

Edgar thinks Johnny responsible for his success

Edgar was born in Beaumont, Texas on December 28, 1946.

He has played music in public since he was 8 years old and he and his brother Johnny, then 11, played ukeleles together. "We used to do Everly Brothers things like 'Wake Up Little Susie.' We did talent shows and went on TV but we weren't really serious about it."

By the time Edgar was 11 and Johnny 14, they had started a regular rock band with Edgar playing drums and piano. "Then I decided I wanted to play saxophone and Johnny said 'I don't want no saxophone in my band,' so I started my own band." The brothers played together again a couple of years later forming a band called Black Plague which played go-go clubs in Alabama, Louisiana and Georgia, performing songs by Ray Charles, Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding, and whatever else the audiences requested. "I was never a singer in those days. Johnny did all the singing; I was playing lots of saxophone and organ. Very rarely, if I was in the mood, I'd sing one or two songs. We were on the road for a long time. We loaded and unloaded this trailer of ours a million times. Finally, our car broke down and nobody wanted to buy a new one so we broke up."

Edgar then took a correspondence course to get his High School diploma and planned to go to Houston's LaMont College to learn about classical and experimental music which had always interested him. Instead, Edgar joined a jazz band. Most of the other members of the band went to LaMont but Edgar decided not to because "the guys in the band told me I could learn just as much by playing and that suited me fine. I had always hated school because my eyesight is bad and it was hard for me to do most of the stuff you have to do." Via the members of his band, Edgar started listening to Cannonball Adderly, John Coltrane, and others.

ENTRANCE

Not long after, Johnny was

"discovered" by Steve Paul, and signed to Dolomite Records amid a mountain of publicity. Edgar was called to Nashville to play on the first album and do a few charts. Afterwards, he toured with Johnny where his versions of "Tobacco Road" and something called the "Double Drum Song" got ovations night after night. On the latter, Edgar and the band's regular percussionist both played drums in a powerful instrumental. Both songs remain major parts of Edgar's repertoire today. "I think Johnny is probably more responsible than anyone for my success, except maybe Steve. Johnny introduced me to Steve, and he really 'discovered' me. Johnny was always a leader and I was behind the scenes musically rehearsing the band and stuff. He had developed a sort of unconscious dependence on me, which brought me into his band, giving me a chance to play before thousands of people. I thought it was really cool."

Between Johnny Winter tours Edgar got "a cocktail job. I got booked in Texas club called the Golden Fleece. It had a chorus line called the Golden Girls and we were called the Goldenaires. The bandstand was shaped like a Viking ship with an air conditioning duct that went up to the ceiling in the shape of a yellow sea serpent. We played all kinds of music — jazz, psychedelic music, old blues, everything."

Steve Paul began talking to Edgar about making an album of his own. "At first I was very cautious. It sounded good on the surface, but I was afraid that when it came down to it, I wouldn't have much freedom." Eventually Edgar came to New York and recorded "Entrance" for Epic Records, a total concept album on which Edgar played practically all of the instruments. It was a big production new-jazz work which received some critical accolades but which sold very little. "It was never a commercial attempt. I never intended to perform the music on it." He went to the studio every day for five weeks. He had

never done string arrangements before but picked it up quickly. "I've always been able to do things that after so much time alone, Edgar wanted to play with other people again. "Entrance" is still my favorite album, though," says Edgar, "because it was the most ambitious. I want to make new sounds."

WHITE TRASH

After "Entrance," Edgar was ready to form a band and make a more commercial attempt. After looking all over the country for musicians to play with, Edgar decided to team up with the musicians he had played with before Johnny made it big, and Edgar Winter's White Trash was formed, an eight-member R&B rock band of Texas and Louisiana musicians. Their album "White Trash" far outdid "Entrance" and permanently established Edgar as a major concert attraction in his own right. White Trash was selected to headline on the closing night at the Fillmore East, and their hard-driving horn section, mercilessly rehearsed by Edgar, was critically hailed as the best rock horn section of all time.

After about a year of successful touring, Edgar and White Trash parted ways because the band wanted to play exclusively R&B and Edgar, as always wanted to keep growing and changing. "It was a good band, the members were many of my best friends from high school, and I do love R&B but I wanted to expand and they didn't." A two-record album, "Roadwork," was released in 1972. It consisted of live recordings of White Trash and was Edgar's best-selling work to date.

(ALBINO GOLD) THE EDGAR WINTER GROUP

"I started the new band with a different goal. I wanted to be happy, healthy, successful, and have fun. Also, I was still in debt and I wanted to pay it back." Dan Hartman was the first to join. "He had sent Steve a good-sounding

tape and we played good music together, but his main asset was that he was the right kind of person." Ronnie Montrose, who had played with Van Morrison and Boz Scaggs, joined on guitar and Chuck Ruff became the drummer. "The whole band came together in about three days. Promoters were confused and worried about the break-up of White Trash and we started working for a lot less money; but people liked the new band better than the old one. The main thing we had going for us was energy. I wanted to give everybody in the band a chance — not my being a star and them being sidemen."

The material for "They Only Come Out at Night" was composed by Edgar and Dan on tour in airplanes and hotel rooms. "Dan has helped me more than anybody else in writing songs that appeal to lots of people. He really listens to the radio a lot and uses that as a guideline. In songwriting, I'm more of a romanticist than a realist. Dan on the other hand — if he likes it — if you can sing along with it — that's a good song. I had to learn that concept. And I think Dan has been influenced by me too, because I like to have inspiration for a song. I don't like being superficial. I think of it like an art — it has to have validity."

Working on the album says Edgar "was the easiest and most fun LP I ever made. We did the whole thing in two weeks." "Frankenstein," which was to become a million-selling, Number-One hit single, was the last track put on the album — because Edgar was worried that it wasn't commercial! "Frankenstein" developed from the group's live performance originally as a showcase for Edgar's new-found interest in the synthesizer. "I first heard synthesizer on 'Switched-On Bach' and I loved it; I had to get one. I went to Manny's, picked out the Arp 'cause it seemed to have more gadgets than the others and took lessons on it for a while." The lessons were too technical, however, and Edgar decided he'd learn by performing. He remembered the "Double Drum Song" that had gotten so much reaction when he played with Johnny, and every time he'd learn a new trick on the synthesizer, he'd inject it into the song. For the album, Edgar wrote some new parts and substituted timbales for drums. At first it was much too long and Rick Derringer, who produced the album, and Edgar kept cutting it. "We called it 'Frankenstein' because of all the cutting. We had created something from a lot of different parts and stuck life into it. Also I'd always loved horror movies, occult and all those things — I like spooky weird music, it's monster music."

Even more editing was done for the single. "Frankenstein" was originally the B side of "Hangin'

Around," from the album, but following radio station requests for a shorter version of "Frankenstein," it was re-serviced and quickly became the nation's Number-One single. Soon after, the album "They Only Come Out at Night!" also reached Number One and as of November, 1973, had sold 1,200,000 units making The Edgar Winter Group one of the few American rock groups of 1973 to receive a coveted Platinum Album. "I never expected 'Frankenstein' to be a hit but I loved it. I always wanted an instrumental hit as a kid — that was my ideal."

Directly following "Frankenstein" was the release of "Free Ride," written and sung by Hartman, and it too became a Top-Ten hit nationwide.

In late October, 1973, Rick Derringer joined The Edgar Winter Group as lead guitarist and vocalist. Rick produced Edgar's last three albums and for a short time was lead guitarist of White Trash. "I was surprised when Rick offered himself to the band," says Edgar, "since he was only helping us out while Jerry Weems (who had replaced Ronnie Montrose) was hung up with a military commitment. But I am so happy Rick is with us because he's always been my favorite guitarist and he's also a tremendous help as a writer and singer." In the current Edgar Winter Group, Dan and Rick each sing a couple of their own songs in addition to Edgar's vocals, and the show is climaxed by a medley of oldies in which all four members of the band sing. While drummer Chuck Ruff sings "Hound Dog," Edgar takes over on drums.

Edgar's clothes have changed radically from the days when he first appeared on stage with Johnny. "At that time I was very conservative with clothes — wearing pinstripe suits and short hair. I was sensitive about looking unusual anyway, so I thought if I wore straight clothes I'd be less noticeable. By now I've gotten into the spirit of being on stage and I look at clothes as a total fantasy thing as I did when I was younger. When I was a kid I used to love to wear a Superman outfit underneath my regular clothes which were very plain. After the pinstripe suit phase I went through a blue jean and tee-shirt phase and then a velvet pants and sequins phase but now I like to wear really weird clothes and nothing in the stores is weird enough for me. I've got a guy in L.A. named Bill Whitten who designed my outfits for me and he's great." Anyone who has seen Edgar on stage recently will agree that his clothes are both weird and great — and certainly unique. "I like to keep people off balance — that's why I loved the album cover on 'They Only Come Out at Night,' because it was weird."

Continued on page 17

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