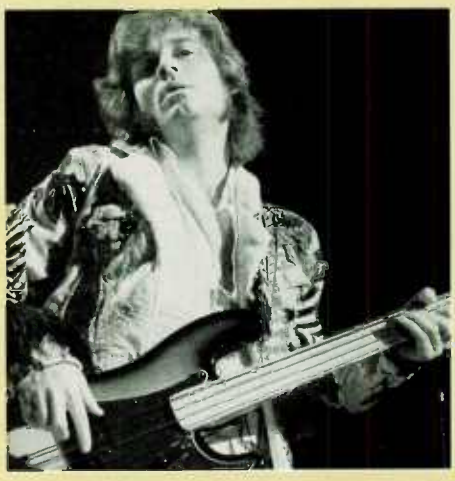
SEATED IN A 32-TRACK HOME STUDIO that houses everything from his most ancient synthesizers and basses to the highest of high tech digital equipment, John Paul Jones leans back and relaxes between mixes of a record by his eldest daughter, Lacinda.

The gifts that made Jones an in-demand studio musician in the '60s—Donovan hit big with Jones' arrangement of "Mellow Yellow," and a decade later the Carpenters lifted his original score of "Kind of Hush" note for note—infused atmosphere and lushness into Led Zeppelin's crunch on orchestral pieces such as "Kashmir" and in the sweeter voicings that suspend the verses of "Stairway to Heaven." Jones and John Bonham's interest in R&B and soul helped reshuffle the rhythms of Page and Plant's Caucasian takes on Robert Johnson. "It wasn't like a 'band and any one musician' situation," Jones recalls. "The direction was us. The band was made up of four totally different individuals with different musical tastes. From bandmember to bandmember, Led Zeppelin was the air between us all. It was the forum in the middle, really. There couldn't possibly be a direction that one person didn't want to go in, because the band didn't have any energy without all four members."

The liberties Zeppelin took with time and tempo laid the foundation for many of their finer moments. "We were all pretty strange when it came to rhythm," John Paul says. "That's one of the things we share. Bonzo had some particularly odd rhythms, but then Page was always a great one for turning corners after 13 bars or something like that. He got a lot of that from the old blues; the nice thing about the old country blues artists was that a 12-bar blues could be anything from about nine-and-a-half to about 14. But generally the song would demand it. Bonzo would dictate an unusual time signature when we would be writing, or in a jam he would come up with something. Or he would start a riff that was strange, unusual, or just interesting in some way and we would start playing with it. 'The Crunge' was like that; it's just got that extra half beat, which was a brilliant, brilliant thing.

"You just could not help but swing with John Bonham. He was a very sympathetic drummer, a very sympathetic musician, and he would always keep his ears open, which is the only thing a musician should ever do onstage. There's a rapport a bass player and drummer can get after quite a short period of time, providing you're both of a certain standard, that just builds and builds. It's quite uncanny sometimes; we would both pick an off-the-wall phrase and put it in at exactly the same time and it would end up totally in synch, which is rather nice. It becomes second nature after a while."

Telepathy was the better part of Led Zeppelin's live energy. John Paul is a lot quicker than Page to isolate his own most fulfilling times with the band. "It was probably a stage moment. Studios are always studios, whatever anybody thinks. There's good takes and bad takes and long hours. There's many stage moments I remember. I should think the first one was probably the Boston Tea Party gig in '69, the first tour. We had an hour-and-a-half act by then and we played for four-and-a-half hours. We played the act twice, and then we did Beatles and Rolling Stones and Who numbers. Everything that anybody knew. I think we did some Everly Brothers and Elvis numbers. If you knew more than four bars, you started. We played four nights there and the whole thing just climaxed on the last night, which was by then a big party because you knew all the audience—it was the same people every night! I remember everybody knew that it was really going to be good. And [manager] Peter Grant put his arms around all four of us and lifted us into the air. It was brilliant. But there have been a lot of really good gigs. That to me was what Zeppelin was all about."



The longevity of Led Zeppelin's long, unusual records, their occupation of FM radio, is quite amazing. "They weren't contrived in the first place," Jones explains. "We knew what we wanted to do and we did it regardless. There were things that people didn't like, but it didn't change our direction in any way. We just carried on doing it the way we'd always done it and people either liked it or they didn't. There was always a certain honesty about the music. You could bring in anything and if it didn't work everybody knew it. A good idea is a good idea, whether it's conventionally seen as weird or not. You could go anywhere, do anything, and we did most of it. We never tried to think, 'Is this radio-ready?' We really didn't care. We didn't do television, we didn't do Top 40 radio, we just did what we wanted and it's audible. So much of recorded music at the present time is geared to 'Will it sell?' and demographics and all that, that you end up trying to please everybody and doing nothing that's of any value or integrity."

Was Page always master of ceremonies in the studio? "Not at all. We all knew more or less what we were doing when we put the basic tracks down. I did most of the orchestration, in fact. We worked on the arrangements amongst us all, although mainly it was Jimmy and I. On 'Stairway to Heaven' Jimmy and I just worked out the arrangements verse by verse, chorus by chorus.

"His was the original direction, the initial vision and the impetus behind the band and he spent the longest on the mixing." John Paul laughs. "Especially in the later period. But it certainly wasn't a case of us all going in and just doing the tracks and then he would finish the record. Robert wrote at least half the songs, because he wrote the lyrics. Robert's part was always last. We used to write the songs, then rehearse them all together, work out the arrangements all together, and then go into the studio and put it all down. And then we would do all the overdubs that were necessary.

"Again, to me the records were a starting point. The most important thing was always the stage shows. So many great nights. At our very worst, we were better than most people. And at our very best we could just wipe the floor with the lot of them. It was a very good band."

Photograph: Robert Ellis/Repfoto

unison thing. Was that laid down live? Or did Robert do a reference track first?

PAGE: Oh, no, no, no, that was a live one.

MUSICIAN: *That brings up something Jason Bonham said about watching you work with his dad, about how Zeppelin used a different flow structure than most bands. Bass and drums are usually a unit, with the guitarist overlaying on that, but he said his dad used to follow you, you used to follow Plant, and John Paul used to follow Bonham.*

PAGE: Yeah, yeah. It was the band's policy to keep things as active as possible during live performances. Solos wouldn't be exact. A few of them I had to more or less follow, like "Celebration Day," but where there was any chance of stretching out, then that's the way it went. And of course, to make that sort of stuff interesting, you need all this rhythmic attack going on with it, and synchronization. And I guess that's the part that Jason's referring to with his dad. We used to hit rhythmic things at exactly the same time. A lot of that wasn't planned; it's just because we got to know each other so well. That's one of the better aspects of a band that's been together for quite a while. They get to know each other so well.

"Led Zeppelin II was recorded while we were on the road, so there's that energy to it. The third album came together from the first break we had. We were in a cottage with no electricity."

MUSICIAN: *Zeppelin always had a very interesting notion of the flexibility of time, probably one of the first power bands to use odd meters and fives and such.*

PAGE: What, shifting the goalposts, you mean [*smiles*]? Yeah. That could have come right from the Indian stuff, but from my end, I'd say from Howlin' Wolf, because I found his riffs would cut across the time and regular 4/4. Like "Meet Me in the Bottom." I was extremely influenced by that stuff. I guess it's just the way one started to think [*laughs*], and it just became more progressive and more apparent.

MUSICIAN: *The blues has always been a foundation of the music. You do your variations, your overbends, like Albert King. Listen a lot to him?*

PAGE: Oh lord, yeah, I listened to loads of blues players and I had a pretty sizable blues collection, as you can well imagine. And, I might add, a rock collection as well. It was never one thing or the other, really; it was a combination of lots of things. When I came back on the scene with the Firm, people were saying, "Oh, you're a blues guitarist, you really ought to be doing a blues album." And I thought, "Well, I don't know about that." I never thought of myself as a blues guitarist as such. Just a guitarist, really.

MUSICIAN: *You were using a lot of interesting chords and weird substitutions in Led Zeppelin, like "Custard Pie," and a lot of funk rhythms, like "The Crunge." We know where the blues came from, but what about that funk?*

PAGE: It's sort of a James Brown thing. John Paul Jones came up with the first part of the riff for that and John Bonham started playing it and then I just started going over the top of it. That was one of those ones which wouldn't have existed but for the fact of having a mobile recording truck in this house Headley Grange, where we weren't pressurized on the time factor, of having to finish in an hour 'cause somebody was coming in after us. It was far more relaxed, and a *lot* of material came out of that place. "Rock and Roll," for instance, was just something that happened immediately and we recorded it in no time. However, there were obviously some which had a lot more preparation before the actual recordings. I mean, there's all different ways that the writing came together. Something like "Rain Song" I would have prepared totally with my home recording. It would have just been a guitar piece developed from a tuning—we're talking about the sweeter chords. Then I laid a Mellotron string part on it. I didn't play it very well, but it gave a guideline and John Paul Jones got it right [*laughs*]. I can't play keyboards and I'll be the first to admit it.

MUSICIAN: *The guitar is kind of a limited instrument—at least in terms of the average player being able to create something unique— until you start playing with the tunings. So for such a song, you would start with a tuning, tape certain things that might stretch the tonality of conventional song ideas...*

PAGE: All the different sections and then join 'em up, yeah. Especially if it's a tuning which I just discovered, that would be the only way to do it, really. I used to work in quite a lot of tunings. Some of them I don't think anyone's even used. Like "Friends." I've never given this away before. "Friends" is top E is E, B is a C, G is a G, D is a C, A remains the same, and the low E goes down to C. We also did that on "Poor Tom" and "Bron-Yr-Aur."

MUSICIAN: *Were the orchestra sounds on "Rain Song" and "Kashmir" all Mellotron?*

PAGE: No, there was both. On "Kashmir" it was actually some orchestra as well, some brass and strings. But "Rain Song" was the Mellotron. It was a pretty bizarre unit, really. It was a keyboard with a series of tapes, a tape for each note, and it had maybe three instruments on it. Actually, they used to sound pretty out-of-tune. I managed to get them all in tune. As it was a tape running over a head, it only had a certain amount of time to run. It wasn't very long; it wasn't very good for sustains, but you got to know how long you could use it. On *In Through The Out Door* Jonesy had this Yamaha called the Dream Machine that was employed quite a bit as well. We went from *Presence*, which was guitar-oriented, to an album which had a lot of keyboards.

MUSICIAN: *What about the sounds on "The Wanton Song"?*

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PAGE: Which part of it?

MUSICIAN: *Where the guitar sounds like an organ.*

PAGE: That's backwards. I know I invented the backwards-echo thing, because we did it on a Yardbirds track which I don't believe even came out. And it was used at the end of "You Shook Me," and then I started experimenting far more than that, using it to run into choruses. There were lots of different effects, but the backwards echo was definitely one of them. Not backwards guitar, but the backwards echo. You turn the tape over—you *did* turn the tape over in those days—and then record the echo which is obviously after the signal; you turn the tape back and then it precedes the signal. It was used quite a lot along the way. For instance, I used it quite a bit on the harp as well. "When The Levee Breaks" has got all that sort of stuff in there.

MUSICIAN: *When did you discover that the acoustic guitar could be such a powerful instrument?*

PAGE: I guess listening to flamenco players, in the power of it. And the first couple of albums that Bert Jansch did; he was really getting into some incredible stuff. There was a little network of folk guitarists that would sound almost like Charlie Mingus.

MUSICIAN: *Did you listen to a lot of jazz?*

PAGE: No, I never fitted comfortably into jazz. I was always a rock 'n' roller with blues overtones [*laughs*].

MUSICIAN: *With the third album, it's been said Zeppelin took into its purview California people like Joni Mitchell and CSN.*

PAGE: Not really. It was put across like that in the reviews. Everyone expected a real hard and fast rock album after the second. But the second was recorded while we were on the road, so there was all that sort of energy in it. The writing in the third album came together from the first break. The first couple of years we were touring all the time, and that was the first official break that we had. In retrospect it probably wasn't that long, but we were pretty mellow at that time. We were in a cottage with no electricity, just gas lamps. The only electricity was in the cassette recorders we had for reference. And that's what we put across, I suppose. Any set of circumstances can be inspiring, really. I guess a lot of the acoustic songs came after tours, when you couldn't really go home and set up a 200-watt stack and just blast out, and consequently you just work out on the acoustic. That was a good balance, really, because you can explore riffs in other ways.

MUSICIAN: *It must be quite disconcerting to get bad reviews when you're doing something you believe in as a musician. Did you get resentful?*

PAGE: Well, insomuch as we had four excellent musicians. We all felt that what we had on the albums was really good quality stuff, and a lot of thought had gone into it. But the most important thing about each album was that it didn't follow any formula from the previous one, and I think that that's the reason why we got a lot of bad reviews: because people didn't quite know how to handle it. But obviously now, looking back, it's stood the test of time, so it must have been right.

MUSICIAN: *Why is there such a fascination on the part of British musicians with American blues and country music forms? The Who, Kinks, Zep, and later Mark Knopfler all got into it in a big, traceable way. What is it about the sound of rural America that got all these British musicians going?*

PAGE: Well, that didn't grab me like it did those people. I could see it certainly with Mark Knopfler. And Albert Lee, obviously, who was a real country picker—he was just born in the wrong country [*laughs*]! Marvelous stuff. And he always *played* like that, it was always his thing, this sort of country/swing playing. The thing that was most appealing to me on the country records was the pedal-steel guitar.

MUSICIAN: *Have you experimented with that instrument?*

PAGE: Yeah, that's hard as well [*laughs*]. I used to have a crack at it, but I never played it properly. I was having too much trouble getting things together on the six-string. It's hard work. The way I got into the pedal-steel guitar was listening to those things Chuck Berry did. "Deep Feeling," I think, is one of his. The story is he went into the studio and there it was and he just started playing it. It appears on some of the early Chess albums. When I found out that was a pedal-steel, I was really interested to see what he was doing. I went on from there into the obvious sort of country clichés, but I was never a very good pedal-steel guitar player. Jerry Garcia was playing it pretty good, for someone who made a transition and played it alongside his normal guitar.

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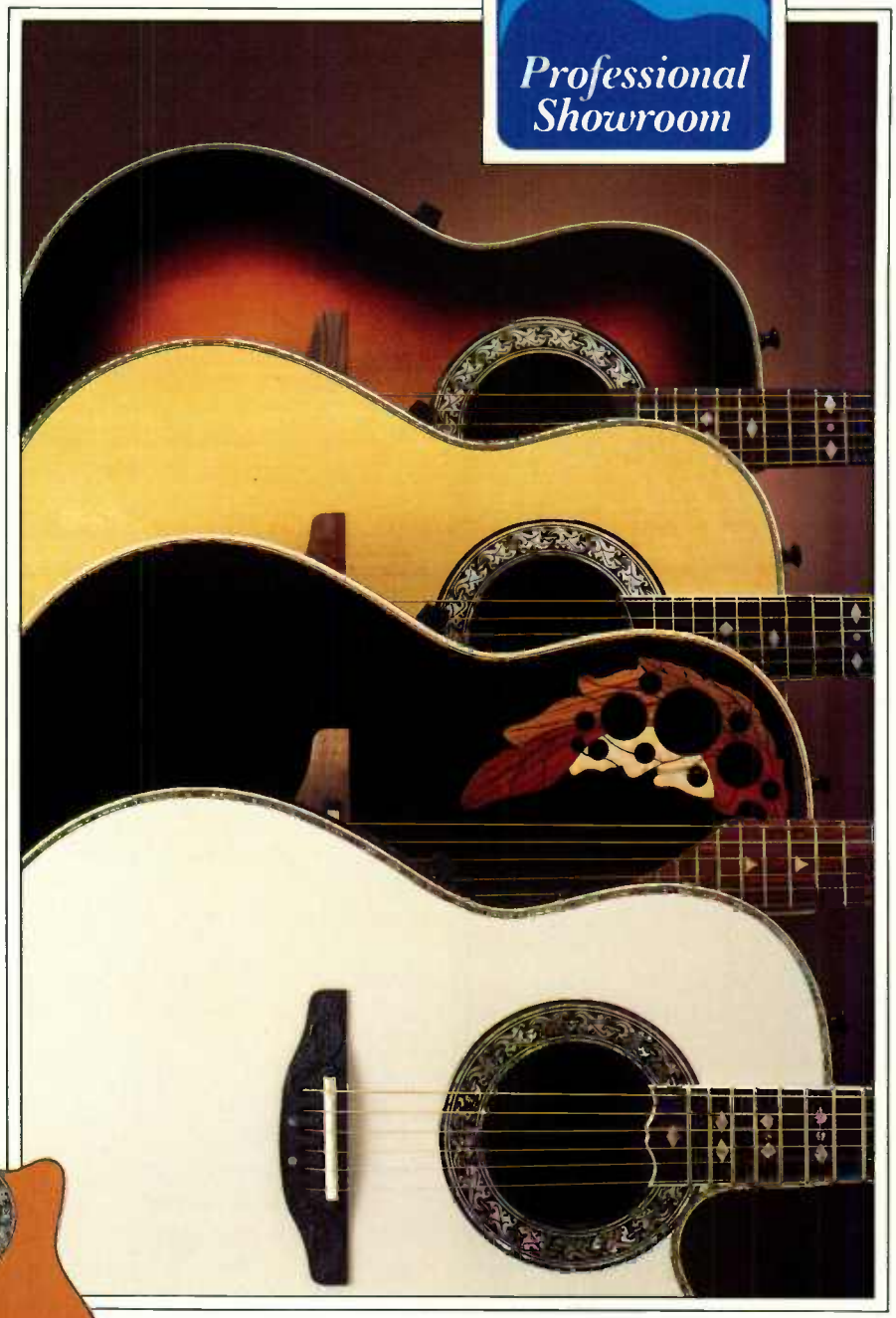

Above top to bottom: 1862-1 Custom Balladeer, Sunburst; 1717-4 Legend Deep Bowl, Natural; 1768-5 Elite 6-String, Black; 1869-6 Custom Legend, White

Standing upright, left to right: 1758-6 Elite 12-String, White; 1767-4 Legend Deep Bowl Cutaway, Natural; 1763-4 Nylon String Classic Electric Cutaway, Natural

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parts, but it works nicely.

PAGE: I know why that is. That's because that's direct injection, and it was pumped through a couple of limiters—compressors, actually which were fighting against each other on a sort of threshold. I didn't used to use very much direct injection, although it sounded good on that. But, I'll try anything to make it sound a little bit different.

MUSICIAN: *So would the sound come from the atmosphere of the tune? Or would the sound come first?*

PAGE: Sometimes the sound could come first. The thing that springs to mind immediately doesn't start from the guitar, it starts from the drums: "Levee Breaks." We had actually tried to record that in a regular studio and it just didn't happen, but we knew there was something there, that we just had to try another attempt. When we got to Headley Grange, Bonzo's drumkit was set up in the hall. Right from the first album the whole object was to try and make the drums sound like drums, but this hall made them sound like super cannons. It was a three-story entrance hall with a staircase going all the way around it. The minute we heard that we said, "Let's try 'Levee Breaks' and see what happens!" And of course, that gave the backbone to the overall sound. However, with the guitar all the overlays were relative to the atmosphere of the song.

MUSICIAN: *Some guitarists say that moving a mike a quarter-inch in the speaker cone can dramatically change the recorded tone.*

PAGE: I used to use a number of mikes. Yeah, I used to use a close mike and a distance because I'd always heard that distance on a mike made depth, so that was going to make it fatter. Microphone placing was a total science.

MUSICIAN: *Was the tone on the end of "What is and What Should Never Be" the result of distant miking?*

PAGE: Yes, that would definitely be a distance. You know, it wasn't 40 feet. It was still basically a Les Paul and Marshalls, which always seems to be a winning combination.

MUSICIAN: *People always point to speed when choosing guitar heroes, but some of your best solos were very slow passages. Like the slide solo on that song, and the Honeydrippers' "Sea of Love," which is just fascinatingly lyrical.*

PAGE: I think all this goes right back to the things that really turned me on to guitar playing, that they were all melodies. James Burton solos were melodies in themselves, and I guess that always stuck with me. I thought it was really important to have a guitar solo which had a substantial melodic form to it. So you're right, I was always conscious of that. I think they hit home a lot faster.

MUSICIAN: *Let's talk about the integrity of the first take versus the possible dilution of a mood through adding things later. How did the band react to the progression of Zeppelin becoming a studio band, in the sense that there was more to happen after they finished their parts? Was it ever a problem?*

PAGE: No. That was the great part about it, really. I guess because what I'd done had worked in the past, they trusted me. They thought it was going to be all right next time [*smiling*] and invariably it was. But the other side of it was that the numbers used to stretch quite considerably and change form and vibrancy once we were doing them live. We weren't content just to play note-for-note copies. We kept working on them all the time.

MUSICIAN: Outrider *was kind of overlooked. It was a very powerful record. Were you disappointed that it didn't become a massive commercial success?*

PAGE: I don't think it had the material on it to be a commercial success. It wasn't really that accessible. I just wanted to try some different approaches. The second album will have a totally different approach from the first one: It will be be far more accessible, with more powerful material for radio play, without getting too silly about it. Just real good strong stuff. In fact, all of this Led Zeppelin has come right in the middle of it! But that's good, because it's giving me a good buzz.

MUSICIAN: Presence *was very much a break from the unconventional—no sprawling arrangements, but rather rock 'n' roll jams and vamps. Then you came back with* In Through the Out Door, *probably the most accessible record you made. Had you decided to make a complete break from everything you'd broken previously?*

PAGE: Yes, yes. There's no keyboards on *Presence*, for instance, but you have to understand that that album was recorded after Robert had his motor accident. He had his leg in plaster and apparently it wasn't 100 percent that it could heal properly. That's what *I* was told at the time, anyway. So, you can imagine, that was a bit hairy. I think it reflects in that album, there's a lot of *tension* there. I think that's quite a good

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album. "Achilles Last Stand" sounds amazing now, after you haven't heard it for a long time. That was one of the ones that when we were remastering, everyone was going, "My goodness gracious." [*laughs*]

MUSICIAN: *Did you use a wah-wah pedal on that song as a tone control? You seemed to employ that idea on parts of* Outrider, *not so much for the classic squawk, but for a nasal, opening-and-closing compression.*

PAGE: I used to use it as a tone control, yeah. You're not referring to the beginning are you, the phasing? I'm not so sure about that. I'm not sure whether it's a wah-wah or just a phasing pedal. The solo wasn't.

MUSICIAN: *Were most of the effects you used in the late '60s and early '70s created at the signal source or added in the mix?*

PAGE: Both. Eventide Clockworks were bringing out Harmonizers and things like that, digital delays. As soon as there was anything new, my name was down there to have one of the first! I was right on top of all these studio effects and things. But even then I was always messing around with them, trying to make them sound different to what they ought to sound like. For instance, there was a Delta T digital delay, and I fed that back into itself and that's the weird sound that you get on the end of and the beginning of "Houses of the Holy," just a digital feedback. I'd try anything to get something unusual.

MUSICIAN: *That would happen after the original track was recorded?*

PAGE: Yes, that was.

MUSICIAN: *So you used it as sort of a time-manipulation device as well.*

PAGE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MUSICIAN: *Was the solo on "Fool in the Rain" guitar synth?*

PAGE: No, that was just an octave pedal. Normally, they don't track as well as that. I was just really lucky that it managed to track all the way through.

MUSICIAN: *You've had a love/hate affair with synthesis for the same reason; the pitch-to-voltage problem makes it useless.*

PAGE: That's right. I was really interested in it all the way through. I tried all the different developments. But none of them tracked properly, especially the lower down that you got. The time delay. It's pitch-to-voltage, that's exactly what it is. It got really frustrating. But I used a Roland guitar synth on the *Death Wish II* soundtrack and that was fun. That was the most I ever used it and then it just got more and more annoying [*laughs*].

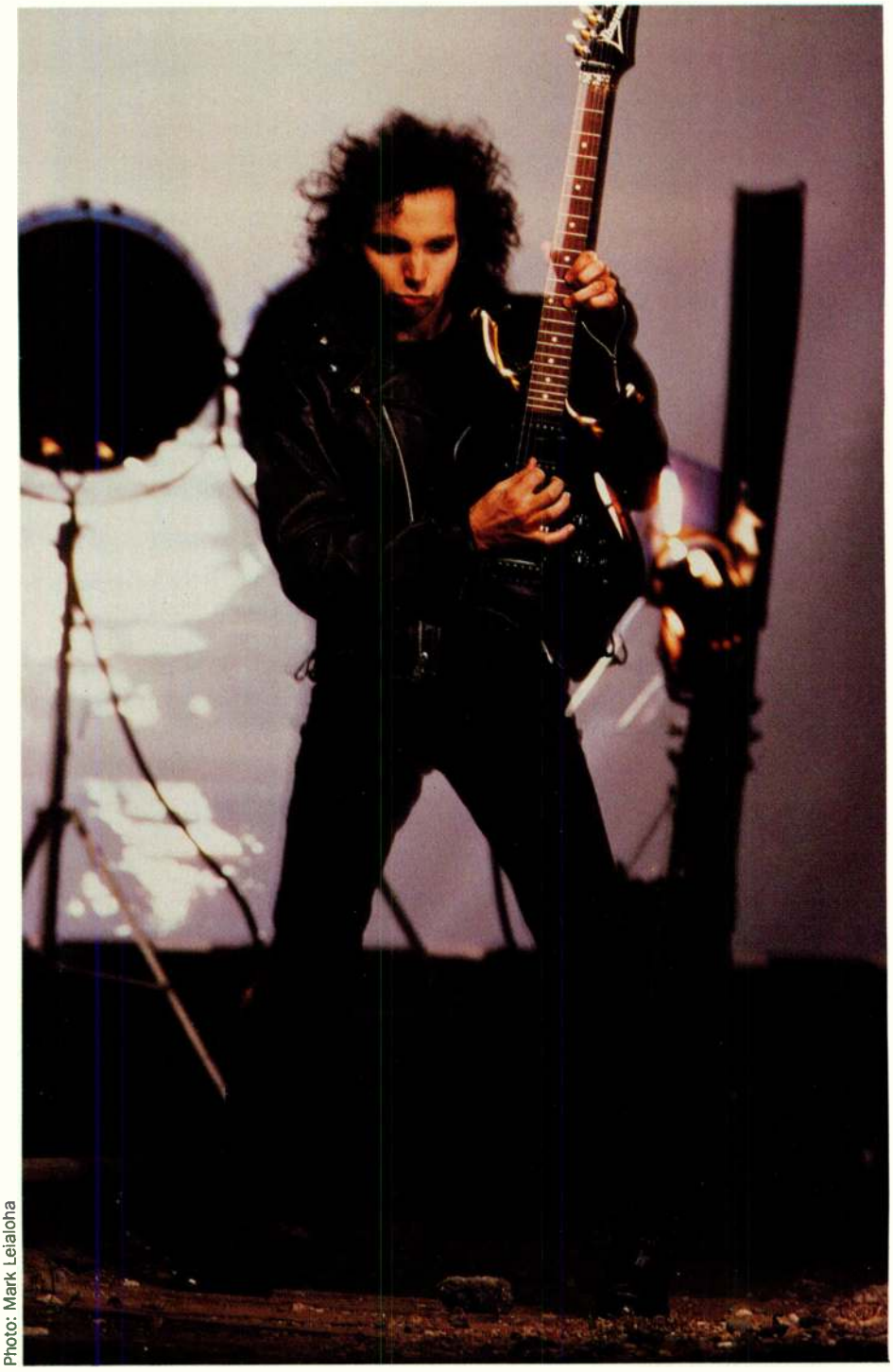
MUSICIAN: *Did you try the SynthAxe? That's the most expensive, sophisticated unit.*

PAGE: Is that the thing that looks like a Martian's handbag? [*Laughter*] The strings are all sort of odd, aren't they? They all look like first strings or something. Yeah, the one, surprisingly enough, which I did find to be pretty good value for money was the Casio, because that wasn't bad just as a straight guitar.

MUSICIAN: *As producer did you have a hand in the construction of John Paul Jones' bass tone throughout the course of the band's studio development?*

PAGE: Yes, as far as the mix goes, I suppose. Obviously it was always raspy and sort of bassy if it was a rock number. I can't really generalize on it because everything was totally different. But I must

All guitar strings are the same?



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say, he came up with some fantastic things, you know. That synthesizer introduction to "In The Light" was fantastic. He was always really very involved in synthesizer.

MUSICIAN: *As the composer, you have to wonder where your jurisdiction ends. The bassline's a very important consideration for a song. Would you feed him ideas for harmonization, or would he play something and have you suggest changes? Or was it case-by-case?*

PAGE: Case-by-case. Mainly, he would come up with his own parts.

MUSICIAN: *Would you record guitar parts sitting down?*

PAGE: No [*laughs*]!

MUSICIAN: *You would stand?*

PAGE: [*Laughing*] Yeah, depending again...

MUSICIAN: *Because you've always worn your guitar so low, I've often wondered how you could play certain chords the way your wrist was so unnaturally bent around the neck. Did you ever notice a difference in your playing from one situation to the other?*

PAGE: Well, yeah. I hadn't thought of it that way, but you're right. Yeah. I didn't think of it at the time.

MUSICIAN: *What electric guitars gave you the best clean tone?*

PAGE: Oh, a Strat. I always rely on the Strat for a really tight sound. I found the Les Paul to be the most versatile guitar at the time, but mind you, that's excluding any sort of tremolo arms, really. Just for tone. On *Outrider* I used every guitar *but* that, during the initial tracks, and then when Chris Farlowe came down and we did the blues number, which was just a live take, I got the Les Paul out and it just sounded fantastic: "What the hell have I been doing? Why haven't I been using it more?" It's just instinct.

MUSICIAN: *What's your favorite acoustic?*

PAGE: Martin D-45, I believe it is. I used to use a Harmony as well quite a lot. That's in the early days, because I couldn't afford the Martin! There's probably a lot of the things that have got the Harmony on which it would have been nice if... On the first album, I borrowed a Gibson J-200 which sounded pretty good—certainly better than my Harmony. But in the end I would wind up with the Martin.

MUSICIAN: *Did studio work condition you to read music?*

PAGE: I had to in the end, yeah. Initially it was just sort of doing riffs and play what you want, but after a while, you know, crows began appearing on telephone lines on the chord charts. And bit by bit I just realized that I was having to read music, that I was sort of doing it. It came in very handy afterwards.

MUSICIAN: *Was there a lot of chart work in Zeppelin?*

PAGE: Not really, no. It was just sort of locked in the memory. But during those studio days, I very rarely knew who I was going to be playing with and it could be anything from folk music to jazz, Burt Bacharach, you name it. There was a day that I went to do a session and it turned out to be a Muzak session, which is recorded exactly as you hear it. When you record Muzak, you just have reams and reams of paper and turning and reading and playing [*laughs*]. "No! This is the end for me!" That was the day I resolved to get out of studio work [*laughs*]! That's the furthest thing from rock 'n' roll...a horrible thing to have been involved with.

MUSICIAN: *John McLaughlin gave you guitar lessons?*

PAGE: He did, that's true. It was great. He could hear things which I couldn't hear. He certainly taught me a lot about chord progressions and things like that. He's fabulous. He was so fluent and so far ahead, way out there, and I learned a hell of a lot. I must have been about 20.

MUSICIAN: *When things become accessible, more mainstream, do they lose a bit of their integrity? Did Zeppelin ever suffer from its own popularity?*

PAGE: No, no, no, no, I don't agree with that at all. When we got together to record we came out as where we were at at that time. We never thought, "Oh, what's going to be a single?" We didn't have to because it was an album market, so we didn't have to chase our tails like that. It's very handy really. It makes for better work.

MUSICIAN: *There's a rumor that the band has been offered $200 million dollars to reunite for a tour. I can't fathom how that kind of a figure could be turned down* [Page laughs] *but I understand Robert doesn't care to do it. How do you feel about it?*

PAGE: Well, I've always loved the music, I'm *proud* of the music that we made. I don't think you can have any more of a rewarding experience as a musician than to actually *be in* a band like that and make music which has stood up for this amount of time. I love the music and it's always going to be part of me. My goodness, it was such a major part of my life. So I'd be prepared to do it, but who knows? I think you said it: Robert doesn't want to do it, so there you go.

MUSICIAN: *Is it more of an insular process now, not working with a foil to bounce things off?*

PAGE: Heh, did you say a fool or a foil? Yeah, I definitely miss that. Without *any* doubt. Because the best part of Led Zeppelin was when I was writing material for Led Zeppelin I knew *exactly* what was going on, I knew exactly what the approach was going to be to it and I was writing songs with Robert's voice in my head. I guess that's where *Outrider* might have been a little shaky. I was doing a lot of tracks without any vocalist at all.

MUSICIAN: *You're really looking to make a more accessible record next time?*

PAGE: Oh, yeah.

MUSICIAN: *Why should that matter at all?*

PAGE: Oh, well, let's put it this way: stronger riff material. What matters to me at this point is making a record which is really going to be excellent. And I'm not going into the studio until I think the material that I've got stands up to that. A lot of people said to me, "You're really known for your riff work"—I'm going to make sure this time people get to know that it's there.

MUSICIAN: *I'm surprised you would be affected by those expectations. I mean, who can get close enough to you to tell you such things except record company guys anyway? Who cares?*

PAGE: I don't mean it like that. The other album was more or less made up in the studio. That was a pretty reckless way of going about a first solo album. I want this one to be far more structured.

MUSICIAN: *Why do you think you become best known only for your riffs?*

PAGE: I don't know, man [*laughs*]! I really don't know. Because I

thought that a lot of it would be from the orchestration of the guitar, of the guitar overlays. I thought there'd be more recognition for that, but it seems to be for the riffs. But that's cool.

MUSICIAN: *Was Robert as lyricist responsible for melody and how melody fell within syncopations and things like that?*

PAGE: Sometimes, yeah. They're all different. On some of them, you can hear the guitar playing the melody, and other ones I'd suggest a cross-melody or something and he'd come up with them on his own. In the early days I was writing lyrics as well, although I wanted to get to a point where he was doing all the lyrics because I wasn't very happy with mine. Once he was doing all the lyrics there were times when he would come up with melody lines and that was great. And we got to the point where they were obviously good, where we weren't sort of hemming and hawing about them.

MUSICIAN: *On the* Outrider *tour it seemed like in your own element, you thrived. You appeared to be a lot more forceful and happy than when you were with the Firm or on the ARMS tour.*

PAGE: Oh, I was happy on the ARMS tour, that was fabulous. That was such a great buzz that when we finished, those of us sitting on the plane going back were going, "Oh, no, it's finished!" On an ordinary tour everyone would have been bored, but we would have been able to carry on and on and on. We were having so much fun with it. But the Firm wasn't anything I wanted to carry on. Originally it was just one album, though in fact we did make the second one, but I didn't want to get involved in a third one or anything. It wasn't the sort of vehicle that I wanted to be locked into.

MUSICIAN: *I understand "Dazed and Confused" was originally a song by Jake Holmes. Is that true?*

PAGE: [*Sourly*] I don't know. I don't know. [*Inhaling*] I don't know about all that.

MUSICIAN: *Do you remember the process of writing that song?*

PAGE: Well, I did that with the Yardbirds, originally. When Jeff left, that's one of the things that went in, because that wasn't heard before. And it's a shame it *wasn't* there before because it would have been good with Jeff on it as well. In fact, it's on a pirate album, *Live at the Emerson Theatre*. It was back there. The Yardbirds were such a good band for a guitarist to play in that I came up with a lot of riffs and ideas out of that, and I employed quite a lot of those in the early Zeppelin stuff.

MUSICIAN: *But Jake Holmes, a successful jingle writer in New York, claims on his 1967 record that he wrote the original song.*

PAGE: Hmm. Well, I don't know. I don't know about that. I'd rather not get into it because I don't know all the circumstances. What's he got, the riff or whatever? Because Robert wrote some of the lyrics for that on the album. But he was only listening to...we extended it from the one that we were playing with the Yardbirds.

MUSICIAN: *Did you bring it into the Yardbirds?*

PAGE: No, I think we played it 'round a sort of melody line or something that Keith [Relf] had. So I don't know. I haven't heard Jake Holmes so I don't know what it's all about anyway. Usually my riffs are pretty damn near original [*laughs*]. What can I say?*

MUSICIAN: *You seem to have a fairly posi-*

*The acoustic "Dazed and Confused" on *"The Above Ground Sound" of Jake Holmes* (Tower Records ST-5079, June 1967) is very, very close to Led Zeppelin's 1969 version, musically and lyrically.

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tive perspective. I don't mean this as an insult, but that's a surprise because the last couple of interviews I've read with you, you seemed very hesitant to talk about topics like the process of composition.

PAGE: Yeah, well, I'm pretty positive because I'm quite confident about what I'm doing at the moment. I'm not saying that I wasn't confident before; it just depends on whether the guy'd come in with a whole folio of Aleister Crowley and just want to turn the interview into that. I just wouldn't go for it and that's the sort of thing that can happen and fair enough. But you're stuck in that spot with the tape recorder and consequently you can feel a lot of friction coming out. If they start trying to rub you up the wrong way with certain things, you say, "Well, I don't want to talk about that," and he just keeps coming back and back and back. There's a variety of things I don't necessarily want to talk about, and there's so many other things that you *can* talk about. And that's where the friction can start.

MUSICIAN: *Well, you don't seem hesitant to talk about music, which is a more difficult thing to verbalize anyway.*

PAGE: I think at the end of the day it's the music that does the talking anyway. It always has done, really, from my end of things.

MUSICIAN: *Can you be too old to rock 'n' roll?*

PAGE: I hope not. There's a lot of guitarists around my age that don't feel that, and I'm certainly one of them. I think you go until you die.

MUSICIAN: *What do you think of what's going on in rock now?*

PAGE: Where I live you have trouble picking up London radio stations. To really keep up with everything it's going to cost you a fortune in CDs [*laughs*]. What I mainly do is, we've got a rock 'n' roll pub 'round that way which has bands on Fridays and Saturdays, so we go down there to keep my fingers on the pulse and sometimes get my fingers on the strings.

MUSICIAN: *You jam?*

PAGE: Yeah, sometimes. Blues and rock 'n' roll things.

MUSICIAN: *What do you think about the way guitar technique has developed in the last few years?*

PAGE: Well, the guitar's always fascinated me. It's pretty obvious when you listen to what I did on the first album: all those different influences, all the different styles of guitar playing that there were, acoustic to electric. Now to hear people vastly different, like Stanley Clarke, and then all the tapping techniques—it's great the way it's developing. Anything to do with guitars is all right by me.

Steve Vai sent me his album; I thought that was really good. I'm pleased he sent it to me. I met him at Donnington. I was jamming with Aerosmith. They're a great band, a really good band to play with. And everyone was sort of smiling so much they said, "Look, we're playing at the Marquee Tuesday, do you want to come down and do it?" and I said sure, so we did six numbers there, and that was great.

MUSICIAN: *Do you practice on acoustic or electric around the house?*

PAGE: Both. Fingerstyle things on acoustic. That's a totally other world, you see.

MUSICIAN: *Some people say Page has gotten really sloppy, that his playing isn't what it was.*

PAGE: I was always a sloppy guitarist, you know. I never had the sort of technique of a John McLaughlin. And I [*cont'd on page 72*]

A MOMENT OF SILENCE.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN • 1954–1990

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Lost and Found and Lost Again

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

1954-1990

By Tony Scherman

"STEVIE WAS *ON* IT. PLAYIN' GREAT, KICKIN' BUTT," SAYS ROBERT Cray, and when Double Trouble was done, everybody—the Vaughan brothers, Cray, Buddy Guy—came up on the bandstand to watch Eric Clapton. During one of his solos Clapton quoted "Strangers in the Night" and Cray went over and tapped Jimmie Vaughan on the shoulder and shouted, "You hear that?" "Aw," said Stevie, turning around, "he's been tryin' to do that all night and he finally got it right" and Jimmie and Stevie had a good guffaw over that one—just a coupla Texas boys rankin' out God—and if the multi-guitar superstar jam on "Sweet Home Chicago" was a rowdy mess it was fun, and when it was over Stevie Ray hugged everybody, said goodbye to Jimmie, hitched a ride on one of the Clapton choppers and died instantly when the helicopter ploughed into a man-made ski slope a half-mile away. It was four years to the day since his father had died.

Photography by John Barry

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

1954-1990

LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, Robert Cray heard about it in the morning. "I stayed in a hotel five miles from the concert. Sometime after nine my manager got a call from Stevie's organization. He said to me, 'Brace yourself,' and it just...Shock waves went through, you know? I didn't know, I didn't know what to think, except that this was not real. We'd just been having so much fun. His brother was there; he was having a great time.

"So I left that morning for Chicago and I haven't been sleeping very well the past week. People are already asking, 'Well gosh, how does it feel, you were one of the last to play with him.' But you don't think about it that way. I remember a lot more about him than that.

"I go back and think about the first time we met, which was back in 1979 at the San Francisco Blues Festival. Chris Layton was playing drums even back then. It was Double Trouble with Lou Ann Barton singing, and this Stevie Vaughan guy was tearin' up all this guitar. Next day we were at a barbecue and he shows up in a complete Hendrix costume: wig, scarf and waist-length silk kimono. Who the hell *was* this guy?"

The guy himself can tell us that. Over the years, Stevie Ray Vaughan spoke often to *Musician*, notably to Ed Ward in 1987 and fellow guitarist Larry Coryell in 1989. In his polite, rather halting drawl, Stevie talked about growing up, about the bluesmen he loved, about almost losing his life to drugs and alcohol and winning it back; he talked, with varying articulateness but invariably deep soul, about playing guitar. On August 27, 1990 he was flung from a foggy sky in East Troy, Wisconsin. Here, in his own words as much as possible, is his story.

"I WAS BORN in South Dallas on October 3rd, '54. Daddy was an asbestos worker—a pipe coverer—so we traveled around to follow his work, through Louisiana, all over Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, a little bit of Arkansas. But I mainly grew up in Cockrell Hill and Oak Cliff, which are just little parts of south Dallas."

Big Jim Vaughan and the former Miss Martha Cook were stone pop-music freaks who loved to dance—"danced their asses off," said their younger son. Big Jim didn't play an instrument; he could barely play the radio, he liked to say, "but every time Daddy'd hear a great singer he would get his hand goin' and he would start dancin', and every time he'd hear a bass, an upright bass or a walkin' bass of any kind, he'd get chill bumps all over."

Jim and Martha took Stevie and his older brother Jimmie Lee to see Fats Domino and Jimmy Reed and Bob Wills, and guys from the Wills band even came over to the house for raucous games of 42, Nello and Lowboy, if you can imagine dominoes getting roisterous. Stevie's uncles Jerrel and Joe-Boy Cook were pickers: "We'd go to family reunions and the whole family'd be jammin'. Both sides." And not just on little nylon-strings either, but on Telecasters and amps, right there in the living room.

"Daddy's gig wasn't the happiest in the world. Working with asbestos and coughing all the time, crawling in between walls where it was like 300 degrees. He'd wear thermal underwear to stay cool, work 15 minutes and take 30 off." So Big Jim didn't try to stop his sons from playing music—anything, he said, was better than what he did.

"I remember Mother and Daddy comin' to a lot of my shows: Here I'd be singing all these songs to 'em, singin' 'Sweet Thing' or 'Pride and Joy,' and here were the two of 'em dancin' and huggin'. It was great. And they would cry when I'd play Hendrix songs. My father's gone now, but my mother, she's still in there with us.

"Far as I can remember I got my first guitar on my birthday in '61, so I was seven, I guess. It had catgut strings and it was one of them—not a Gene Autry or a Roy Rogers—but it was made out of Masonite, with the little stencils on it, you know? I had to take three of the strings off 'cause it wouldn't tune and I started out trying to play kinda bass riffs. Didn't make any sense, but I tried it."

Jimmie Lee, three-and-a-half years older, had already been playing a year or so. "He broke his collarbone playin' football and someone gave him a guitar and said, 'Here, play this, it won't hurt you.' First day, he made up three songs. Every time he played something I'd try to pick it up afterwards, then he'd go on to something else. Part of it, I'm sure, was being a little brother and going 'Me too!' But it was a real inspiration to see somebody pick up something and just floor it. And I saw how hard he worked at it, how much fun he was havin' doin' it, and how good he was. Within a couple-three years, if that long, he was the hottest guitar player around Dallas." Jimmie wasn't even out of his teens before he was backing up Texas bluesmen like Freddie King. "It's obvious that he learned a whole lot by doing that and that I missed some things. I ended up having to look for my own thing, but he got a lot of insight into rhythm playing and relaxing and holding back. And a lot of mine is kind of like, floor it—with guesswork. I like to come on like gangbusters and I haven't learned to ease into anything yet."

Jimmie's early-teen band was called the Swinging Pendulums (Big Jim Vaughan, chauffeur/manager). They played Dallas talent shows, battles of the bands, dime dances in school before classes started (good God—no wonder Texas breeds musicians); they played the Hob Nob Lounge for 50 bucks apiece, six nights a week through the summer. Too young to go rattin' the streets—hell, he was only nine—Stevie stayed home, and grew fat on influences. "Jimmy Reed was still Top 40, Top 10, whatever, on the stations on

Thanks to Ed Ward, Larry Coryell and Ted Drozdowski for use of previously unpublished portions of their interviews with Stevie Ray Vaughan.

our crystal radio. And B.B. King and Bobby Bland." Record-wise, "Jimmie had this knack for finding the real deal. So we were listening to the Beatles and Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy and Albert King and Freddie King and Lightnin' Hopkins and Kenny Burrell and Wes Montgomery...and also the Stones and the Bluesbreakers and the Yardbirds and the Who and Hendrix. Since I heard them all within a few years of each other, I never really noticed that this one was before that one.

"So I don't necessarily look at myself as self-taught. I would sit down and listen to something and if I couldn't find it on the neck yet, I would learn to find it *singin'* it the best I could. Trying to find the sound with my lips and my mouth, doing some bastardized version of scat singing. Then I would learn how to make the sound with my fingers that I was making with my mouth."

It wasn't long before Stevie was playing out—if you trust his memory, it was before he hit double digits. "First club gig I had, we had an 11-piece band, and we played after hours for eight days and made $600. But my first band was the Shantones. We played a talent show and about halfway through the song we went 'Fuck it' 'cause we discovered we didn't know the whole song. We were trying to play things like 'Sleepwalk' [Santo and Johnny's 1959 hit] although we didn't have a steel player. We was only eight or nine years old."

Stevie tried to tag along with Jimmie Lee, who'd tell his baby bruh to buzz off. Stevie tried hard be Mr. Cool, but as Jimmie once put it, "What can you do when you're, like, nine years old?" Big Jim and Martha took the boys to The In Crowd, a fancy Playboy Club–style nitery; the boys were supposed to play the Sunday Nite talent show but when the bunnies wiggled out Martha clapped her hands over Stevie's eyes and Big Jim hustled the li'l kid into the men's room and peeked out the door himself.

School was not among the boys' priorities. Jimmie Lee repeated ninth grade, quit at 17 and left home with a band called the Chessmen. By 1969 he was in Austin playing the blues in the town's black district; by 1970 he had a kid of his own. Stuck home in Dallas, Stevie was gettin' restless.

"I was goin' through a deal where it was hard to get along with my father. I was tryin' to grow my hair out and stuff, all those things. Jimmie'd moved out, and I'm sure my parents thought they were going to lose their other son, too. So there was a lot of holdin' on, you know? Obviously I was gonna play music, too." He quit high school right at the beginning of the 12th grade—"the principal was announcing over the P.A. system that if I didn't pay my locker fees I couldn't get my diploma. I only stayed seven more weeks. I woulda graduated in '72; I'd already been playing the Cellar for a year or two, and the Funky Monkey and the Fog." After visiting Austin a few times, Stevie moved to The Town With The Sound for good: New Year's Eve, 1972.

> "I spent a lot of time running away from myself and my family. I figured I could be close by my mother and learn to know her again."

In the early 1970s, university-town Austin was a bellbottomed seedbed of Aquarian consciousness. You could get 25-cent hamburgers and rent a house with six other hippies for 85 bucks; you could wander into clubs like Soap Creek and hear the renegade country music that would soon burst onto *Newsweek*'s pages, courtesy of Willie, his picnics and his publicity sense. Less publicized was Austin's busy blues scene. Its leading lights: Jimmie Vaughan's Fabulous Thunderbirds, the Cobras and the Triple Threat Revue, for which Stevie Vaughan left the Cobras in '76. As Ed Ward put it: "These three bands and their various jamming permutations and later incarnations are basically all you need to know about Austin blues."

Stevie had fit into Austin right from the start, just another piece of the longhaired flotsam that washed up in college towns in the '70s: an all-night bar rat, a crashpad-sleeping undersized unwashed urchin distinguished only by great guitar licks and a beatific, hunched-over onstage presence; less remarkable, given the environment, was his already advanced inability to just say no to booze, coke, marijuana, pills.

"[At first] I lived at the Rolling Hills club on the pool table and the floor, then I stayed around wherever I could, and then my band got a house. That didn't last too long, couple months anyway; God, every month there was someone new in the band. Pretty much I went from there straight to the Nightcrawlers ["a motley, surly crew," recalls one Austin writer] and then I went to California a couple months and joined the Cobras when I got back. I was with the Cobras till about July of '76, because August 8th was the first gig with the Triple Threat Revue: me, W.C. Clark, 'Cold Shot' Kindred, Freddie Pharoah, and Lou Ann Barton."

Triple Threat was hot but unstable; by 1978, Stevie was looking to form a new band. He barely knew drummer Chris "Whipper" Layton when "I went by his apartment and he was set up in his kitchen with drums and headphones; seems he was playin' along with 'Conversations' by Max Roach. I stood there and watched him for 10 minutes...you know how we get—oblivious to everything. He turns 'round and sees me and gets red as a beet, and all I can say is, 'Hey man, you wanna start a band?' And [bassist] Tommy Shannon I've known since the night he left Johnny Winter. He was on his way to California with a band he'd just formed called Crackerjack to do what you do in California, go make it big or whatever people do. And it was funny, 'cause at the time I was 14 and playin' in some of my first joints. Tommy, for some reason, was the only one would pay any attention to me, and we've played together off and on ever since." Shannon settled in for good in '81, and aside from the later addition of keyboardist Reese Wynans, Double Trouble never changed personnel again.

Back when the band started, "touring meant goin' and playin' a couple of gigs out of town. Some weird thing up into Arkansas

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

1954-1990

seemed like a major tour." Very quickly, though, the band began to cause a low, gathering rumble in the nation's blues festivals, campuses and higher-class dives. When Jimmie's T-Birds signed with Chrysalis, there were rumors of a younger Vaughan who burned stages down. In 1981 Stevie was hired for *Musician*'s annual private concert at the Chicago NAMM show. "Young Stevie Ray Vaughan, brother of Thunderbirds guitarist Jimmie Vaughan," wrote a reviewer, "instantly pumped up the evening's energy level with a torrid if slightly clichéd set of blues and rock 'n' roll standards. Fronting his Texas trio Double Trouble, Stevie Ray Vaughan pushed his vintage Strat ('aged' in the glorious Rory Gallagher tradition) to the limits: squeezing, bending and literally shaking notes out of the guitar. His gruff, sympathetic vocal style, compact, rhythm-based guitar playing and total commitment to the blues form (with frequent nods to Hendrix) bode well for Vaughan in the future..."

Indeed. Double Trouble shot a video that their manager, Chesley Millikin, gave to his old employer: Mick Jagger. The Stones brought Double Trouble to Manhattan for a private party, heightening the buzz, and Millikin (with an assist from producer Jerry Wexler) got the band a spot at the Montreux Jazz Festival. In its mythic contours, Stevie Ray's international debut was downright Hendrixian: he came "roaring into the 1982 Montreux festival," wrote *People* magazine, "with a '59 Stratocaster at his hip and two flame-throwing sidekicks he called Double Trouble. He had no record contract, no name, but he reduced the stage to a pile of smoking cinders and afterward everyone wanted to know who he was."

> "Growing spiritually—at this point that's what I'm drawn to more than anything. And it's a pleasure."

Back in Austin they knew very well—they just couldn't believe it. "I can remember John Hammond saying that Vaughan was going to be huge," wrote the *Austin Chronicle*'s Michael Hall recently. "I wanted to believe it, but I wasn't the only one who chuckled at the prediction: Stevie Vaughan was the lifer who played for peanuts at the Continental, who jammed for hours at Antone's with his friends and idols, just another raggedy, drug-troubled Albert King fanatic."

John Hammond...Mick 'n' Keith...David Bowie asking for and getting that "China Girl" guitar solo...Jackson Browne offering free studio time, offering free *tape. Texas Flood*, the band's 1983 debut, went gold. Big bucks 'n' big accolades. Big hype, too, skeptics said. Stevie was fool's gold, they grumbled: too flashy, too florid, too freaking loud. After the initial publicity storm, Stevie was almost taken for granted, just another blues-based guitar hero with a big adolescent-male following. Thing was, behind the critics' backs he *kept developing*. Listening like a bat, deepening his roots. Turning in beautiful, muscular, fat-toned guitar on album tracks like "Voodoo Chile" (the Hendrix homage that never left Stevie's repertoire) and "Couldn't Stand the Weather"; playing concerts that sometimes seemed like invocations of a huge, howling guitar god that dwarfed the little pouchy-cheeked guy onstage.

If Stevie still courted excess in his playing, he embraced it in his life. A heavy drinker virtually since childhood, by the '70s he was helpless without drugs and alcohol. By 1986 he was running down: dead-eyed coming offstage, miserably depleted and past caring, scaring and pissing off his friends. One night in Geneva—not far from his Montreux triumph of only five years before—he collapsed. "Everything just—went down. I collapsed and had every kind of breakdown a person can have. And went and got some help.

"I had conned myself into believing that I was controlling it—keep in mind that if I'm gonna roll that way, I'm damn sure gonna be a good con with it, too. I mean, doin' a quarter-ounce [of cocaine] a day, snortin' it. I'd put a half-gram or a gram in a drink, down that, then make another drink. The schedule started getting more hectic, and the more I ran into the kind of situations where there just wasn't enough time, I'd try to be Superman. And you just can't do that forever. Somehow I'd managed to keep myself from completely falling apart, but I'd been pretty much a space case. There's a lot of people that can go party socially and not run it into the ground, and I wish I was one of 'em, but I'd gotten to the point where I'd done my share and part of somebody else's. My brain was chemically changed. I didn't know when I was drunk anymore. Just before I quit drinkin', I could drink a whole shitload and not get drunk, and the next day with no warning take half a drink and be fucked up. And it was gettin' to where it was interfering with my playing."

After his initial rehab—four weeks in an Atlanta clinic—Stevie retraced the path he'd taken 15 years before and left Austin for his hometown. "By that time, almost everybody I knew in Austin was who I got my stuff from. Or hung out with because they had it. That's what happens with addiction; you just envelop yourself with the whole deal. I moved back to Dallas 'cause it seemed like a new playground for me, even though I grew up there. I figured I'd spent a lot of time running away from myself and my family. My mother still lived in Dallas. I figured I could be close by her and learn to know her again."

And when he got back out on the road, he fooled everyone by staying sober. "It's weird, 'cause it'll sneak up on me. I'll see a bottle and like, have to stop myself. Soon as I get past that urge, it's okay. But I go to meetings and just really pay attention and get on my knees a lot, man. It's true.

"I haven't kept it quiet that I'm sober, and a lot of people just don't come around anymore. Those that do, most of them have sobered up, too. There's still people that are fighting the demon, still fighting to

EPITAPH

Stevie Ray Vaughan was one of the best blues guitarists we had, and not just out of his faith to the form. His deep affinity for the dynamic—for the soul—made each of his performances a distinct, vital experience. He would stand around offstage, smiling like an elfin cowboy, but when he strapped on his guitar he was glowing. It's easy to romanticize him now, but that was Stevie Ray: a humble little powerhouse of a man with more balls than any of the other white boys who play blues. At 35, he'd put in as much road time as many musicians twice his age, but by the way he was playing when he died, he was poised to go on forever.

I remember seeing him backstage at a 1988 concert in New York, hours after the show had ended. The gear had been socked away into trucks. The usual phalanx of crew and friends were milling about and waiting to leave—all but Stevie. He sat on the trailer stairs in a kimono, surrounded by fans, talking and signing records and grinning and laughing in a completely unguarded manner for a lot longer than you'd expect. It's impossible to forget the look on the face of the kid who'd brought his Strat for Stevie to sign. More striking was Stevie himself, who looked so far from put upon by these kids that he could just as well have been one of them—hell, he was.

I spoke with him a few times since: with Jeff Beck during the pair's rigorous '89 tour, and again in the spring of 1990. Chomping endlessly on Nicorette gum, a nicotine substitute he took to draw him away from cigarettes, Stevie Ray spoke of the strain of constant touring, the demands of managers and promoters. While he was saying all this, it struck me that in all the times I'd seen him play I'd never caught him on an off night, nor had I ever even heard about one. Considering how much he toured, it's amazing he had anything to give on the platform at all. But there he always was, music pouring out of him, bringing things down to a simmer three-quarters of the way through his set for his nightly inspirational rap that told the forlorn tale of his drunkenness and dependence. Sometimes I actually felt sorry for him, a simple but astoundingly gifted little man being dragged around the world at the behest of insensitive cigar-chompers who pocketed the rewards of his efforts and—until Stevie pulled himself together—had paraded him around and left him passed out and stinking, his stomach shredded by the wicked concoction of whiskey and cocaine that he'd taken to swigging like mother's milk.

But then it hit me how much the guy loved to burn, how it virtually defined him, how much of a *motherfucker* he was. That was how Buddy Guy defined Stevie, and he could get it as well as any of them. He used pipe-thick guitar strings and got a mean, resonant sound that could cut you. It was the struggle, he and Jeff Beck agreed, the extra edge of effort or pain you put into playing your instrument, that makes your style unique. Stevie unquestionably had his. He squeezed and pulled, grimaced and snapped at his guitar, slip-dancing across the stage with eyes closed. Even when he was attacking his instrument—he would often come up with his pick from beneath the strings, drawing them away from the face of the guitar and letting them snap back into place—he sounded utterly at ease, natural, and the power was not so much like it was being forced, but that it simply couldn't be held back. He'd piledrive a wall of mismatched amps to come up with that wet Stevie Ray tone, and that would often mean hours spent every night hunched inches away from screaming speakers, sweating out the slightest details of timbre. One of the last times I spoke to him he sounded deathly tired, but he lived it and he loved it, and that's what put him in touch with something very special. I don't ordinarily go in for superstition, but it seems strange now, a frightening sign, that just weeks before he died, a stage stanchion collapsed and crushed five of Stevie Ray's guitars.

It's funny; when I think about Stevie's death, it doesn't seem to have really happened. When I see something in print about it, I want to cry, and I didn't even know the guy that well. I saw him at a record company lunch a few weeks ago, and his crooked but sincere smile said everything. He was a sweet, sensitive guy, and his music had an indelible effect on my life. He played with such power and urgency that he was almost transcendent, like he was about to burst. That's the way the best music always is.

—Matt Resnicoff

Photograph: Paul Natkin/Photo Reserve

run with it. I hope they come around. 'Cause you can only go so long or it kills you, or you go nuts, or go to jail.

"The program that I'm in to stay sober—on the record, I can't talk about it. Off the record, well, it's Alcoholics Anonymous and it's really a great deal. Funny, most people think it's a bunch of drunks sittin' around talkin' about being drunk—and that's exactly what it is. But we're sober now, and everybody's helpin' each other. In our band and crew there's six of us right now who get together and hold our little meetings and work with each other. There *are* people in the crew—they're not alcoholics, they're not addicts—but I ain't got nothin' against them havin' a beer or nothin'. If they got a problem and they wanna come for help to one of us that's dealin' with it, they're welcome. We'll give 'em all the help we can give 'em. But it's not 'You drink a beer, you're fired'; it's not that kind of deal."

IN MEMORIUM

"STEVIE REALLY GREW UP, he became a different guy." Nine days after Stevie Ray's death, Nile Rodgers sat in a Los Angeles recording studio. Three months earlier, he'd produced *Family Style*, Stevie and Jimmie's first album together. "Stevie was always a loving guy; that part of him was no different. But he was *much* more gentle now, and very focused. You could tell he'd found a different life when he gave up drugs." And his spirit was stronger than ever: There's a soulful, simple song called "Tick Tock" on the new album, "and when Stevie sang it in the studio," says Rodgers, "I just sat there with tears in my eyes thinking, 'He doesn't even understand his power.'"

If you looked closely at Stevie Ray lately, you saw, dangling over the big peacock chest-tattoo, a Maori fishhook carved of bone. To anyone who asked, Stevie Ray said it symbolized the quest for knowledge and spirituality. "And that's where I'm goin' right now," he said late in 1989. "I'm startin' to find out that that's really what matters in the first place. For me, anyway. Growing spiritually—at this point, that's what I'm drawn to more than anything. And it's a pleasure."

Not long ago, Stevie told writer Michael Corcoran that "ever since I was a kid, I've always been 'Stevie Ray Vaughan, Guitar Player.' That was it. Nobody ever thought of me as anything else, including me. I'm just now discovering there's so much more to life than playing the guitar."

PAGE

[*cont'd from page 64*] had to work hard at it. And being basically self-taught as well, I guess that's where it stems into the area of originality. I suppose you make up with originality what you don't have in technique.

MUSICIAN: *So it never bothers you to hear bad reports about the Zeppelin reunion at Atlantic Records' 40th birthday party?*

PAGE: That was very trying, I can assure you. That probably did a *hell* of a lot of damage. It's unfortunate to be measured by a one-off shot like that, when you haven't played for a while. But I know that people weren't going home dissatisfied from the *Outrider* tour.

MUSICIAN: *Pete Townshend said that after a great deal of deliberation about bringing the Who back together, he did it out of a debt to America's inspiration for and acceptance of his music. Would that be an enticement for you?*

PAGE: You mean as Led Zeppelin? Well, yes, that's a good point. Obviously there's been such a following for all these years that it'd be great to do it. Yeah [*laughs*]. So let's do it!

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ng, *Ottawa, Ontario*

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Shure 6 Beta 58 Microphones

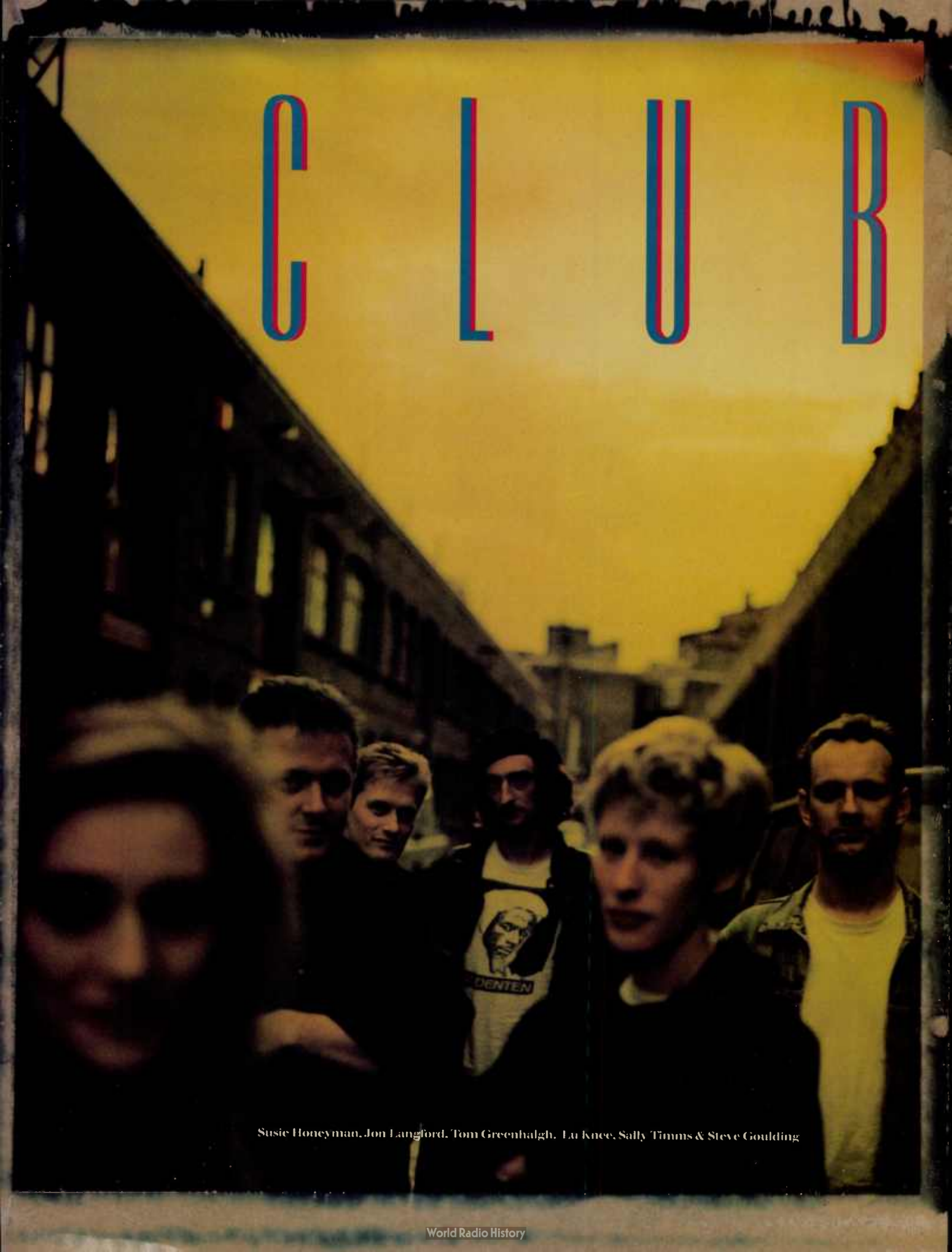
After long hours of vigorous listening, careful deliberation and intense scrutiny, MUSICIAN is pleased to present the winners of the Third Annual Best Unsigned Band Contest. These 12 bands were deemed to be a cut above the rest by the publishers and editors at MUSICIAN, and our esteemed (and very patient) all-star judges, Lyle Lovett, Branford Marsalis, Robbie Robertson, Lou Reed and Vernon Reid. They will appear on "The Best of the B.U.B.s" CD compilation produced by Warner Bros. Records.

The Polkats were selected as Grand Prize Winners and will receive the home recording studio featuring a **Tascam** 16-track recorder, **JBL** monitors, **Seck** boards, and a complete wireless microphone system from **Shure**.

The decisions were tremendously difficult, thanks to the high caliber of the entry pool–kudos and best wishes go out to everyone who took part. Robbie Robertson summed it up best: "There were some very hard choices to make here...I must say it was a pleasure to listen to these up and coming bands."

MUSICIAN

The Players' Choice



Susie Honeyman, Jon Langford, Tom Greenhalgh, Lu Knee, Sally Timms & Steve Goulding

MEKON

THE MEKONS ARE BRITAIN'S LAST GREAT PUNK BAND

BY JON PARELES

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE DOUGLAS BROTHERS

IT'S A PERFECT SUNNY AFTERNOON IN LEEDS, ENGLAND, A NORTHERN town that boasts an art college, a credit on a Who album and the home base of the Mekons. Clouds drift across a blue sky, birds twitter; England could not be more green and pleasant as Jon Langford, a charter member of the Mekons, and I stroll through a hillside park a few blocks from his house. As we talk about Margaret Thatcher's nefariousness and the quality of the local brew, Tetley's ale, we glance down at a pond a few hundred yards away.

Swans are gliding across it, and sitting on a dock is a young man with a leather jacket, tattoos and a Mohawk, also contemplating the swans with a calm smile. Now and then, he brings a small white plastic bag to his face. Langford, 32 and getting a touch of gray, chuckles and tells me why: "He's sniffing glue." Punk is definitely alive and well in Leeds.

"WE DIDN'T WANT TO MAKE A RECORD, DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE OUR PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN, DIDN'T WANT TO TUNE. THERE WASN'T MUCH LEFT FOR US TO DO."

But we knew that already. The soft-spoken Langford may not have the haircut or the wardrobe for the part— he's wearing an unripped Sun Studios T-shirt and jeans—but he and the Mekons are among Great Britain's few undaunted survivors from the punk era. After all, the Sex Pistols, the Clash and Leeds' own Gang of Four are long gone; the Damned and the Buzzcocks have already done reunion tours.

The Mekons no longer play clattery, three-chord rave-ups; their newer songs are more likely to sport an accordion and fiddle or to crank up a drum machine. While their punk-era contemporaries like the Cure or Siouxsie and the Banshees have moved up to the theater and stadium circuit, the Mekons have kept their music a cottage (and club) industry, acting out punk's street-level, do-it-yourself imperatives. They record cheaply, sing what they want, ignore most of the music business and consistently come up with songs that observe no one's categories.

After about eight albums on nearly as many labels, played by ever-shifting lineups, the Mekons have landed on A&M (through its deal with the Twin/Tone label) with one of the best albums of 1989— *The Mekons Rock 'N' Roll*—and the release of a four-song EP this month; an all-new album is due in January.

The EP—three unlikely cover versions and the Mekons' new music for a lyric by the late, great rock critic Lester Bangs—marks a minor milestone. "Being on a major label that doesn't drop the Mekons after one LP is completely new," Langford says. "Of course, they haven't spent much money on us. The advance they gave us was like a couple of weeks of Sting's room-service bill."

The Mekons' music is wayward and homemade, smart without preciousness and raucous without self-congratulation; it can be tuneful, especially when Sally Timms is singing, or it can pound and crunch. Either way, the songs carry lyrics that are political yet slogan-free and personal minus goop; it's not harrumphing political rock, sodden with its own self-importance, but rock by people with a passion for ideas. And fun, too; "Memphis, Egypt" ruminates about capitalism and consumption and the breaching of the Berlin wall, but no one I know can resist shouting along on the chorus: "Rock and roll!" With songs that good, someday the Mekons ought to be able to make a living as a band.

"THE BAND MADE a conscious decision not to work full-time," Langford says. "But the question is, how do you survive?" The other Mekons teach art or music, temp or do odd jobs.

For Langford surviving means juggling half a dozen projects at once. Along with the Mekons, Langford writes music (but not words) for the Three Johns, a band whose next album, *Eat Your Sons*, sounds like the Cure with an angel-dust hangover and a double handful of razor blades; it merges brute-force drum machine stomps, buzzing synthesizers, blaring guitars and the sarcastic, apocalyptic pronouncements of singer and lyricist John Hyatt, and it ought to be a college-radio smash.

Langford's also busy painting pictures and producing other bands, and now and then he turns into a mini-mogul of music publishing. He signed one band, One Paradise, for £500 (about $950) and got lucky; a major label became interested, and his investment brought in £5000. He plowed that stake into an independent label, Snat Records.

Snat? "We're working on definitions," he says. "It could be stuff you've got in your pocket, or things you find in a cupboard, or a meal, or a hairdresser's catflap."

Among Snat's first projects are Dimsubooteyo, the duo of Langford and the Notting Hillbillies' Brendan Croker (a longtime Mekons crony who has just built a 16-track studio in Leeds), the Wannabe Texans, a San Francisco band, and a solo album by Rico Bell, the Mekons' frequent accordion player. "We're just doing it because there's stuff that we like that wouldn't get released otherwise," he says. "Okay, we're throwing money down the toilet."

Langford's house is full of works in progress. In the basement, by the washing machine, are paintings that he's collaborating on with Mekons co-founder Tom Greenhalgh—odd, allegorical things with ambiguous figures who might be medieval heretics or deranged cowboys. This month in London, the Mekons will mark the release of the EP with "Club Mekon," an exhibit of Mekons art coupled with band performances and perhaps a lecture by gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson—your basic postmodern salon.

Langford also has some of his own paintings: photographic renderings of country and rockabilly musicians in rhinestones and 10-gallon hats, with the surfaces glazed and cracked and veined and tinted until it can be hard to recognize the figure underneath (like the face of Elvis on the cover of *The Mekons Rock 'N' Roll*).

The music is upstairs. A small room holds a portable four-track, guitars, a typewriter, a drum machine and various electronic toys, along with skull-headed Mexican Day of the Dead figures, like those on the cover of 1988's *So Good It Hurts*, and selected odd Americana, like a "Mutants for Nuclear Power" bumper sticker. "We made most of the Three Johns album right here," he says. "With the drum machine, the only things we needed to record live were guitars and vocals, and we spent one day in a proper studio doing all the bass."

There's a stack of paper with lyrics that have been ricocheting between Langford and Greenhalgh—"America your dull day of corruption is over," ruminations on the politics of torture—and ideas for things like album covers; how about "Socialist Realism" made to look like a McDonald's logo? In a way, the Mekons' songs are the reverse of Langford's paintings; the words are oblique, a splatter of

ideas and images, but the presentation is unvarnished.

"The next album is trying to come to terms with what's going on at the moment," Langford says. "The situation doesn't fit anybody's conception of what politics has been—the American empire is sort of crumbling, and what is this European thing that is coming up? I don't see how anyone can be politically correct in addressing those subjects because the goalposts have moved so far.

"When we write, we try and push the parameters of what our politics are, always questioning. To lecture to people is insulting, and our slogan is that sloganeering is implicitly reactionary. If you assume there's a stupid public, you might as well be a Nazi yourself."

Of course, for the truly pure there are contradictions in marketing art as a consumer commodity for the profit of a label like A&M and its parent, PolyGram.

"We're not paragons of virtue or ideological soundness," Greenhalgh says. "What we do is try to be as aware as possible of various ramifications of what it is that we're doing. It's a question of steering through the system we're in, so that what you actually do can't be co-opted too much—putting out odd spines and spikes, so you can't be swallowed whole."

Langford plays me a backing track from the next album: a bouncing, minor-key vamp, somewhere between Booker T. and the M.G.'s and Augustus Pablo, topped by an accordion. He also plays a full-fledged production, a stately, anthemic song about Germany's secret memories of World War II, sung with somber dignity by Sally Timms. Neither sounds anything like the current EP, which has eerie, processed vocals above tape-looped drums—Steve Goulding, the Mekons' drummer, was in Chicago so the band used his samples—that create a kind of stoic danceability. The Mekons are still not a band anybody can predict.

"THE SECRET OF our success," says Tom Greenhalgh, "is not being successful. The entire time, and certainly up until 1986–87, we were more or less ignored and left to get on with what we were doing. There must be so many bands who made one good record when they first started out—the record that had to be made—and got signed to a major record label and that was it, end of story, even though they've made 10 more records. With the Mekons, we felt we could just keep it going for our own amusement as much as anyone else's."

Greenhalgh is the one Mekon who looks something like a rock star—blond, high-cheekboned, handsome. His singing voice, however, is an unrepentant bawl, the sound of a soccer fan cheering a losing team in the rain.

Greenhalgh and Langford were art students in Leeds when punk transformed British rock. "The Sex Pistols, the Clash and the Ramones played in Leeds, all within a very short space of time," Greenhalgh recalls. "Suddenly, for the first time ever, it seemed that it was possible to be in a band. Up until then, you'd see bands like the Who and you didn't really think, 'I could be doing that.' It changed overnight."

Like hundreds, maybe thousands of other arty young Britons, they decided that they, too, should start a band. At the time, Greenhalgh recalls, he knew all of two guitar chords. "Kevin Lycett and Mark White and I got together because the Gang of Four had just started. They were close friends of ours, and they had equipment, which we borrowed when they weren't using it. The name came from Dan Dare and the Mekons, a 1950s comic strip. Dan Dare was a stiff-upper-lip imperialist Briton, and a Mekon was an arch-enemy, an alien evil intelligence that went around in a flying saucer."

Langford joined a few months later, playing drums. (He moved to guitar later, when he was in danger of losing his amateur status on drums.) It was 1977, when punk was in its glory. "The Mekons, when we first started, had a big manifesto, a long list of things we didn't want to do," he said. "We didn't want to make a record, didn't want to have our photograph taken, didn't want to tune. There wasn't much left for us to do."

But they did it. "One club put on punk bands," Greenhalgh recalls, "so we went down there and managed to bluff the guy and convince him that we were a proper band. Our second gig was supporting the Rezillos in Leeds, and their tour manager, Bob Last, was looking to start his own record label. He asked us if we wanted to do a single.

"We were simply shocked and horrified, and it seemed completely insane, so we did that record, 'Never Been in a Riot.' And then we were in this position of actually having a record out. What bands do when they have a record out is, they go on tour, so we did. If we hadn't had that initial impetus we might have had a bit of a laugh playing around Leeds for a few months and gotten bored and done something else."

"Never Been in a Riot," the first Mekons single, was an answer record—a reply to the Clash's "White Riot" that already showed the Mekons' skepticism and distaste for received opinions. "Right from the beginning, we were trying to deal with issues," Greenhalgh says. The early Mekons played punk-rock somewhere between the Clash's key-of-E speedballs and the Gang of Four's dubwise dissonances; early on, however, they also took up synthesizers, getting plenty of mileage out of the inhuman, mechanical tones.

In a fit of post–Sex Pistols optimism, Virgin signed the Mekons and put out three singles and an album, *The Quality of Mercy Is Not Strnen*. The Mekons were partway through recording the followup when Virgin dropped them, and they were stuck with the studio bill. At that point, cooler heads in the band decided to quit while they were behind, but the Mekons core straggled on, and the album was finished as a kind of experiment.

"WE FELT KICKED AROUND BY THE WHOLE BUSINESS. EVERYTHING WE DID WAS KIND OF REVENGE."

"Whoever felt like going to the studio could go in and do whatever they felt like doing," Greenhalgh explains. "They could also do whatever they felt like to whatever was on tape." Ominous, highly electronic and full of sonic holes—I suspect someone erased things as well as adding them—*Devils Rats and Piggies a Spe-*

cial Message from Godzilla, released on the independent Red Rhino label, was anything but ingratiating, and didn't exactly expand the fan base.

Langford and Greenhalgh briefly considered getting jobs as bus conductors, but with the Gang of Four tearing up the burgeoning new wave circuit, Leeds was enjoying a moment of trendiness. "We toured in Europe in 1980 and went completely mad," Langford recalls. "We had the feeling that something was over but we were going to have a good time before we go."

On New Year's Eve, 1980–81, the Gang of Four, the Mekons and the Au Pairs, a pioneering women's rock band, shared an all-Leeds triple bill in New York City. But it turned out to be the Mekons' last live show for more than a year. "One of the reasons we stopped playing live was that the punk scene in England had got really quite ugly," Greenhalgh says. "We would stop playing if a gig

TUNELESS TRUMPETS

TOM GREENHALGH and **JON LANGFORD** play Tokai copies of Fender Strats and Telecasters. Langford has a Peavey Bandit amp and, for studio work, a Vox **AC15**. "It's a 15-watt amplifier made to be used by accordionists, so when you look at the amplifier the knobs are all backwards because the accordionist would stand behind the amp with the speaker obscuring his legs and knees. That gives me all the guitar sounds when I record." He's also fond of an Archer Mini-Amp, made by Tandy, which hangs on a belt and "has about minus three watts. When you put a close mike on it, it makes you sound like Neil Young." Other equipment in Langford's music room includes a Casio **SK-1**, a Roy Smeck Harmony banjo, a couple of ProCo Rat pedals, an Alesis Midiverb, a Yamaha RX5, a Tascam Ministudio *and* an Olympia typewriter.

Greenhalgh also has a Hofner Galaxy guitar, a Vox AC30 amp, a small Marshall Combo amp and a Roland Space Echo. "I don't use it for playing guitar, I just use it for recording as an effect. With vocals, it's really fantastic; whatever anybody says, no digital delay or echo can duplicate the Space Echo, the tape." He also has a Korg MS-20 analog synthesizer. "I get really nice droney, harmonic sounds out of it. The Korg in combination with the Space Echo is quite a fearsome thing to behold. It's really good for getting noise into a track. If I have a track going, if it sounds a little bit tame, put a synth noise in there and it will just sort of create whatever effect you're going for. It gets an extra thing happening that doesn't have to be obviously musical."

Semi-Mekon **BRENDAN CROKER** plays a red hot Gibson **ES 330**, a Stella 12-string and a Martin .0021. Drummer **STEVE GOULDING**'s got a Gretsch "Rosewood Finish" kit with a 22-inch kick drum, Zildjian cymbals and "two wooden sticks."

And now, on to the deputy Mekons...**KEN LITE** plays a Woolworth's plastic ukelele with a "Jimi Hendrix" wah-wah. **JOHN "DUBMASTER" GILL** plays a Hohner Button accordion and a "cheap Japanese bass." **CHARLIE GREENHALGH**'s got his own Martin .0021 and a Tokai Strat copy. He also blows Hohner harps (Bandmaster, Special 20 and Marine Band). All guitarists employ Jim Dunlop picks and D'Addario strings.

became violent, but there were times when we'd come offstage and find that somebody in the back had been glassed, had had a glass smashed in the face. That was the mood at the time."

The band only squeezed out a single, "The Sporting Life," whose first pressings were labeled "the last Mekons record." And as of early 1982, the Mekons might have been one more end-of-punk statistic. Langford turned to the Three Johns, who came up with a prototype of the drum machine–plus–power chords formula now thumping continually on MTV. But what saved the Mekons, Langford says, was spite. "We just felt kicked around by the whole business," he says, "and everything we did was a kind of revenge act.

"At the end of 1981, we started work on *The Mekons Story*"—an album that, despite its title and packaging, not to mention the narration between cuts, was largely new songs. "It was a joke, a play on *The Motown Story*, and the idea was, 'Let's make an album and not put much effort into it, just for the fucking spite of it. Everyone thinks we've split up, and we're considered dated by the British music press, so we'll just do a record that really annoys them.' And it did. After that, people classed us as a hopeless joke band till the end of all time."

And still the band hung on. Amid the jokes, the music was changing; instead of punk austerity, the Mekons were beginning to follow more inclusive instincts. With "The English Dancing Master," a 1983 EP, the Mekons started to twang a little.

"It wasn't like we sat down and said, 'Let's start playing country music,'" Greenhalgh recalls. "But the whole punk thing had gotten stale and Britain had the awful New Romantics. John Gill, who had been our engineer, had joined the band, and he was a folk musician as well, and I began to realize that there was folk music with a strong political perspective. I'd always dismissed British folk music as totally fake nonsense, and suddenly I realized that there had been this totally submerged tradition. We also felt that after messing about with synths, we were getting bored, and we decided to start playing some real instruments."

Sally Timms, a Leeds woman, had gradually joined the band against her better judgment, first as a studio singer on *The Mekons Story* and eventually onstage. "I used to think they were the worst band in the world," she says. "I used to cower in embarrassment when they were playing. It must be a sign of getting older when you don't get embarrassed by getting onstage and making a fool of yourself with people you thought were a load of rubbish."

Timms has become the band's melodic beacon; her voice blends composure and melancholy, and whether she's singing about history or affection or despair, she sounds simultaneously level-headed and full of sympathy.

The band's rhythm section stabilized with Lu Knee on bass and drummer Steve Goulding, formerly of Graham Parker and the Rumour. "I like being in a band that isn't so conventional in its approach," he says. "It's been more, kind of, organic, I suppose you would say—it smells funny, anyway." In a final act of professionalism, he toured with the Thompson Twins. "That was my last brush with reality, and I was so impressed I went back to the Mekons," he says. Meanwhile, Susie Honeyman, a classically trained musician who had also played with Rip Rig and Panic and the Fire Engines, joined the band on fiddle in 1983, and Rob

Worby, a computer-keyboard expert, began sitting in. "But me and Tom, we never got to a point where we can play really well," Langford says.

The latter-day Mekons have been as inclusive as the early Mekons were spartan. *Fear and Whiskey* (1985, reissued here with additional songs as *Original Sin*) and *The Edge of the World* (1986) brought together the doomy self-laceration of hard country music with the thumpalong punk sense of rhythm; *Honky Tonkin'* (1987, and the first Mekons album officially released in the United States) had more bounce in its step and even less hope for the human flotsam in its songs: "If they hang you," Timms sang to a friend, "I'll have a few sleepless nights."

On 1988's *So Good It Hurts*, the Mekons had some fans worried because they sounded almost polished, as they tried on a few more styles than they could make their own. But with *The Mekons Rock 'N' Roll* they dispelled any inklings that they might be getting too folksy. The band barrels through the songs, tearing into the implications of big media and the big beat while romping and stomping like mad. It was recorded virtually live in the studio. "I like the idea of a record that's like a performance," Langford says. "You don't have to be so precious about it that you've worked out every note."

Like most of the Mekons' other efforts, songwriting follows no routine. "We write things down on bits of paper and people look disinterested..." says Langford.

"And they get on to something else or go out and get drunk..." Timms continues.

"And when it comes time to make the album," says Langford, "we say, 'Well, I've got this bit,' and someone says, 'Well, that's all right,' and that's how things end up. A lot of it is quite spontaneous, sometimes almost too spontaneous."

"A lot of it is quite desperate really," Timms adds. "Sometimes I've seen people sitting with books underlining whole lines of words to take out and sing instantly in the studio, because there had to be words. It's kind of a crude sampling of literature."

"It's easy to write loads and loads of words," Langford adds, "but Tom will often ask me, 'What do you mean to say here,' and we have to clean things up a little bit."

So aren't the Mekons ever tempted to sell out—to tune up, hook in the sequencers and babble about love?

"I don't think we'd know how to do it," Langford says. "We've put out things that I thought were pretty commercial—'Ghosts of American Astronauts' was, like, a nice pop tune, although I guess the words were a bit heavy.

"But we don't try to be weird, we just try to do things that we think fit. I know there's a way of jumping on a bandwagon, and trying to make something that sounds like something that's actually fashionable and no, we wouldn't do that. But I always think the things we do are good enough to sell a lot of records. I don't think the production is crap on them, I don't think they're bad songs. But I don't think the world needs another band desperate to get in the charts.

"I feel easy with it," he says. "I've been in the band since I was 19, all the best years of my life. Having never made any money for all those years, I still think it's better than going to work."

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ROB TYNER IN HIS ARMOR, 1990.

AFTER THE REVOLUTION THE LEGACY OF THE MC5

SOMEWHERE THERE EXISTS AN ALTERNATE universe in which the MC5 became the biggest band in history—bigger than the Beatles (their ambition), bigger than Chairman Mao (their manager's). A universe in which thousands of their direct descendants express the White Panther Party's three-point program—rock 'n' roll, dope and fucking in the streets—by accelerating social change through a musical fusion of Sun Ra, John Coltrane, the gutter-tongued rhythm and blues of Andre Williams and prepsychedelic, non-nonviolent Anglo-rock glommed from the Who and Them.

In this universe, everyone wears black leather trenchcoats and spangled stage costumes, guitarists wiggle through power chords, singers storm and stomp as they bash drumkits with out-of-control mike-cord lariats, skinny blond drummers bead sweat 'cross naked chests as they struggle to fit Keith Moon rolls into Elvin Jones–based patterns, while the crowd demands that anyone as wimpishly literary as the Velvet Underground "Kick out the jams motherfuckers! Or get off the stage."

I know this universe because my active career as a rock 'n' roll fan began as one of the several thousand MC5 fans who followed the band's adventures around Michigan and the upper Midwest from 1967 through its disintegration in the early '70s. I know it because, with the band and its manager, John Sinclair (the self-styled "cigar-chomping psychedelic

BY DAVE MARSH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVEN R. NICKERSON

gangster" now best known as the subject of a John Lennon song) and those other fans, I dreamed it.

About the only resemblances between that universe and the one *Musician* inhabits are that the bassist remains stock-still at the back of the bandstand, and that those power chords and quasi-revolutionary concepts occasionally loom up as signposts to a better way of life.

By now, though, such offshoots are grown hydroponically, thrashers and punkers with their roots tangled and distorted because they're cut off from the twin sources of the Five's sonic fury: The frenzied frustrations of Motor City R&B's spiritual energy clashed with the intellectual anger of Midwestern bohemian dreams crashing to earth amidst the multiple disasters of racial backlash, psychedelic crapout and Vietnam psychosis. Today's misunderstanding of high-energy Michigan rock is exemplified by the fact that most historians credit the Stooges, the Five's exquisitely comic doppelganger, as one of the era's and the area's pre-punk prime movers. An error at least as significant as calling the Yardbirds more influential than the Stones, or ranking Joe Tex ahead of Otis Redding.

Make no mistake: Iggy and the Stooges were a great band, one of the most unsettling groups ever to seize a stage. But the MC5's shows were of a whole other order, as great in their own sizzlingly seismic way as the Who's or the Stones' or Springsteen's or Dylan's, and for exactly the same reason: They had every intention of changing the whole world, every time out, and on their best nights, the band and those paying attention realized some incredible fragment of that ambition and were transported to a state where that alternate universe wasn't just a possibility but the actual Truth, not only what was Going to Happen but what was actually Happening.

"When I go out in armor, people treat me normally. When I wear a suit jacket they don't take me seriously."

Rob Tyner, c. 1968.

The Five presented themselves with such sudden, gaudy force that getting a fix on them, no matter how close to the site you happened to stand, proved virtually impossible. Originally they were just a pack of rock rats from the downriver, downscale suburb of Lincoln Park. They weren't especially "progressive" the way that term is understood today: Rather than Anglo-popsters, they were greaser soulsters, and the MC5 moniker evolved, I always suspected, partly because it had that biker/car club ring to it.

Sometime in the early mid-'60s, the Lincoln Park brigade did hook up with the local avant-garde, in the form of beatnik painter Michael Davis, who soon left his canvases for the bass guitar. A few blocks away, Trans-Love Energies' Artists Workshop struggled to liberate poetry and jazz from the art ghetto. The Five were actually the first clear test of John Sinclair and company's thesis that ordinary rock 'n' roll street kids would thrive if thrown together with the avant-garde on equal terms. The Trans-Love credo, "There is no separation," seemed to mean "There is no condescension." In Sinclair's Coat-Puller column in the old *Fifth Estate*, he once confessed to reading *Hit Parader* because they did good interviews and "besides I kinda like knowing what Ringo eats for breakfast."

To see the Five in those days—singer Rob Tyner playing harp on "Empty Heart" or "C.C. Rider" till his mouth was shredded and bleeding, or performing the ritualized atomic explosion of "Black to Comm" and thus holding its own on a bill with Joseph Jarman's ensemble or various other elements of the Art Ensemble of Chicago—was to experience not the *idea* of revolution but a form of the real thing. It was the Velvet Revolution as played out within the cultural matrix of Detroit, which is to say partaking of jazz, gospel, rock 'n' roll, psychedelic and comic-strip attitudes.

The Five were police targets, all of them. Sinclair made himself the Motor City's most notorious pot fiend, and managed to get sent up to the state pen for 10 years for giving two joints to an undercover narc (the same guy who'd given him his *second* bust, so go figure). Meantime, the rest of the band's "management company," a hippie conglomerate earlier known as Trans-Love Energies, moved to collegiate Ann Arbor, absorbed various psychedelicized SDSers and the like and became the ultra-militant White Panther Party, with its uniquely salacious political program (and a genuinely stupid name that has led to the widely mistaken belief that they—we—were some kind of white supremacists. The first point of the WPP's program was actually "Full support of the Black Panther Party's 10-point program," which ought to settle the issue).

Ludicrous as it may seem, the WPP attracted the direct interest of the FBI's Cointelpro (through which human agency I do not know or I would most certainly be tellin'); several of its members were arrested for (ineffectively) bombing an Ann Arbor CIA office and wound up on the Ten Most Wanted List. Meantime, the Five themselves managed to get busted for all sorts of things, ranging from illegally wrapping themselves in the flag to obscenity (the cry "Kick out the jams motherfucker" probably remains illegal in most states, not only Florida) to shoplifting sunglasses.

The MC5 lived and worked at a killing pace and pressure. By the late '70s, three-fifths of the group were in governmental rehab in the federal penitentiary at Lexington, Kentucky, site of a Burroughsian nightmare—going cold turkey under armed guard while

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gram on his first try. He writes for the page as well as song lyrics. But when Lennon "fed the baby," he had somebody else to cook the food and clean up the dishes. Tyner and his wife Becky (whose costumes were a key element of the MC5's act and whose catered cuisine has energized many a Detroit rock show's backstage) are on their own, in a small house in suburban Berkeley (boyhood home of Eagle Glenn Frey, perhaps the Michigan musician least influenced by the Five).

As the armor suggests, however, Tyner's not your ordinary Mister Mom. He also "spent a lot of time doing research in paleoanthropology, especially Native American studies. I became very interested in the study of mankind, where we came from, why we do what we do. I studied the question of violence. Why do people love violence? Being a person who has portrayed violence so much, I know they enjoy it. And I came to a startling conclusion. I don't think we're descended from monkeys. I think we're descended from lemurs—primitive forest creatures who live in fear. It's not our aggression that causes us to be violent. It's fear." He says that he finds this conclusion "endearing, in a kind of way."

It's "Renegade," *Bloodbrothers*' first original song, that defines Tyner's renewed point of view. "You see I once fought in a revolution," he sings, "I was searching for a more radical solution/But my comrades turned and started shootin'/I had to make my getaway."

Like all great music, the MC5's was about love, "love in spite of circumstances," as Tyner says of *Bloodbrothers*. So the MC5 remain the rock concert experience against which I measure all others, because getting lost in that music, as you were meant to, became a vehicle for finding yourself. It was as scary, as exhilarating and as worthwhile as it sounds. No wonder the men who made it happen were so depleted that, since then, they've done very little. Although he'd in many ways treated himself more considerately than any of the others, by mid-'88 Tyner found himself hospitalized, on the verge of full systemic failure. He survived, he says, through tapping his own shamanism after Becky brought him a copy of Joseph Campbell's *The Masks of God*.

Tyner always kept himself a little aloof from the core madness of the Five's scene. For one thing, he and Becky had a stable marriage and, by the time [*cont'd on page 143*]

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6 WEEKS ON, 46 OFF

By Dave DiMartino

"ALL MY RECORDS ARE KIND OF IN THE DEMO STATE," says the elusive J.J. Cale, typically self-effacing, in the L.A. office of BMG Records one late afternoon. We're talking about *Travel Log*, his first record in many years—and the manner by which the U.K. Silvertone label, headed by Brit industry legend Andrew Lauder, ended up releasing it. Lauder, he says, wanted to release a new Cale album; Cale himself had a batch of songs he wanted Lauder to issue before recording anything else new.

"Some of 'em are live, most of 'em are first and second takes, and two or three of 'em are super-overdubbed on. I hardly ever re-record anything. I should," he laughs, "because for radio, you ought to really polish up your tunes. But I mainly was making recordings for musicians to do my tunes, and so I kind of left things in the demo state."

Though Lauder's "small English label" appealed to Cale, the major irony may be that it has a distribution deal with massive BMG Records—and that Cale, who'd quit making records for Phonogram (now PolyGram) in 1985, was once again, whether he liked it or not, hooked up with a corporate giant. "I didn't really expect it," he says. "I thought they'd just put it out in England and that'd probably be about it. They'd get their money back, and it'd be about it."

The reason Cale stopped making records? "The record company was paying me a lot of money to make records," he says, "and I felt like I was giving them *art* back, you know? And they can't really sell art. I was kind of giving 'em my *bag*, and they wanted hits."

But Cale—the composer of "After Midnight" and "Cocaine," among other songs—had many things other than hits on his mind. Foremost among them was simply sitting back, playing his guitar and enjoying himself.

"I spend a lot of time in recording studios and buses and nightclubs in my life," says J.J. Cale.

MUSICIAN: *Are you in a position now where you don't have to make records if you don't want to, just on the basis of incoming royalties for songs you've written?*

CALE: Right. "Call Me the Breeze," "After Midnight," "Cocaine"—those three songs there pay my rent. I had a Michelob commercial, Eric Clapton brought back "After Midnight" again. That's one of the reasons why. I didn't quit till I had my rent paid. There's a point when you make enough money, and then if you're not doing what it is you like to *do*...And I'd got to where it wasn't fun to make records anymore, because, I don't know—you have down times and up times. So I asked them to let me out of my contract and they did and it worked just fine. And now I'm doing this here. It's basically the same old music, it's just that I'm a little fresher now because I've had a rest.

MUSICIAN: *It's great that those songs did so well, but you wrote them years ago. It must be strange when a PolyGram says there are no "hits" on one of your records, when your actual hits were things you wrote off the cuff a long time ago. You must have asked yourself what the point of it all was.*

CALE: Yeah. You're correct there. No, I'm not competing against myself. This album here sounds like the first record I made, to me. It's a bag I do. I try, I try like *hell* to get out of my bag...but when I get through and listen to the damn thing, I say, "This just sounds like *me*." I'll play the guitar, and they'll say, "It's the *guitar*." So I'll go get another guitar and play that, and I'll think it's gonna make me sound different, and it don't. Making records is the same way. I always have the intention of slipping into something new just to surprise myself, and possibly my audience. But when I get through [*laughs*] and I listen to it, I think I'm still in that narrow little bag I created for myself. There's an upside to that and there's a downside to it. You can count on it—and the downside is, there's no surprises.

MUSICIAN: *Do you dislike large corporations? Is that why your latest album was on Silvertone?*

CALE: Yeah. A big corporation has to have hits more than a little corporation, because their overhead's so high. I understood that, and I didn't feel like I was actually coming up with Top 40 kind of

J.J. CALE'S GOT IT MADE

tunes, and I was kind of glad. Because I was getting up in age, and I thought, "Well, I've already paid my dues to the hit."

MUSICIAN: *What would drive you to go out and play on the road when you didn't have a new record to promote?*

CALE: The tours I've done in the last five years were to promote nothing. I didn't make any money—by the time I got home, the bus or the motor home or the band and the hotels ate up the profit. I like to play. I'm a musician. I could draw 200–300 people in all the major towns on the circuit that everybody plays, the one that's been around forever. It wasn't money-oriented or promotion-oriented or marketing-oriented. I didn't have a label or wasn't making any money. I'm a musician and I like to go out and play. I don't do it very much—six weeks out of the year. You got to remember, there's another ten-and-a-half months I don't do nothing—six weeks out of the year is not very long. But once a year, I try to go out and play, mainly in the United States. Again, I'm a songwriter, and I get ideas, get to hear new bands, meet new people—it's what I got in the music business for.

MUSICIAN: *How do you feel you play the guitar?*

CALE: Very sloppily [*laughs*].

MUSICIAN: *Really?*

CALE: Well, from time to time. Some days I can't play a wrong note, man, and some days I can't hit a right note. And sometimes that day is when I'm making a record or in front of an audience, and sometimes it's just home in the living room. I think all people are like that.

MUSICIAN: *Sometimes you play lead and sometimes you don't.*

CALE: It's just whatever works at the time. If somebody plays something really good, I'll just use that. Or sometimes when I'm doing the song, I take the rhythm player's position, because I'm the only one who really knows the chords, because I wrote the song. Sometimes, if nobody plays anything, I'll go back and overdub the solo myself. Or sometimes I'll hire somebody to come in and play the solo. And we took each tune as it was, and said, "Well, I don't like the solo you played, let's get somebody else to come in and play and see if it puts some light on the tune." And maybe somebody'd come in and they'd play as bad as I did, or as bad as the last guy. There was really no formula to it. It was just whatever we tried to get to work; sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. Sometimes people played great, sometimes they played terrible.

MUSICIAN: *You lived and recorded in Nashville in the '70s. What was the general interaction between musicians like out there then? Was there a feeling of camaraderie—did you all hang out—or was it a more mercenary scene?*

CALE: I don't know what it's like now. I moved out here in 1980 and I started cutting stuff out here in L.A. Most of the guys in Nashville are session players. They do that for a living, and you call them up and they come over at 10, and maybe they're playing with someone else. It's not a hang-out kind of thing. I don't know what it is now, I'm talking about the '70s. It was not a hang-out thing. You'd call them to do a certain thing. Like if you built a house, you'd call a guy who does nothing but windows, and another guy who does floors or walls. Out here, there's not as much of that session thing. Nashville's more cliquey, session-oriented than L.A. The guys I used out here to make the recordings on the last two or three albums are more friends of mine. I've known Jim Keltner for 25 years, and Tim Drummond. The guys I used in Nashville were more or less session players; they'd play on George Jones records and Randy Travis records or whoever.

MUSICIAN: *Did you get the impression they felt they were doing anything special with you?*

CALE: Sometimes they would—and sometimes they'd come in and play the same thing they played on the last guy's record. Sometimes they played so many sessions that it was almost like a typewriter to them. Everybody falls into that—you start imitating yourself, or you can't come up with something new. Sometimes they'd walk in fresh. We tried to maybe hire them early in the week. That's the way that system worked there.

MUSICIAN: *Some people might view your emphasis on "feel" as being antithetical to the general session-player scene. In your view, can they pretty much "feel" on command?*

CALE: They're better than most. The thing about session players is, they can play what a lot of people can play, but they can do it about 10 times faster. Because when they walk in there, you don't rehearse or nothing—you just go in and play the song for them. And they write down the chord changes and they try to make a little thing to fit it. They're really fast—that's why session players are used like they are. You can get more product in a smaller amount of time. It's all business-oriented. Which I liked for a while. And then I got tired of that, and said, "Let's use the road band on that, and put a little spice on that." They'd say, "Oh, the road band plays out of tune, and they're always drunk, and they're not take-care-of-business guys like session players are." But you get things from that kind of environment which you don't get out of the session players. There's a little raw, and a little rock 'n' roll. Maybe it's a little funky. I like that, along with the really slick kind of things. I like both kinds. I don't like it *all* funky, and I don't like it slick. So I try to mix it up.

MUSICIAN: *Speaking of collectors—what about you and guitars?*

CALE: Yeah, I got into collecting guitars in the '70s. I don't collect them anymore, but I bought more guitars than anybody could ever play for a while, 20 or 30 or so.

I really liked the old Gibsons. I visited the old Kalamazoo factory right before they went out of business, and I knew the old American guitar firms were going. The Koreans and Japanese were gonna put them out of business like they did everything else. At one time there

"The kind of amplifiers I use is the kind I can pick up. If I could afford somebody to haul my amp, I could get a bigger sound." –J.J. Cale

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was Gretsch, Gibson and Fender—they were the main guitars, not counting Epiphone or Guild or Harmony—but I was always a fan of that, like people are of old cars or whatever, so I got to buying some. I got two or three antiques, and I bought a lot of new ones right before they went out of business. Guitars are works of art to me, I look at 'em like some people look at a Rembrandt painting. For many years I was so poor that if I wanted a new guitar, I had to trade in the one I had. I could never afford two guitars. I was always making a payment on a guitar or an amp. Then when I got successful, I went, "God, I can go to the music store and buy five guitars and bring 'em home." And I like to modify guitars—I'm a shade-tree guitar repairman, I do that as a hobby.

The first five or six albums, I had that old roundhole Harmony that I kept modifying, and pretty soon it was no longer an acoustic $50 Harmony. I jerked the back off of it and put wires and springs to hold the neck together. Every time I'd go on tour, the airlines would crush it. And I'd get up onstage and the pickup wouldn't work, so I constantly modified it. For the first five or six albums, I played nothing but that Harmony guitar. After about five or six albums, I started collecting guitars, and I started playing the guitars on the tapes. But for the first albums, and all my touring, all I had was one guitar, and it was that old Harmony. And I think I had a Gibson electric—but it was a modified acoustic guitar with a lot of electric pickups in it.

MUSICIAN: *What kind of modifications did you generally make?*

CALE: Putting pickups in acoustic guitars. I loved to do that—gouge a big hole in 'em and make 'em look real ugly, not do it with any precision or anything. I guess I messed up two or three nice guitars.

MUSICIAN: *What about effects?*

CALE: I've run my guitar through every known gimmick that there is. And also, I have a lot of amplifiers, and I'd run digital delays, wah-wahs back when it was popular, and modify the sound. I'd also just put a mike on an acoustic guitar and try to get the purest sound you could get with the least amount of wires. I was experimenting with everything, because that was what was fun for me—the experimenting. It wasn't so much the sound I got, it was the journey, not the end. You know, there's the tune, it's all done, now there's nothing to do. The fun was the whole trip—modifying the guitars, putting 'em on the songs—"Well, that guitar sounds terrible," you know, doing this and that, changing the audio equipment. I was really never writing songs, I was always modifying electronics and musical instruments, and then I'd put my voice on it to make a song. I'd go in to record, and maybe the tape recorder wouldn't work, and then I'd have to get out all the tape recorder trouble-shooting stuff, and I'd spend six hours fixing the tape recorder, and then when I got everything working, everything sounded good, I wasn't in the mood to play *[laughs]*. But I enjoyed doing that—the maintenance, the fix-it part. And some of the songs come out of that endeavor—screwing with electronics.

MUSICIAN: *What's your overall impression of technology's effect on playing? Is pure skill or final sound the ultimate bottom line for you?*

CALE: I'm into both. The jazzbo part of me, the purist part of me, says you either play or you don't, no matter what you do. Then the other deal is the technical—you know, manipulating the technical stuff can get into art. A lot of people don't think it can, but getting all the electronics going...Jimi Hendrix proves that.

MUSICIAN: *Eric Clapton once said that what he enjoys most about you is your subtlety, the sense of "what isn't being played."*

CALE: Yeah, I underplayed a lot of stuff. I was a rock 'n' roll, Chuck Berry kind of guitar player for years and years when I was younger. And then by the time I started making songwriting type of deals, I was about 32–33 years old, and I'd already figured out by then that there's plenty of people out there doing hard rock. And I thought maybe I'd try a different approach to see if I could slide into a slot nobody had covered. So I kind of underplayed everything. And that worked. Rock 'n' roll in the late '60s and '70s, everybody was really standing on it, you know. A lot of people didn't like what it was I did, because it wasn't a stand-on-it kind of thing. But there was a hole in there, and I was trying to figure out how to make recordings and not get into anyone else's bag, so I kind of underplayed, and there wasn't anybody really underplaying at that time.

MUSICIAN: *In the late '60s, when Cream, Hendrix and others were exploring noise, distortion and feedback techniques, was that something that excited you?*

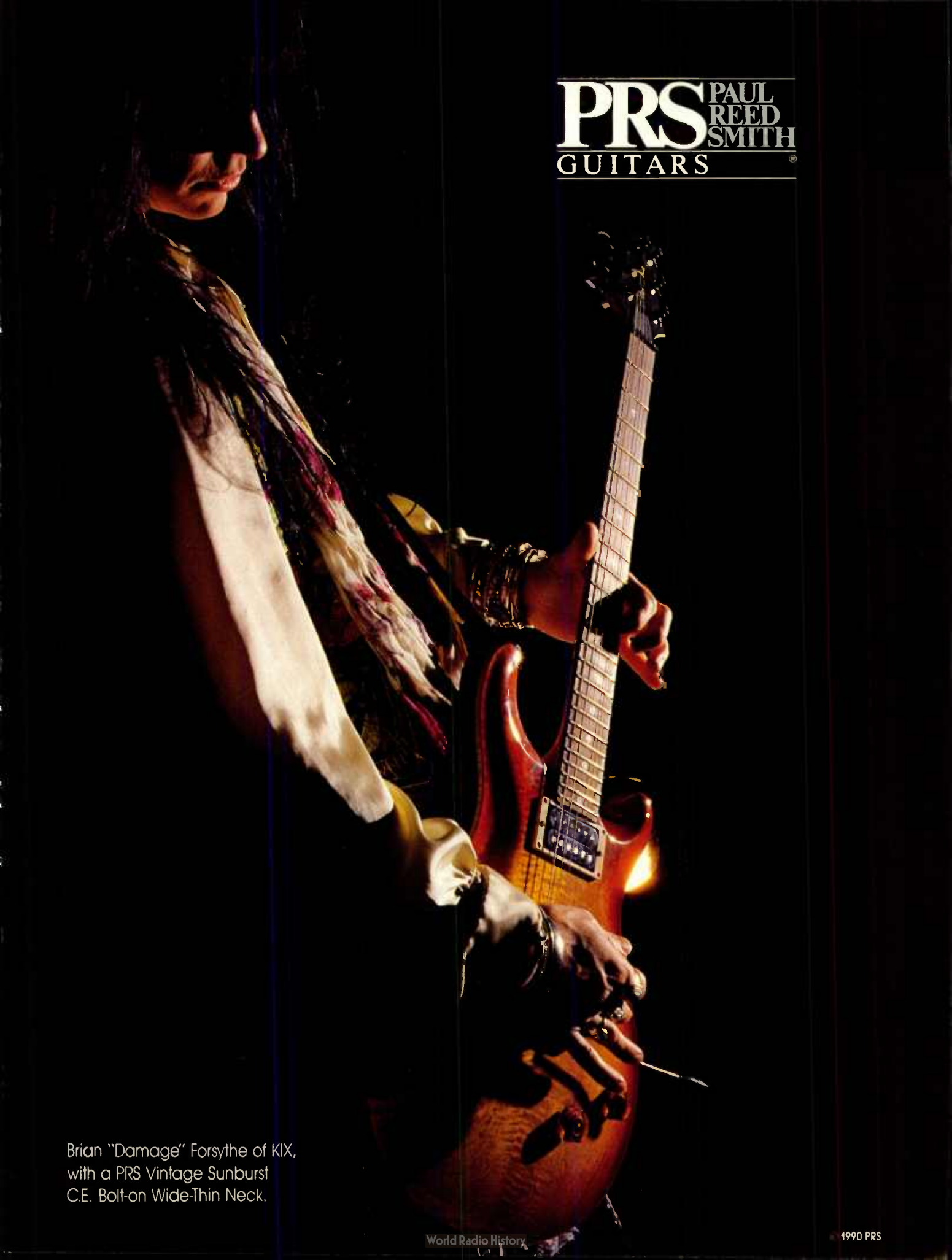
CALE: I liked it. The ironic thing was, most of the people I was around in those days were hung up more in rhythm and blues. So the bands I played in were doing more Otis Redding kinds of things. All the bands that I played with in those days were doing more Stax-oriented rhythm and blues for nightclubs. I was the guitar player in the band. Most of the people that I was around didn't like Jimi Hendrix, they *considered* it noise. But being I was a guitar player, I really liked it. And then Jimi Hendrix kind of went away. And it's ironic, of all the music that was happening in those days, it's funny that what he was doing—which was considered, "Oh, that guy's crazy"—is now what everybody imitates. That's the roots of heavy metal music. You go out and listen to a 25-year-old band, and they're a whole lot closer to Jimi Hendrix than anything that was actually more popular at that time. I liked Jimi Hendrix at the time, because I was a guitar player.

MUSICIAN: *Do you generally use standard tuning?*

CALE: I've made very, very few records in other than standard tunings. One of 'em's "Humdinger," which is done in G tuning. I hardly ever record out of standard tunings. I may use a capo, so I can play fingerstyle or whatever. I fool around with tunings, but I never ever put it on records. I may do more of that.

MUSICIAN: *What are you playing on the road?*

"Session players play what a lot of people can play, but they can do it about ten times faster." –J.J. Cale



Brian "Damage" Forsythe of KIX,
with a PRS Vintage Sunburst
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CALE: I'm playing a synthesizer—a Casio 380 synthesizer guitar now—and have been for the past two years. The last two tours I had, I've been playing it. I discovered this Japanese Casio, which is supposed to be a little cheesy guitar. They make a regular guitar that's only a synthesizer guitar, and then they make this unit called a PG380, which is a regular Japanese Stratocaster guitar, and then it's got this synthesizer built into it. You can turn it off and just use the guitar—plus it's got a MIDI out, and it opens up that whole world there. I've been experimenting with that, and I really like that. I go out and play and people will be surprised, because they consider me an acoustic guitar player. And I do play some acoustic, too—a little gut-string. But mainly I've been playing synthesizer guitar.

MUSICIAN: *What kind of amp?*

CALE: I've been experimenting around with those. I used a Peavey for a long time, PVR—they don't make that anymore. I got an old 4x10 Bassman—when I used to play the Harmony, I used an old 4x10 Bassman, which is kind of a collector's item now. I still got that. Now I'm using keyboard amplifiers for the synthesizers, and I use one of those little Fender amplifiers that are made in Taiwan. I tell you—the kind of amplifiers I use is the kind I can pick up. My sound ain't no bigger than my back [*laughs*]. I have two Marshalls—but I can't pick a Marshall up, and I don't really play big enough gigs to hire anybody to pick the damn Marshall up, so I haul my own amplifier in every night and put it on the stage, do all that kind of stuff. When you do that, and you don't have roadies to haul in your stuff, your equipment gets real small. I got a couple of Boogies—I love the Boogie sound, but I can't pick the damn thing up, it weighs 80 pounds. And I'm 51 years old now. I couldn't hardly pick 'em up when I was 25. I got an old Fender Twin I've had for about 25 years, and I think it's what's wrong with my back. I've hauled it in so many nightclubs, you know? So now I use these little bitty transistor amps—not because they sound good, 'cause it's all I can haul in. I guess if I could ever get my career up to a point where I could afford somebody to haul my amp in and haul it back out, I could get a bigger sound.

MUSICIAN: *If you had your druthers, would you rather be performing, or sitting out there on the front porch living off the royalties you've made?*

CALE: I'm doing *both*. Like I said, mainly I work about six weeks out of the year. I'll probably do more than that now—but if I work six weeks out of the year on tour, and then maybe spend a month or so making a new record, that's what—nine or 10 months I can sit on the porch and do nothing? So that way I'm doing both—I don't have to hit it 12 months of the year. It seems like I can get the same thing with less. It's not any easier to come up with music, but it doesn't take as long. I know a little bit more about what it is I'm doing now. Maybe I'm easier to satisfy, maybe I don't take it quite as seriously as I used to. I was always worried about being old and poor, you know? Now that I'm old and not poor, I go, "Oh well, I solved *that* damn problem." I'm really a lucky fellow. I got to play music most of my life, and got paid for it—which is real hard to do. Got friends. I can go out and play, people know me. I'm not a household name or anything like that, but there's a few people in every little town who's heard of me and they come out and hear it. I don't have to really worry about all the bad stuff. I'm lucky, I guess. Ⓜ

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Rock Singers, Classical Vocal Technique

When pop cops opera chops

By Joe Donovan

AT NEW YORK'S Beacon Theater, at nine o'clock on a spring evening, a female vocalist in black jeans, leather jacket, motorcycle cap and dark glasses pops out of a hole in the stage. Then, backed by a five-piece rock band, she sings Jimi Hendrix's "Ezy Rider" and goes through the usual nonsense: She grinds her hips, strokes her thighs and chews on a microphone that hurls her voice through a mammoth P.A.

A few days later and just a few blocks away, in a Lincoln Center–area studio, the same singer, now dressed in slacks and a blouse, stands with her hand resting on a grand piano. She vocalizes on the five Italian vowel sounds and, at the end of her lesson, sings "Non so più," Cherubino's first aria from Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

"Oh, she sings Cherubino like few others can!" beams her singing teacher, Gabor Carelli, a Hungarian-Italian lyric tenor who sang with the Metropolitan Opera from 1951–74 and, for the last quarter century, has taught at the Manhattan School of Music, New York's top-rated (over Juilliard) conservatory for opera singers.

His pupil is Taylor Dayne, whose 1987 debut album, *Tell It to My Heart*, was certified platinum, hatched four Top 10 singles and made her a dance-club favorite in America and Western Europe. Phrases like "dance diva" have become rock-journalism clichés, but in Dayne's case, the moniker is literally accurate: Like a number of other rock singers—including Pat Benatar, Jon Bon Jovi, Cyndi Lauper, Annie Lennox and Linda Ronstadt—Dayne is an ongoing student of classical vocal technique. Her goal, however, is not to sound like Joan Sutherland: It's to keep her vocal apparatus in good running order for many more nights— many more decades—of microphone chewing.

Pete Townshend could afford to smash his guitar with insouciance; for the following night's show, all he had to do was snap his fingers and a roadie would toss him a new one. But singers can't be so cavalier: If they blow out their pipes, the show may be over forever. Taylor Dayne recalls, "Right when I started singing with rock bands around age 16, I began to worry if I kept jumping up onstage and screaming my brains out night after night, I was going to wreck my voice."

When she set out to find a technique that would allow her to sing rock without damaging her instrument, Dayne discovered that she didn't have to reinvent the wheel. Luckily, several centuries earlier, singing teachers in Europe had perfected just such a vocal technique. And, although it was originally developed for classical music—especially opera, which began to emerge in the early seventeenth century—the technique, passed on through the centuries from teacher to pupil right down to the present, is useful for all types of music.

"Technique is technique, and it's compatible with just about anything you sing," says Marjorie Rivingston, a former opera and concert singer who became one of Broadway's top voice teachers and who, for the last 10 years, has included Linda Ronstadt on her student roster. "I don't think any of us who work with rock singers do much with their material. We give them a technique that keeps their voices healthy, and they go and use it however they please."

The cornerstone of classical vocal technique is diaphragm support—also known as "singing on the breath"—whereby the singer maintains a stable, continuous, highly pressurized column of air with the mus-

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cles of the diaphragm. "The vocal mechanism is like a standard transmission on a car," explains Dale Moore, president of the National Association of Teachers of Singing and professor of music at Indiana University's School of Music, home of the world's most important voice faculty. "When you sing on the breath, your vocal mechanism is naturally in gear and functions well. But if you don't, it's like riding the clutch: It'll tear up your throat."

According to Professor Moore, singing on the breath has a number of specific advantages: It permits the singer to manipulate the vocal mechanism indirectly through actions of the diaphragm; it widens the range of the voice, especially upwards; and in general it makes it possible to sing with relatively little breath, which means the singer becomes exhausted less quickly.

Left to their own devices, untrained singers—and that includes most rock vocalists—tend to develop a breathy, unsupported non-technique, called "singing from the throat." This usually causes fatigue after relatively short periods of singing because so much breath is used. In addition—and this is far more serious—it leads singers to strain their vocal mechanism through its direct manipulation "from the throat" and to dry out their vocal cords with excessive amounts of unnecessary breath. As a result, the cords, which are mucous membranes, can become dry, tough and leathery. In some cases, they even develop abnormal, projecting growths called polyps.

Poor vocal technique causes polyps the way a bad pair of shoes causes corns. Drinking, smoking and snorting cocaine can cause polyps too, according to Katie Agresta, a New York voice teacher whose students include Cyndi Lauper, Annie Lennox, Jon Bon Jovi, Twisted Sister and "80 percent of the heavy metal bands in the tri-state area. The first thing I have to do with some new students," Agresta says, "is get them to stop partying so much."

Thanks to laser technology, polyps can now be removed surgically with a high degree of success; consultant of choice on such operations is Richard Quisling, M.D., a Nashville doctor who has become the oto-rhinolaryngologist to the stars. "Cyndi Lauper turned me on to Dr. Quisling," Agresta notes solemnly. "I just referred Annie Lennox to him."

But in the old days, polyp surgery set the stage for she-may-never-sing-again scenes out of operas of the soap variety: They often left scar tissue that made it difficult or impossible for the post-operative vocal cords to "approximate" (meet) correctly. Among the many pop and rock singers who reportedly had their polyps scraped by a surgeon's scalpel were Nelson Eddy, Harry Belafonte, Neil Young and Grace Slick.

Because Taylor Dayne began studying classical voice so early in her career, she did not have to unlearn a lot of bad vocal habits or go through the laborious process of relearning how to achieve her arsenal of stylistic effects with a new technique. "She is a smart girl," says Gabor Carelli, "coming at this from the other direction, before the voice is damaged."

But other singers are not so lucky. Many achieve fame and fortune in their field, and then experience mid-career vocal crack-up, the legacy of years of poor technique. At that point, the studios of voice teachers like Carelli, Rivingston and Agresta are transformed into emergency rooms. "I've seen just about everything, but the worst case I ever had was Cyndi Lauper," says Agresta,

who recalls that when Lauper came to her over a decade ago, "she couldn't even talk, and three doctors told her she'd never sing again." Rivingston, who claims three minutes is enough for her to diagnose everything a singer is doing wrong, is currently in the midst of what she calls "rescue work" with Leslie Gore, who has been "singing from the seat of her pants" for the quarter century that's elapsed since her hits "Judy's Turn to Cry" and "It's My Party."

Even in the world of opera, where singers are usually carefully trained before embarking on their careers, mid-career crises are common, though less serious than in rock. "Many famous singers from the Met with problems used to come to me, though I cannot divulge their names," Gabor Carelli says merrily, his voice a thick impasto of Hungarian, Italian and Upper West Side accents. "They would say, 'Please, I want to talk to you, but let's do it at an hour when no one will see me coming to your studio.'"

But the vocal crack-up of West German tenor Peter Hofmann is a matter of public record. Like Dayne, Lauper, Ronstadt, et al., Hofmann began his music career in his teens by singing rock. But within a few years he began formal training in classical vocal technique and switched to opera performance. Armed with a big, natural tenor voice—and blond, blue-eyed matinee-idol looks that made him a favorite with stage directors—Hofmann quickly became the tenor of choice on the international opera circuit, from the Bayreuth Festival to the Metropolitan Opera, for a handful of roles, mostly Wagner. By the early '80s, however, his voice was in shreds. One opera insider says, "Hofmann never acquired the technique to preserve his instrument, which was really quite extraordinary when he began, especially the top."

Around the same time, in what was probably a strategic career move, Hofmann began to switch back to rock, where standards of vocal health are infinitely less strict than in classical music. He toured Western Europe with a band four times and produced four records of rock for CBS, one of which, *Rock Classics*, sold a million-and-a-half copies. Hofmann is currently starring in the Hamburg production of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*, and will be issuing his fifth rock album shortly. According to his brother and manager, Fritz Hofmann, he will stop doing opera completely in a few years and devote himself entirely to rock "for artistic reasons" and because it is "easier."

Although Fritz Hofmann admitted that rock is also more lucrative, he denied that was the reason for his brother's decision to dump his career in opera.

While the consensus is that classical vocal technique is compatible with rock style and repertory, there are limits nevertheless. One of the peculiarities to opera —and there are many—is the care with which singers "carry" their instrument. That is, while they act out the story of the opera, opera singers adopt certain postures and, in particular, a so-called "neutral" head position that optimizes the functioning of the larynx and the diaphragm. Watch Carmen as she dances while singing for Don José in Act II: It's no Tina Turner bump-and-grind. Such a studied approach is at odds with rock's convulsive singing style, which is often as choreographic as it is musical. Taylor Dayne, who moves nonstop while singing, says she tries to favor a neutral head position, but that there are limits to the extent to which she can do so.

Another area where rock and opera singers diverge is volume. People coming to opera for the first time from rock are often surprised to learn that opera singers are audible over orchestras of one-hundred-plus instrumentalists without amplification, which is used only in relatively rare outdoor performances. Learning to make the voice big—without shouting and damaging the apparatus—is one of the tricks of classical vocal technique. But in rock, the entire matter is academic: To make your voice big, you grab a mike. "When I first started working with rock singers, I was amazed at how incredibly tiny their voices are," says Marjorie Rivingston, who adds that opera singers, when they do use a microphone, must be careful not to get too close—say, closer than six inches; otherwise, they'll blow it out.

Finally, there's diction, the art of singing text so that the words are intelligible. Opera singers toil for years and years to perfect the niceties—especially the vowel sounds—of French, German and Italian. But in rock, smudging, smearing and otherwise distorting the vowels and consonants of one's own native language are marks of high style. Who can understand even half of what Michael Stipe sings? Indiana's Dale Moore concludes, "The classical singer's command of foreign language diction is, of course, of no use to rock singers. They have their own foreign language, which makes most of the words unintelligible, thank God." Ⓜ

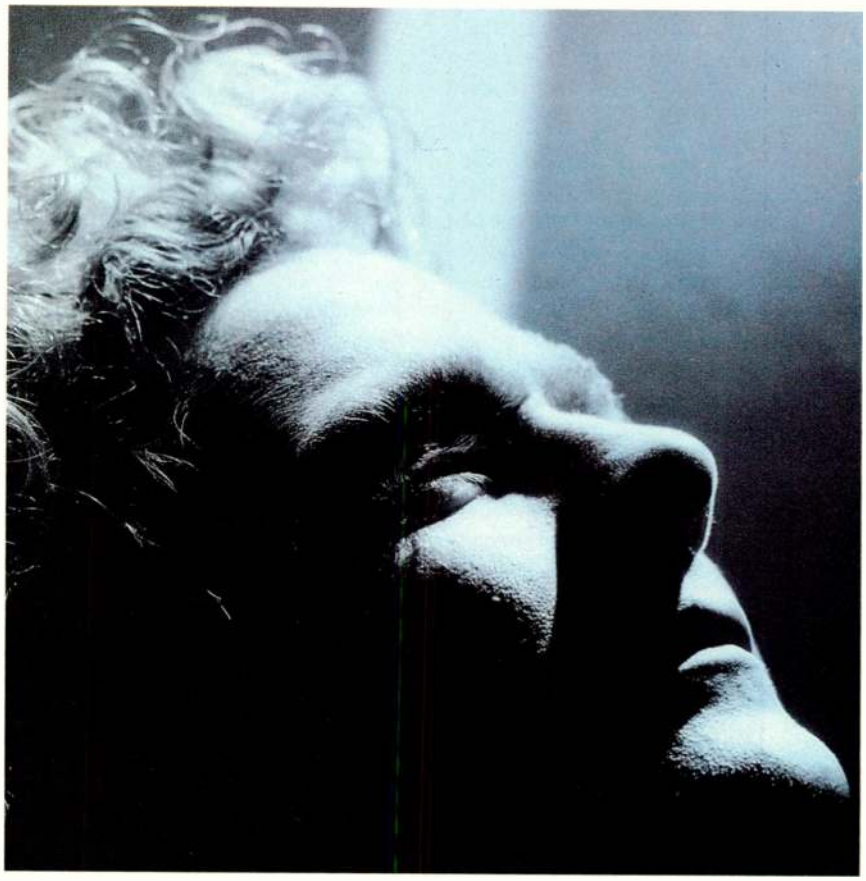
STUART HAMM: VAI & SATRIANI'S SOLID BOTTOM

A private lesson with the boss of new bass

By Alan di Perna

STUART HAMM sits in his modest home studio in the '50s Hollywood rancho-style apartment he shares with his wife and cat. It's a comfortable place—not glamorous, opulent or intimidating. Just reassuringly ordinary, much like Hamm himself. Stu is a '90s bass hero. He isn't weird like Jaco or metal-boy pretty like Sheehan. And he certainly isn't funky like Stanley. He just serves up the mondo chops, undiverted by confusing art theories or flamboyant personality traits. Hey, the guy got famous for his bass renditions of kitsch living-room piano chestnuts like "Moonlight Sonata" and Vince Guaraldi's Peanuts theme. There's a strong identity between Hamm and his legion of lesson-taking, tablature-reading fans. He's a regular guy, just like them...except for when he picks up a bass, of course.

Down in his studio, I'm concentrating intently on Hamm's right hand as he plays. That's the hand most bassists use to pluck the strings, while the left hand frets notes on the fingerboard. But Hamm's right hand is often employed in tapping out melodies and even two- or three-note chords on the fin-



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gerboard while his left hand plays hammered-on ostinatos or countermelodies. The seeds of this approach were sown during Stu's years at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where bassist Victor Bailey was one of his dorm buddies.

"Victor was one of the first people I heard experiment with laying down a root and fifth with the left hand while doing Latin rhythms over the top with the right hand. We all started experimenting with that. Then when I moved to California to record *Flex-Able* with Steve Vai, I picked up some tapping techniques from him."

Hamm played in various bands with Vai throughout the mid-'80s and appears on the guitarist's latest album *Passion and Warfare*. He also works extensively with Vai's old guitar teacher Joe Satriani, anchoring Satch's live band since 1987 and performing on the guitarist's live *Dreaming #11* EP. Like Vai, Satriani and other tapmeisters, Hamm tends to favor his first, second and third right-hand fingers for tapping. But he often uses his thumb and pinky as well.

"Whatever it takes," he laughs. "When I was working out the 'Moonlight Sonata,' which took about six months, I ended up tapping a lot of notes with my thumb." Hamm demonstrates with several passages from the piece (recorded for his 1988 debut *Radio Free Albemuth*) in which his thumb taps the middle notes of Beethoven's familiar triplets. From there, the bassist segues into "Flow My Tears," one of his own compositions, where he uses his pinky to tap the uppermost melody note in the passage where the bridge modulates to C.

Of course, Hamm doesn't *always* use his right hand for tapping; he has a full repertoire of slapping and popping techniques as well. One of his most interesting tricks is the "flamenco rake" he uses on pieces like "Count Zero" from his latest album *Kings of Sleep*. Stu illustrates how it works: The third finger pops the G string and the hand then zips up to the fretboard to tap out an arpeggio. To aid in this and other popping techniques Hamm has had a specially made pickguard added to his Kubicki Factor bass.

"Ordinarily if you have your finger between the string and the body for popping, there's too much space in there. The pickguard cuts down on the area between the body and the string. So when you rest your finger against the body there's just the right amount of space there and you can go a lot faster."

Hamm also uses an interesting technique for sliding open-string harmonics with his left hand. "I got this from Percy Jones, who played in Brand X," he confesses. "You hit the harmonic and then just push down with your finger and slide it up. Even if you just press the note down on the same fret where you hit the harmonic, it's not going to kill the note." Try it. It really works.

Stu taps a lot of harmonics with his right hand as well, often using artificial, rather than open-string, harmonics. "That's what I'm doing in the ending of 'Surely the Best' [from the *Kings* album]," he explains. "I'm fretting the G and C—in other words, the fifth fret on the D and G strings—and then tapping the harmonics 12 frets up, on the

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17th fret, to get the octaves. You can get a whole range of intervals that way, like fourths and fifths, but they don't speak as well as the octave. And on the piece 'I Want to Know' [also from *Kings*] I use the Jaco 'Birdland' technique, which is basically playing the note at the 12th fret and then stopping it an octave up with your thumb while you pluck the string with your first finger to get the harmonic out."

What's most amazing about Hamm's techniques is how comfortable he seems while executing them. He plays melody and accompaniment on electric bass as naturally as a pianist, which isn't surprising since Hamm studied piano as a kid. Currently, the bassist is writing material for his upcoming third solo album, which is tentatively slated to feature appearances by guitarists Eric Johnson and Reb Beach. "I'm trying to get more into composition," Hamm says of the project. "Every song doesn't have to be me out to prove something with flash technique. I think I've done that already." Ⓜ

EDDIE BAYERS LEARNS TO ADAPT

Rosanne and Rodney's first-call drummer overcomes hand and wrist injuries

By Rick Mattingly

"THE DOCTORS WERE predicting the worst," Nashville session drummer Eddie Bayers says, recalling the accident he suffered in 1986. "I was riding my motorcycle, and a guy ran a red light and hit me. The impact crushed the main bone in my left wrist that gives you mobility between the hand and wrist. I was in and out of casts for eight months, and the doctors couldn't see how I could ever go back to being a drummer because of the force a drummer has to play with."

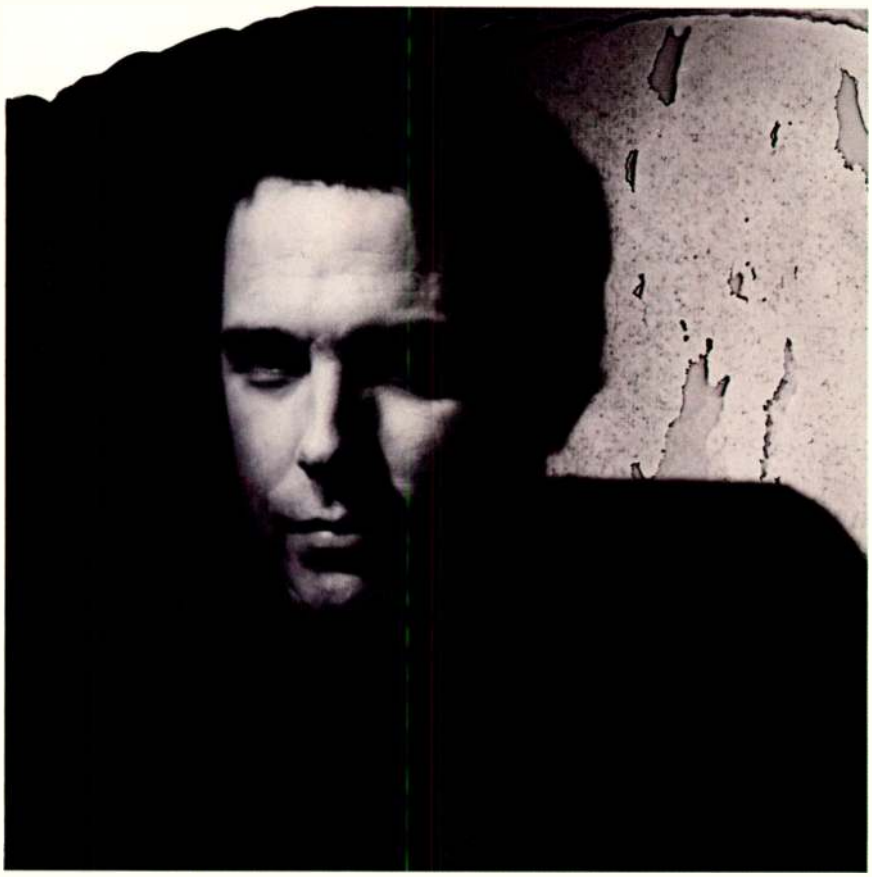
But several of the artists who had grown to depend on Eddie's playing weren't going to let him off the hook. "Rodney Crowell and Rosanne Cash both called me and said that they wanted me to play on their albums," Bayers explains. "To them, feel and groove were the bottom line, and they knew I would never lose that. The Judds and Michael Murphey did the same thing. When they called, it was like the day of reckoning for me to say, 'Well, I can at least try.' It worked out fine, and I couldn't be more thankful for the graciousness of the artists who supported me."

At first, Bayers made it easier on his left hand by programming hi-hat parts, and playing everything else. As his left hand healed, he started using it again, but instead of playing the traditional way with right hand riding the hi-hat and left hand hitting the snare drum, Bayers began playing exclusively in the open-handed style: left on hi-hat and right on snare.

"I had lost some mobility," Bayers says, "and it took two or three months for things to feel the way I wanted them to feel. But the body can adapt to a lot of situations, and now my left hand does whatever I want it to. I can get around the toms technically, and I can play hard for certain fills and accents. But I let the right hand do most of the work as far as playing the snare and pounding."

He had already done some playing like that prior to his accident. "On some feels," he says, "especially ones that had heavy sixteenths on the hi-hat and a lot of syncopation, I found that I played better open-handed anyway. But then in other situations I would cross over and play what most people would call the 'right' way. With the arms crossed, you can do a lot of different things, technically speaking. But when you play open-handed, boy, it gives you all the leeway in the world with your snare. When it comes to playing hard, you have all that space there between your hands to really bring the stick up."

And Bayers makes the most of it. In the studio, he is most apt to be smacking his snare drum double forte, while his hi-hat is shuffling along underneath at pianissimo. Engineers love it. "One of the advantages of my 15 years in the studio," Bayers explains, "is that I've spent a lot of time in the control room with a lot of different engineers. I've



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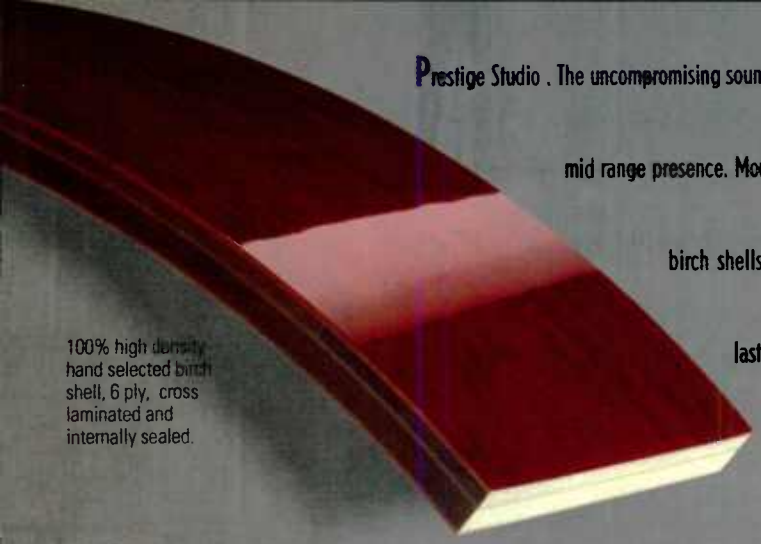

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heard them discuss some of the dilemmas they've run into, and a constant one seems to be hi-hat wash in the snare drum mike. I can even remember engineers putting a drumhead on the end of a boom stand, and angling it down between the snare drum and hi-hat to get better separation. So I guess from being in situations like that I started playing with that in mind."

Separation seemed to be the key word when Bayers first started working in the Nashville studios. "The concept then was a lot of burlap," Eddie laughs. "No ring at all. Total isolation was the goal. But then we got electronic drums where you could use pads and really get total isolation, and engineers would notoriously pan heavy left and heavy right. You had isolation between every tom, which just isn't natural. It made the records sound manufactured.

"From about 1980 on, they realized that they could put drums in the [cont'd on p. 145]

BAYERS' NECESSITIES

EDDIE BAYERS' electronics rack contains a DrumKAT, a Roland MC 500 Mark II sequencer, an E-mu Proteus I, an Akai 900 sampler, a ddrum brain and an old Simmons SDSV brain. "They should bring that Simmons unit back," Eddie comments, "because it's the greatest piece of gear I've got as far as really being able to enhance drum sounds." Eddie has a 16-channel Quest mixer that was custom made by Moe West, and a Marc MX 1+ trigger interface. "Unless I'm programming or using pads," Eddie says, "I'm not really utilizing MIDI in my acoustic setup. It's all pretty much analog triggering because I really like the 'lightening' factor. There's still a little bit of delay in MIDI. It doesn't matter how fast you get the message to the units, it's how long they take after they get it." Eddie's drums have Radio Shack PZMs siliconed to the inside of the shells, with XLR outputs on the sides of the drums.

The drums themselves are Remo, with "dimensionally perfect" toms: 10x10, 12x12, 14x14 and 16x16. The toms are fitted with Remo Pinstripe heads on the tops and clear Ambassadors on the bottoms. The bass drum is a standard 22" diameter. Eddie often uses a Remo piccolo snare drum, but has a full complement of 5½ and 6½ snares to choose from, depending on the situation. Eddie uses Zildjian cymbals and Pro-Mark sticks.

MARC RIBOT: MASTER OF THE SIDEWAYS GUITAR

The odd man in is proud of his mistakes

By Ted Drozdowski

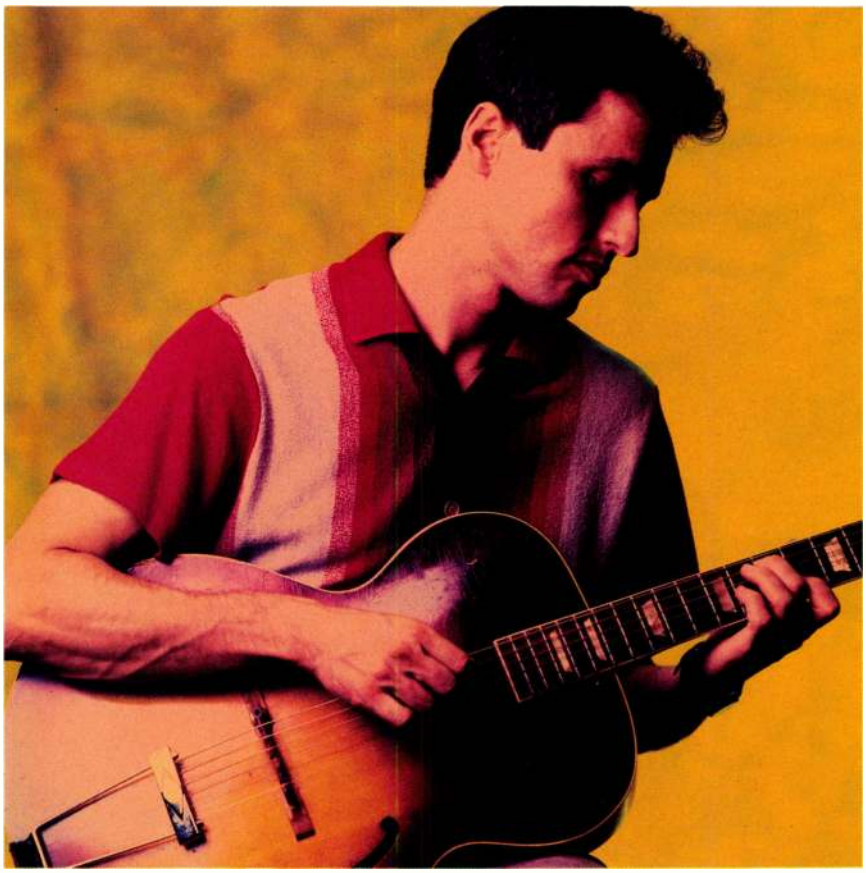
"THE SOUND YOU USE matters a lot more than the actual notes you play," says guitarist-for-hire Marc Ribot. "I don't really think about what I play that much. I spend more time thinking about my reverb.

"With a big reverb, you're saying, 'This is arena rock.' Another type of reverb and clean distortion, and it's Eric Clapton, no matter who's playing."

And Marc Ribot?

"Oh God, I sound like garbage. My equipment is garbage. I collect garbage. If other people want to sound like garbage they should imitate me. I use two volume pedals. You wanna know why? One controls the amount of gated reverb; the other one is just because I'm ignorant and lazy. You know why I don't use the volume knob on my guitar instead? Because it fell off! Take a look."

Sure enough, nestled among a rats' nest of cables and stomp boxes and leaning casually against an amplifier onstage, the brown mongrel Telecaster that's seen Ribot through a stream of sessions, gigs and tours with Tom Waits, Elvis Costello, Marianne Faithfull, Evan Lurie, John Zorn and the



Photograph: Chris Carroll

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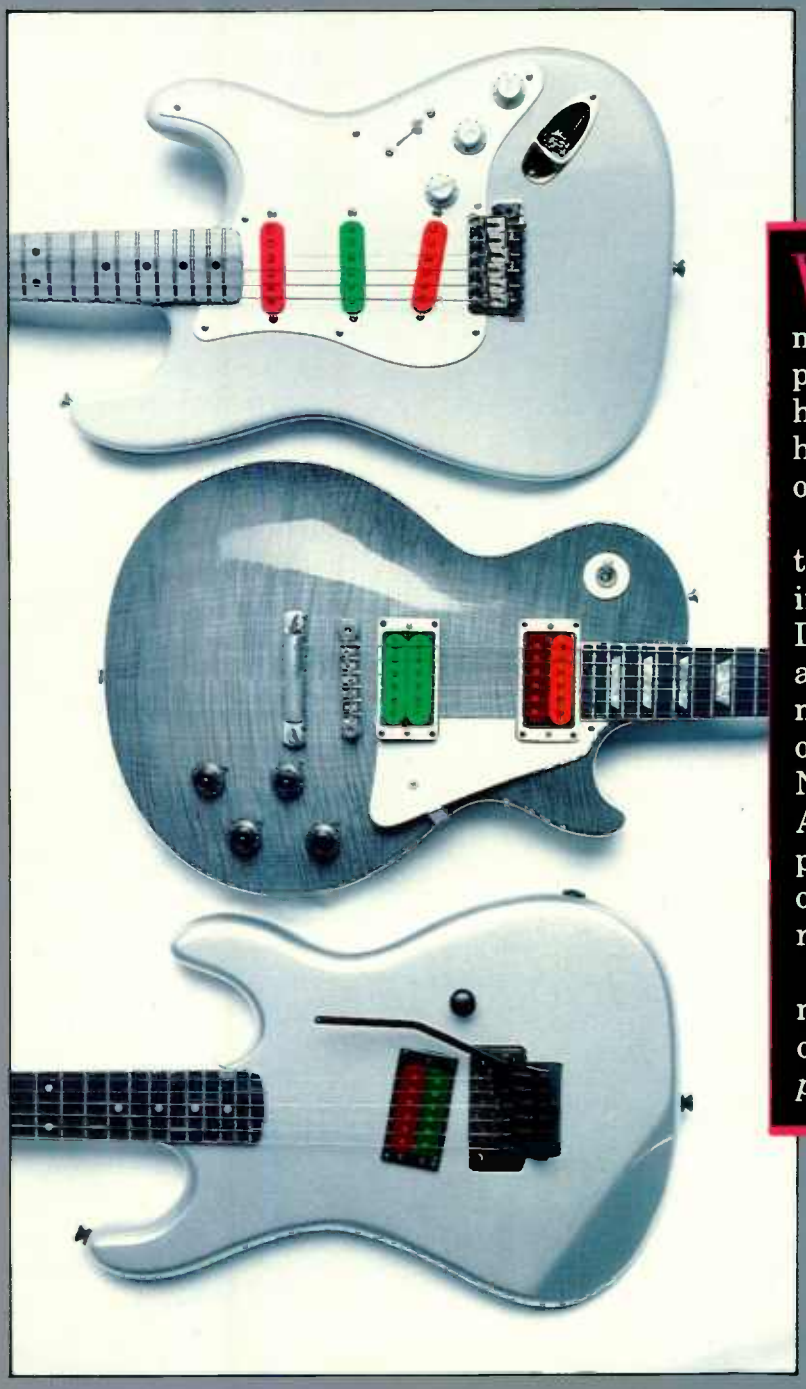

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two bands to whom he's pledged loyalty, the Jazz Passengers and his own Rootless Cosmopolitans—sports a mere sliver of steel where its volume control should be.

Between forkfuls of a pre-gig salad at Johnny D's Uptown Lounge in Somerville, Massachusetts, where the Jazz Passengers are playing, the downtown-Manhattan-based string strangler acknowledges that although he's played just about everywhere, he's an "East Coast kind of guy—nervous, bloodshot and wan." You can hear it in his fidgety, clamorous and clanging solos—especially the dinger he rips through "Hang on St. Christopher" on Waits' *Franks Wild Years*. Full of screeching bends and stuttering phrases, that solo moves like a rusty metal spider sidling sideways across its web.

"It's basically a blues solo," Ribot allows. "We did a cool thing by punching in at some particularly unnatural places. I enjoyed doing that. I was in a club one night and I heard it come on, and everybody stopped dancing." He chuckles, low.

A 35-year-old spawn of New Jersey's suburban garage rock scene, Ribot says he'd gone through all the usual musical drudgery before hitting his niche as odd man in. "There's this mythologizing that goes on about what a young musician in the downtown New York thing does, and the truth is I've done restaurant gigs and played in a million rock bands at Kenny's Castaways just like everybody else. I wasn't particularly good at it. My angularity you seem to appreciate on the Waits record got me into trouble on other gigs. But that didn't stop me from trying. Eventually, I became proud of my mistakes. That's all you can hope for, really.

"I feel that I lucked out in being able to work with Tom Waits and Elvis Costello. They're both very smart producers who have figured out a way to use the noise I make to support their lyrics. Perhaps the reason I wound up with those gigs is because, underneath it all, my playing is blues-derived."

But Arnold Schoenberg is always elbowing Hubert Sumlin for room on Ribot's shelf of influences. Though he's a music school dropout (who says he can "read, but not enough so it hurts my playin', as they used to say in Nashville"), he's extremely well-versed. Check his take on the jazz standard "Mood Indigo" on the new *Rootless Cosmopolitans* (identified by Island Records as a Ribot solo CD/cassette on its spine, though it's a band effort). Coming on with soft Django Reinhardt chords, the tune lays a big fat hug on Ellington, Carl Stallings, serial composition, free-playing, African polyrhythms, and digital-delay technology in under five minutes. Then the band slams into Ribot's own "Have a Nice Day" with the kind of noisy juice and cynical, black-clad lyricism that serves Sonic Youth so well.

Ribot took cues from Eric Dolphy to begin making leaps of harmonic logic. He began as a straight-ahead jazz guitarist, but through transcribing Dolphy's sax solos he discovered methods of transcending the standard bop vernacular even when they didn't lay particularly well on the fingerboard. Dolphy grabbed Ribot's ear with his use of octave displacement—playing certain notes in a scale or riff an octave above or below their normal register—along with drastic rhythmic deviations. "His phrases completely screwed up the bar lines," Ribot laughs, "and didn't correspond to eight-bar segments; they pulled against that as much as possible. What I was looking for was, 'What is that note that hurts?'

"Dolphy would not just look for a note. A bop player usually thinks in terms of a scale

and passing tones, and the passing tones have different degrees of consonance or dissonance. But it seemed that Dolphy was trying to work off whole-tone and diminished scales and sort of *lose* reference to one root entirely. My favorite solo of his is on 'Out There.' A big part of it is rhythmic—just try to follow that in terms of eight-bar phrases! And a lot of what he plays in there is Charlie Parker. He'll use bebop phrases to establish a key for a second, but it'll bear some kind of strange relationship to what the piano is doing. Not that arbitrarily using any key is good, but the truth is that the *effect* is one of arbitrary choices, and that's an effect I like. And in fact, it can be reached by arbitrary means. I mean, after all the listening, and all the attempts to figure out what's really going on, the truth is that I can get basically the same effect and—in a way that's more satisfying—by detuning or playing with a house key.

"Everything's already been played," the guitarist contends, "so I think you might as well derive from as wide a field as possible. That makes things difficult sometimes. For some people, their only decision is whether to use a single or double stack of Marshalls, but I was recently playing on this tune and went back after recording and stripped everything back to drums and bass again. I spent the whole day working on guitar parts for this one song and eventually came up with three parts: one was in whole notes, another in eighth notes and the last was a series of rhythmic hits on top.

"After painstakingly arriving at three parts and considering every part I could have played, I realized they were stock rock 'n' roll. I'd just arrived at them by process of elimination because they sounded good. So by the end of the day, I'd figured out what every third-year guitar student already knows." Ⓜ

I, RIBOT

MARC RIBOT plays "a sort of bastardized ESP Telecaster with a vibrato bar installed by Paul Skelton of ESP in New York. I hate to answer these specific questions because it encourages people to imitate rather than experiment."

He has a Yamaha amp with two 12s, a Cry-Baby wah-wah, DeArmond volume pedals, a Rock distortion box, an Alesis MIDIVerb, a Yamaha FEX 50 and an MXR fuzzbox.

LOUIL SILAS, JR.'S HANDS-ON HITMAKING

An A&R activist who knows what he wants at MCA's black division

By Jock Baird

"WHATEVER I'VE BEEN involved with has been very hands-on," says Louil Silas, Jr., who for nearly five years has been head of A&R at the black division of MCA Records. "I get involved with the mixes, with the producer and song selection. I get involved in what an artist will wear for the photo shoot, where he gets his hair cut, who the photographer is. And I *like* being that involved, because you know who to congratulate if something happens and you know who to blame if something doesn't happen."

Louil (pronounced like "jewel") Silas, Jr. has been taking a lot more congratulations than blame in the last few years, especially since his "number one project," Bobby Brown, became a superstar. MCA's black division is a veritable R&B powerhouse, its roster stocked with the likes of New Edition (and spinoffs Bobby Brown, Bell Biv Devoe and Ralph Tresvant), Eric B. & Rakim, Jody Watley, Pebbles, Heavy D & the Boyz, Guy, Klymaxx, Sheena Easton, the Boys, Ray Parker, Jr., Stephanie Mills, Gladys Knight and Patti LaBelle. Silas is quick to credit his mentor and former president of MCA/black Jheryl Busby with signing much of this talent, but it's Silas' A&R activism which has fueled much of MCA's dominance. Especially matching artists with top producers and songwriters.

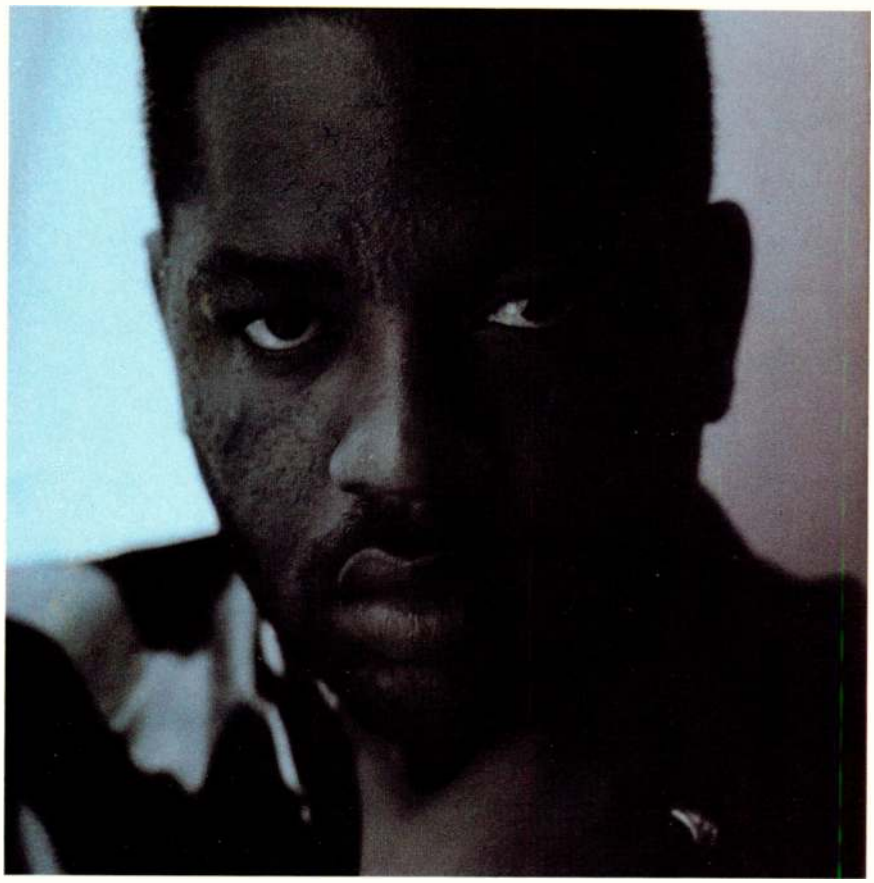
"That's what A&R's all about," Silas explains, "the coupling of great talent with great producers and songs. I can't just send everybody into the studio and say, 'Call me when you're finished.' That's how MCA was when I got here initially in '83, before Jheryl came. The black music head had no input—he'd just sit here and wait for the artists to be finished. That's a great way to *end* a record company."

Silas is especially hands-on when it comes to mixing. He estimates he's remixed 75 percent of the music that MCA/black's released in the past seven years. That studio activism is the fruit of his seven years as a club DJ in L.A.: "I lived music, that was my life," he smiles. "Out in those clubs I was rockin' 'em!" Silas feels DJs, who "form the musical opinions of thousands of people each week," perform a lot of A&R functions, and notes proudly that more labels are recruiting club DJs as A&R staff—Louil himself is the first to ever head a major department.

Silas sees the opening up of pop radio formats as a key contributor to Bobby Brown's—and MCA's—success: "Now is a good time to be black, because people are more receptive to what black people are doing. It could've happened long ago, but we just caught it at a time when pop radio is opening up its playlist."

Shades of that bad old word, "crossover"?..."Well, crossover wasn't a bad word," Silas frowns. "What was bad was black artists trying to make crossover music, pop music. Bobby Brown's *Don't Be Cruel* was not a pop album—it was a very black-sounding record, but pop radio played it. I think you'll find a lot of artists that did pop music, people like Lionel Richie and Whitney Houston, this time around will come with a blacker sound, more true to what they really want to do."

What does it take to be good at A&R? "It's instinct, it's ears, it's knowing what to comment on and what to lay back on when you're not quite sure," Silas muses. "It's not being fooled by grooves, trying to realize what good songs are. Songwriting is key. I'm a real stickler on lyrics, and I hear so much junk on the radio today. People are being fooled by lyrics—or the lack of lyrics. They



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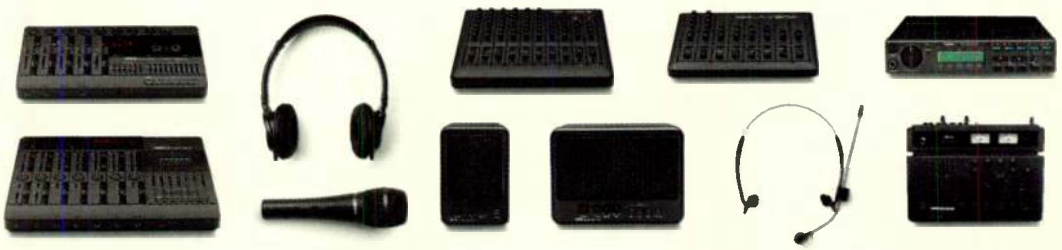

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hear a groove and think, 'Wow, what a great song.' But it's not a great song, it's just a great groove."

The R&B business today revolves around producers, and Silas has cultivated the cream of the crop. He introduced Bobby Brown to the team of L.A. & Babyface, who had already made hits for Silas' discovery Pebbles as well as other MCA artists. He also sent Brown to New York to meet Teddy Riley. "When he came back, 'My Prerogative' came back with him," Silas shrugs. "I didn't midwife that one—sometimes you just put some great personalities together and see what happens." And Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis gave Silas the idea for a group using the three lesser-known members of New Edition; it became Bell Biv Devoe, a.k.a. BBD, a group that's sold 1.7 million albums and counting. Talk about husbanding and recycling a vital resource: Silas has now managed to split New Edition into three platinum acts—and he also signed Johnny Gill to MCA before Jheryl Busby took Gill with him to Motown. Silas is now putting together a Teddy Riley–produced single with all six members, which he calls a "logistical nightmare," and hints at a huge '91 New Edition tour.

Silas makes it his business to recruit and cultivate the next generation of R&B producers for his artists. Among his favorite new studio wizes are Vassale Binford ("very melodic, a perfectionist"), Ian Prince ("from London, very rhythm oriented"), Larry Hatcher and Keith Andes, East Coasters Lores Holland and Wayne Brathwaite, and David Conley from the band Surface. Silas also works closely with veteran Angela Winbush. Of course, the paradigm of the self-contained '80s producer/songwriter/artist is Prince. Has Silas bumped into any similar "total package" artists?

"No, I'm still looking for that artist," he says. "The total package has not come to me yet. There is one artist we just signed, London Jones, that I see a lot of the same things in."

Unlike most A&R people, Silas frankly admits not everything he releases is wonderful. "There are always going to be things that slip through, maybe because of favors, maybe from a production deal gone awry. I haven't had a favor record yet that's happened, but even those things, when they go out of this office they're the best they can be. They may be a piece of shit, but they're the best piece of shit they can be. Unlike a lot of people, I don't stop the release of an album when it's done. I give the artist a shot, 'cause you *never know*. Music is emotional. I may think it's shit and the world thinks it's great."

What exactly is he looking to sign? "I'm looking for real singers right now," Silas replies. "If there is a 20-year-old guy out there that can really belt it out, can really, really, *really* sing like Johnny Gill, I'm looking for him."

Silas is especially excited about a Rhode Island discovery named John Pagano. "He looks like Rob Lowe and has a voice like Jeffrey Osborne. And right now we're brainstorming what he's going to be musically. He's a white guy on the black music division and when you hear his product you'll know why. If this guy hits, it could be the biggest thing that's happened in the music industry for a long time."

Wouldn't this just be another variation on the appropriation of black music by whites, from Elvis to New Kids on the Block? "New Kids is white America's answer to New Edition," Silas declares hotly, "and any two guys in New Edition have more talent than that entire group! This is not like a Michael Bolton or Bill Medley. They're soulful white

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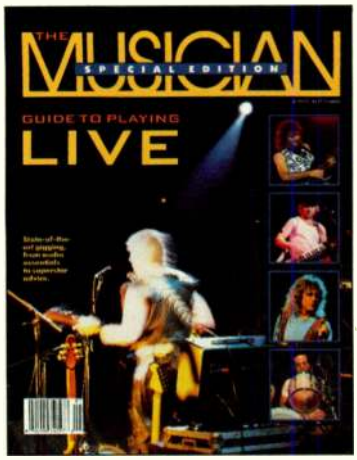

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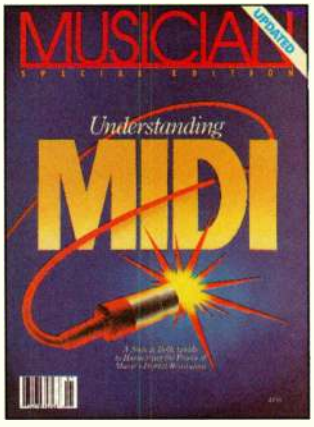

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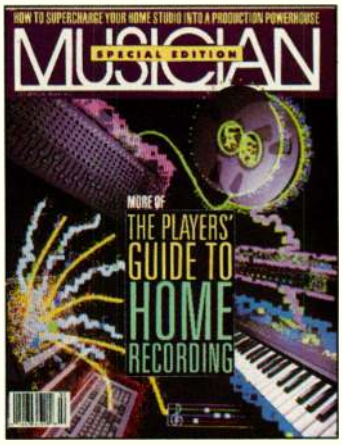

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guys, but they're not singers of black music. This guy is just amazing, and his being white is like some ironic twist. Maybe you have to be black to understand what I'm hearing when I hear George Michael, who is about as far removed from the R&B Vocalist of the Year, which he won a couple of years ago, as Phil Donahue is!"

But even if Silas decides to sign an artist, forget the big signing bonus and limousines. "For the black roster, you get rewarded *after* you sell some records," he says. "If we get into a bidding war with another label, at some point the madness stops and we get back to reality. I mean, with our roster, it's not like we can't sell some records." Silas mentions that he was ready to sign a London band called Five Star, but "the deal just got ridiculous. It was between us and CBS and we ended up passing. They've since had no success on CBS, and the people down in Business Affairs say, 'Good thing we didn't do *that* deal!' But I know in my heart what the problem is in that group and that whole thing wouldn't have happened if they'd been here." Louil also admits he passed on Mariah Carey, something that's making him "a little crazy right now."

Using a methodology he calls "controlled chaos," Silas runs a small shop—only two other A&R people round out his staff. One is Madeleine Randolph, director of A&R who also works out of MCA's Universal City complex. The other is Wendy Creedle in New York. "They're both very aggressive and very talented and very open-minded people," Silas says. "I noticed a lot of producers and writers are men, and men like to talk to ladies. So if you find the right woman to work on your staff, it's great. It's the exact opposite of me. I get on the phone with a guy and I'm hollering and screaming and then she calls him and calms him down. But sometimes we reverse the roles."

Although Silas has accepted unsolicited material in the past, he is now returning tapes with unpublished songs like hot potatoes. "I'm in depositions now from this guy who says he wrote 'On Our Own,' which L.A. & Babyface wrote for Bobby Brown. I don't want to get caught having a tape on my desk and years later hear, 'I wrote that song, it was right on his desk, and he copied it!'

"I'm not going to take seriously some little tape in an envelope with a scribbled note," he continues. Then he laughs and his eyes widen. "But then the other part of me comes in and says, 'Well, you *never know*...'"

MAURICE STARR: NEW KING ON THE BLOCK

2 years, 20 million records

By Rory O'Connor

THERE ISN'T A DRY SEAT in the house, as the old joke has it. In part, of course, this is due to the sudden summer squall that dumps several inches of rain onto Giants Stadium in East Rutherford shortly before showtime. But in equal part it's the direct result of the effect the anticipation of seeing New Kids on the Block is having on tens of thousands of pre-pube rockers. Welcome to the Magic Summer.

It's 7:30—a bit early for us erstwhile concertgoers—but then many of these new kids to arena rock look like they've never been up past 10 before. Onstage, a six-foot-three-and-a-half, 265-pound black man, sporting a modified Al Sharpton pompadour and a Salvation Army–cum–Sgt. Pepper's military uniform, takes the microphone. It's "The General," a.k.a. Maurice Starr, a.k.a. Larry Curtis Johnson—and although few in the sodden multitude splayed before him realize it, they're all here to hear his music.

In addition to his role as Master of Ceremonies, Starr is the creative force behind three of the evening's four acts: a skinny white Cliff Richard look-alike he calls Rick Wes (born Craig Gendreau); the Perfect

Photograph: John Soares

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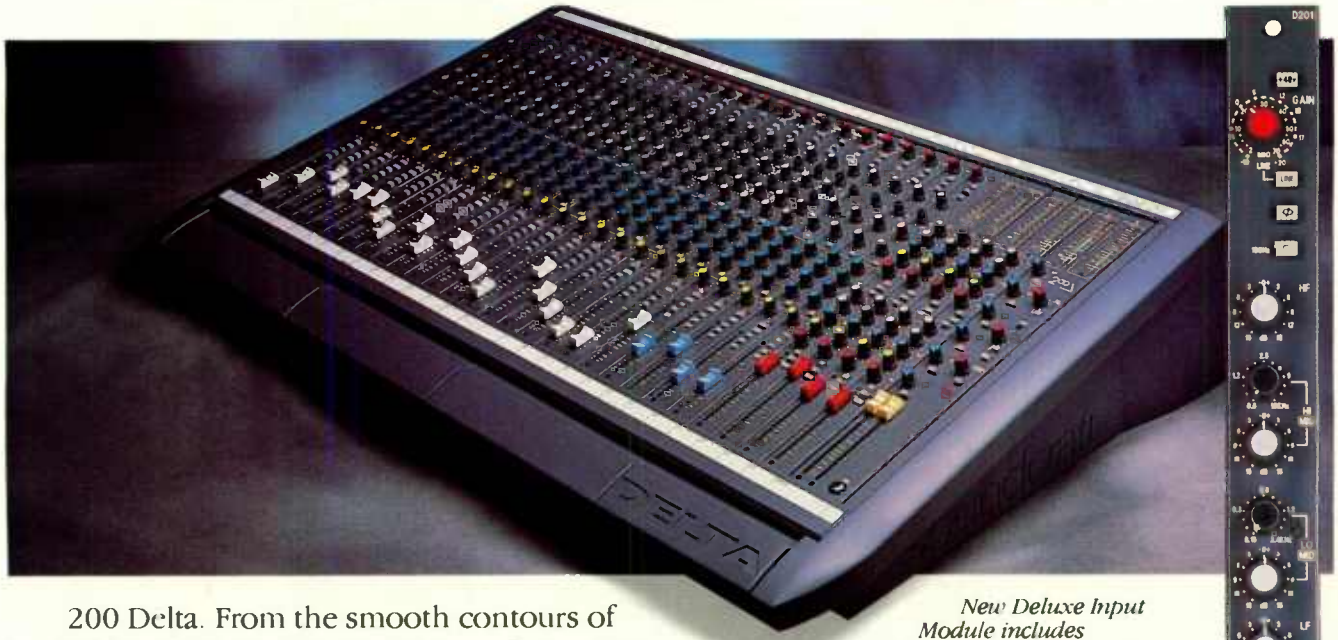

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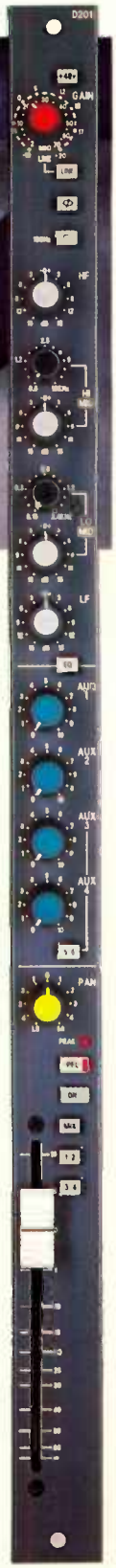

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The New Kids have sold enough records, tickets, T-shirts, hats, caps, badges, buttons, postcards, calendars and key chains to make each Kid a millionaire—with plenty left over for the General. And why not? These latest All-American Kids were wholly invented by Maurice Starr: look, concept, presentation, choreography—oh yes, and their music as well, which Starr, a shameless plunderer of the entire compendium of modern black pop music, accurately dubs "the Osmonds with soul." Midway through the Magic Summer tour of 61 performances in 46 cities before more than two million people, Starr stands on the stage of Giants Stadium and surveys his domain.

The last time I saw Starr was in early 1985 in Roxbury, the heart of Boston's black community, in a ramshackle house one step up from abandonment. Maurice had dubbed it the "House of Hits," and installed an eight-track studio in one of the bedrooms.

The "Hits" came from the New Edition, five preteens Starr pulled out of the Roxbury projects. Starr wrote, produced and arranged all the songs, played all the instruments and sang the backup vocals for the group, which he hoped would become the next Jackson Five. But after first record *Candy Girl* sold a million copies, they had a falling-out over finances. The New Edition dumped Starr for new management, and the entire matter headed for court, where it languished for years. Was Starr bitter?

No way! "I just figure, I did it once, and I'll do it again," Maurice told me in that spring of 1985, with a Svengali-like smile. "Only this time I'm gonna do it with five white kids from Dorchester. I call them the New Kids on the Block."

Five years and millions of dollars later, Starr is as affable as ever. Between sets, Starr describes himself as a modern-day Sam Phillips. In the '50s Phillips found Elvis, the white man who could sing like a black and who would make him a millionaire.

"The New Kids are doing something people didn't think could ever be done," Starr points out without a trace of hype. "This is 'blue-eyed soul' surrounded by a black situation, something that's never been seen before. I've been criticized a lot by black people for having white kids performing to black music, but that's the whole idea! I'm making history right now as a black manager. The biggest black act in the world—Michael Jackson—had a white manager. If Michael Jackson was white, it wouldn't have taken him 20 years to make it to where he is now...it would be more like nine months!

"People say the New Kids are bigger than the Beatles now, but I had to fight to get them by. Black radio wouldn't play them because they were white. White radio wouldn't play them because they sounded black and had a black manager. We had to hide what they looked like, with no picture on the single, and a blurred photo on the cover of *Hangin' Tough*...all because of the black-white thing in the music business."

When they did break in 1988, however, the New Kids broke *big*. When a Tampa white radio station began airing their fourth single, "Please Don't Go Girl," others rapidly followed suit. A year later, they were *Billboard*'s top recording artists, and a year after that they had moved more than 20 million units, including six Top 10 singles and

STUDIOS OF THE STARRS

WHAT TECHNO-GADGETS does the master producer/ arranger/ songwriter employ to achieve the glossy studio sheen common to all his work? "I just grab whatever's near me," says Starr. "I don't be looking at brand names. I just go by the sound. It might be a two-dollar drum machine."

In fact, some of Starr's biggest hits—from "Candy Girl" to "Please Don't Go Girl"—had their genesis on a low-rent Yamaha keyboard and a Melodica and were recorded directly onto "a $19.95 tape cassette machine."

In the studio, it's much the same, as might be expected from someone who recorded his first million-seller on a ramshackle Tascam 80 eight-track at the original House of Hits in Roxbury. "Usually I lay down a drum sound first—either on an Oberheim DMX, or on real drums made by Gretsch." Other Starr-favored oldies-but-goodies often pressed into service include a Minimoog, a Fender Stratocaster and a Fender Jazz Bass.

Today's revamped House of Hits is one of three studios kept in "heavy rotation" by Starr & Co. (The other two are brother Michael Jonzun's Massachusetts-based Mission Control and Normandy Sound in Rhode Island.) The studio features 48 tracks of recording possibilities, with AMK Mozart and SSL 4000 and 8000 consoles and an array of sophisticated electronics, including an Otari MTR90MKII and MTR 12, an Akai DR 1200 digital recorder, Sony and Panasonic DAT machines, and AKG 414 and NFO Mann microphones. This is complemented by Urie Gauss Yamaha speakers, Yamaha and Bryston amps, a Lexicon 224 XL, a Yamaha Rev 5, an Eventide 300SE Reverb, SSL and Neve compressors, and AKG headphones. Instruments kept close at hand include a Roland D-50, a Roland Juno 60, a Yamaha SY77, Korg M1 and T3, a Roland Vocoder, a Roland 808, an E-mu Systems SP12 emulator, an ARP Odyssey, a Yamaha acoustic grand piano, Yamaha and Pearl drum sets, and Zildjian cymbals. "Maurice doesn't let technology stop him," says chief engineer/studio manager Sidney Burton. "But he has plenty of engineers and technicians around. That way, we can do everything we want here. Nothing has to go anywhere else."

two Top 10 albums. Not to mention all those ancillaries, of course.

Today Maurice Starr lives in a nine-bathroom, 12-bedroom mansion in Brookline, a fashionable white suburb across the city line from his old haunts in Roxbury. Starr paid a reported 1.5 million dollars for the Georgian brick house—$576,000 in cash. But despite his success and its millionaire trappings, Starr seems unchanged.

"Yeah, I'm just as jive as I ever was," he admits. Although Starr remains onstage throughout both Rick Wes' and the Perfect Gentlemen's performances, he is out the stadium door midway through the New Kids' tumultuous set. And as the multi-million-dollar, stadium-packing, McDonald's-sponsored, squeaky-clean, all-white-all-right Magic Summer rolls on, Starr permits himself one slight smile of satisfaction, if not revenge. He's referring to the New Edition suit (which was finally settled in 1988 "with the lawyers getting all the money"), but he could just as easily have been writing his own epitaph: "I guess you could say I lost out. I lost out—but I won."

HIGH TECH'S BROKEN PROMISES

In the mid-'80s synths promised a brave new world. Where'd it go?

By Craig Anderton

LOOK AT THE COLLEGE charts, filled with back-to-basics roots groups. Consider the current popularity of heavy metal, which relies not on MIDI plugs but on tubes, a technology that predates most people in the music industry. Ask any music store owner what's hot, and the answer (at least for this week) will be acoustic guitars. Synthesizer unit sales, which, according to the AMC, peaked out in mid-'87, have been declining ever since (a 12% drop from 1988 to 1989).

For a while back in the '80s, synth-based music coexisted on the charts with roots rockers like Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty and John Cougar Mellencamp. As always, people were attracted to the sound of a screaming guitar over a hot rhythm section, but they were also interested in the new types of sound being produced by an up-and-coming generation of high-tech bands. Yet somewhere along the line, the synth music scene withered.

High-tech musical tools are such a part of today's music-making process—even for roots groups, who use studio technology as much as anyone—that the idea of a high-tech backlash may seem unjustified. Has high-tech really lost its appeal, or has it simply become less visible?

Some of the best places to look for answers are record stores, department stores and radio stations. There's a close relationship between the people who make music, the people who buy music and the manufacturers who make musical instruments. When the Beatles took over the world, electric guitar sales went through the roof. When the punk ethic of "anyone can play an instrument" collided with the advent of instruments so new there was no accepted way to play them anyway, the seeds were planted (especially in England) that resulted in a number of synth bands.

The years between 1980 and 1985 saw significant releases from Eurythmics (*Sweet Dreams*), Laurie Anderson (*Big Science*), Depeche Mode (*Speak & Spell*), Devo ("Whip It"), Thomas Dolby (*Golden Age of Wireless*), Ultravox (*Vienna*), Human League (*Dare*), Bill Nelson (*Vistamix*), Howard Jones (*Human's Lib*), the Cars (*Shake It Up*), Kraftwerk (*Computer World*), Soft Cell ("Tainted Love"), Tears for Fears (*Songs from the Big Chair*), the Thompson Twins (*In the Name of Love*) and many more. These records marched to the beat of a LinnDrum, an Oberheim System or a Roland MC-4 sequencer, and pounded out lead lines on Prophet 5s, Minimoogs and DX7s. There have been a few survivors, but most of the synth groups have dropped by the wayside.

Much of the reason for the decline of synth-based music is that it failed to broaden its base. The back-to-basics music of the '80s broadened into different genres (new folk music such as Suzanne Vega and Tracy Chapman, roots rockers like the Silos and Melissa Etheridge, and the great interest in world beat), and in the process increased its audience. The synth bands generally subscribed to a tightly defined style that had a lot to do with novelty of sound. When that novelty wore off, so did interest in that style. It seemed that while acoustic and electric musicians had no trouble working electronic devices into their act in some capacity—a synth player here, some MIDI-controlled signal processing there—the synth bands had a difficult time bringing new elements into their music. You won't hear a tremendous amount of musical growth over the recording careers of Gary Numan or Devo.

There are other reasons why high-tech music-making lost some of its shine. First,

Illustration: Russell O. Jones

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Over-drive distortion	*Gated reverb*	*Graphic EQ*
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manufacturers oversold the technology. Synthesizers were claimed to "make any sound imaginable." They couldn't, so then it was claimed that samplers could "make any sound imaginable," and of course they couldn't either. Yamaha introduced FM synths as "the future of music," and while the technology made a major impact, even Yamaha is now combining sampling with their FM generators. ARP said their Avatar guitar synth would revolutionize guitar; it worked so poorly and cost so much that it instead managed to give guitar synthesis a bad name. Computers were supposed to take the drudge work out of composition, but as computers themselves became more complicated, it was a full-time occupation just to keep a computer system up and running. And let's not even talk about "workstations." Billed as the one-size-fits-all answer to every musician's dream, the average workstation turned out to be nothing more than a keyboard with a sequencer and some signal processing.

In the process of selling musical gear, manufacturers made promises they couldn't keep, and musicians felt burned by the wildfire progress of technology. Now when a company announces the "latest, greatest" technology, musicians are hesitant to get excited—even though the equipment being produced today is remarkably cost-effective and sophisticated. For example, E-mu's Proteus offers 16-bit sampled sounds, 32 voices and exceptional modulation options for $995. Just eight years ago, $995 brought you E-mu's Drumulator—a fairly simple drum machine with eight-bit drum sounds. Keyboards like the Ensoniq VFX-SD, Roland D70, Yamaha SY77 and Peavey DPM-3 provide sound quality that was unheard of only a few years ago, but people just aren't as easy to impress these days.

Another example of technological oversell was the under-$300 portable electronic keyboard for consumers, which was billed as a way for people with no musical training to get into playing music. People were attracted by the concept, without really understanding that it takes work to make satisfying music. Simplistic automatic accompaniment is fun for a while, but like a video game you know too well, it wears thin quickly. Portable keyboards crashed and burned in '89, selling 42% fewer units than in '88.

Then there's the nature of music-making itself. It took a few years before musicians realized that sitting in your room with a drum machine, a couple of synths and a tape recorder—but with no feedback from either an audience, band members or an engineer/producer—is not necessarily what music is all about. Sure, MIDI systems are unparalleled for composition and education, but when the process of music-making lacks social interaction and communication, much of the fun is lost. Despite some manufacturers' claims to the contrary, people instinctively know that all-synthesized music often lacks something: Drum machines don't sound like drummers, and a sampled violin doesn't sound like a violin player.

Which brings us to the second reason for the burst of the high-tech bubble: Most musicians failed to exploit the technology to anywhere near its potential. They allowed themselves to get lazy, using the same factory preset sounds as other musicians (in the

mid-'80s, it sometimes seemed as if Congress had passed a bill requiring every pop album to use the same DX7 bass sound). Electronic instruments, particularly newer ones, can be extremely expressive, but learning how to use these expressive options is not always easy.

A sax player will caress each note in a solo, adding vibrato or tremolo, changing the dynamics during the course of a note and varying embouchure so that the timbre constantly evolves. The keyboard player will call up a sax patch and press a key down to start the note and release the key to end the note. Maybe there will be a little bit of expressiveness added with aftertouch or vibrato, but that doesn't equal the level of nuance obtainable with acoustic instruments. When musicians such as Mark Isham, new-ager David Arkenstone or Marcus Miller *do* make expressive electronic music, it may not be perceived as such because it sounds like "real music."

The third reason has to do with changing public tastes. Technology, while not quite yet a dirty word, is making people uncomfortable. Of course technology has brought us a great many benefits (I'm very glad I didn't die of the black plague at age 12), but when we hear that the ozone layer is being destroyed, that groundwater is being contaminated and that low-level radiation is a far more serious health threat than anyone imagined, it's no surprise that people are starting to distrust technology in general. Rightly or wrongly, to some people items like drum machines, MIDI sequencers and synthesizers represent technological decadence.

Besides, anti-high-tech sentiments dovetail nicely with rock's tendency toward reverse snobbery. Ted Nugent saying "MIDI is for wimps" suggests that musicians are supposed to be sweating and playing, not reading a manual and debugging local area network setups. The beauty of rock 'n' roll is that a bunch of kids can get together in a garage, thrash out a I-IV-V progression and strike a common chord with an audience. The idea of setting MIDI channels and "programming" rather than "playing" music seems at odds with rock's populist bent.

Another component of changing public taste is simply fashion: People don't want to hear the same sounds over and over again. To those who came of age in the '60s, the current popularity of acoustic guitars seems old hat. To those raised in the days of disco and new wave, however, acoustic guitars sound

fresh and new. The Minimoog, once considered a fairly simple-minded synth that couldn't hold its own with new digital models, is now coveted again precisely because it doesn't sound like the synths that replaced it.

So is the boom over for good? Is this the end of the synthesized road? Not at all. High-tech electronics have matured and are an accepted—if little noticed—part of today's music-making process. How many people who saw the Monsters of Rock tour realized that Alex Van Halen was plugged into two Simmons drum units hidden underneath the stage? Even acoustic acts often go into a studio where MIDI automation helps create a smoother recording process, and use programmable effects to enhance the sounds of their instruments. People don't really question the use of technology; they question the overuse—and the overselling—of it.

Synthesis is still a valid and exciting way to make sounds, and there are synth players who exhibit the same kind of virtuosity on their instruments as, say, Jeff Beck exhibits on his. Joe Zawinul, Peter Gabriel, Larry Fast, Wendy Carlos and Vince Clarke have pushed the envelope of synthesis and sampling. These players know not just how to make music, but how to shape sounds for greater musical impact.

All this reminds me of the early '60s—the days of the British Invasion. For a while, if you didn't have long hair or an English accent, you were in trouble; and if you had both, you had a pretty good shot at a hit, regardless of your talent. Lots of groups that were, in retrospect, pretty poor were able to ride the fashion wave and make a living. Similarly, the early '80s were the years of the "Electronic Invasion," where if you didn't have a synthesizer you were hopelessly passé. Manufacturers could put out just about anything and it would sell; groups with little more than good haircuts and a drum machine became top-selling acts.

Now we've all become a lot more knowledgeable and critical. The high-tech boom may be over, but a high-tech bust will not follow. Rather, high technology will take its rightful place as part of, not the exclusive focus of, the music-making process. The number of electronic music devices and players may decline, but the quality will go up—hopefully way up—as people approach these high-tech tools because they feel a genuine rapport with the instrument, not just because it's fashionable. Ⓜ

PERFORMANCE OF THE MONTH

STILL ETHNIC AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

By Gene Santoro

ON AN EARLY SEPTEMBER THURSDAY, about 7000 upscale-looking folks and their kids spread beach blankets beneath the beaming blue afternoon sky. On a field surrounded by dwarf pines and cedars sat a huge stage where Montauk resident Paul Simon—along with guests Billy Joel, Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Loup Garou—sang to raise money to preserve the 200-year-old Montauk Point Lighthouse.

WHO
Paul Simon
WHERE
Indian Field Ranch
Montauk, L.I.
WHEN
August 30, 1990

After Loup Garou's stomping zydeco, Simon came on with 14 backing musicians, including South African guitarist Ray Phiri (whose shimmering arpeggios formed the spine for most tunes), keyboardist Richard Tee and saxman Lenny Pickett. A four-piece Brazilian *batucada* ensemble kicked off "The Boy in the Bubble." As the group charged into drastically rearranged takes of "Kodachrome" and "Me and Julio," it became clear how incongruous and oddly endearing it is to pit Simon's thin voice and limp stage gestures—he has the performing charisma of a laundry bag—against such a roiling barrage. It became even clearer when Ladysmith overwhelmed him with their churchy soaring and percussive booms and chirps on "Homeless" and "Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes," where their strutting looked like the Rockettes after kung-fu lessons.

Simon also unveiled three tunes from *Rhythm of the Saints*, his new Afro-Brazilian album. Two of them—"Proof" and "She Moves On"—seemed dissociated in the way some songs from *Graceland* did: While the fierce music rumbled and peaked, Simon sang his characteristically bookish, dryly ironic lyrics about faded hopes and disappointed loves. On the other hand, "Cool Cool River" felt unified, with its contrasting time signatures, chug-a-lug percussion and punctuating horn-section slamdunks. In the middle of Simon's set, East Hamptonite Billy Joel, who'd passed up a limo to drive over in his red pickup truck, hit the stage for three tunes. (Wife Christie Brinkley had hit the photographers' pit earlier, brandishing a minicam as the lensfolk yelled, "Look this way, Christie!") Joel, whose energetic performances can make his songs worth hearing, did some things Simon didn't: He started by thanking everyone for coming, he told jokes on himself, he talked repeatedly about the benefit's purpose and he pointedly related "Down East Alexis" to his setting by saying, "I want to get in a plug for the local commercial fishermen." Most of them couldn't afford the benefit's $25 ticket price.

Photograph: Merri Cyr

After Simon put some off-key harmonies to Joel's medley of "Whole Lotta Shakin'"/"Sea Cruise," he gave his fans by-the-numbers arrangements of "The Boxer," "Graceland" and "You Can Call Me Al." Encoring with solo versions of "Still Crazy After All These Years" and "Sounds of Silence," he lulled the crowd back into their Saabs and Cherokees. Ⓜ


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TOMORROW'S P.A.S, YESTERDAY'S AXES, LOTS MORE

One-ton presses, 1000-foot mosquitoes and other numerical details

By Alan di Perna

FFSSSSSHHHHUHNNNKKKKK. A one-ton press comes down on a new JBL SR4700 series speaker enclosure. Ouch! A torture test? A sick David Letterman segment? No, just standard manufacturing procedure. Boy, these things are built tough. I recently found myself inside JBL's vast Northridge, California factory, contemplating the evolution of P.A. speakers. Back in the mid-'60s garage band days, we'd simply filch the P.A. horns off the local elementary school roof and sing through those. There wasn't much on the market that sounded a whole lot better. But today there are computer-designed marvels like the SR4700s, with all kinds of hi-fi blandishments: titanium-diaphragm tweeters, self-cooling woofers and industrial-strength, trapezoid-shaped cabinets.

For all that, though, the enclosures are relatively lightweight, with switchable jacks on the back to let you run them bi-amped or normal, and another switch that lets you kick in 2 dB of high-frequency attenuation to control the squealies. They come in six configurations, including a single 12" cabinet, a three-way and a subwoofer system.

Tall, dark and trapezoidal, JBL's new industrial-strength SR4700 P.A. speakers come in six different configurations, including a single 12" cabinet, a three-way and a subwoofer system with switchable jacks on the back to let you run bi-amped or normal.

Great stuff for P.A. or keyboard rigs. Just don't leave them unattended in the schoolyard.

As P.A. gear keeps evolving, guitars continue to hark back to the golden days of "Louie Louie." Great, isn't it? The latest company to catch the vintage reissue fever is **Gibson**. They're bringing back the 1960 Les Paul, with its smaller headstock and a neck that was thinner and wider than the '50s Pauls. Also back is the Gibson ES 295 archtop: a '50s entry in Gibson's historic ES (Electric Spanish) series, with two P-90 pickups, a metallic gold finish and optional **Bigsby** tailpiece.

Over at **Martin**, they've never really departed from the good old ways of guitar making. But in these days of dwindling natural resources, we're facing a shortage of East Indian rosewood, the stuff the Martin clan have always used to make many of their guitar bodies.

They've found a closely related strain called Morado, which is also known as Bolivian or Santos rosewood. The first instrument to incorporate it is the HD-28MP, which is essentially a Morado version of the HD-28 herringbone dreadnought that Martin reissued during the late '70s. How's the HD-28P sound? Maybe a wee bit brighter than many Martin dreadnoughts, but no less beautiful.

On the electro-acoustic front, **Takamine** has two new models. One is the NP-18C, which has a Sitka spruce top and parametric EQ. This sprightly single-cutaway goes for $1395. Alternately, tuxedo types will want to check Takamine's new HP-7 classical guitar with its onboard parametric EQ and a palathetic pickup, which is of course not to be confused with that old caveman mating custom, the Paleolithic pickup.

In guitar amp developments, **Gallien-Krueger** recently sent over one of their new Microamplifiers, the ML-E, for a test drive. The thing really is micro (about one rack space high, 13.5" across and 6.5" deep), but it can sure crank: to the tune of 120 watts mono or 60 watts per side in stereo. It's a two-channel job. The distortion channel, unfortunately, is subject to all the usual transistor amp ills. There's no real middle ground as you increase the chan-

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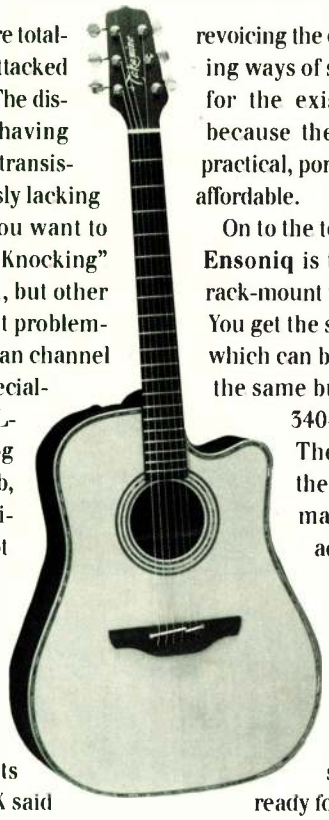
nel gain level: Either you're totally clean or you're being attacked by a 1000-foot mosquito. The distortion tone, along with having that typical "squared off" transistor quality, seems curiously lacking in sustain. It's great if you want to play "Can't You Hear Me Knocking" or ZZ Top tunes all night, but other overdrive sounds are a bit problematical. In contrast, the clean channel is pure celestial bliss, especially when used with the ML-E's sweet, built-in analog chorus. The built-in reverb, an ancient "bucket brigade" analog design, is not as successful. Plugs are plentiful: both balanced and unbalanced stereo outs (no cabinet emulation, drat!), a headphone jack and a mono send/stereo return effects loop. A spokesman for GK said the company is currently in the process of revoicing the drive channel and investigating ways of substituting a spring reverb for the existing circuit. Good news, because the ML-E is otherwise quite practical, portable and, at $569, relatively affordable.



This Sitka spruce cutie is one of Takamine's two new electro-acoustic models, the NP-18C. Onboard parametric EQ lets you shape the tone of your wildest dreams.

On to the techno poop. The latest from **Ensoniq** is the SQ-R. It's essentially a rack-mount version of the Ensoniq SQ-1. You get the same 21 oscillators (three of which can be stacked in a single voice), the same built-in effects and the same 340-sound memory capability. The only thing you don't get is the onboard sequencer. Which makes SQ-R a desirable little addition to a MIDI system that already has a sequencer. Especially for the $1195 list price.

Meanwhile, just when you thought summer sequel season was over, get ready for the Ensoniq VFX-SD Version II. It's an enhanced edition of the E-Boys' Big Workstation, the VFX-SD. The main addition is one megabyte of acoustic piano sounds. There's also a new chorus/distortion/ reverb algorithm in the effects section, and a few new sequencer features, including step recording and the ability to do multi-track real time recording of sequences instead of recording one track at a time.

Of course this means the original VFX-SD will be phased out of production. What to do if you already own one? You can get all the new features *except* the piano sounds via a simple software upgrade. But if you want the ivories, you'll have to get the main board replaced. See your dealer. All others can just lay down $2695 for a new VFX-SD Version II.

Peavey has also entered into the affordable synchronizer sweepstakes with the Synclock ($599.99). A synchronizer that can read and generate SMPTE in all formats, can also jam sync, offsets...the Synclock does it all.

MUSIC POWER

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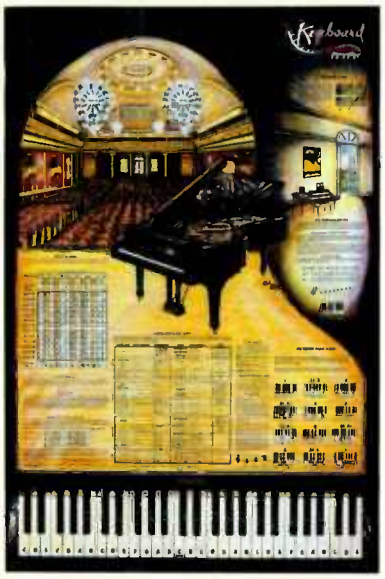

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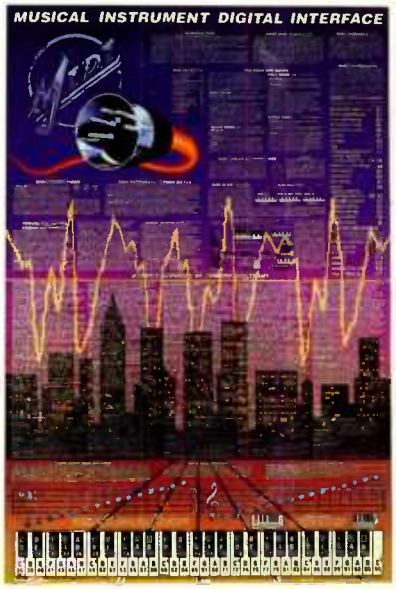

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Appetite for Construction

Living Colour Ups the Ante—for Us and Them

Time's Up
(Epic)

A TALENTED AND AMBITIOUS jazz-rocker, Vernon Reid first cut his teeth in Ronald Shannon Jackson's ritualistic Decoding Society, absorbing influences like Jimi Hendrix, Eric Dolphy, Miles Davis (with John McLaughlin or Pete Cosey) and Parliament-Funkadelic (with Eddie Hazel and Michael Hampton). His style combines everything from blues and funk to modern jazz and hard rock—a musical notion, as Reid likes to point out, of inclusion, not exclusion. As such, Living Colour became a

Illustration: Patty Dryden

John Werner

Before words. Before music. There was the beat.

Mickey Hart, the virtuoso percussionist for the Grateful Dead, shares his lifelong fascination with the history and power of drumming in a remarkable new book and a companion album. With vivid anecdotes and nearly 100 color and black-and-white illustrations, he explores the myths, legends, and amazing variety of a music that has enthralled the human spirit since the dawn of time.

Hart's new solo album—his first in over a decade—extends this personal odyssey, combining the most ancient techniques and instruments with the most modern recording technology. Guest artists Jerry Garcia, Zakir Hussain, Airto Moreira, Babatunde Olatunji, and others join Hart for this breathtaking aural achievement.

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RYKO
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lightning rod for the hopes and aspirations of the burgeoning Black Rock Coalition in New York City; their 1988 debut *Vivid* helped focus media attention on how much talent was really out there, while contradicting conventional notions about rock's cultural roots. A couple of hit videos and one Rolling Stones tour later, the band could write their own ticket.

Living Colour has punched that ticket and moved on, with an album so edgy and powerful it makes *Vivid* sound almost generic. *Time's Up* is as dangerous as a Molotov cocktail, a majestic vision of hard rock on the cutting edge of a new musical coalition. Living Colour is a band with a Capital M-essage, which is that the future is here, and it doesn't work for most of us. While the lyrics don't fall into neat, bouncy couplets, the situations depicted—from the amoral detachment of the crack man on "New Jack Theme" to the sexual double whammy of relationships on "Under Cover of Darkness" (with a nice editorial turn by Queen Latifah)—are all too real.

More to the point, these songs seem to proceed directly from the music, not the other way around. This is a state-of-the-art power trio, as they show with the speed metal thrash of "Time's Up" and burping funk of "Elvis Is Dead," as they slice and dice their way through a barrage of broken rhythms and 4/4 crunch, keyed by Will Calhoun's relentless proto-funk rhythm modulations and Muzz Skillings' roiling bass. Vocalist Corey Glover's emotive gospel-blues delivery would make a rendition of the help wanted ads a cathartic experience. He never shouts, he sings; pulling on each turn of phrase until he bends it like taffy, answering Reid's dive-bombing hollers with swooping counterpoint. Reid's tone is squalling and acidic, dive bombing in and out of key with reckless abandon. But he also breaks free from the square wave zone with lush Afropop chording on "Solace of You" (with a nod to Jorma Kaukonen's "Embryonic Journey") and boppish counterpoint to Latifah on "Under Cover of Darkness."

Living Colour's detailed arrangements and real world concerns make for bold, brutal, beautiful music. With *Time's Up*, Vernon Reid and company have transcended teen town tinsel and upped the ante for every hard rock programmer on the planet. Wonder how many have the guts to take the bait.—**Chip Stern**

The Replacements

All Shook Down
(Reprise/Sire)

THE REPLACEMENTS' first two major-label albums after establishing themselves as an indie/cult/critics success—*Tim* ('85) and *Pleased to Meet Me* ('87)—contained no ostentatious commercial concessions, only the sort of tightening up and more focused songwriting you'd expect a talented group to develop over time. But with *Don't Tell a Soul* ('89), the other shoe (as in, first you sign with a major, then your music becomes bland) finally dropped with a vengeance. Accumulated goodwill moved many to generously search *Soul* for those singular Westerbergian nuggets. But as the first attempt by these no longer incorrigible scamps (minus one occasionally brilliant but troublesome guitarist) at settling down to some long-haul music making, *Soul* was restrained to a fault. In fact, a lot of it was dull.

Which makes *All Shook Down* that much more pleasant a surprise. Make no mistake, you can't go home again, and the Replacements are less a band now than the Paul Westerberg show. But the songs here are a mostly zippy lot. Some of the chords ("Merry Go Round") and lyric concerns ("Someone Take the Wheel") recall the band's glory days; some, like "Attitude" and "When It Began," reflect Westerberg's new I-think-I'll-be-around-for-a-while frame of mind. The title cut, featuring a weirdly enhanced whispery vocal, delineates either the recording scene or the L.A. drug scene or the band's crisis of a few years back or yesterday...Westerberg has always had a sterling knack for good ol' pop/rock lyric ambiguity, the kind of shifty meanings you don't mind hearing more than once. And his appealingly grubby vocals are better than ever with more expressive reach; while still hoarse and lived-in, you no longer feel like the voice is going to crack and disappear (and, sure, many old fans will consider this gain a loss).

So call me crazy, but I think they're cool again. Friends continue to groan about the great band that was, and how can this latest catchy trifle compare...but Westerberg has evolved into a neat pop/rock miniaturist, deviser of clever—sometimes better than that—little songs, sung in an affecting, personal voice. And that's something, no?

—**Richard C. Walls**

Paul Simon

The Rhythm of the Saints
(Warner Bros.)

PAUL SIMON IS a top-notch lyricist, a decent songster, a compassionate singer, an idiosyncratic performer who makes adventurous turns when he sees a dead end ahead, and a guy with absolutely no gift for timing his releases. *The Rhythm of the Saints*, with its Brazilian percussion, West African guitar and Simon's own weary vocals, comes together in a warm weather rush and general laziness. Breezes blow, but nothing to get too worked up over. And Paul, hate to tell you this—but it's *fall*.

Not that this makes for a lesser record; it'll just take you longer to adjust to the mood. Unlike *Graceland* and the "days of miracle and wonder," the opening cut here, "The Coast," lets us know "This is a lonely life/Sorrows everywhere you turn." Predictably, this desperate downbeat attitude (best perfected years ago with "Still Crazy") undercuts the freest rhythmic sections, adding what Simonites would call "depth." And while it's curious that Paul, on "She Moves On," sings, "but I feel good/It's a fine day...the plane lifts/She moves on" without a trace of hostility, it be hard for anyone to get worked up when Beach Boys–type vocals pop up behind a Folgersesque blend of congas, bongos, cowbells and scrapers.

As for Simon, he's the same thoughtful guy writing slightly askew lyrics and

melodies, but of course with entirely different arrangements tricking you into thinking it's something you haven't heard before. The scenery may change, but the artistic vision stays the same. Still, there are moments when the heart misses a beat, causing that elusive lightness of being. During "Cool Cool River" the music mostly falls away, leaving Simon's voice: "And I believe in the future/We shall suffer no more/Maybe not in my lifetime/But in yours I feel sure." Outside of Simon, only Van Morrison (and maybe the Surgeon General) could deliver a line that hokey and make you believe it for a moment.

There's some magic in these grooves, maybe not enough to get you to dance, but enough to make you smile. If at first it just sounds like Simon singing over Brazilian rhythm tracks (take exception to the train rhythm "Obvious Child"), give it a little more time. Paul Simon albums weren't built in a day; their success depends more on the listener's ability to assimilate them into the bloodstream than on any instantaneous response. Or in other words, if you don't like Simon you never will and if you do, you know what I mean.

—Rob O'Connor

T-Bone Walker

The Complete Recordings of T-Bone Walker 1940–1954
(Mosaic)

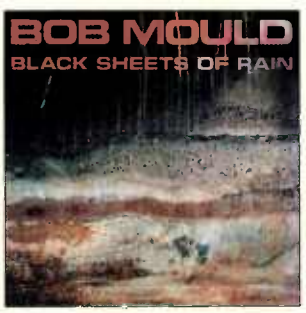
Aaron Thibeaulf "T-Bone" Walker is usually acknowledged as the father of modern electric blues, and one of the central figures in the recorded history of the electric guitar. Yet there hasn't been a domestic reissue of Walker's superb post-war material since 1975, when Blue Note released a two-LP collection of his Imperial sides. Now Charlie Lourie (who executive-produced that Blue Note set) and Michael Cuscuna, partners in the ambitious mail-order-only label Mosaic Records, have rectified that oversight in spades. *The Complete Recordings of T-Bone Walker 1940–1954* collates 144 Walker tracks, cut primarily for the Black & White, Capitol and Imperial labels, onto nine LPs/six CDs. In terms of comprehensiveness and sheer historical weight, the Mosaic set is nothing short of monumental; it also contains some of the most famous, and highly entertaining, modern blues performances ever recorded.

Walker reputedly began playing an electric instrument in 1935 (a few years before Charlie Christian and Eddie Durham made their first amplified recordings), and gained renown for his electrified solo on "T-Bone Blues," cut when he was a featured soloist with the L.A.-based Les Hite Orchestra in 1940. His influence reverberates in the work of every blues guitarist from B.B. King on down, while his clenched, dense single-

string style worked its way into rock 'n' roll so well—Chuck Berry's earliest solos are pure T-Bone. It's less frequently noted that Walker was also a delightful singer of surpassing urbanity and a skilled writer of suave, funny uptown blues. While the Mosaic set contains such dark, straightforward numbers as the classics "Call It Stormy Monday" and "Mean Old World," it's pop-styled songs like "I'm Still in Love with You" (heard in three different versions), "I Want a Little Girl" and such wry, sly blues as "Bobby Sox Baby" and "You're My Best Poker Hand" that reveal the breadth of his abilities.

This compilation shows off Walker at his peak, playing in front of sophisticated bands featuring such notable soloists as pianist Lloyd Glenn, saxophonist Jack McVea and the members of Dave Bartholomew's seminal New Orleans studio unit. A wealth of alternate takes are presented here for the first time, and are startling in their uniform high quality. For non-devotees, the repetitive nature of Walker's style and the wealth of alternates on *The Complete Recordings* might make the set slightly rough sledding. For blues fans, however, the Mosaic compilation is nothing less than an invitation (to quote "T-Bone Shuffle") to "have a natural ball." (35 Melrose Pl., Stamford, CT 06902)

—Chris Morris



Bob Mould

Black Sheets of Rain
(Virgin)

This guy cracks me up. I can't help it. Reading his lyric sheet for this new one brings to mind that great SCTV parody of Connie Francis, imitations of her songs being presented K-Tel style, each one more depressed and depressing than the previous. We're talking major gloom, unrelieved by wit or insight or poetic caress. It's the all-encompassing aspect of this sad-sack worldview that gets me chuckling.

How can anybody stay so unrelentingly focused on such a small patch of personal pique? Is he kidding or what?

Mould wasn't always such a dour downer. With Hüsker Dü he specialized in sensitive anger, his burly, foggy voice pitched on the barely controlled side of hysteria (barely musical too, but that was part of the kick). True, it was the group's drummer Grant Hart who came up with most of the more melodic change-ups, but Mould seemed to know back then that it was better to rage than to sink into morbid self-absorption. He was also a bit of a guitar hero, supplanting the required wall-of-buzz with chewy, frenetic runs and a whole catalog of post-'65 textures. Maybe not everybody's idea of a fun guy but, you felt, *alive*.

After Dü's acrimonious breakup, Mould released a solo effort ('89's *Workbook*) on which the fiercely energetic outrage seemed occluded by a new despair—not just in the lyrics (which often struggled toward hope), but in the overall sound. With *Rain*, Mould is more bummed than ever: "It's the black sheets of rain/Following me again/Everywhere I go" (title cut); "The fish in all the streams are dying/Fluorocarbons fill the sky/And I don't really want to die" ("It's Too Late"); and "In the forest/All the trees are turning black" ("One Good Reason") are fairly typical. Oddly, the music on the album often gives the project a tint of cognitive dissonance; "Late" kicks off with the riff from the Move's "Do Ya" and reaches such groovy pop/rock heights that the tambourine that appears toward the end sounds right on time; "Out of Your Life" is damn near power pop, down to its hooky descending bass line; throughout, the churlish complaining is mitigated by fat, vital guitars and catchy melodies (though there's a big dose of leadfooted metal-pomp, too).

Thus the lyrics state the bleak case while the music contradicts the hopelessness and supplies the reason the singer seeks for going on. But the singer, pacing moodily within the contours of his discontent, doesn't even notice that salvation is literally at his fingertips. I tell ya, it's a riot.

—Richard C. Walls

Dave Holland

Extensions
(ECM)

No point going on about Holland's well-documented strength as a bassist's bassist, or about how his concept for the instrument reaches well past utility and into deep, thoughtful elocution. There's even little point in addressing that old saw about how the bass player in any band worth its salt is usually an uncrowned captain, keeping one foot firmly in the groove and the other solidly up the soloist's butt. If you know anything at all of [*cont'd on p. 143*]

SHORT TAKES

So much music, So little time

ROCK

ROBERT CRAY BAND

Midnight Stroll [Mercury]

Clever as the material might be—and it's hard not to admire a lyric as ingenious as "The Forecast (Calls for Pain)"—Cray's delivery is what makes the difference here. Thanks in part to the meaty, Memphis-style groove, there's more rhythm in his blues, more soul in his singing. That just adds to the jazzy assurance of "Labor of Love," the helpless resignation of "Consequences" and the screaming abandon of "These Things."

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Red, Hot & Blue [Chrysalis]

Usually when rock stars cover a Cole Porter tune, it's an attempt to show how sophisticated and grown-up—how *un-rock*—they are. For *Red, Hot & Blue*, the idea is to raise money for AIDS research and make Porter stomp, something Neneh Cherry's hip-hop "I've Got You Under My Skin" understands from the get-go. Not everyone gets the idea; Sinéad O'Connor is impossibly earnest in "You Do Something to Me," while Fine Young Cannibals treat "Love for Sale" like a music hall routine. But Salif Keita's "Begin the Beguine" is adorably offbeat, Kirsty MacColl's "Miss Otis Regrets" is bracingly brazen, and U2's "Night & Day" simply sizzles.

DAVID CASSIDY

David Cassidy [Enigma]

Sure, this is prepackaged, radio-ready earwash. But what did you expect from a guy who owes his career to having been the designated heart-throb in a made-for-TV version of the Cowsills? Art?

DEEE-LITE

World Clique [Elektra]

Never mind that line about "I just wanna hear a good beat"—the real delight of Deee-Lite is the songwriting, an all-out melodic assault that specializes in ingeniously tuneful arrangements and instantly memorable choruses. It hardly matters whether the mood is urgent and rhythmic, like "Groove Is In the Heart," or sassy and soulful, like "Smile On"—the result is dance music even wall-flowers will love.

BOB GELDOF

The Vegetarians of Love [Atlantic]

Imagine a cross between Bob Dylan's whine and Mark Knopfler's sneer that somehow combines the worst of both, and you'll know why Bob Geldof is more famous as a fund-raiser than a singer. Listen to his songs, though, and as his tuneful charm and garrulous wit make their mark, you'll understand that a good voice isn't everything.

COCTEAU TWINS

Heaven or Las Vegas [4AD/Capitol]

Listening to the Cocteaus was like watching fog, as slow-moving, candy-colored clouds of sound drifted leisurely through the mix. With *Heaven*, there's a genuine groove. Granted, no one is going to mistake these dreamscapes for dance music, but there is a new vitality to this music, adding to the muted melodicism of "Iceblink Luck" and the saucy shimmer of "Pitch the Baby."

WALTER HYATT

King Tears [MCA]

It's one thing to make a jazzy, understated album of standards, quite another to write such songs yourself. (Just ask Harry Connick, Jr.) So how does Walter Hyatt do it? Some of it is the insightful elegance of his writing, and some the quiet cool of his band. But mostly, it's the honesty of his singing, which fills even the most off-hand lyrics with unexpected warmth and nuance.

ASIA

Then and Now [Geffen]

Later.

TOMMY CONWELL AND THE YOUNG RUMBLERS

Guitar Trouble [Columbia]

Playing bar-band rock can be a double-edged sword. Getting an audience reaction from licks this familiar is easy; getting songs that sound original and different isn't. Yet Conwell does both, pulling poignancy from the unabashed adolescence of "I'm Seventeen," and true grit from the title tune's rave-ups.

YOUSSOU N'DOUR

Set [Virgin]

N'Dour is an astonishing singer, but his American recordings always seemed lacking, as if the fire in his voice burned brighter than any of the music around it. Not this time, though. With *Set*, the music is insistently percussive; even mid-tempo numbers like "Sabar" seem to strain at the bit. Coupled with the gorgeous arabesques of N'Dour's delivery, it makes for exquisite listening.

THE CAVEDOGS

Joy Rides for Shut-Ins [Enigma]

Admittedly, the Cavedogs' sound is basically the same kind of guitar pop that's been bubbling up from garageland for the last 15 years. But it's not the sound that makes this band worth hearing, it's the songs—small-scale gems like "What in the World," "La La La" and "Bed of Nails."

JON BON JOVI

Blaze of Glory/Young Guns II [PolyGram]

Though the images are pure cowpoke, the approach isn't Old West—it's more like West Jersey. True, JBJ does round out his Springsteenisms with a touch of Mellencamp twang (ooh—variety!), but what really adds an aura of cowboy chic is his fearlessness. After all, it takes guts to sing a lyric as idiotic as "Dyin' Ain't Much of a Livin'."

THE VAUGHAN BROTHERS

Family Style [Epic]

Given that the Vaughans in question are Jimmie and Stevie Ray, it goes without saying that the guitar playing is phenomenal, from the down-home boogie of "Hard to Be" to the slick ZZ Top groove of "DFW." But it's not just the guitar playing; it's the deadpan wit of "Good Texan," the offhand audacity of "Hillbillies from Outerspace," the snarling soul of "Telephone Song." And when they get to "Tick Tock," with Stevie's chorus of "time's ticking away," it's hard not to choke back a tear or two.

—J.D. Considine

Illustrations: Chad Draper

SOUND OFF!

MUSICIANS AGAINST CENSORSHIP

Many early rock 'n' roll records were called "smutty." Records by the Five Royales, Hank Ballard & the Midnighters ("Work with Me Annie," "Annie Had a Baby") and many of mine ("Good Golly, Miss Molly," "Tutti-Frutti," "Long Tall Sally") were called smutty records. And censorship was on TV too. Elvis Presley was censored and only shown from waist up. There were no review boards. The churches established the criteria as to whether records were dirty or not. If they said they were, they were. If you didn't come up to their standards, or were a singer or band they didn't care for, you didn't fit the mold. But someone else could do the same song and it would be alright.

What's going on now with the rap groups and the way different singers are expressing themselves is nothing new. I'm not saying that I agree with every word—I wouldn't do it myself. I'm just saying they have the RIGHT to do it, whether I, you or whoever, likes it or not. That's their God-given, constitutional right. We have the right to freedom of worship, prayer, singing, thought, buying, whatever . . . we have our God-given power of choice. This country was established for that freedom for all mankind. Trying to stamp it out is wrong . . . this country was not built that way. If I want to be a Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Methodist or Seventh Day Adventist, I have that right. And if I don't want to be a part of ANY of them, I have that right, too.

It's the same with music. I have the right to curse if I want to in my songs, whether you like it or not, whether it's good or bad, right or wrong. I have that right. Now, you have the right not to buy it, listen to it, read it, or look at it. But you shouldn't stop me from listening to it or seeing it if I wish.

Some of these rap groups are talking about what they are seeing in their neighborhoods . . . people who are poor, hungry, homeless, people who have lost hope and are doing all kinds of things for money. Here's these young kids speaking on records using the language that they've heard all of their lives, so it's not wrong to them. They're used to hearing language that my generation may call foul or a disgrace. For them to take it, put it to rhythm and turn it into poetry . . . it's their God-given right. If we let anyone stop that freedom to speak, sing, preach, play or write, this country's going to be in trouble. You may not like what these rap groups are saying . . . but you better keep freedom of speech alive.

Censorship is a sign of dictatorship and that the country is leaning too far to the right. People came to this country so that they could live by the dictates of their own conscience. God gave us the power of choice and there are some people that want to stop the freedoms that God has given us.

The press made 2 Live Crew bigger than they would have been and I'm glad that they did. The world needs to know that freedom of speech, worship, and thinking is slowly being taken away from us and we cannot allow that. This IS the land of the free for all people of all races. This is AMERICA. Our freedoms are guaranteed in the Constitution. No one should interfere with those freedoms and if they try to, those people are very wrong.

Little Richard

MUSICIAN
Where the Players Do the Talking

NEW YORK COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA

New York Composers Orchestra [New World]

Many of today's players can arrange for large ensembles, but few have the clout to put them in play. Consider this collection of works by Marty Ehrlich, Robin Holcomb, Wayne Horvitz and Doug Wieselman an aberration then, a huge, stomping, luscious aberration. Some pieces allow for improv (Ehrlich's "After All") and some don't (Holcomb's "Nightbirds"), but both points of view foster a very modern sense of drama. Wieselman's circus textures, Horvitz's liberating use of repetition, Ehrlich's swing references, whatever—as composers they account for a lot of this century's stylistic cornerstones. Factor in the narrative feel that the programming of tracks offers and you've got a grip on the breadth of what today's orchestration can encompass. Superb stuff. (701 7th Ave., New York, NY 10036)

MARION MCPARTLAND

Marion McPartland Plays the Benny Carter Songbook [Concord]

When Carter plays his own pieces they always teem with grace, a quality usually attributed to his enormous instrumental prowess. However, McPartland's adroit sashay through Carterland tells us that Benny's pen provides improvisers with much of that stately lilt—it's written right into the tunes. Because the pianist has a way of giving elegant phrases gutsy little proddings, there's a taut feel to this trio date. Even a melody as breezy as that of "Only Trust Your Heart," which could dissolve into anemic cocktail fare if not paid strict attention to, comes off as an exquisite construction. And when the master's horn—ornate yet supple, studied yet capricious—etches several tunes, you're treated to some of the most lyrical inventiveness of this century.

BASSDRUMBONE

Wooferlo [Black Saint]

Though these miniatures are penned by three cagey writers—Ray Anderson, Mark Helias, Gerry Hemingway—they are played by three full-tilt blowers (same trio). That's why the accents, which range from flatulent eruptions to pious bowing to shimmery cymbaling, fit together so snugly. You can tell that this isn't a one-off date, but a fully realized effort, number three in fact. And with each member bringing a wealth of experiences to the gig—extending each instrument's base language—the pieces sound complete, fully realized. That's how you define top improvisers.

DON PULLEN

Random Thoughts [Blue Note]

Part two of the master's trio outings, not quite as devastating as last year's watermark, but wonderful nonetheless. Pullen's gone through a few rhythm sections trying to hone his very, very swing-oriented context, but this one—Louis Nash on drums and James Genus on bass—is constantly inventive. You have to be to keep up with the pianist, who lets few moments pass without throwing kerosene on the fire. Pullen hears the trio as having the same clout as larger ensembles and does his best to use harmony, phrasing, volume and the sheer number of notes played to make these tunes pack a formidable wallop. Also, these seven pieces reiterate how lyrical his writing has become. Now maybe Blue Note will give him the green light to get that organ orchestra into the studio.

NICOLAS COLLINS

100 of the World's Most Beautiful Melodies [Trace Elements]

Listening to free improv at home has become less and less desirable in the last couple years (maybe because the outside world has become more and more damned abstract), but this Zorn to Zumma, Cora to Coleman downtowner's deal rolls cogently along. It's like mitosis, so if I start using words like "threadlike" and "segmented" you'll know I looked up the full definition of the cell growth process. Collins cautions that he's not a player, but by sampling sections of his partners' blipped-up input, he comes up with his own lines. Talk about sound bites—these are sound chews. (172 East 4th St., New York, NY 10009)

DUKE ELLINGTON

Piano Reflections [Capitol]

The chances to hear Ellington in spare settings are few and far between, but when the opportunity arises, the master's graceful technique, and how it informed his composing, becomes clear. This '53 session is a testament to measured passion: Every note he strikes gives us a new focus on how he viewed the blues (with a rural ear as well as an urban one), and though many of the passages project an air of informality, a profound sense of drama inevitably emerges. His "Melancholia" is airy, his "Passion Flower" stark. Throughout, the joy that he found in performance is evident. With a flick of the wrist he turns a lone upper-register trill into a reason to roll up the rug.

MILES DAVIS

Double Image [Moon]

You could fry an egg with the heat from Miles' brain in '69, and this decent-plus-sounding boot from a Paris gig of that year shows just what kind of sizzle the woefully un(der)recorded Shorter, Corea, DeJohnette, Holland quintet was capable of. Lots of ornery nipping at each other's heels during the ultra-extended blowing, but more than a few luscious signposts you might not expect from such a tenacious outfit (they slip in and out of "My Funny Valentine"). No matter how much Davis disses open-ended situations, he knew how to trailblaze, and, during the most violent passages, wax lyrical as well. (Tower Records)

BENNY GREEN

Lineage [Blue Note]

One quality that can take a talented improviser over the top is confidence, and young guy Green has got it in spades. There are no maybes in his world: Every time he strikes the keys of his Steinway, he's emphatically explaining something to you. Of course that's a bit easier (and less thrilling) when you play your cards as close to the vest as he does on his Blue Note debut, but I hear that cautiousness as a tribute to melody—concrete, resolved, lush. And there's no equivocating in the bebop department; the speedways of Hope and Powell—driven by bassist Ray Drummond and drummer Victor Lewis—are thoroughly credible. Besides, anyone who starts their record with Timmons' "Dat Dere" is jake in my book.

MARC RIBOT

Rootless Cosmopolitans [Island]

More grungy and fragmented than what you might expect from these much-buzzed about downtowners, perhaps to make you pay closer attention. Bummer though, 'cause when you do, you find out that the improv tactics—part free (random plinks), part organized (riff-harnessed plinks), part arch (wry plinks)—have all shown up somewhere else before. There's a deliberate cheesiness to the affair as well. Still, as you realize from your Waits and Lizards discs, Ribot is loaded with ideas about individual sound, so even though his deconstructions allude to the Meters, the Ventures and Grant Green, his guitar gently weeps like few others.

—Jim Macnie

BUDDY RICH

Buddy Rich Memorial Scholarship Concert—Tapes One and Two [DCI Music Video]

Even in death, Bernard Rich dominates these proceedings, a source of eternal intimidation. Volume One is easily the more satisfying of these two videocassettes. First, there's a terrifying clip of Buddy reaching critical mass on "Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie." Second, drummers Gregg Bissonette, Dennis Chambers and Louis Bellson manage to draw inspiration from Buddy's vitality while casting long shadows of their own both as solo and trio interpreters. Tape Two is a bit of a drag, because for all their formidable chops, neither Dave Weckl, Vinnie Colaiuta nor Steve Gadd seem particularly comfortable with the big band, and are content to simply reprise their generic signatures during the solo sections, with nary a nod to the impatient ghost. Nor do they show much musical compassion for each other during their drum trio.

—Chip Stern

ELVIS PRESLEY

Elvis: The Great Performances [Buena Vista]

The King's visual legacy—films, TV appearances, newsreels—is getting sliced and diced almost as creatively as his endlessly reissued audio output. *Great Performances* is certainly a valid concept; the two volumes (low-priced, but under an hour each) merit their title by concentrating on El's pre-Army career. Volume One has the edge, with a higher percentage of '50s clips than its companion, and a riveting 1956 "screen test" lip-synching to

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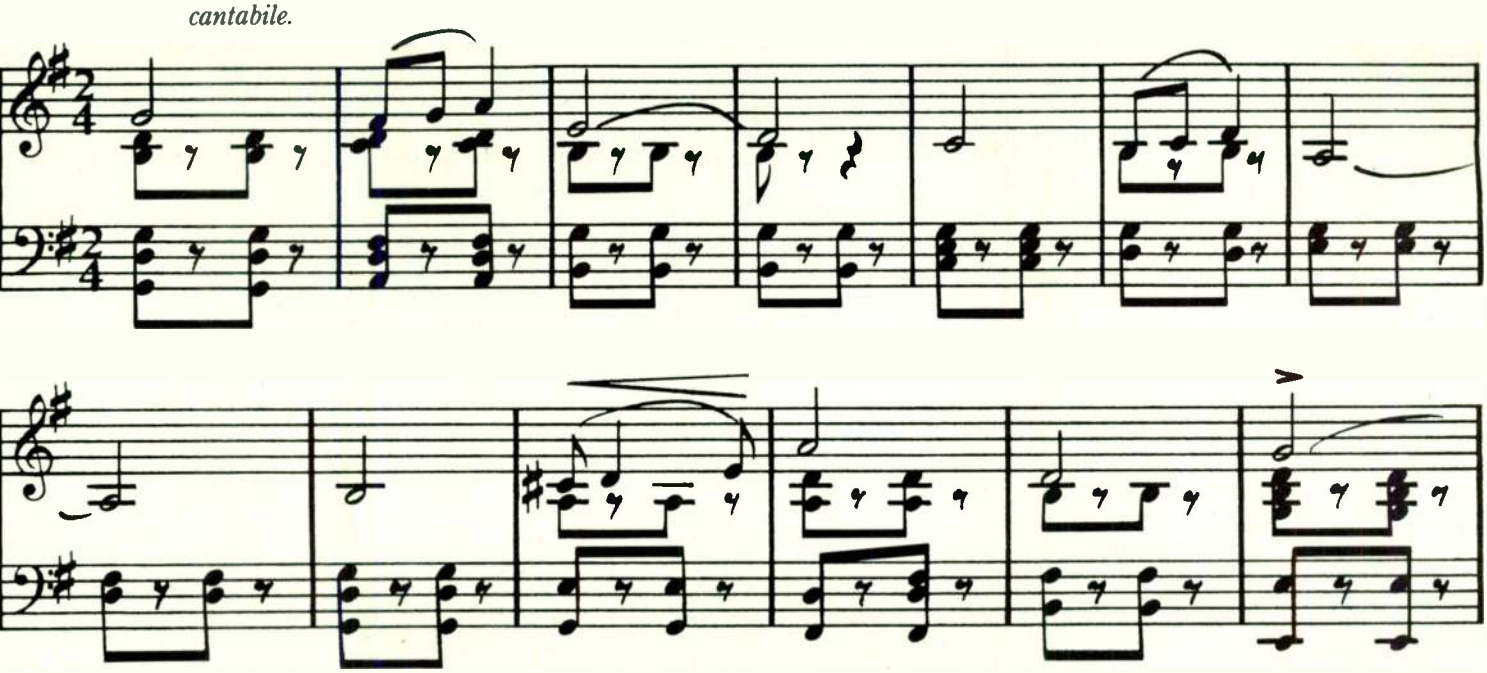

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INDIES

ALISON KRAUSS

I've Got That Old Feeling [Rounder]

The ultra-talented fiddler/vocalist is just this close to sounding like a mainstream C&Wer, spruced up and straight off the sidewalks of Music City. What separates her from the Dunns, Browns and Matteas is context: She remains an acolyte of acoustica, and bluegrass—where she got a start and the circuit that still pays the bills—is a style she'll defend to the end (even though drums show up on the last two tracks). That doesn't stop her contempo version of the high lonesome sound from being a tad sleek, or her idea of precision from containing a certain uniformity. Still, a breakdown is a breakdown, and "Will You Be Leaving" is as good a balance of emotions and mathematics as you might hear. If the songs get too cloying—and at points they do—you can always take a bath in the picking.—*Jim Macnie*

VARIOUS OBSCURITIES

Wild Men Ride Wild Guitars [Hollowbody]

Challenge isn't the first record company that leaps to mind when you think "rockabilly." The label released its share, though, as this 20-track CD proves. There's some excellent playing here, some good singing and even a few songs to justify the effort—like Big Al Downing's celebrated "Down on the Farm" or Huelyn Duvall's ode to summer vacation, "Three Months to Kill." Sound quality and booklet notes are impeccable. (Sundazed Music, Inc., Box 85, Coxsackie, NY 12051)

—*Scott Isler*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Ska Beats 1: The Street Sounds of Freestyle Ska [ROIR cassette]

Leave it to the Brits to create musical mayhem with an inspired mixup of dance styles. In this case, take acid-house, add a dash of rap and throw it in the blender with some chukka-chukka ska. Dread rapper Longsy D is one of the dub controllers, as he and the others add Skatalites samples and left-field sound effects to the mutant grooves. Other neo-ska luminaries such as Buster Bloodvessel (Bad Manners) and Ranking Roger (the Beat, General Public) lend a hand or throat to the looniness. (611 Broadway, Suite 411, New York, NY 10012)

—*Tom Cheyney*

THE FRINGE

The Return of the Neanderthal Man [Northeastern]

It's quite possible that the Fringe is the only exploratory jazz group on the planet to have had a regular gig every week for the last decade (at the Willow in Somerville, Mass.). This live recording demonstrates the trio's many strengths, with several passages that go beyond mere soloing into the realm of spontaneous group composition. George Garzone's tenor grunts and squeals in a manner appropriate to the title subject, while John Lockwood lays down muscular bass and Bob Gullotti tortures his kit. The level of communication between players is astounding; hard to believe it's almost completely improvised. A monstrous album, in a nice way. (Box 3589, Saxonville, MA 01701-0605)—*Mac Randall*

CARNIVAL OF SOULS

Flop [Top]

Remember how crummy it was to be young? *Flop* is an excellent excuse to wallow in someone else's angst (for a change). The crypto-expressionist songs have the virtue of brevity, but most of all they sound good: Carnival of Souls is your basic rock trio with an all-American guitar tone. Self-conscious as hell, but only one acoustic-guitar number. (Box 6332, Washington, DC 20015-0332)

—*Scott Isler*

REISSUES

GRANT GREEN

The Complete Blue Note Recordings of Grant Green with Sonny Clark [Mosaic]

Neither personally charismatic nor a revolutionary improviser, Grant Green is rarely regarded as more than a footnote in the history of blues, R&B, pop or even jazz guitar. But befitting his niche as the Blue Note house guitarist in the early '60s, he was wonderfully fluent in all these styles—or more accurately, was wonderfully fluent in a highly personal, elegant style that could modulate effortlessly from one genre to the next. Never self-aggrandizing or a player who soloed on for its own sake, he swung effortlessly, with a tone at once smooth and biting, imbuing standards of blues, Broadway and bebop with melodic turns that appeared freshly spontaneous while ingeniously constructed. In other words, classic Blue Note.

The four CDs collected here, in a boxed set typical of Mosaic's surpassing standards, feature Green in the company of pianist Sonny Clark, another Blue Note regular whose taste and subtlety makes these sets so utterly listenable. The compositional fare here ranges from Sonny Rollins (a particular favorite of Green's) to an Eddie Vinson blues to standards as lugubrious as "Moon River"; the playing features side dishes by saxophonist Ike Quebec, percussionist Willie Bobo and Art Blakey—who prods the normally supercool Green into a wickedly bluesy solo on Gershwin's "It Ain't Necessarily So." Thirty years ago, Grant Green was a groove—and chances are, that's what he'll feel like 30 years from now. (35 Melrose Place, Stamford, CT 06902)

—*Mark Rowland*

MILES DAVIS

Pangaea [Columbia]

Given how little use Miles had for Eric Dolphy, Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor in '60s interviews, it's fascinating to hear how much these menacing free improvisations suggest of their influence, as well as more obvious sources like Marvin Gaye, Sly Stone, James Brown and Jimi Hendrix. This is the evening performance by the same band which gave us the daytime *Agharta*, and is generally held in higher regard by aficionados of electric Miles. Sonny Fortune's mysterious flute and Miles' pensive, wah-wah-inflected interludes on "Gondwana" echo the balladry of his youth, and offer a delicate contrast to the cokomotive rages and Afro-Acid rituals of "Zimbabwe." And for guitarists—particularly the more sentient of our heavy metal brethren—Pete Cosey will provide a rude awakening.

—*Chip Stern*

JO JONES

Jo Jones Trio [Fresh Sound]

This 1959 Everest recording—Jo Jones' personal favorite among his output as a leader—has been unavailable for decades, but now this singular, woefully underrated piano trio can again take its place among the greatest in jazz history. Ray Bryant manages to combine the outrageous harmonic fluency of Art Tatum, the rhythmic propulsion of Bud Powell, the taciturn wit of Count Basie and the sanctified funk of Ray Charles in one swinging package. Brother Tommy Bryant shoulders much of the time-keeping burden, allowing brother Ray and Papa Jo to engage in an animated cat-and-mouse dialogue. From the celestial calm of "Greensleeves" through the dualities of "I Got Rhythm" and the deep bluesiness of "Little Susie," *Jo Jones Trio* is what jazz is all about. (Jazz Workshop S.L., Barcelona, Spain)

—*Chip Stern*

WANDA JACKSON

Rockin' in the Country [Rhino]

While true rockin' gals were scarce in the '50s, loud, proud Wanda Jackson was a real humdinger. Hottin' and hollerin' like a wilder Brenda Lee, she made sexy sparks fly on "Fujiyama Mama," Elvis Presley's "Party" and "Hot Dog! That Made Him Mad," recording in Memphis with crackerjack players like guitarist Joe Maphis and pianist Big Al Downing. The second half of this welcome compilation documents a familiar transformation, from free spirit to conventional country artist, though it's still hard to resist the cornball charms of "A Girl Don't Have to Drink to Have Fun" and "My Big Iron Skillet."

—*Jon Young*

CLAUDE THORNHILL

Best of the Big Bands [Columbia]

Big-band music could be dreamy and romantic, just like the Beatles or Motown. Still, it's often remembered for its power and brass. Thornhill's band used French horns and adapted an impressionistic idea or two from Debussy. Arranged by the young Gil Evans, this jazz was early cool that never threatened to evaporate, even when it floated. The sound is digital spotlessness at its most unrealistic and pinched—compare the wide-open analog spaces of *The Uncollected Claude Thornhill and His Orchestra* (Hindsight HSR 108)—and you'll have to construct your own credits from the disc and Will Friedwald's liner notes. It's worth it.—*Jim Hunter*

Dave Holland, you've got that.

For those who don't: Holland takes few solos. His showcase might be the urgency of a figure, or a structured bass theme that bridges the flights of two other players. It could be an unaccompanied, unnerving intro (hail hi-fi—one can now determine the size of a man's calluses through the miracle of good engineering), where he'll lay it down thick and then lay back, forcing a momentary tonal stretch to nudge along an improviser, as he's done time and again with saxist Steve Coleman. Holland's writing is dark, involved and eminently interpretable; his two tunes here (of six) evolve rather than bluster forth, harnessing the flux of Coleman's roomy explorations and Marvin "Smitty" Smith's absolutely remarkable flourishes. For Holland's music to thrive, everyone best be put to the test.

Holland's other miracle of avuncular miracles this time out comes in the form of Kevin Eubanks, a young guitarist previously notable for being inexplicably steeped in Limburger Fuzak. This guy's playing like nobody's business, prowling and glissing and pumping fire through the set with such fury and abandon that you simply have to start hollering, lest you be dead. It makes you wonder just what it takes to get at that inner thang, and that's what this record is about. It's also about the funk, the squeal, about letting go and pulling hard. These guys *git* it.—Matt Resnicoff

Victoria Williams

Swing the Statue!
(Rough Trade)

ECCENTRIC AND PROUD, VictoriaWilliams could be a cross between Tom Waits and Natalie Merchant. Or maybe Jonathan Richman and Kate Bush. Anyway, *Swing the Statue!* is the equivalent of an old easy chair, lumpy and unsightly, but fun if you're willing. For the less tolerant, her exaggerated vocal mannerisms will have the resonance of fingernails on a blackboard.

Cooing and squawking like a delighted toddler, Williams demands a response, whether she's injecting a country twang into the jaunty "Why Look at the Moon" or illustrating a young bird's attempt to fly in the appropriately titled "Wobbly." Though Biblical-style parables and other Christian allusions abound, the dogged pursuit of cosmic grace should make sense to romantics of all persuasions. It's hard to dismiss the devotional warmth of "Holy Spirit," with its cozy gospel chorus and "Kumbayah" quotes: Wide-eyed wonder rarely comes purer, or cornier.

Thankfully, Williams displays a sense of humor in playing the divine fool and, better still, boasts a surprisingly varied repertoire of sounds. There's miles between the Cajun hoedown of "Vieux Amis" and the warped cabaret textures of "Clothesline Saga," which recalls Van Dyke Parks' arrangements for her 1987 LP *Happy Come Home*. Overlooking the precious "don't worry, be happy" theme, the lurching "On Time" suggests a closet rocker, while "Lift Him Up" uncorks some of the sweetest hillbilly harmonies north of Nashville.

Ultimately, the brassy persona—as relentless in its own offbeat way as a high-profile superstar's—wears thin. The bitterly eloquent "I Can't Cry Hard Enough" (a rare non-original) packs the most punch by straining for effect the least. Embracing the dread she usually denies, Victoria Williams offers a tantalizing glimpse of darker passions behind her good cheer. That's missed on the rest of *Swing the Statue!*—Jon Young

MC5

[*cont'd from page 90*] of the band's second album, a baby. For another, he avoided the smack scene. More important, Tyner seemed more interested in the quasi-religious elements of what was going on. "The Five was ritualistic from the git," Tyner says. "I understood it from the black Baptist church. When the Holy Ghost takes over, then the magic happens. Then the music becomes more than an arrangement of noises. It grabs you and shakes you into an awareness. If it wasn't for the music, I don't think I ever woulda bumped into God."

Most of all, though, the pragmatism of Tyner's basic philosophy insured survival at some level. "For me, existence and survival is a process of avoidance more than anything else," Tyner says. "It's a process of avoiding the things that will kill you." He sells himself a bit short, because Tyner has always acted as if it's also a matter of finding and nurturing the things that sustain you, whether that means multi-generational family life or working with returned Vietnam vets. Having lost what was certainly the greatest communal rock band, Tyner spent the past two decades seeking out and helping to form and improve other such units. As a result, he's reinvented himself as one of the most highly individualized performers—hell, people—I've ever encountered.

Tyner's language is so high-energy and descriptive, his sense of humor so dry, and many of his attitudes and opinions founded on such deeply internal and counterintuitive logic, that he often seems involved in some elaborate put-on. He almost never is. Working with some of America's least conventional bands was part of the process by which he acquired the skills, musical and recording studio craftsmanship and basic social information he needed to reemerge.

"I've come to realize that the one who hates violence the most is the warrior," says Tyner the Art Warrior, "'cause he's the one who's got to deal with it." *Bloodbrothers* is a first vehicle for Tyner to do just that. There will be live shows around Detroit, maybe a tour. There will be another record, this one exploring the theme of "how very difficult Peace is and how very painful Peace can be" and using Tyner's potential as a power balladeer.

Most important, Rob Tyner will go on making music for the rest of his life—out of need as well as desire. "I was never comfortable in the '70s," he admits. "And I *hated* the '80s. But the '90s, so far, I kinda like 'em." So he's back, on the way to what's next, proudest of all that "I came out of it with the same values that I went in with.

"But I'm a little tougher now," he adds. "Because teenage boys are coming to the door to take my daughter away." Ⓜ

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VAN ZANT

[contd from page 40] another big step. I'm sure I'll get raked over the coals by the critics a few times," he grins.

Still, after years of struggle, Johnny Van Zant says it's nice to be noticed. "I love it. I guess I'm just a ham. I've been through all that dues stuff and I'm sure I'll pay more. But right now I figure I'm in the prime of my life. Everything just feels right." Ⓜ

ROAD FEVER

FOR THE RECORDING of *Brickyard Fever*, JOHNNY VAN ZANT sang into an AKG 414 mike. Guitarist TIM PIERCE strummed a Tom Anderson custom Strat, augmented by a Soldano amp, Hiwatt amp, Marshall amp, Vox AC 50 and Marshall 4x12 cabinet. Fellow axeman ERIC LUNDGREN used a Jackson Strat, Marshall amp, Soldano amp and Marshall 4x12 cabinet. DENNY FENGHEISER bashed Drum Workshop drums, including 22" bass drum, 10", 12" and 14" toms, and assorted Drum Workshop snares, plus Zildjian cymbals, Remo heads and Dean Markley sticks. Keyboardist BILL CUOMO's arsenal consisted of a Prophet VS master keyboard and four slaves: a Roland D-50, E-max SE, rack-mounted Roland MKS-70 and Korg EX-8000.

BAYERS

[contd from page 110] big room and everything else in booths," Bayers says. "You could get big sounds on drums, but then you could bring them back with limiting and things like that. It's hard to beat a good-sounding ambient room with live drums in it. I might use 30 percent samples just to reinforce hard hits, but the drums in the room are the most beautiful to me."

Besides his use of triggered samples to enhance his drums, Bayers also enjoys playing drums along to programmed percussion parts, as he did recently on a track for Steve Winwood's upcoming album. "I work a lot with click tracks of course," Bayers says. "But when you've got percussion tracks, it makes you round out your sound and feel. You do kick patterns and everything differently. Also, with just a basic click, you can push and pull all you want. But you don't tend to do that when you have patterns going with, say, congas, cabassa and cowbell.

"Drummers often ask me what they can do to prepare for studio work. Take a drum machine into your practice room and program basic percussion, such as maracas, congas and tambourines, and play to that. Practice locking in with it. That could help people a lot. Another thing is timing. Really get to know your beats-per-minute. Not explicitly, but at least have a sense of 95 beats to 120 beats. And on a session, it's often a good idea to work with a click initially even if you don't want to cut the take with it. Everybody should hear it, not just the drummer, because everybody in the room could have a different concept of the tempo. So just go through it one time with the click so that everybody has the same reference point. Then you can shut it off. But it really gives a perspective, and it can save a lot of time in the studio." Ⓜ

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Dean Markley – 3350 Scott Blvd, #45, Santa Clara CA 95054 (408) 988-2456 ..... 65, 127
DigiTech – See DOD Electronics 77, 131
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Shure Brothers Inc. – 222 Hartrey Ave., Evanston, IL 60202 (312) 866-2200 ..... 31, 32, 33, 116
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BACKSIDE

MacKenzie Rockman

Boy, network TV is really rockin' this season! Morris Day has a sitcom, Fresh Prince has his own show, and best of all Steve Bochco, the producer of "L.A. Law," has launched "Cop Rock," a weekly rock opera about policemen. Now we here at *Musician* really like "L.A. Law"—the office is a lot like our own. Our publisher is the very image of kindly old Leland MacKenzie, our editor has the fighting integrity of Michael Kuzak, and all our ad salesmen combine the good money sense of Douglas Brackman with the personal sincerity of Arnie Becker. To tell the truth, though, we have our doubts about singing cops (once you get past Eddie Money, who's left?). But rock 'n' roll lawyers? From Peter Garrett to Ruben Blades, it's a proud tradition. So what we suggest Mr. Bochco do is combine his two good shows into one great one. We say, make "L.A. Law" a rock opera. And have we got a cast!

As *Leland* Les Paul

As *Douglas* Brian Eno

As *Kuzak* John Mellencamp

As *Arnie* Don Henley

As *Stewart* Paul Simon

As *Grace* Laurie Partridge

As *Kelsey* Nancy Wilson

As *Sifuentes* Tony Orlando

As *Abby* Suzanne Vega

As *Jonathan* James Ingram

As *Roxanne* K.T. Oslin

As *Benny* Brian Wilson

Backside photograph credits on page 44

Damn Yankees Rocks with DigiTech

Currently on their U.S. tour

Photo by Robin Visotsky

Ted Nugent, Tommy Shaw, Jack Blades and Michael Cartellone left nothing to chance for their debut world tour. They selected DigiTech to handle their signal processing needs. Below is just some of the DigiTech gear they're using.

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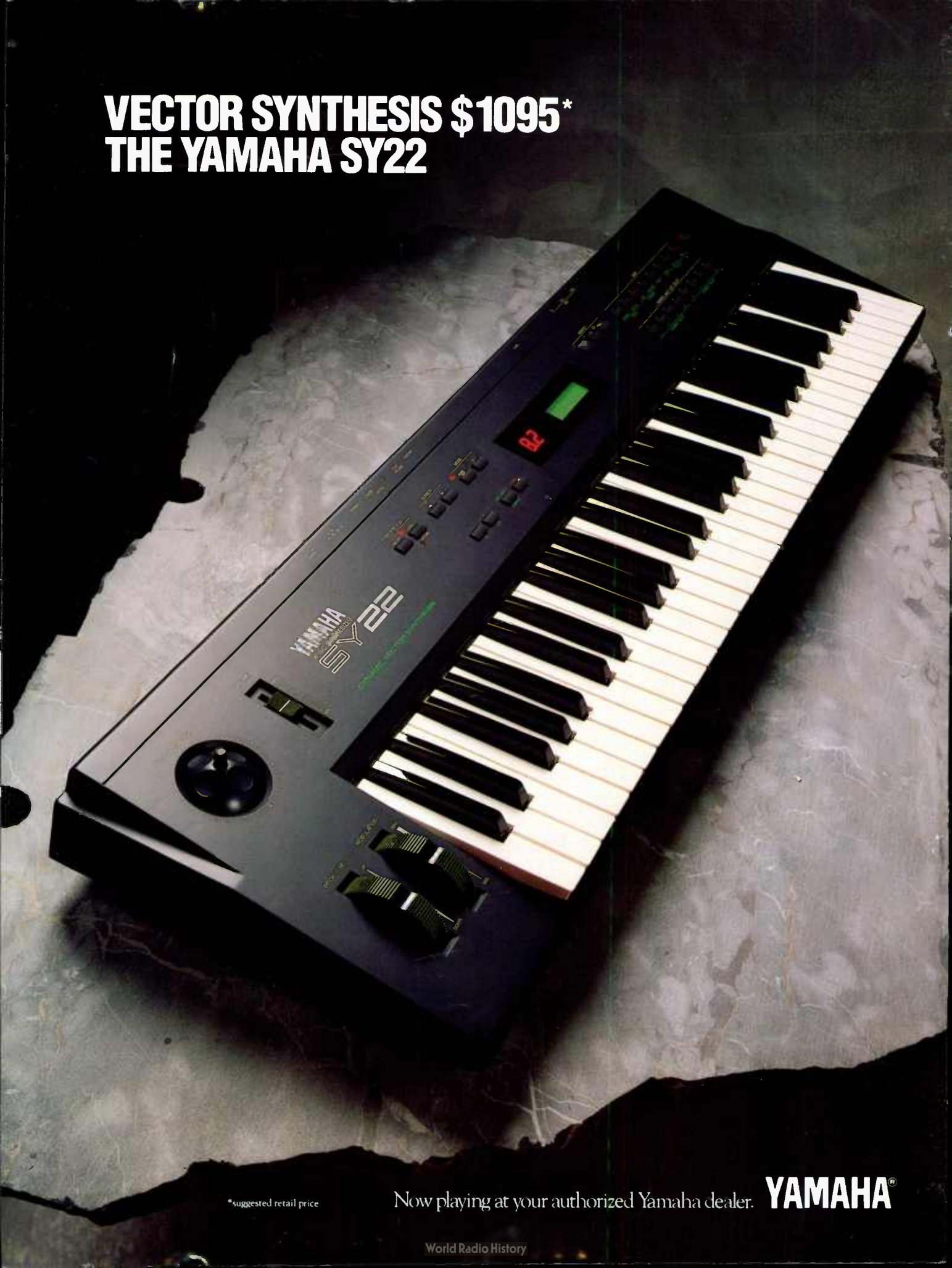

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