

CHROME Box Set, Revisited

Alien Soundtracks

Half Machine Lip Moves

No Humans Allowed

Blood On The Moon

The Chronicles I

The Chronicles II

Bonus LP: Into The Eyes Of The Zombie King

CHROME – The Story of Pat Stevens

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Ruby Ray's photos were taken in 1980 at Embarcadero Center, San Francisco. According to Ruby, Damon made off with the negatives, and prints were made from the contact sheet she retained.

Chapter headings are lyrics from Chrome songs.

Back cover drawing by Damon Edge, circa 1977.

Special thanks to everyone who participated, and to the Yahoo Chrome discussion group.

Dedicated to O. D. Lavemour

Layout by Anthony Clarkson

San Francisco's **Chrome** made some of the most outrageous, mind melting records of the 1970s and early '80s, each a uniquely crazed soundscape combining oceanic psychedelia and maniacal garage punk with delightfully depraved, science fiction themed lyrics and imagery. While other bands might rock harder or louder or more cleverly, none will pull you into a total musical environment of demented insanity like Chrome. Not only do they make a strong case for science-fiction rock as a legitimate genre, but for my money they represent the high point of underground rock in America. If you crave analog tape collages of post-apocalyptic synesthesia, delve into these records with the lights off for maximum visual impact.



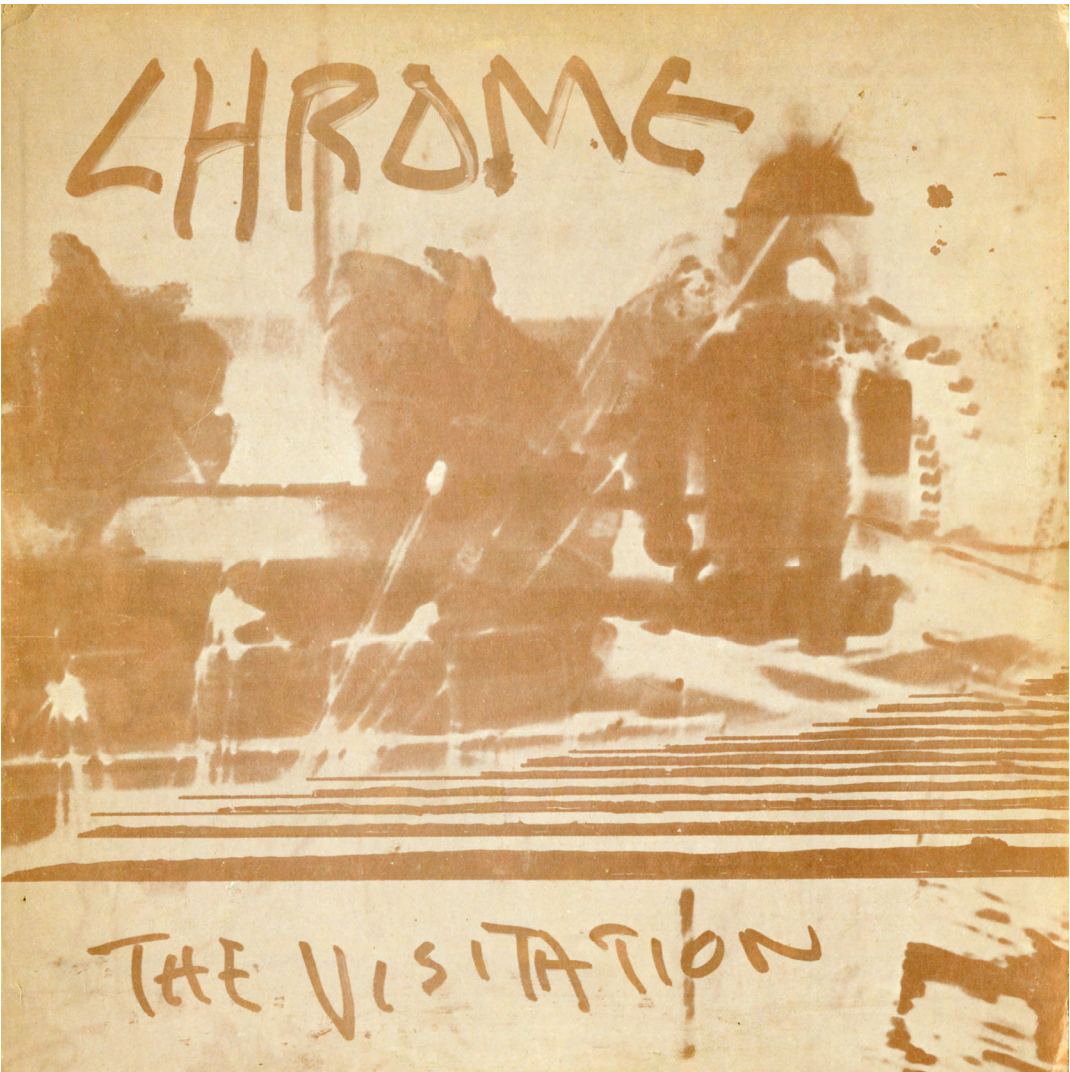
Helios Creed and Damon Edge in San Francisco, 1980 © 2014 Ruby Ray

“We could mutate ourselves together and explode in thirty seconds”

Throughout San Francisco’s history, musicians, artists, writers, and freaks of all stripes have been drawn to the idyllic city by the Bay, which spawned the so-called beat generation of the 1950s and early ’60s, and, by the middle of the latter decade, was the epicenter of a counter-cultural revolution that gave birth to the sexual liberation movement, underground comix, and psychedelic music and culture. But by the mid-’70s, the radio was dominated by disco and soft rock, and popular music had increasingly lost its appeal to those interested in forging a new, alternative culture. Musically speaking, this era in SF has often been described as the twilight years: While distant echoes of the once flourishing psychedelic scene still wafted through local bands like Jefferson Starship and Santana (and spin-offs Hot Tuna and early Journey), many distinctly felt the town’s musical and cultural heyday had passed.

The Tubes’ odd combination of glam and art-rock attracted a crowd that was into Eno and Roxy Music; Tower Records and City Lights Bookstore in North Beach were among the local breeding grounds for new ideas making their way into the Bay Area; but everyone seemed to be waiting for something new and exciting to happen, namely punk. While Chrome’s first record *The Visitation* (recorded mostly in 1976, at the very cusp of the punk era) was not necessarily what anyone was looking for at the time, as founding member Gary Spain explained, “I guess because it was a garage album, and the recording quality was so poor, the only people that related to it were the punks.”

Almost impossible to pigeonhole, *The Visitation* is a lively, confident, yet off-kilter rock record. The songs are solid, full of wild, funky rhythms, intricate guitar playing, and a passionate (at times shrill) voice wailing kinky-futuristic lyrics. While it



may not sound quite like what Chrome fans know and love, all the basic elements are there, though producer/drummer/singer Damon Edge (née Thomas Wisse, 1949-1995) had not yet honed his agoraphobia-inspired studio wizardry; nevertheless, a few atmospheric touches adumbrate the musique concrète-styled tape manipulations that would dominate their next few releases (notably, a backwards snippet of Cheech and Chong on the intro to the track “Sun Control”). Almost entirely ignored in its day and unjustly maligned over the years, *The Visitation* is a unique album, at times quite beautiful – but alas it failed to make people sit up and take notice when it was released in 1977.

It could be argued that the SF punk scene was a bit closer to art-rock than its NY or LA counterparts. Although progressive may have become a dirty word, psychedelia was not entirely ruled out as an influence, and even elements of contemporary classical and avant garde music were caught up in the fray. Damon Edge grew up in Los Angeles and attended Cal Arts where he was influenced by Allan Kaprow, whose ideas about “happenings” and the random element in art inspired Edge’s own ideas about “esoteric communication” and “elaborating systems of mutation” – concepts that somehow allowed him to justify dismissing live performance as an unnecessary formality; whether or not this was an excuse for his agoraphobia, he was not alone in this approach: A local label called *Ralph* had been releasing sinister yet whimsical records by a mysterious group called The Residents, who (at the time) never appeared live and obscured their identities with a range of disguises. The dark, angular, and sultry Tuxedomoon was forming in the shadows of The Angels of Light (an offshoot of local bearded drag queen performance troupe The Cockettes). Although heavily influenced by British space-rockers like Hawkwind and Pink Floyd, Chrome (and the SF scene in general) also drew inspiration from proto-punk weirdos Pere Ubu

and Devo in Ohio, The Stooges from Detroit, Cabaret Voltaire and Throbbing Gristle in England, as well as Can, Faust, and Neu! records imported from Germany. The resulting aesthetic was rough and defiant, cold yet intense, hermetic and enigmatic, and local troublemaker Monte Cazazza named the zeitgeist, “industrial” – a vibrant yet elusive, multidisciplinary subculture, nurtured in spite of its its contrary nature by a prodigious local press that included scrappy tabloid zines like *Search & Destroy*, *Vacation*, *Damage* and *Another Room*, and most dynamically typified by the records of Chrome.

The original lineup heard on *The Visitation* never played live (or all at the same time, if we’re to trust the surviving members’ memories). As original guitarist John Lambdin explains, the group’s nexus came from the ashes of an experimental improv musical group called Ba Ka Da:

I was twenty in the late summer of 1970, and had already been moderately successful, playing with some members of the original Mothers of Invention in the Valley. By the middle of 1970, I met a gang of people in Topanga Canyon playing off the cuff, free association music. Tony Salvage was on electric violin, Dean Olch played shakuhachi (a Japanese bamboo flute) and regular flute, Chris Smith was on bass and saxophone, me on guitar, and among this group was a guy named Thomas Wisse who was playing dumbek. Tom had just got back from somewhere in North Africa and would later change his name to Damon Edge. He had spent about a year at Choinard Art School which I’m pretty is where he met Dean. When Choinard moved to Cal Arts, both he and Dean went there, and they were the only ones among us going to college at the time. The bass player Chris Smith and I had been professional musicians while the others were more like savants. Tony could sight-read on his violin, but he’d just gotten an echoplex so it was kind of like a kid with a new toy.

We called ourselves Ba Ka Da, did a whole lot of recording on Tony’s two-track tape machine, and played at all sorts of events around Topanga. At one point, we hooked up with two people named Kirby and Gavin who were mixed up with MGM, and we ended up doing part of a soundtrack for a movie called *Clay Pigeon* (1971). We did the big, intense murder scene at the end, which was a bit like the *Psycho* theme. We were sort of adapted to that kind of stuff because, although we really didn’t work out any orchestral parts, we had a whole collection of everything from toys to clangers, and we were good at making colorful sounds. I was trying to get them to be more disciplined and play songs, but it dismally failed because most of them had no idea what they were doing, so it was up to me and Chris if we wanted to repeat anything. We tried to record an album in late ’71 or early ’72 at Mystic Sound Studios in Hollywood through Doug and Wally Moody (who might even still have the master tapes), which also failed. It ended up being a wonderful time, but by ’74 the thing had totally gone kaput. Tom and Dean both graduated from Cal Arts, and Ba Ka Da had pretty much scattered.

Around that time I went to Venice Beach and hooked up with a few bands, one of them being Danny Wildflowers’ Magnetic Misery, which is where I met Gary Spain. He was a good violin player and we played a bunch of gigs around Venice, but by the end of the summer of ’75, it was getting time for me to leave Venice. So I went up to San Francisco and moved into a hotel in

North Beach, and around early ’76 I called up Tom who was living in Berkeley, and so we got together one day, and he told me he was trying to do some recording with a guy named Mike Lowe in Mike’s garage in Richmond. So we spent a while recording and I realized I needed somebody else up there with some chord understanding, so I called Gary, who came up from LA to join us. He got on welfare and lived in one of the hotels in North Beach too, and joined the recording sessions about 1/3 of the way through.

There was a great deal of drug use going on. I was probably more involved than anybody else, just because I kinda ran with a speed freak crowd, and Gary never really had that problem. He’s always been kinda neutral. I always admired Gary’s chordal concepts, because he comes from a music place. Tom’s idea of music was: “Let’s record this riff and loop it and then splice it all up, okay now we got a bottom track, and we can add all these backwards toys and things ...” I’ve played with many drummers, and he was really not a disciplined guy. When you wanted something punchy and tight, he was very prone to being sloppy. So each one of us has his limitations. I don’t write lyrics, but he had a wonderful sense for lyrics and an idea of what he wanted to produce. He just *wanted* to be a drummer, like he wanted to be a visual artist.

Tom was really trying to think about how he was going to market himself. The name Tom Wisse wasn’t working for him, and he felt he needed to sound more European, more exclusive, a little bit mystique-ful. To be just another local doesn’t really grab a lot of attention, but to be from somewhere far away, a bit cult-y, a bit reclusive, really works for getting that kind of attention. So he became Damon Edge. But I mean, there was no way to tell Damon Edge, “Come on man, we’re going to play straight up rock and roll and we need a drummer, can you come out and gig with us?” We just weren’t going to get a normal thing out of him. Ba Ka Da was very scattered and didn’t get a whole lot of recording completed. But Chrome finished this album, and he went ahead and pressed a bunch of copies, and we spray painted the album covers up at his house in Berkeley. Gary and I wrote all the tunes. Mike sang ’em and Damon and he wrote the words.

I asked Gary Spain what he remembered about his involvement and his former bandmates:

When John went up north, he contacted me and said they needed a bass player, and so I managed to get a bass for \$20 and took it up there in the spring of ’76. We were rehearsing in Mike Lowe’s backyard studio, and they had already laid down quite a few of the tracks at Mike’s house, so I added bass to most of that, maybe all of it. I think somebody else put bass on one or two songs. Damon



Damon circa 1976. Photo: Steve Pacheco





AVAILABLE AT AQUARIUS IN S.F.
AND RATHER RIPPED IN BERKELEY

⑤ THE VISITATION
ON ECLIPSE RECORDS

pressured me to get better equipment, so I hit my dad up and bought a bass system. I stayed until my mother died in late '77, and I went back up there after that and was still up in the Bay Area for several more months.

Discouraged by the lack of gigs or public response to their first album, Mike Lowe quit the band and nobody seems to have heard from him since. But before that, Damon had become friendly with the Mitchell Brothers, San Francisco's notorious porno kingpins. Gary Spain recalls:

WITHOUT YOU

FROM THE SKY AND THE
THUNDER / I WROTE A
BITTER POEM FOR YOU
IF I ~~WAS~~^{WERE} TO WAIT ~~FOR~~
WONDER / IN THE PARK
~~AT~~ THIS AFTERNOON
I'D ~~BE~~ SAY ^{TO YOU} ~~TO MYSELF~~
DON'T CRY I'LL BE THERE
OR I'D BE HAPPY WITHOUT
YOU I'D BE HAPPY YOU
WITHOUT
YOU

THE EVENING SOUNDS
COME STICKING TO ME
BUT NOT ENOUGH FOR ME
TO SAY
THEY ONLY TELL OF SOME
ILLUSION ^{DOWN THE ROAD}
THAT HAPPENED ON THE WAY
I'D SAY ^{TO YOU} ~~TO MYSELF~~ DON'T CRY
I'LL BE THERE
OR I'D BE HAPPY WITHOUT YOU

THE EVENING SOUNDS
COME STICKING TO ME
BUT NOT ENOUGH FOR ME
TO SAY
THEY ONLY TELL OF SOME
ILLUSION ^{down the road}
THAT HAPPENED ON THE WAY
I'D SAY ^{TO ME} ~~TO MYSELF~~ I WON'T CRY
I'LL BE THERE
OR I'D BE HAPPY WITHOUT YOU

Unused Damon Edge lyrics, circa 1977, courtesy of Gary Spain

What most often happened between him and me was he'd be driving over the Bay Bridge and he'd think of some lyrical idea. He'd chant it into his little tape recorder, and he'd bring it to me and say, "Hey, can we make a song out of this?" And it almost never had any real melodic quality, but it would have something about it that would suggest a rhythm or a melody to me. I can chord anything, so I would turn it into a song. He couldn't carry a tune, but I guess he had a reasonable sense of rhythm. He definitely had a sense of style.

I remember he was really impressed with some punk band, I don't remember who, but they just came on and did like thirty minutes of the hardest hitting ... just threw it right at you. And he once presented to me the idea that, if we ever did a live gig, he described what he wanted the impact to be, and he had a real sense of the style he wanted, which was a blitzkrieg concept. He didn't want a band that would just get on stage and tune and then play some songs. He wanted to make an impact.

In a 1979 interview with Ray Farrell from the fifth issue of *Another Room Magazine*, Damon described the process:

WAVES IN PARI

① I CAME FROM L.A TO SAN FRANCISCO
BUT THERE'S NOT MUCH ROCK IN COLLISPO
SO I WALK THE BRIDGE AND WATCH THE SHIPS
COME IN
AND IN A FEW DAYS THEY'LL LEAVE AGAIN
SO I COULD JUMP AND END IT ALL NOW
BUT IT WILL WORK OUT SOMEHOW
SO I'LL SELL MY CAR AND FLY TO FRANCE
LAY THE BEAT DOWN SO THE KIDS CAN DANCE
BECAUSE I COULD BE A STAR IF I WERE IN PARI,
I COULD MAKE IT BIG IF I WERE IN PARI.
I'D DRIVE THRU TOWN IN MY FERRS AND BUGATH.
YAH I COULD ~~BE~~ MAKE BIG WAVES IF I
WERE IN PARI.

② MAYBE I'M JUST A ~~FANATIC~~ ANOTHER FANATIC
GOING THRU A TRAUMATIC CHANGE THAT
FEELING THE NEW ROCK & ROLL cause ill
OUT WAISTING MY LIFE AWAY ~~WHOLE~~ ~~FOR~~ whole life as a
BUT I'VE GOT TO SAY I'M THERE
AND IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT I DON'T WANT
CAUSE I FEEL ~~THE SAME WAY~~ ~~I DON'T WANT~~ cause i'll all
AND WE COULD ~~STILL~~ ~~CAN~~ ~~STILL~~ ~~ROCK~~ ~~HAVE THAT'S~~ keep my name
~~STRAIGHT~~ ~~ROCK~~ the definition of
I COULD BE A STAR IF I WERE IN PARI,
I COULD MAKE IT BIG IF I WERE IN PARI
I'D DRIVE THRU TOWN IN MY FERRS AND BUGATH.
YAH I COULD MAKE BIG WAVES
IF I ~~WOULD~~ WERE IN PARI

When I write songs, they always come to me on the Bay Bridge. I’m just driving along and they come. I have no idea why. It always comes to me on the way back from San Francisco – underneath, which is the ugliest part of the bridge – I just get all these songs. But most of our stuff is not written before it’s recorded. There’s no set formula. No two songs were written or recorded the same way ...

On the first album we had veto-land, you know, everybody agreed on everything. That was idealistic but it didn’t work. The second album, I went “Oh fuck, this is crazy.” I got tired of making decisions that I knew were wrong, you know, just to make everybody feel at home. Not that I don’t want everybody to feel like that, but I wanted to get a little more guts and direction. It was time to take control. The first album was too wishy-washy.

A couple years later, Damon was interviewed by Australian radio DJ Tony Barrelle (who felt Chrome’s music was the closest musical approximation of the actual psychedelic experience), and he explained his inspiration for naming the band:

I was always inspired by the Surrealist movement. I was reading an article about the shah of Iran, who in 1930 commissioned a Paris deco artist to invent air conditioning for his car, and that’s how air conditioning was invented – the shah wanted air conditioning. So after that, he was so impressed he said, “Well, now build me this really far out mansion,” and so the guy built a mansion and he stuck a lot of Chrome in it. I was in the doctor’s looking at the magazine, and it seemed to give me a sense of design: Chrome, the metal itself is very high class, it’s very stated, it’s very minimal, and it has something deeper about it too, it reflects.

Produced by Damon Edge
Recorded at Almar Studios, San Francisco
Mixed at Mystic Sound Studios, Los Angeles and Super Sound, Monterey
All songs written and arranged by Lambdin-Low-Edge, '76, Chrome Music (ASCAP)
Cover design by Damon Edge
Photography by Amy James
Special thanks to: Eric Prestidge, Doug Moody, Zoey Lehr, Chuck Leary, and Lauri Meagher

MIKE LOW
lead vocals,
background vocals,
guitar, bass, synthesizer

JOHN LAMBDIN
lead guitars, synthesizer,
bass, mandolin, string ensemble,
electric violin, background vocals

GARY SPAIN
bass, keyboards, acoustic and electric violin

DAMON EDGE
drums, percussion, synthesizers, tape effects,
background vocals, lead vocal on Return to Zanzibar

I asked Gary about their musical influences, and how affected they were by punk.

Well, this is the funny thing. The first album was very heavily influenced by contemporary English rock. You can tell even in the lyrics: “at the underground” [from “Kinky Lover”] is the London word for the subway ... We were all influenced by English rock of the 1970s, Traffic, Pink Floyd, things like that. I could never relate to the punk rock scene, though personally I liked new wave pop like The Cars and whatnot ... but the new wave thing started influencing us because those were the people that related to our music. But Damon Edge had his own ideas. He was influenced by acid punk, which was current in England at the time, or so he claimed.

He was also influenced by the song “Roxanne” by The Police. When that song came out, he played it to me, really excited. “You gotta hear this, it’s the most amazing sound!” He really loved it. I guess because it had a good drum beat, y’know?

HOW MANY YEARS TOO SOON?
HOW MANY TIMES AROUND DID YOU GROW?
YOU WANT TO LEAVE ME HERE, TURN ME UPSIDE DOWN
YOU WANT TO GROW
LOVE IS REAL, FROM THE FEEL
FIND A WAY FOR TODAY
HOW MUCH OF WHAT I'VE LEARNED CAN YOU USE?
HOW MANY MEN LIKE ME HAVE YOU SCREWED?
YOU WANT TO TAKE ME DOWN, SUCK ME DRY
YOU WANT TO GROW
I ASK MY KNOWLEDGE, LEAVE ME OLD AND GREY
THEN YOU GO
HOW MANY TIMES AROUND THIS TRACK HAVE YOU BEEN?
HOW MANY SPIKE AND HEEL WOUNDS DID YOU MEND?
YOU WANT TO RUN ME FAST, SO I WON'T LAST
YOU WANT TO SPEND
YOU'LL FIND OUT, YOU'VE GOT IT INSIDE-OUT
YOU'LL END UP LIMP

CAROLINE
CAROLINE YOU ARE MY FRIEND
I LOVE TO SEE YOU NOW AND AGAIN
I KNOW WHO YOU PREFER TO BE
AND I KNOW WHAT THE OTHERS CAN'T SEE
I USE MIRRORS IN YOUR EYES
SHINING THROUGH YOUR DISGUISE
THEY'RE CANDLES IN THE RAIN
LIKE LOVE SHOOTING THROUGH MY VEINS
I ALWAYS SOMEBODY RIGHT BEHIND YOU
FLASHING PICTURES AND TRYING TO FIND YOU
GET AWAY AND LET WITH ME
TO AN ISLAND ACROSS THE SEA
SAW YOU AT THE BRAND HOTEL
WEARING THAT STARE I KNOW SO WELL
TAKING PICTURES BY THE MIRROR
OF THE PALM TREES AND THE LAGOON
EYES ARE YOU WON'T RELAX
GET ALL SET UP AND GO INTO YOUR ACT
YOU GOT THE CLOTHES AND THE LANGUAGE DOWN
THE NATIVES THINK YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN AROUND
I USE MIRRORS IN YOUR EYES
SHINING THROUGH YOUR DISGUISE
THEY'RE CANDLES IN THE RAIN
LIKE LOVE SHOOTING THROUGH MY VEINS
I ALWAYS SOMEBODY RIGHT BEHIND YOU
FLASHING PICTURES AND TRYING TO FIND YOU

KINKY LOVER
WENT DOWN TO THE PENNY ARCADE
SITTING THERE AND YOU'RE FEELING BRAVE
TOOK YOU TO THE BACK OF THE LOT
THE MOVIE'S STRANGE BUT MY PANTS ARE HOT
YOU KINKY LOVER SPIN ME AROUND
YOU KINKY LOVER AT THE UNDERGROUND
I HAVE THESE BRAND NEW FALL BACK SEATS
YOU PART YOUR LIPS AND THE SPEAKER SQUEAKS
YOU GO DOWN ON A SHADOW EFFECT
MAKE AN IMAGE AND A SOUND EFFECT
YOU KINKY LOVER SPIN ME AROUND
YOU KINKY LOVER UNDERGROUND
TAKE IT HARD 'CAUSE IT'S HARD TO TAKE
TAKE MY MORNINGS JUST TO CONVALESC
EVERY SCENE TELL A THOUSAND WORDS
YOU'RE IN THE DARK 'CAUSE YOU LOST YOUR NERVE
YOU KINKY LOVER SPIN ME AROUND
YOU KINKY LOVER UNDERGROUND

SUN CONTROL
YOU THINK OF FACES BABY WHO LIKE TO STAR
TRY TO REMEMBER YOU PUT IT BACK
COME BABY SOON, YOU SEE IT'S ALL
RAISE LIKE THE DEAD
SUN CONTROL
RAISE THE DOME
YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN
HE LOOKED YOU UP, YOU SEE LOVE NEVER CARES
YOU NEVER SEE HIM WAVE, YOU GO NOWHERE
AND ALL YOU FANT ABOUT MUELLER NEVER DO
RAISE LIKE THE DEAD
SUN CONTROL
RAISE THE DOME
YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN
YOU BLOODY WELL KNEW THE ANSWER TO MY SOUL
AND EVERY SECOND LOVE HER, YOU KNOW IT TOO
AND YOU CAN LOVE AND SING IN
AND WHO CAN LOVE YOU TOO, YOU ARE TO
RAISE THE DOME
SUN CONTROL
RAISE THE DOME
YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN

RAIDER
FAR AWAY FROM ANY ATMOSPHERE
ON THIS SHIP MY FAMILY IS MY CREW
I'VE GOT MY JOB TO DO
PORTSIDE GUN
BLEW AWAY FROM OUR PLANET HOME
FAR AWAY FROM ANY CROOKED CONTROL
THROUGH IT'S FREE, WE'RE ALWAYS IN A RACE
TO GET SPEED TO END SPACE
COMPUTERS CALCULATE
REPORT BOGE ON THE SCREEN
TRACKER MANNED, COMPLEX GEOMETRY
FIRE CONTROL, SQUAWK, BOX SOUNDS ALERT
BUT BORDO LIGHTS SHOW ALL CLEAR
WATCH AND WATCH BEHOLD
RAIDER HAS A PARALYZER RAY
BUT MY SHOT COULD BE ON IT'S WAY
I CAN SEE MY BEAM HAS MADE A SCORE
THE RUINS OF THEIR SHIP, PASSING BY IN BITS
GET AWAY

RETURN TO ZANZIBAR
LOST MY HEAD IN THE RAIN
CAME TO A PLACE WITHOUT YOUR NAME
BROKEN STREETS AND TWISTED GLASS
CAN'T SEE THE COLORS ANY MORE
SO FAR BELOW THE SEA
MAYBE YOU COULD RETURN TO ME
SECRET EYES SEND ME A WISH
BY A STAR FROM ZANZIBAR
LEFT YOU IN THE DARK LAST NIGHT
THOUGHT YOU'D HAD YOUR FILL
DON'T THINK I HAVE A CHOICE
KEEP HEARING YOUR VOICE EVERYWHERE
THROUGH THE SAND AND THE WIND
I'M IN THIS PLACE AGAIN
SECRET EYES WAITING THERE
SOLARIZED WITH BROWN HAIR
SECRET EYES SEND ME A WISH
BY A STAR FROM ZANZIBAR
FEEL LIKE I WON'T ALWAYS
HAD TO LISTEN TO YOUR VIBE
I'M AN IN YOUR TOWN A FRIEND GIRL
SHE TOOK ME ALL AROUND THE WORLD
THOUGHT I'D NEVER LEFT AGAIN
GOT RIPPED OFF BY A FRIEND
STARTED FEELING LIKE A GHOST
LIVING OFF YOUR FISH AND TOAST
SECRET EYES SEND ME A WISH
BY A STAR FROM ZANZIBAR
SECRET EYES SEND ME A WISH
BY A STAR FROM ZANZIBAR
MAYBE WE COULD GET DOWN
I'M AN IN YOUR TOWN
GET ON YOUR BOOTS, I LIKE THAT
YOUR UNUSUAL LOOKS REAL GOOD
DO WHAT YOU WOULD, IT'S TIME TO RELAX
GET MY BACK ALRIGHT
BABY CRY

RIDING YOU
WAITING BY THE SEA
YOU CAME UP TO ME
AND STAYED TILL NIGHT WAS GONE
I HOPE YOU'LL CARRY ON
MYLAR SUIT WITH A RADAR BEAM
MEANEST THING I'VE EVER SEEN
RIDING YOU WITH MY LOVE
YOUR LEGS FIT LIKE A GLOVE
YOU COULD RUN THIS TOWN
WHEN THE LEGS COME 'ROUND
AND THEY TALK OF STAYING
YOU FIND IT SO AMAZING
MYLAR SUIT WITH A RADAR BEAM
MEANEST THING I'VE EVER SEEN
RIDING YOU WITH MY LOVE
YOUR LEGS FIT LIKE A GLOVE
I COULD HAVE BEEN YOUR SLAVE
YOU THREW IT ALL AWAY
HANGS WAITING IN THE SKY
MYLAR SUIT WITH A RADAR BEAM
SWEETEST THING I'VE EVER SEEN
RIDING YOU WITH MY LOVE
YOUR LEGS FIT LIKE A GLOVE

MY TIME TO LIVE
I CAN SEE THE CREATURES AROUND YOU
IN THE CENTER OF THE LION AGE
MAYBE SOME WILL HYPNOTIZE YOU
AND SOME DEMONOLIZE YOU
MAKE LOVE, MAKE THE COFFEE
IT'S SO GOOD LIVING HERE WITH YOU
ON WHITE SHEETS IN THE EVENING
DON'T YOU KNOW MY HEART IS BEATING
IT'S MY TIME TO LIVE
IT'S A WORLD WRAPPED IN A BALL
WHY DON'T YOU COME AND TAKE IT WITH YOU
WE COULD MUTATE OURSELVES TOGETHER
AND EXPLORE IN THIRTY SECONDS
TAKE TIME, TAKE IT EASY
I CAN SEE YOUR FACE BELOW
YOU'RE ALWAYS LIVING HERE WITH YOU
DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT I'M FEELING
IT'S MY TIME TO LIVE
THE DOOR OPENED AND NOTHING WAS THERE
EXCEPT YOUR FRIEND WITH THE GOLDEN HAIR
I CAN FEEL THE CONFUSION AROUND YOU
AND THE PROGRAM START TO HOUND YOU
MAKE LOVE, MAKE THE COFFEE
I CAN SEE LIVING HERE WITH YOU
YOU'RE ALWAYS DAY DREAMING
DON'T YOU KNOW THAT I'M CREAMING
IT'S MY TIME TO LIVE

ALIEN SOUNDTRACKS

*“Three moons out tonight, everything so clean and white,
sure feels good from a different point of view”*

Chrome’s next recording project originated when Damon (still playing with John Lambdin and Gary Spain) got to know the Mitchell Brothers, who hired them to make some music as the soundtrack to be played in the new “Ultra Room” at the Mitchell Brothers’ O’Farrell Theater strip-club – the first live sex show with private booths in America. It was during this time that Damon started obsessively fiddling around with the tape machines after recording sessions, getting more enmeshed in the recording process and taking their music into provocative, even transgressive areas. Much of the experimental material ended up on their second LP *Alien Soundtracks*, but before that project was completed (according to Gary Spain)...

John went off the deep end on speed, and went into his paranoid phase, and wasn’t really quite all there. John’s one of the greatest guys in the world, but in that state of mind ... He left town to get his head together, so we needed a replacement.

When I first went up to San Francisco, there was a bar in North Beach called Gulliver’s where we could play and pass the hat at night. Helios Creed was one of the musicians I came across there, and we started playing together. He was playing acoustic steel string and I was playing fiddle, and I liked some of the stuff he did. Rock with a kind of folky edge. He and I were both heavily



influenced by Jethro Tull. He still is, and I still am. They’re the only band I ever saw twice! So it was kind of in that vein. We played quite a bit at Gulliver’s, and just because I rather liked Helios, I introduced him to Tom and they hit it off. They’re both Scorpios, and I had the sense not too long after that of ... “What have I created?” Two Scorpios together who became this machine, and so that was the end of any possibility of John being part of it. At one point he was pretty pissed off that he was sidelined.

According to John Lambdin:

Once Tom had planted his recording studio up at his house in Berkeley, he was successfully barricaded, and Chrome became a Damon Edge project. And the project was really getting darker, which Mike wasn’t into. Since Damon was running the show, it kinda went wherever he wanted it to go, and it really did seem to be getting more paranoid, more narcissistic in a lot of ways. And I was good with that, because I was hanging around with witches and stuff. So I was bringing in more paranoia than anybody, but I really finally lost the ball. I left Chrome before *Alien Soundtracks* had been completed. I was playing with a couple bands, and Gary was playing with a few folky people, and the one that actually looked like he had the stuff to take my place was Helios Creed. He had a loud voice, looked good, could play a few chords, it really worked.

By the time *Alien Soundtracks* was close to complete, I basically needed to evaporate. I came back to LA and went into an institution for six months. It’s formally called amphetamine psychosis, and it turns you into a ghostbuster.

THE
SCORPIOS
DAMON
EDGE
NORMAL

CHROME NEWSLETTER
EDITION #5
BY STEVE KOP

CHROME = A SOCIALLY FRUSTRATED BAND OF OUTCASTS, A HARD TO WRAP PACKAGE, A WHOLE MILITARY CONCEPT - BUT NOT FROM HERE. A PROTO TYPE VACUUM CLEANER THAT SUCKS UP PYMIES AND BULLY BARTY LOOK A LKES, AN UNACCEPTABLE TOLERANCE LEVEL, A SHERMAN TANK WITHOUT HUMANOID FACTORS, PAIRS OF BLACK BOOTS THAT ATE YOUR BLOCK, NOTHING ELSE TO DO, A SKILLFUL NO TALENT GARAGE STATE (WHERE INTELLECTUALS ARE PRESSED AND LABELED) REAL BAD RECEPTION ON LABEL VISION, WHEN HILIDS CREED WADS UP NEWSPAPER AND IT'S AMPLIFIED THRU RADIO SHACK SHIT INTO A 3 INCH SPEAKER THAT'S CRACKED AND MIKED AND PUT THROUGH NO EQUALIZATION ON PURPOSE, BUT AMPLIFIED AGAIN - AND FINALLY VIA HEADPHONES YOU GET THE MESSAGE - AT FULL TWISTED AND BROKEN MESSAGE - WHEN THE WAR MOVIE COMES ON AND VOLUME - WHEN THE WAR MOVIE COMES ON AND CHROME STEPS INTO YOUR LIVING ROOM OUT OF A GREY MERCEDES WITH A BROKEN WINDSHIELD, AND YOUR STRAPPED DOWN AND GIVEN AN E.K.G. AND YOUR MUMMY WATCHES AND FEEDS YOU WHILE YOUR MUMMY WATCHES AND FEEDS YOU INTERVINGLY AND YOU START TO GET DIZZY, THE CEILING FALLS HALF WAY AND CHROMES 2ND ALBUM COMES OVER THE HEADPHONES AND TWISTS YOUR EARS 45 % TO THE RIGHT OR LEFT DEPENDING IF YOU LISTEN IN AN EDUCATED WAY OR NOT, AND YOU'RE REAL GLAD YOU GOT THE GOOGLES ON THAT FEEL KIND OF SCRATCHY, WHEN ~~THE~~ GARY SPAIN, WHO'S STANDING ON A GREEN MAN WITH A CHEAP SMALL RIPS SOMETHING OFF HIS FACE AND PUTS IT ON YOUR LIPS UNTIL MORNING WHEN YOU SAY "YES I LIKED THAT" AND CONTINUE EATING YOUR BREAKFAST AT THE FAIRMONT MINUS THE TOAST.

Fortunately for me, I’ve been able to bounce a few times.

In any case, the combination of Damon and Helios was a match made in heaven. They seemed to have the same agenda. And I was gone, so whatever they had of my recording, they could totally have. I mean, there was nothing I could do about it.

Barry Johnston (aka Helios Creed) was born into a Navy family, raised between Long Beach and San Diego, but spent his teenage years on various Hawaiian islands. In 1972, he moved to San Francisco in hopes of starting a band.

Everybody told me, “No, you can’t make a band in SF. Everybody’s making bands in LA, you have to got to LA!” But I just hated LA, so I went to SF, but SF was dead. As far as music at the time, it was the hippie thing that was just narrowing down to blues and jazz. There wasn’t much going on until punk, until around the time I met Damon. Gary kept mentioning that he was in a band, and I asked who was in the band, and he goes “John and a guy named Damon.” I kept asking him questions: “What do you guys sound like?” And he goes, “We’re making a record.” And I go, “You’re making a record? How are you making a record?” I just kept asking him questions, because I always wanted to make a record. So, one day he brought this record *The Visitation* to me, and I listened to it, and I told Gary, “This is good, but you know what you guys need? You guys need me!” So I met John, and then finally I met Damon. The singer Mike split because nobody liked the record, and I auditioned as the new singer/guitar player.



After I joined, it was just me and Damon and Gary. At that point, we were gonna be like a trio punk band, that was the idea. But then Damon played me all these weird tapes, stuff he was messing around with after the recording sessions, and I go “God, that’s great!” He wasn’t even gonna use it! I said, “You’re more psychedelic than punk.” Just totally bizarre, back-wards, weird songs. He and John and Gary made a lot of the stuff that was used on *Alien Soundtracks* before I joined. I went, “That stuff is great, man. We oughta be a psychedelic punk band. That is better than our set.” So we decided that’s what we wanted to be. We started developing that at an early stage. We did some stuff all together, and then Damon and I worked on a lot of *Alien Soundtracks* by ourselves. John was too drugged out and had split, and when Gary moved back to LA it was just me and Damon.

I asked Helios what he remembered about his bandmate, whom he has described as a “brother.”

Damon was great, and we were buddies for a long time. He came from a wealthy family, so we were all jealous of that, ’cause half the time we were living on the street. Why’s this guy living in this house up in the hills? He was a weird guy. He talked slow, was always conscious of being overweight, always trying to lose weight. After he broke up with his girlfriend Amy, he was freaking out, and he’d eat like a coupla spoons of food a day. Once he got over her, he’d lost all this weight and had all these new girls. Damon was always afraid to have me over to meet his new girlfriend, or anybody! And I remember he used to get annoyed when I’d bring beer to the rehearsal and get drunk. He didn’t drink, didn’t smoke hardly any pot, didn’t do any drugs, he was pretty together back then.

According to Damon (again, from Ray Farrell’s interview in *Another Room*):

Some of my personally best inspirations are audial hallucinations. When I was in Morocco, I scored some really good keef. I got a lot of audial hallucinations on that drug, the way it was there. It’s different stuff they bring over here. But it’s unbelievable. It’s like the most audial hallucinatory drug I’ve ever had. I’d just sit in my hotel room and space out, floating in the universe, listening to my friends talking outside the room and listening to new Rolling Stones songs that they’ve never recorded. Like a whole radio show of gone stuff.

All we do is based on our drug experiences. Most of us have been stoned for years. I mean really ripped. Everybody in the band took a few years out to leave reality. But now when we’re doing something, we just want to utilize all those things into what we’re doing. But I like to listen when I’m stoned. We don’t play ripped often. One or two tracks we recorded when we were pretty fucked up. Yeah, it helps for certain moods.

During this period, Ray Farrell managed Rather Ripped Records in Berkeley, a store that championed lesser known artists and records one wouldn’t find at any other store. When I recently spoke to Ray, he recalled Damon fondly:

Early on, Damon brought in copies of *The Visitation*, but emphasized that the next record was going to be the important one. So when *Alien Soundtracks* came out, we did a window display for it, which I don’t think any other stores did. Rather Ripped was well known for its creative displays. Infamously, we celebrated The Residents’ *Third Reich ’N Roll* LP with a window display. Within hours a rock was thrown in the window, shattering the glass.

Damon was very enthusiastic and engaging, and quite a bit older than me, so I think he responded to my own enthusiasm for the records. As far as influences, I don’t recall him discussing anything specific, and my impression was he would be secretive about that kind of thing. We discussed science fiction and contemporary authors. Some people in the local punk scene were writing about J. G. Ballard, Philip K. Dick, the Burroughs/Gysin cut-ups, and he knew about them. The music was original enough that I didn’t think of it as belonging to an existing continuum.



CHROME
ALIEN SOUNDTRACKS

JOHN LAMB DIN-ELECTRIC & ACOUSTIC GUITARS, ELECTRIC VIOLIN & BASS-GARY SPAIN-BASS, ELECTRIC VIOLIN, GLASS, & ELECTRIC GUITAR, MOOG & LEAD VOCAL ON ST-37-HILIOS CREED-ELECTRIC GUITARS, LEAD VOCALS, BASS & TV-DAMON EDEE-DRUMS, MOOGS, ELECTRIC WATERPHONE, TAPE EFFECTS, LEAD VOCAL ON ANDROID & PHAROAH CHROMIUM + GUITAR ON PYGMIES

PRODUCED & ENGINEERED BY DAMON EDGE FOR SIREN RECORDS, RECORDED AT ALAMAR STUDIOS, SAN FRANCISCO, MASTERED BY MICHAEL GORE AT CBS STUDIOS, SAN FRANCISCO, CHROME PHOTOGRAPHED BY AMY JAMES, COVER & OTHER GRAPHICS BY DAMON EDGE, STAR CHART DATA SUPPLIED BY DOCTOR JERRY NELSON, LAWRENCE BERKELEY LABORATORIES, ALL SONGS CHROME MUSIC (ASCAP)

SPECIAL THANKS TO MIMI TIERNEY, RICHARD HARRISON, ZOEY LEHR, THE MITCHELL BROS., KEN ARMSTRONG, GEORGE HORN, VICKI NELSON, STEVE PACHECO, AMY JAMES FOR FLUTE ON MAGNETIC DWARF REPTILE AND TO MICHAEL LOWE FOR BACKING GUITAR ON PHAROAH CHROMIUM

SIREN RECORDS 433 HYDE STREET SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94109

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SIREN RECORDS
©1977

BARADAS NICTO



CHROMOSOME DAMAGE- YOU'RE FIGHTING ON THE STREETS, PUT YOU WITH ALL THE THIEVES & CHEATS, GOING OFF TO FIGHT IN THE WAR, I DON'T KNOW WHY BUT I DO KNOW MORE (CHEATING IN THE STREETS & FIGHTING ON THE LINES, I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU SHOULD TAKE MY ADVISE, GOT MY BABY & I WANT TO GO THERE, YOU KNOW THEY SAY THE STREETS ARE NOWHERE, WELL I WANT TO FLY, I WANT TO FLY AWAY, YOU KNOW THE WAY THINGS FADE, I CAN STAND

ALL DATA LOST- HERE COMES THE DAY, AND OF THE NIGHT, DO YOU SEE CLOUDS PULL OUT OF SIGHT, YOU WERE THE DREAM, YOU WANT TO MAKE, FOR THE LIGHT FIELD, SHOULD BE NO MISTAKES

PYGMIES IN ZEE PARK- WAITING FOR YOU IN THE PARK BY THE ZOO- WAITING FOR YOU IN THE PARK BY THE ZOO, SITTING IN THE PARK, PYGMIES IN ZEE PARK

END OF THE RACE FOR MAN, SHOULD GET ONE LAST SPECIMEN, JUST AFTER THIS NEXT SEA I'M SURE THERE WILL BE, SITTING IN THE PARK, PYGMIES IN ZEE PARK

SLIP IT TO THE ANDROID- THEN IT SUDDENLY OCCURS TO, SLIP IT TO THE ANDROID, YOU DON'T LIKE THE DISGUISE BUT SO WHAT, SLIP IT TO THE ANDROID, YOU HAD NOTHING BETTER TO DO GOING OVER CRATOR 452, SLIP IT TO THE ANDROID, LIFT UP THE MECHANICAL ROBE, SLIP IT TO THE ANDROID, 3 MOONS OUT TONIGHT

EVERYTHING'S SO CLEAN & WHITE, SURE FEELS GOOD FROM A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

PHAROAH CHROMIUM- MIDNIGHT IS LIKE AFTERNOON, DON'T GET OUT MUCH 'CEPT IN '72, ASKED ME HERE LOCKED IN THIS ROOM WITH MY SNAKES & MY COLORED TATTOO, BUT I FIGURE I COULD GIVE YOU THE SKY, IF YOU JUST DO WHAT I SAY, I HEARD THE PRINCES WAS IN TOWN, YOU MAKE SURE SHE COMES AROUND, DON'T GIVE ME NO LINE AS WE STAND HERE IN TIME, I CAN SEE YOU DANCING CLOSE TO HIM, TALKING 'BOUT PHAROAH CHROMIUM

ST 37- SEXUAL CHAKRA, SAME OLD SOAP OPERA, ENVIRONMENT SURROUNDED BY CEMENT, LATEST SCOOP ON DABAS, PAINTING OF LAS VEGAS, CAPSULIZED RESORT ON POLICE REPORT ST 37 ST 37 ST 37 TAKE YOU UP TO HEAVEN, GET IN THE WINNEBAGO, GO DOWN TO SAN DIEGO, GOING TO HAVE TO TANGO AT THE NEXT FANDANGO, WHERE YOU GOING TO GO, WHAT YOU GOING TO DO, WHEN YOUR DESTINY COMES AFTER YOU ST 37 ST 37 ST 37 TAKE YOU UP TO HEAVEN

When he brought Helios to the store, I noticed that together they had a slightly more menacing vibe than Damon did by himself. Friendly nonetheless. On meeting Helios, I sensed that the duo knew what they wanted Chrome to be. They were both tall and, you know, big guys, and seemed like a good team. They knew how to cultivate a sense of mystery around their music, and didn't seem to make any effort to fit into a particular scene; as I recall, they both had sort of shag haircuts. Helios seemed more like the mad scientist of the two, and was pretty quiet, while Damon was the pitch man.

Damon spoke about his bandmate (again, on the Australian radio show):

Helios and I were both heavily influenced by the psychedelic movement, though we liked a lot of the ideas more than most of the realities. But the ideas of exploration and tonal difference and, more than just writing a song but getting an aura about your music, creating a real three-dimensional space with the music. And to do that in terms of song and rock n' roll seemed to have a really appealing power, physically as well as mentally, psychically. And that's what we're doing. I don't say trying, because we're doing it.

Helios and I have been the nucleus ever since the real beginning. Not on the first record, but as soon as that was over, Helios and I met and getting in contact with all other people around us seemed meaningless, y'know? As soon as we started working together on *Alien Soundtracks*, the results were so obvious and things started going on for us immediately. We were together six months and stuff started flying. Both of us had been playing in bands and different situations, and we were looking for something that was really real, where you didn't have to force it or make some relationship or tell someone to do this. We just had this feeling about the whole thing. We both liked the rhythm and the electronic aspect, and it was just perfect. Helios is really incredible.

In the early days, every song was a new concept on how to write a song. You take an album like *Alien Soundtracks* and you say, "How'd you write the first one?" We'd say, "Well, we did the guitar and drums then added bass and keyboard, then the vocals." You go, "How'd you do the second one?" "We did the bass and drums then added the guitar, and then added the vocals, and cut it up, added some TV, then re-recorded this next part and spliced this on. And to do the third song, we did a drone and added the bass..." We just did so many things, and had to approach things so differently in terms of what instrument was even going down first, and we found it broadened our perspective of music, the actual feelings we could get from different approaches. And after finding all those feelings available – not to say that we found every feeling – but we're much more aware of where we can go now.

After those first few albums, we started listing other weird names on the albums to give the impression we were a real band because we thought people would think that was more hip. Since nobody knew who we were anyway, it didn't seem to matter, and we just listed ourselves first. But nobody else existed. John L. Cyborg doesn't exist.

Close to a decade ago, a 1/4-inch reel-to-reel tape surfaced on the internet labeled *Ultra Soundtrack*, featuring early versions of some of the songs on *Alien Soundtracks*:

a longer, instrumental version of "Slip It To The Android," "Nova Feedback" without the short intro, and a much longer version of "Magnetic Dwarf Reptile"; all presumably handed over to the Mitchells for their consideration. The first two of these tracks, along with "Pharaoh Chromium" (sung by Damon, with backing guitars by Mike Lowe) were completed before Helios joined the band, while "ST37" (sung by Gary) and the final version of "Magnetic Dwarf Reptile" feature all four members. It's possible that all of these were presented for use in the Ultra Room (as might have been the remaining five songs on *Alien Soundtracks*, credited to Creed/Edge). Whatever the case, according to Helios, the material they recorded was rejected outright by the Mitchells as "too weird," although by Gary Spain's account, the project was shelved due to legal trouble acquiring a city permit for the radical new wank space. In the interview from *Another Room*, Damon described the scene vividly:

The Mitchell Brothers said, "We need some music in three days." I'd worked on sets with them. I helped to make the *Sodom and Gomorrah* set. That was bizarre. We ran around with acoustic instruments while chicks were giving guys blow jobs and getting fucked. We made it and I don't know if they ever played it past the first night. All these straight business guys were there and it was too gone. And so they started putting on heavy breathing with a little background disco. It was pretty surreal. These chicks would come up and spread their cheeks in front of you, all sorts of things ...

The music may not have worked out for its intended environment, but anyone shopping for unusual records in 1978 would likely have taken notice of the album that eventually resulted. Although the homemade collage, sloppy scrawl, and general "fuck you" look of punk were not unfamiliar by then, the purple monochromatic cover of *Alien Soundtracks* was at once absurd, dadaistic and distinctly science-fictional, a combination you didn't see much in punk or psychedelic records at the time. Someone (read: Damon) had gone wild with an exacto blade and détourned a photo of a suburban housewife lounging in a carpeted den (no doubt lifted from a mid-'60s magazine or interior design catalog), gluing two giant eyes in the windows and a mouth over the patterned rug, to form a ghostly face looking out at you. While contemporary bands like Tubeway Army, Ultravox! and even Blondie all flirted with science fiction themes in their music, few wore the influence as prominently as Chrome. Most who glanced at their second record, let alone bought it and listened to it, probably didn't know what to make of it, as it had virtually no precedent. Truly, is there anything else in the world that sounds quite like "Slip It To The Android"? According to Helios:

A lot of people hated the record, but we had fun making it. I would often sing spontaneous lyrics, and sometimes we'd jot it down, like on "The Monitors," and Damon would add these messed up voices to it later. I sang lead on the songs "Chromosome Damage," "Pygmies In Zee Park" and "All Data Lost."



A lot of those songs, he recorded the drums, then I laid down the bass, guitar and vocals, we were just putting it together ourselves. He sang “SS Cygni” – all that “dancing in the shadows” stuff. I added a bunch of guitar to “Magnetic Dwarf Reptile” and the voice saying, “Don’t do that!” That was a total ... We just turned the TV on and that came on perfectly. “Pat Stevens” was from a commercial. We’d just turn on the TV to soap operas.

Actually, it was when Damon played me “Nova Feedback” that he totally blew my mind. I said, “You gotta put this on the record. It’s better than the Sex Pistols.” That was done before I got involved. Gary played a sped-up bass solo that sounds like a guitar, and a flanged hi-hat. Yeah, when they played me that I thought Damon was a great producer.

“Slip It To The Android” knocked me out. I added the backwards voice. It’s a weird drum beat; all of a sudden the downbeat would be the upbeat. Damon’s drumming was incredible. John was doing what Damon called his “whiny guitar sound”. Gary on violin.

Gary credits John with much of the violin playing, which he deems “Stravinsky-esque musings of the first order.” I asked Helios how they got Gary to sing like that on “ST37.”

We put some gravel in his mouth. (Laughter.) That’s just the way Gary sang. That was a song we all made together and Gary sang. Damon and I made the tape loop at the beginning: “Oh-h-h web.” There’s a band in Texas called ST37 that I played with. The song was named after a mouthwash.

According to Gary: “To me it was the name of a gargle, but to Tom it was the name of a star.”

HALF MACHINE LIP MOVES

“I can feel the void of a world surreal”

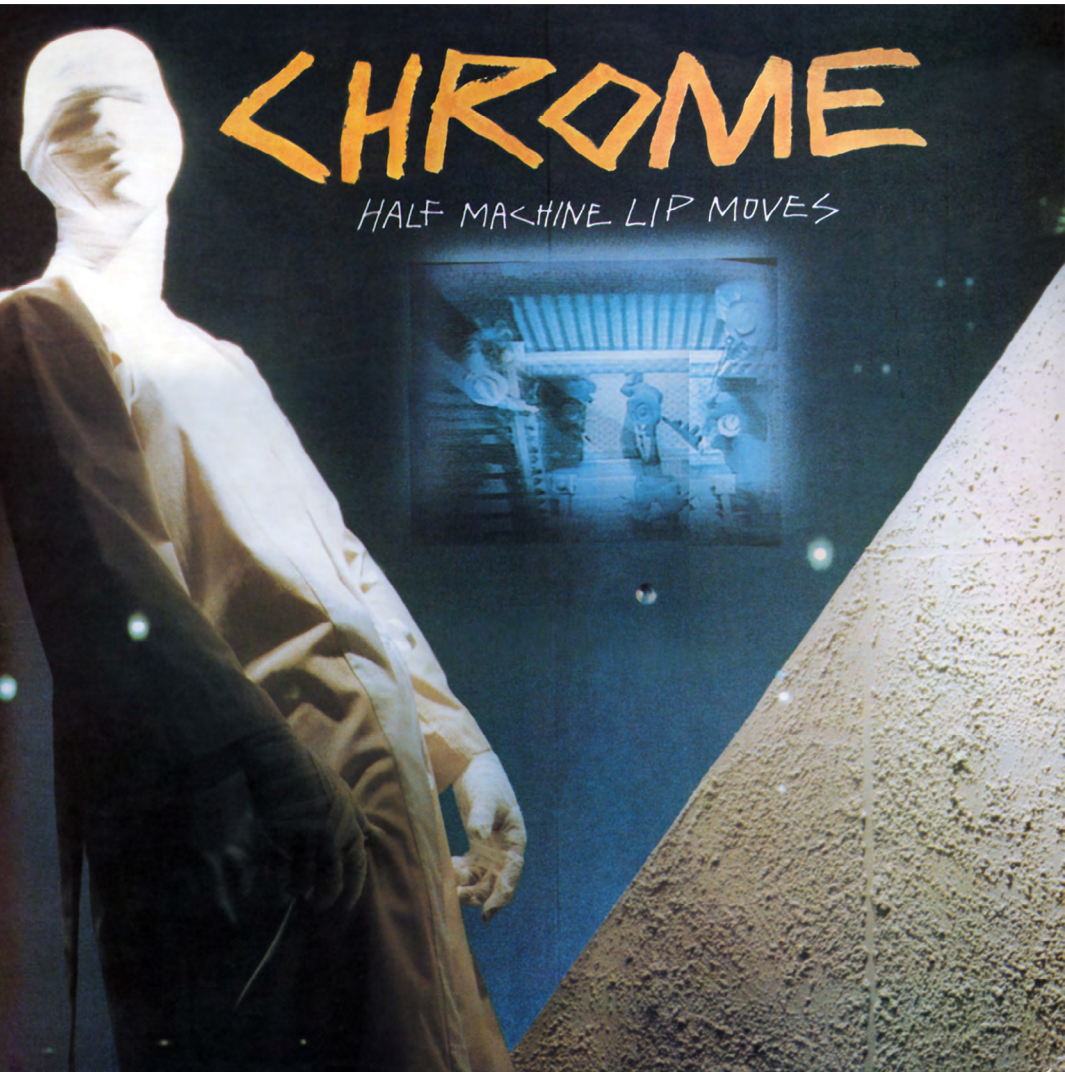
Gary Spain stuck it out in SF for a little while, but went back to LA when he could no longer support himself, and the pair of Scorpios with colorful sobriquets continued to play music together, effectively becoming a two-man recording project. Gary was credited on Chrome’s next LP *Half Machine Lip Moves* for material he’d recorded earlier, while John Lambdin was relegated to “data memory” as (the first) John L. Cyborg, a pseudo-entity that would continually crop up on liner credits. A couple years later, Gary and John formed a band called The Bent (another story for another time). According to Gary:

After we left Chrome, John and I never gave it a second thought. We lost touch, then two decades or so later, we found out it had gone on to produce a legacy, and that there were actually people around who had heard of it, and we were flabbergasted! Honestly, we never expected it would go anywhere. We had noticed at the time that two Scorpios were a powerful mix into which little else could intrude.

While the playful, spaced-out vibe of *The Visitation* still lingers in a few songs on *Alien Soundtracks*, *Half Machine Lip Moves* finds Chrome in full possession of the over-the-top style for which they would become widely known and respected in the world of underground, experimental rock. The combined, isolated energy of Helios and Damon resulted in what many consider their best work, and certainly their most cohesive album to that point – if such a word can describe the complete musical pandemonium therein: Helios’ ragged and piercingly beautiful guitars, Damon’s rude synth bursts and thunderous 4/4 beats with the crazy tom-tom fills, both raving and crooning in heavily distorted voices about zombies, pygmies, aliens, androids, and mad bombers. Although they would go on to many different styles and permutations, these early albums, mostly recorded on a Revox 4-track reel-to-reel machine, are often cited as a huge influence by innumerable musicians and bands, and even as precursors to the cyberpunk genre of science fiction literature.

At the time, the idea of playing live shows was something Damon considered “obsolete, man.” Preferring to take their time in the studio, he and Helios honed their sound into something unique and increasingly disturbing. Although, like *Alien Soundtracks*, much of *Half Machine Lip Moves* was cobbled together from recordings of live jam sessions, spliced, tweaked, and twisted into often unrecognizable forms, in actuality Chrome records from this period feature plenty of straight-ahead rock songs – but few last more than a couple bars before splintering off into backwards TV voices and other seemingly haphazard sonic manglings – a crazy-quilt mixing technique developed by Edge, incorporating what he referred to as “the random element” – all calculated to transport the listener into a brutal yet richly detailed delirium.

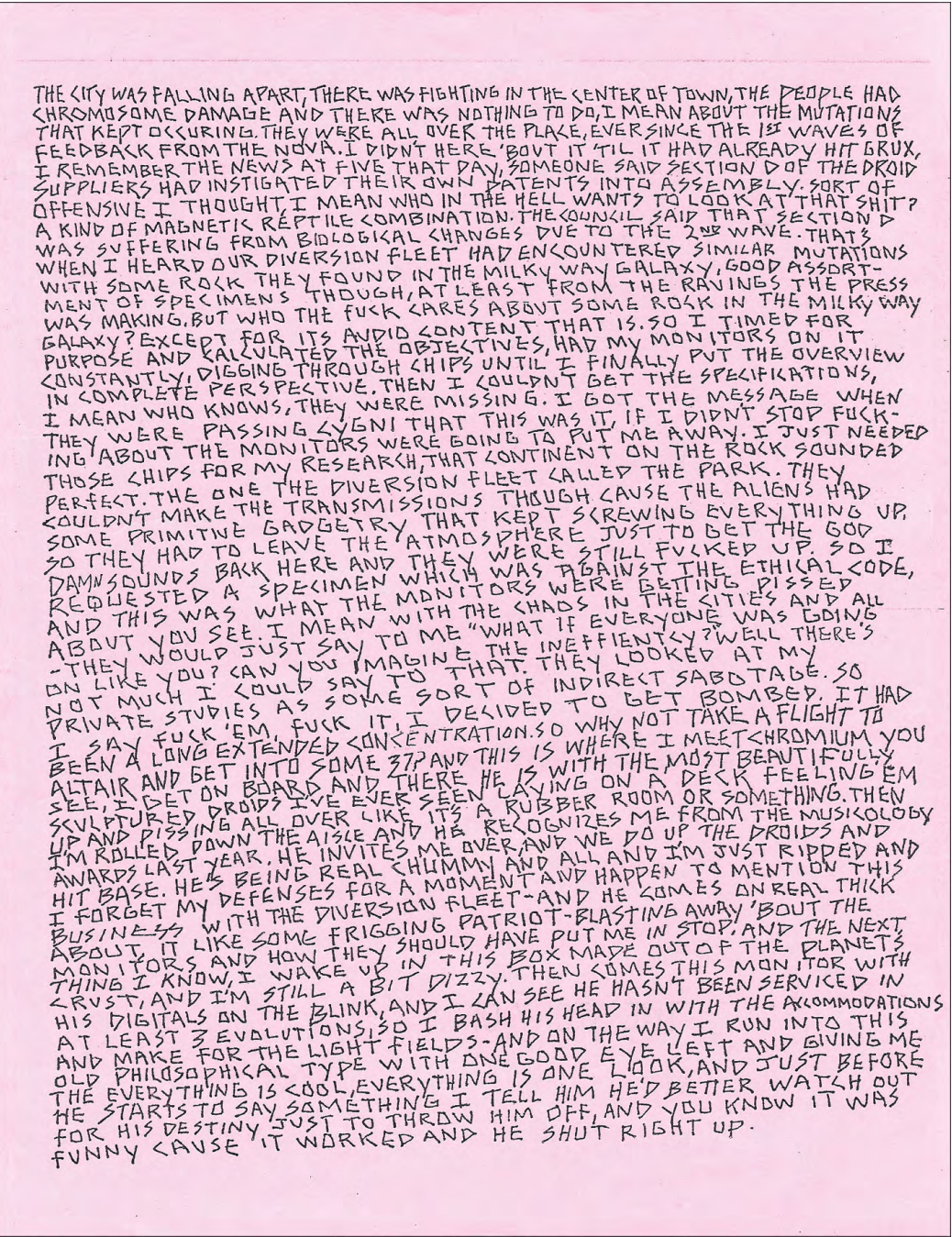
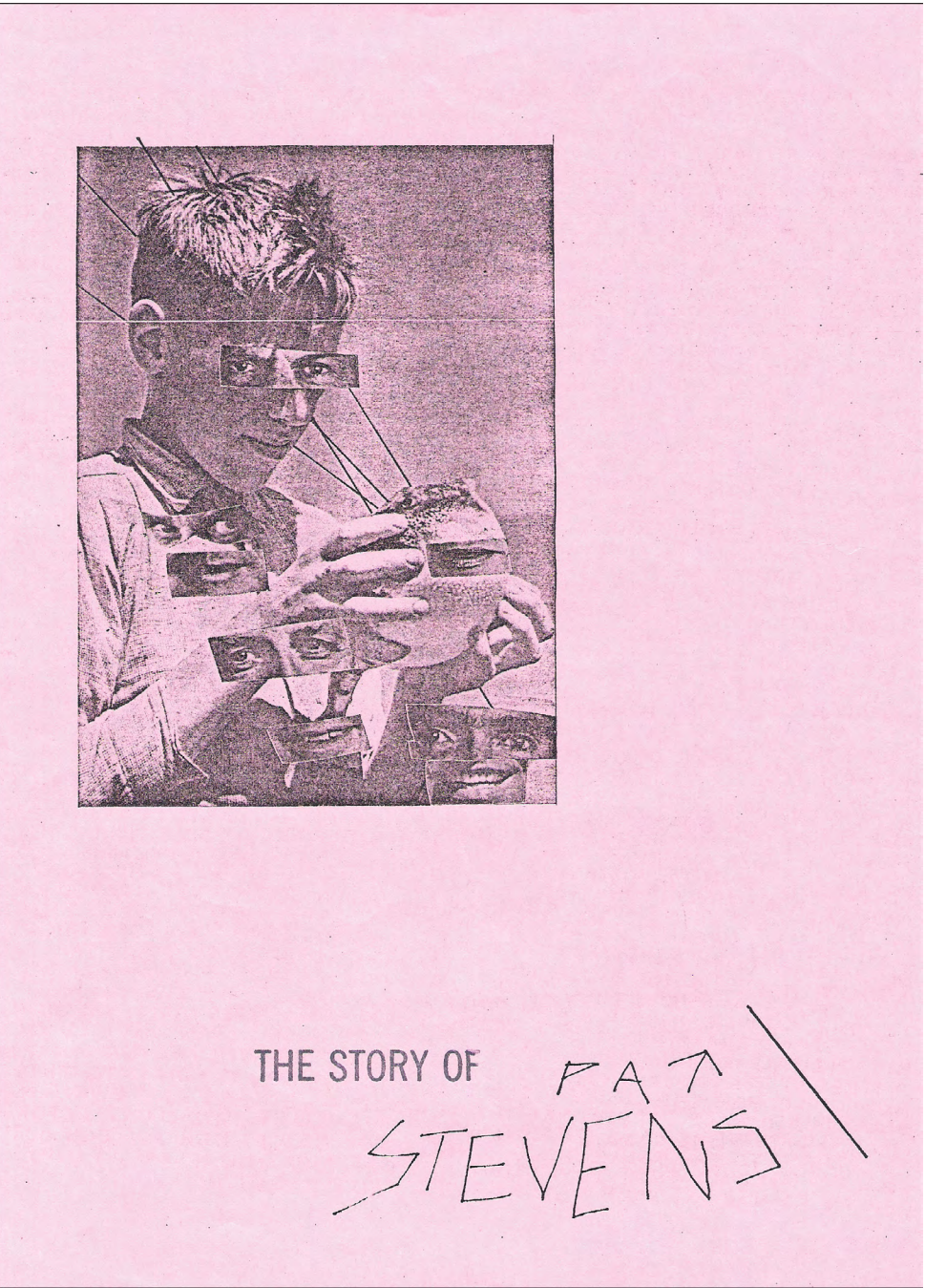
Overall the beats on this album are heavier, the guitars harsher, and the instrumentation increasingly diverse; in addition to drums and Moogs, Damon is now credited with playing “machine guitars, organ, Buchla synths, barbecue and industrial percussion electrified, tape effects.” Vocals are more heavily distorted than ever, often punctuated by creepy laughter and bestial grunts, all conveying a sense of queasy, otherworldly hilarity. On “Zombie Warfare” Damon growls, “I feel it like a scientist ... I can’t let you down” through a feedbacking megaphone, while “March of The



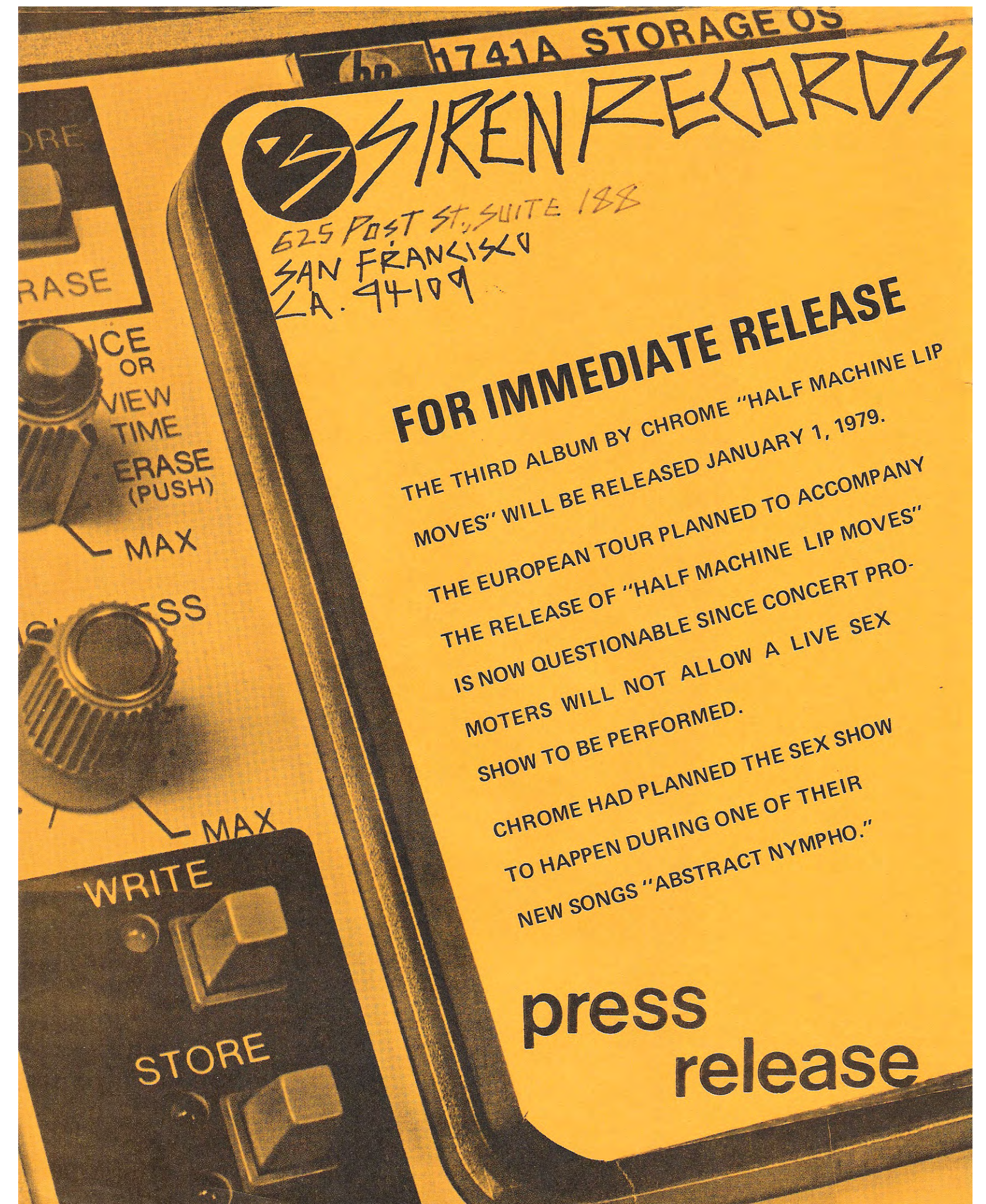
Chrome Police,” finds Helios directing a ridiculous tirade at Russia, snarling “A cold clammy bombing will ruin your town.” According to Helios:

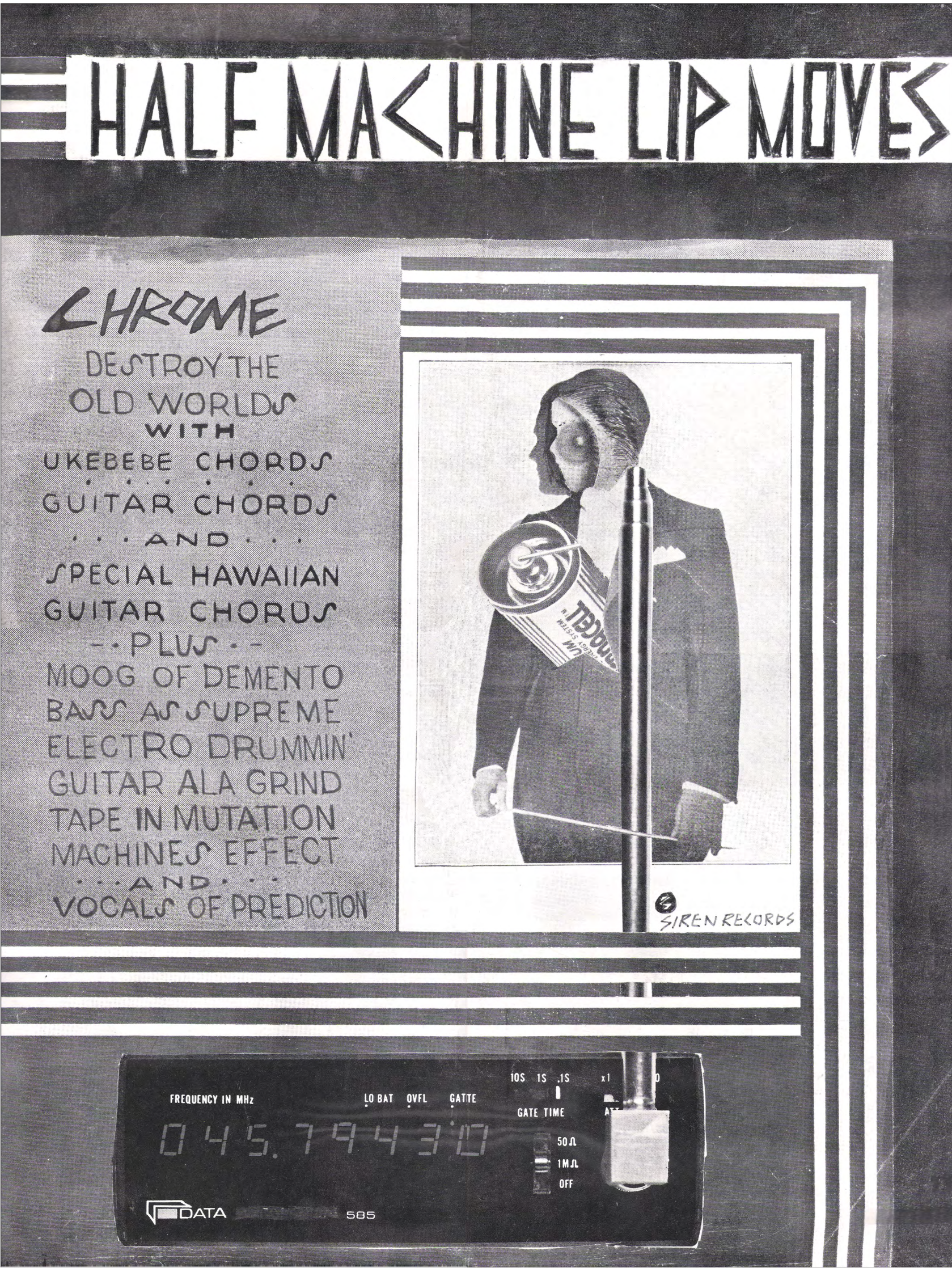
Damon described that song to me, wrote down the lyrics, told me how he wanted it to be, and I actually put it together. He laid down the drums, and explained how he wanted the guitar to be, so I came up with the guitar and the straight ahead bass riff. We wrote it together, but it originally came out of his head. All the grunting and laughter on that song was Damon. He was influenced by Pere Ubu. And he sang the second half too. [“Fundamental! Monumental!”]

Similarly, with “Abstract Nympho,” Damon came up with the line, “I want you to be my dog” as a response to the Stooges’ song, “I Wanna Be Your Dog.” Helios added the verses and sang the lead, with Damon bellowing in response, “Ya gotta be my dog” over and over. While it’s usually easy to distinguish Damon’s more guttural voice from Helios’ nasal crooning, they often sang together, at times seeming to mimic one another, blending in a miasma of distortion and reverb. On “Creature Eternal,” Damon sputters incoherently about “living with the zombies ... grown like vegetables on the shock table” until Helios begins warbling about “the light of dawn” and “the night’s cold air.” In a similar vein, on the album’s title track Helios bellows into a toilet paper tube, sounding like a cross between Bing Crosby and Boris Karl-off: “They’re moving on to passion times, but does the world for your love resemble mine?” until Damon bursts in with his diabolical thug routine: “I saw you, in the zoo, in the parking lot. Can’t you see what you need you’ve already got?!” (Actually, Helios’ singing on this record and *Alien Soundtracks* sounds closest to Texan folk-rock



Original xerox insert from *Alien Soundtracks* LP by Damon Edge





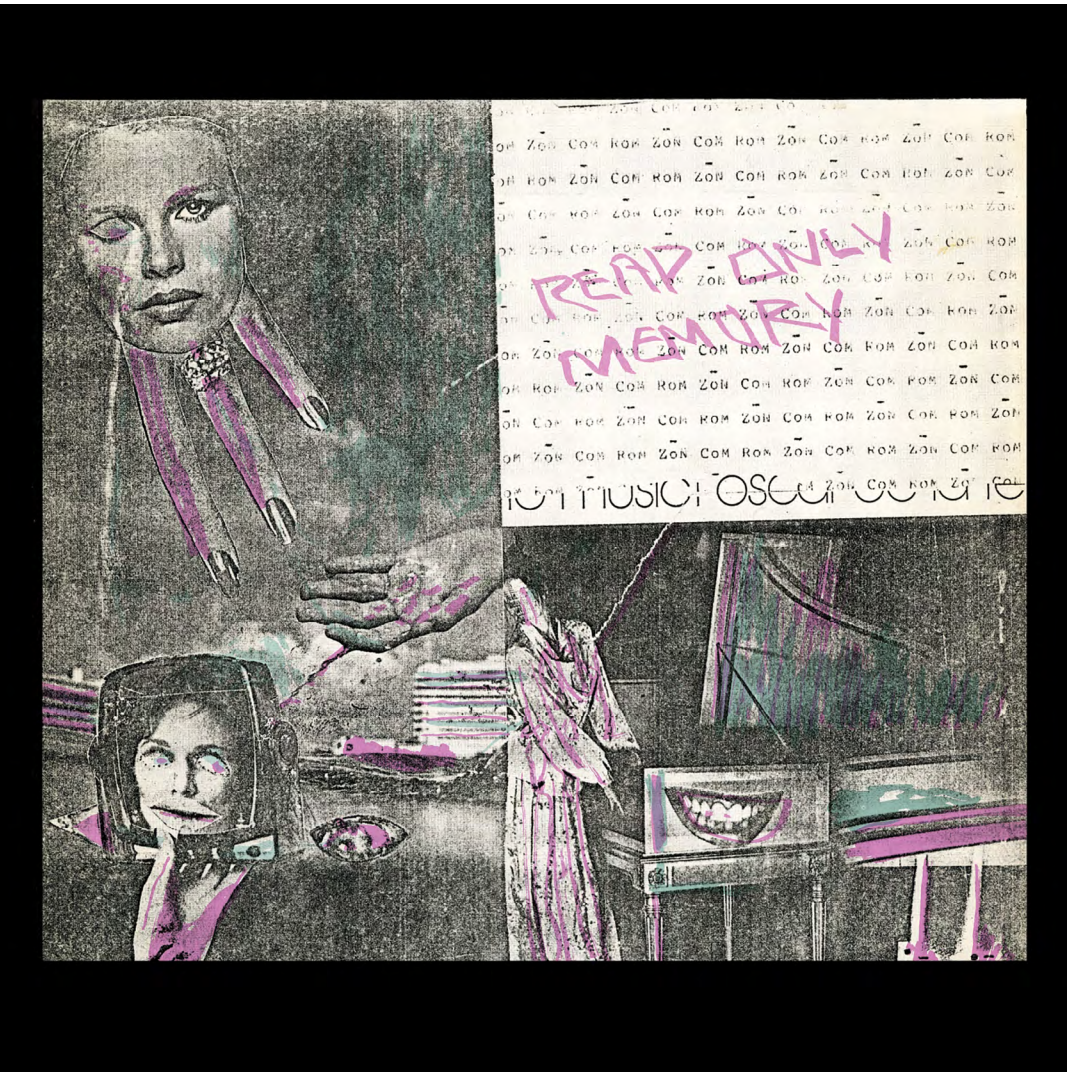
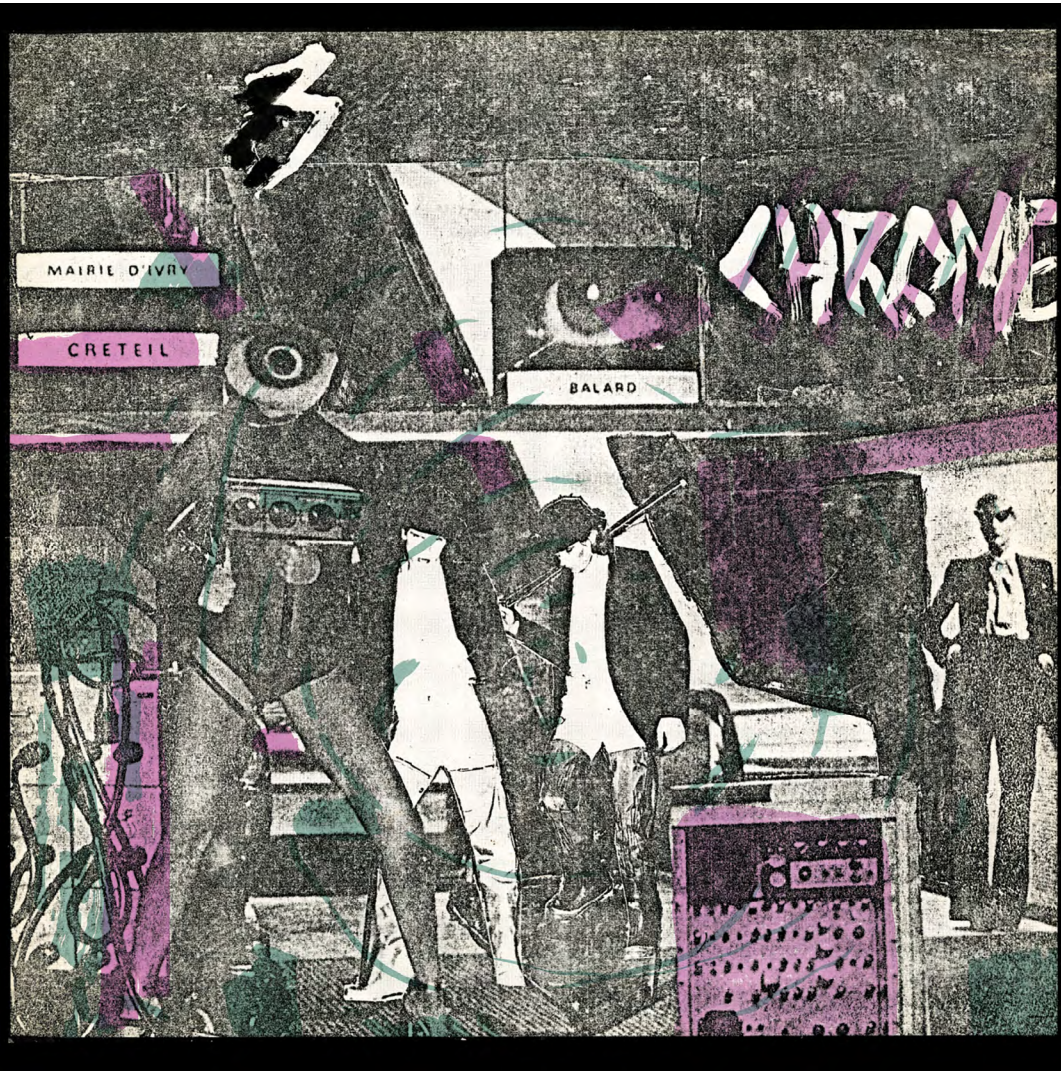
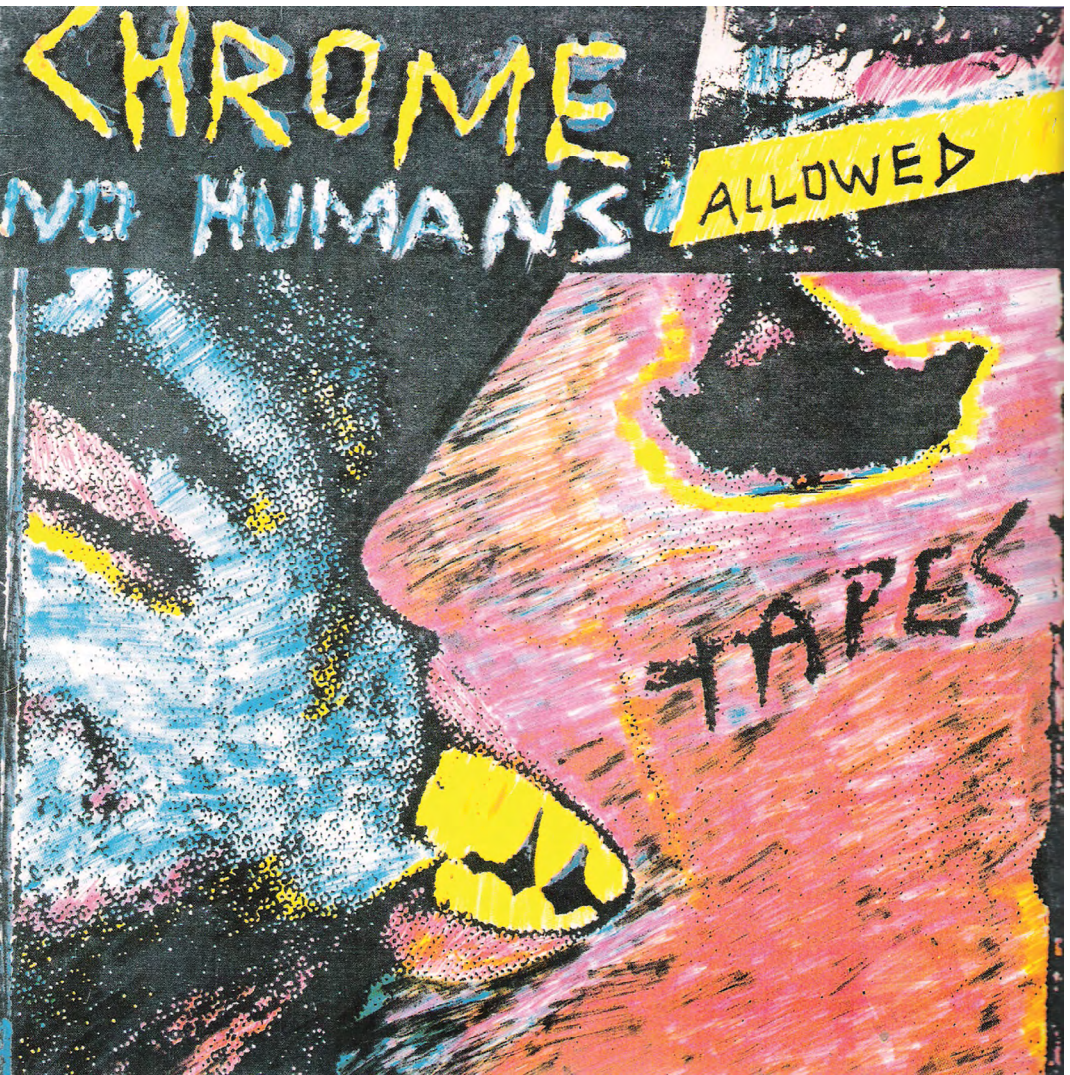
NO HUMANS ALLOWED

(Compilation LP including Read Only Memory and Inworlds)

“Looking down the street, tomorrow is an alien”

Attention started pouring in from Europe around this time, and Damon was able to strike a deal with the UK label *Beggars Banquet*, who financed their next LP. But before, Helios relates, they spent “a few days in Damon’s living room studio, sitting around and smoking opium.” The result of this brief, creative binge was a unified suite of five sound-art pieces, each containing sonic elements featured in the others, all of which ended up on the EP *Read Only Memory*. According to the record’s poster insert, it was mastered in England, and was released on their own label *Siren Records* in conjunction with the UK label *Red Records* (which at that point seems to have released only one other record, an EP by British postpunk band The Lines, but would soon put out stuff by the New York industrial funk band Material and former Soft Machine-ist Hugh Hopper, among others); if memory serves, there were never any factory-shrink-wrapped copies, which would indicate a distinctly European manufacture.

For better or worse, *Read Only Memory* may be Chrome’s most puzzling record of all. At once formless and highly clarified, it seems to distill the essential collage element of their music, while omitting anything overtly rock. And yet, for all its free-form abstractness this music could certainly not be called atmospheric or ambient – at least not in the usual sense of the terms. Perhaps closer in spirit to Throbbing Gristle or avant garde composers like John Cage or Stockhausen, it evokes a uniquely abrasive, dystopian environment, simultaneously hilarious and threatening. One could argue it



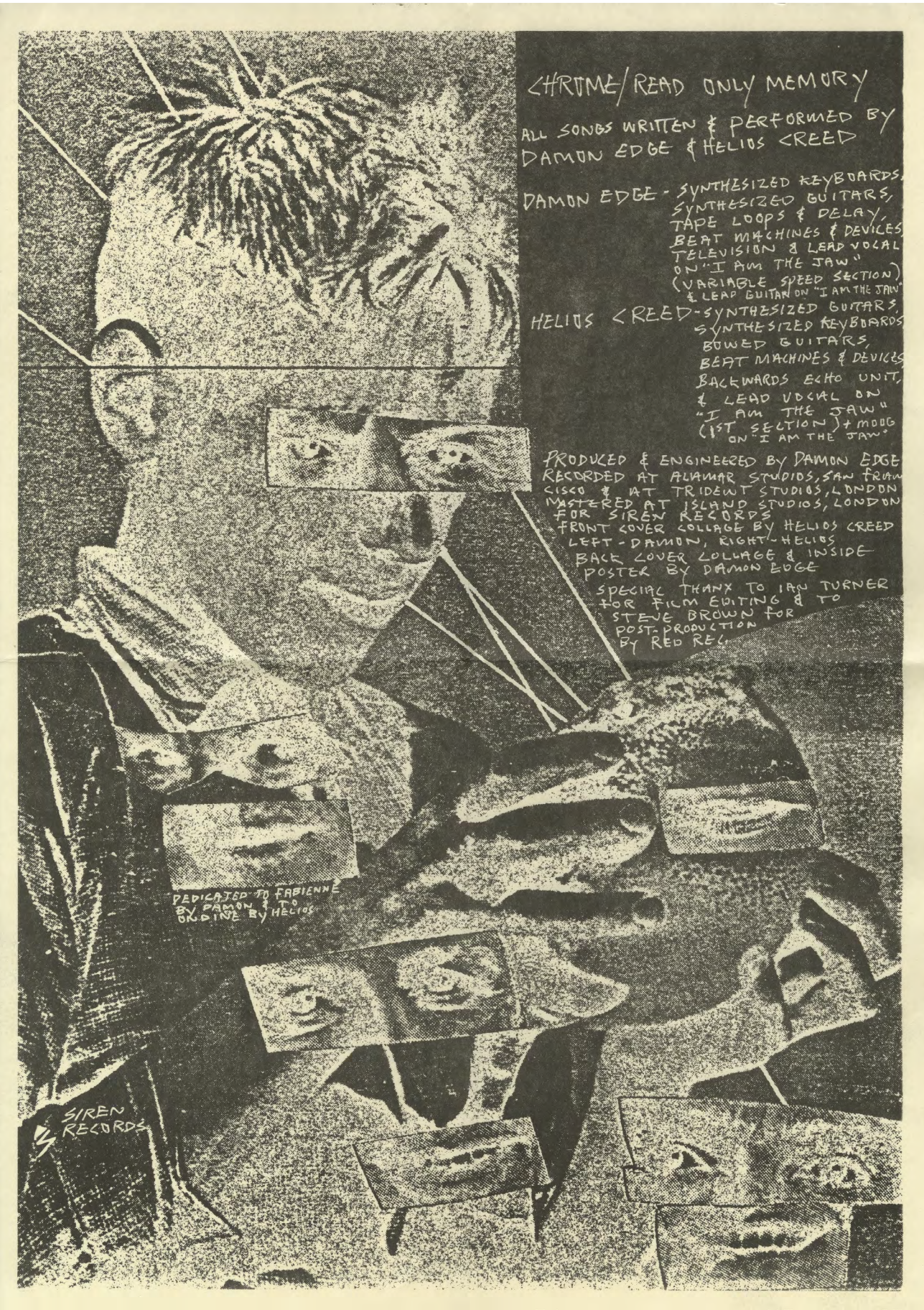
would be their least memorable record, but for the intrusion of their maddest “song” of all, a truly disturbed stretch of tapework that features a jaw-dropping spoken word performance by Helios, detailing the identity problems, Freudian anxieties, and vampiric lust of an unimaginable, futuristic creature identified simply as “The Jaw,” who unburdens himself in a series of dryly intoned couplets spread out over a Moog Taurus bass pedal riff and distorted guitar drones. I’m almost scared to try and decipher Damon’s vocals in the “variable speed section”; the only line I can make out is “In front of the crowd” (title of the preceding track).

Largely instrumental, much of *Read Only Memory*’s eerie, shifting dronescape is dominated by a backwards tape loop from a contemporaneous instrumental version of Public Image Ltd.’s Python-esque “Fodderstompf” called “Megga mix” (found on the B-side of their 12-inch “Death Disco” single). The reversed shuffle of PiL drummer Jim Walker’s hi-hat and inverted Jah Wobble bass riff are among the record’s most distinctive sounds. The entire EP was included as the second side of the Chrome compilation *No Humans Allowed*, originally released in 1982 with the original *Chrome* box set and again by the Italian label, *Expanded Music*; sadly, when *Dossier Records* re-issued it in 1990 that side was somehow mastered backwards, leaving the PiL track nearly intact and rendering the vocals unintelligible, pretty well destroying the record’s impact.

The xerox-degraded collage on the front cover of *Read Only Memory* was Helios’ handiwork, and features images of himself and Damon dressed up as characters from Stanley Kubrick’s ultra-violent movie *A Clockwork Orange*, taken from the same Jamison Goodman photo session as that on the back cover of *Subterranean Modern*. (Peter Principle of Tuxedomoon told me he recalled once seeing them around SF dressed in these outfits: “I asked them what was up with the droog get-ups and they just gave me attitude.”) Helios insists the female figure’s collaged eyeball-head predates The Residents’ eyeball-headmasks, which appeared around the same time. According to a sticker affixed to the cover, the record was the soundtrack for an upcoming movie. Although the movie never materialized, the record does contain their most straightforwardly cinematic moments. Without anything resembling a traditional song or even a recognizable melody, they managed to create a set of highly evocative, synesthetic motifs open to subjective visual interpretation in each listener’s personal auditorium. I asked Helios if *Read Only Memory* was actually made for a movie.

No. Maybe Damon was talking to someone. A lot of things were talked about but never happened. There was another movie we were supposed to be in that somebody approached us about. It was going to be about this big record company owned by these parents who get killed in a car accident, so when their kids take over the record company, they sign their favorite band which would be Chrome. I really hoped they’d make that, but it never happened. Some producer’s idea. But everybody hated the records. Everybody hated the band.

Be that as it may, a couple years later Chrome would have crowds around the block for their one and only live performance in San Francisco, shortly after having been flown 6000 miles to play a festival in Bologna, Italy.



“I know you want to fry!”

Despite consistently skeptical or downright hostile reviews in British music papers like *New Musical Express*, *Record Mirror*, and *Sounds*, “TV As Eyes” and “Abstract Nympho” had become minor hits in England, Germany, and on US college radio stations, and Chrome was offered a generous deal by the UK record label *Beggars Banquet*, allowing them to set up their arsenal of noisemaking devices at Oliver DiCicco’s SF-based Mobius Recording Studio during the summer of 1979. The time spent at Mobius would prove to be an extended period of fertile creativity for Chrome, and after delivering a few sublime, raucous tracks to their friends at *Ralph Records* for the compilation *Subterranean Modern*, they completed their fourth LP in early 1980, painstakingly recorded over a period of several months.

Considered by many to be their magnum opus, *Red Exposure* continued to explore themes of kinky, futuristic alienation, but with considerably more polished production – not that different from what they’d been doing on 4-track machines in Damon’s living room, but now they had sixteen tracks and a professional engineer to relieve them of the constant struggle for audio fidelity. Rather than fragments spliced together, most of the songs on *Red Exposure* follow verse-chorus structure, accentuated by densely layered electronic textures. The primal rock and creepy humor are still there, yet the music exudes a subtlety, restraint, and elegance largely absent from their earlier work. With Oliver DiCicco, they had found a new collaborator to help give form to their pictures. Before contacting Oliver, I discovered that in the years since working with Chrome he had built many stunning musical sculptures (oliverdicicco.com). He explained that he came from a background in experimental and electronic music, and really enjoyed working with Damon and Helios:



I was into prepared stuff, and musique concrète, and I was interested in finding different ways to get sounds, and those guys were totally into being experimental, and so it just kind of fit. At night I was recording their stuff, and during the day I was working on this new age album for *Windham Hill*. The contrast was so bizarre. The song title “New Age” was a reference to that.

I was never really a member of the band, but I think I had something to do with their sound, at least on the records we did together. I mean, they didn’t have anything written when they came into the studio. Basically it was all improvised. I was a pretty new engineer at the time, but we kind of all worked on it together. I was involved creatively, but it was definitely their thing. They had final say, but I contributed some ideas, even a couple snippets of lyric. “Meet You In The Subway” was one of my lines. I said, “Damon, that sound reminds me of subway wheels screeching.” I was credited on the album as John L. Cyborg, which was kind of a running pseudonym they had going ...

It was an interesting time with those guys. They were an underground band, and people didn’t dig ’em that much back then. That was the feeling I got, and I think they were a little frustrated. I think the European community was more into them, but here it didn’t fit in with the punk scene or anything. It was pretty much ahead of its time, I thought.

During the recording of *Red Exposure*, Damon spoke to sympathetic journalist Michael Goldberg (who went on to great success in the field) for an *NME* article about *Subterranean Modern*:

Nobody else was going to release our stuff. It was too weird. No record company president in his right mind would have released *Alien Soundtracks*. It was too gone. We didn't want to kiss ass. Didn't want to have to play some high school scene for people to like us. And if they really liked us and they thought we were okay, then we'd be let out into the world and it would be okay. Forget it, man! I don't have to ask anybody's permission. I don't care! I mean, we want to communicate. We're not some bombed out hippies making tapes just for ourselves.

I like rock. It's got the primal essence. I wanted to make something which would be a foundation for a unit to abstract from.

There's earth and the Western World. And in the Western World, there are those entertainment zones and performing zones. And we're on the outside of that ... We live a rebel kind of existence ... There's us and them. We're outside of everything.

What this city means to me is the last stand on American ground. People who don't fit in anywhere else come here. That's why the bridge is so popular to jump off. There's no place else to go in America. If you can't relate artistically in San Francisco ... you jump off the bridge.

Goldberg actually seemed to get them, describing the as yet unreleased tracks, "Eyes On Mars" and "Animal" as "oozing from the speakers like an inorganic blob rising from a pool of radioactive industrial waste ... as disconcerting as anything on their previous three albums ... Only the sound has grown. The material on *Sub Mod* and the newer pieces represent Chrome's first recording in a 16-track studio. It's the difference between black and white TV and color. 16 tracks have allowed Chrome to flesh out the subtleties and creeping horror of their excavations into the subconscious. Layer on layer of disconnected/fractured voices, synthesized industrial debris and guitar notes that seem to hang on for eternity, before dripping off the tape."

In the months to come, however, British reviewers were not so sympathetic. Writing for *NME*, Paul Rambali (an influential UK critic who really should know better) compared *Red Exposure* unfavorably to Martin Rev's solo record: "Chrome are a good limited stimulus for the imagination, but leave no really deep or lasting impression ... cold and obvious."

Phil Sutcliffe, in *Sounds*, offers: "*Red Exposure* might be a tongue-in-cheek arty con trick, but I suspect the performers are deluded too, which places the album in the bracket of sheer pretension ... weird noises on guitars and keyboards with an often dominant bass drum and the crotchety traction-engine puffing of electronic percussion ... never rises above the level of a Hammer horror soundtrack. The vocals are whispered and gargled through gawd-knows-what processors and digital delayers. The only advantage of this is that you can't hear the words, which the inner sleeve reveal (sic) to be extremely

silly. Nonetheless these chaps are so pleased with themselves they want to take credit for every little noise you hear, so among the instruments listed are 'backwards hi-hat' and 'mutated guitars'." After comparing them unfavorably to The Beatles (I kid you not), he concludes the review with a long list of insulting terms from his thesaurus.



Damon and Helios, 1980 © 2014 Ruby Ray



EYES IN THE CENTER

EDGE/MUSIC & WORDS CREED/MUSIC

DAMON EDGE LEAD VOCALS
LEAD SYNTHESIZER
RHYTHM MOOG KEYBOARD
SO CAL. OIL DRUM
BOMB SHELL
DRUMS

HELIOS CREED LEAD GUITAR
LEAD RHYTHM GUITAR
RHYTHM BUZZ
BASS

JOHN L. CYBORG
FLANG CONTROL

EYES IN THE CENTER
HEAD TO THE RIGHT
ALL YOU KNOW ON THE VOID
COME TO SEE YOU
UNDER THE NIGHT
MONDO DANCE AND A TRANCE
MONDO DANCE HAD A TRANCE

EYES IN THE CENTER
HEAD TO THE LEFT
FINGER ATTACK ANYTHING
AND YOU DANCE MONDO DANCE
HEAD IN A TRANCE FOR MONDO DANCE

HEAD TO THE RIGHT
EYES DOWN A MILE
FUCKING IT IN
GOING OUT IN STYLE
AND YOU TALK MONDO TALK
AND YOU WALK MONDO WALK

ELECTRIC CHAIR

EDGE/MUSIC & WORDS CREED/MUSIC & WORDS
DAMON EDGE MOOG KEYBOARDS
BACKING VOCALS
ECHO PERCUSSION
DRUMS
TAPE EFFECTS
TALK VOCAL ON BRIDGE

HELIOS CREED LEAD VOCALS
RHYTHM GUITAR
BOWED GUITAR
BASS
BACKING VOCAL

I HAVE ELECTRIC CHAIR
I WANT TO ELECTRIFY YOU
I HAVE ELECTRIC CHAIR
I WANT TO CRUCIFY YOU
I WANT TO ELECTRIFY YOU

I HAVE ELECTRIC CLAMPS
I HAVE BASEMENT WALL
I HAVE A MILLION AMPS
I'M ON PROTOCOL
I HAVE BASEMENT WALL

SITTING IN MY CHAIR
WITH YOUR MINI SKIRT
I TURN THE KNOBS
YOU LOVE THE CURRENT

YOUR KNOCKING ON MY DOOR
I KNOW YOU WANT TO FRY
YOUR COMING BACK FOR MORE
YOU LEFT THAT OTHER GUY
I KNOW YOU WANT TO FRY

NIGHT OF THE EARTH

EDGE/MUSIC & WORDS CREED/MUSIC & WORDS

DAMON EDGE LEAD SYNTHESIZER
SUBLIMINAL VOCALS
CHORUS VOCALS
BASS MOOGS & KEYBOARDS
ELECTRIC CHIMES
ELECTRIC DRUMS

HELIOS CREED GRAND PIANO
SUBLIMINAL VOCALS
CHORUS VOCALS
BASS
BOWED GUITAR
BIRD SOUNDS

JOHN L. CYBORG WHITE NOISE
& DISTORTION UNITS

ISOLATION

EDGE/MUSIC & WORDS CREED/MUSIC
DAMON EDGE LEAD VOCAL
LEAD YAMAHA KEYBOARD
BASS MOOG KEYBOARD
SLOW SPEED BELLS
TELEVISION
ELECTRIC DRUMS
DRUMS

HELIOS CREED LEAD HARMONY VOCAL
LEAD GUITARS (REVERSE)
ECHO RHYTHM GUITAR
BASS
ACTIVE LOW BASS
TELEVISION

TV INTRO

WHEN YOU TAKE AWAY ALL SENSATION
WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENS TO HIM
IF HE SEES NOTHING, FEELS NOTHING
TASTES NOTHING, HEARS NOTHING

WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BODY
AND PARTICULARLY TO THE CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM
WHEN THE MAN IS PUT INTO THIS COMPLETE ISOLATION
INTO THE SORT OF CONDITIONS THAT MAY WELL
BE EXPERIENCED IN SPACE FLIGHT

TO DO THIS WE INVENTED A COMPLETELY NEW
PIECE OF APPARATUS - WELL BECAUSE MY SYSTEMS ARE

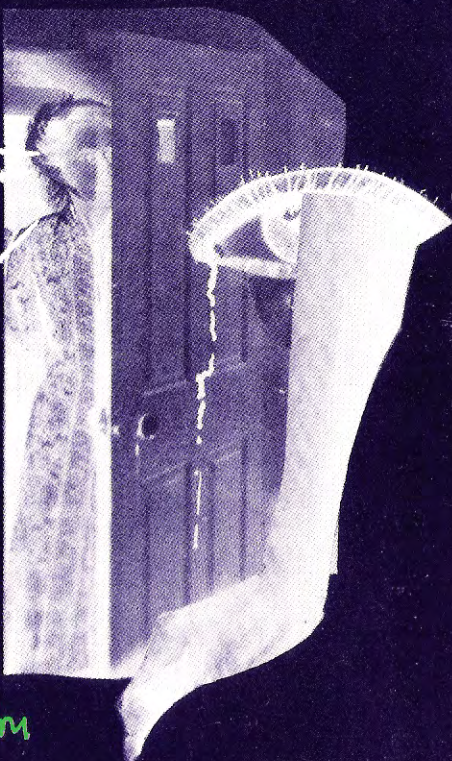
FOUND THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION
OF THE HUMAN BEING
ALL THE TRAFFIC ON THE WEST BOUND SIDE
STRETCH OF INTERSTATE
SCALES FROM MY EYES TIRE INSIDE
TRY TO SPEND THE SIT DOWN SHOW, RIDE, RIDE
I'M SO ISOLATED
I'M SO ISOLATE
I'M SO ISOLATED
YOUR SO ISOLATE

JOHN L. CYBORG WHITE NOISE
ON TV INTRO

ALL SONGS WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY DAMON EDGE & HELIOS CREED
PUBLISHED BY BEGGARS BANQUET
PRODUCED & MIXED BY DAMON EDGE FOR SIREN RECORDS
CO PRODUCED BY HELIOS CREED
ENGINEERED BY JOHN L. CYBORG AT MOBIUS MUSIC, SAN FRANCISCO
BETWEEN JUNE & SEPT. 79 - TECHNICAL ADVICE BY OLIVER DICICCO
MASTERED BY DAMON EDGE & JOHN DENT AT ISLAND STUDIOS, LONDON
COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY IAN TURNER
COVER ART BY TOMY ESCOTT & MALTI KIDIA
SPECIAL THANKS TO FABIENNE, ANDRINE, CHARLIE, STEVE, MARTIN, NICK & IVO



BECA 15



Reviewing the British release of *Half Machine Lip Moves* in *Record Mirror*, Mark Perry (*not* the same guy, by the way, who founded the band Alternative TV and the classic '70s punk zine *Sniffin' Glue*) deems it: "totally unbearable to listen to. Heavy metal meets a squashed brain. Chrome are experts at making an incredible racket for no apparent reason. They're the Residents without the brain and Throbbing Gristle through a mincer ... I can't understand why *Beggars Banquet* have bothered to release it again, there's plenty of rubbish in our own country without going overseas."


And reviewing it in *Sounds*, Terry Sanai finds they fall short of Simple Minds: "I've no idea who Chrome are, and listening to their record has made me painfully edgy. Not a good omen, eh, boys? Or rather shop-window dummies, as the cover so subtly implies ... This band have combined gum-chewing American vocals, stylised via voice-distorter, a lot of synth cacophony, plus heavy-metal guitar thrashings ... a good many twiddly noises and neuro-bangs ... no melody ... no hint of passion or emotional depth of any kind. Just bang bang screech screech ... I can find no excuse for ugliness, pretension and fraudulence of this kind."

As early as 1978, French publisher/record label *Sordide Sentimental* devoted six pages of favorable coverage to Chrome - in the form of obscure semiotics of questionable relevance to the band, but hey. Still, for a band supposedly beloved in Europe, Chrome

found their most well-attuned interviewers in hometown zines *Search & Destroy* and *Another Room*, though the most sympathetic article appeared in the June 1981 issue of SF's *Damage* magazine. In an article called "The Communication Warriors," writer D. W. Person advised readers to listen to Chrome with headphones, "not only because they allow the intricacies to be found and appreciated, but because, at base, the music is fundamentally cerebral, almost necessitating a way of bringing it into closer proximity to the brain. Listening through earphones, the two highpoints of the music are revealed: The rocky high-energy contacts with the street fusing with the moments of pure surrealism, sound that surrounds you like a dream."

All Chrome LPs include Damon's hand-scrawled lyric sheets and inserts with detailed instrumentation credits and personal acknowledgements, and in this regard *Red Exposure* is no different, if a bit more polished; likewise the luminescent, paint-splattered cover art by *Beggars Banquet*'s art director Malti Kidia (who also designed their ultra-slick Gary Numan releases). As ever, their lyrical approach is a mixed bag of doomy alienation, crazed rants, whimsical consumerist metaphors (Helios declares himself "Anti-Fade"), infusing new life into rudimentary rhyme schemes. During the same *Damage* interview, Damon admits to keeping lyrics elusive "because they mean more than that way..."

Anytime we get into writing anything that says too much directly, I seem to think it loses something. I like hidden things - they're more attractive. I hate lyrics really. We write them because we hear sounds from voices and they say these things and we don't even know what they say. A lot of times we record them and then find out what we've said later. They don't make any sense and that's why we like them. They're not thought out - there's no brain acupuncture going on.

Client <i>Chrome</i>		Tape Machine <i>Amper MR70</i>		Möbius Music Recording Studio 	
Artist <i>chrome</i>		Speed <i>15 IPS</i>			
Engineer <i>Oliver DiCicco</i>		Tape <i>250</i>		<i>Reel B</i> SAFETY 1583 SANCHEZ, SAN FRANCISCO, CA. 94131 415 285 7888	
Date <i>11-10-79</i>		Noise Reduction <i>NO</i>			
+3db record level (250nwb/m)		P.O.			
Comments <i>Tails out</i>					
Title	Counter	Time	Comments		
1 <i>1Khz Test Tone</i>		:30			
2 <i>10Khz " "</i>		:30			
3 <i>100hz " "</i>		:30			
4 <i>50hz " "</i>		:30			
5					
6 <i>the new age</i>					
7 <i>Paradise</i>					
8 <i>Eyes on MARS</i>					
9 <i>military</i>					
10 <i>Animal</i>					
11 <i>Information</i>					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					

client <i>chrome</i>	tape mach. <i>3m 56</i>	comments <i>+3db record level</i>	Möbius Music recording studio <i>Reel 4</i> 1583 SANCHEZ, SAN FRANCISCO, CA. 94131 415 285 7888				
artist <i>chrome</i>	speed <i>30</i>						
eng. <i>O. DiCicco</i>	tape <i>456</i>						
date <i>1-7-80</i>	noise red. <i>NO</i>						
title <i>Last Resort</i>		take					
1 <i>K</i>	2 <i>Sn</i>	3 <i>H.H.</i>	4 <i>BASS</i>	5 <i>"WIKI" Rhyth Guit. 1</i>	6 <i>chorus verse Rhyth Guit. 2</i>	7 <i>chorus Sn DBL</i>	8 <i>verse moog</i>
9 <i>BEW H.H. 2 chorus</i>	10 <i>verse moog chorus</i>	11 <i>chorus Yamaha</i>	12 <i>chorus Damon VOC LOW</i>	13 <i>chorus voc moog 1</i>	14 <i>Helios verse voc moog 2</i>	15 <i>chorus vocs Banned</i>	16 <i>chorus Buzz Guit</i>
title <i>the way it should be</i>		take					
1 <i>BASS moog</i>	2 <i>BASS Keychance</i>	3 <i>KeyBd</i>	4 <i>+H VOC Ringmoog</i>	5 <i>D VOC Flange</i>	6 <i>moog LEAD Guit.</i>	7 <i>D VOC Flange</i>	8 <i>Per</i>
9 <i>Guit</i>	10 <i>moog GUITAR 2 on chorus</i>	11 <i>DRUMS</i>	12 <i>DRUMS</i>	13 <i>DRUMS</i>	14 <i>Sn</i>	15 <i>K</i>	16

Möbius Studios documents, courtesy of Joe Dupre.

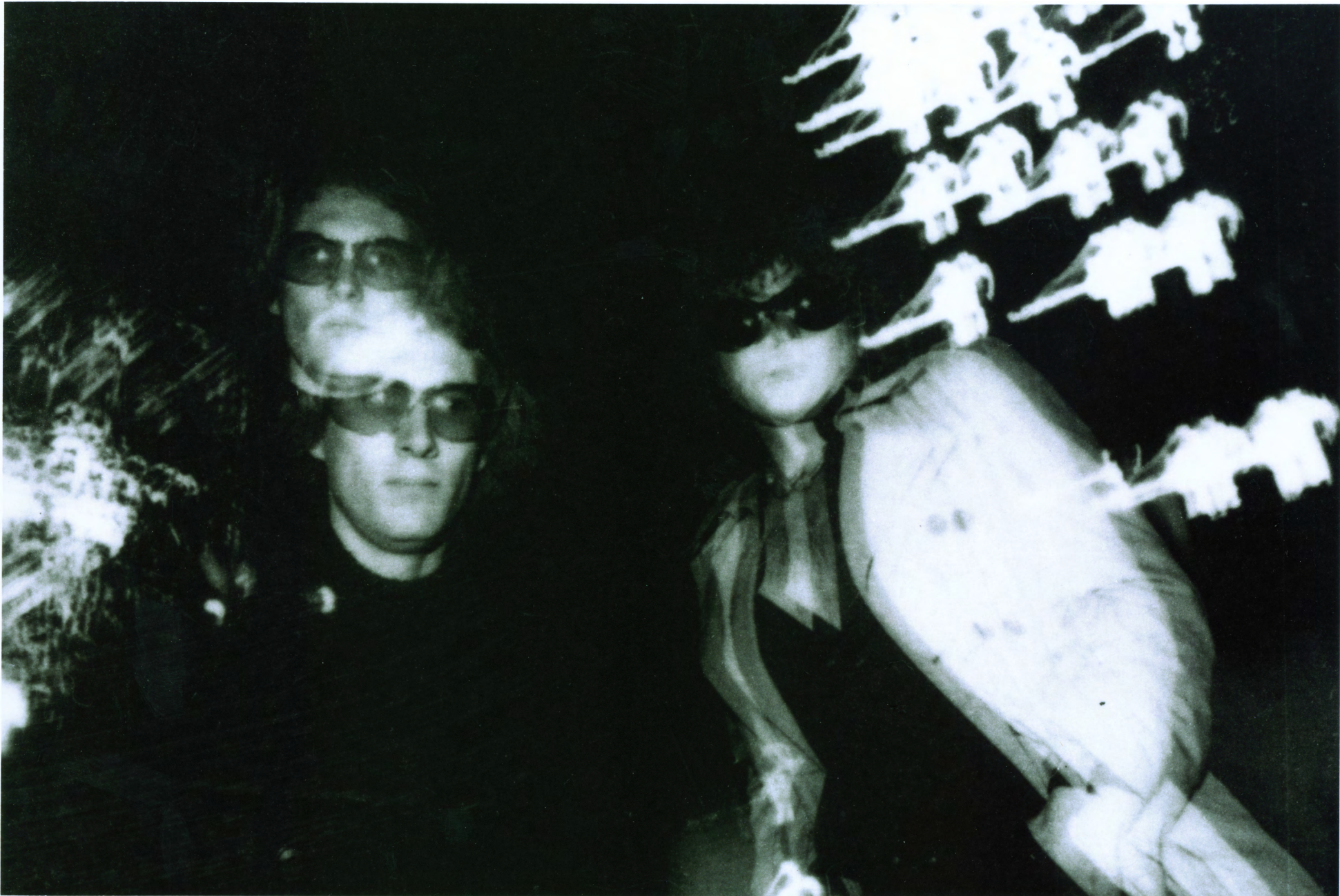
Left: Safety master list for *Red Exposure*, side 1 (originally slated to be side B). Note the different song titles ("The New Age" instead of "New Age", "Paradise" instead of "Rm. 109", "Military" instead of "Jonestown"); also "Informations" was originally intended to close this side, replaced by "Static Gravity," recorded half a year later.

Above: Recording track sheets for "Last Resort" (working title for "Static Gravity") and "The Way It Should Be" (working title for "Animal").

If I hear a sound, I get an image, and I work to create more of the image with the sound. So like, I hear a sound first, then I get an image, then I get an idea of where that image should go, and then I try to create the sound to go there. We make pictures for people’s heads.

Oliver DiCicco speculated candidly about where these pictures came from:

As I recall, Helios was pretty spacey. I mean, we were going to record a bass part or something, and you’d have to go and plug his bass in for him. He was kind of a spaceman in a lot of ways, but he could really play. He had that SG guitar, or SG Junior, I forget what it was, and he could get a lot of sounds out of that thing. I think he’s a fairly natural musician in a lot of ways. Damon was kind of an edgier guy. He was definitely the more aggressive of the two, and I thought he was making music that was better than his musicianship, if you know what I mean. I think of Lennon and McCartney. Neither one of them on their own was The Beatles. But Chrome definitely had something.



Helios and Damon, 1980 © 2014 Ruby Ray

Now I didn’t realize it at the time, not when we were making the first record, but later on it sort of became apparent that something was up with Damon. But it was hard to tell what drugs those guys were into. I think Helios liked to smoke pot in the studio, I can’t remember, but they both seemed like they were on something. That was always the impression I got. Helios was toasted, but he was definitely more mellow. Damon was a dark guy. I mean, he had a sense of humor and all. I remember we used to take breaks and drive down to Pier 39 and ride the bumper cars, and gang up on little kids. (Laughter.) I have one memory of Damon in the studio: We were looking for this backbeat sound and we got a 55-gallon drum in there. He’s playing it with a two-by-four, smoking a cigarette, and there’s wood splinters flying everywhere while he’s doing this take. There he is in this pall of smoke, just beating the hell out of this drum to get this cool backbeat sound.

I don’t remember titles of the stuff, I just sort of remember sessions. If I went

into the basement and pulled out those tapes and looked at track sheets, I might have a little more information about what was what. They were here for a while. At the time it seemed to me like they had a big budget. It may have only been like \$10,000 or something, but that went a long way back then. They ended up owing me like two grand. I think the bill came out to ten grand, and I got like eight of it. And then (laughs) I let Damon come back and do the next thing, which I did get paid for, although I never did see that other money. Then Damon disappeared to Europe, and I never heard from him again. I heard that he died. I don’t even know the circumstances of his death.

In fact I still have their masters sitting in my basement, that I’m owed money for. Now they’re probably unplayable. There was a certain vintage of tape in the ’80s, if it’s been stored for a long time they have to be baked before they can play. I haven’t gone back and listened to any of this stuff, so I don’t even know what’s on there any longer.

When I told Joe Dupre (who runs the Chrome website *staticwhitesound.com/Chrome*) about these tapes, he contacted Oliver and bought them for the missing two grand. They baked the tapes before transferring them to Joe’s computer, and soon discovered they were filled with unreleased songs, mostly unfinished but nonetheless delightful and revelatory. (We discussed using them for this box set, but Joe eventually sold the tapes to Helios, who was able to mix them into a presentable double-LP entitled *Half Machine From The Sun*.) While going over the studio track sheets from Mobius, something else came to light: “Static Gravity” (one of Chrome’s best songs ever) was recorded several months after the rest of the album, and shortly before the LP was released, it took the place of the comparatively drab “Informations,” which ended up as the B-side of the single featuring the LP’s opening track, “New Age” (which Helios and I agree features some of Damon’s most effective words and singing).

Despite sprawling, somnolent soundscapes like “Night of The Earth” and “Isolation,” *Red Exposure* failed to chart – but seriously, one can’t help but wonder what might have happened if they’d chosen the manic, Devo-esque pop of “Electric Chair” for the single, instead of the woozy, downbeat “New Age.” (As a DJ, I’ve gotten crowds moving to “Electric Chair” and “Eyes On Mars,” while “New Age” invariably clears the floor.) The videos they made to promote the single feature Helios behind the drums and singing, though in reality he did neither; if you look closely, you can see him mouthing the words to “New Age” as they appear (incorrectly) on the lyric sheet. In any case, Damon traveled to England to promote the video, where he spoke with sympathetic journalist John Gill, mostly about greenbelt zones and ecological stability. A month later, he was arrested at Gatwick airport for carrying a starter pistol, but managed to squeeze out of trouble (a typically smug *Sounds* reporter using the name Jaws remarked on the incident, “Shame they didn’t put him away for good”) and rendezvous in Paris with his lovely, new wife Fabienne Shine, singer for the French rock band Shakin’ Street. Damon had met Fabienne at a Ramones concert at the Oakland Coliseum in October 1979, and they were married the following year. Fabienne would sing on Chrome records, and in recent years she released a record called *No Mad No-mad*. (That’s Damon Damon, spelled backwards.)

I was standing in the audience watching The Ramones, and he just came to talk to me, just like that. In the dark, I didn’t even see him. I just heard a big voice, and some very spooky vibes. At the time I was touring around the States with my band, we were signed to *CBS Records*. I was touring when I



met him, so I couldn’t see him a lot. I was going from town to town, jumping from one plane to another. It was difficult, but he kind of got seduced by the glamour of touring. He couldn’t believe it. He wanted that....

Damon was unique. An extremely dark person. Very mysterious, and very good-looking, before he started drinking. Very creative, very poetic. A dreamer. He was extremely interesting, intelligent, absolutely adorable, a wonderful person, but hard to get along with and not always fair. A bit spoiled and very possessive, jealous, always suspicious of everyone. *Un monstre sacré* ... A Sacred Monster, he identified with that term ...

I was so busy myself, I was gone a lot. Those years were my favorite years because I was so busy. I didn’t have time to see anything bad. Everything was beautiful. But I did notice, I was in conflict with him for his personality, because I did notice that he wasn’t fair with people. He was not giving credit to people who helped him, a lot. Like, an engineer who actually mixed his album ... He was always saying, “I did this, I mixed this, I produced this.” And I said, “Listen, you know you didn’t mix this. He did it! I’m a witness.” I started to realize that he wasn’t fair. A total megalomaniac.

We stayed married for eleven years, but he started drinking heavily, so I had to leave. Heavily, like insane. And also heroin. We went to France in ’84, and it was very fashionable. We stayed four years in California, we were not taking any drugs. We were just very socially – stoned. I mean, nothing special. We went to France, and heroin was very fashionable. It’s very easy to get it over there. It’s a terrible drug. It started changing his personality. He was becoming – you know what a drug addict is. It’s very unfortunate. He lost a lot to drugs. I stayed because I thought he would change. I left because he was becoming bizarre, crazy, you know. He was going to a psychiatrist. As soon



as Damon started to drink and take drugs, he became suspicious, paranoid, agoraphobic, and – what is it when you hear voices? – schizophrenic. He had them all, and his parents had a lot of money and were paying for the doctors. He was going every week, from 1987. He was constantly listening to voices, seeing things, hearing things. He was ill. His mind was not functioning normally. Oh, he was bad. Thank God I never heard voices – yet! (Laughter.)

After a while, he was drinking so much that he couldn't walk, he was falling everywhere, in the streets. He couldn't drive anymore. He was totally self-destructive. Everything has to be destroyed. He was crazy. He was adopted, you know? I believe he never recovered from that. He was spoiled to death. His mother loved him. They were hard-working people, and they were very nice to him. He was not nice to them. No. He was very spoiled. I mean, he was nice; he was very loving, adorable. He loved animals, children. He loved people. But he was weird, eccentric, an extremely weird person.

I have a photo of Damon. We were taking photographs in a subway in Paris, in a little booth. We took photos together, then him alone and me alone, after. And I was waiting for the photos to come out, and in the photo, he had toilet paper all around his face, like a mummy. (Laughter) It was fantastic. He was very artistic in his craziness.

But he was doing really well at that time, working with Helios. I think it was the best work he ever did – I shouldn't say that, he did some good recording in France. But the real Chrome is Damon and Helios. I mean, come on.



Damon and Fabienne, circa 1985, photo by Benjamin Wisse



“*Why you look at me like that?*
You make believe it’s all a dream, you know I know better than that”

Beggars Banquet supposedly pressed over 30,000 copies of *Red Exposure* (including Canadian, Japanese, and Australian editions) and Chrome was said to be their second top selling artist of 1980 after Gary Numan. Whether or not this is accurate, in 1981 they were put on a subsidiary label for American artists called *Don’t Fall Off The Mountain* (although Helios thinks the label’s name – the title of Shirley MacLaine’s first memoir – was a subtle injunction directed at Damon and himself not to go off the deep end with drugs or insanity, this seems doubtful, as the label’s first release was from the Boston band Human Sexual Response), and in March of that year a 12-inch single entitled *Inworlds* was released. When *Damage* critic Person had asked about the considerably less abrasive sound of *Red Exposure*. Damon replied:

We just felt we had projected a lot of darkness without relief, and we were sort of sick of it. We just had to get something else out of our systems. We’d done *Alien Soundtracks*, *Half Machine Lip Moves*, *Sub Mod*, and all that stuff was just really, you know, “heavy gestapo rock” or whatever the English press called it ... So we just wanted to get into something that had a few dreamy spaces. And things seemed to have gotten a lot better after we psychically made an effort to get out of that cycle.

But this year, I think we’re going to be getting darker again. It’s just that we’re feeling more aggressive this year, musically. We just needed to clean ourselves out. And now that we’re clean, we’re back into power. We’re going back to crunch. We want people’s brains to ooze out of their noses. And a



Reagan administration is going to be very excellent for psychedelic rock or whatever the fuck it is we do.

When asked what music they listen to, Helios claims to cull a certain vocal style from Sinatra, while Damon mentions Killing Joke, Snakefinger, Gary Numan, Neu!, and Bowie.

We listen to things we’re not supposed to be listening to. We don’t listen to the shit in our genre too much... We just work on what we’re doing. It’s nicer that way. It’s more real to me because we don’t even care what anybody does at all. I find to listen or even to care about what’s happening a limitation on my own imagination.

We had felt that we could do so much more on tape than we could in a live context. Though now we’re working out certain minimal concepts, where some of our past stuff hasn’t been that minimal.

As I recall, my friends and I already considered Chrome to be the craziest band in the world, but when the 12-inch 45 *Inworlds* came out we all agreed they were the coolest thing ever. Glowering at you from the green monochromatic cover, they looked unspeakably badass. Both songs “Danger Zone” and “In A Dream” share a stark horror-rock vibe, featuring Helios on lead vocals, and eerie synth lines from Damon. The former song’s chorus is strikingly reminiscent of British science fiction spacerockers Hawkwind’s “Days of The Underground,” (which mentions “chromium heroes”) from their seventh album *Quark, Strangeness And Charm* – possibly the greatest single influence on Chrome’s overall aesthetic – but I daresay Chrome’s groove is chunkier and more driving than anything from that band (even when Lemmy and Si

mon King were providing the bottom). Five years after *Inworlds*, the Ramones would release a song called “Danger Zone” with a lyrically identical chorus. (Curiously, I’ve heard Hawkwind detractors sarcastically describe the British stoners as “basically, the Ramones playing twenty minute songs.”) In spite of their new label’s best efforts, SF’s weirdest outsiders never achieved a fraction of the popularity enjoyed by New York’s loveable lunkheads, nor anywhere near the exposure of the perpetually touring Hawkwind – but, as became increasingly apparently, exposure and popularity were not their initial or main motivations. An esoteric rock aesthete’s wildest dream and creepiest nightmare in one, Chrome has always evoked in me the image of a pair of cartoon monkeys tripping out in an old, clanking rocketship. Loveable losers of the sort one rarely sees any more.

Except for some TV voices buried in the mix and a few Synare bloop, the two songs on *Inworlds* sound dramatically stripped down compared to *Red Exposure*, a trend that would continue throughout the remainder of Chrome’s recording history. Although credited solely to Damon and Helios, I remember thinking the drums seemed too tight to be Damon. Actually, *Inworlds* featured Jean-Lou Kalinowski from Fabienne’s band on drums, who had asked not to be credited since he was under contract to *CBS* at the time. I asked him about his brief stint in Chrome:

Damon came to see Shakin’ Street on stage many times and started to appreciate my drumming. We were on tour in the States with Blue Oyster Cult and Black Sabbath, and I had two weeks off. That’s when he asked me if I would play on their next record. We recorded at a small studio in San Francisco. I went straight in without rehearsing, and recorded the two songs in a few hours, playing only with Helios on bass, so I had no idea what the songs would be like, but they knew what they were doing.

Helios didn’t talk much, but he’s really a cool guy. Damon was talented and interesting, but weird, like his music. I remember the day he flew to France

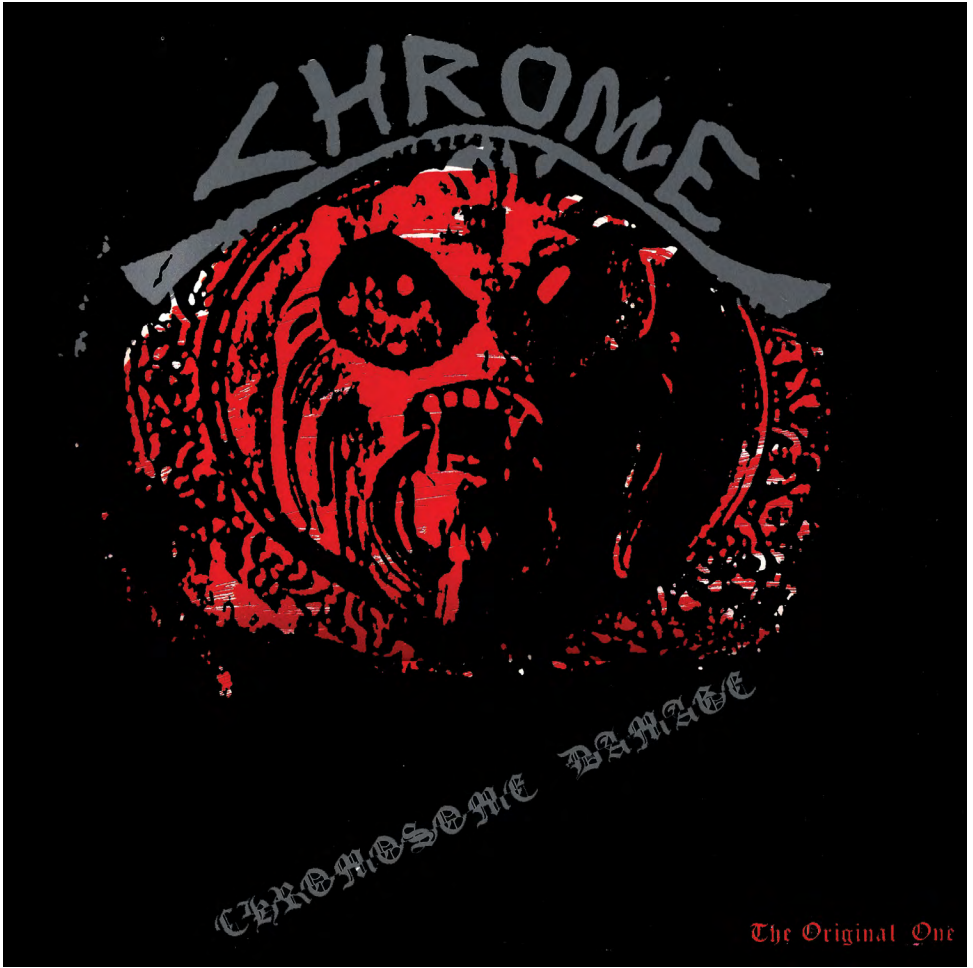
to spy on Fabienne while she was on tour; he hid on her balcony all night to make sure she was not sleeping with anybody. And I recall one day a tree fell on Damon’s house and destroyed it. He had just gone out, lucky guy.

After the recording, Damon asked me to play with them for their first live show in Italy, but I had to decline his offer because we were supposed to fly to London, then take a boat to France, then a train to Italy, and I just didn’t feel like doing this trip. Also we wouldn’t get paid.

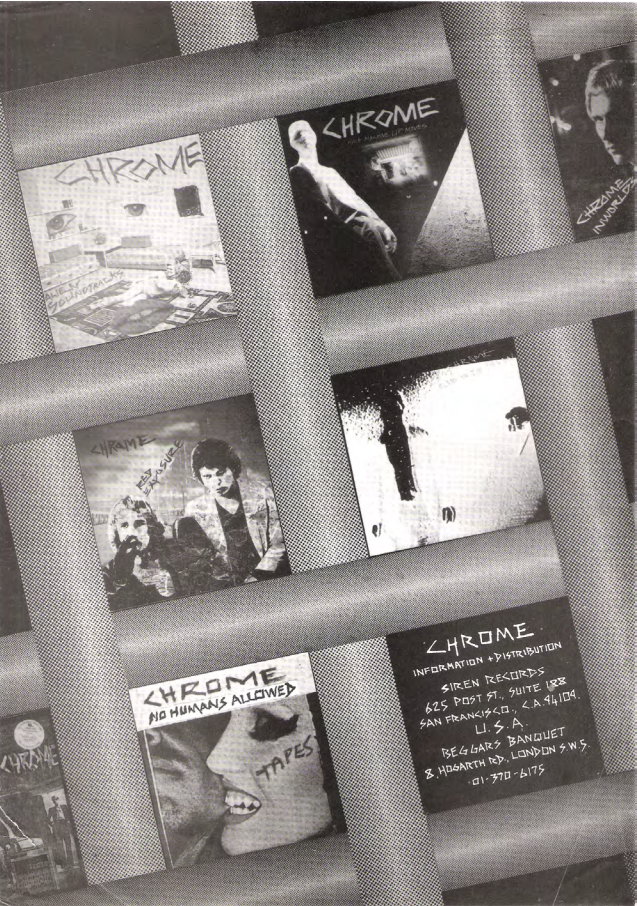
Damon was indeed intoxicated by Fabienne’s glamorous rockstar lifestyle. Her band was quite successful, touring Europe and the US, which left him with a lot of time on his hands. Since Helios had always been itching to get out and play live, Damon opted to overcome his agoraphobic tendencies, and spoke about this decision on the Australian radio program after their first live show in Bologna:

We had sorta burnt out on playing everything ourselves. There was something we couldn’t get and that was the feeling of playing live. We could create this great feeling on record, but we were never in it. If you had a band that could play some of the stuff you were playing earlier, that stuff was live and you were actually playing it, you’d be crazy in your brain, so we wanted to get some of that! It took us a long time to find people we wanted to play with, and who could play with us. And actually, we didn’t even know about playing live until about six months ago, I got this thing, the Moog Liberation, because I had no instrument I wanted to play live. So we weren’t going to play live and then we found this thing.

Oliver DiCicco introduced them to drum/bass duo John and Hilary Hanes (aka the Stench Brothers), who had played with a variety of Bay Area bands, including The Soul Rebels and Pearl Harbor & The Explosions, and they were good to go: a sleek version of the band with a thunderous rhythm section, ready to rocket around the world and blast their infernal message to a live audience, which they did ... twice.



Chromosome Damage, 1986 bootleg on Pentagram Records (allegedly Italian) with live recordings from Bologna.



Original insert from Blood On The Moon

BLOOD ON THE MOON

“We’re going far and hard, we’re going to a thousand places”

Even though Chrome still owed Oliver a couple grand for the earlier sessions, he invited them back to his studio to record their next album as a quartet. Although even more simply produced than *Inworlds*, *Blood On The Moon* is overall bouncier and, if possible, at once dronier and more melodic. Damon had started playing the Moog Liberation, the first commercially-produced keytar synthesizer released in 1980, and, according to Helios, strived to replicate the exact order of his bandmate’s guitar effects pedals when recording his own keyboard parts, rendering the two instruments almost indistinguishable – a huge, blended groan of distortion washing over the comparatively dry but surging pulses laid down by the Stench Brothers. Hilary once explained his involvement with Chrome to me:

Though we were never credited with co-writing the songs, John and I were an integral part of the music’s creation, though not the lyrics. Typically, they would play us an idea for one or more parts of a song, and we’d react musically to their themes. We would then refine the ideas, and often my brother would suggest ways in which my ideas could work better with the drums. Damon and Helios were always very open to our ideas, but frankly they were not too articulate about their ideas. I would say that the idea of the music being a soundtrack for a science fiction movie pervaded virtually everything they wrote, and this was appropriate since their daily lives seemed to have a science fiction quality about them.

There was such a purity to the parts they created, we rarely if ever suggested changes to what they were doing. But there were times when John and I would be jamming on one of our ideas during rehearsal or in the studio, and they would join in. The song “Blood on the Moon” for instance came about when Damon and Helios built parts around what we were doing.

Although *Blood On The Moon* rocks hard and strange, it’s the first full Chrome album conspicuously missing the production peculiarities that endeared early listeners. Gone are the stray voices, puzzling instrumentation, “found” sounds, and out of control drum fills. Rather, the set of songs seems specifically designed for a live performance, and indeed much of it would form the basis of their first show on July 20th, 1981, at the Palasport in Bologna, Italy, where they shared the stage with British goths Bauhaus.

Damon, again from Australian radio:

We didn’t tell anybody it was our first gig. The whole crowd just freaked and, being of the competitive nature that I am, I was really pleased when the national Italian newspaper came out the next day and said we blew the shit out of everybody. It was a three day festival and there were a lot of art bands that didn’t have any beat, and then there was some straighter punk kind of stuff that didn’t have anything going on to really get you out there. Anyway, there was nobody like us and we felt pretty good. So this journalist who’d been following our work from ’78 – he used to be a DJ and had been playing our records since ’78 – he came over to the hotel the day after the gig, and he

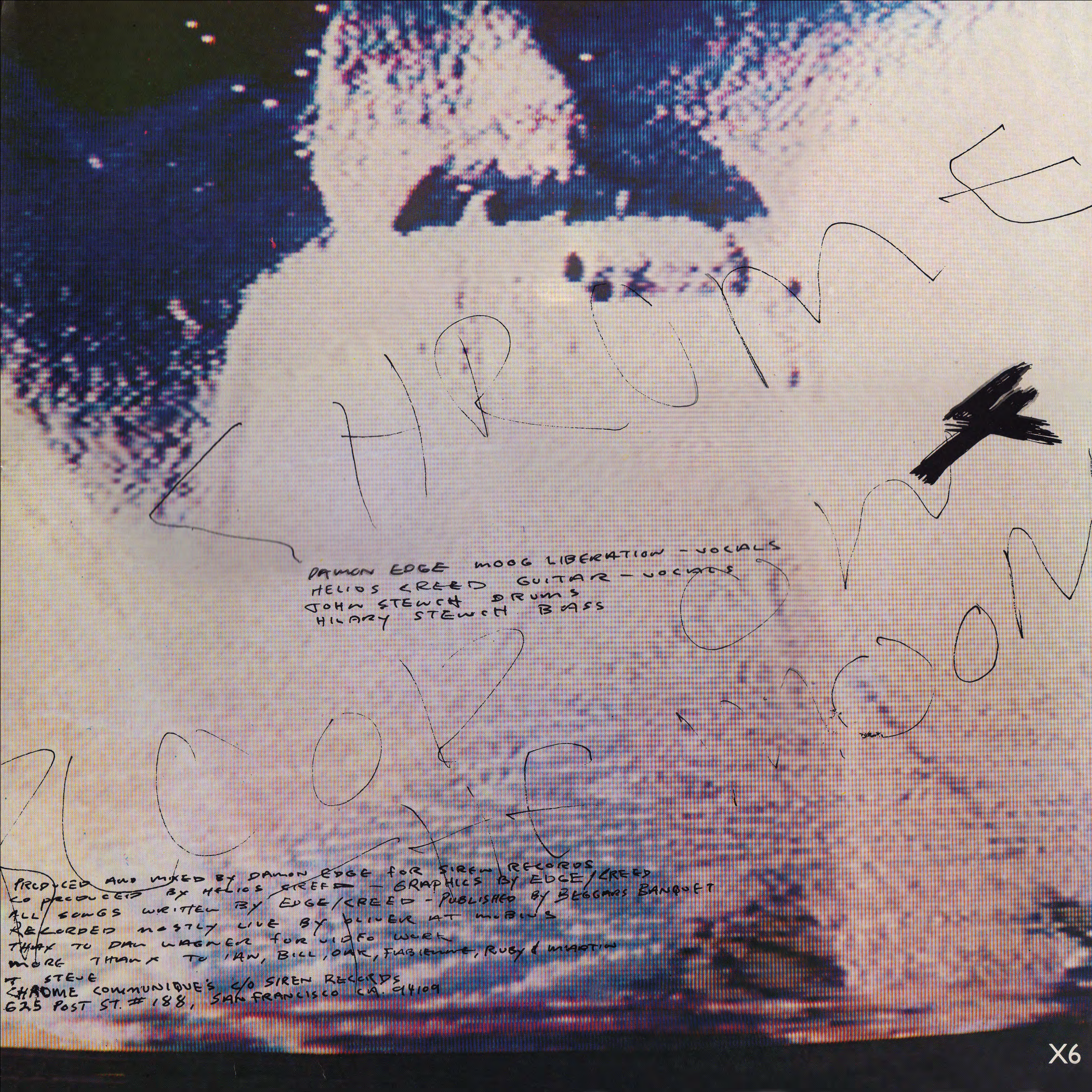


asked us when our first gig was. I said to him, “You really want to know?” He was asking what it was like when we used to play in ’78, and I said to him, “Let me tell you a secret you’re not going to believe. You really want to know?” He’s like, “Yes!” I said, “Last night!” His eyes went about three feet out, on the floor, because we didn’t come off like that, because we were already so confident about what we do.

They played again just a month and a day later at the On Broadway in San Francisco, where the line to get in reportedly stretched down the block. According to Hilary:

Our involvement with them was limited to recording, and we performed at the Festival of Future Ghosts in Bologna, and once in San Francisco. Before that show, I had no idea how many people would be interested to see Chrome live, and was not expecting much. As it turned out, the room was packed to capacity and we had a truly awesome show.

Over the years, audience recorded bootlegs have surfaced, sounding mighty hot, and from what I’m told they were really something to witness. Alas these would be the only live shows Damon and Helios ever played together.



THE NEED

I WANT TO MEET YOU
I WANT TO SEE YOU
WE ARE CONNECTED
YOU WERE SITTING
IN THE MIDDLE OF PROTECTION
WE NEED TO BE THERE
WE NEED TO KNOW
WE NEED TO BE THERE
RIGHT NOW

SEE THEY ARE WAITING
THEY ARE REFRIGERATING
DON'T BE HESITATING
LIVING IN THE MIDDLE
OF A PALM TREE SUMMER
WE NEED TO BE THERE
WE NEED TO KNOW
WE NEED TO BE THERE
RIGHT NOW

INNERVACUUM

ITS TURNING HALF PAST MIDNIGHT
WHERE'S THE GUARANTEE
SHOOTING THRU A VACUUM
RUNNING OUT OF BIRTHDAYS
SAW YOU STANDING THERE
BUILT WITHOUT A FLAW

ITS SOMEONES WORLD
THEY'RE NOT ALL TOGETHER RIGHTEOUS
IF ADJUSTMENTS MADE JUST RIGHT
I HAVE NOT UPTURNED NEW NUMBERS
DON'T TURN YOUR BACK ON ME
LIVING IN THIS LIFE STYLE
I HAVE NOTHING MORE TO SAY
YOU CAN HAVE YOUR FOOLS AND HEROES
YOU CAN HAVE YOUR VICTORY

ITS SOMEONES WORLD
BUILDINGS BUILT LIKE BEACHES
DRIPPING OFF THE LAND
SAND IN THE SOUP BOWL
GRAY DAY ON THE CAMPSITE

ITS SOMEONES WORLD

PERFUMED METAL

WERE GOING SOMEWHERE
CLIMBING ON THE ESCALATOR
WERE GOING SOMEWHERE
WHERE THE STEEL'S GROWING
WERE GOING FROM THE CAR
WERE GOING TO A THOUSAND FACES
WERE GOING TO A THOUSAND PLACES
WERE GOING FAR AND HARD
WERE GOING TO A THOUSAND PLACES
WERE GOING FAR AND HARD
WERE GOING SOMEWHERE

THE OTHERS

FALSE PREDICTIONS
PHONY FORTUNES
BREAK THE NIGHT
SIGN OF THE TIMES

I DON'T REMEMBER STANDING IN LINE BEFORE
BUT I THINK THE SERVICE IMPROVED

BUY TEN, BUY FOUR
APOLLO
RECYCLED SOUL

GET IN THIS LINE

I DON'T REMEMBER STANDING IN LINE BEFORE
BUT I THINK THE SERVICE IMPROVED

THINGS GET SHALLOW
HARD TO SWALLOW
THINGS GET HOLLOW
NOT VALENTINO
I'M NOT LOOKING
STUPID FORTUNES
DON'T NEED STRANGERS
IN MY LIFE

I DON'T REMEMBER STANDING IN LINE BEFORE
BUT I THINK THE SERVICE IMPROVED
SLIMY STRANGER GETTING STRANGER
BREAK THE NIGHT - THERES NO CHANCE
IN A MOMENT - IN AN HOUR
THERE'S NO WAY - THATS ALL I WROTE

INSECT HUMAN
THERE IN VANCOUVER
THERE IN MONTREAL
THERE IN BOSTON
THERE IN CAIRO
THERE IN MOSCOW
THERE IN MADRID
THERE IN DETROIT
THERE IN CHICAGO

WE ARE CONNECTED

THERE IN LONDON
THERE IN MUNICH
THERE IN PARIS
THERE IN HONG KONG
THERE IN L.A.
THERE IN NEW YORK
THERE IN BANGKOK
THERE IN STOCKHOLM

WE ARE CONNECTED

OUT OF REACH

DESTROY THE MEANING IF YOU
WANT TO DO IT ALL AGAIN
WHY NOT DO IT ALL AGAIN
REPLAY - DON'T PUSH THAT
BUTTON OR YOUR MIND BREAKS
CASHIN - BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

I SEE THEM OUT OF REACH
THEY'RE MOVING - GROUND ZERO
DON'T LOOK BACK - THERES
SOMETHING LIVING IN YOUR MIND
IMAGINE LIVING MILES AWAY
DREAMING NOWHERE
LEARNING TO DESTROY

WE ARE CONNECTED

BRAIN SCAN

TAILS OF MOTION
TOUCHING THE GROUND
FELT YOUR HANDS
TOUCH MY FEET
DON'T TOUCH THAT DIAL
MARKED IN THE
SOMETHING TO BE
SOMETHING TO ME
I'M YOUR MAN
TOUCHING THE GROUND
FELT YOUR HANDS
PULLING ME DOWN
WERE IN COMMAND



Damon and Helios, 1980 © 2014 Ruby Ray

"Bing Crosby came back, but you can't see him 'cause he's on the sunset and he's talking"

The next Chrome album is yet a further departure from their earlier working methods, as Damon and Helios were starting to become personally estranged from each other, their music increasingly grave and plodding, at times barely held together by the Stenches' sedulous grooves. Don't get me wrong, *3rd From The Sun* is vintage Chrome and a sonically cohesive, seething maelstrom of metallic goth. But in retrospect all three tracks on side one sound remarkably like what Helios would do on his own in years to come; his voice is now less a maniacal snarl than a sinister hiss, lyrically targeting parents and teachers like an end-times preacher, his mood distinctly apocalyptic. With the exception of the title track, the second side is sung entirely by Damon, and two of his songs "Off The Line" and "Shadows Of A Thousand Years" are among his most "gone" (a term he often used), both spacious, psychedelic dronescapes, the latter featuring his most haunting, enigmatic lyric: a Ballardian, cinematic death-dream in which Bing Crosby shows up as savior. Although unique in Chrome's discography for a variety of reasons, these songs seem to point in the direction Damon would take just after the inevitable break with Helios; both feature the beautiful, haunting voice of Fabienne Shine, who continued to collaborate with her husband on later musical projects.

Although overall a downbeat release for Chrome, nevertheless *3rd From The Sun* would become their highest profile record, attracting many new listeners. The album's single *Firebomb* was their first release to receive unanimous praise in both American and British press, and indeed it's a monstrous little slab of noisy pop — the only Chrome song with an overt automotive metaphor, this creepy paean to the perfect woman/car features Helios at his most seductive, unleashing something like a basso profundo (normally closer to Damon's vocal range). It was also their first single (and album) to be released simultaneously in the US and UK. Success seemed imminent, possibly going to Damon's head ...



FIREBOMB

IN YOUR BURNING TIGHT LEATHER YOUR A FIREBOMB
WITH YOUR HANDLES SMOKING YOUR ON FIRE
NOT A FLAW NOT A MESS YOUR WAY ON TOP
LIKE A CLASSIC CAR A FIREBOMB
YOU GOT YOUR MOTHER WORRIED YOUR FATHER UPTIGHT
IN A FIRE MOON WINTER SHE IS MY LOVE
THE WAY YOU TINGLE MY FLAME YOUR A FIREBOMB
THE WAY YOU BLOW OUT MY BRAIN YOUR A FIREBOMB

FUTURE GHOSTS

FUTURE GHOSTS
STUCK IN TIME SHADOWS UNDER MY PILLOW AWARE ME
WALK INTO THE WINDOW LOOKING DOWN AT THE SHINY METALLIC MONSTER
YOUR SOFT STICKY PEARLS SURROUND MY MIND TO CAPTURE
LOOKING DOWN TO SEE WHATS GOING ON DOWN UNDER THE RUN
TOO MANY FUTURE GHOSTS AND DENSITY ON THE
THAT'S SOMETHING THERE TO REMEMBER THE DOWNSIDE

LOOKING BACK THERE'S SOMETHING THERE TO REMEMBER
TOO MANY FUTURE GHOSTS THAN
LOOKING BACK TO SEE WHAT'S GOING THE DOWNSIDE
LOOKING BACK TO SEE WHAT'S GOING THE DOWNSIDE
THAT LOOK IN YOUR EYE COULD NEVER TURN TO DUST
YEARS AGO YOU KNOW OUR INSTINCTS WERE LEFT ON THE RUN
TOO MANY FUTURE GHOSTS AND DENSITY

ARMAGEDDON

ARMAGEDDON
TAKE IT TO THE TEACHER TAKE IT TO THE PARK
WANT TO MAKE A MILLION IS AT ARMAGEDDON
LIKE TO HEAR THE VOICE IN GOT NOTHING TO DO
GOT NOTHING MORE TO SAY TO YOU GOT NOTHING TO DO
THE LIGHT FIELD GROUND ZERO OUT OF REACH

STANDING IN THE LIGHT FIELD GROUND ZERO
DONT WANT NO PARDON ARMAGEDDON

TECHNICIANS ON THE MOON FEEL SAFER THAN YOU
STANDING LIKE THE TARGETS IN MIST OF ARMAGEDDON
DONT WANT NO PARDON ARMAGEDDON

HEARTBEAT

HEARTBEAT
I SEE HEARTBEAT PHANTOMS KNOWING HEARTBEAT FROM ME
WE SEE SANITY I KNOW WHAT THEY EXPECT FROM ME
THEY'RE SPEAKING OF SANITY THEY'RE HEARING SOCIETY
I HEARTBEAT I KNOW WHAT THEY EXPECT FROM ME
I HEAR THEM THINKING HUMANITY

THEY'RE SCREAMING SOCIETY THEIR THINKING HUMANITY
I HEAR HEARTBEAT I FEEL SANITY
I FEEL HEARTBEAT I HEAR HEARTBEAT
I'M HEARING HEARTBEAT I'M HEARING HEARTBEAT
YOUR THINKING SANITY YOUR HEARING HEARTBEAT

OFF THE LINE

OFF THE LINE
WHEN I'M OFF THE LINE I CAN FEEL YOUR EYES
AND WHEN I TOUCH YOU I'VE TOUCHED EVERYTHING
WHEN I SEE YOU I SEE INTO YOUR EYES
WHEN I SEE YOU THERE IS NO TIME
WHEN I FEEL YOU THERE IS PARADISE

3RD FROM THE SON

370 FROM THE SON
SEEING THEIR CHILDREN CAUGHT UP IN THE LATE
THE PARENTS WERE WORRIED THINKING THEY'D GONE BAD
EVERYTHING THE SAME NOTHING HAS CHANGED
EVERYTHING THE SAME NOTHING HAS CHANGED AT ALL

TAKING THEIR AXES TURNING AN AMBER RED
MAKING A NOISE ABLE TO WAKE THE DEAD
EVERYTHINGS THE SAME NOTHING HAS CHANGED AT ALL CHANGES TOMORROW

LOOKING THROUGH WINDOWS ONLY TO SEE THE RAIN
THE WAY THEY ARE MOVING GROUND ZERO ATTACK MY BRAIN

THE WAY THEY ARE MOVING ON THE BEACH OF THE WAIST
THEY FIND YOU IN THE TIME LAYING ON THE BEACH OF THE WAIST
CAULING TO THE SHADOWS OF MONSTERS DEERING IN THE SAND FOR SLAM SHELLS-SHADOWS OF A TIME
THEY PUT YOU IN CELLUOID FOR THE WAKE AND YOU WAKE UP IN THE MORNING AND YOU SMILE
AND YOU SEE THAT THE TIME IS DEAD BUT THE MAN IS WALKING BUT HE'S ON THE SEA AND YOU CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S TALKING
BING CROSBY CAME BACK BUT HE CAN'T SEE HIM CAUSE HE'S ON SUNSET AND HE'S TALKING SHADOWS OF A THOUSAND YEARS
AND HE'S WEARING A BROWN SUIT WITH A WHITE HAT JOKING AND HE'S GAMBLING'S LIFE A COMPARE BUT HE'S SMOKING A

DE 5E L777

SHADOWS OF A THOUSAND YEARS

SHADOWS OF A THOUSAND YEARS

SHADOWS OF A THOUSAND YEARS
HE WAISTED LAND OUT OF REACH

FOR SLAM SHELLS-SHADOWS OF A THOUSAND
IN THE MORNING AND YOU SMILE

UP IN THE MORNING AND YOU CANT
SEE HIM BUT HE'S ON THE SEA AND YOU CANT
BELIEVE HE'S TALKING

BELIEVE HES TAKEN
SHADOWS OF A THOUSAND
SUNNARS

HE'S ON SUNSET AND HE'S TALKING
TAKING AND HE'S CAMPING

OKING AND HE'S GAMBLING LIKE A
GAMBLER BUT HE'S SMOKING

GAMBLER BUT HE'S SMOKING
SHADOWS OF A THOUSAND YEARS

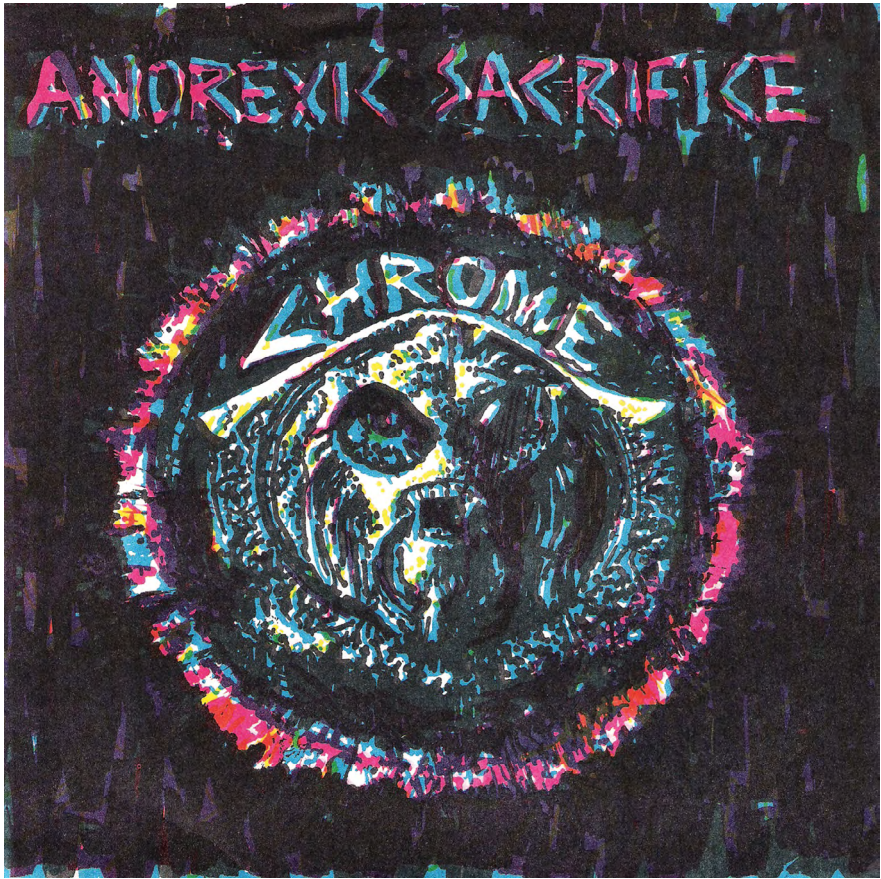
THE CHRONICLES I
THE CHRONICLES II

“Across the winds of time, from the gifts of sight,
we are flying in the night”

3rd From The Sun might have been their final collaboration, except a little while later Damon had the inspiration to contact a local label called *Subterranean Records* about accumulating their past triumphs into a boxed set. Steve Tupper, the label’s owner, liked the idea and suggested they record something new for the occasion, exclusively for release with the box. Damon rallied the troops once more and returned to Hyde Street Studios (where they had recorded *3rd From The Sun*), and the band pounded out *The Chronicles I & II*. The resulting seven tracks (two of them side-long, a first for Chrome) comprised two discs in the six-disc *Chrome Box*, which was available “for the extremely insignificant sum of \$16.00” – a bargain even in 1982.

Although Helios referred to the style they were pursuing at this time as “modern gothic,” the single *Anorexic Sacrifice* has a diabolical edge, the closest Chrome would come to a commercial metal sound. Two tracks from Chronicles in particular represent high points of this venture: Damon’s “Wings Born In The Night” is pretty far out and considerably less repetitive than anything he would ever do again, while Helios’ “Gehenna Lion” seems to follow the apocalyptic mood of “Armageddon,” a fairly ambitious track from the previous album. In an interview with Steve Tupper from around this time, Helios spoke freely about his state of mind and inspiration for this song:

Chrome started out as sort of ... psychedelic inspired. We were into effects, little tricks and stuff which developed further ... from basically a frenzied psychedelic era to a music headed toward the past. What I do, I’m not really conscious of, but when I write lyrics I know what it is. It’s hard to describe.



For example, Hendrix just wrote unconsciously, but it was a message to a lot of people and to himself. That’s similar to what I feel is happening with our stuff. I’m following it into a renaissance of its own, you know what I mean? After the great established mutations of burnouts ...

We got totally sick of the industrial cold wave bombardment that everybody else was doing and decided to make a left hand turn. So we got this gothic, ancient, modern inspiration and are dwelling in the medieval dungeons of somewhere else. That isn’t really in vogue right now, but we were never in vogue anyway. We’re telling a sort of story, as if you were going on an experience with us, dying with us. Death is just the toil of life, struggle to survive. You can feel it in the music, there’s no overindulgent rehearsal sessions. We just basically get the inspirations through stories, sort of a modern fairy tale as if this whole big ugly world is just going to disappear and we’re going to end up in the garden of Eden. It’s an old story, but it’s as if life turned into that, we’re projecting that. Like the end of “Gehenna Lion,” right? The Gehenna Lion is the spirit of death. It identifies itself, right? You go through the identification with yourself, but you’re gonna die. You go through Gehenna, which is the realm of death, the battleground, and you end up in Eden. Very simple, right?

That’s where the whole Chrome trip ends up, right there at “Gehenna Lion” where it wipes out even small record companies. That’s the ancient story that goes back to the 1500s ... I projected the battle as won at the most bitter, darkest moment. Desolation. Then all of a sudden it breaks and everything’s okay. Total white magic. Things don’t happen unless you project it ... The last thing we did, *The Chronicles I & II*, was the most fanatical, insane, positive projection as we could put out. The records before that were more sub-conscious than this ...

Where’s all the magic in the world? Why has it been taken away? Why can’t we go to a concert and see the music float in the air like in the ’60s? Why is it LSD isn’t as beautiful as it used to be? Why are things so dense, dirty, ugly and frustrated? All those questions. Where is the warm, peaceful place where we want to be? It’s been taken away.

When I do acid, I talk to spirits, they communicate with me. For some reason, I’m like a medium. Last August a spirit came down to me, this very, very strong spirit and called itself the Lion, the spirit of death, and the main mover. I feared it because its thoughts merged with mine and it said I was going to write this song and I flipped. I said, “You never called on me to do this work before. Who are you, are you Christ?” I would talk to this thing and it favored me to do this particular job. It’s very real ... it was even able to talk through me. It had a very different voice than mine, a stronger voice. It let me see my history on a human scope; spiritually, that I was cool. He said, “Start writing a song and I will guide you,” and I wrote “Gehenna Lion.” Words were just flowing into my consciousness. I changed a few of the lyrics consciously to make them right as a story. I could see what he tried to make me write. The music isn’t like any that I ever wrote before. What that song is doing out in the world, only he knows. He works through other people too. He wanted me to identify himself in this music and he called himself the spirit of death. He said, “This is the time, this is the year, we’re preparing for ’83.”



Helios, 1980 © 2014 Ruby Ray



Damon and Helios, 1980 © 2014 Ruby Ray

INTO THE EYES OF THE ZOMBIE KING

*“On dead rock, with no clock,
Found a peace.”*

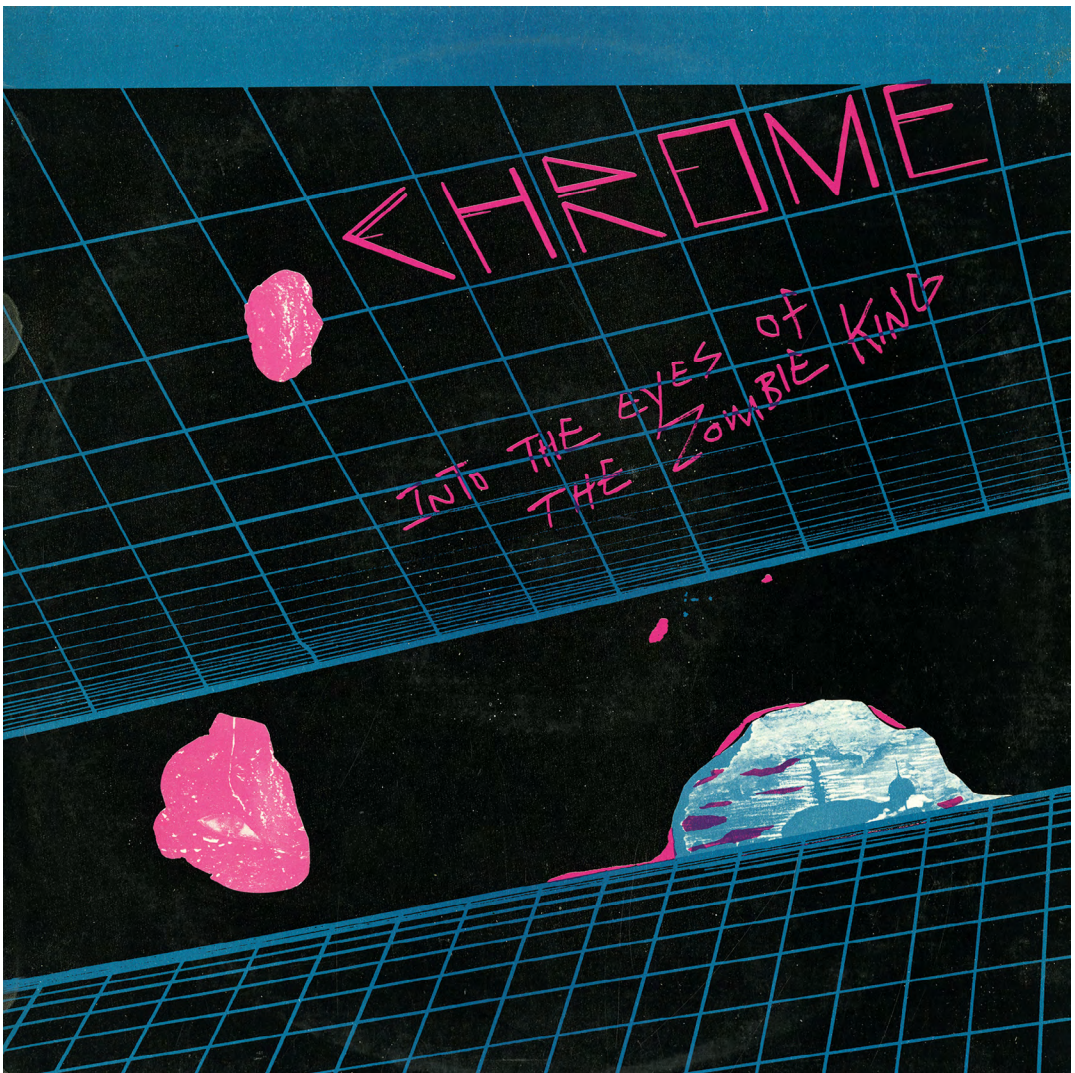
In 1983, soon after recording *The Chronicles*, Damon and Fabienne moved to Paris together, where she introduced him to drummer Patrick Imbert and bassist Renaud Thorez (who played together in a French group called Logo, and had recorded some demos and a single with Fabienne for the label *Vogue*), and also guitarist Remy Devillard, who rehearsed a few old Chrome songs for a large concert at the Lyon Cultural Center (recorded on stereo cassette tape and eventually released as *The Lyon Concert*). Having wrested legal control of the Chrome name and catalog, Damon put out an abbreviated version of *The Chronicles* called *Raining Milk*, and proceeded to record a string of albums, some brilliant and others a bit bloodless, all very weird. Even without Helios, *Into The Eyes of The Zombie King* is pure Chrome madness, at once eerie and whimsical; whatever you may think of this period, the French Chrome started off with a bang!

Patrick and Reynaud played without any contract, nor any contact with Damon’s record label, and never considered themselves actual members of Chrome, but simply musicians hired to record with Damon in the studio. Damon himself paid them directly for their performances; their fees were minimal, and they had only 48 hours of studio time to record each album. There were no rehearsals, so they’d arrive in the studio without knowing the songs and work them out on the spot. According to Renaud Thorez (from an interview with Lars G. Tängmark):

It was nerve-wracking and physically challenging to keep up the intensity of recording so many songs in so little time, following the chord structures established by Remy, who found himself thrown into an important role on the albums. Damon wasn’t really a musician in the technical sense, but more of a designer of ambience and sound, and Remy had to understand, translate, and construct the pieces. He used Remy for a while and then moved on. I think Remy knew that, as strong as his contribution was, it was not a lasting one. Damon was a sort of traveler, regularly drawing on other people’s energies to feed his work.

Like the Stench brothers, Patrick and Renaud had played together for a long time already, so they had a cohesive bass and drum sound, and the rhythm tracks were recorded in a single day. Although they used a click track to establish a steady tempo, Damon didn’t want to use drum machines or sequencers, and thought the result was more effective than if the rhythms were programmed. Actually, this click track was often kept in the mix, engineer Philippe Darnaud doctoring the sounds with a number of effects (phasing, reverb, echo, harmonizer), and adding all Damon’s vocals and synth parts afterwards. Patrick often overdubbed roto-toms, but Damon instructed them all to play “mechanically,” very cold and without any interpretation other than strictness and punch. The slightest deviation, or attempt at playing with more feeling, was immediately condemned by Damon: “Renaud, please, just play like a machine!”

This lineup played on four albums with Damon, who over the years would create new songs by re-assembling parts of these original recordings – for example, the extra tracks on *The Lyon Concert* are derived from a single song on *Zombie King*, and the 1989 album *Alien Soundtracks II* is almost entirely built up from earlier rhythm tracks. During this period, Damon controlled everything on his productions, even cre-



ating his own album covers (which sometimes feature his name as many as 15 times). According to Renaud, he lived like a shut-in, and his apartment was always kept in total darkness.

The stories you hear about Damon are true, he was a very strange person. In Paris, he rarely went out, and always wore dark sunglasses. He was discreet about drugs, but it was obvious that he was always under their influence, and he also took neuroleptic medication, smoked a lot of cigarettes, and drank only white wine and milk. He almost never ate.

He had a Honda sport coupe, and took me for a spin one night. This experience gave me one of the biggest scares of my life, as he drove very violently and fast. I don’t know if it’s true, but he explained that he had learned to drive race cars and competed in the US. Our contact was limited, as he didn’t speak a word of French, and didn’t express himself much. He seemed to be in another world, very introverted, jealous and possessive of Fabienne.

I don’t know how to categorize the music Damon produced other than to say that it reflected his own image; that is to say, strange, without concession, brutal and original. He was a true artisan who didn’t allow for any outside input. He defined his music as “cold wave” and didn’t seem to care whether a larger audience appreciated it or not. He only seemed to want to produce a lot of albums without compromise or constraint. I don’t think his songs had any sort of commercial success. Damon Edge and Chrome were entirely underground phenomena in Europe, only known by a marginal group of youths,



Damon, 1980 © 2014 Ruby Ray

whose number I couldn't estimate. Our appearance alongside Damon Edge was brief. Afterwards, we carried on our main musical activities.

Shortly before his tragic death from heart failure in August, 1995, Damon explained to Nez Zendik what inspired his music:

I think it really began during my first trip to Europe. I was going nuts living in Los Angeles, you know, so I just told my father, "Look, my brain is gonna blow up and explode blood all over this room if I don't get out of here." So, he got me a flight to Europe. I remember the first sight of Europe I had, we flew into a rainbow over Portugal, on my way to Madrid – that was really fantastic. And these little boats and little houses, you know, along the coast. It just looked like a fun place. I've always liked it there.

Anyway, I flew to Madrid because this friend of mine was there. I bought a bike, a Bultaco Dirt Scrambler, and he had a bike, so we cruised down to Morocco and went into Fez. When we were first in Morocco, we're driving down these mountain roads and there's no lights at all, they're not paved, you're driving through rocks in the middle of the night! My friend had the brightest headlight on his BSA, so he would lead the way. And I remember him yelling back to me, "Rock!" and it just missed me by like four inches when he said it. It wasn't a rock; it was a goddamn boulder in the middle of the road (laughs)! So, I yelled back to this other guy behind us, and I hear this crashing sound, you know – he went over the cliffs (laughs). I mean, he was okay but it kinda freaked us out.

So, then we went back to Valencia, Spain, and we were indulging in some refreshments in our room. I'd been hearing all this Arabic music while I was in Morocco, you know. And suddenly, that night I started hearing it in my head with this really solid 4/4 beat behind it. And these songs were just coming to me. I was listening to this music in my head, and that's when I conceived of the idea ... I'm sure you've noticed that there's a lot of atmosphere in the sound and production of Chrome, and a lot of 3 and 8 note melodies and this atonal drone, driven by some real hot rhythm sections. That experience pretty much gave it the atmospheric quality that I needed, the inspiration.

Interviewing Damon for *Another Room*, Ray Farrell had asked him whether he believes in God. After a pause, Damon replied:

I'm sensitive to the life forces. Terming it God or something, however big or small, the old term of God sounds so ... What we're doing more than anything else is trying to figure out what's going on. To us it's based on intuition. Constantly gotta be ready to pull stuff out of the obvious. These trucks come out here and start digging away, I stick mics out the window. The sounds of the albums formulate as we're doing them, we don't worry about it. All kinds of experiences.

Maybe we shouldn't get into it now but I drowned once ... teaching someone to sail in Majorca, Spain, I fell out. I saw the light flash. I've had a lot of stuff like that. I've been really close to dying about eight times. Scares the fuck out of me. It gives you this incredible rush. It hasn't happened for about two years. I almost got annihilated by a semi truck, but that wasn't a positive rush. Drowning was ... You just get real light headed after you've gulped down all



this water. And then, God, just total peace. I was looking through the water and my hands. I remember seeing the sunlight. Just like everything that was ever good just went by. It was really a trip ... You can only panic so long. You can't breathe, you're just gone ... I woke up on the beach. This guy was watching the whole thing from the shore. I didn't know it. He just dove in and got me. I woke up in hysterics. I couldn't believe I was alive. People looking at me. It was like being born again. I'm back!

Although Damon became increasingly agoraphobic and alienated, spending his final years in LA as an alcoholic loner, he was one of the last genuine weirdos of rock, and his singular, obsessive musical and aesthetic vision steered Chrome on its varied course for over two decades and some 20 albums.

Helios continues to play music, keeping both the name and spirit of Chrome alive. (helios-creed.com)

Judging by how many times these records have been re-issued, it seems evident that time has vindicated Chrome. Will this unique and influential band ever be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame? Somehow I doubt it. Too gone!

– Neil Martinson
San Francisco, CA 2014

