

CRISIS WHAT CRISIS?

The crisis of mediocrity infests pop music at the moment; its cause lies in the business desire for success that demands a certain conformity to commercial principles.

In the last three years old heroes have mellowed only to be replaced by marketing-controlled fads and homogenous sounds. The singles charts, rock 'n' roll's true thermometer, have spelled out that the patient is sick, doc, real sick.

The first two China Crisis albums were symptomatic of this lack of distinction that has plagued many emerging bands



China Crisis: Eddie London and Gary Daly.

in the last few years. To their credit, they have tried to extend themselves on their new album, *Flaunt The Imperfection*, which, prompted by producer Walter Becker, has at least yielded a batch of strong tunes and some decent arrangements.

Learning

Like most bands, Liverpool's China Crisis started with modest ambitions:

"We just wanted to release a record because we realised we weren't that musically gifted. We want to sell a millions albums now but we didn't then. Ed London and myself went to the same school and we started writing songs when we were about 17. We made little demo tapes at home that we passed around to people and we eventually signed to Virgin when I was about 19."

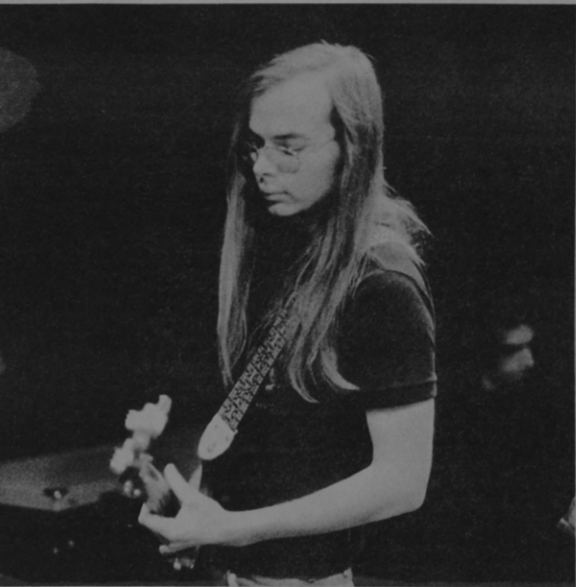
Daly's soft Liverpool accent floats over the phone unconcerned about the complete but justified dismissal of the band's first two albums:

"We never imagined the critics would like us. All we wanted to do was to release a record, what the papers said didn't matter. We were really surprised that our first record, 'African White', which was limited to 5000, sold out in the first week. We didn't think we could do that in a year."

"The press we've always regarded as being for pop stars and we didn't consider ourselves in that league. What the press say can get on your wick a bit but we're not too bothered."

As it turns out Daly has his own views on the pop crisis:

"A lot of songs at the moment do lack charac-



Walter Becker in Steely Dan days.

ter. We write songs, record them and go out and play them to people. A lot of other bands take it further by going out and doing tricks as though they were in a circus. I'm talking about people like Boy George, we stay away from that. We admire the classics like 'Bridge Over Troubled Water', the Beatles, Joan Armatrading, Joni Mitchell and Durutti Column (a classic what? — GK). We gear ourselves to writing great songs as opposed to doing tricks."

Flaunting

Walter Becker was the dude in Steely Dan with the long, fair hair and glasses. Along with Donald Fagen and one half of one of the finest songwriting duos ever. He produced *Flaunt The Imperfection*.

"He bought our second album while he was in Hawaii. Like us he is on Warner Bros in America and while we passed through LA supporting Simple Minds he phoned us and said he wanted to start working again. We met him in a little village in England. He was a great person and he had some great ideas for the songs. And we wanted to get away from that British pop scene anyway. Working with him was exactly what we wanted to do. When he showed an interest we were overwhelmed as Steely Dan have written some of the

best songs around."

How much say did he have overall?

"The agreement was that he would help us as much as he could, particularly in arrangements with brass instruments and with harmonies in choruses. Things that we'd never dreamt of because we didn't understand them. All Ed and I know is what we've listened to, really."

Becker's influence is pervasive, particularly on the Steely Dan chorus of 'You Did Cut Me' and on songs like 'The World Spins', where the whole approach is Becker-Fagen inspired.

"We were going to get someone in to do the harmonies on 'You Did Cut Me' but what Walter would do is sit at the piano and play it and I would sing it, Ed would sing along and Walter would sing the harmony. So we would just do it between ourselves. That's actually the best song on the album."

"We had a lot of brass with the keyboards for 'The World Spins' originally but we took the brass out. That was a fun song to do, it's not as serious as the others."

And working with Becker?

"Very strange, he's very disciplined and he works hard and we weren't used to that as we were used to having fun in the past. It was fun working with him, but he was very professional and he knew a lot more than we did."

For an album that is almost a flawless pop product, *Flaunt The Imperfection* is an ironic title. What's it getting at?

"It means show off what you've got. If you haven't got blue eyes or blond hair or whatever then

you can't flaunt those but if you've got a sense of humour then let's hear that."

The album has one or two religious references, like 'King In A Catholic Style' and 'Wall Of God':

"Yeah, it's what we've grown up with. Ed and I went to St Kevins which is an all-boys' school and so religion is imprinted on our memories. But we use it to give the songs that feeling of importance as things like 'king' and 'God' are all pretty important."

Flaunt The Imperfection has made the Top 10 in the album charts but odds on it was the single 'Black Man Ray' that drove it there:

"I stole the name Man Ray from the photographer and put 'Black' in front of it so we got this visionary figure. It's just a figurehead and what we're doing is singing about whether we're happy in what we're doing."

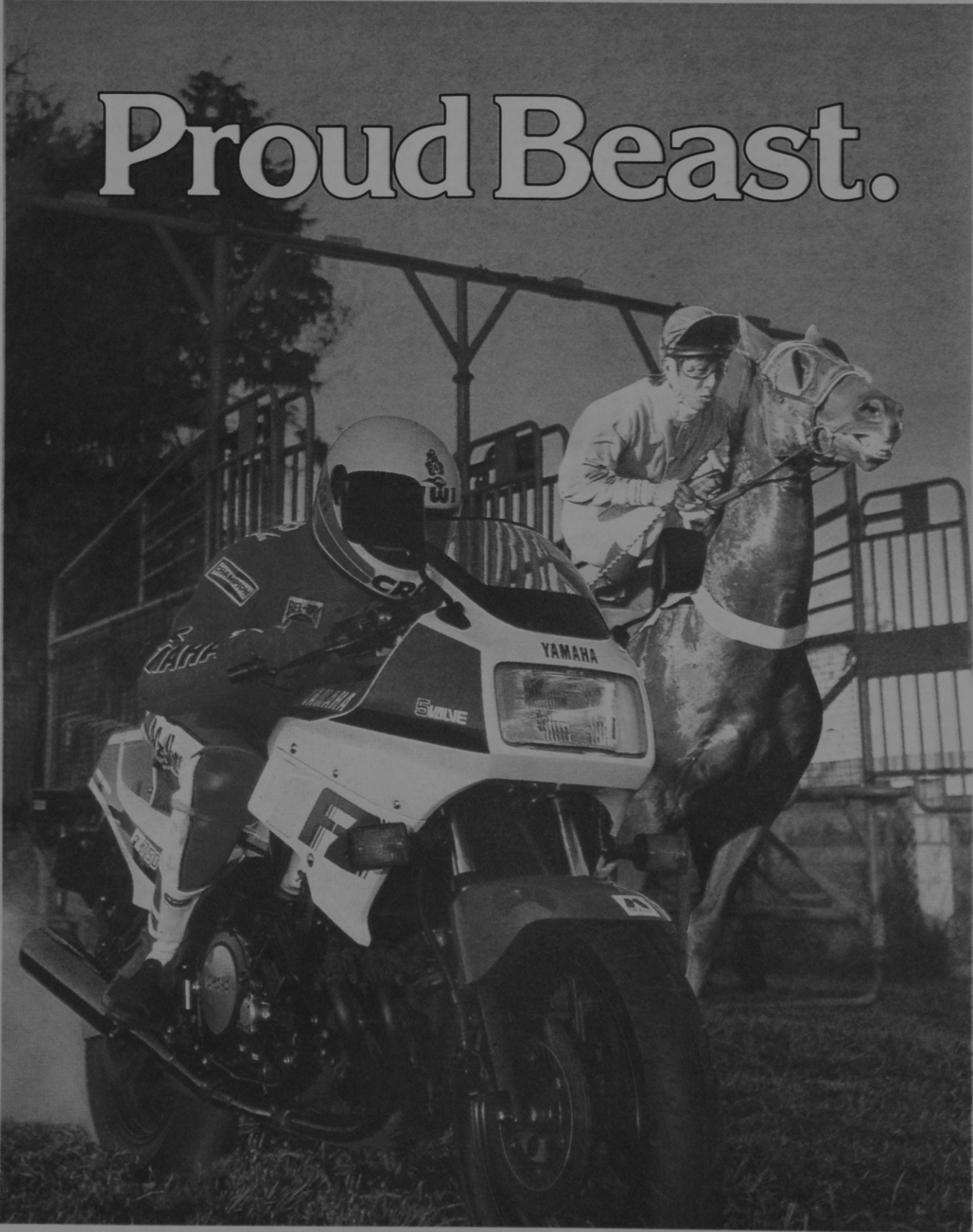
The morning the album was finished the band was involved in a car crash:

"I broke my left arm and Gazza (Johnson) broke his upper jaw. It looked horrible and it was. We went through a brick wall and head-on into a cottage and the car ended up on its side. This was five o'clock in the snow. It was quite horrendous. But we're all well now and we've been touring for the last month. It was probably a lesson as we've so much travelling to do that we'll be more careful."

And that travelling could bring them down this way.

China Crisis may not be solving pop's problems, but at least they're not adding to them.

George Kay



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