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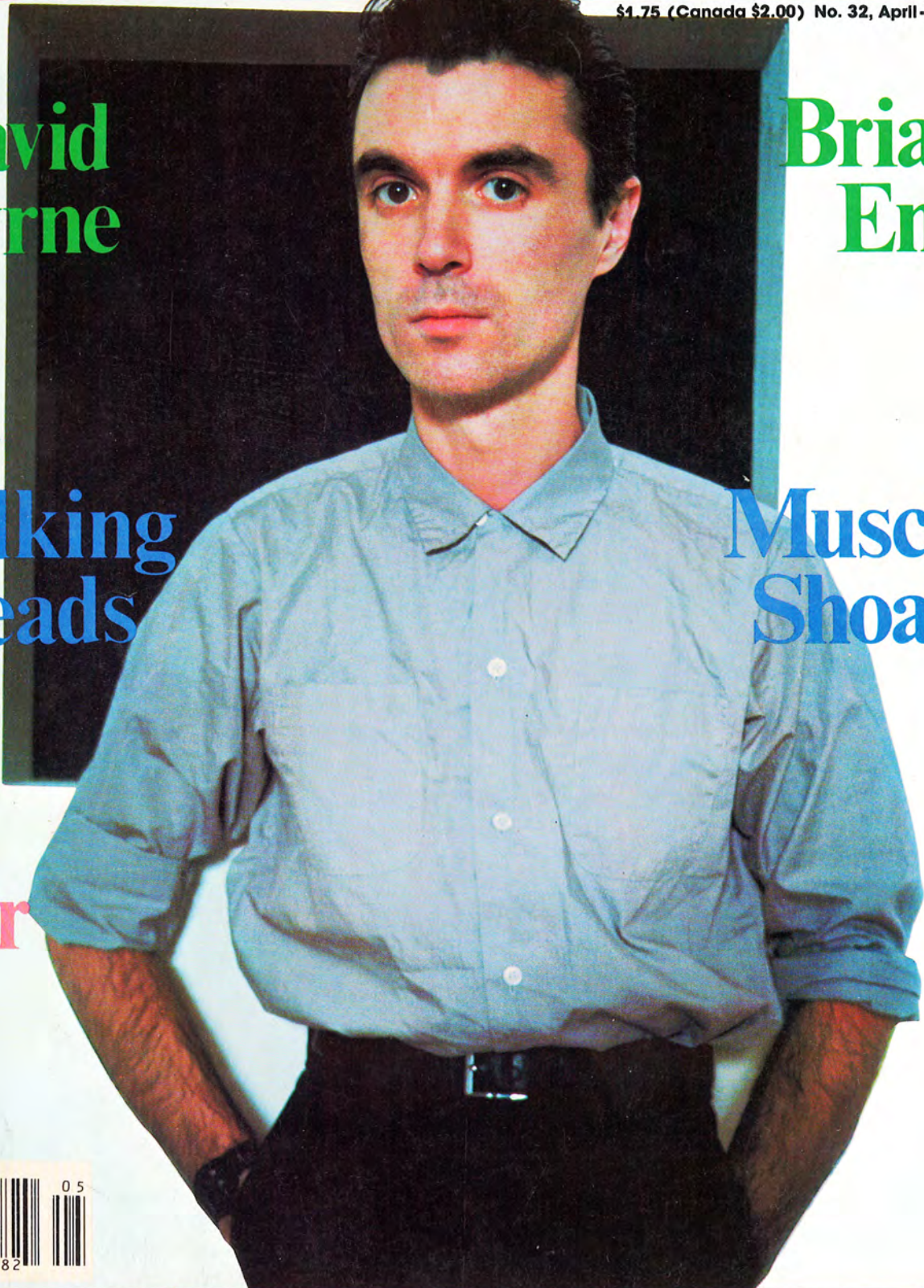


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Air



JOHN SCOFIELD'S BRILLIANT CAREER

An uplifting sage of clenched teeth, rush hour jams, "snowflake", and the Studio Stud.

By David Breskin

John Scofield is smoking. Huffing, puffing, you know the rest. Susan Scofield, wife, sits at a table with a cassette recorder. She's recording. Sometimes, when John raises his voice too loudly, she walks out on him. Tonight, she perseveres. John is playing loudly, apparently not too. Relaxed and jolly, John Abercrombie, friend, guitarist, smiles beatifically from a couch in the back of New York's Jazz Forum, where tonight the jazz is felicitous.

Scofield leads his trio of bassist Steve Swallow and drummer Adam Nussbaum through the six-pack of songs that comprises his translucent new record, *Bar Talk*, which is not only his finest (and a three-way pun at that), but the finest guitar trio session since Metheny's *Bright Size Life* in '76. Rocking back and forth on firmly planted duck feet, cigarette dangling a la Elvin, amp exhaling long breaths of silvery metallic precision, Scofield reaches to straddle the point where hard swing, blues feel, rock energy, and post-bop improvisational elegance come together like so many states in the Southwest: John Scofield's Four Corner's Monument.

His voluminous lines — which a few years back struck me as little more than zazy rollercoasters of unrelieved emotion — tonight are well-paced, orderly, intricate. Mobius strips of sound, they still swoosh and swag like they always did, but now they're effectively scissored by open spaces and sutured by block chords. What's more, Scofield's *sound* isn't monolithic in the manner of so many electric guitarists: he often shifts from a light, sweet, pastoral voice to a dark, nasty, grimy one within a single thematic passage or solo. "Those are the two faces of the music I know, the two faces of what I am," he explains. "The beautiful European harmony and then the blues feeling. My heart is one with B.B. King and Otis Rush, but I know about all the other notes too."

All the other notes, indeed. But just because he knows about them, doesn't mean he feels compelled to play them all the time. In this regard, Scofield's different from the heroic fusioners, whose last hope, Al DiMeola, undermines ungodly talent with penny artistry on a nightly basis. Scofield's style — despite his voracious lines — is as much one of *feeling* as of aggressive technique. He fits in the gaping hole between the Charlie



John Scofield: "Jazz is a risk, you should always risk something."

Christian-through-Jim Hall players and the virtuosic McLaughlin tradition — a niche shared by John Abercrombie and Pat Metheny. Abercrombie fills the space with distanced romanticism, Metheny with open-country enthusiasm; Scofield attacks it, borrowing from both edges, with blue-bop fervor.

Pop Metaphor Time In The Big City

Cold as an undertaker's smile, full of night and flu and the wail of obscurity, a belligerent wind kicks off the Hudson, towards which our subject advances with iced eyes and bent back. The interviewer, who accompanies him, stopped extracting pertinent data for music magazine column three-beers-at-the-corner-bar ago. They're headed for Westbeth, an artists' co-op (formerly a Ma Bell lab) on the fringe of the condemned highways, decaying piers, and gay life that is west Greenwich Village. Clenched 'tween the teeth of the frostbite westerly, Scofield shudders, "You feel this? Shhhheeeeeeetttt! This is my life, man, this is my god damn life." Pertinent data.

Voice Over: The Medium Is

"The act of improvising is my whole life, playing what I feel every second. The legacy left us, starting in this century, shaped by people like Louis Armstrong, has nothing to do with color. What came down in this country changed *all* our lives. Me, I'm a true fusion person: I grew up with the King-

ston Trio and Muddy Waters which led me to Robert Johnson which led me to Yardbird to Coltrane to Miles which led me to Stockhausen which led me to Bartok to Bach to Beethoven. There are no ethnic borders: Coltrane came through pure thought, and so did Bach. Pure art, pure sound; twelve notes and what's in between. That's all that matters. Makes no difference if you're from Vienna or the Deep South or Tokyo or Wilton, Connecticut.

Flashback Montage: Co-opting The Old Science Teacher 101

Wilton, Connecticut, middle-class suburbia. Mother rents guitar for John, age 11. John reads in some music rag that the Beatles came from Chuck Berry and Little Richard. (Imagine that?) Begins listening to blues gee-tar, B.B. to Grant Green and the groove players. Pre-pubescent John gigs in integrated bands, integrated clubs in Conn. blue-collar towns. A sentimental education. Finds a bassist — good God! — with James Brown records. Forms The Skylarks. Adam Nussbaum, age 8, hangs around their rehearsals; precocious lil' feller. John does poorly in high school, despite allowing both art and science teachers to play in band. Homework: trekking to NYC for the Mothers, Paul Butterfield, Muddy Waters, Gary Burton, Coryell, Hendrix.

Stymied by first page of Plato's *Dia-*
continued on next pg.



logues in entrance test for St. John's college. Rejected. U.Conn. — also rejected. Where to? To Boston, Guitar Heaven. Enrolls at Berklee through '73. Learns to read and write. Takes from Mic Goodrick, the guy in Bahstin at the time. Teaches John Jim Hallesque left-hand-hammer-strings/right-hand-just-glance-with-pick technique. Ah!! Gary Burton waits for rush hour to end before driving home, jams with eager boys at John's pad. Daily rush hour, daily jams. 1974! Goodrick can't make Gerry Mulligan date at Jazz Workshop, sends in young John. Leads to Mulligan/Baker Carnegie Hall Reunion and record; "My roommate drove me down to the gig with my little amp and I just kinda slid into Carnegie Hall. I was scared, scared totally shitless and it's on the record; I get lost, stone lost on 'Bernie's Tune'."

Even better, a gig with Airto. Opens for Cheech and Chong somewhere in Jersey. "Many, many things thrown at us, a real treat." That's entertainment. Airto splits, will send for band. Uh-huh, sure. Never does. "That was my first big break." Gigs with drummer Horacee Arnold. Billy Cobham hears and likes, snags Sco when Abercrombie deserts for DeJohnette. Two years with Billy. Labelled, ugh, a "fusion" player. Becomes guitar hero, jazz version, in Europe. Called "Snowflake" by members of all-ebony Cobham-Duke band. Learns Latin — "straight up and down eighth notes" — from Billy. Mixes with Elvin poly-swing, Tony drive, Jack rabbit chop. Plays with 'em all.

Voice Over: 0 To 60 MPH In 8.2

"Why did fusion die such an early death, at least creatively? Because guys started making Big Money and then everybody wanted to make a big record on a backbeat, or a funky record, and finally now they could do it. The whole thing got formularized to the max: people forgot they were playing music. Everybody played to what that audience wanted, and that audience responds to speed and technique. It's just juvenile. It's like: who has the fastest car? You can go to the auto show and the boat show too."

Scene 3: Escape From Linear City

The Gary Burton Quartet plays the near-empty Ivanhoe Theatre in Chicago. Scofield, who'd filled the chair vacated by Pat Metheny, rips through a series of vehement, earthy, violent solos — fine in themselves, but awkward in the context of Burton's dreamy pastels. (Image: Bull Scofield charging through Burton's china shop.) It's as if Scofield, stripped to his guitar more than visa versa, was soloing in a different room from the rest of the band: a room where vertical wars with horizontal, rough edges splinter and poke, a conspiracy of sixteenth notes hover in the corner. Out the only window, he could see a train

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ARTHUR BLYTHE'S "ILLUSIONS" He's made the Top-10 albums lists for 1980 in *The New York Times*, *High Fidelity* and *The Boston Phoenix*.

Why haven't you heard him?



Arthur Blythe continues to win the critics' praise. Jay Cocks of *Time* says "this man uses his sax like a blowtorch." Robert Palmer places him "in the front ranks of modern saxophonists." Leonard Feather calls his alto "the most provocative new horn to project itself into jazz prominence." Neil Tesser acknowledges "... no one is more deftly affecting the ballyhooed fusion of funk and the avant garde."

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Jeffreys cont. from pg. 16

added some of the heat that the Rolling Stones used to command. Critical raves followed, louder this time, and for a moment Garland was everybody's favorite son, the crown prince and the next in line. But again nothing happened, sales were sluggish, and the spotlight moved away.

Two more records were recorded and released with little fanfare and less sales. *One Eyed Jacks* was a somewhat empty exercise, filled with top New York studio musicians undercutting all of Garland's natural rhythms, and *American Boy & Girl*, though far more spirited, still fell short of the promise of his first two albums.

Now, just as the distance between himself and fame seems the most unbridgeable, Garland's emerged with *Escape Artist*, an album that's stronger and more exuberant than anything he's recorded in years.

"Modern Lovers," "R.O.C.K.," or the passionate re-working of "96 Tears," might give him the hit he's been trying for so long, and for once the band (solid working players instead of session pros) is as strong and agile as his singing. On the new album, the Frankie Lyman in his voice has been filtered straight through Elvis Costello, but it's a fairly comfortable marriage: passionate but never too far from the cold wink of reason and suspicion.

The new songs are catchy, if more studied, less intuitive and angry than those that graced *Ghost Writer* and his first album, but the longing in them and in his voice still comes through. After ten years, Garland Jeffreys keeps knocking on the door of the radio, hoping that the man will finally appear and say, "Come on in here, child, no cause you should stand outside." And it's this longing, this desperate will to succeed, that may ultimately pull him through.

But fame is only fame. Jeffreys also insists we take him seriously as an artist and it's frustrating that we can't — especially since he's so obviously gifted. He has a strong, often haunting voice, consistently inventive phrasing, a genuine talent for hooks, and some of the best musicians in the hemisphere backing him up. But there is no emotional resonance, no discernible heart informing these songs. In the past, he's evinced anger ("Wild In The Streets," "City Kids," "I May Not Be Your Kind") and evoked a very tangible past ("Ghost Writer," "She Didn't Lie"), but he hasn't written a truly convincing love song since "Lovelight" on his first album. It's not that his songs are dishonest (there are painfully honest lines scattered through the record), but most of them are so self-occupied, so caught in creating and perpetuating his own mythology, that there simply isn't room for another person. No room in the mirror.

Success doesn't always cure self-involvement and insecurity. Neither

does failure. If Garland finally does have hit, he may relax enough to trust himself and get on with his own work and rely on his own name, his own talent. Meanwhile, he's off on tour backed by Graham Parker's band, with Bruce Springsteen's road manager, singing with Elvis Costello's voice.

Erratum

Only the North African heat or the NYC cold could have made me confuse a dead French film director with a large and living American. Paul Bowles wrote soundtracks for Orson Welles, not Jean Renoir, as previously reported. The similarity of their names must have caused the confusion. Apologies to all concerned, living and dead. **M**

Scofield cont. from pg. 27

passing in the night. A four-years-many-miles-later explanation: "I wanted to play a certain way which wasn't into Gary's thing, though I love his music. My sound must have been a reaction to that style. I was listening to Coltrane daily, for hours and hours. I was playing nothing but single note lines, just like a horn player. It was Linear City for me. But when I joined Dave Liebman's group, which was pianoless, and formed my own trio, I heard what chords would add to the music. I used to never, never even think of playing a chord during a solo."

Scene 4: Scofield's Dialogues

Between a circuit of Japan with native son Terumasa Hino and a trek around Australia with his own group, Scofield goes domestic. While taping new music for the road, he lounges on a carpet that crawls with album covers, turtles and ash trays. If he wanted, he could do up a fine tape of Mingus, Konitz, McShann, Orsted-Pederson, Liebman, and Cobham with only one common denominator: Scofield as a sideman. The interviewer, good natured pest that he is, nudges the discussion toward the nexus of art and economics. John, how many records have you been on since the Mulligan date in '75? About 60, says Susan. No, it can't be that many, says John. Yes it is, says Susan. Is that too many John? I have to make a living, says John, it's only recently I could even afford to say "No" once in a while. Would you like to have some of those dates back to try again? Of course, says John, but jazz is a risk, you should always risk something. These days there are a lot of cats who just want to set up something perfect for themselves on their own records. Susan, laughing, in response, says the career of Scofield The Studio Stud has the classic four stages, beginning in the mid-'70s and ending who-knows-when: 1) Who in the hell is John Scofield? 2) Get me John Scofield! 3) Get me someone who sounds like Scofield! 4) Who in the hell is John Scofield? So it goes. [Funny how that comment gets around, David Spinozza said the same thing in *Musician* August 1979.]

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THE COLLECTOR

By Andy Doherty

James Brown and **Wilson Pickett** are still with us. It's their records that have disappeared. This absence can be attributed almost exclusively to the awful things that were done to soul records on weekends. Ninety per cent of the Wilson Pickett and James Brown albums pressed since history began got played to death all night at loud parties and were junked in the morning with the empty cans and bottles.

Today there are new parties needing the services, but it's been years since Pickett's classic Atlantic LPs (*In The Midnight Hour*, *The Wicked*, *The Sound Of*, *The Exciting*) have been easily available in anything short of war-game shape or greatest hits collections. Value on these out-of-print albums, when they can be found in playable shape, has accrued accordingly, and can be calculated by looking to the East for a reference.

When the desirable Picketts became hard-to-get, the Japanese, who have to have everything, began reprinting them. Japanese albums tend to cost somewhere near fifteen dollars per disc by the time we see them. Extrapolate from that figure: If the reprint is worth fifteen dollars, then the funkier American original with the heavy cover has to be worth more.

Not all of Pickett's albums, mind you, are worth this kind of money. The bulk of the man's LPs are common and likely to remain that way. His later Atlantic albums (*Hey Jude*, *In Philadelphia*) are not going anywhere as investments. Nor are his RCA albums, not even the one with Wilson chalking his cue on the cover. Something — though this is a long shot — could eventually happen with the 1976 album, *Chocolate Mountain* (on Wicked Records), because it doesn't seem to have sold more than a dozen copies.

A reissue campaign has also begun for James Brown, with the reprinting — albeit behind different and therefore less-desirable cover art — of *Live at the Apollo Volume 1*. But talk about barely scratching the surface! King Records released dozens of James Brown albums, many of them first-rate and most of them hardly ever offered for sale anymore. A few of the earliest albums are rapidly approaching the fifty dollar barrier in good condition. Even copies of later albums like *Papa's Got A Brand New Bag* and the double *Live at the Apollo Volume 2* are easily worth between fifteen and twenty dollars.

Anyone as prolific as **Brian Eno** will eventually present problems for the collector who has to have everything. As the years go by and things go in and out of print, the problems multiply because Eno is somewhat, shall we say, esoteric, and his records have never been produced in any sizable numbers. Then the problems really get out of hand as Eno became involved in a multi-media extravaganza, *In a Land of Clear Colors*.

Technically, *In a Land of Clear Colors* is a book, a fancy printing of a science fiction story by Robert Sheckley with fourteen illustrations by Leonor Quiles. Packaged with the book is a record. The record provides a dramatic presentation by Pete Sinfield drawn from the text and backed up by an Eno soundscape. Only a thousand copies of this hefty package have been printed and the price is only a hundred dollars.

Thanks, Eno...I think. It's difficult to imagine what record collecting will be like if projects like this one become the norm. For those of you who just can't quit, the mailing address is: c/o Martin Watson-Todd/Galeria el Mensajero/Santa Eulalia/Ibezia, Baleares, Spain.

Write first to make certain the price hasn't gone up.

A trick to collecting records successfully is to be on the lookout for talent under-appreciated in its time. History has a way of catching up with the talented ones and acknowledging their efforts. A target for such revisionism could be **Joe Ely** and the people associated with him in Austin, Texas.

Much has been made of Ely's talent in these and other pages, but rarely has a critical-favorite sold as few records. His first and arguably best album (on MCA Records) is still listed in catalog but has already gone through at least some remainder bins and is rarely seen in stores.

As a result, Ely could easily have a few tough-to-get records on his hands in a few years. What will definitely be rare records, no two ways about it, are the albums made by two Ely henchmen, **Butch Hancock** and **Terry Allen**. Hancock, whose repertoire has been tapped by Ely for numerous songs, has put out a pair of albums to date on Rainlight Records (210 Post Road Drive/Austin, Texas). Allen, backed by Ely and members of his band, has done three albums for Fate Records (63 West Ontario Street/Chicago.

Voice Over: Rodney Dangerfield Is A White Jazz Guitarist

"All the critics, and everybody who believes 'em, are looking for the latest, newest thing. That's why the free players get so much press. It's all, hey, who's gonna be the next Great Black Man or the next Brubeck or whatever. All this looking for what comes next and who comes next is total bullshit because Armstrong played the most beautiful choruses imaginable and that's what jazz improvisation is, and that's that. And you know what, some of my best friends are white drummers. Really."

Scene 5: Back To The Head And Out

Scofield's filing down the edges of his big black cat, "Fat Dancer." (Right, right, a tune for the cat.) He purples the two-part melody with tacks on the cool blues section and lace when it gives way to the sunshine of a gospelish chord progression. Then, a humid smear of notes and he's into his solo. By the time his cigarette renounces its ash, which tumbles dangerously shirtward, the head of that damn cat has been stroked, dismantled, vivisected, squashed, abandoned, reclaimed, bathed, renovated and polished, polished to a chordal finish that's lustrous and worn and warm from the friction. Around the room, smiles puncture the bluegrey smaze. Warmer still, for Scofield, the flash of applause for Christian, for B.B., for Hall, for Otis, for him. **M**

Scofield's Guitars

Scofield uses a tremendously and endearingly beat up 1958 Gibson ES 335, in cooperation with medium Light Gauge strings and a Polytone Special Mini-Brute 4 amp. On occasion, he also picks at an Ibanez Artist Series model, and an Ibanez acoustic.

Black Rock cont. from pg. 38

Kid Creole & the Coconuts would also like to make. Remember, Hendrix only began to be appreciated by a majority of blacks after his death.

The Bus Boys and Kid Creole, August Darnell's extension of Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band, represent a part of the latest trend in funk 'n' roll which might be characterized as Art Funk. This is the Roxy Music of soul. There's a definite swing, it's tied to dance, but it's all a vehicle for the Concept, for the lyrics and persona.

As opposed to the Bus Boys, Prince has far more readily-identifiable swing with the black audience. If the Bus Boys want your head, Prince aims for your groin. Prince live and the new *Dirty Mind* album, however, are causing quite a controversy among audiences attuned to the "standard" funk of, say, Rick James. Prince uses many more of the

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