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leader

you can't turn on a TV or look at a newspaper these days without encountering a discussion about the Internet, the information super-highway that will change our lives forever. Indeed, if the more enthusiastic proponents are to be believed, anyone without an Internet address and their own Web page might just as well move into a cave and rub sticks together. And their argument is so logically presented — the wealth of information out there is immense, there are people whose only joy in life is to help their fellow cyber travellers, and musicians from all corners of the globe can collaborate on vast and meaningful, cross-cultural, General MIDI symphonies. There are libraries full of free software to meet your every need, friendly manufacturers to solve any problem you might have with your equipment, and even on-line philosophers and psychoanalysts you can turn to if you develop an inferiority complex about the speed of your modem or the size of your Pentium chip.

This is the promise, but what is the reality? Here at SOS, we've used on-line services to communicate by email for over seven years now. We chose CompuServe, as it has a huge advantage over the mainstream Internet in that it allows users to send each other files that arrive intact, just as if they'd been sent on a floppy disk. Not so with the Internet — it seems email works fine (I can't imagine life without email in my job), but trying to send other types of file via Internet, especially if you're a Mac user, is a complex ritual which involves turning the file into something that believes it's a text message, emailing it, then relying on the person at the other end having access to a suitable piece of software to convert the file back again. What's more, if the file is over a certain length, it gets broken into chunks which are then sent separately and the recipient has to guess which order they were sent in before they can be reconstituted. If you've ever seen the film The Fly, you'll have a fair idea what can happen to files sent via the Internet. The whole experience is so frustrating that on more than one occasion I've resorted to airmailing a jiffy bag with a disk in it!

But what about the wonderful World Wide Web, the data super-highway where you can browse, graze and cruise as you feed your intellect and your curiosity? Well, I've been there — I've surfed the Net, trawled hyperspace and supped at the cybercafe of life, but compared with the so-called information super-highway, the M25 during rush-hour is like Silverstone; it's not so much like surfing as wading through a tar-filled septic tank wearing ill-fitting Wellington boots, partly filled with decomposing melon! It's so agonisingly slow — you can easily spend an hour or more trying to track down a useful file only to find yourself wandering down fruitless, time-consuming dead ends. Select a new link and the wait before it appears seems interminable (especially if the USA is awake), and when it does finally materialise, it isn't the data you want anyway. Before you know it, you feel jet-lagged, your eyes are watering, and you desperately want to go to bed (and that's if you log on in the morning!). But interestingly, you persevere and keep doing it, because every once in a while you come up with a nugget of information or a useful file that makes it all seem worthwhile.

Information technology may be the future, but I can't see the Internet being the future of information technology — the information age demands something much faster and better structured. At the moment, the only people who really stand to benefit are the opticians — have you had your eyesight checked since you became a Net addict?

Paul White *Editor*

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SX Mixer

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Crosstalk

Atari altercation meets Falcon furore

Ofir Gal's Atari Notes column attracted two written comments last month. Sadly, there is not room to print either letter in full — both have been edited for publication.

I am grateful to *SOS* for all the coverage they give my continuing efforts to promote the Falcon (most commonly in the Atari Notes section of the magazine) but I feel I have to react to the underlying tone of June's Atari Notes.

I should first of all state that there is nothing inaccurate in anything Ofir has said. Indeed, I have never known Ofir to misrepresent any facts about any computer (he has proved one of the best sources of information on computers for me over the years). My argument is with the underlying premise of the feature, which makes several assumptions I feel are misplaced in a musician's magazine...

Ofir does at least start out comparing the cost of software between a brand new piece of software just announced for the Mac with Falcon *Cubase Audio*, which has been shipping for three years. Whilst no-one who has bought a Falcon/*Cubase Audio* bundle lately has paid anything like £699 for the software, he is correct that that is the list price Harman will quote you for it. But does *Cubase Audio v3.0* for the Mac include Timestretch RAM sampling and 24 parametric EQ modules on hardware that retails for £680+VAT(and can you get the 32 channels he talks about on that computer)?

What I know definitely isn't available for this software on the Mac is the hardware add-ons for separate outs and S/PDIF and Ofir admits this with the phrases "in the near future" and "on the cards". It is still true to say that if you need these hardware add-ons which divide the multimedia sheep from the serious musical goats today, the Falcon is still the only system which delivers at this price point.

Of course, if you only want stereo-in, stereo-out with computer-quality converters now and don't mind waiting until these hardware add-ons become available, then the Power Mac with *Cubase v3.0 VST* looks a good solution... But to suggest that the Mac has caught up before the hardware add-ons can be bought, plugged in and used is misleading...

You may say that I am over-reacting to a piece that simply suggested some alternative options, but that is not how the people who are attending my roadshows are interpreting it. Several people have said that they are now really worried about buying a Falcon, even though they have never heard of Adobe Photoshop and have no interest in the Internet. What they want is a computer for *music*, and the Falcon seems to do everything they want, but they feel it can't be any good if the guy who writes *SOS*'s Atari Notes is suggesting the Mac looks a better bet... One guy actually suggested that Ofir must have been paid by someone to destroy the Falcon's reputation. I don't think that for a second, but that was a genuine comment from someone who had just read Atari Notes expecting to get information about using his Atari for music. He was amazed to find that with the Falcon he can go direct in digital into his Yamaha 02R desk using the ADAT interface from SoundPool and that he can create a template for an entire audio CD on the Falcon before blowing a recordable CD. These are facilities which musicians are interested in doing on an Atari-compatible computer because that's what they are used to using. If they want to read about Internet access or photo-retouching, they'll buy a general computing magazine, not *SOS*...

I hope this letter doesn't read like a spoilt child who isn't getting his own way all the time. It has just been very depressing for me to have spent so much of my own money (not C-Lab's) setting up and doing roadshows all over the country and finding that all my efforts are undermined by comments made in the Atari Notes of *SOS*, where I had always looked previously for support. I have always believed in the

Midiman Muddled

Following the publication of the MIDIMan press release in *SOS* May '96 (p.16) announcing the new GMan sound module, I would like to clear up a misunderstanding regarding the sound chip that is used in the module.

The GMan sound chip is a GM/GS-compatible sound module, having taken advantage of the release of the GS specification, and does comply with this specification. This information was incorrectly given as "Roland-licensed sounds" on the press release. In fact, the sound chip itself is not licensed from *nor* made by Roland.

I apologise if this has caused any confusion, and would be grateful if you would print an erratum at the earliest opportunity.

Mike Partridge
Midiman UK ❑

Crosstalk

freedom of the press to tell it like it is — I just worry when someone tells it like it might be on the Mac, when they are supposed to be telling you how it is on the Atari platform.
Paul Wiffen
Digital Media

I write as an advertiser in *SOS* to question the content of Atari Notes, currently written by Ofir Gal. The words 'turncoat' and 'judas' spring to mind concerning the way he seems to be turning away from the machine which I presume has made him a lot of money...

At this juncture, let me state that my business is mainly involved in *Cubase* and music on the ST, so my comments should be taken in this context...

March's Atari Notes is mostly Falcon-orientated... and April's Atari Notes was full of info of little use to a muso (multitasking and Magic, which no self-respecting user would try to use with *Cubase*...) In May, the article again has nothing of value to the musician...

Finally, to June. *Surely* this Atari Notes was meant for the Mac Notes page. Nothing for the Atari musician — just 'buy a Mac'. Ofir Gal is taking money under false pretences if he thinks this irrelevance is of use to an Atari user...

We can keep the ST running for another 10 years. It does the job, and on value-for-money grounds alone deserves better treatment than given by recent articles. I suggest Ofir re-reads Vic Lennard's last few Atari Notes and continues in that vein, instead of undermining the ST simply to fill column inches...
Barrie Heywood.
Keychange Music Services
Cheshire

Ofir Gal replies: *I must say I'm surprised with the responses I got to my Atari Notes column. In the first letter, Paul disputes the prices I quote. I always quote recommended retail prices, and as any SOS reader knows, you can always get a better price in the shop. Would it be any fairer to compare Mac retail prices with Atari discount prices?*

Paul may also think that musicians are not interested in the Internet or desktop publishing. Well, my band is just about to release an album and we found the Mac very handy. It was used to design the CD cover and booklet as well as taking care of more mundane tasks like sending faxes. The various music and MIDI-related areas on the Internet are
extremely busy, so someone out there must be using it. Most of the specific examples he gives, the ability to burn an audio CD-ROM for example, have been available on the Mac for some time.

Mr. Heywood accuses me of writing about things that no "self-respecting muso" will want to use. Well, if the muso is working, he may well be using his Atari for writing invoices, keeping a database of contacts and even doing his accounts.

What Mr Heywood seems to forget that unlike the Atari market which he is involved in, the rest of the computer industry has moved on. There's no point referring to Vic's old Atari Notes — things were different then, and both Vic and I held a more optimistic view of the Falcon. Vic has since sold his Falcon — I still use my Atari. It is sad, but the ST/Falcon-related press releases and product announcements are not exactly pouring in.

I believe that my piece simply stated facts about the Falcon and computers in general. Indeed, I sum up my article by saying that the Falcon does its job well, and you should only look at the alternatives if you need the extra features they offer. My real intention was to bring the availability of two fine products, namely MagiC Mac and GEMulator, to the attention of the reader. I spend a considerable amount of time each month searching for interesting new Atari-related products. I trust both Paul Wiffen and Barrie Heywood will keep me abreast of new developments, so that I can continue to report Atari news to the readership.

Editor Paul White adds: *While I concede that June's Atari Notes included certain negative*
comments about the Atari platform, I feel that Ofir made a number of valid points — remember that Atari Notes is there to provide information to broaden the knowledge of Atari users, not to try to persuade them to use the platform, or to abandon it for that matter. After all, look at how many Mac magazines ran in-depth articles on Windows 95 when it first came out! Column writers invariably hold personal opinions, and I expect their copy to reflect what they would say if someone asked their advice privately.

I have an Atari ST of my own running C-Lab's Creator software, and it has given me reliable service for almost a decade, but most of my work is now done on a Mac running Emagic's Logic or Logic Audio. The Atari delivers wonderful performance for its price, but after working with a Mac, the Atari feels horrendously clunky. Ofir made a fair point about Atari users being able to upgrade to the Mac without too much pain, because the Atari operating system is, conceptually, very similar. Indeed, that's exactly why I went the Mac route. To use a car analogy, the Atari is like an old VW Beetle — it is reliable, inexpensive to run and goes on forever, but after driving an executive saloon for a few weeks, the Beetle's hard ride, manual-wind windows, noisy engine and non-power steering suddenly look rather crude. Even so, it will still get you from A to B, and will, as Barrie Heywood suggests, probably continue doing so for the next 10 years or more.

In past issues of SOS, you will have noticed a number of anti-Apple digs in Apple Notes, while the frustrations of PC ownership surface in various parts of the mag, not just in PC Notes! No computer ever built is above criticism. Our aim is to present the facts as we find them, and the truth is that all of the major computer platforms have flaws. These are often most serious when you try to indulge in hard disk recording — a significant percentage of the readers' queries I get concern hard disk 'MIDI plus Audio' sequencers that either refuse to work at all or deliver sub-standard (and/or unstable) performance when they do work. Of the calls I receive, those concerning Falcons tend to be rather more numerous than the machine's market share might suggest, whereas almost nobody calls with Atari ST problems.

Of course, where there are problems, there are solutions, so if any of the manufacturers out there would like to let us in on the workarounds for the various problems rather than simply pretending they don't exist, we'd have a lot more positive things to put in SOS's Computer Notes pages!

shape of things to come
by Derek Johnson & Debbie Poyser

The X (Music) Files

Bristol-based music equipment retailer X Music have announced the winner of their 'extremely silly' photo competition. Jason Pegg of Brighton netted himself a Roland MS1 sampler by simply sending in the rather odd photo of himself shown below — well, we assume it's him, anyway... Not known for resting on their laurels, X Music have already outdone the splendid silliness of their photo competition with the premise behind their *new* competition. It's very simple — essentially, the person who is deemed to have sent the most unpleasant, smelliest pair of socks to

X Music (remember, X Music, *NOT* the *SOS* offices — we're very keen to stress that) wins themselves a pair of Spirit by Soundcraft's new Absolute Zero monitors. Phew!

SOS staff are just glad they don't have to judge *that* one... And what happens if you only send in one sock? Do you only get one monitor? We think we should be told...

🅰 **X Music, 20 Cotham Hill, Cotham, Bristol BS6 6LF.**
🆃 **0117 973 4734.**
🅵 **0117 973 4800.**

Mackie mixes with Digidesign

Mixer manufacturers Mackie Designs and digital recording specialists Digidesign have announced that they are to jointly develop a "low-cost" hardware control surface for Pro Tools, as well as other DAE-based products. Scheduled for release later this year, the new product will feature touch-sensitive moving fader technology, transport controls, and basic editing facilities. More details when we get them.

Back in the world of hardware mixers, Mackie's latest design is the SR40•8, a large-format, 'centre master section'-style sound reinforcement console with full mute automation. The new desk claims to offer the features found on a $20,000-$40,000 desk for substantially less — in the region of £8,500 in the UK. Improvements in manufacturing technology have allowed Mackie to achieve significant savings. Yet the desk is still fully featured, and includes a 12 x 4 matrix section, eight aux sends, 4-band EQ (with swept hi- and low-mids), comprehensive talkback, and much more.

🅰 **Key Audio Systems Ltd, Unit D, Chelford Court, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 3AG.**
🆃 **01245 344001.**
🅵 **01245 344002.**

Michael Gerzon (1945-1996)
Renowned Oxford-based mathematician and scientist

It is with great sadness that Waves announces the passing on May 6 of Michael Gerzon, the inventor of many key technologies behind Waves' DSP software. Michael Gerzon was 50 years old and had suffered from severe asthma for many years.

Mr Gerzon graduated from Oxford University in 1967 and did post-graduate research in axiomatic quantum theory there. He undertook extensive research in psychoacoustics and was awarded an AES Fellowship for work on directional psychoacoustics in 1978. He also had extensive practical live recording experience in classical, jazz, improvised and rock music, including several LP and CD issues. He was the co-inventor of the Soundfield microphone and was deeply involved in its development. He was also the main inventor of the Ambisonics technology for surround sound, under the auspices of the British Technology Group.

In 1971 and 1976, he published papers on multi-channel versions of the Schroder-Loagan algorithms for 'unitary' networks. This was the basis for the Waves *TrueVerb* and other future products. Mr Gerzon formulated all mathematical and physical models of Ambisonics, for which he was awarded the AES Award for Excellence in 1992.

Michael Gerzon had endless creativity, ideas and enthusiasm for his work. He did not need much for himself and truly worked out of enjoyment, together with a strong sense of mission.

WRH

FAR out speakers
from Belgium

Stockport's Axis Audio Systems have announced the availability of a range of professional monitor speakers from Fundamental Acoustic Research (FAR) of Belgium. Axis are to undertake exclusive UK distribution of the range. Seven models are available, from the CR10 compact 2-way nearfield monitor, with a 5-inch LF driver and a retail price of £499, through the larger 2-way CR20 and CR40, with 7-inch and 8-inch LF drivers respectively, at £799 and £699 (the more expensive CR20 has a Kevlar HF cone), up to the top of the range DbW200, a 3-way model with dual 12-inch bass drivers, at £4569. In the middle of the range are 3-way models costing £1485, £1995, and £3995. Prices include VAT and are per pair.

All the models above come in soft black or blue finishes, but other custom colours are available at a small extra charge. Contact Axis for more info or a brochure.

A Axis Audio Systems Ltd, 3 Waterloo Road, Stockport, Cheshire SK1 3BD.
T 0161 474 7626.
F 0161 474 7619.

Shelter
stage house night for homeless

It's a little known fact that Bristol has the second highest number of homeless people in Britain outside London. In an attempt to fight the complacency amongst 'young people' when faced with youth homelessness, the volunteers at Shelter's Housing Aid Centre in Bristol are arranging a club night at the New Trinity Community Centre. Trinity is apparently a popular local night club, and Shelter have got the venue for free (apart from security and equipment hire). The club holds 950 people, and DJs already agreeing to appear for free include Andy Weatherall and Justin Robertson. Other national and local DJs are yet to be confirmed — there may well be more famous names to come. The date to put in your diary is October 26; contact Shelter in Bristol for further details. Ticket prices have yet to be set — again, contact Shelter for details.

The group are also looking for a PA for the night, so if anyone in the industry thinks they can help, the team would be more than happy to hear from you.

A Shelter Bristol Housing Aid Centre, 3rd Floor, Sterling House, Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3HX.
T 0117 926 8115.
F 0117 926 8617.

Sounds of summer: Dance-tech '96

Soundivision Ltd, in association with the Mean Fiddler and Universe Organisations, have announced Dance-Tech '96, an exhibition dedicated to DJs, remixers and producers. The event, which is officially sponsored by Roland UK and *DJ* magazine, will offer attendees the opportunity to see, hear and demo the latest dance music-orientated products. Hi-tech manufacturers showing their wares include Roland, Yamaha, Akai, Korg, Emu and Novation; suppliers of DJ products at the event include Technics, Vestax, Pioneer, Denon, and Gemini.

Dance-Tech '96 takes place at the new Complex Club at 1-5 Parkfield Street, Islington, from 1pm to 6pm on July 7. Entry is £3 in advance or £3.50 at the door. All visitors will have the chance to enter a draw for six Complex VIP tickets, a Roland JS30 sampler and six annual subscriptions to *DJ* magazine.

A Soundivision, Adelaide House, 383-385 Liverpool Road, Islington, London N1 1NP.
T 0171 609 6639.
F 0171 609 1310.

L-R: Soundivision's David Graham (MD) and Paul Harris (hi-tech and studio manager) with Universe Organisation's Chris Birch (marketing) and Ian Jenkinson (co-director).

caught in the net

WEB MASTER

UK mixer manufacturers Studiomaster have a new web site featuring a full catalogue of the Studiomaster range. The site will also contain regularly updated news pages with information on forthcoming products and other fun stuff. Surf on down to:
http://www.studiomaster.com

XG FAQ — FAB!

Yamaha have launched an XG home page on the world wide web. The new site offers information about the latest XG instruments, an explanation of the XG format and a comprehensive XG FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section. There's also an XG Library of downloadable MIDI song file data and MIDI clips, which will be regularly updated. Note that the site doesn't offer technical support, but Yamaha say the information available could answer many XG-related questions. You can find the XG home page at:
http://www.yamaha.co.uk/

CYBER SPACE FROM TC ELECTRONIC

TC Electronic's TC CORE (Co-efficient Optimised Room Emulator) Reverb v2.0 for the M5000 Digital Audio Mainframe can now be downloaded by M5000 users, free of charge, from TC's web site. All M5000 users who purchased and registered their M5000 before April 3 of this year will receive the v2.0 software by mail, but future software updates will only be available via the TC web site. The new software features small room and plate reverbs and is the first in a series of CORE reverbs. Head for:
http://www.tcelectronic.com

shape of things to come

Orbital programme the future with Prophecy

While working on their most recent album, *In Sides*, Paul and Phil Hartnoll — better known as Orbital — took delivery of a Korg Prophecy physical modelling synth. The duo have made use of the sonic potential of the Prophecy on the new album.

Still on the Prophecy front, Korg UK have released two new banks of sounds for the synth. Titled 'Analogue and Vintage Sounds' and 'Modern Models', both the new banks make full use of the Prophecy's five different virtual synthesis methods, and are available as either RAM (£89) or ROM (£50) cards.

A Korg UK, 9 Newmarket Road, Kingston, Milton Keynes MK10 0AU.
T 01908 857100.
F 01908 857199.

Crimewatch SOS

Thieves struck at the Barnet branch of Digital Village over the weekend of 25th-26th May. The following new gear was taken:

Two Akai Remix 16 samplers; Akai CD3000i sampler; Akai S3200XL sampler; two Fostex DMT8 digital multitracks; two Fostex D80 digital multitracks; two Roland VS880 digital recorders; Roland DM80 digital recorder; Roland JV1080 synth module; two Roland Dance and two Orchestral synth expansion boards; Roland Vintage and Roland Dance Sound Expansion series sound modules; three Oktava MK219 mics; two Audio Technica ATM series mics; Phonic UM97 mics; one Iomega Jaz drive; three Mackie 1402 mixers and one Mackie 1604 mixer; one pair of Spirit Absolute 2 monitors; Technics WSA1R synth module; four Tascam DA20 DAT recorders; two Emagic *Logic* and two *Logic Audio* sequencer packages; Shure SM57 and SM58 mics; ART Tube MP mic preamp; MIDIMan MacMan MIDI interface; an 80MHz Apple Mac 7100, with 8Mb of RAM, a 500Mb hard disk, and a CD-ROM drive; two Korg 05R/W and two X5DR synth modules; four 270Mb Syquest cartridges; 10 100Mb Zip cartridges; and three 135Mb EZ cartridges.

If you are offered any of the above in suspicious circumstances, or know anything that might help, Ray Edwards of the Digital Village would love to hear from you on 0181 440 3440. Alternatively, give the details to the officer in charge of investigating the break-in, DC Pleece (and yes, that *is* his real name!) at Whetstone police station (0181 733 5206).

During the same incident, reader Alan Broadhent also lost his Roland DM800, which was on the Digital Village premises awaiting repair. There are one or two distinctive points about his unit which might make it easy to identify: firstly, it is equipped with the new v2.01 operating system, which few units have as yet; secondly, it has two internal 500Mb hard drives, one of which is not working; last but not least, it has a serial number of H30558. Please call Alan on 01959 571548 if you know anything that might help.

Uncool

Uncomfortable

Warmish

Cool

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Spirit Absolute 2 shattered the complacent world of nearfield monitoring, rapidly becoming the preferred choice of professional studios around the world. Now you can get the Absolute sound in a smaller 95W per side package.

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Fax: +44 (0)1707 665461.

SPIRIT
By Soundcraft

H A Harman International Company

http://www.spirit-by-soundcraft.co.uk

SO 3

shape of things to come

Akai DD1500:
Major update

Akai have announced a set of major enhancements for the DD1500 Digital Audio Workstation, with the release of software version 2.00. The new version adds five DSP (Digital Signal Processing) functions — Timestretch, Pitch-Shift (both with a range of -50% to +200%), Varispeed, EQ (with six filter types) and Reverse. The DSP functions are 'off-line' (ie. non real-time) and available on complete edit ranges (so you could timestretch a cross-section of all 16 tracks, for example, if required).

Version 2.00 also includes a flexible Autoconform package, which supports most known EDL (Edit Decision List) formats. Video edits can be shown on a spare audio track, and the EDL can be edited graphically before audio is conformed into the DD1500. Audio can be conformed by Track, Cue, Reel number or selected region. The DD1500's backup options are also enhanced by the new software, which supports the newer generation of 4mm and 8mm tape drives. DD1500 prices start at around £12,000 plus VAT for a 16-track system with mix outputs and a 2Gb hard disk.

The BBC obviously find the DD1500 just right for their broadcast production needs: various BBC departments have taken delivery of no less than four DD1500 systems to go with the ones they already have.

A Akai (UK) Ltd, Haslemere Heathrow Estate, The Parkway, Hounslow, Middlesex TW4 6NQ.
T 0181 897 6388.
F 0181 897 1508.

education corner

LOTTERY WIN FOR ESTOVER

Estover Community College in Plymouth has won £720,000 from the National Lottery for a new community music centre in the South West, to be called The Soundhouse. The College will develop the new centre in partnership with the acclaimed Estover Percussion Project, whose bands include pan

ensemble Real Steel, junk-funk outfit Weapons of Sound, and the 50-piece street band Jam Samba.

The Soundhouse, to open in 1998, will be equipped with a digital 24-track studio, plus performance and rehearsal spaces. This will allow the College to develop its portfolio of Music & Technology courses, currently being run in cramped though well-equipped accommodation. Courses currently on offer include the Music & Technology Training course (MATT); Introduction to MIDI; A-level Music Technology; and, from September, GNVQ Performing Arts. Additional units on the MATT course include ABRSM Exams and Trinity Rock School.

T Dave or Alex, 01752 781714.
F 01752 788569.
E 100764.3151@compuserve.com

WEEKEND BREAK WITH SONE AUDIO

Sone Audio Training are offering a range of weekend-long, hands-on training courses designed for those who wish to further their knowledge of recording and music technology. All aspects of the recording chain from mics to mastering will be covered. The course is supported by Soundcraft and uses facilities provided by the London College of Music and Thames Valley University.

A Sone Audio Training, Down To Earth Centre, Broadway, London E15 1NG.
T 0181 534 6605.

YORK UNIVERSITY'S COMMUNITY SERVICE

The University of York is to introduce a new MA course in Community Music — the first to be offered by a British University. It will be a part-time course starting in October, and is based on a series of short modules, some academic and some vocational. The course is designed to meet the needs of students who are developing music skills in a community setting, such as a school, youth club, hospital, day centre, or prison. York Music Department's past work in Community Music has included training BBC orchestras to work in schools, training prison staff to use music in their work with prisoners, and running vocational courses in music technology for the young unemployed. Students will follow both core modules and options, often including practical placements, and will also submit a research project.

A Department of Music, University of York, Heslington, York YO1 5DD.
T Bruce Cole 01904 433957.

LEWISHAM GOES LIVE

From Autumn, Lewisham College will be offering two new BTEC courses: the National Diploma in Film & Television and the National Diploma in Sound Recording and Broadcasting Media. Other courses available this year are one-year Foundation and Access courses and a two-year National Diploma in popular music, and the college also offers City & Guilds and London Open College Federation courses in sound engineering.

Bands composed of 1996 Lewisham students are playing live at the Albany Theatre, Deptford, London, on 25th and 26th June. Styles will range from soul, jazz and rock to reggae and world music. College tutors will also be at the Albany to give information on courses at Lewisham College, so it's an ideal

Heavenly Music UK are pleased to announce the immediate US availability of their range of building block software, via an exclusive distribution deal with Tran Tracks US. Tran Tracks introduced

USA: Heavenly's final frontier

Heavenly's products at the recent NAMM exhibition. Having pioneered the market in the UK and Europe in 1992, Heavenly now see the US as ripe territory for their acclaimed high-quality MIDI file productions.

Back in the UK, Heavenly have a range of new products:
• The new Professional Song File compilations are aimed at the gigging musician. Each compilation contains two 5-song sets with a focus on a particular style — Motown, Beatles, Dance, Rock, and so on. The introductory price per disk is £14.99 including p&p, for a limited period only.

• The Heavenly *SBK AWE32 Sound Fonts* range has been expanded with *Classic Kits* Volumes 1 & 2. Each disk contains four new drum kits for the AWE, suitable for a wide range of styles. Also coming soon is the *Fairlight II SBK* series — virtually the entire sound set of the legendary Fairlight! Classic Kits 1 & 2 cost £14.99 each, including p&p.
• *MIDIRobics* is a set of diagnostic MIDI files aimed at the serious MIDI user — useful in various situations, from setting up a multitimbral sampler to testing a complete MIDI system. Test signals for virtually every currently used controller are included. GM, XG and GS templates are provided to help with sequencing MIDI files, and there are also optimised demo files for each format, plus text files with hints and tips. Again, the price is £14.99.
• Last but not least, Heavenly are offering a collection of the most useful Windows shareware, including MIDI utilities, disk copiers/formatters, databases, calculators, PIMs, art programs, sounds, pictures — almost everything a project studio is likely to want. All applications are supplied as a self-extracting EXE, and the price is a mere £4.99.

Free demo and catalogue packs can be obtained by sending a blank (formatted) floppy disk and an A5 stamped, self-addressed envelope to Heavenly at the address below, or sending a request via email.

A Heavenly Music, PO Box 3175, Essex CO15 2RP.
T 01255 821039.
F 01255 821039.
E heavenly@ortiz.demon.co.uk

Surrey's Wychwood Recording Studio, a 24-track, ADAT-based facility which is gaining popularity with record company A&R departments engaged in artist development, has equipped its control room with a Soundtracs Solitaire 24PB console. Polygram producer Tim Laws is currently working with new artist Otis on a debut album at Wychwood. Pictured are Otis, Tim Laws (middle) and Wychwood's Richard Carson.
T Soundtracs 0181 388 5000.

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opportunity for interested parties to get an idea of what can be achieved. Tickets are available from the Albany box office on 0181 692 4446. For details of courses, contact the address below.
A Information and Admissions Centre, Lewisham College, Lewisham Way, London SE4 1UT.
T 0181 694 3240.
T Freephone 0800 834 5454.

SERVICING ON COURSE FROM GATEWAY
Gateway and Kingston University's new Sound and Music Industry Service Course, due to commence this September, is to be a 2-year modular Diploma featuring modules on analogue and digital electronics; software writing and development; electronic sound processing; acoustics and listening skills; recording systems and practices; music business studies; and marketing. The course has been developed in conjunction with leading recording and music industry players, and places a strong emphasis on technical competence, technological expertise and hands-on audio experience. Gateway founder David Ward commented that: "The industry has been asking for this type of course for several years, and we are all aware of the shortage of trained service personnel... In some sectors, service personnel sit at a bench all day and change circuit boards. In our industry, service has a much higher status and consequently training needs to be at a much higher level. It is also important not to overlook the communication skills that a service engineer needs to have, particularly in recording studios."

The new course will result in a Higher Diploma in Sound and Music Industry Service and is currently going through Kingston University's quality control procedures.
A Gateway, The School of Music, Kingston Hill Centre, Surrey KT2 7LB.
T 0181 549 0014.
F 0181 547 7337.

MUSIC GOES POP IN THE MIDLANDS
Nottingham's Arnold & Carlton College is staging the second annual Music Industry Week in Nottingham this July. The four-day event is organised by tutor Carlos Thales and is aimed at anyone interested in getting into any area of the music business, including musicians, promoters and DJs. You'll be able to meet people from the industry (including representatives from labels EastWest, China, Ten and Creation), get your hands on hi-tech equipment, and take advantage of MIDI, PA and business seminars. Carlsbro Sound and the Confetti School of Recording Technology will also be involved, and this year musicians will be given a chance to perform at some of Nottingham's "leading venues".
A Arnold & Carlton College, 29 Wensley Road, Woodthorpe, Nottingham NG5 4JW.
T 0115 953 1222.
F 0115 953 1185.

MT STUDENTS SYNC OR SWIM ON ALBUM PROJECT
Music technology students at Preston College have spent the last eight months preparing a 15-track compilation CD, as part of the Sound Business Project, the major assignment in the final year of the BTEC course. The tracks, which vary from dance and pop to rock and punk, were all written, engineered and produced solely by second-year students in the college's digital studio. The money for manufacturing the CDs was raised from advance sales, a raffle and a Christmas party. The project was handled as a fully commercial enterprise, to simulate the pressures and problems found within the music industry. The CD, *Sync or Swim*, price £6.99, is available from most record stores in Preston.
A Head of Music, Sound Business Project, The Park School, Preston College, Moor Park Avenue, Preston PR1 6AP.
T 01772 254145.

ENGINEERING AT ESSEX
The University of Essex is offering a nine-month, full-time MSc in Audio Systems Engineering. Core subjects include systems design, analogue systems, digital systems, perception of complex sounds in speech and music, theory of signals and systems, and analogue IC design. A range of specialist one-day seminars will also be provided, including loudspeaker design, surround sound systems, multimedia, valve amp design and much more, and practical work will include a technical article, teamwork, and a hardware-, software- or theoretically-based research project.
A Postgraduate Courses Admissions Secretary, Dept of Electronic Systems Engineering, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester CO4 3SQ.
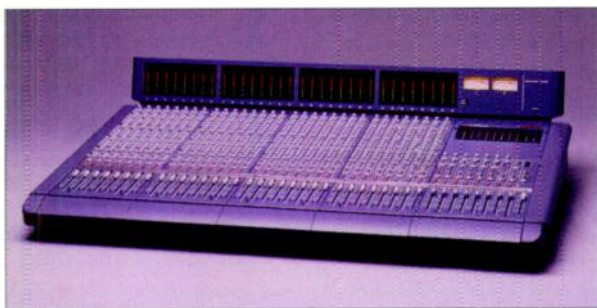**T** 01206 872419.
F 01206 872900.
E esemsc@essex.ac.uk
W http://esewww.essex.ac.uk/pg-courses.html

Tascam:
better, stronger, faster

Two new products from Tascam appear at opposite ends of the recording market, yet both are more in the way of enhanced, relaunched versions of established products than completely new designs. For the serious project studio owner, the M2600 MkII 8-buss desk improves upon the original 2600 (reviewed in *SOS* August 1994) by adding switchable +4dB/-10dB balanced multitrack ins and outs, refined trim control ranges and op-amp designs (for even lower noise performance), new channel inserts, and a choice of three optional meter units with high-intensity bargraphs for faster, more accurate level reading. The M2600 MkII is available in 16-, 24- or 32-input versions, with dual-path design doubling the number of inputs on mixdown. The desk is also equipped with two stereo and four mono aux sends with six stereo returns.

Also more of an updated model than a totally new machine, the 424 MkII Portastudio has been enhanced with the addition of sweep mid-range EQ, balanced XLR mic inputs, and auto punch in/out. Other improvements over the original include a new display, plus improved aux sends, metering and sync capabilities.

> **A** TEAC UK Ltd, 5 Marlin House, The Croxley Centre, Watford, Herts WD1 8YA.
> **T** 01923 819630.
> **F** 01923 236290.

microphone corner

JHS: LOOK PA, NO WIRES
John Hornby Skewes' Scanner wireless mic system set a new affordable price point for wireless technology; now the Scanner II adds true diversity operation (which helps eliminate spurious signals, distortion and instability) to the Scanner specification for a total system price of just £299.

The Scanner II consists of a VHF hi-band, fixed-frequency, dual-diversity receiver with tone-squelch muting circuitry, plus a hand-held mic transmitter with Audio Technica capsule. The original Scanner is still available, providing the same facilities in a non-diversity receiver for the lower price of £199. Both systems are available on the following frequencies: 173.8, 174.1, 174.5, 174.8 and 175MHz. They're DTI-approved, and JHS have also just announced that both systems have been tested to and are compliant with EMC regulations for Radiocommunication Transmission Equipment, as is the Scanner L1 Lavalier non-diversity model (£229).

> **A** John Hornby Skewes & Co Ltd, Salem House, Parkinson Approach, Garforth, Leeds LS25 2HR.
> **T** 0113 286 5381.
> **F** 0113 286 8515.

T-SERIES: SHURE THING
Shure's new series of wireless microphone systems, launched at the Frankfurt music fair, are almost £100 cheaper than their predecessors, making a Shure wireless system more affordable than ever before.

Prices for the T-series start at £305 for single-aerial models and £411 for diversity systems. The range consists of:
- The Vocal Artist, available with either the SM58 or BG 3.0 mic head.
- The Presenter, a belt-back transmitter which comes complete with the Shure WL93 Lavalier mic.
- The Headset belt-pack system, which comes with a Shure WH10 head-worn mic.
- The Guitarist, a belt-pack system with jack lead.

> **A** HW International, 167-171 Willoughby Lane, London N17 0SB.
> **T** 0181 808 2222.
> **F** 0181 808 5599.

You're so square (baby I don't care)

The *Sound Cube* from Best Service of Germany is a 10-CD set of mixed-mode CD-ROMs containing a wide variety of .WAV and AIFF samples aimed at multimedia developers and desktop musicians alike. Available together for £89.95, or singly for £12.95 each, the disks' titles say it all. The list includes: *Dance Instruments, Orchestra and Classic, Voice Spectral, World FX* (three disks), *Crash Boom Zap, Sound Tracks, Ethnic Journey,* and *Rave FX*.

> **A** Time & Space, PO Box 306, Berkhamsted, Herts HP4 3EP.
> **T** 01442 870681.
> **F** 01442 877266.

Paranormal EQ

It's uncanny. The precision and sheer musicality of Ghost's EQ will take your breath away.

Drawing on 22 years of Soundcraft experience, Ghost's new EQ is perfectly in tune with today's music.

Two fully parametric, overlapping mid bands with shelving high and low filters redefine the classic British EQ.

But there's much more. Each channel strip benefits from its own dedicated circuit board and supports both the main input plus a mix B path for tape or other input signals. Ghost's flexibility

and fidelity are staggering. The signal path quiet, true and uncompromised. And the automated mutes, just part of Ghost's comprehensive machine control and MIDI implementation, don't so much cut, as fade very quickly. There are no thumps and no clicks.

You'll hear nothing untoward from ProMic either, Ghost's microphone preamplifier boasts a better

gain to noise performance than you'd expect on consoles costing many times more.

We could go on, but to appreciate fully the ergonomic and audio integrity of Ghost you need to see and hear one in the flesh.

So call +44 (0)1707 665000 to find out more.

Soundcraft

Ghost

shape of things to come

JBL take it on the road

The TR series of sound reinforcement cabinets from JBL have been designed to offer high quality and rugged build with an affordable price tag. JBL's proprietary protection circuitry — SonicGuard — is also new for this entry-level market; this feature limits power to the speaker under severe drive conditions and protects against thermal stress and sharp transients.

The four new cabinets are as follows:

- TR105 (£799 including VAT): a 225W stage monitor with horizontal or pole-mounting options.
- TR125 (£749 including VAT): a 225W loudspeaker.
- TR126 (£859 including VAT): a 225W loudspeaker with a flared cabinet for improved low frequency response.
- TR225 (£1049 including VAT): a 450W loudspeaker

incorporating two LF drivers and improved crossover design.

A Harman Audio, Unit 2, Borehamwood Industrial Park, Rowley Lane, Borehamwood, Herts WD6 5PZ.
T 0181 207 5050.
F 0181 207 4572.

Speedy CD from TEAC

TEAC's new CD58E (£169) is an 8x CD-ROM drive that features 110ms seek time and 1200kB/second data transfer rate. It supports all standard CD-ROM formats, and is fully compatible with the following formats: Video CD, multi-session Kodak Photo CD, CD-ROM Mode 1, Mode 2, XA Ready, CDI and CD Plus. The drive also meets all specifications of the newly-formed MPC Level 3 standard and supports audio CD. The drive will also be available in a SCSI version, as the CD58S.

Also new is the CDR50S (£999 for internal kit, £949 for bare drive). This is a CD-Recordable drive with quad-speed read/write abilities. The drive features an average access time of 220ms, a 1Mb buffer, and high-speed SCSI-2 interface. The 4x performance enables the drive to process 650Mb of data in 15 minutes, and read all CD-ROM formats at quad speed.

A TEAC UK Ltd, Data Storage Division, 5 Marlin House, The Croxley Centre, Watford, Herts WD1 8YA.
T 01923 225235.
F 01923 236290.

musicians wanted!

WIN A RECORD CONTRACT

UK independent dance label Chemical Honey are on the lookout for demos from artists involved in all areas of dance music, including techno, leftfield, jungle, drum & bass/breakbeat and experimental. To add a little more spice to the proceedings, the artist who sends the best demo the company receive will be given the opportunity to professionally master their tracks and sign a recording contract with the label. In case you're wondering what kind of people you might be signing with if you were lucky enough to win, the label philosophy is "to challenge the boundaries of currently accepted forms of music and provide its artists with the security and resources to be freely innovative and forward thinking."

Chemical Honey are currently enjoying success with artists The Mad Dog Reflex and Carbon Unit, and are being very well received by the press and DJs alike. They're waiting for your demos...

A Chemical Honey Records, The Little House, Elsynge Road, London SW1 2HP.

SUS MUSIC SEARCH FOR TALENT

Producer David Yorath's production company SUS Music is also looking for some help in locating new talent. They've launched a search for new artists to form the basis of projects for 1996. Having had success producing artists from overseas, David, who owns the well-known Surrey Sound professional studio, now wants to make a dent in the home market, and is looking for demos from you. He doesn't mention what style, so presumably is open to whatever is out there. What are you waiting for? Tapes or requests for further info, by post only please, should be sent to the address below.

A David Yorath, Surrey Sound Studios, 70 Kingston Road, Leatherhead, Surrey.

shape of things to come

Hard cards and soft synths from Yamaha

And now for something truly summery: the builders of the world's largest snow castle, at Kemi in Finnish Lapland — as recognised by the Guinness Book of Records — used a Spirit Folio Lite to mix the music and announcements within the large ice arena. Over 400 metres of ice walls and 200 ice sculptures surrounded the mixer, which performed "perfectly". The event was a joint project between Kemi and UNICEF, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.
T 01707 665000.

Calum Malcolm, Edinburgh-based producer of The Blue Nile, Runrig and Simple Minds, has recently bought a pair of Tannoy AMS8 active nearfield monitors for use as part of his mobile recording system. Calum notes: "They are small and light, and sound so natural." The mobile setup allows Calum to turn almost any location, from theatres to country houses, into an effective recording environment.
T 01844 261896.

The first release on Tangerine Dream's own TDI record label is a collection of club-friendly dancefloor remixes of classic TD material. The Dream Mixes is "a double CD at a single price", according to UK PR and Marketing company Frontline. Contact Tim on the number below for more details.
T 0181 659 3202.
F 0191 512 1104.

N ew from Yamaha Media Technology is the SW60XG, the first ISA-bus card from Yamaha to feature their acclaimed XG (Extended General MIDI) sound set. The card features no less than 737 instrument samples, plus 21 drum kits, three independent 24-bit effects processors, and an 18-bit output stage. It's GS/GM- and XG-compatible, naturally, and runs well, according to Yamaha, under both Windows 95 and Windows 3.1. Installation takes only a few seconds, as no IRQ or DMA channel is used. The SW60XG package will include an as-yet unnamed but "world leading" sequencer program, and comprehensive editing software. Recommended retail price is £152.

A fascinating product called the *SSGM Soft Synthesizer* is also on the way from Media Technology. This new software-only synthesizer apparently contains the essence of a professional PC soundcard, and is supplied on a disk. According to Yamaha, users will be able to use the synth to play back their favourite songs "with stunning clarity and accuracy"; they see software synthesis as representing the "long-term future of computer desktop sound", and in keeping with this philosophy, updates to the *SSGM* will be available on the Internet for a nominal cost, as well as through local high street stores. There's no retail price announced as yet, and little in the way of product details, but we'll bring you more on this as soon as we have it.

A Yamaha Media Technology,
Yamaha-Kemble Music (UK) Ltd,
Sherbourne Drive, Tilbrook,
Milton Keynes MK7 8BL.
T 01908 366700.
F 01908 368872.

Steinberg

Cubase VST for PowerMac

Integrated sequencing and hard-disk recording has always been a great idea, but until now you've had to buy expensive extra hardware, or use the Mac's built-in audio. This might have given you 8 tracks or more but with only two outputs, there was no possibility of individual EQ and effects treatment.

Now Cubase VST redefines music on the Mac platform, and sets a completely new standard - not only can you record up to 32 tracks (Processor dependant), but it also has built in realtime effects and EQ. Effects include reverb, chorus, delay, echo and many more, with the plug-in architecture leaving room for huge future developments, and the EQ is fully parametric (up to 128 bands!).

What's even more incredible is that the VST technology is included in every version of Cubase from the standard version at only £329, through Score for those with more sophisticated printing requirements, to Audio XT, for use with digidesign hardware. Call us now for your copy or to book a demo. Bundles with Power Macs also available, please enquire.

- **Up to 32 tracks of Hard Disk recording**
- **Up to 128 bands of EQ**
- **Built in realtime reverb, delay & chorus etc.**
- **Pitch shift & time stretch**
- **Industry standard sequencer**
- **Ridiculous price!**

DrumStation — novation

Someone had to build this eventually! Despite being discontinued for at least 10 years, Roland's TR-808 and TR-909 drum machines have remained indispensable popular classics ever since. Now, Novation bring you those classic sounds with the original editing parameters, and in the convenience of a 1U rack, with MIDI, and 8 outputs. Initial supplies will be limited and demand, high. We have been guaranteed a significant quantity of the first stock available. Call for further details.

RRP £449 NEW PRODUCT

DTC790 Dat Machine — SONY

We have exclusively secured a small supply of the Sony DTC790 to bring you the cheapest full size DAT machine on the market, but this is not at the expense of features: SPDIF coaxial input and optical in and out, digital and analog recording at all three sampling rates (32 kHz, 44.1 kHz, 48 kHz), as well as all the usual ID functions and a full function infra red remote control.

These machines are brand new and boxed with a full twelve month warranty. Another DAT exclusive from Turnkey!

TURNKEY EXCLUSIVE £499 INCLUDING REMOTE

CS1x — YAMAHA

Here's another fantastic addition to this year's slew of equipment specifically designed for dance music. Not only does it look great, it sounds great too! As well as 480 XG format voices and 11 different drum kits, the CS1x also has 128 special performance sounds especially designed for dance and techno music. Front panel knobs allow instant access to crucial editing parameters like the filter, and 2 are assignable to anything you like. Round this off with top quality effects and an arpeggiator, and you have what has to be the best value keyboard of the year!

RRP £599 NEW PRODUCT

Orbit The Dance Planet — EMU

Emu have taken their wealth of experience in making modules such as the Proteus, Vintage Keys and Morpheus, combined it with the filters from the incredible Emulator 4, and with their usual inovation, come up with the Orbit - especially built for dance music.

The Orbit is stacked full of classic drum sounds, pulsating basses, ambient pads, as well as a huge variety of hits and effects. The inclusion of the E4's 16 different types of 6 pole filters mean that this module has more powerful filtering than any other synth. Finally the 'BEATS MODE' includes a wide selection of loops and grooves, which can have their pitch changed *without* tempo change and vice-versa, and even their sounds too !

The Orbit is already on demo at Turnkey - audition one today !

NEW PRODUCT £849 INCLUDING FREE CABLES

SyQuest EZ135

Removable External SCSI Drive

Where can you store all those long samples and audio files? PAUL WHITE checks out one possible answer.

With the proliferation of 'MIDI plus audio' sequencers, and also the increased use of samplers with large memory capacities, hard drive storage space has become a major issue. Recently, low-cost removable drives have appeared on the market, such as the Iomega Zip and Jaz drives (see the *SOS* review of the Zip drive in last December's issue), and the SyQuest EZ135 reviewed here. The SyQuest EZ135 is of particular interest, because it is fast enough to use for direct-to-disk audio recording, and it also seems the ideal medium for storing samples. Even if most of your samples come from CD-ROM, there will be occasions on which you want to edit the sounds in some way, and then resave them.

THE EZ LIFE

Unlike the early 44Mb and 88Mb SyQuest drives, the EZ135 is smartly styled, affordable and, most importantly, the 135Mb disks are only just over £17 each. A rear panel switch allows easy selection

of the SCSI ID, and a SCSI terminator and lead are supplied. Power comes from an external adaptor — also bundled with the drive — that automatically adapts to the local mains voltage. The only complaint I have here is that it's too easy to insert the PSU plug incorrectly into the drive! Mine wouldn't work until I unplugged it and plugged it back in the right way around. A better mechanical keying system would solve this.

Bundled with the drive is a floppy disk containing the necessary PC installation

software, while the Mac equivalent comes on the included cartridge. The vital bit for Mac users is *Silver Lining Lite*, which enables your computer to mount the disk; it can also be used for formatting, though new 3.5-inch disk cartridges (which have a mechanical write-protect switch) come ready-formatted and with duplicates of all the original software on them. The software includes a limited copy of *Virtual Disk*, which allows you to keep a catalogue of your removable disk contents on your internal hard drive, plus several games that seem to involve rampaging through blood-splattered corridors.

IN USE

The drive worked just like any other hard drive with my ProTools II system and with Emagic's *Logic Audio*, but best of all, it proved to be really quiet in use; previous SyQuests I've owned have been like sharing the studio with a dishwasher! On shutting down the computer, the disk unmounts and

the eject lever pops out, so if you want to use the disk next session, you have to remember to push the lever back in.

When connected to an Akai S2000 sampler, the disks can be formatted directly from the sampler, and again, no problems were experienced. The drive seems every bit as fast as a typical fixed hard drive — except you don't get fan noise. The disk cartridge packaging is also rather nice; as well as being very protective, there's also a transparent outer sleeve beneath which you can fix your own label.

At the price, the Syquest EZ135 is a bargain that's hard to resist — and incidentally, I didn't! It may not have the capacity for album editing or long multitracking sessions, but when you just want to add the odd guitar solo and vocal line to a MIDI composition, it's just the ticket. What's more, the disks are affordable enough to archive at around twice the price of a DAT tape. SOS

Fatar Studio

MIDI Master Keyboard

This Italian master keyboard may be completely dumb soundwise, but it's pretty clever in other departments. DEREK JOHNSON & DEBBIE POYSER just love being in control.

atar master keyboards have been widely available in the UK for three or four years now, and seem to be doing well with the support of distributors Arbiter. At the top of the current range is the 88-note Studio 2001, with four independent MIDI outputs, eight keyboard zones and six controllers; next in line is the Studio 1100 (see *SOS* review, December 1994), also featuring 88 notes and a slightly curtailed spec. The latest entry in Fatar's Studio series takes the 1100 as its starting point, and places it in a more compact 76-key package — hence the name, Studio 1176.

COVER STORY

The operating surface of the Studio 1176 is clean and uncluttered: the Pitch Bend and Mod wheels are on the left above the keyboard, to save space, and the editing controls and 3-character LED display are in the middle. There are two sliders next to the display: one is an overall volume control, and the other an assignable slider that does duty as a data entry control when editing. Several black keys on the keyboard also double as a numeric keypad, for entering parameter values and Program Change numbers directly. A recessed back panel hides the connections — in addition to the MIDI In and two parallel MIDI Outs, there's a sustain pedal socket, plus an assignable control pedal socket. There's also a mini-jack power socket, since power is supplied by a 9V external supply.

FATAR FACTS

The 1176's keyboard is velocity- and aftertouch-sensitive and can be split into four Zones, which can be layered (up to four sounds playing at the same time) or given separate key ranges (so, for example, you could have a bass patch assigned to the lowest zone, a pad sound to the next, a piano to the next, and so on). Each Zone can have its own MIDI channel, Program Change number including Bank Select (to select a patch on your sound source),

volume setting, and transposition value. The above parameters are set and edited using the four buttons labelled Preset/Function, and the four labelled Zones. It's easy to do: select one of the four Zones with its button, press one of the Function buttons, and you're in edit mode. Now cycle through the three parameters available under each of the Function buttons, using the Control/Data slider to alter values, which are shown in the 3-digit LED display. When you've finished editing, your settings are automatically saved as a so-called Preset. There are 32 of these memory locations,

1176

and when these are full, the memory can be dumped to an external MIDI storage device.

While creating a Preset, you can also define whether each Zone will be able to transmit aftertouch, pitch bend and mod wheel information, and set the keyboard's velocity response in each Zone — so you could have a different keyboard 'feel' for a piano patch than for a string pad, for example. Velocity customisation can also allow you to create a velocity 'crossfade' between two layered Zones. In addition, the Control/Data slider and the Control Pedal input can both be assigned to any MIDI Continuous Controller between 0 and 120 — on a per-Zone basis, naturally.

Usefully, there are one or two things you can do with Zones without even having to go into edit mode. If you no longer want a Zone you've set, you can mute it simply by pressing its Zone button (active Zones are indicated by a yellow LED), and if you want to change the sound

assigned to a Zone, pressing the Zone button and keying in a Program Change number selects a new patch on the attached MIDI sound source.

ACTION, MAN

Fatar keyboards feature some of the best simulations of piano feel around. The company's 'patented hammer action' is once again used on the Studio 1176, and the result is an eminently-playable weighted keyboard. For those reared on plastic synth keyboards, an action such as the Studio 1176's will probably be hard work until you get used to it. For pianists moving in the opposite direction, there should be no such problems.

Other controller keyboards, including

Fatar's own 2001, offer more Zones, more Controllers, more keys, and more independent MIDI outputs — but they also cost more. The Studio 1176 is a straight-ahead, high-quality MIDI master keyboard, with convincing piano action and a sensible level of MIDI control, at a reasonable price. If that's what you're after, your search may be over. [SOS]

£ £749.95 inc VAT.
A Arbiter Group plc, Wilberforce Road, London NW9 6AX.
T 0181 202 1199.
F 0181 202 7076.

Spirit Folio SX

20-Input Mic/Line Mixer

First observed by the SOS team at the bottom of an aquarium at this year's Frankfurt Musik Messe, Spirit by Soundcraft's new Folio SX mixer has now arrived. PAUL WHITE dries it off and removes the goldfish droppings from the insert points...

The no-nonsense Folio SX has an external power supply so you can make it work, there are sockets so you can connect things to it and there are controls — so you can control things [*been watching that Toyota advert again, have you? — Assistant Ed*]. There's no driver's airbag, or air conditioning, but you do get 12 fully-functional Mic/Line channels, two comprehensive stereo channels, and a two further general-purpose stereo inputs with a choice of Main or Sub mix buss routing. Add these 20 inputs to lots of powerful EQ, a generous aux send system, and a convenient carrying handle (which also serves to prop the mixer up at a jaunty angle when in use), and you have a mixer quite obviously designed to muscle in on the Mackie 1402VLZ market (check out the review of the Mackie in last month's *SOS*).

CONTROLS AND FEATURES

Because of its topography, the Folio SX is well suited to simple multitracking, live recording, PA or keyboard use. All the channels are controlled by full-length faders, and there's global phantom power for capacitor mics, plus phono inputs for a 2-track recorder such as a cassette deck or DAT machine. Each mic/line input has a switchable 100Hz, 18dB/octave low-cut filter, a gain Sensitivity control, and a TRS jack insert point. Channels 1 to 8 are fitted with ground-compensated (pseudo-balanced) direct output jacks. Recessed switches next to the fader enable the direct output to be set pre- or post-fader. Post-fader is the default option, but you can switch to pre-fade if you prefer.

There are three aux sends in all; Aux 1 is fixed pre-fade, and Aux 3 is fixed post-fade. Aux 2 may be switched to pre- or post-fade operation via a master switch, and all three sends have master level controls. The 3-band EQ fitted to all 12 mono channels has a sweep mid control providing up to 15dB of cut or boost over the range 240Hz to 6kHz, plus HF and LF shelving controls operating at 12kHz and 60Hz. There's no EQ bypass, but the controls are centre-detented. Routing comprises a conventional Pan control (or Balance on the Stereo channels) and Mix/Sub switching, which sends the channel signal either to the Main stereo buss or to the Sub stereo buss. Separate channel On buttons are provided in a fetching shade of lilac, and ample scribble space is provided below the fader. All input channels have PFL buttons, aside from the phono inputs (channels 13,14 and 17,18).

The aux sends have AFL soloing, and, as usual, the channels input gains can be set up using the PFL buttons and the meters. A master Solo LED indicates when one or more channels are solo'd, and any solo'd sources are heard in isolation over the Monitor output and the headphones. Plugging in headphones disconnects the Monitor output, which I feel is a trifle restrictive. At any time, the tape input can be monitored by selecting the 2Tk button.

The Stereo channels are similar to the mono channels, except that they have no mic inputs, no insert points, and no mid-band EQ. At the very top of the channel strip are Level controls for the final pair of stereo inputs, which are on phonos, and these may be routed to either the Main or Sub mixes. As these have only level controls and no access to EQ or sends, they are probably best used as effects returns, though they can handle any line-level signal.

CONNECTIONS

The XLR mic inputs, TSR jack line inputs, aux sends and main outputs are all electronically balanced, although unbalanced connections can also be used with the right leads. The Direct channel outputs employ a pseudo-balancing system know as ground compensation, whereas the phono connections are obviously unbalanced.
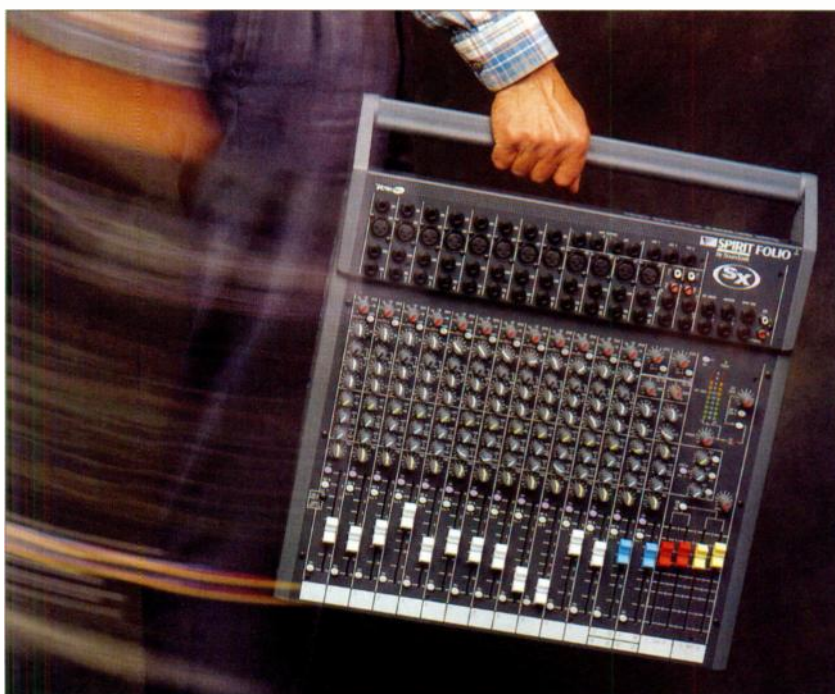
A rather light-duty, moulded non-locking 3-pin socket connects the power supply to the rear panel of the mixer — all other connections, including the Phones output, are at the top of the front panel. The power lead does have a moulded locking lever, but this doesn't seem to work — you can still pull the power cable out quite easily. The headphone output should be used with phones of a 200Ω impedance or greater.

MASTER SECTION

Separate fader pairs are used for the Main Mix and Sub Mix output, while the Monitor output and Phones level are set using the same rotary control. A separate level control is provided for the 2-track return. Metering is via simple 10-section peak-reading LED ladders. A Mix/Sub switch swaps the meters and phones output from monitoring the Main mix to monitoring the Sub mix, and for simple subgrouping, the Sub mix can be fed into the Main mix using the Sub to Mix button. Separate insert points are provided for the Main Mix, and there's also a mono, summed output for mono PA applications, governed by a separate rotary control. With the exception of the inserts, direct outputs and phono inputs, all the signal connections are electronically balanced, with a nominal operating level of +4dBu. Status LEDs are fitted adjacent to the 48V Phantom Power switch and a green LED shows when the mixer is powered up. A further red LED shows that one or more channels are solo'd.

OPINIONS

Interestingly, surface-mount technology has been employed in this model to optimise both size and cost, and the performance of the SX is typical of the rest of Spirit by Soundcraft's Folio range. The signal path is quiet, the EQ is positive (and about as musical as you can get in this price range), and the routing options are adequate to meet a number of different requirements. The dual buss system isn't quite so flexible as true 'something into four into two' routing, but by using both the Sub outs and the Direct channel outputs, multitrack recording is quite possible.

Physically, the console is both compact and light, but it isn't in any way cramped, and the use of full-length faders gives it a very professional feel. The old knob wobble syndrome has clearly been consigned to the past, though some controls are noticeably stiffer than others; perhaps they'll run in with use?

I also like the rather bold colour scheme, which somehow works, unlike some competitors' attempts to be visually distinctive. The manual is worthy of mention too, as it is refreshingly concise yet very informative, with practical examples of wiring systems for PA, recording and so on. There's also a useful section on cable wiring conventions.

As I've said before, I don't know how long mixer manufacturers can go on exploiting what was originally a niche market for small mixers, but as long as there's a demand, Spirit look set to remain somewhere close to the top of the pile. The SX is a neat addition to the Folio range in all senses of the word. **SOS**

BRIEF SPECIFICATION

Mic Input Impedance	1.8kΩ
Line Input	10kΩ
Outputs	75Ω
Headphones	150mW into 200Ω
Frequency Response (any input to any output)	25Hz to 30kHz within 1dB
THD @ 1kHz, (+20dB at all outputs)	0.006%
RMS Noise (16 inputs routed, faders down)	better than 85dBu, 20Hz to 20kHz
Overall dimensions	479 x 511.5 x 80mm

Shure Beta Series

Dynamic & Back-Electret Microphones

Shure have recently updated and augmented their 7-year old Beta microphone range. PAUL WHITE assesses the newcomers alongside the rest of the range.

Just like the manufacturers of Coca-Cola and their world-famous 'brain tonic', mic manufacturer Shure have to be very careful of any changes they make to their classic SM58 dynamic mic — otherwise hordes of purists rush to say that it's no longer as good as the original. The dynamic models in the latest Shure Beta range of mics are based on a Neodymium magnetic system which promises a higher output level and an extended frequency response when compared with other dynamic mics, but other than that, Shure seem to have tried their best to keep the family sound intact.

BETAS NOW EVEN BETTER

The Beta series hypercardioid mics were originally launched in 1989, but Shure have recently updated the range by making minor alterations to the design of the Beta 57 and Beta 58 dynamic mics (resulting in the addition of an 'A' to the model number of these two mics). In addition, there are two completely new mics, the Beta 56 drum mic, and the Beta 52 bass drum mic. We received a complete set of Beta series mics for review, which comprises the four above-mentioned mics plus the odd one out, the Beta 87. This differs from the other, dynamic mics in that it is a back-electret capacitor mic intended for hand-held vocal use or studio recording. Cosmetically, all the mics have a family styling with heavy cast bodies finished in metallic blue/grey paint and matt-chromed mesh grilles sporting a light blue trim. All have balanced XLR outputs, supercardioid response patterns, and none are fitted with on/off switches. Soft carry cases and standmounting clips are provided as standard.

THE BETA 58A &57A

The equivalent Beta to the classic SM58, the Beta 58A, is exactly the same shape as the regular SM58, the main outward difference being the blue trim and the bluish tinge to the body colour. A pneumatic shockmount is used to minimise handling noise, and the frequency response is designed to suit close-miked vocals, though some engineers also like to use 58s on electric guitars and even drums. With a useful frequency range extending from 50Hz to 16kHz, the mic has a falling bass response below 500Hz to compensate for the proximity bass boost that results when the mic is used up close. The top end features a dual peak presence rise at around 4kHz and 10kHz which helps to produce a sound capable of cutting through a loud backing track. Because all these mics have a supercardioid pattern, they are slightly more sensitive to sounds coming directly from the rear than cardioid mics, so stage monitors are best placed between 60 and 30 degrees off axis.

Almost as famous as the SM58 is the SM57, and this too has its equivalent in the Beta 57A. Designed for miking drums (mainly toms), amplifiers and brass/woodwind, the 57A also holds its own as a vocal mic, making it an excellent choice for somebody needing a high quality all-rounder. The frequency response is very similar to that of the Beta 58A, and the mic can be distinguished by its barrel-shaped grille.

The Shure Beta series (l-r): The 58A, 57A, 87 (centre top), 56 (centre bottom) and 52.

THE BETA 56 & 52

The Beta 56 has a slightly less pronounced presence peak than the Beta 57A, but is again a general-purpose model especially suited to drum and instrument amplifier miking. The mic has a very short body and an integral swivel stand adaptor which makes it particularly good at getting into tight spots, such as between drums and cymbal stands. It is well suited to miking snares as well as toms and also works well with brass and woodwind.

Until recently, Shure haven't had a high-profile bass drum mic to compete with the likes of the AKG D112, but the new Beta 52 now seems to fit the bill nicely. Again equipped with an integral swivel stand adaptor, the Beta 52 has a large body, and can accommodate the very high SPLs encountered inside kick drums. The maximum SPL is calculated as being 174dB at 1kHz — evidently Shure couldn't find anything loud enough to actually test it with! The frequency response plot extends from 20Hz to 10kHz and shows this to be anything but an honest mic — it is specifically designed to bring out the deep kick and the high-end impact sound of the kick drum. Used up close, the proximity effect results in a hefty boost in the 30 to 50Hz region, and the top end features an almost violent presence peak at 4kHz which really helps bring out the head impact 'click'. This, coupled with a lower mid-range dip results in a very confident tone, with bags of edge and minimal 'muddying'. No doubt somebody will want to use this as a vocal mic because of its looks, but my guess is that it's best reserved for miking kick drum or bass guitar amplifiers.

THE BETA 87

Finally, there's the back-electret Beta 87, which has a barrel-shaped grille similar to that of the Beta 57. Like the dynamic mics in the range, this model has a robust capsule suspension system and manages a useful frequency range of 50Hz to 18kHz. The presence peak is similar to that of the Beta 58, but because of the extended frequency response, the sound is noticeably more 'open' than you get from a dynamic mic. A phantom power source of between 12 and 52V can be used to power the microphone. The maximum SPL when running into a 150Ω input is 134dB. Surprisingly perhaps, the Beta 87 isn't a great deal more sensitive than the dynamic mics in the range, but as it's designed for close use, perhaps this isn't a bad thing. It does, however, make the mic less suitable than some other capacitor and back-electret models for recording acoustic guitar. On the plus side, this mic has a rich warmth which combines the punch and presence of a dynamic with the top end clarity of a capacitor.

SUMMARY

Overall, this is a well-designed series of microphones which combines quality of sound with seriously heavy-duty construction. The range is obviously designed primarily for live performance, but all the models would be equally at home in the studio. The Beta 87 is a strong vocal performer, while the Beta 57A and 58A deliver the classic sound but with a slightly enhanced edge. The Beta 57A is a fine tom mic, and if I had to choose an all-rounder from the range, it would probably be the 57A. Having said that, I'm glad to see Shure building mics like the Beta 52 and Beta 56 for specific drum applications, especially the Beta 52 kick drum mic.

Finally, if you decide to go for one or more of these mics, be sure to check it out carefully to make sure it's exactly what you want — because knowing Shure's build quality, it'll still be going strong in 20 years' time!

STEEL APPEAL

As Mackie's new 1402VLZ goes a long way to bridging the gap between their original 1202 and 1604, it comes as no surprise that the new 1604VLZ has evolved a whole new range of features. PAUL WHITE checks out the update of this steel-clad classic...

MACKIE CR1604VLZ 16-CHANNEL MIXER

Mackie's original 1604 (reviewed way back in *SOS* December '91) put the company squarely on the map as a serious mixer manufacturer, but since then their range has expanded considerably, with the new 1604VLZ occupying pride of place at the top of the 'small but cute' general-purpose mixer range. The 1604VLZ retains the trademark Mackie sheet steel casing, as well as the original 1604's ability to convert the mixer from table-top to rackmount mode, by adding rack ears and reorientating the rear-panel connector pod, so that the connectors appear on the top panel rather than on the back. This seemingly complex feat takes only a few minutes and requires nothing more than a Philips screwdriver.

ACROSS THE CHANNEL(S)

The 1604VLZ is still very much a general-purpose mixer, with 16 mono mic/line channels and four stereo effects returns, but unlike its VLZ-less forebear, the VLZ version now has true 4-buss routing in addition to L-R routing. Faders are used to control the channel gains, the four buss output levels and the main stereo output. Each channel sports a switchable 75Hz, 18dB/octave, low-cut filter, as well as a TRS jack insert point.

Like a full-size console, each channel kicks off

with a gain Trim control. The Solo system offers both AFL and PFL modes, so you can use the meters in PFL mode to set up the trims properly. The 3-band EQ has a swept mid-range control, but no bypass button. The high control operates at 12kHz, while the low control comes in at 80Hz, and I'm pleased to see that the mid sweep range goes from 8kHz right down to 100Hz, which means you really can use it to get to grips with bass EQ problems. There are four aux sends per channel, and sends 3 and 4 can be switched as a pair to aux busses 5 and 6, which makes this a very flexible mixer for serious music production work. What's more, both Aux 1 and 2 may be switched, as a

BRIEF SPECIFICATION	
Frequency Response (any input to any output):	20Hz to 60kHz +0dB/-1dB. Up to 100kHz at -3dB
THD @ 1kHz, (measured at +14dB)	0.005%
Common Mode Rejection (CMR) mic input to insert send:	better than -80dB
Equivalent Input Noise (150Ω):	-129.5dBu unweighted
Dimensions:	442 x 455 x 140mm
Weight:	9.1kg approx

pair, to pre- or post-fade operation. The second pair of sends are dedicated post-fade effects sends.

Routing is achieved via three buttons: 1-2, 3-4 and L-R, with the Pan control being used to move the signal between odd- and even-numbered busses. Green signal LEDs come on when the channel signals exceed the -20dB level, and red overload LEDs warn of impending clipping. When a Solo button is pressed, the Signal LED stays illuminated, and when a channel is muted, the red Overload LED stays on. When one or more channels are solo'd, they're heard in isolation over the Control Room/Phones output, and their levels are shown on the meters.

MASTER CONTROLS

Considering that this is a compact mixer, it has a very grown-up master section with just about every facility you'd expect on a mixing board, apart from talkback. It even has a BNC socket for a gooseneck lamp. Aux send output level controls are provided for sends 1 and 2 only; the rest go directly to the outside world, so you have to use the input gain on your effects units if you want to boost the signal, though that shouldn't present a problem. All four stereo aux returns have gain controls, and whatever effect signal is coming in on Return 1 can be fed to Aux Send 1, making it possible to add effects to foldback in live or recording applications. Similarly, a second control allows Aux Return 2 to be fed into the Aux 2 send. Note that although the send and return numbers correspond, you wouldn't generally use them that way. When recording or setting up a PA, Aux 1 and 2 would generally be used for foldback, and the effects would be connected to sends 3 to 6.

Aux Return 4 may be routed to the main mix or to either of the Group pairs (which Mackie call Subs), while the fourth return may be routed into the control room/phones feed only if required, which makes it easy to add 'comfort' reverb to the headphone mix if you're recording in the same room as your mixer. A single Solo button allows all the returns to be solo'd together, and sends 1 and 2 also have their own Solo buttons.

Faders are provided for the Main Mix and Group levels. Each Group may be assigned to the stereo buss using separate Left and Right buttons (used in combination for left, right or centre panning) and the headphone output follows the control room output, the level of which is controlled by a knob. The control room feed can be taken from either an external 2-track tape machine, Groups 1-2, Groups 3-4 or the main stereo mix. The tape input has its own level control, and phono connectors are fitted to provide tape in and out connections. A further button routes the tape return into the main mix, which means the tape return can be used as yet another stereo line input, bringing the total of simultaneously mixable sources up to 26.

Two 12-section, LED bargraph meters follow the control room source selection, though if you press any Solo buttons, these signals take priority on the meters. There is sufficient headroom for -10dBV and +4dBu operation, and like the other Mackie VLZ mixers we've looked at, the meter scale is such that 0VU = 0dBu rather than +4dBu (or -10dBV, if

that's the level your mixer works at). Personally, I like this honest approach, because you know what your true output signal levels really are at all times.

The Solo mode may be switched from AFL to PFL, and a separate Solo level control means you can solo a channel without being deafened. A bright green Solo master LED flashes whenever a channel is solo'd. Why this is green when it is red on all the other Mackie mixers I've tried is one of life's little mysteries...

OPINIONS

The more you look at the CR1604VLZ, the more you realise what a super little desk it is. It has more than enough facilities to be used as an 8-track recording console, and the signal path is clean enough to do justice to the modern generation of digital multitrackers. What's more, you could rack up one of these mixers with an Alesis ADAT or Tascam DA88 and have a brilliant, portable live recording setup in one flightcase. Even though there are only four Group outs, you can take direct outputs from the insert points just by plugging in an unbalanced jack lead. See the 'Socket Set' box on connections for more details.

Though some of the controls get pretty close to being cramped (especially the buttons between the faders), there's very little to criticise about this mixer — about the only thing I really miss is not having EQ bypass buttons. However, you do get low-cut filters, and unlike those fitted to some desks, these really work, and seem to come in at exactly the right frequency.

The EQ is extremely positive yet very musical, adding a lovely sizzle at the top end, and a warm punch at the bottom. As you'd expect from a well-designed modern mixer, the noise floor is extremely low, and the '60kHz plus' frequency response helps maintain clarity at high frequencies and on transients. On balance, this is a very worthy successor to the original 1604, and incorporates significant advances. **SOS**

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With years of record label legal wrangles finally behind him, George Michael set about making an album to put him back at the top of the charts and consolidate his status as serious artist/producer. Working the desk on the Older sessions at SARM West was engineer Paul Gomersall, who tells MARK CUNNINGHAM about the making of the album.

welve years ago this summer George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley as Wham! were bouncing around in their white shorts, singing 'Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go' to a worshipful *Top Of The Pops* audience. Back then, there was little to suggest that Michael would make it big, then bigger still as one of Britain's premier pop songwriters and solo performers. The emotional ballad 'Careless Whisper', from that same summer, was the first sign that Michael had ambitions above Wham!'s apparent disposability, and his debut solo album, *Faith*, displayed clear indications of a burgeoning maturity. But it was in 1990, with *Listen Without Prejudice (Volume One)* and quality songs such as 'Praying For Time', 'Soul Free'

and the beautifully-textured 'Cowboys And Angels' that critics began to favourably compare Michael's writing skills with those of Elton John.

Owing to well-publicised legal fisticuffs with his former label, Sony, Michael was unable to release new product for six years, but the public never lost interest, and the response to his recent dance hit, 'FastLove', and its new parent album, *Older*, has been little short of ecstatic.

RENEWAL OF FAITH

The recording of *Older*, largely in SARM West's Studio Two, occasioned a reunion with engineer Paul Gomersall, who assisted producer Chris Porter on several Wham! records, as well as engineering sessions in Denmark's PUK studios for *Faith*, back in 1987. Not only did *Older* herald the launch of Michael's new regime following his split with Sony, which sees the formation with cousin Andros Georgiou of his own North London-based record label, ÆGEAN, it was also notable for the artist's first use of a hard disk recording system, namely the Otari RADAR.

Gomersall saw little of Michael during his withdrawal from the public eye in the early '90s and was pleasantly surprised to receive a call to start work on *Older*. He says: "George likes to keep a regular team together and, having done so much with him over the years, it was great to be back in the frame. When we started on this album, Chris Porter made the decision to move strictly into production with people like Gary Barlow, so he quit the project

Rock of

PAUL GOMERSALL • RECORDING GEORGE MICHAEL'S *OLDER*

Picture courtesy Stirling Audio.

Ages

and it created the space for me to work in.

"Compared with what I experienced on the *Faith* sessions at PUK in Denmark, it was very different this time around, with George a lot more in control, and playing most of the keyboards and bass guitar. We've used a lot more computers and synths on this album than George was previously accustomed to, and now that the technology has improved so much, along with his grasp of it, he's doing a lot more himself, as opposed to bringing in a lot of musicians. On *Faith*, the musicians were around all day, every day — Deon Estus on

bass, Chris Cameron on keyboards and Hugh Burns on guitar. But he has always appreciated that his listening audience wants to hear George Michael, so he now tends to do most of the work himself. So the programmer, Steve McNichol, got the sounds up for him on the keyboards and helped to streamline a creative environment. Chris Cameron was called in occasionally if George got stuck on certain chord progressions and he played a few takes into the computer, so that we could cut, paste or copy the sections George liked best. Steve Sidwell also came in to do some horn tracks but ▶

▶ apart from a few other contributors, the album consists mostly of George's performances."

The sessions for *Older* took almost a year to complete, in fits and starts, and, unlike many artists conscious of the high costs involved in block-booking a studio of SARM's stature, Michael did not demo his songs in advance. Gomersall observes: "He arrived with the songs in his head, and whenever he was ready to lay something down, he would call the guys into the studio and spend a few hours getting a basic backing track on tape, and then they'd leave."

HARD DISK BENEFITS

The recording of Michael's new album began on his own Mitsubishi X850 32-track digital machine which, due to its reliance on regular servicing and tendency to emit strange noises, was beginning to wear the patience of the studio team. It was clearly time for a change and when good reports were received of Chris Porter's purchase of the Otari RADAR hard disk recorder, the team were keen to try out a system.

Gomersall: "Stirling Audio lent us one 24-track RADAR for three weeks and we slaved it to the 32-track machine. We found that there were certain aspects of the system that proved invaluable and, compared to the Mitsubishi's somewhat harsh sound, the RADAR's playback response is very faithful to what is recorded. So when it came to the end of the loan period, I said to George that it would be great if we could have one. He replied that we should have two! So that was when we stopped using the Mitsubishi, and

Two of the main flightcases in George's home studio facility. Top case, from top to bottom: Opcode Studio 4 MIDI interface, Emu Procussion drum module, and Emu Vintage Keys, Emu Ultra Proteus, Yamaha TG500, Roland MVS1, Kurzweil K2000R and Roland JV1080 synth modules. Lower case, from top to bottom: Akai S3200, S3000i (x2), DAC hard drive.

we transferred everything onto the two RADARs."

Michael's favourite room in London, SARM's Studio Two, features an SSL E-Series 48-channel console, and in addition to the Yamaha NS10 and Auratone monitoring, his own Dynaudio monitors were installed for occasional beefier playbacks. Despite the fact that parts of *Older* display some rare, dry-sounding vocals, the production of Michael's voice on torch ballads such as 'Jesus To A Child' has been traditionally notable for the use of long, lush reverbs. Debate over the processing used on that track in particular continues on the pro audio sectors of the Internet, but Gomersall provides the definitive answer. "It used to be the old EMT plate on the Wham! records, but we don't even plug it in any more. It hums too much. So we now put his vocals through a range of Lexicon gear — the 224X, 480 and PCM80. I prefer the 224X to the 480 because it sounds a little warmer, and the PCM80 is from the same family. George's favoured vocal mic is a Neumann U49: we got it from PUK Studios when we did 'One More Try' for *Faith*. He liked the sound of the mic so much that when we left, Chris Porter asked if we could buy it from them. He now takes it to every session."

The sessions also saw Michael engineering his own vocal drop-ins on around half of the tracks. Says Gomersall: "An artist can get terribly frustrated when he is trying to direct someone in the control room about places in a track where he wants to replace a vocal, and when an artist is cooking, he wants to act *now*. Almost from the word go, the desk was in mix mode because George writes his lyrics and melodies as he is recording the song. In the past, he has sung a line and then asked me to drop him in on one of the words in that line that I've only just heard for the first time! So I've often asked 'which line?' But having the RADAR, we were able to set up the remote controller on a speaker stand in the studio just by the microphone and George used it to literally drop himself in and out." ▶

GEORGE MICHAEL'S STUDIO

Within George Michael's newly-acquired and highly attractive London office suite is his new writing studio, which is filled with the best of today's technology and maintained by his assistant and new programmer, Niall Flynn. Gomersall comments: "George realises the benefits of leaving your house every day to go to another place to do your work. So Niall has been getting the studio up and running, and ready for George to start work on his next projects."

Michael's studio includes the following equipment, with much of the same processing hardware used at

SARM West for *Older*. Items marked with a star are in George's home studio, but were not used in the making of *Older*.

RECORDING
- AKG LSM50 cube monitors
- Aphex Expressor compressor
- Denon tape deck *
- Dynaudio Acoustics M1 monitors
- Lexicon PCM80 effects
- Lexicon LXP15 effects
- Mackie 32•8 32:8:2 8-buss console
- Otari RADAR 24-track hard disk recorders (x2)
- Tascam DA20 DAT *
- Yamaha NS10 monitors

SOUNDS
- Akai S3000i samplers (x2)
- Akai S3200 sampler *

- Emu Procussion percussion module
- Emu Vintage Keys Plus module
- Emu Ultra Proteus synth module
- Korg Prophecy keyboard synth
- Korg Trinity Plus keyboard synth
- Kurzweil K2000 sampler/synth
- Roland JV1080 synth module
- Roland Juno 106 analogue keyboard synth
- Roland Vintage Synth MVS1 sound module
- Studio Electronics SE1 synth module *
- Yamaha SY77 keyboard synth
- Yamaha TG500 synth module

MISCELLANEOUS
- DAC hard drive *
- Opcode Studio 4 MIDI interface (x2)
- Powermaster drive *

The two Otari RADAR hard disk recorders used to make Older.

RECORDING GEORGE MICHAEL'S *OLDER*

▶ GOMERSALL GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

It was while attending a music electronics course at the London School of Furniture in Whitechapel that Nottinghamshire lad Gomersall first set eyes on a recording studio — SARM East in nearby Osborn Street — and decided an engineer's life was for him. He recalls: "A group of us from the college went there on a day trip, and I saw all these buttons and knobs, which immediately impressed me. As a kid, I had a Grundig reel-to-reel tape recorder, and I'd always played around with cutting up bits of tape and doing my own version of editing, as well as fiddling with short-wave radio. I knew deep down that this was something I wanted to do, so I applied for a position there. At the first interview, I was faced with Trevor Horn, Jill Sinclair and Gary Langan, sitting in a row in front of me like the hanging committee! Even when I got the job, nobody ever told me what was expected of me, so I literally played it by ear and learned 80% of the job within the first three months just through enthusiasm and asking people things."

Gomersall joined the SARM team in 1984 and was almost immediately posted to a session with Trevor Horn and Yes after accidentally nudging a flight case and crushing the original assistant engineer's foot. "I filled in while he went to hospital! But I must have done something right, because I continued as an assistant, and went on to work with Steve Lipson and Trevor on Frankie Goes To Hollywood." His training was fortified by working alongside Horn and also a fresh-faced, 21-year-old George Michael. The differences between the approaches of the pair were at the time, he says, worlds apart. "I worked with Trevor on 'Two Tribes' for about a month, trying lots of different variations of a song. Even when he was mixing it, he still wondered what it would be like if it was done in a slightly different way. Digital

recording was just coming in, and it allowed him to save a lot of alternate takes and compile them with the computers. Of course, having lots of options means it takes longer to make decisions. Meanwhile, when George did Wham!'s 'Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go', he walked in with everything clearly planned in his head and completed the task within a day and a half. I had assumed through working with Trevor that three months was what it took, so it was quite a shock to discover the vastly different approaches to creating Number One singles. I quickly learned that there are no rules in record production!"

Working for SARM may have been an excellent starting point for Gomersall, but after five months, the long hours became unbearable. "As a young assistant, you are out to prove yourself, and you go out of your way to do whatever is asked, otherwise you feel you are risking your job. But, in the long term, it is a very negative, self-perpetuating situation, and one that I had to get out of. There were a couple of people who had gone freelance as assistant engineers, so I thought I'd break away and try my hand as a freelancer."

Twelve years down the line, Gomersall has engineered for some of the most successful names in the business, including Kate Bush, Phil Collins, Genesis, Blur, and Cast.

"After working alongside a producer and an artist on many occasions, I find it very refreshing to work on a purely one-to-one basis, as I have done with George. The artist is effectively producing and I have a direct line to him. It's always healthy for an artist in George's position to listen and react to a second artistic opinion, and I do offer such words of wisdom, but because he has always known exactly what he wants, especially in terms of vocal and musical phrasing, he generally ignores me! I think most people would agree that his track record more than suggests George is his own best producer." **SOS**

THE PROGRAMMER: STEVE McNICHOL

Having worked as a programmer for the likes of Diana Ross, the Pet Shop Boys, Genesis and Take That, as well as *Confidential*, the new Tina Turner/Pet Shop Boys collaboration, Steve McNichol was able to offer George Michael the ideal balance of experience for the making of *Older*, while also augmenting Michael's equipment with several pieces of his own. He says: "George is a lovely guy to work for. He's very direct about the sounds he wants, and excellent at communicating those thoughts. I left most of my stuff at home because George asked me to recommend a lot of stuff for him to buy, so I drew up a list for him, and he now has a freight load of gear!

"I'm very pleased with the results we got with the strings for the title track, 'Older'. It was a mixture of samples and edited sounds on modules, with tons of controller information. We took a lot of time over volumes and pans to get the strings to sound as wonderful as they do, which is very Burt Bacharach. Chris Cameron contributed the string lines for that track, which has a feel of 'Cowboys And Angels' [from *Listen Without Prejudice*] about it, but that's

probably down to Chris's very stylistic playing.

"We were starting on the last track, 'Free', and it was going to be an overture containing all of the main themes, riffs and hooks from the tracks, worked into a groove. The plan was to take elements from the sequences and import them into a new file. But then it evolved into something quite different when Chris went away with a copy of the album, so that he could form a blended arrangement of these melodies based on this overture idea. So if you listen to that, there are bits of 'The Strangest Thing', one of the lead melodies from 'Older', and all sorts of little segments that won't instantly be recognised."

Gomersall comments: "'Free' was originally twice as long as it appears on the album, and then it was hacked to bits on the RADAR, with chunks taken out and redirected throughout the piece. It was done mostly as an experiment, but it worked so well that the result sounds wholly intentional from the outset." Some work on *Older*, in particular the track 'Doesn't Really Matter', was carried out by Gomersall at his own home. While working on one of Michael's vocal

tracks at SARM, the threshold setting on the compressor was accidentally knocked and although Michael liked its effect on his voice, the distracting saliva noises within the actual singing needed to be removed using Emagic's *Logic Audio* — "a very time-consuming process," says Gomersall.

One of the remixes of 'FastLove' on the CD single features snatches of Wham!'s 'I'm Your Man' and Patrice Rushen's 'Forget-Me-Nots', but the original version of the track was a straightforward, uncomplicated affair in comparison. McNichol says: "George met up with Jon Douglas (producer of Lisa Moorish's version of 'I'm Your Man') one day at SARM, and he liked a lot of Jon's ideas, so he got him to add some extra touches to 'FastLove' in Studio Four. That version was then sent down to us in Studio Two for more input from George before mixing. The guys in Studio Four were using *Cubase*, whereas we had *Logic*, and it was interesting to see how the MIDI data from *Cubase* came back and booted up into *Logic*. You can import a *Cubase* song file or arrangement into *Logic*, and it keeps all the parameters set by *Cubase*, but it doesn't work the other way around, because *Cubase* cannot load *Logic* files."

The Symbiosis Studio (250 ° panorama)

Digital DIY

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND THE MODERN MUSICIAN

Computers helped former BBC engineer CLIVE WILLIAMSON and his band Symbiosis through all the stages of CD production, right through to finished discs and artwork. In the first of a two-part series, he explains how he brought digital technology and traditional musicans together to create atmospheric ambient music.

Digital technology has been at the heart of most home-based and professional recording studios for about 10 years now, but only recently has it become feasible to carry out every stage of making an album with help from computers. In this two-part article, I'll be looking at the way computer technology has helped our group Symbiosis improve the scope of our writing and the sound of our recordings, to master our own CDs, and even to create our sleeve artwork.

The long-term potential of computers in music is enormous. They can offer creative freedom, ways to fine-tune a performance and — eventually — financial savings too! But things don't always work as they should. The falling cost of hi-tech equipment has brought many exciting tools into the price-range of the average musician, but it can be a time-consuming and frustrating business to learn how to use them. Hopefully, our experiences will be helpful to others planning to follow a similar route.

ANALOGUE DAYS

When we began Symbiosis, we needed to record concert flute played by John Hackett; acoustic, electric, and STEPP guitars from Rick Bolton; and my own voice, ethnic flutes, and hand percussion. Much of what we do is 'ambient' music in Eno's sense of the word — so our natural instruments were blended with atmospheric soundscapes and sampled percussion from synths. Our modest studio underwent rapid growth as I learned about MIDI. We moved quickly from a borrowed Tascam Porta 2 4-track cassette to a Fostex M80 8-track linked via a SMPTE timecode stripe and a synchronising unit to an Atari 1040 STFM computer system running C-Lab's *Notator* sequencing software. Pieces were mastered onto ▶

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▶ a Revox A77 via a Seck 18:8:2 desk, and as the synth and digital effects collection grew, we bolted on an Alesis 1622 mixer for extra inputs.

After our first two albums, we moved to digital mastering on a number of portable DAT recorders, before finally settling on a Sony DTC1000ES modified for 44.1kHz operation. This DAT recorder also served to back up early experiments on Digidesign's Sound Tools system on a Mac IIcx.

Live instruments have always been a vital part of our sound, and although the M80 multitrack

Rick Bolton.

recorded acoustic and electric guitars well, and could manage the odd fretless bass, it really struggled with wind instruments like flutes, oboe and cor anglais. The sustained, pure waveforms of these instruments, which contain hardly any harmonics, often triggered an uncomfortable low grinding noise called bias bubble, and this was especially problematic in our gentlest, most ambient work, so I began to look for digital alternatives. As an interim measure, we improvised direct to DAT, editing the recordings in *Sound Designer II* on the Mac, then adding effects at the mixdown stage. But we soon tired of playing solos and duets, and it was then that the Alesis ADAT system came along and saved the day!

THE MOVE TO DIGITAL

ADAT was a major turning point. Here at last were perfect drop-ins, longer recording times, the possibility of making digital clones as backups or for alternative takes, and great sound. ADAT's clean recordings were a real joy, but soon began to highlight weak areas in studio acoustics and monitoring, revealing with perfect fidelity all the hiss, thumps, breathing, rumble and ambient noise that had previously been masked by the relatively high noise floor and distortions of analogue tape. To get around these problems, we had to make do with careful microphone placement, closing the double glazing, disconnecting the phone, and never recording during the rush hour, or when Concorde was due to fly over!

The most immediate effect of introducing the ADAT was to make me much more aware of the sound quality of the other components in the recording chain. Fortunately our mics were well up to the task: an old AKG C414 EB still sounded great on acoustic guitar and voice; and a newer C460 with a hypercardioid capsule was clean and noise-free for recording a full flute sound without too much of the room's acoustics. The Seck and Alesis mixers had minimal EQ, but perfectly acceptable sound quality. The weakest links turned out to be:
• The sound of the recording room.
• Our monitor speakers (an old pair of IMF ALS 40s).
• High-frequency losses in a long loom between the Seck mixer and the ADAT.
My engineering method in the Symbiosis studio has always been to record the instruments as cleanly as possible, and then add reverb later, using units like the Alesis Microverb II and Quadraverb. The ADAT recordings made it clear that there were far too many HF reflections in our 13-foot square room, colouring the sounds of some natural instruments before they even

1 metre Van den Hul cables with silver solder and Neutrix 1/4" jacks.

Alesis Optical Connector

Alesis Q2 Reverb

Alesis ADAT

Seck 18:8:2 Mixer

Figure 1: Symbiosis studio recording setup.

reached the digital effects. I placed an order for some acoustic tiles, and we velcro'd these around all the available wall space to reduce high-frequency ringing and spurious reflections.

Studio monitoring was also improved by the addition of the foam tiles, but I felt we could go further. After many listening tests, we purchased a pair of the Professional Monitor Company's AB1 loudspeakers. Mixes on these speakers seem to sound superb on most other equipment; after the ADAT, they are definitely the best things we've bought for the studio. Room acoustics and speakers dealt with, that just left the loom problems to be sorted out.

MAKING THE RIGHT CONNECTIONS

One of the most exciting developments in music technology in recent months has been the shift towards fully digital mixing desks, led by the Yamaha 02R, but I realised that we couldn't possibly justify buying one, so I started to look for cheaper ways to maintain recording quality. Going digital as early as possible in the recording chain seemed to be the order of the day. The release of the Alesis Q2 reverb provided the perfect answer, and solved our loom

problems at the same time.

Besides offering really clean reverb and effects, Q2 was designed from the start to link in digitally with the ADAT. Our current recording setup (see Figure 1) uses hi-fi cables (kept as short as possible) between the Seck 18:8:2's Track 1 and 2 outputs and the Q2, and a direct optical link from the Q2 to the ADAT. Once the recorder is switched to Digital In, the Q2 in bypass mode (Preset 99) acts as a switching matrix to any two of the eight available tracks, and the analogue signal only has to travel down one metre of high-quality cable!

Recordings made this way sound much sweeter and clearer at the top end, with the bonus that the Q2's settings can be edited to provide instant digital EQ on recordings. Used as a high-pass filter, low-frequency rumble can be rolled off before it gets to the ADAT, and much more precisely than with the low filters built into our AKG mics. The Q2 can also store a range of 'instant EQs' for any instrument regularly used by the group. Major equalisation changes are still left for the final mix, but the results going to tape are much more controlled. It's just a shame that the Q2 doesn't have any compression or peak limiting functions to prevent accidental clipping — but you can't have everything. Results through the mixing desk were further enhanced by throwing out our old 16-way loom altogether, and making up short-run good quality cables to get signals back from the ADAT's outputs to the desk.

ADAT TO ADAT XT?

Another important reason for getting a Q2 reverb was its ability to act as a digital router for track-bouncing on the ADAT without the greater expense of buying a BRC. The unit is relatively easy to use in this way with a single ADAT recorder, needing only a two-way optical link to be established (see Figure 2). The ADAT must act as the clock source for the Q2, which is achieved by the following switching sequence:
• Set Q2 to Preset 99 'Bypass' and make sure the direct signal is ON (Global menu);
• Set ADAT clock source to Internal;

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Figure 2: Track bouncing on the ADAT using a Q2 reverb.

Alesis Optical Connector

Alesis Q2 Reverb

Alesis ADAT

▶ • Set ADAT to Digital In;
• Alter Q2 to Optical Input and optical clock source (Global menu);
• Select incoming and outgoing tracks for ADAT on Q2 (Global Menu);
• Prime 'record ready' on the relevant tracks, and check signal. Once this is done, you can bounce signals from track to track cleanly, one or two at a time. You can also select any Q2 patch to add EQ, effects, or delay during the bounce. It's important to know that the Q2's meters only display anything sourced from channels 1 and 2 when used this way, so it's best to look at the ADAT's input metering to check things are working properly.

Anyone owning the newer ADAT XT won't be so interested in these features, but for the thousands of original ADAT users, the Q2 really is a sensible upgrade, especially as its A/D converters are better than those in the first-

Clive Williamson.

generation ADATs, and match those of the XT, being 18-bit and 128x oversampling.

DIGITAL BUILDING BLOCKS

After ADAT, we added an Alesis AI-1 digital interface and sample rate converter to allow sound to be transferred digitally from any source, or moved between the 8-track and *Sound Designer II* software via an Audiomedia II card on the Mac. This instantly gave us the freedom to improvise onto the ADAT, then edit two adjacent tracks in *Sound Designer*, pass them back digitally and use that as the starting point for new pieces. Used this way, Digidesign's software often reverts to its original function — that of sample editor — giving us the chance to alter pitch, edit, blend and even turn sound round without any quality loss. Interestingly, it has proved possible to use the AI-1's sample rate conversion facility over a very wide range, and signals fed out of the Audiomedia II at a playback rate as low as 1kHz (a drop of over five octaves!) are still converted to 48kHz on the ADAT without any problems.

Audiomedia's co-axial S/PDIF outputs have

Alesis AI-1 Interface

Roland S 760 (Digital Out)

Marantz CD Player

Digital output to Audio Media card in Mac.

DAC

Cambridge Audio DAC Magic 1

Analogue outputs to mixing desk

Figure 3: Using the DAC Magic as a digital router.

The DAC Magic shows sample rate, copy prohibit and emphasis status of the incoming digital signal.

SYMBIOSIS STUDIO TIPS

PERSONALISE YOUR MUSIC

We're all using the same synthesizers, so...

- Don't just use your synthesizer's presets! Collect the largest palette of sounds possible, and create or edit your own voices for your instruments.
- Don't restrict yourself to a five-octave keyboard — get a larger one, transpose, or tie two together through a sequencer.
- Use keyboards and drum pads with a sensitive velocity response, and if necessary use your sequencer to edit the response to suit you!

THE BEST FROM DIGITAL EFFECTS

Acoustics can have a tremendous influence on how we play...

- Make notes of reverb and effects settings for live players, so you can re-create the space they heard whilst recording when you do the final mix, to make full sense of their performance.
- Commit complex sounds to tape, so as not to lose the special quality that you spent hours working on (thanks to Nick Magnus for reminding me of this one!).
- Be aware that digital effects often sound very different in mono, so check their mono/stereo compatibility.
- Remember that most effects units can be controlled by MIDI during mixdown!

THE HUMAN TOUCH

Digitally-generated sound can have a sterility which tires the ear, so...

- Take care when using sampled sounds, especially in loops or as the lead line.
- Remember that many synthesizers have a greater variety of tone and modulation than samplers, and session players — especially percussionists — can add even more 'human touch'.
- Make full use of MIDI controllers — Mod wheels, aftertouch, MIDI volume.
- Use more expressive synths (especially a wind synth with breath control).

DIGITAL TIPS

- Always master at the final sampling rate for the product (eg. 44.1kHz for an Audio CD, 48kHz for a mix to be transferred to ADAT).
- As digital systems become more complex, you need to develop 'Clock Awareness' (ie. know which equipment should generate the master digital clock, and which should slave to it — horrible clicks or the ADAT changing speed are signs that you've got it wrong!).
- Watch for equipment noise build-up when making multitrack mic recordings near a hard disk or computer-based system.
- Check your mixes on headphones if you think equipment noise in the mixing area might be masking low-level problems.
- Always back up your computer work.
- Try creating a MIDI backing mix on two tracks, then record instruments elsewhere, using 'real' acoustics.

Symbiosis flautist John Hackett in an anechoic chamber at the BBC's Research Establishment at Kingswood Warren. The complete lack of reflections from the walls makes it very difficult to play, and shows how useful digital reverbs can be to create a good acoustic environment in the studio.

proved useful for interfacing directly with equipment such as DAT recorders and a Roland S760 sampler with the OP760/1 output board fitted, and also with another handy building block in the Symbiosis digital studio: a Cambridge Audio DAC Magic 1. This is actually a hi-fi component offering a very good quality D/A converter at a reasonable price (under £200 from some outlets) with three switchable co-axial inputs, one co-axial digital output and line outputs from the D/As on both phonos and XLR sockets. We use DAC Magic as a digital signal router and listening point, saving lots of re-plugging, and augmenting by two the existing four separate outputs from the excellent S760. One of the two extra digital outputs from the 760's I/O board is

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► permanently plugged to a DAC Magic input, and the D/A outputs appear on two channels of the mixing desk (as shown in Figure 3).

The final elements in our digital studio are a JL Cooper SyncMaster (for synchronising the Mac to SMPTE timecode), a JL Cooper dataMASTER (which generates SMPTE from the ADAT without wasting a track to record it) and a Sony DTCA8 DAT machine, replacing our DTC1000ES. All our music is now mastered onto the A8 using its Super

Ashley Drees and John Hackett.

Bit Mapping option, which seems to impart a richer, 'firmer' quality to the work, and provides a much better sense of space at low listening levels. As we bought one of the first A8s in the country, even our supplier didn't know that the machine suffered from the dreaded SCMS (Serial Copy Management System), but copies can still be made via the digital inputs of Audiomedia or the AI-1, both of which strip off the copy-protection flag set in S/PDIF signals!

I should also mention that I've also upgraded the Mac IIcx to a PowerPC 8100/80 with a 1Gb AV hard drive to cope with digital image-handling for album cover design, and we have recently obtained OSC's *Deck II* and Emagic's *Logic Audio* in the hope of further integrating MIDI recording with hard disk editing and mixing.

CREATIVITY & THE DIGITAL STUDIO

Recording studios have always been places where things can go horribly wrong, and the more complex we make them — with MIDI and digital connections — the more frustrating the problems can become. We're trying to link pieces of equipment from so many different manufacturers to make them do something new and wonderful with sound, only to discover that often the system doesn't work as it should, and no-one can tell us why! One major snag with today's technology is that it develops so fast that there is barely enough time to assimilate the possibilities offered and techniques required by one bit of gear before we have to move on to the next. The only answer seems to be to alternate technical 'learning and editing' sessions with creative 'writing and recording' ones, so that the frustrations of the former don't taint the exciting potential of the latter. Above all, we need to test equipment well before we buy it, and make sure that we can work easily and intuitively with it.

A word of caution on the subject of the potential offered by today's technology was once offered to me by Bob Moog: "Everybody has certain reservations about how easy it is now to make sounds, and put sounds together into something that appears to be music. But it's just as hard as it always was to make *good* music. One always has to remember where the garbage pail is." **SOS**

Next month, Clive Williamson describes the processes of preparing a CD master, burning recordable CDs, and designing album sleeves for Symbiosis with the help of computers.

IT CAN TAKE WHATEVER THE TOUR CAN THROW AT IT

The new WMS 300 brings breathtaking UHF radio microphone performance to the road at a breakthrough price. With instant flexibility no other radio mic system can touch.

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THE MAIN *Event?*

EVENT 20/20 STUDIO MONITORS

even a quite decent £500, 2-way speaker will incorporate bass drivers costing under £15 each and tweeters that cost maybe £8 each or less. The rest of the money goes on the crossover, the cabinet, assembly, and of course the manufacturer's development costs and profit margin. No wonder, then, that some hi-fi systems contain sadly under-engineered drivers; by the time the pretentious trim and endangered-rainforest veneer on the cabinet has been paid for, there's really very little left to invest in decent woofers and tweeters.

Event would appear to have approached the problem from the other end, and though their drivers must still be built to a price, they're properly designed to do the job asked of them. The custom-built bass driver in this 2-way system is eight inches in diameter, and uses a mineral-loaded polypropylene cone mounted in a pressed steel chassis via a damped rubber surround. Driving the cone is a 1.5-inch, high-temperature voice coil in a magnetic assembly large enough to inspire confidence. A silver diecast aluminum trim ring provides a smooth aerodynamic transition from the driver to the cabinet, while forming a part of the 4-way mounting system.

It is generally accepted that soft-dome tweeters produce the most natural sound at sensible listening levels, and the 20/20s use a 1-inch, silk-domed unit with ferrofluid cooling. A second-order crossover (12dB/octave) operates at 2.2kHz, providing an overall frequency response of 50Hz to 20kHz +/- 2dB. This is quite a low crossover frequency considering the crossover slope is only second order, and it says a lot for the quality of the tweeter that no serious anomalies are audible in the 500Hz to 2kHz part of the spectrum, where the tweeter must still deliver a significant amount of audio energy, albeit at a progressively lower level with falling frequency.

A long, large-diameter port is used instead of a shorter, narrower one and this has a right-angled bend in it to make it fit the cabinet. This angled port design feature was also used on the Alesis Monitor Ones, and is intended to keep the port working properly at high sound pressure levels; ▶

*E*vent may be a new name on the studio equipment map, but the people behind the company are anything but new players: their chief loudspeaker designers (including Frank Kelly, interviewed back in SOS April '95) have a 25-year track record with some of the biggest names in US audio, including JBL, Gauss, UREI, Harman and Alesis.

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

Designing a new loudspeaker can be no easy task, because most of the parameters and potential problems are well-documented, as are most of the solutions. Indeed, some would argue that the only improvements still to be made are very small, and while this is probably true, the Event approach seems not to be to improve on perfection at all costs, but rather to build a cost-effective monitor capable of rivalling the performance of established models costing two or three times the price. This is a most laudable aim, but how is it possible to build a very high-quality studio monitor loudspeaker system for under £400?

If you've ever seen how a hi-fi loudspeaker system is priced, you might be horrified to learn where the money goes. Once you've deducted the dealer and retailer margins, it's quite possible that

Event 20/20 Monitors

▶ smaller ports apparently suffer from turbulence which makes the effective port size, and hence the cabinet tuning, change with level.

So far, the quality of design and choice of components seems fine, so where has the money been saved? The most obvious area of economy is the cabinet. This is fabricated from vinyl-laminated, five-eighths-of-an-inch medium-density fibreboard, and the constructional method seems to be similar to that used for low cost hi-fi systems, so what you get is a functional box with sharp corners and a no-nonsense, wipe-clean finish. Machined rebates accept the drivers, which are mounted without the benefit of gaskets, and are secured using screws rather than bolts. Despite the lack of gaskets, there appears to be no air leakage around the bass driver, and the overall presentation is very smart. The front port vent is plastic, but inside the box the port changes to a cardboard tube — again, perfectly acceptable in engineering terms, and another way to trim the cost without compromising performance. Absorbent lining is placed on the cabinet sides, and the crossover is mounted on a small PCB affixed to the rear panel. Grain-orientated steel laminate rather than air-cored inductors are used, presumably to save cost, and though some purists will argue the merits of air-cored inductors, the only meaningful test is ultimately to listen.

An off-the-peg, rear-panel terminal block accepts unterminated wires, banana plugs, spade terminals or pin connectors, and no provision is made for bi-wiring, doubtless on the very valid basis that few studio users would use it anyway!

LISTENING IN

The Event 20/20s are quite compact, measuring just 14.75 x 10.25 x 11.75 inches, and they're obviously designed to fill the need for a nearfield monitor, though they deliver quite enough bass end to be used as main monitors in a small studio or edit suite. Tonally, the speakers are detailed, but without being overbearingly harsh — a common fault among budget monitors. There are no untoward bass-end hot spots, no nagging peaks in the 3 to 6kHz range, and the general impression is that you're hearing a pretty honest representation of what's being fed in. The adjectives smooth, sweet, confident and effortless spring unbidden to mind, but as I don't have a sentence to put them in at the moment, I'll leave them here for the time being. There's plenty of top-end clarity without any tendency to fatigue, and the stereo imaging is excellent, even when you're well in front of the sweet spot. To maintain a sense of perspective, the sound of the 20/20s stands up well in comparison with the likes of the smaller Genelec and Dynaudio monitors, though every different brand has its own unique character. The 20/20s' sound isn't as tightly controlled as from my little ATC 20s, which are far less efficient and very highly damped, but there's nothing to worry about, especially at the price the 20/20s are going for.

These monitors are rated at 200W peak, 150W programme, and have a nominal 4Ω impedance, though they're efficient enough at 88dB@1 Watt @ 1m that you could monitor quite loudly with an amplifier as low as 50 Watts per channel, or even less. Because loudspeakers often dip below their nominal impedance at certain frequencies, it is essential to use a good-quality amplifier, one that is rated to handle 4Ω loads or lower. I used an AVI 100W per channel integrated amplifier for testing, and had plenty of level in reserve.

SUMMARY

The Event 20/20s turned out to be damn fine monitors, well up to the task of serious mixing, editing or post-pro work; I'm looking at my Pro Tools system at the moment to see if a pair would fit, though a lack of magnetic shielding on this particular model means you can't put them too close to your computer monitor. I understand that a magnetically-shielded version of this monitor is in the planning stage.

The 20/20s' bass end is sufficiently extended to make them useful as the sole pair of monitors in a small studio, yet it isn't so extended as to cause problems in a project or home studio that may not have the benefit of thorough acoustic treatment. Well-recorded music is reproduced with a degree of clarity and detail that you'd normally associate with rather more costly monitors, while flaws in poor recordings are clearly exposed. This is exactly what you need from a monitor system — overall honesty without frills or flattery. After all, when something isn't right, you want to be the first to know about it.

As a first product from a new company, the 20/20s seem to have hit the target price for a project studio monitor without significantly compromising on audio integrity. Corners have been cut, but these are all in exactly the right areas — the cabinets are functional rather than statements of high fashion, both cabinets are identical rather than being built as right- and left-handed versions, and the design has been worked out for efficient assembly. I don't have a problem with any of that, as the drivers are up to the task, and the basic design is sound. If you're in the market for new monitors in this price range, you'd be doing yourself a great disservice by not checking out the Event 20/20s. I'm now very curious to see what they come up with next — who knows what awaits us beyond the Event horizon? **SOS**

THE ACTIVE APPROACH — THE BI-AMPED EVENT 20/20

This active version of the 20/20 (not shown in the picture in this review) includes a pair of amplifiers — 130W driving the LF speaker and 70W feeding the tweeter. These are fed from a 4th-order active crossover operating at 2.6kHz. The input socket can accept either balanced XLRs, balanced jacks or unbalanced jacks. An input level control provides 20dB of gain adjustment, and separate trim controls are fitted, so the low frequency and high frequency levels can be adjusted independently to help compensate for room acoustics and speaker position. An active, subsonic filter attenuates signals below 30Hz (these wouldn't be heard anyway, but they might tax the speakers and amplifiers), and RF filtering is also included to reduce the risk of radio frequency interference. A green power indicator LED is positioned at the bottom of the woofer trim ring to show the speakers are on, which also doubles as a clip indicator. Protection for the speakers and amplifiers is provided by amplifier output current limiting, over-temperature sensing and switch-on muting to guard against power-up transients. There's also a resettable mains circuit breaker.

Though the speakers have the same family sound as the passive versions, the use of a steep active crossover and bi-amping results in a noticeably tighter, better-controlled sound with greater clarity at the bass end in particular. At the top end, the sound seems smoother, yet very detailed. Even at very loud monitoring levels, the sound remains tight and very well controlled. If you haven't already got a suitable power amplifier, I'd strongly recommend you consider the active versions, as they have a very clear sonic advantage over their passive companions.

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the system, but LA Audio clearly thought they could go further. In the 4x4², they've delivered added value with a vengeance.

RETHINK REMODEL

Rather than being an upgrade, this is a complete redesign based on the circuitry used in the LA 4C and 4G dedicated compressor and gate units. The cosmetics are new, the internal design is new, and the features on offer have been extended to include separate filters for the gate and compressor, plus electronically balanced inputs and outputs on XLR connectors. Further jack connections are provided, so that the gate filter can be used as a separate equaliser if required. There gate also offers a Key Input, for external triggering. And for good measure, there's a basic but useful single-ended noise reduction mode thrown in.

The compressor has the benefit of an external side-chain In/Out connector, allowing additional EQ or other processing to be inserted in the compressor side-chain. Taken as individual compressors and gates, these features would be welcome but unremarkable — after all, we've seen most of them before in LA Audio's own 4C and 4G models. It's only when you consider that you get *two* compressors and *two* gates, complete with all the above facilities, in a sensibly-priced 1U package,

Always ready for some off-road action, PAUL WHITE scrambles for his XLR adaptors and test drives LA Audio's latest incarnation of the 4x4.

Four Wheel Drive

LA AUDIO 4x4² 4-CHANNEL DUAL FILTER NOISE GATE COMPRESSOR

With so many compressors and gates on the market, companies need an angle to make their products stand out from the crowd. Some go straight for the jugular and set rock bottom prices, while others go to the other extreme, offering fancy colours, high prices, and the promise of vintage performance.

LA Audio seem to prefer the 'added value' route; their original 4x4 processor comprised two compressors and two gates, plus filters which could be assigned to either the gate (for frequency-conscious gating) or to the compressor (for de-essing/de-popping). I remember being impressed by the sound quality of these compressors, as well as the overall flexibility of

that the 4x4² begins to look rather special.

Both the gate and compressor retain LA Audio's proprietary FET technology, which is designed to emulate the warm overload characteristics of tube designs. The compressor also has a soft-knee characteristic coupled with a ratio control — a combination I've always found to work well.

The gates and compressors may be used independently or in combination with the gate before the compressor in the signal path. Linking is achieved via the Ext/Gate button in the compressor section, and when linked, the gate output and compressor input become unavailable — a good system if you want to leave the unit wired to a patchbay.

GREAT GATE?

Looking at the gate section first, this has almost as many features as you'd find on a stand-alone dual gate, the main difference being that the envelope attack is switchable between Fast and Auto rather than being fully variable. Fast mode has a very fast attack time, suitable for use with percussive sounds, while Auto continuously adapts the gate attack time to the transient characteristics of the input signal. Release, Range and Threshold are all fully variable, with Range setting the amount of attenuation when the gate is closed, and may be varied continually between 0dB to 60dB.

Triggering is switchable from Internal (where the gate triggers from its own input signal) to External, and a green status LED indicates when the gate is open. Bypass switches with red status LEDs are provided separately for the compressors and gates, while a Key Listen switch allows the gate keying signal (post-filtering, where applicable) to be monitored.

Filtering follows the familiar, variable frequency high-pass and low-pass formula originally introduced by Drawmer, but an Int/Ext button enables the 4x4²'s filter to be disengaged from the gate, so that it can be accessed via the rear panel sockets. The filter section comprises two independent, variable-frequency shelving filters, each with a 12dB per octave response. The Lo filter has a high-pass response, while the Hi filter has a low-pass response. Steep shelving filters of this kind can usefully extend the flexibility of more conventional equalisers, as well as being ideally suited to their more usual role of helping reduce false gate triggering. The idea of making them accessible for external use is thus very welcome.

A further filter option is the SNR mode, which uses the filter to implement a simple, single-ended noise reduction process. This works rather differently to most stand-alone SNR units, in that the filters are used to determine how much of the signal will be allowed to pass when the signal falls below the gate threshold setting. For example, you might set the Lo filter to 150Hz and the Hi filter to 3kHz, so that when the signal level falls below the threshold, the audio bandwidth closes down to reduce hum below 150Hz and hiss above 3kHz. Though this arrangement isn't quite as sophisticated as a sliding filter SNR, it is surprisingly effective, and reasonably transparent — provided you're careful with the settings.

EXPRESSIVE COMPRESSION

Like the gate, the 4x4²'s compressor compromises by having a switchable attack time, though this time the choice is between Fast and Slow rather than Fast and Auto. Personally, I feel Auto would have been a better choice, as the Auto setting on my own

Drawmer 441 adapts beautifully to anything you throw at it. The main compressor controls comprise the usual Threshold, Ratio, Release and Gain (output make-up gain) with switching that allows the compressor to be used independently or after the gate. An 8-section LED gain reduction meter monitors how much level is being trimmed off by the compressor at all times, while a Stereo button in the centre of the front panel (accompanied by an amber LED) allows the two channels to operate as a ganged stereo pair.

The 4x4² sees the compressor with its own filter; in this case a switchable high- or low-pass filter continuously variable from 100Hz to 10kHz. This is normally employed in the side-chain, where it can be used to make the compressor react in a selective way to pull down the gain of high frequency sibilant sounds (in high-pass mode), or reduce low frequency artefacts such as popping (in low-pass mode).

Another use for the filter becomes evident when you select Half mode, which configures the compressor as a half-band compressor. This is a very creative mode — it lets you split the frequency spectrum using the filter, then (depending on whether you've selected high- or low-pass filtering), you can compress just the upper or lower end of the spectrum, leaving other frequencies unchanged. The Gain control adjusts the level of the compressed portion of the spectrum against the uncompressed portion, so you can do lots of neat things like compressing the top end, then bringing it up in level to create an enhancer-type effect. Similarly, you can compress just the bass end of a sound — or even a full mix — then crank it up to deliver a very punchy sound, without affecting the brighter elements in the mix. The split point is set by the Frequency control, allowing you to be very precise about where the effect comes into play.

OFF-ROAD ACTION

Checked individually, the 4x4²'s gates and compressors behave very much like those fitted to the 4G and 4C — hardly surprising, given that these are the very circuit designs upon which the new 4x4² is based. The compressor has a deliberately warm character. When you really pile on the compression, the gain pumping becomes clearly audible but in a constructive, 'vintage' sounding manner rather than being unpleasant. Of course, you can provoke the pumping to excess

> "The designers really have gone flat out to provide you with just about every possible combination of options based on gates, compressors and filters..."

▶

LA Audio 4x4²

▶ if you choose a fast compressor attack, a fast release and lots of gain reduction — but used sensibly, the compressor is smooth and flattering.

In split compression mode, I had great fun trying to create very beefy mixes by compressing just the bottom end. At the opposite extreme, you can create a very exciter-like effect simply by compressing everything above 4kHz or so — then bringing up its level while using the Bypass button to check that you haven't overcooked things. Similarly, the filter is useful for gentle de-essing, but lacks the focus of a dedicated de-esser unit. Such devices usually include a band-pass filter option, allowing you to tune into the sibilance more precisely.

The gate works well, and the Auto setting means that you don't miss a separate Attack control — except when you wish to use a gate to impose a deliberately slow attack on a sound. The side-chain filters are suitably sharp, and the overall balance of features is impressive. I also rather like the 'quick and dirty' SNR option, which can really help quieten noisy synths and guitars. It works just like a gate, except when the gate closes: instead of nothing, you're left with a filtered version of the original, and how filtered this is depends entirely on your filter settings.

PERFORMANCE

At almost £465, the LA Audio 4x4² doesn't quite fall into the lower end of the budget equipment category, but when you take into account that you're getting two comprehensive gates and two very flexible compressors for your money, there's no disputing its value. The designers really have gone flat out to provide you with just about every possible combination of options gates, compressors and filters, and for this reason the 4x4² is a very powerful creative tool as well as a useful all-rounder.

Criticisms are few, and perhaps the only shortcoming worthy of mention is the lack of an Auto compressor attack setting. The two switchable options perform well enough for most applications, but Auto would have been even better. My favourite creative mode is the split-band compressor, but it's also good to be able to use the gate filter externally, without having to lose the use of the entire gate. Full marks (almost) for lateral thinking — a well thought-out British design with impeccable styling. **SOS**

ROUND THE BACK

The 4x4²'s main audio connections are supplied on electronically balanced XLRs, and the circuitry is compatible with either -10dBV or +4dBu operating levels. Each channel has separate input and output sockets for the gate and compressor.

The gate is fitted with an external Key Input, as well as a TSR jack which provides access to the filter input and output. The compressor has side-chain access on a stereo jack (wired Ring-Send, Tip-Return). Power is thankfully provided via a standard IEC mains socket — no wall-warts here!

info

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fixing the *mix*

Conventional wisdom states that you can't 'fix it in the mix', but that doesn't mean you can't try! PAUL WHITE discusses a few practical salvage techniques in the first part of this short series.

I n an ideal world, a producer decides what is to be recorded while the engineer is left to set levels, sort out routings, programme effects and so forth. In the typical project studio, however, the same person usually ends up having to do both jobs. If everything has been recorded perfectly, and if the musical arrangement is appropriate to the song, then it should be possible to set up an initial mix fairly quickly, using little or no EQ. But what do you do if the session didn't go so well and some of the recorded sounds are less than ideal? Worse still, you may be called upon to take over work on a poorly recorded job that was started at someone else's studio. That's when your skills at salvage work are really put to the test.

Over the past couple of months I've discussed ways of making good recordings and achieving good-sounding mixes [see 'Match Before You Mix' SOS May/June 1996], hopefully by avoiding most of the problems that I'm going to touch upon during the course of this article. I've also gone on record as saying that there's only a limited amount you can do to fix a bad recording, but provided not everything is disastrously recorded, it's usually possible to make some improvement on any mix. My approach here will be to look at specific problems and then propose possible solutions

PART 1: SALVAGE TECHNIQUES

or partial solutions using both basic studio equipment and, where appropriate, more advanced hardware.

The first option is invariably the most satisfactory, but for whatever reason, musicians often seem very reluctant to take it — if a track sounds wrong, either musically or technically, then simply re-record it. While this option may not be open to professional producers working with busy international artistes, it's usually possible to get Fred from down the road to come back and redo his out-of-tune bass part.

What follows is a catalogue of increasingly desperate strategies that may be applied if re-recording is not feasible. Recording problems break down into many types, some clearly defined, others less so. The most obvious technical problems relate to noise, distortion, EQ and spill, while the more artistic considerations include the wrong choice of sounds, poor timing, out-of-tune notes or just plain incorrect notes. As you might expect, the more serious the problem, the more difficult it is to do address it, but by using samplers and hard disk recorders, even out-of-time and out-of-tune playing can be improved if you have the patience.

GATING & MUTING

Probably the most common technical problem is 'noise', which could include tape hiss, instrument amplifier hiss, amplifier hum, and general digital grot from budget synths and effects units. You can attack noise on several different levels, and if the contamination is serious, you may need to use two or more of the following processes in combination. ▶

Drawmer DS201 Dual Gate.

fixing the *mix*

A *noise gate* is a very effective means of removing unwanted noise during the pauses between sounds, and you'd be surprised how much you can clean up a mix by gating any channels that contain parts that do not play all the way through the mix. For example, if the lead

> ## "I don't know of any technique that is entirely successful for rescuing a distorted lead vocal..."

guitar solo only pops up in the middle of the song, you don't want any background noise on that track contributing to the mix the rest of the time, so bang a gate on it. It's usually worthwhile gating vocals also, because there are always pauses between words or phrases where nothing useful is happening. However, don't feel you have to gate out traces of breath noise, otherwise the vocal track may well end up sounding unnaturally sterile.

With any slowly decaying sounds, make sure you set an appropriately long gate release time. Even if some gated sounds appear to be slightly unnatural, there's a good chance they'll sound fine when you add reverb, especially when the rest of the mix is playing.

Closely related to gating is MIDI *muting*, often found on upmarket mixers. Although it isn't usually practical to use this to clean up tiny pauses between individual words or phrases, it is very useful nonetheless for temporarily shutting down tracks when they're not required in the mix. Obvious uses are to mute the guitar solo track until it's needed and to mute the vocal tracks during instrumental passages.

NOISE REDUCTION

A more subtle alternative to gating and muting is the *single-ended noise reduction* (SNR) unit. Gates and mutes can only remove noise when they are closed, and no signal is allowed to pass — they can't do anything about noise (such as hiss) that's audible over the top of the wanted signal. Single-ended noise reduction units, however, employ variable-frequency low-pass filters that open and close according to the level and frequency content of the music being treated. Though by no means perfect, a decent SNR can significantly reduce audible noise, both during pauses and when material is playing, without inflicting too much damage on the wanted signal.

As with any processor, if you ask too much of it, side-effects will show up. In the case of SNRs, typical side-effects can include audible dulling of the signal (if you try setting the threshold too high) or the over-processing of reverb tails. For this reason, whenever possible it is best to route signals through an SNR prior to adding reverb, and if you have several channels that you think would benefit from the treatment, route them all to a stereo subgroup and patch the SNR unit into the group insert points.

EQUALISATION

An often forgotten ally in the war against noise is the *equaliser*, but the EQ in a typical mixing desk may not be flexible enough to do the job properly. A good graphic equaliser is more versatile, but for the ultimate in control, you need a good parametric EQ.

Changing the EQ of a signal is obviously going to have some effect on the overall sound of that signal, but quite often you'll find your mix includes sounds that occupy only a limited part of the audio spectrum. For example, an overdriven electric guitar contains no really deep bass and the top end rolls off very quickly above 4kHz or so, because of the limited response of a guitar amp's loudspeaker. This being the case, you can apply a sharp top cut above 4kHz and a low cut below 100Hz without changing the guitar sound too significantly. You'll need to experiment to discover the exact frequencies, but you'll find this technique very useful, not only with guitars (and bass guitars) but also with warm synth pads from cheap or vintage instruments. Careful use of EQ may also help to reduce the effect of finger noise on stringed instruments.

If you don't have a parametric equaliser, you ▶

KEEP THE NOISE DOWN

- All noise reduction techniques work better when applied to individual tracks rather than to entire mixes, though digital noise reduction systems and SNR units can be used on complete mixes providing the amount of processing is carefully controlled.
- To clean up a reverb, try putting a gate or SNR on the reverb input. Most allegedly noisy reverb units are actually victims of noise fed from the effects buss. Any attempt to treat the reverb output is likely to result in the reverb decay being modified

in an unnatural manner.
- Even if you think your recording is astoundingly quiet, you will probably still hear an improvement if you gate or otherwise mute mixer channels when the track isn't playing anything.
- Always switch your noise treatment in and out to hear what difference it is making to the wanted part of the sound. Listen in particular for noise 'breathing' (the effect of the noise floor level changing as the noise gate or mute opens). In the case of EQ and SNRs, listen for high frequency timbral changes, especially at the ends of decaying sounds.

fixing the *mix*

▶ can use the side-chain filters in a Drawmer DS201 gate as equalisers, simply by leaving the gate in Key Listen mode This particular gate has very steep shelving filters which can be used to 'bracket' the wanted sound. The Low filter will keep out bass rumble and hum while the High

The Cedar-2 system.

filter will reduce hiss and digital grot (my technical term for non-random noise and/or whining produced by budget digital synths and sound cards!).

It is vitally important to keep in mind that noise is cumulative, and though individual tracks may appear reasonably clean when listened to in isolation, when you bring up all the mixer faders, the overall background noise can still be quite significant, especially if you have 16 or more tracks (including virtual MIDI tracks) on the go. Anything you can do to reduce the noise contribution will greatly improve the clarity of your finished mix.

OFF-LINE DE-NOISING

Some of the more serious hard disk recording systems offer digital de-noising, which tends to provide a far more effective solution than the simple analogue processing discussed so far. Roland build a stand-alone digital SNR unit which is well worth investigating.

De-noising systems such as Digidesign's *DINR* software (or the more upmarket CEDAR and Sonic Solutions' NoNoise packages) may be used to reduce the level of background noise by several dBs without introducing audible side-effects. The simpler systems typically allow you to reduce the level of noise by as much as 5 or 6dB without any side-effects showing, while the more

sophisticated systems can probably double that figure.

Many of these systems work by first splitting the signal into a very large number of frequency bands. A software algorithm is then used to decide how much noise is present in each band and a separate threshold is set for each band (normally an automatic procedure handled by the software) below which any residual signal is assumed to be noise. It's almost like having separate intelligent noise gates working on several hundred very narrow frequency bands. If you push such systems too far, however, whatever noise is remaining may be heard occasionally peeping through the various filters. This produces a sound almost like distant wind chimes. Again, the more sophisticated systems are less likely to suffer from this problem, but if you hear it, at least you'll now know what it is.

These digital solutions can be applied to individual tracks (or sections of tracks), by copying them from tape onto hard disk along with their timecode reference. Using timecode is a good idea, otherwise you may find it difficult to copy the processed audio back onto the multitrack in the right place after you've cleaned it. If you must work without timecode, then deal with short sections and 'fly' each one in by hand as though you were playing back from a sampler. Ideally you should put the processed audio onto a spare tape track, but if you don't have any, you may have to risk recording it back over the original.

NON-RANDOM NOISE

Mains hum or buzz from fluorescent striplights can be a serious problem, because as well as the fundamental frequency of 50Hz (or 60Hz depending on which country you live in), there's often a whole string of related harmonics present that run right across the audio spectrum. High-

> **"You'd be surprised how much you can clean up a mix by gating parts that do not play all the way through the mix."**

pass filtering may well take be used to remove the hum component altogether, but you'll still be left with an irritating buzz.

Roland's single-ended noise reduction devices are particularly good at dealing with this problem, ▶

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fixing the *mix*

▶ because they employ a whole series of digital filters which create narrow notches in the frequency spectrum corresponding to both the odd and even harmonics of the fundamental hum frequency. A similar technique is employed by Digidesign's *DINR* software, when used in hum removal mode, and a clever search algorithm enables the filters to lock onto the hum automatically. However, attempting to attenuate the hum by too much can cause audible side-effects — the notch filters start to work on the wanted audio, creating a slight 'phasey' effect.

A lower tech approach is to use a multi-band parametric equaliser with the lowest band tuned to the fundamental hum frequency (eg. 50Hz) and the following filters tuned to double (100Hz), three times (150Hz), and four times (200Hz) that unwanted frequency. The filters should be set for the highest Q (ie. a very narrow band) and the cut function applied until the hum problem is reduced.

This method will only be partially successful, because the multi-band parametric won't have enough filter bands to tackle all the hum harmonics, but you should still be able to make a noticeable improvement. In most situations, the fundamental plus the first few harmonics will be the loudest elements, with the higher harmonics being much quieter. Each filter will have to be tuned in by ear and it may be useful to bypass all the filters apart from the one you're tuning, so that you can hear exactly what effect each filter is giving you. Once you've optimised the individual filter settings, you can switch all the other filters back on.

As mentioned earlier, the Low filter on a Drawmer DS201 gate can also be useful in removing the low frequency components of hum. What's more, the hum may only be clearly audible during pauses in the signal, so gating could be applied here in the same way as to tackle broad-band hiss.

DISTORTION

Distortion is a particularly difficult problem to deal with and I don't know of any technique that is entirely successful for rescuing a distorted lead vocal or overdriven acoustic instrument sound. In theory, there are elaborate digital processes that could be used to reconstruct distorted waveforms, but in the smaller studio the most useful tool is probably the equaliser.

Before you reach for the equaliser, there may be an even better way out. If the distortion occurs only in one or two places, then my first thought would be to look for identical passages (or even individual notes) elsewhere in the music. If these exist, you can sample them and then drop them in over the top of the original sections. As always, work on a spare track using a copy of the original part if at all possible, because it's very easy to make something worse if the drop-in doesn't go your way. If you have access to a hard disk system, this is where you'll come to appreciate the joys of cut-and-paste editing.

To tackle distortion successfully, you need to understand a little about what it is. Distortion is caused when a circuit is driven into clipping or when an analogue tape is driven into saturation; the usual outcome is that a whole series of harmonics are generated, some of which can sound very unpleasant. Because the harmonics are higher in frequency than the basic pitch of

FILTERING OUT DISTORTION

I've used the High filters of a Drawmer DS201 gate on more than one occasion to try to 'skim off' some of the top end from a distorted signal. Of course any variable-frequency, low-pass shelving filter with a 12dB per octave slope (or greater) will also do the job, it's just that most studios have a DS201 in their rack somewhere.

To create a sharper filter, you can patch the right channel of the DS201 (or other filter) into the second channel and set both Frequency controls to the same value. In theory, this will double the filter roll-off rate (giving 24dB/octave) providing greater attenuation of frequencies immediately above the cutoff point. Any parametric equaliser which includes a shelving low-pass filter will also work nicely.

Tape tracks containing instruments such as electric guitars or bass guitars may also be played back through guitar combos and remiked — the speakers will act as filters while the amp EQ also gives you the chance to polish up the basic tone if need be. The same technique can be used with distorted synth sounds, but please realise that this is a last resort and distorted parts should always be re-recorded if at all possible.

the sound being distorted, it is sometimes possible to reduce their effect by applying high-cut filtering, but in most instances this will also affect the wanted sound. Even so, a slightly dull acoustic guitar might sound better than a distorted one.

Just occasionally, you'll find you can hide undesirable distortion by applying even more distortion to the whole track, but this is more likely to work on an artistic level when applied to guitars and synths than it is to, say, vocals or piano. Having said that, distorted drums and even vocals can be useful in certain styles of dance music, though you're unlikely to get away with it if you're mixing a ballad.

REMEMBER. . .

Whatever you do, try to get away from the old idea that you can hide a serious error by recording something over the top to distract the listener's attention. If it is a drumstick click , you might just be able to overdub a vibraslap or a tambourine, but it has to be artistically appropriate — and even then, it will only work if the sins being masked are very minor. Back in the hippy '70s, we used to joke that if we had a lousy mix, we could always flange the whole song!

Next month, I'll be looking at the evils of vocal popping, out-of-time playing, tuning problems and musically inappropriate sounds. **SOS**

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'm surprised someone hasn't brought one out before; a rack device dedicated to reproducing the two most sought-after drum machines to hit planet Earth in the last million years or so: Roland's TR808 and TR909. Novation have already made lots of friends with their BassStation synth, and have now turned their beady eyes on the drum box market. Using a combination of samples and Analogue Sound Modelling (or ASM if your brain has storage space for the acronym), you can build a kit featuring sounds from both the TR808 and TR909 with all the means of modifying the sounds that has made these drum machines so popular. The one thing lacking is Roland's neat method of programming rhythm patterns, but if you opt for a convenient MIDI rack device instead of the real thing, the chances are you're after the sounds, and

not just the 'pose value' of owning the original. So, how closely does it resemble the real thing sonically? The answer is pretty damn close. I managed to borrow a TR808 to try alongside it, and working on an 'eyes closed' method, found the most obvious difference was the way the TR808 was programmed. With *Cubase*'s drum editor, I could get near to the programming style, but I wouldn't attempt to convince the 'original is best' advocates who hold to their beliefs at all costs — even when faced with machines held together by sellotape and bits of string.

APPEARANCES ARE INFORMATIVE

Housed in a 1U rack module, the DrumStation is decked out in a tasteful combination of pale yellow and grey on a black background, and packed with

ACTION

NOVATION DRUMSTATION DRUM SYNTH MODULE

rotary pots, switches and rubber 'calculator-style' pushbuttons. Although small, these controls are well conceived and accessible. A small red 2-character display conveys the various messages, program numbers and the like to the outside world. The manual, though excellent, was hardly needed at all — if I had to stoop to a cliché at this early stage in a review, it would be that this is an intuitive machine. On the far left is the master volume, which is notable, because it can be overriden by a MIDI control change 7 message at any time. Presumably Novation have a reason for this, but I found it pretty disconcerting. When I turn something down, I like to be sure it will stay down...

Two buttons to the right of the master volume select which drum kit is to be edited. Since some of the features of the TR808 and 909 differ, those

means that you get to stray from the comfortable path of sample reproduction and delve deeper into the heart of the sound. Few details are available on the modelling process, but in many cases the ASM tone is combined with a sample to produce the finished result (see the chart elsewhere in this article for more details). Six of the instruments are totally sample-based (with no ASM): the cowbell, maracas, claves, ride cymbal, rim shot and hand clap. These still work effectively, allowing the real sound generation muscle to be reserved for the more complex voices. The manual explains that ASM sounds, unsurprisingly, require more processing power than sample playback, and consequently polyphony is reduced depending on the number and type of drums sounding. This sounds confusing (and it is) but, in practice, it didn't cause me any problems, since I only have the usual complement

STATION

functions pertaining to the TR808 only are marked in grey text. Perhaps the percussion voices unique to the 808 should have been labelled in grey also? Underneath are the headphone socket and memory write-protect switch.

The DrumStation comes with 25 preset kit memories and a further 15 user memories. This is probably quite sufficient, but if necessary, you can transmit SysEx dumps of single kits or all user kits to an external device. The Select button below the display steps through the various MIDI functions such as transmit and receive channels, utility mode (see separate box for details) and program save or select. Navigation is via the tiny matrix of buttons.

The back panel is generously endowed with stereo outputs and six individual outs. Output routing can be saved as part of a kit, and I found it convenient to think in terms of each output being used for a different effects unit, rather than a different drum (see the Utility mode box for more on this). MIDI In, Thru and Out sockets are of course present, and the DrumStation controls send out all the movements as MIDI controller information, so all tweaks can be recorded into a sequencer, although some parameters (eg. Distortion, Pan and Front Cut) require you to generate the controller information yourself from your sequencer or master keyboard. If you are lucky enough to have a BassStation, Novation thoughtfully provide a conversion table of matched controllers for this purpose. And if that weren't enough, a Roland Sync 24 output (a pre-MIDI communication protocol) allows triggering of old gear such as my battered TR606, providing you route a MIDI Clock to the DrumStation.

DREAM DRUMS? — THE SOUNDS

Sounds may be auditioned via MIDI or the handy auto trigger facility, which repeats a note at a tempo you set — that's the sort of attention to detail that I find most endearing! Many of the drum voices feature ASM — yes, it's that 'M' word again — and this

British company Novation made their name with the BassStation synth, which offered dance music producers instantly tweakable, analogue-style synth sounds in a MIDI-controllable package. The new DrumStation applies the same formula to the de rigueur dance sounds of Roland TR808 and TR909 drum machines. PAUL NAGLE moves from Station to Station...

of hands and feet anyway! I'm told polyphony is "up to 8 notes", not 12 as stated in the manual, and I guess some form of reserve function would have been nice, even as a global setting.

True to the original Roland sounds, the snare drum has four dedicated parameters: Tune, Level, Tone and Snappy — a setting which increases the amount of white noise in the drum body. Using these, you can squeeze plenty of life out of that old 808 snare, even before resorting to external processing. The bass drum has Tune, Level and Decay. For the 909 kit, there is also Attack, and for the 808, there is Tone. The remaining instruments each have Tune and Level knobs, with the toms, hi-hats and cymbals also featuring a Decay setting. Those instruments which share common controls are selected via a small 3-position switch, making it a little more difficult to set the relative tuning of the toms and congas.

It is difficult to single out any individual voice for praise. All are excellent renditions of their TR808 and 909 ancestors. If, by some chance, you have never heard these machines, remember that (with ▶

NOVATION DRUMSTATION

▶ the exception of the 909 cymbal, which was a sample anyway), none of the voices actually sounded realistic. Yes, the toms can sometimes be mistaken for someone hitting a cardboard box with a dead fish, and yes, the famous 808 'snare' does sound rather like a yeti stomping through a pile of cornflakes, but what the hell — these sounds were what gave drum machines such a unique musical identity.

Novation have managed to reproduce a bass drum which has great presence, especially with a little front cut and external EQ. The toms sound superb with a touch of distortion, and the crisp, metallic hi-hats and 'plinky' claves are classics that I will personally never tire of. Both the 808 and 909 snares seem destined to last forever, although thankfully the popularity of the handclap seems to have waned with the passing of disco. Of all the instruments, the only one I could never find a use for was the bloody awful cowbell! If I could vote for an enhancement, it would be to add the sounds of other classic machines such as the Drumulator or TR707 (especially the latter) — but perhaps now that the work has been done to create the modelling technology, it will be possible in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

A drum machine without the rhythm-making section isn't a new idea, but the DrumStation is targetted at a very specific market. So, what's the verdict? Well, anyone with a regular need for these sounds will be more than happy with the DrumStation's version of them. Of course, because

ANALOGUE SOUND MODELLING/SAMPLE CHART

	TR808	TR909	ASM	Sample
Bass Drum	O	O	O	
Snare Drum	O	O	O	
Rim Shot	O	O		O
Hand Clap	O	O		O
Closed Hi-Hat	O	O	O	O
Open Hi-Hat	O	O	O	O
Ride Cymbal		O		O
Crash Cymbal	O	O	O	O
Low Tom	O	O	O	
Mid Tom	O	O	O	
High Tom	O	O	O	
Cowbell	O			O
Low Conga	O		O	
Mid Conga	O		O	
High Conga	O		O	
Maracas	O			O
Claves	O			O

Of these, the TR808 hi-hats and crash cymbals are recreated using ASM, and the 909 versions are samples with ASM envelopes and tones.

many instruments already include some 808 and 909 samples, the average punter might consider the DrumStation an expensive luxury — but I've heard many quality 808 and 909 samples, and none allow such a degree of control over subtle nuances of the sounds. On the other hand, although packing these sounds into a convenient rack is very neat and tidy, you do lose the pattern memories and step-time input that was for some as important as the sounds themselves. At the end of the day, you have to keep in mind that if you wanted both of the original drum machines and a sync/MIDI box for the 808 too, you would probably have to pay twice the asking price of the DrumStation.

I suppose Novation must have felt faintly sick when they heard about the forthcoming Roland MC303, but there are significant differences between the two, not least that Roland's box omits all the dedicated knobs that make the DrumStation such a joy to use. And with advance orders for the DrumStation apparently numbering well into the thousands, it would seem that *plenty* of people are fed up with lining the pockets of those who were cunning (or fortunate) enough to pick up real 808s and 909s for a song when everyone was selling theirs! **SOS**

MIDI UTILITY MODE

Some intriguing features set the DrumStation apart from its analogue predecessors, and allow you to carry out some things previously only achievable with patience and extreme cleverness. In Utility mode, you select the drum you wish to edit via the plus or minus keys. A nice time-saving feature is that a quick turn of any knob causes its drum to become the currently selected one — but I'd have liked to have gone one stage further, and been able to select drums for editing by incoming MIDI note (though this could prove problematic for drums that share the same editing controls, like the toms). As it is, you can be auditioning a tom sound from your master keyboard and end up furiously tweaking the DrumStation's front panel controls, wondering why the sound you're playing isn't affected.

Front Cut, which removes up to 99 milliseconds from the start of the drum sound, results in a more muted or rounded character. This is particularly good for removing the 'head' element of a bass drum, enabling you to catch that 'hit in the chest' thud that is so vital in cardiac emergencies and dance music.

Controller/velocity decides whether a particular parameter responds to velocity or other controller data. You can program different elements of each drum so that, for example, the snare's tone and tuning respond to velocity but the 'snappiness' is controlled via MIDI, allowing a great variety of responses. I found I could get great results when triggered from my little Yamaha DD12 drum pads, combined with a continuous pedal mapped to pitch. The DrumStation can accept or ignore note off

information for each drum. This means you can choose whether drums cut off when hit again before their decay time has ended. If you get problems with polyphony, this might be useful and is set on an individual drum basis, like all the other parameters mentioned here.

General MIDI is, happily, almost entirely absent, but it does rear its bland head in the form of a simple remap facility. If you want to quickly integrate an 808 or 909 kit into a GM song, this is the way. Output Set lets you assign any of the drums to anywhere in the stereo panorama or to any of the six individual outputs. This is a generous number, and is invaluable if you wish to process the sounds of kick and snare separately. A useful feature within the Assign Bank function allows you to map a single drum sound over an octave range on the keyboard, although I didn't find a means of overlapping drums on the same note.

Novation have continued with their high standards as far as MIDI spec goes. Practically every DrumStation parameter has its own associated MIDI controller — 100 in total — with which you can coax out every drop of expression from these simple noises. Purists can ignore this if they wish, but I loved the power to take such basic voices and move them as far as possible from the starting point. Distortion adds 'soft-knee' distortion to the currently selected drum voice, and is particularly good for adding some extra nastiness to snares and kicks. Last amongst the utility functions is a demo which shows off the sonic power of the DrumStation admirably with stereo hi-hat panning, wacky tuning changes and dynamic kick and snare combinations. I freely admit that none of my own efforts matched this.

Apple NOTES

MARTIN RUSS surveys his dying Mac IIsi and ponders the purchase of a new model. Will he go for leading-edge Power or a last-generation bargain?

It's been quite an eventful month here at Apple Notes. There's an annoying (no, alarming!) hardware fault in my once trusty Mac IIsi: my boot drive has developed an alarming tendency to mess about with preference files, I seem to have RAM that isn't, and one of my SCSI plugs keeps popping off its socket. All this makes my Mac rather unstable — prone to suddenly stopping in the middle of everyday operations such as drawing a menu, or closing a dialogue box. It's all been rather distressing.

In fact the situation has become so bad that I'm considering retiring my loyal friend and moving closer to the leading edge of Mac computing. The IIsi is worth surprisingly little these days, and getting it repaired seems like a bit of a waste of money. Times have changed considerably since the IIsi and I first met, and so, following the often-quoted 'change your computer every three years' rule, I've been looking around at the possibilities.

There are two schools of thought: one says that you should go for leading-edge technology because you will need it in three years time (!), and the other says that tried and tested technology is less of a risk, and probably cheaper. Balancing on the advancing wave of technology is OK if you have the money, but not everyone does. With this in mind, the pragmatic solution seems to be to look closely at what has gone before and what is happening now, and work from that.

The most obvious major change over the last few years is the demise of the Macs based on 680n0-based processors. The Mac II series turned into the Quadras, then the Centrises, LCs and Performas — with the range gradually becoming 68040-only when the Quadra 630 came out. More recently, the rise of the Power Macs has seen the gradual demise of NuBus and the adoption of PCI, even by the Power Computing clones. With the third generation of Power Macs now coming on-stream, the Mac

Power Computing's Mac clones (like the P120 pictured here) make worthy alternatives to bona fide Apple Macs — but be sure to check the clones' expansion slots if you're contemplating using your machine with a Digidesign system, as the newer models appear to be swapping from NuBus to PCI slots...

range of computers is now wholly Power Mac, with the exception of some PowerBooks. The increase in computing power has seen a corresponding rise in number of features and complexity of applications, with a resulting increase in their size and the amount of RAM they require. *MIDI Manager* appears to have been declared officially obsolete by Apple, at least according to some reports.

So one approach to upgrading would be to go for a brand-new Power Mac, choosing one with the right mix of features and price, and allowing just a little bit of room to cope with the evolutions of the next three years. On the other hand, the last generation of 68040-based Macs are now very low-cost, and they should have few problems with running those favourite old programs that you've been using for years. The Quadra 650 is a good example of one of the last set of 68040 Macs that has the option of an upgrade to Power Mac in the future by replacing the main board (if you can still find an upgrade when you decide to move on, of course). PowerBooks can be very effective replacements for the Mac Classics, SEs and SE/30s when you need to take a computer on the road. Performance musician Nick Rothwell uses a PowerBook in his live setup (see the 'Music and Movement' feature in the ▶

Apple NOTES

November 1995 issue of *SOS*, and Apple Notes in the December 1995 issue).

So what do I go for? Is it a Power Mac, a 68040 old-timer, or a portable PowerBook? Tune in to this channel, same time next month, to find out...

TIP OF THE MONTH: EMERGENCY RECOVERY

Speaking of hardware faults, what happens if the hard disk that you boot up from suddenly dies? It does happen, and from my conversations with Mac users, many people don't seem prepared for this sort of emergency. What's needed is an emergency disk from which to boot so that remedial action and repairs can be undertaken. If you don't have one already, you need one!

One of the emergency boot disks I use came with the original System 7.1 floppies. The Disk Tools disk has a System Folder containing a very minimalistic set of system files, plus *Disk First Aid* and the *HD Setup* applications. The first port of call for a Mac crash recovery is probably the *Disk First Aid* utility. After that, professional help may be needed if all is not well.

But what about more recent systems? Making your own emergency disk ought to be straightforward, but for some reason it isn't as easy as it could be. If you use the System 7.5 installer program to custom install a minimal system onto a floppy, you may be told that there isn't enough room on the floppy. The solution is to install the minimal system onto a spare hard disk (I use a SyQuest removable) and then prune things by hand. Remove all the beeps and so on from inside the System, then put just the Finder and the System onto a floppy. You may also need empty folders for the Apple Menu Items, Fonts, Control Panels, and so on. I managed to get the system down to 854Kb, and this allows a 294Kb Finder and the 53Kb *Disk First*

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│   ▷   🖳 Control Panels       zero K         │
│   ▷   📁 Extensions           26K           │
│       📄 Finder              294K           │
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My 'F Plan' Emergency disk — about as slim and trim as it gets these days, at 854Kb!

Aid to fit onto one HD floppy. (If you've only got 800K drives, you need to upgrade, because almost everything comes on HD disks these days.)

And let's hope you never need to use the emergency recovery disk! **SOS**

HOW IT WORKS — COMMUNICATIONS

This month I'm taking a closer look at the kind of programs you'll need for electronic communications using your Mac.

• TERMINAL EMULATORS

Just about the simplest way to communicate over a telephone (apart from talking, of course!) is directly from one computer to another. In its basic form, this involves making a connection from your computer to another computer, and then making your computer compatible with the other end — emulating the sort of terminal device the other computer expects. This explains the name 'terminal emulator 'for the application program that accomplishes this task so that your computer can communicate with the remote computer. In most cases, the remote computer sends text to you, and you send text back. A terminal emulator is often included in the set of utility software that comes with modems, and these programs often have catchy names ending in 'Term'.

• BULLETIN BOARDS

One use for this inter-computer communication is to allow people to leave messages on the remote computer, which other people can then look at. Rather like a bulletin board — so that's what it's called. Bulletin board computers live at the other end of telephone lines, and can be used to provide all sorts of messaging and storage functions. Many bulletin boards have become entwined in the Internet.

• EMAIL

Long before the Internet became hugely hype-worthy, people with computers and modems were sending each other messages using electronic mail — email. No stamps, no envelopes, and no need for blotting paper. Instead, all you need is someone to act as a sorting office — which is where bulletin boards come in. Why put messages on a bulletin board and expect people to come to that board when you could move the message to a bulletin board that they already use? From this simple idea, email has evolved to allow the transfer of electronic messages from any computer to almost any other computer. It's a little like the biggest MIDI network you can imagine, only bigger. One of the

most popular Mac email programs is called *Eudora*, for reasons which escape me at this moment.

• FTP

Bulletin boards can be used to store more than just messages. One way of transferring data between computers is called File Transfer Protocol, or FTP for short. This can be used to transfer applications, picture files or MIDI files — the contents of the file don't matter. FTP programs are often called by obvious names like *FTP*, although one of the popular Mac versions is called *Fetch*.

• WWW

The World Wide Web is another name for a set of specialised computers which are spread all over the world, and connected by the Internet network. To communicate with these computers, you need a WWW browser. This allows you to wander around all the WWW computers, which are called servers because they act as intermediaries between your WWW browser and their information. The information on the WWW is in the form of pages, rather like a very large magazine. A recent count estimated that there were over 30 million pages on the WWW.

WRH

Software sequencers are in a state of transition. When audio was introduced to MIDI sequencers, it was seen as a premium addition for top-of-the range packages. Recently, however, audio has started to establish itself as standard even on lower-cost software. Opcode's *Vision*, formerly a MIDI-only sequencer, now features audio, though in a more basic form than the company's own flagship, *Studio Vision Pro*. And with the launch of Steinberg's *VST* (Virtual Studio Technology) for Power Macs, audio now figures even in the standard Power Mac version of *Cubase* and *Cubase Score*, as well as in *Cubase Audio*. Anyone buying *Cubase* for the Power Mac now buys *VST*, an audio *and* MIDI sequencer which exploits this machine's 16-bit audio capabilities, though for those who don't want audio or don't have a Power Mac, there's a non-*VST* disk set too.

So does *VST* simply bring audio recording to the parts of the *Cubase* range which didn't previously have it? As welcome as that would be, given that the price has remained the same, *VST* actually adds more. In short, it takes the sophisticated MIDI sequencing of *Cubase*, plus most of the audio recording and editing facilities of *Cubase Audio XT* (excepting Digidesign TDM support), and adds comprehensive parametric EQ and four virtual effects processors — reverb, chorus, autopanner, and stereo delay. You can now sequence MIDI parts to your heart's content, manipulate them with powerful editing facilities, then add a number of channels of audio material, which can be EQ'd, effected, and mixed — all within your Power Mac, with no need for an audio recording card, or external effects or EQ. The final track is then output from the Mac's stereo output for mastering. The only external gear you'll need

Welcome to Virtua

STEINBERG *CUBASE VST* AUDIO SEQUENCER FOR APPLE POWER MAC

is MIDI instruments, a mixer (more later on this), an amp and speakers, and/or headphones.

Surely there's a catch? Well, Power Macs' audio connections are on stereo mini-jack sockets, not the most robust or high-quality of audio connectors. Its stereo input means that you'll only ever be able to record two audio channels at once, and the stereo output means that your finished work will have to be mixed inside the computer. You also have to rely on the Power Mac AD/DA converters, which won't be audiophile quality. In a pro studio, these would be real limitations, and you'd want to spend the money on additional hardware to ensure the highest audio quality.

However, not all of us have pro studios. Thousands of musicians have modest 'project' setups, where they produce demos and even budget releases. These are the kind of people who'll be interested in Virtual Studio Technology.

lity

HARDWARE & INSTALLATION

The first requirement is a Power Mac, running System 7.5 or higher (but not 7.5.3 at the present time). Steinberg recommend the 90MHz 7200, and the minimum machine they say you should use is the 6100. The speed of your computer is one of the factors that governs how many audio channels you'll be able to play back, and how many simultaneous EQs and effects you can use. Other factors are hard disk speed and installed RAM. The minimum *free* RAM for *VST* to run is 7Mb (it won't even stoop to installing with less than 16Mb total RAM!), but the more RAM, the more audio channels you can have. You need a 256Kb 2nd level cache memory, which should cost around £120-150, and some kind of data backup method will be required.

Installation is easy, using Master Disk Authorisation copy protection, and the next step is deciding how many audio channels to assign to your system. This figure is quite fluid, depending

Audio Performance

CPU ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░░
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The Audio Performance window monitors the load on your CPU and hard disk.

on your hardware and memory, but *Cubase* helps you set a realistic number. Enter a number of channels in the Audio System Setup (pictured above right) dialogue and set an amount of memory per channel from a preset list — the more the better, as far as audio performance is concerned. You also have to set a disk block buffer size, which governs the buffer size used when

reading and writing data from/to the hard disk; the two figures are intimately related. If you set too many channels for the RAM available, *VST* alerts you. Then you have to juggle channels and memory allocations.

According to the manual, a Power Mac 7200/90MHz machine with enough free RAM for

The System Setup dialogue: this helps you set a realistic number of audio channels for your system.

This year's show-stealer at Frankfurt's Musik Messe, Steinberg's **Cubase VST** *isn't just another 'MIDI plus Audio' sequencer — it adds the effects and processing options hitherto only available in expensive TDM systems, for the same price as the previous, non-audio version of* **Cubase.** *Is this the perfect desktop recording environment?* DEREK JOHNSON & DEBBIE POYSER *find out.*

the recommended memory assignment (around 12Mb), working with its internal drive, should be able to handle 16 audio channels and 32 activated EQs. With a 9500/133 and a large, fast hard drive, you might get as many as 32 channels and 64 EQs. On our 75MHz 7200, with 16Mb of RAM, we were able to run six channels of audio with two EQs each and all four effects processors. We didn't even assign the recommended amount of RAM, giving *VST* 10Mb instead of 12Mb.

An 'Audio Performance' window (shown left) with CPU and disk load meters can be left onscreen at all times, and if you're overdoing it for your system, red Over indicators light up. However, by then you may already have heard the distortion which means you need to pull something back — turn off an EQ, for example.

GETTING STARTED

First, plug a sound source into the Mac's input. Many musicians already have a multitrack mixer, and will feed sound sources into the Mac via that — which is advisable, because the Mac's input is set up for mic-level signals and is quite fussy about incoming levels. You'll probably have to make a ▶

Steinberg Cubase VST

The Monitor Mixer for six audio channels. It has all the usual mute, solo and pan facilities, plus EQ and FX buttons for accessing and switching off EQ and effects for each channel. The little pan sliders above the faders can be automatically centred by Command-clicking on them, and faders can be set to 0dB by the same method.

The Master Fader window can be set to monitor the level of incoming signals, by selecting 'Input Meter'.

special lead to connect your mixer to your Mac; we noticed that our Power Mac's socket recesses are slightly too small for the average mini-jack to fit perfectly. The plug appeared to fit, but produced unusual levels of noise because of incomplete electrical contact. We were dismayed at this noise until we diagnosed the problem. You may have to obtain mini-jacks with extra-skinny barrels, or *carefully* shave a little off the ones you have. Even with a correctly-fitting connector, there is some hiss from the Mac output, but at normal volume, it isn't even as bad as the average synth or effects processor.

Recording is initiated from the Arrange window. The Track Class menu allows you to select an Audio track; opening the Track Inspector box then reveals Monitor and Record Enable buttons. Record Enable readies a track for recording, and you then select an audio channel to record with. The Mac assigns signals from the left input to odd-numbered channels and those from the right input to even-numbered channels. Stereo or other two-channel tracks can be recorded: set their channels to 'Any' in the Inspector.

Record Enabling also enables monitoring for the selected channel. *VST* offers three monitoring types: Tape Type and Record Enable use the Mac's hardware for monitoring, but its design creates a buffering delay between the input signal and the same signal being monitored by *VST*'s mixer. If you're recording 'live' audio, like someone singing, this can be enough to throw their timing, and in this case, it would be better to select the 'Global Disable' option. This turns off Mac monitoring and lets you use your own mixer for monitoring instead.

To help you set the correct input level, *VST* has a nice-looking Monitor Mixer (shown above left) with a Master Fader window (shown left)

whose meters can show signal input level. This should not exceed 0dB: avoid going into the red and lighting the clipping LEDs. If levels are too high, your instinctive reaction will be to pull down the on-screen faders. However, this won't help, since you cannot set input levels within *VST*: you have to do it at source.

The Monitor Mixer is also used for final mixdown. It can be automated via a separate 'mix' track, which records all mixer movements, including mutes, solos, and EQ and effects changes. Complicated mixes can be assembled a track at a time, and you can even edit individual mix events using List Edit.

RECORDING AUDIO

When you enable recording for a new Song, *VST* asks where to store the audio Files. You can't create a new folder at this point, so make a habit of creating one for each project before starting to record.

With input level set, recording can commence. A selectable Pre-record parameter starts recording early to catch the attack of sounds starting before a bar-line, and if you fluff part of an otherwise good recording, Punch-in (programmable or manual) is easy to set up and produces flawless results. During recording, *VST* acts very much like tape, and the usual transport controls navigate around an audio track, but it also has some great extra features. Cycle Audio, for example, allows you to set up a loop of part of your song and record multiple consecutive takes of the same part. In the Audio Editor, the takes are ready-stacked, and you can play them back individually to find the best parts of each, for assembling a composite take. This is great when recording vocals or guitar solos. When you've identified the best bits, you can delete the rest, leaving portions of audio scattered across various takes. Selecting 'View by Output' then shows them all together, looking like a single take.

VST lets you record as many audio tracks as you want (disk space permitting), one or two at a time. What you can't do is *play back* as many as you like at the same time. The important restriction is audio *channels*. Tracks are played back by channels, and if you only have eight audio channels in your system, that's all you'll be able to play back at one time. You could play back more, however, by using the channel space cleverly. For example, if one track on channel 2 contains a vocal which occurs during choruses, use the space in between for another track containing a guitar part which occurs during verses. The guitar track would also be set to channel 2, and the result would be two tracks playing back on one channel. If the audio on those tracks overlapped, however, only one track would sound, as they would be fighting for the same channel.

Another way of stretching available channels is Audio Mixdown — like 'bouncing down' with multitrack tape. It re-records the contents of multiple tracks playing on several audio channels onto another track playing on one channel, freeing up the original channels. With *VST*, you don't even have to keep a spare channel to bounce ▶

The Audio Editor, showing three channels of audio (see page 94).

Steinberg Cubase VST

▶ onto, because as soon as the original tracks are muted or deleted, their channels become available for playing back other tracks. Audio Mixdown bounces can even be in stereo, with all level, pan, EQ and effects settings intact.

Audio recordings show up on the Arrange page alongside MIDI tracks. You can use many of the same tools you'd use on MIDI data to move, copy, split and paste the audio, but for more detailed editing, you'll probably use the Audio Editor.

THE AUDIO EDITOR

This is the best place for audio track trimming and assembly — cutting a long recording into smaller Segments, masking parts of the audio with 'Inset Handles', editing volume and pan curves, and working with 'Q' (Quantise) and 'M' (Match) points.

Cubase has powerful features for quantising audio events in a similar way to MIDI events. However, since audio, unlike MIDI data, doesn't automatically contain reference points, the audio quantising procedure is inevitably more complex than MIDI quantising, since reference points have to be created. *Cubase* inserts 'Q-points' at sensible locations when you record, and when you perform operations such as splitting audio into smaller parts and manually punching in. There is only one Q-point per audio event, and they are used by the program to snap events to musical positions when you move audio, and also for quantising. Though *Cubase* inserts them, you can edit them. Match points are markers *inside* an audio event, which you or *Cubase* can generate. There can be many of these for one event; they should correspond to significant points, like beats in a drum part, and are used for creating audio groove templates, and Match quantising of audio to tempo, audio parts to MIDI parts, or even audio parts to other audio parts. These audio quantising features would be invaluable in certain situations, and it's nice to know they're there, but they are complex to use.

One operation you're likely to perform is deleting

silence from an audio part, to save disk space. There is a special function for this, called Banish Silence, which is not very well explained in the manual. The waveform appears in a dialogue box with a pair of horizontal and a pair of vertical lines superimposed on it. You can move these lines so that they set a time and level threshold, selecting a 'slice' of the waveform that you consider corresponds to silence. *Cubase* then finds sections of waveform fitting the description and nukes 'em. However, the waveform display in the dialogue is small and a bit fiddly to use. We thought it more fun to simply blow the waveform up in the Audio Editor, go through it finding silent bits, which are quite obvious, and then deleting them. This doesn't take long for an average track. Deleting is done using the Backspace/Delete key, which removes the selected area of waveform from the display, or doing the same while holding down Command, which deletes it from disk too. Audition the waveform here by clicking on it with the magnifying glass, and scrub audio by dragging the mouse over the waveform in either direction. Auditioning is great, but scrubbing sounds like Pinky and Perky on speed! To edit several audio parts at the same time, selecting them in the Arrange page and then double-clicking on one of them displays all their waveforms in 'lanes' in the Audio Editor.

THE WAVE EDITOR

Audio Editor operations are non-destructive of Files on disk but Wave Editor operations work directly on the audio File. You can Undo your last operation, but going further than that will change the audio File permanently. So if you want to experiment in the Wave Editor, duplicate the File first and work with the duplicate. Once in the ▶

The Time Stretch window. You can set stretch amount in tempo, samples, or absolute time.

Steinberg Cubase VST

▶ Wave Editor, you can zoom to single sample level, for detailed editing, and apply DSP functions: these include Fade-in and Fade-out of events; creating Crossfades between events; Inverting Phase; Normalising (to boost a quiet recording's level); Quietening (to reduce the level of a recording); Reversing; and Silencing (replaces a portion of audio with silence).

Rather more fun Wave Editor features are Pitch Shift and Time Stretch (see screen window on page 94). Briefly, Pitch Shift changes the pitch of an audio File without altering its length, and Time Stretch alters length without affecting pitch. Pitch Shift can change the key of a whole vocal, say, or just fix wrong notes, and it produces surprisingly good results as long as you make small changes. A shift of one semitone up sounds natural, and two semitones would probably be OK on a backing vocal in a mix. A downwards shift of two semitones is quite usable. Using Time Stretch for moderate tempo changes is effective too, but note that neither of these processes works terribly well on long stretches of complex audio.

More sophisticated pitch-shifting and timestretching is available from Steinberg's *Time Bandit* (an early version of which was reviewed in *SOS* April '94). If you have it installed, it's easily accessible from within *VST*; a couple of *VST*'s audio and tempo matching operations actually require *Time Bandit*.

THE POOL

When you've made several recordings, the Pool, a kind of database for keeping track of recordings, comes into its own. On opening it, you'll see a list of audio Files. Clicking on the arrow next to a File shows its 'Segment' list. Every File has at least one Segment, which is an instruction to play a portion

of the File. A Segment could play a whole File, or just part of it, and when you chop a recording into smaller bits, they become Segments in that File's Segment list. Because various operations create new Segments, the Pool can become crowded with Segments which may not be used in the current Song. The 'Purge Segments' function finds Segments which are not referenced, and deletes them from the Pool — although this doesn't affect the audio Files on disk. The Pool offers other File and Segment deletion functions, as well as showing where Files are stored, when they were recorded, their length, start and end points, mono or stereo status, and how often they're used in the Song. File renaming should be done here: if you rename Files in the Finder, *Cubase* may not be able to locate them next time the Song is opened. Though you can manually re-locate Files and tell *Cubase* their new names, it's best to avoid the problem altogether. It's also possible to drag Segments from the Pool into the other editors.

Administering recordings is easier if you understand what happens to Files when you delete them. To tidy a messy Pool, without actually deleting audio Files off disk, use the Delete key. Using Command-Delete removes Files from the Pool list *and* the hard disk — only do this if you're sure you don't want them. Another command to handle with care is Delete Unused Files: this finds Files not used in the current Song and removes them from the Pool and the disk.

The relationship between Files and Segments isn't too hard to comprehend (Files are full audio recordings, saved on disk; Segments are simply specifications for playing sections of Files), but there's another term to get used to: Audio Events. You could compare these to MIDI Note On messages for audio, since they tell a Segment where to start playing. One operation that illustrates the distinction between Audio Events and Segments is making an Audio Event play back a different Segment to the one it's currently playing. Clicking on an Event in the Audio Editor, while holding down Command and Option, brings up a menu listing all the Segments in that audio File. You can then choose another Segment for the Event to play — a verse vocal Segment could be played back by the Event that's currently playing the chorus vocal Segment. Fortunately, Audio Events are pretty much invisible to the user, and you can usually ignore them and concentrate on working with Segments.

EFFECTS & EQ

Apart from support for Power Mac audio, *Cubase VST*'s other brand-new features are its four effects processors and comprehensive parametric EQ (shown left). Steinberg are encouraging third-party manufacturers to develop *VST* plug-ins, so more effects and processors should be available soon.

VST's effects are accessed from the Monitor Mixer, where four effects 'sends' route pre- or post-fader signal from each channel to the effects. They're presented in a 'rack', and are very nicely ▶

EQ setup window and effects sends: there are two EQs showing here, but you can have as many as four per channel if your system permits it. The 'Dry' button at the top of the effects send column kills all sends for that audio channel.

Steinberg Cubase VST

▶ styled, with metallic finish and 3D controls. The effect types are:

• Espacial, an editable reverb.
• Choirus, a chorus/flange hybrid, also fully editable.
• Stereo Echo, a simple programmable stereo delay.
• Auto-Pan, also programmable (see box for effect editing parameters).

Effects can be configured as four of one type, two of two types, or any combination, to a maximum of four processors. Equally welcome are the banks of preset effects, and the ability to save custom effects, individually or in banks.

Speaking subjectively, the quality of the effects is easily as good as standard hardware processors, and all changes can be heard in real time. It's tremendously useful and very intuitive to have effects on tap within an audio sequencer, and now those of us who can't afford a TDM system can feel the benefit! Having four processors gives plenty of scope, but remember that the Audio Mixdown feature mentioned earlier records all EQ and effects settings for audio tracks, thus freeing up effects for 'live' processing — like recording effects to tape in a traditional studio.

Each band of EQ has a frequency range of 20Hz-16kHz. Steinberg have thoughtfully provided four presets — Lo, Lo mid, Hi mid and Hi — for instant access to four bands of EQ in useful frequency ranges. Control is also provided for gain (+/-12dB), centre frequency, and bandwidth. Once again, presets are provided for bandwidth, from wide to very narrow. The EQ is very good,

The Arrange page: audio tracks are shown as waveforms in the lower part of the track display. The Transport bar is at the bottom, and the Track Inspector, left, is where audio channels are selected and tracks record enabled.

and is capable of being as drastic or as subtle as you want, with all results in real time.

THE GOOD & THE BAD

We found odd problems when working with *VST*, but none were insurmountable. Most difficult, perhaps, was getting used to how careful you have to be with Power Mac input levels to avoid distortion. You also have to be a little careful with playback levels. You can boost a signal by up to 6dB, and this is generally plenty, but you may get the odd crackle of distortion if you boost all your audio channels at the same time. Just pull back a fader or two and it cures the problem.

Other niggles include the fact that EQ setup pages are usually accessed from the Monitor Mixer via 'FX' buttons — most people would intuitively click on the adjacent 'EQ' button, but this only works the first time you select the EQ page for that channel; subsequent clicking on the EQ button simply turns EQ on and off. To add to the confusion, the manual states that the EQ button opens the EQ page, while an accompanying diagram indicates the FX button! Also, setting exact values in the effects window with the mouse is incredibly difficult; the manual gives a technique for fine control over parameter dials, but this simply doesn't work well enough on the effects display, and you can't simply type a value into the display window.

In places, it feels as though the loose ends of the audio side aren't completely tied up. For example, the manual says audio tracks can't be put into Group Tracks (as MIDI tracks can) but if you try to anyway, the software lets you go almost all the way there but won't complete the procedure. There's not even an alert to say "Not with audio please!" And even if you save a Song before quitting, when you close down the software, a dialogue asks if you want to save your Song — *Cubase* doesn't sense that you've just done it. Another irritating point is that the manual says explicitly that *Cubase* automatically groups stereo recordings: *it doesn't*, which can be

CUBASE MIDI SEQUENCING IN BRIEF

The MIDI sequencing side of *Cubase* is so well known that there's little point in going into great detail here — check out past *SOS* reviews and features (listed in a separate box elsewhere in this article) for a more in-depth summary of its features. However, for anyone who's never used *Cubase*, here, briefly, is what the program's MIDI side offers. And remember, we're only scratching the surface.

At the heart of *Cubase* is the Arrange window (shown above), where you'll do the majority of your sequence recording and organising. The track list, which includes track names, MIDI routing information and so on, is on the left, with the linear tracks to the right. Each track also has an 'Inspector' box for altering playback parameters, including transposition, volume, velocity offsets, program change numbers, and patch names. The horizontal bars representing MIDI tracks can be pretty freely cut, copied, split and moved around to create the finished product, and MIDI data can be extensively manipulated in the main editors:

• **KEY EDIT:** a typical piano roll editor, with notes

shown as horizontal bars, and a controller information and velocity display underneath.
• **LIST EDIT:** a list of raw MIDI data, including notes, velocity values, programme changes, and System Exclusive data.
• **SCORE EDITOR:** using traditional notes and staves. Layout options in *Cubase* are comprehensive, but are enhanced further with *Cubase Score* and *Cubase Audio XT*, both of which rival dedicated notation software.
• **DRUM EDIT:** a dedicated editor for drum parts, showing notes and velocities as diamonds on a grid.

In addition, Logical Edit and the Interactive Phrase Synthesizer (IPS) offer more esoteric facilities for changing data or creating new parts from old. IPS could be used to create a real-time arpeggiator, for example, while Logical Edit allows you to selectively transform one kind of MIDI data into another. Both are impossible to sum up in a few words.

For studio or film and video professionals, *Cubase* offers a range of synchronisation options, plus a

sophisticated Master Track for tempo and time signature changes. Tracks can also be 'time locked'. This feature allows you to use multiple tempi in an arrangement, create crossfades between songs of different tempi, and keep certain events at absolute positions, while changing the tempo of the rest of the song.

Comprehensive MIDI mixer options are also available, and creating your own from scratch is fairly straightforward. Users with MIDI Machine Control-equipped hardware can use *Cubase* to control track selection, recording and playback on their equipment.

One notable feature of *Cubase* is that its interface is similar across all platforms. There are differences (some keyboard shortcuts, for example), but in general, users crossing platforms should find themselves in a familiar environment. Of course, the downside of this is that every version has resemblances to the original Atari program from 1989. One exception is the new Mac *VST* extras, which feature very polished graphics.

vexing when you move them about and only one half of the stereo track responds, thus throwing out your track positioning. Sometimes, the Wave Editor temporarily refused to audition processed waveforms, though it soon recovered on each occasion, and finally, using Mixdown (not Audio Mixdown — see the 'Manuals' box for the distinction) to group several tracks onto one track was unpredictable in operation. It didn't always mix down all the chosen tracks, affecting perhaps three or four out of five selected, for example. This point has been passed on to Steinberg, who are now working to fix the anomaly.

There are many nice touches which balance the above, though: audio continues playback during other operations, even when you're changing effects and EQ settings; faders in the Monitor Mixer can be linked in adjacent odd-even pairs by holding down the Option key while moving one fader, and the Option-linking of channels usefully extends to effects and EQ settings; Power Mac native code means that *VST* runs very fast even on our 75MHz machine; and the sound quality of *VST* audio recordings (16-bit, 44.1kHz sample rate) is subjectively rather good. *VST* also seems stable: during our time with the software, it only crashed once.

CONCLUSION

The bottom line is that Steinberg have added powerful *Cubase Audio*-like features, plus an as yet unprecedented selection of digital effects and EQ, to their basic MIDI sequencer for a starting price of £329 — and that's simply amazing. For integrated MIDI sequencing and audio recording on a Power Mac, there is nothing as cheap with a similar feature set. Although the Power Mac's audio hardware is not as good as you would get from a Digidesign board, the audio quality obtainable with *VST* is easily good enough for demos, and exceeds the performance of cassette-based multitrackers.

Many a home studio-based musician will have been looking forward to such a cost-effective, all-in-one solution to MIDI sequencing and digital audio, and in this context, *VST* is a great success.

SOS

CUBASE IN SOS

REVIEWS:
- *Cubase* (ST) August 1989
- *Cubase* (Mac) October 1990
- *Cubase v2.0* (ST) December 1990
- *Cubase* for Windows February 1992
- *Cubase v3.0* (ST) April, May 1992
- *Cubase Audio* (Mac) November 1992
- *Cubase Score* (Mac) October 1993
- *Cubase Audio DAE* (Mac) October 1994

FEATURES:
- *Cubase* MIDI Mixer: October, November 1992
- Living with *Cubase* on the Falcon: September 1994
- *Cubase* Logical Edit: March-May 1995
- *Cubase* SY85 Mixer Map: June & August 1995
- *Cubase* Basics: September-December 1995.

It was quite feasible to have both hard disk systems using one display at the same time, using the 'Maximize' buttons whenever more detailed control was required. The Soundscape waveform displays helped to show what was going on.

Faced with unfinished album sessions on analogue tape and a studio full of PCs and digital gear, BRIAN HEYWOOD gets a chance to find out how flexible modern equipment really is.

Early in January, my band and I decided to make a concerted push to finish the album that had been on hold since our old drummer went off to Australia (maybe it was something we said?). Nightwatch is my folk/rock/jazz fusion band; we've been together about 10 years now, but we've never quite got around to recording a full-length album. The timing seemed ideal, the new line-up had settled down, and I didn't have any major projects tying up the studio. As the production relied heavily on the PC-based systems in my studio, I thought it might be of interest to the readers of this column.

The studio is really quite modest by commercial standards, with three recorders: a single ADAT (eight tracks), Soundscape SSHDR1 and SADiE hard disk recorders, both the latter being hosted on a 486DX33 PC. Sequencing is provided by a 486DX50 PC running Voyetra's *Sequencer Plus Gold* — a DOS-based package — and interfaced to the MIDI instruments via a Voyetra V24s interface. The synthesizers used for this project were a Yamaha TG77 and TG500, a Roland Sound Canvas (CM300) and an Akai S950 sampler. We had up to 16 audio tracks at our disposal, which is actually one more than when we did the original sessions for the album on 16-track tape, since we didn't need to allocate a track for timecode.

REELING IN THE YEARS

The original sessions had been recorded using a Fostex 16-track, so we had two reels of half-inch tape with some basic rhythm and melody tracks that we didn't want to lose, plus timecode on track 1. The first job was to transfer the material we already had to the ADAT. So I arranged with the truly wonderful Vic Lennard to hook his Fostex 16-track to the ADAT via a JL Cooper DataSync2 and a Fostex synchroniser. As we had to redo all the drums, we didn't need to transfer them and — as there were never more than eight tracks of other instruments — the ADAT had enough tracks to take the material. Once we had worked out how to get the two sync boxes to 'talk' to each other, the process went very smoothly, with the only slight glitch being caused by a piece of discontinuous timecode.

Back in the studio, I transferred most of the tracks onto the hard disk systems, since we wanted to record the new drum parts onto the ADAT. The reason for this was two-fold: firstly, the new drum parts were likely to need the most 'space', since they would need to run through almost all of the tracks; secondly, we wanted to keep the tracks together on the same recorder, and the hard disk systems only have four individual outputs apiece. The first of these points shows an advantage of traditional tape-based recording: you have considerably more storage space than is common and affordable in a hard disk system. Consider a 42-minute ADAT tape: you get the equivalent of 8 x 42 x 5.025Mb (digital audio requires about 5Mb of disk space per minute) — 1.7Gb of storage per reel. Just for the drums we would have needed more than 2Gb of hard disk storage (we went into a second ADAT tape). Hard disk systems store data much more efficiently than a tape-based system, but in this case, this feature would have not made any difference.

LET'S WORK TOGETHER

For the rest of the project, the ADAT was the 'sync master', which is to say that the computers all derived their synchronisation from the ADAT via the DataSync2. This was because we had no way of getting the ADAT to 'chase' external SMPTE timecode generated from the computers. This system turned out to be very robust (at least when the ADAT was working) and only had the slight downside that the ADAT had to be continuously cycled when performing overdubs — which slowed things down a bit and increased head and tape wear. The JL Cooper device is a little gem, as it directly converts the ADAT's internal sync signal into MTC and SMPTE — and even MIDI clock and SPP (Song Position Pointer) if required. This meant that we could drive the Soundscape system directly off the MTC output while SADiE and the sequencer were being driven by the SMPTE timecode output.

Creating the final version of each track was a three-stage process: track-laying, mixing, and post-production. The track-laying consisted of overdubbing new performances onto the various recorders, which sometimes got slightly confusing, especially if we were swapping

Nightwatch album - Sync and Audio paths...

Sync'ing two hard disk recorders to the ADAT was simple using the JL Cooper DataSync2.

▶ between the two hard disk recorders: their user interfaces have substantial differences, especially with respect to their keyboard shortcuts. On the whole, I think I preferred using the Soundscape over the SADiE for track-laying, although it was slightly annoying to have to define the start and end points of

each take before commencing recording (thankfully, this requirement has been removed from the latest version of the Soundscape front-end software).

The live parts were laid down in sync with the sequencer, which we used to record a live performance rather than pre-sequencing the parts. The live instruments tended to be placed on the same tracks for each song, so that the basic monitor/mix layout remained constant. While this removed some of the flexibility of the system, it prevented us from getting confused when recording new tracks. This also paid off at

mixdown, since the EQ for these tracks stayed pretty much the same. It wasn't too much of a problem to transfer an ADAT track to SADiE, correct any minor glitches, and then transfer it back, though we only really did this with the tracks recorded two years previously. When recording live tracks, we tended to repeat the overdub if there was some problem. The whole point of this approach was to keep the sessions as natural as possible, so the technology wouldn't get in the way of the creativity and feel of the recordings.

MIXING IT

After taking a break for a couple of weeks, the producer and I settled down to mix the tracks. As we don't have an automated desk, we used a technique of setting up a static — or at least a very simple — mix, and then recording it onto DAT. Each segment of the mix was recorded with a couple of seconds of material on each side of the edit points, so that we could crossfade between them. The segments might be several minutes long or only a couple of seconds, depending on what we were trying to do. As we created the mix in stages, we were able to

Voyetra's Sequencer Plus Gold still provides the best sequencing solution for me, due to its multitrack recording facility and rock-solid synchronisation.

generate an extremely complicated final product.

The post-production stage consisted of digitally copying the audio segments from the DAT back onto SADiE and then stitching them together in the editor's Trim window, with crossfades to ensure that the joins were seamless. Then it was simply a matter of putting the finished tracks in the right order, balancing their overall levels, setting the inter-track gaps to the correct length, and copying the material back to DAT via the S/PDIF digital output. The DAT could then be used as a production master. We backed up the EDL (Edit Decision List) of the master from SADiE to DAT, so that the mix can be tweaked at a later stage if required. One nice feature of the SADiE is that it allows you to burn a Red Book standard 'gold disc' CD using a CDR drive (in our case, a Yamaha CDE100) and then play the mix in any domestic CD audio player — which is a great way of sending the finished product to interested parties.

THE LAST WORD

As this was the first album-length project I had recorded with this particular studio

configuration, I learned a few things about how to best use the equipment. The first is: don't forget to back up your data. This does not apply only to the hard disk systems: the ADAT went down during the course of the project, causing damage to a 30-second section of tape. Unfortunately, the ADAT data had never been backed up, so that section is lost forever. If you don't have two ADATs, consider hiring a machine for the day on a regular basis — say for once a week, or at key points in the project.

In an ideal world, I think I'd prefer a single hard disk system working with the ADAT, so I'm rather looking forward to seeing the planned new Soundscape hardware, which it seems will expand the number of separate inputs and outputs — the Soundscape would be my system of choice for track-laying and mixing at present if it had enough outputs. We could also mix directly to SADiE rather than to DAT, simplifying the mix and post-production phase, and reducing the wear and tear on the DAT recorder. One last point about using a hard disk system in this kind of project is that you can never have too much hard disk space. We ended up with only 40 seconds of free space on the Soundscape system. Still, we couldn't have done it without the two hard disk systems. **SOS**

Session

in progress

Digidesign's Session digital recording software has now made the transition from Apple Macintosh to Windows-compatible PCs, a feat made possible by the simultaneous release of the company's first PCI-format digital I/O card, the Audiomedia III. PAUL WHITE checks out both.

DIGIDESIGN SESSION DIGITAL RECORDING SOFTWARE FOR WINDOWS • DIGIDESIGN AUDIOMEDIA III PCI CARD

As a relative newcomer to PCs (see the Leader column in *SOS* May 96 for the full story), I've made a conscious decision only to work with Windows 95; vintage operating systems hold far less appeal for me than vintage audio equipment! I've also decided that wherever possible, I'll only deal with Plug and Play hardware, because this relieves the user of the responsibility of working out addresses, DMAs, interrupts and so on — something no non-anorak-wearing end user should have to endure.

The old approach of Plug and *Pray* holds no appeal for me whatsoever, though anyone who ever spent a whole summer trying to solve Rubik's cube might find it has its attractions.

Session for Windows is the first piece of PC software I've had to write about, but for me, the similarities between its user interface and that of ▶

Main Edit window.

Digidesign Session PC/AudioMedia III

▶ Pro Tools give it a comfortable familiarity (and *Session* was, of course, originally a Mac program — David Mellor reviewed it on that platform back in *SOS* December '95). The software is designed to run using the new Digidesign Audiomedia III PCI card, which, in addition to handling digital-to-analogue and analogue-to-digital conversion, also includes a 56000 DSP chip — and this chip removes much of the heavy digital processing load from the host PC (see the 'Trump Card' box elsewhere in this article for more on the Audiomedia III). With this setup, *Session* can provide up to eight tracks of audio recording, and similar editing and mix automation features to non-TDM versions of Pro Tools. In addition, because the PC is a true multitasking computer, you can use *Session* in sync with your regular sequencer; I had *Session* running alongside *Cubase Score*, using internally routed MTC to link the two, and everything ran perfectly.

To run *Session for Windows*, you need a Pentium PC running at a minimum clock speed of 75MHz with at least 8Mb of RAM — and ideally 16Mb or more. Plug and Play BIOS must be installed, and you'll need a 800x600 SVGA monitor and card with 256-colour resolution.

Installing both the Audiomedia III card and the *Session* software is quite straightforward, and Windows 95 guides you through the whole software installation process, prompting you to insert disks as required. No copy protection is used on this software, which makes installation and re-installation a less worrying experience. At present, *Session for Windows* is bundled with the Audiomedia III card, but very shortly, the card and software will be available separately. If you have a PC-based Session 8 system, you might like to know that *Session* software will also be acting as

a replacement for the current Session 8 PC front-end software in the near future.

THE *SESSION* INTERFACE

Session's interface is based on a relatively small number of windows, and before getting down to the interesting stuff, you need to visit the I/O Setup Window, which lets you select the sample rate (11.025, 22.050, 44.1kHz or 48kHz), internal or external digital sync, and which of the inputs and outputs are digital (again, see the 'Trump Card' box for more on this). There's also an analogue gain fader which provides gain adjustment when you're recording from a source with no output level controls.

The main screen for most users will be the Edit window, shown in Figure 1. Here the audio waveforms on the various tracks are displayed, along with a 'Region Bin' on the far right in which all the regions created by editing the original sound files are listed. At the top of the screen are all the familiar edit tools for selecting regions, moving regions and scrubbing the audio, as well as other tools for entering level and pan automation (see the 'Mixing and Automation' box) and one for switching Shuffle Mode on and off. With Shuffle Mode on, audio regions can be dragged to any position on the timeline, whereas if this mode is turned off, region starts can be made to snap to the end of previous regions — useful if you're working with song segments or drum loops. There's also a 'snap' option, which acts as a kind of quantise, insofar as any regions snap to the nearest line on the time grid. The grid may be set to work in either bars and beats (providing you enter the appropriate tempo information), locators, timecode, or the starts and ends of regions. The bars and beats way of ▶

TRUMP CARD: THE AUDIOMEDIA III

The Audiomedia III card is Digidesign's first PCI-format card, which means that it can be used in both PCs and the newer Power Macintoshes equipped with PCI slots — though of course different versions of software will be required to support the card for each platform. The card and driver software currently provide PCM playback support, and work with any compatible Windows applications, including *Cubase/Cubase Audio PC*, *Wavelab*, *Sound Forge*,

Cool Edit, *Cakewalk Pro Audio*. *Logic Audio* is expected to follow shortly.

On the PCI Mac front, it is envisioned that the card will shortly be usable from within third-party sequencing software including *Cubase/Cubase Audio*, *Logic Audio*, *Studio Vision Pro*, *Digital Performer*, and so on.

The card is surprisingly compact, featuring one S/PDIF digital input, (A to D has 24-bit, delta-sigma conversion with 128 times oversampling and 18-bit output), two analogue inputs, one S/PDIF digital output and two analogue audio outputs fed from 18-bit converters. All the I/Os are on phono connectors which protrude from the rear of the PC, and in proper PC tradition, none of them are actually labelled, so you have to refer to the manual! The digital ins and analogue ins can be used at the same time, giving the system true 4-in, 4-out capability, and the noise performance is a creditable 88dB weighted, providing a linearity roughly equivalent to 15 bits. If you select the analogue ins to feed tracks 1 and 2, they also feed tracks 5 and 6,

with the digital ins feeding the remaining tracks. If you're only using the analogue input, you have to go to the Input selection page and switch inputs to get the analogue inputs feeding tracks 3,4 and 7,8. When used with *Session*, the outputs are configured as one main stereo mix and two aux sends; you can select whether the analogue or digital outputs carry the main mix, and the other outputs automatically take on the role of aux sends.

During mixdown, the inputs may then be used as aux returns or to mix in MIDI instruments, though you will either need an effects unit with a digital output or a spare DAT machine to use as an analogue to digital converter if you want to use the digital input with analogue equipment, such as a mixer. This being the case, I would like to see a version of the card available with four analogue ins and outs as well as the digital I/O, even if you could still only use a maximum of any four at once. It's all very well assuming that the end user is going to mix directly to DAT, but if you're running alongside a MIDI sequencer, you're probably going to have to go via a mixer, and there are few budget mixers with digital inputs. Perhaps now's the time for some enterprising company to market a small box full of competent but non-esoteric A/D and D/A converters at a realistic price...

Music Village

▶ working is useful if you're working with regions that are whole numbers or multiples of musical bars, but there is no way of importing tempo data from your sequencer. Considering the ease with which *Session* runs alongside a sequencer, this would have been a valuable addition. As it is, it's often easier to use an audio version of your sequencer, so that both MIDI and audio can be viewed against the same tempo reference.

To the left of the screen are the Record Ready, Mute, Solo and Automation buttons, plus a floating transport palette (also shown in Figure 1), which carries the transport controls, the time indicator and 10 numbered buttons which function as autolocate points. These are arranged as 10 banks, giving 100 points in all. There are also icons representing the three main operating screens, so that you can go directly to them without having to enter a keyboard command. Multiple windows can be opened simultaneously, but you have to be careful where you put them, unless you have a very large monitor. In common with other PC software I have seen, I felt the windows were rather larger and chunkier than strictly necessary, giving the interface a sort of 'Fisher Price' Pro Tools look, but this probably has more to do with Windows 95 than Digidesign. As it is, even with a 17-inch monitor, you're continually dragging windows around so that you can see the appropriate bit of each, although in most situations, you can manage with just one window open at a time, plus the transport controls.

Audio is recorded as .WAV files, a format with which most PC users will be familiar, and if you have a CD-ROM drive, you can import .WAV samples or drum loops to use in your compositions, though these are converted into dual mono files on loading. For multimedia users, *Session* can also import .AVI format movies, allowing you to create sound tracks as you watch. Unless you have a very fast Pentium machine, the movie window should be kept as small as possible, so as to minimise the drain on CPU resources.

When you make a recording, it appears both in the waveform window and in the Region Bin as a mono sound file; stereo recordings or imported files materialise as two mono sound files, so it's up to the user not to let the two halves get separated. For me, this way of handling (or not handling) stereo audio files is perhaps the greatest weakness of the system.

Using the Selector tool, regions of the file can be defined and added to the Region bin, and because editing is non-destructive, you can use the same region as many times as you like simply by dragging it from the Region Bin into the desired track. There's also a very powerful crossfade editor, where you can define the time and shape of the crossfades between regions; the fade-in and fade-out curves may be edited independently. Regions may be moved using the Grabber tool, and you can play a recording back from any point to check what you've done. Regions may also be copied and dragged

from track to track, but there's no fancy DSP processing such as reversing, normalising or virtual effects. It's also impossible to do punch-in recording on the fly, though it's very easy to set up auto punch-in/out points, which may be dragged using the mouse if their position needs fine-tuning.

As with Pro Tools, you can overlap regions, but if you do this, only the one on top will be heard during playback. There's also a function called Playlist, which is actually a type of virtual track system, allowing you to create alternate versions or arrangements for tracks. Only the currently selected Playlist appears in the track window, but because Playlist data is really just a list of edit points based on your originally recorded files (not the audio data itself), you can save a number of alternative Playlists without taking up

> "Despite the budget nature of *Session*, it is every bit as flexible as early Pro Tools systems, and includes some features that even Pro Tools doesn't have."

any significant amount of disk space. A useful trick is that if you run out of tracks for bouncing, you can close down a Playlist and use its track as a bounce destination, then move the result back to one of the original source tracks before restoring the original Playlist.

Arrow buttons let you zoom in and out of the waveform display in both horizontal and vertical directions, and there's a nice touch here — there are four Zoom Presets activated by dedicated buttons, which means you can jump from one scale to another without having to press the Zoom buttons dozens of times.

When it comes to editing, most of this involves changing the lengths of regions or moving regions about, and one very practical feature is supported by this software, which my old Pro Tools II doesn't have; you can now select all the regions to the right or to the left of the currently selected region ▶

Digidesign Session PC/AudioMedia III

▶ in one go rather than having to go around 'rubber banding' them or selecting them individually. Also, like Pro Tools, once you've placed a region where you want it, you can lock it to prevent it being moved accidentally.

If you run out of tracks during recording, you can bounce tracks, just as you would on a tape machine, and if you need to archive a session so you can come back to it later, you can dump the whole project to DAT via the digital output port on the Audiomedia III card. Backing up multitrack recordings in this way is always slow, but at least it's cheap!

USABILITY

Despite the budget nature of *Session*, it is every bit as flexible as early Pro Tools systems, and includes some features that even Pro Tools doesn't have. *Session* has a decent scrolling display, colourful (if

sure each gets the same treatment. Similarly, automation data is related to absolute time, not to the regions it controls, so if someone asks you to open up a gap in some dialogue after you've finished doing the automation, you have to select and move all the automation points by the same amount. Considering the effort that's gone into creating a 'tape and tracks' analogy, this is far less than ideal.

When you record automation data from the Mixer page fader, the data shows up as new break points on the Edit page automation graph, which is fine, but if you go back over a piece of automation, it doesn't seem to replace the original, but rather merges with it. To get rid of automation data, you have to select it and then bin it. A replace mode button on the automation page might have been neater. Even so, the automation facilities provided are pretty

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MIXING & AUTOMATION

If you're one of those people who prefer to mix using faders rather than mice, and you have a MIDI interface on your PC, you can plug in a hardware MIDI fader unit (such as those made by Peavey, JL Cooper, or Penny and Giles) to provide a real control surface when

it comes to a *Session* mixdown. If you want to automate a mix controlled by one of these hardware devices, you need a MIDI sequencer into which to record the appropriate controller data. To make setting up such hardware interfaces easier, a useful Learn facility is included, which necessitates waggling the on-screen and real faders so that they can recognise each other.

Finished *Session* tracks can be automated both for level and pan, and for those who like the graphical approach, this can be done from the Edit

window by selecting Automation and then choosing level or pan. This system works exactly like Pro Tools, where you create break points along a line, then drag them about, just as you would with the envelope in a synth editing package. Automation points may be moved or erased, and you can also move or erase several at once by marking them with the selector tool, and then performing the appropriate action on any one of them.

The other way to automate the mix is to go to the Mix page (shown in this box), and record the level and pan fader movements, in real time. This page is set up very much like a typical console automation package, and includes the ability to subgroup up to four sets of faders. A small trash can icon may be dragged to grouped faders to ungroup them.

It's also worth mentioning that the two aux sends and the master faders may be automated via MIDI using your sequencer. In fact, you can do all the automation from your sequencer if you want to.

Session's Mix window.

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a little PC game-like) graphics and a very professional range of editing and crossfading tools. The automation works reliably (again, see the 'Mixing & Automation' box), and, as already mentioned, I got *Session* running in sync with *Cubase Score* without any problems.

If there *are* flaws, these result from *Session's* Pro Tools ancestry. Even Pro Tools relies on a bodged track linking system to handle stereo files which have been split into two mono files, but *Session* doesn't even do that — you just have to handle the two channels very carefully and make

impressive, even to the extent of having proper fader grouping, and on the whole, the automation is easy to use.

I don't know if it's because I'm mainly a Mac user, but some of the tools in *Session* feel rather less positive than they do in Pro Tools; you have to line them up with the target object quite carefully, and the fact that the cursor is often an icon (such as a trash can) rather than a neat pointer makes this tricky to do precisely. It doesn't take too much getting used to, but at first it's like trying to drive a car with a particularly quirky gear shift.

On the sound front, the Audiomedia III card was impressive, with none of the digital background chatter I'd half expected to find on the analogue outs. If you turn up the gain sufficiently, you will hear a small amount of noise,

but it's good, honest analogue hiss, not whistles and whines. I'd certainly have no qualms about undertaking serious audio projects using this hardware.

IN CONCLUSION

Viewed as the poor person's Pro Tools, *Session* offers virtually all the key facilities of non-TDM Pro Tools systems in a similar operating environment — and some features are actually better than in the current version of Pro Tools. The package is very easy to use, well documented, and there are numerous keyboard shortcuts for commonly-used functions. What's more, these are usually sensible to the point that you can guess at them and come up with the right combination.

I was particularly impressed by the ease with which *Session* could run alongside *Cubase* to provide audio capability, and, as commented above, the analogue output sound quality was rather better than I had anticipated for a sound card residing in such close proximity to noisy data busses.

The trouble with software reviews is that you can never paint the whole picture — the *Session* User's Guide runs to over 350 pages, and even that's keeping things concise. Having said that, you can learn the salient features of *Session* in far less time than it takes to read the manual if you're in any way familiar with digital audio recording software or even with MIDI sequencers. As a practical tool for recording music, the *Session* package is restricted only by the lack of stereo file handling and a real-time punch in/out system. Musicians working alone are used to having a footswitch to punch in with, but with *Session* you have to set up auto punch in and out points every time, which could prove to be a creative hindrance. To be fair, you only get real-time punch-in on expensive computer-based hard disk systems, because it's not very easy to implement digitally (especially if you want to punch in on multiple tracks at the same time) — but that won't prevent those of us who were brought up on tape from missing it.

As for other applications, *Session* is useful for editing existing stereo material (though not nearly so powerful as *Sound Designer* in this respect), and it can also be used to compile music, dialogue and sound effects for use in multimedia productions, soundtracks or radio programmes. Being realistic, anyone using Audiomedia III will probably have other software such as Steinberg's *WaveLab* or *Sound Forge* for handling specialised editing tasks, and those using 'Audio + MIDI' sequencers will tend to use them wherever possible, rather than running two programmes side by side.

Though imperfect in some areas, the *Session for Windows*/Audiomedia III bundle offers extremely good value and has the potential for high-quality, multitrack audio recording, plus the ability to back up to DAT. There's even a Tascam DA30 setting to get around the problems that sometimes arise when these Tascam DAT machines are used with Digidesign hardware — not that this was Tascam's fault! With mainstream Digidesign systems becoming so expensive, this package could be just what the company needs to put it back on the 'real world' map. **SOS**

Atari NOTES

The C-Lab Falcon MkX has flown through its CE tests and finally landed in the UK. OFIR GAL checks the spec and assesses the new machine's chances of taking off.

The C-Lab Falcon MkX builds on the success of the Falcon as a complete solution for the modern musician. The new case design makes it easier to upgrade and expand than its predecessors.

Yes, it's late, but it's here at last. After months of delays, the repackaged, enhanced and revamped C-Lab Falcon MkX is finally sitting before me — disguised in a dark 440 x 290 x 60mm metal case. It was actually ready for release before Christmas, but was delayed by Eurocrats and the requirement for CE approval.

C-Lab took over the manufacture of the Falcon from Atari in 1995, with the intention of marketing the machine as a music tool, something Atari failed to do properly. With built-in MIDI ports, a DSP chip, and the lean and mean TOS, *Cubase Audio* and a range of hardware add-ons, it was a ways a mystery why Atari could not capitalise on this niche market. C-Lab have managed to do just that with the Falcon MkII.

THE FALCON MKX

Building on the success of the MkII, the MkX is aimed squarely at musicians, housed in a slick and robust metal case you could take on the road. As it's designed around the original Atari motherboard, the case has to allow for the various ports, especially the cartridge port, which cannot be relocated easily. This prevents the case from being a true rackmount unit, but in all other respects, the MkX is built like a musician's tool rather than an office machine. All the ports are labelled clearly on the top of

the case, which can also house several optional add-ons. The floppy drive is located at the front, and to its left are two bays for additional drives.

The basic spec is more or less the same as the original Falcon ,which is somewhat disappointing considering that almost four years have gone by since Atari launched the machine. Based around the Motorola 68030 CPU, clocked at 16MHz, the Falcon's true power, from a musician's point of view, comes from its sound system and DSP. The original Atari sound system featured an integrated A/D and D/A converter capable of eight 16-bit audio channels with sampling rates up to 50kHz. The C-Lab models have improved audio circuitry with similar capabilities. The DSP allows the machine to perform real-time audio

mixing, and effects such as EQ and reverb, and has remained unchanged in the C-Lab machine. The original Falcon performance was hampered by quirky SCSI implementation, which meant that hard disk access was not 100% reliable when put under strain. Applications like *Cubase Audio* suffered from various crashes and hangs due to disk access problems, and C-Lab addressed these by modifying the SCSI board. Users of the previous C-Lab models have enjoyed better reliability when working with large amounts of digital audio.

THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

Essentially, the new model is the same machine as the MkII, in an improved case that allows for ▶

In addition to the internal SCSI drive, you can install a removable drive, or even a CD recorder. The internal S/PDIF interface can be seen at the top left of the picture.

▶ easier expansion and upgrades. Among the possibilities are RAM upgrades and high-capacity removable drives. Even more interesting is the ability to install a SoundPool S/PDIF (FDI-compatible) or ADAT interface inside the machine. The various additional I/O ports are accessible from the back of the case, neatly aligned with the audio connectors. All

then write it directly onto a CD. Better still, with the aid of programs like *Audio Master* from SoundPool, you can do the post-production work and burn a final CD that can be used to produce a glass master — without the files ever leaving your Falcon. See the box for full pricing details of the new machine and peripherals.

The optional S/PDIF interface is installed internally, with its ports accessible from the back of the machine. Note also the new quarter-inch jack sockets that replace the flimsy stereo mini-jacks of previous models.

other ports appear as they did on the original Atari Falcon, with the exception of an RGB/TV output.

Purchasers of the MkX can choose between two basic models: one uses a Mega ST or Mega STe keyboard; the other is called the MkXAT and can be used with a PC keyboard. Whichever you buy, it comes with the standard SCSI port, so you can connect any external SCSI drive to it. The basic unit ships with 4Mb of memory and no hard drive. An optional 1Gb SCSI hard disk, including the required additional internal hardware, costs £399. C-Lab are so confident about their modified SCSI board that they promise smooth operation with *Cubase Audio*, and will replace your Falcon if it doesn't work properly with that program. In case you're wondering, the IDE interface is still there, so there's nothing to stop you from adding an IDE-based internal drive as well.

Like its predecessor, the MkX has modified and improved sound hardware, but it now sports two pairs of proper quarter-inch jacks, replacing the old mini-jacks. Unfortunately, this also means that C-Lab had to remove the headphone socket. There is one more omission from the original Falcon spec: C-Lab have removed the composite video output, so you cannot connect an RGB monitor or TV any longer.

The C-Lab 'complete musician's solution' concept can be enhanced with a Yamaha CD recorder. The bundled software allows you to compile *Cubase* AIF files into a track list and

As part of their commitment to supporting Falcon owners, C-Lab have signed a deal with System Solutions (0181 693 3355) who will provide warranty repairs and upgrades.

GRIBNIF SOFTWARE AND TITAN DESIGNS

The closure of Compo UK, distributor of Gribnif Software, has left popular programs like *NeoDesk* and *Geneva* without a UK home. Titan Designs, a company known for products such as *Apex* and *Expose*, has taken over distribution of all Gribnif products, as well as some old favourites and a couple of new entries. Although the products are not music- or MIDI-specific they can help make your Atari more productive.

Nemesis is a new Falcon accelerator set for release in June. The final spec has not been confirmed yet, but it is likely that the CPU will be clocked at 30MHz and the DSP and FPU at 60MHz. Titan Designs are currently testing the product's reliability with time-critical applications, including *Cubase Audio*. The accelerator will also be available for C-Lab Falcon models. The following Gribnif products will be offered by Titan; prices include VAT and carriage:

• *Geneva v1.04* (£59.95): fast, full-featured multitasking OS for any Atari ST/TT/Falcon.
• *Geneva Utilities Disk* (£12.95).
• *NeoDesk 4* (£59.95): the latest incarnation of the popular replacement Atari Desktop.
• *Neodesk 4 Icons* (£7.95).
• *Neodesk CLI v2.1* (£24.95): Command Line Interface for use with *Neodesk*.
• *Geneva/Neodesk 4* bundle (£99).
• *Steno v2.12* (£24.95): text editor that operates as a desk accessory.
• *Stalker v3.05* (£39.95): communications program with background Z-modem.
• *Convector Pro v1.00J* (£79): fast and easy to use auto-tracing program.
• *Arabesque Pro v2.15* (£119): vector and bitmap editing/creation program for the Atari range.

For more information, contact Titan Designs on 0121 693 6669, or email them at 100345.2350@compuserve.com.

BITS AND BOPS

System Solutions have just announced *BitBopper*, a new Falcon-based product. Utilising the Falcon's hardware to its fullest, *BitBopper* takes an audio input and produces a video light show suitable for club dancefloors. The program can generate psychedelic video imagery, employing strobe effects and Kaleidoscopic patterns, and the software is content-sensitive, so the imagery can work with both hard-core techno sounds or with calmer ambient music. The screen objects, called 'videogobos', are always in sync with the beat. The software can also display text and can be set to respond to MIDI input, so that images can be displayed at any time using MIDI events, or even controlled directly from a MIDI keyboard.

BitBopper requires a Falcon with an RGB or TV output (which excludes the new MkX, sadly!). System Solutions can configure a system according to requirements, from single to multi-user, as well as multiple screen arrangements. Contact them on 0181 693 3355 for more details, or visit the new System Solutions web site at http://www.ssolutions.com. The company also provides online support for their complete product range via email at ssolutions@cix.compulink.co.uk. **SOS**

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Happiness

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U nless your band is called The Beatles, three years is a long time to be absent from the world of mainstream pop music. In the even more faceless world of dance music, the 'stars' — if you can call them that — often burn out much faster, and are swiftly forgotten. But although it's *over* three years since the release of 808 State's last album, *Gorgeous*, Graham Massey is in fine spirits, and with good reason. The group's new release, *Don Solaris*, marks a return to form after *Gorgeous*, a record that Massey himself now admits to finding "weak"

Bath with Al Stone as our engineer, who's mixed Björk and the Stereo MCs. Of course, we wrote more tunes there as we mixed in the studio".

Massey feels Stone's input much improved the album: "He made it loads better, just in terms of keeping everthing sonically clear. It had got quite dense — and sometimes you can get in a bit of a pickle with that. We'd be concentrating, going 'errr — you know the fourth type of hi-hat in the eighth kit? I can't hear it!'. It's good to have an outsider come in and tell you that that doesn't matter. He's good to work off, a good critic — and

Solar Flair

GRAHAM MASSEY OF 808 STATE • RECORDING *DON SOLARIS*

It's taken a couple of years, but 808 State have at last emerged from a variety of studios with a sleek new album, the superbly-crafted Don Solaris. MATT BELL talks techno to head of State Graham Massey.

in parts — a victim of what he and colleagues Andrew Barker and Darren Partington perceived as the stagnation of the dance scene that they had dominated at the turn of the decade with singles like 'Pacific 202', 'Cübik', 'In Yer Face', and the albums *Ninety* and *ex:el*.

TIMELY RETURN?

However, Graham's current enthusiasm doesn't just result from satisfaction with the group's new material — he believes music is now more interesting than it was at the time of *Gorgeous*: "Programming is a lot more exciting than it used to be — the 'drum and bass' movement is widening the whole thing out completely. Of all of the things you hear when you go out clubbing, that's been one of the things that's got me really excited again. It's affecting all kinds of other music as well, and that's good for us. Once upon a time, I think people looked on what we were doing as rather flash, but it's accepted now. It's only in the last year and a half that people have been able to be that broad — things like Tricky would never have happened earlier on. There's a more open, eclectic climate".

So, perhaps the delay was a good thing. For *Don Solaris* is definitely late — in his last *SOS* interview, in November 1994, Graham was talking about a January '95 release. At the time, he claimed the group were "sitting on about 40 finished tracks". I wondered what had happened, and whether any of that 40 had made it onto the final record. "There's quite a lot of them. Basically, we hit a point where we'd recorded in so many different studios that it didn't have any continuity to it". Extensive recording had already taken place in Sheffield's Fon studios and Manchester's Planet 4, and mixes of the material had been completed, when 808's label ZTT suggested the band go and mix the album again from scratch in one place. The intention was not to do any further recording, but it didn't turn out like that: "We ended up going to The Wool Hall in

it became a proper album, as opposed to a collection of tracks. The recording process can be quite fragmented now, because you might take a piece from your home studio, and another piece from another studio... Once upon a time, you went in the recording studio and made a record — now you're collecting little elements all the time, which you put together at the end, in the mix."

I assumed that the group must have employed hard disk recording to assemble the final tracks in this way, but this was not the full story, as Graham explained. He purchased a Digidesign Pro Tools system last Christmas to digitally assemble the album master (of which more later), but most of the tracks themselves were finished by then: "It depended what studio we were working in. Some had Pro Tools systems running with *Cubase*, but we were flying things in on two-inch analogue tape as well. It was a real curry! We used a lot more live elements on this album, and hard disk recording helped out there, because you can almost treat audio as if it were MIDI information, but you've still got that spontaneity and randomness. For example, we

know a really good Latin drummer, so we got him playing along roughly to some stuff in our own studio, and then took a DAT of him down and fitted chunks of his playing into our grooves".

INSTRUMENTATION: GOING LIVE?

It is the more 'live' feel that sets *Don Solaris* apart from the likes of *ex:el* — although the incredibly complex 808 State programmed rhythms and basslines are still in evidence (of which more elsewhere in this article). Back in November 1994, Massey promised a more 'organic' 808 State, stating that the increased use of acoustic instruments that had begun on *Gorgeous* was much more advanced on the new record. Not only is this apparent now that *Solaris* has at last risen above the horizon, but the production techniques used on the album have been more 'organic' too, with wider use of improvisation-inpired composition, old-fahioned analogue effects, and amp miking techniques than you might expect from a band named after a drum machine. Graham: "We felt a lot more comfortable about ▶

808 State at the Don Solaris mixing sessions, Olympic Studios, London, late 1995: (left-right) Andrew Barker, Graham Massey, Darren Partington.

808 State

using guitars and instruments like the vibraphone and glockenspiel on this album. There's more brass and wind instruments on this one, too. They were on the others too, but it used to be a big deal to put a *guitar* in, say. Now we're comfortable with being less tied to SMPTE."

Session musicians were not required to play the brass and wind instruments, as Graham has been playing both for many years, having been part of various improvisational jazz bands before his techno conversion: "There are hardly any samples — we've really cut down on those. It's just a natural element that's always been there, from 'Pacific State' onwards."

Certainly, on the track 'Black Dartagnion', the band sound like they're trying to get every world genre into one piece of music: tablas, a jazzy bass clarinet, a didgeridoo, and a dub bassline blend together with subtle synths to create a much more natural-sounding backing than anything the group have produced before. Graham: "That was one of the earliest tracks, and survived from the Fon sessions — it's about three years old now. We didn't want to change it — we thought it was really good already. The bass clarinet is one of my favorite instruments, and there's loads of original Fender Rhodes in it too. We went to town on the electric pianos on this album — we got a Hohner Electra, which has a different sound altogether, and Wurlitzers. We used them all layered together, for that Miles Davies 'five-Rhodes-in-a-room' sound."

Other equipment was used to enhance the warm feel of the record, like the Korg G5 bass analogue processor, used by the band to impart a fat, Moog synth bass-type feel to tracks played on a real bass guitar, for example in the closing passage of the track 'Mooz'. Graham: "You can get a lot of Moog-style feeling into your bass parts with it. We've also started putting kits through it. A guy I know who does a lot of drum and bass stuff got one just to put his kick drums through, and I've heard it on loads of jungle records since then! People have obviously all got the same idea at the same time there.

"We also used a lot of cheap analogue effects pedals — one of the best things I've bought all year is a Digitech whammy pedal, which I've used in countless situations."

The keyboard solo on the closing album track 'Banuchaq' — one of the wildest I've ever heard — was played on a Moog Liberation. The signal was sent through several analogue pedals and a parametric EQ, as Graham explained: "The EQ was being tweaked as the Liberation was played. You get quite a lot of control on a Liberation with its controller ribbon, and if you get the oscillators sync'ed up and pass the whole lot through a parametric EQ set to distortion, the sound really turns into something else. That wasn't sequenced — it was just a case of going at it!"

Indeed, for the recording of much of the album, the band exhibited the same tendency to 'go at' things and improvise. For Graham, this presented a welcome return to the kind of playing he had been used to in improvisational groups; but he did acknowledge the usefulness of technology for improvisation, as a non-classically-trained musician. "You're *constantly* having to deal with the limitations of your musicianship. I know this happens for a lot of people, if they're not trained musicians — and we're not, not really — you go to a keyboard every day, and you find yourself doing the same things. But if you're recording into a

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808 STATE: SELECTED GEAR

SYNTHS		RECORDING		MISCELLANEOUS

SYNTHS
- ARP 2600
- ARP Odyssey
- ARP Quartet
- ARP Axxe
- Chase Bit One
- EDP Wasp
- EM&M Spectrum Synth
- Emu Vintage Keys
- Korg Prophecy
- Korg Wavestation AD
- Moog Prodigy
- Moog Rogue
- Moog Minimoog
- Moog Memorymoog
- Moog Liberation
- Moog Opus 3
- Oberheim 4-voice
- Oberheim Matrix 1000
- Roland D50
- Roland JD800
- Roland Juno 106
- Roland Jupiter 4
- Roland Jupiter 8
- Roland JX8P

- Roland PC100
- Roland SH09
- Roland SH101
- Roland SH2000
- Roland TB303
- Sequential Pro One
- Yamaha CS30

COMPUTERS
- Atari 1040ST running *Cubase*
- Apple Mac Quadra 650 running Pro Tools

SAMPLERS
- Akai S1100
- Akai S1000

RHYTHM UNITS
- Alesis HR16
- Denon rhythm box
- Pearl Syncussion
- Roland CR78
- Roland R8
- Roland TR606

- Roland TR727
- Roland TR909

RECORDING
- Arbiter Time Dimension DDL pedal
- Boss overdrive
- Crybaby wah-wah
- Digitech whammy pedal
- Electro Harmonix Doctor Q
- Electro Harmonix memoryman
- Korg G5 bass synth processor
- Korg VCF pedal
- Morley wah fuzz
- MXR phaser
- Roland Space Echo
- Sovtec Bigmuff (x2)

ORGANS
- Bentley Acetone organ
- Fender Rhodes Stage 73
- Hohner Clavinet C

- Hohner D6 Clavinet
- Hohner Electra piano
- Vox Jaguar organ
- Yamaha DX7 mk I

GUITARS
- 6-string lap steel
- 8-string hawaiian lap guitar
- Casio MIDI guitar
- Fender Stratocaster
- Gibson Les Paul
- Guild Starfire
- Hawaiian Ukelele
- Ibanez ST50
- Kramer
- Takamine acoustic steel
- Takamine classical acoustic
- Yamaha 12-string acoustic

BASS GUITAR
- Fender Musicman

BRASS & WOODWIND
- Alto clarinet
- Bamboo flute
- Bass clarinet

- B flat Clarinet
- B flat trumpet
- Bongos
- C flute
- Cornet
- Congas
- Cowbells
- Egyptian tamborine
- Glockenspiel
- Kalimba
- Pocket trumpet
- Tamborine
- Tenor recorder
- Timbales
- Traford soprano saxophone
- Trombone
- Vibraphone

MISCELLANEOUS
- Alto melodica
- Cromatic harmonica
- Electric violin
- Peavey Gold Amp
- Stylophone (x2)
- WEM Dominator bass combo

THE STATE OF SYNTHS TODAY

Though 808 State's enormous number of synths — featured on every album sleeve in tongue-in-cheek gear lists — is undiminished, it would seem that they've not bought much that's new since the making of *Gorgeous*. When I make this point to Graham, he concurs: "It's true. More and more, you get tired of buying. There used

here. But it's moved abroad. It was always a pretty British thing — when we were over in the States a couple of years ago, you could still pick vintage gear up cheaply there. You can't any more — and now the Japanese have gone mad for it as well."

A couple of modern synths have caught the group's eye,

out and push a slider. It's our master keyboard, but it's been on a few tours and is a bit battered. Some of our music is now shaped by the fact that several keys have been kicked in and are missing..."

Graham's colleague Andrew Barker has recently parted with one of his two prized Roland TB303s — and the high price he

Graham Massey with
the beloved 808 State Prophecy.

to be this feeling that buying a new synth would expand everything, all your sounds — but when you've bought your umpteenth synth, you realise it's only added a little bit to your power. You get a bit more choosy. We're in a fortunate position — some people only get one choice, don't they?

"It seems analogue synth mania is finally tailing off over

however, Graham: "We got a Korg Prophecy when they came out, and it seems manufacturers are finally starting to listen to what people really want. That synth is really organic. I love the feedback loops in it — you can make everything go absolutely mental. The JD800 is still one of our main instruments for the same reason — you want something, you can just reach

fetched for the unit allowed him to go straight out and buy the object of *his* desire, a Waldorf Pulse monosynth. Graham: "It's brilliant — just like a Memorymoog in a box. *And* it's stable. On the other hand, I saw one of those Quasimidi Ravens the other day — and I was appalled at how easily you could do rave music with the thing — it was like the Antichrist!"

computer, you can change what you record later. You have a link from your brain to your hands which is only good enough to do certain things — but then you have the link from your brain to the computer, which is capable of much more. But it's still your brain — and they're still your ideas. That's what's great about technology. Despite that, being in an improvisational band for years was a tremendous help to composing; you need to improvise to create in the first place. I think a lot of programmers now would benefit from being in a jamming situation. I know jams are sometimes really terrible, but it's a great skill to learn if you can. I've been trying to do it a lot more myself lately — just get in a room with humans and play. I've done

remixes where I've brought a lot of session musicians in: percussionists, and flute and sax players — and while I've been waiting for the album to come out, I've been doing a few other projects that are more musician-based; I like having that human element again."

WHOSE (INSTRUMENTAL) LINE IS IT ANYWAY?

On some of the songs, improvisation, hand in hand with technology, took the group far away from their original ideas for the track. One of the few new synths used on the album (see the 'The State Of Synths Today' box) was a Korg Prophecy. Graham had written a drum pattern with a North African feel to it, and when the group dicovered that the ▶

808 State

Photo: Piers Allardyce.

Darren Partington (left) and Andrew Barker (right) pictured at Olympic Studios during the mixing of Don Solaris late last year.

WANTED — ONE CASIO FZ1

Rather as with their synths (see the 'State Of Synths Today' box elsewhere in this article), 808 State have not been gripped by upgrade frenzy where their sampler is concerned — they're still using an Akai S1100. Graham: "It's fine — except we sometimes take our stuff down to Bunk, Junk, and Genius for remixes — and our Akai disks don't fit in the S3200 down there. If we were going to upgrade, we might keep our S1100 and move up to an Emu or something — except then you have to convert your library sounds... Sometimes, though, it's good to have a clearout! I've still got a load of old Casio FZ disks that are like antiques now. I'd like to get those sounds back again, because there were a lot of good ones on the FZ sample disks, really upfront strings and things — and the FZ had a great resonant filter too. If I see one going cheap, I might get it. Anyone want to sell me theirs?"

▶ Prophecy keyboard could be set to different tunings, they elected to try an Arabic scale to fit the tone of the rhythm pattern — which was unused in the final version of the track, named 'Balboa'. Graham: "We played loads of Arabic flute over the top, then we took out about four bars that sounded good, wrote basslines to go with them, and worked out mid lines from the same improvisation. That track was one of the ones that we wrote in the studio at the end".

The arpeggiated and extremely unpredictable chord progressions at the end of the track 'Kouhoutek' came about in a similar way. Graham: "That came from another piece. We had the front part, and needed an ending. I had this tape which we'd done at our studio, with chord progression exercises on it — I was just messing around with some chords and the arpeggiator on our Jupiter 8. We edited some of the chords out and ended up with a section of about 24 bars, with some really good juxtapositions. It shouldn't really relate to the rest of the track, but somehow it does. We'll very often take a successful piece of a tune that isn't working properly as a whole, and work it into another track by changing the key."

Like the unexpected chord progressions on the fade of 'Kouhoutek', many 808 State tracks exhibit bizarre melody or bass lines. Another good example from Don Solaris is the sax line with a deliberate off-key note on the track 'Joyrider'. But Graham defends his choice: "Sometimes, it's limited musicianship, a lack of 'proper' knowledge that leads to strange chords in our stuff. But that happens in all kinds of other music. A 'wrong note' in something can be the most *right* note, because to do the obvious thing all the time is boring. We often squabble about certain notes in the middle of the night, and some things get left. It can be very hard to get tuning right, especially when you're dealing with sub-bass. You almost ignore a sub-bass line until you put it up on big speakers — and often, when it's in tune on large

monitors, it twists out of tune again when you play it on something else quietly... it's only in tune when it's loud. That makes it hell to mix. You have to decide: should you make it in tune when it's quiet, or in tune when it's loud? Or do you just forget it? Often, we leave it, and again, on this album, Al Stone was good at encouraging us not to worry about things like that so much."

MIXING IT

The mixing sessions for Don Solaris (carried out using SSL consoles, mostly at The Wool Hall in Bath, but also at Olympic studios in London, where the photos accompanying this article were taken) were a vital part of the making of the record. Far from being a simple matter of balancing levels, this was the stage where heavy processing was applied to the tracks recorded, in some cases distorting them out of recognition, as Graham explained:

"Once upon a time, electronic music was quite a sterile environment — you wouldn't mike gear up, as the whole point was to DI everything. That was the thrill — everything was plastic and clean. It's all gone the other way now; you're trying to pretend it's *not* a D50 anymore, it's an old organ, or whatever. And distortion's 'in' as well, so we used the studio facilities a lot to give us room sounds — we'd send individual lines through miked-up guitar amps, and we used a lot of cheap processing, like crappy MXR phasers instead of the AMS in the

MASTERS OF THE RHYTHM: DRUMS & BASS

On Don Solaris, as on all their other albums 808 State do not use sample CDs to provide them with percussion loops, but build up their incredibly complex rhythm patterns themselves. Surely, I ventured, it would be easier to get them off the shelf? Graham was firm: "We haven't got any CD-ROMs. We don't have any big objection to doing it, but we never get so stuck that we have to resort to something like that. It's just not as challenging." I asked how they go about building up their patterns.

"All kinds of ways. Rhythm usually comes first when we start a track, though we do do it other ways. We really like just programming on drum machines sometimes, like the Roland TR909 or R8. Or, we'll take weird preset patterns out of our CR78 or our Denon preset rhythm unit. That's an old preset organ accompaniment box, with wicked sounds in it — kind of like a TR808, but with its own character. I got it in an organ shop for about a fiver, and it's been

on loads of our tracks Once you've got your basis, you stack further patterns over the top. Sometimes, you'll be flicking around trying to get two patterns in time, and you'll hit a point where they're not in time, but they're doing a rhythm that works anyway. At that point, someone shouts 'Stop! Let's see if we can do anything with that' — rather than try and fit everything into four-on-the-floor 'pockets'. You just have to be aware enough to recognise when something's working, even when the rhythms aren't supposed to go together.

"Sounds also dictate rhythms. Rhythms are almost like another layer of music in themselves, with different tones and textures: a Buddy Rich-style crusty vinyl sound will dictate a certain feel to a track, and a big fat 808 sound on the bass will dictate another. So, when we're making up rhythms, we're not just thinking like a drummer would, we're thinking sonically. Because you're not actually

playing the kit, you're free to think about the sounds you're using. When you stick a drummer in a room and record him, there's only one sound — and that's such an old ideal You're just dealing with technique then, and though that's very important, there's a lot more to drumming than that. We've got more of a palette now, and that's brilliant."

808 State's fluid, portamento'd basslines are also extremely distinctive, and contribute a great deal to the group's impact on dancefloors. Here Graham shared a couple of secrets: "We get some really good basslines by putting a polyphonic line through a monophonic synth — sometimes chords played through a monosynth result in very odd bass ideas, depending on the way the synth handles note priority. We also do the same thing we do with drum patterns — we'll write basslines in Cubase to go with a rhythm, and then copy the bassline to another track and shift it on a few beats in time — to the next 'pocket', where it fits rhythmically, but sounds totally different to how it used to."
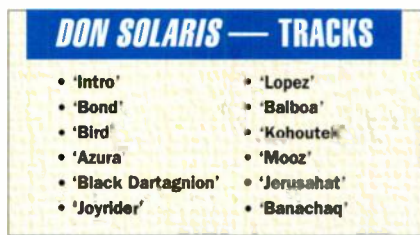
studio. To give a big 'soundscape' feel on 'Bond', we had the drums playing through some big speaker stacks into a room, and then we miked those up.

"We used some digital outboard too — Lexicon reverbs from whatever studio we were in — but what I *really* love is analogue squelch boxes, like the new Mutator filter, which I've just tried out [*see the Mutator review on page 126 this month — Ed*]. That's wicked! We didn't use it on the album, though — it wasn't out then. We like to use a lot of old analogue effects, like the Roland Space Echo and an old Echoplex, to give the album a real flavour, rather than having everything too clean. At the other end of the scale, we also used digital distortion — our sampler feeding back on

DON SOLARIS — TRACKS

- 'Intro'
- 'Bond'
- 'Bird'
- 'Azura'
- 'Black Dartagnion'
- 'Joyrider'
- 'Lopez'
- 'Balboa'
- 'Kohoutek'
- 'Mooz'
- 'Jerusahat'
- 'Banachaq'

itself. We sampled that, chopped it up, and used it in 'Bond'. It sounds like a motorbike — in fact, anything that sounds like a motorbike is usually a piece of equipment going wrong. We have DATs with different kinds of sounds stored on them, so when equipment starts to die on us, it's 'quick! Stick it on the motorbike DAT!'".

At the mixing stage, the songs varied wildly in their complexity. Involved pieces like 'Bond' went across 48 tracks, while the comparatively spartan 'Lopez' only used eight tracks. SSL automation was used to mix the entire album, which was then placed into Graham's then-newly-purchased Pro Tools system so that he could create a crossfaded master.

MASTERING THE SITUATION

When he spoke to *SOS* in November 1994, Graham was looking forward to getting to grips with a digital editing system such as Pro Tools, so that he could create records with no clear track boundaries. At the time, he said, "An editing system is something we could use really well... we've done maybe three mixes of each track, and then lots of little sections ready for editing — we want to merge the whole thing, make it one continuous piece. I like the idea of using music as raw material to build a bigger picture; that's something the new album will definitely show". I was surprised on listening to the album that this appeared not to be the case. Tracks crossfaded into one another, but

remained fairly distinct musical entities. I asked Graham why he had changed his mind.

"That was an idea I had that I *was* going to do. There's elements of it in there — that's what the 'Intro' is for at the start, it's like an overture of pieces from other tracks — but it didn't turn out the way I thought. I was quite ambitious when I started, and did a few psycho versions at home, but the album lasted two hours, and it was all getting a bit long-winded! Gradually, I got that out of my system, and toned it down to something that worked. I think you would need to do an album in a different way from the start to pull that kind of thing off successfully. I've been doing stuff since just to try it out, really loose stuff that you can jam together. You don't end up with songs so much, just themes."

Unable to decide whether to master onto analogue tape or DAT once the crossfading was complete, the group elected to test both: "We had it cut from half-inch first, and it was a bit muddy for us. Half-inch tape sounds great with minimalist stuff, but this album was too dense for that. So, we went back and cut it again on DAT. Certain tracks were suited to half-inch, and others weren't, but we cut the whole thing from DAT in the end. And now we're going to sell all our half-inch for recycling, because it costs a fortune!"

THE *DON* ARTICLE

With the album now on release, and the striking 'Bond' already picked as the first single. I wondered which tracks Graham thought would make good follow-up 45s. He seemed most keen on the commercial 'Jerusahat', or the simple 'Lopez', with vocals sung by the Manic Street Preachers' James Dean Bradfield. "Instrumentals seem to be a bit more acceptable in the charts lately — you've had Robert Miles' 'Children' and the X-Files track. I'd like to try and put 'Jerusahat' out as a single. I think it'd sound great on the radio." Was this his favourite on the album? "No, that changes all the time. I think the album as a whole is quite balanced, and that's the main thing — it's been concentrated over a period of time into something quite solid. Of course, my picture of it is a lot bigger, because I know all the other stuff that was going to go into it... I could get picky about some aspects of it, but you've got to stop doing an album at some point, put in a full stop — and do another one!" **SOS**

Don Solaris was released on June 17th, on the same day as the new single, 'Bond'. 808 State are planning a British tour for later this year.
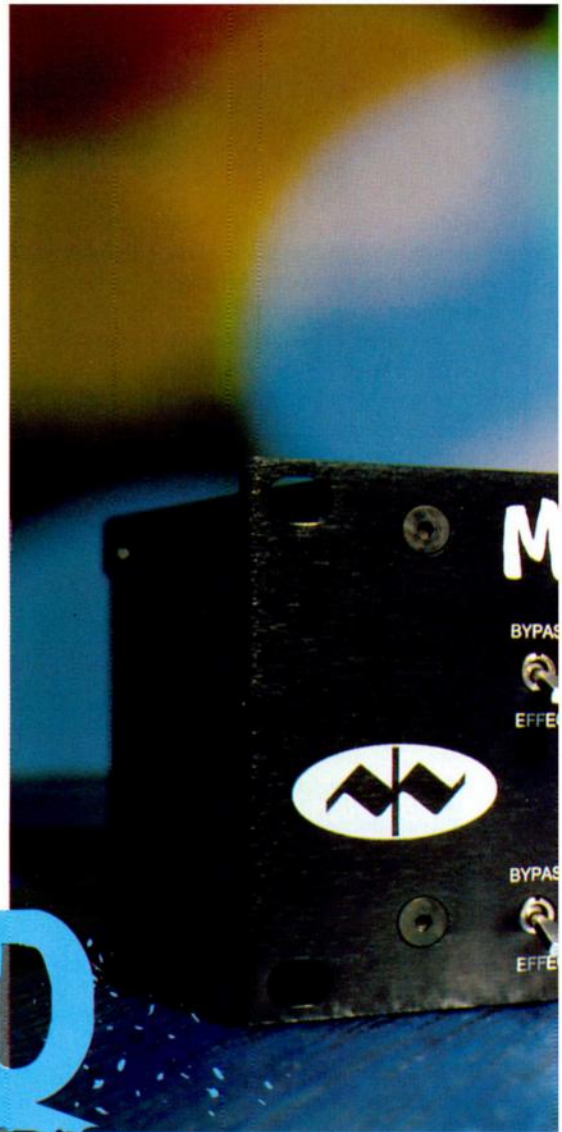
WRH

The predictability of modern digital sound sources, while convenient, may have you longing for some of the chaotic complexity of analogue. PAUL NAGLE looks at an analogue filter which could put the surprise value back into your music.

With the thirst for analogue warmth in a cold digital age seemingly unquenchable, the number of devices aimed at the retro market shows no sign of slowing. While some companies are busy packaging old sounds in new boxes, others are concentrating on devices through which you can force your squeaky-clean sounds, to have them emerge suitably endowed with retro-credibility. New boys to this market are Mutronics, and their first offspring, the Mutator, aims to bring the warmth of the analogue filter to our warm analogue ears.

CONTROL FREAK

The Mutator is basically a pair of 24dB-per-octave analogue filters with envelope follower capabilities. This latter point means that the input volume level of a sound can determine the cutoff frequency of the filter — in other words, the filter 'follows' the 'envelope' of the input signal. An external audio source can also be used as the control signal, allowing the Mutator to superimpose the envelope of one sound onto the filter contour of another — in much the same way as an external key input on a compressor might enable one sound to control the compression characteristics of another.

aLtereD

MUTRONICS MUTATOR STEREO ANALOGUE FILTER

States

Since the Mutator is a two-channel device, the controls for each channel are largely duplicated, although there are some important differences that I'll point out as we pass along. Over on the far left of the front panel is the Bypass/Effect switch, enabling quick and convenient wet/dry comparisons. How often this simple control is forgotten by manufacturers who should know better! Next up is the Internal/External control source switch, which determines whether the treated signal or an external audio feed will be used as the control source to drive the envelope follower. The Gate/Envelope switch tells the Mutator how its envelope will react to the control source. In 'Gate' mode, the control source becomes a trigger, turning the envelope follower fully on as soon as the signal reaches the threshold set by the Sensitivity knob, and fully off again as soon as the signal falls back below the threshold. In 'Envelope' mode, the control source is continuously tracked by the envelope follower, to provide a variable control voltage for the VCF (Voltage Controlled Filter) and VCA (Voltage Controlled Amplifier), with the Sensitivity knob taking on the task of controlling the envelope drive level.

The envelope controls themselves are quite basic for anyone used to the multi-stage variants found in most of today's digital synthesizers, providing adjustment of attack and release times only. This is probably the weakest area of the Mutator's spec. It would be nice to have a full implementation of an ADSR envelope, which would give a much more interesting opportunity to provide filter modulation over an otherwise static signal. One way around this is to use an external control source to provide the envelope follower with the ADSR characteristics required — when used with a synth this could be achieved by programming a second sound to play in unison with the first, and feed this from a separate output into the Mutator's External input. Usefully, the envelope follower is equipped with an LED level indicator that shows the current output

level. This LED makes setting drive and threshold levels relatively simple.

The onboard LFO (Low Frequency Oscillator) is capable of running from approximately 0.1Hz (one cycle every 10 seconds) to 100Hz (100 cycles per second). This is a good, healthy range, allowing subtle changes in timbre over time, or clangorous, pseudo-ring modulation effects. Four waveforms are available for the LFO, these being the familiar triangle, square, ramp and inverted ramp. A single LFO depth control is provided, doing duty for both the VCF and VCA. A 3-way switch determines whether the LFO will modulate VCF only, VCA only, or both. In keeping with the Mutator's suitability for stereo signal processing, Channel 2 will happily make use of Channel 1's LFO. The LFO waveform sent from Channel 1 may be inverted, for dramatic stereo auto-panning or filter frequency-dependent sweep effects.

The voltage from the envelope follower arrives at the VCF via an Envelope Sweep control knob. This knob is capable of generating both negative (turn to the left) and positive (turn to the right) control voltages to govern the filter's cutoff frequency — it's good to see the possibility for negative envelope sweeps. Apart from the more obvious uses, such as those delightful squelchy synth 'twangs', the Mutator can also perform frequency 'ducking' — perhaps to drop the high frequencies from a heavy guitar backing during vocal passages, for instance?

VCF cutoff and resonance both have their own dedicated controls. With resonance turned way up, the filter can be driven into good old fashioned self-oscillation. A switch on the far right toggles the VCA in and out of circuit.

THOROUGHLY MODERN MIDI

The review machine came equipped with the optional MIDI board. This option allows the Mutator to respond to various MIDI message types. At its most basic, the MIDI board might be put to work triggering the Mutator's envelopes from MIDI Note On commands. The filter cutoff tracks the incoming MIDI note number and may also be swept across its entire range by use of pitch-bend commands. Resonance is controlled from a modulation wheel. The Mutator's response to MIDI controller numbers is hard-wired at the factory, so if you don't like a particular controller assignment you'll have to use some form of external MIDI processor to do some re-mapping. I found the assignment of mod wheel to resonance the most problematic, since it precluded the use of mod wheel vibrato. I got around this by programming my MIDI patchbay to filter out mod wheel messages to the Mutator. The VCA level will respond to standard MIDI controller 7 volume messages, but an option to apply key velocity to VCF cutoff and VCA level would have been welcome.

MIDI channels are selected with a rotary switch on the rear of the machine, which is a tad ▶

Mutronics Mutator

inconvenient! While Channel 1 responds on the chosen MIDI channel, Channel 2 makes use of this channel + 1 (or channel 1, if the selector is set to 16). Unfortunately, there is no way to allow both of the Mutator's audio channels to share the same MIDI channel. Also on the rear panel (although I am assured by Mutronics that they will make it to the front in production models!) are two switches responsible for toggling the Mutator's use of MIDI Note On/Off commands.

We've already visited 'Gate' mode, which merely triggers the envelopes. When the Mutator is in 'Envelope' mode, MIDI Note On commands can be used to reset the LFO back to the beginning of its waveform cycle. This voltage will be held until a MIDI Note Off command is received, at which point the LFO will continue to produce its normal waveform. This simple feature is an extremely inspiring tool for creating all kinds of subtle — or not so subtle — rhythmic variations. You could use this facility to keep a repeating synth pulse in time, or just make random stabs to add a little anarchy to the proceedings.

SOCKET TO ME

Each of the Mutator's audio channels has four associated sockets on the rear. The audio in and out are pretty much self-explanatory. The external input is where a second audio source is plugged in to act as a modulation source. The final socket is a simple CV (Control Voltage) input, which will allow modulation of the filter cutoff, perhaps from a modular synth system or a MIDI/CV converter. The audio in, external in and CV in of channel 1 are normalised to channel 2, which helps with setting up for stereo operation (ie. 1-in, 2-out). Power is supplied to the Mutator via a standard Euro-plug connector with easily accessible fuse — none of those nasty wall-warts or line-lumps here, thank you very much.

The basic Mutator's rear panel (although the MIDI version was tested for this review). This version also sports the inconveniently-sited rear panel MIDI channel selector.

WELCOME TO THE HOUSE OF FUN!

With my mouth watering like a vampire in a blood bank, I plugged in, looped a couple of favourite sequences and began to play around with the filter controls. The Mutator began to burble and squeak in a most appealingly analogue manner. I found the envelope follower extremely responsive and was able to achieve excellent results with a variety of recorded sources, such as bass or rhythm guitar tracks, synth pads and backing vocals. By triggering the VCF and VCA from a drum track and feeding the bass guitar track through the Mutator, I was able to generate a whole new bass part! With more subtle settings, I found that I could add rhythmic emphasis to synth pads without making the effect too obvious, the drum hits just lifting out the higher frequencies in the sound. The LFO retrigger option had simple bass lines squawking and zipping across the speakers like a demented parrot! Even pedestrian sustained chord parts took on a whole new meaning with a little stereo LFO filter sweep and some externally triggered stabs. At a pinch, the Mutator also does a reasonable job as a pair of single-ended noise reduction devices or as basic noise gates, although the results are not as refined or controllable as one would expect from a dedicated processor.

The next job was to plug in my trusty MiniMoog and see just how good the Mutator's filter really is. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the answer is "pretty damned good, actually!" I had to check that I'd opened up the Moog's own filter because it was occasionally difficult to tell the difference — now that *is* a good filter! The more I attempted to overdrive the Mutator, the warmer it sounded. A sampled sawtooth waveform from an Akai S1100 sampler emerged from the Mutator with an altogether different character, thicker and much more worthy of attention in a busy mix. This is without doubt the best-*sounding* retro filter I have come across. Hear it and weep. In fact, the only real drawback is that lack of a full ADSR envelope, which would really be the icing on the cake. I seemed to spend far too long setting up separate feeds from my sampler to provide envelope templates, when a simple twist of a control would have been much less traumatic. The Mutator's inability to have both channels trigger from the same MIDI note message made setting up for auto-panning a bit awkward too — a 'MIDI link' feature would certainly be on my wish list for future developments.

PRODUCING THE GOODS

As a production tool, the Mutator is pretty much in a field of one. I can think of no other device that would achieve quite the same results — and certainly none that would be as quick to operate. Into one side goes a relatively mild-mannered musical part and out the other climbs a party animal with a 12-pack and an attitude! When in use as a synth retro-filter, the Mutator is a little clumsy due to its limited envelope, its basic and inflexible MIDI specification and the lack of any programmable memories. For those who are prepared to put in the effort, the results are the best that I have heard from the new breed of analogue filters, but the Mutator is arguably more at home in a production environment than hanging off the back of a sampler.

This machine has its little idiosyncrasies, but then so do all the best things in life. I have a strong suspicion that the Mutator will carve out a niche for itself and will invoke the kind of fanatical devotion reserved for similar niche products — the Roland Dimension D and dbx Boom Box immediately spring to mind. This device scores highly as a production tool, and should certainly be checked out by remixers everywhere. In the right hands, it is a highly creative device that could just give your productions that elusive edge. **SOS**

1235, and features walls almost four feet thick.

In the spacious former hayloft, above what once were the stables, we settle in Shaw's recording studio with some tea. A Crystal 16:4:2 desk, two Alesis ADATs, a Roland W30 and SH101, Korg DW8000 and 01R/W contrast quaintly with the age-old woodwork, as well as a collection of wooden flutes, and a little altar featuring rattles, shells, bird bones and all sorts of other natural artefacts. Shaw himself is an easygoing, affable person, who speaks with quiet confidence and appears to have a relaxed live-and-let-live attitude.

Occasionally, however, another side of his character shows — a determination which surely must have helped him get to where he is now. He's particularly outspoken about the dream of so many musicians — to be signed by a record company. "The biggest trap in the world," he fumes. "It's

At home with...

Nigel Shaw

Nigel Shaw isn't signed to a record company, yet sales from the multiple albums he's produced in his home studio enable him to make a good living from his talents. PAUL TiNGEN talks to him about the business of independent music.

In a stunningly beautiful, 13th century Grade 2 listed building right in the middle of Dartmoor lives a musician who has resisted the traditional record company route to making money from music, and shown a new way forward for like-minded others. Impressively, he appears to have it all: still only 34 years old, he makes a comfortable living from selling and performing his own music, lives in idyllic surroundings with his wife-cum-musical partner, plus two children, and enjoys the benefits of a modest home recording studio. No record or publishing company is involved — no distributors, no middle men, no managers. Everything is done by the couple in-house: his many solo albums and collaborations, and her albums and prints, are sold either by mail order, or via 'new age' shops, and in some cases via regular record shops. The dubious machinations of the music industry are nowhere in sight. As a result Nigel Shaw and partner Carolyn Hillyer retain complete control over their music, their careers, and their lives.

PHILOSOPHY

So how does he do it? And what, exactly, does he do? On a grey and misty day earlier this year, I made the long trek from London to Dartmoor to find out. I marvelled at the remote and pastoral location of Shaw's home, a beautiful Devonshire longhouse, the central part of which was built in

fatal, especially when you're young and just starting out. Looking for a company or person to rescue you eats up lots of time and energy that could be spent producing brilliant pieces of work. And I've met very few signed people who've had a really good time with record companies. For almost everyone it's a compromise, and it's the element of compromise that I find distasteful. How can you compromise with your own creativity? Musicians should empower themselves and do their own thing, and stop other people feeding off what they do. If *I* can get my stuff out and support myself financially from my music, everyone can do it. It's like the early punk attitude: anyone can do anything, regardless of what talent they have. It's not about having a specific skill or technique, it's just about belief: do you believe in yourself enough so that you know you can do it?"

For some, this may already be a challenging question too close for comfort. Yet Shaw isn't finished with his sermon: "There's a key issue at stake here. It's not even a matter of whether musicians are capable of doing it or whether they believe in themselves enough, it's often a matter of whether they're willing to do it. Many musicians think it's beneath them to sell their own stuff, that it somehow degrades what they're doing. To me, that's totally weird. How can it possibly be degrading to take your own stuff out to people? In fact, you're actually the best person to stand behind your work. To me, the act of selling your music is no different than producing the music in the first place. You're in a different place when you're doing it, but the energy is the ▶

MUSIC LAB

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Roland TR707 Drum Machine	E/H	£350	H/W MX8 DJ Mixer	E/D	£100	Fostex D5 DAT	E/D	£749
Roland TR727 Drum Machine	E/H	£300	Fender Bassman 59 Combo	New	£325	Alesis Monitor 2	E/D	£575
Roland TR505 Drum Machine	E/H	£200	Yamaha QY8 Sequencer	New	£180	KRK 6000 Monitors	E/D	£550
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Sennheiser Radio Mic (hand held)	E/H	£400	Roland GI10 + MIDI Pickup	New	£425	Alesis RA100 Amp	E/D	£250
Urei 964 Digital Mteronome	E/H	XXX	Samson Servo 240 Amp	E/D	£225	EMU ESI32 SCSI Sampler	E/D	£1000
EMU Performance 1+	E/D	£150	Samson Servo 150 Amp	E/D	£150	Sony SVO9620 Pro SVHS	E/D	£2200
Mackie 1202 Mixer	E/D	£230	Samson E62 2x31 Band EQ	New	£230	Tascam M2600 16/8 Mixer	E/D	£1700
Acoustic Energy AE1 Monitors	E/H	£400	Samson E30 1x30 Band EQ	New	£230	Cubase Windows	E/D	£150
Sennheiser MKH20 Omni Condenser	E/H	£600	Roland MS1 Sampler	New	£290	MOTU Freestyle	New	£150
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Mackie CR1604 Mixer	E/H	£550	Deep Bass 9 Module	New	£340	Ensoniq DP4 4ch FX	E/D	£900
Tannoy PBM5 Monitors	E/D	£190	GEM Powercase 16 Powered mixer	New	£900	Yamaha REV7 FX	E/H	£600
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E / H = Ex Hire - E / D = Ex Demonstration - S / H = Second Hand - New = New

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At home with...
Nigel Shaw

The Seventh Wave studio gear, from left to right: (on stands) the Korg DW8000 and Roland W30; (in flight case) Alesis Quadraverb multi-effects, Korg O1R/W synth, JBL monitors, Alesis Microverb II (concealed behind Beyer MC834 mic), Yamaha GC2020 compressor, XRI Systems synchroniser, Ibanez SDR1000 delay, 3G Crystal mixer, Sennheiser HD480 headphones (hanging from beam), Denon tape deck, Sony DTC690 DAT. The Alesis ADAT and ADAT XT are out of sight.

SONGS OF THE FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

CAROLYN HILLYER
NIGEL SHAW

▶ same: you're putting out something of yourself. And it teaches you about personal responsibility. I think that taking more personal responsibility is the way the whole planet is going, and wouldn't it be amazing if everybody was responsible for their own creativity?"

TURNING POINT

Well, yes. But there will be many unconvinced sceptics asking how on earth Nigel Shaw from Dartmoor has actually managed to sell many tens of thousands of his CDs and cassettes, and has come to enjoy a healthy turnover of £50,000 during 1995. Given that there are few groups or artists who have so far managed to succeed where Shaw has (one extremely notable exception being the unsigned band Show Of Hands, who recently sold out the Royal Albert Hall purely on the strength of their mailing list), he must surely have a sneaky secret, some hidden advantage: a rich dad, a certain contact in a certain place? Well, no. Delving deeper into Shaw's story, it appears that if he did have an unfair advantage, it was of a very mundane kind. His unassuming, instantly likeable personality — people quickly feel at ease around him — is surely of great help when he's representing his music. And the fact that he's always seen himself as a bit of a non-musician, with no ambitions for fame or stardom, surely takes away a lot of ego and fear-of-failure pressure. But to this writer, the defining factor appears to be something that everyone can adopt: Shaw's eminently down-to-earth attitude. He has a vision, but he's allowed it to unfold slowly and organically, careful not to get ahead of himself. Instead, he took a small step forward every time, and then made sure that all parts of him and his business had time to catch up. As the Zen masters say: regard the journey as more important than the arriving.

Shaw's journey began when he started playing keyboards at the age of 19, in 1981, while studying Applied Biology in London. He spent his entire grant on a Roland Juno 6: "I figured that with a synth you can get some wonderful sounds just playing with one finger". An SH101, Fender Rhodes, and other keyboards followed. Though Shaw already realised that his future somehow lay with these machines, he nevertheless completed his degree, and also acquired a diploma in Pharmacology.

Finally released from the last remaining pressures of 'common sense' (get a degree, then a day job) in 1984, he made the "very conscious" decision to become a musician, and instantly went on the dole. He started recording on a Fostex X15 cassette 4-track, went on the Enterprise Allowance Scheme in 1985 as a composer, and produced his first "very basic" album, *Spirit Of The Elements*. He took it round to a few new age shops, some of whom bought it. An "amazing turning point" was some improvised performances he did at the Festival for Mind, Body and Spirit in London in 1985: "I sat up all night after I sold all my 10 copies of the album after the first performance, copying more tapes and drawing more covers. I thought: 'hey, something's happening here'." A second album followed, and Shaw gradually expanded his studio to 8-track. To support himself, he initially worked in a music shop, and later rented out his home studio. Meanwhile, he still felt like a stranger in a strange land: a chops-challenged non-musician and non-engineer entering an undiscovered country and learning about it as he went along.

FEEDBACK

"It was an organic process, each time doing a little bit more with my music, expanding a little bit more. I learnt gradually to deal with the business side as well. Apart from one point, when I couldn't see the next step, couldn't see how I could make it bigger, it never occurred to me to take the music to ▶

SHAW'S SEVENTH WAVE STUDIO

SYNTHS/SAMPLING
- Korg DW8000 synth
- Korg 01R/W module
- Roland S50 sampler
- Roland SH101 analogue monosynth
- Roland W30 sampling keyboard

RECORDING
- 3G Crystal 16:4:2:1 mixer
- Alesis ADAT and ADAT XT digital recorders
- Alesis Microverb II reverb
- Alesis Quadraverb effects
- Beyer MC834 mic
- dbx compressor/limiter
- Denon cassette deck
- Ibanez SDR1000 digital delay
- JBL monitors
- Sony DTC690 DAT recorder
- Sennheiser 421 overhead mics
- Sennheiser 541 mics
- Sennheiser HD480 headphones
- XRI Systems synchroniser
- Yamaha GC2020 compressor/limiter

At home with...
Nigel Shaw

▶ someone else to sell it for me. As I said before, to me the business is inseparable from the music: doing my accounts is as much a part of the process as recording a new album. One may be more enjoyable than the other, but it's about a process of growth, where you learn to handle all those things. By 1989, I was selling one or two thousand copies of four album titles, and was just starting to make a living, selling my tapes at new age festivals and via new age shops. The advantage of doing it all myself was that I had a much higher return on every cassette copy I sold, as much as £7. Had I been with a record company, I would only have made a fraction of that per copy."

Shaw was by now playing at every new age fair or festival around the country, and his contacts with new age shops were growing rapidly, helped by the fact that he had several album titles, "so they could order a selection and make the postage and investment in my name worthwhile." Personal contacts with audiences at the festivals or feedback from the shops also helped: "You really get a sense of how music affects people's lives, you see it working. It's amazing." In 1991 Shaw produced his first CD, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, a project for which he borrowed £2,000 from the bank. Two largely improvised ambient CDs followed: *The River*, which used a background of nature sounds recorded in Dartmoor, and which has become Shaw's best-selling work to date, with over 15,000 cassettes and 6,000 CDs sold; and *The Seventh Wave*, featuring a backdrop of ocean sounds, which sold about half that amount. *The River* was his first album recorded in Dartmoor, where he moved in early 1992.

"I've met very few signed people who've had a really good time with record companies. For almost everyone, it's a compromise."

It was around this time that two other events took place that were of pivotal importance: he met Carolyn Hillyer, a painter who wrote songs to accompany her paintings, and he began playing the flute, an instrument that soon became of central importance to his music. Shaw and Hillyer became both personally and musically involved, and "things took off. There was now this joint vision; two sets of energies going out in the same direction." The two combined forces under the umbrella of Shaw's Seventh Wave Music, the name tag that he had used for his ventures since 1987. Today Seventh Wave Music produces a beautifully laid-out mail order brochure that features six of Shaw's eight solo albums to date, three of Hillyer's albums — *House of Weavers* (1992), *Heron Valley* (1993) and *Grandmother Turtle* (1994) — and a series of her cards and prints. There are also several collaborations with other musicians, amongst them two albums by the band Global — *Willywoman* (1994) and *Shamanka* (1995) — both featuring wild "ambient trance-dance music". And this May two collaborations between the couple were added: *Songs From The Forgotten People* and *Echoes of the Ancient Forest*.

INSPIRATION

So what, then, of the music with which Shaw has achieved such remarkable success? Given that he has spent the last 10 years selling most of his music to new age audiences, one would be forgiven for assuming that his music falls firmly into that category. Shaw himself begs to differ, stressing that he does "ambient music. New age doesn't mean anything to me." New age music has acquired quite a bad name for itself, courtesy of a flood of tedious, repetitive, unimaginative albums that appeared to be an excuse for the creatively-challenged to make a quick buck. And a market for purely functional, impersonal new age music — like 'music for meditation', or 'music for massage' has also done little to earn the genre artistic respect. Shaw's music is a world away from the latter type: it's personalised music with a theme and a message — and, apart from the two ambient CDs, *The River* and *The Seventh Wave*, it demands attention. Yet it has many of the characteristics we commonly associate with the new age tag: slow-moving, synth-string washes, nature noises, lots of space in the sparse arrangements, much rhythmless hanging on one chord, and so on. It is generally very slow, calming music, and it is easy to see why it would appeal to a new age market.

At the same time, there's a haunting, melodic quality to Shaw's music, and this, combined with the extensive usage of American Indian flutes on later albums, and other acoustic sounds, whether sampled or 'real', gives his music a timeless, other-wordly quality, rather than a synthetic feel, and is thus far removed from new age clichés. Hillyer's albums, filled with intense, shamanistic-ritualistic songs, and the up-tempo dance rhythms of their band Global, also bear little resemblance to new age's stock-in-trade. Shaw agrees, though, that most of his music is undramatic and slow-moving, and explains: "It definitely is a reflection of my temperament. I love slowly-changing textures, and I love strings and polyphony. Classical music, for that reason, has always been a big influence on me, especially composers like Mahler, Fauré or Vaughan-Williams, who also have that brooding, slow-moving quality in their music. I don't like ▶

▶ that Mozartian thing: here's a theme in your face and let's play it at 90 miles an hour and repeat it over and over again. And other than in the dance music, for which I use the W30 sequencer, I don't sequence my music. Horrible, rigid, sequenced predictability is one of new age music's greatest failings."

Shaw stresses that it is the quest to create a "sense of beauty" in his music that drives him, and adds that his biggest inspiration is Dartmoor: "That's a direct resource that I use in my music; to get that feeling of space and emptiness, to capture the energy of the land. We don't make folk music, but there's an ancientness of feeling to our music that is intentional and linked to Dartmoor."

This 'ancientness of feeling' has been particularly enhanced in recent years through the use of the aforementioned American Indian flute, especially on albums like *Seven Stones* (1993) and *The Lone Tree* (1994). Flutes, like synth strings, have played an important part in Shaw's music for many years. In the past they were samples, initially played on an S50, and later on his Roland W30. His Korg 01R/W, he says, "has the best string sound I've ever heard. It's not a brilliant machine — a lot of sounds are based around the effects that are in it — but the string sounds have a very rich quality to them, and the touch response is fantastic: the string sounds are beautifully playable."

ATTITUDE

Holding one of his American Indian flutes in his hand, Shaw dryly observes that "this technology has lasted longer than the music technology that is around at the moment. But brilliant results come from the combination of ancient things and electric stuff. There's something that really works about that." The only other keyboards Shaw owns are a Roland SH101 and a Korg DW8000. Combined with his 3G Crystal desk (a PA desk that he has slightly modified, and praises for its superior EQ and transparent sound

"If I can get my stuff out and support myself financially from my music, everyone can do it."

quality), two ADAT machines ("dead easy to use, and brilliant for recording flutes") and some minimal outboard gear, Shaw's studio is positively spartan. He explains that equipment, for him, is just "work tools to get a result, I don't get attached to any particular box. I don't need anything more.

You can always feel that you need a new piece of gear, but it quickly makes you a victim, rather than a user, of technology when every time the next thing rolls off the production line, or is reviewed in *SOS*, you think: 'I really need to buy this.' You're forever learning about new equipment, rather than actually making music. It's for a similar reason that I don't use a computer sequencer: you can get so easily lost in the technical side of it, and get distracted from making music."

Towards the end of our conversation, we return to the subject of Shaw's DIY approach to selling his music, and talk about the nuts and bolts of his business — like how he never makes sale-or-return agreements with shops, "because it is a nightmare. Shops often don't keep records of what they sell, and the extra admin just takes time and energy. When I ring a new age shop, or an independent record shop, I make sure I make personal contact with someone, send him or her some material and agree to ring them back a couple of weeks later. If they like it, I suggest that they order five or something, with a 30-day invoice. I only charge £3.50 per cassette and £5.50 per CD, so that's not a big risk for them. My prices are very cheap — distributors sell CDs to shops for £7.50. If my production costs were higher, I would charge more too, but one of the main things that makes this whole DIY venture possible is the low production costs of CDs and cassettes. You can have 500 CDs made for £1000. If you sell them at concerts for £10 each, you only need to sell 100 to break even."

Shaw stresses the importance of having more than one album, and of taking things step by step. "The mistake would be to press up 1000 CDs, 500 cassettes, and then contact the shops. You should initially just have a few, and talk to people, make friends with them — there are many really nice people working in shops. It's a long, slow process, but it works." Shaw warns that the American market is virtually a no-go area, because new age shops won't buy other than from official distributors, no matter how much they like an album.

Finally, he denies that he's been successful purely because he has found a hole in a niche market: "I've carried on with exactly the same attitude with which I approach new age shops when I deal with record shops, and/or sell my dance music. Of course, you can forget about Our Price, but there are many independent record shops, including HMV and Andy's, with buyers who are always keen on new and adventurous material. They often can't stand the stuff that is dumped on them by record companies. It's your attitude that is the most important thing. Becoming independent and self-sufficient as a musician is a path, a spiritual path, that involves not just music and business, but your whole personality. I don't tend to define things in terms of spirituality particularly, but to me it's totally that." **SOS**

The five available reverb blocks are exactly the same as in the basic PCM80: Concert Hall, Plate, Chamber, Inverse and Infinite. The first of the new effects blocks is Glide, comprising a stereo pair of 2-tap gliding delays routed into four adjustable delay 'voices', each of which has its own feedback and pan parameters. The maximum delay time using a PCM80 with fully expanded RAM is a massive 42 seconds, and the pitch-changing character of the gliding delays makes it possible to create dynamic flanging-type effects or dramatic pitch-shifting treatments, many of which defy simple description.

The Chorus block might seem mundane from its name, but this one sounds wonderful, and sports four separately adjustable voices, making it sound like four chorus units working at the same time. The chorus effect is crystal-clear, with none of the noise or mushiness that afflicts many cheaper units.

Next up is M-Band, another 4-voice delay effect, but this time incorporating high- and

It's not often that plug-in cards merit the same attention as the equipment they plug into, but these add-ons are capable of transforming Lexicon's PCM80 effects processor into a completely different beast, as PAUL WHITE discovers.

PLUG-IN POWER!

LEXICON PCM80 PLUG-IN EXPANSION CARDS

L exicon's PCM80 multi-effects unit is not yet two years old — we reviewed it back in *SOS* December '94 — but it has already made its name as a worthy '90s successor to Lexicon's classic PCM70. In its basic form, the PCM80 includes some fairly serious reverb algorithms, and although the number of simultaneous effects may seem limited on paper, the aural experience is never disappointing — and frequently stunning. If you own a PCM80, you can now expand its capabilites considerably, courtesy of the three new plug-in cards under review here, two of which (the Dual FX and Pitch cards) offer new processing algorithms and presets, while the third just offers new presets.

DUAL FX ALGORITHM CARD

The Dual FX algorithm card (the blue card on the right of the main picture) extends the PCM80's flexibility by offering 25 brand-new effect algorithms, which combine five completely new effects blocks with the five original reverb types. The algorithms must be loaded from the read-only card whenever the machine is used — the easiest way to work is simply to switch on the machine with the card plugged in. Alternatively, you can plug the card in with the PCM80 already running, and instigate load proceedings. Once loaded, the card can be removed from the machine and the algorithms will remain available until the machine is next switched off, which means that a studio running more than one PCM80 could load them all up from a single card at the start of each day. Using the card doesn't increase the number of user presets, but it does provide five new banks of presets prefixed X.

low-cut filters, enabling it to create repeat echoes that change in timbre as they decay. Though this isn't a new idea, it sounds exactly right, and you can get very close to setting up tape-echo sounds or echoes that appear to fade into the far distance.

Resonant Chord Res 1 and Res 2 are derived from the classic PCM70 and PCM80 resonant effects, where precisely controlled short delays are combined with large amounts of feedback to create resonators that 'ring' at a specific musical pitch. Percussive sounds produce metallic, tuned percussion effects, whereas harmonically rich pad sounds can become quite eerie. It is possible to control the resonator pitches via MIDI, allowing percussive sounds to be processed via chordal filtering, and there are two different systems for pitch allocation, which create two distinctive effects. Res 1 assigns pitches to the four resonators chromatically — the resonators retain the pitch of the last four MIDI notes played. The result is a sustain-like effect, as the resonators stay in their current state until a new note is played. Res 2 allocates the pitches diatonically harmonised with the scale, key and root note entered by the user. This allows a MIDI-controlled sound to be processed in a way that creates a resonator harmony. Both versions include conventional delay, which can be up to 38 seconds for a fully-expanded PCM80.

These five effects blocks are combined in all possible combinations with the five reverb types, hence the total of 25 different algorithms. The best way to describe the result is to pick out some of the more memorable preset types. As you'd expect, the chorus, modulation and delay effects are very clean, but what amazes me is just how ▶

▶ much effect you can pile onto a sound without smothering it. There are rotary speaker simulations, lots of nice variations on standard treatments, and some wonderful emulations of tape flanging and tape ADT. As the basic PCM80 has a lot of nice reverbs built in, the card tends towards the less obvious, and there are many acoustic spaces well suited to post-production work as well as to music. For example, there's a fabulous underpass/subway tunnel just crying out for a busking solo sax, and there are some frighteningly realistic rooms, which include simulations of combined close and distant miking. You also get a car park, various chambers and a symphonic string hall, which combines phasing with reverb in a very creative way.

There are numerous drum reverbs which make use of filtering combined with reverberation, a few really good plate simulations with tape pre-delay, and various bouncing echoes. To me, the simulation of space is the most impressive factor — there are patches that create an absolutely convincing sense of distance. With some, you can even move the sound source away from you in real time! You get TV sound, telephone sound, ducking delays, composite modulation effects and a useful range of dual effects, which allow the unit to produce two quite different mono or stereo effects fed from two different aux sends. In all cases, the extensive real-time parameter control of the PCM80 can be exploited to create patches which either respond to the sound being processed or changes sent over MIDI.

For anyone who already has a PCM80, or who is thinking of buying one, the modest cost of this card is a small price to pay when you consider the number of brand-new, truly useful effects to which it gives you access. Not buying this card verges on the tragic!

PITCH FX CARD

As it stands, the PCM80 has no conventional pitch-shifting capability, but the Pitch card (not shown in the picture, but identical to the others in all but colour — it's mauve) changes all that, providing access to five very advanced pitch manipulation algorithms. What's most impressive is the amount of shift that can be used before the side effects of the process become significant — there's a bare minimum of that irritating modulation that makes lesser units sound permanently 'out of tune'.

First off the card is the 'Quad Hall' algorithm, which combines Hall reverb with a powerful 4-voice pitch-shifter. Delay times of up to 1.25 seconds per voice may be included, and each voice has variable feedback. For more shifting flexibility, the 'Dual-Chmb' algorithm brings together the chamber reverb and a dual shifter with a vast +/- 3-octave range and a precision of 1 cent. Again up to 1.25 seconds of delay may be added per voice.

As an alternative, there's 'Dual-Plt', which substitutes a plate reverb, or 'Dual-Inv', which uses a reverse reverb algorithm. The 'Stereo-

Chmb' option is optimised for processing stereo material, and again, the range is +/- 3 octaves. Finally, 'VS-Chmb' provides on-the-fly, high-quality pitch-shifting for real-time pitch correction or varispeed compensation. The range is limited to +55% down to -35.48%, with a resolution of 0.01%. MIDI control over shift is applied to some programs, and each effects block incorporates a sophisticated submixer which lets you decide how

Lexicon's remarkable PCM80.

to combine the reverb and effects blocks. Facilities include stereo width, output level and filtering, as well as dry/effect balance.

The card comes with 100 factory presets organised into two banks, and within the banks, the effects are arranged into logical groups. For example, Bank X0 starts out with vocal and vocal harmony patches, before moving into guitar and instrument territory. Bank X1 strays further into *X Files* territory, but includes some fantastic pads and drones, pitch sequences and combination effects, as well as a set of 'clean slate' algorithms for the creation of new patches. All the patches are impressive, but some are simply stunning. I was particularly impressed by the clarity of some of the vocal thickening treatments, while other patches created spatial effects as powerful as anything I've heard from dedicated 3D sound systems. In all, you get a wide selection of presets ranging from patches that let you hand-tune a dodgy vocal line to completely outrageous sci-fi effects that challenge one's powers of description, and though the pitch-shifting starts to show up side effects when you dial in huge shifts, you can move a vocal a few semitones either way without it warbling unduly. However, there is no attempt at formant correction, so the 'chipmunk on helium/Darth Vader with bronchitis' effect still rears its head if the degree of shift is excessive.

Again, this is a must-have card for anyone into anything vaguely ambient; it's also great for everyday vocal thickening and fixing. If you have a PCM80, you just have to have it. **SOS**

SCOTT MARTIN GERSHIN CARD

Scott Martin Gershin of Soundelux Media Labs is a sound designer for film and TV, and he's put two banks of his own presets onto a card (the green one shown in the picture at the start of this review). All his presets make use of existing algorithms, so they can be used with a standard PCM80, and the majority of the presets are aimed at audio post-production. For example, there's a whole section on telephones, answering machines, TV and live PA simulations, rooms, and even patches for enhancing explosions! The next section of this bank moves the weirdness quotient up a notch, giving us effects suitable for flashback sequences, computer voices, so-called 'fantasy' sounds and sci-fi treatments, before getting back to earth with static, a car boom box, and a neat DJ effect where the resonators skip a perfect fifth every measure.

The second bank kicks off with patches such as 'Dreamscape', 'CyberFdbak' and 'Cybermare' before launching into a raft of rotating pans, multi-tap treatments and surround effects. Again, life returns to near normal towards the end of the bank, where there are simulations of auditoria, various rooms, and a very practical set of reverb patches optimised for various instruments or room characters.

Considering that Scott Martin Gershin was involved in the soundtrack for Disney's *Pocahontas*, most of these presets are anything but cute and cuddly. What you get is a concise sound designer's toolkit that meets the needs of the video post operator, but also has enough musical effects to make it worth adding to the studio repertoire. There's a generous helping of weirdness without making the overall collection too gimmicky, and on the whole, these presets really show off Lexicon's uncanny ability to create the illusion of space and distance.

Sample shop

Our regular look at the hottest new sample CDs and CD-ROMs.

X-STATIC GOLDMINE 3
(AUDIO CD & AKAI-FORMAT CD-ROM)·

The loops that open this collection of 1500 house and techno samples are ex-vinyl, mono, 2-bar and absolutely filthy. However, as we know, grunge can be a positive production element, particularly wnen overlaid with pristine 16-bit samples.

First, a word about the format on the Audio CD reviewed here: the 24 loops on each track from 2-16 are tempo-matched within each track, and tracks are presented in semitone intervals. What does this mean? Any loop can quickly be made to fit tempo-wise with any other simply by using coarse tune on your sampler. A neat trick, and not the first time I've seen it in a *Goldmine* product.

This is meant to be a potted past and present history of house and techno, so some retro (ie. tired old favourite) loops are bound to appear. Trouble is they *keep on* appearing in various guises and tempos — a percussion overlay here, programmed drums there, foreground or background, each source loop gets a multitude of airings. No wonder they found it easy to tempo- and fee¹-match 24 loops per track!

The tempo rises as you continue through the CD, and as the loops get faster, so the fidelity gradually seems to improve (maybe we're just hearing sample playback at a higher tempo), and the patterns become more interesting and more current, though still workhorse rather than thoroughbred. Nice Roland rimwork on track 9, by the way.

Onwards and upwards, the loops get ever more frenetic. By track 13 we're into 'Put the needle on the record' territory. Then come three tracks of 24 jungle loops, each at 150-168 bpm. These are not the fast-but-cool, immaculately-produced patterns recently in vogue, but once again grungy, high-NRG types.

All 48 synthesizer "vintage sequences" and "hooks" on the CD are either at 126 or 141.5bpm, and are key-matched to A or E, like just about all the melodic samples on this CD. I reckon these are originals; they're certainly not lifted off vinyl, anyway — too clean. They're cheeky without being too cheesy, and curiously, they all sound as if they came from two or three compositions. If you were writing sequences specially for a sample CD, wouldn't you want them all to be completely different? I'm beginning to get the idea that much *X-Static Goldmine 3* loop material has been edited and mixed from in-house multitrack recording sessions...

A goodish selection of bass tones leads into a rewarding bright piano chord set. I mapped some of these onto a keyboard and had some fun. Some organ chords follow, then it's onto the big ones — stereo and mono chord pads and hits. The lush stereo is obviously simulated, via a chorus program. (I'd rather sample in mono and apply my own effects.) Still, the sources are very tasty, very chilly, and very classic. In fact the chord tones and hits section covers hundreds of samples, and is by far the richest vein in *Goldmine 3*. Sounds are strong in character, with fidelity pitched about right for the genre. There are warm pads, lush eerie drones, metallic and brassy hits, organ stabs — you name it, it's here. All samples seem to have been tweaked with EQ and compression to maximise impact. (The majority are probably from vinyl anyway, which usually adds a little something in addition to groove noise.) The runs and sustained tones that follow are classics too, including the great muted trumpet.

The special effects are appropriately chosen and edited, being short and rude, rather than

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STAR DOCTOR WHO MONSTERS

THE DALEKS
THE CYBERMEN
THE SILURIANS
THE QUARKS
THE MYRKA

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filmic. Drums, which are chunky rather than clean, are offered as kit sets of 12 mono samples, then tracks containing "favourite 12 kicks" or "24 deep and phat bass drums", for example, complete the CD. The exception is track 99 — "Test Tone 1kHz". For once, I decided to check out the usefulness of this feature: I sampled the tone at 0dB digitally into my S770. The sample sounded and looked absolutely clean. Nonetheless, some samples I'd already taken from the CD showed clipping on transients when taken at unity gain. I had to resort to the digital attenuation option on my sampler (-3dB seemed to fix it in most cases). So much for relying on the test tone to set sampling level!

X-Static Goldmine products never stint on quantity, and this CD is no exception. It contains much well chosen, in-your-face dance material, especially the tones, chords and runs, which you would be well advised not to be without. Where I feel the CD is lacking is with the loops — these seem to have been duplicated many times with various programmed overlays. Some of the engineering is also perhaps a little too rough and ready. Still, loops apart, this is a collection with plenty of attitude which should not disappoint house and techno enthusiasts. Incidentally, this disc is now also available as a CD-ROM, and the whole *X-Static* range on CD-ROM is currently going for £99 per CD-ROM, so it might be worth considering the ROM if you're interested.*Wilf Smarties*

£ **CD £59.95; CD-ROM £99 inc VAT and UK p&p.**

DIGITAL KITCHEN'S MIND CONTROL
AUDIO 3-CD SET

The skulls on these CDs give you some idea of what to expect from this bunch of Euro-weirdos: those seeking the dance sample equivalent of the Hieronymous Bosch painting entitled 'Garden of Earthly Delights' need look no further.

This set of three CDs is devoted entirely to industrial rhythmic grooves and sound effects. The first two discs are based around hard-edged and aggressive grooves. All bpms are dutifully recorded in the sleeve notes, and some of the rhythm sections are usefully long, containing evolving or changing patterns. Extensive use has been made of distortion and resonators to twist the original drum and percussion sounds to the edge of recognition, and the outcome is a surreal metallic landscape of sound. Many of the heavily featured drones sound like the beating of bomber engines, or Darth Vader slicing up Luke Skywalker in a striplight fight, but they're very ▶

sample shop

▶ powerful and fit in perfectly.

Disc three is where you find the sound effects, and again, distortion and filtering are applied by the bucketload. The disc ends with a long selection of individual percussion samples in the same general style as the preceding material. Most of the effects are best suited to industrial dance and soundtrack work, and the majority are about as restful as a trip to the dentist. There's filtered feedback, flanged synth 'thwips', security alarms, mechanoid pulsating drones, flanged circular saws, tortured ring-modulated noises, and a selection of nasty atmospheres which should delight any sci-fi producer. All this adds up to a bleak, dark, other-wordly collection which bears about as much resemblance to your average dance groove CD as the creatures from *Aliens* do to the Andrex puppy. You may love it, you may hate it, but you can't remain indifferent. I feel I have to give it four out of five for its persistent nastiness, which doesn't let up through all three discs. Cyber-hell on a stick!
Paul White

£ Audio 3 CD set £99 inc VAT and UK p&p.

SYNCLAVIER SAMPLER LIBRARY
AKAI-FORMAT CD-ROM

The name of Synclavier is synonymous with serious sampling. Over the years, the company built up an enormous library of samples, some of which have found their way into major film soundtracks and record releases. Now the US sample company ILIO is marketing a five-disc CD-ROM library based on this collection and known as the *Synclavier Sampler Library*.

Available individually, the discs are categorised as *Keys and Guitars*, *Brass and Winds*, *Strings*, and two percussion discs: *Essential Percussion* and *World and Orchestral Percussion*. The samples themselves range from massive piano sets that require a fully stuffed sampler to use, right down to floppy-sized samples of 1Mb or less. The quality of the sounds is, on the whole, consistently good, with some of the solo instruments really shining.

Keys and Guitars provides an eclectic set of pianos, guitars, harpsichords, and even a Chapman stick, alongside a number of analogue synth sounds. The pianos and guitars are nicely sampled and include some useful distorted guitar

sounds, while the synth section is exceptionally well-stocked, if not exactly ground-breakingly original.

Brass and Winds concentrates mainly on orchestral wind, presented in a variety of playing styles. Though ethnic instruments make a token appearance, this section is very short, comprising only pan pipes, whistles, a wooden flute, and a didgeridoo. A huge range of orchestral playing styles is included, making it possible to programme very realistic orchestral arrangements.

Like the wind selection, the *Strings* disc is almost entirely comprised of orchestral samples, including both solo and ensemble instruments. There are some lovely harp arpeggios and numerous excellent solo instruments, including the notoriously difficult to capture violin. However, I felt some of the ensemble string sounds were below par, because of the amount of bow noise, which gave them a noisy, almost 'fluffy' character. While accepting that bow noise is an integral part of natural strings, I have heard much cleaner-sounding string samples that sacrifice nothing in the way of realism. The disc concludes with a few choral examples and string combinations.

Essential Percussion concerns itself with the traditional drum kit, along with a few bass sounds. The majority of the contents are broken down into separate drum types rather than complete kits. The drums are beautifully sampled, with plenty of dynamics, and keyboard mapping to provide access to alternate samples on a number of occasions. This enables you to create your own drum kits using any of the available sounds, though the non-GM mapping (GM mapping would be impossible because of the number of multi-key sample variations) means that you may have a little shuffling around to do in order to get things exactly where you'd like them. For those with less inclination to build their own kits, the disc rounds off with a handful of ready-constructed kits.

The final disc offers *World and Orchestral Percussion*, which is divided into Latin, Shakers and Rattles, South American, Far East, and Miscellaneous, plus Orchestral Percussion. Contents are of a very high standard, especially the vast array of orchestral percussion, but again I felt this was a very 'safe' collection of sounds, with no African or Indian drums.

To summarise, I love the drum samples, and some of the individual orchestral samples are stunning, but the collection isn't totally without flaws. While there are few samples that could be called technically bad (the looping is first-class throughout), there are one or two lacklustre examples, and those seeking world sounds will find only a limited selection here. Where the collection really scores is in its thorough treatment of orchestral sounds and styles. Most of the samples are also surprisingly memory-efficient, which means that you can make more use of the multitimbrality of your sampler when creating orchestral arrangements. *Paul White*

£ All CD-ROMs in series £169 except the two percussion ROMs, which are £129 each. Prices include VAT and UK p&p.

FLAMENCO SOUNDS
AUDIO CD

The title says it all, really. Time & Space have come up with a collection of samples that give you all the building blocks you need to add either a hint of Flamenco to an existing track, or construct your own Spanish-style dance-floor smash.

The main instrument in Flamenco music is, of course, the guitar, and the first 40 of the 99 tracks are given over entirely to the sounds of the nylon acoustic. Strums (complete with wonderful fretboard taps) are presented in a number of tempos and keys. There are also arpeggios, strums, runs, and chord hits, all of which ooze authenticity and feeling, and the intelligent mapping of key signatures and bpms mean that they lend themselves to sampling more easily than you might expect.

The next section takes male Cantaor and female Cantaora vocalists and fills 16 tracks with about 80 sung Spanish phrases. These range from simple phrases like 'Ay Ay Ay' to complex and unusual long melodic phrases that sample like a dream. The quality of the recording is excellent throughout, and gives you lots of room to add your own ambience or other effects, should you want to.

After the solo vocals, there's a small section of group shouts, speech and singing. This is not nearly as inspiring as the solo stuff (the group sound as though they may have had a little too much sangria whilst waiting to record), but they're good fun and useful all the same. The 'Cajon' drumming is, again, utterly traditional and authentic, but a little harder to pin down into any specific category of usefulness — unlike the foot tapping, stamping and castanets which makes up the last three sections of this CD. These worked brilliantly against a number of rhythm tracks I tried, and all are listed with their appropriate bpms.

Time & Space can congratulate themselves on a job well done. This CD brings the feel and spirit of true flamenco music into the realm of sampling. Many would argue that this type of music doesn't lend itself to such a hi-tech approach, but as the demo on track 1 shows, if you have an open mind to fusing these samples with other, more modern music forms, there are a number of exciting possibilities just waiting to be discovered. *Flamenco Sounds* is an unusual addition to the CD rack, but a well-constructed and inspiring addition all the same. *Paul Farrer*

£ Audio CD £59.95 inc VAT and UK p&p.

A All this month's sample CDs are available from: Time & Space, PO Box 306, Berkhamstead, Herts, HP4 3EP.
T 01442 870681.
F 01442 877266.
E sales@timespace.com

'll never forget that fateful evening in May 1979 when I tuned into BBC1's *Top Of The Pops* and witnessed a strange, bleached blond, young man in unusual black attire performing an equally strange song. Tubeway Army's soon-to-be number one hit single 'Are 'Friends' Electric?' was quite unlike anything I'd ever heard before and arguably opened the floodgates for the early '80s wave of synthesizer-based acts to follow. Its sneering creator, Gary Numan, briefly became an icon for a generation of synthesizer fans.

The song in question's chart-topping parent album, *Replicas*, recently made it onto CD for the first time in its own right with fully restored artwork — prompting *Q* magazine to observe, "Songs like 'Me! I Disconnect From You', 'Down In The Park' and the vanguard monster hit 'Are 'Friends' Electric?' not only helped the ungrateful Human

FALLING STAR

In a nutshell, when Gary opted to 'retire' from the rigmarole of touring in 1981 with a series of visually spectacular, yet financially crippling, sell-out shows at London's Wembley Arena, he immediately alienated his substantial overseas following in the process. BBC Radio One subsequently refused to playlist his music from 1983 to the present day, corresponding with his departure from Beggars Banquet to set up his own independent label, Numa Records. To all intents and purposes, Gary's rapid decline from millionaire 'superstar' status began here. However, contrary to popular belief, with a fanatically loyal following and buoyant fan club boasting 3,500 members, Numan is still making records, touring, and rapidly approaching his 20th professional year in the pop industry.

Gary numan

A NEW FLAME

Gary Numan's music epitomises the electro-pop era and undoubtedly helped boost synth sales in the early '80s. With the chart re-entry of his classic hit single 'Cars', Numan is approaching his third decade in pop. JONATHAN MILLER receives a lesson in the art of survival...

League and Depeche Mode into the charts, but also established Numan as a highly-skilled and intuitive pop musician." And deservedly so. In our age of commonplace six-figure production budgets and their attendant lengthy block-booking of state-of-the-art recording studios, it's hard to believe that *Replicas* was recorded on 16-track in just three days flat at Gooseberry Studios, in London's Chinatown, for a total cost of almost £500.

Despite now enjoying a hitherto unknown degree of rock acclaim amongst current chart bands — many of whom have covered his songs on record or stage, including Pulp, Beck, Hole, The Foo Fighters and Shampoo — it was a different story in 1979. Back then, Gary Numan was continually ridiculed by the press for no apparent reason other than being successful. Numan's record sales exceed a healthy 15 million units, whilst 1979's *The Touring Principle* — filmed during his first sell-out UK tour — was the first commercially available full-length music video, pipping Blondie to the post by a matter of weeks. Put simply, Gary was almost alone in seeing the opportunity for a 'star' of synthesizer-based music — a smart move, as evidenced by the string of hits to follow, with over 35 chart singles and more than 20 chart albums to date. By chalking up two number one albums and two number one singles in a three month period of 1979, Numan became the UK's fastest-rising star since The Beatles. So what went wrong?

At his home-based 24-track recording studio, Outland, I finally met Gary — a quiet-spoken, rather shy and reserved 38-year-old, quite unlike his flamboyant and occasionally menacing stage persona. Outland may seem a small studio for an artist of Gary Numan's stature, yet its ergonomic layout and use of natural daylight makes for a pleasant working environment, and perhaps goes some way towards explaining Gary's increased recorded output of late (more of which anon).

Setting up his own record label might be viewed as a way for Gary to attain greater control of his musical destiny, yet this was not the driving force behind the move: "At Beggars Banquet I just felt I was forever being promised things and not getting them. At one point a representative even said, 'We know we're guaranteed to sell 50,000 or 60,000 albums with you in this country and we're happy with that.' It wasn't a case of trying to make it bigger and build on it around the world. So when faced with that situation, you've got to move on, because it kind of indicates your relationship is pretty much finished.

"So that was the reason for setting up Numa — it wasn't so much for control. I thought, 'Hang on, if I'm selling that amount of albums, I'm going to be quids in if I have my own label.' But that soon turned to worms, because I didn't bank on getting no airplay."

STATE OF INDEPENDENCE

Back in 1986 Gary was still based in the infamous Shepperton film studio complex, at Rock City Studios, and in the process of expanding Numa Records as an independent concern with a roster of new artists, casting himself as producer. Unfortunately, things did not quite map out as ▶

Gary numan

Not only is Gary credited with all writing, performance and production duties on *Sacrifice* — the tiresome role of drumming currently being handled by an Akai S1000 sampler/Apple Macintosh Quadra 650 computer/Emagic *Notator Logic* sequencer combination — he's also formed the NuFederation artwork company to create his own record sleeves on the Mac, without the involvement of outside graphic artists. A true one-man-band effort, "*Sacrifice* was the best album I've done for a long time — perhaps the best ever. To write something like that after so many disappointments and setbacks was a great relief to me."

LEARNING CURVE

Company conundrums aside, I asked Gary how developments in the field of music technology had enabled a progression from the appealing quirkiness of *Replicas* to the slick overtones of *Sacrifice* — albeit with a welcome return to his characteristically 'punky' guitar on tracks like 'Love And Napalm': "Because so much stuff is now electronic and in-line, a great deal of the engineering skill is null and void. You don't need it to make a modern record, which must be a horrible position to be in for highly-qualified and skilled engineers who aren't required anything like as much as they used to be. I give myself an engineering credit purely for egotistical reasons, but I'd never get a job as an engineer! If, like me, you predominantly use keyboards and samplers, you don't need to be one."

There is, of course, usually a downside to technology and I wondered if, in his current state of seclusion, Gary misses the spontaneous recording sessions as in days of yore: "If you look at the relative quality between *Replicas* and *Sacrifice*, then I couldn't honestly say I miss it. One of them sounds like a piece of shite made in the '70s and the other sounds like an album made with a lot of time and care spent on it.

"But the technology is getting in the way a little bit, for me. Not only is the technology itself complex and takes time to master, it now gets updated at such a ridiculous speed — you're constantly in a state of learning and I'm growing tired of that. I've left school and don't want to spend the rest of my life studying. When recording *Outland*, at one point I was reading 17 equipment manuals, just to make an album!

"I do understand that new technology is moving very quickly, but I think we should all be aware that ▶

ARE 'FRIENDS' ELECTRIC

Musical success generally involves a winning combination of talent, luck and, in the case of Gary Numan, fate. His entire career essentially rests on one pivotal song — 'Are 'Friends' Electric?' — yet his modest conclusion that "it's nothing clever" took me by surprise.

It's actually composed of two entirely separate songs — the spoken sections were initially part of an uncompleted ballad and later added to the basis of 'Friends' simply because Gary was stuck for ideas to finish the song. This — coupled with an amorous chance encounter with a Minimoog, left over from a previous session at Cambridge's Spaceward Studios whilst demoing guitar-based Tubeway Army songs — led to a million-selling synthesizer classic.

That said, had it not been for renowned Radio One DJ John Peel's fortuitous suggestion of Tubeway Army filling a vacant *Top Of The Pops* slot on that fateful evening in May 1979, it may well have been a different story...

planned. As Gary recalled with a hint of bitterness: "What I tried to find were artists that I thought were good, who had been turned down by everyone else, because that was exactly what happened to me. It's soul destroying when even the tiniest independents tell you to piss off. The intention with Numa was always to give someone a stepping stone. If they went on to do great things with a bigger label, then I would have their first album and get my money back. But it never worked out that way and overall it was a very unhappy experience.

"I now have a lot of sympathy for record labels who've had to work with people like me, who moaned about every little thing that went wrong! All of a sudden you realise that you're moaning at the small group of people who are actually trying to help you. Numa really did make me change my opinion and regret an awful lot of things that I'd said in the past about Beggars Banquet and WEA."

POLITICS OF DANCING

A brief flirtation with Miles Copeland's IRS label in the late '80s spawned a 100,000-selling album in the United States — Gary's first foreign release in several years — before becoming yet another problematic period in his turbulent career. This came to a head over the continuously segued, crossfaded *Outland* album in 1990.

Faced with such lunacy, Numa Records was re-activated in time for Gary's 15th studio album, *Machine & Soul*, in 1992. A solution appeared to be found with 1994's studio album, *Sacrifice*. This was a case of going back to basics and doing it all himself, as on *Replicas* where he played everything bar uncle Jess Lidyard's drums and bass.

we don't have to buy everything when it comes out. In the end, you're constantly torn between not being left behind and simply not having the time to learn it all. Bearing in mind that I now do everything myself, it's a problem because there's only so many hours in the working day."

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

Whilst having always been credited as a producer on his records, it wasn't until he set up Outland in 1990 that Gary began to take a hands-on approach to the recording process: "At Rock City I was involved in the mixes, but only by sitting there interfering with the engineer and irritating him by asking, 'Can I have a bit more reverb?'. Although I moved volume faders up and down, I didn't actually know what was going on.

"When Rock City's lease expired in 1987, my intention was to never have another recording studio for as long as I lived! It was a horrible experience that cost a lot of money.

"Owning my own studio, but never being that interested or involved in the actual running of it, I was very unaware of what had been going on technology-wise in home recording and music in general. I didn't really get into sequencing until about two or three years after everybody else. One of the bands I signed to Numa were heavily into sequencing and I was thinking, 'That's good. How do you do that, then?'

"Eventually I decided I was badly out of touch

and bought a Roland S10 sampler, a sequencer, and a little portastudio and started teaching myself how it all worked — even though I'd owned two professional studios at one point!"

THE PROFESSIONAL TOUCH

A makeshift 24-track system comprised of two Akai MG1214 "glorified portastudios" saw Gary over the interim period, following Rock City's demise. One B-side was recorded on this setup with Shakatak's Bill Sharpe — with whom Gary had a couple of collaborative hit singles — before synchronisation problems sent him running into a commercial studio for the first time since 1979's *The Pleasure Principle*.

"In 1988 I went to a place called Black Barn to record the *Metal Rhythm* album and really enjoyed working in a proper studio environment again with proper machines. By now I was starting to take a lot of notice of what was going on — watching what the engineer was doing, looking at the gear and finding out what things cost. I was shocked at the cost of making an album in a commercial studio. It wasn't a problem, but I felt it was wasted to a degree and it started me thinking, 'I could do all this myself.'

"It's the same with EQ mastering at cutting rooms nowadays. They reckon it's a highly-skilled thing that they're doing. It's a very expensive thing and some of the people doing it are highly-skilled, but some of them are monkeys and they charge the same money. I might as well pay nobody and be a monkey myself, so that's what I'm doing.

"Now I finish an album, put it into Sound Tools, and compress it or whatever. By comparing it to other CDs by Nine Inch Nails or Depeche Mode — something that has the same kind of sound to what I'm doing — I can listen to what my EQ is doing. If it sounds as bright and hard, and it's not waffling down the bottom end, then I'll go with it.

"Now I know this may not seem absolutely professional, but it works. The last album I put out that I EQ mastered myself was a live recording, called *Dark Light*, and I got an email message from an American bloke who thinks it sounds much brighter and clearer than the previous live album, which was done by so-called professionals."

DRIVING LESSONS

Gary Numan's name is inextricably linked to analogue synthesizers, thanks in part to the success of 'Cars', his second UK number one single, and its accompanying promotional video featuring Gary 'driving' over an endless landscape of Polymoogs! Never one to ride with fashion, however, Gary is somewhat scathing of the distinctive sounds which assisted his meteoric rise to fame — even in today's prevailing retro climate: "I remember people wanting to be punk rockers ▶

long after it was over — people who were too young to be one at the time — and there seems to be an element of this when looking back at old synthesizers. People want to use Moogs because they missed them first time around, but I was there and don't have any nostalgia for them whatsoever.

"The Polymoog had one good preset in it called 'Vox Humana', which is the high string sound heard on 'Cars', and with the Minimoog I was just trying to make it sound as powerful as two chugging guitars, since I wrote most of the early stuff on the guitar anyway. I think there have been much more creative things done with synthesizers since then, because nowadays they can do so much more.

"Having said that, in my opinion, the Oberheim OBXa was the best analogue synth of them all, but that was from later years. I'm probably going to get mine up-and-running again, but it's so huge and I don't know where I'm going to put it!"

MODERNISATION

Although Gary once cited the saxophone and guitar as his all-time favourite instruments and not the synthesizer, a quick glance around his home studio revealed a more modern selection of digital instrumentation, including an Alesis Quadrasynth, GEM S2 and Korg Wavestation SR. His ageing collection of notoriously unreliable, yet currently in vogue, analogues now lie in cold storage, flightcased and forlorn in an outbuilding — not that the latest acquisitions have been entirely trouble-free, a dire scenario with which no doubt many recording musicians can identify.

"I really do have a thing about manufacturers releasing gear before it's truly ready. It goes on a great deal and I think it's disgraceful! For example, Alesis recently brought out an update for the Quadrasynth and they're not supplying it free to people who supported them by buying the original instrument. We're like unpaid testers and they're updating it because there are faults that we owners have been complaining about.

"I understand that development cost sometimes comes into it, but often it's not even development — it's repairs! If you buy a new car which has to

be recalled because the steering wheel keeps falling off, you wouldn't expect to pay for it to be fixed because it's a design flaw!

"I don't mind if it's adding functionality to what is essentially a very good machine that does all the things it was supposed to do when I bought it. If the manufacturer then says, 'We've done some work and we can now make it do XYZ as well' that would be like buying a turbocharger for your car — you bolt on another bit to make it go faster."

By now Gary was on a roll and next in the line of fire were Emagic: "I've got *Logic 2.1* and it doesn't

"In my opinion, the Oberheim OBXa was the best analogue synth of them all."

send out MIDI song position pointers. That's like a car that doesn't have a motor in it! At first I could only assume that there was a fault with mine, but I rang up a mate who's got it and his doesn't do it either. I can't believe this isn't a fault, and it's not like we're talking about version 1.0 here!

"I've learnt my lesson and now I'm going to wait until something's been out for at least a year before considering whether to buy it. I don't care whether the studio goes out of date or not, because it means that when I finally buy something it should work properly."

PREMIER HITS

My visit ended on a musical high with Gary playing some unfinished backing tracks from his forthcoming studio album, provisionally entitled *Exile*. Abetted by the multi-layered sampled percussion loops that have become his latter day trademark, these were already sounding incredibly powerful in their infant state and a clear indication that Gary has indeed become a master of both his craft and tools with a unique brand of sinister and heavy music.

"I used a changeable mixture of drum loops taken from sample CDs, although they were all retuned from the original. For example, I would not use a loop for a 90 beats per minute song that was recorded at 90bpm, but rather one that was recorded at 120bpm and then slow it down. This changes the ▶

BRAVE NUWORLD

In joining the so-called 'information superhighway' at the tail end of 1995, it would appear that Gary Numan has become something of a jack of all trades. NuWORLD: The Official Gary Numan Internet Connection is entirely his own creation and incorporates aspects of the NuMIND database, Fan Club newsletters and his information telephone lines. Its nomination for a 'YELL! For The UK Best!' award is both a testament to Gary's natural artistic talent combined with the Apple Macintosh's ease of use and versatility — not bad going for a self-confessed computer novice.

Gary is hopeful that this newfound technology will help alleviate his prevailing state of isolation and expand his present fan base beyond the boundaries of the UK. Regardless of your intentions, it's well worth a browse as an excellent example of a well executed World Wide Web site. Check it out on: http://www.numan.co.uk

Gary Numan

▶ sound of the loop, making it the right tempo, but heavier in texture than the original 90bpm loop. I'm sure others would disagree with that, but it seems to work for me. I also added individual samples that I 'played' from the keyboard in real time, to put in fills and basic timing the way a real drummer would. Cymbals and hi-hats were also 'played' individual

"I was very unaware of what had been going on technology-wise in home recording..."

samples in most cases. All of the drum sounds were heavily EQ'd in one way or another and everything went through my trusty AMS and Lexicon reverbs, usually on gated or non-linear settings, but occasionally an artificial reverse reverb was used. That's all there was to it actually, but you must be careful when building up drum layers that you don't lose clarity in that never-ending search for power."

With possible major recording and US licensing deals looming on the horizon, perhaps a Numan renaissance à la Human League is just around pop's fickle corner? The fact that 'Cars ('93 Sprint)' already features on the soundtrack album to 1994's box office movie *Speed*, whilst 'Cars ('Premier Mix)' is currently being used to front a UK nationwide Carling Premier television and cinema commercial on an eight month run, is undoubtedly serving to heighten his profile — as has the TV-advertised follow-up Gary Numan/Tubeway Army compilation album, *The Premier Hits*.

The irony of this classic song's fourth chart placement (respectably re-entering at number 17, almost 17 years after the original) is not lost on Gary, who joked, "It's quite possible that my career is going to be saved by a lager commercial, and I don't even drink!"

On a more positive note, rumours are abounding in the music press over a planned Gary Numan tribute album featuring a diversity of 'fashionable' artists. Likewise, Dave Grohl's Foo Fighters cover of 'Down In The Park' on the *X-Files* album should further assist in the kudos stakes. It would appear that Gary Numan's influence on the popular music scene is at last being recognised. **SOS**

FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS

Aside from Gary's forthcoming studio album, *Exile*, other projects in the offing from the Numan camp include *Human*, an instrumental album of short pieces dating from Gary's score for a low-budget horror film called *The Unborn*; a dance album of remixed/reworked Numan tracks by a team called Techno Army, featuring Gary himself on vocals; an "unplugged-style" acoustic album; an album of ballads culled from his lengthy recording career; plus his eighth live album and accompanying video recorded during the 1996 *Premier* tour.

A second recording company, Salvation Records, has additionally been set up for "other bits and pieces that I want to do, like future collaborations." Releases thus far include the Radial Pair video soundtrack and the fan club-only Babylon CD series — essentially all of Gary's Numa B-sides and remixes, previously only available on vinyl.

Gary will be playing at two UK festivals in August 1996, namely Chelmsford and Warrington on the 17th and 18th respectively. Pulp are the headline act with Numan fourth on the bill, behind Cast and Supergrass. The fact that Gary has never even been to a festival before, let alone performed at one, makes these events a particularly interesting proposition.

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Offering 5-part harmony at a budget price, the MV5 is Digitech's easiest to use pitch-shifter yet. The DAVID MELLOR Singers provide the tune...

DIGITECH MV5 VOCAL HARMONY PROCESSOR

Compared to many effects units, the Digitech MV5 MIDI Vocalist is extraordinary on two counts: it has no LCD display and it features large, illuminated, user-friendly buttons. These features alone tell me that the MV5 is going to be friendly to use, not fiddly, that I am likely to get quick results from it, and that I shall be able to exploit its full potential.

Perhaps it's a phase I'm going through since I threw out my studio computer (shock! horror!) and started *listening* to the music I was trying to create, but I really do feel the time has come for manufacturers to concentrate on giving us the features we *need* in a particular unit, rather than simply making the feature list as long as possible, with the result that many devices are so complex that 95% of their features never get used. The MV5 is a step in the right direction — it does what it does cleanly and simply. You will need the manual to get started, because this device performs tricks other effects units cannot, but with only 10 minutes experience under your belt you can let your creativity take over and *have fun*!

INTELLIGENCE COUNTS

The Digitech MIDI Vocalist is an intelligent pitch-shifter. This means that it 'understands' the rules of harmony and can add harmonies to a lead vocal that are appropriate to the key of the song. (Brian May soundalikes may substitute 'guitar' for 'vocal' in the previous sentence, because the unit is not restricted to vocal processing.) Being intelligent and bestowed with a certain amount of good taste, this is not a unit for creating weird, delayed feedback pitch-shift effects, although you *can* certainly construct such sounds with the aid of a delay unit and a little bit of mixing console know-how.

Up to four harmonies are allowed in four distinct and useful modes of operation. Taking a look at the front panel first, the most obvious feature is the group of six buttons set into a musical staff with a treble clef. If you were thinking that the positions of the buttons on the staff meant something, then you had been fooled too. It's simply a design feature, but the fact that they slope at an angle does represent the *relative* pitches of the harmonies, if not the actual notes. These six buttons allow the user to select four harmonies spaced above or below, or in unison, with the input note. It's a quick and easy way to create the harmony voicing you are looking for and the MV5 will select the actual pitches for you.

Bypassing for the moment a group of six buttons which select the mode of operation and the key of the song — more on these later — we come to three rotary controls which set the input ▶

▶ level, the output level of the lead vocal (the source signal) and the level of the harmonies. It couldn't be simpler. A front panel XLR is provided (sadly, without phantom power) for a microphone input.

For those of you who are as interested in the back of equipment as in the front panel, the principal features are a line input, stereo outputs, and the normal trio of MIDI sockets. Another socket is provided for the Digitech FS300 footswitch, which can be used to control the Set Key, Harmony Mode, and Bypass functions. A single momentary action footswitch may be used to control the Bypass function. Also on the back is the input for the 'wall-wart' power supply. I'll continue to complain about these devices as long as manufacturers use them because, as well as being inconvenient, I know that the easiest way to destroy equipment is to get your warts mixed up. This is easily done, since they seem to come in an endless variety of different voltages and polarities. There is a fortune awaiting the inventor who can design a powering system that is as convenient for the manufacturer (allowing them to sell identical units worldwide) as a wall-wart and works for the user, too.

MODUS OPERANDI

Having dealt with the hardware, let's look individually at the MV5's four modes of operation.
Chordal Harmonies
To produce chordal harmonies, the MV5 needs two inputs. One is your voice (or lead instrument) and the other is MIDI information from your keyboard. In this instance the keyboard isn't used to generate sounds, just to tell the MV5 which harmonies to create. In a studio situation you would probably record the lead vocal onto tape and spend as much time perfecting it as you need, whilst the MV5 quietly bides its time in the rack. Then you could record basic chords into your synchronised

sequencer, which you would then play back via MIDI into the MV5. The MV5 will analyse the chords you play, and automatically select suitable harmonies based on these chords and the settings of the Harmony Voicing buttons on the front panel. As you record the harmonies to tape you will probably drop in and out of record mode, so that harmonies only go where you want them, since the MV5 in this mode will always create harmonies according to the last MIDI data it received.

As well as being useful in the studio, the MIDI Vocalist could be exploited in a live situation by a singer/keyboard player performing solo in a bar, for instance. In this situation, the keyboard is being used for accompaniment, as well as transmitting MIDI data to the MV5 telling it about the chords being played. Here we have potential for confusion, since any fancy arpeggios, grace notes or glissandi could fool the MV5 into creating wrong harmonies.

Obviously a little bit of extra care is necessary in playing, along with tasteful use of the Bypass footswitch. To help matters though, the MV5 can be instructed to respond over a set range of MIDI notes only and ignore all others. This is easy to achieve, and it would only take a moment to reset the zone between songs.

If you are wondering whether the MV5 has a full understanding of harmony, or whether it can only handle Status Quo songs, then take a look at the list of chord types (see box). The great thing is that even if you don't know a flattened fifth from a sharpened Chinagraph, the MV5 does and the harmonies will always fit in with the chords you are playing.

Scalic Harmony
While Chordal mode will nearly always work for most types of music, it tends to produce harmonies that are a bit static. In fact, they are only as static as the MIDI notes you send to the MV5, but one's fingers always seem tempted to the same intervals as long as they seem to be working. Scalic mode, on the other hand, doesn't always work for every style of music, but it will produce much more activity in the harmony lines. If you think of Chordal mode as a choir backing a solo voice, and Scalic mode as a more interactive style of harmony, then you won't go far wrong. Alternatively you can think of Chordal as 'Amazing Grace' mode, and Scalic as 'Eagles' mode. (It's OK — they're trendy again!).

In Scalic mode, you don't need to play chords all the way through a song. A single chord, containing the important notes of the scale, played at the beginning will be enough to tell the MV5 which key you are in and which scale type you require. If you change key or scale type during ▶

CHORD TYPES

In Chordal Mode, the Digitech MIDI Vocalist will recognise any of the following chord types, in any key:
• Major
• Major 7
• Minor
• Minor 7
• Dominant 7
• Major 6
• Augmented 7
• Minor 7 flat 5
• Diminished
• Suspended
• Suspended 7
• Minor-major 7.

SCALE TYPES

In Scalic Mode, the Digitech MIDI Vocalist can be set to any of the following scale types, in any key:
• Major
• Major raised 7
• Major lowered 5
• Major 6
• Dorian
• Minor
• Harmonic Minor
• Diminished
• Whole Tone

MIDI: THE OUTER LIMITS

Although the Digitech MIDI Vocalist is admirably easy to use, those who like to push their equipment to its limits will find that that there are extra functions accessible only via MIDI. You may have noticed that the MV5 doesn't offer factory or user preset programs. It doesn't need to, since you can set the unit from scratch almost as quickly as you could recall a preset. You might think that this means you can't automate the MV5 as

you can with other effects units, but you would be wrong. Each time you press a button on the MV5, a MIDI message is output which you can record into a sequencer. This could include Harmony Mode, Voicing, Key/Scale, Chord Root/Type and Setup changes. When you replay the sequence, the MV5 will respond as though you were pressing the buttons yourself. This includes the Bypass control, which receives more use than the bypass

function on any other type of effects unit, since the MV5 creates harmonies in response to the input signal all the time, and you almost certainly wouldn't want those harmonies to appear all the way through the song. You can also send a MIDI Control Change message to set the vibrato depth, which cannot be set from the front panel. Extra voicings are available via MIDI messages, just in case you can't find what you are looking for from the six front panel Harmony Voicing buttons.

the song, then you will need to input another chord or the harmonies will be out of key. Notice that once you have specified a key, the MV5 handles all the chord changes that are customary in that key for the type of scale selected. (See box for a list of scale types.) Apart from the common-as-muck Major and Minor varieties, highlights of the scale type list are the Dorian scale, which adds the minor third and flattened seventh that are appropriate for blues style harmonies, and also the Whole Tone scale, which creates instant musical impressionism à la Debussy.

In Scalic mode, the Harmony Voicing buttons also define the spacing of the harmonies. I didn't mention it earlier, but normally the MV5 corrects the pitch of the harmonies. So if your singing is out of tune, at least the backing vocals will be OK (provided you sing within a quarter tone of the correct pitch). Sometimes, however, too much perfection can get a bit boring and you might wish for a little sliding (portamento) of the notes to give a more relaxed feel. If so, then all you have to do is send an upward MIDI pitch-bend command to the MV5 and it switches into a mode where the harmonies track the vocal precisely.

Vocoder Mode

Now don't go thinking that there is a full-blown vocoder built into the Digitech MV5 as well as a harmony processor. 'Vocoder' is about as descriptive in this respect as the word 'coffee' on a vending machine — it indicates the flavour of what you are about to receive without actually promising the real thing!

In Vocoder mode, all the intelligence of the MV5 is bypassed (as are the Harmony Voicing buttons) and harmonies are created which exactly correspond to the notes you play on your MIDI keyboard. Vocoder mode is actually *more* versatile than the other modes because you can create exactly the harmonies you want, whether or not they fit into 'proper' chords or scales. You could even take an out-of-tune vocal recording and feed it through the MV5 while playing the correct notes on the keyboard, and magically a perfectly in-tune vocal would result. In fact, the original vocal doesn't even have to be close to the right notes, because the MV5 will harmonise a dog's bark if necessary. Of course, there are limits to how well this process can work. Basically, the more work the MV5 has to do, and the more the vocal slides about, the less believable the end result becomes. Overall, I'd say this vocoder technique is best applied to backing vocals, where a little bit of 'flanginess' might go unnoticed in the mix.

Detune Mode

This is another mode where the intelligence of the Digitech MV5 is put on hold, yet it could easily become the mode in which the unit is most used. One of the most common requirements in recording is for some sort of 'thickening up' of the sound, especially on vocals. If you have ever sat in front of the mixing console wondering what you could do to turn that thin, weak vocal wafting out of your monitors into a fine, healthy specimen, bursting

MV5 SPECIFICATIONS

Microphone Input:	Balanced XLR, >2kohms
Line Input:	Unbalanced jack, >10kohms
Input Level (mic):	-31dBu to -3dBu
Outputs:	Two unbalanced jacks, 1.5kohm
Maximum output level:	+14dBu +/-2dB
Sampling:	16-bit linear at 31.25kHz
Frequency Response:	30Hz to 11.5kHz, +0.5/-3.0dB through DSP
	30Hz to 30kHz, +/-1.5dB, analogue bypass
Signal-to-Noise Ratio:	>86dB A-weighted through DSP
	>92dB A-weighted, analogue bypass
THD:	<0.03% at 1kHz

with life and vigour from the drive units, then this mode could represent one potential solution to your problem. You can achieve a similar effect with many other effects devices, but on the MV5 it's achieved with the push of a couple of buttons — and as we all know, the sounds which are easy to get at are the ones that are going to be used.

There are three possibilities: Light Detune adds harmonies at plus and minus seven cents to the original (one cent is one hundredth of a semitone), Heavy Detune adds harmonies at plus and minus 12 cents, and for the strongest effect you can combine the two. If you have used this trick before, you will understand its benefits and limitations, but I think that Digitech have provided three options which will cover most eventualities and can be accessed very easily.

A SOUND SENSATION?

Digitech have an immense amount of experience in designing pitch-shifters, so you would be entitled to expect pretty good sound quality from the MV5. If you bear in mind that real-time pitch-shifting is the most difficult effect to achieve, and that perfection will probably remain unattainable for many years yet, then I think most users will be very satisfied with the sound of the MV5. Even though the 31.25kHz sampling rate only results in an audio bandwidth of 11.5kHz, when used for backing vocals nobody is going to point at you and accuse you of cheating with a fancy effects unit. They'll believe you sang all the harmonies for real. I couldn't say that the pitch-shifted output sounds absolutely as clean as the original signal, but I couldn't say that about *any* pitch-shifter — even the most expensive models.

In conclusion, I'll repeat myself and say that I think you will be very satisfied with the Digitech MV5. It does a good, solid job of work and you don't need a brain expansion to use it. **SOS**

Quiet *Life*

When using effects, it's all too easy to add noise to your mix — and it's not always the fault of your effects units. PAUL WHITE offers a few practical tips for achieving quieter mixes.

MINIMISING MIXER AND EFFECTS NOISE

People often complain that their effects units are noisy. Frequently, though, the entire blame for excess noise doesn't rest with the effects units themselves, but is a result of not enough attention being paid to proper gain structure within the mixer, and to ensuring that nothing reaches the effects unit that shouldn't. The input level gain on the effects unit itself is also vitally important, because too low a setting will result in excess noise, while too high a setting will cause distortion.

MINIMISING MIXER NOISE

Even though today's mixers are pretty quiet devices, a certain amount of noise is generated by the mixing circuitry itself, and though this can be minimised, the laws of physics conspire to ensure that some noise remains. One inescapable fact is that the more channels you mix together, the more noise (known as mix buss noise) you'll produce, even if some channels are muted. Optimising your input gains using the PFL (Pre-Fade Listen) buttons and meters will help achieve the best signal-to-noise ratio, but nothing you can do will eliminate all noise. Not only does mix buss noise occur when you mix your input channels down to stereo or to the desk's sub-groups, it also occurs in the aux send busses, so the more channels you have (all with aux sends), the more hiss you'll notice at the input of your effects unit.

Obviously it makes sense to turn the aux send controls right down on any channels not being used, but although this removes channel noise from the scene, it does nothing to help with mix buss noise — you could turn all your aux sends to zero and the noise would still be there. If more channels mean more noise, then fewer channels mean less noise, and if you have a mixer which will allow you to switch aux sends to different busses, you have a way to make unwanted channels effectively disappear. Let's say that two of your sends are switchable to aux busses 1,2 or 3,4. Providing you don't need all four effects busses, you could route channels which don't require effects to aux busses 3,4, leaving only those channels which need effects routed to 1,2. Now the mix buss noise at aux sends 1,2 will be reduced, because fewer channels are contributing. All unwanted channels are sending their mix buss noise contribution to the unused aux 3,4 outputs. You can do the same with your main stereo mix buss by ensuring that ▶

Effects Unit

Mono instrument cable feeding effects unit

Stereo jack with ring and tip linked as shown

Mixer insert point

This arrangement allows a pre-fader direct channel output to be taken from the insert point wihtout affecting the signal flow through the channel.

Stereo effect return

Mixer

Figure 1: Construction of an insert direct out lead.

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Minimising Mixer and Effects Noise

► unused channels are not routed L-R. As mentioned earlier, mere muting isn't enough.

It's also important to ensure that you have sensible settings on the mixer aux send control being used:

• The channels with the highest effect levels should have their sends set at around three-quarters of maximum, and the master send control should be in a similar position.

• The input gain control on the effects unit itself should then be set while watching the unit's meters. If it has selectable +4dBu or -10dBV level switching, choose the correct setting to match your mixer. This will usually be the one that lets you work with the input gain control closest to the centre of its range.

• Finally, set the effect output level to three-quarters of maximum, and use the aux return gains on the mixer to set the amount of effect you hear. Once you've done this, you can go back to using the channel aux sends to make adjustments in the usual way.

GO DIRECT

If you have an effect that only needs to be applied to one mixer channel, it makes little sense to use the aux send system, because you'll accumulate a lot of noise for no purpose. A better option is to drive the effects unit from the channel direct output (which is generally post-fader), or, if you don't have a direct output jack, use the insert point. You can take a pre-fade feed from an insert point without breaking the signal path by using a special lead with a stereo jack at the mixer end, where the ring and tip connectors are linked together; instructions for making such a lead are shown in Figure 1. Using this method is less than ideal, because the effect level will be independent of the channel fader setting, but if the track will require little or no gain adjustment during the course of the mix, this limitation should be acceptable.

If you find yourself without insert points, there's still a way out, because you can take the appropriate multitrack output directly into the effects unit, and then feed the two outputs (presuming the effect is stereo) into two mixer channels, as shown in Figure 2. The dry/effects balance will now have to be set using the effects unit's own Mix control.

GAIN WITHOUT PAIN

Applying the above techniques should make things a lot quieter, but there are still further gains to be made. For example, most digital effects units overload quite unpleasantly, which forces you to set a lower than ideal input level to leave an adequate safety margin. If you have a spare compressor/limiter lying around, you can patch this in before the effect and set it to act as a limiter, by dialling in the highest compression ratio possible. S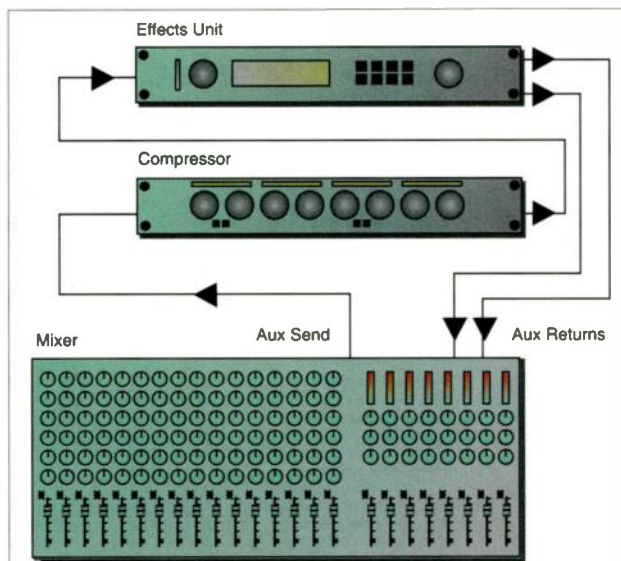et the threshold so that the compressor limits at a level just before that at which the effects unit overloads, and you should be able to increase the average signal being fed into the effects unit quite noticeably. In turn, this will improve the effect unit's signal-to-noise ratio. The actual setting of the limiter should be done by ear, as most effect unit meters are notoriously unreliable. Audible distortion may occur before the meter hits the red on some effect patches, especially those with lots of feedback, such as flanging. Figure 3 shows how a limiter may be used in conjunction with an effects unit.

It is also possible to gate the input to your effects unit, or to patch in a single-ended noise reduction unit (SNR). A gate will ensure that the input to your effect unit stays firmly off unless some signal is being fed into it, and an SNR's dynamic filtering will bring about an improvement in noise performance even when signal is present. If you're using a compressor with a built-in expander/gate to limit the effects unit input, the internal gate may be used for this purpose. As a rule, it's a bad idea to process the output of an effects unit in any way, as this invariably compromises the quality of any reverb tails. However, MIDI muting systems may be used to mute the outputs from effects units until they are required.

Ultimately, the absolute signal quality available is governed by your equipment, but more often than not, equipment is used well below its maximum potential. Use the simple techniques discussed here, and you should find your mixes noticeably less noisy in the future. **SOS**

Figure 2: Effects used in series with mixer inputs.

Multitrack output to be effected is patched directly into the effects unit

Multitrack Recorder

Effects Unit

Effects unit output feeds directly into two channel line inputs

Remaining multitrack outputs feed the mixer tape returns in the usual way

Mixer

By setting the compressor to act as a limiter, protection against overload is provided for the effects unit. This removes the need to leave a generous amount of safety headroom and consequently improves the signal-to-noise ratio.

Effects Unit

Compressor

Mixer   Aux Send   Aux Returns

Figure 3: Using a limiter before an effects unit.

TeeBee
Or Not TB?

Back in the days when I didn't have a receding hairline, a mortgage, and kids, I borrowed a TEAC 3340 4-track tape machine from a friend, and also took up his offer of a couple of bits of silver Roland gear as well. Armed with a 2-track tape recorder and a primitive electronic piano, I was now ready to record my first serious cassette!

This equipment may seem outdated to the modern *SOS* reader, but at the time, the silvery Roland boxes — a TR606 Drumatix and TB303 Bassline — completely changed my opinion about sequencers, drum machines and expanders. With the aid of a DIN cable, you sync'd the two boxes together, and could programme in your own drum and bass patterns. Commonplace now, perhaps, but not 14 years ago!

Of course, many would expect the passing of time to have consigned both of these devices to the scrapheap long ago. But just as popular musical styles seem to cycle round, musical equipment also seems to have periodic returns to favour, and as everyone knows, the TB303 has become a sought-after collector's item, in

With prices for an original Roland TB303 as high as £1000 on the open market, it is unsurprising that the last two years have seen a number of manufacturers attempting to emulate the 303 in a cheaper, MIDI'd form. MARTIN RUSS checks out the latest pretender to the throne...

common with many other analogue pre-MIDI instruments (although the 606 seems to have been eclipsed by the later TR808 and 909 drum machines). Prices of the TB303 — which you could hardly give away 10 years ago — have risen to dizzy heights, so that people unable to afford the real thing have had to resort to sample CDs. A ▶

Syntecno TeeBee

▶ number of manufacturers have sought to plug this gap in the market over the past couple of years: Novation and Control Synthesis, for example, have had TB303-soundalike bass synths on the market for some time, and Roland are now even providing their own alternative in the form of the forthcoming MC303 Groove Box. The latest MIDI-equipped TB303 recreation is the unit I'm looking at here — the Syntecno TeeBee.

HIDDEN DEPTHS

The standard black, anodised aluminium front panel of the 1U-high, rackmounting TeeBee has little of the appeal of the '80s silvery original, and is confusingly labelled 'T303'. But appearances

Figure 1: Schematic of the TeeBee's internal construction.

are often deceptive, and the TeeBee is no exception. Hidden behind that front panel are:
• A monophonic bass synthesizer.
• A 4-channel MIDI-to-CV converter.
• Five rotary controls which can act as MIDI Controllers.
• An MTC (MIDI Time Code) to Roland Sync24 converter.
• A simple real-time sequencer.
• An auto-wah filter effects processor.

As you can see from the picture heading this review, the TeeBee's front panel features just a few controls, and at first it seemed a little hard to believe that all the TeeBee's functions were controlled by a push switch, a 'Sawtooth/Square' selector switch and five rotary controls. But the TeeBee manages to make the most of the meagre front panel furniture by using a very unusual audio feedback system instead of the more usual LED or LCD display — more on this shortly.

The rear panel holds 14 connectors, although eight of these are 3.5mm mini-jacks for the 4-channel MIDI-to-CV/Gate conversion. There are two MIDI Thrus, and the MIDI Out can be defined as

an Out or a merged Out and Thru. The audio output is a standard mono jack, and the unit uses an external power supply. In addition, the front panel also features a jack socket marked 'Analogue In' — see 'External Processing' box for further details.

Unlike most other vintage monosynth reworkings, the TeeBee is not just an analogue synthesizer with a MIDI-to-CV converter attached. The positions of the front panel rotary controls are converted to MIDI Controller messages and made available at the rear panel MIDI Out sockets; they're also used to control the synthesizer parameters and even held inside the MIDI SysEx memory of the TeeBee. The result is that the rotary controls can not only be used to control the synthesizer sound as you would expect, but they can also be used as general-purpose MIDI Controllers, if 'Local Control' is turned off. And because the synthesizer settings are derived from the MIDI Controller settings and not just from the front panel controls, external MIDI Controllers or SysEx dumps can be used to change the synthesizer sound. If you're having trouble visualising this, take a look at Figure 1, which shows the internal layout of the TeeBee in diagrammatic form.

The TeeBee does not have any internal sound memories. Instead the entire setup and front panel control positions (with the exception of the ▶

THREE'S COMPANY: TERNARY CODING

The rotary knobs of the TeeBee use ternary coding to control its internal parameters. Ternary is a close relative of the binary coding that is used in digital equipment, but instead of having two different values (on and off, or 1 and 0), it has three. Ternary coding is used in some telecommunications applications, where the three states mean no current, or current flowing in one direction, or current flowing in the opposite direction. The XMIDI proposal also used the same ternary coding of currents in order to extend the numbering system used in MIDI.

Syntecno provide a reference table, which means that you don't need to learn how to count in ternary, but here's a comparison chart showing the first 16 decimal, binary and ternary numbers so that you can get a feel for how they work:

DECIMAL	BINARY	TERNARY
0	0000	000
1	0001	001
2	0010	002
3	0011	010
4	0100	011
5	0101	012
6	0110	020
7	0111	021
8	1000	022
9	1001	100
10	1010	101
11	1011	102
12	1100	110
13	1101	111
14	1110	112
15	1111	120

WRH

Syntecno TeeBee

Square/Sawtooth switch) can be saved as a System Exclusive dump via the 'Program' switch. By editing the parameters in the SysEx dump and sending it back to the TeeBee, you can change both setup and sound. This means that a sequencer can be used as a way of storing sounds and setups — rather like the volume setting and instrument assignment that you find at the start of a General MIDI sequence file.

This intimate connection between MIDI and the synthesizer control voltages is reflected in the other use of the TeeBee: as a 4-channel MIDI-to-CV/Gate converter.

POWER PLAY

The TeeBee plays a short sequence as it powers up. Switching on the unit while holding down the Program button until this sequence has stopped accesses programming mode, where many of its features are found. Once in this mode, the TeeBee trills between two notes, waiting for you to start using it. Settings are made via the unit's rotary controls; each time you make a new setting, you press the Program button. Different pitches in the TeeBee's trill indicate what the next input needs to be. This is one of the most unusual user interfaces I have ever encountered, and it takes some getting used to. Having said that, the audio prompts are easy to understand (if a little annoying after a while) and the method is consistent, if slightly cumbersome.

The TeeBee's programming mode is used to define setup parameters, although you can also use a SysEx dump instead. If you want to use the internal sequencer, the front panel controls are the only way to record and play sequences. The controls use ternary coding (see the 'Three's Company Box' elsewhere for more on this peculiar system), and so only three positions are used: fully counter-clockwise, in the centre, and fully clockwise. On the review model, these controls were quite stiff, and turning them rapidly to make changes was not very convenient. Unfortunately, the Tuning control is also one of the programming controls, and so the TeeBee's tuning almost always needs to be re-adjusted whenever programming mode is used. This can be avoided by only using SysEx dumps to change settings, of course.

Switching the TeeBee's power on and off is required quite frequently, since this is how you access programming mode, and when you turn it off, there's a noticeable thump. It may be a good idea to get into the habit of turning your mixer fader down before doing this.

BACK TO BASSICS

With only five controls, the possibilities for making sounds with the TeeBee are somewhat limited. Its bass sounds, however, are classic examples of late '70s and early '80s analogue synthesizer.

The Sawtooth/Square switch toggles between the woody, hollow timbres of the Square waveform, and the more synthetic-sounding, bright timbres of the Sawtooth; the four rotary

1 Smooth hollow bass sound

2 Classic filter sweep 'acid' bass sound

3 'Fruity' percussive bass sound

4 Hard overdriven synth bass sound

Figure 2: My favourite TeeBee patches.

controls then enable the timbre to be shaped in more detail. The filter Cutoff frequency control alters the brightness of the sound, while the filter Resonance control changes the 'emphasis' of frequencies near the cutoff frequency of the filter. The Resonance control doesn't go high enough to force the filter into self-oscillation, but this is consistent with the behaviour of the TB303. The ▶

DIGITAL THRU ANALOGUE: EXTERNAL PROCESSING

The TeeBee's front panel 'Analogue In' jack socket overrides the Square/Sawtooth switch setting and replaces the internal oscillator with an external audio signal. MIDI Note On messages are used to trigger the TeeBee's enveloping and the result is a sophisticated auto-wah effect. Using the TeeBee to process my digital equipment produced an unusual mix of digital precision modified with analogue filtering. Lots of scope for experimentation here!

SILVER DREAM MACHINE: THE ORIGINAL ROLAND TB303

The TB303 is a simple monophonic synthesizer, with almost the bare minimum of controls. It follows the basic VCO-VCF-VCA format of many analogue synthesizers. The VCO (Voltage Controlled Oscillator) provides the raw sound source, with sawtooth or square waveforms. This is then processed by the VCF (Voltage Controlled Filter) a two-pole, low-pass resonant filter which is swept by a decaying envelope (just the decay stage!). The overall envelope is very simple: attack and release are both very fast, with

the filter decay stage being the only part of the enveloping that can be controlled.

Before MIDI, some things weren't quite as predictable as they are now. Portamento was produced by processing the keyboard control voltage rather than changing a parameter on a display, and was usually controlled by a variable resistance with a dedicated switch/footswitch to turn it on and off. Accents and velocity control were not standard at all. New equipment tended to redefine standards, and the

TB303 is an interesting example. The TB303's 'slide' control produces a glide (or portamento) between successive notes, but also prevents the filter sweep envelope from retriggering — in fact, the sound sustains until the 'slide' is turned off! In the context of a monophonic synthesizer this makes sense — most monophonic musical instruments do not retrigger the sound when you slide the pitch. But I suspect that the sustain that results from the use of the slide control is probably an artifact of Roland's circuitry! The TB303's accent is also unusual, since it affects the decay time of the filter sweep envelope.

How to become a Record Producer

according to which one you and the band have most enthusiasm for at the time. Or you may have booked a session player who you want on more than one song, so he might as well do them all in the same session. This means locating to each song on the multitrack and resetting the monitor mix on the console. If you confine yourself to level/pan/reverb monitor mixes, it won't take too long to set up. Sometimes, however, during the later stages of overdubbing, you may feel that the mix you're hearing sounds really great, just by chance, and you would like to keep it as a reference for when you start mixing proper. In this case it's a simple matter to copy the monitor mix onto a DAT so you can check it later. With so few variable elements, it's pretty easy for a skilled engineer to reconstruct the mix almost exactly, and then you can go ahead and improve it still further.

HOW TO GET A GOOD MIX

Simple. Use a good engineer and go away! I mentioned earlier in the series that engineers acquire a vast amount of experience of working with music and sound, and they are the people who should

be operating the faders — not the producer, unless the producer comes from an engineering background, of course. If the producer sits in the studio from the moment the first fader is raised all the way through to the finish, he will be nothing but an inhibition for the engineer, who would really like to get on and tinker with the sounds and try out lots of ideas, many of which might not work. So this is a good time for you to take a walk in the fresh air and clear your mind ready to make an objective judgment on how the mix is progressing, two or three hours after you left the engineer alone with it. You may leave behind a few ideas or guidelines, or you may even encourage the engineer to go wild and try out some crazy things. When you return, you will hear your production in all its glory and you will be able to advise on what you want more of and what you want less of. You could even say that it is entirely wrong and you want to start again. An experienced engineer accepts that the producer is in charge and won't take offence (he just won't work with you again!).

A trickier question is what *makes* a good mix. It's especially tricky for the engineer who has to ▶

THE ENGINEER'S VIEW — PAUL GOMERSALL

Paul Gomersall has recently enjoyed the privilege of engineering George Michael's new CD, *Older*, where George, as usual, is his own producer (for the full story, see the article starting on page 40 this month).

Engineer Paul Gomersall and Programmer Steve McNichol at work on George Michael's Older at Sarm West studios — and they weren't posing!

Paul's other credits include work with producers Trevor Horn, Phil Collins (as a producer), Stephen Hague, Stephen Lipson, Thomas Dolby, Chris Porter, Laurie Latham, and others.

• WORKING WITH PRODUCERS WHO ARE ALSO ENGINEERS

"Producers like to distance themselves from the desk, as long as they have an engineer they can trust. It's one of the joys of production. If they have a problem, they might dive in and try and sort it out themselves, but usually there won't be a problem. You are the interface with all the technical stuff so the producer doesn't have to think about that. If the producer comes up with an idea you make it work for them."

What should an engineer do if a producer appears not to hear a problem?

"Point it out. One of the good phrases is 'I think we should listen back to that'. He will be listening by then. There are ways of getting your point across. Diplomacy is a big part of the job."

• WORKING WITH GEORGE MICHAEL
Monitoring: "I give him the mix output of the desk in his headphones. The headphone mix is very important to anyone. That's what they are listening

to in the studio so that's what they want to hear in the headphones."
Reverb: "The way he sings the consonants, it gives a bit of excitement to his vocal sound. It's being used as another instrument. I generally set up two, three or four reverbs that I think will suit the track as it's coming together and take it from there, and George will pick what he wants."
Mixing: "The mix is an evolutionary thing. Virtually every song we do we work through to the mix. You never get a stage where everything is finished and you start mixing. It evolves, and somewhere along the line he'll want to do a vocal ride so we'll switch the mix computer on, then we'll switch it off again and add some more things and continue like that. I know we're finished when he says 'let's put one down'. He'll take a mix home and come back the next day and probably continue working on it. The programming diminishes as the work carries on and we get more involved in riding levels of things, EQ and other bits and pieces. And then suddenly it's there. It's finished. The rough mixes are really important because sometimes George will ask to refer to something we've done before and then carry on from there. So we keep all the mixes we've done in case one of them had something that was really good."

Syntecno TeeBee

Filter knob actually just controls envelope modulation amount, and finally, the Decay control sets the time over which the filter sweep envelope decays. The TeeBee's envelope is decay-only, although with the filter control set to minimum, I was able to produce slight rising envelopes.

Two important elements of the TB303's sound were 'Slide' and 'Accent' (see TB303 box for some background on the original). Both of these

The TeeBee's rear panel. Note the dual MIDI Thru and DIN Sync24 (a pre-MIDI instrument connection protocol) sockets.

functions are hidden on the TeeBee. Slide is governed by a MIDI Controller, which needs to be turned on and off to control the glide between notes, in much the same way as a sustain pedal. The TeeBee's synthesizer is first-note priority, and the envelope does not retrigger if additional notes are played whilst the first is held down: strict monophonic operation.

Accented notes on the TeeBee have short decay times, producing a result that is more like a negative accent. It's selected by using the attack or initial velocity of the MIDI Note messages that are playing the TeeBee. From 1 to 100, the velocity maps to volume changes as you would expect, but from 101 to 127, the velocity causes decay to be set to the shortest time. This requires an unusual playing technique, and is probably better suited to detailed editing using a sequencer.

Figure 2 shows the settings for four of my favourite types of bass sounds created with the TeeBee.

THE CHIPS INSIDE

Because the TeeBee uses an external power supply, its case has plenty of space inside for the two relatively small printed circuit boards. The circuit board at the rear of the case holds the Intel 80196 micro-controller, the MIDI Input and Outputs, and the MIDI-to-CV converters, whilst the front panel circuit board is home for the analogue synthesizer circuitry.

Although the TB303 is normally described as having a 2-pole, 12dB/Octave resonant low-pass filter, the circuit inside the TeeBee looks more like a 4-pole 24dB/Octave design, whilst sounding like a 2-pole filter! I was unable to confirm the number of poles in the filter with distributors Blue Systems.

The layout and quality of the PCBs is good, although there was quite a lot of hand-wiring

inside the case of the review unit, and the front panel switches had been mounted incorrectly, with the star washers on the outside of the case. This may be a deliberate cosmetic device, but it didn't appeal to my eyes!

MIDI IN CONTROL

Slide is assigned to MIDI Controller 0 as a default. This is an unusual choice, because it's the same as the MSB (Most Significant Byte) of the Bank Select message. This can cause one or two problems when you try to use the TeeBee with some sequencers, but it can be re-assigned to any of the first 80 controller numbers instead, as can the MIDI Controllers from the front panel rotary controls. The default setting for the 'Tuning' control is also a little strange: it's assigned to MIDI Controller 10, which is normally used for Pan control. Controller 11 maps to Filter Cutoff.

Naturally, I tried out the MIDI-to-CV conversion, and found no obvious 'zipper' noise artifacts. However, the MIDI Time Code to Sync24 conversion could not be tested during the review period, since I no longer own anything which uses Roland's Sync24 standard!

THE BOTTOM LINE

The TeeBee is in competition with other monophonic bass synthesizers, like the Novation BassStation Rack, the Control Deep Bass Nine, the Spectral ProTone, and the Synthology Clone 3. None of these has quite the same approach as the TeeBee, however, and the user interface of the TeeBee is quite unlike any of the others. Making a price comparison is hard because of the mix of additional facilities that the TeeBee offers. You need to decide if you need these features, or just a TB303-type sound.

If you can live with the unusual programming interface, mastering the TeeBee means coming to terms with the complexities of using the Slide and Accent functions effectively. Plain step sequences sound much the same on any monosynth, but the careful use of these additional TB303-type features on sequences with large leaps in pitch can definitely produce that characteristic Bassline sound.

The underlying sounds of the TeeBee are classic vintage analogue, and beyond that we enter the realms of personal preference. They're certainly completely in character with the intended market, and are not lacking in authenticity. But the final choice has to be yours — give the TeeBee an audition and then decide if it can provide the Bassline you've always wanted. **SOS**

How to become a Record Prod

become a Record Prod

As the final mix looms, the end of the producer's job draws near. But which approach to mixing is best? DAVID MELLOR fires up the Moulinex...

PART 7 — THE MIX

Much has already been said in these pages about mixing, but from an engineer's point of view, rather than a producer's. Many years ago, before the modern era of multitrack tape, recording and mixing were part of the same process. You *had* to get a good balance between the voices and instruments at the session, because there was no way of making adjustments later. In fact, much orchestral music is recorded in the same way today, directly to stereo. Mixing directly to stereo is also very common for today's live and broadcast popular music. It's possible to do without a multitrack stage in all of these situations because the engineer knows before even one fader has been lifted what the final recording should sound like — as close to the original as possible. Since skilled engineers can achieve such remarkable results, you might wonder why we need a multitrack stage at all. The answer is that it allows much more attention to be paid to each element of the recording, in terms of sound quality, musicality, and creativity. Giving these three aspects the attention they deserve is why recording takes so long and demands so much effort.

GET IT RIGHT FIRST TIME

Ideally, the producer should start the mixing process as soon as the project gets off the ground. He should have an idea of the sound being aimed for, allowing a certain amount of scope for creativity, depending on the nature of the project. If it's a dance record, for instance, the producer must understand the style well enough to know the elements of the music his audience demand, and should add to those elements new and different sounds and textures to push the style further into the future. If the producer knows how every step of the preparation and recording process is going to contribute to the final mix, the mixing stage should be straightforward and successful. This means, among other things, getting the arrangement right and selecting the right sounds, making sure the musicians are playing in time and in tune, and obtaining a good performance from the singer by whatever means necessary. If there is a problem in any of these areas, you can only turn a deaf ear to it for so long — until the mix, in fact. Any problems present on the tape at the mixing stage will have to be disguised or covered up. Those problems should have been corrected as soon as they occurred.

MONITOR MIXING

As more tracks are being added to the recording during the overdubbing stage, the engineer and producer will be working with a mix that may bear a passing resemblance to the finished product — the monitor mix. The monitor mix is what you listen to during the recording process, and is usually thought of as a rough guide to what is already on the tape — good enough so that the musicians can get a proper feel for the music, and good enough to tell the producer how the recording is shaping up. The exact monitor mix depends on the type of mixing console you are using: some have only very basic monitor facilities — perhaps just level, pan and a couple of auxiliary sends. This means that you can't do anything in the monitor mix apart from set how loud each instrument is, where it appears in the stereo image, and how much reverb it has (the other aux will be used to send foldback to the musicians' headphones). This is not a bad way of working, however, because you will hear exactly what is on the tape as you progress through the recording. If the monitor mix sounds good, you can be sure the final mix will sound great.

This simple style of monitor mixing has its merits,

but large-scale consoles offer vastly more sophisticated monitoring facilities. You can create a mix on the monitors using EQ, compression, gating, and everything else that is part of modern studio technology. If you regard the monitor mix as something temporary, but you — and the engineer — then proceed to use all of these facilities, you may find yourself in big trouble by the time you flip the multitrack onto the big faders and start to mix from flat, because the sound will be totally different. By the time you graduate to SSL- or Neve-class studios, you should have learned the first rule of recording: nothing less than 100% effort is good enough. You should regard everything you do as being part of the finished product and make it as perfect as possible. This includes the monitor mix.

With a console that only has rudimentary monitoring facilities, you'll probably want to perfect everything on tape. With a console that has sophisticated monitoring facilities, you'll record

ucer

a good clean sound on tape, and then anything you do to the monitor mix will become part of the final mix. The console will allow you to do this so you don't have to start from scratch when the overdubs are finished. In fact, you can do this with any console that has enough channels. It's very common, once a few tracks have been recorded, to route the multitrack to the channel faders and start to mix as overdubs progress. Working in this way, you never have to say,

"Right, let's clear the desk and start to mix". Instead, you come to a realisation that everything is done and all that is needed is a little polishing. Self-produced artist George Michael works in this way and his status at the top of the singles chart as I write confirms the value of this philosophy.

FROM ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

There are many ways to make a record, and I can imagine some producers reading the above and disagreeing with it. Another style of album recording involves putting down all the basic tracks, then overdubbing other instruments and vocals, then taking a break of a few days before starting to mix the whole lot. The disadvantage of working a song at a time, all the way from basic tracks to mix, is that you can easily lose perspective. On average, people probably listen to each record they buy about six times; the producer of the record has to listen to it more like six *hundred* times during the recording and mixing process, and over-familiarity with a song and the recording of that song means that you can't judge it in the same way as a punter would. Taking a break between recording and mixing means that you can come back to the song with fresh ears and hear very clearly which bits need to be brought out, and which elements play an important but subservient role. If this is the philosophy of mixing that appeals to you more strongly, it would probably be a waste of time working on an elaborate monitor mix. You could store it on a console with recall facilities, but that would negate the advantages of taking a break before mixing. A simple monitor mix is probably the best idea.

Still on the subject of monitor mixes, another common practice is to swap between songs during overdubbing, ▶

The Rapino Brothers in their compact and bijoux home studio, with Kylie Minogue, whose recent album featured four Rapino-authored tracks...

...and the 'brothers' with two members of Take That, for whom they have produced and remixed several album tracks.

THE REMIXER'S VIEW — MARCO SABIU OF THE RAPINO BROTHERS

The Rapino Brothers are Marco Sabiu and Charlie Mallozzi. (They are not real brothers, obviously — 'rapino' is Italian for robber). They have built up a significant and lucrative following among record companies as writers, remixers and producers, making new versions of original recordings by Take That, Roxette, Sleeper, Suggs, Rozalla, and Dubstar, among many others.

• THE NEED FOR REMIXING
"I'm not the one who said remixing was necessary. It's the record companies who want remixes, because they want to have their songs played in the clubs. If people like the song in the clubs, they will go and buy the record."

• ON FOLLOWING RECORD
    COMPANY INSTRUCTIONS
"Sometimes they tell us what kind of style they want. Sometimes they don't tell us anything, they just give us the vocal and we do

what we want. Usually we only keep the vocals and redo everything else, unless it's a band with guitars — then maybe we'll keep the riff. It depends. It can be almost like doing a new song."

• REMIXERS VS. THE ORIGINAL
    PRODUCER
"I listen to the original producer's mix to try to get the kind of vibe that they used, so I can avoid doing the same thing. I don't know whether producers like what we do. We always do a radio version of a remix and sometimes the record company will use it as a single. If that version goes into the charts I think the producer should be quite happy because the album will sell better."

• REMIXING AS A WAY OF
    GETTING INTO PRODUCTION
"I can't see any difference between a remix and a production, because at the end of the day when you do a remix you

start from scratch. The only thing you have is the vocal. To me that is a production."
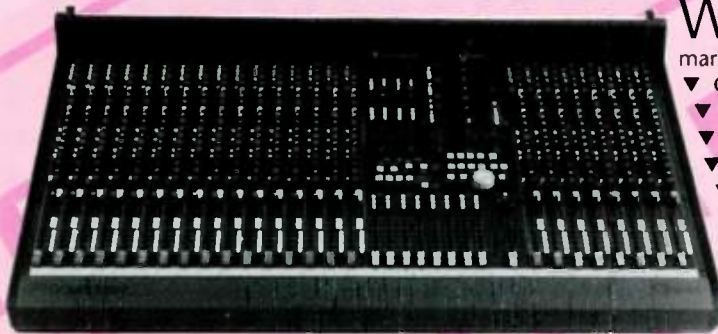
• TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE
"On that side we are quite lucky, because when I was in Italy I worked as a sound engineer, so for me now it's helpful to have that kind of knowledge. If I want a sound I know how to do it. I don't have to ask someone else, which would be just wasting time. I think it's quicker and better if you have a good knowledge of the machines you have. We have a Pro Tools 3 system with *Logic Audio*, so we do everything with that."

• ACOUSTIC INSTRUMENTS
"We quite like to use live drums and real guitar and bass. When we do that, we usually go into a bigger studio because we don't have the space. Then we come back to our home studio [pictured here], transfer everything into Pro Tools and start editing."
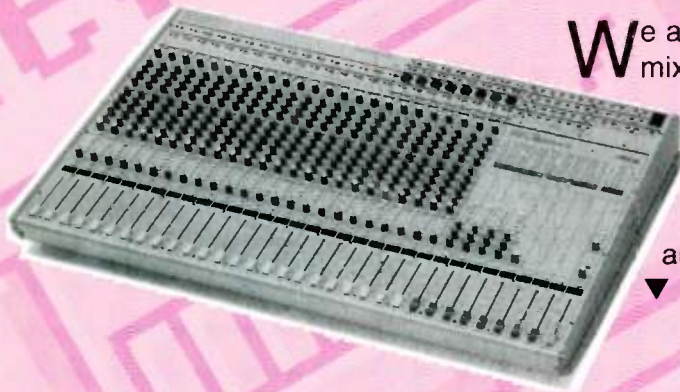
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How to
become a
Record
Producer

according to which one you and the band have most enthusiasm for at the time. Or you may have booked a session player who you want on more than one song, so he might as well do them all in the same session. This means locating to each song on the multitrack and resetting the monitor mix on the console. If you confine yourself to level/pan/reverb monitor mixes, it won't take too long to set up. Sometimes, however, during the later stages of overdubbing, you may feel that the mix you're hearing sounds really great, just by chance, and you would like to keep it as a reference for when you start mixing proper. In this case it's a simple matter to copy the monitor mix onto a DAT so you can check it later. With so few variable elements, it's pretty easy for a skilled engineer to reconstruct the mix almost exactly, and then you can go ahead and improve it still further.

HOW TO GET A GOOD MIX

Simple. Use a good engineer and go away! I mentioned earlier in the series that engineers acquire a vast amount of experience of working with music and sound, and they are the people who should be operating the faders — not the producer, unless the producer comes from an engineering background, of course. If the producer sits in the studio from the moment the first fader is raised all the way through to the finish, he will be nothing but an inhibition for the engineer, who would really like to get on and tinker with the sounds and try out lots of ideas, many of which might not work. So this is a good time for you to take a walk in the fresh air and clear your mind ready to make an objective judgment on how the mix is progressing, two or three hours after you left the engineer alone with it. You may leave behind a few ideas or guidelines, or you may even encourage the engineer to go wild and try out some crazy things. When you return, you will hear your production in all its glory and you will be able to advise on what you want more of and what you want less of. You could even say that it is entirely wrong and you want to start again. An experienced engineer accepts that the producer is in charge and won't take offence (he just won't work with you again!).

A trickier question is what *makes* a good mix. It's especially tricky for the engineer who has to ▶

THE ENGINEER'S VIEW — PAUL GOMERSALL

Paul Gomersall has recently enjoyed the privilege of engineering George Michael's new CD, *Older*, where George, as usual, is his own producer (for the full story, see the article starting on page 40 this month).

Paul's other credits include work with producers Trevor Horn, Phil Collins (as a producer), Stephen Hague, Stephen Lipson, Thomas Dolby, Chris Porter, Laurie Latham, and others.

• WORKING WITH PRODUCERS WHO ARE ALSO ENGINEERS

"Producers like to distance themselves from the desk, as long as they have an engineer they can trust. It's one of the joys of production. If they have a problem, they might dive in and try and sort it out themselves, but usually there won't be a problem. You are the interface with all the technical stuff so the producer doesn't have to think about that. If the producer comes up with an idea you make it work for them."

What should an engineer do if a producer appears not to hear a problem?

"Point it out. One of the good phrases is 'I think we should listen back to that'. He will be listening by then. There are ways of getting your point across. Diplomacy is a big part of the job."

• WORKING WITH GEORGE MICHAEL
Monitoring: "I give him the mix output of the desk in his headphones. The headphone mix is very important to anyone. That's what they are listening

to in the studio so that's what they want to hear in the headphones."
Reverb: "The way he sings the consonants, it gives a bit of excitement to his vocal sound. It's being used as another instrument. I generally set up two, three or four reverbs that I think will suit the track as it's coming together and take it from there, and George will pick what he wants."
Mixing: "The mix is an evolutionary thing. Virtually every song we do we work through to the mix. You never get a stage where everything is finished and you start mixing. It evolves, and somewhere along the line he'll want to do a vocal ride so we'll switch the mix computer on, then we'll switch it off again and add some more things and continue like that. I know we're finished when he says 'let's put one down'. He'll take a mix home and come back the next day and probably continue working on it. The programming diminishes as the work carries on and we get more involved in riding levels of things, EQ and other bits and pieces. And then suddenly it's there. It's finished. The rough mixes are really important because sometimes George will ask to refer to something we've done before and then carry on from there. So we keep all the mixes we've done in case one of them had something that was really good."

Engineer Paul Gomersall and Programmer Steve McNichol at work on George Michael's Older at Sarm West studios — and they weren't posing!

How to
become a
Record
Producer

▶ learn every detail of how to get a good mix. A producer, on the other hand, doesn't need to know the details but has to be able to recognise when something is right, and offer meaningful comments when it isn't. You need to keep in mind the purpose of the mix. Is it a dancefloor mix that should sound great on a club PA? Or is it intended for CD listening at home? A radio mix should emphasise the 'buy me' factor, whatever it is that will attract the listener to the record store.

The engineer will always sit in the optimum listening position, directly between the speakers, while mixing, but you will probably wander around the room. This is so you have the opportunity to hear the mix in less than perfect conditions, which is exactly the way the record buyer will hear it — in a club with the bass turned up to stomach-pounding

> ### "On average, people probably listen to each record they buy about six times; the producer of the record has to listen to it more like six *hundred* times during the recording and mixing process."

volume, or on an average home hi-fi, or on a car radio in heavy traffic, with a hole in the exhaust. Your mix has to sell the song in each of these situations, so while the engineer considers the finer points which will only be appreciated by those with good quality home stereo systems or a decent pair of headphones, you will be looking for the overall impact. If the mix sounds good from any listening position in the control room, it probably *is* good.

All studios have two or more pairs of monitors, so you can check the mix on very high-quality speakers or on the console-mounted nearfields. You can also have a cassette copy made so you can check the mix on a cheap stereo system, on a Walkman, or in the car. The more ways you can listen to the mix, the better.

STEREO FORMAT

Most multitrack recordings are mixed to DAT these days, but at a professional level, DAT isn't always considered to be entirely satisfactory. For one thing it's only 16-bit, which means that its sound quality isn't any better than the CDs people listen to at home. The engineer, therefore, has absolutely no headroom to play with, and inevitably there is a margin of unused capability that makes the recording not quite as good, technically, as it ought to be. It won't be too long before we see 20- or even 24-bit stereo formats in the studio on a regular basis, although it might be some years before any one is accepted as a standard. In the meantime, many producers are opting for the 'old fashioned' alternative of analogue reel-to-reel tape. They don't use a battered old Revox, however. Top studios have slightly worn but well maintained Ampex or Studer stereo machines that run at a speed of 30 inches per second (twice the 15ips long considered the professional norm) and take half-inch rather than quarter-inch tape. Such a machine isn't totally transparent but has a definite sound of its own, and it's a sound that producers like, particularly if a recording has been made on a digital rather than analogue multitrack. The frequency response is, in fact, better than DAT or CD, which can only manage around 20kHz at the top end. Half-inch analogue at 30ips can go up to 25kHz and beyond, and quiet signals can still be clearly heard below the already low noise floor — even without Dolby SR noise reduction. There are many who will say that half-inch is better than digital for these reasons, and so many successful records have been mixed to half-inch that it is difficult to disagree.

When the stereo master is finished, the producer's work continues into the CD mastering studio. This is the final stage, where the stereo master is committed to a U-Matic video tape or Exabyte data cartridge. After this, no further alterations can be made to the sound. CD mastering isn't quite such a creative opportunity as vinyl mastering used to be (mostly because of the technical limitations of the medium). It is, however, a chance to make sure that all the tracks have the right relative levels, EQing and compressing where necessary. You'll also set the length of the gaps between tracks, and perform any crossfades between tracks that you think are appropriate (and to hell with radio plays!).

When you leave the CD mastering studio, your work as producer is complete and you can look forward to the financial rewards for your labours. Actually, you may also have to look forward to your recording being handed over to specialist remixers — a fact of life that you will accept as gracefully as a true professional would! (See box on the Rapino Brothers.) Next month, in the final part of this series, we'll look at the business aspects of enjoying a long and fruitful career as a record producer. **SOS**

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ALL HANDS ON DECKS!

TASCAM 302 DUAL CASSETTE DECK

PAUL WHITE takes Tascam's new dual cassette deck into the studio for practical trials.

Most dual cassette decks are pretty sad affairs, best suited to the less quality-conscious listener who wants to make a quick bootleg of a friend's tape for in-car or Walkman listening. The fact that this is a copyright infringement doesn't seem to put anyone off, but then looking at it from another angle, there are so few opportunities for radio airplay of anything other than mainstream pop that bootlegging may well be the only effective marketing tool the record companies have left!

While there are few legitimate uses for a dual cassette deck, one such is in the project studio, where clients frequently want to run off a handful of tapes from their own master. Indeed, I have a TEAC W525R dual deck in my studio for this very purpose, and like many of these decks, it offers regular or double-speed copying for a choice between speed and convenience or highest quality.

Basic dual decks are pretty limited in what they can do, because you can usually only record on one of the decks. It would be more useful sometimes if you could record on both at once — especially if your master tape is being played from DAT and not using up one of the cassette decks.

DUALITY BITES

Enter the dual deck that does it differently — the 3U rackmount Tascam 302. Both decks can be used to record and play with dubbing from decks one to two at either standard or double speed. A number of professional features have been included, making this deck very flexible both in the studio and in sound installation applications. Perhaps the most important ability is that of being able to record on both decks at once, but there's also a Cascade feature which allows multiple 302s to be connected and controlled from a single deck for quantity copying applications. Here, the master tape can be a cassette in deck one of the master

machine, or it can be an external source, such as a DAT machine. Conventional phono leads are used to cascade the audio, with a further set of phono leads needed to cascade the external control connections. Each machine also has a socket for an optional hard-wired remote control.

For background music applications, the two decks can be set up to play sequentially, and because the mechanisms auto-reverse, you can play all four sides of two cassettes in order before having them repeat. By linking multiple 302s, you can have as many tapes play sequentially as you like.

The deck facilities are identical for each of the two tape drives, and each has totally independent controls apart from those associated with deck-to-deck dubbing and auto-reverse playback. Separate audio ins and outs are provided for the two decks, but these can be switched to Common mode so that only deck one's inputs are required when making duplications. There's a choice of Dolby B, Dolby C or Off for noise reduction — again independently switchable for the two decks — but there's no HX Pro (a headroom expansion system used in conjunction with Dolby noise reduction to prevent high-frequency tape saturation). Each deck has its own Pitch Control, Input Level and Record Balance pot. Master/Slave switching status is provided for applications where multiple machines are being used, and the headphone output may be switched to either deck. Other than that, the transport controls are pretty conventional, with a Return To Zero function and a 4-digit tape time counter. A custom fluorescent display provides counters and bargraph record level meters for both channels, and the tape doors are nicely damped so that they open slowly when Eject is pressed.

In use, the Tascam 302 delivers clean, bright recordings within the constraints of the cassette format itself. Slight wow and flutter was evident near the beginning of some budget cassettes, but I guess few machines would do better under the same circumstances. The varispeed option is welcome, as it allows master tapes made on poorly-calibrated machines to be brought back to concert pitch. Overall, the audio performance of this machine compares well with most mid-price hi-fi decks.

Though more costly than your average dual cassette deck, the Tascam 302 is a genuinely useful machine to have around the studio. It can handle the odd high-speed dub with ease, yet at the flip of a switch, it can make two real-time copies from an external source. Add one or more additional machines and you have a real-time copying suite. The continuous replay facilities are less useful in a studio environment, but they're well thought out and effective. Definitely a step up from your regular dual deck. **SOS**

Media Revolution

There are now more recording media and data storage formats than ever before. PAUL WHITE catches up with Pro Tape's Richard Symons, to discuss the role of tape in a multi-platform future.

Alesis's ADAT XT and the S-VHS tape it uses: "We now have a professional audio format which evolved out of a consumer video camera format!"

RICHARD SYMONS OF PRO TAPE

Richard Symons is a partner at Pro Tape, the well-known West End recording media supplier, which puts him in a very good position to monitor trends and feelings within the recording industry. I started our interview by asking for Richard's impressions of how the market is responding to digital technology.

"People entering the market are going for ADATs or DA88s, or in some cases they may have a MIDI system plus some kind of direct-to-disk system, mastering to DAT, but once they find some success and start working with outside record producers, and certainly with a record company, they tend to move up to analogue 2-inch tape."

Is this a matter of sound quality, or is there more to it than that?

"I think it's more for the sound quality, but you can't say it's superior — it's just different. And there's the reliability factor. Both 8-track digital formats are great because of their low cost, but dropouts do happen, especially if it's a long project and you do a lot of shuttling, dropping in and out, and so on. They've done very well in the live recording field, but even then, the top-end professionals are more likely to use open-reel digital or open-reel analogue machines if they have the choice. The new high-output analogue tapes let you record using more level than with standard tapes, which means you get closer to a digital signal-to-noise performance, while retaining the benefits of the analogue sound."

It's true that there is a perceived difference between the analogue and the digital sound, but it's probably also true that analogue recording is about as good as it's going to get, whereas digital formats can still be developed a long way from where they are now.

"But would you want anything better than some of the analogue records you've got?"

Not from the sound quality point of view, but digital surely has numerous benefits: the

PRO TAPE

signal on tape stays unchanged once it has been recorded, you can make accurate clones — which you can't do with analogue — and digital systems can give you true gapless punching in and out.

"So you're happy with the sound of analogue, but not with its versatility from an editing point of view. I totally agree, and digital technology should improve with time to give us the same quality. I'm just waiting for that time. Also, I'm not sure how big a problem high-end loss and additional noise from copying and bouncing is on 2-inch tapes, though on smaller formats you might worry about it. Digital has a very clear advantage if you're editing or cloning material, and track bouncing is quieter, but then not too much bouncing goes on at a professional level. There's a technical paper doing the rounds which says that to make digital audio work acceptably, you need a sampling rate of 256kHz, and if that's the case, it's going to be a long time before it becomes practical because of processor speeds — not to mention the data storage requirement. At the moment, you can get an album (stereo) onto a 1Gb drive sampling at 44.1kHz, but that would go down by a factor of about six."

ON BORROWED TIME

One of the things you've spoken to me about before is the fact that analogue recording equipment and media is designed specifically for that purpose, whereas most digital technology and media is borrowed from some other market area. For example, ADATs use video tape. Is this a major concern, or are ▶

The **AKAI**

Family Album

The close-knit Akai family of professional hard disk recording products all share the advanced component design of the DD1500, the mother of all audio post-production workstations. Entirely purpose designed for the dedicated recording, editing and syncing of audio to picture, the line is continued by the Akai DR8, an 8 track hard disk digital recorder/player as easy to use as a conventional MTR and its bigger brother, the DR16 which shares the family's powerful non-destructive editing facilities and gives a surprisingly low price level per track. Up to eight DR16s and DR8s can be chained together in combination to give a maximum of 128 tracks. **The family that plays together, stays together.**

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- 16 channel digital mixer
- Remote operation up to 200 metres away
- Disks compatible with DR8, DR16 and DD1000

Akai DR8
8 track hard disk digital recorder/player
- 16 bit linear professional quality 8 track simultaneous recording/playback
- Logical format of conventional MTR tape machine
- User choice of hard disk fit, fixed or removable
- Non-destructive editing facilities
- Disk random access allows instant playback or edit
- Standard digital interface allows 16 track backup to DAT
- Built in 16 channel programmable mixer
- Same synchronisation performance as DD1500
- Optional VGA output board
- Extensive range of common DR8/DR16 interfaces for upgrading
- Disks compatible with DR16 and DD1500

Akai DR16
16 track hard disk digital record/player
- 16 tracks of 16 bit linear digital performance from a single SCSI hard disk, fixed or removable
- Highly cost-effective price level per track
- As easy to use as a conventional MTR
- Standard digital interface allows 16 track backup to DAT
- Total editing with zero loss
- 16 channel programmable mixer
- Same synchronisation performance as DD1500
- Optional VGA output board
- Extensive range of common DR16/DR8 interfaces for upgrading
- Disks compatible with DR8 and DD1500

RICHARD SYMONS OF PRO TAPE

LIFE AFTER ANALOGUE

It seems to me that the life of the medium used for storage didn't change for the better when we switched to digital. While some analogue recordings have suffered from so-called 'sticky shed' syndrome, there are still playable analogue tapes made decades ago. By contrast, digital tapes such as DAT, or even removable hard drives and writeable CDs, tend to have an estimated life span in the order of 10 years.

"Certainly with DAT and the smaller formats, 10 years may be all we can expect from them. If you want to keep a stereo master intact for as long as possible, it needs to be on a minimum of quarter-inch, or preferably half-inch, analogue tape. The sticky shed problem only afflicted certain types of tape, and even then we can't be certain how carefully all of it was stored. People can be very careless about how they store tape — all the effort goes into the creative process, then the master DAT gets stuck on a shelf.

"It's amazing that the National Sound Archive can still get recordings to play back that were made on wax cylinders as long ago as 1904. Somebody actually took the machine into the jungle to make ethnic recordings, but I'm prepared to put money on it that if they'd gone out with a DAT machine, we wouldn't be listening to the original recording now. You might say that we don't need to listen to the original because we can clone it, but that only stands up if you can make the copy before the original degrades and starts dropping out. So you'll replay the DAT and at the slightest hint of dropout, you'll make a copy. That's fine, but by the time you've realised there is a problem you've lost some data already, and who has time to check all their old recordings? The irony with the National Sound Archive is that they're transferring all their material to DAT.

"The basic problem centres on the fact that we're using less and less space to store more and more information. In ancient Egypt, a full stop carved into a block of stone would have occupied a three-inch-square space for a single bit of information. Five thousand years later, even though the edges have been rounded off by the elements, we can still read it. Nowadays, an optical disk of the same dimensions can store 230 million bits — which is an amazing leap — but you've only got to mishandle the disk by leaving it in the sunlight or next to a heat source, and you run the risk of losing some of that data. Of course, this is using two extremes of information storage technology, but I hope it illustrates the point."

"Studio owners tell me that when they ask an artist what they want to master on, the answer is almost always DAT — until they hear an analogue half-inch master."

we merely benefiting from the economies of scale?

"It is a concern. Take 8mm tape. It starts as a camcorder tape, you soup up the tape formulation and the electronics so you can get more information onto it, and out of that grows Hi-8 and a data storage format. Finally it gets bastardised into a digital 8-track, so now we have a professional audio format which evolved out of a consumer video camera format.

"The pro audio business is very small, and as you've probably heard, 3M have pulled out of tape sales altogether. If you look at their professional tape sales, they are very good, but seen as part of their whole tape business, which includes video tapes and audio cassettes, it's really a very small part. Professional audio will always be insignificant compared to consumer formats, which makes it impractical to develop media specifically for pro-audio recording, with the exception of the top end. On the other hand, because consumer formats are cheap commodity products, the running cost of any system that uses them is very low and there are lower hardware development costs.

"The downside is that none of it is really professional — even DAT is, strictly speaking, a failed consumer format, and if it had been designed from the start as a professional format, it would have been far more robust. Even digital U-matic uses a professional video player. Audio is always the poor relation, and the main difference in

use between a consumer product and a professional one is the out-and-out hammering the pro gear is designed to withstand. You can soup up the hardware all you like, but the ultimate limitation is with the format itself. With DAT, DA88 and ADAT, you're squeezing a massive amount of very important data onto consumer formats and then expecting them to perform to professional standards in a professional environment. I suppose what I'm saying is that I'd like to see a digital format designed from the ground up, in the same way that 2-inch analogue was. You look at what the pro user needs — let's say a 256kHz sampling rate with 24-bit resolution — then you build a format around that requirement, instead of looking at available mass-produced technology and then adapting it as best you can."

FORMAT FUTURE

How will your business be affected by the way in which hard disk is becoming more popular for recording and editing work? This is another example of technology developed for one market area being used for audio work, and just one of the problems that came up was that of thermal recalibration, where hard drives would interrupt the audio flow during playback to calibrate themselves.

"We supply information-bearing media, so as long as people want to store information, we will supply whatever is needed."

So if, in 10 years, we're recording onto holographic perspex cubes, you'll be selling them?

"Yes! But I think there's still a lot of life left in analogue tape, just for esoteric reasons, the same as there is in valves. Look how well Tony Larking is doing with his valve range. And a lot of that is down to the way digital audio sounds.

"Two-inch tape is in a slight decline but it's still doing very well, and part of the credit must go to the high-output tapes [Ampex 499, BASF 900 and 3M 996], which can be run at 30ips with no noise reduction to produce unbelievably good results.

Ampex's high-output 499 2-inch tape — still flying the flag for analogue.

▶ Quarter-inch tape has almost totally lost out to DAT, except in the areas of location recording for film, while half-inch soldiers on as the superior stereo mastering format. Studio owners tell me that when they ask an artist what they want to master on, the answer is almost always DAT —

DAT's inexorable rise as a format — even in areas like film location recording, where analogue quarter-inch tape retains a foothold — has been aided by handy machines like the HHB PortaDAT shown here.

until they hear an analogue half-inch master. It sounds unbelievably good. It's still quite worrying that they have to sell people the idea of mastering onto half-inch as well as DAT."

One thing that worries me to some extent is that as new technologies emerge, we're ending up with a huge proliferation of formats, not only in tape, but in removable digital media such as Zip drives, Jaz drives, the various SyQuest cartridges, and so on. Do you see this as being a problem area?

"I think that probably keeps us in business, to be honest. What concerns me more is the reliability of the new formats — for example, the Zip disks have a lifetime guarantee, but what does that mean? As yet, they haven't been around long enough to prove that they're up to the task. Our society is becoming increasingly dependent on information, and manufacturers are exploiting that very effectively, giving us immediate access to a whole world of it. I'm just very concerned about how much attention is being paid to the longevity of the data we create, use and store. History gives us the best sense of perspective we can ever have, and we need to preserve it as a means of measuring how we move forward, learning from our mistakes, and even just enjoying a past era. That used to mean preserving films, books, art and artifacts, but in the completely digital near future, how much will be retrievable just a quarter of a century down the line?"

CDR: storage medium of the future, or only good for 10 years?

BACK TO BACKUP

Most people are now familiar with the benefits of hard disk recording and editing, but of course the big

problem is where to back up data. What are the professionals doing?

"They're using tape streamers of some sort. We're selling a lot of Exobyte, with data DAT a close second. Optical disks are also great, but the cost is still too high for most people and the capacity isn't there. A 1.3Gb optical disk costs around £50. Of course, that will keep coming down, but at the moment, the tape-based systems are still the most cost effective. The better Exobyte systems have a read-after-write facility, so they won't go on to writing the next bit of data until they've confirmed that what they've just written is OK."

Is CDR a useful archiving medium?

"Well, it is susceptible to heat and light, but the truth is that we really don't know. You can do accelerated ageing tests on all these media, but the only way to really find out what will happen is to sit around for 10 or 15 years and wait. We see guaranteed archival figures varying from 10 to 100 years. I wouldn't want to guarantee 100% data integrity for much more than 10 years with CDR."

Does this mean that there ought to be more boxes for checking the error rates in media so that we know when it's time to clone?

"Some studios have that facility, and certainly you can get error printouts for U-matics, but yes,

> **"There's a technical paper doing the rounds which says that to make digital audio work acceptably, you need a sampling rate of 256kHz, and if that's the case, it's going to be a long time before it becomes practical."**

we have to build up a backup mentality where digital data is concerned, and we have to store the media with respect. Tape gets taken for granted until there's a disaster.

"Last month, a big production house who use a SADiE hard disk editor and store the end results to DAT were having terrible problems with data errors on DATs, but they can't pin it down to one

The last year has seen the rise of new removable digital media, like the Iomega Zip drive shown here: "As yet, they haven't been around long enough to prove they're up to the task".

machine. They'd check the playback at their own studio, send it to the BBC, who also checked it on receipt, then when it's been transmitted, there's been a major dropout. Sometimes it's happened in the studio and it's been the only copy — completely random. If you're relying solely on DAT and you don't have a backup, you can lose a lot of work in one go. It means that you can't always be 100% confident that your work is intact, so if you're making a CD master from DAT, you really need to sit in and listen to every second of it as it goes across, to make sure it's OK."

To put things in perspective, most people manage most of the time without any problems. I've used DAT since it first came out and I've had few problems that couldn't be traced to either a faulty tape or machine incompatibilities. The same with ADAT — I can't remember ever having a dropout while using the recommended tapes, though I have had clients who've brought in recordings made on other S-VHS tapes and some of those have thrown up serious errors. I would imagine that one cause of reported ADAT errors, at least from home users, is using the same tape over and over again. If you do that with a video tape in a video recorder, you eventually get sparkles or a fuzzy picture, and I imagine the audio equivalent is an increased error rate.

"I don't want to be alarmist, but because we're selling media day in, day out, we get a broad overview of the problems with the stuff. Naturally we don't get every customer calling us up to tell us that the stock they've been using has been great — we only get a comeback if there's a problem, so that's what tends to stick in your mind. And you're right that re-using old tape is a completely false economy. Enthusiasts think nothing about spending thousands of pounds on equipment, then they'll spend years cycling around the same £20-worth of tape. In fact, forget £20 — they'll come in and look at two different brands of ADAT tape, one of which costs a tenner and one of which costs, say, £11, and you can see them standing there trying to decide which one to buy!"

And this goes right back to the guy with the cassette multitracker — you should always use a brand new tape for every session, and it should be the right type of tape. But how many people do that?

"It's amazing that the thing we store the information on gets so little respect. I've been on the other side, and when you're trying to decide whether to buy five reels of 2-inch tape and you have to choose between 456 and 499, the difference in cost comes to about £50. But at the end of the day, it's your recording. It shouldn't be a question of 'what's the *cheapest* I can get away with?'. The question should be 'What's the *best* I can afford?'."

SOS

demo DOCTOR

If you'd like our resident specialist **JOHN HARRIS** to review your demo tape, just send it on cassette or DAT, with recording details and a photograph, to: Demo Doctor, Sound On Sound, PO Box 30, St Ives, Cambridgeshire PE17 4XQ.

Readers submitting demo tapes should note that SOS regards the inclusion of photos or artwork with demos as permission for the magazine to reproduce this material free of charge, as illustration, with any review of the accompanying tape.

Recording Venue: Home.
Recording Equipment: Yamaha QY10 sequencer/sound module, Yamaha TG33 sound module, Aiwa ADF410 cassette deck.

It always makes me cringe when I read letters that say "I have written over 50 tracks", with the obvious implication being that they are all great. Few people seem to exercise quality control over their work when enthusiasm for churning out songs takes over! Still, Darren's tape is very worthy of mention for his use of sound.

The first composition crosses electro/acoustic music and ambient dance, with knocking, percussive synth, tuned kick (upfront, with a long decay), a grating and very high-pitched melody line, and good use of industrial chords as a backdrop. Sonically, it's very well put together, and I also like how the kick pattern occasionally drops beats to keep the listener awake. It's interesting that Darren doesn't use any external effects, because he's still managed to choose sounds with appropriate processing. Those of you with one sound generator will realise how difficult this actually is. The kick drum decay, for example, could be gated reverb or a long decay time and the low industrial chords sound as if they have been treated with delay, stereo panning and modulation. These chords also sit well within the track because their bandwidth has been limited to about 2kHz. So they provide body and warmth in what is an otherwise hard set of sounds.

The second composition demonstrates once again that Darren has given a lot of thought to the sounds and their overall texture. Some very low bass underpins this more ambient track and in places sounds exactly like a car engine revving up outside. It's quite a relief when this cuts to a bell sequence. However, the bell section really goes on far too long, with no variation, before cutting back to the start of the piece. It was an interesting idea to then put the two sequences together but, again, the idea is in danger of outliving its usefulness. ❏

Recording Venue: Home.
Recording Equipment: Atari 1040 ST running *Cubase* and *Creator*, Tascam 424 Portastudio, Philip Rees TS1 Synchroniser, Studiomaster Reddimix 8:2 Mixer, Alesis Microverb and Midiverb II effects, Zoom 9050 effects, Philips 730 DCC recorder.

This is an interesting demo from Dave, Paul and Tim, who are collectively called Nation to Nation. The band name is certainly reflected in the first track, a collage of different 'World' sounds. For instance, sampled tablas play a big part on the rhythm track, with strong support from four-on-the-floor kick and mixed cabasa and hi-hat. Yet there are also American Indian-style invocational vocals, the sound of children singing, which could be from Africa or Asia, some pretty heavy guitar chords, and some ethereal Indian flute. Given that the vocals have been dubbed over from cassette, the quality is pretty good, with no obvious signs of deterioration in clarity. The use of analogue synth filter zaps is also good, tying the track firmly into the ambient side of dance. If there is any criticism, it is that thematically the track is too varied and goes on a little too long.

The second song is more conventional rock/pop in style, featuring '80s-style string synth and bells with early Simple Minds guitar playing from Tim Roberts. Heavily effected vocals, which are also EQ'd to sound megaphonic, cut in from time to time. These use quite a lot of slapback echo with a slightly longer delay time than would normally be used — probably 130ms or more — and work well, even if that particular production trick is well used.

For me, the band sound more exciting when they're experimenting with early synth textures, especially the Mellotron-style strings, and mixing this with World music percussion and guitar textures. Returning to this format for the third composition, the sound is much more 'now'. If they could only join the structured singing style of the second track to this ambient dub, they might have something. Even so, this is a well-mixed demo where the use of effects, particularly echo, help to make vocals and guitar sit well with the synthesized sounds and samples. ❏

demo DOCTOR

► CONTRIBUTION

Contribution

Three Songs Vol II
Utopia via Bexleyheath

Recording Venue: Home.
Recording Equipment: Fostex X28H cassette multitracker, Aiwa DAT recorder, Roland Sound Canvas synth module, Emu Emax 1 sampler, Yamaha V50 synth, Alesis Quadraverb GT effects, Tandy Microphone.

This is a moody, eloquent demo from Kent-based band Contribution — but talk about getting your money's worth from an effects unit! The first song uses the Quadraverb GT to good effect on nearly everything, from phased and echoed vocals to industrial bass clang and, of course, guitar. I'm pleased to report that the wet/dry mix is well handled, so that the effects never completely take over. The result is a homogenous mix coloured by the idiosyncrasies of the Quadraverb — slight sibilance on the vocals and a grainy reverb quality. This suits the guitar in particular, creating a two-note power-chord drone which underpins the track in a most un-guitar-like fashion.

The second song employs mood swings between exposed strings and voice, and full backing. The backbeat drags a little when it arrives and I think a more modern rhythmic feel should have been used — possibly some kind of breakbeat. The last song, 'Insular Life', uses a better kit sound from the Roland Sound Canvas, with some bite provided by a higher-pitched snare.

Overall, this is a promising demo. The songs come across with their well-delivered angst vocals, and the style is early '80s synth pop with lashings of rock guitar. However, the use of effects gives the tape a more quirky feel. ❏

MORE UNFRIENDLY PEOPLE IN MY BACKYARD: This offering is described as 'post-industrial indie thrash', with heavy distortion on the guitar riffs through a backing which sounds vaguely classical in places — brash and full of pomp. The spun-in female vocal (Tori Amos) works well on a track

SWEEP THE DOCKS

as paranoid as the name of the band. The second song is more straightforward thrash at an incredibly fast pace, complete with screaming vocal, but what elevates it above the rest is the 10-second interlude of choir vocal when the guitar drops out. This is really quite an unexpected twist that throws preconceptions out of the window and ties in nicely with the female vocal on track 1. Perhaps the band should label themselves 'thinking man's post-industrial indie thrash'!

4 SIGHT: Horrendous, tabloid-worthy punning occasionally clogs the pages of SOS too! Still, if it was good enough for Shakespeare... Meanwhile, back at the demo, Graham and Leon have put together some rather good trancey dance music. Pulsing downward filter sweeps provide the hypnosis, low sub-bass throbs gently on beats one, two and a half, three and four, and it could be leaning towards the ambient in places, with the addition of girlie choir synth. Yet the synthesized filter sweep twanging and drum programming keep it just that bit uptight. At 21 minutes, 34 seconds there has to be some variation, and the lads keep the vibe going. Good festival fare for those hot summer nights.

ANDREW LLOYD: Andrew's produced a solid demo with definite soul leanings. He sings and plays drums rather well too, taking the unusual step of recording kit drums to a cassette multitracker. Drums an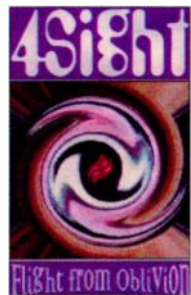d synth were recorded in stereo, then bass and percussion were added live as the whole lot was routed to the remaining stereo tracks. Vocals and extra keyboards finish off the production. The Mackie 1202 mixer must have come in useful, and its famous mic

inputs have come up trumps on the drum sound, which is one of the best real kit sounds I've heard off a cassette-based analogue multitrack. If there's any criticism, it's that the bass on the first track is a bit woolly and the snare could have done with a little reverb. However, as 'rough sketches' go, these recordings are better than many we receive on larger recording formats — which only goes to show that there's no substitute for good musicianship and a musical ear when it comes to recording at home.

WILD BUNCH: Swedish media student Jorma Linna has quite rightly taken advantage of the fine equipment in his college studio. His resulting demo is excellently recorded Status Quo-style boogie, even though Jorma regards his mixes as 'kind of rough'. For me, they've captured the energy and slightly messy edge that this kind of music requires. All the sounds are punchy, courtesy of some decent compressors; in your face, the result of good mixing and good choice of reverb balance; and big, due to the use of good sound sources and thoughtful choice of microphone positions. I suppose a little more time spent on the vocal effects would have been useful, maybe using some slapback delay instead of the small room reverb. There's also a little hiss noticeable between tracks, but nothing a decent gate or digital editor couldn't handle.

OBSCURE STATE OF MIND: This outfit relies heavily on synthesized backing to produce music which has the feel of the Pet Shop Boys without the humour. Perhaps this is why Darren and Chris have had no success with record companies so far, but more likely it's to do with the singing. Here I have to concur (for a change) with the A&R at EMI, who felt that the vocals were a bit weak. However, I didn't think that the lyrics were also lacking. The actual recording is OK, with a slightly dull vocal sound that has been treated with too much reverb. Strings are used as a chordal wash behind

ΩBSCURE ΣTATE ΩF MΨND

every song, and some substitute needs to be found to stop different songs sounding too similar. It doesn't hurt to drop chords out altogether in the verses, for example, and just use them to make the chorus pick up. For

instance, on the third song, 'Children of the Universe', the percussion I could hear in the background at one point could have been used on the verses instead and brought to the front of the mix.

JONATHAN OVIN: Jonathan worries about the quality of his demo because it was recorded direct to a normal cassette and not to DAT.

Jonathan Ovin
Sombre EP
Chaos

However, with all-digital sound sources triggered from an Atari/Cubase setup, he's really got nothing to worry about on this score. Considering that he was also only 14 when he was working on this instrumental project at school, the recording shows a good grasp of sound and balance. He's more successful when he attempts something structured, like the second track, 'Yello' — a homage to heroes, perhaps? Choice of sounds on this short track is good and I especially liked the obviously synthesized kick drum.

THE BARTOKS: This band have been making all the right moves, playing support to Skunk Anansie and for various A&R people, yet they're still looking for a good album and tour deal. Tracks 1 and 2 of the tape, recorded at Ca Va studios in Glasgow, sound excellent, and it's difficult to understand why a band as good as this can't get any financial backing in Britain. The songs are strong, the singing and playing excellent, and they've captured the production sound of the moment in both vocals and guitar style. Wah guitar and moving octaves instead of chording all the time works brilliantly. In comparison, the tracks recorded on a Portastudio sound compromised sonically, but the songs still come across well. One criticism I will make is that the addition of keyboards detracts from the skeletal attack of the band. It may be that the sounds chosen — mainly strings and piano — date the production, bringing The Bartoks dangerously close to the worst of '80s rock. ❏

brief encounters

CONCISE REVIEWS OF ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

PROSONIX 48-WAY BANTAM PATCHBAY

While professional studios invariably make use of compact bantam patchbays, most home studios are forced to go the quarter-inch jack patchbay route, mainly because of cost. Admittedly, there's a certain convenience aspect to quarter-inch jacks, because of the predominance of the jack as an instrument connector, but in my experience, the normalising contacts on most budget jack bays become intermittent after a few months. While bantams are not immune to intermittency problems, the design of the connectors makes them less vulnerable to dust, and most of the professional systems are easily disassembled for cleaning.

Those who'd prefer to use bantams may be interested in the Prosonix bantam patchbay, which provides 24 pairs of TRS sockets in just half a unit of rack space, and which costs around the same as a decent budget jack patchbay. Each pair of sockets comprises a Neutrik NJ3TT/2 dual-socket assembly mounted on its own circuit board, with a 4-way DIP switch. Because the connector assembly is fully enclosed, the only way in for contamination is via the jack holes. Should cleaning become necessary, a plastic cover can be prised off, revealing the gold-plated contacts. The boards themselves simply slot into the metalwork, so you don't need any tools at all to take the patchbay apart.

Normalising is handled by three of the four DIP switches (the fourth is redundant), allowing you to normalise the tip and ring separately, and also to isolate the input and output grounds if required. When normalised, the sockets follow the semi-normalised convention, whereby the top row (outputs) can be used to provide a feed without breaking the signal flow, but inserting a jack into the bottom row breaks the contact. The rear connections on the review model were hard-wired, which entails soldering your cable harness directly to the patchbay; while this may seem tedious, it actually saves a lot of money in connectors and is a lot more reliable. However, Prosonix are planning models with connectors on the back, including the 'D' connector used by some manufacturers (Tascam and Fostex, for example).

Bantam patch cables are traditionally very expensive compared to quarter-inch jacks, but Prosonix have sourced a range of low-cost cables from Piranha, who use Neutrik plugs and cable, both in a choice of colours, to produce a balanced patch lead for under £10.

Prosonix may be a new name in the patchbay market, but the guys behind the company were founding members of the original P&R, a name which is well known to project studio owners, so it's not surprising that they're applying their talents to bringing prices down. This is the first of their products I've seen, but there seem to be few compromises, and it's obvious that a lot of thought has gone into simplifying the design to reduce manufacturing cost. Inevitably, panel space is in short supply for labelling, though standard sticky labels apparently fit, but even so, you'll need to use some fairly cryptic abbreviations. My own instinct would be to use bantam patchbays for insert points, aux send/returns and outboard gear, but to retain standard jacks for any line inputs likely to be used for DI'ing instruments. That way you avoid having to make or buy adaptor leads. Other than that, bantams clearly have the advantage when it comes to saving space and keeping the contacts clean. *Paul White*

£ Bantam patchbay £89.95;
Patch cables £9.95 each.
Prices include VAT and UK p&p.
A Prosonix, PO Box 32, Hailsham,
East Sussex BN27 3XT.
T 01323 848808.
F 01323 441185.

MUSIC HOUSE DATA PRODUCTS POWERMASTER RACKMAC C2 APPLE RACKMOUNT KIT

The idea of making computers rackmounting for studio use is not a new one, but the necessary hardware tends to be expensive. After session musician (and *SOS* reader) Whyman Baker casually commented on the astronomical price of existing rack kits, Powermaster decided to produce their

own version, which is now on sale at a more realistic price of £199.

In these days of RAM raiding there's a security benefit from rackmounting your computer, especially if you use security rackmount screws such as the ones available from Studiospares. Designed to fit the Centris/Quadra 650 and 7100-style models (other versions are being developed), Powermaster's contribution to the protection racket is effectively a satin-black sheet steel shell, enclosing the whole computer aside from the front panel and the connector area of the rear panel. The parts of the shell are held together by simple bolts, and once the hardware is mounted in a rack cabinet, there's no way the computer can be removed without first taking the hardware back out of the rack.

Of course, security isn't the main idea behind computer rackmounting — it also helps keep things tidy by moving the clutter off your desk and into your rack. If you're taking a computer on the road, rackmounting has obvious practical benefits, though to prevent transit damage, you should always use the type of rack system with an inner cabinet shockmounted inside a larger cabinet using foam or springs. This consideration applies to any shock-sensitive audio equipment, not just computers.

Having assembled and used the Powermaster Mac racking system, I'm impressed by how solidly it is constructed and how much neater my system looks because of it. Now I have my Mac and my rackmount hard drives in the same box, which keeps SCSI cabling runs short and cuts down on exposed wiring. This is a simple concept, but the implementation is well designed and well engineered at less than half the cost of the previous competition. *Paul White*

£ £199 inc VAT.
A Syco, Kimberley Road, London NW6 7SF.
T 0171 624 6000.
F 0171 372 6370.

▶

brief encounters

▶ There have been many inventions aimed at producing a wider or deeper stereo image from conventional stereo speakers, but few can be as cost-effective as the Nureality Vivid 3D. The aim of the Vivid 3D is to treat the stereo signal in such a way that the reflected components of the sound appear to come from outside the loudspeakers, just as they would in a real-life ambient environment.

This tiny box takes its power from an external adaptor and connects to your system via two phonos and a stereo mini-jack. The connectors hint at the Vivid 3D's target market, which would appear to be computer games and stereo TV. There are no real user controls other than volume: you can simply select 'SRS' to process a stereo signal, '3DM' to add a sense of width to mono sounds, or bypass the effect altogether.

With the box in circuit, switching from bypass to SRS mode causes a noticeable increase in level, which the manufacturers say is due to how the circuitry rebuilds off-axis information. When we hear something off-axis, it is different in both timbre and level to something heard on-axis, due to the human hearing system's frequency response. Microphones don't behave in the same way,

and SRS mode aims to correct this by splitting the signal into middle and side components (rather like the output from an MS mic pair), applying the necessary tonal correction to the side signal and then recombining the two. The subjective effect is to reduce the impression that the soundstage exists only between the two speakers; sounds in the centre of the mix are little affected, but sounds panned hard left or right seem to be diffused around the room.

An email message to the manufacturer answered all my technical queries and also revealed that the process has been granted a number of patents. Using my phase meter, I detected the use of out-of-phase components (a usual ingredient in stereo widening) in the 3D setting used to widen mono sources — but it's claimed that the SRS system adds no additional phase shift.

Because of the tonal coloration introduced by reconstructing off-axis sounds, I'd be reluctant to treat complete studio mixes with this process, but it is useful to pick out odd bits of percussion, little synth details and, of course, effects. Feeding a stereo reverb back through the Vivid 3D produced a noticeably more spacious sound.

Because SRS doesn't use delay or phase shift, it should have better mono compatibility than some other stereo enhancement processes, but by the same token, the results may not be as dramatic as, say, RSS or QSound. However, it is a useful and very valid effect based on sound psychoacoustic principles that can be exploited in the studio to make mixes more interesting. The signal path is reasonably quiet, and apart from the oddball 'games' connectors, it's no trouble to use. Other models are available which offer the user more control, and there's also talk of a rackmount unit in the near future. At the current price, however, this is one area of space exploration that most people can afford. *Paul White*

£ Vivid £D £39.95 inc VAT, plus £3.50 p&p; Vivid 3D Plus (which adds a Centre mode for enhancing central imaging) £49.95.
A Bull & Bear Ltd, Macmillan House, Kensington High Street, London W8 4SG.
T 0171 795 6977.
F 0171 938 4944.

The Roland MC50 is one of the best hardware sequencers ever made, but it can be a bit puzzling for the first-time sequencer user. One reviewer dubbed it "Darth Vader's Filofax", and an air of mystery has surrounded it ever since. This book, written by Bobby Maestas and published by Alexander Publishing, proves that the MC50 is actually as flexible as many software sequencers, provided you make the effort to grasp all its basic functions before you dive into the murky depths of the editing pages.

The book is set out like an instruction manual, with everything explained clearly and with a minimum of fuss. There are 21 chapters, beginning with an excellent section on how to connect the MC50 to several keyboards, and ending with the delights of tape and MIDI sync. I was grateful to see a decent explanation of the 'Event Copy' procedure on the MC50, something which never fails to catch me out. The MIDI sync chapter is also extremely useful, because many hardware sequencer fans have a drum machine in their setup. This partly makes up for the lack of information about rhythm programming and advanced editing. Anyone seeking advice on these aspects of the MC50 will find everything they need in the Operations Handbook Level 2.

Few people would put an instruction book on their list of priorities, but MC50 users will appreciate the straightforward style of this one. It shows that with patience and a little understanding, an MC50 will be your friend for life. *Richard Clews*

£ £22.99 (no VAT payable).
A Sounds OK, 10 Frimley Grove Gardens, Frimley, Camberley, Surrey, GU16 5JX.
T 01276 22946.

Sounds of the '80

ENSONIQ SQ80 WORKSTATION SYNTH

On its release in the late '80s, the SQ80 had to slug it out with Roland's D50 and Korg's M1, and didn't come out on top, at least as far as sales were concerned. STEVE HOWELL takes a look at an early and underrated workstation that still has a lot to offer.

Back in 1986, before this eminent publication had even reached its first birthday, and was a mere 80 pages rather than the bookshelf-battering size it is today, Ensoniq released the ESQ1 synthesizer [*and* SOS *reviewed it too, in the August '86 issue — Ed*]. This was a revolutionary instrument, integrating advanced sequencing and sophisticated synthesis years before the word 'workstation' had been applied to keyboards. For the first time, it was possible to create complete multitimbral compositions from one box (albeit with only 8-voice polyphony). Ensoniq also deserve credit as being the first company to introduce the polyphonic, multitimbral mode of sequencing

we all now take for granted. Prior to this, whilst some synths offered multitrack or multitimbral operation, each part was strictly monophonic. On the ESQ1, each part was dynamically polyphonic, stealing voices as and when they were needed and/or available. It was to be a couple of years before Korg, with the M1, were to launch an instrument to rival it.

Costing around £1100 when released, the ESQ1 was out there on its own for a while, with its wide range of unique sounds and multitimbral sequencer. But then came the Roland D50, crammed with chiffy noises, pan pipes, bowy strings and other, less describable sounds, all aided and abetted by a simple reverb/chorus combination. The D50 took the world by storm, and soon its ability to combine sampled attacks with sustained loops was regarded as *the* way to create new sounds.

ENTER THE '80

Ensoniq countered with the SQ80 (reviewed SOS February '88); basically an ESQ1 with extra waveforms, polyphonic aftertouch, an expanded sequencer section, and a floppy disk drive for saving and loading sounds and sequences. A serious rival to the D50, surely? Sadly, 'twas not to be. The reason is something of a mystery, because not only did the SQ80 offer a clean combination of sequencing and sound creation, its synthesis capabilities were also considerably more advanced than anything else around at the

time. Just look at the specifications: three oscillators per voice, each with their own Digitally Controlled Amplifiers (DCAs), feed into a resonant low-pass filter and out to a stereo output amplifier. To complete the impressive lineup, three freely-assignable multi-wave Low Frequency Oscillators (LFOs) and no less than four freely-assignable multi-stage Envelope Generators are also available. On top of this, there's a single-triggering monophonic mode, portamento, oscillator sync, ring mod, and more. It's the SQ80's modulation capabilities, however, that are so appealing to hardcore programmers. Virtually any controller can be routed to any module but, rather than using patch cords, as on modular synths, it's all done in software. At the time, the only thing that compared was the keyboardless, sequencerless 6-voice Oberheim Xpander, at considerably higher cost.

DIGITAL SYNTHS DO IT WITH NUMBERS

Unlike the Xpander, however, the SQ80 is not analogue. Ensoniq achieved what they did at such remarkable cost by doing the bulk of the signal generation and processing digitally. The traditional Voltage Controlled Oscillators (VCOs) found on analogue synths were replaced with digital oscillators reading out samples from wave memory, rather than generating the real thing — more waves to play with, but ultimately less beefy, largely due to the waves' restricted bandwidth. The ▶

▶ filter, however, is a true analogue 4-pole (24dB/Octave) job, which nevertheless lacks the 'welly' of its analogue counterparts, probably due to the fact that it is being fed with 'bandwidth-challenged' sampled waves.

That's not to say that the SQ80 is sonically weak, however, because it is far from that. It can produce strong, rich pads and strings, and fair simulations of most analogue synth sounds. It's not so hot on truly woofer-wobbling analogue basses. With a mere 256Kb of wave memory to read from (synths today measure their wave ROM in Megabytes!), long multisamples, of pulse width modulation, for example, are not possible, so any sonic movement has to be created with oscillator detune and/or modulation. This is easy enough, given the three oscillators and the sheer number of LFOs and modulation possibilities.

The wealth of digital waveforms on offer allows you to create distinctive metallic and other 'non-analogue' noises, and also gives the SQ80 an appealing 'PPG-esque' quality. The ability to combine analogue and digital waves across the three oscillators also enables a wide range of hybrid sounds to be created.

Strings, piano, bass, electric piano, organ, reed and other such waves are on offer too. These latter waves are single-cycle multisamples, not the detailed multisamples of modern ROM-based synths. They're capable of giving a good impersonation of the sounds they represent, but if you use them as interesting waves in their own right, you won't go far wrong. Some of the SQ80's voice-like and breathy waves can be used to create totally unique vocal sounds not readily found elsewhere, and in an attempt to capture some of the D50 market, Ensoniq included some short, one-shot clicks, bumps, thumps, plucks, clicks, and scrapes to use as attack transients. Some of these waves don't transpose terrifically well, being rather aliased at the lower reaches of the keyboard, but most are useful additions to the sonic armoury, and for some sounds, that digital grunge can really add character. The SQ80 does have some drum sounds, but these are hardly worth mentioning, being of low bandwidth and quality. I class them as virtually unusable except, possibly, as attack transients for percussive sounds.

FUN IN THE WAVES

The SQ80 came supplied with a floppy disk containing hundreds of sounds, and many of these are very usable. They also form a good starting point for experimentation.

Editing or creating a sound on the SQ80 is a doddle. On the right of the panel, rather cleverly laid out to represent the signal path of a voice, is a set of keys which give direct access to sonic building blocks such as Oscillators, LFOs, Envelopes, and Filter. To edit a sound, simply press the key for the one you want to affect and use the 10 keys around the custom fluorescent display for direct access to each parameter. To tweak the cutoff of a string sound, for example, press 'Filter', then 'Freq', and waggle the Data Entry slider. Simple, quick and effective. Each module's parameters are available on one page, so there are no awkward cursor movements or page scrolling.

The three oscillators, their associated DCAs, and the filter each have two modulation inputs,
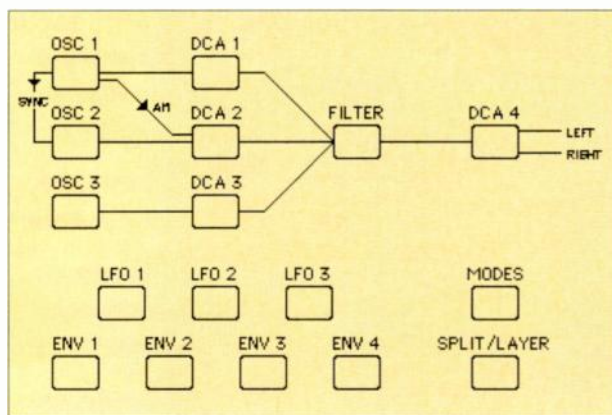

Figure 1: A schematic of the controls on the top right panel of the SQ80. The layout of the top section also helps you to grasp the programming architecture of the synth.

and each mod input may have any of the 15 available controllers assigned to it — including the three LFOs, the four envelope generators, and real-time MIDI controllers such as the wheels, aftertouch, velocity, keyboard, and an (optional) pedal controller, plus a definable external MIDI controller (such as breath, for example). These can be mixed and inverted

JACK OF ALL TRADES?

The SQ80 can produce a wide range of serious analogue, digital and FM-ish hybrids, with some attempt at S+S. It can do lush and dreamy pads, unusual vocal textures, spiky basses and clavs, excellent bells and other metallic sounds. It's very adept at organ sounds and no slouch with electric pianos. Modern, fashionable sounds can be created on it but, perhaps more interestingly, so can

unique sounds not so readily available on other synths — with an SQ80, you might stand out from the musical crowd a little. The sounds won't stand direct comparison with a true analogue (but neither will more contemporary digital synths), and its digital sounds won't worry a PPG or FM synth too much. However, that said, you can get surprisingly close on all counts.

for a wide range of modulation and performance possibilities.

Oscillator sync between the first two oscillators was a welcome innovation for a synth with all-digital sound generation, and although the results may not be as impressive as a MemoryMoog, many interesting and unique sounds can be created with the wealth of waveforms available on the SQ80. The ability to use any controller to modulate Oscillator 2 adds much flexibility to the range of sync sweep sounds available. A missed opportunity, perhaps, is the SQ80's inability to cross-modulate one oscillator's frequency with the output of another oscillator within the flexible modulation matrix; I can only assume that this is a hardware limitation rather than an oversight on the part of Ensoniq's designers.

The fact that each oscillator has its own DCA allows quite fine control over the oscillators' level, and the DCA for Oscillator 2 serves a dual purpose, in that it can act as a ring modulator, with one input derived from Oscillator 2 and the other from Oscillator 1. Some interesting clangorous noises can be coaxed out of it, especially when you consider the number of waveforms you can use to cross-modulate each other.

The three DCAs are summed to the input of the analogue low-pass filter and can be set to overload the filter slightly. As mentioned, this is an analogue 4-pole resonant filter, but controlled from the SQ80's digital control sources. Cutoff frequency and resonance controls are provided, as is a dedicated keyboard tracking control. Like the oscillators, it has two controller inputs which allow different control sources to be combined, mixed and inverted, for fairly flexible tonal control.

The filter passes to a final stereo output DCA, where you have control over the output level and pan position of the sound. The pan section has one control input, and any of the controllers may be used to move the sound between the left and right outputs, enabling the introduction of a great deal of stereo movement into a sound.

The three LFOs are identical, each offering triangle, square, sawtooth and noise waveforms (sadly, there is no random 'sample and hold' wave available and the noise waveform does not make a good substitute). The output level of the LFOs can be affected by any of the controllers — so you can 'shape' the LFO modulation via one of the spare envelope generators. Using real-time MIDI controllers, you can control LFO depth via velocity, keyboard position, aftertouch, an ▶

▶ optional pedal, or mod wheel. The LFOs are extremely functional and to have three of them is certainly a treat, but if I have any criticisms of them, it would be the inability to modulate the LFOs' rate from the matrix — a curious omission.

The four envelopes are also identical, with four rates and four levels. You can control the envelopes' output level and attack time using velocity. A key-scaling function allows you to make keyboard position control release times — higher pitches create shorter release times, as on many acoustic sounds such as piano, guitar or tuned percussion.

In an attempt to simulate some kind of reverb on the SQ80, Ensoniq introduced a function which involves a second release stage kicking in — instead of going to zero immediately, the second release reaches a low level and then fades to zero at a fixed rate. The effect can be bypassed if you wish. The idea may sound a bit strange, but it's not ineffective on some sounds — onboard DSP processing it most certainly isn't, however.

Last in the voice programming department' is a 'global' page, where you may, amongst other functions, switch on a single-triggering playback mode that emulates analogue monosynths, plus a glide function that works in both polyphonic and monophonic modes.

SUPER SEQUENCING

So the SQ80 is capable of producing a very wide range of warm analogue sounds and strong digital sounds, plus many, many more besides, with sophisticated but easy control. On top of all this, however, is a nifty little sequencer which, whilst not rivalling software-based sequencers, is extremely functional, on

this, so it's advisable to switch it off except for sounds that really need it). Sequences are held in memory even when the SQ80 is powered down (though you can save both sequences and sounds to the onboard floppy drive if you wish), so you can come back to your work with no tedious loading time. Tracks can be mixed, muted, merged, quantised, transposed, deleted and otherwise manipulated after the event, and sequences can be copied, appended and deleted. Also provided is a simple autolocator, and all these functions are accessed very simply using the nine Sequencer keys to the right of the display.

Recording a sequence is very easy, as is overdubbing. You can select a loop playback mode so that when an overdub is complete, the sequence will loop round and immediately play back what you've just recorded. When the overdub is looping, though, you can't then continue to overdub more data into that track as on, say, Akai's MPC60/3000, which is a shame.

After recording, you can edit a sequence at the track level, including erasing, copying and merging tracks. Quantising is available, with a resolution of quarter notes to 32nd-note triplets. Generally, this works very well and will tidy up sloppy timing quite adequately without adverse effects on the performance. Like many of the sequencer's edit functions, quantising is non-destructive, and the SQ80 allows you to audition the original, unquantised sequence, or the quantised one before deciding whether to keep the new sequence or return to the original.

No step-time input is possible, but you can edit in step-time. Finished sequences can be chained together in any order you wish in

than many other so-called 'workstation' sequencers I have used, even recently. In fact, my only criticism of the sequencer is its lack of step-time recording facilities, for those occasions when really tight, solid sequenced riffs and arpeggios are required. The SQ80's ability to sequence both internal sounds and/or external modules with Program Change and MIDI volume control allows it to be quite a sophisticated central controller in a budget studio, if you can live with the 8-track limitation.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

As a master controller, the SQ80's keyboard has a curious feel to it. It certainly plays well enough, even offering a choice of velocity curves to suit your playing technique, but the polyphonic aftertouch mechanism, with a separate sensor underneath each key, makes it quite 'clattery' and noisy to play. The action is fine, though, and the polyphonic aftertouch is great fun and very expressive on sounds such as strings, brass, vocals and pads — if you dig into just one note, only that note is affected by whatever modulation type (amplitude or vibrato, for example), you've assigned to aftertouch.

WELL-KEPT SECRET

The SQ80 has much to offer: extremely versatile synthesis which can produce a wide range of very good, usable sounds, in the analogue, digital and, to an extent, S+S styles; a more than capable sequencer, especially with a few external modules hooked up to overcome the synth's limited polyphony; and an eminently playable keyboard, one of the few to feature polyphonic aftertouch. The integration of sounds, sequencing and control of external MIDI gear is very thorough, everything is well laid out, and the direct access to sounds, synth parameters, sequencer tracks and edit functions makes operation very quick. It's a truly underrated instrument.

But it's precisely because the SQ80 has been overlooked that I bring it to your attention now, because it has very little resale value at the moment and is a bargain waiting to be had. I recently bought one for £299 and that was from a shop! I think I did very well, however, and you should expect to pay a bit more than that — around £400 would be about right for an SQ80 in good condition. This would give you an excellent sound source and a versatile little sequencer that could form the centre of a budget home studio.

Buy one for its sound-making potential. Buy one because it is so easy to use. Buy one for its cracking little sequencer and the fact that you can control a whole bunch of external modules from it so easily. Buy one because it's cheap and you get a hell of a lot for the money! [SOS]

RELATIVE VALUES: THE ESQ1

If you're on an even tighter budget, check out the Ensoniq ESQ1, which is functionally identical in terms of sound making but has only 32 waveforms instead of 75. The sequencer is also more

restricted, offering only 30 sequences and 10 songs. If you're looking at an ESQ1, make sure it has the memory expansion installed — without it, there's a measly 2,500 note limit, which the

expansion board takes to a more sensible 10,000 notes. The ESQ1 has a velocity-sensitive keyboard with a nice action but no aftertouch at all, it has no disk drive, and off-line storage of sounds and sequences is only possible using cartridges or cassette dump.

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a par with many hardware sequencers, and more versatile than one would at first imagine.

The sequencer features eight polyphonic tracks, all easily accessed in sequencer mode from keys around the display. Each track can control internal and/or external sound sources, and can send out Program Changes and MIDI volume. Up to 60 sequences of any length and time signature can be chained together, drum machine style, into 20 songs. There's a maximum note capacity of 20,000 notes (although aftertouch, particularly the SQ80's polyphonic aftertouch, can consume a lot of

Song mode, and since the tempo of each sequence is retained as steps change, some degree of tempo variation is possible within a Song, even though gradual *rallentandos* and the like are not possible within the sequences themselves.

Finally, the sequencer can be synced to MIDI clock (with Song Position Pointers — SPP), and there is also a simple FSK tape sync code (without SPP) for syncing the SQ80 to tape.

All in all, then, the sequencer is more than functional. It offers quite a simple approach to building up sequences and songs and is better

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FOSTEX 280 4-track tape machine. Comprehensive 8-channel mixer and transport controls, ideal for getting those ideas down £350 ono ☎ Dustin 01703 557054 or E-mail djb4@soton ac.uk
FOSTEX 380S double speed 4-track with 12 inputs and Dolby S, loads of brilliant features, excellent condition, £380 ono ☎ 01434 632075
FOSTEX 812 drull, MIDI mute, cost £1100 new, vgc, £475 for quick sale ☎ 01223 322442
FOSTEX 812 12-channel 8-group mixer, 3-band EQ with sweep, 3 aux, 30 channels on mix, vgc, boxed with manuals ☎ 01223 894270
FOSTEX 820 mixer, 20 channels, eight subgroups, 38 inputs on mix, bargain at £795, Bit 99 analogue MIDI synth, £250, Yamaha FB01 module, £70, home use only ☎ Nottingham 0115 981 6464
FOSTEX 2412 desk, hardly used, boxed, £995, Atari Falcon with CDP Soft, SDI, £260/1b hard drive, £495 ☎ Tristan 01865 404266
FOSTEX 4030/4035 sync units, £450 ☎ Gary 01869 810956 (Oxon)
FOSTEX A8, perfect condition, only 20 hours use, just serviced, with Tascam MTS30, £600 ☎ Alex 01752 789454
FOSTEX B16 and Studiomaster 20:16:2 desk, with 16 monitor channels, giving 32 simultaneous inputs, full looms plus tapes, may split, £1950 ☎ 01724 855095
FOSTEX B16 with remote and test tape, recent service, home use only, £1100 including shipping to any country in the world ☎ 00 852 257 66 283 Fax 00 852 250 43 336
FOSTEX E16 16-track tape recorder, £1800 ono ☎ 01633 880858 (Gwent)
FOSTEX E16 good heads, well maintained, Seck 12:8:2 with meter bridge and case, Fostex 4050 autolocator/synchroniser for E16, £2550 ono, may split ☎ Paul 0191 4554581 Newcastle
FOSTEX E16, rack mounted, with stand, £2200, 2 Seck mixers, £500 each, Revox B77 quarter-inch open reel, £700 ☎ 0171 372 6428
FOSTEX E16, £1700, Fostex 4050, £225, Soundtracs 16:8:16 desk ☎ Dave 01522 778229
FOSTEX G24S with 8330 sync board, home use only, excellent condition, quick sale needed, £3500 ono, Alesis Quadrasynth S4 rack, £450 ☎ Terry 0181 521 4491
FOSTEX M80 8-track, home use only, £500 ☎ Terry 0151 931 1657
FOSTEX R8, very little use, perfect condition, boxed with manual, £750 ono ☎ Pete 01503 220762
FOSTEX R8, wiring Loom and tapes included,

£850 ono ☎ 01295 710130

FOSTEX R8 wth MTC1, very good condition, recent service, £900 ono ☎ Blair 01225 763235, eves

FOSTEX R8 plus 812 mixing desk, mint condition, plus looms and extension lead, £1400 ☎ Colin 01342 850507

FOSTEX R8 plus Seck 12:8:2, vgc, including loom and manuals, £1000, might split, Korg DDD1 drum machine with manual, £100 ☎ Adam 01304 212520 after 6pm

FOSTEX R8, immaculate condition, £750 ☎ Lee 01226 283487

FOSTEX R8, approx 10 hours use ☎ Nick 01273 601648 12-6pm (Brighton)

FOSTEX R8 recorder, Studiomaster Mixdown 16:8:16 desk, Quad 405 amplifier, Celestion 3 monitors, looms, manuals and boxes, £1700 ☎ Fred 01422 353904 (Halifax)

FOSTEX R8 multitrack, MTC1 and remote extension lead, excellent condition, £750 ☎ Steve 0115 962 6795 (Nottingham)

FOSTEX R8, £700, Fostex 2016 line mixer, £175, Yamaha RBX 350 bass guitar, £180, Yamaha SY35, £300, Yamaha RY30 drums, £180, all good condition with manuals ☎ Roger 01450 870225

FOSTEX R8 8-track with MTC1 sync box, home use only, with three reels of Ampex tape, boxed, manuals, vgc, £800, Roland MT32, £110 ☎ 0113 282 2239

FOSTEX R8, virtually unused, perfect condition, boxed with manuals, £800 ☎ 0973 733843

FOSTEX R8 reel to reel, immaculate, remote extension, manual, leads, quick sale required, hence £650 ☎ Luca 0171 207 9726 anytime

FOSTEX X26, brilliant 4-track, 6 inputs, aux send and return, equalizer, Dolby B, £150, Yamaha RX8, great drum machine, no manual but easy to use, hence £120 ☎ Robin 01305 785675 after 6pm

FOSTEX X28H high-speed cassette 4-track, mint, boxed, manual, PSU, £265, Akai 4000DS quarter-inch stereo reel to reel, £96 ☎ John 01604 767051 (Northampton)

FOSTEX X28M 4-track, mint condition, hardly used, £250 ono, Midiman Smartsync unit, never used, brand new, £60 ☎ Steve 0121 588 2350 (West Midlands)

JBL CONTROL 1 monitors, perfect condition, still in box, hardly used, £60 ☎ 0191 2711 456

JBL CONTROL 10 mid-field monitors, titanium tweeters, 12-inch woofers, 40Hz-20kHz frequency response, 300W, under four months old, too powerful for room, £700 ☎ Mark 01274 611343

JL COOPER PPS100 MIDI/SMPTE sychroniser, £130 ☎ Andrew 0181 678 1729

LEXICON LXP15 MKII, bought in error, days old, shop wouldn't refund, cost £795, sell for £679 ono, transferable warranty ☎ 01302 538304

MACKIE CR1604 VLZ 16-channel mixer, latest model, including gooseneck, £799, Alesis RA100 power amplifier, £250 Both immaculate, only 3 months old, original warranties, £999 for both ☎ 01952 260064

MM MP175 8:2 mixer, good for PA or recording, 4-band EQ, FX loop, analogue metering, stage box with 25m multicore, good condition, £175 ☎ Stewart 01353 669854

OMNICRAFT QUAD GATE, £50, Akai ME35T MIDI trigger, £175, Akai XE8 MIDI drum expander, £125, Akai S612 sampler, £125, all as new ☎ Dave 01522 778229

PEAVEY LINEMIX 8 rack mixer, £160, Peavey Classic 6060 tube rack power amp, £350, Digitech DSP16 rack delay/reverb, £160 ☎ Tony 0171 207 0059

REVOX B77 2-track recorder, plus manual, remote, speed control, dust cover, NAB adaptors, excellent condition, £850 ☎ Vic 01889 582652

ROLAND M240 24-input line mixer, £350 ☎ 01426 209138 (pager)

ROLAND VS880 8-track hard disk workstation, with Iomega Zip drive, as new, with manuals, £1320, or VS880 on its own, £1200 ☎ 01933 678608 (Northants)

SANSUI WSX1 6-track Dolby C portastudio with 8-channel mixer and integral mastering deck, plus Sansui MDR6 smart FSK sync and remote unit, £475 ☎ Paul 01527 550135/541511

SECK 12:8:2 MIXER, 12 mic/line inputs, 8 group outputs, £395, Drawmer LX20 stereo compressor/limiter, £175, both in excellent condition ☎ 0181 924 1101

SECK 18:8:2 mixer, low-noise power supply, switchable metering, good condition, £550 complete ☎ 0181 9309413

SHURE headset mic, £110, Ultra metal foot pedal, £25 ☎ Carl 01507 606956

SONY 377 reel to reel recorder, little used, pristine, £400 ono ☎ 0113 262 9160

SONY OPTICAL in/out lead, very rare lead for Sony portable DAT machines, never used, still under guarantee, £100 ☎ 0191 271 1456

SONY DTC D7 DAT machine (portable), excellent condition, hardly used, £325 ono, Casio CZ5000 with good flight case, £90, no offers, 2x1Mb SIMMs chips, 72pin, £20 ☎ Myles 01980 553719

SONY DTC D7 portable DAT, used twice only, boxed as new, with Sony 909 stereo mix, cost £595, sell £395 ☎ 0113 268 0331

SONY DTC77 ES DAT machine with flightcase, perfect, offers, Drawmer DS210 noise gate, perfect condition, offers ☎ Keith 01444 831504

SOUNDCRAFT 24:8:16 mixing desk, 42 channels on mixdown, includes meter bridge

Nice looking! ☎ Brad 01633 865758 eves, 01633 873118 office hours

SOUNDCRAFT SPIRIT 12:2 rack mixer, Spirit Absolute 2 monitors, both nearly new, home use, boxed, £450 ☎ Eileen 01744 758883

SOUNDCRAFT SPIRIT Live 8:3, excellent condition, in expensive aluminium flightcase, cost, £900, accept £425 ono, Tascam MM1 keyboard mixer, 20:2, MIDI muting, excellent condition, £350 ono ☎ 01226 714740

SOUNDCRAFT SPIRIT Studio, 16:8:16, immaculate, £1000, Fostex R8 8-track plus remote and loom, £850 ono; JL Cooper PPS100 SMPTE, £75, LA Audio 32 channel mutes plus loom, £300 All boxed ☎ Steven 01273 565754/453671

SOUNDCRAFT SPIRIT ABSOLUTE 2 100W monitor loudspeakers, £225 ☎ Sam 0121 778 3986

SOUNDCRAFT SPIRIT FOLIO 10:2 with hard case, one year old, mint, home use, manual, mint, £279 ☎ Andy 01296 770259 eves

SOUNDCRAFT SPIRIT FOLIO RacPac mixer, ideal for live or studio, 28 inputs at mix, phantom power, 4-band EQ, direct outs on each channel, home use, excellent condition, £500 ono ☎ 01268 511687

SOUNDCRAFT SPIRIT FOLIO 12:2 mixer, excellent, £275, Frontline 8:2 rack mixer, £75, Casio VZ10M synth, £250 All boxed with manuals, vgc ☎ Harvey 01424 732599

SOUNDCRAFT SPIRIT FOLIO 12:2 mixing desk, as new, boxed, less than a year old, £225 ☎ Richard 0171 250 3325

STUDIO UPGRADE, many items for sale, including Kurzweil K2000 keyboard, Allen & Heath GS3 mixer, Sony DAT machine, effects and modules. Phone for prices and details ☎ 0113 268 0331 (Sheffield)

STUDIOMASTER 16:2 Sessionmix Desk, flightcased, line/mic inputs, direct outs, mid sweep EQ, 4 aux, mint with manual, £350 ☎ Kevin 01773 606545

STUDIOMASTER MIXDOWN 16:4:8:2, £750, Alesis 1622, £420, Fostex DCM100 plus MixTab MIDI mixer, £450 ☎ Andrew 0181 678 1729

STUDIOMASTER PROLINE 16:8:16:2 mixer, excellent condition, home use, £600, Studiomaster Series 5 16:16:2 mixer, vgc, full working order, £450 ☎ 0191 384 5389

STUDIO RESEARCH 16:2 mixer, 3-band EQ, 2 aux, phantom powering, immaculate condition, £300 ono ☎ Sean 01371 876625 (Essex)

SWAP 3 Guitar FX, 2 Vestax Micro FX, Kawai S100F (not PI) monosynth, for Atari STacy plus Midex +, or something interesting, or sell ☎ Chris 01235 534152 (Oxon)

TASCAM 38 half-inch 8-track, excellent condition, £750, Seck 16:8:2 mixing desk, old, needs a service, hence, £200, or £875 for both ☎ Rob 01442 391363

TASCAM 38 8-track, superb condition, £800, 2 Tascam DX4D noise reduction units, £175 each, Bose 802 Professional PA speakers, £825, Bose Controller, latest rackmountable version, £275, Tascam 22-2 reel to reel recorder, as new, £375, Sony DAT machine, £345, Peavey XR 600C 400-watt PA Amp, £285, Roland W30 workstation/sampler, £800, Roland DEP5 digital effects processor, £250 ☎ Paul 01603 487580 (Norfolk)

TASCAM 85/16B 16-track, 1-inch, fully pro machine, inc remote, balanced line adaptor kit, trolley houses, dbx, deck, amps, etc, immaculate, superb sound, £2250 ☎ 0117 951 4035

TASCAM 234 4-track, Yamaha FB01 module, TEAC model 2A mixer Offers? ☎ David 0171 209 5822

TASCAM 244 Portastudio with Tascam flightcase, good condition, £295 ☎ Peter 01273 564286

TASCAM 464 4-track Portastudio with dbx, double and normal speed, 8-channel mixer, vgc, home use only, £390 ☎ Tony 01222 236036

TASCAM 488 Portastudio, good condition with manual, £600, Kawai KC20 synth, velocity and MIDI, great sounds, £300 ☎ 0171 438 0141

TASCAM 488 8-track, brand new, genuine reason for sale, £800 ono ☎ 0121 745 4280

TASCAM 488 Portastudio, excellent condition, £600, no offers ☎ Wayne 01254 202032 (Blackburn)

TASCAM 488 MKII and Philip Rees TS1, £750 for quick sale ☎ Graham 0181 248 3424

TASCAM 488 MKII, 1 week old, brand new, in box, £800 ono. Selling because I bought a Fostex DMT ☎ 0131 334 1577

TASCAM 644 Midistudio, boxed, vgc, £399, Akai SO1, 2Mb, 100 disks, £449, Yamaha DX7, ROMs, pedal, case, £249 ☎ 0181 995 1977

TASCAM 688 8-track Midistudio, 20 inputs and meter bridge, MIDI muting, electronic scenes and routing, built-in sync, dbx noise reduction, mint condition, £295 ☎ 01302 880975

TASCAM 688 8-track Midistudio, very little used, mint condition, any trial, £900 ono ☎ Geoff 0115 933 5656 (Nottingham)

TASCAM 688 8-track Midistudio, pristine condition, boxed with manual, £1200, Shure SM58, £50; Alesis Quadraverb, £150; Yamaha FX500, £125 All perfect condition and boxed with manuals ☎ Paul 0181 518 8826

TASCAM 688 8-track Midistudio, full MIDI, two effects sends, 3-band EQ, built-in sync, electronic patchbay, excellent condition, boxed with manual ☎ Matt 01423 536530

TASCAM DA88 digital 8-track, flightcased mixer, 8-channel output mixer, timecode, remote control, 24-way jackfield, hardly used, £3250, A&H GS3V 16-channel fully

automated mixer, £2500 ☎ 01428 656178 (Haslemere)

TASCAM M2600 32:8:32 mixing desk, 8 aux, totally switchable EQ, 16 months old, boxed, immaculate, for quick sale £2700 ono ☎ Nick 0181 330 1249 (Worcester Park)

TASCAM M3700 mixing desk, 24:8, fully automated, onboard disk drive, mint condition, leads included, cost £11,000 new, will reluctantly sell for £4500 ono ☎ 0131 663 3248

TASCAM MM1 20:2 mixer, boxed, £345, Sony DTC55ES DAT with remote, £295 ☎ 01903 755840

TASCAM MM1 20-channel keyboard mixer with MIDI muting, excellent condition, in box, £400 ono, JBL Control 1 monitors, Alesis Microverb II, perfect condition, in box £120 both ☎ 0191 271 1456

TASCAM MSR24 1-inch 24-track recorder, excellent condition, dbx noise reduction, less than 100 hours use, perfect heads, cleaned regularly, calibrated for Ampex 456, £2995 ono ☎ Andy 01422 310879

TASCAM MSR24S with remote and trolley, very good condition, well maintained and cleaned, £3800 ☎ Luke 01252 710244 (Surrey)

TASCAM MTS30 SMPTE box, MIDI-tape sync device, boxed, mint, no power adaptor, hence £90 ☎ Sacha 01733 237748

TASCAM PORTA 07 plus mic, as new, £300 ☎ Felix 0191 261 1255 before 6.30pm, 0191 226 1498 after (N. East)

TASCAM PORTA 07 4-track recorder, manuals, box, etc, mint condition, £275. Buyer must collect ☎ Bobby 0121 681 2662 (Birmingham)

TASCAM PORTA 07 4-track, mint condition, £260 ☎ Henry 01695 570378 (Yorks)

TASCAM TSR8 8-track half-inch tape machine and reel of Ampex 456, both unused, genuine reason for sale, boxed, manuals, immaculate condition, hence £1475 ono ☎ Matt 01629 636572

TASCAM TSR8 half-inch 8-track recorder with remote control, very little home use, mint condition, £1000 ☎ Michael 0161 798 0581

TASCAM TSR8, home use only, low mileage, box, manual and unused Ampex tapes, £875 ☎ 01904 782350 (York)

TASCAM TSR8, used once only! Three reels tape, adjustable trolley stand, remote control, ATS500 SMPTE synchroniser and interface cable, £1600 the lot, may split ☎ 0113 278 5446

TASCAM TSR8, very good condition with manual, £900, no offers, M1/D50/D10 hard case, mint condition, £60 ☎ Karim 0171 622 2760 after 12pm

TC 2240 parametric EQ/preamp, £350, Yamaha REV7, £350, Urei 7110 limiter/compressor, £200, Quadraverb +, £250 ☎ Neil 0121 753 0171

TASCAM TSR8 half-inch pro multitrack, dbx, full logic control, serial and dedicated ports, 8 in/out, varispeed, pristine, boxed, manual, leads, £1300 ☎ Rob 01925 762541

TASCAM TSR8 half-inch 8-track tape machine with remote, mint, very little home use, boxed, manuals, £1000 ☎ Michael 0161 798 0581

TEAC 80-8 pro half-inch 8-track recorder, dbx, pristine, recently aligned and serviced, £950 ☎ Tim 01865 750878 (Oxford)

TEAC 144 4-track Portastudio, multitrack recorder with built-in mixer, manual, excellent condition and sound, £150 ☎ John 01227 462059 (Canterbury)

TEAC A3300SX quarter-track reel to reel, twin speed, 10.5-inch reels, good condition but requires azimuth adjustment, £150 including tape ☎ 01702 437777 (Southend)

TEAC A3340 4-track reel-to-reel with dbx-type noise reduction and remote contro, excellent condition, top quality machine, £295 ☎ 0171 254 5638

TEAC X-2000M 2-track quarter-inch master recorder, immaculate condition, little home use, cost £1750 new, will accept, £1000 ono. Will deliver ☎ Andy 0151 336 6657

TECHNICS RS DC10 DCC deck, digital and analogue ins/outs, top spec, cost £750 new, accept £175 ☎ Tim 0191 384 8360

XRI XR300 SMPTE synchroniser, very little use, £130 ☎ Tony 01709 556274

YAMAHA MT3X 4-track cassette recorder, dual speed, £220, ART Multiverb LT effects unit, £90 ☎ Richard 01793 611017 (Swindon)

YAMAHA MT120S 4-track, boxed, manual, mint condition, 40Hz-18kHz, simultaneous 4-track recording, dbx, double or standard speed, graphic EQ, £265 ☎ Dave 0191 372 2621 eves (Durham)

YAMAHA PROMIX 01 digital console, two available, as new, boxed with manuals, upgrading, £1375 each ☎ Darren 0181 959 4659

YAMAHA SPX90, £180, Simmons 8:2, £150, MIDI Temp PMM88 8x8 MIDI Function junction, £175, Roland D110 with Steinberg Editor, £200, selection of flightcases ☎ Louis 0385 790997

ZOOM 9121, £250, Hammond organ, £50, Ibanez delay, £80, 20U rack, £30, AKG C253 mic, £80, Studiomaster Proline Gold 16:8:16, £600. Everything must go ☎ John 01438 310139

SAMPLERS

AKAI DIGITAL IN/OUT board for S3000, record from CD, DAT, back-up, etc, £250 ono ☎ 0171 351 5639

AKAI S950, perfect condition, fully expanded,

manual, £750, no offers, Pair Yamaha NS10M monitors, need new tweeters, £80 ☎ 0181 594 7298 after 6pm

AKAI S1100, 10Mb, SCS1 digital in-out, home use only, mint condition, £1495 ☎ Bernard 01844 353904

AKAI S2000, 2Mb, disk library, as new, boxed, less than a year old, £650 ☎ Richard 0171 250 3325

AKAI S2000, 6Mb, 6 months old, still guaranteed, home use only, £800, no offers ☎ Adam 01993 850755

AKAI S3000XL plus effects, 3 months old, £2000, Apple PowerBook 5300 plus software, £1100 ☎ James 0181 980 9262

AKAI S3000XL, 18Mb, EB16 effects, Syquest EZ135 removable hard disk, plus 13 cartridges loaded with library, three months old ☎ 0181 980 9262

AKAI S01, fully expanded, 32 seconds, 8 banks, as new, £450 ono ☎ 01480 433488

CASIO FZ1 keyboard sampler, with memory expansion, box, manuals, library, £700 ☎ Stephen 0181 549 6975

CASIO FZ1 with brand new disk drive, memory fully expanded, £575, Atari ST with 2Mb RAM but no monitor, only £100 ☎ Guy 01903 700714, office hours

CASIO FZ1, flightcase, £550, Roland D110, £185, Yamaha FB01, £85, Anatek MIDI Merge, £30 ☎ 0121 603 7834

CASIO FZ10M, manuals, library, DOS editor, £650, Roland Juno 6, recently serviced by Roland, £160 ☎ John 01269 831592

EMU EMAX II sampling keyboard, with SCSI, internal 420Mb hard disk, triple-speed CD-ROM, and entire Emu library on four CD-ROMs, 8 outs, FX returns, 16 track sequencer ☎ 01484 865137

EMU EMAX II stereo sampler, 8Mb RAM, 350Mb hard drive, SCSI, 8 outs, £1300, Yamaha GC2020 stereo compressor £140, JBL Control 5 monitors, £250, Korg Wavestation SR, offers ☎ Eddie 0181 248 3391

EMU EMAX II TURBO 16-bit stereo sampling keyboard, 8Mb RAM, 210Mb hard disk, resonant filters, automated mixdown, £1475 ono ☎ Paul 01527 550135/541511

EMU EMULATOR 3 keyboard, immaculate condition, Emu-approved service, custom flightcase, full system including optical drive and 1800Mb library, offers ☎ Keith 01444 831504

EMU ESI32 stereo sampler with SCSI and 730Mb hardrive, £1150, Akai S01 Sampler, £360 ☎ Richard 0973 763925 (Leeds)

EMU ESI32, new software, 2Mb RAM, box, manual, sound disks, excellent condition, £900 ☎ 01235 768466

ENSONIQ EPS sampler, full memory, 10 outputs, £600, Korg Poly 6 analogue, true VCOs, good condition, £250, Alesis ADAT, 760 hours, V4.03, £1300 ☎ Nick 01942 494551

ENSONIQ EPS16+ sampling workstation, 16-bit sampler, 24-bit effects, 16-track sequencer, advanced synthesis, automated mixdown, fully serviced by Sound Technology Nov '95, large library, £750 ☎ 01908 583621

ENSONIQ EPS16+ rack sampler with 50-disk library, £750, Kawai K1 rack module, £165, Roland D10 keyboard, £235 All boxed, as new ☎ 01624 627213

ENSONIQ EPS 16+ with 100 disks, good condition, £700, Korg M1, £300 ☎ Colin 01207 509258

ENSONIQ ASR10 stereo sampler workstation, excellent condition, under guarantee, 50+ disks, manuals, keyboard, 24-bit DSP as used by Prodigy, Sharman, LTJ Bukem, etc, £1400 ☎ Ben 01280 814385

ENSONIQ ASR10 keyboard sampler, 16-track sequencer, superb effects, 8 outputs, good condition, manuals and library, £1450 ono ☎ Andrew 0161 286 6585

ENSONIQ ASR10 stereo sampling keyboard, with manuals and sound disks, boxed, as new, two months old, £1600 ☎ Toby 01608 682224

ENSONIQ ASR10 sampler keyboard 16Mb, 273.93 seconds sample time, 50 effects, 16-track sequencer, as new, boxed with manuals, £1800 ono ☎ 01524 844394

ENSONIQ ASR10 sampler keyboard, sample disks, manuals, pedal, on-board sequencer, mint condition, £1300 ono ☎ Luke 01707 336370/335686

KURZWEIL K2000 version 3.16J, SMP-K sample option, FK-1 fan kit, 16Mb RAM, 290Mb hard disk, RMB-K daughter board, ROM 1 orchestral soundblock, P-RAM expansion, mint, boxed, offers ☎ Chris 01563 533965

PEAVEY DPM-SP 16-bit sample player, £275 ☎ Brian 01752 550199 afternoons (Plymouth)

PEAVEY SP + SX SAMPLER, 16-bit, 2 SCSI ports on each, good condition with manual, disks, £450; SP alone, £300 ☎ 01933 678608

PEAVEY SP/SX sampler, SCSI, filter, 16-note polyphonic, 2Mb, easily expandable to 32Mb with SIMMs (30-pin), manual, power supplies, bargain at £399 ☎ 01933 678608

ROLAND DJ70, fully expanded to 4Mb, £800, Boss DR660, £250, MC202, offers, Yamaha CS70M, offers, Mackie 1202, offers ☎ Paul 01865 775073 after 6pm

ROLAND MKS100 sampler, DX200, swap both for one of these Korg EX8000, EX800, Roland D110, Roland CP40, K4R, or swap just DX100 for triple tier A-frame or R2D2 ☎ 01733 349882

ROLAND MS1 sampler, £300 ☎ Dave 0171 624 1816

ROLAND MS1, power supply and MS1 video, £240, Yamaha QY20, power supply, QY20 video and carrying case, boxed, £250 ☎ 0171

843 4410

ROLAND MS1 groove sampler with CD, excellent condition, hardly used ☎ Steve 0121 458 3183 weekends, 0976 249437 anytime

ROLAND MS1 digital sampler, manual, boxed, £250 ☎ 01782 322869

ROLAND S10 keyboard sampler, good condition, manual & footswitch, £225 ☎ Simon 0151 426 7326

ROLAND S10 digital sampling keyboard, good condition, £180, Studio console desk with rackmount section, etc, grey/black metal, padded front, suit 8-track setup, offers, Charvel model 2, £150 ☎ 01892 543633

ROLAND S10 sampling keyboard, touch-sensitive, 8 seconds, 4 parts, disk drive, A1 condition, case and instructions, £220 ono ☎ 01932 761988

ROLAND S10 keyboard sampler, very good condition, complete with sound library, £240, Samson Mix Pad 9 mixer, only 3 months old, still boxed and under guarantee, £160 ☎ Paul 0956432965

ROLAND S550 sampler, plus monitor, £650 ono ☎ 01633 880858 (Gwent)

ROLAND S750, 10Mb, with 44Mb hard drive, 8 outputs, best filter sound on any sampler, £2500 ono ☎ Tony 01280 822763 (Bucks)

ROLAND S760 with 16Mb memory expansion, manuals, box, etc, £1399 ☎ Andrew 0116 282 4616 (Leicester)

ROLAND S760 sampler, 32Mb, OP760 board, manuals, SCSI, PSU, as new, boxed, excellent condition, hardly used, £2500 ono. Contact Andrew Slegt, 2 Spring Crescent, Widcombe, Bath, BA2 4HZ

ROLAND S760 sampler, OP1 expanded, CD-ROM, as new, £1350 ono ☎ 0802 428939

ROLAND W30 with flightcase, mint condition ☎ Colin 01342 850507

ROLAND W30 sampling workstation, 16-track sequencer, large library, manual, home use only, vgc, £650 ☎ Martyn 0191 537 3473 (Tyne & Wear)

ROLAND W30, excellent condition, 16-track sequencer, very easy to sample, loads of filters and edit functions, good sample library, manuals and leads, £825 ono ☎ Lewis 0116 291 3995 (Leicestershire)

ROLAND W30 plus library, £750; Roland JV880, £450; Yamaha SY35, £350; Alesis D4, £250, Studio Research 12:2 desk, £150, all A1 condition ☎ Simon 01803 732199 evenings (Totnes)

ROLAND W30 sample workstation with 80-disk library (dance), £750; Boss DR660 drum machine, 808/909 sounds, £250, no offers ☎ Richard 01757 701010 after 6pm (Selby)

SAMPLING OPTION for K2000 keyboard, £450 ☎ 0161 795 0989

SEQUENTIAL PROPHET 2002 sampler, £450, Boss SE70, £350, SH101 + MIDI-CV, £350. No time wasters! ☎ 01470 824196

COMPUTERS & SOFTWARE

AMIGA A500 plus colour monitor, mouse, joystick, games, disks, £170 ☎ Dan 01273 697572

APPLE MAC CENTRIS 660AV 12/230, with double-speed CD-ROM and 16-bit sound and video, plus Apple 14-inch Trinitron display, keyboard and mouse, £1100 ☎ 01844 344112 (Bucks)

APPLE POWER MAC 7500/100, 24Mb, X4 CD-ROM, keyboard, 3 PCI slots, upgradable, etc, £1750, or £1850 with slightly damaged Duplovision monitor All perfect/boxed ☎ 0191 273 6687

APPLE POWERBOOK 530032/500 including 24Mb RAM card, colour monitor support to 17-inch, 16-bit stereo I/O, original packaging, manuals, etc, £1595 ☎ Tim 0191 384 8360

ATARI medium-resolution colour monitor, £45 ono ☎ 0181 428 5360

ATARI FALCON, 16Mb, with 32MHz CPU upgrade, Cubase Audio, dongle, manual, SMP24 6-way MIDI interface and SMPTE sync box, whole package £1100, will split ☎ Ben 0181 748 3624

ATARI FALCON 030, 4Mb, 120Mb hard drive, as new, direct to disk, digital recording £420 ono, Atari ST sequencing setup including monitor, £220 ono ☎ 01882 57487

ATARI FALCON 030, 4Mb, 65Mb hard drive, SM124 Monitor, D-to-D hard disk recording software and dongle, 160 disks, computer desk, boxed, manuals, £520 ono ☎ 01709 896160

ATARI FALCON, 14Mb, £550, Cubase Audio, 16-track version, £475, Syquest 270Mb removeable drive plus two cartridges, £300 ☎ 0191 271 1456

Atari 1040ST with Cubase v3.1, Novation Bass Station, EVS1 keyboard module, Yamaha SPX50D, Alesis MidiVerb 4, Alesis dual compressor with gate, Yamaha 8-track desk, 48-plug patchbay, Alesis RA100 amp all in smart rackmount box, £2000 ono ☎ Matt 01908 568850 (Bucks)

ATARI STE with hi-res mono monitor, excellent for sequencing, £250 ☎ Bedford 01234 363339

ATARI STF, 4Mb, plus monitor, Emagic Notator, recent power supply fitted, misc software, £400 ono ☎ Jamie 01628 526562 (Maidenhead)

ATARI STFM, 4Mb, hi-res monitor, additional serial port MIDI adaptor, over 100 disks MIDI software, many extras, £250 ☎ 01635 871269

ATARI STFM, 2.5Mb 520, with SM144 hi-res monitor, Notator SL 3.1 and many games, original manuals and packaging, two joysticks, £350 ono ☎ 0181 980 1521

ATARI STFM, 1Mb, hi-res monitor, Cubase

V2.1, £225, no Offers, Akai SG01V Vintage module, £245, Yamaha DX21 synth, £175, Yamaha PSS51 keyboard, £125 ☎ Steve 01553 674076 (Norfolk)

ATARI STACY 4/40, excellent condition, £700 ☎ Paul 01527 500673

BAND IN A BOX Atari version 5, genuine disks and manual, £45 ☎ Rod 01228 710001

CAKEWALK home studio, PC sequencer, £55, Powertracks Pro PC sequencer, £25, Soundblaster 16 soundcard £45, all unregistered, boxed with manuals, price includes postage ☎ 01706 250846

C-LAB EXPORT MIDI expander for Atari, £50, also arranger and improviser software for Atari, offers ☎ Chris 0181 748 4631

COMPAQ DESKPRO 386/25 DX 4Mb RAM, 120Mb HDD, 1.2Mb FDD, keyboard, mouse, VGA colour, as cond, £300, Replay MIDI sound card, £65, Vidi-PC capture, £75 ☎ 01482 496215 (evening)

COMPAQ PRESARIO 486 DX266, 8Mb RAM, 270Mb hard drive, full multimedia with MIDI interface, Cubase, Windows, DOS installed, interested in swaps or £750 ☎ Chris Ross 01703 491321

DESKTOP MUSIC SYSTEM: Korg AG101 GM module, Master Tracks Pro for IBM PC, boxed, as new, manuals, cables, £450 ☎ Peter 0181 679 7993

DESKTOP PC 50MHz Multimedia Packard Bell, 4Mb, 340Mb hard drive, CD-ROM, 16-bit snd, 1Mb Video Ram, 14-inch SvGA, Windows 3.11, Windows '95 with bundled software, boxed, excellent condition, £500 ono ☎ 0115 9230 710

DIGIDESIGN AUDIOMEDIA II for Nubus Mac, with software, £375, Korg Z3 Guitar synth, £220, Roland CM32 module, £70 ☎ Mark 01224 712174

DIGIDESIGN AUDIOMEDIA II for Mac, £550, Cubase (Mac) v2.05, £450, Apple Mac llsi, 12Mb RAM/270Mb HD, CPU, only £550 ☎ Norman 01326 316829 (Cornwall)

DIGIDESIGN AUDIOMEDIA LC for Mac with Sound Designer II software, boxed, as new, cost £750, bargain, £400 ☎ Graham 01483 751883 (Surrey)

DIGIDESIGN SESSION 8 Cubase Audio V3 PC, unopened, £1700, Maximation 16 ULAs, £350, Roland S750, 18Mb, colour monitor, £1450, Jupiter 6, immaculate, flightcased, £800, Atari 1040 + monitor, £200, Wanted PC1600, analogue bits n' bobs, MMT8, FX, etc ☎ Brian 01268 559284

DIGITAL ONLY CARD D PC card for direct digital transfer to and from DAT, £280, MXQ32M MIDI card, £120, both boxed, as new ☎ George 0181 868 8187

EMAGIC LOGIC sequencer for Atari, mint condition, complete package, dongle, MIDI ports, manuals, case and unused registration card, £200 ono ☎ Matthew 0161 483 9551 (Manchester)

EMAGIC NOTATOR v3.21 for Atari, boxed with dongle, perfect, £75 ono ☎ Matt 01932 765253 or 0385 223491 (SW London)

ENSONIQ EPS Atari ST sample editor, Eze by Gelvi software, requires 1Mb Atari, onscreen sample waveform and synth parameter editing, cost £150, sell for £95 ono ☎ Chris 0421 507144

EMAGIC LOGIC 2.0, complete, £150 ☎ 01829 732427

EMAGIC LOGIC AUDIO/AV for Mac, £550 ono, 02 44MB Syquest drive with four cartridges, £75 ono ☎ Steve 0171 594 7523

FEELING PARTNER unique software (Atari), Peavey Spectrum Bass, Yamaha RX5, Sony 909 stereo mic, Sony camcorder outfit, Sony PCM701 with/without Betamax Hi-fi VCR, mint ☎ 0113 268 0331

GREYSCALE 520 STFM medium-res monitor, sequencing, sampling, desktop word processing software, mouse, leads, games. Swap for £150, drumpads (SPD8, Simmons portakit, Drum Station, multi-effects, synth module, W.H.Y ☎ Daniel 0189 583347

HI-SOFT AURA 12/16-bit sampler cartridge for Amiga 600/1200, boxed with manuals, vgc, £50 ono ☎ 01684 893698 after 6pm, or 0402 181543 mobile

HOLLIS TRACKMAN II 32-track sequencer for Atari, dongle, footswitch, manual, £30 ☎ Chris 0121 308 0769 (Birmingham)

HP DESKJET 520 printer, £190 ono ☎ Jamie 01628 526562 (Maidenhead)

LBM/AST brand-new multimedia 486, 66MHz, 8Mb, 540HD, bundled software, Soundblaster card, SVGA monitor, Pentium upgradable, full 1-year on-site warranty, £675 ☎ 01484 647131

MICRODEAL CONCERTO sequencing software for Atari ST, original, boxed, master disks hardly touched, loads of editing features, runs in hi or medium res, a bargain at £25 ☎ 01354 695239

MICRODEAL STEREO REPLAY cartridge and Quartet, plus samples, editors, drums, sequencer, MIDI Studio Master, other utilities and stuff for Atari STFM/E, reasonable prices ☎ 01480 406415, evenings

MICRODEAL REPLAY 16 sampler for the Atari, £70 ☎ Stephen 01144 268 3208

OPCODE MIDI TRANSLATOR II Mac interface, boxed, as new, £35, Studio monitor, Systomper 931, crystal clear sound, £180 ☎ 0191 273 5687

OPCODE STUDIO VISION PRO Version 3.1, brand new, hard disk recording, powerful sequencer, £300 off retail price, yours for £900 ☎ 01825 724093

OPCODE STUDIO VISION Pro 3.0.1, for Mac, latest version, offers ☎ Sean 0171 424 0194

PINNACLE RCD1000 recordable CD, Macintosh software, warranty until October, supports most CD formats including

Andre, but not Masterlist 1.2, hence sale at £650 ☎ Richard 0117 974 1153

RESAMPLE PROFESSIONAL for Windows, ultimate digital sample editor/audio files converter between virtually all formats of samples by major manufacturers. In original pack with manual £70 ☎ 01438 715892 anytime (Herts)

SONY MAGNETO-OPTICAL drive, removable 600Mb cartridges, 6 available, £1500 the lot, flightcase for A3000, £50, Philips green monitor, £50 ☎ 01453 731933

SOUNDSCAPE for PC plus CD Writer, Tascam DA38 II DAT, Yamaha Promix 01 desk, patchbays, mics, stands, stageboxes software, backline extras, complete digital studio, £8000 ono. May split ☎ 01823 642089

STEINBERG AVALON 16-bit D/A stereo converter plus Avalon universal sample editor for Atari ST computers, with key and manual, cost £700, sell for £295 ☎ 0956 339577

STEINBERG CUBASE v3.0 for Atari, £100, Zoom 9001 Fx, £75 ☎ 01703 346855

STEINBERG CUBASE LITE for Apple Macintosh, manual and song disk, £40 ☎ Danny 0113 274 3849

STEINBERG CUBASE SCORE new version 2.0, Windows, sound module, manuals, disks, still boxed, unwanted gift. Had the good luck to win same in competition, £300 ☎ 01332 512228

STEINBERG CUBASE SCORE latest version for Atari or Falcon, also Cubase v3.0, manuals and dongles for both ☎ 0161 232 9300

STEINBERG CUBASIS for PC, registered and guaranteed, cost £275, sell for £195 ☎ Robin 0171 737 6233

STEINBERG CUBASIS v1.11, boxed with manuals, unregistered, offers. Must go ☎ 01426 218014 (Warwickshire)

STEINBERG CUBASIS for PC v1.13, educational edition, includes full program, tutorials, teachers' notes, £85 ono, inc postage ☎ Jeremy 01904 700329 or email downing@anynet.co.uk

STEINBERG CUBASIS AUDIO for PC, as new, boxed with manual and dongle, £140 ☎ Chris 01422 540395 (eves)

STEINBERG CUBASIS AUDIO for PC, unregistered, £150, AWE32 with 8Mb sample RAM, £200 ☎ 01638 743052 (Cambs)

STEINBERG CUBASIS PC, unwanted gift, cost £139, sell for £90 ☎ Adrian 01604 37077

SEQUENCERS

BROTHER PDC100 pro disk composer, 32 tracks, disk drive, MIDI data Filer, MIDI bulk data £140 ☎ Frank 01708 553873

ROLAND MC50 MKII, brand new, boxed with manuals, £475 ☎ Mike 01367 240799

ROLAND MSQ700 8-track MIDI DCB sequencer, £125 ono ☎ Steve 01691 655019

ROLAND TB303 original carry case, recently serviced, mint, £750 ono, Sequential Pro 1, recently serviced, boxed, excellent condition, £400 ono ☎ Keith 01245 264417 daytime, 01376 513992 evening

SEQUENTIAL MODEL 800 analogue sequencer, £300, Roland CSQ100 analogue sequencer, £100 ☎ Sean 0171 221 7274

YAMAHA QX5FD sequencer, vgc, with 3.5-inch disk drive and manual, £130, Casio CS10P piano module, perfect, £60, Shure SM58 mic, perfect, with case, £75 ☎ 01256 468208

YAMAHA QX21 sequencer, good condition, original manual, excellent ideas machine, £75 ono. ☎ Alan 01705 295289

YAMAHA QY20 with padded case, power supply, boxed, with manuals, £230 ☎ Wayne 01254 202032 (Blackburn)

YAMAHA QY20, £310, Yamaha QY8, £120, Tascam Porta 07 4-track, boxed, £50, Yamaha DX7, £320, Korg M1, £450, Wanted Roland MT120S ☎ 01973 325822

YAMAHA EMQ1 disk recorder, records sequences to 3-inch floppies, manual, £75 ☎ Tony 01579 382850 (Callington)

DRUM MACHINES

BOSS DR660 drum machine, as new, boxed, less than a year old, £245 ☎ 0171 250 3325

ROLAND R8 drum machine with case and cards, immaculate, £300 ☎ 0117 924 9891

ROLAND TR505, £45, Roland JSQ60 Sequencer (for Juno 60, Jupiter 6), £35, Both boxed, manuals, excellent condition, prices include p&p M. Sanders, Villa Nova, High Street, Godshill, I.O.W PO38 3HZ

ROLAND TR606 Drumatix, vgc, with manual, easy to use, will deliver, £90 ono ☎ Darren 01270 766451, after 6pm

ROLAND R8 drum machine, vgc, with manual, £280 ono ☎ Darren 01270 766451, after 6pm

YAMAHA RX8 MIDI drum machine, many sounds, RAM card, £170 ono ☎ Dan 01273 386672

YAMAHA RX17 drum machine, manual, song book, £75 ☎ Doi 01562 825267 (Midlands)

YAMAHA RX17 drums, £250, Hughes & Kettner Crunch Master valve guitar preamp, £50 ☎ Carl 01203 394737 (Midlands)

MISCELLANEOUS

1KW PA SYSTEM includes mixing desk, reverb unit, 2 amps, 2 speakers, flight case,

£900 ono ☎ Ian or Maria 01344 412358

JL COOPER FPS100 synchroniser, excellent condition, £110 ono, Roland D110 multitimbral sound module, good condition, £180 ono ☎ 01292 267532 (Ayr)

KORG WAVESTATION Drums & Percussion cards WPC-02 and WSC-02, both for £25, Roland M16-C memory cartridges for JX8P (3), £10 each or all for £25 ☎ 01274 620004 (Bradford)

LANEY KD100 keyboard combo, 3 inputs, reverb, FX loop, line in/out, £200 ono ☎ Andy 01203 683385

PEAVEY ES15 speakers with Peavey stage stands, speakers contain 15-inch units plus horn, stands are strong tubular aluminium and height adjustable, brand new condition, £325 ☎ 01952 260064 (Telford)

PEAVEY KB100 keyboard combo, £140, Phonic 31-band mono graphic eqaliser, £65 ☎ John 01273 208992 (Brighton)

PHILIP REES MIDI sync converter, £30, Alesis Microgate, £40 ☎ 01902 20381

RACKS, brand new, 12U high with locking doors, very sturdy, £40 each ☎ Justin 01784 432385

RAMSA SUBWOOFERS 2 pairs, £325, PP System controller, £100 ☎ 01226 283487

ROLAND GR707 guitar synth and GR300 synth unit, both excellent condition, £350, Quad valve mono blocks and preamp and tuner, £300 ☎ Andy 01222 493528

ROLAND MIDI MIXER: 10 channels for controlling volume and pan via MIDI, like a desktop version of Cubase MIDI manager, ideal for live MIDI mixing, boxed, as new, £80 ☎ Ian 0161 232 1707 (Manchester)

SESSION ROCKETTE 30 guitar combo with reverb, overdrive and MOSFET valve sound circuitry, £100 ☎ Paul 01422 839631 (Halifax)

STOLEN: Akai CD3000, 10Mb, registration A944515366. Reward for information ☎ 01372 468783 or 0956 910137

YAMAHA EMX2300 powered desk, 12 channels, 2 aux, 15 internal effects, 9-band EQ, phantom power, 500 watts stereo, 4 outputs, portable, bought for £1700, sell £700 ono ☎ 0181 300 5334 eves/0171 939 4858 days

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PERSONNEL

ATMOSPHERIC, original, melodic, imaginative, instrumental albums or tracks wanted for new age releases, all tapes listened to, SAE for return. Dream Machine Music, PO Box 84, Watermooville, Hants PO8 0FX

A&R AGENCY representing a wide range of dance labels require artists with good quality demos, all dance/electronic genres welcome, send. En-Phonic, PO Box 10503, London N22 6TQ. Replies guaranteed

DANCE MUSIC required for newly forming record label. Send demos to Rabid Records, Flat 4, 89 Cathedral Road, Pontcanna, Cardiff CF1 9PG

DANCE PRODUCER/programmer, able to remix soul, house, drum 'n' bass, jungle, looking for work and other people with home studios ☎ Damon 0956 139029

DRUM 'N' BASS engineer/producer wants to hear from artists with good ideas to develop, produce and release projects ☎ Kia 0973 563888

ENGINEER seeks studio work in Britain or Europe (preferably Netherlands). HND qualified with good studio experience, speaks proficient Dutch, major studios only please ☎ Kevan 01738 625554

EXPANDING DANCE LABEL seeks new artists interested in most kinds of dance music. Send tape to Homers House Records, 10 Moorwood Avenue, Housley Park S30 4WA

EXPERIENCED ENGINEER/ PROGRAMMER wanted for top North London studio for major remix work. Must be expert with Notator. Send CV to Andrew ☎ 0171 722 9151

EXPERIENCED SINGER songwriter in pop/dance, seeks programmer songwriter anywhere, to collaborate on songs. Influences M People to Erasure ☎ Mark 01904 794183 (Manchester)

EXPLOSIVE RECORDINGS are currently seeking demos from artists, singers and producers in the fields of house and garage. Send to Explosive Recordings, PO Box 1032, Sheffield S6 6YR

FEMALE SINGER required for dance group. Must be keen and dedicated. We have songs written, so songwriting is not important ☎ Mark 0161 969 4529

FEMALE SINGER/SONGWRITER needed for East London production team, currently producing with Japanese major label. All aspects of dance music. Only serious vocalists please ☎ Geoff 0181 520 5646

FEMALE VOCALIST required for various dance projects, must have attitude and some musical ability to sing and collaborate on future chart/club hits ☎ Leeds 0113 294 5649

FLYTRAPP RECORDS need fantastic dance music. If you have some, please send it to us. Flytrapp Records, 20 Churchward Drive, Frome, Somerset BA11 2XL

KEYBOARDIST with gear seeks DJs/programmers/collaborators with view to live sets in clubs/house/dance, Cambs/Essex area. Don't waste time, let's have some fun! ☎ 01799 527352

KEYBOARDIST/PROGRAMMER wanted for forward-looking dance act, loads of ideas,

strong material, many influences ☎ Pete 0181 299 6009

MANAGER/PROMOTER wanted for a songwriter/performer who has a range of killer tunes from garage, house, R 'n' B, lovers, ragga, jungle. Must have contacts and resources, no timewasters ☎ Kerry 0973 128347 or 0956 189284

NEW LABEL requires the deepest of house demos, Carry Heard-style beats required. Send demos to Dispatch, 38 Willow Dene Close, Ashley, New Milton, Hants BH25 5BX

PRODUCER WITH STUDIO seeks vocalists/groups for UK/US collaborations in R+B dance. Must travel to Salisbury. Yank with industry contacts needs acts ☎ Steve 01722 500 855

PRODUCER WITH CHART SUCCESS seeks songwriters with commercial material to set up chart-storming company. Good technical knowledge and ability to work under pressure essential ☎ 01379 853982

RECORD LABEL requires hot house/dance tracks, vocal and instrumental. Send tapes and SAE to Bang Records, PO Box 8999, London, N7 0DF

SUCCESSFUL dance production team based in Crouch End, North London, require talented female singers for session work or collaborations. Various major and unlabelled projects ☎ Simon or Tom 0181 342 9014

TRANCEMISSION recordings requires innovative talent, trance/techno/house, etc. Send demo and info to Trancemission Recordings, PO Box 4314 6202 VA Maastricht (The Netherlands). Enclose IRC for sure reply

VOCALIST WANTED by keyboard player/arranger, influences must include Ferry, Bowie, Sylvian ☎ Chris 0181 998 4249

WANTED

BAND IN A BOX STYLES DISK version 6, especially Jazz styles ☎ Simon 01792 422116 (Swansea)

BOSS MICRORACK RAD10 19-inch rack shell (2 required) or BMRS micro rack unit. Cash waiting for right price ☎ 01354 695239

BOSS DE200 rack ears wanted, are there any left anywhere? Cash waiting for right price ☎ 01354 695239

BSS DPR 502 noisegate wanted, cash waiting ☎ 0181 883 4329 or 0956 339577

BIT 99, White Cheetah MS800, PG800 ☎ Gordon 01670 523363

CAKEWALK PROFESSIONAL version 3, original disks and manual ☎ Jim 01563 527786

CASIO MG510 MIDI pickup wanted, cash waiting ☎ David 0141 954 0802 (Glasgow)

CIRCUIT DIAGRAMS, etc, for home construction of modular analogue synths (with components that are still available?) ☎ 0131 6613383

CUBASE V3.01 for Atari 1040 STE, original copy, must have manuals ☎ Steve 0181 886 6357 after 7pm

DBX NOISE REDUCTION, two or four track, prefer TEAC DX2B or RX9. Cash paid ☎ John 01297 489259

DEEP BASS 9, will pay about £200 ☎ Steve 01293 510946

DIGITECH VOCALIST 2 cash waiting. Also wanted, expansion boards for K2500 ☎ Paul 01302 538304 (Doncaster)

DRAWMER DS201 gates, DL2LH compressors, SM58s, remote + autolocate suitable for Tascam MS16, AKG C3000, NS10Ms, Digitech Vocalist II, any half-decent reverb/multi-effects, cash waiting ☎ 01270 663405 eves

EMS DK1 CRICKLEWOOD keyboard or VCS3. Must be in excellent condition ☎ 01274 620004 (Bradford)

EMU ESI SAMPLER, Kenton Pro2 MIDI-CV converter, Roland System 100M modules ☎ James 01484 865137 (W. Yorks)

ENSONIQ EPS/EPS16+ keyboard, upgraded memory, separate outputs and service history if possible, also Casio VZ10M, cash waiting, sensible prices please ☎ Enrico 01702 341755

EPS 4X MEMORY expansion with SCSI. Cash waiting ☎ Alvin 01926 435056

EVENTIDE Phaser/Omnipressor/Harmoniser, working or not, but must be cheap. Also manuals for Phaser/Omnipressor, Boss DC2 pedal, X-or IMac/Unisyn software ☎ 0181 692 8129

FOSTEX X15 remote foot control required, model 3060, two needed ☎ 01255 221576 (Answerphone)

GERMAN MUSICIAN pays for TB303, £500, TR802, £250, TR808 MIDI, £350, TR909, £500, SH101, £150, MC202, £150; call or fax me ☎ 0049 5152 61676/ 0049 5152 8179 fax

HAMMOND B3 for enthusiast, cash waiting, can collect anywhere, any condition considered ☎ 01977 557560

HELP! I need a copy of MIDI Sequencing in C, by Jim Conger (out of print book)? Buy or borrow? Good price/all costs paid ☎ Pete 0161 248 6616

JL COOPER DATASYNC for ADAT, also Atari editor/librarians for Proteus 2 and Quadraverb GT ☎ Paul 01905 610794

KORG PROPHECY, MIDI data filer ☎ Jonny 0171 740 6220

MAGAZINES WANTED for research. USA Keyboard, Electronic Musician, music and computers UK/GB Audiomedia, EMM/MT, IMRW, Sound International, other similar

publications, including European ☎ Noel 0191 528 2813 (Sunderland)

MANUALS: YAMAHA REX50 and Cheetah MS50 controller keyboard, photocopies will do, cash waiting for Breaktnru sequencer 2 Plus, Atari version sampler, Akai S950 sampler ☎ Paul 01604 646173

MANUAL FOR EMU ESI32 V2.1 software upgrade ☎ Richard 01305 782554, after 5.30.

M64C CART for 707, realistic price paid ☎ Leo 0161 445 5975

MIDI PROGRAMMING IN C book by Jim Conger ☎ Steve 0121 458 3183 weekends, 0976 249437 anytime

PEAVEY control voltage volume pedal or equivalent for DPM3SE+ ☎ 0161 724 7995

ROLAND CM64 module ☎ Paul 01905 610794

ROLAND D70 Sound cards PCM, ROM, RAM, prefer Roland original including M256E, SN-SPLA, SN-U110, PN-D70 ☎ Malcolm 01242 528241

ROLAND JUPITER 8, swap for TB303 Bassline with manual and PSU, must be mint condition as mine is, no other offers accepted ☎ Mark 01734 869700

ROLAND JV1080 ☎ Dale 0161 872 9064

ROLAND JV1080, Korg Wavestation keyboard ☎ Rob 01273 555772 (Brighton)

ROLAND JV1080 EXPANSION board, World, wanted ☎ Kev 01208 873649 anytime

ROLAND JV90 expansion boards wanted ☎ Eddy 01928 565616

ROLAND JX8P with PG800 programmer, cash waiting for right price ☎ 01843 587098

ROLAND MKS50 synth rack and PG300 programmer, Quasar synth rack. Contact Andrew Slegt, Paramex, No. 2 Spring Crescent, Widcombe, Bath BA2 4HZ

ROLAND R8 MkII drum machine, also Roland TR808, Juno 106, Ensoniq SQ80, all must be in good condition ☎ Delroy 0181 885 4372 after 6pm

ROLAND R8 ROM Cards urgently wanted Dance 10, Electronic 4, Ethnic Percussion 6 + Contemporary Percussion 1. Also required Roland System 100 monosynth, £200 ono ☎ 01560 484787 after 6.30pm

ROLAND R8 909 dance card urgently wanted ☎ John 01224 697287

ROLAND R8 CARDS: Dance, Electronic and Contemporary Percussion, top price paid ☎ 01909 722908

ROLAND R8 cards, Dance, Electronic, Wavedrum RAM for T5500. Top price paid for all items ☎ 01909 722908

ROLAND S330, preferably with manuals, library and monitor. Also consider Roland S550! ☎ Simon 0171 792 1512

ROLAND TR808 can pay, £250, TR606, £65, SH101, £160. Oberheim DMX, £100 for sale D170 Sampler, Easy to use, VGC boxed, manual etc ☎ 01432 266752

ROLAND SH101, £160, MC202, £175, Sequential Drumtrax, £100, MSQ700, £100, TR606, £65, Juno 106, £250, SH09, £100, Jupiter 6, £550, Jupiter 8, £650 ☎ Ian 01432 266752 (Anytime)

ROLAND TR707, full working order and good condition, up to £100 ☎ Jonathan 01952 260064 (Telford)

ROLAND TR808 drum Machine, 727 drum machine, Roland SH101, Ensoniq SQ80 keyboard, Roland R8 MkII ☎ Herman 01444 871260 (West Sussex)

ROLAND TR909 drum machine wanted, will pay £600, TB303, will pay £450, Jupiter 8, will pay £600, Casio FZ10M sampler, will pay £450, Wasp, will pay £100 ☎ 0114 248 2760, eves

SIMMS: 2MB 30-PIN for Roland S750 sampler, Mac or Kurzweil memory will do ☎ Jiiven 0116 285 4547

SWAP YOUR JUPITER 6 for a TB303 plus £500. Must be in good condition ☎ Ian 01432 266752 (Hereford)

SPL VITALISER, cash waiting ☎ 0181 883 4329 or 0860 482822

SPL VITALISER wanted, will also consider Behringer Ultrafex 2 or Aphex C2, also jack patchbays and quality patch leads wanted ☎ Ricky 01482 448767

STILL LOOKING for Simmons SDS kit with or without brain, Simmons 'suitcase' considered, must be in working condition ☎ Steve 01526 323468

SWAP BRAND NEW Bass Station rack for either a TB303, SH101, or TR808 ☎ 0181 974 1880 after 5.30pm

TECHNICS DAT SV-DA10 in gold/black with remote, manual if possible, must be in mint working condition, top price paid ☎ Clive 01752 674205, after 6pm

TASCAM REELS: spare 10.5-inch reels with Tascam logo ☎ Tony 01224 899524

WORLD EXPANSION BOARD wanted for Roland JV1080 ☎ Kez 01208 873649 anytime

YAMAHA 2.8-INCH quick disks, new or used, quantity 10-20 according to price ☎ 01684 565962

YAMAHA QY20: I've got £150 waiting so I can buy one! Cubase mixer maps for Casio CZ1, Yamaha DX100 and FB01 also wanted ☎ Robin 01305 785675, after 6pm

YAMAHA SY85 wanted for cash. Leave message for Mark 01359 271019 (Suffolk)

YAMAHA TG500 expander, Yamaha RM50 drum module, Philip Rees 2M MIDI merge unit ☎ 01268 777023 (Essex)

YAMAHA MT8X multitrack recorder in good condition. Will pay £500 ☎ Tim 01732 741382

SUBSCRIBE & WIN

TASCAM 488 MkII

8-Track Recording Studio

The advanced features and performance of the TASCAM 488 MkII take 8-track cassette multitrack to the professional level. The 488 MkII's mixer features 12 inputs and 4 group busses so you can handle a wide range of live or line-level sources, while features like balanced XLR mic inputs and built-in phantom power for high quality condenser microphones let you take advantage of pro recording equipment and techniques for outstanding sound. There's 3-band EQ with sweepable midrange control on all mono input channels for precision response shaping, and two independent effect sends for external signal processing flexibility. The 488 MkII is also designed specifically for smooth integration into MIDI-based music systems.

The recorder section delivers solid reliability and faultless tape handling with the same mechanism and Hysteresis Tension Servo Control system used in TASCAM's 122 MkIII professional cassette deck. The recorder runs at 9.5 cm/sec. and features built-in dbx noise reduction for high sound quality and low noise. Precision automatic punch-in/out with a rehearsal mode and three auto-locate points allows fast, efficient recording. To enter, all you have to do is subscribe to *Sound On Sound*, answer the tie-breaker question, fill in the form below and return it to us by the closing date of 30 September 1996.

Existing subscriptions expiring within the competition eligibility period are also entitled to enter. When you receive your Renewal Notice, just attach your answer to the competition question on a separate piece of paper, or use the application form below.

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What name would you give to an 8-track digital portastudio?

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Name..

Address..

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Postcode .... (UK subscribers must include their full postcode)

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By Mark Vail

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by Martin J Newcomb

If you liked our feature on the opening of the Museum of Synthesizer Technology in October, but haven't got the time or the cash to visit in person, then the next best thing has to be the museum's guide book. This 118 book is printed on glossy paper and contains full-colour pictures of a large selection of exhibits from the museum, together with some descriptive text and company backgrounders. The text reads a little like a fanzine, but the hardcore synth fanatic will want this book for the pictures. In these pages you will glimpse instruments that you are unlikely ever to experience in the flesh: an exceedingly large Roland System 100 modular set-up, an EMS Synthi 100, an ARP 2500, a large Emu modular and what must be the comprehensive collection of Moog equipment anywhere.

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THE A-Z OF ANALOGUE SYNTHS PART ONE: A-M

by Peter Forrest

The author has aimed to make his book a complete rundown of all the major analogue synths and keyboards ever made, and on the evidence of this first volume, he seems to have succeeded. The book is useful and detailed, and shows evidence of the massive amount of research and effort put in by Peter. He gives pocket company histories and detailed data on the instruments produced - but note that a few entries for a few particularly obscure instruments and companies are limited due to lack of data. The book also provides a comprehensive overview of the qualities of various instruments; charts and tables assess second hand values and maintenance levels necessary to keep a given instrument playable as well as such intangibles as sound quality, collectability and user interface. The A-Z of Analogue Part One, which is limited to 8000 copies worldwide, also features 96 colour pictures of classic instruments.

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By Ray F Badness

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by R A Penfold
A comprehensive collection of simple MIDI projects, including CV and gate converters and a MIDI Thru box. A lot of the book is taken up with interface various obsolete computers to MIDI (Spectrum, CPC464, Commodore 64, BBC B, ZX81 and so on), but the general information is basically sound. Could prove a boon to musicians who are *really* broke!
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CODE V047 **£24.99**
Running time: 50 minutes (approx)
Format: VHS (PAL)
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

ROLAND GP100

Presented once again by Nick Cooper, this video manual for the Roland GP100 covers every aspect in detail with many practical demonstrations. Everything you need to know is covered; topics include; an explanation of COSM, layout, typical setups, initialisation, global settings, use of the tuner, selection and editing of patches, and use of the FX loop and harmonist.

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ROLAND TDE-7K DRUM SYSTEM

Roland's TDE-7K Compact Drum System Comprises the TD-7 Percussion Sound Module, MDY-7 Cymbal Pad Holder, FD-7 Hi-Hat Control Pedal, MDS-7 Drum System Stand, PD-7 Drum Pads & KD-7 Kick trigger. You may have a different configuration to what is shown in the video, but no matter!, Roland Product Specialist Gary O'Toole shows you how the complete kit is put together. Gary concentrates on the TD-7 in detail, showing how the parameters are set up, and giving demonstrations of how the sounds are derived and altered. Good use is made of the visual side in this video with multi-camera shots, a 'birds eye' view of the entire Kit shows Gary's playing abilities to the full. As you would expect from a production aided by Roland UK & USA, this video shows you everything you need to know.

CODE V045 **£19.99**
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YAMAHA PSR6000 ELECTRONIC KEYBOARD VIDEO MANUAL

Yamaha's PSR6000 is a home keyboard with a difference, and offers many professional features plus excellent sound quality. Tim Walter starts at the beginning and makes the instrument look easy and fun. His enthusiasm is catching, and, yes, the PSR6000 is a very capable instrument. The tape runs to 75 minutes, which makes for excellent value.

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These two video manuals have been produced to help the user get the most out of Roland's sophisticated GR-1 guitar synth, the first covering all the basics from mounting the pickup and getting tuned up to selecting sounds and using the on-board sequencer. Each step is patiently explained and demonstrated by Roland's guitar synth specialist, Jay Stapley.

The Advanced tape takes the mystery out of sound editing, custom tuning, advanced sequencer applications, external sequencer hookups, using other MIDI sound modules, indeed virtually everything the GR-1 is capable of doing. If you own a GR-1 or are thinking of buying one, do yourself a favour and order these indispensable videos.

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STEINBERG CUBASE

This manual is presented by Chris West, Steinberg expert. It's very much a practical, 'get up and running' video, showing the novice user exactly how to install and begin using Cubase, whether they're running the program on an ST, Mac or PC computer — there's even a basic background on using the computers themselves! All of Cubase's controls are shown, explained and demonstrated in depth. Once you're familiar with the basic controls, Chris takes you slowly through recording your first session, followed by overviews of the various edit screens. It's rather like having an expert tutorial that you can run again and again in the comfort of your home, until you can use Cubase like a true pro.
Topics covered include; the main screen, customising names and outputs, copying and pasting between arrangements, MIDI filter, cycle mode recording, the tool box, all edit screens.

CODE V011 **£29.99**
Run time: 1hour 30 minutes Format VHS (PAL)
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KORG AX30G TONEWORKS VIDEO MANUAL

The Toneworks series of guitar processors from Korg gets a real work out on this 55 minute video. Korg's guitar demonstrator Steve Fairclough whizzes through the G1, G2, G3 and the flagship AX30G and provides clear explanations of how each units works. And to put the units into context, there's lots of footage of Steve showing off the sonic capabilities of each processor (not to mention his prowess as a guitarist).

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3 CAKEWALK 3.0 VIDEO MANUALS

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For Windows

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CAL

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SOS Videos

JUST ARRIVED!
MACKIE ULTRA MIX VIDEO GUIDE *NEW*

This highly informative video for the Ultramix automation system, clearly demonstrates how to set up and use Ultramix's many time-saving features to get the best from your system. The cost of the video may be redeemed against the purchase price of an Ultramix system, making the video a good way to try before you buy!

CODE V066 **£9.99**
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

ROLAND G800 *NEW*

Presented by Roland UK's product demonstrator Sara Reybould, this video covers every essential feature and function of the Roland G800. Sara provides the user with a wealth of knowledge on this sophisticated instrument, with recourse to many practical examples and close-up shots of the LCD screen. The video was produced in association with Roland USA and Roland UK to ensure that the content is accurate and informative.

CODE V060 **£19.99**
Running Time 92 minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

ROLAND GR09 *NEW*

Presented by Roland UK product demonstrator Nick Cooper, this application-based tutorial video for the Roland GR09, produced in association with Roland USA, covers every function completely. Covered topics include; the GK2A Synthesiser Driver, pickup sensitivity, use of the tuner, what a patch consists of, use of the pedals, patch edit 1 & 2 (including layering and detune, chromatic function, reverb & chorus, edit target, pitch shift), the use of external midi devices, saving to an external sequencer & more.

CODE V061 **£19.99**
Running Time 57 minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

ROLAND JV-1080 VIDEO MANUAL

Roland's amazing JV-1080 synthesizer module is covered in detail in this informative video. Presented by Tim Walter the video guides you through the basics, and leads you painlessly onto the advanced features. The video even shows you how to fit the expansion boards & gives demonstrations of some of the wonderful sounds they contain. Once again this video has been produced in association with Roland UK & USA to ensure that everything in it contains is accurate, and relevant to the new and more experienced users alike.

CODE V046 **£19.99**
Running time: 80 minutes Format: VHS (PAL)
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

ROLAND XP-50 *NEW*

This XP-50 video owners manual is produced by Roland Corporation US and covers all the major features of the instrument in detail. This is an application based video that provides many examples of how your new found knowledge can be applied. Just a few of the 30 separate topic areas covered are: Effects, Choosing Sounds, Loading a Song, Loop Recording, Copying a Track to Pattern, Making an RPS Set, Track Editing, Multitrack Recording, Patch Editing, Creating Splits & Layers in a Patch.

CODE V063 **£24.99**
Running time: 63 minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

WINDOWS 95: WHAT WILL YOU LEARN TODAY? *NEW*

This video is aimed at new Windows 95 users and goes from basic to in-depth advice, covering topics such as minimum hardware requirements and common problems, and providing useful tips and tuition. The video also features Labyrinth's Video Index System to help the user locate particular topics, by means of on-screen timecode and an index booklet.

The video is written by computer journalist Ian Waugh.

CODE V065 **£19.99**
Running time: 74 minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT PCs BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK!

Written by Ian Waugh
This video has been produced in response to the number of potential PC buyers and existing new users who do not fully understand the jargon and basic operating procedures associated with PCs.

It covers everything from 'What is a PC' to the 'Internet'. There is even a Windows tutorial, and a DOS basics section. (Over 120 different sections).

It includes a booklet listing all the main and sub sections along with their respective TimeCode number for easy access when used as a reference tool.

CODE V048 **£19.99**
Running time 91 minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

KORG PROPHECY VIDEO MANUAL

Written by Phil MacDonald
Korg's new Prophecy Synthesizer now has its own video manual!

The video covers all the major features over 6 sections, with lots of examples of the amazing effects that are available using the 'log' and 'mod' wheels. The video's visual interest is maintained by the extensive use of Chroma Key and multi camera effects. This is a video that is ideal for new owners, and those who want to know more about the Prophecy before they make a purchase.

CODE V049 **£14.99**
Running time: 36 minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

BOSS ME-8 *NEW*

Nick Cooper (Roland UK product demonstrator) explains every single feature and function of the ME-8 in detail. The unit is clearly explained in a logical sequence with examples given of how the functions effect the available sounds, a perfect aid to new users of the ME-8 and those who would like to get that little bit more from it. Just some of the main points covered are: What is a Patch?, Selecting a Patch, Copying a Patch, Edit Mode, Using The Effects, Control Effects, The Tempo Function, Manual Mode, and lots more.

CODE V064 **£19.99**
Running time: 72minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

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SOS Videos

EMAGIC NOTATOR VIDEO TRAINING MANUAL

This video manual is detailed and helpful, and is presented in a most friendly and approachable manner by session musician Tim Walter, whose tone throughout the video encourages and inspires confidence. If you are new to Notator and are still in awe of its power, this is the video to bring you down to earth. An introduction and 28 tutorials take the user from the absolute basics - including plugging in the dongle - to working with Unitor and SMPTE, and synchronising to video. As well as actual recording of MIDI data and sequencing, comprehensive coverage is given to using the score layout and printing facilities that are as much a part of Notator. Topics covered include; sequencing page, score editing, lyrics and text, graphic arranger mode, hyper edit, the printer page, using the part box.

CODE V012 **ONLY £19.99**
Running time: 2 hours 20 minutes Format: VHS(PAL)
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

KORG X3

This video offers an easy way in to this powerful workstation. It starts from absolute basics, including audio connections and volume levels, and the clear and helpful script covers all basic facilities of the X3. The video features a sophisticated use of picture in picture, with the X3's display cut into the main image to show you clearly what Phil is actually doing, and main points are reinforced with on screen text and graphics. The main section headings are:
• *X3 Audio Connections* • *Getting Around the X3*
• *Factory Disk* • *Disk Drive Modes*
• *Selecting Sounds* • *Global Modes* • *Sequencer Mode* • *Quick Sound Editing*
• *Playing MIDI Files on the X3* • *Using the X3 with an external sequencer*
Note that these are loose headings, with each section also containing information on connected subjects in varying amounts of detail. A lot of ground is covered, and we can recommend the tape to any X3 owner.

CODE V018 **£19.99**
Running time: 55 minutes Format: VHS (PAL)
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

HOW TO GET A RECORD DEAL

The facts you need from the people who know. How To Get A Record Deal contains vital information and insight that you will not find anywhere else, from artists and executives who have made it and know what it takes.
On this video music industry pros give you the straight facts on how to break into this extremely competitive business. Because sometimes the difference between success and failure is information.
Presented by the National Academy Of Songwriters

CODE V003 **£14.95**
Running time: 1 hour 7 minutes
Format: VHS (PAL)
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

BOSS DR-5 DRUM MACHINE

Presented by Nick Cooper (Roland UK Product Specialist) this video covers all the functions of the DR-5 in a clear and concise manner. Produced in association with Roland UK & USA. By using the information gathered from Roland 'helplines', particular attention has been paid to the areas that many users find most difficult in. This makes it of interest to beginners and experienced users alike. Nick imparts the information with ease and a professional manner, making it enjoyable and entertaining.

CODE V043 **£19.99**
Running time 57 minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

ROLAND JV-90 SYNTH

Roland's JV-90 synthesizer gets the treatment in this informative Labyrinth production. Virtually every facet of the JV-90 is covered, from the basic functions to more advanced programming. Chris Allen guides you through the powerful features this instrument has to offer. Produced in association with Roland UK & USA to ensure that everything it contains is accurate, and relevant to new and more experienced users alike.

CODE V044 **£19.99**
Running time 70 minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

ANALOGUE HEAVEN

Remember our feature on the opening day of the Museum of Synthesizer Technology which we ran back in October 1994? Wish you'd actually been able to attend?
Well, now you can have the next best thing: the museum has released a fascinating 50 minute promo video that features footage shot on the day as well as a lightning tour of the facility. The program is hosted by SOS contributor Julian Colbeck. The tape opens with synth pioneer Bob Moog making the inaugural speech and officially opening the museum, followed by a nostalgic run through one of his old modular systems. Analogue Heaven makes diverting viewing for anyone interested in vintage synths, represents good value, and offers the perfect companion to the Museum's guide book, also available from SOS Bookshop.

CODE V026 **£12.95**
Running time: 50 minutes Format: VHS (PAL)
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CODE V042 **£34.99**
Running time 87 minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

KORG X5 SYNTH

Korg's new X5 synthesizer, reviewed in SOS' January 1995 issue, now has its own video manual. Presented by Tim Walter in an entertaining and lighthearted manner, and explains all basic aspects of Korg's highly affordable instrument in very clear terms. If you're in any way daunted by your new purchase, or want to get a feel for the instrument before laying out your cash, this is the video for you.

CODE V027 **£19.99**
Running time 55 minutes
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

YAMAHA QY20 MUSIC SEQUENCER VIDEO MANUAL

by Tom Robinson
Yamaha's popular QY20 portable sequencer/ sound source is a deceptively simple device to use; if you think you might like some insight into getting that little bit extra out of the device, then look no further. Produced in co-operation with Yamaha, the video features mobile musician Tom Robinson showing you how to get the best from this portable marvel. Tom, who has used the QY20 extensively as a writing tool on the road, says: "I never leave home without it".

CODE V016 **£19.99**
Running time: 90 minutes Format: VHS (PAL)
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF HOME RECORDING   **3 TOP CLASS VIDEOS**

A superbly presented set of videos which no home recordist should be without. Have you got your set yet?!

LEVEL ONE

This well presented video explains how to set up and operate a simple cassette-based multitrack home studio. It clarifies all the basic terminology and demonstrates the recording of a song from beginning to end, covering how to record guitars, keyboards, vocals and drum machines; which microphones to choose; how to patch in effects units and use them well; what makes a good arrangement; what makes a good mix; plus what to master on to and why. Full of professional tips and clear examples, this superb video offers the musician with no recording experience a fast route to successful operation of a simple home studio.

CODE V005 **£24.95**
Running time: 1 hour 10 minutes
Format: VHS(PAL) HiFi Stereo
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

LEVEL TWO

This is, in our opinion, the *best ever* guide to the equipment and skills needed to produce high quality results from a home studio.
Full of clear examples and graphic information, the video majors on effects and how to use them well. It also covers the do's and don'ts of track bouncing; microphones and mic techniques for different applications; getting the most out of multi effects units; plus an analysis of guitar effects with top session guitarist Milton MacDonald and an enlightening interview with ace producer Alan Parsons. Writer/ presenter Julian Colbeck packs the programme with professional tips, allowing musicians of all kinds to get the most out of their home studio.

CODE V006 **£24.95**
Running time: 1 hour 45 minutes
Format: VHS(PAL) HiFi Stereo
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

LEVEL THREE

This video is packed with information and professional tips on advanced MIDI applications in the home studio, including interfacing with sequencers, which sync code is best for which application and why. Hit producer Martyn Phillips (Erasure, London Beat) discusses modern recording techniques, and top programmer Paul Wiffen examines the opportunities and benefits offered by hard disk recording.It offers practical advice on sampling - how to save time and tracks; plus professional tips on advanced arranging and mixing techniques, including spectrum mixing.

CODE V007 **£24.95**
Running time: 1 hour 30 minutes
Format: VHS(PAL) HiFi Stereo
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE KORG M1

Written and presented by Julian Colbeck
The Korg M1 is a classic instrument. The range and quality of its sounds has made it one of the most successful synthesizers of all time. But because the M1 is so immediate, it's too easy just to scratch the surface, leaving many of its exciting capabilities undiscovered. This highly informative video enables M1 owners to unleash the full creative potential of this enormously powerful workstation.
With plenty of musical examples, tips and inside information, the video offers clear, concise explanations of the instruments features and operating procedures, helping you to greatly expand your dexterity and creativity across the whole range of this world-beating instrument.
Comes with a FREE exclusive custom library of fabulous new M1 sounds on Atari format floppy disk (100 Programs, 100 Combinations) created by ABWH/Yes programmer Chris Macleod.

CODE V002 **£24.95**
Running time: 1 hour 10 minutes Format: VHS (PAL)
Postage: UK £1.75, Europe £4.95, R.O.W. £6.95

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NOVATION
BassStation
Rack

WIN

G o back to the future and win Novation's classic analogue synth sound module, described in our SOS review as "a true, programmable monosynth for the '90s" and "tremendous fun and an unqualified bargain at £399". Features include two oscillators with standard waveshapes, a voltage controlled filter with resonance, plus an LFO and two envelopes for filter/pitch/pulse width modulation, all housed in a handy 1U rack unit. The BassStation Rack is fully conversant with MIDI and includes real-time transmission and reception of filter and envelope controls —

perfect for live 'tweaking' and recording on your MIDI sequencer. There's even a built-in MIDI to CV converter to allow you to control other analogue synths.

To enter, use your skill to select the correct answer to each multiple-choice question below, and complete the tie-breaker. (See our review of the BassStation Rack in SOS July 1995, if you require inspiration.) Then, send your completed entry form to the address below, to arrive no later than **Friday, August 9th 1996.**

Prize kindly donated by Novation. Tel: 01628 481992.

the small print

QUESTIONS

1. Which of these is not a Novation product?
- a. BassStation ☐
- b. DrumStation ☐
- c. SpaceStation ☐
- d. RaveStation ☐

2. What does 'CV' stand for on the BassStation Rack?
- a. Curved Velocity ☐
- b. Curvaceous Voluption ☐
- c. Controlled Velocity ☐
- d. Control Voltage ☐

3. What standard oscillator waveshapes are offered by the BassStation Rack?
- a. Square, Saw, Pulse ☐
- b. Soft, Blur, Pulp ☐
- c. Saw, Square, Triangle ☐
- d. Rhomboid, Hammer, Saw ☐

4. What is the cutoff frequency range of the BassStation Rack's filter?
- a. 0Hz to 5Hz ☐
- b. 5Hz to 10kHz ☐
- c. 5kHz to 100kHz ☐
- d. 5MHz to 100MHz ☐

Name ....

Address ....

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Daytime tel. no ....

TIE-BREAKER

In not more than 30 words, describe the essential features of a new product that you think Novation should manufacture

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☐ Please tick box if you do not wish to receive further information from Novation.

Post your entry to: *SOS Novation Competition, Sound On Sound, Media House, Burrel Road, St Ives, Cambridgeshire, PE17 4LE.*

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The Advertisers Index

sounding Off

SOS reader, songwriter and freelance producer STEVEN ROBINSON has some strong opinions on the state of pop music today. In this month's stream of invective, he gets some of it off his chest...

Somebody has to write an epitaph to the semi-art form pop music — which, in my opinion, died sometime in the mid-'70s — somebody with the conviction to speak out against the complacent music business. The industry has descended into a barren, moronic inferno, sterile as an operating theatre and largely devoid of real talent. Much of the blame for this lies with UK record companies, who have been trying to outdo Josef Goebbels by brainwashing the public into believing that what they are given is what they actually want. I see companies cynically manipulating sales figures and applying every known trick to bulldoze the public into buying what I consider to be a fake product rather than the genuine article. Indeed, over the past 20 years or so, we've been fed such a monstrous amount of garbage — passed off as music, but unworthy of the title — that a whole generation has grown up believing that what they hear is the best there is. This view may upset the cloth-eared, pseudo-experts working for the record companies — but the truth hurts.

If pop music is losing out to computer games and other distractions, as we are told, the record companies only have themselves to blame — they don't seem to give a damn about the music, only short-term profit. How else do you explain the phenomenal success of re-releases and cover versions of classic pop songs such as 'Unchained Melody' — reported to be the biggest-selling single of the decade? The original versions of all these classics were created using relatively primitive gear, and would sound good played on just an acoustic guitar, whereas the gradually worsening trash of the past two decades has the benefit of improved recording technology and the 1001 sounds that synthesis and sampling have to offer. But it's still trash!

Anyone dismissing current 'politically correct' musical fashions tends to be castigated, or at best, labelled old-fashioned. Yet I am neither old nor old-fashioned, nor am I opposed to any new style of good music. But the secret of a good song is, as ever, a memorable melody capable of evoking emotion, supported by an accomplished performance. Such qualities engender longevity. Who will be playing the majority of today's pop music in two years' time, let alone 10? What today's hopelessly untalented songwriters fail to realise — along with their equally tone-deaf hype champions in the record companies — is that you can't just string together an almost random sequence of notes and call it a melody. Nor can you add moronic lyrics and call the result a song. That's why flashy, irrelevant videos featuring half-naked, nubile dancers are used to camouflage banal songs. Composing music which is meaningful to the human brain takes real talent and feeling, all of which is sadly lacking from the typical *Top Of The Pops* music scene.

The overriding fixation on the 'bottom line' — making money — is evident in the ruthless exploitation of TV personalities. The sniggering record companies treat the public like fools, and seem prepared to sign up any soap opera star, footballer, model, boxer or even Donald Duck if they think they can sell records. It's a sad fact that you can find better singers in many Karaoke bars, or even on the streets, than on *TOTP*. In fact, the musical content of an act is now a relatively unimportant part of its market potential, judging by a recent TV interview with a bunch of schoolgirl Take That fans. When discussing the merits of the band, there was much mention of nice smiles, attractive band members and nice bums, but precious little about the music. This shameless pandering to the lowest common denominator has resulted in the virtual disappearance of good songwriters and musicians.

Of course, computers haven't helped — they now seem to be the masters, not the slaves, churning out variations on three or four repetitive motifs which have already been done to death by the likes of Stock, Aitken and Waterman, the Pet Shop Boys, Erasure and so on. Where are the UK's equivalents of Whitney Houston, Tina Turner, Mariah Carey, Michael Bolton or even Michael Jackson? Now we have Sam Fox, direct from page three, Kim Wilde, and the award-winning (yes, really!), Jason Donovan — heaven help us! Even the old-school performers like Bowie and Elton John did their best stuff long ago, but the fact that they are still major names is a sad indictment of their would-be replacements, who've failed to deliver. Even the Brit awards have lost all credibility after a series of increasingly absurd nominations, and the tuneless meanderings of over-hyped 'darlings' such as Pulp, Blur, Oasis and Supergrass do little to inspire confidence. The late John Lennon would surely turn in his grave to hear Oasis described as the new Beatles; whoever coined that one could surely use some psychiatric help.

Unless the record companies can climb out of this mess of their own making, they should call it a day — they have no more idea of who to sign than a donkey has of how to play chess. No wonder the UK is no longer a driving force in world pop music. It must be demoralising for real performers and songwriters to realise that unless they jump the queue by first joining the cast of *Eastenders* and *Neighbours*, they just won't get a break. If, as all the evidence suggests, the record companies only want to make money, why don't they move into manufacturing toilet rolls? There'll always be a call for them, and they're just as disposable as the music currently on offer! **SOS**