Long Time No See!

Hello again, Hiatt-Heads! Well, it's been so long since Issue 3, I almost forget what you all look like...(Wait, I've never known what you look like.) Unfortunately, I have no excuses for waiting so long before producing this issue, but I do have lots of tid-bits to share! First of all, I have to thank Peter Liacos for maintaining the Shot-Of-Rhythm internet site devoted to John Hiatt and all the lovely, musically-saavy people on the "SOR" discussion lists, because most of the information in this issue came right from these sources. If you have a computer, be sure to check out http://www.tiac.net/users/pfl/mainmenu.htm. However, for those of you who don't have the technology or the desire to jump into the World Wide Web, my little photo-copied labor of love is here for you enjoyment and enlightenment.

First off, as you know, John has released The Best of John Hiatt on Capitol records. Most fans agree that the title should be "Some of the Best of John Hiatt," and some lucky foreigners saw the release of another Best of which included almost an entire albums worth of additional material. Those of us in the States also missed out when a Hiatt tour was canceled. I've heard several reasons, but none official, so I'll spare you the rumors. The good news is that the venues we've heard from in both Maine and Massachusetts said ticket sales were going well. Of course, the better news is that Hiatt will be doing at least a few concerts this summer, including two in New York City on July 17th. Hope to see some of you there, or that John will be heading to your neck of the woods soon!

The bad news, however, is that John did face some health problems last year. Our favorite singer/songwriter had developed some cysts on his throat which, although weren't overly serious, needed to be removed. The operation was successful and John is expected to have a full recovery of his voice. (As we'll find out for ourselves, I'm sure.)

More good news...John's new version of the classic "Have A Little Faith In Me," was nominated for two Grammy Awards, but unfortunately did not receive an award in either category. In the "Best Rock Vocal" category, Hiatt was beat out by Lenny Kravitz's song "Fly Away," and "Uninvited" by Alanis Morissette took the prize for "Best Rock Song." Despite this, I'm sure John was honored to be nominated, and we all know who comes out tops in my book!

Good news number three: John is already working on his next album, which will be a reunion with the Louisiana musicians known as the “Goners” who performed on...you guessed it, Slow Turning. It’s hard to say what this means for Davey Farghner, Michael Urbano, and David Immergluck, who formed the Nashville Queens, John’s latest band. Davey Farghner even helped John produce half of Little Head, and performed with John on some summer dates while the other “Queens” were taking a break. It’s hard to believe they are parting ways. If they are, I’m sure that’s not the last we will hear from Davey, Michael, or David. You probably already know that Sonny Landreth, the lead guitarist for the Goners has since produced his own solo album and that Michael Ward, the raucous lead guitarist who performed on Perfectly Good Guitar and John Hiatt Comes Alive... at Budhokan? has since moved on to a little band called “The Wallflowers” a.k.a. Bob Dylan’s kid’s band.


In this issue, I've continued the tradition of sharing your comments with other fans, as I have printed some very funny and creative versions of John Hiatt lyrics by a man named Ronny Watt, from the Shot-of-Rhythm discussion list. Thanks for being just so cool, Ronny and Write On!

Good luck with this issue's puzzle. I hope you enjoy this new issue as much as I enjoyed putting it together! Rave On!

*Slow Turning is not an official magazine and is not affiliated with John Hiatt or Capital Records.*
RAVE ON!

One thing I, as a fan, can never get enough of is collecting comments from writers and musicians about how great John is. Below is just a sampling of what people have had to say about John and his music over the years.

"One of a dying breed--the prolific song craftsman--Hiatt gets neither the radio play nor the retail sales enjoyed by many of the artists who have covered his tunes...he has turned out songs for [others]... Hiatt is also a funky, soulful singer who consistently generates solid, good-time, bass-drums and guitar driven pop as well as searing ballads..."
-David Handelman, People Magazine

"He's one of the best writers and singers we've got. I've been a fan since he began making the rounds years and years ago. I just love his wry, keenly observed view of the world. He's vulnerable, funny, cynical, self-deprecating and angry all at once. His lyrics are way above the level of most, and as a singer and arranger, he's brilliant as well. (I guess it's pretty clear I like him.) I think he should have been more acknowledged commercially, but he came out at a time when progressive FM radio was getting more limited and corporate."
-Bonnie Raitt, musician. As quoted from an online chat site.

"What has kept Hiatt going is his sense of humour. His albums, as much as being personal observations, also include odd, pointed anecdotes which could culled from the pages of the National Enquirer...Hiatt can touch the deep dark well within, spin out a funny story and rock out with the best and he also can spit up a splendid line of invective which has seen him likened to Elvis Costello."
-Graham Reid, New Zealand Herald.

"At 41, John Hiatt may be getting older, but he's out to prove you're only as old as you play. On his 11th disc, the music sounds livelier than that coming from performers half his age...the lively rock on the album works like musical Geritol, keeping him and anyone who hears it young and vital."
-Craig Tomashoff, People magazine.

"He made his greatest impression as a performer with 1987's 'Bring the Family,' an album that went a long way toward defining family life as appropriate material for rock 'n' roll."
-J.D. Considine, The Baltimore Sun.

"Listening to Hiatt's most famous songs back to back confirms what his true fans have known for years: Hiatt is simply one of the best singer/songwriters in the business, and if there were any justice his albums would be selling millions."

"John Hiatt tells stories. He can't help himself, it's in his blood, much as it was for John Cheever, Raymond Carver, and Flannery O'Connor...the oft times aimless yet right-minded characters that people his idiosyncratic, tuneful tales are every bit as believable and brimming with life as those found in the best prose."
-Kevin Avery, writer.

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More on the Songwriter

Fans, critics and fellow musicians alike have raved on Hiatt's songwriting ability, a process Hiatt has developed since he first landed a job at Tree Publishing in 1971, as a staff writer for $25 a week. Below are words straight from the man on how he wrote some of our favorite songs, and about the process in general.

Fast facts:
* John's first song was a ballad called "Beth Ann" which he wrote when he was twelve for a friend's girlfriend, because as a shy, overweight pre-teen, he didn't have a girlfriend of his own.

* Although Hiatt is perhaps best known for what fans have called "The Recovery Trilogy" (Bring the Family, Slow Turning, and Stolen Moments) which contain songs that deal with Hiatt's troubled past and new-found happy family life. Hiatt states, "there's probably not as much autobiography as people would imagine in my songs."

"Rockers in the Briefcase": "I had an office away from the house for the first couple of years when I went back to Nashville after living in California, and it was helpful because I was so undisciplined. I kept thinking of a famous advertisement in the 60s of some guy going off to work, kissing his wife and kids. Something about that was just hugely appealing so I made an attempt to re-create it. I think us weirdo types, creative types I suppose, find a certain kind of normalcy very attractive, I dunno..."

"Rockers in the Suitcase": "I've always got three or four hours where I'm sitting in the hotel, wondering what I'm doing out here. I sort of bought into that 'Oh man, I can't write when I'm out on the road' line pretty early in my career. That's right up there with 'You gotta suffer to write on the road.' But all the things you need to write a song are there when you're on the road. You've got your solitude, which is hard to find when you're at home with three kids. And you've got that thing, that magic, that wonderful gift: boredom. The Native American Indians will tell you that's a real gateway to some creative stuff. And there's plenty of boredom out on the road. It's what my mom always told me. 'You've got to make good use of your time, and I never bloody did, up until now. I've finally go the hang of it, here in my late 40's.'

Songwriting as therapy: "It's a wonderful process with has been in place since I wrote my first song when I was about 11. It's a life habit and my own personal therapy to use songs to clear things up for myself, like a reality check and look at where I am at a given point in my life. I envy people who can express themselves simply and directly. I have a tough time doing that and maybe that's why I started writing songs. Communication on a person-to-person basis is still difficult for me. But hey, I'm an American male in my late 30s, what can I tell you? We're a fairly shutdown bunch and not known for our great communications skills."

The album Walk On: "I think that inventory taking which started with Bring the Family is gone...which isn't to say I won't be back there again someday. The stuff I've written for [Walk On] was all written on the road during the last tour. We were out for about fourteen months, which was the most extensive touring I'd ever done. It was almost out of necessity that I started writing songs on the road - just to write for my own sanity - the tedium of touring being such that you need contrasts, and I think that's what these songs provided. They're aslo a bit more acoustic, almost like folk songs, which was kind of a direct contrast to the music we were making last year...I've gotten a lot more flexible in terms of my writing style and how I go about it. It's much less disciplined - more spur of the moment. I like that. Also, there's a lot going on in these songs because I was aching for hearth and home."

On the structure of writing: "What usually happens is, I'm sitting around, playing some chords, and then I get a melody idea off of the chords. It seems like lyrics come from a rhythm and a chord structure or pattern, and then I get a melody off that and start singing nonsense. Eventually a word from the English language will fly out from the grunts and groans I'm making, and that'll set something off. So I'll write a line as I'm singing the song. I'm playing, singing a song, and I'm writing as the story develops. But I'm not a fine tuner; I let it run rough and mean. I'm not a fuzzer, but I fuss as I go, so I figure when I'm done with it, it's done. That's how I feel. But the real thing to me is, how does this line sing? How does it lay?"
More on the Songs

So, now we know the story about how Hiatt goes about writing his songs in general, but I bet you'd like to know a little more about how your favorite Hiatt-tune was inspired. Lucky for you, all you need to do is read on!

Seven Little Indians: "It was inspired by my Father, who was in Alaska during World War Two, and was employed by the Army. And like the character in the song, he brought back all this stuff, like mukluk gloves. He was a storyteller, and used to make up stories for us when we were little kids. Wonderful takes of all kinds of great things happening in the family. The stories were filled with his hopes and wishes for our family, which didn't necessarily materialise. But reality is often a very different story. Still he had high hopes for us, and that's what the song is about." ##

Friend of Mine: "We had a tour manager at that time who had the uncanny ability to squeeze all kind of perks out of the various hotels around the country. Somehow, for the rate of a regular room, he conned them into giving me the presidential suite. What president, I don't know...." In the room there was a grand piano. "I put my bag up and sat down and started noodling. The next thing you know, I was playing the figure for that song. The song just flew out. It was almost as if my buddy kind of visited me there." ^^

Mile High: "We kept imaginining that it was being played by a lounge band, but the lounge was the bar in the Shining." ^^

The album Walk On: "Visualization played an important part in the rest of the album's (Walk On) conception, too. As we were recording the record, we came up with this visual image of the sound we were making. We likened it to as if we were wandering the woods maybe a hundred years ago—or even yesterday—and you came upon a house or a log cabin and there's a light emanating from the doorway. As you get closer you see inside there's a family and they're making music. Mom's on the dulcimer and Grandad's playing the banjo or the zither. Dad's on the guitar, Junior's beatin' the pots and pans, and there's Grandma on the pump organ. That's the kind of music that was wafting out to these strangers wandering out in the darkness." ^^

Real Fine Love: "Yeah, pretty true, except I didn't roll out in back of a pick-up truck, I rode out driving a Corveer which cost me $35. I bought it from a buddy and it didn't have any floorboards, and I drove it to Nashville.... In fact, I still drive an old truck, but hey, I'm drivin'! I'm not riding in the back!"***

Trudy and Dave: "That was a local news piece about a couple who had done a copycat crime. I was really taken with the sincere regret they expressed that they had done such a thing. I had the sense they were people who had gotten their backs against the wall and didn't have a clue as to how and why. They just felt their options had narrowed sufficiently so their only out was to commit the crime. It was touching to me and I get moved by little things like that." +

On writing Little Head: "Sometimes, you just have to create it and go through the process regardless of what comes out—and not judge it to hard. Time is of the essence—I don't want to waste it getting caught up on writing the 'perfect song.' The best songs just come. I like being surprised. But I really love creating. I don't know if this makes any sense, but about the only way I can describe it is that it makes me feel I don't know - clean." –

+ From "Through a glass, darkly," by Graham Reid, for the NZ Herald, 3/22/91.
^^ From "John Hiatt's Wonderful Racket," by Kevin Avery, 1995
# From an article by Michael Gelfand in the November 1998 issue of Musician Magazine.
*** From "John Hiatt- On the Road" by Gary Fleming for Rip it Up
## From "Stolen Moments info from Polygram Records, NZ."
On the Shot-Of-Rhythm discussion list some truly creative people post some super keen insights about Hiatt and his lyrics, but perhaps one of the most interesting and fun of these posts are some parodied versions of Hiatt lyrics created Ronny Watt from Ontario, a.k.a "Ronny." Below is his take on the Hiatt classic "Tennessee Plates," which describes a scenario maybe one or more of us have experienced before. I've also included John's version to show you what a great job Ronny did. You like it? Want to try it yourself? Check out the back page on how you can submit your own Hiatt translation.

**Hiatt's version**
I woke up in a hotel, didn't know what to do,
Turned the TV on and wrote a letter to you.
News was talkin' bout a drag neat up on the interstate,
Seems they were looking for a Cadillac with Tennessee Plates!

Since I left California, things have gotten worse.
Seems the land of opportunity for me was just a curse.
Tell that judge in Bakersfield, my trial will have to wait,
Now they'll be looking for a Cadillac with Tennessee Plates!

It was somewhere in Nevada, it was cold outside;
She was shivering in the dark so I offered her a ride.
Three bank jobs later, four cars hot-wired.
We crossed the Mississippi like an oil-slick fire!

If they'd known what we was up to they wouldn't have let us in,
We landed in Memphis just like original sin.
Elvis Presley Boulevard to the Graceland gates,
We were looking for a Cadillac with Tennessee Plates.

Well, there must have been a dozen of them in that garage,
There wasn't one Lincoln and there wasn't one Dodge.
There wasn't one Japanese model or make...
Just pretty, pretty Cadillacs with Tennessee Plates!

She saw him singing once, when she was seventeen
And ever since that day, she's been living inbetween
I was never King of nothing, except this wild weekend,
Anyway, he wouldn't care. Hell, he gave them to his friends!

This ain't no hotel I'm writing you from,
It's a Tennessee prison up at Brushy Mountain.
Yours sincerely is doing five to eight.
Just stamping out my time making Tennessee Plates!

-John

**Ronny's version**
I woke up in the morning to see the snow had gone away,
I turned the radio on to hear the weather for the day.
The girl she said sunshine and temps up high.
I decided it was time to take my cobra for a ride.

I'd been bored with all pop music; it was always getting worse.
Seemed all the radio stations were living with a curse.
Damn near given up on them but whoa-just wait...
I heard some guy singing 'bout his Tennessee Plates!

It was sometime in the spring, it was warm outside;
I put the top down and I went for a ride.
Three Spice Girls later I just about died.
When Hiatt blasted on like a champion sire.

If I'd have known how he could write I'd've listened years before.
Instead of hearing all the stuff I couldn't take anymore.
Headed up to the record shop that carried all the greats
I had to find the album that had Tennessee Plates!

Well there must have been a dozen 'em sittin' in the shop.
There wasn't one rapper and there wasn't one pop.
There wasn't one Beatles clone that sounded really fake.
Just pretty, pretty Hiatt's and one with Tennessee Plates!

I discovered Neil Young when I was seventeen
And ever since that day I thought he couldn't be beat.
But Hiatt was around the whole bloody time,
And nobody told me- what a bloody crime!

Now I'm trying to get them all from Observatory on.
I don't wanna miss one single Hiatt song.
Turns out he's playing in Toronto on November 12th!
But I can't even go because I've got no wealth.

-ronny

**SHOT-OF-RHYTHM...CHECK IT OUT!!!**

Got a computer? Love John Hiatt? Want to talk to some of the nicest, most musically savvy people on the World Wide Web? Then check out Shot-Of-Rhythm, the Official-as-it's-Gonna-Get John Hiatt Homepage at http://www.tiac.net/users/pft/mainmenu.htm. There you will find articles about John, the latest news updates on tours and upcoming albums, and information on how you can join the discussion list to share your comments about John with other people year-round! Make sure you tell 'em SLOW TURNING sent you!
Continuing with the tradition started in Issue 3, here is another view of John Hiatt history. In 1981, Hiatt made All of a Sudden, which until a little while ago was only available on vinyl. Below is the information Geffen Records sent to the press to promote Hiatt and give background on the artist and the album.

"When people who know what they want, find what they're looking for, you can usually tell by the way they lean back in their chair, cross their arms and grin that certain grin of long sought satisfaction.

That's what John Hiatt is doing right now, sitting amidst amps, instruments and mixing boards in a San Fernando Valley rehearsal hall gearing up for an up-coming spring tour keyed to release his Geffen Records debut, All of A Sudden. Those who know Hiatt, even by reputation, are aware of his near-maniac quest for that sound somewhere inside his skull--a sound that apparently has not escaped intact until now. Never mind the fact that Hiatt's last two albums, Slug Line and Two Bit Monsters received near-unanimous critical praise from the terminally jaded rock press corps. To Hiatt they are only well-intentioned failures--some solid songwriting to be sure, but a sound that fell, on the whole, something short of adequate. Never mind the burgeoning cult following the 29-year-old Indianapolis native has attracted over the past few years with a galvanic live show, a scene-stealing guest slot on the recent Ry Cooder tour, soundtrack contributions to several films, including, most recently, The Border, and some VIP song covers. Hiatt is really only interested in one thing--success on his own terms. "All I ever asked for was a shot," he insists. And like the one heard 'round the world, All of A Sudden could well be the broadside Hiatt's been waiting to deliver.

With the generosity of a man who's finally gotten what he wants, Hiatt is not at all opposed to sharing the credit for All of A Sudden, which certainly does sound, from first listening onward, like the singer/writer/guitarist's most assured offering to date. "Music is a totally collaborative art," he says. "And this time I made a real effort to hook up with people who knew what they were doing so that together we could pull something off and make it stick." Those hookups included Hiatt's present band; Jesse Harms (keyboards, background vocals), Darrell Verduco (drums, background vocals) and James Rolleston (bass, background vocals), who, along with newly added guitarist Jack Sherman, will form Hiatt's touring group as well. But the real catalytic factor in the All of A Sudden success formula was producer Tony Visconti.

On the subject of the expatriate American producer, celebrated for his work with T. Rex, David Bowie and Mrs. Visconti--Mary Hopkin--among others, Hiatt waxes positively rhapsodic. "I was delighted," he confesses. "Tony didn't let me down. It was my first experience working with a bona find record producer and it was a good one. It took us a while to know how much we could each get away with, but by the end I felt we'd really only scratched the surface of what we could do together." Smoking a modest chain of Marlboros, Hiatt muses on the essential nature of a producer's role in record crafting. "It's a lot more than turning dials," he asserts. "A real producer can help you weed out the stupid stuff in your music and really inspire you. That's exactly what Tony did. I was anxious for someone to be really honest about what I was trying to do. Tony was a great help vocally as well as musically. When we first started recording I'd wanted to bring in another guitarist. He advised against it and was able to draw things out of me on the guitar that I didn't know I had. In terms of style, I wanted to try and change things up a bit and I needed a producer who wouldn't be thrown by the diversity. Tony was able to take the material and present it coherently. It's pretty slim pickings as far as producers go," Hiatt asserts. "You either get something completely overblown or have to settle for pot luck. Tony knew what he was doing."

So, from all indications, did Hiatt. From the evidence of All of A Sudden's twelve selections, his songwriting skills have kept pace with his own escalating demands. Hiatt's attention to craft of tunesmithing should, if there's any justice in this world, earn him the thanks of a grateful listening public, a public Hiatt feels he has a lot to say to. "No one's writing songs anymore," he asserts. "At least, I haven't heard any on the radio I've been listening to. All I hear is a lot of groans and grunts over a four beat bar," Hiatt sighs. "Sometimes I don't know why I bother. A lot of the so-called avant garde slag the Tin Pan Alley tradition of songwriting, but that's what it's really all about--it's got to get back to the average person somehow. I really believe that my music can be understood and appreciated by a whole lot of people.

All of A Sudden is certainly a mix of moods and methodologies and that rarest of commodities, an album with no bad cuts.

Whatever Hiatt's position vis-a-vis his own rigorous creative standards, it's obvious the guy's not looking back. A pause, another Marlboro, and he plunges into some speculation on the future. "This album marks an end of a certain kind of songwriting for me," he explains. "I'm trying to get my lyrics even more pared down, the idea being that, by simplifying, you ultimately get something more weird; maybe I'll call the next LP Plain Talk," he muses.

Hiatt's already way ahead of himself, out beyond the rehearsal studio, the interview, even All of A Sudden. It's kind of scary really, as when he's asked to sum up his feelings on the long-player in question. "It's the first album I've made that's not an overall disappointment," he states. At the thought of a John Hiatt LP that would totally satisfy its creator, the mind reeks."
Crossword

Here is another chance to test your Hiatt IQ!. Below are clues based on the lyrics of John Hiatt’s songs. To make it easier, I have included the initials of the album which includes the song the lyric comes from. This issue’s puzzle has a numeric theme, so spell out all of the number answers (eliminating hyphens). If you can complete the puzzle, we’ll put you in our “Hiatt-Head Hall-of-Fame.”

Across

1. Magazine found in a Pink Bedroom (SL)
2. Memphis guitar (BTF)
3. Loved Jerk’s title (RWTK)
4. Who sawed the woman in half (LH)
5. Face better than John’s on a Slug Line
6. # of years she lived ten lifetimes (WO)
7. Ethylene’s favorite song (WO)
8. State setting of Feels Like Rain (ST)
9. Age John first Stood Up (in mos.) (BTF)
10. Galaxy to bleed over (WO)
11. Age to learn to love (BTF)

Down

1. Where a replacement waits to strip a uniform (TBM)
2. First step on a Slug Line
3. Pavement pounding shoes (PGG)
4. Memphis Restaurant to get a decent meal in (BTF)
5. # of lesson for lights low longing (RWTK)
6. Cost in $ of kewpie doll (RWTK)
7. Animals without a choice (BTF)
8. Pink animal that falls through trap door (WUTIA)
9. “We Ran” w/ undone ___ (WUIA)