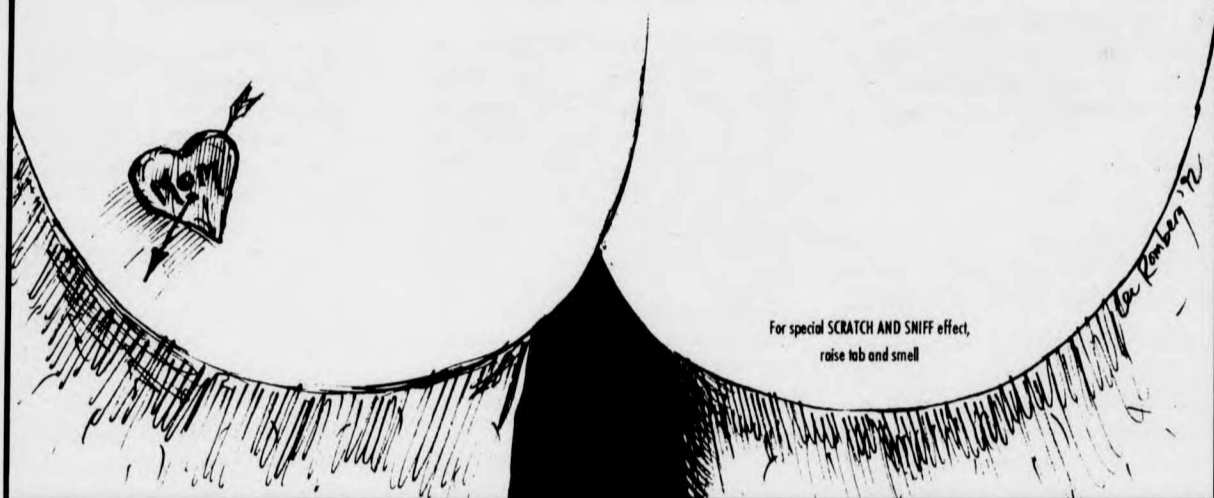


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Spinal Tap



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Spinal Tap gives fans a Break

by Eric Alper

PREVIEW

Legendary band Spinal Tap's new album, *Break Like the Wind*, is getting a lot of pre-publicity. Excal writer Eric Alper tries to figure out why.

Join me for a docu-article... a rock-article, if you will, on Spinal Tap's latest album, tentatively titled *Break Like the Wind*.

And you — in the back — stop snickering.

Conceived in the late 70s by Michael McKean, Harry Shearer and Rob Reiner and created in the early 80s, the phenomenon they call Spinal Tap has actually outlasted many of the bands it was originally intended to satirize. While other acts' pathetic, overblown works have long since been found in delete bins around the world, the Tap's small talent has, like a ghastly snowball, grown in stature to the point where it is now virtually a collective rock n' roll memory. What started out to be a laugh turned out to be a cult.

The laughs in the film *This is Spinal Tap* have obvious sources: the scene in which Nigel Tufnel shows off his guitar collection to director Marty DiBergi was suggested by a similar scene featuring Jimmy Page in Led Zeppelin's *The Song Remains the Same*. DiBergi himself was based by director Reiner on Martin Scorsese in *The Last Waltz*.

Polymer Record head Sir Denis Eton-Hogg, meanwhile, was partly inspired by ex-Polygram president Robert Stigwood (producer of *Saturday Night Fever*). And the fateful studio problem that precipitates the Tap split was closely modelled on the Troggs' tape, the legendary bootleg recording which captured the group's vain attempt to produce a song without Larry Page (which included over 150 "fucks" in four and a half minutes).

The last I heard, an article claimed the title track of the new album will be "a kind of Kansas-style, very deep, probing song." Also included on the album is "Rainy Day Sun," which was, of course, the original B-side to "(Listen To The) Flower People;" "The Majesty of Rock" — "our new anthemic item;" and "The Sun Never Sweats," the title song to their concept album about the rise and fall of the British Empire, seen as a love affair.

"What we're saying with this al-

bum is, 'We're back. Come back with us. Join us, won't you, in a consumer sense,'" the band's press release announces.

But first they have to find a drummer. Tap hasn't had the best of luck with their drummers. Their original drummer, John "Stumpy" Pepys, died "in a bizarre gardening accident." Their second combusted onstage, as did his replacement Mick Shrimpton. Oh, and one died when he choked on vomit. (But it might not have been his own.)

Does life imitate art or what?

So Tap combined their reunion press conference recently with an open audition for a new drummer amid the splendid rock splendour of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

A mysterious ad had been placed in *Billboard* late last year: "Drummer died, need new one. Must have no immediate family." Over 400 genuine rock n' roll hopefuls were lured for the chance to play one number with Spinal Tap in the first date of the new tour.

What the band is looking for in their new backbeatmeister is the ability to count to four. Several times in a row.

The first auditioner came clad in a body-concealing, flame-resistant suit (insurance against the fiery flames of former Tap drummers) and could certainly count to four. This was not entirely surprising once it was revealed — halfway through "Big Bottom" — that it was Mick Fleetwood of Fleetwood Mac.

Other celebrity audition-attenders included Stephen Perkins of Jane's Addiction and former Go-Go's Gina Shock. The winner (I guess one can call it that) will be announced sometime in the next few months.

Spinal Tap's three surviving members, rhythm guitarist David St. Hubbins (the "fire"), lead guitarist Nigel Tufnel (the "ice"), and cucumber-concealing bassist Derek

Smalls (the "lukewarm water"), appeared on the Westwood One Radio Network, saying they want to reclaim their rightful place as a footnote in rock history. *This is Spinal Tap* had shown the band "in a light that was not totally accurate. We've heard that people see the film and laugh."

"DiBergi saw us from the outside," St. Hubbins concluded. "We have no choice but to see us from the inside. And it's not ruddy funny."

Given the controversy surrounding the group's last album, *Smell the Glove*, would the record company allow *Break like the Wind* to carry a warning sticker?

"Yeah," St. Hubbins, "but it won't be about lyrical content. It'll be a warning that you'll not be able to return this for money."

Among those producing tracks for the Tap's new effort are Danny Kortchmar (Don Henley), Niko Bolas, T. Bone Burnett (ex-Hall and Oates member), Dave Jordan and Steve Lukather. Smalls explains the multiproducer approach: "We're hedging our bets. Because one of them might get it right, we figure."

The band has mixed feelings about breakthroughs in recording technology. "There's a lot of things in the studio they wouldn't let us touch," says St. Hubbins. "Anything that says 'digital,' they would say, 'Now you stay away from that.'"

Spinal Tap's influence is still seen today, artistically, if not musically. Did anyone happen to notice Metallica's latest album is like Nigel's indisputable analysis of *Smell the Glove*'s amended sleeve design? How much more black could they be? None. None more black.

So what does all this mean? Lock up your children. And your grandmothers.

Ian Faith, the band's manager, is dead. Viv ("Have a good time...all the time") Savage has left. Nigel's pastoral piano piece, "Lick My Love Pump" has long been — er — combusted.

The future is now.

With a new album, a tour under wraps and videos to be filmed, people should envy them. *They* envy them.

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