

On Reflection

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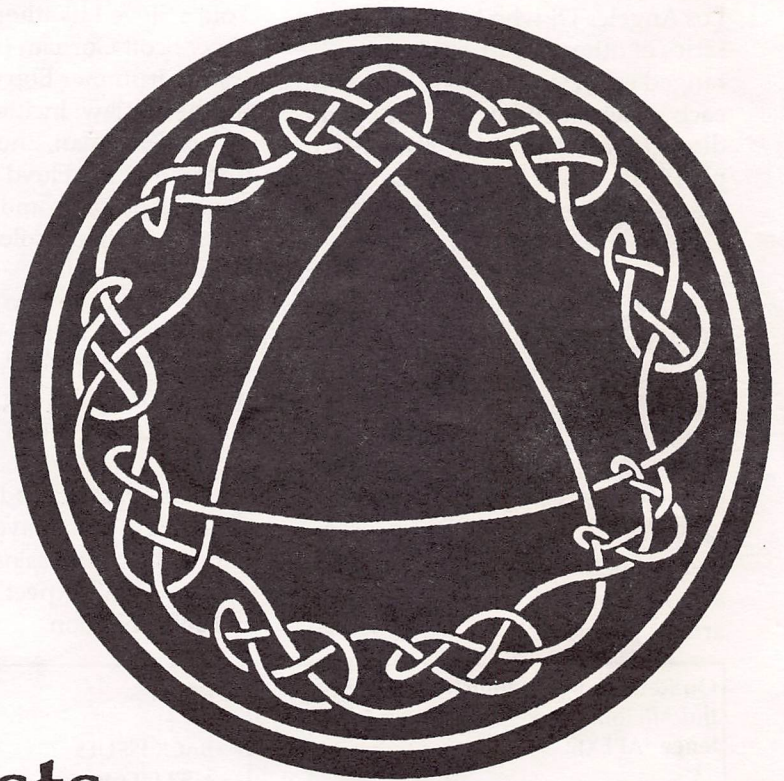
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"...the musician becomes a trained instrument to be played by music. We approach the intangible by working on the tangible. At a certain point of application, of concentrated effort, craft becomes an art."

—Guitar Craft

Getting crafty with
Robert Fripp & the League of Crafty Guitarists

(article begins on page three)



Relayer

WONDEROUS NEWS

The latest issue of *Wonderous Stories* reports that the second ABWH album was largely recorded between March and June. Mixing, etc. should be done by October, according to their management. The hopeful release date is early 1991.

Bill Bruford's Earthworks is also apparently planning a US tour in the fall, with Michael Brecker sharing the bill.

DAS BOOK

A new and what looks like quite a valuable reference book is now available. *Uncle Joe's Record Guide: Progressive Music* is by Joe Benson, a Los Angeles DJ who has published a series of other record guides. Arranged encyclopedia style by artist, each section includes histories and discographies. To order, send \$9.95 plus \$2.05 shipping and handling to Uncle Joe's Record Guides, P.O. Box 12464, Glendale, CA 91224-9948.

THE INCONTINENT OF ASIA

"The most disappointing group of the '80s is now the most disappointing group of the '90s," said fellow APEXer Scott Gold as he handed me the release sheets for Asia's new album, *Then and Now*. The band is now a three-piece and like Genesis and UK before them, paring down to a trio can be seen as a sure sign of artistic decay.

Side One of the album is "greatest hits," though the selection does little justice to that already essentially meaningless tag: "Only Time Will Tell," "Heat of the Moment," "Wildest Dreams," "Don't Cry," and "The Smile Has Left Your Eyes" (should be Ears). The previous Asia albums were bad to begin with, but there are still better tracks to choose, like "Time Again" and "Cutting It Fine."

Side Two has five new songs, with titles like "Prayin' 4 A Miracle," "Am I In Love?," and "Summer (Can't Last Too Long)." Wow, impressive. They work with a variety of guitarists on this side, including Toto's Steve Lukather and ex-Thin Lizzy Scott Gorham (who is Supertramp drummer Bob C. Benberg's brother-in-law; incidentally, another ex-Lizzy axeman, Snowy White, was originally Pink Floyd's second guitarist on stage and plays on Richard Wright's solo album, *Wet Dream*.)

According to the release sheet, "There will be videos for the singles and a major AOR and cross-over push on this high-profile act." Isn't it exciting when they use industry lingo like that? By the way, the album art is a bad ripoff of Roger Dean, who must have wisely declined the commission.

Don't expect a review from me anytime soon.

MORE ON FRIPP

This Fripp has just produced an album for ex-Crimson avant garde pianist Keith Tippett.

He also has apparently formed a band called Sunday All Over the World, with his wife, singer Toyah Wilcox, and two others. At 44, he does not appear to be slowing down and that's fine with me!

ANNIE TOUR DATES

Here are the latest dates on Annie Haslam's U.S. tour. When I went to see her in Boston, the show was cut way short due to rain (see page 8) but she and her band sounded great. You won't be disappointed.

Aug. 31 - The Hearth - Doylestown, PA

Sept. 6 - Jigg's Corner - Butler, NJ

Sept. 16 - TBA - New Haven, CT

Annie will also be performing on the Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethon. Her segment will be done in New York after midnight one of the nights of the telethon. It isn't known, however, if her segment will actually be aired.

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SPECIAL THANKS: Steve and Karen Ball, Annie and Joanne, Scott Gold, hello to Robert Fuller, and Laura.

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Pro- gres- sive rock!

Robert Fripp & the League of Crafty Guitarists

Robert Fripp and the League of Crafty Guitarists are snaking their way through the country, turning a lot of people on to the pure power of the acoustic guitar and making people clamor for repeated encores from musicians they have never heard of before.

After a recent gig in Boston, I had the pleasure of having lunch with Steve Ball, one of the Crafty Guitarists, and he helped shed a lot of light on this project of Fripp's and just how much autonomy the Crafties have from him. One thing that emerges from this discussion is that the Crafties are perfectly capable of operating without Fripp and that they are in themselves a legitimate progressive entity. It is certainly clear just from listening that the music they create and the tools they use to accomplish their sounds form the basis for some of the most original, interesting, and inspired progressive music since the heyday of the genre.

They entered in single file and stood before their chairs, waiting for Fripp's cue to sit.

Then they sat in silent meditation, waiting for the crowd to silence themselves. At Fripp's cue, they began playing. The first tune was representative. Six of the musicians played one melody, which was counterpointed by the other five playing another, lower melody. Then they all played a theme in unison. There were only a few numbers, actually, where all 11 musicians played at the same time or even on the same song. Some of the numbers were duets, trios, and quartets; others began with two or three musicians, then a few

others joined in while others remained in the still, silent seated posture for the duration of the song. Sometimes a musician would not perform for two or more consecutive numbers, including Fripp himself.

Seeing the musicians in that immobile state can be as attention-getting as a musician who leans toward the audience, arches his back while soloing and leaps about. Is it meditation? Is it yoga? Why, I asked Ball, do you have to sit with eyes fixed straight ahead, back straight, expressionless, and with the left palm open and facing upwards? The answer was simple and made a lot of sense. The musicians have a three-year commitment to being a touring and recording unit that represents Guitar Craft, the West Virginia-based school that Fripp chartered in 1985. Within Guitar Craft, there are nine levels, or grades. The Crafties are generally at the sixth level. For all levels, however, there is learned the discipline of playing and practicing anywhere from four to twelve hours

a day. While it takes a mental commitment to achieve such a schedule it also takes physical considerations. This posture allows you to be able to play guitar for many hours a day, every day, without causing back pain, arm strain, or weight gain.

Another reason for the posture is that it serves with the expressionlessness to keep the musicians in the present. The focus is on the music, on themselves, and on their fellow musicians. "It's a conscious effort to be attentive to the music," says Ball. Is it unimportant or incorrect to acknowledge the audience with a look or a smile or a "thank you?" No, says Ball. "We feel there is a great deal of interaction with the audience. But it's the music that interacts. Being a musician and playing for an audience isn't about making faces while playing. I don't see a connection between what your face is doing and what your fingers are doing. And for the audience,

continued p.5



Robert Fripp (far right) and the LCG (Steve Ball in center)

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WANT LISTS RESEARCHED

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Robert Fripp & the League of Crafty Guitarists

being acknowledged isn't about getting recognized by a celebrity."

The acoustic guitars, which are amplified, synergise each other as would the violins and violas in an orchestral string section. This makes them sound electric and in many pieces, such as the two or three tunes that are based on the introductory theme of Crimson's "Larks' Tongues in Aspic, Part II," that sonic power is easily exploited and creates an immense effect.

The players tune together every three or four songs. Fripp strikes one, then another, tuning fork against his leg and then stands it on the face of his guitar. The other musicians tune to the reverberating pitch. After each tuning session, Fripp nods to the vocalist, Patricia Leavitt, who comes to center stage. She has her own tuning fork and gives herself the right note. After an appropriate silence, she sings *a capella*. She performed seven songs throughout the evening, most of them quite short, two of them phonetic scats. She sings like they play: very few consecutively repeating notes, her voice going high, going low, suddenly stopping and starting. Heavily echoed, she even seemed to accompany herself; as one line lingered, a new one in complete contrast rushed to meet it.

According to Ball, Patricia entered Guitar Craft as a guitarist. "Robert points out that we each have our particular specialties. Patricia's is her voice. One day, she just came out with some songs and it seemed like a good way to break up all the guitar music." One very impressed audience member at a recent show at the Bottom Line was none other than Jon Anderson.

There were a series of rounds, called "circulations," where Fripp would play a note; not just "play" it but by turning and leaning his body and face towards the

musician on his right, he was *giving* the note. The next musician would play and give the next note to the person on his right and so on. After the last person played his note, Fripp sent it around again and again. Then with a wave of his guitar, they would hit a chord in unison two or three times. The round would start with every person included down the line, then it would skip every other person, then some would play a melody underneath while others continued the round. It was very exercise-oriented but provided for very interesting musical patterns.

There was much emphasis on echo (for the vocalist) and sustain (for the guitarists). A sustain for as high as an eight count often left the audience wondering whether the piece was over and if they could clap. Some pieces went unapplauded simply because the listeners weren't sure it was over until a new piece began. The sustains had great effect, however, being that they were fueled by 11 amplified acoustic guitars. Within the held notes dwelled so many others. There seemed to be melody even within the short inertial playing of the sustains.

The club was very hot that night, which amplified the stillness and unidirectional attention with which the musicians conducted themselves. Steve Ball in particular was in the crossfire of two light beams for the entire night and was sweating profusely from his face. Not once, however, did he wipe his brow or acknowledge with his tongue any of the drops of sweat that fell throughout the show. If he wasn't playing, he was in the immobile seated posture. At one point, though, even Headmaster Fripp opened one of the buttons on his own shirt. Why, I asked Ball, couldn't he break his concentration to wipe off the sweat? The answer, again, was simple and obvious. "Well, I didn't have a

handkerchief and the last thing I wanted to do was to get my hands and fingers wet with no way to dry them off."

It struck me at the show that such a night as this must be humbling to Fripp, at least to his fans. It has always seemed that Fripp's playing was such that no other human being could do likewise. And yet, the LCG offers ten others who play in the same style and while they are of varying levels of ability, the mark of Fripp is upon them. Fripp only soloed twice, both shorter than anyone would have wanted and both truly fabulous. Perhaps, I thought, he seeks to clone himself to further distance himself from the kind of vampiric artist/audience adulatory relationship that was a factor in his desire to break up the original King Crimson in 1975. Not all the playing, though, was Fripp-derived. One musician very effectively played as would a slap bassist, with the side of his thumb, and pulling the strings to make a snapping sound.

So I asked Ball just how much of what we see and hear in the League of Crafty Guitarists is due to Fripp's direct input. And the answer is: surprisingly little. Isn't Fripp the dictator who gives the cues, picks the tunes, and writes the rules? No, not really. With a group on stage, someone has to take responsibility for keeping things on track and in order. When Fripp is there, he assumes the responsibility. But when they toured earlier this year without Fripp, someone else took over. Not as a leader but as a facilitator. And what about the songs? They all have that *Discipline*-era Fripp feel. Does he write all the music? Hardly. As Ball says, "only about 15% of the material is Robert's and much of that is from three to four years old. Everything else is written by the other musicians."

And as for the familiarity of

Echoes

UNITED WE STAND

I am writing to thank you for *On Reflection*. It is encouraging to know that there are still others out there with the sensitivity to appreciate quality music and the talented musicians who create it.

I must admit that, in this age of star-studded rock extravaganzas, Phil Collins' assembly-line melodies and the sheer existence of New Kids on the Block, my faith in the music industry is fast on the decline. After much discussion and debate, my husband, friends and I have all come to the conclusion that progressive music (and the integrity and freedom of thought that it represents) must continue to grow or we fear the world will only become uglier than it already is.

The responsibility of promoting and strengthening progressive music lies in our hands. Those of us connected with this publication surely realize that we are a minority, particularly in the U.S. But minorities with the foresight and will to unify can make a difference.

I am curious to see if your readers would be interested in coming together to meet one another. There could be many benefits to such a convention-like event:

- 1) to develop a network of like-thinking individuals,
- 2) to share ideas and information (i.e., albums, videos, connections, etc.),
- 3) to offer exposure for any new progressive rock bands and artists,
- 4) and to allow musicians in search of bands (or vice versa) to find one another...the possibilities are endless.

If you find this idea interesting (as well as feasible), please let me know. I don't know how large the *On Reflection* readership is or how widespread it is geographically, so I cannot tell how cumbersome a

project like this could be but I'd be happy to help organize and coordinate it if you think it's worth a try.

My friends, husband, and I have grown tired of sitting idly, complaining about the deteriorating state of music and bemoaning the fact that we and the artists we admire are labelled "dinosaurs" and "relics" by the commercially-minded music consumers of today.

So maybe it's time to stop sitting idly?

Colleen Tyler
Bronx, NY

MEMORIES OF OLD DAYS

I went to high school from 1967-71 in a small town in Illinois. Since we were close enough to Chicago to barely pull in the current underground radio shows like "Psyche" on WOPA, "Ron Britain's Subterranean Circus," and especially "Triad" on WXFM, we were exposed to a whole world of sounds that was previously unknown to us. The small circle of friends that I associated with were what I considered to be the chosen few as far as musical tastes were concerned. The other cliques, such as the jocks and the greasers, avoided us because we were the first "hippie"-type group in the school and there was no telling what we were up to.

This did not sit well with the counselors or the administration, because obviously we were all on drugs. While the popular groups in the area were CTA, REO Speedwagon (local heroes at the time), and Fuse (a Cheap Trick forerunner), my friends and I listened to early Soft Machine, pre-*Dark Side* Floyd, Gentle Giant, the Nice, and King Crimson.

The import bin at the local record store, Strawberry Fields, was a haven for obscure European releases. The musky scents of patchouli

incense, cardboard, and cellophane were heady greetings upon entry to this great store. We were constantly trying to outscop each other by finding great new obscure bands. I personally "discovered" Yes, Gentle Giant, Atomic Rooster, and Soft Machine, among others. We were also often disappointed with some very bad groups.

These early influences led us to form one of the first bands (the Planets) in the area to play alternative music, which went unappreciated by most except for the more liberal-minded girls. This was fine with us. At that time, it was highly uncommon for a band to have two keyboard players and a psychedelic light show, but we did. Remember that this was farm country. And since one of our long list of bass players was the dean's son, we were sometimes able to use the main stage for practice during school hours. What a wonderful alternative to study hall! This was especially nice since the girls' gym class took place in the same auditorium.

Thanks to our Euro role models, we quickly became quite proficient. I am sure we were the only band around that had tunes like "Astronomy Domine" and "Rondo" in our repertoire. During this time, we attended many concerts at venues such as the Auditorium, the Arie Crown Theatre, and Ravinia. To us, this was like going to church. We were awestruck by the level of musicianship of our heroes. We saw many memorable shows such as any combination of Led Zeppelin, Jethro Tull, Spooky Tooth, and King Crimson on the same bill. Back then, every show had three or four bands on the bill and ticket prices ranged from \$3.50 to \$6.50. We were upset when they went up to \$7.50!

But most vivid to me are some of the unlikely double billings such as Siegal-Schwall Blues Band

Robert Fripp & the League of Crafty Guitarists

style, Ball reminded me that yes, Fripp's technique of repeating and alternating single note patterns has played its role as an influence in Guitar Craft, but the audience also comes into the shows with expectations and the knowledge of this sound. And so the other diverse techniques that belong to the other musicians and which exist within the music, tend to be far less noticed than the more Frippish styles. And is there room for improvisation? "Oh yes, we're free to improvise at any time. As Robert says, we're free to play any note we want as long as it's the right note and it's in time."

After a while during our conversation, I started to feel like a fool. I had spent the show observing little things about what the musicians were doing and how they were presenting themselves. I wondered about the significance of everything and I was sure there *was* some significance to everything. I followed the circulations closely, trying to see the patterns and relationships when in fact I should have shut my eyes and perceived the intended effect: that it sound as if one musician was playing. I confessed that I was taking it too seriously. It was reassuring then to have Ball confess that the Crafties are aware of a condition known as "Guitar Craft Face." When afflicted with this malady, the musicians become so intent and conscious of needing to be relaxed and present that they in fact become removed from their goal. Ball describes it as "unintentional inhibition." For both the artist and the audience, it becomes easy to fall prey to the feeling that Fripp, being part Vulcan, somehow has superhuman ways and that it can't be easy to be involved in what he does. And so the obvious becomes unnecessarily complex and the experience becomes once removed from where it really belongs.

They only played a couple of

songs from the live LCG album that was released a couple of years ago. But the musicianship and the stylistic familiarity of the music enthralled the crowd into requesting and receiving four encores. The first encore featured a short number by the musicians sans Fripp, then a vocal number. The second encore was a new song called "Leap of Faith," followed by another song of Fripp's choosing. Then another vocal scat and another round called "Final Circulation." The third encore started with tuning, then a vocal number, then a round in which Fripp took one of his solos, the kind that brought so many people out to see this latest project of his, knowing that if he is behind it then it must have some value. This turned into another go at the "Larks' Tongues" theme, which stopped on a dime in the middle of its loudest, most frantic moment. Then they sat, acknowledging the applause inwardly. When the applause subsided, they remained in meditation, and then rose and walked off stage to more hammering applause. The fourth and final encore was a very short instrumental piece. After nearly two hours, they finally left the stage for good and long after the houselights went on, the crowd still wanted more.

There were no wild theatrics, no windmills, no leaping, so sing-alongs, no film clips, no light show, no special effects, no gut-wrenching solos, nobody posing for the audience, eliciting audience reaction with Jagger-ish struts, taunts, or teases. Instead, eleven musicians and one vocalist, all seated, all completely immobile when not performing, all moving only the appropriate fingers when they *were* performing, all with their attention inward and to the music and to their fellow musicians but not to the audience, all with the most basic of Western instruments, completely blew the crowd away. It

was like homeopathic medicine, where the most infinitesimally minute dilution of a substance is used to cure disease. The success of the performance was due to the stripping away of the conventions of live performance. It was like group personal study. It was practice made perfect. ☺



Getting Crafty

There are Guitar Craft seminars held throughout the year at various locations. Fripp himself is not active as a teacher in some of the levels. If you are interested in learning more about Guitar Craft and would like an application, write to Guitar Craft Services, Rt. 1, Box 278-M, Charles Town, WV 25414.

According to Ball, "Everyone in Guitar Craft came the same way. We wanted to work in Guitar Craft. Not everybody has aspirations of being a professional musician and not everybody will become one. But the doors are open to anyone with the desire and commitment. Guitar Craft is inclusive. To be involved, you just have to show up. A lot of people you see on stage at our shows were beginners three or four years ago."

The League of Crafty Guitarists' second album, tentatively titled *Hot to Rock*, has just been recorded and will be released early next spring. They will continue to tour for the next two years. ☺

Echoes, continued

with the Mahavishnu Orchestra, Doctor Hook and the Medicine Show or Billy Joel with ELP, Deep Purple with Rod Stewart and the Faces, J.J. Cale with Traffic, Gentle Giant with the J. Geils Band, Tempest with Fleetwood Mac, or Camel with Bachman-Turner Overdrive.

As time went on, we gravitated toward the German electronic artists such as Klaus Shulze, Tangerine Dream, Guru Guru, Kraftwerk, and Neu. These sounds, combined with the popular psychedelics of the day, expanded our midwestern universe even more.

As more time went on, we all went our separate ways. I went on to join various hard rock and new wave bands in the late '70s and early '80s that reached limited commercial success.

As even more time went on, we all got yuppie jobs and now I am again listening to Soft Machine, Gentle Giant, King Crimson, etc., and yearning for the glorious past.

God, those were great days!

*Vic Stanley
Lafayette, IN*

Annie get beans from Boston

With glee, expectation, a camcorder, and a fist of flyers for *On Reflection*, I headed into Boston on August 9 for a free, outdoor concert by Annie Haslam.

Alas, a series of troubles cast an unimaginable gloom over such an event. First, the city hadn't turned the power on until shortly before the time that the show was supposed to start. Then the stage and P.A. system provided by the radio station (which is not what you would call the most progressive of radio stations) proved to be too small and cheesy to be of any use. Innumerable sound problems delayed the show for roughly 75 minutes. Meanwhile, storm clouds circled overhead.

When the show finally started, Annie's frustration was evident. Though she was committed to going on with the show, she was rightly annoyed with her silent monitor. Speaking with her before the show, she was afraid that everything was going to work against her that day. I assured her that the crowd would give her their love and support. And I was right.

After four songs, it began to rain and the show could not go on (the station had not provided a canopy over the stage). But in a magnificent gesture, she did an unamplified rendition of "Carpet of the Sun" accompanied only by acoustic guitar. Then she signed autographs and talked with the crowd. If she comes out your way, catch the show. She is the best. ☺

The APEX

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We know progressive music when we hear it!