

01. KEEP THE FIRE BURNIN' (Kevin Cronin)
02. SWEET TIME (Kevin Cronin)
03. GIRL WITH THE HEART OF GOLD (Bruce Hall)
04. EVERY NOW AND THEN (Gary Richrath)
05. I'LL FOLLOW YOU (Gary Richrath)
06. THE KEY (Kevin Cronin)
07. BACK IN MY HEART AGAIN (Gary Richrath)
08. LET'S BE-BOP (Bruce Hall)
09. STILLNESS OF THE NIGHT (Gary Richrath)
10. GOOD TROUBLE (Kevin Cronin)

**PRODUCED BY KEVIN CRONIN, GARY RICHRATH,
KEVIN BEAMISH, ALAN GRATZER**

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

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 Assistant Engineer - Bruce Barris & Tom Cummings
 Originally mastered By - Jeff Sanders

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 Mixed at Kendun Recorders

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 Brad (Porque) Baker and Ron (Rollo) Scheurenbrand

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REO Speedwagon



GOOD TIMES BAD TIMES

THROUGHOUT THE SEVENTIES REO SPEEDWAGON HAD PLIED THE COURSE OF AN ARCHETYPAL ROCK BAND, RELEASING ALBUMS ON A REGULAR BASIS, BREAKING OUT FROM REGIONAL SUCCESS IN THE AMERICAN MIDWEST TO HIT PLATINUM WITH 'LIVE: YOU GET WHAT YOU PLAY FOR' FOLLOWED BY EVEN GREATER SUCCESS WITH 'YOU CAN TUNE A PIANO BUT YOU CAN'T TUNE A FISH' AND 'NINE LIVES.'

AND THEN 'HI INFIDELITY' happened. The album was a phenomenon, spent nearly eight months in the Top Ten, was the #1 album for fifteen weeks, and stayed on the charts for a massive 101 weeks. It spawned four hit singles, two each from the pens of frontman Kevin Cronin and guitarist Gary Richrath, with one of them still one of the best known songs of the era, Cronin's 'Keep On Loving You'. From humble beginnings now everybody knew who REO Speedwagon were, and the spotlight was firmly upon them; but basking in the spotlight is one thing, and creating under that same spotlight is another thing entirely.

"'Hi Infidelity' was so massive," Cronin recalls; "it was a game changer for the band. It set the stage for our next album in a way that had never happened for us before. Every record we'd made before, including 'Hi Infidelity', we'd been on the verge of being dropped by Epic and the pressure was always on. When we were rehearsing



REO Speedwagon l to r : Gary Richrath, Alan Gratzner, Bruce Hall, Neil Doughty, Kevin Cronin

the material for 'Hi Infidelity' the word had come down that this was our final last chance – we'd had last chances before and survived, but this was the final one."

You might think that Epic would have been happy with the band's degree of success at that point, but 'Nine Lives' had sold just half a million copies compared with the two million sales achieved by the Tuna Fish record, and it had been the band's ninth album; evidently Epic were thinking that maybe REO had achieved all that it could, and it was time to invest in someone newer who might go further, and preferably take less time to get there. But of course all that changed with 'Hi Infidelity', with the band's last 'last chance' turning into a triumphant victory dance for the boys from Champaign, Illinois. And now they had to follow it up; the problem was that they now had to adjust to a whole new set of circumstances.

"There was always pressure on us when it came to making an album, it was something we were used to – it was more like fuel for us to go 'oh yeah, just watch this!' I think for the band, and certainly speaking for myself, it was a position I was used to, and it was very new to be champions trying to retain our title.

"Your life does change dramatically, both in terms of reactions to your music, and all that comes with it... looking back now it seems ridiculous, but it feels like once you get there, in that position, that's where you're going to stay – it's very hard to step back and look at things objectively.

"And that's how we approached the 'Good Trouble'

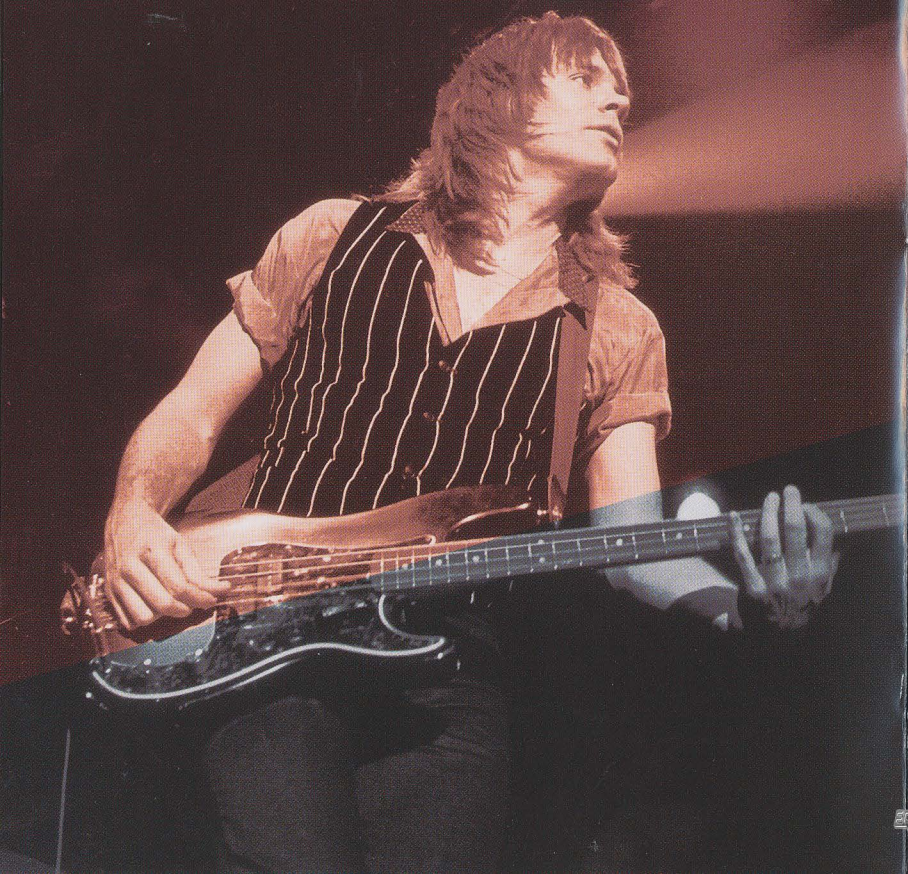
record, it was a position we were totally unused to. We had been underdogs for so many years and now everybody's eyes were on us – and where they had been rooting for us, it seemed, now they were maybe ready to tear us down a little.

"And the fact is that when we came off the road we were burned out, burned out early in fact – we never even took the tour overseas. But when you're that successful there's suddenly money everywhere, and of course the label had gone from being ready to drop us to throwing money at us. The label head's coming to shows, we're getting showered with awards – and it wasn't like we were an overnight success, so there was a certain feeling that maybe we deserved it all. And success brings out the best in people, but it also brings out the worst; in the end I think 'Big Trouble' would have been a more truthful album title.

"There were two factions in the band at that point. We did what we had always done, which was to take a few weeks off and then regrouped in the studio to make the next record. And the first day in the studio we got into a huge fight before we'd even picked up our guitars; everybody at the label wanted us in the studio, everybody on the business side wanted us in the studio, and everybody in the band wanted to be in the studio. Except me.

"My songs weren't finished, I hadn't had the time to write – I just wasn't ready, and career-wise one of my major regrets is that I didn't stand firm. Nobody could have forced me to sing, I could have stopped that record from being made, but I caved. I should have stood my ground but there were so many





forces pushing us to go along with the regular pattern and I was in a lonely place. Some of it was that people were afraid of losing the momentum that we'd always had, but the fact was that we'd always rushed back into the studio because we'd always been on the point of getting dropped and didn't have the bargaining power to take a longer break and maybe make a better record. We did it because we had to, and after 'Hi Infidelity' we didn't have to."

IT'S PERHAPS surprising that Epic Records was backing the plans for a quick follow-up to 'Hi Infidelity', given the fact that when REO started recording 'Good Trouble' its predecessor was still in the Top Ten. Which clearly means it still had legs, and many more dollars in earning potential for the label. But only a few years previously Epic had seen another act go mega and then implode. They had wrung every possible dollar out of Meat Loaf's 'Bat Out Of Hell', and when it came time to follow it up there was the debacle of his lost voice and the broken relationship with Jim Steinman. Once bitten, twice shy?

At least the band was able to avoid the worst forms of record company interference, something that has ruined many a record.

"In a way our organisation is like a big family – we've had the same management since day one, and they've always insulated us from the record company as much as possible, so in that sense at least it was business as usual. Everything went through John Baruck and Tom Consolo – which was smart, because you really don't want any personal

differences to develop between the band and the record company, that's a recipe for disaster."

And that's something that could easily have happened, given the fact that apparently when Epic had come down to listen to the band running through the songs they were about to record for 'Hi Infidelity', the head of A&R was sure that 'Keep On Loving You' shouldn't be on the record because it wasn't really strong enough.

"And after the album came out I chose 'Take It On The Run' as the second single, and everybody at the record company said no, that's the wrong choice, don't do it. As I said, our management was strong, they sided with me – and it went on to be a Top Five hit. How do you pay attention to the record company when that's the kind of advice you're getting?"

Obviously you don't. But Cronin had bigger problems at the time, he wasn't listening to himself either. Simply being short of finished songs wasn't the ultimate crisis because REO had always been a duopoly, with Cronin picking up the slack for Gary Richrath on some albums, and Richrath performing the reciprocal service on others – but the singer had issues way beyond anything as trivial as 'writers block'.

"It was really a case of 'oh my God, I'm not mentally ready to do this again so soon'. 'Hi Infidelity' was so life-changing that I needed – not consciously, I'm talking with the benefit of hindsight here – I needed the time to let it sink in just how much my life, our lives, had changed, and then write about it. I'd always believed that the anxiety and insecurity I

sometimes felt were down to the fact that the world hadn't seen what I was capable of yet – but now it seemed like everyone on the planet had heard my music and there was no excuse any more. But those feelings were still there, and it kinda freaked me out a little. What I probably needed right then was therapy, and instead I was in a recording studio with a vice around my balls..."

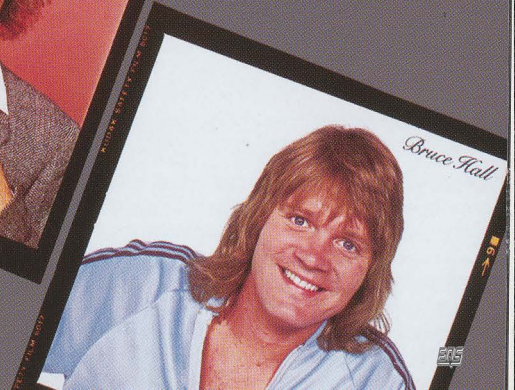
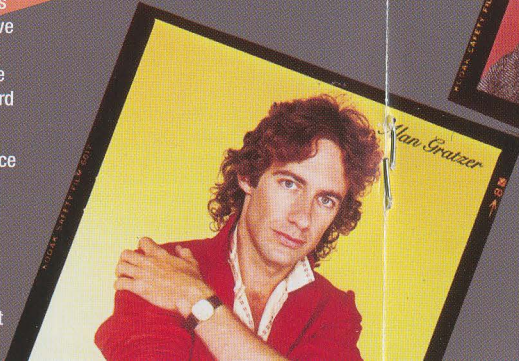
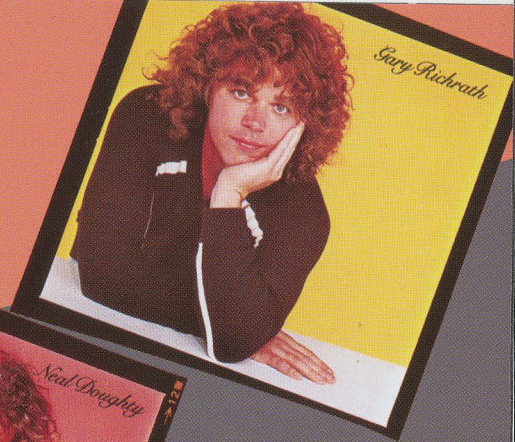
ULTIMATELY CRONIN would place four songs on the record, as did Richrath, but he concedes that he was not captain of the ship this time around.

"I did not enjoy making that record at all, but if you talked to Gary I think he was happier with the process, and with the end result. Part of the rhythm of the band had always been that the pendulum would swing back and forth between Gary and me, one of us at the helm and the other co-piloting alongside. For the '...Tuna Fish' record I guess I was at the helm, for 'Nine Lives' he definitely drove the ship; 'Hi Infidelity' was maybe a little bit more me, but it was certainly the record where our energies best came together – which is maybe why it did so well.

"It's probably the case with most bands where you have two guys with a sense of what the music should sound like. You can have co-leaders of a band, but I think at any time someone will have a firmer grip, and in REO it came from the songs – whoever had the stronger material ended up with a little more say in how the record panned out. You're on a hot streak? Go for it!"

Which is not to belittle the band's third creative force, bassist Bruce Hall – most REO albums featured a Hall tune, and 'Good Trouble' actually had two.

"Bruce is still with us, and every night I introduce him as REO's secret weapon. He's a big presence physically, but as a band member his presence is a lot more subtle. He's extremely gifted musically, but he's one of those guys who starts a lot of songs but



doesn't finish so many. He was always invaluable as a third option for songs – if Gary or I were having a hard time and coming up short he always had something cool when we needed it. And he had two songs on 'Good Trouble', make of that what you will...

"He wrote 'Back On The Road Again', which is probably one of the five most important songs in the band's history, we still play it every night – so you know he's a great writer. And this time around he had 'Girl With The Heart Of Gold' and 'Let's Be-Bop.'

"Now 'Let's Be-Bop' may be one of the worst song titles ever, but it was a really fun song, so great until you got to the last line of the chorus. And if I had been more on my game for the record I might have done something about it – and as one of the producers, which is what I was, that's part of the job. But it just didn't happen. Bruce and I still laugh about that title – it's a great song, well written, the chords are cool, the melody's cool. But the title..."

IF HIS own contributions to the record, Cronin is most critical of 'Sweet Time'.

"I never really finished that one – as far as I'm concerned that's still an unfinished song. I remember in rehearsal [returning engineer/co-producer] Kevin Beamish was raving that it was a number one single for sure, but I knew it was incomplete, I only had scratch lyrics too. I was having a lot of difficulty writing at that time, but if enough people tell you it's a hit you start to believe it. Maybe it was finished – here, take it. But it wasn't."

On the other hand, 'The Key' was finished, and speaks volumes about the singer's state of mind as 'Good Trouble' was going down.

"It really encapsulates where I was at then – it's really me admitting that my frustration over the lack of a hit record wasn't the root of my problems, we'd had 'Hi Infidelity' and nothing had changed for me, evidently there were other things I needed to address. So that song is certainly the truest thing I contributed.

When its thirtieth anniversary came along I put it on, hadn't listened to it in, well, thirty years. And it was a reminder of all the craziness and fears that went into it. We never performed any of the songs from it once the tour was over, but there were always fans asking why, so I figured for the thirtieth anniversary maybe I could find something that I'd like to play again.

"And in the process I started messing with 'Keep The Fire Burnin' and realised that it wasn't that I didn't like the song, I just wasn't fond of the way we produced it. Plus there were a couple of chord changes that sounded really pukey..."

"So I changed those chords, made it a little bit cooler, and now I love the song and play it whenever there's an acoustic set. I wish we'd done it this way back then but that's the great thing about music, there's always a second chance and in reality you can reinvent a song on a nightly basis.

"So really it wasn't the song, it was how we recorded it. But still, some fans had always loved it, some of them even say that 'Good Trouble' is their favourite album – which is a real reminder that the most





important thing isn't how a band or artist feels about a song, what's really important is how each individual receives it, and I'm humbled by people who love that record. Where I was at back then is one thing, but I'm honoured by the people who love it in spite of my unhappiness in making it. A lot of people liked the record, it's just down to me to find a way to like it myself so I can play some of the songs for them!"

SYMPOMATIC OF the rot that set in over the course of the sessions was a parting of the ways with engineer and co-producer Kevin Beamish, who was making his third successive album with the band and firmly entrenched. But right from the start he apparently seemed more like an outsider, and as tensions escalated in the studio his relationship with the band began to fray.

"He got caught up in the hype of 'Hi Infidelity' and that kind of scared me, because that's not what you want from the guy you're counting on for critical input. Alan, Gary and I produced and our engineer was our co-producer, that's how it worked with us."

His apparently misplaced enthusiasm for the aforementioned 'Sweet Time' was just one black mark, but the big one came towards the end of the sessions when the band was having a hard time finishing what they had started, and needed the extra pair of ears more than ever.

"We were having a lot of trouble getting the mixes right – and he just left us, to do a Starship record! Well, now that I say it I can't think how we could

have finished it without him, so maybe it was the mastering rather than the mix. Either way, he just took off, so that was the last time we saw him for a long time. We were like 'are you kidding me? You're leaving us now?'"

"I think by that time everybody knew that we were in trouble. The support started to wane, and we ended up in survival mode. The lustre of 'Hi Infidelity' had faded pretty quickly, and I think that my own unhappiness was probably the core of the problem.

"I'm the lead singer, the frontman, and with me unhappy I think it started rubbing off on everyone else. I'm not proud of that at all, and I take responsibility. And it all stems from the fact I should have been strong at the beginning and said guys, I just can't do this now. I've learned this about myself, it's something I've had to work on – I went along with the plan but inside I was angry about it, and there's no way that ends well. Today if I feel something I'll tell you about it, because I've learned what happens when I don't."

SPEND ENOUGH time in the studio with someone who doesn't want to be there, and you won't want to be there either, so it's no surprise that by the end of the 'Good Trouble' sessions REO were not a happy band at all. Which is a little ironic, given that they had entered the studios to make its predecessor as an unhappy band – 'Hi Infidelity' is, after all, basically an album about broken relationships with wives and girlfriends – and emerged as a unified team, bonded by working



through the shared misery. Now they were supposed to be a bunch of happy guys, on top of the world thanks to the huge success of 'Hi Infidelity', and instead they faced heading out onto a lengthy tour with a total lack of enthusiasm.

He's able to laugh about the absurdity of it all now, but Cronin recalls how well he handled the prospect of touring 'Good Trouble' for a couple of years. He just didn't want to be there.

"We played the first show and then we had a day off in Roanoke, Virginia and I sat up with our manager John Baruck into the small hours of the morning trying to persuade him to cancel the entire tour and just do a short series of charity shows. It made no sense at all, but it was where I was at."

SO WHAT do rich rock stars do when they're out on the road with black clouds hovering over their heads? They do their best to numb themselves to it all of course.

"Whenever we played a show there had always been a party afterwards, it was just what you did back in those days, and we always had a great time. The show was always the focus... but by the middle of the 'Good Trouble' tour it was just something we had to get out of the way so that we could get to the after-party.

"Things were just not right with the band and there was way too much partying going on, which I think was just numbing ourselves to the reality of the choices we had made and the situation we found ourselves in. It was really traumatic – we were

partying way too much, and I put myself in some bad situations under the guise of having fun. Some of it was fun, but it was really stupid too. Doing blow off Rod Stewart's American Music Award?

"And some of the guys were partying even harder than me, but of course that was what rock stars with money did at the time, so it didn't feel crazy at all. "In a way we squandered the success of 'Hi Infidelity' – which was still on the charts! Everyone had rushed us to make another record and we hadn't had the strength to say no.

"'Wheels Are Turning' is when we were ready to make the follow up to 'Hi Infidelity' – if we'd got the better songs from 'Good Trouble' and the better songs from 'Wheels Are Turning' we'd have had 'Can't Fight This Feeling' following up 'Keep On Loving You' (the band's two number one singles, in reality separated by four years), we'd have done more touring on 'Hi Infidelity' and given it the support it deserved, and then taken our time until we had the material. Truly 'Can't Fight This Feeling' was the follow up to 'Keep On Loving You', it's just that we made the 'Good Trouble' record in between...

PAUL SUTER

Los Angeles, September 2013