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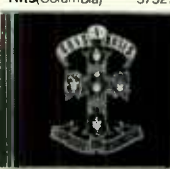

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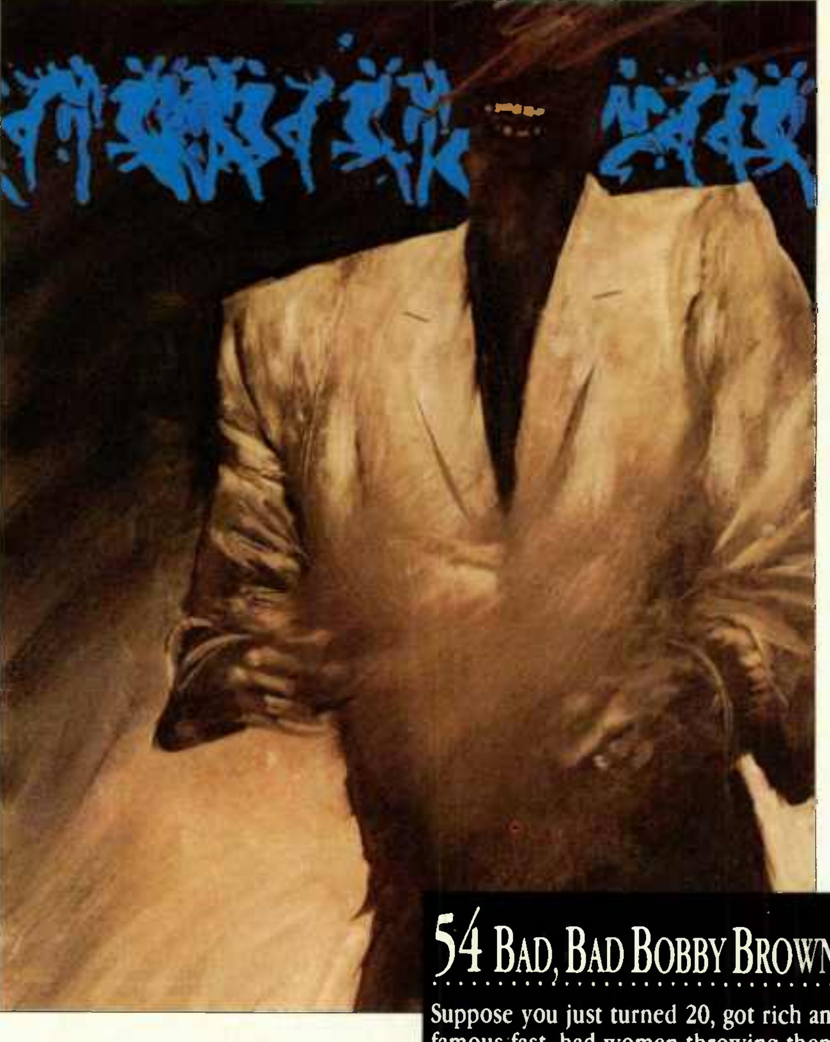

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Mister Prolific took two years off to assess his art, change record labels and exit England. Then he made *Spike*—musically the richest album of his rich career—with backup from the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, the Three Macs (McCartney, McGuinn and MacManus) and a host of notables. Over Christmas Costello sat down with *Musician* to open his heart, shoot off his mouth, feed the squirrels and make fun of some of the other rock stars we write about.
by Mark Rowland

36 Jeff Healey: Over Under Sideways Down

Hey! Nobody plays guitar like that! Oh, sorry pal, didn't notice you were blind. Y'see, you've got that guitar in your lap and your hands are backwards and *holy smoke!* Nobody plays guitar like *that!*
by Ted Drozdowski

32 Artificial Intelligence Cops a Feel

Machines may still be writing rhythm parts, but they're getting a lot better at it.
by Alan di Perna

54 Bad, Bad Bobby Brown

Suppose you just turned 20, got rich and famous fast, had women throwing themselves at you, managed to take some mighty black music to number one on both the pop LP and singles charts and were being called the Black Elvis? Yeah, you might feel pretty good, too. Bobby Brown is on top of the world.
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MUSICIAN

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COVER: ELVIS COSTELLO, LONDON, JAN. 1989. PHOTOGRAPHED BY ANTON CORBIJN. ASSISTED BY JULIA HAYNER. MAKE-UP BY NASSIM. **THIS PAGE:** ELVIS COSTELLO BY ANTON CORBIJN. BOBBY BROWN ILLUSTRATION BY RICK BERRY AND PHIL HALE. JEFF HEALEY BY MIM MICHELOVE

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Child Prodigy, Heir Apparent

Lucky Peterson has been turning heads with his music since before he was old enough to read.

By the time he was three, he was performing with pioneers like Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker in his father's nightclub. When he was just five he made his first record, produced by the legendary Willie Dixon, leading to appearances on "The Ed Sullivan Show" and "The Tonight Show."

As a teenager, he went on the road with Little Milton, serving a three-year apprenticeship with the rhythm & blues great that led to a spot in Bobby "Blue" Bland's band. He was Bland's featured soloist for three years.

Now 25, Lucky has played more stages and filled more passports than most musicians twice his age. "Lucky Strikes," featuring Lucky on guitar, keyboards and vocals, marks the emergence of an important new voice in contemporary blues.

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Letters

GUNS CONTROL

THIS FINALLY TEARS IT WITH me. The article on Guns N' Roses (Dec. '88) clarifies your journalistic philosophy: Sales über alles! To even remotely glorify such human trash as this band does us all a great disservice, and truly bespeaks your lack of ethics. This group has by far been the most repellent and counterproductive thing yet to emerge from the dark id of the record industry.

Harry DeBusk II
Baltimore, MD

DOES MARK ROWLAND ACTUally think *Musician* readers give a fuck about a band that thinks it's cool because it destroys its equipment onstage? Who's his target audience—sexually insecure pubescent males? The premeditated smashing of one's axe is a bit passé, don't you think?

Incidentally, Axl Rose has the most shrill and insipid rock voice since David Byron of Uriah Heep.

Frank Schraner
Birmingham, MI

LET'S GET THE ROAD MANager's name correct! It's Doug Goldstein, not Goldsmith. Maybe Mark Rowland was thinking of how many copies of *Musician* would sell with Guns N' Roses on the cover, thus making Rowland a "goldsmith" of sorts.

Guns N' Roses is happening. *Musician* is not.

Vicky Kraft
Atlanta, GA

AFTER MUCH PERSUASION I agreed to let my 12-year-old son order this magazine, hoping it wouldn't be *too* bad. However, on receipt of this first magazine I am *very* opposed to it.

I do not want this type of material in my home. Especially for my son.

Sharon Ostler
Salt Lake City, UT

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THERE IS a world full of more worthy candidates for your staff to write about. I consider the fact that you must sell magazines and subscriptions, but bands like Guns N' Roses should be left to teen magazines that create them and maintain their marketability. For with bands like these, it is not musicianship but rather marketability that is the band's staple.

Dennis Gray
Middleton, MA

I HAPPENED TO BE LIVING IN Dallas when Guns N' Roses and INXS played Texas Stadium (which isn't in Dallas but in Irving). I am not a metal head and generally don't like bands where the men have nicer hair than I do. So when I went to Texas Stadium Guns N' Roses were neither here nor there for me. By the time they finished their first song I hated them. They were the most unprofessional, foul-mouthed, inconsiderate band I'd ever seen in my life. (This from someone who lived at CBGB's from 1981 to 1986.)

But...something happened. I decided to listen to them without visual effect through my Walkman. They *are* raw! They *have* electric energy! They *have* lyrics that make me wish somebody wrote that song for me.

Guns N' Roses has made me hungry again for decadence. Let's hear it for "I don't give a fuck" bands.

That's what it's all about.

Lauren Alles
New York, NY

ENLIGHTENMENT

WHILE A DEVOTED READER OF your magazine, I occasionally find an article which sheds new light upon the history of rock 'n' roll. Such was Bill Flanagan's interview with Glyn Johns (Dec. '88). The

questions were as incisive as the answers were insightful, and Mr. Flanagan should be commended for his mature, knowledgeable and adroit handling of the interview.

One last point: Didn't Johns mean Tim *Renwick* and not Tim *Redding* (possible overlap with Noel Redding?) as Eric Clapton's occasional sideman?

Brett Hoffman
West Burke, VT

NOT *HIM* AGAIN

THANK YOU TO BILL FLANAGAN on his article on Edie Brickell and New Bohemians (Dec. '88)! People are so quick to judge an artist whose name appears before the band's, when most don't realize the artist has little or no control over it. I had the pleasure of meeting Edie and her band in Cincinnati after one of their shows. She is genuinely as humble as your article made her seem.

Michelle Saxton
Louisville, KY

INDIVIDUAL ISHAM

BRAVO ON "MARK ISHAM'S Year of Living Dangerously" (Dec. '88)! At least there is somebody in the United States who plays what he wants.

I think a musician is a person who creates, not follows the others. Mark Isham *is* a musician.

Amber Black
Cut Bank, MT

DRUMROLL, PLEASE

BEFORE YOU PRINT SOMEONE'S personal feelings towards comments made during an interview, your editorial staff should check that person's reference. I am alluding to the letter (Dec. '88) where a David Houghton states that Hal Blaine is the drummer on "Josie" by Steely Dan. Well, Dave, my copy of that recording says that Jim Keltner is the drummer in question. As a matter of fact, Hal Blaine does not appear on the album at all. Blaine may be a great drummer, but not on "Josie" he isn't.

Bob Hibson
Narragansett, RI

THE OLDER THE BETTER

HEY! WHAT'S THE FUSS ABOUT giving so much limelight to our supposedly "geezer musicians" (*Letters*, Dec. '88)? Maybe the cold, hard fact is that Clapton, Page, Beck, Plant, etc. are *better* than the sludge younger bands come up with. And hell, most of these younger guitarists are, what they like to call, "reinforcing" a guitar riff. So the truth stands up. Maybe these "geezers" are what music is all about.

And personally, I'd rather read about Percy and Pagey than Guns N' Roses.

Michael LaFleche
Mt. Pleasant, MI

DISGUSTED

I RECENTLY RECEIVED MY FIRST issue of *Musician* and I wanted to tell you I was disgusted! Your pictures were awful; your articles dragged on and seemed to have no point. Please cancel my subscription and, if at all possible, send back my money so this won't be a total loss.

Beth Hedgeman
Colorado Springs, CO

Our readers have the best sense of humor, don't you think? – Ed.

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Faces

Gipsy Kings

Flamenco a Go Go

Earlier this decade, Los Reyes had the career blues. The septet—two sons of a French flamenco singer and their gypsy brothers-in-law and cousins—had recorded two albums of flamenco. Despite their pop touches, the discs went into the ghetto-like folk bins of record stores. "They didn't understand who we were targeting," recalls guitarist Jahloul "Chico" Bouchikhi.

Spending nearly a year in and out of the studio with producer Claude Martinez, this Mediterranean extended family reshaped their sound even more. When they emerged with *Gipsy Kings*, the fluttery acoustic guitars and Nicolas Reyes' emotive vocals were still prominent. But castanets were out, and synths, mildly funky electric-bass lines and electronic drums were in. The renamed Gipsy Kings thus transported flamenco into the twenty-first century.

"We don't have any pretensions about being the defenders of a tradition," Bouchikhi—dressed in un-gypsy-like cowboy boots, jeans and black sweatshirt—explains through a French translator. "Even when we were young, the way we were playing the music was already on the edge of the real

The Chills

Safety in Numbers

It's a good thing all those cold-temperature puns were used up months ago when the Sugarcubes arrived from Iceland, because now we can skip that cleverness and cut to the chase in addressing the Chills: This nifty New Zealand band specializing in moody, propulsive pop has a fairly large number of alumni—and an incredibly large number of songs.

Singer/songwriter Martin Phillips helped form the band in 1980; the bio that accompanies the group's latest record, *Brave Words*, indicates the LP is the product of "Chills lineup 10 (we think)." But the quartet that toured the U.S. a few months ago featured yet *another* new drummer.

Now that we're on Chills lineup 11 (we think) and counting, it's reasonable to ask Phillips—the only original member—why there's been so much turnover. Happenstance? Halitosis? What?

"It's mainly a coincidence," he says. "It's just that the Chills started pretty much as a garage band. The commitments weren't great at that time. The demands have grown and the requirement for [people who are] committed to the band has grown ...But this lineup seems stable."

Given the band's personnel history, that last observation may mark him as the Joe Isuzu of New Zealand pop. Phillips is certainly remarkably prolific: His Chills vinyl scorecard includes numerous singles, an EP, a compilation LP and the aforementioned *Brave Words*—a batch of exceptional songs, unexceptionally presented (sonically speaking).

The album certainly isn't representative of the substantial, surprising power these unassuming-looking lads generate onstage. Phillips doesn't blame producer (and former Red Crayola-ite) Mayo Thompson but rather a shortage of funds and attendant lack of studio time. Phillips says the Chills were able to spend only about two weeks—including recording and mixing—on the album.

He vows to do much better on the next LP, which he hopes will surface around April. It's anyone's guess what the band lineup will be then, but it's a safe bet there will be plenty of material to chose from, partly because Phillips got the hang of songwriting quickly.

"I wrote my first song maybe around 1979," the 25-year-old tunesmith recalls. "By 1980 the songs were coming fast and I was able to get more done. And now I have a backlog of around 250 songs."

Two-hundred-and-fifty?

"Well, I haven't even finished most of them," he allows, "There's about 60 to 80 songs I've finished and maybe another 200 beyond those that are rough ideas on tape—or just riffs that I think are good. But I mean, if even only a third of those [pan out], it's gonna keep us going for a long time."

– Duncan Strauss

JAY BLAKESBERG

World Radio History

flamenco style." He attributes that to the influence of Western rock like the Beatles and Stones. That pop sensibility, heard on bouncy album tracks like "Bamboleo" and "Djobi Djoba"—not to mention their rendition of the French hit "My Way"—led to gigs playing for the European jet-set crowd.

Perhaps it's naïveté, but Bouchikhi doesn't sense any faddish novelty in seven swarthy guitar-strumming men in their 30s singing this music (in French and Spanish) to hipster crowds in America. "I feel that the music we play wakes up in people feelings that were sleeping for some time," he explains sincerely. "And that's why the reaction is such. People suddenly discover that they have these kinds of feelings in themselves." – *David Browne*

Bright Lights, Big Lawsuit

Jimmy Reed's was a success story—up to a point. Despite only a third-grade education, the Mississippi-born singer/guitarist became a leading figure in the Chicago R&B scene of the '50s and '60s: Reed wrote and played such now-established classics as "Baby What You Want Me to Do," "Ain't That Lovin' You Baby," "Honest I Do," "Shame, Shame, Shame" and "Bright Lights, Big City."

Reed's lack of education, though, is at the center of an $18-million lawsuit his co-writing widow and their eight children filed December 2 against the current owners of their music publishers. (Reed himself died in 1976.) The suit claims that Jimmy and Mary Reed, the latter with a sixth-grade education, lacked "the ability to comprehend the complex documents" they signed in 1965 transferring their copyright renewal rights to Arc Music Corp. for a total of $11,201. The suit also charges that $10,000 of that amount was never paid, and that the Reeds' signatures on a follow-up document two years later, relinquishing all rights to Arc, are forgeries. Mary Reed's personal manager describes her and the Reed children as "literally destitute." – ***Scott Isler***

Don Covay

The Quality of Mercy Mercy

Don Covay still remembers his first brush with success back in '61, right after he released "Pony Time."

"I was watching 'Bandstand' one day when my wife said, 'They're playing your song.' It took me a couple of seconds to realize it wasn't my record; it was Chubby Checker. I was shocked. I couldn't handle it. I knew what a cover was, but I'd never had anything to cover before."

True enough, though the young singer/songwriter already boasted solid credits by the time Checker took "Pony Time" to number one. As a D.C.-area teenager, Covey sang with Marvin Gaye and Billy Stewart in the Rainbows, circa 1955. Two years later, this self-confessed "Little Richard clone," dubbed Pretty Boy by his idol, cut a single with Penniman's own backing band, the red-hot Upsetters.

Following the "Pony Time" disappointment, Covay saw his star rise steadily. He scored a minor (if lame) dance hit with "The Popeye Waddle," while Gladys Knight, Hank Ballard and others took his material into the charts. And in 1964 he hit his stride with "Mercy Mercy," a dose of sweet 'n' greasy soul on the tiny Rosemart label. When black-music titan Atlantic Records bought out his contract, Covay was where he belonged.

"Everyone wanted to be on the red label at the time," he grins. "I never thought I would end up there, but I did." Though none of Covay's down-home Atlantic sides achieved the notice they deserved, his songs were recorded by everyone from the Stones and Steppenwolf to Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin, who turned out those sizzling versions of "Chain of Fools" and "See-Saw."

He enjoyed another creative stretch on Mercury in the early '70s, highlighted by the melancholy cheatin' ballad "I Was Checkin' Out She Was Checkin' In." Since then, Covay hasn't been heard from much, though he's stayed busy. He co-authored Peter Wolf's 1984 hit "Lights Out" and recently logged studio time with Paul Shaffer and old buddy Steve Cropper.

Just don't call the ebullient Covay a grand old man, 'cause he scoffs at the suggestion. "Rock 'n' roll people don't get old," he explains. "One of the guys who taught me how to write rock 'n' roll was Jesse Stone, who was in his 70s.

"If you're a real rock 'n' roller, you sing until you go out. I say: 'When I die, don't bury me deep/ Just put a guitar to my head and feet/ Tell all the world to come and peep/ 'Cause Don Covay has gone to sleep.' "

—*Jon Young*

EBET ROBERTS C.V.D VOOREN/RETNA

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▼ Kazumi Watanabe

East Meets East Coast

PAUL ROBICHEAU

You may hear Japanese inflections of harmony and phrasing in Kazumi Watanabe's guitar playing, but for the most part he sounds more like a product of the east *coast*, with an incisive touch akin to John Scofield and Mike Stern. The main Japanese trait he brings to his music is that country's legendary fascination with things American.

Take his series of four *Mobo* albums, for example. The essence of mobo—a Japanese-English hybrid for "modern boy"—has to do with melding electric-guitar aggression and harmonic sophistication. The mobo factor has landed Watanabe stints with Gary Burton, Steps Ahead, Sadao Watanabe (no relation) and Jaco Pastorius, in addition to leading his own group.

His latest vehicle has been a power fusion trio (with some keyboard washes by Peter Vettesse), as heard on his recent album *The Spice of Life Too*. Bassist Jeff Berlin and drummer Bill Bruford forge a tight bond with the guitarist on tunes which veer from funk-driven vamps to progressive rock riffs. In this context Watanabe likes room to move and breathe. "In trio music, having so much space makes it very flexible," Watanabe says in broken English.

Judging from the steady flow of recorded work he has put out since 1971, Watanabe is a prolific composer. "It's not easy," he says of the creative process. "Every time before recording, I don't sleep." Concepts pop out of the ether at the oddest times. "When I'm washing my hair in the bathroom, I get ideas suddenly. When I'm riding the train, I don't have music paper and pencil. A friend of mine taught me a good way to remember ideas when you're away from home: Call up your answering machine and sing into it."

Though grounded in jazz and rock, Watanabe is not so westernized that he's lost touch with the musical language of his homeland. He has performed in duets with shamisen and koto players, and believes in the validity of musical trade policies. "If New York musicians were to play with a shamisen player, it wouldn't be so difficult. It's the old west-meets-east merger. But when I play with traditional musicians, it's kind of east-meets-east," he laughs. "That's the new thing."

– Josef Woodard

The Pursuit of Happiness

▼ Hard Edge, Soft Texture

I can't come at this from the standpoint of intellectually being superior. I'm from a small town in Canada," Moe Berg says softly. "This is traditional boneheaded music."

This is the Pursuit of Happiness, Berg's five-piece band that, as he tells it, is "an attempt to weld a hard rock sound with a pop sensibility." That pop sensibility is most pronounced in the femme-fatale backup vocals Berg utilizes to complement the power-chord guitar attack. Kris Abbott, one of the femmes in question, says TPOH has a "real hard edge with this real soft texture, which are the backup vocals. But we're not laid back. I'm not a typical rock chick"—Abbott doubles on rhythm guitar—"but we're not fluff either." Berg's shamelessly hooky melodies and love-stinks lyrics have made TPOH, how you say, big up north, and the group has now set their sights geographically a bit lower.

Formed in Toronto two-and-a-half years ago, the group first achieved a taste of the old spotlight when the video to their angst-a-go-go anthem "I'm an Adult Now" became a fixture on Canadian music video programs. Touring the frozen north on the strength of self-released demos, Berg and Co. found themselves signed to Chrysalis and in the studio with that renowned purveyor of pop, Todd Rundgren. "I've always been a huge fan of his," Berg explains, "and I brought up his name innocently with Chrysalis." "We figured Rundgren was out of reach—his name was brought up as a joke," Abbott continues. "Then it turned out that he was who the record company thought should produce the band, without knowing it was Moe's first choice." Rundgren, who has been known to alter a group's sound in the studio, captured what Berg sees as "the essence of the band as a live act on record."

The resulting album, *Love Junk*, has just been released and Berg and band are headed back home to prepare for the Big Tour Push, hoping to join the ranks of other Canadian groups that have hit the big time here in the US of A. Don't think Berg hasn't had that on his mind for a while; when asked about the derivation of the band's name, he grins broadly. "Well, after all," he says, "it is from your Constitution." *– Amy Linden*

National Treasure Dept.

There were—and are—lots of rockabilly singers, but there's only one Charlie Feathers. He never hit it big like contemporaries Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins or Johnny Cash (with all of whom he was briefly a label-mate on Memphis' Sun Records). But the cognoscenti have long prized his keening, Southern-drenched vocals, fiery spirit and songwriting talent on "One Hand Loose," "Bottle to the Baby" and "Tongue-Tied Jill," among many.

Feathers remained an active and viable performer into the 1980s. In late 1987, though, he was diagnosed with diabetic neuropathy, a rare degenerative disease, and today he is without the use of his legs, in constant pain—and "still pretty determined," according to his friend Billy Poore. Feathers fans can show their support (financial and otherwise) by writing him care of Poore at 204 Sycamore Road, Severna Park, MD 21146. Non-Feathers fans should check out one of his reissue albums and *then* write him. – *Scott Isler*

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Sonic Youth

by David Browne

The Preeminent '80s Guitar Band Discovers Songs

Clockwise from top: Thurston Moore, Kim Gordon, Steve Shelley and Lee Ranaldo.

PAUL ROBICHEAU

Call it growing pains. In the seven years since they first converged in the bowels of Manhattan's downtown scene, Sonic Youth has been through it all—four drummers, half a dozen independent labels, guitars stolen right off the stage, gigs in the Mojave Desert, you name it. But they never expected *this*. As a result of record-company machinations, the masters of uncompromising guitar rock 'n' roll find themselves linked, however precariously, with Duran Duran.

It's like this: Enigma Records, which recently hooked up with the band's British label Blast First, is in turn distributed by Capitol. The upshot is that, through absolutely no effort or inclination of their own, Sonic Youth is suddenly part of a conglomerate, and the affiliation leaves them uneasy. As the band sprawls around the one-room Lower East Side offices of Blast First, a simple reference to their Capitolization brings a curt denial from normally pun-filled guitarist Thurston Moore, he of the tumbling blond hair and basketball-player height. After finally admitting to the deal, the band's other guitarist, shorter, darker and more pockmarked Lee Ranaldo, flatly adds, "It's not really very exciting. It's frightening."

The band's ambivalence is understandable. Sonic Youth has become arguably the preeminent guitar band of the '80s, but they've done so on their own terms. Recording for indies like Neutral, Homestead and SST, the group has pushed the limits of controlled hysteria, sometimes with unlistenable results: When Moore deadpans, "Most of our songs are inspired by the sound of gaffer's tape being ripped off guitar cases," he's only partially kidding. Their unconventional tunings and playing styles (screwdrivers and drumsticks instead of picks, thanks), and tendency toward disembodied shrieks and chaotic rumblings (epitomized by their live cassette, *Sonic Death*) are not for the faint of heart, but the result is challenging rock 'n' roll that answers to no one.

Despite all that, Sonic Youth is slowly, inevitably, becoming more popular and more successful. They play in Spain and Greece, there are Sonic Youth bootlegs, and at a New York show this fall young girls shouted, "I love you, Thurston!" as the band splayed one of their new songs, "Kissability," all over the stage. Their new album (the first distributed by Capitol)—four glorious sides of whipped-to-a-frenzy fury called *Daydream Nation*—marks a musical milestone as well; it's at once their most accessible and most forward-thinking work. Moore half-jokingly calls the quartet "professional punks" (their ages range from early 30s to 26), but that's what they're on the verge of becoming.

Major labels and international tours were a mere dream when the original line-up formed in 1981. At the time, Ranaldo and Moore realized that their respective New York bands, the Flux and the Couchmen, were going nowhere fast. Eventually, both found themselves working with composer Glenn Branca, and it was during that time that the two guitarists and California-born bassist Kim Gordon (soon to be Mrs. Moore) began gigging with assorted friends, including drummer Richard Edson, future co-star of *Stranger Than Paradise* and *Tougher Than Leather*.

"We kept changing the name of the

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band," recalls Gordon, whose deadpan, icy stare could stop stampeding buffalo. "I thought, 'Well, let's get the right name and everything will fall together,' because it was really eclectic and not quite happening. Then Thurston came up with the name Sonic Youth, and that gave us a feeling for what direction we wanted to go with."

Only a few months later, the original quartet made their first record, a self-titled EP financed by Branca and recorded and mixed in two days. Since then, the band has been nothing if not prolific, releasing five albums, numerous EPs and 12-inchers, solo albums and, on their own Ecstatic Peace label, records by admired musicians and bands. What Gordon dryly calls "certain sounds that aren't exactly melodious" persisted, but with each record—culminating in 1986's *Evol* (which introduced current drummer Steve Shelley) and the cascading guitars and locomotive lurch of 1987's *Sister*—they turned their dissonance and oddball tunings into a plus.

Daydream Nation, which Moore calls "pure and simple art-rock," may be their finest moment. Recorded for $30,000 ("our first non-econo record," says Moore), the album has the usual mix of urban-decay landscapes ("The Sprawl"), *musique concrète* ("Providence," an answering-machine message set to piano tinklings) and accessible (for them) rockers like "Total Trash" that implode with fret-scraping frenzy. For the first time since their early days, the band worked out arrangements onstage before recording the tracks, which added to the record's success. Admits the baby-faced Shelley, "It's more like playing music instead of working out a structure in your head. You're actually playing *songs*." Gordon simply states, "I think in general we wanted to have as much power as any mainstream rock band."

Her comment is especially telling, for despite their much-loathed "noise band" tag, Sonic Youth maintains that they're misunderstood. "Oh, yeah, definitely," Gordon says, "that we *aspire* to noise, that we *aspire* to dissonance." Shelley adds solemnly, "That we're a *dark* band." Gordon continues, "We don't want to be thought of as an indie band or a noise band. We think of ourselves as a guitar-oriented rock band."

Those are the big words coming from

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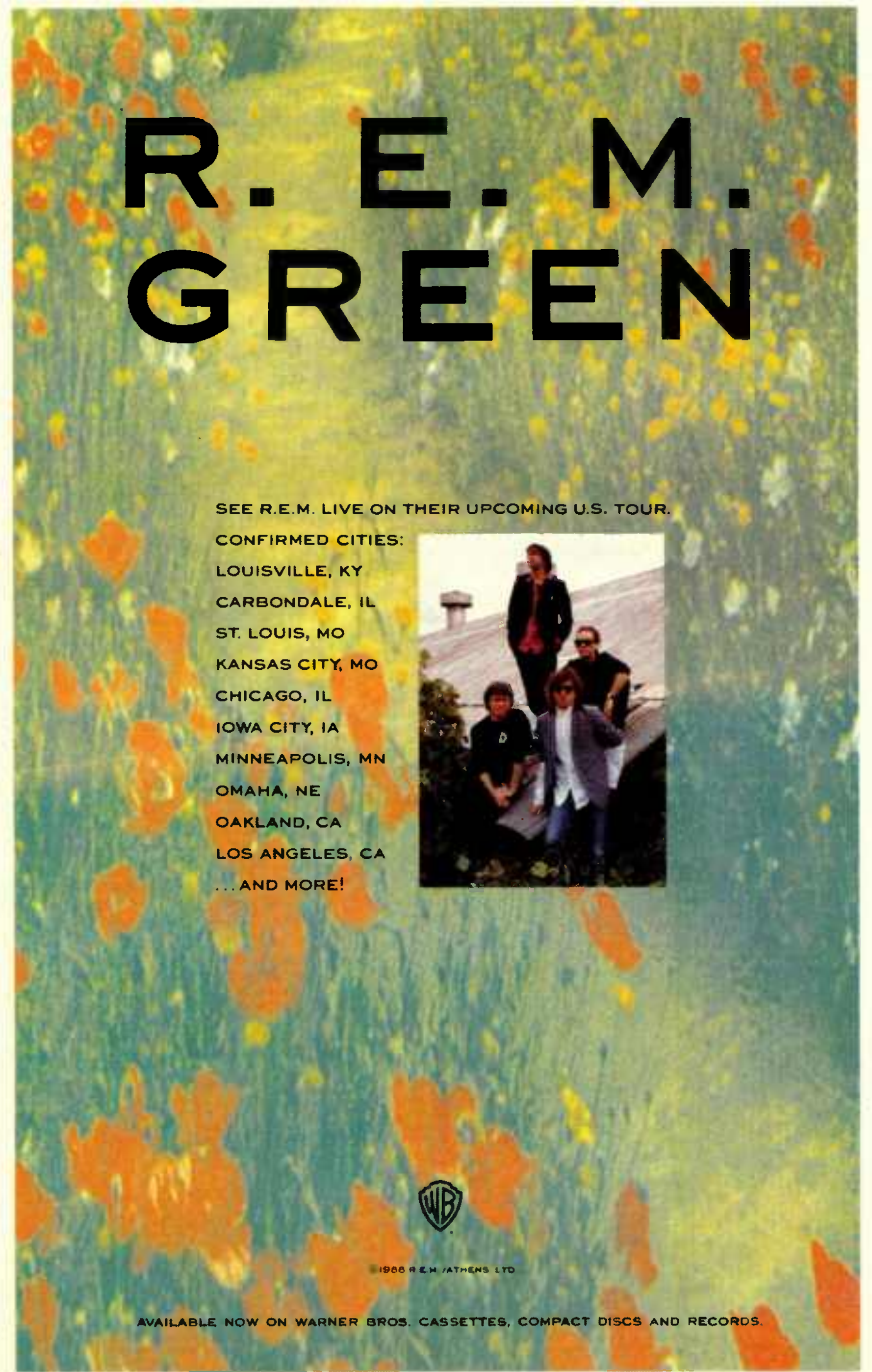

TOTALED TRASH

Sonic Youth guitarists **Thurston Moore** and **Lee Ranaldo** share "a million guitars between us," according to Ranaldo; 18 of them, each tuned differently, are taken on the road. Most are gutted and remade by the band, but Ranaldo and Moore generally start with Fenders: Tele Deluxes, Mustangs, Duosonics, a Jaguar and a Jazzmaster. Other guitars, in assorted demolished condition, include a Harmony Les Paul copy, Univox clear plexiglass and fretless Drifter strung with bass strings. Effects of choice include a Fender digital delay, Boss compressor and Morley volume pedal.

Because they tend to break so many strings, Moore and Ranaldo buy the cheapest they can find and do so in bulk, 10 packs of each gauge. Brand names don't matter ("whatever's cheapest—ultimately, they're all the same," Ranaldo says), but D'Addario and Ernie Ball are mentioned as preferences. Guitar picks are Jim Dunlop 73s and 88s.

Kim Gordon uses a blond Rickenbacker bass with a Marshall head and "some kind of cabinet." As a standby, she has an Ovation. Drummer **Steve Shelley** plays a five-piece wood fiberglass Pearl kit he's owned since the age of 13. Cymbals of choice are Zildjian (one crash, one ride, one high-hat); sticks are wood-tipped Promarks.

"And," Gordon adds, "we pack our favorite aspirin." The rest of the band chimes in: "Advil!"

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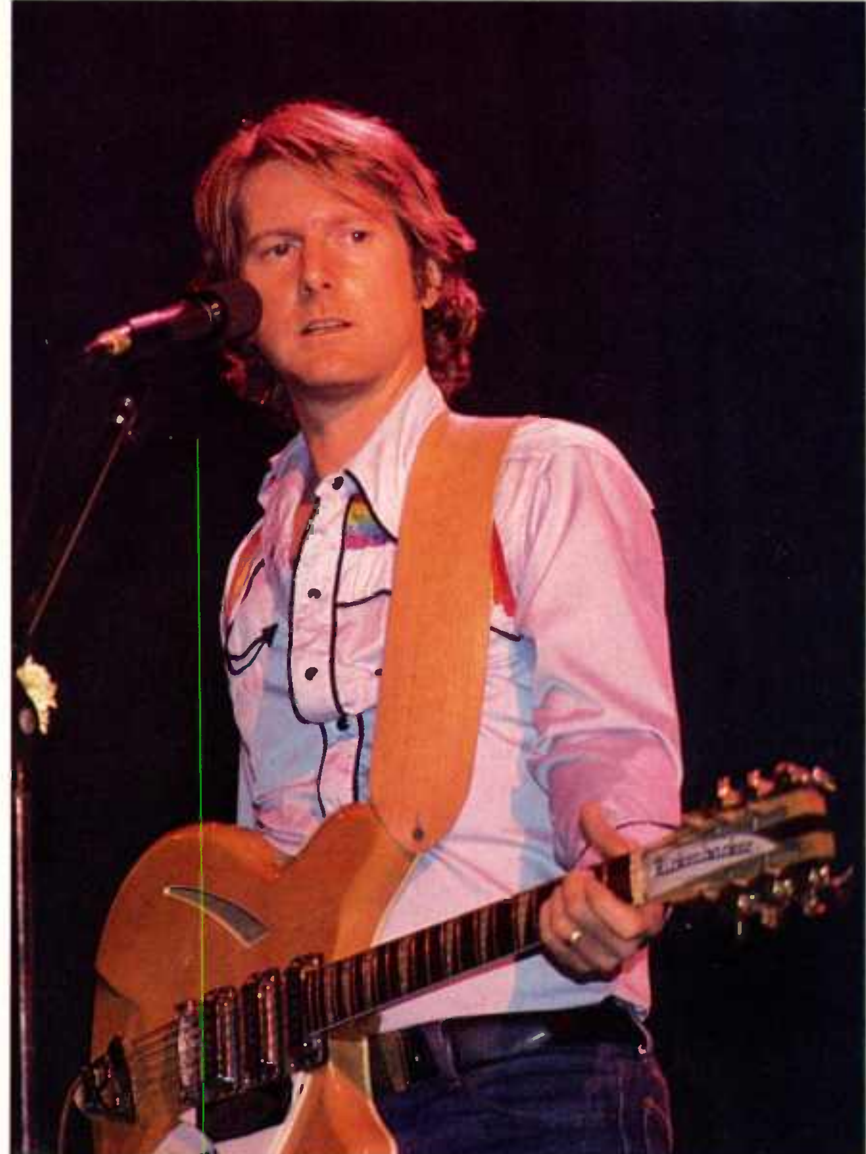
Roger McGuinn

by Dave DiMartino

Evening's Empire Has Returned into Sand



EBET ROBERTS

Being in Roger McGuinn's shoes must be an absolute gas, as long as your name isn't Roger McGuinn. Pleasant, cheery, out on the road working his butt off in 1988 while bands that couldn't shine those very same shoes draw megabucks lip-synching to their own videos—the man himself is trapped in a Fifth Dimension he never made. It is a world where he is judged solely on his accomplishments of over 20 years ago, with the Byrds.

"I could think of a lot worse millstones to carry around than the Byrds," McGuinn says philosophically. And in those 23 years, McGuinn's millstone, the Byrds, has aged so very well that it has come to define '60s pop music. Since its emergence, the sound McGuinn and his band introduced has never *not* been part of rock music. Still, "It's frustrating from the point of having new material," he says. "When I play that material, people go, 'Yeah, that's great, let's hear "Turn, Turn, Turn."' But I don't *mind* playing 'Turn, Turn, Turn,' it's one of my favorite songs. I just sort of live with it. It's something I adjust to. Although I would prefer it if I had a hit out, one of my new songs, and then this was nice background stuff."

"I like success, but it's not as all-important as it was back then."

To recap:

- In 1964, McGuinn formed the Byrds with Gene Clark, David Crosby, Chris Hillman and Michael Clarke.
- By 1968, Clark, Crosby and Clarke had left. Gram Parsons joined, recorded *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* and swiftly took Hillman with him to form the Flying Burrito Brothers.
- By 1970's *Untitled*, McGuinn's Byrds included Clarence White, Skip Battin and Gene Parsons.
- And by 1972, with *Farther Along*, the Byrds disbanded.

In 1973, a patchy, David Crosby-produced original Byrds reunion album was issued—it didn't work—and McGuinn began releasing his five solo albums.

No sales.

But another fling with Byrds Clark and Hillman won McGuinn a Capitol Records contract as part of McGuinn, Clark & Hillman in '79. By 1980's *City*, the trio became "Roger McGuinn * Chris Hillman * Featuring Gene Clark," then, later, McGuinn-Hillman, McGuinn's last recorded project. It featured a mere three songs he penned—*co*-penned with Hillman, actually—and not one but *two* tracks by rising U.K. star Graham Parker. Irony fans will note that Parker, whose since-fallen star has again risen, has gone on record decrying labels that force their artists to compromise artistically for the sake of sales. "Chris and I wrote hundreds of songs for that album," McGuinn now recalls. "But [co-producer] Jerry Wexler didn't let us get any of them on there. Because he was trying for, quote unquote, 'hits.' And he didn't get any, because it wasn't a very good album."

McGuinn does not look back fondly on that period. "What I really wanted to do back then was be a solo artist," he says. "Gene Clark and I went out acoustic together, and the feeling that I had when I went out there with Gene was that it was good, but I would rather have been doing it myself. Because I had the feeling I was kind of carrying Gene a lot of the time; he wasn't really there for me onstage, and I felt, 'Oh man, if I could only just go out there and do this myself.'

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4/10 • HOLD FOR AWARD SHOW
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4/16 • VANCOUVER, B.C., CANADA
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4/20 • SACRAMENTO, CA
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I Realize There Are Things You Say & Do
You Can Never Take Back
But What Would You Be If You Didn't
Even Try
You Have To Try
So After A Lot Of Thought
I'd Like To Reconsider
Please
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"Then it was Ron Rainey and Al Hersh, who were co-managing me at the time, who got Chris Hillman to come along, and actually formed McGuinn, Clark & Hillman around me. And I really wasn't into it. It wasn't that much of a fulfilling situation for me. Especially because once I went into the studio, the Albert brothers, who were producing, decided they didn't want it to sound at all like the Byrds. Which meant that I couldn't play guitar or sing very much. So I was kind of sidelined for it; it was frustrating."

Gene's dropping out?

"Gene got very heavily involved in heroin and started missing tours," says McGuinn, bluntly. "Not showing up for work. So..."

Was Roger McGuinn nervous in the mid-'70s, making his solo albums for Columbia and watching his sales decline?

"I was kind of out of it," he says. "I was doing a lot of drugs and alcohol, and I was not really paying attention to what I was doing. I was being lazy mentally and creatively, and so on. So what you see there are some flashes of creativity, but moments of real apathy. It shows up in the work."

In 1977, when his last Columbia album, *Thunderbyrd*, came out, McGuinn, the voice of a generation, the man who helped launch Bob Dylan's pop music career by concocting rock cover versions of his folk songs, had taken to covering Peter Frampton and, worse, Tom Petty—the equivalent of Pete Townshend singing the Jam or Bruce Springsteen paying tribute to John Cougar Mellencamp.

And, also in 1977—a year after taking part in Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue—Roger McGuinn "accepted" Jesus.

"It's given me an inner peace about my life that I didn't have before," he says. "I just was ready for it. I'd been searching for God in all the years that I'd been in the Byrds—through Eastern religions, even taking LSD and whatever. That was all a spiritual quest, and I think I finally *found it* in '77."

Has his acceptance of Jesus been a factor in his not making records?

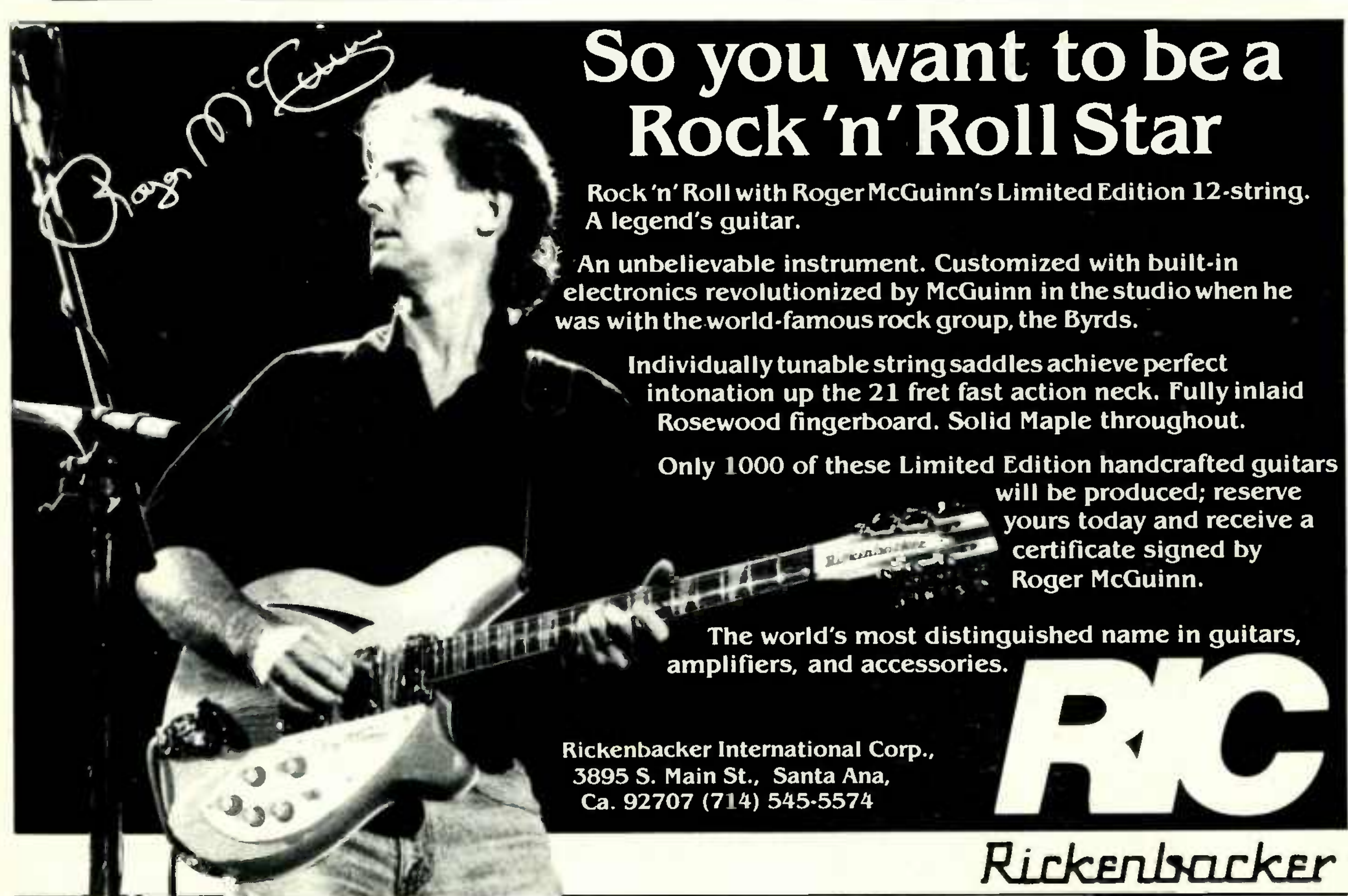
"Well," he says, "it didn't seem as important to me to be a star after I did that. I felt like I was already successful, that I was born again, that I was going to heaven, and who *needs* this rat race? Although I like the fruits of success. I like being able to play good venues, and have people appreciate my work. But it's not

UNTITLED

That Roger McGuinn plays a Rickenbacker 12-string should come as no surprise to anyone hip to Rock Axioms 101. That the one he plays now bears his name, and is commercially available in a limited run of 1,000, might be. With three individually wired pickups and an active circuit—compression with treble boost—within, the guitar very easily provides that "Byrds record sound," as McGuinn calls it.

"It took about six months or so to get Rickenbacker to agree to put the active circuit in there in the first place. They didn't want to do that. For years, I've been trying to get them to do an active circuit, and at first, when F.C. Hall was the president, he said, 'No, it'll destroy the purity of the tone, and our whole thing is high-fidelity and stereo.' So I said okay, and built my own into it. I took the insides out of a Vox treble booster, put it underneath, and had a switch on it. Finally I got them to agree to do it." Roger notes that the guitar has a 12-saddle bridge.

Made of solid maple, it's available at music stores in two models—one with compression ($1,399), and one without ($1,299).



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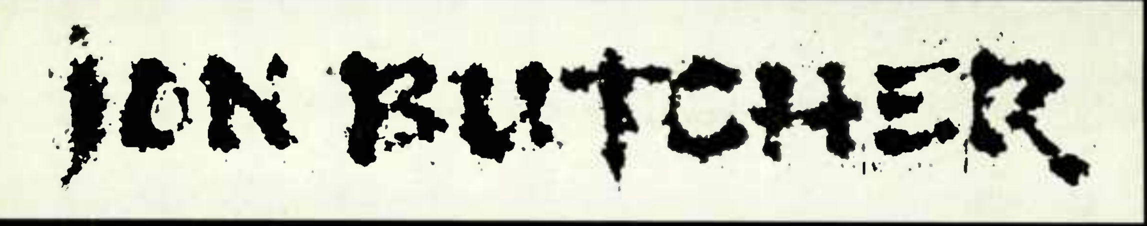

PICTURES FROM THE FRONT

Jon Butcher is back with an album that's going to make everybody stand up and take notice. Last year's "Wishes" LP, with its top ten hit "Goodbye Saving Grace," established him as one of rock's most respected and popular artists.

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PICTURES FROM THE FRONT, the new album from JON BUTCHER, featuring the hit single "SEND ME SOMEBODY."

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as all important as it was back then."

Yet the past is inescapable: McGuinn's in L.A. to headline a show with past cronies David Crosby and Chris Hillman, a benefit for the newly resurrected Ash Grove club. The club, an area fixture from 1958 to 1973, helped launch the careers of many, including McGuinn, who played his first professional gig there with the Limeliters in 1960. Furthermore, while in town with his wife of 10 years, Camilla, he's doing interviews to promote *Never Before*, the recent compilation of Byrds B-sides, stereo mixes and other rarities from the band's mid-'60s heyday. McGuinn says his input on the project was very limited ("I listened to a couple of tapes of it periodically, and said, 'Yeah, that sounds pretty good' and 'Why don't you turn my guitar up a little bit' here and there. That was all I had to do with it"), but calls the set "a nice package. I think it's real pretty. I don't get anything *out* of it, but I've been promoting it like crazy."

And it continues: Rhino Records issued a revamped *Preflyte* soon after our conversation, while early '89 saw, of all things, yet another Byrds reunion in L.A. Who? McGuinn, Crosby and Hillman. Why? Legal purposes, they said. Three gigs to keep the name flying free—and to prevent former partners Clark and Clarke from separately touring and using the "Byrds" moniker themselves.

Recently McGuinn's also joined Elvis Costello in the studio, spraying big guitar all over "This Town," a track for Costello's new album that also features Paul McCartney.

Like I said—an absolute gas being Roger McGuinn. Sitting with him, I point to the cover of *Never Before*; a young audience out there, I say, might look at that picture, see those clothes and glasses, and think the Byrds are a brand new band.

"One time," says Roger, "I was playing the Lone Star in New York, and these kids came in dressed just like that. There were three guys and a girl—a total '60s look, with the little glasses and the three-button suits and the short collars and all that stuff. And I hung out with them for about 30 minutes, and at the end of it, I said, 'I love your costumes.' And they went *crazy.*"

"They laughed," says Camilla, "and then the girl came back, really upset."

"She came running back up the stairs after they'd left," says Roger, "and she said, 'I think that's terrible, what you said about costumes. These aren't *costumes*. These are *our clothes*.'" ■

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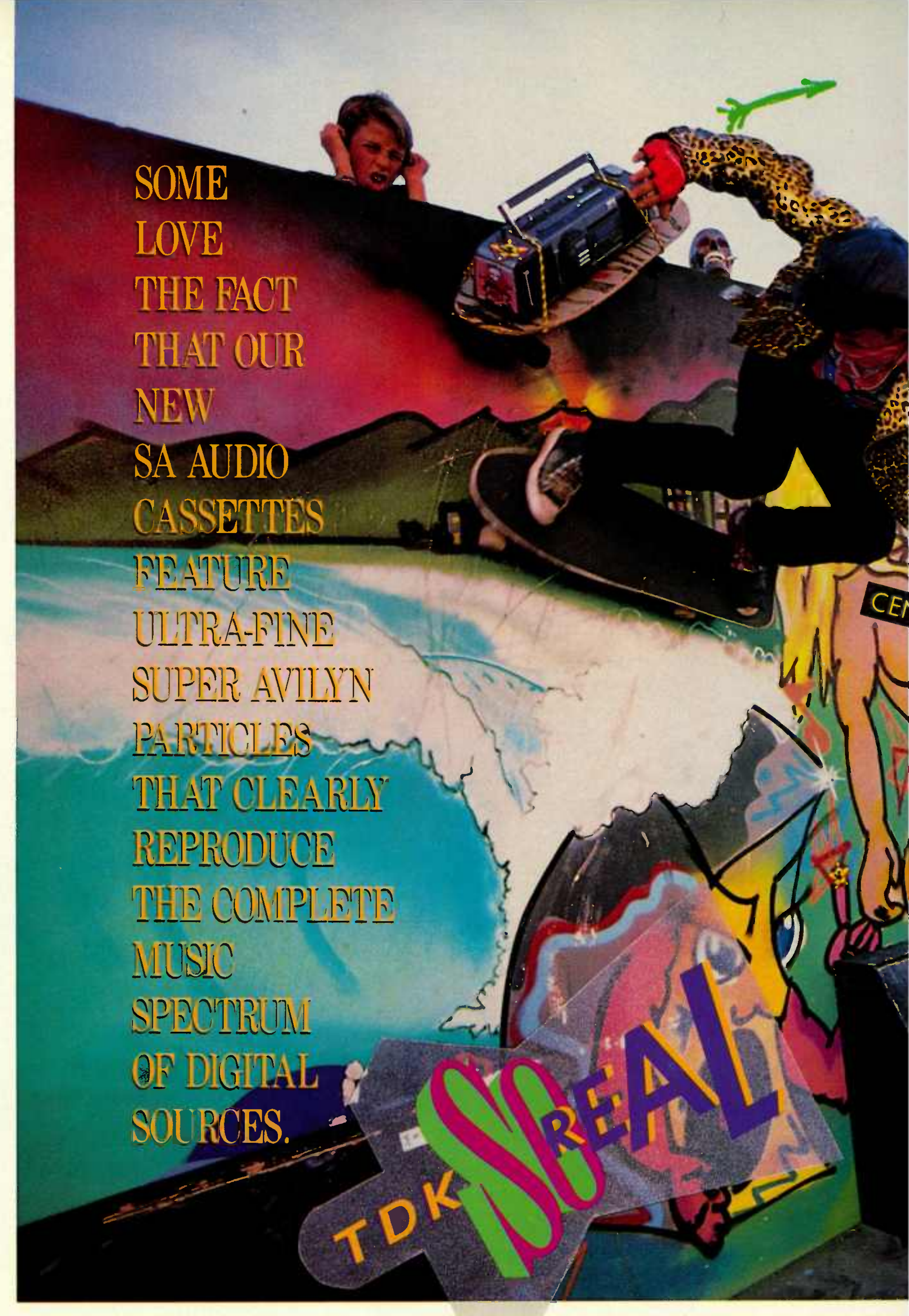

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Martial Solal

by Jerome Reese

France's Virtuoso Pianist Likes to Be Difficult

MEPHISTO

In Martial Solal's home, set in a lazy and hilly suburb of Paris, the piano is the centerpiece of the house. It is the first time in over 25 years of playing that the Algerian-born Frenchman has a place where he can practice at any odd hour of the night if he so chooses, though it's doubtful he would with his mother, wife and daughter asleep upstairs. There are few records, and the old stereo is broken. Sitting in the cozy living room watching his daughter play in the garden, Solal talks quietly, his voice clear and precise. "See that hammock out there? When the weather's nice and I'm tired of practicing I often relax in it."

The subdued atmosphere makes it hard to believe that this reserved, balding, 61-year-old Frenchman with the polite smile and self-deprecating humor is one of the finest jazz pianists alive. Solal is usually labeled—perhaps as a courtesy to Americans—as Europe's best jazz musician, its most outstanding virtuoso since Django Reinhardt, with whom Solal worked at the beginning of his professional career. Solal has graced several hundred recording sessions since the late '50s, many as part of a European rhythm section for American musicians passing through, for now-forgotten pop stars, tango performers and with his own groups, mainly trios. He also dabbled in film scores for a time, one of the first of some 30 commissions being Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless*.

A cubist painter of jazz sonorities: "The only way to evolve is through composing."

He remains relatively unknown in America, however, even among jazz fans, in part because he rarely performs there. His most recent appearance was as a last-minute addition by George Wein to the 1980 Newport recital series, where his performance received rave reviews. Another reason Solal's name is shrouded in mystery is that almost all of his records are on out-of-print European labels, including five stunning efforts (most of them with bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen) on the now-defunct MPS label, the expensive hobby of a German piano fanatic, Hans Brunner-Schwer. Brunner-Schwer took it upon himself to record his favorite pianists in his Black Forest studio, producing numerous sessions by Oscar Peterson and several by Cecil Taylor. Not bad company for the self-effacing Solal.

So what does Monsieur Solal sound like? Hard to say. The critic Gary Giddins once played a Solal solo piece as part of a blindfold test for two knowledgeable music critics. One of them thought it was Art Tatum, the other—Cecil Taylor. When performing with his trio, Solal accentuates the harmonic structure of a song. As a soloist he paraphrases the melody, telescoping it and distorting it with a seemingly endless and sometimes bewildering array of musical ideas that call to mind both stream-of-consciousness and Brion Gysin and William Burroughs' "cut-up" technique. Solal could be called a cubist painter of jazz sonorities. One has the impression of hearing Tatum—if he were alive and had absorbed the advances in music of the past 25 years.

Solal grew up listening to Fats Waller, Tatum and Teddy Wilson; then he was profoundly affected by bebop. Lennie Tristano's influence is also evident. In his 20s Solal was backing up the likes of Stan Getz and Lucky Thompson in smoky Parisian cellars. "When I started out I was influenced by everyone. Then the day came when I refused systematically to listen to other musicians, which is necessary if one wishes to acquire a personal style."

The early '60s were fertile years; Solal composed film scores and first played in the States, performing at Newport in 1963. Signed for a two-week gig in a New York club, he ended up staying three months. Family problems kept him from emigrating, though, and legal difficulties facing foreign musicians who wish to tour in the U.S. have since kept his performances to a minimum. The explosion of pop and the rise of free jazz in the late '60s wiped out the film commissions and left Solal isolated and ignored, playing music that couldn't be categorized. He experimented, kept busy with small tours, recorded noted duo albums with pianists Hampton Hawes and Joachim Kühn, and continued to compose "contemporary" music.

"Twenty years ago, when asked what I thought the future of jazz was, and my future in it, I said that in order for jazz to survive it had to have a repertoire, jazz musicians had to write important works. Just after that stupid declaration everyone did exactly the opposite, playing totally improvised music. Presently there is a return to traditionalism, and I persist in believing that the future of jazz lies in written music, in longer and longer written sequences, which does not

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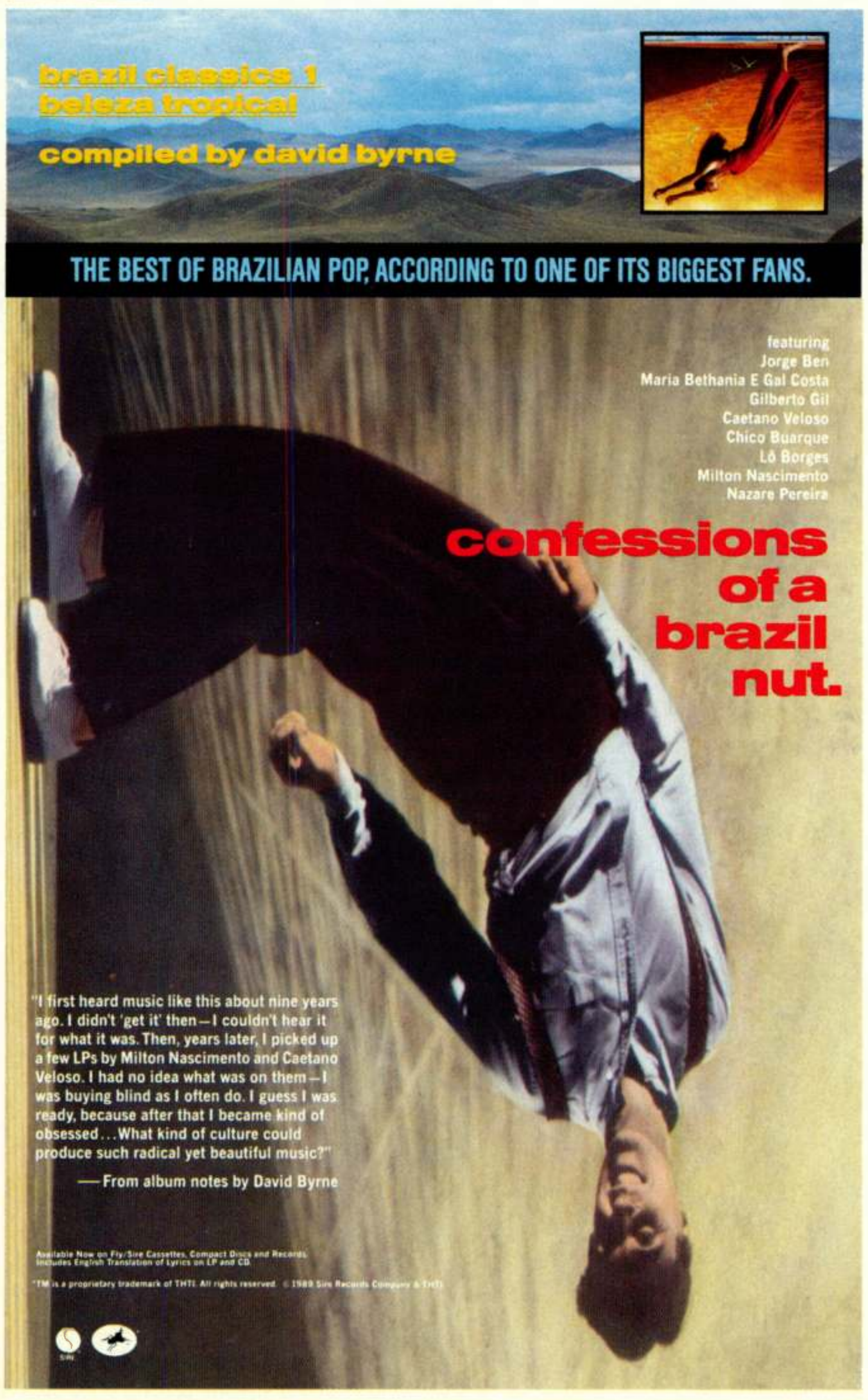
exclude improvisation, of course. I also believe that once one has a very definite style, the only way to evolve is through composing." Solal has backed up his words with a written concerto for piano and orchestra, commissioned by the French government. Solal's big band of the early '80s, which played his highly demanding works, eventually evolved into the government-funded Orchestre National de Jazz.

Solal has had an ambiguous relationship with classical music since he began practicing it seriously years ago in order to help his jazz playing. Constant practice has earned him the breathtaking technique that is his trademark and for which he is often criticized. "Contrary to what I'm told, that I have too much technique, I know that I don't have enough. What is technique but the ability to express one's ideas correctly? It is very rare that a jazz pianist will tell you that he's done his three hours of scales for the day, which should be quite normal, if only to stay at the same level. I've always worked on my technique in order to be able to play any idea that pops into my head. I have an agreeable way of practicing, which consists of playing a scale with one hand while I improvise with the other. That way one hand, at least, is entertained. I also get much of my reading done that way: by propping up a book or magazine on the piano and reading while practicing."



He isn't kidding, incidentally, which brings to mind several examples of Solal's droll humor. At one concert he wove a long improvisation based entirely on a Czerny exercise for beginning pianists. At another he announced that he was going to play something by "a certain Thelonious Monk" and proceeded to play "'Round Midnight" with his right hand and "Blue Monk" with his left. During solo concerts he will often refer to a piece of paper between songs, scratching his head and wondering aloud to the audience what to play next. The paper is usually blank.

After a Solal concert I once heard a wide-eyed young man describe the music he'd heard as "Oscar Peterson on acid," something Solal would find amusing since he neither smokes nor drinks. (His drug is a complicated miniature train set.) It is indicative of the problems an audience faces when listening to Solal.

"Freedom, for me, means being able to go as far as possible in a certain direction, established and prepared in advance. But I don't like the idea of 'anything goes.' That's why I play jazz standards, which give the audience something they can follow more easily and which will perhaps entertain them while having to put up with my, shall we say, busy style. Even when playing my own pieces, a major part of my performance consists of humorous musical citations I'll throw in as they pop into my head. But this humorous aspect can only be appreciated if the audience knows the standards I'm quoting. I like music that can surprise you at any given moment, not to show off, but in order to produce something different each time.

"When improvising you should never repeat the same figure twice. For example, I'll alter a phrase rhythmically by playing the phrase in its first tempo and then playing it completely backwards. It is this sort of subtlety that escapes most listeners, unfortunately. I don't want it to be a tedious discourse but a varied and diverse one, in which I constantly introduce little differences of the kind the classical composers wrote down. In effect, I like difficulty, being forced to resolve problems, and that's why I'll never have a very large audience."

Considering Solal's reputation as a demanding, hermetic, highly technical musician, it is somewhat ironic he's best known in France for his duo albums with Sidney Bechet, Stephane Grappelli and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 89

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PRIMITIVE MODERN

TECHNOLOGY UNLOCKS NEW MEANS OF MAKING OLD RHYTHMS

There was genuine horror in some circles when algorithmic composition software first started appearing. Almost overnight, Intelligent Music's M, Dr. T's Phrase and similar cryptically-named programs crept into our midst. Artificial Intelligence (A.I.)—that Frankenstein creation from the dank cellar of computer science—had finally come to music. We awoke to a brave new world where computer programs could generate actual melodies, accompaniments and other musical ideas for you. (Why you couldn't just cough them up for yourself, as always, was never made quite clear.)

A lot of musicians recoiled from this idea because it seemed so unnatural. But me, I recoiled for the opposite reason. The musical ideas produced by these things seemed a mite *too* natural—if you take the word in its earlier sense, of referring to people and things that are ... well ... kinda simpleminded. For me, musical

BY ALAN DI PERNA

World Radio History

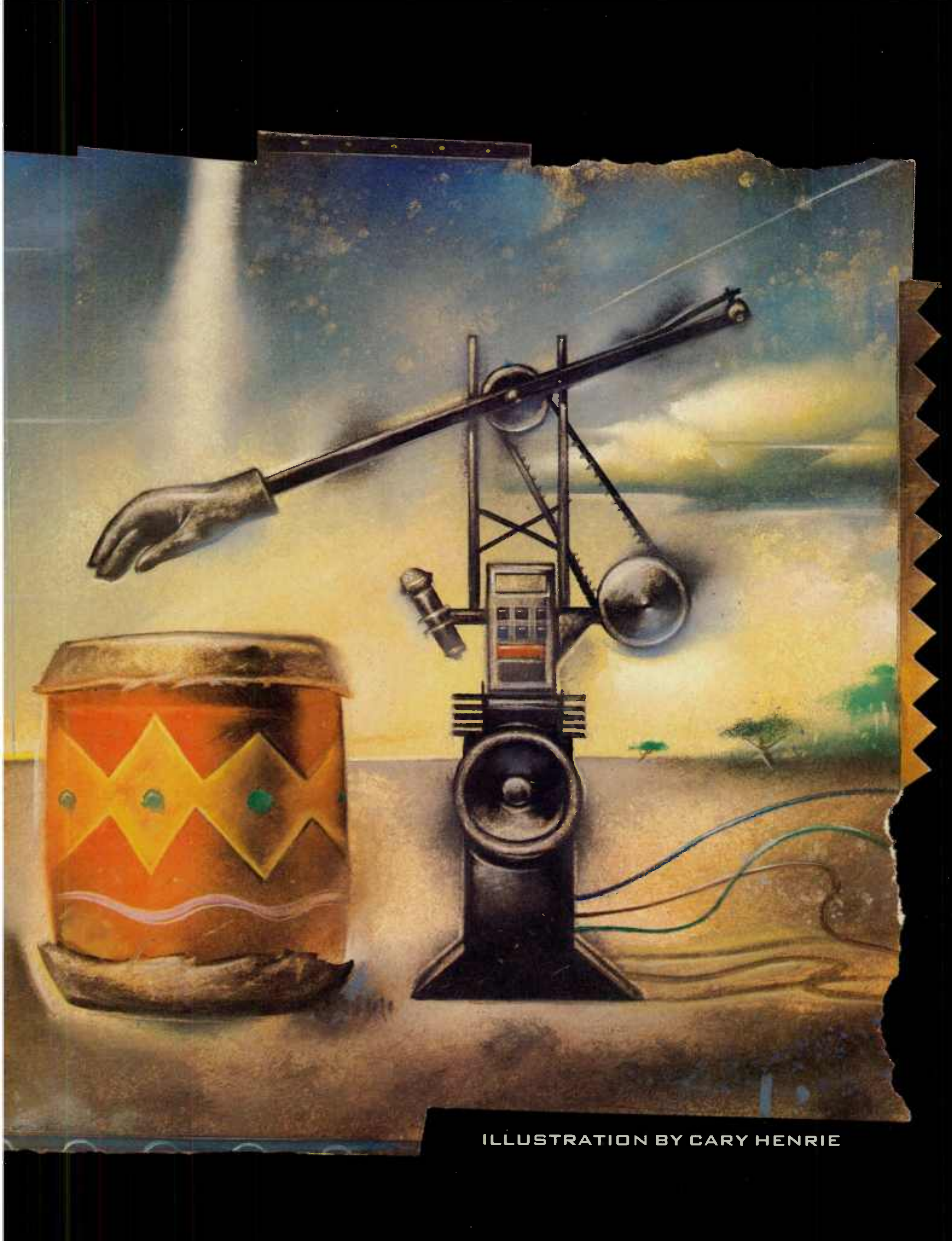

ILLUSTRATION BY CARY HENRIE

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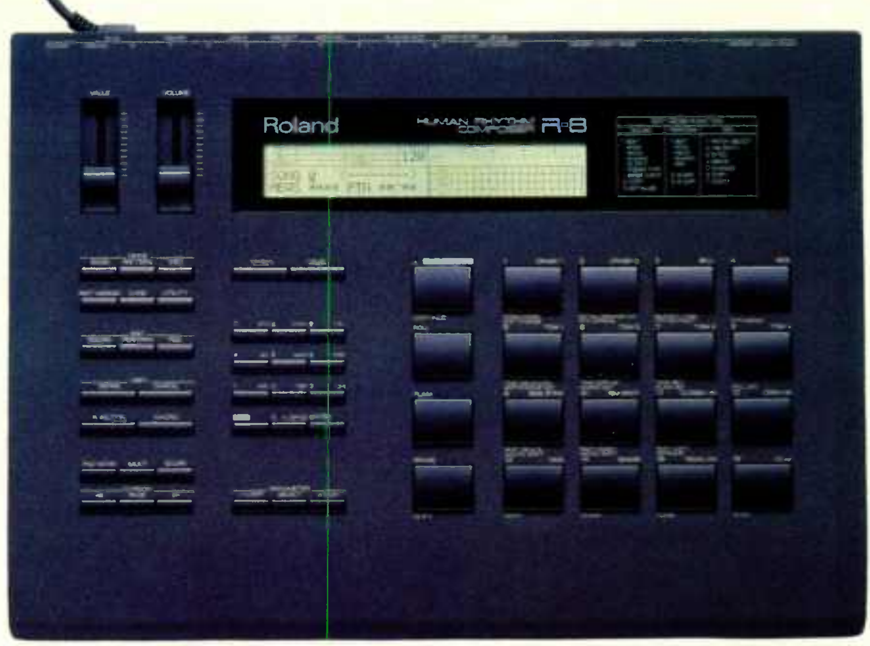
themes generated by A.I. always seem to have a plodding, predictable quality—like something the village idiot might come up with if you gave him a couple of arpeggiators to play with. The instant popularity of algorithmic composition programs in the never-never land of American network television seemed to confirm my suspicions that, musically speaking, A.I. might be a little lacking in the old I.Q.

Boy, Artificial Intelligence had sure let me down. See, in the immemorial conflict between Art and Nature—Artifice and Simplicity—I've always been a real Artifice man. Hold the fiber-rich natural grains and spare, angular modernism please. Give me what's Rococo, Byzantine, Glittery, Synthesized, Made-Up, Camped-Up, Tarted-Up, Tricked-Out, Contrived, Clever, Cooked, Baroque, Against Nature, Overwrought and all those other words that put both '70s hippies and anorexic post-punk minimalists right off their food. So I was really expecting this Artificial Intelligence business to deal nature a swift kick in the wholesome nuggets.

STRANGELY, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SEEMS TO BE GREAT AT SIMULATING CERTAIN *UNCONSCIOUS* PROCESSES THAT ARE CRUCIAL TO MAKING MUSIC.

Things still may turn out alright, though. Okay, so maybe Artificial Intelligence—as applied to music at least—is not so wonderful at simulating that conscious process of mind whereby raw musical ideas become monumental hooks, catchy melodies, rousing choruses and all that stuff. But, by a strange twist of fate, A.I. seems to be great at simulating certain *unconscious* processes that are crucial to making music.

The proof? Artificial Intelligence as applied to rhythm. We're starting to see drum machines and other rhythm devices which use A.I. very effectively to capture that elusive quality many people call "feel." Consider what happens when you play the drums. (Even if you're not a drummer, you've probably had a go at it sometime or other.) On the conscious level, you're doing everything you can to whack them suckers *right on the beat*.



A Feel Edit Mode aboard this Roland R-8 can induce unmechanical variation.

But, strive as you may, those sticks are always going to come down a teeny-weeny bit off the beat every once in a while. They're going to collide with the drum a little harder sometimes, a little softer other times. And a different part of the stick is going to hit a different area of the drum head or cymbal each time it lands.

In short, a few things step in to subvert your conscious efforts to play like some kind of Automaton Stud. One is sheer chance: the dumb luck of a wooden stick flying through the air and colliding with a stretched plastic surface or tempered metal disk. But also some subconscious force starts to possess you. Your body takes over. You start to groove. And strangely enough, Artificial Intelligence is great at simulating that unconscious/preconscious/physical/quasi-sexual/primal/intuitive... *natural* thing we usually think of as being exactly the *opposite* of intelligence. And definitely anything but artificial. You figure it out.

How does A.I. pull off this rhythmic paradox? To answer that, let's look at two rhythm devices that use Artificial Intelligence. One is **Roland**'s new drum machine, the R-8. The other is the Feel Factory, which has recently been picked up for distribution by **Aphex**. Then we'll see how A.I. can be used to get a feel going on algorithmic composition software programs like **Dr. T**'s Tunesmith and **Hybrid Arts**' Ludwig.

But first, the Roland R-8. It's got lots of great-sounding 16-bit samples, a pile of memory and all the other goodies you expect in a first-rate drum machine. But it also has something called a Feel Edit Mode, which places the R-8 in a class by itself. Feel Edit Mode, you see, uses Artificial Intelligence to induce many of those chance/unconscious variables mentioned above. Make no mistake: we've come a long way from the primitive "swing" knobbies our ancestors used in a desperate attempt to make earlier drum machines groove.

What kind of parameters can you vary on the the R-8's Feel Edit? First of all, you can fiddle around with MIDI velocity: how hard or soft any given drum appears to get hit each time the stick comes down. Secondly, you can vary what Roland calls "nuance." Many drum sounds on the R-8—take the ride cymbal, for example—really consist of two different samples. You get one sample of a stick hitting right near the central bell of the cymbal and another of a stick hitting right near the cymbal's outer edge. Now, nuance involves varying the crossfade ratio between these two samples, so that the stick will appear to be hitting many different areas of the cymbal between the bell and outer edge. And by placing nuance under A.I. control, you can make the cymbal sound as though it is being struck in a different area each time the stick hits—just as would happen under ordinary, natural circumstances.

In addition to all this, you can also vary the pitch and decay of notes via Artificial Intelligence. In real life, of course, both the pitch and decay of an honest-to-goodness drum will change as you strike it with different degrees of intensity. So, to sum it all up, there are four parameters that can be altered in real time via Artificial Intelligence: velocity, nuance,

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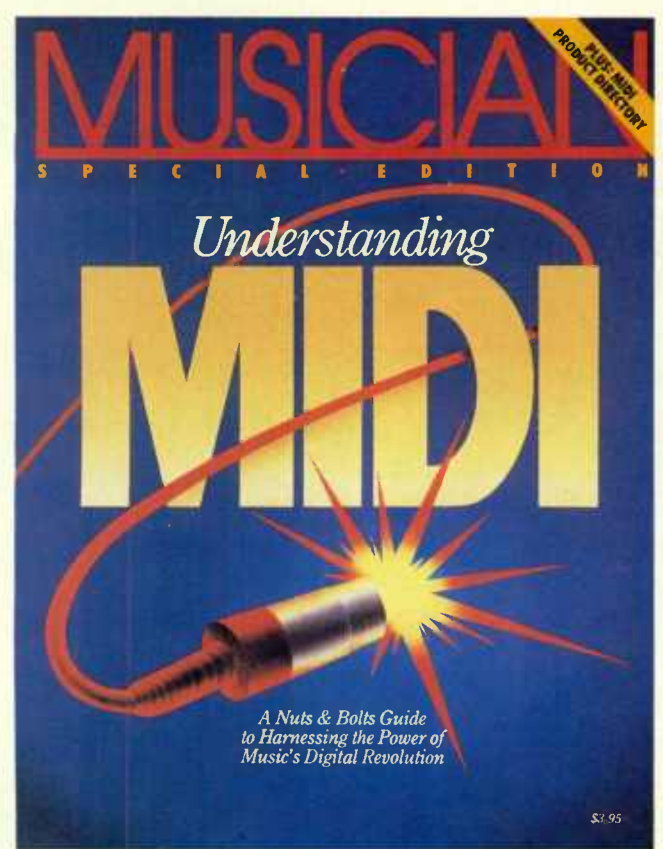

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JEFF HEALEY:

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HAVE GUITAR, WILL SIT

BY TED DROZDOWSKI

Jeff Healey is the most unorthodox guitarist since Stanley Jordan. He plays seated, most of the time, with his guitar flat on his lap. As his right hand picks and strums, his left scrabbles like an angry arachnid across his Strat's strings. All five fingers form bar chords and hammer, and his thumb and three consecutive fingers spell out nimble leads. He bends steel wire like putty, pushing or pulling with equal ease. And when the mood hits, he locks his thumb behind his axe's neck and tugs with two fingers to neatly lift his notes two whole steps.

"I've just always played guitar that way," the blond, boyish, blue-eyed Canadian explains. "Ever since I got my first acoustic guitar when I was three I've laid it flat on my lap. I've never tried to analyze the style. It's just something that gave me the kind of sound I wanted, without really knowing how it happened."

But unlike Stanley Jordan, there's more to Healey than how he plays. Healey believes in blues power: There's soul in his Reeboks and feeling in his fingers. On his debut album, *See the Light*, his Marshall sings with the same joy he does as he brags about "My Little Girl." When it's solo time in the John Hiatt-penned "Confidence Man," his guitar echoes the song's sad mixture of bravado and betrayal. And trading runs with ex-Robert Plant sideman Robbie Blunt on the Grammy-nominated "Hideaway" and their improvised "Nice

Problem to Have," he fuses traditional blues licks with rock dynamics.

What's more, he knows when to kick out the jams: The cut "See the Light" is an overdriven tour of wah-wah territory that builds into a spark-shower of every scream and wail in the Healey guitar vocabulary. Live, he's a courageous showman, tossing off speed runs behind his neck, plucking strings with his teeth, dancing wildly across stage with a strapless guitar pressed tight to his gut by his elbow. He'll toss a Strat to the floor and trash it to summon monstrous feedback. And sometimes, when it feels right, he'll dive offstage and rush the crowd.

Big deal, you say. Well, there's another thing you should know about Healey, if you don't already. He's blind. He was born with eye cancer and hasn't seen since he was one. And in the 200-plus interviews he's done since the Jeff Healey Band's album was released last fall, that's led to some pretty stupid questions. Take the Boston radio jock who asked Healey if blindness has given him a greater affinity for the guitar. You know, like Blind Blake and Blind Willie McTell and all those other blues guys?

"That's just bordering on dumb," says Healey, sipping tea in the Toronto apartment he shares with his girlfriend Kim Gallacher. "The dumb questions are: 'You must listen to things like Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder to get inspiration?' That's dumb. The fact that they're blind and so am I is just that, a fact. But there's a lot of good musicians who can see and a lot of blind guys who can't play a goddamned note, so the two have nothing in common as far as I'm concerned."

Blindness, says Healey, has never affected his vision. "I dropped off a stage once into a bunch of people, but we all had a great time once we got up. I missed my chair once in all the times I've sat down after I've gotten up to solo. And I've had very little trouble in the business. Only in my earlier days when I played in scummy places for the stupid people that ended up running scummy places. They just didn't know that having a blind guy perform in their club meant that they'd have to be

ADRIAN BOOT/RETNA MIM MICHELOVE

World Radio History

Joe Rockman, Healey and Tom Stephen: "Most of the bands that were forming didn't want me around."

kind of responsible for him."

Healey got paroled from the scummy places in 1985 when he and a buddy went to see Albert Collins at a Toronto club called Albert's Hall. His pal convinced the Texas bluesmaster to let 19-year-old Healey sit in for one song. Collins kept the kid onstage for an hour. Then he made him promise to come back three nights later to play with *his* buddy, Stevie Ray Vaughan. After that three-way six-string free-for-all, Healey, who'd been thinking about trading his pick for a broadcaster's microphone, was barraged with calls from Toronto club owners eagerly offering dates.

Three years later Healey's mojo is still working. The Jeff Healey Band has its deal with Arista Records, has clinched a radio hit with "Confidence Man," has splashed across the boob tube, traveled a sizeable chunk of the world and made a movie called *Road House* with Patrick Swayze. Well ... four outta five ain't bad. And with the Healey band rippin' up onstage for much of the flick, the ham should come with a tasty blues-rock garnish.

The scummy places Healey used to play were largely in the outlying suburbs of Toronto: towns like Mississuga, Oakville and Natobico. Healey and his two sisters—all three Healey kids were adopted—grew up in Natobico, once a borough of Toronto that's made the transition to independent township. "My family was about as middle-class as you could get. We had just enough money for X amount of frills and that was it." Those frills included a small acoustic guitar for three-year-old Jeff, which he played in open tuning with a slide until someone at the School for the Blind in Brantford showed him standard tuning. At 11, he got a cheap copy of a Gibson SG. By then he'd developed an affinity for jazz and country music by osmosis.

"I grew up with a lot of old records around. I was fascinated by the music, its entertainment value. I was singing along when I was two. By the time I was 10, a lot of older relatives started cleaning out their closets and attics and handing these records over to me, so I had about 400 78s." Today he has over 10,000, mostly of jazz and blues from the 1920 and '30s, which cover one wall of his downtown digs. He plays some of these records every Thursday from one to two p.m. on CIUT, the University of Toronto's FM station. "I've had an interest in broadcasting since high school and I worked for the CBC for a little while, so doing the show keeps me in touch with that, although these days I have to do a lot of pre-taping because of touring."

But when he first started playing guitar, he was purely a country kid hooked on the deep rhythm sounds of Chet Atkins and Luther Perkins. "I don't really remember the first time I played in a club," he says. "I know I was probably 14, back in the days when I was playing a lot of country. It was sort of a fluke. The guitar player hadn't shown up and they needed someone to play and sing some back-up vocals. I know I was by far the youngest person in the band. The rest of the guys were in their 20s and 30s.

"From country the natural progression for me was into rockabilly, which has quite a blues base. Most of the songs are 12-bars. And I played in all the jazz and concert bands in my high school on guitar and trumpet. I still like to take my trumpet and go sit in with some of the dixieland bands around town.

"Then in my high school years I got more into playing with people I was hanging out with and listening to things like Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimi Hendrix, and then tracing that back to B.B. King and Albert Collins and Buddy Guy.

"In my last couple of years in high school a few of us had a band called Blue Directions, and it was kind of like this band now—blues-based, but not entirely a blues show. It was fun and a good chance to learn. We played quite a few clubs, mostly in the suburbs, and some little places in downtown Toronto. But the three other members went on to higher education, and stupid as I was I decided to continue with music.

"I hadn't really liked school anyway since I got to high school and discovered that you had to work. I'm basically a lazy person. Ultimately I ended up walking out two credits short of completing my twelfth year because I wanted to play."

"Have guitar, will sit in" became Healey's motto. "I worked all different styles of music as a fill-in player and occasionally under my own name. Just about every gig was thrown together, or I'd go to a few rehearsals with a band that needed a temporary guitar player, learn their stuff, do the gig, collect my 10 bucks and leave. I played a little bit of R&B. I did a heavy-metal jam session once—which is really nothing. You get a little cheap transistor amp, distort the hell out of it and play what you know and you've got heavy metal.

"One night I even did a pickup gig with a reggae band, which I sort of dabbled with for fun anyway. When I went to the gig, the guy said, 'Now when you're playing, just imagine that between each beat somebody's passing you a joint. You've got to take the joint, take a drag and give it back in that time frame, so it's tight but relaxed.'

"I did that for a year," says Healey, lighting another cigarette and settling back on his flower-printed couch, "and I was not having a great time. Most of the bands that were forming didn't want me around, because they figured that just from my

ADRIAN BOOT/RETNA

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playing style—holding the guitar the way I do—that I would be sort of the oddball. Everyone would be watching me. I've never tried lifting the guitar and playing it conventionally. I can play a few chords that way, but I can't play a lead to save my life.

"So everyone would wish me a lot of luck and say that if I kept at it, I'd go far. But I was thinking, 'I love to play music, but possibly I'm not cut out for this.' I was thinking about maybe going into broadcasting as an engineer or something."

"THERE'S A LOT OF GOOD MUSICIANS WHO CAN SEE AND A LOT OF BLIND GUYS WHO CAN'T PLAY A NOTE. THE TWO HAVE NOTHING IN COMMON."

That's when Healey's pal Corey Mihailiuk asked him to bring his guitar to the Albert Collins concert. "He said, 'I think you and he should get together onstage.' I said, 'I don't think that's gonna happen.' But it did. It was a really exciting thing for a struggling kid of 19."

Three days later when Healey returned to jam with Collins and Stevie Ray Vaughan, Healey's friends and the owner of Albert's Hall had the club stocked with the press and booking agents. Then Jeff's phone started jangling.

"The only problem was," says Healey, who's now 22, "I had no band." And that's when Tom Stephen and Joe Rockman got lucky. Healey called drummer Stephen, who he knew from jam sessions. ("That's how I learned to play," Stephen offers, "basically getting kicked off a lot of stages.") And Stephen called bassist Rockman to round out a Sunday night trio gig at Grossman's Tavern. "We played about a half-dozen numbers and it was a real magical thing," Healey recollects. "We came offstage, shook hands and said, 'Okay, it's a band. Let's go to work.'

"I had about a month's worth of dates already booked," he says. "Originally I figured I'd just call people to fill them up, but they became good dates to build the band's repertoire and tightness. Then we took to touring around Canada."

Stephen, who's 33, was delighted to leave his job as an office-fettered urban planner for the Ontario Land Corporation: "I think I'd always wanted to play drums. When I was a kid I had a kit, but I don't think my parents liked it too much. I grew up in a hard-core construction family, which is a very straight-ahead kind of business. So when I had a chance to get in this band I took it, because I knew that for a guy like me this would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"I didn't really start playing drums till I was 28. I still wish I had more experience, because there are players who are 22 and 23 that can blow me off the stage with one hand. Timing isn't one of my strengths, but I'm a real basher. And I play more of a groove, like Hendrix and Cream, which is the kind of music I loved when I was growing up. It has a lot of dynamics and space, which is important for Jeff's playing."

Rockman, a studio musician who thought he'd given up on bands, also signed on with glee: "When I met Jeff I had some work lined up and I threw it all in the garbage, because when we played I knew there was something special. It cut my income to about $50 a week at the start, but I didn't care.

"My role as a bassist in the band has developed into keeping the time and anchoring the harmonic movement. I play legato, basically holding the notes pretty long and giving Jeff and Tom the freedom to play fills and stretch out."

And Healey? "I was never interested in being a solo artist; I was always interested in being part of a band that would go out, play, survive and have fun, and that's what we do."

"All of us have an equal share in the band's business. We're

JOSH CHEUSE

self-managed, which I'm really proud of," Rockman adds. "Tom in particular has done a really good job of adapting to the music business."

It was Stephen, in fact, who initiated the band's deal with Arista. Armed with dubs of their video for "See the Light," which the band released as an independent single and clip on its Forte Productions label in 1986, he ventured to New York. "He got kicked out of a lot of offices and he came home, but a few weeks after he got back the telephone started ringing. Finally Arista said, 'We want the band, let's make a deal.' After six months of negotiations," says Healey, "we had a contract."

The stringslinger with the smooth-whiskey voice admits he and his bandmates "hadn't a clue about how to select a producer. In fact, we were gutsy enough to suggest that maybe

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we could produce it ourselves. They said, 'Bullshit. You need someone else.' And they were right. We needed a fourth person to get us off each other's throats when the bass isn't loud enough, or the drums are too loud. We all want to hear different things, and we needed somebody who could say, 'Look guys, this is fine as it is. Let's move on.'"

CONFIDENT MEN

Jeff Healey keeps it simple. He sits in front of a Marshall 4x12 with a 100-watt Marshall head, set low. He lays a black Fender Squier Strat, a white standard Strat and a black Jackson six-and-12-string doubleneck on his lap. All have pickups made by Rod Evans of Victoria, B.C. He uses a Tokai stomp box for overdrive, a Boss EQ and an old MXR flanger.

Tom Stephen beats his custom Ayyottes from Drums Only in Vancouver with Pro-Mark 5-B sticks, and his cymbals are Sabians. **Joe Rockman** sidles up to a Fender Precision Special bass with a built-in pre-amp. It runs through a Gallien-Krueger 800-RB head into a custom cabinet stocked with JBL 15s.

Jimmy Iovine was Arista's first-draft referee. Coincidentally, just after the tough-talking producer who put the sonic boom behind Bruce and Patti Smith received the Healey band's "See the Light" video, a script for a movie needing a soundtrack landed in his lap. It called for a young, blind, blues-rock guitarist who played flat on his lap—the leader of the band in the film's mythical *Road House*. Guess who got the part?

"As it turned out, the writer was from Toronto and he'd seen the band," says Healey. Iovine started recording the soundtrack in Los Angeles in mid-March 1988 and finished in late April, just in time to fly off to work on U2's *Rattle and Hum*. "All Jimmy had to do was basically get a soundcheck and let us go to work. It was all recorded live," Healey notes. About 12 of the 20-or-so songs Iovine recorded will appear in the film, and five should be on the soundtrack which will surface with the movie in June. One of the leftovers, a broiling, dusky version of ZZ Top's "Blue Jean Blues," appears on *See the Light.*

"We recorded our own album with Greg Ladanyi in May and actually filmed the movie in June and July," Healey recounts. "While we were filming, Greg was putting on some vocal overdubs and stuff like that. It was my suggestion to bring Benmont Tench [from Tom Petty's Heartbreakers] in to play some keys on what we'd recorded. So there were some days when we'd come in at night after filming, overdub or listen to mixes for a couple of hours, then go home and collapse for five hours and go back to the movie set. As I told you earlier, I'm basically lazy. So between this and touring I haven't been myself this past year."

So who has he been? "Well," Healey pauses as he takes a drag from his cigarette and his cats Louie and Bess zoom around the carpet, "I hope I haven't changed too much more than what I naturally would in human evolution. I'm not one to get caught up in all the hype and glamor and junk. I don't like the fact that to go into a major record store to do a little browsing, for instance, I have to call in advance to set it up.

"Well, let's not say I don't like it. Let's say I'm not used to it. But from the record company's marketing standpoint that's the way it has to be. I have to meet the right people while I'm there so they don't feel ignored. Otherwise I'd just go in, grab some records and leave."

"I'VE NEVER TRIED PLAYING THE GUITAR CONVENTIONALLY. I CAN PLAY A FEW CHORDS THAT WAY, BUT CAN'T PLAY LEAD TO SAVE MY LIFE."

Despite stardom's mixed blessings, Healey is happy about his evolution as a songwriter—something he was compelled to take seriously as the band tried to build its reputation and lure labels. Five of the songs on *See the Light* are his own. "Even though I've got hours and hours of tapes of songs I wrote when I was a teenager, I've always thought of myself mostly as a guitarist. But I can see myself improving. Songwriting takes a lot of experience, and I'm working on it."

So far his expertise lies in affairs of the heart. "I write about things that everyday people understand," he offers. "I won't write about politics, which a lot of people can take or leave. But love between human beings is a natural thing, so

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we can all relate to it. And if I get to play some guitar in the bargain, then everybody's happy." 🅼

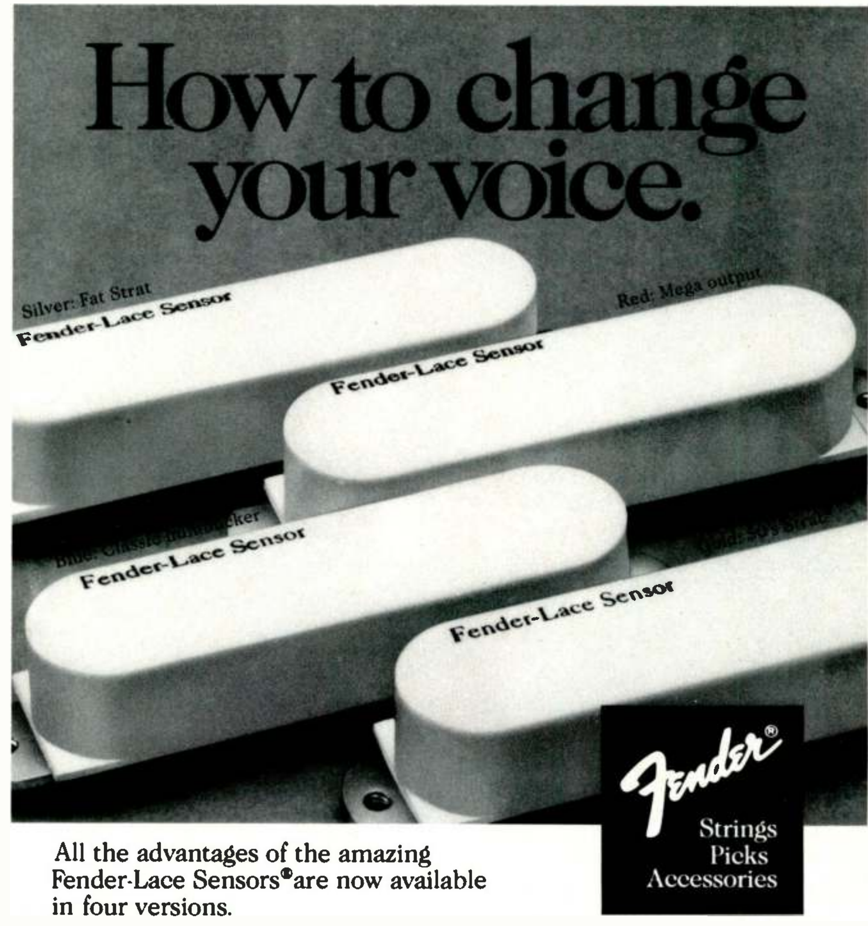
PRIMITIVE from page 34

pitch and decay. Each of these parameters can be varied for any drum (or other instrument) in a pattern.

But exactly how can they be varied? In two different ways. One is to place them under the control of an algorithm. Don't let the Big Bad A-word scare you, though. An algorithm is really nothing more than a simple set of rules for changing numbers inside a piece of data digital—data which can represent anything from the waveform characteristics of an oscillator to the velocity of a MIDI note. And feel algorithms tend to be very simple beasts, consisting mainly of a series of numbers which say, "Turn the parameter up five notches above its original value; now turn it down eight, now up to 15, now down 12..." and so forth. In the wonderful world of numbers, though, this can be stated much more compactly as +5, −8, +15, −12.... (You synthesists will recognize that this is very much like a good old, multiple-stage Envelope Generator.) Put the MIDI velocity of a hi-hat pattern through an algorithm like this and it'll sound like a real drummer, hitting a high-hat with a different degree of intensity each time the stick comes down.

The R-8 gives you eight programmable feel algorithms, known as grooves. These range from Groove 1, a simple (and not terribly useful) one-step algorithm, to Groove 8, which gives you eight steps, i.e., eight opportunities to say "Turn it up, turn it down, turn it up...." These algorithmic changes can be locked to a note value, so that they'll happen every quarter note or every eighth note or whatever. Know how a drummer will intuitively "lay into" his or her high-hat at certain regular points while playing a beat? Or how a percussionist will rattle a shekere, tambourine or some maracas with a certain regular emphasis? Those are the kinds of things that the R-8's grooves will let you achieve.

The other way to vary the R-8's velocity, nuance, pitch and decay parameters is to pop them into what's called a randomizer. (Very "Dr. Who," eh?) Here, as you might guess, the changes are unpredictable—or random—rather than algorithmically rule-bound. But the degree of randomness can be specified in some detail. So you're never just totally



taking pot luck. Unless you want to, of course.

One great strength of the R-8 is that you can mix-match random and groove factors—just as the two things get all jumbled up in one throbbing great gestalt whenever a qualified human drummer plays. For example, you can take your closed high-hat and place its velocity under a nice, pumping groove algorithm, while you use the random factor to vary the nuance of your snare. It can really get your little bottom to wiggle.

But what about that most vital aspect of "feel": placing drums a little behind or ahead of the beat? To accomplish this on the R-8, you have to go into one of two other edit modes called Micro and Macro Timing Shift. Here, you can select any instrument in your drum pattern and shift it forward or backward in increments of 1/96 of a quarter note (Macro) or 1/384 of a quarter note (Micro). The pity here, though, is that this is a fixed rate. In other words, this is one key "feel" parameter that *can't* be varied by means of Artificial Intelligence on the R-8.

It can be, however, on Aphex's Feel Factory. This is an add-on box designed to bring rhythmic Artificial Intelligence to any MIDI system. It's designed to be patched into a MIDI network between a sequencer and the instruments controlled by that sequencer. If you're using one of those sequencers that has a drum machine inside—like the Akai/Linn ADR-15—or if you just want to use the Feel Factory with a drum machine, there are ways to loop it into the system via the drumbox/sequencer's own MIDI In and Out ports.

Of what, then, does a Feel Factory consist? First of all there are eight sliders. Each of these can be assigned to any MIDI note number or to any MIDI channel. Assigning the sliders to MIDI note numbers is what gives you access to individual drum sounds on a drum machine. (Each drum sound on a MIDI drum machine corresponds to a different MIDI note number.) And by assigning sliders to MIDI channels, you can control synths and other MIDI instruments—not just drums. So here we graduate from using A.I. to groove up the drums to using it on bass riffs, horn lines and other instrumental parts.

The Feel Factory's eight sliders can control two parameters: MIDI velocity

CONTINUED ON PAGE 80

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DAVID KERSHENBAUM

COMMERCIAL WITHOUT COMPROMISE

by
Alan di Perna

For David Kershenbaum, the Tracy Chapman phenomenon is easily explained. It's all in her voice. Simple as that. Kershenbaum realized this when he began producing the singer/songwriter's self-titled debut LP—you know, the one that helped reinstate intelligence, commitment and emotional honesty as things that might actually have something to do with pop music.

"We based everything on her voice," Kershenbaum insists. "I mean, if you missed that, you were dead. It was hard to miss with her, though. She sounded good on every mike we put her on."

Several things made Kershenbaum an ideal producer for Chapman. One of these was his previous experience with artists rooted in folk and acoustic music. He started out in the music biz—as a staff producer for RCA—in 1971, when the "soft-rock" boom was in full swing. He cites albums like Carole King's *Tapestry* and early-'70s hits by Crosby, Stills & Nash and Don McLean as prime influences on his earliest productions. These include a moderately successful string of records by B.W. Stevenson, recorded before Kershenbaum left RCA to go independent in 1975.

He didn't stay independent for long, though. A&M Records co-founder Jerry Moss asked him to produce Joan Baez's 1975 "comeback album," *Diamonds and Rust*. This led to more projects for A&M, and Kershenbaum eventually joined the company as vice president of A&R. During this time, he produced a few more records for Baez as well as for artists like Cat Stevens and Richie Havens. These were the credits that caught the attention of SBK Record Productions, the publishing company which had signed the then-unknown Chapman in 1986.

"It seemed folk was the one style that hadn't been experimented with again."

"They'd put Tracy in the studio with a producer or two, I believe, but they hadn't found anyone who really knew how to produce a record based on vocals and acoustic guitar, rather than the usual obsession with grooves and hooks. So they contacted me and sent a demo of just her and her guitar. It contained nearly everything that ended up on the album. Except 'Fast Car.' That was written just as I met her in New York; she played it for me the first time in the SBK conference room. Again, just a vocal and guitar. I knew we could make a great record if we stayed faithful to what that voice and guitar were conveying emotionally."

But wait a minute. It would be an oversimplification to paint Kershenbaum as Mr. Sensitive Folkie producer. There's more to it than that. Before leaving A&M in 1983 to go independent once again, he worked with such non-folk names as Joe Jackson, Supertramp, Eddie Money and Graham Parker. And since his departure from A&M he's been in the studio with a thoroughly mixed grill of acts including Berlin, Shadowfax and Laura Branigan.

In fact, the folk side of his resume comes as something of a surprise from a guy who, on first appearance, seems to personify the L.A. Record Biz at its glitziest. For our interview, he sports yellow-tinted aviator shades and a bright red jogging jacket, half-unzipped to reveal a generous expanse of chest hair. His white stretch limo is parked just outside Powertrax, the studio and corporate headquarters he built a few years back in that venerable Hollywood build-

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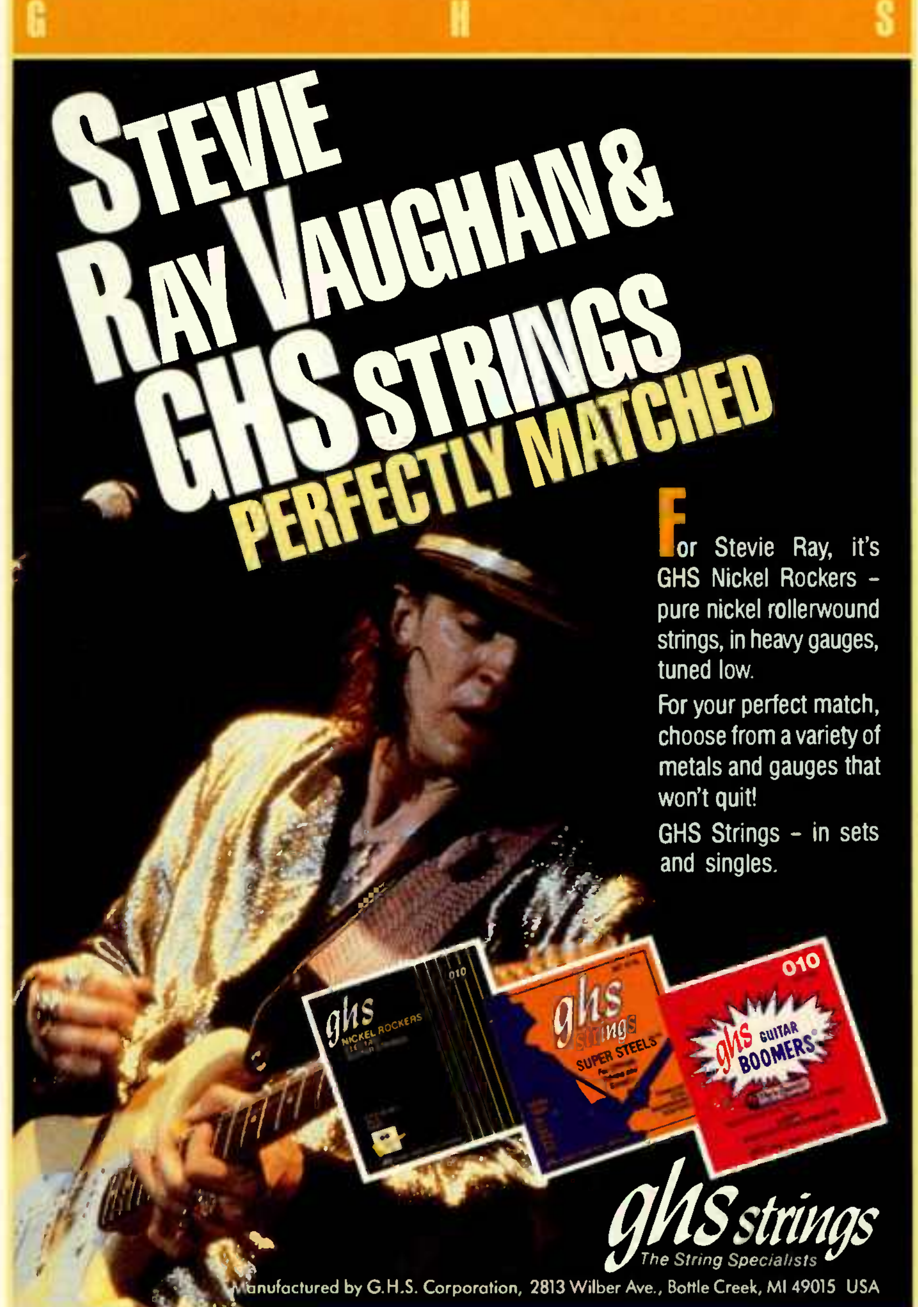
ing which was once Wally Heider Recording. From here, Kershenbaum operates his publishing company, film-scoring firm and two technophile recording rooms.

But looks can be deceiving. In the wake of Chapman's phenomenal success, Kershenbaum's behavior has been anything but standard L.A. Record Biz. When the record hit number one, offers to produce major acts began crowding his mailbox. But he has turned most of these down to work with lesser-known artists—many with a neo-folk flavor—such as Show of Hands for IRS, the Pilgrims for MCA, Latin Quarter for RCA and the Burns Sisters for CBS.

"That's a decision I made really early on: to go for cutting-edge things. This is a real interesting period of time musically, and I want to take advantage of that as much as I can. What I'd like to be known for is making intelligent records that have character and emotion. And if that happens to fall within the folk area, that's fine with me."

See, Kershenbaum really goes for this idea of a folk revival—another thing that made him an ideal producer for Chapman. It fits into a larger theory he has about the music business. "I don't know if it can be validated or not, but it seems like there's this 10-year cycle, where music starts off real young and everybody says, 'Ah, this is how it should be.' But then those artists begin to grow away from where they started. They get more comfortable, get bigger budgets... they just grow up. And that's when everything turns upside-down and a whole new stream of talent comes along."



Yeah, yeah, you've heard this one before. But it's a theory which fits Kershenbaum's own career better than a tailor-made suit. The last great upheaval, the theory runs, was the punk/new wave explosion of the late '70s, which would make the late '80s prime time for the start of a new cycle. "And I guessed that it *could* be a folk thing," he elaborates. "Computerized synthesizer music had gone about as far as it could; and folk is about as removed from that as you can get. I figured that a folk-based artist would make enough of a contrast to create a real impact. And also, it seemed that folk was the one style that hadn't been experimented with again. Then Suzanne Vega came out, and I said, 'Oh boy, this is great.' So actually I'd been looking to find an artist like Tracy about a year before I met her."

Kershenbaum's work with Joe Jackson also relates directly to his Big Decade theory. He signed and recorded Jackson specifically to get involved with what he saw as the last great cycle, i.e., new wave. Cut in just two weeks at a small London studio, Jackson's debut LP *Look Sharp* was all about attitude and seat-of-the-pants recording.

"Three or four instruments and you basically had the whole picture. Again, it was exactly the opposite of what was going on at the time. The tempos were real quick and the drums were real roomy, rather than dry and in your face. There was just a lot of raw passion, which is what attracted me to Joe in the first place."

But as Jackson began writing more complex material for larger ensembles, the need arose to capture it all with the appropriate sonic clarity; so Kershenbaum began to experiment with digital recording. "There was a real parallel between what Joe was doing and what the digital format would allow. Both of us fell in love with it right away and became real supporters of digital."

As the culmination of this evolution, Jackson's 1986 *Big World* LP was recorded live to digital two-track. In one sense the technique is simplicity itself. Microphones are positioned and the music is recorded live, just like the good old days. But it's a technique which

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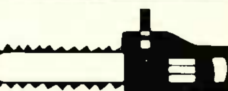

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places an incredible demand on both producer and artist. Without the benefit of overdubs or punch-ins, there's virtually no margin for error or reconsideration. Jackson and Kershenbaum, however, seem to have relished the challenge.

"We had even talked about doing a direct-to-two-track recording on the *Body and Soul* album [which preceded *Big World*]. And we could have done it, but the arrangements were such that we needed to do several different things with room acoustics in order to capture the music. So we pretty much ended up going direct to digital multitrack, but not direct to two-track digital. Then Joe said, 'I'll arrange the next album differently.' He arranged *Big World* specifically for direct-to-two-track recording. I think we did it because it was scary, you know? And hopefully some of that edge and energy comes out in the music. Again, realism and emotion are what's most important."

Which brings us back to the *Tracy Chapman* album. Here too, emotion and realism were Kershenbaum's goals. But his approach was different in this case. As mentioned, he started by working alone with Chapman at Powertrax—establishing a vocal and acoustic guitar sound as a guide for the instrumental colors to enhance it.

"That's the opposite of the way most records are made these days. Usually you start by building a really burning track and then fitting the singer over it. But it was only after I knew how I was going to record Tracy's parts that I started inviting musicians in to play with her for a couple of hours every day. It

THE HOUSE OF DAVID

It just has a vibe...a patina...that simply doesn't exist in studios that were built recently." David Kershenbaum is talking about the memory-haunted Wally Heider recording studio, which he purchased a little over two years ago and converted into his own Powertrax. But it isn't as though he regards the old Heider room as *sacred*. He updated Heider's antiquated "dead room" acoustics for a more contemporary live sound provided by mirrors, hardwood floors and other reflective surfaces.

He also put in all new equipment. Powertrax is outfitted with a custom-wired, 56-input console featuring API audio components and Martin Sound's Flying Faders Automation system. The latter is the latest buzz in pro audio circles, and has recently been adopted as the standard automation for the new Neve B-Series consoles.

"Monitoring," says Kershenbaum, "is everything with me. It's not only a matter of accuracy. Emotionally, monitoring causes you to make a record a certain way. It's a function of the way you hear and feel things in the room." Powertrax is fortunate to be equipped with something of a rarity—a pair of George Massenberg monitors. "There are only two sets in the world," says Kershenbaum. "George has one set and I have the other."

When it comes to multitracks, Kershenbaum is a staunch supporter of Mitsubishi's X-850 digital 32-track recorder. His is equipped with Apogee Electronics filters in the A-to-D conversion stage. "One thing digital lets me do, which I guess is a little different, is mix down to two tracks of the X-850's 32 tracks. This way I can keep punching the mix in. I can go back and fix little things, but everything stays in the digital domain, so there's no signal degradation."

Kershenbaum recently decided to open up a second room, which will serve mainly as a vocal overdub studio. It too will be X-850-equipped. The console will be a vintage Neve 8048. "It has the classic 1081 four-band EQs. Those and the API EQ are my favorites. At first, I thought of getting another API for the room. But then I said, 'Why? I've already got one.' The Neve and the API each have their own unique qualities. So now I can get different sounds from different rooms."

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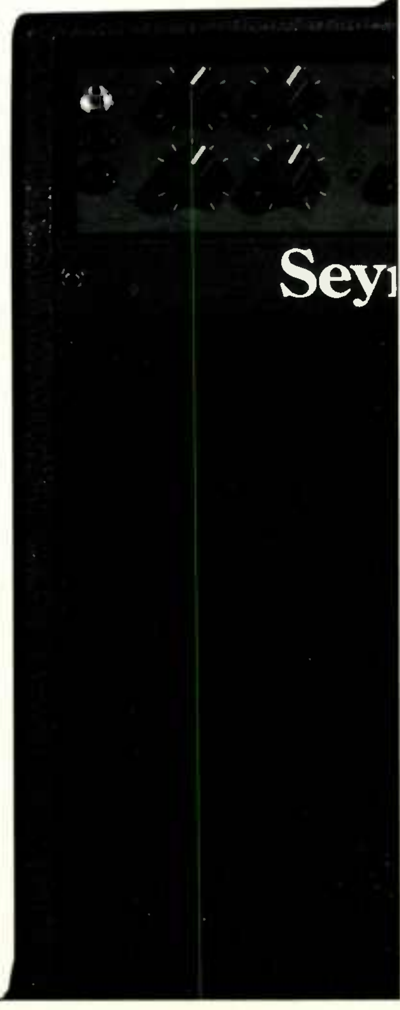

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was very important to come up with players who were sympathetic."

He installed Chapman in Powertrax's vocal booth and had her try singing and playing with different rhythm sections—recording the whole thing as it went down. The players he and Chapman ended up selecting came from different days' sessions. The gig went to drummer Denny Fongheiser and bassist Larry Klein—the latter Joni Mitchell's husband, musical collaborator and a producer in his own right. Klein and Fongheiser soon coalesced into a supple, supportive rhythm section. They cut basic tracks with Chapman on acoustic guitar and vocals. From there, Kershenbaum kept overdubs to a minimum, generally one instrument per track—maybe a little dobro, Hammond B-3 or hammered dulcimer from multi-instrumentalist Jack Holder, or some percussion from Paulhino da Costa. And that was essentially it.

While he's keen on the neo-folk idea, Kershenbaum isn't betting the entire farm on it. His film-scoring company is gathering momentum, with two major projects—*Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* and *Next of Kin*—in the works. And he continues to make records in all kinds of genres. But he still maintains that the need for the grass-roots social commentary of performers like Tracy Chapman, Show of Hands and others is only likely to grow in the impending years of continued Republican rule.

"If Bush follows the kind of format that it looks like he will, there's going to be more people out of work, more people on the streets...a general magnification of what we already have. So there'll be plenty of things to write about. I think we'll have no problem there." M

YOUTH from page 16

Sonic Youth. Like the Major Band status just around the corner, though, the topic of group development is a touchy subject. "I don't think of it in terms of growth," Gordon states flatly. "I'll hear an older song of ours and sometimes it'll take me a while to figure out what it is. I'll think, 'That sounds familiar; what is that song?' It's like a memory. That's all it is."

Moore, who's been contemplating the possibility of breaking a Crime and the City Solution album in half, sits up. "Yeah, but the bass-playing you do on 'Teenage Riot' and 'The Sprawl,' you wouldn't have been able to play that way on the first album. There are things you know about playing music now that you didn't know then. That's growth." Gordon isn't buying it. "Yeah," she says, "but I don't really think ... I mean, when I hear our music, I just don't think about progress."

That, then, is the gist of today's Sonic Youth: You can fight progress, but you can't stop it. Or, as Moore cracks, "We can't get rid of our punk roots. We try washing them out—we try *bleaching* them out."

At a group meeting, it looks as if the powers-that-be want to do something along those very lines. Sonic Youth's second Blast First/Enigma/Capitol release, *The Whitey Album*—a collection of tape manipulations and Madonna and Robert Palmer songs released under the Ciccone Youth alias—is being readied for release. A Blast First honcho is already concerned about the projected cover: a close-up of Madonna used without her permission. Since the band never got flack for using a shot of Mrs. Penn on the sleeve of their 1986 Ciccone Youth single, a demolition of "Into the Groove" called "Into the Groovey," the executive's objection does not go over well.

"Come *on*," Gordon says incredulously. "Fuck him," Ranaldo shoots back. The quartet then considers the possibility of substituting a blow-up of Madonna's nipple. "How could they prove it's *her* nipple?" Moore asks. Everyone laughs with him, but no one has an answer. Chances are Simon LeBon doesn't have these problems. M

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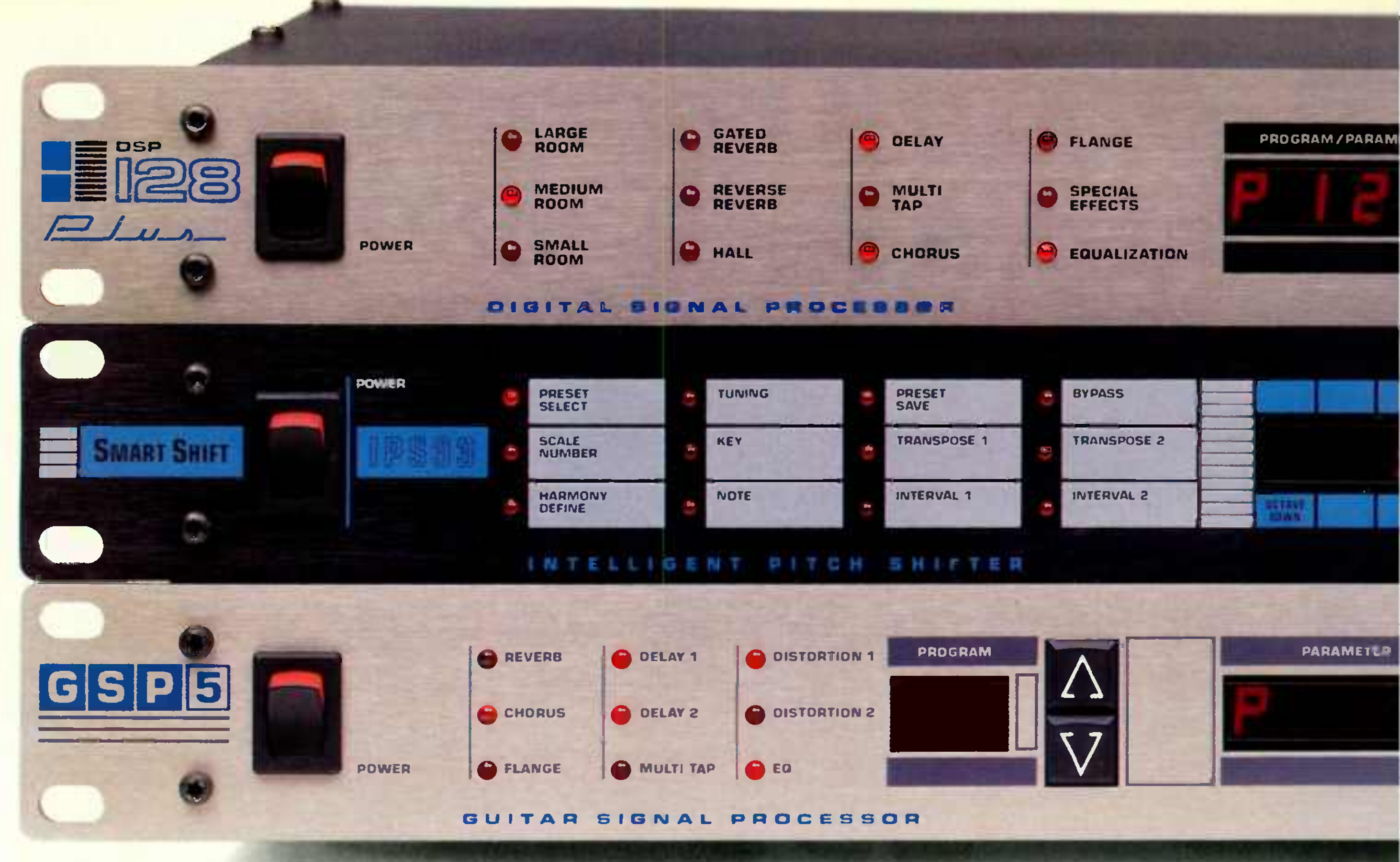

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Bobby Brown exercises his prerogative

There are still six shopping days left before Christmas, but New York's Madison Square Garden is jammed, and it looks like the guy sitting behind me got his present early. He's documenting the full house with a pretty nice camera, and he's into it. Over the deafening boom of the pre-show enticement tape, I hear him mumbling about already getting some "hip shots," but they can't be of the artists; there's nobody onstage yet. The concert is running about 45 minutes behind schedule. That makes the camera man frustrated, and he's not alone. The rest of the crowd knows what they want—the tremendous wallop of funk—and they want it now. The aisles of the place are jammed with kids and adults; some are ass-shaking and some are waiting out the delay. Finally the MC takes the stage. "Are you ready New York?!" They're ready. "Tonight we got for you Neeewww Edition!" YEAHHHHHHH! "Al B. Suuurrre!" YEAHHHHHHHH! "And some bad news...Bobby Brown is sick, he won't be here tonight..." ONNNHHHHHHHH! "Shit!" squawks the camera man immediately. "Those who want their money back must get it from the box office within the hour!" ONNNHHHHHH!

The former leader of New Edition is now making his own decisions.

by Jim Macnie

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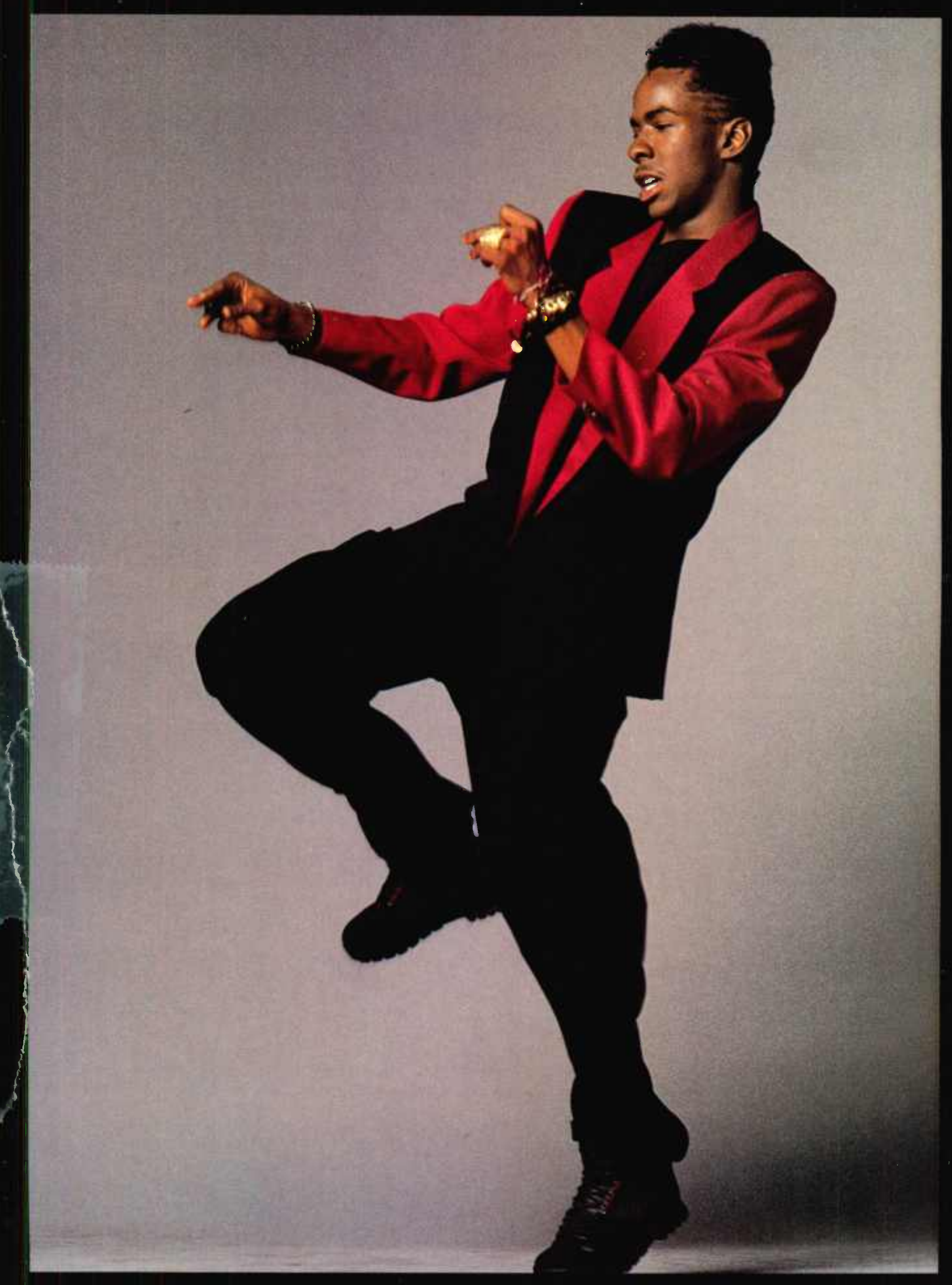

TODD GRAY

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Given the collective arousal of the audience, you expect everybody to hang. It's a total get-down scene, right? Unh-uh. Al B. Sure! hits the stage pelvis-first and the crowd erupts whole hog. The aisles swell again with people, only this time they're checking out. In the lobby, the refund line is huge and gettin' huger. And the pissed percentage is up in the red zone. "Al B. Sure! ain't shit!" says one disgruntled teenager. "I saw him and New Edition last time through. And even New Edition was only C+ or B−. Bobby Brown, that's what I wanted tonight. We outta here!"

Bobby Brown is what a lot of people wanted that night. They'd come to see the man whose second solo album, *Don't Be Cruel*, had hit a platinum number-one on the black LP charts. But the former New Edition vocalist was suffering from a debilitating bout of bronchitis. It was the last night of the widely heralded "Heart Break" tour (named after New Edition's own million-selling record), and because Brown's a staunch show-biz trouper, it's odd for him not to have gone the distance. But you can't sing if you don't have a voice. So to give his vocal cords a chance to rebound, and to catch a few days of much-needed R&R, Bobby blew home—not to the infamous gray and cold Roxbury section of Boston, where he and the rest of New Edition grew up, messed around and began their professional career together, but the looks-like-we-made-it, hot and hazy turf of Los Angeles, where his new digs serve as a refuge from the exhilarating headaches that come with mega-popularity. Work becomes the top priority when the charts tell you your record's got nothing but a bullet for company. But damn, you gotta chill sometime.

And that's what Brown did over the Christmas break. Coolin' in Cali, the 20-year-old veteran took time to breathe deep, set up phase two of his well-planned media assault, watch "My Prerogative" ascend the singles charts, and chant his Christmas mantra in hopes of the ultimate present: "Number One Pop, Number One Pop, Number One Pop."

It's now a couple of days into 1989, and that's what Brown is jonesing for. "Don't Be Cruel" made a major dent on the black charts, but it's crossover clout he wants. And it's not unrealistic: As he paces his manager's plush home outside of Oakland (he's driven north for further privacy), "My Prerogative" occupies the number-two spot on *Billboard*'s Top 100 for the second week... with a bullet. Nowhere to go but up. That makes Brown visibly nervous. They told him not to leave New Edition, they told him he couldn't make it on his own. This is the chance to refute all that, and cackle with the satisfaction of a well-focused young guy. But it's frustrating.

"Lookit," Brown says, flipping through *Billboard*. "Phil Collins is sneakin' up on me. He's behind me, trying to get me. He's got enough Number Ones. See? Collins moved up again this week, I froze." Although a lot is on the line, Brown shouldn't be that nervous. New Edition were certainly no strangers to hit singles; in six years together, they brought a few—"Candy Girl," "Mr. Telephone Man" and "Cool It Now"—into the top circle. Doing it on his own is what Bobby is psyched about.

"It's this guy that's blocking us," muses manager George Smith, pointing at Poison's "Every Rose Has Its Thorn." "He's been there too long." Bobby and the bossman don't know it, but Santa is going to make a late delivery. The next day, the numbers come in. "My Prerogative," a hip-hop-informed paean to self-determination, sits pretty, funky and def at the top. So's the album. Not the black charts. The pop charts. Little Bobby—happy at last.

"I just want to give my thanks to everyone who made me number one pop," Brown sincerely laughs later, "and I also want to encourage people to listen to music that's labeled R&B, or street music—just give it a chance. I was never taught to look at a color. Music is music. You can't put a label on R&B or pop these days anyway, because you got guys like George Michael on the top of the black charts and you got me and Michael Jackson on the pop charts. People should hear all kinds of music."

Brown has agreed to this interview even though the doctor told him to avoid lengthy conversations if he wants to have his voice back for the "Arsenio Hall" television show later in the week. Dressed head to toe in a red jogging suit, he looks a bit different than the natty dude who drives the girlies crazy in the "Prerogative" video. It's down time. "It's hard to do what's right when you're on the road," he says, "eat right and sleep right. People think you want to be a singer because it's not a

JOHN BELLISSIMO/RETNA

nine-to-five job. I'll tell ya, for me lately it's been 24/7. And you're constantly thinking about your next move. You got to push yourself to go ahead, go ahead." Just out of his teens, wired with the adrenaline of success, Brown can't slow down. His voice trails off and he doodles the bassline to the hit on a synth in the workshop cellar, breaking the doc's rules by singing along with it. Bobby Brown is checking for green lights, not red.

You could say Brown's been activated for about 17 years now, because that's how long he's been a veteran of the stage. When he was only three, he got into the show-off mood between sets at a James Brown concert his mother had taken him to in a Roxbury nightclub. The Sex Machine was on break, and Bobby began doing the shimmy-shimmy-shake to the music. Mom propped him up onstage, and the kid strutted as much as a toddler can. That, along with a ton of music bouncing around the home, sunk the hook deep into Brown. Growing up, he was a neighborhood point man on the prowl for fun. Funny boy, street dancer, singer. A performer using whatever tools he could to get some notice.

"I always felt stage-close," he recalls. "Doing that kind of stuff was more important in my neighborhood than sports or anything. If you could dance or sing, you was the person, the dude. I loved being the one. I was too small for football, no good at basketball or street hockey. But at five I started

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entering local talent contests, and I found out I love to perform. I guess it wasn't a shock; I was voted class clown about seven years in a row."

If you've seen the video for "Prerogative," you know that Brown's not exactly shy. Grand sweeps, slick moves, bump and grind, everything. And it works: Flamboyant without being vacant, Brown dresses the song with enough youthful macho to warrant his current status as a ladies' man. He's had the moves all along, and he got them the old-fashioned way. "All the talent shows were held right in the neighborhood, in the community centers," he explains. "The first song I ever performed was 'One in a Million' by Larry Graham. My voice was very high and I remember the song was very low. I came in second. Later on they held shows at Dudley Station, where most all the trains intersected. And really, unless you wanted to be in trouble all day, you participated. We took them seriously. My buddies and I would be all set; we'd have the steps and the clothes, and we'd go to it."

"There's a new generation going into the '90s who not only know what other young people want to hear but what older people want as well. The mothers are saying, 'Turn that down...wait, don't turn *that* one down.'"

Evidently, being in trouble all day didn't hold too much interest for Brown—though he did have his share of street incidents typical of a low-income project like Roxbury's Orchard Park. "Yeah, we ran around, and we did little things, like snatch clothes or something, but we weren't selling drugs or anything heavy," he sighs. "I mean I didn't feel like I was on the wrong road or nothing. Things was a bit lighter in those days. Not like now, where there's other people comin' in, bringing the neighborhood down. It used to be a project full of family people, and you could play outside. Now you got all the drug dealers runnin' people down and shootin' people up.

"I was into music anyway. My father listened to blues basically, Mom was into J.B., my brothers and sisters liked funk. One of the guys I was into gets forgotten a lot: Donny Hathaway. He was one of the greatest singers and composers I've heard. Stevie Wonder takes you on that Donny trip a lot. So I know a bunch of different music. That's one of the things that kept me out of trouble. At that time I wasn't really thinking about growing up, just having fun and performing. Break-dancing came out, we had to master every new dance. That's how I hooked up with the rest of the New Edition; they were my buddies."

With poverty all around him, Brown concentrated on fun and neglected the future; he claims he could still be in Roxbury if not for another typical projects incident. "We had stolen some bikes and gone to a party," he recalls, "and of course everybody in the neighborhood knew not to touch our stuff. But we came out and some guys from another part of town was messin' with our bikes. 'Hey, you mess with our stuff, there's gonna be a fight.' But we didn't know these guys were crazy. They pulled out knives. I said, 'Fight me with your hands!' but the knife came down and killed my best friend, Jimmy. From that moment I knew the streets were only going to get worse. Real danger had come to the ghetto."

Disturbed by the loss of his friend, Bobby was checked into a therapy program by his Mom. When he came out he had a new direction. "I knew exactly what I wanted after that," he says point-blank. "I asked Mike Bivens, Ricky Bell and Ralph Tresvant—we was all pals—if they wanted to get serious, and they said, 'Sure.' There was a show comin' up in two days and we wanted to get in it. Got the kind of steps the Temptations had, picked the song—'Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now'—and we were gone.

"I knew some dance stuff from my brother bringing home Betamax videos of Elvis; like, that guy could move! Brook Payne, [fifth New Edition member] Ronnie De Voe's uncle, was a top Boston choreographer; he gave us tons of ideas, including the name New Edition. We went down to Dudley sporting brown cords with black shoes and brown bow-ties. Lookin' sharp, feelin' sharp. It's been uphill from there."

New Edition was seen as a post-Jackson 5 idea: cutesy black kids who have some hook-laden, lowest-common-denominator pop songs dumped at their feet, and a strong sales machine behind them to make with moola. They worked constantly in the early '80s, and for a while brought as much national attention to Boston as did that other hook-laden band, the Cars. Brown was right out front in New Edition, and when they began to take off, he was thrilled. "To know what you believed in for years was coming true? Man, it felt great."

Further, he doesn't mind the derisive tag critics put on the band's lightweight music. "Bubblegum?" he scoffs. "Yeah, it *was* in a way. But I don't even think that's a negative term necessarily. The Jacksons were deemed the same thing; the press just gave it to us. We were just being what we were: kids. We might've grown up in a bad neighborhood, but there was still some sweetness in there."

Though kids, New Edition did the same amount of road work and recording as adults. Along the way they began to get their eyes opened to the dog-eat-dog adult lifestyle. Tickled to be singing for a living, Brown never worried much about compensation; as a result he claims to have been burned by New Edition's managers. "VCRs had just come out," he says, "and we got $500 a week and a VCR. We thought, 'Check it out: some cash *and* a VCR? All raaaaaght!' But we was getting ripped off, we was overworking, and we weren't looking to the future. We were managed by two guys who thought, 'They're kids, let's clean 'em out.'"

The lack of guidance began to drive Brown crazy. Plus he was on the verge of adulthood himself. His ideas were

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changing, as well as his musical tastes and influences. Having tasted success with his pals, he started to get the yen to break off on his own—a hard decision since they had all been friends before becoming work mates. But, he recalls, "I think we were making some wrong decisions as far as letting the majority decide things. I figured if I took my career in my own hands, I'd have an easier time making it to the top. I was getting older and wanted to do some things that my Mom could listen to—stuff that everybody can get into, not just kids. In most cases, your business is your business and your life is your life. But with me, both is the same. If people are going to accept me, they're going to accept me for being Bobby Brown."

Brown sates his crossover jones.

A definitive part of the growing process is coming to grips with who you *really* are. Discussing the move, Brown doesn't come off as conceited or pompous, only like he's had his eyes opened. In 1986 he decided to stand tall, leave the band and shoot his shot. He fell in with a new label, and his first solo record, *King of Stage*, yielded a decent if slightly generic black chart-topper called "Girlfriend." But Brown wasn't really satisfied with the LP, and regards that period as one of stasis.

"I knew even when I was making *King of Stage* that it was only going to be a reminder at best," he says glumly. "During the recording I was thinking it just wasn't right. It was basically the same thing New Edition were doing, and I was saying to myself, 'I'm not even making a change.' I was still with my old management; I wasn't psyched. I put it out because I just wanted to let people know I was still around. There was a lot of bad-mouthin' about me after I left the group. And I just wanted to shut people up."

It's obvious that *Don't Be Cruel* wiped that slate quite clean. Pumped-up, rippling with energy, it's one of 1988's most seductive dance records. And it shows that Brown is a member in good standing of the new hard-funk community of writers and producers currently giving so-called pop a toughening-up lesson on the sonic Nautilus machinery of the studio. "My Prerogative" rocked its way to number one thanks to an ominous, minor-chord tone, a defiant bassline that kicks mercilessly, and a relentless drum-machine crack that pushes you back two or three feet.

All that oomph is due to the production techniques of Teddy Riley, currently one of the deffest masterminds of black pop. Riley's a member of Guy, another key component of the new street-smart, bizwise sound. Brown fell in with cohort Riley (they're both the same age) and the two became pals; "My Prerogative" was born in the producer's Harlem studio. Here was the grittier sound Brown heard in his head; it was something he knew he could sink his teeth into.

"There's a new generation going into the '90s," Brown says bluntly. "There's a bunch of young people at work who not only know what other young people want to hear, but what older people want to hear as well. The kids are buying the records, and the mothers are saying, 'Turn that down... wait, don't turn *that* one down.' It's because young people are acting older, in a way, and older people, in and out of the business, are starting to believe that the kids got some hip ideas, they're not just goofing off.

"'My Prerogative' has got that sound. Teddy and I let a drumbeat play for about five minutes, added a bit of keys—not too much—put in the funky bassline, and brought the whole groove out. Teddy's one of the guys that's going to bring us into the '90s, with the heavy drum groove. When the bottom hits you like that, no way you're not going to like the song. Stuff like 'Groove Me,' 'Rescue Me,' 'Teddy's Jam'—those are the things that show the style off best."

The camaraderie of the whole creative process is a telling clue as to why "My Prerogative" has gotten across to so many listeners. With a regimented bounce that smirks as it swaggers, the flow of the rhythms suggests an afternoon of hanging out with like-minded pals rather than industry stress sessions bent on browbeating out hit after hit. "A few of my friends and all of Guy was in the room, and it was just a good feeling; everybody was working together on the stuff. Nobody was saying, 'I want credit for this part or that part,' no one was worried about money... and a lot of money was made off that song."

Brown must have been hedging his bets, because Riley isn't the only *très*-happening idea man to help formulate the singer's sound. Much of *Don't Be Cruel*, including the title cut, was produced by the slickest of right-now West Coast production teams, L.A. & Babyface. Like Riley, they don't hide their heart-attack motherwit or broken-bottle boom; the gutbucket crunch that runs all the way through "Don't Be Cruel" is a bold lump of blackness. Yet Brown's personality isn't lost in a producer's aural turf. Bobby explains that it was different than the Harlem work scene, but just as rewarding.

"Those guys, L.A. & Babyface, they're like producers to their hearts. But they know it's your record, they let you bend them. I put my music in their hands and they did the right thing with it. See, we was talking about who was going to do the album, and I'd heard the Whispers stuff and Pebbles stuff and Deele stuff that they'd done. At first we wanted Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, but they were doing *Heart Break*, which we knew was coming out at the same time; I didn't want my new sound to be like New Edition, right? So we got L.A. & Babyface, and when they started doing the playback, they was killin'. It was some really hittin' stuff. And I was surprised, because they're a bit older, got suits on, and operate in a business mode. They're calm when they work. At Teddy's, everybody was energized; we were all young. But L.A. & Babyface cranked it, you can hear it."

What the producers from both coasts realized is the currency hip-hop now has, and they were determined to incorporate it into the pop realm. "Don't Be Cruel" isn't a strict hip-hop tune, but Brown raps low-down, with a delivery that could care less about genres. One second he's singing, the next he's railing against his laissez-faire lady, saying that "if I put a drink up, you won't even toast." The cold cuts come and go, the sampled choir falls in and out, and "Don't Be Cruel" mows you down.

"I love hip-hop," Brown shrugs, "and one of the reasons I incorporated rap with pop is that people look at rap the wrong way. That whole rap violence thing. Bullshit. The way you sing doesn't make people kill each other. In the beginning the lyrics might've been, 'You can't take me out; I'll bust your head; you're a sucker.' But c'mon, it's not all that way. Check it out: It makes kids smarter, because you have to be intelligent to write a rap. Eric B. & Rakim are a good example; they're the presidents of rap. And KRS-One, he talks about heavy things,

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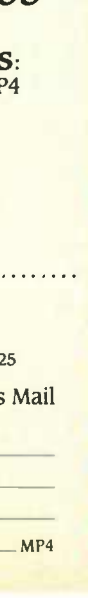

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speaks to the issues. All this is about being creative and helping the kids, but I don't know, it seems that if you're from the streets, you get knocked."

Two nights later I'm back home checking "Arsenio Hall" for Bobby, and he comes out killin'. You can hear that his voice isn't in perfect shape, but that doesn't matter; it's easy to get lost in the whirl of stalking dance steps that define Brown's personality as much as his vocals. It's a Friday night show, and Brown's letting America know that David Lee Roth isn't the only one who can shake some booty in the camera and get away with it. He cavorts all over the soundstage, flaunting his newly rounded cameo (with some sharp parallel temple lines), reminding viewers that Hall's show is going for a party atmosphere. It's obvious that, for Brown, performing is a priority. Back at the house, we'd discussed the fact that he had only 25 minutes to turn some heads on the "Heart Break" tour. *Don't Be Cruel* was still on the rise then, and Brown was relegated to opening act.

"I'm not trying to be conceited or nothing," he says, "but I felt I could have done a lot more if it was my whole thing. From the response I'd say the people decided who should have been the headliner. I had to go for the jugular, but I think you should be able to get the people going within a couple minutes anyway. I look at it as entertainment. I got my brothers with me as dancers, we do some skits and stuff, it's a performance. That's why I like videos so much; the audience gets to see the artist strut his stuff, so to speak. It should make you want to come to the concert. I came up with most of the ideas for the videos, and that's lots of fun."

At the end of the TV show's sweaty take of "My Prerogative," Brown jumps up on a drum riser and makes with a "Lemmeeheahsaayeah!" that doesn't hold anything back. He's rockin' the house, jubilantly spouting his declaration of independence. "Yo! Arsenio, we outta here!" he bellows, but the work will start again tomorrow morning. Brown realizes that this is a new beginning, but he's also aware that pop glory can last for just a second or two.

"I don't want to go changing," he confesses. "That's one reason I have my family around me. If they see me being a jerk, they're the first ones to say, 'Listen man, you better chill that shit out.' I just want people to like what I'm doing because it's me, and I'm gonna work at it until the audience says, 'Forget you, Bobby, we don't want no more Bobby Brown.'"

That might not be for a while. Brown's management set up a 900 "talk-to" number at the start of the year; the first week it received 8,000 calls. Word. And give-it-all-you-got performances like the Arsenio show can only amp up the response. Though he obviously appeals to the ladies ("What man wouldn't like girlies throwin' bras at him?" he queries), Brown's electricity cuts across the sexes. His combination of the old soul-review frenzy and today's high-gloss performance ethic is dead on. And the response is massive, with both male and female audience members swooning to the groove.

"Yeah," he grins in conclusion, "it's all up to them. That's why my next video, 'Every Little Step,' is going to be for and about the listeners who stuck with me. I'm trying to get Guy, New Edition, Al B. Sure!, Teddy and L.A. & Babyface; we'll be at a house party and there'll be people from different countries dancing. 'You will be there,' says the song, and that's the part that goes out to all my friends. Some singers call 'em their fans, but I call 'em my friends." M

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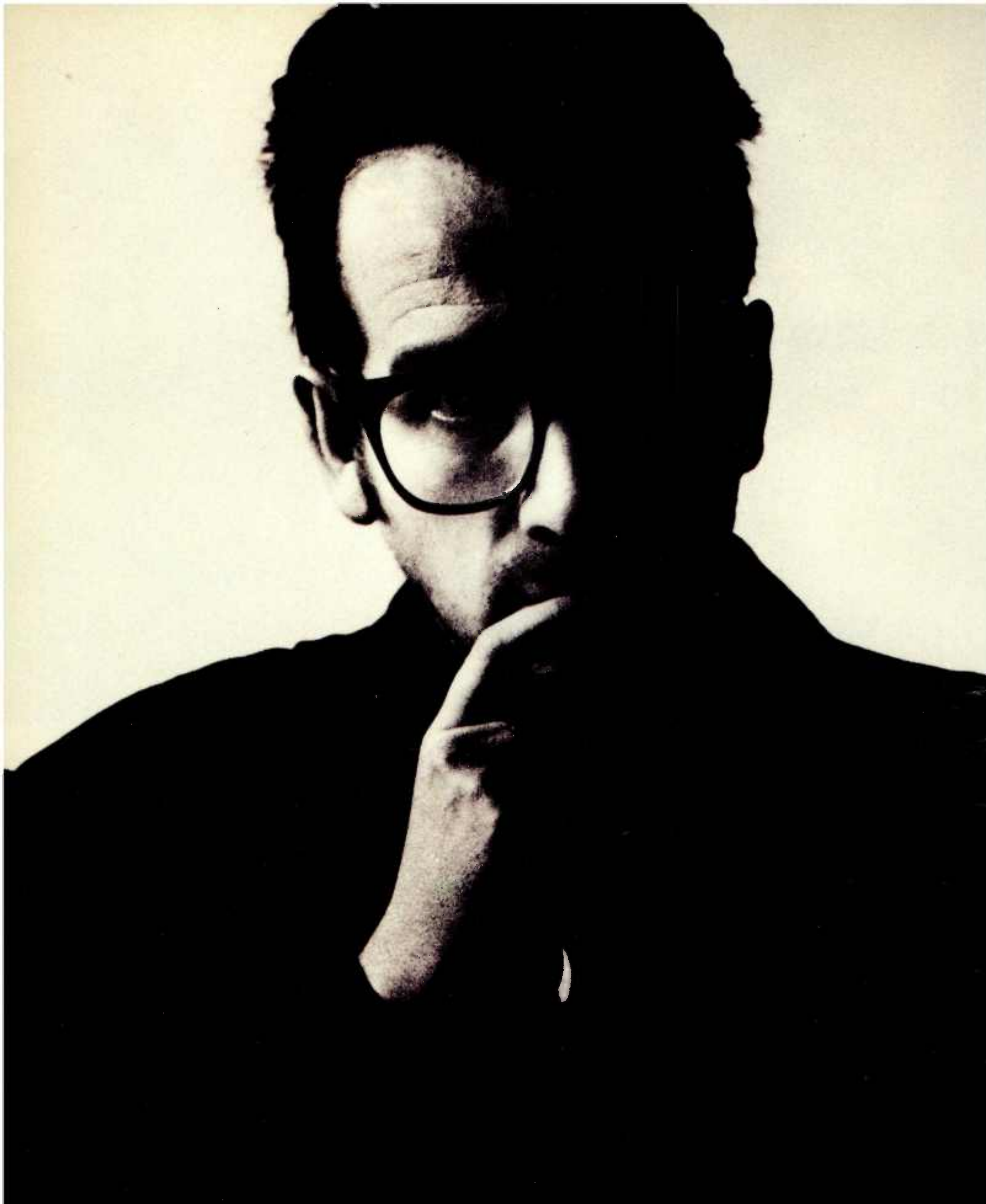

Photography by Anton Corbijn

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Elvis Costello in Love & War

There's a deceptive balm in the air, a bright December afternoon curdled by icy darts of breeze, as Elvis Costello and Cait O'Riordan stride along the thoroughfare from their flat in London toward Holland Park. After a pit stop at a local health store for bags of nuts, Elvis leads the way up a stiff, winding incline, setting a pace better reserved for occasions when you're about to miss a plane, extolling the beauty of the day while Cait, with her curious half-smile, moves quietly apace. The park looks wild and overgrown, an English garden with an Irish attitude. Cait saunters off to look for rabbits while Elvis settles on a park bench. He opens his bag and is soon accosted by fat squirrels, who proceed to eat walnuts out of his hand.

"Patience is a virtue, young squirrel," he counsels, as one particularly rapacious fan climbs down a tree to nudge the back of his shoulder. He pulls on a glove, turns and feeds the squirrel from his open palm. "You have to be

By Mark Rowland

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"I just wrote songs, and I was quite shocked when people turned around and said, 'He's a misogynist!' No, I'm not! I love women! Honestly. Take my word."

careful," he adds as an aside. "They'll take your bloody fingers off."

Well, Elvis Costello should know. Ten years ago, the man who sang, "I want to bite the hand that feeds me" was top of the pops and talk of the town. Life-sized Costello posters adorned the walls of CBS publicists, while their bosses broke in new calculators figuring his futures. His label debut, *My Aim Is True*, packed trendy clubs while critics compared him to Buddy Holly. *This Year's Model* filled concert halls while critics compared him to Bob Dylan. *Armed Forces* filled bigger halls while critics compared him to George Gershwin. Everyone agreed: Elvis Costello was an Artist.

Then a funny thing happened. Elvis turned out to be an artist. And not artist as in Fleetwood Mac, coming on real sophisticated while turning out fluff by the boxcar, but the kind who makes unpleasant scenes and takes chances with his music and foils your expectations without even saying excuse me. So Costello followed the majestic *Armed Forces* with an instant record hop (*Get Happy!*), a bunch of country standards (*Almost Blue*), an album of pop tunes reeking of torture and so weirdly recorded it felt like a masterpiece gashed with a broken bottle (*Trust*), and then an album of even knottier songs, with orchestral arrangements no less (*Imperial Bedroom*), which

Elvis and the missus (Cait O'Riordan) look toward life in Eire.

critics, fans and record company executives quickly hailed as a work of genius, breathed a sigh of relief that they were now off the hook, and tuned in to the new Stevie Nicks album. *Punch the Clock* never had a chance, and when Elvis staggered in with *Goodbye Cruel World*, his only real disappointment in a decade of unusually prolific and provocative work, you could feel the vultures circling. This year's model indeed.

To be sure, Elvis provided his share of brilliant mistakes and bad feelings along the way. But hey, the guy is an artist. So three years ago he began reconstructing his image and career with the wonderful *King of America*, the first album since his debut recorded largely without the Attractions, then brought back the Attractions for a wild reprise, *Blood and Chocolate*. He toured the U.S. and Europe with a good-natured show that included two bands, a spinning "wheel of fortune" to determine his repertoire and a go-go dancer that bore suspicious resemblance to inamorata Cait. He scored music for a film, *The Courier*, in which she stars. He struck up a songwriting collaboration with a fellow Liverpudlian name of Paul McCartney. He left CBS Records and signed with Warner Bros. And on a more personal note, he and Cait decided to vacate their London flat to live in a house near Dublin, Ireland.

That's a lot of changes, even for Costello. And nowhere is that mercurial mood more evident than on *Spike*, his Warners debut, and perhaps the most musically ambitious album of his career. "I hadn't made a record in two years and I really wanted something different," he explains. "Obviously, when you work with the same bunch of musicians, there's the advantage that you can count on their interpretations and their style is very vivid to you. But there's a point at which it becomes stale, and you need to stretch more. I didn't want to just take a band into the studio, even a band I'd been using for 10 years. I thought it was time to do this music that was in my head."

Spike was recorded over four months time, in studios in Dublin, New Orleans, London and Los Angeles. It includes musicians as disparate as McCartney, Roger McGuinn, the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Chrissie Hynde, Marc Ribot, Benmont Tench, Mitchell Froom, Donal Lunny, Steve Wickham, Allen Toussaint and the ubiquitous T-Bone Burnett, sometimes in seemingly kaleidoscopic combination. More to the point, Elvis gave the musicians room to help shape the sound of his album, rather than simply request stock parts.

"I think the lazy take on this record will be, 'Oh it's eclectic,'" Elvis observes with some dread. "Which I don't think it is. That's a confinement that's been built out of a very narrowminded attitude toward rock 'n' roll. If you listen to some of the great rock 'n' roll of the '50s, it's full of novelty sounds. Think how eccentric Elvis Presley must have sounded to crooners. But over the years it's become amazingly conservative music."

An irony is that when Elvis first came on the scene as part of the late '70s punk explosion, he was hailed as the lone exemplar of pop's more traditional, conservative impulses. (Translation: He wrote the best melody lines.) He still enjoys his way around a hook—on "This Town," one of *Spike*'s more inspired strokes, he gets Paul McCartney to play bass to Roger McGuinn's 12-string Rickenbacker. And as anyone who's spent time with him can testify, Costello possesses a virtually encyclopedic knowledge of pop music's history and tradition, which makes him more able than most to avoid the clichés and dilettantism that tend to afflict musicians who roam outside their genres.

But what really gives *Spike* its punch is more elemental than that. It's Elvis being Elvis. The songs are by turn hilarious, spooky, nasty, even out to lunch—anything but bloodless. The chap does have a way of dicing up the world.

Among *Spike*'s offerings, for instance, are songs based on a 1952 murder trial ("Let Him Dangle"), a contemporary news item ("Coal Train Robberies"), and a tale handed down from his grandfather ("Any King's Shilling"). For Costello, it's an unusually narrative approach, "looking out rather than in.

"There's more storytelling," he says. "But it's all part of your life, really. The only difference is that I turn the binoculars around. On other records I've been poking at myself—'What

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happened to me?' Well, this is what I'm thinking about when I'm *not* thinking about 'What happened to me' or 'What happened to this person that I care about?'

"It comes down to being more settled as a person," he decides. "Your personal life has a bit less froth than a few years before, so there's no real necessity... not that there was ever a necessity to talk about yourself. But it seems important at the time.

"I don't think I ever got too indulgent, hopefully, with the confessional measure. I like to be truthful about things, some of which are quite painful, but only because they happen to other people as well, and that's the job of songwriting. The fact that there's not so many songs now about personal relationships doesn't mean my life has become dead in that sense—anything but! It's the opposite. So I'm free to look at other things."

Elvis may have achieved some measure of domestic tranquility, but he hasn't lost his passion, or his edge. He loves to spar with ideas and is a natural raconteur. (He also displays the markings of a formidable rock critic—he's got sharp ears, listens to everything and doesn't mind calling a spade a spade.)

"I'm broke. I'm going on the road solo 'cause I can't afford to put a band together."

For all that, Elvis Costello comes across as a warm, funny, even genial guy. If he's never been mellow—he's one of the few people I've met who orders double expressos and then asks for a refill—he retains the good sense to be true to himself without taking that self too seriously.

"I don't think I'm making any huge demands on your intelligence," he says. "I just see things differently."

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MUSICIAN: Spike *would seem to have a lot in common with* King of America*—both produced with T-Bone Burnett, mostly with American musicians and minus the Attractions. But the musical approach here is radical by comparison.*

COSTELLO: On *King of America* the environment was designed by T-Bone: We cast that record together but he made all the suggestions and was like my interpreter for what was needed. There wasn't a tremendous amount of arrangement on that record. The songs were so simple, structurally, that it was pretty easy for those musicians to grab the right kind of feel, the right arrangements. The songs that didn't turn out so well, or didn't even make the record, were the ones that begged for more sophisticated, slightly fuller, more arranged sounds. So when it came to doing this record, the pre-planning was about 75 percent of it, I would say.

Before this album I did the soundtrack for *The Courier*, and it was great because I didn't have to worry about words or song structures at all. It was like being let off the leash. I could juxtapose instruments that I couldn't get away with doing, or didn't think I could, inside a song. I wouldn't make any claims for it being Nino Rota or anything, but when he heard the soundtrack T-Bone said to me, "This is the way you should do your album, with the same freedom of sounds. *America* was very strict, very formal; this should be the complete opposite, or else it'll just be like, 'Oh, here are the styles he didn't do on *King of America*.'" It'd still be bound by its genre. So that was a good piece of advice. He said, "Let's bring on [engineer and co-producer] Kevin Killen, because he's the guy who'll make sense of the way you work." And when we talked about sounds

"I got the impression Columbia thought I was a con man. Like I had a ready-made blueprint to sell millions and just wouldn't make that record."

he said, "You should take that responsibility, otherwise it'll be the way I hear your songs, not the way you hear them." So that was T-Bone's role on this record, more like a devil's advocate or provocateur, you know?

MUSICIAN: *Maybe you should have given him a "philosopher" credit.*

COSTELLO: Yeah, a guru! We went about drawing lists of people we might get. On this record there were no "live" tracking sessions, so it didn't make any difference whether the people could get on with each other. It was more like that thing you'd do when you were a kid, making your ideal baseball team out of all the famous players.

One of the good things about working instrument by instrument, although it's very slow, is you record someone and then the next person has to react to that. I could see the whole picture; I was like the guy with the box off the jigsaw. I wasn't being Stanislavski or anything, I wasn't trying to be weird. But sometimes happy accidents came out of that "backwards" way of recording.

I suppose the oddest part of the recording was in New Orleans, because we had the Dirty Dozen Brass Band playing these parts with just drum patterns and maybe an acoustic guitar marking out the changes and Allen Toussaint playing piano. Very bare arrangements. But when we took them to L.A. we found we didn't really want to put much more on those tracks. On "Deep Dark Truthful Mirror," we certainly intended to have a more conventional soul-band sound—but it didn't seem right. Once Toussaint's piano part was on, he's got such tremendous personality, what was the point? No bass could complement that. So the process of doing the record backwards uncomplicated it for me. It made it easier to hear the song.

MUSICIAN: *And at the same time gave you the chance to expand your musical vocabulary?*

COSTELLO: I think this record *is* more musical. *Blood and Chocolate* was an all-out, raving, shouting-my-head-off record. If you sang it gently, a lot of those songs wouldn't make sense. On this record I had to relearn how I would sing the songs after we'd put the backgrounds in. If I started screaming and shouting they didn't always sound right, and I had to say, "No, it's a rock 'n' roll song, but it doesn't have to be a raucous vocal. It can be a bit sneaky."

MUSICIAN: *Can you give an example?*

COSTELLO: When I sing "Pads, Paws and Claws" on acoustic guitar it comes out like a rockabilly song. But after we'd done all that sort of backwards rockabilly arrangement, the funny beat and everything, it needed a more poppy way of singing to bring the words out. There was a lot of eccentric playing going on already; it didn't need pumping up. Although if you listen, in the midst of all the beats being played backwards and the funny atonals on guitar by Marc Ribot, the song doesn't really change its structure.

That was one of the songs I wrote with Paul McCartney, you know. He was like, "We've got two verses, now we need a

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bridge!" He really writes like that, he really thinks about telling the story—that it's all very good to have a good hook line but maybe you need to explain what it means. I got an education in that, about being a bit more disciplined about these things. I always take for granted that people are going to understand everything I'm saying. Though he's not pedantic. He'll also go, "I like that," when you suddenly throw in something for effect that might not otherwise seem to make sense.

MUSICIAN: *How did you two begin working together?*

COSTELLO: I just got a call, and then we went to a meeting to talk about it. I thought it best to come along prepared, so I brought along these half-finished things, to work on as sort of an exercise, to get to know the technique of each other's work. Those are the two songs we're co-credited with on this album, perhaps not the most vivid examples of our work together. After that we wrote a bunch of songs that were more a proper collaboration.

MUSICIAN: *Will those show up on his record?*

COSTELLO: Hopefully—the ones he thinks are most appropriate to him. I'd never actually written a bunch of songs with anyone before, and what happens is, whoever has a bit more energy that day or a quicker grasp of where a song heads next, it has that person's stamp, even though you work together. So some of the songs have a bit more of me than maybe they should, since we were writing them for his record. Maybe they'll be the ones left off his record and then I'll have a crack at them. We'll just have to see.

MUSICIAN: *Did you have preconceptions about working with him?*

COSTELLO: You can't deny the baggage, but you try not to let it affect you. Occasionally you look up and go, "Oh my God, that's Paul McCartney!" He's probably one of the most famous people in the world, and I'm exactly the right age to have been a fan. Then there's a certain degree of professional pride, so you're trying to put your point over and justify being asked. Not because he's such a flawless songwriter, but because I like his stuff and I want him to write the best songs—particularly if I'm involved in writing them! But it didn't get in the way much.

When you've been at the center of a hurricane like they were, I think it's inevitable that the face he gives to the public—in interviews, anyway—is a bit more defensive than other people who haven't been through so much. Writing one on one, there wasn't that distance or defensiveness. You don't lay your soul out every day—who does? But he'd go, "Oh fuck off, you can't say that," and I'd do the same thing, have a bit of humor and find a way that works for you to work together. Two people writing is not going to be as personally revelatory or confessional as one, but I don't think that's ever been a big part of what he does. He's a really good melody writer, has a fantastic voice, plays great bass and he can put together some good records.

MUSICIAN: *How did you manage to get McCartney and Roger McGuinn to play on the same song ["This Town"]?*

COSTELLO: By sheer chance, while we were recording in New Orleans McGuinn was there and I was introduced to him. I was horribly drunk at the time, and I thought I'd made a complete ass of myself. But later, we rang him up and he was great. All we had was a drum machine on the track and it was like, "Roger, fill this out." But what you don't realize is that his guitar is like eight feet tall. When it came to find what other instruments went with it, even a live drummer, it didn't work. We ended up using this kind of powered-down drum machine and then taking out one beat and really turning it backwards in order to live with McGuinn's guitar. 'Cause it's so enormous, it was hard for anything to coexist with it.

McCartney went on the song last. I'd asked him specifically to use the Rickenbacker, because they don't have a tremendous amount of bass on them, but you can make them operate in a slightly higher frequency; therefore you can play a lot more notes and skip around the beat more, and part of his style is flipping between playing a counterpoint and playing a groove. He's a pretty good intuitive musician. He just finds the spot where he should play.

I don't think they'd ever been on a record together before. So I gave myself as Declan McManus in the credits on that one. We were The Three Macs.

MUSICIAN: *As one who doesn't claim a lot of technical musical expertise, was it difficult to get your ideas across to some of the studio veterans who played on* Spike*?*

COSTELLO: I don't know if they're just being polite, but I never seem to have that much problem getting my ideas over. When people start talking about particular intervals, using musical terminology, I might get a little lost. But it's a bit like—have you ever discovered you speak a foreign language when you're drunk? You absorb more over the years than you really admit to knowing when you're being self-conscious—terms I wouldn't use myself 'cause they know I can't write it and it would sound pretentious. It's funny to be illiterate in that respect.

"I'm quite anti-English. Always have been."

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MUSICIAN: *Especially as your songs so often have relatively sophisticated structures...*

COSTELLO: But it's just what I hear in my head. I wanted it to sound like that, so I got these players to play it! And obviously you experiment a bit. The Dirty Dozen, for instance, were great. I'd met them in Sweet Basil in the Village. I'd taken my mother to New York and we ended up going there for a late show and staying for two sets, 'cause she really liked them. The Dirty Dozen kind of incorporate the history of jazz, put their slant on it and make it their own.

"There's the curse of Costello to consider when you look at Linda Ronstadt. One moment she was the highest-selling female singer in America. The next thing she's in opera. Record four of my songs—that's enough to finish anybody's career! Now she's singing Mexican songs—she knows I can't write in Spanish."

I wondered what on earth they would make of our collaboration. In the studio I hit things on the piano, or sang parts I wanted to hear. And they tolerated my kind of naïveté or ignorance about things. I'm not claiming any great innovation here, this was just my way of working with horn players. (Sometimes horn players in England can be a bit snobbish about people that don't read.) Their intonation makes it much easier to arrange for them, because they can make quite simple voicings sound really rich. On "Deep Dark Truthful Mirror" they'll play their slurs and it doesn't sound like gimmickry, but what they should do. The last thing I wanted, particularly in New Orleans, was to go there and put on my New Orleans coat, you know? I didn't want them to play any clichés, as they identified them. I think what we did there was balanced between stuff that sounded like it belonged in New Orleans and stuff where we were stretching them as much as they were stretching me. So in that way we didn't get into this phony thing of trying on other people's shoes.

MUSICIAN: *I'd imagine you were drawn to Marc Ribot's guitar and Michael Blair's percussion from their music with Tom Waits.*

COSTELLO: Mostly from Waits, yeah. I saw Marc give the best guitar-playing performance I'd ever seen *anybody* give a couple of years ago at the Folies Bergère, when Tom was playing Europe. It was the most unbelievable sort of shadow-boxing act, where he got within this close to upstaging—well, not upstaging, there's no such thing as upstaging Tom Waits—but stepping over him, which no supporting player should ever do. And it pushed Tom to the limits of his performance. It's the only time I've ever seen them do that. It was like a high-wire act. And that was the thing that impressed me, that if I wanted to go in this direction, that he was the man to have.

Michael was sort of the original band member, as it were. We were going to track with T-Bone Wolk on bass, but the Hall & Oates record ran over and he had to pull out. And that accident meant that we were free to go wild with the idea of leaving instruments off. And Michael, therefore, because he had no bass player to track with, got even more into this kind of "landscape gardening" that he does with his pots and pans, and making it impossible for the next player to play any sort of stock part. Because there was no space to play it in.

There's a lot of humor in the way Michael plays, and I wanted to bring that out, because there's a lot of humor in these songs. I'm sort of undone by the image of the first couple of records. There's humor in them as well, but people didn't choose to see it at the time, because it wasn't with the times to be funny. Everything was intense. And I played up to that, reinforced it with things I said and did—and now I'm paying for it. [*laughter*] Now I run onstage in a gorilla suit and people still won't believe it's me doing it.

MUSICIAN: *To me it feels like* Imperial Bedroom *climaxed one career, and with* King of America *and* Spike *you're constructing a new one.*

COSTELLO: I'm not really bothered with being a nostalgia act. I've never been afraid of saying "fuck everything else that I've done before." The good thing is that I don't feel there's anything to be embarrassed about. I've made some bad tracks, a couple of albums that didn't quite come out the way I expected, and one of them, *Goodbye Cruel World*, is just a bad record. But nothing I'm absolutely ashamed of yet, which isn't bad for 12 years. If I want to pull a song out from 10 years ago, there's always one I can honestly put my hand on my heart and say, "I don't feel foolish singing this." There are advantages to having a career. You do get a repertoire—in lieu of a pension or a health plan.

MUSICIAN: *Though you'll probably always get concert requests for "Alison."*

COSTELLO: I like singing that song. It created a good mood, and it's a challenge to keep singing a song like that. There was a time when I got very rebellious about it, and by our third tour of America I told the public, "I won't sing that song anymore." And then I went back on it after a couple of years and started singing different versions. In 20 years' time people might still get me to sing it.

I don't have that many hits. Though my morbid dread is getting lumbered with that crass track that suddenly becomes popular and you have to play it forever more.

MUSICIAN: *You shouldn't have that problem with* Spike. *There aren't any crass tracks and there probably aren't any hits.*

COSTELLO: The one thing I was determined not to do on this album was make the patronizing pop single that somehow made everything else "acceptable." I wasn't gonna have the light-hearted, throwaway rock 'n' roll song. I just really don't want to do that anymore. It's not like these songs are so "important," but this is what I took my time to write about. There's no point leaving one of them off because it might depress people. If they want a nice easy ride and cheerful music, there's plenty of other records in the racks.

MUSICIAN: *Several of these songs, like "Let Him Dangle" and "Tramp the Dirt Down," seem to have specific political contexts.*

COSTELLO: Well, the last thing I want this record perceived as, apart from "eclectic," is "political." 'Cause that's a write-off as well, isn't it? That's the lazy way, you know? *Chalkmark in a Rainstorm* is a "political" record, *Lawyers in Love* is a "political" record. And there's good stuff in those records.

MUSICIAN: *Perhaps that's painting it with too broad a brush.*

COSTELLO: I think it's too narrow a brush. I don't see a subject called politics, it's just right and wrong and what happens in life, what you're moved to write about. Whether it has any purpose beyond that is down to the listener, isn't it? I did my job, and beyond that I can't demand that it's accepted a certain way or has some effect. "Let Him Dangle" is probably the last song to

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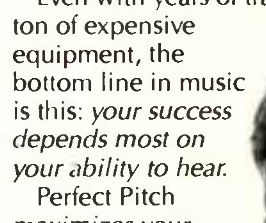

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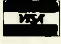
☐ Please charge my 

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convince people of an argument. They'll say, "If that weirdo's saying it, then we should definitely bring *back* hanging. He's the first one we should hang!" [*laughter*]

It seems like government and authority always have the best arguments. They are the ones who appear clear and reasonable. They have a way of taking the heat out of everything. You only have to listen to Margaret Thatcher speak; she's terribly reasonable. The English people like her because she reminds them of some schoolteacher that you were afraid of, but also respected. And I don't have that English kind of respect in me, fortunately. It wasn't put in me as a kid. And along with a lot of other people, I can't stand her. I find her ridiculous and more than a little frightening. But it's very easy to make a totem out of her, as well.

So yes, there should be arguments to make and there will always be clearheaded people to argue the moral case. There will be bishops to argue against hanging and bishops to argue for hanging. But there should be songs to sing, as well. It's not like it's going to change a damn thing, but it gets it out of your head to say it. It stops you from kicking in the TV and maybe it does the same for somebody else. And that's the justification.

MUSICIAN: *Maybe this is reading too much into it, but it strikes me that the themes and instrumentation of songs like "Tramp the Dirt Down" and "Any King's Shilling," and your and Cait's moving to Ireland, are all part of the same impulse, embracing your Irishness, so to speak. Do you agree?*

COSTELLO: I think it's being more overtly anti-English than pro-Irish! I am quite anti-English, always have been, and it sounds paradoxical because—I am English. I was born here and I'm a third generation removed from Ireland and I don't have any of that "old sod" bullshit mentality. I really hate that

Amsterdam 1977

The Annotated SPIKE

By Declan McManus

"This Town": I always wanted this to be the opening track, but it was like a three-legged chair for a while. We probably had more trouble with this song than any other. The intro was the last thing we put together; it was edited from other phrases in the song, at T-Bone's instigation. That ended up being like an overture, and suddenly it was back to being the opening track.

I was quite happy because it has the bit about the nightclub guy at the front of the song. It wasn't making a big-deal statement, but I do think the entrepreneur is the scourge of English and Irish and certainly Australian society. The song won't ring true in America, though, 'cause the battle there was lost a long time ago. It's almost become a virtue and you've got your entrepreneurs who are like, "lovable eccentrics." Like Donald Trump, or Cal Worthington.

"Baby Plays Around": Cait wrote this one. I went to the store to buy a paper and when I came back she had sung it all into a tape recorder. I'm really conscious of people making the decision of whether they like a song in the first eight bars. People have become so self-conscious about any sort of jazz idiom creeping through the changes that they immediately assume a certain pose. It's sad, because it makes it impossible to use some instruments in certain contexts. It's like the "Jazz Police," that Leonard Cohen song—they come in and haul you off! So instrumentally I really wanted to keep that song out of the lounge. I did it with just an acoustic guitar and Hammond bass pedals.

"God's Comic": When I was a kid there were still a few comedians who had survived the demise of the music hall and made it to TV. One familiar act was the drunk act. I wanted to make "God's Comic" that character, and then I thought, a drunk priest would be even more despicable. And when he goes to heaven God has his head in his hands over what we've made of this world. There aren't too many other songs that say what God said, literally. When Randy Newman wrote "God's Song," that was pretty shocking, so you have to give him credit for that. But I don't think that stops you from having another God in another song. I'm not saying mine is the only God up there, if there's one at all.

"Coal Train Robberies": I read a news item about people robbing coal trains—something you'd expect to hear about in Paraguay, and it was happening in South Wales! Of course there's an obvious song to write about that: "Oh the poor downtrodden people, they have to steal

World Radio History

London 1989

kind of sentimentality. It's bogus.

I don't feel any kind of nationality, to be honest. I haven't felt at ease with "the English way" since England won the World Cup in 1966. I like football, and one of the guys played in Liverpool with my team. And I thought, "Great, we won!" That's the last time I remember being proud of being English. Now I hate it.

I've never been part of any strong community, never lived anywhere where there was that feeling, based around a school or a church. Maybe a little bit, but not enough to define that sort of clan identity a lot of people take through life. I just never fit in here. The whole empire and the Queen bit, it rolls me up the wrong way. There's an almost masochistic instinct in English people. My grandmother used to refer to the "higher-ups"; she literally believed the people she worked for were better than her. It seemed incredible to me. I couldn't persuade her otherwise...

MUSICIAN: *So what inspired you to move to Ireland?*

COSTELLO: Well, I didn't feel drawn by some sort of genetic magnet. We just like the place where the house is. And I don't want to live here anymore. I don't like the attitude.

It hasn't changed my friends. I still like people for the reasons I like them. There are still certain places I like to be in this country. And I don't think Ireland is like the Garden of Eden. I would say Ireland has one of the worst entrepreneurial attitudes. The whole bloody government's on the take.

So it's not their sensibility. It's not the climate; it's not the drinking water. It's just—to be there. We lucked into a place that's nice to live and we've been living in this pokey flat for three years and we want somewhere where we can find that book that you want to read. There comes a point where there

their coal." But I'm never sorry to have a song that maybe puzzles people for a while. And I wasn't convinced about taking on the voice of the coal thief that's in the first verse and extending it for three verses. It wasn't credible. So I thought I'd just contrast it with some of the more noble efforts done in the name of justice inside my business. And compare it to them having their little moment.

The song isn't really effective in saying how contemptuous I sometimes feel for these so-called noble efforts. I do things for charity, but there's a time when it just becomes off-loading your responsibility. "We've dealt with world hunger, we killed the abuses of human rights." And it just isn't true, it's like taking an aspirin for a bad conscience. I'm blaming myself as well. But it's an argument we certainly can't fit into a three-minute song. So I thought I'd just put the contradictions in and let people sort for themselves.

"Tramp the Dirt Down": A friend of mine was responsible for me writing the extended verse in the middle. He said, "You're not including enough in, you can push it even further." It's nice to have people who will say that. You start thinking, technically the song is too long. But like "Satellite," it's not an easy thing to sing about and it's going to take six minutes. What I liked when it was finished was the unreasonable anger. It wasn't balanced, it wasn't considered. You can't blame the government for somebody murdering his son. But to him, it might seem like their fault, 'cause he was placed in an intolerable situation. So he murdered the very thing he loved. I thought it needed that little bit of madness. Like that Clash song "White Riot." That's not exactly a balanced argument either, but it makes a point.

"Any King's Shilling": My grandfather was a first-generation immigrant from Ireland and when his father was murdered—that's another story—he ended up in an orphanage and then the army. He was a trumpet player, a bandsman. He got badly wounded in the First World War and then got stationed in Dublin, ironically. His story was, just before [the Irish uprising of] '16, his friends warned him to keep out of the way. This could have been embellishing, but it *is* a great story. I'm sure it still happens today, certainly in Belfast. I thought the music should sound a little stiff-collared. The harp is appropriate, it gives it formality and something archaic. And the pipe solo is stirring, almost a marching effect.

"Chewing Gum": I was at an airport and there were these two young Oriental girls with short skirts and these two enormous Middle Eastern guys, and I thought, this is an unlikely pairing. One of the girls literally had something in her ear that was probably cotton but looked like chewing gum, and I had this vile fantasy: She's putting it in her ears so she doesn't have to listen to all the shit this guy's telling her. So the story turned into a guy and his mail-order bride and he never gives her anything. Then I saw this TV program about literacy programs in certain parts of the world where one faction argued that they were only being taught words that made sense in terms of the other's propaganda, to manipulate them. I thought, "God, what a warped thought." I reduced it to this personal thing where the guy only tells her the words he wants to hear back.

By the way, do you recognize the second horn riff the Dirty Dozen plays in that song? It's a little fragment of "Koko," really slowed down. Kind of turning jazz snobbery back on itself.

continued on page 76

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are other things than fighting the good fight—where you just say, you only get one life.

MUSICIAN: *If you say you never felt like part of a community...*

COSTELLO: I don't mean like "I knew I was different as a kid." But my parents were different. My friends always thought my folks were great, because they were hip to the music and had more contemporary attitudes. They were like liberal socialists. My mother used to sell records, from the '50s through the '60s, and my Dad was a trumpet player who was very into the modern jazz and bop eras, before he became a dance-band singer. And it seemed like a glamorous thing, to have your Dad on the TV or radio every Friday and he makes the odd record and Mom buys records and I got loads of records off my Dad because he had to learn the songs of the day and so there were records going in the house all the time. And they liked other kinds of music. My Dad liked Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie and Irish music and Paraguayan music, all that stuff.

In the '50s, it seemed like by the time you got to be 17 everybody looked like they were 35. People had great uniformity about the way they thought. Simple ideas we take for granted now were quite unthinkable just a short time ago. And I think it's sort of coming back 'round again that way. When you speak to younger people they don't seem to know what they want. They're really not being given much choice.

I was told right before I took my last exam in school, if you don't get these you're really fucked. 'Cause you're too old for apprenticeships. That was the alternative—or you go to the university and cling to the coattails of some other way of life. Where I lived was really on the edge; my parents' background was working-class, particularly my mom's, but we lived a sort of middle-class life. Which by sociological definition now means a certain income, but really came down to whether you had newspapers or books in the house. Incredible as it might sound now, the difference in class 25 years ago wasn't how much you earned as whether you made money by working or by thinking.

I remember when I first went to work I had a drone job at some computer place

"I'm sort of undone by the image of the first couple of records. People didn't choose to see the humor—and I reinforced that with things I said and did. Now I'm paying for it. Now I run onstage in a gorilla suit and people won't believe it's me."

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for £20 a week. And then I went to work in a bank so I wouldn't have to work shifts anymore, and I took a drop in pay to £16 a week. I'd convinced myself that my inability to get qualifications to get to the university was the same thing as not wanting to go. I had no idea how I was going to do what I wanted to do. I wanted to play music but it was all very vague....

MUSICIAN: *Even though your Dad was a musician?*

COSTELLO: 'Cause that was like, a *job*. If Dad had been a bank manager I probably would never have wanted to be a bank manager. And so it took me an awfully long time to make the connection between the music that I liked when I was quite young, as a fan, beat music, and when I first started playing. I couldn't identify it as the same occupation. Maybe because in between was that crucial time when rock 'n' roll turned into "art." And I was sucked into that "rock 'n' roll is art" stuff like everyone else—when we all got serious and put on long expressions to look for the meaning of this song. So when it came to just playing guitars in bands, when I was about 18, it never occurred to me that this was the same thing the Beatles had done in Hamburg.

All I could think about was getting a band that could play in a pub. Then I met Nick Lowe in a pub, in Liverpool—actually it was the Cavern, funnily enough. I bought him a drink and told him, "I've got your records," just like a fan. It never occurred to me there might be more in it, 'cause they [Brinsley Schwarz] didn't seem to be doing terribly well. I mean, I had to buy him a drink. But the music was good fun; it connected with a lot of stuff I'd liked before but had seemed impossible to make a living from. The music I'd liked as a pop fan I thought just came out of the air; I never imagined anybody in the studio making it. I listen to old records now and I hear the drums, you know? Back then you just heard the record.

I'm just a big record fan, really. Though I think I've reached the point where I'm not looking for any more. Kind of depressing when you get to the end of it, like getting the final stamp in your collection. But then you turn back to the first page and realize that, in the time that's gone between, it sounds completely different. Records that I thought were indispensable 10 years ago—please don't ask me which ones—sound different. While others sound a lot better to me.

MUSICIAN: *Which ones sound better?*

COSTELLO: Richard Hell and the Voidoids. [*laughs*] I think their record is great. I really do. It's an overlooked record. But that's the only one I can think of. All the rest you can throw in

World Radio History

the bin. [*laughter*] We're like Victorian people and their libraries. How the hell did they read them all?

MUSICIAN: *But I think you've tried harder than most to build bridges between musical communities. Singing "My Funny Valentine" in the middle of the punk explosion, or making "Almost Blue."*

COSTELLO: It's a selfish thing. You just enjoy it if there is a challenge involved or you really are arrogant enough to think you can do it. I remember being completely astounded when Jake [Riviera, Elvis's manager] told me George Jones was going to do my song ["Stranger in the House"]. And then that he wanted me to sing on it. Today, being completely cynical about it, somebody on the production side, not George, probably figured, 'This'll open it up for some people who wouldn't otherwise buy his record.' Well, it's a fair trade. I don't mind that at all. It used to be perfectly acceptable for musicians to get together without being naturally compatible. Like Sinatra and Laurindo Almeida, just because he liked that music.

I didn't imagine that recording with George Jones would suddenly make me Country Entertainer of the Year. But I didn't mind if it helped me get into Nashville a bit more. Because I was curious about it. I didn't know its limitations.

MUSICIAN: *Are you disappointed that the country songs you've written haven't had more acceptance there?*

COSTELLO: Before I went to Nashville I might have been more idealistic that good songs just got recorded. We got a fairly good ride, but there's no way you're gonna break into that without a lot of easing yourself in, and I don't have the time for it. It's a full-time occupation, though there are exceptions, like John Hiatt.

MUSICIAN: *I'd think a song like "Shoes Without Heels"...*

COSTELLO: I played that to Ricky Skaggs and he just looked at it. He couldn't hear it. It's my voice, I think.

MUSICIAN: *Maybe if someone else sang your songs...*

COSTELLO: Yeah, if someone covered my songs then they'd get covered! [*laughter*] But still, Johnny Cash recorded "The Big Light." That's pretty good, isn't it? I'd trade Johnny Cash any day for a half dozen Reba McIntyre covers, though Reba's would probably pay for some new curtains. Reba, if you're listening, nothing against you recording a *whole album* of my songs. But I'm not much of a song-and-dance man in that respect. Which is probably why I was so snotty about Linda Ronstadt's covers. Because I thought it was more like they liked the idea of recording my songs better than they liked the songs. Which is still an ungracious thing to say. I was just being punky and horrible.

Of course there's the curse of Costello to consider when you look at Linda. One moment she was the biggest-selling female singer in America. The next thing she's in opera. Record four of my songs—that's enough to finish anybody's career! Now she's singing Mexican songs; she knows I can't write in Spanish.

There are a number of artists that have really gone badly since they've recorded my songs. Dave Edmunds, never heard of again...

MUSICIAN: *Have you ever held back a song because it felt too revealing about yourself?*

COSTELLO: I don't think I ever held a song back because I thought it was too honest. I don't really think I'm doing such important work, like "Oh, that'll stun the world, if I say that." I have no sense of an audience out there waiting. I just put it out, and I'm always surprised when people come up to me in the street and say something nice.

MUSICIAN: *How about a song like "I Want You," which is so emotionally naked, and people will naturally assume you were singing it to Cait?*

COSTELLO: But the whole impulse to assume that is a product of *Plastic Ono Band*. Certain records are like landmarks because they change the way people think about music. I don't think *Sgt. Pepper* is the best record the Beatles ever made, but it did change the way people looked at albums: The stuff became "art" from then on. And *Plastic Ono Band* and a few other records in the early '70s, like Joni Mitchell's, defined the notion that songwriting was confessional. Nobody thought Cole Porter was singing "Night and Day" for a particular person. Now people look for that. But it's not my responsibility. And it doesn't illuminate the song more, either. The only difference is if I go, "No, the song isn't about Francis of Assisi. It's about the dustman." But I'm not looking to say anything.

MUSICIAN: *So do you subscribe to the idea that a song can truthfully mean opposite things to different people?*

COSTELLO: I love that. And that's one of the advantages of using certain types of lyric writing, where it's more open to interpret. Though after a while it's like a card trick, it doesn't really say anything and it's ultimately unsatisfying. You find it out onstage when you try to invest these songs with emotion

"I remember being completely astounded when George Jones did 'Stranger in the House.' Today, being completely cynical about it, somebody on the production side probably figured, 'This'll open it up for some people who wouldn't otherwise buy a George Jones record.'"

ROBERT MATHEU/RETNA

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and you can't remember what the emotion is.

MUSICIAN: *It does seem as if your canvas has grown broader over the years. Your early albums have an obsessive quality, picking apart relationships between men and women.*

COSTELLO: It didn't seem obsessive at the time and I still don't think it is. I think it's perfectly natural for anybody my age, suddenly let off the leash like that. If there was anything self-conscious about the way I wrote it was the idea to grab hold of a person, to not make a song wishy-washy. In other words, an inspiration from the punk thing. But I never thought, "Well, here's a subject." I just wrote songs and I was quite shocked when people turned around and said, "He's a misogynist!" No, I'm not! I love women! Honestly. Take my word.

MUSICIAN: *Your last album with the Attractions,* Blood and Chocolate, *had a lot more in common with your early records than with either* Spike *or* King of America. *How did that come about?*

COSTELLO: The Attractions had come out with me to California for *King of America*, and the sessions didn't spark that well. There seemed to be too much at stake or not enough; it was just unpleasant. I don't think I handled it with tremendous grace, but some other people didn't, as well. When I finished it up I did another solo tour. And I was coming up with the sort of songs you slap on the table and sing. They weren't strongly held feelings, they were just raving songs. And we were on a few raving times then too. I really just wanted to do an EP, and I thought, "Well, I don't want everything to fall apart over the previous bad feeling. So let's do something of what we *do.*"

Meanwhile, between the way we conducted our business and the way I made records, I think we alienated a lot of people in the middle-to-upper levels at Columbia. I got that feeling—they never told us *anything*, but I got the impression they thought I was a con man. Like I had a ready-made blueprint to sell millions, and just wouldn't make that record. It was like, I would go to Nashville, I would record with an orchestra, I'd do anything but make the record they wanted me to make. But they never told me what that record was except that I knew it had to do with being aggressive and lots of these glasses and red shoes with pointy toes, sort of a punk-band attitude but, "Let's have some tunes."

Anyway, we ended up with a bunch of songs that were all pretty much the same—sort of an older, grumpier version of

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"SATELLITE": I do imagine a time of interactive TV, and on this I imagined a cross between a photo booth and a peep show. She walks on the set but the whole thing has been contrived to be like passive porno on her part. And the guy is leering over it, but he's on TV as well, watched by people who don't even have the courage of that lust. I do think the satellite is kind of like a new deity. It's ironic that it's up in the sky like the ancient gods. But I didn't want to dwell on that 'cause it starts to sound like Sun Ra or something.

I wrote this and "God's Comic" on my way to Greenland, and maybe that's why they're more like fantasies. It was a tricky song to do. I wanted it to have a real dreamy sound, a Burt Bacharach-type arrangement. Burt happened to be in the studio next to me and I had him come in and listen to it. I don't know what he made of the content but he's a really nice man. He looks like a Kennedy but he's really more of a jazz cat, like Gil Evans. Definitely a "cat."

"STALIN MALONE": This was first recorded with three horns and the Attractions rhythm section; it sounded a lot different from the way the Dirty Dozen play it. I had the idea of adding a recitation, but it was too crowded and the mood of the music didn't necessarily support the lyrics. I figured, "Well, I've never done an instrumental on a record." That conjures one mood and then you can read the words [printed on the liner sleeve] for another. It's like having two songs with the same title.

"MISS MACBETH": It was inspired by somebody that used to terrorize me where I lived, a horrible old woman that everyone thought was a witch because she looked like one. I thought, "What if she was? Wouldn't that be great?" It's always in Hollywood films that people who suffer have great perseverance. What they don't say is that some of them are real bastards. [*laughs*] So this is like, a dark story. But it is supposed to be funny.

"VERONICA": I didn't want to write a song like [Paul Simon's] "Old Friends"—the old people and their funny minds. It's more about a *state* of mind. I like to think that the mind is kind of like the soul, and it retreats somewhere that science doesn't know about as the body dilapidates. It was sparked by going to see my grandmother the last few years of her life when she was rambling. And the times she was happy or least distressed was when she was bouncing back and forward from the '30s to the '20s to the '50s. Her conversation made no sense and I thought, "Well, maybe that's all there is."

I wanted it to be joyful-sounding, but with some sort of defiance. Because there's a strange sort of defiance in old people when they're physically pathetic. A strange way about them. They'll suddenly look at you and they'll be looking right into you. And then you look back and they won't be there at all. I think that's quite comforting.

"PADS, PAWS AND CLAWS": It's just a story about some drunk guy who doesn't know what good stuff he's got. That's one where the original idea of fracturing the structure of the songs really worked to an advantage.

"LET HIM DANGLE": It's a story that's almost like folklore in England. I knew it when I was a kid. I wrote the song from one newspaper article, an interview with Bentley's [the man hung for murder] sister who's still campaigning to get a pardon or some recognition that a mistake was made. The only line I'm troubled by is the one about Sydney Miles' [the victim] wife saying she didn't want Bentley hanged. That was Bentley's sister's interpretation of her silence. Someone could pull that apart. But that isn't the main thrust of the song.

"DEEP DARK TRUTHFUL MIRROR": Allen Toussaint has the most complete technique as a pianist I've ever seen, and I've worked with a pretty good pianist for 10 years. His touch was elegant. And he was a gentleman, and I mean that as the highest compliment. Few people carry that with any sense of bearing. I don't know what he thought of this song. It's about a form of madness.

"LAST BOAT LEAVING": This was written for *The Courier*, but they changed the ending of the film and the song contradicted the new ending. They dropped the song and kept the tune as an instrumental. But when you do commissioned stuff like that, you often end up writing the song for yourself. The line about "They took his pride, they took his voice"—even though I have this enormous luxury compared to people who can't express their feelings to those close to them, I can broadcast to the world—sometimes you want more. When you measure what you do against the gravity of what you're writing about, a little song isn't really the ticket.

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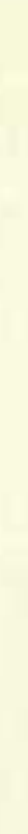

"I had some songs for this record I thought could've been done with the Attractions, but at least one member said, 'We do the whole record or not at all.' I said, 'Well, don't hold your breath.'"

This Year's Model. It was actually done more primitively than that. We didn't use any headphones and we recorded it in Olympic Studios—where the Stones did "Have You Seen Your Mother Baby?" We were really going for that sound, like you're trying to hear what's going on in the background but you can't because some idiot's put a big overdub in the front.

MUSICIAN: *"Tokyo Storm Warning" even sounds like "Have You Seen Your Mother."*

COSTELLO: I think half the album's really inspired playing. And I thought, "Well, this'll be a surprise. It'll be like 'extra time' in sports, we'll hit the winning goal in extra time. We'll finally give Columbia the real Elvis Costello and the Attractions record they want." Because they weren't mightily impressed with *King of America.* It did the same thing as most of the records, got some nice reviews, but that joke had got very old—the guy who gets the good reviews and never sells. And after their bungled attempt to portray *Imperial Bedroom* as some kind of masterpiece, which I found deeply embarrassing, they seemed to have run out of ways of solving this problem that I didn't sell records no matter how good the reviews were. They didn't seem able to sell the strengths of the records individually; they wanted to sell the clichéd Elvis Costello element in it. Which is why I changed my name, to lead them to the thought that there might be another person there.

So when we handed in *Blood and Chocolate* I was quite convinced this would be the one, just by the irony of it. And of course they did what they did with the last two or three records: They buried it. I don't want to get like people who bitch about their record company, but they were pretty useless, really. I think at a quite senior level they were deeply incompetent—not presently because there are obviously new

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people involved—and the people who had any intelligence about music were not given enough power. If they'd paid any attention to Joe McEwen, for instance, then we might have done better. But there were all these people who knew "better" that didn't know anything about what we were doing or who we were. And I do feel that the balance of that company was seriously out of whack between the words "music" and "business" at that point. If you look at the other music they were putting out at that time, it bears it out. And they dropped Johnny Cash! That is really unforgivable. That's like the Museum of Modern Art saying, "Sorry, we've taken down all the Picassos. We didn't think they were any good."

So I was really glad to get away from them, and I don't think they were terribly sorry to see the back of me except for all the money I owe them. For which I don't feel any guilt whatsoever. I think they got quite a lot of good publicity out of all the critical acclaim I got. Between me and Bob Dylan they've done pretty well over the past 30 years.

MUSICIAN: *So what do you think you'll get from Warner Bros. that you didn't get from Columbia?*

COSTELLO: They've asked the right questions and I've tried to establish a more timely relationship with them. You know, there's a world of difference between talking to [Warner Bros. president] Lenny Waronker as an equal and being sort of patted on the head by [CBS CEO] Walter Yetnikoff, which was the attitude I received. And Lenny did produce what I think was one of the best records ever made, *Sail Away.* That gives him a head start with anybody at the senior level at Columbia. 'Cause they've never created anything except trouble, for me.

All labels have to keep afloat, obviously. But they've encouraged me to make the record the way I want it to be. And not balk and say, "Well, it's gonna be difficult to get that over." Or "Where's the hit single?" They seem willing to try to sell the record I made, not the one they wished I'd made—promote the strengths rather than apologize for its oddness. That's the difference, really, and time will tell whether it works out.

MUSICIAN: *Where has all this left the Attractions?*

COSTELLO: I think *Blood and Chocolate* was really good at what it was, and I think we did a good tour, which followed that record and *King of America* coming out fairly close together. We had the two bands and the "Wheel" and it was an attempt to do something different and we played very small theaters so we could do all these things in intimate surroundings, and we lost a ton of money.

We had two types of rock 'n' roll show with the Attractions on that tour: the ones based on the old repertoire and the all-out *Blood and Chocolate* assault. We could play the old songs with slightly more affection than having to pump them up to be as aggressive as they were the first time around. We could play "You Belong to Me" as if it were "The Last Time," not some punk song based on "The Last Time." And we had a lot of fun.

The tour kind of fell apart once we got to Europe, though. The wheel could be hilarious or disastrous depending on who you got and what nationality the audience was. Now we know what it's like to be on a game show: Sometimes it's embarrassing. You get some buffoon in shorts prancing across the stage while you're trying to sing, or some girl who's tripping, taking her clothes off. In Holland a guy wanted to play piano and we just let him, and the audience didn't know any of the songs that he knew and we tried to get them to sing along. Some really fantastic disasters.

In some European languages the humor didn't always translate. Sweden doesn't have game shows. They didn't know what we were parodying. In France all the people were too hip to get onstage. We were saved by a bunch of American tourists who were mad to get onstage and show off. I think it's notable that L.A. was our best night.

In Rome the promoter got this girl who claimed to be a famous celebrity, and when she walked out onstage there was an audible "oh no, not her again!" She was obviously some nauseating, ever-present type, not the queen of Italian pop as we were led to believe. So maybe the European leg was a bit more than we should have done. By the end of it, I felt we'd seen enough of each other for a while.

And a few other things happened which are not really mine to talk about. But before this record started I had some songs that I thought possibly could be done with the Attractions. And I said, "Let's get together and play so we know we're talking the same stuff." And at least one member wouldn't do that. [Since Pete did play on the record, that leaves two.] He said,

DECLAN PLAYS AROUND

When I go into the studio I always drag out all my guitars that have been moldering away in a warehouse like I'm gonna use them all. I've amassed quite a lot of instruments over the years, most of which I can't play for shit. The strange thing is: In the last *Musician* interview I mentioned that I played acoustic guitar on *King of America* because my electric guitar was stolen, which was true. It was a beautiful '54 Telecaster which someone stole from backstage in Melbourne. When I went there last year, a guy came and gave it back to me. He'd stolen it from the guy who stole it from me! I never heard of anyone getting an instrument back. So I figured it would be all over this record. I think I used it once. It sounds different, it's been voodooed. I can't play it anymore.

"So mostly I used a Gretsch Country Club, mid-'60s. I also used a hot-rodded National electric that belonged to T-Bone. On *Blood and Chocolate* I used another Telecaster. I also started playing my old Jazzmaster again, which no one else can play 'cause I have my name in dots on the neck. I used a Rickenbacker on 'This Town,' '60s model—full-scale, six-string—it was kind of a joke for playing with McGuinn. Most of the rest that are brittle-sounding are Jazzmasters, like 'Coal Train Robbery'; the fuller tremolo sound is probably the Gretsch. I used three acoustic guitars: one with a small sound but very nice, I think, on 'Baby Plays Around,' that's a Gibson Century, with a white neck, very unusual-looking. I also use a '30s Martin which doesn't stand up to the road so I don't take it out. I was looking for a new Martin for solo work and got this Santa Cruz guitar; only a few of them are made, with hieroglyphics on the twelfth fret. It's done really well and I imagine it'll improve. I used that on 'Last Boat Leaving.' I played a Hofner bass on a couple of cuts. I need that smaller neck 'cause I haven't got bass player's hands.

"I use a Yamaha keyboard, the top of the home line, a PSR or something. I got my amplifier by accident. I originally used Peavey but they didn't stand up to the road too well. Then I got Music Man, which you can't get anymore. For a backup I got this Roland Chorus amp—instead of a tremolo, which as you can tell I really love, they put a phaser on this amp, which is really hideous. But what I discovered is that, if you turn it up, you get this underwater sound, which I used on 'Pads, Paws and Claws.' After that it became a mania for me. I started putting everything through it, whenever I wanted to mess up some sound, particularly the keyboard. So in the end I wasn't even playing the keyboard so much as the amp.

"I also used Hammond B3 bass pedals and a Steinway acoustic piano. I don't know much about microphones except that Ocean Way Studios had a lot of great old mikes that were really up to scratch. They're like a '50s studio that's been kept up to date without losing any of the great things about it. I'm completely against SSL boards, a total energy sponge. It doesn't follow that all Neve boards are great, but Ocean Way kept to a very high standard. Definitely give that place a plug."

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"We do the whole record or not at all." I said, "Well, don't hold your breath." And that's pretty much where it lays. I don't know that we'll play together, or even what purpose there is to play together, unless we're more positive than that.

MUSICIAN: *Fifteen or 20 years ago, rock 'n' roll was for all purposes the province of the young. Now it appears there's a commercial audience for pop performers even as they enter middle age. Do you think that affords opportunities...*

COSTELLO: Good and bad. In other forms of music it's acceptable that people get old. Because of the way Louis Armstrong's career was shaped in later years, people forget he was a revolutionary when he started. But who would deny him the right to have a lengthy career? I'd much rather that someone finds peace in their work and live a long and happy life even if they don't challenge you, than burn out and die young. There's nothing particularly romantic about that, I don't think.

On the other hand, you have all these people who are currently big, doing tailored versions of what they've done before, like Steve Winwood and Phil Collins and Robert Plant. I don't like the beer commercials—Eric Clapton and all that. It's pretty soulless. I think there is more interesting music to be heard both old and new. I doubt age has anything to do with it. It's just down to marketing a product on the back of an Eric Clapton or Tina Turner because they're recognizable.

I think it makes them look ridiculous. Look, how famous can you be? What's the point? They don't need the money or the exposure. Was it Miller that did a series with young bands, the Del-Fuegos and Long Ryders? See, in a way that was doing a public service: Let's expose a few young groups to an audience that drinks our beer. That makes sense to me. I can understand a young band taking that opportunity. But I really don't see the point of Eric Clapton doing a Michelob commercial.

And Michael Jackson doing Pepsi annoys me immensely, because he's got this sort of "I'm from another planet" image, and "I love chimpanzees and only eat nuts." He's got a massive platform so he could say something really positive because he's got the ear of so many young people all over the world, not just in America. He's one of the five most famous people in the world, maybe. And what's he selling? Bloody sugarwater! It's stupid, it's irresponsible.

MUSICIAN: *It's hard to believe he really drinks the stuff.*

COSTELLO: I'm sure he doesn't. Who'd drink Pepsi Cola? It's disgusting. I think it diminishes him, and whoever advises him is an idiot. Some people, like Eric Clapton, I don't think they've got anything more to add, but Michael Jackson is really some sort of totem to people and he could use it more positively. His one attempt to doing some sort of statement—"Man in the Mirror"—was very vague, very manipulative, using the imagery without really saying anything. It's disappointing. If it were eight years ago you'd put it down to youth. He's 30 now, so he really should wise up.

And Whitney Houston, you get people taking her new record and turning it into a Pepsi commercial before it's really been a hit! 'Cause she's so famous they can guarantee it's gonna be in the charts at the same time the advert comes out. The calculation of it... I don't have any sympathy for the corporation, of course, but I think it really does a bad service to the so-called artist. It's a bit sad 'cause I think she's a terrific singer. But somehow after the first single from that second album, the light went out of her eyes and it hasn't come back yet. She's like 26 or something and she's suddenly turned into this very tired-looking 37-year-old. But then the whole R&B industry seems to be having a fatal attack of show business at

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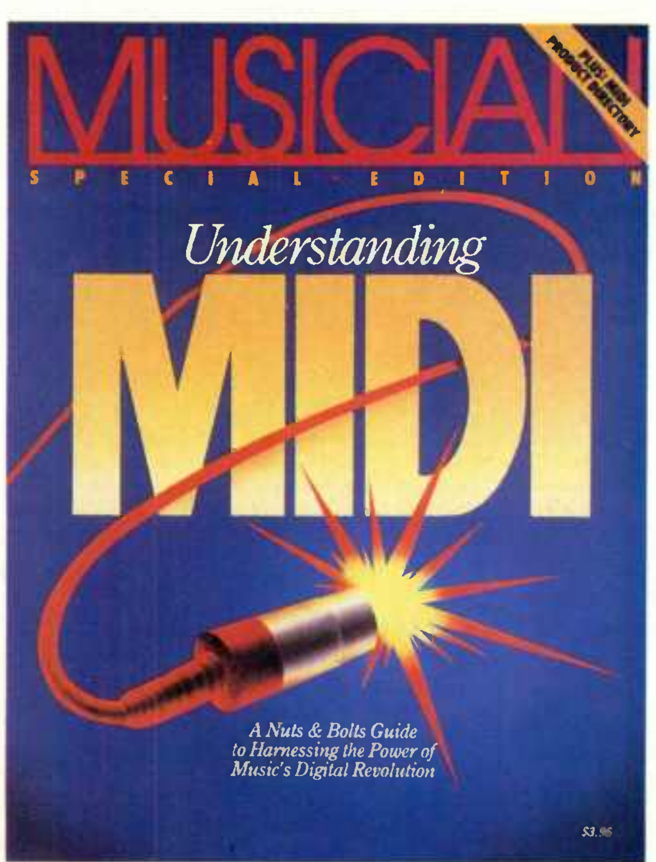

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PRIMITIVE from page 41

(just as on the R-8) and time, i.e., whether notes fall right on the beat, a little ahead of it, way behind it or whatever. Each slider can govern either of these parameters individually, or it can govern both at once. Using the sliders by themselves will let you set a fixed offset for the assigned parameter(s). That is to say, the overall timing of the material assigned to the fader will be pushed forward or backward at a fixed rate, and/or the overall velocity value will be increased or decreased.

But now for the real fun: Up to two algorithms can be assigned to any slider, allowing variable—i.e., algorithmic—changes to take place on the drum sound or instrument being controlled by the slider. There's a total of eight algorithms, which can be assigned to sliders in any combination. (Multiple assignment schemes can be saved in memory.) These algorithms bear some general resemblance to the R-8's, but they have a few advantages over the R-8's. First of all, each of the Feel Factory's algorithms has a full eight steps. Secondly, each can be set up to function in one of three different ways: as a randomization algorithm, as a placement algorithm or as a frequency algorithm.

The randomization algorithm on the Feel Factory is a little different from the Random function on the R-8. To begin with, it isn't totally random—you have to set a series of values, just as you do on, say, the R-8's algorithms. Then, the first MIDI note that comes into the Feel Factory's randomization algorithm will be affected by the first value you've set, the second note by the second value and so forth. In other words, there's no time base involved. The algorithm *is* random in that respect.

In a placement algorithm, the eight values correspond to eighth notes in a 4/4 measure (conventionally counted as "one and two and three and four and"). Crank up the third value, for example, and any notes that fall on the second beat of the measure will get their velocity goosed and/or get slipped a little ahead in time, depending on which parameters you've assigned.

Finally we come to the frequency algorithm. This one instructs the Feel Factory to discriminate among note values and treat each one differently. In other words, each of the eight values in this algorithm corresponds to a different note value— whole note, half note, quarter note, etc. If you set a high number for the value that corresponds to quarter notes, for example, and leave every other value at zero, then every quarter note that plays will get bumped up by the value you've set, and all other notes will remain unaffected.

You don't have to be Stephen W. Hawking, then, to figure out that, with eight algorithms, two parameters and up to eight channels of MIDI control, a person could arrive at an almost infinite series of groove combinations. But the story doesn't end with hardware devices like the Feel Factory and R-8. Let's not forget that there are also lots of algorithmic composition software programs out there just bursting with Artificial Intelligence. There are even regular old sequencer/scoring programs—like C-Labs's Notator, for instance—with some A.I. wit. And even if you don't need Artificial Intelligence to write music, you can always use it to cop a feel or two.

Like MIDI sequencers, most algorithmic composition programs give you a number of tracks—four, six, eight, whatever. The principal way of using the software is to assign a different MIDI instrument and channel to each track and then have Artificial Intelligence control the pitch and rhythmic value (half note, quarter note, etc.) of each instrument,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 97

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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.)
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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 comprised 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.
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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.

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A PRIMER IN ORNITHOLOGY

CHARLIE PARKER

The Complete Savoy Sessions
(Savoy/Muse)
Bird—The Complete Charlie Parker on Verve
(Verve)

Subject One: At least for me, there was always an assumption that the century would keep on going indefinitely, and that the musical greats—Armstrong, Ellington, etc.—of another era would maintain their greatness, but would have their equivalents in my generation. As the century grinds to a halt, it's getting clearer that the black American culture spawned in the '20s, which not only included Armstrong, Ellington, Fats Waller, Butterbeans and Susie, Bojangles Robinson, and Bessie Smith, but Zora Neale Hurston and Countee Cullen as well, was the sort of ground-breaking that won't be equaled.

Subject Two: One benefit an overview of the century also allows is an understanding of individual greatness, and in that manner Charlie Parker stands out even more as the chaff drifts away. Enough has been said about his life, and how the be-boppers turned entertainment music into an art. But not enough has been said about the way that Parker has changed utterly the *possibilities* of music, in a way that only Armstrong has before or since. Not simply through the direct influence of his playing, either, for Parker was never as popular as, say, Dizzy Gillespie. But his rhythmic, melodic and harmonic ideas were picked up by the media wing of the music business—movie music writers, TV music writers, jingle writers, studio musicians who were ex-jazz musicians, R&B musicians who were jazz musicians at heart, Muzak writers and musicians, etc.—and eventually passed on to you the customer, whether you're a jazz fan or not. In other words, anybody who has spent hours grokking TV has spent hours grokking Charlie Parker. That means Metallica.

Subject Three: *Bird.* The movie has brought Parker into a more public arena again, and scared a bunch of stuff out—stuff that had been out before, but never on CD, or at least packaged the way it is now. For instance, *The Complete Savoy Sessions* (Savoy/Muse), which is simply some of the most important music made in the twentieth century, music that acted as centurion for a revolution. These are the tracks that every young musician in the '40s completely wore out learning the solos—"Billie's Bounce," which was backed by "Now's the Time," was owned by virtually every nascent bopper, and for good reason. But there's something else special about these dates: Parker's solos are pared down, essential, the residue of learning Lester Young; each solo sounds special, unique. The sessions include equally legendary, wild tracks as well: "Koko," "Thriving on a Riff" and tracks that have still to be discovered by historians and critics—"Perhaps," for one.

There's a whole world of undiscovered Parker on *Bird—The Complete Charlie Parker on Verve,* a 10-CD set which includes nearly two hours of unreleased material, mostly false starts and stuff but also live material with Ella Fitzgerald, which is typically brilliant. While the Verve collection isn't as uniformly perfect as the Savoy material, there's lots of it (10 hours!!!) in all sorts of contexts, from Machito's big band (which influenced Sonny Rollins) to the incredible live Jazz at the Philharmonic sessions of 1946 and '48 (hear Charlie solo, then hear Lester Young) to a weird track called "Bird" which, in its labyrinthine winding and twisting, is gorgeous.

The boxed set covers roughly the last five years of Parker's life, and while some of the value of the playing is con-

TIM BOWER

World Radio History

troversial—the dates with strings or a vocal date arranged by Gil Evans—it's all Parker and none should be ignored. Even the shaky solos or the klutzy bands fill out the picture, color our knowledge. And it's fascinating to hear him really

improvise—for example, on a couple of tracks with a big band where he plays by ear, without rehearsal.

Since they're on CD, the three versions of "La Cucuracha" and the 11 takes of "Leap Frog" (is this an undiscovered strain of animism in Bird's works?) can be shuffled around to make them listenable. Also of no small importance, the sound has been cleaned up. Elegantly packaged, this set is the definitive Charlie Parker—at least until the next two hours of unreleased discoveries turn up. – **Peter Watrous**

CAMEO

Machismo
(Atlanta Artists/PolyGram)

"Owl-owl-owl-owl-owl!" Cameo leader Larry Blackmon knows that, with the '87-'88 successes of the inspired singles "Word Up" and "Candy," his nasal riff has become a signature for the largest audience he and his Atlanta-based band of funk believers have ever commanded. *Machismo*—decisive, filler-free, hard—follows *Word Up*'s promise that, after a decade of shows, recordings and support from U.S. and British R&B fans, Cameo can stake a claim as America's premier funk thumpsters.

Exploiting this momentum to the max, Cameo remembers that funk is its own reward. Though Blackmon brings in brass ringers for *Machismo*—ex-James Brown saxophonist Maceo Parker and Michael and Randy Brecker among them—all fit in like band members instead of high-priced guests. On "In the Night," Blackmon trades in lead vocal lines for none other than Miles Davis, whose horn bends and flickers and stretches around the rhythm. (In funk, song lyrics may be just accessories to the beat, ways to get it in motion and see that it stays there.) "You Make Me Work," which opens the album, is a more forceful marriage of backbeat and English, sung by a guy whose girlfriend won't brook much laziness, as Cameo's music plays out both her wish and his determined effort.

But the scope of *Machismo* doesn't let the group stop at terrific tunes about "Pretty Girls." They target passionate Georgia-bred harmonizing ("Soul Tightened"), as well as Jamaican rhythms ("DKWIG"). "Listen to the sound of my voice," Blackmon asks on "I Like the World," turning the Cameo signature to other uses: Set to an edgy midtempo rhythm, the song calls for critical self-regard and optimism as ways to help straighten out a country where homelessness has become a national disgrace. Cameo finds more common ground on "Skin I'm In," an insinuating piece that seeks to be "realistic without turning pessimistic," while pointing up racial inequalities.

"I have a taste for special things," Blackmon sings on "Soul Tightened." On *Machismo* those things shake out as funk and decency. No doubt we'll need plenty of both in the '90s. – **James Hunter**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Rai Rebels
(Virgin/Earthworks)

Trend alert! David Byrne, queried recently about his current listening faves, referred to the Algerian ethno-pop style called *rai*, a weird, wonderful kind of Arabic rock that's been driving Algerian youth nuts for a decade or so. Until recently, the chances of an American getting his or her hands on a slice of *rai* were close to nil, unless one had *a)* opportunity to go to Paris to search the Algerian shops there, *b)* found oneself in a North African *souk* where bootleg cassettes of *rai* are numberless or *c)* knew David Byrne.

Rai roots harken to more traditional styles of western Algeria, but—just like the blues—once migrants brought their music to the big city, specifically the notorious port city of Oran, it was cranked up to help the good times roll. Lyrically it deals with sex, drinking and wild living (not respectable Muslim topics); musically it's become increasingly electrified, supercharged. Eighties-style *rai* is replete with drum machines, synthesizers and electric bass guitars meshing with traditional percussion, accordions and violins, in support of keening, open-throated singing from the great tradition of Arab vocalizing.

Happily, *Rai Rebels* is a killer compilation, the best possible entree to this

outlaw genre. It opens with a duet featuring female *rai* star Chaba Fadela on a raw, hypnotic romp and hardly lets up. The production, though kinda cheap-sounding, is far better than most North African recordings. The instrumental tracks are constructed by recording improvising *rai* musicians for a series of spontaneous takes, then mixing the playing around one vocal. The results, as on a duet between Chaba Zahouania and number-one *rai* bad boy Cheb Khaled, can be intense—skirling, buzzing synths, galloping electro-drums and traditional percussion. Some may find the complex time-signatures and decidedly un-Western microtones offputting; others may be unable to transcend America's anti-Arab zeitgeist. But, baby, this *is* rock 'n' roll.

– **Randall Grass**

'TIL TUESDAY

Everything's Different Now
(Epic)

The names haven't been changed to protect the innocent on this, 'Til Tuesday's third LP. A nakedly personal page from the diary of group leader Aimee Mann, *Everything's Different Now* wears its heart on its sleeve as it recounts the dissolution of a recent romance between

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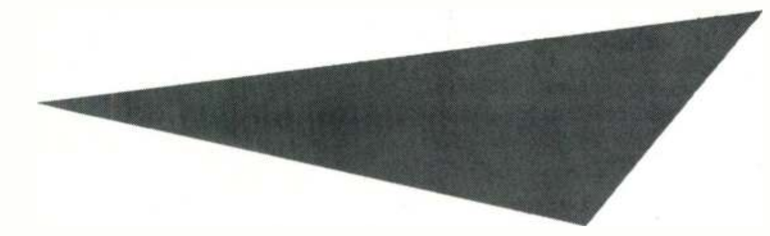

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Mann and ace tunesmith Jules Shear. The album is packed with three-minute musical melodramas guaranteed to sweep you into a private realm of memory, longing and regret.

Best known for their mewling hit single "Voices Carry," 'Til Tuesday makes a quantum leap forward here in the quality of their music. Masterfully produced by Rhett Davies, *Everything's Different Now* is thoroughbred pop that combines the bubblegum buoyancy of the Bangles with the sophisticated soul of the Pretenders. Mann has obviously worked hard on her singing, and where she once came off as shallow and coy, her voice now resonates with genuine depth and feeling. The latest in a long line of bummed-out chick singers who build their work around the theme of romantic betrayal, she asks the same basic question—where did our love go?—in each of these 10 songs, a few of which are explicitly detailed; "'J' for Jules," for instance, leaves little to the imagination. While there's plenty to be said for writing from the heart, there's also something vaguely creepy about presenting such a personal aspect of one's life in such undisguised form, and one feels a bit voyeuristic just listening to this record. Somebody give this girl a crash course in metaphor.

But Mann may also have learned a thing or two about songwriting while hanging out with Shear, because she's written the four best tunes on the album (better, in fact, than those she co-wrote with Shear and with Elvis Costello, who also contributes a guest vocal). Mann is shaping up to be a better-than-average popster; if and when she develops a more graceful way of interweaving fact and fiction, she'll be very good indeed.

– **Kristine McKenna**

JANE IRA BLOOM

Slalom
(CBS)

It's not unusual to have to wait for an artist to pin down the right context to best illuminate ideas. It's a matter of growth: Self-assurance has as much to do with presenting music as does talent. The bulk of Jane Ira Bloom's recordings—mainly for small labels—have found her negotiating a variety of settings. All had their moments, but none ever carried the full thrust of what her work was about.

On *Slalom*, her second record for CBS, the soprano saxist/electronicist/composer has put together her most revealing statement thus far. Bloom does many things well: With its sax/piano/bass/drums format, *Slalom* boasts a facade of traditionalism, but its programmatic layout—a suite of sorts—allows a drift through an array of moods that take many of jazz's stylistic turns into account. Though each epoch is only given a peck on the cheek, it's enough to start the hormones flowing.

Bloom's yen for swing ("Blues on Mars"), her submission to romanticism ("If I Should Lose You") and her bouts with free improv ("Miro") all yield to her

formidable instrumental command without flaunting an "I'm the boss" demeanor. The common denominator here is lyricism: As a composer, Bloom portrays vulnerability without coming off maudlin. The overtly "pretty" moments elicit no shudders; there's even grace in the syrupy "Ice Dancing," dedicated to skate-a-sonics Torvill and Dean.

Together with her associates—pianist Fred Hersch, bassist Kent McLagan and drummer Tom Rainey—Bloom pays attention to detail, proving that fragility need not be insubstantial, as well as showing how frenzy can be directed. When the fare does begin to turn toward the winsome, her electronics beef up the action. Not that they need to; the string and horn duet of "Light Years Away" proves that the tone of the saxist's naked soprano has a steadfast virility. There's more Shorter than Lacy (along with a bit of Lucky Thompson) in her axe, and even her nimblest dartings carry clout. That's part of what supports *Slalom*'s ebb and flow, making the transitions between tracks so natural and creating a record that's at once wide-ranging and cohesive. – **Jim Macnie**

THE WATERBOYS

Fisherman's Blues
(Ensign/Chrysalis)

With his band's name copped from Lou Reed's "Berlin," an early song about Patti Smith, and now a cover of Van Morrison's "Sweet Thing," singer/songwriter Mike Scott sometimes suggests a major fan more than a major artist. The sole redeeming aspect of this near-uncoverable *Astral Weeks* track appearing on *Fisherman's Blues* is financial: It was already well-near swiped and redecorated as the title track of *This Is the Sea*, the last Waterboys album. Now Van the Man gets his due dollarwise; let's hope he won't mind the lyric changes.

But credit where it's due. *Fisherman's Blues* is probably Scott's best work, certainly his most mature. The departure of multi-instrumentalist Karl Wallinger—who left the Waterboys to form World Party—and the band's subsequent move to Dublin has had a profound effect on their sound. Fiddle, mandolin, bouzouki and accordion figure prominently, and where Scott once wrote or co-wrote all material he now shares the majority of it with his bandmates. Though the Irish trad influences seem forced and self-conscious at first—especially since they've never been evident in Scott's music previously, and hey, it's not as if Van Morrison just recorded an album with the Chieftains or anything—they ultimately hit home in this context.

Best of all, Scott seems at least on his way toward putting his influences behind him. You can hear it on the tail end of "We Will Not Be Lovers," the album's best track, where amid Scott's characteristic yowling and yipping he strums his guitar arhythmically and for once connects emotionally with his lyrics. It's a powerful moment, and a reminder of what's best about *Fisherman's Blues*—it delivers the goods and skips the rant.

– **Dave DiMartino**

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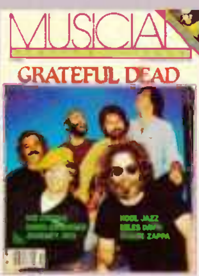
33
The Clash
Ronald Shannon Jackson



36
Grateful Dead
Hard Pop, Miles Davis

99
Boston
Kinks, Year in Rock '86

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John Cougar Mellencamp
Bryan Ferry, Maurice White

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John Coltrane
Springsteen, Replacements

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Springsteen
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George Harrison
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Heavy Metal
Dream Syndicate, George Duke

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Sting
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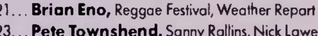

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33... **The Clash,** Ronald Shannon Jackson
34... **Tom Petty,** Carlos Santana, Dave Edmunds
36... **Grateful Dead,** Hard Pop, Miles Davis
37... **Reggae,** The Rolling Stones, Rickie Lee Jones
42... **Hall & Oates,** Zappo, Jaki Byard
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58... **The Kinks,** R.E.M., Marvin Gaye
61... **Jackson Browne,** Eurythmics, Keith Jarrett
64... **Stevie Wonder,** Reggae 1984, Ornette Coleman
67... **Thomas Dolby,** Chet Baker, Alarm, Marcus Miller
70... **Peter Wolf,** King Crimson, Bass/Drum Special
71... **Heavy Metal,** Dream Syndicate, George Duke
77... **John Fogerty,** Marsalis/Hancock, Los Lobos
80... **Phil Collins,** Joan Armatrading, Josef Zawinul
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101... **Psychedelic Furs,** Elton John, Miles Davis
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106... **David Bowie,** Peter Wolf, Hüsker Dü
107... **Robbie Robertson,** Tom Petty, Big Guitar Special
108... **U2,** Tom Waits, Squeeze
109... **George Harrison,** Mick Jagger, Crazy Horse
111... **R.E.M.,** Year in Rock, 10,000 Maniacs
112... **McCartney,** Bass Special, Buster Poindexter
113... **Robert Plant,** INXS, Wynton Marsalis
114... **John Lennon,** James Taylor, Robyn Hitchcock
115... **Stevie Wonder, Sonny Rollins, Joni Mitchell, Johnny Cash**
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117... **Jimmy Page,** Leonard Cohen, Lloyd Cole
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121... **Prince,** Steve Winwood, Randy Newman
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HAMZA EL DIN
Eclipse
VARIOUS ARTISTS
The Music of Upper and Lower Egypt
GOLDEN GATE GYPSY ORCHESTRA
The Travelling Jewish Wedding
USTAD SULTAN KHAN
Sarangi: The Music of India
DIGA RHYTHM BAND
Diga
BABATUNDE OLATUNJI
Drums of Passion: The Invocation
(Rykodisc)

The road to the check-out counter of your fave pop disk-ery has been paved recently by aisles full of world musics. Now Rykodisc, the New England company dedicated to digital technology (witness their stunning Hendrix CDs, *Live at Winterland* and *Radio One*), has taken the progressive plunge with a six-CD release dubbed *The World*. In this case, it is the world according to Mickey Hart, one half of the Grateful Dead's percussion section and a long-time devotee of non-Western sounds. Four of these first six releases were originally on Hart's own label in the '70s, while the Olatunji was recorded in 1986. That the music has aged so gracefully is perhaps a testament to our enhanced sensitivity for such "exotic" fare.

Taken as a set, this one-from-column-A/two-from-column-B approach to the third world provides insights into the shape of pop musics to come, each with its own special charms. The Near-Eastern strains of Upper and Lower Egypt have the bump and strut of a communal dance, with pulsating drum and choral refrains. Hamza El Din is a master of the oud (a double-stringed instrument of consuming delicacy), and his hypnotic blend of strings, vocals and *dumbek* echoes Arabic and African traditions from up and down the Nile. (Pick up his third-world classic *Escalay/The Water Wheel* on Nonesuch/Explorer.) The Golden Gate Gypsy Orchestra is an amiable noshorama of East European, gypsy and Yiddish folk strains, a sort of dixieland string music. The sultry stylings of sarangi master Ustad Sultan Khan should be a revelation to all violin players, and reinforce this listener's endless curiosity about the transcendent beauty of India's raga forms.

The most powerful sets are those with which Hart was more personally involved. Both are rhythm workouts. The Diga Rhythm Band is a kind of R&B version of Max Roach's M'Boom, centered in the arranging and virtuoso hand drum talents of the mind-boggling Zakir Hussain; the son of Ravi Shankar's master drummer Alla Rakha, this veteran of Shakti is the Buddy Rich of the tablas. The timbre of multiple tabla sets and hand drums provides a unique tonal underpinning for the percussion ensemble, almost like an army of rhythm guitarists. The use of mallet instruments is

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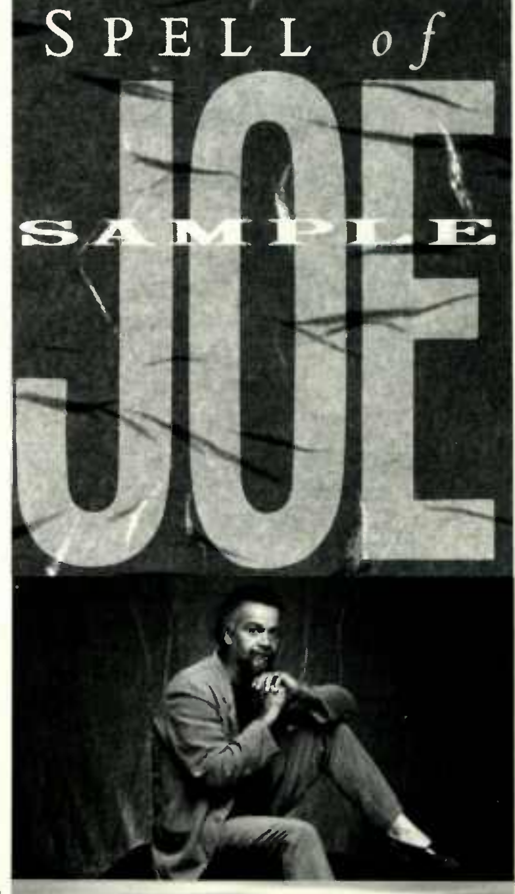

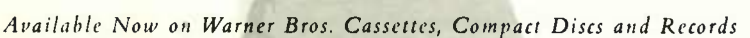

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more textural and less harmonically intricate than M'Boom, but the complex interweaving of multiple meters proves you don't need a 4/4 pulse to groove. (Oh yes, the Rev. Jerry Garcia contributes a couple of belly-dancing cameos.)

The real killer-diller here is Olatunji's Yoruba rhythm ritual, which will put the well-traveled listener in mind of Milton Cardona's masterful *Bembé* or Sunny Adé's talking drum breaks. If anything, Olatunji's music is even more powerful; its immense sound scalds till you can feel the humidity coming out of the ground. Olatunji has been a fixture on the New York music scene for decades, and his dedication to the ceremonial, sacramental aspect of rhythm is apparent in these settings, as he and his ensemble celebrate the *Orisas* (great creators) of the Yoruba in great waves of vocals and percussion, call and response. Drums of passion indeed. I suspect hip-hop DJs will find much to sample in these grooves, and that, for percussionists, Olatunji's *Drums of Passion: The Invocation* will resonate like a polyrhythmic high mass. – **Chip Stern**

SOLAL from page 28

Lee Konitz. The Bechet duet, if one of the saxophonist's most interesting recordings, offers little insight into Solal's current command of the piano. The several duo albums with Konitz for the Italian Horo label are another story. The fascinating explorations of jazz standards with the alto saxophonist have attracted some well-deserved attention, and a compilation on Columbia entitled *Critic's Choice* featured a Solal selection. In France, recent productions include two big-band albums featuring his complex compositions, and a four-record set of live performances from 1959 to 1985.

As Solal drives me to the station for my train ride back to Paris, he sums up his ambitions, his obsession, perhaps, in a few lucid comments: "Even if it doesn't sound modest, I think that one must listen to my music several times because of its density. If you are surprised by the technical aspect, then the musical content may escape you on the first listening. I have always had very high hopes for jazz. I want people who love classical music to find that same perfection in jazz, and 90 percent of jazz doesn't satisfy that demand."

PLATTERS THAT MATTER

1. **Lou Reed** – *New York* (Sire)
2. **Bob Neuwirth** – *Back to the Front* (Gold Castle)
3. **Push Push** – *Can't Wait* (Tone-Cool)
4. *Lucinda Williams* (Beggars Banquet)
5. *John Prine Live* (Oh Boy!)

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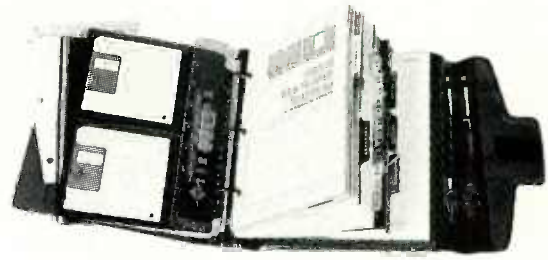

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World Radio History

by J.D. Considine

SONIC YOUTH

Daydream Nation (Blast First/Enigma)

WITH ITS DENSE, DRONING DISSONANCES, implied violence and intimations of druggy depravity, this music seems more nightmare than daydream. Which is undoubtedly the idea—not for nothing is Sonic Youth considered the modern equivalent of the Velvet Underground's sound and sensibility. Tellingly, though, it's not the noise that marks them as Velvets-presumptive so much as the sly sense of melody holding that cacophony in place, providing the sort of poetry that makes the dark streets of *Daydream Nation* worth traveling again and again.

THE SAINTS

Prodigal Son (TVT)

CHRIS BAILEY MIGHT SOUND AWFULLY like Van Morrison, but where Morrison surrenders to the sound, losing himself in the ebb and flow of rhythm and melody, Bailey sings with painful self-consciousness, as if he knows where the music is taking him and wishes he could do something about it. Yet that acute self-awareness is what gives *Prodigal Son* its power and poignancy, lending a dark majesty to the lament of "Shipwreck" and a self-mocking glee to the boasts of "Music Goes Round My Head."

MARC ALMOND

The Stars We Are (Capitol)

CONSIDERING HOW KINKY ALMOND'S OUTput has been, from the slinky decadence of Soft Cell to the import obscurities of his solo career, it's hard not to take perverse pleasure in the unexpected accessibility of these songs. Almond's once-wobbly voice now commands an impressive range of expression, allowing him to stretch from the torchy heartbreak of "Your Kisses Burn" to the romantic assurance of the title tune. And as the buoyant, infectious "Tears Run Rings" proves, it's the resilient melodicism of his material that's made him a star.

RAY CHARLES

Just Between Us (Columbia)

ALTHOUGH THE PACKAGING LEAVES THIS looking like another of Charles' Nashville specials—a smattering of duets, an assortment of arrangers, a dearth of credits—the music is closer to that classic Atlantic sound than anything he's cut in years, from the big-band blues of "I'd Walk a Little More for You" to a jazzy "Save the Bones for Henry Jones" with Lou Rawls and Milt Jackson. Typically, he sounds like he's played it this way all along.

SAMANTHA FOX

I Wanna Have Some Fun (RCA)

THE FRIGHTENING THING ABOUT SAMANtha Fox isn't that she's parlayed tit-shots into a singing career, but that she's become almost listenable. Give Full Force full credit—with time, those guys could make Jessica Hahn sound soulful.

THE FALL

I Am Kurious Oranj (Beggars Banquet/RCA)

ACCORDING TO THE LINER NOTES, THIS is no mere album, but an actual ballet composed by the Fall. (Oh.) Don't worry, this step into terpsichorean culture only improves the band's music, shifting the emphasis away from Mark E. Smith's impenetrable verbiage and toward the giddy roil of bass, drums and guitar. *Swan Lake* it's not, but it still stands as one of the band's best.

DEBBIE HARRY/BLONDIE

Once More into the Bleach (Chrysalis)

IN MOST REMIXES, ONLY THE BEATS HAVE been changed; here, about the only thing left untouched are the vocals. Blasphemy? Hardly—Blondie's second-hand chic was revisionist from the start. That's why, from the driving Eurodisco rethink of "Denis" to a dub-wise "Tide Is High" that's more roots-rockin' than the original, *Once More into the Bleach* makes a truer tribute than the Primitives' peroxide cool.

ABECEDARIANS

AB-CD (Caroline)

AMERICAN BANDS HAVE NEVER BEEN PARticularly adept at industrial gloom, being either too abstract or too abrasive. This L.A. trio is the exception; as this CD retrospective shows, the Abecedarians not only get the dull, clangorous textures right, but manage to infuse these soundscapes with a deceptively passionate resignation. Subtle and stunning. (5 Crosby St., New York, NY 10013.)

KITARO

Ten Years (Geffen)

WADING THROUGH THE 16 SYNTHESIZED meditations gathered into this hulking hits collection, it's hard not to be impressed by how expertly Kitaro handles his instrument, not only coaxing credible string and wind sounds from the circuits, but accurate articulation as well. But the best-of approach ultimately backfires, leaving what were once nuggets of melody shining through the cosmic goop sounding like excerpts from some soft-core porn soundtrack.

MICA PARIS

So Good (4th & Broadway)

IMAGINE A SADE WITH SIZZLE, AND YOU'LL understand why people are so excited about Mica Paris. Imagine this sizzling Sade singing assembly-line soul, and you'll know why *So Good* isn't.

THE TODD TERRY PROJECT

To the Batmobile Let's Go (Fresh)

FORGET THAT SMILEY-FACE CRAP THE English dote over—this is what acid house really sounds like. Terry's scattershot samples and muscular, hypnotic groove make "Back to the Beat" a body-pumping classic, but that's only half the trip. What really gets the batmobile rolling is Terry's textural dexterity, which helps him keep the beat on course even as the album's mood swings from the searing soul of "Weekend" to the quiet, jazzy cool of "You're the One." (1974 Broadway, New York, NY 10023.)

THE TOLL

The Price of Progression (Geffen)

AFTER SUFFERING THROUGH THE TOLL'S 10-minute lament on "gosh, native Americans have it rough," I found myself wishing I hadn't been so hard on the Unforgiven.

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World Radio History

by Chip Stern

BUFFALO CHIPS: THANKS TO CLINT Eastwood for bringing Bird's name to the fore again, but shame on all involved for neutering his music and shifting the focus from Bird flights to Bird droppings. How many more movies do we have to see featuring doomed black men wallowing in degradation and self-pity? How about letting them wallow in their genius for a taste; show us the roots and fruits of their inspiration and their discipline. How about analyzing the creative act itself? Charlie Parker was a lot more complex, intellectual and spiritual figure than this movie allows. By going for the easy pathos, and failing to involve living American masters like Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach and Roy Haynes (*who were there*), what's left is another soap about dope, reinforcing the middle-class minstrelsy of our indifferent mass media. Better you should check out compact disc collections like *Bird at the Roost, Volumes 1-4* (Savoy) and *The Complete Charlie Parker on Verve* [see lead review]; Sonny Stitt's Atlantic CD reissue *Stitt plays Bird* (with John Lewis, Jim Hall, Richard Davis and Connie Kay); Sphere's last recording with the late tenor master Charlie Rouse, *Bird Songs* (Verve); or the Sony videocassette *Celebrating Bird: The Triumph of Charlie Parker* for a true measure of this American Mozart's dignity and joy.

MICHAEL CARVIN
First Time (Muse)

FOR THIS POWERFUL DRUM STYLIST, *FIRST Time* represents a coming-out party, Carvin's first real solo vision since his propulsive 1974 duets with Jackie McLean (*Antiquity*) and 1975 maiden voyage *The Camel* (both on Steeplechase). Carvin has a tonal conception of the trap set, with a masterful sense of touch and dynamic range; his solo on "M.R." has all the singing qualities and structural grace of a good pianist. Carvin's vigorous, interactive time dances along lightly or strongly by degrees, but mostly it swings with the modernist urgency of icons like Blakey, Coltrane and Miles. Dig the subliminal R&B underpinning that harks back to Africa—by way of Henry Carvin and Chick Webb—on "A Night in Tunisia" and "Caravan."

BEN WEBSTER/COLEMAN HAWKINS/LESTER YOUNG
The Big Three (Doctor Jazz)

DELFEAYO MARSALIS SEEMED TO IMPLY IN his liner notes to *Random Abstract* that you could go to class on the great tenor masters, blow a term paper and move on. Well, Del, you'll be required to stay after class. The unfathomed depths of Webster's tone were such that one note carried as much import as 10 rapidly arpeggiated chord changes, like his fervently melodic solo on "Spang"—wotta holler! This resplendent post-war session highlights Webster's gift for lyrical blues vamps in the company of Sid Catlett, John Simmons and Bill DeArango, for a swing-to-bop-flavored sound. Side two reprises 1943 *Classic Tenor* alternates of primo pre-Army Lester Young flotations, and Coleman Hawkins' blustery "Blues Changes" from 1943 (one of Max Roach's earliest sessions).

EITHER/ORCHESTRA
Radium (Accurate)

THE SOURCE MATERIALS ON *RADIUM* ARE so fully digested you never have a sense of eating the same meal twice—though tasty repasts from Mingus ("Moanin'") and Roscoe Mitchell ("Odwallah") are reprised, the flavor of the writing is all their own. No stylistic or technocratic breakthroughs, but their post-modernist blues fusion is sensitively crafted, avoids the well-traveled clichés and gets optimum mileage from four brass and three reeds—like the more swinging side of the AACM. The Either/Orchestra is fresh; anyone willing to elucidate the harmonic connections between Monk and Bobbie Gentry ("Nutty/Ode to Billie Joe") has my attention. (117 Columbia St., Cambridge, MA 02139.)

LOUIS ARMSTRONG
Stardust (Portrait)
THE DUKE ELLINGTON SMALL BANDS
Back Room Romp (Portrait)

A RECIPE FOR FURTHER NEGLECT? START with great digitally restored classics; phone in some of Nat Hentoff's nostalgic effusions; withhold all discographical information for that distinctive taste of a one-shot. Shame, 'cause there's some dandy music on these Portrait reissues, from the blues of Memphis Minnie and Big Bill Broonzy to the lyrical trumpet of Bobby Hackett and Dave McKenna's rambunctious two-hand piano. Not surprisingly, Armstrong's big band and these early Ellington small groups (led by Rex Stewart, Barney Bigard, Johnny Hodges and Cootie Williams) are the priority purchases. See if you can find them in a year.

DAVE HOLLAND TRIO
Triplicate (ECM)

FOR TIME, TONE, TECHNIQUE AND SHEER feeling, there isn't a more prodigious upright bassist in all of jazz. Holland simply *hears* the band differently than most contemporary bassists, and this keen sensitivity is reflected in his compositions. By turns lithe and swinging, dark and reflective, funky and energized, they're always full of graceful, airborne counterpoint. When Holland hooks up with drummer Jack DeJohnette, the results are invariably kinetic. Steve Coleman is a sly referee.

PETER ERSKINE
Transition (Denon CD)

OTHER DRUMMERS MAY POSSESS MORE garish floor routines or swing harder, but there aren't many in the post-MIDI age whose composing chops are flexible enough to assimilate contemporary electronics within a jazz conception without grossing out. Erskine's feeling for the tonal quality of percussion animates these leitmotifs, not as a drum showcase, but as a blowing framework for soloists Kenny Werner, John Abercrombie, Joe Lavano and Bob Mintzer. Erskine's hymn-like synth colors and oriental adornments enliven the programmatic sections, and the resulting blend of jazz, classical, fusion and third-world elements straddles stylistic distinctions more effectively than most of the fuzak I've heard lately.

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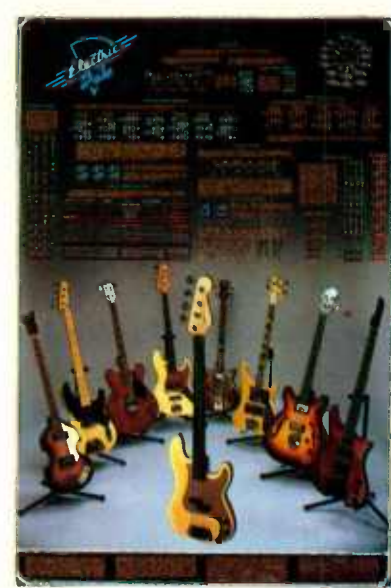

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World Radio History

HALF JAPANESE

Charmed Life (50 Skadillion Watts)

You gotta give Half Japanese credit. Since the band's formation they've cranked out around a dozen records, and their latest features no less than 21 songs (31 on the cassette). *Charmed Life* offers no Earth-shattering changes in their formula—quavering vocals atop scratchy Velvet Underground-inspired guitars and off-key saxes—but none of their past work has pop hooks like this. Which means that either the HJs are maturing into keenly insightful, wittily adroit songsmiths, or they're trying to sell their souls for the bigtime. Either way it's a good record. *– Thomas Anderson*

UT

In Gut's House (Blast Off)

Let's not quibble: Ut, a trio of American women who live in London, is a confusing brood. But don't call them confused. They mask pointed, direct ideas of structure with sonic mayhem derived from guitar/bass/drums, giving the illusion of musical primitives. They are not. They bay and mumble oblique, detached lyrics which initially come off as psychobabble. It isn't. Riffs break in two, rhythms crumble just when you think they're going to fly, motifs crop up only to say goodbye. Yet this double 45-rpm EP is their most cogent block of songs so far, one that suggests a more anxiety-ridden, less ethnic-enamored version of the Slits or Raincoats. Ut's crusty soundscape comes on abrasive and primitive, but by exposing us to its innards, winds up being curiously warm and open. *– Jim Macnie*

REVEREND CLAUDE JETER

Yesterday and Today (Spirit Feel/Shanachie)

Rev. Jeter, 74, was the "lyric tenor" captain of the Swan Silvertones; since the late '60s, he's been a gospel-circuit soloist. He's often credited as the source of Al Green's wails and whispers. This album ends with 1954 concert performances by the Swans, where Rev. Jeter trades leads with Paul Owens, a commanding singer (and quartet arranger) as well. Owens shows up on the seven new studio recordings, along with Cecil Brownlee and the Mellotones featuring Paul Worrell and a ferociously centered drums/keyboards/guitar/bass band. Whether settling into old Swans hits such as "Careless Love" or "Motherless Child," an organ-backed version of "Too Close to Heaven" or the full-fledged Jeter-Owens duet "I Don't Know Why," the album is extraordinary. If you have a soulful bone in your body and nine bucks in your wallet, you want it; any music this sure is rare. *– James Hunter*

ELLIOTT SHARP

Larynx (SST)

Larynx is a primal wail from the heart of modern composition. Working with the natural overtone series found in Inuit and Mongolian throat singing, New York composer/conceptualist Elliott Sharp has tapped the order of structured music, the freedom of improvisation and rock's sheer power to blast a dense, loud, chaotic and wholly logical hole in expectations about all three. His 13-piece ensemble, featuring some of downtown's finest, creates an environment as dark and ephemeral as a thunder cloud. But there's light, too, in the singing showers of harmonics that rain from homemade instruments like the slab (a hunk of wood with pickups, many strings and sliding bridges hammered with mallets). And there's heat, generated in Sharp's risky sax and guitar breaks and the group's authority. *– Ted Drozdowski*

NAJMA

Qareeb (Shanachie)

On paper, Najma Akhtar's U.S. debut resembles Israeli superstar Ofra Haza's recent *Fifty Gates of Wisdom*, as both singers set folk songs to unwinding rhythms. Once Najma starts traveling through her own melodies, though, this young British-Asian commands a voice that won't remind you of anyone else's. At tempos that settle in ("Har Sitam Aap Ka") or take off ("Dil Laga Ya Tha"), she grafts her intimate and expansive singing to Urdu *ghazals*, which are Indian love poems traditionally delivered by men. The arrangements—with various world percussion instruments, Navazish Ali Khan's resourceful violin and the occasional saxophone—sound reedier and are far less beat-happy than Haza's, for example. The music is like the singer, engaging and untroubled without sacrificing heat. *– James Hunter*

DARREN ROBBINS

Steals Your Girlfriend (Like)

This CD is not just the debut of a talented and likable Chicago popster, it's also the recorded return of the Elvis Brothers, a wonderful trio whose two brilliant CBS albums vanished on impact. Robbins (no relation) has a strong, unwimpy rock voice and an adequate supply of melodic hooks. For their part, the E. Bros. produced, served as backup band and contributed to the songwriting—indeed, the record's best tracks (including "Get Out of My Life [I Can Mess It Up Myself]" and "Try for a Miracle") are by an Elvis, suggesting what a great third album that band may yet make. A boppy rendition of "I'm into Something Good" tops off the frothy fun in fine style. (4013 N. Southport Ave., Chicago, IL 60613.) *– Ira Robbins*

CHARLES EARLAND

Front Burner (Milestone)

If you never quite got your fill of great '60s organ lounge jazz—and it's hard to see how you could—here's your ticket. Earland isn't as technically facile as Jimmy Smith or as funky as Jimmy McGriff, with whom Earland began playing saxophone, but he does coax warm horn-like melodies out of the Hammond B-3 as his ingratiating quintet drives along on his custom-built tunes. One of them, "My Two Sons," has the makings of a standard, at least in those places where the red lights are low and the seats crushed velvet. Yeah, it's a groove. *– Mark Rowland*

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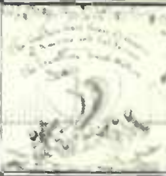

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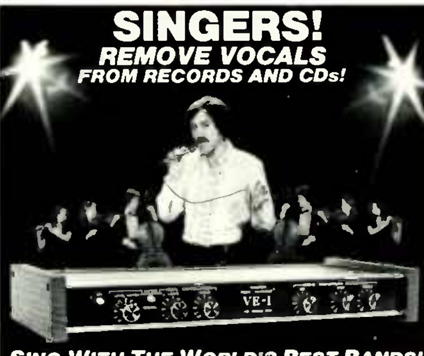

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thus "writing" a "part" for each instrument to play. But another approach is to use each track for a pattern that will drive a different instrument on your drum machine—one track for the kick drum, one for the snare, one for the high-hat and so forth. As we noted earlier, each drum sound on a MIDI drum machine corresponds to one MIDI note number, so by limiting a track's range to that single note number, you can get the track to play just that drum sound. In short, you can cancel out the facilities for changing pitches and basic note values on each track and just use the program's Artificial Intelligence to vary the sort of "feel" parameters we've been talking about all along.

Most algorithmic composition programs are just crawling with "feel" parameters like this. Consider, for example, Dr. T's Tunesmith, a second-generation version of one of the earliest algorithmic packages, the previously-mentioned Phrase. For each of its six tracks, Tunesmith lets you set an individual Velocity value, which can then be varied via a separate Accent parameter. Above and beyond this, there's a Feel algorithm which will randomly vary the velocity of notes. The amount of variation depends on a number of things, including the basic Accent value for that particular track.

How Byzantine can you get? But sometimes you've got to be pretty smart to simulate what comes naturally to some sweaty cave…er…person sitting behind a hollowed-out log. But it gets even deeper. Tunesmith also has multiple algorithms for varying the Articulation (i.e., the decay) of notes and a Delay parameter which algorithmically varies the placement of notes in front of or behind the beat by a number of clock pulses.

And so it goes with other programs. Hybrid Arts' Ludwig gives you eight tracks. For each track, you can build an algorithmic Pitch and Rhythm series (for doing the usual A.I. instamatic composition stuff) and also a Velocity series, which you can use—separately from Pitch and Rhythm—for creating a rhythmic feel. Each Velocity series consists of 32 steps, each of which can be set at any of eight basic velocity levels. These levels can be randomly shifted by a set amount. And the overall velocity pattern, or series, can interact with the track in a number of complex ways, responding to accented notes and doing a variety of other amazing things—all of which can make for a very convincing human groove.

And so we arrive at last: Artifice and Nature reconciled. Not that they were ever at odds, really. The very idea of "the Natural" is, after all, an artificial concept. (Think a prairie dog goes around worrying whether it's eating a natural diet?) All, then, is artifice—especially when it comes to music. Musicians' natural instincts have always told them whether or not a rhythm track is grooving. Now we can use a little healthy artifice to make damn sure it does. M

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COSTELLO from page 79

the moment. It's very conscious of itself as a commodity.

MUSICIAN: *Are you conscious of appealing to an audience that is willing to follow songwriters like yourself beyond the realms of dance-pop?*

COSTELLO: I haven't got an idea of what the person who listens to my record looks like. I just assume it could appeal to anybody. They only have to have the willingness to listen to it and also that I get a fair break for them to hear it, and that I get written about fairly. I don't think I've ever made a studiously uncommercial record.

The ironic thing is that reviews of really bland records made to a formula audience are received so uncritically. Maybe it's too much like stooping to conquer. You read good reviews of the Robert Plant records. They say, "This is really good at what it is. It's Robert coming back and showing those Kingdom Come boys where to get off." It's a load of old rubbish! He must know that, it's written all over his face. He's just trotting it out because people are gullible enough to have swallowed the myth and it's like eating somebody else's half-sucked Polo Mint.

"There are advantages to having a career. You get a repertoire—in lieu of a pension or a health plan."

Then you've got artists who clearly go into their own territory, and somehow their records come up for more scrutiny. So much more is expected of them because they're doing something outside of those narrow confines. Randy Newman is an example. A completely unreasonable demand. Where quite clearly, he would just like to have a hit. It's bewildering, really, why that is.

MUSICIAN: *You must be talking about yourself a little bit.*

COSTELLO: I don't feel there's any great demand on me. But we get so much more asked of us, the few people who are doing something that isn't so mainstream. We're not in some club together. The only thing that really binds us together is lack of success. [*laughter*]

MUSICIAN: *But a lot of your records are commercially successful.*

COSTELLO: They are compared with a little band that prints up their record and sells 5,000 copies. But once you've had some success everyone measures you by these ludicrously inflated terms. You have to play Madison Square Garden for five nights! And then there's nowhere to go except down. So there's something to be said for staying out of that race. As long as I make a living and no one takes away my house and puts me in debtors' prison, I don't really care.

If I have a big success, great. Most all of the money I've earned, I put back into what I do. I don't have a big car—I don't even drive! I've never been that extravagant. I live better than a lot of people do with a nine-to-five job, obviously. But I don't know how much longer it's going to go on.

Warners gave me an advance and I spent all of it making this record. In a world that's measured by money, I did literally put it where my mouth is. I'm broke. Now I'm going on the road solo 'cause I can't afford to put a band together. I'm not crying poverty, I like playing solo anyway. And then, hopefully, if the record is a success, I'll put together some sort of band that can embellish the music more.

MUSICIAN: *In your last* Musician *interview, you basically put down every record you'd ever made. Weren't you a little harsh on yourself? It's certainly disconcerting to a fan.*

COSTELLO: I am pretty critical and I don't think blowing my own trumpet about something I did 10 years ago serves any purpose. I would feel bad if people thought, "Oh, he really didn't care about those records." That wasn't what I meant. On another day if you asked what I thought was good about all those records I would tell you all the tracks I think we got right, and it would sound a lot more positive. But it wouldn't be an all-embracing love of my work. I just make records. I don't think I'm on a mission from God. I know there are people in the business who really believe they are.

You know, the John Lennon film [*Imagine*] came out just as we were finishing this record. And the whole thing about that film felt very oppressive. The book and the film conspired to just completely warp the guy's music out of any context. It's like he's become one of those people, like Kennedy, who just doesn't exist anymore. He's a figment of everyone's imagination. I think that's really bad. He wrote some terrific records.

I don't see people whose music I like in terms of an hour-long documentary. It's a much more raw kind of feeling that's inside you. And if I started to explain it, I wouldn't get it out right.

A lot of the time you have nice conversation and fun talking about things and slagging people that are beneath contempt; it's easy and it's sitting around fencing with words and being terribly smart and smug. Everybody does it. But when it comes down to the stuff I really care about, I hardly talk about it at all. Because it really goes beyond words. M

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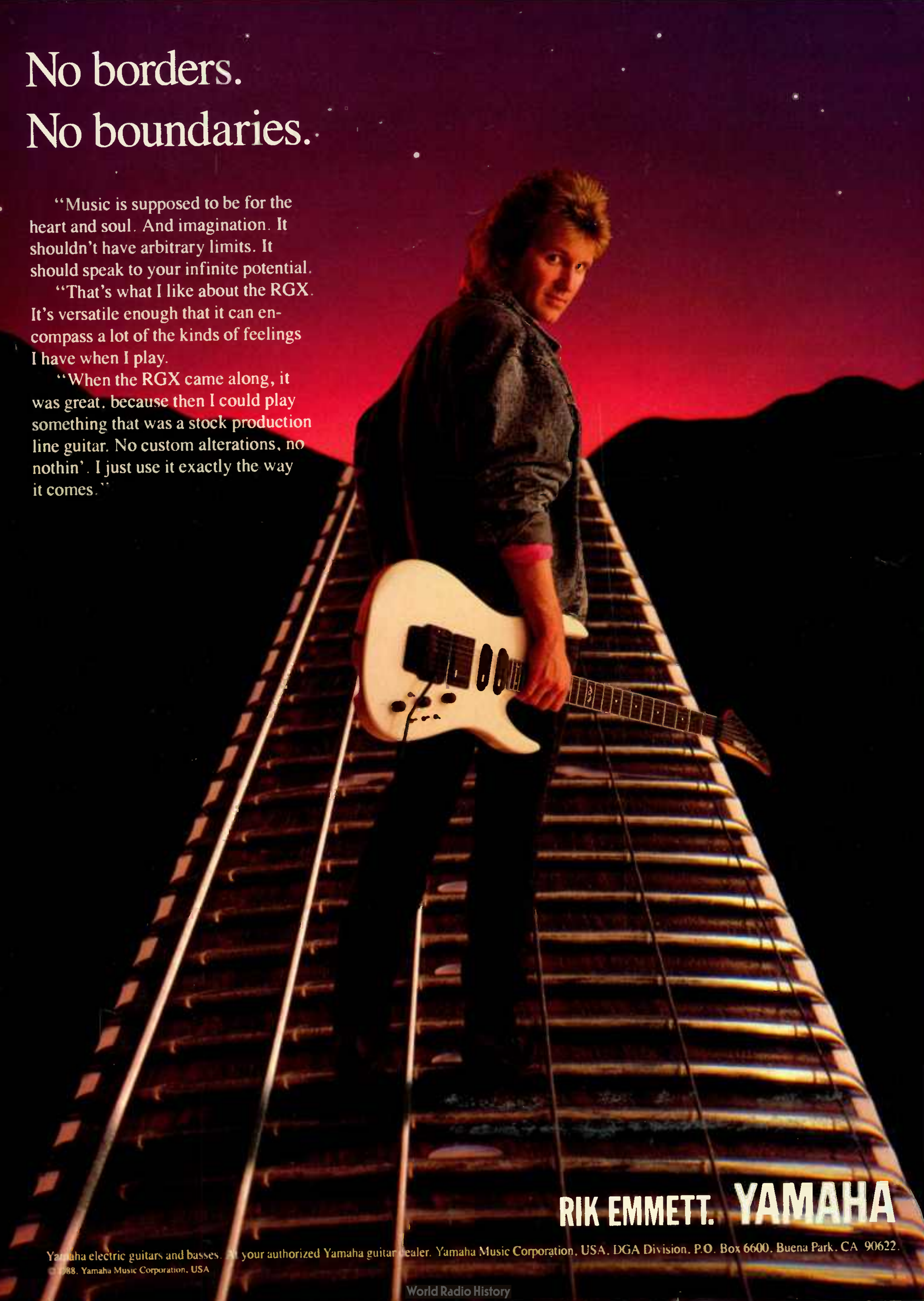

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