

Pulling Two Solo Artists Out Of A Columnist's Hat

By ROMAN KOZAK

How do we find the artists who are going to be profiled in this column? We would like to be able to tell you that it's a real romantic quest, that we snare them somewhere backstage or in dark corridors in the middle of the night. But it doesn't happen that way.

What does happen is that the record companies or private p.r. firms call us, and while we do turn down some turkeys, usually we say OK, and make an appointment at some office or hotel room or restaurant. We bring our Aiwa, look whomever in the eye, and hope not to be too bored or boring for the next 30 minutes. The tape listens.

From the tape, the story is written. It's all easy enough, except, of course, when there are no tapes that week, or when there are too many of them. Like this week, when we have, no kidding, 10. So who do we write about, when all are worthy?

This week we pick. We put all 10 tapes in a hat, and draw two. . . . And get: Patrick Simmons ex of the



Doobie Brothers, and Rodger Hodgson, former and part-time member of Supertramp.

A good find, as both are talented musicians coming from extremely successful bands who are now embarking on solo careers. Simmons already has his solo album out on Elektra, while Hodgson is still working on his for A&M. Let's talk with Simmons first:

An original member of the Doobies when they started in 1970, Patrick Simmons has just released an LP, "Arcade," whose single "So Wrong" is breaking into the top 30, while the video is on medium rotation on MTV. With it, Simmons is also getting airplay on urban contemporary and new music stations.

He says that he has gotten a new band together consisting of young musicians he has found around the San Francisco Bay Area in the last few months. They are not the same players who appear on the album.

Simmons admits that it's "pretty hard" to go out alone after so many years in an established group. "You don't know what direction to go in first and what to do first," he says. "I'm just taking it a day at a time. Doing the album and putting the band together were the first things, but now I can do things pretty much the way I want, close to home in Santa Cruz."

Simmons says one of the reasons he left the Doobies was simply that the rest of the members of the band lived in Los Angeles, while he wanted to stay close to home and his motorcycles and his garden in Santa Cruz, and he just didn't like to have to travel 500 miles for a rehearsal.

"Having to be jumping all the time with a band that was as active as we were was a lot of pressure," he continues. "I feel that in that respect the pressure is off. It's not so much that I'm a family man as that I have

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roots, and my roots are in the Bay Area. I am sort of proud of that. There is a particular type of music scene that is going on there that I can better identify with."

As a result, he says, toward the end of the Doobie Brothers there was no desire to reorganize one more time a band that through the years got to be well known for its shifting cast of musicians. "It was one of those things at the end where I could see that certain people were going to probably not stay with it, and that we would have to reorganize again," he says.

"I actually left before the thing came down and the band went their separate directions, but I had a sense that it wasn't as exciting to some of the guys as it had been. I could foresee it. And I didn't want to reorganize it again. I personally didn't want to go through that. I couldn't see beating it to death."

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Coincidentally, Rodger Hodgson also lives in Northern California, while the rest of Supertramp lives in L.A., and while Simmons is rehearsing with his new band for a possible tour, Hodgson is in his own studio, working to finish his solo album before he, too, goes on the road. But he's going with Supertramp. He's sticking around with his old mates through the summer, until they finish a contracted world tour, their first since 1979.

"I have left the band, but we are getting together for a world tour, basically because we have been hanging around together for the last four years, and rather than waste those four years, we felt we should go out with something positive," says Hodgson.

"After that, Supertramp will be continuing, but they will be a different band, really. I myself am coming up with a solo album in June, and I felt I should keep a high profile during that. We are still all good friends, but I felt that (Supertramp's) music was not reaching its full potential," he says.

"So something had to change, and

I really wanted to work with other musicians. And they wanted to continue as a band," he adds.

Hodgson says he's doing his own record "in record time" in order to finish it by the June deadline, which basically means doing it in six weeks. It doesn't sound all that difficult until Hodgson tells you that "Famous Last Words," the latest LP from Supertramp, took 18 months to make.

"Rock music in general has begun to bore me to tears, and obviously new pioneers are needed in the use of instruments and in what people write about. I want to team up with musicians who are breaking new boundaries, and I want to do it myself," he says.

"Supertramp was a bit vague, and I want to get less vague. I want to be more meat and potatoes. I don't think the last Supertramp album was that great. It was disappointing for what it could have been, both in the choice of material and the whole energy that went into it. In terms of what's out there it's still a very good album, but what's out there isn't that great."

Hodgson, or at least his press people who are there, say that he wanted to move in a "heavier" direction with Supertramp, as did fellow Supertramp writer Richard Davies. The problem was that both men's ideas of what "heavier" things they could do with Supertramp were different. That's what made the album take such a long time, and made it turn out the way it did. Ultimately, the only things they could agree on were the lighter pieces.

"Working together became so difficult that the only things we could do together were the lighter pop things, while we both wanted the meat and the potatoes," says Hodgson, during an Indian lunch interview. He is, incidentally, a vegetarian.

"But it's been very good for the both of us, and I don't think it's going to be the end of our relationship, either. This needs to happen for us to want to work together again. We've been married for too long, 13 years. We need new musical partners."