

Keyboard wizard and dream weaver, Gary Wright:

Synthesizers and electronics are rock's future

by George Bacso
Assistant Managing Editor

Gary Wright is the dream weaver—a space-age synthesizer wizard and songwriting talent. On his new album, *The Dream Weaver*, Wright's various electronic keyboards provide a lush, fanciful framework over which his soothing and entrancing voice soars. Onstage, Wright effectively duplicates his studio work. Offstage, he speaks in calm, reassuring tones as he verbalizes his dreams and musical philosophies.

Despite his spacey pyrotechnics, Wright is definitely a rock 'n' roller. He has played with such notables as George Harrison and Ringo Starr, but is best known as the keyboard player, vocalist, songwriter and founder of Spooky Tooth.

Following the final demise of Spooky Tooth, after seven albums and almost as many personnel changes, Wright released two mediocre solo LP's. Now he has a popular album that is listed at the number 53 spot on *Billboard* magazine's top 100 chart—with a bullet next to it. The bullet means "going up fast."

The Dream Weaver (on Warner Bros. records) is a pleasant mixture of rock, ballads and funk, with synthesizers constantly weaving in and out. Wright's tasteful keyboard work is displayed on clavinet, Hammond organ and Fender Rhodes piano. Wright also handles the bass, brass and string arrangements,

using a variety of Moog and Arp synthesizers.

Although talented, Wright is not flashy or over-indulgent, like several current members of the rock keyboard. The title cut is a slow, almost cosmic piece. There are several medium tempo rock numbers and one medium tempo funkier, "I Can't Find the Judge." There are also slower ballads, notably, "Feel for Me."

But despite his versatility, Wright's songs begin to sound very similar, the only fault of the LP. After nine songs a Moog bass begins to sound very repetitious. Wright produced the album himself however, and the resulting sound testifies to his ability to mix sound in the studio.

Wright recently visited the Greensboro Coliseum to open for 'Kiss.' Costumed in a space suit (without the helmet) and surrounded by a vast array of synthesizers and electronic devices, Wright performed a short set consisting of four songs off his new album and an update of an older tune.

With two other musicians also playing keyboards, Wright managed to effectively translate his work from a disc to a live concert. Afterward, Wright sat in his dressing room and discussed his past, present and future in an exclusive interview with the DTH.

DTH: What caused you to adopt the space-motif which you display on the cover of your album and in your live performance?

Wright: Well, I just feel that costumes and theatrics are an important part of live concerts today and the space idea fit well with the music.

DTH: Do you think theatrics, as



Photos by Mark Dearmon

"There are so many things coming out now—different kinds of synthesizers and different kinds of things you can do with them. I think they are the future of rock, and you will soon start to see bands based around keyboard musicians rather than guitar players."

exemplified by such groups as 'Kiss,' are excessive?

Wright: Yes, because the music is still the most important thing, and I'm not really into their music.

DTH: So the theatrics should just compliment the music?

Wright: Right. But with such groups as 'Kiss,' I think the theatrics are more important to the group.

DTH: Are you a science fiction nut?

Wright: Yes, I like science fiction and science fantasy.

DTH: With the futuristic outlook that implies, do you think the future of the synthesizer in rock is as bright as it once was?

Wright: I think it is now even brighter. There are so many things coming out

now—different kinds of synthesizers and different kinds of things you can do with them. I think they are the future of rock and you will soon start to see bands based around keyboard musicians rather than guitar players.

DTH: Has the guitar gone as far as it can go, or will guitar synthesizers continue their importance?

Wright: Guitar synthesizers are just guitars plugged into a synthesizer. The action involved in playing is so different: you simply strum a guitar, but a keyboard instrument is different—you play it.

DTH: I noticed that Tomita's electronic adaptation of Debussy was being played before you came onstage. Was that at your request, and what do you think of total electronic or total synthesizer work like Tomita's?

Wright: Well, that was at my request because I love Tomita. I would never personally get that far out, but that's just because of the nature of my music.

DTH: That's something which makes your latest work so attractive, the fact that you keep your electronic excursions within a basic rock framework and chord structure, with clearly defined melodies.

Wright: That's probably because I'm more of a traditional songwriter.

DTH: Do you envision a day when music will be created totally by machine, with computers conducting the whole process, including the songwriting?

Wright: Oh sure. Just as long as the rudiments are there, such as good tune, and everything forms an aesthetic whole.

DTH: What were your early musical influences?

Wright: I was influenced by Ray Charles, Stevie Winwood and Sly, among others.

DTH: Did you go through the whole piano-lessons-as-a-kid thing?

Wright: No, I never took piano lessons. I taught myself.

DTH: Are you influenced at all by today's current crop of rock keyboard players?

Wright: Not really. I respect people like Emerson and Wakeman, but they're all different. And I think that in their styles they're all different from me. That's the important thing.

DTH: Do you ever see your current work as an extension of what you were into in the past? There still seem to be

ghosts of Spooky Tooth and your previous solo efforts in your new music.

Wright: It's all a relative progression, all my stuff is. It's just that now I have a little niche to work in, a situation where I can do most of the work on keyboards, in contrast to the basic guitar, bass, drums format.

DTH: Do you have trouble coordinating, not only your own work, but that of two other keyboard players onstage? The technical problems must be immense—such as tonight, when it seemed your organ wasn't working right.

Wright: The problems can be a hassle and the organ was giving us a lot of trouble tonight. But the problems come because we actually have a miniature recording studio onstage. Our equipment is twice as complicated as the average band's. We have eight keyboards, three eight-channel mixers, four-channel amplifiers and studio monitors, all of which run through echo systems.

DTH: A credit on *The Dream Weaver* says the title was inspired by Paramahansa Yogananda. Who is he?

Wright: He is a master of eastern thought whose works I've read. George Harrison gave me one of his books, and there's a reference in it to "the dream weaver."

DTH: Your album is very spacey, and the dream-like quality is certainly evident, but it is very down to earth in its subject matter. You write a lot about love.

Wright: Well, I believe that love is simply the greatest force in the universe. And I'm very happy now. Things are happening in a big way for me now. My album is moving along the charts, and I think I have the nucleus and the embryo of what I want to do.

Gary Wright is a man whose head may be in the clouds mystically, but personally and philosophically his feet are firmly planted on the ground.

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