

May 1989

CHINA CRISIS

With album production by Walter Becker and a style that's a good deal less jazz-informed and more direct than Becker's old band, Steely Dan, China Crisis is tough to categorize. Their fifth album, *Diary Of A Hollow Horse*, marks both their tenth anniversary as an entity and a return to action some two years after their 1987's *What Price Paradise*.

The band was formed in Liverpool in '79 by Gary Daly and Eddie Landon (guitar, vocals), two friends from nearby Kirkby, England who came together with a mutual love of Bowie, Stevie Wonder, and Brian Eno.

After leaving school to concentrate on music, Daly and Landon kept body and soul together by enduring a number of menial jobs: motor maintenance apprentice, beer pump assembler, roof tiler, hair dresser. They continued to record tapes in their bedrooms before finally quitting their day jobs entirely and going on the dole. "We knew the songs would come together if we stuck it out," said Landon.

The duo's first recording was a single called "African and White," originally released (in November, 1980) on the Inevitable label and later reissued by Virgin Records, under whose guidance it cracked the British Top 50.

The first China Crisis album came in 1982, and carried a mouthful of a title: *Difficult Shapes and Passive Rhythms (Some People Think It's Fun to Entertain)*. The album yielded a hit single, "Christian," and led to their second major tour. More hits followed, including "Working With Fire and Steel," produced by Mike Howlett (Joan Armatrading, Flock of Seagulls). That single also marked the debuts of China Crisis bassist Gary "Gazza" Johnson and drummer Keith Wilkinson. Keyboardist Brian McNeil joined in '85.

China Crisis' first American album, also titled *Working With Fire and Steel*, was released here by Warner Bros. Records in early '84. That same year, the band spent six months touring America, Europe, and Britain, opening for Simple Minds. And when it came time for their third album, *Flaunt The Imperfection* (Warner Bros., 1985), China Crisis found themselves with a sterling mentor in Walter Becker.

The band's follow-up (and first A&M release), *What Price Paradise*, saw them working with producers Clive Langer and Alan Winstanley, whose credits included Madness, Dexy's Midnight Runners, and the Jagger-Bowie "Dancing in the Streets" single. The result was lyrically direct Gary Daly songs like "Arizona Sky" and the playing of a real band, a full-fledged, five piece group unafraid of growing up with their audience.

Diary Of A Hollow Horse finds China Crisis reunited with Becker; Mike Thorne also produced three of the new album's nine tunes. From the beginning, Becker-China Crisis has been an unusual

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match. "We told him, 'Look, we're not accomplished musicians — we're not the kind of people you're used to working with.'" said Daly. "I mean, there's two extremes: there's Steely Dan, with 1001 chords, and there's us, with three chords. But Walter has always been open to that. I think we all realize that sometimes the easiest way is also the best way.

And sometimes the most plainly emotional way is best, too. *Hollow Horse*, recorded in such disparate locations as Hawaii ("There was no time for sunbathing," says Eddie Lunden), New York, and Liverpool, and featuring guest performances by Americans like saxophonist Jim Horn and guitarist Tim Weston, was directly influenced by the recent birth of Daly's daughter, Molly. That influence may not be obvious, Gary says but it's there.

So is Daly's attitude toward lyric-writing, which he describes as "some kind of inverse of the rap approach, where everything is focused on the words. I like what Paul McCartney said once: the first four lines are the song, and the rest is just so much explanation. We're from a very old school."

China Crisis is also from the school that puts a premium on music, as opposed to fashion, videos, and such. As one reviewer said, "this band has no obvious gimmicks, they just make great music." Music like *Diary Of A Hollow Horse*.