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**THE RAPID RISE OF
LINKIN
PARK**



The Road to

LINKIN PARK

Guitarist Brad Delson discusses
the quick and unpredictable rise of his band, the trials and tribulations of touring, and the route they've taken to success

AS THE MEMBERS OF LINKIN PARK WALK DOWN DELMAR BOULEVARD in University City, Missouri, it's not at all apparent from their laid-back manner and slow-moving gait that their debut album, *Hybrid Theory*, is exploding nationwide. The six-member group—guitarist Brad Delson, vocalists Chester Bennington

and Mike Shinoda, drummer Rob Bourdon, DJ Joseph Hahn, and bassist Phoenix—are all in their early 20s. And with their baggy jeans, backpacks, and knit caps, they look a lot like the students and skate punks on the corner basking

in the sunshine of an otherwise cold-weather day.

Down the block there's a long line of people waiting to enter Vintage Vinyl, a local record store. They're anxious to get inside where Linkin Park is scheduled for an in-store appearance any minute. As the band walks by, some passersby recognize them and stare or say hello, but only a few—few enough, it turns out, that Delson and Bourdon decide it's time for a bit of fun.

"We're getting in line," they say conspiratorially, splitting off from the group as they're herded toward the store's back

By Daniel Durchholz
Photography by Michael DeFilippo



entrance. The pair calmly strolls past the line out front and pulls up behind a blond woman with several teenagers in tow.

After a few minutes, Bourdon breaks the silence. "You going to the show?" he asks the woman.

"Nope, they were sold out," she says

sadly. "Do you have tickets?"

"Yeah. We got 'em on the radio."

"Oh. You're so lucky."

Suddenly, the doors of the store burst open and two record company promo guys in charge of the event come rushing out to collect the pair. A shock of recognition

rolls across the woman's face—"Hey, that's them!"—but it's too late, Delson and Bourdon get whisked away. Still, she is able to laugh about it two hours later, when she finally makes it through the line to get autographs.

The members of Linkin Park should

ROCK AROUND THE CLOCK

A Day in the Life of Guitarist Brad Delson

"Does this kind of life look interesting to you?"

That's the musical question once posed by Frank Zappa, wondering aloud whether the life of a traveling musician was any kind of life at all. But times were different then. Whereas Zappa's Mothers of Invention managed to take some solace in trashing hotel rooms and some liberties with various groupies, touring is very different today. For some bands, the road still means sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll. But for others it's simply the place where the business of music is conducted at its most basic (and some would say satisfying) level.

To get a glimpse of the behind-the-scenes hardships, hassles, and, yes, the rewards of the road for a band on the brink of superstardom, we followed Linkin Park's Brad Delson around for a day as the band's album *Hybrid Theory* was exploding nationwide.

11:00 a.m. Breakfast with DJ Joseph Hahn in the dining room of the seedy downtown St. Louis Ramada Inn. Brad orders

scrambled eggs on a bagel with mayonnaise. "I bet your mama thinks you eat weird," deadpans the waitress. "She just thinks he is weird," answers Hahn.

11:30 a.m. Ride to photographer Michael DeFilippo's studio. With some justification, Brad warily eyes the building's scary freight elevator.

11:45 a.m. Photo shoot begins, and Brad realizes he's lost his laminate and bus key. "I'm the most scatterbrained, disorganized person I know," he laments.

DeFilippo suggests some shots that involve Brad and a small trampoline. At first, he's unsure. "I can veto this if I don't like it?" he wonders. But he likes it fine, and with the Black Eyed Peas playing in the back-

ground, he's bouncing on the mini-tramp and even doing some spins.

12:15 p.m. We're off to do some outside shots. It's sunny, but cold, with the temperature hovering in the mid 30s. Not great news, since Brad just got over a bad cold that now afflicts the rest of the band.

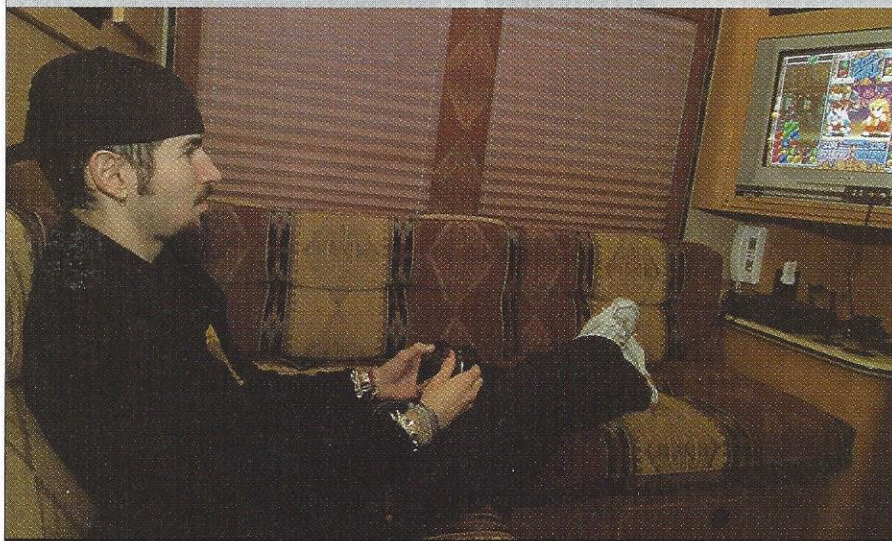
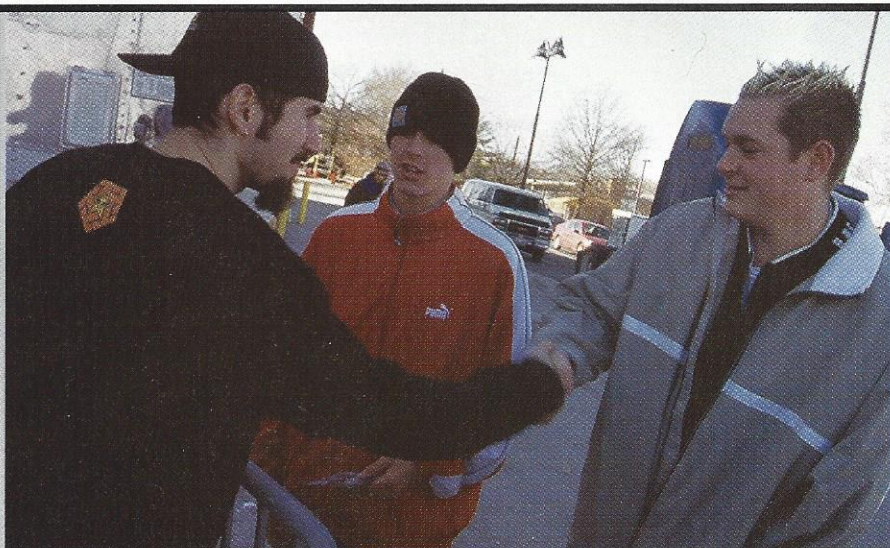
We shoot in an alleyway between two clubs with some iron fencing in the background. A few passersby give us curious looks, and one stops to ask us for bus fare.

12:45 p.m. Up the block to another location. Brad stands in a field behind a huge dilapidated warehouse. We discover—too late—that the open space is a minefield of dog shit. DeFilippo accidentally kneels in some and moans, "Oh, man, I'd rather kneel in broken glass." That, too, is an option.

1:15 p.m. We stop at a coffeehouse that has some hardcore honky tonk and country-politan on the sound system. "Who's that?" Brad wonders, as a Ray Price tune plays. We're due to meet the band at the venue at 1:30 p.m. Brad slowly sips his tea and smiles: "We'll just say you had a hard time setting up the last shot."

1:30 p.m. We're on time, but the band isn't. Brad takes the opportunity to de-lint his black T-shirt with some duct tape.

1:55 p.m. The band blows in, and vocalist Chester Bennington flops on a couch. "I went to bed at 7:30 this morning," he says to no one in particular. "I can't sleep



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Hybrid Theory really caught fire right out of the gate. Tell me how life has changed for you since the record came out.

We started touring eight months ago, which is four months before the record came out. We were able to build up a fan base through touring before the album was out, which was really important. We didn't want to come out as a new band, have a record company go to radio with us and not have anyone know who we were. Even though a song can do well at radio, we're not about a song or a promotional appearance. We're about being a real band with a real fan base, something that has longevity. The way to do that is to build from the ground up: through touring and connecting with kids one-to-one.

People say, "Oh, you guys are an overnight success." But that's not true, because we've been working really hard for a long time. But since the record's come out, the trajectory of our success has exploded. We went to Europe for a week, and there were kids in London who knew all the words to our songs. It was like, "I've never been to London, how do they know my name?"

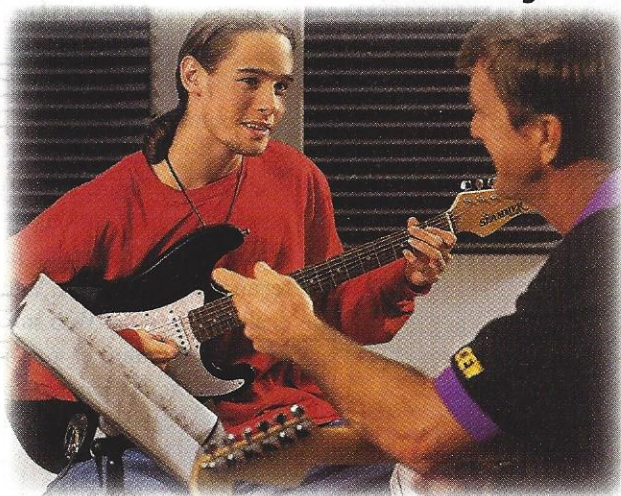
A few nights ago, you received a platinum record. What was that like for you?

It was kind of weird. Our whole label came to Las Vegas and presented us with our plaques. It's a really great honor, but it's a process for us.



Top, l to r: Joseph Hahn, Phoenix, Rob Bourdon
Bottom, l to r: Brad Delson, Chester Bennington, Mike Shinoda

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This isn't about: "You've hit this mark, now you're successful." This was fun for us when we were making songs in our bedrooms, and it's still fun for us.

Are you finally getting paid?

We're actually starting to make some money. We're starting to get bigger guarantees for shows. In the record industry, unfortunately, artists get paid very slowly. Even though we've sold all these records, we're probably not going to get paid for them for another year, basically. So we're still living pretty much hand-to-mouth.

Right. Your hotel tonight—the Ramada Inn—is not the best place in town.

Not the one here, anyway [laughs]! One difference is that we used to carry all our own gear. We were traveling in an RV for months, and it was grueling. Now we've got a great crew, and that really relieves a lot of pressure. But because we have more time off during the day, people are filling that time with promotional appearances and interviews—which is fun, but there is a point where it all becomes too much, and it can affect the show. We're at a point right now where we're still figuring out what is comfortable and what is too much, because, at the end of the day, we want to play a great show and have a lot of energy and not be worn down.

Do you feel obligated to say "yes" to everything you're asked to do?

You can't do everything all the time. You can't be in more than one place at a time. We're normal human beings. We need time to ourselves. We need time to just screw around and not think about being in the band. But at the same time, doing things with Linkin Park, we put our hearts into it and really take pride in what we do. We want to do a good job. We want to write good songs and play good shows. We're not here to goof off and take, take, take. We want to make something special.

Talk about your relationship with your fans a bit.

I talked to somebody a while ago and they were saying how, with really great artists, you can pinpoint what they were "the most of." Like Ol' Dirty Bastard, he's like the dirtiest guy. Marilyn Manson is by far the scariest guy. We focus mostly on songwriting and our music, but outside of that, we've tried to be the most fan-oriented band. That doesn't mean we don't appreciate or value our privacy. We need to take time for ourselves, too. At first, we were always the opening band on tour, so after we'd play, we'd stay inside the club at the merchandise table and sign autographs and talk with people rather than go and hide. We still

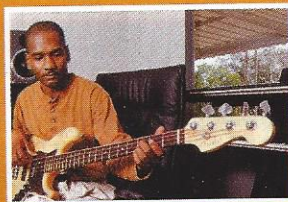
"We're trying to use our electronics with our rock with our hip-hop and make it all come together into one thing."

do that. After the show we'll go out and sign autographs in the crowd. I've seen Mike stay until every single person in a 2,000-capacity club has gotten an autograph. It's insane, but it's something we've really gotten a lot out of. It's a good investment in terms of building

positive vibe, 'cause that's what we like to see at shows. If someone falls down, we pick 'em up. If a girl is crowd surfing, you don't grope her. We're not a sexist band. If we were to see that, we'd be really upset. I think our fans have a lot of energy, but they're really respectful, too.

relationships with people.

Our fans are really dedicated, really high-energy, and also really positive. We try to put out a really



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Linkin Park

Even when they come and ask us for autographs, they're always really nice about it.

What are some of the more outrageous demands that have been put on you?

When we were in England, some girls brought clear tape and they were asking us for pubic hair. I think Chester actually gave one of them a sample. That was pretty gnarly. They were dead serious about it.

What do you do when you have time off?

If I have two hours off, I'll try desperately to find a movie theater and see whatever I can.

Do you see much of the cities you're playing in?

I'd like to be able to see some of the cities more than we've been able to. But it's getting to the point where now we've been to some of these places multiple times. So it's kind of funny; I actually know where to get my clothes washed when I'm in Columbus, Ohio. I can tell you the best places to eat. The cool thing is that I'll see faces that I've seen two or three times before at shows. I'll remember their faces.

What are the worst things about touring?

There's not really a lot of downside, as long as

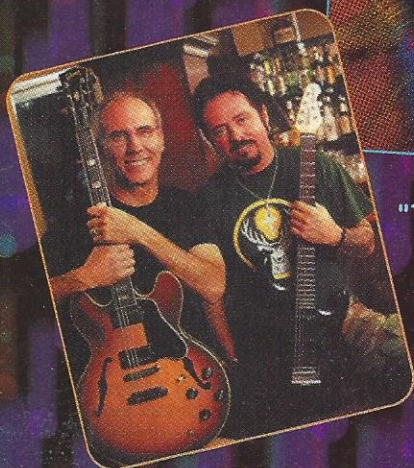
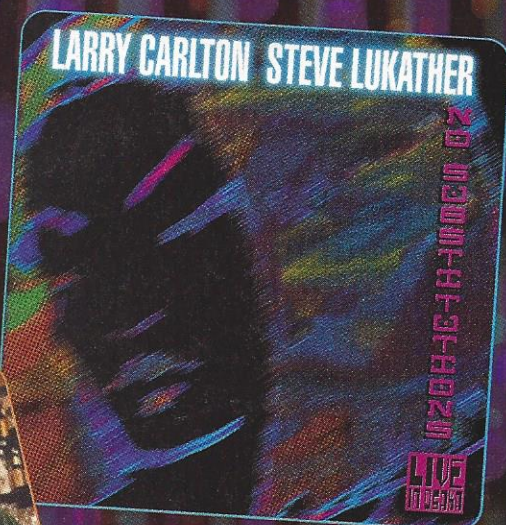
we have enough sleep and we get to eat. Honestly, we've had days where we haven't eaten. If we eat twice during a day, we're stoked. I need a ridiculous amount of sleep. That's my superpower—I can sleep for 13 hours at a time, and that's normal. Sleeping and eating are the essentials.

Have you been sick since you've been on the road?

I got sick in Europe. It was a promo tour, and I've now learned that "promo tour" means "be scared for your life." Basically, it means they're trying to pack in as much stuff as they can, and it's invariably too short a time. We were in Germany for a day, and they had requests that they'd probably been getting for months. So we literally had a 20-hour day, and we still had to play a show. I got run down, and I got sick.

We went to New York from London to play on Conan O'Brien's show, and we were supposed to have two days there and then a week off in L.A. before this tour started. I flew on the plane with a cold, and I got fluid in my ear. I saw a doctor in New York, and she said that it wasn't safe for me to fly home to L.A. because I could have burst my eardrum. So all the other

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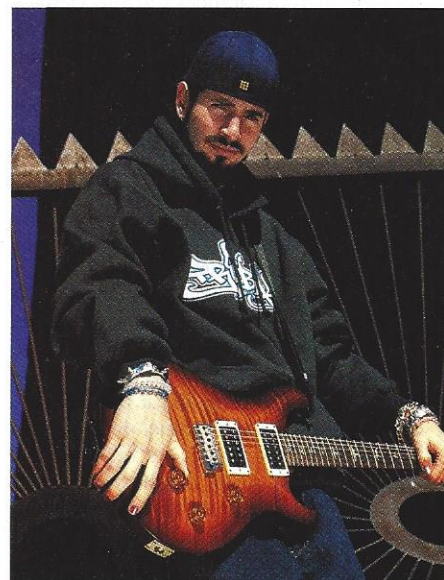
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guys got to go home, and I was stuck in Manhattan for a week in like 30-degree weather. I just sat by myself in the hotel room watching Spectravis. And they didn't have adult movies, unfortunately. That would have been the one payoff.

What do you do to try to stay healthy?

It's hard. If there are 12 guys on a bus, if something goes around, it's hard to avoid it. I think there are nine or 10 guys on our bus now that have the same cold. And I think I probably gave it to everyone. I'm the only one who didn't see the doctor today.

We all try to eat healthy. Maybe some bands have heroin on their rider. We have fresh vegetables. Chad from (hed) p.e. kind of

showed me what he eats. He's a vegetarian. We have pitas, and vegetables, and deli meat, and water. We try to eat as much good stuff as we can. We have some guys in our band and our crew who are sober, so we generally have a really clean environment. Some guys in the band drink and do their own thing, but in general we don't have any drugs or alcohol on the bus. It's a pretty focused work environment.

Has playing so much guitar on tour affected your chops, positively or negatively?

I don't know. I try to be really tasteful in my playing. I'm not a very technical guy. I have a background in music theory, so I have an appreciation and understanding of music, and I've played guitar for 12 years. So I feel proficient on it. But I'm not trying to call attention to the guitar. I'm trying to write guitar parts that work well with the songs.

Playing every night definitely helps me as a player. When you play songs over and over, it helps you to not have to think about what you're doing physically, and just kind of lets you project energy out to the audience, which is really what a show should

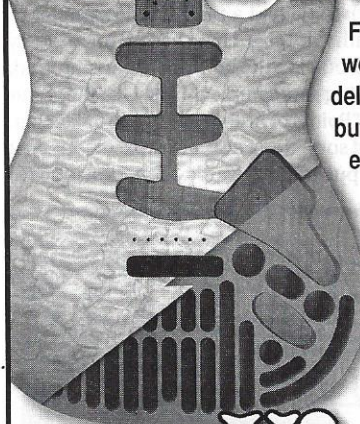
"We're not about a song or a promotional appearance. We're about being a real band with a real fan base, something that has longevity."

be about. It's not about us standing there staring at our hands. It's a very active show, very high-energy. A lot of times if I jump around I can miss a note.

We watch videos of ourselves, and Rob, our drummer, who is our practice-perfect technical guru, never plays a part wrong—he'll always point out if something's not up to par. But if I'm trying to do something that visually looks cool onstage, it's really easy to screw up. So I'm trying to be able to do both.

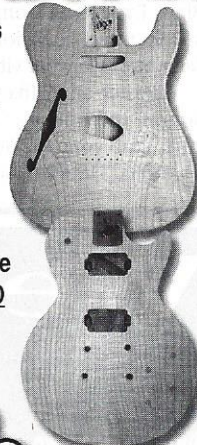
Where do you see yourself amid the current crop of hard rock/rap bands?
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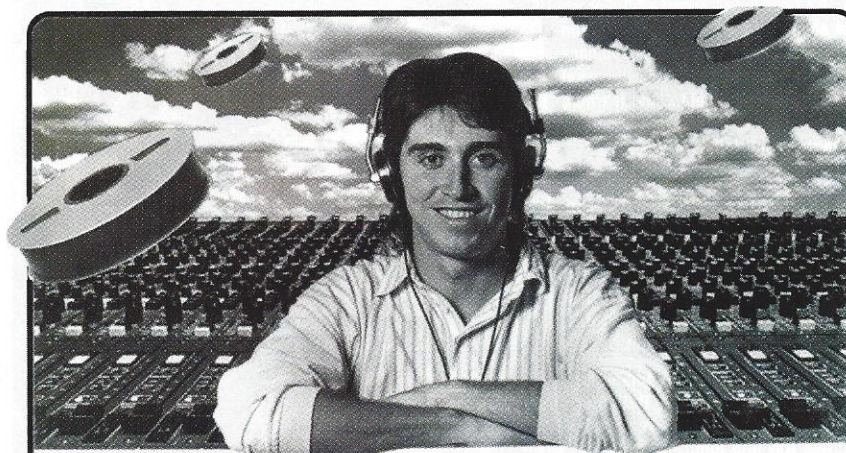
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later. A lot of other good bands that mix rap and rock weren't necessarily influences of ours at the time. The bands that we've always drawn from tend to be a little darker and more serious than maybe some of the other rap-rock bands' influences. We're big fans of Nine Inch Nails, Depeche Mode, the Roots, Black Eyed Peas, Common. Groups that are a little more conscious lyrically and musically have a darker vibe.

Chester and Mike are really trying to be honest and not say, "Hey, we're the coolest guys, grab your 40." You know what I mean? It's about, "Here are some problems that we've

had." We're trying to address them on the record without it being like "poor me." We're trying to be as much ourselves as we can.

How do you come up with your guitar parts?

Mike's always been our production genius, from when he had a really crude sampler to now, with Pro Tools. He's a wizard on it. We try to think outside the box, move parts around, chop things up, sample things. Like the guitar part in "Points of Authority." I didn't play that. I played something else, and Mike chopped it up and put it in backwards; he made it into five

different pieces and then sampled it. We try to use that kind of stuff as much as possible, because we're trying to use our electronics with our rock with our hip-hop and make it all come together into one thing.

Tell me about your gear.

I use a custom Paul Reed Smith set-neck, 24-fret guitar. I have a couple of those. I have a bolt-on as well. I really love the PRS because it's very versatile. The heavy sound is great and the clean sound is just as great. You can't go wrong. I use Ibanez seven-strings, because I think they're really heavy and awesome. I used Ibanez and PRS on the record and did a lot of layering. I use MESA cabinets, and MESA Dual Rectifier heads. And I have a BOSS delay, compressor, sustainer, and chorus pedal.

"The bands that we've always drawn from tend to be a little darker and more serious than maybe some of the other rap-rock bands' influences. We're big fans of Nine Inch Nails, Depeche Mode, the Roots, Black Eyed Peas, Common. Groups that are a little more conscious lyrically and musically have a darker vibe."

I've kind of added effects because I feel I have to. I think it looks stupid to have no effects on the stage [laughs]. But most of the parts I've written, you really don't need 'em. On the parts that don't sound like guitar, I'm playing harmonics and doing some unusual things. But I don't want to sound too space-agey. I want it to be really straightforward, and my tone to be really thick. I feel like I've achieved that on the record. I'm happy with my sound.

I noticed you were playing longer during soundcheck than everyone else.

We call them 'lab rats'.

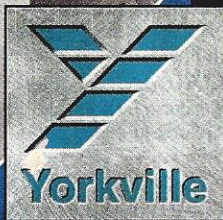
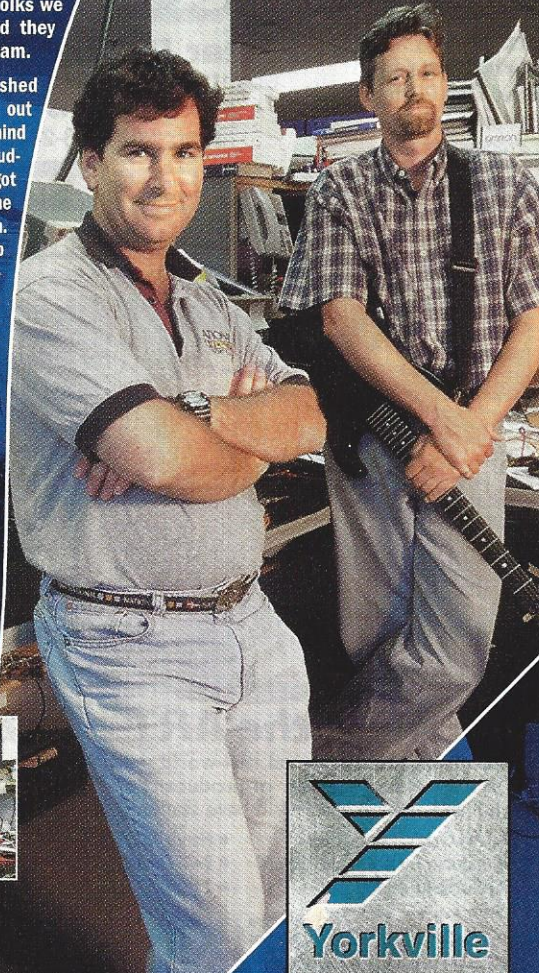
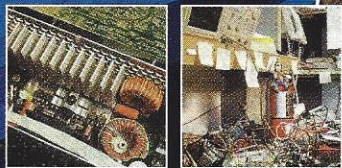
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Ray and Tom are two of our twenty or so full time designers and engineers. ...the folks we affectionately call our 'lab rats', and they are an integral part of our Yorkville team.

Ray (on the right) is also an accomplished musician, spending some twenty years out there as a guitar player. He's the man behind some of our most popular products, including the new tube guitar amp. He's finally got the sound he's always wanted. ...Tom (the other guy) heads the engineering division. He's also been a live sound engineer who spent about decade in the real world running his own sound and lighting company. He's made a career out of knowing what can go wrong in the field... and learning what is needed to make great sounding gear that doesn't fail.

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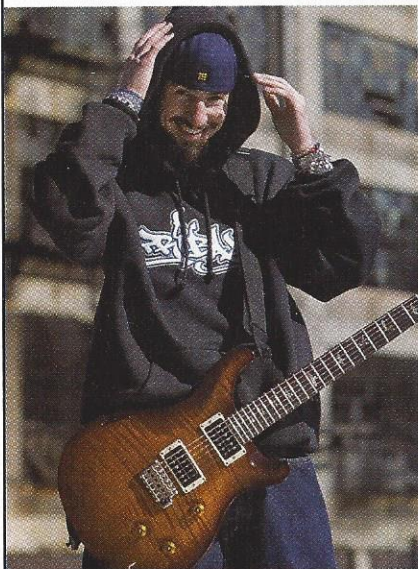
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Is that typical?

A little bit. I like to make sure my tone is perfect for the show. But I was playing extra today because Mike is playing guitar on a couple of songs. My rig is up to par, but we've been playing with some different things on his rig so he sounds just as good. That's what I was working on.


Who are some of your guitar heroes?

Dave Matthews. That kind of throws people for a loop. I don't go for his tone, but his musicality, his playing is ingenious. He's insane. I really like Stef from the Deftones. I think he's great. I really like a band called Sunny Day Real Estate. And I'm really influenced by non-guitar driven stuff, just aesthetically. I don't listen to that much rock. I'd rather listen to the Dido record than a metal record. I think you can draw inspiration from a lot of sources and make something really special that way.



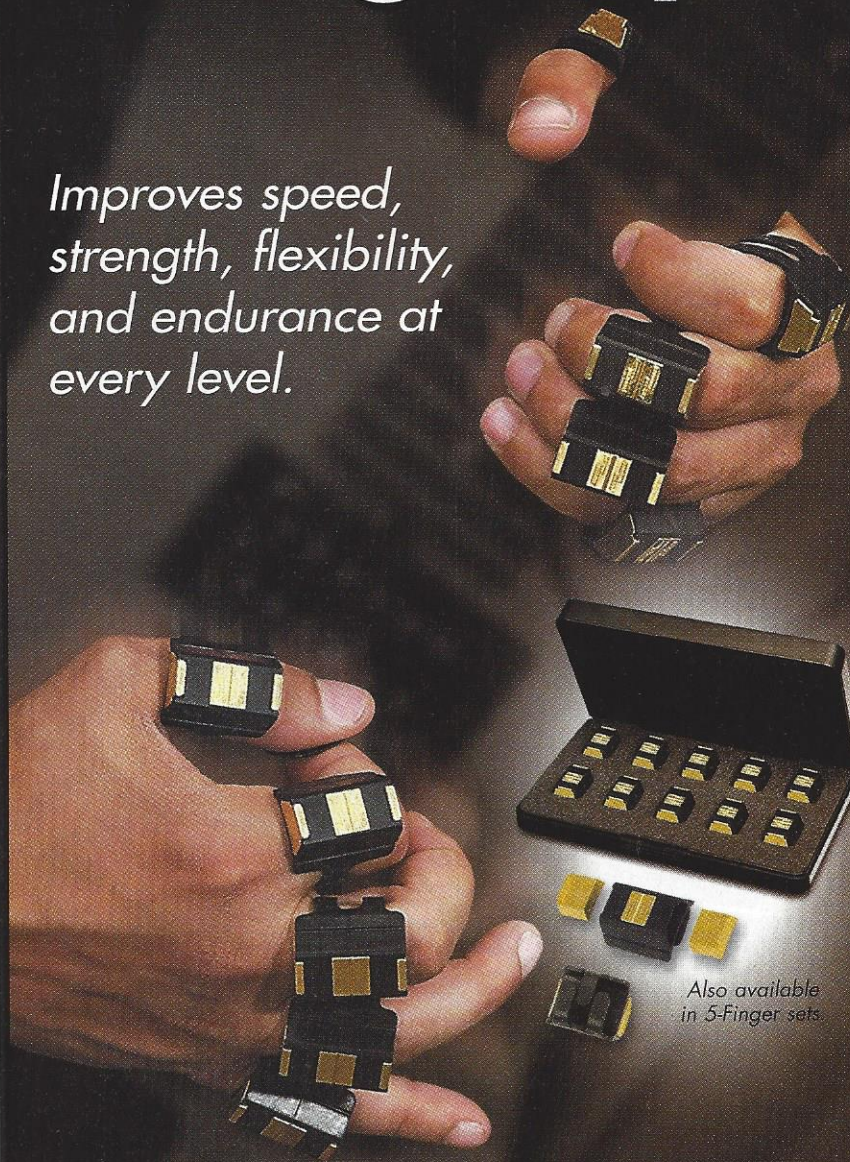
Do you ever think that things might be happening too fast for you guys?

Initially, our goal was to write songs and then play them for our friends—once!—at a club. But we enjoyed making music, so we just kept setting more goals. The one thing that happened really fast was we got a publishing deal after our first show. But it took us a long-ass time to get a record deal. People didn't get it. We were mixing hip-hop and rock, but we were doing it differently than a lot of bands that had become popular around that time. But it was our vision, our music.

Now, I think that had we gotten signed earlier, maybe it wouldn't have worked out so well. Maybe we would have been too immature to deal with all the responsibility that comes along with getting signed. Bands think, oh, if we get signed, the coast is clear. No way. Every step you take in becoming a bigger band comes with much more responsibility. 

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