

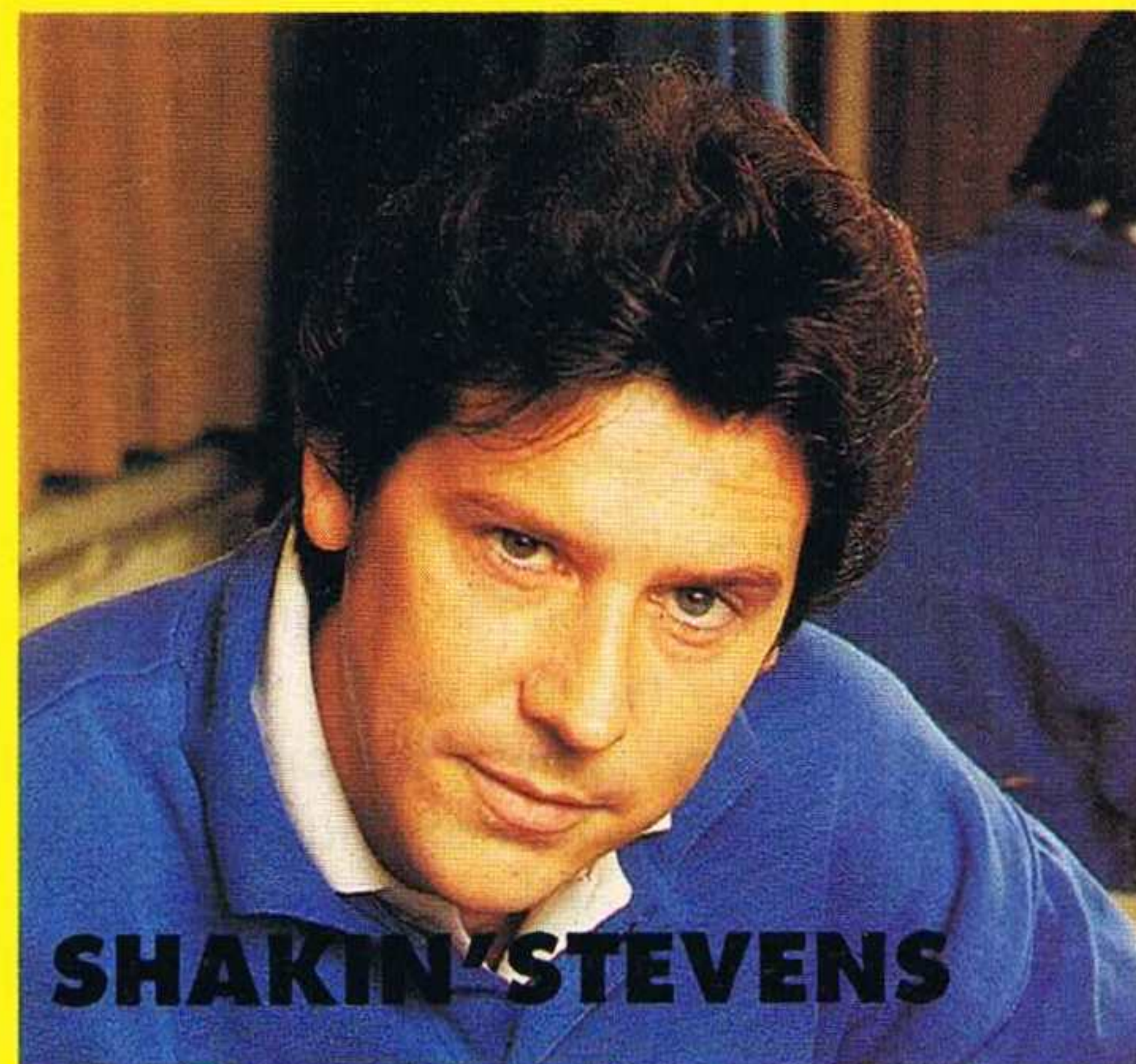
PIC ANDY BRADSHAW

# POP OF THE ROCKERS!

**From his early days as a Pop producer for the likes of Nik Kershaw, PETER COLLINS has become one of the most sought-after names in the Rock production big-league. Fresh from producing the new Suicidal Tendencies album, 'The Art Of Rebellion', Peter talks to ANDY BRADSHAW.**

Bloody hell, it's Bob Hoskins! But of course it's not. 'Tis none other than the bearded figure of Peter Collins, producer extraordinaire of some of the world's top Rock bands. In a long and successful career, peppered with hit singles and albums, and taking in a multitude of Pop artists along the

way, Peter has become a big name in Hard Rock production. It might seem strange that a man who has twiddled knobs for the likes of Matt Bianco, Tracey Ullman, The Lambrettas and that god of the wobbly knee, Shakin' Stevens, should have also worked with such Rock luminaries



PIC : TIM BAUER/RETNA

**SHAKIN' STEVENS**



as Rush, Queensrÿche, Gary Moore, Alice Cooper and, most recently, Suicidal Tendencies. But Peter is a man who likes to keep his options open, as his CV suggests. Sitting in his West London apartment, he is relaxed, yet slightly wary.

"This is the first interview I've done in years," he admits. "I let one remark slip the last time, and it plagued me for ages."

This trepidation is understandable. A man in his position cannot go around upsetting the bands whose business he depends upon to keep a roof over his head. He needn't have worried. In conversation he came across as a warm, friendly individual, with scarcely a bad word to say about anybody - and a disarming ability to make you feel at ease. "If you want to be a good producer you have to be able to get the best out of people," he grins. "You can't very well do that if you're making the bands uptight." Peter's empathy with musicians is not surprising when his own background is taken into account.

"I started out as a Folk singer in the late Sixties, playing clubs, restaurants, anywhere I could to earn some money. I had an uncle who was in the music business, managing bands like Argent and the original Nirvana. After hearing some of my material, he thought it would be a good idea for me to make a record. So I got a deal with Decca and did exactly that. I put out this Donovan-style single which sold about six thousand copies which, at the time, I thought was quite good. Looking back, it wasn't really!"

The experience of being in the studio for the first time made Peter realise something. He definitely felt at home in that environment, but preferred to be behind the console rather than in front of it. Having the honesty to admit that he was unlikely to make it as a performer helped make up his mind. Starting as a tea-boy with Decca, with aspirations to becoming one of the label's in-house producers, Peter learned about the technicalities of studio life. To supplement his income, he put his musical talents to good use by writing advertising jingles. The benefit of this was that, as well as being commissioned to write them, he was also responsible for production.

"It was useful, but very frustrating working in and around the studios while I was at Decca," he recalls. "You can learn what everthing does, but it's hands-on experience that really counts. That's why the jingle thing was so important."

In 1974, after four years at Decca, Peter left and, after a brief stint with a music publishing company, he moved on to work as a freelance producer for new bands.

"I didn't have a great deal of chart success with any of those acts. One did appear briefly at number 65, but that was about it." As the Seventies rolled towards the Eighties,



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something dreadful happened.

"Disco. Suddenly everything was a four-to-the-bar, kick-drum beat and it left me cold." However, in 1979, there was light at the end of the tunnel. At MIDEM (the annual international record industry conference), he was taken under the wing of Magnet Records and asked to 'make hit singles'.

"It was fantastic. There I was, drowning in a sea of Disco blandness, barely making a living, and they gave me carte blanche to spend money and produce hits."

The first band that Peter was given was Matchbox, a Rockabilly act, for whom he produced several hit singles, including 'Rockabilly Rebel' and a top five with 'When You Ask About Love'.

Perversely, his next successful act was Mod band, The Lambrettas. Their reworking of the classic 'Poison Ivy' went top ten. Peter was starting to make some ground.

It was not until 1982, however, that he was







to have his first taste of Metal, with the Tygers Of Pan Tang.

"Up until this point I had mainly worked with Pop acts. One of my close associates in the business was Pete Waterman, who was very keen that I should introduce Rock into my portfolio. A friend of mine, Charlie Eyre, had recently joined MCA's A&R department. He had inherited the Tygers and thought that it would be a good idea for me to see the band with a view to producing them. So I went up to Newcastle to see them rehearsing in a church hall. It was the first time I'd heard serious power guitar in an enclosed space. Seeing John Sykes setting the instrument alight with playing ability was stunning. I was hooked!

"I ended up producing 'The Cage', and trying to introduce some of the Pop know-

how I had acquired along the way. I used Syn- drums on 'The Cage'. I believe I was one of the first people to do that. Mutt Lange came in to have a listen during the recording, but he wasn't very impressed, which is ironic considering the success he's had since with synthesised drums!"

A lot of Peter's contributions to Rock music, he believes, come from a Pop perspective in terms of structure and sounds.

"The trick with producing a good Pop record is to make it sound larger than life - which is certainly applicable to modern Rock music. What I was trying to do at the time was to bring Rock into the Eighties; make it sound more contemporary."

'The Cage' was reasonably well received, going silver in the UK, but after seeing a dismal performance by the band on a 'live' TV show, he decided that for the time being, he would go back to his old stomping ground... Pop.

The result was the massive international success of Nik Kershaw and Musical Youth. By a bizarre quirk of fate, Peter's work with Musical Youth was to bring him back to

**"I was delighted to work with Queensrÿche, and even more pleased when I was asked to produce the 'Empire' album, of which I am immensely proud."**

Hard Rock. Peter Price, who managed Musical Youth, had moved on to work with 10 Records, a division of Virgin.

"Peter called me up one day, explaining that he was involved with Gary Moore, and they had an album track which they felt would make a great single - but they wanted it re-cut and would I be interested in doing it?" Peter was flown out to Belgium to see Gary in action and was "blown away" by his guitar playing.

The single that Peter was asked to re-cut, went on to be a massive hit for the Irish-born guitarist. It was of course, 'Empty Rooms'. Gary was so impressed with Peter's style that he hired him to produce further Moore products in the shape of 'Out In The Fields' (with Phil Lynott) and the 800,000-selling 'Wild Frontier' album. Peter remembers one thing about working with Gary Moore that brings a smile to his face.

"When we were looking for a studio, Gary sent one of his crew down to measure the room, to make sure it was the right size!" It was through Gary Moore that Collins was to pick up another prestigious Rock act, Rush, further cementing his reputation as a top producer in the field.

"Gary was on tour with Rush in the States. They were impressed with what they'd heard and gave me a call with a view to me producing their next album."

Peter describes his time working with Rush on the 'Power Windows' and 'Hold Your Fire' albums as "a great learning

## RUSH



PIC: APRE





**GARY MOORE**

experience. They are consummate professionals, amazing musicians and fantastic people to work with. They're totally unafraid of technology too."

Peter admits to having been fairly unaware of the mystique that surrounded Rush.

"I remember watching them in concert, thinking that the vocals could be better, and that the drum sounds needed looking at. It didn't feel like a big challenge at the time. Now I listen to old Rush records with a lot more respect. At the time I was just a cocky British Pop producer!"

Due to an unfortunate experience working with Billy Squier which, to spare Peter's blushes, we will not go into, there may never have been another Rock album produced by Peter Collins. In fact, much to his subsequent dismay, he passed-up on a rather superb opportunity.

"I got a call from Cliff Bernstein, asking me

to do some work with a great band of his called City Kid, whom I loved. But after working with Billy Squier I didn't want to do another Rock band for a while. They, of course, became Tesla..."

All was not lost, however, because the same management company, Mensch/Bernstein, called him up again with another one of their developing bands: Queensrÿche.

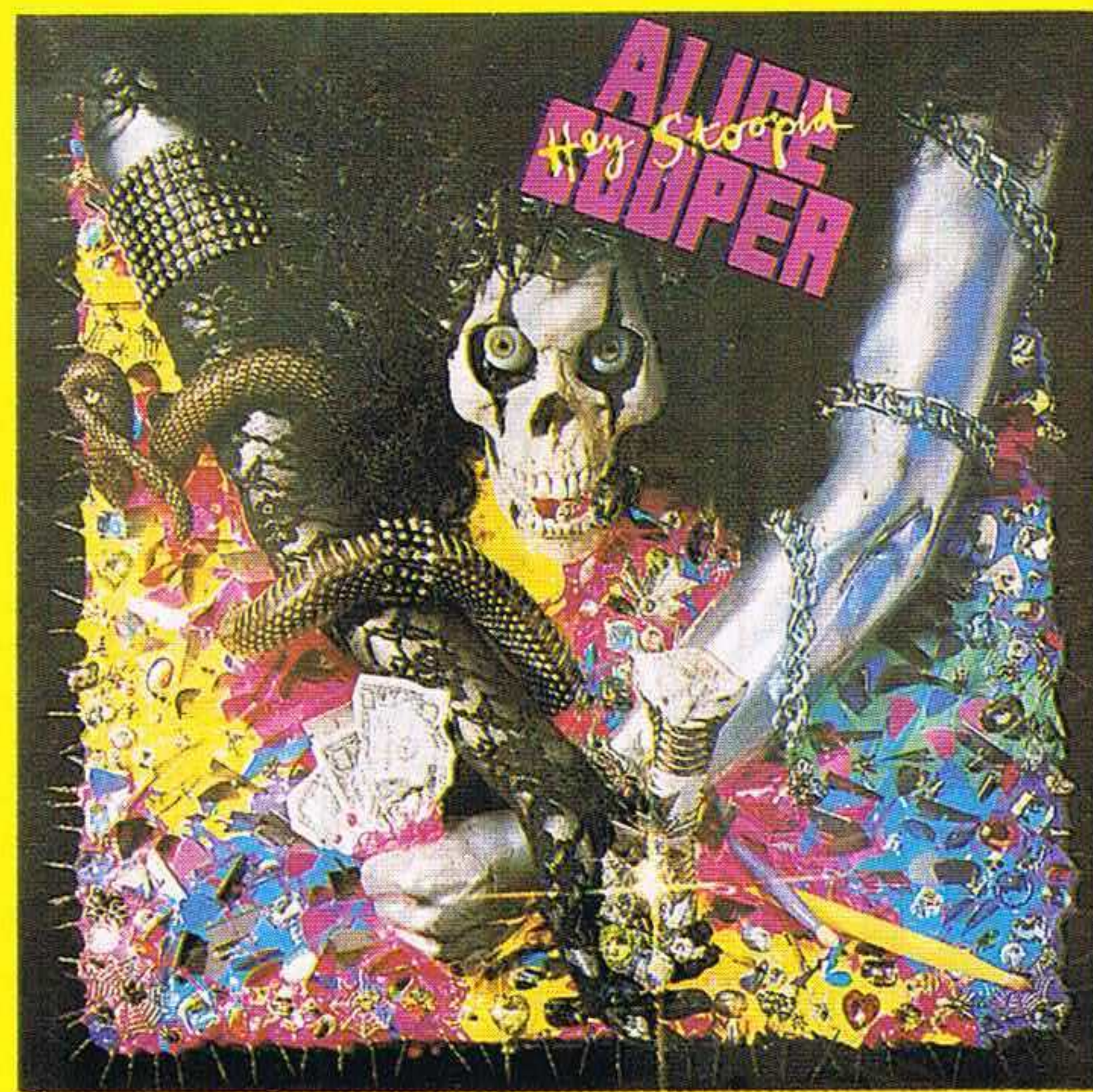
"Queensrÿche were very much of the Rush mentality: they wanted their records to be as good as possible. Geoff Tate had a vision of how 'Operation: Mindcrime' should be, and I was lucky to be in a position to help crystallise that vision. I was delighted to work with Queensrÿche and even more pleased when I was asked to produce the 'Empire' album, of which I am immensely proud."

In between the two Queensrÿche albums, Peter produced the "comparatively low-tech" Salty Dog debut album which, through no fault of Peter's, was only a modest success. His next big job was to be for none other than Alice Cooper in the form of 'Hey Stoopid'.

"Alice Cooper? What can you say? Great fun, and he kept me in stitches for the whole recording process. Alice used to regale me with tales of when he used to hang out with people as diverse as Groucho Marx and Elvis Presley! Fantastic guy."

Which brings us to the new Suicidal Tendencies album 'The Art Of Rebellion'. "That album was a delight to work on. Mike Muir is both very funny and a great musician. I expect big things of this record. There are some fantastic songs there. And yeah, I'd love to work with them again." But what of the future? More Rock? Peter purses his lips and frowns slightly, contemplating the question.

"Actually, I think it's time I did a bit of Pop again. A guy's got to keep his hand in you know...?!" ■



## SUICIDAL TENDENCIES

