

311 Considers Its Fans No. 1

Capricorn Set Offers More Music For Lower Price

■ BY CARRIE BORZILLO

LOS ANGELES—Even with a multiplatinum album under their belts, a well-established name, and one of the sturdiest fan bases around, the members of L.A.-based, Omaha, Neb.-bred 311 haven't lost sight of what got them here: the fans.

That's the main reason the band opted to record its new set, "Transistor," due Aug. 5 on Capricorn, as a double-album on one CD, priced as a regular-length disc. The 21-song album, which will be simultaneously released on double-vinyl, is the follow-up to 1995's "311."

"311," or "The Blue Record" as it's commonly called, sold more than 2.2 million units, according to SoundScan, peaking at No. 12 on The Billboard 200 and spawning two modern rock and mainstream rock hits, "Down" and "All Mixed Up."

Not only did the band want to give the fans 10 extra songs for free, but it also insisted that a bonus track, which has multimedia capabilities and is at the beginning of the album, be included only on the finished CDs, not advance copies. In addition, a limited-edition sticker will be included inside the CD.

"There are two reasons, really, why we did a double-album," says Chad Sexton, 311's drummer, who writes many of the songs. The other members are lead singer/guitarist Nick Hexum, guitarist Tim Mahoney, bassist P-Nut, and singer/turntable maestro SA Martinez.

"We didn't want to decide against any song until we heard it in the final version, so we recorded a total of 29 songs," continues Sexton. "We didn't want a double-album because we didn't want the fans to pay \$22, so we cut down the songs until we could fit it on one CD."

"We're only contracted for 11 songs; we don't get paid for more than that. But we wanted to give them to our fans rather than just the 11 songs, because they've waited awhile for new songs from us."

G. Scott Walden, VP of artist development at Capricorn, says the label was more than willing to let 311 do what it wanted for "Transistor," the band's fourth album for Capricorn and its first since the label inked a distribution deal with Mercury. "That's one of the great things about 311, that they really are fan devoted. Ten songs for free is proof of that," Walden says.

The other reason for the extended album is obvious: It's been two years since the release of "311," and the band has always been prolific.

"We released our first record, 'Music,' then toured for five months. The next year [1994], we released 'Grassroots,' then toured. Then '311,' then toured forever with no new record out," says Sexton. "We had a lot built up. So, when we started to record it, we just decided to do them all."

There are no real surprises for 311 fans on "Transistor." The band stays true to its core-rock-meets-rap-meets-reggae-with-a-pop-sensibility sound. However, "Transistor" offers more melody, more dub reggae (or



311

"space dub rock," as Sexton says), and an overall trippier vibe.

The album also has more of a live feel, which is the result of using 311's live sound engineer, Scott Ralston, as the main producer instead of someone who is "outside the 311 family," according to Sexton.

"We were able to do what we wanted, and that included not putting a compressor or noise gates on all the tracks like most producers do," Sexton says. "It detracts from the sound. There are little things that we don't approve of that other producers do, like that. The production and sound of the instruments to me on ['Transistor'] sound way better than we've ever sounded."

Out of the slew of rock bands that have broken through to the masses and achieved commercial success in the past few years, 311 is on the short list of those that truly earned it the old-fashioned way: touring.

Radio and national video outlets didn't catch up to 311 until some miles were logged on the road with the likes of Cypress Hill, plus time spent on the H.O.R.D.E. and Warped tours. The band has also headlined tours of its own.

In fact, 311 and its booking agent, John Harrington at Variety Artists,

are in the early stages of creating an annual summer package tour called the Unity Festival, which is slated to begin in the spring or summer of 1998.

"The band has always wanted to do a festival," says Harrington, who's been booking 311 for the past five or six years. "In the early years, we tried to get them on some festivals but were never successful. We've seen a lot of these things driven by corporate greed, and we want it to be more musical and fun. It will be a multiband festival that will raise money for a charity—something that's fun and comes from the heart."

Because of the way "311" developed, Bob Bell, new-release buyer for the 230-store Wherehouse Entertainment chain based in Torrance, Calif., believes the new set is "going

(Continued on next page)



Bryan And Blaxam. Bon Jovi keyboardist David Bryan is trying his hand at management with Toronto-based Blaxam. The band recently appeared at an "ASCAP Presents" showcase at Don Hill's in New York. Some of the attendees pictured, from left, are Bryan, Jon Bon Jovi, Mercury Records A&R exec Frankie LaRocka, Foreigner's Mick Jones, ASCAP's Jonathan Love, Blaxam co-manager Scott Bellone, and band members Adrian Eccleston, Shannon Maracle, Dean Jarvis, Jacintha Tuku, Saidah Baba Talibah, and Washington Savage.

Lighthouse Family Coming Ashore In U.S.

A&M To Release 'Ocean Drive' By Slow-Growing U.K. Act

■ BY PAUL SEXTON

LONDON—A&M is hopeful that the Lighthouse Family's radiant U.K. success of the past 18 months is about to shine across the Atlantic.

The duo, comprising London instrumentalist Paul Tucker and Nigerian-born singer Tunde Baiyewu, has enjoyed remarkable and enduring prosperity with its "Ocean Drive" album in Britain. The disc is certified quadruple-platinum (1.2 million units sold) and remains high on the album chart in Britain after some 70 weeks.

Released in the U.K. on Wild Card/Polydor, the album's belated U.S.



LIGHTHOUSE FAMILY

appearance will come Aug. 12 on A&M, preceded by the lead track, "Lifted," which was worked starting June 25 to hot AC radio.

A&M senior VP of promotion (U.S.) Rick Stone explains the over-

due American appearance of "Ocean Drive," saying, "The music has to come into the marketplace in the right way, not only externally but internally in the company. We didn't have everything set [before]. But we love the record, we met Paul and Tunde and hit it off great, and we get the music."

Stone adds that the label will take "Lifted" to top 40 "at the appropriate time" and emphasizes his own enthusiasm for the song. "From the minute Tunde starts singing, there's some sort of magic. We hear it not only as a hit song but as a lifestyle song."

For the group, Tucker says, "I had hoped we'd be doing it a little bit earlier [in the U.S.], but it's just one of those things. I still love the album, and all these people are still buying it. I'm bullish about it in America."

If the U.S. appearance of "Ocean Drive" has been a while in coming, the Lighthouse Family's U.K. achievements were by no means automatic either.

"Lifted" was first released as a single in the U.K. in May 1995, when, despite considerable airplay, it stalled at No. 61; the follow-up "Ocean Drive" grazed the top 40 that October. The album of the same name emerged in the U.K. in November '95 and spent just one week in the chart basement.

But perseverance in 1996 brought Polydor some outstanding results, including massive airplay throughout the year. "It was a question of right time, right place," says Ashley Tabor, Capital Radio group music assistant, recalling the commercial radio group's enthusiastic support of the reissued "Lifted" single. "We all

(Continued on next page)

Texas Finds International Hit In 'White'

Mercury To Take Advantage Of Band's Higher Profile

■ BY DOUG REECE

LOS ANGELES—With unprecedented sales of Texas' new album, "White On Blonde," in international markets and a string of hits lighting up charts around the world, Mercury has good reason to be optimistic that the Scottish quintet's fourth album will be its breakout title in the U.S.

Songs such as "Halo" and the album's first U.S. single, "Say What You Want," have gone top 10 in several countries, including the U.K., Germany, and France.

Meanwhile, Mercury reports the album, which will be released here Aug. 5, has already surpassed previous Texas releases with European sales of more than 1 million units.

In fact, Mercury VP of marketing Marty Maidenbergh says the stir has been so strong that the label was forced to push back the album's U.S. release date several months.

"The extra time enabled us to go back to Germany, France, and Australia so we didn't have to take away from our promotions there," says



TEXAS

Maidenbergh. "We could never have planned for the kind of success they had in those countries. No one knew how huge this thing was going to be."

Considering the band's past sales performance, Maidenbergh's surprise was shared by many when "White On Blonde" debuted at No. 1 on the U.K. album chart.

The band's last album, "Ricks Road," has sold only 38,000 units in the U.S. since it was released in 1994, according to SoundScan.

Still, Maidenbergh says Mercury is confident that the word-of-mouth from territories outside the U.S.,

combined with new radio-friendly songs, will help the band start fresh here.

"We're going to take them around to radio and reintroduce them as if they were a new band," says Maidenbergh. "This album is markedly different from what they've done before, and people need to hear them. The music is really going to work for us, and the credibility of their live show is unsurpassed."

Karl Grier, a buyer for the 18-store Peppermint and Starship chains, says that he is curious to see how people react to the new album, based on the band's relatively low U.S. profile over the last few years.

"We have already had two stores that are receiving some strong requests, but honestly, it was a surprise to me," says Grier. "I didn't realize they were still around."

Though music from the new album is still solidly embedded in pop and rock, the band's tunes are touched by many influences, as evidenced in the strikingly Motownesque cut "Black Eyed Boy."

(Continued on next page)

TO OUR READERS

The Beat is taking a break. It will return next week.