

BRIAN ENO MEETS JOHN CAGE • WALTER BECKER • TEARS FOR FEARS

# MUSICIAN

\$2.25 NO. 83 SEPTEMBER 1985 ICD 080859



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# DIRE STRAITS

BY BILL FLANAGAN

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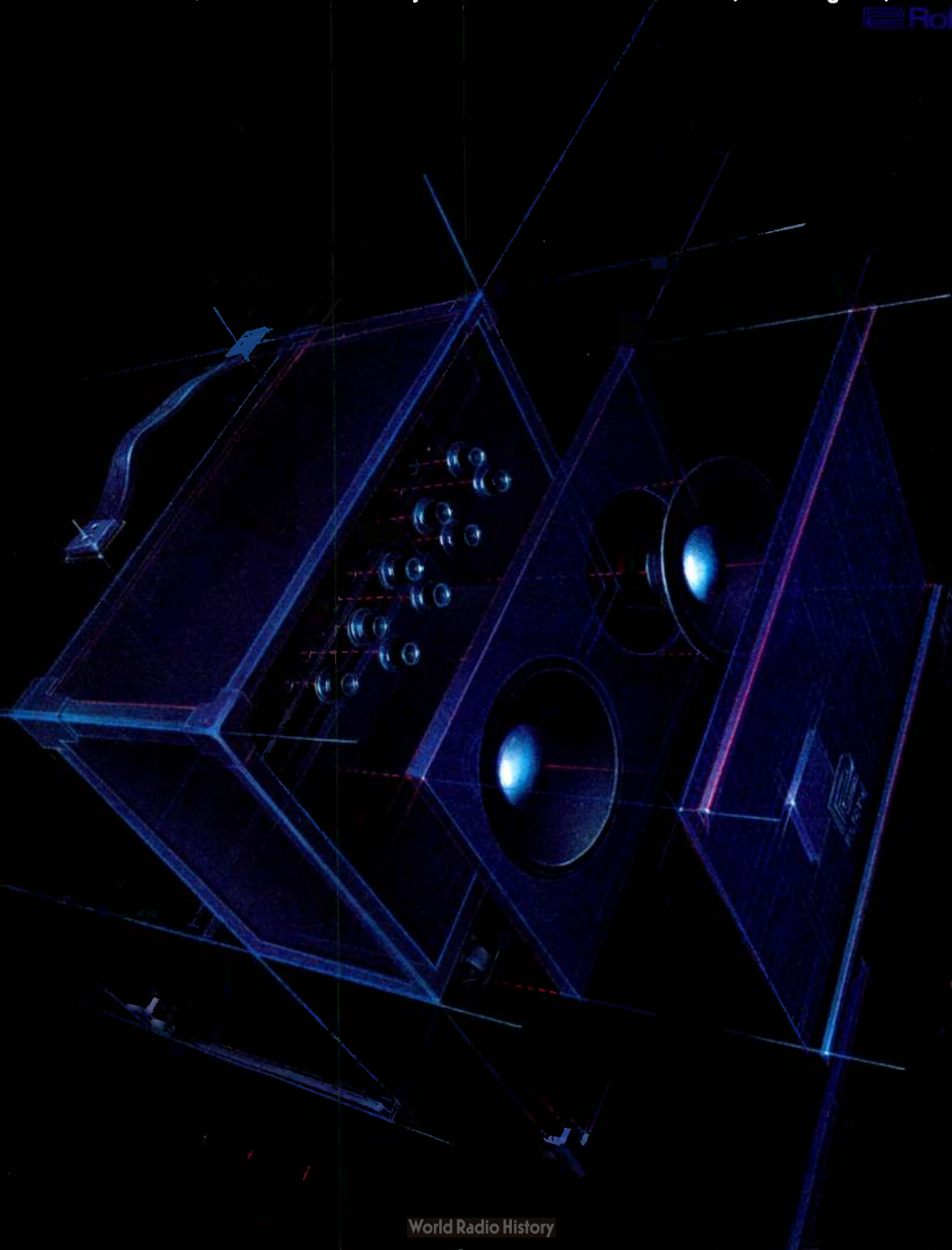
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# MUSICIAN

SEPTEMBER 1985

NO. 83



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

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STEVE MARSEL

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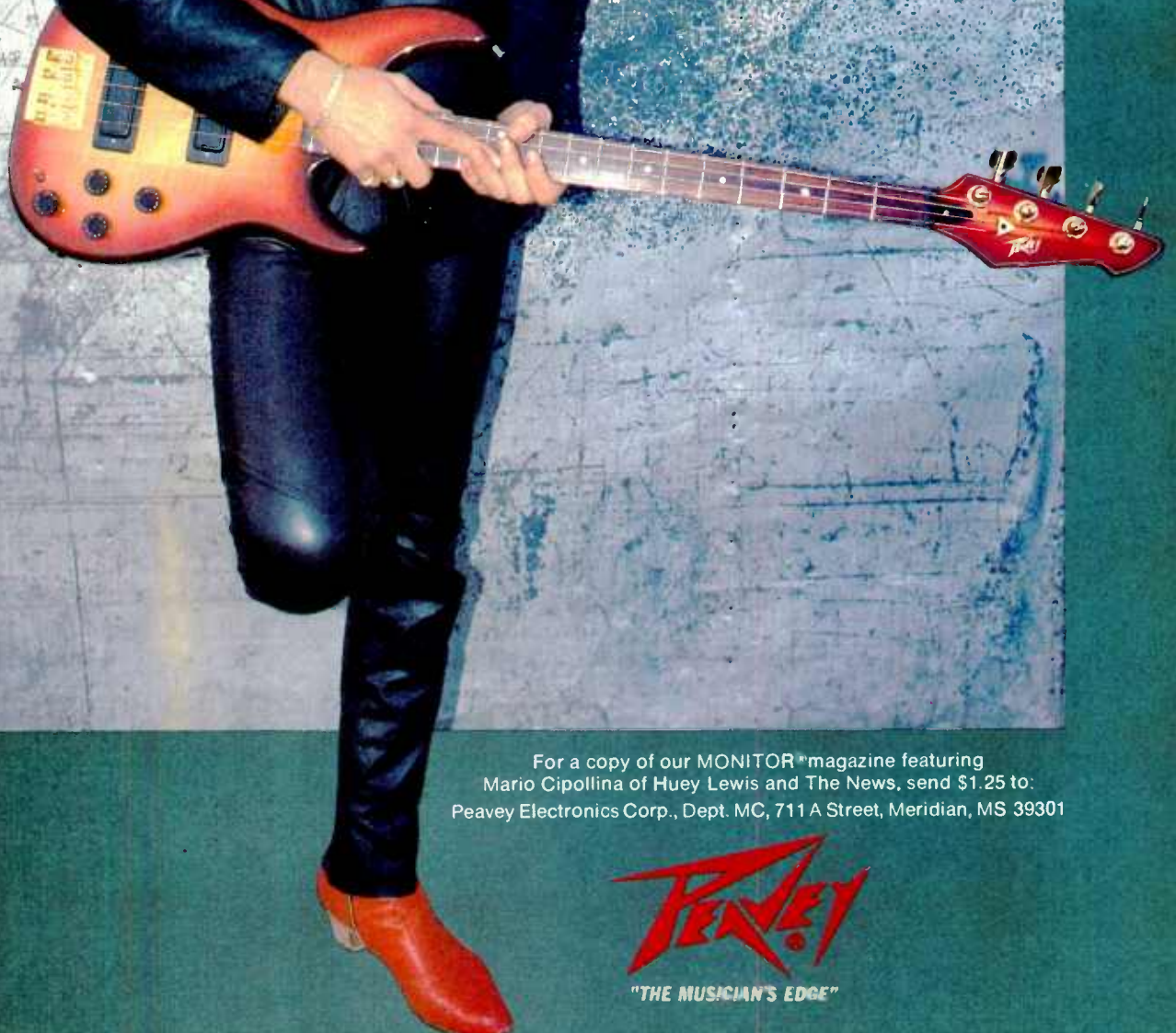




“...The Bad Boy on the Peavey Bass.”

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"THE MUSICIAN'S EDGE"



## He's an Easy Cover

If the old adage that genius is ninety percent perspiration and ten percent inspiration has any validity, then surely Phil Collins' rise to the top was pre-ordained. No one could possibly have predicted this from his rather anonymous drumming for Genesis. He didn't sing or contribute tunes for the band, yet when Peter Gabriel's departure left a gaping hole to fill, he stepped in and transformed their sound from progressive art-rock to one that was tighter and more accessible.

What with his solo albums, session work, Genesis albums and production work for a myriad of artists, Phil Collins has earned the sobriquet "the hardest working man in show business." In this age of pretty-boy teen idols his less-than-perfect appearance makes him enormously identifiable. The huge success he now enjoys couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.

Gary Kimber  
Downsview, ONT



It's just amazing how two different magazines can go in completely different directions on a topic: how one can create a small masterpiece, and the other a minor disaster. A classic example is J.D. Considine's feature on Phil Collins.

Considine touched on some of the very same points as the *Rolling Stone* article in May, but the *Stone* article had all the polish of a gossip rag. It was sloppy, filled with inaccuracies, and an insult to my intelligence.

Your article was nothing like that. It had a precision to it, was succinct, and Considine obviously put a lot of

thought into it. Simply put it was well written, and I like the way your interviews in general let the musician speak for himself. I wish there was more journalism like that around.

Pat Forden-Smith  
Champaign, IL

All of the recent Phil Collins articles concern themselves with Phil Collins, the individual, or Phil Collins as a part of Genesis. That's all well and good, but what about Brand X? As an avid admirer of Brand X I was very disappointed to see that they were not mentioned as part of his history. Brand X, to me, represents some of the finest jazz-rock. Why did he not mention the group himself? Whoever bangs those drums does an excellent job.

Martin Eisele, Jr.  
Benton, AR

[We never mention Brand X on this station.-Ed]

## Open Letter

On May 31st a terrible tornado hit our area. The stricken area spans two states—Ohio and Pennsylvania. Many people have been left homeless and without anything. Many people do not have the money to rebuild their homes or to replace their lost possessions. Kenny Loggins out of the kindness of his heart is performing at a benefit concert to help these destitute people. However, this is still not enough. Could any of you please come and help us? There is something uniquely frightening about a natural disaster—the lack of control you have over it is so scary. Please Boss, I know you're out there. Come help!

Christopher Edmund  
Niles, OH

## Just the Blues, Ma'am

After trying to decipher Chip Stern's obscure mock-ring-side description of the Town

Hall concert celebrating the rebirth of Blue Note Records, I have no earthly idea what happened—or failed to happen—musically. By framing Alfred Lion's informative remarks with his own self-indulgent prose, Stern succeeded in leaving those of us who really wanted to be there out in the cold.

If Mr. Stern has an inside joke or two for fellow scribes Giddins, Gitler and Christgau—whose names appeared prominently in the article—he should just phone 'em up instead of squandering the precious few column inches your magazine devotes to jazz. Next time, "just the facts, ma'am," please.

Joe Vanderford  
Chapel Hill, NC

## Beck and Fricke Backers

Really nice of David Fricke for sharing his recent conversation with Jeff—a real pleasure for readers with more ah, discriminating musical palates.

It's probably the only time J.B. has ever been so plainly upfront and honest. And I would be more than happy to cop the record if he ever releases it...but really Jeff, you needn't worry about finding a viable video "Image" (façade) of yourself to reach the dickbrains in MTV limbo-land. I mean, was Herbie Hancock in *Rockit?* A class act is a class act.

And next time you're around, will you fix my MGB and give my TR6 a lube job?

Rebecca J. Beck  
E. Cleveland, OH

[Curious name there, Becky. Could you be...?]

I'm glad to see a worthwhile artist covered in *Musician* for a change. Lately too much credit has been going to the pop-pushers, not enough to the rockers. Beck and a band like the Firm are breaths of fresh air.

Jay Mazur  
New York City, NY



If I read just one more article that coddles Jeff Beck while going out of its way to berate the efforts of Jimmy Page, I'll become an even more cynical bastard.

Let's not forget who did what, when and for how long.

Ida Jones  
Youngstown, OH

## Byrned Up

David Byrne, I am the most loyal fan you could ever hope for. Musically, you can do no wrong, in my opinion. I have to say, however, that your opinion about USA for Africa and the Ethiopian famine is sadly mistaken. Yes, Oxfam is more in-depth in its efforts, but like the song says, "There are people dying"—now. They often can't wait for the roots of the problem to be pulled up. And although it is human greed on the part of the Ethiopian government that makes outside help necessary, all the idealism in the world won't start the rain falling on the dying people's land. It's much better to put some "business as unusual" into action in a situation like this one.

Chet Scoville  
New Milford, NJ

## Do You Remember?

My thanks to Chris Morris for his article on Hüsker Dü—what a pleasant surprise! I, like Gary Norton, am tired of "pop bands with cute haircuts." Therefore, I find Hüsker Dü refreshing and recommend seeing them live. They are talented enough not to need cute haircuts. Now I know what their name means.

Kristen McElhiney  
Media, PA



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# VIDEO CLIPS: NO MORE FREE LUNCH

**SCOTT ISLER**

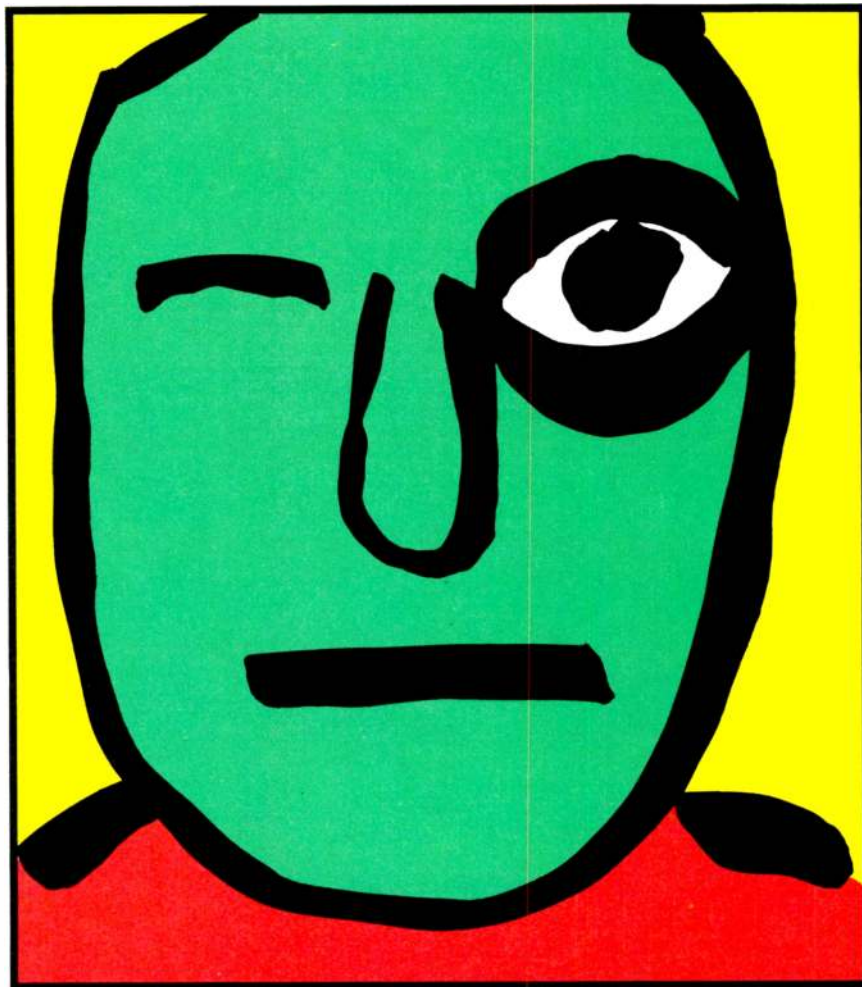
## CBS' DECISION TO CHARGE FOR VID CLIPS STIRS UP A HORNET'S NEST

**M**usic videos: promotional tool or programming content? Stop! You're both right! Depending on who's talking, the ubiquitous video clips of pop music songs are three-minute commercials or television fare as legit as *Miami Vice* or the evening news. The question is at the heart of the latest flare-up between broadcasters and record companies.

CBS Records took the initiative. On May 24 CBS Music Video Enterprises sent out letters to television outlets that show CBS clips. The letters warned that the company would start charging for the videos, formerly provided for free; the charges are reportedly flat monthly fees ranging from \$500 to \$2,000, based on a show's audience size and ad revenues. Accompanying contracts stipulated that outlets sign and return the agreement to CBS by June 14, or "authorization to use our videos will expire" the following day.

The response was predictable and immediate: a howl of protest. *CVC Video Report*, an industry tipsheet, surveyed forty regional and local video programmers. Eighty-seven and a half percent of them said they would drop CBS videos rather than ante up. (Ten percent said they would pay; two and a half percent said they would take their shows off the air.) One full-time UHF music video station promised a bonfire of CBS videotapes. A Houston radio station that produces a semiweekly video hour plotted revenge via a "free CBS taping hour." And there was much talk of counterattacking with a lawsuit.

After all the saber-rattling died down, the thorny issue remains. What are the nature of video clips? "We've regarded them as promotional pieces," says Brooke Bailey Johnson, program director of WABC-TV's *New York Hot Tracks*.



PATRICK BLACKWELL

To do otherwise, she says, would raise "certain labor-relations issues." "This material is used on commercial television," counters Bob Altshuler, vice-president of press and public affairs, CBS Record Group. "The station has the opportunity to sell time on that program. We're providing them with programming content. Whenever television uses programming content it's the practice to pay for it."

Programmers fear the CBS move is only an opening shot. Video programming contracts commonly contain a "most-favored-nations" clause stating that if one video source is paid, all must be paid. Mitchell Rowen, the publisher/editor of *CVC Video Report*, predicts that by the fall most major labels will be charging for clips.

People on both sides of the issue see pay-for-play as an idea, for better or worse, whose time has come. "Obviously the record companies wanted money," says Arnie Ginsburg, general manager of Boston's V66, "or they wouldn't have sold exclusivity." Last

year seven major labels agreed to give MTV first dibs on videos in return for payment. Those exclusivity agreements now further raise the hackles of outlets who feel they will be made to pay for used goods. The CBS plan was reportedly talked about for a year before the company made its move.

"For the last six months or so I thought it's been inevitable," Rowen says. He gives two reasons: increasing artist demand for videos, leading to more money being spent on the clips; and the failure of the home-video market to bring in the expected revenue. "We put very low rates, liveable numbers, on each situation," CBS' Altshuler says. He estimates an average CBS video cost at "more than \$50,000 and hopefully less than \$100,000."

"The money should come from record sales," Johnson maintains. "I sympathize very much with the artist. Everyone has an inflated notion of how much money these video shows are making. A very small number of people can afford to pay."



One of them who can is David Benjamin, producer of NBC's *Friday Night Videos*. The show has paid for clips since its inception two years ago. Benjamin predicts "every label" will follow CBS' lead, and soon. "If they care at all about artists, they have to charge," he says. "If we want video to become a real art form, you have to be able to make a profit, or at least break even."

Benjamin disputes Johnson's claim of video broadcaster's indigence. "Most video shows are making money. You wouldn't be on the air if you weren't making money for somebody." He does think, though, that charging for videos will weed out an overcrowded field.

"This is television, not radio. You overload it and the public's reaction is not to watch. That's what happened with sports, and I'm afraid it's happening with music. There's a glut of programming."

Unfortunately for the smaller video programmers, there are no surveys accurately measuring a music video's impact on record sales. Common wisdom has it that MTV "broke" then-new acts like the Stray Cats and Duran Duran. But that was a few years ago, when MTV virtually dominated the broadcast-video scene; the proliferation of cable, UHF and VHF music-video shows since then has watered down MTV's authority. Rowen attributes the recent

success of 'Til Tuesday to MTV and other video shows. Benjamin notes that, for all the shows now on the air, "record sales didn't increase at all last year, when you take out Michael Jackson's *Thriller*." He feels MTV's effectiveness was in getting radio to play new music. "If we just played it and it wasn't on radio, I don't think they'd be hits. You need radio first; then you need video."

Morton Nasatir was executive director of the Association of Music Video Broadcasters, an alliance of UHF stations programming at least fifty percent music clips. The AMVB is currently in limbo, victim of a lack of perceived common goals. Many of those UHF stations, Nasatir says, "chose video as a format because it's inexpensive." But if fees become standard practice, "at least twenty percent of the stations will go religion. It's an easier way to make a buck. They're having problems with audience recycling and audience maintenance. They're having trouble building figures that will impress advertisers."

"There are situations out there that are very healthy," Altshuler says. "They are the ones that will continue to use our product." The CBS plan can be seen as a Darwinian lesson in the music-video marketplace. Besides facing a dwindling number of outlets, independent artists—already hard-pressed just to produce a video—may very well be denied air time as stations tighten their belts and whittle their playlists. "Broadcasters will only broadcast sure-thing entertainment," Nasatir predicts. "A reduced playlist is just what the industry doesn't want."

Ginsburg, whose V66 plays videos by local bands, takes a conciliatory approach. "We have never opposed payment in some form to help defray the cost of making promotional videos," he says, "as long as it makes sense to everyone." V66 answered CBS' letter and expects a reply. "We feel something can be worked out."


"We've told CBS Records that we cannot accede to their request for payment for specific videos," Johnson states. But she was also attending a meeting on the subject, and is "hopeful that this will be resolved."

"CBS has made it known it is open to negotiation about the figures on its initial contracts," Rowen says, adding that the boycott figure from the CVC *Video Report* survey was ebbing as a result of these negotiations. Altshuler says he is unaware of such dealings, but "we are listening to what people are saying." He had no comment on a report that lawyers were examining a clause in the CBS contract that forbids airing "any material which promotes the sale or use of blank recording tape or

*continued on page 106*

# PROFILES

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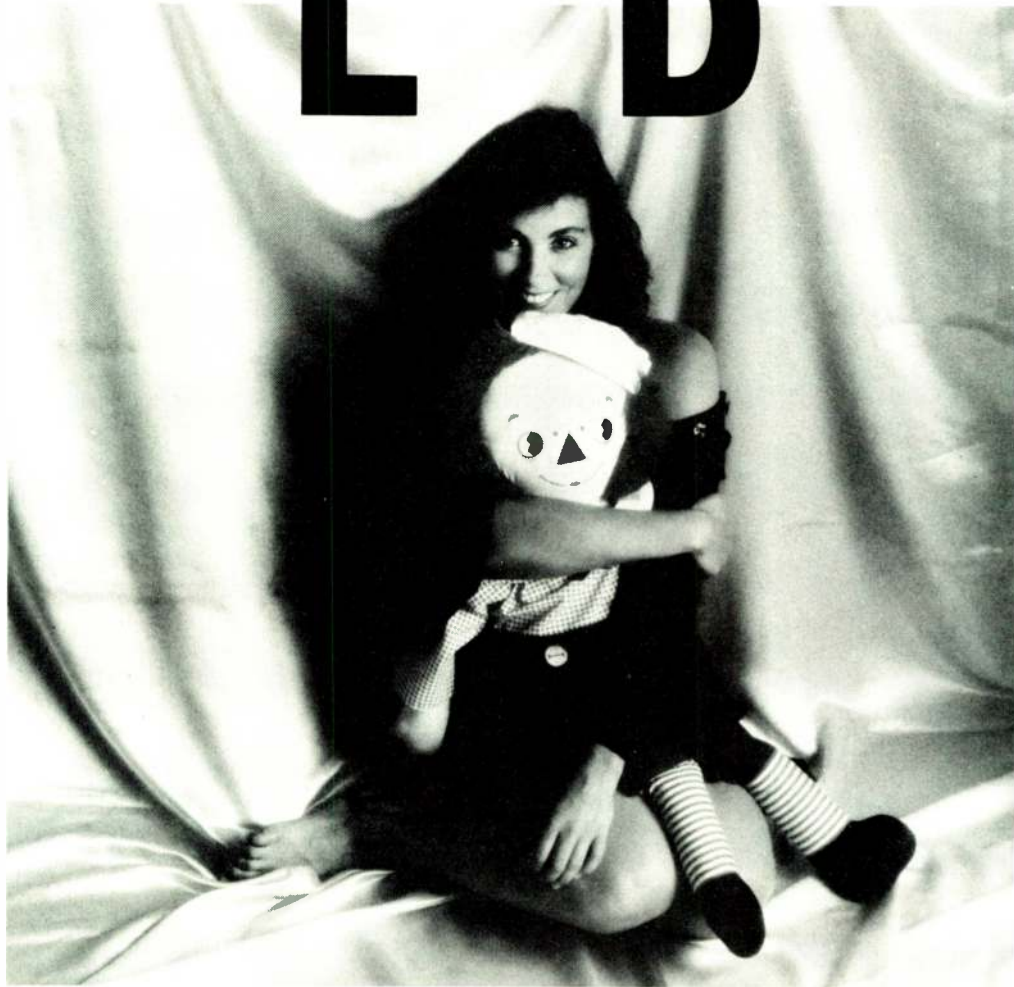
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# NEW ORDER



Bernard Albrecht, Gillian Gilbert, Peter Hook and Steve Morris hang.

LAURA LEVINE

## SCOTT ISLER

### CULT HEROES JUST WANT TO HAVE FUN— AND BETTER DISTRIBUTION

**T**hirty minutes after the interview is scheduled to begin, the members of New Order stroll casually into Warner Bros. Records' New York offices. Rock-star arrogance? Hard to say. The British quartet flew in from Los Angeles the day before, and took advantage of their biological time clocks to stay up until just a few hours ago at New York's glitziest new club. Yet they project less so-what diffidence than tired sheepishness. Not known for their punctuality onstage either, New Order can move at their own pace. We'll wait.

They're worth it. Since forming as Warsaw eight years ago, the band has produced some of the most moving, not

to mention harrowing, music ever to be misfiled under "pop." As the ironically titled Joy Division, they churned out aggressive dirges to accompany singer Ian Curtis' droning studies in self-analysis. Curtis suspended treatment by suspending himself from the end of a noose in May, 1980.

The surviving trio changed their name to New Order, added a keyboard player, and got heavily into electronics. "Blue Monday," a twelve-inch single released in the spring of 1983, marked the "new" group's maturity with hip-hopping sequencer lines and cold-blooded drums. The unconvinced called it disco by any other name, but the record sold a reported 650,000 copies in the U.K. In this country "Blue Monday" was an underground hit, absent from the airwaves but blasting out of trend-setting dance venues. The following album, *Power, Corruption And Lies*, cemented New Order's reputation as a propulsive bunch with more on their mind than get-down-and-boogie. They had overcome Curtis' curse of the living dead. They were their own band.

*Movement*, the first album under the New Order name in 1981, was never released in the U.S. *Power, Corruption*

*And Lies* came out via an independent distributor, Rough Trade. Still on a two-year schedule, New Order recently issued its third album. Before *Low-life* appeared, though, it was already talked about for heralding the band's U.S. signing to Qwest, Quincy Jones' label and a Warner Bros. affiliate. The fiercely independent New Order yoked to the Warner combine?

"Qwest has got Warner Bros. lurking in the background," bassist Peter Hook admits in nasal north-English dialect. "We didn't consider it to be that important. Since we've been here it does seem to be"—he laughs—"very important!"

Hook is New Order's most outgoing member, which isn't saying much for this bunch. Unlike 1983, however, when the band broke its longstanding interview embargo, this time they seem genuinely compliant. Hook's manner is bluff, his appearance similarly crusty. He's wearing a gray T-shirt boosting the South and emblazoned "Rebel Yell," maroon running pants, and sneakers. As always, his dark blond hair is pulled back into a short pony tail, with sunglasses perched on top. His beard is permanently frozen at stubble length.



New Order definitely does not belong to the dress-for-excess school of British bands. The band's sartorial style is more the dingy side of prep. The low-profile ethos is intended to let as little as possible get in the way of the music. The primacy of the music apparently had much to do with the switch to Qwest. "We'd had a lot of trouble with Rough Trade," Hook says. "They didn't seem to be able to handle it."

Tom Atencio, an independent A&R scout and New Order fan, was working freelance for Qwest when he caught the group at a London show in June, 1984. New Order had resisted major U.S. record companies before, including

Warner Bros.—"they still have a small-label mentality," says Karin Berg, that label's director of A&R—but Atencio says he thought that with Qwest, "the sociology might be interesting to the band." Fortunately for him, New Order respected Quincy Jones; Atencio needed "two months to strike up a rapport" with band manager Rob Gretton, but then the wheels were in motion. "Qwest actually compromised and met some of our demands, which none of the others would do," Hook says. "All the others would do is offer us more money." One demand was that their album covers remain the way they want. The typical New Order record sleeve,

as designed by Peter Saville (a partner in Factory, New Order's British label), is as devoid of information as possible.

In February New Order signed a two-album licensing deal with Qwest, for the new *Low-life* and a rerelease of *Power, Corruption And Lies*. Qwest also reissued the "Blue Monday" single, which now appears on the cassette version of that album. For all their insistence on cover-design integrity, the band allowed Qwest to dispense with the costly tracing-paper overlay (reduced to a belly-band here) on the British package. "Qwest has cooperated with us a lot," Hook explains. "We felt it was only fair to compromise with them. We've never done it before, so it's interesting."

Part of that compromise may also be the band's interview binge: two days in Los Angeles and two in New York—an unprecedented media blitz. New Order will show they can gladhand it with the best of 'em. Let's ask singer/guitarist Bernard Albrecht—who's been busy gaping at the ceiling while Hook was talking—what he thinks of his new record. Whaddaya say, Barney?

"It's just another album."

You have to imagine this reply delivered in a near-whisper by a wispy, clean-cut character in blue jeans and white windbreaker from South Gate High School. Albrecht (a.k.a. Sumner; his legal name is Dicken) still looks boyish—he also looks like he could use some sleep—but he and Hook, both twenty-nine, are New Order's senior citizens. They've known each other from childhood, and started Warsaw after attending a Sex Pistols show. Neither had any prior musical experience. Drummer Steve Morris is the most technically accomplished musician in a group that grows organically. Songs evolve out of jam sessions; Albrecht improvises lyrics at gigs, then refines them for recording. *Low-life* has an abundance of unhappy love songs. "He's frustrated," Hook says to general laughter; both Hook and Albrecht are fathers. The latter says "love" is "the first word that comes into me 'ead." But lines like "why won't you ever say my name in front of my family"? "I don't know, then," the author replies hesitantly. "I don't like to go into it because a lot is subconscious."

"Unconscious," Hook offers none too helpfully.

New Order's oblique song titles are also indicative of their creative approach. Michael Johnson, who engineered Joy Division and the last two self-produced New Order albums, notes that they choose titles after the songs are in the can: "As they go along they write down a list of titles. Every time somebody thought of a good phrase or title they put it down, whether it's got anything to do with the song or not. They

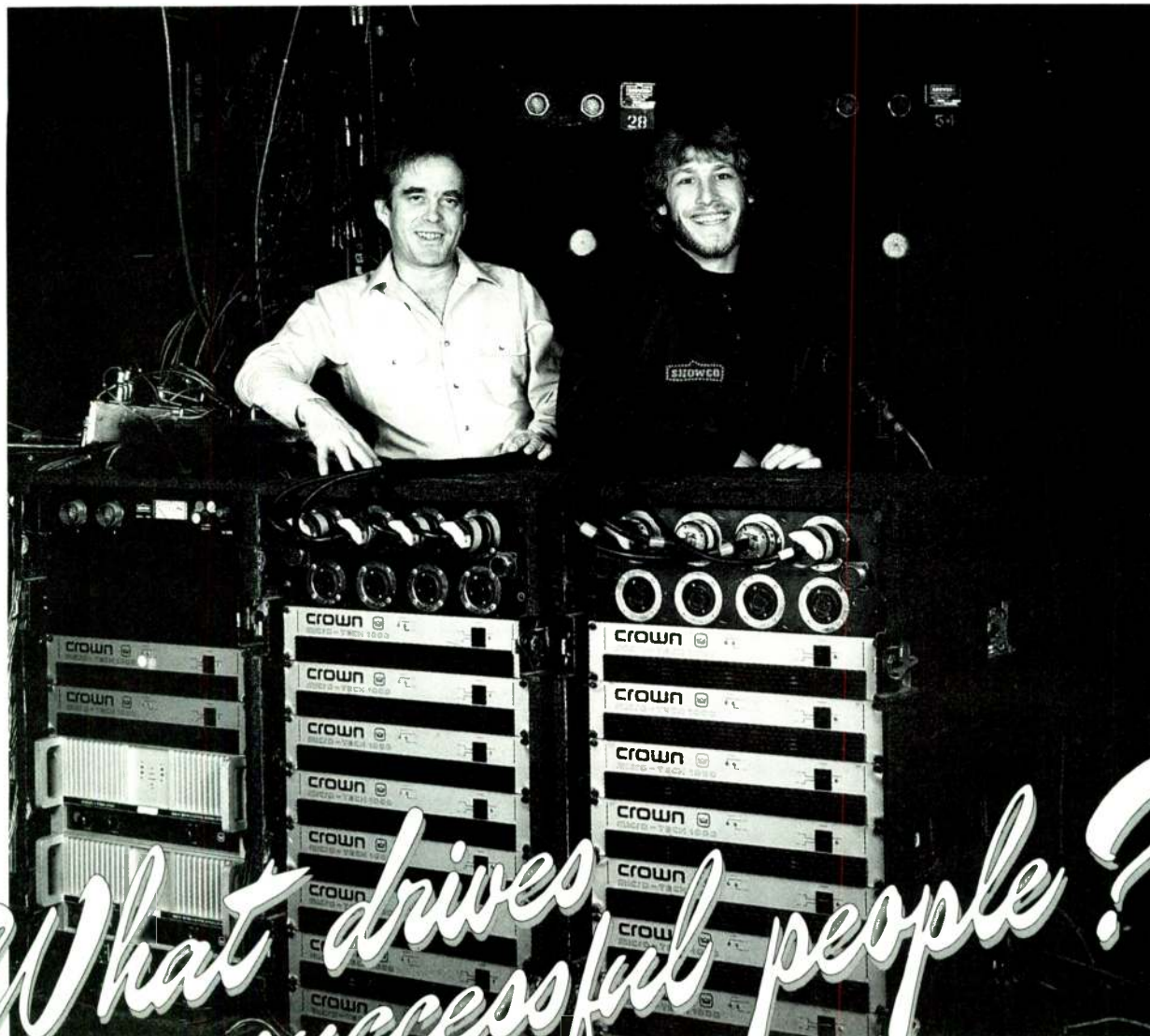


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had dozens at the end."

Johnson also says a lot of New Order songs are edited down extensively before release. *Low-life's* "Elegia," a delicate 3/4-time instrumental conceived as the soundtrack for a Japanese video, was originally over fifteen minutes long. The video project fell through and the band reduced the track by two-thirds. The uncut version is "really good, the way it builds," Johnson says. "The one on the LP is like a trailer for it." Hook, however, feels "the edit version was what we needed to play it live."

Anyone who's seen New Order perform knows that what they don't spend on their wardrobe goes into equipment.

The band has a lot of gear—ten tons, Hook says—even though this seems to go against their musical aesthetic.

"People think you've got to have loads of equipment before you can be a musician," Albrecht says. "It's not true."

Hook, toting a Sony Betamovie carrying case, admits New Order's high-tech fetish has "put people off." Albrecht points out that the band uses its arsenal sparingly; "Love Vigilantes" on *Low-life* is just guitar, bass and drums. "We don't have banks and banks of keyboards," Morris explains. "It's just that they're tied together."

New Order got into electronics, Al-

brecht says, because "we couldn't play." Now Hook complains that "all this fucking equipment" takes so much time to sort out that the band has had to increase its practice/jam sessions from two to three days a week. The rest of the time? "Just sit at home."

That these quiet homebodies make such riveting music has an Emily Dickinsonian logic to it. They open up when discussing their tools and techniques of the trade. Hook clearly is into hardware, and even the taciturn Morris flickers into action describing his electronic experiences. Only Gillian Gilbert, New Order's newest (post-Curtis) and youngest (twenty-four) component, re-

*continued on next page*

## The Perfect List

**Bernard Albrecht** plays a "Gibson headless," a 335 whose head he smashed off. He also has a 1955 Les Paul Special, and in Japan recently he bought a Tokai Strat. He uses a Boss Playbus distortion unit, Vox compressor and a 1963 Vox AC30 amp. At one time he tried installing JBL speakers but found the results didn't sound as good. Strings are Gibson Equas. And that's a Hohner melodica.

**Peter Hook's** main bass is a Gibson EBL2, customized with Yamaha pickups. Sometimes he uses a Yamaha DB1200. He plugs his Alembic stereo pre-amp into a Drawmer noise gate and Electro-Harmonix Clone Theory; thence to a Korg digital delay and Ancron (Crown) DC-300 P.A. amplifier; and it comes out of two custom-built speaker cabinets each with two fifteen-inch Gauss bass speakers. Hook also has two Shergold six-string basses, and just had a custom twenty-three fret, semi-acoustic bass built; "it's the first luxury I've ever afforded myself." Strings are Roto-sound round-wounds. As back-up he has another Clone Theory pedal, Roland digital delay, and Dynacord BS412 combo with an additional BS414 cabinet. Besides bass, he shares duties with Steve Morris on Simmons SDS-7 electronic drums.

**Gillian Gilbert** uses three Octave-Plateau Voyetra synthesizers, one of them a sequencer. Her main sequencer is a Yamaha QX1, her drum machine a Yamaha RX. There's also an E-mu Emulator II with MIDI, and a Boss distortion/compression unit in there somewhere. Everything goes through a Dynacord Gigant 3S stereo amp powering Dynacord CS91 cabinets—one high-end, one bass—with Yamaha delay.

**Steve Morris'** drum kit is a Ludwig, with 10-, 12-, 13-, and 14-inch deep-shell single-headed Concertones; 14- and 16-inch double-headed war toms; a 20-inch bass drum; and a 5½-inch metal snare with a contact mike inside for a Simmons SDS-7. Morris also has a Premier snare. Tama cymbal stands support a 16-inch crash, 20-inch ride crash, 20-inch earth cymbal, all by Zildjian, and a Paiste 18-inch ride crash. The high-hat cymbals are Zildjians, the pedal is by Tama; the bass-drum pedals are Premier 2002s. Morris prefers Premier nylon-tip CC drum sticks.

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mains peacefully withdrawn.

They have definite opinions, for example, on electronic drums and click-tracks. "If you get a straight acoustic track," Hook says, "it's always nice to build up to fast beats, to speed up. We're always telling (Steve) not to use a click track." "We'll start off with a click-track," Albrecht adds, "just to get the tempo of a song, and fade it out after about thirty seconds." The band tends to use electronic drums with synthesizer tracks; "The Perfect Kiss," Johnson says, is "purely drum machine."

According to the engineer, some New Order songs start off with drum machine "and Steve will either add to it, like playing a snare drum on the chorus, or he'll replace the snare drum throughout, sort of half and half. Barney will do a guide vocal, Gillian will play guide keyboard, Hooky will play his bass, and we'll try to record Steve. He plays without a click-track. He's very good at it; he only does a couple of takes. Most of the groups I've worked with, the drummer is never much good on a real kit."

"The equipment we've got now is the best we've ever had," Hook says. "We've had a lot of trouble in the past. You've got to compromise between things that can do what you want, and sounds. Now, with MIDI, you don't have to compromise. The problem before

was the best sequencer you could get, which was the DSX, was only suited to Oberheim equipment. We wanted to keep our Prophet. Now, with MIDI, we're almost happy with the situation"—is that a sardonic smile?—"especially with the new Emulator."

Despite all the fancy talk, New Order's acquaintance with this gear has been learn-while-you-earn. "It was the Sex Pistols that inspired us to play, and they couldn't play," Albrecht says. "We've still got the attitude that you don't need to be a good musician to write good songs." They've heard their rhythms and arrangements crop up in the work of Paul Hardcastle, Frankie Goes To Hollywood and Bronski Beat, among others. They themselves are vague on what they listen to; Albrecht mentions Italian disco records.

*Low-life*, New Order's most consistently rewarding album, was hip-hopping up the charts—a U.S. first—as of late June. The record, with Qwest/Warner muscle behind it, is giving the band a visibility they never had before. Berg's claim that "the sky's the limit" for New Order in this country suddenly doesn't sound so far-fetched. "You can't change the band," Berg says, "so you try to change the marketplace."

Another first for New Order—their faces on *Low-life*'s cover and inner

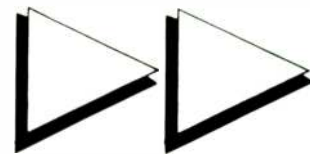
sleeve—literally imparts another form of visibility. Maybe it also indicates the end of the ridiculous mystique that has enfolded the band like a horse blanket.

When Johnson toured Australia with the band as sound mixer a couple of years ago, fans would ask him what New Order did during the day. "I'd say 'They go sunbathing, sitting on the beach.' They couldn't believe New Order went sunbathing. They're absolutely staggered that they do that sort of thing. They think they stay in all the time and read books, which is not what they're like at all. They're very down-to-earth people. It frustrates them a bit as well, that all they're interested in is attracting girls," he laughs, "and all they ever get are blokes with spots and specks and long raincoats."

This May 18 was the fifth anniversary of Ian Curtis' death. New Order was touring Australia; they played "Love Will Tear Us Apart," Joy Division's posthumous single, at the show that night. "We talk about it more now," Hook says of his band's morbid past. "I feel it as a shadow. These days we're not so paranoid about playing Joy Division songs."

Albrecht has a reason for his involvement in New Order that brooks no argument: "It's the only thing I've ever done that I'm successful at." ☐

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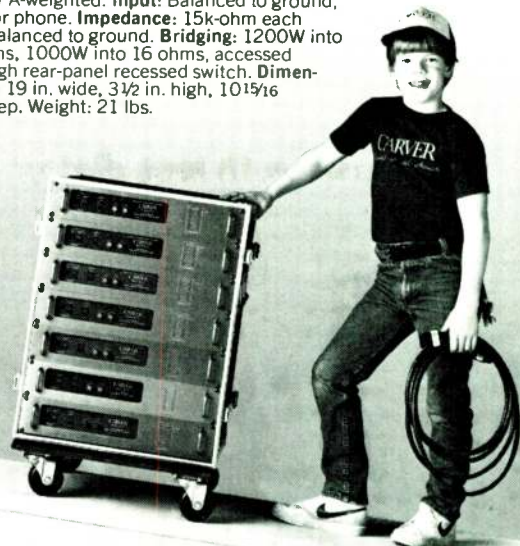
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# WALTER BECKER

MARK ROWLAND

## DR. WU GOES HAWAIIAN: STEELY DAN'S MYSTERY MAN REAPPEARS

**A**t the close of our last episode, Walter Becker and Donald Fagen, elusive masterminds behind Steely Dan, decided to part company, abruptly closing a fascinating seven-album chapter in pop music history.

The 1980 dissolution was not a complete surprise. Becker and Fagen's studio fastidiousness had begun to suggest musical constipation. Their last album, *Gauche*, took three years to put together, and though its surfaces were smooth enough to skate over, it was the first time a Steely Dan effort marked neither a significant departure from or improvement over its predecessor. Other clouds descended over the Dan's principals—a threatened lawsuit for their unsubtle lifting of a Keith Jarrett melody for *Gauche*'s title track, the death of Becker's girlfriend, and Becker's own injuries sustained when he was struck by a car. With the gods lined up against them, Steely Dan disappeared. In 1982 Donald Fagen released *The Nightfly*, a graceful memoir of New Frontier naivete, sweeter and more gently ironic than Steely Dan's work. Walter Becker, the silent partner, simply disappeared.

Five years have passed, and Walter Becker has surfaced—as the producer for a young Britband called China Crisis, an intriguing, upbeat hybrid of Dire Straits and Haircut 100. The 1985 Becker seems less like a troubled artist who'd spent the 70s punching tape edits in darkened studios than a cheerful guy who's been living in Hawaii for the past three-and-a-half years, enjoying sun, surf and (recently) fatherhood. Time has changed Becker from a gadfly operating on the fringes of the mainstream, to an enlightened conservative who heralds songcraft, depth and spirit as cornerstones of musical quality



Becker in paradise: "Nothing relieves creative anxiety like unconsciousness."

The computer revolution has vindicated Steely Dan's legendary preoccupation with studio technology, an obsession, ironically, which Walter Becker no longer shares. He does appear renewed in spirit, however, and eager to immerse himself in the music once more. More importantly, he's healthy and happy: "I feel like all my troubles are behind me."

**MUSICIAN:** *Why have you stayed out of the pop spotlight for so long, and what brought you back?*

**BECKER:** The reason I left had to do with changes in my personal life, problems I had to work through—some of which I'm sure you can imagine. If I hadn't managed to make some changes for myself, I'm sure I'd be dead by now. Even in my much deluded state I realized that much, and eventually I was fortunate enough to do something about it.

Before that, making records had been pretty all-consuming; I'd wake up, have a cup of coffee and head down to the studio. I spent my twenties in smoke-filled rooms with no windows. To suddenly wake up one day living in Hawaii was like an invitation to some

other kind of life, which I accepted. It was like a new start for me. I learned to enjoy other things. My whole attitude changed and I got into a much better frame of mind.

Then, once I was *in* that better frame of mind [*laughs*] well, there I was driving in Hawaii in my truck, and I started to think, "Gee, I kind of miss those big speakers and leather couches and the lights that dim." Eventually I got a little more antsy about it, and finally I found something I wanted to do.

**MUSICIAN:** *In retrospect, do you feel you and Donald Fagen may have been too studio-conscious?*

**BECKER:** I've had a lot of time to consider that question, and I think that part of what was going on was that we just *liked* to be in recording studios. We were in charge. We felt everything good was there. And our circumstances afforded us the rather rare luxury of just going on ad infinitum until we had something that was such an incredible fucking jewel that we would deign to present it to the public. I thought that was a good thing. But I also think we developed a perfectionist attitude that came to be more of a problem than a solution.

Being forced to do the China Crisis



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record in eight weeks was a tremendous new experience for me. You don't have the time or money to be indulgent, so you do things differently. Listening to English records, I can see that they're not so concerned as in America about that tightness of production—they tend to sketch out their musical ideas with bold strokes. After a while that appealed to me. I can see the value of making records with that kind of immediacy. And so I've come to the conclusion that too much repetition in the studio often translates into a loss of musical ideas and what's really important. Sometimes you hear people's demos and then you hear the records, and most of what you like about the demo is gone. Also I'd done all that studio stuff before, and once you know how to achieve an effect that way it's no longer so fascinating.

**MUSICIAN:** *Did you enjoy your role as elder statesman?*

**BECKER:** It's great to have that kind of respect. It's one of the things we always counted on with Steely Dan. When Tom Scott, let's say, showed up for a session we knew he had it in his mind that we'd have something he could sink his teeth into. When I went into this I had no idea to what extent I'd find that attitude, but it turned out to be pretty similar. Musical values haven't changed all that much. If I were making my own album it wouldn't necessarily be this kind of music, but the *idea* of trying to get a depth of performance and to capture it is there. It's a mellow sounding record, but they're a very mellow group.

**MUSICIAN:** *Did you make a conscious decision to stop writing when Steely Dan broke up?*

**BECKER:** Well, I was very seriously distracted so it helped me make the break. Nothing relieves creative anxiety like unconsciousness. But since this project I got myself a little synthesizer and started doodling around on it. I think I might go down and buy a drum machine and maybe one of those little 4-track recorders like all the other kids.

**MUSICIAN:** *So many of your songs with Steely Dan were elliptical in their lyrics or narrative, like pieces of a puzzle. Could you and Donald Fagen always envision the whole?*

**BECKER:** Oh yeah, we knew what we *thought* we were writing about. You can only use a few words in a song. We'd have an idea, and talk about it and joke about it and define it endlessly and then finally we'd start to sketch it out. And of course from the few words that were there it was possible for the listener to arrive at all sorts of deductions—maybe inevitable that it would be completely different from our own. Sometimes people have even misheard the words to our songs. That's happened to me

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too, and sometimes the words I heard were much more interesting than the ones that were actually written. If people want to believe that Rikki's number is a marijuana cigarette [laughs] well, that's fine with me. Nevertheless it was always fairly clear to us.

**MUSICIAN:** *In your songwriting with Steely Dan you adopted a lot of different first-person personas. What was the advantage of that approach?*

**BECKER:** I don't know what Fagen would say about that, but I always felt that it allowed you greater range, you could say things that were very personal that you couldn't say on your own, in Fagen's case, singing and even shouting them. We were able to express things that we wouldn't have been willing to identify with that strongly, if it wasn't so clear that it wasn't necessarily us.

**MUSICIAN:** *Was yours a genuine collaboration with Donald?*

**BECKER:** Over the years our artistic purposes became very much enmeshed. Even if one of us had started something or did most of the work, the other one always got in there enough so that it was hard to say who was responsible for the final result. Fagen came up with a lot of chorus ideas, he was really good at that. Then I'd have to figure out what it meant so we could write a verse. Not that it necessarily came out meaning the same thing. Musically, as we went on we came to conceive of records rather than songs. We would seriously alter the song to fit the type of record we had in mind. Our songs got to be more and more of a layering process. We arranged with certain musicians in mind: "This would be a perfect song for such and such a drummer," or "We need a solo here for this sax player." We'd be talking that way early on in the song.

**MUSICIAN:** *The Ellington approach.*

**BECKER:** Yes, I'm a big admirer of the Ellington approach. He always had these great soloists in the band, like Paul Gonsalves, who were not necessarily the most versatile or the best technicians. He always seemed to pick expressive soloists over the best technicians. If the player only had a few good keys (to play in) he'd figure out a way to modulate the tune to fit those keys, and in that way the player's limitations became assets. And that's why Ellington's pieces sound so much more interesting than most of the other big band's. They move, they modulate from section to section and at the same time they're built around these great solos.

**MUSICIAN:** *The melodic construction of Steely Dan's songs was also pretty sophisticated and complex compared to your peers. You weren't afraid to tap into the songwriting traditions of a*



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Richard Rodgers or Harold Arlen.

**BECKER:** That's part of what made us stand out. Everyone was saying, "Geez, how did these guys invent all this stuff?" and we were just using things that we'd heard. They would have used it too if they hadn't stopped listening—if that kind of music hadn't become so vastly unpopular.

**MUSICIAN:** Do you two keep in touch?

**BECKER:** Every couple of months we talk. It's kind of hard to talk long distance from Hawaii. The connections are always bad and you get that echo and the time delay. It can get difficult.

**MUSICIAN:** You're not considering any kind of reunion at this time?

**BECKER:** No. But we've both mentioned

in passing that we could do that if we want to.

**MUSICIAN:** Did Nightfly surprise you?

**BECKER:** I was surprised at the album's overall concept, and at a couple of the songs that he did—those oldies, rock 'n' roll type things. [laughs] But I got over that.

**MUSICIAN:** I'm intrigued that your *China Crisis* production and Fagen's solo record are both so much more gentle in their tone and sensibility than *Steely Dan*. Do you think you tended to give each other an edge?

**BECKER:** I think probably we're just getting older. It's hard to maintain that frantic adolescent humor well into your thirties—though we did. But maybe you're

right—we did feed off each other in that particular way, spurred each other on. Now we're just getting mellow. Hell, I'm thirty-five and Fagen is forty or sixty or something, I don't even know.

**MUSICIAN:** Were you ever frustrated that you had no real rivals?

**BECKER:** No. I always thought what we were doing—combining glitzy harmonies with rock 'n' roll—was very hard to do. Maybe the mainstream of pop music was like a big broad avenue and we were a little alley off to the side, and there wasn't room for people in our little alley. I don't mean to compare our talents, but maybe you can see an analogy with Thelonious Monk and the way he approached jazz. What he did was great, but if everybody did it, it would have seemed silly.

The funny thing is, I can hear how a lot more records do sound slick these days; I think we've had some influence there. They're getting these accomplished keyboard and synthesizer players who have a lot more to do with the record's sound, flipping these little chord changes around. But the way it's being done, it loses its impact. It sounds more like lounge pop.

**MUSICIAN:** So what was the nature of your collaboration with *China Crisis*?

**BECKER:** Well, in spite of what I just said I wanted to do, I did a lot of the same old crazy things [laughs], because the band really didn't have very fleshed out parts. They could benefit from being enriched a little. We ended up adding a little dissonance here and there, maybe a minor ninth on top of a minor seventh chord and things like that.

**MUSICIAN:** There are some synth figures at the end of "Gift Of Freedom" that sound a little like 60s Miles Davis. I thought that might be attributable to your fine hand.

**BECKER:** That's a perfect example—those figures just fit the song. It had that modal *Kind Of Blue* sound to it. I don't know if (China Crisis) ever heard *Kind Of Blue*, but there it was. So I'm lucky in that I could make that kind of contribution. That's why I wanted to come back in as a producer. I felt there must be musicians out there who could benefit from my kind of acumen. Especially when I recall my own experiences with producers, who are frequently anti-musician—they see musicians as their natural enemies. This does not include [Dan producer] Gary Katz, by the way.

**MUSICIAN:** It sounds like you were casting about for possible projects before settling on *China Crisis*. What was their specific attraction for you?

**BECKER:** Well [laughs], now that I know them I can't imagine what attracted me. No, that's not true. What I liked was a band that was built around songs and songwriting, not around their clothes or



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the musical equivalent. A lot of groups today are more involved with particular sounds, and often very strident, insistent sounds that you tire of in a short period of time. The snare sound, say, will be so prominent that it becomes a distraction. In China Crisis they're more concerned with enhancing the song. Plus their lyrics didn't make much immediate sense, so of course I was drawn to that in a big way [laughs]. I saw that as pure genius.

**MUSICIAN:** Considering the rather lush textural arrangements of the last two Steely Dan records, I'm surprised that as a producer you opted for such a spare, stripped-down sound.

**BECKER:** Frankly, what happened is that we ran out of time. When we got to the end of week seven and it was time to mix, we still needed a percussionist; the one we'd brought in turned out to be terrible. So in the end we just didn't put any percussion on the album! I played some cowbells and I think we used a drum machine to make a tambourine effect. I was in deep anxiety about it for two days, but there really wasn't anything I could do at that point. So that's the secret of the "stripped-down sound."

That experience reminds me of an album I used to have on Impulse called *Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus*, that had a version of the Haitian fight song called "Better Git It In Your Soul." In one chorus there was this blues structure with an eleven bar verse. I was really struck by that, an eleven bar blues. I thought that was really neat that Mingus did that. Then later when I was at ABC records I heard the master tapes and discovered that what it really was was a bad edit! The engineer had cut a bar out of the blues, and apparently Mingus had threatened to kill him [laughs].

**MUSICIAN:** What are your plans?

**BECKER:** I'd like to produce another album, and continue my groovy little lifestyle in Hawaii, which I'm now rather attached to. I'm a new daddy, you know, so most of my time now is spent burping and changing. It's interesting to see the kind of people who are drawn to Hawaii. Basically you find very healthy, happy people who want to preserve their good mood. At this stage of my life I value that.

At the same time I'm in a good position to waltz back in and do some kind of musical project every now and then. It's a good set-up. I do feel a little self-conscious that I can do that and I'm not scheming and brooding and driven....

**MUSICIAN:** You feel guilty about that?

**BECKER:** I start to think maybe there should be a guy like that doing my job. But now I'm starting to scheme and brood more often over there. Maybe I can strike a happy medium. ☐

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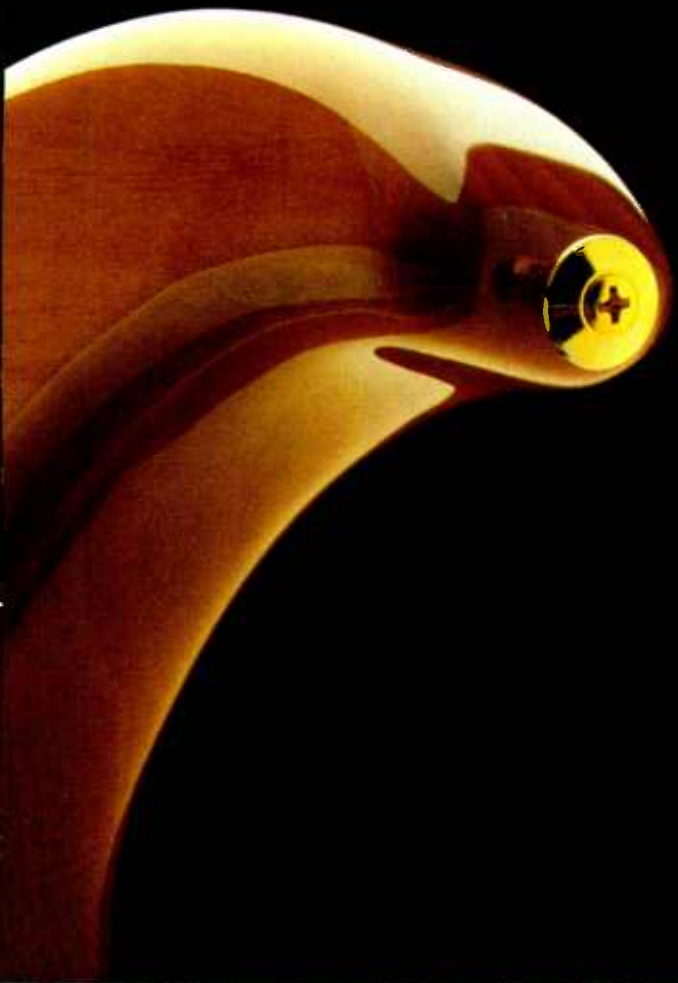
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## JESSE JOHNSON

### *Doing Time in Cincinnati*

**Y**ou ask people to dance and you get arrested." That's how Minneapolis funk-rocker Jesse Johnson summed up his May 10 show in Cincinnati, which resulted in his facing felony charges of inciting violence.

Johnson was opening for New Edition at the Cincinnati Gardens arena when he invited the crowd to come up onstage and party. "Forget the security. There's more of you than there are of them. Get the fuck up here and dance," Johnson told the

young crowd of around 5,000 (half capacity). More than sixty of them responded to his call, rushing past the T-shirted security guards and onto the stage.

It was a regular part of Johnson's show, but the twenty-six-year-old singer/guitarist hadn't reckoned with local concert security laws. Cincinnati police arrested Johnson in his dressing room after his set. They took him to the city jail, where he remained in a holding cell until his \$25,000 bail was set the following morning. There were no other arrests, and no injuries reported.

Johnson was a victim of strict city ordinances passed after the Who's December 3,

1979 Riverfront Coliseum concert left eleven young fans crushed to death outside the arena. Besides banning general-admission ("festival") seating, the new laws prohibit such typical concert activities as dancing in the aisles and end-of-concert Bic flicking.

Johnson wasn't the first rocker arrested in Cincinnati for onstage behavior. At Van Halen's appearance here less than five months after the Who deaths, David Lee Roth told the crowd to ignore security and "Light up!" He was arrested on charges of complicity to violate the municipal fire code. The misdemeanor charges were thrown out in court. Other such cases have ended similarly. Johnson, however, was the first performer to spend any time in jail and the first to be charged with a felony.

The charges were lowered at his June 10 criminal court hearing: from third-degree felony (inciting violence) to first-degree misdemeanor (inducing panic). Johnson pleaded guilty and was sentenced to one day in jail, which he'd already served, and a \$1,000 fine, \$900 of which was remitted after Johnson donated \$250 to Cincinnati's FreeStore Food-Bank.

Despite the lowered charges, Johnson remained angry. "All the white performers who were arrested here, they never had to spend any time in jail," he said after the hearing. He also expressed outrage over what he felt was Cincinnati's repressive attitude towards rock 'n' roll:

"I've traveled all around, and this is the first city I've seen that really seems to hate kids. The only vibe I get here is that they really don't like teenagers. I call it the *Footloose* tone."

— Larry Nager



## MEREDITH MONK

### *Hearing All the Rhythms*

**B**efore there was performance art, Meredith Monk was creating performances. As a composer/choreographer/dancer/singer/writer/director/bandleader/filmmaker/visionary, she's given typesetters nightmares (about running out of slashes) and befuddled categorical thinkers.

Twenty seasons ago, Monk brought a production called *Break* to New York's Judson Church, a center for experimental choreography. She decided to make her 1984-85 season a twenty-year retrospective, with a premiere of a new theatrical work, *The Games*; a Carnegie Hall debut concert



GARY LEONARD



LAURA LEVINE

and a tour by her ensemble; films and videos at the Whitney Museum; and a revival of *Quarry*, a multimedia "opera" from 1976, at New York's La Mama Theater.

In *Quarry*, Monk lies on her back center stage, playing a sick child who may or may not be dreaming about the rise of fascism all around her. Ordinary life turns sinister, a dictator gives a speech in gibberish, an exercise class-cum-rally fills the stage with fierce young people. The music consists of short, modal motifs linked into longer songs and choruses.

"I direct by ear," Monk says. "I'm lying in the middle of the space with my eyes closed, but I can tell if it's working by hearing all the rhythms. If you closed your eyes, the piece would work on its own. Even the bicycle bells are pitched a certain way, even the maid sweeping is part of the texture.

Narrative is just one thread; the real organizing basis is music, in the widest sense of the word."

*Quarry* echoes with ideas from Monk's other work: a child's-eye viewpoint, dreamtime continuity, music suggesting preverbal cries, movement both casual and exact, joy in patterning coupled with a distrust of regimentation. Its form, with details repeating and twining together, differs from Monk's later, more centralized works, which most often proceed in vignettes. "I have the theory," she says, "that every artist has this one story that they tell over and over again. There are basic themes and certain worlds that each person is dealing with.

"What interests me is making a new kind of form, to try and start at zero every time. I don't want to keep making the same kind of shirt."

— Jon Pareles

## CABARET VOLTAIRE

### *The Art of Annoys*

It's hard to think of any musical irritants as hardy, not to mention unswerving, as Cabaret Voltaire, Sheffield's contribution to the collapsing-factory-with-backbeat school that includes Throbbing Gristle and the Residents. Bassist/mouthpiece **Steven Mallinder** gleefully swears that when the original three Cabs (Mallinder, Chris Watson—gone since '81 to work on English TV—and Richard Kirk) teamed up in 1974, their entire *modus operandi* consisted of an oscillator, some tape collages and a desire "to annoy as many people as possible. And in that respect, we really haven't changed all that much."

Of course, nowadays the band has drum machines and other high-tech toys with which to sandpaper your ganglia. It's all part of Cab Volt's new rhythmic putsch: suck them in with the dance beats, and all the weird stuff on top can infiltrate your

psyche unnoticed. Video now forms a large portion of the "weird stuff"; it almost goes without saying that their rough-hewn collages of "borrowed" movie footage, political aggrandizing and sullen anti-glamour band shots guarantee no airtime on MTV.

But it was enough to get them into New York's Ritz club in May (their first East Coast gig), where a video overkill system would seem the perfect complement to Cab Volt's multi-media tendencies. No such luck. The band's stage presence was static (Kirk) and herky-jerky (Mallinder); a dozen or so screens provided the video equivalent of wallpaper. Given the choice between the two, most of the crowd wound up focusing on a vanishing point somewhere in between. Their recent *Microphonies* album emphasizes dance beats and has a track titled "James Brown," but far more spontaneous dancing broke out when the Real Thing's "Sex Machine" strutted out of the P.A. Cabaret Voltaire generated little more than shell shock.

— Robert Payes



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# BEASTIE BOYS

## An Ugly Cinderella Story

**T**hey've thrown down chants like, "Say ah-wah, say tadh, say kyam. Say ahwhataduck-lam." They've shut down the competition with lines as scathing as, "We're from Manhattan/You're from Secaucus." Where can the premier white rap/punk/metal crew go next?



Laura Levine

"Not to Secaucus, that's for sure," says Double R **Rick Rubin**, the Beastie Boys' DJ and head of their record company, Def Jam.

But the Beastie Boys are going places. They've just finished a national tour opening for Madonna and drawing brickbats in hockey arenas and racetracks throughout North America. They're in the new film *Krush Groove* alongside Run-D.M.C., Whodini and other rap luminaries. And, against all odds, they're on the verge of signing a record deal with a major label. A truly ugly Cinderella story.

Def Jam is also going places. In June, Rubin graduated from New York University's video program and had to relinquish the minuscule dormitory room that housed two students and a successful indie label. How successful? Def Jam's first four twelve-inch singles, without benefit of radio play or promotional hype, sold nearly a quarter of a million copies. At twenty-two, Rubin is a young music industry magnate but an old Beastie;

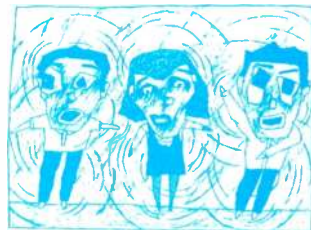
the three other Boys are eighteen and nineteen. Besides spinning metal and beats for the BB's, Rubin plays guitar for punk funklers Hose, who are also threatening to sign to a major. The other Beasties play in the hardcore band the Young and Useless.

The Beastie Boys started in 1983 as a joke punk band, and gradually developed (?) into a joke rap band. Before the world knew what had goosed it, the odious scratch-and-sniff "Cookie

## Too Young to R\*ck?

"Most parents are unaware of the words their children are listening to, dancing to, doing homework to, falling asleep to." A yellowed clipping from a 1957 *McCall's*? A jazz-age warning from the 20s? A note of despair from Aristotle? Could be all of the above, but the quote actually comes from a letter circulated this April by a group of mothers saying "rock music has become pornographic and sexually explicit."

What gives these mothers some clout is that they're a Washington-based group including the wives of Treasury Secretary James A. Baker III and Sen. Albert Gore Jr., among other politicians. Spokesperson Pam Howar went over the edge "when I heard Prince singing about masturbation." In mid-May they organized as the Parents Music Re-



source Center and met with Edward Fritts, president of the National Association of Broadcasters; Fritts subsequently mailed a letter to over 800 radio and television station owners alerting them to the problem.

On May 31, Fritts sent a letter to forty-five record companies requesting that

"Puss" single was a cult fave, and the Beastie crew started taking its obnoxious self seriously. Like most New York City high schoolers, the Boys caught hip-hop fever and started to throw down for real. Their aggressive metallic sound bears some semblance to Run-D.M.C.'s, and they've rocked the house at Harlem's Disco Fever, but the Beasties don't try to pass themselves off as anything they're not.

"I don't understand why people construe doing what

lyric sheets be included with records sent to radio stations. Besides the NAB, the women's group also met with Stanley Gortikov, president of the Recording Industry Association of America, and two vice-presidents of MTV—another target.

Howar says the PMRC wants the record industry to develop a ratings system for song lyrics, and to "regulate album covers depicting violence and specific sexual themes." She worries about "a lot of casual-love songs not talking about the consequences. Why can't we have more uplifting lyrics?"

A section of the U.S. code prohibits radio broadcasting of obscene language. "The situations are very limited" for the Federal Communications Commission to take action, according to John Kamp, the FCC's assistant chief for legal affairs at the mass media bureau. Howar says the PMRC is talking to "various senators who are considering hearings." But she would prefer the record industry to regulate itself.

Is self-policing of song lyrics overdue? Prince's "Darling Nikki" is not unexpected from the author of "Head," but the singer has a higher visibility now than he did at the time of *Dirty Mind*. Since the NAB's actions MCA Records withdrew a single, and notified broadcasters that it "may be too suggestive for programming." (Artist and song title available in a plain brown wrapper upon receipt of an SASE. Adults only, please.)

Record companies have

we want to do as wanting to be black," **Mike D** (Diamond) says. "We make it clear by the way our music sounds that we're not black. I've heard people say, 'Why don't you give black groups a chance?' But all the black performers are behind us one hundred percent."

And so, with a sound that incorporates everything from AC/DC to Run-D.M.C., Double R, Mike D, Ad Roc and MCA have become a force in contemporary music. God help us. — *John Leland*

complained that submitting lyric sheets of all their records is a bit of overkill. Radio stations claim they're responding to popular taste. That argument doesn't cut it with Howar, who was never a rock fan.

"We're trying to clean up rock music," she says. "Unfortunately, no surveys exist to indicate anything. But we all know the impact advertising has on people. Young people are listening to rock music four to six hours a day. That has to have some kind of effect. Young people are getting these messages at a crucial age."

## Print Plugs

Has rock music let you down lately—like in the last twenty years? Feast your eyes, then, on *Kicks*, a fanzine celebrating 50s rock 'n' roll, 60s punk and the whole junk-food/junk-culture nexus. The new issue has stories on Wanda Jackson and Ronnie Self, an interview with Joyce Randolph (better known as Trixie Norton), and the usual barrage of vintage photos and graphics stolen from everywhere. It's the ginchiest. (Box 646, Cooper Station, New York, NY 10003.)

From the other side of the country, *Loud 3D* has to be the first publication of hardcore punk band photos—any band photos?—printed in the anaglyphic (red and green) process. And the enclosed glasses work just as well on Nile Rodgers' *B-Movie Matinee* album cover. (In3D, 5841 Geary Blvd., San Francisco, CA 94121.)

Lindsey Loch



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World Radio History







# Dire Straits' Mark Knopfler

An inside look at the outside man

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by Bill Flanagan

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**M**ark Knopfler is an Englishman, but his wife Lourdes is a New Yorker. They have a house in London, and a house in Greenwich Village. Right now they're in the New York house, which has been in the same unfinished state for the past couple of years. Sheets and plastic cover most of the furniture, protection from the sawdust and splatters left by the procession of wall-busting carpenters, circuit-shorting electricians and backward plumbers who've extended a simple renovation into the greatest archeological reconstruction since the excavation of Pompeii. Lourdes Knopfler has been keeping tabs on the sandblasting and fee inflation all winter, while Mark has been in the Caribbean recording a new Dire Straits album. Now Mark lifts the plastic off a cassette player and puts in a rough mix of "So Far Away," a loping tune about separa-

tion. "You've been in the sun and I've been in the rain," Knopfler's taped voice sings, "And you're so far away from me."

Lourdes perks up. "Hey, just a minute," she says. "Who's been in the sun and *who's* been in the rain? I'm the one who spent the winter fighting with plumbers in New York! *You've* been in Montserrat."

Knopfler just smiles. Far be it from him to sweat the little stuff. His life, as Randy Newman would say, is good. Knopfler's a superstar in Europe, Asia and Australia. Dire Straits even enjoy great popularity in Latin America and the Middle East. If his band's substantial American success is not equal to the stature they enjoy elsewhere, it doesn't seem to bother Knopfler one bit. In fact, he seems to take a sort of perverse pleasure from his low American profile. When Dire Straits made their last studio album, 1982's *Love Over Gold*,



the band asked Warner Bros. to release as a single "Telegraph Road," a track that lasted fourteen minutes. Dire Straits last toured the U.S. in 1980. Five years later, they've finally consented to make another pass.

"The fact that we don't have to 'break America' has become one of the main reasons we don't," Knopfler says. "It would be great if we had a bigger audience here in the States, but it's very nice as it is. We do have a big audience here. It's not anything like other countries, but we're not going to kill

"Jack was in a real bad way for a real long time," Knopfler explains. "Frustration, just working at his guitar. I said to him, 'Just one condition. Whatever I do, man, try your damndest not to let it affect our friendship.'"

To the American public Mark Knopfler is Dire Straits. He writes and sings all the group's songs, produces their albums, and plays the distinctive, haunting guitar that is the band's sonic signature. In the five years since Dire Straits

## "I'm so slow, I had to learn the nuts and bolts of production to find

ourselves in Holiday Inns in order to achieve it. 'Cause once you do, so what? We don't feel we have to play the Astrodome. We do enough of those gigs in the rest of the world. We enjoy them, they're events. But a lot of these acts who are trying to make it in the States just seem like rats in a barrel, scrambling for every bit of billboard space, air space, chart space. I mean, I think I'd be a liar if I said that it didn't bother me that so much mundane stuff is being touted as the greatest thing—but hey, you know, it's popular."

Knopfler takes another slug of wine, no rat in a barrel he.

"I was just told that we're apparently one of Warners' top-selling acts over here," he goes on. "Which suggests to me that they must have a few *horrendously* big ones and then they fall off to what they call 'majors.' From 'Humungous' to 'Major' must be a big drop."

You can't blame Knopfler for snickering at show biz priorities. When Dire Straits arrived to play their first American club tour in 1979 they parachuted into a hurricane of hype, a monsoon of media. "Sultans Of Swing" was all over the radio and the band's debut album was rocketing to the top of the charts. (Well, to number two anyway. Number one was *Saturday Night Fever* or *Grease*—one of those pre-*Rolling Stone* Travolta vehicles.) Everywhere the four-man band played, they were crowded into corners by disc jockeys, rack jobbers and record company whazoos telling them, "I was the first one to play" or *break or stock or hear* "your record!"

Knopfler and company were amused and puzzled by this American criterion. One night David Knopfler, Mark's brother and the band's original rhythm guitarist, couldn't take it any more. "What," he asked, "is this American obsession with being *first*? Who cares?" And ya know, until you hear it put like that it never dawns on an American that the goal is sort of childish.

Jack Sonni was one of the fans who squeezed into the Bottom Line to see Dire Straits' first New York show in '79. Jack worked at Rudy's Music Stop, a guitar store on 48th Street, and was delighted when David and then Mark Knopfler began patronizing the store and chewing the fat. David even invited Jack to come visit him in London. When Jack got there he commented on how wild it was that David had no bars on his windows. Jack Sonni is a true New Yorker.

Jack had bars on *his* windows. He lived in a tiny, seedy ground floor room in Hell's Kitchen. The toilet didn't even flush. When Mark Knopfler would come by to play on Jack's spare guitar it was a perfect study in how differently fortune can treat two talented musicians. Jack and Knopfler would sit with the window open, playing guitars in the little room. Then Mark would go off to Europe or the Caribbean and Jack would go back to the guitar shop.

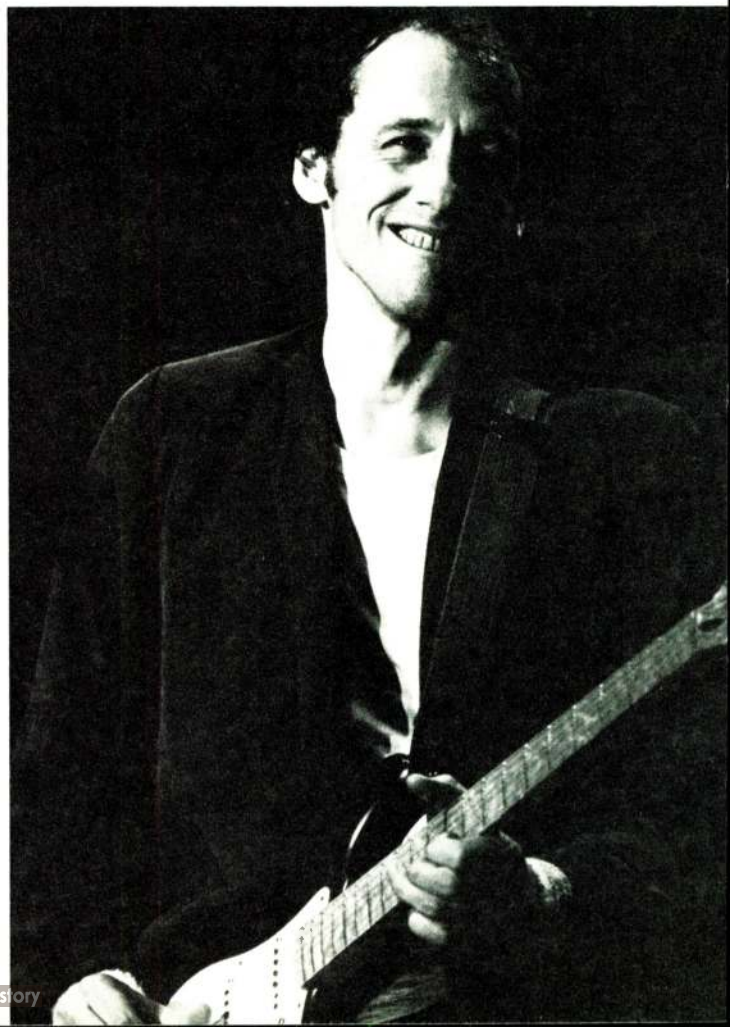
Just before Christmas of 1984 Knopfler approached Jack with a problem. Hal Lindes, the guitarist who replaced David, had been fired and the group had a world tour coming up. Could Jack possibly see leaving the guitar store to join Dire Straits? Legend has it that Jack Sonni's head made a sizable indentation in Rudy's ceiling. And Rudy's has a high ceiling.

Knopfler said to his manager, "It's nice to play Father Christmas."

last played in this country Knopfler's name has been before the public as a record producer (Bob Dylan's *Infidels*, Aztec Camera's *Knife*), film composer (*Local Hero*, *Cal*, *Comfort and Joy*) and session guitarist (Van Morrison's *Beautiful Vision*, Steely Dan's *Gaucho*, Bryan Ferry's *Boys And Girls* and a host of others). The other Dire Straits' only recent American splash was as Tina Turner's backing band on "Private Dancer," a song written by...Mark Knopfler.

"We were going to put 'Private Dancer' on *Love Over Gold*," bassist John Illsley explains. "But in the end I don't think Mark really wanted to sing it; it's really a woman's song." Illsley is having breakfast in a restaurant on Central Park West. "Tina heard a very rough tape and loved it so much she asked if the band could play on it." Knopfler had other commitments (Jeff Beck came in to play the guitar solo), but the other Straits agreed to record with Turner. "It was tremendous fun," Illsley says. "Tina came in and recorded it live in the studio with the band. She gave it three hundred percent energy. You'd think she was in front of 20,000 people

Look at that yo-yo, that's the way you do it....



rather than four guys. We were putting down the tracks"—the Straits also backed Turner on their pal Paul Brady's "Steel Claw"—"and she was goin' nuts."

Illsley is a great believer in soul over dexterity. "I'm almost totally unimpressed by amazing players," the bassist says. "Sometimes the whole *technique* thing just knocks the soul out of music. You're not thinking about feeling, gut reaction. You're thinking about technique. So you produce something that goes over most people's heads. Oh yeah, it's great

## out I really don't get off on it."

*playing.*" Illsley taps his chest. "But touch something *here.*"

Handsome, proper and very tall, Illsley is the only original Dire Strait besides Knopfler. He's come to cover many of the band's business decisions. "Mark does between sixty and seventy-five percent of the music in the band," the bassist says. "The rest is worked out by the guys. I do an awful lot of administration and stuff. I'm the link between the band and the management. I also just filter out a lot of stuff, make non-musical decisions. Mark trusts me to do that. I think we're a good team. I think we complement each other musically, too. I'm an emotional bass player. I respond to the song and ideas."

Holding on to a fragile emotional spirit in an expanding musical ensemble has required determination from Illsley and Knopfler. Dire Straits onstage includes two guitarists, two keyboard players, a bassist, drummer, percussionist and sax player. It's not always easy to keep that sparse, soulful throb; it's not easy to keep young players from wanting to show off.

"The parts are worked out real carefully," Illsley says. "So when somebody starts to mess around with them it throws everybody off. The last keyboard player we added would learn his part, play it in rehearsal, and then when we got onstage we'd all go, 'What was *that?*' If we were a blues band, okay—but when we play something like 'Romeo And Juliet' you can't mess about."

Illsley finishes his breakfast and walks down to the Power Station, the Manhattan studio where Dire Straits are finishing the album they've dubbed *Brothers In Arms*. The record's running late. Come hell or high overhead, it has to be finished in time for Dire Straits to begin a year-long world tour in May. To speed things along the whole band has been brought over to New York to rehearse for the concerts in one Power Station room while album mixes and overdubs are worked out in the booth.

At the studio Knopfler sits conferring with Neil Dorfsman, his Greenwich Village neighbor, long-time engineer, and now co-producer. "Neil's always had a lot of input," Knopfler explains. "But he's developed more and more, he's become a more experienced record maker. If anything, I would say that I wrote the songs and helped organize the music and Neil produced this record."

"I'd like to move now away from these little excursions into writing film scores and producing other people, and just tour with the band and then make another Dire Straits album. To me the band is the best thing. I've always enjoyed it more than anything else. And of course, you know I'm very slow. I have to do all these other things to find out just how much the band means to me." Knopfler grins. "I'm so slow that I have to be bashed over the head more than once; I have to learn the nuts and bolts of record production to figure out that I don't really get off on record production. It's when I'm rehearsing the band that I'm totally in tune with what's going on. That's when I really am happiest. Making a record is beautiful when it's happening. But when it's not happening—for any reason—it can be a diabolical pain."

One diabolical pain that erupted in the making of *Brothers In Arms* was a defective batch of recording tape that

scotched three tracks while Knopfler and company were recording in the Caribbean. That set the old schedule back by a good week. Now it looks like one of the Power Station's super-duper computerized digital zillion track egg-beating coffee-making guitar-tuning state of the art recording consoles has lost Michael Brecker's sax solo on the jazzy "Your Latest Trick." Dorfsman gets Brecker on the phone and the horn player makes it down to the studio. Knopfler, avoiding the buzz of panic in the air, goes into the next room and starts leading the band through "Six Blade Knife," a tune from the first Dire Straits album that most of the current group has never played before.

Brecker plops down in the control room and adjusts his reed while Dorfsman hits switches and bangs gears like Han Solo looking for warp drive. Suddenly elation lights the producer's face. Brecker's lost solo has been snatched from the computer's labyrinthine memory. The sax player listens, amazed, as Dorfsman explains the complex mechanics of retrieval in terms only a Vulcan could comprehend. Two glass



EGRETNA

### Original Straits survivors John Illsley and Knopfler

partitions away, Dire Straits have found their way into the staggered, bluesy groove of "Six Blade Knife." Knopfler's face radiates contentment.

"I like the emotional impact and the simplicity in the way Mark writes and plays," Brecker says as he packs up his horn. "He likes to get to the essence of something without too many frills. I have a way of articulating notes that Mark likes, a kind of inflection he does on the guitar, too. It's not quite blues—it's almost a kind of country/urban tenor. It came out in the *Local Hero* soundtrack."

A sense of the roots that came to American music through Appalachia, but which go back to Ireland and Scotland? "Exactly," Brecker nods. "You can hear it in country music, in Cajun stuff. He has a very strong melodic conception. Mark's willing to experiment, but he knows what he wants."

That Knopfler is the boss in Dire Straits has not been questioned in some time. Those who resent his boss-hood tend to exit through the band's revolving door. David Knopfler, who had a hard time regarding his brother as his superior, was the first man out—during the recording of *Making Movies*, the band's third album, in 1980. Pick Withers, the Straits' original drummer, was replaced by ex-Rockpile Terry Williams right after finishing *Love Over Gold*, the fourth album,



in '82. Williams himself took a backseat to Weather Report's Omar Hakim on the new album, and Hal Lindes, the blond Californian who replaced David Knopfler, went off to Montserrat with the band to record *Brothers In Arms* and was back home without a job before he knew it. For all his good humor, Knopfler doesn't stand for any crap when it's time to work. That attitude, together with the aural luster of the Knopfler-produced Straits records, has won him a reputation as a studio perfectionist.

"I don't believe in perfect," Knopfler protests. "There's so many ways to do any song. Perfection's just a cloud in the air. People say I'm a perfectionist. It's just not so."

But surely he'll admit to great...self-confidence.

"Well," Knopfler smiles, "I have the self-confidence to go gaily steaming off in completely the wrong direction." He laughs. "Yes, that's the kind of man I am. Musically it's very easy for things to get out of hand with me. Just because I've got *the confidence*. I continually put myself in situations where it's made absolutely obvious that the directions I feel like charging off in aren't the right directions at all.

"Neil's probably lost count of the times that I've been working away quite happily with something and he's had to say, 'It's not really working.' It's always most humbling, educational and delightful to learn that you are in fact wrong."

Knopfler jokes about it, but if he wants something done right he is inclined to do it himself. Despite his position as

a stranger standing apart from the insiders. In "Water Of Love" Knopfler sang of being "high and dry," "lost and lonely," completely cut off.

It was only after those first two albums were written and recorded that Dire Straits became successful and Knopfler found himself a local hero, the leader of his own gang. His writing reflected the shift. When Dire Straits arrived in New York to record *Making Movies* in 1980 Knopfler had moved his narrators to the center of the action. He could still stand at a distance to observe the roller girl in "Skateaway" or the lead-footed homosexual cabaret team in "Les Boys," but the singer was front and center in "Hand In Hand," "Romeo And Juliet" and "Expresso Love." "Solid Rock" was Knopfler's declaration of independence—a pronouncement that he was taking full responsibility, nothing was going to get in his way, and those who wanted to come along on his terms were welcome to share the ride. "When you point your finger 'cause your plan fell through," Knopfler sang, "you got three fingers pointing back at you." Mark saw that as an image of accepted responsibility. Brother David took the other three fingers to be the other three Straits. David left the band during *Making Movies*. The last song Mark added to the album was "Hand In Hand":

*If I been hard on you I never chose to be  
I never wanted no one else*

*I tried my best to be somebody you'd be close to  
Hand in hand like lovers are supposed to*

Maybe it was unintentional that the song worked as well for "brothers" as for "lovers."

It was at the same time—the summer of 1980—that Mark met and fell in love with Lourdes Salamoni. Lourdes was working at the Power Station and when Mark announced their betrothal there were mumbles among some of his distant north country relations. Who was this woman who wanted to marry their rich grand-nephew? An American gold-digger? Well those suspicious aunts were set back in their rockers by the revelation that Lourdes was herself from New World wealth and had been working for her money not because she had to, but because she wanted to. Kind of brings to mind another Randy Newman song; the one where the groom comes out of the bathroom on his wedding night and tells the startled bride, "I ain't no negro, I'm a millionaire!"

Knopfler says he always figured he'd live in America eventually. "Just because of rock 'n' roll music," he explains. "America's made up of Everyman, and in some ways I feel I'm made up of Everyman, too." Knopfler's taught college, worked on a farm, been a reporter, and figures he fit in pretty well at each stop.

"I feel I have things in common with almost every place I am," he says. "The only time I feel really at odds with all the people around me is when I'm anywhere near a mob. That's when I really feel like an outsider. I remember once going to a football match where the guys liked to fight one another, and feeling so utterly separate from that. Maybe they were kids who were made to feel like rejects, and this was their way to release all that energy. I got into plenty of fights growing up in Glasgow and Newcastle. I enjoyed playing all the war games as a kid. But I still fear it and feel terrible about it—that so many people are not averse to waving a broken bottle in somebody's face; so many people walk around with guns; so many people feel it's perfectly alright to send armies into places to shoot 'em up. What the hell is that? In World War I my grandfathers were probably fighting in the British and German armies. If they'd killed each other there'd have been no strummin'."

His empathy for the downtrodden and Knopfler's political sympathies have resulted in a whole suite of anti-war songs on *Brothers In Arms*. "The Man's Too Strong" is delivered in the voice of an aging war criminal, apparently a Nazi.

"It's a study in guilt, hatred and fear," Knopfler explains "It could be a Hess-like figure in the depths of Spandau



### *Who's been in the sun and who's been in the rain?*

ringleader, there's a lot about him that's always on the outside looking in. Knopfler's father, a Hungarian Jew with leftist sympathies, escaped Europe when the Nazis took over. He married an Englishwoman and settled in Scotland. Mark grew up a bit of an outsider. "It's very easy, if you grow up in England, to become very fixed in your views of what constitutes *breakfast*, what constitutes everything. I'm profoundly thankful for the fact that I had that added intensity of vision as a child. It's very fortunate for a child to get an outsider's view of his own environment. It's more sensitized. In England if a kid in school has a name that's different..." Knopfler abruptly shifts away from the personal. "I always felt sorry for the fat girls, the kids who never got a dance at Christmas time. I wrote a song about it called 'Secondary Waltz.'"

In the songs on the first two Dire Straits albums, the singer was always observing other people without ever making direct contact. Whether watching the Sultans of Swing play to an unappreciative pub, watching the Lady Writer on television, or watching mystery women in "Wild West End," "Follow Me Home" and "Portobello Belle," the narrator was always

Prison, or anybody who's not at peace with himself."

Could this new subject matter be connected to the fact that Knopfler, now in his mid-thirties, is the same age his father was when he fled the Nazis?

"I don't think so," Knopfler says. "If you're involved in poetry and music, that's different from being involved in anything else. We're all different people. There are similarities, obviously, but it's a mistake to start identifying with your fathers...or your brothers.

"On 'The Man's Too Strong' I was just trying to get into the mind of somebody who's lived his life that way. It's an exper-

fans out there and it's been five minutes and—oops—time for another big gesture.

Knopfler laughs at the scenario. "Well...I suppose. That's partly true but...I'm just really *happy* to be with a crowd that's into the band. I always wave a towel 'cause *they're* all waving. It's to give people a positive charge. I'm sure that's what most musicians want to do. It's not like 'We will make you raise your fists in the air.' It's not like 'We Are The Champions!' It's not jackboot rock."

The '85-'86 Dire Straits tour will take almost a year to go from the Middle East to Europe to North America to Japan to

## "I don't believe in perfection—it's just a cloud in the air."

iment in character, in play-writing I suppose. 'Brothers In Arms' is written from the point of view of a soldier dying on the battlefield. To write something like that you can't just write off the top of your head. You have to dig deep if the thing's going to be realistic. You're an outsider, but to do it properly you're also digging inside. I don't think you can get away scot-free. If you do the song's not going to work.

"The whole area of creation plays all kinds of tricks on the writer. It can fool him into thinking it's easier than it is; it can fool him into thinking it's harder than it is; it can fool him into thinking it's working when it's not, or not working when it is."

So which Dire Straits songs are completely from the inside? Which are Mark Knopfler speaking in his own voice?

"I suppose 'Hand In Hand,'" Knopfler answers. "And 'Water Of Love' because I was so fed up. I felt I was going no place. I could see my future stretching out in front of me long and bleak."

Every writer has some subject that eludes him. "I've never felt moved to write about particularly *obscene* people," Knopfler says. This upright impediment presented a problem when the songwriter put together "Money For Nothing," a lyric inspired by an appliance store employee Knopfler heard mocking the MTV rock stars shining down on him from a row of display televisions.

"I borrowed a bit of paper and actually wrote that song while I was in the store," Knopfler recalls. "I wanted to use the language the guy really used. It was more real. I did use 'that little faggot,' but there were a couple of good 'mother-fuckers'—which mean nothing to you in a hardware store in New York City, but which might mean something to people who live in Tallahassee. There's no way I could expect people to receive that in the spirit it's intended. They'd probably think I was just being vulgar. Still, if we have time I might record a version with the real language, just to have it for myself."

Knopfler figures the logic of the songwriting process becomes apparent only in retrospect. "It's always based on music you like to play," he says. "It's a weird business. It has to have a whole harmonic balance. You try to create something that will work on a number of levels—it's functional, it's beautiful, it makes a point, it has its own reality. I'm not saying that everything is a crisis, but everywhere there are *choices*. You try staying outside while being inside, too. You can't just enter into the depths of the thing and have bits of paint flying all over the place. It's also important to stand back and look at what you're painting."

Bring into this discussion Knopfler's status as a guitar hero and he denies it. Press the point and he says, "Aw, come on. You know very well that sort of thing doesn't really enter into it. You've been talking meaningfully to me about *songs* and then all of a sudden you come hula-hooping out with this *guitar hero* stuff."

Well, okay. But it is sometimes strange to see the eternal outsider up there on a big stage making oversize gestures to the far balconies and receiving the homage of thousands. His love for playing is always apparent, but one sometimes feels Knopfler has to remind himself that there are 20,000

Australia. The band's set itself a crazy schedule—usually five nights in a row and then one night off. While they struggle to finish rehearsals and their album, word comes to Dire Straits that their ten nights at London's Wembley Arena sold out in no time, and extra shows are being added. The City of London has also given permission for the Straits to play a free concert in Hyde Park (the first such event since the Stones' bon voyage to Brian Jones there in '69) to accom-

### Wired Straits

Mark Knopfler's favorite guitar is a red Schecter with Seymour Duncan vintage pick-ups. ("They're a lot less powerful than the stock Schecter pick-ups," guitar technician Peter Brewis says, "and get much closer to a Strat sound.") He has several other Schecter Strat-style models, that he uses for special jobs. For example, Knopfler plays "Tunnel Of Love" on a Schecter sunburst, which Brewis says has more kick. Mark also has a Schecter Tele which he used on the soundtracks to *Comfort and Joy* and *Cal*.

"It's not a matter of *preferring* Schecters to Strats," Knopfler promises. "It's just that Schecters are better for taking around. I've got an old Strat, I think it's a '61, that I don't want to bash around the planet."

Mark also plays a Gibson Chet Atkins nylon string on light-fingered numbers like "Private Investigations." It's a solid body guitar with contact pick-ups in the bridge. Knopfler uses Concertise strings on that guitar. He puts Dean Markley custom lights (.009 to .046) on the electrics, and when he reaches for an acoustic guitar you can bet that boy's pickin' on an Adamas.

Knopfler's effects rack holds a Roland 555 chorus echo; a Delta lab delay unit; a mike mix flanger unit; a master room reverb; a Roland 31 band graphic equalizer (used when he plays his National Steel), all controlled by a switching system built by an Englishman named Pete Cornish. "Mark never plays completely dry," Cornish explains. "He likes to have at least a touch of reverb."

Jumpin' Jack Sonni is bringing his proselytizing authority to his bandmates. Jack plays Schecters, but lately favors Frankenstein-like creations made from Schecter parts and Seymour Duncan pickups in Rudy's lab. Jack doesn't care what kind of strings he uses, and plays Adamas acoustics onstage. John Illsley claims that though Jack will be playing he will not be plugged in. Jack has also convinced Mark to try out Kelly amps onstage.

John Illsley uses Wal basses (custom made by England's Ian Wallace), fretted an un-, with Dean Markley medium lights or LaBella strings. Illsley pumps that bottom through two Ampeg SVT heads and a Crown crossover. He has a Clark Technique 31-band graphic equalizer, and a cabinet built by Mega.

Drummer Terry Williams plays Ludwig drums and Paiste cymbals.

Ask Mark Knopfler about the barrage of synths cluttering up his once skeletal sound and he'll say, "the Keyboard Twins (Alan and Guy) collect them. They seem to have made it their life's mission to find as many keyboards as they possibly can and try to MIDI them all up so that simply by playing one note on the piano they can play either the *1812 Overture* or simulate the end of the universe as we've come to know it. We've just bought a new Synclavier; it's stereo, touch sensitive and the whole thing's far superior to the old. We have an Emulator which Alan's totally in love with, two Yamaha DX7s, and a DX1.



moderate all the fans who couldn't get tickets for Wembley. John Illsley gets on the trans-Atlantic phone to debate the pros and cons of that gig, which he's told would draw an estimated crowd of half a million.

The next day Illsley, in an attempt to keep himself healthy, goes jogging in Central Park, slips, and sprains his wrist. The impending tour and unfinished album are getting to be a real concern. Illsley and Knopfler decide to bring in hotshot bassist Tony Levin to cut "One World," a tune which becomes more upbeat in the transition. Illsley, his forearm in a cast, sits drinking coffee while Knopfler adds guitar to the song.

"The first leg of the tour is three months with hardly a day off," Illsley sighs. He studies his injured arm. "I'm just worried about somebody breaking a wrist or getting seriously ill. In seven years we've never yet cancelled a date. We just commit ourselves to a ludicrous schedule and try to stick to it."

Later on Knopfler recalls some of the special effort that dedication to scheduling has caused. "We once had to put John onstage in a chair," he chuckles. "In the very early days John decided he knew how to ride a horse. My brother David's girlfriend said, 'Let's go riding!' John said, 'I can do that!' See, it comes back to that *confidence* we were talking about. Anyway, this horse took off down the field, jumped a haybale, and John went sailing off and landed on his back. Went straight to the hospital. We had a gig that night at the Albany Empire in Deptford. So we got him out of the hospital, gave him his bass, and stuck him onstage in a chair. He looked like King Arthur."

On the day the rest of Dire Straits are to depart New York for London and final tour preparations, Knopfler and producer Dorfsman are still mixing *Brothers In Arms*. Everyone's trying to cash checks, and those who succeed lend dollars and pounds to those who don't. Jack Sonni, looking about

as happy as the grand prize winner on *Wheel Of Fortune*, can't wait to get airborne. John Illsley hopes Jack won't flip out when he sees his first Dire Straits audience—30,000 Israelis in Jerusalem. Illsley needn't be concerned. In the spotlights Sonni turns into a duck-walking extrovert. "He was *born* to it," Knopfler laughs after a month of dates. "Born to boogie, born to rock; pick your cliché, they all fit Sonni."

"Everybody says bands are a pain," Knopfler says. "But it's worth it. I realized that the first time I went out and did a session with somebody else. It's always great to get back to the band. If I went in to do a solo record and I wasn't feeling good that day and all I had was a bunch of hired people, it would be hard. Peer pressure can keep the ball rolling, keep the vibe going. And you'd be alone a lot of the time. If you had to do a TV show you'd turn up by yourself, you'd be traveling through Germany in winter with a bunch of hired hands. You'd sit in airport lounges by yourself. With Dire Straits we all see the same thing at the same time. I travel through an ever-changing world with *shared eyes*."

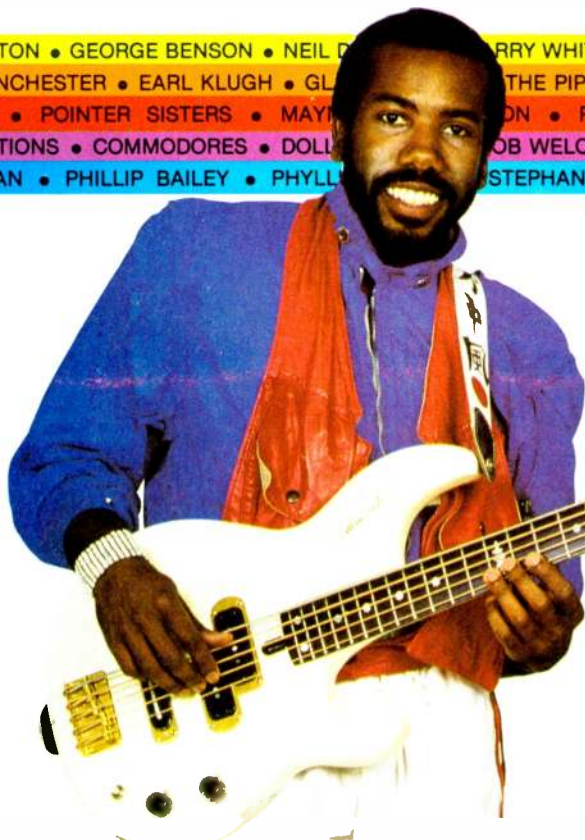
Thus does the eternal outsider come in from the cold.

Mark Knopfler is the son of a Hungarian father and British mother raised in Scotland and England, with an American wife, homes in two hemispheres and a life on the road.

Asked where he thinks he'll close his eyes for the last time Knopfler says, "I think it's England. I'd like to die with my boots on. I don't see myself dying in some place where they play dominoes. It'll probably be in a little club. I'll be playing guitar, an old walking stick hung up over me amp."


A few weeks later David Knopfler calls from Europe, where he's touring to promote his second solo album. "Have you heard the new Straits record?" he asks, and I wonder for a moment if the old fraternal rivalry still stings. "God, it's great," he says. "'Brothers In Arms' brought tears to my eyes. Someday I'd love to make a record like that." ☐

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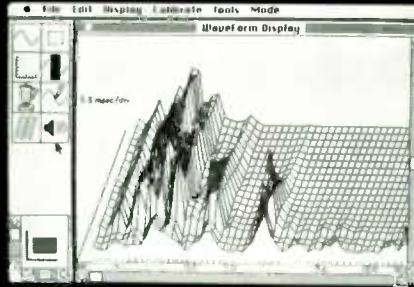
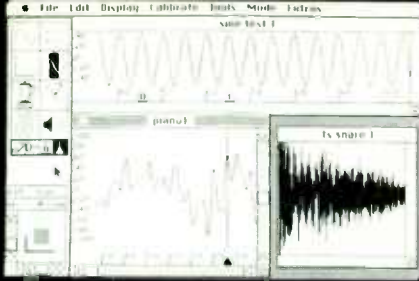
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A Different  
American Dream  
by Scott Isler

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# REM.

*ATHENS (771 alt., 18,192 pop.), on a curve of the Oconee River, is known both as the home of the University of Georgia and as a city of fine ante-bellum houses....It's an aristocratic, old-fashioned southern city, leisured in its tempo, gracious in its manner of living.*

— Georgia: A Guide to Its Towns and Countrysides (University of Georgia Press, 1940)

Forty-five years ago, maybe Athens, Georgia did look like a shooting location for *Gone with the Wind*. But in 1985 Athens (775 alt., c.50,000 pop.), like most of the formerly deep South, has pretty much joined the cultural mainstream of these great United States. Turn off a side street of towering trees where a chirping bird can drown out a wind chime, and you'll find a bleak drag of gas stations and laundromats. The Joseph Henry Lumpkin House, built in the 1840s in classical-revival style, is next door to the Athens Podiatry, in fallout-shelter-revival style. The stately-columned house of Mrs. Peninah Thomas (1835) looks down on a jaggedly geometric wing of the Emmanuel Church (1962). These and a few other elegant mansions, long converted to institutional use, are a dwindling breed

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Photography by Steve Marsel







reduced to rubbing shoulders with fast-food outlets.

The University adds a volatile element to this stereotypical old-meets-new *mise-en-scène*. The tidy campus, across the street from a promised Burger King and Gelato Supremo, swells the population by almost fifty percent and exerts a lively influence—not least in fueling Athens' handful of music clubs. For, as sure as you're reading *Travel & Leisure* magazine, the city is better known for a series of remarkable bands than even for sheltering the Tree That Owns Itself.

The B-52's put Athens on the rock map; R.E.M. is keeping it there. Since forming five years ago, R.E.M. has taken on quasi-mystical proportions to its followers. The group knocks musical convention sideways: At first the mumblings of "singer" Michael Stipe can seem a perverse accompaniment to the lilting melodies and forthright rhythms of guitarist Peter Buck, bassist Mike Mills and drummer Bill Berry. Then you realize the music and perceived words work in tandem, like an imagistic hall of mirrors. Remember, this isn't just any stoopid group; R.E.M. are all college drop-outs. Could this be—poetry?

"So many people characterize us as an art band," Stipe mumbles—sorry, says. "I really hate that. It's not like that at all. We're kinda like a big ball of mud. You can take us and make us into whatever you want. I don't like it when somebody takes that ball of mud and takes a stick and carves the word 'art.' That's an elitist attitude. It's nothing we're striving for."

"People give us all these motives and conscious ideals which aren't necessarily there," Buck agrees, with an analogy of his own. "Old whalers used to carve ivory in their spare time. Then they found, gosh, you could trade this in and get food and booze and whores and stuff. That's just like the rock 'n' roll business. We started out doing this 'cause it was fun to do. We're not dumb hicks who don't know what we're

Whether he likes it or not, Stipe, twenty-five, is R.E.M.'s center of attention. His slurred delivery of lyrics that are challenging enough without being buried in the mix has fans studying R.E.M. records with a Talmudic zeal unknown since "Louie Louie." Onstage Stipe's lead-singer role makes him a focusing point, though he recently hacked off his shoulder-length blond curls. Indeed, he's more than short-haired, having also given himself a monk's tonsure. "I've always wanted to do it," he says; in London, "people left me alone on the subway—except one young hooligan asked me if I was a Jew. I said no, are you? He took offense."

The tonsure, now peach-fuzzy, is hidden under a beret. Stipe also wears black-rimmed eye-glasses, a maroon corduroy jacket over a sweatshirt (on a sunny spring day), jeans with rolled cuffs, and a few days' growth of beard. He speaks in bursts, and in a lugubrious, inflectionless voice that he hates, pitched lower than his singing voice. Seated at a window in a vegetarian restaurant, Stipe and a friend are occasionally distracted by passing females. Afterwards, he can't remember where he parked his car, but once he finds it he provides a critical tour of the houses of Athens, many of which he's apparently lived in ("this one's great...that one's a piece of shit").

Stipe's parents live on a farm about twenty miles outside Athens, "with a trampoline and a lake and turtles and a dog." His family moved around when he was young, but Stipe has lived in Georgia most of his life. Although his high-school years "were downright embarrassing," the new-wave musical revolution of the mid-70s provided a revelation. Patti Smith, Television and the Ramones "immediately put into place everything else everyone in my school was listening to." So much for musical inspiration. On a barely more practical level, Stipe enrolled as an art student at the University of Georgia in 1978. "I was good at going to school but I wasn't good at what I was doing. I was a wretched student. I was able to convince my teachers that what I was doing was worthwhile when I was really not doing anything. But what the fuck can you do with a master's degree in painting? You may as well take conceptual tapdancing."

At the University Stipe met Buck, who says he "was trying to avoid the real world; college is the best place to do that." A non-Southerner with an even more peripatetic background than Stipe, the fast-talking Buck hit it off with the reticent Stipe. Their names sounded like a vaudeville team, but they decided to form a band instead. Buck was a guitarist who couldn't solo or play barre chords.

In early 1980 a mutual friend introduced Bill Berry to Stipe and Buck at one of Athens' infinite number of parties. "They were not seriously looking to get a band together," the drummer recalls. "They wanted something to play at parties." Drumming since he was ten, Berry was at school aiming for a law degree. He had resumed his education following a year's stint as go-fer at a rock booking agency in his hometown of Macon. "I wanted to get into the music business. Why, I don't know. Am I glad I didn't. I think it sucks."

One benefit of this apprenticeship was that Berry met Ian Copeland, whom the agency brought over from England. (Ian's brother Miles would eventually start IRS Records—R.E.M.'s label.) "I thought he was the coolest guy in the world," Berry says. "He introduced me to all this new music. Everybody else in Macon was still listening to the Outlaws and Marshall Tucker."

For bassist Berry recommended his high-school friend Mike Mills, also attending (somewhat) the University. The four assembled to run through songs like "God Save The Queen," "(I'm Not Your) Steppin' Stone" and "Secret Agent Man" (Buck: "The first record that made me want to play guitar"). The band debuted at an Athens party in April, 1980. They



**L**iving in the South all my life, having all my roots here, transfers over to the music in a big way."

doing, but we don't sit around and think about it a lot."

R.E.M. doesn't sit around much, period. It's early April, and they've just returned to Athens from London, where they recorded their third full-length album, *Fables Of The Reconstruction*. About a week later they'll kick off a three-week college tour to break in the new material, and then launch a full-scale international tour after the record's release. Athens is a nice place to visit, even though they live there.

"I hate to use the phrase 'laid back'" to describe Athenian life, Buck says, "'cause the next thing after 'laid back' is 'mellow.' It's a simple, nice life. We go see bands, hang out."

chose their name at random, despite an apt reference to a dreaming state. "We just like the dots," Stipe once explained.

From the very beginning R.E.M. concentrated on original songs. Stipe and Buck were writing together before the group coalesced. At first, Buck says, Stipe "wasn't wild on the idea of writing lyrics. None of us were. We'd just put words together to help him out. Some of the early stuff that's really horrid I wrote some of the words to, just 'cause Michael couldn't think about it." "We didn't have any idea what you're supposed to do and what you're not supposed to do," Stipe says; consequently he dismisses R.E.M.'s "first thirty or forty songs."

As Stipe assumed control of the lyrics department, his fellow musicians noticed something peculiar happening. Buck would listen and occasionally think, "God, that's really left-field." "I still don't know what to make of it," Berry admits of Stipe's distinctive vocals. "But I know I like it. At first I thought it was silly, kinda pretentious. Then I realized it wasn't. The more I listened to it, the less I understood it, which was good." Now the drummer insists that onstage Stipe's microphone be the loudest element in his monitors "just so I can hear him change lyrics from night to night. It's really funny. He'll throw in current events; he'll see somebody in the front row and I can tell if he's responding to them. It's great, very spontaneous."

"The first thing for me," Stipe says in oblique explanation of his technique, "is building those walls, coming up with rules, with these turns of phrase, and using them differently, changing them so that old rule doesn't apply anymore and a new rule has taken its place.

"I do something without thinking about it, and then later the clarity seeps into my head and it'll make sense. Sometimes it makes sense for a very short amount of time. 'Pilgrimage' [on the *Murmur* LP] still baffles me. As the person singing the song I have no idea what people are looking at. But at one point right after we recorded it, I heard it and it made perfect sense. I was so exhilarated; I thought I had accomplished what I set out to do. And then I forgot! It hasn't come back to me yet with that much clarity. But it really made a lot of sense."

The band began to get a reputation. Then they got a bigger reputation. Everyone but Stipe left school. They started to tour, which Stipe can't stand—although it did have its uses. "When we started," the singer smiles, "it was a good excuse to get out of town. At one point, in the first year or so, we played out of town because three of us couldn't make rent and our landlords were threatening to throw us out. So we locked all our doors, played around North Carolina and came back."

To their surprise, they eventually found they were making more money from R.E.M. than from their day jobs. "We never felt we were so super-talented that this was going to make us a living," Buck says. "We just figured, well, this is something to do. The less we have to work at the Athens *Banner Herald*, the better we are."



**Peter Buck, Mike Mills, Bill Berry and Michael Stipe demonstrate core skills.**

The band launched its recording career with an indie-label single in 1981. Stipe says it was an offer they couldn't refuse: "It wouldn't cost us anything, and we'd get to put a picture on it." "Radio Free Europe" and "Sitting Still" (both rerecorded for IRS) got prestigious critical notices just when R.E.M. was expanding its tour horizons. By this time they were almost continually on the road, usually in the Georgia-Tennessee-Carolinas region. "We were always going somewhere so we could eat," manager Jefferson Holt says.

At the end of 1981 the single showed up on various "best of the year" record lists, and bigger record labels started courting the group. They signed with IRS Records at the end of May, 1982; *Chronic Town*, a five-song EP released soon after, established the basic R.E.M. style of driving music and mystifying words. Their first full album, *Murmur*, dented the top forty, eventually sold about 300,000 copies, and sealed the band's fate (or doom) as critics' darlings.

"Living in the South all my life, having all my roots here, transfers in a big way over to my contribution to the music," Stipe says. "We probably could be from Chicago, but we'd sound a whole lot different if we were."

Although only Berry and Mills have anything approaching Southern drawls, R.E.M. doesn't deny its heritage. Stipe hopes their new album, with the resonant title *Fables Of The Reconstruction*, "has a lot to do with where we live": "When we were writing the songs I was thinking a lot about Br'er Rabbit and *The Wind in the Willows* and Aesop's fables, that kind of thing. Some of the stories are so incredibly weird that you have this recollection of them from childhood. You don't



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think about it for years and someone says 'Little Black Sambo and the tiger that turned to butter' and you go, 'God! You can see the tiger running around the tree.'

As sons of the South (adopted, in Buck's case), R.E.M. can't entirely escape the geography-is-destiny argument. They probably wouldn't want to. You can get used to the commingled scents of magnolia blossoms and Walter's BarBQ. *Murmur's* cover proudly depicted a tidal wave of kudzu, the vine that threatens to strangle the area. R.E.M.'s second album, *Reckoning*, has cover art by Howard Finster, one of several Georgia folk artists/visionaries that Stipe roots out and savors like truffles. The new record has downright pastoral touches like "Driver 8"; "Green Grow The Rushes," with its reference to "amber waves of grain"; and even a banjo on "Wendell Gee."

Unlike *Reckoning*, whose songs were written over a year's time, the new material came together in two short bursts of band writing activity. "When you write things all at once," Buck says, "themes tend to jump around from song to song. I think there's three train songs on this album."

"We had everything pretty much figured out" for *Fables* in advance, Stipe says. "There were a few loose ends. We wanted to try working in the studio on a song, which we'd never had time to do before. We actually wrote one song in the studio; it sounds like a Henry Mancini spy-movie theme." (It did not make it to vinyl.)

*Fables Of The Reconstruction* marks a new bend in R.E.M.'s course in a few ways. For the first time since signing with IRS, they worked with a producer other than Mitch Easter. "For so long he had to put up with this incestuous relationship with R.E.M.," Berry says. The drummer adds that Easter's seemingly permanent presence behind the board on R.E.M. records was detracting from the producer's own career with the group Let's Active. Also, "we wanted a different sound. We didn't want to seem lazy."

They chose British producer Joe Boyd, best known for his work with Richard Thompson. "Pete's a real Richard Thompson fan," Berry says. As a trial run the band had Boyd do a quick mix-down of demos recorded in one day. "He seemed compatible so we went ahead and did it. I don't think we made a mistake. I was skeptical at first. When we were recording I had to keep reminding myself I felt that way during the first two records; 'It's not finished!'"

A new producer also meant recording in a new studio. Boyd was available for a limited time, so the band went to London, figuring he would be most efficient in his favorite room. "I literally jumped on the plane wearing what I had on, and a toothbrush," Stipe says. "I got over there and after about four days I started to stink a little and had to go out and buy a pair of tennis shoes, two pair of socks, two pair of pants and a shirt."

R.E.M. are typically studio speed demons. They laid down the basic tracks for the entire *Reckoning* LP in two days. This time "we had six or seven of the basic tracks down in the first two days," Stipe says. "Then we were like, 'Hold it, we better slow down.' We were just trying to relax in the studio. Staying up three nights in a row is the way we've done it before." They took about one and a half weeks to record, slightly longer to mix.

"The last two records," Berry compares, "by the time we went into the studio, were songs we'd played live literally hundreds of times. The recording process was very simple. This time we had a new producer, a new studio, brand new songs. We were literally arranging songs in the studio; background vocals were conceived and written in the studio."

All R.E.M. compositions are credited to the entire band listed in scrupulously alphabetical order. It's democratic, if not necessarily accurate. On *Fables*, Berry wrote "two songs

completely from beginning to end, just about," he claims. "We don't like to say who wrote what songs." With his self-professed "ability to write country songs," however, Berry could likely be the author of *Fables'* good-timey "Driver 8."

Berry and Mills, as well as Buck, play guitar, which results in a plethora of song ideas. "We get together," Berry says, "throw pieces together and they turn into songs. Rarely will any one of us write a song from beginning to end."

"On any given song one of us might put in a whole bunch," Buck explains, "but by the time we get around to arranging, putting in a new bass or guitar part, it becomes band work. We all decided early on we wanted it to be a group thing. It seems like what breaks bands up is greed, and the need for the spotlight. It also means we can lie and say, 'Hey, I didn't write that song,' if we're ashamed of it!"

Not even Stipe, the sole non-playing member, has autonomous control of the lyrics department. "Peter's real good with phrases," the singer notes. "The bulk of the words are Michael's," Mills says, but he and Berry contribute a lot of their own backing vocals and help edit Stipe. The latter mentions that Mills sings "pretty much dual lead vocal" on *Reckoning's* "Harborcoat," and adds much to the new album's "Wendell Gee" and "Auctioneer": "He'll come up with these things that are amazingly close to the ideas I had, without really knowing what I'm singing about."

It's nice to know that Stipe's own bandmates are as baffled by the singer's opaque, half-buried lyrics as we outsiders. Yet it's possible to attach too much importance to R.E.M.'s words when analyzing them apart from the musical settings. "We make the songs strong enough to stand on their own," Mills says in defense of R.E.M.'s tunesmiths. "They're not



**W**e went, 'God we're big-every-one in New York loves us!' Then we played for four people in Detroit."

mere messengers for Michael's lyrics. If it's not good enough to stand on its own it never gets to the point where Michael finishes the words."

"Everything works...all together," Stipe says. "I always hated the idea of having the vocal way above the music. On 'Old Man Kensey' [on *Fables*] the vocal's way out there—but that's the only way it could be handled. On some songs, like [*Fables'*] 'Kohoutek,' I can't imagine the vocal being loud. That's a real swirling one."

"Knowing Michael is half the chore, as far as figuring out what his lyrics are about," Buck says. "Every once in a while I go, 'What the hell does *that* mean?' Most of the time he says, 'That one doesn't mean anything. I was just filling up



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space till the next line that means something.' A lot of things that he refers to that sound like they don't make sense are personal things, or little in-jokes among the four of us or his circle of friends." (Kensey is "a real person," Stipe affirms. "These are all true stories.")

"Yesterday we were having this conversation with these people," Stipe says, "and I started copying down parts of it. Probably all the really great turns of phrase are things I've stolen from conversations. I used to be able to go out and stand with my back against the wall and listen to people talk. I'd get some incredible turns of phrase."

Stipe is flattered by the attention R.E.M.'s more maniacal fans devote to deciphering his vocals. "Things are too easy



**A**t first I thought the lyrics were pretentious. But the more I listened, the less I understood, which is good."

these days, in general. It's good for someone to sit down and concentrate on one thing, trying to focus on that little bit and pull something out of it. Sometimes the things they pull out of it are," Stipe smiles, "a little odd." He laughs. "I feel that once the words are on a record they're public property. They're everyone's to try on and button up and see how they will fit. If they're a little bit too big, then stuff some Kleenex in the toes."

He cites a friend who congratulated him on "the greatest line you've ever written" by misreading Stipe's handwriting, switching "horns" for "hours" in the phrase, "Tell me what you do between the hours of the day." "Walker Percy wrote this amazing essay about 'metaphor as mistake.' Anyone who really wants to figure out the words to our songs should probably read that essay, then go back and listen. If they have to have everything right there, this might make a little more sense. It talks about how people misinterpret or misunderstand something that's being said, and come up with a little phrase or word that actually defines the essence of what the original was better than the original did."

Stipe is more than band lyricist. His vocal lines, Buck says, can add a crucial melodic element. The guitarist cites "Green Grow The Rushes" on the new album as an example. "We were playing it and I was going, 'I think that's boring, guys, I don't think we should do it anymore.' Michael's saying, 'Wait till I get the words together, just wait.' When we heard it through the P.A. it was like, 'Wow, that's really nice.' I used to call it the 'happy carpenter song' when we were working on it. But the melody and words totally transformed it."

Stipe says "Green Grow The Rushes" deals with the subject of migrant labor. His descriptions of other songs are only

slightly less oneiric than the lyrics themselves. "Auctioneer (Another Engine)" is "a transitional song to me. It's like going from one hand to the other hand. I wrote it on a train when I couldn't sleep. I returned to it three months later and I had no idea where it came from. I only put it together on that train trip at three o'clock in the morning after leaving my girlfriend."

Two cuts on *Fables Of The Reconstruction* stand out for their novel textures and arrangements. Significantly, both are the lead-off tracks on the record's two sides. "Can't Get There From Here"—which Buck says is about going to "a weird little town" about forty miles from Athens where Stipe has friends—boasts a most unusual (for R.E.M.) funk rhythm with trumpet and sax interjections.

"That's one of those songs that happened in three minutes," says Stipe, who is not quite Mr. Soul. Buck notes that the song has "all these weird chord changes" and evolved from a "jazz ballad" to its present chicken-scratch/James Brown/beach music homage. He recalls when he and Stipe would put on dresses (Stipe, anyway) and make-up and bravely enter a local soul club to try to pick up frat boys' girlfriends. "We wanted to get an Otis sound on that one," Berry adds. "The song just came out in rehearsals. I was really surprised it turned into anything. It was kinda like a joke."

"Feeling Gravitys [sic] Pull" is much more serious. Stipe says it's currently his favorite cut on the album: "Every time I hear it I get shivers." A guitar-noise introduction, an unsettling downward harmonic interval against a sinister ascending bass line, and a morose string section with pummeling bass drum convincingly convey aural unease. "Michael thought that should have something off-the-wall, really unexpected on it," Berry says. "At some point in the song there should be something that knocks you over the head. We started tossing around instrument ideas; harmonium came up, which we did use. We went ahead and threw on the strings." Stipe wrote their part and "conducted" the string coda.

"A long, camel-walky, slowly cacophonous thing" is Stipe's description of the song. "We had problems mixing that 'cause there was such a delicate balance that the song should be heard one particular way. I put down a new vocal, they re-mixed again and it worked incredibly well." The classically trained string players "were utterly confused—very nice people, and very English. We were asking them to do things, and they were listening back to the song and looking at their feet a lot."

The strings turn up again on "Old Man Kensey," which Stipe feels is even more ominous than "Feeling Gravitys Pull." "The strings should sound like you're listening to the song and it's not quite connecting. I imagine the white-noise feeling you have when you're driving through a rural area late at night and you're picking up seven stations at one time. That's the greatest radio."

Without trying, R.E.M. has tapped into a romantic strain of rock music with a potent appeal to its mostly college-age audience. *Reckoning* was on the record charts for a year, but sold virtually the same as *Murmur*. "When *Reckoning* got to number twenty-seven on the charts," Mills says, "I looked above it. Every record above it had a big hit single. We didn't. I wonder if that's as high chartwise as we can get."

A hit single—an R.E.M. tune you can hear on other than college radio stations—would spring the band from its pleasant but constricted categorical confines. Unfortunately, compared to contemporary-hit-radio fare, R.E.M. sounds a bit quaint (Southern?)—and Stipe's gnostic delivery has all the appeal to mainstream broadcasters of an AIDS warning jingle.

Mills, for one, is undaunted. "We have our 250,000 fans,"

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he says, and he's content to be with IRS Records rather than lost in the shuffle with one of the bigger labels. As one-fourth of R.E.M., the easy-going, horn-rimmed bassist fits right in with the overall band temperament—which in turn fits right in with Athens, Georgia. Buck appears the most image-conscious of the group; he sports a vest and dangling earring. The others go as far as T-shirts, blue jeans and denim jackets. Nobody tucks in their shirts. It's that kind of place.

The R.E.M. members even hang out with each other when not performing! Golfing is Mills' and Berry's secret vice. Buck, Mills and Berry patronize Athens' music clubs when at rest; Buck, perhaps the band's biggest music maven, seems genuinely interested in every group that hits town.

Only Stipe holds himself relatively aloof from the scene that supports R.E.M. "When I'm in London I would rather go around and look at buildings than go see a band," he says. These days he photographs more than he paints, but while recording *Fables* in London "I went to practically every museum and gallery in the city." ("It's a Man Ray kind of sky," goes a line from "Feeling Gravities Pull" referring to the painting "Observatory Time – The Lovers.") "I've never listened to radio, I don't have a record player and I don't have a television." He doesn't have a telephone either. He does have two cassette players, so he can listen to two tapes simultaneously—like Henry Mancini and Hüsker Dü. "It gets

or Omaha, Nebraska and there are people that are really excited to see us," he marvels with a deadpan expression. "It's a surprising thing, don't you think?"

Levelheadedness keeps R.E.M. from going off on a star trip. Then again, they haven't quite been offered a first-class ticket. Buck remembers the first tour the band did after signing with IRS "was the same as all the tours we'd done before: \$200 a night, five people to a hotel room, no food, no sleep. The day we signed the contract we went, 'God, we're big. Everyone in New York likes us.' We drove to Detroit and played in front of four people, none of whom had heard of us. That's happened more in our career than you'd expect. Ever see *Spinal Tap*? Know that scene where they're playing second-bill to a puppet show?"

"Nothing in this band really does what it's supposed to do," Stipe says, summing up R.E.M.'s appeal. "The guitar doesn't necessarily play the parts a guitarist's supposed to play. The bass is much more melodic than bass is supposed to be in rock 'n' roll." When Stipe heard Berry's drums on *Fables* songs ready for his vocal tracks, "there were so many parts I didn't even have to sing because he had already played that on drums."

In keeping with the unexpected, the stoic Stipe announces "I'm incredibly happy" in his fixed monotone. "I feel really satisfied and I feel like there's so much more for me to do. There's not enough time in the day—there's not enough horns in the day," he corrects himself.

And he laughs. ☑

### Roster of Equipment for Music

On *Fables Of The Reconstruction* Peter Buck plays a custom black Telecaster; a Rickenbacker 330 hollow-body "for rhythm and more rock 'n' roll loud stuff"; and a Fender Telecaster thin-line with an f-hole. He also has a Guild electric-acoustic, and a Rickenbacker 360 twelve-string. The studio amp is a Fender Twin Reverb; onstage Buck uses a Simul-Class Mesa Boogie with a Sa/Boo 4x12" speaker cabinet. He likes heavy-gauge Dean Markley strings, ".013 at the high end, .058 at the low end. The thicker the strings are, the more resonant tone you get, like an acoustic guitar. I put new tuning heads on; I use Gotoh, and Schallers are pretty good." He doesn't use his Ibanez 4001E effects unit that much. There's fuzz on "Feeling Gravities Pull"; a chorus effect "I have on every once in a while to get that little ringy sound, and a compressor I use only if I want to get feedback or noise." His acoustic guitars are "cheapo Yamaha imitations."

Mike Mills' bass of choice is a 1973 Rickenbacker 4001. He also plays a Guild with EMG pickups, and lately a Rickenbacker 4003 with Bartolini pickups. Strings are medium-gauge Dean Markley round-wounds, 1.05 to .50, "although the 4001 is meant for flat-wound strings." He finger-picks on R.E.M.'s quieter numbers, and otherwise uses a Fender extra-heavy (1.21mm) pick. The bass goes into a QSC power amp and Lost parametric pre-amp, then to an electronic crossover cabinet with two twelve-inch JBLs and one fifteen-inch Gauss speaker. Mills has a dbx 160 limiter/compressor.

Bill Berry has a pre-1975 five-piece Rogers drum set, updated with Tama hardware: a 22-inch kick, 14x4 snare, and 12-, 13- and 16-inch toms. His Profile cymbals are a 14-inch hi-hat, 20-inch ride, and two 18-inch crashes, one Volcanic Rock, one Rock Velvet. He also has a Paiste 19-inch China splash. His sticks are black graphite Aquarian X-10's, "really crisp on cymbals and they never break." Electronic gear? "No way! Those just fuck up." He sometimes uses a drum machine at his home studio for demos, however. His recording equipment consists of a Teac four-track deck, Tapco six-track mono mixer, and three Shure microphones: a 57 and two 58s.

The band's P.A. system is by Manticore Sound, in Cincinnati. R.E.M. has a Meyer Sound Lab MSL-3 speaker cabinet, Carver power amps, Midas house mixing console and Soundcraft monitor mixing console. Vocal mikes are Sennheiser 431s; other mikes are by EV and Shure. Other gear includes a Lexicon reverb unit, Klark/Teknik EQ, and Eventide harmonizer.

**W**e make songs strong enough to stand on their own, not mere messengers for Michael's lyrics."



so confusing you just have to leave the house.

"This area is full of people that...do things," Stipe says in explanation of his fondness for folk artists. "They sit around and carve wood"—and, in one case, sing in a band. For R.E.M.'s rough-hewn words and music derive from the same individualistic tradition that propels the Howard Finsters and Rev. Ruths that Stipe likes to visit. Hardly countercultural rebels, all four band members come from families supportive of their career choice. (Stipe's sister Linda gained some renown in yet another Athens group, Oh-OK.)

Stipe bristles at any term as formidable as "career." "As far as what's to come, I'd just as soon not even think about it. I never have, and that's always served me really well." Berry can't see himself in the group ten years from now; "I'm losing my hair too fast." He admits, though, that "this is our sixth year together and it sure doesn't seem like it."

"It's been a slow, organic, step-by-step thing," Stipe says of R.E.M.'s progress. That's just the way he wants it. He's still amazed by the group's success. "We can play in London

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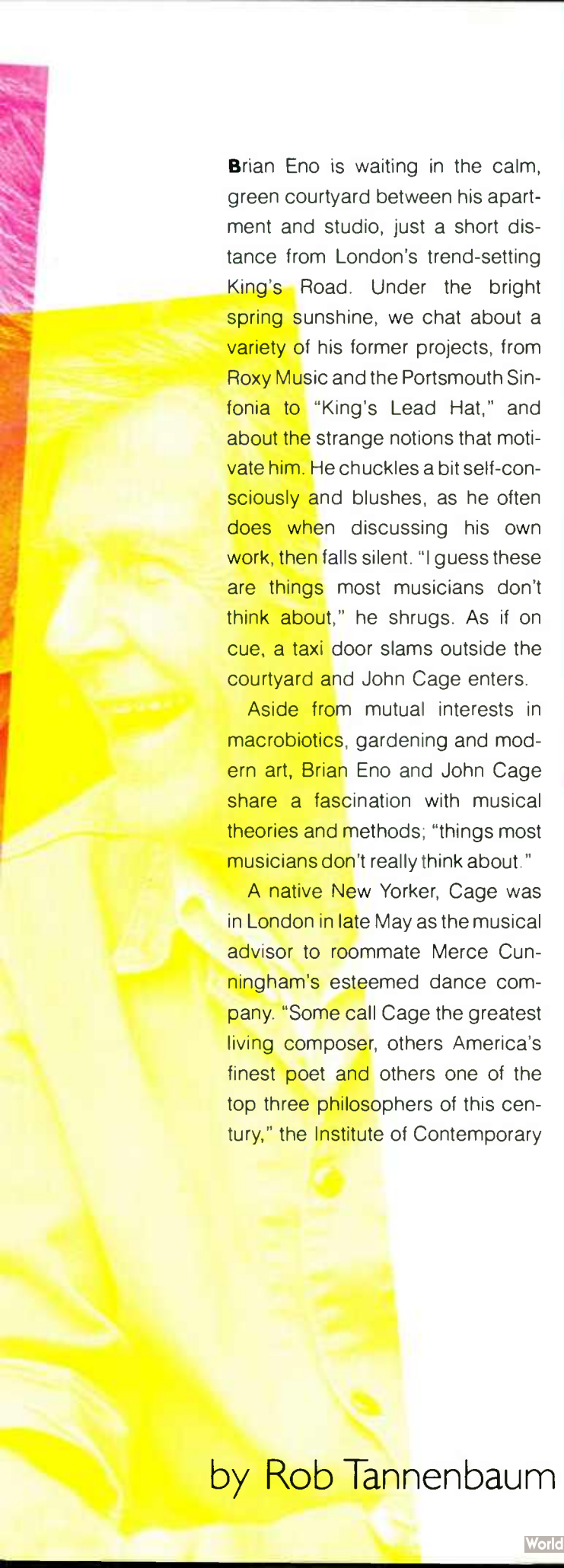
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**B**rian Eno is waiting in the calm, green courtyard between his apartment and studio, just a short distance from London's trend-setting King's Road. Under the bright spring sunshine, we chat about a variety of his former projects, from Roxy Music and the Portsmouth Sinfonia to "King's Lead Hat," and about the strange notions that motivate him. He chuckles a bit self-consciously and blushes, as he often does when discussing his own work, then falls silent. "I guess these are things most musicians don't think about," he shrugs. As if on cue, a taxi door slams outside the courtyard and John Cage enters.

Aside from mutual interests in macrobiotics, gardening and modern art, Brian Eno and John Cage share a fascination with musical theories and methods; "things most musicians don't really think about."

A native New Yorker, Cage was in London in late May as the musical advisor to roommate Merce Cunningham's esteemed dance company. "Some call Cage the greatest living composer, others America's finest poet and others one of the top three philosophers of this century," the Institute of Contemporary

Arts proclaimed when he delivered a lecture there that week. At seventy-four he is still composing, still giving encouragement to young artists, still abandoning methods as quickly as he invents them. "When I've found that what I'm doing has become pleasing, even to one person," he has said, "I have redoubled my efforts to find the next step."

John Milton Cage Jr. began piano lessons in grade school and graduated as the valedictorian of Los Angeles High at fifteen. After discovering the non-narrative writing of Gertrude Stein at Pomona College, he made a pilgrimage to Europe to explore modern art.

# A Meeting of Sound Minds

## John Cage + Brian Eno

by Rob Tannenbaum



When he decided upon a life in music in 1935, he presented himself to Arnold Schönberg, the most revolutionary composer of the early twentieth century.

Cage's early compositions were in the style of Schönberg's twelve-tone system, but the pupil sought a method that more completely rejected the western tradition of harmony. A jury had once dismissed a Schönberg composition as sounding "as if one had smeared over a still moist score," and this randomness was just what Cage wanted. He composed for percussion ensembles and for prepared piano, altering the tone of the instrument by jamming objects between the strings. He also gave lectures and wrote articles that explained his techniques, using these addresses as another opportunity for experimentation.

In the mid-40s, after moving to New York, Cage began to apply Zen Buddhist principles to composing, trying "to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expression of human sentiments." His goal was to accurately notate life, including all the disruptions and disharmonies. On the epochal *Music Of Changes* (1951) he tossed coins, divided yarrow stalks and consulted the Confucian oracle book *I Ching* to make decisions on tempo, sounds or rests, durations and dynamics. "That's noise!" some shrieked. "That's life," Cage shrugged.

His purest embrace of chaos came with the notorious 4'33" (1952), in which a musician sits at a piano for four minutes



**ENO: You're my excuse for being a composer...  
CAGE: You were able to work with new means...**

and thirty-three seconds without playing a note. The music results from the actions of the audience, effectively putting them onstage and making their lives inseparable from the performance.

In the company of other New York artists, Cage ventured into multi-media projects and his compositions grew wilder. Suddenly the chaos which skulked in the background of our daily lives was being flaunted and amplified. The music was difficult for most to listen to. "I love John's mind, but I hate what it thinks," said Pierre Boulez. For *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*, Cage tuned twelve radios according to chance. *Living Room Music* utilized household furniture, a TV set and a telephone book, while *Water Walk* used a bathtub of water, a pressure cooker, a siphon, a bottle of Campari bitters, a bucket of ice, a Waring blender, five radios, a piano, a tape machine, bells, whistles, party poppers, a large vase of roses, a garden sprinkler and a rubber fish for just three minutes of music.

In 1961, Cage collected several speeches and articles into an anthology called *Silence*, which has since become the *Das Kapital* of avant-garde composing. *Silence* urged musicians to ignore the most basic rules of western composition and doubted the very notion of what was or wasn't music. "Why do they call me a composer, then, if all I do is ask questions?" Cage wrote. What could Cage possibly be asked that he hadn't asked himself?

Eno was enlisted to help, breaking his recent reluctance to do interviews for the opportunity to meet Cage. One conjures up an image of the adolescent Eno locked in his bedroom in the early 60s with tape recorder and a copy of *Silence*: **ENO:** (reading aloud) "Where none of these (musical) goals is present, silence becomes something else—not silence at all, but sounds, the ambient sounds." Hmm...What if I made tapes of background music that were really ambient....

**Mrs. Eno:** *Brian Peter George St. John le Baptiste de la Salle Eno, you put that book down right now and come eat your steak and kidney pie! Why can't that boy listen to Beatles records, like all his friends.*

Well, that wasn't exactly how it happened, but Eno once described Cage as "the most influential theorist at one time... a completely liberating factor." And although he hastened to add, "I now disagree with nearly everything he said," much of what Eno expressed in their encounter betrays Cage's lingering influence. And just as Cage's vitality has formed a historical viaduct from Schönberg, Cowell and Satie to Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson and Fred Frith (to name but a few), Eno has passed the heritage on to a new generation of pop-oriented artists, where it has disseminated for years.

While at the Winchester School of Art, Eno explored experimental methods of painting and sculpting. His fascination with new systems led him to the synthesizer, and to membership in Roxy Music. Eno's solos on "Re-make/Re-model" and "Do The Strand" have an aleatoric abandon that's still startling all these years later (eat that, Howard Jones): A self-described "non-musician," Eno's solo career proved him a creative *provocateur*, coaxing new sounds from David Bowie and John Cale, as well as himself. While most British veterans sneered at the punk revolution (and were spat at right back), Eno produced the debuts of Devo and Ultravox and the influential *No New York* collection. With Cageian contrariness, he turned his back on synth-punk just when it began to trickle down to the mainstream, limiting his production ventures to Talking Heads and U2.

Dressed in black clothes and red socks, a week after his thirty-seventh birthday, Eno blushes when the photographer recalls a Roxy photo session where feathers, leopard skin and mascara were the styles of the day. He seems reluctant to quiz Cage on anything other than gardening. Ever the inquisitor, Cage takes the meeting as a chance to learn about Eno. He is courteous and gentle, almost patriarchal, with a delicate voice that recalls Truman Capote. Perhaps because of his sly sense of humor, he seems as unassuming as a living legend can be. And when he finds something very funny—this is just too amazing—Cage tilts his head back, opens his mouth, and laughs absolutely silently.

We go inside Eno's studio, sitting among some very modest, rented recording equipment. They begin comparing notes on macrobiotic diets while I go across the courtyard to bring over some tea. When the tea and I return, they're discussing the pantheon of modern painters.

**ENO:** Painting is my background. And I can remember when I was at art school, there was a whole echelon of painters that were considered terribly important, who actually really aren't anymore. Some of the quieter painters who didn't appear to be so dramatically far out are reckoned rather well now. Like Ron Kitai. He's a painter who's just solidly done good work for thirty or forty years and has always failed to attract attention because he's never occupied a very extreme position [*laughs*]. And he's been hammering away at this for years and years, and now people are starting to say, "This is really a good painter." Of course, other painters have been looking at him for a long, long time.

**MUSICIAN:** *I wonder whether either of you, as members of a musical pantheon, feel any discomfort with the legendary status you've gained. It's almost like being labeled before you've finished.*





**ENO:** Retreat is also a choice. The extremes aren't the only interesting places to be.  
**CAGE:** Except for me. I'm happy to be extreme. **ENO:** Well, you're a polar explorer.

**CAGE:** I try not to think of any particular notion of myself, or of my work, so that I can write the next one....

**ENO:** Clean.

**CAGE:** Yes.

**ENO:** I find it rather uncomfortable sometimes, I must say, because I think it creates a momentum for what you have been. It's as if there's a historical you, which is of course the you that people are generally seeing or responding to. But then there's a me at the present time, which isn't quite as confident of a position as I am of that (historical) position. So it's difficult to disregard the approval and encouragement you get for a past position in favor of the uncertainty of a contemporary one.

I pretty much always have the same feeling about what I'm doing, which is, "What am I *doing*?" [laughs] I don't know *where* this is going." And I only need someone to come along and say, "Why don't you do some more of those other type of records." So it does make me uncomfortable. I don't like to hear about it too much.

**MUSICIAN:** John, do you manage to stay away from hearing about your reputation?

**CAGE:** I had a difficult time recently. I was commissioned to write a piece for organ, and I was sent half the commission in advance. And then a correspondence developed that explained that the piece that they really liked, I had written in 1948 (*Dream*), and would I please write something like that [laughter]. And so I sent the check back and said that I was not interested in repeating some past work and that I wanted to write something completely new. And then they said, "Oh, please..." They sent the check back, it kept bouncing back and forth from the west coast to the east. And they said, "You can do anything you want. You have carte blanche." Then when I had carte blanche, I felt obliged to do what they wished [laughs]. And so I wrote a piece that will be played here in London shortly called *Souvenir*. And

the title is obvious.

**MUSICIAN:** That brings up a quote of yours, Brian. "The idea is to produce things that are as strange and mysterious to you as the first music you ever heard."

**CAGE:** That's beautiful.

**ENO:** [blushing] I thank you.

**MUSICIAN:** Can each of you recall the first thing you heard that seemed strange and mysterious enough to make you want to create music?

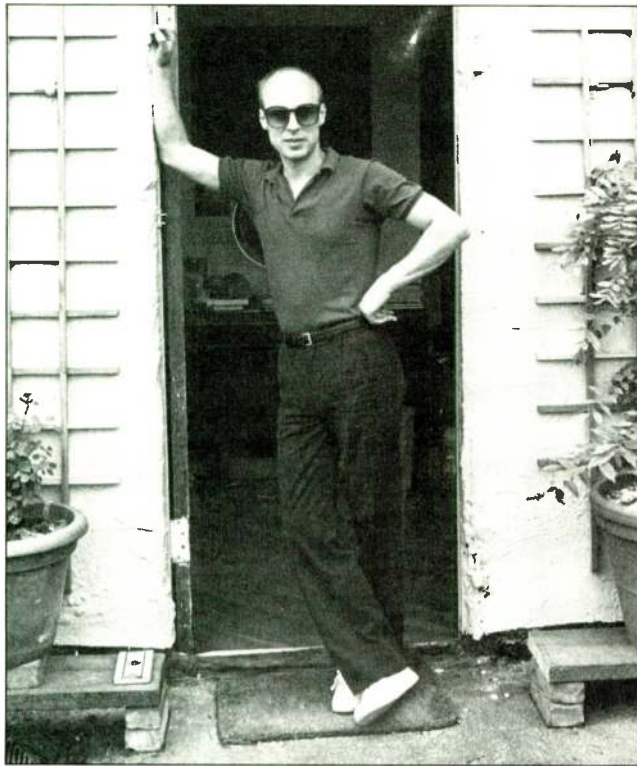
**ENO:** One of the early things I was impressed by was a record by the Silhouettes called "Get A Job." [to Cage] I don't know if you've ever heard this. It was a doo-wop record that came out in 1955, and the reason I heard this was because I lived in a part of England which has two big American air bases. And I can remember the sensation of first hearing a cappella music. And that was the most *fantastic* thing. My parents remember how I used to...I managed to get a copy of this record when I was seven, and we had one of those auto-repeat record players and I used to leave it on all day, every day. That was a big experience for me.

And then another one I heard was, funnily enough, the Ray Conniff Singers. Because I had an uncle who had to leave the place he was living, and he parked his record collection with my parents for a while. And his taste was 40s big-band jazz. The sound of those voices on the Ray Conniff records I thought was superb. I was about nine or ten at this point. And every morning, before I went to school, I'd put one of those records on. I remember these winter mornings, hearing these amazingly lush, soft, silky voices, and I thought it was a beautiful sound.

**MUSICIAN:** John?

**CAGE:** I went to Paris instead of continuing my third year of college, and in Paris I was struck first of all by the Gothic architecture. And I spent a number of months studying Gothic flamboyant architecture at the Bibliothèque Mazarin. A pro-





**"If you think of culture as a great big garden, it has to have its compost." Could Eno mean Madonna?**

fessor I had had in college was furious with me for not being involved in modern architecture. He got me working with a modern architect. And then I heard that architect one day say that to be an architect, you'd have to devote your life to architecture. And I realized I wasn't willing to do that. I loved a number of things—poetry was one, and also music.

So I went to him and explained that I was leaving, that I couldn't give myself to architecture. At almost the same time, I heard a concert of modern piano music played by John Kirkpatrick. It included a piece by Stravinsky and several pieces by Scriabin. And I saw modern painting. My reaction to both was that I could do that too [laughter].

**ENO:** Absolutely!

**CAGE:** So I began both painting and writing music. I continued for about two years, and then I presented myself to Schönberg. I wanted to study with him. He said, "Will you devote your life to music?" And I didn't hesitate, I said yes. There are people who would think I haven't been faithful [laughs]. But it seems to me that music has been generous to me, and allowed me to do these other things.

**CAGE:** [to Eno] I've unfortunately only heard one record of yours, and I'd like to know more about your work. The one I heard was the airport thing...

**ENO:** Right, *Music For Airports*.

**CAGE:** And the way I heard it was by coming into a situation where there was a sound system and a large record collection at the Crown Point Press in (Oakland) California, where most of the [visual] artists work while records are being played. And the only other composer, as far as I know, who was asked to make etchings was Steve Reich. Anyway, as you know I like silence very much [laughs]. So I never asked to hear anything. But one January at Crown Point I said, "Do you have any Brian Eno?" And they played this record. I was struck, of course, as anyone hearing it for the first time would be, by the structure, which is sound...and silence. And on my way here this afternoon, it seemed to me that you must work with some rhythmic structure. I would enjoy knowing how you work.

**ENO:** It's quite interesting actually that you mentioned Steve Reich, because if I had continued this list of pieces of music that influenced me, there was a piece by Steve Reich that was probably, as a working composer, the most important piece that I heard, in that it gave me an idea I've never ceased being fascinated with—how variety can be generated by very, very simple systems. The piece I'm talking about is called *It's Gonna Rain*, the tape piece. It's a loop of tape of a preacher saying, "It's gonna rain, it's gonna rain, it's gonna rain, it's gonna rain." And at the same time, on another recording, the same loop is being played at a slightly different speed. So that gradually, the two tapes are sliding out of sync. And a very interesting thing happens to your brain, which is that any information which is common, after several repetitions, you cease to hear. You reject the common information, rather like if you gaze at something for a long time, you'll cease to really see it. You'll see any aspect of it that's changing, but the static elements you won't see. And what fascinated me with that piece was that it generated a kind of audible difference and patterns. The amount of material there is extremely limited, but the amount of activity it triggers in you is very rich and complex.

So this impressed me as a way of composing. I heard this in the early 70s, which was just at the time that most of the people that I was involved with [could he mean *Roxy Music*?] were doing exactly the opposite thing. Twenty-four track recorders had just become current, and the idea was to make more and more grotesque, Gothic pieces of music, filling up every space and every corner of the canvas. And to hear something that was as alive as this Reich piece, and so simple, was a real shock to me. And I had that experience that John said. I thought, "I can do this. It's not hard." [laughs]

And so I started doing it. In fact, Reich sort of abandoned that system as a way of working, which is rather fortunate because that meant I could carry on with it [laughs]. And *Music For Airports* is one of the products of that. What happens with that piece is that...well, I'll take one of the four pieces there. There's one piece that is just groups of voices singing long notes. And each long note was actually a very long loop of tape, so each single note repeats at a regular cycle. But each of the cycles of repetition is of a different and complexly related length. The relationships between the lengths aren't simple, they're not six to four. They're like 127 to 79, or something like that. Numbers that mean they would constantly be falling in different relationships to one another.

**MUSICIAN:** Were the relationships determined before you began recording?

**ENO:** [laughs] Actually, they were determined like most of the things I do. First of all, all the notes lasted for a different length, because the people singing them could hold some of the notes longer than others. And so I would just find the end of the note and then leave what I thought was a reasonable amount of tape at the end, because I wanted a silence at least twice as long as the sound. So I'd spin off a whole lot of extra tape and then cut the loops. It wasn't measured. And I didn't want to measure it, because I did want to arrive at complicated rather than simple relationships. And then I started all the loops running, and let them configure in the way they chose to configure. So sometimes you get dense clusters and fairly long silences, and then you get a sequence of notes that make a kind of melody. [stops suddenly]

I hope I'm not talking too much; I tend to talk a lot.

So then, listening to this piece I thought, "Well now, what I'm going to do is apply the way of listening to this that I apply to pop records," isolating particular sections and taking those out and trying to make another piece with those. It's rather like a kind of distilling process. So the first piece on the second side is a more interesting piece to me in a way, because it's saying, Okay, this establishes the technique, now let's use it to make a tune you can whistle. It's like trying to do something that my mother would like. She did, in fact.

My mother likes that record.

**MUSICIAN:** [to Cage] *Brian did a series of albums not meant to be listened to attentively, but rather as background music. When you play them at a low volume, they merge with the environment. This is similar in effect to some of your pieces.*

**CAGE:** There's a piece called "Instances Of Silence," which Merce (Cunningham) uses for *Trails*. And people frequently ask me afterward why there wasn't any music. Or they think the sound is coming from the environment.

**ENO:** That's very close to what I would like to be doing as well. I've been doing video installations quite a lot recently, which are in themselves a little hard to explain so I won't bother talking about what they do [laughs]. But the musical side of those uses four stereo pairs—that's to say eight—discrete channels of sound. What I like to do with the music is first of all inspect the place where the show is going to be, and then try to make a piece which completely sinks into that environment somewhere. So that many of the sounds are indistinguishable from the traffic outside, the general hum of the city.

I like to have this feeling that people could sit there and think that the music continued out of earshot. I like the notion that you're sitting in this field of sound, and you don't necessarily hear all of it. If you move to a different place you will hear a different version of it. So this is actually why I'm interested in recorded music now, because I suddenly start to realize that you can use recordings as a way to generate unpredictability rather than repetition. I have four cassette recorders running at once, always out of sync. So that any moment is a unique moment acoustically, just like it is in the real world. I've suddenly gotten excited about tape recorders again, because I'd gotten bored with them for a while. It's not so interesting to have something repeating, exactly the same.

**MUSICIAN:** *Both of you make music that has a relationship with a live audience, so how does that affect your view on recordings of your music?*

**CAGE:** I have never used records in my life. Now and then I come into contact with them. I guess I follow what the Musicians' Union asks for about live music [laughter]. I'm involved so much with it and I've come to enjoy environmental sounds so much that I don't really need records. I have no way of playing them.

**ENO:** Actually I don't either. I haven't had for quite a long time. There's a record player in the studio, but I don't come here to listen to records. There are two things I listen to with any regularity: I have some tapes of Arabic popular music that I like very much and I listen to gospel music. Those are the only two things. And I listen to them usually when I'm cleaning the house.

**MUSICIAN:** *John, is it the predictability of a record that you're not attracted to?*

**CAGE:** It may be that. [pause] I think though now, that music is being practiced in at least three different ways that I can distinguish. One is live music and the writing of it, as I do, to bring that live music about. Generally the notations are like letters either to friends or strangers.

Then there's music such as you are making, which is actually the making of a record, as far as I can see. So that the music becomes something not written, but something that can be held, either put on a turntable or not.

And then there's a third way, which is more and more popular now. And in my mind, this resembles the troubadours—the connection of a musician with an instrument, often of his own making. That's what I think David Tudor is doing. He designs his own circuitry. And he performs an instrument, or a collection of them. He doesn't write a score, the way I do. He simply makes something that...

**ENO:** Does something...

**CAGE:** That can be used to produce sounds. Or I know a young Canadian composer, Andrew Culver, who makes ten-

segrity structures [based on a system developed by Buckminster Fuller] and then connects them into the sound system and plays the instrument with a variety of beaters.

**ENO:** That's right, so the piece of music is really vested in that particular structure.

**CAGE:** And he doesn't write down the music. But he insists he's a composer.

**ENO:** I would say he's right.

**CAGE:** Oh obviously he's right. It's just a very different way from writing music.

**ENO:** Well writing music is so far from anything I'm capable of doing, it's a very foreign form to me. But I like this third area very much; the idea of making a piece or a thing which is a piece of music and from which a piece will continually issue, as it were.

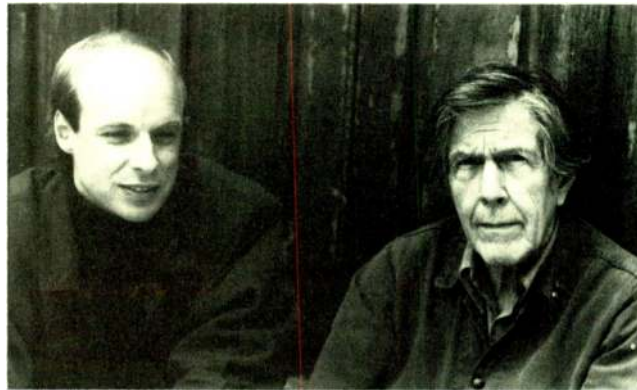
**CAGE:** And could change from time to time.

**ENO:** That's right. And the notion of these installations is a little bit—I think of them in that way. Because that version of the piece exists only in that place, and then either I make a piece of music for the next place or I dramatically change it to suit the new place. So that's a unique piece for that circumstance. But the connection I haven't made yet is that within the tapes, the piece doesn't change. Each tape just soldiers on and does its work. So that the whole combination is constantly different, but the elements are not in any way responding to the environment. If something dramatically different happened in the environment, nothing different would happen in the music. That's kind of unsatisfactory to me.

**MUSICIAN:** *Is there a way of getting the audience involved in the composition?*

**ENO:** I never really think about that. I don't think of my pieces as things they particularly want to get involved in [laughs].

**MUSICIAN:** *I was thinking of John's 4'33", where the actions of the audience construct the piece.*



**CAGE:** I have trouble when music tries to control.

**ENO:** When it's so heavily laden with intentions...

**ENO:** I wonder what the difference is between those two, actually. It's a rather interesting distinction. I must say I wouldn't really encourage a situation where people came in thinking this was a piece of music they were supposed to participate in. "Oh, let's bring some flutes" [laughter].

In the same way, I wouldn't want them to go and start pulling apart the structures that I've built. I wouldn't want them to decide that they could rearrange them [laughs]. "I don't like this one." I have kind of a hands-off thing.

**MUSICIAN:** *Both of you have defended the idea that you can be a good composer whether you're trained or untrained, but this creates a certain problem. There seem to be a lot of Enoesque or Cageian composers who think that because they have no training, they're automatically daring. So what is it that separates untrained composers who aren't worth listening to from untrained composers who are?*

**CAGE:** I think the term "worth listening to" depends on who's listening. I think it would be right to say that no matter what,



if it is sounds, one could listen to it. I haven't yet heard sounds that I didn't enjoy, except when they became too musical. I have trouble, I think, when music attempts to control me. I have trouble, for instance, with the *Hallelujah Chorus*. But if the sound is unintentional, then I have no problem.

**ENO:** That's right. Some sound comes so heavily laden with intention that you can't hear it for the intentions. This is the great problem of lyrics, as far as I'm concerned. It's notable that if you read the way critics write about pop music, they'll always write about lyrics because it happens to be their medium. It's much easier to talk about lyrics than to talk about...music. But I have the same feeling about lyrics. I just don't want to hear them most of the time. They always impose something that is so unmysterious compared to the sound of the music they debase the music for me, in most cases.

But the question you asked about trained and untrained musicians.... In fact, I must say that [to Cage] you're the reason, or you're the excuse for why I became a composer. The alibi, I should say. Because I never learned to play an instrument, and still haven't. But I had always been very fascinated by music, and when I was in art college, I was shown your book *Silence*. And in fact, I saw several concerts of your music, came to London to hear you speak, and so on. And it was that same thing again—there's a lot of space here, a lot of new territory. It's a territory that nobody had yet had the time to say you couldn't do something.

**CAGE:** You were able to work in a field with new means that really didn't require being studied.

**ENO:** That's exactly what was happening. The first materials I used were tape recorders, and I just collected them. I was fascinated by them and I collected them in any condition, whether they were not working properly or had a big wobble or could only run at one-and-7/8 inches per second. Each one had its character. I had several of these, and very few people had ever thought of using them as musical devices. So there was no one to tell you the rules for that. I feel the same way about video. There's a background for video, which is anarchic. It has to do with theater and film. And there's a future for video which is tremendously exciting.

**CAGE:** And is that the digital business?

**ENO:** Before you leave I'll show you some of the things I've been doing. They're hard to explain because they're not videos in the image sense. You don't look at the screen. I'm using the video system as a way of generating a controlling light. Because light is one thing that you can really do with video, it's something that people really haven't explored.

The video tapes themselves are also cut the same way as the audio tapes; they're all different lengths so the structures as well as the sound don't repeat during the course of the show. So nothing happens again. And there's a feeling to that that I like very much. Nothing happens twice, but nothing very different ever happens. It doesn't dramatically, suddenly change. And so it has a kind of evenness of texture over time.

**MUSICIAN:** Brian, on *Music For Airplay* (a promotional compilation of his more accessible solo work, released in 1981) you wrote: "On re-listening to this material I find that rather than it having become dated, many of the stylistic innovations which initially appeared rather odd have since become the currency of what is now vaguely referred to as 'new wave music.' Since my interest has shifted away from this area of music, any pride I might feel in this contribution is mingled with considerable consternation." It seemed like it would be a while before you worked with another rock band. [Eno nods in agreement.] So what got you to produce U2?

**ENO:** I've been listening to a lot of gospel music, and part of that is reevaluating traditional musics. This started with a book I read, *The Unknown Craftsman*, by Soetsu Yanagi, who was the director of the Museum of Folkcraft in Tokyo. He talks about the two different ways of making things. There's the hard way and the easy way. [mutters] Why should anyone bother with the hard way, I wonder.

The hard way is the way of the individual artist who establishes his own terrain, as it were. The easy way is the way of grace and the way of tradition, where you don't even consider the possibility that you are there to make major innovations—you're there to make 200 parts today. And one of the things I like about gospel music is that it has that same kind of humility, that the people who are singing it are not puckered-brow artists. There's the same freshness and thrill that you see in all kinds of folk arts. People doing something that is shaped by a whole lot of quite unconscious factors, like the limitations of their own vocal range. All sorts of factors which seem very interesting.

So I was thinking at that time a lot about whether you could reconcile these two ideas: the easy way, which you could compare to a ship being blown by the wind, and the hard way, which is trudging across a rocky path somewhere. And I thought about Matisse, who is somebody who took the hard way to end up the easy way. Because I'm sure at the end of his life, he was in a situation of being a folk artist in a tradition that he invented, really. And he worked for so long in a particular approach to making things that toward the end, I believe he really did that with a kind of innocence that you have to work at long to get to.

So I thought, "Now I wonder if this is true of popular music as well." And as a band, U2 are the closest thing that you're likely to find in this part of the hemisphere to a soul band. They're people for whom the spiritual aspect of what they do is very important. I thought they would be a band worth working with, from that point of view.

These video installations I've been doing are very exciting because they have a very definite ending. I know that by the time a show opens, I will have gotten something good finished. But I don't know what it is now. So it's exciting to be in a situation where you know there's a distinct point in time where you say, "Right, that's how the piece is." I don't feel that way about making records anymore.

**CAGE:** If you have the permutations you spoke of, what one hears will change all the time. And you have them in this video situation?

**ENO:** That's right, I will [laughs]. The only thing is, I went to one of my exhibitions after it had been up for a couple of weeks and discovered that some keen person had been diligently rewinding all the tapes and cueing them up again. They thought I didn't realize it was all running out of sync.

**MUSICIAN:** Do you find that people have set notions of how they should respond to music, John?

**CAGE:** [slowly] I don't think so. The problem I find is that if an audience is in the presence of something they're not familiar with, they generally begin to talk. I went to an exhibition here of the Saatchi collection (a sterling modern art collection in London), and apparently a group going to see that show made graffiti on some of the paintings and on a sculpture by Donald Judd. So there's now people protecting the work. But it seems to me that making graffiti on a work of art is very similar to in any way making sound...

**ENO:** Talking at a concert...

**CAGE:** Or laughter or any way making sounds, unless the concert is like one of the things we've been talking about. Like Satie's *Furniture Music* (*Musique D'Ameublement*), where he wanted the audience to talk. But then they were very quiet. In Zagreb recently, there were two ladies sitting in front of me at a concert, and they were perfectly quiet until the music began, and then they started to talk [laughter]. Then there was another time at a concert where this young boy and his father were in front of me. Stravinsky was conducting. This was some time ago. And the son turned to his father and said, "Dad, that isn't the way it goes." [laughs] He was unable to listen because of his memory.

**MUSICIAN:** Memory being something you've made a life out of trying to avoid.

**CAGE:** I like the Marcel Duchamp directive. The way he ex-

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pressed it, if I can remember correctly, is "To reach the impossibility of transferring from one like image to another the memory imprint." In other words, to come to the point of living like a tourist.

**MUSICIAN:** *A recent quote of yours that I liked was, "Everything I see is something I haven't memorized." Whether you're a composer or a writer or a builder, it's hard to make a familiar thing fresh each time you do it.*

**CAGE:** It's only hard if one takes a lot of baggage...

**ENO:** That goes back to momentum, the first thing we talked about. One of the things that makes it hard is that there's always a tremendous amount of encouragement for you to...

**CAGE:** For you to *think* it's hard.

**ENO:** Yes, that's right. And for you to repeat a past success.

**CAGE:** Someone asked me recently when I was inspired. And I said I used to be inspired when I took laundry to the laundromat, but that now I have my own washing machine [*laughter*]. A good friend said about the care of plants, "First thing's first, each day." And I find as I take care of the plants, that any ideas I need for the work I'm doing will come to me.

**MUSICIAN:** *Would you talk a bit about your most recent methods of composition?*

**CAGE:** If it's a small group, I write in individual parts. By small I mean up to twenty. I would write single parts and not have a conductor. I arrange the parts in such a way that a conductor wouldn't be necessary, but that each time it was played, it would be different. One of the ways I do that is to, in a section, have the beginning take place between zero and forty-five seconds, and end within another particular time (thirty seconds and one minute fifteen seconds). And then, with a chronometer, the player would figure out whether he's doing it fast or slow, and make himself a kind of schedule. My advice is that each person make his own schedule. That's pretty much the structure of a piece called *Music For*. It's either *Music For Two* or *For Three*, *For Four*, *Five*, *Six*, *Seven* and I think now it's up to *Eight* or *Nine*.

If it gets to a larger number than twenty, then it's a question of an orchestra. And then I would divide the orchestra into groups, and have several conductors. What I want is an unpredictable relationship of events and time such as one hears in traffic. And I would do that, too, with a large orchestra, from forty to eighty.

**MUSICIAN:** *The basic message of Silence seems to be that everything is permitted.*

**CAGE:** Everything is permitted if zero is taken as the basis. That's the part that isn't often understood. If you're nonintentional, then everything is permitted. If you're intentional, for instance if you want to murder someone, then it's not permitted. The same thing can be true musically. As I was saying before, I don't enjoy being pushed while I'm listening. I like music which lets me do my own listening.

**MUSICIAN:** *It's been suggested that the options that were so wide open twenty-five years ago just haven't been explored.*

**CAGE:** You mean that composers are conservative?

**MUSICIAN:** Yes, that rather than taking advantage of your spirit to discover new things, they've merely imitated the end product you arrived at.

**CAGE:** I think the musical world is in a very different situation than it was when I was young. When I was just beginning there were only two things you could do: one was to follow Schönberg and the other was to follow Stravinsky. If you want to be a modern composer now, there are so many things to do, and people do them. Some of them don't even know who I am. And yet all that freedom exists. It comes about through a great change in technology and through a really changed world in which people who were formerly in cultures that were separate are now fully aware of each other. And it comes about through a greater number of people, so that there is, as Marshall McLuhan once said, there is a brushing of more information today than there was fifty years ago. It's a changed world. It's not a world in which we are obliged

to follow a mainstream, represented by X or Y.

**ENO:** That's right, you don't have to belong to a pantheon or even know about it.

**CAGE:** No. It's independent of Schönberg's notion that German music is supreme. It has nothing to do with Bach or Beethoven.

**ENO:** The first statement of your question assumed something which I would query. You said that John had opened up all these options, but you thought now people were being conservative, or had retreated from those. What I would say actually is that retreat is also a choice you can make. The extremes aren't the only interesting places to be.

**CAGE:** Except for me [*laughter*]. I'm happy to be...extreme.

**ENO:** Well you're a polar explorer.

**CAGE:** I wouldn't be happy otherwise.

**ENO:** But not everyone wants to live at the south pole.

**CAGE:** And there's no need for it.

**ENO:** No. It's nice to know that it exists and you want to hear about it from somebody else. But you might first live in the south of France and have a very useful, happy life there too. There are artists who make another choice. They know those boundaries, and they think, "Right, I'll be there."

**CAGE:** But don't you think it's more subjective, finally, than being at the pole or being in the south of France. It's actually being at one with oneself. And one's own means.

**ENO:** So it doesn't any longer relate to the rest of the field of activity, yes. And then having found that place you might look around you and say, "Oh look. I'm in the south of France." I agree with you that the choice is not predicated on a comparison with what other people are doing. Of course it's thrilling to do something for the first time, but it's equally thrilling for somebody to do it well, taking advantage of the strengths and weaknesses of what you did and mixing it with other approaches. I have different circles of friends, and some of the people I know come from so-called serious music backgrounds and others are from popular music backgrounds. And whenever I'm with one group, I'm always defending the other.

**MUSICIAN:** *As somebody who is so frequently "borrowed from," I would think you'd have mixed feelings about new artists doing something that really isn't new art.*

**ENO:** I think of it as compost. If you think of culture as a great big garden, it has to have its compost as well. And lots of people are doing things that are...not dramatic or radical or not even particularly interesting; they're just digestive processes. It's places where a number of little things are being combined and tried out. It's like members of a population. We're all little different turns of the same genetic dice. If you think about music in that way, it makes it much easier to accept that there might be lots of things you might not want to hear again. They happen and they pass and they become the compost for something else to grow from [*laughs*]. Gardening is such a good lesson for all sorts of things.

**MUSICIAN:** *If the most important thing is being satisfied with your own work, John, do you bother to read reviews?*

**CAGE:** I've been reading the reviews here of the Cunningham Dance Company. They've been very favorable. Most of the enthusiasm is for the dancing. One of the critics, in fact, complained about the music, just as he said he would have complained twenty years ago.

**ENO:** [*laughs*] It's nice to be consistent.

**CAGE:** The problem for some critics and for some audiences is that the music and the dance are independent of each other. Most people find coincidences [*to Eno*] which certainly exist with your work in the installations—and when they see the coincidences, they think it's been made that way.

**ENO:** It's very hard not to think that, actually. It's in the nature of your perceptual mechanism to want to connect things.

**CAGE:** Except when we see two things on the street, one is physical and one is audible, we know that we're making the

*continued on page 106*





# Do you hear voices?

If you spend a lot of time thinking about music, you probably have all sorts of sounds running around in your head.

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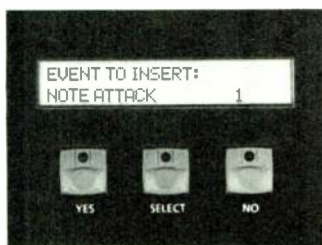
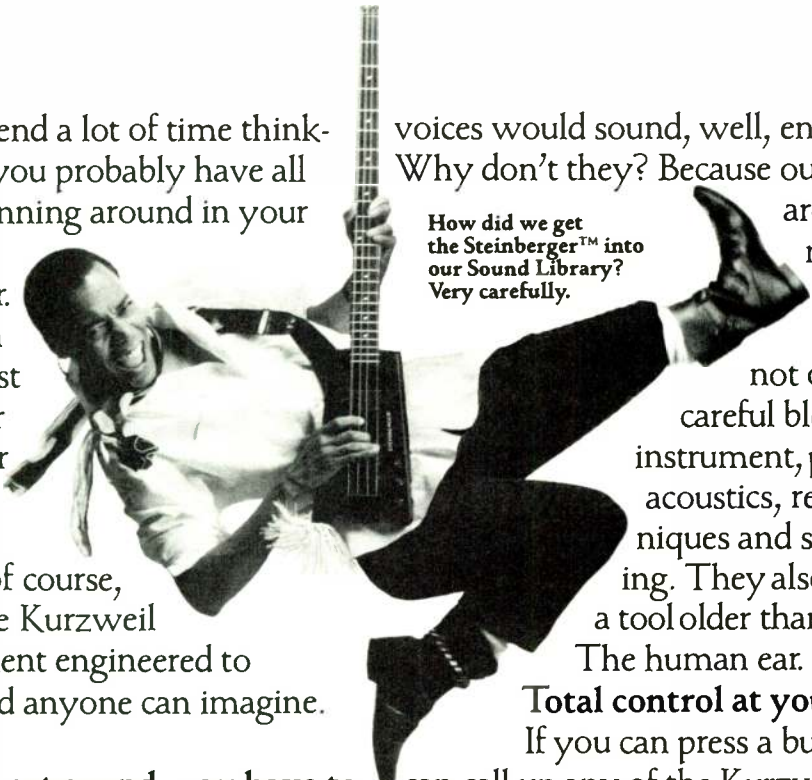
The human ear.

**Total control at your fingertips.**

If you can press a button, you can call up any of the Kurzweil 250's 45 resident voices and 124 keyboard setups. Instantly. Because they're all in the Kurzweil 250's massive on-board memory. That way, you won't ever have to mess around with disks.

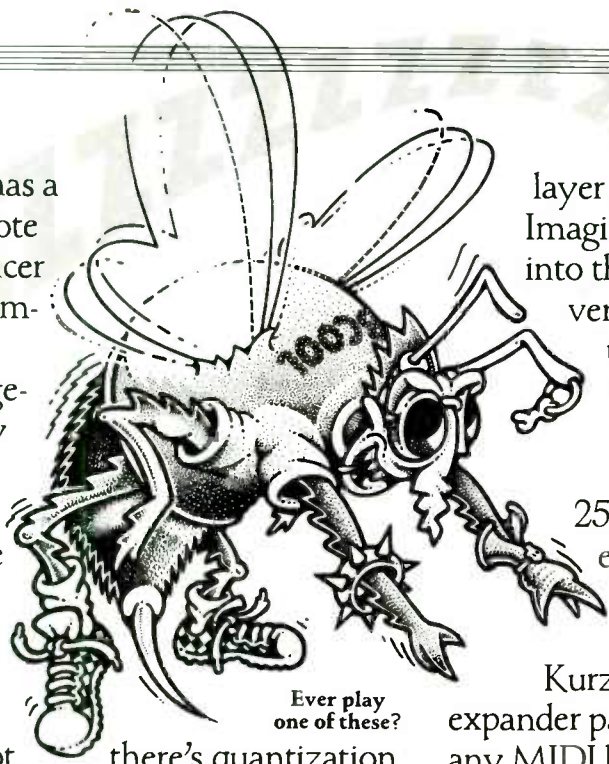
Then play any voice or setup on the Kurzweil 250's velocity sensitive, 88-key wooden keyboard. Which is weighted to feel like a grand piano. So it can be as expressive as a grand piano.

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Kurzweil 250 has a built-in 7900-note 12-track sequencer that lets you compose your own complex arrangements. Edit any note, edit any track, insert notes or change tempos and volumes. And once you're satisfied with what you've got, there's quantization to clean up slight timing errors.



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MIDI is available on a lot of keyboards. But no keyboard instrument lets you do with MIDI what you can do with the Kurzweil 250.

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# MUSICIAN

WORKING

## Rumble on the River: The Guitar & Keyboard Camps Gird for Battle

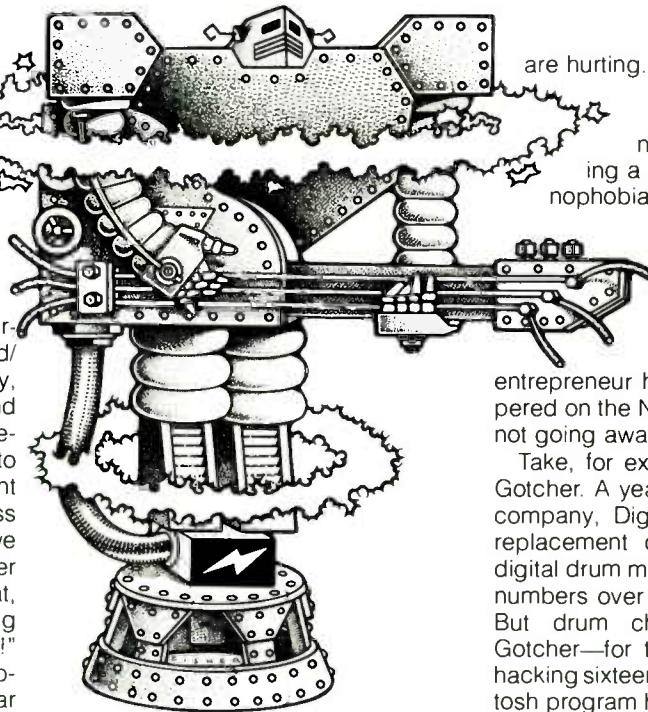
A Report from N.A.M.M.

By Jock Baird

**N**EW ORLEANS, HILTON HOTEL, JUNE 23:

It's a late Sunday evening at America's bi-annual music instrument trade show, N.A.M.M., and a fight is being picked. From the stage of the Seymour Duncan/Fostex/Schecter concert, Ted Nugent, flanked by Quiet Riot bassist Rudy Sarzo and Julian Lennon's guitarist Carlos Morales, is assaulting the keyboard/computer/digital camp with a steady, X-rated series of insults, taunts and crotch-grabs. "Are there any synthesizer players out there? We'd love to have you come up and join us," Nugent sneers, indicating a keyboardless stage. "You can see how necessary we think you are." As Billy Idol's drummer bashes out a cavernous HM backbeat, Nugent observes, "No bleeping LinnDrum can do what this guy can do!" The Wango Tango then pours his observations into a slow, twelve-bar "N.A.M.M. Blues," raising whoops and agreeing laughter from the hardy six-string faithful.

After several numbers spent visibly establishing his undimmed guitar cred-



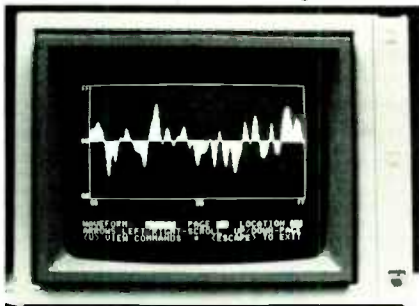
holds-barred version of "Wild Thing," the hall-of-famers fire off high-velocity rounds from various impromptu guitar-hero sculptures. It's an inspiring (if perhaps musically undistinguished) tableau that must have made host Seymour Duncan (who himself did a mean Jeff Beck variation earlier in the evening) proud.

The only problem is figuring out whether the scene resembled the marines at Iwo Jima or Custer's Seventh Cavalry at Little Big Horn.

Because Nugent had touched a responsive chord among the have-nots at N.A.M.M. the musical instrument community has been quietly polarizing the last few years into keyboard and guitar camps, one growing sixty percent a year, one struggling to hold its own. Not all keyboard companies are growing, of course—some American firms were rumored to be in financial trouble—and not all guitar companies

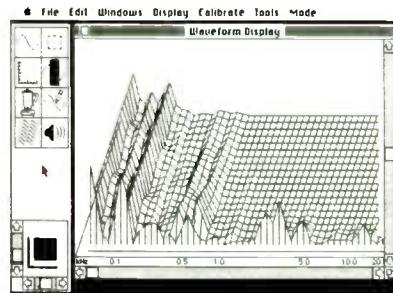
are hurting. But disappointing show attendance and the recurring recessionary nightmare are accentuating a gathering storm of technophobia and frustration that Ted Nugent put into words (mostly four-letter ones) that night. For while the old guard clings to its traditions, a genuinely new breed of entrepreneur has appeared and prospered on the N.A.M.M. stage, and he's not going away.

Take, for example, a guy like Peter Gotcher. A year or two ago, Gotcher's company, Digidesign, began making replacement drum chips for various digital drum machines; his catalog now numbers over seven hundred sounds. But drum chips are old hat for Gotcher—for the last year he's been hacking sixteen hours a day on a Macintosh program he wrote to shape sound samples on the Emulator II called Sound Designer. This is one of the leading edges of music technology, because it takes under-ten-thousand-dollar sampling keyboards and makes



The Mirage's Voice Editing System

entials, Nugent retires, leaving a few re-joinders on the terminal wimpiness of the keyboard contingent. He soon returns with Edward Van Halen, Brian May, and John Entwistle, all well into an evening of serious libations. As Nugent leads the forest of guitars into a no-



Digidesign's Sound Designer

them as potent as forty-thousand-dollar units. Ultimately, beyond its present keyboard application, this is the next level of analyzing and shaping recorded sound that will become a required production skill by the end of this digital decade.



Gotcher's company observes a new set of business practices. It has access to computer research at nearby Stanford University, giving it a kind of new-age gratis R&D wing. It piggybacks on other companies. Gotcher & co. designed a MIDI interface for the Mac that communicates significantly faster at 500K baud than the usual 56K link. Digi-design then licensed the design to a large computer manufacturer called Assimilation who will put it in computer stores for \$89. (Gotcher threw into the deal a cute little \$29 4-track sequencer with a screen display that looks exactly like a Portastudio, complete with turning tape reels.) Nearly ready is his SMPTE cue sheet software package that will enable the Emulator II to do major-league film or video sound effects.

One wonders what Ted Nugent would say if he watched the youthful Gotcher

what about Ensoniq, the new Pennsylvania company of Commodore renegades who built that incredible \$1699 sampler, the Mirage. Ensoniq showed a \$350 Apple-based Voice Editing System of their own that substantially beefs up the Mirage's capabilities. Price point becomes a critical issue here. So we've got three top-flight American firms locked in combat at a marketplace show in which two Japanese giants are universally acknowledged to have rewritten musical instrument history. If the guitar industry is losing, no one's exactly sure who's winning.

Noticeably dampening the relentless optimism we've seen at previous N.A.M.M. shows was the current slump in the overall computer industry. The mood was further exacerbated by the growing inadequacy of the conven-

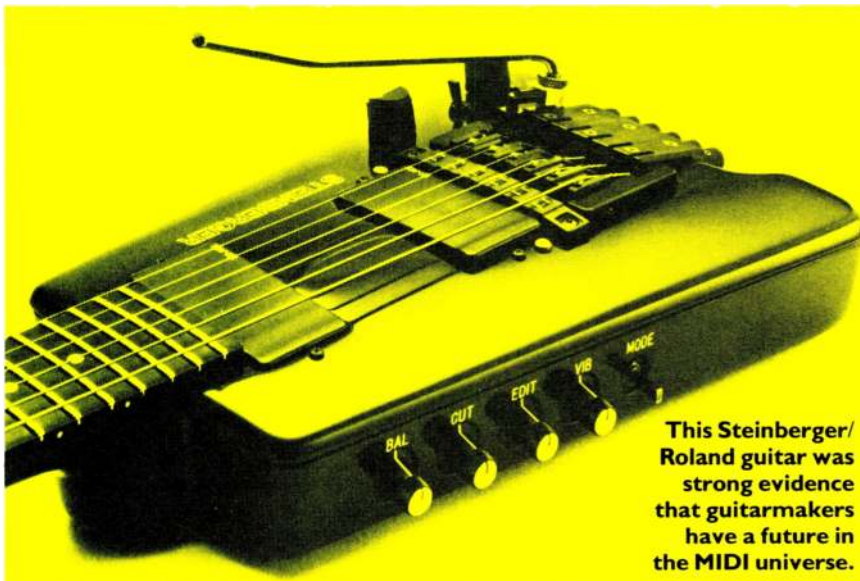
also revitalize some of those hurting guitar firms—let's face it, they're the ones who really know how to make great guitars and MIDI has relieved them of the burden of making the synth section. But with a few very important exceptions, most guitar makers seem to tacitly agree with Ted Nugent's assertion that "MIDI is bullshit."

Octave-Plateau took the biggest step forward, unveiling a completely original MIDI guitar design that uses a micro-processor system to scan the frets and strings for activity and convert the information to MIDI data (the Roland design uses pitch to voltage conversion). The Voyetra MIDI guitar boasts tighter tracking, on-board keypad and alphanumeric display, and accurate dynamics sensitivity—you can even do two-handed fretting.

We got even more excited about a surprise prototype from Ibanez. Similar to the Roland in electronics and equipped with a huge MIDI-converting whammy bar tailpiece, the Ibanez MIDI guitar felt and played—surprise!—like a "real" guitar, and it tracked exceedingly well. It's expected to list for \$1200, but changes in body shape will delay its market debut till the winter. Another digital-friendly guitar company was Steinberger—their guitar with Roland guts turned out to track significantly better than a similar Les Paul version. Which makes sense, given that neck rigidity and absence of overtones and dead spots are essential for reading pitch.

But so far the game still belongs to Roland, who wasn't planning on letting the latecomers catch up. This show they introduced a new bass synth, the GR-77B, and a bass controller, the G-77. Roland continues to bring down the price of conversion kits—they're now under \$300—and they have a programming add-on panel, the PG-200, that makes programming their GR-700 a bit easier. Roland's string selection function is also an ace in the hole—you can assign any voice, pitch change or hold function to any string—a nifty foot pedal unit controls the level (a pitch change on the B-string gave the Roland a perfect pedal steel effect).

Maybe the most exciting development for Joe Guitarist was the Pitchrider 7000 from IVL, a cousin of Cherry Lane Technologies. It's a small strip of pickups that mounts near the bridge of any guitar and then goes into a box with a MIDI output. It's polyphonic, tracks reasonably well (depending on the guitar you put it on, natch), translates note bends, lets you use all the capabilities of the synth you're using, including keyboard splitting on the fretboard, and of course talks to a computer or sequencer, all for a thousand



**This Steinberger/Roland guitar was strong evidence that guitar makers have a future in the MIDI universe.**

dashing back and forth between multiple-window waveform displays, 3D frequency analysis plots and reductions of the Emulator II's front panel like a teenager zapping Gorgon aliens. Would he recognize rock 'n' roll Darwinian adaptation at work? Would Nugie get bug-eyed when Gotcher talks about developing an electronic hook to reach right into the miniature landscape of the plot and change the sound, or would he snort and ask if it could play a twelve bar blues?

But there's another side of Gotcher's high-tech coin: to buy his \$1000 Sound Designer, a purchaser must own an Emulator II and a Macintosh, a somewhat limited pool. And in the realm of ten-grand samplers, E-mu is up against another fine American firm, Kurzweil, who already has a Mac voicing program called the MacAttach. Is the market big enough to float two products at this price point, or are E-mu and Kurzweil going to have to fight to the death? And

tional guitar store dealer in explaining and selling the new technology to its customers. These troubles were accentuated in New Orleans by a quirk of show floor planning that left many of the newest and most vigorous software companies in a whole other building by themselves, unfortunately reinforcing the feeling that the keyboard/computer crowd was speaking mainly to itself. And with a few exceptions, that crowd had yet to produce any compelling demo music—seeing the unlimited potential of the digital revolution engaged in endless variations of Harold Faltermeyer's "Axel F" can be downright depressing.

The solution to some of these troubles was a viable, affordable MIDI guitar controller. If the huge number of guitarists could be brought into the computer pool through MIDI, the software market explosion so long heralded and so long delayed might become a reality. The MIDI guitar could

dollars. It's anyone's guess how far this product could go.

New Orleans N.A.M.M. brought more refined computer-based sequencing software, and a few new companies. Two Boston-based rookies were heavily into Macintosh: Southworth Music Systems showed a formidable sequencing, editing and transcription program called Total Music; and Musicworks debuted an integrated software system, including a hot sequencer called MegaTrack, a DX/TX librarian/programmer and a series of Macintosh interfaces. Roland, who already had Kentyn Reynold's terrific \$500 IBM sequencing/transcription program, MPS, came out with a more basic 8-track Apple sequencer called MUSE for \$150.

Rhodes/Chroma showed one of the few software sequencers that wasn't MIDI-based, claiming that its parallel computer interface between its Polaris and an Apple was superior (of course, there's MIDI out of the Polaris so you can still use other synths). Octave Plateau not only showed its IBM-based Sequencer Plus, but unveiled its own modified portable computer with MIDI ports. MusicData expanded its burgeoning line of Apple/Commodore software with MIDI Delay, a disc-based, fully programmable digital delay with a hang time of up to several minutes! They also brought out a MIDI file management program with modules that speak to a number of different synthesizers. Hybrid Arts continues its steady growth, showing a 16-track sequencer for Atari and a number of patch programs. And veteran software mongers Cherry Lane and Passport saw some of the heaviest foot traffic of the show.

Keyboard hardware brought more modular keyboards. Kurzweil made both keyboard and sampling section of

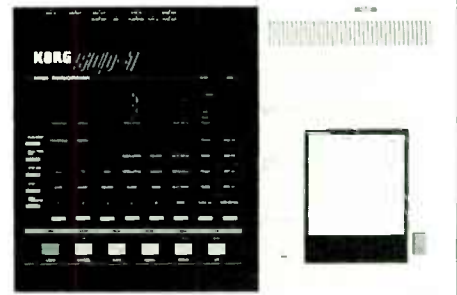
the 250 available as separate units. Roland unveiled a new \$700 strap-on remote pressure-sensitive keyboard called the Axis. Europa, who distributes the P.P.G., debuted a handsome, ergonomically designed strap-on called the Lync that plays four MIDI channels simultaneously. And Yamaha showed a \$1700 88-key keyboard, the KX88, with nineteen types of controls and up to 192 types of parameter changes. This last was part of Yamaha's long-awaited Computer Assisted Music System, with kick-ass sequencer (the QX1) and tone generator/expander (TX816). Yamaha is also bringing out scaled down versions, including a 2-track sequencer (the QX7) and an FM synth module (the TX7). They also added DXs, from an entry level DX7-type synth, the \$800 DX21 (with non-touch sensitive keyboard) to a \$4500 version of their top-of-the-line DX1.

Casio, whose \$500 phase-distortion synthesis keyboard the CZ101 made such a ruckus last show, was back with a new edition: the CZ-5000 offers a full size keyboard, what amounts to two CZ-101 voicing sections, and an 8-track MIDI sequencer which can drive other synthesizers, all for \$1200. We'll be taking a closer look at this keyboard next issue. Casio also showed a \$400 4-track MIDI sequencer for \$400 called the SZ-1 which could bring digital keyboard recording to the masses.

Korg opened a few eyes with a relatively inexpensive 16-track, 30,000-note disk-drive MIDI sequencer, the SQD-1. They also followed up on the success of their Digital Waveform Generating System synth the DW6000 with a new model, the DW8000; it has eight voices, touch sensitive keyboard and—nice touch—a built-in programmable digital delay. Korg was noticeably computer fluent, with their own Apple/Commodore voicing programs for both Poly 800 and DW8000. Kawai introduced a sporty 8-voice, MIDI and sequencer-equipped synth for \$1700, the SX-240.

Notwithstanding the gloomier weather on the guitar side of the tracks, a number of companies were smiling. Kramer, with figurehead Edward Van Halen, has aggressively pursued new ideas, as witnessed by their license of the Ripley individual-string stereo guitar. Washburn has also quietly flourished in the new metallic landscape. A low-profile Fender showed a sporty new body style, the Katana, as well as a dead-ringer for a Les Paul. Ibanez expanded its successful Pro Line of guitars and added a new inexpensive series, the AxeStar.

A major recovery has been under way at Guild, and this show brought big crowds for Brian May, who oversaw a commercial version of the guitar he de-



**MIDI recorders for the masses: Korg SQD-1 (\$700) and Casio SZ-1 (\$400)**



signed twenty years ago. The mahogany BHM-1, as it's called, is equipped with a special Kahler tremolo and three pickups Larry DiMarzio whipped up for May and made part of his Signature series. Guild also drew rubberneckers for Steve Morse's bass sidekick Jerry Peek (Morse himself was performing over at Ernie Ball). Other bass stars demoing on the floor were two extremely hot NYC sessioneers, Tim Landers at Peavey and Wayne Pedzwater at Marshall. Other star basses included both a new headless body design and five-string jobs from Ibanez and Yamaha, and continued compliments for the Kubicki Ex Factor 4.

Talk about thriving—Scholz Research continued their domination of the guitar landscape with a two-part, very upscale rack mounted edition of the Rockman called the RockModules. One half is the preamp and sustainer section, while the other is the stereo chorus/delay portion of the program, each side selling for \$270. With more controls and readouts and with studio-quality specs, the RockModules may take the Scholz sound even further than it's already gone.

Acoustic guitarists should definitely take note of Gibson's Symbiotic Oriented Receptor System (or SORS), a new pickup that uses thousandth-of-an-inch-thick piezo polymer film. The film's dielectric strength is seventy times that of piezo ceramic crystals, and the system has an electrical energy input maximum forty times greater than that of crystals. There's also an active electronics section, and no direct box needed. The reinforced sound at the demonstration was nothing less than

*continued on page 106*

**Lync remote keyboard from Europa**





# Midnight Oil

## The only band that really matters

By J.D. Considine

**T**here's a TV commercial running on television stations in Sydney that explains a lot about modern-day Australia. The ad is for McDonald's, and seeks to show just how Australian McDonald's is. As a slow pan across Ayers Rock dissolves into a similar view of a Big Mac, we are assured that "prime Aussie beef" and "fresh Tasmanian potatoes" give McDonald's "the best of everything" Down Under.

So much for the vegemite sandwich. Such a sales pitch seems almost absurd on this side of the Pacific, where

ADRIAN OVERALL





we feel confident that Australia is all tart accents and kangaroo jokes, while McDonald's is as American as Uncle McSam. On Australian TV, though, the spot runs between episodes of "Dallas," "Simon & Simon" and "The A-Team," and seems nothing out of the ordinary. Especially not when you can walk, as I did, down a street in suburban Sydney and pass a 7-11, a Colonel Sanders' Kentucky-Fried Chicken stand and a Carvel Ice Cream shop in the space of three blocks.

That's not to say that Australia is turning into the "all-American amusement park" Randy Newman satirically prophesied in "Political Science." But the cultural shadow cast by the United

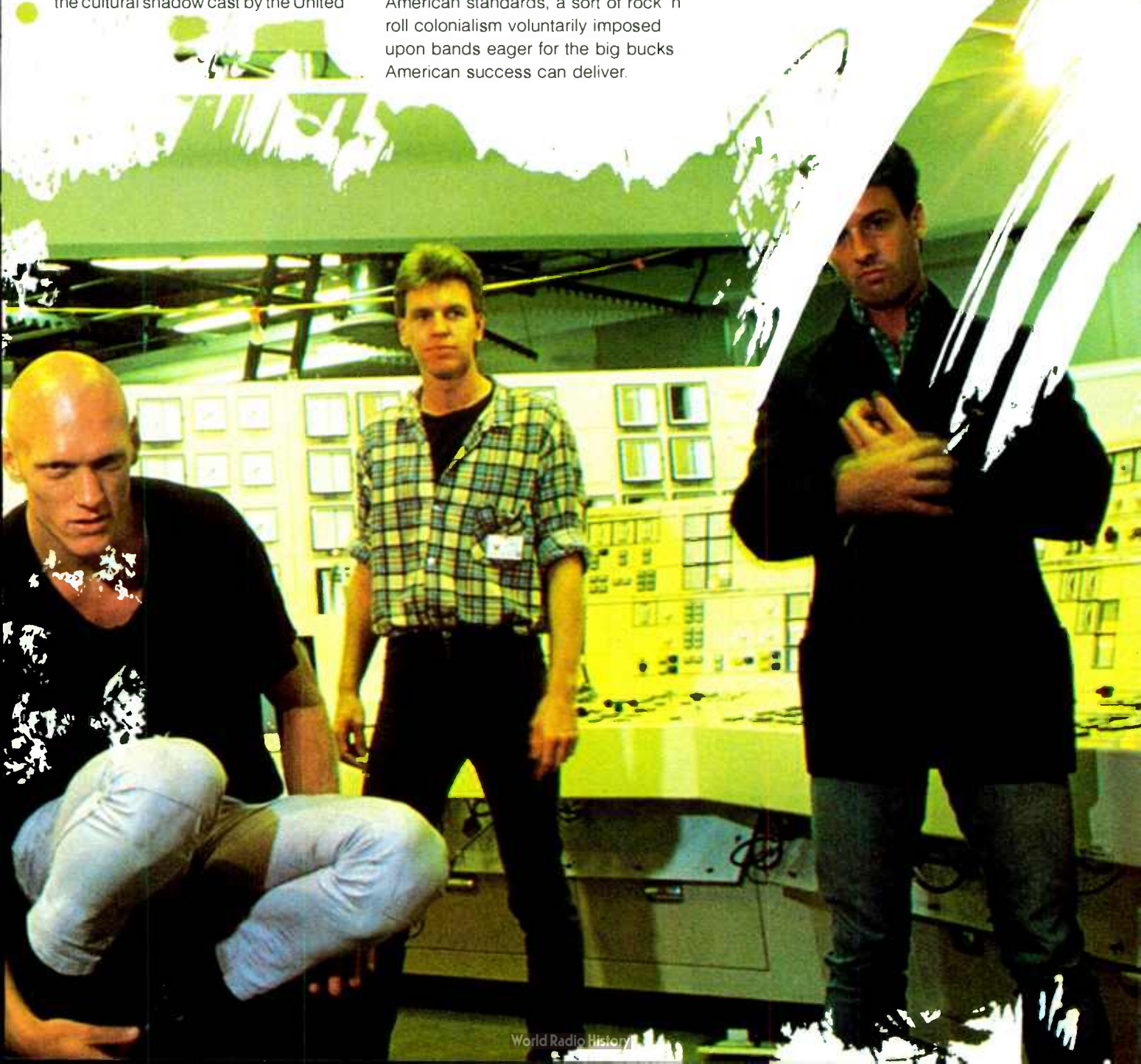
States is pretty long down there. Even the music scene, so recently hyped on this side of the Pacific as the Next Big Wave, seems much the same. According to the Australian charts in early April, the top single was by USA for Africa, and the number one album was Bruce Springsteen's *Born In The USA*.

"Y'see," explains singer Peter Garrett, as the subject comes up in a conference room at Midnight Oil's offices in Sydney, "there's this argument about the universality of rock 'n' roll. But there's not much of that happening at all. Really, it's just the *Americanization* of rock 'n' roll." In other words, he says, adjusting the world's tastes to meet American standards, a sort of rock 'n' roll colonialism voluntarily imposed upon bands eager for the big bucks American success can deliver.

"We just want to reverse that flow a little bit."

Which is why Midnight Oil refuses to "write for America, as many Australian bands have done," as drummer Rob Hirst puts it. Instead, the band has taken a like-it-or-lump-it attitude toward presenting *Red Sails In The Sunset*, Midnight Oil's most powerful—and uncompromisingly Australian—album, to America.

On the one hand, the record delivers the perfect compromise between art-rock intricacy and pub-rock ferocity, widely varying the music's textures while simultaneously maximizing its



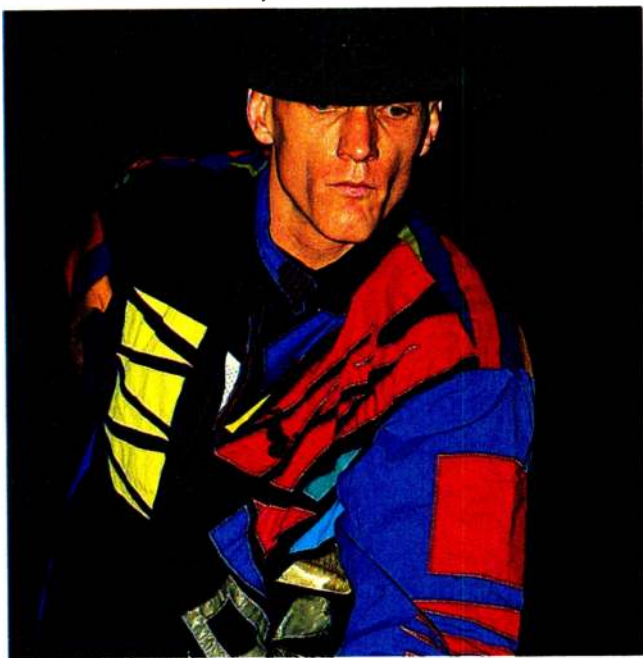


impact. On the other hand, the songs tend to address topics that leave most Yanks yawping in ignorance. This isn't the Australia of bush hats and sheep dip, but a country as complex as our own.

A country, needless to say, most Americans don't know beans about.

The members of Midnight Oil acknowledge that, though what to do about it frankly stumps them. In fact, Hirst half-jokes that the reason the band wants to tour America is that, "We've too much money now. We want to go and lose it all, so there'll be a challenge left. So where can you lose money faster than anywhere else? We figured we'd do a big American tour."

Truth be told, though, there's a genuine feeling within the band that it's time for a fair exchange. "Obviously, we're introducing stuff that makes sense to Australians that Americans aren't going to be able to acknowledge straight away," Garrett says. "But we'd say that we've had Hollywood, and all that's gone with that, for many, many years. (Australians) watch a lot of American television, they listen to a lot of American music, and they're eating a lot of American food. Their life is determined by the actions of American people."



**Peter Garrett, lyricist, lawyer, singer, senate candidate**

"We think about this a lot when we consider traveling overseas," adds Hirst. "For instance, the Japanese version of *Red Sails* comes with an inner sleeve that goes to great length—or appears to. My Japanese not being very good—explaining what this band is on about.

"We've got a problem, because what we're saying is very important to us. But in half the world, either they can't understand us because they don't know the language, or they can't understand us because they don't know where we're coming from.

"And we are making it more difficult with each album. With the last album, *10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1*, "Power And Passion" got quite a bit of airplay as a single. So the logical thing for us to have done, in terms of going after international success in a big way, would have been to hone our music into one area; not be so specific about place names and famous people here, which mean nothing outside Australia; and go travel our asses off, the way a lot of Australian bands in the 70s did, AC/DC being an example. Just wear people down with great live playing until we couldn't be ignored anymore.

"In actual fact, we're going the opposite way. So far, at least, we haven't made any concessions."

## The Sound of the Fury

Midnight Oil began life on the pub circuit in Sydney, origins that are far from unique in Australian rock. "Other bands you might have heard of who were spawned from this very apprenticeship," says Hirst, "would be people like Cold Chisel, Rose Tattoo, Angel City. These bands were characterized by the fact that their attack was loud, and it appealed to people who spent their days either in very hard jobs or unemployment queues, and wanted their music hard and fast."

Going on that much, it's tempting to draw comparisons to the working-class bars of America or Britain, but pub life in Australia is not so simple. For one thing, Australians head to their locals for reasons other than why Americans hit the bars. "Most of the year 'round, you've got a hot climate," explains guitarist Martin Rotsey, "and Australians are very active as far as sport is concerned. And it's like a social occasion after you've done something energetic to sit down and drink and rave about it to one another, right?"

Weekdays, this might be at neighborhood pubs, which in Australia are more common at street corners than traffic lights, but come the weekend, many Aussies flock to huge venues accommodating 1,500 people or more. Understandably, this changes the dynamic of bar-band music somewhat.

"For the pubs, putting on entertainment is not really drinking and music going hand-in-hand," Rotsey says. "We're at the pubs to get entertained." For that matter, the bands aren't used as a draw to sell alcohol, as is the case here in the States, for the big money-makers in many of the large outfits are the poker machines.

Consequently, the only way a band like Midnight Oil could survive was by fighting for attention. Garrett sums up the basic aesthetic as "Play loud," while Peter Gifford adds, "At the big houses, you can't hear the band—it's too crowded."

"At the big houses," counters guitarist Jim Moginie, "you can't get to the bar because it's too crowded."

Where Midnight Oil cut its teeth, though, inattention was sometimes a blessing, because the surfing crowd which built their first following rarely hesitated to express displeasure.

"They wouldn't put up with any bullshit," explains Rotsey, and Hirst adds, "You throw a slow song on, then exit out the back door before the beer glasses start heading in your direction. It's a little bit like those Southern clubs where they put up the chicken wire. It's a great apprenticeship for having records, because if you can survive those days, you can play anything."

"Yeah," laughs Moginie, "I wouldn't want to walk into some of those pubs that we played with the *Red Sails* set."

It's hard for the American listener to get a sense of just how far Midnight Oil has moved from its pub rock roots, for the only albums readily available in this country, *10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1*, and *Red Sails In The Sunset*, are the exceptions, not the rule. For instance, *Midnight Oil*, the band's 1978 debut, is stripped down and basic, espousing hard rock sentiments with brisk, new wave efficiency and no small amount of grit. Hirst's description—"putting a live show in the studio and trying to come up with the best answer"—explains a lot of the rawness, but also offers a clue to the band's edge. "All the bands of the late 60s and the early 70s were our influences," he explains, "and I think what the punk explosion did for us was to say, "Look, that's the natural way the band plays; let's make *energy* the bottom line for the band. It still is. I think that's the one thing that puts us apart from most other bands in this country."

Maybe. But the most obvious differences now are stylistic, for Midnight Oil has taken eclecticism to new heights, mostly through a series of false starts. Consider *Place Without A Postcard*, produced in 1981 by Glyn Johns and which seemed to set the Oils down the road to heavy rock heaven. It was the perfect commercial distillation of the band's live



# THE MIXING LINK



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sound; maybe that's why the next album, 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1, was built around dense textures and intricate arrangements, taking a sort of hooligan's approach to art rock.

Says Garrett, though, "All that happened when we got to 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1, was that we had more time in the studio. It was just that whole thing where musicians who want to create a sound will go and look for an instrument or a way of creating it which is a bit different from just a guitar and an amp."

The new stuff is far more involved. Not only has the band broadened its instrumental axis, with Moginie adding keyboards (and, in the studio, clarinet) and Gifford the Chapman Stick, but the use of these extra sounds is a step away from the brash functionalism of the band's early days. Some of it echoes the work with Glyn Johns, as with "Best Of Both Worlds" from *Red Sails*, where a careful blend of brass and guitar lends tremendous impact to the verses.

But there's a lot more than cleverly-hyped hard-rock guitar running through the album. In fact, complains Hirst, some fans find the sound of *Red Sails* a bit too diverse for their liking. "A lot of people think our music doesn't make sense, that it is far too polarized," he states flatly.

Which seems only natural for an album that, on one song ("When The Generals Talk"), deals in hip hop-style tape edits, while on another ("Helps Me Helps You"), sets its rhythms with a didjeridu drone. Eclectic? That's not the half of it.

This is no mere muddle, though, for each unlikely device makes perfect sense when heard in context. It isn't simply Garrett's belief in looking for the perfect sound, because there's a considerable structural acuity to these recordings. The Oils have discovered how to develop their material so that the arrangement shifts gears as the melody accelerates and decelerates, and that allows the song to coast along smoothly. As a result, "Who Can Stand In The Way" is able to work its way through hard rock and rap from a misty electric guitar intro to a dueling acoustic blues guitar finale without really straying from its basic melodic idea.

Of course, reproducing all this live is a different matter altogether. Moginie, with his rack of keyboards and assortment of guitars, seems forever to be leaping from instrument to instrument, while Hirst must divide his attention between his drum kit, drum machines and the vocal duties he shares with Garrett. As the material has grown more texturally varied, the instrumental switch-offs have mushroomed. "Which makes the live show an exhausting thing to play, admits Hirst, "as well as witness. But we're sort of honing our thing." Indeed, Rotsey admits to having abandoned his attempts to use Vox amps live, because a normal outfit wasn't loud enough, while with a full array, "it begins to look like a music shop up there."

But the band's approach is so communal—even though most of the writing is done by Moginie, with either or both Hirst and Garrett—that scaling down the arrangements is as easy as building them in the studio. "I mean, we've been playing together for a long time now," says Garrett. "So, in a sense, once you've built up that kind of thing, it doesn't really matter what sort of music you find yourself writing or performing or playing. It's going to come out sounding like Midnight Oil. Because it is.

"I mean, we've been called a heavy metal band, we've been called a punk band, we've been called an art rock band. But people here don't try to whack a label on you like they do in America. Here, they'll listen to it; if they like it, great."

## Helps You, Helps Me

Last year, Peter Garrett did something rock singers never do. He ran for the Australian Senate. This was no joke candidacy. As Garrett says, "It was deadly serious." Garrett, though running as a single-issue candidate, chose the nuclear question as his focus, and hit home with a lot of Aus-

tralian. "There hadn't been anyone in this country who's articulated the anti-nuclear arguments well," he says, "and I think that I was able to do that. I was serious about it.

"Maybe," he shrugs, "I was just lucky, because I'm a lawyer, and I can speak the language if I have to. There was a feeling in the straight media, who didn't know us, that it was just a rock 'n' roll gimmick. But our audience, and a lot of people in this country, know that we're serious about the issues that we think are important, and the benefits that we've been active in show that we mean it."

Garrett did well, drawing the support of intellectuals like writer Patrick White as well as rank-and-file voters, but in the end fell victim to Australian politics.

"Briefly," explains Rob Hirst, "Peter got many more primary votes—that's the first vote you cast—than the Democrat, who was the guy he was running against for the vacant seventh position. But owing to a system of preferences in this country, whereby there are one-two-three-four preferences, the second and third preferences are weighted as much as the primary votes. If the major parties in this country—which are the Liberals and the Labor—allot their preferences to one side or the other, then those secondary votes, those twos and threes and fours and things, can actually swamp the

*continued on page 106*

## Burning of the Midnight Lamp

**Rob Hirst** uses a drum kit compiled of various Ludwig and Premier drums—the actual assortment varies—with Ludwig and Premier hardware, and an SDS 7 Simmons set he uses "very sparingly. I've also used LinnDrums and [Oberheim] DMX rhythm machines." His cymbals are a mix of Paiste and Zildjian, "big cymbals. 14-inch Paiste ripple high-hats; the crash cymbals are all 20-inch and 22-inch. The small ones break and don't sound good." His drums are fitted with white Remo Ambassador heads, "because they're clean and they ring," and his sticks are thin and wooden, "like 5As and stuff."

When recording *Red Sails In The Sunset*, however, he used Yamaha drums, and then dubbed the cymbal parts later with "whatever was hanging 'round the studio." He never records with cymbals, by the way, "because in the acoustic environments where we record drums, the cymbals just crash over everything."

**Jim Moginie** plays a Gretsch solid body, outfitted with GHS .010s, through two Carlsboros—"They're an English amp, and when I went American we couldn't get any, so I used Roland Jazz Chorus amps, which are pretty similar." His guitar effects are limited to a Choron 30 tremolo unit, and a volume pedal. His acoustic guitar is a Washburn, with GHS medium lights.

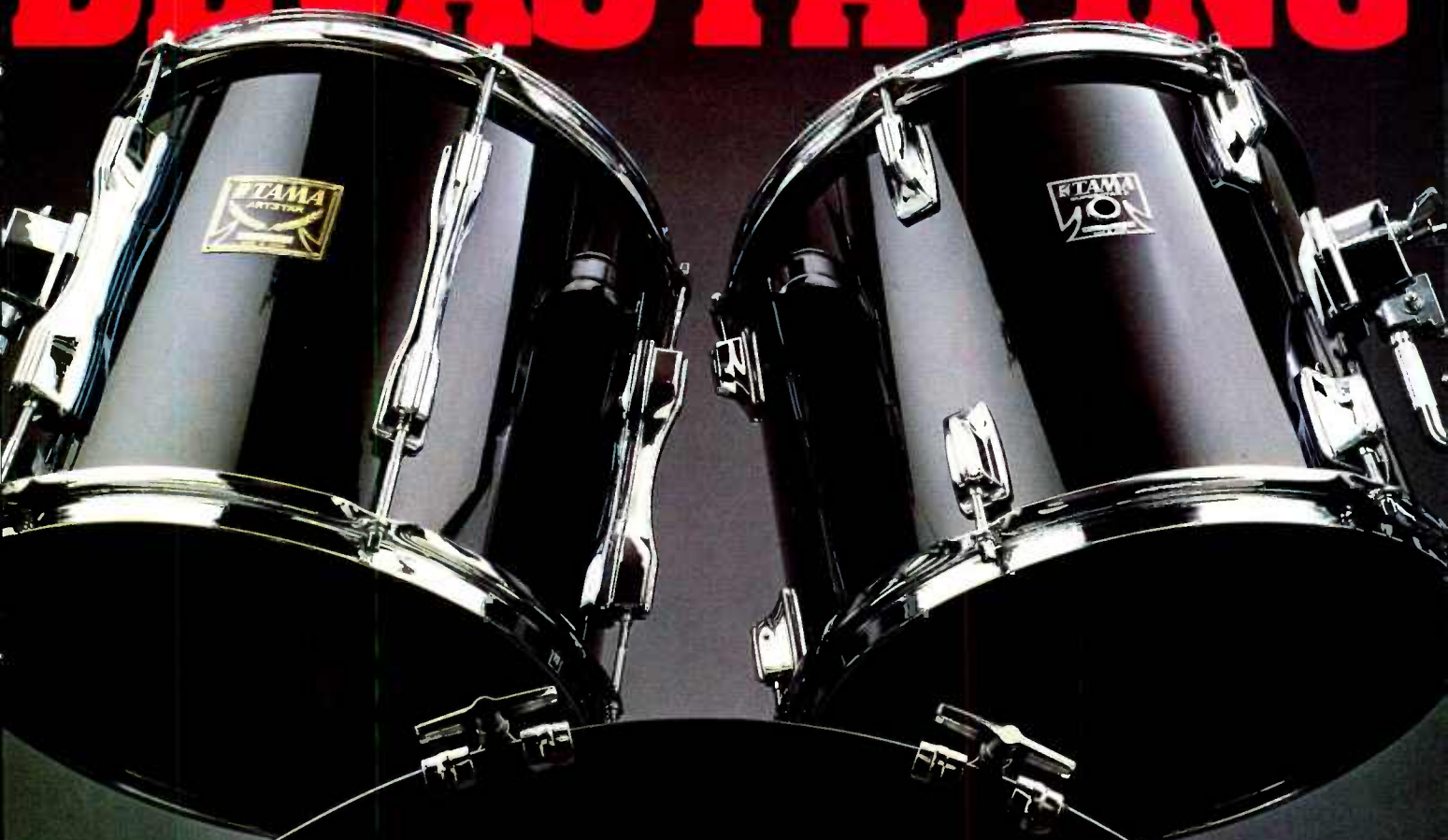
His keyboard setup includes a Yamaha CP-7 piano, run through a Boss flanger; a Yamaha YC-25D organ, through an old Roland chorus; a DX7; and a Casio VL-Tone. "And a Yamaha Portastudio, which I got in Japan. It's got a cheap burn-on of a dog barking, various sounds like that. It's quite a weird little number."

**Martin Rotsey** usually plays a stock '63 Stratocaster, although his favorite guitar is a Rickenbacker twelve-string, with a custom-built twelve-piece bridge. His acoustic is also a Washburn, and he, too, uses GHS .010s, although he adds, "We sort of change a lot, just get a box of something. We're liable to use something else the next week." Both he and Moginie use Jim Dunlop picks, "so we can swap. It's more convenient live." His amps are 100-watt Marshalls, with a single cabinet, and his effects are Boss overdrive and graphic pedals.

Onstage, **Peter Gifford** plays "a pretty old Fender Precision," which currently sports Bill Lawrence pickups, but which he plans to change to Mighty Mites. His amp is an Ampeg SVT head, which ran through four 15-inch JBL's, although, he adds, "now I've got Electro-Voices installed in two of the boxes." His strings are Rotosound Swing Bass, or GHS Light if Rotosounds aren't available. As for effects, "I usually just pick up the throw-offs from the guitar players," currently a Boss chorus and flanger, and Rat distortion. In the studio, though, he played an Ibanez Musician bass, and an Ibanez single-pickup fretless.

**Peter Garrett's** only instruments are a couple of Marine Band harmonicas, although he does allow that "occasionally, I'll pick up an Ovation six-string acoustic, and wave it around my head." Mike of choice is a Shure SM58.

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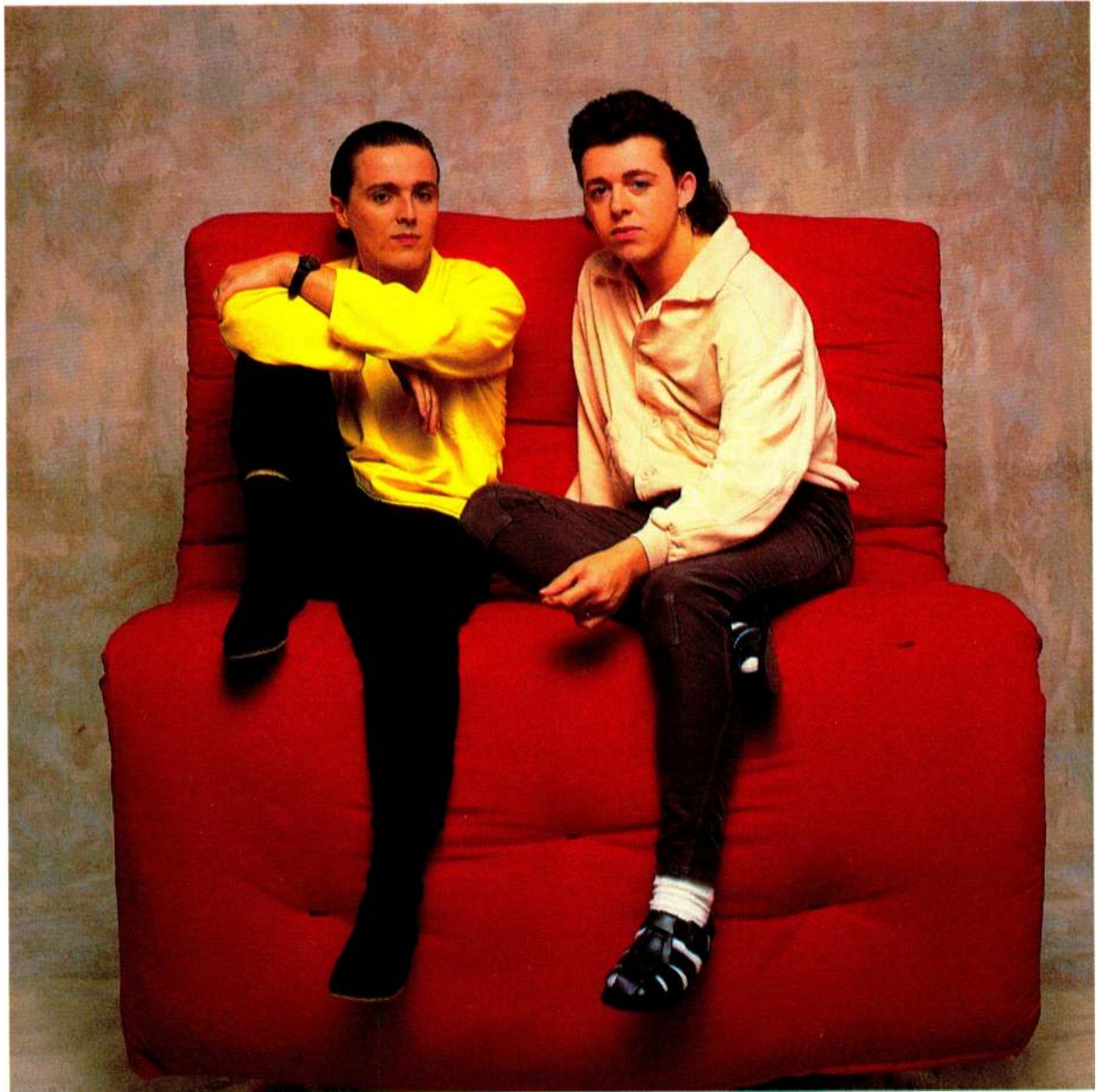


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**CURT SMITH & ROLAND ORZABAL MAINTAIN.**

**C**urt Smith and Roland Orzabal enter New York's Tower Records to the sound of shuddering glass. The teenaged mass outside, collecting since dawn, has begun pounding on the store windows, venting their emotions in a frenzy. Though Tower has virtually reinvented the in-store promo appearance over the last couple of years (up to and including mobile record racks for easy crowd control), the store's veteran employees look more than a little concerned. There are a couple of thousand kids out there, a Tower record, and unpredictability is in the air.

You can see the thoughts working behind Curt Smith's eyes: this is a very normal kind of guy. His hair is slicked back, making his nose look even more Roman—he could be Marlon Brando's illegitimate son. Smith's a cheerful competitor in the traditional English hard-drinking contest, someone who calls his wife at home twice a day, and it is beginning to really *sink in* that a big chunk of him is now somebody

else's industry, that finally clicking in America is somehow MORE, not just more of the same. Roland Orzabal, lost in a giant sweater and wearing a loud and slightly loopy grin, seems to already know that—maybe that's why he usually lets Curt work the promo/interview circuit alone. With all those girls staring soulfully into your eyes (and there is no sound like fifty teenaged girls all pouting at once), it has got to make you feel that maybe, just maybe, things are getting a little out of control. You'd have to be David Lee Roth to get off on this...and St. Ignatius not to.

Orzabal and Smith smile and wave, calming the multitudes. With the first flush of emotion spent and disaster less imminent, the real business of the in-store begins. The cash register goes ka-ching! The line starts filing by for a touch of glory and a signature of dwindling legibility as the TV screens show a loop of TFF videos out-of-sync with a loop of blaring album tracks. The scene becomes a more predictable celeb-

ration of capitalist success (complete with street vendors selling bad concert closeups from last night's Poughkeepsie show), but still, there's something very odd here, very odd indeed. Among other things...where's the rest of the band?

## **A COMPLETE (IF CONSIDERABLY COMPRESSED) HISTORY**

It's 1974 when Roland Orzabal and Curt Smith meet, two ordinary thirteen-year-old schoolkids in the English town of Bath, neither of them well-adjusted nor happy nor satisfied. Bath isn't your cosmopolitan forward-thinking metropolis; it's a little town a thousand years old, grown up and over and around Roman ruins. Roland's parents are divorced. Curt is desperate enough for attention from his that he dabbles in petty crimes like stealing cameras from his school.

Naturally, they form a band.

Roland convinces Curt to sing after hearing his friend warbling along with a Blue Oyster Cult record (even today, Curt's tastes are somewhat unusual, from Talking Heads to Alice Cooper). Their first recording together is "The Sounds Of Silence," knocked off at the top of Bath Music Centre when they are fifteen. By eighteen they are local pros, making their living off club dates. Not too long after that they form a band called Graduate, which manages to connect with PYE Records. Fame and fortune await.

And wait. The Bath Sound is not yet fated to sweep the Empire. Graduate is, in theory, a democracy. In practice this means Roland and Curt are consistently outvoted 3-to-2, even though Roland is the primary source of the band's material. After recording one record they don't like to think about, they leave the band. (Quick cut to 1985 Curt being asked to autograph a copy of the Graduate album and putting his fingers together in a cross, as if warding off a vampire.)

Enter a new actor in the drama. Ian Stanley: carpenter, self-admitted "not very good" keyboard player, escapee from London to the backwaters of Bath. Having heard that Graduate is the only happening thing in town, he joins, only to discover that they are terrible. Quickly ascertaining why, he hunts up Roland and Curt. Shortly after that he quits Graduate, and the three of them begin recording 4-track demos in Ian's home.

TFF has begun, though nobody quite knows it yet.

At the heart of Roland and Curt's new music is a fixation on the work of Arthur Janov, the psychotherapist who wrote *The Primal Scream* and advocated a direct approach to problems of emotional health: Don't duck your fears—face them directly instead, cry and scream your guts out over them until they are completely defused. Hence the band's name and Roland's darkly urgent lyrics on their first album, *The Hurting*.

But Janov can't be held completely responsible for the cold and downbeat quality of *The Hurting*. Nine months post-Graduate, a demo for "Pale Shelter" lands the group a contract with Phonogram. Manny Elias joins in to play the drums. Ross Cullum (engineer for Roxy Music and Adam & the Ants) and Chris Hughes (producer and drummer on those first A & A albums) enter as co-producers. Fame and fortune await.

And wait. The Bath Sound does better this time, garnering three top five singles in England (plus dance club attention and good reviews in the States), but the emotional and financial costs of album production are ludicrously high. *The Hurting*, videos and a followup single that goes nowhere leave them deeply in debt to their label and creatively dried up.

At Chris Hughes' suggestion they retreat to Ian Stanley's house again, dragging an Otari 24-track and Soundcraft mixing board with them. Technically it's laughable. Emotionally it's bliss. Creatively it's not so bad, either, as they gather their friends around them and experiment like crazy and cheerfully record the snare drum in the bathroom. Over the course of 1984 *Songs From The Big Chair* takes shape, and the happiness that goes into its creation becomes fully evi-

dent when it is finally mixed (in considerably fancier surroundings) at a studio in Munich. The last track recorded is "Everybody Wants To Rule The World," laid down in a mere five days ("Mothers Talk" took two months). The record company loves it.

*Songs From The Big Chair* is a significant advance over *The Hurting*: bigger and stronger in all ways, and considerably more cheerful, for all the continued intensity of its lyrical content. "Shout," the lead track, soars to the top in Europe. TFF finally climb into the black, no longer slaves to the Phonogram accountants. "Everybody Wants To Rule The World," meantime, walks in and takes over the American airwaves, leaving Roland, Curt, Ian, Manny and Chris (when he admits it) more than a little stunned. And much better off financially. And—enter the teenage girls—it makes the visible duo, Roland and Curt, stars.

Fame and fortune no longer wait. The Bath Sound (or bathroom sound, considering the snare) has arrived. And what happens next ought to be very interesting.

**MUSICIAN:** The *Hurting* was a solid and credible beginning, if not a huge success. Why take such a totally different approach for *Songs From The Big Chair*?

**CURT:** We were bored with what we were doing. We were going down the wrong roads, because we had no time to

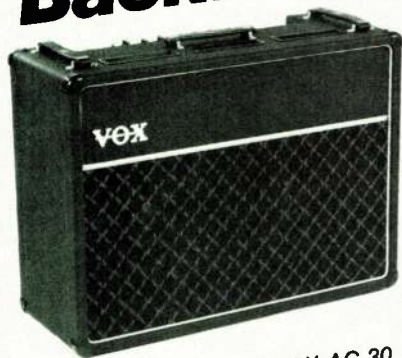
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decide what we really wanted to do. It was all blindly going into studios and spending a lot of money on recordings that weren't very good [laughs]. We didn't really have any songs, after the first album, so it was very much a job. We'd go in and try and make a record with no inspiration. Whereas when we started to work with Chris again we began to get inspired.

**MUSICIAN:** *Just like that?*

**CURT:** It took a while. Because he had to encourage us to change. And when you're as self-indulgent as we can be most of the time it's very hard to change. We're perfectionists in what we do. And sometimes we get involved to an extent where we can't be objective about it.

**MUSICIAN:** *How did your working methods change between albums?*

**ROLAND:** It's funny, but *The Hurting*, which was so electronic and sort of stiff, that was all composed on acoustic guitar. And *Songs From The Big Chair*, which is more open and uses a lot of rhythm guitar—which was a dirty word on the earlier album—that was all composed on a LinnDrum and a (Sequential Circuits) Prophet 5.

**MUSICIAN:** *Clearly you enjoyed yourselves more making *The Big Chair*...*

**IAN:** I mean, who wouldn't? It was done in a house with loads of friends around all the time, and the other was done in London, in millions of studios, and cost us 125,000 pounds.

**MUSICIAN:** *Why did the first one get out of hand like that?*

**CURT:** We didn't have any management. We didn't know any better. And we didn't have any hits under our belts, so we had no power whatsoever.

**ROLAND:** It's also the people we were working with. I blame Ross Cullum. I know he's sitting over there at the bar, but I do blame him. He can argue...very well, actually...see, Chris and Ross are very strong arguers. That's why they're survivors. Even when they're wrong, they're right. Ross made it painful to put things on the tape. He just did. There was no kind of creative flow. Everything was so guarded.

**IAN:** There was a general preciousness about the first album that you can't blame one person for. It came from everything we'd done.

**ROLAND:** It's important to never ever say no, that way. You record different things in different places, and you gain an appreciation of how different kinds of rooms affect things. You go to a normal recording studio and it has one bloody room, which does nothing. It sounds dead.

The thing about Chris is he got a bit ill doing the Wang Chung album—who wouldn't—and he wanted to get away from quality and purism and all that bullshit, and get back to making excit-

ing records, something he hadn't done since *Kings Of The Wild Frontier*. So he was really into recording at Ian's. It was a way to get away from the hectic studio life that had made him ill. He'd finish at 8 o'clock, and take Sundays off, and do things off the cuff. Spontaneous. A lot of it is down to him. And even though he doesn't create he pushed us in the right direction. You see, I personally suffer from single-mindedness and vertical thinking. So I tend to do things logically. Mathematically, almost, in the way I construct things. But Ian tends to be a lateral thinker. In fact he can't even think properly.

**IAN:** That's true NOT! If we don't know what to do, one of us will play along on guitar, bass, keyboards, whatever—and the rest of us will listen, waiting for something to happen. Then we'll argue for weeks deciding what bit was really good. The important thing is to tape everything.

**ROLAND:** Especially with me on the guitar. I'm useless. It took me hours to construct the rhythm solo in "Everybody." It was all drop-ins, every tiny bit. And I hated it while I was doing it. You never really understand what the effect is when you're doing things. I didn't understand how well the part worked until we turned up in Munich to mix it.

**IAN:** Absolutely brilliant. But the solo people love is at the end of the song. Neil Taylor did that. Say, that's not Robert Palmer, is it? [Palmer is indeed at the next table in the hotel bar.] We opened for him at a show in Rotterdam last year. It was horrible. We had no chance to soundcheck at all and it was unquestionably the worst single performance of our lives. We were billed as "special guests," but it didn't help.

**MUSICIAN:** *What do you like best about the new album?*

**IAN:** My favorite part is the opening of "The Working Hour." It's such a great contrast of things, with this brilliant saxophone played off against a MIDI'd DX7 and Prophet T8. That whole electronic versus human thing. The synth parts were sequenced on this dodgy computer program for the BBC Micro that Chris Hughes loves, and it's just obviously not something human beings can play. I love it...CHRIS HUGHES!!! [Ian has seen Chris Hughes coming into the hotel, and I experience my first and only primal scream while in TFF's company—right in my left ear. Everybody in the bar, including Robert Palmer, turns to look. They see me holding my head and Ian turning pink.]

**MUSICIAN:** *Getting back to "The Working Hour"....*

**CURT:** I like the whole bass line in it—I think we're all going to say the best bits are in that song, actually. It's pretty much our favorite on the album.

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**ROLAND:** I like the key change from the bridge to the chorus.

**IAN:** That was originally two separate songs, and where they're slammed together everything abruptly goes up a semitone. That was Roland's idea, and we argued about it with him for days.

**ROLAND:** [deadpan] Brilliant. It's absolutely brilliant. Another thing I like a lot is William Gregory's saxophone break in "I Believe."

**CURT:** I'll tell you the best note on the whole album. The very low note that William hits on his sax in "The Working Hour." That shoots up about 9 dB on the VU meter...

**ROLAND:** Then of course there's the rhythm guitar playing on "Everybody Wants To Rule The World." Brilliant.

**IAN:** You say "brilliant," but do you mean "out of the stratosphere"?

**MUSICIAN:** [to Roland, deciding to assault this flood of "brilliant" head on] You don't think you're a good guitar player?

**ROLAND:** Truth is, I don't. I don't know why, really. I just take it for granted, that I'm not good, that I could always do better than I've managed to. I've been playing guitar since the age of nine. My mum and dad used to run an entertainments agency, and we used to get guys coming around playing the guitar and singing, and I just got off on it. I developed an interest in guitar as a form of accompaniment to the voice.

**MUSICIAN:** What else influenced you? Other than Janov.

**CURT:** The Wolverhampton Wanderers. That's a football team.

**IAN:** Sex. Food. Wine. Especially sex.

**ROLAND:** Well, the lyrics...they're just feelings, on *The Hurting*. And they do stem almost totally from Janov. But yeah, other things do influence me. Paul Simon. Not Simon & Garfunkel, but Paul Simon. I nicked a lot of chords off *Still Crazy After All These Years*.

**MUSICIAN:** Doesn't sound like it.

**ROLAND:** I'm not as good at it, is why. And from the new album, let's see..."Shout" just came. I nicked a rhythm off a Talking Heads track from *Remain In Light* and programmed it into the LinnDrum, then mucked about on top of it, just changing the sounds on a Prophet 5, until I got this sound that at the top had a really sharp attack and on the bottom had an ominous bass...and the words of the chorus just came, like that, like out of the cosmos. The chorus and this mantric rhythm: I thought that was it. But we tried it that way and it sounded appalling. Then Chris came up with a different rhythm, taking elements of the old one and adding a backbeat from a Drumulator "rock" kit.

That's when Ian came up with this absolutely beautiful flutey kind of part,

but Chris kept saying we needed a verse—I kept saying we didn't. And then Ian said "Oh, these two notes work over this flutey part—and bang!, within a half an hour a melody came in.

**IAN:** The whole next week me and Chris spent saying to Roland, "Look, this is *not the right melody*. It's no good."

**ROLAND:** But the melody stuck, and it became a worldwide hit.

**CURT:** Funny how time flies.

**ROLAND:** Then there's "Everybody Wants To Rule The World." I didn't think it was right for TFF. I mean, listen to that da-dum-da-dum-da-dum rhythm. We don't do songs like that! But we were looking for a song for the end of the album, since one called "The Good And The Bad" wasn't coming together. Chris insisted we should try "Everybody" because we needed an American single and he thought the song could do well here. I said "fuck off," and he said, "Let's just try it." So for a couple of hours every day whenever we got to a low point of creativity with the album, we just sort of mucked about with it. And then the whole recording came together in a week. Everything we did was right. Or, if it wasn't right, we could come in the next day and immediately correct it. You can't argue with something like that.

But unless something hurts and is so painful to do, we don't really appreciate it. We thought it was quite funny, the massive claps, and so on. Then the record company heard it and they thought it was absolutely brilliant.

**MUSICIAN:** What do you all play?

**IAN:** Fairlight some. Prophet 5, T8, DX7 a lot. And we used sequencers a lot. People thought we used them a lot on *The Hurting*, but all we had was an old Sequential Circuits unit and we didn't even use that that much. The greatest discovery we ever made was a Lexicon 224X (digital verb).

**ROLAND:** I'm a Stratocaster man. I've got this (new Fender) guitar called the Strat. A lot more bottom end, a lot smoother...that's what I used on "The Working Hour" and the rhythm stuff for everything else. Another guitar I used on the album was a Gordon Smith. That's an English hand-made electric, like a Les Paul. Neil Taylor soloed with it in "Everybody" and "Broken."

**MUSICIAN:** You have thirty seconds left to say something fascinating.

**CURT:** [in one breath] It of when, when we could be if, and then if we did we wouldn't be we didn't, if we would.

**ROLAND:** This is the first interview that me and Ian and Curt have ever done together.

**CURT:** Probably the worst.

**IAN:** [looking at Robert Palmer one last time and no doubt thinking of Rotterdam again] I can get very expensive people to hurt you a lot for that. ☹

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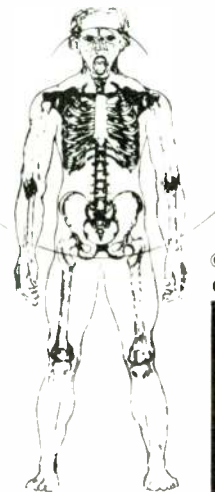
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Robert Gansert has been a performing vocalist for over twenty years, and has been featured in numerous concerts and recordings. His work has been internationally acclaimed. He is currently a noted instructor at the Carnegie Hall studios.

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## TALKING HEADS

*Little Creatures*  
(Sire)[CD]

**D**avid Byrne was describing the new Talking Heads album as a return to "traditional song form" after his band's expedition to African musical territory. But *Speaking In Tongues* made only superficial efforts to get off the good foot. Okay, back to the drafting table. Two years, a concert film and a few more solo projects later, *Little Creatures* kicks off with a shouted "hey," seesawing chord changes, clearly demarcated verses and chorus—even a bridge in the relative minor! It's trad, dad!

It's also the Talking Heads variety show, with something for everyone: a loping, deceptively breezy "country" tune, "Creatures Of Love"; the Stax/Volt-like roll on "Perfect World"; funky syncopation on "Walk It Down" and "Television Man"; even plain-tune vocal harmonies introducing the military anapest of "Road To Nowhere." Previously the group's albums tended to explore a rhythmic mode in depth. Here they sample a little each of more.



NEIL SELKIRK

Would it be coarse to notice that the Heads' all-American menu coincides with a flag-waving revival? That folk artist Rev. Howard Finster, who painted the revelational album cover, did the same for R.E.M. last year? Yes, it probably would be. Talking Heads is not known for going with the flow or jumping on trends.

Byrne's lyrics, however, do seem self-consciously populist. His singing persona makes the boldest bid yet for acceptance with "Creatures Of Love," a naive view of affection and sex. On other songs Byrne's neurotic protagonist, while still self-centered, is more accessible than usual: as a W.C. Fieldsian misopedist on "Stay Up Late," or a media-blitzed "Television Man." He treats prototypical (i.e. abstract/behavioral) subjects with more concrete imagery than in the past: the levitating woman in "And She Was," the descending/disappearing woman in "The Lady

Don't Mind." (Get the feeling this guy can't connect?)

The music does its stuff with reassuring harmonies and well-defined strophes—and Byrne adds comic relief with soul-man interjections like "got-ta, got-ta," "watch me now!" and a quote from "Ain't Too Proud To Beg." After we've become accustomed to the "expanded" Heads, the stripped-down band on *Little Creatures* sounds lean and efficient. There's outside help, notably percussionist Steve Scales, but no redundant efforts.

A classic? Ask again in ten years. For now, though, we can enjoy the dreamy chorus and Byrne's McCartneyesque melisma on "Perfect World," the double entendre on "Stay Up Late," and the momentum and plausible oxymoron of "Road To Nowhere." The lyrics may even be a red herring. It sure is a pleasure to hear Talking Heads modulate again. — **Scott Isler**



## JEFF BECK

*Flash*  
(Epic)[CD]

What is cool? For guitar hero Jeff Beck, it's being brilliant only when you damn well please. Arguably the baddest axeman alive, he didn't achieve that exalted status by working overtime. Beck has made no secret of the fact that he'd as soon clean a carburetor as play a solo (see the interview in May's *Musician*); indeed, his last record came out half a decade ago. Nevertheless, on the aptly-named *Flash* the man remains an awesome original, capable of making a guitar squawk like nobody else can.

Cool is also being great in spite of your surroundings, which is another way of saying that nearly every non-Beck facet of *Flash* fizzles. Unlike his 70s fusion albums, this one features a wide variety of styles, not to mention five different producer credits—from elegant Muzak to smooth soul to blustery rock (not rock 'n' roll). Although Beck infuses "Gets Us All In The End" with a howling tempest of inspired noise, singer Jimmy Hall and producer Arthur Baker do their best to make the whole thing sound like Survivor or Jefferson Starship. Ghastly! Likewise for the Nile Rodgers-produced "Stop, Look And Listen," melodramatic claptrap that JB salvages with a savage closing outburst. On a different dire note, "Escape," a portentous instrumental written by and featuring former bandmate Jan Hammer, shows why the synth-whiz excels at scoring *Miami Vice*: It's pure background music.

Speaking of alumni, none other than "sexy" Rod Stewart pops in to warble "People Get Ready," which will gladden those who remember his late-60s collaborations with Beck. The guitarist deftly underplays, but Stewart dispatches the lyrics clumsily like the hack he's become. Oddly, Beck himself sings the two best-realized tracks: "Night After Night" and "Get Workin'" are jaunty, light-funk pieces reminiscent of Chic (composed by Rodgers, naturally), no less engaging for Beck's mod-

est pipes.

So he's done it again—made a so-so album chock-full of monster guitar. Anyone with a bent for conspiracy theories might conjecture that Beck encourages mediocrity in others just to make himself look better. But it's unlikely. He's probably too cool to go to that much trouble. — **Jon Young**



## STING

*The Dream Of The Blue Turtles*  
(A&M)[CD]

A good album that disappoints keenly on first hearing and gets better with repeated listening. Still, the temptation to Monday-morning-quarterback it lingers. If only you could go back to the master tape, remix it so that Branford Marsalis, Kenny Kirkland and Darryl Jones could be heard clearly, get rid of all that swollen reverb, remaster and press it decently—not even Sting's prominent voice is particularly well rendered—half the album's problems would be solved. The other half wouldn't matter much. Sting remains about the finest Abkhazian—excuse me: *Caucasian*—songsmith in pop, and its most compelling melodist. That carries weight.

All the songwriting, with the exception of a clunker called "Consider Me Gone," is of a high order—though the album's first single, "If You Love Somebody," doesn't seem to have needed Sting to write it. "Children's Crusade" arrives just in time to tell us World War I was bad—as with all the political songs on the album, the sentiments are unexceptionable but hardly startling. Marsalis' burial in the mix here is most puzzling. Live, the saxophonist's stirring, martial fills and eloquent solos were a perfect antipodal voice to Sting's, but on record he's barely audible; you begin to wonder, if you haven't already, what happened to the details that lit up Police albums.

"We Work The Black Seam" is a coal-mining song with a burrowing keyboard figure that persists despite the melody's attempt to tug it into modulation. "Fortress Around Your Heart" towers over

everything else on the album. An undertow of harmonic contradiction tugs at its flawless surface; Sting's voice in its exquisite cage of chords stretches for a freedom it can envision but not wholly attain. The A section moves in finely subtilized half-steps. The lyric, free of the generalizations that typify the rest of the album, works as metaphors ought to: organically and as instruments of evolving self-knowledge and vision. The chorus provides a stunning release. The aura of progression, of attainment, makes the rest of the album seem written in a reflective hiatus.

Good as "Fortress" is, the band is still used unadventurously. For example, Marsalis only tootles over the fade, which he could do in his sleep and eventually will if this is all he's given to play; a solo on the lovely changes might have proven interesting. You're left wondering why hire these particular musicians if they're going to be heard so incompletely; why (aside from the industry's assbackward insistence that a tour should only promote an album) rush into the studio so quickly; and what Sting has up his conceptual sleeve for this group's future. — **Rafi Zabor**



## FRANK LOWE

*Decision In Paradise*  
(Soul Note)

## OLIVER LAKE

*Expandable Language*  
(Black Saint)

Kids these days: no respect. Listen to bassist Charnette Moffett bounce riffs off of revered elder Don Cherry's forehead on "Cherryco," from Frank Lowe's *Decision In Paradise*. Or listen to guitarist Kevin Eubanks do his take on John McLaughlin on "Comous," from Oliver Lake's *Expandable Language*. And on both records, young pianist Geri Allen, unintimidated by her fast-lane company, serenely cruises through a variety of contexts, keeping her personality and invention intact.

*Decision* is filled with pungent writing by Lowe, plus a tune apiece by Don



Cherry, Grachan Moncur III and Butch Morris. Lowe's proved he's a good writer before, but tunes like "Decision," with its blues ominousness, "Lowe-ologie," with its R&B insistence, and "Dues And Don'ts," with its rhythmic change-ups, show just how good a hook writer he is as well: These are tough tunes to forget. Everyone puts in good solos. On "Dues," Lowe slowly tears apart the melody during his improvisation. On Moncur's wistful and resigned "You Dig!" Allen is percussive and oblique at one moment, fleet-fingered the next, while Moncur blasts a powerful, rhythmic hard-bop solo. And everywhere is Charnette, pushing and pulling rhythms around, lifting the music off the ground.

Where *Decision* is friendly and consistent, Lake's *Expandable Language* moves from the astringent "Everybody Knows That," an AACM-type duet between Geri Allen and Lake, to "N.S.," a sunny, straight-ahead tune he navigates on flute. "Expandable Language" and "Page Four," typical Lake compositions in that their long and sinewy melodies wind around and around above a swinging rhythm section, both reach thunderous, dense climaxes during three-way dialogues between Eubanks, Allen and Lake. As on *Decision*, Geri Allen tails all the soloists, comping aggressively. But Lake's the standout, piercing through the group textures with furious swirls of sound.

Both Lowe and Lake work hard at combining 60s expressionism with the rest of jazz history, and both have come up with a whole new hard-swinging thing. The young musicians here are irreverent and searching. These grooves are loaded with optimism.

**Peter Watrous**



## ARETHA FRANKLIN

*Who's Zoomin' Who?*  
(Arista)

**A**retha Franklin has never made a bad record. When her records lacked the fire that ignited her greatest singles, that voice has been enough to keep almost any tune from falling flat. But it's been far

too long since her last *great* record, despite the chart success of her work with Luther Vandross. Part of the reason is that as producer after producer tries to invent the "new" Aretha Franklin, no one quite remembers what made the old one tick.

"Freeway Of Love," which opens this album, brings back the old 'Retha with a vengeance. With a backing track that simply drips memories, from the Motownish back-beat wallop to Clarence Clemons' update of King Curtis, all it takes is for Franklin to cut loose with one of her gospel-tinged melismas, and your memory leaps back to the likes of "Think" or "Chain Of Fools." This is no ersatz oldie, though; producer Narada Michael Walden works each echo of 60s soul in such a thoroughly electronic 80s groove that it's hard to figure out which decade begins where.

Rather than worry about remaking that Muscle Shoals or Memphis sound, Walden builds the rest of his tracks around a different trick from that classic period: Taking current hits and Franklinizing them. Walden doesn't waste time on cover versions; he *models* tunes on other hits. Consequently, the reggae-flavored "Ain't Nobody Ever Loved You" shows what Donna Summer's "Unconditional Love" should have been. "Push," a baroque electro-funk duet with Peter Wolf, sounds like supercharged Shannon. "Sisters Are Doin' It For Themselves," a duet with Eurythmic Annie Lennox, comes across as overly mannered, but that's a minor complaint. On the whole, *Who's Zoomin' Who?* sounds like proof that soul never left; it just got lost on its way through the 70s.

— J.D. Considine



## THE STYLE COUNCIL

*Internationalists*  
(Geffen)

**L**eadng the Jam, Paul Weller was usually eloquent about the ineloquence of youth. Now he's an adult, and he's learned all about monetarism (it's bad) and socialism (it's preferable). So on the Style Council's second album, Weller decides to tell us exactly what is wrong

with England, and the world as well. The string of insufferable slogans that constitute *Internationalists* proves the singer's earnestness, but they also blur together in a one-dimensional, self-important roar.

Weller fills the lyric sheet with sophomoreic declarations that wouldn't even make good graffiti: "The rich enjoy less tax"; "what you reap they sow"; "the class war's real and not mythologized." On it goes, like hurried notes from an introductory course in Marxism. Weller bravely declares support for redistributed wealth, honesty and unity (both world and regional), and against repression, ethnic jokes and wealth. I'm sympathetic, but I'm also suspicious of anyone who reduces complex problems to simple slogans, then claims that parroted mottos equal revolution.

Weller and keysman Mick Talbot are still mining Memphis soul and cabaret Eurojazz; "Boy Who Cried Wolf" even includes an absurd George Benson imitation. But in their eagerness to proclaim, the Council neglects to construct anything as magical as "Long Hot Summer" or "You're The Best Thing." "Homebreakers," for example, is about a family that is forced to split up to look for work. Weller is very upset about this, and swears revenge on "whoever devised this economy plan." Los Lobos' "A Matter Of Time" confronts the same problem with quiet dignity and understated emotional strength, rather than vague finger-pointing, and hits deeper as a result. Good political rock—it does exist—offers several levels of social and political dimensions. But Weller emphasizes concern at the expense of depth. — Rob Tannenbaum



## GROUP GAPURA

*Sangkala*  
(Icon)

**I**ndonesia in the 80s is still a land where rice fields are watered according to the wishes of the gods. And traditional *gamelan* music vies for airplay alongside *pop Indonesia*, a rock-infested hybrid particularly favored by the post-Sukarno military regime. One strain, less frantic than

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The *degung* ensemble includes a thin, reedy flute (*suling*) improvising over a hand-beaten drum, plus five varieties of gongs, chimes and metallophones. The *degung* itself is a series of small suspended gongs intoning a fixed pentatonic melody; the others play submelodies, maintain pulse and punctuate phrases in a rhythmic cycle of pongs, dings and dong. Spry walking tempos and unpretentious little tunes evoke a pastoral itinerancy. The emotions here are mere wisps of sentiment, yet pleasantly haunting. Undercutting the naiveté is an almost tangible sadness; Sundanese musicians are said to be often overcome by melancholy after playing.

Depending on your state of mind, *Sangkala* can lull you to sleep or gently wake you up. For those looking for mellow with a touch of the magical, it's a charming stop on the way to Shambalah. (New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.)

— Pamela Bloom



## BILL NELSON

*Trial By Intimacy*  
(The Book Of Splendours)  
(Cocteau Connoisseur)

Bill Nelson—visionary modern musician, producer and all-around renaissance man—has provided the world with copious, perhaps excessive, amounts of music, artwork and writing in a ceaseless quest for self-expression. The ambitious *Trial By Intimacy* is a boxed set (on his own label) of four conceptually arranged albums of previously unreleased instrumentals, each in its own Nelson-designed sleeve. There's also a slick book of photographs (*The Arcane Eye*) and a set of postcards. Nelson's shameless pretensions and limitless self-indulgence in the name of art may be too much for some, and certainly open him to charges of arrogance and rampant egotism. But his unshakable integrity, charm and taste somehow make even this behemoth effort an acceptable auto-erected monument.

As Nelson acknowledges, eight sides of music that defies humming and toe-tapping present quite a challenge. But *Trial By Intimacy* offers significant rewards, whether sampled casually or consumed *in toto*. Whether the editing and organization makes any collective sense or not, the eighty-three selections—all strictly solo endeavors, recorded in his home studio over the past several years—are uniformly excellent in a variety of styles from Orientalia to guitar exercises to electro-rock to found-voice pop art.

A thumbnail menu: *The Summer Of God's Piano* and *A Catalogue Of Obsessions* collect numerous and varied audio sketches with no obvious connections. *Chamber Of Dreams (Music From The Invisibility Exhibition)* contains backing tracks for improvisations as well as "interval" music, both used at a multi-media presentation Nelson organized and took on tour in 1981 and 1983. *Pavilions Of The Heart And Soul* is "dedicated to the charms of sacred and profane love"—his own *Boleros*.

This is not the most compelling record you'll play all year. It is, however,

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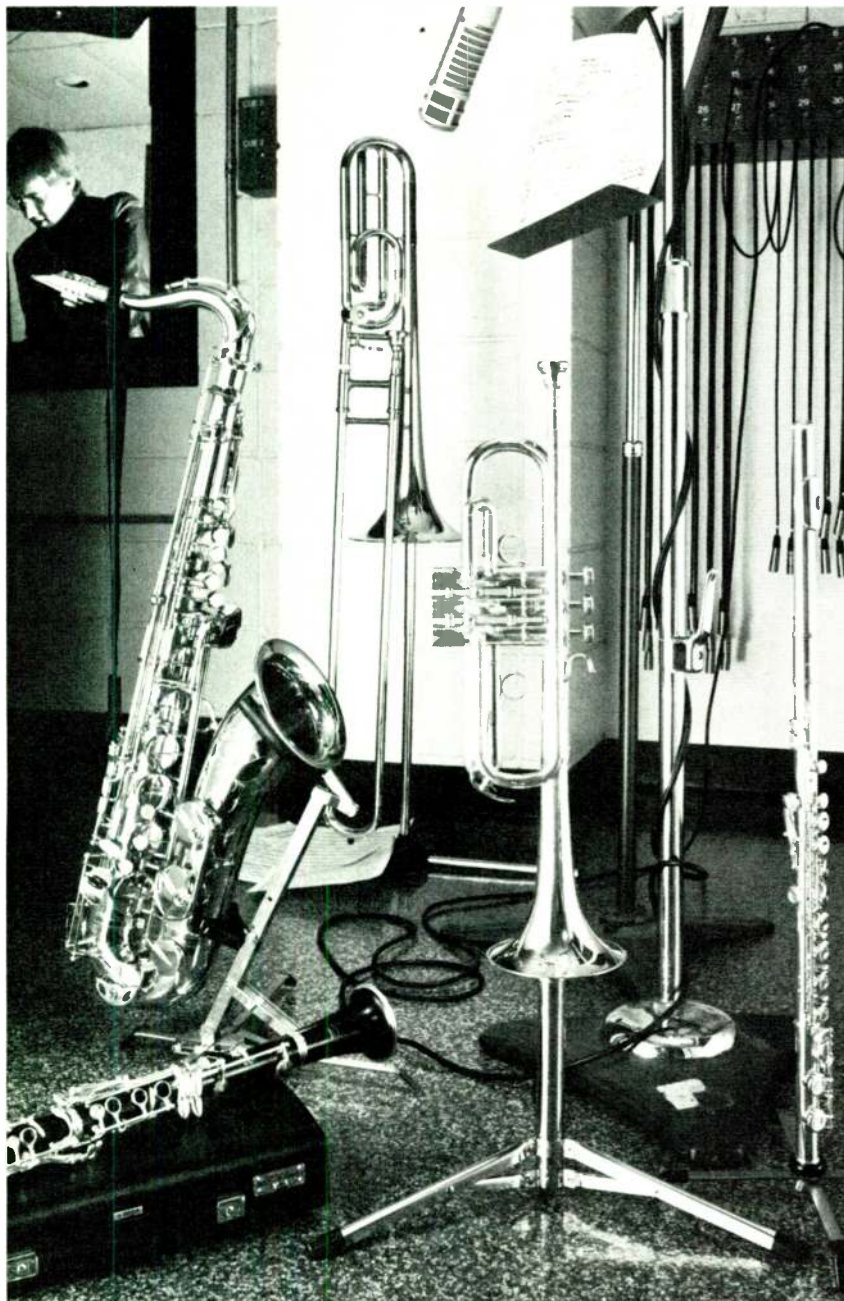
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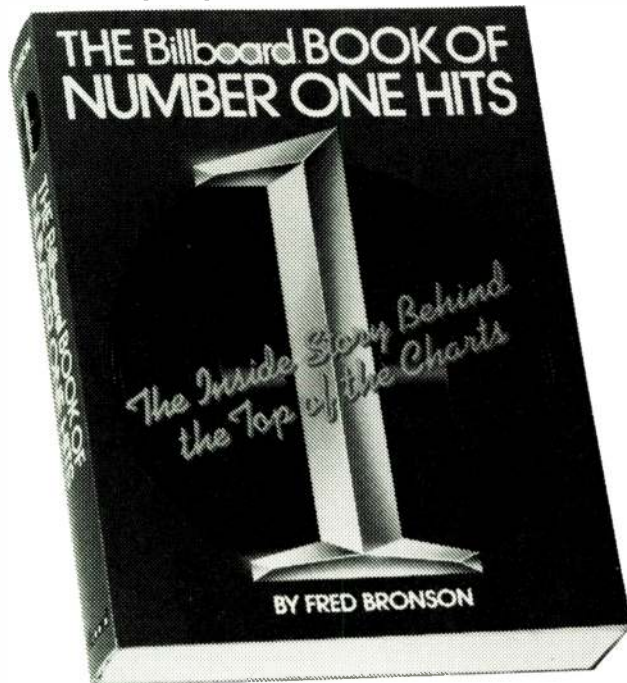
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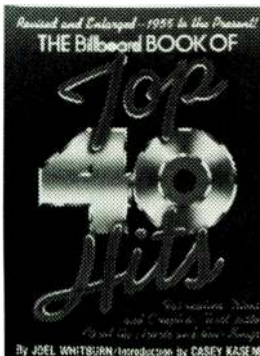
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## BOBBY WOMACK

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*Radio M.U.S.C. Man*  
 (Elektra)

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Listen to the way Bobby Womack transforms "Someday We'll All Be Free" from a sanctimonious sermonette into an impassioned prayer, and you'll have a sense of just how this brand of soul operates, for rather than playing to the pieties of the lyric with well-worn vocalisms, Womack immerses himself in the idea behind the words, and pulls out the song's spirit. Clearly this stems from his gospel upbringing, but he secularizes it without making it less sanctified.

Cecil and Linda Womack don't take such a churchy approach on their album, which makes sense, because *Radio M.U.S.C. Man* deals with the problems of the flesh. The bulk of the songs here concern the temptations that conspire against married life, a standard soul music subject but one which their vocal characterizations make particularly vivid. Cecil and Linda's protagonists sound like real people, not just the subjects of some well-rhymed situation, and that makes the likes of "Maze," "Eyes" and "Romeo & Juliet (Where Are You?)" as captivating as well-written novels, and more danceable by far. — **J.D. Considine**

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J.D. Considine

**Rosanne Cash***Rhythm & Romance* (Columbia)

In which Cash is given the SoCal country pop treatment—lots of artificial sweetener poured over the ballads, gobs of carefully equalized power guitar on the rockers, and thick harmony vocals throughout. But Cash rises above the recipe, in part because of the restraint shown by the producers (especially the team of Rodney Crowell and David Thoener), and in part through her formula-free songwriting. Mostly though, it's the passion Cash invests in every melody, for few singers are as completely credible as she is here. Hearing is believing, in the truest sense.

**Scritti Politti***Cupid & Psyche 85* (Warner Bros.)

Imagine Scritti Politti as an intellectual's Culture Club, and you'll have a sense of the group's pop promise as well as its problems. The sound is sophisticated and slick—as well it might be, given the calibre of N.Y.C. sidemen the Polittis employ—and the songs wear their upscale funk arrangements as casually as an Armani sweater. True, singer Green Gartside is impossibly fey at times, making Boy George sound as earthy as Otis Redding, but it doesn't stop "Wood Beez (Pray Like Aretha Franklin)" from being utterly irresistible.

**Cock Robin***Cock Robin* (Columbia)

Everything you ever hated about Foreigner, Quarterflash and Laura Branigan in one easily disposable package.

**AC/DC***Fly On The Wall* (Atlantic)

It figures. Just when you figured they could finally be written off as totally irrelevant, AC/DC go and release their

strongest album ever. You want crunch? They've got it, and then some, as the brothers Young churn out more power riffs in the space of ten songs than most bands do in a career. More to the point, though, every one of those riffs is tied to a hook strong enough to leave your brain buzzing for days, the way the band's best singles always have. Who said heavy metal was dead?

**Robyn Hitchcock & the Egyptians***Fegmania* (Slash)

Between his hypnotic rhythm guitar figures and often aharmonic melodies, Hitchcock seems to dance daringly along the border between pop convention and artistic pretension. Put in the context of songs as otherworldly as "My Wife & My Dead Wife" or "The Man With The Lightbulb Head," though, this former Soft Boy makes a very strange kind of sense. Dangerously addictive.

**Plan 9***I've Just Killed A Man, I Don't Want To See Any Meat* (Midnight)

Thanks to a real genius for deadpan gothic excess, this garage rock grunge-a-rama is the answer to any fuzz-guitar freak's prayers. With songs evoking the cool disdain of vintage Velvets and guitar interplay that smacks of the Yardbirds in their heyday, Plan 9 has all the right resonances. But this live album adds enough power to that formula to make the music leap out of the speakers, lunge across the floor and grab you by the throat. Not for the timid. (Box 390, Old Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10011)

**The System***The Pleasure Seekers* (Mirage)

As David Frank's synth-funk sensitivity becomes more and more marketable, the System's instrumental sound can be heard all over (for example, as the backbone to Scritti Politti's "Wood Beez"). What makes this album distinctive, aside from the superb balance the material maintains between balladry and funkativity, is Mic Murphy's voice, which manages to one-up Robert Palmer, Michael McDonald and Frankie Beverly.

**Van Morrison***Live At The Grand Opera House Belfast* (Mercury)

You couldn't ask for an easier way into Morrison's recent work, for these performances—mystically allusive, sensually entrancing, vocally rapturous—are

strong enough to convert even the most skeptical. It isn't simply that Morrison himself is supremely focused throughout; the band plays with the sort of unity that implies telepathy, while the background singers literally drench the music in soulful harmony.

**Dead Or Alive***Youthquake* (Epic)

"You Spin Me 'Round (Like A Record)" is as good as post-disco pop gets, from its vividly inane lyrics to its relentlessly propulsive beat. But the rest of this album is pure cartoon, form without any sense of content or context. Stick with the single.

**Original Soundtrack***The Goonies* (Epic)

It's not a good sign for superstars when the Bangles' "I Got Nothing" soundly trounces not one but two Cyndi Lauper numbers, and when the anonymous Goon Squad (a.k.a. Arthur Baker and studio pals) walks all over Philip Bailey, Teena Marie and Luther Vandross. And without special effects, either.

**The Stanley Clarke Band***Find Out!* (Epic)

Turning "Born In The USA" into a rap number is an unexpected masterstroke, making this Clarke's most listenable effort in eons. Too bad it's more the exception than the rule.

**Golden Oldies:** For the record buying public, drawing a bead on those early sounds often meant a futile rummage through countless collections and scratched singles. Which is why *Rock & Roll: The Early Days* (RCA), Gregg Geller's spectacularly remastered anthology of seminal hits, is a godsend. From such expected fare as Elvis' "That's All Right" and Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti" to relative rarities like Wynonie Harris' "Good Rockin' Tonight" and Big Mama Thornton's "Hound Dog," you couldn't ask for a better short course in rock history. On a slightly larger scale, *Jerry Lee Lewis Milestones*, available from Rhino (1201 Olympic Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90404) handily compiles not only the best Sun stuff, but also the important hits from the Killer's Smash/Mercury period. Finally, *Just Me And My Guitar*, a gold mine of Hank Williams demos released by the Country Music Foundation (4 Music Sq. East, Nashville TN 37203), is both illuminating and enjoyable as it exposes his creative process.

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### Wham! The Video (CBS/Fox)

Yeah, I know: They're icky and plastic and oh so derivative and all that. No argument. But there is a subtext here for pop pundits and media mavens to sink their teeth into if they so desire. This chronological clip compilation goes back to the days of Wham UK! when George Michael had black hair and Tim Pope directed spunky, inventive and repeatable clips like "Young Guns" and "Bad Boys." With the hopelessly naive literalness of "Club Tropicana" they make their move for jet-set allure (George and Andy are vacationing pilots, y'see), and with "Wake Me Up Before You're Ga Ga" they, er, Make It Big. And after umpteen million plays, Andy Morahan's brilliantly staged and shot performance video still fairly leaps off the screen (although I still say Michael looks less man than mannequin). The real pay-off is the closer, "Everything She Wants": A wounded-looking Michael sullenly mouths the bitter you-hurt-me lyric, supered over shots of screaming teeny audiences and flying dollars. One can't help but think Wham! resents success and their audience. Wha'd they expect? The real question is, do pop pundits and media mavens care to wade through all the icky derivative plastic to chew on this meat by-product?

### Bette Midler: Art Or Bust (Vestron)

Between the Divine One's presence and relentless effervescence, the spot-the-20th-century-art-master references in the staging, and the heavy post-production that often turns Midler into a live painting herself, you never once forget the punny theme of the title. Some vintage footage of Midler at the Continental Baths, where she got her start, and

being outrageous on a 1973 United Jewish Appeal telethon makes clear that *Art Or Bust* ain't yer usual concert/documentary/whatever. It's mostly marvy, and Bette freaks won't mind that it seems to go on and on and on.

### The Jazz Life: Chico Hamilton (Sony Video LP)

Little jazz, and not much life here either. Hamilton may be an accomplished drummer, and he seems like a nice enough guy. But this music is nothing more than a mellifluous, two-guitar take on dentist's-office Muzak. The visuals are standard, static shots of Hamilton and band tranquilizing a complacent Village Vanguard crowd. One point of interest: Hamilton sets up his ride cymbal *real* low so he has to *lean* into the neo-bop beat. Recommended only as a video sleeping pill.

### Randy Newman At The Odeon (RCA/Columbia MusicVision)

Newman is hardly the world's most riveting live performer, but at least he seems to know so and freely admits it in his self-mocking between-songs banter. Then again, "Sail Away," "My Life Is Good" and "That's Why I Love Mankind" are...well, fairly riveting songs. Ry Cooder joins in for a few tunes, as does Linda Ronstadt; her turn on "Real Emotional Girl" is fittingly the most disarmingly candid and emotion-charged performance I've ever seen or heard her deliver. That revelation aside, this tape is Randy Newman, straight up—a solid, unadorned portrait of a gifted and unique artist.

### The Jam: Video Snap! (Music Media)

This historical compilation rises above the norm for such programs in capturing the band's relentless energy, and in its surprisingly high production values. *Video Snap!* could make people who'd never really cared much about the Jam realize their mistake. Taken with the fiery concert tape *Trans-Global Unity Express*, the Jam is well represented in the home video market.

### Jazz At The Smithsonian: Red Norvo (Sony Video LP)

The great Norvo had long since traded in his xylophone for the more mundane vibraphone by the time he taped this 1982 concert, but his musical genius shines through as brightly as the twinkle in his eye. His interaction with nonpareil

guitarist Tal Farlow is especially rewarding on "Cheek To Cheek" and "Fascinating Rhythm." Singer Mavis Rivers, pianist Norman Simmons, bassist Ron Novosel and drummer Mike Shepard are also on board for a most enjoyable ride. Norvo's conversations with host Willis (*Voice Of America*) Conover reveal a personality that's winningly genteel—just like his music.

### Personal Property (Sony Video EP)

This compilation comes on at first like Sony's earlier *Danspak*, i.e. with a cheap video-art look. But the directors are various, and the overall quality, unlike the pretty swell *Danspak*, extremely erratic. George Kranz's invigorating verbal/percussive assault "Din Daa Daa" is funky and fun and shot straightforwardly. Psychodrama's "I'm Not Your Doormat" sets up the male singer, who whines misogynistic bluster over wheezy synth-pop, for a trap-door fall. Tarracco's "Sultana" is full of sounds and images of high-speed travel and clattering percussion. That's the good stuff. Malibu, Boytronic and the Flirts are insultingly awful. Alternative video club programming? Maybe.

Premier remixer John "Jellybean" Benitez goes back to his roots for an upcoming instructional home video called *How To Be A DJ*, directed by Andy Warhol (?). Distribution being lined up now. More jazz and fusion video on the way: CBS/Fox's *Prime Cuts: Jazz And Beyond* (clip compilation of various artists, featuring Miles Davis' delightful "Decoy" video); MCA Home Video's *Crusaders Live: Midnight Triangle*; and Sony's tapes of **Chick Corea**, **Art Farmer**, **Bob Wilber**, **Mike Mainieri** and **Mel Lewis**...An **Elton John** concert video, *Night And Day*, due soon from Vestron...A half-hour version of the sixty-minute "We Are The World" documentary from RCA/Columbia MusicVision...CBS/Fox enters Sony's "Video 45" territory with the four-cut **Sade**: *Diamond Life Video*...D.A. Pennebaker's classic **Dylan** docu *Don't Look Back* due on home video by the end of the year...**The Cars**: *1984-85 Live* in August from Vestron, with a highly-produced concert shoot said to look like "a psychedelic roadside carnival." Like, far out...Hour-long **The Fixx**: *Live In The USA* due in August from MCA...**Stewart Copeland's Afro-percussive** documentary *The Rhythmist* due soon from A&M/RCA/Columbia Music-Vision.

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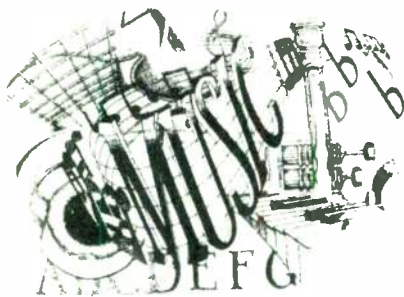
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**Cage/Eno** from page 72

connection and that it didn't make it. And then we speak of being in the right place at the right time.

**ENO:** [laughs] As if you could ever be anywhere else.

**MUSICIAN:** *It's difficult to listen to experimental music without placing it in a traditional frame of reference. Maybe that's why people still have the reaction that you both had years ago—"Oh, I could do that."*

**ENO:** [laughs] It's funny that more people don't think that. But actually I constantly evaluate things, I must say. I don't think I'm past evaluating at all. I was talking to somebody about this last night, that one thing I find continually interesting is to find out where I am by what I do. So I look at the things I've done as if somebody else did them, as if they're separate things that now exist in the world. And then I see that they stand in relationship to other things. And it's always extremely interesting to me to see what they're close to. I mentioned the Ray Conniff Singers, as a matter of fact. But it's also not very far from Steve Reich. So I keep looking at myself as seen through that particular thing or this particular thing. And I find myself standing in lots of strange places.

**MUSICIAN:** *Aside from specific techniques, the most obvious thing you two share is a continuous personal joy in making music. After all these years, can you still get that sense of mystery that we started talking about?*

**ENO:** [to Cage] You first.

**CAGE:** I think it's not all joy. It's something more like an unpredictable gift.

**ENO:** It's a practice of some kind. And I think one thing we have in common is we're both interested in what procedures we're going through, that is the day-to-day nature of our lives, as in coming up with a wonderful new piece, a new rhythm. If you're doing that, it quite frequently happens that you're just treading water for quite a long time. Nothing really dramatic seems to be happening. It's not terribly miserable. It is occasionally for me, but not very often. And then suddenly everything seems to lock together in a different way. It's like a crystallization point where you can't detect any single element having changed, but suddenly things have locked. There's a proverb that says that the fruit takes a long time to ripen, but it falls suddenly.

**CAGE:** That's beautiful.

**ENO:** And that seems to be the process.

**CAGE:** So that you can't speak of it being continually good. [pause] But there's no other life.

**ENO:** Yeah. That says it all. ☐

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**Midnight Oil** from page 84

primary votes. And that's actually what happened: In a quirk of cynicism, the Australian Labor Party gave its preferences to its traditional enemies, the Liberals, and, having done that, that completely swamped Pete's chances."

It's a hard reality, but strangely typical of the view Midnight Oil takes of Australian politics and history. The only trick for American listeners is understanding the key to these issues. Take, for instance, "Jimmy Sharman's Boxers," off *Red Sails In The Sunset*. Over here, it just seems a saga of hell on the boxing circuit, where drunkenness and physical abuse are the voluntary limits of the participants' universe. But when you understand who Sharman's boxers were, the song takes on an entirely new aspect. "Jimmy Sharman was a boxing troupe entrepreneur during most of this century," explains Hirst, "and he had a traveling show, half of which was made up of aboriginal boxers, who were drawn from the Outback of Australia, northern Queensland and places. And as with the mobility of blacks in America, whose only way up was music or sport, these aboriginals would join up with boxing as a way out of poverty, and they'd get to travel. But he's a rather controversial character now, owing to the conditions which he ran those tents."

Of course, America, not having aborigines, should find such songs meaningless. Or should they? Consider the issue of aboriginal land rights. "Kosciusko," also from *Red Sails*, "is about mining rights versus aboriginal rights, which is a big issue here," Hirst says. In the U.S., the same issue is being addressed in the courts through Indian land rights cases, with similar exploitative deals and legal double-crosses in pursuit of natural resources. So who says Americans can't understand what Midnight Oil is on about?

Of course, there's one song on the new album any American can comprehend, with footnotes. Called "Harrisburg," it's as chilling a depiction of the Three Mile Island debacle as you're likely to hear. "The words for that were actually taken from a poem by an Australian poet called David Gibbons," says Moginie, who wrote the music. "It's a very long poem, as he wrote it; we just took a few of the lines, with his permission, and more or less constructed a song around it. It was very simply, very succinctly put, instead of propagandizing. That's what attracted us to it in the first place."

Does it seem odd that TMI should be a major issue Down Under, far away from any potential fallout? "I think we're fascinated that it isn't a major issue in America," Garrett counters. "It's a major

issue everywhere in the world, Australia no different than anywhere else. All that's happened in the United States is that the nuclear weapons question is always intrinsically linked to ideologies and national pride, that sort of stuff. The nuclear issue's been covered up, really. But I think in Australia we have a sense that we don't have to inherit all the incredible problems that America and Europe have, and that we can make some stand for ourselves, and for the Pacific area."

Is "Harrisburg," then, more of a message to the world?

"It's the American single, mate," laughs Garrett. ☐

**Video Pay for Play** from pg. 12  
tape recording equipment."

"You either respect the artist or you don't," Benjamin says. He views charging for clips as a "pro-artist, pro-creative community move on the part of the record companies."

"If you're getting something for nothing," Altshuler says, "there's bound to be a reaction when you're told you have to pay. We made the right decision." He adds that "the situation will look very different a few weeks from now."

If music videos are, as Altshuler claims, "programming content" and not promotion pieces—and given what he says are "the significant costs involved in producing these videos"—the question naturally arises why CBS didn't charge for them in the first place.

"We probably should have," Altshuler admits. ☐

**N.A.M.M.** from page 79

sensational. Other good news for acoustic players comes from GHS, Peavey and Kaman, who all brought out new highly refined acoustic string sets.

With N.A.M.M. handicappers split on whether the rising technological tide would bring fistfights between guitarists and keyboardists by the next show, it was time for some serious Nevillization. *Musician*, Simmons and JBL brought local heroes the Neville Brothers out on the Mississippi riverboat Natchez and fixed them up with some high-tech gear—Art Neville didn't want to return his Kurzweil at the end of the night and the Simmons-equipped drum section smoked with guest star drop-in JR Robinson. The resulting funk explosion disabled the Natchez's air conditioning system and steamed the nervousness out of the Who's Who crowd of N.A.M.M.-ers. Now if we could just teach the Nevilles to program a Macintosh.... ☐

[Next month, new N.A.M.M. developments in recording, drums, and sound reinforcement.]

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