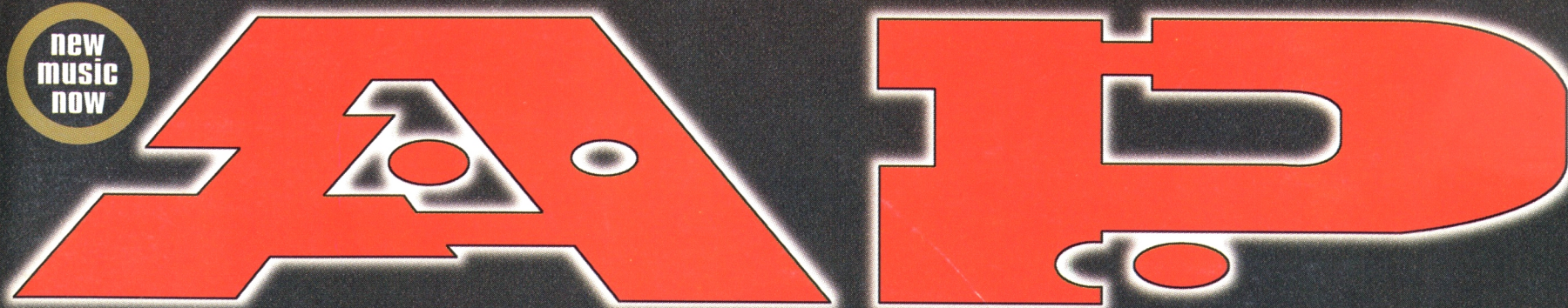


HOLE • PEARL JAM • TORI AMOS • MARILYN MANSON • KORN

new
music
now



ALTERNATIVE PRES®

THE 25 MOST ANTICIPATED ALBUMS OF 1998

A PREVIEW GUIDE & PHOTO ALBUM FEATURING

NINE INCH NAILS



"The new album will be irritating
to people 'cause it's not
traditional NIN."

114 JAN 98 • USA \$3.95 • CAN \$4.50



DISPLAY UNTIL JANUARY 1

KEVIN SHIELDS, PHONE HOME



new
music
now®

Nine Inch Nails cover and content photos: Marina Chavez

in the rag

24 THE 25 MOST ANTICIPATED ALBUMS OF 1998

Alternative Press previews the important albums of next year and visits Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor at his New Orleans home, revealing his mindset as he records the long-awaited follow-up to 1994's *The Downward Spiral*.

66 GIVE THROUGH THIS!

A.P.'s guide to better gifting offers some solutions to holiday shopping dilemmas.

SECTIONS

4 INCOMING LETTERS

8 NEW RELEASES LISTING

10 WIRETAPPING NEWS

Rage Against The Machine get down on the idiot box; **Lisa Gerrard** readies a solo album; **Fig Dish** explain their bunny business; **Spoonbender** twist music; **Royal Trux** lose their Virgin-ity; and other happenings.

16 LOW PROFILE

Smash mouth, **Mogwai**, **Valentine Six**, **Chopper One**, **Dream City Film Club** and more.

71 REVIEWS

New releases by **London Suede**, **Aphex Twin**, the **X-ecutioners**, **Bob Marley**, **Bardo Pond**, the **Sea And Cake**, **Morphine**, **Tsunami**, **Laika** and many more; plus **Genocyber**, the column that reviews angst-driven machine music. **Self-Analysis** with **Deftones**; **Origins Of Cool** genuflects toward L.A. punk royalty **X**; **Loud Life** amplifies hardcore, metal and other extremes; **III Literature** reviews Abbey Road Studios and EMI Music Company coffee-table tomes; plus reviews of singles and reissues.

100 BPM (ELECTRONICA AND BEYOND)

Headrillaz' house-rocking funk; reviews of electronica's elite, including **Luke Slater**, **EC80R**, **Eat Static** and **Loop Guru**; and more.

104 TECHNOLOGY WORKS

Blood-sucking CD-ROMs, interactive music-making and more.

111 CHARTS

112 SOUND AFFECTS

Conan O'Brien sidekick Andy Richter testifies how his life was saved by new wave.

nine inch nails: closure

double video box set



NIN

nothing

©1997 INTERSCOPE RECORDS • ALL RIGHTS RESERVED • NY2-90157

1

NOW HEAR THIS!

The Most Anticipated Albums Of 1998

25

Wm. Ferguson and photographer Marina Chavez visit Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor at his New Orleans home, revealing his mindset as he records the long-awaited follow-up to 1994's *The Downward Spiral*. Then *Alternative Press* previews other important albums of next year and captures their creators on film.

Nine Inch Nails

"If I don't completely change myself..."
Trent Reznor's voice trails away.
He stares into space, searching for a way to express... to express... what it is, about how he's feeling. "If I don't change... then I won't be able to..."
He falls into a reverie and sinks further into his couch. And that's as far as that thought is going.

Reznor woke up today in a chemical fog. The night before, he had taken a few Tylenol-PM, which, with 25 milligrams of diphenhydramine per capsule, helps you sleep—in the way that a billy club to the base of your skull helps you sleep. It's not as if he has to drive a tractor today, but for some reason he has consented to an interview.

He takes another approach at describing his frame of mind. "I always thought that music and being a rock star would save me. Provide some sort of..."

When Reznor speaks, his voice is deliberate and gentle, and he sounds uncannily like Donald Sutherland in the Volvo commercials. It's a quiet Sunday afternoon in New Orleans, and he's taking the day off from recording the new Nine Inch Nails record. He has decided that he will be interviewed in his living room while he lies on a leather couch and stares at the ceiling. The therapy posture is surely not lost on him. Maybe he's manipulating the scene for its dramatic potential, maybe the diphenhydramine is clouding his sense of syntax, but you could parallel park a moving van in his conversational pauses.

"...reason," Reznor concludes.

Nearly four years have passed since the last full-length album of new material from Nine Inch Nails.

The Downward Spiral was a desperate hymn to suicide and self-loathing. The music was brutal, textural and not at all commercial. The only thing likely to get airplay had the chorus: "I want to fuck you like an animal." And the album was a huge success. At the time, Reznor said that the making of *Spiral* "sucked the life out of me." And now he's in the midst of making another album. The new one will be out when he's done, he says. His tone of voice suggests that further attempts to pin him down are not welcome. For now he's calling it *The Fragile*. He's hoping for a February release.

"I think I've done some of my best shit ever, ever, ever," Reznor says calmly. "And it will be irritating to people 'cause it's not traditional Nine Inch Nails." He's reluctant to say more than that. And he isn't popping in a cassette of demos today. "Think of the most ridiculous music you ever could imagine... with nursery rhymes over top of it," Reznor says. He alludes to having "80 pieces of music around" but doesn't elaborate. "The inspiration for this album has been the things... that give the goosebumps, the chills up the spine," he adds, knowing that description doesn't help much, either. "It's probably the opposite of *The Downward Spiral*. A bunch of"—he pauses, not entirely comfortable with defining himself—"pop songs."

Since Reznor is essentially the only member of Nine Inch Nails, no one is more aware than he is of just how long things are taking. "I admire those prolific artists," he says, his voice rising. "And I say that with full fucking sarcasm." He makes a face of disgust. "Such as..." Reznor spits out the name of an MTV icon. The name isn't important; it's only a symbol for Reznor of what he doesn't want for himself. Nevertheless, his publicist happens to have manifested in the doorway. "Anybody need anything?" she queries. It's no doubt a coincidence that she has appeared

just as Reznor is dissing the pop star. Still, she's got good timing. Reznor is notoriously undiplomatic in his assessment of his peers. A Nine Inch Nails record is as rare as a comet, and no publicist wants to be stamping out brush fires before the thing is even finished. He nods gratefully, indulging her like a favorite teacher. "We're fine," he says gently. When she heads back toward the pool, Reznor finishes his thought. "The writing has been a bit more elusive than it has been in the past for me."

It's not as if Reznor has spent the past four years hiding out in his mansion,

watching NIN videos on the enormous projection TV that Interscope gave him. Since *The Downward Spiral*, Reznor has maintained his profile by darting from the bulrushes like Zorro—*touché!*—and delivering a blistering new song like "The Perfect Drug" before slipping back to his bayou hideout. He has busied himself producing soundtracks (*Natural Born Killers* and *Lost Highway*) and other bands (Marilyn Manson). His most recent effort is the re-imagining of David Bowie's "I'm Afraid Of Americans."

He knows that his association with Bowie is dubious to some of his fans. When Nine Inch Nails toured with Bowie in 1995, Reznor was accused of letting his image be co-opted by a has-been. But it was farsighted of Reznor to align Nine Inch Nails with a legend, further distancing himself from the cliché that industrial rock had become. Even better, Reznor got to observe the master changeling from backstage every night.

"I got a lot of shit for doing a tour with him. The thing is, Bowie mattered to me. He reinvented himself so many times—it must have been a daring statement to do that, risking failure. And hanging out with him and seeing him like that—he's my dad's age, born in the same month—when you find someone who's as satisfied and happy with his life, someone who's been through a really dark period, which most of his music I care about is from, *Low*, *Lodger*, "Heroes" era.... But he came out of it and made something that mattered."

Reznor was in New York to shoot the video for "I'm Afraid Of Americans." He spent two days running around the Lower East Side, being menacing for the camera. He's the American Bowie is



afraid of. He says it was good to be in Manhattan; he's debating getting a place there. But for now, New Orleans is his home. This is a bold move for Reznor, who in the past decade hasn't lived in one place for longer than six months. For the first time in his 32 years, he isn't renting.

Reznor's mansion is two miles upriver from the French Quarter. His neighbor is a longtime fixture on the New Orleans city council; goth novelist Anne Rice lives a few blocks over. When the Garden District tours stop in front of Reznor's place, as they always do, the guide will note the architectural style (Greek Revival) and the year of its construction (around 1860). The gaslights of Reznor's house are always burning, even at 2:30 on a Sunday afternoon.

This is a huge house for one person. Whoever built it had a big family in mind, as well as servants. When Reznor bought it, the place was in "a horrible state of disrepair" and had been turned into a duplex. He had the dividing walls demolished. In deference to the councilwoman next door, he installed soundproofing and double-paned windows. As for the gaslights, Reznor likes them, but he has no idea why they don't burn the place down.

Though he claims the new album won't even allude to the Crescent City—no zydeco, no blues and no washboard—it's obvious the environment is influencing him. Reznor is talking about goose bumps. He's looking for a vibe.

"I saw Erykah Badu here in concert. And it was a kick in the ass," he says. He props himself on an elbow. "One-hundred-percent black crowd; I was the only white male there. And every single person in the room was spellbound, singing every lyric. And I haven't seen that... probably ever.

"It has a spirituality, a kind of integrity that—as I incoherently talk about it—I am trying to shoot for. It's one of those things that's not easily identifiable as a thing that is good."

If it's difficult for him to say what he's after, it has been no less frustrating for him to chase it down. On the advice of producer Rick Rubin, Reznor packed off to Big Sur, California, for a month. "Another thing that's probably slowed the procedure down," Reznor says, for those keeping score.

"The whole idea of going up to Big Sur was to try writing songs on a piano versus the way I'd always done it in the past, which was to start with a loop or a bass line—and also to avoid becoming a parody of myself."

It was a noble idea, but Reznor quickly labels it a disaster.

"It was fucking hellacious being up there," he says of some of the most beautiful coastline in the world. "What creeps up on you is the feeling that it would be great if you were here with your girlfriend for a weekend. But when the element of complete and utter isolation creeps in... it'd be nice to stare at the 5000 stars in the sky *with* someone. That—on top of the fact that it was about a 300-foot cliff at the end of the front yard."

A few ideas may have come out of the month at Big Sur, he figures. But most important is that he has stuck with the resolve to avoid writing with a computer.

"Everything I'm working on now was played on guitar or on a keyboard that doesn't work right," he says. "It gets to that elusive... vibe. It's more me as a musician learning about the subtleties of what makes something *feel* right. I always thought everything was X plus Y plus Z equals..." Reznor holds up whatever finished, quantized musical product would result from X-plus-Y-plus-Z. It's about the size of a drum machine.

And maybe it's the quasi-psychoanalyst's couch, but now he isn't really talking to anybody but himself, as if he were listing his shortcomings under his breath.

"And when I look back at my lyrics, I realize *every* song starts with 'I.'" He is silent for some time.

"Yeah," he warily continues, "I went through a hard process recently." After some prodding, Reznor reveals that his grandmother, who raised him, died at 85. "I got to watch her die," he says with grim sarcasm. He stares at the ceiling for nearly a minute and then says, "That sucked."

He draws his arms across his chest. His chin quivers. The only sound in the room is the sound of him sucking back his own saliva. It is a tense moment.

One of the criticisms Reznor has endured as a public figure is that he's faking it. When you're known as a tortured soul, there will always be those who doubt your integrity. The assumption is that it's a scheme to get attention. In fact, Reznor was asked in interviews after Woodstock II whether Nine Inch Nails' appearing onstage smeared in mud was calculated. Calculated? What kind of mind do people think Reznor has? That he could see a patch of mud and in an instant understand that smearing it on himself translates as triple-platinum record sales?

Back in New Orleans—did his chin really quiver? Yes. Did he seem to be on the verge of tears? Yes. Can that be faked? Is he really that miserable? Instead of answering that, ask yourself this: If, for the past decade, Trent Reznor has consistently and constantly faked his angst—every time he has appeared onstage, on television, in a video, in an interview, as well as in every lyric he has ever written—if he has so completely hidden what a shrewd and happy chap he really is, then, well, wouldn't that be a miserable existence, too?

He stares glassily at a middle ground, unshaven and wan.

"Watch somebody die sometime," he says. "And it's not the perfect, fucking"—he closes his eyes in a peaceful gesture—"thing you're told it would be. It's terror."

It's fair to wonder whether Reznor feels

isolated in New Orleans. Unlike Los Angeles or Cleveland, recent way stations on Reznor's journey to find a home, he has invested in his new city. In addition to his house, he has built a state-of-the-art studio here. He has sunk more than a million dollars into a place he moved to because he liked it when Nine Inch Nails came through the city on tour. Of course, he's kind of an adopted local hero: The Sunday edition of the local paper printed a page-one photo of Reznor's mansion the day he moved in.

Every city in America has at least one Gothic club. In New Orleans, it's the Blue Crystal. When a band like the Cure is in town, the Blue Crystal throws a party after the show. The club called Reznor, the closest thing they have to a local dignitary, to invite him to the Cure after-show party. Further conversation revealed that the only way the Cure would show is if Reznor is there, too. You can't hear it anywhere in Nine Inch Nails, but Reznor is a Cure fan from way back. He considers the Cure's *The Head On The Door* "one of the best records ever." His favorite description of himself: "Robert Smith with a head cold."

"I end up going to the club, and surprisingly, everyone from the Cure is there. And the bartender calls me over and says, 'Robert really wants to talk to you.'" Reznor smiles, makes a face that says: *You mean I have to meet one of my teen idols in a goth club in Louisiana? Now? In front of all these people?*

"It ends up," Reznor says, "me and him, hugging on the dance floor. He's like, 'I love you, dude,' and I'm like, 'I love you too, man.'" The Cure fans formed a loose circle around the pair while New Order's "Blue Monday" pumped out of the speakers. "It was the greatest scene," Reznor says.

"We were both fairly incoherent," he feels compelled to add.

"New Orleans is so decadent and ridiculous—and that's what drew me here in the first place. And it was so unlike Pennsylvania,

which is what I so desperately wanted to get away from."

True, New Orleans is as culturally distant as possible from the *Deer Hunter* landscape in which Reznor was raised. (Mercer, Pennsylvania, is notable chiefly as the intersection of Interstates 79 and 80.) And maybe that's exactly what he needs. But when he observes that his "whole process has been eliminating people from interfering with my art, reducing... down to one person"—if he can find a place like Big Sur "hellacious," how long can he last in a swamp?

His isolation is not purely geographic. Although Nine Inch Nails was always Reznor's project, many of his longtime associates have left the fold. And although he has left once before, Chris Vrenna, who was with Reznor when he learned how to use a sampler back in Cleveland, is no longer in the NIN camp. Reznor only alludes to Vrenna's departure.

"I gave up the notion that Nine Inch Nails was a collaborative project," he says. He deliberates for a moment. "And, recently, with the departure of some friends and the inspiration of the new music, I feel good about it."

Reznor's publicist makes another appearance. She's trying to gauge Trent. Almost done? Everything okay? Okay, says Reznor.

"Who are we talking about?" she asks, and then recites a list of *verboden* subjects: "Bush, R.E.M. and Prince?" Convinced of Trent's safety, she exits. Reznor rights himself and in a stage voice says, "*So, anyway, about Courtney...*"

The publicist wheels and bolts back into the room. "Did you see her on the cover of *Us*?" For the first time all day Reznor raises his voice. "What the fuck was that?" he demands. A brief off-the-record discussion about Courtney Love and her new California look ensues. Reznor insists that whatever Poppy Z. Brite wrote about him in her Courtney bio is "1000 percent untrue." The publicist says she just thinks it's sad and takes her leave. She pauses at the door. "Anyway," she concludes, "those names we just mentioned? We didn't mention them."

Reznor rises to give a quick tour of the house.

The interior is pretty much what one would expect of an industrial-rock millionaire bachelor with a taste for self-destruction. A bust of Mephistopheles stands in the foyer; Reznor's Grammy hangs on a ribbon around its neck. A chandelier has goldfish swimming in its base.

How many rooms? "Good question," Reznor replies. At the top of the stairs is a useless nook that is bathed in sunlight. "Here's where the harpsichord will go," he says. His bedroom is dark and imposing, dominated by a Medieval-looking four-poster bed. The windows are hung with thick velvet drapes, blocking out the afternoon sun. The woman in his bed waves sheepishly. He saunters through an empty little space off the bedroom. "This will be the baby room," he says. Wait. Is he serious? But he's off and standing at the entrance to the bathroom. "Okay. This is decadent, I realize," he says. "But we had to put in a whole new bathroom, so why not?" He opens the door. There is a jacuzzi. And there is also a shower. It is without question the best shower in Louisiana. Reznor opens the glass door and turns a faucet, and a torrent is released. The shower head is the size of a Frisbee. There are side jets. It's a great shower.

Earlier, Reznor had apologized for being "so depressed." Yet it seems funny that he can be so transfixed by something as homely as plumbing. I can't help but wonder if it isn't the music that is making him miserable—if that's the right word. So here's the Faustian bargain: If Trent Reznor knew that he could be happy only if he quit music forever, would he?

"I've never been happy," he says. "So I don't know." **ALT**



**“I think I’ve done some of my best shit ever, ever, ever.
And it will be irritating to people ’cause it’s not traditional
Nine Inch Nails.”**