JOE SATRIANI AT THE CROSSROADS

MUSICIAN

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NO. 126 APRIL 1989

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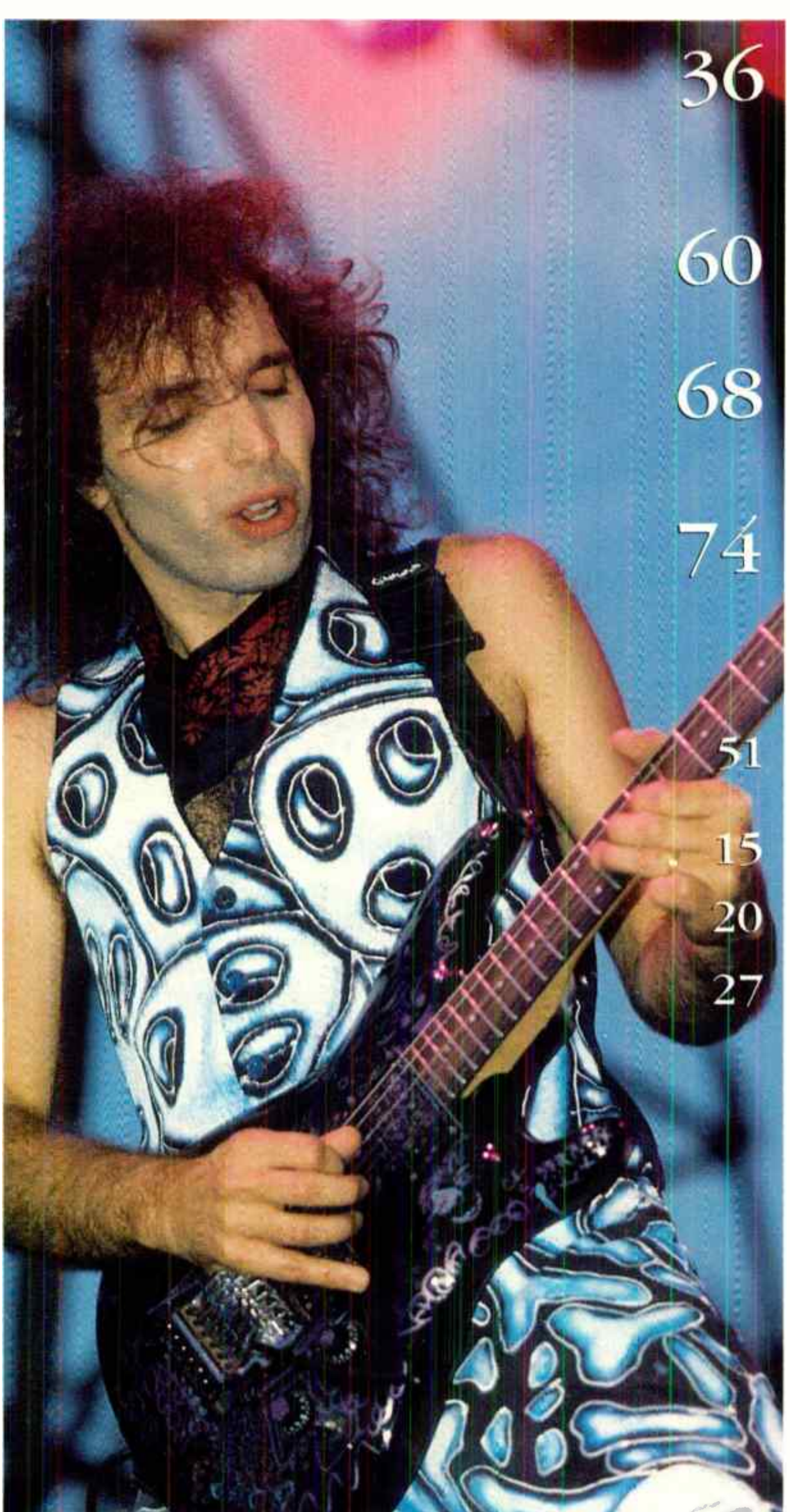

EBET ROBERTS

JOE SATRIANI

He's fast, he's fresh and he's heavy. But how will he hold up? A new guitar hero in a dangerous place. *By Ted Drozdowski.*

THE VELVET OVERVIEW

LOU REED

The poet of feedback talks about how his new masterpiece was inspired by anger, retribution, friendship, black humor and the Disney Channel.

JOHN CALE

A stern Welshman takes a break from composing serious music for classical ensembles to examine himself. A year on the trail of Tanglewood's black sheep.

REED MEETS CALE

Twenty years after the Velvet Underground changed the rules of rock 'n' roll, John Cale and Lou Reed sit down to set the record straight about Andy Warhol, the lunacy of their '60s adventures and the function of record producers.

NAMM '89: A REPORT FROM THE FUTURE

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MUSICIAN

A BILLBOARD PUBLICATION
APRIL 1989 NO. 126
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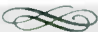

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Musician (USPS 431-910) is published monthly by Amordian Press, Inc., 33 Commercial St., Gloucester, MA 01930. (508) 281-3110 Amordian Press, Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of Billboard Publications, Inc., One Astor Place, 1515 Broadway, New York NY 10036. Billboard Publications, Inc. is a subsidiary of Affiliated Publications, Inc. Musician is a trademark of Amordian Press, Inc. ©1988 by Musician, all rights reserved. Second class postage paid at Gloucester, MA 01930 and at additional mailing offices. Subscriptions $21 per year, $40 for two years, $57 for three years. Canada and elsewhere, add $12 per year, U.S. funds only. **Subscription address: Musician, Box 1923 Marion, OH 43305. Send address changes to above address. Call 1-800-347-6969 for subscription service in the cont. US and 614-382-3322 elsewhere.**
Current and back issues are available on microfilm from University Microfilms Intl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.
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LETTERS

AULD LANG SYNE

I'D LIKE TO THANK BILL FLANagan for giving me some hope. "The Year in Music" (Jan. '89) reminded me that some people still know talent and truly good music. Let U2, Sting, R.E.M. and Tracy Chapman carry us over the trash into '89.

Colleen Halley
Lavallette, NJ

THERE IS A CERTAIN POETIC justice in the notion that Tracy Chapman's single "Fast Car" was initially heard only on tiny folk and women's radio stations. On the other hand, it is untrue. A number of commercial rock stations including KBCO in Boulder, WHFS between Baltimore and D.C., WBCN in Boston and others began playing "Fast Car" as soon as the record became available. In addition, many of the more progressively-minded "new-age" stations played the single very early. This record began not with a whimper but a bang.

Lin Brehmer
WXRT-FM
Chicago, IL

BOY, THERE'S NO MISTAKING your political leanings! Michael Stipe is commended for his "gesture of decency" of contributing to Dukakis' campaign; Bush is publicly skewered in an item on Bobby McFerrin; and Mike Love is called a "right-wing Republican toady" in an item about his brother's embezzling. (How that relates to Mike's politics is beyond me.) I haven't heard you call, say, Tracy Chapman a "left-wing Democratic radical."

I happen to like R.E.M., U2, Peter Gabriel, Midnight Oil and Tracy Chapman very much. I respect their right to their opinions. But you should leave the political commentary to *The New Republic* and *The National Review.* They're a lot less puerile.

Thaddeus Wert
Nashville, TN

A lot less liberal too, huh?
– Ed.

AULD LED ZEP

PLEASE MUZZLE BILL FLANAgan. His blatant Led Zeppelin hatred is showing again. His brilliant comment, "Let's face it, Zep's music was always dumb" (Jan. '89), has offended about everyone I know who enjoys your magazine.

Bill, yank your foot out of your mouth and then go give a good listen to some classic Zeppelin—with an open mind (if possible).

Robert Miciotto
Shreveport, LA

I FIND NOTHING "DUMB" ABOUT Jimmy Page's virtuosity and brilliant producing. Led Zeppelin music lasts because it is great rock 'n' roll. What's so dumb about that?

Philip Dennis
Miami Beach, FL

Bill Flanagan replies: "I said that the members of Led Zep were smart and the music was dumb. I didn't mean that as a put-down. Something like 'Immigrant Song' is such fun because *it's so dumb—dumb in the great tradition of 'Louie Louie' and 'Are You a Boy or Are You a Girl.' If you don't think Plant and Page know that and get a kick out of it, I've got some old Ramones albums I can sell you."*

UNFORGETTABLE IRE

KRISTINE MCKENNA'S REVIEW of U2's *Rattle and Hum* (Jan. '89) was the most uninsightful and ignorant I have ever read. Reviews like this make me wonder if professional criticism should be abolished.

Kathleen McNeill
Detroit, MI

AFTER READING KRISTINE McKenna's thoughtful and (I'm sure) impartial review of U2—not their record, but the band themselves—what I would like to know is:

1) Who the hell is Kristine McKenna?

2) What has she done to help bring an end to such mindless atrocities as world hunger and apartheid?

3) Would she have the courage to state publicly that she is an active Christian? (Not exactly hip.)

4) Why is Kristine McKenna writing for a publication that has a reputation for taste and objectivity?

Tom Hennessey
Haddonfield, NJ

BRAVA KRISTINE MCKENNA! How can any band that spends over $5 million on a movie about themselves be taken seriously when preaching about those starving in Africa?

Renee Cicerone
San Francisco, CA

PERHAPS YOU SHOULD CHOOSE someone less cynical to do your record reviews. Or did McKenna have some other reason for her vitriolic attack on a harmless album—an attack which then segued into a diatribe against the artists?

Rhonda Daniel
Garland, TX

THANK GOD FOR CRITICS LIKE Kristine McKenna. I mean, I'd always thought U2 did honest, thoughtful songs that appealed to me and others because they reflected the emotions we felt but didn't know how to express.

What a fool I was. Now I can see that every note they've ever recorded has been soulless, hypocritical, carefully manipulated, embarrassingly overwrought crap. Thank you, Ms. McKenna, for showing me that nothing matters and what if it did. Back to Kenny Rogers.

Angela Bozeman
Marietta, GA

BROOOOCE!

YOUR ARTICLE ON JACK BRUCE (Jan. '89) was a great start to the new year. It's long been a source of frustration to have my favorite artist ignored, taken for granted, relegated to oldies-rehash stations or hidden behind the Clapton hype. Jack's gift should be recognized for what it is: light years ahead.

Gail Adams
Chicago, IL

FEMALE TROUBLE

OUR EAGLE-EYED READERS have noticed that the photo of Dianne Davidson illustrating the Olivia Records article (Jan. '89) was misidentified as Cris Williamson. Sorry for the slip-up.

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

WARREN GEBERT

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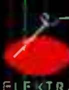

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NO HIP-HOP HIPPIES HERE

De La Soul

"Believe me, it has nothing to do with this hippie stuff," says 19-year-old vocalist Public Speaker Posdnuos, speaking to the critics that have labeled his crew "flower children," "psychedelic," "Aquarians," etc.

"Nothin' *near* hippies," adds co-Public Speaker Trugoy the Dove, 20. "Nothin' near wantin' to be white, nuttin' like that. It's just bein' ourselves."

The roundish, 19-year-old P.A. Pase Master Mase, who in most crews would be called a DJ, is more pissed. "When the people was classifying us as hippies, whatever, it didn't bother me. Now it bothers me. It bothers me a lot."

With only two 12-inch singles under the belt, De La Soul are already hip-hop's most misunderstood innovators, which is understandable. Add, to the usual journalistic confusion over hip-hop, the look and sound which distinguish the De La unit: mellifluous wordplay, multicolors and talk of a now-arrived "D.A.I.S.Y. Age." Lay back. Relax. Sixties pseudo-sentimentalism in full effect.

De La Soul's album, *3 Feet High and Rising*, has real funky cuts on it, with crazy titles like "This Is a Recording 4 Living in a Fulltime Era (L.I.F.E.)" and "Potholes in My Lawn." Their name means "from the soul." "D.A.I.S.Y." stands for DA Inner Sound, Y'all. They have female dancers, China & Jette, who are also featured vocalists on a cut called "De La Orgee." Dove and Mase live around the corner from each other in the town of Amityville, New York, on Long Island. Posdnuos is in nearby Massapequa. Together, the Soul have the

JOHNNIE MILES

planet's best haircuts, and Dove is the barber... of the 'Ville, if you will.

Public Enemy producer Hank Shocklee calls them "the rawest group in hip-hop." Of the album, Pos says, "We was gonna actually go more crazier than this." That's hard to imagine. Listen to it, and remember: Pos's favorite animal is his pet rabbit, Celery. Dove's favorite animal is his pet dove, Perdue. Mase wants a guinea pig. "Call him 'New Guinea,'" suggests Dove. I burst out laughing. "Did I win?" asks Dove. "I won with that one." The bespectacled Posdnuos drolly shakes his head. – *Harry Allen*

BEYOND INTERPRETATION

Cassandra Wilson

"When people listen to singers," vocalist Cassandra Wilson suggests, "they want to hear some lyrics that they've heard before: stuff from Tin Pan Alley, or other parts of the standard repertoire."

So that's exactly what Wilson, who doesn't deal in the traditional, offers listeners on her third record, *Blue Skies*. If it's a move designed to attract the broader audience Wilson's immense vocal chops deserve, it's working.

Wilson is a member of M-Base, a collective of young musicians whose melange of funk and improvisation is trying to widen the contemporary jazz vernacular. Their growing notoriety, along with their massive instrumental clout, suggest that something big is up. "It's good to have a shared repertoire; working with other people to create a different sound from that of the day is important. But," Wilson adds, "I also enjoy doing standards, and that's where I differ from a few of my M-Base pals."

Though the piano/bass/drums context is obviously trad-bound, Wilson throws a few modern change-ups—the keyboardless title cut, for example. "My voice is just another instrument," she says, "and without the harmonic constrictions of the piano, the song opens up, giving me a chance to use what I've learned singing my original pieces. If I'd done this record five years ago, it would've been a ho-hum type of thing. Now I know how to make it happen."

Wilson touts Betty Carter's chance-taking and Abbey Lincoln's grace as inspirations, but *Blue Skies* tells her own story. Savvy phrasing and sophisticated arrangements that draw from pop and blues disrupt the tunes. "Chances are taken, of course," she concludes, "because that's the nature of the music. If I didn't use my own vocal approach, these tunes wouldn't truly be *interpreted*." – *Jim Macnie*

World Radio History

Black Tie, Gloves Off at R'n'R Hall of Fame

Another January, another induction dinner (on the 18th) for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame at New York's Waldorf-Astoria hotel—not known as a spiritual birthplace of the form, but, unlike the Hall, at least it exists. This fourth year found inductors and inductees less awestruck than irreverent, a good attitude for rock 'n' roll.

The most surprising attendee may have been Phil Spector, honored as a non-performer. Tina Turner introduced him with ambiguous praise, citing her "exciting experiences" working with the "unusual" producer. The formerly reclusive Spector—making his second public appearance in three months!—weaved around the microphone while expressing his gratitude with remarks like "I don't git it. I'm very sorry to have missed the inauguration" and "Uh, where *is* the inauguration?"

Little Richard, as always, reduced the proceedings to good-natured chaos with his induction speech (loosely speaking) for Otis Redding. Inspired by Paul Shaffer and the World's Most Dangerous Band's walk-on vamp of "I Can't Turn You Loose," Richard strode to the mike and sang the song. He also ran through a few Redding songs—fair enough, as Redding began his career as a Little Richard imitator—mentioned to the industry crowd that he didn't have a record contract, and even managed to say a couple of things about Redding before his widow accepted the award, her voice breaking with emotion.

Other Hall of Famers this year were Dion, the Temptations and Stevie Wonder—who gave the evening's most stirring speech, asking the audience to close their eyes and hear the voices of his world. But you'd probably rather read Pete Townshend's stinging (in fun, one hopes) remarks about inductees the Rolling Stones.

"If it wasn't for the vast sums of money they can make," Townshend noted of the group, "they might not bother at all. At least Mick [Jagger] probably wouldn't. Lucky for us fans that Mick has such expensive tastes." Townshend summed up by acknowledging, "So much of what I am I got from you, Stones. I had no idea it was already second-hand."

Jagger's acceptance speech took no prisoners either. Referring to the Hall's executive vice-president and chairman respectively, he said, "Now that Jann [Wenner] has finished his house in East Hampton, and Ahmet [Ertegun] has finished his house in Turkey, I hope they can get down to building the phantom temple of rock. I particularly look forward to visiting the [ex-Stones manager] Allen Klein wing, where the best examples of repackaging will be found." Jagger also pointed out the irony of "being rewarded for 25 years of bad behavior."

The Stones rhythm section of Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts were absent, offset partly by the presence of alumnus Mick Taylor, who didn't act like he was about to rejoin the group. Keith Richards wasn't exactly chummy with Jagger either.

The evening ended, as usual, with the participants mobbing the stage for a jam session. The low point was Bruce Springsteen (an audience member this year) singing the late Roy Orbison's "Crying" in tribute to the man Springsteen had inducted two years earlier. Alas, it only proved Orbison's irreplaceableness. Immediately after, though, Tina Turner belted out "River Deep, Mountain High," bringing a smile to Pete Townshend's face, among many.

Now that's rock 'n' roll.

– Scott Isler

"Bang, you're dead!"
"No, *you're* dead!"

EBET ROBERTS

But Seriously, It's Not *All* Fun and Games

Tom and Randall Barbera are still managing rock artists, but they've decided to benefit mankind with their accumulated knowledge. So they created Rock 'n' Roll: The Music Biz Game, the latest amusement—and one of the cleverest—based on that bigger amusement, the music industry.

Packaged in a simulated roadcase, the game includes an LP-sized spinner with "turntable-arm" pointer; situation cards, resembling cassettes, with real-life predicaments like "Your A&R man picks the wrong single again. Lose turn"; and, of course, play bank checks instead of play money. (What, no drugs?)

The object is to make a pile of dough and retire fast—also just like real life. And you don't have to be smart to learn how to play, just like—well, we better stop here. – *Scott Isler*

World Radio History

NO FISHING, JUST WISHING

GRACE POOL

"I decided the other day we could describe our music as 'songs, textures and rhythms,'" observes Bob Riley, guitarist and co-founder of Grace Pool.

"One DJ called our record 'impressionistic mind paintings,'" laughs partner Elly Brown, lead singer for the New York-based quintet.

More specifically, the sweeping melodies and romantic vocals of Grace Pool's self-titled debut have inspired comparisons to the likes of Kate Bush, U2 and, believe it or not, Aaron Copland. And is this kooky, or what? The group takes its name from a character in *Jane Eyre*.

Anyway, Brown and Riley trace their roots back to another universe entirely. The two met in the late '70s as members of South, which Riley says was "a country R&B band financed by a rich jingle producer" who dreamed of emulating the Band. Also featuring greasy axe king Lonnie Mack and bassist Harvey Brooks, South lived—and sometimes rehearsed—on a Pennsylvania farm. "There would be great music occasionally," Brown recalls, "but the older guys went fishing constantly! Though I'd love to be in a band where you fished all the time now, back then it wasn't right for me. I was 17 and eager to sing."

Riley, then a drummer, signed on late in the game, and when South disbanded he and Brown headed back to their home sweet New York for other scenes, including a bar band with G.E. Smith and T-Bone Wolk. Noting she and Riley have worked together over a decade, Brown interrupts the chronology to say, "We're not a couple. We're joined at the hip creatively and we've spent a lot of time together, but we have separate lives." (The versatile Riley's other life has included work as drum programmer on Brian Wilson's LP.)

Grace Pool took shape a few years ago after Riley switched to guitar. They'd probably still be "writing and searching," in Brown's words, if a friend at Warner Bros. hadn't slipped a home demo to the company's A&R department. "We were signed quietly. It was almost like tiptoeing into the music business," she says.

Between the allusive lyrics and evocative layers of sound, Grace Pool may remind old-timers of the '60s, when hippies still ran free.

"I hope it's not so naive," Riley says quickly.

"There's beauty in naiveté," Brown counters. "Our music isn't cynical—we have that in common with the '60s—but we're not rehashing." Still, she concedes, "There's definitely a bit of the hippie sensibility in my character. The sparkle's kept alive here and there."

– Jon Young

An Aquarian Exploitation

You knew there was a big Woodstock festival anniversary hype coming up, right? (It was 20 years ago this August.) But maybe you didn't expect it to start so soon.

Think again. On January 31, Warner Bros. Inc. and MTV Networks announced plans to make sure the viewers of MTV and VH-1 will be saturated with Woodstock vibes. The two cable stations have exclusive telecast rights to Warner's 1970 *Woodstock* documentary, which they'll show this summer.

In addition, the networks are producing some 75 "Woodstock Minutes," heavy-rotation teaser spots that debut May 1. Warner Bros. is producing a two- to four-hours-long television special—the company hopes to include outtake footage from the feature film—and also wants to exhibit *Woodstock* theatrically on a roadshow basis. (With its split-screen techniques, the film never took well to the TV tube anyway.)

Of course, all these events, plus the inevitable merchandising, are up for grabs to savvy sponsors—even the "Woodstock Minutes," which are themselves ads.

Ed Bleier, president of pay-TV and network features at Warners, admitted that "although we are commercializing" the Woodstock festival—which once was a nominally countercultural event—"we are doing it appropriately." He added that "'Woodstock' is symbolic of popular music with the younger demographic." If that's true: "oy" to the younger demographic. (And wait'll they discover Patti Page and Eddie Fisher!)

Bleier referred to Warners' strategy as following "the three Ms: the 'Minutes,' merchandising and the movie." He must have just temporarily forgotten about the music. – *Scott Isler*

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LUCINDA WILLIAMS

A New Rocker Outgrows the Old Rules

BY BILL FLANAGAN

Burning her bridges—and no more father figures.

GREG ALLEN

Lucinda Williams almost got unlucky 10 years ago; she made two albums for Folkways Records when she was too young, before she found her own voice. Those LPs were girlish attempts to sound like a tough blues mama. Not terrible records, but nothing you'd spend money on when you could buy Sippie Wallace—or even Bonnie Raitt—albums. Good thing for Lucinda her work passed unnoticed. That fortunate failure gave her eight years to find her own style, live her own life, get married and divorced, waitress a little, play a lot of crappy gigs. In other words, to grow up. In 1988, tired of being strung along by major labels and name producers with the promise of big things about to happen, Lucinda signed a deal with Rough Trade Records and cut a self-produced album with her own band for $10,000. The result, called *Lucinda Williams*, is a marvel—12 unself-conscious rock 'n' roll songs sung with conviction and played with joy and authority. Williams set her compass on Neil Young, the Band, Bob Dylan and Creedence—and landed right on the money.

Lucinda says of her lost years: "I was doing music the whole time, but for quite a while I didn't really have a game plan. I just went along day by day. It wasn't like, 'I've got to get a record deal!' I never thought about it that much. I don't feel like I was ready anyway. People just develop at different ages." Louisiana-born, Williams had been living and playing in Texas for several years when Columbia's Peter Philbin heard her and suggested she record some demos for CBS. Lucinda moved to L.A. and threw herself into the record race. "When I did the CBS tape I was real uptight, I was still a novice. I wasn't comfortable in the studio. Henry Lewy [Joni Mitchell, Joan Armatrading] produced that tape. I had to verbalize everything to him. He was into more of a standardized pop vein: 'This is what it's supposed to sound like so it's going to sound this way!' It's a formula. The same way a lot of people write songs—*verse verse chorus bridge verse chorus end.* I even had a lot of problems with that. Peter Philbin would talk to me for hours about my songs—'How can we make these better? You've almost got it but it's not quite there. This doesn't have a bridge! You can't have a song without a bridge!'

"That frustrated me to no end. Before that, no one approached me. I was just floating along, a little hippie folksinger dabbling in this and that, smoking a bunch of pot. Then I met Peter, I moved out here, and all of a sudden I had this influx of people trying to figure out what it was and make it into something. I had this manager trying to figure out why I wasn't getting signed: 'What seems to be the problem? Maybe you need more bridges in your songs!'"

Finally Lucinda went into the studio with producer/guitarist Pete Anderson, fresh from his success with Dwight Yoakam. That turned into a clash of wills, too. Lucinda disliked his direction but had a hard time asserting herself. "That was the last thing I did where I didn't have control. The straw that broke the camel's back was when he would not even let me play my own guitar. He would say, 'Let me just do it. It'll be faster.' The guitars and vocals were mixed down, the bass and drums were mixed up; the complete opposite of what I wanted. I said, 'Pete, what are you doing? This is horrible! I don't want this to go out, no one's gonna hear this tape, shelve it, forget it!' I just let him have it. Before that I was trying to be daddy's good little girl. He was like this father figure or something. He said, 'This is what it has to sound like to get a major AOR record deal.' I said, 'Then I don't want a major AOR record deal, forget it. This is not representative of me.' He said, 'That doesn't matter, just get your foot in the door and then go in and do whatever you want.' I said, 'Pete, it doesn't work that way. They'll think this is what the album's gonna sound like.' We didn't talk to each other for a few

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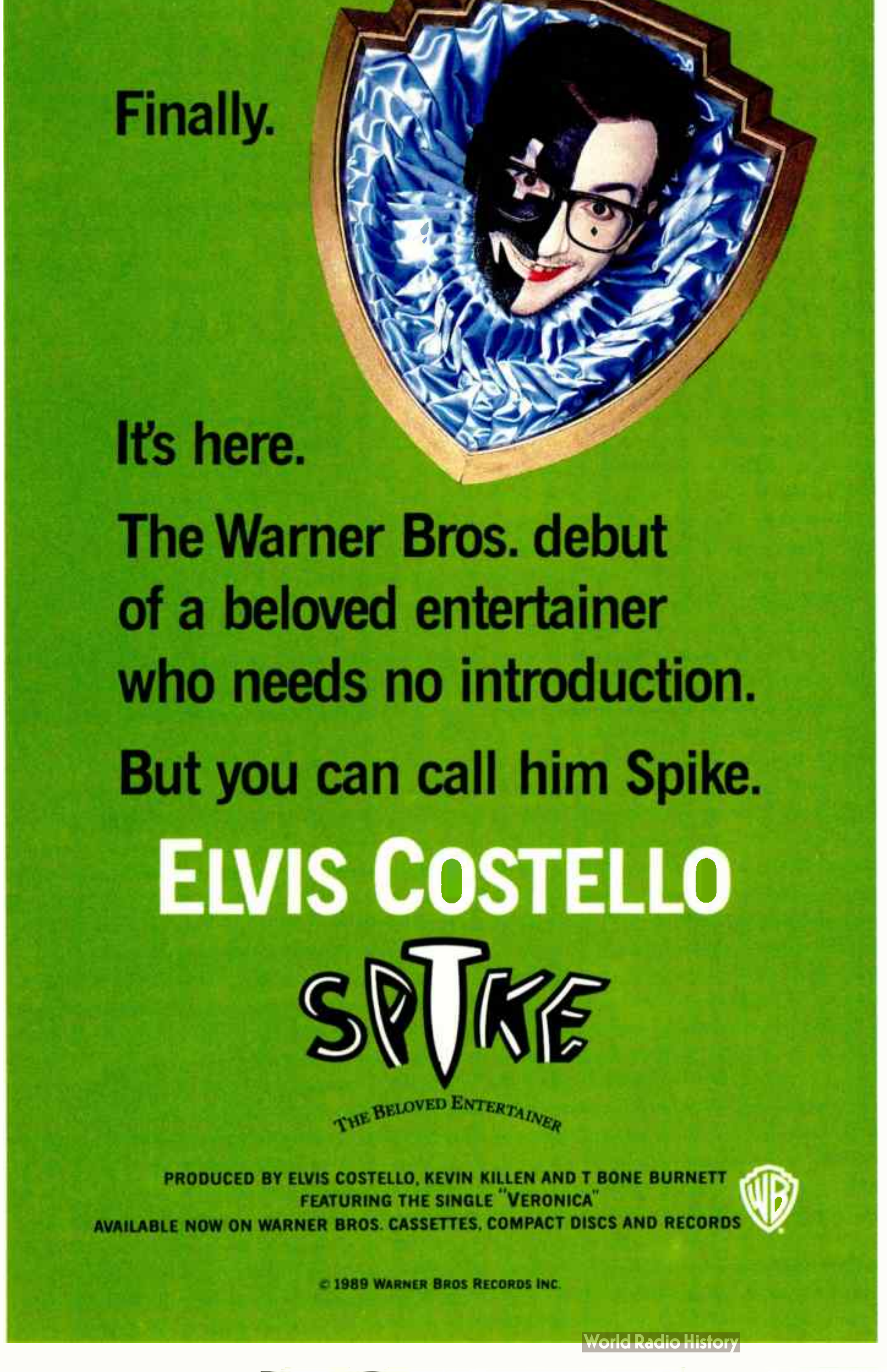
days. Then he called me back and said, 'Yeah, you're right. The demo sucks.' So he was depressed and I was depressed and that was the end of that. Rough Trade had been pursuing me, waiting in the wings for about a year. Pete was putting them off, saying, 'No, no, no, we're gonna get more money and a better deal. Don't go with the first thing you see.' *The first thing I see!* I'd only been waiting around for *eight years*."

Lucinda's decision to go with Rough Trade drove a wedge between her and Anderson. He went on to produce Michelle Shocked's *Short Sharp Shocked*, an album that only Lucinda could think of as overly slick. Rough Trade gave Williams complete freedom, even supporting her "bolt of lightning" decision to produce the LP herself, with her guitarist Gurf Morlix, backed up by drummer Donald Lindley and bassist John Ciambotti. They'll be hitting the road in March, though Ciambotti is torn between the band and his day job—as a chiropractor. Of their striking achievement in low-budget record production, Lucinda laughs, "There's something to be said for naïveté and innocence."

Lucinda Williams' songs might claim some innocence—if hard-won innocence is not a contradiction—but naïveté is not apparent at all. The 11 original compositions on the album deftly navigate the rough waters between conflicting emotions—fear and anticipation in "I Just Wanted to See You So Bad," hope and frustration in "Passionate Kisses" and, most striking, the vying needs for security and for freedom in "Side of the Road." That song—which Lucinda says reminds her of Wyeth's painting of a woman alone in a vast field—is a quiet request by a woman to her lover to pull the car over and let her walk off by herself for a little bit. "If only for a minute or two/ I want to see what it feels like to be without you." The character walks to a farmhouse, wonders if there's a woman who lives there with her husband and children, wonders if that woman is glad she married. The song takes on the aspects of a Gothic novel as the heroine is tempted to return to "a place where the wild things grow/ To a place where I used to always go." "Side of the Road," like much of the LP, was written when Lucinda was newly in love with Greg Sowders of the Long Ryders. The album was recorded when they were getting divorced. Some of the ambiguity in the record springs from that tension. "'Side of the Road' is autobiographical," Williams says. "All of it is. That was right before I was married. He was on the road, I was real frustrated. Needless to say he doesn't care for that song too much. It makes some people uncomfortable, it makes them look at themselves. A lot of people practice denial quite a bit."

Taking charge of her music after five years of trying to please various father figures must have required a great force of will. "Yeah," she agrees, "but it's not just five years—it's a lifetime of it. That's the only thing the feminist movement means to me: It's control, it's not being a



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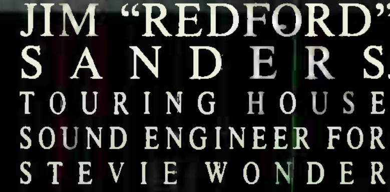

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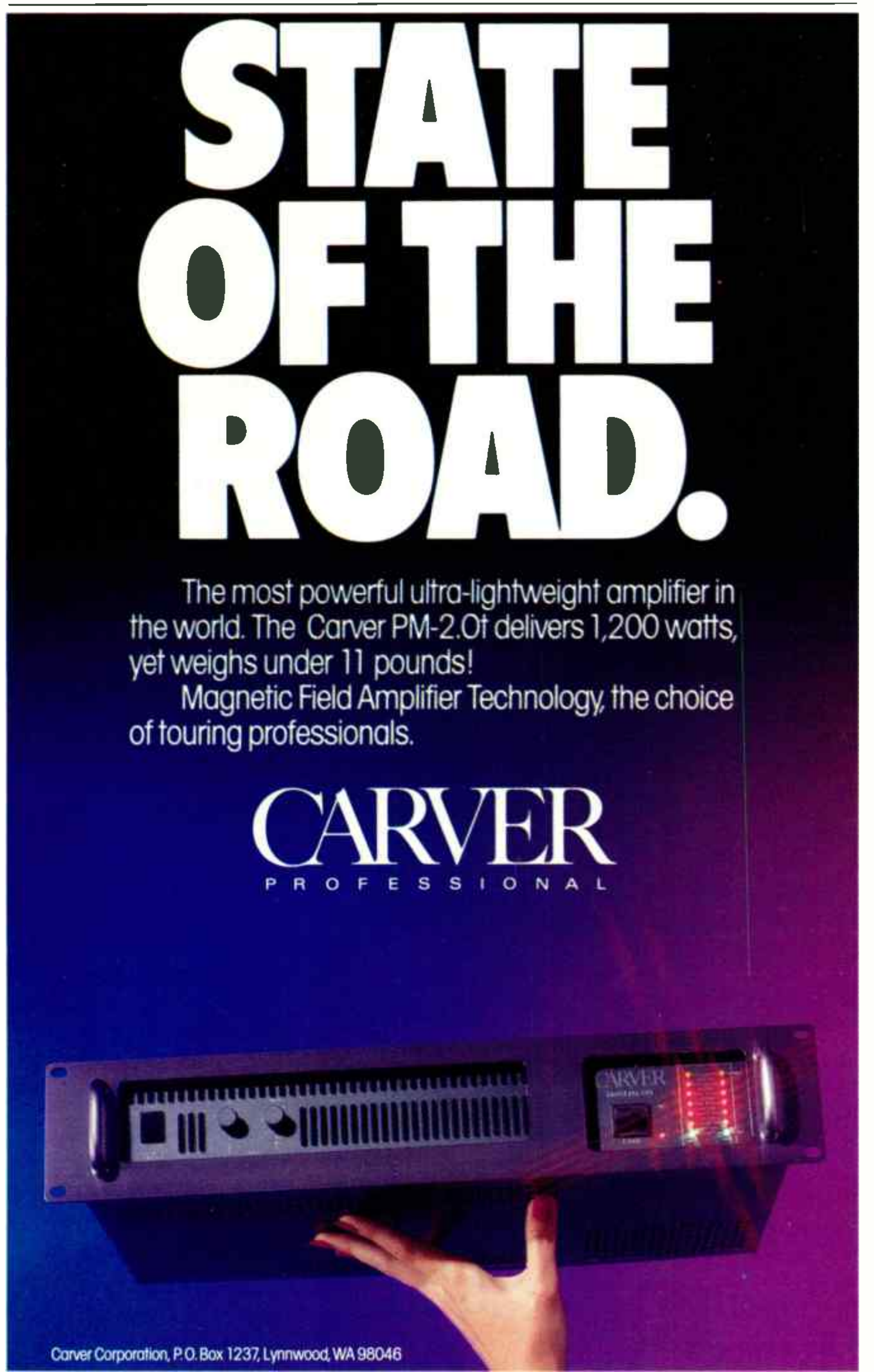
victim. I'm still trying to get past that in my personal life. And I know so many women who go out and play and do all this stuff, but when it comes to their personal lives they get into these victimized roles. They can't get out. That's what 'Side of the Road' and most of those songs are about."

But "Side of the Road," as well as songs like "Changed the Locks" and "Am I Too Blue," suggests that emotional victimization is not imposed from outside; it's something people do to themselves. "Yeah, right. That's why I didn't join NOW. I got turned off by all the hostile rhetoric, by everybody blaming everybody else for their own problems. I mean, most of them really have serious mental problems. It doesn't have anything to do with politics." Which brings up a couple of Lucinda's other gray areas: The daughter of a poet/college professor, she has a tough time swallowing orthodoxies of the right or left. She was expelled from high school for refusing to salute the flag, and describes a teenage visit to a Baptist church the way most people describe root canals. But her days on the folk circuit showed her no alternative community in which she could feel at home. She has spent lots of time around hippies, feminists and folksingers, and has harsh words for all of them.

"I saw a lot of hypocrisy," she shrugs. "I got into the whole '60s radical thing, and got turned off by the rhetoric. I just saw a lot of bullshit. When I was living in Arkansas there were all these barefoot hippies running around saying stuff like, 'Don't have an abortion, we'll take your child to the farm and love it just like you would.' I'd look at that and say, 'Wait a minute.' On the one hand I was wearing a long skirt and had long hair and was walking around barefoot playing guitar. On the other hand, my intelligence wouldn't allow me to fall into that. It was a trap. They weren't really thinking. It was the same thing with the feminist movement. I got into that, too, and then was able to stand back and look at the ironies of it. I opened a lot of gay feminist concerts. They'd always ask me to open up for Robin Flower or Meg Christian. But I never allowed myself to get too drawn into it. It was like Eastern religion. If I'd been a different person I might have ended up in an ashram.

"It's the same as in my songwriting: I hate stereotypes and clichés. My father's a writer, so I've always had him over there saying, 'Now remember, don't say *the moon in June* or *the stars in your eyes.*' My dad's writing students would listen to my songs, too. I had a lot of good critics coming up." And for all the straightforwardness in Lucinda's songs, there is a sense of poetic abandon. Mostly in her refusal to cut her thoughts to fit that despised verse/chorus/bridge cliché, but sometimes in the lyrics, too. In "Changed the Locks" she starts out singing about normal measures she's taken to get over a bad romance (she's changed the locks and her phone number) and ends up taking the song right out the window: She changes the tracks under the train, she changes the name of the town she lives in—Lucinda starts the song a normal woman and ends up wailing on Highway 61. "You learn certain things about songwriting," she laughs. "If you get an idea you just elaborate on it. If you're singing about a house, you talk about the shingles, you talk about the door, the window...."

But many songwriters—including most of her old folkie comrades—would end up with the letter in the mailbox or walking out the old front gate. Lucinda Williams burns down the house. "That's 'cause they're afraid. They're living by certain rules, and there aren't any rules. I hate to sound flowery, but that's what I learned from Bob Dylan. He did that. He broke all the rules." She laughs. "*His* songs didn't have bridges." M



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BILLY BANG

Scratchin' at the Avant-Garde Hoedown

BY JIM MACNIE

"When people play on the beat *all* the time, there's no surprises. That's not me."

RUSSELL FINE

HOW CAN YOU TELL Billy Bang from the rest of the violinists on today's jazz scene? Well, he's the soloist whose torso fidgets more than his elbow while in the throes of soloing. He's the bandleader who looks like he carries the intensity of the whole ensemble on his back. He's the composer who . . . Wait a minute, how many jazz violinists are there right now, five? Let's make this simple. Note for note, concept for concept, band for band, Billy Bang's the most inventive, quixotic and arresting of the lot.

"I like to hit it hard, definitely," the 39-year-old string maven admits with a laugh. "When I'm at work, I can get wrapped up in the music. A lot of bands play in the concert mode; that's a little too polite for my groups. We just get on the stage and do hoedowns and stomps, you know?"

Bang won't pander in the high-tech smooch 'n' pet tunes that litter the *Billboard* jazz charts. Despite that—or maybe because of it—he's a figure to be reckoned with, partly because he plays an instrument that's still somewhat exotic within the jazz tradition, and partly because he plays the hell out of it. Like many contemporary improvisors, he's covered a lot of conceptual ground in his 10-plus years on the NYC scene, from straight ahead quintets to voluptuous troikas, scratch 'n' sniff duets and tough-as-nails solo stints.

Last year, Bang surprised fans by leaving the String Trio of New York, a precise, earthy collective who helped turn the concepts of classical and jazz inside out. Bang's self-dismissal comes as a bit of a shock; with a decade of work and five superb records to their credit, the String Trio was surely the most established outlet for his music.

"I was going through some personal problems," he confesses, "but many things prompted the split. I didn't have any problem with those guys [guitarist James Emery and bassist John Lindberg]; we did an awful lot of fine work together. But celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Trio scared me in some ways; I decided to move on."

That's nothing new. Born Billy Walker in Mobile, Alabama, he grew up in the South Bronx, spent his formative years at a western Massachusetts prep school, and did time in Vietnam. If art indicates a distillation of experience, Bang has garnered an impressive amount of info.

"I carry it all with me; I'm a quick learner," he asserts. "In grade school I felt kinda out because the violin wasn't the hippest instrument; I was small and that's the axe they handed me. Comin' home from the prep school to the neighborhood was tough, too; I didn't know who I was. After 'Nam I heard Trane's stuff and got politicized by the shit goin' down in the '60s. Once I started playing that, I knew I had to leave the Bronx; I'd be walking around with Ornette's *Golden Circle* records under my arm, and the guys would come by and say 'Oh man, this one's done lost it!' I wanted to get serious, so I came down to the Lower East Side."

Bang showed up in time to join another movement. Patriarchal improvisers like Leroy Jenkins and Don Cherry lived within walking distance; peers like Butch Morris, David Murray, Frank Lowe and Jemeel Moondoc were looking to share ideas; chances were waiting to be taken. Jazz was about due for another shaking up, and though barely a novice on his instrument, Bang wanted to be one of the shakers.

"I met Wilbur Ware and Leroy Williams, and they sensed something in me," he recalls, his voice suddenly grown pensive. "I was slightly uneasy about the ideas they were showing me and told them 'Hey, this don't sound like Ray Nance; I've gotta quit.' They'd lecture me about *not* trying to be Ray Nance; but I wanted to get closer to those Ellington ballads."

No, he wasn't Nance. Chops-wise, he wasn't even that *competent*. Sam Rivers politely provided him with a crow sandwich on the bandstand one night, a subtle shutdown that changed his tune and opened his ears ("I'll always thank Sam for that; quite a teacher," he laughs). A couple years of intense woodshedding later, a distinct personality started to creep into Bang's playing. You could hear influences certainly, but no overt echoes; a voice that had never really been heard on violin before began to emerge.

"I came through Leroy Jenkins of

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course," Bang points out. "He actually helped me with my physical technique. And Ornette too, a lot of people thought he was kidding with the violin, but I dug it. I consider my style a synthesis of those two: Jenkins has the perfect notes, Ornette the non-perfect. Each was legit. See, I'm tryin' to perfect the non-perfect notes. Right in the middle, that's where I want to be. The *charanga* cats—Puerto Rican string musicians—were also real important to me. That's from the Bronx, remember, we're a product of our environment.

"Comin' downtown and playin' free music was *hard* for me. I came out of a Latin thing and a Temptations-type bag; everything had a beat, everything! So when I was attempting to play this other kind of music, and I came to a feeling of syncopation, I consciously *wouldn't* put it in. That was wrong, too. Balancing those elements has been a priority. When people play on the beat *all* the time, you can anticipate what they're going to do—there's no surprises. That's a bore, that's not me."

Still, it's the inviting rhythm of swing that keeps Bang working the NYC clubs. Whatever textural corners his various ensembles examine, their book usually contains some flat-out blowing vehicles: "recognizable" jazz has never been a problem for the violinist. "I like to bridge the distance between myself and the audience. You wouldn't go to Japan and try to speak German, right?

"Ultimately I come out of a hard-bop thing. I'm not tryin' to trick anybody—we're just going from *here* to *there*," he points out. "My strength is not in the vehicle, it's going through the vehicle trying to get to the outer limits of the music. And I try to get there as fast as I can! Two notes, boom, let's go man!"

Among the more traditional Bang gangs was a quintet with Michelle Rosewoman, Wilbur Ware, Dennis Charles and Charles Tyler. Mainstream with a twist, they perform a version of "Loverman" Leonard Feather might herald. It's this kind of mature flexibility that should have major labels sniffing 'round his door. Should.

"Yeah, that band was hip," he concurs. "I like cats that are *players*. You have to know how to read music of course, and I'm not ashamed to say that my reading could be better. But if the lights go out, or someone snatches my paper, I'm still going to make it work; I've trained myself that way."

That's an understatement. Bang the soloist is a guy who is always ready to burn the place down: one knee up, crotch rocking crudely, bow doing a blur, lines building, building, building. "I try not to restrain myself," Bang laughs. "I'm at home onstage; I'm fired up. I want my music to be palatable, but still be able to take the wildest solos ever—362 bars of fire! That's the core. But I try to keep a connection between the solo and the starting point; there has to be a logic."

One distinguishable aspect of Bang's musical personality is his tone: vinegary but vibrant, slightly "off" in the Jackie McLean sense, it's a sound you're not likely to confuse with any other. Bang says it's also a style formed largely by circumstance.

"My seventh-grade teacher said I surpassed the other string students, so he moved me to viola. That was a weird blessing, because when I came back to violin, I wasn't sure of the positions anymore; I was playing wider intervals. There are a lot of notes between C and C#, and I take advantage of them."

Though the instrument is usually associated with the classical, there's nothing highbrow about Bang's sound: If his lines are at times romantic, his tone is straight from the street. His essentially folksy strains incorporate Eastern drones, and his voicings range from Africa to the Appalachians.

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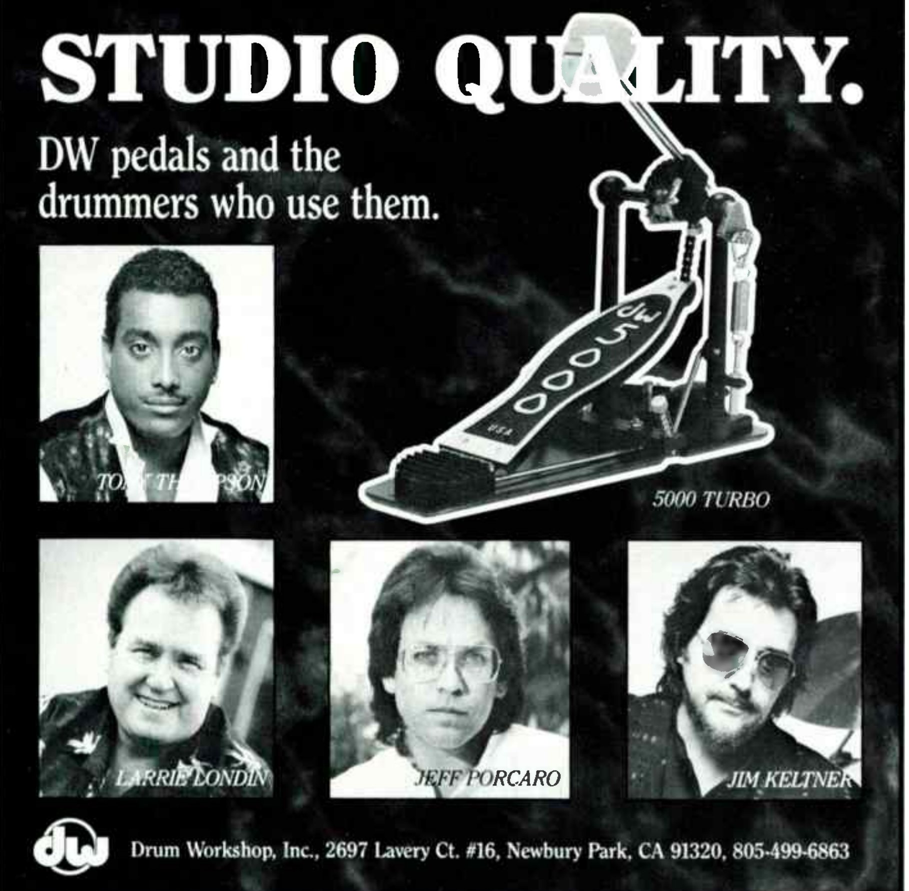

"I've always been a cat who related to the populace," says the man who once recorded "Skip to My Lou." "I don't want people to study to get into my music, just groove. I wish I could go to the hills and hang out with those cats for six months, then go down with the Cajuns—some harmonies they've got sound like bagpipes. I just got back from Japan, some of my plucking techniques are very oriental, and they *heard* it. There's an aboriginal thing in there, too. Don Cherry helped me with that; sympathy notes from India, four-note things from Ghana; music evolves, right?"

Though Bang utilizes all these tinges, he's essentially a riff writer. Stating a theme and then taking it out is the general rule. When he applies himself to more formal composition, however, he produces arrangements that hang as tough as his solos. The clarity and daring of his 11-piece *Outline No. 12* revealed a previously untapped side of his personality. For the moment, though, he's not ready to claim composition as his turf.

"Threadgill, Murray, Anthony Davis—they're the writers I respect. My pieces are minimal by comparison. But I extract so much music from the players who work with me, it is another way of composing.

"A lot of guys are still trying to prove to the community that we are as strong as the composers we've studied in school. That kind of game-playing was the downfall of Eddie South: He thought he had to *prove* he was a violinist. I don't care about that. I'm just trying to live the music as it really is.

"Sometimes people put me down in a very polite way by reminding me that Wynton Marsalis is playing classical and jazz. They want to know why if I play violin, I don't try to do that. Man, that's not my thing. If we can prove to people we're technically proficient, great. But *feeling* is where I'm at. I honestly think that, as great as he is, if Wynton and I went to Mars and played for some aliens, they'd understand me better. I'm trying to connect, make a statement with the tradition."

Billy Bang still has a lot of music to get out of himself. His recent projects include a tribute to Stuff Smith and writing the music for *Three Views from Mount Fuji*, a new Ntozake Shange work. He and his current unit play at art galleries and supper clubs alike. "In the next five or 10 years I'm looking to become one of the cats," he says with a glint in his eye, "and it's not about getting rich. It's about leaving a legacy."

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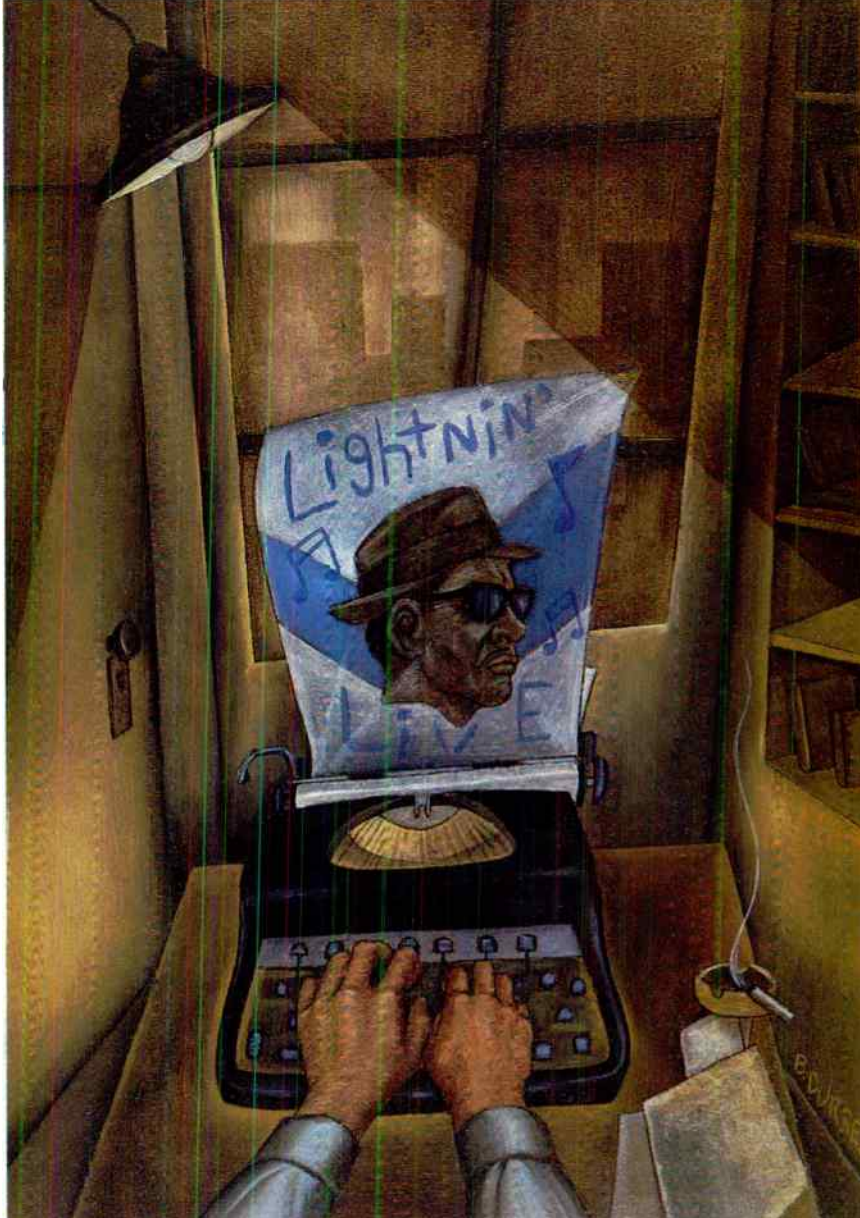
My Back Pages

What Motivates a Music Critic?

By Peter Guralnick



I NEVER THOUGHT MUSIC was going to save the world. I never thought music was going to save me. I knew from the start there was no salvation—but at the same time there was something apocalyptic about my first exposure to the blues. Both Doc Pomus and Delbert McClinton have described similar impressions of their own baptism in the music. For Doc it was hearing Big Joe Turner on the radio for the first time when he was 15, around 1940. From the moment that he heard Big Joe Turner sing, Doc—a white, heavy-set product of the Brooklyn middle class who had been crippled by infantile paralysis at the age of six—knew what he wanted to be: a blues singer. "It was," he says, "the transformation of my life."

Delbert describes an almost identical transformation—same singer, it could have been virtually the same song—only it was 15 years later. "There's no way I can explain it," Delbert says. "In fact, my Mama, I remember she told someone once about how I got into music and she said, 'One day he just became obsessed.' And she's exactly right. I was coming back from squirrel hunting and there was this old black barbecue place, and I heard [Turner's] 'Honey, Hush.' The closer we got, the more excited I got. My heart went to pounding, and I said, 'Who is that, and what is that?' I'll never forget that. It was like hitting up with speed or something. You just went nuts."

The same thing happened to me when I heard Lightnin' Hopkins for the first time; it just took me a little longer to realize the implications. I had transferred to a new school my junior year in high school. I was making new friends, staking out new territory, undoubtedly seeking to create a new image for myself. That might have been part of it—it was undoubtedly *part*—but it wasn't anything like all of it. A classmate named Bob Smith and I stumbled across the blues—Leadbelly, Big Bill Broonzy, Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry—in the midst of the broad-based folk revival that more or less climaxed with Newport, 1959. We saw Lightnin' in the fall of 1959, I think (when *I* was 15), at Harvard with Cisco Houston. "Well, that mean ol', mean ol' Cisco," Lightnin' sang to Woody Guthrie's one-time partner. That cemented Bob's and my lifelong friendship (Bob died five years ago) and started us for a time, like Lightnin', to wearing shades at night. And it cemented a lifelong commitment to—or maybe it was just an obsession with—the blues. Which led in a way to as different a kind of life for me as it did for Doc and Delbert, but I didn't realize that for a long time.

Most things in life are a combination of accident and inclination. I got into writing about music strictly through the back door. One day in the fall of 1965 I was so overcome with admiration for the great rediscovered bluesman, Skip James, that I called his manager, Dick Waterman (with whom he was staying for a gig at Club 47 in Cambridge), and told Dick that I was doing a story on Skip for the English magazine, *Blues Unlimited*. I don't know what emboldened me. I didn't know Dick, except as one of the blues elite who could hang out backstage at Newport or stride past the waiting lines at Club 47 and walk right in the door. I didn't know Skip James, except as someone I venerated for possessing true genius (like the English writer, Henry Green, who was the only other person I

BRIAN J DURSEE

World Radio History

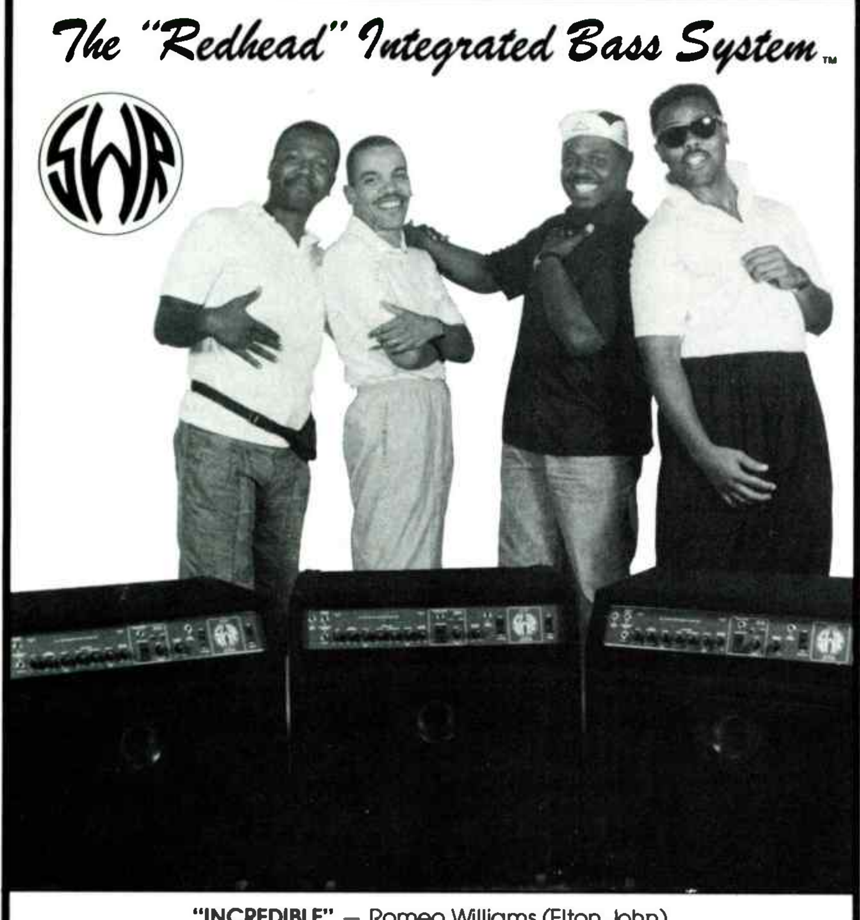
cool about it, of course, skeptical of my place in a magazine that could glorify the Jefferson Airplane and Moby Grape, but underneath my heart was beating fast. Now I could at last put down the names!

> Jerry Lee Lewis is really the last one left. The others, Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, Carl Perkins, Warren Smith, Johnny Cash, to name a few, have either dropped out of sight or gone on to other sounds. The yellow Sun label said "Jerry Lee Lewis and His Pumping Piano." Today the piano is just the same, even if sometimes the backing is a little ragged or the voice coarser.
>
> Even more surprising, there is the same vitality and excitement, and after 10 years on the road, a long time after the big hits, Jerry Lee can still shout out his songs as exuberantly, every one stamped with his unique and dynamic style... – P.G., *Boston After Dark*, January 11, 1967 (the same week that Otis Rush was appearing at Club 47, all week)

I didn't even sign my own name that first time (the second time was a front page feature on James Brown the following week, which I did put my name to), but writing about music got me in free to the Ebb Tide, where Jerry Lee was appearing; it actually conferred a degree of legitimacy on me, or so it seemed when I nervously presented myself at the door. It also introduced me to my heroes, one by one, and even gave me something to say to them.

Most of all, though, writing about music brought me friendship. Just as I knew that my reasons for writing about music stemmed from a passion that I wanted to share, so I found that the musicians I was writing about were not just subjects but people that I wanted to know, work with even, to whatever extent it might prove possible. Together with Dick Waterman, whom I had actually gotten to know now through my writing, several friends and I started up an organization called the Boston Blues Society in 1971, which for two or three years put on concerts, mostly at Harvard, where Bob Smith and I had first seen Lightnin' Hopkins a dozen years before. One time one of those friends, David Gessner, actually brought in Lightnin' himself for a concert at Rindge Technical High School in Cambridge. With my wife Alexandra and our three-year-old son Jacob, I was taking tickets at the door when a kid came up, plunked down his $2 or $3 admission, and said, "Did you really mean what you said about Solomon Burke in *Rolling Stone?*" I was a little taken aback, but, of course, I did mean it, so I said I did. "Cool," said this tall kid with reddish hair and a serious, blank, almost indecipherable expression, who introduced himself, after several more equally laconic meetings, as Joe McEwen. Joe, who was an undergraduate at Tufts at the time, went on to become (as "Mister C.") a well-known DJ, freelance writer and then A&R man for CBS Records. Over the years we became the best of friends, soulmates and ping-pong buddies, and 15 years later, when I published my book on soul, it was only appropriate that it should be dedicated to Joe, and to Solomon Burke, through whom we met. Joe, for his part, introduced me to Elvis Costello, both the man and his music, thus opening up still more musical worlds for me.

Still, I continued to try to fool myself that this wasn't really me. I was a novelist who happened to be writing about music, strictly as an avocation. When I finished my first book, *Feel Like Going Home*, I announced to the world, in an afterword to the book, that that was it, that I wasn't going to write about music anymore. And I didn't—for a while anyway. I quit for a couple of years and wrote another novel. Then Jim Miller, who was music editor at *The Real Paper*, tricked me into doing a story on Waylon Jennings by offering me a column. I was



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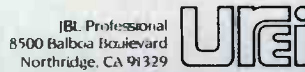

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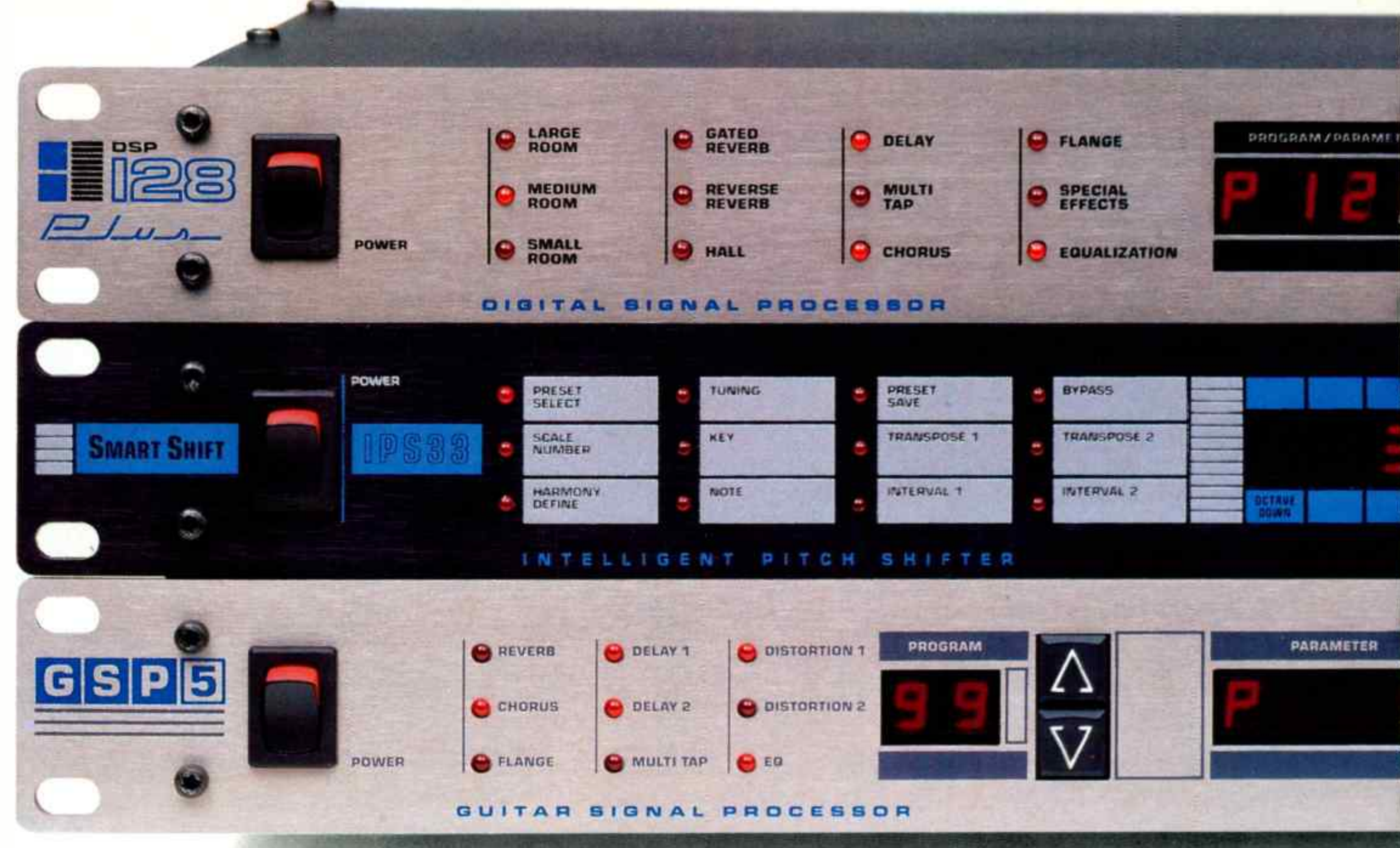

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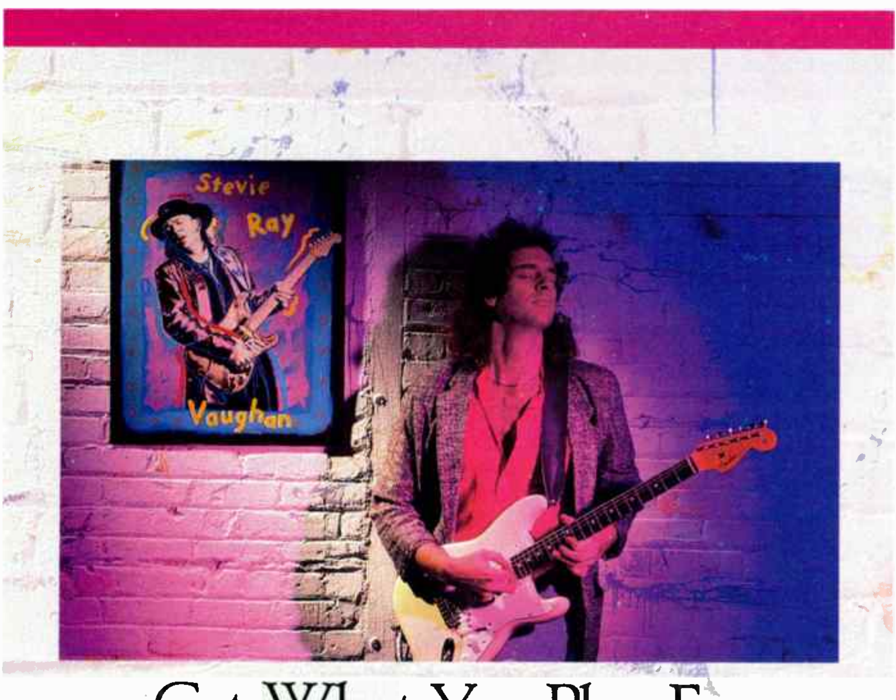
back! I couldn't help myself. But I don't think it ever hit me how *little* I could help myself until I was offered an epiphany while pursuing Bobby "Blue" Bland in Nighttown the week that he was appearing at a club called the Sugar Shack in Boston. I had been teaching at Boston University for seven years, but my time was finally up. I was faced with a choice: write more or get another teaching job. Every night I would be down at the Sugar Shack, blissfully lost in the freakshow world that Bob Dylan was always celebrating, talking with Bobby Bland, earnestly conferring with his bandleader Mel Jackson, showing up for a one or two a.m. band rehearsal that might or might not ever happen. One day we went out into the country to shoot the cover for Bobby's new album; another night I was going to go out to dinner with Bobby and his wife, but we ended up ordering hamburgers from room service. It wasn't anything glamorous, or sordid either. It was, like most things, no more than what it was—a matter of hanging out, trying to get to know someone I had always admired from his work, getting to see a little bit of his world from a certain angle, and trying to deduce as much of the rest as I could. One day I wasn't able to come in till late. I had an appointment for an interview for a teaching job at a fancy prep school. I had lunch with the headmaster and his wife and an interview with the head of the English department. We talked about *Tristram Shandy,* a book I dearly love, spoke a little bit about the kind of writing I did, the kind of writing I aspired to do. He was a very nice man, but that night I *plunged* back into the world of Bobby "Blue" Bland. I embraced as best I could (if not quite with Dylan's gusto) the gangsters and the junkies and the whores, the illusion and the knowledge of the illusion—don't ask me why. I just knew I would rather spend time with Bobby "Blue" Bland than with the head of the English department at an exclusive private school, or anyone else I had met in the academic world. Like it or not, I had to face facts: There was an undeniable part of me, however deep down and conflicted it might be, that wanted to join this world; there was a part of me that wanted desperately to belong, however inadequate my qualifications for membership. I loved The Life. And I was determinated to live it, in my own palliated, writerly way.



Get What You Play For

One other thing Delbert McClinton said that has stuck with me about the music that he first heard when he was a kid: He was speaking of the blues of Big Joe Turner and Sonny Boy Williamson and Howlin' Wolf and saying how it had affected him when he first encountered it. "That stuff still does it to me," he said. "Boy, I wish I could hear more [music] that could do that to me now." Well, it's understandable. We're all stuck with our first loves. We will all speak, at one time or another, with that same sense of regret. And although it's fashionable to dismiss this with the usual set of rational pieties, there's an undeniable truth here, too. It never can be like the first time, exactly; it never will be that way again, with the same sense of limitless possibilities, that assurance of invulnerability and a freshness of response to whatever experience comes your way because it just doesn't slot into a pattern that you can name or know. Once I thought I would never forget anything I ever experienced or felt. I thought for sure someone was a phony if they pretended not to remember—whatever it was they said they didn't remember. Now sometimes I feel as if I can scarcely remember my own name. I read things and I say, "Gee, that's pretty good." But it's something that I've written. Maybe this is just another way of sneaking up on experience, replacing innocence with oblivion. For my birthday this year my parents gave me a CD player. Which is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 89

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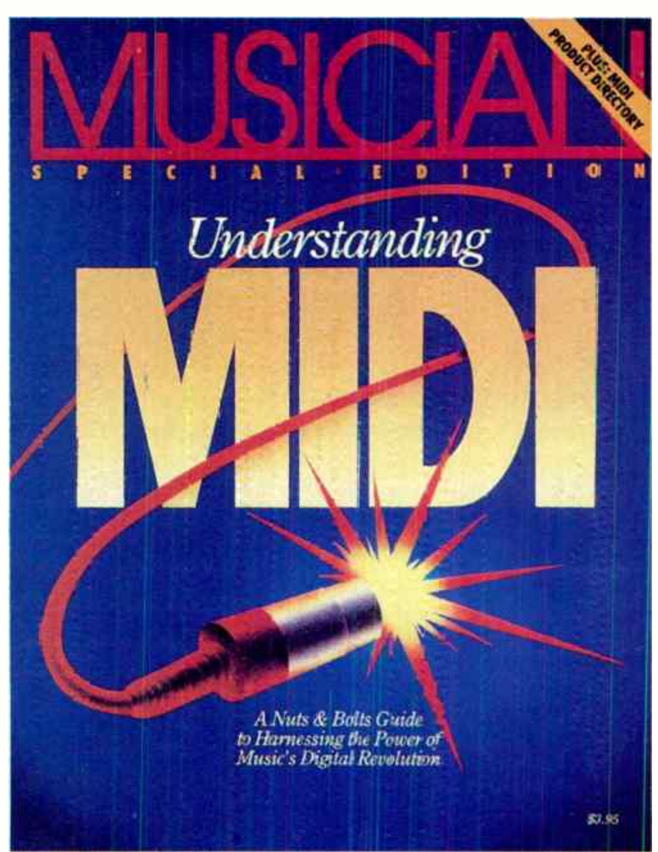

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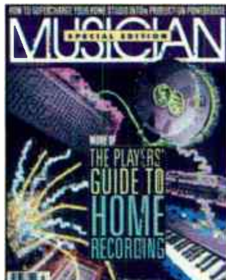

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THE DEVIL AND JOE SATRIANI

A Guitar Hero Strikes a Different Kind of Bargain

By Ted Drozdowski

BACK IN ROBERT JOHNSON'S DAY, they'd have said that Joe Satriani, too, had sold his soul to the Devil. Another midnight deal done down at the crossroads. How else could a musician gain such mastery of raw sound?

In Satriani's hands, the guitar can conjure chiddering "Hordes of Locusts," summon the dry slither of the temptatious "Snake" or scry a dark view of Golgotha, "The Hill of the Skull." More practically put: He has virtually every whinny, crunch, bomb and two-handed filigree in the modern heavy-rock vocabulary at his command—yet Satriani's more mage than metalist. He's studied with the great bopmeister Lennie Tristano, though nobody would mistake Joe for a jazz man. And riding shotgun alongside the roar of his roughest rhythms, over dense hailstorms of harmonics and sunshowers of feedback, are some of the prettiest pop melodies since the Ventures.

There's something undeniably elemental in Satriani's playing that connects with headbangers, guitaroids and high-school girls alike. Maybe it's that his *Surfing with the Alien* is the first rock-inclined instrumental record you can sing along with since *Blow by Blow*. Maybe it's something deeper. After all, there is a vaguely Faustian quality to his sudden ascendance.

Once upon a time, Satriani was a Long Island kid with a proclivity for playing guitar, just like his Carle Place hometown buddy and ex-student Steve Vai. At 17, Satriani pestered his parents and high school principal to consent to his early graduation. They agreed, and he turned 18 on the road with the rock band Justice. Then he moved to California to begin 13 years of hard labor.

He woodshedded. He started a three-piece power-pop outfit called the Squares, which was always just shy of a record deal. He did studio work when he could find it (Satriani sang back-up on the first Crowded House album), but day jobs—mostly guitar lessons—kept food on the table. He made a solo EP, *Joe Satriani*, in 1984. It was released on Rubina Records, a label named after his wife, and slid into the six-string sea with nary a ripple. Joe's first album, *Not of This Earth*, waited nearly two years while he shopped for a record deal and worked in Greg Kihn's band. When Relativity put it out in 1986 it featured a stickered endorsement from Vai and started a low growling in the underbelly of the guitar world.

Still, only fret fetishists had heard of Satriani when his *Surfing with the Alien* was released a year later. But something odd happened. Radio started playing the cut "Satch Boogie." Even odder, people liked it. So radio bit deeper into the album. And oddest of all, people bought it. By

PHOTOGRAPH BY NEIL ZLOZLOWER

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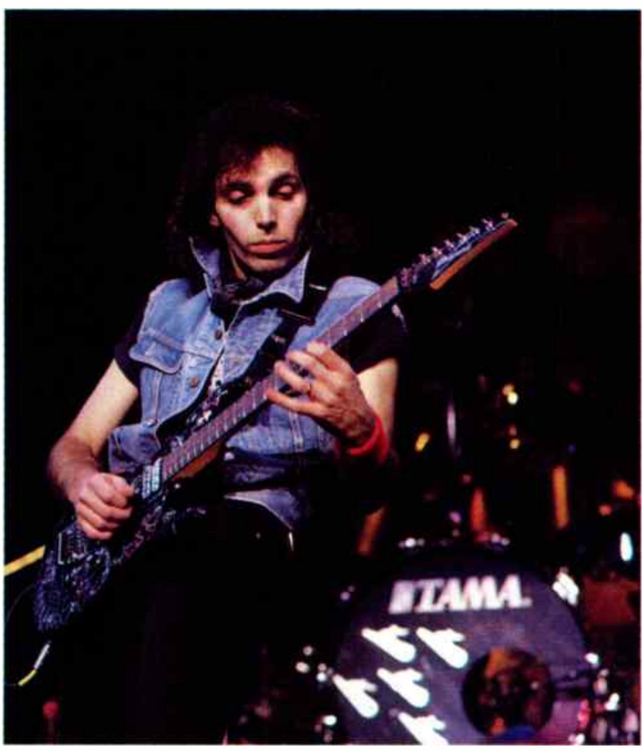
spring, *Surfing* was riding a wave of Top 40 prosperity.

Nineteen-eighty-eight was Joe Satriani's golden year. *Surfing with the Alien* sold well over 500,000 copies and has hung ten for 62 weeks on the *Billboard* charts. *Dreaming #11*, a follow-up studio/live EP, is keeping it company—with a bullet. Satriani's band spent eight months re-establishing the sanctity of the power trio in sold-out shows on three continents. And when Mick Jagger needed a guitar player for his first solo tour, he called Joe. Jagger's impeccable taste was ratified by the Grammy awards committee, which nominated the *Surfing* album for Best Rock Instrumental and the romantic "Always with Me, Always with You" for Best Pop Instrumental. Rarely does the music industry show such deference to an independent label recording.

Yes, a very good year indeed. And if the Robert Johnson/Dr. Faustus factor truly applied, now would be a time of reckoning. But Joe attributes his sudden success to neither Satan nor savvy. He says it was a time warp, "a little door that opens up every 12-15 years when people decide they'll listen to rock instrumentals. John Cuniberti [his producer] and I thought we were making an album for ourselves and a small group of guitar players—just this wild, cathartic, experimental experience for ourselves. Anything we thought anyone else would say no to, would think would be too unorthodox, we wanted to do. We never thought about being commercial or accessible, because we figured nobody's ever going to hear this record. Radio won't play it. No one will know it exists.

"It makes me laugh," Satriani continues. "The world is such a funny place." And he's still on top of it. Yet when we meet in late January over plates of mahi-mahi in a sunny San Francisco restaurant, just across the bridge from his Berkeley home base, Joe Satriani is nonetheless at a crossroads Robert Johnson never dreamed of. The world's newest—and possibly nicest—guitar hero is getting ready to make his third album, the successor to *Surfing with the Alien*. His legions of fans and his record label are waiting. The next two-and-one-half months of pre-production and recording may well determine his future. But at 32, Satriani seems to be feeling no pressure—except from the braces he's wearing to correct a painful jaw condition that, left unchecked, could require even more painful surgery. Dressed in a black T-shirt, short-sleeved Levi vest and jeans, he looks like just another rock 'n' roll Joe; but he radiates the confidence, comfort and levelheaded balance of a man who's made no pact with anyone, save for himself.

"Instrumentals are funny—sometimes you get something extra, a sound or vibe."



NEIL ZLOZOWER

MUSICIAN: *Now that you've been given the guitar-hero mantle, how does it wear?*

SATRIANI: I don't feel it at all! There may be a second or two when someone says, "Hey, you just won an award," or something like that. For a split second it's great. But then, you feel like you always do. It's important, I guess, in the musical community to be acknowledged by your peers and fans. And I don't take that lightly at all, but to be honest when I get up in the morning I don't feel like, "Ah, good morning guitar hero!" I still have the same urge to go play guitar every day, and that, along with my private life, is what my mind is all about.

MUSICIAN: *Not building sports cars in your garage?*

SATRIANI: Exactly.

MUSICIAN: *Speaking of Jeff Beck, were you influenced by* Blow by Blow*?*

SATRIANI: Yeah, I think so. I've always played instrumentals. Since my first amplifier was a tape recorder, I got hooked on the idea of recording. So I had all these weird instrumentals and I never got any encouragement from my peers to pursue it. To them it wasn't a viable form of music.

When Jeff Beck came out with that record—and I had learned jammin' to records that he and Jimmy Page and Johnny Winter and Eric Clapton were on, and of course Hendrix, my main influence—I thought, this is great! Every song was different. It was a nice break from the lyrical excesses of the '70s. It sounded great. I always liked George Martin as a producer and I think he really added a great touch to the whole thing. He captured Beck in a good light. As a fan, which I was and still am of Beck, you always hope your artist gets recorded in his best environment, because you get a better record to take home.

So that record and *Wired* I thought were brilliant. They introduced a style of recording and arrangement that made quite an impact on me. Although I still had trouble selling the idea of instrumentals to my friends, let alone the industry. Maybe it gave me confidence to look back and say, "Well, the Ventures did it. Wes Montgomery did it. And now Jeff Beck did it." I would think about people like that and Dick Dale and Hendrix. They became like buddies, in my mind. They helped me feel not so weird when other people said, "What's that? Where are the lyrics?" And I could just laugh it off.

MUSICIAN: *I think for a lot of young players* Surfing with the Alien *has become their* Blow by Blow.

SATRIANI: That's a funny thought. One of my friends said he was watching us play recently and he looked around and it hit him that all these people had come to see Joe. Like, our friend, Joe. And sometimes I have that same feeling. It sort of goes back to your question about "guitar hero." I can't... It's very difficult to get those kinds of things into the brain. Very abstract. Perhaps I'll always be immune to that sort of thought. That's probably a good thing.

But I did have to change my phone number. I didn't want to,

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Satriani chats with his part-time boss: "Mick's really a complex musician, but a straight-ahead guy at the same time."

but it was just overwhelming. I would get calls from Germany, Scotland, Seattle, Florida, New Jersey and all over the place at three o'clock in the morning. Someone wakes you up and all they can say is, "Joe? Is this really Joe? Oh wow!" And then they hang up. The thing about these phone calls is that sometimes you hear that tone creeping into your voice, and when you hang up it's like, "God, was I rude to somebody?" And then I feel awful, because I don't ever want to do that.

MUSICIAN: *What about those braces you're wearing?*

SATRIANI: I've been wearing a splint to correct a misplaced jaw. To correct the problem they have to move my teeth around so they come together sooner and create a better jaw position. I had getting braces planned for about a year-and-a-half, but I had to find time when I wouldn't be on the road. Zero hour came about a month ago when I finished touring. I knew I'd be in the studio and wouldn't be traveling for four months. So I went to an orthodontist and said, "You've gotta do it, but you've only got a couple months." He slapped all these wires on and tightens them quite a bit.

Hopefully it'll take care of the problem, which is called TMJ. What you get is really bad headaches, neckaches, backaches and intense face pain with blurry vision, nausea. It's a weird group of symptoms that come from a problem with the jaw joint. There were times onstage when I'd get sharp pains in the middle of a song. Positions I'd put my mouth in, just being lost in the music, would give me a slap in the face. I'd have to remind myself, "You can't do that!"

MUSICIAN: *This must be a challenging time for you: new braces, a new record coming up. Are you feeling any pressure from the expectations of your fans or your record company, or yourself?*

SATRIANI: There's a lot of freedom in what I do. The nature of instrumental records is, at least for me, to have a lot of variety. So I don't feel like I have to play a certain kind of thing. Even if I were to listen to people who call and send letters, the indication would be to just go ahead and keep doing it—go along the crazy path one more step, which is my nature anyway.

Sure, it's obvious that the record company would like another successful album. But I think it's common knowledge that you really don't know what a successful record is. You know what a good record is: You like it! But you never know if a record's gonna be successful. There are so many forces in the world that can change, or let's say dilute, an audience's craving for something: an act of God, it could be war, it could be another artist or group of artists making the scene. So my main concern is to make a good record. Whether it's the magic record that should follow *Surfing with the Alien* or *Dreaming #11*, I don't think you can figure that out.

MUSICIAN: *So you haven't succumbed to Michael Jackson Syndrome?*

SATRIANI: No. Oh God! I like my nose very much thank you!

MUSICIAN: *Do you have any creative expectations for the record?*

SATRIANI: Well, because the songs are already written I know I'll be into some new areas and I'll be able to experiment some more. John Cuniberti and I will be able to, from a production standpoint, stretch out again—as we have with each new record. We'll be trying to get some new sounds on tape. The songs beg for that.

John was our soundman in the Squares. He's an excellent engineer and the perfect backup for me when I'm really way out in creativeland and start to lose touch with reality. He's always got his feet on the ground so I can afford to go really crazy in the studio and know there's a sympathetic person next to me as well as someone who technically can make sure we capture whatever kind of strangeness goes on.

EBET ROBERTS

World Radio History

MUSICIAN: *Does John reel you back in if things get too far out?*
SATRIANI: He never does that. He records it. His vocabulary as an engineer is much greater than mine, so I might have only a very colloquial way of describing some ideas. And his task is to somehow translate those into studio language so we can record them.

Sometimes if I'm writing a piece that's got its roots in spiritualism or something that's very sad, I get into that vibe. So if I have to feel morose and down in order to play the right kinds of notes, I'll descend into that world and he won't. Which is a good thing! He creates a studio environment that lets me put things down, and when we're down, we're done—everything goes back to normal.

MUSICIAN: *So he's kind of the right side of the brain.*
SATRIANI: Yeah, kind of like that. Before I go into the studio I'll give John my notes and tapes I've made at home, so he'll know what I'm looking for. I give him my imagined track sheets, play him the demos and say, "These are the goals that I wanna reach versus what you hear on these little four-track tapes."

Right now I have enough material for a few records, but usually the week before we hit the studio is my last editing session. And after that I'll still record a few extra pieces, and then make a decision when we go to mix on what we think are the best tunes.

MUSICIAN: *Will Stuart Hamm and Jonathan Mover, from your live trio, be recording with you?*
SATRIANI: I have Jonathan coming in to play drums, but Stu's involvement I'm not quite sure about because I'm going to do the basics myself—guitar, bass, keyboards. If it turns out there are a few songs that are more demanding... Well, I've been practicing, but if I feel I can't do it myself I'll give Stu a call.

MUSICIAN: *You played all those parts yourself on your last two records as well.*
SATRIANI: I like doing it that way. I feel very connected to the songs in a bass sense. I write a lot of them on bass anyway, so I feel more confident in a song if I can lay down the bass track because of all the little nuances I know in my head that the guitars are going to do. I know the feeling of the solo, I know what the keyboard parts are gonna be, so I can put all of that in the bass part.

I also like to go quickly and hate to have to say to somebody, "No, I don't like what you're doing. I want you to do it more like this." It brings a bad vibe to a project if there's conflict.

But I don't mind saying that to myself. If I lay down a track and know it really stinks, I'll replace it. And if I can't do it, I'll make a note of that track, record all the rest of the tracks, and then call somebody like Stu. That's more effective. I don't plan on spending six months to make a record. I like to knock it out in two-and-a-half months. Complete.

"I don't like using my songs to prove I'm a great guitar player."

MUSICIAN: *When you work on a demo, where does it start?*
SATRIANI: Mostly it's bass and melody. Maybe rhythm as well, depending on the nature of the song. There are some songs that don't have any rhythm guitar. On *Not of This Earth* there's a song called "Rubina": It has three guitars playing harmonics through the whole song, and a synth-bass, no bass guitar. So when I recorded that at home, I could only record a guess at an idea that might work. When we got to the studio, it was, "Well, let's just try it and see what happens."

Some of them are too complex to even demo at home. Like "Lords of Karma," with all the things I wanted happening. Sometimes to get a near approximation of the sounds I want, instead of using bass or guitar on my demo I'll use a fuzz bass that in my mind will represent a distorted guitar and a bass guitar—each doubling lines.

My demos are very personal. Only I can decipher what they represent. Other people might just hear them as a weird collection of sounds, but I like to obtain first impressions of songs for all of the strange and magical stuff that goes on when you plug in and first try to play something.

MUSICIAN: *Do you write on the road?*
SATRIANI: Yeah. Sometimes I find I'm really motivated. Sometimes I'm not, but you've gotta have that four-track around because you may feel like recording only one night in a month, but on that one night it could be very important to get everything down on tape.

I think "Surfing with the Alien" got started when I was on the road with Greg Kihn. But there wasn't a melody and the arrangement wasn't there. When I was reviewing all my material to go into the studio for the album, I thought, "Maybe this has a chance." I just had to work on the melody and got rid of the B section, created a different bridge—came up with an arrangement that I thought would be the most fun. That was the *key* to that song: It had to have a lighthearted arrangement. There had to be a certain amount of thrashing through it to make the song sound up as opposed to dark and heavy.

I wasn't quite sure about "Surfing" until John and I went in to lay down the melody and solo and got a sound very quickly. It excited us and we just, *boom*, laid down the track that runs through the whole thing. As soon as we laid that down, the song sort of revealed itself to me.

Instrumentals are funny. Sometimes you wind up with a song that just has a nice melody and other times you get something extra. That song has something extra: a vibe, a sound, that was unusual. The mojo was working at that moment.

MUSICIAN: *"Surfing" really is a fun song. There are times when the guitars sound like they're laughing.*
SATRIANI: That was the idea. You know, there's a thing about guitar players that maybe a lot of them won't admit. We're always slightly caught up in the subjunctive thought that, well, I should be displaying this. If I play this way it means that my image is like this. And so that song had to cast all those barriers away. It had to break down the walls and say, I'm gonna play whatever I wanna play, as opposed to reflecting upon me to show that I'm the greatest guitar player in the world, or whatever. I didn't want to prove anything with that album. I don't like proving anything with any of my songs. So that song had to be... unashamed.

MUSICIAN: *Where are you at creatively now?*
SATRIANI: I'm sort of bursting with ideas. I'm in a good space. The last year provided so many sights and sounds. I'm drawing on all of it, without a doubt.

A year or two ago, if somebody had said, "Do you want to do a live album?," I'd have said no. But after playing with Jonathan and Stu I realize that when you're with the right people you tend to get some great live recordings. The spontaneity and inspiration are there, and mistakes don't really mean anything. They don't detract from the power of the performance.

MUSICIAN: *How did you meet Jonathan and Stu?*
SATRIANI: I met Jonathan by accident. There's a company called Hoshino that runs Ibanez and Tama. I was there to see the Ibanez people [*Satriani endorses their guitars*] and Jonathan was there to see Tama. We were in the same waiting room staring at each other. That was about two weeks before I was supposed to play in Chicago. We started talking and he said he was a drummer and familiar with my stuff. I said, "What are you doing in two weeks?" And he agreed to meet me in

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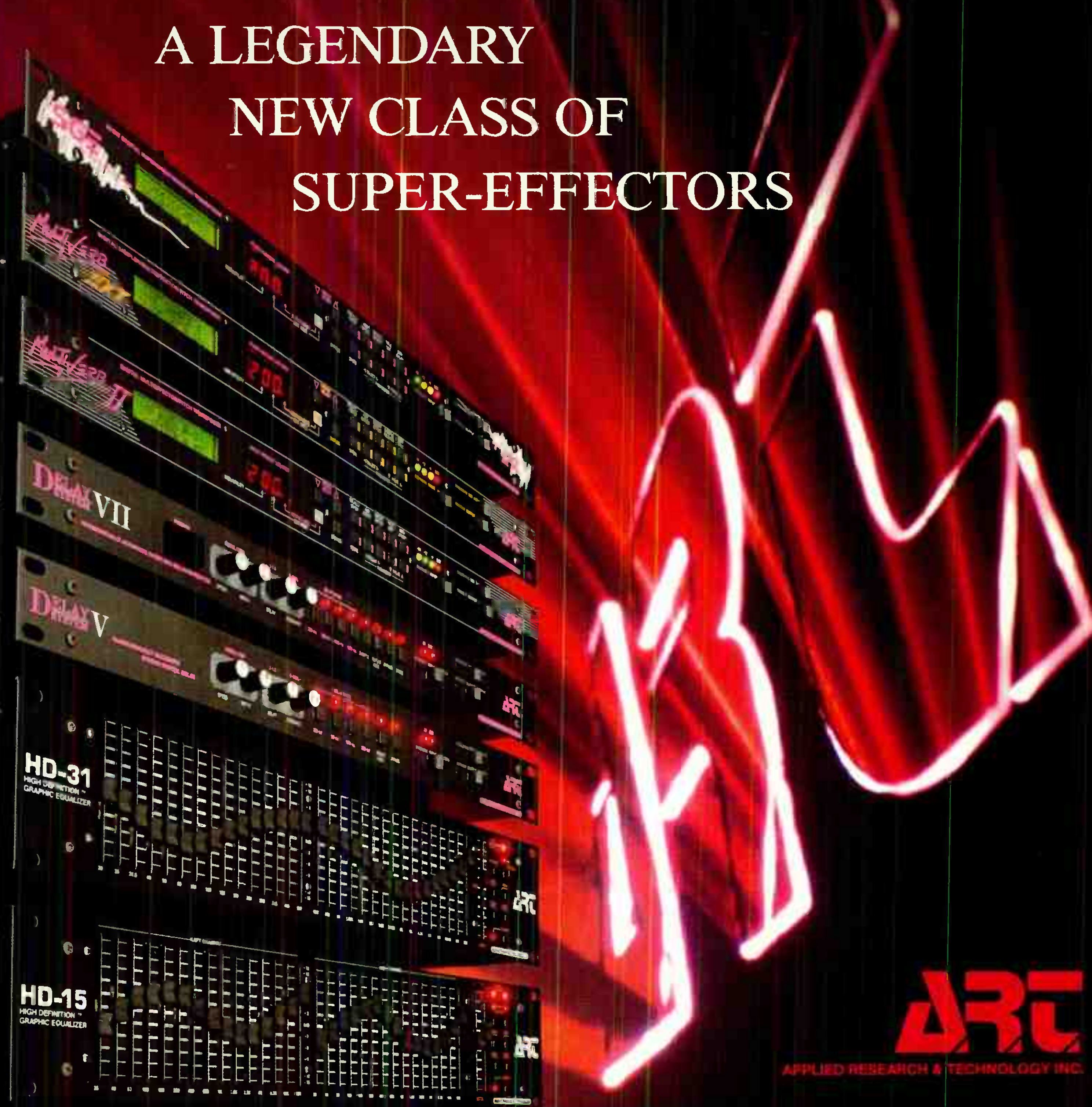

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Chicago. Then I called Stu and asked him if he wanted to do the gig. Stu was in two of Steve Vai's bands. He's on the *Flex-able* records. And Steve always said, "Joe, if you get a band together, use Stu." That Chicago date was our first performance, at the Limelight.

MUSICIAN: *So the band first played about a year before the live songs on your new EP were recorded in June '88 at the California Theater in San Diego. Where did the title* Dreaming #11 *come from?*

SATRIANI: It was actually the title of a song on my first EP. It was just one of those funny little phrases, like *Surfing with the Alien*, that pop into my head. I applied the title to a song on that EP that was a strange collection of sounds. It had an Allen wrench on the pick-ups for a kickdrum, slowed-down scratch for a snare, a sped-up tapping on the strings for a closed high-hat sound. I had all these percussion sounds generated just from a guitar plugged directly into the board. And on top of it I had bass, but it was actually a guitar, not even detuned, just playing popping bass. Then I had a rhythm guitar that sounded like an outgrowth of James Brown, but in retrospect it sounds more like what Prince got into with "Kiss" and "Sign o' the Times" and "Alphabet Street"—that sort of dry guitar set-up. And I had this R&B guitar melody over it. The song ended in a simulated train whistle that I did with a Big Muff and a weird technique of pulling strings over other strings and then off the neck. That song was a collection of non sequiturs, and I thought "The Crush of Love" and the three live songs on the new record didn't really have anything to do with each other. So *Dreaming #11* applied.

"Lennie Tristano was intense. One mistake, the lesson was over."

Naming a record's a pretty complicated thing. I think there are threads and themes that reveal themselves as you go. *Surfing with the Alien* wasn't going to be the last album's title until we were about three-quarters along. Then I felt like it was starting from that song and spilling out all over the place. Of course, if I'd sat down halfway through and said, "Hey, should I call this record *Hill of the Skull* or *Surfing with the Alien?*" the answer might have been pretty obvious; but when you're working on a record you have to give equal attention to everything because every song deserves its best shot.

MUSICIAN: *You said you like to work quickly, but how much time are you willing to give to a song?*

SATRIANI: Some songs I have a hard time finishing. The best example is "Lords of Karma." The first chords are the theme, something I came up with maybe 15 years ago and failed time after time to write a song around. I *knew* there was a song there and I wrote all these strange little improvisations around those two chords. But I always thought, "No, that's not a song." They turned out like new-age pieces. To me those are not songs; they're not strong. And I got lucky before recording *Surfing*. The song revealed itself to me, or suddenly I realized what kind of melody could be put over those chords and that I could use a different rhythm underneath without changing the chords at all.

But some things are done at the last minute. "Headless Horseman" was done the day before I went into the studio. "Driving at Night" was written and recorded after I'd finished the record and decided I wanted to get rid of one song and replace it with another.

It goes back to the idea of naming a record. If you name an album before you start recording it, then it becomes some sort of preconceived project. Because my concept of the album may change in a month or so, today's title could taint today's song ideas later. Each song should be left alone to become its own entity, no matter how long it takes.

If there was going to be singing on the album I might be more sensitive to that. It might be confusing to people if you sang a boy/girl song, went right into a nuclear protest, sang about a serial killer and then about outer space. Then there's the human element we all respond to: the way a singer uses breath and vibrato to suggest meaning. I don't have that as an instrumentalist; I just have to work extra hard to create interesting acoustical landscapes for people to react to.

MUSICIAN: *Which gives you a lot of freedom. I mean, it's unlikely any right-wing watchdogs will come nipping at your heels.*

SATRIANI: I've got no problems. I mean, Tipper Gore's never given me a call, although I've thought of giving her a call a few times. [*laughs*]

MUSICIAN: *Unless you name your next record* Hill of the Skull.

SATRIANI: But that's right out of the Bible! The hill of the skull is the site of the Crucifixion.

MUSICIAN: *You tend to draw on folklore and spiritualism for a lot of your titles.*

SATRIANI: I do a lot of reading on metaphysics and theosophy and the occult; and like anyone else I've got a lot of questions like why are we here, where'd we come from and what is all this stuff that's always happening in the world? There's a lot of great books out there that serve me in a way to make life more interesting and challenge my mind and concept of reality.

MUSICIAN: *Money's a hard reality in the record business. Have you got a bigger budget for this album?*

SATRIANI: Well, for *Surfing*, I did a lot of things to make that record work—and for *Not of This Earth*. I did free sessions for people in trade for studio time. Because as the project went along I'd say, "Oh God, I need another seven hours. I've gotta redo this part." So I made a lot of deals to keep costs down.

Eventually an artist realizes he's spending his own money. There's no sense in spending money for the luxury of having a studio locked out for three hours so you can go have dinner. Or to invite people into the studio to jam around and try to figure out if it's a song later. I don't work like that.

So the bigger budget means that we can go to studios that fit

SATCH'S BOOTY

With his band, **Joe Satriani** plays custom Ibanez guitars with DiMarzio pickups and D'Addario strings. His amplifiers are Marshalls, usually a pair of 100-watt heads driving two 4x12 cabinets. "The amps are run clean. I've got a compressor in-line but I don't really use it. I use an Ibanez digital reverb, some Ibanez digital delay, a Cry Baby, different distortion pedals and a Boss CE-1 chorus. The rack I have is really filled with a lot of back-up stuff: an extra chorus, a Randall amp/pre-amp that I can use if my pedals don't work, a t.c. electronic delay. It's really low-tech, inexpensive, cheap, simple."

With Jagger, Satriani plays a Strat: actually a hybrid of Fender, Tokai, DiMarzio and Ibanez parts with a 1954 Fender neck courtesy of Joe's guitar tech, Pierre de Beauport of New York City. His main amp's a Marshall, but there's a Roland JC-120 with a Boss delay tucked away for "Midnight." He also uses a t.c. 2290. "It's got all sorts of loops that allow you to program whole sections. So Pierre, who has a script, can just punch me in and out of these little patches so I can get louder or softer, or there'd be some delay. I wanted to keep the stage as clean as possible."

When he's writing, Satriani uses a four-track Tascam Portastudio. "I've got some Rockman gear and an array of cheap pedals at home. That's about it. Plus a lot of basses, synthesizers, guitars and cassettes lying around."

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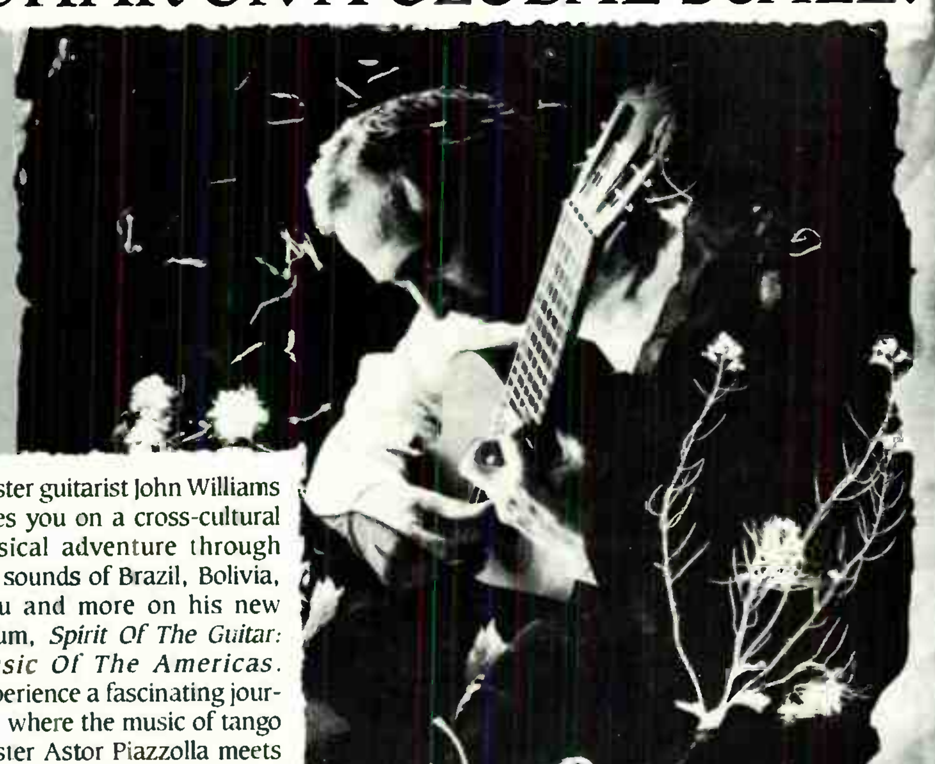

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more of what we're doing at the moment. Like when we start out and are doing overdubs one at a time, we don't need a huge room; what we need is perhaps an automated board so we can assign mutes to it as we go along. Then when I'm laying down, say, the seventh track of guitar, John doesn't have to sit there muting other tracks when they shouldn't be heard. The computer can do a light mix.

If we go into a studio that has a lot of really good outboard gear, or let's say a shower and a place to lie down, and it's in a neighborhood that has 20 restaurants, that saves time for us. When you do the drums, you might want to spend extra money—or less money—for the right room. Or you wanna be able to pay good people more than what they ask. That's a good way to use a budget.

MUSICIAN: *So how big was the budget for* Surfing?

SATRIANI: There really wasn't one. Barry Kobrin, the president of Relativity, just said, "Go ahead and make the best record you can and don't go crazy." We spent less than $30,000. We had some technical problems that made us have to redo things that revolved around using new technology, testing out stuff. That pushed the budget up another 6K. It was gonna be a $20,000 record. In the end it turned out to be excellent sounding, so we accomplished what we set out to do.

This time we're going one step further with using 24 tracks of Dolby SR, which allows you to make analog recordings as quiet as digital. But with all the benefits of analog: the warmth and beautiful transient response without the harshness of digital. Especially with all those grinding guitars, sometimes digital isn't best. 'Cause you can't play with the tape, you can't push the needle into the red.

Another thing I can afford this time is lock-out, which means I can set up six different guitar sounds and leave them up. All the recording I've done in the past was set up and break down. I've been a roadie every day I've had to record and that's hard, that's really hard.

So the budget is really whatever I spend. The record company has faith in me as a producer because I have a firm grip on the understanding I'm spending my own money and that I'm not looking forward to spending a lot of it. But I will spend as much as I need to make a product superior to the last record. That should be the one goal of any artist: to go one step better.

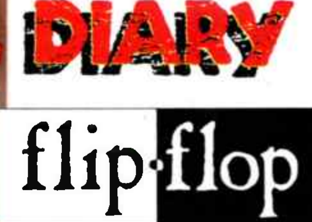
MUSICIAN: *You're into wild sounds. Have you tried using guitar synthesizers?*

SATRIANI: No. I've picked them up a few times and they always sound like cheap keyboards, so... [*laughs*] The whole thing about the guitar is that the guitar sounds good. Why try to make it sound like another instrument?

I guess I could see it being used if I'm standing here playing guitar and suddenly I've got to trigger another sound. But I prefer the idea of having, say, Jonathan trigger it. That's what we did on this last tour. Jonathan had a sampler with the chords from "Not of This Earth" and "Lords of Karma," and the whistle, claps and screams from "Headless Horseman." Some songs where we could have used samples, I decided not to. Like "Always with Me, Always with You" never came across right if we tried to make it sound like the record.

But I don't want anything to interfere with gut-to-gut guitar. That's the instrument I like. That's the one I can play!

MUSICIAN: *Speaking of your tour, it's interesting that most of the time when you see a guitar-oriented performer the audience is usually all male guitar-heads. But when you play there's a pretty good cross-section, including women.*



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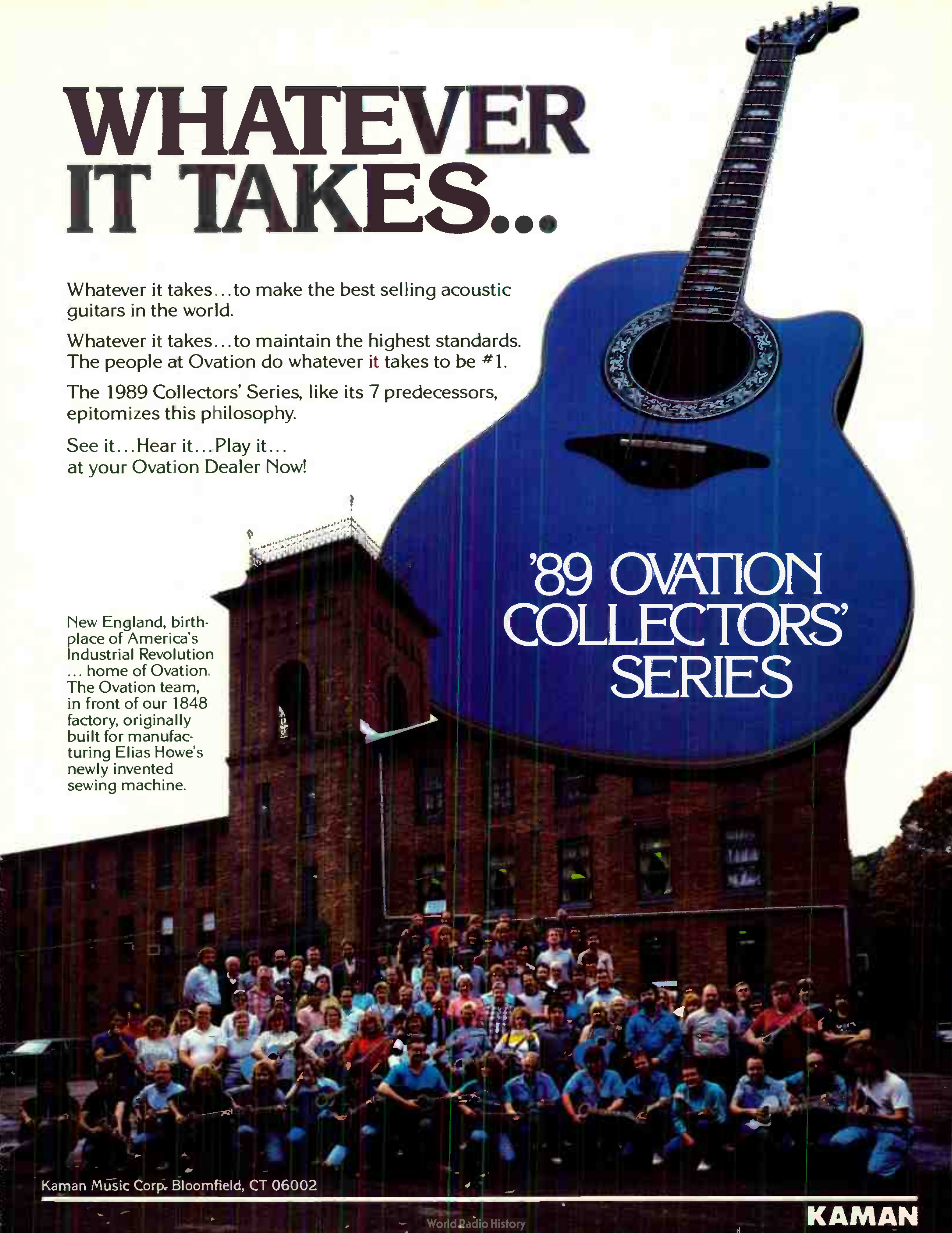

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SATRIANI: Well, it's certainly nice for me and the rest of the guys, 'cause when you play hundreds of shows and your audience is only other guys... Let's face it, if your audience is limited, the feedback you get is limited.

Also, and I don't want to put my foot in my mouth saying this, but I don't know how else to put it: The element of sex is in the music. When I'm writing it, since I'm a healthy young man, those feelings are in me like with any other guy and so they become part of the music. That's a very positive energy in the world, so I like to think that people respond to that in my stuff. Subtly perhaps.

MUSICIAN: *With so much road work under your belt in the last year, has it opened up new areas of your playing?*

SATRIANI: Gee, certainly playing live you wind up looser with less of a design on where the songs are going to go. Jonathan, Stu and I never discussed a lot of the songs in the set as a rule. It would be up to little nods and winks. So I guess I'm working on more songs now where I can build in a space for true improvisation, not just solos.

You know, when I first got together with these guys and played, I realized, "I'm gonna be able to just not say anything to them. They're gonna just go mad every night and it's gonna sound great." Which means I can walk onstage with no worries about where I'm going to go. You don't need any safety nets, so you can really stretch out.

MUSICIAN: *How different was it in Mick Jagger's band, with him calling the shots?*

SATRIANI: He's really a complex musician, but a straight-ahead guy at the same time. Mick assembled the craziest bunch of players in the world. During rehearsals in New York, he would jam with us in small groups or sometimes all together. But he would often just leave us alone, and you know how musicians are: Soon there would be this big jam session going on. And he would just listen while he walked around working on the staging or lighting. He'd walk up to you while you're jamming and check out what you're doing and smile.

Then, as we started getting into the songs, he'd remind you of something that he'd heard in the middle of some tech-rap-bebop jam and say, "You can do that if you want."

MUSICIAN: *You had a solo spot?*

SATRIANI: In Japan we tried doing "Midnight" and "Satch Boogie." They went over really well, but the problem was that segueing "Satch Boogie" into "Gimme Shelter" didn't always work. Eventually we dropped "Satch Boogie" and I did an extended version of "Midnight" by myself, which was nice because I got to wander around the entire stage and play a beautiful piece.

MUSICIAN: *Was it a blast playing those classic Stones songs?*

SATRIANI: It's fantastic. It was like a rock 'n' roll dream come true. Of course it would be fun for all of us to see Keith and Mick get back together again.

MUSICIAN: *How did you change your approach for Mick's band?*

SATRIANI: It was obvious what wouldn't work. For example, the style of playing that I use on "Ice 9" has nothing to do with any of the songs we played. It was clear when I first started playing with Mick that I would be drawing on my earlier roots—all the rockers from the mid-to-late '60s.

I play the blues a lot, even though you don't hear it on my records. In fact, some of the better times we had were these guerrilla dates we would do. The band would run into some little bar in Australia or New Zealand, use someone else's equipment and do "King Bee," "I'm a Man." To me that was

She started playing the drums at age 7 and was introduced on To Tell The Truth by Buddy Rich!

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really liberating. The band took off because there was no show, just a couple of people cramped on a tiny stage playing little amps, with Mick playing harp.

Another thing is that I couldn't get my Ibanez guitars to produce the right sound to cut through another guitar, two keyboards, five singers and the unbelievable rhythm section of Doug Wimbish and Simon Phillips. It was just too much sound.

The sound I use in my trio is not as piercing as you might think. It seems piercing because it's only a trio; it really has a rather broad fidelity. So I had to go for a more cutting sound with Mick, and an old Strat just seemed to make sense.

MUSICIAN: *Actually you play at a fairly low volume with the trio, don't you?*

SATRIANI: I don't believe in piercing volume. I'd like myself and my audience to be able to hear in 2010. My soundman is under instructions to keep it on the low end.

You see, in my mind, music is a very beautiful, multicolored thing. Then I've got to put it through guitars, loudspeakers, microphones. My God, by the time it comes out it makes you want to puke. You want to grab someone and explain, "This is not how I intended it to sound!"

One thing you can do with success is use money to create a more delicious sound, like Pink Floyd putting on an unbelievable sonic treat for their audience. I think I'm going to apply some of this success to create a more interesting live sound. But my music is totally different from a Pink Floyd. It will always be rather raw and there's lots of improvisation.

MUSICIAN: *When you lived in New York you studied with pianist Lennie Tristano for a while. Did you learn much about improvising from him?*

SATRIANI: He led me to change my whole technique. His basic message was: Practice harder than you can ever imagine, learn everything there is to learn, never play what people want you to play, only play what you want to play and go do what you want to do in life.

He was the most intense disciplinarian, when it came to displaying technique. You just couldn't get away with a mistake. You'd play a mistake, the lesson was over. And when it came to improvising, it was totally free-form. Completely unself-conscious, uninhibited.

MUSICIAN: *So if you hit one bum note he'd kick you out?*

SATRIANI: Yes, if it was during the part of the lesson where he'd said, "Play me a B-flat harmonic minor in fourths up and down the guitar in all octaves." And if you made a mistake, you'd have to come back next time and play it right.

But if you were playing unaccompanied and hit a wrong note it didn't matter. What you did after hitting the wrong note mattered. If you stopped, he'd say, "Why'd you stop?" The idea for him was never to be judgmental while you're improvising. Never think about what you should or could be doing; get out of the whole subjunctive state of mind. Be a free spirit as you play. Let desire guide your music.

MUSICIAN: *Well, desire's taken you to some interesting places.*

SATRIANI: A few years ago if somebody said, "Hey, you're gonna have two records in the top 100, you're gonna have braces on and you're gonna play with Mick Jagger and be nominated for Grammies," I'd have said, "Nah." This is like something in a Kurt Vonnegut book. How could all of these things be happening at the same time? But, in fact, they are. And it's interesting. M

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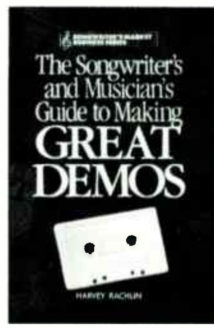

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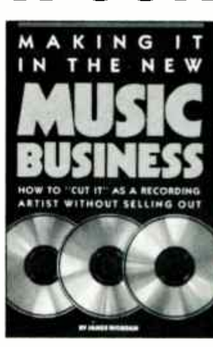

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SNEAK PREVIEWS GOES TO NAMM

Albert Einstein and Thomas Alva Edison Cover the Latest in Music Equipment

By Jock Baird & Alan di Perna

EDISON: Hi everyone, and welcome to "Sneak Previews." I'm Thomas Alva Edison, father of electricity and film reviewer for the *Newark Sun-Times*. Across the aisle from me is my colleague Albert Einstein, father of modern astrophysics and movie critic for the *Vienna Herald*.

EINSTEIN: Thanks Tom. For today's show, we've got more than the usual crop of disposable celluloid. In an effort to put some scientific substance into their usually vapid tech reporting, *Musician* has flown us out to the NAMM show in sunny Anaheim, California, to scope out the latest musical equipment, and that's what we'll be doing on today's special edition of "Sneak Previews." The expectations for this Winter NAMM show have been expanding more rapidly than the universe, but after three hectic days on the floor and in the hospitality suites, I'd say this has been one of the most explosive shows in some time.

EDISON: Explosive, Albert? If remakes and sequels are your idea of a Big Bang, then I guess it was explosive for *you*.

Nothing here really lit my bulb, although some of those remakes were kind of okay.... But since that famous zeal of yours has got your hair standing on end again, why don't you go ahead and tell the viewers what your favorite new product was.

EINSTEIN: Unquestionably the **E-mu** Proteus. Only a patent-crazy Yank like you would call *that* a remake. A single-rack-space box that's a 16-bit play-only sampler with 32-voice polyphony for under a grand. Come on, Thomas, look at this thing: It's got 192 onboard samples made from their $10,000 Emulator III sampler. Now I know everything's relative, even sound quality, but I would call the Proteus' sounds extraordinary. It can play up to 16 separate multi-timbral parts and even has six separate outputs that can be ganged together as three stereo pairs. It even has analog, additive, FM and linear synthesis capabilities. Think of it—the ultimate MIDI module for $999!

There's more to it than pure sound, though. The Proteus has this performance controller mapping setup called MIDIPatch which gives you real-time control of more than 40 parameters of each sound—E-mu likens this to a digital patchbay. And the Proteus uses dynam-

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ics to increase a sample's brightness when you play harder, rather than clumsily crossfading between two or more different samples? And it's even got an editor/librarian software package from Opcode ready to go. I gather you're unimpressed by my hypothesis.

EDISON: Well, Albert, your calling the Proteus the pick of NAMM was instructive but hardly original. Indeed, that's been the knee-jerk reaction of many show-goers. And it's a useful enough unit. But what's so earth-shaking about a bunch of E-III sounds in a box. **Kurzweil** gave us that last season with the 1000 series. There may be some new price ramifications, but I do think we've seen this one before.

EINSTEIN: Isn't it possible that your fixation on new technology may be blinding you to social and economic implications? With more units like this, sonic want may vanish from the globe, beginning a new era of world peace. For instance, I saw another play-only sampler over at **Roland** called the U-110 which has 31-note polyphony, six individual outputs, 99 internal sounds and the ability to access new sounds through four card slots—all for $1100. The samples are apparently 12-bit, but they curved my space pretty well. So if you're so smart, what's *your* pick?

EDISON: Given your limited experience with practical electronics, Albert, perhaps you missed the **Yamaha** V80. But for those who can dig 6-operator FM, who love Yamaha's QX3 sequencer and their digital effects processors, this is the blockbuster of the season. What a dynamo! Like your puny little Proteus it's got 32 voices, it's 16-channel multi-timbral and there's an SPX90-style effects chip. It's also got a 32-track sequencer with all the QX3's editing power. There are even some brand-new FM parameters, like random LFO, random-pitch EG, velocity-to-feedback and independent-operator modulation, although the V80 is fully compatible with Yamaha's other six-op instruments. It's just under $3000—a little steep but worth the climb.

Roland's 31-voice play-only sampler, the U-110.

EINSTEIN: How ironic. In your myopic obsession with novelty, you've made your top pick a workstation, the very product concept that dominated the synth market's attention for most of 1988? Altogether amusing.

EDISON: Oh your head *is* like a vacuum tube. That's precisely my point. This is the plot-line practically every synth company at NAMM seems to be touting, a predictable sci-fi tale of recombinant mutation. Tone module meets sequencer. They inhabit the body of a keyboard and maybe breed a little effects processor or two. So since manufacturers aren't making with the new technology here at NAMM, the question becomes this: How good are the user interfaces on their new hybrid creations? And on that front, I give the V80 three quarks for Muster Marks. It's got a big, cinemascope LCD which allows related parameters to be grouped conveniently on a single page, and it lets you zip from page to page like electricity between two filaments. Historically "Yamaha FM" has been Japanese for "hard to program," but they seem to be trying to correct this with the V80.

EINSTEIN: Hey, I just love those six MIDI control sliders. And I thought it was interesting that **Grey Matter Response**, who make the celebrated E!board, is also involved in the V80's development, and that Yamaha's been soliciting lots of that pragmatic American know-how you're so famous for, Tom. And I was also knocked for a quantum loop by the V80's little brother, the four-op 16-voice V50, with its built-in eight-track sequencer and 32 internal effects. Marketwise, you'd have to consider the V50 a real atomic reaction to the workstation wars. The V50 has a full eight-track sequencer, RX5 PCM drum sounds and the multi-effects, plus a disk drive, all for $1900. In short, despite the fact it's only got two stereo outs, it's rather good counterprogramming.

Some people, of course, do have a bad attitude about FM, but this *is* new-generation, TX81Z-style FM, with the more complex waveforms. FM-phobes may also be reassured by the "quick-edit" modes on the V50, which let you bypass the gnarliest aspects of FM programming. And you certainly have to give Yamaha some credit for not using the W-word to describe the V80 and V50. Too bad Roland didn't follow suit with their W-30; they've dubbed it a workstation.

EDISON: And why shouldn't they. The W-30 can sample while the V80 and V50 can't. And for my money, you've got to have sampling in order to have a workstation. Without it, you've just got a tap-dancing synthesizer. But in the $2800 W-30, we see the same recycling tendencies I referred to earlier. It's a Roland S-330 sampler coupled with a keyboard and a 16-track/15,000-event sequencer that has many of the same sophisticated editing features as Roland's Super-MRC software for their MC-500. And to save on precious RAM, they even give you a whole bunch of

Yamaha's mega-workstation, the V80 FD.

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preset drum samples in ROM. I thought it was worthy of the name workstation.
EINSTEIN: Perhaps, but I'm more intrigued by your thesis that all the new synths at NAMM are just variations on the same old combination plot. Let's test it. What about the **Oberheim** OB-8k?
EDISON: Matrix 1000 marries Perf-X Systemizer. They have keyboard.
EINSTEIN: The **Korg** T1?
EDISON: M1 gains weighted wooden keyboard.
EINSTEIN: Ah, but don't forget the disk drive and expanded sequencer capacity. How about the **Ensoniq** EPSM?
EDISON: EPS loses keyboard but gains four times the RAM memory, the eight outputs and SCSI interface that were custom add-ons during its not-so-dim keyboard past, all for the same price.
EINSTEIN: I was also not unimpressed by their signature series. I wouldn't at all mind using some Nile Rodgers or J.R. Robinson samples on my home rig. Say, what about the mysterious Ensoniq VFX, which never made it to the show?
EDISON: SQ-80 loses onboard sequencer, gains EPS architecture, a new VLSI chip and hotter onboard wave samples.
EINSTEIN: Hmm. And the **Kawai** K1II and K4?
EDISON: A bit like *Rocky II*, isn't it? The K1 beefs up with a built-in reverb and a pile of drum sounds, which can function as a ninth multi-timbral instrument. As for the K4, it's a new synth that takes the K1's PCM waveform concept and moves it uptown with 16-bit resolution and a (still very reasonable) $1200 price tag.
EINSTEIN: What about what many considered the big story of NAMM, the **Peavey** synthesizer? That's new.
EDISON: Yeah, right. Just what the world needs. Another synthesizer.
EINSTEIN: You're certainly in a poor mood today. What, did you get stuck in the Holland Tunnel on your way to the airport? To me the whole premise behind this project is provocative. Musicians are tired of buying the hippest new synth only to discover 18 months down the line they need something hipper and can only get 10 cents on the dollar for their original investment. Hartley Peavey charges that current synth makers "look at the world as a great black hole you dump synths into. The dealer becomes a banana merchant—move it quick or it goes rotten."

Personally I was flattered he used the black hole metaphor. Anyway, Peavey's answer was to *not* build yet another product out of custom, VLSI chips, but rather to make it out of off-the-shelf components and set them all up in a host/slave multi-processor configuration. The whole machine then runs on software routines that can be constantly updated and adapted. Next year's model is software. Planned obsolescence, Peavey suggests, will become obsolete. So what is this revolutionary product? Well, they call the DPM-3 a "composition center," but—you guessed it—it's a workstation, all right. It's essentially a wavetable synth with nine-track sequencer, multi-effects, PCM drum samples and disk drive for $1900—where have I heard that number before? Altogether I was intrigued at how audacious the whole project is. Now Thomas, I know you're aching to say that we've already seen software-updatable MIDI gear from other companies, but certainly nothing as open-ended as this.
EDISON: Actually, Albert, I was going to say that what I heard didn't sound like it was going to capture the public's imagination the way the M1 and D-50 did. And how seriously can you take a system that calls its DCFs "digital convolution filters"? They gotta be kidding!
EINSTEIN: Frankly, Thomas, I never thought a guy who lived in Jersey could be such a snob. And granted they'd only had the thing a day or so before the show so the sounds were, shall we say, undeveloped. But it is 16-bit and had more punch than I expected. Also don't forget that Peavey and their AMR wing have been building decent high-tech MIDI processors for quite some time now. Did you notice they had six separate computers packed into the DPM-3, including two 24-bit jobs for the voices and another for the effects? I wouldn't underestimate Peavey's ability to build the machine they're describing, or their strong dealer network. Of course, cynics could remind us there were Peavey drums and even a Peavey electric piano some years back.... But moving on, Tom, didn't you see anything you thought was *genuinely* original?
EDISON: Yeah, I did see something called the MIDIMan from **Music Soft**. What it lets you do is take any stream of MIDI data and record it onto ordinary audio tape—cassette, reel-to-reel, DAT, whatever. So you can download your sequences onto a cassette machine and use them for backup if your sequencer goes down. Or if you're brave, you can just leave the sequencer at home when you go to a gig or studio. Another thing you can do is print your MIDI data onto one track of a multi-track tape and jettison the whole sync box/sequencer rigmarole. All for $180. Just pray there are no drop outs.
EINSTEIN: Hey, be nice. I was a drop out. It's appropriate you've brought up tape, because another big theme we saw here at Anaheim was the six-track cassette recorder, coupled with the appearance of—oh no—a cassette "workstation." When will it end? I'm talking about the **Sansui** WS-X1, which combines an eight-channel mixer with a six-track cassette recorder with a two-track cassette mixdown all for $2000. It's even got an onboard echo unit. You saw it—what did you think?
EDISON: I was skeptical at first, but I must admit it sounded pretty good. The two-band shelving EQ is a bit spartan and of its two buss sends, one is dedicated to the onboard effect, which right now is a very rudimentary delay line. But if they upgrade that, which they say they will, they should have a box-office hit on their hands. Not to mention that cute little $300 sync box, the SY-1X, and the 12x6x2 MX-12 mixer for $1200.
EINSTEIN: **Vestax** also had a six-track cassette recorder, but theirs was mainly a stand-alone deck. The big pitch for their MR-66 is sound quality; the Vestax

Sansui's WS-X1 combines an eight-channel mixer, effects, and six-track and mixdown cassette decks.

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people openly question whether you can get 20 Hz to 20 kHz of bandwidth with 90 dB of dynamic range onto eight cassette tracks and decided it was safer to do it on six. I can relate to that—I worry a lot about recording quality in my studio, and six seems like a nice compromise between eight and four.

EDISON: Frankly, Albert, having heard your tapes, I wouldn't worry about it. By the way, who told you you could sing?

EINSTEIN: They're just demos! Anyway, the MR-66 also has this 34-point patchbay, which makes bouncing and combining tracks a lot easier. Vestax also says you'll be able to bounce any track to any track, including the one next door, and if you want you can do it in stereo. It has IC logic transport controls with two song markers and type II dbx and goes for $1400. Vestax also has the first cassette four-track with a 16-bit digital reverb, the MR-100FX, which has some nice extras for its $800 tag. Speaking of cassette recorders, I heard that there was a top-secret back-room unveiling over at **Tascam**. Did you happen to talk to anybody that was allowed to see it?

EDISON: Actually *I* saw it. You weren't invited? Maybe they had a dress code. It was interesting, something called the 644 MIDI Studio. As its name implies, this thing is designed with MIDI home studio users in mind—people who only need a few tape tracks for vocals or guitars, but who need tons of inputs for all their synths, samplers and drum machines. For lost souls like these, Tascam has mated a four-track cassette deck with a 16-input snapshot-automated mixer section. It looks like it has lots of MIDI capabilities for its scanty $1500 price tag. It makes me proud to have invented recording.

You also missed the MM1 MIDI-equipped mixer. Tascam is billing it as a keyboard mixer but I think it'll appeal to a much wider audience, including home studio owners and P.A. mixer types. It's got 20 inputs, the first four of which are stereo, plus four effects sends, four stereo effects returns, and individual outputs on each channel. Mixer settings on the MM1 can be stored in 99 different memory locations and selected via MIDI program change command. It also does muting via MIDI note numbers.

EINSTEIN: I'll tell you what I *did* see in the realm of 16-channel mixers, and that was the **Alesis** 1622. Think of it, man! Sixteen channels, six busses, XLR inputs... all for $800. How do they do it?

EDISON: The tech grapevine says that the mixer and EQ potentiometers are screened onto circuit boards, which cuts down considerably on production costs. They certainly designed the 1622 to play in Peoria—and everywhere else, for that matter—with six sends, eight returns, insert points on each channel and direct outs on the first eight channels. I would've liked a closer look, but the unit was under one of those glass bubbles that we're seeing more and more of at NAMM shows.

EINSTEIN: But still, you can't really say it's vaporware.

EDISON: No, maybe we should call it *glassware*. Which is what we also have to call the Alesis M-EQ 230 equalizer. It really looks scrumptious under that transparent dome, though: two channels of 30-band EQ for just $199. That should make your poor, huddled home studio masses happier. It might even initiate your precious world peace five years ahead of schedule. But if you ask me, I wonder if our standards may be quietly slipping. Call me a purist, but shouldn't a mixer have CD-quality circuits, even if it's only an eight-channel stereo one? Now this Unity 8 rack mixer from **Passac** is the kind of thing I'm talking about. You talk about bandwidth, how about 15 Hz of low-end with 20 kHz on top. There's 95 dB of dynamic range available on this thing.

Peavey's ambitious DPM-3 "compostion center" is almost totally software-based.

Sequel mania in action: Ensoniq's EPSm, Son of EPS

EINSTEIN: Isn't CD-quality actually *96* dB, Tom? Boy, are we more on top of the numbers than those usual guys who do the NAMM reports. No, on this one we agree. And in this wonderful stereo-processing era, the ability to handle busses in pairs adds a lot to the usefulness of the Unity 8, especially for keyboard and guitar rack practitioners. And Passac is still standing tough with its MIDI guitar system. Of all the pitch-to-voltage MIDI guitars, I really find it the most playable. And I finally got some quality time on the Yamaha G10, which I found very responsive.

EDISON: Oh please. Not MIDI guitar. Here's another area where the manufacturers are churning out sequel after sequel. Over at Roland they mated the GM-70 with an L/A tone module and called it the GR-50. At least they came up with a smaller 13-pin guitar-to-brain connector plug. And the Korg Z-3 guitar synth looks like another pitch-to-voltage extravaganza, also with self-contained voices. At least there was a fret-wired **Valley Arts** MIDI bass controller, I understand. Although I must admit I didn't get to see it.

EINSTEIN: Maybe if you'd had your mind on basslines instead of hemlines you'd have seen more equipment. Or you'd have explored the show's biggest irony: that in the midst of all this technology, the biggest comeback of the year was acoustic guitars. Not just cheapo ones, either, but all across the price spectrum. How can a company like **Taylor Guitars** not have a new product for six years and be thriving? It's enough to put MI writers out of business! And I know **C.F. Martin**'s business is booming—we read it in the *New York Times*. At least Martin had the decency to bring out a really nice acoustic bass guitar so we had something new to talk about.

Why is low tech beating out high tech? Could it be significant that Martin sees the same type of frustration with planned obsolescence and the declining worth of used MIDI instruments that Hartley Peavey decries? They point out that the day you buy a synthesizer is the best it

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An Amazing Story!

THEY LAUGHED WHEN I SAID THEY COULD HAVE PERFECT PITCH—

BUT WHEN THEY HEARD FOR THEMSELVES...!

It's a universal fact: you need a great ear to make it in music. Keyboardist David L. Burge, 30, tells the true story of how he unlocked the secrets to the Perfect Ear.

World famous for his Perfect Pitch Seminar, Burge explains how to gain Perfect Pitch. His simple teaching is for all musicians.

by David L. Burge

It all started when I was in ninth grade. There was this girl in my school named Linda—she was supposed to have an incredible gift. They said she could name any pitch *by ear!* They said she had "Perfect Pitch."

I tried to imagine it. Do you mean if I play a B♭, she can tell me *without looking?* It seemed impossible. How would she know B♭ from A, B, or C?

But then again, if there *were* such an ability...it would enhance your entire understanding of music! All musicians—from rock to classical—would want to identify pitches by ear!

It was too fantastic a claim. I doubted it.

The Challenge

Indignantly I sought out Linda and asked if the stories were true. Could she really name any tone just by hearing it? Casually, she said she could.

I felt more than a little incredulous at this point. I rudely asked, "Do you mind if I test you sometime?"

"OK," she responded cheerfully. It made me all the more curious and impatiently excited. I *had* to get to the bottom of this musical mystery.

At the first opportunity I reminded Linda about my "challenge."

I carefully picked a time when she had not been playing the piano. I had her stand where she could not see the keyboard. I made sure other classmates could not give her cues. Everything was set just right so I could expose this thing as a ridiculous joke.

Inside me the tension was mounting. Linda, however, appeared serenely unaffected. With silent apprehension I chose an obscure note: F#. (This will confuse her!)

I had barely touched the tone. No sooner had it sounded than she *instantly* said, "F#"!

I was astonished! It was so amazing that I quickly played another tone.

She didn't even stop to think. *Immediately* she announced the correct pitch. I played more and more tones here and there on the keyboard, and each time she knew the answer—without any visible effort. Unbelievably, she identified the pitches as easily as colors.

"Sing an E♭," I demanded, determined to confuse her. Quickly she sounded the proper pitch. I asked for more tones (trying hard to make them increasingly difficult), but still she sang every one perfectly on pitch.

"How in the world do you do it?" I exclaimed. I was totally boggled.

"I don't know," she replied. "But I'm sure it's something you can't buy."

The reality of Perfect Pitch hit me hard. My head was swooning with disbelief, yet I knew from my own experiment that Perfect Pitch is real.

My Musical Quest

"How does she do it?" I kept asking myself. On the other hand, why can't *everyone* do it?

It dawned on me that most people go through their entire lives listening to music, yet they seldom know the tones they hear. Most *musicians* cannot tell C from D#, or G major from F major. It seemed odd and contradictory.

I found myself even more mystified than before I had tested her.

Humiliated and puzzled, I went home to work on this problem. At age 14, this was a hard nut to crack.

You can be sure I tried it myself. My brothers and sisters would test me. Each time I would try to carefully determine the pitch by how high or low it was. Almost every attempt failed miserably.

I tried day after day to locate that "mental pitch barometer." I tried to feel each tone. I tried to visualize them. I tried associating things to them. Then I tried to memorize them by playing them for long periods. But nothing worked. The situation proved utterly hopeless.

After weeks in vain, I finally gave up. Linda's gift was surely unusual and extraordinary. But it was for her and a select few like her. Others were not meant to have it. And do not ask me how she does it, because I have no idea.

The Realization

But just then something miraculous happened. I had stopped *thinking* about the problem. I had stopped *trying*. I had stopped *intellectualizing* all about listening. Now, for the first time, *I STARTED TO LISTEN NATURALLY.*

Suddenly I began to notice faint "colors"

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within the tones—similar to the colors in a spectrum of light. But I did not *see* colors—I *heard* the sublimely delicate "sound colors" which exist in all of music—the pure and natural colors of the *sound* spectrum. They had always been there. But this was the first time I had ever really paused to listen.

Now I could name the pitches by ear! It was simple. An F# sounded one way—a B♭ had a different "color sound." It was as easy as seeing red and blue!

Instantly the realization hit me: THIS IS PERFECT PITCH! This is how Bach, Beethoven and Mozart were able to hear music mentally and sing and identify tones at will—by "color sound." It's simple!

I became convinced that every musician has Perfect Pitch in his or her own ear, but the vast majority have never really learned to *listen*.

I tried out my theory on my close friend, Ann. She is a flutist. I told her that Perfect Pitch is easy, and that she could do it herself.

"Oh, I could never have Perfect Pitch," she laughed. "You can develop a good *Relative* Pitch [comparing one tone with another], but you have to be *born* with Perfect Pitch."

"People feel that way because they don't understand what Perfect Pitch is," I explained. "It's really easy—all you have to do is listen!" I sat down at the piano and showed her my discoveries.

She agreed with everything I showed her. She *had* to, because she heard everything for herself. But she still had a nagging doubt that this was really Perfect Pitch.

The next couple of weeks we dabbled a

"How in the world do you do it?" I exclaimed. I was totally boggled.

bit more. Though hesitant at first, Ann gradually came to identify tones with incredible accuracy. Of course, this is the very definition of Perfect Pitch. It soon became clear she had fully acquired the skill which before was a mere fantasy.

Fame spread throughout our school that Ann and I had Perfect Pitch. We became instant celebrities. Students would often dare us to name pitches, sing tones, what chord is that, how high did she sing, give me an A, etc. Everyone was amazed.

Perfect Pitch allowed me to progress far faster than I ever thought possible. After all, hearing is the basis for all music. Not only did I receive A's in ear-training (no problem!), but I completely skipped over required college courses. Most important, I learned that no amount of practice, lessons, or equipment can ever replace the value of your ear.

Spreading the Knowledge

That's how it all started. Little did I know that years later I would be teaching seminars on Perfect Pitch.

Actually, I rejected the idea of seminars at first. There were so many misconceptions about Perfect Pitch. People often *laughed* when I said they could have it. Some thought it would bother them if things were out of tune. I guess it's easy to downplay something when one feels it is beyond reach.

But Perfect Pitch adds a dazzling new dimension to listening. It's a total artistic sense which promotes tremendous levels of talent in every phase of musical activity—from performing and playing by ear, to improvising, listening and writing, singing, transposing, tuning, better memory—and much deeper *enjoyment* of music. Perfect Pitch means *increased powers of listening*.

I let musicians test me to prove my points, but it didn't help. They usually felt that I had the knack, but for them it was unattainable.

How was I to calm this skepticism? Remember, at that time I did not have the thousands of students worldwide who are experiencing Color Hearing for themselves.

So I went back to the basics. I would prove my points in just one simple way: by having people *hear for themselves*.

It worked! No amount of lecturing could do it. No amount of testimonials. No amount of logic, persuasion or research would prove it to some. But even "old school" professors were gratefully changing their minds when they *experienced* their "first taste" of real Perfect Pitch. Rock musicians, classical, jazz—they heard for themselves! All talk became unnecessary.

The Experience

The experience is both subtle and awesome. It's like switching from a black and white to a color TV. Without Perfect Pitch it's like "black and white" hearing—all the tones sound pretty much the same, just different shades of "gray."

Perfect Pitch gives you the *colors* of the tones. Color lets you recognize them—an A over there, a C# here, E major chord there, etc. Each tone has its own unique color sound. That's why I like to refer to Perfect Pitch as "Color Hearing."

Perfect Pitch is definitely something you can't buy. Instead, you unfold it *from within yourself*. I feel fortunate that I'm able to offer the knowledge of how to develop it. It's ridiculously simple. But you have to hear for *yourself* to gain it. It's yours—inside you, waiting, free as the air you breathe. And it's a priceless musical possession.

To start, you just need a few basic instructions. As your ear becomes cultured you begin to enjoy and use these delicate sound colors. You learn to hear beauty you may never have appreciated before. It's a whole new awareness—once you uncover it you own all its possibilities.

This is Perfect Pitch.

GET STARTED!

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will ever sound, while the day you buy a Martin is the worst it will ever sound. Hmm. Bohr said that about my theory of relativity. But who the heck is buying all these acoustic guitars? Both Taylor's and Martin's research says many of them are people who are thirtysomething and possessed of a '60s sensibility, with some assistance from 1988's vaunted folk revival and ongoing new-age phenomenon. But there may be more to this than aging hippies, especially because electric guitar and bass activity was kind of flat at Anaheim.

EDISON: Actually, the hottest thing I saw in guitars was tubes. I always knew those little guys had a long life ahead.

EINSTEIN: Oh no, here we go with the vacuum tubes again.

EDISON: Cut me some slack, Albert. Sometimes you can't beat the old classics. **Marshall** obviously thinks so. They've rereleased their great oldie, the JCM 45MkII tube head, which was such a great vehicle for Hendrix, Townshend and a cast of other guitar heroes. Marshall has also put an all-tube preamp in front of their new 9000 series rack system. It's a three-channel, single-rack-space preamp called the MPG 9001, with one effects loop and a five-band master EQ. You can pair it with tube or solid-state 9000 series amps.

Peavey has gone much the same route with their Rockmaster all-tube preamp. Again you get three channels, but here there are no less than five effects loops—one for each channel, one that's shared by the two distortion channels and one that's common to all three. The preamp can be paired with any of Peavey's new Classic Series all-tube power amps but viewers who prefer their tube amp thrills in an affordable floor pedal will want to check out the **Dean Markley** Overlord, which has a single 12AX7 tube right inside.

EINSTEIN: Enough with the tubes already. In fact, companies are getting better at making solid-state circuits do tube distortion. I spent some time listening to **Paul Reed Smith**'s new combo amplifier, and this guy's got his crunch *down*, especially that Hi-Watt/Marshall thing. This one was a prototype, fairly simple in the controls department, but lethal at 75 yards. And Marshall came out with a solid-state distortion pedal called the Guv'nor that will also curl your hair and curdle your blood. But to my way of hearing, the biggest news in guitar distortion was strictly digital. Tube snobs like yourself may pooh-pooh digital distortion and mumble incantations about tubes accentuating only the odd harmonics, but you didn't plug into a **Digitech** GSP-5 rack, which has all the 16-bit MIDI-fied multi-effects we loved in their DSP series—including a second and a half of delay—and adds some real teeth-rattling capabilities. You can chain five effects together at a shot for around $500. Roland was also swaying the chandeliers with its GS-6, which is primarily a distortion sculptor, but also has some basic reverbs and delays aboard for $999. And **ART** checked in with a $300 distortion device called the Power Plant that also acquitted itself nicely.

Tube vs. digital crunch: Roland's GS-6 and Marshall's MGP 9001 preamps.

EDISON: Say what you will, Albert, but to me a digital effect's place is in the studio, and shouldn't be bothered with all that messy stuff. Look at what Yamaha's doing with their SPX series—their experience in the synth market has taught them that sequels generally mean good box office. With the SPX1000, they gave us *Son of SPX90*, and now that multi-processor has spawned its own affordable sequel called the SPX900. Thrill to the same sounds and number of programs you get in the SPX1000. Gasp at the price: just $995 as compared with the 1000's $1795 admission fee. What's the catch? Well, you have to sacrifice the true discrete stereo and digital ins and outs you get on the SPX 1000, but who's complaining? Will this spectacular series ever end? Let's hope not.

EINSTEIN: If you want to talk spectacular, though, how about the **ART** offensive. Delays, reverbs, multi-effects.... As we know, the current trend is to have four or five processors working simultaneously in one rack. Would you believe ART has a unit that'll run *nine* at one time? It's called the SGE, and in addition to the usual effects, it's got a harmonic enhancer, an equalizer, a noise gate, a compressor/limiter, an expander and four types of distortion, all for $650. You'd think programming this baby would be a nightmare, but its menu setup is surprisingly straightforward. ART also had a $600 update of their successful MultiVerb on hand, which adds, among other things, a one-octave pitch transposer; they furthermore showed a version with two seconds of delay which could be used for sampling, the $675 MultiVerb EXT. Then you've got two new digital delays and two equalizers, all MIDI-fied and all decorated with this splashy new ART color scheme. It's a certified digital effects blitz.

Martin acoustic bass

EDISON: How would you know? You hightailed it out of Europe before the real Blitz ever started. But let's move on to another combative area: electronic drums. **Simmons** came back after a big internal shake-up with a new logo and some new stuff. A sissy like you who hates to leave the studio would appreciate their ADT Acoustic Drum Trigger, which is the easiest trigger-to-MIDI interface you'll ever own. It uses Simmons' "Learn" feature, which automatically sets your levels for you based on one hit. The ADT will translate anything from taped tracks to bug mikes, and has programmable compression and echo; it can even do dynamic crossfades on samples. Altogether hip for $800. Simmons also was unveiling a cute set of five add-on pads called Drum Huggers that clip right to the rim of acoustic drums. There's a master controller which retains MIDI note and

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channel assignments—that goes for $200—and then four "dumb" slaves that cost a hundred a pop. And Simmons has a new five-piece kit called the SDS 2000 which they call the cheapest set they'll ever make—it'll get you into electronics for a cool grand (if you want the onboard reverb option add $400). The 2000 has 18 onboard kits built up from their classy SDX library, 10 of which are user-programmable, and it allows you to load in more via a card slot. And since their Trixer has been such a big hit this past fall, Simmons has some new pads that can be patched into it. Quite a lot coming out of these limeys lately.

EINSTEIN: I hear you, Tom, but let's talk high-end a minute. For drummers with a bit more cash in their wallets there was a new version of the **ddrum**, the fancy Swedish kit that uses real drum heads. This one is the ddrum II; it's now got MIDI, but its chief attribute is raw sample quality and fairly simple programmability. If the 26 internal sounds don't fill you up, there's a whole cartridge library that will. The way the ddrum II seems to change sound the harder you hit is impressive, and the word is that their pickups last forever. Still, with the brain alone costing five Gs, it's not for everyone, but there's a less expensive ddrum Plus system available for the chronically cash-short. A lot of big drumming names are now using the ddrum kit, by the way.

Simmons Drum Huggers

EDISON: True, but a lot of other drummers want to stay with their acoustics and are only looking for a better way to mike 'em. And **AKG** had something for them. It's their Micro-mike series, which clips on a drum rim and has this shock-mount that'll survive a direct stick-hit—not many condenser mikes can, you know. The whole head of the mike, which resembles their classic D-110 kick drum mike, actually bends and snaps back. The Micro-mikes can be either phantom or battery powered, and can also be used for other dangerous close-miking activity like saxes and percussion. AKG also has a variation for acoustic guitars that includes a surface contact pickup in addition to the mike; it uses a belt pack power supply with a thumb-wheel control to balance the acoustic and the pickup feeds. That's the best of both worlds.

EINSTEIN: Astronomically speaking, of course. And as long as we're beating this percussion horse, we should mention

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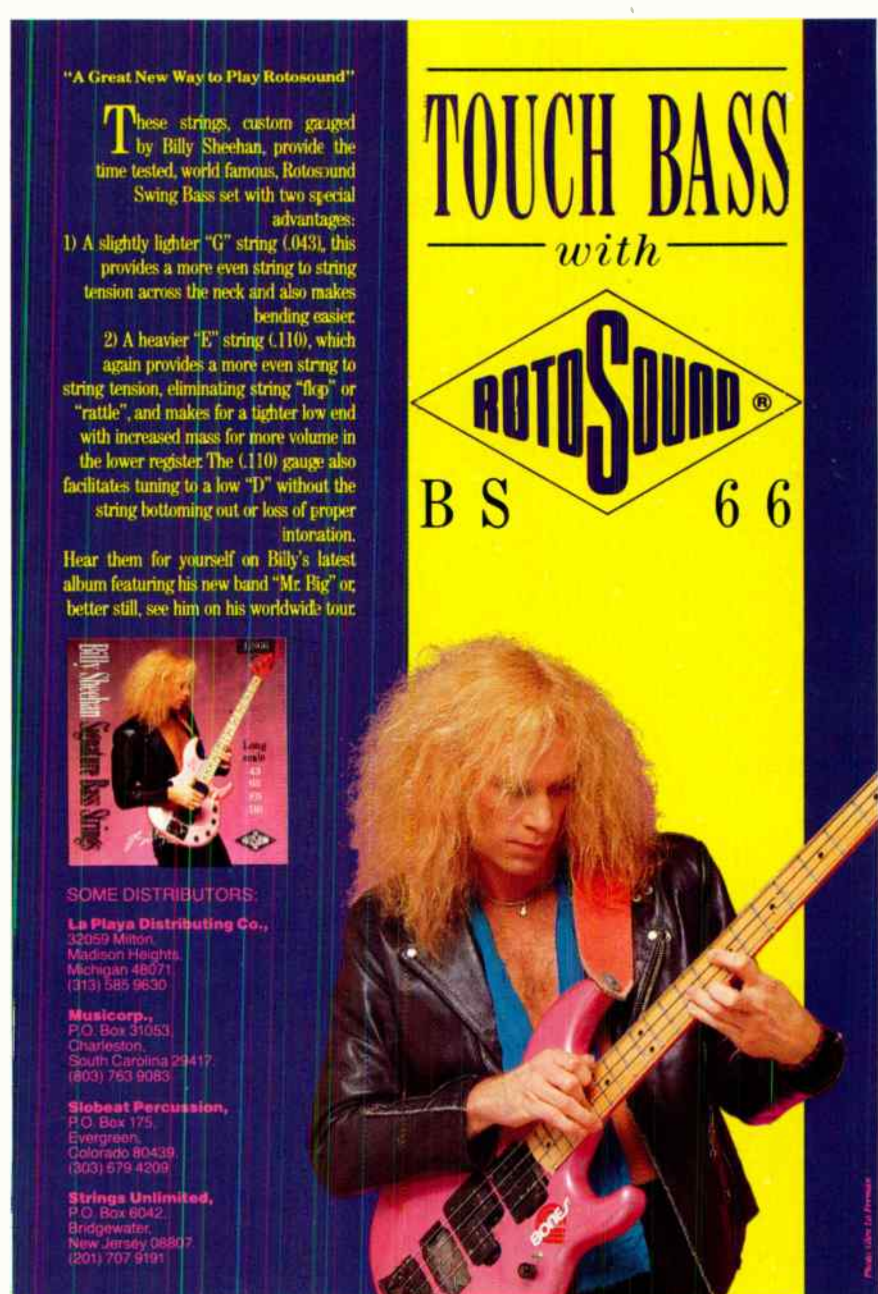

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The Velvet Overview

BONFIRE *of the* STRAWMEN

Lou Reed Burns Down New York City

By Bill Flanagan

ANDY WARHOL'S real funeral came late. On Sunday, January 8, 1989, the faithful gathered in the rain on the sidewalk outside St. Ann's, a beautiful Gothic church in Brooklyn. At four o'clock they filed in, filling the hardwood pews and the choir loft. Then John Cale and Lou Reed seated themselves in front of the altar and conducted a one-hour eulogy on electric guitar and keyboard. They sang and played 14 new songs about the life of their old Velvet Underground patron Andy while slides of his paintings were projected behind them. The austere surroundings and unfamiliar material forced the congregation to pay strict attention. The legend of the Velvets, as much as the cathedral, inclined the listeners to reverence. It's said that in great collaborations a third spirit appears, different from the individual spirits of the collaborators. Certainly that ghost was in the church, sitting between Reed and Cale, making this effort more than two old bandmates taking turns after 20 years, making this a truer Velvet Underground reunion than anyone would have thought possible. That Reed and Cale would choose to

PHOTOGRAPH BY WARING ABBOTT

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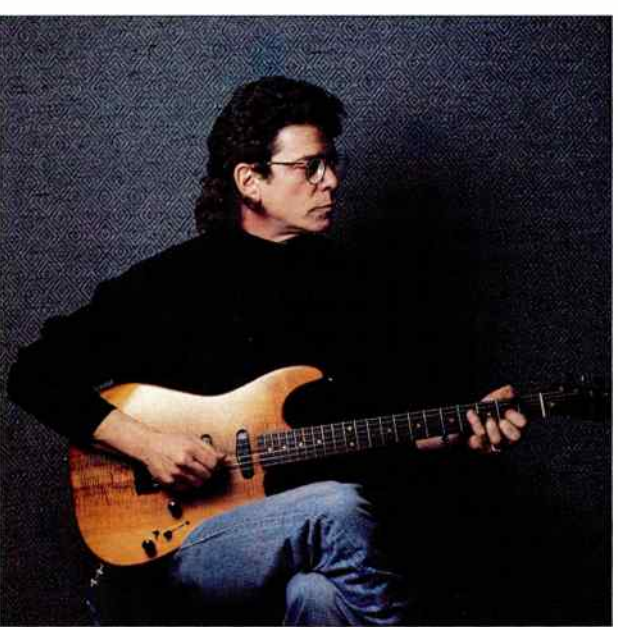
summon that spirit in memorial to their old producer/manager was as great a tribute as the performance itself. And the performance was stunning. At the end Reed sang a song called "Hello It's Me," in which he addressed Warhol directly. "Andy, it's me. I haven't seen you in a while. I wish I'd talked more to you when you were alive." In the funeral context the best line was "I know this makes you feel like a saint."

Andy Warhol was a Catholic, and as with most Catholic funerals, the service moved from the reverence of the church to a reception at someone's home, where the congregation ate snacks and reminisced and finally got caught up in jokes and gossip and nostalgia. Reed and Cale spent two hours chatting with friends and well-wishers, receiving accolades. Complimented on a song called "Work" ("He said, 'You're lazy.' I said, 'I'm young.' Andy said, 'How many songs did you write?' I said, 'Ten.' He said, 'You won't be young forever, you should have written 15'"), Reed said, "So you *could* hear the lyrics?" Yes, yes, everyone nodded, and Reed said, "That song was true! Andy was the first one in every morning and the last to leave at night. They say life's about love and work; for him it was just work. He'd say to me, 'How many songs did you write today? You should have written more!'"

Faces from the old days appeared. Velvets drummer Maureen Tucker was there, as was the wife of guitarist Sterling Morrison (Sterling, she said, had to work—after the Velvets he taught college and earned a PhD; now he admirals tugboats). Composer LaMonte Young and Warhol vet Billy Name arrived. Bob Neuwirth appeared and Reed threw his arms around him. Lenny Kaye and Suzanne Vega approached. Throwing Muses chatted with Seymour Stein, president of Sire Records, Reed's new business address. A cake was produced, decorated with the "banana cover" Warhol designed for the *Velvet Underground and Nico* album. The atmosphere became celebratory. *Hey, that was some great music.* A more polished version of the memorial, called *Songs for 'Drella*, will premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music next autumn. Cale said they had abandoned plans to orchestrate the work, though; it will stay as stark as it was today.



"Real overload, that's what I'm in love with."

WARING ABBOTT

If *Songs for 'Drella* were all Lou Reed produced in 1989, it would be a productive year. But Andy Warhol's *work* philosophy must have finally gotten to him; even as Reed and Cale were performing *'Drella*, Sire was releasing *New York*, Reed's new album. The record's so good it's scary. Now you may say that's hype—certainly more than a couple of Lou Reed albums have been declared masterpieces by the critics only to be ignored by the public—but *New York* is a jaw-dropper. Fifty-seven minutes of vim and vitriol about living in America's biggest city during 1988, the year of heat waves, red tides, crack dealers, Mike Tyson, Donald Trump, TV preachers, Morton Downey, leaks in the ozone, Rudolph Giuliani, the Tompkins Square riot, Howard Beach, AIDS, municipal corruption and a thousand other irritants, amazements and brief respites. For anyone who sweated through the summer of '88 in a small apartment, *New York* comes like a startling winter déjà vu, a reminder of what horrors hibernate under the snow outside.

The album's nasty, it's accurate, it's hard. It's also very, very funny. For all his anger, Reed comes on like H.L. Mencken with an electric guitar, devastating his targets with raging one-liners. "Give me your tired, your poor, I'll piss on 'em. That's what the Statue of Bigotry says. Your poor huddled masses, let's club 'em to death and get it over with..." "This room costs 2,000 dollars a month. You can believe it, man, it's true. Somewhere a landlord's laughing till he wets his pants." Here's Lou debating the pros and cons of fatherhood: "Why stop at one, I might have 10, a regular TV brood. I'd breed a little liberal army in the woods. Just like those redneck lunatics I see at the local bar with their tribe of mutant inbred piglets with cloven hooves. I'd teach them how to plant a bomb, start a fire, play guitar, and if they catch a hunter shoot him in the nuts."

Not that Lou goes easy on liberal icons. He has a song about Jesse Jackson that includes the line, "If I ran for president and once was a member of the Klan, wouldn't you call me on it, the way I call you on Farrakhan?"

Reed made the album with a small commando crew: producer/drummer/occasional bassist Fred Maher, guitarist/co-arranger/occasional co-writer Mike Rathke, hipster bassist Rob Wasserman in an image-changing performance and—on two songs—Maureen Tucker, who still drums standing up after all these years. *New York*'s voice and sonic integrity are assured by the team's decision to make the album without a keyboard or horn or outside session player (though Dion was invited to sing on one tune). It's two guitars/bass/drums rock 'n' roll executed with unusual devotion.

Hey, nobody's looking. Let's get wildly hyperbolic for one paragraph: Lou Reed's *New York* takes the concept of *Bonfire of the Vanities*, mixes in the hilarious spleen of Hunter Thompson, the bent poetic sensibility of William Burroughs and the delivery of Lenny Bruce. Oh yes, and it rock 'n' rolls like a bastard. In spite of *Loaded, 1969, Coney Island Baby, The Blue Mask* and *New Sensations*, and at the risk of not being taken seriously, we must say what we feel: *New York* sounds like the best thing Lou Reed's ever done. Put it together with *Songs for 'Drella* and 1989 may be considered the artist's most productive year. And as we say it, 1989 is one week old.

MUSICIAN: *When you were working on the words for* New York, *did you laugh out loud? Did you write, "Just like these redneck lunatics I see at the local bar with their tribe of mutant inbred piglets with cloven hooves" and then slap your leg and say, "Oh, boy! I really nailed that one!"*

REED: I've been known to cackle over my own lyrics, but at that time I was concentrating on getting the meter straight. Because I didn't want to leave any of those words out. I wanted "cloven," I wanted "mutant," I wanted "inbred." And I had to make it fit, I had to get that line to sit. I've been doing it so long,

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I had a lot of it in my head before I went near putting it down. All this editing was going on in my head. The really hard part is to rewrite. That's the virtue of a deadline for someone like me. I set a deadline, sometimes it's an artificial one.

I'm glad to hear that you thought some of it was funny, because some of the reviews I've been reading have been talking about this *rage*. I keep saying, "Now wait a minute, it's a pretty good take on what's really going on, and there's a lot of funny stuff running through it to take you down the road in a fairly decent mood."

MUSICIAN: *That's why it reminds me of H.L. Mencken. He had that ability to rip something to shreds in such a funny way that it was very hard for anyone to take it seriously again. You do a number on Jesse Jackson in "Good Evening Mr. Waldheim."*

REED: Yeah, absolutely. Him and the two other guys (Kurt Waldheim and the Pope). When you think about it, there's so much stuff you can write about that it's amazing there isn't more of it.

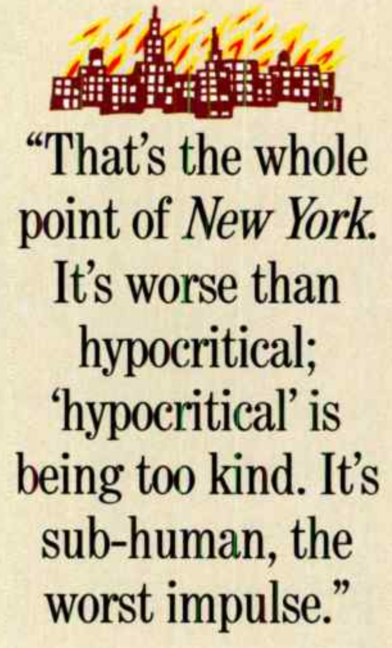
MUSICIAN: *Sure, but we are all limited by our predispositions. During the campaign some of my Jewish friends were real uncomfortable with Jackson. I, being gentile, would say, "Oh come on, give him a break, look at the Republicans."*

REED: But look at Farrakhan! That's what I say. Check out Farrakhan. I thought it was really true. If I ran for president and I'd been a member of the Klan do you think I'd be still running for office? Are you kidding? I'd be history! It would be unthinkable! And yet, in this case, all of a sudden—hands off.

MUSICIAN: *I like the image in "Romeo Had Juliette" of the Spanish kid who curses Jesus but wears a diamond crucifix in his ear just in case. To ward off the fear that he's lost his soul...*

REED: In someone's rented car. Isn't that a thought, not even his own car.

MUSICIAN: *That's the spiritual dichotomy in a nutshell. There are a lot of little glimpses of that tug of war throughout, until the last song, "Dime Store Mystery," which finds you watching* The Last Temptation of Christ *and running straight at the human/divine quandary.*


"That's the whole point of *New York*. It's worse than hypocritical; 'hypocritical' is being too kind. It's sub-human, the worst impulse."

REED: You know what's kind of funny? I wanted to make sure that the European countries had the lyrics in translation. I thought it was important. Warner Bros. came back and said, "Italy has a problem with five of the songs." I said, "Well, we can put a blank where the offending line is and then the English translation." They said, "It's not a problem with a line." I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "It's the whole thing, it's the idea behind it." Isn't that interesting? This is 1989! They object to the *very idea*. And furthermore they now didn't even want it in English! It was "Good Evening Mr. Waldheim," "Busload of Faith" and three others. You could be sued for it. There's a law there. I was just amazed that anybody could say that.

MUSICIAN: *How did you feel about last night's performance?*

REED: I was just listening to my DAT. I'm a very critical person. I thought the sound didn't come around till a little after midway through it. Then it jelled. I thought the vocals were great from the beginning straight through the end. I thought there was a clarity in the vocals that you generally miss in concerts. The mixer had his work cut out for him because of the kind of guitar tones that I'm interested in; it's all in overdrive. But midway through it found its proper place.

In this particular show we're throwing an amazing amount of information at you. Usually when people go to rock 'n' roll shows they expect to hear songs they already know and the lyrics aren't really that important. In my case—last night's a perfect example—there is no show without the lyrics, and no one's heard them before. It's really like going to a *concert*. It puts a great burden on us, if I can call it a burden, but the weight is also on the audience. Because there's a lot coming at you and you've got to follow it. If you don't, it is either a problem for you or a problem for me or both. It probably means that we didn't do it well. On the other hand, some people don't want to be bothered with that—it's not why they go to a quote "rock 'n' roll show." So I don't even know if I'd call this a rock 'n' roll show, or if when I go out on tour I'll call that a rock 'n' roll show. I don't even know if my new album is rock 'n' roll, the way rock 'n' roll is thought of these days. It's certainly not pop.

It's Lou Reed music. When I perform these new tunes—I don't want to sound pretentious about it but—I really want them to be able to hear in a way they're not getting to hear. They've got to follow it and it's got to be *worth* following. There's got to be a way out of the show-bizzy aspects of it; I just can't bear it. Like the guy up front being the lead singer with the attitude that goes with it. Yet that's part of the format that we present it in, so why shouldn't it be mistaken for that? That's another way of looking at it. So I'm trying to think of some way in the staging when I go on tour to break past that. One way is not to play the rock 'n' roll venues.

As things get bigger, in my opinion, they become harder to hear—every time you add something. It was interesting to me that this thing yesterday had a very big sound with no drum—a drum would have only cluttered it up.

MUSICIAN: *The absence of the drum forced everyone to rethink their expectations right away, and put the lyrics back at the center.*

REED: That was part of the genius of Maureen, oddly enough. Her drum setup made you think twice about what was going on. You'd never seen anything like it. Anything that's so noticeably different... We're trying to think of some way by playing the right venue and changing the setup. Another thing that changed was I was sitting down. I've been thinking about this. I'm going out on tour with 14 songs with so many lyrics, and it's a lot of concentration and effort just in the memorization of that. Doing that sometimes makes me not concentrate on the guitar. Plus, my *back* hurts. But if I had those lyric sheets on a stand, that would just free me on up. I don't like to think of it as the front man. I want to move the focus onto the music. I like things really simple. I'm talking about just having a chair or a couch.

I'm talking to Mike Rathke, my guitar player, about trying to set it up the way it is in this music room that I've got out in the country where we play. It's a small room with a low ceiling out in the woods. Mike—who is very, very, very responsible for this album—and I were out there woodshedding away. I had Fred, my co-producer, and Jeffrey Lesser, the engineer, come out there. I said, "This is what it sounds like. I've had a lot of problems on records, Fred." I played him these cassettes. I said, "Listen to this. Why do I make these great cassettes, and then when I get to my album I don't have that thing? Why are

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the bass and drums so loud, how can I get them down?" So Fred goes [*mimes pulling down faders*]. I said, "I know *that*, I've done that—that's not what I mean by 'down.'" Fred said, "You know, all the other times we've gone into a really big studio, a really big room, and then pumped it all up. Why don't we try to find something more like this room, just move this?" *Riiight*. There it is sitting in front of me! Why not do that?

We went and tried different studios in the city. A lot of things I did on this album that I never had the luxury of doing before resulted in the album being as good as it is. By that I mean it came out exactly the way I wanted it to. Which is a real first. We got all those tones.

Actually, I could play a tape for you that's just great that will be a B-side in England. They kept saying, "Don't you have anything you left off? Why should somebody buy the single if they've already got the album? Put something new on it." I said, "When they put *Moby Dick* out do you think they said, 'In the paperback version let's leave out chapter 13'?" Anyway, I didn't have anything. Then I said, "Wait a minute. I remember one little jam Mike and I did that was great fun. Maybe I can find it on the cassette." So I'm going through these cassettes. We're mastering the next day with Bob Ludwig at Masterdisk. I adore Bob Ludwig. I really listen to what he has to say. I knew we were in good shape, Bob would work his magic. So I'm zipping through these tapes the night before we've got to go in and I find this thing. I call Mike and say, "You've got to hear this!" I'm playing it for him over the phone. He says, "I don't know. It's kind of hard to tell over the phone." I say, "Oh God, I've got to make a decision." It was on a Fostex, on only one track of the four, meaning it was only on the left-hand side. My wife Sylvia said, "You've got to use that, you're a fool if you don't." It's so great. No drums—just two guitars. It's amazing what happens when you don't have drums, what you can hear. So I went up to Masterdisk with it and we all listened. It didn't need to be EQed, it was like God was watching us that day. The mix consisted of the fact that my favorite Shure microphone was set between the two amps. Bob said, "Wow. I wouldn't touch it. It doesn't need to be EQed, doesn't need to be Dolbyed, doesn't need to be anything." They transferred it to a Sony 1630, they handed me my cassette back and said, "Here's your master tape." And the thing is fantastic. It's fantastic. I'll play it for you. It's called "The Room."

"My favorite line on the whole album is 'I wish I hadn't thrown away all my time on so much Human and so much less Divine.'"

[*Lou finds cassette and plays it. Rathke's guitar starts the instrumental with a shimmering, blues-based pattern that pulses steadily, taking on a slightly Middle-Eastern tinge—a little like Richard Thompson. Reed comes in with swelling, distorted tones that crest and break in waves. Rathke's tone, by comparison, is very warm, and he falls back or steps forward as Reed gets wilder or more controlled. When Reed gets piercing, Rathke plays full. When Reed's guitar spreads out, Rathke pulls way back.*]

Mike's playing through that Fender Vibroverb behind you.

MUSICIAN: *It's interesting the way his guitar follows yours. Your music stays close to him, moves away, comes back. When you start to move away he gives you enough room, but also makes sure he's giving you a place to land.*

REED: We've been playing together for a while. I need to have that other person to get that thing going. My favorite's two guitars. When I don't have a second guitar I go to the bass. I've got to have that other person to work with. When I do tours without a second guitar there's a keyboardist. That's because the keyboard guy can play a better guitar than anybody I ran into at the time. There are people who always show up right in front of the stage and yell, "Why is there a keyboard?" Because I couldn't find a guitar player who could do the two-guitar lock with me. But then I ran into Mike. We've been playing together two years now. The whole album is rooted in that.

MUSICIAN: *Cale was following you last night. He was watching you for cues and signals.*

REED: Well, we were giving each other cues.

MUSICIAN: *Yeah, somewhat, but you were conducting. And that's interesting because when I see Cale play with his own band, he has very much a conductor's attitude. I'm not saying he was deferential, I'm just saying he was very professional—it was interesting to watch how the two of you related onstage.*

REED: Well, I had a Marshall with four 12s sitting in back of me. You'd better pay attention. [*laughter*] It's interesting the difference between four 12s and one 12. Certainly one 12 could be easier to control; in the studio a lot of what we did was on one 12. On a couple of songs it's very obvious it's four 12s. It's easier to fill a small room than a big one, and it's easier to record and control it. I've devoted 20 years now to being interested in how to get a loud sound soft. But a *real* loud sound, not a phony pedal sound. Real overload, that's what I'm in love with. How could I get the good harmonics and get rid of the bad harmonics? How could I do what I did on this album and what I did last night? All I had to do was *look* at the string and move back an inch and it was *there*. But there's all kinds of wiring going on to make it easy for me. You can't imagine the number of pickup combinations I've run through, the different kinds of speakers, the different kinds of wood. All, over 20 years, so I could look at it and get that feedback, that pretty harmonic, have it do exactly what I want. The new album's filled with it. And so was last night with John.

MUSICIAN: *Which tracks does Maureen Tucker drum on?*

REED: She's on "Dime Store Mystery" and "The Last Great American Whale."

MUSICIAN: *The two big mythological opuses. It's great that you used her for those. My favorite Velvet Underground tracks were things like "Ocean," where she got that same rolling sound.*

REED: Oh, I love that tune. When I wrote it I knew no one else but Maureen could do that. How would I even explain it to somebody else? She's the only person I know in the world who could do that. She just went in and she was right there. We've stayed in touch over the years. I played on her record that's coming out, and when this came up I asked her to play. Michael says she's a genius, her drumming just kills him. It's such a completely other approach, the way it frees things up, it doesn't get in anybody's way.

MUSICIAN: *Was there any thought of involving her in the collaboration with Cale?*

REED: No, I really believe that piece works best with just two people. There's so much there to listen to and try to follow.

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Lou's New York: Sinking like a rock into the filthy Hudson.

MUSICIAN: *Where did "Last Great American Whale" come from?*

REED: I was waiting for inspiration to strike. I had years to think about this project, now it's official. Let's get down to the hard part! No more thinking, now we're writing. And I got fed this great title. I sat down and wrote "The Last Great American Whale." Geez, what a great title! I wrote the first version and it was horrible, but I knew it was going to be horrible, I'm not interested in whether it's good or bad, I just want the thing written out. Then I will go someplace with it. But first I want to find out what is this about? So strange. So I write this thing out. Hmmm, little story, little parable. Then I'm doing a rewrite of it and I'm trying to remember things like, what color's a whale?

See, certain things I take liberty with. I don't really care whether they're true or not. If I say the whale has a yellow ring around it and in fact whales don't have any rings, it doesn't matter. I just make it come out the way I would like it. If there wasn't a whale like that there should have been. Maybe they just haven't discovered it. Then I go inside the house and turn on the satellite TV—I'm watching the Disney channel, something that appeals to my intellect, and *there's a show about whales!* This is way before the whales were trapped under the ice; I'm sure everybody will think that's what inspired it. They're talking about how the whales look and I'm comparing my lyrics and going, "Tell me if it has a ring around it!" I figured, "Now are we going to be into some weird metaphysics? Is there something operating here?" I said, "Lou, don't get carried away—*coincidence.*" Well, nonetheless, now we have the reference for what whales really look like.

It's odd, I did an interview with a guy from Europe, and this is the power of the word—it's fascinating, it's just in my case I keep insisting on putting it to music—he said, "Is that a real Indian myth?" Now I didn't exactly know how to answer him.

MUSICIAN: *"It is now."*

REED: Yeah. That made me feel great—that it was done well enough that someone could say, "What tribe is that from?"

MUSICIAN: *You do a tricky thing there. The song starts off with what sounds like a very literal description of the whale's dimensions and characteristics. Nothing in the first verse really stretches the listeners' credulity. Then, before you get into the real mythology, you stop for a joke—"My mother said she saw him in*

WARING ABBOTT

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Chinatown, but you can't always trust your mother." [*laughter*]

REED: Oh yeah, I love that line! That's one of my favorite lines. Just a little [*mimes elbow in the ribs*]. That's such a comment from left field: "My mother says she saw him in Chinatown." *What?* It's a way of keeping your attention: "Hey, I know what you're thinking—stay." There's a lot of techniques for writing. I've used them for years. [*Lou shoots out his left hand and snags a mosquito out of the air.*] Martial arts made it possible for me to do that. If I could have done it with chopsticks...

The album really is essentially in the order it was recorded. I think we made one change. The songs build on one another. When you get to the story of the whale you've been hit prior to that with these little vignettes of Romeo, of Pedro the kid on the boulevard, of the two people who, God forbid, might have a kid and if they did it would be Pedro. Then you get to the whale. It's suddenly this strange story about ecology. That's why I said on the sleeve people should try to listen to it in order. If you listen to it after being told all this other stuff, that's another story. Then you flip the thing over and get into "Busload of Faith," and there's no characters at all—he's talking about concepts, literally talking about philosophies. Then you're talking about people, and it goes on and on and ends with "Dime Store Mystery," the great metaphysical... the big one. I mean, just because everybody and their brother has written about this all through history doesn't mean I can't take a shot at it.

MUSICIAN: *Right, any more than it stopped Marty Scorsese. "Dime Store Mystery" opens with you contemplating* The Last Temptation of Christ.

REED: I had seen Marty on Ted Koppel's *Nightline* when he was being so viciously attacked. He was so articulate. I must have had this title, "Dime Store Mystery," for 10 years with no lyrics. Just to hear Marty talk, I thought it was incredible the way he gave you a fresh take on Christ. What was He thinking when He was tempted? When He was up there, nailed. Marty was talking to Ted Koppel about the goodly nature and the godly nature. I just started writing it down. Then I said, "Ah, there's my dime store mystery." I did some rewrites on it and I went to sleep figuring, "Well, that's over." I woke up at six o'clock, my mind was like a neon sign saying, "You're not even halfway there, son. That's not it at all. It's not your own words, you don't own the song. It's just a concept." What's the famous Woody Allen line about a concept on the way to an idea? So I started writing it again. All of a sudden I realized the lyrics had taken me to St. Patrick's. Why St. Patrick's? Ah, that's where Andy's mass was! Then I had my song. I went and rewrote it now that I knew what was going to happen. Then it was over. Then it was my song.

MUSICIAN: *And by coming out of the theater showing* Last Temptation *and into St. Patrick's Cathedral, you take us back to New York. Just as at the end of "Last Great American Whale"*

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FINDING THE LOUD SOFT SOUND

Lou Reed plays a custom-made Pensa-Suhr guitar, and says he's been using D'Addario strings forever. "The only two amps I use are Mike Soldano's and Jim Kelly's. Jim Kelly doesn't make them anymore, I have five of them. The man was in love with the tone. Incredible amps. That's a Jim Kelly over there on the floor. Great tube amp! That's real overload, that's not a foot pedal. See, the thing comes with an attenuator, what they call a power soak. The other amp I use is made by Mike Soldano in L.A. What a great amp he builds, lemme tell ya. It's a joy. It's easy to work, no push/pull. I think he builds them in his house. I keep hoping they don't give in and sell it to some major corporation—that'll be the end of it. I've got to get another one before I hit the road. These things are really roadworthy."

Mike Rathke: "I use a Fernandez Strat copy on the record, and an ESP custom. Both are outfitted with Joe Barden pickups. One of them has EMGs, too, but the Joe Barden's what I rely on." For strings Mike uses D'Addario XL110s. His amplifier is an Engle Digital, but Mike says don't let the "Digital" offend you—it's a tube amp. Playing with Lou Reed, Mike says, demands close attention. "We had a rapport right off the bat, and it's gotten better with time. We've really got the lock now, tonally and rhythmically. Even in shows, things will change when we're playing. Little things like extending parts, extending solos. If something's really happening Lou will let it keep going. He never plays the same thing twice."

Lou loves his cheap Shure 57 microphone. "You can use it on anything. Voice, guitars, drums." Omni or uni? "Omni—I think it's omni, it's round on the top." Yeah, that's omni. "It's *beige*. After being on the road for a while Sylvia said to me, 'Why don't you get your own microphone? Why do you use everybody else's?' And I said, 'Oh...' So many obvious things...So I went and got my own mike, which I carry with me."

When **Fred Maher** rejoined Lou five years after drumming on *New Sensations*, it was as a producer. He says going from being the guy behind the band to the guy behind the glass felt natural. Of course, he was doing double duty. In addition to co-producing he played drums on 12 of the 14 tracks and bass on two. "I played *red* Yamaha drums." He laughs. "It sounds ridiculous, but I've had more Yamaha drum sets that are red that sound better than ones that are other colors. You never know." Well, Fred, how about if we spraypaint a blue Yamaha? "No, you have to buy them that way." Fred used Zildjian cymbals and Pro Mark 5A sticks. When he played bass it was a mid-'70s Fender Jazz model, plugged into both the board and an Ampeg B15 bass amp. That's the amp set-up **Rob Wasserman** used, too. But nothing else about Wasserman's approach was normal. This, after all, is the shy guy who makes those beautiful jazz albums. Here he comes into the studio to overdub the bass parts onto Lou Reed's blazing rock 'n' roll record. And what's he going to play? A Clevinger electric upright six-string! "Rob came in and fit right in," Mike says. "I was a little skeptical at first, meeting Rob and seeing an upright bass. He said, 'I really want it to be known that an upright bass can do this.' Upright players generally don't play that style. I think he's trying to break that conception. The Clevinger is an amazing instrument. He managed to get right along with us in all the different feels. When Lou and I play alone, we play such a variety of stuff. Rob was amazing to work with, he came in and did all his parts in about three days. There's a big variety from the raging sounds to the quieter pretty sounds; he would just change his hand positions and make his bass sound unbelievable."

The one track Rob played live with Lou and Mike was "Dime Store Mystery," which was also one of the two songs that featured the reunion of Lou and Velvet Underground drummer **Maureen Tucker**. "She played standing up," says Fred. "We just took my five-piece drum set apart, I ordered an extra floor tom, I set up the two rack toms on a stand with the two floor toms in a semi-circle, like an orchestral percussionist. And she used mallets."

"Maureen is unbelievable," Mike says. "It was the first time I'd ever met her. She has a feeling in the way she plays I've never gotten from anyone else." Imagine the scene. Lou Reed and his guitarist are cutting a rock 'n' roll record. This small woman's standing up playing a deconstructed drum kit with mallets, and there's a quiet fellow in the corner bent over an upright bass. "And he's bowing it!" Mike adds. "Which was amazing. At the end Rob started bowing really fast to get this batwings kind of sound. None of that was planned. We just looked at each other and he went with it. He's just brilliant."

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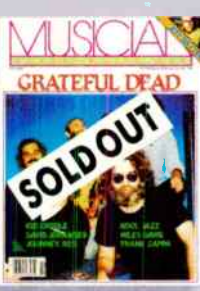

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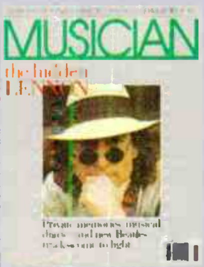

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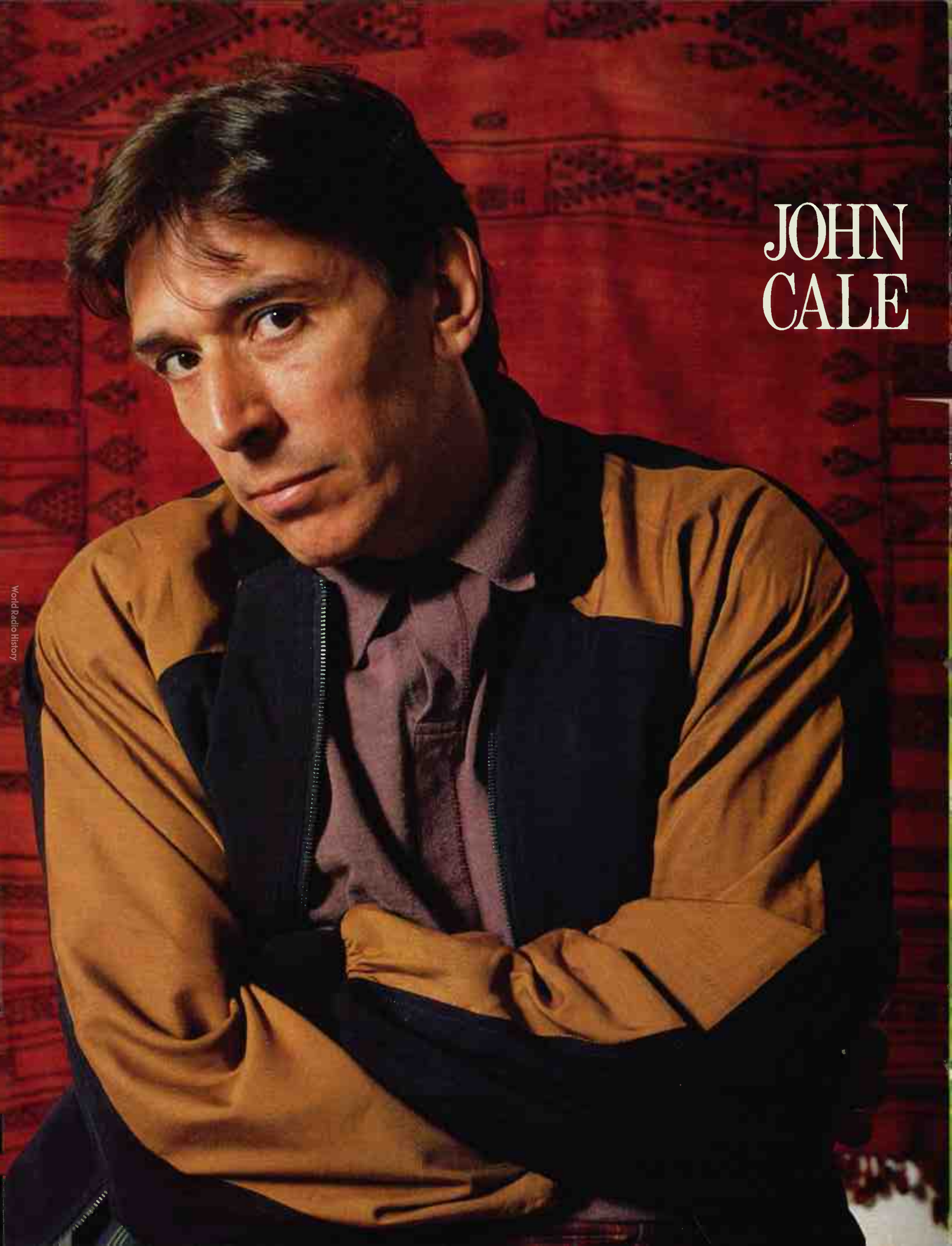

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BLOODIED *but* UNBOWED

Violence, Violas and Enigma Variations

By Scott Isler

HE'S VERY MUCH a private man," says one of his associates; "he keeps his own counsel." "He's amazingly articulate," says another, adding, "He's also incredibly humble." "He's a perfectionist... he knows what he wants," the first counters.

The various viewpoints aren't surprising, considering the subject: John Cale has baffled, shocked and thrilled people with his music for over two decades. He plays "Dirtyass Rock 'n' Roll" (the genre and the song, which he wrote) and symphonic sketches with orchestras. He prefers Brahms and Jimmy Reed to hip-hop—or Philip Glass. He knows viola, keyboards and guitar; insists he's a classical composer; and tours clubs with hard-rocking little groups inevitably featuring guitar wizard Chris Spedding. In the early '60s, while performing at Tanglewood, Cale chopped up a table. Over a dozen years later, performing more visceral music in a less effete atmosphere, he chopped up a chicken. In short, a well-rounded musician.

But there's more to Cale than chops. His studio expertise keeps him active as a producer. His taste in projects has shown a discernment justified by history if not record sales: Cale produced the debuts of Iggy Pop (with the Stooges), Jonathan Richman (with the Modern Lovers), Squeeze and Patti Smith. His four albums with the enigmatic singer Nico, who died last year, embrace some of the most profoundly unsettling sound ever marketed as "pop."

And yet, for all his achievements, there is one albatross Cale can't get off his neck. From 1965 to 1968 he was a member of the Velvet Underground, a band that—though little heralded at the time—has so grown in stature over the years that it is now considered a crucial turning point in rock music. Cale was second in the group only to main singer/songwriter Lou Reed; but while Reed's wildly uneven solo career has received lots of attention, Cale—to paraphrase a Reed song—has done his growing up in private.

John Cale is a legend who would rather be famous.

JANUARY 1988: Cale arrives promptly at a Greenwich Village coffee shop, looking professorial in a dark herringbone tweed jacket over a sweater over a blue shirt. In his late 40s, he cuts an imposing figure: largish build, but with the tucked-in look of someone who works out. A shock of hair falls over his forehead, accenting his broad features. The voice retains a Welsh accent, with rolled Rs and muzzy intonation.

A week earlier Cale played with band at New York's Bottom Line. He looked distinguished in a pin-striped ruffled shirt with Eton collar and suspenders, while grinning maniacally through "Guts" or screaming cathartically on "Leaving It All Up to You." Cale screams well. At the end of the set he bowed formally to the cheering audience.

Two months later Cale would be playing piano at the American premiere of his 1987 *Falklands Suite*, four Dylan Thomas poems and three interludes all scored for chamber orchestra, pedal steel guitar and children's choir. No rock 'n' roll animal here.

It sounds like culture shock, but Cale has always moved gingerly between these two musical worlds. Indeed, his résumé and conversation suggest that rock, not "classical," is more foreign to his taste. "Instead of putting bands together

PHOTOGRAPH BY CLAUDIA THOMPSON

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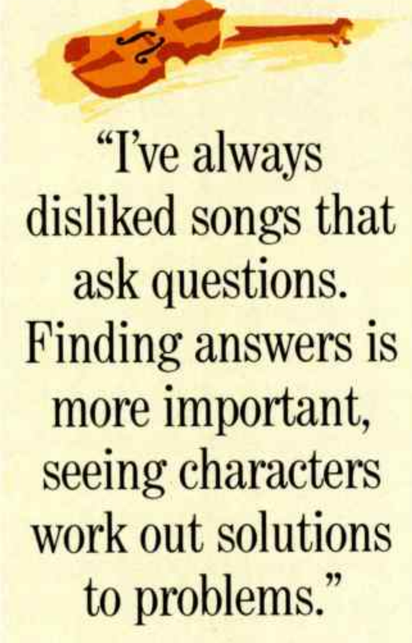
when I was a kid," he says, "I used to play viola concertos with youth orchestras." He left his native South Wales to study classical music at London University in the early '60s. From there he went to the Eastman Conservatory at Tanglewood on a Leonard Bernstein scholarship. By 1964 Cale was in New York, working with proto-minimalist composer La Monte Young and discovering pop music.

A fortuitous business encounter threw Cale and Lou Reed together in a touring band to promote a pseudo-dance craze number Reed had written called "The Ostrich." "That was a song," Cale remembers, "written entirely by detuning the six strings of a guitar down to a B—six B strings. You played the whole thing by barring it."

The Reed-Cale partnership evolved into the Velvet Underground. Cale played on the band's first two albums; then Reed fired him, giving rise to persistent mutual-hatred rumors (though the two reunited onstage with another VU alumna, Nico, a mere two years later). Cale admits he and Reed were out of touch for some time. But in 1987, Cale says, "I called up Lou and I said, 'Look, I've got these few songs and I'm stuck with them. I thought maybe you'd be interested.'"

That was the beginning of *Songs for 'Drella: A Tribute to Andy Warhol*, a co-commission by Arts at St. Ann's, a Brooklyn Heights church, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Cale "supposes" Reed was surprised to hear from him. "But I think he was more surprised how easy it was to get back into working than anything else—just as I was that things started off in one direction and rapidly grew in strength. The ideas were really good."



Songs for 'Drella (a Warhol nickname, from Cinderella) completes a circular voyage for Cale—not only reuniting him with Reed but acknowledging the artist and media guru who was the patron saint of the Velvet Underground. In the 20 years that Cale has been on his own, he's dabbled in various areas: Besides his own recordings and productions for others, he's been a record-company A&R rep and even acted on film. Since the release of his last studio album, 1985's *Artificial Intelligence*, Cale has purposely emphasized his classical-music side. The catalyst was the birth, also in 1985, of his daughter, Eden.

"I took a year off to be a father," Cale says. "I wanted to learn parenting. Then I decided, okay, I'm not going to go out and tour and leave my family, and I'm not going to take my family with me. I'll do something that would be a compromise: I'll write more classical pieces."

He began with a string quartet in 1987, a commission from the Massachusetts College of Art. Then he started a symphony, but before he could finish he received another commission, from the Randy Warshaw Dance Company. The orchestral ideas went into *Sanctus*, which the Warshaw company performed (with the aid of Kurzweils and string synthesizers) that November.

The Falklands Suite grew out of an early-'80s desire on Cale's part to set Dylan Thomas to music—"partly to find out what musical sounds worked with the internal rhythmic clatter of the words," according to Cale's notes for the piece. He also used the opportunity to throw in the pedal steel guitar he had earlier written into the string quartet and then taken out. "I showed it to somebody and they just threw their arms up in the air and said, 'You can't do this. You can get steel players who have great ears but very few of them can read.'"

Later, however, Cale met Joshua Dubin, a musician who says he's "very much into trying to do different things with the steel guitar." Cale, Dubin adds, "was as unfamiliar with steel guitar as I was with his music," but the composer still "wanted a certain sound," and Dubin was willing. *The Falklands Suite* had its world debut on Dutch television, played by the Metropole Orchestra "which spends most of its time doing Nelson Riddle arrangements," Cale says. "These guys are bureaucrats: 'Don't fuck with me, Jack, I've got tenure.' They're all very well dressed and totally disinterested."

Cale is just as critical of himself. He prefers the string writing in *Sanctus*, done on a computer, to that in *The Falklands Suite*. The latter is "a mixture of *The Sound of Music* and Benjamin Britten," and he wants to revise the score, which "sticks in my craw." He's hardly more lenient toward his only recorded orchestral work so far, the miniatures on his 1972 album *The Academy in Peril*. "Most of that was padding," Cale says, "holding chords. But it had a few moments of original noises from the orchestra."

Not even the Velvet Underground is sacrosanct. "We had a chance to do it and we blew it," he stated in a 1979 interview. "We didn't deliver."

So who does Cale respect? Would you believe... the Doobie Brothers? Steely Dan? "There are elements of them that are very, very strong," he says, apparently in earnest. "Some parts of them show incredible craftsmanship, and that's what I appreciate. There are certain things Randy Newman does that, in the craft of songwriting, are really his brand: the way he creates phrases, his lyrics especially. There was a recording thing with the Doobies that I thought was tops. Steely Dan just seemed like they worked very carefully on their words." Cale still knows how to shock an audience.

Regardless of what he says, Cale the producer doesn't gravitate to slick performers. Instead, what attracts him to an artist, he says, is "individuality. You've got to resolve conflicts in situations. You've got to be an ally, a co-conspirator. Sometimes you have to introduce conflict into the situation in order to resolve it. You have to make one position or another untenable. With Patti Smith, it was a case of, 'Look, you're gonna have a band that would be able to do the Rolling Stones for you. You have got to be neither the Rolling Stones nor a member of the band. What you're doing is really not involved in songwriting at all. You're involved in something else that employs a band, but what it is I can't tell you.' The vaguer you leave it, the more product you get."

A vein of anger, like molten lava, runs through Cale's own rock-oriented work. His first solo release, pleasant enough musically, was called *Vintage Violence*. Later Cale albums grew increasingly strident in tone and subject matter. By 1981 at least one critic was moved to ask, "Why is John Cale's mind so full of bombs and barbed wire?"

"It was, then," admits the composer of "Fear Is a Man's Best Friend," "Gun" and "Mercenaries (Ready for War)."

World Radio History

"But...it was fashionable at the time." This isn't quite an answer worth an eight-year wait.

His friend and co-writer Larry Sloman notes Cale's "academic interest" in terrorism and government intelligence. Sloman, executive editor of *National Lampoon*, recalls Cale asking him for credentials to attend a National Security Council seminar in Washington on international terrorism. "I had to explain to him," Sloman laughs, "'John, they're not gonna take it seriously if *National Lampoon* asks to cover this!'" However, "judging by the way events unfold, John's insights always seem to be closer to reality than paranoia."

And maybe we should take Cale at his word. His new material, he says, consists of "humorous love songs. They're not anywhere near as dark as the old ones. Subject matter was really the one thing that was bothering me. I didn't want to get involved in that intense, psychotic—that was always something that happened with the old songs. You start off with a plain tune and it turned into a totally different situation. This time it was a conscious effort *not* to get involved in it, to maintain equilibrium."

Asked if his songs are inner- or outer-directed, Cale fudges: "Inner-directed looking at other people." He refers to *Music for a New Society*, a 1982 album that is among Cale's most harrowing in its stark textures, extreme scenarios and lack of traditional song forms. Those pieces "seemed to have characters in them where forces around them were making them come to decisions. I've always disliked songs that ask questions. Finding answers is more important. And seeing characters, personalities working out solutions to problems is real interesting. That's what soap operas are. But songwriting is not that monochromatic."

Neither is Cale. His career is "all over the place," and it doesn't help that he has no manager. He admits it would be "handy to have somebody who knows everything that's going on. I don't know anything that's going on." Instead he retains a London-based representative, "basically a booking agent. It's a good arrangement for whatever little needs I have for some business."

He notes that Lou Reed is also managerless: "He seems to feel much better about doing everything himself. We have similar attitudes towards managers: We never quite figured out how the hell to use 'em. You've got to know what you want from 'em. You can't just say, 'Okay, you're the manager.' Usually when that happens you get a manager who's got an ego streak in him that's meaner than yours and there's never enough gratification for him."

One thing Cale's discovering from his present situation is that "record companies are loath to deal with an artist. They don't want to talk to you; they want to talk to your manager. You can't get on a personal basis, even if you know what a manager does. You can't argue with a record company without damaging your relationship with the publicity department."

That may explain why

(Below) Cale accompanies Nico, 1979.

Military madness, 1982.

EBET ROBERTS

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there have been no new John Cale recordings in four years. But if Cale's lost any sleep over that, he isn't letting on. "I hope that the different situations I've gone through haven't completely destroyed the thread of what the music is about," he says of his variegated career. "There's been a lot of distractions along the way, but I'm still here, alive and kicking. And I'm pulling all the little threads together, slowly."

AUGUST 1988: New York summer, with urban grace, has kicked spring aside, and the city is now stewing in its worst prolonged heat wave in 44 years. Cale arrives at a (different) Greenwich Village café wearing jeans and a purple short-sleeve pullover. He seems distracted and/or fidgety. He's been pulling apart *The Falklands Suite*:

"I'm gonna drop the instrumental introduction; it doesn't fit in.... I'm going to try to do it with a smaller orchestra..... A lot of that string writing is murky, especially the cello parts. I like having that buzzing going on down low. The thing about doing it with fewer numbers is you don't have that depth, that low end."

In the meantime, Cale's been keeping busy: producing an album for Canadian singer/songwriter Art Bergmann, touring as a one-man opening act for Pere Ubu, preparing ballet music for choreographer Ralph Lemon. And then there was the *Songs for 'Drella* project, pending Cale and Reed signing "a legal document that's very restrictive. But it's a strong foundation for a collaboration." The agreement, Cale adds, "won't apply only to *Songs for 'Drella.* It'll apply to anything. Then you'll be able to approach labels."

(Reed had also asked Cale to play on the former's *New York* album, then in progress. This fell through for reasons Cale won't divulge. Velvet Underground drummer Maureen Tucker appears on *New York*, suggesting that sentimental Lou was flirting with a VU reunion. Cale hints that with Reed it's "three steps forward, two steps back.")

"I'm really excited about the *'Drella* thing," Cale continues. "Once we get the kind of writing I love from Lou—that kind of 'Venus in Furs,' 'Black Angel's Death Song' kind of writing which he doesn't give you so much of anymore. The lyrical style is denser, it's more intricate and compelling.

"Lou comes to terms with himself in songs. I wouldn't be surprised if he's most satisfied when he's written a song 'cause it's worked out all these tensions that are in his head. It happens with me too. It's like somebody discovering their identity. I've written 'pop' songs, for want of a better word. Those things don't move me anymore. I don't like the idea that I'm writing pop songs. 'Santies' in *Music for a New Society* is not just a song, it's a dramatic movement, like a monologue. 'Black Angel's Death Song' was a slap in the face, confrontational: 'We don't care where *you* are, *we're* over here'—very defensive. It's trying to have as many levels as you want in a song, not just those that pop songs seem to fall into."

Cale has another reason to be thinking about the Velvet Underground era. A month earlier Nico had fallen off a bicycle, hit her head and died of a cerebral hemorrhage.

"She was such a great lady," Cale says, his voice dropping in pitch. "I miss her. She's the one who was carrying the torch for the Velvet Underground. Everybody else went their own way. Nobody ever told her what to sing; she was a law unto herself."

Her willfulness apparently contributed to her death. "She dressed swaddling style, layered in black," Cale recalls. "And

CONTINUED ON PAGE 80

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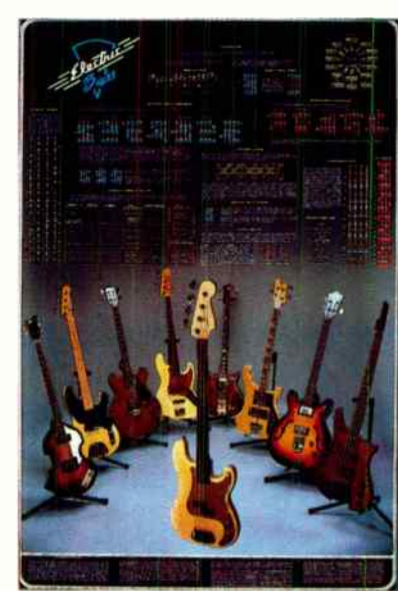

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WHITE Light White HEAT

PAINTER/EXPERIMENTAL filmmaker/ media icon Andy Warhol was introduced to the Velvet Underground—Lou Reed, John Cale, Maureen Tucker and Sterling Morrison—in late '65. The band was struggling, playing Reed's innovative rock 'n' roll songs to a Greenwich Village scene hung halfway between hootenannies and acid rock. Warhol was looking to expand his influence into the rock world then dominated by Bob Dylan in New York and the Beatles in London. Any number of bands might have fit into the colony centered around Warhol's "Factory," but against all odds the painter and his aide-de-camp Paul Morrissey found a group touched by genius. The Velvet Underground signed on as the musical component of Warhol's traveling multimedia show "The Exploding Plastic Inevitable." That sound-and-lights happening also sometimes included dancing by fashion model star Edie Sedgwick, and extra vocals by the European femme fatale Nico. The addition of Nico as a part-time member of the band was rumored to have annoyed the Velvets—but that was another era and, besides, the chanteuse is dead. Their first album, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, produced by Warhol, included great Reed songs such as "Heroin," "I'm Waiting for the Man" and "I'll Be Your Mirror." The record was not a commercial success, but like all the Velvets' albums it is still reaching new fans and influencing musicians today, long after most of the hit groups of the time have hit the cut-out bins.

Lou Reed and John Cale Remember Andy Warhol

By Bill Flanagan

After that album, Nico was left behind (though Reed and Cale wrote songs for her solo debut, *Chelsea Girl*, as did her teenage boyfriend/guitar player, Jackson Browne) and soon the band decided to cut loose of Warhol and get serious about the music business. After their second album, the abrasive *White Light/White Heat*, Cale quit. Although his multiple instruments and dark humor had helped define the Velvets' sound, Cale's songwriting had been lost in Reed's shadow. Freed of that inhibition, songs and solo albums poured from him. The Velvets made two more studio LPs before Reed went solo in 1970. Of course, once they were dead, people decided they loved them.

Getting Lou Reed and John Cale to sit down together to be interviewed was just a little easier than reuniting Lennon and McCartney, a bit harder than finding common ground between Shamir and Arafat. That's not because they don't get along—*Songs for 'Drella* demonstrates that whatever animosity once existed has been buried—but because both men are engaged in ongoing careers and don't get much satisfaction from public strolls down memory lane. But with Andy and Nico gone, and former hangers-on cashing in with tarted-up memoirs of the Warhol/V.U. glory days, it seemed like a good time for Cale and Reed to get a few things off their chests. We spoke at suppertime on January 20, Presidential inauguration day.

MUSICIAN: *How was* Songs for 'Drella *composed?*

REED: Oh, it was just a hundred-percent collaboration. John and I just rented out a small rehearsal studio for three weeks and locked ourselves in.

CALE: It was on and off around Christmas time. We were planning on maybe five weeks, but when we got working on it...I started adding keyboards until we had a whole MIDI

PHOTOGRAPH BY WARING ABBOTT

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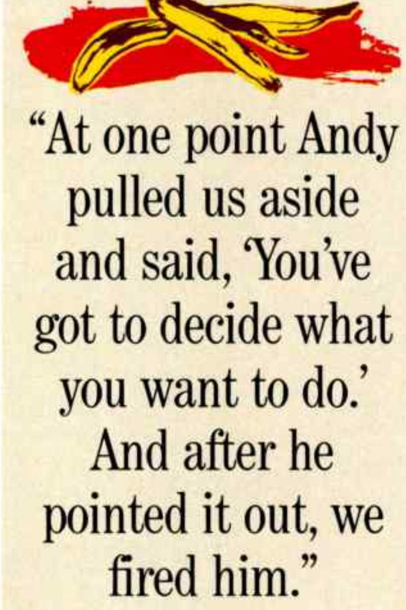
setup. I had a Roland D-50, a Yamaha CP80 MIDI and a Korg M1. And they slowly started being part of the songwriting process. A lot of it was done just on the piano to begin with.

MUSICIAN: *The opening number, "Small Town," has claustrophobic lyrics ["When you're growing up in a small town and you're having a nervous breakdown"] with very jaunty music. [John plays piano and Lou sings.] It is very much like the opening number of a Broadway musical—an upbeat tune that introduces the main character.*

CALE: I know we set ourselves up for this idea of a theater piece, but it really is banished. Because what we have there is such a strong core idea that the simpler the better. I was really excited by the amount of power just two people could do without needing drums. When we started work I was always, in the back of my mind, wondering, "Where the hell does the backbeat go?" And by the time we finished it I was saying, "Thank God we don't have one!" *[Reed laughs]* The way it's going to be at BAM is exactly the same. We're going to maintain that hard-edged, clear-eyed image of it—simple and very hard.



"At one point Andy pulled us aside and said, 'You've got to decide what you want to do.' And after he pointed it out, we fired him."

MUSICIAN: *Most of the songs are in Andy's voice and from Andy's perspective. Were you concerned with making the voice of Andy the character match the voice of Andy, your old friend?*

CALE: One of the things that happened while we were putting the thing together was we never quite clarified what our attitude was toward Andy speaking all the time. And that included the question of whether there should be any reference to the Velvet Underground. It's a good lyrical device to write it from another person's point of view, but inevitably it's going to blur. In "Forever Changed" I feel as if I'm singing about myself as much as Andy. Specifically, my coming from Wales to New York and meeting members of the band.

REED: Some of the things that apply to Andy apply to all of us. There are things that I think are very universal, and probably make Andy more of an approachable person. Through the lyrics of the songs. If you knew him and you knew the situation—and John and I spoke about this at great length—you could see things from his eyes and experience things perhaps the way he did. And some of the situations he found himself in were analogous to situations everyone finds themselves in.

MUSICIAN: *Well, that's one of the most impressive things about the work for those of us who got our image of Warhol from books like* Edie. *We come to the show with the idea that Warhol was this cold, calculating figure—and you immediately get us to consider him much more sympathetically. The second song, "Open House," has the lines: "My skin's as pale as the moon outside/ My hair's silver like a cheap watch/ I want lots of people around me as long as they don't touch." You do a brilliant job of disarming our prejudices.*

REED: Yeah, that was exactly it. "Small Town," the first number, seemed the way to ease into the show, because we thought, "People are bringing a lot of notions to this show before we ever play a note. How can we get their toes in the water without smacking them over the head, and before we let the electric instruments go as far as they're going to go?" It seemed like that little cabaret number was the thing that answered that. I think it disarms you a bit; it's not what anyone expected. And in "Open House," John and I had spoken a lot about—particularly with the spate of unattractive books that are out...

CALE: Hear! Hear!

REED: ...what we thought of Andy and how to present it, and what did he do and how did he do it from our points of view. It was very much wrapped up in some of the things we felt were very strong character traits that he literally brought to New York with him.

CALE: More about this spate of books: There's a question here of responsibility in narrative—that is, you don't apply moral judgements and dump responsibility on one of the characters in your book. In the way that we approached the song cycle it's more like we accept responsibility for our beliefs of what went on. We don't pass judgement.

REED: We came to understand that we were asking the audience to absorb a lot of information. They were going to be bombarded by a lot of new information, musical and lyrical, so they would have to go along with us and they would have to concentrate on it. And I thought that was really a good gift to give to the audience. John and I were talking about, "Well, what happened the first time people went to see *Hamlet*?" They were going to get bombarded by a lot of information.

CALE: And they were drunk! The Globe Theatre.

REED: Supposedly the people at the church were sober. All I'm trying to say is that I don't think there's anything wrong with giving them a lot of information and trying to get them to go along with the possibility of having to be an *ally* of this work, of having to concentrate and absorb the thing and follow it. That's part of the adventure of the show. Now, they missed all this the first time around, 20-odd years ago, when they were asked to concentrate on some stuff. So here's a little second shot for them. People have been moaning about, "Gee, I didn't see it then" or "Why isn't there a Velvet Underground reunion?"—which there isn't going to be. But there is this particular thing. And we wanted to present it in as pure a state as possible. Certainly that's my goal, to get you as close to the music and the words as possible with as little showbizzy glitz going on as there could be, and to introduce you to our friend Andy.

CALE: That theatrical device, though, is time-honored. It's one of those things that Orson Welles used a lot in his movies. He may have had a dialogue on paper, but he had all the actors talking at once in those scenes—everybody all of a sudden had to pay attention to hear exactly what everybody's point of view was, and it really pulls you right into the action.

REED: It requires something of the audience. You're talking about one of my favorite directors, it goes without saying...

CALE: ...When in *A Touch of Evil*...

REED: ...the camera angles are incredible. I mean to this day I'm sure you know if they're showing something on TV and I look over there—"Orson Welles movie! Stop everything! Let's look at this!" *Touch of Evil* was particularly wonderful. Andy had that ability with some of his movies. In no way to denigrate Paul Morrissey's movies, but the earlier movies that Andy directed, where he didn't move the camera at the beginning—I was really so struck by it, as I was by so many things that Andy

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GERARD MALANGA

When we was Velvet: Nico, Warhol, Maureen Tucker, Reed, Sterling Morrison and Cale in 1966.

did. We wanted to bring some of that up in this piece. He was not this little tinkertoy society plaything that he's being made out to be.

MUSICIAN: *The fourth song, "Work," is the first time in the show that Lou Reed speaks in his own voice. We've had three songs from Andy's perspective and now Lou Reed or the Velvet Underground enters as a character.*

REED: Yeah, that's true. In that case it's no longer just an anonymous third-person narrator: it's the Velvet Underground talking. Lyrically there are a lot of devices we can use, and I thought that one brings you a little step closer, gives this ring of authenticity. If I use the word "I" they immediately say, "Ah, it's true. He's singing from a first-person experience." We kind of save that, 'cause sometimes when you do that, people sit up and say, "Uh-oh, here come the real goods." And what we're talking about is a work ethic. That's not what Ultra Violet talks about.

MUSICIAN: *I haven't read her book.*

REED: I haven't either, but I've been told about it. I don't think she has a work ethic.

MUSICIAN: *But you and John do. Do you think Andy influenced that?*

CALE: I don't know. From my childhood I just remember I'd hate going to sleep because somewhere in the world something amazing was going on, and I'd miss it.

REED: And *to this day* [*laughter*], to this day the poor man *still* can't be in seven places at once! Andy really did say that. When we shaped the lyrics we tried to make it so not only are they real, but they're effective in the song. So we can't say that those are verbatim quotes, but even if they are not, they should be. You know what I mean? Because the results should approximate what went on then from that point of view. I was very, very struck by his work ethic. I was always struck by the fact that Andy was the first one there at work, Andy was the last one to leave. And when he spoke to me he was always going on about the work, how incredibly lazy I was. Which I really enjoyed hearing, as you can imagine.

MUSICIAN: *When Andy first approached the Velvets, did you worry about being swallowed up by his thing? He was already famous; were you afraid of being overwhelmed by his Exploding Plastic Inevitable?*

REED: Well, he didn't have it then. He just had pieces and fragments of an idea that was going to be put together and ended up being bigger than all of us. Including him. At a certain point it turned into people thinking Andy was the guitar player. So it depended on whose world you were in.

MUSICIAN: *But did you two ever look at each other and say, "I dunno, we're a rock band working on something pretty original, do we really want to be part of Warhol's world?"*

REED: No, I think we looked at each other and said, "This sounds like really great fun and a lot better than playing in this tourist trap in the Village."

CALE: The relationship between him and Paul Morrissey was bordering on the spurious in terms of them managing us. I mean, Andy was a catalyst. He was so magical in his ability to transform mundane things into really important events. This *work* thing Lou just spoke about—Andy may have been the first there and the last to leave, but he never stopped there. Once he got out of the Factory he was going straight to a restaurant or to another person's. Whenever you approached

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him with a problem there would be this facile ability to come up with a really exciting solution.
REED: The solution might be worse than the problem.
CALE: For instance, he was complaining that because we'd been on the road too long, the band was turning into a road band and we had little time to sit down and really work on arrangements. He said, "Well, why don't you go onstage and rehearse?" That's something I wish we'd done now. Well, we did end up doing "Sister Ray Part 7" onstage and then going into "Sister Ray."
MUSICIAN: *When a band goes in to make their first album they want a producer they can lean on. Andy produced your first album, but I imagine he looked at the knobs and controls with more confusion than you did.*
CALE: I remember that first album with so much hilarity. That the thing actually got done... For $1500! I mean, my God.
REED: We were in the studio where Dionne Warwick did "Don't Make Me Over" and stuff like that. Andy was the producer and Andy was in fact sitting behind the board gazing with rapt fascination...
CALE: ...at all the blinking lights.
REED: At all the blinking lights. He just made it possible for us to be ourselves and go right ahead with it because he was *Andy Warhol*. In a sense he really did produce it, because he was this umbrella that absorbed all the attacks when we weren't large enough to be attacked. We weren't worth really attacking at the time. So they'd attack us, but just use us as a springboard to attack him. As a consequence of him being the producer, we'd just walk in and set up and do what we always did and no one would stop it because *Andy was the producer*. Of course he didn't know anything about record production—but he didn't have to. He just sat there and said, "Oooh, that's fantastic," and the engineer would say, "Oh yeah! Right! It is fantastic, isn't it?"

"Andy was not this tinkertoy society plaything he's made out to be."

EBET ROBERTS

CALE: I was just thinking about one of the charming things that happened immediately after meeting Andy. Where else would we get an invite like this: He had us perform at a psychiatrists' convention! To be stared down by these people in tuxedos who were all suggesting we needed a long rest and some severe medical attention.
REED: That was when the *Herald Tribune* still existed, and we made page one of section two: "Warhol and Rock Group Plays Psychiatric Convention: Hard to Tell Doctors from Patients." I mean, our lives were filled with things like this, courtesy of Andy. Then at one point he pulled us aside and said, "You've got to decide what you want to do." And after he pointed it out, we fired him. When he got angry the worst thing he could think of to call me was a rat.
MUSICIAN: *John, I'd like to get your feelings on something I asked Lou about last week—the song "I Believe," in which Lou wishes retribution on Valerie Solanis for shooting Warhol. He sings, "I believe I would have pulled the switch on her myself."*
CALE: I agree with that.
REED: Point of interest is that Billy Name came up to us after the show and assured us that he had seen her death certificate in L.A.
CALE: Which we wished we had. We could have made a slide of that just to show there is some justice in the world.
REED: Right.
MUSICIAN: *The shooting of Andy, the attempted assassination, is portrayed in* Songs for 'Drella *as a climactic moment. Afterwards, in "Nobody but You" and "Forever Changed," you imply that it gave Andy greater self-knowledge and perhaps pulled him back from some sort of abyss. There is a counter-implication that it might have eventually caused his death. The idea of building to a violent climax from which the protagonist emerges with a greater self-knowledge is so central to theater that I wondered if you were exaggerating the effect the shooting had on Andy for dramatic effect. Was he really so transformed?*
CALE: I was thinking about how shooting him did not kill him.
REED: I was thinking about how at one point I ran into him and he said that he was alive, but he thought he may have died. One of the most astonishing remarks I'd heard in a while. Along with "Why didn't you visit me, where were you?" Which was something that's bothered me over the years. But he said it more than once. They had thought he died in the hospital, he was there for eight hours and he was telling me how he ran out of veins and they had to take blood out of his hands, how the pain was so awful and he was alive now—but maybe he had died. He wasn't sure that he felt any difference.
CALE: Christian imagery.
REED: Andy was really an astonishing person. When he talked to you he never ceased to say the most amazing things. Just another way of looking at it that at least in my case would make me stop right in my tracks and think about what he said.
MUSICIAN: *In "Forever Changed" Andy lists a number of people who "will see me through." Edie Sedgwick was one, I didn't know the other names. Are they all dead? All saints?*
CALE: No. They were all people—like Henry Geldzahler — who were influential on him at one point or another. When we first hooked up with Andy he had the mixed-media-event bull by the horns, and it was a major effort to then enter the salons of Central Park West [*Reed laughs*] and shake the sensibilities of the art cabal. Some of these people are mentioned in the songs.
MUSICIAN: *You mentioned absolution and Christian imagery, John. There was quite a funereal feel to the whole presentation of* 'Drella—*partly because it was presented in a church.*
CALE: Yeah, that building is really overpowering.
REED: It's just my own personal taste, but when we do the BAM version I wish we would stay in that church. 'Cause I think the church itself was incredible; it made us into a trio—John, myself and the church. [*laughter*]
CALE: And God!
REED: The father, son and holy ghost! When we go on the road we have to take the church with us! It was a very powerful part of the thing. We didn't realize during soundchecks and dress

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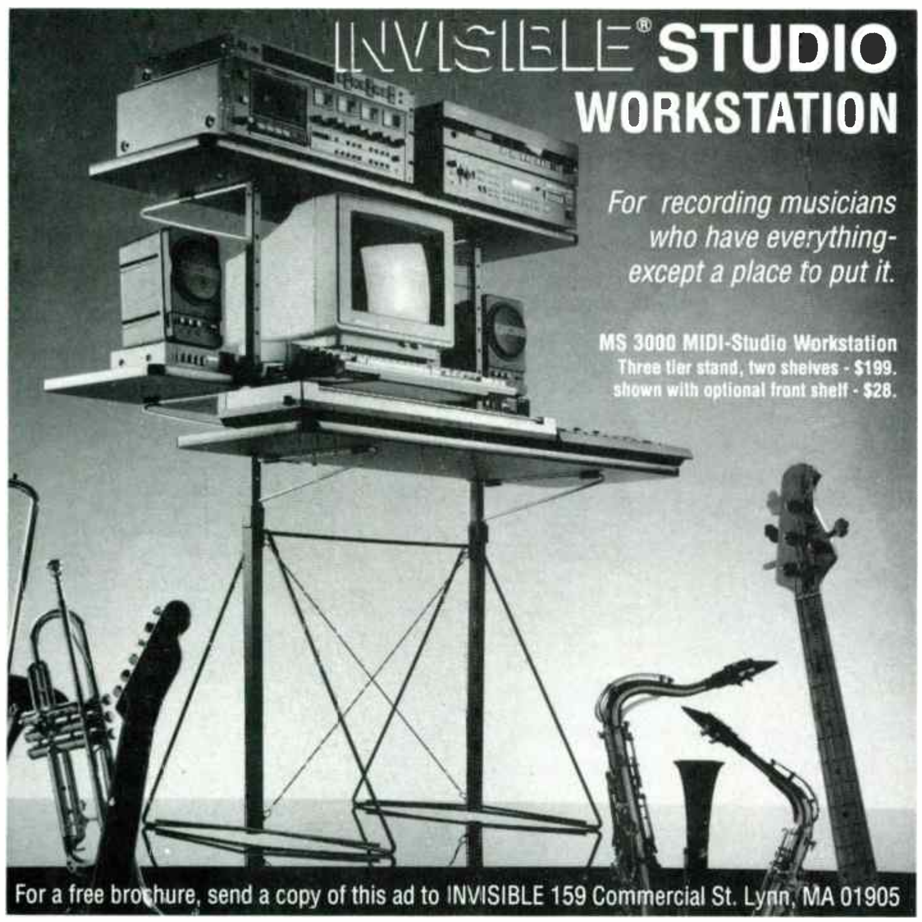

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rehearsals that when there were people in it and we were up there with the stained windows... you suddenly felt this incredible surge that this house devoted to belief can generate.

CALE: [*bursts out laughing*] Come on, Lou!

REED: Let me try a little harder. Give me a half hour. I've got to rephrase that one so it's proper... Thanks, John, I appreciate that.

CALE: I have to say that that's sort of like typecasting. The building is not the star of the show, it's Andy.

REED: Except that Andy always went to church, which was something that a lot of people either didn't know, or didn't associate with him even though they'd heard about it. Every Sunday he went to church with his mother. We wanted to give people some taste, if it was possible, of how brilliant he was. That this was not just some...

CALE: This was no fool manipulating headlines.

REED: Right, exactly.

CALE: He was a very penetrating individual.

REED: Right. A very, very talented, extremely brilliant spark of light. Ⓜ

CALE from page 72

one thing you don't do in Majorca in summer is go cycling in these clothes!"

Cale's own willfulness hasn't hurt him—at least not fatally—though he's aware he can't be accused of going for the gold. "I can't put two and two together," he admits cheerfully, if only he sounded cheerful. "Some people say, 'Let's write *this* kind of song,' and go off and do it. If I wrote that kind of song, I'd always end up seeing I'm doing it gritting my teeth with an ulterior motive in mind."

He's never recorded anything "commercial," then?

"There's too much egotism involved in it. I figure, well, it'll still work as a piece of my personality. I never have to be an apologist."

Cale then abruptly announces he has to leave. "I'm playing at four."

Playing?

"Squash."

He leaves. Ⓜ

PLATTERS THAT MATTER

1. **Fire Town** – *The Good Life (Atlantic)*
2. **Vern Gosdin** – *Chiseled in Stone (Columbia)*
3. **Ann Peebles** – *Greatest Hits* (MCA)
4. **Buck Owens & the Buckaroos** *Live at Carnegie Hall* (CMF Records)
5. **Nanci Griffith** *One Fair Summer Evening* (MCA)

– *Peter Cronin*

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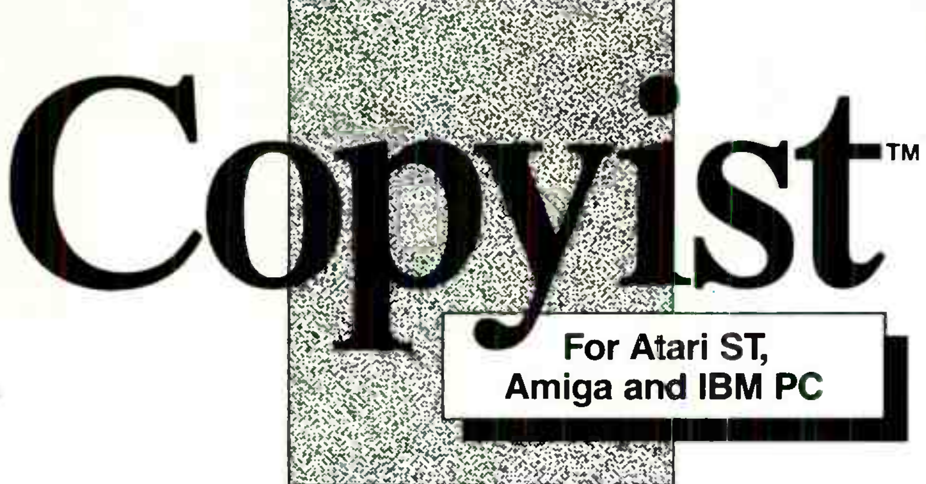

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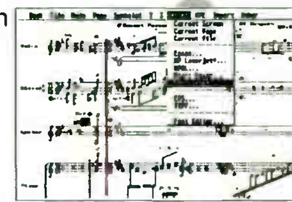

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GIRL GEORGE AT THE CROSSROADS

DEBBIE GIBSON

Electric Youth
(Atlantic)

LAST SPRING I WAS WATCHING the Atlantic Records 40th Anniversary Concert at Madison Square Garden when I noticed that the chairman of Atlantic, Ahmet Ertegun, was sitting with Henry Kissinger, a man who has made a career of promoting the massacre of peasants so that multinational corporations might have unfettered access to resources and markets in the Third World. This put me in a foul mood, and I found myself contemplating the question, "Is it fair to hate Debbie Gibson because someone who is despicable finds her a pleasant diversion while he awaits eternity in Hell?" I concluded that since Debbie Gibson had barely been born during Kissinger's worst war crimes, and undoubtedly had learned nothing of them in school, it was unfair. Nonetheless I have failed to shake my association of obedient, cheerful, well-choreographed "youth" with mass destruction. Maybe it's all those Up With People shows (4000 shitheads tap dancing and singing "Up-Up and Away") that I watched at halftime of football games during the Nixon administration.

My other association with Debbie Gibson is Jane, a girl with whom I attended elementary school. Jane was petite and exquisitely beautiful. All the boys had crushes on her, and the teachers loved her even more, because she was obedient and cheerful and "creative." When Jane drew a picture, it always went to the most prominent place on the bulletin board as an example to the rest of us to be more like Jane. So one day the rest of us chased Jane out of school and made her crawl through the sewer pipe under the railroad tracks. This was very satisfying—not because Jane was beautiful and talented, but because she was a collaborator.

So when Debbie Gibson writes in a press release (she's a prodigy in public relations as well as music) that she was part of something called Widening Interests through New Experiences for Gifted Students, or WINGS, I find myself wondering about the student lumpen proletariat that was implicitly labeled Ungifted and Worthy of the Big Snore for 12 Years of Public Education. Does the number of kids out there who would like to make Debbie Gibson crawl through a sewer pipe equal the three million kids who bought her first album? Will those three million kids buy the second album, *Electric Youth*, even though the songwriting has deteriorated? Will Debbie Gibson, at the age of 18, go the way of Boy George and lose her audience when they get old enough to become directly interested in sex? Or will she pick up the doe-eyed innocent demographic that Olivia Newton-John seems to have aged herself out of?

I don't know. I do know it's difficult to think about this record in non-demographic terms. Gibson writes in the above-mentioned press release that the song "Electric Youth" is about "how much energy a young person has and how many off-the-wall ideas only a child can come up with," and that adults should not dismiss "a young person's ideas because 'he/she's just a kid.'" What ideas? They're unspecified, like TV commercials in the '60s that celebrated the "idealism" of youth teaching the world to sing while youth was burning down the ROTC armory. Knowing your way around a recording studio at an exceptionally young age is not an idea. It's a craft. Give me the energy of youth, the enthusiasm, the foolishness, the barbarity, the self-righteousness, the satire of everything that is old—give me anything but craft. And craft is all I hear from Debbie Gibson. An empty vessel

DAVID COWLES

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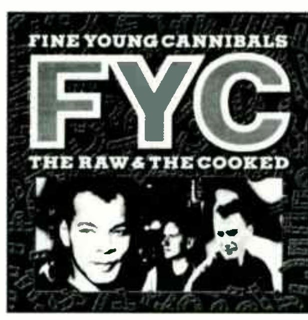
for adults to sail in search of money, she is perfect for corporate endorsements, and so she pushes Revlon Natural Wonder cosmetics. She'll need them when her fans show her the sewer pipe.

– **Charles M. Young**



FINE YOUNG CANNIBALS

The Raw and the Cooked
(IRS)

WHY CAN'T THE BRITISH make soul music? Scientists blame a variety of factors, from something in the water to a genetic imbalance. In any case, the sad fact is that most attempts emanating from Over There are terminally self-conscious, falling painfully short in the groove department to boot. Look for *The Raw and the Cooked* to shatter existing theories, however, 'cause it's one sweet set o' sounds.

By most measures, Fine Young Cannibals are unlikely contenders for fame, fortune or artistic greatness. The group was founded by English Beat alumni Andy Cox and David Steele, low-profile types from whom little was expected. Handsome Roland Gift, dazzling enough to be Jackie Wilson reincarnate, has the pipes and the pizzazz to be a solo sensation, not just the frontman for an eccentric trio. And *The Raw and the Cooked* (from a Claude Lévi-Strauss text) comes three years after the Cannibals' debut, hardly the sign of a career-minded band.

Still, here they are, with enough driving rhythms and deep feelings to make even a hard-core Otis fan take notice. The secret is in *not* trying to copy the classics. While the Cannibals have roots aplenty, they've shuffled sources like a deck of cards. "It's OK (It's Alright)" follows a skittish funk verse with a rolling Four Tops chorus; "She Drives Me Crazy" backs Gift's sultry wail with furry power guitars, producing a cool collision of styles. The arrangements are consistently lean, often to the point of barrenness. All the better to showcase the star.

Boy, can this guy emote! Though Gift may not have a perfect, pure voice, he takes care of business, moaning like one of the damned on the deep lament "I'm Not the Man I Used to Be," adding an anguished rasp to the spiffy pop of "Don't Look Back." With a couple of exceptions, the man's outgrown the mannered excesses that made the Cannibals' cover of "Suspicious Minds" an absurd miscalculation. Instead, he simply gets down and dirty. Connoisseurs of sexy falsetto must experience the spellbinding "Don't Let It Get You Down," where Gift's writhing reaches erotic intensity.

It's tempting to overvalue the freshness of Gift and Co. after the tired homages of Paul Young, Paul Weller et al. After all, the Cannibals deliver the goods upfront, without pausing to genuflect. But I'd be willing to bet a stack of Rick Astley records *The Raw and the Cooked* will taste as good in 1999 as it does today. – **Jon Young**

BUNNY WAILER

Liberation
(Shanachie)

BOB MARLEY

Bob Marley
(Urban-Tek/Slam)

IF, LIKE MOST SERIOUS RASTAS, you've been thumbing through the Book of Revelation, lately it might seem more pertinent than Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner* or the *Times*. The text heralds prophesies of plagues and floods, earthquakes and pestilence, a sun that burns as never before and a poisonous fallen star called Wormwood. (Chernobyl is the Ukrainian word for wormwood, as any pious locksman will point out.) Luckily, Bunny Wailer has done the reading for us, and his remarkable new album, *Liberation*, resounds with more apocalyptic reggae authority than any release of his career.

Implicit in *Liberation* is the penance of a prodigal son, since Bunny has spent the last four years laboring in the decadent vineyards of dance-hall, lending credence to the slack and often violence-condoning sound that nearly dug "spiritual" reggae's grave. The devastations of Hurricane Gilbert have actually been credited with changing the tune of many artists on the JA scene; whatever the source of Bunny's reconversion, he shows a new warmth on the title track, an exercise that weds reggae chant fervor to a taut contemporary riddim.

As usual, the album is billed as being "produced, performed, arranged and directed" by Bunny, but his superb sidemen include the indispensable Sly and Robbie as well as Wailers rhythm guitarist Chinna Smith and Skatalites trumpeter Johnny Moore. All hands temper their strengths in the service of Bunny's rootsy vocals and songwriting —which haven't been so blatantly Niyabinghi since 1976's *Blackheart Man*.

"Ready When You Ready" and "Want to Come Home" show how versatile this ritualistic mix of syncopation and intonation can be, as both tracks groove deeply behind Bunny's devout wordplay. Imagine Sam Cooke and Jerry Butler borrowing I-Roy's voicebox for a revival meeting, and you'll sense the bubbly brimstone of the singer's topical rage on "Botha the Mosquito" and the anti-crack "Dash Wey the Vial."

Yet *Liberation* is the finest album Bunny Wailer has ever created because of the overall tenderness of his message. Supple reggae ballads like "Rise and Shine" and "Didn't You Know" capture the soul of the pariah Rastas' creed: The last shall someday be first. And as Bunny's trebly baritone peaks on "Serious Thing," his piteous fear of heaven's verdict on the majority of the human race is palpable.

Just as tangible, but utterly devoid of enchantment, is the trite opportunism of entrepreneur Danny Sims' latest project, a melange of vintage Wailers performances newly overdubbed by session players and christened *Bob Marley*. Sims recently lost a court case to control much of the Marley estate's song catalogue, and this ghoulish experiment indicates the wavelength Bob's erstwhile producer/publisher was on. The rocksteady-era Marley output Sims still owns has genuine historical value, and Sims is entitled to exploit it, but this tack is a cultural desecration. The press release for *Bob Marley* quotes Marley's manager of the '70s, Don Taylor, as being "very impressed" with this project. This is the same Don Taylor a jury heard Sims describe in retrospect as "a total fucking amateur...and a discredit to this business."*

Bob Marley attempts to turn a time-

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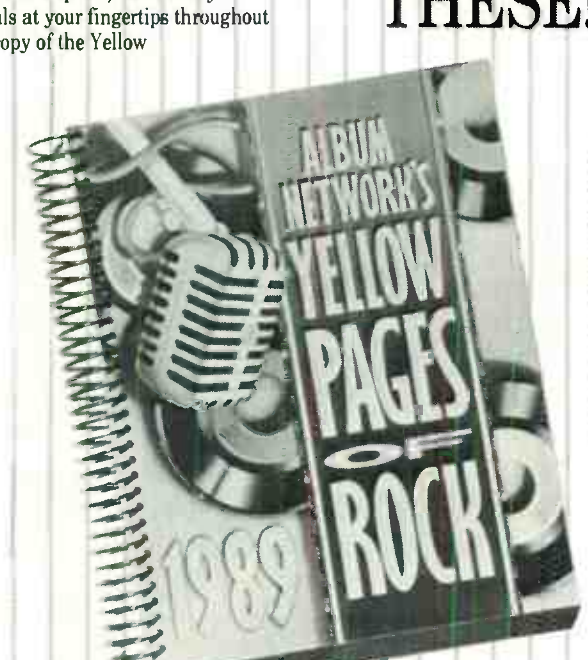

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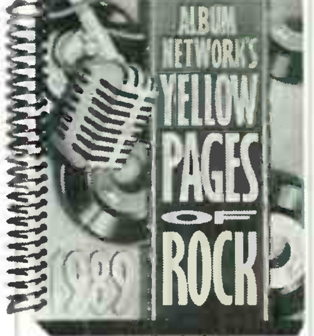

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less artist's legacy into a slick lie. But in life, as in reggae, the truth shall make you free. Come the Last Judgment, you won't file a stronger affidavit on behalf of humanity than Bunny Wailer's *Liberation*. – **Timothy White**

*In a tape (with transcript) labeled Defendant Exhibit T and played during proceedings in the Supreme Court of the State of New York for Cayman Music vs. Marley Estate et al, index #24020/84.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Brazil Classics 1: Beleza Tropical
(Fly/Sire)

NOW THAT DAVID BYRNE has turned his aesthetic radar towards Rio and Bahia, you might have expected a Brazilianized *Remain in Light* or *Naked* to emerge as the result. Instead, the leader of Talking Heads put together a compilation album of his favorite Brazilian artists, appended by English translations of their lyrics and Byrne's extensive liner notes. While the artists selected for *Brazil Classics 1* are somewhat predictable (Milton Nascimento, Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil are among the best-known Brazilian musicians internationally, especially in Europe), the song choices here are unusual and inspired.

The album kicks off with "Ponta de Lança Africano," a funky gem recorded in 1976 by Jorge Ben, whose smooth, hypnotic samba/blues fusions in the '60s and '70s share a certain affinity with later syncretic Talking Heads efforts. From there the album cuts a stylistic swath, exploring musical territory that will probably sound strange but exotically appealing to American ears. Sensuous-voiced Baiano divas Maria Bethânia and Gal Costa duet in the beautiful slow samba "Sonho Meu." Caetano Veloso minimalizes afoxé (an Afro-Brazilian style) in the mellower-than-mellow "IlêAyê." Chico Buarque revises northeastern Brazilian folk in "Caçada." And Nazare Pertera (a Paris-based expatriate, the LP's only unexpected pick) chants/sings the politically charged "Caixa de Sol" over mesmerizing rhythms plucked out on the berimbau and mbira.

Gilberto Gil, who led Brazil's Tropicalismo movement in the '60s and '70s with Veloso, is well represented here by the joyful afoxé "Andar Com Fé," the upbeat samba "Quilombo" and the moving, transcendent yearning of the northeastern Brazil-flavored "Só Quero Um Xodó." Milton Nascimento comes across much better than he did in his '88 CBS release *Yauareté* (arguably the weakest of his 21 albums); "San Vicente" and "Anima" are hauntingly beautiful songs that show why Milton is one of the world's greatest singers and Brazil's most popular musician beyond its shores.

Brazil Classics 1 is an invigorating and appealing collection that reflects the earthy sophistication and originality of Brazilian popular music over the last two decades. While this album could have captured an even more interesting cross-section with some alternate choices (João Bosco, Alceu Valença and Geraldo Azevedo, to name a few), the vast spectrum of Brazilian pop will be respectably represented if Byrne also brings out compilation LPs of samba and forró (an accordion-based dance music from the Northeast), as planned. In any event, Byrne is to be praised for giving us the unabridged stuff (what rock star has ever before presented a sampler of foreign music?). A *Graceland* (or a *Remain in Light*) can be a valuable stepping stone to other musics, as well as an interesting crosscultural concoction. But it's nice to hear the music directly from places like Rio, Bahia and Recife—straight, no chaser. – **Chris McGowan**

ERIC AMBEL

Roscoe's Gang
(Enigma)

THE LAST TIME I SAW Eric Ambel, he wrecked my hat. Ambel, a.k.a "Roscoe," is the guitarist for New York's Del-Lords, and when I ran into him in an L.A. club, he took issue with an item I wrote about his band a couple years before. As we grew more agitated, he grabbed my Dobbs Golden Coach fedora, ripped the hatband off, spit on it and dropped it on the floor.

Ambel's first solo album is a little like that encounter—unexpected, pugnacious, spontaneous and kinda left-field. Unlike that run-in, it's also a lot of fun.

A straight-ahead nugget of rootsy rock 'n' roll, *Roscoe's Gang* was cut 'mongst talented friends; the sidemen include Lou Whitney (who co-produced with Ambel), D. Clinton Thompson and Ron Gremp of Missouri's storied Morrells, Peter Holsapple and Will Rigby of the dB's, singer/rock goddess Syd Straw, Mojo Nixon's gutbucket partner Skid Roper and some less familiar galoots. The band whips up a relaxed yet forceful and user-friendly noise that's country miles more entertaining than any studiedly star-laden get-together you could mention.

Ambel makes a good front man: He has a strong, hearty voice, and his snapping lead work meshes well with cohort Thompson's picking. His taste in covers is superior (Dylan's "If You Gotta Go, Go Now," Swamp Dogg's "Total Destruction to Your Mind" and Neil Young's "Vampire Blues," the latter cut live in the studio Crazy Horse-style). The originals, by Ambel, Whitney and Del-Lord Scott Kempner, shine. The whole project is as comfy as an old sofa and as bracing as a six a.m. bloody mary.

Okay, Roscoe, your record's mighty fine. As for old business, I take a size 7¼. – **Chris Morris**

NEW ORDER

Technique
(Qwest)

TECHNIQUE IS NOT something most listeners associate with New Order. Sure, the band has made significant strides over the years, developing a sound far more sophisticated than the post-punk primitivism of its Joy Division days. And, as the heavily-

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   C. One copy of the song's lyrics typed or printed legibly in English. (In Latin category, lyrics must be in Spanish with an English translation. In Jazz category, lyrics not required.)
   D. A nonreturnable check or money order or approved credit card in the amount of $15.00 (U.S.) for Song Contest entrance fee, payable to: 2nd Annual Billboard Song Contest, for each cassette submitted.
   Contestant's and co-authors' names (if applicable) and song title must appear on each form. By signing the entry form, each entrant agrees to accept the terms of the Song Contest.
2. Songs should be no longer than [illegible] minutes. A contestant may enter as often as he/she wishes, but each song must have its own entry form and be recorded on a separate cassette with typed or printed lyrics included. The check or money order must reflect the total number of entries submitted. ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY JULY 31, 1989. Billboard Song Contest is not responsible for entries that are late, lost, misdirected or mailed with insufficient postage. Billboard Song Contest is not responsible in any way for entries that are stolen or misappropriated. The entrance fee is not refundable. Cassettes and lyrics will not be returned. Contestants are responsible for keeping duplicate copies if they wish to have them. Songs may be copyrighted, but copyright is not required. Contestants are responsible for placing copyright notices on their entries and are responsible for any filing under U.S. copyright law.
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   Capitol Records will record the winning Country and Rhythm & Blues songs. EMI Latin will record the Latin winner and Blue Note will record the winning Jazz composition. [illegible] obligation to accept any offer of a publishing contract. All prizes will be awarded.
4. The contest is open to any person who has averaged less than $5,000 per year in total royalties [illegible] from music he/she has written since 1984. The song must be the original work of the contestant. Employees of Billboard magazine, Billboard Publications, Inc., J.A. [illegible] and Associates, Inc., Capitol Records, Gibson Guitar Corporation, and Ventura Associates, Inc. and their affiliated companies and their advertising, public relations, and promotional agencies and their immediate families are not eligible.
5. Winners will be selected by a Blue Ribbon Panel under the supervision of Ventura Associates, Inc., an independent judging agency, whose decisions in all matters pertaining to the contest are final. A contestant may enter his/her song in any one of seven categories: Rock, Pop, Gospel, Jazz, Latin, Rhythm and Blues, and Country. All entries will be judged on the basis of the following criteria: Originality, Lyrics, Melody and Composition. Production and performance quality will not be a consideration in awarding prizes. A series of preliminary panels supervised by songwriting professionals will select semi-finalists for consideration by the Blue Ribbon Panel. The Blue Ribbon Panel will be composed of noted professional songwriters and world renowned music industry personalities who will select the major prize winners. The preliminary panels also will select alternate semi-finalists if deemed necessary. The Song Contest reserves the right to change panelists and criteria. Each song category will be judged by specialists from the music industry. Winners will be determined by December 1, 1989. Winners will be notified by mail. No duplicate winners (in any category). No transfer and no substitution for prizes except at Billboard's sole discretion. Method of division among co-authors is the responsibility of the winners. Taxes are the responsibility of the winners. Contest void where prohibited by law.
6. Winners will be required to sign and return an Affidavit of Eligibility and a Publicity Release within 14 days of the date of notification. The Affidavit will include a statement that the winner's song is his/her original work and that he/she has never published the song and retains all rights to the song. Failure to sign and return such Affidavit or the provision of false or inaccurate information therein will result in immediate disqualification and/or forfeit of prize. In the event of disqualification, an alternate winner will be selected at the sole discretion of the judges. Affidavits of winners under 18 years of age at time of award must be countersigned by parent or guardian.
7. For additional Entry Forms or a Winner's List, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: 2nd Annual Billboard Song Contest (specify Entry Forms or Winner's List), P.O. Box 35346, Tulsa, OK 74153-0346. Requests for Entry Forms must be received by June 30, 1989. Requests for Winner's List must be received by December 1, 1989.

• • •

I certify that neither I nor any member of my immediate family is employed at Billboard magazine, Billboard Publications, Inc., J.A. Halsey and Associates, Inc., Capitol Records, Gibson Guitar Corporation, and Ventura Associates, Inc. or their affiliated companies or advertising, public relations or promotional agencies. I certify that I have read and understand the 2nd Annual Billboard Song Contest Official Rules and I accept the terms and conditions of participation in the 2nd Annual Billboard Song Contest as stated in such official rules. (If entrant is under 18 years old, the signature of a parent or guardian is required.)

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synthesized gloss of recent dance singles like "True Faith" and "Blue Monday 1988" shows, New Order really knows its way around the studio. Then again, technique isn't just about the ostentatious finger-twiddling of guitar heroes and other fretboard athletes; it's also the art of achieving ends with the least apparent effort.

That's what this album is all about. Though several stand-out tracks are full of sonic spectacle—the fevered, effect-laden "Fine Time," in particular—what we really notice here is the effect of all that aural detail; the breathless pace of a verse, the emphatic punctuation of a phrase, melodies that stand out as if written in italics.

Nor is that approach confined to dance numbers. The quietly melancholic "Run," for example, seems initially like any other New Order ballad with its plodding pulse, scratchy rhythm guitar and melodic lead-bass. Listen closer, and not only does the burst of power guitar behind the chorus throw the lyric into focus, but the dreamy wash of synth chords at the close offers a denouement far more explicit and evocative than anything uttered by singer Bernard Sumner. By final fade, the listener ends up feeling precisely the emotions the song means to express. *That* is technique. – **J.D. Considine**

BOB DYLAN / GRATEFUL DEAD

Dylan & the Dead
(Columbia)

WHILE BOB DYLAN'S FANS seem to wax and wane in their devotion, thousands of besotted Americans reach for their wallets at the mere mention of Jerry Garcia's name—and who can explain why? The musical equivalent of meatloaf, the Grateful Dead are bland, predictable and unaccountably popular. Not surprisingly, they fail to provide a particularly interesting frame for Dylan's music here. While occasionally managing to muster a vague approximation of the rich musicality of the Band

World Radio History

(easily the best backing band Dylan's ever had), they mostly sound flaccid and, yes, laid back.

The merits of his band aside, Dylan could have made much more of this album than he did. Recorded live in the summer of 1987 when Dylan toured with the Dead, the record suffers from uninteresting song selections: Of the seven Dylan tunes, two—"All Along the Watchtower" and "Knockin' on Heaven's Door"—have been covered to death. Nor do these versions bring anything new to the songs. One of the great things about watching a legend run through his routine is seeing him comment on his myth, step outside it and have a little fun, but there's none of that here: Dylan makes his way with grim determination and his vocals often sound slurred and strained. As for the Dead's hoary backing vocals, the less said the better.

Obviously, Bob Dylan has a perfect right to do whatever he wants with his songs, and any thinking individual should feel a deep sense of gratitude to the man, not just for the brilliant music he's produced but for continuing to work in the face of such daunting achievements (it can't be easy to be Bob). Nonetheless, for the past few years it seems that Dylan's been spewing out records willy-nilly and forming temporary liaisons with every Tom, Dick and Harry on the block. All-star jams do occasionally—rarely—produce a sum greater than their parts; Dylan's last supergroup, the Traveling Wilburys, made a delightful record, with Dylan responsible for its most sparkling moments. *Dylan & the Dead*, on the other hand, is what's known in the music industry as product.

– **Kristine McKenna**

ABDULLAH IBRAHIM

Blues for a Hip King; Tintinyana; African Sun; Voice of Africa (Kaz/NMDS)

FOUR DOUBLE ALBUMS RECORDED IN AFrica, mostly, between 1971 and 1979, though the liner notes are mystical and, therefore, who knows. The music is extraordinary: a mixture of American gospel, Duke Ellington, John Coltrane and, of course, township rhythms and sensibility. Anybody enticed by *Capetown Fringe*, Ibrahim's immensely happy and elegiac album on the Chiaroscuro label, will love this ("Capetown Fringe" is included on *Voice of Africa*); his orchestrations, lush and ripe, are balanced by his reserve, until, for a moment, he spins off into Cecil Taylor territory, all over a groove that broadcasts the inevitable. Not to be overly romantic but this is freedom music.

– *Peter Watrous*

PAGES from page 34

only appropriate since it was my mother who gave me not only my first record player but my first Elvis Presley record. For Christmas my son Jacob gave me a CD of *The Best of the American Folk Blues Festivals, '63-'67*, with Wolf, Muddy, Sonny Boy, Sleepy John Estes, and Lightnin'. The way it jumped out at me it was as if I'd never heard this music before. I don't know if it was strictly the technology, but I would hate to think so. Reading Jimmy McDonough's recent stories in the *Village Voice* on country singer Gary Stewart and the great '40s R&B star Jimmy Scott, agonizing stories of life written from the inside out, afforded me the same kind of sensation in another way. It put a fresh sheen on experience. It made me rush back to their music and listen with new appreciation. And if the music was, unavoidably, more familiar, each new day and odd refractory angle of emotion and experience makes it different. M

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SHORT TAKES

BLUE NOTE HAS KINDLY REISSUED ON CD a batch of classic stuff: This time around we get Andrew Hill's *Point of Departure*, Freddie Hubbard's *Open Sesame* and Art Blakey's *Like Someone in Love*, among others. *Point* is one of the best, and best known, of the eight records Hill released originally on Blue Note. Both are partly due to the appearance of Eric Dolphy, who winds fast, angry and snake-like through, above and around Hill's chordal labyrinths; my guess was that it was kept in print more than say, *Smokestack*, because of Dolphy's presence. But the Blakey record, which never got much notice when it came out, probably because it's a fairly conservative record for the time, is wonderful, full of moody Wayne Shorterisms, a slow ballad (the title track), and a Lee Morgan waltz. Blakey isn't known for his introspection or his waltzes. It also has the rare distinction—and this might have helped stiff its reputation—of being one of the few Blue Notes to open with a ballad. *Open Sesame* isn't slouchy either, with Tina Brooks' silky, limpid yet tensile sound on tenor; he's simultaneously one of the most overlooked players in jazz history, and the most overrated. And Hubbard is one of the great Blue Note arrangers; his tunes are good examples of the effects an arranger can get out of small-group arranging, an overlooked art.

KARLTON HESTER & THE CONTEMPORARY JAZZ ART MOVEMENT

Dances Purely for the Sake of Love
(Hesteria/NMDS)

SOME THINGS ARE WEIRD, SOME MYSTERious: This is both. Hester's put together a group including a harpist/cellist and an oboeist, along with good young vibist Brian Carrott, Phil Bowler on bass plus Geoffrey Gordon on percussion. This stuff is worked out, with ostinatos in unusual meters fading to black, then back to white. Hester's no primitive; each segment of his pieces flows like a river. Some pieces sound funny, like Nino Rota, others ascetic and yet passionate, like prime Andrew Hill Blue Note. I never heard Hester's two records previous to this, but I know something good when I hear it, and this is good. (500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012)

THELONIOUS MONK

Live in Stockholm 1961
(Dragon/Down Home Music)

AT THE TIME, MONK'S QUARTET WAS IGnored as a viable aesthetic force. Remember the context—Cecil, Ornette, Coltrane, etc. But time makes jazz's unhealthy emphasis on the new wear away and it has become as obvious as a car wreck that the quartet with Charlie Rouse on saxophone was one of the great groups of the '60s. One complaint—that Monk always played the same material—was mostly true, and irrelevant, as this double album will show. During the '60s Monk and Rouse worked on an idea of interplay that has rarely been equaled. Throughout the album, Monk and Rouse talk to each other, back and forth, back and forth, like old friends on a long train ride. (10341 San Pablo, El Cerrito, CA 94530)

SAUNDERS KING

The First King of the Blues
(Ace/Down Home Music)

REFINEMENT AND JUMP/BOOGIE ARE CONtradictory terms, but not in King's hands. A Charlie Christian-styled guitarist who recorded 78s in the '40s from, of all funky places, San Francisco, King not only had a good ear for smooth rhythms and tempos, but for complicated arrangements as well. While the band was jumping, a clarinet would solo. Intricate riffs blocked off his thicker-than-gold vibrato—he was an ex-gospel singer—and in general he kept things restrained but intense. In a genre defined by its similarities, King dared, if only a bit, to be different. It worked.

RALPH PETERSON QUINTET

V (Blue Note)

THE REAL DEAL, ONE OF THE BEST RECORDS to come out of the new generation of musicians. From the sideways but immensely logical soloing of pianist Geri Allen to Peterson's Krakatoa-esque drumming, the album, Peterson's first, never lets up. Peterson, who's backed everyone from David Murray to OTB, has put together a group including Terrence Blanchard on trumpet, Steve Wilson on alto saxophone, Phil Bowler on bass and Allen on piano. The record won a couple of awards last year in Japan; it deserves them. Not only does Peterson put up an endless wall of invention, arranging rock-hard riffs, stomping around, changing rhythms about every bar or so, but the tunes themselves, with their occasional formal variation—a drum-alto duet, for example—take it away from just another straight-ahead session. Allen's comping, which adds another complex rhythmic voice to the choir of the record, is worth listening to on its own.

GUNTHER SCHULLER

The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1933-1945 (Oxford University Press)

A STRANGE BOOK. ON ONE HAND IMMENSELY valuable—it has just about all the information anybody could ever want on anything from obscure white bands to obscure territory bands to obscure trumpet soloists with both of the above. On a larger scale, it's also toothless. There's no sense of why things happened; it's just noted that they do. There's no sense of how important the culture of jazz was for the black community from which it came. There's no sense of how important the music was for American culture as a whole, how a disenfranchised minority changed the way the majority—and much of the Western world—thought, through rhythms, textures, humor and dance. So there are some big blank spots. What this book does have is musical analyses, chronologies, meticulous descriptions of every track ever recorded by Glenn Miller, etc. It's the world's longest set of liner notes.

BY PETER WATROUS

World Radio History

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THE REPLACEMENTS

Don't Tell a Soul (Sire/Reprise)

THIS ISN'T JUST THE REPLACEMENTS' MOST ambitious album, it's also the band's most accomplished. So why isn't it the most enjoyable? Part of that stems from the very power of Paul Westerberg's point of view: Touching and accurate as "Achin' to Be" or "Anywhere's Better Than Here" might be, the truths he delivers are far from uplifting. Besides, progress isn't everything, and though it's encouraging to find the 'Mats aspiring to musical sophistication with "We'll Inherit the Earth" and "Asking Me Lies," it's hard not to miss the gleeful abandon behind the hard-rockers the band thinks it has outgrown.

TANITA TIKARAM

Ancient Heart (Reprise)

LIKE FELLOW PRODIGY TRACY CHAPMAN, Tikaram's music is graced by an emotional perceptiveness and deep-voiced delivery that suggest a wisdom beyond her 19 years. But where Chapman channels her gifts into folkie traditionalism, Tikaram draws from a broader musical base, playing off a warm, jazzy swing in "Poor Cow" or a Celtic lilt in "Good Tradition." She's blessed with an instinctive understanding of how to frame a lyric with a simple melodic twist, allowing her to pull impressive depth from the likes of "Twist in My Sobriety" or the deceptively dark "I Love You."

THE DEAD MILKMEN

Beelzebubba (Enigma)

SO WHAT IF THE JOKES ARE OFTEN CRUDE, cruel or hopelessly juvenile—we're not talking Noel Coward here, okay? Sometimes tastelessness is precisely the point, as in "RC's Mom," which tops amateurish white funk with a James Brown impression built around the lyric, "Gonna beat my wife...." Still, it's with the music that the Milkmen really deliver, making sure there are enough hooks to keep you listening even after the punchlines have worn off.

THE WEE PAPA GIRLS

The Beat, the Rhyme, the Noise (Jive)

EVEN WHEN THEY GET THE LINGO AND ACcent right, there's something basically bogus about British hip-hop, leaving most of these acts sounding more like wanna-bes than actual rappers. Not so the Wee Papa Girls. They take strength from who they are, Brit accents, reggae beats and all. That, not the album's aggressively "authentic" production, is what makes these raps come correct.

ENYA

Watermark (Geffen)

FINALLY, A NEW-AGE ARTIST WITH GENUINE pop sense! "Orinoco Flow," with its eddying rhythms and gently swirling chorus, may be the obvious hit, but it's by no means the only gem here. Because Enya writes whole songs and not mere sound-sketches, even otherwise ethereal efforts like the solemn "Evening Falls..." or the meditative instrumental "Watermark" manage to be quite catchy in their own quiet way.

LOU REED

New York (Sire)

IF IT'S TEMPTING TO CALL THIS ALBUM A breakthrough, it isn't just that the words are so perceptive or the music is so lean and incisive; the real difference is that the dyspeptic Reed sounds happier than he has in years. Which may seem odd, given the album's gripe-oriented content, until you notice how much *fun* Reed has ripping into the zealots and hypocrites he sings about. It's as if he's finally found the verbal equivalent to the stinging sound of his guitar.

CICCONE YOUTH

The Whitey Album (Blast First/Enigma)

WHERE SONIC YOUTH IS ALL ABOUT ELECtric guitars and harmonic density, Ciccone Youth is all about sampled records and rhythmic intensity. That's not to say the two don't intersect, for Ciccone Youth sound distinctly "Sonic" when covering Madonna (Ciccone) hits like "Burnin' Up." Though this high-concept joke gets some laughs out of its deadpan send-up of "Addicted to Love," the truth is these Youth are so cerebral that *The Whitey Album* may be the least funky dance record in history.

TIFFANY

Hold an Old Friend's Hand (MCA)

IT'S REALLY NOT AS BAD AS YOU'D THINK. But then, neither is root canal work.

JACK BRUCE

Willpower (Polydor)

IT'S NO *CROSSROADS*, BUT WHAT JACK Bruce compilation could be? This does have Eric Clapton, though, on vintage Cream tracks and a pair of new tunes that prove the wind hasn't yet gone out of Bruce's sails. Still, for all the forgotten gems like "Can You Follow?," *Willpower* will leave hard-core fans famished for a taste of his Michael Mantler and Carla Bley collaborations. Or, at the very least, a bit of West, Bruce & Laing.

MASTERS OF REALITY

Masters of Reality (Def America)

TIME WAS WHEN HEAVY ROCKERS KNEW how to get down and dirty without losing sight of the tune, and *Masters of Reality* recaptures that sound better than any album since *Mountain Climbing*. Sure, the Masters like their riffs dark and drony, but they also have a taste for acid blues and an almost shocking fondness for melody (plus a singer who can make the most of it). Forget the Cult—this band is for real.

CHERRELLE

Affair (Tabu)

JIMMY JAM AND TERRY LEWIS DON'T MAKE records about beats, but about emotional situations. That's what puts the bounce into the flirty "Pick Me Up," the tension into "Discreet" and the power into Cherrelle's performance overall. That's also what makes albums like *Affair* matter.

BY J.D. CONSIDINE

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NAMM from page 59

that the Alesis HR-16 drum machine has a new cousin, the HR-16B, which comes with a completely different set of 16-bit samples. They're generally more modern and aggressive, some using more processing and others built up from as many as four or five different drum sounds.

EDISON: And now we have further escalation in the battle of the scaled-down drum machines: the Roland R-5 versus the Yamaha RX8.

EINSTEIN: I was certainly impressed by the RX8—a 16-bit drum box with 43 internal PCM samples for $500. How do they pull it off? First they don't make the pads velocity-sensitive, figuring you'll use a remote keyboard to write your parts. Second, instead of many separate outputs, they figure most people only use a couple, so besides the main stereo outs there are only two more. And among its sounds are not only standard kits and Latin percussion, but a marimba, an orchestra hit and two electric bass samples so you can program pitched accompaniments. How far can you tune these suckers? Two octaves' worth, Tom. And you can reverse them if you want, which a nerd like yourself would probably do. It's full eight-voice polyphonic so you can stack eight snares together, and yes you *can* program tempo and volume changes. This thing should make waves.

EDISON: Nothing as bizarre as your haircut. Don't you ever comb that thing? If you thought the RX8 was a big deal, what would you have said about the Roland R-5? It's a trimmed-down version of Roland's powerhouse R-8. It's got the same human feel facilities, the same 16-bit sound generation....

Yamaha's 16-bit, $500 drum box the RX8.

EINSTEIN: Yeah, but are the actual sounds the same?

EDISON: Well no, actually. See, the R-5 doesn't have the RAM and ROM card slots you get on the R-8 so you can't load the R-5 up with new sounds. Therefore Roland has packed it with a different, presumably more generic set of sounds.

EINSTEIN: Aha, so it's not really the same. But tell me. How many of these sounds do you get?

EDISON: I've got you there, dim-bulb! Sixty-eight. Plus you can edit the sounds and store the results in 28 user memory locations. But it has velocity-sensitive pads and a total of six outputs.

EINSTEIN: Okay, okay, but what does it go for?

EDISON: Seven hundred bucks.

EINSTEIN: Dummkopf. That's two hundred more than the RX8. Can't you people add out there in Jersey?

EDISON: I have to take this, from a man who left gravity out of his original theory of relativity?

EINSTEIN: I refuse to be insulted by a guy who they say never really invented half the things he was credited with.

EDISON: Well, that's okay, we have to go anyway. You ran off at the mouth so long that now we're out of time. We didn't even mention all the software action, like **Opcode**'s Vision or **Steinberg**'s M-ROS.

EINSTEIN: And thanks to your stupid digressions, we've left out the new $2000 **Samson** wireless and the **Shure** Beta series mikes. Now we'll have to come back and do a whole other show just to cover everything we didn't get to.

EDISON: Well look, now that they're rolling the credits, why don't you get out of here and see if you can finally nail that unified field theory.

EINSTEIN: Oh yeah? You want to step outside and say that? M

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World Radio History

REED from page 66

you bring us back from the myth to the city with the verse about Americans polluting the rivers.

REED: Oh, I hadn't thought of that. That stuff's all for real, I don't make any of that up. All the stuff in there is essentially true. I don't have to make it up. See, I don't think people understand how serious Marty is in his faith. That's what this movie is all about. This is by a person who's obviously very religious. For them to say he's sacrilegious... That's what prompted the song and in the end it's a dime store mystery: "Descartes through Hegel, belief is never sure." I love that line. My favorite line on the whole record, though, is "I wish I hadn't thrown away my time on so much Human and so much less Divine." That is a superb line. That's the one where I stopped and said, "Ah, *that* one."

MUSICIAN: *There was some of that in "Hello It's Me," the last song in* Songs for 'Drella*: "I wish I'd talked more to you when you were alive."*

REED: Oh yes. "I thought you were self-assured when you were really shy." I'll tell you... Writing—you can make it come out any way you want. The character can stand up, he can sit down, he can say this. Then the music is like the screen in a movie theater. It envelops it all.

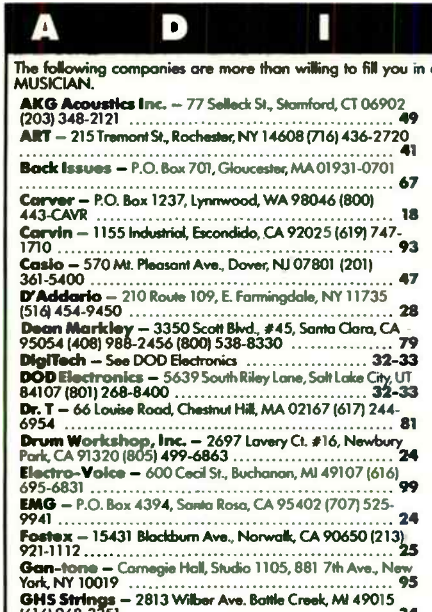
Isn't it sad that they've got all these six-screen movie theaters with little screens? You've got to see that movie big. That was the most amazing track. It ended just one or two seconds after where we faded it out. I wanted all of it. It was a live track, it was so astonishing. When we were done with it, everybody knew we'd really done something. We were just awed. We weren't quite sure what to do now, because it was the last track. There was no reason to go do it again. It just did something to us, you can feel it on the record. I dunno... *[gropes for words]* That's music. *[laughter]*

MUSICIAN: *"Christmas in February" is about the Vietnam vets.*

REED: It's just about walking into these people outside. One guy I ran into had a sign: "I'm a vet, I have AIDS." You start wondering, but all you had to do was look at this guy. Even if he was lying, it was horrible. To this day there seems to be this terrible problem regarding the people who came back.

MUSICIAN: *That's no surprise. People still have a terrible problem about what happened in Vietnam.*

REED: But we shouldn't take it out on *them!* I have a real problem with the whole thing. Because I was drafted and I got out of it. As crazy. But that's not something to be proud of. I was certainly very happy about it at the time. The army was not a place where I would function very well. But I'm sure everybody said that. I was drafted the day I set foot out of college. I managed to get out of it, as almost everybody I knew did. But I think about it. There's a moral dilemma that goes along with that. Yeah, I thought we shouldn't be there, but on the whole I would have said that about practically anything. Not World War II. But I don't know what I would have said about Korea. Vietnam was an easy choice to make, I didn't have to think twice about it. Neither did anyone I know. Some of the scams that were being run... I was going to say it was almost always



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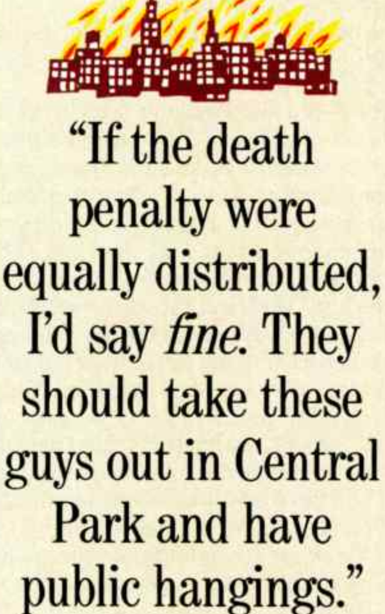
World Radio History

whites but that's not true, black guys I knew got out, too. I had a bass player who pulled a great one—I can't imagine anyone getting away with this but he swears it's true: He said he was deaf. They would sneak up behind him and [*slaps hands together*].

MUSICIAN: *That takes determination. You have to look at pictures of the rice patties every day to stay that focused.*

REED: Yeah, but I think that would do it. I keep thinking how can anyone—how can the Reagan administration be so mean-spirited toward people who can't defend themselves? Women, sick people, the elderly, children. They're the ones bearing the brunt of all this. You can't ask a government that's so vicious to make some kind of program for these guys who went over to Vietnam. Now there's all these damn TV shows about it, but these guys are still out on the street! I know there's never any equity going on, but certainly *that's* not a hard thing to agree on! Certainly of all of them you would think Reagan would act on *that*.

See, that's the whole point of *New York*. It's worse than hypocritical; "hypocritical" is being too kind. It's sub-human. It's the worst part of the human impulse in operation. Do you remember when they said ketchup was a vegetable? Now I didn't make that up. I couldn't, I can't think that way. There are certain depths where you've got to be one of these pathological sorts to come up with that. It's funny, right? "Ketchup is a vegetable." It becomes a joke. And yet it exists.



"If the death penalty were equally distributed, I'd say *fine*. They should take these guys out in Central Park and have public hangings."

MUSICIAN: *There's violent retribution on the album—cops shooting civilians, criminals shooting cops. But I was really struck by the song in "Drella" about the woman who shot Warhol. You sang, "I believe there's got to be some retribution/ I believe there's something wrong if she's alive right now/ I believe being sick is no excuse/ I believe I would have pulled the switch on her myself."*

REED: I'll tell you, it kills me what's going on. I don't understand someone murdering someone else and they're out in seven-and-a-half years. I don't get it. I don't get it that Valerie Solanis could shoot Andy Warhol and get out in a couple of months, which is less time than you get for stealing a car. No, I really believe this country has abrogated all its moral responsibilities totally and completely. Plea bargaining and everything, people don't want to be taxed for jails, they don't want the jail in their neighborhood, so they let them out. *Wait a minute!* Everybody knows the law's a joke. You can't get arrested! And even if you do they won't keep you in long. *Murder*, you would think... Okay, I understand why people say, "No death penalty." I'm a member of Amnesty International. They have a lot of reasons. One reason *I* can go along with for being against the death penalty is because it's only used to electrocute or poison blacks.

On the other hand, if it was equally distributed, I say *fine*. Or give them life in jail and mean it. But that's not happening at all. If you shoot someone and paralyze them, shoot someone and kill them, you're out in six or seven years. *Wait a minute!* Everybody knows the law is a joke. If you shoot a guy in the face and he's lucky and doesn't die, he's just paralyzed from the neck down—technically that's not murder? You're out in four years? *Wait a minute! He's* the one who's lucky, not you! He lived but you should go away *forever*. But they don't do that. I thought Mailer had one great idea. They should take these guys out in Central Park and have public hangings. Don't fuck around! People do not give a shit. They don't want their taxes raised, so you have a public school system that's a joke and absolutely no rehabilitation. You have jails filled to overcrowding. You let everybody out of the mental hospitals. You said you'd have halfway houses but you don't. So where do you dump them? *In the street*. Where did you leave them? *In the street*. What kind of followup did you have? *Zero*. Well, surprise! Look at what's happened. If you wanted to draw a blueprint of how to destroy society, that's what we've done.

MUSICIAN: *It's like when Castro sent us his mental patients and prisoners as refugees.*

REED: And we took 'em! That was hilarious! We were such great humanitarians. What the fuck? Why are we always such bozos? We should have sent them back with some of ours. Said, "No thank you, we have enough refuse here, thank you—try some of *our* crazies."

MUSICIAN: *Hey, you mention Mike Tyson on* New York. *Isn't he a neighbor of yours?*

REED: He lives in this building. Well, not him—her.

MUSICIAN: *Oh—the wife. So you don't know Iron Mike?*

REED: No, I shook hands with him. His hand is the size of my head.

MUSICIAN: *Ever meet Ali?*

REED: Yeah. I met him on the Amnesty tour. He autographed a picture for me. It was very, very sad. I mean, *Ali!* I remember once coming up 8th Avenue near Times Square. I got out of the cab and there were hundreds and hundreds of people walking up the street. They came off 42nd and turned up 8th. I said, "What's going on?" It was Ali! Ali. Talk about thrills he gave us all! His ride... I said to him, "Ali, I just want to shake your hand and tell you how much I admire you, what you did with the draft, all of that." I mean, shit, I just got out—talk about ducking the draft! He could have gone in, kept his title, just put on boxing exhibitions and they'd have made him a colonel. But he said no. There's this line between being brave and being stupid, and I wonder where it falls sometimes. Anyway, I said to him, "It's good to meet you," and he said, "I'm nothin'. I'm nothin', I'm a bum, I can't do shit, I'm nobody." I said, *"That's not true!* You're *Ali!"* For me he's Ali but for him he's nothin'.

I'm a real boxing fan. Ali took us all on a ride and he did it his way and he stood up for what he thought was right. I've got all these videotapes of Ali speeches and Ali at colleges talking to kids. I'll never forget watching him lead that mob of people. It was just amazing. He did it all.

MUSICIAN: *Do you think that this album is so full of 1980s references that 10 or 20 years from now it will be hard for a listener to understand?*

REED: No, because I used things that I thought weren't rooted in any one particular time. I thought about that. There's nothing that is yesterday's news; it's just examples of certain things. I'm not at all worried that this stuff won't be going on years from now. My worry is the fact that it *will* all be going on, and that people will be able to identify with it as strongly 10 years from now as today. ■

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