

REVIEWED: Apple Logic Studio • UA Xpander • IK Multimedia ARC



Vol. 10, No. 3, MARCH 2008

ELECTRONIC • URBAN | PRODUCTION • PERFORMANCE

REMIX

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ERYKAH BADU

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ELECTRIC LADY**

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AND *EVERYWHERE*

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DOIN' IT IN
THE DARK

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DUTCH MASTERS

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She's got a fro that goes for miles, but Erykah Badu channels more than just Jimi Hendrix's trippy hair. Setting up shop in the New York studio Hendrix built 38 years ago, Badu got all psychedelic and freaky experimental and even recorded parts to tape. But unlike Badu, Hendrix never sang vocals into a Mac on his lap. He probably would have dug it.

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Right before the *Remix* photo shoot, poor Lyrics Born accidentally stepped on his cat and had to rush his furry friend to the vet. As his new album suggests, he really is *Everywhere at Once*, but when it comes to making music, it's a good thing. Fortunately, in the process of recording with a bunch of live musicians, artists and producers, no one was hurt.

44 Hot Chip By Bill Murphy

They seemed to appear out of thin air. Then suddenly, the members of Hot Chip were the talk of the town, and everyone went out and bought Casios. Now with their third album—which was *Made in the Dark* of their bedrooms, tour bus and London's Strongroom—the band took it to the next level and attempted one-take live recordings. The gall!

49 What's Up, Stretch? By Jason Scott Alexander

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You might think distortion is only for metal heads and emo kids, but quite to the contrary. With this tech feature, you'll learn about the dirt and the grit, but you'll also get tips on the softer side of distortion. It's not just for people rockin' like Dokken.

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Steve Jobs is so rich that he burns money in a diamond-encrusted fireplace. That's why Apple can bundle Logic Pro 8 with extra programs for half the price of Pro 7. Must be nice.

70 Universal Audio UAD Xpander Xtreme

What would you Xpect from UA's portable DSP system for laptop Express Card slots? Tons of Xpert plug-ins with Xcellent sound quality and interfaces? Xactly.

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In the cutthroat world of audio editing, Sound Forge had to up the ante. Now with multi-channel audio and mastering plug-ins, this little guy is bringing his A-game.

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Between these two sampled and modeled string collections, you can no longer whine about the cost of hiring a 30-piece orchestra. Stop your sobbing and use these.

80 IK Multimedia ARC System

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These breakbeats, electronic drums and epic house sounds will get your cardio going.



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Timothy Saccenti
Digital enhancement
by **Mal Torrance**

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HJ Kim, **Dr. Jennifer**
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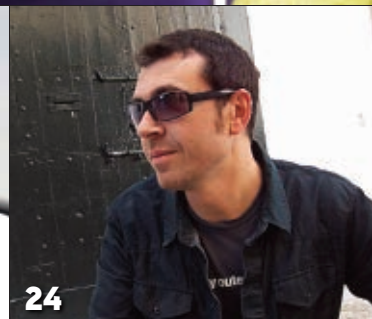
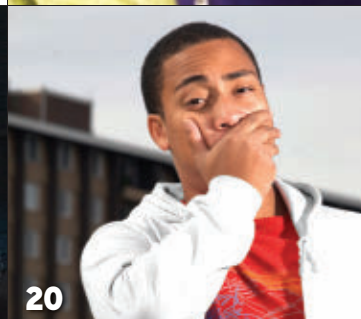
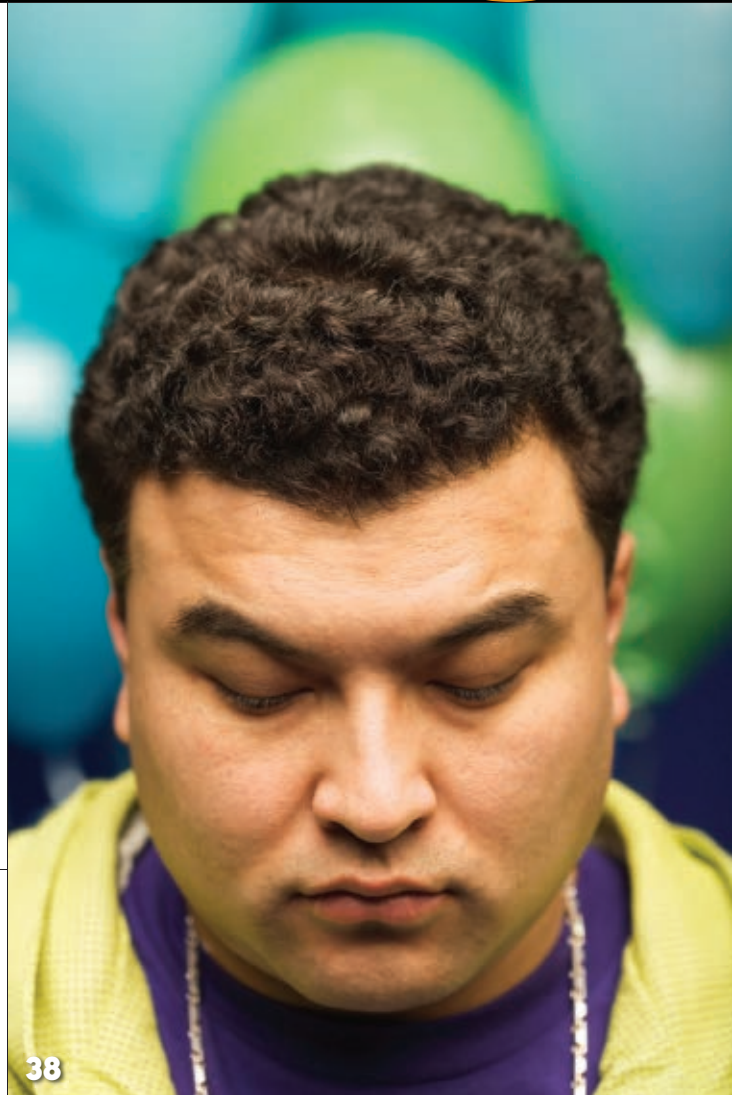
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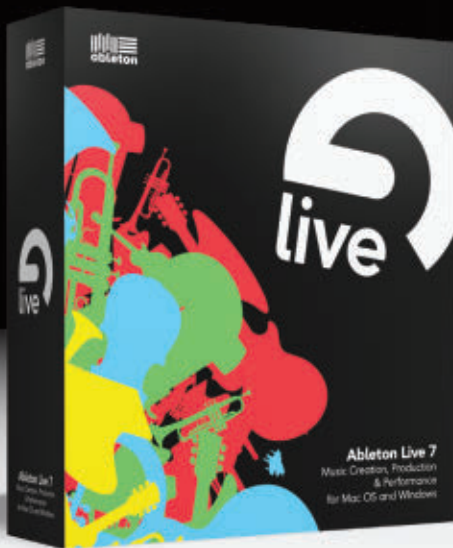
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MILES AND MILES AND MILES

For a musician, there's nothing like getting in a van with four of your friends and hitting the road. If you don't get the opportunity to tour nine months of the year—what with all the bills, full-time job, ties at home and, well, lack of tour support—to finally have a couple weeks to get out there is pretty awesome.

You can play shows in your hometown month after month, but when you're superfamiliar with the clubs you're playing at and the people you're playing to, it's a little safe and limiting after a while. If you really want to make your mark, you need to take a risk and perform in front of people who have never seen you live.

If you don't have a tour booker, the part that isn't so fun is lining up shows in cities where the club bookers don't know you. But if you've got some buzz in your hometown and have released an album or two, you can start to make relationships with out-of-town bands, bookers and fans.

Of course, as a relatively unknown band touring to a new city for the first time, there's a very real possibility of playing to four people in some dingy club with a crappy P.A., but you still need to play your best show to those four people. Sometime in the early '90s, a couple people I know saw a No Doubt show, and even though there were less than 20 people in the room, the band put all of its energy into performing and made themselves 20 new fans, who in turn spread the word.

There are ups and downs to touring, for sure. On my band's last trip to SXSW in Austin, Texas, we had to stay at some pretty awful motels, including one we lovingly called "The Crime Scene Inn." I'm not just talking about a hotel room so sketchy that you can't sleep under the covers; I'm suggesting that the dried blood on the sheets made me question my safety. We also had some interesting things happen in Deming, New Mexico and Olympia, Washington, which I won't go into so as to avoid offending the tourist boards in those cities. But even the bad experiences became fodder for funny stories when people asked, "How was the tour?"

It's the best feeling when you drive out of the rehearsal space parking lot with a ton of gear, a cooler full of food and some excited bandmates ready for the road. As you'll read in this month's "Band Aid" column, touring is an important part of building your "brand" as a band, but it doesn't have to be a chore.

If you're like me, you'll save up all your vacation days like a fat, greedy squirrel gathers nuts and play in any city that'll have you. After all, touring is how the artists featured in this issue got to where they are now. By the time you read this, I'll be gone...to Texas or bust. There are more crappy motels and In-N-Out Burger joints ahead of me, but I'll love every minute of it.

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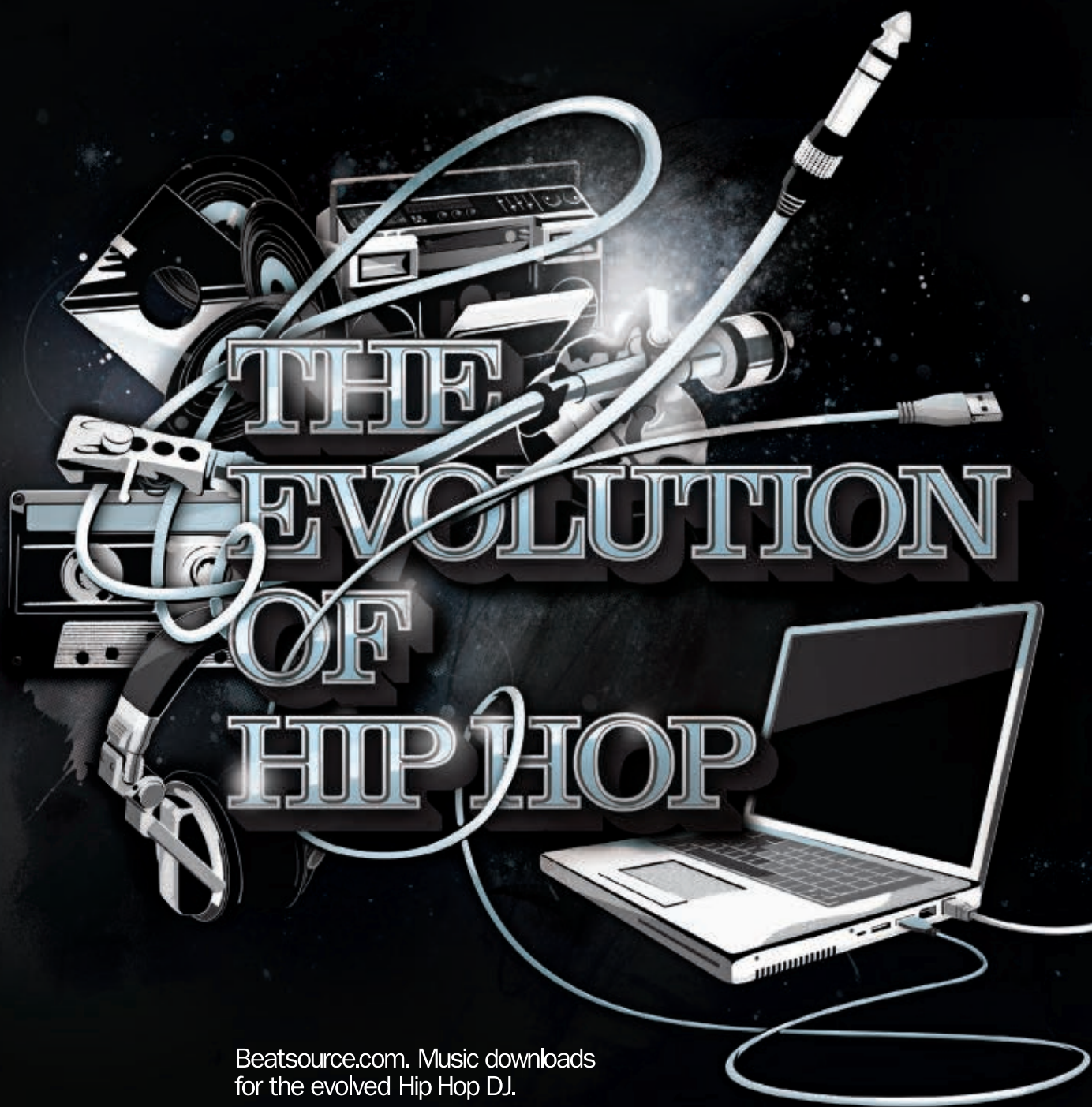
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LETTER OF THE MONTH

MUSIC VS. THE MAN

The year 2007 ended (at least for me) with one of the greatest landmarks in music history, and this is kind of what I read between the lines and throughout the pages of the December 2007 issue of *Remix*, starting from the Editor's Note ("Innovators vs. the Machine," p. 10) and the "Dreamweaver" Letter of the Month (p. 14) to the passion that Tony Wilson ("The Pied Piper," p. 98) had for the music as an art form instead of a gold mine.

Yes it is true, an artist has to find his way for a meal, but it is also true that times and technology are shifting the music industry, and on rare occasions, we are in the presence of events that forever change how the industry works. Cases in point: Napster vs. Metallica; the way independent artists try to distribute their material thorough MySpace; Radiohead's great slap in the face to the music industry with the release of their new album *In Rainbows* via a rare but creative "name your price" method through their Web page; and one of the best hip-hop albums of 2007, *The Inevitable Rise and Liberation of NiggyTardust!* by Saul Williams and produced by Trent Reznor, an album that was distributed on the Williams' Web page for free or, for a higher quality audio format, \$5. Both distribution methods gave us a long-forgotten feeling of surprise after hearing them for the first time in a legal and not "leaked" way.

This is possibly the response of musicians to the industry for selling sometimes one fair song with 12 other forgettable songs of a profitable but not innovative artist, or maybe it's the need for real artists to just get their material out there and forget about the middleman, allowing them to regain control of their material and to let you decide what you want to pay or not pay for their art.

Oh yes, these are great landmarks in the world of music, a tap in the back that reminds us of the art form and gives us the inspiration to keep working in the basement, on a bus ride or while sipping coffee at 3 a.m.

Thanks for your great magazine; without it, I would not find a lot of my inspiration, and I also bet a lot of us bedroom musicians would still be trying to splice tape rather than use an MPC2500.

Jorge Ortiz
El Paso, Texas

For sending in this month's winning letter, **Jorge Ortiz** wins his own **KRK Systems VXT4** monitors (MSRP: \$399). If you send in the most inspired correspondence next month—or simply the letter we like best—you'll win the **Delphi SKYFi3** satellite radio (MSRP: \$199.99). All you have to do is send a letter to remixeditorial@remixmag.com. Please include your full mailing address.



TOO MUCH LOVE

My main goal in writing is to express how much I love *Remix* magazine and to ask the editors a question.

First off, I started getting your magazine for free after I placed an order (for an M-Audio Oxygen MIDI controller, Key Rig and Drum & Bass Rig) from novamusik.com. After reading it for a few months, I'm hooked, and I will definitely be renewing my subscription.

I love music to death. And I've been able to make a decent living off of it thus far (I'm a 19-year-old saxophonist). My main point in writing this is to basically say that lately I've been wondering if the music industry is being oversaturated by music. I wanted to get your perspective on this. Can there ever be too much of a good thing (music)?

I think the accessibility of music-making is both a gift and a curse because while it certainly gives us great acts that wouldn't be heard otherwise, it also brings in the not-so-great acts. I don't mean this to sound elitist at all. I could very well be one of the not-so-great acts. I guess it depends on everyone's relative definitions of "good." But going by my definition, I think there aren't that many good acts nowadays. And I say that as somebody from the younger generation.

When I look at my CD collection, I see mostly music from before 1990 and before I was born in a lot of cases. Now, I'm not on some "hip-hop is dead" or "music is dead" tip because there are certainly people still making good music. But I hate the fact that I don't want to listen to most of the stuff that's on the radio. Most of it is filler that has absolutely no permanence (and to me, little meaning). And sure, there are the Lupe Fiascos, Sharon Jones & the Dap Kings, Immortal Techniques and Alice Smiths of the world that will presumably stand the test of time, but for every one of them, it seems that there are 200 other no-talents who have a hot single and are gone a year later. To me, that is tragic because it suggests that music is a transient thing rather than what I see it as: food for the soul that lasts forever.

I know there has always been bad music, but I keep asking myself if the incarnation of the home studio has led to an abundance of it. What do you all think?

Joseph Edwards
Upper Marlboro, Md.

Hey Joseph—Well, we're opening up a can of worms with this one. Let's just hope that the cream keeps rising to the top!—The Editors

STRAIGHT DOO-DOO

First of all, I would like to say I love your mag, man, straight up and down. I'm writing this letter as a consumer and wannabe producer of music in training. My main genre is hip-hop, with a little taste for the other flavors. It seems to be coming along.

Anyway, I purchased a copy of your November



2007 issue with the RZA on the cover. It was that issue, plus being a fan of Wu-Tang, that made me anticipate the release of *8 Diagrams*. So I bought it, with every inkling of being sent back to *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* and beyond. But after the hiatus of all the members, solo projects and listening to the damn thing three times, I concluded that *8 Diagrams* is more like the cooking of Thelma Evans from *Good Times*: just horrible!

I know this is just one person's opinion, and that's cool. But for once I would like music to have a fire sale—everything must go! What if there were no soft synths, USB this and that—you know, the stuff that seems to make up today's music production? What if these fly-by-night Best Buy computer-buying producers had to do it the old-fashioned way, with a sampler, a couple of records, some keyboard sounds and a little thing we call creativity? Could they do it? I really doubt it. Yes, it works for some, but come on, have you heard the radio lately? It's straight doo-doo.

With all that equipment RZA had on *8 Diagrams* and his knowledge, he still makes a crappy-ass album? That's *bad*. I might as well just sell my Ensoniq ASR-10 and go get a computer to produce a better album. With all the cookie-cutter, stupid-dance, white sunglasses-wearing, platinum plaque for ringtone sales artists out there—are you serious?

So I'm rededicating myself to becoming a top-notch producer, taking more risks, being more creative and more spontaneous, no matter what roadblocks come my way. I'm going to do it my way—take no prisoners, love me or hate me. When you hear my music, you're going to get 100-percent hot sauce flavor out the gate. Not album sales, video vixens, cubic zirconia chains or rented Rolls-Royce Phantoms; none of that—it's old and tired already! Step your game up!

Charles R. Frank II (aka Dark Knight)
San Antonio, Texas



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TRIPNOLICS



It was a perfect evening in downtown Los Angeles: unusually clear night, unusually beautiful skyline, unusually traffic-free, unusually cheap parking (\$4? *what!?*) and, appropriately, one of the most unusual events to hit this jaded plastic city in quite some time.

All that was known beforehand was that Plaid and Tokyo's the Cornelius Group would be performing in "Man Machine in the Digital City," the latest installment of Concrete Frequency, a Walt Disney Concert Hall series that "celebrates the symbiotic relationship between music and the urban environment; a multidisciplinary festival designed to examine and celebrate the elements that define a city and how those qualities are affected by, and reflected in, music and art."

Plaid's Ed Handley and Andy Turner took their stations in front of their laptops and immediately dropped in with a strangely soothing ambient soundscape composed of tweaked blips and bleeps. But then the bass kicked in, and the psilocybin we didn't ingest began to take effect. All of a sudden we were immersed in a dirty, industrial, digital jungle replete with primal drums and purple arrows, wah bass on a blue laser bridge and static-y pings in a gold maze. A bit trippy, huh?

Whereas Plaid sequestered attendees within their industrial machine, the four members of the Cornelius Group gathered around their instruments and supersonically stocked effects pedals, keyboards, voice boxes, a weird violin/piano contraption, wind chimes and a plethora of gizmos and gadgets garnished with multicolored blinking lights, and took us outside of the machine for a breath of fresh air.

That was when the audience was treated to a different kind of aural and visual journey, from the serenity of the mountains to the chaos of a million moths and blabbing mouths. There were tons of bizarre images: a lollipop spinning on someone's tongue while a clip of Jimi Hendrix popped up with Japanese subtitles running across the bottom, pharaohs and graffiti, freeway tunnels running through grooving surge protectors, organic circuitry, pet people-rocks waltzing with cockroaches, dancing sugar cubes and a DNA strand unweaving with coins dropping from it. In a word? Freaky.

You see, it's like this: Although the music was ever-present, it took a while to get used to the idea that the focus was meant to lie elsewhere—particularly the lighting schemes and oversize screens that dotted the venue. Plaid and the Cornelius Group simply provided the ambience. The entertainment was created within everyone's own imagination, continually stimulated through the imagery and atmosphere present in a valley of ones and zeros aimed at overloading all known senses. Couple that with the Frank Gehry-designed venue constructed upon the math and science of acoustics so tightly distinct that a mouse fart would sound magical, and you get...well...rhythmic melodic punk bass pounding sensual Japanese lullabies, of course.

"Man Machine in the Digital City" was truly a unique event and an experiment that warranted and received not one, but two rousing standing ovations. Cornelius, Plaid and Concrete Frequency...you made a fan out of we.—*Wasim Muklashy*





Giant Panda

IMPRINT > TRES

Style: Hip-hop

Established: Chikara Kurahashi (Chikaramanga from Giant Panda) and Taro Aikawa created Tres in March 2004 in Los Angeles.

Artists: Blu, C.R.A.C., DJ Alibi, Giant Panda, Lightheaded, New Jack Hustle, Thes One (of People Under the Stairs), Y Society

Essential Listening: Giant Panda, *Fly School Reunion* (2005); Lightheaded, *Wrong Way* (2006); DJ Alibi, *One Day* (2007); Thes One, *Lifestyle Marketing* (2007); Y Society, *Travel at Your Own Pace* (2007)

Manifesto: "Tres Records, a label founded and run by artists, is committed to procuring the hip-hop aesthetic while exploring the infinite possibilities of the sampling tradition," says Kurahashi, label general manager. "Tres seeks out artists with the same passion and provides them a space to be creative and maintain their musical integrity by putting quality before quantity."

A&R Philosophy: "We appreciate artists' craftsmanship, such as diggin' and the process of making beats, recording and mixing," Kurahashi says. "We want to work with artists who care about these things. Projects we put out are always something we can get excited about being part of. Yes, we accept demos."

Upcoming: "C.R.A.C. [a collaboration between Blu and Ta'Raach] has a full-length, titled *The Piece Talks*, due out in April 2008," Kurahashi says. "Giant Panda's second album, *Electric Laser*, will be out in May. You can also expect a full-length album by Newman (of Giant Panda) and Shawn Jackson's group, New Jack Hustle; Blu's second album; Lightheaded's third album; and 12-inch singles by these artists and some vinyl-only projects. We have the desire to keep vinyl alive."

Contact: Tres Records, 3325 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 716, Los Angeles, CA 90010; (213) 382-7949; info@tresrecords.com; www.tresrecords.com; www.myspace.com/tresrecords

FUTURE GEAR

Who says you can't look into your future? At the annual NAMM Show at the Anaheim Convention Center in Anaheim, Calif., you can. Every year, a fair share of the coolest musical instrument and pro audio hardware and software makers trot out the new gear that will change the way you make and perform music...that is, once it becomes available. Most of the time it's a bit of a tease because the stuff is not yet shipping, and this year's show—which took place Jan. 17–20—was no different.

A full buffet of mouth-watering treats for DJing, producing tracks and just plain rocking out were commonly earmarked for release at the end of February, but a couple of tantalizing virtual instruments will take even longer. Spectrasonics debuted its amazing, huge-sounding Omnisphere (\$499)—the heir to the popular Atmosphere ambient synth—but it's not scheduled for sale until Sept. 15. EastWest was a little more vague when it said that its kooky and cool Forbidden Planet sample-based morphing synth—aimed at composers and forward-thinking musicians—would be available "not anytime soon." In the past, that has meant up to a year of impatient waiting. For a tasty hardware temptation, there was the Vestax VCM-600, a beautiful DAW control surface with tight integration specifically for Ableton Live, available in June.

Fortunately, there were plenty of eye-popping toys at NAMM that were much closer to the counter; for a first look at some of them, check out New Products on page 62. See also the *Remix/Mix/EM* NAMM site at <http://emusician.com/ms/namm08> for full coverage and videos.—Markkus Rovito



WHERE MY LADIES AT?

Seeing the need for an outlet for female producers, Tachelle "Shamash" Wilkes started femmxxx.com, a site dedicated to lady producers, MCs and DJs. On Femmxxx's *Lady Beat Makers Vol. 1* DVD (check it out at myspace.com/ladybeatmakersfilm), ladies in the studio give advice about getting in the game. An inspirational case in point: "Everyday you have you work," says producer Shakti, "whether you're getting a check, whether you're signed or whether your stuff is getting airplay or not." To get involved, join Femmxxx's chat room and help keep the ladies marching forward.—Kylee Swenson



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what moves you

THE OLD DAYS

Canada's visionary hip-hopper revisits his youth while holding down the club

To modern society, 21-year-old Rollie Pemberton may seem a little behind the times. The Edmonton, Alberta native doesn't have a driver's license, and he just recently learned how to ride a bike. Despite miss-

ing out on a few regularities of urban living, this MC/producer/DJ known as Cadence Weapon has been way ahead of the game when it comes to video games and music—two undeniable staples of his youth. Since only age 4, he enjoyed Nintendo and absorbed classic hip-hop and dance records played by his dad, Teddy Pemberton, a pioneering radio DJ in Edmonton.

"I'd just be [absorbing] stuff through osmosis in the house," Pemberton recalls. "I'm coming to grips with it more now, and it's kind of weird for me, but my music is completely a sum of the stuff that was being played around me."

These influences surely rubbed off on Cadence Weapon's debut *Breaking Kayfabe* (Upper Class, 2006) and especially with his sophomore LP, *Afterparty Babies* (Anti-/Epitaph, 2008). This danceable, party-worthy and somewhat personal release is inspired heavily by Pemberton's recent experiences as a club DJ, but even more so the sounds of his childhood. Take the track "Limited Edition OJ Slammer," in which the collaged 8-bit blips, bleeps, synths and handclapping drums make for a fun slice of nostalgia. "That [track is] a direct cross between video-game music and electro-funk from the '80s," he says. "It's literally the two things I was probably listening to [back then]."

Afterparty Babies isn't entirely about revisiting the past. Although regardless of the reference point, Cadence Weapon's most notable strength as a beat-maker is his ability to cleverly chop and combine untapped samples—a style he picked up by listening to productions from the Wu-Tang's RZA and trip-hop king Tricky. Using his simple home computer setup—consisting of Adobe Audition 1.5, Image Line FL Studio 7.0 and Propellerhead Reason 3.0—Pemberton's approach to sampling is far removed from mere loop snatching. But as elaborate as his productions get, he tries to keep his focus on creating a melody.

"Whenever I'm chopping, it's more of a trial-and-error thing, but it's always based on melodic elements," explains Pemberton. "It's always based on interesting high sounds and interesting low sounds and trying to keep those frequencies in a way that makes sense. I don't have traditional musical training—I can't read music, but it's basically what sounds cool to me."

On "Messages Matter," a warped but bumping track with orchestral samples and reversed strings, Pemberton particularly puts the aforementioned sure-fire theory to practice, using his technique of looking for clean, loopable pieces that have a high or low melodic sound. "I wanted to make a traditional rap beat but with intentionally jarring shifts," he says. "When I get into the second part of the verses without the reversed strings, I am arranging my chops so that the ending sample of each bar alternates between a high pitched-up string sound or the low sound of a warbling man's voice."

When asked about further chopping methods, Pemberton opts to play *Remix* a preview of a track-in-progress—an echoed, video game-inspired joint with a crunk/grime undertone. Upon explaining the science behind this beat, he shares his method of leaving empty space in between the chops, which allows him to layer different sounds underneath the samples. "When I do chops, I like to put echo on a couple of them, and that kind of fills up the empty space in between the chops and creates a cool lag element to it."

Pemberton says his next album as Cadence Weapon will be more lyric intensive, and judging from the aforementioned new beat, less club-friendly. As he explains of *Afterparty Babies*, he didn't set out to ditch his lyrically reflective nature, yet he wanted to tap into his increased interest in dance music.

"With a lot of the new songs, I wanted to create a vibe, like a groove, and get people into it and have more chant-type vocals. For the next one, it's gonna be a more introspective thing. I have a feeling if people consider this album to be a sophomore curse, they'll consider the next one to be a return to form. [*Laughs*.]" 

“My music is completely a sum of the stuff that was being played around me.”
—Cadence Weapon



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THE LONG HAUL

Quirky UK duo plants the seeds of staying power on its own terms

When London's influential XFM radio DJ John Kennedy received an innocuous-looking disc in the mail in December 2006, he liked it so much, he immediately played it on the air. The song on the disc—a scathing spoken-word indictment on government, relationships and contemporary music over a hard, electro beat—immediately hit a nerve among listeners. Within a week, “Thou Shalt Always Kill,” by then-unknown Dan Le Sac Vs. Scroobius Pip, became the most requested song in the show's history. From there, the song virtually exploded on the UK music scene, spreading to the States via word-of-mouth and a wickedly funny self-produced video.

“People seem to know who we are [in America], which is strange as we've never been here and never released anything over here,” Pip says before hopping on a flight to L.A. for more gigs. “A lot of people initially will be coming along to hear [“Thou Shalt Always Kill”], but by the end of [the set], we tend to have won people around, and they're aware we've got a lot more.”

As the song—whose music took a brisk three-and-a-half hours to create from start to finish—achieved ubiquitous status, it was only inevitable that labels would start swarming. “Thou Shalt Always Kill” ended up being released as a single on Lex Records in 2007. But in the age of decreasing label reliance, the duo decided to forego all initial offers and make their upcoming full-length debut on their own. (As of press time, they had yet to sign with a label at home or abroad.)

“We didn't want to just cash in on a quick buzz, and then everything goes down the pan,” Pip says. “We're not

here to have one track and then go back to our day jobs.”

The duo, which hails from the tiny town of Stanfords-le-Hope in Essex, originally met while working at the same record store, but it wasn't until years later—when then-promoter Dan booked burgeoning spoken-word artist Pip for a show—that the two really connected. Both men had been in bands separately, but neither wanted the hassles of depending on other people. “I wanted to do something that all I need to rely on is me,” Pip says. “If I can get to a venue, I can do that gig.” But after listening to a remix by Dan of one of his tracks, “We realized people were more interested in what we were doing together than what we were doing on our own,” Dan says.

So if they work so well together, why is it one “versus” the other?

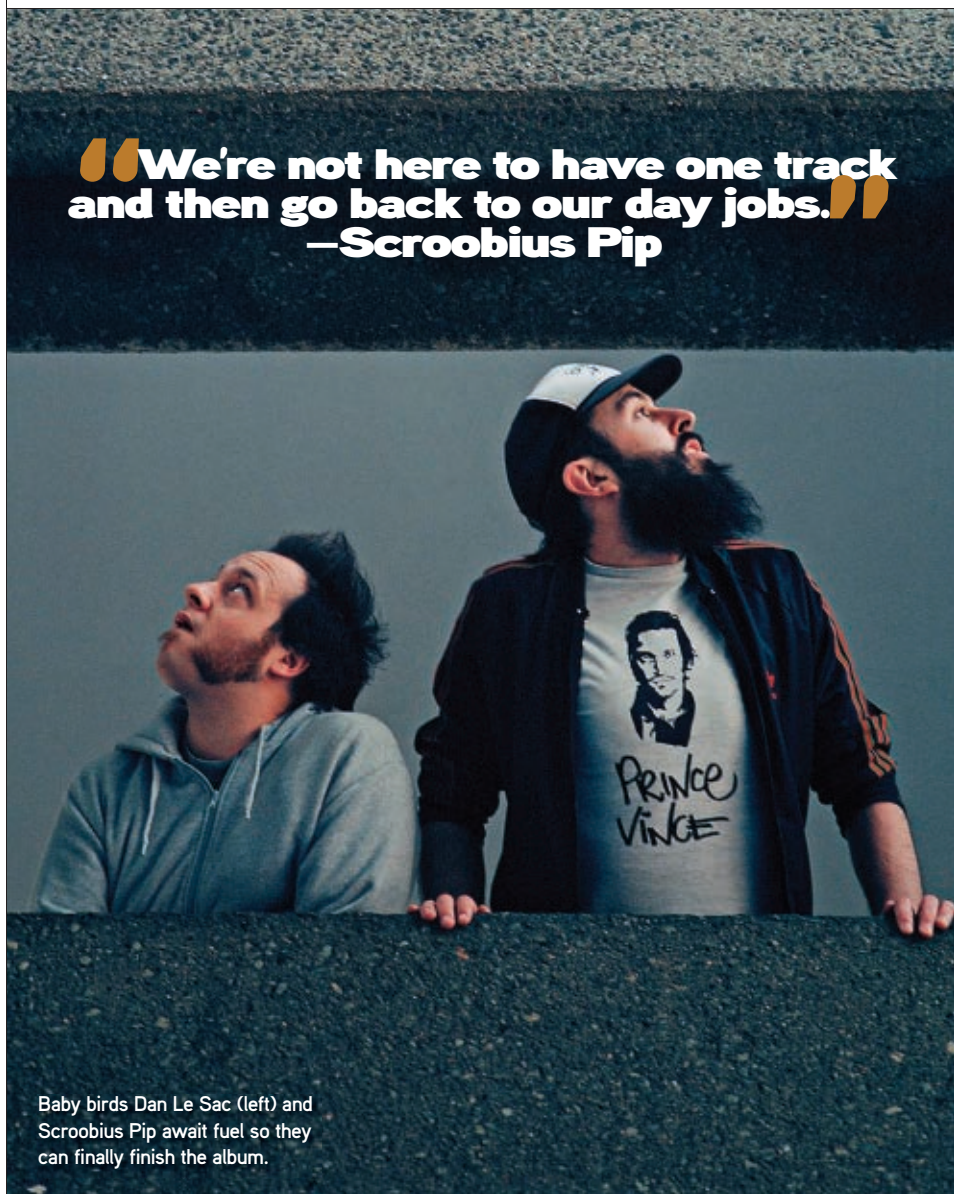
“We work separately,” Pip says. “It allows us to work really comfortably together and keep our own identities.” Over the course of six months, Dan and Pip would continually e-mail each other music and vocals, building on demos to the point that when they finally entered the studio to record their debut album, the songs were virtually finished.

On tracks like “Beat That My Heart Skipped,” Pip's spoken-word-meets-MC style deftly mixes with Dan's dirty, electronic beats. Dan admits, however, that getting that grimy effect didn't come automatically: “I chopped up this folder full of drum breaks I'd amassed over the years until I got this nice groove, but it didn't have the meat or the dirt. I ended up recording it through this really dirty little valve DI box onto reel-to-reel tape and then back off again. It added a bit of warmth to it, but just loads of dirt, as well. The main bass line is just nice little bass-y stabs on the Korg MS-20, and the main keys riff is Operator in Ableton, with me tweaking the arpeggiator rate so you get these faster runs that sound a bit like getting Power Ups from [Nintendo's] Super Mario Bros.” It's that grime that permeates most of the album, creating a raw yet dance-y vibe.

In the studio, Dan's setup is nearly identical to the group's live show. Using both a MacBook Pro and PowerBook G4 with Ableton Live 6 (“I haven't received my free copy of 7 yet...still waiting,” he says), the album is a synth-heavy product, with Alphakanal Automat, Korg MS-20 and Korg Polysix all in the mix. “I use the MS-20 the most,” he explains, “because of its modular nature. It's quite controllable to make simple bass lines, but you can really pull out this self-modulation. There's a ring modulator in there as well, so it gives it a real dirty bottom with interesting sounds without sounding overly soundscape-y or complex.”

With a planned tour backing up Mark Ronson and a highly anticipated full-length (as of press time, the album has yet to be titled) dropping this spring, the group has already begun to allay any fears of being a one-hit wonder. “It's quite nice to see that at our third single [“Letter From God to Man”], people are like, ‘Oh, hang on, they're still here! What's going on?!’” Dan says. “We're gonna be around for a little while.”

“We're not here to have one track and then go back to our day jobs.”
—Scroobius Pip



Baby birds Dan Le Sac (left) and Scroobius Pip await fuel so they can finally finish the album.

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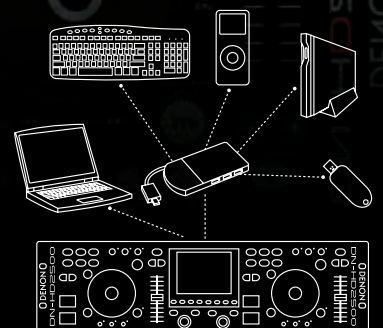
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LEASE ON LIFE

Chris Joss survives a freak accident and keeps the lounge sounds going strong

At 11, a young Frenchman started taking keyboard lessons. Self-taught bass, drums, guitar and a life-long fascination with The Beatles would follow—and Chris Joss' music career was born. You might know that Joss, who still resides in the quiet hamlet of La Rochelle, France, is an accomplished and ground-breaking instrumentalist, composer, producer and engineer; what you might *not* know is that he does all that in spite of struggling with ongoing tinnitus, plus a recent accident that almost cost him his right arm.

"It was a freak thing," Joss explains. "The mezzanine gave way in my home, where I have my studio, and I fell. I thought, eh, I only have broken my arm, but it was bad. I had a very good surgeon who is also a guitarist, but [the accident] still slowed my music."

Joss is understating this a bit. He may still be in danger of eventually losing the use of his arm, but it's made him oddly grateful. "You tend to think you are immortal, but I really appreciate each moment now, you know?" he says. While in the hospital, using only a notebook computer, Joss recorded a cover of John Williams' *Superman* theme song, slated for the new movie trailer; but due to time constraints, it was released separately by his label, ESL. Meanwhile,

Joss' "The Man With a Suitcase" was picked up for use in the *Ocean's 13* trailer. The accident also caused him to take four years to record his newest album, *Teraphonic Overdubs*.

Inspired by the sounds of the '60s and '70s ("There was a lot of freedom in people's minds then—you can hear that in the music," he explains), and by The Beatles' penchant for experimentation, Joss created the album at his PC-based studio with a Soundcraft mixing desk, an ST Audio soundcard and Ableton Live.

Instrument mics were of paramount importance. Joss favors a T.bone ribbon mic to record his sitar and double bass, which he bought at Thomann, a small retailer in Germany ("in France, no shops sell sitars," he says with a laugh). He also uses the T.bone for his Startone flute, which he plays most notably on the track "Magic Tubes." "I don't fancy myself a real flute player, but I can record a bit," Joss says modestly.

Meanwhile, his sitar can be heard on "Count the Daisies." "My sitar sounds are influenced by George Harrison," he explains. "Although, traditional East Indians would be horrified by how I play; I use a bass technique, with two fingers, which makes me able to play really fast."

Joss also uses a special five-mic setup for his drum kit: a Shure SM57 on the snare and SM58 on the kick, a couple of Schoeps on the overheads and a Milab on the hi-hat. And he's got very specific recording methods for his Epiphone Sheraton guitar and Fender Jazz Bass.

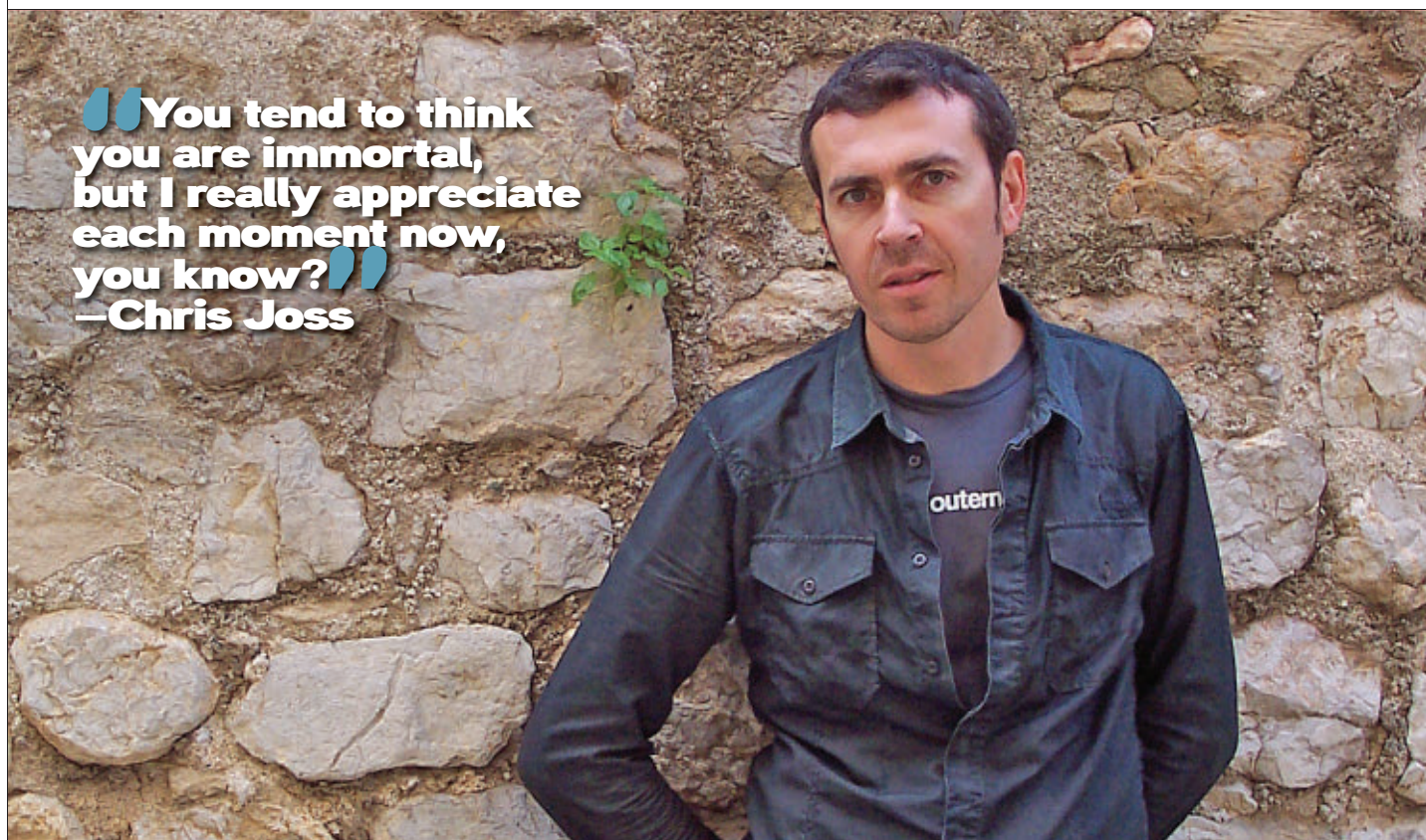
"I plug them through a Boss multi-effect SE-70 using light compression and an amp simulator," Joss says. "I go through the desk to hear myself before sending to the soundcard. I know the SE-70's amp simulator is basic, but I'm happy with it." His keyboards, on the other hand, are due for a revamp.

"My mother keyboard is on the cheap side," he says. "I'm about to buy a better one. And I use two very old sound libraries for plug-ins; I've had them for over 15 years, but I like them. I'm not even sure what they are anymore; they were converted from Akai to E-mu and then to HALion format when I switched to PC ages ago."

And Joss' dream keyboard? An old Wurlitzer he ran across on a recent trip to the States. "I wanted to get it, but it was too expensive, \$3,000. Plus, I'm probably better off with plug-ins anyway, given the little space I have."

Old sounds, new sounds, no matter: Joss has an uncanny ability to select the perfect elements for each track. "Fatality Strikes" features the Native Instruments Pro-53 emulation of the Sequential Circuits Prophet-5, which nicely encapsulates the song's spy-lounge mood; "A Room with a VU Meter" is anchored by the ideal harpsichord sample from Joss' aforementioned Akai/E-mu sound library; and "Granted" wraps up the disc with its refined wah guitars and funky feel. Chris Joss is the perfect example of, "It's not the equipment you've got, it's how well you use it." 

"You tend to think you are immortal, but I really appreciate each moment now, you know?"
—Chris Joss



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INTO THE LIGHT

Recovering from depression, Sia Furler found relief in studio experiments

Calling from New York while lounging in bed with her two dogs, Lick Lick Science and Pantera Marvelous, Sia Furler speaks like the same soulful, slightly damaged figure heard on *Some People Have Real Problems* (Hear Music, 2008). Roughing it like Amy Winehouse one moment, rocking it like Chrissie Hynde the next, the former Massive Attack/Zero 7/Jamiroquai vocalist has recorded an album of classic sensual soul, complete with live band, brass and strings. Where *Colour the Small One* (Systematic, 2004) was an introverted affair, *Some People Have Real Problems* is a full-bore energy carnival. Joined by Beck (on one

track) and assisted in no small way by his drummer Joey Waronker, Sia was determined to express her musical liberation.

"I was really depressed when we did *Colour the Small One*, so I wasn't thinking about touring," Sia says. "I was thinking about survival. I sang real quiet. But after recording and touring *The Garden* with Zero 7, which had a lot more fun and belt-it-out songs, I wanted to make a more fun album to sing, and I didn't want it to be put in any particular time. I wanted it to sound like it could belong to any era."

Writing basic demos into an Apple MacBook Pro with bassist Sam Dixon and others, Sia recorded at Joey Waronker's The Bank and the Dust Brothers' Boat studios with producer Jimmy Hogarth (James Blunt, Amy Winehouse, KT Tunstall) at the helm. Tracking and mixing was achieved using an Apple Power Mac

G5 running Digidesign Pro Tools|HD (and an SSL 4000 G+ board) with editing performed on a G5 running Apple Logic 7. To get that classic vibe, Hogarth used a variety of old-school mics, including Neumann U 47, M 49 and U 67s, as well as Coles 4038s, Shure SM57 and AKG C 24 into Neve 1073, Urei 1176 and Telefunken V79 mic pres. A Roland Space Echo, EMT plate reverb, Chamberlin keyboard and Moog Music Minimoog synth (all from Waronker's flush gear room) added to the album's timeless sound.

While "Little Black Sandals," "Lentil" and "The Girl You Lost to Cocaine" were largely recorded live using edited sections that didn't always include a click track, "Playground" began as a programmed dance track, which was then fleshed out with live instruments. Experimenting further, Hogarth recorded Sia's vocals so she could react in the moment.

While recording, we had rich-people problems like a bitter latte or bad traffic. At the same time, there are people who don't have rice or are waiting for a new heart. —Sia



"Sia sang in the live room with the M 49, and I set up a stereo pair of Coles 4038s as ambient mics," Hogarth explains. "The room was diamond shaped; she was at one corner of the diamond with the M 49 two feet away and the Coles out in the middle of the room pointing left and right. She would pull away from the M 49 and sing to one side and then the ambient mics kicked in, particularly when she got louder. She changed the parameters herself rather than us dialing it in. She could hear the mix changing in her phones as she moved around. She was getting off on it, and it made her sing a little differently than how she might otherwise."

Well-known for her potty mouth (the 30-year-old jokingly told one publication that she enjoys rough sex; another interviewer was invited to listen to her "wee"), Sia was more thoughtful when titling *Some People Have Real Problems*. With possible fame and riches around the corner, Sia kept it all in perspective.

"While recording, we had rich-people problems like a bitter latte or bad traffic," Sia remarks. "At the same time, there are people who don't have rice or are waiting for a new heart. There was a good vibe around this album; it made me think I am going to get successful and famous and rich. I knew people would ask me about the title, so it helps me to remember while it's all happening that I mustn't become a wanker." ○

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By Job de Wit

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CARL CRAIG

At Rush Hour Records in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

It's certainly not Carl Craig's first visit to this small record shop in the centuries-old city center. The Detroit DJ/producer has had a long relationship with the store, which over the past 10 years has come to encompass a distribution company, a record label and party organization. As a matter of fact, in 2005, Rush Hour released Craig's revamped version of his then 10-year-old *Landcruising* album, titled *The Album Formerly Known as....* It should be no surprise then that the techno figurehead is feeling right at home almost 4,000 miles away from home, listening to records behind the decks on the store counter. It's dark and rainy outside, but Rush Hour's label manager, Christiaan Macdonald, only has one road to cross from his company's HQ to meet Craig on the shop floor. "Christiaan is like my brother," the DJ says. "I know it wasn't from my mom's womb, but.... Actually, I think it was through [Detroit producer] Recloose. We just clicked!"

Macdonald is one of the first to congratulate Craig in person for his first Grammy nomination. After a

very productive remixing stretch that goes back to the late '80s, including (just in the last couple years) phenomenal reworkings of records by Throbbing Gristle, Beanfield, Theo Parrish, Goldfrapp and LCD Soundsystem, the nod finally came with his remix of Junior Boys' "Like a Child." "Finally!" exclaims the producer, who is up against a Benny Benassi remix of Public Enemy and an Eric Prydz version of a Pink Floyd track, among others.

Although hitherto lacking in Grammy awards, there aren't many dance music producers and DJs with a track record quite like Craig's. Coming into his own at the dawn of the '90s, his discography is lined with classic tracks released under various aliases such as Psyche ("Crackdown"), Paperclip People ("Throw," "Oscillator," "The Climax"), 69 ("Jam the Box") and Innerzone Orchestra ("Bug in the Bassbin"). There is a great musicality at work in Craig's tracks, without losing sight of the machinelike power that propels a dancefloor. It wouldn't be hard to argue that a Grammy award is long overdue.

And the nomination couldn't have come at a better time. Carl Craig's new double mix album, *Sessions* (IK7, 2008), features a selection of personal career highlights, including his own releases and remixes. Whereas most dance producers tend to actively

pursue remix jobs in the early stages of their career to establish a name, Carl Craig is busier than ever crafting new versions of other people's tracks. It has been over three years since he last released a 12-inch of original material, 2004's brooding *Just Another Day* (Planet E).

"I've gone through those years of making *my* records somebody *else's* records," he says of his remixing style. "It's cool because of the creativity, but at the same time, there hasn't been enough of that person's record that's there. Derrick May used to say that he was tired of giving people his music in a remix. I guess the end story is that you want people to hear a record and boost the career of the artist. They hire you in order to do something for the artist. It makes the artist popular with a market that they don't see."

With remixing inspiration in mind, Craig dives into a pile of records. "Let's listen to some Rush Hour stuff, some Dutch stuff and then maybe some Detroit or Chicago!" It's a few hours before his gig at 11, a club with a fabulous view situated on the eleventh floor of Amsterdam's former postal distribution center. "Usually when I listen to records," he says, "I listen quite fast. Sometimes I'll throw something in a pile where I don't buy it, but then I hear somebody else play it and it sounds really good. Sometimes



one man's garbage is another man's treasure."

While Craig can definitely get his share of records for free, vinyl freeloading is not his style. "You gotta support!" he says. "If you don't support, then labels go out business, the stores go out of business. Okay, maybe a few people will buy it after I play it. But if it weren't for those guys buying *my* record and playing it, I wouldn't be making records anymore. I wouldn't be able to afford to do it."

DANTON EEPROM

"Confessions of an English Opium Eater" (InFiné)

I don't know if it's the greatest record for a dancefloor, but the rhythm is pounding, and it's got a lot of elements I really like about it. I can really appreciate it. It is a bit like what I do. It's kinda like "Throw." Sorta. But...darker.

FOOG

"4040" (File)

It's nice to lead into the end of my set and give myself time to settle into the idea that I'm done for the night. It's like a nice meditation that puts me into a trance. When I hear it, I can imagine walking through a dark tunnel and finally arriving to the light at the end. That light is an oasis with fresh air and a waterfall. I would play an Âme track after this.

FRED HUSH & NOSEDA

"In the Dark" (Rush Hour)

I love the soundscape of "In the Dark." It reminds me of some early electronic experiments from the '50s where strange sounds were used to display "the amazing potential of stereo." It's a nice record to build up the momentum in the room before I would play my remix of Alter Ego.

NEWWORLDAQURIUM

***The Dead Bears* (NWAQ/Delsin)**

What attracts me to the music is the dream quality. It seems to be very inspired from what Kenny Dixon and Theo Parrish and those guys have been doing over the years, and it's something that's completely like in another world. I like music that doesn't necessarily fit in any restrictions or any boundaries that somebody would think of as house music, techno or whatever. It's very dramatic. It reminds me of the feeling I would get listening to Manuel Göttsching's *E2-E4*.

POPULATION ONE

"Rush Hour (Rolando Remix)"/"Rush Hour (Original Version)" (Rush Hour)

Rolando just decided to wipe the slate clean and do his own thing. It was a Rolando track, not a Rolando remix. This is...it's just the bass and a sound. If I were to remix

something like this, I would probably just add like a hi-hat and a clap, and that would be the remix! There's not really anything you can get from it other than the sound. The sound is the track.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

***Firecracker EP 03* (Firecracker)**

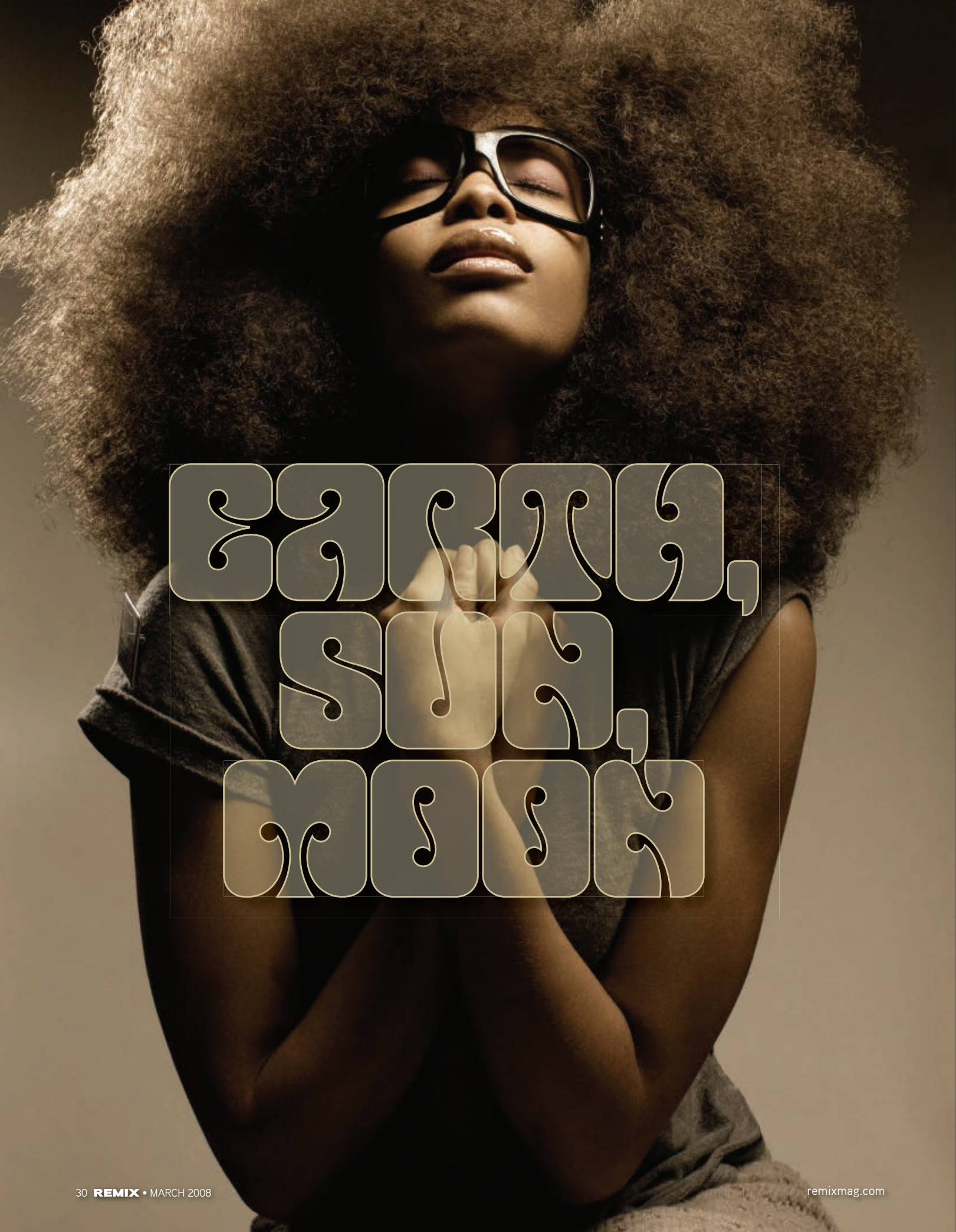
I picked this one for Linkwood's "Hear the Sun" and Fudge Fingas & His Fidgety Friends' "Aksman" tracks. I like the creative sampling and the feel of the grooves. They're nice tracks to start an eight-hour set with, where the room is full of fans of the music who want to hear something a little different. I would play these with some Theo Parrish or Norma Jean Bell tracks.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

***Waajeed Presents the War LP Part Two* (Fat City)**

I'm always interested in what Waajeed does. It's funny 'cause I'd always heard the name but I'd never met him for a very long time. In fact, I think it was here in Amsterdam that I met him! That one track with Jay Dee I think is fantastic. I like the whole CD, though. 

Rush Hour; Spuistraat 98, 1012 TZ Amsterdam, The Netherlands; +31-(0)20-427-4505; info@rushhour.nl; www.rushhour.nl



EARTH,
SUN,
MOON



As grounded or otherworldly as she wants to be, R&B singer/producer **Erykah Badu** and producer/mixer **Mike "Chav" Chavarria** balance the practical with the extreme on ***New Amerykah***

By Ken Micallef | Photos by Timothy Saccenti

Calling out a guest who has arrived at Electric Lady to hear her latest release, *New Amerykah*, Erykah Badu insists, "No one hears my music until they talk to me first."

Typically bold, direct and personally magnetic, Erykah Badu is hip-hop goddess, soulful earth mother and mystical avant-garde soothsayer all rolled into one. Badu's status as hip-hop's reigning neo-soul ambassador is based on several multiplatinum-selling albums; her sleek, bass-heavy productions; a recognizable honey-and-salt vocal style often compared to jazz legend Billie Holiday; and, to a lesser degree, her former relationship with Outkast's André 3000 (who fathered her child, Seven).

Camping out in her own personal lair at the Greenwich Village recording complex built by guitarist/composer Jimi Hendrix in 1970, Badu keeps the lights low and her Apple MacBook Pro powered up as she works on all phases of *New Amerykah*'s launch: CD cover art adorns the walls; pages of a proposed magazine, *The Freq*, fill several small tables; and mystically inclined drawings of unknown purpose cover a lava lamp. Badu readily reveals her working processes for *New Amerykah* (Universal/Motown, 2008), as dozens of tracks from producers as disparate as Madlib, 9th Wonder, Shafiq Husayn (Sa-Ra), J Dilla and Karriem Riggins are arrayed on her laptop's screen via her favorite software: Apple GarageBand.

"Everything that the producers e-mailed me I put into GarageBand," Badu says, spooning green tea ice cream into her mouth. "Then we would try to duplicate it at Electric Lady. I did vocals on my laptop, babies crying and everything. I also EQ'd the tracks using effects like GarageBand's Vocal Reflection."

SO 10 YEARS AGO

Assisted by mixer/producer Mike "Chav" Chavarria (J Dilla, Eminem, Snoop Dog), Badu recorded vocals and basic tracks at Luminous Sound Recording in Dallas. But the bulk of *New Amerykah* is based on the producers' raw 2-tracks, which were e-mailed to Badu, dumped into GarageBand, then embellished by her and Chav at Electric Lady (in Pro Tools). Adding live bass, guitar, flutes, percussion and keyboards, plus a wealth of freaky effects and plug-ins, the pair produced a surreal magnum opus of hip-hop. The

first single, "Honey," is a poor indicator of the depths and heights scaled on *New Amerykah*. The album's fluid bass rhythms (courtesy of Steve "Thundercat" Bruner) recall the low-down subterfuge of D'Angelo's masterpiece, *Voodoo*; Badu's layered vocal harmonies (recorded to a Studer A820 1/2-inch, using RMG tape) are at times frighteningly bizarre; the music is diverse and exploratory; altogether, the overwhelming underground nature of the record recalls a mad mash of Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions*, Sly and the Family Stone's *Fresh* and Quasimoto's *The Further Adventures of Lord Quas*. Badu doesn't mince words regarding *New Amerykah*'s intended message.

"It's a play on my name, and it's very different and new for me," she explains, settling into a large purple couch. "In 1997, a 25-year-old Erykah Badu came out as an artist, pregnant, a mother-to-be. We used to bring cassettes home as our listening from the studio. No one had a cell phone, only a couple people with these great big contraptions. The Internet was not our form of communication; we still had the library. We were creating from sand and scrap. So quickly it's turned into this technological society. I can send the album to millions of fans from Antarctica to Mexico City with one push of the button. The way our children think and the things they see? It's new, and it's happened so quick. And I am in the middle of that. Me on the platform with a microphone—that is how I envision *New Amerykah*."

The album is scheduled to appear in two parts during 2008: part one, *New Amerykah*, a self-described "political purging," and part two (to be released as a USB stick within a jewel case), the occultist-sounding *Return of the Ankh*. Badu reveals her astrological sign (Pisces, Moon in Aquarius) and her fondness for adding the bell-like peals of tuning forks to her records, furthering her cosmic-conscious approach.

"I always use tuning forks," Badu says. "According to the message I am trying to get and studying the frequency of sound, each tuning fork has a certain vibrational energy that is conducive to a feeling or a color or a smell. They're related to different chakras in the body, too. Some may make you feel good or sexy or conscious of what you're saying. Depending on the song and the frequency I am trying to get over to the people, I use the tuning forks, and I also played talking drum."

VOCAL CONFESSIONS

Talking drums and tuning forks aside, what jumps out on first listen to *New Amerykah* is Badu's multifaceted vocal approach. The queen of neo-soul is still in full force, cool and clever, but on tracks like Shafiq Husayn's "Twinkle" and "Me," Madlib's "My People" and "Emotions" and Badu's own "That Hump," she scales high walls and makes you wonder, "How the heck did they do that?" Often, her layered harmonies sound purposely time-stretched or at least pitch-altered, so wide are the intervals she hits. But put it down to the gear used and her eclectic mic technique, not Electric Lady's Pro Tools|HD3 trickery.

"I prefer a \$37 Shure SM57 mic," Badu reveals. "I have a very nasally voice. That mic has a lot of bottom in it. I put my mouth right up on it like an MC. I sit right in the control room between the two speakers next to the engineer, and I can hear what is going on very well. I used to have candles and incense in the studio, but I don't require that now. I am in the mood all the time in the studio. I might do a vocal take 100 times and not get it, then come back the next day at 3 a.m., and laying down on the floor, my ears will get it. Pitch is good but feeling is better. I never cut and paste or punch in, I like a single vocal take.

"When I do vocals, I am singing with a certain volume in my voice," she adds. "I am singing the double and triple harmonies at different volumes. You don't have to adjust it; I have already done it. We mix as we go, so by the time we put the vocals to 1/2-inch tape, I know it. If you touch a damn thing, I will know it."

Badu prefers to cut her vocals in the control room with the monitor mix blasting over her head as she sings. That obviously presents leakage problems for Chav, but he has developed ways to work around her methods while also getting a usable take. Sometimes Badu would sit in an overstuffed chair about six feet behind the SL 9000 J board, alternately using a Neumann M 269, Shure SM57 or AEA R44 ribbon mic with Sony MDR-V900 headphones into a Furman headphone mixer. But she was just as likely to discard the headphones and sing right into the studio's Adam Professional Audio S3A studio monitors.

"There's not any feedback there when you do that, but there is a fair amount of leakage," Chav explains. "We worked to make her vocals fit into the track, phase-wise. I asked a lot of people how to do this. They said, 'Sit her in an equilateral triangle with the speakers, putting one of the speakers out of phase, so the leakage should cancel itself.' But to do that, the mic has to be stationary, and she likes to hold the mic like an MC. She is at home as a live performer. What did work was to keep the monitors fairly low and turn the microphone out of phase, and we would move her around the room until she found a spot where the leakage was reasonable and where she felt comfortable and could hear herself. But just as often she would just sit in that chair behind the board in the A Room.



“I might do a vocal take 100 times and not get it, then come back the next day at 3 a.m., and laying down on the floor, my ears will get it. Pitch is good, but feeling is better.” —Erykah Badu



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"Her voice has so many frequencies," Chav continues, "from a subharmonic of her tonic to a thin raspiness, and she wants to hear all of that. And she couldn't hear all of that in the headphones. I tried to get her a pair of \$3,000 Stax phones, but the label didn't go for that."

DILLA TO DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

New Amerykah is jammed with old-school samples, including Blaxploitation trailers, Eddie Kendricks' "My People Hold On" (for Badu's "My People"), what sounds like The Meters in J Dilla's "Love," Nancy Wilson's "I'm In Love" ("Honey") and James Brown's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf" ("Dirty Dirty"). But beyond the samples, what raises the sonic level of the album are the dexterous live performances by trumpeter Roy Hargrove, Jr., bassist Thundercat, drummer/producer Karriem Riggins, keyboardist James Poyser and guitarist Jef Lee Johnson. Badu and Chav's embellishment of the 2-tracks with live performances is particularly evident in Shafiq Husayn's "Me."

"We recorded the original track in Dallas with her vocal," Chav recalls. "Erykah went to L.A. with just the 2-track and had Thundercat play bass over it. So it is his playing over her singing on the 2-track, and when we got back to New York, Roy Hargrove came into the studio, and there wasn't time to organize the Pro Tools session. So he ended up playing trumpet over the 2-track, as well. It was like playing over three generations of 2-track. It built up as it went along."

"I had never worked like that before," he elaborates.

"On this record, I did more over 2-tracks than I have ever done on any record. And that is because it came straight from her laptop, and we couldn't get Pro Tools sessions from producers. We were able to build around them. Erykah made this record to display to the world that there is this whole group of producers out there who are outside of the mainstream making great music. She was trying to highlight what they do. We didn't want to change what the producers originally brought to the table. We didn't change it; we just added to it."

"I work in layers," Badu explains. "The first layer is the track. The second layer is the songs. The third would be the musicians who add a certain nuance. And when they play, they play like they are a sample. Or we take a piece of what they played, and we sample and loop it."

Badu and Chav, along with engineers Chris Bell and Tom Soares, worked hand in glove, creating off a shared vibe built from endless hours spent listening to older Badu records such as *Baduizm* (Kedar, 1997) and *Mama's Gun* (Kedar, 2000), as well as 1973-released

albums, including Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* and Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions*. Chav took these influences and Badu's prodding creative flow into the realms of effects and vocal processing throughout *New Amerykah*. Using a variety of plug-ins (SoundToys' EchoBoy, Digidesign D-Fi's Lo-Fi and Sci-Fi and Pro Tools' Signal Generator) and guitar pedals (Line 6's DL4 Delay Modeler and Moog Music's Moogerfooger), Chav had a ball and earned his keep.

OVERBOARD EFFECTS

"On 'Twinkle,'" Chav explains, "I used a Line 6 DL4 pedal. I ran the vocal through the pedal on an aux end from Pro Tools, and on the way back, I ran it through a couple Neve preamps, then back into Pro Tools and recorded it. I manipulated the controls on the pedal as the track played and recorded it, just feeling off the track to make it live. I like to make effects live instead of just sitting on them. I rode the delay on the pedal in real time to get those backwards-sounding effects. Almost like automating, but it was recording, just one chance and that was it. Otherwise, you have to redo it. Erykah wanted that track to get crazy. I was trying to match what she was asking of me. I would try to go overboard on things just to be really creative and then get her feedback. A lot of people would ask to scale it back, but she was with it."

"Twinkle" is one of the album's true mindblowers, a crisscrossing, effects-heavy track complete with white-noise bursts, helium-endowed gerbil voices, lyrics about "Venus bitches," madly panned

effects and instruments and layers of twinkling keyboards. Even Chav is unsure of some of the sound's origins, in retrospect.

"I am not sure exactly what is producing the bass in that song," he says with a laugh, "but it is definitely keyboard bass, and it was played live, all the way down. When we got the track, it was just the drums, bass and a little sample. The bass and drums are the heart of it, the way they lock together. We effected the arrangement drastically, added a lot of elements that really build. We played with the sonic textures and the way that it moves. That is the song that I added the most things to, like static; I wanted it to feel futuristic or like an interrupted transmission from space. I used the Signal Generator plug-in in Pro Tools to make a lot of the effects. For the little blips, I used a simple 1 kHz tone and threw it in here and there for a percussive element along with the static. That, and along with the DL4 delay and a Moogerfooger pedal, I took a piece of audio and ran it through those effects and manipulated





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the frequency as the track played and recorded it. Basically, it's just seeing what you get 'cause those pieces aren't predictable. There was a lot of automation of the SoundToys EchoBoy plug-in, too. We used effects and delays as instruments."

And what created the darting vocals and gerbil effects? Like an outtake from Frank Zappa's classic *Over-Nite Sensation*, "Twinkle" is as insane as it is totally creative.

"Those vocals at the end of the song are being contorted through a combination of riding the delay time on the EchoBoy plug-ins and the Line 6 and the Moogerfooger plug-in, and also the D-Fi package," Chav says. "Those are some basic Digidesign plug-ins that everybody has, but I don't know if anyone uses them."

"In 'Twinkle,'" he continues, I had an idea of what I was trying to accomplish. I took an aux end of the

track and fed that to the aux input and had the Lo- or Sci-Fi plug-in on that one, and pretty much had the send-level static but bussed that aux track to another track and recorded it. Basically, whatever changes I made to the plug-in I was recording—pretty much the same way that I do with the outboard pedals but using a plug-in, doing things like manipulating the effects frequency and modulation parameters. Then it is just about blending those sounds 'cause there are lots of layers in that song."

Chav's ability to get down and dirty with effects came from Badu's need to destroy expectations of what she should be recording in 2008. She seems ready, willing and able to risk it all, evidenced by an ongoing battle with her label (at the time of this writing) over whether Universal/Motown would release her second set of songs in '08. She won.

"Erykah is an artist, but she is also a producer," Chav states. "People don't look at her like that, but most of the time in modern-day hip-hop, the songs usually aren't created with the producer around. But in order to take these songs to the next level, to take them from beats into records, it takes more production. And Erykah is very direct and very knowledgeable."

BADU FUTURISM

Ten years after her emergence as a leader of neo-soul school, Erykah Badu is pushing hip-hop boundaries rare for someone of her multiplatinum stature. After a certain monetary line is crossed, most hip-hop and R&B artists are determined to hang on to their ego and their sales figures. Badu is seemingly more concerned with satisfying herself and exposing underground producers than scoring *Baduizm II*.

"In 1997, they accused me of being the queen of neo-soul," she whispers. "But the only thing neo-soul about me is the guy who made up the name. I do admit that I poked a hole in the dam and a lot of floodwaters rushed through. So I am conscious of that and conscious that I can do that again. Apparently, the sheep are at the gate; they will listen to whatever I have to say because now we have morphed into one thing: me and the people. If I can introduce them to a different frequency of music and a different frequency of producer, then that can help to get us out of listening to the same old thing."

With her expansive hair now quaffed into a deliciously sub-Saharan Afro, is Erykah Badu still "the analog girl in the digital world," as she once described herself?

"I am in this thing," she offers, her green tea ice cream now melting onto the couch. "I am looking around, but I am still me. I'll bring what I can to the digital world. I am a Pisces with Mercury in Aquarius, baby. Mercury is the planet of communication. And Aquarius is a futuristic thinker." 

CITIZENS OF NEW AMERIKAH

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Apple G5 and MacBook Pro computers, GarageBand software
Chandler Limited Mini Rack Mixer
Digidesign Pro Tools|HD3 system
Lavry 2-Channel AD Converter (Blue Series)
Prism Sound Dream AD-2 AD Converter
Studer A820 2-track 1/2-inch tape deck

Console

Solid State Logic SL 9000 J console

Monitors, headphones

Adam Professional Audio S3A studio monitors
Augspurger custom monitors
Direct Sound EX-29 Extreme Isolation Headphones
Furman HRM-16 Headphone Remote Mixer
Sony MDR-V900 headphones
Yamaha NS10 near-field speakers

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AKG C 451
Korby KAT67
Neumann M 269
Shure SM57
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Tuning forks
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"I would try to go overboard on things just to be really creative and then get [Badu's] feedback. A lot of people would ask to scale it back, but she was with it." —Mike "Chav" Chavarria



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ALL OVER THE MAP

Lyrics Born steps aside from his lonely sampling ways to be *Everywhere at Once* with a gang of musicians and influences running the gamut from Timbaland to The B-52's

By Rhonda Baraka | Photos by Mitch Tobias

Noelty has nothing to do with it. Even if being an Asian rapper didn't make him an anomaly in an industry dominated by young African-American men, Lyrics Born would still be in a league of his own. The 35-year-old MC/producer, who is half-Japanese, half-Italian/American, stands out not so much for his ethnicity but for his knack for creating music that defies contemporary trends.

With a nod to old-school R&B and hip-hop, Lyrics Born's music has been lauded as a departure from the chart-toppers of today. While—not unlike his peers—Lyrics Born seasons his rhymes with a few witticisms about his skills and a tale or two about the ladies, he seems to make a special effort to bypass most of hip-hop's tried-and-true trends, a tactic that has garnered him critical acclaim and elevated him from an underground niche rapper to an international contender.

His new album, *Everywhere at Once* (Anti, 2008), is a ballsy blend of genres, including hip-hop, pop, rock, R&B, reggaeton and funk. From one song to the next, Lyrics Born digs into a different bag of tricks and comes out with something that is unlike anything else in popular music today. The riskiness of such an undertaking is not lost on Lyrics Born, but it is somewhat consistent with the artist and the man he's been from the start.

IT ALL STARTED WHEN...

Born Tom Shimura in Tokyo, Japan, Lyrics Born (formerly known as Asia Born) has been a child of hip-hop since its early days. Growing up first in Salt Lake City and later in the San Francisco Bay Area, Lyrics Born says he was about 5 years old when he began to indulge his interest in music. "I knew from a very early age that I definitely wanted to be some kind of entertainer," he says, "but it wasn't until I was a few years older that I realized that [a rapper] was the type of performer I wanted to be. When I first heard Sugar Hill Gang, I was like, 'Oh, you mean I don't have to take guitar lessons; I don't have to take piano lessons; I don't have to take singing lessons? This is for me.' It was really that simple."



It was that mentality that has raised the ire of hip-hop critics who view the art form as a shortcut to the music industry and a poor substitute for traditional music skills. But Lyrics Born scoffs at such criticism. "I think just because it's self-taught, that doesn't invalidate it," he offers. "In the '20s and '30s, they weren't teaching jazz in school, and I don't hear people saying that about jazz musicians anymore." But he hastens to add, "Of course, I'm not dissing music. I'm the first person to tell you that I wish I could read and write music, but it doesn't take the place of me knowing how to rap."

As a child, Lyrics Born didn't have to look far to find support for his creative endeavors. His father was a novelist, his aunt was a singer and his mother had what he calls "an artistic flair." Translation: Pursuing a

career in the arts was not frowned upon in the least. "My father was probably my biggest influence," he says, "because I could see what it took—sometimes staying up all night to get things done. When a lot of my friends' parents were getting up, going to work at 6 a.m., he was just going to bed."

Just as Lyrics Born's creative pursuits were encouraged at home, he also found a nurturing environment outside his front door. Growing up in Berkeley, he says he was surrounded by a "wealth of revolutionary ideas" and a "wealth of musical talent that has always gone against the grain." "I just think it's kind of in our blood," he says. "People from the Bay Area are very independent and the area is very diverse, so it's not really that unusual for a Japanese rapper to come out of the Bay

Area." He stresses that because there was essentially no music industry in his backyard, many artists started their own record labels. "That gave Bay Area artists a certain kind of hustle," he notes.

When Lyrics Born migrated to Davis, Calif.—a city located about 15 miles west of Sacramento—to attend the University of California-Davis, he hooked up with a like-minded ensemble of hip-hop heads (DJ Shadow, Lateef the Truthspeaker, and Blackalicious members Gift of Gab and Chief Xcel) to form SoleSides Records and Quannum Projects. "We came up together doing this," he recalls. "We listened to the records that other artists were making, and we tried to outdo each other and outdo everybody else. That's how we raised ourselves, and that still carries over to this day."

EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE

Engineer Mike Cresswell discusses a few key aspects of collaborating with Lyrics Born on *Everywhere at Once*.

Was it tougher to mix using live takes as opposed to pretreated samples? Do you have a particular signal chain that you're most happy with when recording live musicians?

The bulk of my experience comes from recording live musicians, so I don't view it as tougher at all. I think it's tougher to mix soft synths and the like. As far as recording chains go, I have my own defaults I refer to for different situations, but these days I'm kind of at the mercy of what gear is available and the environment I'm in. Plus, I get bored using the same old thing every time; I like to try new stuff and just go purely on gut instinct. Also, gear usually reacts differently in every situation, so I try not to get stuck in set ways. On this project, however, most things were shaped in the mix.

As long as it sounds all right to Tom going down, we can deal with it in the mix.

There's a nice, wide stereo field on *Everywhere at Once*. Do you have a particular methodology for getting the bass nice and beefy, the snares crisp, the kick thumping/thick and such a nice chime and clarity to things like guitar?

You have to listen to how every little detail affects everything else. Things that help me are listening at low levels on small speakers and getting everything up in the mix pretty quickly. I use these cheap Roland MA-8 speakers. They were sold as "multimedia" speakers and are no longer in production. I tend to get lost in a mix when listening to normal speakers like Genelecs, KRKs, Dynaudios, etc., for too long. Reducing the overall frequency response helps me focus on getting a proper balance. It's like standing too close to a painting; you need to take a step back to get the whole picture.

What's your theory on panning? There is some interesting automated panning on "Top Shelf."

More and more, I subscribe to the hard-left, center, hard-right approach, then using effects to pull it in toward center if need be. It gives a much more layered sound, plus it turns out a lot wider and creates more space for the lead vocal in the middle. Tom loves autopanning, so on "Top Shelf," I used Waves MondoMod plug-in on several tracks for some autopanning sweeps, usually set to the factory default setting. Then in tandem with that, I will do some manual panning of certain tracks.





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TWO (OR MORE) PLACES AT ONCE

On *Everywhere at Once*, his second solo offering, Lyrics Born is definitely all over the place, shamelessly indulging his many musical influences and tastes and somehow finding a way to meld them together. "I definitely wanted to pursue a lot of different styles on this album," he says. "The title *Everywhere at Once* is kinda where I was coming from musically. I knew it was gonna be all over the place, and I knew I was gonna explore a broader range of topics and emotions on this album than I had in the past. Production-wise, I knew I was gonna do it differently than I had done in the past. I just wanted to take it further

than I had ever done before, and as I listened to what all my peers were doing, I wanted to take it further than what I heard other people doing, as well."

The influence of Lyrics Born's musical heroes is also everywhere. "I was referencing so much music when I made this album because I was really trying to connect in specific ways," he explains. "I was listening to everything from Curtis Mayfield to The B-52's to Devo to New Edition to Timbaland to the Black Eyed Peas to old-school hip-hop like Jungle Brothers. I was just trying to tie it all together."

Tying a variety of mismatched pieces together into one uniform sound wasn't an easy task for Lyrics Born. "I was aware of the fact that a lot of people, particularly recently, are trying to tie in all their influences and tie in a lot of music, which I think is great," he observes. "I think the number-one challenge is, how do you bring all these styles together and still make it cohesive and make it a good, solid listen all the way through? I think the key to that is really in the sequencing. One has to follow the other one in a way that feels right. When you play live, you have to put all these songs together that you've done over your entire career, and you've got to string them together in a way that makes the show make sense, so I just bring that logic to the album-making process."

By daring to be everywhere at once, Lyrics Born assumes what many artists and label executives dare not assume: The audience is not one-dimensional; listeners can actually listen to and appreciate songs that are drastically different from one another—all in one sitting. "I've been waiting for this day," he enthuses. "People are so varied in their tastes, and they're not afraid to express it anymore because

“I’ve been waiting for this day. People are so varied in their tastes, and they’re not afraid to express it anymore because of the way everybody listens to music these days and because of the way everybody acquires their music.”
—Lyrics Born

EQUIPMENT EVERYWHERE

Computer, DAW, recording hardware

Apple G5 computer
Digidesign Pro Tools|HD 3 system

Samplers, turntables

Akai MPC3000 sampling workstation
Ensoniq ASR-10 sampling keyboard
Pioneer CDJ-1000 CD turntables
Technics SL-1200 turntables

Synths, software and plug-ins

Access Virus soft synth
Hohner Clavinet D6
Korg Legacy Collection soft synths,
MicroKorg synth/vocoder
McDSP Synthesizer One soft synth
Native Instruments Absynth soft synth
Propellerhead Reason software
Rhodes 88 Stage Piano
Roland Juno-106 synth
Waves MondoMod plug-in

Mics, mic preamps, EQs, compressors, effects

dbx 160X compressor/limiter
Empirical Labs Distressor EL-8X
Klaus Heine—modified U 87 mic
(2) Neve 1073 preamps
Roland Space Echo RE-201
sE Gemini mic
Smart Research C1 Dual/Stereo Compressor
Speck Electronics ASC EQ
SSL G383 stereo preamp/EQ
(2) Tube-Tech PE 1C EQ
Universal Audio 6176 preamp/compressor/limiter

Monitors

Genelec 1030A monitors
KRK RP-10S Rokit powered subwoofer
Yamaha NS10 monitors

of the way everybody listens to music and because of the way everybody acquires their music. It's not coming from any one source anymore. People are getting information everywhere, and that sort of ties in to the theme of the album. I think it's a great time in a lot of ways. I think it's a very challenging time, a very difficult time for music, but I still do feel that it's very exciting at the same time because we are everywhere at once."

ALONE AGAIN...OR?

Lyrics Born is the first to admit that he faced challenges while recording *Everywhere at Once*, the most prominent of which was using live instrumentation. His debut solo release, the 2003 *Later That Day...* (Quannum), which spawned the hit "Callin' Out," was largely sample-based. "Back then, it was me all alone with thousands of records and an MPC, but on this album, I barely touched the MPC. We did everything in Pro Tools, and it was using all live instruments. We looped instruments and we looped the musicians, but I wasn't lifting any samples." Instead, he says, he brought in an array of artists, musicians and producers, among them Poets of Rhythm and Joyo Velarde, as well as Jurassic 5's Chali 2na and producer/singer/musician RJD2. "It was interesting because a lot of the technology has changed from the time I did my last album," he says. "I was using a lot of synths, a lot more drum sounds. It was just a brand-new experience in a lot of ways."

With 18 solid tracks, the set is about as diverse as they come, each song creating a vibe and an energy all its own. Lyrics Born says his favorites are the single "I Like It, I Love It," the Devo-inspired "Do U Buy It?" and the introspective "Is It the Skin I'm In?"

"I Like It, I Love It" is a real supercharged Lyrics Born song," he says. "When I hear it, it's a sound that I'm very comfortable with. 'Do U Buy It?' is the exact opposite. It's something new that I've never done before. It's funny to me. When I listen to that song, I kinda laugh a little bit. As for 'Skin I'm In,' I'm not sure if—from an Asian-American perspective—there are too many songs like that."

Lyrics Born says by far the most challenging song for him to record was the emotional "Whispers," which recounts the story of a close friend's death. "It was really hard to write the song because that's your best friend," he says. "But once I kinda got over the emotional hump and decided that I was indeed going to do this, it kinda wrote itself."

Musically speaking, Lyrics Born says he brought in "every musician I know" for "Whispers." "It's got horns, it's got strings, it's got vocalists. It was a very difficult song to pull off. That's one of my favorite songs on the album, but I never listen to it."

Even though Lyrics Born puts a lot of thought into his content and the sound of his music, he says he doesn't overthink the recording process itself. "I just get in there and do it," he says. "On this album, the method was very different. When I'm working on a song, I don't like a lot of people in the studio. I only like to be in there with the engineer or maybe the musician or group of musicians that

I'm working with that day. In the early stages of the song, I don't like a lot of people in there because I'm a performer by nature, and if I get a lot of people in there, I'll start trying to perform for them and I just can't get anything done. And when you're first working on a song, you need to get the idea out without being self-conscious about people being in there even if they're not being critical about it."

Another difference, he says, is that this time around, he already had lyrics written before he had the music. "In the past, I may have gotten the track first and then I would write to it, but on this album I had a lot of the songs written before I even had music, and I think I had

an idea of where I wanted the music to go. 'Top Shelf' is a good example of that. I had that song written for a year, a year and a half, and I just couldn't get the music right, so I started asking a bunch of producers I know if they had something that would fit."

Everywhere at Once takes listeners on a scenic tour along the back streets of Lyrics Born's creativity. It's ambitious and pleasantly topsy-turvy—sometimes a bumpy ride, sometimes soothing and relaxing. But it's not for passengers who like straightaways with no tricky curves or unexpected stops and starts. It's an adventurous offering from an adventurous and memorable artist. Novelty notwithstanding. 

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Their latest album finds them probing the high-end wares of a professional studio, but at heart, the members of **Hot Chip prefer to record right where they sleep**



Alexis Taylor is rummaging around his flat, looking for the lap-size Yamaha keyboard he bought at a car boot sale a few years back for three quid. "I know it's here somewhere," he says, audibly sifting through papers, coils of patch cords and pieces of gear before pausing to make a larger point. "You know, I can't tell whether it's a good thing or not to give away all of your secrets, but really the secrets aren't in the equipment. They're more in what you play and what ideas you have. I remember when I first mentioned the Casio MT-70 that we used all over our first two records, and suddenly loads of people just started buying it. It was quite funny."

Since the release of their sophomore effort, *The Warning* (EMI, 2006), Taylor and his band Hot Chip have been having a time of it for more reasons than mere copycat worship. Not only did that album make the final cut for the UK's Mercury Music Prize, but it became a certified hit in Britain with two Top 40 singles—no small feat, considering the band had been pegged as a quirky electro-pop art-funk quintet with bargain-basement production methods. Of course, with that style having struck such a heavy nerve (as evinced by the success of LCD Soundsystem, M.I.A. and Funkstörung, to name a few), it was only a matter of time before Hot Chip should start to make waves on this side of the pond.

Made in the Dark (DFA/Astralwerks, 2008) marks a new direction for Taylor and his bandmates—Joe Goddard, Owen Clarke, Felix Martin and Al Doyle—partly because it's the result of a few new recording approaches that Taylor and Goddard (Hot Chip's primary production brain) sought to experiment with. "There wasn't a massive change in a lot of the ways we worked on this record," Goddard is quick to explain. "I still used [Steinberg] Cubase SX3 on my laptop in my bedroom for most of it. But Al and Felix worked on a few songs in their studio using [Apple] Logic, and we also tracked three songs at the Strongroom, which is a real studio in London—that's something that we've never done before. They just had a good live room, so we went in there and set up with all our amps. We actually recorded five or six songs, but three live takes made it onto the record."

Rife with squiggly synth hooks, raucous guitar and bass lines, a sedulous mixture of programmed and live percussion, and moments of soulful introspection laced with wry humor, *Made in the Dark* is a multilayered, headphone-happy outing that brims with spontaneity—a hallmark of many a Hot Chip recording or remix. "We've never really been too good at bothering to get rid of the little imperfections," Taylor admits, finally stumbling across the Yamaha PortaSound VSS-30 synth he's been looking for. "But I think that adds some

By Bill Murphy | Photos by Bevis Martin & Charlie Youle



While You Were Sleeping

As veterans of low-to-the-ground production setups, Alexis Taylor and Joe Goddard are veritable poster boys for what a good old-fashioned bedroom rig can achieve when pushed to its limits. And they're not the only ones who think so; besides the DFA's James Murphy, whose label handles Hot Chip's U.S. distribution, everyone from Amy Winehouse to Kraftwerk has been lining up for remixes. Their latest client is Robert Wyatt—like Kraftwerk, another hero of Taylor and Goddard's rug-rat days.

"Whenever I'm looking through a gear magazine," Goddard observes, "I think about Lee Perry and the fact that you don't need all this stuff to make music. You can get it, and you can make good music with it, but it's about imagination more than equipment, pretty much always. But having said that, I'm starting to miss the fact that I can't get this lovely tone on a guitar just in my bedroom. In the future, I might try working with a few other things. But I still think it's really important for people to stretch what they've got and to learn the ins and outs of all their equipment."

As for the nature of that equipment, again, Taylor prefers to keep at least a few production secrets close to the vest. "We don't really like it if people can tell exactly what we're using," he says, "which is why I think we like to combine live sounds with preset or programmed sounds. There are things that are literally played with your fingers on a keyboard, and there are some things that are written on the computer. It's just more interesting to me to combine an electric guitar with a synthetic pan sound, for example, than to do it all on the computer or all live. The bedroom setups we use are great for achieving that."

personality, and it's good not to be too dogmatic about it if that's what suits the song. You shouldn't just say, 'Oh we never do that, so let's not bother.' If somebody's playing the guitar and they're only really gonna play a little melody once or twice, it's better just to record them doing it while they're in the right groove. As a group, we're working with a lot of different types of musicianship, so we almost *have* to be spontaneous whenever we can."

BENDS IN THE ROAD

Leaked this past June, the ominous-sounding single "Shake a Fist" was the opening punch. The track had become a staple of the band's live sets and, according to Goddard, the studio version—which avails itself of a spoken-word sample from Todd Rundgren's *Something/Anything?* album as a bridge between sections—was nearing completion before *The Warning* had even been released. "I take my laptop while I'm on tour," he says, "and so do Alexis and Felix. We're trying to constantly be working so that even if we're touring quite heavily, we can still build up a back catalog of stuff. 'Shake a Fist' was like that."

Goddard generated many of the song's jagged, undulating synth sounds with Arturia's suite of plug-ins—in particular, the Moog Modular and Prophet-5 emulations. "I just got really into the Moog Modular," he says. "There's one range of presets by a Japanese designer who uses the LFO a lot. You can hear this strange chorus and a wobbly LFO on some of these sounds, which I've used in lots of different productions. I also like to have two envelopes controlling noise and melodic sounds, so if you have the noise on a separate channel in Cubase but following the same melodic part, it just gets much punchier." (The latter trick gets a real workout in the robotic banger "Ready for the Floor.")

Meanwhile, "Bendable Poseable," as its title suggests, swings hard in the rhythmic sense. Using just a Shure Beta 57A mic going directly into Cubase, Goddard recorded a number of different live percussion parts and fashioned them into a jittery, three-minute loop that he emailed to Taylor, who laid down the main vocal using his own GarageBand setup. "I used the Cubase plug-in QuadraFuzz to add a little distortion to the drums," Goddard explains. "One is an

analog drum machine setting that gives them a little more fuzziness and crackliness so they sound edgy and not dull. Then you can mix them so they all have their own space."

STRENGTH TRAINING

Exploring new spaces became the operative method for the spate of tracks that the band recorded at the Neve console/Pro Tools-equipped Strongroom studios in London. Album opener "Out at the Pictures" probably best captures Hot Chip in a live setting, in part because the first third of the song is actually taken from a 2007 performance at The Fillmore in San Francisco. When the live energy of a packed house merges with the live in-studio take, the transition is virtually seamless.

"It's all about playing in one take," Taylor explains. "It's a completely different way of recording for us—even of making music and writing—because we're so used to working in a bedroom [see sidebar 'While You Were Sleeping']. We wanted some of the instruments to go through amps, and we wanted the sound to leak from each mic and amp so that you could hear that we were

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all together in a room." The track also features band-member Martin laying down live beats on an Elektron Machinedrum SPS-1, which was mixed by Dan Carey (M.I.A., Kylie Minogue), who worked his magic for six other tracks on *Made in the Dark*.

"Dan did record some things onto tape, as well," Goddard says. "He took our basic mix of the drums that we tracked at the Strongroom for 'One Pure Thought' and bounced them to 2-inch tape, which really created an amazing effect. It just brought them all into one sonic space and made them sound less like a digital, clean drum machine. Your ears can make better sense of the track now, and it just *sounds* lovely, you know?"

SOUL INSPIRATION

If you saw them in a pub or riding the Tube, you'd probably think the techno-geeky lads in Hot Chip would be the last bunch on Earth capable of delivering some legitimately funky soul, but the churchy "We're Looking for a Lot of Love" and the Chi-Lites-meet-Eno vibes of "In the Privacy of Our Love" dispel all such preconceptions. What's more, Taylor and Goddard really outdo themselves with "Wrestlers"—a slippery clap-track based ballad that's an homage of sorts to R. Kelly's "I'm a Flirt."

"Even though the song was made in a bedroom," Taylor says, "it had to have no surface noise on it

GEAR IN THE DARK

Computer, DAW, recording hardware

IBM ThinkPad laptop

Steinberg Cubase SX3 with Edirol soundcard

Mics, effects, plug-ins

Arturia Moog Modular V, Prophet V

Focusrite The Liquid Channel

preamp/compressor channel strip

Moogerfooger MF-103 12-Stage Phaser,

MF-104Z Analog Delay pedals

Neumann U 87 mic

Shure Beta 57A mic

Instruments, amplifiers, drum machines

Aria AG-20 practice amp

Casio CZ-101, MT-70 keyboards

Doepfer A100 analog modular synth

Elektron Machinedrum SPS-1 drum synthesizer

Encore E375 3/4-size electric guitar

Fender Rhodes electric piano

Gibson Firebird electric guitar

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because it's meant to be a loud, mid-tempo R&B groove that would work in a club, even if people don't normally sing about wrestling. [Laughs.] Me, Joe and Owen made that song in an afternoon, and I like that there's a lot of force behind that bass synth line and the vocal melody."

Layered vocals, in fact, fuel this and just about every other track on the album. "Usually, we do two takes of the same vocal part and then just put them together," Taylor explains. "They'll be slightly different—there will be tiny little idiosyncrasies in the way I've sung or Joe has sung, so if you stack them together they just work because they don't sound too artificial. Other times, we just double one performance and shift it a little bit out behind the beat. I do it more with records I've made on my own; it's that short delay you get on early rock 'n' roll records, like Jerry Lee Lewis, or even later on with John Lennon."

When it comes to creating the beats for Hot Chip's soulful excursions, Goddard claims one producer in particular as a key influence. "I always want to make something that's funky," he says, "but there's also a desire to make something that's just weird. It comes a little bit from Timbaland—the layers of percussion that are just these perfect little strange grooves. He's a massive inspiration probably to a lot of people, but particularly to me. When you put headphones on, there will be rhythms coming at you from all over the place, but all the patterns work perfectly together in the best way, so your ears are constantly being excited. If I can create that feeling, then I know the track is working." 

*programs not offered at all locations

What's Up, Stretch?

Flex and flow with audio tracks using Elastic Time in Pro Tools 7.4

By Jason Scott Alexander

After a long wait, elastic audio technology has finally come to Digidesign Pro Tools 7.4 (including Pro Tools 7.4 LE and 7.4 M-Powered). Using a set of powerful new time compression and expansion (TCE) algorithms, Elastic Time lets you manipulate audio in real time as if it were MIDI data, quickly moving notes, warping phrases and easily beat-matching audio to a session—all with absolutely no tempo constraints.

Not to be confused with the distinct skills of Beat Detective, which manipulates discrete, slice-based locations of recorded audio, Elastic Time fluidly stretches waveforms without cutting the audio. It's ideal for situations where audio should be malleable during experimentations with phrasing and groove construction, or when you don't know what your final tempo will be while laying rhythm parts. Elastic Time also preserves the built-in feel of audio as you apply groove templates or quantize, allowing for much bigger changes in tempo than Beat Detective can do—with little to no sonic degradation, even at pretty extreme tempo changes.

HOW IT WORKS

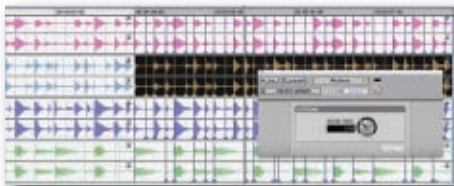
In Pro Tools 7.4, you can assign audio tracks to one of four Elastic Time algorithms that operate either in real time or as rendered processes. The algorithms are essentially plug-ins—Polyphonic, Rhythmic, Monophonic or Varispeed—initiated in the track controls area of the Edit window. Each is designed with specific styles of TCE playback in mind.

For an audio file to be considered “elastic,” it must be analyzed by dragging a file onto an Elastic track or changing a current audio track to play with an Elastic algorithm. In either case, the file goes offline momentarily for the software to detect its transient events; you can see the results by switching to the new Analysis track view, where Event markers show up at each detected attack transient.

I like to call up the DigiBase browser to import and analyze audio, mainly for its ability to audition files against a session already in playback mode. With the new Conform to Tempo button switched on at the top of the DigiBase window, files are automatically analyzed and locked to the session's tempo, even before the next downbeat comes around. That lets you hear which of the four algorithms works best before actually importing files into the events list. You can save time by right-clicking on any drive volume or folder within DigiBase and having Pro Tools analyze the files in the background, without stopping the flow of the session.

POLYRHYTHMIC MESSAGE

With analysis markers in place, the speed of an audio file changes relative to any tempo change—even though the audio file itself has not yet conformed to the actual bars and beats of the Pro Tools session. Quantizing an elastic audio region (using the standard Quantize window) automatically creates Warp markers from underlying analysis markers. If you switch your track view to the new Warp View mode, triangles at the base of each attack transient indicate the transformation.



POST-WARP 'EM > Here are audio tracks before and after quantizing, which adds Warp markers. The Elastic Time Rhythmic plug-in window is fine-tuning the Decay parameter of one of the percussion loops to get it in the pocket with the main groove.

Think of Warp markers as little handles that anchor specific points in the audio file (typically detected transient events) to the timeline to correct or adjust the timing of a performance. There are three types of warp behavior: Accordion Warp expands or compresses audio on both sides of a single Warp marker equally—useful when the downbeat occurs in the middle of the region; Range Warp performs TCE between two fixed points only; and with Telescoping

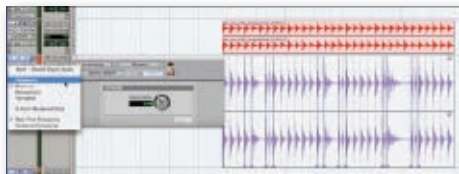
Warp, the entire audio region stretches proportionally to match the session tempo map and Bar/Beat grid. In Warp view, you can add, relocate and delete markers to suit the task.

When you slow down or speed up a session's tempo drastically, reach for the Elastic Time plug-in window. Depending on the algorithm in use, the window will usually contain only a single context-sensitive parameter. The general-purpose Polyphonic algorithm has a parameter that allows you to tighten or loosen the response of the TCE envelope around instruments such as guitar, complex loops or multi-instrument mixes. Best suited for drum tracks and percussion loops, the Rhythmic plug-in features a Decay Time parameter for trimming the tail end of elastic expansion. When applied on a track-by-track basis, it lets you fine-tune the way multiple percussive tracks fit in the pocket together—great for tightening up the *sha-woosh* at the end of a stretched-out snare that's been slowed way down, for example. You never have to worry about the Rhythmic algorithm smearing attack transients because it works by letting a short period of audio after each Warp marker go by unchanged before starting any time compression. Smart.

Another very cool feature lets you copy groove templates—as extracted by Beat Detective—to an audio file. That can be extremely useful in applying the feel of a live drummer to a rigid electronic loop or to a bass



WHIP IT GOOD > The Elastic Properties box is your window to the math behind TCE behavior, with parameters for audio source length, tempo, meter and event-detection sensitivity. It's where you conform a region of known length to the Pro Tools timeline, which adds event markers, as seen here.



BE A CONFORMIST > The DigiBase window now includes a Conform to Tempo button, letting you audition Elastic Audio files at the current session's tempo. It automatically analyzes files and checks them off when they're finished.



DO IT BY HAND > Here, a 16th-note arpeggiator loop (top) has been adjusted manually by sliding Warp markers, either on or off the grid. Trying different Elastic algorithms and settings can yield cool and surprising effects.

line that you recorded in another session. On material where you want to keep the formant relationships intact, such as bass or vocals, the Monophonic algorithm is the one to use. With no editable parameters, you simply set it and forget it.

RUBBER-BAND ORCHESTRA

Aside from its obvious corrective nature, Elastic Time is also an amazingly flexible remix tool. For example, performing stretch-effects on drum hits and vocals using the Polyphonic algorithm, you simply grab the tail-end Warp marker and drag the note out for as long as you wish. It's perfect for vocal stutters, and you don't waste time with offline processing.

Another common remixing trick repeats samples in rapid fire at build-ups and transitions. Previously in Pro Tools, you'd have to do that by trimming it down to a single hit and duplicating the region dozens of times. Now, head to the Elastic properties box, click on the “1/2” button next to the Source Length display, and you instantly turn a standard two-bar eighth-note snare fill into a one-bar 16th-note roll. Halving it again yields a tight 32nd-note roll. Duplicate the region a few times, and you're done.

You can also use Warp markers to manually regroove audio parts with completely fluid and natural results. Take a highly staccato 16th-note arpeggiator loop: By adding new Warp markers anywhere within the decay portion of a particular note and stretching it, you can introduce lofty hang times and change its phrasing entirely. Other great uses for the technique include refitting vocals, interpolating sample replays and introducing variation to an electronic kick drum loop by stretching only certain beats, so as to match or play off the spaces within a live kit pattern.

For a completely wacky effect, try linking pitch together with time compression using the Varispeed algorithm to produce a cool tape-life effect. I often set that loose on breakbeats, so as you move Warp markers back and forth, the pitch jams up and down for a trippy hop-skip-and-jump sound. Of course, the timing remains perfectly on tempo, catching up or falling back as necessary.

Digidesign recently posted the 7.4cs2 update, which changes the behavior of Elastic Time's quantization beneficially for multitrack drums. Previously, it quantized from the transient nearest to the grid, but Pro Tools now picks the earliest transient across grouped tracks for a given hit—that is, the first mic that records a hit. That's a huge improvement for multitrack audio.



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Distorted Realities



Not just for heavy guitar, distortion flows everywhere through the world of music; learn to use it like a warm breeze or an icy storm *By Peter Wetherbee*

We all know what it sounds like to run a sound through the cranked-up amplifiers or overdrive pedals guitarists use; basically, it's the same thing that happens when you overload your microphone inputs while recording and the meters peak too long in the red: The sound gets dirty, fuzzy, grungy and gritty. That is commonly known as distortion, and the same qualities of harmonic saturation that are revered by guitarists can be a bane to recording engineers and home recordists who are simply trying to get a good, clean track recorded.

Distortion, overdrive and clipping are all variations on the same theme, and the result is a saturated signal that sustains and resonates with overtones and character. To overdrive a sound is to crank up its essence and saturate it with its own harmonic content; a cooking analogy would be stewing something in its own juices. This textural modification of a sound can be horrible or sublime, but careful filtering of distortion to remove or enhance certain frequency ranges can make all the difference between magic and mayhem.

Much has been made about the difference between tube and solid-state gear, analog versus digital, warmth versus accuracy, and the qualities that define good sound and bad. In most cases, those distinctions relate to the degree and qualities of the distortion generated. In a tube microphone preamp, for example, the kind of

"warmth" that is most highly valued is a subtle distortion characteristic that softens peaks, clips gently and enhances the character of the microphone or instrument it is transforming to a recordable level. The staggering array of new, handmade boutique tube gear available—as well as great-sounding digital products that are devoted to emulating the quirky funkiness of old-school "warmth"—mean that the right tools are available to anyone who cares to learn how to use them.

LICENSE TO SHRED

Extreme distortion over the years has been the realm mostly of guitarists, who worship harmonic overdrive and saturation with evangelical fervor. Early tube guitar amplifiers made by Mesa Boogie—along with other amps such as the less versatile but no less fearsome Marshall stacks favored by Jimi Hendrix—in many ways put overdriven and sustaining lead guitar sounds on the map in the early '70s (think Carlos Santana). An early innovation on Boogies was a five-band graphic EQ that allowed a remarkable amount of tone shaping, using filters to tame otherwise uncontrollable feedback and saturated tone. When you have a sound that is fat and juicy, a flanger or phaser in the signal path really has something to chew on, resulting in some fine sonic pornography. (See audio examples 1 through 3 at remixmag.com.)

SPIRIT OF '76

Now with over-the-top use of distortion out of the way, let's turn down from 11 to some more subtle instances of distortion to expand upon. These techniques for adding texture and harmonic content can bring some fresh perspective to the traditional tasks of recording and mixing a song.

On the pristine, superhigh-end, pop-record side of things (Mariah, Celine, other superdivas), many producers and engineers agree that the best compressor to put on a lead vocal is the venerable UA 1176. It's one of the great compressors in the history of music recording, but it stands out is because it imparts a very sweet musical bite to a lead vocal track—particularly to a female voice. That is a subtle but effective use of distortion in a place few might expect to find it, and it is a sort of old-school predecessor to an aural exciter-type of effect; it is worth noting that aural exciter circuits actually add tiny bits of distortion at high-mid frequencies to create an extra sparkle on a sound. (See audio examples 4 through 5 at remixmag.com.)

There are several digital emulations of the 1176, and most of them capture its enhancing quality fairly well; this effect is worth checking out on just about any midrange-or-higher frequency track that you want to sit up-front.

On the opposite end of the frequency spectrum, one of my favorite compressors to use to record a down-and-dirty DI bass track is the FMR Audio RNC 1776, which is capable of an unusually fast release time that distorts in a way that imparts a wonderfully natural-sounding fatness. (See audio examples 6 through 7 at remixmag.com.)

Listening to the radio in 2008, our ears are increasingly accustomed to hearing different types of idiosyncratic distortion from tools currently in vogue; extreme

settings on the ever-present Antares Auto-Tune plug-in, for example, bring a kind of resonance to a signal by adding a sort of sine-wave power, which bites and cuts. Many mainstream pop records of the last eight or more years use it overtly on vocals, which again underlines how distortion is used in unexpected places. Add a little tasteful overdrive effect to a healthy dose of Auto-Tune, and a simple background voice or strings can become truly enigmatic. Especially in the freewheeling, constantly innovating and rule-breaking worlds of hip-hop, ambient, techno and all forms of deep club music (which in turn influence the larger world of pop music), pushing these various envelopes leads to creative satisfaction. (See audio examples 8 through 10 at remixmag.com.)

FUZZ ON THE SOFT SIDE

Of course, we can always crank up any mic preamps, compressors, input trims, etc., to the max to achieve some kind of overdrive fuzz, and sometimes that is exactly what's needed for a quick guitar or synth part

If you use guitar stompboxes, you typically need to roll off some of the highs in order to keep your distortion tones from fuzzing out too much. Back in the days of stompbox evolution, some very popular fuzz boxes of the '70s, such as the MXR Dist+ and the Electro-Harmonix Big Muff, were trumped by the Pro Co Rat, which introduced a single filter knob. One of my favorite distortion boxes of the '90s was the SansAmp GT, which emulates Marshalls, Fenders and Boogies in one box, with selectable emulations of three types of mic placements in front of a virtual speaker. The SansAmp has a buffered input that will accept a wide range of signal levels, which you can run directly into the board or as an insert effect; its speaker emulations are that close to the real thing.

Nowadays, there are so many emulations of every kind of amplifier/speaker/microphone combination ever recorded that it quickly becomes overwhelming, but if you have access to the great Line 6 emulations or a plug-in like IK Multimedia Amplitube, you might be surprised at how good some of those presets sound



BLACK BEAUTY > Bomb Factory's 1176 Peak Limiter is just one plug-in emulation of the revered 1176 compressor, which introduces a subtle, creamy distortion to female vocals and other sources.

HIGH AS (SHUT YO' MOUTH) > The classic Electro-Harmonix Big Muff distortion pedal still rules, but you may want to roll off some of the high-end.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL > IK Multimedia's Amplitube (as well as many other plug-ins) provides physical models of countless amp, effect and mic combinations, which will add some zazz to synths, drums and other instruments besides guitar.

Distorted Realities

on your drum and synth tracks that need a little oomph. (See audio examples 11 through 19 at remixmag.com.)

One great thing about fuzz-type overdrive distortion is that when you run just about any sound through a very subtle amount of it, you get a lot of tiny fractal edges that make other effects sparkle farther down the signal path. Just a tiny bit of grit on a simple orchestra or jazz instrument gives it a patina that takes a flanger sweep and makes it sparkle. (See audio examples 20 through 21 at remixmag.com.)

RICH ACOUSTICS

You can find distortion employed everywhere in music. The classic sound of the Hammond Organ relies heavily on the overdrive of the tube amplification in Leslie cabinets, and without that grit, it just doesn't sound like soul music. The African mbira is a thumb piano that benefits greatly from being attached to a resonant gourd with bottle caps nailed to it, which creates a buzzing texture to enhance the mbira's tone. That enharmonic noise component brings to mind another kind of textural distortion, found in the family of instruments loosely categorized as flutes.

Whether we're talking about Mozart or Native American,

psychoacoustic perceptive processes and preconceptions of how a distorted guitar tone is created (cranking up an amp), which can make a listener think, "it must be loud to sound like that." Overdriven sounds evoke both subconscious and cognitive responses in the listener, above and beyond the richness of resulting harmonic saturation. Along the same lines, studio sessions—that may sound great at high volumes through studio monitors pushed to their limits—may sound smaller and tamer in the mastering facility because part of what the artist heard during recording and mixing was aided by distortion occurring in the monitor amplifiers themselves.

During my days working for Bill Laswell in the '90s, I was fortunate to attend many mastering sessions with Howie Weinberg at Masterdisk in NYC. Weinberg had a few surprising tricks up his sleeves in the midst of his hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of ultrahigh-end mastering EQs, converters and compressors. Sometimes he would run finished mixes through the most seemingly incongruous pieces of gear that he had, a couple of old Pultec EQs—often without any actual EQ settings engaged—to simply warm up mixes that came in sounding too clean, brittle and digital.

plug-in on your DAW's master bus, you can gain some of the subtle but important harmonic saturation of analog summing without the expensive hardware. (See audio examples 26 through 27 at remixmag.com.)

WARM IT UP, TAPE

Recording to analog tape introduces pleasing, controllable distortion in the form of compression and non-linear EQ response. Many engineers prefer recording drums, bass and other rhythm instruments to tape precisely for that reason; unfortunately, tape machines, tape and other necessary related tools come at a much higher price than recording the same session digitally, so digital recording often prevails.

I recently dumped the stereo mixes of a rock record that had been recorded and mixed digitally in Pro Tools to analog 1/2-inch tape as the first step in mastering, to achieve some smoothing and gelling of the mixes. This process imparted some of the very subtle and musical characteristics of recording to analog tape, which include a slight compression and harmonic engagement with the tape itself. Although this subtle use of distortion was never noticeable as such,

Indian classical, ancient indigenous wood or bamboo flutes from any continent, flutes by nature employ an intrinsic "noise" component as a result of blowing air over a hole (as opposed to into a sealed mouthpiece like on a trumpet). The richness of a flute's tone is directly related to that nontonal rush of air that is a big chunk of broadband noise, related closer to wind howling or water rushing over a waterfall than to anything flute players do with their fingers to create specific notes.

Synth programmers use similar noise sources to add texture and richness to a patch and as a source for filtering and modulating into something sweet and tasty. Adding harmonic distortion to a flute sound will have a different result than adding more enharmonic noise, but the result may even be more musically pleasing. Overdriving a flute sound will add harmonically saturated overtones that are directly related to the notes of the source material and that can evolve the sound into something that makes your ears perk up. (See audio examples 22 through 25 at remixmag.com.)

A distorted guitar tone always sounds "louder" than a clean tone, as a result of factors including both nonlinear

STIFLING LIMITATIONS

Most of us who record, mix and master music witnessed the "limiting wars" of the last decade, in which engineers would limit and compress a final mix to extreme levels, attempting to fit the most perceived loudness into the 16 bits of a commercial CD release and sound as loud as possible over the radio. The downside, of course, is that making everything as loud as possible sacrifices dynamic range, and everything ends up sounding pretty cruddy and—ironically—smaller.

You can achieve superior results by using a plug-in such as McDSP Analog Channel on the master bus. It emulates the subtle and refined distortion characteristics of a high-end mixing console—typically featuring intrinsic soft-clipping and compression elements—and the advantage is that there are musical components to the process far more pleasing to the ear than simply crushing the dynamics of a mix. Much has been made of the difference between "mixing in the box" (bouncing a mix within a DAW down to a stereo master) and summing computer tracks out through a high-end mixing console. By putting Analog Channel or another such

the result was a richer-sounding mix, smoother on the top and fatter in the low end. McDSP Analog Channel can also achieve similar results with its series of tape-machine emulations. (See audio examples 28 through 29 at remixmag.com.)

The potential enemy here, when adding varying degrees of harmonic saturation to individual instruments or even an entire mix, is mud. Too much of a good thing can fill up too much space, and excessive layers of rich textures can simply make murky soup. The trick is to use your sonic enhancements tastefully and sparingly, to bring richness to key elements and let them stand out instead of having everything saturated.

I hope this discussion of distortion in its many manifestations will inspire further exploration and fearless experimentation in the wild world of overdrive and harmonic saturation. Keep your heads up for next month's similar venture into delay, reverb and other spatial effects. 



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DO MORE FOR LESS

Practice controllerism on a budget with a two-octave MIDI keyboard

The manufacturers don't want you to know this, but the truth is you don't have to plop down \$1,500 for the latest Allen & Heath mixer or \$3,000 on a JazzMutant Lemur to do creative things with MIDI and DJ software. Sure, having a brand new DJ controller with all kinds of bells and whistles will get you excited about trying new ideas, but you might get more mileage out of something at a fraction of those prices. There are many inexpensive two-octave keyboards that offer mappable controls in a small footprint. Perhaps you still have an M-Audio Oxygen 8 (\$149.95 for the Oxygen 8 V2; www.m-audio.com) lying around from your first foray into music production. Take it out and imagine how you might DJ with it. Think of how each knob and slider might best control two or more songs on the fly. It's actually a lot more realistic than you might imagine, so let's turn the zillion-selling Oxygen 8 into a controllerist's dream rig.

GET IT STARTED

When I first switched to digital DJing from vinyl four years ago, the Oxygen 8 was one of the only portable MIDI controllers that would not break the bank, so I made it work. Surprisingly, it beat out every new option until recently when I upgraded to a customized Vestax VCI-100 (www.vestax.com). The Oxygen 8's keys handle all pitch bending, tempo adjustments and transport controls for two decks, and the knobs act as dedicated effects controls. An optional footswitch can engage a hidden "controllerist layer" that I'll detail later. If you have an Oxygen 8 or similar two-octave keyboard, I recommend you get an additional footswitch like the M-Audio SP-1 (\$19.95), which will help you wrangle a lot of control out of a small surface area.

I created TKS (Traktor MIDI assignments) and Oxygen 8 settings files that will get everything running appropriately. You can find both on remixmag.com, but keep in mind that although the files will work with the older Oxygen 8 and most two-octave keyboards—such as the Alesis Photon X25, Behringer UMX25 or the Edirol PCR-M1—the layout is optimized for use with the Oxygen 8 V2. All of the keys in my layout are split into two sections—left and right—which control the left- and right-hand deck, respectively. Each key is grouped into areas based on logical sequences of actions. For example, the three black keys work together to play a song and grab it like you would a record. The first black key drops a cue; the second goes back to that cue and samples it (Cue-play); and the third plays the song from that temporary cue point. This simple but effective grouping is the first basic controllerist technique you can learn: dropping a cue on the fly and then going back to it with the Play and Pause buttons to "scratch out" the section, extending



The author, Ean Golden, developed a cue-point juggling system—and possible back problems—using the M-Audio Oxygen 8 keyboard and a footswitch.

CODY RASMUSSEN

a break or sampling an appropriate word into the next song. That's the bread-and-butter technique of many mash-up DJs and turntablists in clubs. Instead of blending long mixes, they just grab the last part of the record and sample it over the intro of a new song.

STAYING IN TIME

Programs such as Native Instruments Traktor very accurately match the tempos of songs for you, so nine times out of 10 only small adjustments are needed to keep songs perfectly in sync. A group of four tactile and responsive white Oxygen 8 keys effectively handle tempo down, tempo up, pitch down and pitch up, in that order. Because the keys are next to each other, you can easily bend the pitch and tempo at the same time—like a turntable's pitch fader, but with more accuracy. The technique does take some getting used to if you learned on turntables, but for house, hip-hop or any fixed-tempo genre, the keys work surprisingly well.

JUGGLE IT

The easiest way to jump into controllerism is to experiment with cue-point juggling. Cue juggling differs from the turntablist's standard, beat juggling, because you are jumping between different points within a song. That can be done with two different songs or two copies of the same song, depending on the routine.

The key is to consistently place your cue points so that they make sense to your brain and are easy to work with on the fly. I often place five cue points on every song in a consistent manner so each cue is placed on a different hit or sound that I would like to sample in a logical progression through the track. The first cue

point always goes on the first down beat—usually a kick. And if the software supports it, I always make this cue a "load marker," so the song always starts at the right spot. Then the next cue is always placed on the second hit—usually a snare or similar sound—so my kick and snare are always right next to each other for freestyle drumming. The third cue is always placed on a cymbal, hi-hat or sound with a long tail, and the fourth always goes on a fill. Finally, the fifth cue goes on the downbeat of the first major part of the song. Not only does this fifth cue provide me with a visual reference of when I need to be finished mixing, but it's also usually a good spot for beat juggling with two copies of the same song. I set up my VCI-100 so the jog wheels always trigger that last cue. Then with two copies of the same song loaded, I can juggle between them using the crossfader and the jog wheels as triggers. It looks and feels just like juggling two records but with more control—a classic example of effective controllerism. Those five cues are played in the Oxygen 8 layout by engaging the footswitch, which turns the five black keys into direct cue-point triggers for each deck.

Controllerism can be a lot of fun if you set up your gear correctly, so use a controller that is simple to understand and fun to use. There are many options out there, but I encourage you to think for yourself and use these ideas as a jumping-off point to develop your own signature way of working with music. 



For the accompanying TKS and Oxygen 8 settings files and a cue-point triggering video, go to remixmag.com or to Ean's blog at DJtechtools.com.

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PO' MAN'S DAWs

Check out software that lets you record and edit multitrack audio on the cheap

While the exorbitant price tags that come part and parcel with the majority of full-featured DAWs (digital audio workstations), and audio editors have started to come down in some cases (such as the \$499 Apple Logic Studio), several bills for software is still an awful lot for those who are tight in the wallet. But alternatives do exist. On the one hand, smart companies such as BIAS Inc.—although for-profit businesses—know that both hobbyists and professionals are attracted to affordability. On the other hand are the pure motives of the traditional freeware and shareware communities, and more recently, the rising prominence of open-source audio software; both of those worlds share one thing in common: a technically savvy urge to bring useful tools to the widest possible audience, at little or no cost. If you are richer with ideas and motivation than cash flow, look no further than the suggestions presented here for assistance. You'll get up and recording with minimal pinch to your stash.

PRICE SHRINKAGE

Do you want to be in sync with the big-league industry standard but don't have several thousand dollars, euros or pounds to drop on a Pro Tools|HD system? Never fear—enter the most affordable Pro Tools package yet, Digidesign's Mbox 2 Micro (\$279, www.digidesign.com). This simple yet unique USB key authorizes the included Pro Tools LE software and has a miniheadphone jack and volume wheel for monitoring. Aside from breaking the Pro Tools entrance price, this little Pro Tools hardware/software bundle is geared toward on-the-go laptop users. Out of the box, it features 32 audio tracks and 256 simultaneous MIDI tracks, 24-bit/44.1- or 48-kHz audio fidelity, more than 50 DSP plug-ins and virtual instruments and stereo audio output—but no inputs.

If \$279 is still steep for you, check out Mackie Tracktion. When it debuted, Tracktion turned heads at trade shows for its well-featured but uncluttered interface and handsome \$99 price tag. The feature set and price have risen during the course of a few incarnations, but Mackie kept alive its original promise of a competitive yet inexpensive DAW with the Tracktion 3 Project Bundle (\$129.99, www.mackie.com). Don't let the uncluttered user interface fool you; this puppy boasts unlimited audio, MIDI and virtual-instrument track counts; a 64-bit/192 kHz mix engine; an Acid, Apple and REX loop player with auto-time correct; several LinPlug, IK Multimedia and other virtual instruments; a large array of loops and samples; support for QuickTime video; and plenty more.

Cockos Inc. presents an interesting take on shareware with Reaper (www.cockos.com/reaper), a full-



DOUG EISENGREIN

featured DAW that is available as a fully functional trial, as a "noncommercial" license for \$50 and finally a "commercial use" license for \$225 (the Website explains the differences). Reaper supports Windows 98, ME, 2000, XP, Vista and even WINE (Windows for UNIX); a Mac OS X version is in development and expected for early 2008. For most individual artists, the noncommercial license should suffice. For a measly 50 bucks, you get unlimited tracks and unlimited effects per track; support for various file types, sampling rates, bit depths, varying tempos and multiple time signatures in a single project; tremendous flexibility with signal routing and sidechaining; and direct recording to a large variety of compressed and uncompressed audio types, including FLAC and OGG. All that goodness is delivered with a 64-bit audio engine and an installer that is slightly larger than 3 MB.

EDIT AUDIO, NOT YOUR CHECKBOOK

If you want to start out with a professional-grade yet affordable Mac OS X audio editor, check out BIAS Peak LE 6 (\$129, www.bias-inc.com). This chip off the old Peak Pro block supports as high as 24-bit/96 kHz audio files in AIFF, WAV, SDII, AAC, QuickTime, Apple Lossless and other formats. It includes a large amount of built-in DSP effects (both standard and creative) and features a nice array of playlist and CD-burning features, including ISRC code entry and editing.

Rogue Amoeba Fission (\$32, www.rogueamoeba.com/fission) is an inexpensive yet very useful audio editor for Mac OS X; aside from the usual basic array of audio editing tools such as fade-in, fade-out, cut/

copy/paste, split and normalize, it is the perfect companion to iTunes. Are you tired of constantly adjusting the volume on iTunes or your iPod due to variances in your songs' volumes? Fission may be your answer. It has the unusual ability to edit ID3 tags to AAC, Apple Lossless and MP3 files on the fly—no file re-encoding necessary, which means that it is truly lossless.

Finally, for a cross-platform option, the ever-evolving open-source freeware Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>) is a great catch for Windows, GNU/Linux, Mac OS X and even Mac OS Classic users. Though essentially an editor, Audacity can record and play back as many as 16 audio tracks. The audio editing capabilities are excellent considering it costs nothing; it includes the typical fade-in and fade-out, normalize, etc., but Audacity sports its own bundle of plug-ins and supports third-party VSTs, as well. It can handle WAV, AIFF, MP3, OGG and FLAC formats, and files can be as high as 32-bit floating-point/96 kHz. Multiple bit depths and sampling rates are supported in a single project.

SEARCH-ENGINE SAVINGS

Those are just a few of many cheap or free audio applications out there. Some of the companies, such as Rogue Amoeba and Sourceforge, offer many other tools, and some searching on the Web will turn up a treasure chest of other DAWs, audio editors, plug-ins and other strange goodies that will dent your bank account only slightly or not at all. Don't worry about friends who have the latest big-name software (and lower bank balances). Google and inspiration can take you pretty far. 

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STAYING POWER

Build your brand and maintain career longevity in the fickle business of music

In 1997, I, Greg, registered AllHipHop.com to market and promote the artists on my label. When I saw the amount of people who were downloading our music off of the site, I shifted my focus to the Internet. We were doing close to 30,000 downloads a month, which at the time was mind-boggling. I struck some deals with eMusic and other retailers and started selling downloads. Around 1997, Chuck and I linked up. Chuck and I have known each other since high school. He was already in New York doing journalism, as well as running his Website, Tantrum-Online.com. We decided to merge the companies. We adopted the Tantrum logo (the AllHipHop exclamation point) and started marketing the AllHipHop.com brand as a daily hip-hop Website. We have been working on it every day since then. Every day, I must stress!

What does it mean to build a brand?

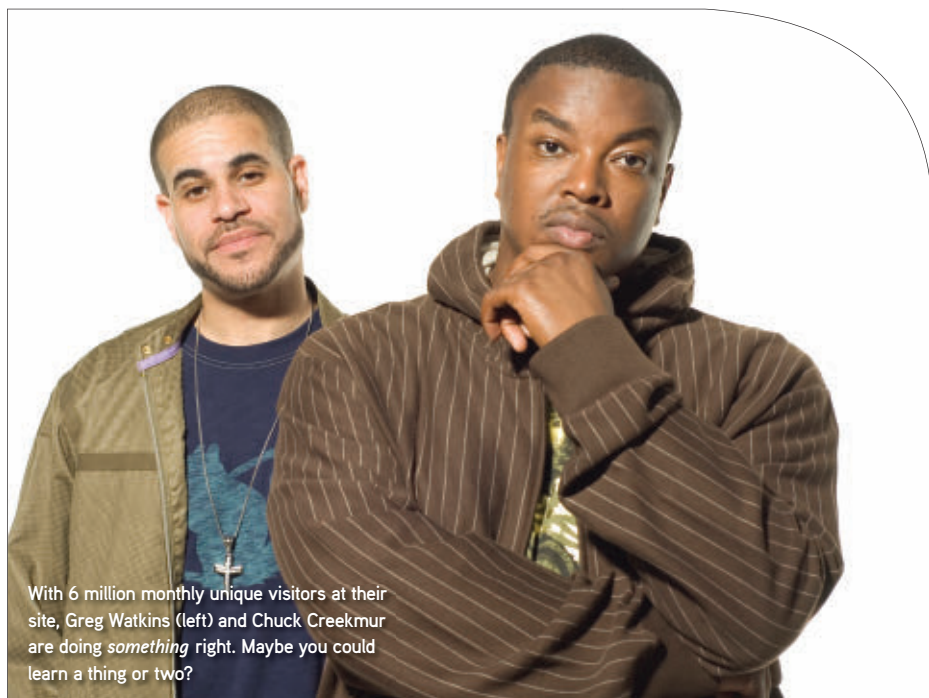
Chuck: The consistency of daily news is important. I am pretty sure we were the first wholly hip-hop site to deliver daily news to the Internet. Then, we added onto that by being the first to deliver news to wireless devices like the Motorola pagers. So the theme for our brand has been consistency, and then a lot of other things have fallen into place from there.

Greg: Building a brand simply means having something your consumer base can continuously identify with. Our brand's growth to this point has been totally organic—meaning word of mouth. The one thing to remember is that your brand is only going to be as good as the product the brand releases. If you are a new band, no matter how much branding you do, if your music stinks, no one will care—longevity comes from your product being world-class.

The music industry is fickle. What are the successful artists doing to get in the game and stay there?

Greg: Know your craft. This means knowing not just a few chords on the guitar, or how to play the drums, but knowing all aspects of music. Sometimes people believe that if you are into the business, this somehow depletes your creativity. That's not true! That's how you get swindled! Sure, you may not want to read a 500-page contract, but reading and knowing the music business is really the first key to success, after which, of course, you have your best music recorded. I have found that reading about my favorite artists helps me learn the business. At the moment, I am reading Rolling Stones guitarist Ron Woods' autobiography, *Ronnie; Soulsville U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records*; and *They All Sang on the Corner* by Philip Groia. In short...read!

Also important, a great band must have a great live show, and each fan must feel like they have left with something. This has always been the area where per-



With 6 million monthly unique visitors at their site, Greg Watkins (left) and Chuck Creekmur are doing *something* right. Maybe you could learn a thing or two?

RAYON RICHARDS

formers make money. (Just make sure you pay your taxes on that cash income.) One thing to do is play with other bands that have followings in areas that you do not. Never abandon your local scene, but take your gospel (the music) on the road and spread the message!

Chuck: Successful artists these days are those who connect to the listener on an emotional level. I am not afraid to admit that I cried with Biggie died. I cried at Jam Master Jay's funeral. Those artists made an emotional connection to me as a person. Same with Tupac. Say anything negative about Pac, and somebody is likely to rip into you. In this new era, we don't always see rappers rise to the top. They just appear up there with a hit song, and there is no attachment to the listener. We saw Biggie, Pac and JMJ grow as people, grow as artists, and when they were taken from us, we felt that like we lost an old friend. I think the successful artist is still able to make these connections to the listener in a way that makes them loyal. After 10-plus years, Jay-Z is still one of the biggest things in hip-hop. Look at 50. People are rabid about him—love or hate. Kanye is the same. And people love Beyoncé because she has grown before them and works harder than ever to entertain them.

Who is key for bands/artists to hire to help them move their careers forward?

Greg: For a band, it probably goes in this natural progression: producer, studio, engineer, manager (to manage day-to-day stuff, from marketing plans to press kits to finding booking agents), attorney (to watch that manager!), booking agent, publicist and accountant (to make sure the tax man doesn't get you). Your team should be doing the things you cannot or are incapable of.

Chuck: I think it is important to have a team where each person can serve more than one role. Both Greg and I have acted in several capacities over the years. I have a degree in journalism, but I also can draw and do graphic images. I learned HTML. Here is a good example: Joe Budden is a rapper whom I appreciate, but I went to a listening session and saw how his team moved, and it was crazy. The guys who make his beats also document his life on video. He's got another person who's a character on the new album, but he also serves as an executive producer. And his DJ does promotion.

What's a common mistake bands make in the biz?

Greg: One thing I see is that bands frequently get wasted or party too much before, during and after their shows. I am all for the party life, but no one can do that every night for a year straight. Well, Mötley Crüe and Ozzy Osbourne did, but many other guys failed miserably and died trying in the process. When I see that, I immediately tune out because I don't want to invest my time or money into anyone who gets on the stage trashed to perform. You should have enough ability and confidence to do it sober.

What's most important for a band/artist to know about maintaining longevity in music?

Greg: I've met many masters of the music business, and I take something away from each conversation I have. The common theme among all who have lasted is building a team and cultivating long-term relationships. Never burn your bridges in this business and work hard. There are usually five to 10 years worth of hard work behind every "overnight" success! 



COOKIN' UP HISTORY — AGAIN.

Grandmaster Flash is not just the Creator of the Quik Mix Theory — he's a Scientist. From his ground-breaking appearance in *Wildstyle* cutting, rubbing and mixing in the kitchen to his induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Flash demands the best from himself and his gear.

Over the last 25 years, Flash has evolved as a DJ and Producer, and naturally so has his DJ setup. In anticipation, he waited for a digital vinyl system that could deliver the purest analog feel while giving him new tools to take his technique into the future.

When Flash got his hands on **TRAKTOR SCRATCH**, the wait was over. With the tightest timecode, most professional audio interface and creative mixing software, Flash can express himself in new ways and keep things cooking on the dance floor.

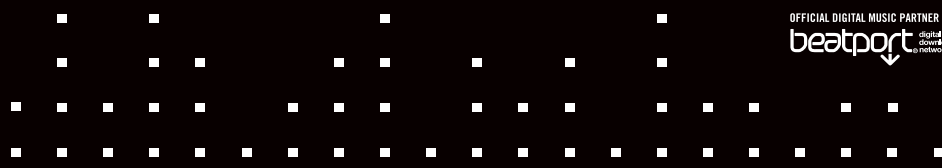
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TECH SECTOR

NEW PRODUCTS

By Asher Fuler



ACCESS VIRUS TI SNOW

TABLETOP SYNTH WITH SOFTWARE INTEGRATION

Legendary Virus TI power is now available in a portable, keyboard-less version as the **Virus TI Snow** (\$1,350; www.access-music.de). In a small tabletop box with a stylish wooden front panel, the Snow works with all TI-series patches. The synth engine sports 50-note playback with four multitimbral parts, multiple oscillator models, a Moog cascade filter emulation and a deep effects section. While the front panel offers full programming capabilities, you can also edit and store sounds using the included Virus Control plug-in for VST/AU/RTAS hosts that, among other things, offers an intensely cool Easy Edit mode that adaptively assigns multiple parameters to the three value knobs for quickly making sweeping changes with a single knob. With analog stereo inputs and outputs, MIDI I/O and USB, the Snow has Access Total Integration that can route sounds from a DAW to the Snow's filters and envelopes and back.

MOTU DIGITAL PERFORMER 6 DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATION

MOTU **Digital Performer 6** (\$795; www.motu.com) should be a success thanks to a serious focus on user-requested features. In addition to a full interface redesign, subtle but powerful improvements include resizable tracks in the Tracklist, new "floating" Inspector palettes, window tabs and more. The powerful new Comp Track feature is similar to Logic's Quick-Swipe comping, and the new ProVerb convolution reverb is drastically more CPU-efficient and includes a cool Dynamic Mix feature that ducks the wet signal as the input level increases for a wetter mix without losing clarity. The new MasterWorks Leveler contains four LA-2A models (two classic, two modern) for smoothing out tracks beautifully. XML file import/export tightens up integration between DP6 and Final Cut Pro, making it easy to see changes to a new video edit from inside your DP6 session. DP6 also shows massive performance gains when using virtual instruments. Audio Units plug-in support has been expanded, now offering 100-percent sample-accurate timing, sidechaining and ramp-based automation. RTAS plug-in support, native AIFF and WAV file compatibility, support for interleaved audio files (stereo and surround), enhanced plug-in management and direct-to-CD burning all demonstrate MOTU's commitment to its users.



NOVATION NOCTURN ULTRAPORTABLE AUTOMAP CONTROLLER

To accompany the new Automap Universal 2 software at the NAMM Show 2008, Novation announced the Automap-capable **Nocturn** (\$199; www.novationmusic.com), the smallest device to support Automap. It sports a pro-grade 45 mm crossfader, eight rear-illuminated buttons and eight rotary encoders, each with bright 11-LED rings. There is also one of Novation's awesome Speed Dials, which can take control of anything your mouse pointer rests over, from DAW controls to other apps and OS controls. As you switch from DAW to plug-in and back, Automap automatically reassigns Nocturn's controls to the currently active program. Users can make their own MIDI Maps just as easily and then find them using Automap 2's browsing. Maps can be traded and shared, and Novation will undoubtedly have a growing collection on its Website to download. A side-mounted USB socket helps the Nocturn sit directly in front of your laptop's keyboard without a cable jutting out of the back.



EUPHONIX MC CONTROL AND MC MIX PROFESSIONAL SOFTWARE CONTROLLERS

Using its EuCon control protocol with eight times the resolution and 250 times the speed of MIDI signals (using Ethernet), Euphonix has brought the power of its high-end large-format consoles to incredibly thin and portable controllers. The **MC Control** (\$1,999; www.euphonix.com) and **MC Mix** (\$1,399) create a modular editing/mixing system capable of controlling any software—DAW or otherwise. The MC Control offers a unique customizable touch-screen interface with 12 assignable soft keys that can send key-strokes—and customizable macro commands—to the foreground application, auto-switching between banks of assignments as you move from program to program. Four touch-sensitive motorized 100 mm faders can control any number of tracks, and eight touch-sensitive, push-button rotary encoders offer even deeper control. The MC Mix loses the touch screen and Transport section in lieu of a set of eight faders, as well as eight rotary encoders. Both devices are compatible with EuCon, HUI and Mackie Control protocols, and can be chained for as many as 36 total faders (four MC Mix units and one MC Control). The included Studio Monitor Express matrix system controls your system's monitoring connections from the control surface, and there is full control integration for Apogee Ensemble, Symphony and Duet interfaces, as well as native Apple Logic Pro support. The MC units can control multiple applications and multiple workstations via Ethernet, a first for a small-format device. Like a full-size pro console in a tiny box, the MC Control and MC Mix can help you produce with speed and precision.

AKAI MPC5000

MUSIC PRODUCTION CENTER

Akai has created a monster. The new **MPC5000** (\$3,499; www.akaipro.com) features big improvements to the MPC line, such as 8-track streaming hard-disk recording and a powerful 20-note synthesizer with three oscillators, an arpeggiator and a multimode filter. You now have the ability to create whole songs inside an MPC, mix them down and burn audio or data CDs to the optional optical drive. The all-new 990 PPQ (parts-per-quarter-note) sequencing engine offers tighter MIDI timing but still keeps the option for that famous MPC swing. Built-in 64 MB of RAM is expandable to 192 MB, and there's a built-in 80 GB hard drive. In addition to the 40 new effects and modular 4-bus effects processor, Akai includes a new Master EQ and Compressor with an Old-School mode for vintage sampling sound. A CompactFlash card slot accepting as high as 2 GB cards and USB 2 offer modern connectivity, along with two MIDI inputs, four MIDI outputs, RIAA turntable inputs, 10 analog TRS inputs, eight ADAT optical output channels and stereo S/PDIF connections. Chop Shop 2 slices loops into individual samples and auto-assigns them to pads, while new technologies such as Patched Phrases and Continuous Sample Track allow Ableton-style warping and sample-syncing. The screen is twice the size as on the MPC2500, and there are 12 Q-link controllers for writing automation (eight knobs and four faders). Beat-heads rejoice!



ECLER NUO 2.0, NUO 3.0, NUO 4.0 DJ MIXERS

Ecler enjoyed a lot of success with its 2003 Nuo DJ mixers, which were known for their ease of use and sound quality. Their replacements, the **Nuo 2.0**, **Nuo 3.0** and **Nuo 4.0** (\$TBA; www.eclerusa.com) aim to follow in the footsteps of the originals while enhancing the overall package. A new aluminum faceplate with etched graphics and lettering should last longer than the originals, and all three feature the larger VU meter from Ecler's flagship EVO5 mixer. The crossfaders are compatible with the popular magnetic Eternal crossfader for pros who want to customize their rig. With two, three and four main mix channels, respectively, the Nuos feature XLR mic inputs, 3-band full-cut EQs, effects send and return with PFL and fader/crossfader shape adjustments/reverse.

ROLAND FANTOM G6

KEYBOARD WORKSTATION

Composers looking for a single unit for writing, recording and performing can look to the quickly evolving keyboard workstations. To stay on top of the game, Roland updated its flagship line of Fantom workstations with the 61-key **Fantom G6** (\$2,899, www.rolandus.com). Featuring a brand-new audio processor, the G6 doubles the available wave-ROM space of previous versions and expands the color LCD screen to a luxurious 8.5-inch widescreen. ARX card slots for two of Roland's unique SuperNatural behavior-modeling emulator expansion boards come packed with sounds. A revamped effects engine offers as many as 22 multi-effect routings per multitimbral patch group, plus global reverbs, choruses and mastering effects. Roland's new Power Sequencer is capable of 128 tracks (24 audio tracks) inside a fully integrated environment with mouse support. Assignable performance controls include eight sliders, four knobs and 10 buttons, and the performance-enhancing arpeggiator, D-Beam and Dynamic Pad section with 16 velocity-sensitive drum pads afford you extended interaction with your sounds. The new line of Fantoms is also available in 73-key G7 (\$3,349) and 88-key G8 (\$3,999) versions.



STANTON SC SYSTEM

DIGITAL DJ DECK AND MIXER CONTROLLERS

Representing a natural evolution from Final Scratch, the **Stanton SC System** comprises the SCS.1m mixer and SCS.1d deck hardware controllers (\$TBA; www.enterthesystem.com). Doing away with the glitchy timecode that can act wonky at slow speeds, the SCS.1d's new error-free, high-resolution tracking system measures more than 1,000 counts per rotation with a laser, so the real vinyl surface never wears out. Its 10-inch motorized platter is the same as on Stanton's T.120 and STR8-150 turntables, with 0.2-second start and stop speeds. The SCS.1d's 100 mm pitch slider is also motorized, and when switching between virtual decks it snaps to its new position. Four rotary encoders have "scribble strips" for feedback, 360-degree LED strips and six banks for a total of 24 assignments. The four-pad trigger section below the platter offers more creative possibilities, and settings for the entire deck can be saved to patches and switched at any time, making it more like several turntables in one. The SCS.1m mixer offers a traditional 4-channel DJ mixer layout for use with tracks streamed from the computer or tracks from the auxiliary audio input. With TRS balanced main outputs, RCA booth outputs and 1/4-inch headphone output, the SCS.1m is a FireWire interface, a DJ mixer and a software controller all in one. The channel strips (with EQ knobs), four volume sliders, crossfader, jog wheel and four LED-ring rotary encoders all control your software of choice. Compatible apps include Native Instruments Traktor Studio, MixVibes, Ableton Live and Image Line Deckadance, with more on the way. 



MCDSP DE 555, NF 575 AND FUTZBOX PROCESSING PLUG-INS FOR PRO TOOLS

Improving on classics, MCDSP's three new plug-in offerings are not sold separately but as part of the vast **Emerald Pack** (\$1,395 RTAS/\$2,595 TDM and as an upgrade, \$95 RTAS/\$195 TDM; www.mcdsp.com). The DE 555 De-Esser, NF 575 filter and FutzBox distortion support Mac OS 10.4 Tiger and 10.5 Leopard, Windows XP and Digidesign's VENUE Live system. All three offer double-precision processing, ultralow latency and come with mono and stereo versions. The DE 555 uses intelligent signal analysis to perform de-essing at any signal level, negating the need for a threshold setting. The NF 575 is a high-resolution filter for surgically removing unwanted frequencies. Each of the five notch filters can be fine-tuned and linked harmonically to fight 60-cycle hum; there is also a detailed Analog Saturation model for realistic tone. Lastly, the FutzBox is a fidelity destroyer. Simulated Impulse Models (SIMs) offer convolution-style emulations of radios, cell phones, televisions and more in an extremely optimized format, so they are significantly less taxing on your CPU. A noise generator with ducking, a fast gate, and varying types of filters, EQs and distortion effects are all combined to help you futz with your sound in creative ways.

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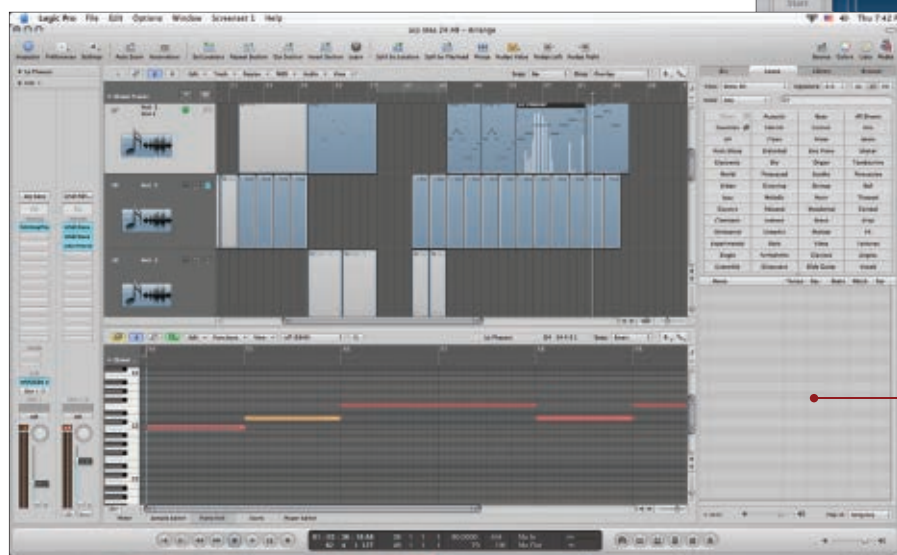
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ROLL WITH THE NEW At the heart of Logic 8, the new Arrange pane (left) lets you work entirely from a single streamlined interface. Also new, the Delay Designer (above) allows you to create custom delay and echo effects that take full advantage of the enhanced surround capabilities new to Logic 8.

APPLE LOGIC STUDIO

HUGE, VALUABLE BUNDLE TAKES PRO MUSIC-MAKING TO THE MASSES

BY ROBERT HANSON

Beyond mics, synths and all things outboard, the most contentious debate among computer-centric producers and musicians is—and will always be—DAWs. Which one is better on which platform? Which one does this or that on the fly? Which one works with what hardware? Which one reminds you to call your mom? Considering that a DAW is the center of most people's music-making universe, it's a subject to not take lightly. But an even more important question these days is, "Do I need to change a thing?" As most DAWs have all matured into massive audio/MIDI/synthesis powerhouses, it's even more difficult for many musicians to justify the cost of an upgrade when the payoff is sometimes little more than that fuzzy feeling of knowing your rig is up to spec.

In the case of Apple Logic Studio, it's not an oversimplification to sum up many users' frustrations over the seemingly endless chasm of time between Logic updates as "WTF?" The last major Logic revision from 6 to 7 happened at the top of 2005. Logic Pro 7 was—and is—an excellent application that rightfully gave a certain Avid subsidiary a serious wake-up call. But that was then, and Logic's once gilded status, especially in the electronic music community, has faced some serious competition on the Mac front from both Digidesign and those plucky Teutonic upstarts Ableton. With so much downtime between updates, let's see if Apple can really satisfy the hardcore users.

DIGGING IN

In trademark style, Apple decided that more stuff for less money is better. So instead of releasing just Logic Pro 8, Apple threw in Soundtrack Pro 2, a new application called MainStage and essentially every loop, sample, noise and preset the collective Apple/Emagic team has ever committed to disk. In all, Logic Studio requires a hefty 46 GB.

For this review, Apple sent *Remix* a Mac Pro with two 3 GHz dual core processors, 4 GB of RAM and Logic Studio preinstalled. I also installed Logic Studio on my now long-in-the-tooth Power Mac G5 dual 2.5 GHz with 4 GB of RAM. Both machines ran OS 10.4.10. Installation is straightforward and no different from any other standard install, with the exception of the massive amount of supplemental audio content. If you opt to install everything (you can also skip the included content or install it on another drive), be prepared to sit awhile. It took roughly an hour to load the whole thing. Also of note, Logic Studio no longer requires a USB dongle. The registration process has been reduced to entering a serial number along with some basic info and hitting the Submit key. It couldn't be simpler. Unlike other Logic updates, Logic Pro 8 is based on totally fresh code, so it won't overwrite your current version. That's handy if you have some older sessions that max out the system, as the latest version requires some extra horsepower.

APPLE

LOGIC STUDIO > \$499 (\$199 LOGIC EXPRESS)

Pros: Streamlined interface. New comping utility. Full surround support. Updated instruments and effects. Huge library of included presets and audio content.

Cons: Audio editing still lags behind competitors. System performance felt buggy.

Contact: www.apple.com

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac: G4/1.25 GHz; 1 GB RAM; OS 10.4.9 or later; 7 GB hard-disk space for basic install

THE POWER OF ONE

When you first boot Logic Pro 8, you get the option of opening one of several preconfigured project templates or starting with an empty session. Seasoned Logic users should be able to dive right in, but the difference of the one-window design is immediately apparent. The old Arrange window has seen a significant refresh and has been broken down into a collection of panes. A new customizable toolbar perches at the top of the window. On the bottom left are the dual channel strips; one channel strip displays the currently selected audio, instrument or MIDI track, and the other channel can be set to display the master output, bus or other destination channel of the selected track. The center of the screen comprises the tracks and audio/MIDI regions and looks pretty similar to the older interface. Directly underneath the Arrange pane, the Editing pane can be set to display the audio sample editor, piano roll editor, mixer, etc. In the Library pane, to the right of the Arrange pane, you can search and audition Apple Loops and audio files, as well as channel-strip and instrument presets. At the bottom sits the transport controls and a master volume slider.

The revised interface doesn't take much getting used to. After the first few hours, I didn't really miss the old way of working. Double-clicking on audio or MIDI regions instantly brings up the sample editor or the piano roll editor, both of which are easily resizable. Click on a track in the Arrange pane, and that channel strip immediately pops up. It's easy to see how that one major revision can really speed up your work. The Media pane is a very welcome addition; it reduces the chore of

searching for loops, audio files and channel/instrument presets to scrolling up and down your assets list.

Another very "Apple" addition to the Arrange window is the customizable toolbar and transport. If you Control-click on the toolbar, you can drag items in and out of the toolbar to your liking. Beyond adding a new layer of customization, what that feature really does is lift the lid on Logic and reveal many of the program's deeper functions that have been long buried behind cryptic key commands and tiny pull-down menus. Similarly, the transport can be tweaked in the same manner; Control or right-click, and start moving things around.

The new interface does chew up some serious screen real estate. I use a 20-inch Apple Cinema Display, and I could see things becoming very cramped on 13.3-inch MacBooks. Luckily, you can still bring up all the windows separately, so if you don't want to use the new interface, you don't have to. The Environment is also alive and well. If you're a longtime Logic user with a set way of working, you can pretty much get on with things as you've always done before.

NIP/TUCK

Logic Pro's audio editing has undergone a pretty substantial update. You can now edit down to the sample level in the Arrange pane. Time compression/expansion is a simple click-and-drag procedure that can also occur within the Arrange pane. For single-track audio editing, things are much improved Logic Pro 7.

The other big addition on the audio editing front is the new comping utility. In the past, when you'd do multiple

takes or loop record, Logic would display each take on a duplicate track below the original. Now it's much more streamlined; instead of immediately eating up a bunch of space with duplicate tracks, multiple takes remain tiled behind the first take until you opt to expand them and begin editing. With the takes expanded, you can quickly swipe across all of the regions, muting, unmuting and creating crossfades on the fly. You can save and edit multiple passes, as well as flatten the resultant edits into a new audio file. That makes working with less-than-stellar performers a much less tedious affair and opens up a host of creative options—especially for vocalists who enjoy composing and experimenting with loop recording.

QUADRAPHONIC BLISS

Another major aspect of Logic Pro 8 is the addition of advanced support for surround sound. The program now supports as high as 7.1 surround across the board. The push to make Logic a fully surround-capable program also extended into the instruments and effects. The two stock Logic items that would most benefit from surround capabilities, Sculpture and Space Designer, have both been totally refreshed. A newer offering called Delay Designer has also been added, also with true surround capabilities. Furthermore, all the included mono and stereo effects are fully surround-ready. For instance, if you drop a compressor onto a surround track, you can apply compression independently to each channel on that track. In essence, the program is calling up five (or seven) instances of that effect, but it's all neatly concealed behind a single effect.

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THE NEW SOUND

Two Logic instruments that have been screaming for a makeover finally got one. The EXS24 has a greatly improved and streamlined editing window. If you're a fan of the Propellerhead Reason NNXT sampler, you'll feel at home creating custom sampler instruments with the EXS24. The editor is very visual and intuitive; once you open it, you'll hardly need directions—just drag in some sounds, set the sliders on the keyboard to define the active keys and start playing.

If there has ever been an instrument that's sucked away more of my life than Ultrabeat, I don't know what it is. On one hand, Ultrabeat is one of the most feature-laden and flexible drum machines/synthesizers around. On the other hand, sometimes you just want to drop in a few sounds and pound out some beats without getting lost in the details. Thankfully, the new version offers a simple grid view where you can call up some sounds and then ignore the rest and just play. But wait, there's more. Thanks to the addition of sidechain support, Ultrabeat now doubles as a multichannel effects processor, providing endless possibilities for rhythmic gating effects that can be spread across multiple outputs. It's something you really have to try firsthand to appreciate.

ALL THAT OTHER STUFF

The inclusion of Soundtrack Pro 2 in the Logic Studio bundle left many Logic users scratching their heads, asking, "Why do I need that? Don't I already have most of this with Logic?" The answer depends on your needs.

Soundtrack Pro 2 is a massive application that could be reviewed on its own. But in short, what it brings to the table is impressive: Photoshop-style audio editing where edits and effects can be reordered, muted and changed an infinite number of times; advanced analysis and restoration tools that far exceed what is available in Logic; seamless integration with Final Cut Pro; and much more. So while many users may never take full advantage of Soundtrack Pro, if you ever need to perform some serious surgery on an audio file, it's nice to know that those tools are on hand.

MainStage is also downright handy. The ethos here is very simple: Create an instrument or a guitar sound in Logic and then open that same sound in MainStage and play it from a simplified interface. By loading only instruments, effects and a basic utilities, more CPU bandwidth can be dedicated to the smooth and fast loading of presets, and the program in essence turns your Mac into a very capable workstation-style synth. Assigning layers, splits, controllers and the like is straightforward. Overall, MainStage is an incredibly simple way to get at your sounds, and as someone who used to have the unenviable job of taking my band's sounds from the studio and then loading them into that era's sampler du jour, I would have killed for this.

THE FINAL BOUNCE

Logic Pro Studio is a substantial offering; if it were a 1.0 product, it would be hard to find fault with anything. With Logic Pro 8, Soundtrack Pro 2, MainStage and a ton of

top-shelf content, the whole thing is a steal at \$499. However, my list of gripes and wishes after reviewing Logic Pro 7 hasn't really changed. The absence of enhanced time-manipulation tools that rival what's offered with Pro Tools 7.4 and Ableton Live is pretty inexcusable at this point. With the downtime between updates, the Logic community was really counting on that functionality, and its absence has bemused many users. The program still lacks a basic drum replacement tool. And the system performance lags behind the previous version. Even with the near-top-of-the-line Mac Pro, I had no problem pegging the CPU meters when auditioning certain factory (yes, factory) presets. Older sessions that loaded without even a hiccup before brought my aging G5 to its knees. I'm really hoping much of that gets addressed in an 8.1 release.

Is Logic Studio worth the entrance fee? If you're a Logic user who works in surround or who is enticed by the workflow enhancements, sample content or MainStage, absolutely. If you use GarageBand and want to step up to something that allows instant compatibility with your existing material, again, absolutely (also check out Logic Express, which is basically the full Logic Pro 8 without the larger bundle). But if you've got a well-spec'd Logic 7 rig, and you're just writing and recording music in stereo, you might save your pennies until the feature list includes more must-have items. Logic Studio may not trump every feature of the competition, but it does deliver everything you need to do the job and then some. And you can't complain about the price. 

16:42:11

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YOU WISH > No, the UAD Xpander doesn't come with a fresh Apple laptop, but it does include a foam-lined plastic carrying case that's poised to protect the unit during travel, making it road-ready out of the box.

UNIVERSAL AUDIO

UAD XPANDER XTREME

LITTLE SHINY BOX OPENS UP A BIG CAN OF DSP POWER FOR LAPTOPS

BY MARKKUS ROVITO

> With many things—clothes, cars, restaurants, concert tickets—you can do well on a budget; you can even have style. But if you really want the best, you have to cough up the dough. The same rings true for audio gear: mics, preamps, guitars and plug-ins. The differences may be subtle or extreme, but either way, you definitely know them when you hear them. Certainly, you could make an entire album in Propellerhead Reason, and if you have talent, it will be good. But eventually, given the means, computer musicians will want to step up to the big leagues.

When that time comes, you'll face the other bane of computer music: processing power. With few exceptions, the plug-ins with the highest audio quality and capabilities demand the most CPU juice. Even in this day and age, high-level audio software brings modern machines to their knees—especially laptops. External DSP units are desirable—if not essential—add-ons for computer producers who want to rock top-shelf plug-ins more than a few at a time. However, until recently, mobile producers and laptop performers have had few decent options for hardware DSP hosts. Fortunately, the Universal Audio (UA) UAD Xpander presents a simple yet ingenious solution.

The Xpander chassis is a bit smaller than an average external hard drive, making it truly portable, unlike huge PCI card boxes that connect over FireWire. The Xpander connects via a laptop's ExpressCard slot, meaning only Apple MacBook Pro and a select PC laptop owners will be able to use it. That's a bummer if you don't have such a laptop, but it's really the smartest way to handle portable DSP. Because many notebooks have only one FireWire bus and one high-speed USB 2.0 bus, you'll likely want to save those ports for an audio interface and external hard drive. If you double up an audio interface and a FireWire DSP unit on one bus, you'll damage the performance of both and defeat the purpose. Xpander's ExpressCard/34 protocol has the same throughput as PCIe cards, and it houses the same CPU power as UA's UAD-1e PCIe cards so you don't sacrifice any performance. (It will also work with ExpressCard/54 slots.) UA's optional Xtenda PCIe card (\$99) lets you plug the Xpander into a desktop machine.

PLUGGING IN THE X-BOX

The handsome Xpander chassis features a mirrored aluminum case (that's an unavoidable fingerprint away from being tarnished) and a backlit logo on the front. The remaining pieces include a carrying case, UAD ExpressCard/34,

UNIVERSAL AUDIO

UAD XPANDER XTREME > \$2,599
(\$1,699 FOR XPANDER XPRT;
\$1,199 FOR XPANDER XPRESS)

Pros: Same processing power and bus speed as UAD-1e PCIe cards for desktop machines. 32 bundled plug-ins comprise a full mixing and mastering suite with world-class audio quality. The ExpressCard is the best answer for laptop external DSP to save the FireWire and USB buses. Roadworthy carrying case.

Cons: Requires AC power supply at all times. Must shut down computer before connecting Xpander. Vista only for Windows.

Contact: www.uaudio.com

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac: Intel processor; OS 10.4 or later; ExpressCard/34 or /54 slot; RTAS, VST or Audio Units host

PC: Windows Vista; ExpressCard/34 or /54 slot; RTAS or VST host

UAD Link Cable, a software/PDF manual disc, DVD tutorial, AC power supply and—a thoughtful addition—two wall-plug adapters for international use.

Installing Xpander is a bit of a production, but certainly worth the effort. First you install the UA Powered Plug-ins software (and check www.uaudio.com for the latest update), which lets you choose any or all of the VST, Audio Units and RTAS formats to install (UAD plug-ins run in RTAS mode using an FXpansion wrapper program). You have to shut down the computer first every time you boot up Xpander, which is kind of pain. Xpander isn't hot-swappable either, so you have to be careful not to accidentally press in the UAD ExpressCard because it could pop out. With the hardware running, you open the UAD-1 Meter program (which monitors the Xpander's CPU usage), and go online to register the Xpander. You also have to download a file to open to register the software. Then you can open your DAW, and the UAD plug-ins will appear where you normally access plug-ins. When you want to disconnect the Xpander, you must quit all the host applications and "eject" the Xpander from the ExpressCard icon in the OS X Menu Bar or Windows Vista Task Bar.

DIGITAL HEAVEN

Xpander comes in three packages: Xpander Xpress (\$1,199/\$999 street), Xpander Xpert (\$1,699/\$1,399 street) and Xpander Xtreme (\$2,599/\$2,199 street). They all have the exact same hardware; the only difference is the plug-in bundle. Xpress and Xpert come with the same 14-plug-in set of 1176SE limiter (low-CPU version), Pultec EQP-1A, RealVerb Pro, the CS-1 channel strip suite and the Nigel guitar amp and processor suite. The Xpress adds a \$500 voucher for UAD plug-ins, and Xpert has a \$1,000 voucher. You'd generally get two or three plug-ins for \$500, such as the rad duo of the Neve 88RS channel strip and new SPL Transient Designer.

For the big bucks, Xpander Xtreme includes 32 total plug-ins—nearly all of the UAD line except for a few recent releases, such as the Precision Buss Compressor. You get most of the kick-ass marquee UAD plug-ins, including the full-strength 1176LN; Neve 33609 compressor, 1081 EQ and 1073 EQ; Pultec Pro; DreamVerb; Roland CE-1 chorus, Dimension D chorus and RE-201; LA-2A; Fairchild 670; and more, including the aforementioned 14 standard plugs.

We're concerned mostly with the hardware for this review, but for the sake of brevity, allow me to reiterate for anyone who doesn't already know that Universal Audio plug-ins deserve their near-universal critical acclaim for outstanding sound quality, as well as faithful emulations of classic dynamics and effects hardware. Case in point, the Neve 33609 Limiter/Compressor sounds simply awesome. Not the least of its charms is the hard and dirty, yet warm distortion that occurs when you crank up the output gain. One of my favorite uses for that is to take an acoustic picked bass and make an aggressive, funky, analog-sounding electro-house bass out of it. Another example not emulated from hardware, DreamVerb gives you just about everything you could want in a stereo reverb plug-in: fantastic sound; a large, intuitive interface with ample graphical feedback; many room shapes and materials to choose from; room shape and material "morphing;" 5-band EQ; and more.

Without the absurdity of entering a "who's better" discussion, I'll just say that UA easily ranks among the elite plug-in makers, along with luminaries such as Waves, McDSP, SSL, Sonnox and others. UA's penchant for re-created hardware GUIs may strike some as easy and intuitive, or it may seem to overlook the conveniences of graphics-heavy GUIs (although Xpander Xtreme has its fair share of the latter, with RealVerb Pro, Precision Multiband compressor and others).

ON THE GRIND

While interfaces and the minute particulars of sound quality are a matter of taste, you can't argue with performance. To test Xpander, I used a MacBook Pro 2.4 GHz Intel Core 2 Duo with 2 GB RAM running OS 10.4.11, but the ExpressCard slot is the most important spec. I used the plug-ins mostly as VSTs in Ableton Live 7, but also as Audio Units in Logic Pro 8. The following is fairly typical of how I used the Xpander.

In Live 7, I had a fairly simple 8-track mix. On the Master output, I slapped an 1176LN, which is worth a huge chunk of the cost alone for the way it smoothes out a mix seemingly like magic and prevents any clipping on the output. On an Aux Send I put the terrific CS-1 Channel Strip. Once I dialed in its EQ, compressor, delay and reflector dialed I simply adjusted how much signal per track to send to it. With several sounds all on the same drum track, I put the Precision Multiband compressor/expander/gate, so I could more easily tweak the kick and hi-hat on the same track. On the bass I put the low-CPU Neve 33609SE, which sounds almost as good—but noticeably not as huge and warm—as the full 33609. The 33609 takes a massive 61-percent CPU hit on the UAD-1 Meter (compared to 33609SE's 12 percent), so it's tough to use unless you want to process one clip at a time and print a new audio track. I dropped a couple of other choruses and EQs on tracks until I had nine total UAD plug-ins using 91 percent of the Xpander CPU, while my laptop barely touched 25 percent.

There's no comparison to mixing with UAD plug-ins over DAW-bundled plug-ins or midrange third-party plugs. I laid down mixes much faster than normal and with results I liked much better using Xpander. One small caveat is that Xpander won't run any non-UAD plug-ins, nor can you pull any UAD plugs off of Xpander. With several plug-ins tipping the 20-percent CPU mark (Plate 140, 23 percent; RE-201, 25 percent; Precision Multiband, 27 percent; the full Nigel suite, 32 percent), you have to exercise some strategy with bouncing tracks to audio if you want use all UAD plug-ins on a project, or else save the UAD plug-ins for the most important tasks only. It's not surprising why some pros pack desktop machines with three or more UAD cards; once you get hooked, you won't want to work without them.

THE YEAR 2008 U.A.D.

The UAD Xpander units bless new laptop users with an amazing outboard DSP option that won't tax your precious data ports. Combining it with a FireWire audio interface and a USB 2.0 hard drive for storing and recording audio, I had a truly capable music workstation both for the road and my small home studio. I may even ditch my desktop computer altogether, and that would have never happened without the Xpander. 

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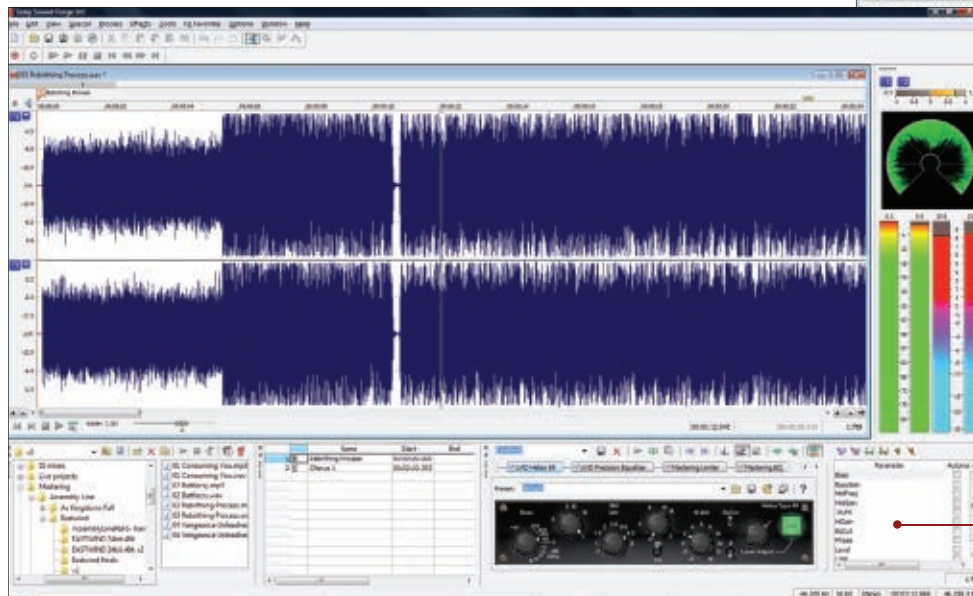
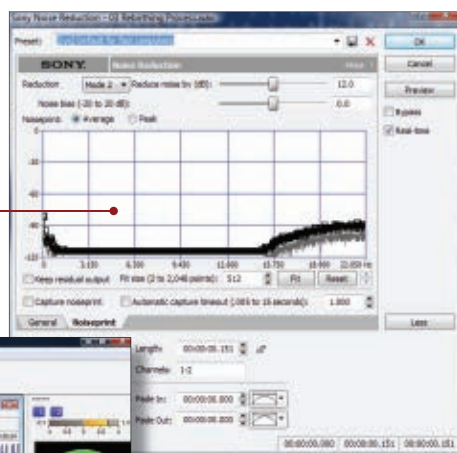
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KILL THAT NOISE > Previously a pricey add-on, the Noise Reduction plug-in is now bundled free with Sound Forge 9.



NOT BROKE; NOT FIXED > Sound Forge 9's streamlined interface incorporates many elements from its original version introduced in the early '90s.

SONY SOUND FORGE 9

VETERAN AUDIO EDITOR BRANCHES OUT WHILE STICKING TO ITS ROOTS

BY JASON BLUM

> If you were involved in audio production at any point during the '90s, you probably knew about Sound Forge. When it burst onto the fledgling computer audio scene in 1991, this groundbreaking application was manna from heaven for producers and musicians who longed for the power and control of something like Pro Tools but couldn't afford the hefty capital that those big boys required. Sound Forge offered everything the others didn't: a quick, easy, inexpensive way to edit 2-channel audio without pledging your firstborn to the bank.

Now, 17 years later, Sound Forge is still alive and kicking under the Sony umbrella and sporting a fresh coat of paint along with a few new tricks. Multichannel audio is now in the picture, along with bundled mastering plug-ins from iZotope and a gratis copy of Sony Noise Reduction software sweetening the deal. However, the playing field is a lot more crowded and unforgiving these days—other editors such as Steinberg Wavelab and Adobe Audition have upped the ante considerably over the years—but Sound Forge has managed to hang on to a loyal base of customers who swear by its power and simplicity. I put Sound Forge 9 through its paces on a couple of projects to see if it holds its own in the face of today's stiff competition and to see if I could rekindle the spark I had with this program back at the beginning of my career.

FAMILIAR FACE

Installing Sound Forge is simple, and registration takes a quick online handshake with Sony's authentication servers. Strangely, CD Architect is still a separate program with its own installation procedure, and it doesn't integrate direct with Sound Forge; recording proper discs still requires shuffling data between the two applications.

At first glance, there doesn't seem to be a big difference between the old-school Sound Forge and version 9, which is a testament to great design. All the tools you need are close at hand, and menus are familiar without any deep-nested commands, creating the feeling that doing real work won't require sifting through manuals. As with previous versions, Sound Forge's toolbars are completely customizable and freely movable to all four sides of the screen. Most floating windows—such as the plug-in manager, meters and video window—will dock and resize as well, allowing you to create orderly layouts that fit your personal work style.

SONY

SOUND FORGE 9 > \$319

Pros: Simple, easy-to-use interface. Workflow enhancements. Bundled mastering suite from iZotope. Multichannel audio editing. Noise-reduction software included. Extended metering and spectrum analysis.

Cons: No multitrack capabilities. Comprehensive CD burning not integrated.

Contact: www.sonycreativesoftware.com/soundforge

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC: 900 MHz; 256 MB RAM; Windows 2000 SP4/XP/Vista; DVD-ROM drive



Virtual String Machine

Virtual Vintage String Synthesizer Collection

Long before polyphonic synths and digital sampling were possible, analog string machines helped shape the sound of pop/rock, R&B, disco and electronic music. Now the world-renowned software instrument designers at GForce, creators of the popular M-Tron virtual vintage keyboard, bring you the Virtual String Machine. This remarkable instrument gives you instant access to the same sounds used by artists as diverse as Stevie Wonder, Kraftwerk, Joy Division, Pink Floyd, Kasabian and Goldfrapp. And the Virtual String Machine goes beyond delivering over a dozen vintage instruments—it lets you layer and process any two sounds into sonic textures that are uniquely yours. Hear it at m-audio.com today.

- over a dozen vintage string machines recorded > classic instruments in software
- layer and process any two sounds > totally unique sounds
- 3200+ samples > meticulous detail from critically acclaimed GForce
- fully programmable with 500+ presets > instant gratification, long-term flexibility
- stand-alone or host operation > RTAS (Mac/PC), VST (Mac/PC) and AU (Mac)



Other GForce Virtual Vintage titles:

M-Tron



Virtual Vintage Keyboard

The ODDITY



Virtual Vintage Analog Synthesizer

imp OSC ar



Virtual Vintage Analog Synthesizer

minimonsta



Virtual Vintage Analog Synthesizer

developed by



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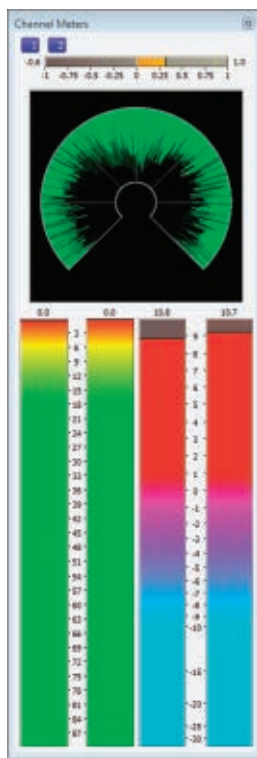
SLICE AND DICE

Sound Forge 9 offers all the standard kit you'd expect from a top-end audio editor: cut, copy, paste, pencil tools, detailed analysis capabilities, a bevy of standard effects and plenty of audio restoration tools, including the Sony Noise Reduction plug-in. Editing in general is a bit smoother in version 9, thanks to support for drag-and-drop between channels, as well as "snap-to" functionality for grid, marker and selection boundaries. The Plug-in Chainer handles limitless chains of VST and DirectX plug-ins elegantly, and Sony kicks in four of iZotope's mastering plug-ins free of charge, which makes the \$319 list price pleasantly palatable.

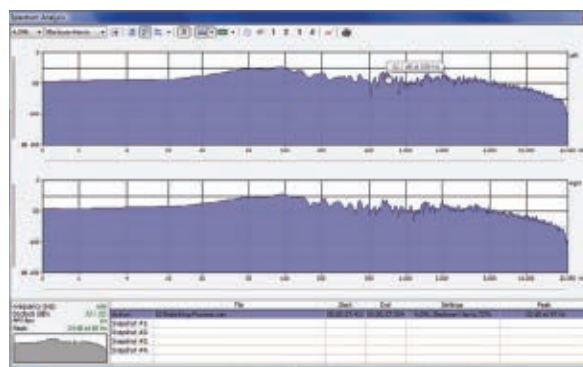
Sound Forge's pristine audio engine can handle as high as 64-bit/192 kHz files. You can open multiple files with various bit depths and sampling rates in the program's work space, but there's no on-the-fly conversion if you need to actually mix together two separate files with different sampling rates. Instead, the program gently reminds you that the rates are different and suggests using Sound Forge's offline converter to bring the files to common ground.

WATCHING MULTICHANNELS

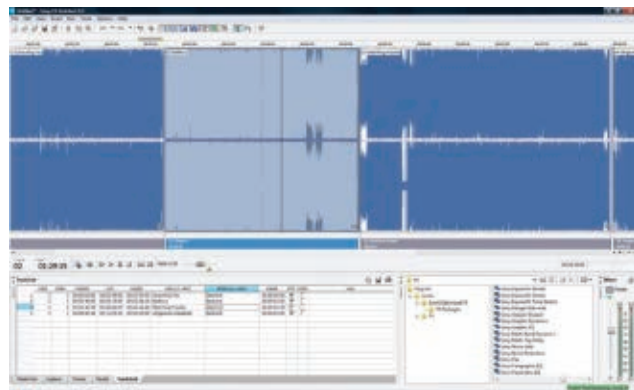
One of Sound Forge's main handicaps over the past few years has been its lack of multichannel audio support. Version 9 surmounts that hurdle with the ability to work on files containing as many as 32 separate channels—finally making Sound Forge a viable editing choice for anyone working with surround-sound media. The pro-



SIDE BARS > Extended metering with phase scope and mono compatibility lets you take a close look at your stereo image while keeping levels in check.



X-RAY SPECS > Spectrum Analysis digs deep and reveals hidden problems in your audio files.



CONSTRUCTION ZONE > CD Architect, Sound Forge's companion application, offers drag-and-drop building of Red Book-compatible CD images.

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program can generate video thumbnails and output to an external monitor, so if you're heavily involved in music to picture, Sound Forge has the tools to satisfy your media demands. Rendering multichannel audio to Dolby AC-3 ices the cake for surround media producers.

It's important to note that Sound Forge's multichannel audio isn't quite like the Audio Montage in Wavelab or the VIP workspaces in Magix Samplitude; it is literally multiple audio channels in a single file and not multiple tracks in a project. That's a critical distinction—saving a 12-channel WAV file in Sound Forge is literally a 12-channel file, not a Sound Forge project with 12 separate tracks. You can insert different tracks directly into different channels and save that project as a different FRG file, but ultimately Sony doesn't want Sound Forge to compete with its own Acid Pro and Vegas Pro multitrack apps.

VISUAL FEEDBACK

Audio editors are often employed in the post-production process, and good metering is a must when you're prepping material for the public. Sound Forge 9 extends those capabilities with much needed phase and mono compatibility meters, filling a gap that previously required costly third-party plug-ins. The phase meter shows the standard Lissajous curve (harmonic motion) that most people have come to rely on by default, or you can configure it to show a more intuitive polar plot that displays a "real-world" view of the file's stereo image.

For more detailed metering, Sound Forge's spectrum analysis tools put audio files under the equivalent of an electron microscope, offering a staggering level of detail. Spectrum analysis runs offline on a selected range of material, or you can configure it to monitor playback in real time. For superhigh-resolution analysis, however, offline is the way to go—otherwise lag times quickly become unacceptable.

A sonogram view is also available and is particularly useful for zeroing in on pops, clicks, mic thumps and other spurious audio events that can be difficult to locate with a standard waveform view. Unfortunately, Sound Forge doesn't offer any spectral editing tools in the sonogram window. It's somewhat frustrating to see a spot that needs a little cleaning, and then realize you can't clean it up with a pencil or eraser tool. Also, Sound Forge's tendency to stop playback when resizing or zooming in on the spectrum analysis window was somewhat disruptive. (Sony's working on a fix for that).

BUILD IT AND BURN IT

For some reason, Sound Forge still hasn't updated its integrated burning facilities and offers only the most basic track-at-once disc authoring from its Tools menu. Fortunately, the program ships with a companion application, CD Architect, which has long been a standard for burning true Red Book-compatible CDs on a PC. There's nothing new here, but it's a significant element in the Sound Forge package, and it's worth noting that the program remains a capable tool for assembling and burning audio discs. CD index markers are listed separately from generic markers to keep the interface clean, and overlapping audio files automatically create crossfades with six selectable fade curves. The only drawback is a lack of VST support, which is a bummer for anyone hoping to apply any overall compression or EQ to a CD project.

You'll need to render each file with VST effects in Sound Forge before exporting to CD Architect for a final burn.

Revisiting Sound Forge after many years was like meeting up with an old girlfriend: I remembered the good times back in the day, but after a while together, the reasons for parting ways became clear. Multitrack and nondestructive editing features have become key elements in audio-editing workflows over the years, and with Sound Forge 9 still focused primarily on working with individual files without comprehensive integrated CD tools, it was more cumbersome to finish a complete mastering session from edit to burn than with other apps. The inclusion of multichannel audio is sure to appeal to anyone mixing surround-sound projects, but

some basic multitracking capability would put Sound Forge on par with other editors on the market today.

Despite those drawbacks, Sound Forge's greatest strength continues to be its simple and elegant user interface. For raw audio editing, it remains a powerful tool that's purpose-built to do the job with minimum fuss and maximum efficiency. The fact that its general feel has changed little over its nine versions proves that this time-tested tool has been doing something right.

It may no longer be king of the hill, but Sound Forge 9 is still a solid product when you take it for what it is—a single-file editor made to slice, dice and rework audio files. Sound Forge's broad user base and dedication to simplicity still make it a viable competitor. 



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- Rolling Stone Magazine

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BIG BEAUTY > Virtual String Machine beefs up the effects from its hardware predecessors. A 6- or 12-stage phaser includes speed, depth, frequency and resonance controls, while the chorus lets you choose 2-, 4-, 6- or 8-voice ensembles.

GFORCE VIRTUAL STRING MACHINE AND MUSICROW VINTAGE STRINGS MKII

TWO CONCEPTUALLY OPPOSED INSTRUMENTS REVIVE HEROES OF A '70S DANCEFLOOR

BY JASON SCOTT ALEXANDER

Unable to afford a Mellotron when it was first released, British keyboard player and engineer Ken Freeman is credited with inventing the polyphonic string synthesizer in the late '60s. The Freeman String Symphonizer (aka Cordovox CSS) had two oscillators per note that achieved what we now recognize as the classic "ensemble string" sound. It spawned a new genre of instrument and a decade's worth of copycats. Some 150 variations on the string synth appeared from dozens of companies; the distinctive sound of instruments such as the ARP Solina String Ensemble and Crumer Performer is heard on classic recordings by Kraftwerk, Pink Floyd, The Cure, Joy Division, Morrissey, Tangerine Dream, New Order, Air and countless others. Despite their popularity then and now (used vintage hardware units are priced absurdly high), there have been few commercial attempts at producing a virtual string synth—until now.

DARE TO COMPARE

Nearly simultaneously, G-Force has released Virtual String Machines (distributed by M-Audio)—a note-for-note sampled collection of hard-to-find string ensembles and polysynths—while Musicrow took a purely modeled approach in Vintage Strings MKII, an update release to its PC-only VSTi plug-in.

Specifically designed to closely emulate the simplistic divide-down oscillator design that Freeman borrowed from early combo-organ voice boards, Vintage Strings MKII couldn't be more rudimentary, both visually and operationally. You start with two main oscillators (Osc B plays notes one octave higher than Osc A), each with seven sawlike suboscillators that can be detuned. The Fat knob controls the detune amount. Each main oscillator also has simple modulation, volume and on/off controls, so you play a single voice or both for true "ensemble" string mode.

GFORCE (DIST. BY M-AUDIO)

VIRTUAL STRING MACHINE >

\$149.99

Pros: Highly authentic sounds with modern add-on features. 66 sample sets cover 17 classic and rare string ensembles and polysynths for a wide range of characteristic sounds. Two sample sets can be layered to create hybrid ensembles. Great real-time controller mapping.

Cons: Nothing worth holding back a purchase.

Contact: www.m-audio.com

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac: G4 or Intel/1.25 GHz; OS 10.4.x; 512 MB RAM; 5 GB hard-disk space; VST 2, RTAS or Audio Units host application

PC: Pentium 4 or AMD/1 GHz; Windows XP SP2; 512 MB RAM; 5 GB hard-disk space; VST 2, RTAS or Audio Units host application

MUSICROW

VINTAGE STRINGS MKII > \$39

Pros: Largely convincing string-synth sound based purely on synthesis. Very low system impact. Very affordable.

Cons: Bit of a one-trick pony. Not very flexible for a modeled synth. Chintzy graphical interface at times feels clunky. No MIDI Learn. VSTi and PC only.

Contact: www.mcrow.net

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC: Pentium 4 or AMD/1.5 GHz; Windows 95/XP/Vista; 256 MB RAM; VST 2 host application

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REVIEW >> VIRTUAL STRING MACHINE AND VINTAGE STRINGS MKII

Located center-panel, a Mod Rate knob determines the modulation speed of both oscillators equally. Like many of the early classic string machines, the envelope section provides only Attack and Release settings, along with a timbre section using a resonant filter to adjust brightness and give the sound some edge. The brightness control has also been hardwired to the modulation wheel, but there's no Aftertouch assignment. The final stage includes a chorus section with Rate, Depth, Delay and Mix parameters, as well as a newly added Reverb fader.

Virtual String Machines (VSM) runs on Mac or PC in stand-alone mode or as an RTAS/VST/Audio Units plug-in and has an attractive interface that's actually way more flexible than its appearance implies. The entire unit is divided into two independent oscillator layers, A and B, with controls to the right. Controls light up red when layer A is selected, and green for layer B. Link mode lights up all controls in aquamarine and allows you to edit both layers together. Oddly, Link applies changes identically to both layers, forcing the target layer to snap to your edited values absolutely. I'd prefer a latch option, allowing you to alter layers relative to one another.

Whereas the old string machines typically gave you a push button for violin or viola, another for Ensemble mode and that was it, VSM lets you layer any two string synths from the past to create authentic-sounding hybrid string ensembles. More than 2.5 GB of data across 66 sample sets captures an enviable collection of 17 classic and rare instruments, including ARP Omni, Solina and Quartet; Crumar Multiman (but not Performer); Elka Rhapsody; Eminent 310; Freeman String Symphonizer; the ultrarare Russian Junost 21; Korg PE-2000; Logan String Melody; Oberheim OB-8 and Xpander; Moog Opus 3 and Polymoog; Roland RS-202; and Yamaha SK-15 and SS-30. Each set features 49 notes—individually sampled and looped—and similar to the company's successful M-Tron Mellotron model, they include vintage blemishes, as well.

You're not strictly confined to straight sample playback. A flexible subtractive synthesis engine can be applied as much or as little as you like to augment the real-life sampled timbres. Each oscillator can be tuned up or down by as much as an octave, or finely detuned, panned and adjusted in volume. Each layer contains a main pitch LFO, adjustable in speed and amount (but not shape), which can be synced to host bar counts. The resonant lowpass, highpass and bandpass filters are loosely based on the Oberheim

	GForce Virtual String Machine	Musicrow Vintage Strings MKII
Synthesis Type	Sampling+synthesis	Digital modeling
Effects	Ensemble chorus, phaser	Chorus, spring reverb
Envelopes	Amp ADSR, filter ADSR	Amp attack/release
Presets	700+	50
Platforms	Mac/PC as stand-alone, Audio Units, RTAS, VST	PC only as VST 2.0
Price	\$149	\$39

OB-8. They purposely do not self-oscillate, which is smart, given that string machines can be quite abrasive anyway. Balancing between modern features and the original Freeman concept, GForce didn't include filter LFO as it would have taken VSM outside the realm of simplicity.

Several other thoughtful twists include the full ADSR filter and amplifier envelopes, as well as filter aftertouch and velocity controls for each layer, providing the dynamic control necessary to bring these classics up to speed with today's sound-design needs. Using the Range slider, you can divide or overlap the layers—handy for creating bass/lead splits or solo/ensemble combinations. This is also where having controls separate for each layer is handy because it allows you, for example, to take the decay off a string bass or adjust its velocity response relative to any pad you have on top.

GRAVITATIONAL EFFECT

GForce went deeper with its effects section—including chorus ensemble and phaser—than Musicrow did, so it deserves a closer look. A big improvement over the simple one-button provisions of early Eminent, Roland and Korg units, you now have the selection of 2-, 4-, 6- or 8-voice choruses with wet/dry mix and detune amount, plus a choice of 6- or 12-stage phaser modes with control over speed, depth, center frequency and resonance. The 6-stage phaser was suitable for most patches, but switching to 12-stage and slowing it down sounded a lot more ethereal and swirly; together with copious amounts of detuning, it can be numbingly beautiful. The phaser's LFO has a Sync button for locking to host. Finally, just beneath the Master volume knob, a Width button applies a few samples of delay to one of the channels just prior to output.

Hidden perhaps inappropriately beneath a dark shadow to the left of the keyboard, the all-important

MIDI Learn button can open a whole world of very cool possibilities to take VSM over the top. You can apply hardware controls to parameters in each layer separately or in combination, as well as assign a single physical knob to as many functions as you want—an exhilarating live experience that took me back to playing with the Morph function on a Clavia Nord Lead 3 for the first time.

The only thing missing from VSM, which Virtual Strings MKII includes, is a modeled spring reverb, which was often employed on string synths to achieve a deeper sound above and beyond the ensemble effects.

BITTERSWEET SYMPHONIES

Both of these instruments have their strong suits. Vintage Strings MKII is built lean and mean, consuming roughly 6 MB of memory and barely tickling the processor of my 3.2 GHz Pentium 4 machine. As a true synthesizer not limited to the pitch of a sample set, it spans the full MIDI note range with pleasing results at both extremes. Comparably, VSM limits you to the note pitches as they were recorded, and patches load at an average of 35 MB per layer.

Perusing through VSM's 700-plus preset library, it's quickly apparent that the sky's truly the limit for sonic choices, flexibility and potential combinations. For example, you could layer an ARP Quartet Cello with a Solina Viola, an Opus 3 string bass patch with an amazing Polymoog lead sound or an Eminent 310 with an Elka Rhapsody for a truly monster moment. You get the picture. The multimode filters, modulations and layers upon layers of drifting effects can create some of the coolest glassy strings you've ever imagined. And a VSM sample expansion pack is already in the works to include some even rarer instruments.

Vintage Strings MKII produces a largely convincing sound, perhaps better with lush warm string pads than lead sounds whose notes stand in relative isolation. For leads, I prefer the complex harmonics and authentic artifacts clearly heard in VSM. Vintage Synths MKII is downright useful, but in staying as faithful to Freeman's minimalist design, it becomes a bit of a one-trick pony. The added filters and effects help in tonal sculpting, but without the ability to pick from different oscillator models based on famous brands, the synth isn't quite as flexible as you may expect. I'd also like if the chintzy look and somewhat clunky feel of the interface were fixed. Still, the price is right for those looking to add the qualities of a vintage string synth without the modern bells and whistles. 



A SIMPLE PLAN > Vintage Strings MKII's spare interface sticks to common standards of retro string synths, including the simple oscillator sections and the 2-stage attack/release amp envelope.

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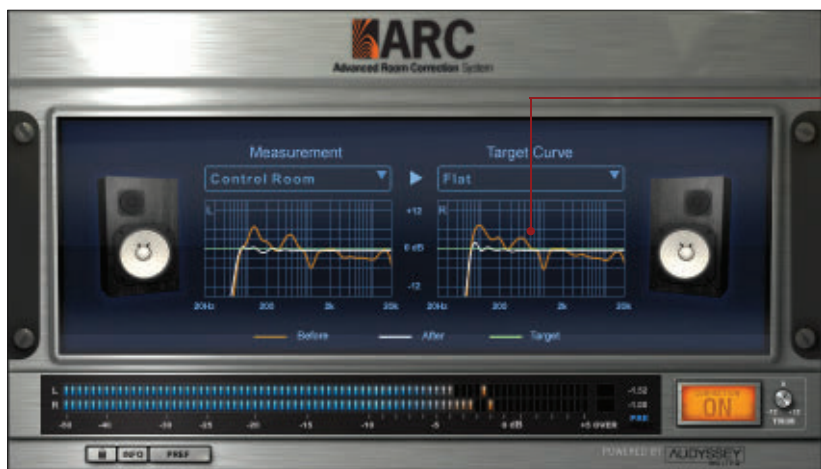
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TRUE COLORS > The orange curve shows the originally measured room responses and indicates an audible bass boost around 70 and 150 Hz. The white curve shows ARC's corrected output.



IK MULTIMEDIA ARC SYSTEM

TUNE THE BOOM OUT OF YOUR ROOM

BY JASON SCOTT ALEXANDER

As a self-taught acoustical architect and designer, I've never been a fan of EQ for tuning studios, largely because the response of a room can change drastically over very small distances, and EQ alone doesn't take into account time-related issues such as modal ringing at bass frequencies and phase response. I prefer to fix the problem by treating the room with substantial amounts of acoustic materials. Granted, not many home studios have the budget or space to line walls and ceilings with two feet of bass traps and diffusion materials. Now IK Multimedia ARC (Advanced Room Correction) System boldly claims to address frequency, as well as positional and timing problems as well.

SWEEPING MEASURES

ARC System consists of a calibrated measurement microphone, stand-alone measurement software for capturing sound information and calculating proper room correction and a multiplatform plug-in that applies the correction. Installation was a snap, and the step-by-step measurement wizard executes brilliantly. Basically, once you've mounted the calibration microphone vertically (using the included mic-stand clamp) at ear level when in seated mix position, the measurement software instructs you to select the input on your audio interface and the outputs that are going out to your speakers. The interface must have a phantom-powered input (preferably noncoloring and not through a tube preamp), some sort of manual output level control and be capable of working at 48 kHz.

Following a short calibration process to set reference levels, the measurement wizard instructs you to place the microphone in the "main" position—the sweet spot where you normally mix. ARC performs a quick series of full-frequency spectrum sweeps the left to right speaker.

That's measurement number one of a minimum of 12 you must take at multiple placements within the listening zone, so the measurement software averages a good overall picture. While the program allows as many as 32 measurements for optimum accuracy, I took 18 within my listening space, placing numbered pieces of masking tape on the floor ahead of time. Measurements have to be done in a specific symmetrical pattern, so you must read the excellent manual thoroughly for successful results.

After 20 minutes of measurements, I had the program calculate the response and save it as a preset, giving it a unique name and also assigning a representational picture of the speakers (Mackie HR-824s). It's cool that you can repeat the process again for other sets of speakers or for other listening positions within the room (such as a client couch) and save them as additional measurement sets. You can even perform tests that take into account multiple sweet spots within the room at the same time.

With analysis complete, open your DAW and put the Correction plug-in in the last slot of the stereo master bus. With graphs for both left and right speakers, an orange curve represents the original measured room response; green shows the ideal "target" curve; and white shows the corrected output. You can select from four target curves, including a perfectly flat response and a few high frequency-rolloff curves that compensate for excessively bright rooms. Hit the Correction On button, and you're off. Remember to remove the plug-in from the master bus prior to rendering the song.

HEAR THE DIFFERENCE

I tested ARC in a carpeted room with acoustic-panel treated walls, several corner bass traps, an 11-foot floor-ceiling plate and a fair amount of gear and furniture.

With correction turned on, it was as though I'd thrown on a pair of my best headphones. Stereo imagery snapped right into place; mids became clearer and highs were far less fatiguing over long sessions. With ARC squashing those bass peaks, the room lost much of its artificial boom. Tracks I'd finished in my professionally treated mix studio translated much better into the edit suite, and vice versa. Indeed, the room was now much flatter. Also, I could lean several feet to the side or back and enjoy a larger sweet spot than before.

Many bedroom producers may balk at the street price of around \$600, but IK is offering a price of \$499 if you own another IK product. It's a smart investment for your music—one you can use to correct any room in the future. You also get a great calibration mic. Ultimately, ARC lives up to its promise of producing a sound you can trust, so you can achieve a clearer mix. 

IK MULTIMEDIA

ARC > \$699

Pros: Impressive frequency and time correction creates vastly more accurate and larger sweet spot for mixing. Addresses multiple listening locations with savable presets for different speakers. Simple to execute.

Cons: Doesn't work with surround monitoring systems.

Contact: www.ikmultimedia.com

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac: G4/866 MHz or Intel/1.5 GHz; 512 MB RAM; OS X 10.4.4 or later; RTAS, VST or Audio Units host

PC: Pentium/1 GHz; 512 MB RAM; Windows XP/Vista; RTAS or VST host

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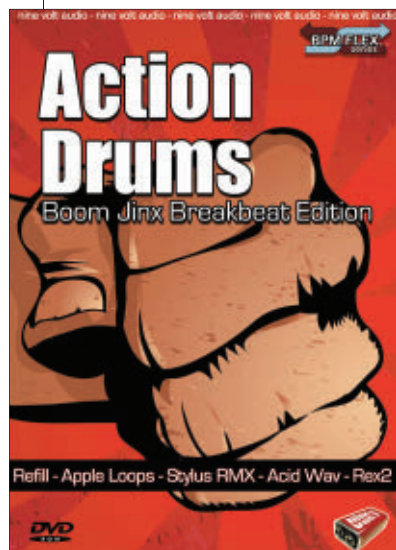
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By Jason Scott Alexander



NINE VOLT AUDIO ACTION DRUMS: BOOM JINX BREAKBEAT EDITION

RHYTHMS BUILT FOR THE CAMERA

Boom Jinx is the alter ego of DJ/producer Øistein J. Eide, a Norwegian whose work has landed him at the top of the European dance charts and on hundreds of TV, film and radio spots. With REX, Acidized WAV and Apple Loop formats, this collection of nearly 600 loops in 60 construction kits (or "beat suites" in Stylus RMX lingo) covers a range of

110 to 159 bpm. Each suite contains full mixes, mixes with no kick/snare, mixes of hats and percussion only, kick/snare only and many other individual parts. Every suite also ends with a four-on-the-floor kick track—handy for constructing transitions from the main grooves, which are typically funkier and syncopated. Groove elements are laid out across the keyboard consistently across all suites, making it extremely quick and easy to build loops across multiple kits because the same MIDI keyboard note always triggers the same drum part.

Stylistically, the suites are kind of hard to pinpoint, but there are definitely influences of hard techno, electro-disco, electro-funk, ambient-trance, house and 8-bit glitch. Drawing on acoustic and electronic sources, Boom Jinx's highly imaginative beat programming delivers a great yin and yang of organic versus mechanical dynamics. Inspiration came in droves as I pared through suites, discovering that the more "background" elements with minimal drums can layer to create really cool motion sequences. A constant sense of exhilaration makes this library well-suited to action sequences in film, television, sports and commercial media.

NINE VOLT AUDIO

ACTION DRUMS: BOOM JINX BREAKBEAT EDITION > \$79.99

At a glance: High-energy beat elements for making action-packed music beds that appeal to the visual senses. REX2, Stylus RMX, Apple Loops, Reason Refill and Acidized WAV.

Contact: www.ninevoltageaudio.com



ZERO-G/XFONIC ANTHEM HOUSE

TAKE A RIDE ON A PURPLE AIRPLANE

The liner notes claim heart-racing rhythms and euphoric melodies that will land your tracks into the biggest clubs from Chicago to Ibiza. Maybe, but you'd need a bloody time machine to get there. The 37 construction kits speak nothing of modern production or writing styles, rather sounding more at home next to audio sampling CDs I collected back in the early '90s. If Anthem House were being marketed as a throw-back collection to club anthems circa CeCe Peniston's "Finally" or Snap's "Rhythm Is a Dancer," then I could relate.

These 750 construction loops tilt the scales at about 1.4 GB, offering full mix, breakdowns and instrument/effects loops for each kit in REX2, Acidized WAV and Apple Loops AIFF formats. An additional 135 synth loops and pads, as well as a folder of 160 breakbeats, complement the kits. All files are keymapped for EXS24, HALion and Kontakt.

Ranging from 110 to 133 bpm, the kits are in fact built on some pretty credible rhythm programming circa the era. You'll clearly detect Roland R8 and TR-series, Kawai XD-5 and Alesis HR-16 sounds that were all the rage back then. The rubbery basses, heavily detuned comp sounds, chorused stabs and synth strikes are also typical of the PCM-hybrid synthesizers of the time. Naturally, piano and organ loops are mostly of the Korg M1 variety, though they fall short of the finer riffs heard in the classic house anthems that I knew well. What's really lacking, however, is the promised sense of uplift throughout this disc; some inspiring chord progressions, soaring gospel house vocals or dirty Detroit techno rhythms and bass lines could help. I'm generally all about anything Zero-G/Xfonic puts out, but this one misses the mark for me.

ZERO-G/XFONIC (DIST. BY EASTWEST/SOUNDS ONLINE)

ANTHEM HOUSE > \$99.95

At a glance: 37 construction kits covering early '90s-style house rhythms. Loops in RMX, REX2, Apple Loops, Acidized WAV formats. HALion, EXS24 and Kontakt instruments.

Contact: www.soundsonline.com

SYNTHATION PRODUCER'S COLLECTION, VOL.1

HARD-ASS ELECTRONIC BEATS

Synthation, best known for producing soft-synth soundsets, has ventured into loop territory with a killer collection of modern club beats. The Producer's Collection, Vol. 1 is a sophisticated assortment of 320 44.1 kHz Acidized WAV loops, and it also has a folder of nearly 900 single-hit drums, hi-hats, cymbals, claps and effects. Additionally, it has pre-mapped drum kits for Native Instruments Battery 2 and 3, as well as Logic's EXS24 sampler. Besides a few progressive-sounding chopped-phrase loops, it's really a concentrated drums-only affair with no bass, synth or vocal samples.

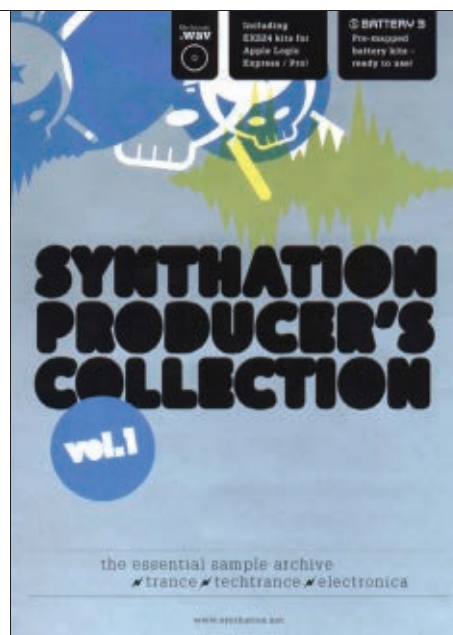
Files range from pile-driven beats to varieties of "thin" loops, where only processed noise, ominous electro-mechanical industrial churning, clangorous metal or filtered hi-hats set the tone. The use of effects—such as reverse gated reverb on nail-gun snares and pumping compressors breathing over dissonant tribal beats—fuel the blaze even more. The Special FX folder contains terrific kick explosions, brass and orchestral stabs, arpeggiated filter sweeps, fluttering LFOs and oscillator drops, DJ effects and freaked-out crash-cymbal modulations that you've got to hear to believe. Tremolo, fader-cutting, crazy rotary speakers and Doppler-style processing give many of the loops a deeply complex and trippy dynamic. Because everything is precisely pitched to 140 bpm, it's simply a matter of stacking loops and doing the necessary subtractive arrangement to create floor-filling mayhem. One could easily produce a monster underground smash with this DVD and a single soft synth. Fast-paced and completely euphoric, these are the manic sounds of a neo-rave hitting climax. I love it!

SYNTHATION

PRODUCER'S COLLECTION, VOL.1 > € 89 (APPROX. \$131)

At a glance: 320 drum loops catering to trance, tech-trance and harder electronic styles. Acidized WAV and kits for Apple Logic and Battery 3.

Contact: www.synthation.net

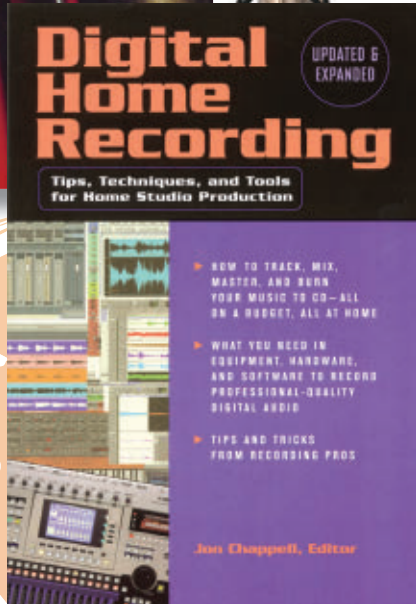
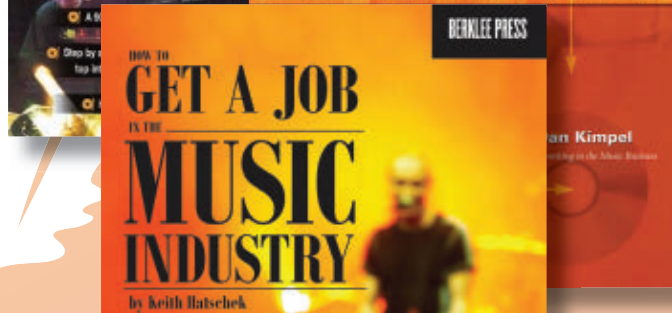
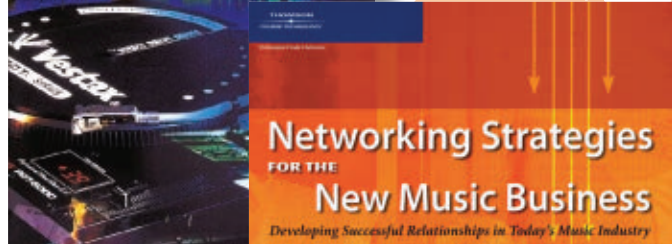


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www.mixbooks.com



AUTECHRE

Quaristice (Warp)

Veteran madness

Since 1987, Autechre's sole operators, Rob Brown and Sean Booth, have plowed over the limits of how pronounced, ghastly and machine-like one can get his compositions to sound if enough time is spent in front of a few analog synths, samplers and a Mac. *Quaristice* is as exhausting as any of the glitch-ridden, catastrophe-mimicking series of LPs that the

British duo has written before this one, and these 20 tracks shouldn't be cheated out of an attentive ear. As tired and oft-used as the phrase tends to be, to truly *live* the cinema-size electronic funnel clouds on Autechre's 2008 effort, a pair of headphones is an absolute must.

Quaristice parts its curtain on a web of brassy synth interplay: "Altibzz" is hardly representative of what follows, somewhat mirroring *Tri Repetae*'s slower-moving melodies (although those beauties rest on scattering percussive counterparts) circa 1996. Unglued, squealing beats here wear the IDM genre tag that has otherwise shifted out of earshot completely ("IO," "Perlence"), but the techno sounds of "90101-51-1," as well as the backward-swirling car crash of "Fol3," propel the devilish mayhem sputtering beneath this innovative ninth album.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★★☆



BAUHAUS

Go Away White

(Bauhaus/Cooking Vinyl)

Swan song of the goth gods

Bauhaus is the quintessential goth-rock trio. After 30 years, with few releases and some occasional touring, Bauhaus has risen from the dead once again—as they often did onstage, dressed as vampires—for its final album. From the sounds of it, that's a good thing. Guitarist Daniel Ash uses a wah-wah pedal that belonged to Jimi Hendrix, creating a teeth-grinding effect on "Adrenaline." "Undone" has excessively vampy vocals that borrow heavily from Velvet Underground. But maybe their time has past: Bauhaus influences AFI, and now they seem like a pale imitation.—*John Brandon*

★★★☆☆



BISC1

When Electric Night Falls (Embedded)

Dark meets light

Bisc1 gets off to a rough start on his debut with the hurried flow he uses on the opening track, "Night Fall." Fortunately, the MC gets a hold of his delivery for the rest of *When Electric Night Falls*—an album based around a blend of elevating raps and overcast, spaced-out production. The suspenseful "Pandemonium" is a strong statement about not taking life for granted, coupled with a creepy cinematic-styled beat. Given the stirring subject matter, it's odd how the production isn't more upbeat. But Bisc1 isn't all about the feel-good faction of hip-hop.—*Max Herman*

★★★★☆



CARL CRAIG

Sessions (IK7)

Back to front to back

On his retrospective double disc, *Sessions*, Carl Craig quells the notion that electronic dance music has the shelf life of milk. Culled over his 20-year career, the expanse of original productions and remixes collected shrug off the idea of primitive tones and elementary production. If anything, the earlier compositions, such as Paperclip People's "Throw" with Craig's signifying bass lines, have a larger impact due to the hefty memories they carry with them. Elsewhere, his remix of Faze Action's orchestral "In the Trees" gives a hypnotic tone to the track that makes it a dancefloor staple.—*Lily Moayeri*

★★★★☆



EVOL INTENT

Era of Diversion (Evol Intent)

Pissed pummeling

Aside from an awkward hip-hop or metal component, Georgia drum 'n' bass producers Evol Intent score well on *Era of Diversion*, with skittery rhythms and fragmented glitch electronica that slip into downtempo at random. The title track is vicious at the onset, with Bush's backward agenda (packaged in speechwriter sheen) prefacing a storm of breaks and synth squeals. "I'm Happy Your Grave Is Next to Mine" isn't driven by Republican lies, but the structure is just as deceptive: An early melody might lull us to sleep save for the subsequent barreling bass and percussive battle axes. Severe.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★★☆



FINK

Distance and Time (Ninja Tune)

Techno artist changes tune

Fink's transformation from ambient electronic artist with a taste for rave to a singer/songwriter challenging José González for the title of most raw pensive folk artist of the past year is somewhat of a shocker. It's also a welcome change. *Distance and Time* is stripped down to the core with its acoustic guitar, soft pulsating beats and honest heartfelt lyrics. No wonder John Legend and Amy Winehouse love this guy. Fink may have left his techno sound behind, but he's replaced it with rhythmically emotive folk and a hint of dub, as on "This Is the Thing" and "Blueberry Pancakes."—*Jason Jurgens*

★★★★★



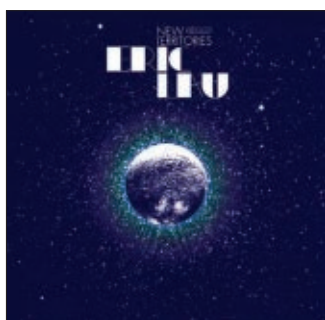
HAALE

No Ceiling (Channel A)

Telling her own fortune

Persian-American singer Haale hails from the Bronx, and during her early years, she was inspired by her father's Dostoevsky novels, Jimi Hendrix and the sounds of traditional Sufi singing. Remarkably, all of those influences can be discerned throughout her new set, in songs like the trance-y "Off Duty Fortune Teller," the striking title track and the rumbling undercurrent of "Zero to One." Haale exemplifies the meaning of world music in her songs, combining a pretty potpourri of sounds from disparate elements to create a mystically poetic stew grounded by the complex rock rhythms of her bandmates.—*Kristi Kates*

★★★★☆



ERIC LAU

New Territories (Ubiquity)
Smoked-out beats

Rippling synth bass, woodwind loops and a touch of wah pedal never did anyone wrong. London beatmaker Eric Lau's spacey neo-soul grooves for *New Territories* are fronted by a cast of mostly strong unknowns. Spots of rich vocal harmony on "Begin" and "Free It Out" keep syllables nicely confined within logical perimeters and pitch—no shrieking here. In a brief, fleeting dropout that splits "Show Me," the kick is yanked and twinkling piano augments a half-speed coda around dense, breathy vocal tracks (from a vibrant-sounding Rahel Dessalegne). Not strikingly *New* per se, but pretty smooth.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★★☆



THE LIONS

Jungle Struttin' (Ubiquity)
Unified riddims

The camaraderie among L.A.'s contemporary funk bands is well documented on this new, reggae-inspired side project, which is composed of members from Breakestra, Orgone and several other acts. Laid-back Caribbean riddims are heard often, but these songs are also the sum of countless influences seeping into each other. With the innovative "Cumbia Del Leon," The Lions deftly tap into traditional Columbian dance music while seasoning the track with dashes of dub and funk. More straight-ahead numbers ("Sweet Soul Music") can be just as easy on the ears, even if they're not as groundbreaking.—*Max Herman*

★★★★☆

CRAZE

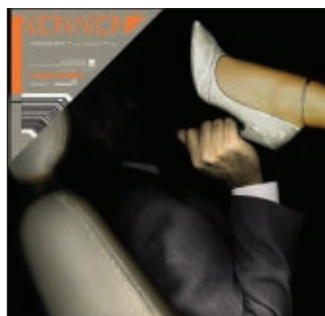
FabricLive.38 (Fabric)

The champ is here

The tally of turntablists that Craze has embarrassed in battle might give the impression that his deck skills would one-up selection for a stab at the FabricLive catalog. Wrong. The Nicaraguan-born producer/DJ can point to a number of trophies on the mantel—several World DMC prizes, Winter Music Conference Scratch-Off titles, beating the Scratch Perverts in their own backyard—but as a regularly touring party rocker, he's been holding it down in the booth for years. On an energetic *FabricLive.38*, Craze doesn't dick around with showboating; he lightly skims classic hip-hop (Tuff Crew, "My Part of Town"), much-blogged jewels, a restrained taste of B-more and a couple of dusty ones before his hour is up.

Fortunately, Craze treats a stale, seemingly required dose of Debbie Deb ("When I Hear Music") on *FabricLive.38* with some beat juggling and furious cuts, but by the time he drops the needle on this one, his magic is already everywhere in the set. Chicago's Cool Kids ("I Rock," "Black Mags") get two top slots while Craze's slick blends and scratchfests (check DJ Blaqstarr's morphing into Switch's Coldcut remix) keep it just brazen enough.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★★☆



NEON NEON

Stainless Style (Lex)
Unlikely duo tests electro-pop waters

To hear Gruff Rhys (the scruffy Welshman of Super Furry Animals) drop pop science over instrumental chameleon Boom Bip's '80s-rich beats makes for a serious head-scratcher. Add to that the glam behind playboy bachelor and inventor John DeLorean (who inspired *Stainless Style* and created the famous failed car), and you've got an album that plays off every decadent male fantasy. Take the track "Raquel," for example, which glorifies goddess Raquel Welch. It's the perfect juxtaposition of two forward thinkers in music coming together to create an electro-pop album worth a trip back to the future.—*Jason Jurgens*

★★★★☆

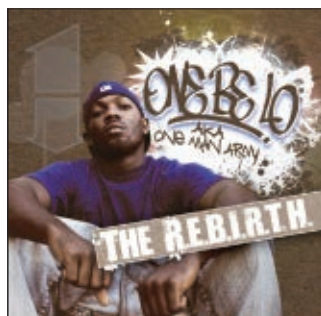


NICOLAY & KAY

Time:Line (Nicolay)
Tiding us over

Certain MCs fare better than others on the sparkling backdrops from Netherlands native boom-bap-loving producer Nicolay. Texan rapper Kay (of The Foundation) does well enough on *Time:Line*'s live-and-looped chemistry, flowing confidently over slow-simmer standouts "What We Live" and "As the Wheel Turns," but check "Tight Eyes"—Oh No's guest verse here big ups "Afghan hash," pre-gamin' an open-bar outing and "holding onto two drinks" over less than two minutes of glitzy organ and funk bass. That alone might even calm the feverish lead-up to the Foreign Exchange sophomore effort.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★★☆



ONE BE LO

The R.E.B.I.R.T.H. (Subterraneous)
Gimmick-free hip-hop

Michigan native One Be Lo has always made honest, unflashy hip-hop his priority. With *The R.E.B.I.R.T.H.*, One still isn't dropping radio-ready hits, though with the help of producers Jake One, Vitamin D and Memo, he respectfully carries on his mission to deliver sincere and soulful tracks. But it's the songs made with unknown beatmaker Texture that make up the album's standouts. This is particularly true on the media-themed "Headlines," which features a superfunk guitar loop and crisp, head nod-inducing drums. Hopefully more One Be Lo/Texture collaborations are in store.—*Max Herman*

★★★★☆



ROBERT OWENS

Night-Time Stories (Compost)
The sun'll come out

On *Night-Time Stories*, veteran gospel-inspired house singer/producer/DJ Robert Owens shells out positivity and weird spoken-word bits in decent collaborations for his first artist LP since 1997. His "Don't stop believin'" lyric almost sounds out of place against grim, glassy chimes on standout "Never Give Up," courtesy of Derbyshire, UK producer/Miso Records head Charles Weber, and "Press On" is more of the same chipper spirit from Owens, this time floating overtop his own deep blend of electric piano and Moogs. But a little too much sun can find you reddened and glazed in aloe...no thanks.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★★☆



MORCHEEBA

Dive Deep (Ultra)

Losing in order to gain

On its sixth full-length, *Dive Deep*, Morcheeba has given up trying to replace its original vocalist, Skye Edwards. Instead, the now duo of the brothers Godfrey has accepted a revolving door of voices for its downtempo compositions. On one hand, one of the best and most identifiable things about Morcheeba was its vocal stamp. On the other hand, having more than one timbre for its

songs has given the group added dimension.

Norway's Thomas Dybdahl's cool and soothing tones act as a tonic on "Riverbed," and his low, borderline hoarse delivery is goose-bump inducing on "Sleep on It Tonight." Morcheeba channel a country style on their cover of John Martyn's "Run Honey Run" through the plucks of an acoustic guitar. "Gained the World" carries that vibe with French singer Manda's calming yet pleading tone and Ross Godfrey's dexterous manipulation of the charango, intensifying the already painful cries of the tune. A great deal of *Dive Deep*'s varied personality can be attributed to the Ross' diverse abilities on any guitar-shaped instrument. Morcheeba may have lost a singer, but if *Dive Deep* is any indication, they have gained far more than they have lost.—*Lily Moayeri*

★★★★★



LUKE SOLOMON

The Difference Engine (Rekids)

It's definitely different

Musician/producer/label owner Solomon has defiantly and amusingly arranged his latest set in his own inimitable fashion. He's mentioned in interviews that this album is about the range of emotions that progress as one grows older, and he sticks to that sentiment, making the tracklist one big mix that's as uninterrupted as aging. Blending retro-house, '80s funk, electronic and even a little '70s punk, Solomon's topical—if sometimes a little over-the-top—lyrics and monologues cement everything together, from the title track's meander around the dancefloor to the Latin-tinged closer, "Liquid."—*Kristi Kates*

★★★★☆



TEMPOSHARK

The Invisible Line (Paper and Glue Ltd/Defend)

Phantom of the Opera, electro style

The UK's Temposhark may have been born of a fashionable electro scene, but its debut album, *The Invisible Line*, has more in common with an over-the-top musical stage production. Bursting with orchestral flourishes on opener "Don't Mess With Me," the tone is set for the über-theatrical dramatics that are the driving energy of *Invisible*. "Knock Me Out" consents to the group's fiery electro label—but with a screaming spectacle vibe. Watch your neck as the already huge single "Joy" is a belt-along number that requires many a head toss.—*Lily Moayeri*

★★★★☆



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Brazil Classics 7: What's Happening in Pernambuco (Luaka Bop)

City goes from junky to funky

The music from Brazil is constantly presenting itself to the rest of the world in a way that is entirely fresh. The latest hotspot, Pernambuco, was once cited as the fourth worst city in the world to live in. Now, as represented on *Brazil Classics 7*, its coastal swamps are the birthplace of the manguê beat movement. Taking the most post-modern methods possible and marrying them with indigenous sounds, the artists here create a futuristic hip-swiveling genre. Watch out for the tricky lyricism of Otto's "Bob" playing mind games with its fast chants.—*Lily Moayeri*

★★★★☆



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Controversy (Rapster)

Interpretation shows off Prince's poetic side

For a workhorse such as Prince, who has successfully driven his sex-filled R&B rock sound down our throats since the '80s, it's nice to see his music interpreted in a way that doesn't emphasize lace or butt cheeks. Here, artists like Susanna and the Magical Orchestra (who?) experiment with his sound, revealing the poetic value in his lyrics. These interpretations, which range from the minimal indie track "Purple Rain" to the roots-y reggae "Girls & Boys," don't possess the usual steaminess, but they certainly don't disappoint, either.—*Jason Jurgens*

★★★★★



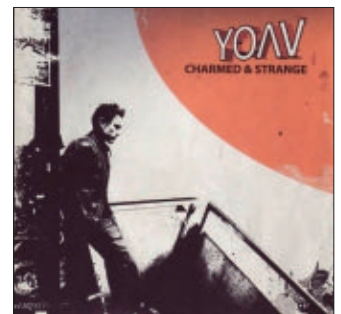
WHY?

Alopecia (Anticon.)

Wordy oddities abound

The head-rattling efforts that dropped on Anticon's frothing fan base in '07, from sound chemists DJ Mayonnaise and Odd Nosdam, are instrumental in nature but hardly straight hip-hop. The third LP from Why? is also an adventurous romp, and the further it swings from hip-hop, the better. While the genre could use as many wordsmiths as it can get (vocalist Yoni Wolf is in top form on "These Few Presidents"), pieces like "Song of the Sad Assassin" or "Simeon's Dilemma," all romantic and swaddled in glockenspiel and über-dramatic piano, bite a lot harder than any of *Alopecia*'s talkie-rhyme stuff.—*Dominic Umile*

★★★★☆



YOAV

Charmed & Strange (Verve)

Technique meets emotion

An anomaly among guitarists, Yoav is one of the few you'll hear who truly pushes the guitar past its own boundaries; it's strange, yes, in a good way, but also gorgeous to hear and quite charmed indeed. The London-based musician draws unusual sounds from his guitar—dark, sharp drumbeats, poignant violins and bell-like tones, all via his own skill and by electronically looping the rhythms he plays on the guitar body. And we haven't even mentioned his rich voice, which especially stands out on tracks "Sometimes..." the supercatchy "Club Thing" and his ghostly take on the Pixies' "Where Is My Mind."—*Kristi Kates*

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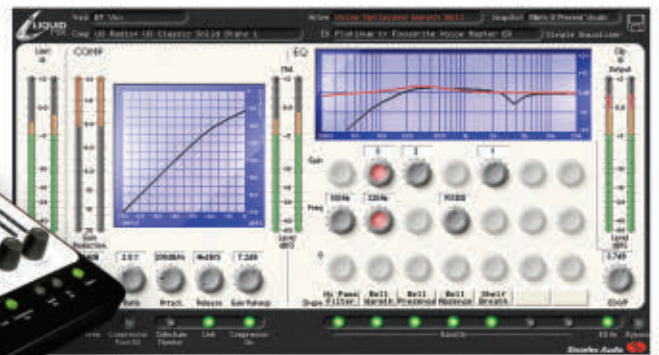
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IN TODD WE TRUST

DJ deity blesses crowds with smash remixes and original club hits

It's interesting that dance music's top DJs are often labeled "gods" by their adoring fans. While spinning other artists' records before a crowd isn't really enough to qualify for deity status, somebody's got to do it, right? Known as "Todd the God" by his global network of fans, New York City DJ/producer/remixer Todd Terry has been a hit-making machine for the better part of 25 years. His productions and remixes have sold in the millions, and he's known for building DJ sets around unreleased tracks, works in progress and his own stellar back catalog. He's also an artist with a rebellious fire; his 1999 drum 'n' bass album *Resolutions* (Astralwerks) was a shock to house music's foundation—here was a house DJ all of a sudden producing music that you *can't* dance to—and while it was critically panned, you have to respect his nerve.

Raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., Terry greatly admired and was influenced by early hip-hop artists such as Grandmaster Flash, Spoonie Gee, Rakim and Mele Mel. He was into the type of hip-hop that could also work on the dancefloor, and his early productions fell more into the freestyle electro sound (rather than straight-up house music) made popular by the likes of

Arthur Baker, John Robie and John "Jellybean" Benitez. Terry's first major production, 1987's "Alright, Alright" (Fourth Floor), came out under the Masters At Work name (along with Franklin Martinez and Mike Delgado). According to Terry, the legendary Masters At Work guise was originally given to his crew of DJs who played out in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and was adopted for record releases. The Masters At Work name was then passed on to Little Louie Vega and Kenny "Dope" Gonzalez, who popularized the name throughout the world and added the signature hip-house-jazz style sound.

"Alright, Alright" was a huge success for Terry and one of the most important singles for the development of New York City house music. It also put Terry on a path to focus solely on house music for the future. "At the time, I didn't know about the dance scene, so [the track's success] didn't mean much to me," Terry tells *Remix*. "I was still into the hip-hop thing and was really doing house music just to pay the bills. When I saw how people were going crazy for house music, I decided to put hip-hop to the side."

Terry spent the remainder of the late '80s and early '90s on a wild ride of releasing smash singles under numerous aliases, including Todd Terry Project's "Bango (To the Batmobile)" (Fresh, 1988), Royal House's "Can You Party?" (Idlers, 1988) and Black Riot's "A Day in the Life" (Fourth Floor, 1988), among many others. "Back in the day, the only way

to get my name out there and many records out at the same time was to use aliases. [Labels] wouldn't take another Todd Terry record, so I had to release records under a different name," Terry says.

As a remixer, Terry had a hand in some of the most popular and highest selling remixes of all time. His eclectic discography of remixes includes reworkings for Sting, Annie Lennox, Technotronic, Cerrone, Irene Cara, Cajmere, The Sugarcubes, The Shamen, Janet Jackson, Tina Turner and most famously, the Jungle Brothers' "I'll House You" and Everything But the Girl's smash "Missing." Terry's winning remixing formula has always been very simple, and he stays true to the original song. "For the most part, I always just added a beat, a bass line and a little melody to the songs. When you have a great song, it makes things so easy," he says.

With Terry's productions, remixes and DJ sets flooding all corners of the dance-music market, fans began referring to the omnipresent artist affectionately as "Todd the God." "My music really got into the people. The music got past the industry, and the people made it powerful," Terry says. However, despite being such an integral part of the development of house music, Terry still finds the United States to be a very difficult market. "The U.S. is horrible," he says. "They just dog all the greatest DJs. We are all here and can't get a gig. That's just the way it is. We can't get a gig here, but a lot of UK DJs probably go through the same thing where they can only get gigs here. It's just part of the bullshit of the industry."

Despite all his successes on the remix front, Terry has taken a hiatus from working on future remixes because he believes that it saps his artistic juices. "I haven't done a remix in the last year and half. I just rather stick to my productions right now," he says. "Remixing kills your creativity, and I was doing so much remixing that I couldn't do my own stuff." Several of these new productions (Todd Terry featuring Tara McDonald on "Play On" and Todd Terry All Stars featuring Kenny Dope, DJ Sneak, Terry Hunter and Tara McDonald on "Get Down") are on *Strictly Todd Terry* (2007), a retrospective mix CD released on Strictly Rhythm.

As with most old-school DJs, the majority of Terry's career was built by spinning vinyl on four turntables. However, while he now DJs with CDs, that's pretty much the only change Terry's made throughout the years. Sets are built around his own unreleased tracks, edits, experiments and music that nobody else will ever have. Of course, his classic tracks still provide the highlight of most evenings. "I've been playing 'Can You Party?' and 'Bango (To the Batmobile)' for years. It's the request, it's there and it still gets the crowd going," he says. "I get tired of playing 'Bango,' but the crowd always chants for it, and I go 'aw, shit,' and play it for a little while. Still, I like playing these songs because the crowd likes it a lot, and that's what it's all about." 

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