

by Dragos Ruiu

"Pst. Hey you. Yeah! You want the latest lowdown on your favorite group?" That's what that one section of the magazine rack always asks. **Teen Beat**, **Creem** and all those other magazines you try to ignore.

But, rolling up the pants and wading in the muck we find that there are some magazines that have actual content. Yep, **Rolling Stone**, **Spin**, and **Graffiti**, the latter being included because it is Canadian and barely manages to elevate itself above the fanzines (read drivels).

# Rock magazines roll with punches

So let the battle begin... In this corner, we have that music industry giant, that ferocious machine that can crush a budding musician's career in the type strokes... **Roooling Stooooone**. (The yuppies in the crowd go crazy.)

In the other corner, we have the challenger, the young upstart, published by a revolutionary following in the footsteps of his father... **SPIN**. (A bunch of guys wearing black coats clap.)

And, in the other corner, fresh from Canada's media limbo, that master of slick trendiness... **Graffiti**. (The high school kids roar.)

So in our triangular ring the champions slug it out:

## Round 1: The initial assault.

Facing three covers, we notice a lot of similarities. All three parade the names of the major groups that are mentioned (sometimes only passing) within. All three have the endearing mugs of some musician or ensemble against a plain colored background on their cover.

**Rolling Stone** even bandies its pretentiousness on the front cover. For example take: Tina, **THE ROLLING STONE INTERVIEW**. Yes, the only interview you should ever read. The end all in interviews. If you even want to read another interview, piss off, we don't want rabble like you buying our magazine.

**Spin** on the other hand is just raring for a fight, "Boy George, The Full Story", "Atlanta, The Suppressed Investigation". Even the logo, stark black and white the colors of rebellion, reminds you of punk. Rebels on the loose...

**Graffiti** is slick. The cover looks like an ad. It assaults you with the sharpest logo, the most names, the glossiest paper. Its cover invites you to shell out cash.

2 points to **Graffiti** for slickness, 1 to **Spin**, the goose to **Stone** for boring stuffiness (by comparison).

## Round 2: General content.

**Rolling Stone** is yuppie material. All their articles are about big commercial stars, except for the stories about how Pepsi is better than Coke. (Next to the suspiciously large, full page Pepsi ad.) And except for the book excerpts, and except for the New VCR guide, and except for the fashion in skiing pieces and except for the piece about television cop shows it is about commercial music. AM stuff.

If you get the impression this has turned into a variety magazine, you're right. Only 60% of the articles are about music, and ones that are musical, are pretentious.

This magazine has a huge influence on the industry, and they sure as hell know it and let you know it. They are very important to themselves, and it is pervasive in the style of writing. Everything is written from a holier than thou ivory tower. When they don't like something, you had better agree, because they know.

When MTV had the gall (oh my!) to put their reporter in the media tent with the other journalists at some show, they slagged and raked them over the coals. Just because they did not get preferential treatment.

The writing is very good, but the interviews are all question and answer type things (Blechh!). The writing is also centered on the good ole U.S. of A. This can grow tiring to a Canadian reader.

You will not find interviews with alternative bands. Paul Simon, Paul McCartney yeah, but the Butthole Surfers are covered only when hell freezes over. (Interestingly enough, they were mentioned in both the other mags.) If yuppies like it so does **Stone**. It's a kind of Entertainment Tonight off a printing press, down to the best-seller charts at the end.

**Spin** comes from the son of **Bob Guccione**

(of **Penthouse** fame), **Bob Guccione Jr.** He funded it, he edits it. He has his father's angry blood. Jr. is always fighting with someone; Jerry Falwell currently. He will stand up for all music. In **Spin** you will find the most anarchistic blend of media coverage to come out in print. Boy George next to Scratch Acid next to Kool & the Dudes.

And these guys are hip, they have the lowdown on what's going on in the scariest places. They have heard of records that exist in quantity one. If alternative music is your

whole bag, stop reading, **Spin** wins. If not, you might not like wading through the angry editorials, and the bizarroid records.

**Spin** content sometimes makes news itself. They uncovered the whole scam behind Live Aid, and received a lot of media hate for digging around in such a sainted cause. If an institution is sacrosanct, **Spin** will attack it and the fireworks will go off — and it's vicarious fun to watch sometimes.

As far as content goes, most of it is interesting. Unfortunately, sometimes they go way beyond interesting and get very strange, and the reader feels really lost. Like there is some-



thing he does not know about. But it is intelligent weirdness. (Is it okay then?) And they do seem to know Canada exists. (Gasp)

**Graffiti** is Canadian (might as well flog this Canada thing, you never know when the government will come out with Canadian content regulations for campus papers) and as a CANADIAN magazine, focuses on the groups that do come here, and we listen to here, in the frozen north.

What they write about those groups, well... succinctly put, it's fluff. But, *Trendy Fluff*. It sort of reminds you of Erica Ehm on **MuchMusic**. She picks interesting music, but when it comes to talking about it, she should have been blonde. Interestingly enough, cute little old Erica is a contributing editor, and she writes like she talks.

Somewhere there probably have to be some strong ties between **Graffiti** and **MuchMusic**, the two always seem to be 'plugging' each other. The whole magazine is **MuchMusic** in print, with a whole bunch-o-trendiness tossed in for good measure. It has sections on trendy fashions for those chic punks and big primary print boxes explaining that MTV stands for Music TV as well as sidebars like "What People Did Before Music Videos: In the 60's". No 1. was READ MAGAZINES! (Wow, mom did you really do that? Gee.)

You get the impression (impression meaning the mark that is left after a blunt object, repeatedly) that this magazine is geared to morons or high school preps who need to know what's hot and what's not. You can easily picture the Students' Council types sneaking back to their locker to read this and know what group they should like now to stay trendy.

Most magazines that have such a target are easy to knock, but **Graffiti** isn't. They manage to stay above fanzine gossip mongering and even occasionally have a few interesting tidbits. Above all it is too seamless to really hate. It is put together like one big video. It is visually interesting, but there is something that grates your nerves when you read it. You feel talked down to.

You want to dismiss it as teeny bopper junk but then you come across sections like Psycho Video reviews (Yep, reviews of the worst gore films ever. So bad they are actually good.) and other features like the new movie about Sid Vicious and Nancy, and a really neat piece about underground, New York, club life. If you can figure it out write us.

**Spin** gets 3 for fun rebellion and **Graffiti** and **Rolling Stone** get 1. Fanzines get 0's. (or is that are)

## Round 3: The reviews.

**Rolling Stone's** reviews are high handed and too stuffy. Very commercial. You know if these guys like it, it'll make bucks. They review John Cougar Mellonhead (ahem, camp! Where do little melons go in the summer? Ba-Bum-Chinp!), the Eurythmics, Madonna, Cindy, Bruce and the rest of the gang.

The phrase "American Rock and Roll" appears a lot, and when it does, it seems to be the highest compliment they have to pay. **Rolling Stone's** favorite albums have Tradi-

They make no black and white judgments, and (inconsistently with the rest of their format) let the readers' own intelligence form the final opinion on the tunes.

They review many styles of music, and although they do not cover the whole spectrum like **Spin**, they come awfully close. No matter what your musical tastes, you will find a record review of something in your style.

Trying for a comeback 2.5 for **Graffiti**, 1.5 for **Spin** and 1 for **Stone** because their stuff makes money.

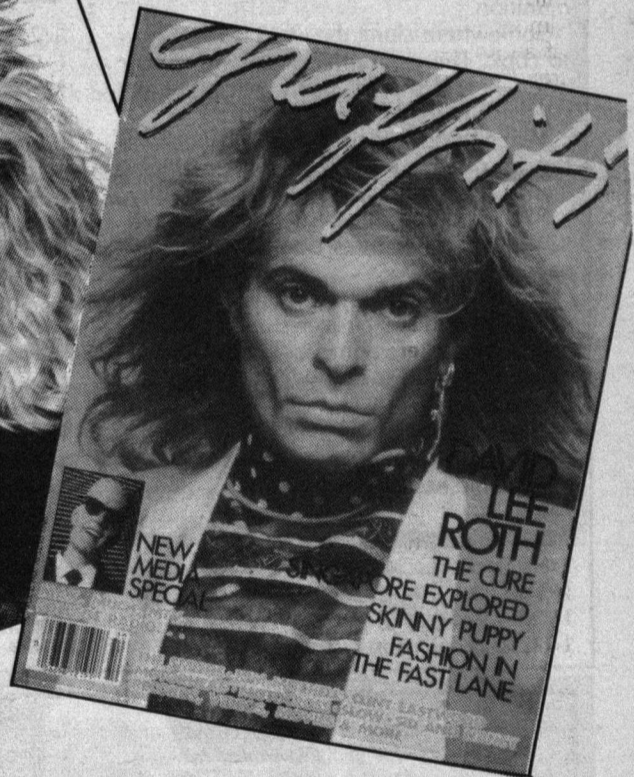
## Round 4: The Ads.

Perhaps the most revealing thing about a magazine is the ads. This will tell you what kind of people read the magazine. Ad men spend a lot of time worrying over this.

**Rolling Stone** is full of ads. So many ads in fact, that if open it randomly, you will probably be looking at two full page ads. The ads are for expensive cars, expensive stereos, expensive ski equipment, expensive fashions, ad infinitum.

The first big warning you get about the plethora of advertisements, is when you pick up the magazine. Two of those goddamn @&#@\$ little cards fall out. Most magazines only have one, but here they have two. The cards are even too harsh to use as toilet paper.

**Spin** is refreshingly sparse of advertising. So devoid, in fact that it makes you wonder if their bantering hasn't hurt them economically. The ads that are there are for musical instruments, stereos, wine, liquor, perfumes, and cigarettes (Oh, was liquor mentioned?)



tional Rock and Roll written all over them. If that's your stuff, then this magazine might be for you.

The reviews make some pretty harsh judgments of the musicians themselves — which is not the place of the review. Worse, the writers make no allowances for the fact that the people reading might have their own opinions. If you don't agree with their opinions, you are beneath contempt.

**Spin's** reviews are definitely varied and interesting. They get some really obscure stuff that would never get media exposure otherwise. And their opinions seem very honest, which also means you might not agree with them.

The reviews are very (VERY) funny most of the time, but bizarre. The whole reviews section in **Spin** is more of a showcase for rare items than reviews. The reviews are entertaining in their own right, and eventually let you glean enough info about the subject matter to tell you if you would be interested.

It is impossible to pin down a pattern of records they like, which is good. There is that much variety here.

Surprise, **Graffiti** has some redeeming points. Their reviews are sarcastic, funny, thought out, and familiar. Maybe too trendy, but you can't have it all.

The reviews tell you some of the background, what the music is about, and give you the information you need to decide if this is something you might be interested in.

Sex, drugs, and rock and roll, almost to the letter.

You can't tell what kind of advertising they have in **Graffiti**, because it is impossible to distinguish the magazine from the ads. It's that slick.

0 for **Spin**, -1 for **Rolling Stone**, and -2 for **Graffiti**.

## Round 5: The Final Blows.

Which magazine do you want to read? It is clearly a choice of what kind of music you listen to. Commercial music fans and yuppies (lest they offend someone) should stick to **Rolling Stone**. The fluff **Graffiti** writes will offend even their intelligence, and **Spin** is just too caustic.

Trendoids might have orgasms at the sight of **Graffiti**.

For people who are concerned about their civil rights, and have open musical minds, **Spin** is it. They cover mainstream stuff too. They have energy and balls. It's actually fun enough to buy every month.

**Spin** wins by knockout. This round, 1 **Spin**, 0 **Rolling Stone**, -1 **Graffiti**.

Final Score:	Spin	6.5
	Graffiti	2.5
	Rolling Stone	1
	Fanzines	disqualified