

01. **HEAVY ON YOUR LOVE**
(Kevin Cronin)
02. **DROP IT (AN OLD DISGUISE)**
(Kevin Cronin)
03. **ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE**
(Gary Richrath)
04. **EASY MONEY** (Gary Richrath)
05. **ROCK & ROLL MUSIC**
(Chuck Berry)
06. **TAKE ME** (Kevin Cronin)
07. **I NEED YOU TONIGHT**
(Kevin Cronin)
08. **MEET ME ON THE MOUNTAIN**
(Gary Richrath)
09. **BACK ON THE ROAD AGAIN**
(Bruce Hall)

PRODUCED BY KEVIN CRONIN and GARY RICHRATH with KEVIN BEAMISH

REO SPEEDWAGON:
KEVIN CRONIN – Lead vocals, rhythm guitar
GARY RICHRATH – Lead guitar
ALAN GRATZER – Drums
NEAL DOUGHTY – Keyboards
BRUCE HALL – Bass guitar

Steve Forman – Percussion and Sound Effects on 'Easy Money' and 'Take Me'
 Background Vocals on 'Take Me': Tom Kelly, Kevin Cronin and Bill Champlin

Engineered by Kevin Beamish and Gary Lubow
 Arranged by Kevin Cronin

Associate Producer: Alan Gratzner

Production Assistance: Gary Lubow
 Assistant Engineers: Steve Williams, D.C.Snyder

Recorded at Sound City, Studio A and Kendun Recorders Studio D
 Mixed at Kendun Recorders Studio D

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And of course... our moms, families, friends and all the REO Speedwagon fans who have truly given us nine lives

Executive scapegoat: John Baruck

Tom Kelly appears courtesy of Infinity Records

PUBLISHING: All tracks © 1979 Sony Music Entertainment

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RE-ISSUE CREDITS

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REO SPEEDWAGON NINE LIVES



CAT SCATCH FEVER

IT'S A GENERALLY ACCEPTED FACT THAT ANY ALBUM FAVOURED FOR REISSUE BY ROCK CANDY IS A WORK OF ARTISTIC GENIUS, WHICH WOULD HAVE SOLD MILLIONS OF RECORDS FOR THE POOR, MARTYRED ARTISTS HAD THEY NOT BEEN ROYALLY SCREWED BY FATE AND THEIR RECORD COMPANY, AND SOMETIMES IT'S EVEN TRUE!

BUT WE ALL know that REO Speedwagon were huge, and responsible for one of the biggest selling rock albums of all time, in the shape of 'Hi Infidelity'. In fact to this day the words 'REO Speedwagon' and 'Hi Infidelity' usually appear together in the same sentence. For a pleasant change they didn't get turned over by their record company and they did sell millions of records. So why is Rock Candy paying attention to them today? Because the words 'REO Speedwagon' and 'Hi Infidelity' appear together in the same sentence way too frequently, and there's so much more to the band than that one album.

Initially formed as a college band in 1967, playing covers in bars around the University Of Illinois in Champaign, REO would be transformed by the arrival of guitarist Gary Richrath in 1970, who brought with him original songs and a whole new rock and roll attitude. Within a year they had been signed by Epic Records and released their debut, self-titled album, going on to become a regional powerhouse in the blue collar



American Mid West, where straight-ahead rock was a whole lot more welcome than it was on a national scale. To make a mark nationally at that time required a little more sophistication, and in truth REO were a little lacking in that department at that juncture.

But they were having their moments, and when Kevin Cronin settled back into the frontman slot for their sixth album – having also fronted the second album, but been fired from the third – the die was finally cast.

And now let's press pause and have a little think. This is the sixth album we're talking about here, and the important part of the story has barely begun – can you imagine any artist today keeping their record deal through five albums which enjoyed not much more than mild regional success? That's right, not every band gets shafted by their label.

Not that Epic is necessarily destined for sainthood. The fact is that REO's regional success was just enough to balance the books for the label, and with no glaring red ink on the band's ledger they were pretty much out of sight, out of mind. And management was shrewd enough to keep band and label at arm's length from each other, with the result that REO kept on getting one more chance to break big.

In the end it was their seventh album which would first see REO looking like a band with a serious future ahead, their double live album 'Live – You Get What You Play For', and then the ensuing studio album 'You Can Tune A Piano But You Can't Tuna Fish' would probably have kicked the band into the upper reaches of the charts but for a major hiccup at the label – at

least we can blame them for something – when the entire promotion team changed and left the record unsupported at a crucial time.

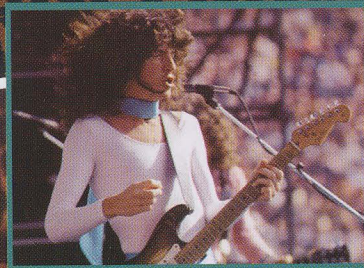
And so it was that REO Speedwagon came to take yet another shot at major success – their ninth attempt. Can you say 'wouldn't happen today'?

For a few weeks it had really looked like the '...Tuna Fish' record was going to break the band on a national scale. The first single, 'Roll With The Changes', had charted, and there was much optimism that the follow-up 'Time For Me To Fly' was going to surpass its success, and that's when everything went awry. Everyone was disappointed of course, but the author of both songs, frontman Kevin Cronin, took it a lot harder than his bandmates.

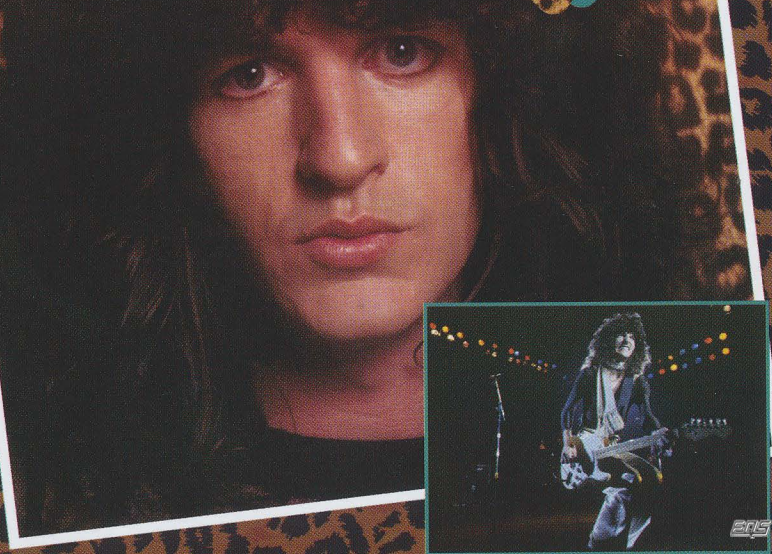
"Thinking about it now," Cronin admits, "I was very disappointed after the '...Tuna Fish' record, I had really thought that it was going to change our lives and 'Time For Me To Fly' was going to become one of those songs that everybody knows. And it didn't happen.

"I'm not going to say that I was actually depressed, but I certainly wasn't inspired, and it showed. My writing on 'Nine Lives' is not what it was on the '...Tuna Fish' record. But Gary and Bruce came through and picked up the slack."

Until Kevin Cronin joined the band, lead guitarist Gary Richrath had been the de facto leader of the band. Although not a founding member, he was not just the driving force of the band but also the main source of material, and whoever was fronting the band at the time – Mike Murphy, Terry Luttrell – tended to go with



Kevin



the flow when contributing their own songs to the band.

But with Cronin it was different. It was his songwriting as much as his performances which got him into REO. Twice, in fact. And his material was unarguably more commercial than the band was used to, which initially led to friction between Richrath and Cronin and played a big part in his departure from the band after their second album. But, ultimately, Richrath would realise that they had both been on the same side and both were trying their damned best to make the band successful, and that a little give and take might just yield the result they were both aiming for in their own characteristic ways; as a result Cronin was invited back and replaced his replacement, Mike Murphy.

Effectively, the frontman and the guitarist found themselves taking turns at steering the ship; although co-productions, the live album was Richrath's baby, and the ensuing '...Tuna Fish' record certainly had Cronin's stamp on it. But given his disappointment that Epic had dropped the ball on a record he had deeply committed himself to it's a good job Richrath was there to steer the 'Nine Lives' album.

"There was always an energy bouncing back and forth between Richrath and me," Cronin recalls. "When I was discouraged he would be hopeful, and vice versa, it kinda balanced things out and kept up the momentum. Not that I understood that at the time, but looking back I think that's what kept us going.

"For Gary I think Tuna Fish was just a case of 'well that didn't work', and he took the reins for a while. I think he'd been stockpiling songs, and he had a lot of cool ideas. 'Only The Strong Survive' for one, there were a lot of things to like about that song.

"Plus Bruce [bassist Bruce Hall] had 'Back On The Road Again', we'd seen him play that song with his own band at The Red Lion in Champaign, which was kind of our home base there. When we hired him one of the first things was 'we want to learn that song!' There wasn't time to put it on '...Tuna Fish', but it was a no-brainer that it would go on the next record."

Once again the band booked Sound City to make the record, self-producing once again, and had set their sights on David DeVore to engineer the record, fresh off his work on Foreigner's 'Double Vision'. The bad news was that he was already booked for other projects.

"He was a golf buddy of our manager, I'd met him a few times and he was the nicest guy too, but he was busy working with Keith Olsen and suggested a young engineer named Kevin Beamish.

"Kevin could get this amazing bottom end on the kickdrum, it just sounded so huge – we liked that a lot! So he got the gig based on David's recommendation and his kickdrum sound. And he's a decent basketball player, which also helped!"

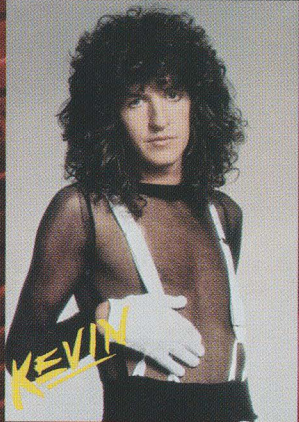
In spite of the failure of the '...Tuna Fish' record to live up to its commercial potential and propel REO into the big time, the recording sessions actually went smoothly.

"Somehow we got some good energy going, and we actually had a lot of fun in the studio. When it comes to actually making a record you have to give it all the energy you've got and focus on getting as much as you possibly can out of the songs, so you really end up in a different state of mind".

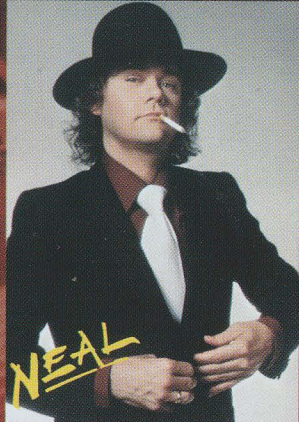


GARY

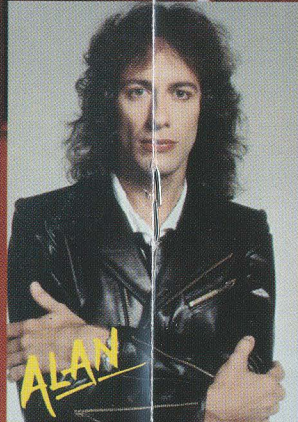




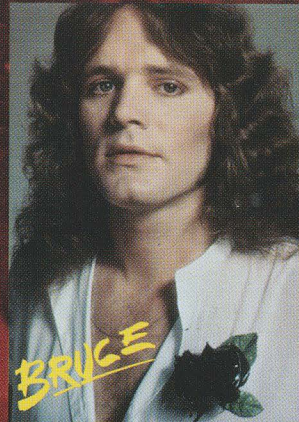
KEVIN



NEAL



ALAN



BRUCE



GARY

Actually the only real difficulty facing the band was the relative shortage of songs to focus on, thanks to Cronin's dry patch, which even led to the rare inclusion of a Chuck Berry cover in the shape of 'Rock 'N Roll Music'.

"In a way it was a grim reminder of my creative drought, something I promised myself I would not let happen again. But on the other hand I was so stoked to record that song; we didn't really think of it as a Chuck Berry cover, to us it was a Beatles cover because theirs was the only version we'd ever heard, and we were actually getting to record one of 'their' songs."

Although things went relatively smoothly in the studio, the band did find themselves lacking an obvious opening track for the record. There's an art to

sequencing an album, and the first song on a record is always hugely important in setting the tone for that which is to follow. The good news was that Cronin's mood had been buoyed by how well things were going in the studio, and as the deadline for wrapping things up began to loom, something clicked.

"As I remember I came up with the title 'Heavy On Your Love' and I had this guitar riff in my head, but I couldn't play what I was hearing. In fact now that I think about it, I pretty much had the whole thing arranged in my head but the guitar stuff was way above my pay grade, so I really needed Gary to sign on and make it happen.

"Writing in the studio isn't something to plan on – anything you write in the studio is gravy, you're there to make a record, not write a record. But in this case

I thought it would be a good piece of music for us to connect on, and maybe a template for future co-writing, which up till that point we hadn't done. We actually wrote it at the last possible moment, recorded it quickly and dropped it into the opening slot on the record.

"Looking back, that song was the saving grace of that record for me. It represented a possible key to the future of the band and it showed the bond between Gary and me."

One of the more astonishing factors in the whole recording process is that the band was largely able to avoid any form of A&R interference in the whole process. Of course it helped that they were signed to Epic in New York, but were recording in Los Angeles, where they had a friend in Senior VP John Boylan,

who had been deputised to oversee the '...Tuna Fish' record – which was also recorded at the same studio in Los Angeles – who largely left the band to their own devices.

"Our management really did a good job of keeping those guys out of our hair. Maybe they thought we were a hopeless case, but they really didn't bother us once we started producing ourselves. Looking back now it's quite astonishing, and I'm really thankful.

"I'm sure there was much more going on between the label and our management that we never knew about, and I'm sure a lot of the things the label said would have pissed us off pretty badly, so everything was filtered carefully before we heard about it.

"The one thing we knew about our relationship with the label was that we were always on the verge of getting dropped after every record that we made, but there was always hope. And rope – one thing about Epic, I must say that to a great degree they got out of the way and where there were issues Gary and I could and did say no, we're not going to do it that way. When we were passionate about something they would go along with us, so in retrospect I guess you have to say that our relationship with them was a good one. They were cool with us."

Of course, that could be that because they had bigger fish to fry, and nobody in the A&R department thought that leaving their fingerprints all over an REO record was going to earn them a promotion. A suggestion which certainly brings a smile to Cronin's face...

"Ha ha, yes, there was probably a little of that! They were making money off us, maybe not enough for us to be a priority they just had to get involved with, and they were making more money after we started producing ourselves – the records sold more, and there was no producer to pay either – and let's face it, their main motivation was to make money. So we always earned another chance – maybe the next time would be the one...?"

Even the album title alludes to the band's continuing survival in spite of the odds, nodding towards a cat's nine lives.

"Yes, it was our ninth record, and we'd come back from near death a few times. And just to make the point, we named our ninth album 'Nine Lives' years before Aerosmith named their ninth album 'Nine Lives'. Hello? Been there, done that."

Thematically the album sleeve went along with the title, and was a decided contrast to the more abstract artwork on the '...Tuna Fish' record. Although a slight fishy smell may well have prevailed once again...

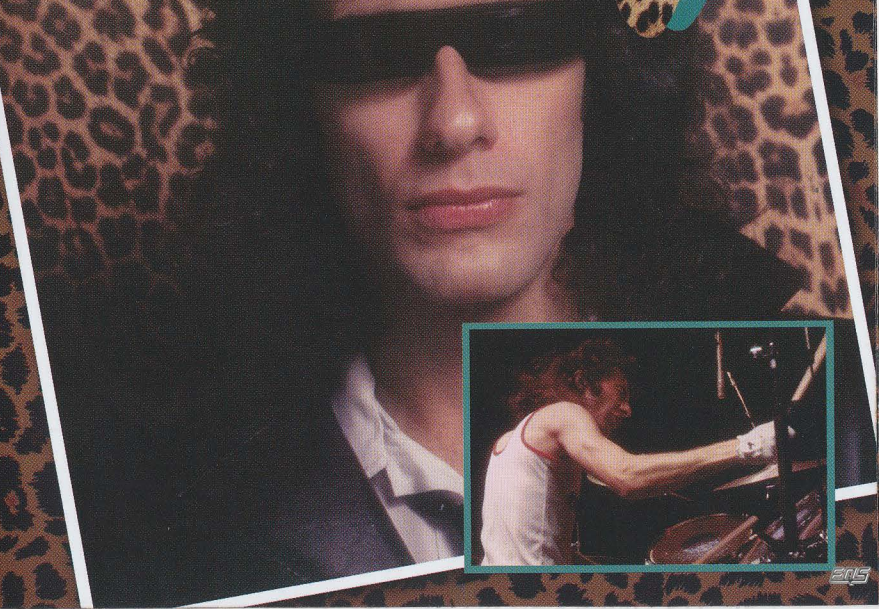
"Everything we did with 'Nine Lives' was a reaction to '...Tuna Fish', which to us – and to the fans too – was a more 'artsy' record than anything that had come before, and now the pendulum was swinging back in the other direction.

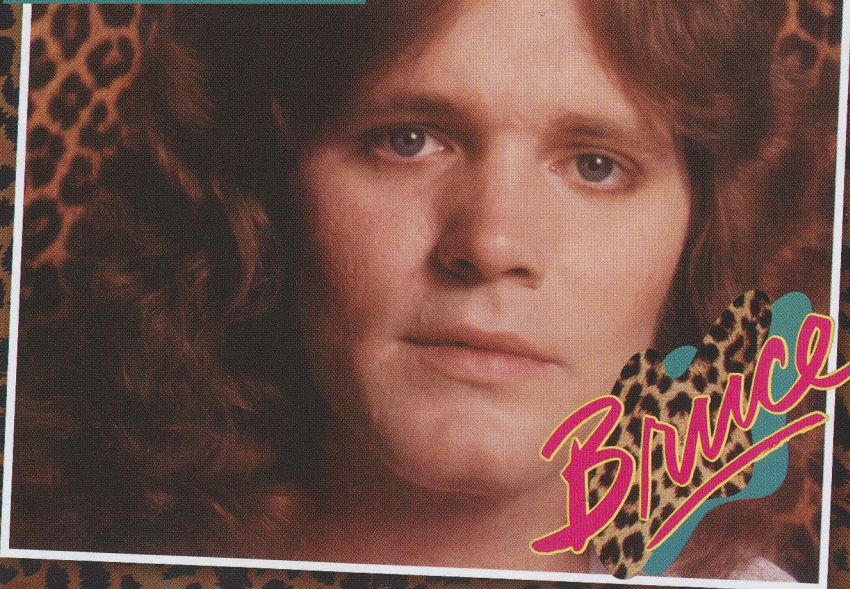
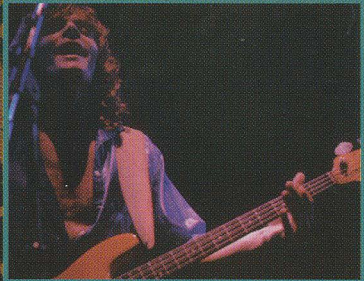
"On the cover we're wearing spandex, there's live animals and space hookers with cat's tails... it was this bizarre thing and even now when somebody puts that album in front of me to sign, I just crack up. It's like looking at your high school yearbook picture – look at us, it's just hilarious! It would be a different story if we had been tongue in cheek about it all but no, we actually thought we looked cool. That's the really scary part!"

Given that Richrath rather than Cronin had taken the lead on the record, it's not surprising that 'Nine Lives' was a harder rocking slice of REO than its predecessor, and more in tune with the live album which had first marked REO out on a national scale. As a result the strategy changed – changed back in fact. During the last few days of their stay in Sound City, the band had put on a live show for contest winners on top LA radio station KWST, which was recorded in studio A there for subsequent broadcast. Epic Records rapidly latched onto the tapes and selected six tracks from the performance (new performances of songs which had all been on the live album!) for a promo-only release with the underwhelming title of 'Live Again' to remind radio stations across the country what a great live



A Live





band REO were, never mind the hit singles. Or lack of them at this time.

"We really had absolutely nothing in the commercial area on this record. It was unspoken, but it was really my job to come up with those songs and I'm not going to bullshit you, I didn't come up with as much as I'd hoped for with that record.

"In those days it wasn't an option to wait until you had the songs before you made the record – once you're on the treadmill, tour follows album follows tour, and if Mr Sensitive here hasn't written his love song yet, life still goes on. I just wasn't ready.

"But there were still some great songs on that record. 'Back On The Road Again' is an all-time favourite of mine and it's still in our live show, Bruce sings the shit out of it. It was actually great for the new guy in the band to have the most popular song on the record. And of course it made me happy because I was the one who had really pushed to get Bruce into the band in the first place, I was sure he was the right guy.

"Every band I've ever been in, Bruce was there too, and I'm a lucky guy to have him as a friend and stage brother."

In a European scenario there's an easy alternative if radio isn't going to sell your record for you, just turn to the press instead. But the American music press was and still is an entirely different story. Instead of trying to nurture new talent they tend to prefer to highlight success to please advertisers. And the publications boosting careers are often focussing on 'alternative' acts. And so REO couldn't even rely on press exposure to boost their profile when they needed it.

"We actually got our first Rolling Stone review for the '...Tuna Fish' record. They'd tried for as long as they could to deny our existence, but they couldn't hold out any longer. The guy who wrote it, Mitch Schneider, later became our publicist and he's still a friend, but his review dismissed the record as 'cheery metal power-pop'. There was something about that description which made me mad, and yet something that I kinda liked too. It didn't make much sense to us at the time, but in retrospect maybe it was true too.

"We certainly weren't first on any critics' list and to a degree I understand why they might not have liked us – there are things about some of our records that piss me off too! But being from the Mid West we were largely a meat and potatoes type of band, just the occasional touch of sophistication, and although a lot of people liked us, it wasn't what the critics were drawn to. Sometimes you want to be challenged by music, but sometimes you just want some good songs to listen to."

Faced with the lack of critical support, and knowing that they didn't have much up their sleeves in terms of potential hit singles, REO would fall back on what they knew best to support 'Nine Lives' – touring, touring, and more touring.

In fact the live shows would start before the album had even been finished, with the band invited to play the California World Music Festival – this was long before world music took on the meaning it has today – which saw REO playing alongside acts such as Ted Nugent, Toto, Mahogany Rush and Cheap Trick (and not forgetting bill-opening English nutters The Fabulous Poodles).



Neal

"We were pretty close to being finished and it was right there in LA, so we took the date. We were a bit nervous about doing it because we weren't really a name in LA at that point, but we felt that we were on the brink of something there, so we figured we needed to do something to set us apart from the other bands on the bill, make people remember us."

You can feel a Spinal Tap moment coming?

"We were set to go on at 4pm, it was going to be broad daylight so we decided to hire a skywriter, but we were on a budget and the only one we could afford was a rusty old cropduster which, we would discover, didn't even have a radio. So the pilot takes off with instructions to write REO in the sky over the stadium at exactly 4pm just as we took the stage.

"But as often happens at big festivals, things started to fall a bit behind schedule, and at 4pm the band before us were in the middle of their big finale, and we're on the ground going frantic, unable to contact the pilot because there was no radio in the plane. So the band is Rex, and they're still playing as the letter R appears in the bright blue sky, then E, everyone in the audience is expecting an X, what a great effect! And when the O appeared instead... well let's just say that it was not what anybody there had hoped for. Another great moment in rock history gone awry – in the end we all thought it was pretty funny, but the guys in Rex probably didn't see it quite the same way!"

Once the album hit the stores REO hit the boards and spent the next six months doing what they did best and selling the album song by song from the stage.

"We were always touring, so thirty plus years later it's hard to recall the specifics of one album's touring against another, but I don't think the size of the venues changed much from the Tuna Fish tour, or the length of the tour either. It was basically theatres and the bigger clubs – plus St Louis where we played the giant football stadium, but again, we did that for '...Tuna Fish' too. Inexplicably they had latched onto us there – Champaign wasn't too far away so we were sort of local, but not really. KSHE was really supportive there, they played all of our songs."

At this point the band would also make their first European foray, having the pleasure of enjoying nasty December temperatures in Britain and Germany – but as Mid Westerners they weren't fazed at all by the cold and brought back some happy memories.

"It was awesome, we had some great shows over there. Hammersmith Odeon I remember, we really had fun at that show."

When the dust finally settled on the Nine Lives campaign, REO were pretty much where they had started out. The album had reached #33 on the Billboard charts compared with #29 for the preceding Tuna Fish album; the difference was that they hadn't managed to secure any significant degree of airplay, whereas the '...Tuna Fish' singles had both charted. But just around the corner was the tenth REO Speedwagon album, a little record called 'Hi Infidelity', which would see things change for the band in a very big way...

PAUL SUTER
Los Angeles, March 2013