

KING OF THE WILD FRONTIER

John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas embodied all the optimism of the 60s, but a cast of characters including Keith Richards and Princess Margaret couldn't save him from himself. Chris Campion speaks to those closest to rock's most complex outlaw

In August 1977, John Phillips was supposed to be recording the album with Keith Richards that would mark his comeback. Studio time at Media Sound in New York was booked from 9pm but it might be 2am before the pair – two of the most charismatic stars of their generation and now two inveterate junkies – finally showed or 5am or not at all. The first port of call for the pair was always the bathroom. “No one wanted to be the one to go back there,” says studio engineer Harvey Goldberg, “because we didn't know if we would find them dead.”

Dealers hovered around the studio angling for business. Goldberg recalls one girl asking if he wanted to see her scrapbook. “I just assumed that she was some sort of groupie and had loads of photos of her with the different stars she'd been with. Instead, she pulls out this scrapbook and it's full of drug prescriptions from the 1700s through the 1800s. It was a collection of drug

prescriptions. And I thought, ‘Wow!’”

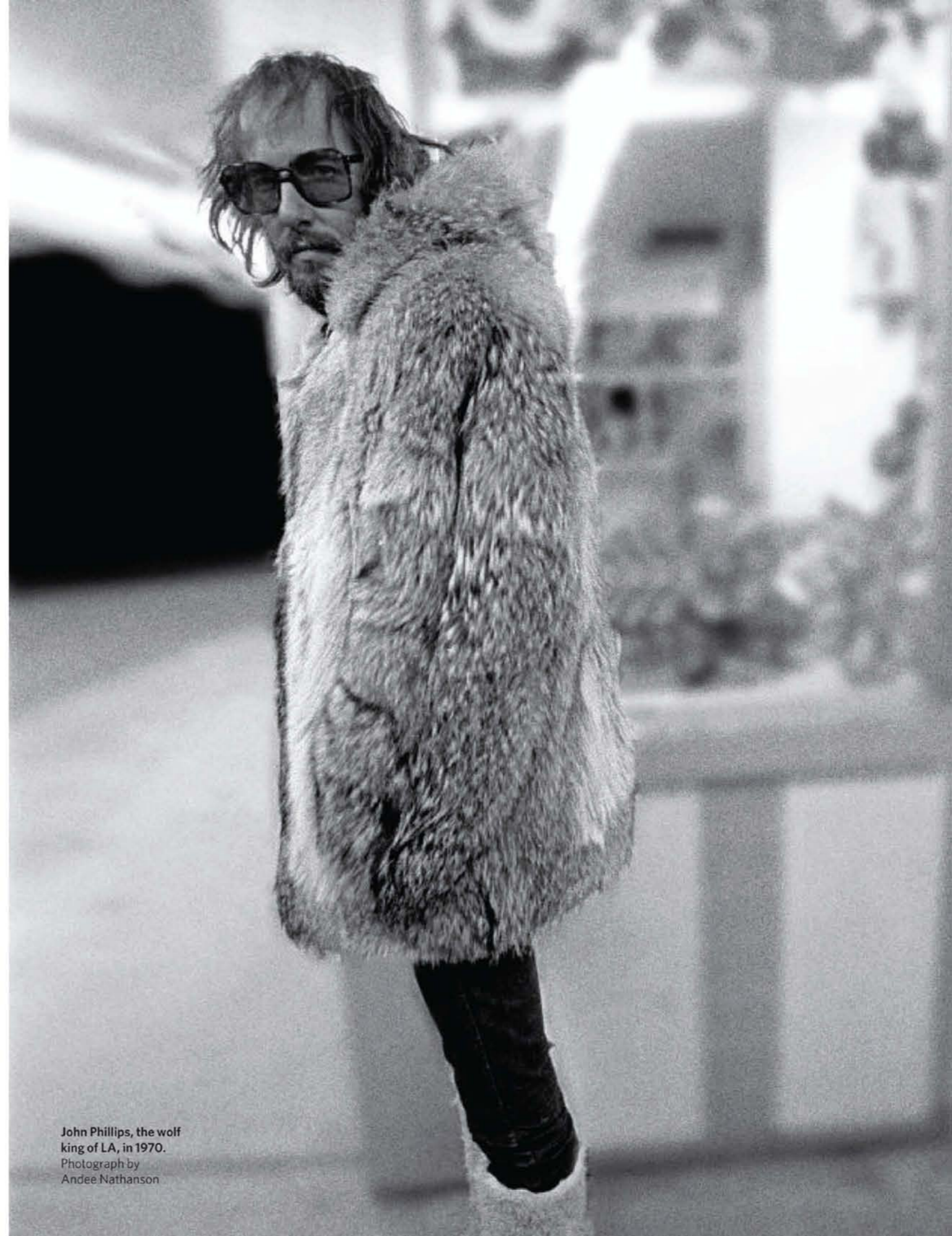
Goldberg remembers Richards standing looking perplexed by his guitar amp one night. “I go over to find out if I can help him out with something. He's just looking at his guitar amp, he looks at me, looks back at the guitar amp. Finally, it's like a lightbulb went on over his head. A big smile comes over his face and he says, ‘I forgot my guitar.’”

Another time: “John comes stumbling out of the bathroom and into the control room. There are little blood stains on his shirt sleeve. It's so obvious that he's been shooting up. He sees me cracking my knuckles and says, ‘You know, you really shouldn't do that. That could be a problem for you later in life.’”

As farcical and surreal as these incidents were, Goldberg was struck by how sad it all was. “These were grown men,” he says. After they had blown \$170,000 in studio time, the sessions

ground to a halt. A mix of the album was passed to Atlantic Records, but the label buried it. The finished master went missing for 30 years, only turning up among Phillips's possessions in 2007. He knew that he had no one to blame but himself. “I had sabotaged the greatest break of my career since the Mamas and the Papas,” he wrote in his 1986 autobiography *Papa John*, confessing to an “intense self-loathing”.

The Mamas and the Papas – Papa John Phillips, his wife Michelle, Denny Doherty and Mama Cass Elliot – had been America's answer to the Beatles. The group reigned as the first family of pop for three years, spawning ubiquitous hits such as California Dreamin' and Monday, Monday that reflected all the yearning optimism of the mid-60s. Behind the scenes, Phillips was the driving force. An untutored musician with a natural melodic gift, he wrote most of their material, devised the vocal harmonies and directed ▶▶



John Phillips, the wolf king of LA, in 1970. Photograph by Andee Nathanson

JOHN PHILLIPS

their performances with a studied precision. An incorrigible rebel with boundless enthusiasm and an indomitable humanist streak, he was also plagued by a fatalism that threatened to engulf all those closest to him.

"He was a very contradictory character in a lot of ways," says Dick Weissman, who played with Phillips, prior to his pop success, in an early 60s folk trio called the Journeymen. "He could be incredibly thoughtful and sensitive and, if you'll pardon me, an absolute asshole: a control freak and very difficult. Those were both ingredients of his character."

Phillips was half Cherokee and half Irish Catholic and his rangy 6ft 4in frame ensured that he always stood out from the crowd – but he hid within the Mamas and the Papas, rarely taking a lead vocal. When the group split in 1968, he was forced to establish his identity as a singer-songwriter in his own right. He was about to embark on the most creative phase of his career, but also the most destructive.

Pop success had brought its own decadent rewards and Phillips embraced them all. The Tudor-style mansion on a rambling hillside estate in Bel Air, Los Angeles, that he had shared with Michelle was the scene of some of the most lavish and debauched parties in Hollywood legend, frequented by a cosmopolitan crowd of movie stars, musicians, politicians and the super-rich. "John was a walking party," says Bill Cleary, a friend since early childhood. "He'd just light up a room. He was glad to be there and people were glad to have him there."

For Phillips, the party always continued long after the guests had gone home. "He had his own rules," says Cleary, "and they were all meant to be broken. They had no lasting power. Like, 'everything in moderation, except moderation' – that was one of his favourites. He wanted excess. To take it over the line. To see what was there. He had no fear. If a door opened, he'd definitely go in to see what was inside: something exciting, something new, something fun."

A seasoned risk-taker, Phillips had embarked on an affair (while still married to Michelle) with Mia Farrow right underneath the nose of her then-husband Frank Sinatra. "John spent the night or weekend at Frank's house," says Cleary. "After that John started dating Mia. Frank was pissed. We heard about it from several goons. John told them all to fuck off. We did, however, buy guns after that!"

Michelle Phillips was no angel either. She acquired a reputation as "the female Warren Beatty" after romancing a string of famous men including Jack Nicholson, Roman Polanski and the real Warren Beatty. The price of all this free love and extravagant hedonism was the swift disintegration of both the Mamas and the Papas and the Phillips marriage.

By January 1969, Phillips was estranged from both his group and his wife and baby daughter Chynna. He found it difficult living alone in a large mansion. He struck up a friendship with a feted young English film director called Michael Sarne, who invited him to live in the guest house of the property he was renting with his wife in Malibu, the beachside Los Angeles enclave.



The Mamas and the Papas, 1970. L-R: Michelle Phillips, John Phillips, Denny Doherty, Mama Cass.

JOHN PHILLIPS A LIFE

1935 Born 30 August, Parris Island, South Carolina. His mother was a Cherokee Indian, his father a former officer in the Marines.

1965 Forms the Mamas and the Papas with Denny Doherty, Mama Cass and wife Michelle.

1968 The group split; divorces Michelle.

1970 Releases critically acclaimed first solo album, *John, the Wolfking of LA*.

1972 Marries third wife, model Geneviève Waite.

1974 Develops disastrous Broadway musical, *Man on the Moon*, produced by Andy Warhol.

1975 Writes soundtrack for Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, starring David Bowie.

1981 Sentenced to an eight-year suspended sentence for drug trafficking, serves just 30 days.

1982 Forms the New Mamas and the Papas, with daughter Mackenzie, Denny Doherty and Elaine "Spanky" McFarlane.

1992 Undergoes liver transplant after years of drink and drug addiction.

1998 The Mamas and the Papas are inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame.

2001 Dies of heart failure, 18 March, Los Angeles.

Sarne had first found fame as a pop singer in England with *Come Outside*, a quirky 1962 single produced by Joe Meek (which also featured the late Wendy Richard). In Hollywood, he was under contract to direct a big-budget adaptation of Gore Vidal's satirical novel *Myra Breckinridge* for 20th Century Fox, and he hired Phillips to write songs for the film with one of its stars, the 76-year-old Mae West. But Phillips and West did not quite hit it off. A song he wrote for her called *Hollywood is a Honky Tonk Town* she flatly refused to sing, complaining that "Hollywood is definitely not a honky tonk town!"

Sarne also introduced Phillips to Geneviève Waite, the 21-year-old star of his previous film, *Joanna*. A willowy blonde with large almond-shaped eyes and a tremulous voice, Waite had grown up in South Africa, moved to England as a teenager to study acting and became a fashion model – the "South African Twiggy". A 1969 *Vogue* magazine pictorial described her as "a kinky wink of a girl" and "a myth, a Martian, a crazy flower". She and Phillips bonded over a shared love of Romantic poetry and she would become his partner, muse and collaborator for the next eight years.

The night they first met, in the summer of 1969, they went down to the beach with Sarne, dropped tabs of mescaline and shot home movies while sitting around a bonfire. At some point, Waite made an off-the-cuff remark about how Phillips and Sarne reminded her of Byron and Shelley. Both had shoulder-length hair and Phillips had taken to sporting a dandyish moustache and ▶▶

JOHN PHILLIPS

beard. "John and Michael wore all those frilly shirts," says Waite. "They had silver goblets and they wore velvet jackets."

They floated the idea of filming a modern version of the Byron and Shelley story, drawing parallels between the decadent lives of the Romantic poets and the 1960s counterculture. In the film, Phillips and Sarne would play themselves (as a musician and a film director) playing their 18th-century counterparts. Phillips quickly secured financial backing to the tune of a \$3.5m multiple film deal through United Artists. Mia Farrow was mooted to play Mary Shelley. The Maysles Brothers (soon to film the Rolling Stones at Altamont) were brought on board to shoot the project, but had to wait until Sarne had completed *Myra Breckinridge*.

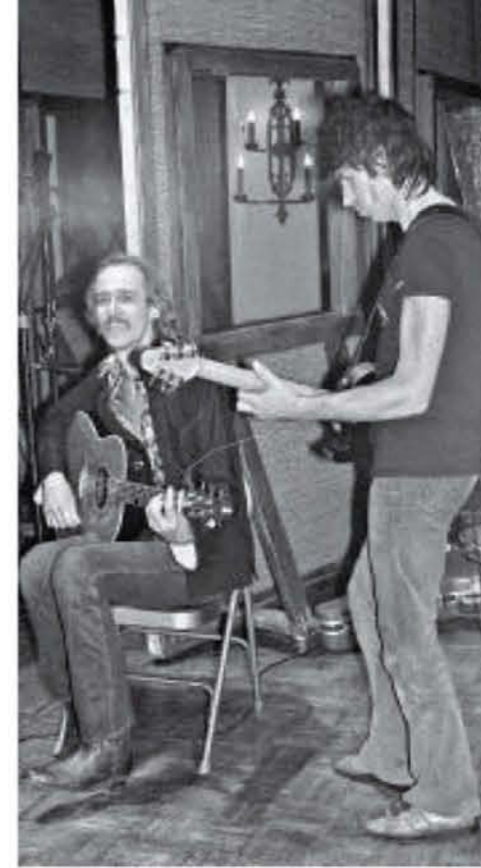
In the meantime, Phillips busied himself with his debut solo album cutting tracks with top-notch session musicians (including Elvis Presley's guitarist James Burton and Phil Spector favourite Darlene Love) in the home studio he had built in his Bel Air mansion. *John, the Wolfking of LA* took the form of a series of vivid slice-of-life portraits about junkie bums, drug burns and gigolos, realised in sweet country rock tones that revealed Phillips as an acutely sensitive songwriter. "From a second-storey window, caught a glimpse of someone's life, and it was mine. My face was dark and dirty, and I'd been crying," he sang on *Someone's Sleeping*, an oblique song about his break-up with Michelle. The entire record was pervaded by the sense of a life adrift and heading for the rocks, and gave notice that a darkness was beginning to creep in around the edges of the 60s dream.

Before the album had even been released, events would overtake him. Both Phillips and Sarne were good friends with Roman Polanski and his wife Sharon Tate. In his autobiography, Phillips recalled being invited up to the house on Cielo Drive for a party the night that Tate and her three friends – hairdresser Jay Sebring, heiress Abigail Folger and her Polish fiancée Wojciech Frykowski – were butchered by the Manson Family. Sarne visited the murder scene with Polanski and he and Phillips were among those subsequently questioned by the police. Crazed with grief, Polanski even became convinced that Phillips was behind the murders in

'PHILLIPS BELIEVED IN DRUG-TAKING AS A WAY OF LIFE. HE HAD NO SHAME ABOUT IT'

retaliation for a brief affair he had with Michelle earlier that year.

By the time *Wolfking* was released in January 1970, the 60s had crashed into the 70s in a maelstrom of cocaine, blood and paranoia, making the album's themes seem all the more timely. *Rolling Stone* declared it a "masterpiece" worthy of comparison to Dylan's *Nashville Skyline*. But others turned against the vagaries of the beautiful peo-



Phillips and Keith Richards during the troubled sessions at Media Sound, New York, August 1977.

ple. A profile in the *Los Angeles Times* described Phillips as a "colourful rebel" but took him to task for his immersion in a world in which everyone was "rich and funky". Pop success did not equate with credibility and Phillips's work was not taken as seriously as, say, records by the Byrds or Bob Dylan and the public were apparently not given to embracing him as a solo artist. The album was a commercial failure, but has since been reissued and reappraised.

Towards the end of 1970, despite selling millions of records, the 35-year-old Phillips found out that he was stone-cold broke. He owed close to a quarter of a million dollars in tax, and was now paying out alimony and child support to two ex-wives. (His first marriage to Susan Adams, the scion of a wealthy Virginia family, had ended in 1962 after five years.) "He was totally 100% in debt, over his ears," says Bill Cleary, whom Phillips called upon to help bail him out by managing his affairs. "Everyone dropped him in LA. Mitch [Michelle Phillips]

dropped him, the record company dropped him, his accountant dropped him. He didn't have any more money for them." But if Phillips was strapped for cash, he was not about to show it. "My philosophy about being a so-called 'star'," he revealed, "was there. An unorthodox parent, Phillips held no truck with the idea that his children should be disciplined. Growing up in the small city of Alexandria, Virginia, he had himself been educated at Catholic schools and military academies and was expelled from every one of them. On arriving at the house, he informed them that the first rule was: "There are no rules. You're on your own."

Cocaine was so freely available around the ▶▶

There was no script to speak of. The Maysles followed Sarne, Phillips and their entourage around for a month capturing "scenes" verité style as they happened. Much of the footage was shot during a short concert tour Phillips undertook in October 1970 to promote *Wolfking*. The cast they accumulated along the way included Andy Warhol and his Superstars, Yippie radicals Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, and a stunning young Nicaraguan model, Bianca Pérez Morena de Macías (later to marry Mick Jagger) – who was filmed romping on a bed with Geneviève Waite in a suite at the Plaza Hotel while Phillips offered up a sacrament of cocaine served on peacock feathers. Sequences were also shot in Warhol's Factory and Arlington National Cemetery in Washington DC, where Phillips got drunk and anointed the grave of his father (a former marine) with booze.

As the shoot wore on, it began to dawn on Sarne that he was being edged out of the frame to make a travelogue about the life of John Phillips, who was in effect now playing Byron and Shelley. "It became much more about John Phillips being madly famous," says Sarne. "The pretension of [Phillips] thinking he was a modern-day Lord Byron actually started to annoy me after a while."

Sarne fled to Italy leaving the project in the lurch. The hours of footage they shot have never seen the light of day. Shortly after the project collapsed, Waite became pregnant with her first child by Phillips, a boy they christened named Tamerlane after the poem by Edgar Allan Poe, another fan of Byron's. Michael Sarne believes Phillips was principally attracted to the Romantic poets because of their fondness for laudanum. "He believed in drug-taking as a way of life. He had no shame about it," maintains Sarne, who puts Phillips's metabolism for psychoactive substances down to "the Red Indian in him".

Even Phillips's dog, a golden retriever named Trelawny, indulged in this debasement of his senses. Phillips reported how the dog once "gobbled up a bag full of mescaline caps" and then "ran in circles for three days without stopping... then he just stared at himself in the mirror for 12 hours." Trelawny, Phillips claimed, was changed for ever by his trip becoming "more human than anything else".

Phillips and Waite moved into a secluded 1930s Italianate mansion in Bel Air called the Nicolosi Estate. Its previous occupants had been the Rolling Stones, whom Phillips had recommended hire it while they rehearsed for an upcoming tour. It had a swimming pool that curled around the house like a river with water supplied by a 150ft electrically operated waterfall. Jeffrey and Laura Mackenzie Phillips, the teenage children from Phillips's first marriage (respectively aged 14 and 13), ran away from their mother to come and live there. An unorthodox parent, Phillips held no truck with the idea that his children should be disciplined. Growing up in the small city of Alexandria, Virginia, he had himself been educated at Catholic schools and military academies and was expelled from every one of them. On arriving at the house, he informed them that the first rule was: "There are no rules. You're on your own."

Cocaine was so freely available around the ▶▶

house – laid out on slabs or in bowls for casual guests – that, inevitably, his children began to partake of it too, developing addictions of their own. This, Phillips maintained, was frowned upon, but they did it anyway. “It was a case of Father Knows Drugs Best,” Phillips joked in *Papa John*, referring to the title of a popular 1950s family sitcom.

In the summer of 1971, the Mamas and the Papas were coerced into reforming for a final album because of the threat of a million-dollar lawsuit for breach of contract by their label ABC-Dunhill, to whom they owed one more record. None of the other members had much energy for the project. Mama Cass had a burgeoning solo career. Michelle Phillips was trying to launch herself as an actress. John Phillips was forced to piece together harmonies from individual vocal takes. The finished album, *People Like Us*, was panned on its release in December 1971, even if with hindsight it sounds like a worthy companion piece to *Wolfking*.

Phillips then hustled \$50,000 from Columbia Records’ Clive Davis which funded six months of sessions with jazz-fusion group the Crusaders, but the label passed on the project after releasing one single, *Revolution On Vacation*. The material – finally released under the title of *Jack of Diamonds* in 2007 – documented his life with deft and disarming candour.

“John was such a great story teller,” says Harvey Goldberg, who worked with Phillips on several recording projects from the early 70s onwards. “I would say 50% of what he would say would be truth and 50% would be fabrication. But you’d never know which was which. And, without fail, the stuff that you were convinced was fabrication always turned out to be the truth.”

“John was, in a lot of ways, very soulful,” says Dick Weissman. “He hated to admit it, and he didn’t like to express emotion publically but it came out in the music.”

Phillips soon sunk his energies into another project. Ever since watching the Apollo 11 moon landing, he had been obsessed with the idea of writing an opera set in space. He and Waite pitched the idea to Michael Butler, producer of the stage musical *Hair*, who brought on board a young director called Michael Bennett. For several months, Phillips’s mansion became a hive of activity. Brainstorming sessions were held in the library, a pile of cocaine available for anyone to dip into. Phillips and Waite started writing lyrics together. “The waterfall was right outside of their master suite bedroom and it made a lot of noise,” says British costume designer Marsia Trinder, who was hired to work on the musical and live with the couple. “They’d be writing and Geneviève would suddenly say, ‘John, please turn the waterfall off. I can’t take it anymore!’”

The story for *Space*, the project’s title, gradually took shape: when a humanoid bomb left on the moon by the Apollo space mission threatens to blow itself up and destroy the universe, an astronaut on Earth is tasked with leading a delegation of interplanetary dignitaries to defuse it. The role of the astronaut was written for Elvis Presley, whom Phillips and Waite had met in 1971.



Man on the Moon, New York, 1975. “One of the worst things I’d ever seen,” says Harvey Goldberg.

(“Elvis and I were just friends and jokers,” Waite recalls. “We used to read the Bible together. John always used to say, ‘You’ve got to make up your mind. Are you staying with me or are you going to Graceland?’”)

Unfortunately, it was not to be. Michael Butler pulled out of the project just as the final cast was to be approved. “Drugs made John very difficult to work with,” Butler says. “He also had a lot of paranoia. And that was the last thing we needed.” But after the idea of turning the musical into a sci-fi comedy movie faded too (despite some interest from Jack Nicholson and the mooted involvement of George Lucas), Phillips and Waite moved to New York.

At Media Sound studios, work started on a Geneviève Waite solo album called *Romance is on the Rise*. Harvey Goldberg, the young session engineer, was staggered the first time he heard Waite’s voice. He recalls: “It was like a cross between Betty Boop and Billie Holiday – which is a combination that should not exist.”

Phillips constructed a big band fantasia around her, attempting a super-hip update of the 40s swing sound with musicians from John Lennon’s Plastic UFO Band. Photographer Richard Avedon offered to shoot the album cover for free. Waite was styled as a glamour girl wearing glass shoes and hot pants, coyly bending over and clutching a gigantic red heart. Avedon suffered a heart attack the next day because, Waite claims, the shoot had so excited him. “I felt really bad about that,” she says.

The record sold fewer than 10,000 copies. Then came a phone call informing Phillips that Mama Cass Elliot had been found dead in her flat. He was devastated. “That’s when it all hit

me,” he later recalled. “I just cracked.”

Nonetheless, with the help of Andy Warhol, Phillips had found new financial backing for *Space*, now to be retitled *Man on the Moon*. Budgetary constraints had meant a redesign of Trinder’s costumes and the sets were rudimentary. Then Waite lost her voice the first day they were to rehearse with the full orchestra. Harvey Goldberg attended one of the 45 preview performances. “It was so bad that I couldn’t even bring myself to go backstage,” he remembers. “It was truly one of the worst things I’d ever seen.”

Two weeks before the scheduled opening at the Little Theatre on Broadway, producer Richard Turley got cold feet, fired Warhol’s friend Paul Morrissey as director and installed an experienced Broadway hand who changed all the stage directions, made cast members switch roles and ordered a last-minute rewrite of the script. “It was a nightmare,” says Waite. Among the audience on the opening night were Warren Beatty, Warhol and Yoko Ono. The cast and star guests partied the night away afterwards at Sardi’s, a famed theatre district hangout. Celebrations came to an abrupt halt when the reviews came in; the *New York Times* wrote: “For connoisseurs of the truly bad, *Man on the Moon* may be a small milestone.” The show closed after five nights. Phillips and Waite were devastated. All the passion they had put into *Space* for three years had been written off in one night. “I think the failure of the show broke John’s heart,” says Waite.

What was left was a suite of 22 songs (which will be released for the first time ever later this year) in which Phillips reinvented himself as a space-age Cole Porter, questing after love and truth in the outer realms. On *Yesterday I Left the Earth*, he sang that “beautiful flying creatures stop me from pushing the button”. The song was clearly less a flight of fantasy and more a plea to prevent his own self-destruction. It wasn’t much of a stretch to imagine him as the human bomb and Geneviève Waite as the angel sent to save him.

“John didn’t believe that anyone could survive life on this planet,” says Waite. “And that there must be a planet where you could survive life, where you didn’t die.”

Ultimately Phillips was fleeing from his family background. His Marine Corps officer father had

AT A PARTY, PHILLIPS AND PRINCESS MARGARET SANG CHATTANOOGA CHOO CHOO

been forced to take early retirement following a series of heart attacks, and he spent his time in the basement of the family home, drinking with only a pack of bulldogs for company. When the young John dared venture downstairs, he would find (as he later recalled) his father slumped over in a chair in his uniform jacket, cap askew, surrounded by empty bottles. The smell of piss and dog shit pervaded the dank room. He ►►

never forgot the odour of rank alcohol on his father's breath.

Following the debacle in New York Phillips would rarely spend more than six months in one place. "We read a biography of [the British explorer] Sir Richard Burton," Waite remembers. "He used to send his wife these telegrams in Peru and he would be in Arabia. He would say, 'Pay, pack and follow' and John used to do that to me." Phillips would later use the phrase as the title of an album project.

In Mustique, the private Caribbean island owned by the errant peer Colin Tennant, they met Princess Margaret. "We were great friends," Waite says. "She and John got on like a house on fire." The couple attended a lavish fancy-dress party held in Tennant's Scottish castle where Phillips and the princess sang Chattanooga Choo Choo together. "She played the piano and it went great," Waite remembers. "She was an incredible musician. If she hadn't been the Queen's sister, she could have been a huge musical star, like Julie Andrews."

The couple moved to London in 1975 and as well as visiting the princess in Kensington Palace to sing Cole Porter songs, Phillips worked on the soundtrack to Nic Roeg's film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. He doorstepped ex-Rolling Stone Mick Taylor to ask him to play on the sessions and then took up residence with Waite in Taylor's old apartment in Glebe Place in Chelsea.

He also made re-acquaintance with the Stones themselves. Both Jagger and Richards had houses in nearby Cheyne Walk. He saw Bianca Jagger again, too, bedding her one night when Waite was away. The day after that encounter, Jagger – well aware of what had happened – took Phillips to a cricket match at Old Trafford in Manchester. There he offered him the opportunity to record an album for Rolling Stones Records, the vanity label the group had set up through Atlantic Records. Phillips would be the label's first signed artist. Jagger and Richards would produce.

Tragedy and misfortune haunted the sessions, which started at Olympic Studios in Barnes in August 1976. Richards's baby son with Anita Pallenberg, Tara, had died two months earlier and the guitarist had recently been busted on a cocaine possession charge. Waite and Phillips

'I'D GO OUT WITH HANDFULS OF DILAUDID AND THROW THEM TO THE DUCKS'

ill-advisedly invited Richards and Pallenberg to share their apartment. By the close of 1976, the pair of them were addicted to heroin.

Phillips and Waite returned to New York and attempted to get clean, enrolling in a treatment programme that was relaxed about the use of cocaine in combating withdrawal – so they ended up cross-addicted to shooting coke as well. Soon enough, says Waite, Phillips "wouldn't even



Phillips with Michelle Phillips, left, and Genevieve Waite at his mansion in Bel Air, LA, 1970, home to some of the most debauched parties in Hollywood history.

care. He would go up to Harlem in his pyjama top and say, 'I'm copping for the Stones.'

Shortly before they were about to start work on the album again, Stones engineer Keith Harwood died in a car crash. Phillips called Harvey Goldberg at Media Sound and asked if he would engineer the sessions instead. "At this point I guess you would say he was almost a poster child of what you would expect a junkie to look like," Goldberg recalls. "He was still his friendly self. He just didn't look well."

In the meantime, Richards had been busted for possession of heroin in Canada and was now awaiting trial with a lengthy prison sentence hanging over his head. "He knew he had to be clean by the end of the summer," says Goldberg, "and I think he was sort of having a last hurrah before he had to clean himself up." By this stage, Jagger had largely washed his hands of the sessions but did come in to sing back-up vocals on two songs.

Some nights they got nothing at all, other times they were boiling hot. The material they recorded had the feel of classic mid-70s Stones allied to Phillips's emotionally sensitive songwriting. The sessions also highlighted Phillips's chameleon tendencies, as at some points he even

seemed to be aping Jagger's vocal style. "He was to some extent an actor," says Dick Weissman. "I don't think he disbelieved it but I also think he was playing a role."

In this instance, Goldberg thinks Phillips really wanted to be one of the band. "John was enormously enamoured of the Rolling Stones and was such a fan that he wanted the album to sound like the Stones and there they were. The reality is he was overpowered by them."

Yet Phillips drew on a much broader emotional palette than the Stones ever could. His southern upbringing gave him an appreciation and depth of feeling for roots music. His talent and charm was such that he could insinuate himself into any scene. His solo career is testament to that. Each music project had its own distinct tone, each reflected the changes in his life. He had come a long way from the quiet desperation of *John, the Wolfking of LA*. The Stones album found his musical persona fully immersed in the seamier side of life. The ballads that pined for redemption became all the more poignant.

One song, Pussycat, was both a sentimental trawl through his favourite New York strip club and a humorous but heartfelt tribute to the girls that worked there. "The only problem with these girls is they can't type," he sang. "Forty lousy words a minute. The world's spinning around but they can't get in it." Waite confirms that the song was a true reflection of Phillips's activities. "He was

quite a night prowler," she says. "He used to like to go and hang out in Times Square in a zoot suit."

Another song, She's Just 14, concerned the travails of his streetwise teenage daughter Mackenzie, "a little girl who thinks like a man". Phillips was joined on the song by Jagger, who delivered a leering vocal that sounds all the more lascivious given the knowledge he would take her virginity later that year. After inviting Phillips and his then 18-year-old daughter up to his New York apartment for a tuna sandwich, Jagger contrived a reason to send him out of the house – telling Phillips he needed some mayonnaise – then locked the door behind him.

The sessions ground to a halt when Jagger and Richards left for France to record a new Stones album (*Some Girls*) and Phillips was left to complete the album on his own. "At that point, John wasn't capable of even getting out of bed, let alone finishing an album," says Goldberg. But they did eventually complete a finished mix and hand it in to Atlantic. Phillips maintains that without any obvious singles, the decision was made to bury the album and swallow the loss, instead of releasing it. Recently reissued, *Pussycat* shows that despite his physical deterioration, Phillips's musical instincts were still firing on all cylinders. If it had been released at the time, his life may have taken another turn entirely.

Instead, Phillips and Waite moved to a large

THE ESSENTIAL JOHN PHILLIPS



THE MAMAS AND THE PAPAS: GOLD (GEFFEN)

Features the 60s hits, including Monday, Monday (their only US No 1) and California Dreamin'. No one else so captured the optimism of the West Coast era while also identifying an undertow of melancholy. (Phillips also wrote San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair) for Scott McKenzie.)



JOHN, THE WOLFKING OF LA (SPV)

Phillips's solo debut and a stone-cold classic, despite its being panned by the critics on release in 1970. Terrific songs, set locally in Topanga Canyon and Malibu, were given a sweet country-rock treatment from a stellar band of musicians. Reissued in 2006 with eight bonus tracks including the single version of Mississippi.



PUSSYCAT (SPV)

Released in 2008, 32 years after it was recorded, could this be the best Stones album of the era that never was? Produced by the Glimmer Twins (Jagger and Richards), and also featuring Mick Taylor, the record sees Phillips firing on all cylinders for the last time. Bonus tracks include session material from the soundtrack to the Nic Roeg film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.

house in a small Connecticut community on the Long Island Sound. Waite cleaned up when she became pregnant again with their second child, daughter Bijou. But with nothing left to anchor him, Phillips's drug habit spiralled wildly out of control. He got caught up in a dangerous scheme that involved taking books of stolen drug prescriptions to a midtown Manhattan pharmacy, swapping them for bottles of pharmaceutical pills and then trading those up with his dealer for his drug of preference.

Bill Cleary tried to come to the rescue but arrived in Connecticut to find Waite painting flowers on jars of the opiate Dilaudid in an attempt to disguise them in case they were busted. "I'd go out every morning with handfuls of Dilaudid and throw them in the Long Island Sound," he recalls. "The ducks would be waiting for me the next day, like I was taking fucking bread out to them!"

In the end, Phillips was caught in a drugs sting and was busted at his house on the afternoon of 31 July 1980. Cleary, whose name had also been caught on tape as part of the operation, was also charged. The Phillipses' unsuspecting neighbours in Connecticut had little idea of what was going on until they were let into the house. "The downstairs was filthy," one told a TV crew. "But it was nothing like what the upstairs was. The ceilings and walls were covered in blood. There was vomit and faeces everywhere. There were

needles lying around. Cigarette butts had been put out on every manner of furniture including the sheets and on the rug."

Phillips was not in that much better shape himself. He weighed little more than nine stone. "He looked like he belonged in a casket," said his elder sister, Rosemary, who saw him shortly before his arrest.

"Rock Star Busted" blared the *New York Post* on 1 August 1980, next to a picture of a gaunt-looking Phillips in handcuffs. "Papa Phillips gets popped in drug swoop," the paper said, explaining that he had been picked up as part of a "jet-set pill-pushing ring".

Facing a possible 45 years in jail, he considered going on the run. Waite dyed their golden retriever, Trelawny, black to see if she could provide him with a disguise. Phillips was caught making inquiries about obtaining fake passports and was warned of the consequences.

Out on bail, he embarked on a publicity spree that took in stops on talk shows, schools and colleges, where he would lecture on the horrors of drug abuse accompanied by his daughter Mackenzie, herself recovering from a widely publicised drug problem. Phillips turned on the old charm, appearing contrite and presenting himself as a reformed model citizen. He claimed the bust had saved him from certain death. The ploy evidently worked. When the case came to trial, Phillips escaped with an eight-year suspended sentence and served just 30 days in a low-security facility.

He never touched drugs again but quickly sank into alcoholism. His marriage to Waite disintegrated. They got caught up in a vicious six-year custody battle and attempted a reunion of sorts 10 years later, by which time Waite says that "too much dirty water had flowed under the bridge". She still loved John but "I was very bitter because he'd put me through all the drugs and then the custody battle."

Phillips liked to boast that he was born in the eye of a hurricane. That hurricane was also named John. It hit his birth place of Parris Island, South Carolina on 30 August 1935 and continued to wreak havoc for close to 66 years before finally blowing itself out. Phillips paid the price of all the excess in 1992 when his liver gave out. He had a successful transplant operation but his health never fully recovered. He died on 18 March 2001, just days after completing work on a new album, titled *Phillips 66* for the year he would have been on his next birthday.

For all the torment and trouble he caused himself and others, he continued to inspire great loyalty and an enormous amount of affection from friends and family right up until the end – and even to this day. "He was the leader of our family," explains Waite. And he did leave them an extraordinary legacy, in his beguiling songs; a peerless catalogue of work that embodies all the tenderness and intelligence, wit, wiles and vulnerability of the man they called Papa John. **OMM**
John Phillips's Man on the Moon will be released this summer. For more information: www.papajohnphillips.com. With thanks to Jeff Greenberg