

In an Attic... with Interpol

by Hillary Johnson

photos by Peter Katis (studio)
and Pieter van Hattem (press)



The debut album from New York's Interpol, *Turn on the Bright Lights*, was one of the most successful independent rock albums in recent years. The band's brooding, atmospheric guitar rock has invited comparisons to post-punk bands like Joy Division, Wire and The Chameleons. ...*Bright Lights* and the upcoming album, *Antics*, were both recorded with Peter Katis of Tarquin Studios [see *Tape Op* #31], a modest (yet amazing) studio built in Peter's home in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Sam Fogarino and Daniel Kessler talked to us about writing and recording their second record for Matador between tours and getting out of New York to hang in Peter's attic.

What's your studio background?

Sam: It just stems from playing in bands for a really long time and just gravitating towards the mixing console. It just started out as this great curiosity as to how things were recorded, how did that happen? How do you put sound to tape? I had a little schooling although it was the biggest waste of money. I went to a small school in Ft. Lauderdale, the Art Institute of Ft. Lauderdale, and it was an 18-month program. They had a really great small facility there with an Otari 5050 8-track and a really nice selection of mics and a Series 65 Trident.

That's what I spent eight years with!

S: I love that board! It sounds great, ergonomically everything is just right there. It has such a great sound. It's so warm. So I spent some time [at the Art

Institute] and became a student assistant within a few months and I used to lock myself in that little facility and just kinda go for it. But then it was just playing in bands that really gave me experience. I moved to New York in 1997 and I ended up buying a Tascam 38 8-track machine and a Tascam M1600, which was their answer to the Mackie.

Do you still have that stuff?

S: I still have it, yeah.

Do you record the band with it?

S: I actually did our first round of demos [for *Turn On the Bright Lights*] and the demo version of the track "NYC" was released as a B-side.

How did you hook up with Peter [Katis, Tarquin Studios] originally and what brought you back to him?

S: Originally I met Peter through my ex-wife. She played music and her bandmate used to go out with Peter. We all went out on a big double date and me and Peter became fast friends and he invited me to his studio a couple times to play on his band's stuff [Philistines Jr.] and then he came to see Interpol and really liked it. I remember looking for New York studios to do ...*Bright Lights* and thought, 'I don't know why I'm looking when we can just go to Peter's place in Bridgeport [Connecticut]'. He has this great Victorian mansion.

What was it like recording outside of the city? You've done it twice now...

S: It's the only thing I really know! I'm wondering if the next time around we'll do it at home just for the experience. The first time around it was great because it was the only experience we had, collectively, so we were kinda lost in that and excited about making an album for Matador. This time around, although we were really excited about doing the album and really loved the material and working with Peter, we started to feel separation anxiety from the city.

You were out there for a while?

S: It was a good two months... We would take the weekends off a few weeks but then we started running out of time and just had to be there all the time. We're all pretty involved in the whole process. Paul never left. It was the first time he didn't have all the vocal melodies and lyrics done for each song so we set up a little Pro Tools LE room in the dining room, with an old Power Mac and a [Dig] 001 and a Shure broadcast mic. He left the studio maybe twice.

Have you guys ever considered putting together your own studio or do you prefer to go into another place?

Daniel: It's hard to say what the future holds, but for this record we wanted to go back to familiar surroundings with someone we already had a history with. We knew that we wouldn't be working with someone who had their own vision, we didn't want a "producer". I would like to have a studio just to help us write. It would be nice to have some sort of facility to record the songs as we've heard them in our heads and playing them out loud but be able to add some keyboards... and experiment a little bit... little details.

You can't really overdub on a boombox.

D: No you cannot, that's very true. All the music was 100 percent finished when we got to the studio, but Paul was still working out some vocals - lyrics and melodies. Having the mini studio downstairs really helped Paul and I think having some sort of workspace for him to go into before we go into the studio [would be good as well]...

So when you did the basics, you didn't have a reference vocal?

D: On this record, here and there. There are some tracks that had reference vocals on them but since the vocals were so new anyway to these songs, we didn't need them so often. On a few songs it helped propel the energy but a lot of the songs, they weren't necessary.

The all new MP-2NV preamplifier. . .



clean & clear at the top, solid at the bottom.

*From Classical to Rock & Roll. . .
The MP-2NV captures the highs and the lows.*

Whether you're wanting accurate clean gain or thunder and richness of tone, the new MP-2NV is the preamp that can provide both.

For specifications and information contact Dan Kennedy at Great River Electronics - 651.455.1846 or visit our website at greatriverelectronics.com



Great River
ELECTRONICS



What was the setup like in the live room? Did you set up like you do in rehearsal or when you play live?

S: We really like to do rehearsal-style setup when we're in the studio... I don't want to see anybody's back.

You don't like their asses? Come on...

S: I see Paul's ass every night! But when we're doing the record, I want to see his cute little face!

How isolated were the amps?

S: Peter has two iso booths on either side of the room. One was used for Paul's guitar [amp] and then there's a storage closet that's actually a room with beautiful hardwood floors and really nice reflections. That was used for Daniel's amp. Carlos' bass amp was put into a littler closet, which just left the room open for the drums. The room is not gigantic, it's kind of a medium-sized room but we still utilized as much space as we could.

So you were using headphones?

S: Yeah, and the occasional click track here and there.

Does everyone else have [the click] too?

S: Yes, if they want it. Sometimes it was only used for the intro, verse and chorus of a song but then by the outro we take it off and some tracks we don't use a click to get that either slowed down or rushed feel that humans are so good at.

That thing that they'll never reproduce?

S: Exactly...

What's your feeling on all of the things like Beat Detective, Sound Replacer and Auto Tune - those things that go along with digital recording these days?

S: It's a tool, it's not a replacement. Used moderately I think they're great, just like anything. We used a little Sound Replacer, but never to replace a sound that we worked really hard to get. And we used a little Auto Tune here and there but it was totally up to Paul's discretion as far as he wanted to push it.

Sometimes it was an aesthetic decision to do something crazy with [the vocal]. I think [those tools] are good for certain things, to enhance your recording. Nothing like that threatens me at all. I think those things are good tools, but you [should] get good first [before you use them].

How long did you spend getting sounds, especially compared to *Turn On the Bright Lights*? Did you spend more time this time around?

S: Interpol is obviously a very guitar-heavy band, so Daniel and Paul really honed in on their own tones [before we got into the studio] and really saved a lot of time [in the studio]. It was just a matter of going in prepared. I knew how I wanted my drums to sound, I knew what heads I was going to use...

Did you use new heads?

S: Yes, except the snare head was not new. It was a little broken in.

Did you use an aluminum snare? A wood snare? Different ones?

S: I used a 6-1/2" brass snare and a 5" wood snare...

Did you use your own stuff? I know [Tarquin Studios] has a lot of amps and such...

S: Paul primarily uses a Fender Pro Reverb and Daniel is a Fender Twin man but I think Paul may have used a Vox AC-30 here and there and some other vintage Fender... Peter has such a plethora... and I think Carlos used his own [Ampeg] SVT and I brought my own kit.

Did you use your guitars or did you use Peter's?

D: I used mine. For this record, for the most part, I used a '67 Epiphone Casino and a '67 [Epiphone] 335 for a half-song here and a half-song there.

When you were doing your overdubs, was your amp in a booth or was it out in the room?

D: It was in the room, in the big space, but when I was tracking, it was isolated in a little bedroom.

Was everything close mic'd? I know you had some room mics going on for the drums...

S: There's some serious room mics going on.

How much of those tracks got used in the mix?

S: A lot. I really pushed for it. Nothing too extreme, just enough to add a heavy breath to the close sound. And sometimes the typical furthest room mic compressed-to-hell...

In mono...

S: Yeah, and sometimes that mic was this old 'birdcage' ribbon mic [Altec 639] [and other times it was] a prized Telefunken large diaphragm condenser mic [Ela M 251] and those two [mics] would act as the "extreme" mic in the setup. I don't even remember how many mics Peter had on the kit... I love it, I want as many options as possible.

But weren't you going to 24-track, 2" 456? Was there a lot of bouncing?

S: No, we'd fill up the [tape] and bounce it into Pro Tools.

So you ended up mixing from Pro Tools.

S: It was all mixed in Pro Tools. What's coming out of Pro Tools gets sent to the Neotek [Elite] console and then back into Pro Tools...

Right, he does stems?

S: Exactly.

Did you take the stems to mastering or did you bring final mixes?

S: Yeah, the final mixes were brought to Greg Calbi.

He did [Turn On the Bright Lights] too, right?

S: Yeah, at Sterling [Sound].

Did you go? Was it an attended session?

S: Yeah, I always go, for the pure listening pleasure, the craziest stereo system in the whole world!

How much was changed from the final mixes in mastering? Did Greg do a lot to them?

D: He didn't do a lot of stuff. He warmed it up and the basic EQ'ing of tracks. He's great, we really liked working with him the first time and it was a pleasure to watch him work this time. Retaining the punchiness was something [important]...

How do you think the sound of the whole record compared to the sound of Turn On the Bright Lights?

D: I have a feeling it's a lot warmer, not that the other one felt colder, but there's something... Peter got better equipment, my guitar tone is a lot better...

What amp did you use?

D: I rented and then bought it. It's a '60s [Fender] Twin. I split between that and a [Fender] Deluxe.

Is it a new re-issue?

D: It's an old one.

Did you use new tubes?

D: No... There's actually a moment on the recording where right at the end of the song you hear the guitar amp just die. The speakers just died. It wasn't because we were pushing them so hard or anything, [the volume was set] probably no higher than 2 or 3. Paul used the Deluxe throughout and we both used a Vox [AC-30] a little bit here and there.

Do you write more for the studio or for the stage? Or for the head?

D: We write for the song. Obviously we knew they were for a record and they were written in a short and specific amount of time, but ultimately we were thinking of them as songs.

Did you take the approach of getting basics done for one song, then you stop and do all the overdubs? Or did you do all of the songs and then go back and do all of the fixes?

D: The first time around we did all of the basics and guitar overdubs in two days and worked crazy hours but this time it took a lot longer. We tracked the whole record, then we did guitar overdubs. Paul did all of his and then I did all of mine. I don't know if it was the best way.

Are there any surprises or ear candy on this record?

D: There's a lot of ear candy, a lot of bleeps and bloops and details in certain songs that people will certainly hear.

Did you spend any more time experimenting this time around?

D: Songwriting-wise, no, we didn't experiment but there's a lot in the bleeps and bloops. You'll hear some experimentation, some sound effects and some noises. We barely had time to get our vision out there. Paul's probably the person that experimented the most, because he was still writing until the very last moment. ☺

www.interpolny.com

TAPE OP is brought to you by our advertisers. Please support them and please let them know you read TAPE OP. They need to know you're reading the magazine, so be sure to tell them, when you fill out your warranty cards and questionnaires on their web sites.

www.tapeop.com
free subscriptions online!

Daniel's Credits include: Mos Def, Cassandra Wilson, Leonard Hubbard of The Roots, Old Dirty

Bastard, Dr. John, Killah Priest, Curtis Mayfield, Wax Poetic featuring Norah Jones, Windwater Music, Elephant Man, Blues Traveler, Sugar Ray, Ziggy Marley,

DJ Logic, Sonica, Olu Dara, Girlright Soundtrack (Palm d'Or Prize Winner), Fox News, NASA.

DANGEROUS MUSIC

MO: Motering, Talkback and Cue

The missing link for pro DAW studios

Monitor: Analog and Digital Input Switching, Master Functions

It will change the way you listen

Mixer: Analog Mixing

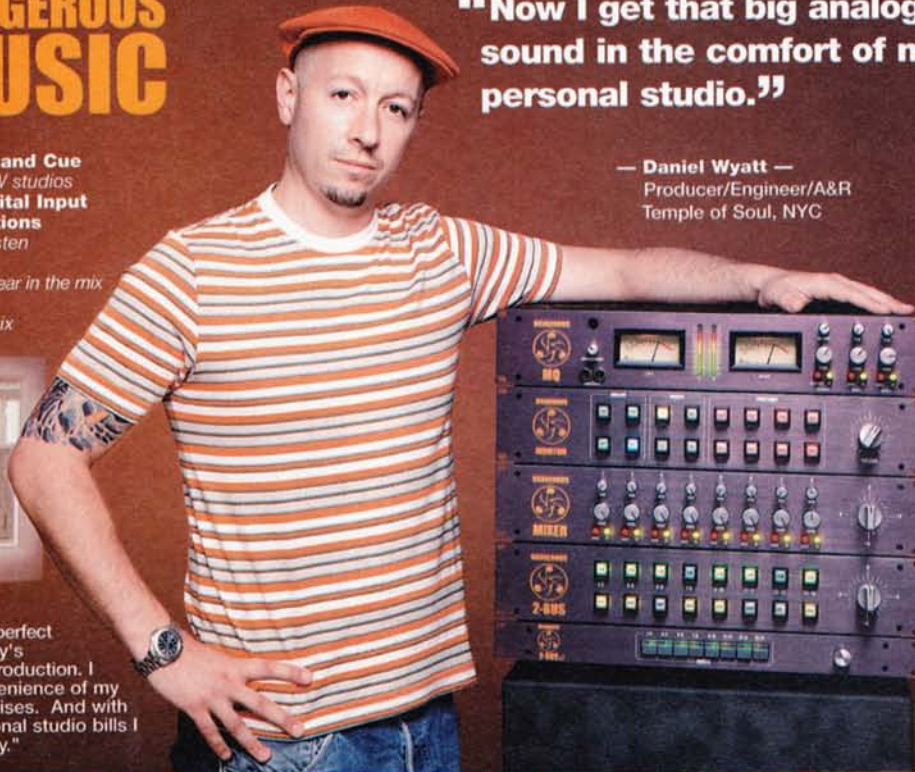
Keep your trusted outboard gear in the mix

2-Bus: Analog Summing

It will change the way you mix



"The Dangerous gear is the perfect analog compliment to today's advances in digital music production. I get all the power and convenience of my DAW without the compromises. And with the money I save in traditional studio bills I make my clients very happy."



"Now I get that big analog sound in the comfort of my personal studio."

— Daniel Wyatt —
Producer/Engineer/A&R
Temple of Soul, NYC

www.dangerousmusic.com