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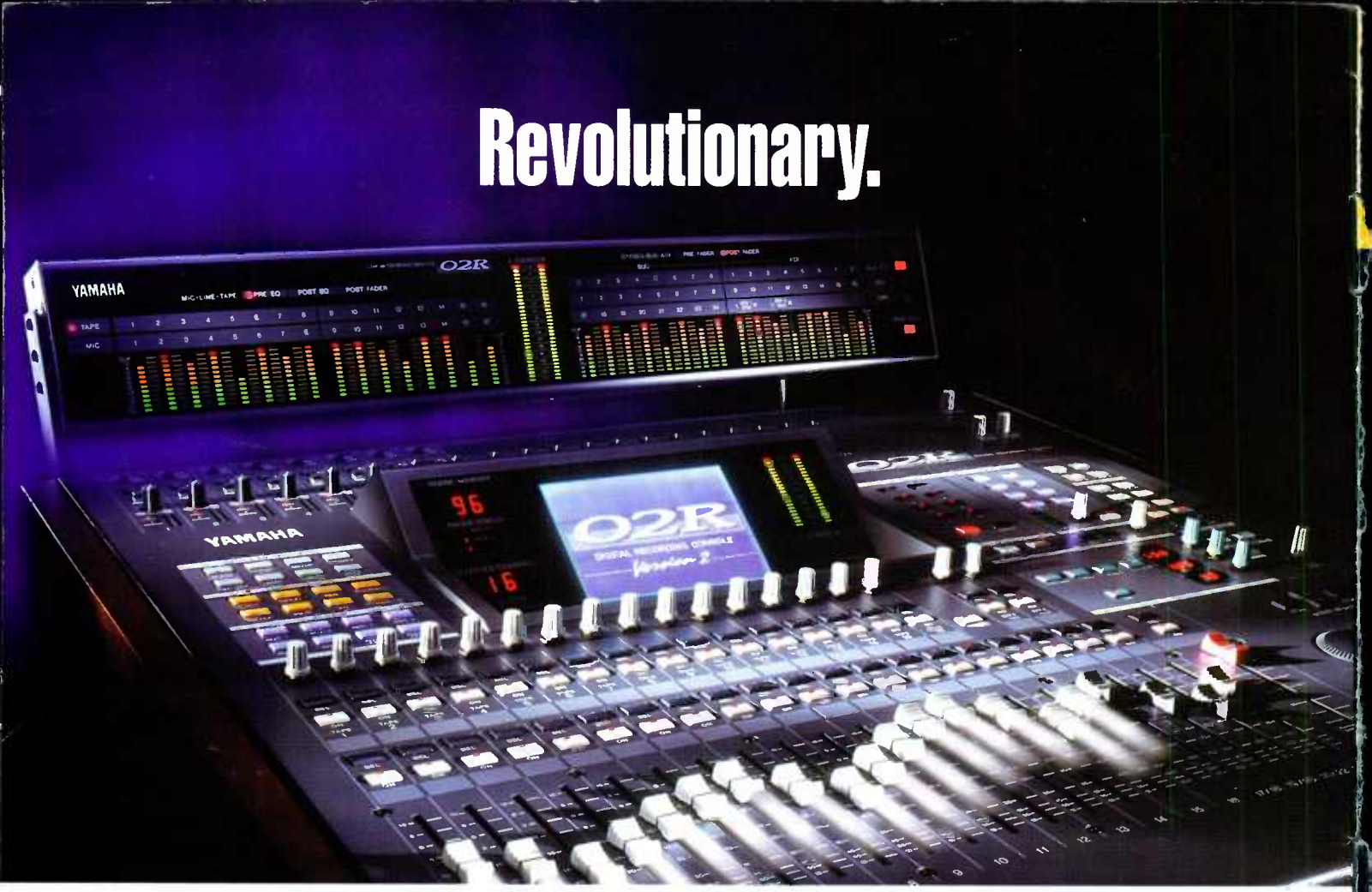

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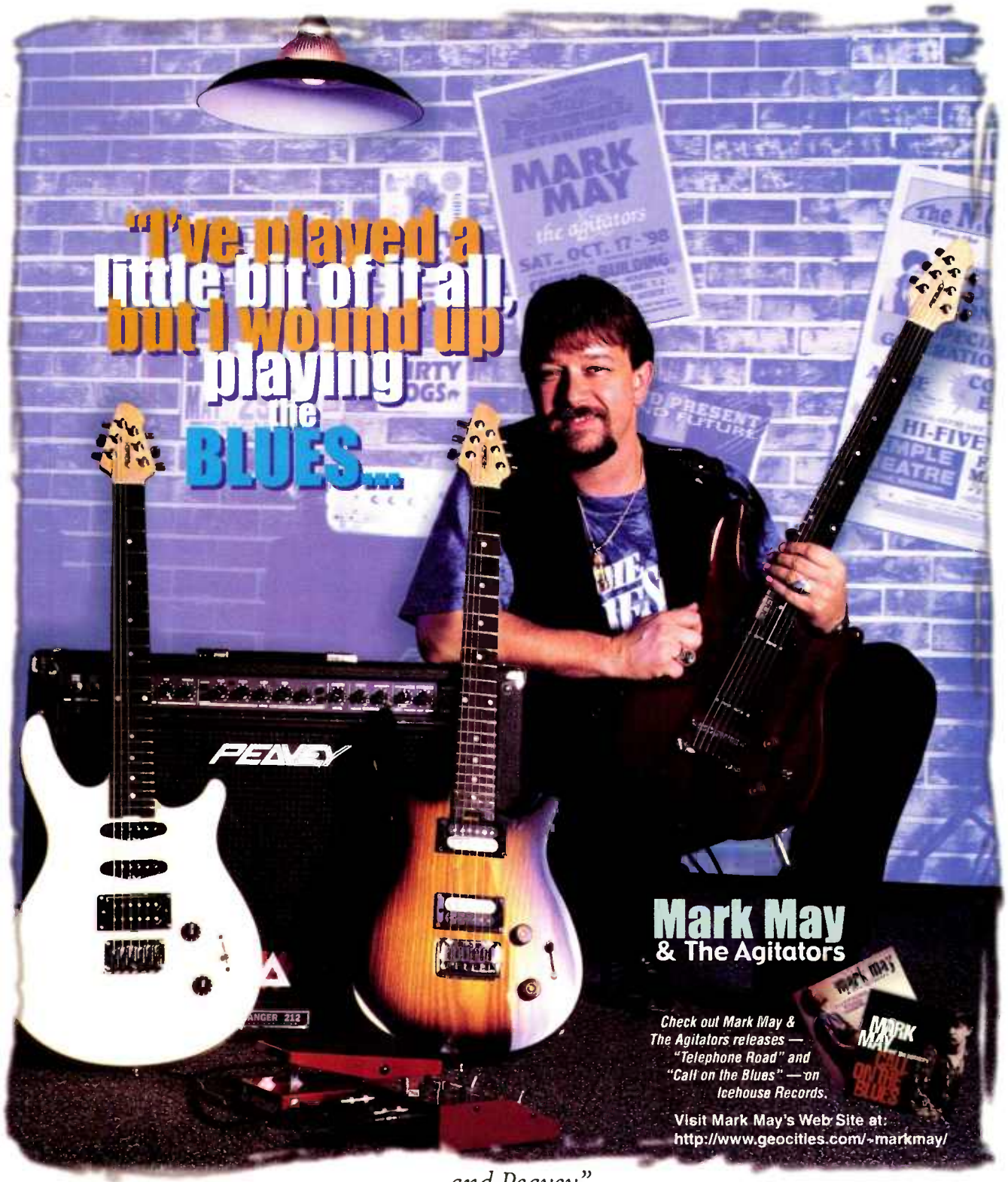

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letters

george martin

I enjoyed the George Martin interview, in which he notes something that should be on a brass plaque above the console in every project studio in the country: "The song is the most important thing. Without a good song, you're nowhere." The greatest guitar parts and most meticulous overdubs won't save a bad song. I should know. I produced ten albums with Three Dog Night, and we always put the song above everything else. With writers like Elton John, Randy Newman, Hoyt Axton, Harry Nilsson, and Laura Nyro, we always started with a great song. The trick was then to get a great performance of an arrangement that gave the record a life of its own. Songs and performances live on forever—trendy sounds don't.

Also, I appreciated that Billy Bremner (Sideman, Feb. '99) was honest enough to admit lifting a solo intact from "Quite a Beat" by drummer Sandy Nelson. I co-wrote that song and played guitar on the record. Maybe next time someone mention's Billy's solo he or she can attach a name to it.

richie podolor
american recording co.
calabasas, CA

I must take exception with George Martin's dismissive attitude toward John Lennon (Interview, Feb. '99). As Paul McCartney's recent book suggests, it seems to be the trend now to bash Lennon. If George Martin really did come up with the concept and arrangement for the backing vocals on "I Am the Walrus," bully for him; he was doing his job as arranger and producer. But let's get real: Neither Martin nor McCartney are or ever have been capable of writing a song like "I Am the Walrus." In fact, their solo efforts prove that they're not even in the ballpark. It's not technology, computers, producers, or record companies that make great music; it's the artists. It was the genius of John Lennon that made the Beatles music transcend all of the efforts of their contemporaries. Martin and McCartney should both be grateful to have been part of Lennon's group.

robert raines
rrcreative@aol.com

metallica's rules

I just wanted to say something to Lars Ulrich (Business, Feb. '99): If all record companies ran their business the way you say you'll run yours, by signing only bands that will sell a lot of records, your band would never have gotten signed, because no one ever thought Metallica would be anywhere near as successful as you have proven to be. Talk about forgetting your roots. From someone whose underground death metal band will probably never be signed by your label, later.

sean samples
beelzabub69@hotmail.com

rasslin for royalties

Once again your outstanding magazine has provided me with invaluable information. As a newly-signed, major-label artist, I found Rich Stim's article on approaches to dividing song royalties (Business, Feb. '99) enlightening and highly useful for me as a non-writing member of a band. This should be required reading for all musicians.

I do, however, take issue with Kathryn Roessel's comment about band members fighting to get their songs onto the album. While the world may or may not need another "Octopus' Garden," I'm sure the world could certainly use another "Everybody Hurts"—a great song from a drummer, of all people.

brett crook
the curb
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Send letters to: Musician, 49 Music Square West, Nashville, TN 37203
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from the editor

We've seen big changes at *Musician* over the past couple of years. The introduction of departments like Technology, Songwriting, and Studio Techniques, the revival of the Working Musician section, the implementation of a unique process-oriented approach to album reviews—all this and more has been launched to make *Musician* more useful than ever as a resource for today's players.

The last major change, introduced with our Nov. '98 special issue on vocals, was the boldest of all: a redesign of our cover. Some risk was involved, since full-page superstar photos had been a trademark here for so many years. Certainly portrait covers drove the point home that the trendsetters in modern music considered *Musician* a high-cred necessity. And it's no secret that all sorts of publications make it a habit to run shots of the leaders in their field on their covers.

Problem is, as we continued to fine-tune *Musician*, the celebrity cover began to feel less appropriate. The heaviest hitters still appreciate being featured in our pages, and we consider their input a critical part of our formula—yet *Musician* is really more about you, the working player, than any single superstar. This is because every page we print addresses the issues that concern contemporary musicians, from this month's investigation of the impact of MP3 to recent stories on digital vs. analog home studios, the truth about music festivals, and other hot-button topics. Clearly, there's more to *Musician* than consumer-oriented artist interviews.

This is the message we convey with art director Derek Wesley Selby's new covers. The broad range of topics is indicated in the type we display on the vertical column and elsewhere on the page. The continued importance of major artist presence is clear from the inset photos—in this month's issue, it's Sheryl Crow. But what about the biggest shot on the page—those players onstage or in the studio on the right-hand side?

Those are photos of you, the real-world working artist, making music. That's what you and *Musician* are about. We're writing about your world; keep watching our cover and, who knows, you may see yourself there before too long.

—Robert L. Doerschuk, editor

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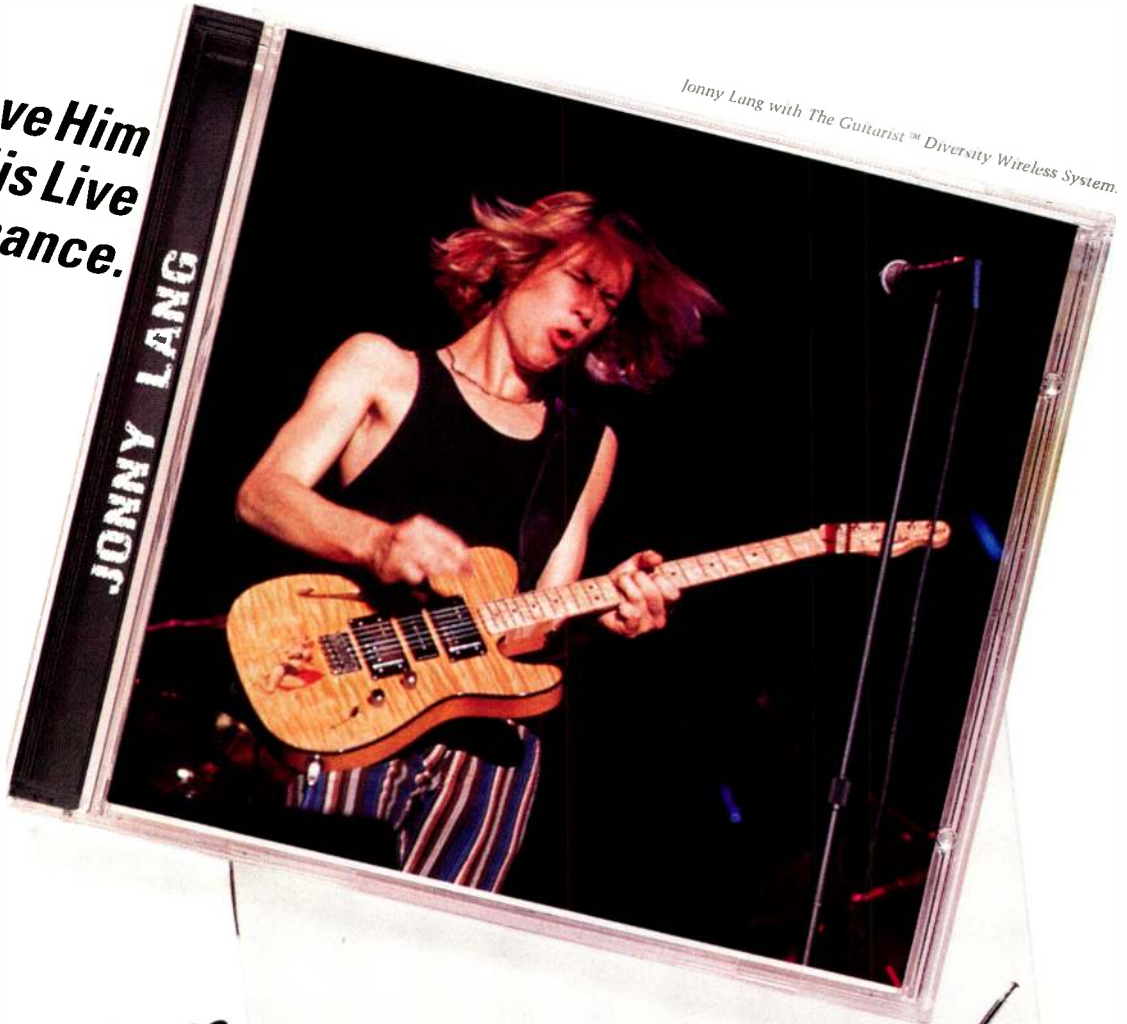

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Paul Westerberg

On your new album, Suicaine Gratification *(Capitol), your voice seems to have changed from how it sounded on earlier releases.*

I don't sense myself that it's changed, but maybe you don't see yourself getting old. Other people perceive it. On "Lookin' Out Forever," that voice is the same. I still have that other voice, but because a lot of the record was done by myself, I don't shout as much when I'm sitting in my basement. I still can if necessary. I did a lot of the engineering, so the voice is louder and there's more low end to it, but that might be [from] me playing the piano and not being really good [at] playing in certain keys that I know better for my hands, then having to adapt my voice to it rather than the other way around. So you might be getting me singing in a lower key than I actually would with the guitar.

Your vocal attack is different, though, maybe because there are more clean electric and acoustic guitars than we usually hear in your music, which must have made it seem that you didn't have to belt it out quite as much.

I do like that. I've come to the point where I like it loud but I can't do anything rhythmically with a distorted guitar sound. I basically need an acoustic guitar with a little distortion. A lot of it was done with a Gibson 335 and a little tiny-ass Gibson amp. It may be that I'm a lazy son of a bitch and I don't want to put another guitar on there. It's like, I'll put it on, and it's slightly out of tune, and I'm like, "I don't want to tune this fucker. Fuck it—it sounds good enough." A lot of it really is that.

You do hint at loud guitar, though, on "Lookin' Out Forever."

Sure, but the feedback brings it back down. The secret to that song is, we kept mixing it and mixing it and didn't know what to do, but now the chorus actually gets quieter, which is the opposite of making a hit record, [where] you bump the chorus to make it louder. Naturally, everyone hit it with all their might on the chorus, so we pulled back each time, and it creates a lot of tension because the musicians explode, and yet the volume remains the same.

That does reflect a change in your approach to writing and arranging.

I think the bravest part of the record is that a second verse will come and there's no sonic event. Like, in pop music, there's a big change: Here comes a background vocal or a new part. But here, it's just the words that change. It's like folk music, Pete Seeger or something. It's the same three chords, but the words are different each verse, and I felt good enough about the lyrics that they could carry the changes.

"I kind of go for aggressive Buddy Holly."

How does that reflect a different approach than in your earlier work?

I used to try to make records that I thought people wanted to hear—you know, where other people are used to hearing a loud guitar because it's the opposite of what it used to be, which was irritating. Now it's comforting. If there's a big distorted guitar, it's like, "Oh, that's comforting, and it's safe." It's dangerous to hear that *plink plink plink*, because you're forced to listen to . . . what? The kick drum? The guy's voice? It challenges you to listen to the song. We could have run anything through a SansAmp and made it sound like Smashing Pumpkins if we had wanted to; it's just the flip of a switch. But no, I kind of go for aggressive Buddy Holly.

So you're into tension?

Yeah [*laughs*]. It's a tense record.

—Michael Gelfand

WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE!
To read more of Michael Gelfand's interview with Paul Westerberg, visit Musician Online at www.musicianmag.com.

Photo: Len Irish

Waddy Wachtel

"We ripped off the Police completely with 'Edge of Seventeen'! I called Stevie Nicks that night and said, 'Don't ever do that again!'"

When did you become aware that you'd developed a sound that a lot of people, particularly in L.A., were quite fond of?

I never did. I wasn't trying for a "sound"; it just caught on. I never used any effects; it was always strictly a Music Man amp, my Strat or Paul, and a volume pedal.

And a good ear.

I think so. That's why I could never use any boxes. Even if I had an old MXR box, when you plug into it—even if you don't engage it—it's altered the sound. That always bothered my ear, because it had this artificial top; I couldn't warm up to it. That's why I always just went with amp crunch.

résumé
Rolling Stones
Bob Dylan
Everly Brothers
Brian Wilson
James Taylor
Warren Zevon
Linda Ronstadt

Still, those deceptively simple-sounding unisons that pop up in your lead playing, like in Melissa Etheridge's "The Only One" or Steve Perry's "Oh Sherrie," became a trademark sound for you.

I was going to that well a bit much! And it's not like it's an original sound either—it's all over the place on Hendrix records. But at some point, I thought, "I've got to come up with something else to do here." But it makes a big statement; it makes a note really have a lot of grab to it. It's almost a disturbing sound. You gotta do it right, though. Your pitches really have to be perfect, or else it sounds horrible.

It seems to me that you added a lot of bite to that hyper-polished L.A. sound.

That was kind of my job, to put an edge into it, because I didn't love the recording technique. Things did sound slick, but at least I'd get in there with my dirty sound. That was why people would hire me, because they needed that rock & roll element.

One of your more famous guitar statements is that staccato opening riff to Stevie Nicks' "Edge of Seventeen." Were you aware of the similarities between that song and the Police's "Bring On the Night"?

I had never heard "Bring On the Night," and at that session they told me they were going to do this song based on this feel. I heard something about the Police, but I didn't know what they were talking about. Then about two years ago, I had the radio on, and on comes what sounds like "Edge of Seventeen"—and all of a sudden, there's Sting's voice! I thought, "We ripped them off completely!" I called Stevie that night and said, "Listen to me, don't ever do that again!"

That's actually not an easy guitar figure to play.

Onstage, the beginning of that song is like a break for Stevie. I'd be standing there, playing that riff for around three minutes, before she'd even start singing! By the end of the tour, I was able to break walnuts open with my right hand.

You gave new meaning to the term "versatile" by signing on as Adam Sandler's musical director, as well as scoring The Waterboy.

At first I was a bit skeptical, though once we got on the road it worked out fine. But the funny part was when we got to Connecticut. I rang up Keith [Richards] and told him that we were going to be playing near him. And I said, "You won't believe this, Keith, but I'm working with a comedian." And he goes, "Aren't we all?"

—David Simons

If I wanted a hobby,

I would have picked stamp collecting.

Recording isn't my hobby, it's what I do. And even though I do it at home, I still expect the sound to be dead on. So when the vocal tracks weren't cutting it anymore, I upgraded my mic to the AT3525. You wouldn't believe what that studio condenser does for my sound. Now the old ball mic is just collecting dust.

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Rustëd Root

***Artist interviewed:* Mike Glabicki**
***Home base:* Pittsburgh**
***Style:* Loose-groovin' rock, with rootsy foundation, world music influences, and neo-psychedelic seasonings**
Latest album:* Rustëd Root *(Mercury), released November 10

What's the secret to successful touring?

The most important thing is to keep having meetings where you can work things out. They could be about anything from what goes into the dressing room to eat, to the tempos of songs, to how somebody is breathing in the bunk next to you. All these things can build up to the point where you don't even want to talk to each other, and that translates into the music in terms of how you listen to one another.

From left: Glabicki, Jim Donovan, Jim DiSpirito, Patrick Norman, John Buynak, Liz Berlin

How do you get the most out of your rehearsals?

We work pretty intuitively, as far as whether to take a break or what to work on next. But we do make a point out of switching our instruments around and jamming things out. With the main songwriter bringing in most of the material, and the bass player just playing bass, and the guitarist just playing guitar, energies can get stuck in one pattern. Switching instruments can give you a feel for how people perceive what you're doing, and help you understand what they need from you, and give everybody else an understanding of what you want out of a song that you brought in. It's healthy to change things up like that.

How do you write a song that works for your band?

Man, that is the toughest thing about being a songwriter in a band. You can spend a week working on a song and get it to where you like it, but when you bring it in to your band, you find that it just doesn't work with them. Maybe they're just not inclined to play that particular groove. Whatever the reason, you've just wasted a whole week. So what I do is, as I'm writing a song, I'll bring in bits and pieces of it, throw them out in a practice, and see how those parts get played out and arranged. Then, if they click, I'll take those parts back home and finish writing the song. With all that, I'll have twenty or so songs to the band that I think can work. But maybe only fifteen of those songs will work for me. At that point, we record those fifteen—and maybe only ten of those will work out on tape. There's just so much work involved in getting ten songs onto an album.

How can you save time and money when recording?

Pre-production is the key. Rusted Root has bought its own recording gear, mainly to do demos. I think we did three months of pre-production on the last album, and toward the last three weeks of that we started laying stuff down and working parts out on tape. At that point you can fly a producer in for, like, two days, to listen to the tape and make comments, and then maybe sit in on a practice situation after that. Then you give yourself two weeks to implement their comments before finally going into the studio. This approach saves us a lot of time.

We might save more time by recording live in the studio, but our track record at doing that isn't so good. We're just not that good as players [*laughs*], especially with the record company looking for the next album. So we concentrate on the basic tracks. On almost all our stuff for the new album, we went for either drums and bass or just drums on the basic tracks, and we do a lot of overdubs. It's a really meticulous process, but that's not necessarily bad. You can learn a lot about your live situation when you do that, and you find that live energy can be generated through overdubs.

How do you find the right management or booking agent?

I would say not to. Build a following first: That's the only leverage you've got in terms of getting a good manager at a good price. I know how it feels at the beginning, when you feel like you need a manager who's gonna take care of all your problems. That is totally a pipe dream. Nobody's gonna come in and make things right for you; you've got to make it right for yourself.

—Robert L. Doerschuk

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To read more of Robert L. Doerschuk's interview with Mike Glablicki, visit Musician Online at www.musicianmag.com.

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CrossoverSchmossover

The term "crossover" is used most often when describing a marketing device, as in when a country star named Shania or Garth "crosses over" to the pop charts, or some shrewd alt-rocker—the Gin Blossoms, say, or Chumbawumba—writes a song pithy enough to hit Top 40 radio. In more artistic terms, though, crossing over is a somewhat less cynical practice, which is to communicate musical ideas in a language that's different from your own.

"If someone speaks English first but also speaks German, French, or Hebrew, he's not a crossover person," says ***Andy Statman***. "It just means that he can speak a different language and communicate to a wider group of people." Statman established himself in the early Seventies as a bluegrass mandolinist and has recorded in that guise as recently as 1993. But for the past twenty years he's been playing the clarinet and exploring klezmer, as well as inventing a highly original style that blends klezmer with elements of jazz, fusion, and classical music.

Does this make Statman a "crossover" artist? Not exactly. "When you get to a certain level of skill on an instrument, the music you play taps into a deeper aspect of your psyche," he explains. "It becomes more a part of you, just like talking. Playing in several styles becomes your voice."

In other words, like saxophonists John Coltrane and Albert Ayler before him, Statman isn't simply trying on a new suit of expression. Rather, he's searching for the ultimate grail of inducing a kind of transcendence through music. "Crossing borders like this, you confront substantial issues musically and

DAVID SYLVIAN
IF I KNEW THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW...

This isn't something I've learned with time, but rather something I've known from the start, and that is the importance of having total control over everything in your work. It seems silly to take control of your album right up to the point of marketing, then leave it in somebody else's hands. I've always overseen cover designs and ad designs, and even which magazines to place the ads in, because nobody cares about all that as much as the artist. I've always demanded that right, because once you start to compromise, there's no stopping. And once you've been known to compromise, you'll be asked to do it again and again.

I know that when you're young, you see an open door, and as far as you perceive it, it's the only open door. You don't know whether there's going to be another one, so you take it. I made that mistake in the very early days with management and publishing; I did put my career in other people's hands. But it was through learning from those mistakes that I managed to make corrections early

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spiritually," he says. "And you deal with them. That's how you get there."

On Statman's stunning *The Hidden Light* (Sony Classical), the artist uses his multicolor voice to refract a gorgeous array of musical hues. "I'm not working on chops," he says. "It's not for my ego. I'm working on communicating in a deeper way, to find a more profound satisfaction in the music I play."

Krakauer

Another internationally acclaimed musician, clarinetist ***David Krakauer***, also deals with some rather profound issues on his new disc, *Klezmer NY* (Tzadik). Known for his proficiency in a myriad of styles, including classical chamber music and avant-garde rock and jazz, Krakauer resides in a place that's way beyond crossover. In neo-klezmer, a genre he began tinkering with as a hobby, Krakauer joined the Klezmatics back in 1987 and has since helped bolster what he calls the "second major revival" of klezmer.

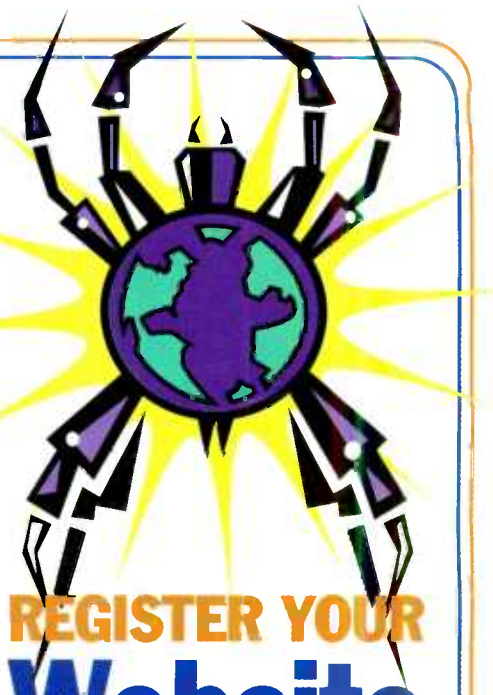
"Twelve years later, it's not what I'd call a crossover," he says. "I've found my musical home. From here I can play classical, compose, and improvise. It's a solid base from which to begin." To Krakauer, crossing over implies dabbling—"which is fine if you want to get a breath of fresh air and do something different," he adds. "But that's not what I'm doing." Instead, he's dedicated to expanding the klezmer vista while at the same time preserving the music of his grandparents. "It's important to be innovative and to keep the music alive and vital," he says. "But it's also important to retain the Yiddish inflection in the music."

Both Statman's and Krakauer's arts come from a source that goes to the root of each artist's mosaic of influences, a source that goes beyond crossover to a spiritual place, a place of imagination and discovery. "To me there's a spirituality in the beauty of [styles] coming together," says Krakauer. "You're in another dimension where everything somehow exists." Wonder if Garth would agree.—***Bob Gulla***

on, so by the time Japan broke up, I was very much in control of my work.

That brings to mind another point, which is just how important it is to have spent time in a band like Japan. Band members live in one another's pockets; they influence one another's tastes. You hear a good record, something that really opens your eyes and your mind, and you share the experience of that music, and you each take on different influences from it, and it starts showing up in your own work. You begin to develop this common vocabulary, which goes beyond language. That's very rare—actually, it's something I miss enormously, to walk into a room with a group of musicians and just start playing together with this understanding, which means that with the raise of an eyebrow or a look at one another's eyes, you know when you've hit on something, when something's got to develop and change.

To move on as a solo artist, you have to constantly reconnect with different musicians, and you have to build up this same kind of vocabulary, which is a far more artificial process than it is with a band. Sometimes you have it; sometimes you walk into a studio with a musician and, yes, you both understand the work at hand, and there isn't a great need for explanation. But that isn't a common occurrence, especially if you're trying to cover new ground. The common occurrence is that a lot of guidance is needed. So if your band is working well together, keep it together. That's such a special thing.
—Robert L. Doerschuk



REGISTER YOUR Website

Whether you've got a band, a record company, or a recording studio, it makes sense to extend your reach with a website. Fortunately, naming and registering a new domain is a relatively simple and inexpensive process: Log on, then go to www.interNIC.net, a service run jointly by the U.S. government and Network Solutions. (You can also go to www.internic.com, which is a commercial site that offers essentially the same service, but at a higher price.) Once there, you'll find clear, easy-to-navigate pages on which you can search their database to see whether the name you want is available. If the name of your project is already taken, taking on the word "music," "jazz," or something else that represents what you do is a common alternative.

Once you've found that your domain name is available, contact the web hosting company of your choice to obtain the appropriate web server IP (Internet protocol) addresses. You'll need this when providing your registration information to InterNIC. Next, fill out the registration template that's provided online, then submit it to InterNIC. They'll check it, and with their okay (via email), all that's left is payment—a mere $70 for two years, with a $35 renewal fee every year after that. Don't worry if you have questions; email, fax, and phone contact numbers are all there.—***David Weiss***

Photo: Michel Delsol

—BAND— MEDIATION

Sometimes the hardest thing about being in a band is your bandmates. Dealing with egos, money, and creative control can make even the most committed team player consider a solo career, and rising tensions have often split bands apart before they had even begun doing their best work. Other groups limp along, burdened by resentments that distract them from playing and writing together.

Fortunately, mediation offers bands a solution. A trained mediator can sit everyone down and facilitate discussions that handle resentments constructively. Negative feelings usually mellow as unvoiced expectations and assumptions are brought to light. As bandmates gain momentum on resolving their disagreements, they may decide to write down the results. This could be something legally binding, as in a formula for dividing royalties, or something less formal but equally important, such as a decision that there will be no interrupting at band meetings.

Unlike friends and managers, an impartial mediator has no stake in the outcome and therefore has an easier time helping the band make its own decisions. Since the band has to live with the results of their discussions, it's only right that they call the shots. Furthermore, the mediation doesn't end until all members are satisfied with the outcome; this is the best way to ensure that the solutions continue to work in the long run and across unforeseen circumstances. A successful working relationship is well worth the few hundred dollars (or less) that a mediation typically runs, since the band will end up not only happier but more productive too.—***Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA***

Contributors: *Dr. Tuckman is the founder of Dog Days Music Mediation, based in Washington, D.C. He can be reached via the Internet at ari@musicmediation.com.*

THE VALUE OF Distribution

Playing the blues for a living can be tough, especially if you're trying to do it via the indie route, so it pays to be resourceful. Just ask thirty-year-old ***Sean Chambers***. After building a vocal fan base in Tampa, Florida, for his Stevie Ray Vaughan tribute band, Chambers decided to test the national waters with *Strong Temptation* (Vestige), a tasty bouillabaisse of blues, with five originals and four covers that owe as much to Johnny Winter and Freddie King as they do to the mighty SRV.

Chambers

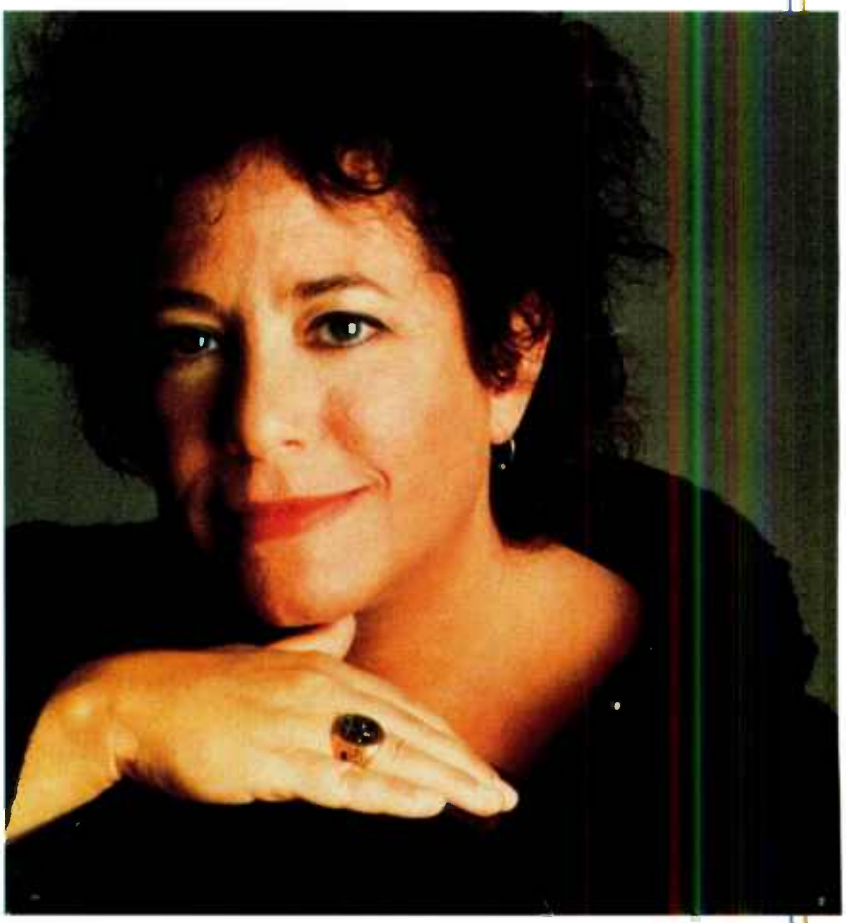
Chambers and his manager, Steve Einzig, shopped the record to a number of blues-oriented independent imprints last summer, with middling results: While label execs liked what they heard, nobody wanted to press the record. So Chambers and Einzig formed Vestige in order to release the album by their targeted date in mid-October. "We wanted to beat the rush of year-end holiday releases," explains Einzig, "as well as build a buzz early enough so that Sean wouldn't miss the chance to get booked for the [upcoming] festival season."

One problem, though: "Most distributors don't want to sign an unknown label with just one act," admits Einzig. Vestige was toying with the idea of a sub-distribution deal when they caught a lucky break: A vice-president at MS Distribution, which handles heavy-hitting blues labels like Alligator, Blind Pig, Black Top, and Delmark, listened to the unsolicited record package and absolutely loved it. "He recognized the passion in Sean's music and wanted to put the record out right away," marvels Einzig. "To see that kind of reaction coming from a suit at a distribution company was just phenomenal."

With MS onboard, Vestige shipped more than two thousand CDs to about 450 shops and one-stops, and Chambers hit the road in force to take his message to the people. "Now I need to build a good foundation and educate people about who we are and what we're about," Chambers says. "My goal for this time next year is to hook up with a major label."

The hard road to the big leagues has been recently repaved, says Einzig. "A lot of money has already been spent to establish Kenny Wayne Shepherd and Jonny Lang, so there'll be less risk involved for a major label to pick up Sean's second record," he points out. "The door is wide open for somebody to follow in their footsteps, but nobody's walked through it just yet." Memo to Chambers: Better master them walkin' blues.—***Mike Mettler***

Photo: Toni Ann Mamary



Sex and Memory

Janis Ian and Stan Ridgway discuss the changing role of gender in modern lyrics.

by paul zollo

It was a fateful day to get two gifted but disparate songwriters together for a discussion on one of the more controversial aspects of songwriting. Stan Ridgway, best known for writing and recording "Mexican Radio" during his stint with Wall of Voodoo, and Janis Ian, who achieved fame as a prodigy composer and performer with "At Seventeen," spoke with *Musician* on the day following the death of Frank Sinatra—a trick of timing that made it seem natural to open things with an appreciation of another master of the craft, Sammy Cahn.

As one of Sinatra's favorite tunesmiths, Cahn played a big role in building the singer's image as a swingin' celebrant of women. There was plenty of poetry, but relatively little obscurity, in Cahn's material: Men were men, and women were any one of a number of things, none of which might be confused with male or androgynous qualities.

There is an undeniable appeal to the great lyrics of Cahn and his colleagues in those less complex days of lyrical artistry. But how important is the use of specified gender in today's songs? Is the kind of songwriting in the Sinatra *oeuvre* appropriate in today's post-feminist world? Janis jumped in immediately to offer her views on this subject, with Stan soon joining in and *Musician* hurrying to keep up.

Janis Ian: Writing those kinds of macho, male-oriented songs was real important at the time that Sammy Cahn and others were writing them. The old saw was that women could sing a song that was gender-directed to women—they could just switch the gender—but men would never sing a song that was gender-directed to men. Even now, when you make demos as a songwriter, you're usually told to make male demos if you must choose, because women can hear a song when a man sings and translate it easier than a man hearing a woman sing.

Is gender specificity a priority for you in your writing?

Ian: Not really. I've always tried to write non-gender-specific songs, unless it's a song like "Jesse" that was written obviously to a male—though I have heard people think it was about a woman.

"At Seventeen," probably your most famous song, was written very much from a female orientation.

Ian: Well, I would argue with that. Fifty percent of the buying audience for that was male. I think that "At Seventeen" could have done just as well if it was sung by a man.

Stan Ridgway: *I* bought it [*laughs*]!

In the January '98 issue of Musician, *Bernie Taupin complained about how restrictive it is to write words these days for Elton John, because Elton wants every song to be universal and gender-neutral—no "he" or "she."*

(continued on page 22)

WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE!
To read more of Paul Zollo's interview with Janis Ian and Stan Ridgway, visit Musician Online at **www.musicianmag.com**.

Photo: John Scarpati

(continued from page 21)

Ian: There's a big difference between Elton and Bernie in that Elton is onstage, so he is seeing the universal; he is seeing the archetype right in front of him, and Bernie is not. But I think I would have a hard time as a songwriter if my singer restricted me. That's a valid complaint on Bernie's part.

"When 'Knife and Fork' came along, I said, 'My God, I've written a song about sex!' I'd never done that before."

— Stan Ridgway

Ridgway: It's a natural thing that happens when you write a lot of songs. You start to feel that you want to relate to everyone. I think you're right, Janis, that you just start to naturally write in a more gender-neutral way as you progress.

Ian: The artist at the end of the day always strives for the universal . . .

Ridgway: . . . if you want to communicate. Otherwise you can be cutting out half of the population. But in the ear of Sinatra and Sammy Cahn, those kinds of songs had something else at work, a kind of postwar ennui . . .

Ian: Yeah, the setting of a scene.

Ridgway: That kind of romance. I just love that era, and I love those kinds of songs. There are standards such as "Yesterdays" that don't have a gender in them.

Ian: But if you look at Johnny Mercer or anyone from that school, even the show tunes tend not to be gender-specific, unless they're building a story. It's hard to imagine the dustman in *My Fair Lady* singing something that isn't gender-specific: "I'm getting to the church on time." But you can also imagine Ethel Merman singing that song.

Stan, I'm surprised to hear you say that a songwriter's songs become more universal as he or she matures, because so many of your songs tell stories and are very character-specific.

Ridgway: It was about building songs almost like theater pieces. In those songs there was a period where I was building stories and a scene and a specific place, and it was a little bit like making a film—a *lot* like that, almost writing a novel. And casting it like a movie. Casting myself in it, I would have a hard time sounding like a woman—certainly not a woman you would want to go out with [*laughter*]. I had to fashion a certain character, or at least I wanted to. A lot of that is natural. Songwriting springs from a place where you just have to do it.

Ian: Yeah, songs lead you. The trick is learning to accept that and then have the craft to bend them and mold them. But Stan is right: If you become an older writer—and by that I mean if you have someone who starts writing at thirteen and is now eighteen, even—your world broadens past keeping track of every single song you write and gloating over them. It broadens past creating a catalog. You broaden past your home town and your family. And the more your world broadens, the more you tend to have a universal outlook on things anyway, and you begin to feel like a citizen of the world rather than a prisoner of your times.

Your song "Hunger" is entirely universal, except for that one line, "I hunger for you like a whore for a man to call a friend."

Ian: When I wrote "Hunger," I had written "Ride Me Like a Wave," which "Hunger" stands on. I had been listening to a lot of Brazilian music and a lot of older music, and I realized that in the past thirty years there's not a lot of sex in songs. There's a lot of *dirt* sex, a lot of "I want to do this and do that to you," but not a lot of overt sexuality in songs, especially in American songs. English is a very hard language to use to write sexual imagery that isn't just bludgeoning people. It really surprised me how uncomfortable the audience was, listening to those two songs. Because for me as a writer—and I think Stan probably agrees with this, judging from his recent work—there's a point where it's *good* for an audience to be uncomfortable. You want to shake them out of their complacency, but you don't want to threaten them to the point where they stop listening. And you try to

Photo: Scott Lindgren

find avenues that allow you to do that.

In "Knife and Fork," Stan pulls off metaphor—"I'll be the knife and fork/You be the plate"—that's about as blunt as what Janis wrote in "Ride Me Like a Wave."

Ian: It's difficult to find metaphors for sex that are understandable and not offensive, and at the same time sexy.

Ridgway: It's hard to write a song about sex, and when that one came along, I said, "My God, I've written a song about sex!" I'd never done that before. Not that way. I find writing songs about sex to be really difficult. What was that Boyz II Men song [*sings*]: "I want to take a shower with you" . . . [*laughs*]. I couldn't believe it, just totally absurd. Songs fulfill certain rituals for people, but the subtlety of language is leaving us, so they cut to the chase very quickly.

"In the past thirty years there's not a lot of sex in American songs. There's a lot of* dirt *sex, a lot of 'I want to do this and do that to you,' but not a lot of overt sexuality."
— Janis Ian

Ian: It works for some people.

Ridgway: And the rest of us wonder if anybody even knows what we are talking about. This is a world filled with blasting sensations. People get numb. Sometimes the thing that really gets people's attention is extreme sensitivity, or a sensitive statement that is expressed in a way that makes you think someone is opening up their soul. The problem is that people are asked to become personal writers so quickly that I think they confuse honest writing with telling the truth. And sometimes telling the truth is just a bore.

Ian: Yes, they confuse vulnerability with bleeding all over somebody. It's irritating to hear someone go on and on about their navel.

Which takes us back to the idea of the universal song. It's a real accomplishment to write something that's specific in its details yet still transcends gender and other barriers.

Ian: It's a real accomplishment because it means that you face your dragons and put them out into the sunlight and make that understandable to the people who are listening. But there is a lamentable tendency that goes back, unfortunately, to when "At Seventeen" was a hit. There were a number of female singer/songwriters at that time who wrote about their therapy. Personally, I am not interested in those details.

Ridgway: It becomes voyeuristic.

Ian: Exactly. And as a writer you end up cannibalizing your own life rather than living. I think it's brilliant to go back to the [old] songs and spend a while singing them, because you do tend to write from your own experience and your world starts to narrow. If you can go back to those writers who wrote with no thought of singing it themselves, you can train yourself out of it.

Ridgway: Absolutely. I've been going through all these old standards, old Sammy Cahn and Johnny Mandel songs, just singing them and getting them into my body. Singing songs by other writers is great: It's like reading a great book or going to a museum. If you take that in, a lot of it starts to work its way into your work.

Ian: It's a double-edged sword there, because if you're only listening to garbage, that's what you end up absorbing.

Ridgway: Garbage in, garbage out. That's absolutely true.

Ian: I don't know if you would agree, Stan, but that's something that people really underestimate. If you can spend some time going back to the basics, whether it's poetry or literature or songwriting, and put it into your body in some way, it makes all the difference. People forget how much of this stuff in the arts is mechanical; it's body memory, it's voice memory, it's emotional memory. It's much like teaching somebody guitar: You can teach somebody all you know, but there are times I go back to *boom-chuck-boom-chuck*. Because it reminds me of a lot of stuff that I've forgotten.

Contributors: *Paul Zollo is a songwriter and author of* Songwriters On Songwriting: The Expanded Edition *(Da Capo).*

Writing by the Rules

In crafting songs, as in other areas of life, there are rules of right and wrong. Ignore them at your peril.

by fred koller

Most songwriters are self-employed. No one is going to fire you if you didn't write an up-tempo love song in the key of C this week. There's no time clock to punch, no human resources department to field your complaints about working conditions. Let's face it, it's a pretty nebulous way to make a living. The only tools required are a scrap of paper and a pencil—and in fact, more than one hit song has been written by writers who repeat it enough times to lock it into their memory for someone else to write down.

In the same sense, there's no manual to follow. The guy at the nearest drive-thru fast-food place probably had to go through a lengthy training period and then pass a quiz on the number of pickles each customer should receive: for songwriters, there's no such regimen. That's not due to any lack of information on how to construct songs: Books and seminars are available to anyone who wants to learn about the craft. One can be taught the values of hard and soft rhyming words or how an F sharp in the bass over a D chord can create a new but exciting tension. We are told to religiously study the great songwriters of yesteryear by one instructor, and then advised by another that all anyone needs to do to become a songwriter is sit under a favorite tree and wait for word clusters.

All this is very interesting, but it seems to me that there's always

one topic omitted in these tutorials. That topic is ethics.

Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines ethics as "a system or code of conduct for a particular profession." In simpler terms . . . "rules." And for songwriters, there is a definite golden rule, which you may have already heard in other contexts: Thou shalt not steal.

A few years back, I played a show with the late Townes Van Zandt. There was a hit on the country charts that blatantly borrowed from one of his better-known songs. When I asked about the similarity, he told me that the writer would have to go to sleep every night knowing that he had stolen Townes' melody.

We've all tossed and turned, questioning whether that tune that keeps running through our heads is original. If I think I'm too close to another song, I'll substitute chords and play with the melody until I know that I have deviated enough from whatever song I was unintentionally plagiarizing. A songwriter I spoke with while preparing this article suggested bouncing new songs off of friends to see if they hear any similarities. You would be better served by playing it to someone who can be brutally honest.

You might not get sued over a song on a CD that you release on your own label or a parody lyric to a recent pop hit that will be performed only a few times. But if the song you created from another writer's work should happen to generate substantial royalties, it would be wise to have a good music law or copyright attorney available.

Even before calling an attorney you can educate yourself about your copyright rights and those of others by reading Lee Wilson's *Making It in the Music Business*. As an experienced music lawyer, Lee wrote her book specifically to give songwriters and performers the information they need about music law and business practices they need to avoid legal tangles and career missteps. The book includes four easy-to-understand chapters on copyright. (*Making It* was first published in 1995 by Penguin U.S.A. A revised and updated edition was scheduled to be released in early '99 by Allworth Press.) To find your own music attorney to advise you on these issues, go to a nearby law library and consult the *Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory* for local entertainment or copyright lawyers; attorneys are listed by their area of practice. You can access this directory online at www.martindale.com.

One question that comes up too frequently at songwriting workshops is, "How many notes from another song can one use without being sued for copyright infringement?" As far as I know, there is no exact number. Copyright law decrees that if your song is substantially similar to a song written by someone else and it can be proved that you had "access" to that song before you wrote yours, you will probably be found guilty of copyright infringement. What do I mean by "access"? If your song sounds just like a song that was played incessantly on the radio a few years back, it will be hard to claim that you were never exposed to it. If you were given a tape of the song at a music seminar, or if your publisher was pitched the song by the other writer previous to when you wrote your song, you'll have a tough time defending yourself. Musicologists will be called in to give their expert judgment, but access is still the most important factor.

Be advised that being found guilty of copyright infringement can be very expensive. In settling the infringement suit they file against you, the owners of the copyright in a song whose melody you steal may agree that you still own your original lyrics, but that won't make you happy, since you will have already spent any income you've received from the songs on lawyer fees and court costs.

Most music publishers and many performers refuse to accept unsolicited material in fear of being sued. Suits of this nature generally involve access and are usually settled out of court, but the time and expenses aren't going to leave pleasant memories for any of the parties involved. The best solution is to be original and not use other writers' songs as sources for new material. It's perfectly normal to listen to songwriters who inspire you when you want to get the creative wheels turning, but don't forget that it is illegal to plagiarize those songs. There are plenty of new ways to use the twelve notes available to all musicians to create a unique and original melodic line.

The same rule can also apply to knowingly taking someone's concept for a song. In many cities throughout America, it's easy to find an open mic night or a writer's showcase at a local club. At these events, songwriters perform a few of their latest creations for an audience that's usually made up of their peers. It's a great feeling to hear the audience applaud and then to mingle with everybody, but recently a number of songwriters have told me that they've gone home from these events with a strange taste in their mouths. They had performed a new song for the first time only a few weeks before and were quite surprised that another songwriter who had been in attendance had applied their title and basic concept to his or her own new composition. When they approached the plagiarist, they were told, "I really don't know where I got that idea. And anyway, you can't copyright a title."

I've had first-hand experience with this sort of thievery. A few years back, I co-wrote a song called "The King and I" (Fred Koller & John Gorka, 1988), based roughly on the Elvis sightings one still reads about in tabloids at the supermarket checkout line. My song included appearances by Jimmy Hoffa, Amelia Earhart, and a UFO. I performed it at many writer's nights. Less than a month after I had first played it in public, friends started telling me about another writer's new song, which featured this same cast of characters. But even though this songwriter performed in the same club where I had played, I would have had a hard time proving that he had been there for one of my shows. In the end, since neither song became an international pop smash, I couldn't see hiring a lawyer and trying to subpoena his credit card charges to prove that he'd been at the club on one of the nights I had performed my song. Like Townes, though, I know that every time he performs this song or receives a compliment on how clever it is, he'll remember how he came to write it.

The moral of all this is this: Don't steal songs. I sleep well at night. So can you.

Contributors: *Fred Koller has co-authored many popular songs with John Prine, John Hiatt, Shel Silverstein, and other writers. His own albums include* Where the Fast Lane Ends, Songs from the Night Before, *and* Night of the Living Fred.

Voices in the Air

Take 6 demystifies the ephemeral art of singing in harmony

by robert l. doerschuk

If you've ever stood in front of an audience with your face scrunched in concentration and a finger in your ear, trying desperately to sing your part while everybody else in your band is howling chaotically through your monitor mix, this one's for you. . . .

There's something secure about being an instrumentalist. When you press your finger on this string, or when you spread your mitts across a keyboard, or push the right combination of valves down on your horn, you know what note you're going to get. It's up to you to think of that note, but once you've got it in your head it's just a matter of mechanics to bring it out.

Singers have no such reassurance. For them, the pipeline between concept and sound is entirely self-contained. That's cool—but without keys or strings or wind tunnels to guide you into the right pitch, that's also a little scary. Yet the great harmony vocalists sound anything but scared as they flow through lush parts, or walk the tightwire of unison lines, or dash through minefields of minor seconds. And when they do it a cappella, that's like working blindfolded *and* without a net.

No one communicates the exhilaration of singing complex yet infectious parts better than Take 6. Their roots are humble, going back to the four original members' first extemporizations in the men's rooms of Oakwood College in Alabama. Since then they've expanded to six voices, whose collective virtuosity is virtually without precedent in American popular music. Certainly no one has married their level of technique to such a sheer, pure feeling of joy. From collaborations with Queen Latifah and Don Henley to the mind-bending unaccompanied performances on their latest album, *So Cool* (Reprise), they set a standard in sound that's about as awesome as that of Mark McGwire on the diamond.

Yet even we mortals can learn from Take 6, both from listening to their work and to their words about the magic of harmony. We met recently with half the group—Cedric Dent, Mark Kibble, and Mark's younger brother Joey Kibble—and asked them to share what they could about how to sing parts . . . not brilliantly, perhaps, but better than many of us have been doing.

As a pianist, I'm used to thinking of notes as being in fixed positions on a keyboard. As singers, how do you envision your parts, especially when singing a cappella?

Mark Kibble: I'm thinking harmonically. I don't necessarily have to see them on the keyboard; I know they're there. I usually do have to play a chord out [on the keys] to make sure that every note is right, but I don't have to see that in my head.

Dent: I actually envision the notes on a staff, particularly when I'm learning a part that someone else is teaching me. I'm seeing the whole chord. I very rarely sing melody, so to remember my parts I generally have to memorize the whole chord structure. It's hard to just learn my part without knowing what the chords are.

So everybody in Take 6 knows everybody else's part?

Joey Kibble: You may know how close they should be to you at a certain part. I know what an interval should sound like, so singing right next to Ced, I know how we should sound in relation to our music. I may not know his part through the whole song, but while he's singing with me, I know how it should sound.

Dent: If you asked me to sing someone else's part, I probably couldn't do it. But if you ask me to play the parts on the piano, I could block out the chords. From there I could probably extract their part.

Does everybody in the group have perfect pitch?

Mark Kibble: Nobody here has perfect pitch.

So if I asked you to sing an A . . .

Mark Kibble: . . . we'd get close. More often than not, we might get really close. But people who have perfect pitch are never wrong . . . so I've heard [*laughter*].

If perfect pitch isn't essential for the kind of singing you do, what talents are?

Mark Kibble: I would think that you need to have relative pitch—that means to me that if a person gives you a key, you ought to be able to hang with it. Many could probably sing a cappella and not even come close to knowing where they should be with the pitch: they just kind of feel their way along. But for us, it's essential that you have some relative pitch, so that you know where you're supposed to be in the overall chord. That means that if the key changes, you still know where you are.

How do you develop a group feel for breathing and phrasing?

Joey Kibble: Where it's natural to breathe depends on how you would sing the phrase. If I'm singing three or four lines and I need a breath somewhere in there, that might tell you where to do it.

Mark Kibble: For us, it's kind of a natural thing, because we've been singing together for so long. We know that if we want to sound good, we probably should breathe the same way. That adds inflection possibilities. We've found that if one person is doing something that's really cool, then everybody else follows suit. Then you have a whole group of people who are sounding good in a certain part; it magnifies the coolness.

Joey Kibble: That always happens when we learn our parts; the song begins to evolve, parts begin to change. Even though this is my note, I have space to do this little trill. Now, let me change up the chord, since I can, and sing *this* part. After you start doing that, the group is like, "You did this? Well, I'm gonna do *this*." Now the song begins to evolve into one that's more personal.

WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE!
To read more of Robert L. Doerschuk's interview with Take 6, visit Musician Online at www.musicianmag.com.

From left: Joey Kibble, David Thomas, Claude McKnight, Alvin Chea, Cedric Dent, Mark Kibble

That's the difference between playing a written horn chart and what you're doing. Your parts are more organic and alive than if they were notated.

Dent: It's actually more akin to when guys like Count Basie worked from head charts. Their arrangements changed a lot; they didn't always remember exactly what was going on. A lot of the writing in those early days was linear and rhythm-based, and in that kind of an environment the stuff would change a lot, as opposed to the era of completely written-out big band charts that everyone was reading.

But decades have passed since then, and artists such as Take 6 have incorporated all kinds of influences that no one had even heard back then.

Dent: The language is different, but the principle was the same, because their riffs would change all the time.

The idea of improvising parts within arrangements as complex as yours is, frankly, amazing.

Mark Kibble: As long as you know where the bass is, you can know how far you can stretch to try something new.

There are certain ensemble parts you can't mess around with.

Joey Kibble: Yeah, there are. So when Ced teaches us the basic arrangement to "Fly Away" [from *So Cool*], then we can begin to play around with our parts, to liven it up and make it real. Now, for that song in particular, we did have to stick to a basic formula, because we're emulating an African arrangement.

How did you get inside that style?

Dent: It's the same process that Mark used when he did "So Cool," when he started listening to big bands. I just immersed myself in Ladysmith Black Mambazo and studied how they phrase, how they fall off the note, how they end phrases—the breathing, even. Of course, the harmonies were easy to pick up, because they're a lot simpler, more triadic, than what we do.

The challenge, then, was in the phrasing. Some notes were cut off differently than they might have been in a more Western context.

Dent: Right. And once you teach the part in an arrangement like this, if someone seems to have a feel within the group that's better than everybody else's, then I would say, "I like the way he did this. If everybody can match the way he just did that fall, it'd be perfect." We do that a lot—follow the person who seems to do it the best way.

Even at the level of mastery you've achieved as an ensemble, is there anything that's still really challenging?

Dent: It's probably a universal problem, but singing unisons is harder than singing six-part harmony.

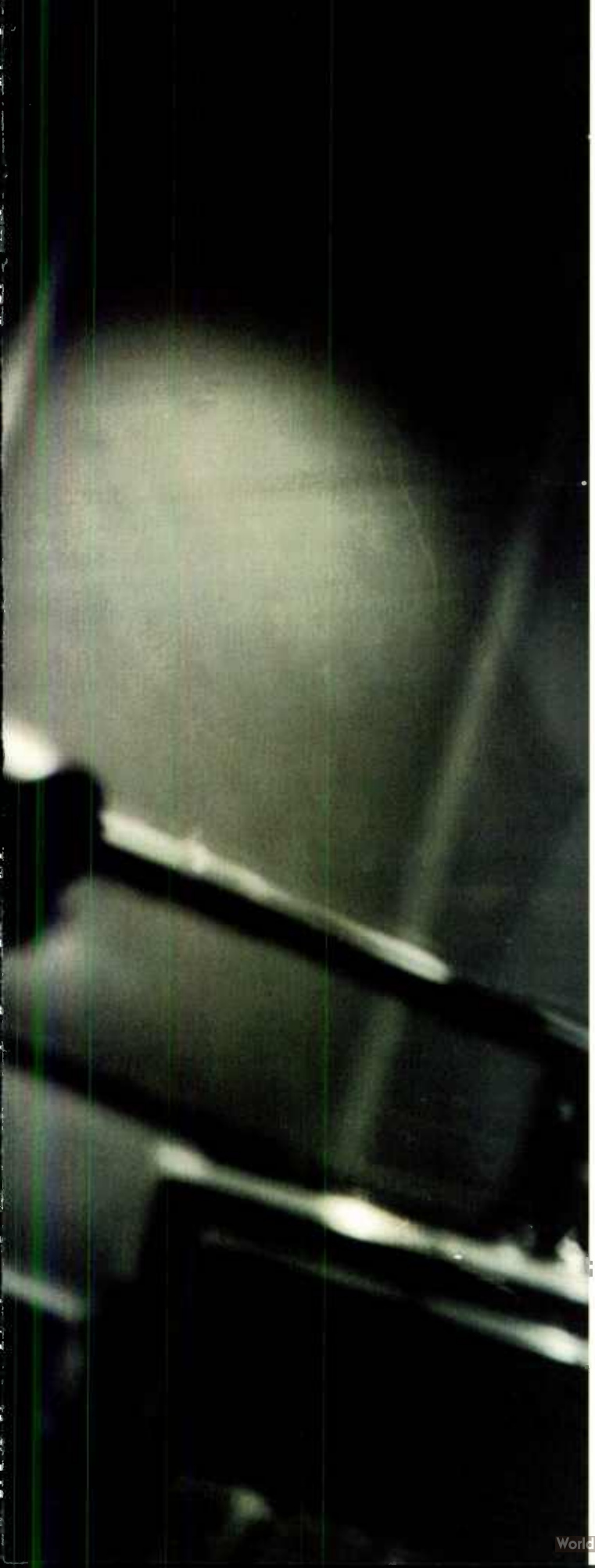
Mark Kibble: You have to be very attuned to what you are doing and not confuse your voice with someone else's. If you can't do that, you're gone.

Dent: I started experimenting a little more with unisons on Joey's song ["A Few More"], which ends the [latest] album. There's a thing where not only do we do a unison, but for the first time we do staggered breathing on that one note. That was the first time we'd held a unison note that long, and it was a challenge. The tricky thing is to be inconspicuous when you have to drop off and take a breath, and then be just as inconspicuous when you rejoin, so there's not a boost in the level and it sounds like one continuous note.

You can't just hold the key down and let the vocal sample loop.

Dent: Right. You also don't have the luxury of circular breathing, which horn players like Kenny G can do.

Mark Kibble: But when you said something about our level of mastery, it's important for me to say that you shouldn't ever think that you've reached the pinnacle of whatever field you're in. You can always learn something from somebody else, no matter how simply they seem to do their thing. They always have something they can teach you that will probably improve your craft. The more you can learn about any kind of music, the more you can keep that open, the more you'll find people who can give you something that will improve what you do. But once you feel like you've arrived, you close that hand, and nobody can teach you anything. At that point you begin to self-destruct.



AROUND THE GLOBE — WITH — SHERYL CROW

The multi-talented artist reflects on writing, recording and producing *The Globe Sessions*, and considers new avenues of creative expression.

BY JASON ZASKY

Is there anything Sheryl Crow can't do? Ever since she burst on the popular music scene with "All I Wanna Do" and *Tuesday Night Music Club*, she has been solidifying her reputation as an exceptionally talented musician. After the magnitude of her contribution to her debut was questioned in the wake of its massive success, she began taking responsibility for an ever-increasing share of the creative process. The release of her self-produced follow-up, *Sheryl Crow*, left no doubt about her abilities as a singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and performer. The album was a departure from its predecessor, not only in its harder-edged, guitar-oriented sound, but in that it featured far fewer collaborative songwriting efforts.

Photo: Tchad Blake

Gearing up for her third CD she altered her creative method even more dramatically. After moving to New York City—a major environmental change in itself—she assembled a home studio (dubbed Globe Studios) in Manhattan's meat-packing district, which allowed her, for the most part, to avoid using expensive public studios. Lyrically, she deviated from her usual narrative technique, instead writing in the first-person, a switch that not only gave the songs a more intimate, personal feel, but meshed well with the soulful, R&B-influenced music she was writing at the time. Named after her new studio, *The Globe Sessions* (A&M) was released last fall and greeted with the usual glowing response from both critics and the hoi polloi.

After the album's completion she began exploring several new areas of interest. Most notably, she produced two Stevie Nicks tracks for the *Practical Magic* (Warner Sunset/Reprise) soundtrack, and ventured into the world of film herself, making her acting debut with Dwight Yoakam in *The Minus Man*. Along the way she added to her growing résumé of soundtrack credits with songs on both *The Faculty* (Columbia/Sony Music Soundtrax), and *Message in a Bottle* (Atlantic) soundtracks, and graced the small screen on her own VH1 *Storytellers*. Currently in the midst of producing Stevie Nicks' solo album, and with a world tour scheduled to last most of this year, it's no wonder she had difficulty finding time to talk. After we had to postpone our discussion almost a half-dozen times—including a potential noontime get-together on a Tuesday in L.A. (I imagined us having a beer together)—she finally was at home in New York long enough for us to have an exchange about making music.

Did you have any trepidation about changing your creative process for The Globe Sessions *when what you were doing was working so well both in critical and commerical terms?*

I really didn't think that much about it. In this particular instance, because I put in a new studio the environment was obviously different . . . [*sound of wailing sirens intrudes*] . . . There's something that happens when you move. I think moving is really emotional and particularly being in New York where it's a totally different environment, a lot of that tends to show up in your art.

How did you go about assembling your studio?

I had put a studio together to take out on the road [for the *Sheryl Crow* tour], thinking that I actually would record most of my next album on the road, and I did do some recording on days off. I found that we had put together a state-of-the-art studio and the only thing I was missing was a 24-track machine and a board. So I decided when I got home that instead of spending more money in a corporate studio that I would just go ahead and bite the bullet and buy the rest of the equipment, so that in the future I'll be able to make my albums in my home studio without having to worry about the big bill.

Did you save money this time around or did the start-up costs offset the savings you would have realized?

I didn't really save money. I made *The Globe Sessions* for about what it cost to do my last album in a public studio, but from here on out it will be paid for.

What recording gear do you have in there?

Photo: Peter Lindbergh

I have a Neve broadcast console and a Neve Sidecar, as well as a couple of API Lunchboxes. I have four 1176's, a Fairchild, and four LA2A's [compressors]. I have 24-track digital capabilities as well as a Studer 24-track machine. I have various tube mics, condenser mics, and compressor mics; a lot of vintage ones as well as newer ones. I have a Mac computer, although I don't have [Digidesign] Pro Tools. That's basically the standard stuff, and then I have other gadgetry. I have a lot of old, vintage amps, and a couple of old guitar modules that are out of production.

How much did you write in the studio prior to getting your own?

I wrote most of my first two records in the studio. There's just a great freedom when you're in your own studio though. You don't feel the pressure of having to accomplish something every day, like you do when you have $1,800 hanging over your head. I still feel that pressure to accomplish something, but it's a little bit different. It's pressure I put on myself, not the pressure of feeling like I'm racing with the bills.

I've seen you quoted as saying you've only had a few songs that have almost written themselves, like "Riverwide." What other songs came to you quickly?

Well, the experiences I've had . . . [*pauses*]. I think [simply] trying to write another song was the impetus for "Riverwide," as well as "Home" and "Redemption Day" [the latter two from *Sheryl Crow*]. Those are the three that come to mind as having basically written themselves in a complete sense. And they stem from my struggling to write another song and not getting anywhere with it. And I think at the moment when I threw in the towel with the other ideas, those songs were free to surface.

How often does poetry play a role—either directly or indirectly—in the creation of your lyrics?

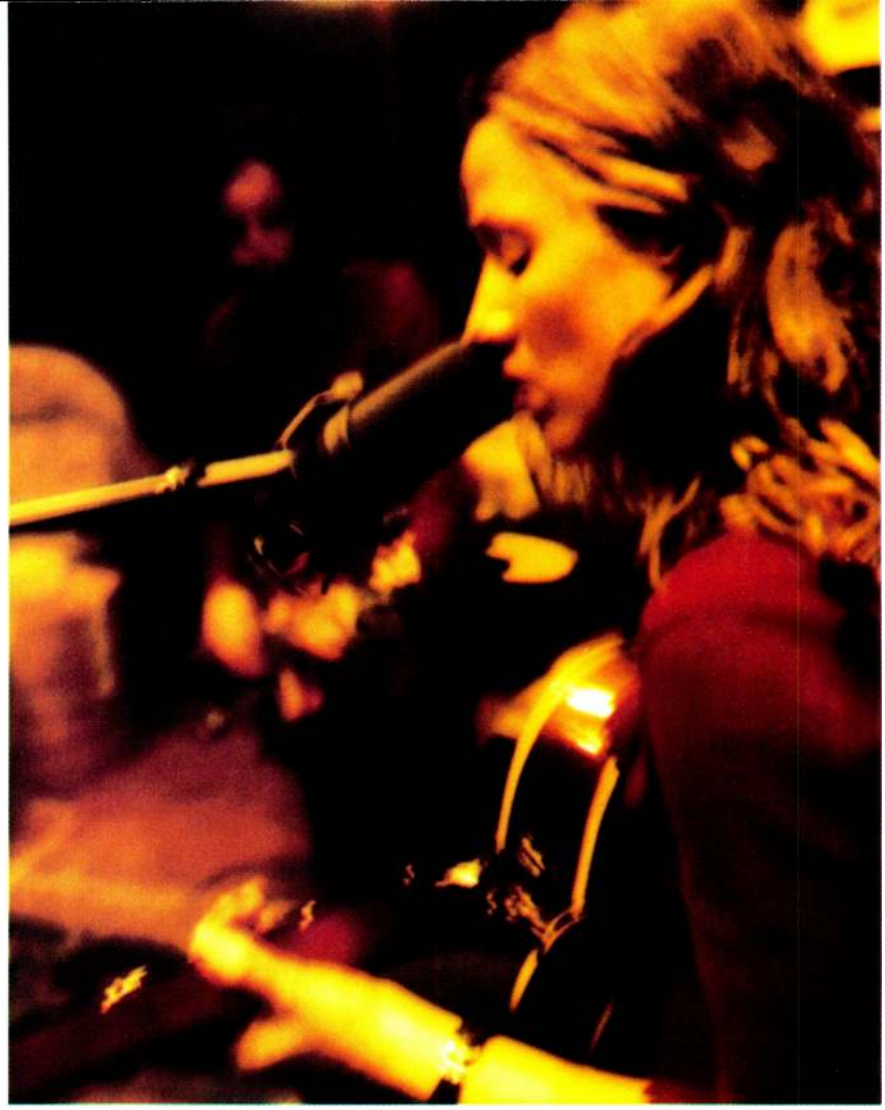
I like to write lyrics first, so in that way the music is always inspired by the lyrics. But on a couple different occasions I've been inspired by other people's poetry. In the case of "Riverwide," that was from a poem from [Walt Whitman's] *Leaves of Grass*. But I probably don't get inspiration moreso from poetry than from other places.

Which is more important: the music or the lyrics?

[*Laughs*]. I think they're both the same. I'd like to think that when people listen to music they care as much about the lyric, but I think if you interviewed people that just listen to music [as opposed to those who create it] that's probably not true. For me I'd like to think that the lyric is as important the groove and the music.

As a songwriter, it's my feeling that it's the lyric that really brings a song to another level.

But I think initially it's the music that draws people in.



How did the opportunity to record "Mississippi" come about?

I was sitting in my studio in New York with my engineer after having mixed and mastered the entire album, and Bob Dylan's manager called and said Bob had this song. At the time I was really on the fence about whether I felt like the album was done or not. And he brought over the song to play for me, and I just thought it was serendipitous that in that moment of real insecurity about what I'd produced and created this song filled in the void.

Did recording "Mississippi" inspire you to write and record additional material?

Yeah, there were a couple of other things that I hadn't finished, and when I got in with this group of musicians [to record "Mississippi"] it was different than the early process of making this record because then I was doing most of the work myself. When I got in with these musicians it was so effortless that I just threw out a couple of other ideas that I had and we recorded them in a couple of days.

On VH1's Storytellers *you said you initially viewed most of your hits as throwaway tracks. Is it hard to tell when you've written a hit?*

I honestly have no idea. I would absolutely not have had any hits if I'd completed my records without people arguing and telling me which songs should go on.

Then how much input do you have regarding what songs will be released as singles?

I have a lot, but I try not to be too emotional about it, because songs mean different things to me than whether they're going to be commercially successful and whether they're going to sell records. Initially, they ask me my opinion about it and all I can do is argue my emotional opinion about each song, and then I leave it in the hands of the business folks.

"In your own studio you don't feel the pressure of having to accomplish something every day, like you do when you have $1,800 hanging over your head."

Did you view "My Favorite Mistake" as a hit when it was finished?

I don't know about a hit, but I defintiely thought it was a good song to come out with for a number of reasons. It speaks for the tone of the album right off the bat. This album is a lot more soulful and a lot more based on soul and rhythm & blues than my other albums. So hearing that song you wonder if that's what the rest of the album is really like. And not only that, I think it has a really singable chorus, and that's a good argument for putting a song out. Not all my choruses have been like that. When I think back on songs that I've loved and I've initially loved right off the bat, they've had pretty simple choruses.

Was there a clear choice for the second single as well?

I think they're going to put out "Anything But Down." In Europe they released "There Goes the Neighborhood," and there was a lot of debate about that, but I think here it's going to be "Anything But Down."

Was "There Goes the Neighborhood" well-received in Europe?

It was. I think mainly the reason they're steering away from that is that I felt uneasy about releasing that as the second single, mainly because to me that song is kind of a conscious stream of thought and I'm not really sure how much I care about that. Sometimes you have to fight for how you feel about songs, as opposed to putting out songs that you think will do well.

Apparently, you had the sense that something wasn't quite right about the album you recorded prior to Tuesday Night Music Club. *Are you worried about those tapes getting formally released at some point?*

Oh no. You can buy it right now if you pay $150 and order

Photo: Tchad Blake

it through the mail. I'm not worried about it at all. The songs are definitely valid and the album is valid. I just didn't want it to come out as the first impression of what I do, because it was such a mature-sounding record. It basically sounded like a Sting album, and it obviously was produced by Sting's producer, so that's not too far of a stretch when you hear it. People who are real avid fans who have that record probably didn't have to work too hard to get it.

Your first instrument is piano. Is that a good foundation instrument for learning others later on?

I think so. It gave me a really good harmonic base, and I went on to study classical piano, and I took a lot of theory and a lot of syntax and a lot of composition, and having a foundation in piano gave me a pretty sound education in voicings and harmony and melodic structure.

The credits on The Globe Sessions *indicate that you play about eight different instruments on the album. How do you find the time to keep your chops up on so many instruments?*

I'm a person that kind of obsesses so that when I get into one instrument that's all I'll play for a while. On this record playing bass was a really inspiring challange. So every time I wrote a song I either wrote it or tracked it on bass. That just was the instrument I gravitated to. I've been playing acoustic gigs and been playing bass and I'm getting better and better at that and then it will probably be something else.

You weren't writing previous records on bass though?

I wrote most of my last record on guitar, but I think writing on bass actually frees you up to think about writing a good melody.

Which guitars and basses are you playing these days?

I typically play Telecasters and Gibson acoustics. I have a 1964 Country & Western that I prefer to play and write on. For bass it's my Kay bass or a Fender P-bass.

And piano and keyboards?

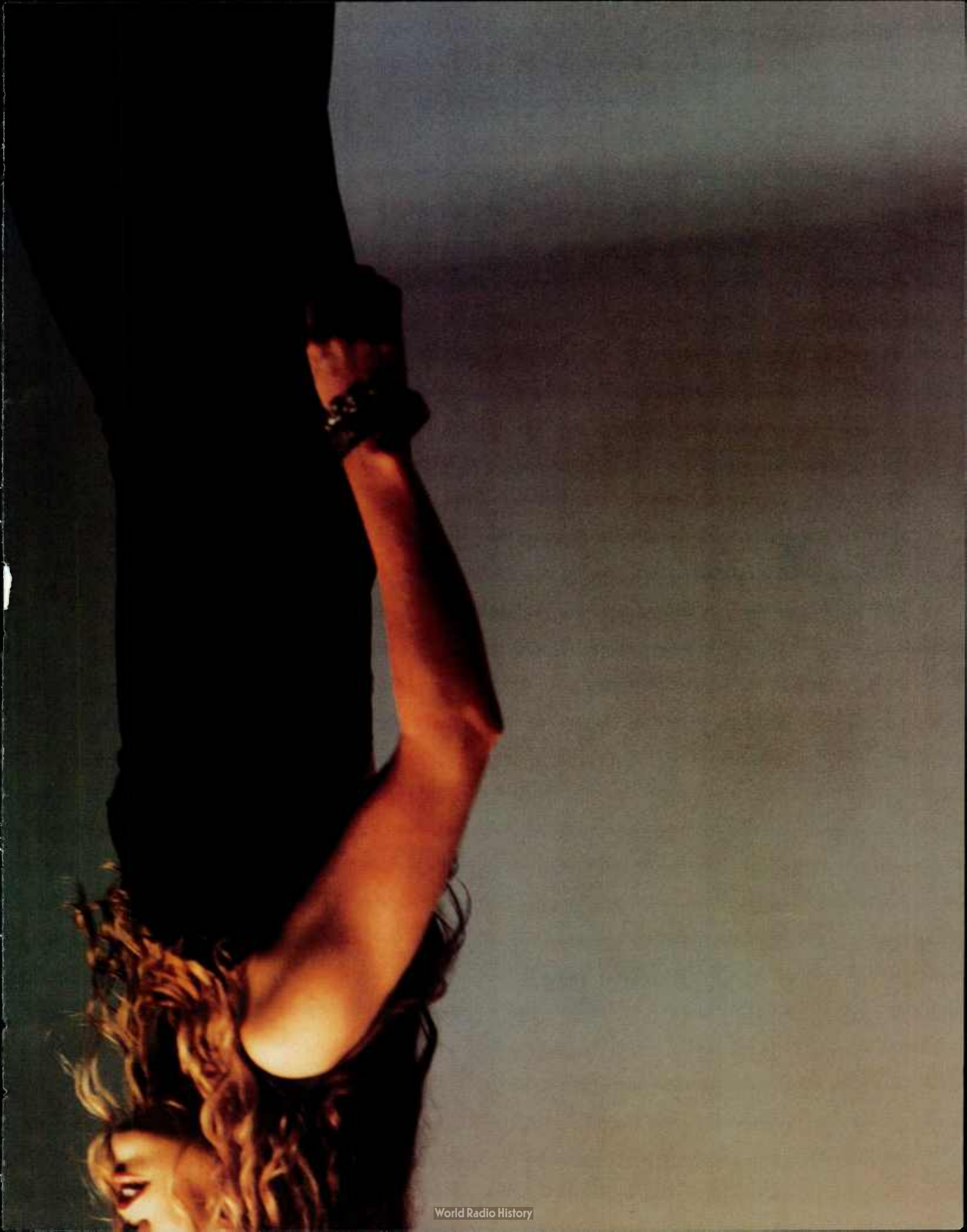
I don't play piano much because I don't own one. I play quite a bit of Hammond and Wurlitzer. I try to keep the keyboard sounds as analog as possible.

Do you have a hard time keeping your voice in shape with all the demands placed upon it?

I've never had trouble with my voice, like losing it or being hoarse. I've really been lucky, even when I've been not so great to my body and have been devoid of sleep.

Do you have any system for taking care of it, particularly on the road, or is it just naturally healthy?

I think sleep is the best healer of your body. I remember having a conversation with Gregg Allman about that, because he sounds amazing after singing every night for three hours for



the last thirty years, and he still pretty much parties and he says that the only thing that can really keep you going and keep your voice in good form is sleep. I think that's true.

You produced your last two albums yourself. How do you stay objective about your own songs and performances?

I've come to learn that producing me is a lot different than producing somebody else. For me producing is basically the process of facilitating getting the song recorded, and I generally know when I start recording something in what direction I'm headed. Whether I see that through or veer off from that depends on how the tracking goes, and I call decisions as I go, basically trying to keep the energy and the creative process moving and trying to keep everybody in sync. I think when you're producing somebody else, a lot of it can be determined when you hear that person's voice over the track you're creating. And it's hard work. I found it's really tiring. Although there's nothing greater than the satisfaction of hearing a song you really like in a great version.

"What's the point of reading reviews when you're not going to go back and change it anyway?"

Are you working with Stevie Nicks on an ongoing basis?

It's going to be ongoing because I'm on and off the road. We did two songs for a soundtrack [*Practical Magic*], but we're also working on her upcoming [solo] album, which I think will be out in early fall.

How did the offer to begin working with her come about?

She called me when we were getting ready to do *Storytellers*, and she asked if there was any way I would be available to record two songs. I had two days right between my *Storytellers* and going to Europe. I said, This is all I have and we'll just really push the envelope and try to pull it off." So that's what we did.

Are you contributing songs to the album?

The work we've done so far has been on stuff that she has already written. We've done four songs and we're getting ready to do the fifth one. Then we're going to start writing.

Are you learning anything new working strictly from a producer's perspective?

The big difference for me is that I pretty much know as I'm creating a track how it's going to fit with my voice because I'm recording as I go. I've learned with Stevie that I can create a really great mood, but when she comes in and starts singing over it, that is going to be the determining factor—how it works with her voice.

So you have to make more adjustments on the fly?

Exactly.

How much do you get into the engineering aspect of being a producer?

I'm there playing and calling the shots and trying to create a direction. Part of your role as a producer is to define what the environment is going to be . . . what the direction and tone of the album is going to be. We're still discovering that.

You've placed a lot of songs on soundtracks in the last few years. Is writing for a soundtrack or scoring for a film an entirely different approach than writing for yourself?

I scored a small independent film recently and that was a completely different adventure because it was all instrumental and we were doing it to [SMPTE] code. It's a different muscle to flex, but it was a really enjoyable experience in that I wasn't concerning myself with lyrics. It was just melodic content, thematic material, and also trying to keep in mind that the cues were to enhance the picture, not to be the main thing in the picture. For the most part, when songs go into movies they approach you about what they think is applicable to the movie, so I just basically approve whether I think the movie is something that I feel good about having a song in.

But when you wrote the title song for Tomorrow Never Dies, *were you writing specifically for the film?*

That was written for the movie, and I loved doing that. It was an interesting experience in that it was a James Bond movie, so you not only have the luxury of getting to step outside your genre, but you have the legacy of these great songs that have come before and the great tradition of James Bond the spy. So the direction we headed in was to create something that was reminiscent of early James Bond.

Since we're on the subject of movies, how do you feel about your [debut acting] performance in The Minus Man*?*

It was definitely something new for me. It was a challenge. I'm not too terribly extroverted when it comes to being in front of a camera so in that way it was a really good experience.

Did your experience making music videos come in handy? In the video for "My Favorite Mistake," for instance, it's just you playing to the camera.

The bottom line is you have to be unaware of your actions and be so instinctual when you're in front of a camera and you're acting like someone else. For me to stand up and sing "My Favorite Mistake" is me singing what I feel. I write those words from my own standpoint, so it's quite a bit different.

I was not completely unaware of how it all works at least. I had some knowledge of cameras, directing, the slow pace of it, and so I wasn't completely out of my element. It's different though when you speak and you hear your voice come out of your body. It's something to really get used to. It's different than when you're singing.

For most people hearing their singing voice is much more difficult to get used to, but I suppose in your case . . .

. . . the speaking voice can be much more alarming [*laughs*].

A lot of musicians assume that when you reach the level of success you've achieved in music that everything is gravy. What's

Photo: Samuel Bayer

the downside?

For me personally there's only a couple [of problems]. I consider myself to be extremely fortunate to be successful and to have the notoriety and respect that I have. I feel lucky that I have a job that I really, really love. But you have to get very tough-skinned about what's written about you, and the other thing is that for somebody who enjoys being on the road I think you miss out sometimes on your own life. I find that I'm gone so much that sometimes I let my relationships go and then I kind of step back and go, "What's happened here?" [*Laughs.*] It's a real absence from your own life.

How do you handle negative reviews or people saying horrible things about you?

I don't read my own reviews, so I guess I'm a bit of an isolationist about stuff like that. I don't read articles about myself. I remove myself from that because my philosophy is that you've made the record you've made, you've done the best that you can, you let go of it, so what's the point of reading the reviews when you're not going to go back and change it anyway? With regard to *The Globe Sessions*, I felt really good about it when I finished it, and I still think it's the best record I could make. People's opinions are just people's opinions.

"I've always wanted to be a great songwriter and a really good musician. It's probably because the people I respect are those things."

Did you feel the same way when you made your first album, before you'd established a reputation, or were you more concerned what people were saying back then?

I was probably more concerned back then, but I was new. I didn't realize that you don't have to read everything, and that you don't have to take everything to heart, and that there are people out there who simply will not like your music because they don't like you. And that's a part that goes along with the package.

How important is it to you to be respected—particularly by your peers—for your playing, performing, and songwriting ability?

I guess I have respect issues, and that's probably the thing that in some ways has motivated me. I've always wanted to be a really great songwriter. I've always wanted to be a really good musician. It's probably because the people I respect are those things. As I've gotten older and as I've met some of these people, it's a really sweet thing to have the respect of people that I've grown up loving and idolizing.

As a high-profile musician, do you feel you have a responsibility to raise awareness about issues you feel strongly about, like the world's landmine problem?

I've fought with myself over this issue before. I would be involved in the things that I care about whether I was a celebrity or not, but it certainly helps with some of these issues, particularly with an issue like the landmine cause, which doesn't really affect everyone in the world—it affects people who are exposed to landmines. Being a celebrity certainly draws attention to that and I can use my celebrity, and I do use it for things that I care about, but as far as feeling a responsibilty I think I feel a responsibility because I'm a citizen of the world and I get to see the world a lot and it makes the world a lot harder to play.

Do you worry that branching out into producing and acting, and getting involved with various causes will take away from your own records?

At this stage in my career I'm more interested in exploring my alternatives—like producing and doing some film scoring. And time off sounds interesting. That's an avenue I might pursue.

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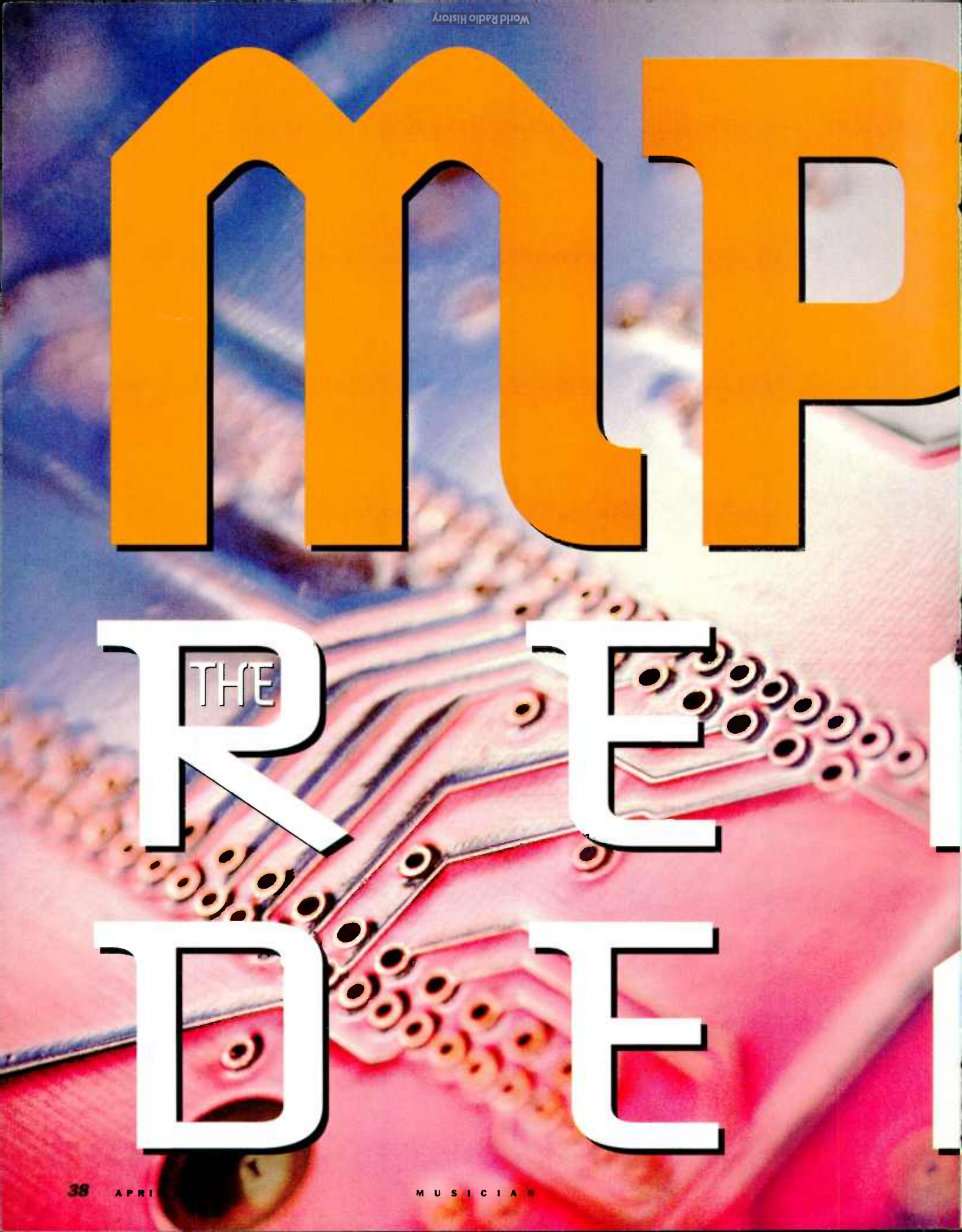

A dramatic new file format offers new freedom for music distribution—but at what price for independent artists?

BY DAVID WEISS

As the Internet evolves from a geek's impossible dream into a powerful medium, the human race holds it in its hands like a hot potato. Every time its enormous potential seems to come clearly into focus, the World Wide Web flexes a new muscle in communication or commerce, stronger than even its creators expected in so short a time.

And every once in a while something entirely bizarre comes up, and nobody knows *what* to think. That's what happened when a compression algorithm called MP3 started showing up everywhere, and people realized that the professional community responsible for the next major stage in the Net's evolution wasn't banking or programming—it was music.

Whether it lasts forever or gets obliterated from the Web, MP3 is an important piece of code to understand. It has the power to either render musicians all-powerful, bringing down the tyranny of the music industry, or to effectively bankrupt all musicians, killing creativity as we know it. Its probable destiny lies somewhere between these scenarios, but exactly which path it will follow is a matter of emotional debate. The relationship between musicians and record companies, and the effect on retail, royalties, and especially music fans, have been pushed violently to the surface by this tricky format.

"R.E.M. said, 'It's the end of the world as we know it,' but it's actually the end of the *industry* as we know it," says Chuck D of Public Enemy, who made extra enemies at his label, Def Jam, by posting free MP3 files of previously unreleased material on his website, www.public-enemy.com. "They can't think like they've thought before; they have to come to the table. This is a technology they can't pimp, and that's a problem.

"We'll see the return of artistry. Instead of making money off records, you'll see artists trying to expand the boundaries of what they can control and reach their fan base. This is a situation where the little man can get a chance."

But the software usually wrapped around MP3 also has the side effect of making mass music distribution over the Internet easy for *anyone* to do,

whether they're the copyright owner, as in Chuck D's case, or just a rabid fan with an Offspring CD, a website, and a little spare time. That's why the Recording Industry Association of America, the popular villain in this saga, is in essence saying, "Not so fast."

"There's a spirit on the Internet that lends itself to people thinking they can take everything for free," points out Steven Marks, vice-president and deputy general counsel of the RIAA. "But it's hard to argue with the basic fact that if you're ripping music off of a CD and putting it onto the Internet, it's theft. It's no different from walking into a store and taking something without paying for it."

A standard that was originally developed as a simple storage application, MP3 didn't begin its electronic life suggesting that it would eventually put Billy Idol and the Beastie Boys on the same Web page. MP3 is short for MPEG-1, Layer-3, and was developed by the Moving Picture Coding Experts Group (MPEG), an international consortium of companies and committees, between 1988 and 1992.

The third layer of a standardized coding scheme for video and audio, MP3 was created with an eye toward saving precious space and time during downloads. "Obviously, the bandwidth on the Internet is very much a commodity," explains Marina Bosi, president of the Audio Engineering Society (AES). "The original aim was to reproduce CD audio quality at much lower data rates. MP3 was the means of reducing storage, minimizing the data rate while maximizing audio quality."

"To say [unauthorized copying] is MP3's fault is to miss the point. I say that it's CDs with no protection that make it possible."

—Michael Robertson, www.MP3.com

While MP3 ultimately fell slightly short of producing CD-quality sound, its compression capabilities have been a very important component of its rapid spread. A song that used to take up forty megabytes of space on a Web geek's hard drive now takes up four megabytes or less, vastly reducing the amount of time necessary for a download. Bundled with "rippers" that can pull the music off any CD and store it digitally on a home computer for easy uploading to the Internet, you've got a highly efficient system that makes worldwide distribution—and rampant piracy—a tantalizing possibility for music maker and aficionado alike.

According to Michael Robertson, who raised the visibility of MP3 with the high-traffic activity of his site, www.MP3.com, the ability to post MP3 files gives independent musicians a powerful tool for promoting and distributing their own work, free from the clutches of the major labels. "The system we have today works fabulously well if you're a Spice Girl, but for that other 95 percent, what you have now sucks," Robertson says. "Artists are adapting: We now have more than 1,500 artists who have signed up with MP3.com to market their own products, and 250 of those use us to sell their CDs [through MP3.com's online DAM label]."

True to his word, bands that want to post their music on the MP3.com site will have an easy time of it. Clicking on the "Artists" section leads to a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and then to the online sign-up sheet. The site's database is free to join, the non-exclusive contract can be terminated at any time, and your band could very well end up on the Top Forty download list that's updated weekly. Even if your band already has its own Web page, posting your MP3 files on MP3.com puts you on a site that gets up to 200,000 visitors a day, including A&R folk, and keeps you in the company of a host of underground and established artists. Along with the music files, you can post a brief band bio, contact info, and whether a hard copy of your CD can be purchased through the DAM label, which splits all revenue fifty/fifty with the artist.

Whether you post on MP3.com or simply download the software and post your music elsewhere, anyone who wants to duplicate your songs can do so a million times over. That's where the dual-edged sword comes in. MP3.com itself asks the question "Are MP3's legal?" and provides the following answer:

"Yes and no. It's legal if you encode MP3s from your own CDs and keep them to yourself. But it's illegal to encode MP3s and trade them with others unless you have the permission of the copyright owner of the music. To put it another way, MP3 is simply a file format that can be used either legally or illegally."

More recent copyright legislation, such as the Audio Home Recording Act of 1992 (AHRA), is meant to prevent making digital copies of copies of copies—"serial" copying—without the authorization of the copyright holder. To achieve that end, Serial Copy Management Systems (SCMS)—inaudible flags that limit a person to making just one digital copy of an original on CD, minidisc, or DAT—must be encoded into the music.

But there's a problem: The AHRA applies only to digital recording devices like DAT players, not to general purposes devices like computers, which therefore aren't obligated to look for those flags. Up until now, effective security measures against serial copying from computer to computer have only been built into other online audio formats, like Liquid Audio. That's why once someone has an Eric Clapton song copied from a CD onto their computer, there's no technical recourse to keep it from spreading to ten thousand more Macs and PCs.

"To say [unauthorized copying] is MP3's fault is to miss the point," Robertson says. "I say that it's CDs with no protection that make it possible. People have always been able to copy music, since the time music was stored. If you're in the five percent that gets your music on the radio, great, but if you're the rest, copying is part of the game. There's probably not a person in the world who doesn't have a bootleg tape."

But Liquid Audio, which licenses software for online music distribution and promotion that embeds anti-piracy and rights reporting into songs, notes that the musical community stands to lose a lot if web surfers get a free ride. "If all music is free, there's going to be fewer musicians because they're not going to be able to afford to work," says Dick Wingate, vice-president of content development and label relations at Liquid Audio. "MP3 isn't getting anybody paid. It's good news because it's indicating high demand. Consumers are looking for music to download, but in many cases they can't find it an authorized format like Liquid Audio, so they're forced to look for unauthorized recordings and MP3s."

If MP3 users had stayed chained to their desks, able to enjoy

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the fun new medium only from their bookshelf speakers, the issue may never have been forced. But then a 2.4 ounce device called the Diamond Rio PMP300 made listening to MP3s an extremely portable proposition, and the RIAA took action—which brought MP3 more attention than ever.

Alarmed that the $200 device would send the level of illegal copying to dizzy new heights, the RIAA obtained a temporary restraining order on the Rio to prevent it from hitting the market. The drama increased when Diamond Multimedia successfully appealed to a higher court to remove the injunction, claiming that the Rio was a playback device, not a recorder, and therefore not capable of violating any copyright acts.

Applying copyright protection to MP3s that are moved over the Internet is its own animal, one that performing rights societies ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC are just beginning to tame. "If all goes well, MP3 means additional income for songwriters, publishers, and artists," says Randy Poe, president of Leiber & Stoller Music Publishing. "But as any new technology creates a new source of income, the downside is it's a new source of *loss* of income."

"[MP3] enables us to get better data, manipulate it less expensively, and get the money out to writers quicker."

—Richard Conlon, BMI

With an estimated 150,000 MP3 music files on the Internet, forty million versions of the free Real Player from Real Networks (www.real.com), and five million versions of another free player, Winamp, having already been downloaded, the societies have a lot to keep track of. But here's where the power of the Web will eventually work in favor of copyright holders: "The cool thing about the Internet is that it's all digital," reasons Richard Conlon, vice-president of marketing and business development at BMI. "It's possible, from publication through performance to identification and payout, to maintain the process in a totally digital way. Ideally, that enables us to get better data, manipulate it less expensively, and get the money out to writers quicker.

"We're working with people who publish MP3s and put them on the Web, just like with Liquid Audio and other audio playing technologies. We're making sure the proper information is included when works go up on the Web, and educating on the need for writers' rights, to make it easy for Web publishers to [post MP3 files] right and legally."

"From a musician's standpoint, MP3s give the independent musician, someone who doesn't have a recording contract, the potential to direct-market their product," adds Chris Amenita, assistant vice-president of new media and technology at ASCAP. "Where there's concern is people putting up a lot of music in a manner they clearly don't have the right to do, and there's the potential that it takes away revenue opportunities from the rights owner."

With that in mind, a songwriter represented by BMI, for instance, could and should contact the society if they find a site where their music has been posted without their permission. BMI will follow up with the site to educate the operator on how to obtain a BMI performance rights license. Although it hasn't happened yet, Conlon concedes that a precedent-setting lawsuit will probably be necessary at some point, when they encounter a site that has taken the property of a songwriter and refuses to compensate the writer or BMI on the writer's behalf. Collecting for mechanical rights is another domain entirely, left in the hands of the publisher and a subsidiary of the National Music Publishers' Association, the Harry Fox Agency.

Legalese aside, many musicians have found that the format is the gateway to fresh creative avenues. Kristin Hersh's site, www.throwingmusic.com, provides her with breathing room in the studio, and gives her fans the opportunity to subscribe to a monthly offering of new MP3 tracks. "This is better for me than trying to force my band or myself into the niches that we've tried to for the past ten years," she says. "MP3s remind me of making B-sides, being free to play whatever music I want and not caring what people are going to think, whether it's the next big thing."

"An artist can go in, cut, and then be up by the end of the next day," Chuck D says. "It's fresh, it's hot—none of this waiting ten or twelve months before you can release material."

But before artists, labels, and retail get a chance to fully analyze the online audio situation, the RIAA is throwing a major curveball at MP3, and all the other formats as well. After countless accusations that they're foot-dragging monoliths, hopelessly incapable of getting hip to doing business on the Internet, the major labels united in mid-December to announce the Secure Digital Music Initiative (SDMI).

Led by Hilary Rosen, president and CEO of the RIAA, the industry heads described SDMI as a voluntary specification to protect copyrighted material in all existing and emerging digital formats and through all delivery channels. Although the foundation for SDMI was being laid long before MP3 became a well-publicized problem, it will probably spell the end of the free ride for much of the new music sold after the initiative is implemented (ambitiously projected for this coming holiday season). "We were fearful of having a marketplace that was fragmented," says Steven Marks. "There are all these different ways to do the same thing, and we worried that they would actually stifle the marketplace."

Adding to the mix will be the power of MPEG-4, which merges compression for multimedia, including audio, video, and computer graphics, in one tiny package. Equipped with an Intellectual Property Management and Protection (IPMP) interface, this latest format permits effective protection of the content and management of all associated rights. With MPEG-4, artists looking to post more media-rich presentations, such as music videos, will be able to do it securely.

Yet as artists and industry continue to arm-wrestle over algorithms and their impact on the future of music, the fans have already spoken. Whether or not there's a price attached, MP3s offer a new level of choice, convenience, and independence that music consumers are not going to want to give up. "That's the best thing about being interactive: People don't want to be programmed," Chuck D proclaims. "They program themselves."

Contributors: David Weiss plays drums with the New York-based group Uvula. His story on how to avoid stress on the road was published in the Dec. '98 issue of Musician.

WORKING WITHOUT A NET

Health insurance seems out of reach to thousands of musicians—but the cost of not having coverage can be devastating.

BY CRAIG P. HAVIGHURST

Laurie Hall had momentum. Just back from a six-week European tour with her band Ovarian Trolley, she was anticipating the release of their third CD on a highly-regarded indie rock label. A 35-year-old bassist based in San Francisco, Laurie had been writing and singing with her sister Jennifer for eight years. Now, with several national tours under their belt and another scheduled to promote the new project, the Halls and guitarist Buck Rito were cautiously priming themselves for a breakthrough.

Then in August of 1997, Hall took her daughter on a sightseeing trip to New York—where a truck ran a traffic light and plowed into the side of

Illustration: DWilson/Satellite Studio

their cab. Hall seemed hurt, but after eight hours in the hospital she walked out with no bad news other than stiffness and a case of whiplash.

"But when I got back to San Francisco," she recalls, "I just started to crumble." X-rays and MRI scans on her lower back revealed seven herniated discs and a broken vertebrae. She couldn't stand or sit for more than a few minutes, or strap her bass to her shoulder. She tried to tough it out at a series of gigs around Seattle and Portland but wound up bedridden for weeks. "That's when I saw I couldn't tour on the album," says Hall.

Beginning with a $400 ambulance ride to the hospital, Hall entered the arcane and often indifferent world of American health care. Like thousands of musicians, she didn't have health insurance, and now, after a series of tests, outpatient procedures, and chiropractic care, she's facing unpaid medical bills of around $6,000, thousands more in lost income, and surgery in the next few months. She can't earn a living through either music or her former day job as an independent massage therapist. On top of it all, she has to deal with the "devastating" feeling of leaving a record label and two bandmates with no way to promote their new record.

IF YOU THINK PUBLIC PROGRAMS WILL SAVE THE DAY SHOULD YOU BECOME ILL OR INJURED, THINK AGAIN.

Hall's plight is shared not only by musicians but by most people who choose a career in the creative arts, where jobs with steady pay and benefits are hard to come by. For musicians, such jobs are pretty much limited to the upper tier of touring performers, members of major symphony orchestras, and those tied to entertainment corporations or movie studios. Most musicians are self-employed, so they have to deal themselves with all the issues handled in corporate America by benefits managers: Social Security taxes, a pension fund, and, most confusing and expensive of all, health insurance. The unfortunate evidence is that most young working musicians either assume health insurance is out of their reach or ignore the issue altogether.

"As a musician, getting sick is the last thing you think about," says singer/songwriter Victoria Williams, who six years ago was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. "I never thought about it. Until something happens, you're just not aware of it."

Linda Ghaffari is risk manager for Flood, Bumstead, McCready & McCarthy, a business management firm for performing artists in Nashville. She sees the problem on a regular basis as the firm takes on unsigned, unestablished artists. "When you're in your twenties, you think you're immortal and you don't need [health insurance]. The last thing you want to do is spend over $100 per month on an individual health plan when you think nothing's going to be wrong. And when you're living hand-to-mouth and not making enough money to buy a house or invest, you tend to shy away from it." Even so, she adds, her firm won't even consider representing an act that goes out on the road until they're covered for health and disability.

That's because the consequences of not having insurance are so high. A day in the hospital now costs upwards of $2,000. Major illnesses or injuries can incur bills of $100,000 or more. There are more subtle effects as well. Uninsured people generally don't get enough primary care, which means that serious health problems, including cancer, don't appear until it may be too late to do anything about them. Even ailments far less dramatic than a fractured back—muscle and joint pain, tendinitis, hearing loss, or polyps on the vocal cords—can keep musicians from earning their living.

If you think public programs will step in to save the day should you become ill or injured, think again. Even when programs are there to help, they can baffle with bureaucracy and then fall woefully short of what is needed. After her accident, Hall was relieved to find that the state of New York has a no-fault insurance program that seemed to cover injuries suffered while riding in a regulated city vehicle. The problems began when New York officials referred her to a pair of doctors in San Francisco. "Both said I could go back to work as long as I didn't sit or stand for more than thirty minutes," she says. "No excessive bending, no lifting over ten pounds. This was all written down. And so they denied me any more insurance, any loss of wages. It was unbelievable." Appeals to the state's general assistance program, the federal Supplemental Security Income program, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (which has since been reorganized and renamed) are all pending or were denied.

In the meantime, while searching extensively for the right kind of care, Hall established relationships with doctors and chiropractors at a Bay Area spine center. "They all agreed to work with me because they thought that I had insurance," she says. Luckily, after New York's insurance system turned her down, "they continued working with me because they liked me. They're hoping that someday they're going to be reimbursed, but they didn't just drop me, and they could have."

Hall's next option was Medi-Cal, California's adaptation of the federal Medicaid program. Medicaid was launched in 1965 as a health care safety net for the poor and disabled. Over the years, the demands on the system have been so great and health care costs have risen so dramatically that Medicaid coverage has been limited to children, their (almost always single) mothers, and the disabled. There aren't many musicians in that slice of the population, but Hall was one of the fortunate few. Ironically, her doctors at the spine center don't even work with Medi-Cal, because its rates are so low and its bureaucracy so Byzantine, but if and when Hall needs surgery, Medi-Cal will keep her from getting stuck with some of the bills for tests and hospitalization.

TAKING CARE OF THEIR OWN

When all else fails, musicians will often turn to their fellow troubadours for support and financial assistance. Hall's bandmates organized a concert in San Francisco to raise money for her care and living expenses. These kinds of benefit shows have become a *de facto* health plan for musical artists, yet they almost never come close to raising the kind of money needed

for a major hospitalization or a long period of not being able to work. Moreover, the amount raised is generally proportional to how famous the musician is.

Fortunately, there are national and regional nonprofit groups and trade associations available to help musicians help their peers. Some are highly specialized. The Big Joe Turner Musician Fund assists needy blues musicians. There's a Jazz Musicians' Emergency Fund and a Gospel Music Trust Fund. A Grand Ole Opry Trust Fund is planning a retirement community for older Nashville-based musicians who may not have socked away adequate retirement funds. And the Society of Singers provides funds for the medical and living expenses of needy vocalists.

The two best-known organizations, and those with the broadest mandates, are MusiCares and the Sweet Relief Musicians Fund. Sweet Relief (Box 39666, Los Angeles, CA 90039; phone [888] 955-7880) gives away about a quarter of a million dollars each year to musicians who have been slammed by medical problems and expenses, according to managing director Jo Anne Klabin. Among its recent recipients are a band of players in their early twenties whose van crashed, a 32-year-old drummer whose insurance covered part of her treatment for rheumatoid arthritis but not the $400 per month she needs to spend on pharmaceuticals . . . and Laurie Hall.

"Now I really get how people [come to be] standing on the corners with their cardboard signs," says Hall, reflecting on the evaporation of her savings and the maze of paperwork that stands between her and government assistance. "I took great risks [by going uninsured], but I needed to be a musician because I'm passionate about it. I'm just so thankful that there are organizations out there that understand how musicians get themselves into these predicaments, just by wanting, needing, insisting on being a musician."

The other such national organization, MusiCares (3402 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90405; phone [800] MUSICARES), was founded by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences in 1989. It's larger than Sweet Relief, with membership open to anyone who works in the music industry, from producers to drivers. Yet it has somewhat stricter eligibility criteria: Applicants for grants need to prove that they've had five years of experience or credits on six "commercially released" recordings or videos. And they need to provide detailed financial records and medical histories. (Our January '98 Headlines feature explored the efforts of MusiCares and another organization, the Musician's Assistance Program, to combat substance abuse among musicians.)

Both MusiCares and Sweet Relief participate in the ten-year-

old Entertainment Assistance Cooperative, which helps relief funds work together and make the most of their limited resources. The groups share cases at weekly coordinating meetings, at which an appeal to MusiCares, for instance, might be forwarded to a local group that's in a better position to help. In addition, the Actor's Fund is developing an Internet site that will describe all the rules, options, rights, and limits on health care coverage for people in the entertainment industry on a state-by-state basis.

The fact that such organizations exist raises a question: Why can't musicians band together like other groups of people to get inexpensive insurance? For a time, MusiCares contracted with an insurer to offer individual coverage at group rates to any participating musician; unfortunately, Tomarken says, "very few people took advantage of it, and it just became too costly for the insurance company to manage." Now the organization has social workers on staff in Los Angeles and Nashville who, in addition to processing applications for aid, will refer musicians to local resources. These might include private coverage, public programs, or high-risk insurance pools run by states to cover people who are turned down repeatedly by private insurance companies. For example, the Motion Picture and Television Fund carries individual health insurance from a group called Industry Advantage. Any performing artist may buy into the plan's group rates. They're available only in California, but almost every state will have *something* relevant to single working musicians, and MusiCares claims to make that information available to every musician who asks.

WE GET OURSELVES INTO THESE PREDICAMENTS, JUST BY WANTING, NEEDING, INSISTING ON BEING MUSICIANS.

Other, smaller alliances have tried to secure health insurance for players, mostly without success. A group of 150 dues-paying members of a group called Chicago Harmony and Truth had an agent do an exhaustive search. "She came up with a plan," says rock photographer Paul Natkin, who organized the group. "But it was still totally out of the range of most of the members." Ironically, while MusiCares had been stymied by trying to find a plan that would cover musicians in all parts of the country, Natkin was told that no insurer would offer group rates to an association that was only local. Then again, nobody ever accused the insurance industry of consistency.

GETTING COVERED

Benefits and discounts for players can be found through their unions and rights organizations. BMI and ASCAP members have access to comprehensive medical plans. Access to group health coverage is a key benefit to joining the American Federation of Musicians, but that option only works for those who are willing to play all their jobs at negotiated union fees—that pretty much excludes anybody on the road with a struggling, unsigned band. The best deal on insurance is for musicians who earn royalties on recorded work. The American Federation of Television and Recording Artists provides an excellent health and benefit package to members who earn at least $7,000 per year in royalties. That coverage is dropped, though, if royalties dip below the limit, so some musicians carry a private policy as a backup to AFTRA's coverage.

If none of these options applies to you, you'll want to explore the market for individual health insurance. The premiums and quality of plans will vary, and you'll need to find an agent or broker to help you sort through the possibilities. Ask several agents to go over your situation. Bear in mind that some will try to steer you to the plan that pays them the biggest commission, not necessarily the one that offers you the best deal. In most states, Blue Cross and Blue Shield will offer the most attractive individual policies.

When you apply for health coverage, you'll be asked to disclose your medical history. This information must be accurate, or else you could have a policy in which you've invested significant money revoked without a recourse. Smoking will boost your premiums by about ten percent—and, according to the insurance industry, if you've lit up *any* tobacco in the past year, you're a smoker. Past problems with drug or alcohol abuse will make it hard for you to find individual coverage. If you're turned down by more than one plan, try looking into state insurance pools for high-risk individuals. If you've had coverage through a job for more than eighteen months and are dropped or quit, you can't be denied coverage due to a pre-existing condition if you apply for new coverage in a timely manner.

It's difficult to generalize about how much health insurance will cost. For young, healthy people, traditional insurance premiums range from around $75 to much more per month. The ultimate cost depends on a host of variables, including where you live, your sex, and your medical history; if you have a chronic health problem, like hepatitis or HIV, there are essentially no limits on what you can be charged. Then there's the plan's deductible, or the amount you have to pay out of your own pocket before the insurer begins to cover the bills. The most expensive kinds of insurance cover every doctor and hospital bill from the first dollar on, with no deductible. For anyone paying his or her own premium, that's a waste of money. Your goal in acquiring health coverage is to protect against catastrophic losses from unexpected misfortune, not to arrange payment for all minor medical expenses. A deductible of $1,000 is a good minimum to consider.

The ultimate in high-deductible, low-premium coverage for individuals are Medical Savings Accounts. This recent innovation in health insurance is especially attractive to self-employed people because it represents a modest start on retirement planning in addition to providing protection against serious illness or injury at an affordable cost. Here's how it works: An insurance company sells you a high-deductible

policy (up to $2,250) for between $50 and $75 per month. At the same time, you set aside up to about $2,000 to start the medical savings account. When you see a health care provider, whether a doctor, an optician, a dentist, or a therapist, you pay for the service with a special checkbook that deducts from the MSA. Money contributed to the MSA is tax-deferred until age 65. Unlike a so-called "cafeteria" plan, you keep what you don't spend, it accrues interest, and you have the option of adding to it as time passes. If your medical expenses in any given year exceed your deductible—due, perhaps, to a hospitalization—the insurance policy kicks in.

Finally, a word about managed care, since it's so frequently criticized in the news. Managed care was the market's response to uncontrollable cost increases in traditional, fee-for-service insurance. It limits cost by limiting each member's choice of health care provider. HMOs won't pay for care outside the network, while PPOs will only pay a portion of such care. Many people chafe at the prospect of losing this choice, but plenty of good health plans choose doctors based on their quality and the satisfaction of their patients. The cost-controlling "preauthorizations" for surgeries or expensive tests aren't unique to managed care; traditional insurers do this as well. The rule of thumb is to look over each plan carefully before signing up. It's tedious, but you should have to do it only once.

Is it worth all this hassle to get covered? One way of answering is that if you have any way of affording it, you have a societal obligation to insure yourself. That's because if you do get injured or sick, somebody will take care of you, and somebody will have to pay for it. If you've paid into the system, you never need to be a free rider. Further, without health insurance, a lifetime of financial headaches and bad credit is just one accident away.

Another way of thinking about it is as a test of just how professional you really are. If you're not willing to be your own accountant and benefits manager, then the life of the freelance musician probably isn't for you. Health insurance is part of a larger process that includes keeping good records of your income, your regular clientele, and your expenses. It's also part of taking responsibility for your health, a 24-hour-a-day vigil that includes a good diet, safe sex, exercise, drinking only in moderation, and not smoking. That's a tall order, but paying attention to such things can make the difference between having a long career doing what you love and being forced back into an office cubicle or an apron to pay off those bills that won't go away.

Contributors: Craig P. Havighurst is a folk and bluegrass singer/guitarist in Nashville. His articles on music have appeared in Performing Songwriter, No Depression, *and* The Wall Street Journal. *He has also covered the health care industry for various trade publications for eight years.*

IF YA GOT IT... SAV

So you're not making as much money as McCartney. All the more reason to plan for your future—even your retirement—now.

BY KEN MICALLEF

The road to riches if often paved with potholes. The list of musicians who've had it all, then lost it due to voracious appetites, giant egos, or bad management, reads like a Who's Who of the music industry. From MC Hammer and Mick Fleetwood, to Blondie, Buddy Rich, and beyond, the music business is littered with those who thought the hits would never stop coming, that "their public" would never stop supporting them, that there was literally no tomorrow. Who hasn't heard the tale of the great talent who was selling out concerts and copies of his or her album one year, only to be broke and busted a few years later?

"Musicians are acutely aware of the fickleness of the industry and the fact that it can all end tomorrow," says Farnum Brown, senior vice-president of Franklin Research and Development. "That is the driver that leads them to be keen on the idea of building an investment program as soon as they have excess cash flow."

The nation's largest and oldest money-management firm devoted exclusively to socially responsible investing, Boston-based Franklin Research advises more than a dozen multi-platinum acts, who with the company's guidance have invested in common stocks and debt instruments (and those ain't clarinets) to the tune of $550 million in assets.

"When artists come to me, they have already created a sizable storehouse of wealth," says Brown," but they have very little predictability of their financial future. Their portfolios need to be focused on preserving wealth and increasing the reliability and security of their financial future. So when the music public isn't interested in them anymore or the artists decide they're not interested in this career anymore, they have something to fall back on and rely on."

/E.I.T!

Investing for retirement, or to buy a home or a studio, or to start your own label, is not beyond your reach. If you are, like most musicians, self-employed and without a 401(k) savings plan, you are fully in control of planning for your financial future. Successful musicians such as rock & roll animal Meatloaf (who once went bust but has since penned articles for financial magazine *Forbes*) have invested wisely, preparing for when Social Security may no longer exist and their own greatest-hits packages may go out of print, forever.

Investing can take many paths. You can trade for quick returns in the hectic world of Internet or technology stocks, as does Scott Sheen of Royal Crown Revue. Or you can follow Sheen's bandmate Daniel Glass and buy into safer money market mutual funds and the popular IRA (Individual Retirement Account). Techno-rocker Moby buys stocks that he knows and likes, while legendary hard-bop pianist Horace Silver avoids anything that doesn't give him a guaranteed return. Drummer Steve Smith, meanwhile, entrusts his Journey loot to a financial adviser who helps him invest wisely.

Be it stocks or bonds, mutual funds or money market accounts, short-term stocks you can juggle or long-term IRAs that you shouldn't touch until retirement, investing requires homework. Unless you've inherited it, you probably made your money from much practice and perseverance; investing requires an equally rigorous approach. And while you may think the stock market volatility of 1998 is a reason to keep your money in a sock rather than in stocks, the market has proven itself over the long haul.

Dale Rabiner, chartered financial analyst and managing director for Barlett and Co., a Cincinnati-based investment advisory firm that manages three billion dollars for institutions and individuals, is also president and founder of J Curve Records, a mainstream jazz label. "Say you invested one dollar in stocks in 1926," he conjectures. "In 1929 the market crashed. From 1929 to 1933, that stock lost 85 percent of its value. So, instead, let's put that dollar into government treasury bills. From 1926 to 1997 that dollar grew to nine dollars, not adjusted for inflation. That same dollar put into bonds grew to seventeen dollars by 1997. Invested in large stocks, that dollar invested in 1926 would grow to eight thousand dollars. And that comes from the worst time you could have made the comparison. Stocks always outperform bonds, treasury bills, money market funds, and saving accounts."

Asset allocation, or how you split up your investment portfolio between stocks, bonds, cash, CDs, and so on, is a small science in itself, on which even the investment brains don't entirely agree. You must figure what level of risk you can tolerate, and how to deal with long-term capital gains taxes, which are now set at twenty percent. You may want to find your own financial adviser, or begin scouring the Internet, where such well-known companies as T. Rowe Price, Vanguard, Charles Schwabb, Fidelity, and INVESCO maintain info-packed sites. But then you may be wondering, what exactly is a bond, a stock, an IRA, a mutual fund, a Treasury bill? Put down that guitar, Eugene, and listen up.

INVESTING 101

Stock A share of stock represents partial ownership in a corporation, issued to help the company expand its business. Shareholders can realize a profit when the company pays out dividends, or when the price of the stock increases, and the shareholder receives the difference in price after selling his or her holdings. Stocks have returned around eleven percent annually for most of this century, but they're also more risky than bonds. If you hold a stock for more than twelve months, you pay a tax of twenty percent on what it earns.

Certificates of Deposit Most often bought through a bank, a CD pays a certain rate of interest and has a certain maturity date, or time it must be reclaimed. CDs are very safe and typically return five percent a year. They are fully taxable.

Bonds Similar to a loan, bonds are issued by a firm, a utility, or the government, and pay back interest plus the loan after a specific period of time. Generally, they are medium risk with medium return of five percent. Bond interest rates vary according to the stability of the issuing firm, current market rates, and length of issue. One type of bond are U.S. Government bonds, which include Treasury bills, bonds, and notes. Sold in denominations of $10,000 for bills and between $1,000 and $10,000 for bonds and notes, these have maturities that range from three months to thirty years, with more risk taken the longer held. Backed by Uncle Sam, government bonds are virtually risk-free, but they pay less in interest than corporate bonds.

Corporate bonds raise capital for business; the lower the reliability of the firm and the longer the maturity rate, the higher rate of interest they will pay. Municipal bonds, issued by local governments, pay a lower interest rate than other bonds, but after taxes, anyone in a 28 percent tax bracket will earn more with the munies than with taxable bonds. And they are usually exempt from federal and state taxes.

Money market accounts This is a cash equivalent fund, bought at one dollar per share; the interest changes, usually weekly. Its value never goes up and down, as does a bond or a stock. Risk is low, with investments made in quick-maturity securities, such as government bonds. Typical return is around five percent annually.

Mutual funds Mutual funds are companies that combine the monies of many investors into stocks, bonds, and other instruments. These investments are made under the supervision of a professional manager, with a whole team of investment junkies at his or her elbow. This is a popular investment because it gives you expert guidance for a very small start-up fee, particularly if you buy a no-load fund, which doesn't assess a sales charge, or load, when bought or sold by the investor. Mutual funds allow diversification among hundreds of stocks and bonds, so that if the market drops in one stock, the other stocks in your portfolio will probably take up the slack. They are also very liquid, meaning that if your fund turns into a stinker, you can move your investment to another fund. Risk varies, as do the returns, but usually higher-risk funds have greater returns, as well as a higher likelihood of loss. With thousands of mutual funds to choose from, many with the option to start as small as $50 a month, you can easily find one that addresses your particular financial needs.

"My investment agent calls me once a week with a report. I've had other guys who barely know who I am. It's not the company, it's the person."
—Steve Smith

IRAs If you make less than $95,000 a year, you can invest up to $2,000 a year into a Roth IRA, which is entirely tax-free if you follow the withdrawal guidelines. You can open a Roth IRA at a bank or a discount brokerage, or with a mutual fund company, and invest in it any way you like, from mutual funds to savings accounts to CDs to money market funds. Leaving an IRA untouched until you reach the age of seventy allows the miracle of compound interest to occur, which can turn an investment of $100 a month at ten percent interest at age 25 into $555,454 by age 65.

Other self-employment retirement plans are the SEP-IRA, SIMPLE, and the Keogh. SEP (simplified employee pension plan) lets you put away fifteen percent or $30,000 a year, whichever is less. The SEP can also apply to a band as a small business, with payments made into the plan for each band member. The SIMPLE lets you put away $6,000 a year and

doubles as a small business plan. The Keogh plan allows you to put more aside than you can with a SEP, but you have to maintain the level of yearly contribution no matter what.

FIRST STEPS

So how do you start? Rabiner suggests beginning slowly. "The Forbes 400 list of wealthiest people in the U.S. is characterized by long-term investors, so find a good mutual fund, put the money in an IRA, and let it grow. If you choose funds that have long-term track records with managers that have been consistently successful, they will add up to a significant amount of money."

While both Rabiner and Brown avoid risky Internet stocks and day-trading, they agree that a level of risk must be tolerated. "The greatest risk an investor faces is getting thrown off the ride early and not getting back on the horse," says Brown. "If you stay on the horse, it will pay off hugely twenty or thirty years from now. Newer bands, like any new investors, should allow themselves a gradual introduction to the market so they can become comfortable with volatility. With a couple of years' experience, they'll come to see that the overall trend that emerges from the various market swings is one of increasing value. So even if you don't have enough money to fall back on, you should still take a gradual approach to get a feel for how the ride goes."

> **"When I started saving I was at one of the poorest points of my life. I thought, 'I don't want to spend the rest of my life living like this.'"**
>
> **—Daniel Glass, Royal Crown Revue**

There are many books and Internet sites that offer information about investing, but Brown advises that you steer clear of what he calls "noise in the system. A whole industry has grown up around programs on CNBC and other cable stations that give people the impression that successful investing is a matter of reacting constantly to hourly changes in the financial landscape. That's a bunch of hooey. As the media have become more sensational, there has become a sensationalized version of financial reporting as well. That has spawned this whole cult of day traders, people trading in and out of stocks every day. Successful investing means, among other things, deferring taxes as much as you can, and that means trading as little as you can. It means having patience. I urge people to tune out that noise."

So say the experts in the field. But what about people like you—musicians, whose lifestyles and needs outline a distinctive approach to preparing for the future? We spoke with a number of artists who have taken steps to take control of their financial security. Here's what they have to share.

Scott Steen. Trumpeter, Royal Crown Revue.
Investment strategy: short-term trading

Over the last year I've needed more access to my cash rather than putting it into a retirement fund, so short-term trading is my deal. I get up at six and go online to read the day's financial news and press releases on companies that have hot prospects. Then I trade on those companies—mostly tech stocks, Internet-related stocks, and computer companies.

Some company will come out with a story after the Wall Street bell, saying they have a new product. You may buy the stock, and it reaches a point where you're happy making ten percent. Sometimes I've doubled my money in an hour. If you make twenty bucks a day, that's $2,000 a month. If you don't go in for a killing, you can do well. Now I'm looking for a good long-term stock that I can convert into a Roth IRA. They're amazing; Roth IRA's aren't tax-deferred, but tax-free.

I carry a laptop on the road and use an Internet broker, Ameritrade, which costs me eight bucks a trade. You put in a check for a minimum of $2,000, which you have to maintain in your account. I probably made seven grand last year through short-term trading, although lost about $1,200 over the past month. And I did buy Cphone, which created WebTV, for one dollar a share, sold it for three, and the next day it went to ten. I wanted to throw up.

If you want to put your kids through college and you only have two grand, don't do short-term trading. But if you're in for the short term and you want to have some fun, it's better than Vegas. Make sure the stocks you trade have a 20 to 30 price-to-earnings, or P/E, ratio, so you know the stock isn't overvalued and the company isn't losing so much money that you may never earn it back. You could have the next Microsoft—or you could have something like Boston Market, which debuted really high and then dove. You can make two grand a month, but you have to educate yourself and watch what's going on.

Daniel Glass. Drummer, Royal Crown Revue.
Investment strategy: IRA, money market funds, universal life insurance policy.

I realized before I joined Royal Crown Revue in 1993 that musicians are in a really precarious position. You always hear stories about guys dying penniless. That made me consider what options I could take to invest for the future, even though at the time I was barely paying my rent. I began with $50 a month into an IRA. Now I do $2,000 a year, every year, into a Roth IRA through Putnam Voyager funds. But investing $100 a year will stand you in better stead than doing nothing.

I also have a universal life policy, which functions as an insurance policy and also as a more liquid, long-term investment. I can cash it in when I retire. And the longer I leave

it in, the more it builds. I put $50 a month into that as well.

My goal is to buy a house and become as debt-free as possible so my wife and I don't drown. I had my Roth IRA in a growth and income fund, then moved it into a Putnam Voyager mutual fund, which is slightly more aggressive. I came from a family where financial responsibility was a serious deal. And when I started it I was at one of the poorest points of my life. The idea of putting just $50 a month away was my motivation. I thought, "I don't want to spend the rest of my life living like this. Whether it's in music or not, I have to prepare myself."

Steve Smith. Former drummer with Journey, now leader of Vital Information and active in studio work and clinics. Investment strategy: mutual funds, SEP-IRA.

Journey made four records before I joined, and they were already a million in debt. The album *Evolution* went platinum, and the money went to pay off the debt. With touring we did better and started to make around $200,000 a year, apiece.

Our manager, Herbie Herbert, created a profit-sharing plan for the band, which funded a pension during the band's peak earning years. When the band broke up, everybody took those funds on their own. I found an investment adviser, who put my money into mutual funds and bonds. He calls me once a week with a report. I've had other guys who never call and barely know who I am. It's not the company, it's the person.

Most all of my money is in stocks, 90 percent of that through mutual funds. I don't have the time or inclination to buy my own stocks. I see that more as people try to get rich quick instead of investing for the long term.

My retirement fund is a SEP-IRA; that way I can put a percentage of my income into it every year. We've tried to project the amount of income I would need when I am sixty, then we plan on how much I need to put in each year in order to meet that objective.

Just get started. Period. Whether it's a Roth IRA or a straight IRA, just get into some retirement plan, then try to add to it as consistently as possible, even if it's just $100 a month. That might not seem like much to begin with, but the longer you put in $1,200 a year, the more it really does add up. It's the opposite of credit card debt. Sometimes I think, "Heck, what's another $300? Who cares if you're already $2,000 in debt?" But with a retirement fund, you're building some money up, and that is exciting. You know you're saving money and it's generating interest. And because I can see the results, I make it a point to contribute to it every year.

"I look at what I own, and I haven't even heard of most of the companies."
—Moby

Horace Silver. Legendary jazz pianist and composer. Investment strategy: common sense.

I don't dabble in the stock market, and I don't divulge how I invest my money. But I don't speculate. I have some money in safer things that guarantee a dividend. And I believe that each musician should plan for his or her future.

I got wise to saving my money because my dad always taught me to pay my bills so creditors aren't knocking at my door. What got me into investing for the future was some of the musicians I idolized before I came to New York got sick, and though they had made a lot of money in their careers, they had no money for hospitals and no money to bury them when they died. Other musicians had to have benefit concerts done for them to help pay their bills. I saw these guys become destitute. I wasn't gonna let that happen to me. I was gonna save my money and plan for my future so when I got to be sixty I wouldn't have to go on welfare.

I began with CDs and went from there. But these stock things aren't guaranteed. I always put my money where I know I'll get a dividend, even if it's small. A lot of people are suckers for get-rich-quick schemes, but I was always for the safe and secure way. I might not make as much profit, but the dividend was guaranteed.

My manager said these rock bands think it's gonna last forever; they get all this money, then blow it. Ten years from now they'll be piss poor and have nothing. They don't put it aside, they don't save, they don't invest wisely. They don't think about that rainy day.

Moby. Techno rocker. Investment strategy: diversification.

Coming from a long line of Scottish capitalists, I grew up in a really WASP environment in Connecticut, where my grandfather owned a company on Wall Street. Financial responsibility was something I was surrounded with from an early age. When I went to Eastern Europe after the Berlin Wall came down, I realized central-planned economies don't work, and that turned me into a qualified supporter of free-market economics.

I began investing in 1991, in stocks and mutual funds. I had a broker who made some recommendations. Then I followed Peter Lynch's approach to investing, which is to invest in what you know. I bought Apple at $40 a share, and it went to $18. But I bought Kroger [supermarkets] after seeing that they carried health food. I was so impressed with that from a management angle; I thought they were smart. So I bought it at $10, and within a year it went to $30. Now, I don't do any direct investing myself; I have a group of portfolio managers who work for me. I have small cap,

international, some conservative stuff, bond funds.

I was sorely chastened because I bought a lot of stuff that did well for a month and then dropped, like Syquest. In 1992 everyone I knew used Syquest drives. It must be a great company, I thought. Then all of these other companies started making removable drives as well. I realized I am not qualified to pick stocks on my own. But I look at what I own, and I haven't even heard of most of the companies. I have a dilettante's understanding of the market.

I'd advise investing conservatively in blue-chip companies that have a tradition of good management and steady returns. Consumer goods never appreciate, so if you get a bit of money, don't buy a car or go on vacation. Invest in something conservative. Even if you're successful now, it's not going to last. Don't spend your money, invest it. How many musicians find themselves broke and destitute and in debt at the age of thirty, when two years before they had tons of money? It's hubris. You think people will continue to love you, but the history of popular music does not support that.

Chris Colbourn. Bassist, Buffalo Tom. Investment strategy: diversification.

We came of age in the time of *Nevermind*, when advances went up and we were able to have some income that went to more than just paying our rents and food. We had a surplus. I bought mutual funds in chunks of $10,000 from our advances. I've done an IRA every year since '93, but at first I just wanted to go into high-risk mutual funds. As the Nineties went on and the market was booming, people were going crazy. But there are lessons, and you have to have a plan or theories to go on.

I invest in things that I really use. You can check out everything on the Internet, but avoid the hot tips, which are usually bullshit. McDonald's, Coca Cola, Volkswagen—those big stocks work.

Put your money into a mutual fund and buy a book that tells you about picking stocks. Go shopping and you can get an idea of where to invest. Just don't put it into a savings account—or worse, buy a $29,000 car. Rock music is big business, and we've been around a few years, but most bands don't last long. It's smart to put the money away.

Mark Hoppus. Bassist/singer with Blink 182. Investment strategy: SEP-IRA, money market fund.

We don't have college educations, and in the business we're in, a band could end at any time. We could conceivably make a million dollars one year and no money the next. So you have to be responsible with your money. If you spend it all on liquor and whores, you will end up broke.

I bought a SEP-IRA, which allowed me to put in more. Originally, the band was a partnership. That dictated the way we were paid, so the SEP-IRA was the way to go. We put in $10,000 apiece.

It's easy to lose your money if you don't plan carefully. I go slow until I know what I'm getting myself into. There is so much to learn. Long term, I just want to invest wisely so I can have a good interest rate that will enable my money to grow but be liquid enough to let me get the money out if I need it for an emergency. I don't know what the future will bring, so I don't want to put my money into something where I can't get it out if that proves necessary.

I know what it's like to be on the road. We toured for years and years where we just barely got by. Even so, it's good to tighten up your program and keep as much as you can. And you have to be informed about what you're doing. At least I know now that when the band is done I'll have planned ahead.

IN SUM...

As of this writing, the stock market is going gaga with Internet and technology stocks. Share prices soar one day but are often sliced in half the next. The long term is where most prudent investors place their bets. Just as you might research your purchase of musical gear, check out the various financial Internet sites to educate yourself on the ups and downs of investing. Once you are comfortable, you might check out a financial adviser—but, again, be wary.

"Whoever you work with," says Farnum Brown, "be very clear as to how they get paid. Brokers are paid based on transactions, and they get paid commissions for generating transactions. It's in the best interest of a broker to have as many transactions at as high a cost to you as possible. It is in your best interest to have as few transactions at as low a cost as possible. You need to be assertive about how someone is getting paid."

Whether you settle on money market funds or mutual funds, or take the plunge into stock picking and day trading, remember that stocks, like music, should have a track record. Would you buy an Edsel from Milli Vanilli? Or a polyester suit from Arsenio Hall?

"Buying Internet stocks is like the tulip bulb mania in Amsterdam during the nineteenth century," says Dale Rabiner. "People started buying tulip bulbs because they thought they were scarce. The bulbs went to these outrageous levels before somebody finally realized it was just a tulip bulb. Internet stocks are priced that way. There is this huge expectation. Good stocks have staying power, like Duke Ellington, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and the Beatles. Stay away from fads."

home studio

Fun Lovin' Criminals

by jason zasky **photos by sonja pacho**

"I'm probably the first Puerto Rican kid from the Lower East Side that's ever been in *Musician*," laughs Huey, guitarist, vocalist, and co-founder of Fun Lovin' Criminals. In fact, the band has gone further than either he or partner-in-crime Fast ever expected. Signed to a major label after a mere six gigs, Fast (far right) attributes getting discovered to "stupid luck." But maximizing that initial break, they recorded their debut, *Come Find Yourself*, in 1996. Propelled by the surprise hit "Scooby Snacks," the album sold over a million copies worldwide, and the Criminals are now enjoying a life centered around making music. "It's like those vacations you take in Jamaica where you pay everything up front and then you chill," says Huey. "We used to work for a living so we appreciate it."

Despite their initial success, the Criminals weren't even sure they would have the opportunity to complete album number two. After their first label (EMI) went by the wayside, the band made a brief stopover at Capitol before settling at Virgin and releasing the soulful, groove-heavy *100% Colombian* at the end of January. Is the album title a reference to their partying lifestyle? "It's a direct drug reference to cocaine and marijuana," jokes Fast. "Actually, we were fortunate that the record company said, 'just go do what you want,' so it means the album is 100% the three of us . . . but now the two of us."

Fast is referring to the fact that original drummer Steve is currently out of the picture after fracturing his wrist just prior to a series of crucial U.S. gigs. "This isn't the first time," says Huey. "He broke his kick drum foot one time, so he got a double kick drum pedal and did the kick drum with his other foot." Since the Criminals weren't inclined to build a custom kit, they enlisted Mackie (Cro Mags, Bad Brains) as a replacement, at least temporarily. "We're not Def Leppard," says Huey. "That's what I said to my man [Steve]."

Released last fall in Europe *100% Colombian* is already a hit overseas, but Fast is still concerned about how the album will be received at home. "Radio is a very hard game to play with an album like this. You can try to work one song to a rock station, the next song to a rap station, the next song to an easy listening station, etc." Regardless of how radio and MTV respond, the diversity is refreshing, and the album's songs are consistently stronger than those on *Come Find Yourself*.

FLC's musical home base is a penthouse studio on Manhattan's East Side; their pad functions as a home studio, rehearsal space, and management office. Consequently, the studio isn't as organized as most recording setups. The Criminals load equipment in and out, move racks around the room, and keep unconnected gear in the corners in case it's needed. The result is a haphazard arrangement of equipment, but any suggestion of tidying it all up is frowned upon.

Along with an extensive use of keyboards and samplers, there's quite a bit of guitar-oriented material on *100% Colombian*, most notably "Korean Bodega" and "Mini Bar Blues," featuring B. B. King.

Huey says the possibility of a B. B. contribution arose when they met on the set of a television show. "He told us he heard our record," reports Huey, "and he started singing some of 'Scooby Snacks' real loud. Then he said, 'If you ever need Lucille and me to come down and play a little something on any of your stuff, you let us know.' I said, 'Well, I'd like to let you know right now, sir.' So we sent an ADAT out to him in Chicago and he played three solos on it and sent it back. The third one was used on 'Mini Bar Blues.'" King's influence on Huey is reflected in his preference for black **Gibson** electrics, including a **Howard Roberts** Fusion model ❶, a Chet Atkins model, and various other Gibsons he keeps on hand. His guitar setup (see inset photo) consists of a **Korg Toneworks DTR-1** digital tuner ❷, a **Boss RRV10** digital reverb ❸, a **Tech 21 SansAmp model PSA-1** ❹, a **Vox AC30** ❺, and a custom 2 x 15" speaker enclosure with Vox grille cloth ❻—"homage to Vox," says Fast. Huey's pedalboard (see inset photo) contains a **Boss PSM-5** power supply & master power switch ❼, a **Boss DD-5** digital delay ❽, a **Tech 21 SansAmp** channel switcher ❾, and a **Jim Dunlop** wah-wah ❿.

FLC's collection of keyboards and samplers consists of a **Vox Jaguar** ⓫, **Crumar Orchestrator** ⓬, **Ensoniq ASR-X** ⓭, **Korg PolyEnsemble** keyboard ⓮, **Ensoniq EPS 16 Plus** ⓯, **Fender Bass Piano** ⓰, **Roland A-33** MIDI keyboard controller ⓱, and **Rhodes 73 Mark I** stage piano ⓲. Obscured by the cardboard cutout of **Noel Gallagher** ⓳ is a Rhodes 88 Mark I stage piano.

"Our philosophy of sampling is fairly simple," says Huey. "We like to relate creating a song in the studio to making dinner. A sample is more like a spice than a main course. A lot of people sample a whole verse or a whole chorus of a song, and that's cool, but you've got to understand that if you're trying to make original music using unoriginal sources, you've got to be really careful. There's a fine line you've got to work."

The Criminals learned early on that's it's better to use samples sparingly, as sample clearing is an onerous process. "Once you get something on tape, you send it to a clearing-house," says Huey. "It takes a long time. The artist being sampled has got to get it through their people, listen to it, get it back to their people, tell them what they think, and then they have to look at how much money they want for it. Sometimes it's a fee up front and then a rollover. Quentin Tarantino took forty percent of the publishing and got a songwriter's credit for

'Scooby Snacks.' Some of the samples we used on this record were Hall & Oates' 'One on One' on 'Sugar' and one from Tom Petty, obviously, for 'Big Night Out.' More often than not permission is denied, though. Ritchie Blackmore wouldn't clear a sample from 'Smoke on the Water' because he said we were playing devil music, which was pretty funny coming from Ritchie Blackmore."

In the background between Noel and Huey is the bass rig, which is made up of a **Mesa/Boogie 400+** stereo power amp ⓴ enclosed in a Mesa/Boogie road case, along with a pair of Mesa/Boogie cabinets. In a rack next to the bass cabs there's an Iomega zip drive, Yamaha FX 550 signal processor, Furman PL Plus power conditioner, Ensoniq ASR-10 sampler, and Whirlwind Multi-Director 4-channel direct box. The band's DJ gear consists of a Gemini PMX 1600 stereo preamp mixer, two **Technics SL-1200MK2** turntables ㉑, and a **Hughes & Kettner** cabinet ㉒, which Fast claims has been retired for use as a table. For drums Mackie has a Yamaha five-piece Maple Custom set, a 14" hi-hat with no company-affiliated markings, and then Zildjian K Custom cymbals—an 8" splash, 15" and 16" custom dark crashes, a 20" ride, and a Gibraltar drum stool.

What do the Criminals use to record their demos and compile tapes for clearing sample requests? Housed in a rack (see inset photo) is a **Yamaha ProMix 01** ㉑, **ETA PD8L EMI/RFI** spike surge protector ㉔, two **TASCAM DA-88** digital multitrack recorders ㉕, and a **TASCAM DA-30** DAT recorder ㉖. Out of sight there's also a Mackie MicroSeries 1202-VLZ 12-channel mic/line mixer and a Sony MDS-JE500 MiniDisc deck.

Finally, Huey was adamant about mentioning his prized **National Lap Steel** ㉗, which is sitting atop one half of the pair of **JBL MR Series** ㉘ and **Yamaha 53115H** ㉙ P.A. enclosures. And the aforementioned gear in the room but currently not in use? There's a Fender Deluxe Reverb amp, a TASCAM DA-P1 DAT recorder, a dbx 160A compressor/limiter, a Hughes & Kettner Tube Rotosphere, a 100-watt Labseries 2 x 12" amp, an Akai S950 MIDI digital sampler, a TASCAM 122 cassette deck, and a Danelectro Daddy-O pedal.

Although all this gear is necessary to facilitate their gangsta stylings, Huey notes that FLC's ultimate purpose is to entertain. "We're all for people enjoying their lives while listening to our music," he says. "We're not the type of band that wants people to stop what they're doing and look at the stereo. Live your life, and if you want some tunes, we made a record."

Special thanks to Skills.

editor's pick

Slingin' Strings in MIDI Land

We can debate for hours why guitar players have responded so slowly over the years to MIDI technology, guitar synthesis, and the concept of recording music with personal computers. But Cakewalk hopes to convert them with its new Guitar Studio software, which the company describes as "the first multitrack MIDI and digital audio recording software designed for guitarists." (Minimum system requirements are a Windows 95, 98, or NT platform, a 120 MHz Pentium processor, at least 12 megabytes of RAM, at least 200 megabytes of free hard disk space, and a full-duplex sound card.)

At its essence, Guitar Studio is a powerful 256-track MIDI sequencer and eight-track digital audio recorder capable of delivering 16-bit/44.1 kHz CD-quality audio, offering extensive editing and mixing capability, onboard real-time effects (including chorus, flanging, delay, pitch shifting, and reverb), guitar-oriented notating capability, and other, more professional-minded features that are pretty darn sophisticated. But true to Cakewalk's claim, Guitar Studio fits beautifully into the six-stringer's methodology. At last, this heady stuff, once the domain of keyboardists, can be driven with only a MIDI guitar controller and nary a keyboard in sight.

Worth mentioning is Cakewalk's partnership with Fender and Roland—an association dubbed the Guitar Technology Alliance and dedicated to pushing MIDI/digital audio technology for the guitar closer to the mainstream. Together, these three companies are marketing Guitar Studio with Roland's GR-30 guitar synthesizer and Fender's Roland-Ready Stratocaster (which features a Roland GK-2A pickup and full access to the GR-30 from the guitar's onboard controls) as a threesome that integrates almost seamlessly into a keyboardless MIDI workstation.

But even using Guitar Studio all by its lonesome with a decent MIDI controller and sound source, along with some non-MIDI sources (a microphone and an acoustic guitar, for example) can yield excellent results. For starters, the software weighs in with some useful guitar goodies. Among the most visible of these features are an on-screen guitar tuner, a notation tool that implements chord grids and chord names over standard musical staffs (along with lyrics, dynamic markings, and other musical symbols), and a Virtual Fretboard feature that resembles a guitar fretboard—rosewood and all—that can be used for learning guitar parts and riffs when viewed during playback. One especially neat-o tool for demoing songs and ideas quickly is Song Wizard feature, which provides style templates that represent various musical styles while adding bass, drums, and keyboard accompaniment that responds to the chords you enter via the computer keyboard.

Guitar Studio is hardly limited by its beginner-friendly and guitar-oriented status. It's not as sophisticated as Cakewalk's Professional Pro Audio 8 and other high-end sequencer/digital audio packages, yet it

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Cakewalk's Guitar Studio software delivers easy-to-manage recording power to today's guitarists.

by mike bieber

(continued from page 59)

delivers everything from sketchpad-quality demos to out-and-out professional quality productions, which are fully compatible with other media and hardware via SMPTE and MIDI time code formats.

With an ordinary Strat, I plugged directly into the microphone input on my computer's sound card via the 1/8"-to-1/4" adapter that's thoughtfully included. Guitar Studio offers several different ways—or Views, as Cakewalk describes them—for observing one's work during record and playback. When creating a new song or project, the file opens with a traditional Track view, which displays a row of tracks, each containing parameters for sound source (MIDI instrument or sound card), volume, panning, and other familiar recording functions, such as mute and solo. Another perspective is the Console view, which resembles a mixing console with faders and meters. Additionally, Guitar Studio's effects can be added to digital audio tracks—a maximum of four at a time—with reasonably extensive control over parameters.

When recording digital audio, you really need to get your input levels right, because digital distortion is without a doubt one of the rudest sounds you'll ever hear. With Guitar Studio, this is accomplished via the sound card's internal mixer, which requires the user to toggle between the sound card mixer window and the Console window, where the level meters are located. Also, digital audio is a pig when it comes to using up your computer's hard disk space: One track containing a minute's worth of data in mono at a 44.1 kHz sampling rate requires five megabytes of disk space. (You do the math.) Still, this drawback is easily overcome by using an adequate external disk drive, and hard disks are getting bigger and cheaper, so it's pretty painless to add another one to your system.

Using an external Roland GK-2A pickup on my Strat as a MIDI controller, I harnessed sounds from the General MIDI wavetable built into my computer's sound card. (You can use whatever MIDI source is available to you.) Guitar Studio's unique Glitch filter neatly removes the ghost notes that are infamous to MIDI guitar controllers. Creating MIDI tracks this way isn't much different than with digital audio, except for not having to worry about input levels, patching in effects, and depleting computer memory, since MIDI recordings are merely events that represent information, not the sounds themselves. One cool feature offered as soon as you create a new file with Guitar Studio is a menu of templates of actual musical ensembles (Rock Quartet, for instance, or Classical Brass Quartet) and popular synthesizers (such as Roland's JV-880 and GR-30 guitar synth) that define voices and tracks appropriately before recording. This menu also offers a template that can predefine a four- or eight-track console for digital audio recording. Guitar Studio also includes StudioWare panels, which offer graphic control over MIDI devices and automated mixers such as the Roland GR-30 and Mackie's OTTO-1604.

For post-production applications, Guitar Studio is a powerhouse. Its editing functions can be utilized via the Audio view, which displays only soundwaves; the Track view's Clip window, which displays MIDI events and digital audio soundwaves; a Piano Roll view, which displays notes from a single track as they would appear on a player piano roll; and the Virtual Fretboard and music staff views. Essentially, Guitar Studio offers editing ability on a par with much more sophisticated packages, with tools for cutting and lengthening a song, fixing MIDI events, quantizing, reversing tracks, implementing fades and cross-fades, and a whole lot more. Its mixing capability is equally powerful, with full automation and as many as sixteen auxiliary buses for submixing. The software's effect modules can be accessed on the actual tracks (four can be used at a time), at the submix stage, or as stereo master effects at the output ports. Patching effects at one of the latter two stages is preferable because these real-time effects eat up a big chunk of your computer's RAM and can overload the machine's CPU overhead, RAM, and hard disk space.

But with Guitar Studio installed in a machine that reasonably exceeds Cakewalk's specified minimum system requirements, the result is a recording system—a studio, in fact—that should convert the most die-hard cassette multitrackers to PC recording: instant track accessibility, no more waiting for the tape to rewind, and a lot of MIDI tracks that'll let you stack your instrumentation and parts to the skies.

I've only got a few bones to pick with Guitar Studio. The Song Wizard, as useful as it is, won't accommodate chord changes anywhere except on a quarter-note. And noticeably missing is the ability to notate and play back guitar tablature, though we're told that this feature will soon be added. We also noted the absence of such guitar-related digital effects capabilities as a speaker simulator and amp models, perhaps overdrive and fuzz. Although these effects are available as plug-ins from Cakewalk and other manufacturers, they would completely ice the cake had they been here. More pertinent to studio applications, though, would have been the inclusion of an onboard compressor.

Regardless, Guitar Studio, more than any preceding product, truly offers guitarists the advantages of MIDI and PC recording technology. And while it is indeed user-friendly—you'll probably begin tracking in digital audio before your first hour with the product has passed—there are some very advanced features and concepts here that you definitely won't learn overnight. But make use of the package's well-written user's manual, rely on Cakewalk's excellent technical support team, and have plenty of patience, and you'll be making extraordinary productions in probably less time than it takes for that old four-track to rewind.

Special thanks to Michael Hoover and Kristen Wiltse.

Contributors: *Mike Bieber is a guitarist and music journalist in New York.*

1 Martin 00-15, 000-15, and CD-15E guitars

The creation of the 15 series in 1997 (beginning with the D-15) marked the re-introduction of mahogany top guitars to Martin's product line. Now the series has been expanded with the addition of the small-bodied 00-15 ($849) and 000-15 ($849) acoustics and the CD-15E ($1,249, not shown) acoustic/electric cutaway. Common features include solid mahogany top, sides, back, and neck, with East Indian rosewood fingerboard and bridge. The soundhole on these models is trimmed with a single banded black and gold herringbone decal rosette, and tuning machines are chrome-enclosed with chrome buttons. For reference, the CD-15E combines the tone of the D-15 dreadnought with a full access Venetian cutaway and a Fishman/Martin System One onboard pickup system with slider controls. ➤ ***Martin Guitar Co., 510 Sycamore St., P.O. Box 329, Nazareth, PA 18064; (610) 759-2837; www.mguitar.com***

2 Fostex VM04 stereo digital mixer

With a retail price of only $299, this compact unit makes digital an option for virtually any home studio or small venue. The VM04 incorporates 20-bit A-D converters, 24-bit internal data processing, and 44.1 kHz operation. The unit has a pair of trimmable mic-level inputs matched with two line-level outputs, each with individual panning and two-position shelving-type EQ, effects send, and 30-mm faders. An analog stereo output and S/PDIF-format digital output is also provided, as well as a standard headphone jack. Twenty types of DSP presets are available, including hall, room, plate, and stadium-type reverbs, with control over level, depth, and rate. All effects are changeable in real time using the jog wheel controller, and DSP and outboard digital audio effects are assignable pre- and post-fader. A twenty-scene memory (protected with battery backup) controls all mixer signal input and effects send levels, recallable either by scene number or user-designated name. A backlit LCD readout (with variable contrast control) displays input/output levels, status of various parameters, and scene numbers/names, and a View function allows the user to scroll through DSP functions for all four input channels. ➤ ***Fostex Corp., 15431 Blackburn Ave., Norwalk, CA 90650; (562) 921-1112; www.fostex.com***

3 Electro-Harmonix Micro Synthesizer

For the sonically adventurous guitarist, E-M has reintroduced the Micro Synthesizer ($358), a device that allows you to reproduce the vintage analog sounds generated by early Moog synths. Ten slider controls give you control over all aspects of the processed sound. Four independent and fully mixable voices—Guitar, Octave, Sub Octave, and Square Wave—can be modified by the Resonance, Start Frequency, Stop Frequency, and Rate controls of the filter sweep section. The Trigger slider can be used to adjust the sensitivity of the filter circuits, making it possible to play synthesizer leads against softer, unfiltered chords. Finally, the Attack Delay control allows you to vary the time required for the voice signals to reach full volume. The Micro Synth is housed in E-M's traditional trapezoidal brushed-steel chassis. ➤ ***New Sensor Corp., 20 Cooper Sq., New York, NY 10003; (212) 529-0466; www.ehx.com***

4 NHTPro M-00, A-10, and A-20 powered monitor systems

The latest in amplified monitors and monitor/amplifier systems comes courtesy of NHTPro, a new company launched by the original founders of NHT Loudspeakers. The M-00 powered mini monitor ($350 each, pictured) is a near-field/mid-field two-way monitor with built-in 75-watt amplifier designed for project and home studio use and surround-sound monitoring applications. The M-00 provides 111 dB SPL peak acoustic output, and includes anti-clipping circuitry and an Auto-On feature that shuts the speaker off when not in use and powers it back up upon receiving a signal. Also aimed at project and home studios is the A-10 studio monitor system ($1,200), which combines a pair of two-way speakers with an outboard amplifier/control unit. The control unit includes a 150-watt per channel stereo amplifier with five-position sensitivity switch, and power and clipping indicators. The A-10 delivers 116 dB SPL output with 55 Hz—20 kHz frequency response (+/-2 dB). Finally, for professional and project studios, the A-20 reference monitor system ($1,900) consists of a pair of two-way speakers and separate control unit that includes a 250-watt per channel stereo amp, clipping indicators, and headphone output, plus output device temperature and line voltage meters. It provides 117 dB SPL capability with 45Hz—20 kHz frequency response. All three models include optimization switches and both the A-10 and -20 feature Wall Proximity controls that tailor bass response to compensate for placement distance from nearby walls. ➤ ***NHTPro, 555 First St., #302, Benicia, CA 94510; (877) 464-8776; www.nhtpro.com***

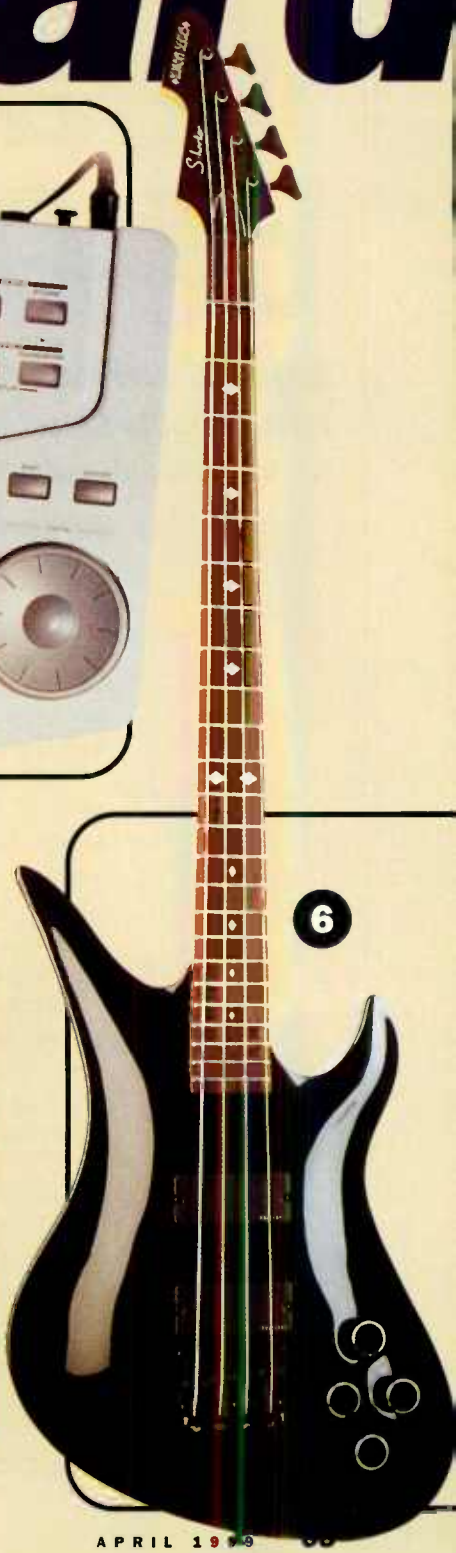
5 Johnson Amplification JM60 combo

The 60-watt JM60 ($899) is the first model in the new Marquis line, combining a tube-driven (12AX7) preamp, fully-programmable digital effects processor. and 12", 100-watt speaker in a single package. Tube integrated amp modeling allows the user to call up eighteen different amp tones at the touch of a button, including single tweed, high gain, tube high gain, tube crunch, tube clean, overdrive, and saturated. Front panel controls include master volume, gain, bass, mid, treble, and level. The effects processor (24-bit DSP, 20-bit A/D/A) offers chorus, flange, phaser, tremolo, vibrato, pitch, delay, and three reverbs. A total of 27 factory presets are provided, as well as 27 locations for custom-defined settings. The rear panel features stereo effects send and return loop jacks and a connector for an external speaker. The headphone output can double as a direct out for recording applications, and the speaker on/off switch allows you to disengage the internal speaker for headphone usage. ➤ ***Johnson Amplification, 8760 S. Sandy Pkwy., Sandy, UT 84070; (801) 566-8800; www.digitech.com***

6 Schecter AB-1 bass

Modeled after their Avenger model guitar, the AB-1 ($669) is the latest addition to the Diamond series. Features include a contoured mahogany body, 24-fret bolt-on rock-maple neck, rosewood fingerboard, two EMG Hz bass humbucking pickups, and active EQ circuitry. Black hardware is standard, and a variety of high-gloss finishes are available, including black, gunmetal gray, dark metallic blue, and metallic green. As with all Diamond series guitars and basses, the AB-1 is set up to play in Schecter's Los Angeles-based custom shop and comes with a limited lifetime warranty. ➤ ***Schecter Guitar Research, 1538 N. Highland Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90028; (323) 469-8900; www.schecterguitars.com***

fast forward



Nearfield of Dreams

Sound advice on choosing and positioning the nearfield monitors that your home studio needs.

by howard massey

Trying to create a piece of music while listening to it through inappropriate, poorly positioned, or improperly wired speakers is a bit like trying to paint a landscape while wearing distorted, scratched, or dark-tinted sunglasses. In both cases, the artist may ultimately achieve his or her goal, but not without a lot of effort and overcompensation.

The first step in metaphorically tossing away those knockoff RayBans is to understand the difference between "speakers" and "monitors." Economic realities have created three different audio markets: the low-end, so-called "consumer" market; the middle ground "pro-sumer" market; and the high-end "pro" market.

The consumer market consists of just about every humanoid on the planet except those of us with a special interest in music and audio (and, believe me, we comprise a very small minority). Since just about everybody in this market owns one or more CD, tape, or record players, it follows that they also probably own two or more speakers. The primary purpose of these speakers is not to accurately reproduce the musical signal being fed them. Instead, it is to sell in quantity by impressing the consumer both visually and by its low price point, which in turn means that these speakers are inevitably mass-produced with relatively cheap components so as to ensure a reasonable turnover in sales. (Does the term "planned obsolescence" ring a bell?) Worst of all, because most people in the consumer market can't tell the difference between good and compromised audio fidelity, these speakers are usually designed to color the sound in a way that appeals to the untrained ear. Most often, they are bass- and treble-heavy so as to simulate a "high-fidelity" experience, kind of like the equalization curve radio announcers use. Beyond the fact that they are inherently inaccurate, listening to frequency-hyped speakers for long periods of time can be very fatiguing to the ear. Clearly, consumer speakers have no place in the home studio, except perhaps as a secondary "real-world" check on your mixes.

Speakers aimed at the "pro" market are rarely if ever even called "speakers." Instead, they are termed "monitors" in order to differentiate them from consumer models and also to underline their primary function, which is to allow you to accurately monitor the sounds you are crafting and the music you are creating. True pro speakers are built almost without regard to cost factor, since this market—which, after all, generates its income from producing high-quality audio—is generally willing to pay a premium for optimum sound. Pro monitors can sometimes be overpriced, although, to be fair, they generally require that the manufacturer make a significant expenditure both for design and skilled labor.

The "pro-sumer" market is aimed at the gap between the other two markets. The typical customer may be a hi-fi buff (an "audiophile") with expendable income, or it

may be the musician just starting out who clearly needs more than consumer products have to offer but cannot afford the pricing of pro products. While pro-sumer products are often mass-produced, they are generally designed with accuracy and longevity in mind, so they tend to use high-quality (though rarely the highest-quality) components. Pro-sumer speakers may be termed either "speakers" or "monitors," depending upon the demographic they are aimed at. (The former term has more appeal to audiophiles; the latter, more cachet with home studio owners.)

How can you tell if a particular model of speaker is "consumer," "pro-sumer" or "pro"? The biggest hint will come from the places that sell it, since each market has a fairly distinct network of dealers. Any model that's widely available in local electronics, appliance, or department stores—places where mom, pop, and the whole family shop—is almost certainly consumer-grade and probably to be avoided for inclusion in your home studio. If, on the other hand, a model is available only at specialty audiophile salons, it's almost certainly pro-sumer and therefore a candidate for inclusion (though bear in mind that audiophile products can be grossly overpriced due to their "snob" factor). By far your best bet is to stick with models that are available at your local music store. These will in all likelihood be either pro-sumer or pro products (the highest-ticket models will likely be carried only by the biggest chains or by special "pro audio" dealers) and worthy of serious consideration.

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The Alesis Monitor One

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Next, it's important to understand the difference between large, full-range monitors and so-called *nearfield* monitors. In acoustic theory, a *sound field* is the space in which sound waves are present. A studio's sound field is the space between its walls, ceiling, and floor. When you place a speaker in this sound field, you hear both the direct sound coming from the speaker itself and the reflected sound coming off the surfaces of the walls, ceiling, and floor as well as all objects within the room. Depending upon the materials used in the construction of the surfaces (and on the amount of acoustic treatment present), there will be a certain amount of absorption and diffusion of these reflected sound waves, but they will always be present to a certain degree, mixed in with the direct sound and therefore reinforcing some frequencies and attenuating others. The result is your "room sound."

A mathematical formula called the *inverse-square law* shows that sound level falls off 6 dB for each doubling of distance. However, for reasons too complex to get into here, this law does not apply within a small area in the immediate vicinity of the source. This area is known as the *near field*, and while experts disagree on its precise boundary, it is generally considered to be within a few feet of a speaker's diaphragm. The bottom line is that as you move within a speaker's near field, there is almost no perceived change in sound level. More importantly, within the near field, you hear mostly direct signal from the speaker itself, and relatively few reflected waves—that is, there is very little room sound.

Large studio monitors are designed to deliver accurate sound over the full frequency range, and they are meant to be operated at very loud listening levels. They're great for plastering your hair back and giving you an adrenaline rush similar to that of a live concert. But because they are designed to fill a room with sound, they are highly dependent upon the sound of the room. In a pro studio that has the budget to spend big bucks on acoustic treatments (wall battings, floating floors, hanging diffusors, etc.), that's fine, but in the typical home studio, where budget allows only for the most basic accoutrements—perhaps a throw rug or two and a bit of foam on the walls—even the best large studio monitors can sound disappointing. In addition, the physiological construction of our ears causes us to hear things differently at high sound levels than we do at the moderate sound levels, which most people use to listen to recorded music. At high listening levels, we tend to hear all frequencies at about the same intensity; in contrast, at moderate listening levels, mid-frequencies in the 3 to 4 kHz range cut through much better than lower or higher frequencies.

In the home studio, the best solution is to monitor your music on speakers designed to deliver accurate audio at relatively low sound levels within the near field—products known, appropriately, as *nearfield monitors*. There are lots of these products out there, mostly priced from $400 to $1,200 per pair—far less expensive, by the way, than large monitors. Perhaps the most popular nearfield monitor is the **Yamaha NS-10M**. The original model (the NS-10) was a bit treble-happy, so studio tradition demanded the careful application of a single sheet of toilet paper over the tweeter. (Believe it or not, debates raged about double-ply vs. single-ply and the precise brand to be used for optimum accuracy.) Later models (those with the "M" appellation) solved the problem with a redesigned tweeter and are fairly flat in their frequency response. Mind you, nobody I know really *likes* the sound of the NS-10Ms; their popularity stems from their consistency and ubiquitous use—everybody knows exactly what they sound like, and every studio has a pair, so they make it easy to do a mix just about anywhere. Other popular nearfield monitors—each with its distinctive strengths and weaknesses—include the **Alesis Monitor One**, the **Electro-Voice MS 802** and **Sentry 100**, the **Event 20/20 series**, the **JBL 4206**, **4208**, and **Control-1**, and the **Tannoy PBM 6.5** and **PBM 8**.

Though the use of nearfield monitors minimizes the impact of the room sound, there are a couple of wild card factors that will affect overall fidelity. One, of course, is the quality of the power amplifier being used. Since nearfield monitors cannot deliver high sound levels, they don't need to be connected to expensive, high-powered amplifiers (in fact, the usage of over-

Yamaha's NS-10M

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powered amps can cause serious speaker damage), but they do work best when hooked up to amps that provide sufficient headroom and minimal harmonic distortion. (The lower the "THD"—Total Harmonic Distortion—amount, the better; pro-sumer and pro "reference" amps usually deliver THD of 0.1% or less.) Another important factor is the length, quality, and thickness of the wiring used to connect the amp and the speaker. In order to avoid level and frequency attenuations, you want to use the shortest lengths possible of the thickest multi-braid cabling you can find. Don't use anything thinner than 14 gauge; even cheap hardware store "zip" cord (the kind that delivers AC current to lamps) works better than line- or mic-level audio cabling. Of course, you need to be absolutely certain that your monitors are wired in phase (hot output of the power amp to the hot terminal; cold output of the power amp to the cold terminal). One easy way to check this is to listen to a commercially-produced CD while switching between stereo and mono playback. (Use the "mono" switch if your console has one, or simply pan both channel outputs to the center.) If the speakers are wired correctly, the bass frequencies (kick drum and bass guitar) should sound slightly louder in mono; if you instead hear a significant reduction in bass frequencies (if the sound suddenly gets "thinner") in mono, one of your speakers is wired out of phase. To fix the problem, simply reverse the wires on one of the speakers; it doesn't matter which one.

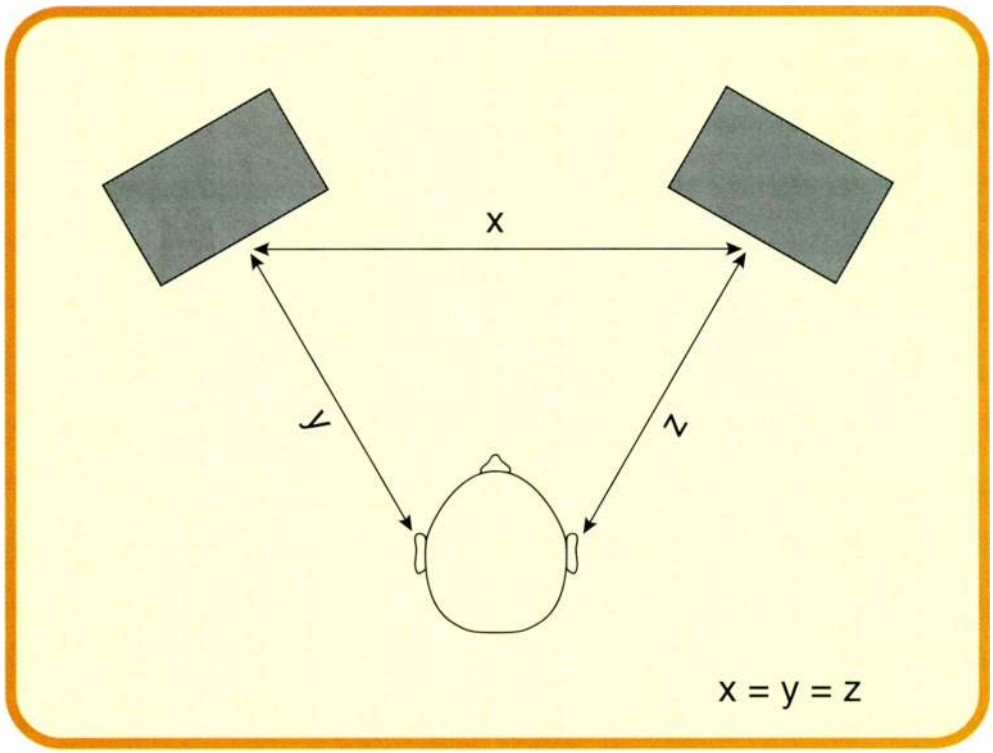


Figure 1. Optimum placement for nearfield monitors in your studio.

Both of these factors—amp and wiring quality—can be completely removed from the equation by purchasing *powered* nearfield monitors that contain built-in amplifiers (perfectly matched to the speaker requirements) and extremely short internal cabling runs. These models are more expensive than their unpowered cousins, but they save you the cost of a separate power amplifier and speaker cabling. Many of them even contain dual amplifiers to separately power the woofer and tweeter (a process known as *biamplification*) and/or room correction circuitry (such as low-frequency rolloff filters) to further increase fidelity. Powered nearfield monitors have become extremely popular in the last couple of years, and models are available from many different manufacturers, generally ranging in price from $600 to $2,500 per pair. Our Nov. 1997 Editor's Pick spotlighted the superb **Genelec 1029A** (and its companion **1091A** subwoofer); more recently, the manufacturer has debuted the **2029A** model, which is acoustically similar but adds a digital audio input. Other excellent powered nearfield monitors include the **Alesis M1**, the **Event 20/20 BAS**, the **Hafler TRM6** and **TRM8**, the **Mackie HR824**, the **Tannoy Reveal Active** and **System 800A**, and the **Yamaha MSP5**.

Because nearfield monitors tend to be fairly small, their frequency range will generally not be as broad as that of large monitors. In particular, their woofers will not be able to generate the very low "feel" frequencies that you hear in large monitors or P.A. systems, so you may want to consider adding a subwoofer. Also, bear in mind that high frequencies are inherently more directional—that is, you can more clearly differentiate where they come from—than low frequencies. (This is why you can get away with a single subwoofer within a stereo system.) Therefore, when placing nearfield monitors horizontally, make sure the tweeters are on the outside and the woofers are on the inside; when using them vertically, make sure the tweeters are on top and the woofers on the bottom.

Whichever nearfield monitor you choose, placement is critical. The general rule is that the two speakers should both be at the same height (ear level is best) and the same distance from one another (at least three feet but no more than seven feet apart—remember, you need to stay in the near field) as they are from your listening position. In other words, the two speakers and your head should form an equilateral triangle. (See Figure 1 above.)

For optimum stereo imaging, nearfield monitors should be angled in slightly so that they focus where you sit at your mixing

board, not somewhere significantly in front of or behind the seating position. There are no hard and fast rules here, but there are tradeoffs to be considered. For example, a toe-in angle of about 30 degrees (or 150 degrees, depending upon your perspective) will yield excellent, tight stereo imaging but will also result in a relatively small "sweet spot" (the area within which the stereo imaging is best). Shallower angling (in the 10- to 20-degree range) will result in slightly less precise stereo imaging, but the "sweet" spot will be broader. If you're working by yourself at a fairly compact mixing board, 30-degree angling may do just fine, but if you're working with others who will be sitting next to you (or if you've got a large mixing board and you don't want to have to keep swiveling into a small center position to hear your mix), a 10-degree angle may be a better choice.

It's important that nearfield monitors be placed as far from walls and other reflective surfaces as is practical (within, of course, the physical constraints of your studio). For this reason, it's usually better to place your mixing console in the center of a room than up against a facing wall. Some nearfield monitors are designed to be placed directly on top of the meter bridge, for proper reinforcement of bass frequencies by the console's chassis; others are designed to be used only on free-standing speaker mounts or modified microphone stands, to *avoid* reinforcment of bass frequencies. Some have front ports for venting of low-frequency waves; others are rear-ported and therefore cannot be used in enclosed spaces such as bookshelves or soffits. All of this information will be provided in the products' owners manuals, so be prepared to do some advance reading as well as listening when choosing the best nearfield monitor for your home studio. You'll find that, once you're newly equipped, your old hi-fi speakers will make for excellent doorstops!

Special thanks to Will Eggleston of Genelec, Peter Chaikin and Stacy Moran of Alesis, John Tamborello of Burello Sound, and Corey Davidson and Chip Weinberg of Davidson Electronics for their assistance in preparing this article.

Meetings by Othe

Jon Hassell, Ry Cooder, and Jacky Terrasson seek the secrets of recording acoustic instruments in ambient space.

by josef woodard

There was a particular, otherworldly kind of hush in the control room on a late November afternoon, as Jon Hassell and Jacky Terrasson were taking the ballad "Estante" into odd musical reaches. Extraneous sounds were decidedly frowned upon, and not only because the "control room" in question was actually the sacristy area of a chapel. Sound baffling was nil.

The label head, Water Lily Acoustics founder Kavi Alexander, perched over his custom-built, one-inch, two-track recorder with a meditative watchfulness. Ry Cooder, the producer and sometimes guitarist on this project, could be found hunched over in an arc of absolute concentration. His head was buried in headphones and his hat, fetched from the Pedal Steel Convention in St. Louis and emblazoned with the almost philosophical motto, "Twang is Good."

The "twang" factor, in this case, is of a sublime order, in on a recording project in which strains of jazz, world music (especially of an Indian character), and classical come together through the filter of Jon Hassell. On this album, entitled *Fascinoma*, Hassell steps out from his familiar experimental new-music stance to bring new resonance to such songs as "Caravan" and "Nature Boy," as well as more improvisational inventions, in a mostly pure acoustic setting.

Key word: mostly.

After an ethereal take, we enter the chapel, in St. Anthony's Seminary in Santa Barbara, California, where many a Water Lily Acoustics session has taken place. The setup, while par for the Water Lily course, is unlike most other recording situations on any given day in Southern California. In this naturally reverberant space, we encounter a grand piano for Terrasson, Hassell's zone, and, in a corner of the room, the electronic gear on which peripheral player Rick Cox triggers subtle loops and samples by guitar. These sounds play through speakers in the room, contributing to the musical fruits captured through two mics.

That electronic component of the project, however discreet, represents a stretch for this traditionally unplugged label. "This is going to corrupt me," Alexander joked, pointing at the non-acoustic gear. "Before long, I'll be recording with digital multitracking." He winces at the thought.

It would never actually happen, though. True, the Indian-born producer has done multitrack sessions; one, a Seventies encounter with Richard Hell and the Voidoids amidst a thrashing mob at New York's Peppermint Lounge, would be enough to earn him a producer's Purple Heart, if such distinctions existed. But since 1985, he has worked with a far more ascetic setup, mostly in this holy and acoustically endowed place. He recorded a variety of musicians, including a 1993 encounter between Cooder and virtuoso Indian slide guitarist V. M. Bhatt, which resulted in the Grammy-winning album *A Meeting by the River*. And, to any who would listen, he has preached the gospel of analog—and not even contemporary analog, but the kind that pares down to two mics, a preamp, and a two-track recorder, all vacuum-tube. Just like they did it in the Thirties.

According to Alexander, there's no better way to record acoustic music. "I don't see why they record acoustic music in studios with multi-miking techniques," he says. "I'm recording the Philadelphia Orchestra the same way I'm doing these sessions with Jon and Ry, and the musicians are telling me, 'My God, Philips put 36 microphones around us, and I'm hearing more detail with your two!' They can't believe that two microphones placed ten feet behind the podium of the conductor could reveal much more clarity than recordings with microphones stuffed down everybody's throat."

Hassell is the newest convert to the Water Lily Acoustics order, which might surprise those accustomed to the technology-embracing fabric of his earlier albums. "There is a little cabal of nuts," Hassell says, "like Tim de Paravicini, who designed all of Kavi's machines. They're just into having as much oxide as possible, and as much analog as they can get. I tended to discount these things before, until I actually listened to some of the stuff. I realized then that there's definitely something there."

De Paravicini is the silent partner in the Water Lily Acoustics story, a British designer and head of EAR-Esoteric Research, which designed every aspect of Alexander's equipment, right down to the vacuum-tube A-to-D converter from which the analog masters are transferred to CDR. If Alexander had his way, it would remain out of the digital realm entirely, but CDs being a fact of market life, he has conceded that much.

The vacuum-tube microphones, set up at ear level in a carefully considered spot in the room, are crossed at 90 degrees, in the "Blumlein configuration." "The configuration comes from the Thirties," Alexander explains. Because it's sampling all the sound simultaneously in time and space, you have perfect phase and amplitude coordinates, which gives you localization and a sense of depth and space. You can close your eyes and pinpoint each musician, and tell how far apart they're sitting. There's left-to-right lateral information in terms of space, back-to-front in terms of depth, and top-to-bottom in terms of height. It's truly three-dimensional."

The Blumlein configuration favored by Alexander isn't the only way to create this kind of perspective. Some approaches, such as the ORTF method practiced by engineers working for French radio and television, involve positioning two cardioid mics about seven inches apart, to correspond with the distance between the listener's ears, at a 110-degree angle; sometimes a baffle is placed in the center, or the angle of the mics is adjusted to 90 degrees. No matter, he insists; what counts more than any formula is the producer's own aesthetic.

"Anyone with good ears and a good sense of music can make excellent

recordings using this technique. It's very cheap, because you don't need a lot of equipment. You can buy a decent pair of microphones—maybe a beyerdynamic ribbon mic or some Audio-Technica condenser mics, a decent mic pre, and a DAT recorder. The main thing is to find the right acoustic: a big stone building, a small chapel, possibly a barn. I know people who've recorded in limestone caves, even in a water tower. Then you experiment."

There are drawbacks, Alexander admits. "All balance questions have to be settled physically, by moving musicians around. You can't pan anything; everything has to be done before you start rolling tape. You can't say that the trumpet is too loud and use the fader at the console; there *is* no console! But it's worth the work, because the sound you get is so beautiful."

Post-production is virtually nonexistent on Water Lily Acoustics recordings. "Just editing," Alexander insists. "That's it. And most of the time, there is not even any editing. This one will have to have some done, but that's it. No sweetening, no nothing. There's no equalization. The whole chain has been designed to be completely flat and neutral, so it's totally transparent. It's the simplest signal path there is, and nothing else."

r Rivers

As exotic, category-busting, and somewhat ephemeral as this project might seem, *Fascinoma* began in Hollywood—or at least on the industry ghetto's far fringes. In his self-defined capacity as a film composer, Cooder has called on Hassell for a few projects, including Wim Wenders' *The End of Violence*. The two quickly found artistic and philosophical common ground.

"The thing that Ry and I have in common is a search for authenticity," muses Hassell. "Of course, Ry has been in search of, first, American originals, and I've been looking in different areas for things that touched the deepest part of what music meant to be. This comes out of my studies with Pran Nath," the late Indian mentor, who inspired such Eastern-thinking Westerners as Terry Riley and Lou Harrison.

Beginning with a session late in 1997 that involved Hassell, the Indian flutist Ronu Majumdar, Cooder and his son Joachim, and Cox, the Water Lily Acoustics project grew to include jazz pianist Terrasson on two subsequent dates. In the end, Cooder and Hassell stole into the digital domain by dumping the masters into Digidesign Pro Tools for edits. The templates that resulted were then used as guides in the final step of cutting and splicing the one-inch tape.

"The basic structure of most of this material is that there is no structure," Cooder says. "By cutting and experimenting, we found hidden elements of structure that become markers along the way. You begin to shape the thing around that. We recorded so much stuff, and it was so open, that I see this process as very legitimate. And because of this Pro Tools technology, you know where to cut the tape; otherwise, you couldn't just go in and start slicing."

In the end, according to Hassell, *Fascinoma* is "a reaction against the fact that, in the digital world, there are so many faster guns that it's very easy to imitate things. There is one thing that can't be imitated, and that's the sound of the trumpet, which is my sound. So in a way, when I'm playing trumpet here, I'm playing my strong card, the one thing that can't be intruded upon by imitators.

Stylistically, though, what is *Fascinoma* about? "I don't know how to describe it," Hassell admits. "The mix of music is quite wide. That relates to other things that I've been interested in, where genres are getting extended, like with Herbie Hancock playing a movement from Gershwin's *Concerto in F*. Formerly there would be a jazz artist here, and a classical artist over here, and a new age artist somewhere else. But this has a different thread. Something tells me that it's been a good thing to do."

Contributors: *Josef Woodard plays guitar, writes, and records with groups such as Headless Household, often in the digital domain (for reasons of convenience and cost-cutting. Really.)*

Photo: Brian Paumier

powerusers

Maximum Effects

311's Nick Hexum rides the effects rapids in his Yamaha 02R.

by greg sandow

You know a product is a hit when everybody wants to talk about it. And all at once, everybody wants to talk about our Oct. '96 Editor's Pick, the Yamaha 02R digital mixer—"the brain of my studio," as Nick Hexum of the multiplatinum rock band 311 describes it.

In fact, the singer, guitarist, songwriter, sample wizard, and take-charge guy on the band's record sessions is so jazzed on the 02R that he insisted on talking about it rather than the other piece of gear—whose identity we will keep discreetly hidden—we had originally agreed to discuss. His first reason is simple enough: The 02R, with 40 inputs, 20 output channels, and eight bus sends, is fully automated, so you can store every mix you do in its memory. With ordinary mixers, Hexum says, almost shuddering, "you'd mix a song, and when you figured it was done, you'd say to your band, 'Everybody listen closely, because this is your last chance!'"

Which wasn't literally true, of course. But if someone decided a week or so later that the guitar was too loud, you'd have to look up the settings of every knob and fader and then slowly recreate them—a process, Hexum says, that used to take him twelve to fourteen hours on more complicated mixes. Now, thanks to the 02R, "it's instant," he smiles. "You hit a button, and your mix is back." That means the band can mix many songs at once, returning to each one whenever it likes.

This immediate recall, Hexum notes, is only the beginning. "*Every* parameter is totally saved," he explains, "including panning, EQ, and effects." Effects? That's right: The 02R has reverb, delay, compression, and just about every other standard effect built in, using "the same 32-bit chip that's in the Yamaha SPX-900 outboard effects box," he points out. "It's the industry standard." *Two* chips, in fact; each 02R sports two independent sets of effects.

The effects, along with everything else, are remembered without any patch bays, digital-to-analog conversion, or, best of all, noise. Yes, Hexum still uses an outboard box or two, like an Eventide H3000 voice doubler, for what he calls "way-out effects, like trippy echoes, or old-fashioned filters."

But he does most of his basic effects work within the 02R. "It's easy," he explains. "You press a SELECT button right above a fader, then an EQ button, and a screen lights up with a standard four-band EQ. Press another button, and you can adjust reverb." The effects, he notes, have terrific presets, including "a complete EQ library. The engineers picked an EQ for an electric bass or a female voice, for *everything*, and you can start from there and tweak it."

Is there anything that Hexum doesn't like about the 02R? Not really, he shrugs, though he does wish that third-party vendors would start providing even more effects on cards that would slip into the four expansion slots conveniently provided on every 02R. Come to think of it, he adds, he might appreciate having more slots too, since all of his are currently filled with, among other things, fiber optic inputs and outputs that connect to his ADAT digital tape decks, along with Yamaha's special interface to chain one 02R to another. At present, Hexum has two 02Rs. This makes him, he insists, the "man with two brains" and gives him twice as many effects, since he can route any sound to either effects module on its own mixer, or to either module on his other 02R.

There's one more thing that Hexum wants to rave about, and that relates to the 02R's full MIDI interface. "My Roland JV-2020 synth makes sixteen sounds at once," he says. "In [Opcode] Studio Vision Pro running on my Mac G3, I can set up fader banks to control those sounds, or anything else on the JV-2020. Then I control the faders in Studio Vision with the faders on the 02R."

The result? "I can take a simple pulsing synth sound, assign a fader to a filter, and play the filter in real time by shaking the fader up and down." That way, the sound gets interesting—"boom *bim*, boom *bim*," Hexum mimics to show how the offbeats now take on a nasal quality.

It's an effect that Hexum was never able to pull off by moving faders on his computer screen with a mouse. Yes, he could have used a mod wheel, but that would have allowed him to control only one parameter at a time—and, he points out, "it's not nearly as expressive." He'd rather use the 02R as a new kind of musical instrument and record the fader movements as he goes, so that when he has a version he likes, it's memorized. "That, right there, is the future," he insists. "The old-fashioned ways are obsolete."

Contributors: *Greg Sandow is a music critic for* The Wall Street Journal, *a member of the graduate studies faculty at Juilliard, and a composer who uses the technology he writes about.*

records

just say "boo"

Boo Radleys
Kingsize
(The Music Cartel)

There was a time when London's Boo Radleys enjoyed picking up their guitars and slashing away *à la* the Pixies or early Dinosaur Jr., but no longer. The Boos' *Kingsize*, their fourth full-length album, is comparatively bereft of guitars, with things like cellos, flutes, horns, synthesizers, house rhythms, and quite a few lovely, um, string tracks taking the place of the potent steel strings of *Wake Up!* and *C'mon Kids*.

"It's a Jimmy Webb feel we were going for on the string arrangements," says singer and guitarist Martin Carr, who, along with colleague Tim Rice, writes most of the band's material. "I'd have gone into the studio without a guitar entirely if I thought it was possible."

The Boos' shift to a guitarless sound helps illuminate the beauty of their current songwriting without obscuring it with distortion or undue electricity. On *Kingsize* Carr resorts only momentarily to his trademark Gibson Tennessean for effect: a wah sound on the noirish epic "The Old Newsstand at Hamilton Square," a ragged power-chord punctuation on "High As Monkeys," a scratchy funk track on "Heaven's at the Bottom of This Glass."

It's the first time in four albums that Carr and the band have plunged into the world of . . . let's just call them "sophisticated" arrangements.

"Because we're really undisciplined, we never rehearsed or talked about what we wanted," Carr admits. "If I have an arrangement, I do as much as I can on the demos. If I don't have an idea, I hope that Tim does."

The Boos have never lacked for ideas, and *Kingsize* serves as a gorgeous clearinghouse of musical concepts and revelations. "Put Your Arms Around Me" might be one of the prettiest acoustic songs out of Britain since Oasis' "Wonderwall," while more elaborate creations, such as the title track, the shimmering, Brian Wilson-derived "Comb Your Hair," and the telling, technique-inspiring "Jimmy Webb is God," never get lost in their own ambition.

"We worked off a TASCAM eight-track cassette recorder," says Carr, "as well as a Korg Trinity and a twelve-track sequencer, which we dumped back down to eight-track." The simplicity of the band's recording process might belie the work that went into their sterling arrangements, which are

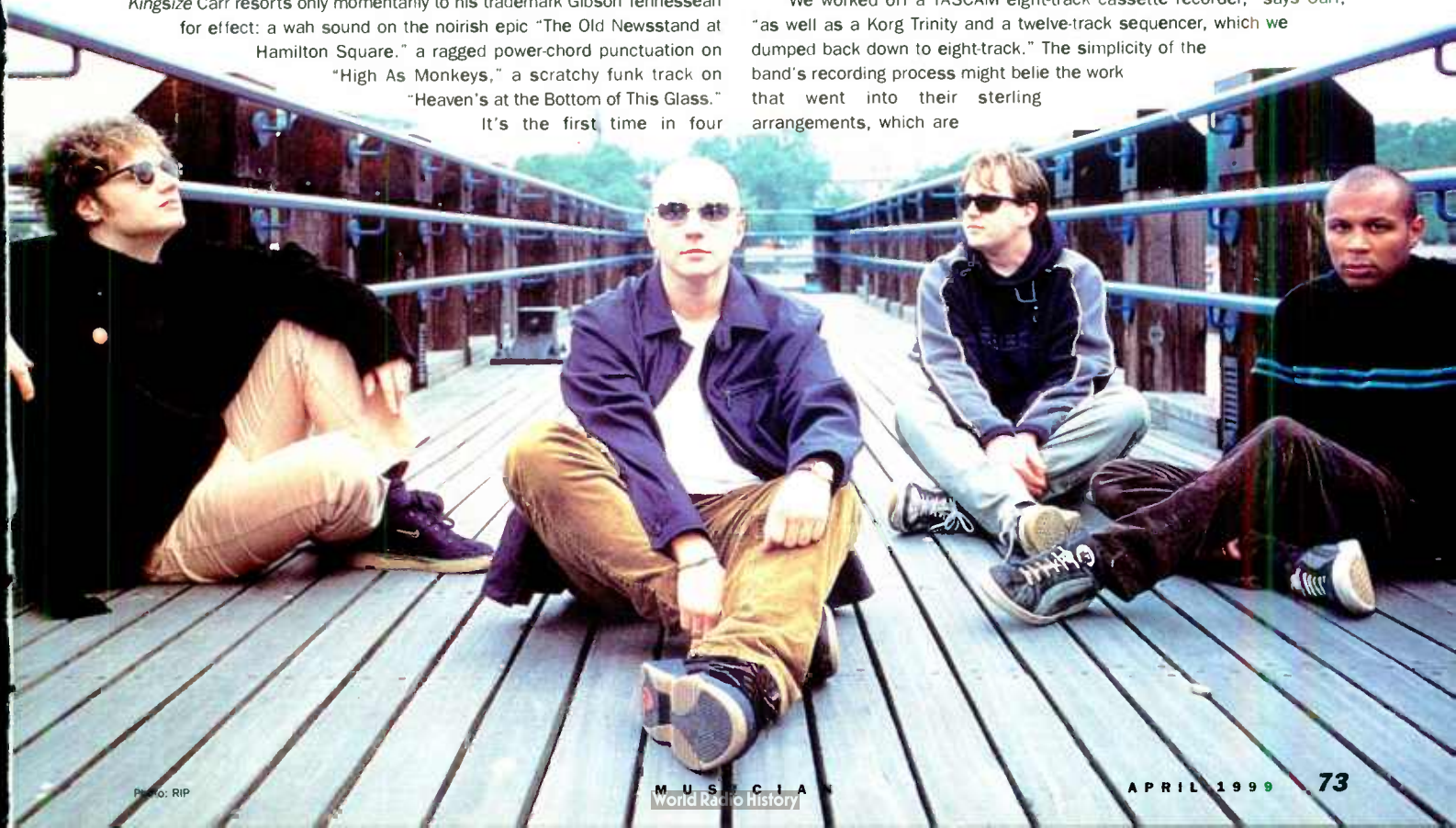


Photo: RIP

ultimately the centerpiece of *Kingsize*. Boo Radleys may have graduated from neo-punks to grownups, but their music remains as relevant and powerful as ever. Perhaps it's proof that "Jimmy Webb is God" after all.

—Bob Gulla

Snakefarm

Songs From My Funeral

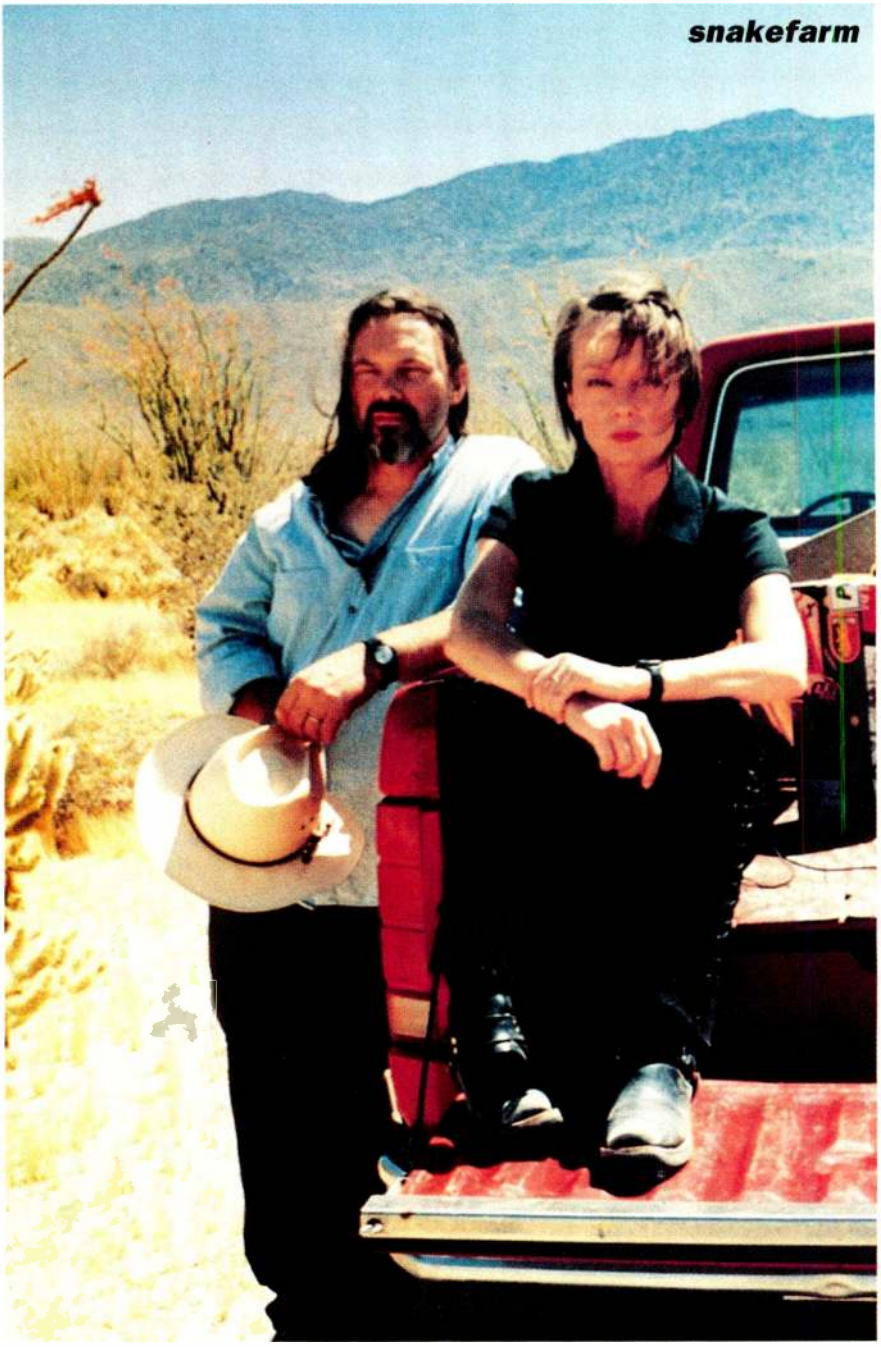
(RCA)

There's a unique power to the American folk song, born from the coupling of raw, simple structure with an often fatalistic, richly narrative lyric. Many of us have forgotten how strong these songs are, thanks to the earnest collegians who bludgeoned and bled them during the hootenanny era. But it takes a lot to put "John Henry" down, and on their debut release the L.A. duo known as Snakefarm brings life back to the steel-drivin' man, and to Frankie's treacherous lover Johnny, and to the mythic cowboys who haunt the streets of Laredo.

There are guitars on *Songs From My Funeral*, none of them strummed with Kingston Trio brio. Instead, Michel Delory plays spare *noir* chords, rich in tremolo and drenched in echo, to complement textures of each tune. Whether breathing cold synth whispers through the chill of "Tom Dooley" or stripping down to a skeletal banjo at the beginning of "Black Girl," Delory and his wife, singer/guitarist/accordionist Anna Domino, connect with the spirit of each song. It's no easy task to approach this material as if it were fresh, unbarnacled by clichés and full of interpretive potential. But that's what they do, and for that Snakefarm deserves both respect and attention.

Sometimes the process was as simple as changing the order of a lyric. They were trying to figure out how to pull off "House of the Rising Sun" without triggering those Animals samples buried in our brains, when a friend suggested that they begin with the second verse and move the first verse to the end. That, plus the device of reciting rather than singing the opening lines, not only worked, it added an almost cinematic quality to the arrangement. Occasionally they'd change melodies and chord sequences, or shorten the text. ("Some of these songs have, like, 38 verses," Domino groans.) The riskiest move, though, was to supplement certain songs with new lyrics.

This was their approach on "Black Girl." "The only extant verses of the song are the first two," Domino explains, and then she recites: "'Black girl, black girl, don't lie to me. Tell me where did you stay last night? In the pines, in the pines, where the sun never shines, and I shivered the whole night through. My husband was a railroad man, and he died half a mile from town. His head was found in the driver's wheel, but his body never was found.' That's it. You have no idea what happened, except this poor young woman is losing her mind." This short but gripping snippet inspired Anna to write three additional verses which, though not as timeless as the original words, do flesh out the story without getting in its way.



The instrumentation throughout *Songs* is pretty basic. Most synth sounds came from a stone-age (okay, an analog-age) Korg Mono/Poly synth, though one of the most evocative textures, the two-note motif over the opening vocal on "Rising Sun," turns out to be a Rhodes electric piano through a tremolo and a spring reverb. Though Anna and Michel would have preferred working with a live percussionist, their looped and sequenced beats actually enhance the hypnotic quality of the stories told by these songs.

"I didn't know whether these songs would work with a strong rhythm," Anna admits. "I figured they'd be at cross-purposes. But really, they arranged themselves, without a complaint. It was an effortless exercise, especially with [Digidesign] Pro Tools, which allowed us to alter things ever so slightly in the final mix. We didn't want to fight with the music; that would be completely contrary to the point. But the songs are so strong that we let them lead us. And it worked."

I'll say. Folk music is as organic and alive as the folk from whom it springs. With artists like Snakefarm plugged into the tradition, its viability is secure.

—Robert L. Doerschuk

(continued on page 76)

Photo: Madoka

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Freedy Johnston learns to let go

Freedy Johnston has this complicated relationship with control. He wants it over his music, for all the right reasons, but he knows from experience that it isn't always good for him. It was Freedy, after all, who insisted on leaving "Bad Reputation" off his masterful major-label debut on Elektra, *This Perfect World*; cooler heads eventually prevailed, and the track became Johnston's signature song.

Two albums later, Johnston is sitting in L.A.'s Ocean Way studios between mixing sessions for his latest effort, which was untitled, with no release date, as we went to press. "I'm glad I'm not producing myself," he muses. "A couple of the tracks I would have thrown out because they sound so loose, but once we mixed them the looseness became a key element of the song. I'm used to stuff being in control, like, 'If I don't like that drum fill, let's comp in another fill from a previous take,' which with a click track and SMPTE has always been a possibility. But it also helps to get away from that."

Johnston is a pop formalist in many respects: He pays proper devotion to what he calls the "Beatlesisms" of pop songwriting and expresses deep admiration for the hi-fi sound of Frank Sinatra records from the Sixties and late Fifties, some of which, he notes, were recorded right here at Ocean Way. Even so, he recently embraced a manner of recording that's at odds with the cultivated craft of those albums—or even of *This Perfect World*. Working with producer T-Bone Burnett and co-producer/engineer Roger Moutenot, Johnston has recorded this album almost entirely in live takes with bandmates Cameron Greider on guitar and Andy Hess on bass. Rounding out the studio quartet is the ringer's ringer, drummer Jim Keltner.

"Before every record it's always been, 'We're gonna get live performances and get that live energy.' And it's always just talk: You get a live basic track but then you decide to overdub the rhythm and then the vocal, and it never really happens. On the last record we did get the bass and drum tracks live, with the rest done as overdubs. But now I see the value of it: There's something ghostly and aura-like to the track that you're not gonna replicate if you do overdubs. And there's an energy that you can't replicate; the groove exists only in that room in that time, and to do an overdub would be really hard if you're not in the room with that visual contact."

Knocking out album-quality tracks live takes time; according to Johnston, each song required a dozen or so takes. "Thirteen was the magic number there for a while. It seemed an inefficient way of working at first because we were burning so much tape, at two takes a reel. It was a basic live setup like you'd do at a radio show; the key was to keep the volume down. The other key was doing a lot of takes and going for the right one."

Freedy did overdub some, though not all, of his vocals; since he accompanied himself on rhythm guitar while singing the live tracks, a few instrumental fixes were necessary as well. "I had to redo the rhythm guitar because the vocal that was in the live rhythm guitar effect was causing a flanging effect, a weird sound," he explains. "But I was also given a lesson in dynamics: The quieter you can play, the more control you have over your tone, acoustic and electric. "I realized that I've *always* been playing too hard, even when I didn't think I had been. The emotion or tension that's created when you're singing makes you want to play harder, to emote through the guitar. But that's not the way it works."

Most of the album was cut at Village Recorder in Santa Monica, which Johnston credits for creating a comfortable, nurturing environment. "We were in the studio where Steely Dan's *Can't Buy a Thrill* and a lot of other sort of L.A. records were made. They have a lot of class there, and they have hearts of gold. I can see the downside of being in a place where you're not respected, because I've had a negative experience at the Hit Factory in New York: That's not a musical place, it's all about maxing out the record budget and trying to get as much money as they can. I'd prefer to work in New York, but L.A. has more studios and the rents are cheaper."

Johnston, Greider, and Hess had rehearsed his new songs prior to entering the studio. Keltner was the X factor, in part because he hadn't rehearsed with the band, and in part due to the drummer's jazzier sensibility. "No one even mentioned a click track, and his approach will differ from take to take," Johnston points out. "On 'Depending on the Night' he played one of my favorite drum tracks that I've heard anywhere, and it was unlike any of the takes that we'd done up to that point. We just happened to capture that moment, and it's worth its weight in gold to me."

Johnston feels that the live approach loosened his own conception of how a song can work. On one track he played piano but realized afterwards that the key didn't match the tone of the song. "It's kind of a sad, late-night saloon song, but I'm singing it too high and it just sounds idiotic. So now I'm gonna keep the melody but change the lyrics."

For all that, don't expect Johnston's new album to sound wildly different from his previous work. "I'm gonna always be singing sad songs about guys who are loners or losers," he says without apology. "That's just the way it is. I know how limited songwriters are. Pete Townshend said we all write the same song again and again, or variations on the same, and that's fine. I was listening to Hank Williams last night while doing the dishes, and all his songs have the same sort of arrangements, like, 'Now we'll go to the lap steel solo.' But he's still a great poet. So it always comes down to the song. You gotta have something to say."***—Mark Rowland***

Photo: Frank Ockenfels

(continued from page 74)

Seam

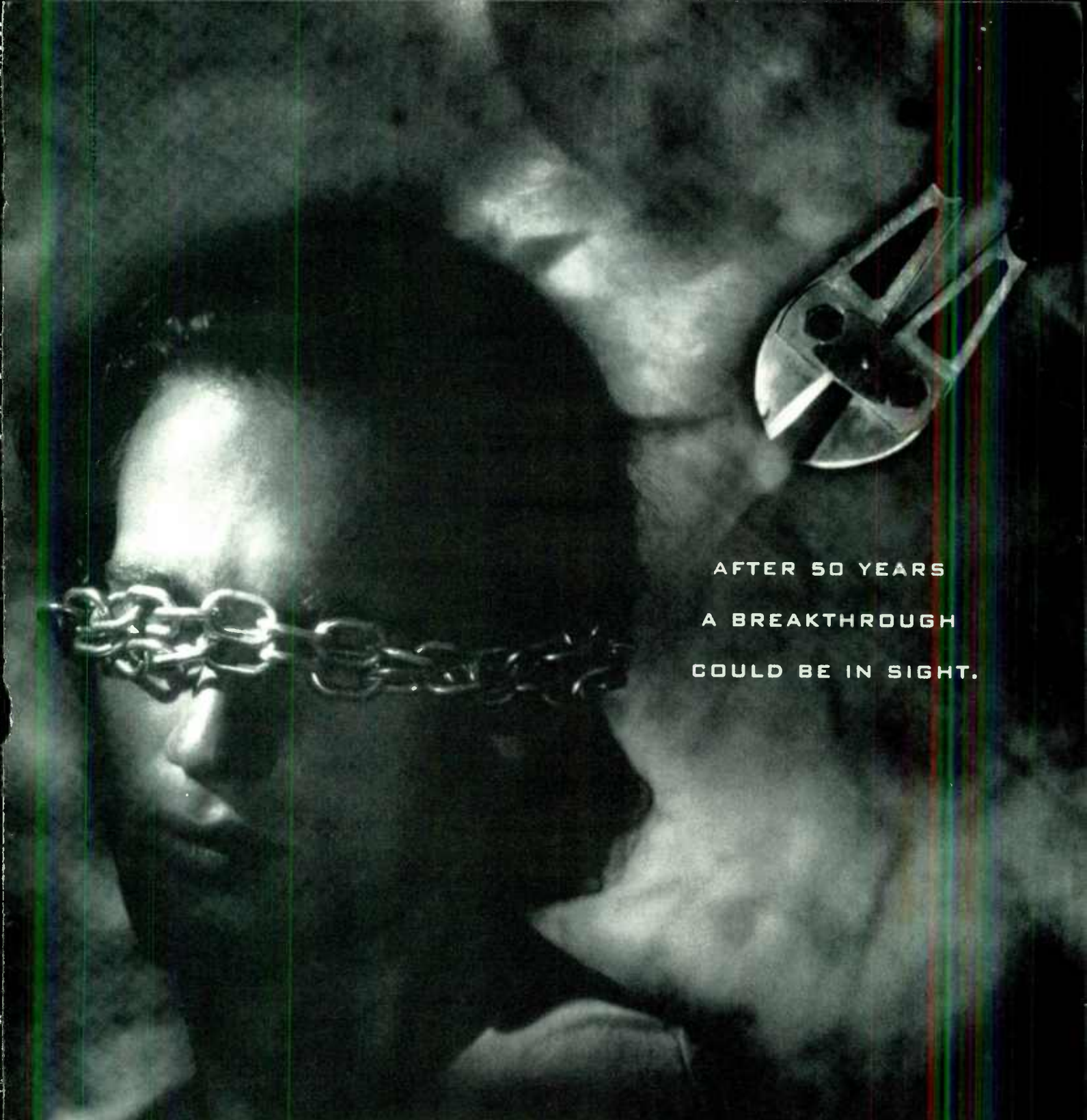
The Pace is Glacial

(Touch & Go)

On their first recording in three years, Chicago's indie heroes Seam throw a wrench into rock's in-your-face obviousness with this sardonic but aptly-titled album. Once a side project of vocalist/guitarist Sooyoung Park's band Bitch Magnet, Seam has been notorious for constant breakup rumors and a revolving-door sequence of drummers, bassists, and guitarists; a band family tree would span from Seattle to Chapel Hill, from Superchunk to Tortoise. But Park has finally pulled together a more or less stable lineup (Billy Shin on bass, Chris Manfrin on drums, and guitarist Reg Shrader) to help craft music with a dreamlike, movie-soundtrack quality. The result is an oxymoron: an understated rock record.

To accomplish this in the studio, Seam enlisted Chapel Hill resident Brian Paulson, whose production and engineering credits drip with alternative cred: Beck, Wilco, the Jesus Lizard, Soul Asylum, Babes in Toyland, Superchunk, and Squirrel Nut Zippers, among many others. Recorded at Electrical Audio Recording (a.k.a. EAR, Steve Albini's swanky new studio), the album emphasizes interplay between musicians, in a democratic approach that underpins Seam's intelligent sound. The ebb and flow of each instrument, as well as Park's voice, highlights the band's gift for texture: On "Inching Towards Juarez," delicate, purposeful guitar, played by both Park and Shrader, entwines sensually with a beautifully spare and inventive bass line to slowly build, with sneaking drums and tremolo guitar, into a profound musical statement. And while the comparison would probably make Park's skin crawl, the mesmerizing, sometimes moody music

Photo: Brad Miller



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displayed elsewhere on *Glacial* suggests Chicago's indie answer to the Smashing Pumpkins.

Most of these tracks were recorded live in the studio, but for the final cut, "Aloha Spirit," Park brought in three tracks of digitally recorded guitars from his home studio and dumped them onto two-inch analog tape. Manfrin laid down the drum tracks over the recorded music, creating a hypnotic feel that leaves the listener simultaneously sated and primed to hit the "play it again" button. This unpretentious channeling of mind and mood through music helps redefine what a rock record, or even a rock band, can be. Though *Glacial* has its uptempo jams, Park demonstrates that you can say as much with a whisper as a scream—and reminds us that when someone whispers, you always lean closer to pay attention.

—Maureen Herman

Steve Earle

The Mountain

(E-Squared)

When country-rock renegade Steve Earle arrived in Nashville in 1974, he and a lot of his Texas transplant buddies wound up hanging with the city's hardcore bluegrass players. "They were the only other guys in town who smoked pot back then, the only other bohemians," Earle explains. It didn't take Steve long to find something else they had in common: "Bluegrass was the *original* alternative country music," he points out. "And at its best, bluegrass rocks pretty fuckin' hard."

Earle has tried his twangy hand at bluegrass several times over the past two decades, culminating in a recent decision to write and co-produce a whole-hog bluegrass album with his old pals in the Del McCoury Band. Or, as Earle puts it, "I wanted to make a rock record, recorded completely on acoustic instruments."

But the making of the album, titled *The Mountain*, turned out to be a climb more difficult than he had originally imagined. For instance, most bluegrass singers have been crystalline tenors. Gravel-throated Earle was forced to "change a lot of old habits, because these songs were in a higher key than I've sung in years. I started wearing my guitar higher. I went to a heavier pick. I had to relearn the way I sang and played guitar to perform them. It was pretty radical."

Despite the McCoury clan's legendary mastery of the mandolin, novice Earle waded into that territory as well—but, he sighs, only playing in the keys of D and G. Del McCoury, himself an ex-banjo picker for Bill Monroe, capoed his guitar to an open tuning and insisted that Earle make all the acoustic runs. The results of all this clucking and plucking? A strangely kinetic album that whir-sputters like some clanky old Model T tanked up on pricey high-octane fuel.

These fourteen backwoods-seasoned tracks are some of Earle's best in years, and are perfectly sculpted for the bluegrass gallery. They were tracked like an old radio performance, Earle explains, "with us literally standing around an array of microphones in the studio until we got it all on tape at one time." That approach drives home the hoe-down *élan* of "Outlaw's Honeymoon," the rustic blues of "The Graveyard Shift," the miner's-prayer nuances of the title track, and the Appalachian murder-ballad creep of "Carrie Brown." Earle and crew also explore the Celtic-country connection in the reeling "Dixieland," a Civil War yarn inspired by Michael Sharra's grim novel, *The Killer Angels*. A moving, chorale-crescendoed "Pilgrim"—which Earle wrote for the funeral of his late bassist, Roy Husky—echoes the classic "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" in both its artistry and gospel spirit.

Each track is made even more inviting by the composer's warm, neighborly drawl, a delivery as righteous as it is redneck. That's always been Earle's saving grace: He's never put on bourgeois airs. *Mountain* will stand as his great labor of blue-collar love—and it rocks pretty fuckin' hard to boot.

—Tom Lanham

Photo: Soren Jensen

Out in Worship

Sterilized

(Perishable)

The word "world" has always proven a rather vague label with which to inform naïve North American ears, but in the case of Out in Worship's *Sterilized* there is no better way to characterize the band's ambitious immersion into transcultural grooves than to call their music "heavy world." Or perhaps just worldly.

With drummer Doug Scharin and guitarist Joe Goldring once again at the helm, Out in Worship continues to delve inwardly on its second (and blissfully bassier) record to create expansive music that transcends stylistic and technological boundaries. Psychedelic guitars, ambient drums, and rumbling dub bass meld with tripped-out turntable scratchings, Asian-imbued samples, and various string and percussion instruments to give birth to a shimmering trance-like sound. Much like Miles Davis' *In a Silent Way*, *Sterilized* relies on tape editing and a careful combination of seemingly incongruous sounds to take you on a journey where

sonic intensity flows with the mesmerizing cycles and chaotic shifts usually found only in nature. The inherent resonance of a sitar loop explodes when played over backward-tracked drums; delayed vinyl scratching vibrates like the double-reed pipes of desert nomads when superimposed over sparse upper-register electric guitar picking; and distorted envelope filtering on the electric bass mixes with room-miked drums, tablas, electronic drum sounds, and bass-heavy DJ scratching to form the ultimate rhythmic symbiosis.

The fact that *Sterilized* moves with such coherence—two of the five songs clock in at more than fifteen minutes each—testifies to both the creative vision and the technical ability of Scharin and Goldring. With the members of Out in Worship scattered throughout the San Francisco, Chicago, and New York areas, Scharin and Goldring brought together tracks that were recorded individually at different times during 1997 and '98 in Brooklyn and San Francisco by transferring between analog and digital domains, then splicing and dicing to achieve a true band feel in their final mixes.

"It's all about tape editing," says Scharin. "When I mix stuff, I like to use two minutes of a song and turn it into eight [minutes], like 'Navajos,' which was originally five minutes long. It's hard for me to make a short track. I get into the ambient part of it, just stripping down tracks and doing something with two tracks for a while. So why not use all the parts of the songs in different ways and make it into something else?"

Typical of the songs on *Sterilized*, "Navajos" came together by taking Scharin's original drum performances, which were recorded on two tracks of a Marantz two-track cassette recorder in his old Brooklyn loft with two Shure SM58s, and dumping them onto an ADAT at bassist Tony Maimone's Studio G in Brooklyn. Maimone added his "harmonic" bass part there, and then Scharin took that ADAT tape out to Pigshead Studio in San Francisco, where the song was completed.

"We did all the bass and drum parts originally on the four-track," explains Scharin, "but we had to redo the bass sounds on all the stuff because it's hard to get a really good bass sound on a four-track; the cassette won't hold the [bass] frequencies." No matter; the original vibe is intact, as Scharin's muscular beats set the tone and provide the spiritual force to propel *Sterilized* deep into your inner coil to work its cleansing magic.

—Michael Gelfand

Knut Hamre & Steve Tibbetts

Á

(Hannibal)

Calculated cultural collisions have prompted some of the more interesting recordings of improvised guitar in recent years. There's Henry Kaiser's and David Lindley's meetings with musicians from Madagascar on two volumes of *A World Out of Time*, and Derek Bailey's work with the Butoh-inspired dancer Min Tanaka on *Music and Dance*. Not to forget guitarist Steve Tibbetts' 1996 collaboration with chanting Tibetan nun Choying Drolma, titled *Chö*.

Well, Tibbetts is at it again. This time he went to Norway to record Knut Hamre—a member of the Hardingfele, or Hardanger fiddle—and then spirited the tapes back to his Minneapolis studio. There he rearranged the recordings and added liberal doses of African percussion and slack-tuned kick drum, plus his Martin D12-28S twelve-string acoustic guitar. The trippy results ricochet between tradition and transcendence.

At times, the rich harmonics and drones of the Hardingfele and Tibbetts twelve-string on *Á* create gently swirling soundscapes. When Hamre's fiddle and the guitar share trills on "Nøringen," the results hew the folk-song line; then "Fjellmanngjenta" moves the affair into free-music conjuring, as percussionist Marc Anderson—Tibbetts' accomplice on his northland excursion—blends bell-like cymbal tones with the crystalline drone of the fiddle and Tibbetts' vibrato-laden guitar. Small melodies flicker and dance, sparking and disappearing until they build a pattern of rising and decaying that echoes the cadences of all manner of religious music, from priestly singing to *Chö*-like chants to Indian folk tunes. Things get heavier still on "Spelar Guro" as Hamre's fiddle repeats improbably rich-toned lines, offset by Anderson's chiming cymbal, to conjure a trance-like power.

"There's a tradition of trance music in Norway," Tibbetts explains, "but can you imagine Norwegians in trance? I live in Minnesota. That's something I'd run from."

But seriously, folks, after working with nuns, "I *had* been looking forward to the absence of spiritual intrigue in Norway," Tibbetts admits. Nonetheless, he was attracted to the Hardingele's "immense, cool, and weird sound." Tibbetts first heard the instrument ten years ago, when a friend gave him a tape of fiddler Vidar Lande. Lande, in turn, referred Tibbetts to Hamre.

To capture that immense, cool, and weird sound, Tibbetts used a Nagra reel-to-reel deck and a pair of Neumann U 87 microphones. One of these ultra-dependable tube mics was placed very close to the fiddle; another was positioned "a little off, to pick up the room and the way the harmonics and drone strings on the fiddle combine." The recording was done in an old stone church, near a fjord. "If you listen closely," Tibbetts notes, "you can hear the ferries that started their engines vroom every forty minutes. But that didn't bother me."

Back in Minneapolis, Tibbetts dropped the fiddle recordings onto two tracks of his sixteen-track TASCAM deck. "I did some serious de-arrangements of those old tunes, splicing and looping everything backwards. I did it with a razor blade. Razor edits are punchier and cooler than Pro Tools. There's also more victory and defeat in sitting around with a razor blade. When you hit it, it's a triumph."

So is *Á*, an album whose title the adventurous Tibbetts says he can't actually pronounce. No matter: The result is pancultural sonic magic that transcends the limitations of language.

—Ted Drozdowski

Ticklah

Polydemic

(Razorfish)

Brooklyn keyboardist Ticklah is yet another struggling New York musician playing low-dollar gigs while awaiting that big break. But Ticklah—a.k.a. Victor Axelrod—is also a firestarter who makes his own opportunities and signature sounds on his debut, *Polydemic*. A fan of Fela Kuti and James Brown, as well as King Tubby, Aswad, and Herbie Hancock, Ticklah creates beautiful nuggets of simmering, jazz-juiced R&B, with significant help from—get this—actual musicians! With a virtually unknown yet gifted and mature cast, *Polydemic* recalls a lost Quincy Jones session from the Seventies, an agile Lee Perry mix, or maybe a bootleg of a dream Stevie-Wonder-meets-Augustus-Pablo gig. How does this 26-year-old capture the sounds of the now ancient masters? Listen, grasshoppa.

"I'm very old-school at heart," laughs Axelrod. "Some sampling is great, but a lot of it is silly to me. Playing live music was always my thing; it's only recently that I've gotten caught up in technology. I like the *Mission: Impossible* theme, for instance, but I didn't know it was Lalo Schifrin until somebody told me."

Recording mostly in his home studio, with drums cut at a proper studio or at his dad's house, Ticklah plays a 1971 Wurlitzer 200 piano, with organ sounds from a MIDI-controlled Oberheim/Viscount D9E module via a Roland Juno-106 or JV-80 synth, along with a Hohner D6 Clavinet and some Rhodes. Recording gear includes a TASCAM 488MkII eight-track mixing board, Alesis 3630 compressor/limiter, Delta Lab Effectron II digital delay, and a hand-held Roland MS-1 Phrase Sampler. Ticklah plays old gear not out of fashion but of necessity; they fit his sultry soul sounds like bourbon with Coke.

"Having a degree of simplicity within melody and arrangements is important," says Axelrod. "All the music that I love, whether it's Fela or Augustus Pablo, always has something simple and profound about it. There is sophistication and simplicity."

"Toe Foo" growls and spews with Maceo-like sax, purring Clavinets, and percussion. "Japanese" wafts lazily with a serpentine, Herbie Hancockian organ melody and some par-tay drumming and handclaps. "Space Root," which is all Axelrod, is the album's most charming track, an airy, urban dub dance tinged with Brazilian allusions and an irresistible melody played on simulated harmonica and Moog.

Razorfish originally released *Polydemic* tracks via the Net in the MP3 format, eventually following with the entire record. This strategy, like Axelrod's home-grown soul sauce, is unusual, but it has its benefits. "I don't know if my music is ever going to be in all the stores," he admits. "The kind of instrumental record that it is, looking for alternative ways of selling it is better. What I am doing won't be selling like Mariah Carey."

Maybe not. But after hearing this record, Mariah may soon call Axelrod for tips on how to get her booty moving in *Polydemic* proportions. ***—Ken Micallef***

Black Crowes

By Your Side
(Columbia)

Just in time, the Black Crowes get back to their roots and play no-nonsense, straightforward rock & roll on *By Your Side*, recapturing the sound and spirit that made *Shake Your Moneymaker* such an alluring debut those eight long years ago. Notably absent are the kind of self-indulgent, lengthy jam sessions that dissipated the energy of their last two records. A focused return to form, *By Your Side* features star turns from both brothers Robinson, with nasty, twanging guitars from Rich and forceful, emotion-drenched vocals from Chris. The latter's lyrics also indicate a growing maturity and thoughtfulness without sacrificing the good-time feeling that is at the core of rock & roll.

Rather than replace former lead guitarist Marc Ford, who left the Crowes last year under mysterious circumstances, rhythm ace Rich Robinson assumes all guitar duties and earnestly plays lead lines like he's out to prove something. No virtuoso, his play-from-your-gut style more than holds its own, with some intricate solo work on "Horsehead" and inspired slide work on the album's first single, "Kickin' My Heart Around"—whose heated harmonica solo from Chris recalls Aerosmith circa *Toys in the Attic*.

Perhaps not coincidentally, producer Kevin Shirley previously helmed Aerosmith's *Nine Lives*, which explains the similar mix of studio craft and live feel on *By Your Side*. "I work very hard to bring it out of the band, so it's not me, it's them that does it," he modestly attests. "I make a point of egging on the performances, and try and keep everything from the live performances and build on that. I'm not one of those guys who goes in and builds tracks up. We make any changes in pre-production, so when they go in to play, they just play as a band. That's the way rock & roll's meant to be."

Shirley's no fan of recording parts and fixing them with Pro Tools either. "The public gets used to hearing time- and pitch-perfect records, and that's not what the soul of music's all about," he insists. "What it really does is take the onus away from the producer or the band from making performances work."

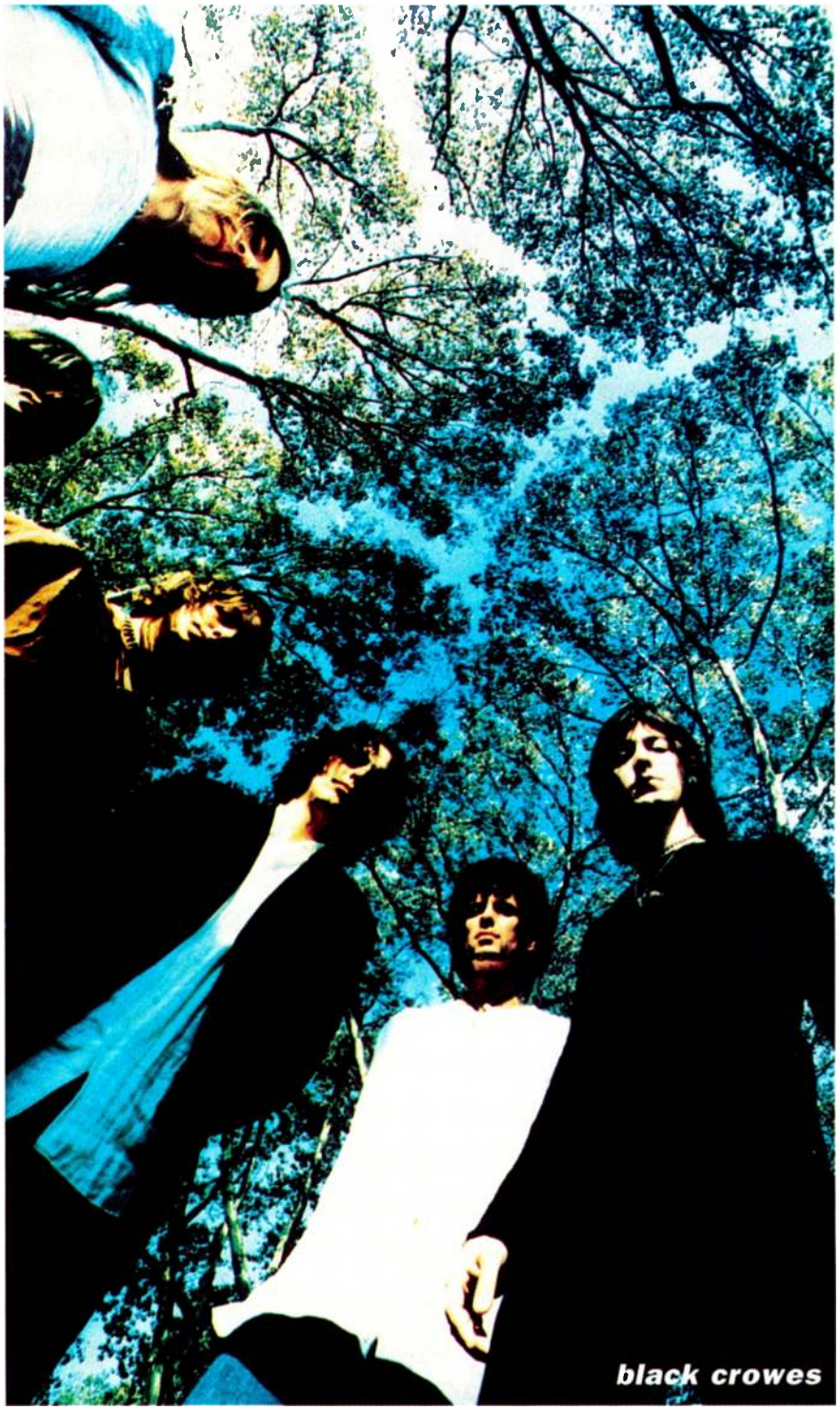

Photo: Ross Halfin

By Your Side was recorded at New York's Avatar Studios (formerly the Power Station), *sans* special effects or engineering tricks. "The control room in the studio is a big wood room that's got this high ceiling with kind of a coffin at the top," Shirley says. "I always have the guitar players come in with their amplifiers, because that makes such a big difference in the tone of their guitars. I never ever have people lay down tracks; they're always playing together. We used an old Neve console, two tape machines, and two microphones, and mixed it onto tape; there was nothing digital in the process. And the Crowes were really open to letting things develop to the point where they could see how they

were going to work.

"This was the most satisfying album I've ever made," Shirley states. It's satisfying for longtime Crowes fans as well. By remembering that less can be more, this band has put together an album with all the elements needed to put them back on the rock & roll map.—***Lesley Holdom***

Kelly Willis

What I Deserve

(Rykodisc)

If Kelly Willis sometimes seems to be in love with the sound of her own voice, she's allowed: It's a wonderful instrument. Blessed with a spicy twang and plenty of soul, she turns unpretentious down-home tunes into memorable drama on the captivating *What I Deserve*. Now part of the alternative country crowd—one of her collaborators is Gary Louris of the Jayhawks—after a commercially disappointing stint in Nashville, Willis underscores an absurdity of the contemporary scene. Three decades ago, her tales of regret and loss would have placed her squarely in the mainstream between Tammy Wynette and Loretta Lynn; now she's an outsider.

In any case, Willis knows how to tug the old heartstrings. She wrestles with love in the bouncy but sad "Wrapped," which depicts desire as a physical affliction. More often, she's battling a downward slide, trying to make amends with a disillusioned lover. The title track finds Willis desperately insisting, "What I've done's not who I am," her mournful tone suggesting that it's too late to put things right, while Paul Kelly's delicate "Cradle of Love" mutes tenderness with the bitter aftertaste of defeat. The players, including guitarists Mark Spencer and Chuck Prophet and steel dudes John Lee Graham and Lloyd Maines, are fine throughout the album, underscoring rather than intruding on Willis' reveries.

What I Deserve had a rocky beginning, with Austin producer Dave McNair picking up the project after a false start. "Kelly started the record in San Francisco and left after a few days because she didn't have a good feeling about it," he explains. "She played me the songs. I thought they were really good, though some things needed to be recut. I told her we should keep the starkness at all costs."

McNair and Willis redid some parts on the eight original tracks and added five new ones, with special attention to the vocals. "She's got a hard voice to record," McNair notes. "It's real powerful and delicate at the same time. I used a Røde Classic, an Australian vacuum tube mic, because it captured all the detail when she was quiet but could also handle the dynamics. I usually give a fair amount of direction on vocals, but not with her. Kelly put a lot of thought into how to sing each song. Her number one thing is to get across the story."

Willis does that in grand style, attacking each song with go-for-broke abandon, as if each note were her last shot at salvation. She offers a haunting version of Nick Drake's "Time Has Told Me" and takes a sultry turn on the bluesy "Real Deep Feeling," which she caps with a nifty Sam Cooke reference. Only her power ballad indulgence on Paul Westerberg's "They're Blind" suggests an area that she might be advised to leave unexplored.

What I Deserve falls a little short of the masterpiece Willis will make someday, when she can interact with a more forceful band. Still, it's hard to imagine her topping the beautiful "Not Long for This World," a hushed meditation on mortality, which closes the album. Maybe she can't pay the bills in today's Nashville, but that's only because Kelly Willis is into something deeper and more enduring.

—***Jon Young***

product index

This product guide lists the equipment and page where the players talk about the gear they use. Feel free to contact the manufacturers for specific information on what the best players play and tell them that you read about them in *Musician*.

AKAI, 4710 Mercantile Dr., Fort Worth, TX 76137 (800) 433-5627: S950, **58**

ALESIS, 1633 26th Street, Santa Monica, CA 90404 (310) 255-3400: Monitor One, **66**; M1, **68**; 3630 compressor/limiter, **79**

BOSS, 7200 Dominion Cir., Los Angeles, CA 90040 (213) 685-5141: RRV10, PSM-5, DD-5, **58**

CAKEWALK, 5 Cambridge Center, Cambridge, MA 02142 (617) 441-7870: Guitar Studio software, **59-61**

DANELECTRO, P.O. Box 2769, Laguna Hills, CA 92654-2769 (949) 583-2419: Daddy-O pedal, **58**

DBX, 8760 S. Sandy Pkwy., Sandy, UT 84070 (801) 568-7660: 160A compressor/limiter, **58**

DIGIDESIGN, 3401-A Hillview Ave, Palo Alto, CA 94304 (650) 842-7900: Pro Tools, **31, 74**

DUNLOP MFG, P.O. Box 846, 150 Industrial Way, Benicia, CA 94510 (800) 722-3434: wah-wah, **58**

ELECTRO-HARMONIX, 20 Cooper Square, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10003 (212) 529-0466: Micro Synthesizer, **62**

ELECTRO-VOICE, 600 Cecil St., Buchanan, MI 49107 (800) 234-6831: MS 802, Sentry 100 **66**

ENSONIQ, 155 Great Valley Pkwy., Malvern, PA 19355 (610) 647-3930: ASR-X, EPS 16 Plus, ASR-10, **58**

EVENTIDE, One Alsan Way, Little Ferry, NY 07643 (201) 641-1200: H3000 voice doubler, **72**

FENDER, 7975 N. Hayden Rd., Scottsdale, AZ 85258 (602) 596-9690: Telecaster, P-bass, **33**; Bass Piano, Deluxe Reverb amp, **58**

FOSTEX, 15431 Blackburn Ave., Norwalk, CA 90650 (562) 921-1112: VM04, **62**

FURMAN SOUND, 1997 S. McDowell Blvd., Petaluma, CA 94954 (707) 763-1010: PL Plus, **58**

GEMINI, 8 Germak Dr., Carteret, NY 07008 (800) 476-8633: PMX 1600 preamp mixer, **58**

GENELEC, 7 Tech Circle, Natick, MA 01760 (508) 652-0900: 1029A, 2029A, 1091A **68**

GIBRALTAR, 20 Old Windsor Rd., Bloomfield, CT 06002 (860) 509-8888: drum stool, **58**

GIBSON, 657 Massman Dr., Nashville, TN 37210 (800) 283-7135: 335, amp, **13**; acoustic guitar, **33**; Howard Roberts guitar, Chet Atkins guitar, **58**; Tennessean, **73**

HAFLER PROFESSIONAL, 546 S Rockford Dr., Tempe, AZ 85281 (602) 967-3565: TRM6, TRM8, **68**

HAMMOND SUZUKI, 733 Annoreno Dr., Addison, IL 60101 (630) 543-0277: XX-2, **10**; organ, **33**

HOHNER, 10223 Sycamore Dr., Ashland, VA 23005 (804) 550-2700: D6 clavinet, **79**

HUGHES & KETTNER, 1848 S Elmhurst Rd., Mt. Prospect, IL 60056 (800) 452-6771: cabinet, Tube Rotosphere, **58**

JBL PROFESSIONAL, 8500 Balboa Blvd., Northridge, CA 91329 (818) 894-8850: MR Series, **58**; 4206, 4208, Control-1 **66**

JOHNSON AMPLIFICATION, 8760 S. Sandy Pkwy., Sandy, UT 84070 (801) 566-8800: JM60 combo, **62**

KORG, 316 S. Service Rd., Melville, NY 11747-3201 (516) 333-9100: Toneworks DTR-1, PolyEnsemble keyboard, **58**

LIQUID AUDIO, 810 Winslow St., Redwood City, CA 94063 (650) 549-2000: **40**

MACKIE DESIGNS, 16220 Wood-Red Rd. NE, Woodinville, WA 98072 (800) 258-6883: MicroSeries 1202-VLZ, **58**; OTTO-1604, **60**; HR824, **68**

MARTIN, P.O. Box 329, 510 Sycamore St., Nazareth, PA 18064 (800) 345-3103: 00-15, 000-15, CD-15E guitars, **62**; D12-28S guitar, **79**

MESA/BOOGIE, 1317 Ross St., Petaluma, CA 94954 (707) 778-6565: 400+ bass amp, **58**

NEUMANN USA, 6 Vista Dr., Old Lyme, CT 06371 (860) 434-5220: U 87, **79**

NHTPRO, 555 First St., #302, Benicia, CA 94510 (707) 751-0270: M-100, A-10, A-20 **62**

OBERHEIM, 1050 Acorn Dr., Nashville, TN 37210 (615) 871-4500: D9E module, **79**

OPCODE SYSTEMS, 3950 Fabian Way, Suite 100, Palo Alto, CA 94303 (650) 856-3333: Studio Vision Pro, **72**

ROLAND, 7200 Dominion Circle, Los Angeles, CA 90040 (213) 685-5141: VS-880, **10**; A-33, **58**; GK-2A, JV-880, GR-30, **59, 60**; Juno-106, JV-80, MS-1 **79**

SCHECTER GUITAR RESEARCH, 1538 N. Highland Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90028 (213) 469-8900: AB-1 bass, **62**

SHURE BROTHERS, 222 Hartrey Avenue, Evanston, IL 60202 (800) 257-4873: SM58, **79**

SONY ELECTRONICS, 1 Sony Dr., Park Ridge, NJ 07656 (201) 930-1000: MDS-JE500 MiniDisc deck, **58**

TANNOY, 300 Gage Avenue, Unit 1, Kitchener, ON N2M 2C8: PBM 6.5, PBM 8, **66**; Reveal Active, System 800A **68**

TASCAM, 7733 Telegraph Rd., Montebello, CA 90640 (213) 726-0303: DA-88, DA-30, DA-P1, 122, **58**; eight-track, **73**; sixteen-track, DA-488MkII, **79**

TECH 21, 333 W. 52nd St., New York, NY 10019 (212) 315-1116: SansAmp model PSA-1, SansAmp channel switcher, **58**

TECHNICS, 1 Panasonic Way, 1C-8, Secaucus, NJ 07094 (201) 271-3348: SL-1200MK2, **58**

VOX, 316 S. Service Rd., Melville, NY 11747-3201 (516) 333-9100: AC30, Jaguar, **58**

WHIRLWIND, 99 Ling Rd., Rochester, NY 14612 (716) 663-8820: Multi-Director direct box, **58**

YAMAHA, 6600 Orangethrope Blvd., Buena Park, CA 90622 (714) 522-9011: FX 550, Maple Custom drum set, ProMix 01, 53115H P.A. enclosures, **58**; NS10M, **66**; MSP5, **68**; O2R, **72**

ZILDJIAN, 22 Longwater Dr., Norwell, MA 02061 (781) 871-2200: Custom cymbals, **58**

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A Strategy for Selling Out

Tired of having lots of integrity but no money? Try learning from the Spice Girls.

The commercial detritus of last year's Spice Girls tour of America—posters, *Spiceworld* videos, high-heeled sneakers worn once—has been lodged beneath the beds of teenage girls for months now. And, in a gray cell in California State Prison, perhaps under the bed of Charles Manson as well. Lost amid the gossip of who was Spicing up the bed of which soccer star was Paul Krassner's satirical quarterly, *The Realist*, reporting that Manson had offered to take a lethal injection if he could meet the Spice Girls.

If the story is true, Manson's a coward: Lethal injection is the easy way out when facing the Prefab Four.

In fact, the Spice invasion had a chilling effect on serious musicians everywhere, something like a nuclear winter blasting through an open bedroom window. This was accompanied by feelings of anger, disgust, envy, perhaps even sexual arousal. They wondered, "What does Posh Spice have that I don't have?"

One answer, of course, is advice from music industry seers on how to make millions by becoming a total shill. This is where *Musician*, helpful as always, comes in, with a blueprint on how to follow the Spice Girls way. And don't feel embarrassed: Remember, even Stephen Stills once wanted to be a Monkee.

Define your target audience. On the afternoon I had my dose of the Spice show, the outdoor venue was besieged by Dodge Caravans stuffed with giggles, braces, and grim chaperones. Clutching umbrellas and wearing brightly-colored ponchos, the crowd of eighteen thousand straggled through the remnants of an all-day rain, looking like a CNN broadcast from a Third World weather disaster. It was like Woodstock, except without the music.

Appeal to prurient interests. Spice Girls songs, such as the big hit "Wannabe," preach friendship ahead of physical relationships. But the group's stage act suggests that safe sex with a Spice Girl has less to do with a handy supply of condoms than it does with owning a padded headboard and a nearby telephone with the speed dial set for a medical technician trained in CPR. Considering that the audience was a sea of fourteen-year-old girls, brace yourself for an invasion of fully-trained Lolitas.

Some assembly required. Like an open audition at a community playhouse, the Spice Girls offer a mixed bag of spotty skills. To make up for this, the show was primarily a triumph of technology as the Girls chirped along with taped background vocals (except for at least one suspicious moment during a lead rap, when none of their four cute mouths were moving).

Develop your act's individual, marketable personalities. Spice Girls dress like colorful, fun party favors—no semen-stained cocktail dresses. The haughty Sporty is the favorite of young girls, who were also transfixed by the pre-, post-, and halftime-show videos that hawked Drew Barrymore's new movie, face-peeling mask products, and Spice Girls merchandise. Boys, on the other hand, are drawn more to Baby, perhaps because her celibacy confession makes her seem so, um, attainable to young dorks.

Charm the critics. As the show was received with surprising lack of venom by reviewers, perhaps the culture police are to blame for not raining on Spice World. Headlines included "Spice Girls show: Not terrible," "At least it wasn't another Monkees reunion," "I couldn't stop staring at Posh's breasts" (which is what Posh Spice has that you may not have), and "Ted Kaczynski requests meeting with cast of *Friends*."—***Jeff Spevak***

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