helped Phil evolve at Conway in L.A. The British were very primitive in their mike techniques. There was no such thing as close miking. And there was certainly no such thing, really, as using baffles to control microphone leakage. But with Phil, I'd really gotten into isolating the various instruments and things like kick drums. Everything went through a mixer and went down to a three-track recorder. We were sending all the instruments to one track of the three because we had to have the other two for vocals and/or overdubs."

Talmy's power guitar sound was based on a three-microphone setup: close and distant mikes on the amp cabinet, plus a third mike on the strings to catch the percussive sound of the guitar pick. But the producer recalls having to use as many as three room mikes to capture the guitar feed- [contd on page 120]

THE POCO REUNION

Old wounds and new recordings illustrate the potential perils of rockstar reunions

By Stan Soocher with Bob Bilboa

RICHIE FURAY usually devotes his time at the Rocky Mountain Christian Fellowship to his chores as pastor of the congregation of 100 that he has led for the last eight years. But today the born-again Furay is at his Boulder, Colorado office doing something he hasn't done since 1973: talking as a working member of Poco.

This is Furay's first interview since the recording sessions for *Legacy*—featuring all five original members of Poco—were finished in Los Angeles the week before. It is also Furay's first secular rock project since the last of his three solo albums was recorded in 1979.

The Poco reunion demonstrates how old wounds must be dealt with anew when a band decides to reunite. The songs on the resulting *Legacy* album often seem dominated more by individual personalities than a group effort. But *Legacy* also represents a return to the bright melodies, sweet harmonies and boisterous country instrumentation that characterized the outfit Furay helped found in 1968.

A veteran also of the legendary but volatile Buffalo Springfield, Furay has made no secret of his disdain for the rock-star life and what he perceives as its conflict with his religious beliefs. And Furay's last try at a reunion, with the Springfield two years ago, soured when Neil Young failed to show up for a session at Stephen Stills' home in Los Angeles. But at the urging of pedal steel guitarist Rusty Young—the only member of Poco to have appeared on all the band's albums until its dissolution in 1983—Furay decided to give the rock world one more try. He's harbored some doubts, though.

"Rusty went around and made contact with everyone to see if we were willing to commit the time to get the project off the ground," says a trim-looking Furay, sporting a "Solid Rock of Christ" T-shirt. "Then we all got together with Allen Kovac [of Left Bank Management] in L.A."

The first session took place in May last year at guitarist Jim Messina's Gateway Recording Studio near his home in Santa Barbara, with original members George Grantham on drums and Randy Meisner on bass. Several years before Grantham had put his musical career on hold. Messina found chart success in the '70s with Loggins & Messina, Meisner with the Eagles.

At Gateway the band jammed on some old Poco riffs and Furay's Springfield ballad "Kind Woman" but concentrated largely on new songs each of the members had written. When they were able to learn five new songs in three days, it was agreed the time was right to record a new Poco album. They inked a deal with RCA in January, and rehearsed for two weeks in March. Recording sessions were completed by the end of May.

Because Furay had to return frequently to Boulder for Bible studies and Sunday morning services, Messina and Rusty Young handled most of the guitar work. Due to what band members refer to only as "personal problems," Grantham was replaced on

drums by Gary Mallaber of Steve Miller fame. However, all five original members contributed vocals to *Legacy*.

But two stumbling blocks stood in the way of the project being completed. First was the choice of songs that would appear on the album—especially ones dealing with sex. Furay says, "All the way through the project there were songs that were submitted where I had to say no, a couple of which were actually recorded. I didn't get into this to hold a microscope up to everyone's life, to come off as some self-righteous Christian. But I couldn't say those kinds of things and with any integrity go back to my church on Sunday and preach against them."

The battle over the songs also manifested itself as a power struggle within the group. Each member had been guaranteed that a minimum of one of his original songs would be used on the album. Final say rested with manager Kovac and album producer David Cole, who also guides the career of Richard Marx, the current chart darling of southern California rock.

Of the three songs Furay initially submitted, "If It Wasn't for You," a lament for the homeless, made the final round. Furay also wrote the lyrics to "When It All Began," an exuberant retrospective of the history of Poco. None of Meisner's songs appears on *Legacy*, though he does sing lead vocals on three selections. Instead the group relied on songs from outside sources.

However, three of Messina's songs were used, and Rusty Young also placed three he wrote or co-wrote. Young wrote and sang Poco's biggest chart success, "Crazy Love," in 1979, and he'd made the initial contact with Kovac. Kovac's star client Richard Marx got a song on Poco's album too, "Nothin' to Hide," a 3/4 rocker likely to garner comparison with the Eagles' "Take It to the Limit."

Rusty admits, "There's no getting around that there's a bit of a payback there. Randy helped out on Richard's first hit 'Don't Mean Nothin',' as did [former Eagle] Joe Walsh and [former Eagle and Poco member] Tim Schmit. The Marx connection probably helped us get signed to RCA and it was important to the record company that Marx be on the album."

Marx's credentials as a pop craftsman can hardly be called into question, but his work has been criticized as post-Eagles country rock with training wheels. Messina was worried. "I walked into the studio sniffing because I didn't want this to be a Richard Marx album. But I discovered after working with David Cole that you could give him anybody to work with, that he's open to different instrumentation and styles."

Poco purists would probably have preferred more input from Furay. But he's made no secret of his top priority: his congregation in Boulder, and a life with Nancy, his wife of 22 years, and their four daughters. His reticence may in part be due to the other major stumbling block that shadowed the Poco reunion project: the long-time personality conflict between Furay and Messina. It was Messina with whom Furay often tangled over *Legacy*'s lyrics.

"Richie and I have the strongest polarity differences in the band," admits Messina. "The love was always there but there was resistance to it. I think the conflict actually helped break it down and bring us together."

Notes Rusty, "It's like fighting with your wife. You don't have the same angry moments with someone you don't care about. Richie and Jimmy are a lot closer than they even know."

Furay had migrated to New York City from Yellow Springs, Ohio in the mid-'60s to pursue a career as a folk singer. There he met guitarist Stephen Stills, who was working in a band with soon-to-be-Monkee Peter Tork. Furay and Stills formed the Au Go-Go Singers, recorded an album for Roulette and even appeared in "On Broadway with Rudy Vallee." Eventually Stills and Furay headed to L.A. to pursue their dream.

Then the now-legendary meeting occurred on Sunset Boulevard when Furay and Stills saw Neil Young and Bruce Palmer riding in a hearse they had driven from Ontario. Furay and Stills had met Young back in New York, and the Buffalo Springfield was formed with Dewey Martin on drums.

Furay and Messina met when a teenaged Messina, working as an engineer at L.A.'s Sunset Sound, replaced bassist Palmer in the Buffalo Springfield. It was during a Springfield tour in 1968 that the pair made plans to start Poco. "Richie and I were riding in a cab in Nashville," Messina recalls. "We talked about forming a new band that would be an extension of what we'd been doing with the Springfield, but more country and rock than folk and rock."

Rusty Young had come to California from Denver to play pedal steel on the Springfield's "Kind Woman." He had been in the Denver band B.C. with George Grantham and also knew Nebraskan Meisner, a

member of Rick Nelson's Stone Canyon Band, from the Denver music scene. Though Poco (originally named after the comic strip "Pogo") stuck with this lineup, they did audition a keyboard player named Gregg Allman, and flirted with the idea of adding Byrd Gram Parsons.

Coming after Dylan's *John Wesley Harding*, the Band's *Music from Big Pink* and the Byrds' *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*, Poco's 1969 debut album *Pickin' Up the Pieces* reflected a turning point in the development of rock. The blazing guitars and progressive technological tricks of the psychedelic era had reached a peak. The Poco album was reactionary; they relied on traditional country instrumentation like mandolins, dobros and steel guitars.

Yet Rusty Young claims *Pickin' Up the Pieces* failed to capture the true spirit of the group. "I had unfulfilled expectations with the first album," says Young. "It sounded a lot stiffer and more structured than we actually were. Plus Randy left the group during the sessions and people in the band had to start switching vocal parts."

"The first album was a nightmare," adds Messina, who's listed as producer. "Because of collective bargaining rules, I wasn't allowed to touch the mixing console and the console engineer wasn't allowed to touch the tape machine. I was never satisfied with the album. It sounded flat, had no depth."

By *Poco*, the band's second album, Rusty Young had begun running his pedal steel through a Leslie speaker to achieve an organ-like effect. He was also experimenting with wah-wah pedals and fuzztones. Timothy B. Schmit had also replaced Meisner on bass. But Messina was becoming disenchanted with the group.

"I wanted to work as a producer and touring was tiring me out," Messina recalls. "I had just gotten married and couldn't support my wife on the $125 a week I was getting paid. And I wasn't getting a lot of support from Richie in my writing and singing."

So in 1970 Messina began rooming with guitarist/vocalist Paul Cotton, from the Illinois Speed Press, for about six months, prepping Cotton to be his replacement. Then, Messina says, "Richie decided at a show at the Fillmore West on Halloween that that would be my last night. That was Paul's first night onstage. I left for home."

Messina would find commercial success with the series of albums he recorded with Kenny Loggins until 1976. "I [cont'd on page 57]

PERFORMANCE OF THE MONTH

DR. FEELBAD OPERATES

Eugene Chadbourne at the Knitting Factory

By Ted Drozdowski

IT'S SATURDAY night at the Knitting Factory, and Dr. Eugene Chadbourne is in the operating theater. The occasion: an autopsy, the final performance of the club's annual Handmade Instrument Festival.

It's been a week of odd recitals, even for this Soho-rooted haven, which has worked hard at its reputation for presenting weird and dangerous music. Downtowner Zeena Parkins dropped by to pluck one of her electrified mini-harps with whammy bars; her neighbor, guitarist/composer Elliott Sharp, stopped in with yet another of the Frankensteins he builds from wood, metal, pickups and strings. Even as Chadbourne scrubs down on December 2 for the operation he'll perform in the club's upstairs performance space, Christian Marclay is raising a nasty ruckus in the Knot Room below by skranking abused records over the top of a homemade turntable, an ugly-but-loud little unit he's fashioned from rusty metal and leftover parts.

In his nearly floor-length lab coat and electro-frizz hair, the bespectacled Chadbourne looks every bit the mad physician as he takes the stage. Behind him, on the operating table, lying swaddled in hospital sheets, rests The Cadaver, a pillow-headed pile of junk metal jammed into pants, a shirt and a pair of boots. Pickups have been strategically inserted in the stiff, and the audience has been warned: This is a work so horrific, so bone-chilling, so drenched in gore that it's normally performed only when trained medical personnel are present. Tonight, however, Eugene's flying solo.

But first, a few tunes to alleviate the tension. Chadbourne grabs a road-weary Vox and plugs into a fuzzbox, umbilically attached to a borrowed Roland JC-120 amp. He's in troubadour mode, sitting and playing like Phil Ochs with a case of the drunken giggles. He strums out songs railing against the Klan, George Bush and other scourges. Then he switches to a battered electrified acoustic, and that's when the real trouble starts. He launches into "I'm Your Neighbor" from his *Corpses of Foreign Wars* LP, a ditty about the busy-body ratfink next door. Chadbourne's funnybone becomes increasingly inflamed, and when the song's solo break rolls around he's just got to scratch it. He stops strumming and licks his finger, rubbing it against his flattop's finish in a screech similar to fingernails on a chalkboard. He stomps on the fuzz and tosses off runs like a speedy slob, his left hand dancing—more like stumbling—inarticulately up and down his guitar's neck while his right hand navigates uncommonly deft, high-velocity picking.

Time for a break. Chadbourne drops his guitar, literally, and hefts a glass of soda to the microphone. He zealously slurps it to the bone through a straw, then tosses a few ice cubes in his trap and chomps them over the P.A. By now one in six paying customers have left. Eugene does another song, a ditty inspired by a real incident from his North Carolina home base in which a man was stabbed in the brain at a church picnic in a case of mistaken identity. The tune climaxes in a feedback fest, his guitar face [cont'd on page 70]

Photograph: Paul Robicheau

"What makes something heavy is not that it's loud," says Thayil. "It has to be wild, insane. Dangerous is heavy. I liked Kiss when I was a kid; I wanted to make a guitar sound like that. But then I heard the Stooges and the MC5. Right then I realized there are other ways of doing things. All these GIT guitar students out there, there's nothing insane about what they do. It's not rebellious, it's schooled. I didn't get invited to parties because they knew I'd bring my Voidoids and Ramones LPs. I'm against anything tame or paint-by-numbers."

POCO REUNION

[*cont'd from page 98*] don't think I'd want a Loggins and Messina reunion right now," Messina insists. "Kenny has gotten into collaborations that have diluted his skills to the point where technology has taken over. I liked his music when it was less complicated."

Eventually even Furay became dissatisfied with Poco's lack of sales. Especially when the group's sound was adopted by the best-selling Eagles, which Meisner had helped found after leaving Poco. Poco's influence on the early Eagles was no surprise to Furay, who remembers, "Glenn Frey used to come over to my house when Poco was rehearsing and sit in the corner and listen—day in, day out."

Furay says *A Good Feeling to Know* is his favorite Poco album "for its diversity. 'Sweet Lovin' ' said a lot for me because I'd just gone through the first of what would be two separations from my wife."

When the album failed to generate the commercial interest expected, Furay decided to call it quits. "I had poured my heart and soul into the band. I was looking for greener pastures."

So when the group finished *Crazy Eyes*, its album tribute to Gram Parsons, Furay jumped ship for Souther, Hillman and Furay, put together by record mogul David Geffen. Recalls Furay, "David said, 'If you get together with J.D. and Chris, you guys will be big stars.' But we were very disoriented, too individualized."

While recording the second SHF album, group guitarist Al Perkins suggested Furay consider Christianity as an alternative lifestyle. Then on his solo albums Furay began stretching out musically, playing some lead guitar, doing more arranging, but the records failed to find widespread acceptance.

Rusty Young firmly denies the reformation of Poco was an attempt to cash in on the current reunion mania: "There wasn't much of this reunion stuff happening when I started working on the Poco project two years ago. I put the reunion together because I'm probably the one guy who's kept in touch with everybody through the years."

Poco tentatively plans to begin touring in the spring or summer of 1990, though it's still uncertain to what extent Furay will participate. But it was Furay's frenetic shaking onstage that often served as the focal point of Poco's high-paced concerts.

"Probably I touched something that shocked me," Furay grins widely in his Boulder office. "Neil would sometimes have an epileptic seizure onstage. It never failed that he'd make sure he didn't go down with his guitar. He'd hand it to me and it would always be out of ground with mine. A jolt of electricity would go right through me!

"But Poco's music was invigorating and charged up," he concludes. "That's what Poco is all about, making people feel good."