



YOUVE heard it said millions of times, but here it is again. Isn't it a drag that so many of our groups don't play live in England? Isn't it sad that America sees them and we don't? All of which is a long way of getting round to saying that Family are one of the few big outfits that play regularly all over the country, and they've certainly reaped the rewards of putting out good music to the largest possible number of people.

Ironically enough, the group are presently touring America for the third time, but a couple of days before they departed, I went to have a talk with John Weider, bass guitar and violin player extraordinary in the Warner-Reprise hideaway in New Oxford Street. John's been with Family for almost a year since he replaced Rick Grech:

"It's all come out right for me since I joined. We all get on fine musically, and I'm playing real music for the first time ever.

'I was working in a house band in a West Coast club after leaving Eric Burdon (John can be heard on *Winds Of Change and Love Is*) when I got a message to go to Detroit and join a band. I wasn't even told who the group were, but I went. It turned out to be Family, which knocked me out. As far as I was concerned, the Beatles and they were the only groups I thought were doing anything particularly good and original'.

There's a lot of fulfilment in the music John's now playing, and a large part of this stems from the fact that he's writing his own material. On a sleeve note to an Animals album, Burdon re-

vealed that John 'suffers from 95.10 ego loss.' True or not, John is genuinely grateful that a lot of people have complimented him on 93's *OK J*, an instrumental he wrote with John Whitney which is included on *A Song For Me*, the group's third album.

In the meantime, Family had just recorded a new single when I spoke to him. 'It's called *Today* and should be out in April. We're all very pleased with it . . . it's very teenybopper!' The last single, *No Mule's Fool*, never really took off; the group are nonetheless anxious to get into the singles market.

John has been recording for a long time. In the 11 years he's been a professional musician—'It all started when I was a kid with violin lessons'—John's been on innumerable sessions. He recently did

some work for Ian Samwell, and it's not at all surprising to discover that he lives in Barnes. 'Just around the corner from Olympic,' where Family now record.

One of the nicer things about working with such an experimental type of group is that John's found a home in Family's songs for all manner of pieces in his head. 'It often happens that I'll have a phrase that's been knocking around in my head for ages that I've not been able to use or expand. I've found they can be slotted in time and time again.'

One of the best pieces of *A Song For Me* is John's amazing violin section of the title track. Did this take a lot of engineering trouble? 'Yes, it did. We'd play a bit through and then see what could be done with it, and then it was more or less up to George

Chkiantz. Some engineers don't have any idea, but George is really incredible—he knows exactly what's the best way of doing it. We owe a lot to him.'

There was an Epiphone jumbo in the office when the interview took place, and at this point John picked it up and proceeded to play some of the most dazzling riffs I'd ever heard. I wondered who he considered to be his influences. The answer was Jimmy Burton, and then, surprisingly, such figures as Richard Farina, John Fahey and Sandy Bull, many of whom he'd had a chance to see in person on the West Coast. As far as violin players go, there aren't many in pop that John rates. 'There's the bloke in Flock, who uses it as a lead instrument all the time. He's good, but I'd rather see the instrument fitting into the other sounds rather than be out front all the time.'

John, who comes originally from Shepherd's Bush, hasn't been anything but a musician since leaving school. 'I must have played in about 15

groups,' he remembers, and all he really wants to do is play music as often as he can. 'I'd rather be playing seven nights a week for £10 than be in a group that maybe plays once a month. I'm not interested in getting a flash car or anything like that, though I wouldn't mind getting a house of my own. That's one of the good things about Family; we're probably in the top three groups here for drawing people in, but we still do a lot of work. It usually works out at five or six nights a week, and we're one of the few groups that still play the smaller places. I mean, we're playing over in Dagenham tonight. I know that there's going to be a crowd of so-called skinheads who'll be right up in front of the stage digging us—they always come when we're in the East London area—and it's really great to see that it's ordinary blokes, not just heads, who like us. I think they probably identify with Roger mainly, but they feel as if we're people just like them. It's great.'



Roger Chapman

Photo: Mike McCarthy



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