



## Benson Breezes In

George Benson may make guitar playing sound relaxed and easy but don't let that mislead you. He didn't turn singer overnight either.

Benson, who turns 35 the day between his Christchurch and Wellington shows, was first introduced to the electric guitar at the age of six when his stepfather played him some Charlie Christian recordings. In subsequent years there were many informal lessons on a number of old instruments but the boy's first love was singing

rhythm and blues. (In fact he did a vocal recording for RCA at age 10.) Upon leaving school at 17, Benson formed a rock 'n' roll band in his home town of Pittsburg. He played guitar, but his voice was still the main feature.

Then at 19 he was hired by jazz organist Jack McDuff and it was in his three years with this group that Benson says he became a real guitarist. On the road, playing day in, day out, the musician developed. He also got to see other guitarists, picking up tips and teaching himself a lot of theory, especially harmony.

Finally, the desire for greater personal expression led Benson to form his own quartet, using the same lineup of guitar, organ, tenor-sax and drums. He wanted to play only jazz but finances often dictated the band accept rock gigs, sharing the stage with go-go dancers. As leader, Benson had major responsibility for music which was being heard not just by a jazz clientele but by rock and R&B audiences as well. He continued to grow, and so, slowly, did his esteem, first among fellow musicians and gradually among a growing coterie of fans. During this time he began recording, either on his own, as in some of the Blue Note supersessions, or with his own group. CBS have recently released a double album, entitled *Benson Burner*, compiled from quartet recordings in 1966-67. In this music the gutsy R&B influence is particularly evident. Polydor have also re-released a '68 L.P. *Blue Benson*, featuring Herbie Hancock and Billy Cobham.

By the early 70's Benson had landed a contract with CTI, and he made a number

of recordings, both as leader and sideman, with that label's heavies: Hancock, Ron Carter, Jack de Johnette, Freddie Hubbard et al. It was CTI who first directed him towards the pop market. His '72 album *White Rabbit* (after the Jefferson Airplane hit) was nominated for a Grammy. He even tried unsuccessfully for the top twenty with a formula-funk vocal single, "Supership."

Irrespective of the pop marketing, Benson was now firmly established as one of the great jazz guitarists. In both '72 and '74 he was voted best guitarist by his peers in Playboy's "All-Star's All-Stars" poll.

After CTI he signed with Warner Brothers where he made *Breezin'* and the rest, as they say, is history. *Breezin'* has sold well over 2 million copies making it the largest-selling jazz album in history. Its appeal is remarkably broad. (This writer knows both bowls-playing retired business-men and fifteen-year-old disco dudes who own and love it.)

Of course the music has changed. It is a heavily hybridized form of jazz that Benson plays now. Electronic keyboards, bass guitar and lush string/moog arrangements replace the organ and tenor sax of yesteryear, and the rhythms are tailored to popular taste. Nonetheless the lyrical guitar style is still there.

Whether you prefer Benson as pop singer, jazz guitarist or simply like his funky beat, his New Zealand performances should fulfil all expectations.

(Benson's new L.P. *Weekend in L.A.* is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.)

### Peter Thomson

Guitarist-singer George Benson is touring New Zealand this month.

have previously played with Bowie: guitarist Stacey Heydon, drummer Dennis Davis and bassist George Murray; as well as three 'new' members: Simon House (ex Hawkwind) on violin, keyboard player Shaun Maynes and synthesiser player Roger Powell from Todd Rundgren's Utopia... another act hitting the road is Genesis who have tour dates set up from March to November. Interesting enough their November dates take them to Japan, could they make it down here? The purpose of the tour is to promote their new album, *And Then There Were Three*, which is released in Britain this month. As you'll recall, with the departure of guitarist Steve Hackett, Genesis are operating in the

studio as a three-piece. All tracks on the new album are co-written by Phil Collins, Mike Rutherford and Tony Banks — the three remaining members. On stage Genesis will continue to use American drummer Chester Thompson and the new man recruited for stage work is Daryl Mark Stuermer who'll play guitar and bass. Stuermer has previously played with George Duke and has spent the last two years with Jean-Luc Ponty... and finally it seems that punk's favourite casualty, *Sid Vicious* of the Sex Pistols, bad mouthed Split Enz as everything he hated in music. *Tim Finn* of the Enz was delighted. He told *NME*: "It made me go all warm when I heard that." Nice one, Tim.

## who's where

**Ted Mulry Gang** March 6-18, Glenfield Tavern, Auckland. March 20-April 8, Lion Tavern, Wellington.

**Rocking Horse** March 13-18, Te Mata Havelock North. March 20-25, Windsor Castle, Auckland. April 5-8 and 12-15, Royal Tiger, Wellington.

**Golden Harvest** March 13-18, Te Mata Hotel Hastings. March 13-18, Sandown, Gisborne. March 20-25, Cabana Hotel, Napier. March 27-April 1, Palace Hotel, Rotorua.

**Spatz** March 8-11 & 15-18, Royal Tiger, Wellington.

**Hello Sailor** March 11, Soundshell, Gisborne. March 12, Soundshell, Rotorua. March 16-18, Gluepot, Ponsonby. April 3-14, University Students' Arts Council Tour. Dances at High Schools — Rutherford (March 30) & Otahuhu (March 31), April 1, North Shore Teachers College.

**Citizen Band** March 23-25, DB Tavern, cnr Albert St & Wellesley St, Auckland. March 30-April 1, Milford Marina. March 12, Soundshell, Rotorua.

**Urban Road** March 8-11, DB Tavern, Auckland. March 15-18, Milford Marina. March 22-25, Ponsonby Hotel.

**Bruce Morley Little Big Band** Saturday afternoons, Windsor Castle.

**Schtung** Tuesday, Wed & Thurs nights at Cascade Bar, Royal International Hotel, Auckland.

**Bamboo** March 10, Island of Real.

**Murray McNabb's Hard Jazz** March 15 & 29, Island of Real Cafe.

**Dean Rod Band** (from U.S.A.) March 11, Gisborne Soundshell.

**Red Mole** April 5 & 6, Island of Real

**Tama's Band** March 24, Island of Real

**Rick Steele** March 30 — April 1, Island of Real.

**Sam Hunt/Gary McCormack** March 8 & 9, Island of Real.

**Jan Kemp/Margaret Blay/Riemke Ensing** March 16 & 17, Island of Real.

**Th' Dudes** March 17 & 18, Island of Real.

**Country Flyers**, March 11, Island of Real.

**Beaver, Hannan, Hooper & Kennedy**, March 22 & 23, Island of Real.

If you are not here that's because you did not let us know. For free listing write to **Rip It Up**, P O Box 5689, Auckland.

## late news!!

**David Bowie** returns to the concert stage with 13 dates in the UK scheduled for June. This will be the first time the thin white duke has played Britain since 1976. The band he'll use includes three members who

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