

For the past couple of years, Gordon and his partner, Anna Mercedes (whose family owns Bear Creek Studios in Seattle), have been settling into their studio, The Silver TransporterRaum. The studio, situated 20 minutes outside of London, is in its third incarnation. The original was in Berlin, followed by Gordon's first studio, in New York's Alphabet City. Gordon started The TransporterRaum with two goals in mind: learning Logic and the Kurzweil. Having spent the previous seven years in Seattle, Gordon had a good foot on the ground from being in a signed band, Sky Cries Mary. "I actually had some legs to stand on, whereas the first time I went to New York, it was after my studio burned down and I had no money and it was really hard."

What's it like working in London?

What it's like over here is that *every* studio has a Neve board. Even a moderately-priced studio has a giant stretch Neve board and tons of LA-2As and amazing microphone collections and kickass engineers who are like 18-23 years old who know how to do everything in Logic and Pro Tools and they're very helpful and they make you tea and they're all over you. It's so great recording here.

How are the rates compared to a studio of that caliber in the States?

I can get an amazing studio for £350 [about \$500/day] plus another £250/day for a Pro Tools rig, so £750/day for a really kick ass studio for amazing results - with an engineer.

So the rigs aren't generally included in the rooms? They're rentals?

In the one set of studios I've been using, the Pro Tools is hired separately.

So they mostly have 2" [analog] machines?

Most studios I've been in have both 2" machines and Pro Tools. Usually they don't charge for the 2" 'cause it's there already. These are the particular studios I was using before I built my own. I'm using Pro Tools HD right now in conjunction with Logic and that's an amazing system. I never even heard it before I bought it. I just thought, I've used Mix Plus for a really long time and it's so good and if they're telling me it's going to be better, well, let's try it!

What else do you have other than HD?

What you can find here is floors and warehouses full of Neve boards and Amek boards and all these old English boards just waiting to be parted out by producers like me. I just got an insane little [Amek mixer] that's only about a foot and a half wide. I was excited by it because I thought, 'This will come in very useful.' What I didn't bargain for was when I

plugged a vocal mic into this little Amek board. It just put to shame all the really expensive pieces of gear I own. I'm not going to be using a lot of the stuff I just bought because these Amek channels make singers sound superhuman - so incredibly characteristic.

Do you record at 96 k?

I never use 96 k. I use 24-bit, 44.1.

You haven't done any experimenting or anything?

I don't really care to. Basically this stuff is for CDs and I don't want some horrible surprise just before the end of my process.

You aren't doing any projects that are ending up on vinyl as well?

Yeah, definitely. You think it's worth trying?

Yeah. The only downfall as I can see it is storage. You're increasing your file sizes.

In many cases I can't even hear the difference between 16 and 24-bit. I just don't notice it that much. I would like to hear it and have someone show me the difference. I tend to get sounds that sound a little bit wrecked anyway so I like it to sound a little bit old-fashioned - like a little bit fighting for its life.

I read somewhere that you had worked back in the day on industrial music.

GORDON raPhaeL

Getting the Nasty, Fuzzy Sounds

by Hillary Johnson



I really only worked on my own compositions for most of my life. Most of my life I just spent with a tape recorder. For the first decade, it was a 4-track reel-to-reel tape recorder and I was there every single day from the moment I woke up to the moment I went to sleep with a few breaks in between. With my ARP Odyssey, an Echoplex, a phase shifter, a Rat fuzz pedal and a guitar and a microphone making thousands and thousands of songs. I come from synthesizers from so far back that industrial music

"This is the story about a guy who always dreamed about being a producer and worked out of a basement studio and had a hit."

GORDON raphael

happened halfway through my synth career. I got really excited - my mind was completely blown in 1985. I'd just come back from Europe and had been doing a lot of technical and outer space uses of electronic music up through the '70s and the early '80s and I saw a band in Canada called Skinny Puppy. They were one of the seminal bands that put me on a whole other course because for the first time in my life, I heard somebody using the same synthesizers that I liked - [Sequential Circuits] Pro-One and Moogs and things like that and Rolands - and they sounded more aggressive than guitars. They sounded like they were killer machines and I had never heard synths used aggressively before. It was always for beauty or outer space, not to completely tear your head off. The minute I heard that idea, it became the focus of my work for almost ten years. When I met The Strokes, part of what they liked about me was that I could get really nasty, messy sounds. I'm not using an effect, I'm just kind of driving a tube a little bit but it sounds a little industrial. If you listen to the guitar solo on "Take It Or Leave It" [the last song on the first Strokes' album], that thing is so aggressive and to know that it was going into peoples' homes and they were enjoying that and listening to it was a vindication of ten years of research that went unheard. I learned quickly after working with them that every single knob turn I did I had to do in front of them. It would be no use to work for an hour on my own or even five minutes because I just have to turn knobs very slowly while watching their faces and then as soon as I find something and they smile and say, "Whoa, that's great." And instead of saying, "Well now I'm gonna do this to even make it better," I just stop right there.

Is Seattle where you professionally started recording?

At one point I moved to Hollywood after fucking up in New York, in 1990, and I met Dave Allen [Shriekback/Gang of Four] and others and people noticed that if they took me in the studio [as a musician], things kind of went smoothly. I could wire the computer up well and I could come up with interesting parts really quickly and even write things so I became pretty handy in the studio. I didn't make

money, nobody paid me, but they took me around and fed me and that was cool. I always liked to eat and I never had any money. In any case, I wound up breaking up with Dave Allen. He didn't like my writing, or his friend Luc Van Acker from Belgium. He told me that my writing was no good and he got rid of me so I went back home to Seattle on a Greyhound bus and mysteriously joined Sky Cries Mary, which Dave Allen ended up signing [on World Domination]. So that was the first time, in 1991, when I returned

to Seattle for about the fourth time of trying to leave that I got signed in a band and we made records and I had a publishing deal and I could buy synthesizers and guitars and digital 8-track tape recorders and samplers

and then I started really going to town in my basement on my own stuff.

When did you start recording other artists?

Way before that, around '85 or so, I noticed there were a lot of really cool bands in Seattle and they knew that I was somebody who knew how to use tape recorders and I could also do live sound so lots of young bands were asking me to do little demos for them. One of those bands was a band called Green River in '86. I didn't really start working for other people until Chateau Relaxo in New York, 1999. I was about to go completely broke 'cause I was used to paying about \$150 a month rent for my basement with my studio in it in Seattle, which was awesome, then I moved to New York, where I had \$900 a month rent for my apartment and \$700 a month rent for my studio. Within three or four months I would go completely broke and for the first time, my family members and my friends were telling me how to fill out a job application and make a resume. This led to being evicted from Chateau Relaxo and starting The TransporterRauM. I continued being known to be the cheapest, fastest studio in New York and people just knew they wouldn't pay much money and I could get things done quickly and they'd be happy with the sound. That was at the moment I met The Strokes, which was just on a nightly prowl to go find more bands so I could pay my rent. There were two bands playing at the Luna Lounge and I went up to both of them equally and said, "Hey, come down the block to my studio, I'll make a quick demo and you'll love it," and The Strokes came and the other band didn't and that little demo turned into whatever this mayhem is now.

So before your success with The Strokes, were the times that you didn't have a studio and were independent slower for you?

All my life I worked in friends' houses on my own stuff. Then in Seattle when I was signed with Sky Cries Mary I used all my publishing money and my record company advances to buy equipment so I could work on my own stuff and have more sample power or more echo machines or more guitars and distortion and things like that. It wasn't until that time at Chateau Relaxo, when I was about to go completely broke in

New York, that I started working in the field of production and getting paid for it. So everything else was just getting by except for those years of being in Sky Cries Mary where I was being taken care of for being a musician. I got evicted during the making of The Strokes album and on Halloween of 2001, I packed up my studio from The TransporterRauM and I moved it into storage. I sold most of the gear and I moved my own stuff into storage and I was kind of a little bummed out and I didn't know what I was going to do. I felt really happy because The Strokes album was going really well and I knew I had choices but I didn't know what they were going to be and at the very moment I was in a truck on the way to my storage space I got a call from Richard Butler from The Psychedelic Furs and he asked me to tour the US in his band. I joined the Psychedelic Furs for an amazing two-month tour around Christmas of 2001, which was an epic year.

Was that the first time you felt that all your hard work had finally paid off?

I felt pretty good about my hard work paying off in Sky Cries Mary cause for seven years I was touring the US and making albums and living kind of like a rock star life where you didn't work, you just went and had Thai food for lunch and came back and worked on your compositions all day. But I also had the feeling of, 'Well, it's not really all my music.' I had a great time with Sky Cries Mary but the whole time, I was mostly in my basement working on my own songs. That's where my focus was. I was waiting for the day where I would get to play my own music. Then, I didn't have a studio up until about three months ago here in London when Anna Mercedes and her family helped me build The Silver TransporterRauM. At first, I'd been doing so much recording - the first year I was in London, I recorded 30 bands. And I recorded them all over town in different studios and I finally found a few that I really liked and wanted to stay with, which I recorded most of them in, called The Garden. But I didn't have my own studio and I didn't really care 'cause here I was using Neve boards. And when I built my studio, The Silver TransporterRauM, my big dream was to get a gigantic Hammond organ and Leslie from the '60s, a whole bunch of synthesizers and just start a band and just rehearse in it and play live music and just not push buttons and not be a producer. And I did that.

Is that Crystal Radio?

Right. I thought, 'If I'm going to use my clout for anything, I just want to find some good musicians.' How about that for a goal? I got a great response and I found five musicians that really can play amazingly well and we put this band together. When I was making The Strokes album I realized that I really do love recording, it's a lot of fun, and I don't know what I was thinking. I got myself the HD system and a whole bunch of API and Amek [stuff] and cool gear to work with and now I have my first studio of my own since The TransporterRauM in 2001.

So now when Crystal Radio is ready to make a record, do you want to record and produce?

I'm doing it right now. The first project I did at The Silver TransporterRaum to see if my system was working, I did six tracks with Crystal Radio.

When you were testing your system, were you in the control room getting sounds and tweaking stuff or did you go out in the studio?

My plan was [figuring out] how to record bands live and preserve the energy at the expense of the fidelity and [how] people will react on just the energy level alone. Something about musicians standing in the same room facing each other. To make that even more powerful make them stand in the same room, face each other and don't have one set of headphones in the room, just have them feel the music in their groin and in their kneecaps and smash all those sounds into each others' microphones...

...just like a rehearsal.

Yeah, just like they do every single day. Why on the day where they're going to be recorded for all time, suddenly change some of the most important dynamics of music making like put it into their ear holes instead of their bodies and then separate all of their instruments - that's a funny concept. An engineer must've invented it! Not a musician.

Probably an engineer in a suit.

Someone that really wanted to preserve the signal integrity in one or two channels. I wanted to record live and I thought I would get all the sounds and push record and have the band walk into the room, count off and play, but as it happened, I couldn't figure out how to get the second set of eight inputs working and I had some technical problems with some of the preamps I was using. I didn't know what to do and my drummer said, "Hey, I'm just going to go in there and you mic up my kit, I'm not going to use a click track, I'm not going to use any musicians whatsoever I'm just going to count you off and I'm going to play your songs for you." I said, "Okay, if you can do that, I'm going to be really impressed, especially if I can make music with it." And he just sat there and counted himself off and played the songs for all he was worth and when I played guitar onto it to see if it would work, it felt like you were playing in a band. So my own technique failed me. I couldn't get it together but the recordings came out stunning. I'm really happy with them.

That's good musicianship.

Yeah, it takes a certain kind of musician to be able to play a song with passion by yourself!

Tell me a little about Shoplifter [Records]. Is this a label you've started since you've been in London?

I'll give you a little background. As a recording person, I always collected and kept the best of the best and thought I would love to show people these recordings. Maybe something good can happen to these people that I believe in. As I became a producer and recorded peoples' demos, I'd always compile the best songs on a CD and try to get record companies or other musicians or whatever interested in it. I thought to myself, 'Okay, 2003 is coming, am I going to record another 30 bands of 18- and 19-

year old kids in London?' Is that what I want to do? It was really fun. I wanted to see how much I could work and because The Strokes were kind enough to put my picture in their record and because England is the number one place for Strokes fans in the whole world, when I would walk into a club, kids would recognize me and come up and give me CDs, so I was just working all the time and it felt like, Okay, I'm going to make up for an entire lifetime of being unemployed and I'm going to see how much I can do in one year and I recorded 30 bands and I found at least ten bands that blew my mind completely. And I thought I would do anything for these bands.

Did you find it hard to solicit yourself [to bands]?

When I was at Chateau Relaxo I put up a little flyer at places and I listed the gear I had at my studio which I thought was impressive-sounding and all the cool synthesizers I had and some of my past history working with Sky Cries Mary [and other] bands in L.A. A little resume didn't get any reaction, not one phone call from that. So even when I was hustling bands, I felt like I had something to back myself up and once I got that flow going, there wasn't a dry period. I had to still hustle to make sure it kept going but I felt like I was on a roll already. I felt like I was working every day and learning new things. One thing I gotta say about producing - at first I was scared because I thought, How can I sit there and record other people's music when I'd rather be working on my own music? That was a real dilemma. It was also a dilemma when I joined Sky Cries Mary because when I stepped on the stage in Seattle with them for the first time there were 1,000 people in front of us and they were all cheering wildly and I had two thoughts simultaneously. One was, 'Oh my god, this is great! I've never played for a thousand people cheering before.' My second thought was, 'Hey what about my own music that I'm working on? I'm not going to be able to focus on that or be known for that if I join this band right now.' And the same thing with production, I thought, If I spend my time listening to other peoples' songs, I'll go crazy, but, actually, because I've been extravagantly lucky all my life to attract really good music into my life, I've never worked on a project with a boring band or someone who couldn't sing or play. I've never had to have that horrible experience where I didn't like what I was doing - partially because of that every time I mixed someone's stuff or listened to what they wanted, a little light went off - That's where the vocals are supposed to sit! I learned so much about why my recordings weren't accepted and weren't widely liked when I worked on my own in my own little vacuum. By working with countless hundreds and hundreds of bands and people and day after day on projects, I absorbed things about mixing, about the proper use of effects, how people like the drums to be, or about composition. I never really cared about composition, I just cared about the sound and the mood and the energy. Something about studying all these people I worked with rubbed off, so I can record things tighter for myself and I can compose

better and I know when something's gone on too long for the first time. The whole piece can be gorgeous and have things going along just brilliantly but there could be one thing, like a hi-hat level that's just screaming, "I am out of place! I am ruining the song!" and to be able to hear the one thing that still needs to be worked on, that's a real skill that I think I learned from producing other bands.

Did you ever produce without engineering?

Not up until very recently.

Did you ever work with other producers?

I worked with producers in Sky Cries Mary. They were producers who worked on our album and in that situation I didn't even know what they were doing. The truth of the matter is that even though I recorded for almost every day from 1977 to the present, I never used a good microphone or a compressor or an equalizer ever in my life until about 1996 at Bear Creek, when they started letting me do my productions and they said, "Here's a compressor..."

Maybe that's because you weren't thinking of the sound?

Because all the studios I had were basement studios with 4-tracks and a little synthesizer and an echo machine and I didn't have compressors, I didn't even know what they were for. It never occurred to me that they had a function...

...that they may help you.

Yeah, it might help me need less reverb, because I loved reverb and I loved delay but I never realized that I needed to use those to cover up for the fact that I wasn't using room sounds and I wasn't using real sounds, real rooms, real mics or real preamps and you have to try to do something to make it sound lively and interesting. But when you have a good mic and a good room and a good preamp and a good compressor, you can get everything that reverb is supposed to give you plus a whole lot more and have it be so transparent, that there's more room for other instruments or to hear the instruments. So that's what I learned in the last six years that I never knew before.

Do you have any favorite nice mics or compressors?

Yeah, I have some favorite things I've discovered. I really like Amek, API, Neve and Trident preamps. As far as microphones, I don't really have a favorite but I got a lot of success from this really cheap mic called the Audio Technica 4033A, which is the one Julian [Casablancas, The Strokes] sings in. He won't sing into a Neumann - he thinks it ruins his voice. He thinks if he sings into an Audio Technica, it really helps. I really like U47s for really good singers. I like LA-2A compressors. I also love digital - the Bomb Factory LA-2A compressor plug-ins, I love that sound and I love Amp Farm plug-ins. Those are two of the greatest sonic discoveries I've ever made in my life. I also like the [Empirical Labs] Distressor. I've gotten single-microphone drum sounds in front of the kick through a Distressor and it sounds like Jon Bonham. And then the other secret weapon I have isn't a real audio piece of gear - it's that ARP Odyssey synthesizer.

Continued on page 81 >>>

Larry's End Rant (continued from page 82)

So imagine that you have a modest home recording setup with digital equipment. You need better drum sounds so you go to a local studio. They tell you the drums can be tracked to tape and you're excited. You also realize you don't have any way to play the tape at home. You eventually end up borrowing or renting the tape and going home with wave files. Did the tape company make any money on you? Not really, as the tape will be reused. What would you have done 15 years ago? Probably the whole project at this studio, on tape that you bought.

What's gonna happen?

It appears that RMG International in Oosterhout, The Netherlands, has all the old EMTEC/BASF tape-making equipment and will be delivering tape in April 2005, though I can't seem to find out how we will purchase it in the US. ATR Magnetic Tape has announced they will be delivering tape no later than June 2005. Plus there's still all the old tape making equipment in Opelika, Alabama, that may get kicked back into service soon. Remember, the pro tape market may seem slim to some, but it's a six-million dollar a year industry. Someone will want to be part of that, even if it gets slightly smaller over time. The only downside is that the price of tape will probably be higher.

In terms of studios, it would seem that smaller, versatile and community-orientated types might be more apt to survive. We can lament the loss of historic rooms like Cello/Western, a place that should rightly become a museum if it doesn't keep functioning as a studio, but just as the government's funding of the sinking airline business makes me nervous, I don't see why a studio should just stay open because we are afraid of change. For me the loss of the Hit Factory is different than that of Cello. I had the opportunity to tour this gigantic facility a few years back. A more boring, soulless place for making records I cannot imagine. Musicians usually want comfortable and inspiring places to make records.

What about the musicians? In my opinion, they are the ones who will eventually benefit from all this. As the big record labels flounder and drop "marginal" artists who don't sell a million albums, these people retreat to smaller labels that care about music or even start self-releasing their own CDs via websites and places like CD Baby. Smaller studios that do fantastic work have existed for years. Now there are just more of them. Artists can record albums at lower costs than ever, and the cost of self-releasing a CD has never been less. Because these artists now have so many choices available they also wield more power than ever. It's their choice of how and where to record that determines which studios remain busy. This makes it obvious that running a successful studio includes treating clients with more respect than ever and making sure to get that word of mouth and repeat business.

And there are many changes afoot for the recording industry. The large studios and tape companies might be going away, but many of us are firmly entrenched in the recording world and are the ones who'll see it through. ☺

P.S.: Come to TapeOpCon this June in New Orleans where we will be forging ahead in this world and discussing the issues that affect us. www.tapeopcon.com

Thanks to John B and Pat Kearns for feedback on this piece.

CD Reviews (continued from page 78)

LOOKING FOR A THRILL: AN ANTHOLOGY OF INSPIRATION DVD Bettina Richards, the head of Thrill Jockey Records, chose to celebrate the 100th release of her label with a DVD of interviews featuring people discussing moments of personal musical inspiration. One-hundred twelve people are interviewed and you can play back the short clips in a variety of sequences or order. Pretty cool idea. A look at who's on here from the "recording world" includes Steve Albini, John McEntire, Casey Rice, Bob Weston, Elliot Dick, John Parish and over a hundred great artists, writers and fans. It's cool to hear these stories and see how musicians inspire new generations of listeners who in turn inspire more. Also an interesting use of the random access nature of the DVD format as opposed to watching linear movies. Directed by Braden King and edited by Ian Williams. All profits go to Greenpeace. (\$20, www.thrilljockey.com) -LC

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Gordon Raphael (continued from page 40)

Yeah, you and the ARP!

I just pulled it out today. I have a relationship with it. It's only got maybe 60 knobs and 30 buttons but it doesn't have a memory system... so there!

Because it's not digital.

And there are an infinite number of sounds you can make on it. I just got a brand new synth that I think is going to become my best friend over the next few years - it's the EMS Synthi-A, which is a suitcase synthesizer which uses patch points where little pins go in and I think it's going to be even more strange than the ARP Odyssey. ☺

Since this interview, Gordon has picked up shop in New York again!

www.shoptifterrecords.co.uk

Gear Reviews (continued from page 82)

The *UE-10 PRO* is my clear preference as an alternate mixing reference with its impressively-smooth frequency-response spanning 20 Hz to 16 kHz and its sensitivity of 119 dB at 1 mW. I have an assortment of headphones, ranging from a lousy Philips set for my portable CD player to my favorite AKG K 1000. The *UE-10 PRO* smokes everything in my studio other than the K 1000. It's hardly a fair comparison, though, since the K 1000's design allows sound to travel around the head, and the *UE-10 PRO*'s two channels are completely isolated.

While the K 1000 sounds more natural, the detail provided by the *UE-10 PRO* is brilliant. Room and reverb specifics are easier to investigate in these phones. My evaluation program included Miles Davis' "So What" from *Kind of Blue*. There's a rattle in the right channel during the song's first minute, presumably from Cannonball Adderley's saxophone, which I'd somehow happily ignored until now. The noise jumped forward with such clarity that I'll never hear this recording the same way again. Gee, thanks, Ultimate Ears! Joking aside, I'll never declare a mix finished without checking it through these phones.

I really appreciate the *UE-10 PRO*'s everyday utility. The custom-fit shells provide 26 dB of isolation; I can't wait to use these during air travel. Even without noise cancellation, these should easily top my next-best candidate, the DJ-style, over-the-ear Sony MDR-V900. Despite a decent seal, the Sony headset allows too much ambient noise for low-volume listening. Even at higher volumes, low frequencies and details are lost from CD or DVD audio. The *UE-10 PRO*'s third driver provides additional low-frequency information. During "So What," I was able to hear Paul Chambers' acoustic bass at comfortable levels while riding the train into Chicago. Better yet is the *UE-10 PRO*'s assistance in keeping my New Year's resolution to work off the "studio physique" at the gym. With my Philips headset, I had to either listen at deafening levels or attempt listening to Calixto and Baha Men simultaneously.

Unfortunately, due to the *UE-10 PRO*'s rigid silicon shell, microphonics and bone connectivity are issues when I'm on the treadmill (as they must be during active stage performance). Every step sends a low rumble through the ear. It's tolerable, but it helps to run in time—no speed metal for me. Nonetheless, I experimented by listening to Talk Talk's *Laughing Stock* while running yesterday. The *UE-10 PRO*'s custom fit and isolation are invaluable. If I still had to listen to that godawful, piped-in disco music at the gym, I'd never set foot in the place again. (*UE-10 PRO* \$900 MSRP; www.ultimateears.com)

—Jeff Elbel, www.marathonrecords.com/ping

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