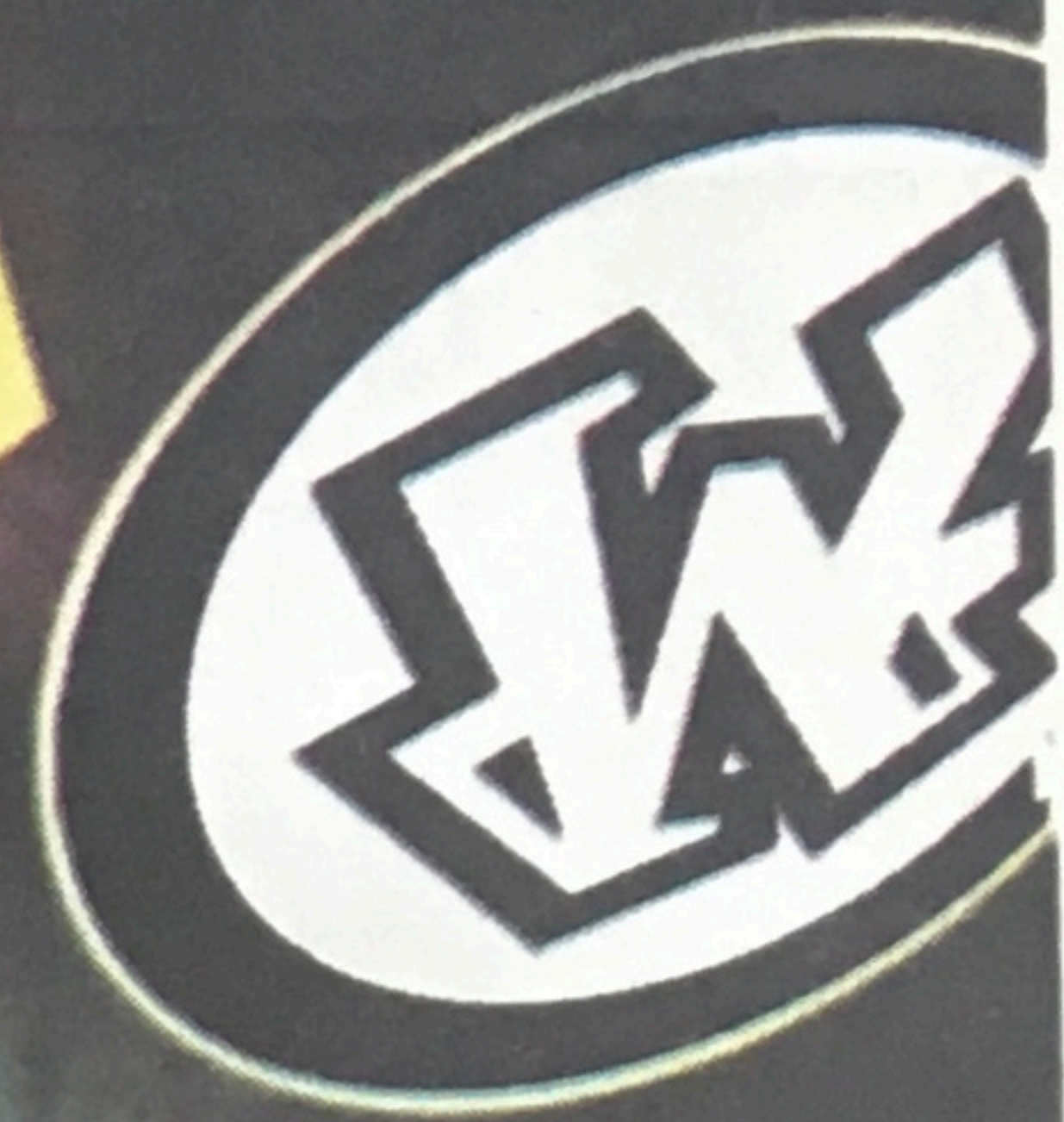


WHEELS entertainment

July • Volume 4 issue 7



No one's looking.
Take one.

SPEEDBALL
SOLID FROG
SILVERCHAIR
TYRONE'S POWER
FOE

by norene cashen

"I have to get an ashtray. I'll call you right back," Jim Thirlwell says politely. I wait five minutes or so. I think about this producer-genius who unwillingly bears the burden of being an industrial patriarch—the guy who's put his fingerprints on too many hit record to mention. He is Mr. Discography hiding behind a slew of memory-jarring pseudonyms: Clint Ruin, Foetus, Wiseblood, Steroid Maximus, Foetus Under Glass, Scraping Foetus Off The Wheel etc... I've got two minutes left and I'm spontaneously formulating and revising questions I think may draw out the paranoid, nightmarish poison that fuels the fire inside this New York City noiseman. I put down nervous blue cursive on a white notecard, "Were you serious when you told *Guitar World* that Gary Glitter was a major influence for you?" The phone rings and, impulsively, I turn the card over and start with something simple...

W Where are you calling me from?

F: The (something something) ...office...

W (thinking I heard him say—from the phone in the office) Citywise, where are you calling me from?

F: New York City (he says a little confused, like *what the hell's wrong with this girl*).

W I've got *Gash*. I listened to that. Ran across *Guitar World* with the Trent Reznor industrial cover...and, did you read that?

F: Yes, I saw it. The three godfathers, they put in. Well, the godfather and his two grandsons.

W That's about as far as I go with industrial music because like...

F: Well, I don't consider my music industrial. In fact, I hate the I-word.

W Okay. I promise I won't use it.

F: I've been tarred with that brush. But if you've listened to *Gash*, it's pretty diverse. I mean, it's just music. The I-word, um, I keep getting fingered as like the godfather of that and I find it a bit restricting to be pinpointed. It's a whole press thing, you know. So I don't like to discuss it. I consider myself making pure music. I may want to sound like a mutated Sergio Mendez or a big band or pure white noise or big band meets heavy metal meets...I don't know...I'm in a position where I'm not confined to being guitar, bass, drums, vocals and working out your song with that in mind and thinking how you can play it live. I may start with an ethnic loop and then like build on that and start playing guitar. Or I may start out at the piano and it'll turn out to be a sort of wistful jazz lullaby. I haven't got a formula and I think the thing that bolts it all together is the sequencing and the fact that I don't want to make a piece of music containing five different genres just for the perversity of it. I see it as the song. But that's how I want to put it across and make a journey within the one song. So I may start at one point and finish at a totally different point, but I still see it as not collage or piecemeal, but it's the form of songwriting I do and when I reinterpret it live it may even sound like a totally different song.

W I don't know what to call it. It just sounds a lot less worried about being accessible to people than a lot of stuff out there today.

F: I think it's really accessible. It's very diverse. I mean, I consider myself a strongwriter...(laughter) a songwriter, strongwriter. And if you played someone who was not versed in my music starting at any one track, let's say you started at "Slong" the eleven-and-a-half minute big band opus, you have a totally different conception than if you started at, say, "Mighty Whitey" or "Steer Your Life Away" or "Take It Outside Godboy" or whatever. But I think it is very cohesive. I've always considered my work accessible, but never had the mechanics behind me to shove it down people's throats. It seems like everyone who's heard my stuff has gone out and formed a band. That's actually a quote from a friend of mine.

I've paid my dues. I've been doing this for a long time and I'm still paying my dues. My goal is not...You know, of course I want to have the mechanics to get across to as many people as possible, but that's not the priority. The priority is not to please the audience, but to please myself first and to do something that's challenging for me, not to the point of perversity. But my work is autobiographical. I've got a huge archive of stuff that I haven't put out. It's first and foremost all Foetus music. I don't really see myself in a context of, say, having peers.

I got a lot of stuff out of my system years ago. And since then, I've been building on my own vision. Of course I'm influenced heavily by my environment. I soak up. I'm a cultural sponge, not a cultural regurgitator. It filters through my vision and comes out. And I think I'm creating new forms of music.

W The work you've done with Prong, Megadeth, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Pantera,

photo by: Jimmy Jenner, Jr.

Nine Inch Nails etc...How satisfying has that been for you?

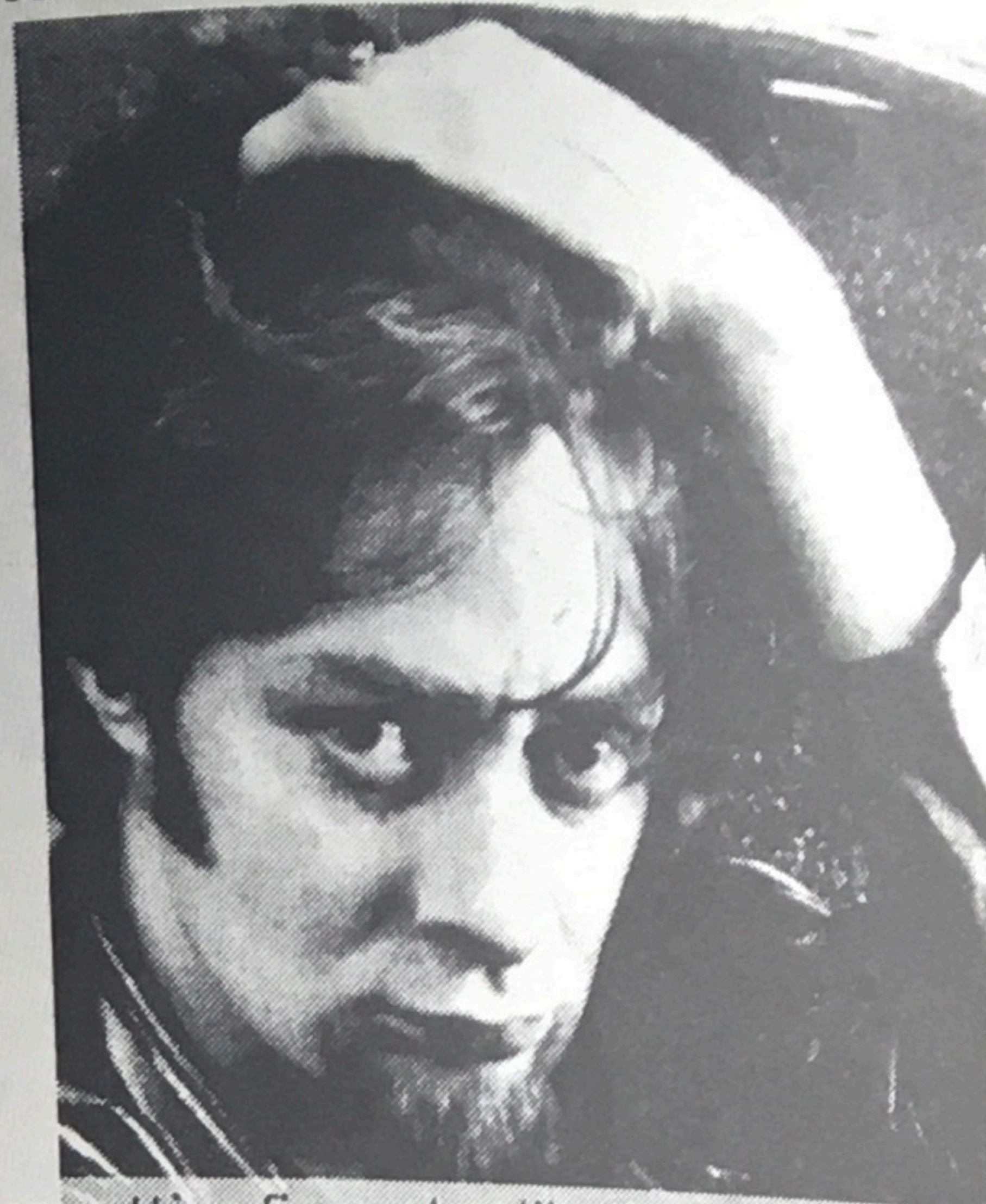
F: Very. I really enjoy it and I get a lot out of my system. I went through a period of all new Foetus studio recordings which was *Thaw*. It came out in '88. In the interim of that, I ended up, through no fault of my own, becoming a famous producer-remixer. I did about 30-35 remixes, produced a few albums, put out two albums under the name Steroid Maximus which was something I had to get out of my system—all instrumental and collaborative and also did Wiseblood mini-LP and worked on two double-live CD's which were compilations of my singles and so on.

I think through all that, between '88 and the release of *Gash*, I taught myself a lot and went through a lot of instances of collaborations. All that has sort of taken...I consider my music to be like a million light years ahead as Foetus. And I wouldn't have it any other way. Um, now I'm going pretty much full steam ahead on Foetus. I mean, I've shed a lot of skins and got a lot out of my system. And I think a lot of that experimentation which I've wiped onto a lot of other people, has really made the, for want of a better word, sophistication of this record.

W What drives you? Without getting too personal, what kinds of things are you getting out of your system?

F: Um, it's a real exorcism. But it's almost like talking to yourself. It's like a one-man dialogue. That's an anachronism to say a one-man dialog. It should be one-man monologue, but it's more like a dialog. I'm talking to myself. I'm documenting periods of my life and it seems that a lot of people—judging from the rabidness of my devotees—are relating to it. And it's all been a refinement. At the pique it's an exorcism; at the worst it's just reminding me of the

FOETUS



experience and driving it into my skull over and over. But it's been an ongoing process of trying to be eloquent and honest with myself. I think a lot of people relate to that. And if they do, fine. And if they don't, not fine.

You know, I don't go out of my way to be inaccessible. I'm making the kind of music I want to hear. It is a liberation of my obsessions. It seems there are a lot of people out there who share my malaise or dissatisfaction or death wish or whatever you want to call it.

W You sound so alienated.

F: This is the first Foetus record I've actually had other people play on. I impose myself a vacuum to create in. Because I don't want to directly have outside influences on my work. However, everything I'm exposed to I think I soak up. Like TV commercials for the Army or I Can't Believe It's Not Butter or walking down the street and encountering something or seeing a rat lying dead or peripherally hearing elevator music or going to see the New Bomb Turks or something.

All this ends up in a mix I try to create in a vacuum. And when I'm writing and recording I never listen to anyone else's music because I want it to come from as deep a place as possible. I think I'm sort of evolving. I build upon my own previous music. In that way, I'm influenced by myself. I try to come from as deep as possible which makes it sound inaccessible. But it turns out, to be flippant about it, totally catchy.

By the way, Jim says he wasn't kidding around when he told *Guitar World Magazine* one of his major influences was Gary Glitter. But he also cites a donut commercial and a drunk homeless person. So, go figure.

Foetus plays at St. Andrew's Hall w/ The Unsane and special quest on July 30.