

# On Reflection

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The newsletter  
of *The APEX*

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## INSIDE:

Relayer p. 2  
Djam Karet p. 3  
Annie on tour! p. 8

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*"When I hear  
music, I fear no  
danger. I am  
invulnerable.  
I see no foe. I am  
related to the  
earliest times, and  
to the latest."  
—Henry David  
Thoreau*

## Exclusive interview with Christopher "Kit" Watkins!

### **Kit speaks out on...**

#### ***the music business:***

"I had no idea...that the music business is pretty wretched."

#### ***Happy the Man:***

"We weren't trying to be original, we were just trying not to be commercial."

#### ***playing with Camel:***

"It felt like prostitution."

#### ***his solo career:***

"I see myself as more of a painter than a musician."

#### ***the future of progressive rock:***

"I think the musicians have to take the lead."

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**On Reflection:** Tell us about your musical education, influences, and what you were doing musically when *Happy the Man* was formed.

**Kit Watkins:** Both of my parents are piano teachers and have been ever since I can remember. I was brought up learning to play piano and I stayed with it until I was about 13, and then I started listening to the Beatles and rock 'n' roll on the radio. I joined a neighborhood band, playing organ.

I had a number of different bands in high school and that all led to *Happy the Man*. In those bands I really didn't write anything until I was a senior and then only one or two things on the hard rock side. I didn't really think about writing before that.

*continued p. 4*



# Relayer

## NEW PROGRESSIVE ALBUMS

There's been a lot of argument in the pages of *On Reflection* over the past few months concerning the state of progressive music as we move into the 1990s. Virtually all of this discussion has been philosophical, however. Since the proof of the pudding is in the eating, here's a look at some excellent progressive albums that have been released this year. I think they're ample evidence that progressive rock is alive, well, and still expanding its horizons in the '90s.

**Adrian Belew, *Young Lions*** (Atlantic, all formats). *On Reflection* readers need no introduction to Adrian Belew. Suffice it to say that *Young Lions*, following the more pop-oriented direction of *Mr. Music Head* and the two Bears albums, is Adrian's most progressive album in a few years. Crimso fans will appreciate Adrian's remake of "Heartbeat," which features a faster pace and denser arrangement than the original. Also included are two collaborations with David Bowie. There are no bonus tracks on the CD, although two non-LP songs, the funny-sad acoustic lament "Shoe Salesman" and the superb instrumental "Neptune Pool" are included on a CD single of "Pretty Pink Rose."

**David Borden/Mother Mallard, *The Continuing Story of Counterpoint, Parts 5-8*** (Cuneiform, CD only).

Borden is a minimalist composer who uses electronic keyboards, woodwinds, guitar and sampled soprano voice to create large-scale "orchestral" works akin to the recent music of Philip Glass. Short melodic motifs are endlessly repeated, slowly and subtly developed, all the while being subjected to the various processes available in classical counterpoint. Borden's son Gabriel contributes some nice electric guitar lines, particularly on "Part 6."

**Fire Merchants, *Fire Merchants*** (Medusa, CD and cassette). John Goodsall of Brand X and Genesis/Zappa/Weather Report veteran Chester Thompson team up with bassist Doug Lunn for a set of superb progressive/metal/fusion workouts. Goodsall's guitar work is dazzling—somewhat in the vein of Allan Holdsworth—and the rhythm section more than holds its own, matching the leader's fretboard wizardry with fiendish syncopations in complex time signatures. This music is fiery indeed.

**Peter Frohmader, *Macrocosm*** (Cuneiform, CD only). Frohmader is a German musician who creates huge electronic soundscapes on a symphonic scale. If that calls to mind the likes of Tangerine Dream or Klaus Schulze, be aware that this is very different. *Macrocosm* is really intense stuff, the kind of music that picks you up by the scruff of the neck and shakes you. This is one of the most exciting and adventurous releases of the year, for sure.

**Peter Hammill, *Out of the Water*** (Enigma, CD and cassette). Hammill has been a fixture on the progressive scene since...well, since a progressive scene existed. His music is challenging and intelligent, his lyrics the most emotionally charged and literate in rock, and his voice an instrument of stunning power. His statements can be obscure but he can also bring his theme shockingly into sharp focus, as in the chilling final couplet of "Our Oyster:" "They're playing world music in Tiananmen Square/The whistle of bullets in the air." Hammill plays most of the instruments on the album himself (with his playing on most of the cuts augmented by either violin, guitar, or sax and bass), creating ethereal synthesizer textures overlaid with his brooding vocals and start-stop acoustic guitar rhythms. David Jackson's sweetly

cascading soprano sax adds a touch of the Van der Graaf style to the yearning orientalism of "No Moon in the Water."

—Michael P. Dawson

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# Djam Karet: *Progressing in a stagnant world*

by Robert Schubert

I'm sure that everybody knows of a band in their hometown that they think is great. Usually this band gains a small but loyal following and eventually fades away. This is not true at all of my hometown band, Djam Karet.

Every time I go to one of their shows, the crowd is bigger than the last time. Every time I talk to one of the band members, I find out that they have sold more records and are increasing their distribution to other countries. I see their name on more flyers, car bumpers and t-shirts every day. And what is more ironic about all this is that their first (cassette only) 1985 release was called *No Commercial Potential*.

Djam Karet is straight out of Claremont, California and they are now in their sixth year of existence. The lineup consists of Gayle Ellet, guitar and synth; Mike Henderson, guitar; Chuck Oken Jr., drums and percussion; and Henry Osborne, bass and effects. They have four releases to date with distribution from South America to Japan. Completely independent (and thank God, too), they have sold over 5000 units worldwide.

The literal translation of the name Djam Karet is "elastic time, the hour that stretches." An extremely fitting title for the music they play. If this band has accomplished anything, they have forced the critics to come up with some of the most creative descriptions I have ever

heard. David Fricke of *Rolling Stone* said of their most recent release, *Reflections from the Firepool*, "Floydian dreamscapes intersect with the jagged complexity of King Crimson and the improv-guitar happenstance of the Grateful Dead and Quicksilver Messenger Service." Alan Freeman of *Audion Music Magazine* wrote, "This type of music isn't fashionable enough nowadays (to sell). But who cares about fashion? Djam Karet certainly don't, and I'm glad of it."

When I was 10 years old, my older brother put a copy of King Crimson's *USA* on the turntable. Before he put the stylus to the vinyl, he turned to me and said, "Listen to this closely, it is very important." I never understood what he meant until I had the pleasure of interviewing bassist Osborne on a local college radio program last year. I asked him if he found playing progressive music in today's market an uphill battle.

He thought for a moment and replied (this is not verbatim), "Well sure, but so is graduating from college or having a successful relationship or raising children. Anything in life that is worthwhile or important is an uphill battle. I wouldn't have it any other way. However, I think once you are on top of the hill, the valley will probably look a little greener."

Djam Karet seems to be doing some important work

of their own. They recently hosted a concert where they showcased some other local progressive bands. Drummer Oken has also created a progressive rock section in the record store he manages. They have also successfully produced their own video of an opening set they did for the Fire Merchants last year. The video is well produced and gives fans who may never have a chance to see them live an opportunity to catch the excitement.

I encourage anyone who is interested in important music to find out more about Djam Karet. *Reflections from the Firepool* is available on cassette, LP, and CD. Their third release, *The Ritual Continues*, is available on LP and cassette. *No Commercial Potential* and *Kafka's Breakfast* are available on cassette only. Then there is the video, *Djam Karet Live*, as well as t-shirts, bumper stickers, and band literature. All the above is available by writing to Djam Karet, P.O. Box 883, Claremont, CA 91711. ☺



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 : .....



# The On Reflection interview:

**OR:** *So you never studied composition?*

**KW:** No, I didn't. The only lessons I've ever had was the piano up to age 13, and I took flute lessons from 5th to 10th grade. I stayed with the flute even though I didn't pursue it as seriously as the piano.

The Happy the Man thing happened just a year after I was out of high school. That came out of meeting a number of the guys at the local university where my father teaches. I went for a semester and then dropped out. I really met them the next semester so I wasn't a student. I had a factory job for a couple of years after that, while the band was forming.

**OR:** *Were you thinking then that music would ultimately be your career?*

**KW:** Yeh, I really was. I had no idea of course that the music business is pretty wretched and I didn't know that if you were on an album, you weren't making any money at all. I just had the impression that people who were putting out albums were making a living out of it. It's not really true and it still isn't for me.

**OR:** *One of the things that set Happy the Man apart from its many progressive contemporaries was the emphasis on instrumentals. Was that a direction chosen as a way to be original?*

**KW:** The instrumental thing was really a last resort. We were originally a vocal band. We had a singer and after a year, he quit. The second singer was around for 6-8 months and then he quit. And at that point, we were fairly disillusioned. I think I tried to raise everybody's spirits by saying "Why don't we try an instrumental approach?"

At that point it was the summer of 1975. We had a number of instrumental songs worked out along with vocal stuff, but for the first time, we really focused on instrumentals. Around this time we moved to the

(Washington) D.C. area and we had enough material for about an hour set. Some of those early tunes made it to the first LP.

**OR:** *It's hard enough being progressive, it must have been obvious to you that the instrumental approach wasn't going to make you popular.*

**KW:** I don't think we ever thought about being popular or not popular. We always thought that there should be vocals. I mean, none of us were jazz musicians. And all the bands we listened to were primarily vocal bands. In fact, when the second singer quit, our first thought was "well, let's find another singer." But we had no where to turn, so we went instrumental.

I've never regretted that move at all. We never thought in terms of marketing or hit singles. We weren't trying to be original, we were just trying not to be commercial. And because of that, we just didn't sound like anybody. I mean, you can hear influences here and there, there's no question we were influenced by people. But we weren't listening to Genesis, for example, and then saying "well, how can we play like Genesis?"

There are a couple of the early tunes we did with the first singer where you can hear all kinds of the influences in our playing. And when the album *Beginnings* comes out in September, people will hear stuff that points directly to Van der Graaf Generator, Genesis, Gentle Giant, whatever. But we soon came to define and follow our own direction. And with three composers in the band, you hear a lot of different things.

**OR:** *How were songs written in Happy the Man? Did you or Stanley Whitaker or Frank Wyatt do complete charts or were things hashed out among the other members?*

**KW:** It depended on which writer did the piece. We each wrote on our own. But we were all living in the same area and some of us even lived together, so you could hear what people were writing. Frank was the most prolific and we all liked his stuff a lot. We would listen to a new tune and if it clicked with us, we worked with it. There weren't too many pieces that got rejected. We'd give just about everything a try.

Nothing was ever written on paper. It was all by ear. A lot of times, I would have other people's parts in mind, sometimes very specifically, sometimes not. Frank and Stanley tended not to do other people's parts, so their work was more often arranged with the rest of the group.

**OR:** *On those first two albums for Arista, were you very dependent on (producer) Ken Scott in terms of getting your music on tape via all those knobs and tracks?*

**KW:** Absolutely. Up to that point, we had done one four-track session. The only other recording we'd done was with two microphones hooked up to a Revox.

The whole studio thing was a shock to us because Ken likes to record everything separately. And in retrospect, I think that diminished the intensity and the life of the music. It made the music a bit sterile, though it was very precise. He's a real perfectionist; we'd do 20-30 takes to get just one section down right.

But Ken was our first choice, we loved all the albums he'd worked on. And it was a great learning experience.

**OR:** *As a do-it-yourselfer, do you find that you have more freedom without an outside producer/engineer or do you find it takes your concentration away from your playing?*

**KW:** I feel I have more freedom now than I've ever had. Now I'm not working until someone else says it's



# Kit Watkins of Happy the Man

right. And the engineering doesn't get in the way. That's really a lot of the fun for me, coming up with the sounds and fooling with the board.

My playing isn't as important to me as it used to be, which a lot of people will notice because I don't do the minimoog solos like I used to. I'm not as interested in showing off my pyrotechnic skills as I am in creating something a little bit different with themes, textures, and the compositions themselves.

I had my dose of that kind of playing, especially on tour with Happy the Man and Camel, and that wore me out in terms of being a player, which was all I really was with Camel.

**OR:** *Arista has been very generous to Anderson, Bruford, Wakeman, Howe in the last year and a half. Why do you suppose they were so unsupportive of Happy the Man? And do you see major labels coming back for progressive groups or are independents the only viable outlet?*

**KW:** I can't even begin to guess what goes on in record companies. There's been a bit of support from the major labels recently like Capitol's Cinema label. But it seems to be more, you know,... progressive to them was Pink Floyd and Jethro Tull, not early Genesis or King Crimson. Seventies stuff, but more mainstream.

I think it's up to the independents. It always was but in the '70s the majors were a bit more adventurous. Happy the Man came along at the end of that. Clive Davis left CBS, where he had signed acts like Simon and Garfunkel and Janis Joplin, to start Arista, and he was looking for all kinds of stuff. And that's why he signed us.

And when he *did* sign us, he said "I realize you're a lot like Gentle Giant [who had two albums out on CBS in 1972 and one in 1980, *ed.*] in that you're going to have a cult

following, you're not going to be expected to have hits, you'll take a number of albums to develop and get a following, and so I'm offering you an eight-album, five-year contract."

And we thought, "this is great!" He seemed to understand us, he seemed not to have expectations for us to have hits so it seemed perfect. But when the time came to record *Crafty Hands*, they were already planning to drop us.

The real problem was bad management, which put us on tour with Hot Tuna and Foreigner. It just didn't work out at all. I don't begrudge Arista. They invested a quarter of a million dollars in those two albums, they gave me a start, and I wouldn't have been able to have my solo career quite so easily without that.

I know the impression is that it's Arista's fault that Happy the Man didn't make it big. But I don't look at it that way. A lot of the right elements weren't in place and we weren't thinking of making it big anyway. It wasn't our intention to make it big. It was, you know, how can we be good at what we do and how can we make a living doing it.

**OR:** *When recording what was later to be HTM's third album, was there a feeling of desperation or were you optimistic that you could still break through with your music?*

**KW:** Yeh, there was a feeling of desperation. Speaking for myself, there was a feeling that things were pretty bad. We lost Arista, we lost our management, and nothing was happening in terms of business. There were some interpersonal problems also. Ron Riddle left right after *Crafty Hands* and then Coco [Roussel] joined the band. He was a jewel, he clicked right in.

We always thought positively. But things were definitely going downhill. Maybe other people

didn't feel that way, but I did and that's part of the reason I left. That and the fact that I got an offer from Camel and I felt I should pursue it. It was time for a change.

**OR:** *You were with Camel for one album and three tours. Camel, of course, had a much bigger international following than HTM. Was it fun to kind of buy into that level of acceptance and success?*

**KW:** No, it wasn't. I never enjoyed being in Camel. And that's because I came from a band where I had been one of the main writers and leaders, and went to a band where I was really just a session musician. I don't really begrudge Andy Latimer that, I think he and I didn't click musically the way I did with the guys in HTM.

I realized after doing it that I'm not a touring person, I don't enjoy being on tour. I don't particularly like performing live as much as I do the recording end of it. I'm not a show person, I don't get off on playing on stage. I did it to make a living. It felt like prostitution. That's a pretty harsh word to use but it did feel that way because I didn't feel honest. That's why I kept quitting the band. I'd quit, then a tour would come up and they'd call again.

**OR:** *Tell us about the formation of Azimuth Records and the start of your solo career.*

**KW:** That was born because I had a bunch of material that I wanted to use on the next Camel album, and when it looked as though none of it was going to get used, I decided I have some things I want to say in music and I ought to just do it myself. So I took the money I made in Camel and recorded *Labyrinth*.

I tried looking for labels but no one was interested. This was before New Age and instrumental music were popular. There weren't as many independent labels then, and CDs hadn't arrived yet. In a way,



# The On Reflection interview:

the CD market has opened things up for indies because of the profit margin. You can make some money selling 2000 CDs but you can't make money selling 2000 albums.

**OR:** *Your solo albums have been very well received by critics but sales are very modest. Do you mind having your music heard by only a select group of musicians and snobby progressive fans?*

**KW:** Ha! I'm glad you're the one that said it that way! Well, I do actually. I'd rather be listened to by more people other than musicians. There's a certain preparedness I expect from my listeners; not that they have to be educated in a particular way, but more that they have to be open-minded.

A lot of people have a very narrow range of music that they listen to and if something falls outside that, they won't give it the time of day. I find that there are not many people who listen to a lot of different kinds of music. I'd like my listeners to be well-rounded in their tastes; not necessarily musicians, but open to different things.

**OR:** *You have a new album coming out soon called SunStruck. How does it compare with your work to date?*

**KW:** It's hard for me to describe it but it's more uptempo than *Azure*. *Azure* was a more contemplative record. I had done a lot of quieter music in the past, and I'd like to get back to that, but I wanted to do it less on *SunStruck*. It's not as intense or serious as HTM's music. But I'm happy with it. It should be out by the end of the summer.

**OR:** *What instruments do you play on the album?*

**KW:** It's mostly electronic and based on my MIDI sequencer. Mostly keyboards, a vocal here and there, some flute and guitar. Even though it's very electronic, I tried to make it all

sound more...human.

**OR:** *I think you were anticipating my next question. Doing it yourself, isn't there something lost, in terms of human interaction and feedback, and even human imperfection in performance?*

**KW:** There is something lost but I think there's something gained as well. What's gained is the ability to schedule things easier, and it allows me greater concentration and the ability to make it more personal.

What's lost is what you said, the human interaction, feedback, different viewpoints. But it takes time and effort to find good collaborators. It does help to work with someone else, it gets you more motivated. But I see myself as more of a painter than a musician. It's a personal expression, just me and the canvass.

**OR:** *How about future solo work? Is Azimuth still going to release your records?*

**KW:** Azimuth went out of business in 1985. East Side Digital has licensed my albums and some of the Happy the Man stuff to release on CD. Right now we're working on a regular artist's agreement, where I'll probably be signed for three albums.

**OR:** *You mentioned a new collection of rare HTM tracks called Beginnings. What's the scoop on that?*

**KW:** It's all unreleased stuff. There are four pieces that were recorded with the first singer in a four-track studio. I still had the tapes and remixed them, so they sound pretty good.

The other three pieces were recorded just before our move to D.C., after the second singer left. Unfortunately, I don't have or know the whereabouts of any tapes made with the second singer. These cuts are all instrumental, except for "Leave that Kitten Alone, Arnone," which has that one line sung. That was a

popular piece in the D.C. area before we were signed. The reason it never made it to record was that Ken Scott didn't like it, although we continued to play it live.

The three instrumentals were recorded with just two mikes hooked up to a Revox. There's a little distortion but it sounds pretty good. The album will be out on WMAS, the Wayside label, in September, and is about 61 minutes long.

**OR:** *You make a living now not from your music but from The Grant Advisor, a newsletter that informs educational institutions on available grants. How did you get involved in that?*

**KW:** I met my partner in 1983. He has a background in higher education and had done the newsletter on a contract basis. Eventually, he took it over and I've been doing that and some computer programming as well. I like it because it's not full-time.

**OR:** *How much time do you spend on music and how much with computer work?*

**KW:** When I work on an album, I work really hard, like 20-40 hours a week. But I just finished an album and I haven't done anything for two months. I don't worry that if I don't practice, I'll lose my chops because I'm not that into performing. As long as I can still play, which I can. It's like typing, you don't forget how. And I know I could be a better player by practicing but it's not as important to me as ideas are. So even though I haven't been in the studio for two months, I've been doing a lot of thinking.

**OR:** *What's the future of progressive rock? And for there to be greater acceptance of progressive music, who has to make the first move: the labels, the musicians, the radio stations, or the public?*

**KW:** I can't really predict because I

*continued next page*



# Kit Watkins of Happy the Man

have no idea where the music scene is going. Sometimes I feel disillusioned and sometimes I feel more positive about it because there's more independent stuff out. It's not all progressive, but it's not mainstream

I think the musicians have to take the lead. I would never be into this kind of music if it hadn't been for bands that I listened to when I was growing up, like Yes, Genesis, King Crimson, ELP, and guys like that. I wouldn't have been open-minded without it. It's ironic that I was brought up in a house where there was a lot of classical music played and I didn't appreciate it or enjoy it. Then when I got into Genesis, I went back and dug out a Ravel piece, and I just rediscovered classical music.

People need to be open to listening but they also need something to listen to. If you're a musician and you have a vision, you should just follow it. The unfortunate part of that is you're not going to make a living doing it. I think there are less

people, knowing that, that are willing to do it. We just got done with a decade of the "Me" generation, maybe the '90s will be different.

**OR:** *How would you define progressive music?*

**KW:** Non-conformist, stylistically not defined, so that if it's progressive it doesn't have a singular stylistic identity. For example, you have groups like King Crimson, Genesis, Yes, ELP, Gentle Giant...and they're nothing alike. Their approaches are completely different. So if you extrapolate that and say the music is undefinable, then you can't really say what progressive music is.

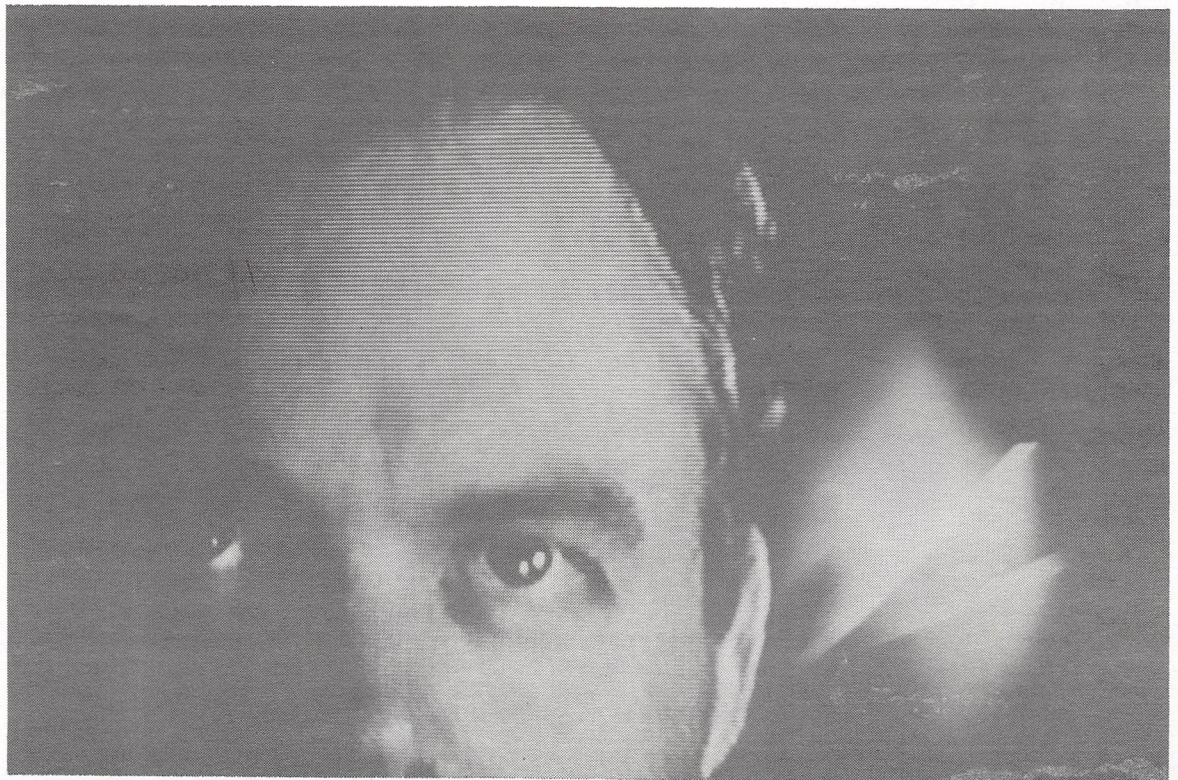
The main element is doing what you think is true to yourself. Not doing it because someone says you should. If you sound like someone else, you're not progressive. Even if you sound like Yes or Genesis, you're not really progressive because being progressive means going after your own vision.

**OR:** *Finally, I know you're a fan of Thoreau so I'd like your interpretation of this quote of his and how it applies to your music: "The highest condition of art is artlessness."*

**KW:** I think it's sort of what I was saying before. The thing is not to think about it as art when you're doing it. Take yourself away from the thought that you're creating art and be in the awareness that you're just creating.

So many times people sit down and do what they do because they think that that's what needs to be done, or someone else thinks that it needs to be done. Maybe they're trying to please their parents, or maybe they're trying to get a record deal and please the president of a record company. But they're not doing what *they* really want. *ew*

*Kit Watkins, from the cover of his forthcoming ESD album, SunStruck.*





# Annie Haslam goes on tour!

Annie Haslam is out on the road with a six-piece band, conducting her first U.S. tour since Renaissance folded a few years ago. The tour, which began at the end of May, is to promote her recent solo album, *Annie Haslam*, on Epic Records. Disconcerted with Epic's lack of promotion, Annie is also looking for a new record deal and is staying on the road until she finds one.

I spoke with Annie recently on the phone while she was in New Jersey. The complete interview will be published next issue. According to her, the show consists of tunes from the new album and a smattering of Renaissance classics, including the show-stopping "Ashes are Burning," which is always guaranteed to be one of the most incredible vocal displays you'll ever witness.

The band consists of Annie on vocals; Raphael Rudd on piano and synthesizer; Mark Lampariello on guitar, bass, and backing vocals; Caris Arkin on guitar, bass, and backing vocals; Rave Tesar on synthesizer; and Joe Goldberger on drums. Rudd and Lampariello were members of the latter-day Renaissance lineup.

Here now is the list of upcoming dates so far. Boston-area fans are especially lucky in that the Copley Plaza concert is *free*.

June 26 - Bottom Line - NY, NY  
 July 27 - Club Bené - Morgan, NJ  
 Aug. 9 - Copley Plaza - Boston, MA

You can address any correspondence to Annie c/o Joanne Shea, P.O. Box 12, Folsom, PA 19033. ☺

*Look for an  
 exclusive  
 interview with  
 Annie in the  
 next issue!*

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*We know progressive music when we hear it!*