The View

THE VIEW Volume I July '88

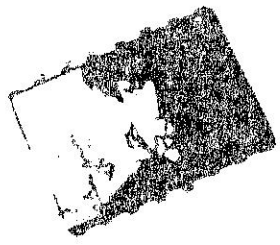
the fan club newsletter of
Arista recording artists
THE CHURCH
featuring highlights of
spring and summer 1988
'STARFISH' TOUR '88

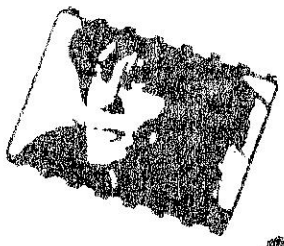
Editor
R. Leone
Contributing Editors
D. Vader
J. Pine

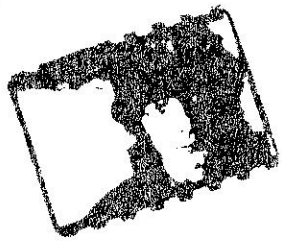
MEET THE BAND

The Church began in 1980 as a three-piece band consisting of Nick Ward (drums), Peter Koppes (guitar), and Steve Kilbey (bass, vocals). Their early career was inauspicious, doing a handful of small gigs in their hometown, Sydney, Australia. Soon after they were joined by Marty Willson-Piper on guitar, who had recently arrived from England. A 4-track home studio demo tape landed them a publishing deal with ATV Northern Songs and a record deal with EMI Australia. Their first single, "She Never Said", (released November, 1980) flopped, but their second single, "Unguarded Moment", (released February, 1981) soared into the Top 10 and pulled their debut LP, 'Of Skins And Heart', (co-produced by Bob Clearmountain and Chris Gilbey) onto the charts as well. The album later went platinum in Australia and gold in Canada. During this period drummer Nick Ward left the band and was replaced by by 18-year-old Richard Ploog from Adelaide, who had responded to an newspaper ad. The band released a double-single, "Too Fast For You", in June, '81 that sold out the first week it was released, and now changes hands at auctions for $50-$100. In December of '81 The Church toured Australia's east coast, playing packed venues everywhere.

Their second LP, 'Blurred Crusade', was released in March, '82 and was immediately hailed as a classic, defining the new guitar sound that would be a constant theme for The Church on future albums. The album was co-produced by the band and Bob Clearmountain, and its first single, "Almost With You" zoomed up the charts. Later in '82 The Church toured England and Europe with much success, and upon returning to Australia released the 'Sing-Songs' EP.







In early '83 the band recorded 'Seance', a dense and somber record which garnered much critical acclaim, particularly in England. In 1984 two of the band's Australian EP's were put together to form 'Remote Luxury', released on Warner Brothers in the United States, and supported by the band's first American tour later that year. The record received glowing reviews and considerable college radio play.

1985 was a period of rest and re-evaluation for The Church, who did a brief Australian tour and later that year began work on their next LP, 'Heyday', which was released in February, '86. They toured worldwide to full houses in cities as diverse as Madrid, Melbourne, Minneapolis, and Montreal. 'Heyday' topped the college and new music charts for many months, and Australia's RAM magazine's 7th Annual Readers Poll voted Steve Best Singer and Songwriter, and Marty Best Guitarist. The band figured prominently in the top five of nearly all other categories.

In July of '87 The Church began recording their new LP 'Starfish' on their new label Arista Records, produced in Los Angeles by Greg Ladanyi and Waddy Wachtel. The record was released in February, and the combination of a great album and a very enthusiastic record company rocketed 'Starfish' immediately into Billboard's Top 200. As of July '88 the LP has been hovering in the 40's on Billboard's album chart for four months, and the first single, "Under The Milky Way", reached #24 on the single chart.

(writing credits: D. Vader, Arista Records)

WHAT'S A STARFISH?

A starfish (or sea star) is a star-shaped carnivorous marine invertebrate animal (members of a species called echinoderms) found worldwide in shallow waters. The spiny body has five or more tapering arms radiating from a central area. Usually dull yellow or orange, but occasionally brightly colored, starfish vary in size from under 1/2 inch to over 3 feet in diameter. Like all echinoderms, starfish have external skeletons just under their skin, no head, and a unique water vascular system with tube-feet. They have extensive powers of regeneration of lost parts. Starfish live on the ocean floor and are cousins to brittle stars, sea urchins, sand dollars, sea cucumbers, and crinoids. The starfish "sees" with a small colored "eyespot" located on the tip of each of its arms. The eyespot senses light, but cannot form images. Starfish that have many arms are called sun stars because their shape resembles the sun and its rays.

Many starfish feed on shellfish like mussels, clams, and oysters. Most starfish live three to five years, but can live up to seven.

In RAM's March 23rd issue, writer J.J. Adams takes a stab at understanding why The Church would call their latest album 'Starfish':

"The Church, like starfish, are not creatures who leap out at the unwary, boldly proclaiming their presence. Some people travel everywhere searching for them, but many others discover them purely by accident. Their music is often colorful and concerts are lively, but a lot of the time The Church seem content to just...be there, watching the rest of the musical world ebb and flow around them."

How did you discover The Church? Write us, and we'll print some replies. One thing we know for sure, they're easy to discover lately!

Two characteristics The Church have and do not share with starfish are their vegetarian diets and their ability to conjure up all kinds of dreamlike imagery.

So why is The Church's latest LP entitled 'Starfish'? In an interview with East Coast Rocker, Steve offers up this explanation:

"I just thought 'Starfish' was a nice name for an album...But it's open to interpretation - if one guy thinks that 'Starfish' is The Church's statement on ecology and another guy thinks it's a clever juxtaposition of the words 'star' and 'fish', then they're both right. I really like that. I think The Church is more open to interpretation than any band on Earth. Everything we do is so random and open to interpretation, and I think that's what people like about us, because they can take it home and call it their own. You can't misinterpret it...We're like a musical Rorschach test, or a perfume that smells different on everyone who wears it. I think it's a good thing that the people who like The Church spend a lot of time with it...and ponder the significance of it. It's like a word association test - we toss things out and let people freely associate."

While open to interpretation, 'Starfish' is generally acknowledged to be The Church's most accessible effort yet (both musically and lyrically), and is the LP that comes yet closest to their live sound.

ON THE PRESSURES OF BEING "BIG"

'Starfish', The Church's debut Arista LP has to date logged sales of over 550,000 units, over 380,000 of those in the U.S. alone. The album is certain to go gold, and sales of 'Starfish' exceed all previous Church releases combined. Not a bad result for surviving the Los Angeles summer '87 quakes and the unlikely pairing of The Church with producers noted for the southern California sound of Jackson Brown, The Eagles, and other west coast soft-rockers.

'Starfish' is the first Church album not recorded in Australia and the album that took the longest to record (3 months). In the June '88 cover story in Australia's Rolling Stone, Bernard Zuel observes, "the effect of these dislocations is evident throughout the album." Marty Willson-Piper comments, "...we needed a bit of aggravated input.", with Steve Kilbey concurring, "But it's nice looking back and seeing the album has this edginess about it."

The appeal of 'Starfish' is due in no small part to the record's capturing a feeling of displacement through themes of travel and alienation, especially evident in the melodic and haunting songs "Destination", "Hotel Womb", "Lost", and "North, South, East & West." (See lyrics to "Hotel Womb" at the end of this newsletter.) Rock critics try to outdo each other in attempting to describe in reviews the mood The Church have conveyed so well with their music.

Perhaps the most imaginative of these (and a particular favorite of Steve Kilbey's) is in the Rolling Stone (U.S. issue) magazine of April 2nd that appeared shortly after the album's release:

"At its most compelling, the band scrambles the real and surreal with ease, rattling its stately guitarchitecture with howling north-wind echo and the troubled undertow of Kilbey's enigmatic lyrics."

Other glowing music trade reviews surfaced in Billboard, Creem, The Gavin Report, FMBQ Album Report, and CMJ New Music Report; international reviews included the UK Barnsley Chronicle, Today, and Toronto's Rock Express. Here's a review montage: "...they swoop and swirl...'Starfish' has a sinuous hypnotic grace...oddball charm... evocative lyrics and gorgeous melodies...sparkling guitar work... full of melancholy, but it isn't bleak at all...class approach mixed with some beautiful climate and textures...hypnotic as hell...a highly lyrical and textured work..." The phrasing of each critic may be different, but the enthusiasm and acclaim are unanimous.

A complete list of recent articles on The Church are too numerous to mention here, but some of the highlights include cover story interviews in the Australian Rolling Stone, East Coast Rocker, Creem Magazine, and L.A. Music Connection. Major articles have appeared in the U.S. Rolling Stone, UK Sounds Magazine, Australia's RAM Magazine, The Los Angeles Times, Billboard, UK New Magazine, Barnsley Chronicle, What's On, Bucketful of Brains, and an upcoming article in Musician Magazine, and the list goes on... The recent Church show at The Ritz in New York was broadcast live on WNEW-FM, the Big Apple's main rock station. Several thousand fans packed The Ritz that night (June 9th).

...BEING "BIG" (continued)

Credit for the breakthrough success of 'Starfish' is due in large part to the lively marketing and caring support for the album at The Church's new home, Arista Records. When the album was released on February 11th, Arista set up listening parties in 25 cities in such diverse settings as aquariums and planetariums. The Church then did a mini promotional tour in March playing shows in Toronto, Los Angeles (The Roxy), New York (The Bottom Line), and Virginia. The shows received raves from press and fans. Donna Vader spoke at length with Church devotees at the Roxy show in Los Angeles and they were thoroughly impressed with The "new" Church, stating this was by far the best performance they had ever seen the band do. During the mini tour the band did some press days, being interviewed by various college papers, radio stations, and magazines from all over the world. On the evening of The Bottom Line show, The Church met with over 50 representatives of college radio in a conference room at Arista Records. Acknowledging the loyalty of college radio, The Church squeezed the interview session in between a soundcheck that went overtime and dashing back to their hotel to get changed for the evening's concert. The college reps kept their cool and gave The Church a very warm reception. Many brought albums with them for the band to autograph, which they did obligingly. The Church spent the first four days in April in a studio in Amsterdam working on song ideas for upcoming releases. A two-week tour of Scandinavia and Europe followed, then back to Australia for a few concerts; they returned to America for a lengthy swing through the west coast and south, (from the state of Washington to Texas), and continued up the east coast into Canada. The Church then crossed the border back to the midwest, and by late June into July they were once again in Europe with several appearances in Germany and outdoor rock festivals.

Highlights of recent touring:

The Church played to packed, sold-out houses in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas (estimates are at 10,000), Austin, Houston, New Orleans, Atlanta, New York, Boston, New Haven, Cleveland, Detroit, and Minneapolis. The day of the New York show, Marty did an interview with WNEW's Ray White. Marty and Steve did a 3-song live acoustic set on both WCBN and WFNX in Boston. The Church filmed an interview with MTV in Atlanta for the "120 Minutes" show. They also filmed an interview for MuchMusic (the Canadian version of MTV) in Montreal. The entire band went to The Hard Rock Cafe in Los Angeles, where they each presented a signed piece of memorabilia. These will all grace the soon-to-be-opened Hard Rock Cafe in Sydney. Marty also signed a Rickenbacker guitar to be displayed in the Hard Rock in Dallas. England's Bucketful of Brains Magazine has Marty on the cover of its latest issue, with a flexidisc of the unreleased Church song "Texas Moon" inside. At the July 1st Roskilde Festival near Copenhagen The Church appeared with Bryan Adams and INXS. The Church will be back in the U.S. in August (confirmed tour dates enclosed with this issue!)

How do The Church view their hard-won success? ("Under The Milky Way" hit #1 on the alternative and AOR charts and the video went into heavy rotation on MTV). In Creem Steve admits, "I don't spend a lot of time thinking about that sort of stuff, 'cause you just get crazy. I just feel it's up to me to make an album and give it to the record company. I know a lot of good musicians who haven't even made a record...If I get to make a record and come here and tour and sell 60,000 copies, that's OK. Anything better is just icing on the cake." When asked what long-term effect U.S. success would have on the band, Steve replied, "I'm just doing what I've always done...just taking it as it comes...And even if the album stops selling tomorrrow-- We've already bettered ourselves." In Australia's Rolling Stone Marty comments, "The Church is very successful for the kind of band The Church is, because we are not an across-the-board mass appeal group. Still it is really interesting for us to see outselves getting added to all these radio stations each week, which has never happened before. We've got a record which is getting good reviews and selling out more than before, but I don't think we really know why."

By keeping focused on their musical expression and crowd pleasing performances, The Church are taking breakthrough success in stride.

STYLE VS. SUBSTANCE

More than a few critics and fans have noted the contrast between the delicate wash of sound on The Church's albums and their frenzied stage demeanor. Just so you can never pidgeonhole these guys... College correspondent Josh Pine was at The Church's recent Atlanta show, and offers his observations:

"If only one word could be used to describe the concert that took place on June 6th at Center Stage Theatre in downtown Atlanta it would be energy - in its simplest and purest form. Acting as the generator was Marty Willson-Piper: twisting, grinding, and present on every inch of the stage at once. The remaining Church members transformed their currents to the eagerly waiting receptors of the audience.

The show opened with a subdued version of "When You Were Mine', but things quickly jelled when Peter and Marty dove into the question/answer riffs of "North, South, East & West" followed by a truly haunting version of "Blood Money". All the elements of The Church were in full force during this number: Marty's ethereal flow of chords opposite Peter's sinister progression of stacatto notes; Steve's soft yet cynical voice, and Richard's accents filling all the spaces in-between. This was The Church at their best; when you truly felt you were involved in some religious ceremony--a ceremony whose spell crystallized on all cuts from their most recent release, 'Starfish'. "Reptile" moved with true vigor and anger, while "Hotel Womb" bathed their followers with bittersweet ease. Of course, "Under The Milky Way" brought the most applause as soon as Marty began strumming its minor chords on acoustic guitar. Several encores were played, and the music ended in an interesting, drawn-out feedback session."

Established music critics comment on The Church's dynamic performing style: New York Times critic Jon Pareles noted in his review of The Church's March Bottom Line show, "The Church is a juggernaut in concert. Above Richard Ploog on drums and Mr. Kilbey on bass, punching out riffs in exact coordination, Peter Koppes and Marty Willson-Piper on guitars orchestrate every song with carefully calibrated turbulence. The Church's closer "She Took" crescendoed from a calm bass riff to a frenzy of strummed, chiming, howling guitars until the air itself seemed about to explode." Ira Robbins of The New York Post reviewed the show at The Ritz on June 9 and wrote, "On record, the Australian guitar quartet plays an engaging mix of Beatlesque pop, folk-rock, and modern psychedelia. Live, however, they're almost a garage band, revving up a loud rock attack with crazed feedback and energetic guitar solos...the night finished with a wildly chaotic rendition of "Tantalized" that clearly demonstrated the group's acid-rock tendencies." Mark Coleman comments on the totally individual stage presences of each of the band members in the May 19th issue of Rolling Stone, "Onstage Koppes stands nearly immobile while Willson-Piper gyrates like a top. Both create symphonies of noise by utilizing every inch of their guitars, twisting knobs and whacking pickups for effect. Kilbey stands betweeen the two, figuratively and literally; he's looser than Koppes but less gymnastic than Willson-Piper. And his vocals, strengthened by Ploog's insistent beat, cut like a beacon through the guitarists' purple haze."

What do The Church have to say about the contrast between their performing style and their recordings? Do they view it as a contradiction? If anything, with each successive release they strive to more closely approximate the raw energy of their live sound. But Steve Kilbey also acknowleges a certain mystery to being unpredictable and enjoys eluding categorization. The April issue of UK's Sounds Magazine applauds the "fascinating contrast between the extrovert stage manner and the introverted songs".

Steve comments: "I guess when we started we were delicate live. But I guess we're a confused and confusing band. We have elements of subtlety, and we have elements of Spinal Tap...The audience knows what we're capable of...There should be a few laughs and a bit of irony."

SPOTLIGHT ON STEVE

In several magazine interviews, Steve talks about his songwriting process and some behind the scenes info on "Under The Milky Way" and "Reptile", the second 'Starfish' single. In Creem, he tells readers that "Under The Milky Way" is "a direct reflection of the fact that when I was three or four years old and my parents first moved from Australia, from England, we were very, very poor. I had only one record, which was Frank Sinatra's 'Only The Lonely', and the whole album was all these songs about love lost, but the lyrics were incredibly surrealistic...Very weird, strange kind of lyrics, and very clever...it was the only album I had I heard it over and over and over, and it was my first exposure to music...

...STEVE (continued)

"So as I grew up, I always thought pop music to be this weird, creepy sound, kind of like a loneliness and isolation thing, and I think that, so many years later, it's come out in this song! "Milky Way" is...a song which in another time and place I would have liked to have seen on this 'Only The Lonely Album'."

"Reptile"'s inspiration came partly from seeing David Bowie live in concert. Steve described Bowie as "reptilian" and said of his video image, "when I looked into his eyes it was like a snake about to eat a little frog. The word reptile was in my mind from then."

In describing songwriting Steve says, "I feel like I'm yearning for something which is fairly vague...all my sensual experiences... don't really add up to anything, don't really fill this kind of vague, empty space I have. That's why I write songs, to try and temporarily bridge that gap. The songs are supposed to be like dreams, totally unsatisfying...not even questions. I enjoy the luxury of indulging myself in vague dreams, fragments and things."

'Starfish', like its predecessor 'Heyday' is an album written by the entire band, featuring a Willson-Piper song, "Spark", and Peter Koppes' tune "A New Season". Most of the song lyrics were written by Steve, and below are the lyrics to his dreamlike "Hotel Womb":

HOTEL WOMB

- S. Kilbey (Tomata Du Plenti Music/ASCAP)

Volcano pierce the air, ashes block out the sun
Down in the lair, well I met her there with a price for everyone
I paid $80 for this wedding ring, I couldn't take it off if I tried
And the cactus sure tastes strangely sweet as it goes down inside

I dream I'm safe in my hotel womb
Soft and soul made, it's a wonderful room

Sudden voltage in the night with a rainforest girl
As we float downstream to the Amazon river where the black waters swirl
I say why are you people wearing those masks, I say can we be reconciled
She says the mother of the storm has to roam the sky searching for her child

I dream I'm safe in my hotel womb
Soft and soul made, it's a wonderful room
I wish I'm back in my hotel womb
Slip through the crack to that wonderful room

Morning comes at last, and she's lying by my side
She's got the face of the widow who keeps following me, and the body of my bride
I say why are those buildings swaying like trees, I say can we stop for a while
She says can't you hear the city that's hidden in there, it's just another mile

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The relaxed confidence and newfound intimacy of Steve's vocals on 'Starfish' can be partly credited to coaching from an opera singer.

SOLO RELEASES/UPDATED DISCOGRAPHY

Prior to exploding from cult to popular status, three of The Church members have found time for burgeoning solo careers, while drummer Richard Ploog played and recorded with several bands including Damien Lovelock's Wigmen and Salamander Jim. In sheer output Steve Kilbey leads the pack with three albums and a book of prose/poetry, while Marty Willson-Piper and Peter Koppes give him a run for his money!

The solo releases have served as an nurturing escape from the very real tensions of four strong egos working together as a band, and provide an opportunity to be creatively freer. What the members learn writing and producing their own projects can flow back into the band's strength as a group. All releases dominated the Aussi music charts.

Steve has released critically hailed 'Unearthed' on Aussi's Redeye label and Enigma Records U.S., and 'Earthed', an instrumental LP with accompanying book of prose/poetry (on Redeye in Australia and Rykodisc U.S. worldwide), and 'The Slow Crack' (Redeye). It is worthy of note that Rykodisc recently released 'Earthed' the LP and book ('Earthed') in a CD version double-gatefold box, and the album (on clear vinyl) is being released this month, with a cassette version as well.

Marty Willson-Piper released 'In Reflection' (Chase Records, Australia) with a booklet explaining his home recording techniques. Most recently his second solo record 'Art Attack' was released on CD by Rykodisc (the single "She's King" is climbing the alternative charts). The album and cassette of 'Art Attack' will be released by Rykodisc this month, and is also on clear vinyl. Survival Records will distribute 'Art Attack' in Australia. Both Marty's solo records were co-produced by his good friend Andy Mason, and grapevine gossip has it a third solo LP is in the works. ('Art Attack' was recorded in 2 weeks time in New York City last year.) The CD version of 'Art Attack' contains 6 cuts from 'In Reflection'. The video for "She's King" is currently being aired on MTV's "120 Minutes".

Rykodisc also recently released the CD version of Peter Koppes' 'Manchild and Myth', which also contains the previously released EP (three songs) 'When Reason Forbids'. Both the EP and album were released in Australia on Session Records. 'Manchild and Myth' will be out later this month in album (clear vinyl) and cassette from Rykodisc.

A brief Church LP discography follows: (A complete list of all songs released will be detailed in an upcoming issue of 'The View'.)

OF SKINS AND HEART (EMI Australia, 1981)/THE BLURRED CRUSADE (EMI Australia, 1982)/SEANCE (EMI Australia, 1983)/REMOTE LUXURY (Warner Brothers/EMI, 1984)/HEYDAY(Warner Brothers/EMI, 1986)/STARFISH (Arista Records/Mushroom Records Australia, 1988)

The good news is that Arista Records is re-issuing all five back Church albums this month. Welcome relief for fans trying to get hold of hard-to-find Church import releases. Your prayers are answered.

Also due out soon is the EMI release of 'Hindsight', a compilation of material from the band's years with that label. That release will feature B-sides from previous Church singles.

WHAT'S AHEAD

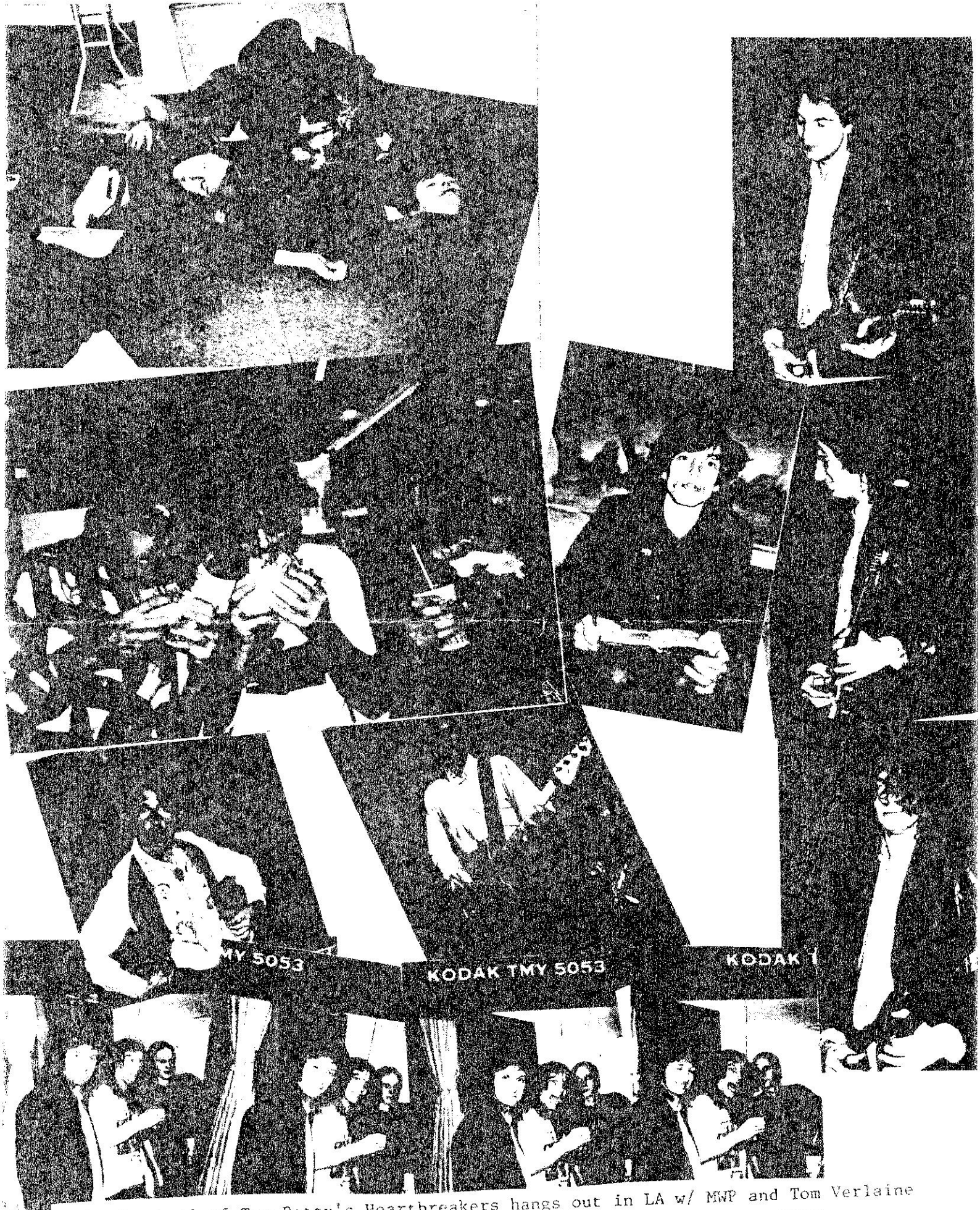
In future issues of 'The View' we will be following the activities of The Church as they return to the U.S. for another leg of the their worldwide tour and keep you informed on their progress; and we hope to get some of the band's impressions on the filming of their videos.

We've listed below confirmed tour dates currently available for late August and early September:

DATE		CITY	VENUE
Saturday	August 20	Dallas, TX	Starplex Ampitheater
Sunday	August 21	Austin, TX	The Opera House
Monday	August 22	Houston, TX	The Music Hall
Tuesday	August 23	New Orleans, LA	The Orpheum
Wednesday	August 24	Birmingham, AL	Sloss Furnace
Friday	August 26	Atlanta, GA	Center Stage
Saturday	August 27	Atlanta, GA	Center Stage
Sunday	August 28	Tallahassee, FL	Musical Moon
Tuesday	August 30	Melbourne, FL	F I T Auditorium
Wednesday	August 31	Tampa, FL	Tampa Bay P A C
Thursday	September 1	Miami, FL	1 2 1 5 Club
Friday	September 2	Orlando, FL	Visage
Saturday	September 3	Jacksonville, FL	Jacksonville University/Valley
Tuesday	September 6	Norfolk, VA	The Boathouse
Thursday	September 8	New York City, NY	The Beacon
Friday	September 9	Boston, MA	The Orpheum

All letters to the band (or individual members), and requests for merchandise lists should be sent to:

The Church
P O Box 20778
Columbus Circle Station
New York, NY 10023-9991



Mike Campbell of Tom Petty's Heartbreakers hangs out in LA w/ MWP and Tom Verlaine