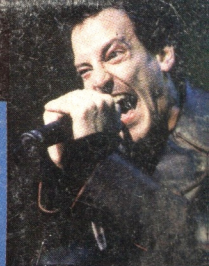


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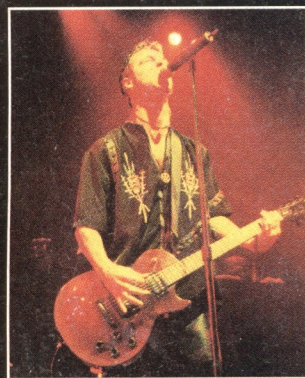
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Trent Reznor. Just let the name hang there in your mind for a minute. Got a picture? Good. Now what does the name mean to you?

Nine out of 10 times, you'll probably get images of a dark, miserable and extremely angry soul ploughing through personal anguish and torment, living a life of tortured genius, full of nightmares and despair.

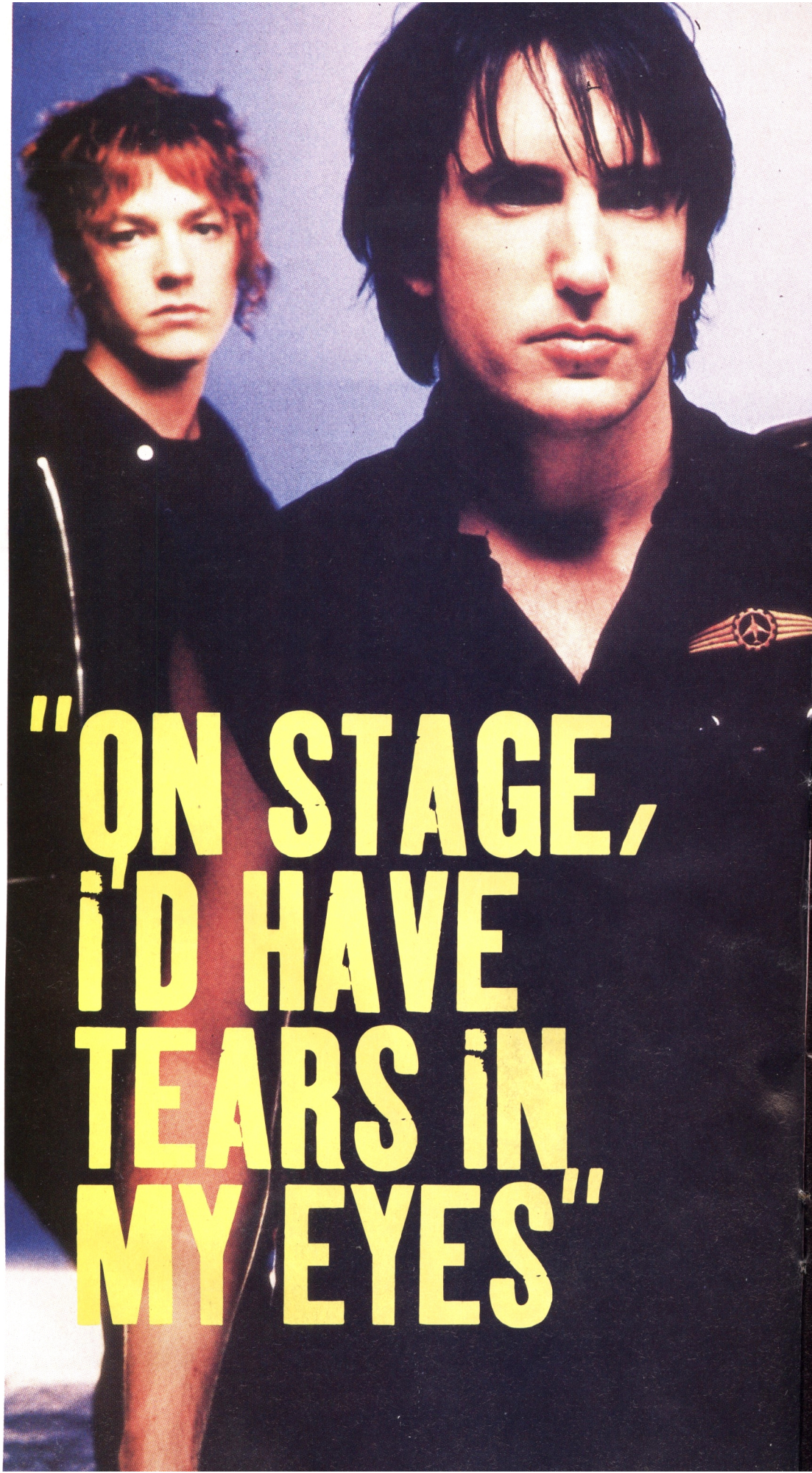
Funny then, that the man sitting opposite me in the plush surroundings of London's Metropolitan Hotel seems to be suffering from something far less serious—the poor guy's gone and got himself a nasty case of the flu. Still, he's in Europe to promote the long-awaited Nine Inch Nails album *The Fragile* and he's staying professional 'til the end. After offering him some advice on how to cure his ailment (a largish glass of whisky—natch—with a dollop of honey, a few tablespoons of ginger, and a drop of lemon), we get down to brass tacks. *The Fragile* is causing an almighty ripple around the rock music industry—as indeed do most things that involve *Time* magazine's most influential musician of the '90s—and the rock press seem generally positive about it. Still, it must have been difficult to keep perspective on an album that took so long to make, surely?

"Well, the reality of this record was that it was a two-year process by the time I started it, and I tried to allow myself to really sit down and start creating," explains Reznor. "It wasn't me over-analyzing or trying to write a certain way; it was mainly me just allowing myself to go with the flow and see what came out.

"When we started, we just went by what felt right, and I'd say that for the first eight months of the recording process some of the tracks were really based on a more experimental approach."

Was it difficult to decipher what was good and what was not?

"Yeah, and a lot of the things we'd end up cutting were the things we liked more,



"ON STAGE,
I'D HAVE
TEARS IN
MY EYES"



*NIN (l-r): Robin Finck,
Trent Reznor, Charlie
Clouser, Danny Lohner,
and Jerome Dillon*

generally the instrumentally weirder things, and it seemed as though it wasn't a fair representation of the whole album when we started cutting those things off. We called in [legendary producer] Bob Ezrin and we just said to him, 'Here's a chunk of 30 songs—tell us what you think, good or bad.' It was kind of like a report card grading from a professor, y'know? His comments were very intelligent and pertinent, and in the most part were very positive. I mean, it is very difficult to be objective when you've lived, breathed, mixed, and fought with, as well as renamed and just fucked around with it yourself."

Does he genuinely worry that his hardcore following is going to like it, or does Trent Reznor not concern himself with matters like that?

"Well, now that it's out, I'd love for them to like it. I'm trying to do the necessary stuff to promote it for that reason. I've stayed honest to what I think is right for me now, and I can only hope that fans can identify with the honesty. There's an emotional quality there lyrically, and it's expressed in such a sense that maybe they can relate to it and pick up something that means something to them. That's probably the main thing I'm concerned about."

As an aside, I ask him how he feels about doing interviews—flu or no flu. It must be a bit of a bind to constantly repeat yourself, particularly when you're considered to be one of the world's biggest rock stars, and one who seems to be in constant turmoil and self-loathing. The press generally love a famous rock star in pain.

"I hate it. I hate it because what I've discovered on this wave of doing them is that part of it revolves around me having to reveal a bit of my life that I don't feel comfortable talking about, because it was a very ugly time, but it's necessary in the explanation of why this album is what it is, and why it turned out the way it has."

Don't you find it ever so slightly unnerving that people are constantly trying to get into the

head of Trent Reznor? It must be hard to cope with the constant speculation on your mind-state and the intrusion into your personal life.

"It's depressing. It's not anything I'm proud of, telling people where I am or was. It's necessary, I know that, but I get tired of playing armchair analyst all day long, and wondering why I feel a certain way. Fuck it! I don't know—sorry! And then I've got them trying to tell me why they think I am, and sometimes you just feel like saying, 'Fuck you! This is my record.' I just try to treat the whole situation with respect, but I will admit it does get annoying. I've come back from a pretty bleak spot where I don't want to go to again, and I've repaired my own self to a degree that I'm a stronger person who can deal with a lot more than I could at one point. I think I went through a necessary change and evolution in my own life, and I think I've achieved something that matters."

The *Fragile* was summed up by our own Dan Silver, thus: "...one of the releases of the decade. But at half the length it could have been *the* one."

So what's with the double set, Trent? Is there a traditional beginning, middle, and end-type structure? Why are things the way they are on there? The record buying public wants some answers.

"From a listener's point of view, the two CDs are broken up in areas where it wasn't logical for a starting and finishing point. I think it's a linear journey; the first CD makes a lot more sense after you've heard the second one, and the second one doesn't sound as important if you don't know the first one. The first one I feel is a more intimate journey. The second one's a bit more esoteric and a bit more flighty at times. In a sense they complement each other. I don't expect everybody to sit down and listen to both CDs every time they listen to the record, but I think it works well listening to one and then the other."

Listening to the album, I'm struck with the thought that

you're going to have one hell of a challenge getting the complexity of the album into a live environment. How are you going to make that transition?

"I'm actually in the process of seeing if I can right now. We're rehearsing and I've got a new challenge in trying to play live material that's substantially more complex than in the past. When we played the MTV awards I needed two cellists and four backing vocalists on the stage, and I don't know if I want to go that way. I'm trying to find ways to execute them with integrity, but not turn into a bloated rock band. When was the last time you saw a rock band with backing singers that was cool?"

Fair point.

Time magazine voted Mr. Reznor as the most influential musician of the '90s, a tag which surely must have embarrassed the man a little bit. After all, he's just mentioned that he's uncomfortable about interviews, never mind having that label hanging around his neck.

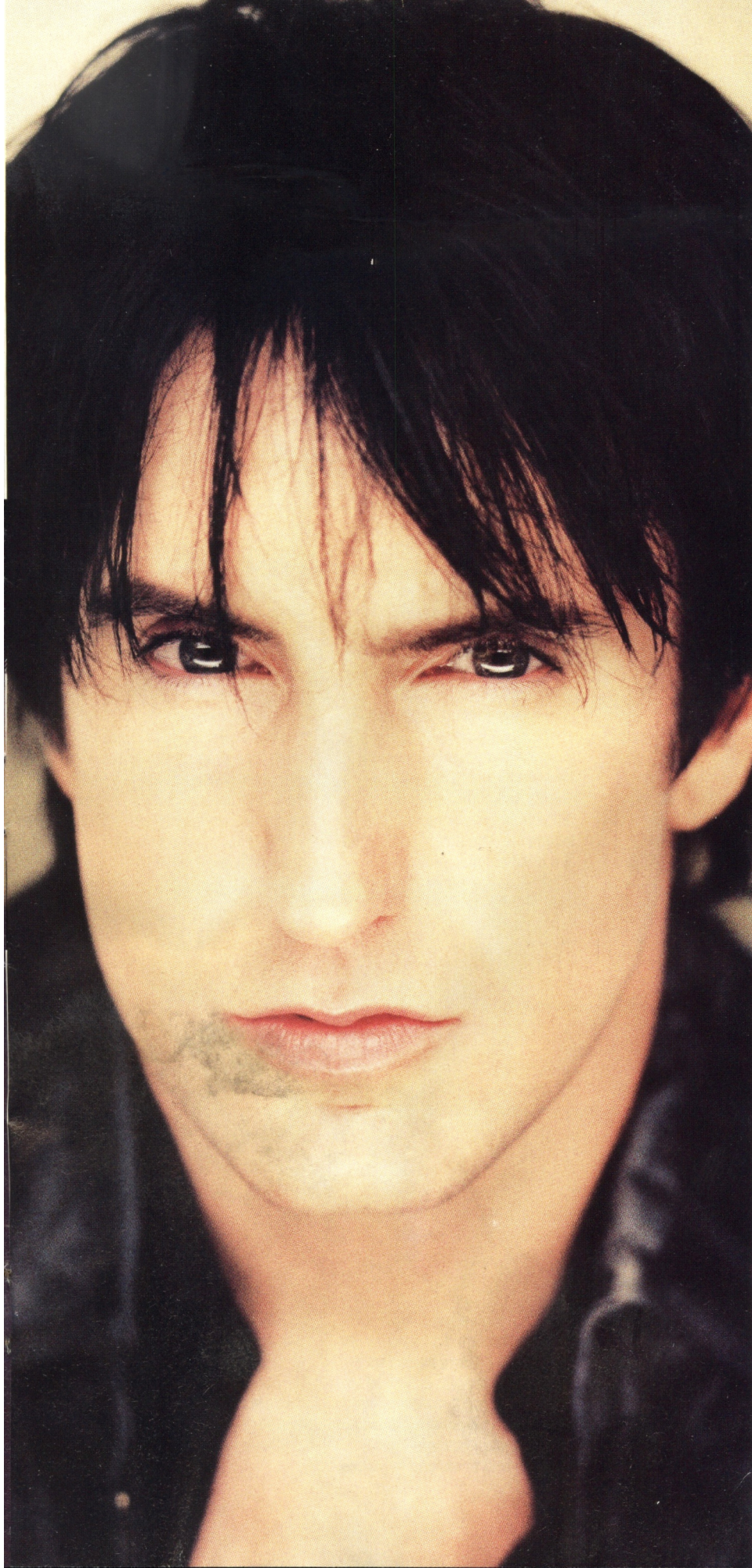
"I have a hard time reading interviews I do. Reviews I'll read. Is it flattering to be called a genius? Yes. Do I believe it? No. Here's my take on the *Time* magazine thing. It's surprising and flattering, but I don't take it to heart because who is *Time* to say who's the most influential?

Things like being the

number one *Billboard* album the first week out. Now that meant an awful lot more to me, because it was people that did matter, namely, the fans, that surprisingly were still out there. Winning a Grammy in America—or two, I guess—so what? I mean, it's nice, it's flattering, but who the fuck are these Grammy people to pick it? Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining about it but I think I have a pretty healthy perspective on what that really means. It doesn't make me think my shit doesn't stink and therefore everything I do is great now."

It must also be hard to keep on justifying the pain on your records...

"Yeah, it is. I don't particularly like being a poster boy, feeling the need to constantly talk about it and then have someone give me their opinion on it. It's like, I'm dealing with it yet I feel like I'm needing to tell you about it to try and sell this record. In the press, I hear it took me 'five years to make a record.' It didn't take me five years to make a record—it took me three years to avoid making a record, and two years to sit down and get it done. We tried to make an original sounding record that's honest, that sounds distressed, that sounds interesting at



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every level. We really went to the fucking limit on this one, as far as trying to get the most deep thing we could get across out."

Some people say that your pain and honesty is purely for effect, though.

"I get that more [in England] than I do in America. 'Is it just cashing in on a market place?', 'Is it drama for drama's sake?' It's hard to be put in a position where I try to say, 'No it's not, *that's* how I feel.' But the reality of the situation is that it's come from a true place of unpleasantness, and it's been a weight for me to get it out of my system and feel better about myself in the process. I try to turn it into something that has an element of beauty, and then maybe some other fans or listeners may pick up on that and relate to it. That to me is the complete circle, and if anyone gets what I'm [going] on about, then they're getting the same feeling that I had growing up, when there were certain songs, which gave me a sense that, 'Whoah, someone else feels this way, and I get it.' Even though I couldn't know what they were really feeling, and maybe they didn't mean what I felt, but it seemed like they meant it to me. That I think is a pretty unique way to make art: the idea that maybe you've taken something that could kill you and turned it into

something good, in which others can find some beauty as well. You wouldn't put the album on and say it's a happy record, but it is about trying to find some sense of reason for where you're at, and that too was a lot more positive than [the previous NIN album] *The Downward Spiral*, which was about getting to the bottom by whatever means possible. I found that to be a much bleaker album. Not that this is a party record." (laughs)

It's genuinely pleasing to see the guy laugh. After witnessing only the recorded or reported Trent Reznor before now—where what you get seems to be a fucked-up individual constantly torturing himself—it's good to see that the guy can be as positive as the next man when he allows himself.

"I'd say that I've recently allowed myself to become more positive. The very dangerous, self-destructive side of me I've now learned to keep in check. I've understood what he's about. I think I crippled him in a way because I know him, his strategies, and I see him creep up every once in a while now in ways of sabotage, in ways of the 'fuck it' guy, 'Just fuck it! Treat someone this way or that, just fuck it!' That guy I've identified with more because he's been

around in my life a lot—not to sound like Mr. Split Personality, but there's been an element that I let get out of control for a while, and I found out he was on his way to killing me. He was leading me down the sometimes romantic path of self-destruction. I was afraid to work and I didn't have any friends, and it was just—pleurrrrh! A place that you don't want to be. I acknowledged that I just have to be aware of, and deal with, my own pain."

There's also a certain amount of catharsis for the people who listen to you, surely.

"Onstage, I'd almost have tears in my eyes because I mean what I'm singing so much, and this thing hurts. And I'd look back and there's a hundred people singing back at me, and they're fucking teared-up and screaming and there's this weird release. The sacrifices, flaying your soul open every so often, spreading it out on paper, and then, not only that but explaining in a situation like this why I did it. Then sometimes defending myself about its honesty because it's easy for someone to dismiss it saying, 'He couldn't feel that way!'... well I did, and I had to tell you that I fucking felt this miserable. The end result for me is a positive one, yeah, and I think for some listeners it is as well. Not for everybody, I acknowledge that, but for some I think it can be."

As I'm sure most of you are aware, Trent has also kept busy working on other people's projects, most notably, of course, Marilyn Manson who, it has to be said, went on to pretty big things after a bit of tweaking from Trent. However, it's pretty much common knowledge now that the pair of them don't exactly see eye to eye. So does he see the time spent with Marilyn Manson as being time he wasted in retrospect?

"I've always respected Manson as an artist, and I continue to. I'm very proud of the work that we've done together and it saddens me that we're not friends now. There has been a personality change in both of us, and I don't feel particularly good about him as a person anymore. I was at a low point and I got kicked a few times and in places

that I didn't feel was necessary within the level of decency, and I got insulted in ways that made me really question the incredible amount of maliciousness that went into doing it. A simple, 'Hey, everything's going to be OK,' 'Yeah, I'm fine'... I don't think that's right. Someday maybe things will work out, but it's the kind of thing where, when you've really been offended on several serious levels... I don't feel good about it."

You don't seem to get a lot of credit for the work that you did with Manson.

"It's issues of ego. The guy that I was good friends with, I don't think he's around any more. I was about to start NIN's new record but I wasn't quite ready mentally, so I stopped what I was doing to work on their album ['Antichrist Superstar']. And when that was completed, that's when our friendship went sour, and that's also when I had to deal with some crises in my own life—losing somebody very close to me—and it all just accumulated into one big pile. It wasn't his fault any more than it was anything else. I did give up some time from NIN to work on his record, but that was my choice to do that, and it's also a time that I'm very proud of, because I like that record a lot and I'm very proud that I was involved in it. I think I helped make it a lot better."

Not that he actually needs to worry anyway. Nine Inch Nails are still about as big as any name you can think of in the world of rock music, and the commotion that the release of 'The Fragile' caused was a good indication of where the name Trent Reznor stands in the scheme of things. Will Nine Inch Nails still be around as an entity in another two or three years time, though?

"I think I'm over a necessary hump in my own creative development that I would hope doesn't stall me out for another several years. I've gained a lot of confidence in the studio and a lot of self-respect, and I sincerely don't believe that I'm on the verge of another travel down that horrible road, which would prevent me from doing anything. I feel very optimistic right now."

That's the spirit.

—Pete Gabler