

MOTELS



Motels (L-R), Michael Goodroe, Martin Jourard, Tim McGovern, Martha Davis and Brian Glascock.

The reputation of Los Angeles as a musical capital has steadily declined in recent years among those who make a point of keeping abreast of current musical trends. After the country rock boom of the early 1970's, LA started to get sleepier and sleepier, as the ones who reaped the most favour went into semi-retirement in their Laurel Canyon mansions, played who's-the-most-enigmatic-superstar-of-all, and ventured only occasionally into the studio or onto the stage.

LA seemed to be filled with old, rich, reformed hippies, indifferent to their public and oblivious to the changes going on around them. XTC's Andy Partridge spoke recently of a phenomenon called "musical constipation." LA needed a good enema.

It happened in January 1979, with a band called the Motels, who tore the Whisky apart with aggressive, extroverted music, the like of which LA had seldom, if ever, seen before. But the drawcard was an undeniably-attractive 28-year-old lady named Martha Davis, the band's lead singer, chief songwriter and rhythm guitarist. The reaction to those first major gigs stunned her.

"When it happened, it happened incredibly fast," she recalls. "It was almost *too* fast. We hardly knew each other and there was already record interest. It was weird."

Berkeley Roots

Martha comes originally from Berkeley, California, where she married at the age of 15. She has two daughters from the now-defunct marriage, the eldest of whom is 12. Martha and daughter

Maria are often mistaken for sisters.

Her first musical experiences were listening to her mother's gospel, blues, classical and Dixieland records.

"I started writing songs when I was 15, but I was a closet case for ages," she says. "I never played with other musicians. I just sat in my room and played by myself, so I developed a whole personal style of songwriting. Whenever I found a new chord, I always thought I'd invented it myself."

Around 1973, she started "a weird, funny little band" called the Warfield Foxes with a friend named Dean Chamberlain, now making a name for himself with a band called Code Blue.

The Foxes played parties around Berkeley, before moving to LA to try and make it big, and changing their name to the Motels.

"We were going to make it big in three weeks," says Martha. "We struggled, got our rehearsal spaces, got burned, learned the ropes. We couldn't find any places to play for a long time. That's why we started Radio Free Hollywood."

Radio Free Hollywood was a concert series-cum-fanzine put together by the Motels and two other "underground" bands, the Dogs and the Pop. It opened up the Hollywood music scene, to the stage where elitist clubs like the Whisky, the Starwood and the Cabaret started putting on shows by local non-cover bands.

The Split

The original Motels (Martha is the only surviving member) broke up, and she spent another two years "kicking around", trying to

put another band together.

From the crowd of musicians she regularly hung out with, she picked up brothers Jeff (guitar) and Marty (keyboards and sax) Jourard, bass player Michael Goodroe, and drummer Brian Glascock (his brother was the late John Glascock, former bass player for Jethro Tull).

That was late in 1978. Jeff Jourard had a masterplan to play throughout 1979 and gain a loyal following, and then shop for a record deal this year. But events overtook them, and by June 1979 they were signed to Capitol and in the studios, cutting their first album.

Producer was Capitol's ace house man, John Carter, who was also retained for the follow-up album, *Careful*. Carter in fact has a reputation as one of the best non-producers around.

"I swear, we couldn't get Carter to produce," said Jeff Jourard in an interview during the sessions for the first LP. "We'd do the session and he'd be standing there and I'd look at him and I'd say, 'Carter? Produce something!' Finally, when we came to start mixing, he started producing. I guess he pretty much wanted us to have it our own way. We like it that way, too."

First LP

The resulting album, *Motels*, was released in New Zealand last April. Interest was stimulated by the rather bizarre cover, a middle-aged Edna Everidge type in a 1950's-style bathing suit. The radio stations immediately seized on the track "Total Control", a sentimental torch ballad showcasing Martha's aching vocals and

Marty Jourard's mellifluous sax. The album showed a broad cross-section of influences, from the Velvet Underground on "Kix", to jazz-funk on "Love Don't Help".

The Motels toured extensively throughout last year, but a rift developed towards the end of 1979, and Jeff Jourard quit to form his own band. His replacement was another old friend of Martha's from the Radio Free Hollywood days, Tim McGovern, from the Pop. The new lineup started rehearsals in January, unsure of whether it would work. The initial rehearsal was a bit rough.

"The first night had a lot to do with nerves being on edge," says Martha. "But the second night was like magic. The ideas started flying and when it was over, voila! We hatched six of the new album's songs that night."

"When you listen to *Careful*, you don't really get the feeling it was done by a 'chick singer'. It's really well-integrated in terms of being done by a female working with a band. It comes off as a collection of songs on which everyone is featured in some way or another."

Martha's feelings are echoed by the other members.

"The coolest thing about the band for me," says Michael, "is that it combines the hard rock authority of classic rock'n'roll with an immediate energy. That really comes through on the record."

"The songs' moods shift back and forth, but Martha's approach gives them cohesion," adds Marty.

"The band's not trying to kill her with overpowering instrumen-

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