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MUSIC & MUSICIANS

PREMIERE ISSUE

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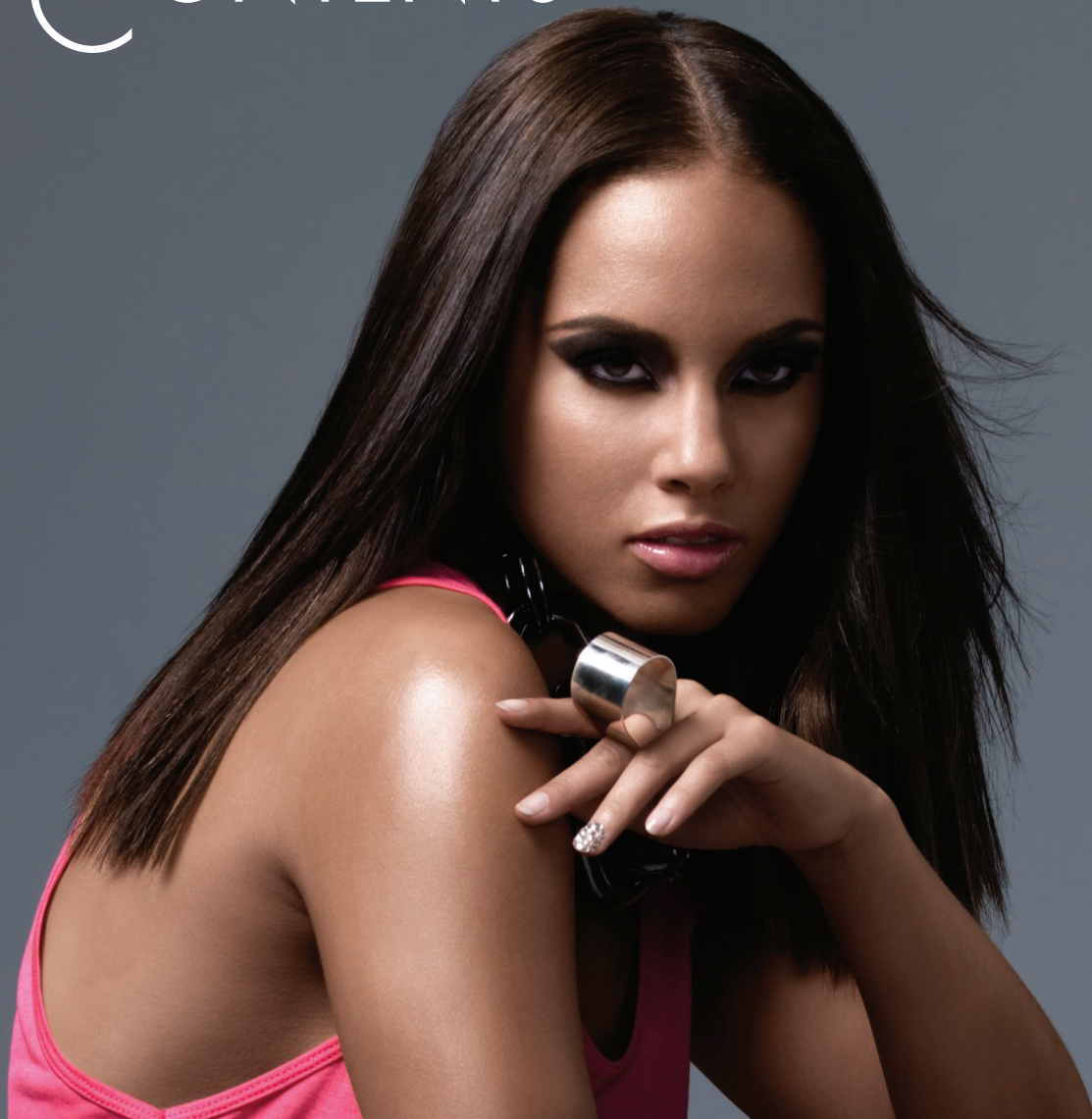
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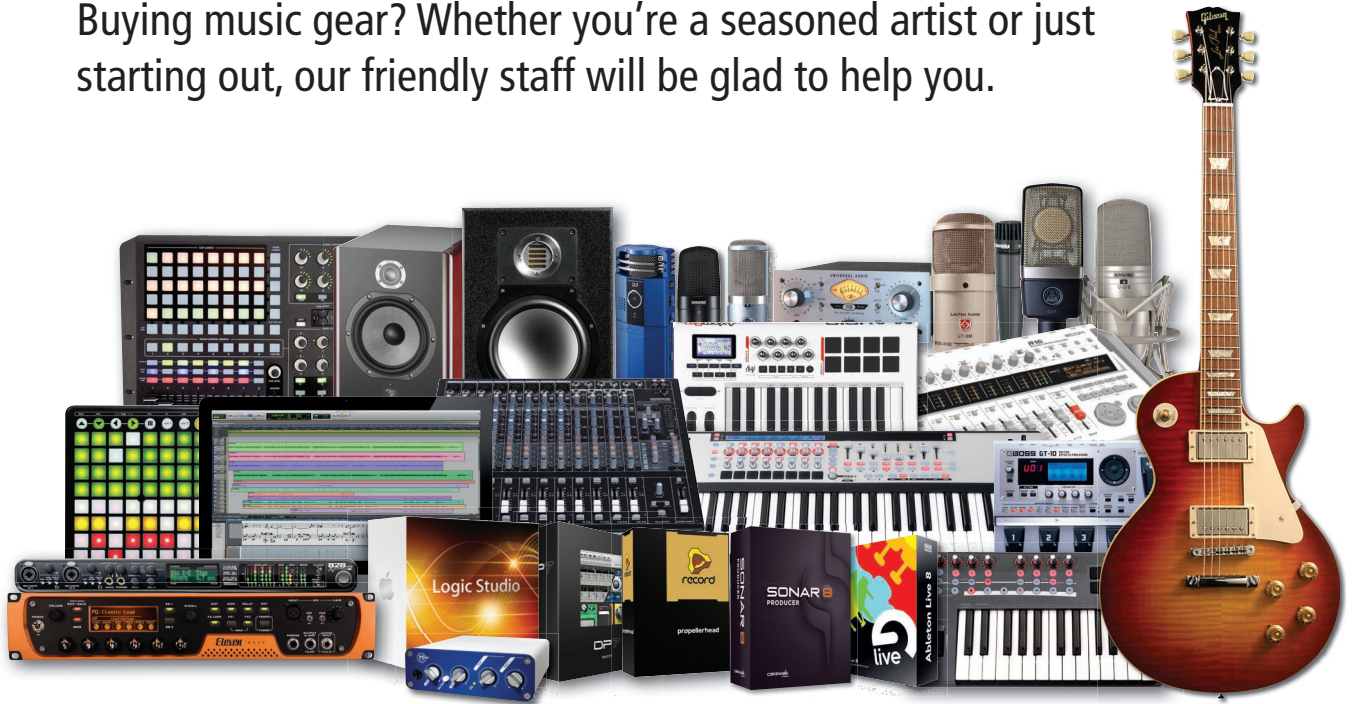
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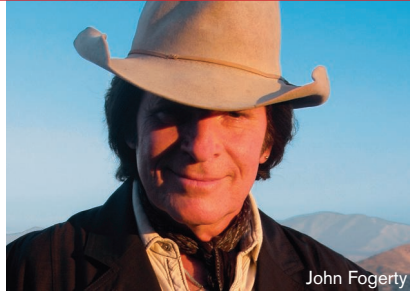
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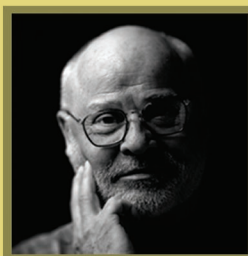
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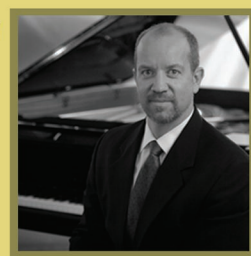
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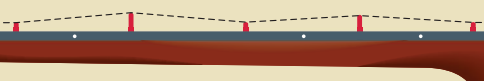
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Brandon Ching



STUCK ON UKE

Driven by a new generation of aficionados, the ukulele rises again

"THE UKULELE IS COOL AGAIN," DECLARES JOHN Schroeter, producer and author of *Between the Strings: The Secret Lives of Guitars*. Inspired by its simplicity and relatively low cost, amateurs and professionals alike have increasingly taken up the instrument in recent years.

Brought to Hawaii by Portuguese immigrants in the 18th century, the ukulele remained off the mainland's radar until the 1960s—and even then, Tin Pan Alley throwback Tiny Tim nudged it further into novelty territory. Over the next 30 years, uke-loving rockers like George Harrison, Pete Townshend, Eddie Vedder, Elvis Costello and the Magnetic Fields' Stephin Merritt helped to gradually increase the instrument's cachet.

Now young acts like Jake Shimabukuro and Brittni Paiva are leading a charge to introduce its charms to a new generation. "What I wanted to do was to show the diversity of the ukulele," Paiva says of her latest album, *Four Strings: The Fire Within*. The word is spreading over social-networking sites like YouTube, where Shimabukuro can be found covering

pop songs like Michael Jackson's "Thriller" and Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps."

"Think about what David Grisman has done for the mandolin, or what Béla Fleck has done for the banjo," says Schroeter. "They took their respective instruments out of the traditional bluegrass milieu and launched them into jazz, blues, folk, classical and beyond. This is precisely what the new generation of ukulele players are bringing to their instrument."



TOP TEN

Post-Beatles songs featuring at least two members of the group on the same track



1. John Lennon

"Instant Karma!" (1970)

Lennon's third solo single features George Harrison on guitar.

2. George Harrison, "When We Was Fab" (1987)

Ringo Starr plays drums on this wry sendup of Harrison's former group.

3. Ringo Starr, "Photograph" (1973)

Starr's chart-topper was co-written by Harrison, who also plays guitar.

4. Paul McCartney, "Take It Away" (1982)

That's Starr playing drums behind his old friend.

5. John Lennon, "Cold Turkey" (1969)

Lennon's emotional account of kicking heroin features Starr on drums.

6. Ringo Starr, "It Don't Come Easy" (1971)

Harrison produced and played guitar on Starr's first solo hit.

7. George Harrison, "All Those Years Ago" (1981)

McCartney and Starr join in on this tribute to the late Lennon.

8. Paul McCartney, "Beautiful Night" (1997)

Starr plays drums and sings harmony on this ballad gem.

9. John Lennon, "Gimme Some Truth" (1971)

Harrison plays guitar on Lennon's spirited protest song.

10. Ringo Starr, "You're Sixteen" (1973)

McCartney contributes a unique solo by imitating a saxophone with his mouth.

'AS LONG AS IT HAS SOUL TO IT, HIP-HOP CAN LIVE ON.'

-TUPAC SHAKUR

1991

LIVE NOTES

> **NORAH JONES' 36-CITY** spring U.S. tour is scheduled to begin on March 5 in Tulsa, Okla., and continue through early May.



> **ON MARCH 22** Wilco will kick off a 16-date U.S. tour dubbed "An Evening With Wilco," which the band says will feature extended sets exploring songs from each of its seven studio albums.



A FRONT-LOADED DECADE

THE DECADE THAT JUST passed saw the album steadily deteriorate as the public's preferred way of consuming music. How much? Consider that the five best-selling albums of the '00s (according to Nielsen SoundScan) were all released in the first half of the decade.

The Beatles 1
(2000) 11.5 million



'N Sync No Strings Attached
(2000) 11.1 million



Norah Jones Come Away With Me
(2002) 10.5 million



Eminem The Marshall Mathers LP
(2000) 10.2 million



Eminem The Eminem Show
(2002) 9.8 million



COMING SOON



Autumn de Wilde

She & Him

SHE & HIM (MARCH 23)

The much-anticipated follow-up to 2008's *Volume One* by Zoey Deschanel and M. Ward, together known as She & Him, is the aptly named *Volume Two*. "In the Sun," which features guest vocals from Tilly and the Wall, is the first single.

BARENAKED LADIES (MARCH 30)

All in Good Time was recorded at Canterbury Studios and Jimmy C's in Toronto with producer Michael Phillip Wojewoda. "The album has an emotional rawness to it that we may have shied away from in the past," says singer and guitarist Ed Robertson.



Melissa Auf der Maur

Corner Shop Studios

MELISSA AUF DER MAUR (MARCH 16)

The former Hole bass player's *Out of Our Minds (OOOM)* album is only part of a planned multimedia project set to include a short film,

comic book, gallery presentations and other elements.

THE T.A.M.I. SHOW (MARCH 23)

The beloved concert movie, featuring performances by the Rolling Stones, James Brown, The Beach Boys, Marvin Gaye, The Supremes and others, is scheduled to make its DVD debut at last.

'I WANT TO PROGRESS, BUT I DON'T WANT TO GO SO FAR OUT THAT I CAN'T SEE WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING.'

—JOHN COLTRANE

1960

IN THE STUDIO: CAKE

THE ENVIRONMENTALLY minded rock band is writing, rehearsing and recording its sixth album at its Sacramento, Calif., studio, which has been converted to run on solar power. "It seemed like the right thing to do," says singer John McCrea. "I believe in science, and science is telling us that we need to make adjustments. Living in California, it seemed like a waste not to take advantage of all the free electricity." The as-yet-untitled album, the band's first since 2004's *Pressure Chief*, is to be released this spring on the band's own Upbeat Records label. The group has been hoping to make the conversion to solar energy for more than a decade, and finally began work on the energy-saving project in 2008 with the help of the California-based Borrego Solar company.



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THE EDITOR

WELCOME TO *M MUSIC & MUSICIANS*, A NEW magazine for those who make music, and for those who make music a part of their lives. *M* will offer music fans insight into the artists they admire, while helping musicians discover the sounds they're seeking. We'll go behind the scenes all over the music world to offer compelling interviews, in-depth features, expert advice, invaluable music and gear reviews and much, much more.

For our premiere issue we chose as our cover subject Alicia Keys, a phenomenally talented singer, songwriter, keyboardist and producer who embodies much of what we want *M* to be—forward-thinking, open-minded, relentlessly exploring creative avenues while respecting the rich history upon which the future is built.

Elsewhere in the magazine, rock legend John Fogerty describes his journey to becoming the guitarist he always wanted

to be; jazz icon Pat Metheny reveals the fascinating new instrument he's playing these days; and Orianthi, the final guitarist to play alongside Michael Jackson, proves herself a formidable artist in her own right. We'll introduce you to the greatest house bands on TV, and delve into the contentious issues behind the debate over sound quality known as the "Loudness War." You'll hear from hot young acts like Vampire Weekend, industry legends like producer Al Schmitt and everyone in between.

We welcome you to *M Music & Musicians*, and hope you'll have as much fun reading this new magazine as we have bringing it to you.

Rick Taylor, Editor



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DANIEL MERRIWEATHER

HOMETOWN: Melbourne, Australia
INFLUENCES: D'Angelo, Otis Redding, Stevie Wonder
ALBUM: *Love & War*, out Feb. 23
WEBSITE: danielmerriweather.com

DANIEL MERRIWEATHER WAS FIRST DRAWN TO MUSIC at age 4, when he discovered his mother's violin. Soon he was playing Vivaldi and Bach concertos, but at 10 he was nudged toward R&B music by his discovery of Boyz II Men's *Cooleyhighharmony*. "That album pretty much taught me how to sing," he says. "I knew every note of every song." Eventually he dropped out of high school to pursue a musical career. "It was either singing or deep-frying chicken at KFC," he jokes. "I was really lucky to be able to do what I love for a living. Things weren't looking too good there for a minute."

Merriweather first caught the public's attention as the singer on producer Mark Ronson's UK hit version of the Smiths' "Stop Me if You've Heard This One Before" in 2007. His Ronson-produced debut album is already a hit overseas ahead of its imminent arrival

on American shores. Like several of Ronson's other productions, *Love & War* heavily features the backing of New York soul band the Dap-Kings. "A lot of the album was made through just letting them interpret and play my songs until it felt good," says Merriweather. "It was cool, because the songs I write are very different from songs they would normally play."

As a songwriter Merriweather finds inspiration everywhere. "I might be reading a book that inspires a lyric or I'll hear a piece of music that inspires a chord progression," he says. "Though people seem to inspire my songwriting the most. I'm fascinated by the human condition, however limited my understanding of it is. Sometimes writing a song is a way of trying to decode human nature and figure out why and what we are."

N'DAMBI

HOMETOWN: Dallas, Texas
INFLUENCES: Betty Davis, Mahalia Jackson, Nina Simone
ALBUM: *Pink Elephant*, out now
WEBSITE: ndambionline.com

N'DAMBI GREW UP IN A STRICT BAPTIST HOUSEHOLD where the only secular music allowed was country, but was drawn to classic soul from the moment she began discovering music on her own. She established herself in the music business working as a backup singer with fellow old-school soul singer Erykah Badu, and was signed last year as a solo act to the recently revived Stax label. She recorded *Pink Elephant* with veteran producer Leon Sylvers III, best known for his work with artists like Shalamar, Midnight Star, The Whispers and BLACKstreet. "Sometimes I write from my experience, but mostly I use my imagination to express myself through storytelling," she says. "I think of the place, the time, the setting of a story and invent a situation that shines a light on a particular issue or theme. They are rarely from my own life. More often, they're someone else's story."



SALVADOR SANTANA

HOMETOWN: San Francisco, Calif.
INFLUENCES: Bob Marley, Thelonious Monk, McCoy Tyner
ALBUM: *Keyboard City*, out Feb. 2
WEBSITE: salvadorsantana.com

THE SON OF GUITAR LEGEND CARLOS SANTANA AND grandson of blues pioneer Saunders King, Santana has music in his DNA. He began playing piano at age 6, and studied at San Francisco's School of the Arts as well as Cal Arts in Valencia, Calif. He co-wrote the track "El Farol" on his father's smash 1999 album *Supernatural*, and struck out on his own as leader of the Salvador Santana Band five years later. His solo debut, *Keyboard City*, finds him collaborating with hip-hop giants GZA, Del the Funky Homosapien and Money Mark. He plans to donate a portion of the profits from album sales to a variety of nonprofit organizations. "I want to use music in a positive way, and give back to people in need," he says. "There can never be enough people who do that."



VAMPIRE WEEKEND

Discovering inspiration in contradictions and cleverness

Rostam Batmanglij, Chris Baio,
Christopher Tomson, Ezra Koenig

SURE, VAMPIRE WEEKEND SINGER and guitarist Ezra Koenig was an English major at noted Columbia University and taught junior high English. And yeah, on the band's new *Contra* album he rhymes "horchata" with "balaclava," among other clever linguistic feats. What of it?

"It's a criticism people try to lodge at us," Koenig says with a resigned chuckle. "In my experience, a lot of our fans like our lyrics—they like thinking about them and trying to decode them. There aren't too many people who are Vampire Weekend fans *in spite* of the lyrics. And if people think my using a big word somehow means I'm part of some old-money network, that's a total joke."

Plenty of words, big and small alike, have been devoted to Vampire Weekend since the band's quirky, perky pastiche of

Western and African pop caught the public's fancy two years ago. While making *Contra*, the group—rounded out by keyboardist Rostam Batmanglij, drummer Christopher Tomson and bassist Chris Baio—was well aware that expectations would be high for the follow-up to 2008's acclaimed *Vampire Weekend*. "Our main goal was to make a record that had its own sound and existed in its own world," notes Koenig. "We were trying to find the middle ground between doing something totally different and still using some of the same ideas we had on the first record."

The tracks on *Contra* offer a disparate but cohesive melding of upbeat, multifaceted musicality with poignant, literate lyrics and often bouncy melodies—hence the title. While the word may conjure for some the notorious Nicaraguan freedom fighters who

made headlines during the Reagan years, Vampire Weekend intends the word in its literal Latin meaning: "against" or "in contrast to." "I wanted every song to speak to a bigger theme, and to me that theme was 'contra,' the idea of an opposition, the idea of duality," Koenig explains.

The assurance with which Vampire Weekend weaves together those varying strands on *Contra* suggests that the deafening buzz that has greeted the band's every move will continue well into the future. "My one fear was that somehow we could mess stuff up so badly that we would disappear with our second album," Koenig admits. "As we started working on it, I knew that wasn't going to happen. No matter if it matches the success of the first album or not, in a certain way it's already a success."

—Katherine Turman

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Think you know this smooth R&B star? Think again

FORGET WHAT YOU MIGHT HAVE HEARD ABOUT R&B artist Omarion.

"I think people misconstrue who I am a lot of the time," he says. "I blame it on the illusion of the game. You might think Omarion is going out to the club, partying and having an orgy with 10 women. If a rumor came out like that, people might believe it. I felt like I really wanted to share more of who I am through my music."

That's just what he does on his new album, *Ollusion*, which reflects the Los Angeles native's growing personal and musical maturity. To help bring his vision to fruition he collaborated with the likes of T-Pain, Marques Houston and the Song Dynasty production





JULIANA HATFIELD

Alt-rocker strips down old school—and finds peace

JULIANA HATFIELD'S 2008 ALBUM *How to Walk Away* was a polished effort, recorded in a New York City studio over a long time with a large cast of musicians. For her latest, *Peace and Love*, she elected to take precisely the opposite tack.

"This time I wanted to be alone," she says. "I wanted to see what would come out of me with no one else involved." Writing and recording at home on an analog eight-track

recorder, Hatfield came up with a ballad-driven song cycle centered on strummed guitars, delicate vocal harmonies and introspective themes. The lack of production gloss only serves to emphasize her exquisite way with a melody—a gift Hatfield attributes to the impact AM radio had on her when she was growing up. "I fell madly in love with '70s pop songs at a time when I was very impressionable," she says. "I loved

Fleetwood Mac, the Eagles, Seals & Crofts, America—songs that everyone knows. That music really got into my bloodstream and my psyche."

While the bulk of *Peace and Love* is spare and acoustic guitar-based, Hatfield does paint outside the lines on occasion. The piano ballad "Why Can't We Love Each Other" is the first song she's ever written on keyboard, while the hot-wired, Neil Young-like electric guitar break in "What Is Wrong" provides the disc with its only plugged-in moment. "There was a period a few years ago when I hunkered down and worked really hard on guitar, learning things like Keith Richards solos in weird tunings," Hatfield says of her approach to the six-string. "I spent about a year doing that, learning how to do certain scales and so forth. But other than that, I've been a slacker—although I care very much about my guitar playing. I think one of the reasons I never studied it very much is that I wanted to keep it pure. I didn't want to be influenced by other guitarists."

It's been more than two decades since Hatfield first made her name as part of the cult-beloved trio Blake Babies. She eclipsed that group's success as leader of the Juliana Hatfield Three with early-1990s modern-rock hits like "My Sister" and "Spin the Bottle" before going completely solo in 1995. She says she's only now begun to consider the musical legacy she has built during her career.

"Some of my old records make me cringe," she admits, "but everything about them was very innocent and very pure. My body of work has integrity, in the sense that I never tried to tailor anything to anyone else's tastes or to the marketplace. I have nothing to be ashamed of, that's for sure."

—Russell Hall

team, which was behind Omarion's 2004 hit "O." "You want the chemistry to be right," Omarion (born Omari Grandberry) says of his experience working on the new album. "You don't want to be in the room with someone who has the idea of the kind of music you ought to make but it's not what you want."

Omarion asserted more control over his musical destiny than ever before on *Ollusion*, his third solo effort following his departure in 2004 from the hitmaking vocal group B2K. "This project was the most personal to me, because I was the most involved on this one," says Omarion. "With the other ones, I would get assigned an A&R guy. He's doing the job of finding records that might be hits but not necessarily songs that pertain to your life. When you make a record and it's about *you*, a different emotion comes out."

The songs on his new album that pertain most directly to Omarion's life might surprise fans who think the smooth-talking

balladeer is all about the quick seduction. In fact, "What Do You Say" finds the singer suggesting to his paramour that they go on an old-fashioned date and do "normal things." "There are a lot of songs on there talking about love and acceptance, and being able to take your time and recognize what it is," he says.

Then again, there's the lead single, "I Get It In," a pulsing club banger featuring rapper Gucci Mane. The song came together quickly in the studio as Omarion swapped lyrical ideas with producer Tank.

"He was doing this melody, and it had this 808 sampler in it, and we were just going back and forth and it was so dope," Omarion says. "That was one of those records, when we were finished, I called my manager, I called everyone, and said, 'OK, we've got the first single!'"

—Eric R. Danton



Billy Martin, Chris Wood, John Medeski

MEDESKI MARTIN & WOOD

Improvisation is key—just don't call 'em a jam band

IN LATE 2008, JAZZ-ROCK TRIO MEDESKI Martin & Wood pondered ways to inspire themselves to write new material. They found that inspiration in the animal kingdom.

"There's a bird, a certain canary, that comes up with a new song every year, which it never repeats in its lifetime," explains keyboardist John Medeski. "We thought, 'Yeah, let's do that, except let's do it for each season.' The concept was to write the music, tour behind it, record it and then never play it again."

The result of the group's experiment is *The Radiolarians Series*, three albums released last year and now compiled as part of a new box set. Titled after a spectacularly beautiful single-cell organism, the discs offer up funky pop grooves, Caribbean-flavored jazz and luscious atmospheric pieces. Medeski insists the music, which despite its many facets sounds cohesive, was created without regard to how the final product would fit together. "There's no logic to anything we do," he says. "Any logic or analysis comes after the music is finished."

The unique project is just the latest adventure for a band that has always approached its music in an unconventional fashion. Formed in 1991, the trio, which also includes drummer Billy Martin and

bass player Chris Wood, embraced onstage improvisation. Medeski likens the group's exploratory process to the coordinated play of a finely tuned basketball team. "Each of us knows where the other is going to be as we work our way down the court," he says. "It's also like keeping a ball in the air. You have to keep tipping the ball, and watch where it goes and what it's doing."

Not surprisingly, the emphasis on improvisation has led some people to characterize the trio as a so-called "jam band"—a label Medeski vehemently rejects. "A lot of these bands claim to be jamming but it's just bullshit," he says. "They're just rock bands playing music that has some solos in it."

In his view, Medeski Martin & Wood operates in a fresher and more original range of the musical spectrum—one in which innovation trumps easy categorization. "Nobody ever asked John Coltrane or Miles Davis or Sun Ra who their influences were," he says. "I'm not saying we're on the same level as those guys, I'm just saying that everyone should be searching for their own voice. The extent to which these [*Radiolarians Series*] albums rekindled that voice for us was a real surprise."

—Russell Hall

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Dave Haywood, Hillary Scott, Charles Kelley

LADY ANTEBELLUM

The hit country trio takes control of its own chemistry

"IF WE COULD COMBINE ALL OUR talent into one person, we'd be one hell of a good songwriter," jokes Charles Kelley, one-third of the Grammy-nominated country trio Lady Antebellum.

Kelley and bandmates Hillary Scott and Dave Haywood are doing just fine as it is. After finding fame with 2007's platinum-certified self-titled album, the Nashville-based group returns with its much-anticipated follow-up, *Need You Now*. The first single and title track—which recently spent five consecutive weeks at No. 1 on *Billboard*'s country singles chart—is about the romantic longing and regret that creeps in late at night after a few drinks. The song shows a more adventurous side of the trio, one that takes advantage of the chemistry between Kelley and co-lead singer Scott.

Kelley believes the success of the first album's hit "I Run to You" proved that the group could connect with fans on a more mature level than its record company had expected. "If 'I Run to You' hadn't worked, I don't think the label or anybody would have felt confident about putting out 'Need You Now,'" he says, sitting in his manager's Nashville office. "But because it did, people responded to the [vocal] back-and-forth, the honest lyrics and taking some chances with production."

And now there's no turning back. Following their debut's breakout status, Kelley, Scott and Haywood decided to take the production reins on *Need You Now* alongside behind-the-boards veteran Paul Worley. "We wanted to take more of a role on this one," Kelley says.

In doing so, the band has put together a set that builds on its debut without duplicating it. "There's still some stuff that's very reminiscent of [our hits] 'Love Don't Live Here' and 'Lookin' for a Good Time,'" explains Kelley. "But this album is more about getting creative and taking chances."

The trio co-wrote seven of the album's 11 tracks with such noted Music City tunesmiths as Rivers Rutherford, Monty Powell and Craig Wiseman. Kelley (whose older brother is the well-known singer and songwriter Josh Kelley) points out that the group's original songs typically start with an idea from its least high-profile member, guitarist and harmony singer Haywood. "He'll riff and Hillary and I will melodically come up with a vocal melody over it," Kelley says. "When we get stuck, he'll come in and chime in as far as a vocal melody. He knows exactly where I'll want to go. It's almost like he's in my brain. I don't like working without either of them."

—Melinda Newman

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MIDLAKE

Slow and steady wins the race for this indie breakout band

AFTER EXPLORING CLASSIC-ROCK influences like Fleetwood Mac and Crosby, Stills & Nash on their breakthrough album, 2006's *The Trials of Van Occupanther*, the members of Midlake wanted a new direction. They found it in the folk-based tradition of vintage British acts such as Steeleye Span and Fairport Convention—then set to the long, arduous task of making that sound work for them.

"It took time to learn how to play together as a band in that way," acknowledges singer, guitarist and keyboardist Tim Smith. "The first year was a learning process for us. Then the second year we got our first song recorded, and it all happened after that."

The result is *The Courage of Others*, a stunning return featuring 11 startlingly vital songs that emphasize the Texas band's careful arrangements and Smith's tuneful, understated voice. Although finding the right direction was a long process, the album came together relatively quickly by Midlake's painstaking standards, starting with the song "Acts of Man."

"That song was written and recorded in five days, which is really quick for us," Smith says. "That never happens—and it was really nice. We listened back and thought, 'Wow,

this is the vibe for the album. If we can make every song as good as this, we'll have made something we're really proud of.' That was the turning point."

Smith wrote all the songs, then fleshed them out with the rest of the band. "I write alone, usually," he says. "I like to be in a comfortable place—my house, preferably. I don't like any turmoil or anything going on in my life. The last thing I want to do is pick up a guitar when things are going badly."

While the songs on *Van Occupanther* were rooted in an observational, third-person point of view, *The Courage of Others* is more direct. "I don't remember setting out with some purpose in mind. I just started writing," says Smith. "I didn't mean for it to be as much in the first-person perspective as it was. Our previous album was about other characters and things, and this one is a bit more personal to me. But it wasn't a conscious thing."

Midlake plans to spend much of 2010 on the road, a relief after having been locked away in the studio for much of the past two years. "We're a better band now, so it was worth it," Smith says. "We wanted to be happy with the album."

—Eric R. Danton

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Chris Carroll



FREEDY JOHNSTON

After eight years, he's back thanks to some discipline in the studio

FREEDY JOHNSTON DIDN'T MEAN TO spend eight years between albums. "I tried to make it a couple times on my own, and it didn't work out for various reasons," says the singer-songwriter. He discovered the key to his new *Rain on the City* album when he brought in producer Richard McLaurin as his collaborator. "You learn some lessons and go down one hallway, find a dead end, and turn around and head down another hallway."

Chasing down those possible directions led Johnston to cover a lot of territory—literally. The Kansas native spent time living in Nashville and Austin before returning to his longtime home of New York City. "I needed to learn more about the music world that I'm living in, and those two towns are the two you need to know," says Johnston, who enjoyed modern-rock radio success in the '90s with songs like "Bad Reputation" and "This Perfect World."

Recorded in Nashville, *Rain on the City* benefited from the discipline of having an outside producer. "Richard was the guy sitting there, twiddling his thumbs waiting for the songs to be finished—which I don't like to do," he says. "I really would love to have a record that's fully written before going into the studio. Maybe it's not destined to be."

The producer also pushed Johnston toward a recording process featuring a combination of live adrenaline and studio craft. "We did live band tracks with the drums, bass and guitars," says Johnston. "But Richard said, 'Freedy, I know you don't want to do this, but I want you to overdub your vocals, because it's going to sound more rock.' So I went with it, and I agree! I like hearing really good, well-done vocals—and you don't always get that with a live vocal." Also helping the album to sound more rock was bringing in what Johnston calls his "Ludwig John Bonham kit with the 26-inch kick drum. That was the key to Bonham's sound, and that's what you hear on this record." As the album's principal guitarist, Johnston says he used his trusted Fender Jazzmaster electric and Martin D-28 acoustic.

After such a long spell out of the public eye, Johnston is eager to share his new tunes with listeners. "It's a kind of group therapy," he says. "The best thing about the job is the person coming up to you after the show and saying, 'Man, that one song of yours got me through a tough part of my life! That's a pretty good job, isn't it?'"

—Bob Cannon

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Dan Konopka, Damian Kulash, Tim Nordwind, Andy Ross

OK GO

Here they come again, sounding more like themselves than ever

IT WAS TIME FOR OK GO TO GET off the treadmill, literally and figuratively. The Grammy-winning video for the 2006 power-pop gem "Here It Goes Again," which featured the foursome performing a wildly entertaining synchronized routine on treadmills, drew the kind of online traffic usually reserved for piano-playing cats. It's been viewed nearly 50 million times, but got the band unfairly pegged in some quarters as a novelty act. With its third studio album, *Of the Blue Colour of the Sky*, OK Go intends to prove that characterization wrong. We spoke recently with lead singer and guitarist Damian Kulash and bass player Tim Nordwind at Kulash's Los Angeles home.

This album is a major detour from your previous two. Why?

KULASH: It comes from the same set of ideas, but our process was very different. In high school we listened to a lot of Fugazi and punk rock. That taught us that the way to write a rock song is to sit down with a guitar and figure out chord shapes. After two and a half years on tour for the last record, we'd played a lot of that kind of music and it was very hard to get excited about it when we got home and it was time to write again. At the end of the tour, we were done not just with those songs, but with a way of working.

After that, it took a year of writing before we were comfortable going in the studio.

This album sounds like it was built from the beats up.

KULASH: Exactly. We'd expended our guitar rock influences and that cleared the path for older, more root-level influences like Prince. You hear a lot of the music I listened to when I was 12.

You write a lot of the band's songs together. How does that work?

NORDWIND: We generally start apart and come up with bits and pieces and grooves, then play them for each other.

KULASH: There's a back-and-forth once we get a few basic elements together. It's "one plus one is two" for hours, and then suddenly "one plus one is sadness" or "one plus one is sex" or melancholy or joy. It's still such a mystery to me that simple elements, a piano note or a drumbeat, added with one tiny other thing can induce so much communicative human emotion. This is both the happiest and saddest record we've ever made. It's also the most all over the map and the most focused—and I know these things are obviously completely contradictory. This feels much more uniquely us than

our other records have. It makes me think we're actually starting to sound like ourselves.

What did noted producer David Fridmann bring to the process?

KULASH: He's an incredibly trained engineer. He understands the physics of it and can break all the rules the way that he wants to. There's a lot of free-form experimentation.

Was there a downside to the popularity of the "Here It Goes Again" video?

KULASH: The short version is no. Do we already know we're one-hit wonders for the rest of our life? We do. There will be nothing that hits like that again. But it had almost nothing to do with a rock band. It was like a great weird art project where 65-year-old women were stopping Tim in Times Square saying, "You're the treadmill guy, aren't you?" It opened so many doors. There was a time when we would walk homemade videos into our label and people would say, "If this gets out, you're sunk." Now people are like, "Could you please bring us some more?"

NORDWIND: People expect weirdness out of us more than they expect another treadmill video, which is a good place to be.

—Melinda Newman

'This is both the happiest and saddest record we've ever made.'





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Paul Reed Smith circa 1985 in the original Virginia Avenue shop.



ORIANTHI

Michael Jackson's guitarist makes her way to center stage

WHEN POP LEGEND MICHAEL Jackson passed away last June, the media was saturated with images from rehearsals for his planned comeback show—offering many fans their first glimpse at his new guitarist, a striking 23-year-old from Adelaide, Australia, named Orianthi. The recent film *This Is It*, which further documented those rehearsals, showcased her virtuoso six-string skills on classics like “Beat It” and “Black or White.” Now Orianthi makes her American debut as a singer on her new solo album, *Believe*.

Far from a quick cash-in on her newfound notoriety, the album has been in the works for more than three years. Her

big break in the United States came when she was invited by PRS Guitars—which will release an Orianthi custom model this year—to play at the NAMM show, where she jammed with idol Carlos Santana and caught the ear of Geffen Records. “Someone in the audience forwarded my MP3s to [Geffen chairman] Ron Fair, who flew me from Adelaide to audition for him,” she recalls. “A year after that I got signed by Geffen.” She earned the job with Jackson after playing alongside country singer Carrie Underwood at the 2009 Grammy Awards.

For those who only know her as a guitar heroine, *Believe* will come as a surprise: It's a mainstream pop-rock record featuring

her vocals as much as her playing, not a guitar clinic for six-string obsessives. “I set out to make a super-commercial record with *Believe*,” she says. “I wanted to get the songs on the radio and write empowering lyrics and inspire more kids to pick up the guitar.” We caught up with the woman born Orianthi Panagaris to talk about her unpredictable path to stardom.

When did you first start playing?

I picked up an acoustic when I was 6. It was Dad's big Finn 125 acoustic. I studied classical when I was 10, and then I picked up electric at 11 after seeing Carlos Santana perform. I was just blown away by the way



‘As soon as I picked up the guitar, I knew this would be my life!’

he played. It really affected me. I went to Dad and I begged him for a PRS electric guitar. I got one, and just never put it down.

So was it in those teen years that you realized this would be your destiny?

No, I knew this would be my life when I was 6. (*laughs*) I know that sounds weird. But as soon as I picked up the acoustic guitar and started strumming along with Elvis and Beatles and Roy Orbison records, I got it.

How did that go over at school?

It wasn't great, being a female player and going to the same auditions as guys. It wasn't an easy time. Kind of like being a male ballerina in a way. The popular girls didn't get it, especially when I went to school wearing Hendrix T-shirts, reading guitar magazines and whatnot. And the guys didn't get it either, because they thought, "You're a girl, you shouldn't be playing guitar." They would call me a freak. And then they saw that I was taking it seriously. I would be recording, making demos at home, and I'd do support gigs. I got on the radio in Adelaide, and started playing out in pubs as well. I'd get up there for a bit and jam out and then have to go as soon as someone found out that I was underage: "Out! Out!" Music was my life, and everything took a back seat to that. It's putting in a lot of hours. When I was younger I used to practice for five hours a day. I'd get home from school and not do schoolwork and just play guitar. I guess kids didn't understand that I was that driven. Kids can be mean, so you just have to shut that out and focus.

Who were your role models as a guitarist?

Carlos Santana is my idol. I finally got to jam with him in front of 15,000 people when I was 18. Well, one of my idols—there's also Steve Vai. I got introduced to Steve when I was 15, and opening for him was my first-ever support gig in Adelaide. Steve kept in contact with me, and I would send him demos. Getting an email from him when I was 15 or 16 would make my week. He's like an uncle to me. We had so much fun at this video shoot the other day, shooting "Highly Strung" [a guitar-duel instrumental they perform on *Believe*], and hopefully kids will see it and want to pick up guitar. Or if they're already playing it, keep at it. Because dreams do come true.

How long have you been in America?

I've been over here for about three and a half years making the record—I was writing it the first year, then we've been recording off and on for about two years.

How did you approach the guitar work on *Believe*?

We wanted to do what's best for the song. I wanted the songs to be played on the radio. Playing guitar really comes first, then songwriting, and singing comes last. But I enjoy doing it, and you definitely connect with a lot more people adding lyrics to music. We wanted to have enough guitar playing for the guitar heads—like me—but I love

which has an AC/DC feel to it. If someone found my iPod they would think I was mad, because I have everything from Rascal Flatts to Michelle Branch to Usher.

Is there one style you gravitate toward?

Yeah, blues. I grew up listening to Stevie Ray, and then Steve Vai, so I gravitate toward playing those sort of riffs. Learning the Eddie Van Halen solos for "Beat It" for the Michael Jackson thing, that was pretty new to me—all the tapping stuff. I think he's an incredible player, but I didn't grow up listening to a lot of Van Halen. I think I played "Jump" once in a cover band.



Soul Brother/FilmMagic

Orianthi at Z100 Jingle Ball, December 2009

'I learned so much from Michael. I wish he was still with us'

pop songs too. It's about trying to find that balance. If the guitar solos on the record are too short for some people, we have "Highly Strung," which is completely instrumental. So I guess that kind of makes up for it in a way. But I have diverse tastes. "According to You" [the single] is probably the poppiest song on the record. There's also "Untogether," which is bluesier, and "Think Like a Man,"

What do you recall about the experience of rehearsing the *This Is It* show?

I learned so much from Michael and the band. I was probably the youngest in the band, so I looked up to all the guys. It was like family. It was just such an amazing time in my life. I just wish he was still with us. That would be awesome.

—Chris Willman

ON AIR



Conan O'Brien with Max Weinberg and the *Tonight Show* band

MUSIC OF THE NIGHT

The top-flight musicians in TV's greatest house bands have to be ready to play anything, anytime

BY KATIE DODD



For more than four decades, we've turned on TV late at night to see talk-show hosts joking about the latest scandal and celebrities hawking their new films. But more discerning listeners know that when they tune in post-primetime, they're also hearing some of the best musicians in the business—masters of precision who can tackle any genre and pick up the slightest cue. Since the halcyon days of Johnny Carson and Doc Severinsen's *Tonight Show* band, house bands have punctuated hosts' antics, musically introduced guests, played in and out of commercials and composed original scores for sketches—all in a night's work. It's time to shine a spotlight on the aces behind the music.

PAUL SHAFFER AND THE CBS ORCHESTRA

The Late Show With David Letterman

BANDLEADER: Paul Shaffer (keyboards)

CURRENT LINE-UP: Anton Fig (percussion), Felicia Collins (guitar), Sid McGinnis (guitar), Will Lee (bass), Tom Malone (trombone), Alan Chez (trumpet/flugelhorn), Bruce Kapler (saxophone)

NOTABLE FORMER MEMBERS: Steve Jordan, Hiram Bullock, Bernie Worrell, David Sanborn

When David Letterman landed an NBC late-night show in 1982, he turned to a man who knew something about late-night TV comedy: Paul Shaffer, who played keyboards in the *Saturday Night Live* band from 1975 to 1980. That proved crucial, as unlike most current TV bandleaders, Shaffer also serves as Letterman's second banana—the Ed McMahon to his Johnny Carson. “Paul is essential,” says Letterman. “It’s a long trip, and Paul is the funny flight attendant.”

Letterman's NBC show provided a bridge from Carson's classic model to today's looser late-night offerings. In his recent memoir *We'll Be Here for the Rest of Our Lives*, Shaffer recalls Letterman asking him at their first meeting if he'd be OK with leading a quartet—a sharp contrast to the *Tonight Show*'s orchestra. “I'd love it. Four pieces is what I do best,” Shaffer recalls. “We could turn on a dime. With four pieces I could still do all the Motown and soul covers I've been learning my whole life.”

Shaffer also reveled in breaking new ground stylistically, forgoing big band standards for an R&B/rock hybrid that took its inspiration from the 1960s and '70s. That sensibility has remained, even as the band doubled in size with Letterman's move



Paul Shaffer and the CBS Orchestra

to CBS in 1993. Shaffer initially resisted adding horns to the band, as it would affect the versatility that became the quartet's hallmark. “Horns meant arrangements and more complex voicings,” he notes. “But the players I chose are masters of flexibility.”

The shift was successful, and in both incarnations Shaffer and his band have proved highly influential on future late-night bands. “I've been watching Paul Shaffer since he had a four-piece in the '80s,” says *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* bandleader Cleto Escobedo III. “He's my childhood hero.”

MAX WEINBERG AND THE TONIGHT SHOW BAND

The Tonight Show With Conan O'Brien

BANDLEADER: Max Weinberg (drums)

CURRENT LINE-UP: Jimmy Vivino (guitar), Mike Merritt (bass), Mark “The Loveman” Pender (trumpet), Richie “La Bamba” Rosenberg (trombone), Jerry Vivino (saxophone), Scott Healy (keyboards), James Wormworth (percussion)

Max Weinberg started his career as a member of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, playing on iconic albums like *Born to Run* and *Born in the U.S.A.* But when he ran into Conan O'Brien on a street corner a few years after Springsteen dissolved the band, he had a different pitch for the comedian's TV house band: jump blues. O'Brien, who was looking for a variety-show feel, was intrigued, and Weinberg assembled a seven-piece band for the audition. By the second song, they were hired.

The energetic sound of Weinberg's

group jibed with not only the format of *Late Night With Conan O'Brien*, but also the emerging 1990s swing revival. And, as O'Brien had hoped, it recalled an older generation of late-night TV in both sound and look. “I wanted our band to sort of be an homage to the classic TV bands—[former *Tonight Show* bandleader] Doc Severinsen in particular—and they always dressed up. So it seemed like the natural thing to do,” Weinberg said at last year's 2009 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction.

Like many house bands, they often serve as unsuspecting straight men for O'Brien's bits. La Bamba, with his trademark fedora, is an easy target for O'Brien's silliness. (A running joke is that he can't read music; an older sketch involved “dumbing down” current events for the trombonist.)

“People don't realize how much work it is,” says Weinberg. “I never did. I figured Doc just showed up at 5 and started to play.” The job got even more hectic for Weinberg in 1999, when Springsteen reunited the E Street Band for a tour; he's juggled both jobs ever since.

In 2009, Weinberg and company made the move from New York to Los Angeles with O'Brien when he took over as host of the *Tonight Show*. But aside from adding percussionist Wormworth, their approach remains much the same.

“We have our unique sound whether we're in California or New York. We'll always reflect an East Coast muscularity,” says Weinberg. “We continue to do what we've done for 16 years, which is to create



ABC/Jimmy Kimmel Live!

Cleto and the Cletones

music that complements and supplements the comedy on the *Tonight Show*, and keep reaching for as many different types of music as we can play from night to night.”

CLETO AND THE CLETONES

Jimmy Kimmel Live!

BANDLEADER: Cleto Escobedo III (saxophone)
CURRENT LINE-UP: Cleto Escobedo Jr. (saxophone), Jonathan Dresel (drums), Jimmy Earl (bass), Toshi Yanagi (guitar), Jeff Babko (keyboards)

Hosts and bandleaders often take years to build a familiar rapport. Jimmy Kimmel and Cleto Escobedo III had it instantly, thanks to a friendship that dates back to their childhood. Growing up in Las Vegas, Kimmel and Escobedo used to stay up to watch

David Letterman together. So when Kimmel landed his own late-night slot in 2003, he immediately called Escobedo, who was on the road with Marc Anthony, and asked him to be his bandleader.

Escobedo, who had also worked with Kimmel on Comedy Central's *The Man Show*, didn't think twice. "In your 20s it's awesome to be on the road all the time," says Escobedo from the *Kimmel Live!* set. "In your 40s, it's really appealing to be home and have a steady gig."

Not content with just one saxophonist named Cleto, Kimmel persuaded his friend to lure his father, Cleto Escobedo Jr.—who gained fame in 1960s soul group Los Blues—out of retirement. The younger Escobedo called his dad to give him the

news that Kimmel was getting a show and to ask his parents to support him during the bandleader audition. "And bring your horn," he added.

The family atmosphere would become one of the hallmarks of Kimmel's show. Other recurring characters include his uncle, Frank Potenza, Potenza's ex-wife, Aunt Chippy, and his cousin, Sal Iacono. It makes for a casual, inclusive vibe that guests often pick up on. "One of my favorite guests is Don Rickles, because he always messes with the band," Escobedo says. "My dad and I are Latin, and he makes some jokes. He's always a fun time."

While the Cletones are always game for comedy bits, when it's time to pick up their instruments, they're all business.

"We'll play funk to Foo Fighters to polka," says Escobedo. "You have to be ready for anything."

KEVIN EUBANKS AND THE PRIMETIME BAND

The Jay Leno Show

BANDLEADER: Kevin Eubanks (guitar)
CURRENT LINE-UP: Gerry Etkins (keyboards), Ralph Moore (saxophone), Vicki Randle (percussion), Marvin "Smitty" Smith (drums), Derrick Murdock (bass)
FORMER MEMBERS: Matt Finders, Stan Sargeant, Lee Thornburg

The passing of the *Tonight Show* torch from Johnny Carson to Jay Leno in 1992 was watched with rapt attention by millions. So it's no surprise that, musically, Leno came out swinging by appointing jazz heavyweight



Paul Drinkwater/NBC

Kevin Eubanks and most of the former *Tonight Show* band moved to *The Jay Leno Show* in 2009.

ON AIR



Justin Lubrin/NBC

Vicki Randle

Branford Marsalis as the leader of the *Tonight Show* band. But the partnership seemed strained from day one, and Marsalis left—not particularly quietly—in 1995.

Into his place stepped guitarist Kevin Eubanks, a mellower but no less seasoned jazz musician who had played with Slide Hampton, Art Blakey and Dave Holland, among others. Eubanks' low-key vibe proved a perfect foil for Leno's antics (showcased in the long-gone "Beyondo" sketches, which featured Eubanks talking to a floating Leno head; and the still-popular "Headlines").

After taking the bandleader mantle, Eubanks called Smith, Moore and Etkins, with whom he'd studied at the Berklee College of Music, and asked them to join the band. With a stable of accomplished jazz players, Eubanks' band quickly carved a niche for itself in late-night TV.

By their nature, the mediums of jazz and television might seem at odds. The musical genre is marked by improvisation, innovation and a resistance to rules. TV music, on the other hand, not only has to appeal to the masses, but also has to adhere to strict limits in time and scope. But Eubanks and his band have always risen to the challenge. A few years after percussionist Vicki Randle joined the roster, Eubanks got the idea to have the accomplished vocalist sing during commercial breaks and bumpers—a twist the audience loved.

"You have to be able to deal with giving the music up for the good of the show,

year out."

After 17 years, Eubanks and his band jumped at the chance to change up their approach with the move to primetime for *The Jay Leno Show*, which airs at 10 p.m. EST. "We needed a new theme terribly bad," says Eubanks. "Remember, I have to play it every single night!"

The earlier hour also required more vitality. "The music goes more towards getting the people to dance," says Eubanks. "I think this show needs a different kind of energy—a more physical kind of energy. Get 'em up, get 'em moving, get that energy into the show and get that feel into people's homes at 10 p.m."

THE SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE BAND

Saturday Night Live

BANDLEADER: Leon Pendarvis (keyboards)
CURRENT LINE-UP: Katreese Barnes (keyboards), Ron Blake (saxophone), Alex Foster (saxophone), Earl Gardner (trumpet), James Genus (bass), Valerie Naranjo (percussion), Shawn Pelton (drums), Lenny Pickett (saxophone), Jared Scharff (guitar), Steve Turre (trombone)
NOTABLE FORMER MEMBERS: Paul Shaffer, G.E. Smith, Steve Ferrone, Michael Brecker, David Sanborn

tapped longtime friend and fellow Canadian Howard Shore, who assembled a horn-centric group inspired by Junior Walker's energetic R&B sound. Rounding out the rhythm section were keyboardists Paul Shaffer, getting his late-night start, and Cheryl Hardwick, who would play with the band for a total of 20 years. Shore composed the opening and closing themes, which have endured for the better part of the show's tenure.

As *Saturday Night Live's* cast of characters has changed over the years—with some notable ups and downs—so has the band's. But for the bulk of the show's history, the SNL band has maintained that exuberant, horn-heavy sound.

One of the most visible members of the band for his 10-year tenure, G.E. Smith was partially responsible for the band's move to the main stage set in 1986. (They had previously played from the rafters.) The current line-up is an egalitarian group, with Pendarvis, Pickett and Barnes sharing musical director duties.

Over the years, the band has provided back-up for some memorable host musical performances: Jill Clayburgh singing "Sea Cruise" in season one, Jake Gyllenhaal belting out *Dreamgirls'* "I Am Telling You I'm Not Going" in drag, and Kate Winslet singing (and tap dancing) to Fred Astaire's "Pick Yourself Up" to prove the show was truly "live" the week after Ashlee Simpson's lip-sync snafu.

They're also called upon to provide original music for sketches when necessary, a gig that usually flies under the radar. But in 2007, Barnes earned headlines for



Mary Ellen Matthews/NBC

Host Kate Winslet backed by the *Saturday Night Live* band

playing the music that best suits the show," Eubanks says. "Where I come from, we vow to serve the music. In TV, you vow to serve the show. You need to have a slow-burning intensity that stays consistent year in and

In 1975, Lorne Michaels was creating something singular on late-night TV—a live variety show featuring comedic sketches interspersed with performances by popular artists. To head up the music portion, he



co-writing the Emmy-winning “Dick in a Box,” performed by Andy Samberg and host Justin Timberlake. At their request, Barnes wrote a ’90s-style R&B melody, and the actors provided the instant-classic lyrics.

“You have to be patient with comedic talent, because they’re under so much pressure to be funny,” says Barnes. “So it’s a balance of allowing them to come up with the material, not getting in the way of being funny, and working with them to make the material funny.”

THE ROOTS

Late Night With Jimmy Fallon

BANDLEADER: Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson (drums)

CURRENT LINE-UP: Tariq “Black Thought” Trotter (rapper), Owen Biddle (bass), James “Kamal” Gray (keyboards), Frank “Knuckles” Walker (percussion), “Captain” Kirk Douglas (guitar), Damon “Tuba Gooding Jr.” Bryson (sousaphone), James Poyser (keyboards)

Rumors that Jimmy Fallon had persuaded hip-hop’s The Roots to be his house band when he succeeded Conan O’Brien at *Late Night* in 2009 were met with almost universal disbelief. Why would the group put a successful touring and recording career on hold to play little more than bumpers?

The Roots were candid about the motivation behind their decision. “It enabled us to survive,” says bandleader Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson. “This would basically match or surpass what we would make touring 200-plus days out of the year. And this allows us to be home.”

Fallon was surprised and thrilled that they agreed. “They’re amazing—they can play anything,” he says. “From punk to soul to surf music.”

Most house bands back musical guests on a handful of occasions per year at most. But in less than a year, The Roots have played with dozens of guests, including Elvis Costello, 50 Cent, Smokey Robinson, Incubus, Carly Simon, Christopher Cross and Q-Tip.

The spontaneous feel that has made The Roots a critically acclaimed live act complements the “anything-can-happen” vibe that Fallon has tried to cultivate as his show’s identity. Already some Roots-themed segments are hits, such as “Slow Jam the News,” and “Freestyling With the Roots,” in which Fallon selects random audience members and a musical style and challenges the band to improvise a rap.

While other late-night bands have released albums together only occasionally, The Roots continue to record. Last June on the show, they debuted the first single, “How I Got Over,” from their forthcoming 11th album. Industry insiders are curious to see how the band’s high profile on a show that averages 1.7 million viewers per night might translate to record sales.

“I think Roots fans might hear a difference in this album,” Questlove says. “There’s a chemistry that we’ve only previously put on the stage.” **M**

HOUSE BAND HALL OF FAMERS

Doc Severinsen and the NBC Orchestra
The Tonight Show With Johnny Carson

In the same way Johnny Carson set the standard for late-night hosts, his band provided a blueprint that today’s TV house bands strive to match.

Trumpeter Doc Severinsen took over as bandleader of the NBC Orchestra in 1967 (having predated Carson as a member of the *Tonight Show* cast from 1952 on). Former bandleader Skitch Henderson had already begun to assemble a top-notch jazz band, poaching instrumentalists like trumpeters Clark Terry, Ernie Royal, percussionist Bobby Rosengarden, trombonist Urbie Green and drummer Ed Shaughnessy from high-profile touring and recording gigs in big bands.

Severinsen followed that approach, luring trumpeter Snooky Young and (briefly) Louie Bellson, who Duke Ellington called “the world’s greatest drummer.” Under Severinsen’s guidance, the NBC Orchestra became known for its full-bodied arrangements



(many provided by legend Bill Holman) of standards such as Cole Porter’s “Begin the Beguine,” Mercer Ellington’s “Things Ain’t What They Used to Be” and Hoagy Carmichael’s “Stardust.”

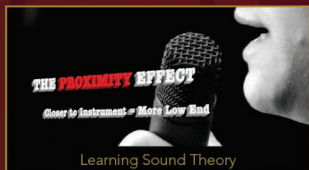
When Carson went off the air in 1992, so did the NBC Orchestra, though they shortly embarked on a popular U.S. tour. Severinsen retired to Mexico in 2006, where he formed a trio, El Ritmo de la Vida, that tours the States periodically. He also owns Severinsen Custom Trumpets.



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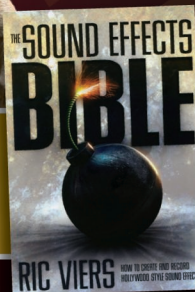
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STEVE WARINER

Paying tribute to friend and mentor Chet Atkins

If anyone is qualified to pay tribute to late guitar giant Chet Atkins, it's country singer, songwriter and guitarist Steve Wariner. Atkins took Wariner under his wing in the late 1970s, welcoming him into his touring band as bass player, and signing the young artist to RCA Records in his capacity as an executive and producer. Wariner's new album, *My Tribute to Chet Atkins*, finds him spotlighting his mentor's illustrious career through a set of mostly new original songs in Atkins' style. We spoke with Wariner about the lessons he learned—and continues to learn—from his longtime friend and collaborator.

How did you first become aware of Chet Atkins' music?

My first memories of Chet were through my father, who had a lot of his records. I was

intrigued with Chet's style. At an early age I'd sit and listen to those records over and over. I knew them inside and out. Then as I fell in love with the guitar I respected his music even more.

How long had you been thinking of making an album like this?

Chet died in June 2001, and I've been trying to figure out a way to do a project honoring him ever since. I wanted to come up with something different than just doing some of his songs half as well as he did. It's hard to do. How do you honor a guy like that? This was the way for me to do it.

How did you prepare?

I'll tell you, I've never done a project where I spent so much time researching and listening

to music. I thought I'd heard a lot of Chet music in my life, but I went and found a whole lot of outtakes, things I'd never heard before. I listened to things I hadn't heard since I was a kid. I learned all kinds of guitar licks doing this record. I'm still cussing Chet: "Damn you, Chet! You're still getting me! How'd you do that?"

Which guitars did you play on the album?

I've been lucky over the years that Chet gave me some guitars, and I used a lot of them on the album. That was a cool connection. The main one I played was a Gibson Country Gentleman that Chet played on many of his records. It's just got that fat tone. When my hands went down the neck the first few times after I had it, I'm sure the guitar was screaming, "Oh, no, who's this? That's not Chet!" (*laughs*) I also played a '58 Gretsch 6120. It wasn't Chet's, but it's a beautiful guitar. I've got three 6120s, but that's the best one I have. I even went so far as to use the kind of ribbon mics he used in the studio, the old [RCA] 77s. Just trying to do it fairly close to how he might have done it, staying real pure and true.

Can you offer a thumbnail description of how to play in the Chet Atkins style?

Just think of your thumb as playing the bass guitar part. Then you think of your index finger and second finger as playing the melody and/or the chords. Then you put those together and do them both simultaneously. The tricky part is to keep the bass going, and to get the right positioning. I've watched guys who don't have a grasp for it—they kinda do it, but not really. The guys who are great at it go to another position to grab a chord that keeps that melody line going. That's the beauty. You'd watch Chet play, and he'd be all over the neck. He'd play this position because that's where you could grab that note, but the bass never quit. His bass was so precise. His thumb was like a machine—it was just awesome. He had such big, strong hands that he could really reach for chords. Something about his hands, that's where it is. It didn't matter what kind of guitar he'd pick up. It's the guitar player; it's not the guitar.

—Chris Neal

'Chet had big, strong hands that could really reach for chords. It was awesome.'



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LITTLE STEVEN VAN ZANDT

Bruce Springsteen's right-hand man is on a rockin' crusade

LITTLE STEVEN VAN ZANDT HAS diagnosed America's ills—and he has the prescription. “We have no great art to replenish ourselves,” he says. “Art is not a luxury. We're the only country in the world that thinks art is a luxury! There's no spiritual nourishment going on right now. That comes from great art.”

Van Zandt is doing his part to get great art to the people who need it, through a dizzying variety of outlets. For almost eight years he has presided over the popular radio show *Little Steven's Underground Garage*, which is now bringing whip-cracking rock 'n' roll new and old to stations all over North America and Europe. He signs promising new garage-rock acts to his Wicked Cool

Records label, and is now expanding his empire to a social-networking site called Fuzztopia. He drew raves as an actor for his supporting role on TV's acclaimed *The Sopranos*, plus he's become an in-demand public speaker known for his razor-sharp analysis of the modern music industry.

Oh, and there's also the day job Van Zandt's held down off and on since 1975, as a key member of Bruce Springsteen's juggernaut E Street Band. The Boss and company completed a massive two-year world tour in November that found the group playing at the top of its game and attracting record crowds, but also facing several tragic losses—most visibly the death in April 2008 of keyboardist Danny Frederici. We recently

spoke with Van Zandt about the ups and downs of rock, radio and life on E Street.

Looking back, what are your feelings about the most recent E Street Band tour?

Creatively, artistically, in many ways we're the best we ever were. It just kept getting better and better. It was a terrific tour, maybe the most fun ever. The business, for us, has shifted a little bit. For many years we were two-to-one bigger overseas, now we're probably three-to-one. We did fine here, we have such great fans here, but overseas we're bigger than we ever were. We're bigger than *Born in the U.S.A.* big! I don't really know why. It's fascinating.



'The E Street Band is not exactly a rock 'n' roll band. We're an orchestra of a sort.'

How did losing Danny affect the sound of the band?

That was not fun. Over the course of this last couple of tours we lost three very important people: Terry McGovern, who was Bruce's personal [assistant]; obviously Danny; and we just lost Lenny [Sullivan], our road manager. That was three very, very big shocks. That was the downside of these past few years. Sound-wise, Charlie [Giordano, Frederici's replacement] came into a very tough job. Danny's an impossible act to follow for many reasons, but Charlie came in and did terrific. Musically, if you're an organ aficionado and you really understand the details of what it takes to be an organ player, then you're going to miss Danny, because nobody plays like him. Overall, musically it was OK—but emotionally that was difficult.

What guitars have you been playing onstage lately?

I mostly play Stratocasters. I also play a Rickenbacker 12-string—usually the Tom Petty model [the 660/12TP], which has a wider neck. I don't know how Roger McGuinn from the Byrds and those old guys that played Rickenbackers did it. It's very hard to fit your fingers on that neck. During the show I might play 10 different guitars, but mostly it's the Stratocasters and the Rickenbacker.

Do you use a lot of effects?

No, I don't. I use occasional delay, an occasional Leslie pedal, an occasional vibrato and a power boost, like a Fuzztone. That's about it. I keep it simple.

The band has expanded quite a bit over the years—near the end of the tour there were 12 people onstage. How have you adjusted to that?

It's an army, man! (*laughs*) It makes it even more versatile, musically. It's not a rock 'n' roll band, exactly—we're an orchestra of a sort. It's rock-based, certainly. A typical five-piece rock band absorbs all kinds of other genres, but when you have more instruments you can do that a little more literally. Instead of hinting at a classical influence or a country influence or whatever, you can go in that direction more explicitly. That's what we've been doing. We've got nothing to prove as a rock band. We've always been a good rock band. Everybody knows that. It's just another dimension, a bigger playground to play in.

How has the radio show evolved over the years?

The rest of radio has tightened up since we started. The oldies format has moved almost entirely into the '70s, so we're the only ones playing Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis now—in addition to being the only ones playing the Ramones and the Clash and a whole lot of the '50s and '60s stuff. Even the early British Invasion—we're the only ones playing album cuts from the Beatles, the Stones, the Kinks—and as far as I'm concerned that's the best stuff. We'll play The Who, but we're not going to play "Won't Get Fooled Again." We're gonna play "Pictures of Lily" or "The Good's Gone," something from the earlier days. Why play a song if some other format is playing it?

With all these interrelated ventures, have you been forced to learn more about being a businessman?

A bit, especially in these last three years.

get their music to the people. You've got to say, "How is this business going to survive?" Because if the business doesn't survive, then the art is going to have a harder time surviving. Great art isn't made out of the kindness of people's hearts. Sometimes great art is made for the most mercenary of reasons, including paying the rent! (*laughs*) These last 10 years have been rough, and it's getting rougher.

How do you run the business side of things while on the road?

I work constantly on the road. You're onstage for three hours, and there's soundcheck and you're in the air maybe for a few hours. The rest of the day I'm working on other projects. I'm listening to records, reading proposals, writing proposals, writing speeches, whatever I have to do. We've done the radio show from the road when we've had to. It doesn't matter where you are, you can get a lot done. It helps if you love it,



'If I didn't like what I was doing it would be difficult. My only frustration is that I don't get the chance to do more.'

The music business is a combination of art and commerce but the commerce side has gotten kind of weird. It's not something you can ignore because everybody wants to

OK? If you really didn't like what you were doing it would be difficult. My only frustration is that I don't get the chance to do more.

—Chris Neal

ELEMENTAL FORCES

ALICIA KEYS LOOKS BACK ON A DECADE OF
INSPIRATION AND EXPLORATION—AND AHEAD TO
A FUTURE INCREASINGLY FULL OF POSSIBILITY

BY CHRIS NEAL



Aptly enough, it all started with the keys. Last May, as she began the process of making her new album, Alicia Keys sought inspiration for her new sounds—by discovering a lot of old sounds. With the help of her longtime engineer Ann Mincieli, Keys amassed a collection of vintage keyboards and set about discovering what exciting new textures her talented fingers could coax from them. In particular she focused on keyboards from the '70s and early '80s, a period during which the synthesizer was just finding its own distinctive voice in the musical conversation. Keys and Mincieli filled the superstar singer's recording facility, The Oven Studios, with equipment that would evoke the boldly exploratory sounds of that era.

"I started to get into more oscillator-based keyboards, and what those sounded like and what sounds I could make from them," she recalls. "So it started mostly on that side. The beginning was experimenting, learning and exploring the keyboards, and that led to where the sound started to go."

The sound eventually led her to *The Element of Freedom*, Keys' fourth album and a fitting caper for a decade that saw her make a remarkable evolution from neosoul upstart to one of pop and R&B's defining voices. This journey, too, began behind a keyboard. Born Alicia Cook in Manhattan in 1981 and raised mostly by her mother, Keys began studying piano at age 7 and quickly acquainted herself with the music of Beethoven, Mozart and Chopin. She followed the muse to the Professional Performing Arts high school in Manhattan and to Columbia University before dropping out to pursue music full-time. Several years of struggle and false starts gave way to sudden success with the release of her critically acclaimed debut album, 2001's *Songs in A Minor*, which earned her five Grammys and has gone on to sell more than 12 million copies around the world.

That album marked the beginning of her ongoing collaboration with co-producer Kerry "Krucial" Brothers, with whom she would form a production company (KrucialKeys Enterprises) and, in 2005, open The Oven. "You come in and you feel like you're walking into your grandmother's house," she says of the facility, which is in fact a renovated three-story house on Long Island. "It's very comfortable. You can take your shoes off and sit on the couch and lounge a little bit." When it's time to get down to business, Keys corrals her players into a 500-plus square-foot live room, presided over from a 230-square-foot control room outfitted with a mix of vintage and high-tech gear—and that's just Studio A. The facility features two more studios, which came in handy when time pressures forced Keys to begin mixing *The Element of Freedom* before recording was completed.

By the time The Oven opened its doors, Keys was well established as one of her generation's leading lights. Her sophomore album, 2003's *The Diary of Alicia Keys*, nearly matched the phenomenal sales of its predecessor and brought its creator

another three Grammys. (Her total today stands at 12, the third highest of any female in history.) She then added author and actor to her résumé with a best-selling book (2004's *Tears for Water: Songbook of Poems and Lyrics*) and acting roles (2007's *Smokin' Aces* and *The Nanny Diaries*, 2008's *The Secret Life of Bees*). By 2006 she was so entrenched in the pop culture that none other than Bob Dylan dropped her name in his song "Thunder on the Mountain." (The rock bard even correctly namechecked her neighborhood of origin: "I was thinkin' 'bout Alicia Keys, couldn't help but crying / She was born in Hell's Kitchen, I was living down the line.") In 2007 *As I Am* became her third studio album to debut at No. 1 and expanded her musical palette deeper into R&B history with touches of Motown and Stax.

Now *The Element of Freedom* finds her again drawing upon the past in order to push her music into the future, not just with her array of classic keyboards and gear but with a new slate of preferred influences: She cites '70s and '80s pop juggernauts like Fleetwood Mac, Genesis, The Police and Tears for Fears as touchstones for the new album, and the hit "Try Sleeping With a Broken Heart" smoothly evokes '80s-era Prince.

Well before the album's release Keys could be heard dominating the radio airwaves as the featured singer on hip-hop star Jay-Z's smash "Empire State of Mind," which was adopted as an anthem for the victorious World Series attempt by the artists' shared hometown baseball team, the New York Yankees. (Keys' own, much-revamped version of the song closes *Element*.) Keys

has also recently been busy hosting her sixth annual Black Ball benefit to help families affected by AIDS. She's launching her new AK Worldwide business and philanthropic organization, which is intended to handle her nonmusical ventures (its first offering is a line of handcrafted jewelry, The Barber's Daughters). She's currently preparing for a major tour, set to begin in March.

Alicia Keys made time during a busy day in her native New York City to discuss her evolving creative process, her career to date and her ever-broadening horizons. "It's been so phenomenal," she says, "and I know that I'm still at the very beginning of where I want to go."

When you first started working on the album, what did you have in mind?

Whenever I go in to make a record, I don't ever know exactly what I'm planning to do with it. (*laughs*) I go into the process to explore where I am and what it feels like and what it's going to turn into. Maybe someday I'll make a very conceptual album, where I'll know from the beginning

what I'm trying to achieve. What I always want to do when I make a new record is to expand to the next level, go to a new place and be genuine about my expression. I knew I wanted to experiment with a lot of these new, different keyboards. My engineer's a collector—she's like a junkie. She loves to get all kinds of vintage things. She



Keys at the 2009 World AIDS Day concert in New York City



‘THERE HAS BEEN SO MUCH TO LEARN OVER THE YEARS—AND I FEEL LIKE I’VE LEARNED AT LIGHT SPEED.’

collects guitars and amps and things, and so I have a lot of those in my studio. I also wanted to go into old drum machines and old keyboards from the late '70s and early '80s.

What keyboards in particular turned out to be important to the record?

The [Roland] Juno was definitely a staple—both the Juno-106 and the original. Just great sounds, and you can always find a beautiful way to enhance a song with those. I introduced the Jupiter on the last record [*As I Am*] with “No One,” and I experimented with those some more. I used a Moog a whole lot. I barely even used a bass player on this record. It’s all Moogs and low synth sounds; it just gave the record a rumble. I got into the [Roland] G-70, which is my new favorite keyboard—it’s so classic. And then some of the more traditional stuff. But I don’t think I played a ton of Wurlitzer or a ton of Rhodes. It was really about those other sounds.

As you were experimenting, did you already have songs written or did they emerge from the sounds?

It’s a mixture. Some of the songs are ideas or pieces of a song that I’ve started at home. For others I start a song and add a sound to it, and that sound morphs into the beginning of another idea. Sometimes it’s just a jam session between me and my partner, Krucial, or my guitar player and bass player come by and we do that kind of thing. It’s a mixture.

You typically work with a co-producer of some sort—in addition to Krucial, Jeff Bhasker, Swizz Beatz and others who make production contributions to *The Element of Freedom*. At what point do they come into the process?

It depends. Sometimes, like with this album, I spend days alone in the studio, creating. I’ll just sit in there and learn the sounds and write songs by myself. Then once we get started, myself and Krucial—we’ve done a majority of the records together—we’ll sit down and I’ll start playing different vibes and songs I’ve been working on and we’ll go through new songs that we’re into by other artists, or old songs that we love. I’ll put together a whole playlist of music that I’m into, a flavor of the things I’ve been vibing on. He’ll start vibing on that. Then we get into the studio and start some new ideas from scratch. So it all ebbs and flows; it’s not necessarily on a schedule.

What’s the working dynamic between Krucial and yourself?

Mostly it’ll start from an idea. Maybe I’ll start a song on the piano at home, bring it in and say, “It’s something like this...” and I’ll have a very strong concept of what I want and I’ll know the last line of the chorus and what the song is talking about. Then we sit and go through it and he’ll be like, “I love that, what do you think about this?” And I’ll be like, “No, I like it like it is.” “Yeah, but what if we make the melody stronger? Something like this...” “Yeah, I like that, let’s explore it.” We’ll add some music around it. He’ll add some drums. We’ll talk about where it should go and how it should feel. It’s very collaborative.

What is the atmosphere like at your studio facility, The Oven?

Amazing, it's a wonderland. It's close to the way I picture they recorded at Motown, the "house" kind of feel. [*Motown's 1960s recording facility, Hitsville USA, was a converted home.*] It feels very comfortable. You can get all your best players in a room and play and start an idea—there's a lot of energy there. The studio itself is totally state of the art; everything is the best of the best. You have all this gear that we have piled up in all the rooms: drum sets, amps, basses and guitars and keyboards. There's a kitchen, offices and another studio upstairs, so both rooms can be going at the same time.

We created, mixed and mastered the record all at The Oven. We have exactly identical rooms, the A room and B room. Toward the end of the album we'd be working in Studio A, and Studio B would be where the mix is happening. We'd go up and check out the mix, make sure it's good, then go down to Studio A and finish what we were doing, then leave for the night. In the morning, Dave Kutch, who mastered the record, would go in and master what we did that night. It's true factory style; it's crazy.

What does your engineer, Ann Mincieli, bring to the process?

Ann is phenomenal. She's extremely organized; she helps on the coordinating side far better than anyone because she understands what's needed. She understands what the musicians and artists we're bringing in need. She's efficient. She loves music. She's an aficionado. She's studied music herself; she's very dedicated to learning and constantly evolving. She studies past techniques of The Beatles and others, and goes into what equipment they used, what boards they were on, what outboard gear they used, what effects they used. She also loves to collect. She'll say, "I just found this amazing keyboard that Lionel Richie used, check it out." She's constantly exposing me to new possibilities. She's an incredible part of the whole process.

While you're working, how much are you thinking ahead to what's going to be a hit or what's going to sound good on the radio?

I don't think about that at all. That's extremely detrimental. I'm only thinking about making great songs. How can I express in music this thought I have as clearly as possible, so that it's memorable and people will feel it and love it. It's about creating the best music, I'm not thinking about those other things.

You seem to be spending less time behind the piano lately when you perform. Is that by design?

I do what the song calls for. I do what feels right. I don't feel like I need to be stuck anywhere in particular just because I need to be there. I feel very comfortable in my skin and I feel very comfortable performing, so I do what the song calls for, what feels natural for it.

Is it a vulnerable feeling, not to have the piano in front of you?

Not at all.



EXTRA ELEMENTS

Alicia Keys recorded 28 songs for her new album, *The Element of Freedom*, but only 14 appear on the finished product. So where are the rest? A further seven tracks can be found on the numerous variations of the album sent to different retail outlets, including such intriguing material as the ethereal "Dreaming" (available on the B-side of the "Doesn't Mean Anything" international single) and a cover of the 1975 Michael Jackson hit "We're Almost There" (on the "Empire Edition" of *Element*, available at aliciakeys.com). Other tracks can be found at iTunes and on a Japanese deluxe edition.

You produced Whitney Houston's hit "Million Dollar Bill" last year. When you produce another artist, what's your approach?

My philosophy as a producer is to get the most stunning, unbelievable performance out of the artist I can possibly get—and also to make them totally comfortable. As an artist myself, I feel like the only way creative songs come together is when you're comfortable. You can't be uncomfortable and do great work. I'm very mindful about their needs and what they're going through. We'll talk for a while, laugh a lot. I set up an environment where they feel relaxed, and I start to learn about them. Every artist is different. Some want to do things numerous times until they get it right, and some tend to like to do two or three times and capture the best. I've got to learn their style. But my main goal is to make the song sound incredible and make the artist sound unbelievable.

'I'VE DEFINITELY EVOLVED OVER THE LAST DECADE, BUT I AM VERY MUCH THE SAME PERSON.'

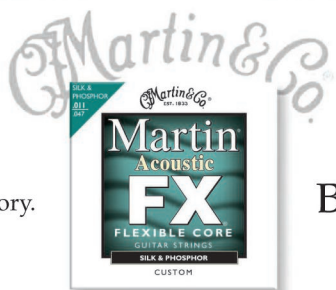
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What's the idea behind AK Worldwide?

AK Worldwide is the home base for everything I do. It's the place where I'm able to constantly bring to life the many ideas that I have or the creative ways I want to develop in my entrepreneurial spirit and bring to the world. It lets me keep everything organized and create the environment and the representation that reflects who I am. I always say we're in the business of inspiration. I feel like that's the most important thing I can do with the things I'm getting into. We're doing so many things. One of the first projects is a beautiful jewelry line, which I love because it's about art—wonderful artisans create and engrave these pieces, which are so unique and individual. The part about them that really resonates with me is that there are words on them—prose, lyrics, prayers, words that are powerful—so that when you wear these pieces you feel inspired by the words on them. They resonate with the person, because it's the person that chose those words. That definitely talks to the songwriter in me.

Does that feel like a new creative outlet?

Yes. It's really exciting to be able to express so many creative elements. Being creative in that realm stretches my brain and makes me even more creative in the musical realm, because it makes you think differently, more broadly.

Are you OK with having to think as a businesswoman?

I am very comfortable with that. Ever since I was very young I've always been front and center in my business, and I'm just taking that to the next level now. It's how I do my business and how I create an environment around me that's going to be fulfilling. Nobody else can do it. It's definitely my thing. I have an amazing support system, don't get me wrong, but it has to be the way that I see it and the way that I want it executed. I'm really comfortable doing that, and I'm getting more knowledgeable about making that the way that it should be.

What comes to mind when you look back at your career so far?

It blows my mind, just the fact that it's been nine years. It's been an incredible process. It's been so rewarding, and so fulfilling. There's so much to learn, and I feel like I've learned at light speed. To be able to connect with people through music and have an outlet to reach people with has been a huge blessing.

Do you feel like the same person you were in 2001, when the first album came out?

Fundamentally we're always the same person. We are who we are. I am that person and will always be, in regards to my heart and the basics of my composition. But I feel like I've grown so much, just because with experience you grow, become more knowledgeable and understand what works for you and what doesn't. I've evolved, but I am very much the same person.

Looking ahead, what are your hopes?

I want to continue to bring incredible music to the world. I want to be known as a person who created timeless music. I would love for my music to far, far outlive me in every way. I'm also in the process of developing ideas for Broadway. I'm doing some development and production for television and film, which I'd like to continue to get into. I'd like to exercise my entrepreneurial spirit and move into other business ventures and continue to be a part of creating a positive business, one that can enhance the world. I'd like to be someone who contributes to our global society. I want to continue to expand every day. **M**

RIGHT-HAND WOMAN

Alicia Keys' longtime recording engineer, Ann Mincieli, offers an inside view

New York native Ann Mincieli has been Alicia Keys' secret weapon in the recording studio for more than a decade. The two first met when Mincieli was an assistant engineer at the studio where Keys was working on her debut album, *Songs in A Minor*. A few years later, Mincieli was tasked with designing and running Keys' Long Island recording facility, The Oven Studios, where she served as chief engineer on the singer's hit 2007 album *As I Am*. On *The Element of Freedom*, Mincieli is listed as "album coordinator"—a credit that reflects the many critical roles she now plays in Keys' organization. "She's extremely intelligent and very creative, and also organized and focused," Keys observes. "She's the best of both worlds."



How did your approach to recording *The Element of Freedom* differ from *As I Am*?

Every album has its own theme and concept, and Alicia is a person who really loves gear and technology—she really likes to dive in and start using things right away. Her goal is to raise the bar with every new album, so we're constantly working with things we've never worked with before and experimenting with new ideas. This time around, she wanted to surround her music with a '70s and '80s kind of coloration, so I went on eBay and started buying up used gear in order to put together a huge sample library of vintage keyboard and drum machine sounds for her to work with. Having said that, my approach as engineer was really much the same: I'm there to do whatever it takes to achieve and implement Alicia's vision. With every new album, we like to stretch the technology further, but this time around we also revisited where everything came from. To that end, we not only collected a bunch of old synths and drum machines, but also old guitars, amps, pedals and microphones. At the same time, we were relying more on today's technology by using more plug-ins. I guess you could say what we were creating was a retro-futuristic vibe. *(laughs)*

Were you tempted to record the album on analog tape in order to further the retro sound?

Not really. Maybe that's because a lot of Alicia's last album was recorded on tape, so it was kind of, "been there, done that." Mind you, most of the drum samples were created by recording drum machine sounds on tape.

Why did the recording team expand considerably for this project?

Mainly because the label pushed our deadline up, plus we needed more bonus tracks than usual because we had to create different versions for different outlets like Starbucks, iTunes and Target. In the end, we had to bring in Tony Maserati and Manny Marroquin to help with the mixing so that we could keep recording without stopping to mix. That gave us the extra time we needed—it was basically a matter of adding hands to meet a tight deadline.

Why do you think you and Alicia work so well together?

I've found that most artists look to give engineers and up-and-coming people a shot. When they realize that you're as serious and passionate about what you do as they are about what they do, they recognize it. It probably also helps that I'm as much of an insomniac and workaholic as Alicia is: We're the only two members of the team that can outdo each other at the end of the day. *(laughs)* When everybody else is dead and can't get up, there we are, working away.

—Howard Massey

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PAT METHENY

The jazz guitarist's new instrument might look funny—but it's no joke

By Jeff Tamarkin

NO OTHER JAZZ GUITARIST OF THE PAST FOUR DECADES has done as much as Pat Metheny to broaden the definition of the instrument and expand its possibilities. Metheny reached out to listeners outside of the jazz mainstream with early releases like 1975's *Bright Size Life* and 1980's *As Falls Wichita, So Falls Wichita Falls*, and he's maintained a huge audience ever since. Along the way he's racked up three gold records and literally hundreds of awards, including 17 Grammys in 10 different categories.

But despite his enormous worldwide popularity, Metheny has been anything but cautious in his career. In addition to his work with the ever-reliable Pat Metheny Group, he has recorded and performed in numerous configurations ranging from solo to quartet and beyond. Metheny's collaborations have crossed all over the musical map, from jazz legends Herbie Hancock, Ornette Coleman and Gary Burton to pop icons Joni Mitchell, David Bowie and Brazilian vocalist Milton Nascimento.

With his newest release, *Orchestrion*, Metheny heads in yet another new direction. Although technically a solo album, *Orchestrion* employs a complex technology based on ideas that originated with the player piano more than a century ago to allow Metheny to operate as a one-man band in real time. He triggers the keyboard, drum and percussion parts all from his guitar, while of course also overlaying his distinctive guitar licks. "What I'm doing here is using solenoid technology," he explains, "which is basically electromagnets, where I can control dynamics. I have worked hard on that aspect, to make sure that things are always rising and falling and breathing."

It may sound like a novelty on paper, but in practice it's anything but—this is some of Metheny's most compositionally detailed work to date. Speaking from Brooklyn, where he's been busily working out just how to adapt this new music to a concert setting, Pat Metheny discussed his latest work and other aspects of his lengthy, legendary career.



'From the first note, I don't think anybody is going to make any mistake about whose record this is.'

How does the technology you're using to create *Orchestrion* differ from conventional synthesizer or MIDI technology?

It's actual instruments in the actual room actually doing stuff. We're not talking about samples. We're not talking about synthesizers. We're talking about dozens and dozens of moving parts that are hitting, beating, plucking, smacking, shaking and doing everything else. As much as I've been involved in electricity, I have to say I've never completely loved the sound of electric stuff. Electric guitar is one instrument going into one speaker, and that's fine. When you start mixing sound in a couple of speakers, it's still electric sound in a speaker. As great as synths have become, which is pretty great, it's still stuff coming out of speakers. With this, you walk in the room and it's alive. It's like the difference between processed food and organic. Air is moving, things are mixing in the air, and it's never predictable. Every time a stick hits a cymbal it's a little bit different. Almost everyone's first reaction when they see this is to start laughing because it is kind of funny. But the music is really hardcore. Among the 30-odd records I've done, this is probably the most densely compositional of them all. The fun part of it for me was that this challenge—because it has been this incredible self-imposed challenge—caused me to get to a level of compositional detail. I had to function above and beyond normal, musically, because it is such a weird project.

Did you compose with the technology in mind or did you take compositions you already had and apply them to the technology?

It was only when the instruments started coming in—I commissioned five inventors to build these instruments for me—that I could really figure out what they were good at, what they could and couldn't do. I had written a bunch of music before that, but I had to throw it all out; none of it worked. So I composed for this, quote-unquote band, as I became familiar with it and figured out its strengths. I had to make a choice at a certain point: What kind of record am I going to make? I chose to make a very densely compositional record that has many references to my general world: harmony, melody, rhythm, etc. I don't think anybody from note one is going to make any mistake about whose record this is.

With this music you are responding to yourself, rather than to other musicians. How difficult is it to be the soloist and the band simultaneously?

Oddly, this is probably the most personal record I've ever done. It's strange because it is everything filtered through my consciousness, especially melodically. I spent a lot of time talking to drummers and thinking about drums, and I used to play a lot of bass gigs and I usually write everything on the keyboard anyway. So those worlds are very familiar to me. I also feel it's important to say that this is not a replacement for anything. I've been lucky to play with the greatest musicians in the world, and will continue to.

Why do you think people who don't normally listen to much jazz consider you their favorite guitarist?

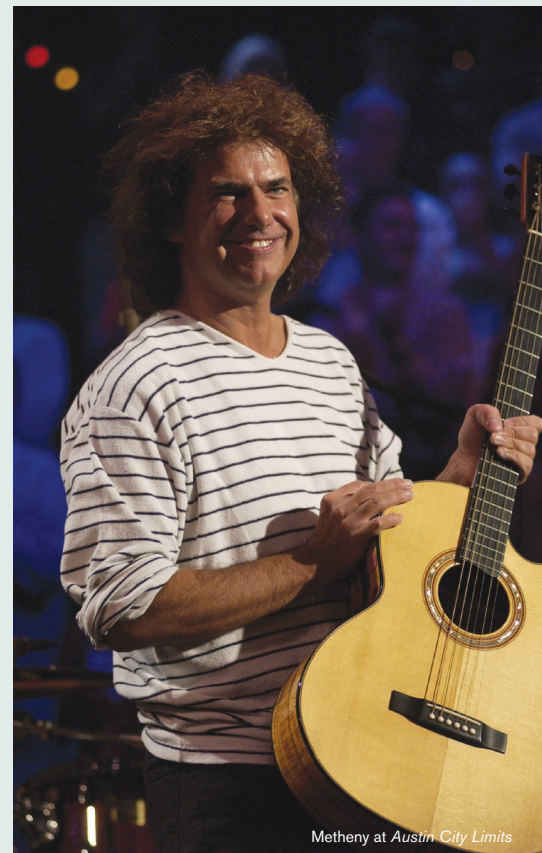
I have no idea. I think some of it is that I've been out there for nearly 40 years playing more gigs than just about anybody you could name. And there was that period of 10 or 15 years from the time I started my band through the early '90s that we had a level of success that was out of jazz proportion. We were selling hundreds of thousands of records, millions of records. Once jazz became too PBS and rock guys no longer looked to jazz for inspiration, things changed. That's a sad commentary on what the revisionist, conservative movement in jazz has brought. I think the best part of jazz is where jazz guys have been revolutionaries. There's never been a successful conservative element in jazz. By that I mean musically—there's never been a time when jazz guys have looked backward to sound their message.

You made some derogatory comments about Kenny G several years ago that gained media attention. How do you feel about that now?

It's funny, that was one of the first viral things on the internet. I honestly never considered at the time that anyone other than six people on my little website and my brother [trumpeter Mike Metheny] would ever see it—it was just a goof between him and me at first. On the other hand, as infamous as it is, it's a pretty clear argument that I think has its place and says some things that are basically true, which is that you should not overdub yourself on dead people's records and call it your own record [as Kenny G did in

"Guitars are like screwdrivers and hammers are for a carpenter to me," Metheny says. "I have this one that does this, I have that one that does that. I will say that in the last 10 years, a lot of those Gibson guitars from the late '50s and mid-'60s that everybody loved, I find myself loving also. I don't really collect them but I've got a couple, like my old ES-175 that I played for years. That period of time of Gibson guitars is really cool.

"I think I had the whole Gibson catalog memorized by the time I was 15—I could tell you the difference between an L-5 CES



Metheny at Austin City Limits

and an L-5 CESN and what all these things mean. So that's in my consciousness and that has been somewhat revived. I do find myself looking at the Mandolin Brothers [vintage instruments dealer] website every now and then to see what's out there and marveling at how much people pay for these things."

—JT



‘This record is everything filtered through my consciousness, especially melodically.’

1999 with a Louis Armstrong recording]. I argued that that's probably not a good thing. I would still make that same argument, although I would pick my words a little bit differently. On the other hand, if I was going to have an infamous cause, it wouldn't be that.

What would it be?

Jazz critics, Wynton Marsalis, the usual. (laughs)

A then-unknown Jaco Pastorius was on your first album. What are your recollections of him?

Jaco was one of the best friends I ever had. I know he's this legendary figure, but to me he was a guy I met when I was 17 and he was 19. For two or three years, before anyone knew either one of us, we were working on stuff together and doing things and talking a lot. We were able to compare notes with each other all along the way, in a way that neither one of us could with anybody else. Then there was a point where Jaco became an unrecognizable person. He was the only person I knew early on who actually had

absolutely no connection to drugs or alcohol, which is the way I've always been—but there was a point where there was a fork in the road where we took different paths. It literally, chemically, changed him to a different person. So that was always hard for me. He was gone to me, in a way, for years before he was actually gone. [Pastorius died in 1987 at age 35.]

Do you ever listen to your old records and say, I wish I could go back and teach this young kid Pat Metheny some of the things I've learned since?

That guy would be the one telling me stuff. I was a million times more sure of everything then than I am now, which is something that comes with being 20. But part of what made so much happen in those early days is that I was so sure about so many things. Now I look back and I think it's amazing that I got all those things through, because they weren't that completely thought out. But on the other hand, when I listen to *Bright Size Life* now, I can still play every one of those tunes and still go, "Yeah."

ESSENTIAL METHENY ALBUMS

Bright Size Life (ECM, 1975)

Metheny's solo debut introduced a player who fully intended to bring something new to his instrument. His wispy tone and Midwestern orientation (tracks include "Omaha Celebration" and "Missouri Uncompromised")—as well as Manfred Eicher's edgeless production—threatened to cast Metheny as a smooth operator, but the thunderous pulsations of a young, virtually unknown Jaco Pastorius on bass gave notice that Metheny was no lightweight.

Song X (Geffen, 1985)

The misconception among some that Metheny is a safe, mainstream player is negated by this collaboration with the visionary saxophonist Ornette Coleman. Also featuring bassist Charlie Haden and both Jack DeJohnette and Denardo Coleman on drums/percussion, it's as "out there" a recording as anyone's ever made. Metheny proves he can operate in the free-jazz realm yet he never loses his distinctive touch.

Like Minds (Concord Jazz, 1998)

Released under the name of vibraphonist Gary Burton—a longtime Metheny associate—this is actually the work of a jazz supergroup also featuring Metheny, pianist Chick Corea, bassist Dave Holland and drummer Roy Haynes. Metheny understands the sideman role he's been assigned, and he fills the spaces with vivid colorings while simultaneously pushing the music along forcefully. And when he takes a solo, he's no one's sideman anymore.

Jim Hall & Pat Metheny (Telarc, 1999)

The magnificence of this collaboration among equals is that despite an age difference of nearly a quarter-century—and, naturally, the reference points that come with such a difference—these two virtuoso guitarists not only find common ground but mesh so fluidly it's often difficult to tell who's playing which run.

Quartet (Nonesuch, 2007)

Coming on the heels of Metheny and pianist Brad Mehldau's exquisite 2006 session of mostly duets, this sequel adds to the mix Mehldau's regular accompanists, bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Jeff Ballard, and elevates the collaboration to the next level. Metheny and Mehldau are highly simpatico musicians—as much so as Metheny and his regular keyboardist Lyle Mays—and the range of textures and moods they navigate together, fleshed out by an equally inventive rhythm section, is a thing of beauty.

—JT



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AL SCHMITT

Five decades of sterling productions and still going strong

By Howard Massey

“LEGENDARY” IS A TERM THAT IS OFTEN BANDIED ABOUT too freely. But what other word could you use to describe a man whose first recording session was for the Duke Ellington Orchestra and whose work continues to dominate the charts to this very day?

After more than five decades behind the board, Al Schmitt is universally acknowledged as one of the absolute masters of his trade. He got his start at age 6, spending time at the New York City recording studio owned by his uncle, and began his own engineering career in the 1950s as apprentice to the great Tom Dowd. Since then he has produced, engineered, and/or mixed more than 150 gold and platinum records for an incredibly wide range of artists: from Henry Mancini to Steely Dan (he helped engineer the duo’s famously immaculate *Aja*), from Ray Charles to Natalie Cole, from Frank Sinatra to Jefferson Airplane (at one point he was recording the psychedelic Airplane at night and old-school crooner Eddie

Fisher in the mornings), from Elvis Presley to Josh Groban and from Barbra Streisand to Diana Krall.

Clearly, he has no intention of slowing down now. Winner of a staggering 19 Grammys, Schmitt was nominated just this year for his work on French chanteuse Melody Gardot’s critically acclaimed *My One and Only Thrill*. He is as busy as ever, having just finished mixing a live TV special for Gardot and recording songs for a new Josh Groban album. “I have to say, he’s one of the nicest artists I’ve ever worked with,” Schmitt says of Groban. “He’s just a joy. If everybody was like him, my life would be a lot easier.”

Despite his fame and recognition, he remains refreshingly down-to-earth, speaking with a distinct Brooklyn accent that he’s managed to hang onto despite being based in Los Angeles for more than 40 years. We spoke with Schmitt about some of the lessons he’s learned from his vast experience behind the board and the continuing evolution of his recording philosophy.

‘My One and Only Thrill is a great album, and I guess the proof is in the pudding.’

How did you come to work on Melody Gardot's *My One and Only Thrill*?

I got a call from Steve Macklam, who is Diana Krall's manager and also manages Melody. He explained that she was unhappy with the mixes of her latest album and asked me to take a shot at mixing a few songs as a favor to him. We went into the studio, and as soon as we loaded the data from her hard drives it became apparent what the problem was: There were a million plug-ins being used all over the place. There were two or three EQs on every track, filters, compressors, de-essers, you name it. There was more crap on everything than I've ever seen in my life—and as a result it really sounded weird. They had also mixed in the box [*mixing inside recording software*], which I still am not convinced is the way to go. So I started by taking everything off every track and began mixing it like I would a normal album—breaking out the tracks to an analog desk and using only analog outboard gear. Suddenly it started sounding just fine, because the original engineer—a guy by the name of Helik Hadar, who I've never met—actually did a pretty good job recording the instruments and vocals. At that point, Melody, who was sitting right next to me the whole time, began totally freaking out about how good it was. At 6 the next morning she called asking me to mix the rest of the album. Then I brought it to Doug Sax for mastering, who did his usual impeccable job. I have to say as good as it ended up sounding, I was really surprised it was nominated by the Grammy people for Best Engineered Album [Non-Classical]. From my point of view, it was really just a matter of taking all the crap off and putting it back to where everything sounded natural again. The problem with those original mixes was simply that things didn't sound real—not even her voice, and Melody has a beautiful singing voice.

Sounds like a classic case of less is more.

Absolutely. It seemed to me that they used all those plug-ins simply because Pro Tools gives you all those options. As we started taking them off, it was like removing layers of gauze and everything started sounding better and better. Plus I don't think that anything mixed in the box sounds as good as things that are mixed through an analog console.

Was Melody very involved in the the mixes?

She was here in the studio with me the whole time and let me know when she was happy or unhappy with something. She was a pleasure



to work with, and I think she's going to be a huge star. She's already big in Europe, and it's starting to happen for her here, too.

I understand she has hypersensitive hearing due to a car accident she suffered in 2003.

Yeah, and she has to wear dark glasses all the time because she's also sensitive to light. But the hearing thing wasn't a problem because I don't mix loud in the studio anyway.

From an engineer's viewpoint, how does Melody's voice compare with Diana Krall's?

Diana has got more of an intimate sound but Melody can really belt it out, and she hardly ever sings out of tune, which is amazing. It's as if she has a built-in Auto-Tune. Plus, she wrote all the songs on her album, apart from one cover: "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." I wrote that one. (*laughs*)

How do you feel about being nominated for a "Best Engineered" Grammy for an album that you only mixed and didn't record?

I don't know. It's OK, I guess. On the other hand, there are lots of albums nominated in that category that have tons of engineers. How much could each of those engineers have contributed? It's hard to say. I guess

I'd have more of a problem with it if I'd been nominated along with eight other engineers. [*laughs*] But *My One and Only Thrill* is a great album, and I guess the proof is in the pudding. I do have to say though that I was surprised that Diana Krall's *Quiet Nights*, which I mixed and engineered, didn't get nominated, because that's a beautiful-sounding record too. I thought if I was going to get any nomination this year, it would have been for that album, or for Willie Nelson's *American Classic*. But I guess no Willie Nelson album is ever going to be nominated for Best Engineered Album, is it? (*laughs*)

Do you ever use plug-ins at all, during either recording or mixing?

No, other than maybe to tune a word here and there. I have my own racks of analog gear that I use all the time. I just think they sound a lot better than any of the plug-ins out there.

So you pretty much just use Pro Tools as a tape machine.

Exactly. I love its convenience—it's great when you need to move something or cut and paste—but that's pretty much it.

Would you still be recording on analog tape today if budget allowed?

No, because of the convenience factor. The quality of digital today is so good—I always record at 96k and mix at 192k—that there's really no advantage to going back to analog. I find that working in digital makes everything happen faster—you can grab a piano solo from one take and fly it into another take in just a minute or two, instead of the long involved procedure if you were using tape. And if you've got a great take but there's just a couple of spots where the bass and the bass drum aren't hitting exactly together, you can just move one of



Schmitt, Tommy LiPuma, Willie Nelson, Diana Krall



Schmitt, Rod Stewart



Eric Olafson, Schmitt, David Sanborn

them slightly to get them to lock together perfectly. And it just takes a second or two. There are just so many benefits to recording digitally. It's really just the plug-ins that I don't like, and I would never mix in the box.

What media do you mix to?

I mix to half-inch analog tape as well as to a Tascam DV-RA1000 at 192k digitally, through a custom converter made by a friend of [mastering engineer] Doug Sax. I take both to the mastering room and we listen to them both. Sometimes we end up using the tape and sometimes we use the 192. There's no real rhyme or reason to which one sounds better; it varies from track to track.

You're a proponent of getting sounds from mic placement rather than from EQ, but do you use very little EQ on your mixes too?

Yeah, I almost try to turn it off. If you look over my shoulder as I'm mixing, you'll see very few EQs.

What about dynamic processing like compression or limiting?

I mostly do hand limiting, especially on

vocals, where I'll simply ride the fader. When I do use a limiter or a compressor, it'll mostly be for an effect. Maybe I'll squash the hell out of a sound if I'm looking for a certain effect on it, but in general I use very little compression or limiting. If a compressor is affecting 2 or 3 dB, for me, that's an awful lot.

Can bad engineering obscure a good song?

Sure it can. But the reverse is true, too: Really good engineering can make a mediocre song or artist sound pretty damn good. I've had that happen. You'll say, "Wow, this is great," and then as you listen further you realize that it's not so great—it was just a good mix with good effects.

What's your general approach to recording vocals?

You've got to use a good windscreen, certainly, and you've got to make sure that the artist isn't swallowing the mic. That's one mistake that lots of singers make—they get too close to the mic, and the diaphragm just doesn't work right when you're that close. Plus, there's

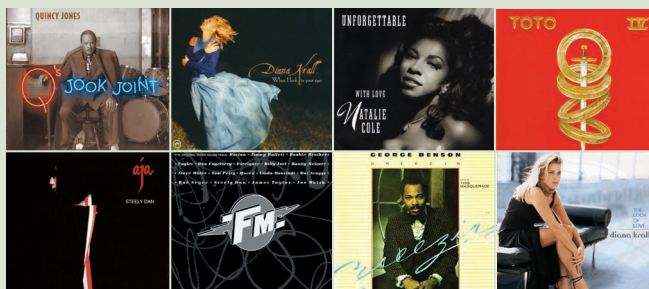
the proximity effect. My recommendation is that you stand at the mic, then stick your thumb to your nose and then spread your fingers out. The singer shouldn't be any closer to the mic than that.

Is mic placement the same whether you're working with an expensive or inexpensive microphone?

It will be pretty much the same, but even with real expensive microphones, no two microphones sound exactly alike. I don't care what anybody tells you. So, I would start with the same placement, but that doesn't mean I'm going to leave it that way. And one of the best judges of that will be the musicians themselves—they can usually give you a good idea of where the best place is for the sound that their instrument is putting out, so you should start there. In fact, the best friend an engineer has in the studio is the musician. You've got to do whatever you can to make his life easier, because then he's going to make your life easier. The more comfortable the musicians are, the better they play, and the easier it is to make good-sounding records.

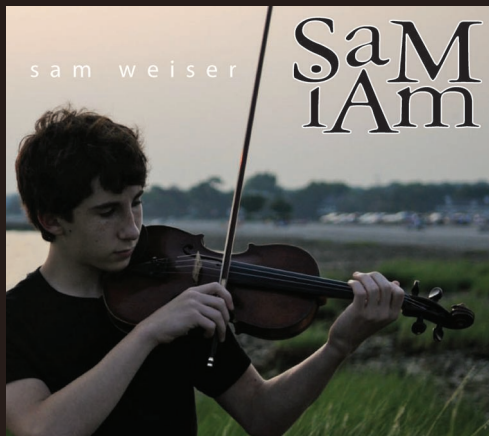
Al Schmitt won his first Grammy in 1962 for his work engineering Henry Mancini's *Hatari* soundtrack, and has gone on to take home many more—including, in 2006, the Trustees Award. Here are the recordings for which Schmitt won Grammys in the Best Engineered Recording, Non-Classical category alone through 2009.

- Henry Mancini, *Hatari: Music From the Paramount Motion Picture Score* (1962)
- George Benson, *Breezin'* (1976)
- Steely Dan, *Aja* (1977)
- Steely Dan, "FM (No Static At All)" (1978)
- Toto, *Toto IV* (1982)
- Natalie Cole, *Unforgettable ... With Love* (1991)
- Quincy Jones, *Q's Jook Joint* (1995)
- Diana Krall, *When I Look in Your Eyes* (1999)
- Diana Krall, *The Look of Love* (2001)



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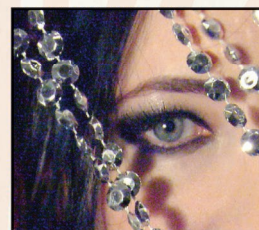


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FOR: The discerning home studio or mobile recordist. ONE is literally pocket-sized, and USB-powered to record via an onboard mic or instrument and XLR inputs. Apogee offers an optional tabletop stand, but the built-in mic sounded clean everywhere we positioned it.

NOT FOR: PC users, anyone recording multiple channels.

AUDIO-TECHNICA BP4025

The BP4025 from Audio-Technica provides two pristine, well-balanced channels of audio in a small, convenient package that practically mixes itself.



FOR: Painless stereo recording of instruments, voices and live sound environments. BP4025 is lightweight, phantom-powered, and mountable to a video camera, which makes it ideal for home videos, documentary and even film. The fixed X/Y position of the capsules provides a way to define the space around a signal and the room using only panning. You can't get into phase trouble moving the "two mics" apart to capture both a wide stereo image and a lot of room reflections.

NOT FOR: Recording geeks who like to tweak the positioning of paired mics. This is the only practical limitation.



BLUE MICROPHONE ICICLE

Blue Microphone's Icicle is a mic preamp and USB converter in a small cylindrical body. Plug it into the end of an XLR cable and any dynamic or condenser mic becomes a USB mic.

FOR: Recording newbies as well as those who know their mics.

Benefits to novices are obvious: simplicity, size and the stamp of a respected brand. For folks with a bigger mic closet, Icicle's biggest benefit is universality. With a selection of mics of different characters, the Icicle acts like a traditional piece of analog hardware connecting various signals to the recorder.

NOT FOR: Monitoring what's been recorded. Icicle is built for amplifying mic signals and sending them into the digital realm, but it has no audio output.

EVENTIDE MODFACTOR

Eventide has simplified getting the right modulation effect for the song while saving players from an endless string of noisy, tone-degrading stompboxes and patch cables.

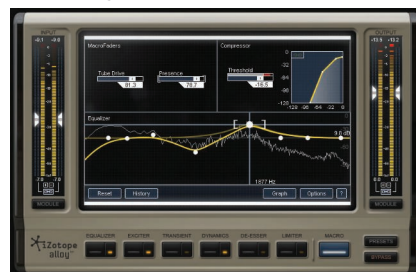


FOR: Guitarists and keyboard players who need world-class phasers, tremolos, filters, wahs, flangers, vibratos and more onstage as well as in the studio. In a compact housing that's built like a tank, ModFactor gathers 10 different categories of time-based effects and offers 40 positions to save the most perfected blends of swirling, swishing and swimming for instant recall. Using handy USB 2.0 to back up presets as MIDI files on a computer expands the memory to virtually unlimited.

NOT FOR: Players who need broad, safe modulation sounds. The degree of control can be overwhelming.

IZOTOPE ALLOY

iZotope Alloy brings the most common mixing processors together in one plug-in.



FOR: Anyone doing digital mixing of audio tracks on Mac or PC. No need to pull up EQ, dynamics, transient shaper, exciter, de-esser and limiter plug-ins—Alloy covers six powerful mixing tools in one integrated interface. A menu along the bottom of the Alloy interface illustrates which effects are active and which one is presently selected for editing. The main window displays a ton of audio information as the track rolls and some of the most straightforward controls you could ask for in a virtual channel strip.

NOT FOR: People who enjoy sorting through cumbersome, complicated plug-ins. We know you're out there.

—Dave Jones

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HIS HANDS IS A LABORER.

HE WHO WORKS WITH
HIS HANDS & HIS HEAD
IS A CRAFTSMAN,

HE WHO WORKS WITH
HIS HANDS, HIS HEAD
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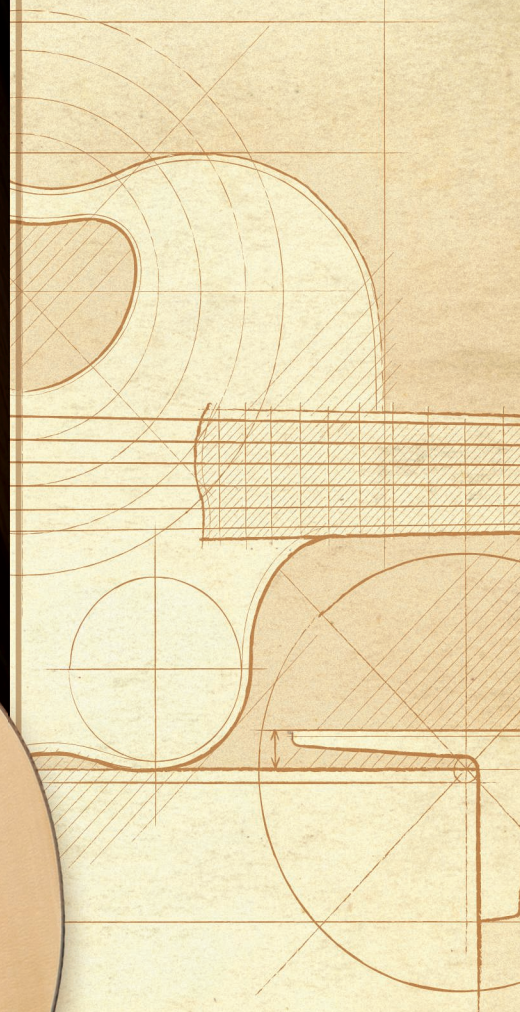
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MIXING AT THE SPEED OF LIVE



Two leading experts on live mixing share secrets to improve audio performance in any venue

THE LIVE PERFORMER'S BEST FRIEND is his or her mixer. That's the person whose skills and savvy can make artists sound their best—or even better. It's the live mixer who makes certain that the soaring vocals or searing solos coming off the stage sound as perfect as possible.

We tapped two top experts—Jeremiah Hamilton and Eddie Mapp—to help us explore the modern state of live audio mixing. Mapp has worked as the front of house engineer for acts like Stone Temple Pilots and Evanescence, while Jeremiah Hamilton is the senior engineer at Houston production service company LD Systems, and has

worked with many acts from Tower of Power to Jimmy Vaughan. They spoke with us about collaborating with artists from behind the board, as well as the latest technologies and techniques to elevate the audio experience.

Tell me about your approach to translating the sound of an artist's album to the stage.

HAMILTON: You study the album to get a feel for the application of effects, the kind of reverbs you hear. You get to know through experience whether

something sounds like a plate, or a hall or a room. Vocal tricks like doubling can all be pretty clearly heard by an experienced ear and you want to mimic that stuff live as best you can. In the really big leagues there's some interaction between the studio people and the engineers from time to time, where they actually discuss the kinds of machines that were used. In the digital age, with certain software and digital boards being interactive, you can almost take exactly the same plug-ins and effects devices from the studio into the live board out in the field. It used to be that a studio engineer was a studio engineer, and a live engineer was a live engineer—with a firm line between the two.



Nowadays with digital being so interactive, that's changing. Studio engineers are finding an outlet in the live environment and vice versa.

MAPP: That's actually one of the things I enjoy. I have a small studio back home where I work on little projects when I'm not on the road, and that gives me a good opportunity to sit down and try techniques that I use live and see how they translate to the studio. For the past four years I've been using a Digidesign VENUE console and with the last two or three bands I've been with we've taken a Pro Tools HD rig out with us. That helps because I can bring that home, analyze what I've been doing on the road, and make adjustments there. Whether it's trying new plug-ins or even finding new miking techniques that might help alleviate some problems or speed things up, it's been a fun thing. It's become the normal way I work.

Do you use a lot of channel effects during a live mix?

MAPP: Especially with this console, all my effects are internal; I don't use anything outboard. All my EQ, compression, gating, delays—all that's already set up in the console. I have a handful of plug-ins that I carry with me, just for consistency. As far as going between the studio and live, I've got some different URS plug-ins that emulate API EQs and Neve EQs so I can use what the artist would have access to in the studio.

So Eddie's obviously a Pro Tools guy. Jeremiah, what's your preferred software and hardware for multitracking off the board?

HAMILTON: You're stuck in some situations because Digidesign products are proprietary to Pro Tools. Personally I—and engineers that I've worked with—prefer the sound of Cubase Studio 4 and 5 and Nuendo. But the predominant software in the industry is Pro Tools.

What tips can you offer bands trying to make live multitrack recordings without a digital console?

HAMILTON: There are many ways to do it, and you don't have to have all the fancy tools. A laptop along with some sort of I/O device will do. I own a small rig of PreSonus [digital interfaces] myself. You can take direct outs off an analog console of important stuff like vocals, bass, lead guitar, plus a sub mix—and

create some very fine recordings very economically.

How do you overcome the challenges of in-ear monitors?

MAPP: The tricky thing is if you have a vocalist who isn't a very strong singer, or if there are a lot of delicate parts. Sometimes it's hard to get those to translate if you've got the rest of the band overpowering them. A lot of guitar players have big, loud amps and they want to feel that. With in-ears you can lose a little of that push you get from the cabinet. One



'There used to be a firm line between studio and live engineer. With digital being so interactive, that's changing.'

LD Systems' Jeremiah Hamilton

thing I always try to do first is get everybody on stage at around the same volume level. Building a good balance there helps your mix as well as the people up front. When the level is consistent between the band members, that helps the vocal get over top of things, too.

HAMILTON: Each time you develop an in-ear mix you're gaining ground in the live environment by taking away a wedge mix. Very often an artist will want both—to take out one in-ear piece and hear a wedge come back at him so he gets a sense of belonging to the room. You can get inside the earphones and it sort of detaches you as the sound fills your head. You can't hear the audience noise quite the same way but of course we stick mics in the audience and blend that back into the mix so you have that realism in your head. But the whole point of the in-ears, and why they've grown so fast, is to get rid of the stage volume so that a mixer has a fighting chance to produce a quality show in an ambient environment. I used to look at monitors as damage control, just trying to make the best of a situation. But with in-ear monitors you can have a quality engineer sit down at a board and create a mix inside the artist's head that's equal to what they had in the studio—and of course artists love that.

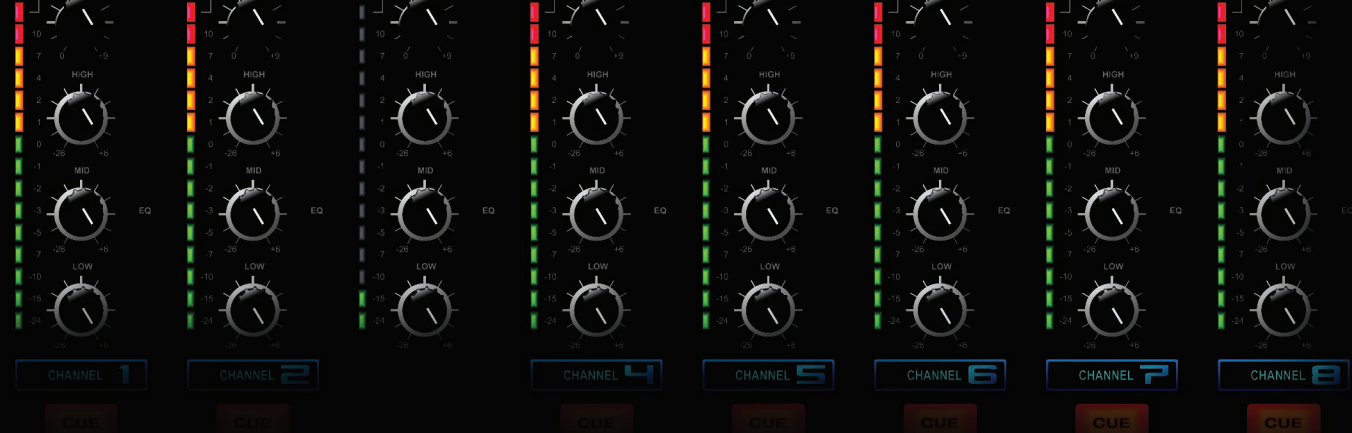
Without betraying confidences, can you tell us how you handle the monitors of artists who use pitch correction?

HAMILTON: To be honest, after 35 years in the business I've only seen it a couple of times. I have seen the Antares [Auto-Tune] device used, but not in that application. I see it used as a deliberate attempt to create the effect by singing one manner and using it as sort of an automated doubler. But as far as "Milli-Vanilli-ing" and correcting things on the sly, I see very little of that. In a lot of ways I think it's blown out of proportion. People make assumptions based on what they perceive people's talent to be. I see vocal tracks hanging in the background in Pro Tools and people singing over them, but very seldom have I ever done a show where the artist is not singing and contributing to the performance.

MAPP: I've never actually worked with any artists that use live pitch correction. I guess I've been fortunate in that respect. I have worked with plenty of artists that use backing tracks. Each band is different in their vision of what they want the show to be. With Evanescence, yes, there are backing tracks. It's mostly loop-based samples or strings, choir and different effect-type vocals. What I tried to do with them is to build the mix around the band: put everything up and just add the backing tracks in as a little spice here and there. I know there are certain artists who use pitch correction, and I just haven't worked with any so far. I try to work with the artist as much as possible to find out where their strengths and weaknesses are, so maybe if I just need to help them a little with reverb or riding a delay to smooth some notes out, that's what I prefer to do. I still like it to be a live thing. It's live music.

—Dave Jones





INTO THE RED

The 'Loudness War' has made new music increasingly difficult for discriminating listeners to enjoy—and now it threatens to claim the classics

BY CHRIS NEAL



Mastering engineer Friedemann Tischmeyer knew something had gone terribly wrong in the music world when he found himself asking clients to leave his name off their albums.

He had been prodded again and again to make the recordings that he was mastering louder, and louder, and louder—and when his arguments made no headway, he acquiesced. But he didn't want his name associated with a sound that he feels is destroying the good name of his chosen field. "It was a daily fight in the mastering process between good taste and commercial needs," he says. Good taste was losing.

Tischmeyer is but one of the many recording professionals who find themselves caught in the middle of what has come to be known as the "Loudness War." Over the past 15 years or so, at the urging of artists and label executives, engineers have been pushed to raise the loudness in master recordings up to and even past the point of distortion—while also using compression to raise the level of quieter elements in the music, flattening out each song's natural dynamics. The aim is to make the music jump out at listeners on the radio (futile, as most stations use equipment that automatically evens out the volume differences) or in noisy environments like cars, clubs and restaurants.

But for listeners who actually pay attention to music, what they're hearing is a shrill, clattering cacophony that is physically fatiguing to the human ear. "Highly compressed or limited music with no dynamic range is physically difficult to listen to for any length of time," writes mastering engineer Bob Weston. "This 'hearing fatigue' doesn't present itself as obviously aching muscles, like other forms of physical fatigue, so it's not obvious to the listener that he or she is being affected. But if you ever wonder why you don't like modern music as much as older recordings, or why you don't like to listen to it for long periods of time (much less over the years), this physical and mental hearing fatigue is a big part of the reason."

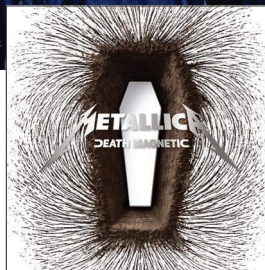
Certainly, loudness and compression have their constructive uses. "I believe every album has a 'sweet spot' where there are actually benefits from lifting the level, if it's done well," says veteran mastering engineer Ian Shepherd, who has done much to bring attention to the issue through his postings at mastering-media.blogspot.com and productionadvice.co.uk. But many modern recordings go well beyond that "sweet spot," pushing recordings to levels at which the music becomes distinctly sour.



Anton Corbijn

The "Loudness War" began in the mid-1990s with notoriously loud recordings such as Oasis' *What's the Story (Morning Glory)*, and noticeably escalated around the dawn of the millennium. Artists who have released albums in the past several years marked by excessive loudness include everyone from young acts like Lily Allen and Arctic Monkeys to veterans like Bruce Springsteen and Paul McCartney. But the public didn't truly take notice until the September 2008 release of Metallica's *Death Magnetic*, an album so distorted by excessive loudness that even non-audiophiles took note.

Fans noticed that the versions of *Death Magnetic* songs created for the video game *Guitar Hero* sounded significantly clearer and more dynamic—owing to the fact that the game's engineers worked directly from



how we make records." Ulrich indicated that the sound was the vision of the album's producer, Rick Rubin, and that he and his bandmates had resolved to "not

get in Rick's way." Indeed, Rubin has produced some of the past decade's loudest recordings, including albums by the Red Hot Chili Peppers and System of a Down.

Death Magnetic mastering engineer Ted Jensen explained that the distortion was present in the mix he was given to work with and couldn't be reversed, much to his chagrin. Shepherd points out that while the Metallica album offers an extreme and highly visible example, this practice is not uncommon. "I get sent a lot of mixes from studios where the level has already been pushed way too high," he says. "Most mastering engineers

I know hate the 'Loudness War' and being asked to push the level higher than necessary, but also there are studios where everything I hear has been smashed."

Another factor is the growing affordability of digital home recording, which has mastering engineers increasingly handed mixes performed by amateurs eager to have the loudest record on the block. "The loudness insanity melts our professional technological benefit over amateurs and home mastering people away," Tischmeyer notes. "Who cares about the quality of the equipment when the end result is distorted anyway? What's the use of our experience and listening skills when nobody cares about that?"

'I personally believe that this is not just a matter of good taste anymore.'

— mastering engineer Friedemann Tischmeyer

the original stems (individual instrumental and vocal tracks) rather than the final mix. An unauthorized version of *Death Magnetic* created from the *Guitar Hero* tracks quickly became a hot item on the internet bootleg circuit, while some buyers protested by sending their copies back to the record label and signing petitions demanding the album be remixed.

Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich said in November 2008 that "there's nothing wrong with the audio quality. It's 2008, and that's





one. For a clear-cut case study, look no further than one of rock's most venerated acts, the Rolling Stones. As the band owns the master recordings for its output from 1971 forward, it has made a practice of reselling the distribution rights every few years—resulting in a new round of remasters. The 1994 remasters for the Virgin label uncovered new depth and clarity in landmark albums like *Sticky Fingers* and *Some Girls*. Fifteen years later, the 2009 remasters of the same recordings released on UMe are much louder, resulting in a more brittle, less dynamic sound. The label “digitally remastered” no longer necessarily holds the promise of improved sound.

Stephen Marcussen, who oversaw the mastering of the 2009 Stones reissues, has been one of the few engineers willing to defend the loudness trend—if only ambivalently. “That’s the gig, you gotta rise to the occasion,” he told *Mix* magazine. “If it’s difficult, it’s difficult. It’s part of what we do.” He points out that with certain genres loudness can be used

Like many great conflicts, the “Loudness War” has its roots deep in the past. Pop and rock music-makers in the 1960s perpetually pushed against the loudness levels possible on a seven-inch vinyl record. The legendary Motown record label adopted an in-house mastering policy it called Loud and Clear, setting a standard that would make its singles uniformly ... well, simultaneously

The label ‘digitally remastered’ no longer necessarily holds the promise of improved sound.

loud and clear. Motown mastering engineer Robert Dennis compares those records to the sounds of today: “There were many technical things that we did to maintain the Motown Sound standards, including using custom-designed filters and adopting a half-speed mastering technique,” he writes. “With today’s plug-in and mastering programs the job is a lot easier, yet many releases still are

loud and very distorted or weak but clear. Too many releases are without the loudness and clarity that would be possible.”

Loudness levels have always bumped against the dynamic range afforded by the format of the day. As the already unprecedented range offered by compact discs steadily improved, many artists took advantage of the additional sound spectrum to create albums with great depth and subtlety—while others simply kept pushing levels further and further into the red. One recent study showed that an average modern recording of today is 14 decibels louder than one released 25 years ago.

And now the “Loudness War” is beginning to claim victims retroactively: Some classic recordings are now being remastered to jack up loudness and compress dynamics, making this arguably the first time in history that a new generation of reissues sounds worse than the previous

WHAT IS LOUDNESS?

The political debate over global warming is made far more difficult by the inability of the layperson to tell the difference between “climate” and “weather”—hence, every snowstorm becomes an opportunity for climate change deniers to say, “You call this global warming?” The “Loudness War” debate is cursed with a similar muddiness of terminology, one that allows loudness proponents to say, “What’s wrong with loud? People love it loud! That’s what rock ‘n’ roll is all about!” So it’s vital to understand the difference between “loudness” and “volume.” Loudness is used to push sounds toward (and sometimes past) the ceiling of a recording’s dynamic range, and those levels are locked in to the recording. Volume is the intensity of the sound, which you control with your playback equipment—and if you indeed “love it loud” you can always turn it up.

WHAT IS COMPRESSION?

When we talk about the “Loudness War,” we’re also talking about the increasing abuse of dynamic compression. This is the practice of making the loudness levels of instruments in a recording roughly equal, meaning the quietest moment is just as audible as the rowdiest. That means that you won’t miss little details in a noisy environment, but it also robs an inherently dynamic song of its power—Metallica’s “The Unforgiven III,” for instance, begins with a soft, mournful passage of piano and strings that is boosted so high in the mix that there’s no contrast when the band itself enters. Mastering engineer Ian Shepherd points out that there’s nothing inherently bad about compression: “Used well, it can pull a mix together, add punch and impact or ‘bounce,’ make things warmer and fuller, more exciting and more immediate. I use it all the time; I couldn’t work without it. But excessive or clumsy compression flattens music.”



Simon Emmet

Lily Allen

without detracting from the music's effect. "With dance music, for example, when you are in a club, it's beneficial to have a louder CD," he said. "It's more exciting, you're not sitting there scrutinizing the sound; it's more of a gut feeling rather than an intellectual comprehension of somebody's

work. There are genres of music where it's appropriate to make screamingly loud records." Hip-hop recordings, which typically have fewer sound elements than those of other genres, are also routinely mastered very loudly and compressed without problems.

While the Stones remasters avoid outright distortion, other classic recordings haven't been so lucky. Last year's reissue of Pearl Jam's 1991 debut, *Ten*, is so loud that it regularly crosses the line into clipping. The Red Hot Chili Peppers' 2003 *Greatest Hits* increased the loudness on tracks from earlier recordings to the outlandish levels of their most recent albums, a common occurrence among new compilations. In at least one high-profile case, the sound was deliberately distorted

by the artist: Iggy Pop remixed *Raw Power*, the 1973 album by his band Iggy and the Stooges, and increased the loudness well into distortion territory in an attempt to make the already-aggressive album sound even more so. A reissue of the album set for release in April will restore the original mix.

There are reasons to be hopeful for at least a cease-fire in the "Loudness War." Several organizations have formed to battle the continued advent of excessive loudness, including Turn Me Up! (turnmeup.org) and Tischmeyer's Pleasurize Music Foundation (pleasurizemusic.com), which urge artists and industryites alike to begin featuring informational labels on albums that boast a wide dynamic range. A few sound-focused magazines have begun including dynamic range levels in album reviews.



NEA

Rush



A two-minute video succinctly explaining the effects of the "Loudness War,"

produced by Matt Mayfield, has been viewed around 900,000 times on YouTube. Many other YouTubers have also produced videos sharing the results of their own amateur analysis, producing homemade clips of

'Most mastering engineers I know hate being asked to push the levels higher than necessary.'

— mastering engineer Ian Shepherd

wave-form video captures pointing the finger at loudness offenders. (Shepherd notes that such sleuthing has its limits: "I'm seeing lots of posts from people looking at waveforms without listening and assuming it must sound bad just because it peaks near zero. That makes no sense. You need to listen to it to see how it sounds.")

Tischmeyer believes the most effective way to sway public opinion is to argue the issue from a health standpoint, pointing out the damaging effect that consistent exposure to loud, highly compressed recordings that never give the ear a moment

GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME

Audiophiles held their breath last summer leading up to the September release of the Beatles' remastered catalog, perhaps the most anticipated reissues in the history of the CD format. An April press release was both worrying and encouraging: "[As] is common with today's music, overall limiting—to increase the volume level of the CD—has been used, but on the stereo versions only. However, it was unanimously agreed that because of the importance of The Beatles' music, limiting would be used moderately, so as to retain the original dynamics of the recordings."

Thankfully, the levels were raised by a very modest three to four decibels. "For something like the Beatles, a band from the '60s, it would have been inappropriate to have given it that treatment," says project coordinator Allan Rouse. "But we have made them slightly louder, so that they are at least slightly contemporary for today—but certainly not as loud as the more contemporary bands." No extra loudness at all was applied to the more collector- and audiophile-targeted *The Beatles in Mono* box set.

"Good remastering aims to present the original material in its best possible light, without trying to change it into something it's not," says mastering engineer Ian Shepherd. "The recent Beatles remasters are a great example of this being done well. They're louder, but not excessively so, and they sound better than the old releases—closer to the way the music was intended to be."

to rest and recover can have on hearing. "We have already a lot of evidence that this is the main reason for the drastic increase of hearing damage in the young generation," he says. "I personally believe that this is not just a matter of good taste anymore, it is a matter of responsibility to protect the pleasure of hearing."

But perhaps the best chance comes from artists themselves moving to protect the fidelity of their own work rather than allowing

the whims of the marketplace to sway them. The 2009 remaster of the Beastie Boys' hip-hop classic *Paul's Boutique* is actually more dynamic than previous masterings. Rush's 2002 album *Vapor Trails* was harshly criticized for an excess of loudness; two of its tracks were remixed to scale it down to a more listenable level for 2009's *Retrospective 3* compilation. "[*Vapor Trails*] was mastered too high, and it crackles, and it spits and it just crushes everything," guitarist

Alex Lifeson acknowledged last year. "All the dynamics get lost, especially anything that had an acoustic guitar in it." Lifeson said the group may eventually undertake a remix of the full album.

Shepherd believes the public backlash against excessive loudness is getting through to artists. "It's an issue that is getting a lot of mainstream coverage, and recently I'm getting people asking me to not 'do a *Death Magnetic*' to their music, which is great," he says. "There are also some artists who are making a point of choosing a more dynamic sound for their CDs. Hopefully this is a trend that will continue." He also sees a ray of hope with the overwhelming success in Europe of the subscription-based Spotify music-streaming service. Touted by many as a likely future model for music distribution, Spotify uses audio volume normalizing software that makes the relative loudness of any one track irrelevant.

An early shot in the "Loudness War" came with the 1987 release of Guns N' Roses' debut, *Appetite for Destruction*, one of the loudest recordings of its day. So mastering engineer Bob Ludwig was pleasantly surprised when he offered frontman Axl Rose and co-producer Caram Costanzo three different versions of his master for the Guns album *Chinese Democracy*, with increasing levels of loudness applied to each—and they approved

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the most dynamic option. "I'm hoping that *Chinese Democracy* will mark the beginning of people returning to sane levels and musicality triumphing over distortion and grunge," Ludwig writes. "I have already seen a new awareness and appreciation for quality from some other producers. I pray it is the end of the level wars." **M**

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JOHN FOGERTY

The legendary rocker returns to his childhood influences

By Chris Neal

WHEN CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL SPLIT IN 1973, lead singer and songwriter John Fogerty was determined that his first solo album would succeed or fail on its own merits rather than his famous name. So he invented the Blue Ridge Rangers.

"It was a personal, ethical, moral issue," he recalls. "I didn't want to trade on that popularity. It's probably suicide for a career, but I felt very strongly about not calling myself 'John 'Creedence' Fogerty' or something like that. I created this fictitious band."

The Blue Ridge Rangers album found Fogerty exploring traditional country music—a passion since childhood. "It was a time to reveal my influences," says the San Francisco native. "What I presented was a balance of all the wonderful things that influenced me, that made me the person I was in 1973. I was still

a very young man when I had this huge career with Creedence Clearwater Revival and made my mark on rock 'n' roll. It seemed like the perfect time to go into the world that was so precious to me." His most recent album finds him revisiting that place after more than three decades away. While the first Blue Ridge Rangers album featured Fogerty playing all the instruments, on *The Blue Ridge Rangers Rides Again* he leads a stellar band of top-shelf acoustic players through a lively set of country covers. Fogerty has also just released a live DVD, *Comin' Down the Road*, and he's at work writing songs for a new album of original material.

We spoke with the Rock and Roll Hall of Famer about his evolution as a guitarist, his return to the Blue Ridge Rangers and the ups and downs of being a one-man band.



'At about 14 I told myself, "I'm gonna grow up and be a really good guitar player!"'

How did you first hear country music?

As a child, it just filtered in through the air. When I was young we had a little show in the Bay Area called *The Hoffman Hayride*. It was something that my parents watched as soon as we got a television, and I really enjoyed that. It was live, and people were spontaneous, and of course they played country music. We also got the Grand Ole Opry on TV when I was a kid. As a very little boy, I certainly was watching all the cowboy bands—Roy Rogers and Sons of the Pioneers and all that. They were a big influence on me.

Why did you decide to play all the instruments yourself on the first Blue Ridge Rangers album?

I discovered I was under this horrendous contract to Fantasy Records. Even though the band had broken up, I still owed them an enormous, unfair amount of product. So I decided to be a one-man band. I can't answer fully what spasm of mental cruelty made me do that. It's just too bizarre to me now. Let's just say that I certainly was not completely healthy mentally. I don't mean that I was running around like a psycho, but there was some obvious injury to my mental state. And that's how it came out. I said, "Well, OK, I'll be a one-man band. And I'll be anonymous!" (*laughs*) It meant I had a lot of healing to do but I didn't know any of that then. It's hard to do a one-man band, man. There's a lot of focus there. It's like time-lapse photography watching a rose bloom all day long. And when the album was done I was having a meeting with one of the henchmen of Fantasy. The guy let me know I had this big obligation of albums I had to give him, and he said, "Well, we're not going to count this Blue Ridge Rangers album as part of your obligation." My jaw dropped. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, it's country, and that's not what we want."

Given all that, it's interesting that you continued with the one-man band approach on the next two albums, *John Fogerty and Centerfield*.

You might say I fell into purgatory at that point. I was also still in this contract, so I kept working at that method while I was trying to figure out some legal way out of that purgatory. I called it a dungeon, really—it had me chained to a wall. Finally, when *Centerfield* was realized in 1985, I figured that's as good as it's ever going to be using that method. (*laughs*) The album went to No. 1, and to me that was the vindication. I unlocked the door and said, "That's it, I'm not doing it like that anymore." And that's a doggone good

thing. From then on I started working with real people and getting out in public. It still took a little while but once I started touring in 1997 I joined the real world. I finally started having what you'd call a normal career.

What prompted the return to the Blue Ridge Rangers now?

In all those 30-something years, there wasn't a month that went by that I didn't think about the Blue Ridge Rangers. I was going to do it someday. I collected songs from time to time. Sometimes I'd even make a list, but this was in the age before computers so it wasn't permanent. I'd put the list somewhere in a drawer and three years later I'd think, "Gee, where'd I put that list?" (*laughs*) Then [in August 2008] my wife says, "You know the Blue Ridge Rangers album you did? It'd be great if you did another one of those." I was dumbfounded. It was like it's a Saturday morning and your wife walks up to you with all your fishing gear, lays it in your arms and says, "Honey, why don't you take a few days and go fishing?" (*laughs*) I was so surprised, and I jumped at it. I got serious about songs and who I'd like to have on the record and all that.

You've said that you spent much of the last few years working on improving as a guitarist. What inspired you to do that?

At about 14 I told myself, "I'm gonna grow up and be a really good guitar player like Chet Atkins." You might say that all my life Chet was way, way up there at the top of the mountain, the embodiment of what you could do if you practiced hard enough. Then somewhere in the '90s I got bit by the Dobro. Bear with me here. All roads Dobro lead to Jerry Douglas, and Jerry Douglas is now my favorite musician of all time. He's at the top of my list of everyone, including Elvis Presley or James Burton or Otis Redding. Jerry Douglas is the man, in my heart. I was listening to a lot of his records just loving his great music. Then a little molecule of that memory became full recall in my brain: the 14-year-old making that promise and thinking of Chet Atkins. I had the emotion the way some people do under hypnosis, suddenly they're there in that moment. All these years had gone by, and I hadn't done it. I was about 48, and had the choice right then to wave it off or say, "Man, you'd better get busy." That's when I decided I needed to pursue my dream. This was about '92. I became demonic. I started practicing Dobro and finger-style slide, and that evolved into my Tele playing, my finger-style guitar playing,

Fogerty recorded his first solo album, 1973's *The Blue Ridge Rangers*, by overdubbing every instrument himself. But for the recent follow-up, *The Blue Ridge Rangers Rides Again*, he recruited an all-star studio band including guitarist Buddy Miller, steel guitarist Greg Leisz, bass player Dennis Crouch and others. He also brought in big-name pals Bruce Springsteen and the Eagles' Don Henley and Timothy B. Schmit to make guest vocal appearances.

"I'd had a long time to think about it," he says. "The thing that was missing on the first one was that it didn't have that interchange, that wonderful back-porch spirit that the great albums have. I love hearing guys who can do it, and who have that heart and spirit in their music. You just say, 'Look, here's the corner of the corral that I want to be in, and if that's cool for you, you just run around in that territory.' And the great guys can do it."



Fogerty notes that recording technology has come a long way since he was toiling away assembling the original Blue Ridge Rangers album—and this time he put it in the service of encouraging a loose, freewheeling spirit among his players. "There's always a chance that the guy didn't play exactly what he was thinking, so you say, 'If there's something you want to improve here and there, go on in and see if you can,'" he says. "And through the wonder of technology now, you don't have to throw away the old one."

—CN



Fogerty at the Mercy Lounge in Nashville, September 2009

‘I have loved being around people who can play, and being able to answer when it’s my turn.’

trying to play with a pick the way the great guys do, flat-picking. It took a long, long, long, long time. But I told myself, “It’s OK. Practice everything, it doesn’t matter.” I started practicing scales, I started practicing rolls, and even though it was horrible in the present, in my mind I was that 14-year-old kid again and I could forgive myself. When you start that process, you sit there feeling pretty embarrassed that anybody can hear you. But I finally knew what the mission was. It took about 15 years, but now I’m comfortable. *(laughs)* I have loved being around people who can play, and being able to answer when it’s my turn and play something worthwhile. At the end of a take, Buddy Miller will say, “Well, I didn’t hurt myself too much.” He’s so self-deprecating and humble about his own ability, and of course he’s one of the most amazing musicians on this planet—but he always acts as if it’s some sort of an accident. *(laughs)* I hope to keep that state of mind in my own playing and continue

in a frame of humility. I’ve been aiming at this all my life. It’s late coming to me—I did the hard work as an adult. So I realize what it took to do it, and that makes me more appreciative. It’s not that long ago that I was awful and I couldn’t do it. That’s still a fairly recent memory. So now I’m just happy that I can sit in with guys that can really play and, like Buddy says, not hurt myself too bad.

What’s your goal for the Blue Ridge Rangers record?

I’d love for it to sell 10 million copies and be on the top of the pop music charts like Beyoncé or Justin Timberlake or somebody. *(laughs)* My publicist would say, “John, don’t admit that it’s probably not going to do that.” They want you to put a smiley face on everything. Honestly, the first goal has been met: It’s really good, and I love to listen to it. It’s music that resonates with me, and it rings true. I feel very comfortable about that.

ANOTHER REVIVAL

There’s been no shortage of repackagings and reconfigurings of the Creedence Clearwater Revival catalog over the years, but the new compilation *The Singles Collection* offers something a little different: Both sides of all the group’s original U.S. singles, presented in their authentic mono mixes for the first time since their initial release in the late 1960s and early ’70s. (Only the oddball sound collage “45 Revolutions Per Minute” is in stereo.) The set also includes a DVD offering music videos for “I Heard It Through the Grapevine,” “Bootleg,” “I Put a Spell on You” and “Lookin’ Out My Back Door.”



Jake Shimabukuro's MIGM Ukulele

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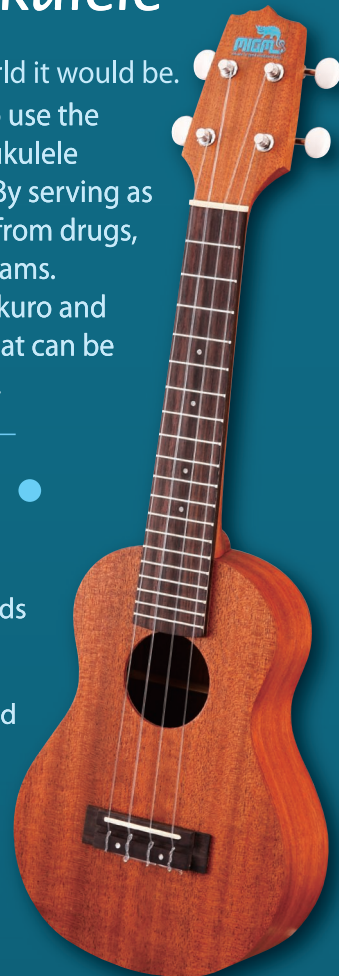
Music Is Good Medicine (MIGM), a non-profit organization whose mission is to use the power of music to heal, influence and inspire people, is working to make the ukulele available to children all over the world through its "4 Strings 4 Kids" program. By serving as a positive force in their lives, the new "MIGM Ukulele" can steer children away from drugs, violence, and other negative influences encouraging them to pursue their dreams. The MIGM Ukulele, designed and produced by ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro and manufactured by Takamine, is an affordably priced, high quality instrument that can be manufactured in sufficient quantity so everyone who wants one can own one.

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● Jake's Key Points ●

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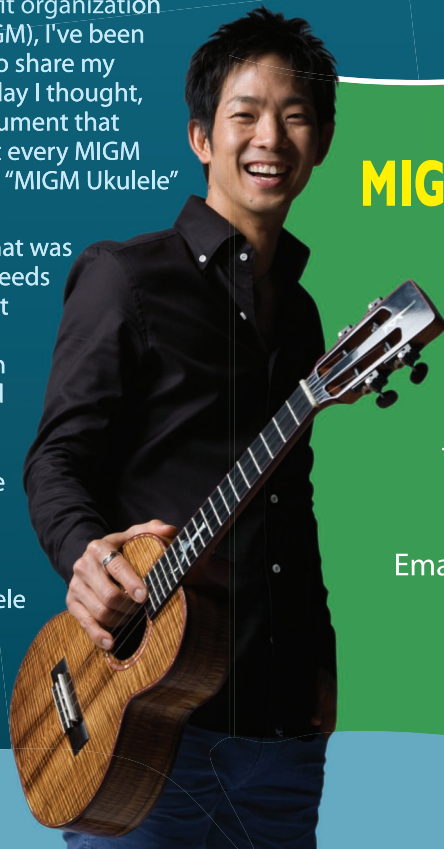


● Jake's Message ●

As the spokesperson for a non-profit organization called Music Is Good Medicine (MIGM), I've been visiting schools around the world to share my passion for the ukulele. Then one day I thought, wouldn't it be cool to have an instrument that could be donated to each school at every MIGM event? That's when the idea of the "MIGM Ukulele" was born.

I wanted to create an instrument that was affordable while still meeting the needs of a serious player. Some important points in the design included, high quality machine heads for precision tuning, a high quality bone nut and saddle for superior tone and sound projection, and a finely compensated saddle to achieve the best possible intonation. Also, working with a world-renowned instrument maker, Takamine, to manufacture the high-quality ukulele played a key role in producing the "MIGM Ukulele."

-Jake Shimabukuro



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ANGIE STONE

A soul songstress' new music embraces her past and the present

ANGIE STONE'S LATEST ALBUM, *Unexpected*, lives up to its title. She departs from the bread-and-butter traditional soul that has characterized her career over the last decade, returning to the flavor of her pre-solo groups: the '80s funky hip-hop of the Sequence and the '90s dance and R&B of Vertical Hold. "I stepped out of the norm of singing songs that cater to the neo-soul ticket," she says. "Everybody's expecting that. I took a chance on encompassing my entire career up to this point." The Atlanta resident took time during a recent visit to New York to talk about the evolution of her brand of sweet soul music.

It was surprising to hear Auto-Tune on "Tell Me." Why did you do that?

I love T-Pain, and it was just paying homage to him. I think people get a bum rap when they go outside of the box. Why kill the dream of someone that picked up that torch and ran with it? You have to allow people to be clever and creative. I heard a lot of people comment, "Oh he's only using that because he can't sing." Well I did it, and I can sing.

Where did you record the album?

I started out in Marvin Gaye's studio [Marvin's Room] on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, and I ended up in a little studio down in

Atlanta [M Studio], and stayed there. I did preproduction in other little studios that were owned by some of the producers, but that place helped me to finish the album in a good space.

Your father died while you were making *Unexpected*. What impact did that have on the album?

It pushed me a little harder. The industry has been so jaded lately, with everybody like crabs in a barrel trying to stick to the top. So when my father passed away, it gave me a whole other purpose to work hard. I actually went in and re-recorded the vocals to quite a few songs, because after my father passed I had a little bit more energy and adrenaline to go in and approach the songs from another area.

You've been making music for three decades now. How have the changes in technology influenced your creativity?

It really hasn't had an effect on my creativity. They found a faster way to cut, which in my opinion is like racing to the finish line. The result is super-fast songs and super-fast lyrics and super-fast energy. In earlier days it was a slow brew. The song grew as a result of the creation of it together. Back in

the day you took your time and you created a masterpiece. That's why they're called standards! I still want that authenticity and that slow brew sometimes. As a matter of fact, two days ago I got this sudden urge. I don't know why, but I felt like I wanted to do something in the [classic soul] mood of *Black Diamond* [1999] and *Mahogany Soul* [2001]. I told one of my managers, "Get me an '87 Fender Rhodes and call the studio to see if next week is available." I just want to go in and shut all the doors and create an awesome, awesome soul album. I don't know where that urge came from, but that's where I want to go next.

How do you think you fit in today's musical landscape?

I honestly don't believe in "Where do you fit in?" I have my fan base, like Rihanna has her fan base, like Beyoncé has her fan base, like Toni Braxton has hers, like Sade has hers. What you're asking me is, "How do you think you compare with the likes of these 15- and 16-year-olds?" My thing is, I don't compare. I'm different, I stand in a class of my own. There are adults in the world. This whole world is not made of children. There has to be someone who is a keeper of that flame, and I'd like to be that person.

—Richard Cromelin

'My thing is, I don't compare. I'm different, I stand in a class of my own.'



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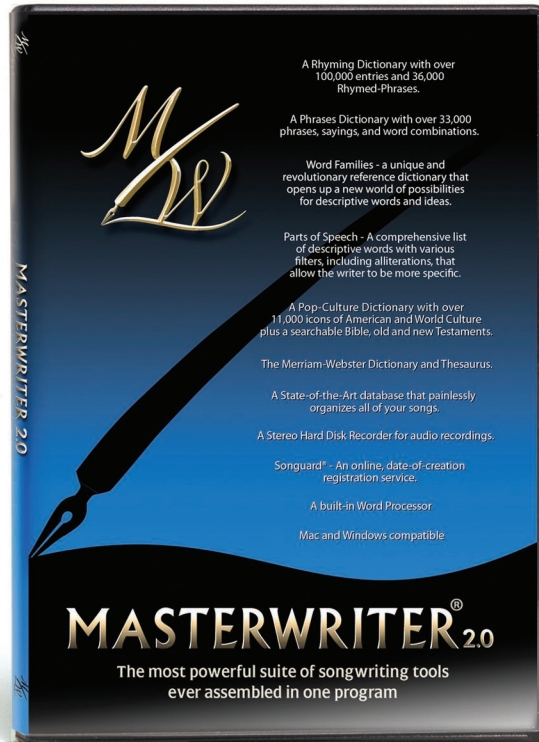
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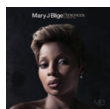
Y Not

[Hip-O Records/UMe]



For most of his solo career, Ringo Starr got by with a little help from his friends—the strength or weakness of his albums tended to rise and fall depending on the caliber of guest songwriters and players on hand, most particularly his former Beatles bandmates. His partnership with producer Mark Hudson changed that beginning in the late 1990s, allowing Starr's star to shine with or without the aid of his big-name pals. With the end of that relationship, Starr has for the first time taken on sole production duties on his latest, *Y Not*. One might expect a certain amount of self-indulgence from an artist who, at age 69, is finally set loose on the board alone, but *Y Not* is as modestly ebullient and straightforwardly charming as the man himself. Starr presides ably over a group of A-list musicians that includes Joe Walsh on guitar, Benmont Tench on keyboards and Don Was on bass, and the leader of the band himself sounds as sprightly as ever behind both the drum set

and the microphone. Typically, the album's highest and lowest points come on the only occasions when one of those famous friends happens by: Paul McCartney provides a gently supportive counterpoint on the strikingly poignant "Walk With You" (written by Starr and Van Dyke Parks), while Starr relegates himself to playing Joss Stone's second banana on the truly unfortunate "Who's Your Daddy." For most of *Y Not*, Starr gets by just fine on his own. —Chris Neal

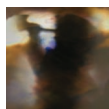


MARY J. BLIGE

Stronger With Each Tear

[Geffen]

For her ninth album, the Queen Of Hip-Hop Soul has rounded up collaborators like Akon, Drake, T.I., The Runners and Rodney Jerkins—but even this show of R&B/hip-hop cred can't hide the impression that Mary J. Blige is increasingly embracing the pop world. It's refreshing for a woman who has notoriously played the "woe-is-me" card to offer such an upbeat and happy album, with optimism-drenched grooves that celebrate self-love ("Said and Done"), horn-blasting flirtation ("Good Love") and downright elation ("I Feel Good"). The ambitious orchestral epic "We Got Hood Love" is particularly blessed with a great melody and an irresistible arrangement. Of course, it wouldn't be a Mary J. Blige album without one gut-wrenching tearjerker; the killer heartstring ballad here is the beseeching "In The Morning," where she pulls out all the stops. —Nick Krewen



ANIMAL COLLECTIVE

Fall Be Kind

[Domino]

The members of Animal Collective started 2009 with the first album of the year worth your buck (*Merriwether Post Pavilion*) and ended it with an EP that proves once again they're one mighty trippy bunch. Like the rest of the Brooklyn band's best work, *Fall Be Kind* lets us fantasize about the music Brian Wilson might have made in the late 1960s and beyond if the drugs he favored had been even harder and Mike Love's prohibitively straight-laced influence on the Beach Boys had been softer. The sounds and the images they evoke speed from point to point without warning, taking you on "Graze" from a beautiful rise-and-shine morning at home to what could be either a funhouse or a madhouse, depending on your mood. *Fall* is inarguably all over the place—but sooner or later, it'll pass through an area where you want to be. —David Styburski



EDITORS

In This Light and On This Evening

[Fader]

After Editors' stellar U.S. debut in 2006 got overlooked and a self-conscious 2007 follow-up came and went here without much fanfare, the British post-punk band seems to have struck a comfortable balance on its third release. Editors will probably never shake the scorn of those who think the band is merely rehashing influences such as Joy Division and Echo & the Bunnymen, but this time it doesn't seem to care. *In This Light and On This Evening* is confident, with a sweeping grandiosity. Lyrical themes include questioning the existence of God on "Papillon" and likening British legislators to ravening carnivores on "Eat Red Meat = Blood Drool." Ringing guitars are swapped for layers of synthesizers that soar on "Bricks and Mortar" and buzz distantly on "Walk the Fleet Road." It's all evidence of a step forward by a band that's still deciding where it wants to go. —Eric R. Danton



PATTY GRIFFIN
Downtown Church
[ATO]

Patty Griffin is, by her own religious estimation, a lapsed Catholic of no certain faith. So she might seem like an odd duck to be doing a “gospel album”—except that hers is a voice you hope to hear sing not only the phone book but also the Bible, Koran and Bhagavad Gita, if possible. In any case, there’s nothing pat or predictable about the quietly stunning *Downtown Church*, which finds Griffin focusing on black gospel material but also tackling vintage spirituals ranging from Hank Williams’ haunting “House of Gold” at the beginning to the traditional “All Creatures of Our God and King” at the close. In between, she contributes a couple of stirring original ballads that admittedly would only count as gospel in the eye of the beholder. No matter her actual faith or lack thereof, when Griffin sings about the afterlife in “We Shall All Be Reunited,” you’ll believe that she believes. —Chris Willman



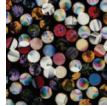
SPOON
Transference
[Merge Records]

Long known as a bastion of alternative country, Austin has also spawned some of America’s most adventurous pop bands. At the top of the heap stands Spoon, a quartet that strives to balance experimental art rock with jagged guitar pop in a way that’s palatable to mainstream listeners. *Transference* achieves that goal better than anything the group has released thus far. Packed with angular guitars, staccato rhythms and progressive funk grooves, the set often sounds like an imaginative hybrid of vintage Kinks and mid-period Sonic Youth. Notable moments include “Written in Reverse,” a bouncy, groove-oriented track fitted with barrelhouse piano; “Goodnight Laura,” a haunting piano ballad that brings to mind the solo work of John Cale; and the riff-driven “Is Love Forever?” Throughout, singer-guitarist Britt Daniel’s sandpapery rasp—think Ray Davies mixed with Box Tops-era Alex Chilton—tethers Spoon’s flighty excursions to something akin to Memphis soul. —Russell Hall



BLUE HIGHWAY
Some Day: The Fifteenth Anniversary Collection
[Rounder]

Formed in the mid-1990s, Blue Highway was a relative latecomer to progressive bluegrass. Although it missed its chance to help define the genre, the group’s consistency over the years has resulted in some of its finest recordings. This collection actually doesn’t pick up till midway through Blue Highway’s career, with its arrival at Rounder Records in 2001. By that time the quintet had already developed a sophisticated songwriting style, exemplified here by the likes of the down-but-not-out “Still Climbing Mountains” and the churning, self-explanatory “Wild Urge to Ramble.” Exemplary vocalists and instrumentalists all, Blue Highway’s members are equally at home with a spare ballad such as “The Seventh Angel” (with cameo guest vocal by Alison Krauss) and more raucous numbers like Mark Knopfler’s “Marbletown” or the opening “Cold and Lowdown Lonesome Blues,” one of two new tracks included on this expertly curated retrospective. —Jeff Tamarkin



FOUR TET
There Is Love in You
[Domino]

Even those who aren’t fans of electronic music would find it difficult not to be impressed by Kieran Hebden’s resume. A former member of the U.K. post-rock band Fridge, Hebden embarked on a solo career a decade ago under the moniker Four Tet, and since then has recorded four albums, opened for Radiohead and provided remixes for an eclectic group of artists that includes everyone from Bloc Party to Black Sabbath. While Hebden has progressed musically and earned the respect of his peers after his modest “folktronica” beginnings, his fifth full-length is a frustratingly drowsy affair. These nine inoffensive instrumental tracks, with their gentle atmospherics, repetitive beats and soothing synth bleeps, would be right at home in the background of a vitamin water commercial. Sadly, there’s been no wake-up call by the final track, “She Just Likes to Fight,” itself the musical equivalent of a shrug of the shoulders. —Jesse Thompson



WAS (NOT WAS)
Pick of the Litter 1980-2010
[Micro Werks]

Don Was (née Fagenson) and David Was (née Weiss) established themselves as critical darlings in the 1980s by marrying clever and often absurdist lyrics to danceable music—a combination that unexpectedly thrust them into the mainstream in 1988 with the irresistible hits “Walk the Dinosaur” and “Spy in the House of Love.” Don Was’ emergence as an in-demand producer helped to keep the duo silent from 1990 until last year’s *Boo!*, which was accompanied by a welcome return to live performance. Now *Pick of the Litter* offers a compact assessment of the duo’s recorded legacy in full, ranging from their debut single (1980’s “Wheel Me Out”) to the present. All of the essential Was (Not Was) tracks are here (except the lustrous 1988 single “Anything Can Happen”) as well as a sampling of the duo’s many fractured collaborations with off-the-wall guest vocalists like Mel Torme and Ozzy Osbourne. —CN



CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG
IRM
[Elektra]

There’s a lot of baggage attached to the Gainsbourg name: Serge Gainsbourg was the enfant terrible of French erotic whisper pop, and the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree when it comes to daughter Charlotte. Her previous 5:55 engaged the talents of Air and Pulp’s Jarvis Cocker to provide music and lyrics. This time it’s Beck who fills that role, bringing his whimsical sense of arrangement to the “Motorcycle Mama” soundalike “Dandelion” and the provocative “Le Chat du Café des Artistes.” *IRM* offers a kaleidoscopic series of moods that range from Beatles-esque psychedelia to sex-kitten frivolity. Gainsbourg is no vocal powerhouse, but her little-girl-lost helplessness adds a slice of vulnerability to songs like “Masters Hands,” the folk-inspired “Time of the Assassins” and the delicate “Vanities.” Beck seems to be the perfect partner to tap into Gainsbourg’s numerous idiosyncrasies, and as a result, the music is constantly interesting and unpredictable. —NK

DVD

It Might Get Loud

[Sony]



It Might Get Loud is presented as a summit meeting among Jimmy Page, the Edge and Jack White, the guitar greats converging on an L.A. soundstage to trade anecdotes and licks. Unless you actively despise music, you'll thrill to these three teaching one another "Stairway to Heaven," "Until the End of the World" or "Seven Nation Army." But one of the documentary's great pleasures is that it also spends solo time with each on his home turf, emphasizing their differences as much as their similarities. White is seen griping about how the growing ease of recording has helped to kill rock—not long after a segment showing how gearhead Edge has a different computerized setup for every song in the U2 repertoire. Director Davis Guggenheim has said that Page "just doesn't get U2," even though the Led Zep legend is too polite to say so in the film. Given their philosophical dissimilarities, maybe these three really should have been filmed in mano-a-mano combat, not a lovefest. Revelatory moments range from Page's galvanizing solo version of "Ramble On" to the Edge uncovering a box of cassettes that contains the jam in which "Where the Streets Have No Name" came into being. Best of all may be a scene where Page retreats to his vinyl library, plays his favorite childhood record, "Rumble," and just grins conspiratorially. These three aren't just the most brilliant musicians of their respective generations—they're fans first and foremost. —CW



ALLISON MOORER

Crows

[Rykodisc]

For an artist whose career has been built on darkly gorgeous hymns to melancholy, suddenly finding yourself happily married is an occupational hazard. Allison Moorer's 2006 album *Getting Somewhere* found her working with new husband Steve Earle, and some measure of inspiration was lost between the earnest sunniness of the songs and Earle's overbearing production stamp. Last year's covers album *Mockingbird* was a lovely diversion, but *Crows* is an all-out return to sweetly dolorous form. Producer R.S. Field frames with delicate care a loose song cycle tracing the journey from solipsism ("Don't expect a twirl, she's not that kind of girl/She reserves the right to be sullen," she jabs in "Just Another Fool") to hard-earned hope. Moorer has always been a master at finding beauty in pain, but *Crows* makes clear that she also has a knack for finding pain in beauty. —CN



HOT CHIP

One Life Stand

[Astralwerks]

Hot Chip's warm and fuzzy fourth album is not without its bangers, but even when this London electro-pop quartet is gunning for the clubs, it's thinking about what's waiting at home. Almost too sweet for their beats, the thumping, bumping likes of "I Feel Better" and "We Have Love" are about finding comfort in the arms of another. The album's 10 tracks rank among the mellowest and most melodic Hot Chip has recorded. In fact, often the use of synthesizers feels incidental: The subtle electronic touches on "Slush" and "Hand Me Down Your Love" add little more than color. On the tone-setting opener, "Thieves in the Night," the group rides a bubbly Erasure groove back to 1986. Proving suave and sincere need not be mutually exclusive, singer Alexis Taylor floats his falsetto high above the sparkle, delivering the disc's hopeful thesis: "Happiness is what we all want." —Kenneth Partridge



JULIAN LENNON AND JAMES SCOTT COOK

Lucy

[theRevolution]

We all recall blushing at the sight of our first innocent childhood crush. Such

thoughts are the essence of "Lucy," the title track from the new EP by Julian Lennon and James Scott Cook. Inspired in part by the same real-life girl who was famously "in the sky with diamonds" in a little ditty penned by Lennon's dad, the song is short on story and long on wordless choruses. Yet when the 46-year-old Lennon claims to still love his childhood playmate (who passed away last year), you don't doubt there's pure truth to it. As for the inevitable Beatles comparison, the acoustic version of the song included here might as well be from 1950s Liverpool. With Lennon and Cook strumming away, blending a slightly nasal voice with a higher, clearer one, it's tough not to imagine a teenage John and Paul crafting an early tune in the McCartneys' front room. —DS



CARRIE NEWCOMER

Before and After

[Rounded]

In the acknowledgements for her 11th solo studio album, folk singer/songwriter Carrie Newcomer thanks several friends for passing down stories that inspired various songs. It's just the first in a series of nods to folkloric tradition: These 13 original compositions also boast quietly uncomplicated arrangements and minimalist metaphors. This simplistic approach is occasionally twee, as when Newcomer borrows from nursery rhymes on "Hush" and "Coy Dogs." But elsewhere the plainness proves transcendent, as on the deceptively deep "I Meant to Do My Work Today," which begins as a lighthearted ode to procrastination and grows more introspective. Throughout, the most compelling moments are those in which Newcomer uses traditional techniques to convey more modern messages—for example, "If Not Now" employs the most basic of song structures in a contemporary call to action. *Before and After*, its title invoking both the past and the future, reminds us that the best music embraces both. —Katie Dodd



THE MAGNETIC FIELDS

Realism

[Nonesuch]

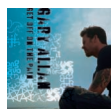
After swathing their songs in bristling feedback for 2008's *Distortion*, the Magnetic Fields take the opposite approach on their latest. Leader Stepin Merritt calls

Realism their “folk album”—but this is variety-show folk with a knowing, occasionally ironic undertone. The instrumentation is mostly acoustic, with guitar, bouzouki, cello, horns and hand percussion. It’s fairly straightforward on the opening “You Must Be Out of Your Mind,” sighing cello intertwining with the catchy melody while Merritt’s trademark wordplay introduces a biting sentiment. Things get folkier on “We Are Having a Hootenanny Now,” with group vocals that evoke an earnest early-’60s folk-revival song. Pianist Claudia Gonson sings over chiming accompaniment on “The Doll’s Tea Party,” Shirley Simms returns with a plaintive lead on the mournful “Always Already Gone,” and Merritt lends a deceptively joyous air to “Everything Is One Big Christmas Tree,” which features a full-throated German chorus. —ED



NEIL SEDAKA
The Music of My Life
[Razor & Tie]

While the days have long passed when Neil Sedaka’s brand of songwriting dominated the airwaves, the 70-year-old veteran holds true to the classic-sounding piano pop that made him a star in the early 1960s and a comeback kid in the mid-’70s. *The Music of My Life* proves that Sedaka has lost none of his touch. Rife with energetic melodies, elegant arrangements and an old-school showman’s flair, the songs have the air of familiarity often associated with standards. High points include “A Fool in Love,” which sports a piano figure similar to Carole King’s “I Feel the Earth Move” (harking back to Sedaka’s Brill Building days) and “Right or Wrong,” a doo-wop song that manages to sound contemporary rather than kitschy. Best of all, however, is the title track: A lightly orchestrated torch song directed toward music itself, it’s a fitting ode to a life richly lived. —RH



GARY ALLAN
Get Off on the Pain
[MCA Nashville]

Leave it to Gary Allan to make ex sex sound romantic: “Kiss Me When I’m Down,” a standout track from his latest album, cleverly disguises a booty call with a sweeping melody and rich steel-and-strings orchestration. That kind of sly juxtaposition dominates *Get Off on the Pain*, Allan’s eighth studio album. He and coproducers

Greg Droman and Mark Wright layer robust guitars, steel, piano, Wurlitzer, B3 and strings atop the singer’s trademark Bakersfield barroom style without losing the homegrown feel. Allan’s voice is a textured drawl that evokes Johnny Cash’s world-weary tone and adds dimension to the album’s more spare arrangements. It’s easy for someone of Allan’s talent to get lost among modern country music’s cowboy-hatted clones—but just as his voice cuts cleanly through the arrangements here, he has always managed to make himself heard above the din. *Pain* suggests he will for quite a while longer. —KD



SUGAR BLUE
Threshold
[Beeble]

Known mostly as the musician who contributed the wailing harmonica riff on the Rolling Stones’ “Miss You,” Sugar Blue has maintained a vibrant career path ever since, offering consistent homage to such esteemed predecessors as Big Walter Horton, Carey Bell, James Cotton and Junior Wells. While *Threshold* continues to echo that bluesy legacy, it also finds him diversifying his palette with blues, R&B and funk. Blue’s harp doesn’t necessarily dominate the proceedings, which isn’t to say he doesn’t make his presence felt. His playing dazzles with rapid-fire dexterity on the furious cover of Junior Wells’ “Messin’ With the Kid,” the emotional sweep of “Cotton Tree” and the controlled frenzy that marks “Noel News.” A bonus interview tacked on at the end proves an unnecessary addendum to an album that otherwise lets the music do the talking. —Lee Zimmerman



THE WATSON TWINS
Talking to You, Talking to Me
[Vanguard]

The Watson Twins came to the public’s attention singing with Jenny Lewis, laying down harmonies that helped make 2006’s *Rabbit Fur Coat* one of the finest alt-country albums of the last decade. But on their second album, the Watsons wisely avoid the Americana sounds that characterized that first impression. They aim instead for the center of a rock-folk-jazz Venn diagram, an overlap beloved by hip housewives and NPR listeners. Within those constraints, *Talking to You, Talking to Me* manages some

BOX SET

Dave Matthews Band

Europe 2009

[Bama Rags/RCA]



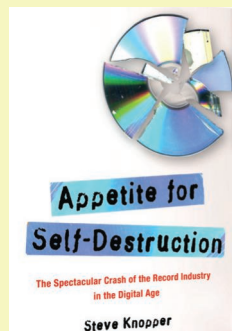
“You are my obsession!” Dave Matthews sings during “Seven”—no doubt taking the worshipful words right out of his one-track-minded audience’s mouths. It will indeed take a certain kind of obsessive to spring for *Europe 2009*, a not-inexpensive four-disc set that uses one DVD to present a nearly three-hour London show from last summer, then spreads an even longer Italian gig across three CDs. It’s a DMB devotee’s dream and a jam-band hater’s night terror. Or is it? This might actually be the set you’d put on—in small doses—to convince unbelievers. The group was touring behind (and playing nearly every track off) their best album to date, *Big Whiskey and the GrooGrux King*, a collection of extremely accessible, electric guitar-oriented, horn section-driven songs whose relative succinctness is maintained in these punchy arrangements. The economy of those pop-funk tunes is balanced out here, of course, by jams as un-succinct as a 21-minute expansion of oldie “#41.” This might be considered heresy by acolytes of the core combo, but it’s the supplementary members—guitar electrician Tim Reynolds, trumpeter Rashawn Ross, and the late LeRoi Moore’s replacement on sax, Jeff Coffin—who push these shows into overdrive, especially at the all-but-orgasmic climax of “So Damn Lucky.” It doesn’t hurt that Matthews has progressed as a songwriter since trademarking his deceptively happy-go-lucky sound of the mid-’90s, adding more tension, sensuality and genuine celebration to the recent material emphasized in these epic sets. —CW

BOOK

Appetite for Self-Destruction

By Steve Knopper

[Soft Skull Press]



From 8-tracks to Payola, the list of the record industry's historic mistakes ranges from awful to amusing—but one wrongheaded misstep trumps them all. *Appetite for Self-Destruction*, written by *Rolling Stone* contributor Steve Knopper, chronicles in painstaking detail the series of short-sighted decisions labels made in response to the dawn of digital music. The book's first half is rightly devoted to background, as Knopper explains how the CD, with its superior sound quality and higher price point, turned the record industry from a comfortably profitable endeavor to a millionaire-maker whose companies were snapped up by mega-corporations. That context proves crucial to the subsequent story of how online music-swapping sites turned the tables, suggesting the motivation behind labels' full-scale rejection of all things internet was a mix of personal greed and pressure from corporate parents. An absorbing read thanks to an exhaustive scope of interviews with major players, Knopper's account offers refreshingly balanced analysis. He decries the argument that piracy was justified, instead focusing on the opportunities lost when the industry chose to punish—rather than collaborate with—the architects of a new music commerce model. Still, as Knopper sees it, too many record execs seemed to feel entitled to the continuation of an obscene profit model despite its growing unsustainability. Did they deserve what they got? He stops short of saying so, but the implication is that the fans and artists who had been held hostage to that archaic system unquestionably did. —KD

variety. "Harpeth River" is a restrained take on vintage soul, while the skittering "Modern Man" and "Brave One" skew surprisingly indie-rock. The sisters are keen on trading lead vocals, but they fare better when working in tandem. Each is a fine singer in her own right, but it's those harmonies—cool, blue and a little mysterious—that most justify their jump from sidewomen to headliners. —KP



DAVID BOWIE

A Reality Tour

[ISO/Sony Legacy]

David Bowie hasn't released a new album in seven years, by far the longest break from recording of his career. Finally, in 2010, we get ... a live album recorded in 2003 and already released on DVD in 2004? Its release on CD at this point may be puzzling, but the actual content of *A Reality Tour* nonetheless demonstrates that Bowie's most recent major tour found him in excellent form. The performer who once kept a cool conceptual distance from his audience is heard here as a rafter-rocking crowd-pleaser, joking easily with fans and leading robust singalongs on anthems like "Life on Mars" and "All the Young Dudes." Just as pleasantly surprising is the way that late-period songs like "New Killer Star" and "Bring Me the Disco King" stand up among the classics, suggesting the critical praise for albums like *A Reality* and *Heathen* was not misplaced. —CN



AHMAD JAMAL

A Quiet Time

[Dreyfus Jazz]

One of the most criminally overlooked masters in jazz is pianist Ahmad Jamal, who scored a best-selling album in 1958 (*But Not for Me: Ahmad Jamal At the Pershing*) and has weathered every seismic shift in the music since without giving up his ideals or succumbing to trends. Longevity is only meaningful if an artist still has the goods, though, and Jamal certainly does. Coming from an 80-year-old who could easily get by with coasting, *A Quiet Time* is a remarkably multitextured work with a wide array of moods. Jamal places enough trust in longtime bassist James Cammack, percussionist Manolo Badrena and drummer Kenny Washington to take frequent dares, tossing in an off-kilter run before sneaking back to the melody just

as unexpectedly. His touch is gentle but quick, his voicings comfortable yet never predictable. Miles Davis once called Jamal his favorite pianist—and *A Quiet Time* demonstrates why. —JT

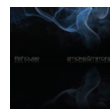


BLUE RODEO

The Things We Left Behind

[TeleSoul Records]

In an age of dwindling attention spans, not many acts would consider issuing a double CD. Blue Rodeo has done exactly that on the group's 12th studio release, and it's a move that only a band that has such full confidence in its abilities could (or should) try to pull off. The size of *The Things We Left Behind* is justified because it's chock-full of sweet harmonies, solid melodies and deft lyrical touches. The vocal and songwriting spotlight falls as usual on guitarists Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor, who show off their close Everly-type harmony on the tuneful "Don't Let the Darkness in Your Head" and the CSN-style "Million Miles." What may be surprising to longtime Blue Rodeo fans are the album's bright splashes of instrumental color. Lush orchestral touches on "One Light Left in Heaven" and the stately "Gossip" add a sophisticated sheen to the group's trademark roots-rock style. —Bob Cannon



LIFEHOUSE

Smoke & Mirrors

[Geffen]

Few bands have worked a winning formula as rigorously as Lifehouse. Roaring out of the box a decade ago with the smash "Hanging By a Moment," the L.A.-based group hit upon a radio-friendlier version of the grunge aesthetic. Four albums later, Lifehouse continues to work that approach for all it's worth. "Halfway Gone," "Had Enough" and "All In" sport anthemic choruses, wall-of-sound guitars and infectious melodies, and are given a brittle edge by frontman Jason Wade's serrated vocals. Tracks like "Falling In" and "By Your Side," on the other hand, come off as by-the-numbers ballads written with an eye toward rock arenas. The group does tinker with the mold on occasion: The trip-hop-flavored "It Is What It Is" ventures into Rob Thomas territory, while the Tom Petty-like title track emits a heartland, Americana vibe. Still, *Smoke & Mirrors* too often sounds like a band determined to play it safe. —RH



Jake Rahner, Ryan Johnston, Johnny Clay, Pierre Kaiser

THE DIMES

Searching through history to discover true tales of the common man



MOST YOUNG ACTS WOULD HAVE little interest in writing songs about failed abolitionists, the great Boston fire of 1872, a 17th-century religious martyr or American Red Cross founder Clara Barton's efforts to save soldiers on the battlefields of the Civil War. Yet that's precisely the tack taken by Portland, Ore., band The Dimes, whose two albums to date—2007's *The Silent Generation* and their current opus, *The King Can Drink the Harbour Dry*—mine such obscure historical incidents with pop precision and a sublime instrumental approach.

"I've always loved history," explains singer, guitarist and principal songwriter Johnny Clay, "specifically the role played by the common man. In school they teach you about the big picture, but it's just words on a page. Once you get beyond the CliffsNotes and learn about the personalities, you realize they were real people. They had the same aspirations, the same fears. So I thought it would be interesting to detail their perspective."

Former college rocker Clay first moved to Portland from Austin, Texas, to pursue

his girlfriend (now his wife), Christi. There he hooked up with guitarist Pierre Kaiser, another former college chum. Kaiser introduced Clay to his roommate, drummer Jake Rahner, who in turn brought in bass player Ryan Johnston (with whom he played in a local outfit called the Silent Majority). After getting to know one another, the five musicians realized they shared a common musical sensibility and work ethic. "I grew up in the Austin scene, where you're not a band until you actually play shows," Clay says. "Nowadays all it takes to be a band is having a MySpace page."

Adopting the name The Dimes on a friend's suggestion, the band recorded three initial EPs prior to embarking on their first full-length outing. "We were trying to find our sound," Clay recalls. "It's sort of like trying on shoes that you have to walk in for a while. You try it out and you go, 'Whoa, that's not us.'"

Clay initially nurtured the idea of securing a major label deal to broaden the group's career possibilities. "I was in my 'starry-eyed dreamer' phase of life," he chuckles. "I told myself, 'I'm going to get a

record deal! But lo and behold, the music industry fell apart. I was telling our manager the other day that there's no way this record would have gotten made if we were with a major. I can just imagine telling a record label I've decided to make an album about the history of Boston."

Indeed, it is hard to visualize an album like *The King Can Drink the Harbour Dry*—with its arcane scholarly narratives, immaculately crafted harmonies and subtle yet supple arrangements—fitting in with the commercial concerns of today's music industry. Happily, the band has been supportive of Clay's unorthodox approach.

"I think that each of the guys realized that this record is my baby," he reflects. "With *The Silent Generation*, we were still growing as arrangers and there were many times we'd say, 'Well, let's just do this or that!' But for this album, the arrangements are definitely more confident and a lot riskier. We wanted to make this a total record experience, a sound that played as a whole and not just as individual iTunes downloads."

— Lee Zimmerman

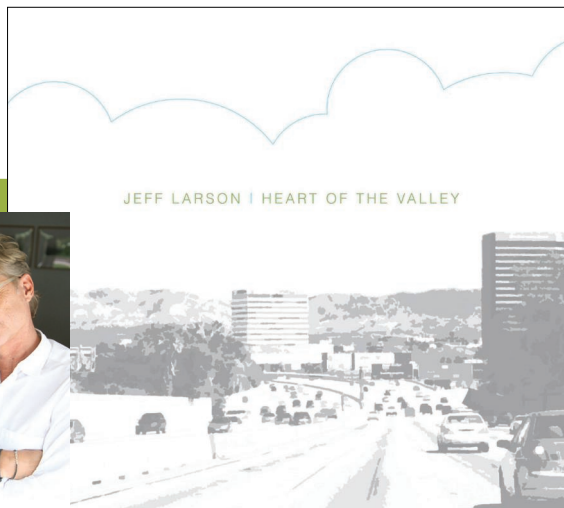
JEFF LARSON

HEART OF THE VALLEY

jefflarson-music.com



Jeff Larson and Gerry Beckley



Over the past decade or so, Jeff Larson's consistent string of smart, hooky and alluringly accessible albums have borne clear references to the Southern California sound of the mid-to-late '70s. So it seems fitting that for the lovely and evocative *Heart of the Valley* he has collaborated with America's Gerry Beckley and welcomed appearances from soft-rock stalwarts including America's other half, Dewey Bunnell, Poco pedal steel player Rusty Young and Brian Wilson associate Jeff Foskett. The America signature is immediate and unavoidable, given that Beckley penned the majority of the songs, produced the sessions and contributes the lion's share of the instrumental duties—guitar, keyboards, bass, accordion, percussion and programming

among them. Consequently, the album basks in a hazy supple sheen that helps ballads like the title track, "Airport Calling," "Southern Girl" and "Five Mile Road" to invite an instant embrace. Credit Larson's radiant vocals with accentuating the appeal, giving this set potential placement on adult-oriented soft rock radio—or for that matter, any arena where beautiful balladry, well-crafted compositions and studio savvy still have an opportunity to shine.



LEE ALEXANDER & CO.

Mayhaw Vaudeville

alexandersongs.com

Lee Alexander's penchant for backwoods melodies and forlorn sensibilities fuses on *Mayhaw Vaudeville* with his sepia-tinted delivery. Including songs boasting a warbling croon sung through a tinny megaphone, Alexander mines his Vaudeville muse through a preponderance of weary, bluesy ballads. That said, a few jaunty excursions ("Okemah Moon," the traditional folk tune "Maggie Mae") temper the album's more laconic ruminations ("Miles Between," "Mayhaw Wine"). Adding to the ambiance is the self-played homespun instrumentation, including pedal steel, jaw harp, tin whistle and accordion. Winsome and romantic, Alexander's ragtime band rolls on.



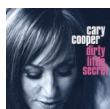
ERIC BRACE & LAST TRAIN HOME

Six Songs

redbeetrecords.com

Reconvening his longtime country combo after an extended break, Brace tackles a broad set of standards, varying the styles for a dazzlingly diverse EP. Here, Brace and company provide a pensive sway with "Always Raining on My Street" and then shift into a party mode on "Soul Parking." While it's somewhat surprising to hear

Brace croon "What Now My Love"—especially in French—or give a revved-up treatment to "Autumn Leaves" (also sung partially *en francais*), the arrangements are tight and assured, with particular emphasis on the swinging horn charts and a sweep of pedal steel. It's all part of a novel collection that's among Brace's best yet.



CARY COOPER

Dirty Little Secret

carycooper.com

With her muted delivery and acoustic accompaniment, Cary Cooper projects the fragile, self-effacing image of a forlorn folkie dwelling among dark shadows. But there's a ruminative beauty that radiates through *Dirty Little Secret* songs like "Edge of the World," "Wondering" and the title track. Cooper occasionally injects spunk and spark into her quiet laments, as evidenced by the unexpected appearance of hip-hop cadences in the otherwise characteristically gentle "Thinking About It" and the exuberance found in "Seventh Grade." The high-profile musical support she attracts here from the likes of Mary Gauthier, Dave Crossland and Emory Joseph (who all contribute backing vocals) suggests that Cooper likely won't stay a secret—dirty, little or otherwise—for much longer.



JASON CRIGLER

The Music of Jason Crigler

jasoncriglermusic.com

On Aug. 4, 2004, guitarist Jason Crigler suffered a brain hemorrhage onstage. Miraculously, he not only recovered but went on to complete his masterpiece, assisted by friends including Marshall Crenshaw, Teddy Thompson and Erin McKeown. The buoyantly infectious vibe of *The Music of Jason Crigler* belies any adversity. The radiant "See the Sun" and the seductive "When the Morning Comes" stand out, but other treasures await via the effusive pop of "The Game," the sultry enticement of "The Bush and the Tree Song," the wistful reflection of "Through Tomorrow" and the quiet resolve of the autobiographical "The Books on the Shelf."



THE DOUGHBOYS

Act Your Rage

thedoughboysnj.com

Who said there's no going home again? Certainly not The Doughboys, who reconvened in 2007 to make their debut album 32 years after their initial schoolboy incarnation. Unsurprisingly, the band treads the same '60s blues-rock terrain first explored by the Rolling Stones, the

Yardbirds, Them and others. Singer Myke Scavone provides a credible Jagger-esque swagger, though he shares the spotlight with drummer Richard X. Heyman, an exemplary pop practitioner in his own right. Covers of the Kinks' "It's Alright" and the Moody Blues' "Tuesday Afternoon" are a seamless fit, further bolstering a set already imbued with Anglophile authenticity.



**THE FIRE MARSHALS
OF BETHLEHEM**
The World From the Back Seat
thefmob.com

Their handle aside, the Fire Marshals of Bethlehem are neither incendiary nor biblical, instead aiming for a communal sound that rings with the flawless congeniality of the Cowsills or '70s-prime Fleetwood Mac. That blend of sweet sentiments, driven by Julie Lowery's cheery, chirpy vocals, Jenny Smith's violin and the group's uniformity of purpose, helps to drive a series of effusive, effervescent performances that make a joyful first impression. This jubilant sophomore offering's bold delivery and tightly knit melodies bode well for mass appeal potential.



JAMIE & STEVE
English Afterthought
myspace.com/spongetones

For over 30 years, the Spongetones have been among indie rock's best-kept secrets. The North Carolina combo has labored relentlessly, turning out Anglo-infused power pop and retro rock brimming with shimmering hooks, radiant harmonies and irresistible melodies. Though stripped down to its pair of principals, Jamie Hoover and Steve Stoeckel (with other Spongetones lending support), *English Afterthought* sounds for all intents and purposes like a band outing. There's no denying its sparkle, from ebullient opener "Emily's Ghost" to the enticing "Color Me Over Again."



THE KAISER CARTEL
Rock Island
myspace.com/kaisercartel

With Courtney Kaiser the prominent voice and partner Benjamin Cartel supplying graceful accompaniment and hushed harmonies, duo The Kaiser Cartel creates an ethereal glow that's all bittersweet sentiment and emo expression. This new five-song EP's opening track, "Carroll Street Station," makes for a grabby intro, but otherwise the instrumentation is kept rather sparse—a tumble of acoustic guitars and unobtrusive percussion. There's a

haunting quality that circles about this set, imparting it with a beguiling aura that's all but irresistible.



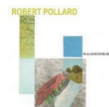
PETER LACEY
Behind the Scenes
pinkhedgehog.com

British journeyman and veritable one-man symphony Peter Lacey made his mark with immaculate chamber pop, but he's lately expanded his parameters with two new albums. *South Downs Way*, a collaboration with Stephen J. Kalinich, found him exploring pastoral reflection and rugged folk narratives. Now *Behind the Scenes* spotlights charmingly whimsical designs in ways regal and retro, using elaborate orchestral flourishes to illuminate certain songs ("Shadow Play" and "Funfair for the Common Man") and reflective McCartney-esque balladry to distinguish the rest.



ELLIS PAUL
The Day After Everything Changed
ellispaul.com

After spending the majority of his recording career on Rounder Records, Ellis Paul turned to fans for the financing of his latest project—and he has rewarded their investment with his most accomplished album yet. Assisted by an adept backing band, he shifts effortlessly from breathless ballads ("Once Upon a Summertime," "Dragonfly") to steadfast rockers ("Walking After Midnight") and rousing anthemic exhortations ("Annalee" and the title track), carrying off each with equal aplomb. This triumphant *Day's* a celebration.



ROBERT POLLARD
We All Got Out of the Army
robertpollard.net

For his latest, former Guided By Voices leader Robert Pollard sets aside aliases such as Circus Devils, Airport 5 and Go Back Snowball to operate under his own moniker. That said, the man's so prolific that the multiple monikers are a necessity if anyone wants to keep some sort of order. The Ohio native's latest finds him busy as ever, cranking out 17 tracks of angular, edgy pop whose diversity allows for everything from Bowie-esque techno rock ("On Top of the Vertigo") to catchy choruses ("Wild Girl") and staccato rhythms (the title track). "We All Got Out of the Army" is a fine example of Pollard simply being himself even as he pursues the dizzying diversity that has long been his trademark.



STONEHONEY
Songs From a Hillside Living Room
stonehoney.com

Stonehoney draws from country-rock influences like Poco, The Flying Burrito Brothers and the Eagles. Armed with blazing guitars, an appropriate dapple of pedal steel and sweeping harmonies, the group turns such songs as "Two Years Down," "Cry Baby Cry" and "Melinda" into jubilant anthems that grab notice on first encounter. With each member of the quintet contributing to the song cache and bolstering the instrumental arsenal, Stonehoney has potential to garner populist appeal. Here's hoping they succeed.



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Celebrating the Music of Lowen & Navarro: Keep the Light Alive
aixrecords.com

Lowen & Navarro might have been heir apparent to Simon & Garfunkel, Loggins & Messina or The Everly Brothers had the duo ever found its way to the music industry mainstream. Sadly, it took Eric Lowen's battle with ALS to earn this well-deserved tribute, featuring big-name acts like Jackson Browne, the Bangles and Keb' Mo' among others. Few selections will be familiar to the masses ("We Belong," which Pat Benatar made a hit, is an exception), but all the songs here radiate with gorgeous melodies.



THE VOYCES
Let Me Die in Southern California
thevoyses.net

The psychedelic spelling doesn't detract from the meaning behind the band's moniker, specifically the gentle cooing harmonies that grace these evocative offerings. Aply, *Let Me Die in Southern California* finds the Voyces parceling out breezy soft rock and a quiet contemplation ideally suited to Pacific coast environs. Bucolic sentiments, graceful melodies and a gentle lilt prevail throughout.

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“Alive”

Pearl Jam
Ten (1991)

Stone Gossard, Jeff Ament, Eddie Vedder, Mike McCready, Dave Krusen

ON A SUMMER DAY IN SAN DIEGO IN 1991, EDDIE Vedder paddled his surfboard out toward the horizon of the Pacific Ocean and let his mind wander. Through a mutual friend, he had just received a three-track instrumental demo from a band looking for a lead singer and lyricist. As he rode the California waves, he began imagining lyrics for the three songs—and a tragic melodrama that would bind them together as a coherent story.

The tale Vedder invented begins like this: A young man’s mother informs him that the man he believes to be his father is in fact his stepfather, and that his real father is dead. This much, at least, is drawn from Vedder’s own autobiography. At 17, he learned that the man he thought to be his father, Peter Mueller, was not—and that his true father, Ed Severson, had died from multiple sclerosis. (Vedder is his mother’s maiden name.)

As the story continues, the mother’s unrelenting grief over her former husband’s death leads her to pursue an incestuous relationship with her son, who looks eerily similar to his late father. “The son grows up to be the father, the person that she lost,” Vedder explained in 1993. “His father’s dead, and now this confusion, his mother, his love, how does he love her, how does she love him?”

Thankfully, this part of the story is fictional ... mostly. “There was no incest in my situation,” he said in 1991. “But people who knew my dad—women—would come over and stare at me when I was a teenager like you wouldn’t believe. They were looking at me because I have his face and he’d been dead for at least 10 years. So they can’t take their eyes off me. And I probably caught my mom—you know, she’d just stare at me.”

To punctuate the tale, Vedder wrote a refrain: “Hey,

I’m still alive.” “All he knows is ‘I’m still alive’—those three words, that’s totally out of burden,” he said. “I’m the lover that’s still alive.” Thus the instrumental that guitarist Stone Gossard had dubbed “Dollar Short” was renamed “Alive.”

Vedder’s tale only grew darker over the next two songs. In “Once,” the son’s confusion and anger leads him to become a serial killer. He is captured, and in “Footsteps” he laments his fate while awaiting execution. Once the lyrics were completed, Vedder dubbed himself singing over the instrumentals and hastily mailed them to Seattle. “The music just felt really open to me,” Vedder recalled in 1991. “Then I thought, ‘Wow, the music is really good; maybe I should have paid more attention. Maybe I should have written it down. Maybe I should have really listened to it before I sent it off!’”

He needn’t have worried: Vedder was immediately invited to Seattle to audition for the band that would become known as Pearl Jam. “Alive” was the first song the group attempted during their first rehearsal together, it was on the set list for their debut performance that October, and in 1991 it would become the first single from their debut album, *Ten*.

Pearl Jam has performed “Alive” in concert (according to the band’s own tabulations) 567 times over nearly two decades. Audiences have taken up the song’s incongruously anthemic chorus as a celebration of resiliency, and increasingly as an affirmation of the enduring bond between band and fans. It’s an interpretation that Vedder never discouraged, and eventually came to actively embrace. “They lifted the curse,” he said in 2006. “The audience changed the meaning for me.”

—Chris Neal

WRITTEN BY STONE GOSSARD AND EDDIE VEDDER

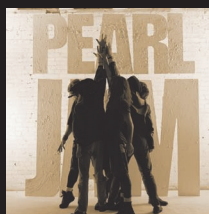
RECORDED AT LONDON BRIDGE STUDIO, SEATTLE, WASH., SPRING 1991

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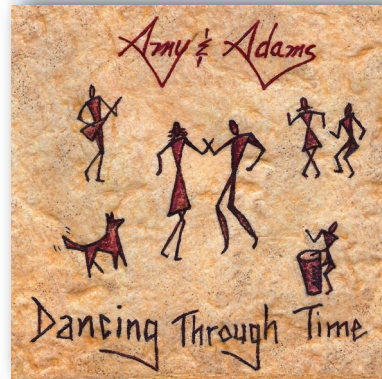
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PHOTOGRAPHER HENRY DILTZ AND THE MEMBERS of Crosby, Stills & Nash were driving around West Los Angeles looking for an interesting shoot locale when Graham Nash remembered recently noticing a funky old building on Palm Avenue. After finding the location—and no one around to ask for permission—the trio sat on a couch on the porch, singing, talking and laughing as Diltz snapped away. Two days later the group decided that a straight-faced shot taken on the couch would make a great cover for their upcoming first album. By then they had settled on the group name Crosby, Stills & Nash—a slight problem, as the left-to-right seating order in the photo was Nash, Stills and Crosby. Everyone involved returned to the location the next day for a reshoot in the correct order, only to find the building had been torn down. The original shot nonetheless proved a perfect accompaniment for the earthy acoustic sound of 1969's *Crosby, Stills & Nash*.

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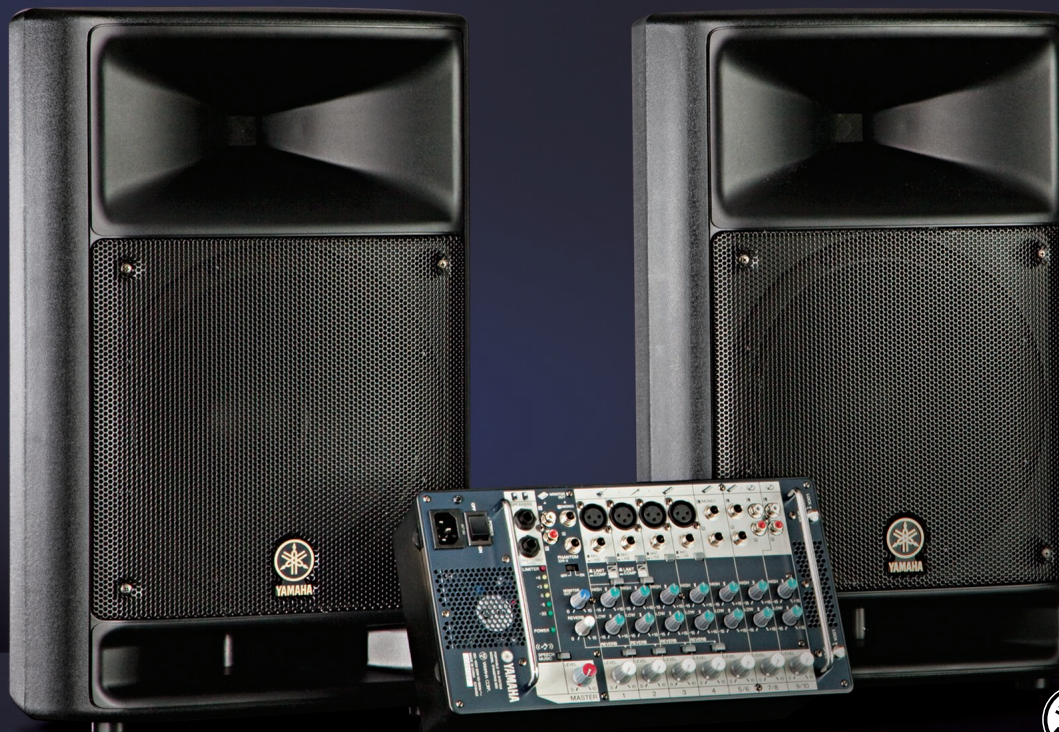
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