

# circular

vol. 6 number 16, monday, april 22, 1974

## Robin Trower's 15-Year Love Affair





# The Expanding Guitar of Robin Trower

by GORDON FLETCHER

Robin Trower has two main interests in the world of rock music: (1) the advancement of the electric guitar as a musical instrument and (2) the development of a viable synthesis of blues/rock/R&B styling.

A warm and basically congenial sort, Trower is more than willing to expound on his love for his instrument. Though he's been fingering the frets for over 15 years, he still *makes* time to practice almost daily, always hoping to discover something new.

## It May Sound Funny

"It probably sounds a bit funny for me to say it," he admits. "Perhaps it would be better for an observer to judge whether or not I'm coming up with new approaches to guitar playing. All I can say is that I strive to come up with new ideas for songs, and since my songs usually start out with a guitar piece, I guess it could be said that I'm constantly trying to break new ground with my instrument."

The mere mention of anybody "breaking new ground" with the guitar almost immediately brings up the ghost of Jimi Hendrix, whose incessant devotion to his axe ushered in the age of the truly *electric* guitar. After hearing Trower's highly-successful debut Chrysalis LP (*Twice Removed From Yesterday*), many folks made comparisons between Hendrix and Trower, some favorable, others derogatory.

"I think the comparison with Hendrix was to be expected," he explains, "but it's reached a point where that kind of talk has no validity anymore. Anyone who's heard the first album knows that

my sound can be compared to Hendrix'—as well it should, since he influenced me more than any other guitarist. With the second album it won't do anyone any good to continue saying 'he plays like Hendrix.' I think that I've established my own identity now and it's up to people to judge my work in light of that."



## Billed with Jimi

Trower's feeling about Hendrix alternate from devotion to disappointment: on varying occasions he's both praised and put down his work. As it was, Trower was never much of an admirer of Hendrix until a week before his death, when Hendrix and the Procol Harum of which Trower was a part shared the bill in Hamburg, Germany.

"I'd never seen him before," Trower remembers, "but on that night I felt as though I understood exactly what he was trying to do. I remember standing off the stage and constantly saying to myself, 'Yeah, that's right. That's how I'd do it,' and really getting off on his playing. Up until then I'd always thought he had gone down-

hill after a good first album, but seeing him that night put things in a totally different perspective."

It's oft-told history that right after Hendrix' death Trower and Procol lyricist Keith Reid collaborated quite accidentally on "Song for a Dreamer," producing a spacy epitaph quite at odds with anything before attempted by Procol Harum. "Song for a Dreamer" was meant as a tribute to a fallen idol and, as Trower remembers, was the turning point in his musical career.

## Just Couldn't Stay

"That song made me realize my capabilities. It was the first time I had done something entirely by myself—I played everything on that track—and after hearing how things worked out I knew that I'd reached a point where I couldn't turn back. All along I'd been staying with Procol because I didn't know what else I could do; after that song I could no longer use that excuse."

After a brief fling with R&B-oriented Jude (a highly-touted outfit that never lived up to its advance notices—"too contrived," notes Trower), Robin found himself in the musical company of Jimmy Dewar and Reggie Isadore, a bassist and drummer who've come to serve him quite admirably.

"The problem with Jude," he explains, "was that it was more a singer-oriented band than a guitar-oriented band. Frankie Miller is a very fine singer, but after a while it became obvious that I wasn't doing myself a lot of good just laying back behind him all the time. I needed more room to stretch out, and with this band there's a 50/50

balance between vocals and instrumental passages. That gives me room."

## One-Instrument Orchestra

Trower uses phase shifters to impart an other-worldly texture to his guitar tones. At a time when other guitarists seem to be turning back to the cleaner "country" sound, Trower's work stands out. "The guitar is like a little orchestra" he explains. "There's so much you can do with it in the way of sheer *sound*. I enjoy exploring the instrument's electronic capabilities," he says.

Perhaps just as important as Trower's mighty guitar prowess is his devotion to rhythm & blues, nurtured through hours of listening to old records and forged through his association with one of England's more renowned "white soul" bands, the Paramours. "The purity of those old rhythm & blues records is what we're constantly after," Trower points out. "Though we're not Black Americans and we obviously can't claim their music as ours, still it's the only thing we can relate to. We're always trying to incorporate the depth and the purity of vintage R&B into the music we perform."

Indeed, as Trower discusses the tracks on his debut album, R&B names start dropping all over the place. "Hannah" was written after an emotional listen to Donny Hathaway's "Giving Up"—"I think it's fairly obvious how much we were influenced by that song," says Trower. "Man of the World" sank its roots into "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," which happens to be his all-time favorite soul song.





## Liking It Better

Trower now has a new album out on Chrysalis—it's called *Bridge of Sighs* and he's quite happy with it. "I didn't care for any of my guitar playing on the first album," he notes, "but on this one I find myself enjoying a lot of it." Beyond his spell-binding guitar lies still more of his devotion to blues and R&B. It's an emotionally involving LP from start to finish.

As Trower puts it, "Once something starts to develop emotionally we just lay back and let it progress naturally." The result is some stunningly inventive music, perhaps epitomized by "Too Rolling

Stoned," a cut which incorporates a lengthy spontaneous jam.

It seems a good bet that Robin Trower is destined for big success. Lord knows he's got the roots (Hendrix, B. B. King and Muddy Waters are a heady bunch of influences), and anyone with half a brain could see that he's got the devotion. But nobody makes it really big these days without a gimmick, and Trower's is perhaps the strongest gimmick of all—hard, no-nonsense music played straight from the heart.

"That's the only way I can do it," Trower admits. "I'm just not into wearing dresses."

## Top Ten

Warner Bros. sales figures for the week of April 8-14

1. Maria Muldaur  
(BS/M8/M5 2148)
2. The Doobie Brothers/  
*What Were Once Vices  
Are Now Habits*  
(W/L8W/L5W 2750)
3. Tower of Power/  
*Back to Oakland*  
(BS/M8/M5 2749)
4. Seals & Crofts/  
*Unborn Child*  
(W/L8W/L5W 2761)
5. Deep Purple/*Burn*  
(W/L8W/L5W 2766)
6. Foghat/*Energized*  
(BS/M8/M5 6950)
7. Gordon Lightfoot/  
*Sundown*  
(MS/M8/M5 2177)
8. Graham Central Station  
(BS/M8/M5 2763)
9. Frank Zappa/  
*Apostrophe'*  
(DIS/M8D/M5D 2175)
10. The Marshall Tucker  
Band/*A New Life*  
(CP/M8/M5 0124)



COMING THIS SUMMER

# Dry Wallers and Cedar Siders Meet the New WB Building

The apparently-increasing rapidity of the approach of July's end—the scheduled completion date of the anxiously-awaited Warner Bros. Records building—poses no threat nor surprise to project superintendent Bob DeWaide.

"We don't expect any more rain. And since most of the work to come is inside, even a sudden storm wouldn't slow things down enough to notice."

Since early February, when last *Circular* dashed across picturesque Warner Boulevard for a look-see at the budding building, a number of

developments have occurred, signaling significant progress in the construction.

"Dry-wall subcontractors moved in a few weeks ago. The painters and glaziers have begun to paint, and to install windows. The cedar siding is up on the outside of the building, and the plasterers moved in on Tuesday. We're currently adding the rest rooms and the basement."

In contrast to Warner Records' current grungy—er, *funky*—headquarters, the New Building has been specifically designed to house the

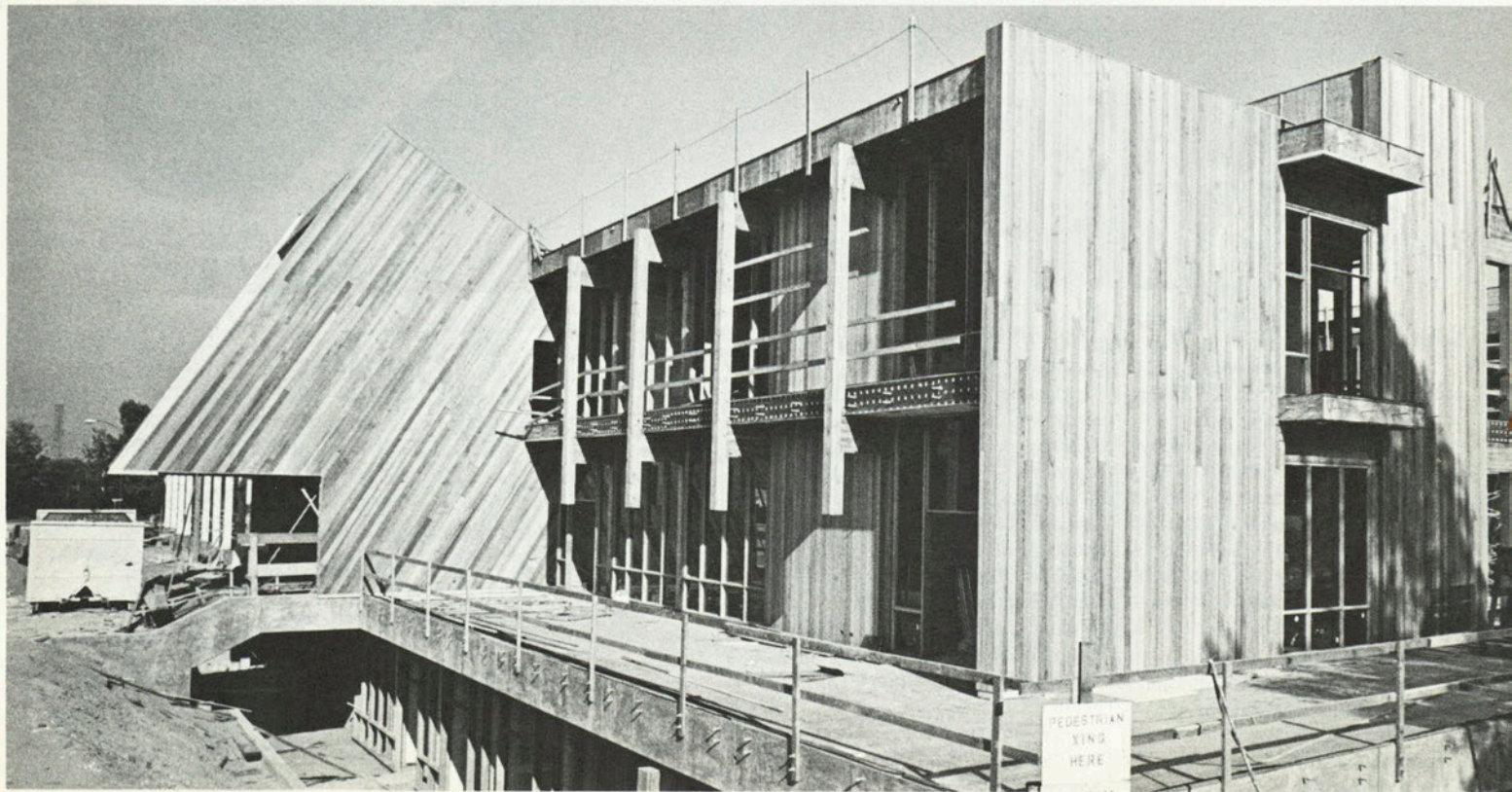
Warners crew. Lots of glass, lots of open space and lots of greenery. Everything in quantity, that is, save parking.

"Next to the building, there's a new, 160-space asphalt parking lot. It's been suggested that that really isn't enough spaces, but it's what the company decided to come up with.

"Of course, there's no reason that a larger, say two-deck, lot couldn't be constructed later. Street parking should be a bit easier for visitors as it stands than it is at the old building."

The New Building has three levels,

to provide plenty of office room. One, the Garden Level, is actually *below* the ground, though cleverly-designed so that there will be windows for sunlight and even a view—of carefully-landscaped ground cover. (This seeming paradox is accomplished by way of a moat-like ditch around the building filled with air, plants and sunlight rather than aquatic reptiles. A guard rail around the ground floor will keep sunstruck employees and visitors alike from falling into the [non-poison] ivy.) An elevator will be available, in addition to a number of stairways that have been planned to appease the



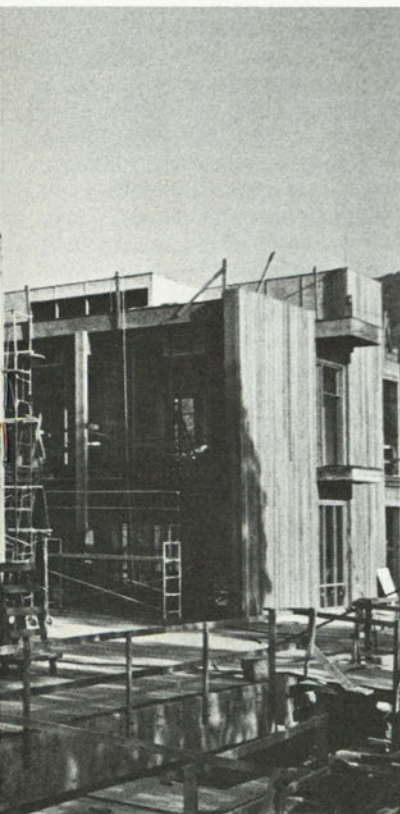


# Widening the Book of the Road (in a Third Edition Already)

exercise-conscious WB folk and in recognition of the energy crisis.

The New Building is located on Burbank Studios land, just a jog away from Warner Records' present headquarters, but is isolated from the Studios themselves. There will be no gates nor intimidating security patrolmen in full uniform to check credentials before entry is allowed; only a genial, smiling receptionist, there to help visitors find the correct office.

All of this, says the schedule, come September (allowing the decorators and movers a month to play).



NOT IN LONDON—Your British Observer is obliged to confess that she is, in fact, ogling at large in the Big Apple. The atmospheric speed-up is far more rattling than the conventional jet lag. I've felt like a 33 record being played at 45. These words come to you from the office of Jo Bergman at WB New York. Jo's in London gathering data for a British and European version of the legend-worthy Book of the Road. Meanwhile, where I am, her assistant Donna is laboring on the promised expanded version of the American book. The new edition of what is affectionately referred to by its compilers as the Good Book will contain info on health food suppliers and restaurants, doctors, dentists, clubs for watching Other Performers at work, zoos, museums, recording studios, exhaustive detail of individual venues (lights, power, stage measurements etc.) and more, more. And already yet they're planning the Third Edition, which will escalate from 33 to 44 cities.

## Nothing Ever Happens

**Here.** If you ever want to kill conversation dead in the press office of your choice, just walk in and say, "What's happening?" Now this tack may have paid off for Rodney Bingenheimer, but in most cases the interlocutor will be regarded in stony, nervous silence. One is far better off eavesdropping and spying. Or coming to the fourth floor of WB in New York, where there is a wall-sized erasable monthly calendar showing all the gigs being played by Warner acts in the vicinity. It is so excellently clear and big that you don't even



need glasses. It reveals that there was a British invasion here last week boasting Alan Price, Leo Sayer and Al Stewart—all of whom did themselves some good, from what I hear. And they've been followed by no less than Gregg Allman, Todd Rundgren and Frank Sinatra. (To borrow a phrase Marryin' Sam once so eloquently applied to Daisy Mae, what we got left over is more'n what most folks start out with.)

**Safe as Milk.** My arrival here coincided with a headline in *The New York Times* claiming the city to be the safest out of 13 tested here in these United States. This exhilarating drop in its chart position comes as a welcome surprise. Although I don't know if it's The Apple improving or those other burbs degenerating that accounts for this sanguine statistic. One does note a healthy campaign of civic owning-up, as in the street signs that bluntly exhort, "Littering Is Filthy and Selfish So Don't Do It." Another heartening sentiment—new to me if old to you—is the

bumper sticker "Honk Twice If You Think He's Guilty." Beep Beep. And now to make what I promise will be my last dated topical reference this week: Did you hear about the guy who fell behind in payments to his exorcist? He was repossessed.

**The Gap in Gotham.** One person not at all responsible for that chestnut is that pillar of the Credibility Gap (if Gaps are allowed to have pillars), Harry Shearer. This person (if pillars of the Credibility Gap are allowed to be called persons) was ligging around Warners' NY office trying to replace a lost air ticket so as to return to the City of the Angels. It was my big chance to tell him what a fanatical follower I had been of the C.G. since 1968, the year KRLA almost made it worth leaving New York for Los Angeles, which latter feat I reluctantly performed. So listen, you should at least buy the Gap's new album. It's a great gift idea, you know.

—SHELLEY BENOIT



# A New Bomb Scare, Old Divorce and Ongoing Record Price Squeeze Fills News

## California's Always Had Too Many Divorces.

Here's a summarized wrap-up of the brouhaha going on between Sonny and Cher, not to mention CBS-TV. This info comes from a variety of sources, among them *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety*. First Sonny filed for legal separation and joint custody of daughter Chastity. Then Cher countered with a suit for divorce plus a suit charging she had wool pulled over her eyes, having signed a contract two years go which gave Sonny legal rights to a percentage of her future earnings in the event of a divorce. Obviously, since the ratings of

The Sonny and Cher Show live where the air is thin, CBS-TV doesn't want to do anything but renew the show as fast as it can. For a week or so, and believe me this is funnier than the show, CBS executives were holding meetings with the couple to see if they (the exex) couldn't put this family back together again. Unfortunately, news came to public ear recently, via Hollywood media, that those patch-up meetings had failed. The show will not be renewed next season so I'm sure all the CBS-TV hot-shots are weeping into their martinis. As to what Sonny, Cher and Chastity are doing, who

knows; but wouldn't a marriage counseling bureau be a great subsidiary business for CBS?

## From the Pages of Playboy?

Someone (I conveniently forget precisely who, however, I have my suspicions it was Solomon Penthaus Himself) brought an interesting letter to my attention. It was from none other than The Playboy Advisor, whose letters usually begin, "When I get a chick into my bedroom . . ." or "My girlfriend and I want to get married but she's only 18 . . ." This missive asked the Advisor if indeed there was a song entitled "The Suicide Song" which

gained popularity during the Depression, but which caused so many people to kill themselves that the FCC banned it. The writer, of course, also wanted to know where he could get a copy, things being what they are these days. PB's answer, in short, was that the correspondent must have been referring to a Hungarian song "Szomorú Vasárnap," which translates as "Gloomy Sunday." In 1936, The Advisor continued, Hungarian police, while investigating a suicide, found lyrics to this ditty and uncovered 17 other self-exterminations they attributed to the tune. Budapest's police force then banned the record, but it subsequently found its way to the USA and was recorded by, among others, Billie Holliday, Josh White, Ray Charles and Mel Tormé. No official anti-action was taken in this country, but the lyrics and melody do have a profoundly depressing effect. A perfect time for a re-release, don't you think?

## Another Bomb at the Troubadour.

Only this was a real bomb, the kind that explode and kill people, not a bad act. Every Monday night LA's Troubadour has a Hoot, to perform at which you do not have to be James Taylor or Joni Mitchell. You have to audition, of course, but no "name," record company money or contract is required. April 8 began as a usual Hoot Night, the bar being packed and almost all seats filled. Suddenly Hoot master Rick Cunha (who has a solo debut album and single currently shuffling around on the charts, but that's another label's story) appeared astage, interrupting a band of sorts to advise everyone to hit the street. He ex-



Funny Costumes Make the Women, Men and Camel. Pixed above from left to right are Fanny Manager Roy Silver, Fanny Publicist Gary Stromberg, Casablanca President Neil Bogart and camel. Photo'd below, same order, are Fanny members Patti Quatro, Jean Millington, Brie Brandt and Nickey Barclay. Photo by Suzanne Ayres.



plained that a bomb threat had just been phoned in and an LA County Sheriff squad was on the way to case the joint. The crowd milled around Santa Monica Boulevard, waiting to see the Troubadour go up in flames while sheriffs went in and out. One half-hour later the folks were allowed back in and Hoot Night carried on as if nothing had happened. Well actually nothing did.

## Looks Like LPs Might Cost as Much as Concerts.

From *The Daily Variety* comes a story which bodes bad news for album-buyers. Caught in the middle of vinyl and paper shortages, diskeries have to pay more for these ever-so-basic supplies. Most large record companies have had to raise album prices for the second time in 10 years—which isn't bad considering how gasoline and meat are going along. So far, the predominant price increase has been one dollar (retail), which makes it \$6.98 for a single LP and anywhere up to \$9.98 for a two-record set. Giving most musical exex headaches now is the possibility that this will cause fewer sales so they'll still lose money. Advertising the vinyls costs more too, not to mention spiraling artist royalty rates. Columbia has a cheerful attitude in spite of all this bad news. Frank Mooney of their Sales Department told *Variety* that hit albums would sell, no matter what the cost. WB National Sales Director Russ Thyret disclosed that WB's policy is to charge \$6.98 for a known-in-advance huge seller and the old \$5.98 for an album which has unpredictable sales potential.

## Ruby's Run-Ons

Why almost each and every issue of *Circular*, and particularly this column, contains grand slam errors week after week beats me. It must be because none of us get enough sleep. Apologies all around to the **Doobie Brothers**. As a group, they really cleaned up in Volume 6, Number 13. Their photo, as it appeared in this column, held two large boo-boos. Firstly, their manager's name is **Bruce Cohn**, not Cohen; secondly, someone mixed up **Tiran Porter** and **Tom Johnston**. That very same issue (dated April 8), with a beautiful likeness of **Jesse Colin Young** on front cover, was misnumbered. It should have read Volume 6, Number 14. One last mistake. **Sue Donahue**, penlady of that nice live-from-New-York piece on **Alan Price** in last week's *Circular*, spells her name **Donoghue** for some reason. Fortunately, she's not one of your hot-collared umbrage-takers.

**Ms. Monday's Question of the Week Department:** What famous guitar player for which well-known group used to play piccolo at Hollywood High? Clue: Initials are L.G. You'll find another clue in photo form somewhere herein. **Alice Cooper** caused mass confusion, not to mention hysteria, in **Brazil** during the first week of April. The Cooper conglomerate did a week of touring that country, unintentionally making quite a spectacle of themselves in **São Paulo**. Prior to a concert there, Alice et. al. held a press conference for all manner of media (TV, print and radio). When and where this press conference was to be held made

front page news in all local papers. Five thousand screaming fans showed up and the police eventually arrived to regain some order. Meanwhile, the ensuing concert at Ahembic Hall was a smash, with well over 100,000 ravers in attendance. Cooper LPs (all of them) are selling faster than studs for your jeans at the moment in Brazil. What **Continental Records** (WB's Brazilian representative) is hoping now is that their natural resource necessary to produce all those discs (crude petroleum) will hold up under the stress. A little research shows that Brazil comes up with about 2.7 billion gallons of the stuff per year. That's a lot compared to say, Ecuador, but not so much when up against, for example, Venezuela. Special congratulations to **Geraldo Loewenberg**, the label manager, and to **Señor Byington**, Continental's general manager, for making such a splendid success of all this news. **Quote of the Week Department** comes from a *Cash Box* interview with **Capricorn's Livingston Taylor**, "We are a very close family and music was always around the house. I do recall my father, arms outstretched, leaning on the dishwasher and singing convincingly that, 'With a little bit of luck one can get it all, and not get hooked,' my mother humming back, 'It ain't necessarily so.' Oldest brother **Alex** listening to **Ray Charles** and spray-painting **James'** guitar blue 'cause he heard that it improved the sound and **Elvis** had done it. My sister **Kate** telling me not to play, which obviously had the opposite effect, and younger brother **Hugh** figuring we were all mad and continuing to build go-carts." Meanwhile, Liv's newest 45, "Loving Be My New



**Mystery Photo.** This one goes with Ruby's Question of the Week Department. No more clues.

Horizon," continues to bombard radio airwaves in Atlanta, Boston, Providence, Baltimore, Washington (D.C.), Cleveland and San Francisco. As a wind-up, I'd like to announce that long-time Reprise group **Fanny** is now signed to **Casablanca**. To prove it, you'll find somewhere near this column a fascinating photo. Fanny is currently working on its next single, "I've Had It," being produced by **Vince Poncia** for Richard Perry Music. All this info came, of course, from omnipresent and ever-on-the-oasis group Manager **Roy Silver**.

## Inspirational Verse

Jenny got her picture in the paper this morning.  
She made it with a bang.  
According to the story in the paper this morning  
Jenny is the leader of a teenage gang.

— The Everly Brothers,  
"Poor Jenny"



# Publishers and Their Parishes



Being a former employee of Specialty Records, Inc., I can vouch for the fact that Specialty christened its publishing affiliate Venice Music because the company's offices were located at the time on Venice Blvd. in Los Angeles.

I have no similar profundities to offer concerning the other publishers listed in last week's quiz. Suffice it to say that if you had a recording contract with Atlantic Records in the 1950s, Progressive Music was ready and willing to publish any original songs you might develop. If you had a hit for Vee-Jay Records out in Chicago, Conrad Publishing made sure there was sheet music available, while up the street Arc Music did likewise for Chuck Berry and other hitmakers for the Chess/Checker/Argo combine.

## Commodore Fats

If you were Fats Domino, Commodore Music made sure that your name and theirs appeared on the label of Pat Boone's cover of "Ain't That a Shame" as well as on the Imperial original. Finally, if you're a truly observant collector of vintage rock & roll, you've undoubtedly noticed that many of those yellow Sun labels that stimulate your juices contain the name of Sun's affiliate Hi Lo Music.

That all comes out to 1-C, 2-F, 3-E, 4-A, 5-D and 6-B. By the way, all six of these publishers were

affiliated with BMI, which by virtue of its roots in 1940s R&B and country music had a near-monopoly on 1950s R&R.

## Affiliation Alterations

Things have changed a bit since then. ASCAP, for one thing, decided in the mid-1960s that rock was going to be around for a while, and moved impressively to reclaim lost territory.

Though many record companies still retain publishing affiliates, much of today's music is published by independent firms especially set up to publish the works of a single writer or group. Often these firms have names as colorful as those of the groups themselves.

Our second Publishing Matchmeup deals with a few of these independent firms, all of them associated with groups or soloists currently, or recently, heard on Burbank-distributed labels. We are not concerned with who actually owns these companies, but just with whose music they publish.

## Musicmakers

1. Little Feat
2. Chunky, Novi & Ernie
3. Captain Beefheart
4. Ry Cooder
5. Grateful Dead
6. Jesse Colin Young
7. Frank Zappa
8. Neil Young

## Publishers

- A. Silver Fiddle
- B. Tonopah & Tidewater
- C. Ice Nine
- D. Naked Snake
- E. Pigfoot
- F. Green Bump
- G. Creeping Licking
- H. Munchkin

Smarter than most people is Alex Pappas, of Milton, Mass., who correctly matched Dr. Demento's April 1 commercial products array with their musical sponsors—Chunky, Novi & Ernie; Martin Mull; The Mothers and Back Door.

Each week the Doctor slips another disc lore question whose answer is the focus of

his subsequent column. Earliest reply to his query (mailed to Dr. Demento, c/o *Circular*, Warner Bros. Records, 3701 Warner Blvd., Burbank, California 91505) wins any single Warner/Reprise catalog album. Be neat and funny and clear.

## Vinyl Statistics

New releases of Warner Family records this week number no albums and four singles.

### SINGLES (April 17)

"Never Gonna Hide" /  
"I Don't Want To Make  
You Love Me"—Glass  
Hammer—Warner Bros.  
single WB 7807  
"Harlem Song" /

"Something's Real"—  
The Sweepers—  
Reprise single REP 1200  
"Liverpool Fool" /  
"Cover Girl"—  
Browning Bryant—  
Reprise single REP 1201  
"I've Had It" /  
"The First Time"—  
Fanny—Casablanca single  
NEB 0009

## circular

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