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# D E L A Y

# MUSICIAN

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**Art Director**

Gary Koepke

**Managing Editor**

Jock Baird

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**Associate Editor**

Mark Rowland

**Contributing Editors**

David Breskin David Fricke

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**Sales/Promotion**

R. Bradford Lee J.R. Morse

**Advertising Sales**

Ross Garnick

**Production Manager**

Pamela Ellis Hawkes

**Production**

Keith Powers Jeanine M. Guerin

Elizabeth East

**Typography**

Don Russell

**Assistant to the Publisher**

Cindy Amero

**Administration**

Michelle Nicaastro Deborah Reid

Maria Pallazola

**Main Office/Production/Retail Sales**

31 Commercial St., P.O. Box 701

Gloucester, MA 01930 (617)281-3110

**New York Advertising/Editorial**

MUSICIAN, 1515 Broadway, 39 fl.

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**Group Publisher**

Gerald S. Hobbs

**Circulation Manager**

Barbara Eskin (212)764-7467

**Subscriber Service**

Gregory Thompson (212)764-7536

**Chairman And President:** W.D. Littleford.

**Executive Vice Presidents:** Gerald S. Hobbs,

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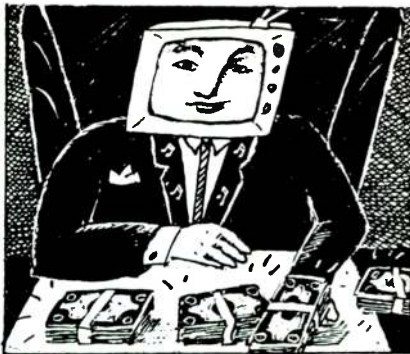
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# MUSIC INDUSTRY NEWS

by Mark Rowland

MTV is offering considerable cash sums to major record labels in return for exclusive use of rock video product. A recent proposal to Capitol/EMI, as reported by *Billboard's* Leo Sacks, totaled \$1.25 million over a three year period, in addition to several free advertising spots. In return MTV would receive exclusive use of thirty-five percent of all Capitol/EMI vids for a month; two thirds of the entries would be picked up by MTV and the remainder by the company. Similar proposals have apparently been submitted to other labels. Benefits for the record companies are fairly obvious—such substantial moola will help offset spiraling video production costs. And since those costs could at some point



SUSAN B. SOUTHWORTH

imperil the quantity and quality of videos, that becomes a concern of MTV as well. So does the proliferation of video programs on cable and network stations around the country—by tying up exclusive contracts with the majors, MTV effectively retains a guarantee of primacy in the field.

Meanwhile, a major advertising

agency has become the first such company to enter rock video production, through it surely won't be the last; the Doyle Dane Bernbach agency has put together the newest Alan Parsons Project vid, "Don't Answer Me." Interestingly, the vid is one of the more adventurous commercial releases, featuring cell animation superimposed over 3-D sets. The trend toward hiring ad agencies will doubtless continue within a medium so prone to emphasizing visual style as a means to promote a product. Indeed, according to Bernbach vice-president Jay James, many prominent video directors are getting their concepts from ad agencies in the first place.

South Africa boycott update: Some *Musician* readers have pointed out that any official boycott by outside entertainers of the South African regime also necessarily penalizes the inhabitants of South Africa, whose interest such a boycott allegedly serves. Dick Griffey, president of the L.A.-based Solar Records, has devised an intriguing alternative. According to Griffey, Solar will continue to sell records in South Africa, but all royalties from sales and publishing will in turn be donated to "the people who help finance the revolution.... While I don't think we should stop selling records in South Africa, because of the joy and happiness they bring our brothers and sisters there," Griffey observes, "African-Americans shouldn't make a profit from a nation that keeps twenty-six million people in slavery." For Solar, such revenues will add up to an estimated \$300,000 this year. Griffey plans to work out financial details this spring with representatives of the Organization for African Unity.

**Phil Collins** is producing the next album by **Eric Clapton**.... Plans are underway for a **Rod Stewart** tour with former compadre (and former boss) **Jeff Beck**. Stewart's career could certainly use the boost—his latest release sold in the neighborhood of two hundred thousand copies, down considerably from his three million record days, and plunging him perilously close to Peter Frampton syndrome. Beck will also appear on Stewart's forthcoming album, as will **B.B. King**.... **Marshall Crenshaw's** new five-song EP (available only as a Jem import) features no less than four remixed tracks from last year's *Field Day* (plus a live cover of "Little Sister"), which suggests that someone wasn't terribly happy with the original production by **Steve Lillywhite**....

New **.38 Special** video is being produced by former *Saturday Night Live* home-movie maven **Gary Wels**.... No truth to the persistent rumor that **Mick Jones'** new band with Topper Headon wants to call itself the Clash. Jones is also currently studying at a theatrical workshop in London, with aspirations toward an acting career.... **The Thompson Twins'** U.K. tour got off to a rocky start when someone made off with £4,000 from the band's dressing room. The dough was slated for road expenses.... The **Gang of Four** have announced their breakup following a farewell concert in London this April. Meanwhile, Gang guitarist **Andy Gill** is producing the debut LP of the L.A.-based Red Hot Chili Peppers.... Culture Club producer **Steve Levine** is currently working on a solo album—the first single scheduled for release was penned by none other than Boy George. Prince Crimson? Ex-Foreigner/King Crimson multi-instrumentalist Ian McDonald has joined with former Wings drummer Steve Holley, ex-Garland Jeffreys and the Rumour/Bryan Adams session bassist Brian Stanley, and newcomer Louie Merlino to form Danger St. Slight Twist of the Month: Woodwind Wiz McDonald will be playing lead guitar. Look for a world-wide satellite broadcast from the Police around next Christmas, according to guitarist Andy Summers.

## Chart Action

Surprise, surprise: *Thriller's* current thirty-two weeks (and counting) run at the top of the *Billboard* pop charts surpasses Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*, and thus becomes the longest running #1 record in the last twenty years. It has a way to travel before toppling the all-time record holder though; that honor belongs to the original cast LP of *South Pacific*, which ran for sixty-nine weeks starting in 1949. Next comes *West Side Story*—fifty-four weeks, beginning in 1962—then *Thriller*. Tied with *Rumours* at thirty-one weeks is Harry Belafonte's *Calypso*, and yet another *South Pacific* soundtrack, this one from 1958.

Elsewhere on the pop charts, Culture Club's *Colour By Numbers*, Van Halen's *1984*, Lionel Richie's *Can't Slow Down*, the Pretenders' *Learning To Crawl*, Billy Joel's *An Innocent Man* and the Police's *Synchronicity* hold their own at positions #2 through #7, respectively. Huey Lewis and Duran Duran have flipped-flopped to #8 and #10, while Yes' *90125* rocks steady at #9. The charts have become so resistant to new entries that this year's debut leader, the Alarm's *Declaration*, can only cut in at #95.



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# WOMACK & WOMACK

Cecil and Linda Womack are sitting on a couch in their home near Philadelphia while Micah, their youngest, plays with a pull-toy on the floor. Outside, the previous week's snow glistens in the sun; inside, Cecil Womack is talking about *Love Wars*, the album he and Linda just released, and some of the more unusual reactions they've received. Like the fellow who told them he thought it was a new wave record.

"New wave?" Cecil snorts, recalling his disbelief.

"Well, whatever it is," the fellow told him, "I've never heard it before. So it *must* be new wave."

The laughter bounces through the room, and even Micah looks up and giggles. Not that she really gets the joke—after all, when you haven't even reached two yet, *everything* is new wave. But to Cecil and Linda, who've been caught up in one aspect or another of rock 'n' roll for the last two decades, the idea that what they do is "new wave" strikes them as outrageously funny.

In fact, the Womacks have roots that run so deep into the rock tradition that it's almost hard to believe that he's thirty-six and she's only thirty-one. But they started out pretty young. Cecil was singing with the Womack Brothers, a gospel group organized by his father, Friendly Womack, Sr., when Cecil was a lad of four; later, he and his brothers crossed over into rock 'n' roll as the Valentinos, spinning off a series of hits starting with "Looking For A Love" and "It's All Over Now." Linda wasn't as precocious a performer, but she started writing not long after her father, the great soul and gospel singer Sam Cooke, died, and she managed to turn in her first hit at age fourteen, writing "I'm In Love" with Bobby Womack for Wilson Pickett. As a team, they've written and produced material for Teddy Pendergrass, Patti Labelle, the O'Jays, Randy Crawford, the Five Blind Boys and others.

They don't wear all this experience on their sleeves, however, and the sound of *Love Wars* is in no way revivalist. Rather, it continues the tradition Womack & Womack grew up in, but on entirely contemporary terms.

"It's really strange," says Linda. "Nowadays, the music is spread in all different directions; some I can appreciate, some I can't. Many times, the basis for the music has been lost. Some of the groups tend to hold onto it more, especially the English groups—Culture Club, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. The music can sound the same, feel the same,

## SOUL DISPATCHES & GOSPEL TRUTHS FROM THE FUNKY FRONT OF LOVE WARS.

J.D. CONSIDINE



MARTIN/1983

**Ace songwriting duo Cecil & Linda Womack have penned hits for all-star R&B clients.**

when it comes from that root, the old gospel thing. They respect that that's the real basis for the music.

"It's diluted now in American music. The synthesizers are taking over, and in a lot of instances, they're not used as dressing so much as the whole thing. There's nothing wrong with the machines, the technology—we use it on our own records as dressing. But you can't use it for everything and still have the same feel as when you add your heart and feelings."

"You know, a lot of the things that you

hear people doing on records now came from old gospel groups who people don't know about," adds Cecil. "One singer who they really got to know, because he stepped out of the arena, was Sam Cooke. Plus, they also got to know Johnnie Taylor. But a lot of people who didn't come straight from gospel, and a lot of things in blues music, have their roots there."

Understanding how the spirit of gospel music, that emotional spark that ignited the music, lives on in contemporary pop is important, Cecil feels, because with that knowledge "you know exactly where you have to go. You don't have to fish the water.

"Musicians nowadays, they don't think they should have to know those people. They say, 'Man, that ain't gonna help me.' You tell them that it will, and they'll say that they're doing a whole different type of music. But they're not. They can't even do what they're doing, because they don't know where they're coming from.

"It's like with history—if you can find out where you came from, you can appreciate where you're at now." Cecil pauses for a moment, then adds with a laugh, "I always used to hate history when I was in school."

A good case in point would be the Womacks' own careers as songwriters. One of the reasons why their work is so popular is that the duo can write effectively for individuals, not just assemble catchy verse-and-chorus combinations. As Cecil explains, "The minute you start to write for somebody else, you've got to think, 'Hey, can this guy sing in *this* key? Does he like to say this?'"

"Does it *sound* like him?" adds Linda. "Because when we do different things, we have to be sounding more like the person. You have to fit the whole mood of the song to that person, so it wouldn't make them uncomfortable."

"To be able to do that," says Cecil, "you have to know the person."

Know them in the sense that you can understand their own musical background and thinking, that is; that's where being well-grounded in the music comes in handy. Cecil mentions how "Love T.K.O.," an early song that reappears on *Love Wars* as "T.K.O.," got recorded by Teddy Pendergrass. "See, his style of music, and the style of music he was doing with the Blue Notes, was similar to our background. Real churchy type of music. So he could relate to it automatically, just like that," he says,

**THE HEART OF  
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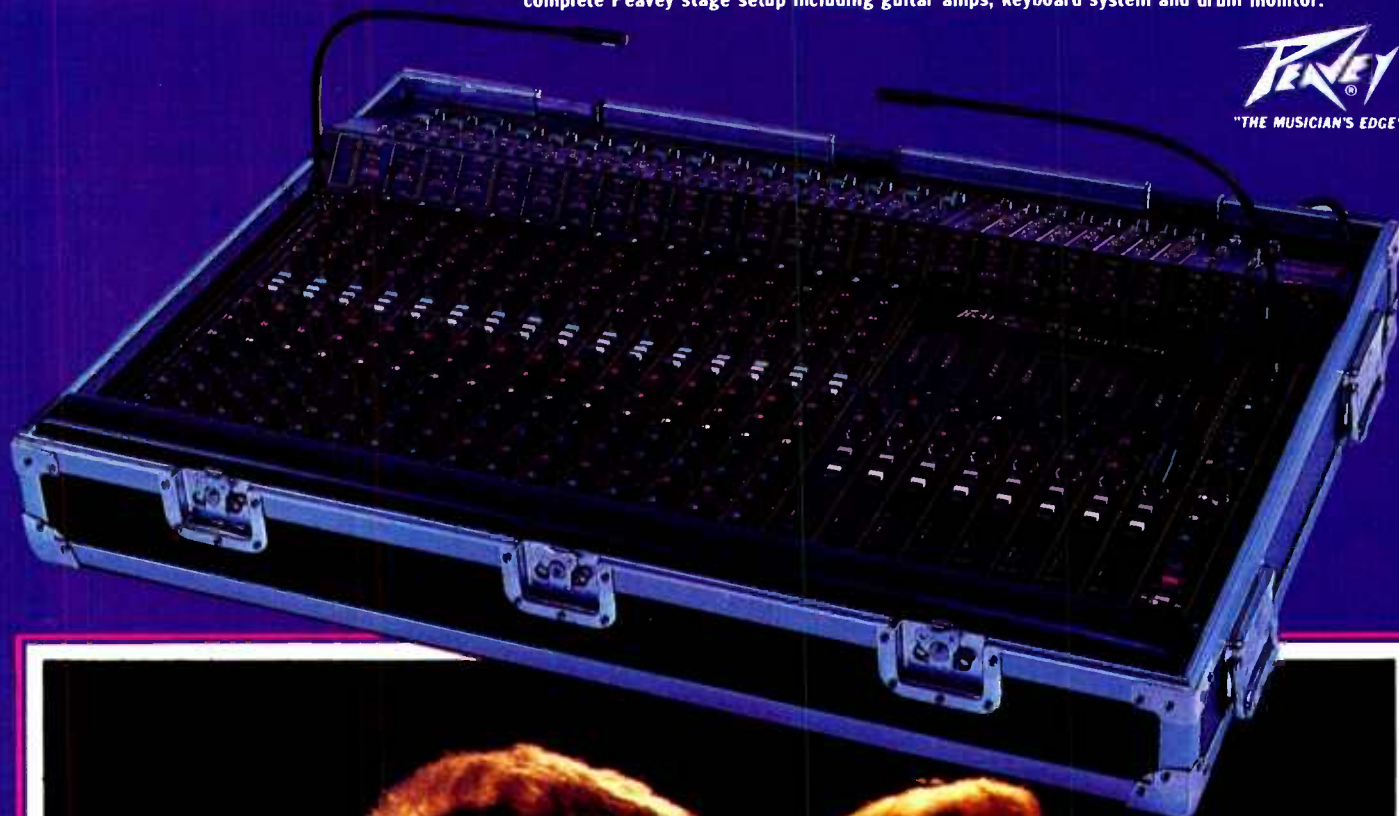
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**PEAVEY**  
"THE MUSICIAN'S EDGE"



Huey Lewis

Johnny Colla



snapping his fingers. And because Pendergrass had such a solid grasp of the song, audiences weren't far behind, helping "Love T.K.O." become a gold single for the singer.

That Womack & Womack wrote so frequently for Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff's Philadelphia International stable can be chalked up to a similar blend of backgrounds. Back when the Valentinos were recording for Cooke's Sar label in Los Angeles, Gamble & Huff were at Cameo/Parkway in Philadelphia, and without knowing it, the two groups were taking cues from one another, and basing their standards on the other label's work. "In the years before we started writing," Cecil says, "before they formed the record company, we used to run

across them. They'd always say, 'Man, we should get together. It'd be *great!*' We'd sing them our stuff and they'd sing us their stuff, and there would always be that interchange, the feeling that our musics were the same, that we talked the same language."

As it turned out, the Womacks spoke Gamble & Huff's language so well that their studio and writing obligations kept them too busy to step out on their own. "That kind of work can be more demanding than your being onstage," Cecil admits. "Bobby had done so much studio work that by the time he did come out as an artist on his own, it was a period of slowing down. He didn't have to do so much as he was used to. But it's worth it, because you get to work with a

lot of different people. You get experience that money couldn't buy."

One of the biggest lessons for Womack & Womack has been mastering the art of making the rhythms slick enough to seem contemporary, but still honest enough to connect with the listener. As Linda puts it, "What we want to do is make it listenable for the people today. You don't want to leave them totally, because you've got something there to express. We do want the contemporary market, although we're not going totally commercial."

So Cecil and Linda pay close attention to the beat. It's central to their writing, because, as Cecil tells it, "You've got to take that feel and build around it; if you lose that rhythm part, you ain't got *nuthin'*. That's the original idea, the origin of the thing." How they generate that rhythm varies, depending upon the specific feel they're after. "Sometimes we use a drum box," says Linda, "sometimes, if something's missing, I'll beat it in." Thus, table tops, the walls, boxes and anything else that's handy may be pressed into service.

In the studio, things are a little more professional. For one thing, the Womacks had an ideal drummer in James Gadson, a musician whose understanding of the rhythmic tradition is easily equivalent to the Womacks' feeling for melody and voices. "We'll be in the studio," Cecil says, "and we'll say, 'Hey, James! Put it here, man!' And he'll say, 'Stax! Yeah!'" Cecil imitates Gadson's drumming, a big grin on his face, and then pretends to call, "'All right, is this it?'" "No, bring it up a little more." "All right—*Motown!*"

Occasionally, Womack & Womack will use drum machines, like the Linn-Drum on "Love Wars" or Linda's ancient Korg rhythm box on "Catch And Don't Look Back." But they try to keep the mechanics to a minimum, because they're not interested so much in efficiency as in quality, the music's *feel*.

Or what the feeling becomes. One song on *Love Wars*, "Baby, I'm Scared Of You," starts off with a samba-flavored Philly groove that falls somewhere between the Hues Corporation's "Don't Rock The Boat" and the Blue Notes' "Don't Leave Me This Way." Linda sings the lyric, which is about a woman who doesn't want sweet-talk and flash from her man, just real, honest love. As she sings over the dreamy harmonies of the chorus, "I don't believe in magic/I believe in love everlasting." As love laments go, it's both eloquent and beguiling.

But it doesn't stop there. Suddenly the groove veers onto a tough, minor-key Latin pattern. As the drums heat up, the mood changes, with Cecil taking the man's role. Although he promises that,

*continued on page 36*

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# THOMPSON TWINS

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MARK ROWLAND

"We were a cult band. Now," says Tom Bailey, "we're a successful pop band, so the means of communication changes. We are what we stand for—you know, a mixture of men and women, black and white. I can't think of another group that does that so succinctly."

Well, not since the demise of the Mod Squad.

"Just a photograph of us actually says something intensely political, if you like," continued Bailey in cool, even Brittones. "Although we're never going to really start ranting and raving about it, you know."

No, that *would* be rather bad form, and these days form—visual, musical and, not least, marketable—is very much Bailey's band's ace. The Thompson Twins—one black, one white, one blonde—boasts neither Thompsons nor twins, but Tom Bailey, Alannah Currie and Joe Leeway hardly lack for image. A silhouette of their decidedly cross-cultural countenances doubles as a graphic logo. Percussive accents that hook dance club hits from "In The Name Of Love" to "Lies" to (I predict) "The Gap" have become their musical signature. And a live show in which all three Twins dance, sing, cavort and otherwise interface with their audience while instrumental mercenaries provide sonic backdrop is certainly well in keeping with prevailing MTV dictums: sell the face and the feet will follow. Synth-poppers from Duran Duran to A Flock of Seagulls to Soft Cell have pursued similar strategies with all the acumen of stock brokers, and with about as much soul. Are the Thompsons less calculating?

Was a time, you may recall, when the Thompsons were more granola than high-tech; a seven-member aggregate that played their own instruments, aggressively allied themselves with Britain's anti-nuke movement, and even encouraged audience members to come onstage and participate in percussive free-for-alls. That last experiment



Hydra-headed, unidentical Twins Alannah Currie, Tom Bailey and Joe Leeway.

was rather ruefully abandoned when it turned out that the percussion instruments were being ruined. The septet, which also included current Thomas Dolby collaborator Matthew Seligman (Dolby himself contributed synthesizer parts on some early TT tracks) was disbanded under more telling circumstances. According to Bailey, it followed the genesis of "In The Name Of Love," a dance track spontaneously concocted after hours by Bailey, Currie and Leeway. "We were just finishing the record," Tom recalls, "and I said, 'I'll do some doodling on the synthesizer. And then we wrote what turned out to be the hit song on the album. So it was very much a sign that the old group had come to the end of its life, and that the three of us should work together and continue in that direction.'"

More to the point, streamlining the band gave Bailey, as the only trained musician of the trio, considerably more creative autonomy. And the techno-funk crosscurrents of "In The Name Of Love" certainly held more commercial promise, if less atmospheric intrigue, than the guitar/syndrum blend of Stevelillywhite-pop that defined their earlier sound. "It gave us a kick in the backside," Bailey

admits. "We realized on what side our bread was buttered."

A follow-up LP, *Side Kicks*, under the aegis of Grace Jones producer Alex Sadkin, and consisting exclusively of three-minute synthesizer, vocal and percussion tracks, had its flaws—too many of the tunes sounded like the same idea spun sideways—but it also gleaned a fair-sized hit ("Lies") and a tour in which the Thompsons effectively consolidated their reputations and stylized image. The band's overtly political stance was muted, and all songs from the band's previous two LPs were stricken from their live performances (save "In The Name Of Love," of course, which was often performed twice to help fill the breach). It was as if the Thompsons had obliterated their own history, and simply re-invented themselves—which, in a way, they had.

So, it would be logical to assume that with *Into The Gap*, their latest LP, Bailey, Currie and Leeway would continue to mine the catchy if formulaic dance grooves of its predecessor. Instead, they've staked out far richer, warmer and more adventurous musical territory, and without sacrificing any rhythmic thrust. They did, however, commit several

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synth-pop heresies—integrating traditional instrumentation like pianos and guitars to round out textures, essaying the character of romantic relationships without flippancy or sarcasm, even going about the business of composing and structuring—gasp—real songs. Thus the Thompson Twins saga becomes a paradigm for the cyclical nature of pop itself—old turns into new, the past becomes the future, the most elemental musical values shore up the new frontiers.

"We were a lot more pressured about the songs than the sound of the tracks this time," Bailey cheerily admits. "On the last record there were a lot of dance tracks and we'd sing over the top of them, so it was a much more percussive and angular sound. Whereas this time we were very much of the business of composing a good song, more lyrically and melodically based, and *then* putting it in a musical context. I think overall it has smoothed down the sound, and brought down the tempos as well—made the whole thing less aggressive."

"I've always been a guitarist," he continues, "but we decided to stay away from those rock 'n' roll clichés for a while. We'd self-imposed that limitation of making a synthesizer, vocal and percussion record. But having done that, we felt more mature and confident to

explore those areas again. Also we were very cynical in our look at human emotions. We didn't want to tackle things like love until we were sure that we were mature enough as songwriters to handle it properly."

If the Thompson Twins latest hit single, "Hold Me Now," serves as a two-pronged exemplar of this recent "maturity," it also helps illustrate the differences that otherwise exist between the band's modular recording techniques and more conventional approaches. "With that song I basically started with the bass figure," Tom recalls, "which uses three thumps and a gap repeatedly through this long rhythm section. And I was enjoying that sort of groove—Alanah and I had been talking about writing a good sort of love song—and very soon we came up with the chords for the chorus. And we put the two together. Instantly we knew we were on to a good thing. Joe started putting in polyrhythmic stuff on congas, and we wrote in string parts—and then we just locked ourselves in the room with the recording equipment, the three of us, and worked until it was finished."

"We don't actually play songs, you see," he goes on to explain, "we just layer it bit by bit. Thinking, 'What does it need now, and wouldn't it be nice if...?' Sometimes that leads up a blind alley,

and you have to retrace your steps or even record from scratch—but that's the way we do it. It also means, when we finish the record, we've never actually played the songs as a whole. We have to go away and learn to do that; and it's very difficult, because of all the studio technique we use."

A classically trained pianist, Bailey still views his synthesizer work as a key exponent of the Thompson's musical approach, but, no longer views it so much as an end in itself. And he's absorbed enough tech expertise to employ synths as an aid to a more human vision, rather than simply allowing them to determine it.

"It always comes down to the person who uses them," he observes. "You know, it can be cold. It can be unemotional, it can lack some of the classic emotions that over the past twenty years we've learned to associate with pop music. And so I think any discerning performer will work hard to put those things in.

"But I mean, on this album everyone was saying to me, 'Look, you've got to get into the Fairlight system or the Synclavier and so on,' and I rejected that. I said, 'I'm basically going to use the same tool I've used before, which is the Oberheim.' And the reason is, I know how to make that thing work for me. I



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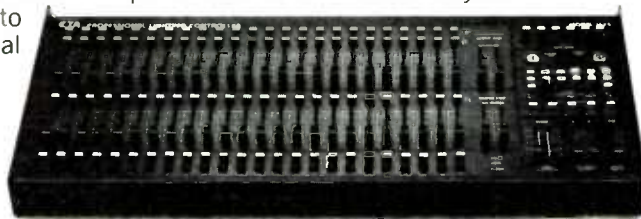
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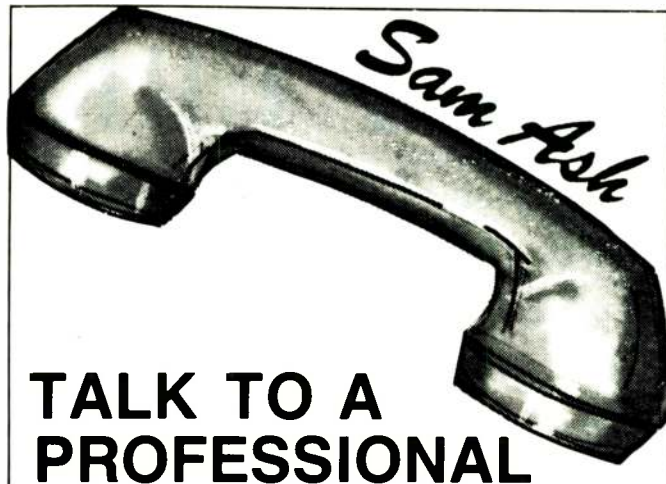
know it inside out. I enjoy its qualities. It's got a coarse sound that may not be that attractive on its own, but, when you make a record with a lot of synthesizers, they remain distinct parts, especially when you're overdubbing. Perhaps there are more advanced machines on the market, but it would take me the album to learn how to use the thing. So what's important is the expression of the idea behind the song."

For all his musical pedigree, however, it is really Bailey's relatively unsophisticated cohorts whose punch remains the Thompson's most recognizable feature. Though neither ever played before joining the group, their backgrounds (Lee-way is from South Africa, Currie from New Zealand) may have helped instill a natural, flowing sense of rhythmic proportion and Third-World accents into Bailey's more classically-oriented forms. Not to mention their shared penchant for the exotic—several tunes, including "Lies" and "The Gap," are humorously embellished by strains of what I'd call ersatz Indian cobra music. Perhaps it's just, as Bailey puts it, that they have a good ear for what's "fun."

"Being in choir school, I studied North German classical harmony," Bailey says, "and I think that's basically at the root of everything I do. I tend to think in those ways. But I can miss the point absolutely and get in a real rut. Whereas they're unhindered by such things—they just know what's right at the right time. They're very light-hearted. It's no big academic thing to them."

Which is fortunate, since their most successful collaborations depend on just the right balance between Bailey's furrowed formalism, and Currie and Lee-way's rhythmic esprit; without it, the incessantly loping tempos and lugubrious textures of songs like "Doctor Doctor" and "Storm On The Sea" suggest a new wave answer to the Moody Blues. Of course, either approach is bound to strike a popular chord. In England, where the Twins, like Dolby, had heretofore remained a commercial disappointment relative to their reception in the States, *Into The Gap* has already pre-sold platinum. Bailey's not surprised: "I'm a big believer in the idea of something being good no matter where. But I am very interested in what's going on in America. America is the perfect place for the Thompson Twins, you see. It's like a mini-world, isn't it? It's got that mix of cultures already."

"You see," he concludes with what amounts to a declaration of principle, "it's a question of learning the language of mass communication. Our message is one of personal freedom...and I just want to communicate that to the general public. So I've got to find the language that's going to suit them." 



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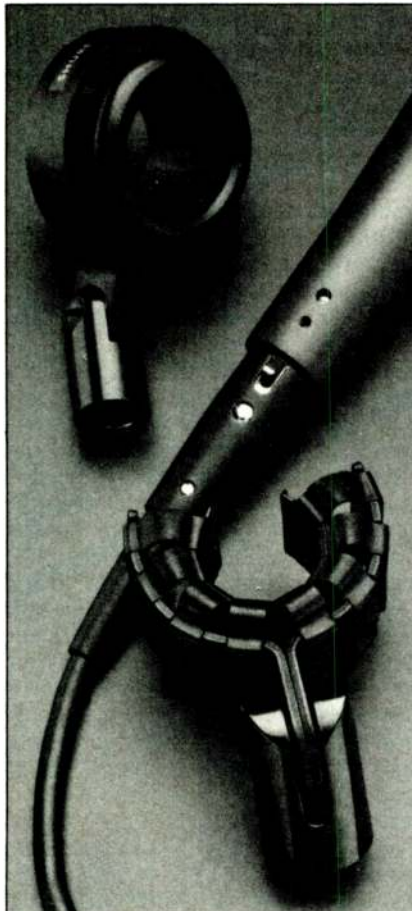


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Jonathan Swift's, a pub in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Despairing of formal arrangements—and remembering the guitarist's hospitality at our previous informal meeting—I grabbed a tape recorder and headed to the bar eight hours before showtime. Eventually the bus pulled up and the band started unloading their gear. Road manager Bill Hall relayed *Musician's* request to Perkins, who agreed to sit down with me at his hotel.

**Musician:** You were with the Beatles when they recorded your songs?

**Perkins:** Yeah. I was over in London on tour. They invited me to the studio—sent a car for me. We messed around, just showin' them different licks I did on the

old things. Ringo kept sittin' beside me there callin' me "Mister Perkins." He seemed a little nervous. All of a sudden he blurted out, "Do you mind if we cut some of your songs?" I said, "God, no, man. I'd love it." He said, "Guys, he don't care! He don't care!" And he jumped up and got on the drums.

The first thing they did was "Matchbox." They said, "What do you think, Carl?" I said, "Why that son of a bitch sounds like that old Sun record." They said (cheers and claps), "God! That's great!" They really wanted it to sound like that old Sun record.

**Musician:** They cut it live in the studio?

**Perkins:** I don't know of a thing that was changed. It's just those four boys pickin'. Same thing with "Everybody's Trying To

Be My Baby" and "Honey Don't."

Now that night they did record "Blue Suede Shoes" and "True Love," and they have a *hell* of a cut on "True Love" that never has been released in any form. Of the five songs of mine they cut that night, that was by far the best thing. Their harmony was terrific on that song! I asked Paul about it and he said, "Oh, it's in the can." He just smiled.

**Musician:** Maybe some EMI executive will read this and say, "I didn't know we had that!"

**Perkins:** (laughs) Yeah. It's there somewhere.

**Musician:** Let's talk about how your guitar style developed.

**Perkins:** My guitar style is nothin' in the world but black blues speeded up. I loved the blues. I grew up in the cotton lands of Tennessee. I worked in the fields with black people. I loved their gospel, spiritual singin'—all that rhythm. I listened to an old black man by the name of John Wesbrook who lived on the plantation. I was a kid, six to ten years old. He wasn't that great a guitar player, but I thought he was. He was playin' much different from what I was hearin' on the Grand Old Opry.

**Musician:** Were blues and country ever mixed before rock 'n' roll?

**Perkins:** I think rockabilly is the music that united the two. As far as guitar is concerned, I'm certain of it. But it relied even more on black gospel—that's where the beat and the rhythm came from. I know Elvis loved black quartets. Bill Monroe was my favorite country singer because he had uptempo bluegrass. Bluegrass and black blues with a drumbeat is about all you've got in rockabilly. That's what it is.

**Musician:** In all the men who created rock 'n' roll, one sensed a tension between the fundamentalist Christian, spiritual part and the hell-raising part. Some—like Little Richard and Johnny Cash—went away from the hell-raising toward the spiritual, while others—like Elvis—went the other way, towards hedonism.

**Perkins:** Elvis got into religion so deep that it eventually hurt him as much as any one thing ever did. It got too mind-boggling. He lost reality. Religion ain't supposed to be that complicated, man. It ain't meant to destroy your life and warp your mind. It's a very simple, private thing between a man and his maker. We don't die in groups and we ain't gonna wake up and face Him in groups. I'll be alone. Elvis was alone when he died.

**Musician:** You're one of the few people who knew both Elvis Presley and John Lennon. Do you see any parallels in their lives?

**Perkins:** Lennon... It was so, so terribly sad that this boy had to be taken out at a time when he was touchin' reality. He said he'd found a place where he could walk down the street. He thought he had.

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He wanted that.

McCartney's got that. He sees to it. When I was with him down in Montserrat, he had Linda and their children there. He didn't get upset one time. We'd be right in the middle of a take and that little boy would be settin' there. Paul'd be barefoot and the little boy'd be playin' with his toes. Now that, to me, says somethin'.

I don't belong to the country club. I'm not sayin' it's bad if that's the way you were raised. Certainly. That's part of America. But I was raised in a cotton field. I feel fortunate to have what I've got, but it's not the only thing in life. My wife and children are, and my friends.

**Musician:** *How did your upbringing shape your musical attitudes?*

**Perkins:** Bein' poor, workin' in the fields with the blacks, we were forced into close association. The wealthier kids weren't influenced by 'em as much. But I was. By their talk, the way they acted. They liked to have a good time on Saturday night and I did, too.

I like that carefree attitude. The white men in that part of the country who owned land had to worry somebody was gonna take it away from them. But if you don't have much of nothin' it's pretty easy to get along with people. We picked up on a lot of the black man's traits.

Music was one. It comes from the soul of those people and I like that. I like

music of any kind played by people who are sincere about doin' it. To play just to get paid don't move me. If a group is givin' it all they got, I don't care what kind of music they're doin'.

I like a simple amplifier. A guy with a guitar plugs in and gets at it. There was a period during the 60s and 70s when amplification, foot pedals and a lot of things made up for a lack of ability. Maybe those guys could play and just liked the sounds those wah-wahs and do-dunks were kickin' out. If gadgets work for a guy, let him do it. I ain't puttin' him down. But I still enjoy seein' a guy plug into his amp and show what he can do.

Rockabilly's simple music but it's not that easy to play. Rockabilly music gets under the skin, gets inside the ear and stays. You are a part of that song. If it's real, it'll move you some way or another. If you ain't tappin' your foot, you're mis-sin' the boat. Might as well go to the next club.

**Musician:** *Who do you like among young guitar players?*

**Perkins:** The boy who plays with the Stray Cats—Brian—I like his style of rockabilly playin'. I like the Blasters. They mean the licks they're hittin'.

I think it's a healthy thing that rockabilly's showin' some signs of coming back. Because it will open things up for new

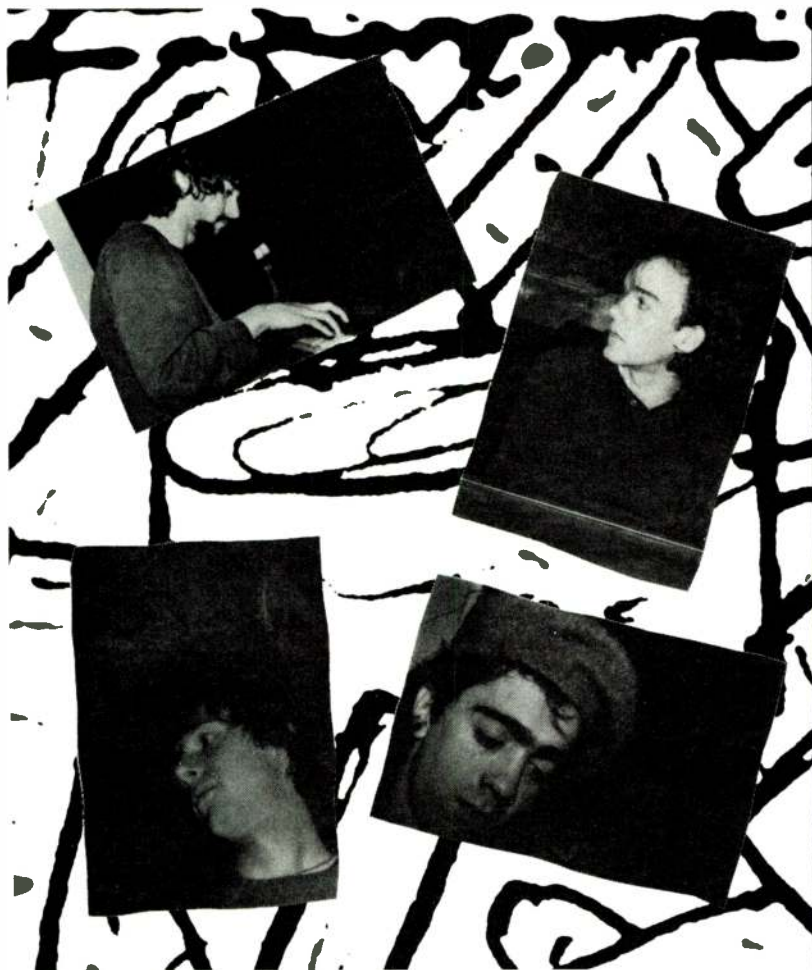
talent. A few years ago, it got to an outrageous point where if a kid didn't have ten or twenty thousand dollars to buy instruments and amps, he felt inferior. Rockabilly's simple. A kid can modify a cheap guitar. You'll see some young boys get a lot better chance than they had ten years ago.

**Musician:** *When you get down to that simple, anyone-can-do-it approach, how does one artist rise up and stand out?*

**Perkins:** You work at your craft and you'll eventually come up with something. It may just be a few little simple guitar licks, but that's usually all it takes to make your difference. I just hung onto a G string and kept ridin' it. One time Bo Diddley said to me, "You know, Carl, what I do is absolutely *nothin'*. I tune my guitar to open E and..." (hums Bo Diddley shuffle). Bo Diddley does not get down and play a lot of guitar. He told me a long time ago, "If I started learnin', I'd be put in that group of Good Guitar Players and they wouldn't know who Bo Diddley was. They know who I am now. I hit my lick and they say, 'Wo! That's Bo!' I'm recognized by stayin' very simple."

There's a lot to that. What he does is very identifiable. Bein' different's better than bein' good.

**Musician:** *When you began performing, did you run into folks who resented a*



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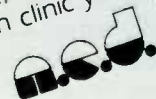
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white man playing black music?

**Perkins:** No, not too much. The white man liked the black man's music. The white man always liked certain things about the black man. Black man's always liked certain things about the white man.

I think music had as much to do with integrating people as anything. I was talking not very long ago with Fats Domino. He's a very wise man. He said, "You know, Carl, when I first heard 'Blue Suede Shoes' I thought you were one of us. Then when I found out you wasn't, it made no difference. Because we had so much in common." And he said, "You know, maybe in our own humble way, without realizing it, we did have something to do with getting a lot of problems solved."

I said, "Man, there's no question about it. In the white honky-tonks where I was playin' they were punchin' 'Blueberry Hill' and 'I Want To Walk You Home.' And white cats were dancin' to Fats Domino. They were dancin' to Chuck Berry."

**Musician:** Was there, at Sun, any sense of competition between you and Elvis and Jerry Lee and Johnny Cash?

**Perkins:** No, no. (slowly) There might have been just a tad with Jerry Lee. Jerry Lee's kind of like Muhammad Ali who said, "I'm the greatest!" In a way, Jerry Lee is. He can be. I think he's one of his own worst enemies, by tootin' his horn a little bit too loud. But there wasn't any animosity among the guys at Sun. He would say, "I'm gonna be the biggest damn thing Sun Records ever had! You wait 'til this 'Whole Lotta Shakin' comes out!" He was almost right. He's got a lot of confidence and he expresses that. Where I never would, Cash never would, Elvis never would.

I think deep down Elvis never worried about anybody catchin' or passin' him. But he certainly never acted like he was a big cock o' the walk. Elvis was as fine actin' a guy as I ever knew. He was the most courteous, was not conceited in any way. I think he lasted under the pressure longer than any of us could have. Even when the Beatles were number one, Elvis was always back there. He never really died and he never will. You don't change as much of the world as Elvis Presley changed—hair styles, clothes, attitudes, moods, looks, sideburns—dad gum! He's gonna be history, man. And he should be.

Here was a guy who never taught kids bad things to do; who loved his parents and proved it. He went out onstage and, sure, he shook around. But that was his way. It was part of getting it out of his system. But he didn't talk bad onstage, he wasn't on drugs. I'm not talkin' about the last part of his life. The Presley I knew would never have let himself get out of shape, get so bloated. He was very concerned about the way he

looked. He got into karate, he worked out. But then I started seein' these pictures pop up in later years. I said, "Uh, oh, something's wrong." As it turned out, Elvis was a sick man. I mean he actually had physical illnesses.

**Musician:** It's interesting to me that when the fathers of rock 'n' roll really get down to it, be it on the Survivors album you did with Cash and Jerry Lee last year or all the way back to Sun's Million Dollar Quartet, you always choose to sing gospel music.

**Perkins:** It goes back to what I told you earlier, Bill. Gospel music has so much to do with rockabilly music. It's the bone of it, no question. That rhythm came out of there.


**Musician:** There was talk a while back of you, Cash and Jerry Lee going out on the road together. What happened?

**Perkins:** We did a couple of shows, played Madison, Wisconsin and Terre Haute, Indiana. Jerry Lee and John have a little problem with...uh, I don't know...it may be an ego thing. Jerry wanted to close the show and John wanted to close the show. They didn't have any words in front of me but... there were a lot of dates planned and we just played two.

**Musician:** Too bad. It seems like everyone could have gotten a turn closing.

**Perkins:** Why certainly, man. I've never had a problem with opening shows. I'll take 'em fresh any time! When "Blue Suede Shoes" was number one, if they wanted me to open the show, I didn't care. I'll get my money and sit back and watch the other guy. In fact, I'd rather open and get it over with. It's work to me. I take it seriously. It's the best I can do.

## Carl Perkins on Guitars

"I don't know nothin' about the electronics of a guitar, couldn't set the neck on one. I've heard the word 'intonation.' I don't know what it means. I pick it up; if I like it, I play it. I don't play 'em 'cause somebody gives me guitars. I can't do that. If I don't like it, I can't play it. I'm playing Peavey now because I like the guitar. And that's only 'cause it's so much like a Fender used to be. The people at Peavey are very kind to me. My son Greg has two or three Peavey basses layin' on the bus out there, but you see what he's got in his hand? The first thing he learned to play on—his Rickenbacker. He said, 'Daddy, I like it better.' I said, 'Well, that's what you play.' I have a Fender layin' out there, too. If this thing acts up, it'll go in the van and that Fender'll be back. It's about a '61. I've also got two or three early 50s models. Leo Fender gave me one of the first Stratocasters they ever made." 

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# FACES

## THE MOTELS

*Pop, Polish & Promise*

PAUL NATKIN/PHOTO RESERVE



"Sell out" seems to be the operative accusation against the Motels, but when they only draw half a house to the venerable Radio City Music Hall, can it really apply? Emerging in 1979 as a quirky alternative to the Left Coast's pervasive pop polish, on their third, and now fourth album, they've moved from the seedy Tropicana tackiness of yore to the palatial patina of the Beverly Hills Hotel. In large part, it's due to the influence of their producer/manager Val Garay, recordist extraordinaire for acts like Linda Ronstadt and Kim Carnes ("Bette Davis Eyes"). But Motels singer Martha Davis insists that his tutelage

isn't a fancy new paint job over a formerly ramshackle act.

She does confess, in a whisper no less, that the original band "wasn't very good. It's so funny. People think of it and look at it now as commercial and slick, and back in the old days as raw and experimental—well, it's called playing the wrong notes. We've gotten to be better musicians, and a lot of it has to do with Val Garay; he makes you do it right."

With Garay at the helm, *All Four One* and *Little Robbers* do sound like the ultimate Linda Ronstadt new wave albums (*What's Really New?*); Garay's gift is cer-

tainly styling sounds around fine female voices that are complementary, cosmopolitan and not overly cosmetic. The sheer seductiveness of hits like "Only The Lonely," "Suddenly Last Summer" and "Remember The Nights" testify to his taste, the backings dressing up but never burying Davis' voice.

After all, the very crux of the Motels is the fact that Martha Davis has *something*. And even if she isn't the "it girl," Davis does possess highly passionate pipes and an individual personal perspective—love as (if you'll pardon the phrase) a battlefield littered with lies, loneliness and battered hearts. "I love love," she says, "and because I love it so much, it's sometimes very painful." Born and bred into Berkeley bohemianism, this former teen-bride has collected enough emotional baggage along her way to invest her songs with the weight of true experience, felt most crucially on her torchy hits.

In live performance, Davis

excels when she's creating those misty moods for modern lovers, even though as a musical entity the Motels project a far too grand, gleaming and precise edifice, sometimes making Davis seem like the Leona Helmsley of rock 'n' roll ("I'd never go to a gig without a syn-drum, and you shouldn't have to either"). Far too dressy and mannered, they're skillful part-players rather than heart players (excepting guitarist Guy Perry, whose playing is simply obnoxious and intrusive). Far too often, Davis' ripe songs and singing are robbed of the juice and even the pulp and pits the music should convey, though the bass and drum team of Michael Goodroe and Brian Glascock kept the evening riding smoothly. By being more Grand Hotel than Motel, they've scrubbed away some of the off-beat charm in older songs like "Total Control" and "Apocalypso Now," both of which need more chintzy bangles and baubles to truly succeed.

If Davis' blue-flame ballads can be counterpointed with more quirky approaches to the up-tempo cookers, there's no reason the Motels shouldn't be leaders in providing salon sounds for the 80s. And as Davis predicts, "Now that we've learned to play and don't have to bring in session players (who abounded on *All Four One*), on the next album I think we'll be getting more experimental." *Vive la difference*, I say—wouldn't have my music without it, and you shouldn't either, Martha. — **Rob Patterson**

## THE LEROI BROTHERS

*Twisted Tradition*

Not just another rockabilly revival outfit, this Austin-by-way-of-Fort Worth-by-way-of-Missouri band owes just as much to the punk psychedelic tradition of the 13th Floor Elevators as they do to Elvis Presley. Thirty-four-year-old singer/songwriter/guitarist Steve Doerr and partner, lead guitarist Don Leady, have been playing

together for almost twenty years, supporting such disparate Texas cousins as Lou Ann Barton, Sleepy LaBeef and Roky Erickson. Touted by Austin rock writer Ed Ward after a pair of independently produced records and signed to CBS, these good ole country boys have an "aw-shucks" humility and naivete' that makes their

music genuine. The LeRoi Brothers' infectious good-time trad-rock appeals to punks and cowboys alike, just like their California cousins, the Blasters.

"We get a good response from a lot of different kinds of audiences," explained band co-founder Leady during the group's recent stop in New York City.

"Our repertoire is versatile," added Doerr. "We can play country or we can rock it up. We try to play with that flow of energy during a set. We just wanna have fun."

"We use rockabilly as a jumping off point, then we just play it the way we play it—hard and loud," agreed drummer Mike Buck, who completed the nucleus of the LeRoi Brothers when he joined Steve and Don three years ago, after quitting his former band, the Fabulous Thunderbirds. Bassist Jack Newhouse rounded out the lineup last year.

Indeed, the LeRoi Brothers put the lie to the wimpy neo-rockabilly of more fashionable quiffsters by evincing a down-to-earth enthusiasm and rawness that is closer in spirit to the crazed voodoo-billy of the Cramps or the garage rock of the Fleshtones and the Morells than the pretty-boy posturing of the Stray Cats.

Live, this drive is typified by the cameo stage appearance of Steve's younger brother, twenty-two-year-old "J.D.," who contributes vocals on his own self-penned, drunken-driving rave-up, "D.W.I." Other ditties on their major label LP debut include three Steve Doerr

originals ("Pretty Little Lights," "Eternally Blue," "Dance With Me") along with a pair of carefully chosen covers by the likes of Missouri trash-rock legend Ronnie Self ("Ain't I'm A Dog") and Roy Head ("Treat Her Right").

"We like to take these obscure, crazy songs and twist them around," suggested Steve.

"We just learn the chord changes and go," said drummer Buck.

"We torture it to see what it will give up," laughed Steve as he described the band's approach to cover versions.

Asked about the group's image (or lack of one), the elder Doerr mused, "It seems like if we decided to be this way or that, the whole thing would dry up. We'd like to be known as really friendly people. I'm just happy when someone comes up to me after a set and says, 'You were great. When are ya comin' back?' That's about all you can really do for people."

"I think it was John Rockwell who called us 'a band rooted in the tradition, with the careening energy of punk rockers.' That sounded pretty good to me. We're not rockabilly or blues crusaders."

"It's more fun than anything else," concluded Don.

"We want to fool people into thinking we originated it," said Mike, and everyone laughed, but the LeRoi Brothers are one of those bands so sincere and honest they turn loving re-creations into something new by the dint of their commitment. — **Roy**

**Trakin**

## ROCHEREAU

### Zairian Rhythm Hero



CHUCK PULIN

"There's a certain magic in my music. You can't just sit and listen to it. There's something in it that lifts you out of your seat, that makes you stand up and dance."

That magic has brought Zairian singer Tabu Ley Rochereau and his twenty-four piece band, Orchestra Afrisa International, to the United States for their first visit. A star of the highest magnitude on his native continent, where he has sold millions of albums, Rochereau has also been well received in Europe and the Far East.

Now he has his sights set on America. "Americans are looking for something in their music," said the French-speaking Rochereau, "and when people in this country see me, they'll like what they see. But they'll also be able to draw something from the show, take something back with them."

Rochereau's Zairian music is a brash and exuberant hybrid that melds the imported polyrhythms of Cuban and Latin music with layers of meticulous yet adventuresome guitars, sassy brass lines, native African melodies and beats and a healthy dollop of American rock and soul. But the dominant sounds are the completely infectious rhythms. "It's in our blood," Rochereau, forty-three, said excitedly. "Whenever we hear a melody, there is a rhythm."

Rochereau's live show has an impact his records only suggest. It's almost like tak-

ing in a set by a classic soul revue. The dancers, singers and musicians perform in various permutations: Rochereau's supple tenor may be out there alone, or he could work with the dancers and swap vocals with his impressive guest star, twenty-four-year-old songstress M'Bilia Bell. Then the tightly rehearsed band will do their own vamping and choreography, or make way for the backing vocalists to handle a song or two.

Most of the songs are African, but Rochereau performs a fearless version of "Let It Be" in his native Lingala tongue and ends the lengthy show with the peppery brass riffs from Stevie Wonder's "Sir Duke."

Rochereau is aware of the favorable response here to King Sunny Ade's Nigerian juju music, and it surprises him. "It's not that Ade is bad," he said, "it's just that there are so many musicians in Africa who are better. You get tired of hearing juju music after two or three times. But you can hear Zairian music many times because there are so many styles in it. You never get tired of it."

Rochereau is not arrogant, just comfortably assured of his abilities and his band's. He became an instant hero in his native land in 1955 when he sang his own poetry, unaccompanied, before a throng of 100,000 at the inauguration of a new stadium in what is now Kin-

*continued on page 36*

LAURA LEVINE



# GEORGE RUSSELL

## Theory & Practice

DEBORAH FEINGOLD



If you were to form a view of George Russell's music based solely on the press he receives, you'd probably arrive at a grand image of coldly technical, highly intellectual art marching in lock-step to the formal dictates of his *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*—which, of course, would be chiseled in granite. Sure, Russell is a theorist of the highest order, but as he puts it, "Bird, Trane, Ornette, Ravel, Stravinsky, every person who broke the laws of music, had to invent their own laws and had to be conscious of their own private theories. I'm the only fool who goes around telling everyone what my theory is."

Russell's recent New York premiere of the "African Game"—a suite he considers his greatest achievement to date—possessed all of the elements of his very human visions. Introduced as an impression of the evolution of humanity in the African cradle, the work brilliantly balanced the palpable (and inseparable) joys and sorrows of our existence with the lonely awe of standing inside an infinite universe.

The drum ensemble, the field shout and the pentatonic essence of the blues all served as reference points. Performed by a fourteen-piece band consisting primarily of his New England Conservatory students and other Boston-based musicians (not the best band Rus-

sell ever put together, but the real story was his composition, anyway), the programmatic suite flowed flawlessly over peaks of polyrhythmic intensity and primal sectional exchanges to almost pastoral passages of serene elegance. Russell's command of compositional proportion and contrast, harmonic tension and release, and orchestral color and texture has served as the meat of his designs since the 40s.

But perhaps the most distinct element of his recent compositions (including the "Vertical Form" series and "Time Spiral" from his latest record, *Live In An American Time Spiral*) is his return to soulful bass lines and corresponding rhythmic propulsion.

"I view rhythm and the ability to elevate one off the ground rhythmically as the most essential element of music.... It's using Afro-American music. I've been in love with bass lines ever since I started. The only time I had to suppress it was when Cool (Jazz) was around. Even though I love the 4/4 bass line played artfully by Milt Hinton or Walter Page, I was always more in love with hearing them play a repetitive ostinato figure. Black people used to be ashamed of their culture to the point of emulating white culture. But as soon as the 60s released us from that, we felt free to return to some of the basic elements of the church and rhythm & blues." — **Cliff Tinder**

# SIMON TOWNSHEND

## Sibling Assistance

"I'm always getting asked, am I being overshadowed?" Simon Townshend sighs, queried about how it feels to follow in the footsteps of a Rock Giant, his brother, Pete Townshend. "It seems like such a silly question sometimes. I always wanted to play myself. It wasn't particularly because of Pete playing. I got my first guitar when I was eight—a smashed one that Pete stuck back together for me. I haven't got any memories as a child when the Who didn't exist. I first saw them in '66 when I was five. To see them onstage then—they were just stars. Anything they've done beyond that—*Tommy*, *Quadrophenia*—didn't make them any more famous to me.

"The fact of it was, Pete was always away when I was growing up. I hardly ever saw him. But I had my own guitar."

His album, *Sweet Sounds*, produced by brother Pete, does demonstrate some flatly saccharine moments that swerve perilously close to Pete's less-illustrious solo work. This Simon blames on the time-lapse inherent in solo recording.

"I've always been in bands. Because of that, I'm used to approaching things head on. But with recording the album,

I had to perform as a solo artist, doing most of the parts on my own—dubbing, overdubbing. So you lose the immediacy of just diving right in there."

Any doubts are dispelled as soon as Simon's wiry frame spins onstage like an overwound top, offset by Andy Shillito's laconic bass meanderings. Simon's break-neck vocals and ambitious, if a bit undirected, guitar solos intertwine with Shillito's pointed bass melodies, driven by Paul Abbot's percussive keyboards and Gary Barroughs' strong, energetic drums. Together, the four conjure up a kinetic swirl of sound enacted with seemingly endless stamina that leaves the audience vicariously exhausted long before Simon's elated latter-day dervishing starts showing signs of running down. And the best part of it is...it bears absolutely no resemblance—visual or aural—to the Who.

"Having an audience full of Who fans doesn't bother me that much, because they've obviously got good taste. But ultimately, these people come to see a show. If we couldn't give it to them, they'd get upset...no matter what my name was. But we can do it." — **Khaaryn Goertzel**





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**Rochereau** from page 33

shasa, the capital of Zaire. "I was asked to perform, and I walked out a star," he said solemnly. "It was an enormous amount of fortune."

South African singer Miriam Makeba has been his greatest influence. But Louis Armstrong's visit to Zaire in 1958 had a decided impact. He showed the Zairians how to fine-tune their trumpets, which are now an essential part of Rochereau's driving sound. James Brown's visits to Zaire also left a mark on him, "because of the way he dances."

Sunny Ade provided many Americans with their first taste of African pop music. His sound washes over and entices listeners. Rochereau's music knocks them down and demands a response.

Rochereau expects to get that response in America. "I want the world to listen to my music," he said. "Up to now, I haven't had the chance. But once people hear my music, they won't ever stop." — **Dean Johnson**

**Womack & Womack** from page 14


"Like Rudolph Valentino, I can fall down on my knees/Pull flowers out of my sleeve/Girl, I know you will be pleased," she answers each boast with the refrain, "I can't understand that." Finally, she declares "I need a man who means everything he say," and when he offers, "Baby, let me groove you," she changes her chorus to "Ooh, baby, I need a little more." It's a remarkable turnaround, one which vividly mirrors the dynamic of a lot of real relationships, right down to Cecil's final laughing, "Baby, I'm going on about my way. I can't do *nuthin'* for you no more!"

It was also mostly accidental.

"That was a song she was singing by herself," Cecil explains. "But when we got into the studio, we got this other groove going, and we kept emphasizing that, and it changed the whole thing. We were just going to leave it open, have the song be real loose, but our producer, Stewart Levine, said, 'That music is so long it should have *something* on it.' So we put something in there."

"Life can have turnarounds that can be very funny like that," adds Linda. "I'm not saying that it's not a very serious or hurting thing when a girl meets a guy she feels is talking a lot of mess to her. But seeing it in the context that turns out, that feeling of playfulness at the end, you deal with it in a different frame of mind. Possibly out of that, people can learn more about one another."

Quite likely, but there's another lesson there, too. As Cecil points out, "That's the good part of what happens when you get into the studio. Things happen that you never would have imagined. You have to be real loose, let it flow."

In other words, do things the traditional way. 





## “IF IT WASN'T FOR CALZONE, WE'D PROBABLY BE WORKING A CAPELLA.”



Tom Schuman

Rick Cua

If you can identify with the unfortunate instrument pictured above, then you're bound to remember that sinking feeling when you realized that the show would be going on — without you and your instrument.

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# the Alarm

## A Fresh Firebell in the Night

Even before they take the stage, the Alarm emit contagious optimism. With their black cowboy shirts tipped in silver and their hair teased into long, curling tentacles, these young Welsh rockers lean forward in their restaurant chairs and speak so fervently about purpose and goals, it seems they're recruiting rather than giving an interview. As they bubble enthusiastically about their heroes Bob Dylan and the Who and about their friends U2 and Big Country, it's clear they're still rock fans even as they're becoming rock stars, convinced they can relight and keep the promises that the Stones and the Clash once lit and lost. While such idealism is refreshing after meeting so many pop cynics, it also makes one fearful and protective of such a new band galloping into the giant maw of the music biz.

Dave Sharp, the Alarm's thin slice of a guitarist, rushes to get the words out: "These are real hard times; in Britain especially, there's a massive recession, so people have to turn to themselves as a source of inspiration. What we try to do is inject hope into people, to show people that the individual is a creative force, that you have to make your own situation. We want to encourage people to turn around and look themselves, and say, 'Yeah, we can do something.'"

Even more quickly, he blurts out: "Everybody's got something special they're destined to do. It lies within you. Everybody's got to look hard at themselves and decide what they want to do; they have to put their heart behind it and go for it. That's what we're doing. We're just some kids from Rhyl trying to achieve something. Our life lies in being in the Alarm, and we want to make the Alarm the best band the world has ever seen."

When they hit the stage at the Bayou in Washington, that optimism motors their music. Sharp and Mike Peters strum their acoustic guitars furiously in the folkie fanfare of "Declaration," the title cut of their new, debut album. The burly, spike-haired Peters bellows out this declaration of principles: "Take this so-o-ng of freedom put it on and arm yourself...." With that, Nigel Twist, the band's beanpole drummer, snaps the song out of its suspended strumming with a crashing downstroke, and baby-faced Eddie MacDonald follows right

behind with a loping, melodic bass line.

All of a sudden, the band falls into the headlong, pell-mell charge of their 1982 British single, "Marching On." "There's a young boy standing, staring at the world," cries Peters in an anthemic call-to-arms. "He can't control his anger/ You can see it in his eyes/ He's gonna smash the window/ He's gonna tear down the walls/ Hey mister you don't understand it/ Take a look at it through my eyes." Sharp and Peters step in place and turn their acoustic guitars forward and sideways as if they were marching down a street. All four lend their voices to the chorus: "Hear our sound; hear our voice./ We're growing stronger, and we'll go marching on."

Back at the restaurant, Peters, decked out in his new American Civil War duds, tries to explain the band's idealism: "For us, making a stand is forming a band and singing songs. A group can inspire people and pass on hope. It can give people an example of someone who's made a stand—both in our songs and in our actions. In that sense we're a political group. People are brought up with words like freedom and democracy, but they forget the meaning of them. It's easy to take freedom for granted and think you're free when you're not. Maybe we are naive. I like being naive, because the opposite of naiveté is cynicism. I'm not a cynic; I have hope for people. I think great things can come, that great things will come. If that's being naive, having hope for yourself, then great, I'm naive."

Ah, yes. The Alarm's *Declaration* (I.R.S.) is a great album, likely to be this year's talisman for those who were swept away by U2's *War* and Big Country's *The Crossing* last year. Yet the very idealism that makes *Declaration* such an appealing record raises questions about the band. Audiences will only accept naive enthusiasm once from a group, and it worries me, fond as I am of the band, that Peters sees no alternative to cynicism and naiveté. He and his comrades talk a lot about the implied promise a band makes to its fans when they first fall in love with each other and how often that promise is broken. But as any bedroom veteran knows, an initial infatuation can't sustain a relationship; it takes something tougher and more knowing.

By Geoffrey Himes





Mike Peters and Eddie MacDonald grew up next door to each other in Rhyl, a faded resort town on the north coast of Wales, not unlike Asbury Park, New Jersey. When Dave Sharp and Nigel Twist moved there from Manchester, England, at the age of fourteen, the foursome soon became fast friends. They were all seventeen and eighteen in 1977, when the Sex Pistols came along and changed their lives.

"We saw the Sex Pistols in Chester, just across the Welsh border in England," Peters recalls. "You couldn't believe the energy coming from the stage; it was like nothing I'd ever witnessed. I have this Sex Pistols' bootleg, called *Indecent Exposure*, which was recorded just a few days after we saw them in Chester. I wish you could hear it, because you'd realize what a great band they were. They played the Who's "Substitute" and the Monkees' "Stepping Stone." They weren't what they became a few months later, when they said they hated everything from the past. Americans only saw a complete parody of the Sex Pistols; by that time it had turned into a joke. But back then it was stunning. At the time, I had a job and was sort of interested in music, but that show made me realize I was still young, and there was a whole life out there for me to live. The message was get up there and do it yourself. I went home the next day, cut my hair and made a headlong rush into learning to play the guitar."

The four spent the next four years playing in different bands together and separately, but found themselves spinning their wheels, unable to get past their influences and find a voice of their own. They even got a shot at opening for Dexy's Midnight Runners, but after a test gig, Kevin Rowland told them they weren't ready. They knew it.

Meanwhile the situation in Rhyl deteriorated. A factory closing threw a lot of people out of work. Many of the Alarm's friends ended up on the dole and apathetic, hanging out with nothing to do. "The town just became dead overnight," Sharp notes. "We were in the same situation—just drifting around. So what we said to ourselves was, 'Look, we've got to find a way out of this situation. Okay, there's no jobs here, but we can still do something.' We were sure there must be a way out; we wouldn't accept it the way it was.

"So the first thing we did was open a clothes shop called Riot in 1981. We made all our own clothes and sold them. We encouraged people to start fanzines and take an interest in what was going on. Then we opened up a club, the Gallery, because there was no place at that time playing the kind of music we wanted to hear. Very quickly, almost overnight, the whole atmosphere of the town changed. Young kids had somewhere to go; they were getting involved again."

After spinning records for a few months, the club started booking bands. One band drew a large out-of-town crowd which had no attachment to the club. A fight broke out; the place got smashed up and then closed down. Undaunted by this turn of events, the guys decided to channel their efforts into the Alarm. "We wanted to take the hope and enthusiasm that had sprung up in our hometown," Sharp claims, "and take it out there to all those people who were jealous or just didn't understand."

So they headed for London and worked for months pulling pints in bars and driving vans. "We knew we'd make it," Peters says, "but we knew it'd be a fight. So we lived out of each other's pockets, stayed at the same flat and saved up all our money to make a record." That record was a single "Safe

Building" b/w "Up For Murder," released at the end of '81 on their own White Cross label. Only 2,000 were pressed, and they're all gone now. "One thing we wouldn't do," Peters continues, "is make any demo tapes whatsoever. We felt every time you go into a studio to make a demo tape, that's more money you've wasted, because they just sit on a shelf and no one listens to them. Once you've made a demo, you might as well make a record."

"We used to walk into people's offices with our acoustic guitars," Sharp remembers with a chuckle, "slap the record on their desk, and say, 'Listen to this,' and play the song. That approach seemed to work, because we got a reaction right there and then. It was either, 'Get out,' or, 'Get on the stage.' They couldn't say, 'We'll phone you back in two months and decide then.' That's how we got our first gigs."

The Alarm attracted a lot of attention right from the start, due in no small part to their novelty as a punk band playing acoustic guitars. The acoustic guitars were more than just a gimmick, though. In some ways, it was natural for a band as idealistic as the Alarm to gravitate to this folk instrument; there's something about the way an acoustic guitar chord lingers in the air that reinforces lyrics meant to linger in the mind the same way. There's something about the cheapness and portability of an acoustic guitar that makes it the perfect vehicle for young kids trying to make their own music.

"When you're a kid first going out there to see a band," Peters argues, "and you go, 'Wow! I want to play that,' it's not too often you have a million-watt amp back in your room at home; it's not too often you can go out and buy an electric Fender and a big Marshall amp and make it go 'Boom!' What you tend to do is find that your dad has an old guitar hanging on the wall, or that there's an acoustic guitar shop around the corner that's got one for five quid. So you get one and go, 'pri-i-ng.' It's a sound that stays with you for the rest of your life."

"Originally we all wrote songs on acoustic guitar," Sharp chimes in, "because if you were playing electric guitars, the old man downstairs would shout upstairs, 'Shut up in there!' We all like to stay up and play late at night, and with acoustic guitars you can carry on a little longer. You can't have inspiration stopped because it's too loud."

"It's got to be a great instrument to inspire so many people to write so many great songs on it," Peters picks up again. "It rattles your bone structure; it feels like it's a part of you when you play it; maybe that's what pulls so many songs out of people. It lends itself to closeness. People tend to write songs on the acoustic guitar late at night alone in their room, when they're quiet and into the spirit of things. When you play electric guitar, you can obviously be inspired by the volume, but when you play acoustic guitar and get inspired at such a low level, you're being inspired by the song itself.

"I remember one day Dave tried out his song on electric guitar in rehearsal, and it just didn't come across. We all got so frustrated, because it had sounded brilliant when he'd played it for us on the acoustic guitar he'd written it on. So Sharpie says, 'Maybe I've got to write it again.' Then it finally hit us: maybe we'd retain the spirit of the song better if we played it on the instrument it was written on. And it worked.

"Then we had to figure out a way to make the sound more massive, so it would fill up a concert hall. We couldn't afford to go out and buy transducers and all that. So one weekend,



PHOTOS BY GLEN LAFFERMAN

Eddie and I went to London to see a gig, and Dave came around to my house while I was gone and nicked my Angelica acoustic guitar and went 'round to Eddie's and picked up this cheap little Eros electric guitar Eddie had. So I came around to Sharpie's, looking for my guitar, and I heard this drill going *b-z-z-z!* I found out he'd ripped all the electronics out of Eddie's guitar and slapped them into mine. Then he hit us with this sound, and it was just what we wanted."

"The trick," reveals Sharp, "was we used very cheap pickups, which didn't pick up very well, so they didn't distort as much. Later, when we had more money, we tried all the modern-day equipment. We thought once we got transducers, we'd have a real acoustic guitar sound, but when we got home, they sounded all woolly and loony. So then we bought some really expensive electric guitars and pulled off their pickups and put them on the acoustics. But they just went *pfwoosh!* It sounded really distorted. So we went back to the shop and said, 'Can we have the most awful, pathetic, little Japanese pickups you have?' And they said, 'Here, take them all; get them off our hands.' We said, 'No, no, we only need a few.'

"See, what happens is this: there's not enough wire on the coils of these cheap pickups to pick up the vibrations of the strings on an electric guitar, so the sound is very, very bad. But when you have the whole soundboard of an acoustic guitar vibrating as well as the strings, a cheap pickup can handle that, while an expensive, sensitive pickup will pick up every grain of wood and just go *pfroom!* A cheap pickup will hold it back almost. It's just something we stumbled onto by accident really."

Up until Christmas of '82, the Alarm featured three acoustic guitarists and a drummer. "We tried to get a real ambient bass drum sound," MacDonald relates, "and use that as a bass. But we realized that we needed more melody in the bottom to give it a fuller range. We needed something solid with the drums to hold Mike's strumming and Dave's picking in place. Because Mike sings most of the time and Dave plays lead, I got to play bass. I still play guitar, but now I like playing the bass."

Steve Tannet of I.R.S. Records turned up at an early Alarm gig in London. "He was like a breath of fresh air," Sharp asserts. "A lot of record companies had talked to us, but they just wanted us for the way we looked and the fact we had acoustic guitars. They were interested in making money really fast, so we decided not to go with those labels. Instead we went out and did more gigs. Then Steve came up and said, 'I can see what the band is trying to do.' From day one, he was over the moon about the band, which is what we wanted to hear from a record company, not, 'Hey, boys, we can make lots of money out of this.' I.R.S. said, 'You make the music, and we'll make the records.'"

The first I.R.S. single, "Marching On/Across The Border/Lie Of The Land," was released in Britain in September, 1982, and scratched the charts. The second single, "The Stand," penetrated more deeply last spring. The four above songs plus an early live version of "Declaration" constituted their first American release: a five-song EP, *The Alarm*. "Sixty Eight Guns," a brass-powered ode to a youth street gang facing pressures to break up, became their first big single in England last fall. It was followed by "Where Were You Hiding When The Storm Broke?," the band's fiercest anthem yet, this past winter. Those two singles plus revised versions of "Marching On," "The Stand" and "Declaration" are all on the new twelve-song

album, *Declaration*.

Before the Alarm even had a record in America, they came over to open a tour for U2. "We were playing a small club in England, and U2 came down to see us," Sharp recounts. "We got talking and found out we had so much in common, because they're a passionate band and want to continue to be, and we're the same way. They got us quite a few gigs in England opening up for them and then brought us along for their American tour. It was a really special thing every time we played for them; we tried to blow them off the stage, which is why they invited us in the first place. It makes them work twice as hard to have a good act to follow."

"We got a great reception here," Peters proclaims. "I think the grapevine's back in action in America. There's some great bands, and the kids are getting excited about music again. I think we're about to see some of the greatest music since the 60s right now. Bands like U2, Big Country, R.E.M., the Violent Femmes and Aztec Camera are great, because they write great songs, and they're committed to their audience. We've learned from the past; we've been fans ourselves for years, so we know how important it is to keep the promises that bands make to their audiences."

"I'm very wary of a lot of new bands," amplifies Sharp, "because not many bands have fulfilled the promise to be there forever, to be there when you need them. Like if you're feeling a bit down one night, and you want to be lifted up, you want to hear your favorite record by your favorite band. So you go up to your room and put it on the stereo, and you want to know the band is out there somewhere doing that song for you that night on some stage in the world. If we put out a record now, and we're not around in two years to play the songs on that record, it undermines people's trust in music. And to believe in music is very important, because music is so powerful. It can lift you up and put you down; it can make you happy; it can make you sad; it can make you go out and do something; it might even change the world."

I'm wary too of new bands who hope for so much when pop history is littered with so many broken hopes. Yet, having lived through too many years when hopes were scarce and pragmatism carried a mean streak down the middle, I'm willing to put aside my caution and feel heartened that there are still young bands brave enough to hope again and make promises.

#### ALARM BOXES

**Dave Sharp:** "I use an Epiphone acoustic guitar and a Fender Telecaster onstage. I put the Telecaster through a Roland JC-128, which I like better than the earlier model, because it rings. I like the Telecaster because it has a bright sound, almost like an acoustic."

**Mike Peters:** "I use a Lorenzo twelve-string acoustic through two little Vox AC40s with a treble boost—you can't get them over here. I like the twelve-string sound because it tends to come back more sexy, more like an acoustic guitar, but I'd rather use a six-string acoustic with a flanger to get that twelve-string sound, because it's easier to keep in tune, but I just busted the head on my six-string."

**Eddie MacDonald:** "When I decided to play bass, I bought an Epiphone semi-acoustic, but it had to have a lot of work done to it, because it lacked a lot of sound. We took it to the hospital and put new pickups on it, because the old, big Epiphone pickups weren't right. I thought the hollow-body bass might lend more to the sound of the acoustic guitars, but I found in the end, it worked better when I used the electricity more powerfully; it gave it more of a throb."

**Nigel Twist:** "I've got a set of Ludwigs; they've got an immense sound." 

# THOMAS DOLBY

## INTUITION AND MOTION

**BY FREFF** *There's blood in the air this afternoon, at the offices of Capitol Records. The MTV remote crew can smell it: hot, heady, decisive. Their boy Roberts is on the prowl again, poised to savage yet another poseur, ready to probe and puncture and pulverize in the name of the countless invisible millions of zoned-out vidiots living life second-hand through his show, Screen Heroes.*

*Morgan Roberts. The Man himself. Celebrity, media idol, virtual god, his crazy gray flyaway hair wild as a corona, his penetrating eyes masked by glinting gold Ferrari sunglasses, his patterned polyester shirt open all the way down to well below his beltline.*

*The crew mutters. There'll be no escape for Thomas Dolby. Not from The Man. Roberts smiles, idly playing with his heavy gold Libra medallion. He's heard about this boy. Intelligent answers that aren't quite answers. Disarming jokes in unexpected places. The buzz in the industry is that Dolby is distant, a little reserved, maybe a little weird. An onion man, you know? Layer after layer after layer. And strong.*

*Well, by heaven, this time those layers get peeled. Roberts turns to bring the full power of his opaque Ferrari gaze on Dolby's chair. He pounces.*

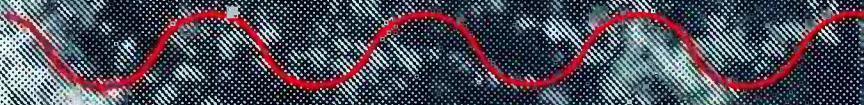
**FRAGMENTS OF TONALITY.**





**WAAHWHI!**

“Anyway, it’s not me that’s mad. It’s the rest of the world.”





energy which *at some point* I will commit to tape."

As with most things, there's an exception. Lyrics. "Yeah, I do write those down, because I like to read them on paper. That's the literary heritage. I like my words to look good as poetry."

*The Flat Earth* wasn't discovered in quite the same way as earlier projects. Piece by piece, yes, but this time Dolby's mastery of his equipment provided a creative environment with room left for the purely human. "Henry the Second" (as he has dubbed his customized amalgamation of Fairlight CMI, Simmons drums and PPG 340/380 Wave computer) was set up in a rehearsal hall and used, not to dominate the creative process, but simply to focus it.

"I gathered three musicians I really admired—Matthew Seligman on bass, Kevin Armstrong on guitar and Cliff Brigen on percussion—and then I set up my basic keyboard and drum machine parts on the computer, and had it play them for me. It *freed* me. I could stand there, pace around the floor, make suggestions in Kevin's ear, wander up to a microphone and sing a bit of melody as it occurred to me. It enabled me to be as spontaneous as possible, to get the adrenalin flowing and myself excited, and thereby come up with the goods."

The computerized synthesizer became the backdrop, instead of the point. The tool returned to being a tool. Dolby's whole musical feel went through a transformation, becoming human again. His lyrics had always been that way: from heart and head to hand and page, in a straight line (no matter how obliquely-angled the emotional subject matter). Now his music was traveling the same road.

"I had worked with arranged music and I had worked with improvised music, but I hadn't worked with the kind of thing that happens when there is chemistry between musicians. And yet a lot of the music I had the most affection for was precisely that. You can analyze that music in terms of what's playing what note, but you simply cannot analyze the magic, the intangibles. So, on at least fifty percent of the album, that's the approach I took. Though I must admit I did it thinking all the time that I was going to wipe my guide piano parts, or my vocals, and then do a lot of overdubbed keyboards."

That didn't happen. In fact, notably on "I Scare Myself" and "The Flat Earth," Dolby found that after a few plays he couldn't live *without* those parts, bum notes and all. He not only accepted the imperfection of being human, he reveled in it, and the results—particularly on a one-take wonder like "I Scare Myself"—were extraordinary.

"The main thing I believe is that there are infinite possibilities in my imagination. Possibly subconscious things. Possibly a result of things that I have absorbed: influences, bits of music, bits of film, all my firsthand experiences. They are all in there somewhere, and there are endless combinations of them, which in the right situation can come to the surface. Now these combinations require certain catalysts to bring them out. It might be somebody walking in the room. A mistake on the piano. A newspaper headline which I misread. And because I know that my best work is often sparked off in this way, I can induce it by *planning* catalysts. What I'm saying is that when I'm in a state of excitement, I produce my best work. In order to achieve that excitement I have to be in the right studio, with the right people, with the right instruments, with the right food in my stomach. And when that happens I will have a few hours of complete hysteria—rushing around jotting down bits of lyrics, whipping through chord sequences, programming sounds, bouncing tracks, mixing a song down, editing tape, writing a story for a video, planning something for a stage show. I rush around and the ideas are coming faster than I can even get them on paper. And then it will go calm again, and I'm indifferent, complacent, bored and depressed for a few hours or days or weeks.

"But the main difference between now and then is it used to be that most of my catalysts were the tools I was using, the machines. And on this album it was the place that I was, what I'd been doing—I tried to space it so that I could live a bit while

recording—and the people that I worked with, that had the greater bearing."



**DOLBY TO ROBERTS:** This album, I think, is going to raise a few eyebrows. But you know...it's still an album I'm very, very proud of.

**ROBERTS TO DOLBY:** *And rightly so. Is it a concept album?*

**DOLBY TO ROBERTS:** Well, not so much a concept album as a collection of concept singles, loosely connected I suppose by the magneto-gravitational theory of the structure of space. In other words, the Earth is a disc some twenty-five thousand miles in diameter. Underneath what we call the North and South Poles are two black holes with inverted polarity. This throws a uniform energy field over the Earth, meaning that light travels faster on the outside of the disc than it does on the inside. Therefore if you walk towards the edge of the disc it's very likely that you will curve round and end up back where you started.

Now, this energy field is concentrated in a dot in the sky—we call it the sun—which moves from east to west on a twenty-four-hour cycle, with a yearly oscillation in its axis between the two Poles—which we call the seasons. And up in the sky, what appear to us to be the planets and the stars, those are actually discs similar in structure to our own, on the same plane in space. But the light from them is curved over as it reaches the Earth's atmosphere, by the action of the two black holes, and therefore they appear to be in the sky. Et cetera.

**ROBERTS TO DOLBY:** *Umm...do you believe all this?*

**DOLBY TO ROBERTS:** No.

**I was so obsessed with the functions that I was unable to experience any sense of interaction."**

## On The Flat Earth

There are seven tunes on the new album. Shorter than one might have hoped, but crafted with care. And warmer, more organic, than anything Dolby has yet committed to disc.

The first song is "Dissidents," which Dolby insists is "not political." And he may be right at that, because the spirit of the tune is wrapped up in the *romance* of the dissident writer, rather than his ideology. It's the fact of dissidence that counts here. What Dolby's really doing is posting a warning. He could have taken the easy (and marketable!) way out, following up his biggest hit with forty minutes of the same. But he didn't. Abandon all preconceptions, ye who enter here.

Second up is the title track. "The Flat Earth" is a love song. A love song to what no one can say for certain—perhaps to the vector of Dolby's motion, or some new perception of his universe's boundaries and his proper place within same. But it's a love song in its heart, bringing echoes of "Sexual Healing" to the mind.

*please remember...  
the Earth can be any shape you want it  
any shape at all  
dark and cold or bright and warm  
long or thin or small  
but it's home  
and all I ever had  
and maybe why for me the Earth is flat*

"Screen Kiss" is a savage little short story, the broken picture of a British love triangle baking in the hothouse depths of the L.A. Experience. Wry and sentimental by turns, the lyrics are underpinned with orchestrations and a Jaco-like bass line reminiscent of Joni Mitchell, circa *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns* (not surprising, since Mitchell is one of Dolby's major influences, and he covered another song from that album—

"The Jungle Line"—on the B-side of the British 12-inch of "Science")

"White City" isn't a drug song, no matter what you might think from lyrics like "a thin white powder film on everything." Pointless visions of Utopia, dancing in a young man's not terribly reasoning head. A hint: at the end of the song, Keith isn't lecturing. He's being interviewed.

"Mulu The Rain Forest" is an inverted dream of an endangered place—or perhaps the other way around. "There are very few rain forests left," says Dolby. "And they are tremendously important. Mulu is actually one in Tasmania. But there's one rather like it in Borneo. There are lots of nocturnal species that live nowhere else, and the local aborigines have deified it as the place of the dreamtime, which is sort of an inverted reality. All of this I've actually learned after the fact; I wrote the song from some vague impression of information about it that I had picked up along the way. That rain forest is in danger of flooding, you see, from a new dam that's being built. One time thirty or forty botanists crashed the construction site and refused to leave. They were all arrested.



musically, it's actually quite a conventional tune. Rather like 'Airwaves,' in fact. So I avoided conventional arrangements. I built it out of things from the rain forest atmosphere—insects and flutes and trees falling in the forest and reptilian bass. Matthew Seligman has a fretless with a transducer in its neck, and when you play over that it sounds quite like a string bass, and very dark."

That brings us to "Hyperactive," the album's single. It wasn't meant to be that way. Another tune originally carried that banner, but it failed the grade during recording when it was judged too similar to "Science." Ask me if I'm complaining... "Hyperactive" blasts you off the end of the album like a rocket. It's got Michael Jackson sound-alike vocals from Adele Bertel and brother, does it have a beat, a beat that slams you in the face and then reaches down to set your feet bopping, a purely relentless beat that isn't in the drums (which are actually fairly restrained) but locked into everything—the nooks and the crannies.



**ROBERTS TO DOLBY:** (getting desperate) We've come to expect a lot from your videos, Thomas. That's a hard act to follow onstage. Can you describe to us what it's like at one of your shows?

**DOLBY TO ROBERTS:** (offhanded) My stage show? Well, it's kind of like being dragged backwards through a carwash with a bag over your head. And that's before you even find your seat.

## Live Wireless

Whether it's that bad or not we'll be able to tell for ourselves, because the Flat Earth tour will be rolling through this quadrant of the disc from mid-April to mid-June, just after covering Great Britain, Europe and Canada, but before zooming on to Japan and Australia. A word of warning. This is no wall of electro-sound and flashing LEDs that's coming round, systems-engineered by stiffbacked Numanesque mannequins in jumpsuits. This is a band. Guitarist, bassist, drummer, keyboardist, backup singers, the works—and Thomas Dolby. On piano.

That's right, piano. That most dazzlingly high-tech of instruments. (Think not? Consider for a moment what it did to the membership of the clavichord players union.)

Call it Stage Three of the Dolby Road Show. Stage One was the one-man-band multi-media approach that first got him labeled a synthesizer wizard. Stage Two was looser, as you

can see in a sixty-minute concert film he directed and edited that will air this spring on MTV. He'd cut back to just a Roland Jupiter-8 interfaced with his PPG Wave, his drummer on a Simmons kit and his guitarist and bassist adding occasional keyboard licks from a Moog Source, a Micromoog, a Solina string ensemble, an old Jupiter-4 and a Juno-60. There were bits of his videos, all time-synched to the music through the PPG, and random but relevant slides, but by and large the presentation was kept sparkling with small human touches: a handheld fan on "Windpower"; walk-ons from a violinist and two extra percussionists when needed; and Lene Lovich showing up to sing lead on "New Toy."

But still... a piano? No synth?

"What happened in Stage One was that I was so obsessed with the functions, the nitty-gritty keyboard parts and program settings, that I was unable to experience any sense of interaction. I couldn't be a performer, a performer having a relationship, having sex with my audience—which is what happens at the best concerts. The machines also left me in a cold sweat most of the time because they were fragile and tended to go wrong. So I decided to do away with all the machines I was using. What talent I have is for activating a situation, be it a recording studio or a video shoot or stage covered in bits of machinery. And it's always been that, rather than the kind of intangible magnetic quality that you associate with a lot of great performers. I'm quite curious to explore that now and see how much of a performer I am.

"I can do it in front of a camera, I can communicate it. But that's in bursts of twelve or fifteen seconds, and I've got three takes to get it right. There's a whole extra language and craft attached to the show business thing, which people call charisma, but which is actually the craft of being in front of audiences, and the few simple devices used to rev them up. You know—Shakespeare, and some things you can update but shouldn't mess with. There are things about the stage that will always hold true."



**ROBERTS TO DOLBY:** So, Thomas, is it true you've been working with Michael... Jackson?

**DOLBY TO ROBERTS:** Vicious rumors, Morgan, vicious rumors.

**ROBERTS TO DOLBY:** So you won't be producing his new album?

## Thomas' Terrible Secret

"Um," he says, and pauses for a long time. "This is actually very plebian taste, but I like Michael Jackson's music."

Dolby's contact with Michael happened when a friend named Steve Barron, one of Britain's most successful video directors (and owner of Limelight Films), was asked to do the video for Michael's "Billy Jean." While going over some of the company's output, Michael saw "Science" and was favorably impressed. He'd heard the single on American radio, but hadn't known Dolby was English.

They met a few weeks later, in Los Angeles.

"I actually really liked him, because I could see that his public eccentricity is very much a product of the niche that people have forced him into. He wasn't weird, or freaky, he was nice and funny and didn't take himself too seriously. Even though we are from different backgrounds, we found we had a lot in common, by virtue of the lives we've had. All his earliest memories are of limousines and airports and freeways and always moving around, never being in one place. So we got along and had a very amusing time."

Michael was hard at work on the new Jacksons album, but hadn't settled on all the material to be used, so he suggested that Dolby might write some tunes.

"In my time off from recording my own album I worked on a few things for him. What he wanted was grooves, sounds, not completed songs. He just wanted me to be me, and put some

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ideas down on tape that he could write his own vocal lines to. On this one particular sequence I worked out, almost purely as a joke, I mixed in a drum kit that was constructed entirely from computer samples of Michael's vocals from 'Billie Jean.' Just to see if he'd notice. He didn't. We talked a little more after that, but I don't know if or when any of this stuff might see the light of day. I can't see Michael recording solo for a while, because he's under a great deal of pressure.

"But still," smiles Dolby, "it was very nice to have made the connection. Because the guy's like an all-time hero of mine."



**ROBERTS TO DOLBY:** *It's a long, hard grind to the top, as we both know. So now that we... now that you've reached the pinnacle of your achievements, would you say that success has changed you as a person? Have you gone under as a personality? Have you stayed true to your ideals? Are you still a nice, modest, level-headed sort of bloke?!*

**DOLBY TO ROBERTS:** Let's put it this way. I don't care if I never make a lot of money out of this game, just as long as I have an exotic lifestyle and all the things my heart desires.

### Will The Real Thomas Dolby Please Not Tell?

Poses. Masks and poses. Sometimes it seems like Dolby's carrying enough for the entire Western World. At other times it seems like he's utterly unwarmed and defenseless, but so very distant that's he's actually backed all the way round the flat Earth and bumped into you from behind.

So who is he? Is he the English Tom Swift with his Nucleo-ronic Tea Caddy, as all the publicity shots from *Wireless* would have you believe, intently tinkering with tubes and wires and careful notes? Is he the South American explorer deep in the fossil rift valleys of the Andes? Is he the sleazy jazz pianist, the sweaty projectionist from *Live Wireless*, or the refugee crossing the border with false documents?

Who? Which? Why?

"Everything's an extension of my own character. I mean, I think it would be dishonest of me to contrive something completely different. I'm not a great actor, but I'm capable of spotlighting aspects of my personality that are already there. That's what I tend to do in the videos. And if you listen to the songs, very often you'll find me singing almost in the third person. I'll concoct situations which are extensions of real-life ones, but after a point, the fantasy has taken over.

"Look at 'Europa And The Pirate Twins,' which I wrote about a girl I fell madly in love with when I was fourteen. Her father was a diplomat, and of course at the time I was traveling around Europe with my father the archaeologist, and she... disappeared. Moved to another country. But she had so much charisma, I fantasized that one day she'd turn up again as a film actress, a pop star on a magazine cover, and that when I tried to reach her, her bodyguards would drag me away. Those are the kinds of situations I tend to dream up. And the part that I play in those situations is rather like a dream or a nightmare. I'm a third person. I'm just another character.



*At the MTV remote, things have reached rock bottom. Morgan Roberts is left with no recourse but The Personal Insult.*

**ROBERTS TO DOLBY:** *Thomas, a lot of people are very keen to know one thing in particular. And that is... those spectacles you wear. Are they prescription? Do you really need 'em, or are they just an image kind of thing?*

**DOLBY TO ROBERTS:** Appearances are a very deceptive thing, Morgan. I mean, just by throwing away these and wearing your shades there I could probably put on the appearance of a bronzed Californian. Here, give them to me....

**ROBERTS TO DOLBY:** *You should try the wig, too.*

*The flyaway gray corona comes off. The glinting gold Ferrari*

*sunglasses come off. It's Thomas Dolby in both chairs, or it's Morgan Roberts in both chairs... but actually it's (full name) Thomas Morgan Dolby Robertson in both chairs. Masks and poses, and poses and masks, and keys that open unlocked locks....*

*Dolby looks at Dolby. Dolby reels, and then regroups. So Dolby wants a fight, does he? Then, by God, Dolby is just the man to give it to him!*

### Curtain Call

When Dolby recorded "Screen Kiss," he ran into trouble. He usually sang in one of two voices, either the breathy one on "I Scare Myself" or a kind of rasping shout, as on "Science." But neither of those were right for "Screen Kiss."

It was a horrendous experience. The emotional event that had given rise to the song was still busy dying. He felt down, vulnerable, worried that he was behind schedule on the record. And now, on top of all that, he was smashed by the frustration of his vocal ineptitude, his lack of chops. Somebody like Paul Young could have walked in and reeled it off straightaway...but Dolby couldn't.

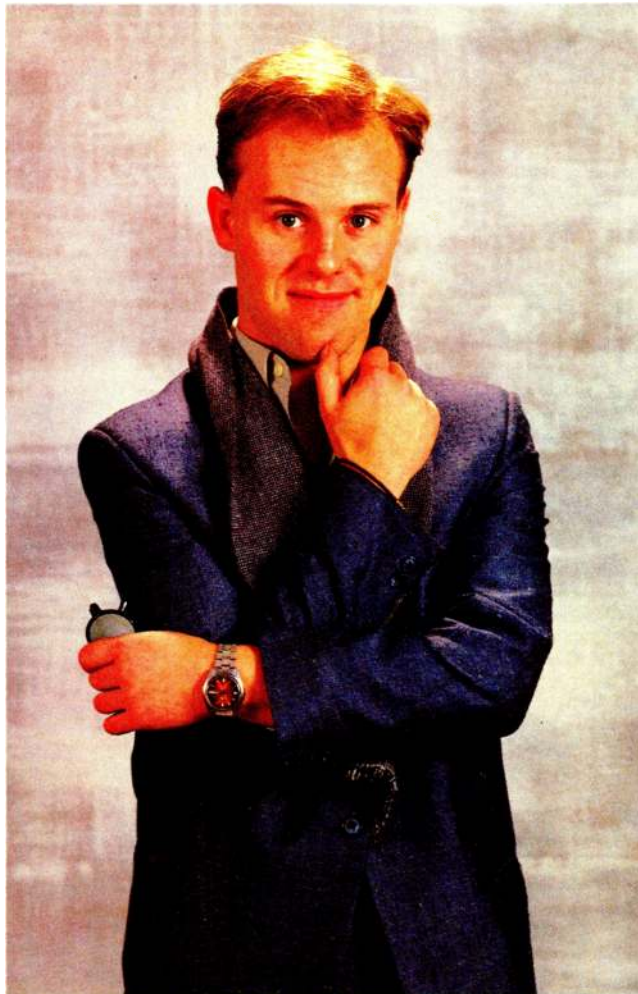
Then out of the blue a note came through his larynx, a note he'd never heard before, one from a totally different person. It was two a.m. That night he got two or three lines recorded in that voice. He spent all of the next day and half of the one following failing to find that voice anywhere in his body.

It took ten days to pull enough out of himself to meet the needs of that song.

But he stuck it out. Behind the masks and poses, there's a new key to be turned, and hidden. Dolby is finding his voice.

"Yeah, I'm finding it." He frowns. "But it's hard."

**"I can do it in front of a camera, I can communicate it."**



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

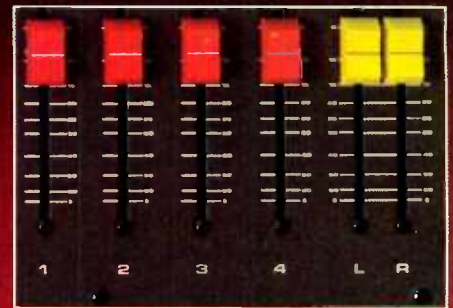
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**PARIS**. Another night, another club: for Chet Baker it is the same story as yesterday, as tomorrow, as twenty-five years ago. A set, a break, another set, sweat. Science fiction lighting adds to the haziness of time and period; everywhere, in the inevitable mirrors and even in the floor, one can contemplate one's image. Without a microphone the sounds flowing from his trumpet would be but a murmur barely more perceptible than his voice—a voice so much softer than the profoundly marked face which only opens enough to let it filter out.

It is hard to believe that he was once called the James Dean of jazz. Chet Baker's face, which bears an eerie resemblance to Antonin Artaud's in the last part of his life, is now but a fascinating mask sculpted by the trials of life and creation.

Without his glasses he seems even farther away, lost in an opaque fog. Chet sees little, but enough to instinctively piece together the listening forms and shadows. Enough in any case to guess, night after night, the other side of the spectacle: the bartender shaking a cocktail, the waitress moving back and forth in front of the stage, the noisy silhouettes leaning on tables.

Even when he's not playing, Chet grips his trumpet like a weapon; he continually licks the embouchure and his elastic face invents new wrinkles. And if he gets up to sing, his hand keeps looking for imaginary pistons on the microphone. Mysteriously, time and tobacco have only

## Chet Baker



MICHAEL THORESEN

BY JEROME REECE

polished his voice, with its imperceptible falsetto which plays every register of feeling. Virtuoso instrumentalist and tightrope singer, Chet has arrived at an extraordinary osmosis of two forms of musical expression, comparable to the great blues singers/harmonica players.

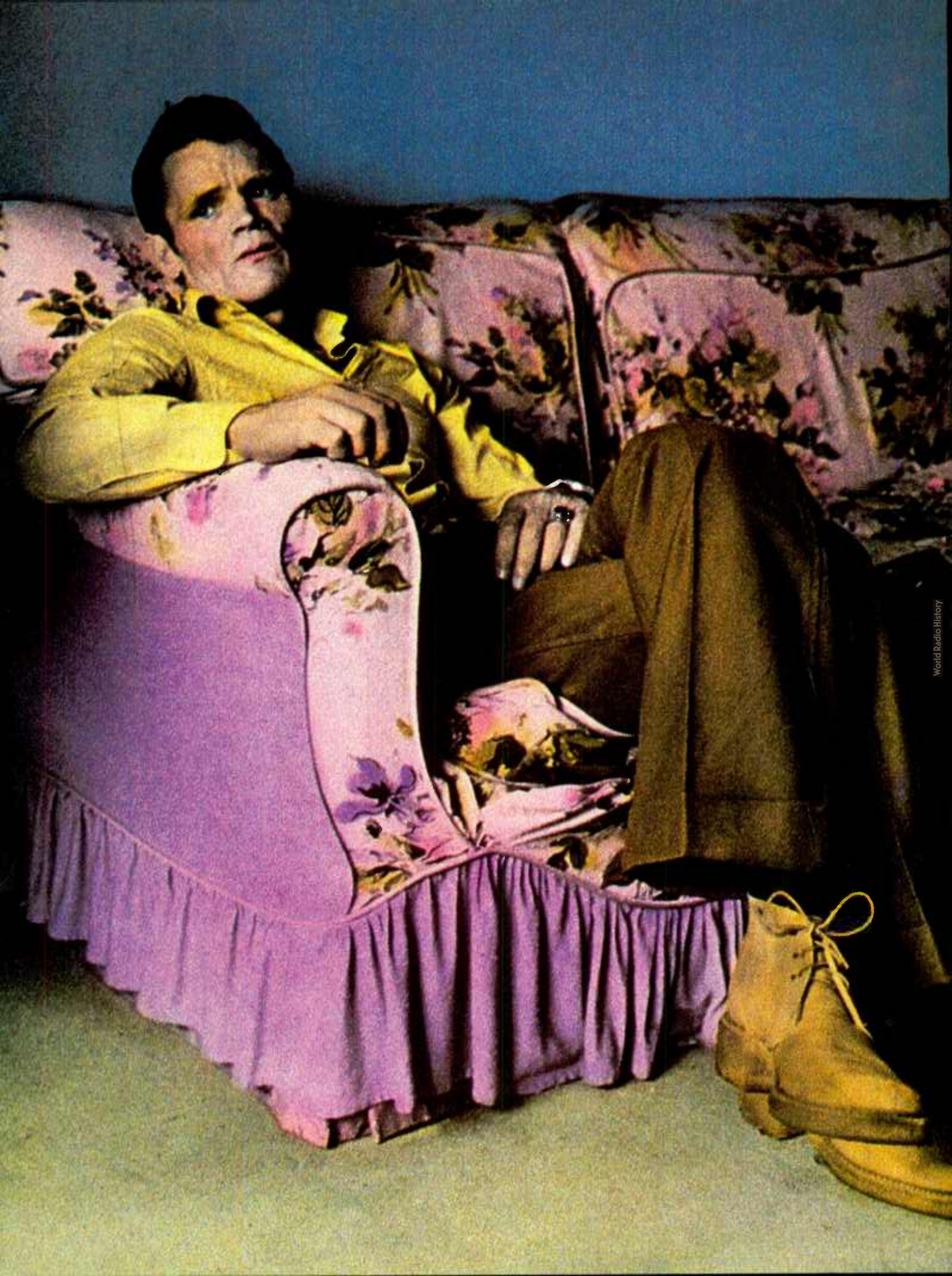
Chet Baker has been a star in Europe for almost thirty years. He has spent the major portion of his career there, beginning with his first, triumphant visit to Paris in 1955. He'd grown up in California; his father had played banjo and guitar in various swing bands. A few cursory lessons in junior high school comprised the whole of Chet's formal musical training; later, as a member of an Army band, he learned to sight-read

by picking up marches by ear and then transposing what he'd heard to the printed sheets before him. Discharged in 1948, he flunked his theory classes at El Camino College in L.A., then re-enlisted to join the Presidio Army band station in San Francisco, and, not coincidentally, join the nightly jam sessions at Bop City with the likes of Dexter Gordon, Paul Desmond and Hampton Hawes. By 1952 he was playing West Coast dates with Charlie Parker. The following year he joined the Gerry Mulligan quartet, where the chemistry between Mulligan's probing baritone and Baker's light, lilting trumpet thrust both toward international prominence. By 1953, the year he began recording under his own name, Baker had already won the *downbeat* poll as the best

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## *Tightrope Trumpet and Solitary Survival at the Edge of Civilization*

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trumpet player in jazz. He was twenty-four years old.

With its lyrical and mellow West Coast sound, the Mulligan-Baker quartet dominated jazz in the early and mid-50s. Baker's fresh, openly romantic style hasn't really changed much over the years, but his subsequent experiences have given his sound an edge that's intensely melancholic and bittersweet. His problems began almost before Chet had a chance to savor his success—first a gum disease which threatened to destroy his health and career, then a lengthy bout with heroin which effectively accomplished the same end. Arrests and prison stretches in Europe commenced with a drug bust in Italy in 1959; in 1968, while back in San Francisco, Baker suffered a vicious mugging that ultimately resulted in the loss of his teeth. He stopped playing for two years, began a slow recovery from his addiction through methadone, and culminated his comeback with a reunion concert with Mulligan and several club dates around New York City in 1974-75. Then he migrated back to Europe. But, as with Miles Davis, whose muted blue tone Baker's own has long resembled, fate's scars have never altered the inexpressible beauty of his art. If, as it has been said, Miles sounds like a man walking on eggshells, Chet sounds like Goethe's Werther singing to himself on the edge of a precipice. Along with a handful of others, he remains one of the last great jazz musicians in an ever-shrinking world where few recall what that "jazz" ever meant—though perhaps (ironically) Baker's exquisite solo on Elvis Costello's "Shipbuilding" might broaden the chance of his "discovery" by yet another generation of fans.

It's four a.m. The magical intimacy inside the club has dissipated with the last encore. Covered with sweat, Chet

## *"Anything I play on the horn I can sing. I think of every note I play."*

timidly holds his trumpet case like a junior executive with a briefcase. I ask him, stupidly enough, how he can stand all these nights in claustrophobic, smokey basements. He smiles slightly: "Lots of practice." For years he has refused interviews—this time, and who knows why, he says yes.

Several days later we meet at the country home of one of his musicians. Chet sits up on his bed, then for hours lies there with his eyes closed, sucking on candy after candy and cigarette after cigarette. At the end he gets up and, with a malicious smile, shows me his trumpet, telling me it's a student model. The music is in him, no matter what object. As I ready to leave he puts a Walkman over my ears. He smiles, always a rare moment, and gives me the cassette as a goodbye present.

**MUSICIAN:** *You call yourself a loner. Have you ever tried to settle down?*

**BAKER:** A couple times. Once in 1974 in upstate New York, with my wife and children. But when the people in the neighborhood found out who I was—through something about me on the local TV station—they started bothering my children, breaking my windows. Calling me "drug addict" in the street. The civilized world we live in is a lot of crap. I tried again a little later on Long Island and that didn't work either. People think I'm some kind of scum, so I just gave up the whole idea. Yeah,

we moved out. My kids are grown up now, I don't have to worry about them. None of them are musicians.

**MUSICIAN:** *Are you happy about that?*

**BAKER:** Yeah, I'm happy about that. Yes I am. The odds against a talented musician being successful are so great....

**MUSICIAN:** *And how do you feel about your music now?*

**BAKER:** It's just my way of improvising and of bouncing off what the other musicians are playing. I respond very much to what is going on around me, since I play a hundred percent by ear. The conditions I grew up in don't exist anymore. I think I'm part of a dying breed. Yeah. It's kind of sad in a way, but that's progress, I guess.

**MUSICIAN:** *The end of a certain jazz.*

**BAKER:** A certain kind of jazz, a very personal kind of jazz. There aren't too many groups anymore like the trio I have, especially without drums. It makes it more like a chamber trio. I'd prefer to play completely acoustic. The louder the music is, it seems the more people talk. But in many places people do listen. In some clubs in Paris you can hear a pin drop.

**MUSICIAN:** *Speaking of progress, don't you think conditions are better now than for, say, Charlie Parker in the 1940s?*

**BAKER:** I think Charlie Parker had a very happy life. He had tremendous success, was loved and adored by so many people. He was the king, the same as the king of a country. Playing with Bird was the very greatest experience I ever had. But I was too young and too stupid to get as much out of it as I should have. I did get to spend a lot of time with Bird—on the stand and off. I would drive him around, go to the beach... we got to be good friends. He certainly told me to stay away from drugs, and he kept certain people away from me who would have tried to give me things. I was twenty-two at the time, and I didn't start taking drugs until I was twenty-seven. Although people seem to think that I started much earlier.

**MUSICIAN:** *It's hard to believe you. You were playing with users like Gerry Mulligan, Dick Twardzick, Art Pepper....*

**BAKER:** I know, but I was totally clean. As clean as a whistle. Dick's overdose [while on tour with Baker in 1955] totally destroyed me. Destroyed me. Dick's parents felt it was my fault, even though I was completely unaware of the situation.

**MUSICIAN:** *So why did you start at twenty-seven?*

**BAKER:** Because I had to find out about it. I'd been fascinated for a long time, but I'd managed to fight it off. Then I started, in the States. I'd gotten married a second time, which was a great mistake. She was a wonderful person, but....

**MUSICIAN:** *And you were less popular than you had been in the early 50s....*

**BAKER:** That could have been a reason too...could have been. It's not because of the "jazz world." It depends on the person. Some musicians were afraid to try drugs because they had a certain success and didn't want to jeopardize it. I'm not like that. I've been up and down so many times.... I have no property, no bank account, no money, and I probably will die broke—which is fine because that's the way I came into the world. I don't get any money from all those records I made. Just the advance. I've been cheated out of my record royalties by almost every company. I have no idea how many records I sell.

**MUSICIAN:** *So, for you, do drugs have anything to do with the way a musician plays?*

**BAKER:** No, I could have played just as well without it. I don't think it hurt it, but I don't think it did it any good. It gets in the way when you're strung out and have to play sick on the stand. I don't need drugs for inspiration. The music comes from inside, and is pushed out by outside influences from the musicians I'm playing with. I love to play, and I think it's the only reason I was put here on this earth.

**MUSICIAN:** *You say that in a religious sense.*

**BAKER:** Yes. But I don't believe there is a God. It's a beautiful story, but.... I was put here through thousands of years of people having children and it finally got to me. And my father was a good musician, he had a good ear, good time.



**MUSICIAN:** So you really feel you were put here to be a jazz musician.

**BAKER:** Yeah, I really do. If I'd played another kind of music I would have been more successful and wouldn't be playing anymore. I'd be retired by now.

**MUSICIAN:** And it all started when your father gave you a trumpet, at thirteen.

**BAKER:** Well, my father wanted me to play trombone, since he liked Jack Teagarden very much. But I was too small physically to be able to play it. I was rather small for my age. So my father got me a trumpet.

**MUSICIAN:** In California?

**BAKER:** Yeah, we'd moved from Oklahoma. I'd been playing about six months when a rock hit me in the left front tooth, chipping it. And I played that way for about twenty-five years. That, of course, made me invent my own technique of playing the trumpet, having that tooth missing.

**MUSICIAN:** It's assumed—erroneously, I think—that you were influenced by Miles Davis. You were both growing up at the same time, and none of the trumpet players were playing in the style you both developed. It was Roy Eldridge and then Dizzy Gillespie.

**BAKER:** It's a style that I evolved myself. Yes. Yes.

**MUSICIAN:** But who were you listening to in your youth?

**BAKER:** I listened to a lot of saxophone players. Quite a bit of Lester Young, Wardell Gray and Dexter Gordon. Wardell and Dexter lived in California. The trumpet players I knew were very young, like myself. Jack Sheldon, Pete and Conte Candoli. Also Art Farmer. We were influencing each other, and influenced by the saxophone players in L.A. at the time: Art Pepper, Lennie Niehaus, Joe Maini, Bill Perkins, Richie Kamuca.

**MUSICIAN:** Were you listening to singers?

**BAKER:** Not really. I admired Frank Sinatra and Mel Tormé, Tony Bennett, and Steve Lawrence also.

**MUSICIAN:** You made your first record as a singer in 1954 for World Pacific (Chet Baker Sings). Had you been singing since childhood?

**BAKER:** Yes. My mother made me enter talent contests as a singer in the L.A. area. I'd compete against girl accordion players, tap dancers, etc. I never won, but I came in second once. I'd sing songs like "That Old Black Magic" and "I Had The Craziest Dream." It was a lot of fun, and good experience. In 1954 Dick Bock, the owner of World Pacific, suggested that I make a record as a singer. He'd heard me sing a few times in clubs—I'd sing maybe a tune a set. I never sang when I was with Gerry Mulligan. Only on our recording of "My Funny Valentine," in the studio in 1953. People really loved it or they hated it.

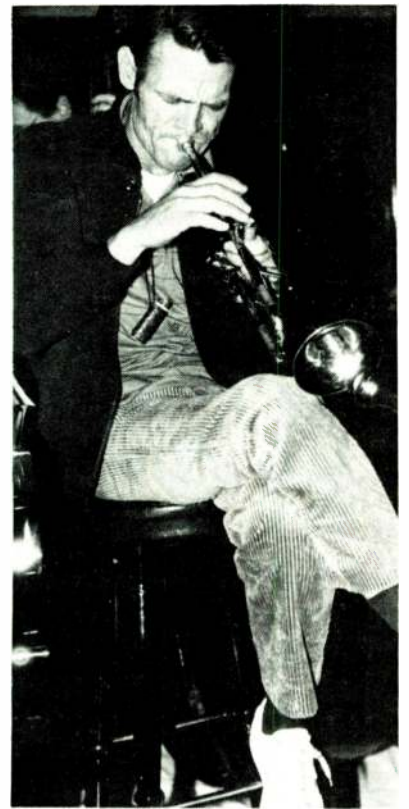
**MUSICIAN:** Another question about your childhood. Is it true that you smoked marijuana with your parents when you were growing up?

**BAKER:** No. And I don't know how that story got invented and circulated. My father would smoke with other musicians a few times a week at the house, but I was very young at the time. I never smoked with my family. What a ridiculous story—my mother was very strict and she was against all that.

**MUSICIAN:** And now since we've come to that period in your life, the early 50s, the inevitable question about Gerry Mulligan....

**BAKER:** Playing again with Gerry is out of the question. He

IRMGARD POZORSKI



just doesn't want to have anything to do with me. He's so pissed off. Because I've been able to make it on my own, without him. He can't hack that. I was supposed to be his trumpet player for life, I guess. And at ridiculous wages. Which is why I left him in the first place. He wouldn't give me a raise, and I'd just been voted the best trumpet player in the world.

**MUSICIAN:** You did make that CTI live reunion album together in 1974....

**BAKER:** We did that just for old times' sake. You can imagine how many people come up to him and ask him when he and I will play together again. It just drives him out of his mind. It's so stupid, because even if we only got together for only one year, for a world tour, it could be fantastic economically. But he won't do it.

**MUSICIAN:** In 1965 you made that nice Plays Billie Holiday album. Did you listen to a lot of Billie Holiday, especially her last years?

**BAKER:** I never listened to anyone a lot.

**MUSICIAN:** That fascinated me in Art Pepper's book (Straight Life), and in Charles Mingus' book, too (Beneath the Underdog); they hardly ever talk about music or other musicians.

**BAKER:** I found Art Pepper's book kind of disgusting. All that shit about how good looking he was, his peeping into bathroom windows...masturbating. Art

was really a loner, but not in the same way I am. It was very difficult to get to know him. People like Pepper and Mingus were a little too preoccupied with their genitals. I realized at a very tender age that there just isn't time or opportunity enough to screw every beautiful woman in the world. It's better to just be cool—if that's possible—and to be selective and wait for the opportunity. I can't really comment on Art because I never really knew him, never got high with him, not even once. I was always rather disappointed with Art's playing when we recorded in the 1950s. He wasn't completing any ideas—things were broken up into fragments. There were no long lines. But I never got to hear him live. I heard that in the 1970s his playing was twice as good as it had ever been.

**MUSICIAN:** What did you do between 1969 and 1973 when you quit playing?

**BAKER:** I had my other front tooth knocked out in 1969. My teeth were in bad shape anyway from all the drugs, I had so much pain that I decided to have them all pulled out. I got a denture, and when I tried to play again I couldn't even get a sound out of the trumpet. So I quit playing. I worked in a gas station sixteen hours a day for almost two years. Then I tried again, looking for a new embouchure. It took me two years. By the summer of 1973 I felt I was ready to try to go back to work. So I was driving to New York and stopped in a club in Denver to hear Dizzy Gillespie. I told him what I was doing and he called a club in New York from his hotel and I was hired for a two-week gig in New York. And that's how I started playing again. Then I went to Europe, and found the audiences very receptive. And now I find myself working in Europe seventy-five percent of the time.

**MUSICIAN:** Why do you spend so much time in Europe?

**BAKER:** It's very difficult to work regularly in the States. In New York if you work in a club you can't play in a club in New York before or after for a least a month—it's in the contract. So you have to travel. It's a lot easier to travel in Europe. And the level of comprehension is much higher than in the States. The average listener in the States has the mentality of a twelve-year-old.

**MUSICIAN:** You've made a lot of records over the years. Are you happy with them, or were a lot of them for the money?

**BAKER:** I always need the money. I'm fairly happy with the results. I would say seventy percent of the records are worthwhile musically. Of the recent ones, *Broken Wing* (Inner City) is very nice. *Two A Day* (Steeplechase) is nice. I've recorded a lot recently, mostly live club dates. In 1982 I did one in New York which I like a lot, I wish it would come out, but the producer—a guy in the garment industry—is having problems. There's Kenny Barron, James Newton, Charlie Haden, Howard Johnson and Ben Riley.

**MUSICIAN:** You recently recorded with Elvis Costello ("*Shipbuilding*," on *Punch The Clock* (Columbia). How'd that come about?

**BAKER:** I'd never heard of him. I was working in London and he contacted me. He is a very nice man. He is the only person not from the jazz world who has contacted me so far for a record date.

**MUSICIAN:** He added some nice little electronic touches to your solo. Does working more with electronics interest you?

**BAKER:** Not really. It would be fun to try to do it. But most jazz record companies don't seem to be interested in that. They want me to keep it... simple. For my public.

**MUSICIAN:** You've always loved Miles. What do you think of his electronic playing, as of 1969?

**BAKER:** I think Miles enjoys doing things that upset people. I prefer his playing of twenty years ago, but I find what he's doing now just as valid.

**MUSICIAN:** Do you hear many young trumpet players you like? Musicians influenced by you?

**BAKER:** Yes, I think my style of trumpet playing is coming back a little. After all, how fast can you play? It's much more musical and certainly more—in my way of thinking anyway—difficult to play in a style where you play less notes and leave more open spaces and choose the notes you play very carefully. Playing a beautiful ballad is very difficult.

**MUSICIAN:** More difficult than playing a fast bebop tune?

**BAKER:** Well, of course, some of the bop tunes are very complicated, and if you try to play them at bright tempos you triple the difficulty, and you get to the point where it's so difficult that it's no fun anymore—just a lot of hard work. And most people listening can't follow you anyway.

**MUSICIAN:** Your music is often so pretty that people may not realize just how complex it really is.

**BAKER:** I've been thinking about that a lot. It does look like it's a little too easy. I'm just sitting in a chair with my legs crossed. That's part of the problem. I'll have to make it look a lot more difficult somehow. But, you know, I've been playing for forty years. Why does it have to look so difficult? It's difficult to do, anyway. But this of course is a problem because people can't relate to that; if it doesn't look hard then it must be easy to do. And if it's easy then it can't be much.

**MUSICIAN:** There's a definite singing quality to your trumpet playing. Do you hear the notes that way in your head?

**BAKER:** Oh yeah. All the time. Anything I play on the horn I can sing. I think of every note I play. Once in a while I'll play something that's rather cliché-ish, because there are only a certain number of ways to get through a chord progression of a standard unless you really want to take it out.

IRMGARD POZORSKI



**MUSICIAN:** How do you keep your lip in such good shape?

**BAKER:** Oh, the main thing is to play every night. I can play about two to three hours a night before I get tired. I don't practice at all, so even if there's one night in the week I don't play the next night I notice it in my playing at first. I have to play every night.

**MUSICIAN:** You play so much, aren't you sick of playing?

**BAKER:** Right now I enjoy playing. It means a lot that I have musicians with me that I have good vibrations with. It makes me feel like giving everything I have. It's not always that way—sometimes I find myself in cities with musicians that I don't like and I really don't want to play.

**MUSICIAN:** When are you going to stop?

**BAKER:** Within five years. And if I ever teach I'd like to get kids not to depend so much on the music on the paper. Look at Berklee, that's a good example of the problem. There are shortcuts you can show kids that could give them a different insight into music that would save them a lot of time. To make them understand that improvising is a complete separate art in itself, outside the mechanics of the knowledge of chords, et cetera.

**MUSICIAN:** You don't compose much. Your piece, "*Blue Gilles*," on the *Broken Wing* album is beautiful.

**BAKER:** It's hard for me to compose. By the time I notate it I've already thought of five other ways it could be. By the end I'm frustrated with the way it sounds—it could always be better. The way it could have been. Since I play by ear I do it all in my head, but some day I hope to have a place and piano. Then maybe it would be easier to get things done. I'd like to write a few things before I give up for good.

**MUSICIAN:** Could we talk a bit about other trumpet players? Don Cherry, for instance.

**BAKER:** I knew him from way back at jam sessions in California in the mid-50s. I liked Don's playing with Ornette later, but it's not my taste at all.

**MUSICIAN:** Clifford Brown?

**BAKER:** (a big smile) Now that was a sweet man. There was no race problem with him at all. I had the chance to hear him live. Trumpet playing would be different today if he were still alive. He was another man who was put here to play trumpet.

**MUSICIAN:** Booker Little?

**BAKER:** (another big smile) Oh yeah! I liked him very much. And Blue Mitchell and Kenny Dorham.

**MUSICIAN:** You used to run around with Lee Morgan.

**BAKER:** I didn't like him as a person, so it was hard for me to care about his playing. Morgan and I used to go up to Harlem together to cop and to get high, and if you turned your back for a second he'd shoot up all the stuff. If I don't like someone I won't be able to like his music.

**MUSICIAN:** Yeah, but even Charlie Parker had a rough reputation....

**BAKER:** He never did anything bad to me. Though I do know that he would borrow instruments from people and then pawn them. It's a terrible thing to do. But I don't think that Bird would ever have done anything like that to me. I used to go up to Harlem a lot. At one point I knew everybody. I could go alone anytime at night and walk down the street and everybody would say, "Hey"... you know. But not now, all those people are gone.

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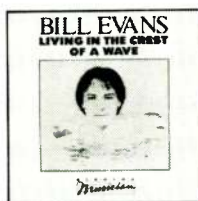
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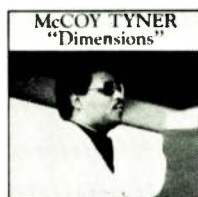
The debut solo album by one of the brightest new saxophonists in Jazz. Bill has gained acclaim for his work with Miles Davis over the past three years and will next be featured with the re-formed Mahavishnu Orchestra. His exciting debut album features Bill on Tenor and Soprano sax in a program of all Evans originals. Supporting players include Mitch Forman, Adam Nussbaum, Mark Egan and Manulo Budrena.



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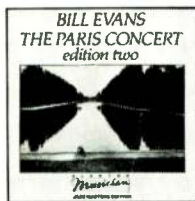
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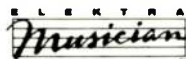
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**MUSICIAN:** So, do you think heroin is as present in jazz now as it was before?

**BAKER:** No, I think it’s pretty much a part of the past. One reason is that it becomes so expensive so quickly. And if you’re depending on jazz to make money—hah—you can’t earn enough money. And if you like cocaine to make speedballs, then you need to earn twice that to mix the two together. And you need to find all that money every day. Drugs were much cheaper in the 50s, and the quality was much better. You could buy really good heroin for three dollars. It’s so expensive now, no one can afford it. Which is good, I guess.

**MUSICIAN:** Speaking of drugs, you smoke way too much tobacco. You don’t do anything for your voice and yet it sounds great. Every time I hear you sing your voice is different.

**BAKER:** I do smoke too much, but I don’t know why my voice changes the way it does. I just have to learn each night how to get around my voice. I have noticed in the past few weeks that the people who come to hear me react especially well to the numbers in the set when I sing.

**MUSICIAN:** Art Pepper told me a year before his death that every time he played he was playing as if it were the last time.

**BAKER:** Yeah, I play every set as though it could be my last set, too. It’s been like that for several years now. Because I don’t have a lot of time left and I want to show the musicians playing with me—more than anybody else—that I’m giving it all I have. I don’t want anyone holding back. ☐

#### Baker’s Ingredients

“For a while now I’ve been playing a Beuscher student model. My trumpet—a Conn Constellation model—was stolen in New York and someone gave me this Buescher. It’s similar to a Bach trumpet. I’ve been playing Conn for years. They’re beautiful horns, but they’re so expensive. The Conn is a very difficult instrument to play. It’s very heavy to hold, and the upper register is hard to play, but the tone in the middle and lower registers is very beautiful, very dark. I played a Martin Committee for years, until the man who was responsible for the workmanship of Martin died. The company changed, and I lost interest. I used to go to the Martin factory quite often and I’d spend a whole day walking around and trying the horns until I found one that I liked.”

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THE FUNKY  
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LUTHER VANDROSS  
& ARETHA; THE JAZZY  
AGITATOR BEHIND  
MILES, GROVER  
& SANBORN

**MARCUS MILLER GETS AROUND.** If you're a pop fan, you probably know him through Luther Vandross. His melodic, string-popping bass lines underscore almost all of Vandross' productions, grounding the songs with a rhythmic and harmonic sureness that combines the muted romanticism of Michael Henderson with the muscular authority of Larry Graham. In addition to that, Miller has written with Vandross for Aretha Franklin, Dionne Warwick, Cheryl Lynn and, of course, Luther Vandross. Miller also co-produced Vandross' latest album, *Busy Body*.

If, on the other hand, your tastes lean more to jazz, perhaps you know Miller as the bright young bassist whose rubbery blues lines and deft blend of bebop syncopation and funk percussiveness sparked Miles Davis' last three albums. Or maybe you know Marcus from his days with Grover Washington. Or Lonnie Liston Smith. Or Bobbi Humphreys.

Could be that you saw Miller in the *Saturday Night Live* house band with David Sanborn, whose *Backstreets* Miller helped produce. If not there, then possibly on the road with Roberta Flack or Lenny White. And should you be the type who reads album credits, you've undoubtedly run across his name somewhere by now, as Miller has recorded with everybody from Joan Armatrading to Kazumi Watanabe (and that's not including the hundreds of uncredited jingles and commercial

BY J.D. CONSIDINE

sessions he's done).

A busy fellow, to be sure. In fact, at twenty-four, Miller has spent so much time in New York studios that you half expect him to have the grayish pallor of one whose only light has been fluorescent. Yet Marcus Miller no more looks the part of the studio mercenary than he talks it, and his conversation isn't centered around matters of sound and technique but around concepts like "feel" and "musicality."

"When I was playing with Roberta [Flack]," he recalls, "the only notes you could play were the *right* notes, and there are only so many of them there for you to play. Even if it wasn't the right note in the chord, you had to find that note, *hit* that note and make it mean something."

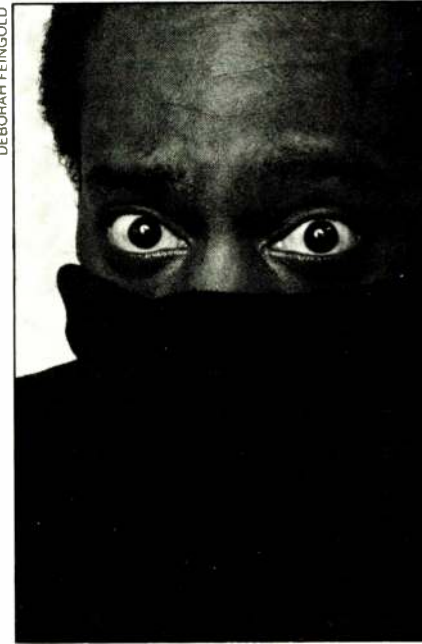
"On a lot of pop records, I hear bass players playing a lot of notes. I think what makes me different from a lot of bass players is that my notes have a lot of weight. If I tried to play as much as some of the guys are playing now, even though physically I know I can and would have no problem doing so, when you heard it coming out of your speakers it would sound like an elephant running through the record. If the notes mean a lot, you have to be more selective. You get wild at the right moment, when you just can't *help* it anymore."

Paradoxically, Miller came to this realization not through his extensive experience in blue-chip pop, but through his jazz work. "The main thing that jazz contributes to pop music is musicality, the ability to listen to something for what it is and add your element," he says. "That's what you do when you play jazz—aside from improvising, it's understanding how to combine ideas and accept things for what they are. As opposed to saying, 'Aw, man, he's rushing,' or, 'He's flat,' you make music out of whatever's happening."

"The ability to do that works really well in pop music, because with pop, you have to come up with something different but make it sound like it belongs. Make it sound like it's *supposed* to be there, like it's been there for *years*. So you come up with a new feeling, and you have to play it with conviction. And if you do that, it works."

Conviction is central to all music, really, but it's usually only the best musicians who can manage it all the time. Whether it's "Louie, Louie" or *L'Incoronazione Di Poppea*, mere technique always takes a back seat to interpretive ability, and to his credit, Marcus Miller realized that early on. Growing up in the Jamaica section of Queens, New York, Miller was reared in a remarkably rich musical environment: there was the funk he heard with his friends, the calypso records his parents would play, the jazz his cousin Wynton Kelly was known for, the Jackson Five records that young Marcus would sing along with. His first

instrument was clarinet, but by the time he got to Music and Arts High School in Manhattan, he was also playing bass. "In order to be accepted as a musician in my neighborhood, funk had to be your forte," he explains. "When I went to high school, Larry Graham was *it*. They had this little stage in one of the rooms at



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

**"Being hip doesn't mean anything to me now if you're not saying anything."**

school, and all the bass players used to get together and jam. There were all these girls around, and funk was the thing. It was like being the hippest basketball player—the funkier guy got all the girls, all the respect. Music as sport, you know?"

Bass became more than a means of getting girls, as Miller scrambled for any club or session jobs he could talk or play his way into. More important than that, though, was the fact that his experience on bass helped Miller understand himself better as a musician.

"I didn't play the bass at Music and Arts; my primary instrument was clarinet. That helped, because you have to read to play clarinet—that's how they

teach you the instrument—so I got that part of my musical training together. But clarinet repertoire is mostly from the classical era, not the romantic. I could read it well, I was good at sight reading, but I just couldn't get the emotional part. I couldn't connect myself to it. A lot of guys are good at learning and interpreting the phrases that were hip at that time, making it a part of themselves, but I couldn't.

"On the bass, I was getting instant acceptance because I had the *feel*. Even though I didn't have the technique or know anything about the instrument, I was getting accepted because I had a good feel."

Thus, at seventeen, Marcus Miller decided against the music conservatory and wound up working with Bobbi Humphreys, writing for and recording with Lonnie Liston Smith and then hitting the road with Lenny White. As his studio reputation grew, he landed dates with the likes of Elton John, Bob James and Tom Browne, as well as signing on for a stint with Roberta Flack. But the truest test of his mettle came when he got a call to audition for Miles Davis' new band.

"I went over and played, and he gave me a hard time—as he gives everybody—but we got along really well," Miller recalls. "He asked me if I wanted to be in his band. I said, 'Sure.'"

"I figured he wasn't going to do anything," Miller adds parenthetically. "I mean, he hadn't played in seven years—I figured he was just going into the studio for kicks. A couple of months later, his manager called me up: 'We're getting ready to rehearse, we'll be playing *blah-blah-blah* and *blah-blah-blah*....'"

Miller laughs at the unexpectedness of the whole thing, but counts his time with Miles as one of the most instructive periods of his musical development. Oddly enough, it was the fact that Davis was relearning the blues that led to Miller understanding so much about the meaning and method of playing music.

"Miles was really kind of rediscovering the blues, because Miles doesn't remember anything," Miller says. "He makes *sure* he doesn't remember, so it wasn't like he was playing stuff that he'd played years ago. To him, it was [Miller affects a Milesian whisper], 'Hey, man, the blues is comin' back.'" As Davis dug deeper and deeper into the bedrock of blues, Miller found that his own playing had to be adjusted accordingly, and that meant keeping things simple and direct. "Lots of times, I just played the patterns," he says, "because when Miles is playing *that* bluesy, there's only so far away from that you want to go. You want it to reach people's hearts, because that's what he's going for; he's not going for their brains."



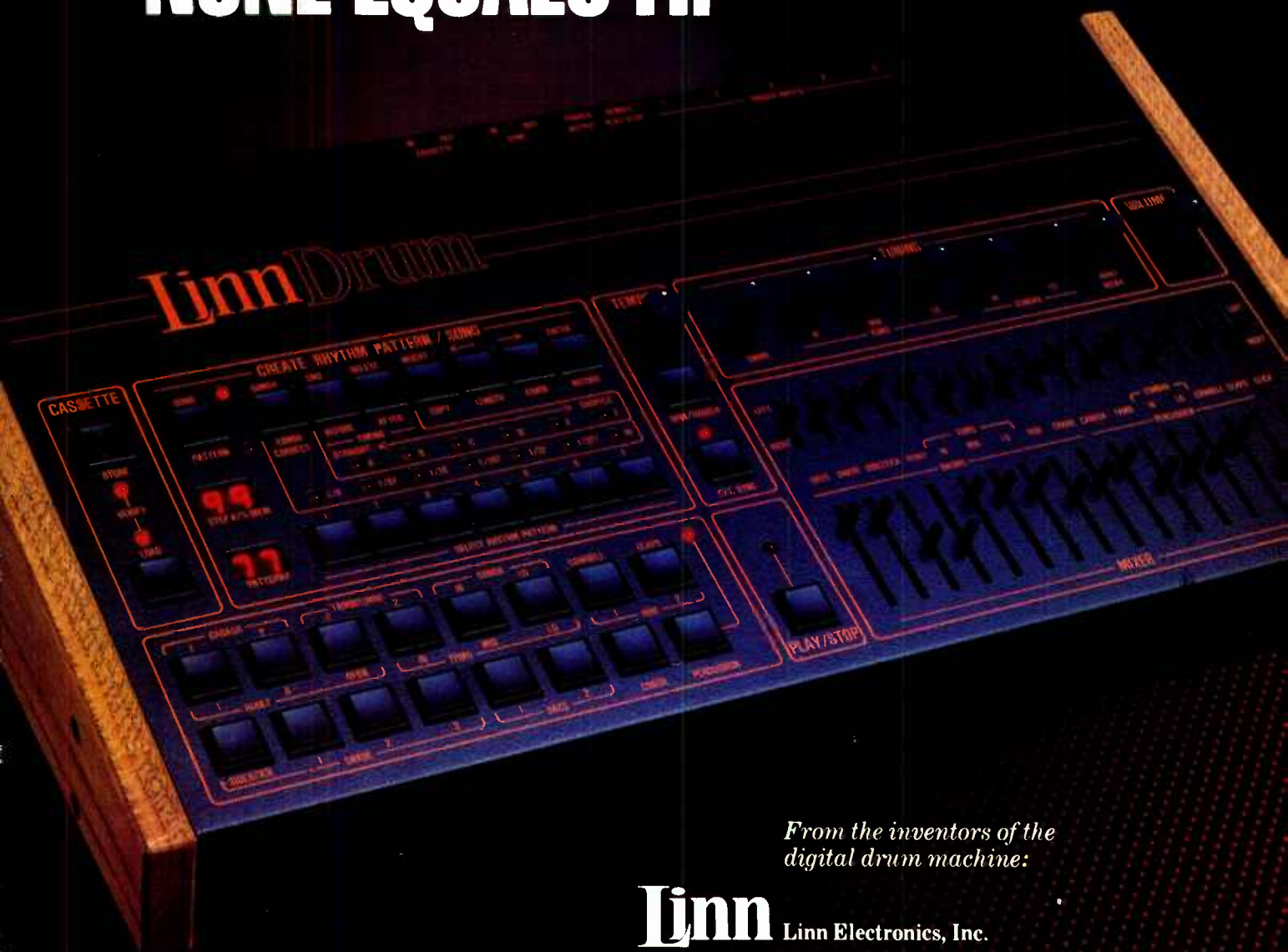
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"Miles told me once, 'Don't ever go to church unless you just can't help it anymore.' He's in church now; when I listen to him, he's playing some church. The thing that I have to do is just give him the basis for that, the kind of bass that thing sounds good against, so it goes straight to the people's hearts. They don't have to think about what I'm playing—I don't want anyone to even care—because they should be getting into that feeling.

"That's what I've been getting into. I say to myself, 'Okay, being as deep as I can is important, but it's not as important as getting to people's hearts.' Because going to people's minds doesn't do anything for me anymore. Used to. When I was younger, I used to listen to some stuff and think, 'Man, this is so *deep*.' My mother would make me turn it off sooner or later, but to me it was hip. The thing is, being hip doesn't mean anything to me now if you're not saying anything. When I'm playing with Miles, I don't care how much I'm varying the blues line; it could be the pattern from the first Mel Bay book, for all I care. If that's what's happening, then that's what's happening, and that's what will make Miles sound as good as he can sound."

Miller presents a different aspect of that approach in his work with Luther Vandross, acting as the solid, rhythmic backbone to the meat of Vandross' soulful vocalisms. Like Miller, Vandross also emerged from years of heavy studio work, and his grounding in the mechanics of record-making is as solid from that angle as Miller's is from the instrumental. "He knows so much about voices, because he's not just a singer, he's a producer," Miller says. "He's a great casting director that way. He'll sit down to do a song, and he'll say, 'Okay, on this top note I really need Cissy [Houston], because when she starts singing this note, there's this gruffness to her voice that's going to be perfect for this recording.' That's how deep he gets into it."

When writing together, Miller and Vandross almost instinctively play off each others' strengths. Miller recalls, "He said to me, 'I'm getting ready to do Dionne Warwick; do you have any songs?' I told him, 'Well, you write ballads wonderfully by yourself, so you probably won't need much of my stuff for this record.'

"Well, I am going to write a couple of ballads by myself," he said, "but I went to her concert, and she was singing 'Love To Love You Baby' and a Kool & the Gang song, and I thought it would be wonderful if she had some of her own uptempo songs to do. Because you can't do a whole concert of ballads. So let's see what we can do.'

"So I worked out some things, and sent him a track to see if he liked the feel of it. He listened to it, and called me up a few days later. 'I've been listening to this, and each time I hear it I like it more and

more. I'm going to work with this.' He works with it for a little while, on words and hooks and stuff, and then calls me up again. 'I think it's going to be great,' he says, and sings me what he's got over the phone. 'Now why don't you come up with a bridge or an extended section, something like that?' he says when he's

DEBORAH FEINGOLD



**“Playing a lot of notes sounds like an elephant running through the record.”**

finished. We just work back and forth like that.

"Then we'll get to the final thing, and he'll sing me the words. Occasionally, I'll say, 'What did you say there? Did you say *with*?' And he'll say, 'No, I said something else, but I like *with* better. Let's go with that.'"

Miller, it should be added, is a prolific writer on his own, and has most recently been assembling material for saxophonist Dave Sanborn as well as for his second solo album, *Marcus Miller*. But Miller has to be careful not to fall into the trap of easy commerciality. "My ears are like magnets," he says. "If I listen to the radio too much, whatever I write that day is going to have some of that in it. I could

probably sign with some publishing company and turn out 'B' songs—you know, like 'B' movies—and make a great living. But I'd be miserable, because my standards would be pretty low, and I'm not going to get into that."

Still, he has had some trouble writing for himself, because his ability to go in so many different directions was hampering his own sense of who he was. "On my first record, *Suddenly*, I think I was a little bit scared to show too many sides of myself. I had to sort things out, try to find myself. So now, I'm almost finished my second album, and I feel good about it because I didn't worry it. I just felt that whatever was going on in my head was me.

"There are through-lines to it, though. It's not like in fusion, where everybody's record was fragmented: there's the rock tune, the Latin tune, the reggae tune, the funk tune, the polka.... With that, every album had ten different feels, and there were no through-lines. When I was making this record, I tried to avoid that at first, but then I realized that I could make a through-line out of it all coming from me. *My musicality* is my through-line."

In the long run, Miller feels that the combination of his experiences, from the technical versatility demanded by studio work to the emphasis on emotion and conviction required by the best of his jazz and pop efforts, has given him the tools to truly have his say, musically. As he puts it, "Some guys can play one type of music. Then there's another world of people who are just musicians, who simply *make music*. They just take whatever affects their lives, apply it to what they're doing, and the music just comes out of them.

"That's what music should be—a reflection of your life's experiences." ■

#### Marcus Miller Bass-ics

"I usually play a Fender Jazz bass. I have an Aria Pro, but the Fender—you know how you try to leave your woman? You find this other woman who looks better, wears better clothes, but it's just not the same thing. You miss some *fault* of your old girlfriend. With this bass of mine, I miss when the C doesn't die on the G string. I've been working around that for so long, it feels a part of me. When it doesn't happen, it feels unnatural, almost like the C is feeding back."

In addition to the Aria, which Miller is refining with the help of the company, he has a custom bass by Roger Sadowsky. Sadowsky also put a pre-amp in Miller's J-bass, which was modeled after the Stars Guitars pre-amp. His strings are Dean Markley super-wound round magnums, occasionally Roto-Sounds. He doesn't own an amp, though. "I've been in the studio, and when I do use an amp at a club or something, a friend of mine just lets me borrow his Ampeg." His only effect is the Lexicon PCM digital delay.

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Pope and Daryl Hall discuss life after high school on the set of "Adult Education."

# TIM POPE'S OPERATIVE SYMBOLS

## On Location with Rockvid's Hottest Young Director

By Roy Trakin

In between controlling the propane torches which illuminate the cavernous set of Hall & Oates' "Adult Education," the pyrotechnist, veteran of many feature film shoots, points admiringly at director Tim Pope, a vision in greased-back, falling-out-of-rubberband ponytail, crumpled and wide-lapelled paisley jacket, above ankle-length peg-leg black jeans and pointy, winkle-picker shoes.

"He's the Ichabod Crane of rock video," he nods.

At twenty-seven years old, with nearly one hundred of what he calls "music films" under his belt, lanky U.K. native Tim Pope is currently one of the most in-demand rock video directors about. His production company, GLO, has recently begun working on stateside projects, of which Hall & Oates' "Adult Education" is the first full-scale, big

budget (\$80,000 plus) test. A twenty-six person crew, including representatives of Champion Entertainment, Hall & Oates' management company and executive producers were present to make sure the two-day shoot went smoothly.

The wiry, energetic Pope is a feverish dynamo on the set, whether consulting his cinematographer about a setup with the Louma crane, walking the grips through a tracking shot or coaxing performances out of his actors. In fact, he got his start training politicians in the art of communicating effectively on television, a skill he now offers to rock stars.

"Artists respond to Tim immediately," says his GLO producer, Beth Broday. "He sits down with the individual and extracts their essence, who they are."

"I expose their vulnerabilities," says Pope during a break. "In the end, all people have weaknesses. I'm like a psychiatrist, pulling out what's inside them and throwing it at the camera. Which can be a painful experience. Even for a Daryl Hall. That's why I like to work with younger bands on the way up, too.

"The one quality I do have is the ability to get people turned on to things. I get in there and get involved. When I speak to

bands, I try to use their language. I've never been turned down by an artist for a concept I've explained to him. I describe the song with words they'll perfectly understand. I translate my needs into their language by describing visual qualities in terms of sounds. It usually works."

Pope graduated from schooling U. K. Labour politicians in media savvy to making videos for the synth-pop duo Soft Cell, whose surrealistic eroticism caused much controversy as well as censorship for far-out pieces like "Bed-sitter" and "Sex Dwarf."

"The great thing about music video is I can be a professional filmmaker one day and an amateur the next, then I can do something else," Pope enthuses. "If you look at most video directors' work, you can tell who's doing what from their styles. If anyone ever spotted my work, I'd give up."

Indeed, since his start with Soft Cell, Pope has gone on to direct videos for Style Council, Talk Talk, the Cure, Siouxsie & the Banshees, the Creatures, Blancmange, Roman Holliday, Slade, Tim Scott, Jacqui Brooks, Paul Young and, after this current project, the Psychedelic Furs. He dares you to spot his signature in the medieval pastorality of Men Without Hats' "Safety Dance," the pop art montage of Bow Wow Wow's "Do You Wanna Hold Me?," the cartoon pixilation of Neil Young's "Wonderin'" or the sweeping scope of H&O's "Adult Education."

"These films should become them," he says. "They aren't supposed to become me. They have nothing to do with me. I don't even want people to know I'm here. I want to be invisible. I don't believe in making videos with two thousand cuts in them. To me, something is amazingly cut if there are no edits at all in it."

Silvercup Studios is located in a converted bakery across the East River from Manhattan in Queens. On a huge soundstage which once housed silos filled with flour, the set of Hall & Oates' "Adult Education" has been constructed with polyurethane, sand, sticks, chicken wire, tiles, toys and a lot of junk "picked up lying around the studio," according to Alex McDowell, the young English production designer and a long-time collaborator of Pope's.

"It's based on desert architecture," he explains. "The markings on those walls stand for magic, alchemy, Japanese etchings, subway graffiti. It's as if a cross-section of New York simply caved in. All the ideas came from the song. We

*continued on page 78*



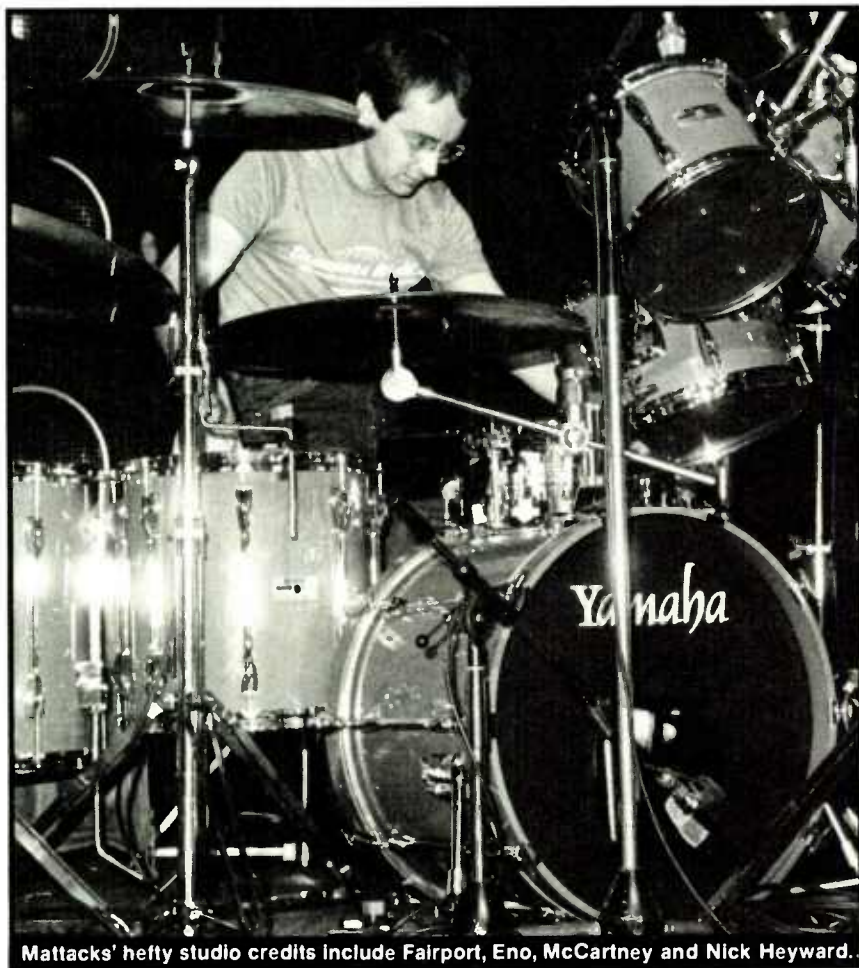
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Mattacks' hefty studio credits include Fairport, Eno, McCartney and Nick Heyward.

## DAVE MATTACKS' UNCOMMON MODESTY

Rhythmic Reflections  
of a Drummer For  
All Seasons

By David Fricke

Being Dave Mattacks is hard enough—drumming behind folk-rock magician Richard Thompson one minute, keeping time on a BMW automobile commercial the next, and then mixing with rock royalty on a McCartney session. But admiring him for it is even worse. This thirty-six-year-old English drummer, best known for anchoring Fairport Convention's original flights of English folk fantasy in solid rock, refuses to accept greatness as his

just reward.

"I am not unaware of the difference between doing the backing beat for a BMW jingle and working with Richard," he declares between mouthfuls of a take-out deli lunch in *Musician's* New York offices during a brief Stateside holiday. "For one thing, I can get more money doing a one-hour session with BMW than I can doing a gig with Richard.

"But when people say, 'Well, you're a creative artist,' I get this vision of people walking around with the back of their hands against their forehead. I'm so against the terminology because so many people have made it so meaningless. I enjoy what I do and I happen to get paid for it. And sometimes, not as often as I would like, I come up with something special. But the rest of the time, I'm just doing the best that I can in any given

situation."

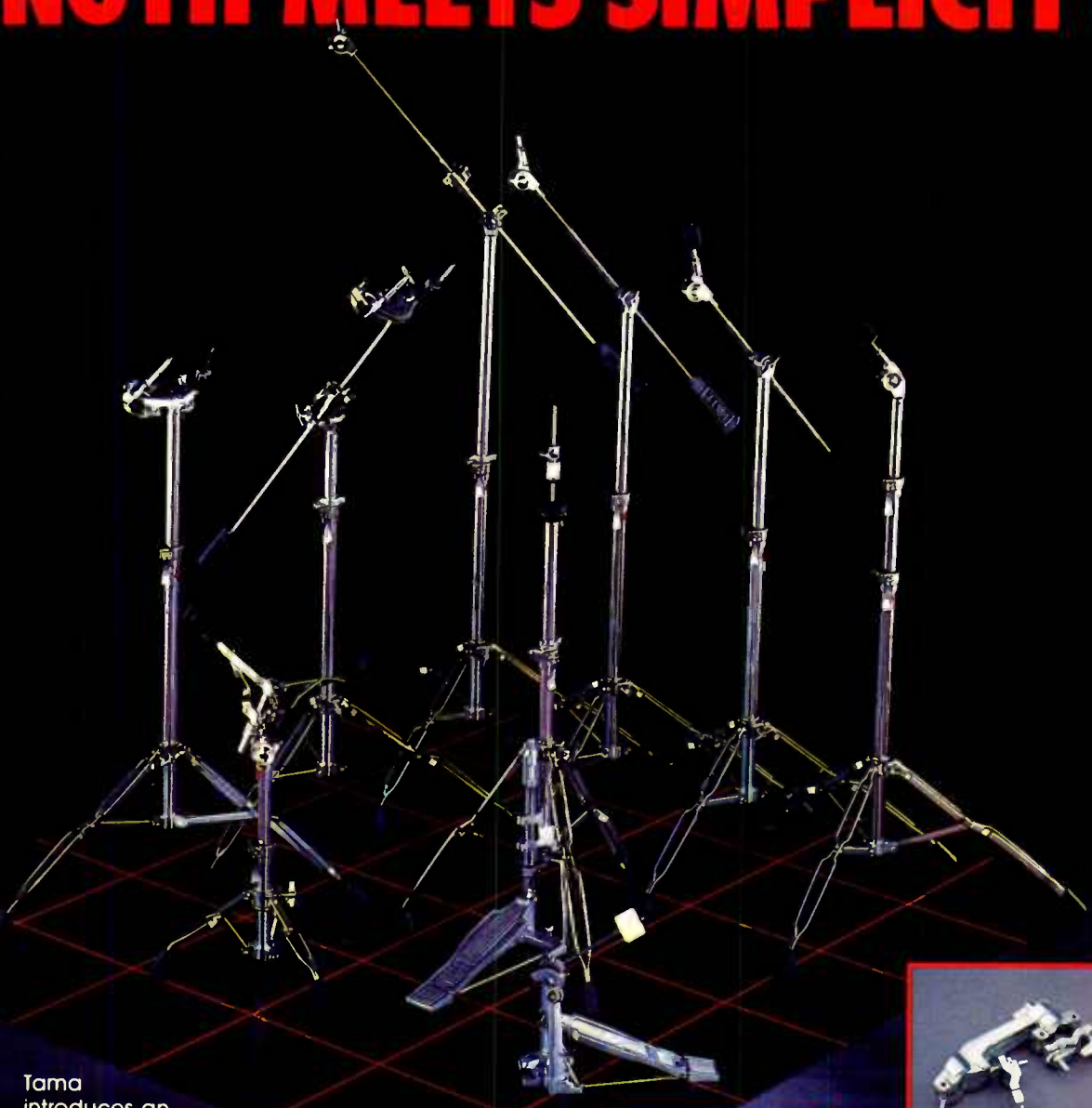
The best Dave Mattacks can do has been, over the years, embarrassingly good. In spite of his militant modesty, he is loose enough to accommodate the brassy pop turns of Britfunk heartthrob Nick Heyward yet well hard enough to stir up a brute Zeppelin roar with Jimmy Page on the *Death Wish II* soundtrack. Polar opposites like Paul McCartney and Brian Eno, Bill Nelson and Cat Stevens, Bill Wyman and the McGarrigle Sisters have all tapped Mattacks for studio work because of his firm expert backbeat and the quietly intuitive way he articulates basic rock 'n' thump. Certainly in his seven on-off-and-on-again years with Fairport Convention during the late 60s and 70s, he was a critical fulcrum in the group's mercurial balance of traditional folk allegiances, fireside warmth and good humor, and charged progressive rock ambition, in much the way Levon Helm rocked steady with the studious country-blues classicism of the Band. Which is strange when you consider Mattacks came to Fairport straight from a series of English Lawrence Welk-style dance bands and thought groups like Blood Sweat & Tears—"complex time signatures, jazzy horns, phew!"—were the real deal.

"It amazes me, this question of *how* I did it," he says of his abrupt switch from cha-cha-cha to whirl-around-the-maypole boogie. "It was just logic. A song had so many verses and it was a story about some geezer and a witch and there were these terrible comings and goings. The structure of the song was partly determined by the fact that Swarb (violinist Dave Swarbrick) worked out the arrangement per verse. One line might have seven meters in it, another line would have eight.

"For the dance tunes, the jigs and reels, I couldn't do just 4/4 because it sounds too staid. And I couldn't just do the high-steps. So I figured out these tunes needed two backbeats. I just combined them, half-polka drumming and half-Ringo backbeat."

Levon Helm, ironically, was just the name to drop with Fairport Convention in the *Liege And Lief* and *Full House* days. The fatter, deadened drum sound on those two albums ("There's no highs on the cymbals," Mattacks points out) was the direct result of long hours spent in communion with *The Band* and *Stage Fright*. But when he confesses other influences like Tony Meehan of veteran British instrumental group the Shadows, session king Snakey Jim Keltner, earthy swinger Tony Williams and Swedish ECM drummer Jon Christensen ("not an innovator, but articulate"), you begin

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hear in Mattacks' reliable attack a modest versatility that enables him to ease gracefully from the jazzy lilt of Nick Heyward's records to the rainbow folk eloquence of Richard Thompson and the Fairport splinter group, the Albion Band.

Of slight compact build with spectacles and elfin features that make him look like an Oxford divinity student with mischief on his mind, Mattacks insists he is just a "meat-and-potatoes drummer," that his best work is a matter of "my personality responding to a situation." Yet his recent contributions to Paul McCartney's *Tug Of War* and *Pipes Of Peace* LPs suggest there is more to his technique than he'll admit.

"He knows how he wants the songs to go," he says of the ex-Beatle's studio manner. "But there have been times when I would suggest things for certain parts and he would accept them or elaborate on them. On 'Through Our Love' (the swelling romantic finale of *Pipes Of Peace*), I didn't come in until halfway through the song. Then there's a key change and it takes off at that point.

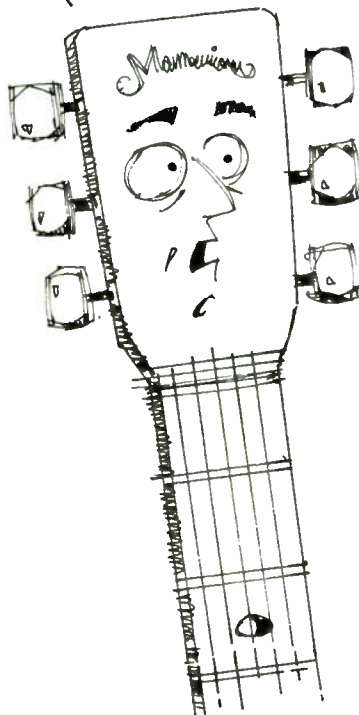
"I played the track and said, 'I've got an idea. How about from that point onwards I overdub another snare drum and get this really big sound. I can use a deeper drum and if we speed the track up and play it back, it will sound deeper.' And Paul said, 'Yeah, that's a great idea, we'll do it.'" Too bad it wasn't a totally original idea. To Mattacks' chagrin, McCartney later recalled that was exactly the same technique the Beatles used for the drum sound on "Rain."

Other session misadventures include Nick Heyward's post-Haircut 100 LP *Whistle Down The Wind*, on which Mattacks was called to overdub new drum parts—after the guitars, vocals, brass and strings had already been laid down. There's also the film score he did with George Fenton, who scored the music for *Gandhi*. "I couldn't see the white on the paper—the damn charts were black," Mattacks laughs. "We were cutting it live, there was a seven-piece rhythm section, brass and thirty strings. And I have this terrible headphone mix with the high-hat, second trumpet, thirty violins and this click track in the background with me straining to hear it."

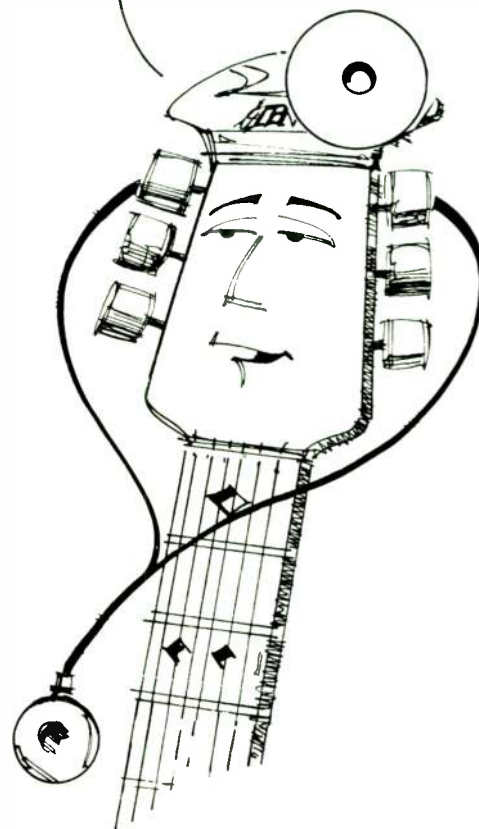
What is interesting about Mattacks' drumming is how little his kit will change from gig to gig. He is basically using the same setup on Richard and Linda Thompson's *Shoot Out The Lights*, *Death Wish II* and a recent BBC television series backing up Leo Sayer as he did on *Liege And Lief*—a cymbal low over the bass drum, Buddy Rich-style, and one tom on the bass. What used to be a Gretsch is now a Yamaha Recording Series kit and Mattacks has four of them, two studio workhorses with different "dead" and "live" qualities and two road setups, one a quiet compact ar-

# KAMIAN Talking PegHeads # 1

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AND STRUNG OUT...  
I SOUND TERRIBLE.  
WHAT CAN I DO?

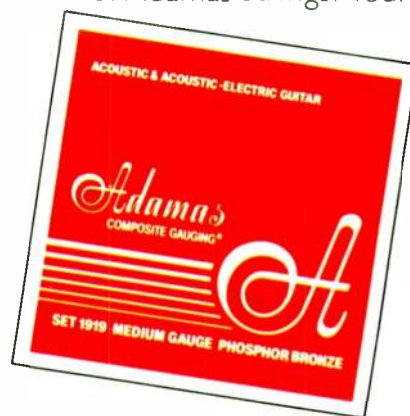


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rangement that he's used on Richard Thompson tours and a bigger flashier variation that came in handy when he recently toured with Nick Heyward.

"I'm very old-fashioned by contemporary standards," he shrugs when talk turns to equipment. "These days, everybody's all over the tom-toms and not using cymbals, that very Peter Gabriel-Phil Collins way of playing. I'm more into backbeat than anything else." Now that's not entirely true. While he will often mix his Yamaha toms (8-inch, 10-inch, 12-inch, 14-inch and 15-inch, the latter two floor toms) with old Gretsch and Ludwig snares, Mattacks' true passion is cymbals, Zildjian by name. Over the years he has collected nearly a hundred different models and shapes that he will select for particular sessions. "When I'm working with fat pop stars," he grins, "I normally have an extra case with ten or fifteen specialty cymbals I can pull out and use." And the one thing that is standard on all his kits is the high-hat, which always consists of a 13-inch medium thin cymbal over a 14-inch heavy "so I don't get any airlock."

For a drummer, Dave Mattacks also spends a surprising amount of time at the ivories. He doesn't own a single drum machine but is well-stocked with Yamaha keyboards, his favorite being the CS70M synthesizer with which he discreetly tarts up the experimental folk sparkle of the last two Albion Band records, *Light Shining* and *Shuffle Off*.

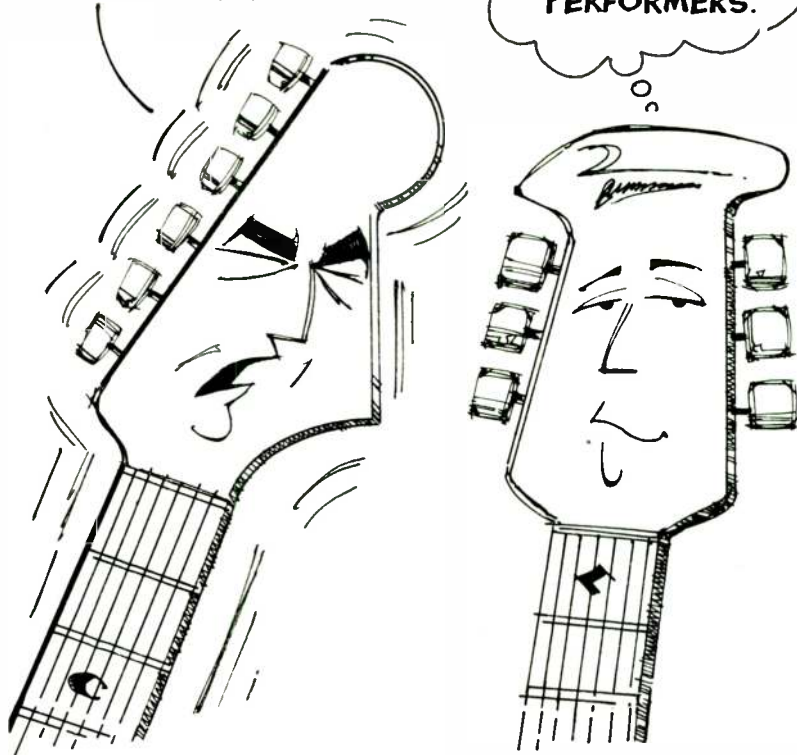
But there is something about his single-minded attitude toward drumming, his refusal to sit on the laurels accumulated during his Fairport tenures, that has allowed him to converse so freely with strikingly different artists and genres. Instead of playing to please, Mattacks is simply pleased to play, with anybody. He is bitterly amused by the attitude taken by the acidic British press towards him as a result of his divided loyalty between Richard Thompson and Nick Heyward. "I go from being a sensitive percussionist blah blah blah with Richard to a washed-up 70s hack in one easy move." He tells a story about the time Heyward was on British radio running down the lineup for his touring band—Mattacks, ex-Sutherland Brothers/AI Stewart guitarist Tim Renwick—when the DJ suddenly exclaimed, "My God, it sounds like a folk group!"

"The drum licks remain the same," Mattacks cracks in conclusion, "only the lyrics are changed to protect the innocent. Look, I'm aware of the differences in the music. But I try to apply the same standards. My attitude is the same, my responsibility is the same. I still feel disappointed if I come out of a studio or off stage and I don't feel I've played well. I will never say, 'Oh, that's good enough for him.'" ☐

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from page 70 interpreted 'Adult Education' as sexual initiation, rites of passage."

Songwriter Daryl Hall came up with the concept after meeting Pope in London and asking him to do the video. "He had basically the same idea of what to do as I did," recalls Daryl in his trailer between takes on the set. "That there is life after high school. I pictured a parallel universe below New York City of granite rock, artifacts and caves. So we set up an alternative civilization that exists underneath the real city. Everything the initiates use in their ceremony has trickled down from above."

As the giant Louma crane tracks into the Cecil B. DeMille-vintage Hollywood set, replete with multiple pools of light, a

sacrificial altar, towering Egyptian columns, flaming torches and a man-sized sphere, the gangly director is shouting encouragement. "The operative word is symbolic!" he implores.

"I always work within very solid structures which are well embedded in my head," he says, insisting he never uses storyboards (though he does do line drawings, which Al McDowell helps him shade in).

"I'm a great believer in improvisation. When you work with musicians, you're dealing with people who aren't actors. They're liable to be different each day. You're not working with a constant. So I try to compensate for that by staying loose and seeing how much I can push."

Assistant director Brooke Kennedy,

an experienced New York production manager, praised Pope's professionalism. "He's taken the time to learn his craft. He knows what he wants and how to get it. He's a pleasure on the set. He doesn't actually have a shot list because he only begins to visualize what he wants when he's standing on the set. But you couldn't do that on a feature film."

Which is all right by Tim because he's one of the few video directors who doesn't necessarily aspire to helming full-length movies. "I still love television," he insists. "Many people making these videos use the language of feature film. I like going into people's homes and being seen by forty million strangers. It's amazing. Leaders like Roosevelt and Churchill didn't even have the ability to reach so many people. That's why I use the language of TV. From working with politicians, I know the power of a close-up or a wide shot as well as the value of structure.

"I'm not a filmic person. I don't believe in that crap. I try to create truth in front of the camera. With big, inverted commas and a small 't' of course. I prefer shooting in 35mm and transferring to video for editing, but I'm not afraid to go out with a Super 8 or a VHS camera either. I'm the person who squiggles on the film with a felt pen. Whatever it takes. Film purists shudder at some of the things I do."

Like filming an unmoving Neil Young lip-synching "Wonderin'" at half-speed, so that when the song played normally the background would appear to be moving twice as fast. "That was based on the idea that Neil lived his life at half-speed," says Tim. "We had Neil sing the song twice as slow while we shot at twelve and a half frames per second. Neil himself appears to be singing in real time while everything in back of him is going twice as fast as normal."

Actually, the only constant factor in Tim Pope's method is his insistence on never merely restating the plot of a song. "I like to set up a situation where the video works organically with the song and complements it," he says. "You can't just impose a concept on a song.

"I work with music so much these days, I can't be objective. Every piece of pop becomes a film for me now. At home, I can't listen to anything but classical music and jazz to keep my sanity. As a track is being played, I begin coming up with storyboards. Pictures instinctively go through my head."

Pope feels the future of the medium entails musicians and video directors working together from the outset, a method of creation he already experiences with bands like Soft Cell, where he gets involved at the songwriting stage, or when they enter the recording studio. But not all artists share this point of view, including Hall & Oates.

*continued on page 94*

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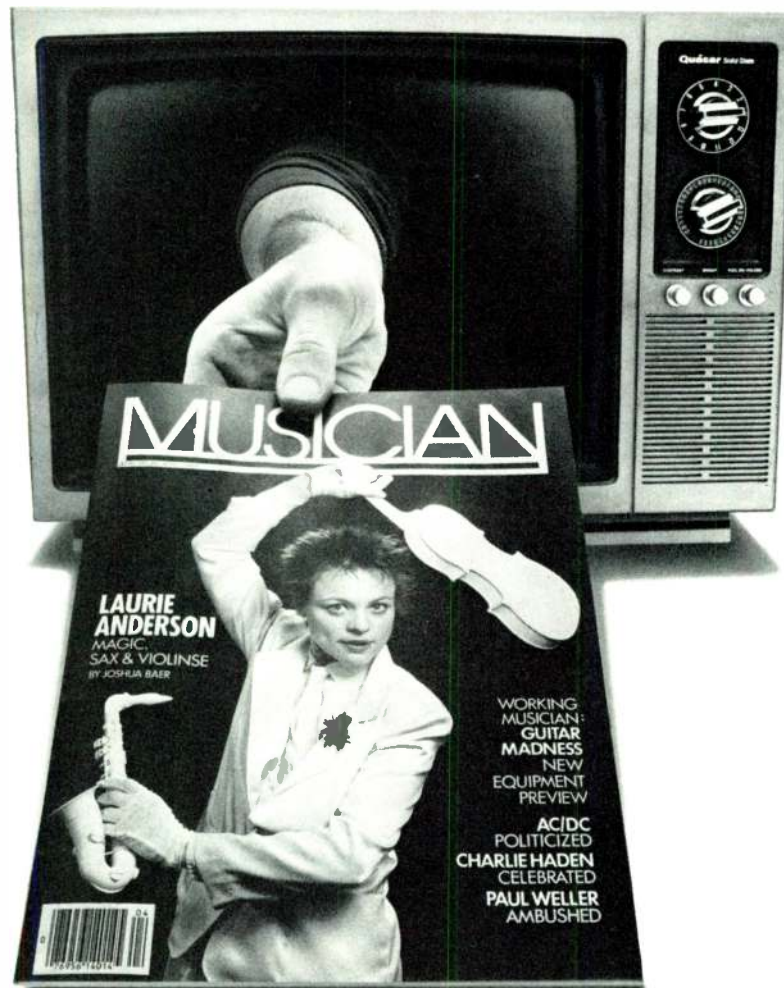
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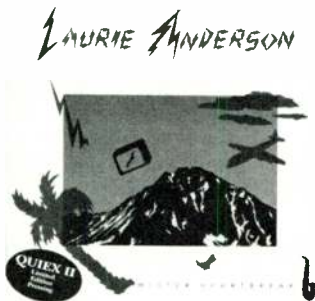
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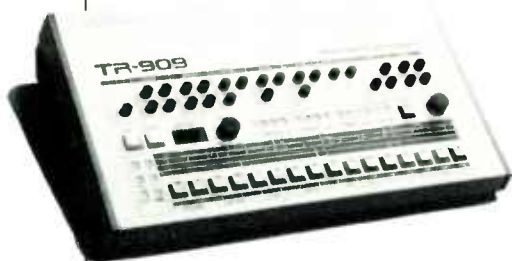


## MUSICIAN

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# BEST BUYS

**Roland** unveils its next generation of drum machines, the TR-909 Rhythm Composer. New sound-generating technology delivers nine studio-quality drum sounds: bass drum, snare drum, low tom, mid tom and high tom, hand clap, rim shot, high-hat and cymbal. Two different degrees of dynamics



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**ADA** announces its 2.56i Digital Delay, a full-functioned delay processor for both live performance and recording uses. The 2.56i produces delay times from a short 0.3 millisecond for high flanging to over 2½ seconds of delay for digital tape loop effects—all at a full 16kHz bandwidth. A LED Rate Indicator blinks at a rate equal to the delay time for accurate, real-time echo setting. For producing special effects, the 2.56i has Regeneration,



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**Carver** has introduced its Magnetic Field Power Amplifier PM-1.5, a professional low-feedback, high head-room amplifier. When Bob Carver introduced his first Magnetic Field Power Amplifier, the M-400, a 200-watt-per-channel amplifier housed in a seven-inch cube and weighing less than ten pounds, he was deluged with requests from sound reinforcement professionals for a "pro" version. The result: the Carver PM-1.5, a thoroughly road-tested and bench-tested amplifier designed and engineered to provide sonic excellence coupled with professional durability. Features include: fully proportional fan cooling; no "thermalling out"; high power, light weight, low profile; recessed front panel controls; adjustable speaker protection circuit thresholds; remote turn-on sequencer with soft-start "power up" mode; dynamic head-room controller; dual modes of precision balanced inputs with one percent resistors; clipping eliminator; easy-to-see LED power monitoring;



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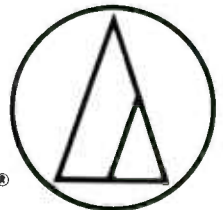
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# RECORD

R E V I E W S

## King Crimson *Three Of A Perfect Pair* (E.G./Warner Bros.)



Through each of its Robert Fripp - engineered incarnations, King Crimson has always been about reconciling intellectual splendor with the simple, eloquent pounding of a rock 'n' roll heart. Certainly with *Discipline*, the 1981 debut of the Belew/Bruford/Levin configuration, the band—and particularly founding guitarist Fripp—came closer to that perfect marriage than at any time since the *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* and *Starless And Bible Black* LPs nearly ten years earlier. There was an unmistakable scent of salty locker room sweat stirred into the group's new intensive dance math, the thrill of hearing brainy sessioneers like Adrian Belew and Tony Levin energized by the fresh air of emancipation.

That rippling art-rock muscle, the atomic crack of their advanced schematics broken down into powerful thump, still counts heavily in the current Crimson's soul-and-science equation. "Sleepless," the mighty zip-funk gallop that sparks the first side of *Three Of A Perfect Pair*, lifts off with machine-gun bursts of Levin's thunder-thumbs bass, slashed with ballet glides and kamikaze plunges of synthetic Fripp/Belew guitar. But the hairline crack between head games and heartbeat that appeared on the group's '82 album *Beat* has widened here into a dangerous chasm that literally splits this album in two.

Of the actual "songs" dominating side one, only "Man With The Open Heart," with its graceful Oriental bends and the pastel shades of Belew's multi-tracked pleading, recalls the relaxed pop elasticity of "Heartbeat" on *Beat*, easily the most *natural* recording Crimson has ever made. Otherwise, the band's interlocking riffs and coyote vocals sound too rigid. These are great ideas—the leapfrog guitar pattern and half-step rhythm strategy of the title track, the angular cut of "Model Man"'s weird mar-

tial walk—cut off at the pass in the interest of group democracy. The delicate balance of power that holds Crimson together—basically four headstrong rock intellects desperately trying to be team players—too often blunts the impact and authority of the music.

You can feel drummer Bill Bruford stiffen in frustration at the stripped-down kick of those side one songs. At other times, Fripp retreats to a rhythm guitar role in deference to Bruford's native energy. But the difference between Crimson in theory and Crimson in flight becomes even more crucial when they demonstrate on side two how far beyond their inhibitions they can really go. The instrumentals "Industry" and "No Warning" are frantic, scary abstracts, Belew's rhino guitar wail running at dangerous odds with the bristling torpedo thrusts of Fripp's own, while Levin and Bruford carve out deep black holes of rhythm space with zoom bass and stark percussion. In between, Bruford's talking drums, a crafty mixture of electronic code and jungle slang, speak volumes under Belew's paranoid babble in "Dig Me."

Ironically, *Three Of A Perfect Pair* is most frustrating at its greatest—like the incandescent reprise of "Larks' Tongues In Aspic," with its industrial guitars vigorously erected at awesome *Metropolis* angles—because it shows how wide of the mark Crimson threatens to fall. Of course, few albums are this potentially brilliant. But when you hear this Crimson really burn, you wonder how much more you're missing. — **David Fricke**

## R.E.M. *Reckoning* (I.R.S.)

### R.E.M. *Reckoning*

On their second album, *Reckoning*, R.E.M. takes dead aim at the charge that "nothing" lies at the core of the elaborate musical textures they wove on last year's *Murmur*. "Why are you trying to second-guess me?/ Who will be your book this season?" taunts singer Michael Stipe,

before bolting into "Second Guessing"'s confident, guitar-charged chorus: "Here we are, here we are."

Indeed, *Reckoning* offers a clearer musical and thematic portrait of R.E.M. than did either *Murmur* or the *Chronicle Town* EP. Convinced that it was more important to be felt than understood, R.E.M. conveyed emotional meaning on their first two records through densely layered music that surged and surprised, and lyrics that, even when they could be made out, evoked more than they stated.

On *Reckoning* the group (and producers Mitch Easter and Don Dixon) stripped away the layers of overdubs and effects and designed a cleaner guitar/bass/drums/vocal sound more reflective of R.E.M.'s propulsive stage show. Strangely, this studio austerity produced expansiveness, not constriction, as if the band found it easier to test new styles once their essence had been defined.

*Reckoning's* biggest surprise is "Rockville," a rollicking country heart-break ditty ("At night I drink myself to sleep/ And pretend I don't care that you're not here with me") that Stipe chillingly subverts at the bridge: "It's not as though I really need you/ If you were here I'd only bleed you." "S. Central Rain (I'm Sorry)," "Letter Never Sent" and "Camera" enact the struggle between distance and desire that threads through so much of R.E.M.'s material, but here the tone is more personal and sympathetic, less abstract than it's been before.

Peter Buck's fierce ringing guitar rhythms heighten Stipe's quivering-voiced frustration (an effect he attains by hammering his chest) over the girl with "Pretty Persuasion," while his Velvets-like droning adds a note of dread to the murky atmospherics of "Time After Time." *Reckoning's* conclusion finds the band rocking back out on the road in "Little America," where the sameness of the scene ("Another Greenville, another Magic Mart") and an off-hand comment to the group's manager ("Jefferson, I think we're lost") suggest a much more profound and pervasive spiritual bankruptcy.

When a combo this young insists on a



"reckoning," is that arrogance? I reckon it's not when the album they deliver displays a reach that unquestionably establishes them among the half-dozen most important bands in the country. With *Reckoning*, R.E.M.'s pilgrimage gains still more momentum. The only question of significance now is how much better can they possibly get? — **Anthony DeCurtis**

### The The

*Soul Mining* (Epic)

### The Smiths

*The Smiths* (Warner Bros.)



"Fifteen minutes with you/ I wouldn't say no," sings the Smiths' Morrissey, echoing Warhol's famous dictum. Well, there you go again, as

President Reagan is wont to scold his opponents. Yet two more Next Big Things from the Land of Boy George, these U.K. exports are hot prospects from opposite ends of the pop spectrum. The The are actually a one-man band, Matt Johnson, from the same Some Bizarre stable which produced Soft Cell, Depeche Mode and Blancmange, while the Smiths are a surprisingly populist guitar-oriented entry from the ordinarily radical Rough Trade combine. Both groups are a tribute to the democratic nature of the British charts; whether they have a chance to duplicate that success here is probably directly related to how well they translate to MTV.

Despite their lineage, the The are not just another heartless synthsoul outfit. Jack-of-all-trades Johnson has sculpted multi-layered parallel landscapes of sound on *Soul Mining*, firmly grounded in a chest-thumping, primal rhythm machine beat, with an inner weave utilizing real instruments (or has the computer created yet another illusion?). Live or Memorex, there's a lot more going on here than meets the ear. Accordions-along-the-Seine mutate into sea-sawing Irish fiddles on the English 45, "This Is The Day," as a Doors-like Farfisa riff haunts the mock pessimism of "The Sinking Feeling." A muted funereal bugle marks the The's "Perfect," a take on Suicide's "Cherie," of all things, while even chic solipsism and self-pity can't mar the mantra conun-Drum of the title track, with its refrain paraphrase of Murphy's Law, "Something always goes wrong when things are going right...." Out-of-control boogie-woogie piano underlines the anxiety in "Uncertain Smile."

For all its seamless craftsmanship and thick tribal stomp, *Soul Mining* never does quite coalesce into more than a

## "Cyan't Blame de Youth"

By Timothy White

These are the transitional times that try the souls of the riddim rank-and-file, but let's face up to the nature of the test: reggae will work its way out of its current quandary only by keeping its mind on its work. I'm not sure the signing of Yellowman by CBS is very encouraging, but the news that the Melody Makers, Bob Marley's brood, are in league with EMI to be produced by Steve "Culture Club" Levine most certainly is. Contrary to popular belief, the youth of Jamaica are into Boy George and Eurythmics, as well as Michael Jackson and DeBarge. Once again, Jamaica is looking beyond its shores for fresh musical grist. ("You have reached us...and we have developed; it's good," said the avuncular Bunny Wailer recently. "Because we are trying hard to reach the Americans"—plus the Anglo studio-synth-whiz fans.) Yet the real change will come when teenage ghetto musicians challenge the hegemony of the elder rockers statesmen, and win the right to back up their contemporaries.

So, while the future will simply have to wait for a bit longer, Sly & Robbie themselves are out canvassing for seasoned new blood to bridge the gap, and their hot tout is twenty-seven-year-old **Ini Kamoze**, whose "Trouble You A Trouble Me," which opens his new Island LP, was a big smash on the island last year. Instrumentally, Sly & Robbie have turned their backs on their trademark density, both rhythms and mix-wise, to serve up a sound as tranquilizing as it is frothy. And there is a throaty sensuality to Ini's vocal tags that both distills and mocks the slack (smutty) trend of much of the male singers in the last two years.

*Live And Direct* (Island) is what it claims to be. The Britain-based **Aswad** avoids any nods to current reggae fashion, pursuing a scorched-earth policy in a blistering performance that blends the best of everything from lock-step lover's rock sashays, *satta*-style rhythms and soca jamdowns to marvelously thick horn flourishes in the classic rockers mode. Lead vocalist Brinsley Forde is one of the most unpretentious and engaging singers in all of reggae, and the throng at the Notting Hill Gate Carnival in 1983 is justifiably delirious as he spurs and presses the transported band through "Rockers Medley."

Nonetheless, the trophy for reggae LP of 1984 must be entrusted to **Steel Pulse** for sakekeeping on the strength of *Earth Crisis* (Elektra), an album so texturally arresting, rhythmically



inspired, harmonically enchanting and immaculately produced that it will stand as a benchmark record for years to come. The gifted David Hinds once again guides a crew that is so canny in every category on this self-produced gem that there'd be nothing left for, say, a Quincy Jones or an Adrian Sherwood to do after they were finished but skim the ashtrays for spliffs and shut off the lights. There aren't any less-than-exceptional tracks here, and when the cry goes out to "Give me back my radio!" in "Rollerskates," I cringe for fear somebody will snatch this windfall from my midst.

Devotees of lover's rock can once again worship at the altar of their deity, **Gregory Isaacs**, whose "Private Secretary," on *Out Deh!* (Mango) is the ultra-debonaire sequel to his infamous "Night Nurse." The Roots Radics band puts some keen edges on the man's effortless delivery, particularly on the title track. "I was tired of the jails but the jails wasn't tired of me," he sings with his best Jerry Butler nonchalance, referring to his recent, umpteenth gun bust.

Lastly, *Making History* (Island), the long-awaited new release by **Linton Kwesi Johnson**, finds reggae's premier poet in a musically spirited setting, mixing a *shebeen* brand of blues-jazz with the one-drop as he analyzes the chilling international bumbblings of the American "Eagle" and the Russian "Bear." As Johnson coolly counsels, whenever cynical superpowers parry around the nuclear panic button, most of the real bullying—and dying—gets done in the Third World, where the stakes and spoils reside.

And so, a few tempered comers and reggae stalwarts have stepped just outside the unbroken inner circle to keep the scene original and vital. Just as soon as several bold young upstarts leap *into* the ring, reggae may regain the dynamic tension it craves to develop further. Truly, it's a ripe moment for some savvy *sprea bwai* or two to turn the beat around.

series of evanescent, overlapping licks. On the other hand, the Smiths' singer/lyricist Morrissey and his musical cohort, guitarist Johnny Marr, attempt to create a full-blown pop statement, with a fatalistic romanticism that is self-critical but never maudlin.

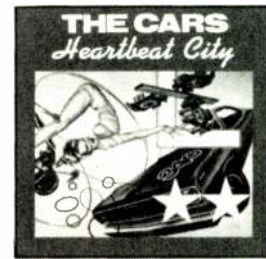
Morrissey's been dubbed the Oscar Wilde of rock, having penned a trio of sexually ambiguous love songs that have each struck a nerve with the British record-buying public: "This Charming Man," "Hand In Glove" and "What Difference Does It Make?," all included on this remarkably poised debut LP. Combining the nasal drawl of the Only Ones' Peter Perrett with the world-weariness of Velvets-era Lou Reed and the angst-ridden *wanderlust* of pre-leprechaun

Jonathan Richman, Morrissey provides the head while Marr's jangly Rickenbacker cuts to the heart of Pop Then (Byrds, Searchers, Hollies, et al.) and Now (R.E.M., U2, Alarm and so on). This is one group of critical darlings that might just transcend cult status.

Certainly they aren't confined to the doom *und* gloom of obvious forebears such as Joy Division or Siouxsie & the Banshees. Not with great lines like "I dreamt about you last night/ And fell out of bed twice" ("Reel Around The Fountain") or "I'm not the man you think I am" ("Pretty Girls Make Graves") or "Does the body rule the mind or does the mind rule the body/ I dunno" ("Still Ill"). Like Aztec Camera's Roddy Frame, Morrissey is a throwback to the classic sing-

er/songwriters. Similarly, the Smiths' neo-folk-rock has emerged with a holistic vision, the kind of world view that's so explicit it doesn't even need a video. Now, *that* would be a refreshing change, wouldn't it? — **Roy Trakin**

### The Cars *Heartbeat City* (Elektra)



Like their namesake, the Cars have fulfilled the American dream. Millions of people buy them. They're dependable. They get you where

you want to go, with no surprises.

No surprises. In the two years since their last album, the Cars have had plenty of foreign competition—much of it from bands following a similarly steely aesthetic. The most immediately surprising thing about the Cars' fifth album is that it's the first without producer Roy Thomas Baker, replaced by fellow Brit Mutt Lange. The switch doesn't affect the Cars' sound: smooth as always, with Elliot Easton's high-powered guitar held in check by Greg Hawkes' sophisticated keyboards and those shock-absorbing vocal choruses.

Of course, this year's Cars have made some requisite model changes. The opening "Hello Again" contains a fashionable bit of ersatz DJ/turntable effects. More promising is the continuation of a trend launched on the preceding *Shake It Up*: songwriter Ric Ocasek imbuing his romantic protagonists with more than two dimensions. From album title to "Magic" (and out-and-out love song!), Ocasek strives to break away from the stereotypical Cars lyric of the frustrated lover, obliquely sketched. Not that that theme doesn't dominate *Heartbeat City*—the ice-bitch/love object of "Why Can't I Have You" is the usual Ocasek *femme fatale*—but even "You Might Think," an assembly-line Cars product if ever there was one, has humanizing detail ("you flash that fragile smile") as well as the trademark eight-to-the-bar guitar pulse.

With easily assimilable eight-bar themes and a narrow harmonic compass, *Heartbeat City's* music isn't likely to break new paths in pop. (Then again, Arnold Schoenberg never went platinum.) Two cuts, both slower tunes, do show the group opening up a little. "Who's Gonna Drive You Home" has a pleasant, low-key feel—the Cars' "Every Breath You Take." "Jacki" makes an inconclusive final track, with its moody keyboard washes. Small steps for the Cars, giant leaps for the listening audience.

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repeated song lyrics and careful arrangements? The Cars could do worse, as do many bands who aren't half as popular. As a musical Ford Motor Company, the Cars have yet to design a Mustang. But at least they haven't given us an Edsel. — **Scott Isler**

**Philly Joe Jones & Dameronia**  
**Look Stop Listen** (Uptown Records)



Great intentions don't necessarily produce great results—witness last year's *To Tadd With Love*, Dameronia's first tribute to bop era composer/arranger Tadd Dameron. Murky recording and uneven solos marred what should have been a revelation: thirty-year-old charts revamped for a contemporary nonet. But with the aid of a real producer (Helen Keane, the late Bill Evans' right-hand woman) and a first rate guest soloist (Johnny Griffin, the "Little Giant" of the tenor saxophone), Dameronia get it right the second time around, turning in a set worthy of the man they are honoring on *Look Stop Listen*.

Tadd Dameron was frequently undervalued as a composer because his

masterpieces were so modestly drawn. Understanding that a bop tune could be more than a quick unison head followed by a set of chord changes for the soloists to blow on, Dameron balanced sharp, catchy turns of melody with instrumental colors unusually lush for the bop era. Thankfully, under the leadership of former Dameron associate and hard bop drummer extraordinaire Philly Joe Jones, Dameronia prove themselves a repertory band that know Dameron intended his music to be performed in jazz clubs, not museums. The material here ranges from the familiar ("If You Could See Me Now," "Our Delight") to the undeservedly obscure ("Focus," "Look, Stop, And Listen"), and without resorting to rhythmic updating (a la Blythe's tribute to Monk), Dameronia's readings of these charts manage to make them sound as fresh and intense as they must have when first performed by Dameron's own groups. The distinction between sidemen and soloists, so unclear the first time around, has been worked out now, with virtuosos Frank Wess (alto) and Walter Davis (piano) dividing the lion's share of solo space with Griffin, and dependable journey-men Cecil Payne, Charles Davis, Virgil Jones and Benny Powell handling the ensembles with panache. Disciplined by the arrangements, Griffin—usually a loquacious sort—turns in some of the

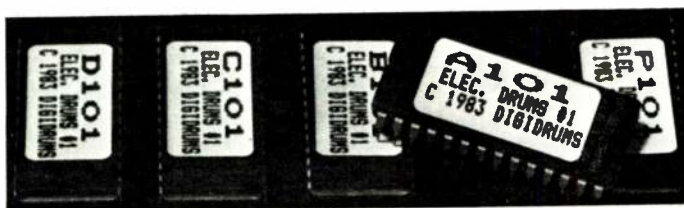
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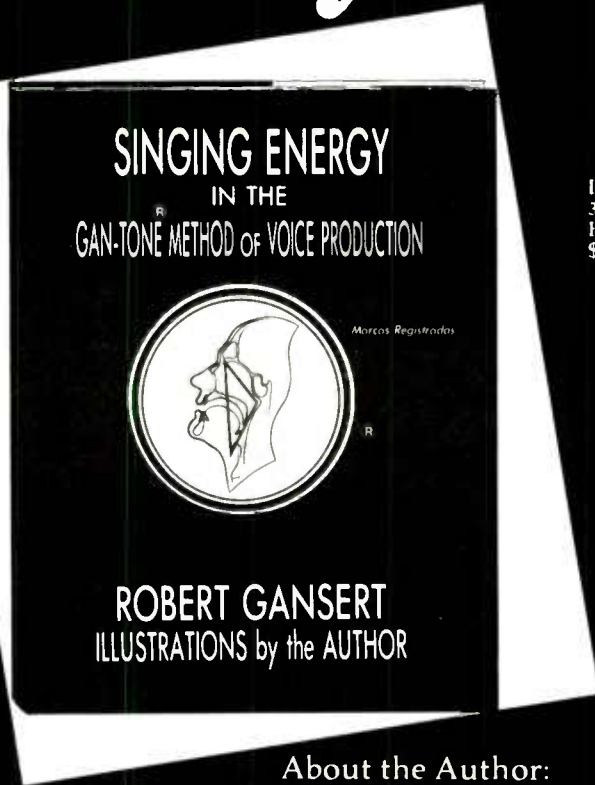
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Robert Gansert has been a performing vocalist for over twenty years, and has been featured in numerous concerts and recordings. His work has been internationally acclaimed. He is currently a noted instructor at the Carnegie Hall studios.

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leanest, most well constructed blowing he has put on record since returning to the U.S. in the late-70s.

To show they have a future outside the confines of Dameron's works, Dameronia also do rousing, uptempo justice to Benny Golson's "Killer Joe" (there's another overlooked composer—Golsononia anyone?). — **Steve Futterman**

### The Go-Go's Talk Show (I.R.S.)



Car 'n' band dance bands are a pop staple with a frequently short shelf life. One or two albums into some of these careers, then it's Judy's turn to cry. Between the sophomore-slumped *Vacation* and *Talk Show*, apparently, it was the Go-Go's turn. Not that they were ever cartoons, but *Talk Show* has an inner voice of sadness and anger that we might not have expected. It stumbles under that emotional weight as often as it runs, but no bones get broken. Some pop bands are crippled forever after their first steps into the dark side.

The tangible changes from the first two LPs are small and sturdy, the unglamorous plodding toward creative maturation. Belinda Carlisle is really singing from her guts now—phrasing less ingenuously, pushing her range, stretching for more subtle dynamics and textures. Guitarists Charlotte Caffey and Kathy Valentine are becoming masters of minutiae. The solos in "Turn To You," "You Thought," "Capture The Light" and "Forget That Day" exponentially increase their melodies' eloquence—in other tracks, the guitar work is the eloquence. Everyone is trying hard to play with more thought, more fire.

Still, the Go-Go's are a singles band, and one's rightful wait for jukebox heaven isn't altogether rewarded here. Side one comes closer than side two, and with a reward you weren't waiting for: the best party songs are the ones with the darkest and angriest hearts. With the exception of side two's "Yes Or No," all of *Talk Show* reaches to express loss and the hope that confronts loss with sweat on its forehead. Into the narrow spaces of party rock the Go-Go's are pushing metaphors, similes, turns of phrase; the tensions of the tight fit could force the band toward extraordinary work. "Beneath The Blue Sky" is a preview of the possible, a moving anti-nuke song precisely because it's so simple and immediate. *Talk Show* doesn't guarantee more of the same later on—but at sock hops, you take it one dance at a time. — **Laura Fissinger**

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### Thompson Twins *Into The Gap* (Arista)



Pop instincts are funny things. Occasionally you'll come across a performer or group with a melodic sense that just won't quit, but more

often than not it's the *sound* of the music that catches your ear, not just the melody itself. Sure, that occasionally leads to being suckered by a neat noise once in a while, but on the other hand, it's equally possible for an otherwise average song to be made irresistible by tweaking the right instruments. Consider, if you will, the case of the Thompson Twins.

Obviously, this is a band that knows how to sell a melody—"In The Name Of Love" and its successors proved that without trouble. But with *Into The Gap*, the Thompsons have made a breathtaking show of just how adept they are with a telling detail, an illuminating flourish. "You Take Me Up" features a melody that's just a little too busy to stand out on its own, but after the Thompsons have girded it with an underpinning of marimba, set it on a slippery shuffle and sprinkled the verses with homey harmonica obbligatos, it's hard *not* to sit transfixed. Similarly, the title track dusts off the tired ploy of thrift-shop Orientalisms to give an otherwise silly song an air of camp glamour.

At times, the gimmicks can be as slight as a synthesizer setting (cf. the cool computer pulse of "Day After Day"), but they invariably make the album seem dazzling even when it isn't. Or, at least, oughtn't be. Of course, that means there's a lot here that qualifies as little more than this month's aural wallpaper, but it's worth noting that the Thompsons are never the least bit coy about the disposability of their material. After all, they seem to say, this month's wallpaper is *always* going to be better than *last* month's. — J.D. **Considine**

### Weather Report *Domino Theory* (Columbia)

Weather Report mixes a bona fide jazz sensibility with rich electronic textures and rocking Third World rhythms so skillfully that the hyphens don't show. And co-leaders Josef Zawinul and Wayne Shorter are among the most expressive composers in contemporary music. But there have been signs on the last several albums that







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Zawinul and Shorter may be getting tired of being Weather Report.

Happily, *Domino Theory* has a little more punch than the group has shown on vinyl in some time. Some of the tracks, like the synthesizer-heavy Zawinul tone poems "The Peasant" and "Domino Theory," have an overly familiar, almost formulaic sound. But there is a visceral excitement reminiscent of Weather Report's earlier days in selections like Shorter's lilting, Caribbean-inflected "Predator" and especially Zawinul's exuberant "Db Waltz," which offers not only compositional ingenuity but also solid, soulful improvising by both the composer and Shorter—something that tends to be in short supply on a Weather Report record.

The renewed energy level found on much of *Domino Theory* is largely attributable to the hot young rhythm section of bassist Victor Bailey, drummer Omar Hakim and percussionist Jose Rossy. On their second album with Weather Report, they sound like they belong; Hakim, who from time to time lights a welcome fire under Shorter's saxophone, even gets co-producer credit.

Artistically, *Domino Theory* breaks no new ground, but it's got the quirkily funky groove of a good Weather Report album. Commercially, it may be the group's biggest record since *Heavy Weather*, for an odd reason: the lead track, a pretty ballad called "Can It Be Done," which has almost nothing to do with Weather Report. The focus is on guest vocalist Carl Anderson; if Shorter is there at all, he's inaudible; and the song was written not by anyone in the band but by New Orleans pianist Willie Tee. Hard-core fans may find themselves skipping this cut, but I bet they'll also find themselves playing "Db Waltz" over and over. —

**Peter Keepnews**

### Elvis Presley

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"Yessir, he probably got more than the \$18 I got for each *Hayride* appearance. Mebbe that's why we fooled around with the false starts on 'That's All Right' (which you call 'That's All Right Mamma'), and why I blew the lyrics on 'Maybelline' and 'Tweedle Dee.' That last cut, sir, don't sound like my band of Scotty Moore and Bill Black playing along with me, as you wrote on your back cover. I never had no pedal-steel guitar in *my* group! And wasn't that a broadcast from Gladewater, Texas, not Shreveport, Louisiana? And—'scuse me, sir—why do you keep spellin' it 'Shreevport'?"

"Details, details! Look, Elvis, these are historic performances. We know they aren't the very first live recordings—we're saving that for another record—and the sound isn't so great, but people wanna hear this stuff! We got you doing a steamy 'Hound Dog' and a fine 'Baby Let's Play House'—I know, we called it 'I Wanna Play House With You.' We got lotsa girls screaming in the background. It's fun! Besides, didn't we wait a respectful seven years after you died before putting it out?"

"Well, sir, I'm just glad you did." — **Scott Isler**

### Billy Idol

**Rebel Yell** (Chrysalis)



It's mildly intriguing how MTV determinism and the canonization of late-60s white rock (and its sometimes tawdry trappings) have

helped shape several self-conscious, derivative but by no means untalented new acts. John Cougar, who made a highly promising LP recently in homage to the Stones, is one example. Billy Idol is, marginally, another. The title track of *Rebel Yell* is redolent of the "Soul Kitchen" brand of party-cum-sex records Jim Morrison made so few of, but it's too well-recorded and sung, and takes itself far less seriously, to be considered a throwback. Unfortunately, the rest of the album's A-side is utterly without merit, although "Blue Highway" seems to indicate that Billy can also scan (and recall the gist of) the titles of bestselling books.

"Flesh For Fantasy" starts the second round off with a contained yet surprisingly seductive slice of ballroom rock that merits an extended spin around the dance floor. Not a shred of irony here, but I still like it a helluva lot. "Catch My Fall" is an unfey and far less interesting circular outing. Like "Crank Call," it has a thin melody built around a dumb catchphrase, and is punctuated by Idol's usually irksome trademark growl. "(Do Not) Stand In The Shadows" is a tepid electronic diddle not interesting enough to

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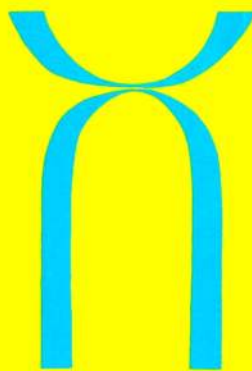
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comment on. However, "The Dead Next Door" is a sweet sun's-up sequel to the Doors' "The End," and with the right director it could make for a, er, diverting video—after the release of "Flesh For Fantasy" has exhausted the LP's singles.

Since Idol's post-Generation (and/or Gen) X output has been repackaged a lot after going solo on Chrysalis, I recommend that his own version of "Dancing With Myself," plus "Mony, Mony," "White Wedding," "Hot In The City" and the three worthy tracks on this album, be collected on one fey record entitled *Cut-Rate Idol Plays Comic Book Rock*; in that context, they would appear both precocious and self-effacing. As for the rest of Billy's career, he'll have to start dressing himself better, reading hard-bound literature and writing about who he might be, before we'll get further indications of his possible gifts. What more can you ask of a simulated and/or emulative pop star in the mid-80s? *Uh Huh.* — **Timothy White**

## POPE

from page 78

"When we write songs, we feel they have to stand on their own," says soft-spoken John Oates. "They have to be good when we play them in the studio, so they sound good when you hear them on the radio. They have to exist as pure music first. Music for movies doesn't necessarily have to stand on its own. It's

there to enhance the visuals."

Still, Tim Pope begs to differ when informed of his clients' feelings on the subject. "Daryl and John actually re-mixed 'Adult Education' so that it would sound more tribal for the video; they're part of this evolving process, whether they're aware of it or not," insists Tim.

After spending four days building the set, Pope and his crew are left with two straight nine-to-five days to finish the four-minute film. Still, Tim enjoys the immediacy of the form, in which the piece can be edited and in MTV's rotation within a week of shooting.

"I've conditioned myself to work that quickly," he shrugs to suggestions of pressure, despite not having bathed or changed clothes in forty-eight hours. "Anyone can make a film like *Cotton Club* that comes in millions of dollars over budget. There's no discipline in that. Sometimes, there is more compromise than I might have wanted. But I'm the only one who knows what a shoot could have looked like. The audience only knows what it sees on the screen."

Finally, aside from his hard-earned craftsmanship and uncanny ability to relate to rock musicians, Tim Pope has a spirituality that imbues his set with a feeling of divine purpose and magical chemistry, turning the ordinary, everyday objects on the "Adult Education" set into transcendental symbols. He allows even the lowliest grip to feel part of the overall plan by achieving what John Oates referred to as a "unity of vision."

"I'm not an artist," says Pope modestly. "I'm an artist with a small 'a.' Art with a big 'A' is about stuff you can't understand. I'm dealing in communication. These music films are for mass distribution, not to be hung in a museum."

"This may sound pretentious, but I enjoy dealing in issues people can understand, like love and fucking. I think these music films are turning into a fascinating form. I see them as cave paintings. Rock 'n' roll was the same in the 50s; it was youth's representation of its own natural drives, the things vital to its culture, just as the cave paintings were about things important to prehistoric civilization, like sticks, animals and fire. All I'm doing is using the latest medium, the marrying of sound and vision. I'm just going, 'Grunt, grunt, grunt.' I'm only now beginning to learn my trade. I'm starting to be able to polish stones. 'Rites of passage' is only one cave painting. The next one might be love or eating or hunting."

The towering crane majestically withdraws from the set as Hall, Oates and the rest of the band dance to the primal beat of rock 'n' roll, while the shadows from the flaming torch dance on the cavern walls. A slight, stooped-over, stick-thin figure orchestrates the movement like a wizened sorcerer. Tim Pope has passed the audition. ☐



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# ROCK

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

First, my back pages:

If you've been reading about **Jason & the Nashville Scorchers** lately and getting mad because you can't find their indie EP, calm down. EMI/America has picked the record up, and gone so far as to add a killer cover of "Absolutely Sweet Marie" to the six songs from the original. So don't waste any more time catching up with this energetic marriage of country heart and new wave spirit, because it's not likely that they'll make this good deal any better.

Also, if you've been put off by the import prices and lack of English that came with the German version of *99 Luftballons*, Epic has released a bilingual version of the **Nena** album with one side in English and the other *auf deutsche*. Those as crazy for the single as I am will rejoice at having a version on each side, but the best news is that the entire album carries the same blend of canny pop craft and vocal ingenuousness as the hit, making this the sort of record that loses nothing in the translation.

Now on to the new:

**Shannon** — *Let The Music Play* (Mirage). The title track is a marvel, contrasting the mechanically precise electro-funk of the rhythm tracks against the all-too-human emotional frailty of the vocal in a perfect display of dancefloor duality. So perfect, in fact, that the device props up almost every song on the album. Trouble is, it isn't the trick so much as the song that wins you over with "Let The Music Play," and though there are grooves galore for dancing, there's precious little here beyond the hit for listening.

**Simple Minds** — *Sparkle In The Rain* (A&M). These lads know their dazzle, no doubt about it—even when it's obvious there's nothing but veneer to a cut, the Simple Minds still manage to transfix the listener through their exquisitely lush textures, unerring ear for detail and absolute confidence in the significance of their blather. Yet it's hard to dismiss them as the ultimate poseur band, because despite all that surface, now and again they turn in something as resonant as "Speed Your Love To Me," in which every gesture rings true.

**Spinal Tap** — *Smell The Glove* (Polymer/Polydor). A lyric like "Crank up the

volume to the point of pain/ Why waste good music on the brain?" sounds so much like a real heavy metal couplet that a lot of listeners may miss the joke entirely. It does, after all, require a certain cynicism to yuk it up over the dumber-than-life burlesques of Uriah Heep ("Hell Hole") and Jethro Tull ("Stonehenge"). If, on the other hand, Heep and Tull strike you as utterly laughable in the first place, skip the record and go straight to the movie.

**Grandmaster Melle Mel** — "Jesse" (Sugar Hill 12-inch). This may sound too much like a paid political announcement to garner much airplay—the "Jesse" is presidential candidate Jackson—but Melle Mel's analysis of how Reaganomics screws the poor makes this record even more cuttingly urgent than "The Message." Even if the arrangement does borrow a little too heavily from Grandmaster hits of the past.

**Original Soundtrack** — *Footloose* (Columbia). Flash-in-the-Pan-Dance.

**Scorpions** — *Love At First Sting* (Mercury). With Germany's heavy metal blitzkrieg well under way, it looks as if the Scorpions will be the band taking the most ground in America this summer. Between the steady stomp of the rhythm section and the ear-splitting raunch of Matthias Jabs' lead guitar, the Scorpions have enough firepower to beat any listener into submission, but because the songs are among the sharpest, catchiest hard-rockers since Def Leppard discovered hooks, the musical muscle adds an exhilarating edge.

**Golden Earring** — *N.E.W.S.* (21). Just as "Radar Love" rolled half a decade's metal mannerisms into a single, all-embracing cliché, the band's current material shreds the basics of contemporary hard rock and synth pop into an easily digestible pulp. Naturally, this trash-masher approach doesn't exactly excite, but what would you expect from a band whose original drummer came up with the "Stars On" concept?

**Chen Lei-shi** — *Spring Night On A Moonlit River* (Nonesuch). The gu zheng, or ancient zither, is the Chinese forebear of the koto, and though it shares the latter's banjo-like pungency, it can also produce rippling, harp-like glissandi of startling delicacy. The com-

positions here are mostly traditional, and Professor Chen emphasizes the melodic development over flashy ornamentation enough to keep Western ears thoroughly delighted. Especially recommended to fans of *The Moon On High*. **John Butcher Axis** — *Stare At The Sun* (Polydor). Butcher seems to have gotten a handle on his ambition since the last album, and as a result the songs are tighter, the playing more focused. Even his pop instincts find their niche, as "Don't Say Goodnight" amply demonstrates. But it's hard to shake the sense that this band has yet to hit its stride, and though "Can't Tell The Dancer" hints at the power this trio can generate, hinting isn't enough.

**Silly Wizard** — *Kiss The Tears Away* (Shanachie). Should you imagine that the Scottish rock movement runs no deeper than Big Country and Aztec Camera, here's where to learn about roots. Just as the Flying Burritos wedded rock and country to rediscover both musics' roots, the Wizards have grafted a rock sensibility onto their Celtic traditionalist approach. It's a sweet sounding result, and when Andy Stewart's vocals are out in front, downright irresistible (Dalebrook Park, Hohokus, NJ 07423).

**Paris Working** — *Paris Working* (Fatal Marble). This Bay Area band manages what New Order often doesn't—angular, driving dance music that doesn't sacrifice soul for its sense of alienation. As a result, you get the same intellectual kick as with, say, "Blue Monday," but at a much more immediate emotional level, thus providing a real reason to dance (1792 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, CA 94709).

**Conlon Nancarrow** — *Complete Studies For Player Piano, Volume 4* (1750 Arch). Because Nancarrow turned to the player piano when he realized it would free his music from the limits of human ability, there's a ferocious virtuosity to these pieces that makes Cecil Taylor seem like Burt Bacharach. Yet because Nancarrow's ear is attuned to the modalities and textures of jazz, even the most excessive moments retain a warped familiarity, like Gershwin gone mad. And because every note is played by a machine, it offers an interesting counter-argument to synthophobes (1750 Arch Street, Berkeley, CA 94709).

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# JAZZ

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

**Jim Pepper** — *Comin' And Goin'* (Europa); **Gato Barbieri** — *Para Los Amigos* (Doctor Jazz); **Jan Garbarek** — *Wayfarer* (ECM). These three tenor saxophonists (one a Native American, one an Argentine, one a Norwegian, all veterans of an era in which the tenor saxophone became the clenched fist of the black liberation movement in jazz, in Frank Kofsky's oft-quoted phrase) deserve respect for struggling to preserve their cultural self-identities, problematic though the results of their struggles often may be. Pepper's celebration of his tribal heritage may ultimately prove as tiresome and transparent a shtick as Barbieri's socio-political variation on the Latin spittfire routine did in the 70s. But all celebrations should be as celebratory as Pepper's! In limited doses, his hearty tenor leaps, and crusty chants and hollers are novel and tough to resist. And when you consider he's invited to record only once a decade or so, you find it easy to forgive him for reprising the infectious "Witchi Tia To" on each of his LPs, especially since this latest full-blooded effort is such a far cry from the paleface Brewer & Shipley cover most of you will remember. This production is flawless, and the supporting cast is stellar with Nana Vasconcelos, Collin Walcott, John Scofield, Kenny Werner and an uncharacteristically moist and Milesian Don Cherry among those comin' and goin'.

The Doctor Jazz live double is Barbieri's best showcase in some time, with a churning Latin rhythm section and absolutely no sweeteners. But four sides of Barbieri blowing full steam convinces me more than ever he's a one-dimensional character actor who was perfectly cast to type on several of Carla Bley's more scenic opuses, but who falters quickly under the burden of carrying a lead role.

I don't think I've ever heard Garbarek play better than he plays on *Wayfarer*; then again, I've never been much of a fan. But it would appear as though Garbarek's continuing maturation as a composer and bandleader is resulting in his becoming a livelier, less solemn soloist, too—witness the title track's Mingus-y accelerations of tempo, which playfully mock his dolorous timbre and the mea-

sured reserve of his phrases. And witness the care with which he has assembled a unit that beautifully underlines the catch-in-the-throat which has always been his most attractive characteristic as a player. (With Eberhard Weber, bass; Michael DiPasqua, percussion; and Bill Frisell, a sensitive guitarist who manages at times to sound as though he has a "catch" in his hands.)

**Amina Claudine Meyers** — *The Circle Of Time* (Black Saint/PSI). She's so versatile she's one of a kind, and that could be why she's been so grievously overlooked—it's hard to pin convenient labels on a pianist with so encyclopedic a style, much less a singer at once so dramatic and sweetly unaffected. Here, with valuable assistance from drummer Thurman Barker and bassist Don Pate, she does a little bit of everything, from sanctified rejoicing to free-form inward gazing. And does it all with skill, needless to say, and with the kind of absolute conviction that rules mere eclecticism out of the discussion.

**Randy Weston** — *Blue* (1750 Arch, from New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012). The opportunity to spread his fingers across the length of a nine-foot Steinway concert grand has resulted in what is perhaps the most whimsically expansive of the many solo recitals this veteran pianist has recorded. And both his teasing homage to Ellington and his many sly paraphrases of Monk suggest that the wisdom of inimitable role models is that you'll eventually wind up sounding pretty inimitable yourself.

**Toshiko Akiyoshi & Lew Tabackin** — *European Memoirs* (Ascent, Box 20135, New York, NY 10025). Save for the co-leaders, the orchestra lacks convincing soloists, and Akiyoshi's travelogues of Italy, Germany and the Austrian Alps are too episodic to realize their programmatic intentions. But her memorial to Bud Powell is a haunting work, masterful both for its overall orchestral tapestry and for the piano stitchery that holds the tapestry together.

**John Patton** — *Soul Connection* (Nilva/N.M.D.S.). Under the direction of drummer Alvin Queen, Nilva is becoming a much-needed haven for veteran players who have dropped out of the

public eye and time-honored styles which have fallen out of fashion at the majors. Patton is as distinctive an organist today as he was when he was leading dates for Blue Note in the 60s, and over the years he has become more adventurous without sacrificing any of his earthiness. Here he leads a proud, tough quintet featuring trombonist Grachan Moncur III—himself an intriguing figure not much heard from these days.

**Stephan Roane** — *Keeping A Secret* (Mothlight, 7 No. Cottemet Street, Irvington, NY 10533). A sturdy young bassist steering a quartet/quintet through a thoughtful but fiercely swinging program of his own compositions (and Coltrane's "Naima"). With saxophonist Richard Grando, pianist Noreen Grey and drummer Gerry Fitzgerald—all likeable newcomers—and the shamefully neglected veteran altoist Frank Strozier.

**Space** — *An Interesting Breakfast Conversation* (1750 Arch/N.M.D.S.). Free improvisations, some alarming and alluring (credit Roscoe Mitchell and Gerald Oshita's powerful saxophone conjunctions), some arid (blame Tom Bruckner's "extended" voice, not as flexible or emotionally resonant an instrument), some recorded live at the Public last spring, all of them tightly focused—this last no small achievement in itself.

**Ned Rothenberg** — *Portal* (Lumina/N.M.D.S.). One comes away from these works for solo alto and soprano saxophones and bass clarinet (with Rothenberg simultaneously doubling ocarina on one piece and trap drums on still another, on which Gerry Hemingway also adds steel drums) impressed not only with Rothenberg's mastery of such performance techniques as multiphonics and circular breathing, but also with his broad vision and pristine sense of development as a composer. Difficult listening, and well worth the effort.

**Alan Broadbent & Putter Smith** — *Continuity* (Revelation/N.M.D.S.). Pianist Broadbent's overly brainy charts for Woody Herman in the early-70s hardly prepare you for the warm heart and solid muscle of his duets with bassist Smith on this record which started off near the bottom of this month's pile and has quickly worked its way up near the top.



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from page 68  
their demos.

Nichols shared with the duo a nearly compulsive desire for good audio quality: "I thought they were great, because they cared about what stuff sounded like and wanted to take the time to get things happening right, and the other artists I was working with never wanted to do that. They were both hi-fi nuts, especially Walter with his quad electrostatic speakers at home and always the *latest* cartridge and the *latest* tone arm."

In the aftermath of Donald and Walter's split, particularly given the quality of *The Nightfly*, it's been suggested that Becker's contribution to the partnership was less than equal. Nichols firmly disagrees, "It was always Donald and Walter together. They're both equally talented and it really was a fifty-fifty operation. Either one of them could've done the records alone, but you can tell that there is a difference when both of them bounce their ideas off each other. They just get fine-tuned that much more. Walter's a great guitar player. The only thing is, he takes a long time to do solos, about an hour a bar, so it takes us a day to do an eight-bar solo. When we started using studio musicians, Walter would show 'em what he wanted, so the later guitar parts were very much influenced by him."

What's Becker up to these days? "I don't know at this point," says Roger, choosing his words carefully. "It was left open for them to get back together when they decided to go their separate ways—it was an amicable separation. He's just sort of resting in Hawaii."

Nichols feels one of the fundamental reasons the post-*Pretzel* records were so extraordinary was how much Becker and Fagen got out of veteran and supposedly jaded session musicians: "It's like the musical Olympics. Here's a musician whose style and capability they know, and they'll push him to ten percent beyond his limits. Just the chords they've written and the things they have in their mind; maybe Larry Carlton's not used to playing these scales over these chords. Another big factor is that we don't care how long it takes. The musician will say, 'Hey, I'm really sorry it's taking so long. It's a great idea, I'm trying to execute it,' and we say, 'We don't care how long you take.' It's all constructively done, and it just takes a long time to do it. But every time somebody comes out, they say they've never played that well in their lives. And then they always want to come back."

One player who said he emphatically did not want to come back, however, was guitarist Mark Knopfler. He told *Musician* at the time that he felt some-

what used, as if he were an object. "Yeah, I read that," replies Nichols. "He thought we'd really beaten up on him because he couldn't read and so it was a little bit harder to get the part across and still let him be himself when he played. But then, after the initial shock of it wore off, I ran into him in Europe and he said, 'Yeah, I really did enjoy it.'"

The cut Knopfler attempted was "Peg," a track which began the rumor that a *Dan modus operandus* was to tape dozens of guitarists over the same solo and choose the best. Were a lot of cuts done that way, and was Steely Dan's rep as cold-hearted inter-changers of musicians a deserved one? "Oh, that was just on that one tune," scoffs Nichols. "And there were only eight guitarists who tried, not thirty. It was just that everyone had their own idea of what the solo should be and it just wasn't matching up to what Donald and Walter expected of it. Jay Graydon was their last ditch effort—it became the Jay Graydon solo by default. It came out pretty much the way they had in mind, though.

"Usually they'd put a band together for the rhythm sections based on the tune and the style of the musicians: 'These three guys will work well together on this tune, let's put 'em together and try it.' Sometimes it worked out and



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sometimes it didn't *quite* work out, so you'd put together another rhythm date later with a different combination. But it wasn't like there were ten tunes to cut and you tried five different bands on all ten, and then picked the best one. It sort of got blown out of proportion by the time the rumors started spreading around: (affecting Gabby Hays) 'Eighty-five bands tried that tune!'"

How were (and are) the duties of producer Gary Katz and Nichols divided? "It works out pretty well," reflects Nichols. "Once in a while I'll have to slam him against the wall, keep him in line. 'I'm not going to do that! *Kerrump!*' But it's just one of those things that clicks. The musicians pretty much know what they want. They're in charge of that. I'm in charge of getting it on tape and making it sound great." And Gary Katz's specialty? "Hiring and firing musicians," laughs Roger. "No, Gary's really

good at getting the most out of Donald when he's doing his vocals. The rest of the time, it was pretty much Donald and Walter leading the musicians down the right path, and then Gary more or less the executive producer. Donald and Walter were the real producers."

As Steely Dan's records grew more mature, the complaint began to be heard that they were *too* perfect, that the raw edges had been homogenized out. But Nichols reveals that perfection was a goal they attained and abandoned in one evening: "I remember mixing the tune 'King Of The World.' Everyone else went home, Gary Katz fell asleep on the floor and Denny Dias and I stayed until seven in the morning, doing it in little sections, getting the balance between all the instruments perfect, then on to the next section, all of it perfect. Then we spliced the 2-track master sections together, which is how we used to mix down before we got the Necam digital mixing system. The next afternoon we came to the studio and played it back: the song started, and then the fade came. We went, 'Wait a minute. Did we leave something out? What's going on here?' And we played it back again and we had to really *concentrate* to realize the song was going by. You could hear everything, but you couldn't hear anything, like sonic wallpaper—really strange. We ended up using the mix we'd done ten hours before, which had more three-dimensionality to it."

So all those supposedly perfect Dan records aren't perfect? "Oh, those were sloppy," laughs Roger. "If the mix had been that perfect, they'd never remember hearing it."

In addition to the Dan work, Nichols mid-70s work as a staffer at ABC included LPs by Jim Weatherly, Rude Boy Slam & the Sex Change Band ("Boogie Til You Puke"), Dirk Hamilton, Mark Jordan and Thomas Jefferson Kaye. Then came a change of ABC's top management and a rapid falling out with the new studio head; Nichols took a job at Warners the next day. As the mind-boggling Steely Dan/multi-label lawsuits complicated allegiances, Nichols became quasi-independent and then completely independent. When Becker and Fagen returned to New York to do *Gaucho*, the indispensable Nichols fol-

lowed them back.

It was during the making of *Gaucho* that Nichols' growing interest in computers led to his designing Wendel: "We found there were certain feels that we couldn't get out of real drummers—they weren't steady enough. So we had to design something that would do it perfectly, but with some human feeling, the right amount of layback. Instead of just one high-hat sound that repeats machine-like, over and over, we had sixteen different ones, so it had the inflections. Wendel can play *exactly* what the drummer plays—if he plays it a little early or a little hard, Wendel plays it a little early or a little hard. Play it once, Wendel memorizes the song, then you play it again and it repeats what it hears."

"The first version was an 8-bit machine, sort of like a Linn machine. Roger Linn was working on his at the same time I was working on Wendel. I decided to use mine for the one studio application; because of the extra high fidelity we needed and the amount of memory it took to do that, it was a pretty expensive machine. The first Wendel would've been twenty grand. It takes *lots* of memory to have a higher sample rate, which gives you an 80kHz frequency response—today's consumer units have only 20kHz. Just one snare drum beat takes 48K of memory. One crash cymbal takes \$12,000 worth. We just used the brute force method so we could get it done. The new improved Wendel has a megabyte of memory, thirty-two megabyte hard disc, higher sample rates and it's 16-bit. I use it quite a bit these days."

A less illustrious piece of Dan history also occurred during the making of *Gaucho*: "A maintenance guy at Soundworks accidentally erased the *best tune on the album*," groans Roger. "We tried to recut it and it never came out as well, so it was never on the album. That track was impossible to get anyway. It was done at 4:30 in the morning—Donald and Walter had left. At the last minute, Jeff Porcaro and everybody decided, 'Okay, we're going to *get* this,' and they just stuck it out, and then edited pieces together—it was just a miracle."

Weren't there any submixes or safety copies made earlier? "No, because we'd made up our minds a long time before that we'd never use a safety and we didn't want to be tempted to, because it's a copy, and it wouldn't be as good as it could be."

If Roger's audiophile obsession was a liability in this one case, his quest for absolute authenticity in recording has otherwise been amply repaid, beginning with the first *Nightfly* sessions at L.A.'s Village Recorders, where they'd brought in a new 3M 32-track digital machine as a backup to the trusty analog Studer.

*continued on page 106*

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Nichols was so surprised by the difference in sound between the two, he embarked on a series of rigorous experiments, enlisting both Fagen and the musicians to do the classic is-it-live-or-is-it-Memorex test. The 3M proved uncanny: "One was exact and the other was...you could tell it was the analog tape. And that's when we decided to do the album digitally."

Nichols has a curious metaphor in distinguishing between these ultra-high-tech \$100,000 to \$140,000 units: "The 3M's are like Fords: you can repair 'em with baling wire and paper clips and parts from Radio Shack. The Mitsubishi and the Sony are like the next generation: they've got a lot better error correction, but if something does go wrong, they're harder to troubleshoot, because each circuit does nine different things."

How can a studio make back such a substantial investment in digital? "You have to end up charging more for the time, but I think it makes projects go faster, makes things sound better so you don't have to work on as much to overcome the deficiencies of analog tape. Punch-in and punch-out is infinitely easier. You can punch out in the middle of a note without any glitches or holes left in the tape. With digital, you can combine different tracks with no degeneration."

Nichols' respect for digital has recently made him begin a new crusade, a one-man volunteer quality-control program for compact disc releases. Roger first became involved when Stevie Wonder called him up to say that a CD of *The Nightfly* sounded "funny." Nichols got the recording and found it worse than the analog LP. Playing a CD of Billy Joel's *The Nylon Curtain* for producer Phil Ramone confirmed Nichols' worst suspicions. He discovered third and fourth generation masters were routinely being used to make CDs. Sallying forth with his mighty word processor, Nichols wrote a detailed article in the December issue of *Recording Engineer Producer* demanding the industry use original 2-track masters to make CDs if it intended to rebut the current criticism that CD is more great hype than great hope.

Nichols' view of the raging analog vs. digital debate is that it is heavily colored by personal prejudices: "When sound recording was invented, it was analog, and that's all there ever was. So psycho-acoustically you've made yourself believe that something sounds like what was recorded, because there was no other choice. There were little deficiencies, so you made up for 'em. It's just like your car pulls to the right, so you're subconsciously leaning on the steering wheel and you've never taken it in to get it fixed. Now, since digital plays back

exactly what you record, that translates to 'Something's wrong; it's accentuating the highs.' No, it's not accentuating the highs, it's just not attenuating them, which is what you're used to."

Nichols' next move may be even more significant than his ample accomplishments to date: he's invented a digital microphone that can be built incredibly cheaply: "How does it work? It's so simple that if I tell you you'll end up doing it. No diaphragm or anything—it actually digitizes the air pressure changes."

In the meantime, having recently finished an album with his friend John Denver, Nichols is back to work on new software programs for MIDI hookups, adding more sounds and software to Wendel, going back into Soundworks to start the new Fagen LP and expanding his nascent but lucrative digital consulting practice. On weekends, he pursues his hobbies with typical overachiever's intensity: photographing auto races for national magazines and teaching scuba diving. He's also helping out his wife, Connie Reeder, a veteran backup singer, with a solo LP.

Nichols' laid-back sensibilities make him choose his projects carefully; his engineering credits rarely venture outside the Dan community. Why, when he could work for anyone and become a name producer on his own? "It's just easy, like a little family effort. It's absolutely no work at all to do an album with people you get along well with. I've turned down a lot of calls because I'd rather do this sort of thing. So instead of being rich and famous, I guess I just ended up being famous."

Nichols screws his face up in mock angst: "Oh, I'm so depressed!"

## Soundworks' Cockpit

The main board is a Solid State Logic 8L6000E Studio Computer. The monitor system is powered by a Crown PSA-2; house speakers are Urei 838 Time-Aligned monitors, but Roger prefers Visonik David 9000s and carries spare sets with him everywhere he goes. The cueing system is powered by Crown D-150s. The digital decks include a 3M 32-track and 4-track, a Mitsubishi X-80 PCM deck and a Sony 1610 2-track mastering deck, all of which use Scotch tape. Analog decks include a Studer B 67 mastering deck, a 3M 32-track, and a Technics 1520 2-track, all of which use Ampex tape. Soundworks' extensive outboard gear includes Eventide SP2016 harmonizer, digital delay, phaser/flanger and compressor, dbx 160X compressor/limiter, Lexicon Prime Time digital delay, Urei 1176LN peak limiter, digital metronome and model 539 room equalizers, Orban parametric eq, Teletronix leveling amp and Marshall time modulator. Nichols himself prefers to work at the sound source, adding a bit of eq only as a last resort; for that he favors a Neve eq system he cut out of an old board and relocated to Soundworks.



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