

# THE RISE & FALL OF SOUNDGARDEN

**4 SONGS**

WITH BASSLINES

**NINE INCH NAILS**

"Head Like A Hole"

**FOO FIGHTERS**

"Monkey Wrench"

**U2** "Staring At The Sun"

**JIMI HENDRIX**

"Dolly Dagger"

JULY 1997

# GUITAR

**exclusive album preview!**

# 311 kicks butt!

**the phat, funky  
future of rock**

**NINE INCH NAILS  
BLACK FLAG HISTORY**

**STYX • ELO • SKYNYRD**

**JOHN FOGERTY**

**ANI DIFRANCO**

**new columns!**

**NO DOUBT  
& KORN**





# phat boys

**Yo! Nick Hexum and Tim Mahoney, two of the dopest brovas ever to represent Omaha, Nebraska, drop da bomb on *Transistor*, the dub-heavy follow-up to their double-Platinum "blue" album.**

**C**ONCEALED INSIDE AN unobtrusive concrete building on an industrial block of seedy West L.A. is NRG, one of the city's top-flight recording studios. As such it boasts all of the latest digital mix-down gear, as well as such rock-star amenities as a lounge with a bar and a cappuccino maker, a couple of plush-but-stylish couches and a massive wall-sized home theater unit, complete with 100 channels of satellite TV and Nintendo. Recent clients have included Rage Against the Machine and Dave Navarro of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, but for the month or so before my visit in mid-April, Studio B has been occupied by the members of 311, who are almost exactly halfway

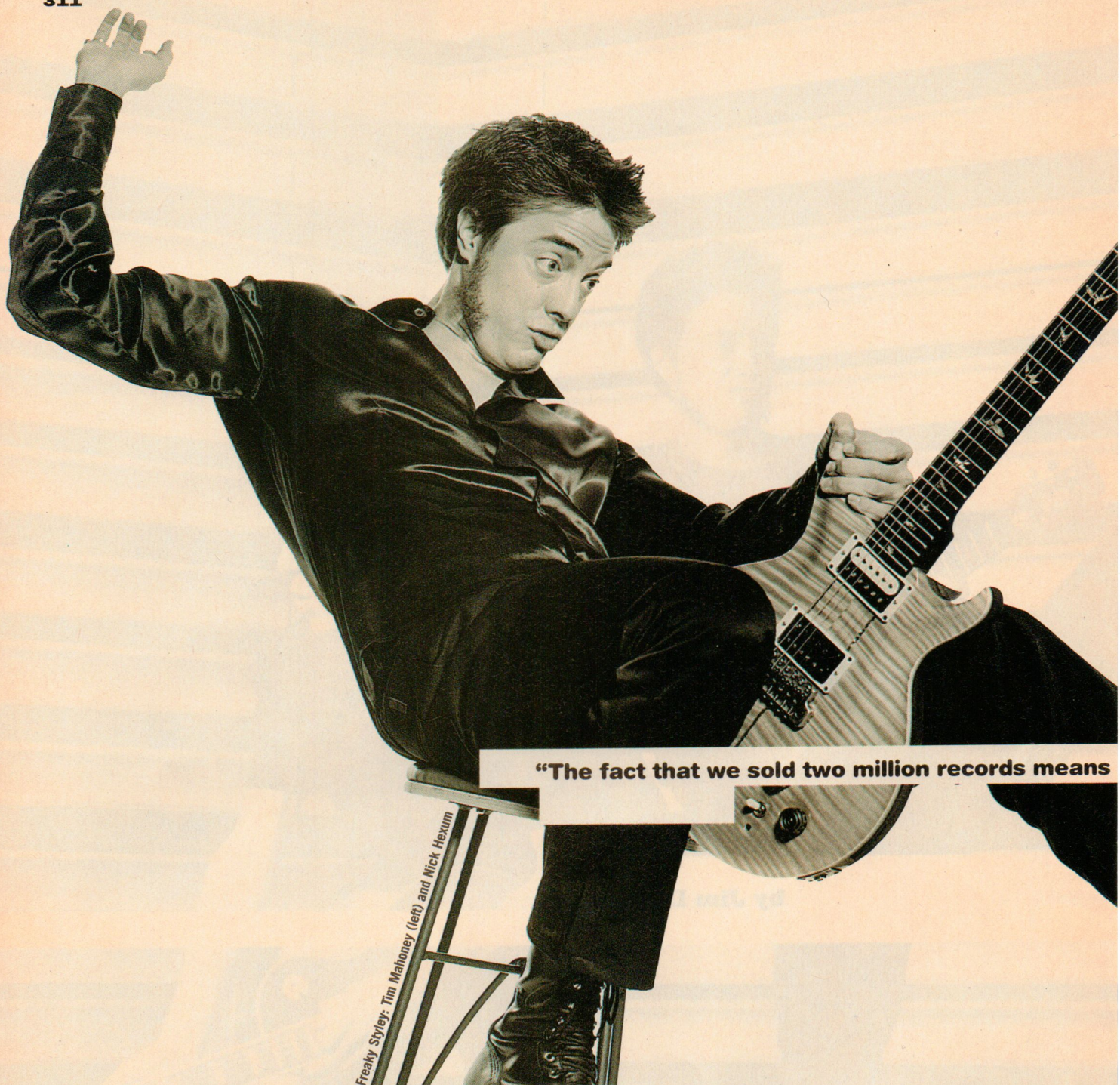
**photography: Roger Erickson**  
grooming: debra ferullo, styling: dana marasco





by **Jim DeRogatis**





**"The fact that we sold two million records means**

*Freaky Styley: Tim Mahoney (left) and Nick Hexum*

through making their fourth and most ambitious album for Capricorn.

The working title of the new record is *Illuminations* (it will later be changed to *Transistor*), and that seems to fit the psychedelic vibe of much of the music quite nicely. "We felt like we were moving really quickly through our development towards what we saw as a frontier of music," says guitarist/vocalist Nick Hexum as he welcomes me into the band's lair. "On the blue album [1995's *311*], we just wanted to keep it straightforward. We didn't want to add a ton of percussion and samples. We kind of thought we were developing too fast for people to digest, and they

had to catch up. Now that we've done that and toured for two years, it's time to take an artistic step forward and try to experiment."

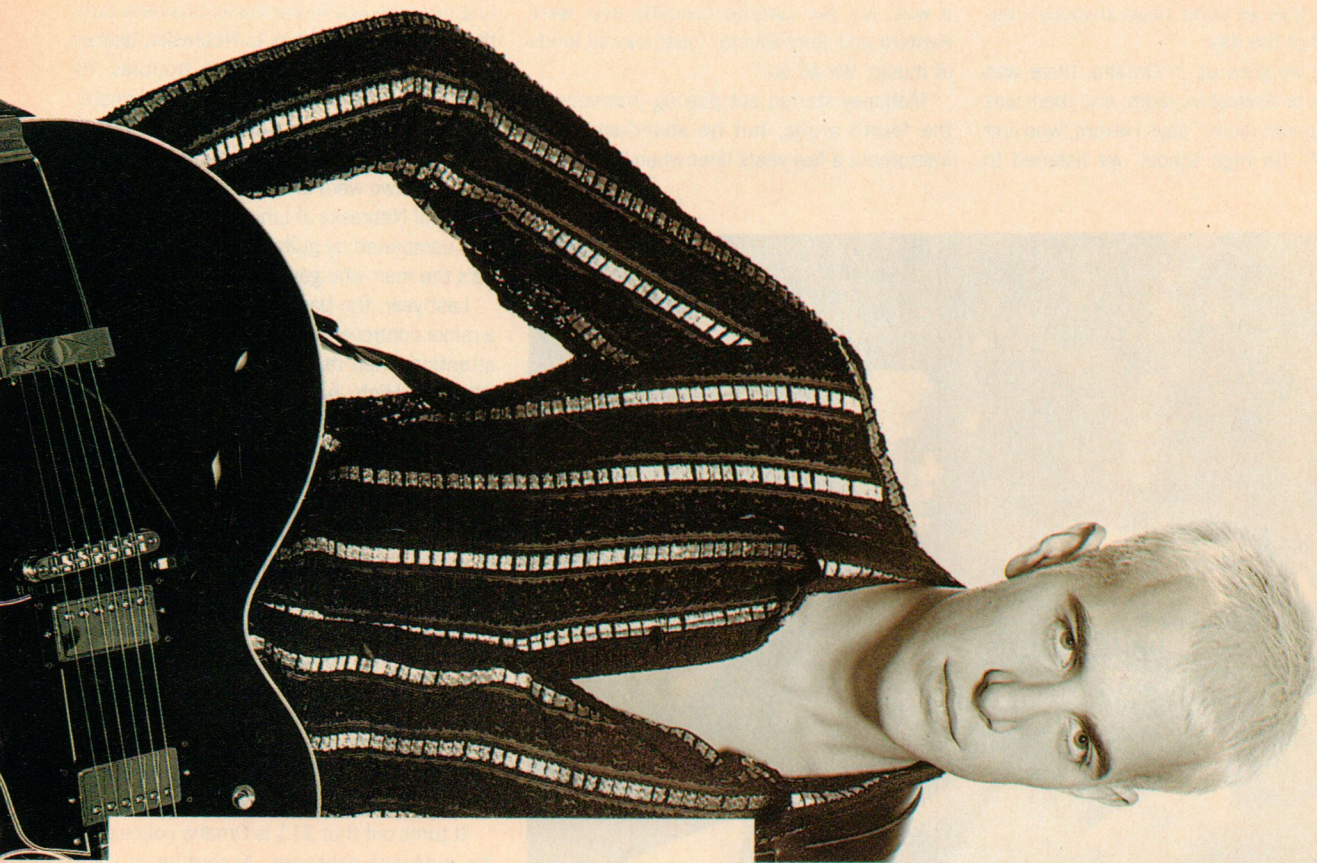
The key to understanding 311's new music can be found at opposite ends of the control room's massive mixing desk. In an effort to keep it "all in the family," the album is being produced by the band's live sound engineer, Scott "Scotch" Ralston. To his far left is an impressive stack containing virtually every echo and delay unit known to man, from ancient analog boxes to the newest rack effects. The group has nicknamed it "the tower of dub." To Ralston's right, and within easy reach of all of the band members, is what may

be the largest bong I have ever seen and what is *definitely* the largest bud I've ever seen.

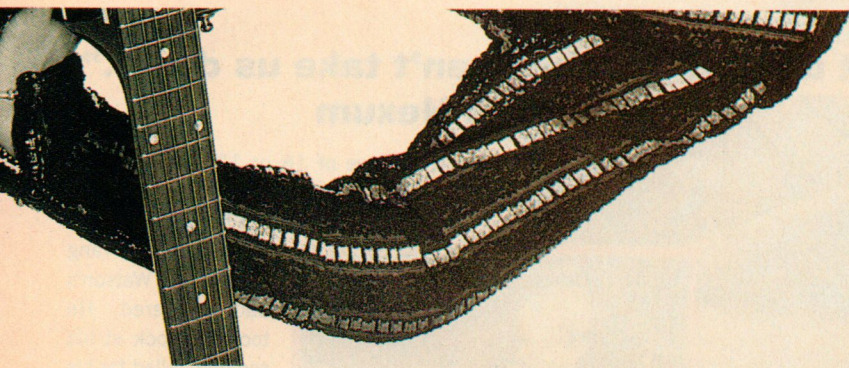
"A lot of this new album is about production and the use of space," Hexum says. "It's psychedelic, definitely, and dub, as well. We're trying to be as creative as possible but still be rocking. We're messing around with keyboards and tape echoes, and I have an old analog synth that I'm getting some sounds out of that it was never intended to make."

During the weeks of pre-production rehearsals, 311 learned some 30 new tunes, all of which are being recorded. In an effort to spare everyone the drudgery of just doing rhythm tracks for the first few weeks, the





that we can be completely artistic and just say, 'Fuck commerce.' " —Nick Hexum



decision was made to record the album in two parts, completely finishing the first before moving on to the second. When all of the recording is done, the band will choose the best tunes to fill up the entire 74 minutes available on a single CD. "It's going to be a double album on one disc," Hexum says. "We're going to jam-pack it."

But fear not, 311 fans: The band hasn't gone off the deep end into wretched self-indulgence. When I ask Hexum if this is going to be the quintet's answer to the Smashing Pumpkins' double-disc, *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, he laughs heartily. "No, and it's not going to be like that travesty where

Guns N' Roses put out two full-priced albums at once [*Use Your Illusion I & II*, (Geffen, 1991)]," he says. When Hexum moves into a jerry-rigged vocal booth set up in the middle of the recording room to overdub a line on "Transistor," the tune has hints of all of the varied sounds in 311's mix: dancehall and dub reggae, Chili Peppers-style funk, street-wise hip-hop, and churning, hard-edged guitar rock.

Hexum raps his line with an energy so intense that it's scary. "How was that?" he asks when the tape stops rolling.

"You know," Ralston replies, "I think we really ought to move the vocal booth over

where you can't see anybody when you're singing, because I'd like you to get *really* wild next time."

YOU'D BE HARD-pressed to find a rock critic anywhere who likes 311, but the band members couldn't care less: they have the kids on their side. Since they started playing in their hometown of Omaha, Nebraska, way back in 1990, they've been building a rabidly loyal and ever-increasing audience for their distinctive blend of high-energy sounds. Their last album, *311*, climbed to No. 12 on the *Billboard* chart, and to date has racked up certified sales of more than two million



copies. If they sound a bit pleased with themselves these days, they've earned the right, because they got where they are through hard work, and they've never been anybody's hip new flavor of the day.

"Where we grew up in Omaha, there was no K-Rock or alternative radio, and there was certainly no rap radio," says Hexum, who just turned 27. "In high school, we listened to

there was a hard-rock scene and a punk-rock scene. There were just people who liked music and were hungry for it, whatever style it was. My two favorite concerts ever were Pantera and Jerry Garcia. I just love all kinds of music. We all do."

Mahoney started out playing trombone in the fourth grade, but he abandoned that instrument a few years later when he got into

Sexton made their first run at the big time in a Chili Peppers-styled band called Unity. They spent some time partying hearty in L.A., getting nowhere fast in the music business until they finally limped back to Nebraska, beaten and broke but wiser for their troubles. At home again, they linked up with monster bassist P-Nut (Aaron Charles Wills), who'd met the versatile and good-humored Sexton when the two were briefly attending the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. The new group was completed by guitarist Jimi Watson, and he's the man who gave the band its name.

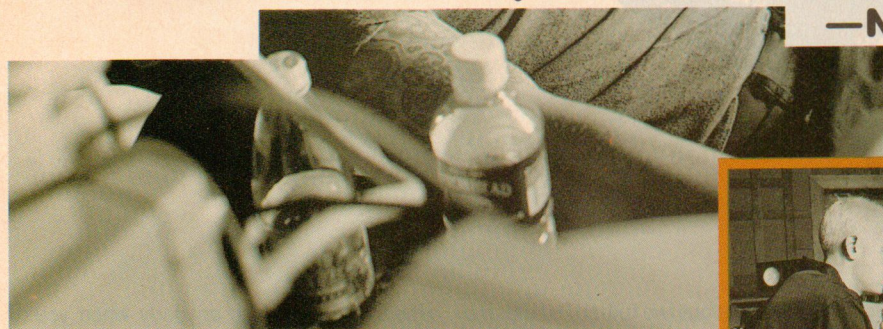
Last year, the band became the center of a minor controversy that got some major press attention when its old alma mater, Omaha's Westside High, banned its T-shirts because school administrators were under the mistaken impression that 311 stood for the eleventh letter of the alphabet three times—or "KKK"—and that therefore the group was a bunch of racists. It was an absurd charge: In addition to heavily incorporating African-American sounds in their music, 311 has a member who's Hispanic—second vocalist and scratcher S.A. (Doug Martinez). And when Hexum and S.A. aren't bragging, rapping good-time party nonsense, or asking "who's got the herb," they're delivering rather earnest sermons about *all* people living together in peace, harmony, and unity.

It turns out that 311 is Omaha police code for indecent exposure. According to band lore, Watson was caught skinny dipping one



**"Rock critics didn't put us here, so they can't take us down."**

**—Nick Hexum**



what was actually the alternative music of the time—stuff like R.E.M. and the Cure—but there was still no radio station playing that, because there wasn't even a college there. I think that was good in a way, because I didn't have anyone telling me what was good or bad. It was just whatever music I got my hands on."

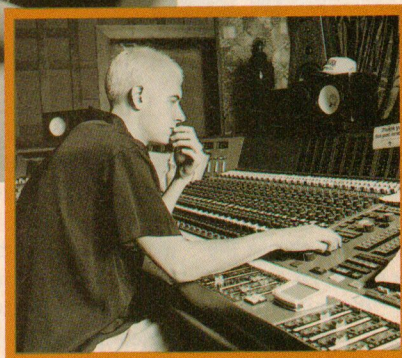
"The thing about Omaha is that you can just absorb everything," adds lead guitarist Tim Mahoney, 28. "It's hard to get exposed to things, but when you *do* find a record you like, it means even more to you. It wasn't like

punk. "I thought, 'I can't play all this music I love on my trombone!'" he says. He bought a cheap Sears-Roebuck guitar, took a few lessons, graduated to a Squier Strat, and hasn't stopped playing since.

Hexum, Mahoney and drummer Chad Sexton first jammed together in various garage bands that imitated the early, jangly incarnation of R.E.M. Then Mahoney dropped out of the picture for a while, and Hexum and

day at the age of 16 or 17, and the cops arrested him, cuffed him, and brought him naked and dripping wet to his parents' front door. The cops rang the bell and Watson's dad answered. He took one look at his son and called for his wife in the other room: "Honey, it's for you."

With Watson still in the fold, the group played its first show, opening for Fugazi, in 1990. "I was friends with P-Nut, and that's how I came to play with the band," Mahoney says. "I saw them play a couple times with Jimi, and I really don't know what happened between him and the rest of them. But they had some songs they wanted to record, and they called me. S.A. was the last one on board; he came after me.





# funk machines

a 311 axology

by Jim DeRogatis

**T**HE MUSICAL INVENTION of 311's album-in-progress has prompted guitarists Nick Hexum and Tim Mahoney to alter their guitar roles a bit on the new material, and to explore some radically new (to them) equipment.

"On this album, I play guitar on every song," Hexum says. "Before, it had been maybe a third of the time or whatever, though I always write on guitar. But in the studio, it was usually just if I felt I had any more to add. Now I'm getting to the point

music—but now we are figuring out how to accomplish some of these things, and the sound man is even going to be able to do dub delays and stuff like that. We are looking forward to really blowing people's minds."

Of late, Hexum's favorite guitar is the Gibson ES-13. "It makes that nice jazz tone—I'm really into that warm, clean playing—but then you can crank it up and get distortion out of it. It's a phat guitar."

Mahoney is using the same Mesa Boogie Triaxis preamp that he used on the last

album, but he's been experimenting a lot with his effects. "I've really been getting into all the analog stuff," he says. "I have an old Electro-Harmonix Memory Man and a guitar phaser, and my all-time favorite that I have been using since Nick and I started playing together is a Boss Octaver. There's also a Boss T-wah and the TC Electronics chorus pedal—that's analog and that has been what I've been using for a chorus. I'm just loving that. The multi-effects are nice because you can use the analog stuff and then add the rotary sound or the vibrato and stuff like that. But if I could have everything analog, I would."

Mahoney has also got a guitar synth, but he hasn't been using his as much as



where I've even got some solos."

Hexum has been incorporating a Roland GR30 guitar synth which triggers an Akai 3000 sampler, into his playing. "They've been giving me some really crazy space noises. I've got my JV1080, which is a Roland sound module that has a 1,000 preset sounds," he says. "And I'm just looking forward to having the flexibility to do this stuff live. Now, even Chad has the drum triggers so he can trigger samples. Before we never did anything MIDI. We still aren't going to play to a click-track—we are never going to get mechanical like that just because we want to keep the human element in our

Hexum. "I thought I was going to be using it more, but for some of the parts that we originally thought would be guitar synth we ended up using some other guitar sounds," he says. "It's kind of nice that Nick uses that stuff a little more, because then we have different sounds with more layers."

As for axes, Mahoney swears by his Paul Reed Smith Santana model. "It's a beautiful guitar," he says. "I love it. I also have two Standards, which are all mahogany, and they have a different scale. The Santana has a smaller scale and we've been kind of using both. Sometimes for solos I'll use my mahogany because it sounds really nice."

311

The four of us had recorded these songs and played out a bit, and S.A. was a friend who would come on stage and guest rap."

The band released three albums on its own while still in Omaha: 1990's *Dammit!*, '91's *Unity*, and '92's *Hydroponic*. All of them are out of print, so of course they are objects of considerable curiosity among the faithful. Hexum laughs. "To have the original pressings would be worth a lot of money to a record trader, but they're just not that great," he says. "There are a few songs that I can listen to without cringing in embarrassment. But we rerecorded a lot of those songs, and the originals are just low-budget versions."

"*Unity* was the one that we got enough money for to put it on a CD, and that was a huge hit locally," Hexum says. "We sold like 1,000 of them, and that was the biggest success story of any local band in Omaha in a while. Then we were like, 'Okay, we're ready. Let's move on out.' And we moved out here to L.A."

The band played a big farewell show at Peony Park, in Omaha, in February '92, and then the five members relocated to Van Nuys, California, moving in together in a rented house. They slept two to a bedroom, but at least the place had a pool. "When we first moved out here, I didn't really know anyone," Mahoney says. "We were all living in one house, and we were like a little commune. As we started tooling around and stuff, it was nice to make friends with other bands, like Fishbone, but I never felt particularly accepted or not accepted. We were just kind of doing what we wanted to do."

While the band's move to a city that is home to much of the music industry certainly didn't hurt their career, the members of 311 say that the trek to L.A. was more important in the sense that it brought them closer together. They were suddenly five people united in common purpose and with no one to rely on but each other. Now that they're all living separately with their respective girlfriends in relative privacy and comfort, they sometimes look back and wonder how they coped when they were eating, sleeping, working, and hanging together 24-7.

"It forced us to really learn to get along," Mahoney says, laughing. "It was weird: I'm an only child, but it was like having four brothers all of a sudden."

"We got through it without any broken bones," Hexum adds.

By early '92, the band's savings were depleted, the debts were mounting, and things were "just about to disintegrate into chaos," according to Hexum. That's when the group met former Yes producer Eddie Offord, whose credits included *Fragile* (Atlantic, 1971) and *Close to the Edge* (Atlantic,





1972). He recognized the quintet's potential and recorded a demo tape, which wound up attracting the attention of Nashville-based Capricorn Records, a label best known as the former home of the Allman Brothers and other no-nonsense Southern rockers.

"If we'd had a choice of a hundred different labels, we wouldn't have gone with them," says Hexum flatly. "But they believed in us. Sure, [Capricorn president] Phil Walden and those guys might not sit around and listen to our music in their spare time, but they at least had the foresight to realize that we had some things that no one else did. So we legitimately thank them, and it's turned out to be great for them and great for us."

Offord engineered and produced the first two Capricorn albums: 1994's *Grassroots* and '95's *Music*. The former scored a modest modern-rock hit with "Do You Right," while the latter sold steadily as the band toured relentlessly. This was despite enduring a horrific experience on the road in '93. Hexum was driving the group's rickety old Winnebago when it started to overheat. The musicians jumped out just before the gas tank caught fire and the RV exploded. They stood on the side of the interstate and watched as all of their gear and personal belongings burned, but they still managed to play a headlining gig the next

*Continued on page 98*



day in Omaha using borrowed equipment.

After two albums, and after engaging in a bitter dispute, 311 and Offord went their separate ways—one of the few such partings in

the group's history. "I don't have anything nice to say about it," Hexum says. "I like to just kind of put it behind us as much as possible. It was behind-the-scenes stuff over money and his behavior."

"One thing that was strange was that he would never let us videotape him," Mahoney adds. (That's an important consideration to the band, as anyone who's seen its home video, *Enlarged to Show Detail*, can attest.) "He was cool on the first album, but then it really fell apart on the second."

The group wound up working with former Bad Brains producer Ron Saint Germain on the so-called blue album, and that's when things really took off. Fueled by its kicking hip-hop/metal verses and anthemic sing-along choruses, "Down" became a major modern-rock hit and an MTV Buzz Clip. "All Mixed Up" followed, and 311 played on both the H.O.R.D.E. and Warped tours in the summer of '96 (nicely illustrating the two extremes of their self-proclaimed "Omaha style"). It was all capped off with a gig opening for Kiss at Madison Square Garden. These five self-proclaimed "regular guys from Nebraska" were left wondering how things could possibly get any better.

OF COURSE, THERE was still that trouble with the critics.

"It's cool because rock critics didn't put us here, so they can't take us down," Hexum says. "We're in a nice position. I don't know if we will ever be critically accepted, but that's all right."

Every band says this, but 311 may actually mean it, since the lack of critical acclaim is more than offset by the devotion of their fans. A quick web search turns up more than three dozen home pages devoted to the group, including several detailing Mahoney and Hexum's guitar rigs, and a few dedicated to charting instances where lyrics are repeated in various songs. (In "Visit," from *Music, S.A.* raps, "I'm wearing my Doc Martens 'cause I'm always down for kickin'/This my friend the city, pity everywhere the enemy." In the next song, "Paradise," Hexum sings, "I'm wearin' my heart sleeveless and I'm always up fo' chicken/This my friend the city, pity everywhere the enemy.")

The 311 bulletin board on America Online logged more than 1,200 messages in a one-month period this spring, slightly behind Pearl Jam's 1,500, but well ahead of No Doubt's 500. And one of the guitar web pages reported logging 115,000 hits since mid-October, 1995. What inspires such devotion in these fans? A sampling of recent AOL postings tells the story.

"I think 311 definitely generates a style of music to come/Their off beat rhythms and funky rhymes are second to none/In other words they're phat as hell!" rhymes a fan with the screen name C9281.



"I was amazed, shocked, bewildered, yet my head was nodding the entire duration," SDatNite writes of his first 311 show. "When it ended, I realized that I had experienced my first brain orgasm."

"I heard the first CD *Music* was good about four months after it came out, and I went and bought it," posts JeffR311. "When I see some trendy poser saying they're selling out, it's just sad. Go back to your usual Cardigans and Spice Girls and leave my favorite band alone!"

Then there's this somewhat frightening statement from Crystal, a.k.a. Pochocco83: "I guess you could say I am obsessed. I am one of those people who listened to the exact 3:11

track on the third CD on 3/11 at 3:11 p.m.!"

"The fans really are dedicated, and it makes me so happy to see it," Hexum says. "It makes it all worthwhile to know that we are touching someone so deeply without the help of the powers that be. Someone posted a message that said, 'I hate how trendy people like 311,' and I was like, 'What can we do? Put a "No Trendies Allowed" sticker on the album?' We aren't like, 'These people are cool and we want to talk to them, but everybody else is below us.' We want to talk to anyone who wants to listen. And if we can sell a billion records, that's great as long as we are doing everything for artistic reasons and for ourselves."

One way the band is insuring their stability is by surrounding themselves with people they know and trust. The group met current manager Adam Raspler during their first tour, when Raspler was in business school in Nashville. "He came out and said he would love to work with us," Mahoney says. "We hit it off, and when our first manager's assistant quit, we said we wanted Adam to be his new assistant. Adam moved out here and then just kind of wound up taking care of business, and he finally became our full-time manager."

The band met Ralston when he worked as an assistant engineer on *Music* and *Grassroots*. "He just wanted to work real hard, and he really believed in our band," says Hexum. "He came out on the road and quit his studio job to run sound for us. I guess it was sort of with the hope that one day he could produce us. And with this album, we decided it was time. We decided we wanted it to be all in the family."

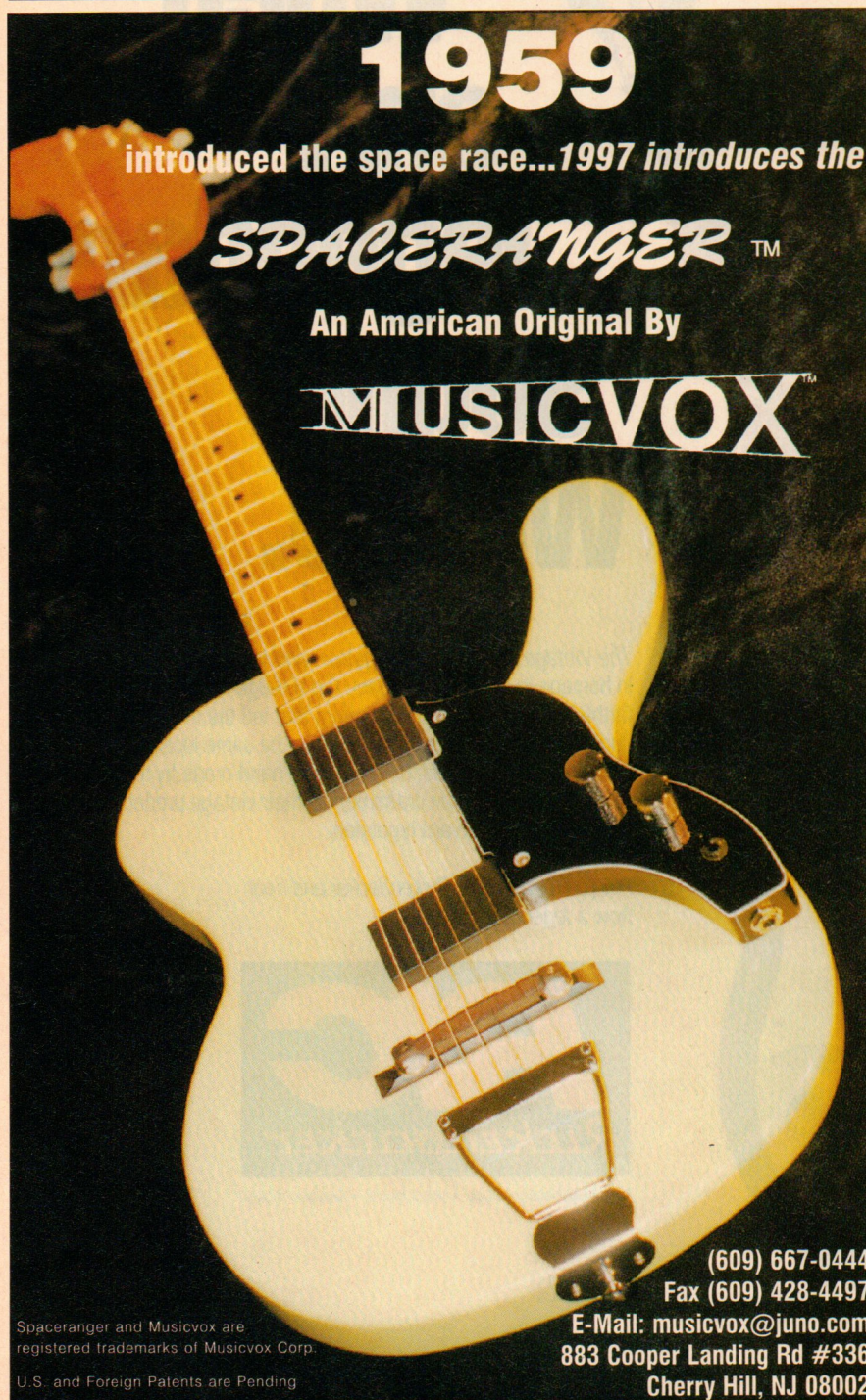
"I think the way we've grown as a band—from the ground up—has been cool," adds Mahoney. He apologizes often for his meandering ideas and tendency to leave his sentences unfinished. He blames his spaciness on the chronic allergies that have him sniffing and carrying around a roll of toilet paper so he can blow his nose.

"When I see us on MTV, I think, 'Finally! It took long enough for you to figure us out,'" Mahoney says. "Sometimes it trips me out, but mostly I feel fortunate that I am able to play music for a living. The last five, six, seven years that we've been playing have been a time of slow, steady growth. Maybe if we would have sold millions on our first record and been thrust into the spotlight, we wouldn't have grown the way we did. But all the years of playing on the road have really made me improve and work towards becoming a better guitarist. And I'm *still* working on it."

Indeed, Mahoney's playing has become more impressive with each album. He's such a solid and spot-on rhythm guitarist, as well as a reliably heavy riff-rocker, that you almost forget he's there—until he steps out to take a solo. Then, his playing evokes the fluid, cascading style of Jerry Garcia, with maybe a bit of David Gilmour and a little Carlos Santana thrown in.

"I love listening to Jerry play," Mahoney says, "especially on live CD's and concert tapes. That's when the magic happens." When I mention that there are similarities between the loyalty of the Dead's following and that of 311's, he beams. "That's really cool. It says a lot that you touch someone that much and they enjoy it," he says.

But with such a devoted following comes an awesome responsibility. People are clear-



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psychedelic experience when they have a fever and their dreams get so fucking weird. It's all imagination."

Mahoney has a slightly different take. "It's hard for me to say, because I *have* had psychedelic experiences, so I don't know if it would be different if I hadn't," he says. "Part of it is the experience when you listen to it. I am a huge fan of Jerry Garcia, so when I listen to him play, I feel like I'm on drugs—but without the drugs. I had a psychedelic experience with the Orb when I first started dating my girlfriend. We were in her living room and took mushrooms. We put on the Orb and started to trip, and I got so freaked out by the music that I had to turn it off.

"So, um, I guess I don't know."

WITH ONLY HALF the album completed—and those songs still in the rough-mix stage—it's understandable that 311 wants to keep its new music somewhat under wraps. But on the second day of my visit to NRG, I talk Mahoney into playing me a couple of tunes on DAT over the nifty sound system in his brand-new GMC 4X4, and once we start listening, it sounds damn good. "Running," which features a breathtaking Garcia-style guitar solo, happens to be Mahoney's only songwriting contribution to the new album. (Most of the tunes are written by Hexum, though all of the other members contribute to varying degrees, and S.A. generally writes the lines he raps.)

The first half of *Transistor*—if indeed that's what it will be called—also includes "MTA," a driving song written by S.A.; "Light Years," which could be a reggae-tinged update on the Rolling Stones' "2,000 Light Years From Home"; a really catchy number with the chorus, "stealing happy hours"; a rocker with the tentative title of "Clone Me"; "Beautiful Disaster," which features some impressive Judas Priest-style dual lead guitars; the trippy hip-hop groove, "Starshines," and the aforementioned bound-to-be-a-hit, "Transistor."

The album is set for an August 5th release, with a major shed tour of the U.S. to follow. "We are really ready to play to as big an audience as possible," Hexum says. "Now we're ready to play the sheds. There was a time when we didn't want to play outside because we couldn't have the full, loud sound like when you play in clubs. We were used to playing in bars where it was so loud and powerful that everyone *has* to go nuts. Now our musicianship has improved and the sound is clear, and we don't want to have it bouncing back at us. We want to have our nice monitor mix sounding the same every night, and then just let the music go. It's just been an evolutionary thing, where right now we are

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*Continued from page 104*

planning to go out on our tour and play Irvine Meadows-type venues that would have scared us shitless a few years ago."

Long known for the frenzied action they inspire in their mosh pits, 311 will inevitably slow down a bit as the group enters larger arenas with their newer, more expansive sounds. Perhaps that was part of the plan: After all, the band members are inching toward 30, and their teenage fans are getting older, too. In the studio, Hexum played much more guitar, and if he plans to reproduce the same parts on stage, it's bound to affect his usual lead-singer antics.

"I don't know which songs I'm going to play guitar on, because if it's a high-energy song, I may just want to rock," he says. "It's probably better for the audience if I *don't* play guitar, but if it's something mellow where I think guitar is important, then I will play. Basically, we're trying not to worry right now about how this record will translate to a live format.

"To me, that's what's good about the studio," Mahoney adds. "It's been about two years since we last recorded—it's the longest break we've had away from the studio—and each time I go back in after being away, I'm happy because I can really tell how my playing has improved since the last time. Because for me, live shows depend on how I feel I've played my solo parts. Most of the rhythm is solid because I play it a lot. It mainly comes

down to sections where I take a lead. And there are so many great players out there that I just try to play within my boundaries and play the melodies that come out."

"Right now, it's, 'Let's just make the album as dope as we can and then figure out how to reproduce it as good as we can later on,'" Hexum concludes.

The only question that really remains is whether 311's audience is ready to follow the group down this new road.

"I would imagine so," Hexum says confidently. "Our hard-core fans are like, 'Get back to that funky stuff,' because our last album was really rockin', and in the early days we did all kinds of funk and reggae stuff, and there was more experimentation. I would think that maybe some of the mainstream fans won't be able to understand it because it's going to be a style they have never even heard. But as far as our real fans, I think they will be really excited. Some bands look at it like, 'Okay, this last album sold two million and the next album has to sell three million in order to be a success.' Well, to me, the fact that we sold two million records means that we don't have to worry about money for a while. That means we can be completely artistic and we can just say, 'Fuck commerce.' We don't have to worry about anything besides what 311 really wants to do." 