

CHROME

The Communication Warriors

By D. W. Person

The world it seems is at the most critical point in its existence. Daily, the media is full of militarist posturings and pre-war sabre-rattling as we drift closer, ever closer to instant population center deep fry. Living in what increasingly appears to be the final era of humankind, everyone and everything is affected by this mad, headlong rush to eternity. And, like the band on the Titanic, to serenade us on our way out, Damon Edge and Helios Creed of Chrome are waiting in the wings.

Before Chrome, Damon had been an art school performance artist, manipulating and mixing media and employing visual and audio sensations, but with no extensive background in music. On the other hand, Helios was a musician, playing original medieval-esque ballads in small clubs and coffeehouses, but not especially accustomed to the use of strange distortions or seeking grander musical schemes. Meeting, they discovered that their talents, backgrounds and, most importantly, their interests complimented each other. So Chrome was born.

Indeed the result of their collaboration, Chrome, the music, has, over the last four years, taken on a life of its own, almost independent of its creators. It is simultaneously ancient and modern (prehistoric tribal grunt, Druid alchemy, Gothic spires, warlock incantations, psychedelic tangents, metal mania, 80's electrodrone); combining a basic primal energy and etherial force and employing levels of lofty romanticism and street violence. They sum up their sound with one phrase: "Really alien."

Chrome is music for 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.

Their lyrics are processed and obscured virtually beyond recognition. Damon seeks "to keep lyrics elusive because they mean more that way. Anytime that 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."

Often their inspiration is first conjured up on a visual level and later translated into audio imagery. "If I hear a sound," explains Damon, "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."

Helios views the process more mystically: "Vibrations of notes have different ramifications. There are certain keys that we mostly write in. 'E' is one of the major notes that Chrome deals with. 'E' is in tune with the genitals, and is also the vibrations of change. 'E' rules the sign of Scorpio, which me and Damon both are, and that's the sign of death and rebirth. When music is in 'E', usually people are more sexually inspired than they are in any other key. Now, 'D' is the vibration

that is at the rate people should be on when they're aware of visions that the music will be transcending—to them; visions of rebirth kinds of energies. 'D' is a 'higher' level of vibration."

Downstairs at Mobius Music on an overcast September afternoon, Damon and Helios are laying down some tracks for their next album. Damon is deciding on the flange rate for his keyboard track on a very oceanic, drone song (which it turned out was later discarded), while Helios sits in a corner of the control room, busily scribbling words in a page, lyrics about being alone in the danger zone. That zone is the city, the USA, the techno-crazy places where the shit will most intensely descend. In about ten minutes, Helios will go into the studio and record those lyrics. Meanwhile, Damon realizes that there's something missing from this other song. He can't come up with any lyrics for it—he needs some guitar melodic lead to guide him through. He summons Helios to lay down said lead. Suddenly Damon sees his task, and the lyrics, rhymed, spacey and logical stream from him.

This is largely how the production process occurs. The basic riffs are usually discovered beforehand, but their studio work is far from the sterile constrictions brought on by over-rehearsal and rote recitation. It is accurate to say that in many cases, they don't know what the song is until they finish it in the studio. And they only use about half of what they do. ["I feel it like a scientist," *Zombie Warfare*.] And so it goes, as they keep laying down track after track of intertwining sound images.

The final product is a dense jungle of song, rich with fiery ornamentations, heavy chords and obscured lyrics swinging about before your eyes. When satisfied that the song paints the kind of picture they want, they set at the piece with a razorblade and a suitcase full of random sounds: TV show soundtracks, modern industry at work, sound effects records, and, who knows... because they slow it down, speed it up, reverse it, splice it around and EQ the shit out of it. In the end, many of the sounds they include are virtually unrecognizable.

Last year, they turned about slightly, and modified much of their violent street-life element in favor of the more melodic, dreamier realms. "We just felt that we had projected a lot of darkness without relief," Damon sighs, "and we were sort of sick of it. We just had to get something else out of our systems. We'd done *Allen Soundtracks*, *Half Machine Lip Moves*, *Subterranean Modern*, and all that stuff was just really, you know, 'heavy gestapo rock,' or whatever the English press called it. Like we had been getting so much shit and putting it back out that we were getting it back. 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



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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."

They released their second album, *Alien Soundtracks*, in 1977 on their own label, Siren Records. It received favorable writeups in the international rock press, who called it a masterpiece and ten years ahead of its time, and encouraged them to record more. *Alien Soundtracks* is comprised of 11 songs, each with two or three different theme sections, moving straight through these sections, without reference back to any original theme; a fairly radical structure for the genre they were entering, definitely not arranged with commercial airplay in mind.

A year later, their third LP, *Half Machine Lip Moves* assumed much greater dimensionality and texture. People liked it because it didn't feel like anything else they'd ever heard. Listening to *Half Machine Lip Moves* feels like you're doing something almost naughty—something you'd never want to tell your parents about. A couple of tracks, "TV as Eyes" and "Abstract Nympho," became minor hits in England, Germany and on U.S. college stations, bringing them further notoriety and interest from major American and English independents. They recorded three cuts as part of the Ralph Records compendium *Subterranean Modern*, along with Tuxedomoon, the Residents and MX-80 Sound seven months later.

Last year, they recorded two more works: an ep called "Read Only Memory" and their fourth album called *Red Exposure*. These two are, in a sense, complementary works. Done around the same time, they are the two opposite ends of the Chrome continuum. "Read Only Memory" is an integrated piece that could easily be found in a library of modern electronic music, alongside of Cage, Stockhausen and the University of Iowa's Corn Price. It is an ambient series of atonal repetitions, some generated live (guitar, bass, drums), some recorded from either media (radio, TV) and some synthesized—then feedback, echoed, reversed, flanged, the works. They refer to R.O.M. as "the soundtrack." Another planet. A purist display of Chrome's rapport with the tape-speed know and the razorblade. Don't listen to it—just put it on and do something else. Let it play for your attention.

Red Exposure is just the opposite. It is comprised mostly of fairly melodic songs, and somewhat more traditional arrangements than what we've been used to from the group before. *Red Exposure* is a statement of strategy. Positive energy. It was around the time of recording R.E. when they realized that to flirt too actively with the negative side was to flirt with death. R.E. is affirmation, particularly on the heels of the slightly satanic R.O.M. Where previously they had recorded with a half-track and a four-track in a house, R.E. marked their entrance into the world of sixteen-track in a professional studio.

Their new album, *Room 101*, integrates the recent, more melodic aesthetic, while stepping up the alien, gone, out-there element. It's more refined and organized, but it still flaunts those wonderfully rough-hewn edges... a modern blend. It's the thickest and rawest they've been yet. A

return to the *Half Machine Lip Moves* kind of energy. A high-volume power-trip, yet still another departure. For the old is dead and it's time to get new. It's also time to get live.

Sometimes before the end of '81, Chrome will be a live band, some four years and six records after their beginning. Damon says that "being able to play what we play live was always a limitation to us—to play live you can only do so much, and 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."

When asked about what music they like, Chrome mentions artists such as Killing Joke, Snakefinger, Gary Numan, Neu and Bowie. Helios says he likes virtually no one anymore and suggests he began recording his music just to have something to listen to. He did, however, say something about culling a certain vocal style from Frank Sinatra.

Elusiveness is a significant part of what's compelling about Chrome. They've never played live, at any given time they're almost impossible to locate—they're in a world by themselves—and don't really care to participate with the rest of the culture.

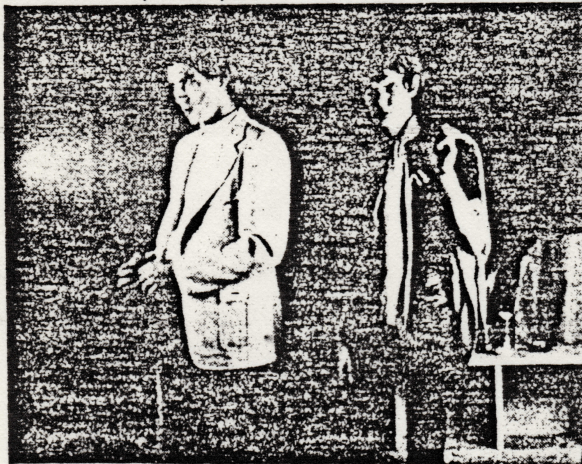
"We listen to the things we're not supposed to be listening to," Damon shrugs, "we don't listen to the shit in our genre too much... we just work on what we're doing. It's nicer that way. It's more real to me because we don't even care what anybody does at all. I find to listen or even to care about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

Until recently, the band has, through its own label, done all of its own promotion and distribution of its records. Last year, after "Read Only Memory" and *Red Exposure*, they were picked up by the English independent, Beggars Banquet (whose WEA connections provide wide European distribution). To date, Beggars Banquet has pressed over 30,000 copies of *Red Exposure* and it's been distributed around the world.

Damon doesn't find it at all ironic that a San Francisco band had to cross the Atlantic to get a contract. "I just found it normal because I grew up in Hollywood and I know what the music industry is like there and I didn't even bother to go to LA. I went to England." But he does perceive an "interesting paradox" in the fact that, despite licensing, "since the beginning, the demand by distributors was a lot bigger in Europe for us. There's something about us that appeals to Europeans, I don't know what it is. We just seem to touch something... that..."

Beggars' top selling artist today is Gary Numan. Their second seller is Chrome.

A great part of their success appears to be the result of the deliberate nature of their business tactics. They rush into no "instant, temporary deals." They have a vision of how they want their ultimate future to look. And what they don't do is very important to them. To preserve the integrity of that position, there must be a little defensiveness, a certain reclusive anonymity, because an inherent quality of warfare pervades the whole nature of this business. Chrome are communication warriors. □



CHROME: The Communication Warriors 1¢
This Frisco-based duo just may be pioneering the new human type as they serenade i
apocalypse. Get yourself a dose of lethal radiation as the gutter merges with the ether: a
watch the Golden Gate Bridge turn to tapioca. Brain damage by D. W. Person



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