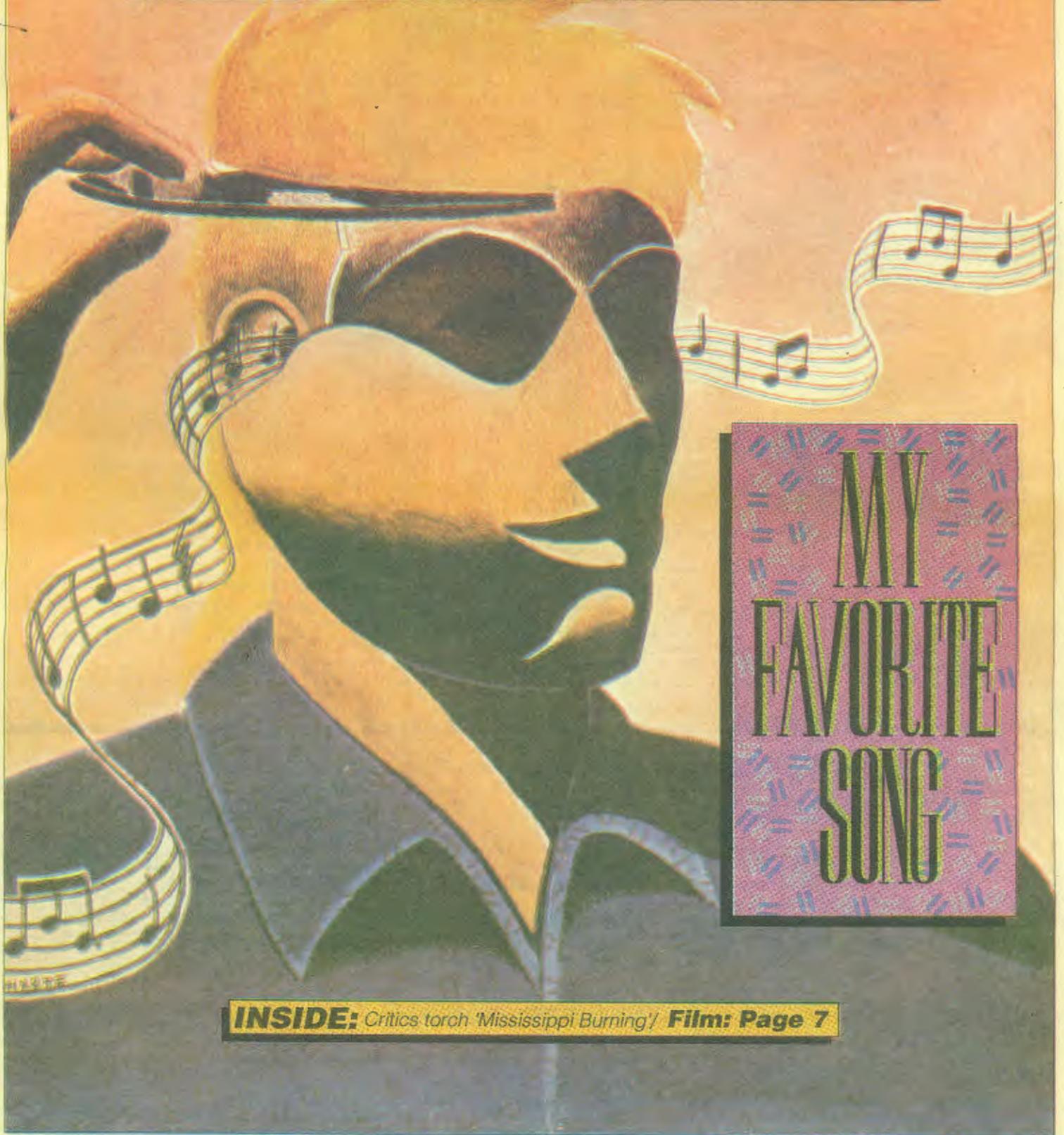


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**MY
FAVORITE
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year and well into '83. When it was finally released on an album, "Learning to Crawl," a year later, it remained the best of the lot, although "2,000 Miles" had a similar poignancy and sweetness and was more lush.

Whenever I hear the first chords of "Chain Gang," I'm immediately transported to the fall of '82 and a mood of bittersweet melancholy.

Now Chrissie's almost 40, she has two kids and she's been married one and a half times (the judge refused to hitch her to Ray Davies of the Kinks 'cause they were fighting at the altar) and her music has grown tamer and tamer.

Last I heard, she was opening a chain of vegetarian restaurants.

That's OK. She'll always have "Chain Gang." So will I.

ELAINE MCARDLE
Staff writer

"Back On The Chain Gang"

I loved "Back On The Chain Gang" from the moment I heard its opening chords.

Of course, I was predisposed to loving it. I loved everything about the Pretenders — their surly/romantic attitude, their unpretentious but evocative lyrics, the fact that they burst on the scene when music was still crawling out of the disco nadir of the late '70s.

But most of all, I loved Chrissie Hynde. She was the first woman in rock 'n' roll I could identify with. The rest were too wimpy. Chrissie was tough and cool and she left Ohio at age 22 to move to London with nothing to her name but an Iggy Pop album, which promptly got stolen.

Plus she worked as a stringer for New Musical

Express, writing record reviews that were gutsy and honest and unabashed about ragging on rocker manques like Kiss.

She was the first woman in rock who kept up with the guys, the first female counterpart to Keith Richards. She didn't look like she was posing, she wasn't sappy like Linda Ronstadt, she didn't act like a groupie who accidentally wandered onstage.

She became my first heroine, and my alter ego.

In the fall of 1982, stuck in excruciatingly boring lectures on chapter three of the uniform commercial code, surrounded by people in Izod sweaters whose overwhelming goal in life was to own two homes and a swimming pool, I would think about Chrissie Hynde and envy her black leather pants, which I couldn't afford to buy.

I depended on the Pretenders. I knew all the lyrics to every song on their first two albums. And then, like manna from heaven, "Back On The Chain Gang" was released as a single, with "My City Was Gone," also pretty awesome and a whole lot raunchier, on the flip side.

I loved the rockabilly jangle of the guitar, I loved the nod to Sam Cooke's classic song "Chain Gang."

I loved the lyrics: "I found a picture of you, those were the happiest days of my life/Like a break in the battle was your part, and the wretched life of a lonely heart," rendered all the more poignant when I learned she wrote the song for her friend and guitarist James Honeyman-Scott, a sort of innocent and another casualty of rock 'n' roll.

And most of all, Chrissie's voice never sounded better, soaring and folding back into itself — completely transcendent.

That song sustained me through the rest of the