

Some years after **TEN YEARS AFTER** called it a day, they're back and, perhaps surprisingly, being greeted with positive applause for their recent album 'About Time'. Veteran guitar slinger **ALVIN LEE** (pictured right) looks back, forward and sideways, **SYLVIE SIMMONS** catches his Bluesy drift

IT'S THREE in the morning, an ice-cold New York night, the bars are closed, the bottle's getting low, and there's a witch sitting on the hotel bed. Long black hair, wiggled-out eyes and a nice line in cosmic witchie patter. We'd just been out on the street talking to Ten Years After in their tour bus, Carole the publicist, Paul the Rock writer and I, after their piledriver performance at The Ritz club. And the witch, figuring we knew the band, followed us upstairs and hid in the toilet. When she emerged, she made a speech: she was not only a witch but Ten Years After's *biggest* fan! She was baptised in the sweat flying from Alvin Lee's snake-fingered solos! Her boyfriend, who refused to come, actually *is* Alvin Lee, though temporarily living in a different, dark-haired American body so as not to confuse anybody. Ten Years After, she declared, had "changed her life".

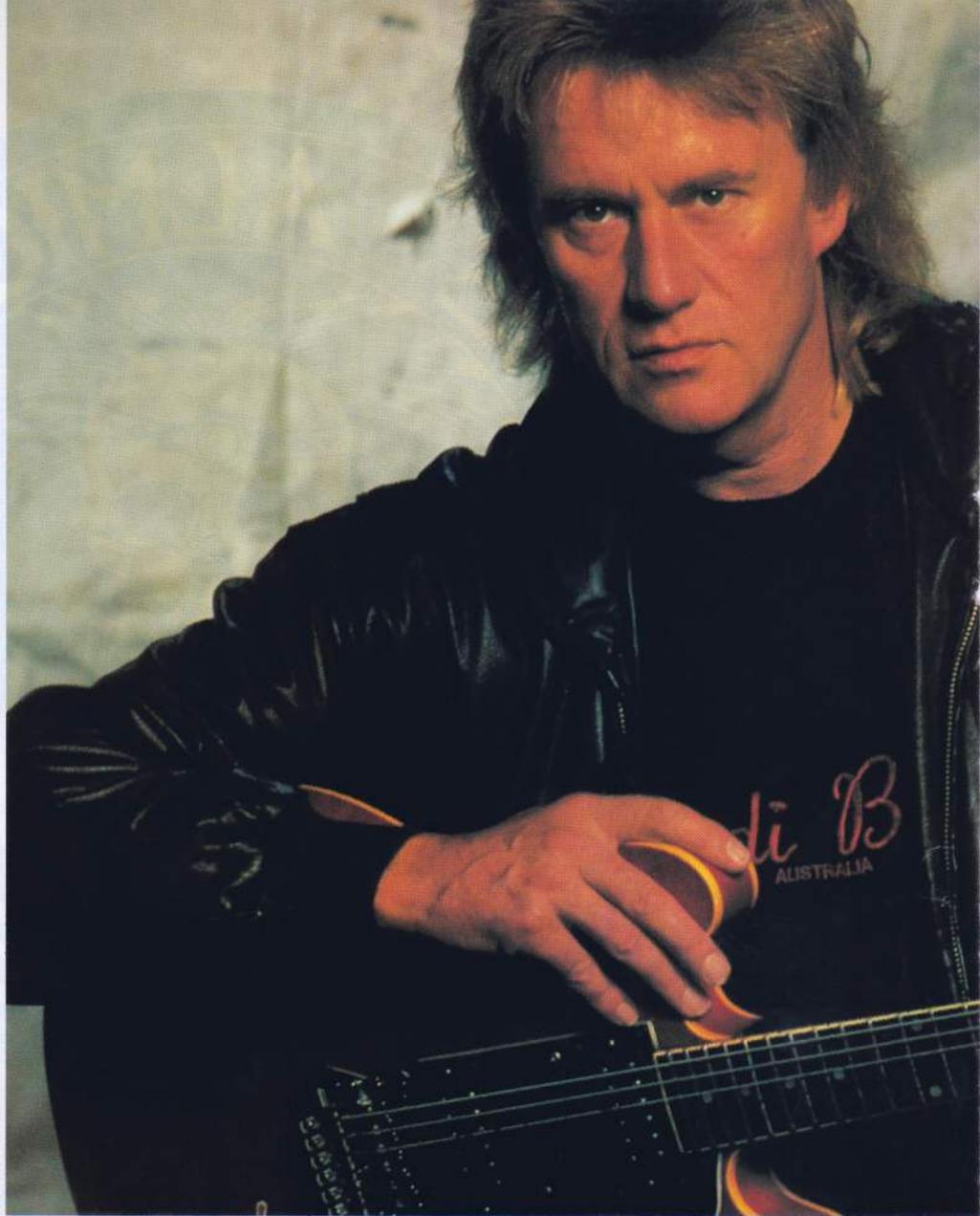
Well it *was* a hell of a show, raw as a chill-blain in stilettos, equal parts virtuoso experience and unbridled energy. Funny business, all these ancient bands reforming

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at the end of the last decade, and such a large proportion of them playing worthy, seminal music. Ten Years After's 'About Time', their first album since 1974's 'Positive Vibrations', is their best album since '69's 'Shhh'. Produced by Terry Manning of ZZ Top fame, **RAW**'s Malcolm Dome reckoned it was the album the Top should have made after 'Eliminator', and I *can't* disagree.

15 years ago, after leading the British Blues Rock boom, after an amazing 28 tours of the States, Ten Years After dissolved. "We just stopped touring," explains Alvin Lee.

"We never hated each other. Ever! When we packed it in we'd been eight years on the road and we just got disenchanted. In fact we started getting disenchanted after the 'Woodstock' movie came out in '70. A lot of people said that *made* Ten Years After, but in fact we were doing real good before then, playing



TONY MOTTRAM

3-5,000 five thousand seaters. When the movie came out, it was like the megadome arenas and ice-hockey stadiums. We did that for a few years, but we weren't enjoying it. We were originally an underground band, we started playing clubs like The Marquee, real *good* gigs. Those stadiums are totally wrong for music. You can't see the audience, you don't get the *feel*. The sound just echoes around those places, and we kind of lost heart. I don't even know who brought it up first, but someone said, 'I'm getting fed up with this' and everyone went, 'Yeah, so am I'. So the honest thing to do was call it a day."

**A**LVIN EMBARKED on a patchy solo career, the others gravitated towards more behind-the-scenes roles in the music industry; producing, publishing. They kept in touch – saw each other four or five times a year for a drink – and when someone suggested they give it another go after eight years, just for The Marquee's 25th anniversary celebrations, they said, 'Okay'.

Weren't they worried that after eight years one of them might have completely lost it, that the band wouldn't work?

"In retrospect," says Alvin, "maybe I should have thought that. But for some reason I thought it was going to be easy. We had two days rehearsal. We got together for five minutes, chatted a bit to feel things out, but when we actually started playing, the amazing thing was it sounded *exactly* like Ten Years After! By rights it should have

sounded a *bit* different, but it was unmistakably TYA."

So why didn't they stick around and make an album back in 1983?

"I thought somebody might pick up on us, but it was definitely the young boys' time then. It was all haircuts and baggy trousers, and *we* had long hair and tight trousers still! I don't know. No-one seemed to want us." But when, in '88, it appeared that someone *did*, they jumped at the chance to reform, becoming one of the many veteran acts treading the boards again.

"I think part of that is the Stock, Aitken & Waterman formula-singles thing. It's getting so boring now. There's not the kind of music you can actually go and get excited about in a live situation. Some of the bands don't even *play* live, they use tapes on stage. That's dreadful. And other bands, the better bands, are just performing their albums on stage.

"The thing, I think, with older bands is there's more jamming, more interplay. Ten Years After, Rolling Stones, you can see the concerts and hear the same numbers but they never sound quite the same, they're always changing, and it *doesn't* get boring.

"We've always tried to make our albums sound like live gigs, whereas a lot of bands try to make their gigs sound like the albums.

"Also, I think some of the younger kids today look back to that kind of '60s togetherness thing, the peace movement, the anti-establishment thing, and they're saying, 'I wish we could have something like that'.