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"Tight spaces make me nervous. My taste leans more toward opera."



The leader of The World's Most Dangerous Band, Paul Shaffer, takes his audience on a musical venture from Coast to Coast with his debut album.

## Encore!

# Paul Shaffer goes 'Coast to Coast' to capture contemporary sounds

By Layne Lakfish  
 Encore Reporter

He's the king of keyboarding. He's always got a good line and a good tune, and now he's got an album — his first album.

In 1986, cutting a record was the last thing on Paul Shaffer's mind. He was busy with *Late Night with David Letterman*, a rock-and-roll radio show that he ran live out of New York City's Hard Rock Cafe, guest appearances and special projects. He also didn't have a "musical statement" to make, as he was quoted as saying in *New York* magazine.

But things have since changed and on Aug. 9 his debut album was placed on record store shelves. After over a year in the making, *Coast to Coast* was finished and Shaffer was satisfied.

"I'm thrilled with it (the album) because I did what I set out to do," Shaffer said in a telephone interview.

The 12-song album is interesting in itself. The title, *Coast to Coast* accurately describes the process Shaffer went through in putting the album together — he went coast to coast. He picked what he considered to be the largest musical centers in the United States, and then he went to each city, in turn, and made music. The result is an album representing eight cities and comprising numerous musical talents.

"One of the best things about making the album was getting to work with people and musicians I had idolized when I was a kid," Shaffer said.

The first song released, *When the Radio is On*, is a good example of what *Coast to Coast* represents. The rap/rock song includes vocals from such greats as Ronnie Bright, Dion Dimucci, Ecstasy, The Fresh Prince and Carole King. Every song on the album is a result of mixing many music industry talents.

Although Shaffer is usually one to stay behind his keyboards, he does something new on this album — he sings.

"It took a lot to get me to sing but I did it because I was inspired by the musicians I was working with," he said.

Cutting a record is never easy, especially cutting a record like this. Sometimes Shaffer would leave a city having accomplished nothing. Other times the music seemed to make itself.

"Since I wanted it to be a contemporary album, the music came easiest in cities with contemporary sounds and harder in cities with other sounds," Shaffer said.

Of all the cities he traveled to, Chicago was

one of the more fun locations. The two songs recorded there were recorded live, unlike all the rest of *Coast to Coast's* songs. "We had a smokin' session in Chicago," Shaffer said. "We wanted to deal with Chicago's blues sounds and we felt the only way to do it was to do it live."

In 1986, this five-foot-tall, spectacled Canadian didn't have a musical statement to make. Now, with the release of his first album, he does. "The album is a tribute to different regional sounds," he said. "And the message is, (pause), 'Baby, here it is. This is what music means to me.'"

Shaffer first sat down at a piano when he was six. He didn't choose it. "I was forced," he said with a laugh. Looking at everything he has done with the keyboards since his parents made him take those piano lessons, it looks as if his parent's "force" was good for him.

Shaffer, who grew up in Thunder Bay, Ontario, was part of *Saturday Night Live's* original cast in 1975. He played the piano, which comes as no surprise.

He also acted in the 1970s sitcom *A Year at the Top* which was not a musical show, "al-

though we did do a song at the end of every episode," Shaffer said. During that time period he pretty much put his music on the back burner but soon came to regret it. "I got really depressed and that's when I realized just how much music meant to me," he said.

Now he's back as the famous band leader and musical director for *Late Night with David Letterman*. His music has come a long way since he first sat down in front of the piano. So has his reputation.

"Thanks to Dave (Letterman), I've become well-known," he said.

Shaffer started working on Letterman in 1982 when he was hired as the band leader, and his contract was just recently extended for another two years, at least.

"When I was hired, they wanted someone that Dave could bounce things off of and talk to," Shaffer said.

Shaffer and Letterman are good friends both on and off camera. "Our professional and personal relationships are great," Shaffer said. "We are good friends but we don't 'hang out.' We used to all the time, but the show is so relentless and we just needed the time away."

The *Letterman* show did make Shaffer famous because it made him very visible. The new album might do the same. But, for Shaffer, it's all music and that's all that really matters.

**'The album is a tribute to different regional sounds. And the message is, 'Baby, here it is. This is what music means to me''**

— Paul Shaffer

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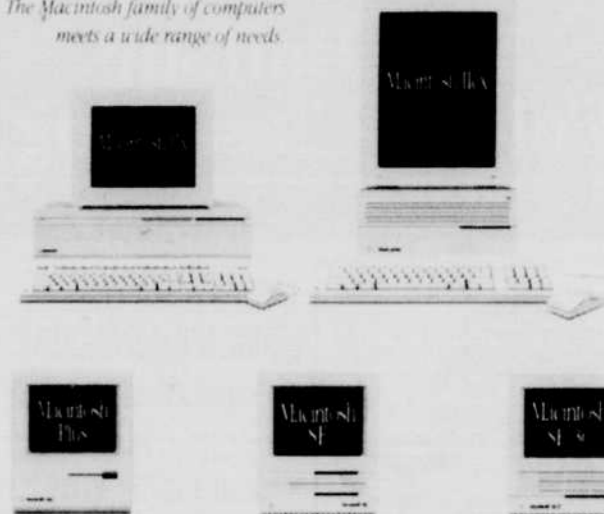
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