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#51

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LETTERS

HOW DO YOU SPELL RELIEF? O-H-I-O

Dear *NYR*,
It was March, alright. The fucking weather was like Russian roulette with an ice cube-loaded gun. I wasn't desperate or anything, just uncomfortable.

I was just waiting, waiting for something to happen. Something to reawaken my restless spirit, some inspiration, some new-found love, some . . .

Then it happened, just like the refrain from that tired cliché. I received *NYR* #49 and right there on the cover . . . Memories from home to reawaken, to inspire, to seize my March blues and melt those ice cube bullets.

THE SWITCHBOARD on the cover! UBU and THE WAITRESSES on the inside! It was just what the doctor ordered. I almost started to weep. Imagine . . . three bands who started, gigged and inspired many, all near my homeland of Akron, all in the same issue, all heart-warming articles. It was *all* too much.

I was fortunate enough to witness the growth and development of these bands right in my backyard and now, living in NYC for just six months, I run across them all over this sprawling metropolis—at various clubs, in mags, on the radio, in the dailies.

How ironic that just when depression was ready to choke me, the freshness of these hinterland bands came to my rescue via *NY Rocker*. The articles started to conjure up memories of the past . . . those sweaty, uncontrollable nights at JB's in Kent, Clone Records, the Akron albums and 45's, Parson's Italian restaurant, Butler with 15-60-75, the Switchboard at the Bank (still-thriving club in Spudland), TIN HUEY anytime and anywhere, UBU at the Cleveland Agora. The whole scene was incredible, if you were lucky enough to follow it.

Fortunately for those of you who didn't, Hill, Grabel and Wheeler have been gracious enough to share some moments of those bands. Maybe you readers don't share my sentiments, but at least you've shared some insight into three wonderful bands from Middle America.

THANKS, ROCKER.

Mark J. Petracca
New York, NY

HE KNOWS WHAT IT MEANS TO MISS NEW ORLEANS

Dear *NYR*,

Some late info: Swamp Dogg (Jerry Williams Jr.) is responsible for producing what may be (in my opinion) Irma Thomas' best album, *In Between Tears*. Long before Millie Jackson, Irma released this multi-perspective view of domestic life (available on Charly import, CRB 1020).

And thank you for giving some recognition to Irma Thomas, Swamp Dogg, Earl King, the Nevilles and other New Orleans and New Orleans-connected musicians. Maybe soon Irma won't have to sing "Wish Someone Would Care" (except as a nostalgia number) because you taught the world to care.

'Scuse me now while I recover from all the second-lining we did two days ago at Mardi Gras.

Tom Boll
New Orleans, LA

TRUTHS ABOUT THE TRIANGLE

Dear *NYR*,

I read your article "NC (Stands for North Carolina)" in *NYR* #49 and found it to be informative and enjoyable. Another band which I think should be given mention is True Hearts, a tight 3-piece R&B band who often play (and even more often, tend bar . . .) at Friday's in Greensboro.

Mention was made in your article of The Forum in Winston-Salem as a venue for new music. Lest other readers be misled, Winston-Salem has NO venue for new music. It's true that the dB's and the Romantics played at The Forum, but these were out-of-the-norm events in this town. So those of us living in Winston-Salem who appreciate new music must trek out to Friday's (Greensboro) in order to see and hear good bands like True Hearts, the Brains, Mission of Burma, etc.

Terry Riehl
Winston-Salem, NC

CRIES AND WHISPERS

Dear *NYR*,

To everyone involved with *NYR*:

I think you folks are doing an A-1, top-notch job in putting together some of the best reading around. And I'm talking about everything from the writing to the new "streamlined" lay-out!

Keep on doing what you've been doing: creative, interesting and responsible reporting—you're one of the very few publications left that fits that description.

Thanks a lot.

Jeffrey Lazar
New York, NY

(Actually, what with Soho News, Record World and maybe the Daily News going belly-up, we're one of the very few publications LEFT . . . ED.)

Dear *NYR*,

I'll go back to the clubs when they play XTC and the Individuals.

Ed Casey
Queens, NY

(Oh, you mean Maxwell's! . . . ED.)

OK, NOW LET'S GET TO THE PUT-DOWNS . . .

Dear *NYR*,

Please print this letter. It may interest some of your readers. (I don't know—you may have lost them with that highly original opening . . . ED.)

I'm really sick of all you trendy East Village "I only wear black" types. (How's that for a start?) (I'm reeling . . . ED.) Apparently you haven't the time or energy to recognize any band that hasn't played the Mudd Club or signed with Warner Bros. yet. You keep churning out the same old boring, in-depth, uninviting, over-informative trash about excuses for bands like the Bush Tetras, Flesh-tones, Waitresses, etc. etc.—these are New York rockers? I may move!

Then there's the swill-from-over-the-sea department: Soft Cell, Orchestral Manoeuvres, Human League . . . the list could go on and on, but I'll spare myself, thank you. These bands are overly accessible as it is—they don't need or deserve more notoriety. Stop wasting paper on put-on pretentious posers like the Undead, Misfits, False

Prophets (leaves a sickly taste in my mouth, that one) and the like. Forget the skinheads (the new improved trend) and people who thrive on the word "hardcore." Personally, it *sucks*. No one can scare me into liking a band. Especially not a high-pitched, over-excited squawk coming from the left end of my receiver telling me to slam once a week. Do you remember what punk is about? Do the words *truth* and *honesty* ring a bell? How about *struggling*? I'm not saying you're not a punk until you struggle, but pretending is worse! (I didn't know poverty was cool.)

I like bands that don't put on an act. No bald heads, ghoulish makeup, spikes or bandanas can make up for a band that lacks originality and honesty. I don't know where this letter is heading anymore, but I had a lot of fun writing it. I feel much better now, thanks.

Sign me,
The Gerbil
New York, NY

P.S. Great to see articles on Detroit and North Carolina. I thought the Zooks and Th' Cigaretz were long forgotten. Nick Canterucci lives! (In Southfield, Michigan!!)

(There's nothing like constructive criticism—and this letter was certainly nothing like constructive criticism! Don'tcha just love folks who think they've got the monopoly on words like "truth," "honesty" and "struggle"? Anybody who comes up with a list of ten living bands this guy would actually ENJOY reading about can have my job. Just don't make the stories too "informative" or "in-depth" . . . ED.)

NO HAND JIVE

Dear *NYR*,

I'm writing in reference to your recent article on Johnny Otis. Personally (I always write personally), I found the piece to be very cohesive and extremely informative. It more than establishes Otis's contribution to rock and roll music. But then, *NY Rocker* is a huge contribution to rock and roll. I can't write to you without pushing local blood—how about a piece on the Standbys? DFX2? The Penetrators? I want William Burroughs on the cover!

Love,
Connie Bennett
San Diego, CA

(Funny you should mention Burroughs. We had a vintage cover photo of the noted author and a 10-year old Mexican peasant boy engaged in an extremely frank discussion of literature and narcotics, but the lawyers nixed it . . . ED.)

TICKETS FOR HARVARD/PRINCETON GAME ON SALE NOW

Dear *NYR*,

How unfortunate it is that Marjorie Karp has swallowed with such appetite the nauseating bait the Police have offered us in their arrogant and glib *Ghosts in the Machine*. (*NYR* #49/April, '82). Consistently satisfied to ride on the comfortable crest of the trendy pop wave (witness their recent tour with the Go-Go's and their hit, "Every Little Thing"), the Police have abrogated their responsibility as artists in favor of the safety of the trite and tried. This would be

bad enough, but their audacity compounds the offense: whereas their earlier adaptations of reggae tacitly implied the revolutionary stance essential to that genre, the Police have now jettisoned the politics that they apparently view as merely unmarketable. The remainder is a gutted version of their "Outlandos" posture, made palatable by a blatant and cowardly retreat from their former commitment to content. How dare they canonize their own sellout with the outrageously self-serving cynicism of a line like "There is no political solution"! How? Because they have correctly gauged the fatuous credibility of their audience, and served up the hollow clichés to order. If the pseudo-philosophical white condescension of "One World (Not Three)" is Marjorie Karp's idea of "pure reggae," I suggest she reassess her entire musical vocabulary.

In the meantime, *Ghosts* is neither "prophetic" nor "sturdy with portent." It is a shallow rehash of George Harrison's *Living in the Material World*, an all-too-transparent smokescreen, behind which lurk \$400/copy editions of narcissistic greed.

Sting, in a recent "interview" (from *Musician, Player and Listener* around October, I think), credited his band's success to being "photogenic" and accused bands like the Clash of being "heavy-handed" in their political integrity. Well, gorgeous, I'll take the latter any day. There is a political solution, and it begins with the recognition of and revulsion from placebo-pop music like *Ghosts in the Machine*.

Sincerely,
Rosanna Cavallaro
Cambridge, MA

Marjorie Karp replies:

Ha-rumph.

Her fervor notwithstanding, Cavallaro's complaint is obscure. Hers is the polemic of inferred motivations for unsubstantiated sins. What evidence supports the charge that the Police are "trendy"? Only the usual allegations—a tour, a hit single and sex appeal. The author has not adequately researched the distinction between a band and its label.

Cavallaro also contradicts herself, accusing the Police of "white condescension" while presuming to tell Sly and Robbie, Frankie Crocker and half the Bronx that they don't know what's good for them. She overlooks ample textual allusions in order to attribute Sting's philosophy to a relatively minor and obscure 20th Century thinker by the name of G. Harrison (see instead Descartes, Rene). She cites the Police for audacity, which is not an evil in rock and roll but the very heart of the matter. Her pronouncement that reggae "tacitly implies" a "revolutionary stance" is hasty if revolution is understood to preclude the central Rastafarian doctrine of one-love.

Finally, Cavallaro's conclusion is *ad hominem* and vacant. It goes without saying that those who define the ills of the world as political believe the solution to be political. This thinking is self-contained and self-perpetuating, positing that those who criticize the theory thereby prove it. *Ghost* is more radical than systematic; it challenges longstanding beliefs that all social problems can be defined in political terms.

**You've heard about John Hiatt.
Now you can hear him.**



John Hiatt
All of a Sudden

Produced by Tony Visconti
On Geffen Records & Tapes

Manufactured exclusively by Warner Bros. Records Inc.

FRONT LINES

Reggae in Jersey

In a corner of the packed ballroom, which thunders with the bass-heavy strains of the latest reggae rockers and dub-wise instrumentals, there's a flurry of spontaneous activity at the mixing board. Jah Screw, the man at the controls, is busy selecting discs and mixing up the sounds while Ranking Joe, one of Jamaica's hottest DJ's, is toasting away at the microphone in his inimitable furious style of rhyming and scat singing. It's Papa Moke's sound system tonight and the crowd is beginning to let loose with its usual abandon.

This may seem like a scene at one of Kingston's top discos, but it's actually the unlikely setting of the Wayne Room at Paterson, N.J.'s Alexander Hamilton Hotel. Although knowledge of reggae's presence is still primarily limited to the region's large Jamaican population, roots music is taking a steady hold in "The Garden State."

Paterson, a crumbling industrial city about 15 miles from New York, has become a key venue for live reggae "sound systems"—i.e., discos—and the rapping DJ's who accompany them to entertain skanking crowds. On

almost any given weekend, sound system dances are being mounted by Downbeat, Sons International, the Twelve Tribes of Israel (a Rastafarian cultural organization), Sir Tommy's Hi-Fi, Roots Rock, Channel One and Papa Moke, The Hi-Power, the local reggae disco favorite.

"The disco plays a very important part [in reggae]," says Moke, a Kingston native who began promoting shows in Paterson in 1979. "Once you have a good, heavy, powerful disco playing that music it's very hard not to be captivated with the DJ rapping away."

After winning a local reggae disco competition in 1977, Moke teamed up with Stagga, the brother of famed dub master King Tubby, who custom-designed a sound system to mount the live shows they had envisioned. "We started the task of bringing a certain kind of sound to the people."

As a youth in Jamaica, Moke says, it was the discos, not radio play, that were responsible for popularizing the latest innovative reggae rhythms.

"When I came over here [in 1972] there was nothing of the sort in Paterson," he ex-

plains. "But the live DJ concept, with a disco and live guys on the mike, that'll really propel the music. We don't want it to go over as something like a fad, it blows tonight and tomorrow it's gone. So, in a way, the fact that it's moving slowly, I think that's the best way for it. Reggae is not something you can hype up as a gimmick. It has to propel and move off its own force."

"Right now, all the top artists are coming up [to the U.S.]. The top DJ's, the top singers, the top bands. They're coming up and giving performances all over and I think it's going to take off. The force is really strong."

A few miles down the road from Paterson in the suburban retreat of Ho-Ho-Kus, Shanachie Records, a young but thriving company, is playing a growing role in the distribution of reggae music. Shanachie promotion director Randall Grass concurs with Moke, calling 1981 a "break-through" year for live reggae in America.

Founded in the mid-'70s as a label devoted to traditional Irish music, Shanachie began distributing England's Trojan Records in

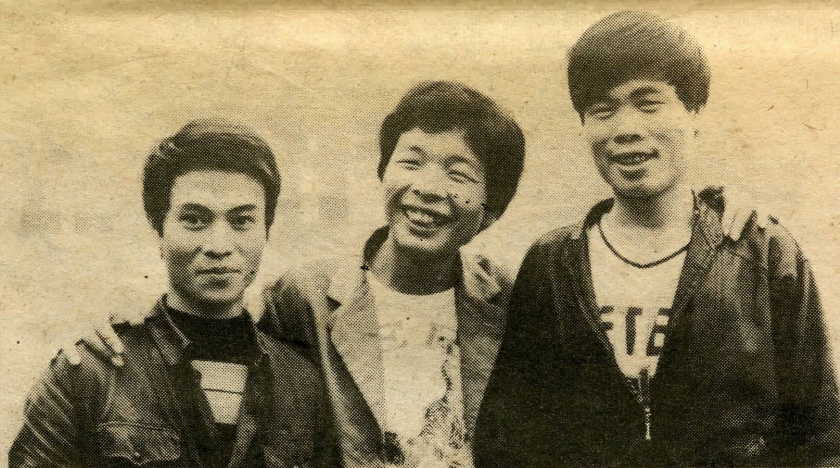
1978 when the demand for reggae imports grew. Through considerable searching and connections, the label signed dub musician Augustus Pablo in 1980, and soon thereafter issued its premiere reggae release, *Rockers Meets King Tubbys in a Fire House*. Shanachie recently contracted the Mighty Diamonds and Rita Marley, whose ganja homage, "One Draw," is fast becoming a mainstream disco favorite.

With its acquisition of the sizeable catalogue of England's Greensleeves label, which will be pressed locally and sold at domestic prices, Grass says that Shanachie will now offer American listeners the widest selection of reggae.

"The fact is," he explains, "reggae has grown every year for the past 12 years in America. It's not going to explode, it's going to continue penetrating.... It's making inroads slowly in suburbia."

by Todd Ellenberg

B-Gas Rickshaw



HOW NOW, MAO? The Dragons, touted as "the first Chinese punk rock group."

"Tuning is just a decadent European concept."
—Alex Chilton

That whacky Marc Boulet has been at it again. The man who brought us two records from Polish bands via the glamorous smuggling approach now brings us *Parfums De La Revolution* by the Dragons—the "First Chinese Punk Group Released in the West." The three anon players—given psuedos to protect, we're talkin' Mainland China here—went into an unoccupied youth center and in a mere two hours thrashed out this fine recording. Now I'd be a goddam lying toad if I told you this is my fave record of the year, but it's definite Top 20. The Dragons construct their tunes w/drums, guitars and the traditional two-stringed Chinese violin. All singing, all dancing, all classically trained. The impression of confusion on first listen is just that. Eventually competency rears its lovely head.

Natch, most of us'll never understand the subtleties that make this such a radical groove thang....but listen to this press release Marxist yankee doodle dogma:

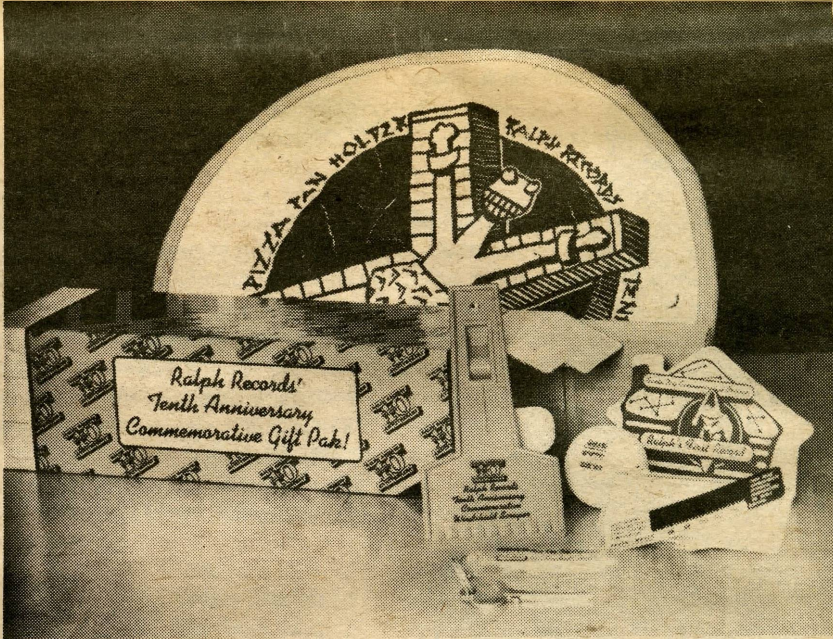
"Their ambitions? To subvert the national economy by trying to boost the consumption of superfluous goods which in the long term would increase their own marketable value."

Just think how much we done copped from the Orient over the years. You remember "Hong Kong Gardens"? Girls in Shanghai Whore dresses? Those silly, expensive ornamental sticks for your hair? "Chinese Rocks" (the song)? Ping Pong? Paper parasols in your Singapore Slings? (How many times did *you* eat Chinese last month?) Not to mention the great "Eastern" influence that's crept into everything musical at one time or another.

Pick Cuts: "Flamme Ardente," "L'île du Temple Maudit" (written by one of the Poles), "Get Off My Cloud" and "Anarchy in the U.K." (also released as a single). For info: Alpheo Productions, 26 Rue Rochechouart—75009, Paris, France. If it's ethnic, it must be on *Barclay*!

by Annene Kaye,
strained through Byron Coley

Happy Anniversary



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU: Now this is what we call *promo*. Ralph Records is celebrating its 10th anniversary, see. That's right, ten years of Residents and Snakefinger and Fred Frith and lots more music so rarely heard on any Earthly radio station or club dance floor that only the Ralphs themselves can figure out how the company's managed to stay solvent this long. Well, here at *NYR* we've figured out the Ralph m.o.—BRIBERY. The company gives away so much great stuff that you're virtually *shamed* into buying one of their albums sooner or

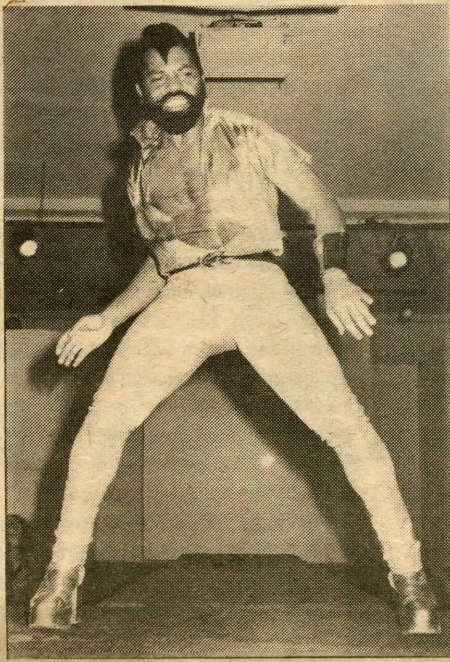
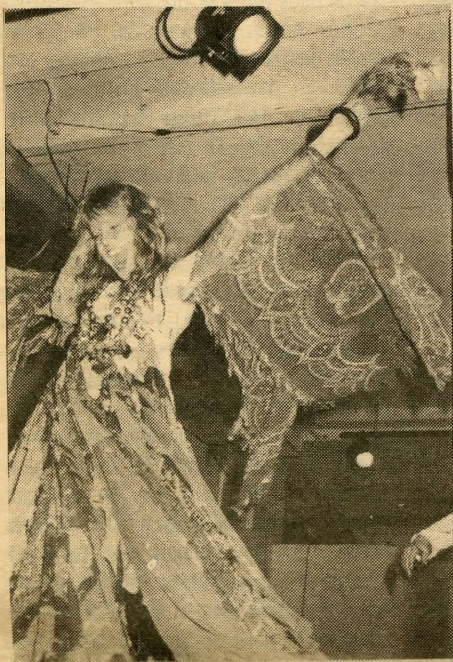
later. Check out this generous 10th Anniversary C.A.R.E. package (clockwise from top): a Ralph Records pizza pan holder, a Residents/*Santa Dog* commemorative sponge, a Ralph Records thermometer (comes in handy during spins of *Eskimo*), a Ralph Records golf ball, a Ralph Records key ring containing a lock of "real Residents hair," and a Ralph Records windshield scraper. Not Pictured: the official Residents/*Mark of the Mole* moist towelette and aspirin pack. We are blessed. (Photo: Gene Bagnato)

IS OUR FACE RED DEPT.

In last month's Independent Recording Supplement article on promotion ("Turn Up The Volume and You'll Get the Picture") we inexplicably and unintentionally omitted *Trouser Press* as an important source for

getting records reviewed and researching other promotional outlets. Review copies should be sent to: America Underground, *Trouser Press*, 212 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Cool Cats



Cool Cats, the book, is an assemblage by *NME* feature editor Tony Stewart illustrating "25 years of rock 'n' roll style" with a few words (by such people as Ian Dury, Paul Weller and three *NME* staffers) and lots of pics. "Cool Cats," the fashion show, was an assemblage by Kelly Howell condensing 25 years into 25 minutes as the climax of a party Delilah Publications threw in Stewart's honor. This parade of tongue-in-chic, which owed more to the Lower East Side than the Brit-heavy book, opened with the lovely Karon Bihari, who starred in Club 57's *Living Dolls*, as a '50s prom queen and closed with a chorus line of new wavers doin' a deadpan neo-frug. In between, as shown from left to right: a flower-throwing '60s vision, a show-stealing tribute to Sly Stone, and two beautiful mutants who made me long for the return of the '50s dream date. But not to worry, for, as Stewart writes, the '80s began in the '50s, which means, I guess, that the more we change our clothes, the more we stay the same.

Photos by Amy Arbus. Words by Michael Hill

What Johnny Can Read

Welcome to Part Three of *NYR*'s continuing coverage of the fanzine scene. As you may or may not know, fanzines are usually typewritten, xeroxed, 'DIY periodicals that cover local phenomena and carry on the time-honored American tradition of printing the first dumb thing that pops into your head. (Keep in mind that if you started a fanzine in Poland, you might wake up and find a tank in your rec room. . .) While there are some good 'zines in this survey, and even some outstanding ones, NO FANZINE in recent memory radiates the same kind of zany nihilism that typified the late, lamented *Sluggo!* from Austin, TX. For me, the best fanzine is one so gleefully unfettered by the constraints of common sense that it makes me feel like I work for *Dun's Review* instead of *NY Rocker*. Anyway, here's the lot of 'em (send stamps for the free 'zines) . . .

The Living Color (PO Box 2326, Hollywood, CA 90028)—A lot of space in this is taken up by meandering short stories, and only a couple of the Charles Bukowski poems printed here were any good. (Of course, if they had Buk writing the stories rather than poetry, I'd subscribe for life.) Otherwise, there's good film coverage, especially on Godfather of Gore Herschel Gordon Lewis, a punchy sports column and a fascist advice page. A lot, really, for free.

Bullet (615½ Mass., Lawrence, KS 66044)—From the lively Lawrence, Kansas scene comes *Bullet*, a neatly laid-out, infinitely readable 56-page booklet that's jam-packed with LP, singles and live reviews. Okay, so reviewing jazz, ethnic and electronic musics is a very broadminded move, but I get a creeping feeling the writers have no idea what they're talking about. Coverage of local hitmakers like the Embarrassment or Get Smart! is a lot more interesting—but that's only logical. At a cost of \$1.00, I'd grudgingly buy it.

Suburban Relapse (PO Box 610906, N. Miami, FL 33161)—From the state that brings you the *National Enquirer* comes *Suburban Relapse*.

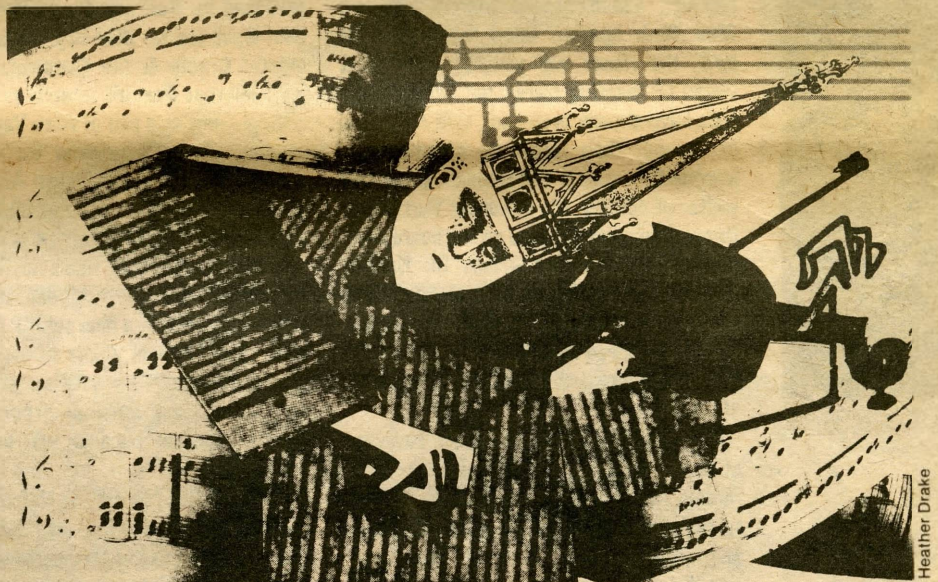
What can you say about a 'zine that has good interviews, live and vinyl reviews, funny comics, lots of local gossip, a fanzine guide, news from other places and is very supportive of the Southern Florida scene? A bargain at 50¢, that's what.

Mind Camp (PO Box 7024, Albany, NY 12225)—Albanian Michael Corcoran has put out one of the grossest, rudest and funniest pamphlets I've seen in a while. *Mind Camp* is essentially a satire mag with a few news columns. (Although these conveyed little actual news, they were still pretty funny.) *MC* includes "The Ten Punk Commandments" ("VIII: Thou Shall Not Bear False Witness, Unless It Gets You On The Guest List"), clever drug humor ("Cocaine: The most overrated white flake since Ted Knight"), and a KKK newsletter parody ("The Publication for the Discriminating Male"). Most of *MC*'s jokes are either racist or sexist with no apparent satirical objective, but I'll wait for the next issue to see where *MC*'s heart really lies. Well worth it for a buck.

Living Eye (71 W. 11th St., Bayonne, NJ 07002)—A fanzine for the rabid collector, *LE* is very big on reviewing great old psychedelic, punk and surf records that are ages out of print and would cost a fortune even if you could find them. *LE* #2 included an exhaustive history of the Seeds and an interview with Bow Wow Wow. (Where they fit in I don't know.) But still not enough for the \$1.50 they charge.

Oh Yeah! (PO Box 370, Arlington MA 02174)—*OY!* is another sort of retro-zine with extensive coverage of Paul Revere and the Raiders, Jan and Dean, Johnny Rivers and Lene Lovich (?). Local scene and vinyl reportage are good, and if they add a lot more news and reviews, it'll be worth its \$1.00 price.

Local Anesthetic (638 E. 13th Ave., Denver, CO 80203)—Good support of the Denver scene (I guess) and okay record reviews. Their attention seems to be split between West Coast punk



Heather Drake

and boring Brit-rock. It's for free, so I suppose I'd read it in the laundromat.

Night Voices (14306 Runnymede St., Van Nuys, CA)—An occult fanzine. Sparse record reviews, not too informative live coverage, but there was a good Fall interview in #5. The rest of the paper is dedicated to ghoulie/ghostie stories, vampire book and movie reviews, and various other topics that go bump in the night. If this is your style, you'll probably pay \$1.00 for it.

Psychedelic Boneyard (c/o Tom Erbe, 311 W. Springfield, #3, Champaign, IL 61820)—The definitive word on the Champaign/Urbana scene, plus neat interviews with bands passin' through. Excellent editorials, especially on women's rights, and their "Quaker Goes Deaf" column is pretty good, too. For free, it's a must-read.

Sub Pop (c/o Lost Music Network, Box 2391 Olympia, WA 98507)—A magazine/ cassette with a mission, *Sub Pop* is a fervent supporter of American music. No real reviews, just lots of

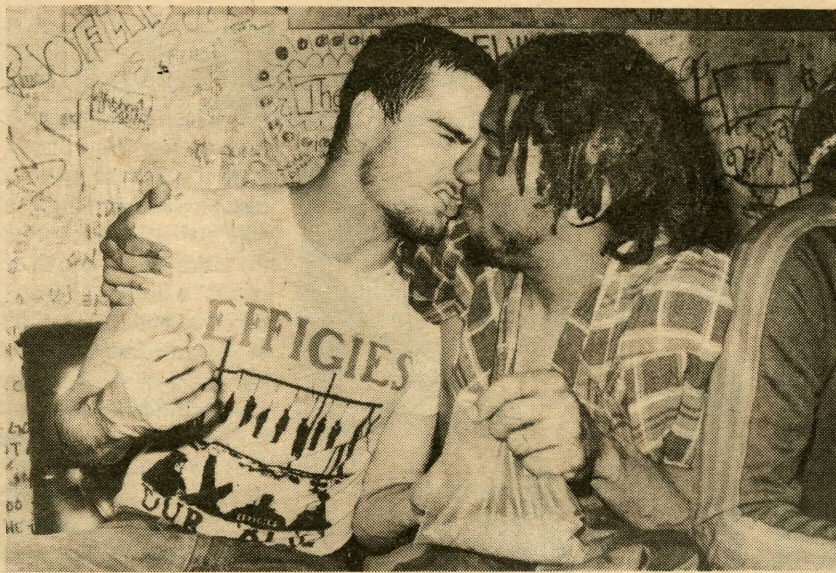
recommended fanzines, tapes, records and comics from coast to coast. Inspired editorials, too. You get two issues and two C-60 cassettes for \$10.00, which ain't too bad.

Take It! (196 Harvard Ave., Suite 5, Boston, MA 02134)—*Take It!* is an overgrown Boston fanzine with excellent local coverage and a list of contributors that includes Richard Meltzer, Jad Fair, Mick Farren, Ira Kaplan and Gregg Turner. (I even did a live review for 'em once—did I ever get paid for it? Nyet!) There's more LP and singles reviews than you can shake yer booty at and if you're a Byron Coley fan—like me—there's plenty to keep you amused. The newly-inflated 77¢ price is \$2.00. Did they think we wouldn't notice?

FINAL NOTE: A great way to find out about fanzines of every species is **Constant Cause**, a catalogue of indie publications and music products from all over. These guys are into it. (CC, 679 Arbor Lane, Warminster, PA 18974.)

by Drew Wheeler

N.Y. NEWS



ONE FROM THE HEART, TWO FOR THE SHOW: One day they shared the cover of *NY Rocker*, the next day they shared a stage and a dressing room. HR of Bad Brains cuddles up with Henry Rollins backstage at a recent L.A. show.

FISHING FOR NEWS: Wait, I think we've got a live one—yep, it's the **Talking Heads**, who dodged all congratulations on the release of their double live LP by taking off on a two-week tour of Japan. The Fab Four were augmented for the occasion by **Bernie Worrell** (keys), **Dollette MacDonald** (vocals), **Steve Scales** (percussion) and **Alex Weir** (guitar). Upon their return to NYC, the Heads will complete their new studio LP (backing tracks for 13 new originals have already been laid), split for a tour of Europe, then return to commence a lengthy U.S. tour in mid-summer. Given this welter of activity, it's a wonder that **David Byrne** finds time to serve on the board of directors of Performing Artists for Nuclear Disarmament, sponsors of a big anti-nuke meeting/discussion/performance hoo-ha at Symphony Space on April 5. (More info from P.A.N.D., 345 Lafayette St., NYC 10012).

IT'S OPEN SEASON, but we'll save our critical ammo 'til we actually hear *The Hunter*, the new album by **Blondie**. Suffice to say it was produced by **Mike Chapman** and includes originals such as "War Child" and "Island of Lost Souls" plus a cover of the **Marvelettes'** "The Hunter Gets Captured by the Game".

HOOKED: The dB's are reportedly close, very close, to an American deal with Bearsville Records. **Ronald Shannon Jackson & the Decoding Society** are poised to pact with Island. **Rank And File** have signed with Slash Records and will doubtless be the next act picked up for distribution by Warners, who don't seem to be exactly frothing for other Slash slabs by **Lydia Lunch**, the **Flesh Eaters**, et al. **Rough Trade** (U.K.) will release a Mofungo single, "El Salvador," taken from their *End of the World* cassette. Our condolences to **Anton Fier**, who failed to win an open-arms RT recording offer with the debut of his **Golden Palominos**—better luck next time, m'boy. **Adny Shernoff** is producing a French band called the **Sponsors** for Plexus Records. Will **R.E.M.** release an EP of **Mitch Easter**-produced tracks on I.R.S.? Well, maybe. At any rate, RCA paid for a more recent 7-song demo, produced by **Kurt Munkacsi** and **Jim Fouratt**. **Certain Generals** pacted to Labor Records for a

planned EP. **Tom Verlaine** now signed to Virgin in the U.K. and Europe; his new LP, *Words From The Front*, is out NOW on Warners here.

ZE'S FOOLISH THINGS: Watch for *Unwholesome Pastimes* (they lead to nasty infections), the second album by **Cristina**, produced by **Don** and **David Was** of Was (Not Was); and for *Wise Guy*, the third album by **Kid Creole & the Coconuts**. The Kid a/k/a **August Darnell** recently performed a custom remix on a pair of **Alan Vega** tracks, "Outlaw" b/w "Magdalena '83"—fine, but does anyone know how much August blew producing the utterly forgettable **Funkapolitan** for Polygram? Suffice to say the entire *NYR* staff could retire to Rio for an equivalent amount. Oh yeah, **John Cale** will shortly release a new solo LP on ZE. Sez label chief **Michael Zilkha** in appropriately solemn tones: "It's a very serious LP that will break new musical ground... and John's classical training will be well in evidence".

YOUR CASSETTE BETS: Natch, **R.O.I.R.** dominates this section—and no wonder. Check out this list of forthcoming releases: **Human Switchboard's** *Coffee Break*, from a November '81 live radio broadcast and including non-LP tracks like "Sharpest Girl," "Somebody Wanted to Help," "It's Not Fair" and "She Invites"; *Loud Fast Rules* by (you guessed it) the **Stimulators**, recorded live in Raleigh, N.C. with the beloved **Harley** on drums; a **Germs** cassette containing the same 1977 Whisky performance as the Bomp LP but with added liner notes by **Craig Lee** and lotsa vintage photos; *Load and Go* by the **Scientific Americans**, half-live and half-studio stuff from the rolling hills of western Massachusetts; and the debut recordings of **Alphonia Tims & the Flying Tigers**, the very promising new funk 'n' roll band led by the ex-Jump Up guitarist/vocalist, in a package entitled *pure Power Funk/Guaranteed Uncut*. Big news Big Apple-wise, tho', is *New York Thrash Bands*, a cassette compilation of NYC h-core cuties like **Bad Brains**, **Undead**, **Kraut**, **Heart Attack**, **Nihilistics** and **False Prophets** (might as well add that the F.P.'s have also cut a second single, "Good Clean Fun" b/w "Functional," for release on their own **Worn-out Brothers Records**).

FLOUNDERING WITH FALLON: Big birthday bash on March 26 for Maxwell's main man **Steve Fallon** at his Hoboken clubhouse. Music (if that's what you call it) was provided by the **Raybeats**, **Individuals**, **Phosphores**, **Cyclones**, and **T-Venus**; drunken revelry was provided by various *NYR* personnel. The guest of honor spent most of the evening hidden in the kitchen. **WINNING WITH WYNBRANDT:** Brothers **Tommy** and **Jimmy W.**, that is, the ex-Miamis whose Chrystie Street loft (a big 'un) has become the scene of a series of Sunday afternoon gigs by the likes of **Alan Vega**, **Greg Pickard** (ex-Revlon), and **David Johansen** w/the **Uptown Horns**, among others. Admission's a piddling three bills, beer and wine are available, and "all programs will vary substantially from performers' usual presentations." When the doors open at 3, it's where you *must* be. **BOTTOMS UP:** Some of those perfectly good groups you always read about in *NYR* but never hear on the radio are getting across to wider audiences, at least here in NYC, via a series of every-other-Sunday-night showcases at the Bottom Line co-sponsored by the club and that paragon of tired-blood radio, WNEW-FM. The dB's kicked things off upon their return from the U.K. with a very good (if not magical) set played to a very different audience from the ones you find at the Mudd Club, Danceteria, etc.; the Bongos, **Individuals**, and **Raybeats** followed suit. Kudos to the club, the bands, and booking agent **Bob Singerman**.

QUICK CUTS: **Regina Richards & Red Hot** are back, free of previous contractual commitments to producer **Richard Gottehrer** and A&M Records (U.K.). There's a new manager, **Peter Casperson** of Castle Music, and five new tunes recorded with producer/engineer **Rob Freeman** (who co-produced the **Go-Go's** LP with Gottehrer). The **Bush Tetras** flew off for a quick jaunt through Europe in April, then returned home to begin recording their first full-fledged LP, to be produced by either the group, **Mike Thorne**, **Jake LaMotta**, **Phyllis Diller** or **Leonard Chess**, depending on your sources. **Jim Martin** is now an official fifth Tetra, playing sax, guitar, keyboards and percussion. Here's the best bit: the BT's played the Beacon Theater (with top R&B vocal group the **Manhattans**) on April 27 in a free concert for the retarded and psychiatric populations of NYC hospitals. Good show! The **Danceare** are presently recording their second album for (U.K.) **Statik Records** at Celestial Sound in Manhattan. The LP, tentatively titled *Guerilla Love*, will include 7 new originals plus a cover of **Stevie Wonder's** "Do Yourself a Favor." Already out is a new 12" single, "Stay Down" b/w "You Got to Know" plus a "version" of the A-side; all three tracks boast a sharper, richer sound than anything the group has recorded previously, and bode well for the album. By the way, the **Dead Kennedys** are also signed to Statik in the U.K. **Anne** and **Amanda** (no last names given) write to inform us that they've established a "correspondence and information service" for **Stiff Little Fingers**. Write them at 159-34 Riverside Drive West, NYC 10032. Reggae fanatics should note the establishment of *Reggae Rootline*, a new monthly newslet-

ter attempting to serve as a "regularizing house of information" about roots and musicians. Sample copies are \$1; charter subs are \$12.00, both from C-PO Box 4187, Philadelphia, PA 19101 (checks payable to Grass). Another addition to your collection of literary cage liners is the "Naked Rock Star" issue of *Flash In The Pan*, featuring revealing shots of **Deborah Harry**, **Bryan Gregory**, **Iggy Pop**, and other hot properties. \$2.00 to FITP, PO Box 636, NYC 10002.

AS WE GO TO PRESS: Legendary V-Coast bluesman **Charles Brown** is knocking them dead at Tramps. **Future Force** fine at an April 12 studio showcase for journalists and producers. **Orange Juice** cancelled their Eastern U.S. tour. **James Brown/P-Funk** sax man **Maceo Parker** was scheduled to lead his own band at two concerts at the Public Theater, April 23-24. **Papa Michigan** and **Gene Smiley** had blown minds inna rub-a-style at the Armageddon, backed by the **Sons of Creation** band. **Eric Burdon** scheduled to make the fourth or fifth comeback of his career at the Ritz... and a veritable array of talent was being corralled for one but two parties-cum-benefits celebrating 50 issues(!) of *NY Rocker*. **Danceteria** in Manhattan (April 29) a Maxwell's in Hoboken (May 7). See next issue for details of the grandest bacchanal since Nero (at least). **BYE!**

MICHAEL HILL (NYR)

The **Individuals**—*Fields* plus "Our World" (Plexus LP & B-side of Plexus 45)
R.E.M.—"Catapult" (from Kurt Munkacsi-produced demo)
Trouble Funk—"Pump Me Up" (from Sugarhill LP *Drop the Bomb*)
David Bowie—"Putting Out Fire (With Gasoline)" (from Backstreet LP *Cat People*)
Pylon—"Crazy" (DB Records 45)
Secret Weapon—"Must Be the Music" (Prelude 12")
Flipper—"Sex Bomb" (Subterranean 45)
Marshall Crenshaw—"Cynical Girl" (demo version)
Grace Jones—"Bullshit" (from Island LP *Warm Leatherette*)
Blondie—"Bermuda Triangle Blues (Flight 45)" (from Chrysalis LP *Plastic Letters*)
Chas Jankel—*Questionnaire* (A&M LP)
Beach Boys—*Pet Sounds* (Capitol reissue LP in mono) (dedicated to C. Stamey)
D-Train—"You're the One For Me" (Prelude 12")
Rita Marley—"One Draw" (Shanachie 12")

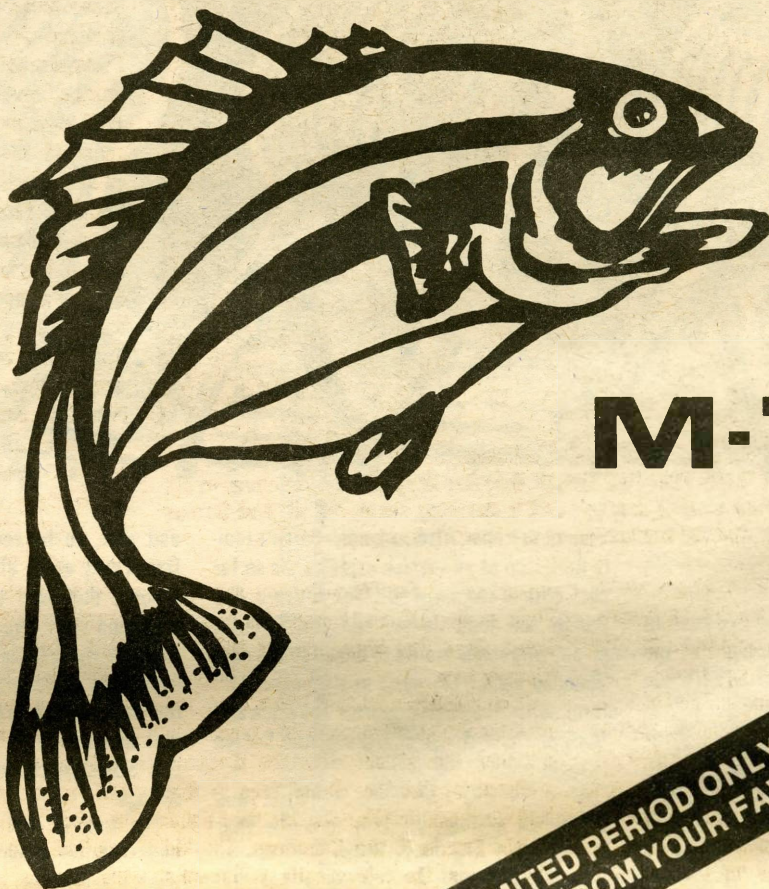
DREW WHEELER (NYR)

Fear—*The Record* (Slash)
Jerry Gonzalez—*Ya Yo Me Cure* (American Clave LP)
Mitch Easter—"Law of Averages" from *Shake to Date* (Albion LP)
Black Flag—"Six Pack"/"What I See"/"TV Party" from *Damaged* (SST LP)
The Secret V's—assorted new demos
The Embarrassment—"Patio Set" b/w "Sex Drive" (Big Time 45)
The dB's—"pH Factor" (Albion 45)
Robyn Hitchcock—"America" (Albion 45)
Bad Brains—"Pay to Cum" (Bad Brains 45)
Captain Beefheart—*Strictly Personal* (Blue Thumb LP)

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— Rockpool



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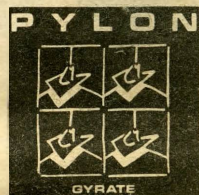
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—Mark Cooper
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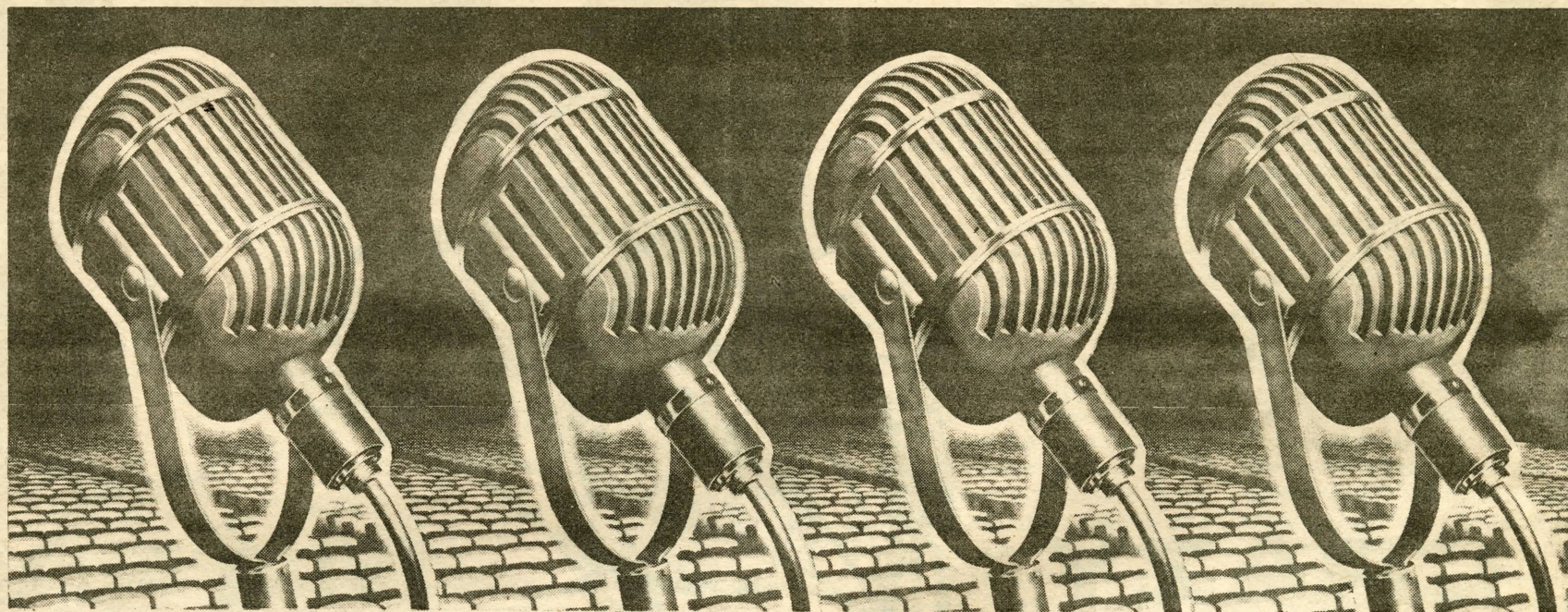
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STRIKING BACK



by Simon Frith

The most remarkable concert I've been to this year was Maze's opening night at the Hammersmith Odeon. I bought the first Maze LP in 1977 (probably because it got a rave review in *Black Music*) and loved it at once—intelligent, relaxed funk, apposite backing for Frankie Beverly's exceptionally warm tenor. But I never took this music particularly intensely and I never thought much about what happened to Maze afterwards. They didn't have a chart or radio hit here and I've not noticed them in discos, so when their (first) British visit was announced I was curious, made sure I got tickets, and only felt a little superior that no one else I talked to had heard of them.

Maze's two London nights were sold out within 48 hours. The soul scene was mobilized and I'd forgotten that soul is still the British center of the most committed, the most passionate, the most determined fans of all. When Maze arrived on stage they got such mighty applause (the audience was 50:50 black/white, remarkable for a British gig) that the group seemed literally stunned with delight. They performed with a sort of mellow passion—Frankie Beverly never stopped grinning—and as their groove got sharper and subtler a collective grin spread through the crowd too. The singing and clapping went on long after the band had gone and people danced through the streets to the tube (in exuberant contrast to the Jam's dour rock fans the night before).

A week earlier I'd been to a similarly emotional event: the Four Tops in Birmingham, Levi Stubbs at his stunning best, singing for us again (an earlier generation of soul girls and boys), a moving reminder that we still defined our emotions in the terms of all those Motown hits.

The soul stars are back in town. The Tops, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Martha and the Vandellas, the Miracles, a Stax package for Easter. I don't think this is just a matter of nostalgia and show biz. Soul has always underpinned British pop—every star a soul fan—and the current move back to dance and feeling and intimacy has only emphasized the fact that the musicians who explain emotion best are American. (In the midst of our anti-Americanism is the odd

assumption that Afro-Americans aren't really American at all—which explains the so far cool critical response to black *rockers*, like Prince and Rick James and the Time.) I mean, who really wants to dance to the new Spandau Ballet LP, even in its boxed 12" form, when they can celebrate Lakeside and Northend and Aurra and Slave and Bettye Lavette and...?

What all this dance music (black and white, old and new) means to me is that *Britons can't sing*. Even my present favorite single, the Associates' "Party Fears 2," depends on a deliberately mannered declamation for its arty edge, and there are any number of hit bands (Human League, Altered Images) that I appreciate in principle but can't hear for long because their singers are so flat and dead and twee.

My favorite record of all time is the Jive 5's *Greatest Hits* (Beltone/Relic) which I found in a second-hand shop in Birmingham a year ago. The Jive 5 were/are a black New York doo wop group (formed in 1961) distinguished from the thousands of others by Eugene Pitt, then as now the group's lead singer/writer/arranger. Pitt is not only an excellently pure singer, he has also has an acute understanding that doo wop is a form that takes its power from its sense of conversation. Like the other vocal groups of the early '60s, the Jive 5 churned out versions of standard ballads (even "Lili Marlene"), but Pitt wasn't only concerned to use voices as rhythm and texture. He was equally interested in the sounds of words, and in his own songs (the Jive 5's best material) he turned the pop theme—true/false love—into puzzled (and puzzling) fables of emotions slipping out of control even as they are spoken. Doo wop remains one of the few pop forms in which male feelings are worried while the women stride impassively by, leaving a trail of moans and pleas and bitter-sweet memory. (The formula was reversed in the girl talk records, of course—complaining, preening females, silent men—and so these fitted better both the formulas of romance and the '60s British hit parade.)

Rock history is written with such a relentless linearity that I've always taken it for granted that once a style is out of the charts, its performers either die or go back to their day jobs. Doo wop stands now for a quaint episode in the history of rock 'n' roll

and soul, to be revived now (e.g. by the Darts) only as an affectionate joke. In fact, though, doo wop was a specific musical craft and what I've just realized, thanks to Ambient Records, is that its best exponents have been performing ever since, doing the rounds of suburban bars, still arranging current hits (listen to the Capris' "Imagine") and '50s classics, but relaxing now into middle age.

The fact is that the Ambient doo wop series fits my Anglo fantasies of New York more closely than the revivalist sounds of, say, the dB's and the Fleshtones. The immediate Ambient achievement is producer Marty Pekar's. He understood, first, that doo wop conversation is essentially live, spontaneously responsive (and managed to record his groups without tape tricks in a "natural" acoustic setting) and, second, that it makes contemporary sense. His five groups (the Jive 5, the Capris, the Harptones, the Mystics, Randy and the Rainbows) don't re-do their old hits but their current sets, mostly self-written but with occasional startling interpretations: the Jive 5 do Steely Dan's "Hey Nineteen," the Harptones make magic out of Jackson Browne's "Love Needs A Heart."

The Mystics and the Rainbows perform enjoyable, Italianate, lightweight pop—thin voices, corny arrangements—but the other three collections are wonderful; the Jive 5's *Here We Are* takes its place without strain next to their original hits. What's clear to me, listening to these discs, is that doo wop can still do things that other pop musics can't. The obvious contrast is with the soul groups that evolved directly from doo wop (the Solid Smoke anthologies of the Shepards and the Manhattans are the best accounts of this process). Soul has much more elaborate and insistent instrumentations, and it quickly took on the Motown shape of lead singer/backing voices, but what this meant was a new account of voice and emotion. Soul singers took from the church the sounds of *direct* expression. They addressed the audience/congregation as their lovers, begged for a response and signalled their intensity of feeling by sounds round the words, by hesitations and slips, inserted notes, sudden shouts and swoops, by an increasing *impurity* of tone (listen to the developing manners of the Manhattans' orig-

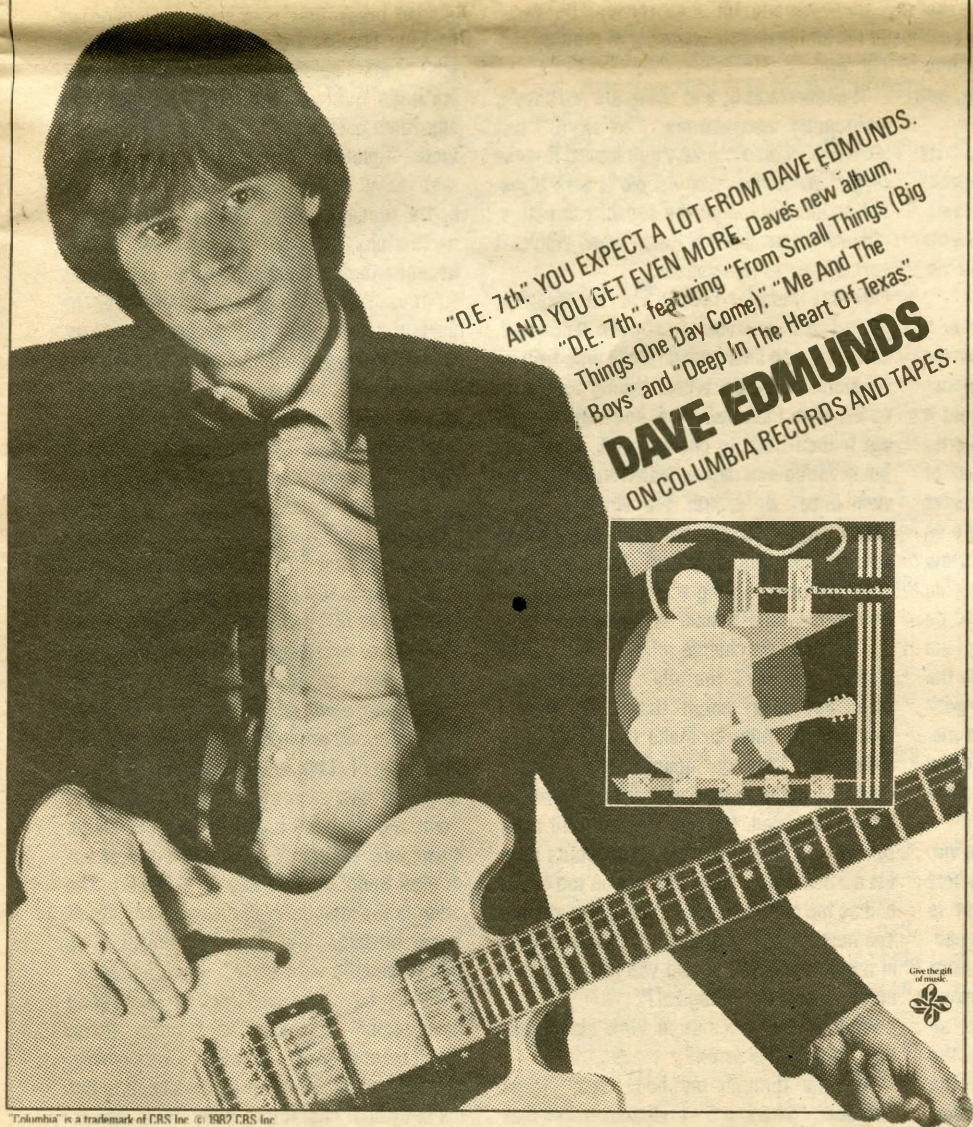
inal lead singer, George Smith).

Doo wop is, by contrast, a detached, secular form. The gospel elements are obviously there, but held in check by a precise sense of song. Doo wop singers use perfect pitch to make the harmonies work, and they are, in the end, interpretative rather than expressive: the sounds that come out are shaped by words, by lyrical meaning rather than by the sub-verbal secrets of the singer. Doo wop groups gossip rather than give sermons, and even their lead singers were much more anonymous than the soul stars, who were soon melodramatizing their feelings.

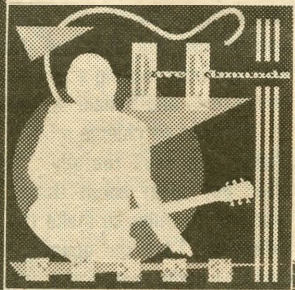
Doo wop provides, in short, an abstract account of emotion. Its material is romantic, but its sounds of joy and pain are ensemble sounds, emerge from stories *about* love. One of the great pleasures of the form (doo wop, like rap, is street music) is its communal base: the singers support each other, egg each other on, talk back, undercut a boast, doubt a conclusion (the contemporary Harptones have a woman member, who adds a different sort of voice to the argument). In soul, the singer is on a permanent emotional tight-rope; in doo wop, the voices can float free. The basic sounds of this music—tenor, falsetto, bass voices *cruising* on a note—have never really been used in other forms of pop, and they still send shivers through me.

What all this says about British music in 1982 I don't really know. Doo wop never meant much here. The Platters were popular but the street group hits mostly only registered in their later Merseybeat versions. In retrospect, it's obvious that the most startling aspect of the early Beatle records—the way they sang *to* each other, revelled in vocal noise—came from doo wop (and why else did they drop so easily into third-person love songs?) But the singing model in the '60s was Ray Charles—individual expressiveness was all, and British pop harmonies soon turned back to slush. All I can say is that at a time when more and more British groups look (in Anne Nightingale's words) like typing pools, rows of bored faces over little machines, the biggest thrill of the month was before the Four Tops appeared, just seeing the four microphones lined up, waiting.

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FILM

Paul Schrader's Cat People The Beauty of the Beast

by Roy Trakin

*By the rivers of Babylon
Where he sat down
And there he went
When he remembered Zion . . .*

Gentle reggae is lilting out of director/screenwriter Paul Schrader's impressive mini-stereo set-up in his suite at the Carlyle. He's wearing a Ralph Lauren polo shirt with a *Cat People* 1982 logo stitched above the breast. He looks more like the film professor who once taught screenwriting at Columbia University than the writer of such volatile screenplays as *The Yakuza*, *Taxi Driver*, *Rolling Thunder* and *Raging Bull*, or the director of the feverish hyper-realism in *Hardcore*, *Blue Collar*, *American Gigolo* and the brand-new *Cat People*. Schrader offers a study in dynamic contrasts: raised in a strict Midwestern, Calvinist environment, he wasn't allowed to see his first movie until he was 16 (which was, ironically, *The Absent-Minded Professor*). After forsaking the seminary for film criticism, he earned an MFA at UCLA's famed American Film Institute and wrote a book about the transcendental qualities in the films of Denmark's Carl Dreyer, France's Robert Bresson and Japan's Yasujiro Ozu, three of the most austere and ascetic of directors.

Despite the patronage of Pauline Kael, who helped him secure a film critic post at a Northwest daily, Schrader longed to write his own movies. Collaborating with his brother Leonard, he sold a script based on a genre of violent Japanese gangster movies, *The Yakuza*. The finished movie was a commercial disaster, and Schrader descended into a maniacal hell of drinking and whoring in L.A. which informed his subsequent writing output—*Taxi Driver*, *Hardcore*, *Rolling Thunder*. *Taxi Driver*, a movie Schrader claims was inspired equally by Harry Chapin's song and the diaries of Arthur Bremer (the man who shot George Wallace), turned his career around when Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro threw their considerable energies into getting it made.

Five years after *Taxi Driver's* savage blast at the world's "scum" and its eerie assassination sub-text (which proved life imitates art when John Hinckley tried to win Jodie Foster's respect by pumping bullets into Ronald Reagan), its author is admittedly "not as angry anymore." The trim, tanned 36-year-old has progressed from the subversive capitalistic critique of *Blue Collar* to the tentative existential redemption of *American Gigolo* and, now, the delirious emotional catharsis of *Cat People*.

Cat People takes off from the '40s horror movie of the same name; like most modernist updates, what was once implicit has now been made gloriously explicit, so that beautiful Nastassia Kinski not only romps around *au naturel*, but literally bursts out of her skin to turn into a black leopard before your very eyes. The film maintains its considerable

tension thanks to a typically kinetic Giorgio Moroder score, as in *American Gigolo*, and a series of horrific set-pieces featuring dangling limbs, savaged hookers and snarling black cats leaping through glass windows.

"I like to collaborate with Giorgio because he works very fast," says Schrader. "He's totally plugged into videotape technology, computers and synthesizers, but he'll throw in some sweetness, too. He's not afraid to use an acoustic guitar. Giorgio has a totally portable video playback system with a little computer attached. He simply comes up with an elemental beat and takes it from there. Like, 'Call Me' was just 'Paint It Black' in reverse. In a matter of minutes after he's walked into the room, Giorgio is at his portable console with 24 tracks of music."

Schrader has always shown impeccable taste in scoring his films. For *Blue Collar*, his directorial debut, Schrader, Ry Cooder and Jack Nitzsche wrote a tune called "Hard Workin' Man," and chose the one and only Captain Beefheart to sing it. On *American Gigolo*, he got Debbie Harry for "Call Me" and now, in *Cat People*, David Bowie croons the main theme over the final, frozen frame.

How does he describe to the musicians the kind of song he needs?

"I show them a video tape in progress and describe the spirit of the kind of lyrics I want," he says. "You give them a feel and they come back with an idea. Like David called me and said he wanted to do something 'very Jim Morrison.' And I thought that was a great idea because Giorgio was coming up with this thing like Brian Eno and having Jim Morrison sing to Eno is a nice, hot combo."

While Moroder's music gives *Cat People* its thematic unity, Schrader's periodic shocks keep the audience on the edge of their seats. What is the director's reaction to complaints about the graphic nature of its sex and violence?

"Ronnie Reagan told us all about how it was better when they didn't go into the bedroom," he says sarcastically. "I suppose sex was better before Freud told us what it was really all about. That Moral Majority side of the argument I think is a load of hokey. But there's another side which says anything you can make the mind conjure on its own is more potent than when you show it. The truth is something in between. You have to show a little to get the mind to do the rest. In today's context of freedom, I am allowed to have a nice hit of violence in the first hour. It's like poking the audience with a cattle prod and saying, 'Watch out for me. I am shameless. I am capable of scaring the living shit out of you.' And then, I never have to do it again."

"What you don't get in *Cat People* is a violent conclusion. Usually, a film of this sort will end in some violence—the beast is slaughtered, the house is burned down, people are killed, bodies are strewn about. That conventional genre conclusion is something I did not want to follow. I did not want an apocalyptic ending. I wanted to have the main character [John Heard] not kill the beast, but embrace it, make love to it, have, in fact, a romantic merging of him and the dark force. He does not kill the dark force, but makes love to it and keeps it alive."

This, of course, is in direct opposition to

previous Schrader works like *Taxi Driver* and *The Yakuza*, which end in orgies of blood.

"I was a much angrier person then," he confesses. "Fortunately, that anger has subsided, that desire is gone in me and I think it's also gone in the general populace. The ending of *Cat People*, on its sad, romantic, perverse note, is actually more in keeping with what I feel and what I think audiences feel."

For his last two movies, *American Gigolo* and *Cat People*, as well as *Blue Collar*, his first, Schrader ends with matters still hanging in the balance, unresolved. In *Gigolo* and *Cat People*, the main romantic leads are left on opposite sides of prison bars, separated physically, if not spiritually.

"I do like those sort of ambiguous epilogues," he agrees. "*Taxi Driver*, of course, had one, too. So that the last scene can play on the sidewalk in front of the theater. People should have something to talk about on the way to the car or over dinner or, hopefully, into the next day."

Do the endings of *Gigolo* and *Cat People* represent Schrader's belief that a satisfactory love between man and woman is impossible?

"There's always hope, y'know," he muses. "Keep trying. Obviously, men and women are, in the main, incompatible. That's not a terribly profound statement, but there is hope."

How about the critics who have accused him of homophobia for suggesting Richard Gere's degradation in *Gigolo* was the result of his increasing involvement in the gay subculture?

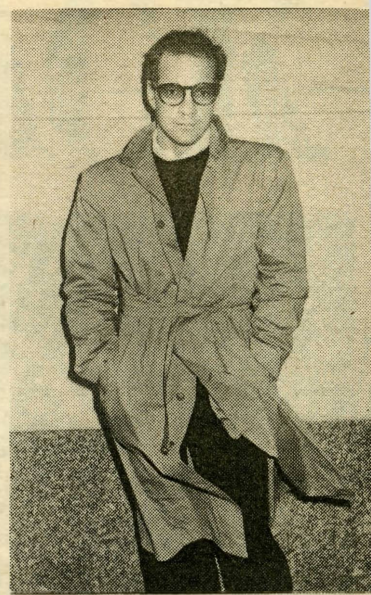
"I understand it, and those are not totally unfounded accusations," he says. "But *American Gigolo* is a very gay movie; it reeks of gay sensibility. *Cat People* is also bisexual. I think I'm one of the swishier directors. When I get accused of being homophobic, it sort of grates against me."

In *Cat People*, Kinski and her brother, played by a malevolent Malcolm McDowell, come from an incestuous family who turn into black leopards when having sex with others than their own kind, and must kill and eat human flesh to change back. While the feline McDowell begins transforming at the very onset of desire, the virginal Kinski doesn't grow fangs until after she's made love for the first time and starts bleeding. Was Schrader making a distinction here between male and female sexuality?

"The rules do change a bit; it gets a little shaky," he says ruefully. "The producer often got upset about things like that. I changed the rules to make the movie more satisfying. Take the opening scene in the massage parlor, where the cat is under the prostitute's bed. If I had waited until after sex to turn him into a cat, that would have been a dull scene. Now, she sits on top of the bed as the cat shakes his tail underneath her. You have a great scene; you're excited to be in a movie theater. Would you rather have a boring scene that's logical?"

What is the fascination with blood that runs through his work?

"It runs through my body, too," jokes Schrader. "There is that religious belief that blood must be shed. Somebody must pay. Before there can be redemption, purging or salvation. In the Old Testament, the animal had to be slaughtered. It was a sacrificial



colt, the Judaic colt. Earlier, humans were actually sacrificed. There are scholars who believe that the origin of the Jacob-Israel story is, in fact, a re-written human sacrifice myth. By the time the tribes are organized, animals have replaced humans for sacrifice—you've got the 'scape' goat. When Christianity comes in, you get the edict that sacrifice only had to happen once. You don't have to repeat it. You no longer have to kill an animal every high holiday. The Supreme Man died once, but you have to believe in his death. Being raised in such an environment, whether Protestant, Catholic or Jewish, you do have this notion that blood has to be shed. It's part of our racial and religious heritage."

Does his representation of the sexual in all its variations, both "normal" and "abnormal," act as a kind of therapy for him?

"Hopefully, that's what art is supposed to do," explains Schrader. "It's the same way dreams work. They give you access to forbidden areas that your conscious mind represses. Dreams are a way you can maintain your mental balance; they establish a relationship between your daytime civility and your nighttime craziness. The same way dreams work, hopefully, *Cat People* will work, that it will help bring out, codify and symbolize that dark side. We call these things perversions, but they are not perversions because they are not unnatural. They come from us. We've had to repress them for the sake of society, but they are still part of us. One of the ways we can deal with them is through art, because nobody gets hurt. Movies don't kill people, guns kill people." Is Schrader a strict Freudian when it comes to interpreting sexual behavior?

"I am in Freudian analysis," he admits. "though, obviously, *Cat People* is more Jungian. In fact, it's for the Jung at heart."

Schrader's future plans include the third episode in his self-dubbed triptych (after *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*) with Scorsese and De Niro, an adaptation of Kazantzakis' *Last Temptation of Christ*. An avid music buff, Schrader originally planned to do a film biography of Hank Williams, which he's now split into two separate projects, one about "working-class bar bands in East Cleveland" and music loud enough to blow the Midwest out of your mind, as they say on WMMS. The other is the long-delayed movie on the life of Yukio Mishima, the Japanese novelist, "a tale of suicide with glory," says Schrader.

Critics have accused him of everything from racism to sexism to fascism. Robin Wood recently wrote that Schrader's movie offered an indictment of modern society but his individual characters were made powerless to change the course of events. Still, the man who looked to the screen for the spiritual sustenance provided by his Calvinist education believes we are capable of per-

sonal salvation, though only through great suffering and an acceptance of our "darker natures."

"Yeah, I think that the history of the human race is fairly explicit," he says. "Obviously, you hope that, by changing yourself, if enough other people change, society changes. But, y'know, this whole world's in a helluva fix and it don't seem to be getting much better. We've never created a weapon we didn't use. It's really hard to get too optimistic about the future."

The last image of *Cat People*: a black leopard stares out at us with dazzling green eyes as David Bowie warbles, "I can stare for a thousand years/Colder than the moon/It's been so long/And I've been putting out the fire/With gasoline." The music crescendos, but this time, Paul Schrader's apocalypse ends with a whimper rather than a bang.

The Atomic Cafe Greetings from Ground Zero

by Renee Shafransky

United States government and military agencies run a film industry that rivals Hollywood's. They produce propaganda in the guise of educational and informational films. No telling what's in production this month, but one thing is certain... today's film is tomorrow's policy.

In the '40s and '50s, these pseudo-DeMilles were busy scripting the Cold War and the Nuclear Age. Vaults and storerooms remain, filled with footage of Cold War stars: Richard Nixon, J. Robert Oppenheimer, Nikita Khrushchev, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, Ron Reagan and the Big Bombs themselves.

Filmmakers Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty and Pierce Rafferty spent five years researching these government archives. They selected newsreels, talk-shows, training films, cartoons, radio programs and "bomb songs"—then edited them into a feature-length documentary called *The Atomic Cafe*, a film record of the implantation of the codes of nuclear gibberish.

Nuclear mythology has been with us since the '40s—since the secrets of Los Alamos were unleashed on Hiroshima—since J. Robert Oppenheimer and the top scientific brains of the nation spent two years in the Southwest, practicing modern alchemy. Because they made mushroom clouds instead of gold, their work took on a religious nature. Like Athena, who sprang from Zeus' head to reign a goddess of war on earth, the A-Bomb has functioned on a metaphysical level for Americans. We have, so far, been bombarded only with imagery.

The Atomic Cafe works this charged imagery into a comic nightmare. It's a compilation film, in the tradition of filmmakers Bruce Connor (*A Movie*) and Joseph Cornell (*Rose Hobart*). Like these filmmakers, *The Atomic Cafe* collaborators pull cultural artifacts out of context and subvert their

original intentions. They've used American government and military propaganda against itself—revealing the absurd, preposterous, titillating, breath-taking and ultimately hair-raising aspects of their material.

The U.S. government is caught in "Moonie-like" indoctrination poses. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower invoke God and "His will" to justify their decisions. The "friendly natives" of Bikini Atoll smile for the benefit of Army cameras as they learn that their island is about to be evacuated and blown-up. Their tribal chief spouts a rehearsed speech about the fate of his people being in "God's hands" (now it's the Army Captain's, a/k/a film director's turn to grin). Other training films describe atomic testing as "one of the most beautiful sights ever seen by man." All of them deliver continual misinformation about the effects of radiation.

But the most delirious material comes with the Cold War in the '50s—a decade, according to Pierce Rafferty, "unique in the level of idiocy it achieved." The footage of this period includes an educational cartoon featuring Burt the Turtle, who advises children to "duck and cover"—a method that has them jumping off bicycles, throwing over picnic cloths and crawling under beds in an effort to get in position for the Big Blast.

The implication throughout this tour of suburban bomb shelters and anti-radiation paraphernalia is that it's all a question of preparedness. When a '50s father tells his children they can come out of their shelter to look around, just one hour after a nuclear attack, we know what level of fantasy we're dealing with.

While researching their material, the filmmakers hit on a number of American pop songs devoted to the A-Bomb. With Dr. Charles Wolfe, "the Atomic Bomb song collector" from Murfreesboro, Tennessee, they produced *Radioactive Rock 'n' Roll, Blues, Country and Gospel*, a soundtrack released by Rounder Records. On both the record and the film, the male voice of authority runs rampant. Though the film foregoes any added narration, the original soundtrack includes presidents, radio announcers, TV interviewers, admirals and male cartoon characters who supply us with continual misinformation and misplaced values. The tragedy of it all is that it's not very different from what we see today.

"Let's face it," says Jayne Loader, "propaganda is as pervasive today as it was then, if not more so. And some of the same politicians who were advocating the use of nuclear weapons in the '50s are making policy in Washington today."

"Right," says Pierce, "and if a healthy skepticism about official voices of reassurance comes out of viewing *The Atomic Cafe*, that would be a satisfying accomplishment."

The problem with *The Atomic Cafe* is that, far from promoting skepticism, its attitude towards its audience is often too entertaining. It borders on camp, and is often as condescending as the original material. *The Atomic Cafe* is a perverse nostalgia film with roots in the present. If the filmmakers' ironical stance can get through to those not already predisposed to see it, perhaps it can increase the awareness of the horrific possibility that the images on the screen will become more than just a cinematic blow-up.



Various Artists ATOMIC CAFE (Rounder)

One hundred thousand Japanese had to die at Hiroshima to make this record. When the bombs were dropped and enemy Japan was pronounced D.O.A., the nuclear age was underway. There was no return to the simpler times of mere conventional warfare. The threat of "the bomb" was with us forever.

In the U.S., when politicians weren't advocating dropping the bomb on the Russkies and the citizenry wasn't hunched over in stairwells practicing what to do if and when the bomb arrived air mail from overseas, America was singing. Ah yes, I hear America singing... singing about the Lord God, his power made manifest through the tip of the index finger of President Harry S. Truman as it pushed the button. America was also singing scared: "... Oh, Lord, please don't drop that H-Bomb on me..."

The Atomic Cafe soundtrack is a sampler of atom bomb imagery in American popular music from 1945-62. It is the novelty record for aficionados of Apocalypse Chic. It is also an anthropological document of America's number one preoccupation for a period of 15 years. (Would you allow your best friend into your bomb shelter 48 hours after a nuclear attack?)

Side One covers the 10 years after Hiroshima. A time of uncertainty when people couldn't be sure that A-Bomb wouldn't follow A-Bomb. The selections here, which are exclusively gospel and western swing, articulate three sides of the atomic question. In "Atom and Evil," the Golden Gate Quartet warn man to cease his Promethean ways and stop messing with God's destructive powers. Jackie Doll and his Pickled Peppers jingo it up in "When They Drop the Atomic Bomb": "If there's any commies left/they'll

be on the run/when Gen. MacArthur/drops the atomic bomb." In "Jesus Hits Like an Atomic Bomb," Lowell Blanchard and the Valley Trio sing that the comeuppance God has in store for sinning humans will make Hiroshima look like Stalingrad look like Verdun look like Waterloo look like...

By the late '50s, the great fear had mostly passed; we had stopped worrying and learned to love the bomb. Despite all the threats we were all still here. Russians and Americans were still talking tough but exhibiting a modicum of self control. On Side Two, "Atomic" no longer stands for devastation but instead is synonymous with sleek, cool, hot and fast modernity. Most of the cuts are rockabilly, and, as our sages tell us, rockabilly ain't about fear and misery. Alienation and angst, sure—but fear and misery... uh uh. "Satellite Baby" by Skip Stanley and "Atom Bomb Baby" by the Five Stars are, respectively, about a love "a million times hotter than TNT" and a plea to "Nuclear baby, don't fission out on me." The soundtrack ends with "Red's Dream," a strange one by bluesman Louisiana Red in which he dreams he comes to power, lays down the law to Castro's Cuba, and appoints Ray Charles, Lightnin' Hopkins and Big Maybelle to the U.S. Senate.

Imagine a time before cable TV, Walkman, and permanent sensory overload, when one major event, a single idea could be thought about and talked about for more than three days. That's what *The Atomic Cafe: Radioactive Rock 'n' Roll, Blues, Country and Gospel* is about.

by D. Zonzinsky

For information regarding screenings of *The Atomic Cafe*, contact The Archives Project, Box 438, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.

NO MORE LO

by Don Snowden

There have been two distinct phases of the L.A. scene to date. The first was largely created by A&R people flocking to sign any local band with enough '60s pop influences to have an outside shot at duplicating the Knack's one-off success, and it did nothing to disprove the prevailing notion that Los Angeles merely absorbed current trends and spawned pallid imitations of them. The second crested last summer when the quality bands that had stuck it out in the face of industry indifference and built their following from the grassroots up—X, Blasters, Go-Go's, et al—graduated to national prominence. Of course, there are always a few artists who fit awkwardly, if at all, into these tidy little patterns. Two cases in point: the Plimsouls and the Plugz.

The Plimsouls were never a "hip" L.A. band; their '60s-rooted sound got them lumped in with the Knack clones despite an infinitely grittier and more modern approach. Their encounter with the star-making machinery reads like a primer on why bands should avoid major labels. The Plugz, on the other hand, always lived on the hip side of the street, even if they sounded a bit different than other early L.A. hardcore bands. But while their Masque contemporaries were rising to prominence or calling it quits, the Plugz were slipping into limbo, wrestling with a major shift in musical direction and struggling to find the right bass player to complement the nucleus of guitarist Tito Larriva and drummer Chalo Quintana.

But now the Plimsouls and the Plugz are both on the road to recovery, taking hold of their future with new records and new resolve.

The Plugz: "We can go as far as we want"

During an interview in the spartanly furnished corner of a downtown L.A. loft that serves as Fatima Records headquarters, it becomes obvious that the Plugz have weathered the storms. *Better Luck*, their second self-financed and -produced album, finds them successfully trading a bit of visceral power for a broader, more sophisticated musical palette. The recent recruitment of Philadelphia native Tony Marsico has apparently ended the Plugz's long-standing bass problem, adding a new lightness and snap to a band periodically prone to dogged plodding.

Larriva formed the Plugz early in '78 with bassist Barry McBride and imported Quintana, an old El Paso musical buddy, to fill the drum chair six months later. Since then, the Plugz have contributed their share of colorful tales to the formative stages of the L.A. scene. During one legendary lunch-time gig at a local high school, a worried principal pulled the plug (sorry, unavoidable), cueing an instant riot in which said principal and other authority figures were pelted with sandwiches, notebooks and assorted fruit while half the student body decided they really didn't feel like hanging around for afternoon classes anyway.

The Plugz were the first L.A. band to put the DIY principle into operation on an album scale when they released *Electrify Me* in '79. The LP



The Plugz: left to right, Tito Larriva, Charley Quintana and Tony Marsico.

predictably suffers from the band's technical inexperience in the studio, but the rawness doesn't obscure the essential trademarks of Larriva's songs: odd chord changes and time signatures, epigrammatic lyrics that hint at mental states more than tell stories, and *hard* riffs with menacing undercurrents that dig and insistently nag at you.

But even while the Plugz were climbing the local ladder to the support slot at Pil's Olympic Auditorium gig, they were being slapped with misleading labels like "Tex-Mex punk" and "East L.A. band" by industry and media people who didn't appreciate the full range of the group's music. That was easy to understand, what with the Plugz featuring a high-octane cover of "La Bamba" and bringing along young East L.A. bands like the Brat to open their Roxy shows—not to mention the band's desire to give the local scene some socio-political credibility by linking East L.A. barrio and English working-class life. But the Plugz were ultimately painted into a corner.

"It was kind of fun at first but it got out of hand," Quintana remarks. "A lot of times we spent more time talking about Mexico and low-

riders than our music. I think the fact that the Mexican thing was pushed so much could be a factor why record companies have shied away. We're kind of looking to re-establish ourselves as a band rather than an ethnic novelty."

The problems were compounded when McBride left the band in mid-'80 due to long-festering musical differences. The Plugz added John Boy Curry (formerly of the Flyboys and currently guitarist/vocalist in Choir Invisible) on bass and entered protracted negotiations with Slash Records. When neither move panned out, Larriva and Quintana went underground to plot their next steps.

Better Luck, which Larriva and Quintana recorded with bassist Gustavo Santaolalla, keyboard man Anibal Kerpel (both natives of Argentina and members of Wet Picnic) and saxman-about-town Steve Berlin, is a major technical step forward from the crude sound of *Electrify Me*. The Plugz don't shy away from exotic production touches—they complement the loopy rhythm of "Touch For Cash" with trombones; Santaolalla plays the *charango*, an Argentinian instrument fashioned from an armadillo shell with a

wooden neck and fish line for strings, on "Better Luck"—but the refinement and expansion of the band's sound doesn't obscure the distinctive signatures of the music. Quintana's precise, powerful playing ranks him with X's Bonebrake and the Blasters' Bateman in the top echelon of L.A. drummers; Larriva's rough, expressive vocals are as effective as ever. "Achin'" and "In the Wait" are like old friends—those bass lines have been stalking through my brain since the Plugz began playing 'em live two years ago—but the surprise track is the ever-so-crisp, clean progression that powers "Shifting Heart."

Better Luck should put the Latino element in its proper perspective as an inevitable, implicit influence stemming from Larriva's and Quintana's background in Mexican culture. You can hear it in the blood-and-guns imagery of songs like "Adolescent" and "Cesar's Song"; there's a certain chin-up pride and dignity in the Plugz's music which I attribute to that heritage (listen to the way Quintana cracks off the beat in the title track). But it's simply a spice adding flavor to the main course.

"Tito and I grew up with those things so in everyday life we use those things," Quintana explains. "We talk in Spanish but we don't treat the band like a Mexican band. There's a little bit involved because we can't help it, but songs like 'Achin'" and 'Better Luck' could be from anybody."

Marsico agrees: "When I heard the album before I met them, I thought they were just a rock band. I didn't pick up any kind of Mexican thing except for 'El Clavo Y La Cruz,' and I loved it because I'd never played anything like that."

(For the non-bilingual among you, "El Clavo Y La Cruz" translates as "The Nail and the Cross." It began life as an instrumental before Larriva added the Spanish lyrics. Aside from the religious play on words, both are common Spanish surnames. The song concerns a *cholo* dude who spray-paints his girlfriend's name on a wall, then brags about it.)

Better Luck has its weak points. "Blue Sofa" treads too closely to Springsteen territory despite an endearing chorus; Larriva sometimes overreaches for poetic effect in the lyrics; and the album's stylistic variance gives it something of a continuity problem. But overall, it's a fine outing; the Plugz are coming to grips with and mastering the studio as they continue to expand musically.

"What's happening now is the process of all our work between the time we didn't play to this point," sums up Larriva, "where we essentially have the freedom to do whatever we wanted as opposed to being typecast as a three-piece. It's expanded the band's view of what we can do. We can go as far as we want with as many instruments as we choose to go with."

The Plimsouls: Leaving "Wimperama City" behind

If 1981 was the year the Plugz got back on the track (and a banner one for L.A. music in general), it was a nightmare for the Plimsouls. Inaccurately packaged/labeled/libeled as the next Knack, pressured to record in a way that stripped their Planet LP of the band's live punch, and troubled by pro-

OOKING BACK

motional problems (e.g., no records in the stores despite airplay and live appearances), the Plimsouls spent a character-building 12 months.

"I got so upset when we were on tour," Plimsouls mainman Peter Case relates over long-necked Buds in a Hollywood bar. "Finally I just totally flipped out, like getting up every day and being drunk by nine because you're so impotent in the face of it. You're out in the middle of the country and nothing's happening anywhere and you can see the whole thing sliding and everything you put into it sliding."

"It didn't really increase our audience at all to be on a major label. That's what I told Richard [Perry] the day I went to him: 'We had that Beat record out [*Zero Hour*] last year, and with your million-dollar building on La Cienega and 90,000 people on the phone, *one guy*, Stephen Zepeda, in a loft in Long Beach with one telephone and a pile of records and address labels in the corner sold just as many records and got it on just as many stations.'"

Case first began playing circa '76 with the seminal/semi-legendary Nerves, who coalesced in San Francisco. That group released its own EP and did a shoestring national tour at a time when such things weren't common practice for new and unsigned bands. The Nerves split up shortly after relocating in L.A., where Case had trouble finding compatible people to play with until he wound up stuck in a freeway traffic jam listening to a James Brown tune blasting out of drummer Lou Ramirez's car. (Is this prototypical L.A. or what?) Case followed Ramirez to the rehearsal studio the latter shared with bassist David Pahoia (the two had been in bands together since the age of 15)—and the Plimsouls were born. They served their apprenticeship early in '79, playing five 45-minute sets a night, five nights a week, in an El Monte palace of excess called The Place.

"You can imagine in El Monte, there's only two things goin' on, and one of them was The Place," Case remembers. "The other one was the bowling alley, and most people wanted to go there. But if you got 86'ed from the bowling alley, you came to The Place, where we'd play. There were all these really horrible gone drunks."

During this period, the Plimsouls were one of those bands I respected more than liked. They worked hard onstage; they had a number of good, solid songs with roots in the rougher, more rocking side of the '60s (e.g., the "Dizzy Miss Lizzy" end of the Beatles); and they were the only band in town that displayed any awareness of '60s music as more than a lily-white English phenomenon by covering Otis Redding and Wilson Pickett tunes. Most importantly, the Plimsouls never came across as pretty-boy poseurs looking to make their rock-star fantasies come true by catering to prevailing industry whims. They were and still are a no-bullshit band that plays the kind of music they do because these songs really *matter* to them.

My respect has recently changed to outright enthusiasm because the Plimsouls have been right on top of what they do—hard, tight and fast—during the last few sets I've caught. They've extricated themselves from the Planet contract, formed their own Shaky City label, and signed a deal with Bomp's Greg Shaw that gives the band complete artistic control and Shaw max-



The Plimsouls: left to right, Lou Ramirez, Dave Pahoia, Eddie Munoz and Peter Case.

imum flexibility in distributing the records.

A 12-inch single, "Million Miles Away" b/w "I'll Get Lucky," is already in the stores, and it shows that the Plimsouls and producer Jeff Eyrich have successfully captured the sound of the band I've enjoyed on stage and wanted to hear on vinyl. Also in the pipeline is a single by the Action Dogs, a/k/a the combined forces of the Plimsouls and Fleshtones (Munoz: "We'd seen 'em a year ago and were just blown away. They epitomized a lot of feelings of the rock 'n' roll we really dig."), to be released on either IRS or Shaky City.

There's talk of a possible live record of cover songs as well. Munoz again: "It wouldn't be bad, to put out some all-out, balls-out shit, so when people go 'power pop' you just throw on the live record and go 'Oh, yeah? Chew on *this*, sucker.'" And the band has definite plans for an LP of new material, recorded singles-style—two songs at a time. This spurt of activity demonstrates that the Plimsouls have emerged relatively unscathed from a period that would have crushed many bands, and are reasserting control over their own destiny.

"It's like you're supposed to go, 'Oh my God, my *career's* in danger now,'" Case concludes. "We have to go get a deal and be all nervous and all that shit. We were making records before we were with Elektra. I mean, that's what we do—write music and play it, right? We're gonna do that anyway. It's like an ongoing thing that exists totally without even an audience, really, since we were doing it before there was an audience. We don't really need someone to go, 'Here're the keys to the kingdom.'"

The Plimsouls lost that gig when the owner dropped in sober one night, caught the band in the midst of a 20-minute version of "Polk Salad Annie" (an audience request) complete with psychedelic echo effects, decided they were on acid, and promptly fired them. The band retired to woodshed in Ramirez's garage before hitting the nascent L.A. club circuit in earnest, where they ran into an entirely different hornet's nest.

"Remember when power pop was a big issue?" Case reflects. "I went, 'Hey, man, if that's power pop, I don't want nothin' to do with it. It doesn't sound powerful to me and it's not too popular

either, so what's so power pop about it?' We never identified ourselves with that but we'd always get lumped in with it, and it was kind of a burden."

"Most of that stuff was Wimperama City," lead guitarist Eddie Munoz adds.

Munoz, a transplanted Texan, joined the band shortly before the five-song *Zero Hour* was recorded for Beat Records. When the title tune became a local radio hit, the Plimsouls turned into the proverbial hot property, and they ultimately signed with Planet. Both Case and Munoz stress that the bulk of their problems centered around Planet's parent company, Elektra.

"The worst thing was going to Elektra to do interviews and the receptionist didn't know who the fuck we were," Munoz relates. "She was going to call the guards on us!"

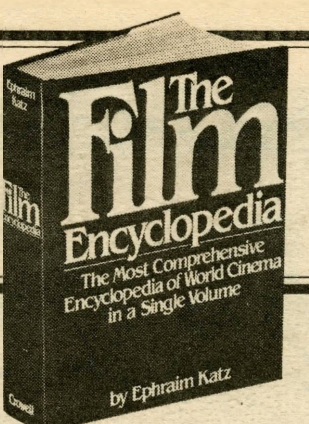
"I had one experience," Case recalls. "Oh, you guys are the Plimsouls. How long you gonna be in town?" And other things like, 'Oh, do you guys play around town?' when we'd done like 300 gigs here—and this was from people way up at the label."

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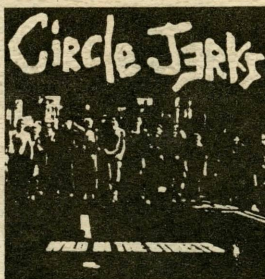


Photo by Ed Colver



FAULTY PRODUCTS

VIOLENT FEMMES

by Phil Davis

Frigid mid-January winds course the dark Milwaukee streets like rampaging Arctic intruders. It's so cold it hurts. Yet down on Center Street, people dressed like extras in *Ice Station Zebra* filter into the Jazz Gallery. Slowly the one-time Polish bar/wedding dance hall turned jazz club fills. People crowd against the knotty pine walls and spill out onto the '50s checkered linoleum dance floor. Waiting for a visiting jazz giant? No, the 150 here are braving killing winter for the Violent Femmes. *Whaaa?*

Soon, three men step up on stage to hoots from the ready-to-dance crowd. Small, dark, apple-cheeked Gordon Gano straps on his hollow-bodied Telecaster and plugs into a tiny Fender amp. Stolid, clean-cut Victor DeLorenzo shooshes his brushes around on his lone snare drum. Stage left, Brian Ritchie fiddles with the cord to his Barcus-Berry amplified mariachi bass, an instrument that looks like an oversized acoustic guitar. Ritchie thumps into an elemental riff, De Lorenzo taps out a stuttering rhythm and Gano nasally whines, "*When I'm walking, I strut my stuff and I'm so strung out.*" It sounds like no-frills Modern Lovers, the Velvet Underground at the hop. Punch-drunk, careening dancers know every word. And over on the wall even Charlie Parker seems to be digging it—frozen in a life-size black and white poster, blowing his little plastic horn.

The Violent Femmes are one of the most exciting, charming folk-rock acts to surface in years, maybe since Jonathan Richman made his private warblings a public phenomenon. And though they're still largely unknown even in their hometown, Shake Records' Alan Betrock signed them on the basis of a couple four-track demos. (The group expects to be in New York this spring recording an EP for late summer release.) Some even unlikelyer Femme fans were the Pretenders, who, after hearing the group play acoustically on a Milwaukee street, asked the trio to open their August 23, '81 show.

"It was a pure fluke," marvels DeLorenzo. "We had gone down to this club called Century Hall and asked if we could do an audition and the manager said, 'Drop off a tape.' He said he was too busy, even though there wasn't anyone in the club. So we said fine and started walking toward the Oriental Drugstore over on Farwell and North. All of a sudden a local photographer started taking our pictures. So we started playing—you know, with the guitar cases open for spare change the way we always do. And this guy comes out of the Oriental Theater, which is next to the Drugstore. He had a British accent and gave us some change and listened. That's when it hit that he must be with the Pretenders because their name was up on the marquee. We figured he was a roadie. So we kept playing. Pretty soon he came out with the others. Then we realized *he* must be James Honeyman-Scott.

And they all sat on their car and listened for 15 or 20 minutes. Then Chrissie Hynde comes up and says, 'Hi, I'm Chris. would you like a gig tonight?' We were freaking out by now. I mean, we had talked about going and playing for the pre-concert line, for change. We played a short set and the Pretenders loved it."

"They were dancing in the wings," adds Ritchie. "Real nice people, not obnoxious rock stars. In fact, they acted more like ordinary people than a lot of the local bands do."

Although their Cinderella story gave the Violent Femmes instantaneous local press, the group still shun the local electric new music scene. For one, their ribald, intelligent songs and half acoustic/nearly drumless sound doesn't jive with the local punk scenemakers' notions of the latest trend. Consequently, the Femmes have opted for more challenging (and fulfilling) venues.

"We had a great gig playing for some retarded people," guitarist/songwriter Gordon Gano relates. "We played at nine in the morning and they were dancing before we even started. One guy did somersaults during the show."

"We'd rather play for an enthusiastic audience like that than a jaded rock crowd," adds Ritchie. "Basically we've existed outside of the conventional Milwaukee music scene. We've used guerilla tactics. Instead of playing certain clubs, we've played all over. On the streets, at folk clubs, literally anywhere. Because we don't play at a loud volume, a lot of older people come. Parents of younger fans dancing with their kids."

The Femmes blame Milwaukee club owners for the ossified local music scene. "Clubs don't appreciate what's happening," says De Lorenzo. "Some charge you to use the p.a. I heard about a band one night that only drew 130 people at the door and ended up having to pay \$1.50 to play there!"

"One club actually has a policy that the bands are supposed to be habitués of the club when they're not playing there," Ritchie says disgustedly. "If you don't hang around the club and spend money, you don't get booked on any good nights."

"And," Gano adds, "in Milwaukee there's some unwritten rule that you just don't play in the street. I suppose some people don't think it's hip. We've taken our instruments on the bus to get to gigs a number of times."

The three—Gano, 18, Ritchie, 21 and DeLorenzo, 27—have only been playing as a band since July, 1981. Before that Ritchie and DeLorenzo worked together as a free-lancing rhythm section. And Gano, who just graduated from high school last May, had been playing solo.

Gano and Ritchie first played together for a National Honors Society awards ceremony at Gano's high school. It turned into a scene as wild as anything in *Rock 'n' High School*.

"I met Brian the night before at a punk club and asked if he'd like to do a couple songs with me," recalls Gano, who was known as a musi-

cian within the Society and thus asked to perform. "We practiced that night. The next morning I came by in my three-piece suit. He had on these ripped jeans and we went to school, walked onstage. They had told me they didn't want me to do this song called 'Give Me the Car.' It was too happy, they said, people would dance! So we worked it out ahead of time that the first eight bars would be one of my real laid-back songs, and then we'd go into 'Give Me the Car.' You've got to understand this is happening at nine in the morning, for a full auditorium, and the school, Rufus King, was mostly black. And though I'd taken out most of the song's bad words, I left in blanks. When we got to the lines '*C'mon, Dad, give me the car/C'mon Dad, I ain't no runt/C'mon, girl, give me your _____/Cause I ain't had much to live for*' the place exploded, like for the Beatles, the Who! They threw me out of the Honor Society and some teachers didn't want me to graduate."

It's that kind of adolescent rebellion, healthy skepticism and humor, tempered with real teen angst, that make the Femmes unique and credible. Although there are traces of rockabilly, reggae, calypso, doo-wop, and large portions of Lou Reed, Gano's songs aren't like much else in contemporary pop. First and foremost, he has a sure sense of a song's essence, a natural simplicity. Buddy Holly had it, Jonathan Richman, and at his best on "Blister in the Sun," "Please Don't Go" and "Add It Up," so does Gordon Gano.

"You know, it's funny," he reflects. "A lot of people say my songs are like Jonathan Richman's or I sing like him. To be truthful, I'd never heard him until I opened for him as a solo. When he heard me, he was all freaked out. He said I sounded just like he did when he was my age. He's a Reed buff too. He says to me, 'You know, 'Roadrunner', you know what that is, it's just the 'Sister Ray' riff I ripped off!' But for all of the band's jocular and breezy live party vibes, some of Gano's songs are bleak and brooding. "*Do you know what it's like to hate/When it's way down deep inside,*" he asks in "Promise," then quickly answers his own doubt: "*I could rule the pain/I could rule the nights/Or would it ruin my salvation?*"

"There's something about really down music like the blues, or in rock, say, *Berlin*, or *The Idiot*, that makes me feel good," Gano explains. "It's more difficult to make a happy song sound

good than a down song." Gano says he's also writing gospel songs, inspired by the black Baptist church he attends. (His father, in addition to being an acting teacher and director at UW-Parkside, is also an ordained Baptist minister.)

Much of the band's chemistry lies in the variety of individual backgrounds: DeLorenzo was a professional actor in Milwaukee's experimental Theatre X for three and a half years in addition to gigging as a jazz drummer; Ritchie has played in dozens of bands, mostly folk-punk, and is the group's acoustic purist, claiming not to listen to any new rock—"I'd never heard the Pretenders"; Gano has performed music and acted, even auditioning for the role Timothy Hutton eventually played in *Ordinary People*. "Obviously I didn't get the part. I wasn't the right age. They wanted someone a little older. But Robert Redford said I'd be perfect as Billy Budd or for the boy parts in some William Saroyan things."

Not surprisingly, the band's name has turned off some. Ritchie says the liberal antipathy is foolish. "'Femmes' is a term we used on the Northwest side of Milwaukee when I grew up. It was the kid who could never catch the football, the kid whose mother wouldn't let him go out. And 'Violent,' it's just a contradiction. It's a stupid pun type of name. It's Dada. It doesn't mean anything. After a while you don't think about it. Although people don't forget it either."

It's also a perfect metaphor for the group's music: outwardly spare, thin and unobtrusive, yet physically propulsive, hard, even angry. Don't be fooled by the minimal instrumentation—the Violent Femmes rock! In fact, using just a brushed snare (although DeLorenzo has a full set and a thing he invented called the tranceaphone, which looks like an upended ashcan mounted on a tom stand) for the drumming gives the music a trebly, early '60s feel; like Bruce Channel's "Hey, Baby" and a multitude of other great records from that era, the sound is all reedy snare. It was enough back then, and for the Violent Femmes it's enough now. They frown on overdubbing, holding firm to a pre-multi-track aesthetic.

"We'd rather have guest musicians play the parts," Ritchie says firmly. "For thousands of years, music wasn't overdubbed. It was real. What you heard was really happening. No one else sounds like us, so why should we tamper with it?"



Mary Jones

GO FOLK THEMSELVES

THE LAST JONATHAN RICHMAN

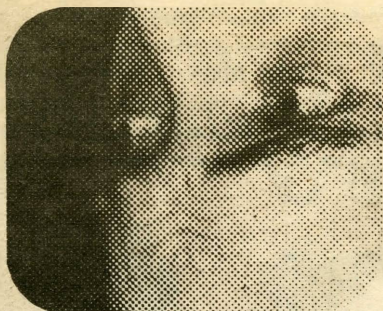
by Kristine McKenna

INTRODUCTION

On May 22, 1980 I interviewed Jonathan Richman at the Gramercy Park Hotel in New York. Jonathan makes a point of meeting with the press as infrequently as possible, but I persisted until he finally agreed to talk with me. I'd hoped to run the interview in *Wet* magazine but Jonathan nixed that idea. "*Wet* is about taking baths," said he. "I saw it, and it had a lotta naked people in it." So the interview was shelved. Nearly a year later his manager of the time, Ken Baker, said Jonathan wouldn't mind if the article appeared somewhere. So here it is.

At the time I talked with Jonathan he was touring with a one-man show—just the man and his guitar, sometimes just the man *a capella*. Recent shows have found him backed by a full band, including female vocal duet the Hummingbirds. To update Jonathan's career further, he's left the independent Beserkley label and has a new manager, Norm Epstein, who's presently shopping around some demos that Jonathan completed last fall in New York. Jonathan is also polishing up a script for a possible half-hour children's TV show.

Though nearly two years old, this interview still bears reading because the values Jonathan espouses here aren't likely to have changed. Jonathan too is probably much the same, which is to say exactly the way he appears onstage: somewhat childlike, warm, funny, and very direct in his opinions.



INTERVIEW

New York Rocker: *You sing a lot about perfect love. Do you think everyone has an ideal soul mate somewhere?*

Jonathan Richman: I don't think about the word perfect when I think about love. To me love is perfect, period.

NYR: *What's the ultimate act of courage?*

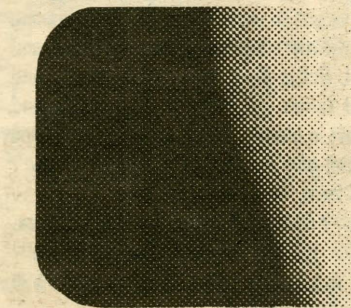
JR: To be sincere, not care what other people think, and do what you believe in. Once in a while I encounter people who live that way and those people are heroes to me.

NYR: *Who, for instance?*

JR: Victor Borge, the entertainer, is a hero of mine. He's funny and plays wonderful music. I love him. Maurice Chevalier and Don Juan, the guy in Carlos Castaneda's books. The Velvet Underground were heroes to me because they were the most honest thing I was seeing at the time.

NYR: *Honest, true. But didn't you find the Velvets' world view somewhat negative?*

JR: I'd rather have honest negativity than fake positive stuff. To me, sincerity is the key, and I believe that if you're really honest with yourself you'll come around to wanting to live. Also, I don't believe in buttering people up with little white lies just to make them feel better.



NYR: *Do you remember your childhood fondly?*

JR: Not especially. I didn't have a bad one, I had a bland one.

NYR: *Is neutral better than negative?*

JR: Maybe, but I'm not so sure. Negative can make you strong.

NYR: *Did you have brothers and sisters?*

JR: A younger brother.

NYR: *Did you go to church?*

JR: Temple, being Jewish, but not very much. I was never very involved in it, which is good—no guilt.

NYR: *What does your family think about what you do?*

JR: They respect me. I invite them to my shows. I didn't say I had a bad relationship with my family. They tried, but if the society they're a part of is a dull, deadly boring one, they can love you in their way but it'll still be a boring childhood. I didn't have problems with my parents beating me and there was no alcohol. My parents were straight and really honest, but it was still a deathly dull thing with school, which is instant prison anyway.

NYR: *Did they encourage you to go to college?*

JR: They were disappointed at first that I didn't go but they didn't pressure me. They were good and supported what I wanted to do. My father bought me my first electric guitar and amplifier. So for me to say I had a bad childhood is a bit deceptive. Compared to a lot of other people I had a tremendously good one, but it's just that I think they all suck.

NYR: *Does glamour hold any fascination for you?*

JR: If you mean the kind of things I think you mean, no. Most stuff that passes for glamour is like an invitation to take a ride in the sewer—not only is it stinking, it's also boring. Many of the people who've intrigued me have turned out to be famous, but fancy parties and all that stuff have never interested me much.

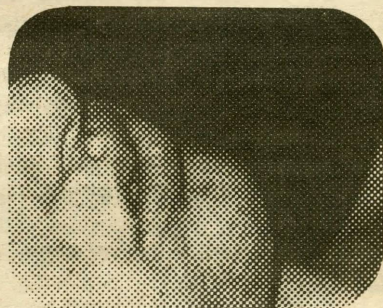
NYR: *Why did you decide to move to Maine?*

JR: Because I love nature and silence. For me the most hellish aspect of New York is the noise. That's why everyone here is so nervous and unable to relax—there's no *silence*. You know, I lived in New York ten years ago and I thought it was gross then—a lazy bunch of slob and jerks. And the healthier I get, which happens every year, the more grotesque New York seems to me. When I lived here I loved it in a way because I wanted all the nervous things it had, the electricity and going a million places at once. It's overwhelming and hilarious but mostly it's weird. Night clubs in New York are great if you like being pushed around and miserable, but a lot of New Yorkers do love being insulted. It's part of the New York thing for conditions to be miserable. These people *wanna* eat shit! I'm serious! I'm not exaggerating! Because they hate themselves.

NYR: *You also lived in Los Angeles for a while, didn't you?*

JR: Yeah, L.A., and San Francisco for a while. It was a good break from the East Coast but I felt lonely there. I lived in Hollywood for about six months in 1973. L.A. doesn't have the same passion that New York has. Everything in L.A. seems to boil under the surface. It's a stereotype, but seems true in the way that L.A. people are more bland on the surface and angry inside. In New York everyone goes around yelling "Eeehhh, your mother eats this!"

There's this disco song I love called "Puppy Love" that reminds me of L.A. It's got one of those insanely unrelenting beats and it makes



me think of some real cool guy in an air-conditioned car with thick carpets and big radio speakers, pulling up and rolling down his window and saying "Wanna ride?" Real L.A. That song sends chills up my spine. I can even smell the barroom and hear the music blaring. Things like that made L.A. scary for me. But I had a great time the last time I was there. I stayed at the Sunset Marquis and ran in the Hollywood Hills with some friends.

NYR: *So what do you do up there in Maine?*

JR: I play about once a week in family restaurants and places like that. Most people who come to see me don't know my songs. They're not so hot on my songs and that's why I like it 'cause it's not a stacked deck and I have to win 'em over. So when I do "Abominable Snowman in the Market" and they laugh, it's like starting over. If there's nothing for me to do I'll just work out, skip rope, loosen up, read some.

NYR: *What sorts of things do you read?*

JR: Right now I'm reading Carlos Castaneda's *Tales of Power* which I like because it applies to my life. I didn't like his other books—"Eat this, smoke that, he vomited violently"—to hell with that shit! But *Tales of Power* is not about drugs.

NYR: *Were you ever interested in drugs?*

JR: No, because I feel things in my heart, and painful as it can be, I've always wanted to be myself. People take drugs because they don't like themselves. See, I'm a proud little son of a bitch. I think I'm okay the way I am so I'm a little suspicious of anything that's going to alter me. If you're not too pleased with what was there from the factory, then you don't mind altering it because you didn't think it was such a great present in the first place. We're talking about



faith in yourself, and I don't like to run from because it's the same thing as running from. You can't feel joy if you don't feel pain. People don't know how to have fun and that's why so many people take drugs. All four people who know how to have fun are going to be at the convention in Iowa next week.

NYR: *What did you think of punk music?*

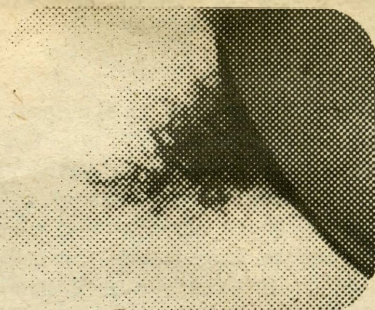
JR: Compared to some other things I'd seen, it had some heart in it, but it was defensive. They were singing pretty real but they were sinners. "Don't mess with me." They weren't willing to put themselves on the line. They mistook tenacity for weakness and defensiveness for strength. Having a 90-pound scowl on your face does not make you strong.

NYR: *Which is more important to you, work or romance?*

JR: The work I'm doing is part of my romance. The two are synonymous. If you really feel romance, even if you're doing something just for the money, your work will have romance to it. Don't think of what I do as work. I'm just a person who loves to sing and I'm glad to be able to sing in public and get paid for it.

NYR: *Why have you eliminated the band from your live shows?*

JR: There's something dramatic about being there all alone. I like to be naked onstage. I like to be more intimate—plus I don't have to please anyone. I like the fact that I do the same show onstage as I'd do in your living room. I like it because it's real and about people, not about ideals. So when I sing I'm not professional, mean, I am—I show up on time and do a professional show. But at the same time, I am like you



NYR: *What sort of music do you listen to?*

JR: The music that moves me is old time rock 'n' roll, especially old vocals from the '50s like the Harptones.

NYR: *How do you feel about being a cult artist?*

JR: Not good. I don't like that obsessive rock criticism stuff. I don't want people to dissect my music, I want them to *feel* it. Hopefully my audience might have a little different view, but I know that for a lot of them it's just another night out, another scene they had to make. Whenever I get an audience that's too mental I have trouble with them. When I sang "My Love is a Flower" in Philadelphia the other night, people cried. That's my idea of a successful show. I see them cry and it makes me start to cry. That's what I call rock 'n' roll.

NYR: *Do you think the music industry has an unusually high quotient of corrupt people?*

JR: No, I think it all works out about the same. I love this music industry because it's full of misfits.

NYR: *You seem like an extremely optimistic person. Do you ever experience bouts of fear and depression?*

JR: Sure, I get fearful and feel lonely sometimes, but it's good that I can feel it and not run away from it. When I feel fear I admit it to myself and don't try to hide it and act confident,

INTERVIEW

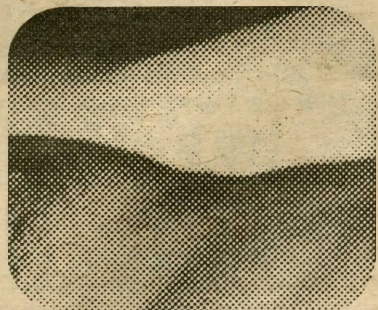
because that's the only way you can overcome those things. You can't sweep that stuff under the rug. And I get a reward for not running away from pain because I'm able to write songs like the ones I write. You can't do it if you don't really feel it, and I get love for what I do. I can feel the audiences respond to my songs.

NYR: *When was the last time you cried?*

JR: This afternoon, listening to a band play Beatles songs in the park and watching this beautiful girl. When I talk about things I believe in it makes me cry.

NYR: *How have you changed in the past year?*

JR: I've gotten more faith and a lighter touch, more immediate and a little less willing to stay at a party when it's time to go. Less inclined to "be polite," as we say. More childlike that way. I have a reputation for being a little brat so it's getting easier for me to come and go as I please. And I've discovered that when you do things in a bratty way you have more fun and end up being nicer to people.



NYR: *Have you always had a lot of confidence in yourself?*

JR: Ever since I was a little kid I've always had more confidence than most people I've known. I can't deny it. In an interview it's tempting to play it down but the truth is I've always had more confidence than most people and more of a voice inside saying, this is what your heart says, Jonathan Richman.

NYR: *Do you see yourself as a man with a mission?*

JR: That's worded pretty heavily, but yes... I do. The important things can't always be said in words, and it sounds too evangelical put that way, but yeah, I do feel like that. People think that what I do can't be done because it's too simple. A lot of people think I'm being sarcastic. But if people can see that I'm not afraid to entertain them just by being myself, just walk up there and sing what I feel and they can dance to it and enjoy it, with me doing nothing more than being myself—then that's my mission.



Laura Levine

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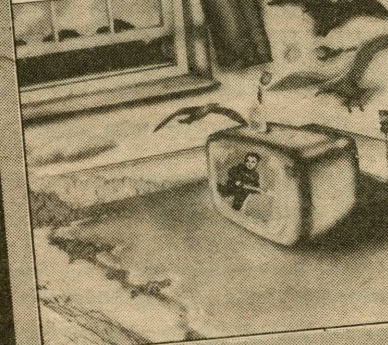


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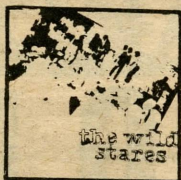
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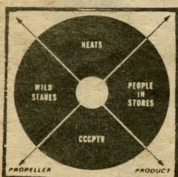
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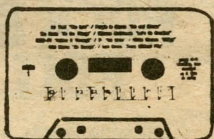
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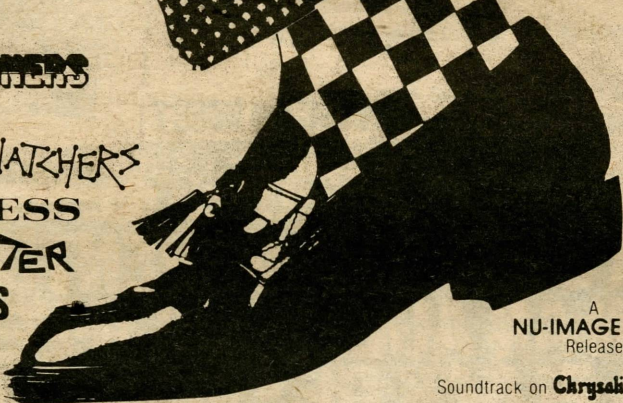
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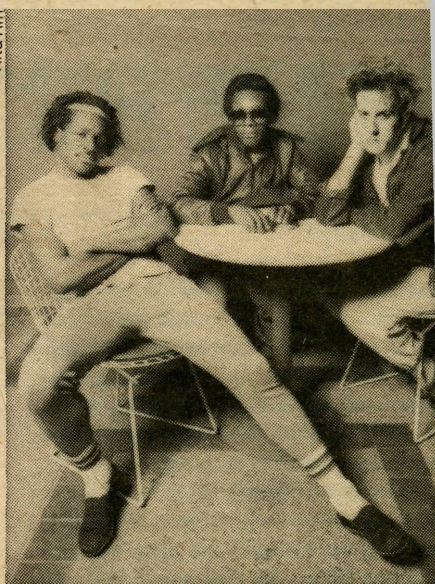
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FUN BOY THREE

by David Fricke

At first glance, being one of the Fun Boy Three does not seem to be much fun. In January, Lynval Golding received a severe, racially-motivated beating at the hands of several young white thugs at a disco in his home town of Coventry, England. His house was then burglarized by robbers who got his address from the news report of a projected series of March concert dates was cancelled because of Golding's concussion and a throat operation on another Fun Boy, Neville Staples. Now, Golding, Staples and Fun Boy number three Terry Hall sit in a Chrysalis Records office in New York, forced one more time to count the bodies in the grisly breakup of their old band, the pioneer U.K. punk'n'skaheads the Specials.

"All we wanted, all we ever pushed for was equality," says Golding, his hand to his black face marred by a savage pink scar on his neck and gruesome purple bruises surrounding his right eye, all souvenirs of his close encounter with the racist kind. "That was what the band was preaching. But there was none in the band. He was the leader of the band and he wouldn't have it."

"He" is Specials founder-organist Jerry Dammers, who the Fun Boys paint as the 2-Tone Hitler. Dammers, they claim, paid himself better than he paid his bandmates. During the Specials' last U.S. tour, he reportedly tried to fire manager Rogers without telling the others. When they got back to England, he did fire guitarist Roddy Radiation, currently leading his own band, the Tearjerkers. Rick Rogers since swung his allegiance to Fun Boy Three.

"Jerry's getting like a miserable kid, very weird," sneers Hall, looking like a Cockney Deerslayer in his suede fringe jacket and corduroy colonial drawers, with a strange orange-brown hair that looks like a patch of tall wheat bending in a pre-wind. "He keeps threatening us with things..." Like lawsuits? Another sneer. "Yeah."

As the famous psycho-jiving front line of the Specials, singers Hall and Staples and singer-guitarist Golding made a convenient alliance. During the Specials' 1980-81 sabbatical, they had already started writing and demo-ing together in anticipation of their departure, which came shortly after "Ghost Town" hit Number One in England. But their lack of formal musical training and practical business sense meant their decision to function as a small mobile pop unit rather than a formal band was as much necessity as concept.

Hall draws a parallel with Suicide. "They were the first band I ever saw that doing what we're trying to do. But we wanted to take that a step further. Even though there may be two or three members in a certain band, they still have allocated jobs. We don't have that. No one in this group has a job. We just want to do what we feel like doing without making a mess."

The strong U.K. chart performances of their first two Chrysalis singles—spooky "The Lunatics (Have Taken Over the Asylum)" and a concrete-jungle boom-bass remake of Jimmie Lunceford's "It Ain't What You Do" with singing strumpet Bananarama—suggest Fun Boy Three are on to something. The provocative boy band's debut album, just called *Fun Boy Three*, confirms it. Usually starting with a mechanical clip of a rhythm machine, Hall, Staples, and Golding pile on all manner of organic percussion to achieve their desired effect—a funereal dirge in "The Lunatics," the natives-are-restless rumble of "Faith Hope and Charity," the paranoid voodoo of "I Don't Believe It." Golding adds bass and occasional guitar, Hall of plunks untutored piano, and their three voices rise in stirring offbeat harmonies that sound like equal parts reggae croon, cottonfield gospel, and African war chant. As to think they do it just by walking into a studio, working out tunes, making up words and picking out sounds as they go along, like kids in some high-tech playground.

"We're the commercial PiL, if you like," offers Hall, which also goes a long way towards explaining their live concert policy. Fun Boy Three were recently offered a Grace Jones tour and turned it down. They hasten to explain that the cancelled British dates were "just concerts, performances," not a tour. And when they do make their concert debut in New York later this spring, the three assure it will be something out of the rock-concert ordinary.

So what's the fun in all this? There is Lynval Golding, gently pointing out the stinging tender blotches of purple on his face. A year earlier, he received a similar beating and wrote a song about it, the pointed, questioning "Why?" from the *Ghost Town* EP. "What can I say after a record like that?" he says with a shrug of bitter resignation. "What else can I say to people?"

There are the Fun Boy Three songs, slices of black social and personal humor like "The Lunatics" and "I Don't Believe It," which tells of a spying neighbor of Neville Staples in Coventry who keeps a running diary of Staples' comings and goings. And there are the sweet and sour memories of the Specials, a group they now believe practiced far less than it preached.

"We don't want to get ourselves depressed with our music," declares Hall, "which we were in the Specials. 'Ghost Town' was like the depression in the band. All we're talking about now is ourselves and how we're thinking and feeling." And the name Fun Boy Three? "We are having fun," he insists. "Besides, it's much nicer than calling the Depressing Boy Three."

DISLO- CATION DANCE

by Ian Wood



Things have been a bit gloomy in Manchester of late. Once the epicenter of the UK Alternative—let's be chauvinistic for a moment and say that with a track record of the Buzzcocks, the Fall and Joy Division, no other provincial city can compare—it seems as if its 15 seconds of fame have slipped away and other places (Liverpool, Sheffield) were taking their turn. Manchester *still* lacks a decent venue, though Factory Records are working on their new FAC 45 project. But on the periphery, things are beginning to look up.

As a reaction to the baleful afterglow of Joy Division, the best of the new bands are taking the formularized New Pop and gently tangling it in knots. There's the new, completely revamped Distractions, concentrating on ballads, working towards a soul/Latin crossover. The Rum Babas, who include former Smirks Simon Milner and Neil Fitzpatrick, extravagantly mix mime, theater, swing pastiche and all-round poetic perambulations—the cabaret of tomorrow, today. Finally, Dislocation Dance have speedily followed up their drily funky extended 12", "Slip That Disc," with a thoroughly delightful album, *Dance Dance Dance*, on Richard Boone's New Hormones label.

Dislocation Dance have been around for a while in one format or another, and now that they're beginning to pick up some good reviews, journalists seem intent on pushing them into the "oddball" category—the excuse being, I suppose, that trumpeter Andy Diagram walks with a stick because of problems with his leg. I met Dislocation Dance in a burger joint; I found a band thoughtful about what they do, great fans of others, who probably don't even take drugs. I was too busy disentangling the straws in my Pepsi to ask.

All have other pursuits. Singer/guitarist Ian Runacre works in a chain chemists', bass player Paul Emerson teaches, drummer Dick Harrison is a farmer, while Andy

"Image is important. The notion that the music will stand up for itself is a very old-fashioned idea."

Diagram doubles up as bass player for the Diagram Brothers, another New Hormones act. Since most of this seemed pretty sane to me, I wondered why get bothered with the Rock Circus?

"I don't want to get involved with the Rock Circus," says Ian Runacre. "We're not a rock band as such... We're in the *music* business, yes, but I think we're in the right part of the music business, working with a small independent label, people we're friendly with. It works out at a very personal level."

I put forth the consumer's point of view, theorize a little about Pop as pure capitalist diversion, the marketing of style as commodity.

"The image side of the band is a very important thing, and the notion that the music will stand up for itself is a very old-fashioned idea," explains Paul Emerson. "I think that the idea of music as a product, carrying an image, is important, and it's something that we do probably spend as much time talking about as we do on discussing the music itself." But Dislocation's real motivation is another old idea, perhaps the most defensible of all. "We're all very much music fans, and absolutely fanatical about it. We've all different tastes, and that energy and enthusiasm keeps us together."

Dance Dance Dance is certainly eclectic, bound together by constants: unobtrusive pop-funk, sly humor, Ian Runacre's softly enunciated vocals, all used as a springboard to veer off adventurously. "Have a Chance (On Romance)," for instance, is a breathy evocation of the Swing Era, paying homage to Sinatra and Riddle before shifting into the bebop "...Have a Dance," fuelled by an ambitious but precise trumpet solo, that spotlights the gulf between DD and such anarachists of form as Pigbag and Rip, Rig—It shows a discipline, an understanding of what ground rules are worth adhering to. Elsewhere there's a wide-open piece, "Footloose," which indicates that someone still listens to Miles' *Silent Way*. My own favorite is Dislocation's only lapse of judgment. "Vendetta" is supposed to be a TV cop theme, but it's really much more Dr. Kildare. Imagine the credits, close up on the stud surgeon sweating in the lab, pan outside to clinical corridors where dear, dear nurses speed the stricken. In the theater, the second ticks away. Can our hero trace the virus in time?

Dislocation Dance admit: "We're basically a shy bunch of people and not particularly egotistical." This seems true, and will surely impede them commercially. But viewed as innovative mood music or as a conversation piece on its own, *Dance Dance Dance* is a worthwhile investment.

So long as you actually like Music Music Music, that is.

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| 22 | MONTREAL - THE PRETZEL |
| 23 | TORONTO - OPENING FOR PETE SHELLEY |
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SINGLES

RAPPIN' ABOUT RAPPIN'

Grand Wizard Theodore & the Romantic Fantastic 5

"Can I Get a Soul Clap" b/w "Instrumental Version" (*Soul-O-Wax*)

Live, Grand Wizard Theodore is one of the great fast-cutting break-mix DJs, but on this record a funky studio track of syn-bass and percussion ("Good Times" revisited) is substituted for Theodore's masterful mixing. Still, with its raw party ambience, the rap has heart, especially in a touchingly rocky sung passage. This record comes out of the same 125th Street record store (run by Johnny Soul) that produced "Live Convention '81," the bootleg rap 12-inch that featured performances by many famous DJs and MCs.

Afrika Bambaataa & the Jazzy 5/ The Kryptic Krew with Tina B.

"Jazzy Sensation (Bronx Version)" b/w "Jazzy Sensation (Manhattan Version)" & Instrumental (*Tommy Boy*)

Released on *Dance Music Report* publisher Tom Silverman's label, mixed by KISS-FM remixer Shep Pettibone, based on Kenton Nix's rhythm for Gwen McCrae's "Funky Sensation" and administered by the legendary DJ Afrika Bambaataa and his Jazzy 5 MCs, this all-star production reaches new heights of sophistication for rap on record. Strip funk down to the bone and you've got the bass (or syn-bass), wood stick percussion and handclaps heard here. When it all breaks down instrumentally, it's like a jungle jaloopy cruising for competition. The smooth ensemble rap is packed with topically hip NYC references to local area schools, "Genius of Love," Mr. Magic, and "Sylvia" (Robinson, of Sugarhill?). (Sadly, these bits have been omitted from the second, currently available version....ED.)

The "Manhattan Version" flips offers an extended sci-fi synth break on the instrumental and a silky-smooth rap by Tina B.: "C'mon, punk, punk, punk it up..." Almost album-like in its sheer breadth and density, this is a mixer's delight, offering infinite variables.

Flash & the Furious 5

"Flash It to the Beat" b/w "Fusion Beats, Vol. 2" (*Bozo Meko*)

Grandmaster Flash

"Flash to the Beat, Pt. 1 & 2" (*Sugarhill*)

The Bozo Meko bootleg is a live recording made by Afrika Bambaataa straight off the board at a Bronx youth center party, with Flash playing his keyboard-controlled rhythm machine, the "beat box." The end result makes rapping and break-mixing sound like some kind of new jazz—just voices and percussion, the beat box pushed way up front in the recording, the voices riffing and diving in horn-like arcs. "For all you MCs in the crew/Here's what we want y'all to do/Shoo, shoo, shoo shoo!"—punk rap or Afro-American vocal folk jazz? This shouldn't be a bootleg, it should be on the Smithsonian label. *Crucial*. The flip is a B-Boy special, a James Brown remix which extends the breaks to make the DJ's inter-cutting a little easier.

Sugarhill Records, Flash's present label, has countered the Bozo Meko boot with a

beat-box track of its own. The rap is slowed down a bit here, changed into....singing, by Rahiem and the other MCs of the Furious 5. The track uses some of the same lines as the bootleg, adding more as it builds over the two parts. Reminds me more of classic George Clinton wall-o'-funk than a trad tag rap group.

NEW STANDARDS

Junior

"Mama Used to Say" b/w "Instrumental Version," "English Party Mix" (*Mercury*)

"D" Train

"You're the One for Me" b/w "Version" (*Prelude*)

What makes these two street anthems from early '82 so outstanding, even in retrospect? It must be the uplifting sincerity they share with tunes like "Paradise" by Change and "Let's Groove" by Archie Bell. It's a feeling that propelled you not only onto the dance floor, but through the working week and the chilly streets of Winter, '82.

"D" Train, a Brooklyn-based synth and voice duo, make synth-rock that really moves, combining Hubert Eaves III's elastic electronics with James Williams' impassioned love manifesto in a resounding work of musical architecture. Fave Moment: towards the end, when Eaves drops gossamer strands of synth from above. A very DJ-influenced record, the flip side simply extends the musical space in a "dub version."

Junior Giscombe's record opens with bongos and U-2 guitar chimes building until you're hooked by his opening "Ooooh, check it out!" Heraldic trumpets, pumping synth bass, shards of bells—"Mama Used to Say" sounds like it was recorded in a cathedral. Fave Moment: when Junior's mom advises, "Now is the time for you to strive, for you to get better at what you are doing." The height of sincere male emotionalism.

FUNKIN' FOR JAMAICA

Taxi Gang

"Soldier Man Rock" b/w "Version" (*Taxi*)

Sly Dunbar

"Unmetered Taxi" b/w "Version" (*Taxi*)

Sly and Robbie may have gone international with their various Island productions, but they continue to release their Taxi-grammed JA-only singles, which usually show up later on Island. (Perhaps these two tracks will appear on Dunbar's new solo album, *Slygenville*.) Both these instrumental auto-portraits are elegant, minimal displays of slowed-down ska classicism—sounds like Dean Fraser on a lazy Lester horn solo as Sly whacks out juju drip-drops on his syndrums. The flipside "versions" are further reduced to riddim only—slow piano jams, break-mix style. It's easy to visualize a soldier crawling through the jungle or a yellow cab cruising to this music. Both songs display the customary aquatic Taxi mix, cool and limpid and hypnotic.

Dennis Brown

"Have You Ever Been in Love Before?" b/w "Version" (*Taxi*)

While their track record may not be 100%, Sly and Robbie do have an uncanny knack for eliciting the best from the singers they produce, Jamaican or otherwise. Dennis

Brown records for many different JA labels and released a mediocre U.S. album on A&M last year, but his finest moment (to these ears) was the Sly & Robbie-produced "Sitting and Watching." So naturally, its winning groove is replicated for "Have You Ever..." The tune is seemingly endless in duration and almost addictive in the succor of its slow groove, drawing you up into the stratosphere with Dennis and his backing angels.

OLD FAITHFULS

Kool & the Gang

"Get Down On It" b/w "Stepping Out" (*Delite*)

P-Funk All-Stars

"Hydraulic Pump, Pt. 1 & 2" b/w "Hydraulic Pump, Pt. 3" (*Hump*)

The most majestic single yet from Kool's *Something Special* LP asks: "What you gonna do? Do you wanna get down? How you gonna do it, if you really don't want to dance, with your back up against the wall? Get your back up off the wall!" A very literal instruction that reaches the heart (or spine) of the wallflower's dilemma. Gang vocalist James Taylor gently coaxes, explaining that the place to be is in the middle of the space—and did anyone notice that the horn riff from Junior's "Mama Used to Say" sounds quite similar to the melody of "Get Down On It"?

Though some writers seem eager to portray George Clinton and Sly Stone as a pair of burnt-out cocaine cowboys incapable of serious funk, Pt. 3 of "Hydraulic Pump" should lay that notion to waste. This heady funk concerto takes the duo to new aqueous depths over a continuously revolving synth/horn riff with a slight New Orleans flavor. The oil-derrick sexual metaphor is splattered with voices, synths and guitars in a tidal wave of funk. Enveloping!

(Above reviews by Steven Harvey)

THE BIG BRIT BEAT

ABC

"Poison Arrow" (*Neutron*)

Unexpected versions from Martin Fry & Co. The top side's a mid-paced "Everlasting Love"-type ballad which won't confuse the teenyboppers; the flip's the same thing, archly hashed up in late-'30s style. Tom Waits on Pernod.

The Associates

"Party Fears Two" (*Associates*)

... Meanwhile, the Associates have emerged from their self-created pea soup and cleaned up. They're about to really clean up. Beneath the customarily extravagant vocal twists the tune, simplicity itself. As simple as... (see above).

Brian Brain

"Jive Jive" (*Secret*)

Possibly the worst named group in the world serves up an amalgam of Can, de-coked funk and rap styles. For all the sales-outlet thought (gatefold jacket, etc.), the result is clever but anonymous.

Ellery Bop

"Ringin'" (*Base Ideas*)

Latest-generation band try successfully show "that Liverpool has more to offer than the lightweight bands usually associated with Liverpool" (according to the accompanying press release). They're still identifiable from the city—Wah! meet Hamd Dance—but only the production is less wide open than the group's ambition.

Haircut 100

"Love Plus One" (*Arista*)

Second smash from what looks to be a major British success story of 1982. Lightweight and unassuming, with Ni Heyward's vocal performance and the whole song structure reminiscent of the kind of ditties the Smirks used to emerge with even now and then. Haircut 100 succeeded simply because of a shrewdly judged visual image which appeals right across the board, but because, as with the Beat, producer Bill Sargeant has provided the kind of warm fluid sound which rivals lack. The flip side "Marine Boy," fairly floats along.

Orange Juice

"Felicity" (*Polydor*)

OJ have a similar appeal, and "Felicity" by far and away the best-sounding record they've released. But to claim a rehash of early flexi-disc is "utterly new," as Poly have been doing in British trade ads, warrants a complaint to the advertising regulatory agencies.

Revillos

"Bongo Brain" (*Superville*)

A lesser staple from the Revillos' stable, brought to tacky life with a truly historic bass-heavy mix.

Soft Cell

"Say Hello, Wave Goodbye" (*Some Bizarre*)

The Hinge & Bracket of rock 'n' pop come up with their third successive bedsitter and Sexual, someone suggested? About as erotic as a cold fish finger.

Mari Wilson

"Beat the Beat" (*Compact*)

Terribly easy to de-camp Compact productions. Ms. Wilson's Grimsby fishwives' idyll of opulence comes complete with a soulless band which wouldn't recognize Stax if they fell over it and choreography that's half *West Side Story*, half cribs off 1966 clips of the Four Tops. However, "Beat the Beat" is a sort of landmark in ersatz cabaret. Sink it to the leatherette covers, and enjoy the duplicity of it all!

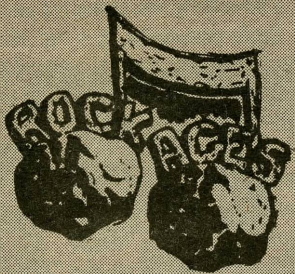
(Above reviews by Ian Wood from Manchester)

INDIVIDUALLY WRAPPED AMERICAN SINGLES

Get Smart!

EP: "Disillusion," "Where Did This Week Go?" b/w "Eat, Sleep A Go Go," "This Is Style" (*Syntax Music*)

Get Smart! is a trio of Kansans with brains and a beat. You may prefer bassist Lisa Wertman's vocals over guitarist Marc Koch's but eventually every stark melody on this EP will wheedle its way into your head (and then move on to your feet). This seven-incher also



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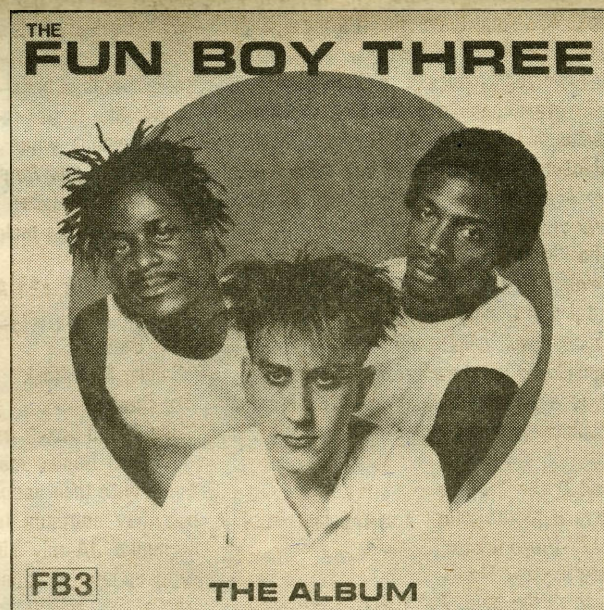
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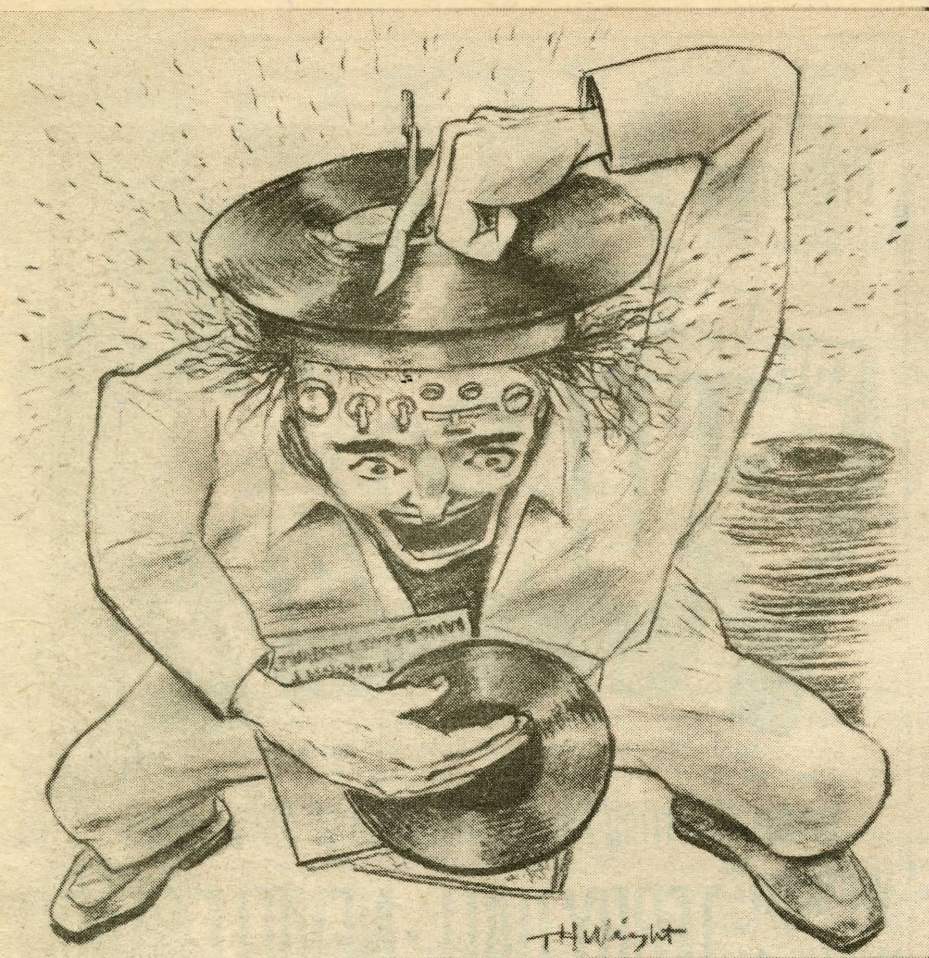
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contains the same version of GS! smash hit "Eat, Sleep A Go Go" that you heard on *Sub Pop* 5.

The Tits

"Love Doll" b/w "Lightning" (*Banana*)

The infamous Tits from Providence, RI, make their vinyl debut and *holy moly*—this band sounds worlds better than the porn-rock fluff I pictured them as. "Love Doll" is smoothly arranged, propelled by a disco throb and presided over by a very evil woman. The tribal space-funk B-side gets better all the time. Could these Tits be a hit?

Los Lobos

"Farmer John" b/w "Anselma" (*Los Lobos*)

One of Smog City's best kept secrets is Los Lobos Del Este de Los Angeles (*Just Another Band from East LA*). Their cover version of Don and Dewey's "Farmer John" is a rowdy, rootsy party number. The Spanish flip goes down like the first *real* enchilada you ever ate, made by somebody's Mexican mom.

The Boners

"Bob the Dog" b/w "Do the Itch" (*Tremor*)

"Let me tell you all/About my dog/He's a darn good dog/And his name is Bob..." So begins a rousing salute to canine courage from the irrepressible Boners. Singer/actor/cartoonist/conceptual con-man Jerry Vile whumps out an idiotically catchy tune, and given my innate liking for pooches of all persuasions, I have to recommend it. NOTE: This song is unrelated to David Letterman's "Bob the Dog," but I'd bet Jerry Vile would *claim* it was in his ruthless climb to stardom.

Trainable

EP: "Pressured by Affection," "Y R Touch" b/w "Art for the Handicapped," "Neutralize" (*White Light*)

"Y R Touch" and "Art for the Handicapped" by Detroit's Trainable lead me to believe that they're on the trail of some kind of avant-dub-thang which seems well worth following. The other tunes are exceedingly dull, and the female singer's lovely vocals are inevitably cancelled out by the male singer's pretentious ones.

The White Lines

"Cos You're Not" b/w "Every Lover's Game" (*AutoMotive*)

Whiny, sing-songy, overslick pop records like this one by the White Lines make this job A REAL PAIN. The women on the picture sleeve are cute alright, but not worth the purchase price of the single.

Jason and the Nashville Scorchers

EP: "Shot Down Again," "Broken Whisky Glass" b/w "I'm So Lonesome (I Could Cry)," "These Women (Make a Fool Out of Me)" (*Praxis*)

Jason Ringenberg is a good ol' boy with rock 'n' roll in his bones and Jack Daniels on his breath. "Shot Down Again" is a country-cookin' weepie concerning Jerry Falwell's unsuitability as a sex counselor (among other things) and "Broken Whisky Glass," while it calls to mind Tom Petty and even the dB's, has a true hit potential all its own: On the flipside, the Scorchers burn up two rearranged C&W hits. Our Favorite-Band, now Jason and the Nashville Scorchers—that's two in a row for Praxis.

The Throbs

"Just One Dance" b/w "Girl Don't Waste Your Tears" (*Hib-Tone*)

"Just One Dance" by Atlanta's Throbs is well-produced, well-arranged and played in fine style—if only the melodies weren't so faceless. Same goes for the flip.

Pylon

"Crazy" b/w "M-Train" (*DB*)

"Crazy," the spiffy new Pylon release, rocks along in a languid, hypnotic groove that reminds me of the Pretenders in the best way. The B pales in comparison.

Mood Food

"The Thang Was Rough" b/w "You Think You Got It Made" (*Zeb Meat*)

"Thang" from Athens, Georgia's Mood Food is a fast funkier with some pretty slick accompaniment. Although not the most original tune or arrangement, it's ultimately danceworthy. The islandy B is pleasant indeed.

Jim Bob and the Leisure Suits

"Panama City Bleach" b/w "This World Is Killing Me" (*Polyester*)

Jim Bob and his Leisure Suits seem to have cleaned up their dopey bar-band act a bit and have gotten interested in more clever melodies. "Panama City Bleach" would've benefited from

a less confused arrangement, but "This World" is a haunting, memorable surprise.

Kraut

EP: "Unemployed" b/w "Last Chance," "Matinee" (*Cabbage*)

Local punks Kraut seem to have a rep as NYC's next hardcore hope, but this by-the-numbers attempt does little to support it. Rumor has it that the plethora of Kraut singles, Kraut video and Kraut promotion is being bankrolled by their parents. So who says punks can't get along with their folks?

Nekron 99

EP: "Let Me Go," "Astro Fighter" b/w "You Really Don't Wanna Know," "Secrets" (*Nekron 99*)

By a band whose name just begs to be spray-painted somewhere, Nekron 99's *Commercial Success* EP is a solid dose of jubilant, juvenile garage pop. A few points need sharpening here and there, but each tune has its hooks and it doesn't take long for them to settle in.

The Vacations

"That Girl" b/w "Modern Art" (*Johnny Apollo*)

Perky popsters the Vacations seem to have put everything they had, playing and production-wise, into "That Girl" and the results are pretty good. *Not* the theme to a popular late '60s sitcom.

Tot Rocket and the Twins

EP: "One More Eviction," "Hundred Years War" b/w "Twenty-Four Hour Protection," "Time to Waste" (*Security Risk*)

Tot Rocket and the Twins seem to be an average-but-likeable rock band that needs just slightly sharper songwriting for everything to click. Of this four-song venture, "One More Eviction" is clearly the sharpest, and if Tot and the Twins can dish out some more like this one I wanna hear it.

Dissidents

"Kool-Aid and Cyanide" b/w "To Be Inside You" (*Maximum*)

This unassuming-looking, no, this downright unattractive-looking 45 by Dissidents actually *sounds* fantastic and is psychedelic right down to its paisley socks. The A-side chugs along just fine despite its obligatory Jonestown theme and "To Be Inside You" is a delightful, smoothly arranged psych-pop number whose lyrics sound about 15 years out of date. What the world needs now?

Terry Mann

"Fire" b/w "Dead or Alive" (*Fly By Night*)

Terry Mann is a helluva nice guy whom you might run into hanging out downtown, and the last time I did he gave me his single. "Fire" is a steady-boil dub number highlighted by a simple, lovely keyboard figure. The live-at-CBGB flip is better heavy metal than most, no kidding. Terry, man, I'm glad I ran into you.

David Myles Meinzer

EP: "Legal Tenderness," "I Like You Too Much," "Love Is Waiting For You" b/w "Bleeding At The Mouth," "Paula Is a Party Girl" (*BCMK*)

Buffaloan David Meinzer appears in five different bands on this five-song EP, and proves himself quite able in a variety of rock 'n' roll styles while excelling in none of them. The principal value of this EP, as I see it, is "Paula Is a Party Girl," a paean to a local sleaze performed with an accordian (by "The Polka Punks" no less) which ends in drunken disarray. Funny.

Attack Under Attack

"Los Alamos" b/w "Operating Instructions" (*J&J*)

Well, it's been a long trip for Jeff and Jane Hudson since the Manhattan Project, but as Attack Under Attack they've finally gotten to "Los

Alamos." J&J usually rise above the rest in the realm of synthy-percussion, but not this time around. Also, their treatment of political themes lack the subtlety that made last year's 12-inch so intriguing.

Heavy Manners

"Hometown Ska" b/w "Taking the Queen to Tea" (*Disturbing*)

Another foiled attempt from this Chicago ska-pop outfit. Do I find *all* ska irritating and moronically bouncy to the point of motion sickness or is it just Heavy Manners? A good question, however boring.

The Cunts

"A Date With Disaster" b/w "There Are Electrical Filaments On My Hamburger" (*Disturbing*)

A better question: Are the Cunts Chicago's best band or Chicago's only band? These songs are so psyche-friggin'-delic it's almost *too much*. With lyrics like "I wish that kids would go the distance/Face tradition with resistance..." these guys deserve a spot on the next *Battle of the Garages*. BUT, unless the Cunts change their name, they'll remain forever asterisked. Just ask the Sic F*cks.

ADDRESSES

SYNTAX MUSIC, PO Box 493, Lawrence, KS 66044

BANANA, 71 Penn St., Providence, RI 02909

LOS LOBOS, 8735 Carron Dr., Pico Rivera, CA 90660

TREMOR, 403 Forest, Royal Oak, MI 48067

WHITE LIGHT, 4744 Second #10, Detroit, MI 48201

AUTOMOTIVE, 29912 Little Mack, Roseville, MI 48066

PRAXIS, 152 Kenner Ave., Nashville, TN 37206

HIB-TONE, PO Box 8436, Atlanta, GA 30306

DB, 432 Moreland Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30307

ZEB MEAT, 100 W. Whitehead Terr., Athens, Ga 30606

POLYESTER, 3232 Tyrol Rd., Birmingham AL 35216

MOUSETRAP, PO Box 451, Canal St. Station, NYC, NY 10013

CABBAGE, PO Box 1424, Flushing, NY 11352

NEKRON 99, 215 Park Row, Suite 3, NYC, NY 10038

MAXIMUM, PO Box 741, Rockville Centre, NY 1157

FLY BY NIGHT, 22 Bond St., NYC NY 10012

SECURITY RISK, PO Box 3483, Grand Central Station, NYC, NY 10017

JOHNNY APOLLO, 2824 43rd St., Astoria, NY 11102

BCMK, 23 Hobmoor, Buffalo, NY 14216

DISTURBING, PO Box 11463, Chicago, IL 60611

THE ERROR OF OUR WAYS

In the layout of Andy Schwartz's singles reviews last month (*NYR* #50), the labels and addresses of a half-dozen recommended records were omitted. Here are the artists, titles, labels and addresses:

Paper Lions—"Love Lies" (Paper Lion, 488 Medlock Road, Decatur, GA 30302).

(Albany) Misfits—EP (Black & White Wreckords, 411 Clinton Ave., Albany, NY 12206).

LeRoi Brothers—EP (Amazing Records, PO Box 26265, Fort Worth, TX 76116).

Ron Scarlett—"Fire From the Sun" (Varulven Records, PO Box 2392, Woburn, MA 01888).

The Plimsouls—"Million Miles Away" (Bomp Records, 2702 San Fernando Road, L.A., CA 90065).

The Housekeepers—"I Gotta Know"

The Gray Bunnies—"He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)" (both Clone Records, PO Box 6014, Akron, OH 44312).

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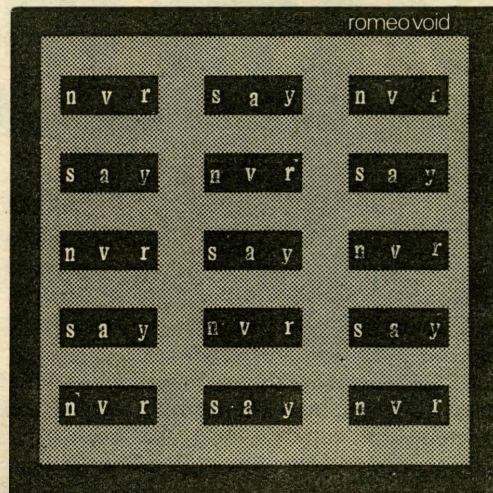
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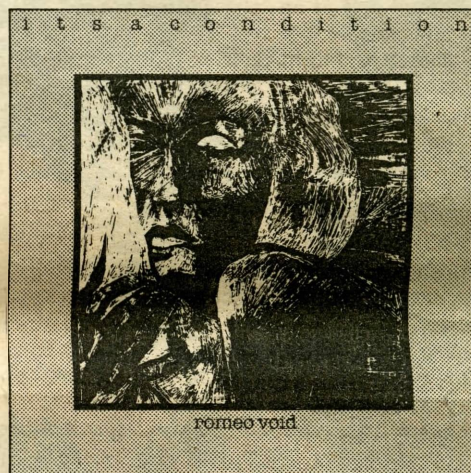
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THAT DOWNTOWN SOUND ... FROM A to Z

by Tim Carr

Now Janie said when she was just five years old
"There's nothin' happenin' at all
Every time I turn on the radio
You know there's nothin' goin' down at all"
Then one fine morning she turned on a New York station
Couldn't believe what she heard at all...
Because despite all the amputations, she could still dance
To a rock and roll station, and it was all right!
— "Rock and Roll"
The Velvet Underground, 1970

But time marched. The '80s dawned and Janie's through with college (she was a creative writing major at Amherst) and there hasn't been a rock and roll station to dance to since the summer of our discontent. She moved to New York City to see if any of those stations remained, but all she could find on rock radio was what she'd left behind: a lot of lowest-common-denominator, survey-sez AOR pablum, spewing out as far as the ear could hear. Nothin' happenin' at all.

She had missed the so-called renaissance of '76-'77 and found the clubs in a rather confused state. The best bands, as far as she could tell, were those trying to recapture that wacky feeling she first fell for in rock and roll. But there was only so much nostalgia she could take — and even the best of those bands were few and far between.

Then she met up with an old friend from college, a theater major, who took her to see some "performance art" at an "alternative space."

This is what she saw:

A woman bathed in half light reciting blank verse, acting out anecdotes and singing into mysteriously modulated microphones while soothing, taped electronically-processed music whirled in the background. The rhythm track was a tape loop of a voice trying to catch its breath — forever exhaling, never inhaling. A series of projections, cut-outs and shadows flashed behind her on a backdrop.

Janie started going to all types of performance: more solo pieces, new music, poetry marathons, experimental theater, downtown dance, video screenings and "no wave" rock shows. And she kept seeing the same faces at all of these extremely different events. As she began connecting names with faces, she found that although a lot of them were, like her, hungry spectators, many were also artists, poets, painters, musicians, dancers, conceptualizers and rock 'n' rollers — often all at the same time. She'd go with these people from evening arts events to the clubs that had begun to cater to their type. She stumbled into a whole 'nother niche in the scene. She began to see bands meld that old wacky drive of rock 'n' roll with low-falutin', high-minded art ideas and coming up with a new rock. It was a glorious sound.

On a night of particular conversion this is what she felt:

The air palpably trembled as a muscular blonde man, with shaved head and naked to the waist, beat furiously and metronomically on a sheet of perforated aluminum, balancing it on a bass drum resonator. Attack crashes melded with reverberating overtones into diminished yet still rich boomerings until the audience was swimming in an ever-changing shimmer of sound. He played for 20 minutes; the sound clung to the air as he left the stage.

Six guitarists and a drummer followed him onto the stage. The leader, in classic rock stance with guitar slung low, turned his back to the audience, a seemingly insolent gesture that proved to be a necessity for his conducting as he nodded out the time sig. intro. Slow build — each guitar, quirkily tuned, entered one-by-one with a simple ringing triad. Just as they all entered unison they downshifted, then, VROOSH, they roared. Pummeling thunder claps and raving organ tones, mystery horns and unseen sopranos rushed out of those guitars, transformed. An ambience of anxious intensity hung in the air as the ensemble shifted and surged.

And Janie just couldn't believe what she heard at all.

"The eruption of the New Wave rock scene in New York has produced a burgeoning field of new music experimentation that aspires to artistic respect and commercial viability. And beyond them, there is a school of rockers-turned-artists and artists-turned-rockers that makes almost defiantly non-commercial 'rock.'"

— John Rockwell, *New Music America/1980 Catalogue*

Or something like that.

So there's another wave upon us. Splash! It is, as the editor of this mag told me, that Downtown Sound. It's been called Noise, art rock/rock art, skronk, rock concrete, post-modern no wave, a soundtrack for the apocalypse in progress, garage-punk-funk-jazz-electronic-communist-white noise. It probably started with the Velvet Underground, or before — at least the feeling — at the birth of New York cool. It was nurtured by the first wave (primarily Patti Smith and Talking Heads) and incubated in primordial Soho.

And it's up against a national prejudice against "weird" New York and, within New York, a sometimes prevailing distrust of what is downtown weird.

These days it's hard to claim you're from Soho. Those New Yorkers truly involved in the arts and those rockers on the periphery have seen what was once the ideal of an artistic community (perhaps only in legend) transformed into an affluent Disneyland, with two chi-chi novelty shops and three chi-chi eateries for every vestige of "old Soho." The generic "Downtown" is therefore more palatable, and because of the permutations, more correct. Displaced artists, the new noise bands and rock composers are now spread over a wide swath of lower Manhattan, from Alphabet City to the Fulton Fish Market, NoHo to Tribeca.

No Cafe Society or Coffeehouse Bohemia, the interaction among downtowners has been fostered in the nightclubs — The Mudd Club, Tier 3, Danceteria and Club 57 most prominently — and the alternative spaces — The Kitchen, Inroads, Artists Space,

PS 1 and PS 122. And the interaction has been heady and ripe.

To give an indication of that interaction, note this: Since its first performance in 1977, all of the following musicians have worked with The Love of Life Orchestra: Kathy Acker, Rik Albani, Laurie Anderson, Becca Armstrong, Ernie Brooks, David Byrne, David Behrman, Rhys Chatham, Jesse Chamberlain, Colette, Sara Cutler, Lenny Ferrari, Ed Friedman, John Fields, Kit Fitzgerald, Anton Fier, Randy Gun, John Greaves, Joe Gains, Peter Gordon, Linda Hudes, David Hofstra, Jody Harris, Iris Hiskey, Mark Hulsebos, Scott Johnson, Jill Kroesen, George Lewis, Arto Lindsay, Bill Laswell, Garrett List, Oliver Lake, Thi-linh-Le, Kurt Munkasci, Fred Maher, Michael Nyman, Dora Ohrenstein, Oleg, Will Rigby, Arthur Russell, Ned Sublette, Al Scotti, John Sanborn, Larry Saltzman, Mike Singer, "Blue" Gene Tyranny, David Van Tieghem, David Woffard, Jimmy Zhivago and Peter Zummo. An impressive list to say the least, including classical vocalists; new-wave, no-wave and punk-junk players; studio musicians; new-music and new-jazz composers; performance, video and visual artists; poets, and the four music directors of The Kitchen.

And to further spin this tangled web, LOLO's leaders Peter Gordon and David Van Tieghem have between them worked with Robert Ashley, Steve Reich, Jon Gibson, Chris Spedding, Tim Wright, Ad Hoc Rock, Richard Foreman, Twyla Tharp, Robert Longo and the occasional solo project. The artists they've worked with (in and out of LOLO) have each collaborated with or participated in as many spontaneous let's-change-the-world-or-at-least-have-a-little-fun-trying ensembles. And an equally diverse and variegated list of interconnections could be drawn up from the off-spring of the first No Wave (showcased at the two-week Artists Space Festival in 1978) and its permutations, which evolved into what was heard and seen at the Noise Festival held at White Columns Gallery last summer.

Herein begins the Theoretical Girls-as-mothers-of-us-all theory, with leaders Jeffrey Lohn and Glenn Branca, along with honorary member Rhys Chatham, directly or indirectly spawning the following bands (as well as their own ensembles): Off Beach, Avant Squares, Ut, Sonic Youth, the Din, the Dinner, Y Pants, Blue Humans, Red Decade, EQ'd, Build on Guilt, Plus Instruments, Chinese Puzzle, Radio Firefight, IMA, Branca/Zev (Doublebills), Smoking Section, etc. And did I forget to mention the Mofungo/Information morphology? Or the Metro Pictures/Mary Boone Artists connections? Or the fathers of us all, John Cage, Phillip Glass or Phil Niblock? And whatever happened to Eno?

Or something like that.

As the Noise Festival and other celebrations of this scene have proven, there is really no definable "Downtown Sound," but rather a spectrum of styles identifiable *en masse* only by their "defiant non-commerciality," their willingness to experiment, their desire to go out, outer, outest.

This is not to say that no two bands sound the same. A lot of them *do*, especially those still struggling with assimilation through imitation or spending more time conceptualizing than practicing. But there is incredible diversity among those around whom, and because of whom, this scene has arisen. And this diversity is a direct result of the convergent evolutionary tendencies of rock and the American avant-garde — the love of progress and change; their thrill in discovering, conquering and confounding new technologies.

While rock 'n' roll has developed into its current conglomerate, it has left in its wake an arsenal of discarded novelties, cast aside as their gimmickry wore thin or a new-and-improved model was introduced. So went the echo, fuzz and voice boxes, the Farfisa organ and the lap steel guitar; so go phasers, synthesizers and harmonizers, from the Top of the Pops into the hands of the experimenters. With each subsequent burst of technology, these new-fangled instruments have become fully understood technically, yet they're only dabbled with creatively, compositionally, musically. These are the weapons of the Noise makers.

The Downtown bands share their love of sheer volume, melodic witticism and the big beat with traditional rock, and augment this with World Music styles, conceptual art, metric variations (stop time, polyrhythms and slow motion), minimalism, dissonance, free improvisation, primitivism and occasional pop references. All of this may sound a little arty and thus counterproductive to those who feel rock and art go together like fire and water, or love and marriage — the old "the butt can move the brain, but the brain can't move the butt" debate. But this is a music phenomenon encouraging an audience to do less sitting on their brains and more dancing in their heads.

Having to argue against what is perceived as the "tarnish of art" is unnecessary when one views rock more as an evolutionary art than a folk art. For it is through its natural evolution that rock has come to share a turf with art. Perhaps this art rock has lost a little innocence in the process, but it still has its share of goofy good times, cheap thrills and out-jokes-for-the-in-crowd/in-jokes-for-the-out-crowd 'til it doesn't matter.

This rock also brushes art via association, through its connections with the current celebration of younger artists in the downtown gallery scene. These artists include Robert Longo, Cindy Sherman, David Salle, Richard Prince, Jack Goldstein, Julian Schnabel, Sherri Levine, Barbara Ess and Mike Zwack, to name a few, many of whom have played in various noise bands and all of whom have added a certain credibility (even if just through their success) to the musical happenings while drawing inspiration from them. And these visual artists share backgrounds with the downtown performing artists. Together they form a community of immigrants — middle-class, predominately white kids, who, like the fabled Janie, escaped the doldrums of that up-bringing, emigrating from Buffalo, Cleveland, St. Louis, Harrisburg, Charleston, Minneapolis... you get the picture. (If there's one native New Yorker among them, I'd like to see him stand up — alright, Jules and Rhys, sit down!)

It is for and from this community of willing and willful renegades that the Downtown Sound has emerged. It has been a support system in which mistakes are laughed at and successes are cheered, by which ideas can be nurtured and their creators pushed forward, ever forward.

(Tim Carr is director of special projects and domestic touring for The Kitchen.)

The following writers, identified below by their initials, contributed the short entries in this section: David Bither, Joe Dizney, Merle Ginsberg, Michael Hill, Annene Kaye, David Keeps, Chris Nelson, Andy Schwartz, Michael Shore, Robert Sietsema, Susie Timmons and Drew Wheeler.



ANDERSON, LAURIE was born in 1947 and grew up with seven brothers and sisters in Wayne, Illinois. The Andersons had a family orchestra and no television set. Trained since childhood as a classical violinist, Laurie studied art history and sculpture in college, and moved to New York in 1966. She then blossomed into a multi-media artist. Laurie is very good at a variety of things; violinist, comedian, sculptress, composer, filmmaker, electronics wiz—you name it. She's a small mobile intelligent unit to be reckoned with. Sometimes she comes across as a magician, but ultimately she's like a movie director. She pulls a lot of things together to project a big vision. Since 1977 she's been performing sections of her four-part epic opera *United States* (which will be mounted in its entirety at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's "Next Wave" festival in November). A multi-media extravaganza incorporating live and pre-recorded music, film, slides, props and cast shadows, *United States*

takes a cool, if highly personal look at the state of the Union. Laurie knits this sprawling subject matter together with an astonishingly inventive use of electronics which she manipulates with magical sleight of hand. Conjuring an electric river of image and sound, she illustrates the awesome scale and hilarious pettiness of America—and the human heart—and creates a mental landscape with the ominous euphoria of a baffling dream.

Laurie has attracted an incredibly broad audience for one with a background such as hers. Her first single, "O Superman," was an international boffo smash hit on the pop charts. Her debut LP, *Big Science*, was recently released by Warner Brothers Records. The big wheels are just beginning to roll for Laurie and I expect she'll do some wonderful things in the next few years.

I've interviewed Laurie twice in the past year and these are some of the things she said.

by Kristine McKenna

Laura Levine



Captain Beefheart has always been my favorite.

Most rock videos are just horrible.

Art is something that's to be received through your senses, not something you have to figure out, and I'm immediately taken in by the art that I like.

I don't like guitars because they strike me as annoying and twangy and have too many associations with some weird macho sexuality. My favorite instrument is the saxophone—saxophone and violin duets are what I really like.

Music is spiritual in a way that something on a piece of canvas simply isn't. Very few people are seen crying in front of paintings and if they are it's probably because it reminds them of their grandmother or something. People cry when they hear music. They cry at movies too and maybe that's because light, like music, sneaks into people in a way that nothing else can.

Movies are a very special thing. There's something about all those people eating together in the dark that I really like.

I once hitch-hiked to the North Pole. It was very hot in New York that summer. I left from Houston Street and it was one of the most beautiful trips of my life. It took about four months and the best part about it was being so totally alone although occasionally it was a bit frightening. My first big scare was when I saw the Northern Lights. I'd heard about them but I wasn't prepared for these incredible, vast waves of color across the sky. It was so overwhelming I thought there must've been a nuclear blast and I was the only one left alive.

The art world is very small, esoteric and a bit snobby about the rest of the culture, and I think it makes sense to try to do work that reaches beyond that context. A lot of work fits well in museums and it would be ridiculous to take it out on the street and say, "Hey! Look at this big piece of blue!" But for other work it's perfectly appropriate to try to present it to a broader audience.

When you start thinking that the politics of art is what makes it good or bad you're in big trouble. What if someone wrote a beautiful, gorgeous opera praising Reagan's policy on gun control? It fulfills all your requirements for art but repels you politically. The two issues just can't be connected.

In New York people tend to be rotating heads on pedestals. If you go to a party in New York, the bodies from the neck down really aren't there too much. There's a real stiffness. And when someone from California strolls in and starts being an entire body it's very surprising. Californians are much more connected to their bodies.

The thing I love most about Americans is their willingness to be fools. We're fools and we don't have the same rules Europeans do about being direct. Europeans see us as loud-mouthed slobbers but that's what I love the most—the way we say what we think without giving it a second thought.

One of the things I try to do is make songs that are roomy enough to be whatever you hear in them. Not that there aren't specific things that I intend, but I tend to float around in the lyrics myself. One of my songs, "Let X=X" is specifically about that issue. Why not let a metaphor equal its own image instead of translating it into something that "means" something?

The people I idolize tend to be women because I think it's still much harder for a woman to work and to be strong and open.

Some things I think are really beautiful other people would find totally vulgar. For instance, a friend and I took a bunch of pornographic slides of dead chickens lounging around with black things over their heads.

Fame has never been one of my fantasies.

There's this game in Ireland called Bowling on the Road where people go out and throw bowling balls down the road but there are no pins—there's nothing. They just follow the balls sort of like "kick the can." It resembles bowling but there's no goal and it's not competitive. The only goal is to pick up the ball and roll it again.

I often think of myself as being sort of invisible and feel more that I'm looking out through my eyes rather than seeing myself as a surface. If I started perceiving myself as a surface to be read I'm sure I'd become very self-conscious.

The biggest obstacle I face is the terror that I'll never have another idea or that the ideas I have don't go far enough—both of those fears strike me often. It's not enough to make something that's quite beautiful but obscure. It should lock into some larger system that makes you say, "Oh! That's what that means!"

When I wake up in the morning I like to spend an hour or two doing zero—basically staring, preferably at some kind of light or sky. That's the time when I get my work done really. The rest of the time I'm just sort of my own slave translating my ideas into pictures and sound.

If I laugh at something or if something makes me cry, I trust it.

My own half-baked theories about what's going on are only that, and I tend to be more preoccupied with mood and rumor than hard fact. I'm not sure in the end if hard fact really exists. You can tilt things any way you choose.

ANTARTICA RECORDS: Antartica is the furthest you can go from the mainstream without leaving the earth, where natural resources have yet to be exploited. Perhaps that's the symbolism record producer/composer Peter Gordon and video artists John Sanborn and Kit Fitzgerald had in mind when they chose it as the name for their new sound/picture label—the first company designed to re-

lease music and video simultaneously (as well as treating each as equal parts of a single project). Antartica's roster of upcoming releases includes work by Rhys Chatham, the Linda Hudes Power Trio, Jill Kroesen, the Love of Life Orchestra and David Van Tieghem. Some of the videos were previewed at Danceteria when LOLO played there in March, and they drew a rapt, attentive crowd. (MG)

ASHLEY, ROBERT: Mr. Ashley is of medium height, wears a walrus moustache and a sober expression. He clipped dark lenses over his glasses, stood before a microphone at center stage, and shouted at the top of his voice for almost 18 minutes. It was difficult to hear him, however, because his electronic accompaniment of piercing shrieks and whistles was played at peak volume and, in the din, his voice was often obliterated. 17 persons walked out during this

marathon.

—The New York Times, September 2, 1964

Possibly music's first conceptual punk, probably the most inventive composer of music with text that America has produced since John Cage, Robert Ashley is now, at 51, a warm, gentle human being—an artist who has more often than not been described as "years ahead of his time" but who is on the verge of completing *Perfect Lives (Private Parts)*, a video opera in seven half-hour segments

that he has been working on for more than four years, a major piece he feels is finally right on time.

For over 25 years, Robert Ashley has been combining words, music and theater in radical new ways. He grew up in Ann Arbor, where he studied the piano, but he was, above all, interested in music that told stories: "I thought I was going to be a jazz musician, up to the point where I realized that the stories jazz was telling were not my stories," he says. "I wasn't black. That's as clean as I can make it. You can tell them all you want, but if they're not your stories, you sound foolish. So I stopped, at about 18 or 20. I had to invent my own form, find some way that I could deal with what I wanted to do."

For a serious young American composer, combining words and music in the late '50s was a lonely pursuit. The traditional format for realizing such ambitions was opera, an old, reactionary musical form—the only creative artists combining words with music were popular musicians. "The one composer really trying to deal with this situation at the time was John Cage," Ashley says. "He wrote his own words, like Wagner or Smokey Robinson."

So Ashley studied acoustics and cultural speech patterns; he worked with crude prototypes of the music synthesizer. His earliest works employed combinations of traditional instruments and sounds recorded on tape. Always there was a fascination with language. His first opera, *In Memoriam Kit Carson*, used electronically processed languages (Spanish and English) to communicate more distortion and pitch than meaning. *The Wolfman*, composed in 1964 for voice and

magnetic tape, was the piece that caused 17 people to walk out of its New York debut.

During the '60s, Ashley was a co-organizer of the ONCE festivals in Ann Arbor, groundbreaking events of the radical performing arts. He organized the ONCE group, a music-dance-theatre performance collective, in 1965, and put together such multi-media spectacles as *The Wolfman Motor City Revue* and *That Morning Thing*. In the late '60s he became a founding member of the Sonic Arts Union, a traveling composers cooperative that included such pioneering electronic music artists as David Behrman, Alvin Lucier and Gordon Mumma.

Ashley moved to California in 1969 when he became director of the center for Contemporary Music at Mills College in Oakland. He continued to refine his methods of using language as the integral element of his music, developing "interior monologues" such as *Automatic Writing*, which sought to release unconscious, involuntary speech. He also became involved in video, producing *Music With Roots in the Aether*, a series of video portraits of such contemporary composers as Phillip Glass, Pauline Oliveros and Terry Riley. Since 1975, he has divided his time between Oakland and New York, and it was here that he was first approached by Carlotta Schoolman, video producer for the Kitchen, about creating a new piece for television. The result, *Perfect Lives*, is, in a sense, the culmination of Ashley's wide-ranging explorations in language, sound and image: "It's really everything I've ever wanted," he says.

So, what is it?

The first opera conceived specifically

Julia Gorton



Julia Gorton

for television, *Perfect Lives* is a dense, evocative epic. At its heart is Ashley's text. He is the storyteller, and over the course of 210 minutes he weaves the tale of a mythical American small town, part Edgar Lee Masters, part James Joyce. It is an expressionistic series of character sketches at once banal in their ordinariness, yet also incredibly complex in form and content. "It's really just little stories about people," says Ashley.

The video imagery combines live performance footage from the *Perfect Lives Lounge*—featuring the World's Greatest Piano Player, the narrator "R", and a pair of lovers, inhabitants of Ashley's Anytown, U.S.A., who double as Greek chorus—with prerecorded location shots, some parts literally reproduced and others treated with a staggering array of special video effects. The net result is an explosion of sounds, images, colors, at times as abstract as technology will permit and, at others, as ordinary as the quiet Illinois farmtown where parts of it were filmed.

Through it all comes Ashley's voice, a quiet, insinuating instrument, partly monotonous, partly magical, a rhythmic, oddly phrased, mesmerizing rap/chant about life, love, birth, death, and the workings of the universe.

Simple stuff like that.

Ashley's collaborators on *Perfect Lives* are "Blue" Gene Tyranny, as the World's Greatest Piano Player; saxophonist Peter Gordon, producer and creator of the musical ambience of the *Perfect Lives Lounge*; singers David Van Tieghem and Jill Kroesen; and John Sanborn, video artist extraordinaire. The music, essentially the creation of Tyranny and Gordon, alternately exhibits the enormous energy and tension of rock and roll and the fake sophistication of the cocktail lounge pianist. Somehow, it works.

Perfect Lives' rock and roll attitude is made explicit when Ashley describes the 1981 tour (yes, there is a live version) of Europe and the U.S.: "It's a very intense piece," says Ashley, "I think when people come to so-called serious music, they tend to expect it to be sort of [he leans back in his chair with his hands up] *polite*. We just came out on stage and gave them

3½ hours of words that they could barely understand. Jill and David were just blasting away, yelling, screaming, singing along with me, tap dancing... and Blue Gene was playing his head off. Nobody was accompanying anybody else. I think for the audience it was like sitting in a high wind... you could feel it sometimes."

A question of definition inevitably seems to arise when discussing *Perfect Lives*. Its structure—both textual and musical—is fiendishly complex; one critic has compared it to the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the *Perfect Lives Lounge* representing the limbo of the soul. On the other hand, its musical appeal is immediate: "I didn't start out writing to make this piece popular," says Ashley, "but I did want it to be exactly in the format of television, so it's not a matter of making it popular, but a matter of making it for a particular thing that is popular... the most popular medium there ever was in the world."

Though Ashley is convinced that the cross-fertilization of the downtown music scenes is a healthy occurrence, he is not ready to concede that the distinction between serious and popular music has disappeared. "I think one of the main differences [between the two kinds of music] is in duration," he says. "It is as simple as that. As soon as music goes beyond a certain duration, it literally has to start using more complicated forms. The most successful popular music gets there right away—it's almost like signals or signs. The words remind you of something that you already know, that is built into you, no matter how complicated they are, whether it is Bob Dylan or David Byrne."

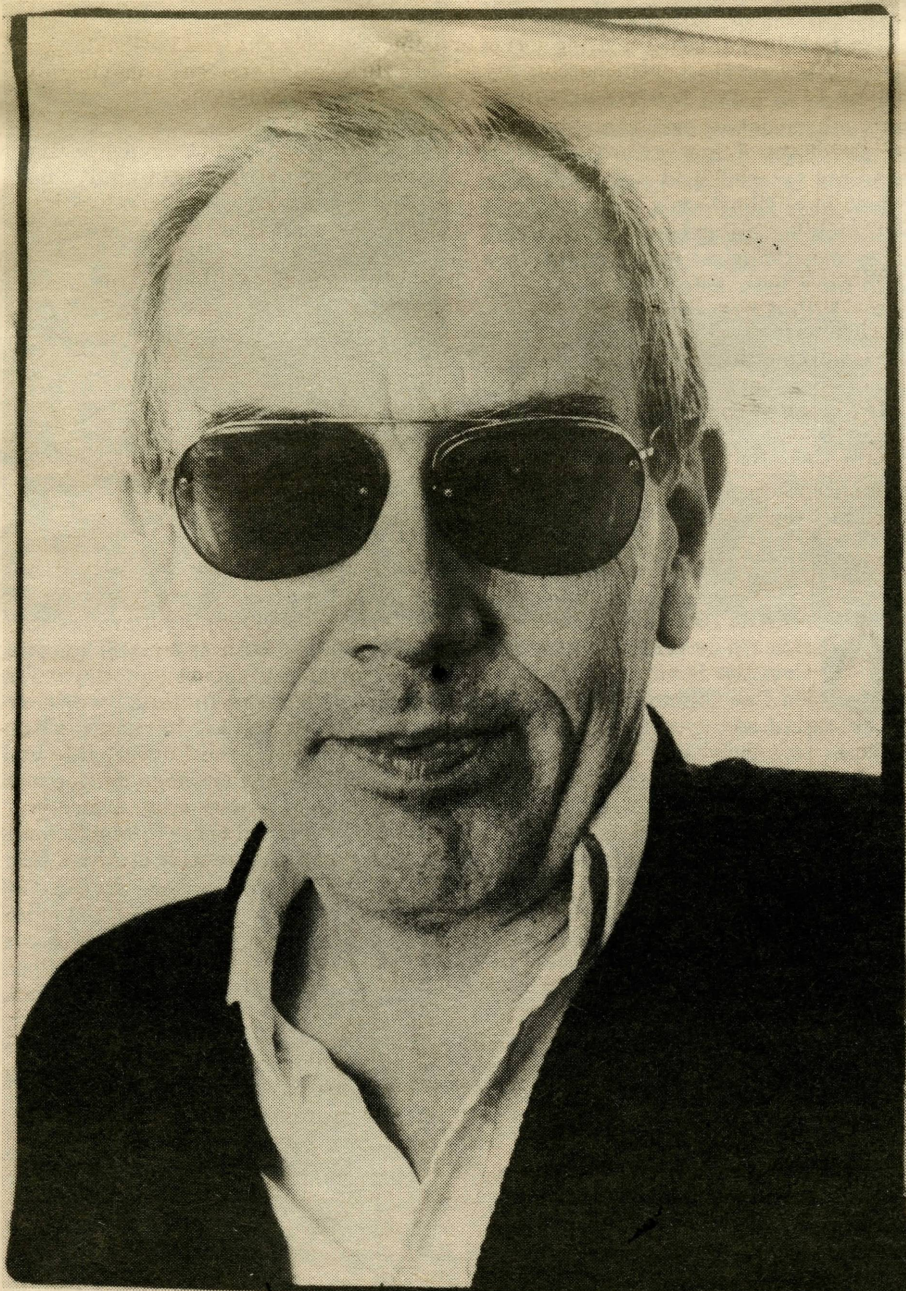
"This sounds like a lecture... but I think serious music should take you someplace you haven't been before. It is hard to do that in a short period of time. Webern and Cage are the only two I know that have done it. We need the language to cross over. We need pop music to use the language of John Cage or David Behrman. And we need it the other way, too, when these composers start using things that people can recognize as modern. It is nice for me to be able to work with things that are modern, like recording studios and synthesizers... they are much more interesting to me than violins. But those two kinds of music have to preserve their integrity in order to be useful to us."

Perfect Lives somehow manages to work both ways: it borrows the sounds of popular music but uses them in a way that expands language and vision. Ashley embodies a dual lineage: he is the heir to both John Cage and Frank Sinatra.

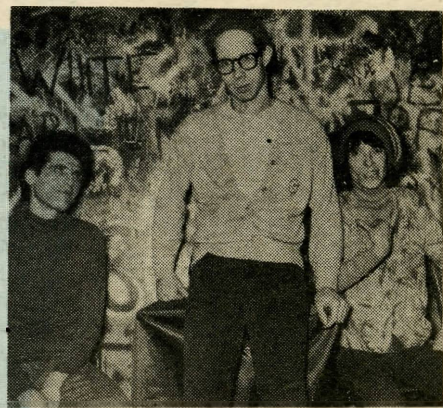
Frank Sinatra?

"Well, yeah," Ashley says, laughing. "Not like Vic Damone, maybe... but the only music in our culture that uses words is pop music. He's telling me a lot of stories. I'm getting the stories from him."

by David Bither



AVANT SQUARES. Conglutinate. Who are we? We are no one. What do we want? A human head. Who are we? We are everyone. What do we want? A large portable fan. Lowdown... and an aeroplane. Slang, upper story, noodle. Sagacity, eagle eye, inspiration, soul. Canny... down my Novocain. Sound the twang, plunk, pluck. Spiculum, fang. Wanton. Autointoxication. Galloping consumption. Mike Sappol, guitar; Barb Barg, drums; Joel Chassler, bass. All singing. Dermis. Camel cargo cult. Logic and set theory. Avoirdupois. Lanky, thinned out, attenuated, lame (as an excuse), threadlike. Oread, undine. See divestment. Watchdog, see memory. (CN)



Teri Bloom

AVANT SQUARES: (L. to R.) Chassler, Sappol, Barg.

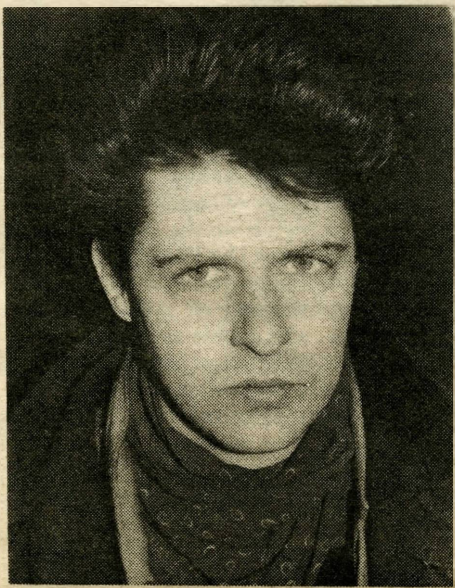


"BLUE" GENE TRYANNY: An extremely mysterious figure, Tyranny is usually seen only as a pair of hands with painted nails playing a piano in "The Bar" segment of Robert Ashley's *Perfect Lives/Private Parts* video. Tyranny's music is strange, alright, but it sure ain't noise. It's delicate, wistful, consonant piano tinkling, kind of a keyboard ver-

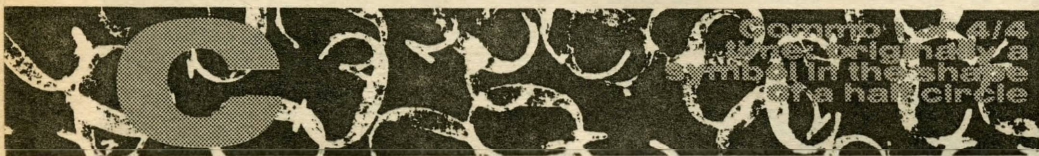
sion of summer breezes wafting through wind chimes hung by a suburban back door. That's at its best; at worst, it's the aural equivalent of watching paint dry. Nothing... much... happens... in... this... music... know... what... I... mean? To these ears, "Blue" Gene's faded-pastel Zen tapestries virtually disappear from view, so little is there. (MS)

BRANCA, GLENN: He plays loud. LOUD. Branca has pioneered the adaptation of the minimalist aesthetic—the static harmonies, the focus on texture as opposed to traditional melodic development—to a rock and roll context; i.e. he uses electric guitars, lots of them: 6, 8, 10 at a time. His music has been called art-rock (remember that?), experimental, but Branca says it's rock and roll. It's loud, it's about density, acoustics, the harmonic textures that appear when one deals in intense volume. It's thrilling to hear all those electric guitars screaming in some sleazy dive of a club, sort of a wet dream for closet heavy metal freaks masquerading as grown-up intellectuals. The sounds shimmer, they roar, you think the walls are gonna cave in. Each piece is built around a chord that shifts in and out of phase, diminishes in volume and then comes howling back. His *Lesson #1* and *The Ascension* LPs are on 99 Records. It's a hard sound to capture on vinyl, and only the latter record comes close. "Symphony #1" at the Performing Garage last summer was an essential event for those in the know.

Quote: "My music is sort of like a circus event... I want to write music that makes people ask, 'Am I on Earth?'" He's on to something. (See NYR #44 for an interview with Glenn Branca.) (DB)



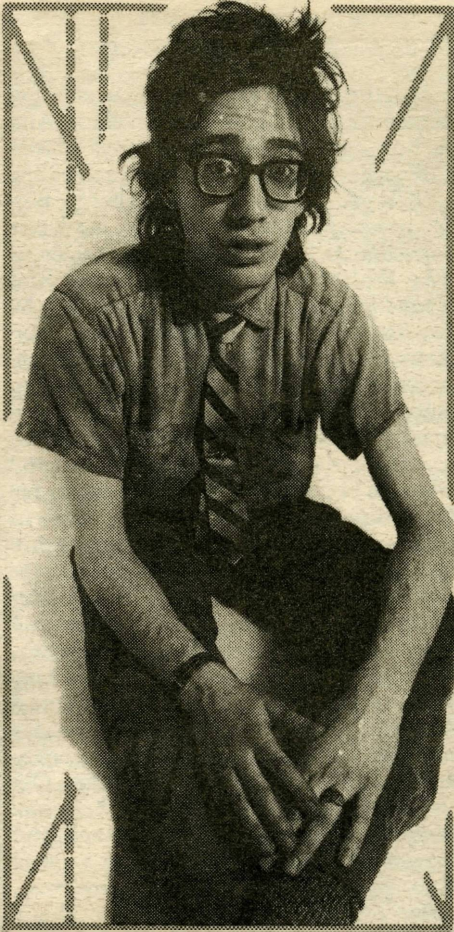
Laura Levine



CHADBOURNE, EUGENE and JOHN ZORN: These two are so far out it looks like in to me. Chadbourne "plays" guitars and banjo; Zorn "plays" alto and soprano sax and clarinet. For years, these two lone ducks existed way beyond the fringe with their "Theater of Musical Optics": frenziedly abrupt squawks, honks and squeaks, with Chadbourne playing his guitars (acoustic, electric, National steel-bodied) with clothes pins and balloons; Zorn taking his reeds apart and blowing mouthpieces into cups of water, etc. Chadbourne and Zorn have never compromised, but they have become drawn into the ever-expanding downtown scene, with



E. CHADBOURNE



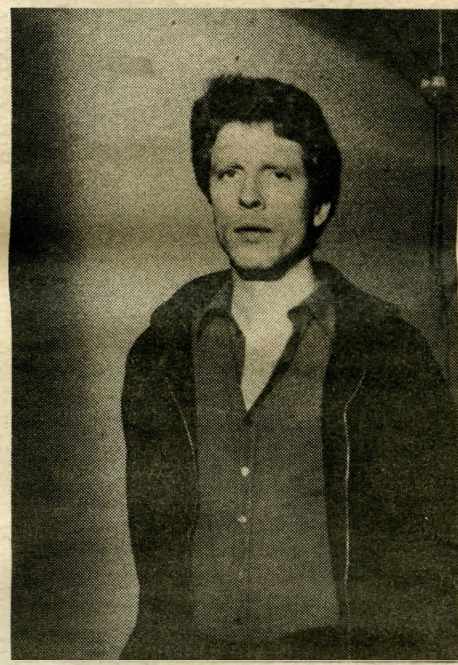
ZORN again.

CHATHAM, RHYS: A one-time music programmer at The Kitchen and former member of the Gynecologists, Chatham has developed an offshoot of Glenn Branca's patented Wall of Guitar Noise: singing, ringing overtones generated by stiff-armed, hyper-distorted, weirdly-tuned guitar thrashing. Some claim to hear heavenly choirs soaring through this high-gain strum-drone (Rhys wasn't kidding when he called his last band "The Din"); others detect only the silly, soulless strivings of a wayward academic desperate for rock and roll credibility. Either way, Chatham's recent efforts (with both his guitar band and a second, rather more musical outfit called New R&B) have been aided and abetted by some skilled players, including ex-Material skinsman *extraordinaire* Fred Maher in the former group and sax man Keshavan Maslak and the superb jazz drummer Charles Moffett in the latter unit. (MS)

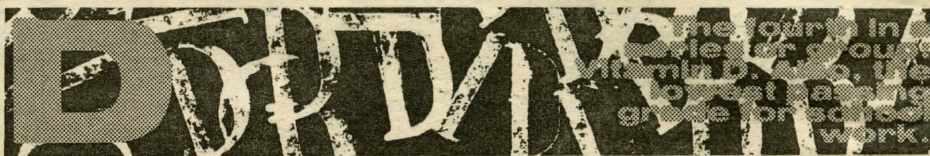
intriguing results. Chadbourne's band, The Chadbournes is a hysterical hillbilly mutation. They used to play "Free Improvised Country and Western Bebop," now they call their stuff "Shockabilly"—either way, it's urgently fractured and energetic, blowing country swing and country standards apart with scattershot free-form gusts and punk-paced wind-ups and breakdowns. Highly recommended, as much for Mark Kramer's priceless hi-tack Farfisa as Eugene's inspired, *outré* guitar and gonzo, off-the-cuff vocalese. Check out *There'll Be No Tears Tonight*, full of mangled classics like "Dang Me" and "Take This Job and Shove It."

Zorn's the kind of reedman who makes Anthony Braxton seem down-to-earth, especially in his abstruse Jackson Pollock-like ensemble pieces, which he rigorously arranges to sound as randomized as possible. But he's found a good home with the promising new Golden Palominos (see "Live" section), where, as with the jazzier Microscopic Septet, Zorn proves he can play (more or less) straight as well as make the kind of noises that inspire writers like me to metaphors like "a constipated elephant trapped in barbed wire" or "a horde of army ants gone duck hunting" (penned for the late, lamented *Soho News*).

All Chadbourne and Zorn releases are available from their Parachute Records, 230 W. 78th St., NY, NY 10024. (MS)



Marilyn Ward



DNA: You could call this "The Greatest Rock and Roll Band No One Remembers." But it's probably more like "The Greatest Rock and Roll Band No One Ever Heard Of In The First Place." For—what, three, four years now?—singer/guitarist Arto Lindsay, bassist Tim Wright and drummer Ikue Mori have been plying their utterly unique brand of skronk 'n' roll (thanks to Bob Christgau for the "skronk") with steadily diminishing returns—at present, the band seems to average one New York gig every four months. DNA's reaction to this impasse seems to be a determination to keep workin' their particular groove thang 'til the rest of the Western world catches up; indeed, Lindsay abandoned a potentially lucrative slot in the Lounge Lizards to pursue the DNA vision. The rest of the world seems equally determined not to bother. Perhaps a truly great DNA gig requires the kind of audience (mystified, unaware, pissed off and/or tickled pink but in some way reacting) and context (a

special sense of time and place) you just don't find in Manhattan nowadays. The best show I ever saw them play was at Irving Plaza, when a very stoned, very naked young woman invaded the stage and joined Tim Wright in a dirty boogie at 16 r.p.m. Now *that* was a surprise.

The music itself remains as wondrous and as impenetrable to me as the first time I heard it. I know there's an iron-clad method to this madness: the three musicians are impeccably tight, and the *Taste of DNA* EP on American Clave helped bring things into focus even if Arto's rich, wild guitar got short-changed in the mix. But like Little Anthony, I'm still on the outside looking in. (No further recording offers have been accepted at this writing; the DNA recently signed by RFC/Quality Records, a top New York disco label, is a black group composed of American musicians recording in France.)

Arto plays with the Golden Palominos whenever the Golden Palominos play. Tim Wright, probably one of the most ingenious and underrated exponents of the



DNA: (L. to R.) Lindsay, Mori, Wright.

Laura Levine

electric bass in the country, swears he has a raft of his own material ready for any musicians able and willing to play it — but that he's yet to find any such musicians. I don't know what Ikue does in her spare time, but she showed up last year on *John*

Gavanti, that delightfully demented remake of *Don Giovanni* created by some ex-members of Mars. I suspect there is a lot more music in these people than they are allowing to come through their present position of frenzied stasis. (AS)

DOG EAT DOG: No Bow Wows, these cool cats and kittens. An East village bing-bang-boom entity, first profiled in *NYR* #43, based upon femme foundation of Soody "I like disco" Sisco (bass), Martha Fishkin (percussion) and Linda Pitt (squealin' honky sax). Newly bolstered by the addition of David Wald's muscular rock drumming and Kevin Jones' shimmering guitar modulations, resulting in mashed-up jazz, rock and dance beats that belie their initial "naive rhythms" tag. DED favor a minimal line in deadpan lyric-chants: "Icons of the true West/Lone Star/J.R." and a sense of community that hopefully won't keep them ghettoized. This perennial "up-and-coming" combo may just be hitting their stride — last spotted sporting actual stage outfits, moving around and looking as if they were actually enjoying their incredible medley of "New Bongos"/"3rd and 14th," a



Marilyn Ward

DOG EAT DOG: (rear) Fishkin, Jones, Pitt; (fore) Sisco, Wald.

handclapping, bongo-bashing candidate for 12" dance discdom. Recently-lip synched "Rollover" and "True West" for a cable kiddie show, tapes of which may find their way onto a proposed compilation LP, currently "wish" they had recording plans. (DK)



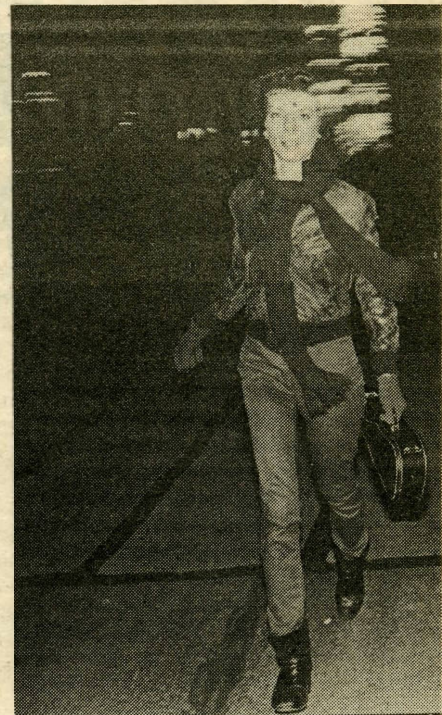
EQ'd: Another all-instrumental combo managing a balancing act between twee electro-pop in the Silicon Teens mode and "rock influenced arty noise." Dan Witz (organ, synths); Machiko Ichihara (bass); Leslie Edge (bass); and John Mastrac-

chio (synthesizer). Nowadays men make machines that make muzak, in the future machines will make machines that make muzak for machines (etc.) 'Til then, there's EQ'd, whose latest poptone "Restless" can be heard by dialing (212) 732-0358. (DK)

Harvey Wang



ESS, BARBARA is currently part of both Y Pants and Barbara Ess/Listen to the Animal. She started out approximately four years ago in Daily Life, with Glenn Branca, Christine Hahn and Paul McMahon. Out of that combo came the Static, with Branca, Ess and Hahn, in which Branca developed the guitar-noise style he's now known for. Ess went on to the all-girl Y-Pants with Verge Piersol and Gail Vachon. Y-Pants make quirky grown-up pop from kiddie toys, imbuing the most deadpan banality ["(I Washed) My Favorite Sweater" from their 99 Records EP] with plaintive yearning. The group is temporarily in limbo because Gail Vachon had a baby. Listen to the Animal (Ess on bass, guitars, marimba; Ming Rose on keyboards; Eddie Grand on accordion; Al Eleganza on drums) is a hard-rocking ensemble in which Ess, without the harmony singing of Vachon and Piersol, sings with a directness that matches the no-nonsense lyrics. Both bands will soon have records out on the Neutral label. (MG & DK)



Paula Court



FRICTION: Who are they? Friction are not of this country, but are nonetheless relevant. Japanese musicians Reck (vocals, bass) and Chiko Hige (Drums) came to the U.S. in 1977 and joined two grassroots no wave bands, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks and the Contortions respectively, proving that ol' music is an international language (neither knew much English). When they each left those bands, Friction became a full-time proposition. They named their combo Friction because "whenever or wherever they are

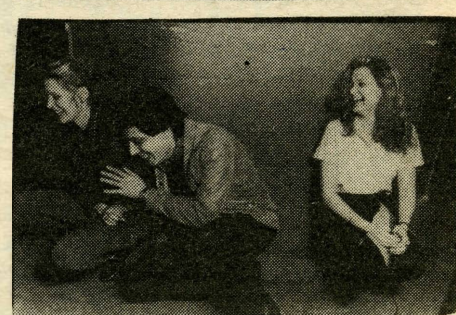
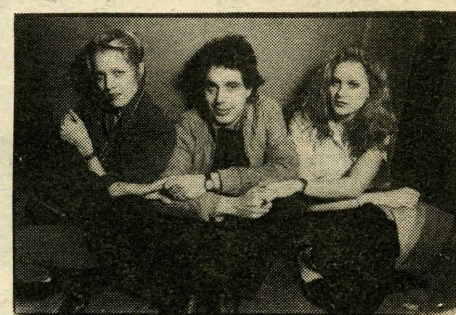
with human beings they always feels (sic) it." They originally joined forces with a musician named Ranis "who used to sing only songs about drugs." He was later replaced by guitarist Tsunematsu Masatoshi on guitar. There has been no word of late about Friction, but three Pass Records releases remain: the *Crazy Dream* EP, the *Friction* LP and the "I Can Tell" 45, all of which parallel, extend and translate what they were doing downtown five years ago. (AK)



GOLDEN PALOMINOS: See "Live" section, elsewhere in this issue



IRIDE THE BUS has three members: Tricia Wygal on drums, Janet Wygal on guitars, and Philip Dray on keyboards (the Wygal sisters sing). The attractive intelligence of this group seems directed toward a new distillation of what is beautiful, meaning they aren't afraid to be beautiful, and they pursue their purpose so assuredly they completely bypass the pitfalls of mawkishness and sentimentality otherwise inherent in such a goal. They make multiple references in their tunes to what I think of as Pop, without employing the simplistic reduction of human interaction which so revoltingly pollutes that genre. I Ride The Bus has had a sporadic development, as all the members have primary activities outside the group: Janet plays bass in the Individuals, Phil plays keyboards in The Scene Is Now, and Tricia is currently part of a dance troupe performing in Japan. However, the interruptions they've endured force them to regard their group as a labor of love, and they communicate this sense very strongly. (ST)



Laura Levine

BUS RIDERS: (L. to R.) J. Wygal, P. Dray, T. Wygal.

In the 17th century, the calligraphic practice of carrying initial I both above and below the line gradually developed

Any spoken sound representing the letter K or k

KITCHEN TOURS: The Kitchen is expanding beyond its Broome Street headquarters with a series of extensive tours through Europe and across the U.S.A.

Tim Carr organized the first domestic tour, which begins in June (hopefully with a send-off performance on the Staten Island Ferry). Julia Heyward and T-Venus, Oliver Lake and Jump Up, Glenn Branca, David Van Tieghem, Fab Five Freddy with two members of the Rock Steady break-dancing crew, and stand-up performance artist Eric Bogosian will first travel south to Baltimore and Washington D.C., then west to Pittsburgh and points throughout Middle America. Along the way they'll stop at such summertime events as Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Arts Festival and do several university-sponsored shows; the performers, in cooperation with local arts councils, will also take part in workshops and solo spots. Carr is mounting a West

Coast tour for the fall, featuring dancers Charles Moulton, Jim Self and Eric Barnes; guitarist Rhys Chatham; Rose Mitchell's Sound Ensemble; and performance artist Ellen Fullman.

Prior to 1980, European arts councils solicited recommendations from the Kitchen, which led to overseas appearances by such performers as Laurie Anderson, Julia Heyward and Meredith Monk. Now, under the direction of Joe Hannon, the Kitchen is doing its own European tours, which, unlike the current U.S. traveling group, consist of individual dates by several American performers. Among the artists who went abroad in '80 were Rhys Chatham, Bogosian and composers Julius Eastman and Jeffrey Lohn. This fall, says Hannon, "a floating group of artists" will once again tackle the continental circuit, including Glenn Branca, pianist Anthony Davis, Peter Gordon and "electronic musician" Frankie Mann. (MG)

KONK: I hate saddling this crew with a description like "New York's answer to Pigbag," so you decide: Konk is a horn-y, highly percussive Afro-fusion featuring throaty, open-chord horn charts, conga/timbale polyrhythms, and riffing guitar midway between reggae skank and JB-style chicken-scratch funk. The occasional vocals are confined to exhortative group chants. The overall sound, especially in the horn charts, is straight out of Fela Anikulapo Kuti, though less so than Pigbag. Konk is also able to execute loose-limbed Afro-Caribe shuffles that sound like neatly spaced-out versions of "The Tighten-Up," as can be heard on their *Ba-La-Mo!* cassette or the



Laura Levine

"Soka-Loka-Moki" 45 (on 99 Records). Capable, upbeat, danceable—most happy Fela, eh? (Sorry—I've been waiting to use that line for a long time.) So long as the real Fela doesn't appear on our shores, this Lower East Side crew will suffice. (MS)

KROESEN, JILL, was known primarily for the musical theater works for which she composed songs—e.g. *Excuse Me, I Feel Like Multiplying*, *The Original Lou and Walter Story*—until Charles Ball's *Lust/Unlust Music* released her 45, "I Really Want to Bomb You" b/w "Jesus," in 1979. On "Bomb You," Kroesen sings/chants in a deep voice that seems an odd cross between Leonard Cohen and Patti Smith; the lyric, set to a Kurt Weill-flavored synth soundtrack by Peter Gordon, tells the story of an apocalyptic love affair, a sexual metaphor for the post-nuclear confrontations of the superpowers and in particular the role of the U.S. in alternately whipping and wooing Third World nations into the capitalist camp.

While not abandoning theater, Kroesen continues to evolve in a more purely musical direction. Kroesen and David Van Tieghem sang with Robert Ashley in live and recorded versions of *Perfect Lives/Private Parts*; she performed as a "decorative percussionist" with the Love Of Life Orchestra; and she's created solo vocal pieces and choral works with key-



Paula Court

board accompanist Joe Hannon. Kroesen recently completed an LP, *Stop Vicious Cycles*, produced by Peter Gordon for Antartica Records. (MG)

LABOR RECORDS: From the ashes of the eclectic Tomato Records rose the reborn Labor, which is already turning out to be as diverse as the revered Tomato. Partners Heiner Stadler (ex-A&R for Tomato) and Susan Martin (an L.A.-to-NY art/music promoter and producer) have already released blues (John Lee Hooker's *Alone Vol. 1*), rock (the digitally mastered Circus Mort EP) and what can only be classified as "new music" (Czech composer Peter Kotik's *Many Many Women*, a five-record set based on a text by Gertrude Stein). While expanding their broadminded blues and jazz orien-

tation with such material as Mississippi Fred McDowell's *Shake 'Em On Down* and *Montana*, a jazz LP featuring former Mingus trumpeter Jack Walrath, Stadler and Martin will also contribute to the documentation of downtown music. Among Labor's upcoming releases: a new version of Meredith Monk's first LP, *Our Lady of Late*; the debut of the Swans, an offshoot of the now-defunct Circus Mort; an EP by Robin Crutchfield and Dark Day; and a four-record set of early John Cage works. Labor's motto, taken from the lips of John Lee Hooker: "Nothing but the best, and later for the garbage." (MG)

LAGUAPA PAPA: What makes a potato sexy?

In this case not only a Spanish band name but founder Bill Obrecht's "Latinized chamber funk," and



horny instrumental compositions like "Burger King Crimson." Assembled in early 1982, LGP currently operates as a septet: bassist Jeffrey Glenn (of Glenn Branca's ensemble and Red Decade); drummer David Rosenberg; guitarist David Seidel; percussionist Daniel Diaz (one-time sideman with Harry Belafonte and Ashford and Simpson); and a horn section comprised of Obrecht (also of Red Decade), trumpeter Pam Fleming and alto saxist Chuck Fisher (who with Obrecht backed Laurie Anderson). La Guapa's live show is an entertaining blend of bygone and yet-to-come styles; dinner dress and big band era music stands help reinforce the swing grooves of the circular funk figures evident in workouts like "#1". (DK)

LIQUID LIQUID: See "Live" section, elsewhere in this issue.

LOHN, JEFFREY: When he first arrived in New York, Lohn did theater and conceptual art pieces. Glenn Branca, who attended one, was so intrigued he decided he'd like to work with him. Along with Margaret Dewys and Wharton Tiers, they formed the seminal downtown group Theoretical Girls, which went on to perform at clubs and gallery venues

throughout New York (as well as performing in Paris). With T. Girls' demise, Lohn continued composing for various instrumentation (keyboards, multiple guitars, etc.). His most recent piece, *Theoretical Music*, scored for percussionists, keyboards, electric bass and guitars, was performed in January in Dance Theater Workshop. (See NYR #49 for a live review.) (SH)

LOUNGE LIZARDS: Whatever happened to them? Well you may ask. Although the Lizards didn't quite break up after the release of their Teo Macero-produced debut LP, any collective Lizardry was soon subordinated to "outside projects." Guitarist Arto Lindsay left the band and turned up on Kip Hanrahan's *Coup de Tete*, as did drummer Anton Fier; both are currently featured in Fier's *Golden Palominos*. A later line-up played the Berlin Jazz Festival in '81, and Lounge Leader John Lurie gigged around as a solo saxophonist for a while.

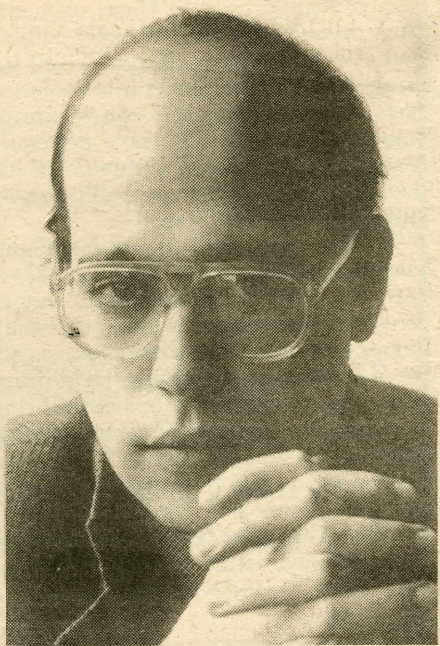
Ellen Frank of EG Records described the Lizards' relationship with that label as "pending... there's been no decision one way or the other." Despite these dark tidings, there is reason for hope. John Lurie says the Lounge Lizards are "re-forming, being revitalized." Into what? "It's a bit too soon to say," adds Lurie, "but it's gonna be amazing." John and his pianist-brother Evan will remain the nucleus of the group, but the other personnel are as yet unannounced. As John Lurie defiantly concluded, "The music business killed the Lounge Lizards, but they will be revitalized." (DW)

LAST LIZARDS: (L. to R.) D. Vlcek, J. Lurie, S. Piccolo, A. Fier, E. Lurie.



Laura Levine

LOVE OF LIFE ORCHESTRA: Thanks to the polyglot perspicacity of leader Peter Gordon (sax and keys) and a fairly steady line-up featuring ex-Necessary Randy Gun (guitar), current-Necessary Ernie Brooks (bass) and percussionist Dave Van Tieghem, LOLO has grown from a back-up band for Soho performance artists to a feature attraction in its own right that can hold a sizeable crowd in thrall at Danceteria on a Wednesday night (as LOLO recently did, augmented by a horn section including the ingenious trombonist George Lewis, who took over from Rhys Chatham as Kitchen music director). LOLO may be the friendliest, most accessible experimentalism around. Familiar, hummable melodies and lightly danceable rhythms are woven in a super-eclectic music-box mesh that's at once an ambient drone and much more, if you want it to be: one-finger Farfisa riffs derived from garage rock co-exist with Phillip Glass-style phonetic vocals and denatured funk bottoms, frinstance. The *Extended Niceties 12"* and the *Geneva LP* (both Lust/Unlust, both increasingly rare) are fine examples of Gor-



don's peculiarly affecting trash/art, foreground/background perspective. Arty-party music? Populist avant-muzak? Whatever, it works. (MS)

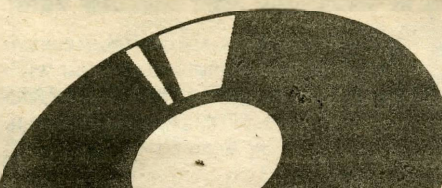
LOVELY MUSIC/VITAL RECORDS, run by Mimi Johnson out of her Performing Art Services office on Spring Street, is one of the outstanding new music labels in America. Sporting a catalogue of 17 LPs and the "Lovely Little Records" box of six EPs, Lovely features the music of such innovators as Robert Ashley, Alvin Lucier, David Behrman, George Lewis, Joel Chadabe, Gordon Mumma, "Blue" Gene Tyranny and Jacques Bekaert. Peter Gordon's first LP, *Star Jaws*, was released on Lovely, as were early Meredith Monk and Jon Hassel recordings and *Village Voice* critic Tom Johnson's beautiful *An Hour For Piano*. Upcoming releases include Ned Sublette's *Western Classics*, with backing by

the Southwesterners, from Portales, New Mexico; another volume (recorded live in Paris) of Ashley's opera *Perfect Lives*; trombonist Garrett List's *Fire and Ice*; and Lucier's *Music for Solo Performers* for, and I quote, "enormously amplified brain waves and percussion." The brains are Lucier's and composer Pauline Oliveros': the former's waves resemble a Max Roach percussion piece while Oliveros' sound like "a tribe of Bedouins coming over the Khyber Pass," according to Johnson. Lovely is documenting radical musical experimentation that is stretching the boundaries of what we define as music; write to 325 Spring Street, NYC, NY 10013 for more information. (DB)

LUST/UNLUST MUSIC: Auteur producer Charles Ball and his Lust/Unlust Music should rightfully go down in Manhattan history as studio midwives to the "Downtown Sound." Ball emerged in late 1977 from the ashes of Ork Records to found Lust/Unlust Music, the corporate heading for a number of diminutive subsidiary labels like Fun, Migraine and Infidelity on which appeared the earliest recordings by seminal Bowery bands like DNA, Teenage Jesus & the Jerks, Robin Crutchfield's Dark Day and the Love Of Life Orchestra.

Ball's roster and output formed a kind of funhouse mirror image of mainstream rock trends. If Kraftwerk swept the progressive airwaves and disco dance floors, Ball would counter with the terminal *noir* man-machinery of Dark Day. If heavy metal was high on the charts, he could theorize for hours on Teenage Jesus as the ultimate HM band. If girl groups were coming back, he would rush to record Ut, a painfully inept female trio of visual artists turned "musicians." (The Ut tapes, like Zev's Ball-produced version of "Wipe Out," remain unreleased.)

The records themselves were painstakingly recorded and mastered, imaginatively packaged—even the press releases were intelligent and humorous. Of course, none of them sold pigeon-squat, either because of Ball's limited promotion and



distribution or because much of the music was, to "normal" ears, positively torturous. Today, Lust/Unlust's future seems so doubtful that the past tense is necessarily employed in discussing Ball's work. His capital is exhausted, his distributors have cut him off, and he's the target of lawsuits. His only releases of 1981 were EP's by Dark Day and the Individuals. Nothing has been released on the label so far this year.

However, rumors persist of a planned cassette compilation of Ball's, er, greatest hits. Such an anthology might conceivably include such Lust/Unlust landmarks of aural entropy as Alex Chilton's "Bangkok," Jill Kroesen's "I Really Want to Bomb You," impLOG's "Holland Tunnel Dive," Teenage Jesus' "Little Orphans," Beirut Slump's "Try Me," and assorted tracks from albums like *Exterminating Angel* (Dark Day), *Extended Niceties* (LOLO) and *Escape* (Robert Quine & Jody Harris). If he never makes another record, Charles Ball will be remembered for his unique, cloud-bound vision and his unflagging dedication to music no one else would touch with a ten-foot pole. (AS)

MOFUNGO: Remember the halcyon days of Theoretical Girls, Blinding Headache, Information and Floating Garbage? (Only in bad dreams... ED.) Mofungo, named for a delicacy of Puerto Rican chow, was there too, making noisy, atmospheric (albeit sometimes torpid) guitar-based music. The *Elementary Particles* EP on Living Legends showed the group progressing into noisy, atmospheric song structures. 1981's fab indie cassette, *End of the World*, was a revelation: a real band playing real tunes with real heart—rather sexlessly, but with ob-

vious passion and sincerity—possessed of an awkward grace and some tenacious hooks plus elastic song structures, snappy beats and noisy, atmospheric intrigue. Add to all that socio-political consciousness, embodied in the wrenching, anthemic "El Salvador." A heartwarming example of evolution from chaos, and a band to watch. *End of the World* and *Tape #1* (a cassette compilation featuring Mofungo, Information and Blinding Headache) are still available for a mere \$3.00 from Robert Sietsema, 630 E. 14th St., NYC, NY 10009. (Check NYR #40 for the complete Mofungo chronicles.) (MS)



MOFUNGO: (L. to R.) Klein, Chubb, McGovern, Sietsema.

MON TON SON are Christian "all I can play is records" Marclay (recycled records, prepared phonograph); Jeanette Riedel (violin); Robert Harrison (guitar, bass). Formed Oct. '81 on the remains of the Bachelors, Even (Marclay and guitarist Kurt Henry) with Harrison (of the George

Metesky Ensemble, player on Branca's *Symphony #1*) and Riedel contributing live textures to Marclay's version of "Charles Ives on the wheels of steel." Of this *musique concrete* party dub mix, Marclay says, "I think I can cut Grandmaster Flash." [ED. sez... "Oh yeah?"] It's all in the mix. (JD)



NEUTRAL RECORDS: Formed in the fall of 1981, Neutral Records is run by composer Glenn Branca and White Columns Gallery Director John Baer. The two conceived of Neutral as a vehicle for capturing on vinyl the music they feared might otherwise never make it that far—and they've wound up with one hell of a label. Neutral's first release is *Sonic Youth*, a mini-LP selling for less than the price of a full-length album, on which the quartet's highly avant sound turns out to also be highly recordable (i.e., it rocks). Imminent releases: 11 songs by Y Pants, pro-

duced by Wharton Tiers; Jules Baptiste/Red Decade, produced by Roma Baron of *O Superman* fame; *B Movie Soundtracks*, an LP by Super-8 filmmakers Beth and Scott B compiling music written for their films and performed by, among others, Adele Bertel, Richard Edson (of Konk/Sonic Youth), John Lurie and the B's themselves. Future releases: Jeffrey Lohn's *Theoretical Music*, Michael Byron's *Entrances For Piano Solo*, Phil Niblock's *Winter Bloom*, David Rosenbloom's *Departure* and Branca's own *Indeterminate Activity of Resultant Masses*. (MG)



OFF SHOTS: A perversely convoluted confluence of players at one time or another connected with the short-lived, soundtrack-without-a-movie eccentricities of *Off Beach* (March-October, 1981), formed by Kurt Hoffman (sax, clarinet, accordion) and Michael Brown (twisted, finger-thumped bass). Brown, with Louisiana-born (read: Stax-Volt) guitarist Joe Disney and Off-and-on Beach drummer David Linto also performed as Rhys Chatham's original *Din*. Other Beach nuts included guitarist Angela Babin; alto saxist Fritz (Red Decade) Van



Offed Beach



Orden; occasional tenor saxists Elliot (Ism) Sharp and Ian Peru; and sometime keyboardist Anne DeMarinis (curator of the White Columns Noise Fest). Brown is now a full-time member of Ism, and with Dizney, Linton and DeMarinis creates heavily rhythmic *Interference*. Dizney and Hoffman, along with Babin and Van

Orden plus bassist Barry Root and drummer Jim Thomas (new members to this incestuous musical menagerie) comprise *Last Cat Earl*, who according to Joe "Noise? What Noise?" Dizney dabble in "bogus African polyphony" suitable for the silver screen. (DK)



RED DARK SWEET: Ask members of Brooklyn's Red Dark Sweet about the genesis of their somewhat off-beat assignation and they alternately quote Austrian *philosophe* Ludwig Wittgenstein's "rules about understanding explanations," pointing out that those words can function as either nouns or modifiers, or say it's about "hard candy"—all without the slightest intimation of paradox.

Their music, likewise, is the product of a number of apparent contradictions. Simultaneously, its moods and themes are playfully threatening, sophisticated in conception yet brutally executed, and—most remarkable—it sounds decisively fresh and unique while acknowledging a long, distinguished heritage.

Founder/guitarist/composer/vocalizer Andrew Klimek had his first significant experiences with music at a very early age via his older brother Jamie. Jamie Klimek became a rabid devotee of the Velvet Underground while in high school and proceeded to establish himself as a major figure on Cleveland's now-legendary mid-'70s underground rock scene. Through him, young Andrew came into intimate contact with most of the creative leading lights of that era. By age 12 he had taken up guitar, and by 17 had formed X (Blank) X with former Electric Eel John Morton and drummer Anton Fier (currently with Pere Ubu by way of the Feelies and Lounge Lizards).

Red Dark Sweet's co-founder, Charlotte Pressler, is another graduate of these same circles. Though her primary functions were as a chronicler and confidant,

Pressler also recorded an intriguing spoken-word single, "You're Gonna Watch Me," in partnership with Doug Morgan (now of Neptune's Car), released on David Thomas's Hearshan label. Two years ago, she moved to Brooklyn with Andrew and took up keyboards, the better to form a band and present her poetical pieces in public. Bassist Frank Kogan and drummer Rick Brown are veterans of a variety of Manhattan basement and avant-garde acts. Brown, even now, is splitting his time between this gang and V-Effect. With roots like these, it should come as no surprise that Red Dark Sweet's music is no simple DOR frug fodder.

Their five-song demo tape (made before Brown joined, with Donna Ratajczak in his place), though recorded in the basement on rudimentary equipment, reveals them to be a powerful, novel and not a little bit harrowing proposition. Klimek tends to set the tone and pace of the proceedings with his bristling, stuttery guitar work; he achieves a motive, fractious sound summing up rather than merely saluting Lou Reed and Sterling Morrison's cumulative efforts on the first pair of Velvets albums. Ratajczak underlines the connection with loose, tom-tom heavy, war-dance percussive Moe Tucker could be forgiven for feeling nostalgic about.

"Mrs. Hanson," however, is their only overtly Velvetian selection, starting out with "Murder Mystery"—revisited cross-chat and trailing out on a shuddering, extended white noise instrumental passage à la "Sister Ray." "Tin Tabernacle," in contrast, introduces a gouging, eva-

sive rhythmic tack to those elements, thus producing a substantially original end effect. Kogan's "Hero of Fear" is a shocking, pile-driver combination of bass, drums and vox that can be directly compared to little else (save perhaps a few errant moments of vintage CLE lunacy that Andy K. was probably responsible for in the first place!).

To date, Red Dark Sweet have only played out a handful of times, mainly at Inroads. But the band are in no way interested in leasing space in any elitist art-damage ghetto. Y'see, there's been a matter of settling on exactly the right drummer. Also, Ms. Pressler has needed time to polish her instrumental abilities (she only just began playing in November, 1980) and to craft lyrics to her satisfaction—a process she explains can take months. The other band members have been occupied with composing chores as well. They recently decided to junk a

good half of their repertoire and are hoping to add nearly a dozen new titles before their next public appearance.

Andrew Klimek describes Red Dark Sweet as now being involved in "a period of research and development." They want to function as "professional musicians," not dogmatically, diametrically against the traditions of rock 'n' roll as such yet IT'S GOT TO BE ON THEIR TERMS. They'd like to play area club more regularly, eventually do some dates abroad, and will be sending a new demo around presently to that end. They'd like to release records too. Charlotte, in fact, should have a cool new 12" out already on the Mustard label, a collaboration with the Styrenes' Paul Marotta (another quasi-notorious CLE expatriate living in Brooklyn), entitled "True Confessions."

What more kin I say? How Sweet it is!

by Howard Wuelfing

RED DECADE: Brainchild of lead guitarist Jules Baptiste, former Branca, Chatham and Laurie Anderson sideman and composer of the epic 28-minute "Native Dance" (a truncated version of which appears on their forthcoming Neutral EP). Comprised of Baptiste, Branca bassist Jeffrey Glenn and saxist Bill Obrecht (see La Guapa Papa) plus Cleveland-born ex-Pagan drummer Brian Hudson (also with the Kingpins) and saxist Fritz Van Orden (see Off Shoots). Red Decade create instrumental rah-rahs integrating beyond-jazz saxophonic screeching, guitar noise/harmonics and a rock and roll rhythm section. Twangy discordancy and modulated, cyclical scales layered over conventional rock and jazz structures create a new "fusion" that is driven and intense—more a psychotic ensemble

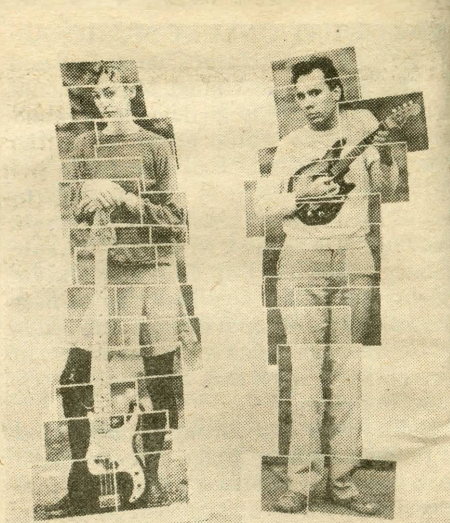


RED DECADE

than a collective of pompous virtuosos soloing the night away. Red Decade evoke visceral film *noir* atmospherics—Baptiste calls his sound "neo-cinematic"—close your eyes and listen and you can almost see shadows, flickering neon and venetian blinds slowly being lowered over shifty, beady eyes. (DK)



SOCIAL CLIMBERS: Accessible, minimal electro-funk with real songs and real singing, the pop face of the Downtown Sound. Formed in 1979 by Jean Seton Shaw and Mark Bingham (once linked with Indiana's MX-80 Sound, also a Branca sideman). First appeared as bass duo, then added A. Leroy Smith on organ and purchased a rhythm box to open "new vistas of sonic banality" to their chipper cartoon Muzak ("Ernie K," "Palm Springs"). Performed a non-stop five-hour marathon of cover songs at the Franklin Furnace (Jan. '80) and collaborated with innovative choreographer Charles "Precision Ball Passing" Moulton at the NY Dance Festival (June '80). Smith continues to be Moulton's principal composer as well as a comic hooper in the Smith/Leroy Dance Team (for which he got his pic in *Time* magazine). Added drummer Wharton Tiers in April, but a sprained wrist put the rhythm box back in action that June. Triple 7" EP version of debut LP (recorded in 1980) released and immediately recalled ("sound defects," they claim). *Social Climbers* released as Hoboken Records 12-incher in October '81, featuring goodies like the



funky "Chicken '80", the anguished Devoesque "Domestic" and the exotic vocal duet of "Tapei." Shaw and Bingham currently touring as a duo, with Leroy emceeding on pre-recorded tape. No matter how far these witty Climbers go, they'll never be over your head. (DK)

SONIC YOUTH: It would be easy but extremely misleading to label Sonic Youth a mere sideshow act in Glenn Branca's three-ring electric guitar circus; misleading because Sonic Youth is an innovative rock and roll band in its own right. Although SY guitarists Thurston Moore and Lee Renaldo are Branca's

cohorts, and have incorporated Glenn's radical textural/theatrical approach to playing into their own sound, their self-titled debut album on Neutral Records bristles with the kind of feverish interactive energy endemic to rock. It's the propulsive rhythms provided by bassist Kim Gordon and drummer Richard Edson that convincingly transport the



RED DARK SWEET: (L. to R.) Klimek, Pressler, Brown, Kogan.



Julia Gorton

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Marilyn Ward

guitar exegesis out of the laboratory and into the living room.

This record is the culmination of seven months' development for the quartet, which came together shortly after the infamous Noise Festival at White Columns Gallery last June. An earlier version of Sonic Youth featuring Moore, Gordon, Ann Demarinis and drummer David Key played around last summer bearing such tags as the Arcadians and Male Bonding. Billed as Sonic Youth, the group performed at the Noise Fest, with Edson replacing Key; after Gordon left, second guitarist Renaldo joined and the line-up that plays on *Sonic Youth* was complete. Renaldo had previously been in Plus Instruments, and Edson has played trumpet and percussion with Konk throughout his involvement with Sonic Youth.

To hear what Sonic Youth have been about so far, better buy the album and play it as loud as possible. Richard Edson is leaving the band and though the remaining threesome will continue, the only safe bet is that future incarnations won't sound the same. "I don't think Richard was comfortable with the direction our music has been taking," says Renaldo. "We're moving into an area of being as concerned with sound texture as anything else. Richard is a great groove drummer, but at times our music calls for somebody who just bashes the shit out of the drumkit." During our meeting, the band members freely discuss possible replacements, including the option of no drummer at all, or one who doubles on other instruments. All three agree that a change is needed.

"We don't want to play the same set every two weeks for a year," says Thurston, citing a particularly trenchant example of a once-daring local band now joylessly going through the motions a

few years down the road. Kim admits: "At our last CBGB gig we just ran through the material on the album and it was a bomb." But doesn't that violate the currently accepted wisdom on Making It Big?

Thurston: "We'd like to keep writing new material and coming up with fresh ideas. Now that could be really bad in terms of commercial acceptance."

"...or it could be really good to change what people expect when they go to see a band with a record," Lee continues. "Usually, you just hear what's on the record and that's a bore. Ultimately, we'd like to play something new each time out." At this point, I need the reassurance that Thurston Moore offers: "We don't want to be an experimental jerk-off band, either. That can be fun but there's really no use for it. We like the idea of songs."

Wonderful ideals, certainly, but how much of any rock audience is that open-minded or tolerant? Sonic Youth's (relative) success to date may suggest a wider-based enthusiasm for music of an adventurous bent than has previously been the case. For example, when Sonic Youth played the opening weekend at Danceteria they received a good (if slightly flabbergasted) response from a non-specific audience checking out a new club. "I think rock and roll people are coming to see us and liking it," is Lee Renaldo's hopeful assessment. "We don't want to be pigeonholed as 'New York Art Wave.' The no-wave bands had a pretty specific audience; I don't think the New York scene is like that any more, there's not such a hermetic mood to it. The music is a lot more open to what people can hear in it. It's not just downtown musicians playing for their downtown friends."

by Mark Coleman



Laura Levine

T-VENUS: Think of T-Venus as a work in progress. Under the guidance of visual director Julia Heyward (a performance artist or, as she puts it, "avant-garde monologist") and musical maestro Pat Irwin (of the Raybeats), T-Venus attempts to meld sound and vision — Heyward calls it a cross "between a 3-D movie and a rock and roll concert" — blending the driving, almost-danceable music of guitarists Irwin and Martha Swetzoff (formerly of Boud & Gagged), bassist Trudy Koby (ditto B & G) and drummer Jim Sclavunos (Panther Burns) with Heyward's words and films. Since T-Venus is a *band* (not merely an assemblage backing a solo artist) that produces *songs* (as opposed to improvisations or incidental music) de-



signed for the stage as well as vinyl, it is unlike other sound/image projects more firmly entrenched in the gallery. While that makes for accessible club fare, sound and image, instead of working in tandem, compete for viewer/listener attention. Heyward acknowledges a "conflict between the performers and *it*," i.e. the screen on which her dreamlike movies are shown; that's a problem she hopes will be resolved through practice and by simpli-

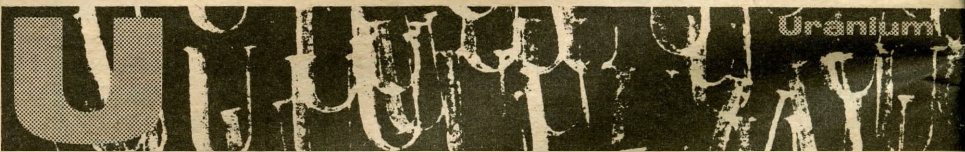
fying her visual statements. T-Venus' local debut at Danceteria was marred by technical screw-ups (and, even after hearing the band a few weeks later at Maxwell's, I'm not sure Heyward's shrill yodeling can yet be termed *singing*), but the playing was *intense* and the visuals often rivetting. All in all, an ambitious experiment by a group that seems committed to making its ideas work. (MH)

THE SCENE IS NOW: I believe it. Phil Dray and Chris Nelson previously played together in Information and Mimi and the Dreamboats. Nelson and poet/guitarist Susie Timmons participated in The Flying Clouds. The Scene Is Now shares Dray with I Ride The Bus. The checkered past of Dray and Nelson includes work on *NY Rocker*. Drummer Jeff McGovern is moonlighting from Mofungo. A five-song cassette is circulating, filled with lovely, jagged melodies and dense rhythms. At a recent loft party performance, guests



Julia Gorton

alternately danced and looked bewildered. (RS)



V-EFFECT: A "power jazz trio"? Maybe; post-No Wave, refracted and constructivist, at least. Fractured linear motifs bop madly to a tenacious, mutable semi-groove, while alto saxman D. Zonzinsky barks pointedly political lyrics, his voice augmented by group-chant choruses. Not exactly soul music (though they do cover Marvin's "Inner City Blues"), but heated, energetic and direct even when turning jagged structures inside out. Zonzinsky (not his real name — gotta get out from under that "cult of personality," dontcha know) used to be in primal Red-noise band Made in U.S.A. (which played Giorgio Gomelsky's Zu Manifestal and,

I think, practically nowhere else) — and boy, can he *play*! Ditto slim, bespectacled bassist Ann Rupel, who prowls the frets with remarkable groin-force and adeptness for one playing in her first real band. Drummer Rick Brown, ex-Blinding Headache and Information (and currently filling the drum chair in Red Dark Sweet), is stolid and solid. The original trio lineup has recently been augmented by timbales player Ricardo Torres to create an even more infectious groove. It all hangs together, a dynamic application of New Math to mutant, multi-directional riffing and radical message. Keep an ear open for this crew. (MS)



V-EFFECT: (L. to R.) Zonzinsky, Rupel, Brown.

VAN TIEGHEM, DAVID, is downtown's most versatile percussionist. A list of the groups he's performed with best describes his stylistic range: drummer for Love of Life Orchestra; percussionist for the Steve Reich Ensemble; one-third of the short-lived Blue Horn Section with Laurie Anderson and Peter

Gordon; one third of The Trio, a rock collaboration with Chris Spedding and Busta Jones (he continues to drum with Spedding); drummer with Robert Gordon for his recent Lone Star Cafe gigs; hard-to-discern-over-the-sound-system percussionist for Anton Fier's Golden Palominos at Danceteria; and as a *singer*, he's part of both the live and recorded/

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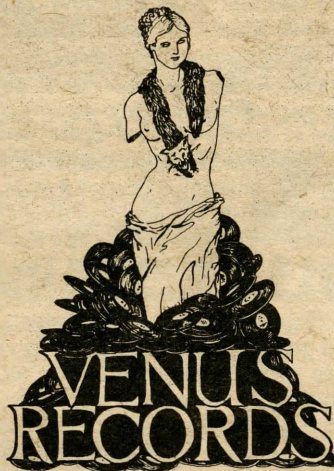
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Deborah Feingold

videotaped versions of Robert Ashley's *Perfect Lives/Private Parts*. Van Tieghem also performs solo pieces like *A Man and his Toys* and *Proceed Accordingly*, in which he "utilizes" commonplace objects

that sound interesting when tapped, struck or banged together. Recently, he's begun to choreograph dances for his solo spots. A Van Tieghem LP is due on Antartica Records. (MG)

VENUES: Until about a year ago, hard-to-classify downtown performers either couldn't break out of the music-in-the-gallery ghetto or found themselves part of obscure bills on off-nights at less-than-supportive clubs. But White Columns' Noise Fest of June '81 put a lot of this music on the map—or at least gave it a label (like "punk") so it could be promoted. (As with any label, it's now one that many performers are trying to shake.) In any case, many more venues now feature the new sounds from downtown; among them, the following:

ABC No Rio—A small performing space at 156 Rivington St. run by a group of artists who often include musical guests in their Thursday night poetry series.

Art On The Beach—An outdoor summer series at the Battery Park landfill, booked by the Creative Time arts organization and featuring dance, music and performance art. Last summer included a sunset set by Glenn Branca and a collaborative piece by Nigel Rollings, Bill Buchen and David Van Tieghem in which they "played the beach."

Brooklyn Academy of Music—Features an ambitious "Next Wave" festival booked for the fall season by Tim Carr and including Steve Reich and Musicians (Sept. 30-Oct. 3); Laurie Anderson, *United States Part I-IV* (Oct. 28-31, Nov. 4-7); Robert Wilson's new opera *Medea* (Dec. 16-23); Glenn Branca's *Symphony #3* (Jan. 13-16); dancer Dana Reitz (Feb. 24-27); Max Roach, Arnie Zane, Bill T. Jones and a vocalist to be announced (Feb. 24-27).

C.B.G.B.—Bowery & Bleeker. Last fall Carol Costa started booking post-Noise Fest bands for Sunday matinees with \$4 cover and 75¢ beers. Among the performers: Avant Squares, EQ'd, Frank Maya, Mofungo, Red Decade and Sonic Youth; some of them have gone back to play Saturday nights. (The Sunday shows are more fun; it's so dark in the cramped space that you can easily fall into a weekend time warp.)

Danceteria—30 W. 21st St. Promoter Jim Fouratt always booked new music—at Hurrah, Danceteria I, Peppermint Lounge and the Underground. (Who can forget his earsplitting triple bill of the all-bass Monophonic Orchestra, all-guitar Glenn Branca ensemble and the all-percussive Zev that sent the less-than-tolerant among the Underground's patrons running for the exits?) So far: Branca,

Rhys Chatham, Phillip Glass, Red Decade, and T-Venus, with more to come. This might be the gig that makes some of these performers "commercial."

Dance Theater Workshop—219 W. 19th St. Programmer/director David White has always booked the newest and hottest choreographers (like Carol Armitage, Charles Moulton and Jim Self), and he's now ventured into showcasing composers, particularly artists who create work for dance. Jeffrey Lohn unveiled his *Theoretical Music* here last winter; next season will include work by Mark Bingham (of the Social Climbers, known for scoring Moulton's dances) and Linda Hudes (of the L. Hudes Power Trio).

Ear Inn—Spring St., near Washington. This is a Soho institution, a funky bar w/ restaurant that features live music on Tuesday nights and Sunday afternoons. The emphasis here is more on the traditional, though not *that* traditional—e.g. the Raybeats' Jody Harris played matinees here with a blues combo.

Inroads—150 Mercer St. Last year Jules Baptiste booked new bands into this tiny theater on Tuesday nights, among them Avant Squares, Information, Mofungo and V-Effect. It was really starting to catch on just as the Noise Fest happened, and the rest is history. Baptiste left to work on Red Decade (though he may be a "guest curator" this summer), and music programmer Ted Goldberg continues to book an eclectic array of sounds from jazz to electronic, Wednesday through Sunday evenings.

The Kitchen—484 Broome St. Ten years ago a teenage Rhys Chatham became the first music director of this artist-run space, in some ways laying the foundation for everything we hear as "downtown" now. Chatham was followed by composers Arthur Russell and Garrett List; he returned for a second stint; then composer/trombonist Geroge Lewis took over, broadening the range of music presented here. This past season the Kitchen hosted Defunkt, Eugene Chadbourne, a Jamaican music festival, Material, Ned Sublette and the Southwest-ers, and many more. Lewis is now departing to perform his own music; as the culmination of his tenure there, he recently presented an evening of orchestral works by Anthony Braxton and Mulhal Richard Abjams.

The Mudd Club—77 White St. Steve Mass' booking policy has *always* been highly experimental, and he hired many of the bands mentioned here even before

the Noise Fest, either in early evening concerts or regular late-night slots. Branca and Chatham now get Saturday nights, drawing healthy-to-huge crowds. Chatham coordinated an early-evening series last summer, and proved that artists like Maryanne Amacher, Peter Gordon and Frankie Mann could draw an audience even in the middle of July.

New Pilgrim Theater—E. 4th St. between Avenues B & C. This ramshackle theater was the site of an early-fall festival of rock and/or noise bands that included the Bloods, DNA, R.E.M., Sonic Youth and V-Effect, booked by Una Johnston. Despite the neighborhood, the week-long series drew a large, enthusiastic audience. Unfortunately, no one has played here since.

P.S. 1—46-01 21st St., Long Island City, Queens. A school building converted into art studio/exhibition complex, it was the site of the mammoth "New York/New Wave" art/photo/performance show last spring that chronicled local cultural history from the early CBGB's days to current graffiti-inspired art. Arto Lindsay "curated" the musical events. Along

with the still-running "Space Invaders" installation, Ann Magnuson (once of Club 57, now of Pulsallama) organized four Sunday afternoon performances featuring music/dance/video, theater and unclassifiable madness (with performers ranging from Lizzy Mercier Descloux to "The Moral Majority Singers").

Public Theater—425 Lafayette St. Music director Nancy Weiss follows the "Jazz at the Public" idea pretty strictly, booking mostly new jazz artists. Sometimes new supercedes the jazz, as in last season's performances by Jon Hassell and "Blue" Gene Tyranny.

Roulette—228 West Broadway. Roulette is mostly for hardcore new music fans, featuring a lot of computer music and some dance. No bands, usually soloists.

White Columns—325 Spring St. This small gallery space gave birth to what is now "The Scene" with last June's Noise Fest. There's been no repeat performance, but the spirit remains.

by Merle Ginsberg



Y PANTS: See Barbara Ess.



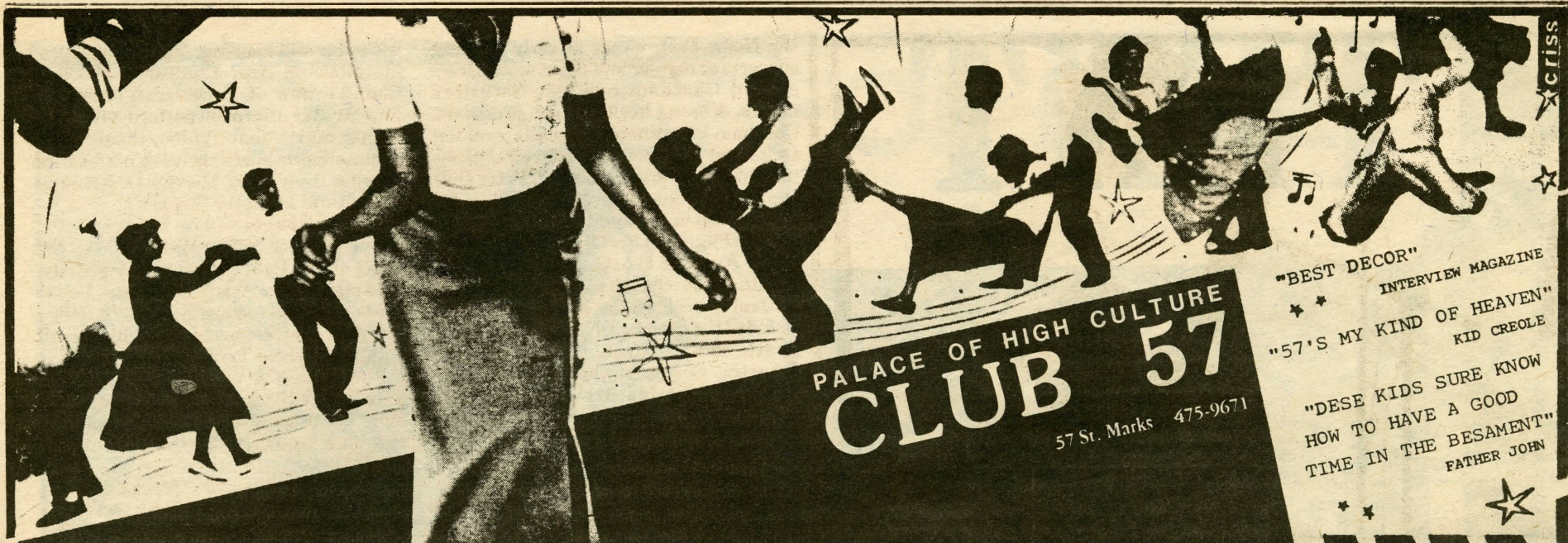
ZEV: From Frisco he came, calling his show "Shake, Rattle and Roll." The Sound of Things Coming Together: things like pots and pans and plastic garbage cans, and any other kind of industrial gee-gaw and household utensil you could think of. Zev is, ostensibly, a "percussionist"; but he's also a performance artist, whose performance *is* percussion. Free-improvised percussion, that is, as opposed to rhythmic drumming. Zev makes a convincing theatrical display of dragging and banging and strewing all these items around, and can rustle up some damned outrageous sounds. Opening for the Bush Tetras at Danceteria, Zev played only a pair of suspended metal tubes and entranced the crowd with otherworldly overtones and pinging siren-calls. Zev

can also play a drum kit when the mood takes him—but, of course, it's a highly unconventional kit, consisting mainly of shallow "flapjack" tom-toms that look like wooden roto-toms and have a peculiar, dry rustling sound; Zev usually drums in the company of free-form guitarist Rudolf Grey (Red Transistor, Blue Humans). Zev may be only making noise to some, but just as often the trained ear can hear his clatter as a very deliberate form of sonic action-painting. The visual element is indispensable to the overall impact, which is why Zev made a big mistake when he made an album, *Salts of Heavy Metals*, for Lust/Unlust (his cover of "Wipe Out" remains unreleased)—Zev should hold out for the age of videodiscs. (MS)



Paula Court

ZORN, JOHN: See Eugene Chadbourne.



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The Wit and Wisdom of Jerry Lee

In mid-1957, following the release of "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," Jerry Lee Lewis was hailed as the next king of rock 'n' roll. A manic piano pumper, Lewis's flamboyant stage antics attracted considerable attention from concert audiences while copies of "Whole Lotta Shakin'" sold at a rate of ten thousand per day. With the induction of Elvis Presley into the army, and the subsequent release of "Great Balls of Fire," another widely successful rockabilly hit, Lewis seemed destined to usurp Presley's throne. However, by early 1959, a scant 18 months after "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" had broken his name to audiences world wide, Jerry Lee Lewis had ceased being a dominant figure in rock 'n' roll.

Lewis's meteoric rise to the top of the charts as well as his equally rapid decline are explored in two new books, *Jerry Lee Lewis Rocks* (Delilah Books, \$7.95) by *New York Times* music critic Robert Palmer, and *Hellfire* (Dell Publishing Company, \$6.95), by Nick Tosches, author of *Country: The Biggest Music In America*.

Jerry Lee Lewis Rocks is 128 pages of big, black and white photos and lively text in which the author intertwines Lewis's personal history with his own recollections of what it was like being a Jerry Lee Lewis fan in the late '50s. More than just a biography of Jerry Lee, the book serves as a chronicle of the Memphis rock scene of the '50s, and in particular Sun Records, an organization which produced not only Lewis, but Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash.

In recounting the legend of Jerry Lee Lewis, Palmer treats his subject with reverence and sympathy, as a tragic figure in an all-demanding world. He views "the Killer" as a brilliant but tortured artist, torn between God's work and the Devil's music, an artist whose great talents were never fully realized. Attributing the singer's downfall to a combination of the media's unrelenting, unjustified badgering following Jerry Lee's marriage to his 13 year-old cousin Myra, Sun's mishandling of that scandal, and manager Oscar Davis's ineptitude in guiding his career, Palmer calls him "a strong and determined individual who persisted despite a ruined career."

Palmer's *Jerry Lee Lewis Rocks* does not elaborate on the vices and misfortunes of the rocker's later life. Instead he smooths over these areas, emphasizing Lewis's resilience and, as the title implies, focusing on the man's contributions to the world of rock 'n' roll. "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," claims Palmer, "is the most profoundly revolutionary statement an artist can make in the rock and roll idiom." He explains in great detail how the song contributed to the change in sexual mores which occurred in this country during the late '50s. And as Palmer deftly points out, "Of all the great stars produced by Sun Records in the '50s, Jerry Lee Lewis is the only one still rocking."

Nick Tosches's *Hellfire* relates the Jerry Lee Lewis story from a different perspective. Purely biographic, the book depicts Lewis as an arrogant asshole who allowed his life to decay into ruin after his fall from public favor. Lewis's bouts with drugs and alcohol, his stormy relationships with women, and his numerous encounters with the law are all explicitly detailed.

Opening with a detailed genealogy of the Lewis family, the book assumes the quality of a novel. Jerry Lee is "the final wild son" of the fast-livin', hard-drinkin', honky-tonkin' Lewis clan, destined to burn out in a final flash of glory. Through rich, descriptive prose, Tosches brings us into the Lewis household and lets us share the earliest experiences of the aspiring musician. We are introduced to his entire immediate family, the primary influences in Jerry Lee's spiritual and musical life.

Hellfire succeeds as both a psychological study of Jerry Lee Lewis and an accurate account of his private life and musical career. Unlike most rock star bios, this book presents the reader with viable explanations for its subject's feelings and motivations. Vivid descriptions are punctuated with revealing comments from Lewis's family and associates. But *Hellfire* ultimately leaves the reader with a hollow feeling in much the same way as *No One Here Gets Out Alive*, the controversial biography of Jim Morrison. Jerry Lee Lewis, one of rock's greatest showmen and the final wild son, deserves better.

by Robert Liquorie



Laura Levine

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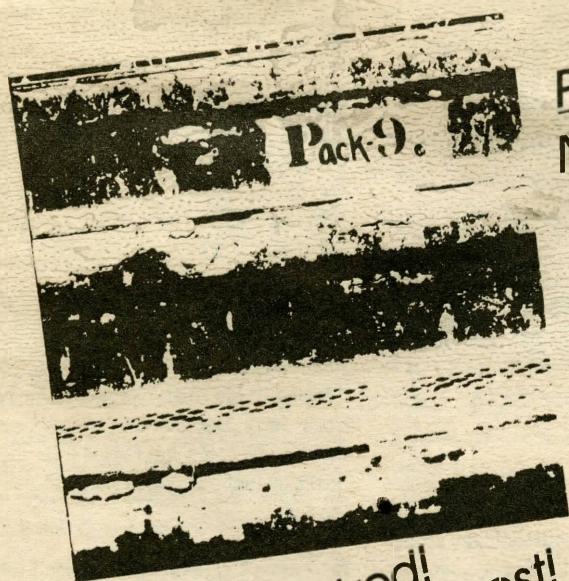


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STRANGER IN '1

by Ken Barnes

I'm a little embarrassed here, having been characterized in two recent *NYR* issues as a "nice guy." Shaky image for a critical curmudgeon to carry around! You know what they say—nice guys finish last... and that's why this column always misses deadline by two weeks.

Before being disconcerted by that complement of compliments, I was going to jot down a few notes on the increasing influence of **Rick James** (who should have a new album out by the time this column appears, but not before it's written). Not content with transforming the funk into a platinum proposition by a strategic imposition of structure and discipline, he's also bridging that ever-widening chasm between black music and rock, notably with the brilliant "Super Freak," which should be a cornerstone in anyone's contemporary collection.

Now the rock-from-the-black-side syndrome is spreading, with two extraordinary crossover bids. One, the **Bar-Kays'** "Freaky Behavior," is directly attributable to Rick James—essentially, it's as blatant an adaptation of "Super Freak" as can exist on the safe side of the plagiarism laws. But there's more to it than merely the sincerest form of flattery. The chorus, "I'm your freaky behavior/A funky new waver," is a further acknowledgement of the burgeoning punk-funk rapprochement. Closer examination of the rest of the lyrics reveals a rather interesting psychological treatise on the nature of the unshackled id, and there's an absolutely off-the-wall musical bonus—right in the middle of all the cheesy organ and strutting bass, there's a warm wash of classical-schlock strings from out of nowhere that just destroys me. The record's crass and shameless, and I love it.

The other exhibit in the case is **Ray Parker Jr.'s** "The Other Woman," a rocker all the way with power chords and a vocal straight out of the Free/Bad Company school. Subdued horns and a female back-up chorus add a little R&B flavor, but they also might not have been out of place on a Lynyrd Skynyrd record, and a blindfold test might fool a few AOR programmers. Ray's woman even makes him want to play with his guitar all night long, and he tears off a credible solo to prove the point. Parker's dry, witty delivery is priceless, and it's quite an astonishing record—and a big pop hit, too.

OK, on with the alphabetical catalog:

ABC/"Poison Arrow": Poised between new romantic synthesizer pop and white British funk (both of which genres are producing a dismaying amount of sludge lately), this record is lightly funky, pleasantly melodic, and immensely catchy. Well-produced, well-arranged and a well-deserved UK hit.

Atlantic Starr/"Circles": I first became impressed by this group with their affecting ballad "When Love Calls" last year; this current Top 10 black hit is not at all similar, being a jumpy and tuneful upbeat number, but it's equally capable of sinking its hooks deep into the music appreciation center of your brain.

Baby Knockers/"Pin Up Girl": On the back of a pointless version of Simon & Garfunkels' "Cecelia" is this enjoyable, vaguely Costello-ish pop tune from the Northwest. Nice record, and the same organization also has an interesting double-sided record by the Strypes, A-side titled "1-2-3-4." Inquiries to the Bros. Haggarty, 7902 Onyx Ct. SW, Tacoma, WA 98498.

Band AKA/"Steppin Out" b/w "New Beginning": double-sided modern funk-pop killer from an independent L.A. label. The A-side's rougher-edged but with the same propulsive drive as a good Solar record, while the B-side is more melodic and a lot more cosmic. The record was picked up by MCA Distributing, but you can also check in at PPL Records Corp., 7927 Oceanus Dr., Los Angeles, CA 90046.

*****Barracudas/"Inside My Mind" b/w "Hour Of Degradation":** Prophets of the new psychedelia (for what it's worth), the Barracudas are favorites of mine even when not in absolute top form. They're pretty close here—the guitar riff insinuates admirably on the A-side, the brief "It's My Life" cops are amusing, and there's a great snarling guitar break. A "My Back Pages" riff leads into the more reflective flip, lyrically deriving from the Barry McGuire school of eschatological philosophy. In a surprisingly strong reflowering of late garage rock/early psychedelic (see entries below), the Barracudas are still the group to beat.

Toni Basil/"Mickey": I previously knew of Toni only for various pretentious dance routines I'd seen televised (plus one single of a Graham Gouldman song cut in 1966), but this huge British hit (written by Chinn & Chapman) has the most heartwarming pure late '60s bubblegum chorus I've heard in years, and its songleader squad histrionics make for good cheer as well.

George Benson/"Never Give Up On A Good Thing": In which Benson proves he can do it without the support of Quincy Jones and Rod Temperton. The guitar snaking through the verses and chorus gets its fangs into you instantly, the horns are just right, and it's a great tune, too. For my money, his best record yet.

B-52's/Mesopotamia (semi-LP): This extended EP or whatever you want to call it seems to be the victim of the old set-'em-up-and-knock-'em-down syndrome, as the vitriol directed its way by splenetic critics seems more than a bit extreme. There are dull points in this record, but there are also new delights like Cindy's lulling "Loveland," "Cake" 's rather spicy mix, and the wonderfully throaty Fred Schneider laugh in "Throw That Beat In The Garbage Can," easily the most arresting merriment on record since the lubricious chucklings of Clarence Carter on "Looking For A Fox" (see below).

B Movie/"Nowhere Girl" b/w "Scare Some Life Into Me": Consistently among the best synthesizer popsters in Britain, B-Movie stands out from the crowd with superior melodies and a little well-placed rock guitar. "Nowhere Girl" is exceptionally memorable stuff, while "Scare" reminds me of a cross

between the Cure's "Primary" and the Doll's disco-pop fusion "Desire Me."

Bongos/Drums Along The Hudson (LP): I foolishly bought the British mini-LP version of this record before learning the U.S. LP had all the previous single sides, including faves like "In The Congo" and "Bulrushes." Anyway, of the newer songs, about half are dismissable on grounds of meandering atonality but, as there had to be with a group as talented as the Bongos, a few gems exist, notably the UK single "Zebra Club" (mutated "Shake Some Action" riff and all) and the fabulous "Clay Midgets," with a classic '60s-ish garage riff and liquid fuzz guitar break.

David Bowie/"Cat People": "Ashes To Ashes" aside, this is his best in many years, featuring an interesting attempt to emulate Lou Reed ("I can stare for a thousand years" is pure "Heroin") that comes out closer to Jim Morrison, but is buttressed by a top-notch Giorgio Moroder production incorporating concertinas with crushing guitars and electronic effects. Giorgio wrote the music too, which may account for much of its excellence.

Billy Bremner/"Laughter Turns To Tears": The former Rockpile guitarist turns in a sparkling surprise, produced and co-written by Records leader Will Birch and bearing his light pop stamp, though anchored in solid rock. The flip is an intriguing salute to the Coasters.

Cars/"Since You're Gone": I got sick of "Shake It Up" moments after praising it in an earlier column, and the same may happen with this one, but at this point I can't resist Ric Ocasek's great 1965 Dylanisms ("you're so treacherous!").

Clarence Carter/"Can We Slip Away Again": The veteran soul singer updates and speeds up his 1968 classic "Slip Away" and even throws in one of those lascivious laughs that no one else can ever approximate (Fred Schneider's "Ha Ha Ha Ha" is in another, more sarcastic category altogether).

Church/"Unguarded Moment": Their album is loaded to the gills with similar sounds, but the single is the best introduction to this Australian band's electrifying combination of world-weary Only Ones-style vocals and vintage Byrds guitar waves. Plus you get a non-LP B-side. Then if you like the single, check out the LP.

Clapham South Escalators/"Leave Me Alone": Another neopsychedelic arrival (of the Barracudas' late '66/early '67 pre-acid variety). Their flip side version of the Electric Prunes' great "Get Me To The World On Time" is ho-hum, but this original is a good punky garage-rocker worth looking for.

Coffee/"Take Me Back": A Chicago trio who haven't previously impressed me, but hit the jackpot with this bright, upbeat, light-funk girl-grouper whose exuberance never lets up.

*****dB's/"Neverland":** A favorite from the

Repercussion album, strongly reminiscent of their classic "Black And White," and quite possibly its equal. Marvelous guitar.

Depeche Mode/"See You": They haven't lost their knack for enticing sonic synthesizer tapestries, and here's a lovely harpsichord-like tone and a little nod to the Crystals' "Then He Kissed Me" that make this record special.

*****Fay Ray/Contact You** (LP): I'd given this British quintet up for lost after writing about their delightful "Family Affairs" single a while back, so I was thrilled to get a U.S. major label album, and even happier to discover that most of the material matched or outstripped the earlier single (which is included). It's an exceptionally consistent album, particularly the second side, and is highly recommended to all who share my penchant for pop-rock bands with top-flight female lead vocalists (Sheila Macartney in this case).

F...Jones/Blast Off (cassette LP): For anyone as enraptured with the *Roman Gods* LP as I am, this cassette-only album is a must, containing an early version of the superb "Shadow Line" and several other rougher but relentless rockers of note, including the Ohio Express/Jamie Lyons number "Soul Struttin'," composed by erstwhile Fleshtones manager Marty Thau and one Tony Orlando. Fans also should seek out the bizarre, extended 12-inch version of "Roman Gods" floating around. (For cassette, contact Reachout International Records, 611 Broadway, Suite 214, New York, NY 10012.)

Gas/"Breathless" b/w "Hostage": An impassioned complaint about the lack of exciting music that doesn't exactly leave me breathless itself but is a punch rocker of considerable merit. The second of two flips, "Hostage," rocks equally smartly.

Nona Hendryx/"X-Ray": The trendy types will seek this French import out for the smart modern funk remake of the Supremes' "Itching In My Heart" produced by Talking Head Jerry Harrison and bassist-around-town Busta Jones, but I value it for the frantic rocker (not credited to Harrison-Jones) on the flip.

Incredible Casuals/"Money Won't Buy You Happiness" b/w "Meanwhile": Dismaying Twilley-style pop-rocker on NRBO's Red Rooster label, plus more breathy pop on .e flip. Good out-of-nowhere contender.

It's Immaterial/"Imitate The Worm": Weirdest work yet from my favorite Liverpool eccentrics, a bizarre guttural chant that sheds its skin to reveal an infectious chorus to worm its way into your heart. Its serpentine strangeness might scare a few fish off, but should bait the interest of the adventurous.

Jam/The Gift (LP): I've been ambivalent about the "Town Called Malice"/"Precious" single; the A-side, though a gradual grower, makes me realize that if I want to hear "You Can't Hurry Love," I'd rather go to the Supremes. The flip is braver, a drastic depar-

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ture into full-scale funk which tends to drag at the end but is reasonably well-realized. The LP itself reaffirms my ambivalence, with excellent tracks like "Happy Together" and "Carnation" colliding with missteps like "Trans-Global Express" and others. Still, the Jam are at least interesting when they're not brilliant, and that tips the balance to the positive side. Hope "Happy Together" is a single somewhere.

Nick Lowe/Nick The Knife (LP): Another album of mixed quality, with my admiration accorded to soul-influenced cuts like "Raining Raining" and "Too Many Teardrops" and especially to the pretty U.S. single "My Heart Hurts" and the lovely, folksy "Couldn't Love You (Any More Than I Do)", which is almost a rock equivalent of the Miracles' "I'll Try Something New" (see below).

Mondo Rock/State Of The Heart: And continuing in a ballad vein, this Australian band led by former Daddy Cool kingpin Ross Wilson has a beauty, great singalong chorus and mournful melodicism, a rapidly growing favorite.

New Math/They Walk Among You (EP): Evidence that the neopsychedelic revival isn't solely England's province. This Rochester band used to play pop, but suddenly here they are with a full-blown Roky Erickson-type psychosis revealed in songs like the title track and the excellent "Invocation" and "Garden Of Delight," both redolent of demonology and the scent of brimstone. The music works too, and I wonder if the production of Howard Thompson, who signed Roky to his UK CBS contract, has anything to do with this fearful transfiguration.

*****Nick Nicely/Hilly Fields** (1892) b/w "49 Cigars": But if neopsychedelia's your thing, Nick's your man above all else. While most other British bands working the style seem to have taken it no further than the Blues Magoos or the Chocolate Watchband, Nick plunges into a swirling maelstrom composed mainly of "I Am The Walrus" John Lennon on the A-side and "Tomorrow Never Knows" Lennon (plus some Syd Barrett/early Pink Floyd) on the flip. Both sides are absolutely stunning, not to be missed, and just what the enigmatic female interjection "Kinky little postboy" on "Hilly Fields" has to do with it all is still a matter for conjecture.

NZ Pop: I was recently able to purchase a batch of relatively current New Zealand singles, which turned out generally impressive. Two singles by the **Screaming Meemees**, "Till I Die" and "Sunday Boys" b/w "At At", were favorites, the latter coupling showing a lot of U2 and (again) Cure "Primary" influence. The **Mockers** "Trendy Lefties" is not only interesting lyrically but mixes clever, mildly ska-styled pop with an odd sort of neopsychedelic bridge; while two of the three flips, "So Close" and "Tonight," reminded me of a gentler Jam. **Pop Mechanix**'s "Texas" is a memorable pop tune, and **Blam Blam Blam**'s "Don't Fight It Marsha, It's Bigger Than Both Of Us" is moodily and quirkily effective. And the **Mal Green Sound**, featuring Split Enz's former drummer, supply another thoughtful pop tune, "Follow Me." High-standard stuff, all in all, and worth investigating.

*****Graham Parker/Another Grey Area** (LP): The British critics seem to have their knives sharpened for this one, probably because Parker used U.S. session men instead of the beloved Rumour. As an admitted Parker fanatic, I love

the LP myself; it completes a brilliant trilogy with *Squeezing Out Sparks* (still the one) and *Up Escalator*. The song quality on the new LP is superb throughout, with "Can't Waste A Minute," "You Hit The Spot," "Crying For Attention," and the reflective single "Temporary Beauty" leading the way.

*****Plimsouls/A Million Miles Away** b/w "I'll Get Lucky": I think this is a brilliant record, great 12-string touches and a sparkling chorus on the A-side, which is probably their best song yet (which for me is quite an admission); and an almost equally exciting flip. But I wish there was a cheaper 7-inch counterpart to the 12-inch configuration, which is the only way you can get it, at a fairly hefty price.

Pop/Love Is Still Ours: Fascinating period flavor, very much like a record by the "Preflyte" Byrds before they'd lost their Merseybeat influences. Fine debut, but this Milwaukee band has some nerve adopting the name of one of L.A.'s finest pop groups before their ashes are cold. Info from Rick Overland, PO Box 09479, Milwaukee, WI 53209; price \$1.50.

Prism/Don't Let Him Know: Bryan Adams, whose brilliant "Lonely Nights" became a Top 10 AOR track months after its release, strikes again, breathing life into a fairly moribund Vancouver band with another on-the-money AOR/pop combination, enough power chords for the guitar brigades and a pretty tune (plus hand-claps!) for the popsters.

*****Pylon/Crazy**: An exceedingly welcome return for this Georgia group, their most straightforward pop record yet (not that it could be called conventional by any stretch of the imagination), spooky and mysterious and hauntingly compelling.

*****Records/Music On Both Sides** (LP): Not even knowing there would be a third album, I was delighted by its sudden appearance and transported by its consistent sparkle. The Records, personnel changes and all, are still a premiere pop-rock band, and this is a terrific LP, highlighted by "Not So Much The Time," "King Of Kings" and any number of other fab waxings.

Rhoda with the Special AKA/The Boiler: A truly scari-fying record, eerie in its detached narrative style until it explodes into violence—certainly not easy or pleasant listening, but it makes its mark.

Mike Runnels/Channel 19: Very impressive Austin rock tune, adapting a sped-up "Tired Of Waiting" riff and a wispy voice to mesmerizing effect. The flip, "Only With You," reminds me of the dB's and is also worth investigating. You may do so via Stress Records, 4716 Depew, Austin, TX 78751.

Screen 3/New Blood b/w "European Journey": More evidence that there's some life in the British white funk scene, as "New Blood" showcases nimble guitar and well-placed trumpets and even an inoffensive rap midway through. The flip is straighter modern pop, though the trumpets make a pleasant reappearance. Impressive new band.

Rick Springfield/Success Hasn't Spoiled Me Yet (LP): And it hasn't. This album's better than the last one, with half a dozen good rockers, in-



Janet Waegel

Ken Barnes trips out

cluding "I Get Excited," "Kristina" and "The American Girl." No clunkers to be found. Rick is refining his refreshing, succinct rock style, with excellent results.

Keith Sykes/In Between Lies: Memphis rocker catches you up in the first half-second with a snappy riff triggering a deceptively loose pop-rock delight. When he's on, he's one of today's best.

Talk Talk/Mirror Man: Another good new British band adding some vigor to the synthesizer pop school. Standard Roxy vocals quickly give way to some pretty turns of melody and effectively-used strings. Looking forward to more.

Taste Of Honey/I'll Try Something New: Superb repertoire choice, an ethereal Smokey Robinson classic so lovely that even a double helping of "Sukiyaki" in the arrangement can't smother it.

Third Eye/Pass Myself: More good late 1966-style UK neopsychedelia (word of the column), with a trace of Monkees mixed in with all the astral/mystic lyrics. Excellent rocker, and a fine yearning version of the 13th Floor Elevators' "May The Circle Remain Unbroken" on the flip.

Dwight Twilley/Later that Night: On the flip of "Somebody To Love," a fine late-1979 single slightly revamped for his comeback, this song has all the fragile-yet-crisp, pop-rock elements that made Twilley such a revelation in 1975. The album is of high quality too, and it's good to have him back firing on all cylinders.

Undertones/Beautiful Friend b/w "Life's Too Easy": Teaming up with a Teardrop, the Undertones don't so much explode as insinuate

with a brooding, subtle, well-produced semi-ballad that improves with each hearing. The flip reworks a track from their last (superb) album, and it's a killer.

Vampire Bats From Lewisham/Mr. Clean: Carnival organ, phasing effects and a jaunty tune highlight yet another obscure-and-excellent UK neopschedelic instant relic. Unfashionable it may be, but this boomlet is producing much better records than I would have guessed.

Various Artists/A Splash Of Colour (LP): And here's the clincher—the highly-ballyhooed leading edge of the neopsychedelic movement, this WEA compilation is surprisingly strong. Mood Six's two songs are my favorites, but by only a slight margin over **Miles Over Matter** and their anthemic "Something's Happening Here" and the more ethereal **High Tide** tracks (also available as a single). You also get the crassly amusing "Keep On Running" "update," "I Helped Patrick McGooohan Escape," by the **Times** (nee Teenage Filmstars), a less-than-stellar but solid Barracudas track, and some decidedly ludicrous psychobabble from the **Doctor**. How can you resist?

Waylon & Willie/Just To Satisfy You: Waylon Jennings's ability to create the occasional country-rocking gem (vastly preferable to all the new rockabilly in London, L.A. and New York combined) continues to impress me, and this one's so good it even makes Willie Nelson bearable. Terrific guitar.

Wild Swans/Revolutionary Spirit: A 12-inch-only debut by a Liverpool band that's reminiscent of Echo & the Bunnymen but has a delicacy the latter band seems to have lost. Most promising.

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WHY I LOVE QUEENS

The best definition of Queens I have ever heard is "a cosmopolitan mentality stuck in a suburban locality." Bayside, where I live (when I have to), has been called "Archie Bunker country" by **New York** magazine. People in Bayside invariably smoke too much dust and kill their parents. It's happened twice in my neighborhood and I graduated with both of the perpetrators.

When I had long hair and a beard, dirty looks followed me the two blocks from the bus stop to my parents' house. Now I have short hair so they can see my earring better and I give everyone mean looks as I walk down the middle of the street. I have had the epithet "JEV" hurled at me from the sanctity of a church a block from my home. My neighborhood is mostly identi-kit Irish/German Catholic blond or red-haired towheads who always stand around tossing a softball or football at each other. When I can, I walk through their game.

I tell people I'm only Jewish on my parents' side of the family. [Lenny Bruce told people he wasn't Jewish until they were anti-Semitic.] The synagogue at the bus stop gets swastika'd on a regular basis. There is a KKK office on Northern Boulevard, also within walking distance. We are the only Jewish family on the block, but we get along. That's because everyone hates the Hindus up the block. Black people only come to my neighborhood to deliver supermarket flyers.

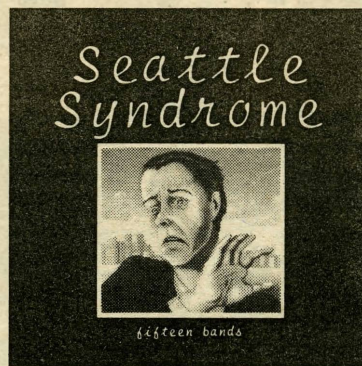
Up until last May I hadn't lived in Bayside for almost three years. When I came back, the people I knew were all doing the same thing: they get stoned, play frisbee, and munch out at the Blue Bay Diner, giggling at the menu all the while. At times they seem to me the embodiment of the reasons I had for leaving Bayside.

Then I started hanging out with a different crowd, including a couple of people I'd just met. Stupid me—I should have known better than to think I could hang out with people who had lived all their lives in that town. I don't need friends bad enough to associate with those semi-suburban simpletons.

My mother is 35 years old. She has spent most of her life in Bayside. I don't think she understands why this town is driving me crazy.

by Lenny Mosse (a reader)

WE'RE CLOSER TO GROUND ZERO THAN YOU ARE



Seattle Syndrome

A sampler of the *Seattle* sound. Loads of different bands (fifteen to be exact). A good way to find out what happens up here in the Northwest.



3 Swimmers 12 inch EP

"The Worker Works To Live" b/w "Take Me Back" & "Behind The Door" "... layers of multiple rhythms, dissonant, harmonic crunching & streamlined melodies" **Regina Hackett Seattle PI**



Blackouts

Men in Motion EP Our first classic release. Featuring *Deadman's Curve*, *Probabilities*, *Being Be & Five is 5*.



the 88's

Money Can Buy (the Best of You) b/w *Real Gone Over You* is their first single. They are high energy rock-a-billy. It's dance time whenever this hits the turntable.



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ALBUMS



SLUMS ACROSS THE HUDSON: Rob Norris and Richard Barone of the Bongos.

The Bongos DRUMS ALONG THE HUDSON (PVC)

In *Sound Effects*, Simon Frith's excellent analysis of the sociology of rock and roll, two points pertinent to this review are made: (1) that to define "pop" music is to define a form aimed at selling lots of records, and (2) that journals of musical opinion such as *NYR* are actually *belligerent* about their music, claiming an intimate acquaintance with musical Truth, and the majority of "rock consumers" be converted or be damned.

The Truth comes in a variety of guises: this month it happens to reside in the grooves of *Drums Along the Hudson*, the album/anthology documenting the music of Hoboken's Bongos from near-inception (fall, 1979) to the spring of last year. It includes both sides of their 1979 debut on Fetish, "Telephoto Lens" b/w "Glow in the Dark," and all three cuts from the next year's follow-up EP. Though early efforts, the songs clearly reveal the group's methodology. Simple chord progressions and immediately hummable choruses create a shimmering aura. Lyrics are a surreal landscape dotted with landmines: "We're gonna glow in the dark tonight" might be romantic but it sounds radioactive. Other lines like "Early morning ghost won't let my phone ring/I won't get no snakebite tonight" stubbornly

defy any attempts at interpretation. The remarkable "In the Congo," about warily stalking (or being stalked by) the record industry—"natural enemies, natural predators"—and the reworking of T-Rex's "Mambo Sun" reveal a paradoxically shinier yet more complex sound and Richard Barone's increasingly distinctive voice.

The paradox is extended and made explicit on the album's most recent material, recorded about a year ago in England. Ecstatic pop songs like "Clay Midgets" sport words that simultaneously conjure dark images of tragedy and fear and speak hopefully of those who plan their lives around love. The warm rush of the instrumental "Burning Bush" and the jangling "Zebra Club" is countered by the dissonant sax of Throbbing Gristle's Charlie Collins on "Certain Harbours." Barone blends Biblical and modern imagery ("The Bulrushes" links heaven to earth via cable) just as the music sounds old and new at the same time. Pop music yes, but clearly not "pop" as defined by Frith. Barone, Rob Norris and Frank Giannini are staking out their own turf in revolutionary pop territory and are making some of the most exuberant, mysterious and invigorating music of the day. And if you don't believe me, just cross this line.

by David Bither

Fela Anikulapo Kuti ORIGINAL SUFFERHEAD (Arista import)

Fela has a new album out and the sound of the music will be instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with his Africa 70 band. All the Fela records I've heard have pretty much the same format: one song per side, usually commencing with an instrumental overture before Fela counts off the 20-piece horn and percussion-laden band into a two-chord vamp, interrupted by the occasional bridge or head, over which Fela solos on organ and alto sax.

But for all the music's passion, what makes it monumental is its subject. There is a tradition of social satire in Nigerian music, but the grief that Fela's acerbicness has brought on him would wither a lesser person. Government troops destroyed his communal home, Kalakuta, and killed his mother, a famous Nigerian activist. But Fela keeps on, conjuring, chanting, and cajoling his tales of government bureaucrats, the church, multi-national corporations, and the military. On "Original Sufferhead," Fela dissects terms often applied to a country like Nigeria—Third World, underdeveloped, non-aligned—and exposes them for the powerlessness they confer. On "Power Show," he talks about the corrupting force of power, when people get swellheaded from too much pride in their position.

I don't think one can expect any recording to convey what a group like this must sound like live (I imagine it as a sort of politicized Sun Ra) and until Fela manages to transport his 40+ entourage to the U.S. (*NME* has mentioned a possible spring tour), we will have to make do with recordings like this to convey Fela's Pan-African message. I for one can hardly wait.

by Steven Harvey

Husker Du LAND SPEED RECORD (New Alliance)

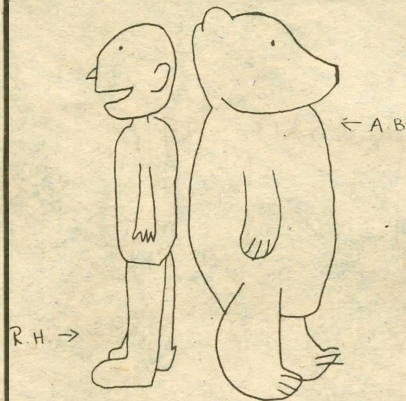
French revolutionaries of the 19th century had an interestin' way of equippin' their "human bombs." What they'd do is take a bucket full o' ball bearings and carefully insert them up the intended's oiled rectum one-by-one until "saturation" was achieved, at which point they'd stand "Kid Dynamite"

on his/her head while a comrade filled the spaces between these rattlin' & lethal "pumpkin balls" with a pasty explosive known as "gouste," thus cuttin' the victim's chances o' (audibly) detectin' said weapon to virtual nil & also assurin' that the load carried quite a punch. Accordin' to literature of the period, the mixture's density was deemed correct when gas would not freely pass through the space a-tween the "p.b.'s," & judgin' from the musical density o' Husker Du's new rec, it's possible that these three gents have been perusin' the French Revolution stacks in the University of Minnesota's library.

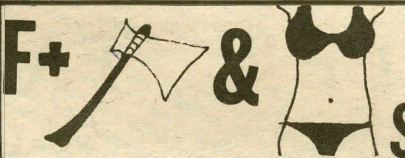
The reason I say this is that while many of the newer U.S. noise mongrels rage unabated for lengths of time previously considered conscionable only by hippie bands of decades past, songs are rarely grouped in "suites" o' more than 4 or 5 at a time & moments o' sonic surcease dot their concert appearances like hives on the face of a jealous goat; as evidenced by this live disc, however, Husker Du offers no such respite. Song runs into song runs into song. Temporal breaks do appear between several of the alb's selections, but they're filled with seconds of what aesthetes would surely consider music-in-and-of-itself if it appeared on a rec by one of our so-called avant-garde artistes AND LET US NOT APPLY DOUBLE STANDARDS! As New Alliance's Mike Watt recently stated in a phone conversation, "You don't get a break till the end of the side." I'm with ya, Mike. The question of course becomes: should we want a break? I think not.

For people not used to this sorta thing, *LSR* could be a somewhat o'erwhelmin' listenin' experience. As casual background noise, it's not real distinct from a whole lotta other recs (the speed's full-bore, the playin' "enthusiastic," and while three vocalists help to diversify the sound, their approaches are not disparate enough to radically alter the aural stew), but the band's lyrics offer a much more developed sense o' humor than many o' their counterparts ("Do the Bee" & "Bricklayer," esp.) & the outright frantiness o' their tryin' to sound like a five-piece puts them virtually in the league of America's best three piece outfits (Meat Puppets, Minutemen, Descendents). My only suggestion would be that they not totally forsake the Fall-ish grind

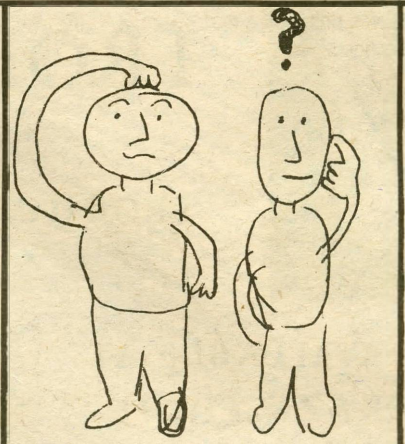
Robyn Hitchcock GROOVY DECAY (Albion import)



Robyn Hitchcock is almost as tall as the average bear.

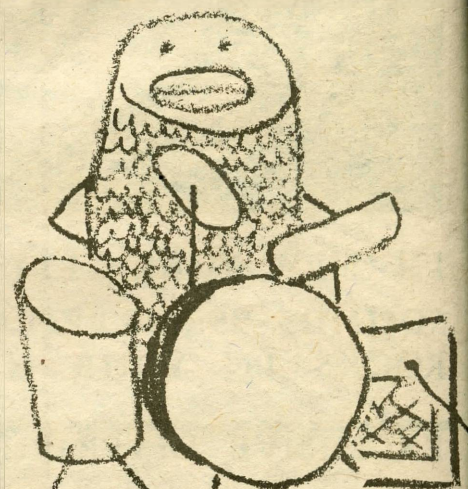


Robyn Hitchcock has made five albums, three with the much missed Soft Boys, for three different labels. You might hear strains of the Byrds and Syd Barrett in his songs, or even some of those artistes' very compositions. Nonetheless, his fans are quick to distinguish these psychedelics from those of the so-called revivalists. *Groovy Decay*, his new LP, is no relation to the late DJ Murray.



Many people are confused because *Groovy Decay* was produced by progressive rockguy Steve Hillage and has Gang of 4 gal Sara Lee on bass.

He has written songs called "Underwater Moonlight" and "Midnight Fish" and sometimes, Robyn



they displayed on their swell Reflex debut single as speed-for-speed's-sake is not necessarily its own reward. Otherwise, I think this is fuggin' fine & I'd recommend it to anyone who likes to squeal hard.

by Byron Coley

(NEW ALLIANCE: P.O. Box 21, San Pedro, CA 90733.)

The Wipers
YOUTH OF AMERICA (Park Avenue)

The grinding, bottom-heavy, four-chord sound of *Youth of America* gives the Wipers' second LP a hard gut-level punch. The do-it-all behind this sound is composer/guitarist/pianist/singer/producer Greg Sage, who also writes the oblique lyrics. There's an unmistakable anger and frustration behind his low and moody singing and it's hard to warm to him on the two opening cuts, "Taking Too Long" and "Can This Be," both routine garage songs. But "Pushing the Extreme" kicks in with a lurching Iggy-like riff and dark "Holiday in Cambodia" texture, and the side redeems itself with the six-minute guitar symphony, "When It's Over." Almost an instrumental, it begins briskly and gradually grows more frantic, getting tense, tense, tenser until Sage eases it into a long passage of mumbling existential wombatmania. This sense of oppression continues on side two's opener, "No Fair," an outburst against those forces that "take a piece of our lives." The draft? High school? Drug dealers? I dunno, and I'm not sure Sage does either, and maybe that's the point of the raging guitar lines. Only a sense of doom restrains the aggression in the album's title cut, the band's magnum opus. Riding a bold riff, a nervous guitar chews into the steady din of the rhythm section. "Youth of America/Living in

the jungle/Fighting for survival/But there's no place left to go." With sinister shading, satisfying spills of feedback and that relentless riff, the song holds its own—for 10½ minutes! That's a long time to stay mad within the confines of a simple rock structure. This Portland, Oregon trio has stretched the garage notion of hard-and-fast to epic proportions.

by Doug Simmons

(PARK AVENUE: PO Box 19296, Seattle, WA 98109.)

LOVE TRACTOR (DB)

With strangely appropriate rhythm guitar chops lifted from Stax soul, disco 4/4's shot through with snare syncopations a la Joy Division or Gang of Four, and fragments of melodies pieced together in A-B-C structures slightly more complicated than your average pop song, Athens, GA's Love Tractor recalls everything from the Ventures (in its untreated guitar instrumentals) to the M.G.'s (in its plaintive, southern feel) to New Order (in its music's tentativeness and shifting moods). But the group doesn't sound like any of them. If there is truly an "Athens Sound" (cf. Pylon, Method Actors, R.E.M.) Love Tractor exemplifies it: snappy, succinct, clean, rhythm-based and influenced by contemporary rather than traditional pop sources.

I can envision such cheery, slap-happy numbers as "Fun To Be Happy" and "Buy Me A Million Dollars" delighting scores of Athens partygoers, even if the songs seem more like limpid, fleeting sketches in my living room. Which is to say, none of Love Tractor's 11 instrumentals compel on their own accord—as autonomous, unforgettable compositions. Instead, the pieces explode in im-



MAKE THEM A MILLION: Love Tractor of Athens, GA.

pressionistic, momentary bursts (sometimes sensual, other times prickly and distant) as the bass, guitars and keyboard voices co-mingle for a few nerve-tingling measures and then split apart.

To Love Tractor's credit, I'm never left hungry for a singer; sometimes, I do wish more thought had been given to the melodies and/or special effects. As ambient music, more atmospherics could embellish without overburdening mood. When the record's over I find myself playing it again, vainly searching for an elusive something—the "there" that isn't. Perhaps it's because the shape and feel of the sound—the style—is the content and it's too indistinct and ephemeral to make itself felt. Honestly, I've been playing the record a lot—when I eat, read, for relaxing, going to sleep, as background for conversation. If I felt like dancing it would work fine too. It's functional and much of it's pretty. Just don't try to listen hard to it.

by Phil Davis

(DB: 432 Moreland Ave. NE, Atlanta, GA 30307.)

Dwight Twilley
SCUBA DIVERS (EMI America)

With "I'm On Fire" and *Sincerely*, Dwight Twilley created an original modern pop sound out of the etherealness of Big Star and the exuberant innocence of the Raspberries. One had to wonder, however, whether his feat hadn't been achieved through luck rather than genius as he proceeded to abandon insulated studio wizardry for hackneyed rock 'n' roll realism on the albums that followed. *Twilley Don't Mind* and *Twilley* were at best indistinguishable from those albums of Tom Petty, 20/20 and Phil Seymour, to cite only those he explicitly influenced. *Scuba Divers* marks a blatant

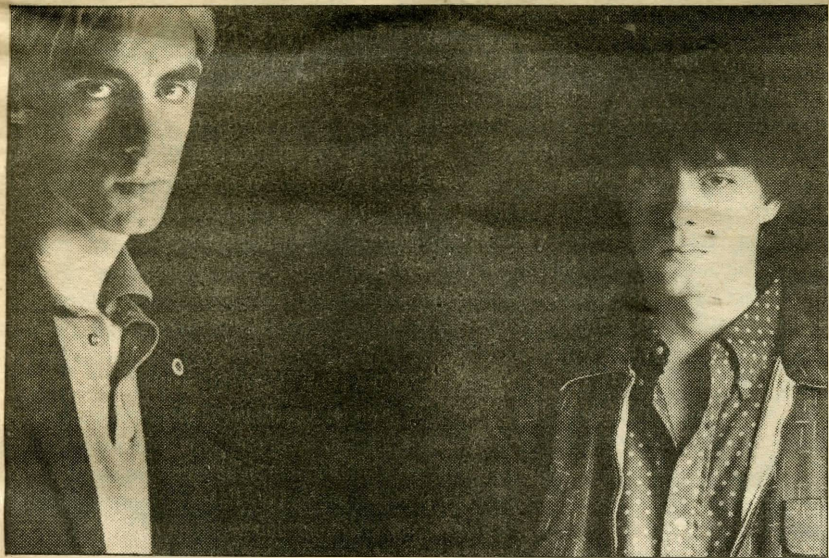
return to the style he pioneered and proves that, although *Sincerely* may have been a once-in-a-lifetime shot, it was no fluke.

Most of the material on *Scuba Divers* was written for one or both of the two unreleased albums Twilley recorded for Arista before the label dropped him altogether. "I'm Back Again" is an exception. Marred only by routine guitar solos, Twilley channels the frustration of his situation into a mesmerizing web of overlaid vocals and acoustic guitar. Encouragingly, "I Think It's That Girl" and "Later That Night," the other new songs on the album, are also especially appealing.

Of the older material, only "Cryin' Over Me" and "Falling in Love Again" don't measure up. The former is a whiny bit of boasting with heavy-handed guitar; and though the latter is the kind of tune you can't stop humming, unfortunately it's because you've already heard it a million times as John Lennon's "(Just Like) Starting Over."

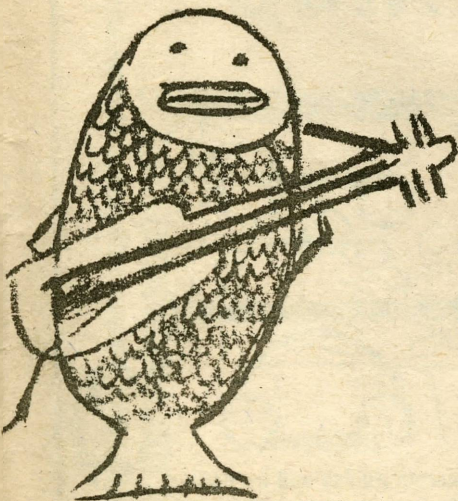
The rest of the album is prime Twilley. Not concerned with, or even aware of, current musical trends, his work assumes an innocence evocative of the Turtles or Holsapple dB's—sweeping melodies and heart-wrenching vocal patterns abound. And as a true pop obsessive, Twilley has his own unusual notions of the form; from lyrics like "10,000 American scuba divers dancin'/ Three hungry frozen robots see them," to the utilization of the Cowsills as backup singers and players. They lend his music the personal touch so rare among powerpoppers (for lack of a better term). That's why this skeptic finds herself almost in tears when she hears Twilley breathe lines like, "You said you loved me and it moved me so much." In a world of jaded cynics, he's a hopeless romantic. This guy really means it. *Sincerely*.

by Jean Rosenbluth



EPICS, HARD AND FAST: Greg and Brad of the Wipers.

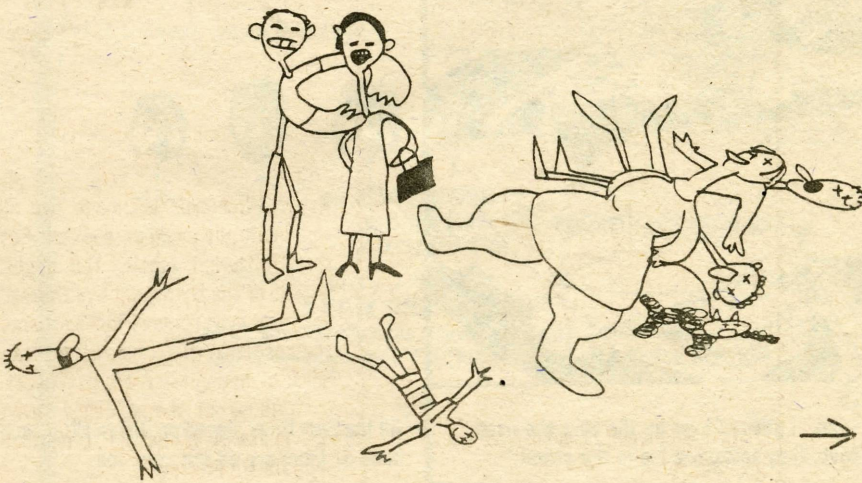
Hitchcock's groups are dressed up like fish.



"I was riding on a loaf of bread," sings Robyn Hitchcock...



...and "When I was a kid/I hated what I did/I strangled all my relatives..."





BLUES ON CUE: Robert Ealey at the door of his Bluebird Club.

**Robert Ealey with the Juke Jumpers
BLUEBIRD OPEN**

Most salt and pepper (black and white) blues efforts have fallen drastically short (e.g. the London Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters sessions), but here's one that reverses the trend. Robert Ealey has bounced around the Lone Star State's blues circuit for some three decades. He and the Juke Jumpers hail from Fort Worth, where today he manages the popular Bluebird Club, a working-class blues joint that caters to a salt and pepper clientele who dig blues of the lowdown variety. When not tending bar or ejecting rowdy drunks, Robert takes the microphone and puts his vocal cords to work, alternately singing and shouting some of the best blues in Texas.

There is everything from shuffles to boogaloes to spine-chilling blues here. Ealey pulls off a throaty early Marvin Gaye-like number, "You Are So Wonderful," one minute and the

Joe Turneristic "She's a Rocket" the next. The Juke Jumpers breathe new life into even the done-to-death "Tramp" and "Part Time Love"; Ealey's unique rhyme schemes and atrocious use of the English language gives them an authentic '50s feel ("I got to found me a part time love!"). Throw in a funky "Workin' With Robert" and the haunting "Something's Goin' Wrong," and you've got just about everything you could ask for from a blues album. And there's still three more great cuts!

Rockin' good-time music that's an echo from the past. More soon, please. Robert Ealey is a knockout.

by Almost Slim

(AMAZING: P.O. Box 26265, Fort Worth, TX 76116.)

**The Misfits
WALK AMONG US (Ruby)**

The Misfits are one of the legion of bands with whom I have a vague familiarity simply because they've been around so long. Horror-rock is the apparent mode, but where the Cramps use it as a campy link to the rock past, the Misfits seem to leave it mired in 1977. Of course, with such songs as "Mommy, Can I Go Out and Kill Tonight?", one assumes they aren't *that* serious, and the group's resemblance to a punked-up Kiss breaks down any remaining barriers of decorum.

There are three songs on *Walk Among Us* that I like. They are, in order of appearance: "20 Eyes," "When I Turned Into A Martian" and "Astro Zombies." These songs bounce along in a bright, Ramonesy pop-punk groove that never fails to put a spring in my step and a smile on my face. The rest of the material on this record, save for a nice chorus there/an OK bridge here, is wholly unaffectionate. It's strange to hear such an uneven Ruby production, after the exemplary *Flesh Club* and *Gun Eaters* LPs, but something tells me the problem lies with the Misfits themselves.

by Drew Wheeler

**The Capris
THERE'S A MOON OUT AGAIN!**

(Ambient Sound)

**The Harptones
LOVE NEEDS (Ambient Sound)**

**The Jive Five—Featuring Eugene Pitt
HERE WE ARE! (Ambient Sound)**

**The Mystics
CRAZY FOR YOU (Ambient Sound)**

**Randy and the Rainbows
C'MON LET'S GO! (Ambient Sound)**

What we have here for the most part is willing flesh, weak spirits and an idea whose time hasn't come and gone because it never really arrived in the first place. These five vocal harmony groups from the '50s and early '60s (averaging about 3/5 original members per outfit) are trying to recapture one of rock 'n' roll's most innocent and heartfelt periods and make doo wop a viable 12" commodity for today's record buyer. But it's not gonna happen. The album covers cry out '50s flashback, and the vinyl is soaked to the gills with blind nostalgia. The stores file 'em all straight into the oldies section.

These groups and so many more like them were never meant to sustain album-length

That Summer Is Here" shows you when Jonathan Richman gets some of his music: inspiration from these days, as does "Guardian Angel" by the Capris.

Randy and the Rainbows come off the worst (guys, I still groove out to "Denise" but this stuff is strictly from Schlocksville the Jive Five turn in the most worthwhile appearance. Eugene Pitt, flanked by four new Fivers (including a pair of Pitt brothers turns in heart and soul performances on cut after cut. Especially moving are "Never Change" and "Don't Believe Him Dorena" (with an assist from the Chantels where hackneyed yesteryearisms give way to poignant recollections of former triumphs. There isn't much more to say except the



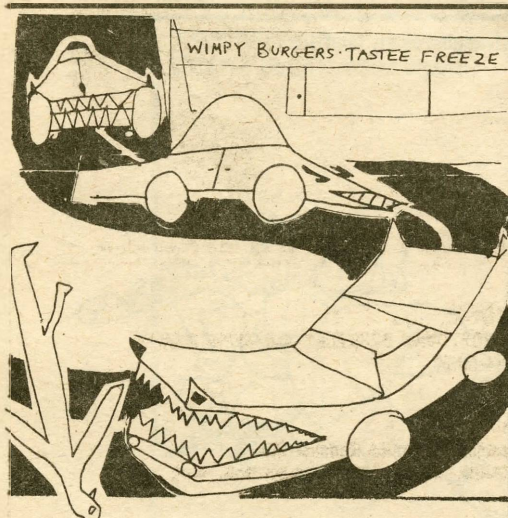
THE JIVE FIVE with Eugene Pitt (center)—"heart and soul performances, cut after cut."

repertoires. If these LPs came out 20 years ago when these people were in their *prime* it wouldn't change a thing. Doo wop lends itself amazingly well to one- and two-shot wonders. And that doesn't just mean deadly dull dirges with overwrought vocals at every turn. Doo wop can be as rollicking and free-wheeling as any other type of rock 'n' roll. If Frankie Lyman could be here, he'd tell you the same thing.

Of course, out of five LPs' worth of material there's bound to be a few points of interest. The Capris come up with a fine finger-snapper called "Morse Code of Love" (available as a 45). Willie Winfield of the Harptones still has a keen edge of sweet sadness in his voice. The Mystics' "Now

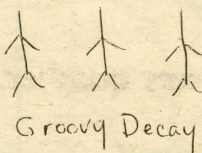
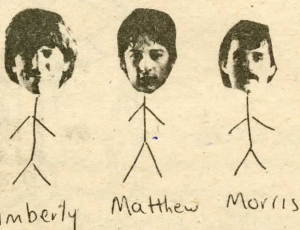
listening to these groups attempt to "get current" by covering REO Speedwagon, Steely Dan, Hall & Oates, John Lennon and Joey Ramone (the Mystics' "Doreen Is Never Boring" a/k/a "Rock 'n' Roll High School Pt. II") leads me back to an inescapable conclusion: it's better to have a live past than a dead present. So go grab a fistful of those old 45s and dig into the soul music of the '50s. I tell you true, their two-minute love bursts of joy and sorrow can still knock me out. One play of "Blue Moon" by the Marcells speaks more eloquently to me than the entire six sides of *Sandinista!* put together.

by Craig Zeller



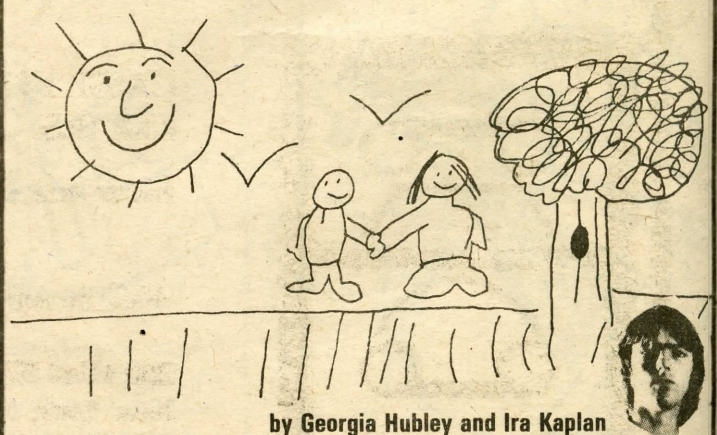
...and "I get run over by the cars she used to drive/They recognize me in the street."

Black Snake Diamond Rule



All the Soft Boys played on Robyn Hitchcock's first solo album, but none of them are on the new one.

It will be a happy day indeed when somebody releases a Robyn Hitchcock album in America.



by Georgia Hubley and Ira Kaplan

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GOLDEN PALOMINOS Danceteria

Q: What's a Golden Palomino?

A: A rockin' horse!

Q: Who are the Golden Palominos?

A: An all-star assemblage of avatars of downtown post-modern, avant-punk, neo-noise fusion. Arto Lindsay, of pioneering meta-noise maniacs DNA, on guitar and vocals; John Zorn, supra-Braxtonesque explorer of reed instruments and singer of game calls from *The Great Beyond*; Jamaaladeen Tacuma, bassist with renowned harmolodic-funk unit Prime Time, led by the legendary Ornette Coleman; super-bassist Bill Laswell, of downtown neo-fusion supergroup Material; drummer Anton Fier, formerly with The Feelies, Lounge Lizards and Pere Ubu; and all-around percussionist Dave Van Tieghem, who's played with everyone from Steve Reich to Busta Cherry Jones and Chris Spedding.

Q: What would one expect from such a lineup?

A: Scratchy, squawking explosions? Gibbering noise outbursts over a bruising, semi-harmolodic recombinant-fusion bottom? Some sort of strange, loud, clangorous horsing around? Hate to answer a question with more questions, but...

Q: And what did the Danceteria audience get from the Golden Palominos?

A: The impressive debut of a surprisingly tight, vigorous, and assured post-modern *rhythm* band. Yes, there were scratchy, squawking explosions gibbering over a muscular base. But it was all very *focused*. Arto and Zorn, two of the least-compromising makers of teeth-clenching insectine noise on the New York scene, have found a perfect forum for their tormented displays of *outré* inspiration. Arto's patented multi-directional guitar slashing sounded more like genuine *rhythm* guitar than ever; Zorn's squiggly squeals through his disassembled saxes and clarinets also benefited from a perfect frame-up.

Q: What did it *sound* like?

A: Material-istic, maybe. Laswell's presence as bass time-keeper reinforced that impression, but also, like Material, the Golden Palominos buttress all sonic exploration with earthy, aggressive rhythm, invigorating and athletic and funktional. Tony Fier, who's always been such a light, bright and topky sounding drummer, played harder and heavier than I've heard; lots of tom-toms doubling the bass drum, few cymbals except funk hi-



RIDE YOUR PONY: (L. to R.) Golden Palominos Laswell, Van Tieghem, Zorn, Tacuma, Fier and Lindsay.

hat riffs—much like Material's Fred Maher, but with the bonus of Fier's more mobile flexibility. While Laswell and Fier laid down the aggressive bottom, Van Tieghem banged and clanged on all manner of percussive accoutrements—scrap metal bits, congas, bells, a bass drum hung 'round his shoulders—accenting and rebounding off the sharp-edged din.

Looking at my notes from the show, I have: "Opening number—fractured but good-natured punk-funk taken at a jagged lope... Afro-hoedown beat with skewed group vocal chants... subsides into spasmodic blurps with Arto scratching dramatically away over the top... Konk-like percussive rave-up... sudden explosion of fantastic JB-ish funk! Eerily intense vocal/sax interplay over P-Funk-ish elasto-bop rhythms, great funky-butt alto sax by Zorn (!)... Brontosaurian metalloid stomp with skittering, herky-jerky free-form interludes... Jagged, edgy top over thick, physical bottom... Band sets up Arto's guitar as rhythm instrument, both located and dis-

located, moving with, against and outside of the beat..."

And that was just the opening number. A *long* opening number. I also have something scribbled here about "a mid-tempo, refracted, punk-funk boogie-blues... sounds almost harmolodic, thanks to Zorn's simple, assured alto statements... punk-funk, bar-band strut..." You get the idea: the Golden Palominos only had a half-hour's worth of material together, but it was a very strong half-hour. Tight but not overbearingly so, good-natured but not at all sloppy. A seamless interweave of out-there noise with in-there bump 'n' grind—mostly heated cut-and-thrust, no-nonsense eclectic grit, arty and musicianly sure, but also a very danceable noise much of the time, and at all times forceful and provocative. Like Material, the Golden Palominos had lots of moments where they seemed too good to be the exclusive property of those who "like this kind of stuff."

Oh yeah. And then there was Jamaaladeen Tacuma. My notes read: "Tacuma is, like,

un-fucking-believable, okay?" With Laswell holding down the bottom, Tacuma was free to: synch in with Laswell at crucial moments for two-bass-hits with the rhythm stick; effect sinewy bass counterpoint for a poly-rhythmic motion that could rip your booty apart; and play terrifyingly ingenious, diabolically graceful rhythmelodic *lead* lines on bass better than anything I've heard from any guitarist recently, and that especially includes Blood Ulmer, whom you might say Tacuma sort of transcribed and refined from guitar to bass. Not that the Golden Palominos were harmolodic. No, the Golden Palominos were something, I think, just as good, just as ancient-to-the-modern primeval and *now*—*rhythmelodic*. Tacuma may have been the star this night, but the Golden Palominos as a whole were strong enough to leave the crowd begging for more, and this writer highly expectant of much more good music to come.

by Michael Shore

NEGATIVE FX/DOUBLE O/GI'S/SS DECONTROL Gallery East, Boston

With the closing of Streets and the numerous police raids on the Media Workshop (the most recent being a near-riot during a Flipper all-ages show), Boston hardcore has been forced to crawl even further underground than before. Hence this four-band slamfest at Gallery East, an alternative art space located in an alley aside Boston's decaying Hotel Essex. By the middle of Double O's set, the Hotel Essex was on fire. Find me a more perfect atmosphere.

This might have been Negative FX's first live performance, but their name was by no means new to those around town, thanks

mostly to expertly applied spray paint. Led by radio-star Choke, who co-hosts a weekly hardcore show on WERS, Negative FX were much better prepared than anyone could've expected, delivering a powerful thrash that belied their inexperience. Drummer Dave Bass held the key to this power; Bass, probably the group's most experienced member (ex-Young Snakes, Alleybeats, former editor of *King's Ransom* fanzine) lends a touch of proficiency and depth that other hardcore bands just don't have. Bass's much-noted knowledge of mid-'60s garage led some to be surprised by his involvement with Nega-

tive FX, but he obviously feels (as I do) that 1982 hardcore is just garage music's modern-day extension.

Double O, on the other hand, don't seem as worried about living in the modern world as they are about fitting a certain mold. To gain some sort of audience reaction, lead singer Eric seems convinced that he must resort to third-rate Iggy-isms (i.e., throwing himself off the stage into crowds of people who *aren't* involved in the present slam). Much to his dismay, none of this made up for Double O's glaring lack of any musical style or substance—a lack duly noted in the audi-

ence's visible restraint in invading the stage. (Contrary to what you might have heard, these kids expect a little more than loud noise.) Pretty boring stuff...

...and totally unlike the GI's (Government Issue), the fastest and funniest group currently coming out of D.C. They have two key things in their favor. (1) Guitarist Brian Baker (also of Minor Threat) *really* knows how to play. Instead of using his skill to put us to sleep, Baker knows how to work *within* limitations. (2) Vocalist John Stabd, resplendent in his striped pants, orange hair and plastic peace medallion, displayed a

natural stage presence that kept *everyone* on their toes (one trait that he shared w/ Eric was his tendency to leap into the fray without warning). Unlike many of their more self-conscious contemporaries, The GI's clearly have a sense of humor, one that often allows them to be more insightful than those around them (e.g. "Rock 'n' Roll Bullshit," much more than a cheap laugh at the expense of heavy metal fans, or "Fashionite," a song that, like the GI's sartorial tastes, doesn't fit any uniform.)

As for **SS Decontrol**, maybe they oughta take a tip from the GI's and lighten up a bit. To give credit where credit is due, if it weren't for SS (Society System, or so they

claim) Decontrol there probably wouldn't be any hardcore scene in Boston. They inspired countless other young folks to follow in their path (key word: *follow*). Decontrol know *exactly* what they are doing, from their exuberant self-promotion and organization of this show to their careful propagation of the "straight-edge" philosophy, and they're reaching more kids than any other Boston band in recent memory. Whether or not it's a good thing is a different question.

Musically, Decontrol are right on the money. Guitarist Lethal has learned how to elicit more distorted GRUNGE than any guitarist this side of Greg Ginn. Lead singer Springa cuts a riveting figure, clutching his

skull in perfect agony as the feedback pounds behind him. It's in the lyrics where my differences with this band lie. Although most of their material is of the usual anti-cops/WW III ilk, some of it is downright reactionary (and I don't mean reactionary as in, "hey, let's listen to the Blasters instead of Visage," but as in "don't bother me with all that art shit").

Specifically, I'm talking about Decontrol's current local radio hit, "How Much Art Can You Take," which won them the biggest cheers at the Gallery. Although at first listen it appears to be nothing more than an OK-by-me PiL/Killing Joke-ish rant, "How Much..." is actually a teen anthem that prides itself

on its own ignorance ["A Certain Generals (?), A Certain Ratio, A CERTAIN BULLSHIT!"]. Although I'm sure that Decontrol's intentions were to do nothing more than write a song that says, in effect, "our side is better," "How Much Art" ends up saying, "If I can't understand it, it's shit." Too bad, because hardcore should be based on trying to open people up and fight prejudices, not build them up. How many contradictions can you take?

by Gerard Cosloy

NICK LOWE/SCREAMING JAY HAWKINS Palladium

The ride into the city went smoothly enough, and by the time they crossed underneath the giant Miller beer logo in the Palladium lobby some of Cindy's nonchalant enthusiasm began to rub off on Mike. Smoking a joint with a designer-punk couple sitting next to them, Cindy remembered that Nick Lowe had been in a band called Rockpile which opened a tour for Blondie. Mike remembered that *concert too; though more because of Debbie Harry than anything else*. Rockpile, as he recalled, played a bunch of sound-alike tunes that reminded him of the Stones playing Chuck Berry but then he had spent half their set out in the lobby looking at how weird all the women were dressed.

Well, a lot had changed since then, and Mike was ready to give this Nick Lowe guy the benefit of the doubt. He hadn't really paid much attention to him two weeks before; a comment Cindy had made about his down jacket and hiking boots really made him feel like a geek. But this time he wore one of his dad's old overcoats and black jeans like the ones Cindy had. He was wondering if her lipstick tasted how it looked (like cream soda) when the opening act, Screaming Jay Hawkins, came out in a cape and started banging out some blues. Mike didn't realize that he did "Caledonia," a pretty good song but Cindy got bored so they went out into the lobby for a beer.

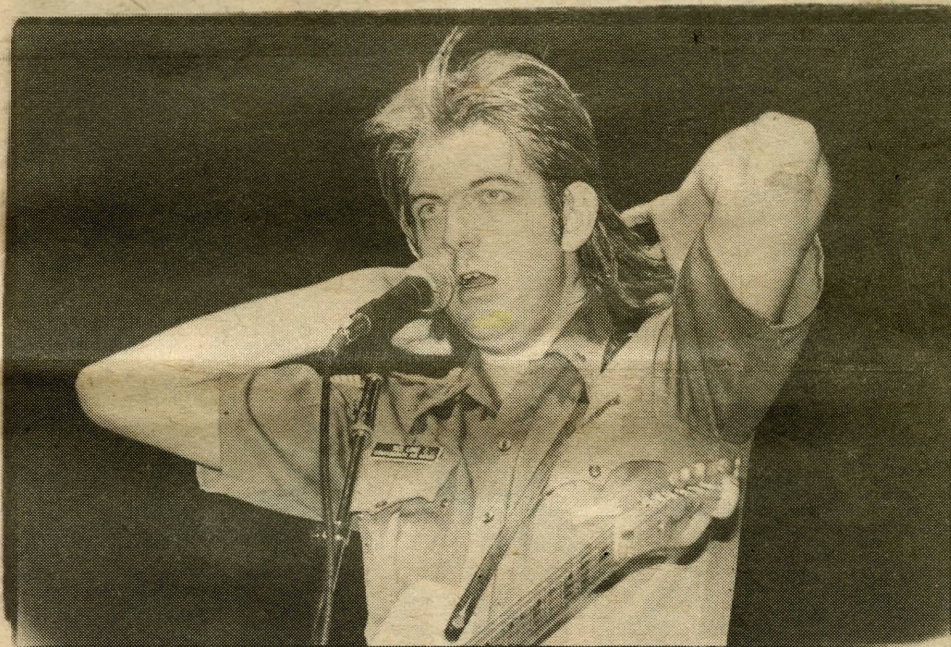
They came back to their seats at just the right time. Hawkins was playing the old Creedence song, "I Put A Spell On You," ranting and raving like a demon drunk and shooting off fireworks. Kind of corny, but funny, Cindy said, and Mike agreed. After that, though, their conversation coasted

aimlessly until the house lights dimmed again and Nick Lowe (a lanky guy in a mover's uniform) and his band took the stage.

They started off with "Stick It Where the Sun Don't Shine," a tune that irritated Mike to no end when he heard it on the radio but didn't sound half so whiny here. Then came Cindy's favorite, "I Love the Sound of Breaking Glass," which reminded them both of David Bowie. Neither recognized the next few songs, but Cindy nearly skyrocketed out of her seat when it was revealed that the keyboard player used to be in Squeeze, and he proceeded to sing "Tempted." Mike nearly suffocated trying to suppress his laughter when he thought of his buddy Rick's interpretation of that tune—"Tempted by the fruit of your mother." For some reason he knew she wouldn't find this as funny as he did.

More songs followed that Cindy recognized and seemed to adore but Mike's attention began to wander. There wasn't anything approaching good guitar playing going on and Lowe seemed a little awkward if not downright goofy. This distraction was erased when they went into "Cruel to Be Kind" and the audience leaped to its feet, Cindy clutching Mike's arm in a gesture of appreciative acknowledgement that came so close to affection he forgot how stupid the lyrics of that song had always sounded.

Everybody stood up for the rest of the show, and the three encores, too. Mike guessed they must have played all their songs after the first and he was right... Lowe introduced a couple songs that had been "written on the bus last week." Cindy



Laura Levine

LOWE & LONESOME: Must critics be cruel to be kind?

thought that exciting, but then she was thrilled when the Cars' guitar player came out to "jam" for the last two rounds. Mike was unimpressed. While all the songs he heard that night were catchy enough, there wasn't much to do with them after you'd caught 'em. It all sounded pretty lame next to the Joan Jett album he'd picked up that week.

His disappointment must have shown because Cindy gave him the proverbial cold shoulder the whole way home. After dropping her off (to "write some letters," talk

about lame) Mike heard another old Creedence song on the radio. "Almost Saturday Night" pretty much summed up his melancholy state, yet the lyrics gave him something to go on. The weekend wasn't over yet. The announcer said this version of the song was by Dave Edmunds and Mike made a mental note to check him out if he ever came to town.

by Mark Coleman

HEART ATTACK/TREACHEROUS THREE/LIQUID LIQUID

Hotel Diplomat

Great concepts do not great concerts always make. On paper, the ideology of "Up-town Meets Downtown"—a mix of rap, hardcore punk, boho polyrhythmics and their respective followings—is both musically adventurous and laudably liberal, but the reality of the event did more to illuminate the differences between NYC music/style tribes than to resolve them. Though the gig was only marginally more integrated than free admission nights at the Mudd, the dingy glamour of the Dip's capacious Crystal Ballroom seemed to promise the ideal atmosphere to sideline prejudices and just

plain *par-tay*. But the audience did not blend as seamlessly as the superb DJ's segues from Oi to vintage disco/soul and back again; although cool tolerance prevailed throughout, only the Treacherous Three managed to galvanize all of the attending cliques.

Heart Attack represented a sensible, accessible choice to showcase from Gotham's burgeoning hardcore legions; their non-costumed straightforwardness and precocious thrasharmonics belie the common hardcore=talentless preconception. These teens sneak clever, if brief, dubwise instrumental breaks into the speedrock on-

slaught of standouts like "Our Approach" (reggae) and "From What I See" (funk); even their careful tune-up elicited catcalls of "Grateful Dead!" and "Freebird!" But like the slam that literally sent me flying across the floor, their crunching power-trio offensive proved just that to a sizeable percentage of the audience, which fled the volume and random chaos of the reasonably restrained slam brigades. Those remaining were treated to the pummeling hammerlock rhythm of bassist Paul D. Praved and drummer Javier, Jesse Malin's guitar scratchings, and their combined shouts, grunts and

we're-justa-buncha-cunts camaraderie, which occasionally recalls the sonic intensities of a simplified Mission of Burma. HA eschew the hilarious moron heroism of peers like Fear and Black Flag in favor of endearingly naive politicizing, yet they are not—God bless 'em—entirely humorless. The highlight of their set was Malin's admonishment to the band on their second attempt of "God is Dead": "We can't fuck up a religious song. I don't want to go to hell."

After being cranked up by Heart Attack, the only place to get was *down* and Enjoy Records' Gang of Three and their treach-

erous megafunk showmanship immediately captured everyone's attention. The **Treach-erous Three** came out to the strain's of "Apache" bedecked in matching velour sportswear, introducing one another and exhibiting streetwise choreography. The front line of Special K, Sunshine and Kool Mo-Dee fast-rapped separately and in precision duets and trios to bass lines and rhythm breaks brilliantly syncopated by turntable cutting wiz Easy Lee, leading white hipsters through call-and-response paces and teach-

ing them to pogo ("Say ju-ump, ju-ump, somebody scream!") and like it. The Treacherous Three's boasting braggadocio and their impeccable choice of backbeats ("Heartbeat," "Rock The House," "Rock Your Body (Body)") created an atmosphere that combined the best features of revival meetings and frat parties; their groovified momentum was marred only by a feeble attempt at the Jacksons' "I Want You Back." If, like me, you've never understood the incredible popularity of NYC rap, witnessing it

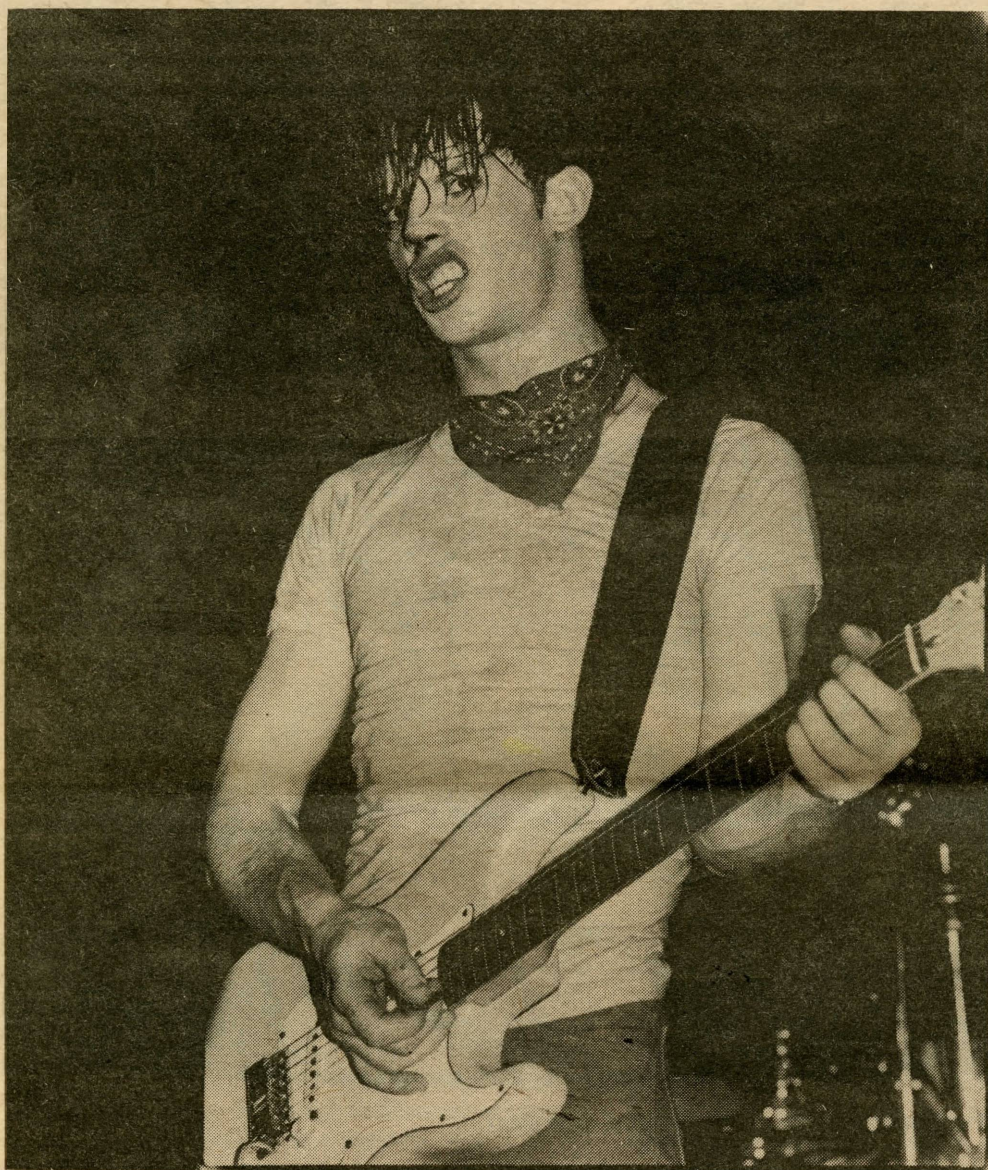
live, especially the Three's entertaining funk-fortified drills, will likely turn the doubtful into the converted.

After experiencing rap epiphany, anything would've been anti-climactic, and the increasingly dwindling audience seemed to agree. As a fusion between black sounds and white players, **Liquid Liquid** best embodied the spirit of the evening, but their propulsive polyrhythms didn't noticeably move the remaining crowd. Vocalist Sal Principato has grown even more expressive, if no

more comprehensible, adding effective lower register growls to his repertoire of moans, and he does a nice turn as bassist on "Rubbermire." But despite impressive gains in musicianship, L2's introverted ensemble playing and structureless musical snippets simply couldn't engage or outrage the crowd the way the Treacherous Three and Heart Attack did before them.

by David Keeps

NEIGHBORHOODS The Channel, Boston



BACK ON THE STREET: David Minehan of the Neighborhoods.

Until their temporary break-up in the summer of '81, the Neighborhoods were considered Boston area's finest, a group that on occasion could rival British counterparts like the Jam or Gen X in terms of dynamics and depth. Early in their career, the Neighborhoods established themselves as a hard-driving pop/punk trio, and their artistic range grew along with their popularity—not, it should be stressed, the other way around. But vocalist/guitarist David Minehan, inspired by fellow Bostonians Mission of Burma (as well as by recent Jam and Go4), wanted to create something more than the 'Hood's familiar pop. Although their 1980 Ace of Hearts hit, "Prettiest Girl" b/w "No Place Like Home," was the single that established them with a large New England audience, the Neighborhoods considered it an albatross around their necks, and by '81 they refused to perform either song.

Although that sort of attitude might have turned off suburban beer-drinking crowds, it only lent greater credence to the band's integrity in Boston. Newer songs like "Cultured Pearls" ("A brand new beat/A protest sound") and "The Patriot" ("Carry a pistol . . . kill somebody, kid, make me proud of you") proved the Neighborhoods to be a band as aware as any. Nonetheless, increasing friction within the band, coupled with the pressure of developing new material when such a strong base had already been formed, led to the group's demise.

But, by the start of '82, they were back. After playing a string of suburban "test market" gigs (some under the name "The 900 Club"), the Neighborhoods were again playing in Boston, this show at the Channel being their second time out. There's been one change in the line-up: bassist John Hart-corn, who currently plays with Primary Col-

ors, has been replaced by Tim Green.

The question is, are they as good as they used to be? Well, no. Not yet, at least. Where new material like the incredible "It All Makes Sense" ignited, forced renditions of old favorites like "Innocence Lost" barely flickered. The main problem appeared to be Green's bass playing. While his unique jazz/funk style pushes a song like "Rhyme, Rhyme" over the top, on older stuff like "Cultured Pearls" he screwed up, and *badly*, seemingly not playing with Minehan and drummer Mike Quaglia at the same time (or on the same song). When I mentioned this to producer Rick Harte a few days after the show, he claimed that, if possible, the band would like to scrap all old material for good. BUT . . . with the impending release of the 'Hoods' 12" EP recorded in '81 with Hart-corn, a song like "Cultured Pearls" has to remain in the set, despite the fact that Green has clearly yet to learn it. "Give them another month and they'll be incredible," said Harte.

Although he isn't the most unbiased of sources, Harte may just be right. The intensity of "I Am the Witness" proved that on songs which they've had the chance to formulate properly, the Neighborhoods are unstoppable; there's an unrelenting flow of energy from Minehan's guitar that always strikes home. With a little more time and a lot less reliance on proven favorites — there was no need for them to drag out their cover of "I Found That Essence Rare," a selection that seemed too obvious the *first* time around—the Neighborhoods won't have to deal with any comparisons—with themselves or anyone else.

by Gerard Cosloy

LEMMY CAUTION/KHMER ROUGE C.B.G.B.

Two new New York bands with two different approaches to post-punk, guitar-based R&R, live at C.B.G.B. The club's as grubby and unpretentious as ever, still my favorite place to hear and see new bands, but since its weekly schedule is crowded with anonymous mediocrities in various styles, some educated guesswork is required on the part of prospective patrons.

Khmer Rouge are three: Barry "Scratchy" Myers, the former Clash tour DJ and ex-Rank And File, on bass; Phil Schofield, guitar and vocals; and Paul DeMartino, drums. Vaguely aligned with Manhattan hardcore by virtue of their politicized lyrics and the kind of places they've played to date, KR's military rhythms and taut chords are actually closer to the Gang of Four than to the all-out thrash of, say, Heart Attack. Unfortunately, it's an academic distinction, because whatever their camp, Khmer Rouge just aren't very good. There are no real melodies riding those power chords, just a lot of grim-faced monotoning by Schofield. The

power of the rhythm section isn't coupled with any sense of swing or even rhythmic differentiation—on each number, Myers and DeMartino simply put the hammer down and leave it there. And while this may seem like quibbling, I don't dig guitar players who hype up the naturally tinny tones of their cheap instruments (like Schofield's Fender Mustang) with phasers, flangers and other distorting devices from Tom (Boston) Scholz's closet. It's like fitting a Cadillac front end on a VW Beetle—utterly superfluous, given the charm of the original. With a lefty orientation, plenty of gigs, and at least one "name" member, Khmer Rouge's career is off to a flying start in every way except for the music itself, which consistently short-changes both the musicians' best intentions and their listeners' high expectations.

Lemmy Caution, another three-piece, have the opposite problem. The music is definitely there (though there's still plenty of room for development) but the group image is fuzzy and gigs have been hard to come by. Too bad

about the lack of work, but as regards the image, be glad this isn't just another pre-fab "new wave" band but one still searching out its direction while working through an intriguing melange of influences, from Richard Hell to Ray Davies.

The songs are written by singer/guitarist Mike Duffy, and the first thing you notice is their (relatively) slow and deliberate pace. Even an up-tempo number like "Joey" forsakes punk ramalama for a hard-edged shuffle akin to Springsteen's "Kitty's Back" (along with the brooding "Bad Time for All," it boasts one of Duffy's best choruses). The other tunes are medium ("Fridays," about a guy working in a fish market, of all subjects) to slow ("Slap In My Face"); they pretty much stand or fall on the strength of their melodies, bolstered by Jurgen Renner's solid but somewhat predictable drumming and Rick Wagner's deft, tuneful bass playing. Both help to anchor Duffy's occasional Telecaster noise forays without overpowering his adenoidal teenage vocals.

I know the above description is pretty cloudy, but Lemmy Caution are not easily categorized or described. That's one reason why I think they have something positive, creative and heartfelt to offer, and why I urge you to see them for yourself.

by Andy Schwartz



LEMMY CAUTION: (L. to R.) Mike Duffy, Rick Wagner and Jurgen Renner

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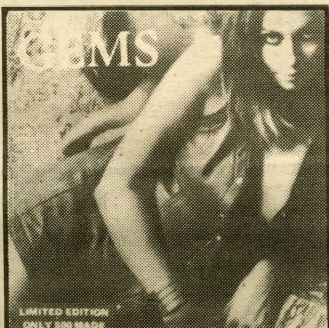
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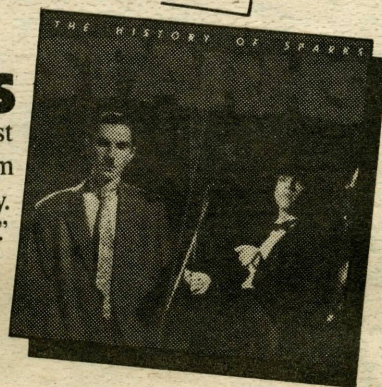
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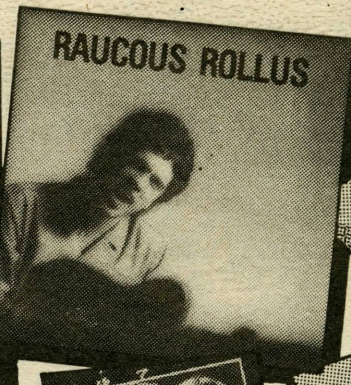


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