

# FAST TRACK



EDITED BY STEPHEN J. DUBNER

BRIEF LIVES

## Score One for Wenner

**K**ING LUDWIG II HAD Wagner. The duke of Mantua had Monteverdi. Pope Julius III had Palestrina. Jann Wenner has Jonathan Larson.

Larson's musical oblations to the founding monarch of *Rolling Stone* are a shade less commanding than the others'. Larson, recipient of an American Academy of Arts and Letters grant and winner of several ASCAP songwriting awards, scores Wenner's home movies.

"I treat it as a serious assignment," insists the 33-year-old composer, a tall, hardly strapping, but strikingly earnest soul with a defiantly downtown sensibility.

For Larson and Victoria Leacock—who is responsible for shaping the home movies' visual content—the collaborative process remains a highly unstructured one.

*Say Da-Da*, for example, evolved out of Leacock's noticing, as she scanned Wenner footage, how often Wenner had tried to get his son Alexander to say "Da-Da" on-camera. Editing all of these moments together with a final shot of the boy at last giving "Da-Da" what he wanted, Leacock turned things over to Larson, who proceeded to construct a sampled score of rock songs with the word *daddy* in them: Aerosmith singing "daddy" from "Janie's Got a Gun"; Madonna in "Papa Don't Preach"; Paul McCartney in

"She's Leaving Home."

Other Wenner films, though, have allowed Larson to compose music from scratch. "I'm particularly proud of *Mommy's Pregnant*," he admits.

by waiting on tables. "In the end," he says, "writing for Jann and waiting tables are just an honest way for me to keep it together financially for my 'real projects.'"

These include *tick, tick . . .*

*BOOM!*, a "rock monologue" that Larson recently performed at New York Theatre Workshop, and *Rent*, a full-scale rock opera inspired by *La Bohème* but set in Alphabet City today. Bearing in mind that King Ludwig helped finance the opera house at Bayreuth so that Wagner could present his *Ring* cycle there, one wonders whether Larson has yet turned to his patron for backing on his



Composer Larson: *Da-Da* was a Rolling Stone.

Unlike his musical forebears at court, Larson must supplement his patron's largess

own opera. No, the composer concedes with a sigh, he hasn't.

BARRY SINGER