

SILLY STRINGS (1) The author and **(2)** his Rock n' Roll Fantasy Camp bandmates try to lick the competition at the Sunset Strip's House of Blues

Thrash Course

Schooled by hair legends like Vince Neil and Bret Michaels, EW's Dan Snierson realizes his fantasy of becoming a rock star...sort of

THERE COMES A TIME IN EVERY journalist's career when he must push aside deep personal passions and set out to provide objective reportage on an incredibly dry, complex subject.

This is not that time.

Rather, this is the story of one lucky dude assigned to attend Rock n' Roll Fantasy Camp (much like the one Homer's family sent him to in a recent episode of *The Simpsons*, minus top-shelf names like Mick Jagger and Keith Richards). My

objectives for this \$4,950-a-head partypalooza—held Nov. 10–14 in L.A.—were few: Shred with aspiring rock citizens until our ears melted; drink from the chalice of fame served by members of the Kinks, Poison, and Mötley Crüe; and rid myself of the Dio-esque demons that torment me for abandoning my dream of heavy metal stardom. On company time, I would finally get the chance, at age 31, to become the hardest-rocking Jew since Gene Simmons.

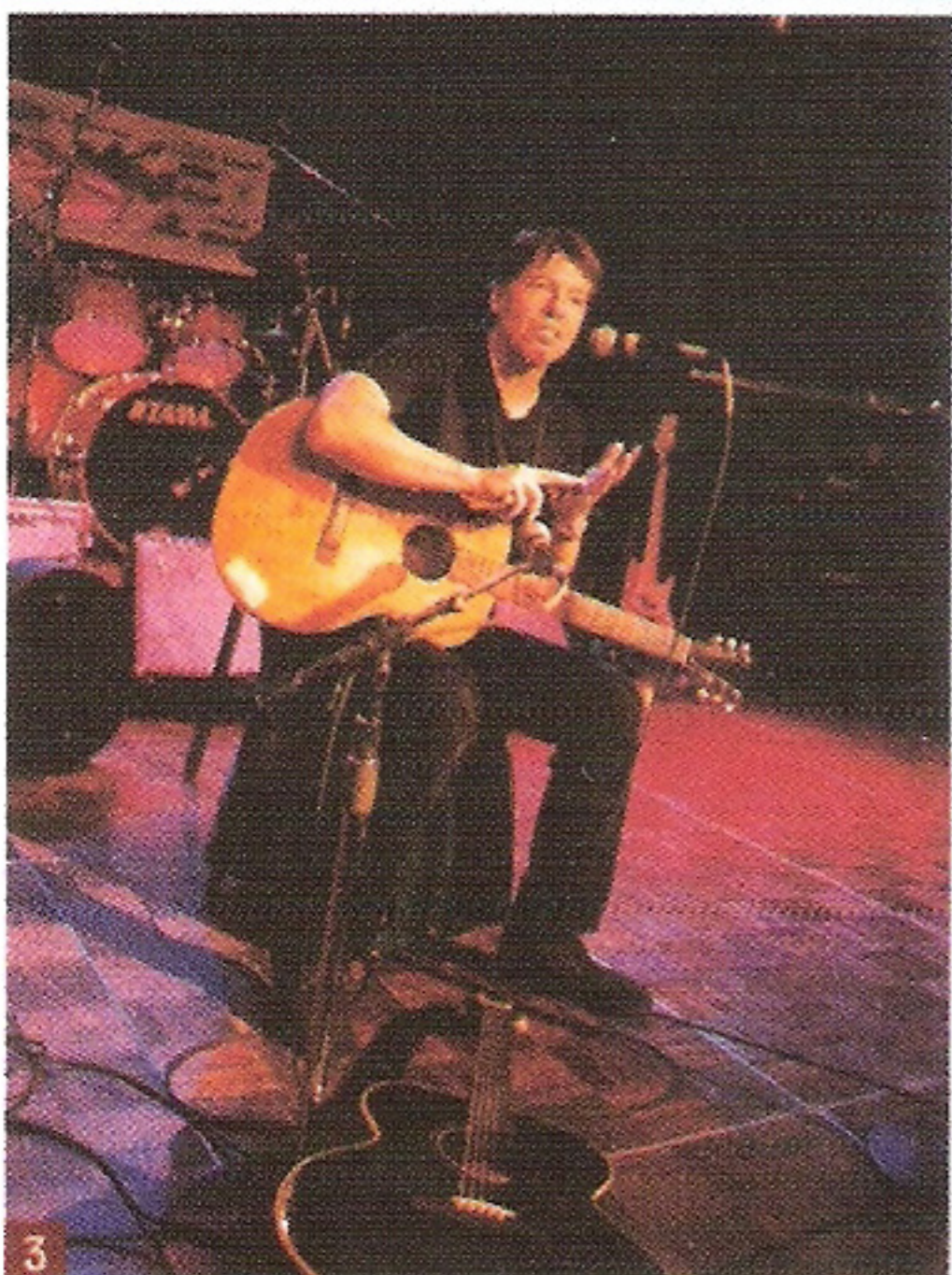
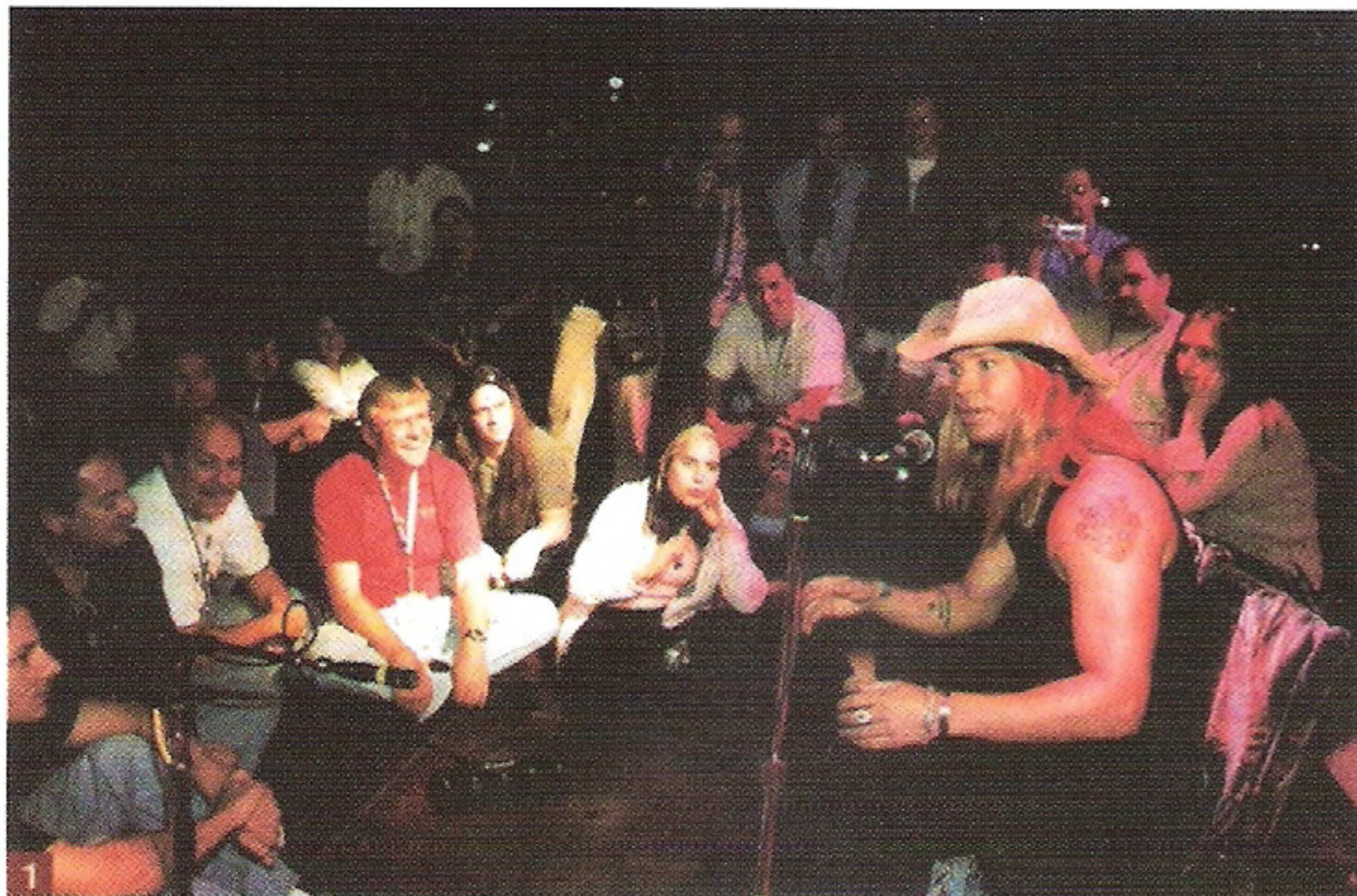
DAY ONE

HAVING VIGOROUSLY GROWN out my hair for 10 days, I arrive at the Hyatt West Hollywood, a.k.a. the Riot House, a legendary axis of excess featured in *Almost Famous*. Several hot-'n'-helpful blondes lead me into a banquet room filled with "camp counselors": Mark Rivera (Billy Joel's saxophonist), Bobby Mayo (Peter Frampton's guitarist-keyboardist), Derek St. Holmes

(Ted Nugent's singer-guitarist), Jack Blades (Night Ranger's singer-bassist), Mark Farner (Grand Funk Railroad's singer-guitarist), and Liberty DeVitto (Billy Joel's drummer). Based on a five-minute audition, I'll be assigned to one of seven groups that'll compete on the last night in a Battle of the Bands. At the House of Blues. On the Sunset Strip. *Open to the public.*

I take my seat before the committee. Turning the volume up to 11 and my pride down to zero, I sloppily blast riffs recalling Journey, White Lion, and Metallica. I even attempt Eddie Van Halen's 195-mph guitar solo on "Eruption." Wrong notes spew all over the judges.

"Great, great—he's gonna rock," chuckles Rivera, studiously taking notes.



RIFF TRADE (1) Poison's Michaels talks down and dirty; (2) a staffer; (3) Thorogood intones; (4) Nugent's St. Holmes (center) gives pointers

"We need rhythm guitarists," remarks St. Holmes.

Rhythm guitarist? That doesn't sound sexy. No time to sulk: I need to size up the competition. Among these 70 hopeful Hendrixes, hailing from Florida to Oregon, I spot numerous receding hairlines and a few protruding guts. There's even a tax assessor. One affable CEO of a high-tech research firm, Russ Jeffries, 45, tells me why he spent the cash to thrash. ("It is, per unit of time, the least expensive therapy," he says. And considering he hasn't taken a vacation since 1994, "the amortized cost isn't all that high.") Finally, I locate something resembling rockers. Stringy-haired singer Paul Villarreal, 25, who toils in a college PR department, yearns to share the stage with pros. "I came with a business card and a couple tapes," he says. "But I'm trying not to be naive like I'm going to be discovered. Whatever happens,

happens." Long-maned, tattooed Casey Wood, 27, is a drummer primed to network and party. "I want to meet all these people really bad!" he says. "Vince Neil is one of my idols. I'm a musician. That's all I want to do. I hate doing anything else." I wonder how Wood, Villarreal, and I would sound as a power trio.

DAY TWO

WE TAKE A SHUTTLE BUS to Hollywood's famed SIR studios, and by 10 a.m. I'm grooving with a dozen guitarists under St. Holmes' instruction, learning how to fade out live. Two high-decibel hours later, everyone pours out of their classes to gather in an auditorium where Poison singer Bret Michaels invites us to join him on stage campfire-style and lob questions. (*What was the toughest song you wrote? Is it frustrating they don't play you on radio any-*

more?) His eager hospitality almost makes you forgive him for wearing all that eyeliner in the '80s. He performs two tunes, signs autographs, and chats up someone's wife on a cell phone. I reveal my fantasy: to duet on "Every Rose Has Its Thorn." "Absolutely," he says. "Wanna grab some acoustics?" As we strum, Michaels effuses, "That sounds *awesome*." If he's lying, I'm buying.

After lunch, Kinks guitarist Dave Davies takes the stage to offer advice ("Never think you have to explain yourself, because you don't"), then pulls up two campers to jam: "Do you know a song called 'You Really Got Me'?" (Chosen drummer Jim Bowen, 48, later gushes: "I'm the luckiest sonofabitch here. I about peed my pants.") Backstage, I ask Davies what he thinks about folks dropping five grand for this privilege. "They're totally crazy," he laughs. "I wouldn't come and see me....

But if it was Eddie Cochran, I'd sell my car to be there." It would be horribly indulgent to make Davies play "You Really Got Me" again just so I can accompany him. But I do.

Kicking it with a Kink is cool, but in 72 hours, I'm gigging for real. I head off to Studio 3 to meet my band, which we name Brooklyn. Members include Villarreal (vocals) and Wood (drums), plus a financial analyst (guitar), a dentist (bass), an entrepreneur (drums), an investor (keyboards), and a bond broker (another guitar). We play "All Along the Watchtower" until my fingers blister.

DAY THREE

OUR WALL STREET GUITARIST, Mike D'Arpino, 42, arrives at morning rehearsal clutching a bottle of Jack actually filled with soda. "You have to look the part," he reasons. St. Holmes inquires how many of us are wearing earplugs. Three raise their hands. "Sissies," he scoffs.

After the aural assault, anti-sissy blues journeyman George Thorogood is glad to the bone to share self-effacing anecdotes in the auditorium. But he's not pleased with the seating provided ("Folksingers sit on a stool; blues guys sit on a chair," he growls). I'd always wanted to suck down one bourbon, one scotch, and one beer with George, but he's apparently forsaken Johnnie Walker for light jogging. So we toast with shots of water. Yup, George Thorogood doesn't drink alone—he drinks with *me*.

Proudly observing the festivities is camp founder/tour producer David Fishof. "People always ask, 'What's this [rocker] like?'" says Fishof, who took his cue from baseball fantasy camps when creating his first event in 1997 (and is planning two more

for next year). "So I said to myself, 'Let's give people an opportunity to hang out with them.'"

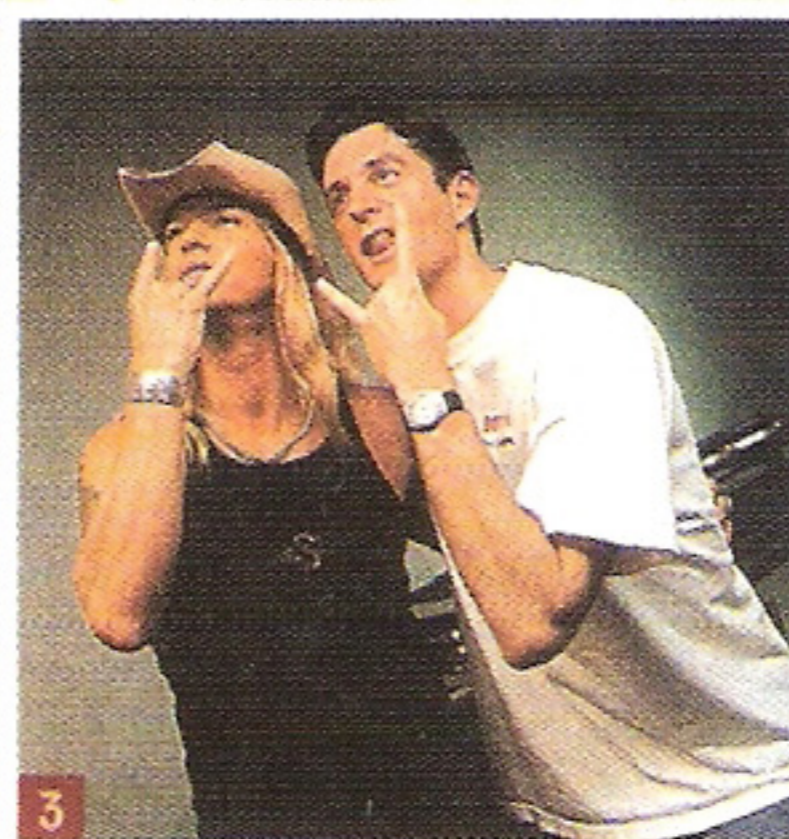
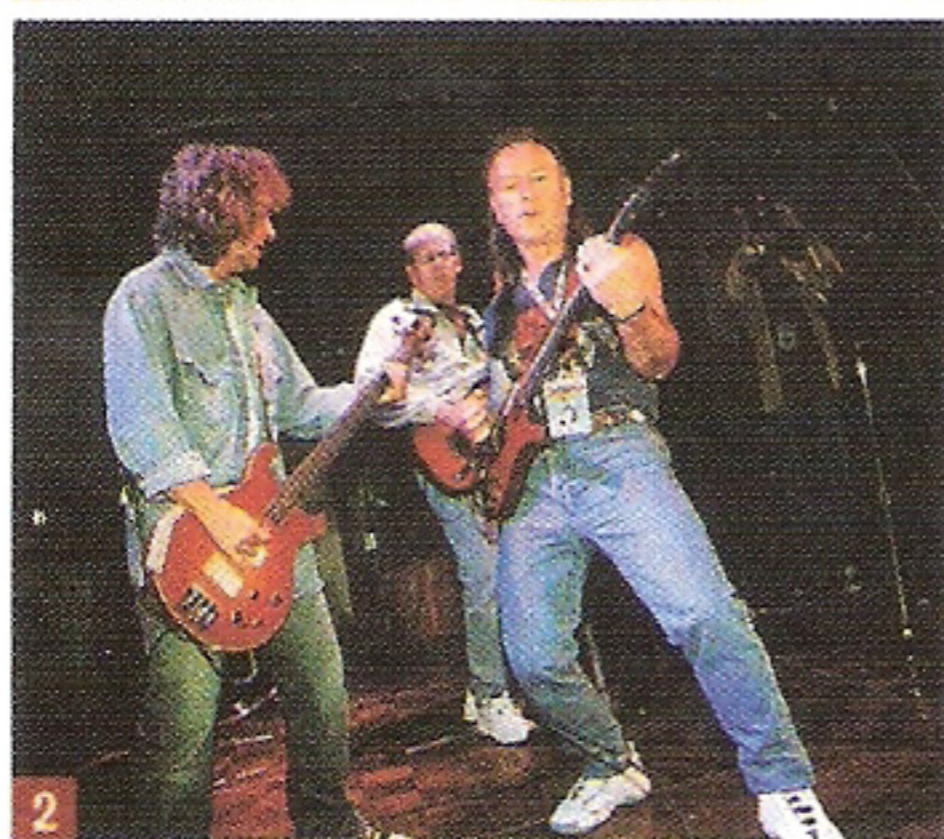
Hanging with Sheila E, who mounts a mean drumming clinic with her dad, ex-Santana percussionist Pete Escovedo, is swell, but what people really want to do is practice. Under the guise of "reporting," I scout other rehearsing bands. I open the first studio door to find one Ed Hill channeling the spirit of Stevie Ray Vaughan with the sick-est pickin' imaginable. He's 17.

I gently weep over my guitar.

DAY FOUR

THE NATIVES ARE RESTLESS. Some are grumbling about the food. Others are bemoaning their arrogant lead singers. Come to think of it, there's only so much ax grinding I can do in a group with three string-slingers. So in a delicious *Behind the Music* twist, I announce I'm defecting to a needier band. "Don't forget where you started," sniffs dentist/bassist Steve Chu, 47. The new outfit, Stackin' the Deck, welcomes me profusely, having lost three members—one of whom was last seen puking in a Dumpster. Another plus: Although rock singers usually aren't neurosurgeons, ours is! A nice man from Fender hands me a shiny Strat and I launch into "You Shook Me All Night Long."

More jamming, more visitors. Vanilla Fudge stickman Carmine Appice sits in with several bands (and advises one giddy camper in the bathroom, "Don't just tell people you played with me—tell 'em you peed with me, too!"). I enjoy a slightly less intimate moment with Crüe singer Vince Neil, who gives concert-posturing tips: "You gotta push your legs apart, foot toward the audience, bend your knee a little, stare right in...and scowl." Anything



JAM MASTERS (1) Motley crew Snierson, Neil, and camper; (2) CEO Jeffries gets his money's worth from Blades (l.) and Farnier (r.); (3) the author strikes a pose with Michaels and (4) works out kinks with Davies

else? "Always make sure you get the name of the city right."

All this crowd pimping is tiring. But before I can pack it in, Simon Kirke, drummer of Free and Bad Company, dutifully trots out gonzo Riot House tales from the '70s involving late Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham: "Whoever's staying in Room 906..." Wait, that's me! I later pump Kirke for details. "Apart from the drug orgies and underage sex," he says, "not much went on."

At the Hyatt that night, I'm overcome with the urge to

trash my room. I try ripping the pictures off the wall. They're bolted on. I hurl the room-service menu. It skids harmlessly across the floor. I give up and eat a burrito, which spills on the comforter. I hope I don't get charged for that.

DAY FIVE

WITH THE BIG GIG JUST HOURS away, who can concentrate on sessions with these final blasts from the past: John Waite and the Animals' Eric Burdon, who has thoughtfully brought along

copies of his book *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood* to sell. Panic rehearsals ensue. Remembering an older and somewhat wiser Vince Neil's counsel on wearing spandex ("Don't do it"), I head over to the HOB at 5 p.m. wearing a basic black T and cords. Everyone is tightly wound except for Stackin' the Deck's neurosurgeon singer, Jim Rodgers, 51: "I feel great. It's kind of like before surgery."

Crap. We're up first. I scan the crowd. Two hundred people? Three hundred? "You're on!" someone shouts. Irony shields activated, we burn through "Every Rose." During my solo, I explode in a rage of finger-tapping pyrotechnics and screechy noises, some intentional. The crowd cheers. Okay, laughs. For our finale, "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me," we unveil a secret weapon: Billy Joel saxophonist Rivera. I playfully lean into him while he wails away.

And then it's over. A roadie hands us towels and I get a compliment from the lead guy in Night Ranger: "Your hammer-ons were great," says Blades, adding, "but you need a little work on the artificial harmonics."

As that 17-year-old whiz kid wows the audience by playing his guitar with his teeth, behind his back, etc., Deck axman Mark Wolfkiel, 39, declares: "We were the long shots! We got three songs together in three days with—let's be honest—very little talent! We rock, baby!"

The judges don't agree. We win only Best Use of a Guest Artist. Still, the band exchanges inebriated this-was-the-best-week-of-my-life hugs. Driving down the Sunset Strip, I submit to one final cliché: I howl into the night air and flash the devil's horns. Maybe I didn't rock quite like my holy forefather, Gene Simmons, but I went down a helluva lot harder than Richard Simmons. ■

PROVIEW

The Ultimate Camp ::

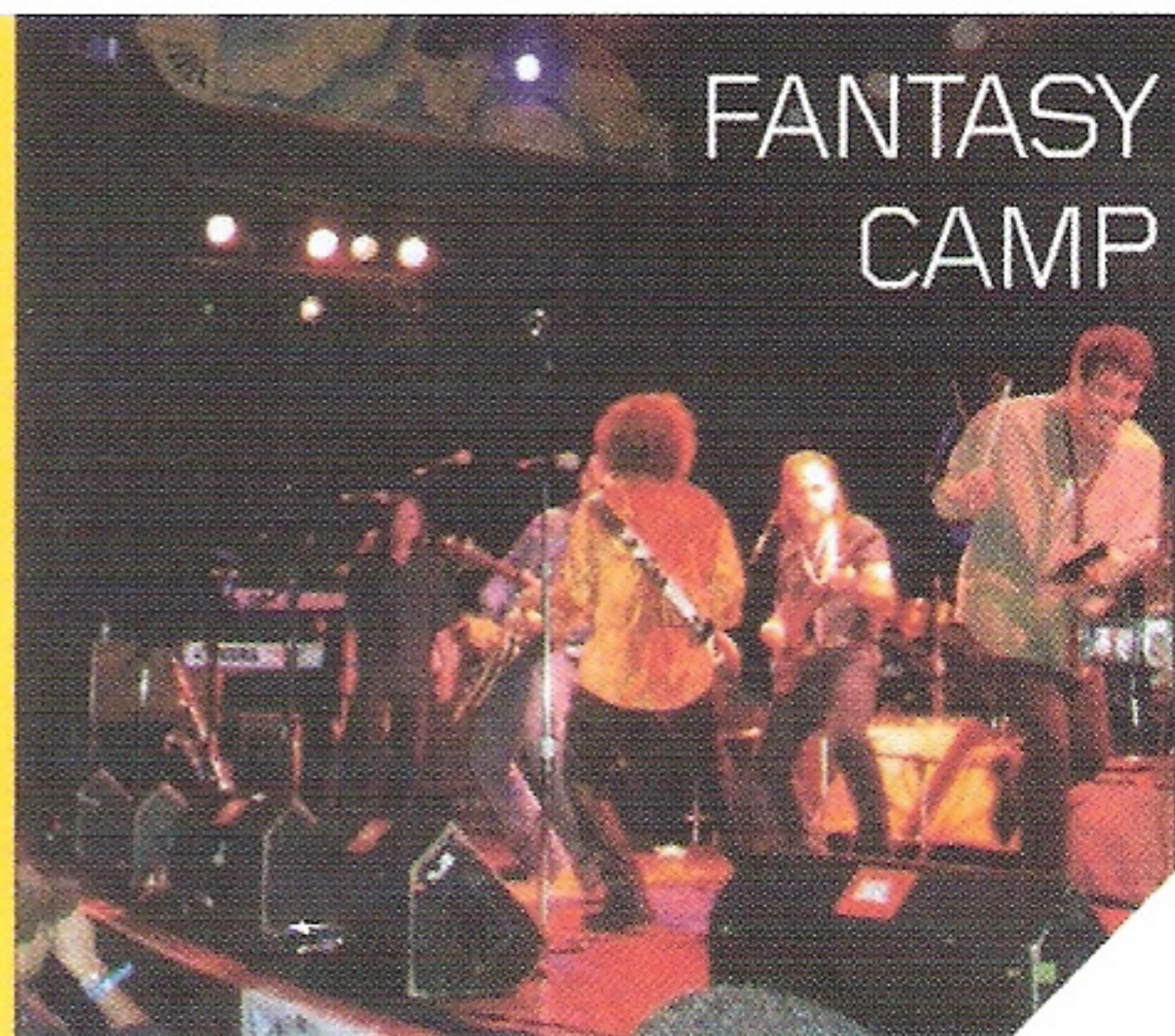
If, as a kid, someone told you that you'd have a chance to jam with your favorite rock musicians, it would be a dream come true. Well, you're all grown up now, but if you're still holding on to your dream, there's hope. The Rock n' Roll Fantasy Camp offers musicians of all skill levels the opportunity to learn from and jam with some of the industry's top performers.

Held in Los Angeles, this year's Fantasy Camp featured such big names as Vince Neil, Dave Davies, Carmine Appice, Bret Michaels, Sheila E, and George Thorogood. Campers and artists strutted their stuff using Korg TRITON STUDIO and TRITON Le Music Workstations, and recorded their songs on Korg D12 and D1600 Digital Recording Studios. Korg specialists

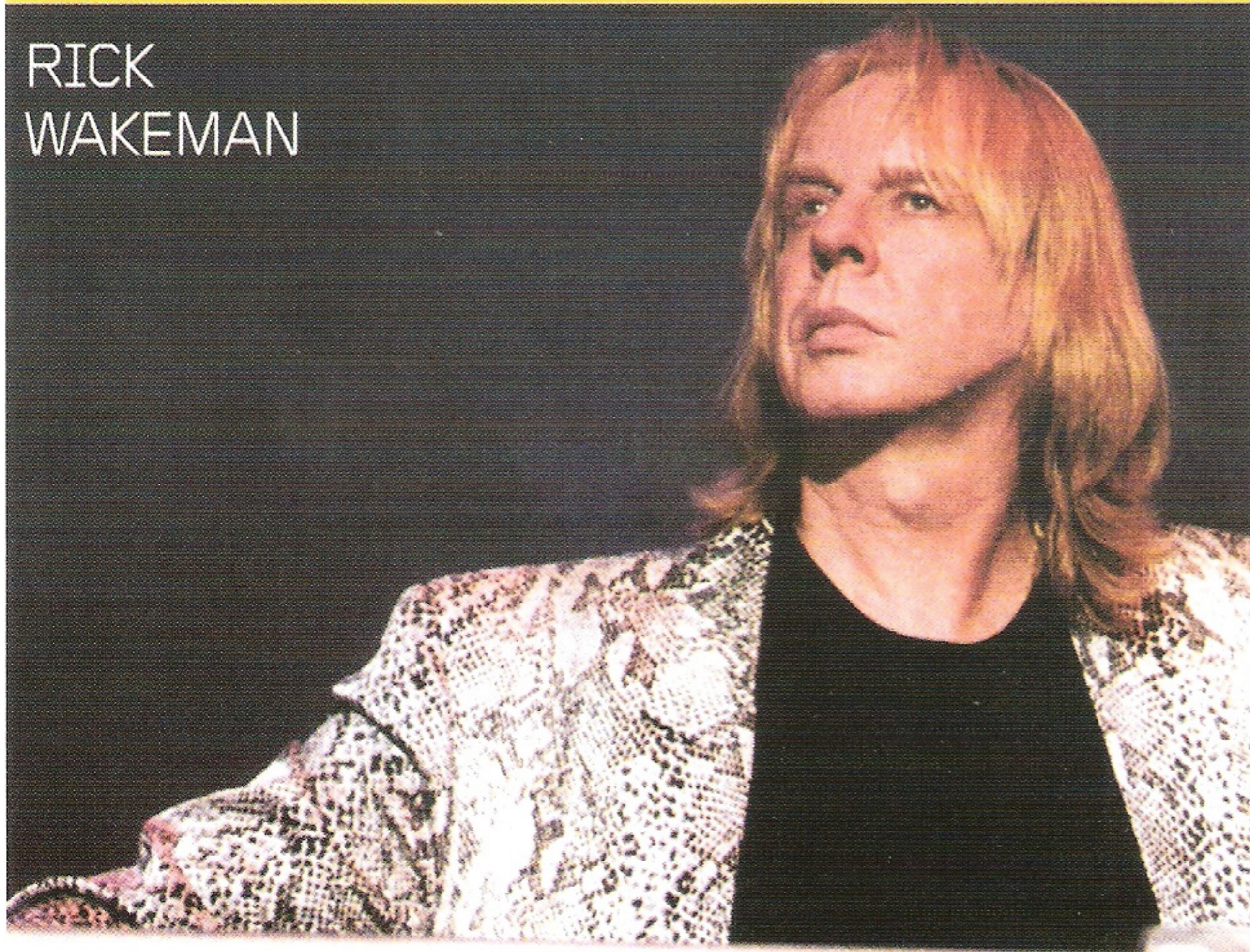
were also on hand to help "campers" get the most of their playing and learning experience.

Participants spent four days practicing, learning, playing in a band, and hanging with top industry players, which led to the camp's grand finale, a "battle of the bands" contest onstage at the legendary House of Blues. Best of all, a portion of the proceeds from the battle of the bands was donated to Sheila E's children's foundation, L'il Angels. "The Rock n' Roll Fantasy Camp was a huge success," commented Harry Javer, producer of the camp. "We couldn't have done it without our friends at Korg."

Think you're ready to live your dream? Check out www.rockandrollfantasycamp.com for highlights of this year's camp, and information about next year's event.



RICK WAKEMAN



Rick says Yes to Korg ::

Rick Wakeman is back on the scene with legendary, progressive-rock band, Yes. Rick, who has played with some of the best, including Black Sabbath, David Bowie and, most notably, Yes, has traveled back to where it all began, and Korg's been along for the ride.

Wakeman who joined the ranks of Yes for their fourth album, *Fragile*, and has been playing keyboards professionally now for almost 5 decades. He first hit the charts with the success of the single "Roundabout" in 1971, and the rest is history.

So where does Korg fall into the mix? Rick tells the story. "More than twenty years ago I was introduced to a new instrument called the Korg Trident. Quite simply, it was the most exciting keyboard instrument I had played for many years, and within a few months, my whole stage keyboard rig was virtually entirely made up of Korg equipment. The interesting thing to note here is that nothing has really changed!"

Wakeman's arsenal basically speaks for itself. His Yes tour rig includes a Korg TRITON Pro, TRITON-Rack, Karma, Trinity Pro, Prophecy, BX-3, X5DR, MS2000R and 01/WProX. Rick continues, "For the last twenty-two years Korg keyboards have been the mainstay of everything I have been involved in musically, whether in the studio or on stage."

R.W. quips, "Korg loves musicians and musicians love Korg. You could say it's a perfect marriage...and for a man who's been married and divorced three times, this is probably the only perfect marriage I will ever have in my life!"

To check out when Yes is coming to a city near you visit them on the web at www.yesworld.com.

TRITON pro

