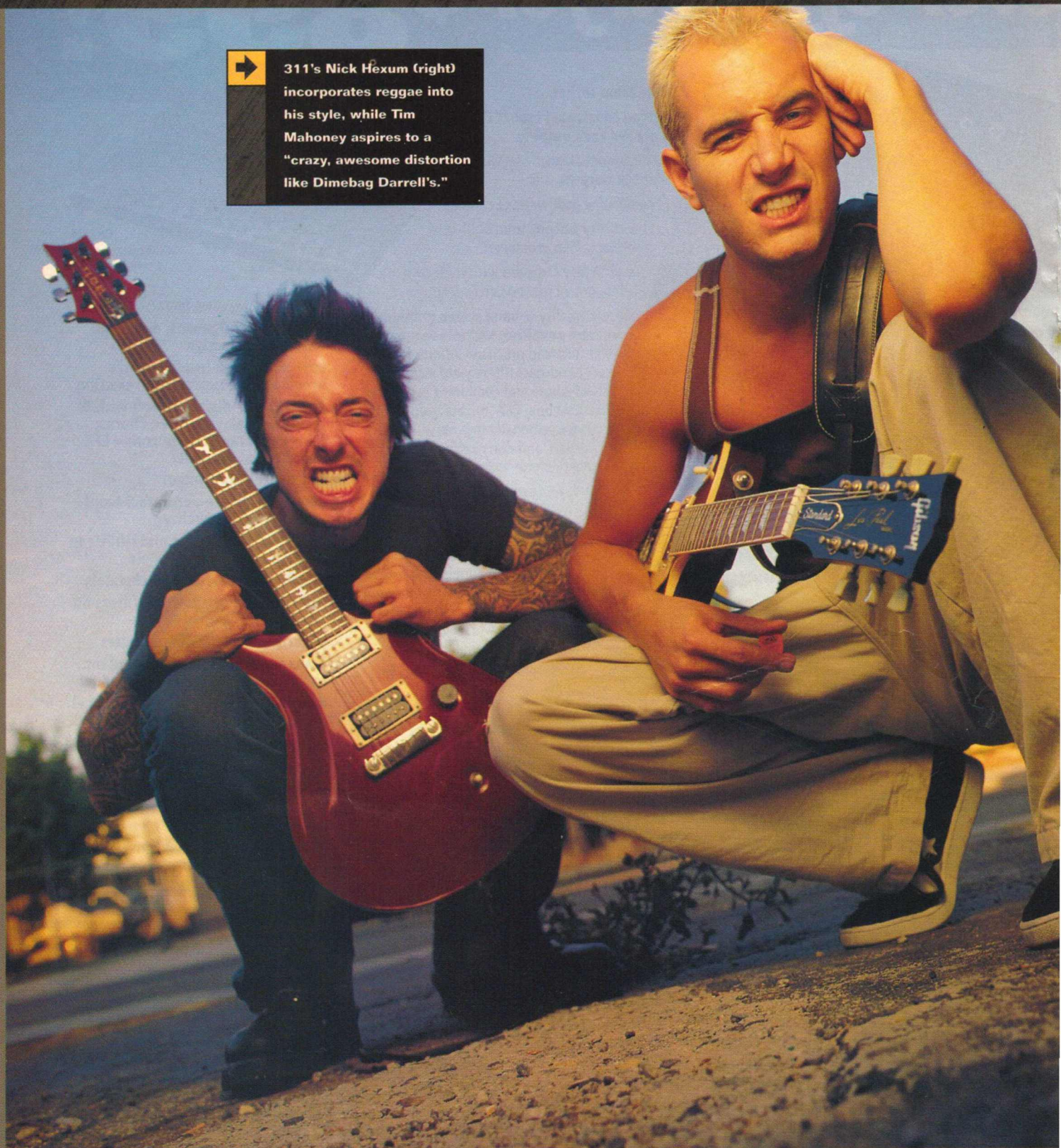




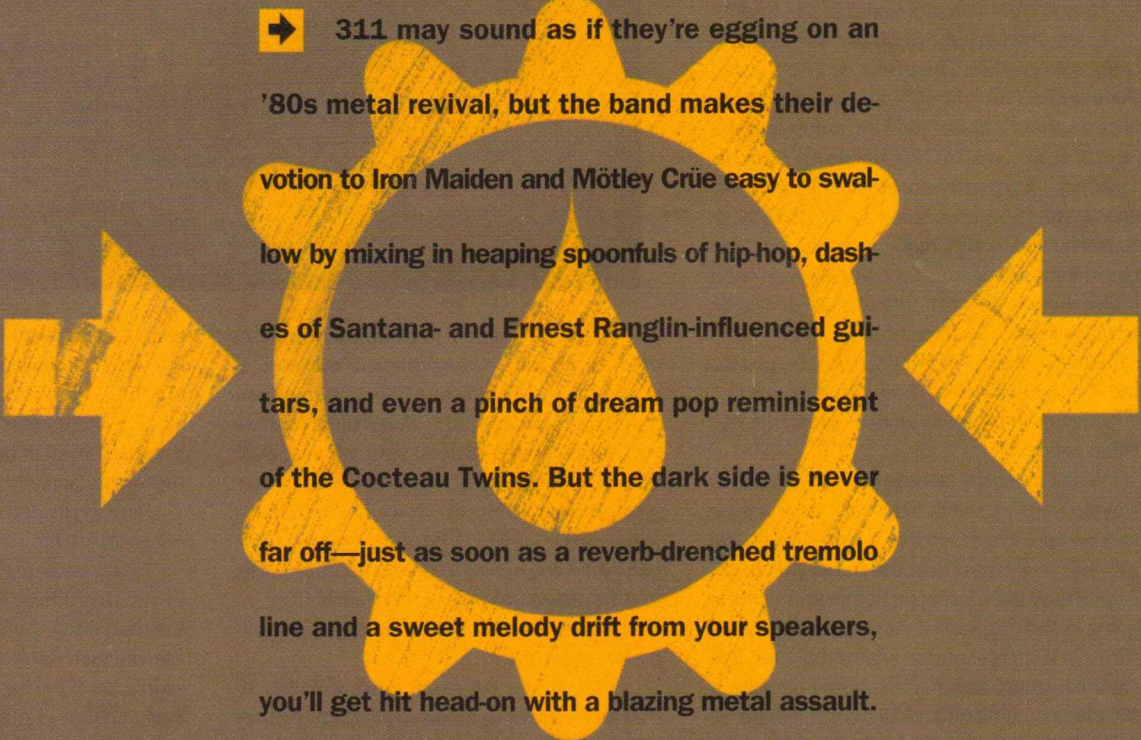
311's Nick Hexum (right) incorporates reggae into his style, while Tim Mahoney aspires to a "crazy, awesome distortion like Dimebag Darrell's."



311 ON FUSING STYLES, DUELING



AMALGAMATED METAL



➔ 311 may sound as if they're egging on an '80s metal revival, but the band makes their devotion to Iron Maiden and Mötley Crüe easy to swallow by mixing in heaping spoonfuls of hip-hop, dashes of Santana- and Ernest Ranglin-influenced guitars, and even a pinch of dream pop reminiscent of the Cocteau Twins. But the dark side is never far off—just as soon as a reverb-drenched tremolo line and a sweet melody drift from your speakers, you'll get hit head-on with a blazing metal assault.

B Y K Y L Ē S W E N S O N

LEADS, AND TAG-TEAM RHYTHMS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VERN EVANS

AMALGAMATED METAL

"I can't help it," admits 311's lead guitarist Tim Mahoney. "I'm a rocker."

The band—Mahoney, DJ/rapper SA Martinez, singer/guitarist Nick Hexum, bassist P-Nut, and drummer Chad Sexton—just released its fifth album, *Soundsystem* [Capricorn]. "On this album we focused on making all the songs rockin' enough that we'd really enjoy playing them live every night," says Mahoney. Before the band rolled the tour bus out of their adopted hometown of Los Angeles (the members are originally from Omaha, Nebraska), Mahoney and Hexum gave up the details about how they mixed the stylistic alloy of *Soundsystem*.



METAL GURU TIM MAHONEY

How do you typically record in the studio?

Lately, I've been into a simple, mono sound using a single stack. There are a couple of stereo guitar effects on *Soundsystem*, but the album is more about a basic "plug the guitar into the amp, mic the speaker" kind of thing. If I want an effect, I'll typically use an MXR Phase 90 or an Electro-Harmonix Small Stone. The Phase 90 is clear and sweeps nicely, so I use it for clean chordal parts—like on the song "Sever"—and it also works well with distortion. For reggae parts, I use the Small Stone. It's kind of hard to explain the difference between the two pedals, but they both have their own kind of sound.

The tones on the album don't sound all that basic, however.

Well, I'm mostly talking about my live rig as a mono sound. It's really hard to get stereo effects to reproduce live—there's so much going on live that you really don't hear the stereo spectrum.

Also, my last touring rig had so many cables going in and out, and I'd think, "My sound goes through each one of those!" For this tour, I've cleaned up my signal path. Now I have loop switchers running off my MIDI controller pedal, so anytime I want to switch sounds, it's just one stomp and everything changes. I have maybe five stompboxes connected to the switcher, and when an effect isn't being used, my guitar signal isn't going through that particular effect—there's way less tonal degradation. I can also set up presets with the MIDI controller that have several pedals running at once, or just one or two. It takes time to configure everything, but once it's done, it's easy.

You also have a Lexicon MPX-G2. Do you use it live?

Not yet, but I used it to record "Flowing" on the new album. The beginning of that song is an effect preset from the MPX—a stereo panning, trippy guitar sound. We sat there until we got a take that sounded just right, because each time I'd play, the effect would react differently. It's a complex little unit. Typically, I'm thinking about effects when I write parts, because some parts will bring a certain effect to mind, like, "Oh, that would sound nice with a tremolo."

Did you tune down to get some of your heavier guitar sounds?

Chad wrote a couple of songs with this SG that he tunes down to low B. He keeps normal strings on the guitar, and they barely hang on—the tone is almost like a "wooh wooh wooh"—but, man, he gets it sounding so good. I just got a Schecter 7-string, but to play Chad's songs on the album, I put thicker strings on my PRS and tuned it [low to high] B, E, A, D, G, B.

What got you into PRS guitars?

I'd always gone back and forth between Fenders and Gibsons. But when we started recording our first album in 1993, I wanted a new guitar. I had a Charvel Strat copy at the time, but I wanted something with humbucking pickups. I wasn't



"My Bonehead amp really shines in the spaces in-between notes—the resonance just shakes the whole room." —Nick Hexum (right)

really that familiar with Paul Reed Smith guitars, but I knew Santana played one. So I checked one out and fell in love with how it played and sounded. The PRS totally caters to the music we play, because I need to get both a good crunch distortion and a really nice clean sound.

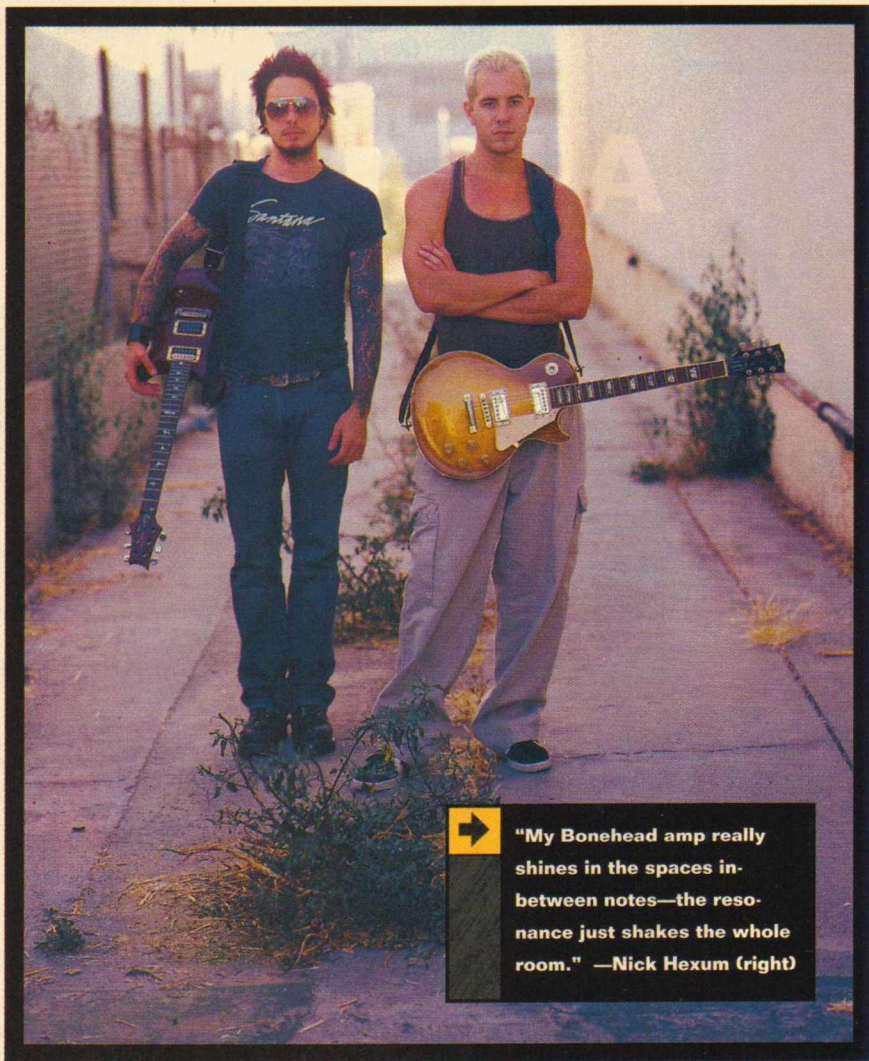
How do you and Nick complement each other's guitar style?

I grew up listening to Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, the Allman Brothers, and other bands that had dueling lead guitars. Both Nick and I are into that. But we'll also switch parts. For example, on "Leaving Babylon"—which is a Bad Brains cover—I play along with the bass and noodle the riff, while Nick plays the offbeats. If he's singing, maybe he'll noodle and I'll play the offbeats. Switching parts is almost a subconscious thing—we're looking at each other and listening to each other play, so there's a little random magic involved as we react to what the other is doing.

THE AMALGAMATOR NICK HEXUM

Tim says that you guys play together like a tag-team.

Well, I don't actually play a lot of complex parts.



AMALGAMATED METAL

If there's anything difficult to play, I leave it to Tim because I'm more of a jack-of-all-trades than a technical shredder. But there *are* three or four spots on the album where Tim and I do harmony leads. It's totally a throwback to Iron Maiden and Boston, when harmony lines were cool. We've taken it upon ourselves to single-handedly bring back dueling solos and harmony leads. It's fun, and it doesn't have to sound like cheesy metal.

What influenced you to bring reggae into the band's sound?

To me, Ernest Ranglin is the man—the greatest Jamaican guitarist that ever lived. Although almost everything I play on the new record is with the Les Paul, I love to get a tone like Ranglin's with my ES-135—a reggae-jazz-hollowbody kind of sound—and noodle away in his style.

Also, I feel there are good parts in every genre of music. It's best to be open-minded and not get locked into one style. There are many talented musicians who have original things to say, and it's just different languages that they speak. A new friend might sit you down and make you listen to Patsy Cline, and suddenly you get it and start appreciating country music.

THE 4-1-1 ON 311

TIM MAHONEY

Guitars: Paul Reed Smith Santana, Custom, Archtop, and Standard; Schecter C-7 Plus; Washburn Dime Culprit.

Amps: Mesa/Boogie Trem-O-Verb 2x12 combo and Mark IV, Mesa/Boogie Rectifier 4x12 cabinet loaded with 30-watt Celestions.

Effects: Boss OC-2 Octave, Budda Budda-Wah, Electro-Harmonix Small Stone, Lexicon MPX-G2, MXR Phase 90.

Strings & Things: Ernie Ball RPS .010s, Dunlop medium picks.

NICK HEXUM

Guitars: Gibson Les Paul Standard, Les Paul Custom, and ES-135.

Amp: Rivera Bonehead with Rivera 4x12 cabinet and 2x12 subwoofer.

Effects: Boss OC-2 Octave, Electro-Harmonix Q-Tron, Rocktron Replifex and Intellifex.

Strings & Things: Ernie Ball RPS .010s, Dunlop picks.

AMALGAMATED METAL

Is the Boss Octave a signature 311 sound?

We do a lot of single-note riffs, and they'd sound weak without an octave divider, so that has always been a staple of our sound—single-note riffs that are funky and fast through an octave box. I'm currently using an old Boss octave pedal.

What other effects do you rely on?

I use a Rocktron Replifex, which recreates vintage effects. And during the choruses of "Life's Not a Race" you'll hear a Hawaiian guitar that's processed through this really great Hawaiian chorus patch on my Rocktron Intelliflex—it sounds like I'm playing slide, but it's just the effect. I used the same patch for "Come Original." My rig is pretty much Gibson guitars, Rocktron effects, and Rivera amps—that's all I need.

Are you still using guitar synths?

That was just a phase I was going through on *Transistor*. I haven't plugged in my guitar synth in about two years. I used it onstage to bust out sitar and weird organ sounds when we'd go into our dub breaks. But lately, I've stuck to a garage-rock style—just distortion.

How do you get such an aggressive distorted tone?

I just put my guitar on the bridge pickup, open up the tone and volume knobs, and turn up the Bonehead. The Bonehead's tone controls are pretty simple—bass, mid, treble, and presence—but it also has this "Los Lobottom" knob that controls the amp's subwoofer. It's the heaviest sound you've ever heard in your life—it just shakes the room. It's a really bad-ass sound, and I think a lot of people are going to be getting into it.

You've released five albums in only six years.

How do you keep rejuvenating your songwriting?

I just get away from writing for a while and listen to new styles. I'm really into drum 'n' bass, jungle, and dance hall reggae right now. If you listen to other forms of music, you're going to get influenced by them. For example, SA and I went to Jamaica after doing preproduction for *Soundsystem*, and at that time, every song was straight rock. But we experienced these incredible Jamaican sound systems blasting the most interesting, futuristic beats. They don't go, "boom boom chick, boom boom chick." They go, "boom boom chick boom, boom chick boom boom." We were totally inspired by these different beats, and when we started working on the album again, we came up with some rhythms like that. Just to get away and be immersed in a new musical culture totally refreshed our music. ■

