



# Owsley

THE POP SELF-STARTER

By KELLY MINNIS

The music industry is full of stories about young upstarts who make brilliant records that get lost in the machinations of corporate entertainment, only to claw their way back to the forefront for one more chance to bring their songcraft to the world. **WILL OWSLEY** thought he had his shot earlier this decade with bandmates **MILLARD POWERS** and **BEATLE** brat **ZAK STARKEY** in **THE SEMANTICS**, who released a brilliant album through Geffen, which never saw a domestic release. Though the band packed it in after the Geffen fiasco, Owsley went back to work as a Nashville sideman, serving tasty guitar licks and harmony vocals for the likes of **AMY GRANT** and **SHANIA TWAIN** to help fund a recording studio in his Alabama home. And so the dream began all over again.

Owsley spent 1997 writing songs with his Semantics bandmate Powers and Nashville pop stalwart **ROSS PRICE** and then retired to

with and, again, coproduced by Powers, with whom Owsley remains in a solid working relationship. "Millard's good at pulling out great performances from me," Owsley explains. Yet he opted for a different backing band to tour behind the album, featuring **JONATHON HAMBY** on keys, **DOLI STEPNIUSKI** on bass, and **JESSE SUTTE** on drums.

Live, Owsley is indeed a band. Will leads the group while playing a refreshing blend of solid rhythm guitar and '70s hard-rock guitar licks that has excited several guitar magazines across the country. "I worked really, really hard as a kid to become adept at playing my instrument," Owsley insists. "I keep the playing subtle on my albums but I like to let it rip live." And that's an apt description. The band came into Seattle's Crocodile Cafe mostly unknown, but left the enthusiastic crowd satisfied. For one thing, the band is well rehearsed, and the singer is an affable frontman. "You know, our record's been out since March, but the album has really just begun. We expect to tour throughout the rest of the year behind it, trying to light a fire the old-fashioned way." Through a combination of solid songwriting and musical prowess, Owsley makes a fine pop album and an even finer live experience.



his new home studio to record his self-titled debut *Owsley*. "The idea was to make an album for giveaways, to raise awareness of my style of songwriting and performing," he explains before his performance opening for **THE FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE** in Seattle. "I wanted to make my album my way without dealing with the corporate machine." His home album reached the desks of Giant Records, who bought rights to the masters for the album and asked Owsley to add two new songs and to remix the album for rerelease. Owsley chose famed engineer **TOM LORD-ALGE** to mix the LP. "Millard and I are all wannabe engineers, and I thought we'd done a pretty good job on the first pressing, but you've got to give it up to the Lord! That man knows what he's doing," exclaims Owsley. After recording two new songs, *Owsley* was released in March 1999, garnering rave reviews from mostly entertainment and underground magazines. "I'm kind of disappointed that neither *Rolling Stone* nor *Spin* have reviewed the record, but what can you do?" he shrugs. Their loss.

Indeed, major magazines are missing out on one hell of a solid pop-rock album. Owsley makes '70s AM rock with a '90s lyrical bent, much like predecessors Jellyfish and The Rembrandts. "Each song is a snapshot to me, a part of a story," he suggests. Owsley writes great radio singles with tongue-in-cheek humor, much like the songs of former bandmate **BEN FOLDS**. "Oh No the Radio" is a throwback to a childhood of air-guitar and lip-synch sessions to the radio, while the rest of the album deals with love, marriage, and family with a unique and mature point of view. Most of the album was cowritten

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