

# HAMPTON GREASE BAND



I wish I knew when this article had started to take hold of me. It's like trying to pin down the source of some dread antisocial disease, one which pervades your everyday life and ruins what were once stable relationships. Instead of going off for the day with Heather and the kids, I sit here punching the keyboard with the sun pouring through the window and the tortured guitar screams of one of Phillips' less tortured albums slicing through the warm air around my head. Yesterday, whilst tea was being taken on the lawn, I could be found huddled under a cooling tree with my knees drawn up near my chin and with a mountain of paperwork and half-articles on the Phillips/Hampton

connection beside me, pinned down by pebbles from the shore of some long-forgotten holiday.

'Half-articles' because until very recently, not a great deal had been written about the Hampton Grease Band. They, and their sole album, seemed to be one of rock's best-kept secrets. Overlooked by the collecting fraternity, forgotten - if ever known - by the underground press and certainly ignored by the mainstream, their mayfly-like existence seemed perfect to me; they were my secret love, an album I could wig-out even the most knowledgeable colleague with during one of those record-playing sessions that we all indulge in from time to time. I tried a dozen times to start researching and writing something about them (hence all those half-articles)

but somehow, every time I came up against a brick wall when it came to the real facts surrounding the band. One of the few pieces on the band was (interestingly) penned by Peter Holsapple, later of the dB's (etc) in a fanzine called 'Groove Associates', wherein he claims that because 'Music To Eat' had sold the most copies in Winston-Salem in North Carolina, they played a gig there which Mitch Easter described as 'a bunch of normal looking guys playing Ventures songs at twice the normal speed...'. Not much to go on, anyway. Until earlier this year, that is, when the threads started pulling together. My good pal and colleague Fred Mills discovered their album - whether it was due to a tip-off from myself I can't remember and it's irrelevant anyway, but discover it he did and a few

months later sent me a live tape with 'ya gotta hear this, Phil!' scrawled all over it. Colonel Bruce Hampton And The Aquarium Rescue Unit, recorded live in Charlotte, North Carolina in late 1990, as bizarre a mess of Beefheartian wailing and twisted jazz impromptu's as you could wish for and evidence indeed that one of my heros of old was indeed alive, and moreover still doing it. Immediately going into a frenzy of letter-writing and attempted research, I was beaten to the case, thankfully because he made a better job of it than I could ever manage, by another pal; Chris Stigliano who runs 'Black to Comm' magazine in Pennsylvania. Like me, a man who had been blown away all those years ago by 'Music To Eat' by the Hampton Grease Band, he interviewed the hell

out of Bruce Hampton and produced a piece on the band in BTC Issue 18 (Spring, 1991) which I freely admit to having drawn from for this article. Chris' article however was written from the standpoint that Harold Kelling was the Hampton's front-line guitarist; for me, Glenn Phillips was the one and since Chris hadn't spoken to Glenn and I felt another angle was called for, I set out to track Glenn down and pen the following piece on both the Hamptons and on Glenn's subsequent solo career. It doesn't really matter which way you look at it: the Hampton Grease Band sported one of the most distinctive vocalists in rock in the shape of Bruce Hampton and two (yes, two) of the most exciting guitarists I've ever heard in Harold Kelling and Glenn Phillips. They are quite simply a MUST for any Terrascope edited by yours truly, a band I've been trying to do justice to since I set out on the rocky road to oblivion as a self-styled writer and critic some ten or more years ago.

All of which is a long and pretty pointless intro to what is actually quite a short piece, one which sits neatly in two parts *viz* the Hampton's history and Glenn Phillips' subsequent solo career. By way of scene-setting, I'd better first put the Hampton Grease Band into some sort of historical perspective. Hailing from Atlanta in the deep South of the USA in around 1967, their only similarities with the hippy scene of the West Coast of that time were their extended jams, for they weren't hippies by a long chalk and indeed had more in common with the likes of Zappa and (especially)

Beefheart and similarly a passing resemblance to fellow regional acts Red Crayola and the Elevators. They gained a large, devoted following in Atlanta as a 'people's band' who played totally out of control gigs consisting of wild onstage antics, lashings of freeform jazz and all topped off



with distinctly Beefheartian weirdness, and went on to record that one double album for Columbia entitled 'Music to Eat' which remains totally unique, and which is the lynchpin for this article. But as ever, I'm getting ahead of myself here. Cut to Glenn Phillips' comments about the formation of the band, starting with an answer to a question of mine about any pre-Hampton's musical involvement:

'No, I'm not on any recordings prior to the HGB. I started playing in 1966 at the age of 16. In 1967 I formed the Hampton Grease Band with high-school friends Bruce Hampton on vocals and Harold Kelling on guitar. We didn't have a bass player or a drummer, so we asked my brother Charlie and close friend Mike Rogers to learn how to play. We began playing out on school nights against

my father's wishes. I'd storm out of the house to play for 50 cents a night at the Stables Bar and Lounge and get home at three in the morning. My lifestyle confused my father and we began to fight...'

Now, there's an apocryphal story about young Glenn which I'd heard repeated often (and which is recounted by Stigliano) that he didn't have any idea about how to tune a guitar when the Hampton Grease Band first formed and that the function merely consisted of turning all the pegs so that they lined up in the same direction. It's a good one and as always has some foundation in fact, but just to set the record straight:

'It's true, when I first picked up a guitar I wondered if you tuned it by lining up the pegs - but by the time the Grease Band started I realised that the best way to tune it was actually to throw it against a wall....'

Bruce Hampton, by the way, was the son of a fairly rich family (connected in some way to those responsible for Coca Cola) of solid military stock who rebelled in time-honoured tradition and at one point actually set out to become a professional wrestler; music was his forte however and he embarked on a career which was to spin off in increasingly strange directions. For all that, he stoutly refused to embrace the fashions of the day and studiously avoided rock-star status by wearing his hair close-cropped and wearing nondescript clothes - in itself an act of rebellion, it could be argued. This fact, coupled with the total strangeness of the band's music, ensured an even wider audience since they were popular at once with the

hipper college types in the South as well as the rednecks. They became so popular that they were the standard opening act for any big-time touring acts that hit town, despite the fact that their increasingly weird stage act invariably left their audiences in a totally confused state - friends of the group would share the stage watching T.V., marching around the stage as if in their own living rooms and oblivious to the music around them; popcorn fights would break out during the set, people would sit reading a book, chaos ruled the stage and not always was it organised. Phillips (this quote doesn't really sit easily here, but I couldn't write it in anywhere else):

'When we first started out, we used to take our equipment to a park downtown. We'd plug into a live outlet and play all afternoon while a crowd gathered. Eventually, the police put a stop to that, and we went on to do everything from small clubs to pop festivals. We played shows with Jimi Hendrix, the Grateful Dead, Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac, N.R.B.Q., the Allman Brothers, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Procul Harum, Country Jow & The Fish and countless others.'

Nevertheless, the band weren't always the raging success I might be intimating by the above. Phillips recalls,

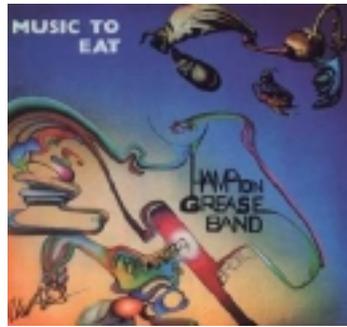
'We opened a show for Three Dog Night in Alabama and were booed at and pelted with objects from the audience. I ended up asking the audience to leave the auditorium until we'd finished our set! The show that stands out even

more in my mind though was when we opened for Alice Cooper in New Jersey. At the end of our set, half the audience was booing us and the other half was yelling out for more. Their cries grew louder and louder. Suddenly, instead of yelling at the stage, they began to yell at each other. At this point, a large portion of the audience was standing up and arguing with each other about the band. It got so bad that the house lights had to be turned on and the ushers had to break up the fighting...'

The festivals mentioned above included a successful appearance at the Atlanta Pop Festival where they caught the attention of Duane Allman who in turn brought tapes of the band to the attention of Columbia Records, but again I'm getting ahead of myself here. Back to 1967, and a trip the band made to New York. Somehow they ended up meeting Frank Zappa, who at the time was sharing a 6-month bill at the Garrick Theater with the Fugs. Phillips:

'The band got to know Zappa pretty well. We played on the Mothers' show at the Fillmore East that John Lennon sat in on and which was later released as a live album ['Live At The Fillmore East' and Lennon's 'Sometime In New York City']. Harold, Bruce and Charlie also appear on 'Lumpy Gravy' - they were in the studio talking one night, and Frank used their voices on the record'.

It was shortly after this that Charlie Phillips and Mike Rogers left the group, to be replaced by Mike Holbrook (bass) and Jerry Fields respectively - the latter being not only an accomplished percussionist, but the first 'northerner' to join the band. They went through several drummers over the years - the band lasted from '67 to '73 all told, with Phillips and Hampton being the only two consistent members - but it was this line-up of Hampton, Phillips, Kelling, Fields and Holbrook which recorded 'Music To Eat', released on Columbia in early 1971.



'Music to Eat' has already had enough of a build-up in this article to encourage most adventurous readers of this magazine to search it out I suspect, but despite its non-rare status in collector's terms - it can be picked up, if at all, for around the price of any still-on-catalogue double album - it's extremely difficult to find since it just happened to be Columbia's second-worst selling album of all time and has, to my knowledge, never been repressed either legally or otherwise; consequently almost all copies are now in the hands of people who, like myself, wouldn't part with it at almost any cost (try me - all four-figure bids will be considered). All of which leads me to introduce it a little more lengthily than I might usually do, starting with the cover

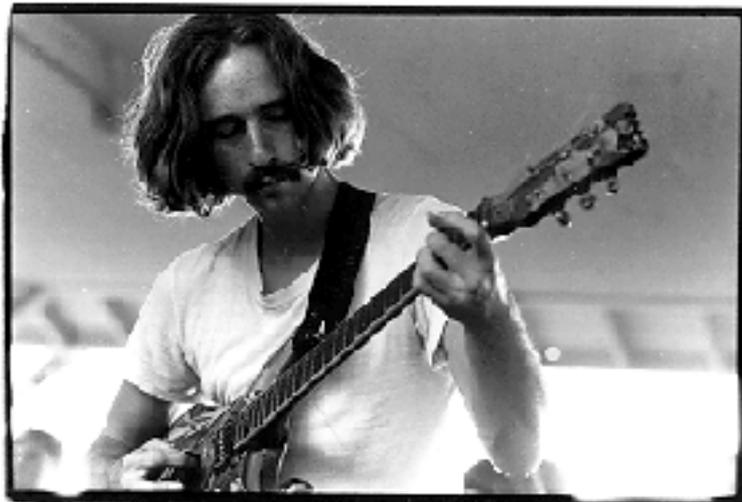
which is a distinctly psychedelic painting by guitarist Harold Kelling, backed with a woodcut of an army tank crafted in turn-of-the-century newspaper style. Inside, the gatefold sports a collection of odd drawings and photographs of the band, their friends and complete strangers (during the signing ceremony to Columbia, Hampton dragged in passers-by off the street to pose with the band for the official photograph) and even a bad review of a Hampton's gig from a local newspaper. As far-out as it is, it's inside the sleeve on the records themselves where the fireworks really start to happen, kicking off with the twenty-minute 'Halifax', a travelogue inviting the listener to go there sometime. The song quickly breaks into a completely free-form rave up with Harold Kelling's devastating lead-breaks hitting you from the left channel and Phillips weaving an involved tapestry of tight cross-stitches on the right. Near the end, the whole thing reaches a climax of sorts before Hampton says 'let's do it again, I don't trust this tape recorder' and the



whole song starts tantalisingly over. Flip the record over and you get a short erotic number called 'Maria' about the first sexual experience of a thirteen year old named Sanchez Rodriguez, followed by another extended piece called 'Six' which consists of a series of songs and melodies shot through with some incredible guitar work, akin to some of the Mothers' more experimental pieces. Phillips recalls that the album was originally meant to be a single LP and not a double:

'The album was recorded live for the most part, and was done on two separate occasions. Originally, we only recorded a single album ('Halifax', 'Evans' and 'Hendon') but when Columbia heard it, they didn't know what to do with it. The shortest song was about 18 minutes. In hopes of getting something more suitable (shorter) for the radio, they simply asked us to record another album with the idea that they'd release them both as a double. We went back into the studio and recorded 'Maria' (the first song I ever wrote), 'Six' (which I've always felt was Harold Kellings' best recorded work), 'Lawton', and 'Hey Old Lady'.'

Of the songs I haven't mentioned already, 'Evans' consists of two lengthy parts according to the band (I make it five discernably different pieces, but what the hell?) which ranges from dreamy, ethereal instrumental guitar parts to distorted fuzz frenzy not that far removed from the Deviants' 'Deviation Street'. The Theramin-fuelled 'Lawton' is a demonic avant-garde twin-guitar workout; 'Hey Old Lady & Bert's Song'



Harold Kelling

is a three-minute interlude of country-rock madness and the lengthy 'Hendon' is another suite, even more disturbed and disturbing than the first and one which kicks off with Hampton reading the directions from a tin of spray paint before launching into free-form jazz territory. Phillips:

'For the most part, Harold or I wrote the music, and then we'd work with Bruce on the lyrics - of which he rarely had any. That's how we ended up with songs like 'Halifax' (with Bruce reading straight from an encyclopedia) and 'Spray Paint' (with lyrics lifted off the side of a can of paint). We started out as a kind of weird blues band, and it kind of evolved into this stuff which Harold and I were writing and which Hampton was throwing stuff on top of.'

The album was to be the Hampton Grease Band's memorial and epitaph, for crippling Harold Kelling left the band shortly after it was recorded. It was a blow which they never recovered from. He was replaced by Mike Greene, who was a woodwind player/keyboardist and not a guitar

player, and the band continued to play live; I knew little of this period of their career until a few years ago, when a tape turned up of the Hampton Grease Band live at Atlanta's Sports Arena (recorded for a radio show) which shows just what a transformation they had undergone - sounding far more professional, they had strayed dangerously into jazz/rock fusion territory and aside from the distinctive Hampton vocals, they could be a different band in a different era. Which, to all incense and porpoises, they probably were and it's a salutary lesson to me to let the past well alone and not expect the kinds of sounds that appear on 'Music to Eat' to ever be heard again. The band struggled on until May 1973, when they self-destructed for once and for all. There was to have been a second album, on Zappa's Bizarre label (they were signed with Zappa's manager, Herb Cohen at the time), but it was never even recorded let alone released.

After the band broke up, Glenn Phillips sat in for a while with Little Feat. Lowell George took a tape of some solo-instrumental stuff that

Phillips had been working on to Warner Brothers, who expressed an interest in releasing it. 'Unfortunately' says Phillips, 'Herb wouldn't release me from my contract with him, and Warner's wouldn't deal with him because they were suing each other at the time'.

Before moving on to the second part of this piece, dealing with Phillips' subsequent solo career, a word about the current whereabouts of the remaining Hampton Grease Band-ers. Bruce Hampton himself (and here's where I owe the debt to Stigliano, I hadn't the remotest idea about all this stuff until I read it in his piece) formed the Russian Butt Broil immediately after HGB, a band which consisted of him on guitar and vocals plus three drummers. They played one gig in Atlanta, opening for Fleetwood Mac and Pink Floyd - Hampton reportedly played his guitar through either 14 or 18 amps whilst rolling around on the floor. He then formed the Early Ice Age and the Late Bronze Age (two jazzy albums on Landslide Records), did a solo album called 'Life Of A Bronze Tourist' in 1977 and as I said earlier, is currently gigging with his band The Aquarium Rescue Unit. Mike Greene (who replaced Kelling for a few months at the very end) formed a new band after the split who released two albums, one on an indie label and one on Mercury - the latter also features Mike Holbrook. Greene is now president of the N.A.R.A.S. (the organisation responsible for dishing out Grammys). Charlie Phillips went on to



become a music lawyer; Harold Kelling ('as brilliant a guitarist now as ever' according to Phillips) released a solo 45 on Hib Tone Records ('Jezebal'/'Harlem Nocturne'), had a band called IV of IX for a while and is currently playing with two groups, Creatures del Mar and Masters of the Edge. Neither group has released any recordings to date. Mike Holbrook, as mentioned above, worked with Greene and has appeared on Glenn Phillips' solo albums - including one Phillips is working on at the moment. Jerry Fields likewise, although shortly after the Grease Band broke up he changed his name to Gurivir Singh (and as Sant Ramh Singh on Phillips' first solo release. At one point he also became Bubba Freon and joined the Late Bronze Age with Hampton. Glenn Phillips, whose solo career I'll

come to in a minute, is also involved in a band called The Supreme Court with Jeff Calder from the Swimming Pool Q's (Phillips formerly worked with Calder on some material for the Q's, but they came up with so much material that they began playing out on their own.) They've recently recorded an album, which is slated for release 'soon'. Phillips has also worked with the ubiquitous Henry Kaiser, most notably on remakes of the Dead's 'Dark Star' and Hendrix's 'If Six Was Nine' for the Imaginary Records tribute album of that name.

## PART 2 - THE SOLO YEARS

*Last issue, I self-indulged in a lengthy account of the history surrounding one of my all-time favourite albums, 'Music*

*To Eat' by the Hampton Grease Band. The intention this time is to continue from where I left off by making some sense of the slew of solo albums released by Hamptons guitarist Glenn Phillips from 1974 to date - albums which all bear the trademark Phillips guitar work, fretful, incisive and melancholy whilst at the same time bulging the cones of your speakers in sheer surprise at the speed and ability of it all. Many of the quotes used herein are to be duplicated in the sleevenotes for a (at the time of writing) forthcoming double CD compilation of Phillips' solo work, rather as Dave Stewart did for his National Health set after penning the account for an earlier Terrascope. Remember where you read it first....*

The first part of this piece

started with a quote from Glenn Phillips about how young Glenn would be out playing with the Hampton Grease Band on school nights against his father's wishes. They fought, and when on the day of Glenn's 18th birthday a baby was born to his then-girlfriend and immediately put up for adoption, the estrangement was completed and Glenn left the house never to return.

The reason for using that tale as an introduction to Glenn Phillips' post-Hampton Grease Band solo career is twofold. For a start, it appears epigrammatically on the rear-sleeve of Phillips' first solo album 'Lost At Sea' in 1975, and secondly subsequent events acted as an impetus to push Phillips into recording again after a two year lay off following the break-up of the

Hampton Grease Band.

'After a few years we began speaking again. Gradually, the distance between us began to fade and it felt good. Well, one day he came over to visit me - I was living then in the same house as I do now. He walked in and looked around. I was bracing myself for some disapproving remarks about how I was wasting my life playing guitar and what a dump I lived in when he spoke up. "You know, you're one of the luckiest people in the world. You get to do exactly what you want to do, you're good at it and you're happy. Don't ever give this up". I couldn't believe it.'

The next day, on his 50th birthday, Glenn Phillips' father killed himself. Glenn didn't even make it to the funeral - the void he was falling into was complete. His father's last words haunted him though, and after a while Phillips started to write and record again, using equipment scattered through the house and with no money, no band and no existing record contract to release the results. Unusually for those days (it was late 1974) Phillips pressed up and released the album, 'Lost At Sea' himself on 'SnowStar Records'. John Peel picked up on it and aired it on BBC radio here in England and orders started to flood in to Phillips' house. 'Melody Maker' ran a readers' poll in which the ever-amazing British public voted 'Lost At Sea' into second place; Virgin Records picked up on the buzz, flew Phillips to England and offered to release the album in Europe.

'Lost At Sea' (Virgin C1519, 1975) isn't the self-

immolating collection of despair-songs that you might expect it to be considering the circumstances surrounding its recording. 'Lenore', billed as 'music for as girl that makes me roar like a lion and soar like a bird at the same time', seeks to recreate exactly those emotions with delicately piercing guitar work which never fails to curl my toes in a similar manner to hearing fingernails scratched down a blackboard. 'Hubbler' is perhaps the most interesting, a full-frontal guitar assault it's actually a holdover from Hampton Grease Band days, recorded live at one of their last gigs (the 12th Gate, a jazz club in Atlanta on 15/7/72). 'Guruvir' was written for Jerry Fields (of the Hamptons), after he 'called and told me he had changed his name and was getting married to a woman he had never met'. All in all, a fascinating album of solid rock riffs and melody which, whilst a product of its time, stands up pretty well to this day and well deserves the accolades afforded it by the Melody Maker readers of the period (Glenn also related a near-hysterical story surrounding the guitar he used on 'Lost At Sea' which I think will be used in the sleeve notes of the aforementioned CD collection, so I'll spare you that one for now.)

Virgin Records, not surprisingly, wanted a follow-up album recorded and asked Phillips to travel to England to record with a select bunch of studio musicians (history sadly doesn't relate who they were). Phillips refused, preferring to stay in Atlanta and record with buddies Bill Rea (bass) and Doug Landsberg (drums) - Virgin even sent over an emissary to

oversee events, but Phillips refused to allow him entry to the studio.

'I spent the next eight months, day and night, trying to chase down every sound I'd ever heard in my head. One night we had a whistler, a banjo player and a guy marching around in circles with a bagpipe in the studio'.

The result was 'Swim In The Wind' (Virgin V2087, 1977), an album which sports one of the blandest sleeves ever mulled over - a kind of inverted fried egg effect with a white central spot fading to yellow at the edges. The music was to these ears similarly insipid, a pale imitation indeed of the former album although as ever, Phillips' guitar work makes up for any limitations in the songwriting by continuing to sound rough-hewn and abrasive, ready to cut not by simple flashiness alone but by a controlled kind of bleeding which in any kind of context (even the resoundingly spaghetti-westernesque mournfulness of 'Druid Hill') nevertheless hits the mark.

Virgin, convinced they had a bona-fide star on their hands, flew the Phillips band over to England to tour and prodded them into moving permanently to London. 'I figured we could carry on just as well with their American office' recalls Phillips, 'and besides, I wanted to get back to my girlfriend Lenore as did Bill to his wife, Janie. Shortly after we returned, Janie and Lenore moved out the same day, Virgin's American office folded, and we were dropped from the label.'

It was around this time that

Phillips started wearing kneepads and attacking his guitar with a hammer during live performances. Dana Nelson joined the band on keyboards, and this line-up recorded an album entitled 'Dark Lights' (SnowStar SS3, 1980) which features some of Phillips' most unrepentant guitar pyrotechnics since his days with the Hampton Grease band. The contrast with 'Swim In The Wind' couldn't be greater, the shadowy textures of the former giving way to live-in-the-studio guitar/bass/drums/keyboards simplicity and rawness which captures the band at their explosive best. The line-up didn't last long however, for within a few weeks Dana Nelson left the group (married with two children, she simply wasn't up to the demands of constant touring) to be replaced by one Jay Shirley. Drummer Doug Landsberg was proving increasingly unstable - including one moment during the recording of a song when he decided to lunge forward and attack the rest of the band, forgetting that he was sat behind his drumkit however he was only brought back to his senses when the kit crashed to the floor in front of him (complete with the words 'hate' and 'kill' scrawled onto the heads with black felt-tipped pen) whereupon he pulled the drums back together and carried on playing as if nothing had happened. Drummers - who'd have 'em?

'Although this sort of behaviour bothered Bill and I, we both loved Doug's drumming and over the years had become used to him. Jay, on the other hand, was new to all this and one night he finally

cracked. While loading our equipment after a gig one night, he took a speaker cabinet and threw it at Doug. Next thing we knew, he had Doug pinned to the floor in the middle of the club and was choking him...'

Jay left the band soon after, to be replaced by Paul Michael Provost - a man who added a whole new sphere of energy to the band. 'Razor Pocket' (SnowStar SS4, 1982) was recorded in Atlanta and sold from home once again, and for me it's this album which works better than anything released by the Glenn Phillips band since 'Lost At Sea'. 'Guitar Intro' is a two-minute guitar masterpiece of controlled feedback and slashed notes; Side Two's 'The Way I feel' and 'Fallen Angels' burst out at you with sheer energy and the bluesy 'The Lonely Night' seems to have all of Phillips' best licks rolled into one melancholic whole. The band seemed to have found a settled line-up which was producing and recording music which would appeal to a wider audience than the cult, mostly overseas, following they had earned to date; but as ever, it was to be short-lived.

'We continued our constant touring, at one point driving non-stop for 52 hours from Atlanta to California to play some shows and then driving straight back, slowing down only when we were hit by an earthquake. When we got back, Doug announced he was quitting the band. I decided to get as much down on tape as I could before he left, and during the next few weeks we made two quickly-recorded albums 'St. Valentines' Day' (SnowStar SS5) and 'Live' (SnowStar SS6, also put out

on the local Shanachie label I believe). After these two albums were released, Doug continued playing with us for a short while but I knew his departure was inevitable. I wanted this era of the band to end with something stronger than those two albums, so we started work on what was to become 'Elevator'. After that came out, Doug left the band.'

'Elevator', Phillips' most critically acclaimed album since 'Lost At Sea', came out on SST Records (SST 136, also SnowStar SS7) in 1987. Still based on the band's 'live' sound, the production (by Phillips as ever) sounds more rounded somehow, as if the very expectation that the shift to a 'major' indie label like SST might make a difference to the sound had somehow been realised. Provost's 'Vista Cruiser' on Side 2 (inspired, it's said, by the film 'Road Warrior') shows what an integral part of the band Provost had become, or at the very least what an understanding he had of the style which would best suit Phillips' guitar. I can live without the fretless bass sound at the best of times, and it intrudes into this album on almost every track which is possibly why I never could get into it; again though, it's the guitar work which saves the day and it's an argument which doesn't hold water when considering the follow-up album, 'Scratched By The Rabbit' (SnowStar SS8, also released by Demon Records in the UK as Fiend 180 and in the US by East Side Digital, an offshoot of Rykodisc) which instantly struck me as a classic of the Phillips oeuvre - one which was completed, oddly enough, 15 years to the day after Phillips finished

recording 'Lost At Sea'. Both Doug and Paul had left by this time, drummer John Boissiere joining and making an important difference to the band's overall sound; never intrusive, he is nevertheless an intuitive player who has (for me at least) helped Glenn Phillips to achieve the aim he set out with when he started putting a band together, to combine the emotional intensity of 'Lost At Sea' with the musical depth of 'Swim In The Wind'. Live, the current band are a different prospect - Bill Rea is suffering the results of a car accident which damaged his wrist meaning he can rarely play live any more; in a full-circle turn, he has been replaced by former Hampton Grease Band member Mike Holbrook, and one Bob Andre has been brought in on drums in place of John Boissiere (again for live shows).

Glenn Phillips is a fascinating guitarist, one who'd probably be described as 'a musician's musician' if he were talked about at all in the press. He has a light-hearted and yet never light-handed approach to his music, and an emotional depth which can sometimes work against him; there's invariably a track on his albums which make you wince in mock sincerity, but the fact that he can scar your backbone with clusters of shooting stars from his guitar endears you - or me anyway - to his entire recorded output.

## the return of THE HAMPTON GREASE BAND

Just as you thought it was safe to dive back into the Terrascope, the Hampton Grease Band raise their ugly heads again. To be honest, there never was going to be a Hampton Grease Band article part 3. I figured that one short piece detailing the background to the 'Music To Eat' album and another one following the subsequent career of that band's most prolific son, Glenn Phillips, would be enough. I'd have done my part, I'd have finally got it all out of my system and perhaps at the same time repaid the band in some small way for all the pleasure their sole album has brought me down the years. I didn't count on two things though: first, the enormous amount of interest there still is out there in the Hampton Grease Band and all its spin-offs, and secondly that their long lost 'other' guitarist, the truly remarkable Harold Kelling, would get in touch with us as a result of the original article. This then is another short article, dedicated to Harold Kelling and telling his side of the Hamptons story as well as picking up on some of the interesting directions his music has subsequently taken.

Harold Kelling's guitar style is harsher, more up-front and in some ways tighter than Glenn Phillips'. Indeed, it's easy to see in retrospect why the loss of Kelling changed the Hampton Grease Band so radically and had something of a terminal effect on their career. Phillips had long been an admirer of his style, and rumour has it - another unattributable rumour and palpably untrue, but then the

whole story of the Hamptons is shot through with rumour and intrigue - that the reason Kelling left was because he was fed up with Phillips copying his style. Kelling sets the record straight on that score however later on in this piece. Talking to the two of them there seems to be a mutual respect for each other's style, they fed off each other increasingly during the Hamptons period and it was this stylistic development which reached its apogee on the now legendary 'Music To Eat' LP. But, you've had enough of my ramblings on the subject already over the last two issues: here then is Harold Kelling's own account of the story.

"In the summer of 1967 a band I was playing with called The IV of IX broke up after three years of high-school dances, college frat parties and night club gigs all over the south-east. We were basically a covers band, playing tunes by the Stones, Byrds, Beatles, Ventures and Link Wray plus some originals written by Tommy Charter (singer and rhythm guitarist) and myself. In 1965 our bass player, George Vance, had told us that a friend of his in our school was going to professional wrestling matches and had a mighty unusual sense of humour; and so he brought Bruce Hampton along to practice one day. I think he was 18 at the time. With a lot of encouragement and some coercion he started coming to gigs and began to develop a stage persona and vocal style, coupled with self-confident abandon and powerful delivery. We loved it, and his contribution brought the band (IV of IX) a unique dimension, unlike anything else in the area. The band broke up in August

1967 and Bruce, Charlie Phillips, Sam Whiteside and I went to New York, where we met Frank Zappa on the street that September. We saw Cream's first US gig in Boston, and walked out on The Doors at the Fillmore East. After we returned to Atlanta we picked up on Paul

and invited us over for the evening.... I just walked up to him and said 'Grease' with no particular context in mind. Somehow we communicated to him our compatible weirdness....

"The Hampton Grease Band were formed on 10/10/67.

a broadened and more eclectic compositional mode. This evolved gradually and came to its head with the material on 'Music To Eat'.

"Some people who hear the band have absurd ideas about the meaning of the lyrics and the music, talking about 'psychedelicesized multi-level innuendo' and 'mystical revelation'. Horsefeathers. Some of the lyrics are obviously lifted from printed material (on 'Halifax' and part of 'Hendon'), but most of it was a tribute to friends, inside jokes and playful abstractions - with the possible exception of 'Hey Old Lady', which was about a mentally ill old lady who did just what the song says. Charlie Phillips wrote the lyrics, although he is not credited on the LP. The song 'Six' however does contain some veiled references to a very bizarre and unexplained series of events that occurred to Bruce and I in New York on and around June 6th, 1966. Overall, the lyrics have about as much philosophical depth as a sheet of saran-wrap. All the heaviness is in the music, with the emphasis on variation, dynamics, texture and drama.

"Around the time of the album's release date, internal frictions within the group forced me to leave, and Columbia shied away when they found out what we played like - 'too surreal and un-commercial'. Some of the gigs we played were really fun and musically transcendent for us, and these memories I cherish.

"The rumour about me leaving the Hampton Grease Band because of Glenn copying me is totally untrue. We began to go in different directions musically as well as spir-



Butterfield and various other blues acts which had been hitherto unknown to us. This blues music hit us hard and was very inspirational. We wanted to play it, but there were no white blues bands anywhere in the South - so we were unique and alone.

"We chose Bruce Hampton's name for the band because he was our only vocalist. He was NOT the leader. We added the word 'Grease' because that was the first thing I'd said to Frank Zappa on the street in front of the Garrick Theater in New York. He in turn responded with hospitality and friendship

Glenn, Bruce, Charlie, Mike Rogers and I were the founding members. We went through several drummers before we found Jerry Fields, who was perfect - and Charlie was replaced by Mike Holbrook in the Autumn of 1968. When the Hampton Grease Band first started playing we were exclusively blues oriented and tried to exemplify what we thought was a sincere blues feeling, choosing material from blues greats such as J.B. Hutto, Otis Rush, Howlin' Wolf, Robert Johnson etc. However, after about a year Glenn and I started to pursue



**Jerry Fields**

itually and as these tensions increased, a split was inevitable. My guitar style was evolving more into a 12 tone and polyharmonic expressionism, the forerunner of which is the song 'Six' with its many faceted, harmonic and rhythmic explorations. Glenn's style was and is almost strictly diatonic... Glenn and I are good friends and have learned from and inspired each other and have recently been working together on 'Halifax', 'Evans', 'Hendon', 'Six' and 'Hey Old Lady And Bert's Song' for some reunion gigs with Mike Holbrook and Jerry Fields. So far Bruce Hampton has been unwilling to play with us, I don't exactly understand why....." (Gosh! Ed.)

Harold Kelling's one piece of post-Hampton vinyl consists of a single released in 1982 under his own name. Released on the Hib Tone label (the same one that brought out REM's debut single 'Radio Free Europe' in 1981!) it couples the old guitar instrumental chestnut 'Harlem Nocturne' (anyone out there heard Bob Flurie's stunning version of that circa. 1977? A gem!) with 'Jezebel' by, confusingly because of the way I've just written that, the Chestnuts. The pic-sleeve features more of Kelling's own strange

drawings that grace the 'Music To Eat' sleeve - well worth searching out, anyway.

"The drawings just come off the top of my head", Harold told me, "A very close friend, Espy Geissler, taught me practically everything I know about colour and painting. We did a series of paintings together from 1970 - 1980 and had several shows in Atlanta and New York. The paintings were done simultaneously by each other on the same canvas, just as musicians improvise together."



**Mike Holbrook**

Kelling has had (or has been in) several other bands though, starting in roughly chronological order with The Starving Brain Eaters. This band was formed in 1973 with some close musical friends of

Kelling's, including Robert O'Toole and Harold himself on guitar, Bill Porter on electric piano, Ken Gregory on bass and Tom Rafferty on drums. They were more jazz oriented than the Hampton Grease Band, but did do versions of 'Six' and 'Hendon' (recordings of which languish in the vaults somewhere - Harold's working on that one!) Harold told me,

"One day in the summer of 1973 John Hammond Sr. was in town and heard a tape of the Starving Brain Eaters at a local radio station. He loved the band and came over to our practice room and listened to us live. He was on the verge of signing us to Columbia but he had a heart attack and then the band broke up; although we reformed a year or so later events didn't lead us back to him."

During 1974, Harold met up with keyboard player Bob Grimes and "instantly became musical brothers - and have been so ever since". Through several name changes and per-

sonnel changes ("and many strange and fabulous gigs!") the band gradually evolved into an outfit which is now known as 'Masters Of The Edge'. This band currently have a tape out which Harold

is keen to promote, and I'm glad to be able to help out because it is quite simply one of the most adventurous pieces of improvisational jazz/rock (yet not 'fusion', that horrible word that conjures up mindless flash for the sake of it) that it's been my pleasure to hear in a long time. Bob Grimes plays a concert Steinway grand piano in a totally unique manner, his fingers flying around the keys both rhythmically and seemingly without direction at one and the same time, Rick Bear plays drums like a madman, someone called L.A. Tuten lays down an unobtrusive yet solid bass line throughout and Harold Kelling's own synth-guitar has to be heard to be believed. A couple of the tracks are slightly whimsical ('What's That Down There' which has definite leanings towards the HGB school of weirdness and the country rock of '30 Links Of Chain'), one or two reflect Kelling's religious beliefs - during the Hampton Grease Band years both Harold and his wife became involved in various forms of occultism; he subsequently denounced that and now devotes "all the music I play to our Lord Jesus Christ, whether it's rock & roll, jazz or just plain weird" - but when the band get into some serious a-compositional mayhem there's few around to touch them, certainly some of their chord progressions are unique to my knowledge. My own favourite is 'Steps To Crisp' (re-annotated as 'Steps To Christ' by Kelling on my copy) which starts off with some fairly straightforward soft-jazz piano work from Grimes before faltering once, twice, and as the drums crash in taking off on some fine exploratory work on the bass guitar which leads you gently towards some truly



magnificent guitar work that shows with its speed, soul and dexterity just why Phillips rates Kelling so highly. 'KPB' is another favourite, you have no idea quite where it's going to lead from one moment to the next, sometimes it's the kind of guitar attack that would have thrash metal merchants revolving in their cocoons and the next there's almost straight (if there is such a thing) improvisational jazz coming towards you. It's pretty well unclassifiable stuff and I have to say that I love it; details of 'Light At The Speed Of Music' by Masters Of The Edge are available on receipt of an IRC or two from Harold Kelling at 514 Valley Green, Atlanta, Ga 30342 USA ("There's only 8 tapes left at the moment, but if anyone wants them they're available for \$10 each - we'll make some more soon"). The less adventurous explorers amongst you, those not so used to improvisational jazz-like elements, could also do a lot worse than check out a 4-song tape from El Supremo which I assume is available from the same source while

you're about it. The band includes Harold's son Tarmon (now 23 years old) amongst its members - 'Hypnotised' is a fine, fine song indeed which features some neat variations in tone and speed, the guitars at one moment sounding pretty much straight-ahead Amer-indie ROCK and the next having a twisting little sting in their tail which was enough for me to stop the tape and rewind it a couple of times to find out just what the hell was going on. The lengthy 'Heavy Lucifer' likewise; although the vocals are unremarkable there's imaginative use of the rise-and-fall scheme of sonic oblivion that only needs the right producer to topple them over the edge into distinction. Bloody marvellous guitar work at the end too, put me in mind of the Walkingseeds for some curious reason.

Harold Kelling also has a band called Creatures Del Mar, who consist of Phillip Stone on vocals, Harold on guitar, Pat Creel on bass and Tony Adams on drums. Their

approach is more straight-ahead rock although numbers like 'Cedars of Lebanon' reveal a finely-honed sense of musical direction, that one in particular featuring some particularly fiery guitar work from Kelling himself, and 'San Andreas Fault' reveals an almost Beefheartian angle of contrapuntal mayhem.

Like I said at the outset, the response to our original Hampton Grease Band article a couple of issues ago has been pretty much unprecedented. Those of you already

familiar with the 'Music To Eat' album seemed more than happy to find out a little more about it, and a great number of others wrote in to ask where they might be able to find a copy. The only answer really has to be "with a great deal of luck" - just how many were pressed originally seems to vary according to whoever you're talking to, although I've never seen the figure put any higher than 3000 and since the album has never been re-issued in any format you can rest assured that most copies are by now in the hands of collectors.

And one last word for the completists, a US compilation album released in 1991 on the Sacred Flame label entitled 'Mighty Risen Plea' (in case the title doesn't suggest it to you, it's an AIDS benefit compilation) includes a track by 'Colonel' Bruce Hampton and Ricky Keller entitled 'The Pope & One' - it's not actually by Bruce Hampton's Aquarium Rescue Unit as credited on the label, but shows if nothing else that the legend lives on.

*Written, produced and directed by Phil McMullen*

