



## PRIVATE LIGHTNING

God was in His Heaven  
We were in a Ford.  
Your head was on my shoulder  
Your socks were on the floor.

"When You're Laughing" Paul Van Ness  
c. 1980

**W**ith their debut album on A&M Records Private Lightning goes public on a nationwide scale for the first time. For the last two of their four years they have reigned as one of New England's premiere local bands. They were as meticulous in signing a record deal as they are with their music. Despite strings of sold-out gigs, ecstatic review and heavy radio play for their self-produced and independently released singles that preceded their A&M signing, they waited until they *knew* they were ready.

The eye of Private Lightning's storm is guitarist/songwriter Paul Van Ness. He is one of those rare musicians who combines intelligent, with and musical finesse with a soul that's pure rock and roll. Rarer still is this band that duplicates and amplifies those same virtues. Adam Sherman sings lead; Eric Kaufman adds keyboards; Paul's sister, Patti Van Ness, plays violin; and the rhythm section is Steve Keith on bass and Scott Woodman on drums. They are a lithe and limber aggregation whose absolute ease with each other creates the crackling energy that animates their music. It's impossible to comfortably slip this group into a single genre of contemporary music. They range too widely for that, effectively employing the crisp tension of New Wave is a gut like "Heartbeat" while just as effectively delivering the goods on a classic ballad like "Side of the Angels." Two factors make this breadth possible without a loss of coherency in sound. Adam Sherman's vocals and the ensemble suppleness that comes with four years of constant giggling.

"The band started out as a straight ahead rock band that happened to have a violin," said Paul Van Ness. "There were a lot of possibilities in this. We could either stay very raw or get real orchestrated. We ended up in between with the best aspects of each." Paul played trumpet through high school while his sister Pattie concentrated on violin. In his late teens, he switched his emphasis to guitar while she continued working on a classical repertoire. It was with the advent of Private Lightning that the two siblings combined their talents for the first time. Patti's violin is as deft and energetic as Paul's bristling guitar and seamlessly integrated into the band, giving their sound a unique tonal richness and texture.

Paul's songwriting is the foundation of Private Lightning's music. "I just write about stuff that's interesting," he shrugs. "I'm not very prolific. Each one takes awhile." His offhandedness is belied by his material. Both he and the band have that special talent it takes to make complexity sound effortless. Each song has been crafted and honed to jewel-like perfection with no sacrifice of visceral impact. He is a master of pungent imagery and often gives his songs plots like concise short stories. "Thriller" describes the wait for the return of a traveling lover; while "Bright City" is a surreal car ride through a metropolis at night. He has a gift for setting a scene and then illuminating it with a flash of insight. Private Lightning's debut is an auspicious one. Their effect on the music of the Eighties will be jolting.

