

GLISTENING GUITAR AND SCARY MUSIC

He has bags under his eyes and a bad cough that's been hanging on for more than a week. From five in the evening to five in the morning, he's been doubling as the music director and as an extra on the movie set of *The XYZ Murders*, and he's beginning to feel the strain. Joe LoDuca looks tired. His arms ache from holding a trombone to his lips through twenty bad takes of the stuntman getting punched in the face, and he's got the flu. He'd like to take a day off.

For LoDuca, one of Detroit's most gifted guitarists and composers, *The XYZ Murders* represents his second film score, the first being *The Evil Dead*, both of them written and directed by Sam Raimi. Filmed entirely in Detroit, *The XYZ Murders* is a comedic thriller which, though set in the Forties, is an obvious parody of the era. When LoDuca isn't "playing" the trombone in the picture's ballroom scene, he watches videotapes of cars exploding and bodies being thrown off the Belle Isle Bridge. The score consists of a nine-piece big band which plays during the ballroom scene, and a separate orchestra which covers the rest of the film. It showcases LoDuca's diversity, which includes writing for symphony orchestra and small fusion groups, a well-regarded album, *Glisten*, and the catchy theme to WTVS/Channel 56's *LateNight America*.

In retrospect, a career in music seemed inevitable for LoDuca. Though his parents were not musicians, they encouraged four-

year-old Joseph in his spontaneous renditions of Xavier Cugat and Frank Sinatra. Formal piano lessons began at age ten and continued until he was thirteen, at which point he switched to electric guitar, a nat-



ural transition for a musically inclined boy growing up in the Sixties. Emulating the great rock 'n' roll guitarists of the decade—Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix—LoDuca found himself in a series of bands that frequently worked in the Detroit area.

"When I was fifteen I was in a group

named the Condors. We'd make \$28 a night playing at places like the Crow's Nest and the Chatterbox, warming up bands like Scott Richards' Case and the MC-5. We didn't know what we were doing. We were just a kids' act. I was so shy that whenever I had to sing, I'd turn around and face the wall."

In college at the University of Michigan in the early Seventies, LoDuca spent hours in the music library, expanding his interests to John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Bill Evans, and the Contemporary Jazz Quintet (with whom he played at the Detroit-Montreux Jazz Festival last summer). But he was beginning to notice a considerable lag in the development of the guitar as a solo instrument.

"Guitarists were about fifteen years behind everyone else. You had guys like Coltrane playing "Sun Ship" and "A Love Supreme," but at the same time, Wes Montgomery was playing "Surrey With the Fringe on Top" and "Down by the Riverside." It occurred to me that there were no guitar play-

ers applying Miles' and Coltrane's ideas to their instruments, and that was something I wanted to do. I've always leaned toward the type of ensemble playing in which the roles of soloist and accompanist overlap."

Joe LoDuca and his versatile guitar: "Detroit musicians are willing to take risks."

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Frustrated by the usual hassles of working the nightclub circuit, LoDuca decided to pursue his music through what he considered more legitimate avenues. He enrolled at Wayne State University's Music School where he studied traditional guitar literature—Sor, Villa-Lobos, Dowland, Rodrigo—in addition to composing and conducting. Fascinated by symphonic music, he transcribed orchestral works by Debussy, Ravel, and Sammartini for the guitar. Despite his busy schedule he became restless in Detroit, and in 1975 moved to New York to study with jazz guitar luminary Ralph Towner.

Playing and studying with Towner was an exhilarating experience. "When Joe first came to me," says Towner, "he was like a humble student asking for guidance, though there wasn't much I could show him. He's a fantastic musician, and his writing is excellent." For LoDuca, the months with Towner were some of the most challenging in his career: "In the course of an evening we'd play folk, classical, rock-sounding stuff, Indian-sounding stuff, bebop, avant garde . . . I had to play out of every musical genre that I had ever known. That's what I always thought music was supposed to be anyway."

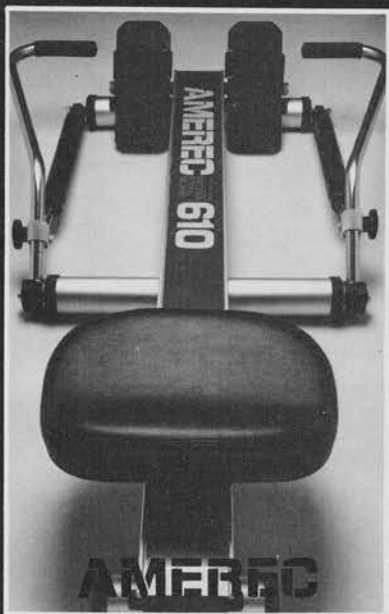
By the late Seventies, LoDuca had hit his stride in Detroit, becoming a fixture in the city's jazz scene. In 1980, he was asked to write the sound track for *The Evil Dead*. LoDuca describes the film as a "classic grade B drive-in horror movie"; writer Stephen King dubbed it "the most ferociously original horror film of the year."

The sound track, which will be available late this month on the Varèse Sarabande label, is enough to send you scurrying out of your living room with adrenaline-pumping fear. Using modern techniques such as random phrasing and atonality, LoDuca produces some truly unorthodox effects. He uses microtones — half-tones, which are more common in East Indian music—to produce the unusual effect of *bending* the sound through a wide harmonic range. At times the string section sounds as though it has been heated in a sonic cubicle, melting into a mass that flows eerily toward the unknown. The rhythms are deliberately out of sync, producing a helter-skelter quality.

After completing *Evil Dead*, LoDuca coproduced and recorded his *Glisten* album (Cornucopia audiophile).

"*Glisten* was simply a culmination of all the influences I had up to that point; the whole blending of Third World music and

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the European sense of structure and harmony with swinging rhythm."

Indeed, the album's variety of styles is startling. Aptly named "Glisten," the title track is a poignant lament stated by melodic classical guitar. Muted synthesizer provides a soft pastel accompaniment. Sparkling harmonics and glittering flecks of light illuminate this tone poem of Baroque and Spanish guitar, Latin rhythm, jazz harmonies and unusual phrasing. It is pure harmonic gold.

In dramatic contrast, "Renaissance City" pops along with a muscular groove laid down by bassist Paul Finazzo and drummer Anthony Robertson. Replete with incendiary Chinese gong, the piece is full of hairpin changes. Infectious and impossible to resist, this is futuristic punk at its best.

Other cuts on the album include a wistful guitar duet with Ralph Towner on twelve-string, and a driving Afro-Cuban jam with Towner on piano, Ralphe Armstrong on bass and Lawrence Williams on drums.

LoDuca's popular "Theme from Late-Night America" (Volley Records) was recorded on 45 rpm by his group, which

includes Ken Kellett on bass, Gary Schunk on keyboards and Tom Starr on drums. LoDuca also added trumpeter Marcus Belgrave and percussionist Larry Fratangelo. The band really cooks on this tune with plenty of funk and flash. Straight-ahead blowing by LoDuca and Belgrave highlight the set.

Joe LoDuca is getting close to national celebrity. His theme is heard nightly from coast to coast, and *Glisten* has had more than moderate success. He's in and out of town a lot, but often he can be heard at Baker's Keyboard Lounge, the Caucus Club, and Alexander's in the Medical Center. He could leave town for good, yet he prefers Detroit as his home base. "There's tremendous energy and talent in this city," he says. "I see artists here who refuse to make compromises, and I admire that. Detroit musicians are willing to take risks in order to follow through on their artistic vision."

You can count LoDuca as one artist whose vision has become reality.

MARK LIPSON, an accomplished drummer, is a Detroit-area freelance writer.

DANCING WITH DETROIT

by Robin Watson

Sunlight floods the Farmington Hills dance studio with a warming light as dancers writhe, leap and glide. There's frost on the windows and sweat on their faces as the hard, but productive workout wears on, a workout alive with anticipation of performance.

There should be nothing unusual about the scene. But for the Harbinger Dance Company, a troupe that spent an entire season in reorganization without performing, each rehearsal is a reaffirmation of its existence; each new engagement a cause for celebration, culminating in its triumphant return to the Music Hall dance series, April 25-29.

To be a harbinger is to be a pioneer, to initiate a major change. To be the Harbinger Dance Company is to have a hard way to go. Since 1970, the troupe has had to find a home, gain recognition in a tightly knit dance community, and try to establish an audience in a tough market.

Harbinger grew from a dance program created for the Detroit Community Music School by Lisa Nowak, a Detroit native and

former dancer, into Detroit's sole resident dance company at a time when the only professional dance that could be seen here was the American Ballet Theatre on tour. After striking out on its own for a while, Harbinger finally ended up at the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College, where it has been in residence for nearly three years.

Yet now, with so much behind it, Harbinger is in the same place where companies like Alvin Ailey and the Dance Theater of Harlem stood a decade ago: far from untalented, yet uncertain and, to a large extent, unrecognized. And perhaps a bit misplaced, for unlike the arts-nurturing environment of New York, Detroit curiously finds the homegrown label somewhat tainted—a stigma Harbinger is trying to shake as it reorganizes its fund-raising and promotional approaches. It stands at the beginning of broader success or spiraling failure.

"The name Harbinger was chosen with the idea that we were the forerunner of dance in Detroit, but visibility is a very