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Sheryl Crow

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For *100 Miles from Memphis*, Crow went back to her early influences—old Stax and Muscle Shoals records. Learn how this drove Crow, producer/guitarist Doyle Bramhall II, and engineer Justin Stanley to rediscover that “feel is paramount.”

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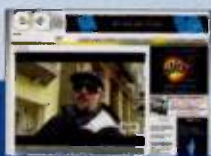
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Cover photo by Mark Seliger

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TALKBOX



THE BEATS GENERATION

Detroit may have fallen on hard times, but it was where EDM (electronic dance music) hit its stride in the mid/late '80s—and never stopped. A true cross-cultural mix, it threw together everything from the machine soul of '70s Kraftwerk—arguably one of the most influential bands ever—to the heart and soul of James Brown.

So is EDM a quaint relic of the days when rave was king, and copious quantities of ecstasy-powered clubs reigned across Europe? Hardly. Go to Shoutcast.com and check out what the non-“mainstream media” people are listening to today: Techno and trance consistently make the top 20 stations, and often, the top five. Then dig deeper, and listen to the Caribbean and African stations. They, too, have absorbed the electronic dance world into Soca, Zouk, and Afro-pop—as have Korean and Vietnamese pop. Even Sirius's “alternative” station plays dance rock on Saturday nights.

Far from fading, the dance-music scene is Darwinism at its best. It mutates and survives, creating strains and sub-genres that carry the message to the next generation. Sure, techno hit its heyday in the '90s—but it never died; it just went underground, which is probably its rightful home anyway. And now it's coming back into the mainstream, as are genres like trance, IDM, tribal, and others. This time around, though, they've shed some of the rigid conventions of the past, and expanded into a new world where vocals matter, and you may even hear—yes!—guitars, while a thoroughly 2010 artist quotes Ultravox songs from the '80s.

Music is about possibilities, not limitations. Need a shot of energy? Listen to the house music from Paris, the electronic experimental beats of Berlin, the DJ mixes from Moscow, and the lyrical dance music of Brazil. If that doesn't twist your head around in some new directions, I don't know what will!

READER'S ROOM



I built my own studio because it was always a lifelong dream to have a place where I could do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, without restraint—the freedom to be creative. I also wanted the thrill of bringing other people's songs to life and working with them on their creative vision.

In the process, I learned a lot about studio construction, e.g. the difference between acoustic treatment and soundproofing, the value of dead-air space, etc. I also reminded myself how much fun it is to buy gear!

I'm currently working on a fascinating album project of world music that's a hybrid of Egyptian, Israeli, and Eastern belly-dance music blended with a hip-hop influence. I'm also working on an old-school country song for a client who sounds eerily like Johnny Cash. The ongoing project I produce here is my podcast: ProjectStudioNetwork.com.

Big Al Wagner, BigToeStudio.com

Big Toe Studio key gear: Avid/Digidesign Pro Tools, Roland A-70 master controller keyboard, Yamaha NS-10M monitors, PreSonus Central Station monitor controller, acoustic room treatment



READER'S DO'S & DON'TS

MONITOR SETUP BASICS

1. Do tow in your near-field monitors to a 30-degree angle.
2. Do space your near-field monitors far enough apart so that the apex of your equilateral triangle is 18 inches behind your head. (I recommend 67.5 inches from tweeter to tweeter.)
3. Do use speaker stands.
4. Do adjust the height of the acoustic center of the speaker (usually midway between the tweeter and midrange).
5. Do experiment by moving the monitor/engineer position back and forth along the length of the room to avoid axial mode nulls. If you're lacking bass response, your best bet will be to close to the front wall. (Contact me at carl@carltatzdesign.com for an axial mode room calculator.)
6. Do attenuate first reflections once you have chosen your positioning by sitting in the listening position and having someone walk along the right side wall with a mirror until you see the left speaker. Repeat for the left wall and ceiling. Place absorptive panels at the wall and ceiling positions that you have identified, as well as the rear wall.
7. Don't assume that your speakers are going to be truly accurate in your room, no matter how much you paid for them or how well your room is acoustically designed.
8. Don't use any other angle other than 30 degrees for stereophonic monitoring. The laws of physics determined that 50 years ago.
9. Don't mount your monitors on the console. Unless your console has a lot of mass, the console resonance will greatly affect the frequency response.
10. Don't use consoles with high backs that prevent proper speaker height positioning.

Carl Tatz, Carltatzdesign.com

STUDIO SOLUTIONS

I tracked a record over a series of very late nights and during one of the sessions, we were looking for really simple backbeat but had no snare on hand. Being that it was about 4 A.M. by that point, no one was picking up their phone, and there really wasn't anywhere we could go to get one. After about an hour of trying different sounds, we were sitting around, discouraged, until the artist found a filing cabinet out in the office, filled the top drawer with keys, and smacked the top with his fist. I threw up a Blue Woodpecker mic about a foot away, and it ended up being exactly what we needed. Combine

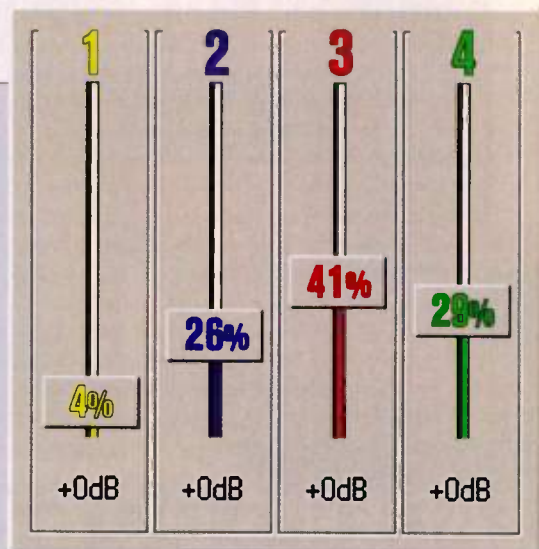


that with a Blue Mouse on an empty accordion box as a kick, and to date it's still my favorite percussion sound I've ever gotten. Jack Zoephel, Aderra.net

EQ POLL

How much do you blend old and new recording techniques?

- 1 Just tape and outboard for me.
- 2 I edit with a DAW but mostly use outboard gear.
- 3 I mostly work in the box but use some analog gear.
- 4 It's all in the box for me.



EQ'S FACEBOOK JURY

How do you avoid losing perspective while working and reworking a song in the studio?



ASK EQ

Live's 8-band EQ, which is inserted in the master bus, is cutting -1dB at 425Hz and boosting 1dB at 4kHz.

My mixes sound kind of "muddy." I've tried rolling off the bass, but that doesn't really seem to help; it just ends up sounding "thin." I'd love to use a pro mastering engineer, but these are just recordings to sell at gigs, and I need to watch the budget. How do you guys get rid of "mud"?

EQ: It's hard to give specific recommendations without listening to your music, but check what's going on around 300–500Hz. Most instruments have some energy in that range, which tends to build up. That's not low enough to hit the bass range, but it's low enough to give a bit of a "muddy" sound.

Try using EQ (the processor, not the magazine!)

to add a broad, shallow cut around 400Hz. Don't take away too much, or you'll lose some warmth and power. This should help reduce the mud.

If you also need some more "definition," try adding a broad boost around 3–4kHz. This should be only a db or so, as the ears are very sensitive in that frequency range. This will impart a certain amount of "crispness."

As with all EQ, before deciding you need to make radical changes, do subtle changes and let your ears get acclimated to the difference. Often, you don't need as much EQ as you might think at first.

Ask EQ a technical audio-related question, and EQ will answer it. Send it to eqeditor@musicplayer.com.

"Usually when I'm spending a lot of time, it means I've put too much into a song and something needs to go."

Thomas Hirschler

"Sometimes you have to walk away for a day or two. More than a few hours of headphones or speakers will fatigue most people, so going over the same song all day/night might not be a good idea. P.S. Keep previous mixes, always."

Ron Bergeron

"When I get into studio mode for my own solo project, I turn into a zombie. Not only do I play everything on the record, but I engineer and produce it as well. So sometimes I'm spending about 60 hours on a track just to make it sound the way I want it, but as you can probably tell, there are so many problems with that."

Taylor Hominda

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SCHOOL OF SEVEN BELLS

on Ethereal Vocal Layering

The Cocteau Twin-esque dream pop of School of Seven Bells contains a particular mix of weighty and weightless vocals from identical twin singers Claudia and Alejandra Deheza. Their shimmering melodies and intricate harmonies may conjure up visions of endless effects pedals, but the band relies on precise layering and a vocals-first approach.

"There's so much going on with a voice that's not happening with a guitar," says Benjamin Curtis, the band's guitarist and producer. "It's the most unique organic sound that you can manipulate."

While recording their sophomore disc *Disconnect From Desire* [Vagrant/Ghostly International] at their home studio in New York City, Curtis set up a Neumann U 87 with a high-pass filter and hung it upside-down. Overdubbing and rarely singing simultaneously, the singers have similar voices but different styles. Alejandra comes on stronger and dives into extended explorations of scales, singing about a foot off the mic. And Claudia, who weaves in intricate harmonies, is more premeditated and sings right next to the mic, often barely above a whisper. The contrast is clear on "The Wait." Alejandra glides through strong harmonies during subdued verses, while

Claudia's pinpoint flourishes energize the chorus.

Curtis runs tracking vocals through a Universal Audio SOLO/610 pre directly to Logic, without compression. "I replaced the stock tubes in the UA 610 with older tubes, which opened up the sound," he says. "We tried the Empirical Labs Mike-E, which we use live, but it wasn't sounding right. We thought recording with compression was going to enhance the sound, but they don't need it. We compress the hell out of everything in the mix, but I hated making that decision early on."

Occasional vocal effects crop up, such as the delay and reverb that gave "Joviann" extra bite, or the chorus of "Babelonia," sung a step up then pitched down for more personality. But Curtis and mixing engineer Jack Joseph Puig focused on blending and placing vocal tracks (up to 20 a song) in the fore.

"I like printing the vocals in mono to make sure the frequencies are fighting," says Curtis. "Putting vocals last is a problem. It's the same frequency range as guitars. Get the vocals down and know where they're going to live and don't be married to the guitar. It's a beautiful thing when frequencies are rubbing. Your brain always picks out the center note and the weird interactions in the speaker. It's beautiful." Patrick Sisson

School of Seven Bells (left to right)—Alejandra Deheza, Benjamin Curtis, and Claudia Deheza.

More Online



Hear School of Seven Bells' "Babelonia."

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SO PERCUSSION and MATMOS

on the Poetics of Processing

A collaborative project by electronic pop duo Matmos and New York's avant-classical ensemble So Percussion, *Treasure State* [Cantaloupe] is so jam-packed with compositional and engineering processes that even Matmos' M.C. Schmidt and Drew Daniel scratch their heads about the methodology of its creation.

Matmos joined So Percussion at producer Brett Allen's SnowGhost Studios in Whitefish, Montana, for a series of studies focusing on the musical potentials of elementary materials such as ceramic planters, pails of water, and aluminum beer cans. The tracks generated at SnowGhost were subsequently diced and spliced by San Francisco plunderphonic-ist Wobbly, and Schmidt and So Percussion's Lawson White overdubbed other instruments and sounds, then processed and mixed the results.

The tantalizingly trippy end product came about through the interface of odd sound samples and even odder post-production choices. The glitchy funk of "Cross" has some surprising sources. "I took a bunch of distorted recordings of swing and big-band drumming," Daniel says, "and then I viciously EQ'd and exaggerated all the pops and dropouts that the vinyl transferred, hence there's barely any of the swing left." Daniel used Cycling '74 Max/MSP software to draw

out previously unheard sonorities from the vinyl tracks.

Much of the Matmos portion of the material was generated live with Daniel's E-mu e6400 sampler, with live- and post-processing via Ableton Live and MOTU Digital Performer. On "Needles," So Percussion played a cactus, amplified with a Barcus Berry transducer contact mic. As the group hit the cactus needles, the signal was sent to Brett Allen, who processed the output with a harmonizer. Daniel then took the harmonized signal, chopped it up, created samples, sequenced them into MIDI, and sent the parts to different sounds.

The dense sonics of "Cross" derive from real kit drums, handclaps, multiple guitar layers, and the cries of a hunting call that Schmidt bought at a sporting goods shop in Montana. "It's supposed to imitate two female elks in estrus, fighting for the attention of the male," he says with a laugh. "It's a double-reed thing where you can't play the same pitch on the two reeds simultaneously, so they're constantly doing these sort of frequency modulation bends back and forth."

After Wobbly built the assembled birdcalls into a solo, says Daniel, "it sounded like Rahsaan Roland Kirk records being playing backwards in a blender." **John Payne**



So Percussion and Matmos (left to right)—Drew Daniel, M.C. Schmidt, Adam Silwinski, Lawson White, Josh Quillen, and Jason Treuting.



So Percussion (left to right)—Adam Silwinski, Jason Treuting, Josh Quillen, and Eric Beach.

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Watch So Percussion and Matmos live.

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BOOKA SHADE's

Plug-In Experiments

Electronic artists tend to evolve in circles. They start with club-friendly numbers, shift to song-based compositions, then return to their dance-track roots. Berlin, Germany-based duo Booka Shade is guilty of such an evolution, as is witnessed on their fourth album, *More!* The duo's intention was to create an album-oriented collection of dance cuts. To this end, the twosome of Arno Kammermeier (whose specialty is drums) and Walter Merziger (the synthesizer expert) employed both what they know about writing songs and creating dancefloor smashers.

To keep the dancefloor element as the foundation, they concentrated on bass and the bass drum—with particular focus on the tuning of the latter. Case in point, “Teenage Spaceman” and “The Door” bounce along hollow, booming beat loops.

“That was hard work,” Merziger admits. “We produced 10 different versions of ‘Teenage Spaceman.’ The Rob Papen plug-in for Sub Boom Bass sounds like a low, electronic tom and gives the main riff a lot of space, and a horn is doubling the main riff, giving the tune a heroic feel.”

For “The Door,” they used a Roland TR-808 for the low end and a Roland TB-303 sound from an old sampling CD. “We wanted to create a retro sound with Kraftwerk elements, but still in the Booka Shade sound world,” Merziger says.

In contrast, “No Difference” has an intense and

“We wanted to create a retro sound with Kraftwerk elements.”

—Walter Merziger

chunky string-synth sound, which Merziger attributes to an edited Klaus Schulze patch from the Arturia Moog Modular V plug-in combined with the string sound from GForce String Machine and a Smart Electronix SupaPhaser.

But part of what makes Booka Shade's sound identifiable and unique is the intentional “mistakes” the two force their computer to make. For example, they take all the MIDI tracks and apply them to other virtual instrument patches, so the hi-hat sequence plays a synth line, or a bass line is played by a percussion instrument.

Then there are their reverb experiments. “[We] really like playing with backward reverbs,” Merziger says. “Have a reverb on an instrument or vocal, reverse the reverb signal, bounce it, reverse it again, and combine it with the dry signal. This is a very interesting effect on almost every instrument. A backward element in the groove can give it a very modern and unique feel.” Lily Moayeri

More Online



Hear Booka Shade's
“Teenage Spaceman.”

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TECH TIP OF THE MONTH

Setting Up an Eventide Stompbox as MIDI Tempo Master

Eventide Factor-series stompboxes have the ability to generate MIDI Clock. That means that you can use your Eventide stompbox as a Master Tempo source for anything in your MIDI chain, including drum machines, sequencers, and other Eventide stompboxes.

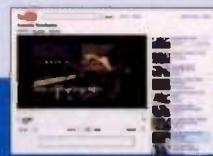
To enable MIDI Clock Transmit:

1. Enter System Mode by pressing and holding both the Right Footswitch and the Encoder Knob.
2. Turn the Encoder Knob until you see "MIDI."
3. Press the Encoder Button to enter the MIDI Menu.
4. Turn the Encoder Knob until you see "CLK OUT."
5. Press the Encoder Button and turn the Encoder Knob so the display says "ON."
6. Exit System Mode by Pressing and holding the Right Footswitch and Encoder Button.

Now when you Tap Tempo or load a preset with a different Tempo, the Eventide stompbox will send the updated Tempo as MIDI Clock to its MIDI Out Port, and you can set the receiving device connected to lock to that incoming Tempo.

Thanks to Ray Maxwell at Eventide for sending in this month's tip. For another tip (enabling MIDI Clock Sync to slave an Eventide stompbox to an incoming MIDI clock), go to eqmag.com.

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Check out a demo of Eventide's TimeFactor delay.

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Tommy McLaughlin (left) takes a nap on the mixing board, while Conor O'Brien hangs out in the foreground.



VILLAGERS

on Maintaining Sonic Subtleties

Sometimes sparse and quiet, sometimes dramatic, Villagers' debut album, *Becoming a Jackal* [Domino] is fragile and sweet, as if it's on the verge of breaking. It's the kind of emotion evocative of UK bands such as The Beautiful South and Belle & Sebastian. And it's emotion borne from solitude.

After the breakup of his former band, Dublin, Ireland's Conor J. O'Brien shied away from collaboration. While O'Brien does play with a live band, he wrote and recorded the majority of the instruments on *Becoming a Jackal* [Domino] himself (aside from strings and French horn arranged by pianist Cormac Curran).

He recorded the album with engineer/co-producer (and Villagers live guitarist) Tommy McLaughlin, whose parents' attic also serves as his home studio. The recording process was simple and stripped back. "We were always careful to not overdo the instrumentation because it can take away from the directness of the songs," McLaughlin says. "Everything is there for a reason, and sometimes less is definitely more."

Admittedly, McLaughlin says he can't afford much of the gear he loves, but he captures many of the album's organic sounds with his Universal Audio 610 preamp. And for O'Brien, it's all about his Akai DPS16 16-track recorder, which he used to demo the album's tracks.

O'Brien wrote "The Pact (I'll Be Your Fever)" on acoustic guitar in his bedroom using his strict

"Everything is there for a reason, and sometimes less is definitely more."

—Tommy McLaughlin

"no television ever" rule to staying creative. "I wanted the words to sound like they were almost spoken over the top of an upbeat *snappy* rhythm section," O'Brien says. "To attain this, I used hotrods on the hi-hat and a towel on the snare. I also gave myself a rule: no crash or ride cymbals."

Mixing was key to ensure that the song didn't end up sounding slick. "Ben Hillier, who mixed the album, and I made the drums mono and panned them to the left, approximately 10 o'clock," O'Brien says. "We mixed the acoustic guitar very high in the mix as I had planned; I played it quietly and without a plectrum, so that the semi-random dynamic peaks could be heard. I wanted the guitar to be slightly uneven and delicate, in contrast with the straightness of the hi-hats. The same idea was applied to the vocals. I sang them quietly so that we could put them high in the mix and emphasize those nice little idiosyncrasies of the voice, which can so often be lost in an upbeat number." Kylee Swenson

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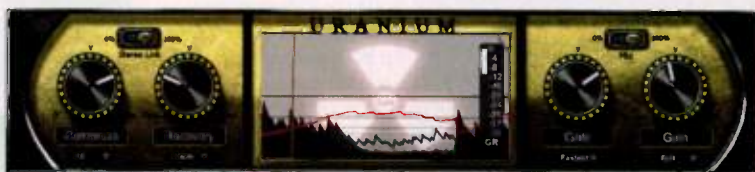
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by Mike Rozkin

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STAX TO MUSCLE SHOALS

Sheryl Crow returns to the funky soul music of her youth (and her collection of classic analog gear) to inform *100 Miles from Memphis*

by Ken Micallef

"I have always been a gear head," Sheryl Crow says from a Manhattan hotel, "because of Bill Bottrell, who recorded my first album [*Tuesday Night Music Club*] and my last album [*Detours*]. I learned a lot from Bill about what gear does what, and the importance of the old outboard gear that was so crucial to making some of the greatest records that ever were. I've always been kind of an elitist about making sure that the sounds on my records are authentic to the great record making of the '60s and '70s."

100 Miles from Memphis [A&M], Crow's latest release, is a throwback to the classic soul records of those eras recorded at Memphis' Stax studios and Alabama's Muscle Shoals Sound Studio. Assisted by Doyle Bramhall II (producer, guitarist) and Justin Stanley (producer, engineer), Crow recorded at L.A.'s Henson Recording Studios (studios A and D), New York City's Electric Lady Studios, and at her Nashville home studio, Cross Creek. Boasting such original gear as a Neve broadcast console and BCM-10 Sidecar, Telefunken ELA M 251 microphone, Urei 1176 Limiting Amplifier, Teletronix LA-2A Leveling Amplifier, two Fairchild 670 Limiter Compressors, and a Studer A80 tape deck, Crow's Cross Creek studio was used primarily to cut vocals and acoustic guitars. Band tracking went down at Henson and Electric Lady. But with six albums to her credit (and millions of copies sold), regardless of the studio, Crow's recording philosophy has remained consistent.

Continued

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"Our Love Is Fading."



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SOUNDS OF SHERYL

"Having done it now several ways," she reports, "I really do love to hit tape. I don't know if it's a psychological thing for me. It's like Starbucks. It's holding that cup. It doesn't mean it's a great cup of coffee, but there's something psychological about it for me, hitting tape. Tape creates a sonic atmosphere that is undeniable, and I love the warmth of it."

Stanley ran Pro Tools and tape simultaneously for all sessions, printing analog then running it back into digital, then choosing the best takes with very few, if any, punch-ins allowed or needed. Stanley also mixed to tape on Henson's Studer A800 MkII. *100 Miles from Memphis*' material is a joint collaboration between Crow, Bramhall, and Stanley; Crow also penned a handful of solo originals, covered Terence Trent D'Arby's "Sign Your Name" (background vocals by Justin Timberlake), Citizen Cope's "Side-ways," and reportedly cut a version of "Come and Get Your Love" by Lolly Vegas (Redbone). Collaborating as a trio, Bramhall often created the melody, Stanley scored the music for the band, and Crow contributed lyrics. They'd cut a maximum of four takes with the band (Tommy Simms, bass; Chris Bruce, guitar; Victor Indrizzo and Homer Steinweiss, drums; and Jeff Babko, keyboards), then move on.

"We had to spend time together going back and forth until we clicked," Bramhall recalls. "Once we did, we began writing, and it took off. It was pretty intense. We had two rooms going at Henson; we couldn't create it fast enough. I would have a room

set up just for writing and putting up vocal arrangements, while Justin would be recording the band in the other room. I would come in on the floor and play guitar, then leave and do another vocal arrangement on another song, or we'd have one room recording horns and strings, and I'd be doing vocals with Sheryl in another room. We were writing so fast, we had to get it down."

When tracking vocals, Crow typically prefers to sing while playing an instrument, which for *100 Miles from Memphis* was either guitar or Wurlitzer. But on past records, from 1998's *The Globe Sessions* to 2008's *C'mon C'mon*, Crow recorded vocals while playing her own Fender Precision bass, which usually made it to the final mix along with the original scratch vocal.

"Almost without exception I play bass on my records," Crow insists. "Up onto this record I've written a lot of songs on bass. Keyboard is my main instrument, then guitar, but if you get into the harmonics and voicings of chords, sometimes you get lazy about melodies. So on my last four records I've written on bass because it makes me put melody first."

"When you're tracking, feel is paramount. It implies so much. You sort of get locked into a feel even if it's not perfect. And it's hard to get away from that. A song like 'My Favorite Mistake' could have definitely benefitted from a better bass player, but we got locked into a feel and wound up keeping the imperfections of the performance just because it is a performance. When bass players come in, I



Left to right—Victor Indrizzo, Doyle Bramhall II, Tommy Simms, Sheryl Crow, and Justin Stanley at Electric Lady Studios in New York.



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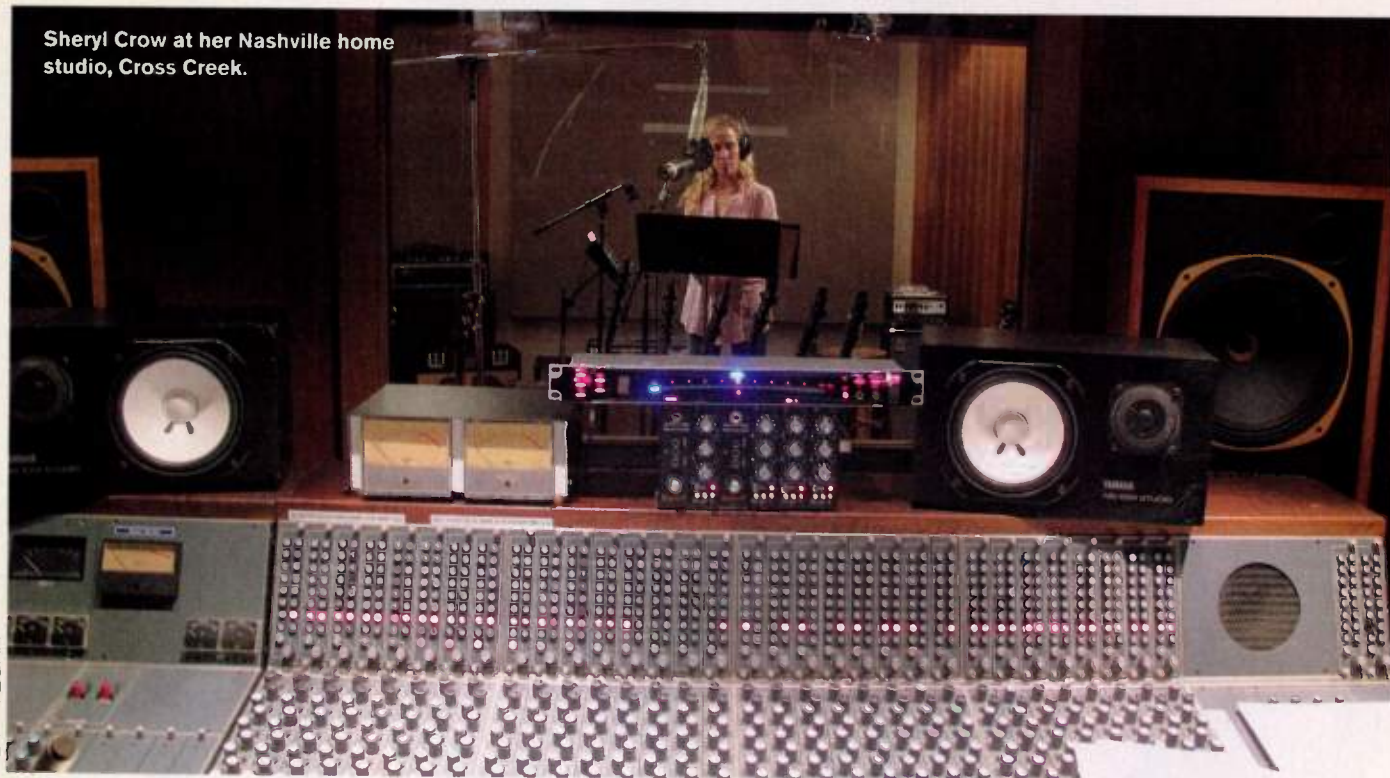
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Sheryl Crow at her Nashville home studio, Cross Creek.

KEITH MEGNA



want them to do what they do, but hook-wise there are certain things they would take from my original part as far as the melodic sense."

Old school to the bone, Sheryl Crow believes in her own low-end bass theory, live tracking, vintage gear, and maintaining a certain rawness.

"My recording philosophy in the studio is to get the best take and work from that," she says. "For me, it's still about musicianship. It's about capturing the best performance and then working from that. It's not about splicing takes together; it's really about capturing nuances and working from there."

SWEET AND SOUR

Sheryl Crow's vocal signature is nearly as recognizable a brand as Coke, Toyota, and Cheerios. Her trademark is twin traits of cream and grit, sweet and sour. But far from being precious about her voice, she practically treats it as an afterthought. Though she loves to sing through her ELA M 251 and Fairchild 670 at Cross Creek, she can't be bothered to perfect vocals in the traditional sense.

"I always say I am going to go back and do the vocals proper," she says, "but by the time I get around to it, I am so married to the scratch vocal that I never change them. I can't beat the scratch vocal."

Far from being the perfectionist we might assume given her slick-sounding pop rock singles, Crow prefers her vocals au naturel as possible. And she insists on singing with the band in the live room.

"There is something about the spirit of singing with the band; it's hard to go back and to recreate

"... I am so married to the scratch vocal that I never change them. I can't beat the scratch vocal."

—Sheryl Crow

that for me," Crow says. "It's really about the performance and feeding off the musicians. Even on the records of mine that I've produced, my method has been to play bass with the guitarist and a drummer and that is when I track my vocal. There is something about the feel of singing and playing at the same time. On this record I played Wurlitzer and sang. When you try to recreate that and you're just singing, it's a completely different feel if you're not playing. For whatever reason, playing and singing gives me a better feel than just singing. I really feed off the band and sing in conjunction with playing, and that lends itself to the feel and it inspires and also informs the feel."

Crow insists on cutting no more than four takes per song, is not fond of punching in or splicing takes, and absolutely resists any sort of Auto-Tune, even though she doesn't like the sound of her singing voice.

"I don't enjoy listening to myself sing," Crow says. "My Favorite Mistake' is one of the only songs of mine that I can listen to on the radio. The other songs I only hear the imperfections, things I wish I would have gone back and redone. But I would never EQ things differently. Hell no. As a live performer, you know the freedom of what your voice can do when you're singing live, and it's never quite like that in the studio because you're more conscious of it being a take that's being recorded for posterity. It's never quite as free. When I sing live, I always think, 'I wish I could go back and re-record my vocals now the way I am singing it live! But it doesn't really work like that.'"

Justin Stanley



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Regarding her choice of mic preamps, Crow likes the API Lunchbox for its clarity and the Neve preamps of her BCM Sidecar for their "murkiness that can be beautifully mastered; it has a lot of bottom end."

And then there's her prized '60s Telefunken ELA M 251 from the original A&M Studios (before it became Henson). "I have a pretty brash upper register, and the ELA M doesn't clamp down on it like some other mics do. It still maintains a warmth and an evenness, at least the particular 251 that I have. When I used to do jingles, I always preferred that mic because it is warmer."

STANLEY ON CROW

Justin Stanley (who recently engineered Eric Clapton's upcoming release and has also worked with Nikka Costa, Explosions in the Sky, and Jamie Lidell) added reverb to Crow's vocals after the fact, using Orban Spring reverb, Briscasti M7, and Henson's plate reverbs and custom echo chambers.

"When Herb Alpert designed A&M Studios, he wanted to recreate the echo chambers that Phil Spector used at Gold Star Studios in Hollywood," Stanley says. "He had the freedom to experiment with chambers. That is why they have seven or eight chambers here at Henson of all different sizes and textures. Some have plaster walls, some have shellac, some have rubber, and they all have a different kind of flavor. That gives it a great character."

Stanley used a combination of Neve 33609, Vintagedesign CL1 MKII, and Retro Sta-Level compressors on Crow's vocal, balancing old with new.

"I'm a big fan of Neve mic pres and the Sta-Level compressor for vocals, and also the Vintagedesign CL1," Stanley explains. "I go to one of those when tracking, and as far as mics, when we're tracking Sheryl's vocals live with the band, I had a Shure SM7 up. A lot of the live vocals with the band were kept. When she wanted to perform the vocal in her own space at Cross Creek, we'd use her ELA M 251. She's really comfortable and familiar with the sound of that mic."

But the Vintagedesign and Retro Sta-Level (a recreation of the 1956 Gates Sta-Level, which dominated the sound of '60s AM radio playlist) gear are staples of Stanley's setup.

"I love the Vintagedesign because it doesn't kill the transients," he says. "But it brings the body of a drum or vocal signal; it glues it all together. It gives you a warmth in the tonality if there is any kind of color there to begin with. It's on the darker side of things. The Sta-Level is just a great tube compressor built in a one-man shop; he makes beautiful recreations of the original Sta-Level design. It's got eight tubes and huge transformers; it



KEITH MEGNA

Doyle Bramhall II and Sheryl Crow
at Cross Creek Studio.

ECHO... ECHO... ECHO CHAMBERS

Producer/engineer Justin Stanley on the echo chambers at Henson Recording Studios in Los Angeles: "An echo chamber works like an effects return. A signal, whether it's a vocal or a drum or a guitar, is sent out via the send on the desk, and that goes down the line to a speaker inside the chamber. Inside the chamber, you can experiment with different mics, different speakers or amplifiers driving the sound. That sound is dispersed in the room, and you get this natural reverb, which is picked up by the mics and sent back to the effects return. Some of the chambers are the size of a garage, some are the size of a closet, some are the size of a small room, and they all give a different picture to the signal."

just holds the sound in such a beautiful way. You don't hear any pumping or squashing of the sound; it just holds it all together."

In addition to engineering, Stanley helped Bramhall maintain a relaxed attitude in the studio. Though Crow always aims for the most relaxed atmosphere possible, Stanley focused on it.

"We made a conscious effort to get Sheryl even looser in the approach to her vocals," Stanley says. "The more people can forget about singing and just let out their emotions the better. As soon as they start thinking about playing or singing, that's when it gets stiff. You want the artist to get lost in their space, so at the end of the take they wake up from that moment. You can see some people when they play or sing at the end of the song, they come out of the trance. That's when you know someone has gone to that special place."

LETTING IT BLEED

After recording vocals, the most important part of Stanley's job was miking the various instruments. But before mic placement, Stanley scopes out the room and the instruments.

"With every instrument, I always go into the room and listen first," he says. "And it always starts with the instrument. If you have a good instrument, you can use any mic, really. There is always a lot of time and thought put into what instrument we are going to use. What snare drum? Are the cymbals too bright or too dark? Which amp are we using? You find the combination then you get the players to go in and feel out the live recording room, and then you can hear where everything sounds best in the room as a collective unit. It's not just a matter of setting up anywhere, you make sure the musicians are comfortable and can hear themselves. The last thing to happen is setting up mics. Once everyone is comfortable, I begin miking."

"And I don't worry about bleed. All the doors are open. There's always amp sounds in the drum kit, drum sounds in the piano; there's always bleed. But that's part of the glue that holds it all together. I love the sound of different instruments bleeding into each other. I don't think you need to control it. You just let it flow and be what it is. People spend hours finding the right reverb to glue things together or to give it some space. But when you are live in a room, it speaks its own sense of place, its own environment sonically. If you listen to any old Stax or Beatles or Stones recordings, you hear a lot of bleeding."

Along with Crow's Fender P bass, the musicians played Gibson ES-335, Fender Telecaster, and Fender Stratocaster guitars, running through an assortment of amps: Gibson GA-40 Les Paul, '69 Fender Pro, Silvertone, and DeArmond amps, and a new product, the Lazy J 20 amp.

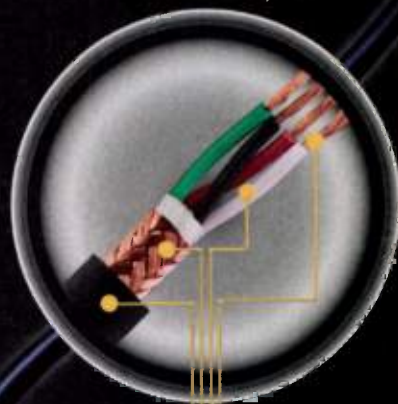
"Usually I put a mic five to six inches away from the cabinet," Stanley explains, "maybe a couple of feet away depending on the sound of it. Usually with the ribbons if I am using an RCA 44-BX or one of the Royers [R-122V or SF-24], I can get a bit more distance away from the cabinet because they're usually a little darker sounding. So the farther away from the cabinet, the more top end you are going to explore. Some of the other tracks I just used a Shure SM57 or a Beyerdynamic M 160, which



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Left to right—Citizen Cope, Sheryl Crow, Justin Stanley, and Doyle Bramhall II at Electric Lady Studios,

is also an older ribbon mic. With the Royers, they've developed the ribbons to handle a lot of SPL, so you can have them quite close to the cabinet and they won't die. The old RCA 44-BX you have to keep a good distance away from the cabinet. The air pressure from the speaker will screw up the 44 if it's too close."

Stanley miked the Leslie cab for keyboards with two Neumann U 87s or U 67s, allowing a bit of space from the cab to "let it breathe and get some room sound in there." He ran the Wurly through a guitar amp and miked accordingly, and for piano, used two U 67s or a U 49 as a mono mic, "just outside the piano, for a warmer sound that you can compress a bit."

When miking the Ampeg Portaflex B-15 bass amp, Stanley took a page from that heavyweight tome on the Fab Four, *Recording the Beatles*.

"I'd read in Brian Kehew's *Recording the Beatles* that Geoff Emerick would use an AKG C 12 about eight to ten feet away from the bass cabinet. So we tried that in Studio A. You'd think the sound would be reverberating everywhere and there'd be no way to get a decent tone on a bass guitar from that distance. But I put the bass amp in the middle of the room with a bit of carpet and put the mic eight to ten feet away, and it was the punchiest, upfront sound that I've heard for bass. It was an incredible realization. I think part of it is because bass waveforms are a lot slower to develop, so it probably takes that distance for them to really come to their fullest potential. That's the sound you're hearing when it hits that point."

Given his penchant for old-school everything, it's no surprise that Stanley follows a minimalist approach to drum miking. Comprised of '60s and early '70s Ludwig and Gretsch drums and Istanbul cymbals, the drum set was recorded with Quad 8 and Neve 1073 mic pres, and various vintage mics.

"Out in front of the kit I used the RCA 44, and then a mono overhead, either a Neumann U 47 or an old Coles 4048 sitting right overhead in the middle between the snare and the rack tom. Then there's a 47 fet on the kick, and that is the main sound of the kit. If I need more detail, I might add closer mics, but I can usually get a great sound with just those four mics."

Inspired by her love of southern soul, Stax, and Muscle Shoals, Sheryl Crow's *100 Miles from Memphis* is a loose and funky affair, recorded sans click to keep it real and utilizing old school gear and techniques. Like Mick Jagger once said, "It's only rock and roll. . . ." That laid-back attitude informed the entire proceeding, including the decision to not overplay the music. Let it flow. Let it roll. Keep it in the moment.

"Sometimes people try to play this kind of music too good," Bramhall confirms. "On a lot of those old Muscle Shoals records, it seems like it wasn't hundreds and hundreds of takes. It's just a theory, of course, but it's really about keeping it spontaneous." **CS**

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IN THE THICK OF IT



CYBELE MALINOWSKI

Midnight Juggernauts on Creating the Jam-Inspired, Processed Layers Inside *The Crystal Axis*' Wall of Sound

by Kylee Swenson

Melbourne, Australia's Midnight Juggernauts are used to the DIY way: They write separately, self-produce their albums, and release their music on their own label, Siberia. But for their second album, *The Crystal Axis*, the prog-rock leaning, electro-pop trio changed up their methodology.

"With this one, we spent a lot more time together in a room," says multi-instrumentalist Andrew Szekeres. "When we first started the demos for the album, we set up a whole lot of equipment down at this remote house on the beach in eastern Australia on the coast, and we just started jamming. The more prog-y kind of psych tendencies that come out with some of the songs is just from the way we were jamming and messing around with loop pedals."

After the demo stage, Szekeres recorded core tracks live with singer/synth-ist Vincent Vendetta and drummer Daniel Stricker at Melbourne's Sing Sing Studios, with help from engineer Chris Moore (TV on the Radio, Yeah Yeah Yeahs). The goal was to achieve a looser feel than their previous album and EPs. "When we recorded the first one, it was very rigid, sequenced, and even recording all the live stuff, it was desperately tied to this metronome," Szekeres admits. "With this one, we tried to keep it a bit looser and have parts of songs where it gets kind of sloppy and weird. There are lots of mistakes on the album—happy accidents—which give the album character."

Once basic tracks were recorded, the band began the long process of layering, stripping back, and layering some more. In the end, some tracks were jam packed, as with the epic and catchy second single, "Vital Signs," which boasts a whopping 130 tracks. "This whole album is very much like a wall of sound, which makes it quite difficult when you're going through it and trying to find space in different parts," Szekeres says.

The guys experimented with a bunch of different synths, string synthesizers, and organs, including a Yamaha YC-20 combo organ and SS-30 string synth, ARP Solina String Synthesizer and 2600 synth, Moog Minimoog and Modular synths, Dave Smith and Casio synths, Roland RS-202 string/brass synth and VP-330 vocoder, and a Hammond B3 organ.

But some ideas originated on soft synths. "I

"There are lots of mistakes on the album—happy accidents"—Andrew Szekeres

either had Andy replay them or sent the original MIDI data to the synths via a Kenton MIDI to CV converter," Moore explains. "Most of the work getting these sounds was done on the synthesizer itself; modular synths have a lot of sound-shaping possibilities, and I spent a lot of time getting unique sounds for every part. Recording-wise, it was just a matter of recording them through a DI into Pro Tools, although we did send a few string-synth sounds through the Leslie cabinet of the studio's B3 organ."

Meanwhile, lots of sounds went through a Roland Space Echo, including a Suzuki Omnichord "going crazy all over the place," says Szekeres, at the end of "Vital Signs," and on the Minimoog during "The Great Beyond." "And the sound at the beginning of 'Lemuria' is Dan feeding the echo back on itself and tweaking the delay time for some classic dub sounds," Moore says.

The guys also fed a Z.Vex Super Duper pedal through guitars (either a '70s Fender Telecaster or a Gibson SG played through a late-'60s Fender Twin) and synths. "The Z.Vex pedal was used as a boost to overdrive the amp for crunchier sounds, and it was also used for distortion on the synth bass on a couple of the songs," Moore says.

Like many of the album's tracks, "The Great Beyond," which features a late-'70s/early-'80s pop-influenced chorus of vocals (sung through a Neumann U 67), morphed midway through recording. "Vin wasn't happy with the chorus that he'd sung, so he redid it at another studio in Melbourne called Hothouse," Szekeres says of Vendetta, whose deep voice hints at David Bowie,



Engineer Chris Moore.



Midnight Juggernauts (left to right)—Vincent Vendetta, Andy Juggernaut, and Daniel Stricker.

but on "The Great Beyond" reaches a higher register reminiscent of Alan Parsons. "He was constantly changing vocal melodies."

Toward the end of the song, it takes a drastic turn into a jam-inspired freak-out of guitar, synths, and Stricker triggering bass from a Yamaha CS-15 from his kick drum, with later overdubs of smashing metallic lids.

"There are a couple of different guitar sounds at the end of 'The Great Beyond,'

both involving the Roland Space Echo," Moore says. "One was more traditionally recorded, with Andy playing his guitar through the Space Echo and a [Musitronics] Mu-Tron III envelope filter pedal into a Vox AC30 reissue. The other was recorded normally through the amp, but during the mix I ran it through the Space Echo, so that you can only hear the Echo and none of the original guitar signal. That created a lo-fi sort of sound where the guitar is constantly fluctuating in pitch and volume, which you can

hear by itself at the very end of the song."

Drum-wise, Midnight Juggernauts and Moore aimed for a tight, dead sound. "We actually recorded the drums in quite a big room, so we used a lot of partitioning and made this little box for the drums in a corner, so we'd get a really dead sound," Szekeres says. "We only used 1/20th of the room because we wanted such a tight sound. And if we didn't like the sound of snares or the way the drums were sounding, we'd try different mics."

"The drums were miked in a traditional '70s fashion," Moore adds, "using Neumann mics—U 67s for overheads, KM 84 for snare, and U 47 fet for kick. We also used Beyer M88s for close mics on the toms. And the album was recorded on a vintage Neve console using 1073 mic pres on every drum and instrument sound."

As for drum experiments, on the super-rhythmic "Lara Versus the Savage Pack," the group got a ringing, percussive sound for the choruses. "We brought a metal table from the control room out and had Dan hit it in time with the snare in the choruses,"



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Moore says. "You can barely hear it in the final mix, though."

And on "Cannibal Freeway," it sounds as though the hi-hat is panned to one side, but it's a sleight of hand created by the Roland VP-330 vocoder. "When we were first doing mixing, we ran the drum track back through that and then re-recorded it through its audio input," Szekeres says. "From the second half of the song, there's this layer of tinny-sounding drums underneath, which are the drums going through the vocoder. The VP is being pushed to one side heavily, and because it's tinny and doesn't have any bottom-end, the hi-hat is coming through stronger."

With such a long push and pull of the songs on *The Crystal Axis*—layers upon layers subtracted, added, and multiplied—it wasn't easy for the band to stay engaged all the way through the process. "I think that there's no greater feeling than that initial excitement and when you feel like you've either written something that you think is really working, or you first do some kind of production thing and come across some sound. It's really hard to keep that feeling," Szekeres laments. "You just lose perspective, and the longer you work on it, the harder it becomes. This album was a lot more difficult in that sense because it was a lot bigger production and a lot more tracked and layers and recording sessions over a long period of time, you don't even know if it's sounding good anymore or what the hell you're listening to."

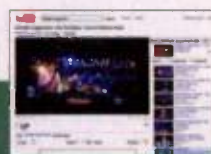
At that point, Szekeres and Moore agree, it's time to take a breather. "If a band is getting stuck or bummed out on a particular song, I recommend taking a break, getting some fresh air, and then returning to work on a different song," Moore says. "Coming back to a song with fresh ears after a break, or the next day, can often re-generate everyone's excitement about the song."

But when you're too close to something, sometimes space in between listens doesn't help retain the excitement. "Eventually you just get tired of it, and you realize, 'Okay, I'm pretty sure this is working,'" Szekeres says. "But you're never sure, not as sure as you are when you first do it. I don't think I'm really that interested in listening to the album right now because of months of dissecting and

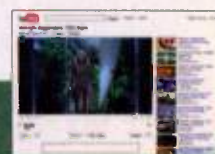
memories of hearing the vocal on its own a thousand times without any music. I think it is difficult for pretty much all musicians to continue to go over a song when

you just want to move on to writing new music without having to painstakingly comb through all these details. That part of it isn't much fun." **EQ**

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GRIT AND

Erasure's Andy Bell and producer Pascal Gabriel distort reality for *Non-Stop*

by Bill Murphy

"It's true I found myself having to pull back and come up with a different sound on this record," says singer and Erasure frontman Andy Bell, explaining how Mute label founder Daniel Miller urged him to switch gears from the soaring vocal lines and giddy synth melodies that have defined Erasure throughout the dance-pop duo's 25-year history. "If I was going to take the time off from Erasure, I was determined to try something else altogether. So the vague idea was inspired a little by Daft Punk and Miss Kittin, crossed with a bit of Ladytron and M's 'Pop Muzik.' It was quite strange to go into making an album that doesn't sound like me, but it was big fun in the studio."

Starting about two years ago, Bell began fleshing out demos with Stephen Hague and then Jon Collyer, both of whom had worked with Erasure in the past. The sessions were fruitful, but it wasn't until Bell re-connected with Belgium-born (and London-based) producer Pascal Gabriel—known for his groundbreaking acid/breakbeat collaborations with S'Express and Tim

Simenon's Bomb the Bass, as well as more recent projects with Kylie Minogue, Bebel Gilberto, Miss Kittin, and Ladyhawke—that the ball really got rolling.

"I did a remix for Erasure back in the late '80s," Gabriel notes, "but we hadn't got together since then, so I knew this would be a great

opportunity. Andy wanted to make a real hard dance record, very contemporary and very modern. Everything you hear now on the radio, from Lady Gaga to whatever, it's really crunched and cranked up—I mean, you look at the waveform and you can't see *anything*. So we deliberately went for that, with a variety of crunchy distortions in our sound palette,

because I think Andy was very conscious of not being polite with this album."

Indeed, *Non-Stop* is anything but cordial. The album's first single "Call on Me" opens with a simple three-chord ditty played on a cheap Yamaha PC-100 Portasound, then crashes into a double-helixed Korg 700/Moog Voyager bass line and a bit-crushed mid-tempo club beat (programmed with Sonic Charge's μ Tonic software, which Gabriel used to build at least six different "kits" for the album). Bell himself sings in more of a throaty midrange, with his layered vocals in the song's chorus immersed in psychedelic stereo flanges and a lo-fi shimmer of distortion. At times the vocals sound as though they were tracked hot, as close to a 0dB ceiling as possible with requisite clipping and compression, but Gabriel makes it clear he has subtler methods at his disposal.

"I always record vocals as clean as possible to keep all options open," he says. "I compressed just enough to give Andy's voice some presence, without peaking too high—nothing fancy really." Bell's mics of choice were either a vintage Neumann Gefell UM 57 (through a Neve 33115 mic pre and EAR 660 compressor to an Apogee Ensemble interface, and from there into Logic Pro) or a Sennheiser Blackfire 541 (through a Universal Audio LA-610).

After committing a few clean passes to Logic, the effects processing would begin. "We used a variation of things on the album," Gabriel says. "Mainly, it was Logic's Guitar Amp and Pedalboard plug-ins, but I also used a modified megaphone [see Melophobia.com/studio] that has a 1/4-inch input so I can send whatever I want to it and then mic it up. I also have a range of small amplifiers that I send stuff to—just so the track can get out of the box and take some air, and then I blend it in with the clean source."

For the liquid flanging and phasing that cycles through "Call on Me" and, most notably, the dark-sounding "Running Out" and the brilliantly catchy "Say What You Want," the vocals were blended in a similar



Pascal Gabriel in his London-based studio.

POLISH

fashion. "In the verse on 'Say What You Want,' Andy sang an octave below the main vocal, and then we put that through [Celemony] Melodyne and squarified it to make it sound more robotic. There's a Korg 700 line following him very quietly as well—it ends up sounding almost like a Peter Dinklage-style talkbox. I remember spending hours just moving things about until each syllable would match up with the synth."

Gabriel would also turn to Logic's Sample Delay plug-in, as well as Universal Audio's emulation of the Roland Dimension D (usually at the highest of four possible "mode" settings), for more effects options throughout *Non-Stop*. "I usually have three tracks for the lead vocal," he says. "I'll mix the clean one in the middle, with the effected tracks in stereo so you get this kind of otherworldly left-and-right swimming thing going on in your head."

Bell himself took immediately to Gabriel's experimental touch. "One thing I quite like is de-tuning the vocals a bit," he explains, "so you have a sharp one just above you and a flat one underneath, and then mixing those together. Pascal would show me amazing things like that, and more often than not I'd go with his first idea because it would work so well with the track."

Logic's Pitch Correction function, softened with low-level doses of the Chorus and Ensemble plug-ins, does the trick, as heard in the Bowie-esque "Subject/Object" (replete with the cascading sounds of a vintage Roland G-707 guitar synth). Then there's the epic electro-punk chorus of "Touch," which opens with an arpeggio mined from Spectrasonics Omnisphere, and also benefits from a sampled-and-reversed scream courtesy of the classic horror comedy *Carry on Screaming*.

Mixed largely as it was recorded, and mastered for added low-end depth by German producer Pole (né Stefan Betke), *Non-Stop* marks a resurgent moment for Bell. Whatever happens, he's sanguine about the future, which includes an upcoming new album from Erasure and some guest DJ appearances in the U.S. "I'm always blown away by the finished sound of anything I work on," he says, "and with this record I feel like we did something amazing. It's difficult to break out, especially now, because music is treated so much like fast food, but I'm thankful that Erasure came through in an era when that meant something, you know?" **ea**



More Online



Watch Andy Bell's video for "Call on Me."



Pascal Gabriel on his Melophobia Machine.

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4 Classic Snare Sounds

Ringo's Dry Thump

For me, the quintessential Ringo snare sound is all over the "White Album." Who would think a muffled snare could sound so cool? The problem we face here is that Ringo's sound is pretty much impossible to achieve after the fact, so you have to record the snare already muffled. The hot setup at Abbey Road for the Ringo sound was a snare tuned loose, with tea towels draped on the top head. Not muffled enough? No problem-o. Ringo would just throw someone's wallet on top of the tea towels for even more ambience-killing thunk. Back then, the Abbey Road crew probably brought back some of the snap and grit by ruthlessly squashing the signal with a tube limiter. You can start experimenting with a 10:1 ratio, and just keep cranking it until you achieve the proper mash. To boost—or cut—some sizzle, manipulate 10kHz with a late '60s sense of freedom and abandonment. If all this sounds like too much work, stick an extra top head on the snare—as I once did by mistake—and marvel at how much the whole thing sounds like a muffled snare slammed by a Fairchild 670 tube compressor.

Crazy Thonk

Who says you can't have crack *and* wood from a snare drum? The Fine Young Cannibals 1989 hit, "She Drives Me Crazy," has a snare sound so distinct, it lodges in the darker recesses of the mind to the point you could name that tune after a single snare hit. While the original version was created using a combination of a real snare and a sample, a bit of EQ tweaking will get you darn close. Boosting 100Hz to 300Hz should give you some major wood, while boosting 2kHz–3kHz will provide crack for days. Compress with a 2:1 ratio, and apply a light dose of a large room reverb algorithm.

Bonham Bedlam

The massive success of Led Zeppelin afforded Jimmy Page the ability to drag the band all over the English countryside to record in various castles and stately manors in an effort to further enhance his spooky cred. Word has it the somnambulist sounds of doom from the classic track "When the Levee Breaks" were achieved by placing Bonham's kit in a stairwell, and miking it from several stories above. Of course, this type of excess is unavailable to mere mortals, so if the Bonham snare sound is the action you crave, a workable understanding of reverb parameters is necessary to recreate the vibe. First, you will need a room. Pick something big—like a large hall or a cathedral. Dial up a reverb time of one second for starters. Predelay settings mimic the time it takes for the original sound to reflect back as reverb, so for our Bonham Fest, 5ms to 25ms should put you in three-story stairwell territory.

Chad's Meaty Thwack

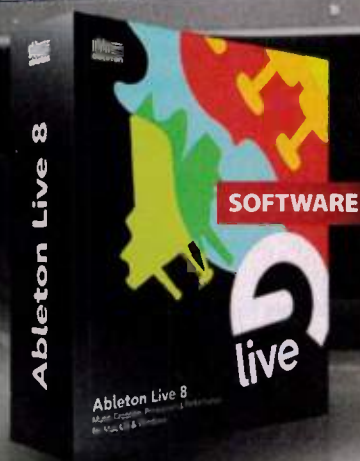
Another distinctive snare sound can be heard on "Give It Away" by the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Drummer Chad Smith whacks his snare so hard, it sounds as if it may come apart on the molecular level, so this treatment will work best with snare tracks played with similar ferocity. First, gate the track using a very fast attack time of 40ms to 100ms. Release times will require some tweaking, but start with fairly fast times in the 150ms range. The reverb on the track enhances the tightness of the overall sound, so go with a small, reflective room or plate algorithm. There is a certain grittiness to the quality of reverb on the track, so if you can dig up an old 12-bit Alesis MidiVerb from the days of yore—or if your reverb plug-in of choice has a bit-reduction function—give it a try. Keep the attack fast, and adjust the decay parameter so that the reverb trail doesn't step on the subsequent snare hits. Tube socks optional. **EQ**



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8 Questions That Can Save Your Session

If more artists had post mortems as to why a recording session tanked, they might discover the winds of defeat can sometimes be blowing before anyone even steps into the studio. Musical pre-production is often discussed as a necessity when making records, but it seems as if administrative and strategic plans are often given little consideration. Well, guess what? If you don't address some of the "whys and hows" before you start tracking, the musical parts and production plans may be insignificant, because the project might die before it's even born.

What Is the Goal?

This is an oft-forgotten, but very deadly question. Too many artists enter the studio without a clue as to why they are really there. Are you making a demo? If so, what is the demo for—managers, booking agents, label executives, or publishers? Are you making a master recording? If so, are you releasing the project on your own, having it distributed through a label, or handing the master to a bona fide record company? For example, C. Tricky Stewart defines his production role as "the liaison between a great song, the artist, and *what the label needs*." You need to know where your project is meant to go.

Does Everyone Know His or Her Job?

Sometimes, democracies can be inefficient in the studio work. In order to maximize productivity—as well as to steer a project towards completion without spending funds indiscriminately—it helps to have a clearly defined chain of command. Be very clear about the roles of the producer, engineer, and various band members. Collaboration should still happen, of course, but it's often best when all opinions and ideas are delivered in an arena of "managed collaboration."

Are You Working with a Good Engineer?

You don't have to be an accomplished engineer or producer to make a good record, but, if you're not, then you need to work with one who can capture what you hear. This means that the engineer with the best hourly rate—or the one provided by the studio—may not be the best partner to realize your creative vision. Never be afraid to spend the time to get to know the person who will be twisting the knobs for you—and make sure that person understands what you are trying to do.

Are You Aware of What You're Competing Against?

Learn what a "finished recording" sounds like for an acceptable demo, a rock record, a pop record, and so on. Compare your song to professional recordings and/or hits, and note all the differences.

Are You Building a Strong and Appropriate Foundation?

Depending on the genre, there are many ways to start a recording. In hip-hop and dance, the rhythm track rules. But for songwriters such as Jason Mraz and John Mayer, the recording may start from the foundation of a basic guitar and vocal track. Of course, songs can start all kinds of ways, but certain styles *do* tend to put more importance on one element or another, so make sure your work hits the style's sweet spot.

Will You Allow for Spontaneity?

Let go of preconceived ideas and assumptions, and let pure creativity guide the process. You can always assess and edit the ideas later, but if you set rules at the beginning of the process, you may prevent something glorious from happening.

Do You Know When to Surrender?

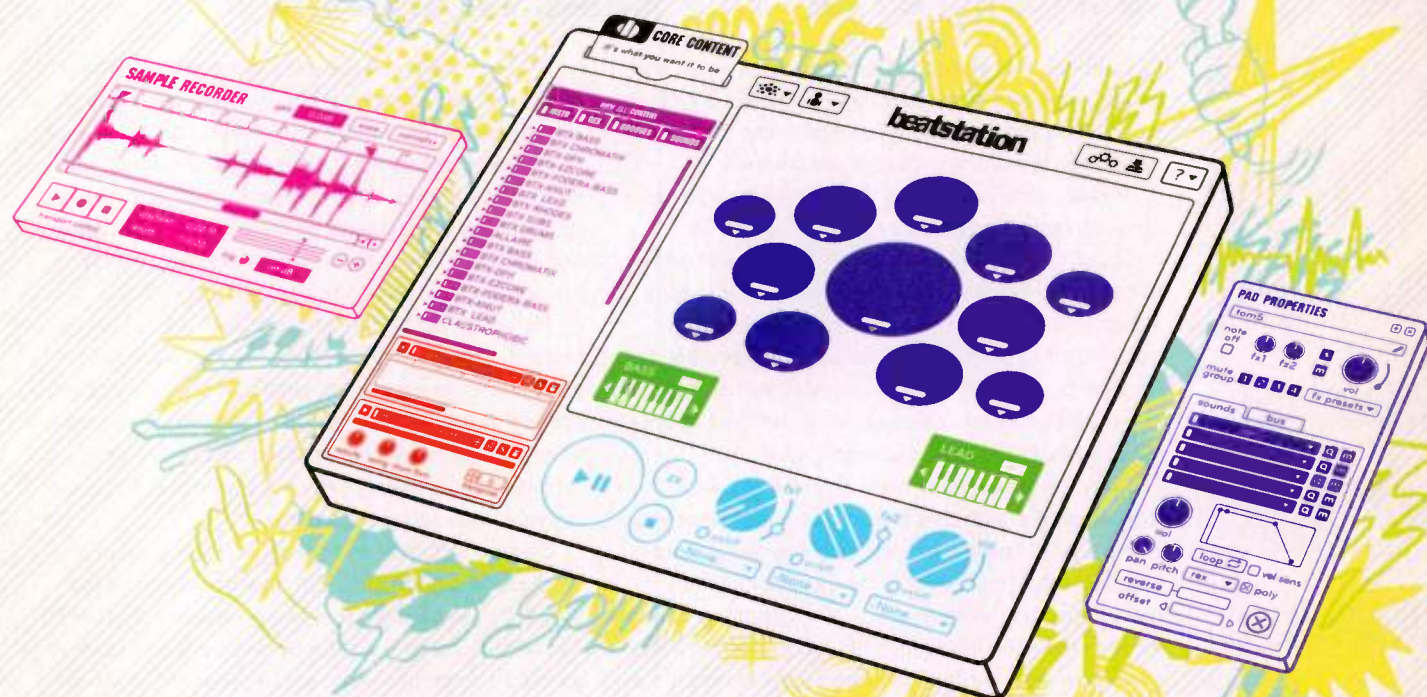
"Learn when to let it go when it's too hard to get," suggests producer/songwriter Robert Ellis Orrall. For example, if a vocalist is trying over and over to get something you'd like to hear, but they can't or won't get it, then move on. Your choice is to have them practice the part and try again later, or just let it go. Sometimes, doing what is attainable is preferable to getting a less-than-great performance on a part you desire.

Will You Commit to Being a Solution—Not a Problem?

If something goes wrong in the studio—and it will—be professional. Things can sometimes get heated with the studio clock ticking and musicians or clients getting anxious. Keep your cool. If it's your studio and you're the producer, the solution will likely be your call, but calmly detail your plan for getting back on track. Don't be too pushy or defensive or visibly confused or angry. If the person who should be in control seems out-of-control, then the whole session can spin into the abyss. **ea**

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Do You Really Want a Producer?

Are you truly stoked to hand over the reins, and let someone else steer your recording project? Are you fully capable of trusting and following the advice of an outside influence on your precious work?

Please circle back to the title of this article to make sure you understand the key word is "want" as opposed to "need." Some artists *need* production help (whether or not they know it), but resist it for various reasons. It can be an ego issue, a control situation, lack of funds, insecurity, fear, or just plain ignorance of what production roles and responsibilities are. Indeed, many artists may need a producer in the most desperate of ways, but still feel they don't *want* one!

Over the years I have been producing, I have worked with artists that fit every range of what you can imagine. There are those who seemingly want production assistance more than anything in their lives, all the way to those who are only putting up with the idea because the record label won't let them into a studio without a producer. I am happy to report that most artists fall closer to the former than the latter, as there is nothing more frustrating and futile than trying to collaborate with a non-collaborator.

In my quest to help you come up with the right answer to this question, I'll say that you are likely to be an artist who *wants* a producer if you find yourself agreeing with the following statements.

[1] You believe the theory that two heads are better than one, and that your strong suit is mainly one of a performer, whereas the producer is a director, pursuing all things that inspire, shape, structure, and finalize the collective vision to equal much more than the sum of the parts.

[2] You have a history of struggling to express yourself with great demos or finished projects that showcase the best performances imaginable, while maintaining a sonic value that matches the music perfectly.

[3] You have come to realize that the "one person does it all" style of multitasking is overwhelming, and actually brings less reward to the overall artistic pursuit.

[4] You feel that the input, energy, and focus of another creative force dedicated to getting the best out of you pushes you to higher levels of excellence, and does not threaten you simply because the ideas are coming from someone besides yourself.

[5] You admit to having "demoitis"—a tragic state of mental blockage that makes one believe a song cannot change from the original demo—and you can't shake it alone. Demos can be a blessing or a curse, so you've got to be honest about whether or not recording them helps or hinders the process of creating your final master recordings.

So now, you may be thinking that bringing on a producer is a good idea. But how do you know the chemistry will be there to make greatness together? If you want to test the waters by doing a single track or so before committing to a whole project, that should be acceptable to most producers, as long as it is a fair arrangement for both parties. Frankly, you test-drive the car before you buy it, right? Also consider that co-production can be a good approach for those who have great production chops, but who want to share the creative load with another producer.

The bottom line in any and all producer/artist relations is mutual respect, and the trust that both can bring the best out of each other. So do yourself—and everyone else—a favor, and don't hire a producer you don't have 100-percent faith in. In order for them to do their job, you have to *let* them do it.

I'll leave you with this well-worn joke among producers: If the recording goes multi-platinum, the artist is a genius and gets all the credit. Conversely, if the project tanks and sinks into the great unknown, it is clearly 100-percent the producer's fault!

So, do you really want a producer? **ea**

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Mix Headroom vs. the Mastering Engineer

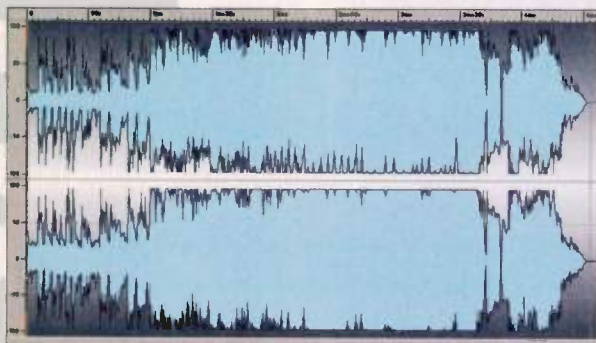


Fig. 1. Mixes like this are no fun to master, and they can't be mastered to reach their full potential.



Fig. 2. The peaks circled in red are clipped.

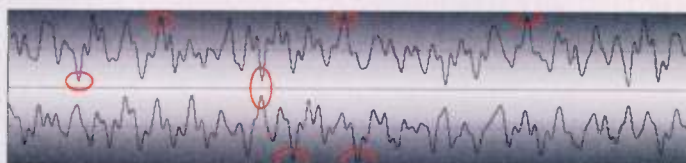


Fig. 3. The peaks circled in red have been severely compressed, but still sound better than being clipped.

If there's one thing a mastering engineer doesn't want to see, it's a mix that looks more like a sausage than audio (Figure 1). This is usually due to someone who straps a maximizer-type dynamics processor across the master mix bus for a "loud" sound, without realizing that it ties the mastering engineer's hands (who likely has better tools for making audio loud anyway). However, lately I've been getting something more disturbing: mixes that look a lot like Figure 1, but upon closer examination, have clipping issues.

Referring to Figure 2, you can see the waveforms are "flat-topped," which causes clipping distortion. One reason this happens is because the mix engineer doesn't realize that with digital, "going into the red" almost invariably generates clipping, so they don't get too bothered when the overload light goes on. But another is personal taste: Some people *like* the sound of digital distortion, and figure a little clipping won't hurt. But when this file goes to the mastering engineer, remember that mastering puts a sort of magnifying glass up to the audio. Once digital distortion is part of a mix, there's almost nothing the mastering engineer can do to remove it. The end result is a sort of fuzzy, harsh quality that robs definition and causes ear fatigue.

Now consider Figure 3. This also shows a mix that has virtually no headroom, but it's due to excessive amounts of compression and limiting, not clipping. The waveform peaks aren't flat-topped, but simply reduced in level. Although this file is still far from ideal from a mastering standpoint, and won't let mastering reach its full potential, it's better than clipping distortion.

Let the Mastering Engineer Master!

The solution is simple: Don't use any processors across the stereo bus (like maximizers), and set levels so there's plenty of headroom when mixing—I generally don't let peaks go much above -10 to -6 dB in my mixes. Mastering can always make it loud.

Some engineers balk at this, saying they like to push the output because it's part of their sound, and they like a squashed effect. In that case, sure, throw a maximizer across the stereo out, and mix away—but *bypass it before exporting the final mix*. Then include a note to the mastering engineer saying you want a really loud, squashed mix; they'll do their best to give you what you want.

As a mix engineer, get the mix and the balance right—but don't mix too hot and introduce distortion, or you'll just end up with a frustrated mastering engineer, and a recording that won't sound anywhere near as good as it possibly could when it's mastered. **CA**

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Home Brew ADR, Part Three

The situation recap: The studio is set up and ready to go. The talent is in the booth and aching to get this done so they can go to their Hollywood premiere. The director is sitting beside you in the control room wondering when you're going to put this magazine down and start working. Well, it's almost time to deliver the project, but we have just a couple of more things to cover. . . .

Dialog and Ambience

Make sure the actors mimic as much of the expansiveness or closeness of the scene as possible. For example, if the filmed scene shows the actor far away, using a close mic to record the dialog will probably sound odd. On the other hand, you have to stretch the aural truth a bit, because even though the actor is far away onscreen, the audience still needs to hear them. You may have to record the lines just a bit off mic—being careful to retain as much clarity and articulation as possible—and then add in some reverb to “fool” the ear into “hearing” the dialog a few feet back. The goal is always to be believable and transparent. Remember, great ADR does not exist to the audience. They should never notice how amazing your work is—they should just hear the lines naturally.

Getting the Lines Down

The process of the actual dialog recording can be tortuously slow. It takes way longer to get fewer lines than anyone would ever expect, so be prepared. Also, there is no way to rush the talent. Sometimes, they are great at it, but the process can drive even the calmest individual to frustration.

The talent will watch the film clip over and over again, and try to recapture the feeling he or she had during the moment they actually acted out the scene—all the time trying to stay in sync with the picture so

that their lip movements match the rerecorded dialog. It's a battle! Usually, if the actor's performance is close, you can often move the audio until it lines right up with the picture. The usual size of movement could be as small as sub frames. Subtlety is the key. There is no secret to doing this part—it's all trial and error—but with practice and patience, you will get good at it.

A Little Help . . .

There are some tools that will make your life a bit easier. For example, there are Synchro Arts VocAlign and Voice Q ADR that match a single audio part to another by using time compression/expansion. I like to mainly trust my ears and eyes more than automated items when matching ADR to the filmed scene, but sometimes it's nice to have a machine to tell you what time of day it is.

Final Touches

Once I am done with the talent, I examine the environments he or she is in, and set up what I like to call the “re-re-recording” of the dialog. I set up a speaker somewhere in my studio that will represent the room where the scene takes place. I make sure I have the correct surfaces and space necessary for a good fit with the ambience shown in the film. Then, I put a mic similar to the one used on the set, and in about the same place the boom was positioned in relation to the actors. I feed the newly recorded ADR track into this speaker, and re-record the audio onto a new track. While this is an extra step, it gives me the correct ambience that I need for the voice without having to use reverb and/or delay to create an artificial room. I mix the “re-re-recorded” dialog track in with the new ADR track, and—*voilà*—I have a great piece of dialog that the audience will never know was done off set. ☞

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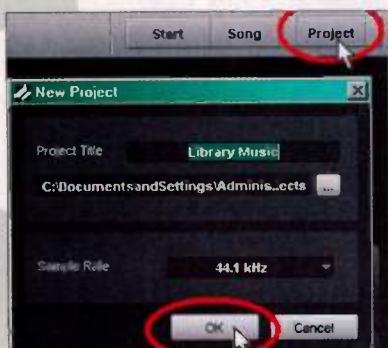
PRESONUS STUDIO ONE PRO

BY CRAIG ANDERTON

Assemble and burn an audio CD

OBJECTIVE: Arrange tracks in the desired order, add processors if desired, then create a CD.

BACKGROUND: Studio One Pro combines DAW-based song creation and mastering/assembly in one program. You can assemble songs created in Studio One Pro (or other programs) in a dedicated Project window, then burn this playlist of songs to a standard audio CD.



1

On the Start screen, click on Project. Enter the project info, then click on OK.



2

Click on Browse, then Files. Drag the songs you want on the CD from the browser to the Project workspace. They will snap to a 2-second pause between cuts.



3

To change the order, drag and drop songs in the Track column. The workspace adjusts automatically.



4

To insert a processor for a song, click on the upper + sign and choose an effect, or the down arrow to choose a preset combination of effects. Similarly, in the Master section you can insert Master processors that affect the entire CD.

5

After placing the songs in the right order and applying the desired processors, insert a blank CD into your drive and click on Burn. In the Burn Audio CD dialog box, enter the various parameter values, then click on the Burn button.

Tips

- Step 2: You can also drag files in from the desktop. If you drag in a Studio One Pro song file, the song will be mixed automatically based on current automation parameters, and inserted into the workspace.
- This Power App presents only basic CD assembly options. You can also add fades and crossfades to individual songs, use metering and other test tools, play through the playlist of songs in the workspace before burning, and more.

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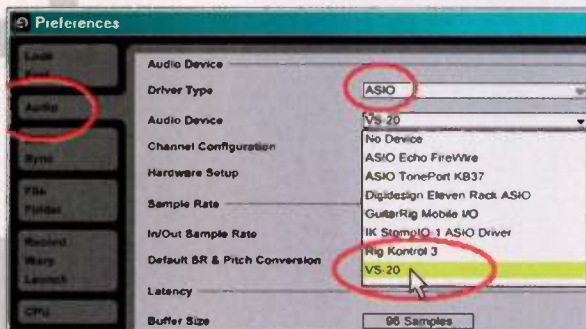
ABLETON LIVE/CAKEWALK VS-20

BY CRAIG ANDERTON

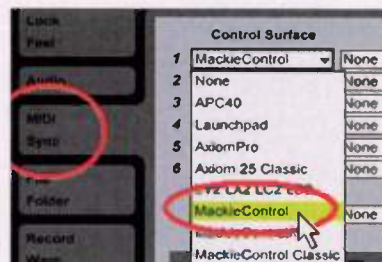
Give Live a guitar-centric audio interface

OBJECTIVE: Make Ableton Live more “guitar-friendly” by adding hardware effects that cut latency, as well as a control surface.

BACKGROUND: Ableton Live 8 added some great plug-ins for guitarists, like distortion and a looper. The VS-20 gives Live a suite of BOSS COSM effects, as well as an audio interface that's optimized for guitar.

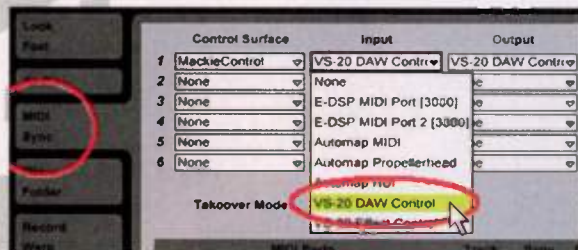


1 Go *Options > Preferences > Audio Tab*. Select **ASIO** as Driver Type, and **VS-20** as Audio Device.

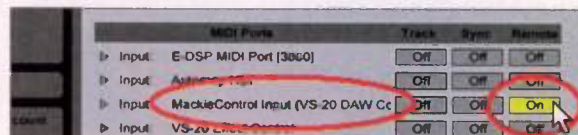


2

Click on the **MIDI Sync** tab. Under **Control Surface**, select **Mackie Control** (not any Mackie Control variations).



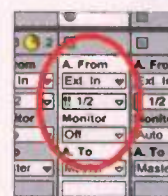
3 While on the **MIDI Sync** tab, select **VS-20 DAW Control** for the **Input** and **Output** fields.



4 Also while on the **MIDI Sync** tab, for the **Mackie Control Input MIDI port**, assign **Remote** to **On**.



5 The faders (red outline) map to eight consecutive channel level controls in Live. Track Group buttons (blue) choose groups of eight channels—1-8, 9-16, 17-24, etc. Track Select buttons (orange) select tracks. DAW Output (green) maps to Live's Master level control. Transport (yellow) maps to the transport.



6 For zero-latency guitar monitoring with effects, open the **VS-20 Editor** and choose your effect. Monitor the processed guitar with the **VS-20 Direct Monitor** control, and listen to Live with the **DAW Output** control. Set up your guitar input in Live for **Ext. In, 1/2**, and turn **Monitor** off so you don't hear the guitar going through Live.

Tips

- Step 5: Just about any VS-20 controls can be mapped as desired using Live's MIDI Map option, including the Patch Select and MIDI Backing knob (both outlined in violet), and the Track Select buttons (orange outline).

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THE BEATS GENERATION

BY CRAIG ANDERTON

You want beats. Your listeners want beats. And apparently the entire *world* wants beats, if this international roundup of beats software is any indication: You'll find programs from the United Kingdom, France, Finland, Sweden, and Germany. (But let's also give a tip of the hat to Americans John Simonton and Roger Linn for putting this whole programmable drum thing on the map in the first place.)

It used to be you had to hire a drummer to play drums. Well, that's generally still the best strategy, even if said drummer is hitting MIDI pads and triggering electronic drums. In fact, one group whose album I mastered recently recorded drums with a wonderful drummer in a less-than-wonderful acoustic space. So they used a combination of drum replacement software and MIDI pads, and the drums sounded fabulous. Granted, 95% of that was because of the drummer, but at least he wasn't sabotaged by the sounds.

These days, though, software drum modules are so good that non-drummers can achieve if not great drum *parts*, great drum *sounds* with little effort. And if the parts thing is a major issue, then scratch the surface of many programs, and you'll find some pretty cool MIDI grooves, too.

Ready to join the beats generation? Let's start.



Fig. 1. Beatstation displaying its outer space skin, and some weird kit I created.

TOONTRACK BEATSTATION

(\$129 street, www.beatstation.com)

Beatstation is Toontrack's "unified field theory" of VST/AU/standalone beat creation: It brings together drum, bass, and lead sounds into a single virtual instrument that has the vibe of being designed by people who had a great time doing so. The company's slogan for Beatstation is "It's what you want it to be," so let's see if it lives up to that claim.

User interface: The look is re-skinable, with pads you can arrange in various ways—show different numbers of pads, arrange them in a square à la MPC or as a series of floating drum pads, change pad shapes and sizes, do color-coding (e.g., all percussion as blue), show/hide particular pads, and even drag them around to different locations—see Figure 1. When you come up with a pad or kit layout you like, you can save either one individually. The little Bass and Lead keyboards are "special" pads that respond to MIDI note below and above the drum notes, respectively. And, all this is really easy to figure out—I didn't even need a manual.

Browsing: You don't show/hide the browser; it's a permanent part of the interface with four main categories for accessing the included core library: Instruments, REX files, MIDI grooves, and sounds. You can filter to each category, or view all content. Beatstation is very drag-and-drop oriented—drag up to five sounds on to a pad (including the Bass and Lead pads), which makes it easy to layer sounds. You can drag MIDI Grooves from Beatstation into your host, and vice-versa; even drop REX files into hosts that support REX file import, and drag REX files into Beatstation from your desktop or host. If you drag a REX file to a pad you can set it to play in different modes: standard (from beginning to end), sequential (plays one slice at a time each time you trigger the pad), and Random (same as sequential, but randomly chooses REX file slices).



Fig. 2. Dig deeper into a pad, and you'll find a lot of variable parameters. The smaller box lets you specify the pad size and color. And do you like effects? Apparently Toontrack does, too.

But, it doesn't stop there: You can drag individual REX slices onto pads. So if there's a REX file with a really worthy isolated kick sound, add it to the Kick pad. Or the hi-hat pad, for that matter!

The only disadvantage with dragging in REX or MIDI files from outside Beatstation's folder structure is you can't take advantage of the feature where if you click on a little magnifying glass in the file window, you can see the filenames highlighted in the browser.

Pad properties: Here's where you can really dig into editing the pad (Figure 2). Drag additional sounds in, set a separate envelope for each layer (as well as adjust pitch, pan, and level separately for each layer), do solo/mute including mutes for individual layers, make a drum part of a mute group, edit an ADSR amplitude envelope, loop a sound, reverse, offset, insert effects, and more.

Effects: Beatstation doesn't skimp on the effects. Not only are there lots of them—for example, 13 compressors—but there are effects slots within individual pads, another slot at the master out, and two aux effects (fed by the FX1 and FX2 sends in the pad properties page). What's more, there's a major surprise: sidechain-ing. Yes, you can gate the bass with the kick, but that's one of only many options; sidechainable effects are compression, gate, and "mastering" effects. This ups the ante for getting cool sounds, and it's something you don't find all that often.

Plays nice with others: Beatstation is compatible with all the various Toontrack expansion packs; if installed, they'll show up in the browser. But, you can also import MP3, WAV, and AIF files, and there's a new format (BTX) for complete Beatstation programs.

The Sample Recorder: In stand-alone mode, you can open a 10-second sample recorder (Figure 3). This listens to your default audio input, and its main purpose is to let you grab sounds that you can—you guessed it—drag into a pad layer. It's rather good at what it does, as you can trim a sample easily (e.g., cut off

"air" at the beginning), apply a fade in and fade out, normalize the signal, zoom in and out on the waveform, and change the level. Considering how many software samplers can't actually sample, finding this capability in a low-cost program is welcome.

Conclusions: While Beatstation definitely isn't a toy, you won't find some "pro" features like multiple outputs for each drum sound, MIDI learn mode for tying parameters to hardware control, and direct audio export (it's limited to either bouncing within the host then exporting, or dragging MIDI as audio to the host or desktop). But that's sort of like complaining that a cute little sports car can't carry a drum set in the trunk; a Maschine-like feature set is not what Beatstation is all about. The accent is on speed, fun, and efficiency—including the ability to bring in your own samples, and create unique sounds by layering, processing, or generally mutilating sounds.

Beatstation has a very high fun factor, and it invites you to play. It's the opposite of "intimidating," and Toontrack has done a good job of making it intuitive (if you get stuck, just remember two things: drag and drop, and if that doesn't work, hold down Shift, Ctrl, etc. as you mouse around. You'll find the answer). Even the sidechaining aspect is easy to figure out.

The bottom line is that Beatstation presents a different take on the subject of beats—but one that's fun, valid, and at this price, cost-effective.

EXPANSION BFD ECO

(\$199 list, \$149 street, \$99 with limited time \$50 instant rebate, www.bfd-eco.com)

BFD Eco is a lighter version of BFD, which set the standard for a huge drum library of multisampled hits. But, considering how heavyweight BFD is, it's not surprising that by "light," they mean a smaller Sumo wrestler—you still get multiple kits (all acoustic drums), a drum mixer, grooves, and processing.

Installation/authorization: The program is 58MB and the content 793MB, which install separately. You can install one of three 16-bit libraries: Full (1,978MB, kits with up to 24 velocity layers), Medium (1,357MB/16 velocity layers), and Small (600MB/12 velocity layers). Given sufficient RAM and hard drive space, go for full.

Authorization is done online. As to licensing, you can install BFD Eco in up to three computers as long as only one is running at a time, and you cannot use the sounds in a sound or loop library without permission.

BFD Eco runs on an Intel Mac with OS X 10.5.7 or higher, or 32-bit Windows XP SP3/Vista/7 (it should also run as a 32-bit app in 64-bit systems, but is not officially supported). Options are VST/AU/RTAS plug-in, or standalone. Drum sounds don't stream from your hard drive, so you'll need at least 1GB of RAM.

User interface: The window's lower half is static, and contains the 16-channel mixer (12 for drums, 2 for aux effects, 1 aux for overhead mic sound, and 1 aux for room mic sound) along with a global controls strip—FX bypass, MIDI learn, bleed amount, mas-



Fig. 3. The Sample Recorder app is available in stand-alone mode, and is perfect for grabbing samples.

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Fig. 4. The main screen, showing the Mixer and global control strip in the lower half, and the Kit page in the upper half.

ter tuning, etc. The mixer includes faders, pans, solos, mutes, output assign, etc.—all the expected features—and individual channel outputs, although I found the instrument mixer itself more than sufficient. The mixer faders and some drum controls are VST-automatable, but not FX parameters or sends; however, almost all parameters can tie to MIDI control through a "Learn" function.

Meanwhile, the interface's top half shows one of three pages at any given time (Figure 4).

Kit page: Select from 61 individual kits, 61 mixes, or 86 presets that contain a specific kit, mix, and set of grooves (more on this later). It also has a spiffy drum set graphic; clicking on a drum triggers the corresponding sound (no mouse velocity, though—you need a real controller for that). The drum sounds



Fig. 5. The Channel page offers a wonderful array of sound-shaping options, from EQ to two different effects.



Fig. 6. The Grooves page is filled with MIDI grooves; you can search based on multiple criteria.

come from BFD2: 5 kicks, 6 snares, 12 toms, 3 hi-hats, and 11 cymbals, with percussion instruments from the BFD Percussion expansion pack. You can't load your own samples, nor can you load drums not associated with a particular drum slot type (e.g., you can't load a kick into a tom slot). However, you can load individual drum sounds—though not presets or kits, due to the difference in basic architecture—from BFD expansion packs.

Channel page: Here you can warp each drum sound subtly, or beyond all recognition (Figure 5). Select a drum, and it shows controls for dynamics, damping, tuning, two aux send levels, and send to the overhead and room channels (some drums have an additional control, like blend, tighten, etc.). Next up: four-band EQ, with two parametric mids and shelf/bell options for high and low frequencies. Two additional effects slots offer 15 options, including fun weirdo stuff like ring modulation and lo-fi.

Did I say “acoustic drums only”? Play with the channel FX, and you can change them into extremely electronic sounds—

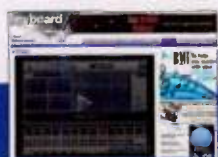
check out the audio example at www.eqmag.com.

The Grooves page: There are plenty of MIDI grooves to kick-start your creativity (Figure 6). Filter them by genre (13 different types), BPM range, library, author, and type (fill or groove). Play individual loops if you want something hipper than a metronome, drop grooves into the host MIDI track that drives BFD Eco, or drag-and-drop multiple loops serially into BFD Eco's “drum track,” which syncs to the host. You can set loop points, start time, quantization, swing, and humanization. Also useful: a “simplify” algorithm for making parts more basic, and if you come up with a really good loop you'd like to add to your personal loop library, export the track as an audio file.

Conclusions: You can treat BFD Eco as pure plug-and-play: Call up a kit, if needed call up a groove, and go. Done. Or, you can tweak a kit within an inch of its life, and completely change the sound. There are three loops at www.eqmag.com—one with straight ahead rock drums and some BFD grooves, another with an acoustic set that has a ton of dynamics, and the other with a custom drum kit and groove I did to create a totally electronic drum sound—which give just a taste of what Eco can do (note that FXpansion has given permission for us to post these loops as examples of BFD Eco, and you're free to use them in your own music).

Yes, the resolution is limited to 16 bits, but I didn't find that a deal-breaker; and despite being “light,” the full version does require some computer resources. But at this

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See a video tour of the BFD Eco interface.



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MONKEY MACHINE

(free, <http://rinki.net/pekka/monkey/>)

Yeah, well I didn't quite believe it myself, either . . . but if you have Internet access, you have a drum machine you can play with. Seriously.

Installation/authorization: Go to the URL above, click on Launch, and Pekka Kauppila's Monkey Machine will start playing (Figure 7). As to authorization, apparently anyone capable of finding the Internet is authorized to use it.

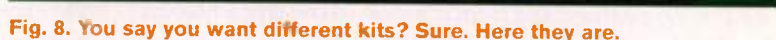
User interface: Each slot has three velocity levels—click once for medium, once more for high, and once more for off.



Fig. 7. Here's Monkey Machine doing its thing, with the website in the background.

Kits: There are a variety of kits to choose from, and wouldn't you know it, they sound really good. There were a couple times I came up with beats, and was disappointed I couldn't just click and export them as audio. As of this writing there are 17 kits, including vintage sounds like the TR-808 (Figure 8).

Other features: The up/down buttons didn't work for tempo, but I could type in just about anything and Monkey Machine could handle it—the textures you get at 1000BPM are not to be believed (and may be illegal in some states, so check first). The timing is solid, too. You can even tap tempo, add shuffle, and adjust the output level. What's more, there's an online database of drum patterns just in case you want something for getting started.



We reviewed Maschine 1.0 in the 06/08 issue, but

More vintage: Given the hardware's MPC-friendly layout, it's not surprising that 1.5 allows importing MPC banks and programs. But you can also choose a



Yamaha DTX550K—Express Your Passion

The DTX550K features the new 10" DTX-PAD with a Textured Cellular Silicone (TCS) head on the snare, real hi-hat trigger and stand, plus chokable three-zone cymbals—all at an affordable price. DTX500 Drum Trigger Module has been updated with new sounds and compatibility with the DTX-PAD. For quiet practice, playing live or as a controller for VST instruments, the revolutionary new TCS head's playability and feel combined with Yamaha's acclaimed digital sound technology, make the Yamaha DTX550K Electronic Drum Kit the one to beat.

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Fig. 10. There are far more sample editing options in version 1.5.



Fig. 11. When you import a REX file, you can see the familiar stepped pitches that trigger the REX slices sequentially.

"Vintage" sampling engine instead of the standard one, with sound options for MPC and SP1200 (E-mu's famous drum machine); the latter includes five different filter types. Many have claimed to duplicate the SP1200 sound, but having written the manual for it, I can vouch for the accuracy—which is most obvious when altering pitch on a high-hat or cymbal, and you hear artifacts like those generated by E-mu's "sample skipping" transposition technology.

16 velocity pads: For precise velocity programming, you can assign a single sound to all 16 pads, each with its own velocity level. This is more useful than it sounds when you're building drum tracks one at a time, as predictable

velocity control can lead to more expressiveness. And speaking of expressiveness, Maschine finally responds to MIDI pitch bend and mod wheel messages.

Sample editing. Maschine now allows deeper onboard destructive sample editing (truncate, normalize, reverse, DC offset, cut/copy/paste, fades, etc.), which as with so many Maschine functions, can happen in either the software or hardware user interface—and all communication is bi-directional (Figure 10). To go along with this, there's better scrolling and zooming. All in all,

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Maschine feels much more like a “real” sampler now.

Slice and dice: Version 1.5 imports REX files, but can also slice existing files based on dynamics, grid, or rhythmic value (e.g., every 16th note)—and yes, slice points are editable, with a great deal of detail. The improved zooming and scrolling comes in handy here too, as you can tweak the slice start and end with precision. After you’re done tweaking, as with REX files, you can see the different notes triggering the slices (Figure 11), and adjust velocity and position for each slice, as well as cut, paste, copy, and overlap slices.

Plays nice with others: Maschine integrates much more fully with hosts, as well as your overall studio setup. Drag and drop works for both MIDI and audio from Maschine to a host (but not from host to Maschine), so any pattern you create can become a part of your DAW project. This has several implications. For one, you can develop patterns with Maschine in stand-alone mode, then bring it into a project as a plug-in and bring all the files into your host. These can then drive Maschine, or some other sound generator. Maschine can also drive external MIDI devices, either from its controller, or the built-in sequencer; this makes it more of a “brain” for a MIDI setup, particularly as you can record notes directly into a DAW from Maschine. This is helpful if you want to use Maschine’s controller, but a different virtual instrument within your DAW. Furthermore, you can export MIDI files from Maschine, and when it’s time to save a project, samples can now be included with the project in a self-contained folder (major thumbs up for that one).

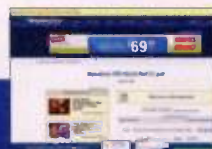
Workflow: You can assign the eight knobs to Macro functions, for example, bringing out several kick drum parameters to the knobs so you can tweak the sound in real time without having to go to specific menus. In addition to some new shortcuts for quick adjustments (e.g., change level and pitch for entire kits or individual sounds), you can load kits without patterns—great for auditioning different kits. And for live use, you can select a sound without necessarily hearing it.

Content: What would an update be without more content? There’s an extra gigabyte of new sounds and kits, bringing the total to 6.2 GB.

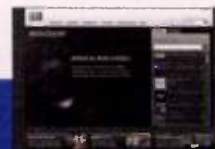
Conclusions: Maschine is not a simple program; although NI makes it surprisingly easy to use, it’s very deep (with lots of keyboard shortcuts), so you’ll need to spend some quality time learning how to exploit

both the software and hardware to the max. The payoff, though, is that you will have mastered an *instrument* that allows a huge array of options for creating, editing, processing, and exporting beats.

More Online

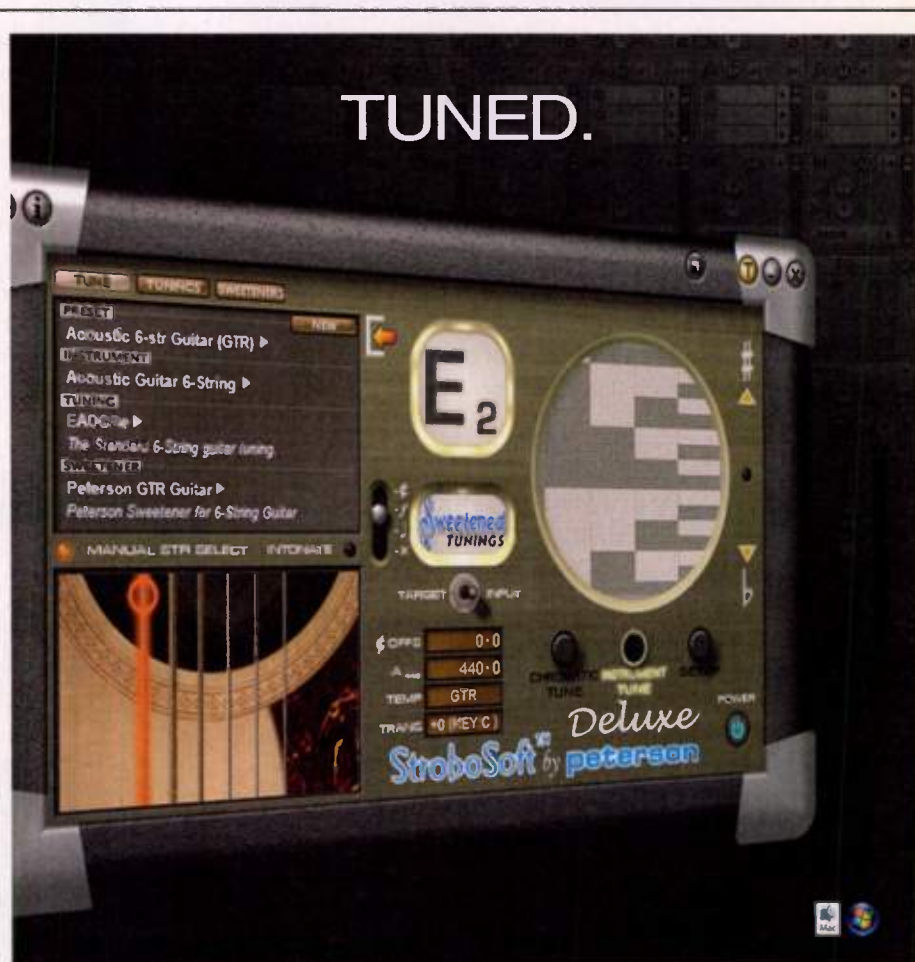


Check out the Hardware Quick Reference Guide.



Get Maschine-related video tutorials.

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People talk about how Moore's Law relates to hardware, but consider this: Ten years ago, how much would a software bundle with a DAW, a pair of virtual instruments, and several hundred megabytes of content cost? Well, it wouldn't have been under \$100, which is what we have here.

French virtual instrument maker Arturia has bundled a version of their Analog Factory software with 250 patches optimized for hip-hop, the "session" version of Applied Analog Systems' Lounge Lizard with four different electric pianos, Ableton Live Lite 8 Arturia Edition, and 1,200 samples and music loops from ModernBeats. The cross-platform package works with Windows XP/Vista/7 and Mac OS X 10.4 (Universal Binary). Let's look at the individual components.

Analog Factory: This VST/AU/RTAS (Pro Tools 6 and up)/standalone virtual instrument has two main sections, the Preset Manager View (where you browse and choose presets) and the Keyboard View—see Figure 12.

The Preset Manager offers a browser where you can filter based on various attributes, such as Instrument, Type of sound, and Characteristics. If you find a preset you particularly like, you can check it as a "favorite." Then, when you click the Favorites button in the upper left, you'll see a list of all the presets you checked. The only other significant elements are a Reset button,



Fig. 12. The Analog Factory Hip-Hop Edition uses the same engine as Analog Factory, but includes hip-hop specific patches.

which clears all the browser fields, and a User Presets button.

The Keyboard View contains the various editing controls, as well as a "virtual keyboard" for playing notes if you don't have a controller handy. The controls are basic: mod wheel and pitch bend, transpose buttons, level, filter cutoff, filter resonance, LFO rate, LFO amount, chorus/FX mix, delay, and amplitude envelope ADSR parameters. But there are also three cool aspects to the editing, starting with the four "key parameter" controls that control strategic parameters in

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Fig. 13. Lounge Lizard Session has that iconic electric piano sound in modeled form. Note Ableton Live 8 in the background, and the ModernBeats samples and loops in the browser to the left.

different presets. There are also eight snapshots that store a preset's settings for later recall; you could store up to eight favorite presets, eight variations on a single preset, and the like. Furthermore, all rotary controls, the four sliders, and the eight snapshots can be controlled via MIDI controller messages, thanks to a Learn function.

Analog Factory has had a good reputation for sound quality, and the hip-hop version is no different. While 250 patches may seem a little on the light side, remember that other elements of the bundle take care of drums, percussion, and electric pianos.

Lounge Lizard Session: Lounge Lizard was one of the first modeling-based virtual instruments that made jaws drop, because the electric piano emulation was so spot on. It still is, and although this "lite" version (Figure 13) is limited to three Rhodes-type sounds, a Wurlitzer, tremolo, drive, effect (delay, flanger, chorus, wah, vibrato, auto-wah, etc.), and three reverb options, the sound quality and effectiveness of the modeling remains at a high level.

ModernBeats content: In a way the package hinges on this, because hip-hop without drums doesn't make a lot of sense. But ModernBeats comes through, with human beat box samples, claps, scratches, three drum types (Dre-type drums, additional samples that sound more like the Neptunes, along with Acetone FR1 and Roland TR-808 vintage drum machines), 100 files of drum loops, and 100 files of more "ethnic" loops (all loops run at 97BPM). There's over about 325MB of content, and the samples are optimized to complement Ableton's drum rack option.

Ableton Live 8: Of all the DAWs to put in this bundle, Live makes a lot of sense because of its loop-friendly demeanor and how it handles samples. If you're one of the 14 people who doesn't know what Ableton Live is, go to the web site and download their demo.

Conclusions: Each element can stand

alone by itself, but the big issue here is value—you're getting a lot for your money. Granted, you're going to have a hard time taking it out of its hip-hop comfort zone; but then again, the package was never intended to be anything else, and does what it's supposed to do very well. **ea**

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BOUNCE, ROCK, HARDCORE

BY CRAIG ANDERTON



Prime Loops: Da Sound of Bounce

Part house, part electro, and part hip-hop, this isn't just about loops but also samples and programs for Reason NN-XT, Steinberg HALion, Logic EXS, Cakewalk SFZ, and NI Kontakt formats.

Loop-wise, you get 22 bass, 57 drums, and 37 synth. One-shots are 39 FX, 91 synth, 54 vocal (hey, oh yeah, etc.), and 14 kits of drum hits. All one-shots include associated sampler programs.

The well-Acidized clips load perfectly in Acid, but in Sonar 8.5 you need to double-click on the loop, turn off "Beats in Clip," then turn it back on again. Saving the file preserves these changes. As to the programs, with most samplers you'll need to browse for the folder containing the samples; however, using the samples with SFZ instruments requires editing the SFZ definition files in a text editor.

The sounds are fun and very electronic—check out the online audio example. The sampler programs are very helpful, as there aren't that many variations on particular loop styles—augmenting them with your own playing helps bring the music alive.

Bottom line: If you want pure bounce, or loops to bring into electro or related types of dance music, *Da Sound of Bounce* provides value and variety.

Contact: Prime Loops, www.primeloops.com

Format: Downloadable; 524 files (over 500MB) of 44.1kHz/24-bit loops, hits, and sampler programs

Price: \$39

Big Fish Audio: Crank'd—Urban Rock

Imagine a TV producer's brainstorm for a 21st-century sitcom: "We'll have these roommates—a synth-playing rap guy, an industrial dude who worships NIN, a rock drummer raised on hip-hop and Zep, and a guitarist who likes Kraftwerk—and get them into all kinds of crazy situations!" Then imagine that the TV show flops, but the guys all get along and decide to make a sample library.

Welcome to *Crank'd*.

This library has the Acidizing/Apple Loops thing down, so mixing and matching works well. Each kit also has some deconstructed drum loops—just kick and snare, high-hats only, etc.—making it even easier to mix things up.

Put away your bit-crushing plug-ins for this library; that industrial/lo-fi sound is baked into the tracks. The vibe is a tad scary (24 of the 30 construction kits are minor key), but not too menacing. Of course you can stay within the confines of the kits, but many loops work with a variety of musical genres.

I haven't heard anything quite like this library, and I always appreciate originality. While a niche product, if you want to go urban while maintaining a rock base with a bit of electronics, *Crank'd* fills that niche superbly.

Contact: Big Fish Audio, www.bigfishaudio.com

Format: DVD-ROM with 1.43GB (626 loops and one-shots) of unique 24-bit/44.1kHz Acidized WAV loops (duplicated for Apple Loops/REX2/Stylus RMX).

Price: \$99.95

Sony: X-Core Hardcore Techno Construction Kit

As in, *HARDCORE*: Think mid-'90s Belgian raves, using sounds set on stun and drenched with distortion and attitude. If that's not a familiar frame of reference, think of a Kenny G album—then flip *everything* about it 180 degrees out of phase.

The loops are generally short, so you need to take a more granular approach to composition. Also, there are no real folders of mixed drum loops, as you instead have individual folders with claps, crashes, hi-hats, kicks, rides, snares, and the like from which you can assemble complete drums tracks.

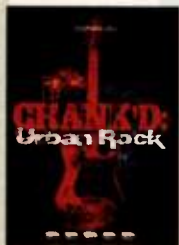
The shortness of the loops is not a problem, as there's plenty of raw material to work with—429 files, in 24 folders. Furthermore, much of the material within folders is compatible; for example, you can often slide from one kick loop to another, then back again, without any sense of discontinuity. The Acidization, editing, and organization are up to Sony's usual high standards.

So can you use these loops in other genres? I doubt it, as they all have "hardcore techno" tattooed into their very souls. But if you want hardcore so tough it can't be measured by the Rockwell Hardness scale, you've come to the right place.

Contact: Sony Creative Software, www.sonycreativesoftware.com

Format: CD-ROMs with 555MB of Acidized WAV files; 16-bit, 44.1kHz

Price: \$39.95





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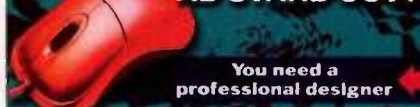
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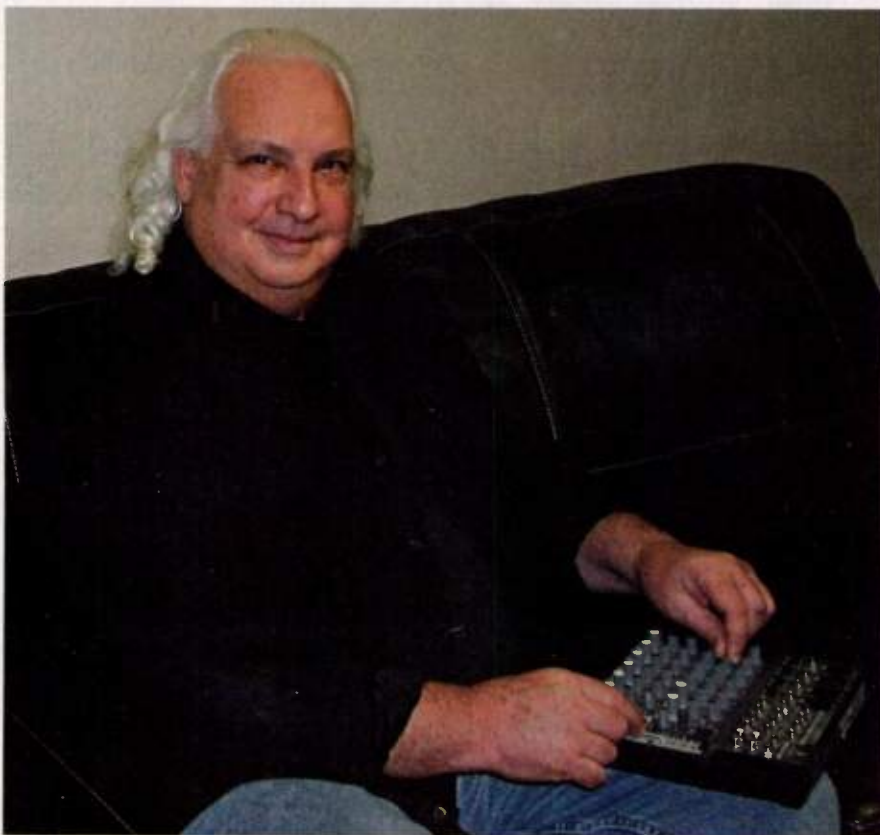
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ENGINEERING EARS

BY SHELLY YAKUS



I worked for my dad's studio in Boston, and I learned to hear doing tape copies. That ear training stayed with me for life. Getting a job in New York at A&R Recording and assisting Roy Cicala and other great engineers was the beginning of me learning to make competitive records.

I learned that I am not the group, the producer, record label, or the A&R guy. I am a recording engineer and mixer, and my job is to get what's in the producer's head to come out of the speakers. From my early days of assisting many different engineers, I experienced some of them trying to make what I call an "engineers record." They ignore the producer and make it sound great to them. It doesn't work.

Working closely with the producer allows me to make the right choices in mics, tonalities, power, etc.

Sometimes when the producer hears the outcome, he realizes it's not working. Then my job is to be "Columbo" and figure out what changes I can make so he says, "That's it! We've got it." Very early in my career, I had a major artist/producer say to me, "What I'm hearing sounds miles away from what we're looking for." I had to figure out how to get what they were hearing—because if I couldn't figure it out, they weren't going to ask for me again.

As an assistant engineer, make sure the food order is right before you leave the restaurant. Don't get discouraged; perseverance is the key.

As an engineer, know your place. Keep a friendly business relationship with the people you work with in the studio. If it's too friendly, they won't be comfortable expressing their needs when they differ from yours. And if you're offered a joint, don't take it. Because in about 30 seconds, someone in the group will realize that no one is flying this kite. **GA**

Shelly "Golden Ears" Yakus is the Vice President of Audio Engineering at MyStudio Audio Labs mastering facility in Hollywood. He has engineered and mixed recordings for John Lennon, Stevie Nicks, Alice Cooper, Tom Petty, Dire Straits, U2, and Madonna.

YAKUS' EAR-TRAINING TIP

Watch music videos and close your eyes for 30 seconds, and the audio will change sound to you. Open your eyes and the audio will change again. Then, listen to just the hi-hat and focus on that hi-hat until it becomes louder than anything. Then do that with other instruments. Finally, zoom out and listen to the whole piece of music, then zoom back in and listen to one instrument again. Keep doing these exercises, and it will improve how you listen.



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