THE

MUSIC TECHNOLOGY

MAGAZINE

August 1992 £1.75

Erasure

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Dance By Any Other Name

On Test

Steinberg Masterscore II

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East/West Sample CD

Four On The Factory Floor

Features

A&R Men – Unjustified & Ancient?

MIDI Delays – Late arrivals at the Data Ports

Yamaha RY10 Drum Machine

Rhythm For The Road

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Permit a new Editor to introduce himself. My name will probably be familiar to regular readers of the magazine – having been Features Editor for a period of a couple of years and, more recently, a regular contributor. Those with an interest in things percussive (and an extremely good memory) might also remember me from days as Editor of *MT's* sister magazine *Rhythm* which I helped launch back in 1985.

But that was then and this is now, and, as you're probably aware, there have been one or two changes in *Music Technology*, of which I am but one. The rest will no doubt reveal themselves as you leaf through the issue – and in the months to come when the plans we have been formulating over the last few weeks should start to come to fruition.

The changes were essential. Music technology (as it always does) has moved on apace in the last couple of years – despite the recession – and if *MT* is to continue to reflect this we need to introduce ourselves and our readers to the periodic psychological boost that comes with a new broom. I am, of course, aware that change is not always welcome amongst a loyal readership – even one as hardened to it as *MT* readers. But most of what we have planned takes the form of additions to the magazine, rather than replacements. That way everyone should be happy.

Needless to say, your input would be greatly appreciated – whatever form it may take: letters, enquiries, demo tapes and contributions of all kinds. Perhaps you could begin by completing this month's Readership Survey, the results from which will be crucial in deciding the direction of the magazine over the coming months. ■ NL

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Dear MT,

I am beginning to seriously doubt the impartiality of music magazines. A few months ago, on the strength of a review in Music Technology, I was persuaded to part with over £70 for the V3 version of Cubase. To begin with I was a little miffed, as I had been a Cubase user since version 1.0 and believed I had paid for a lifetime's upgrading – Cubase's lifetime, if not my own. No matter, I paid my money and took delivery of the new dongle, new disks and new manual – and straight away had trouble with the program.

To say it was bugged, didn't come into it – the damned thing was riddled with bugs. I don't think I managed to do a full hour's work with the program before it crashed, or wouldn't save, or wouldn't load or wouldn't backup files or... wouldn't do something.

Sometime later, I received a more up to-date version of the program which I assumed would have had all the bugs put right. It was worse. I couldn't load Cubase files from my earlier version, the thing still crashed periodically and there seemed to be more bugs than ever. Over the next few weeks I tried a series of different program disks from a friend and from a local studio where the engineer had refused to have anything to do with the Version 3.0 program after he found out he would have to relearn much of what he had already learnt on Version 2.0. Having finally got a working version of V3.0 I think he is making a big mistake – the improvements are brilliant. But the point I'm trying to make is should you have reviewed it in the first place? Or did you manage to get hold of a disk that worked? I can't see how, if the same version was sent out to everybody.

Perhaps you just chose to ignore all the problems and not bother mentioning them. Or perhaps you just wanted Steinberg to carry on advertising.

M. Moorhouse,
Huddersfield

➤ As someone who has had similar problems with Version 3.0 of Cubase, you have my sympathy, Mr Moorhouse. However, I think your complaint would be better directed at the magazine in which the review actually appeared – *Sound On Sound*. In fact, Music Technology has yet to review Version 3.0 of Cubase precisely because of the problems everyone was experiencing. We felt the upgrade had been released prematurely and simply chose not to review it until a fully functioning version was made available – which I'm happy to say is now the case. I'm also convinced that under Harman's auspices such 'mistakes' will no longer be allowed to happen.

But as far as your mistrust of music magazines is concerned, this incident is evidence, if it were needed, that we cannot all be tarred with the same brush. –**NL**

Dear MT,

I was shocked and offended to see the ad for Percy Prior's Music Shop on page 47 of your July issue. Naively I had hoped that the old trick of using a woman's body to advertise 'male' toys had been abandoned long ago – and that a magazine such as Music Technology, which claims to be 'The World's Premier Hi-Tech Music Magazine', would have had the sense and sensitivity to refuse it space. Or do you think as little of your female readers as Percy Prior obviously does?

Jessica Cargill Thompson
London

➤ There's a popular misconception, Jessica, that the advertising space sold in a magazine is somehow the responsibility of the editorial department. It isn't. The ads coming in for MT are usually made up and sent off to be printed without any of the editorial staff ever seeing them – until the magazine is published, that is.

Having seen the ad, I can only say I wholeheartedly agree with your objections. It was quite out of place in the magazine and I can well understand why you should have felt offended by it. However, even had I previously known of its existence, I think I would have drawn back from any wielding of my editorial scissors. It is my firm belief that only when manufacturers and retailers are in a position to guage the antipathy amongst potential customers for such advertisements will they see them for the anachronistic throwbacks they are.

Like anything potentially degrading to the human spirit, it is the demand we must 'edit', not the supply. Only then will preconceptions about what sells product start to unravel. But speaking of preconceptions, Jessica, how about the one about hi-tech musical equipment being simply male 'toys'? – **NL**

Dear MT,

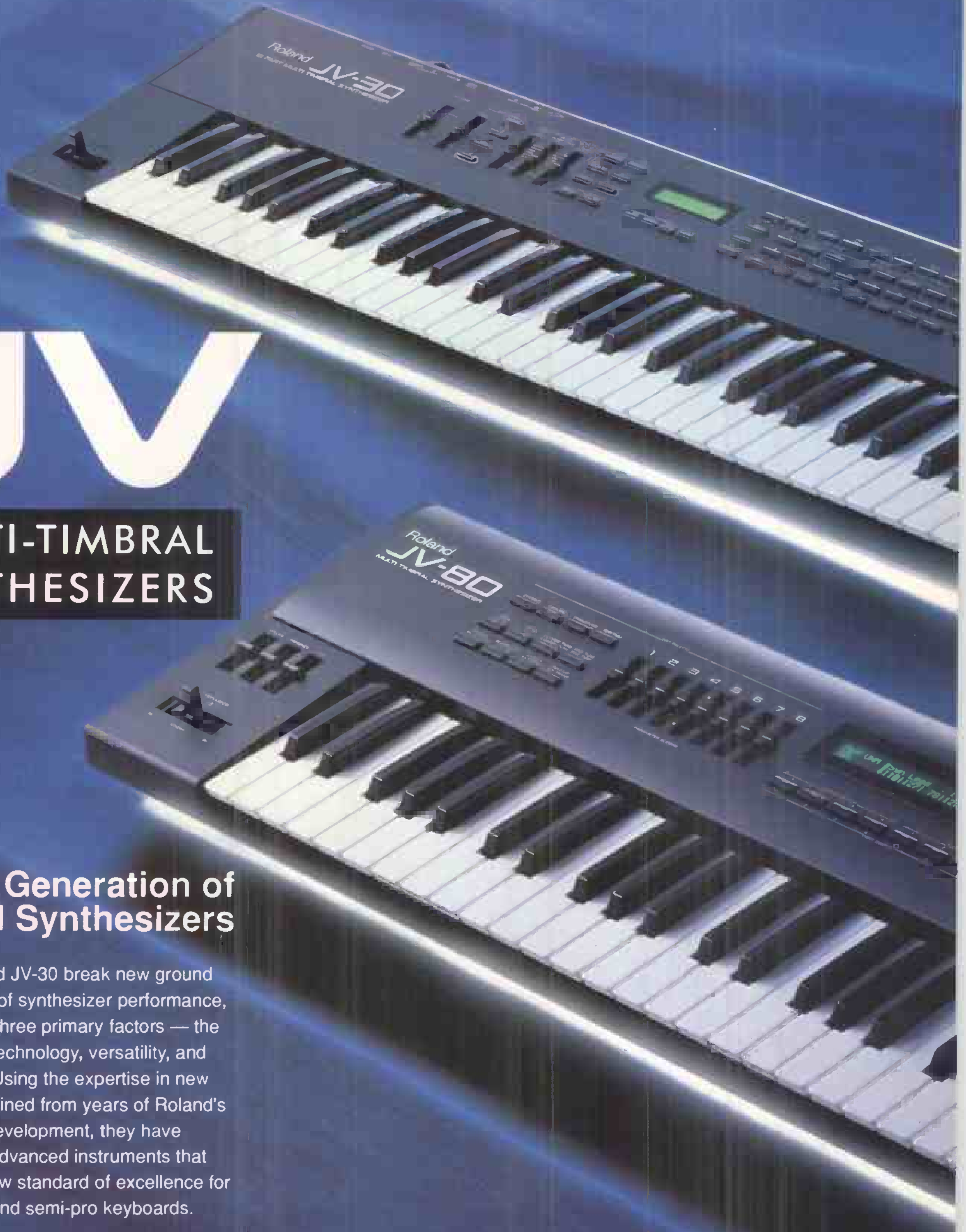
I am extremely irate. You seem quite incapable of finishing what you start. Around 1990 you decided to transform an informative, up-to-date, relevant, well-presented, value-for-money publication into a pick'n'mix assortment of pointless articles, obscure equipment reviews (mainly software patch editors for the Roland D-series on the ST) and endless arsewiffery about fuck all. Yet here we are in 1992 and you still haven't quite managed to complete the task. By this I mean I managed to find 5% worth of interesting and up-to-date information in your latest issue: the adverts. For fuck's sake get rid of them and give the space to the much-deserving On The Beat series, or at least another Moog retrospective. Also, please continue with your policy of one letter per issue – and for God's sake don't bring back reviews of latest albums or live events. And please, please don't even think about trying to be first with product info that not even Which Mortage? reported on six months ago.

See you down the pub for a few beers, mate!

Anon

➤ I don't quite catch your drift. You say the only interesting things in the mag are ads, but you want to get rid of them? We produce unreadable drivel, and there isn't enough of it – is that it? Frankly, Mr Irate (or can I call you Extremely?), as the author of On The Beat, it's all I can do to convince my unbelieving staff that I haven't written this letter myself. They should know better, I don't even read the ads and I'm only interested in the new Moog machines like the sampling keyboards and workstations...

Oh and if we really did have a one letter per issue policy, the cutoff point, rest assured, would have left you to enjoy the anonymity you so richly deserve. – **NL** ■



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News Compiled by Simon Trask and Vic Lennard

Attention Steinberg Users!

New UK Steinberg distributors Harman are providing two phone support services for end users. The Steinberg Helpline is open from Monday to Friday between 2-5pm, with Steinberg Technical Specialist Naji Simaan in the hot seat to answer all those pressing queries. At all other times, the Helpline is switched to a fax machine; in fact, Harman recommend that more involved queries should be faxed through so that Naji can sort out the problem and then phone back with a response.

So that you can keep up to date with all the latest Steinberg developments, Harman are also providing a 24-hour 'New Products And Latest Versions' taped information line.

And now for the all-important phone numbers: Harman Audio: (0753) 576911; Steinberg Helpline: (0753) 554550; Steinberg New Products Info: (0753) 552340.

effectively ensoniq

Already well established as synth and sampler manufacturers, Ensoniq are now moving into stand-alone effects unit territory with the new DP/4 Parallel Effects Processor. At the heart of the DP/4 are four custom 24-bit effects processors capable of processing up to four sound sources simultaneously via four separate inputs and outputs, each one of which has its own level control. What's more, *each* processor can provide multi-effects processing such as EQ + Chorus + DDL.

The 45 effects algorithms include standard effects such as reverbs, delay (up to 3.3 seconds), flanging, chorus and pitch-shift, along with more unusual effects like keyed expander, vanderpol filter and vocoder.

The DP/4 holds 400 presets (200 RAM/200 ROM) which provide single-, dual- and four-processor effects voicings covering single-instrument processing to live sound reinforcement and studio mixing.

RRP on the DP/4 is £1175 including VAT.

For more information, contact distributor Sound Technology's Ensoniq product specialist Simon Stock on (0462) 480000.

NAVIGATING THE SQ

Atari-using Ensoniq SQ1/2 owners can now do all their sound editing from the computer using Argents' new SQ Patch Navigator software. All parameters are shown on one monitor page, making setting up of the SQ's sound, volume, panning and effect parameters quick and easy. As the software is fully MROS and Softlink compatible, you can rapidly switch between editor and sequencer.

Patch Navigator will work with all SQ1s and SQ2s including Plus and 32-voice versions, and is offered *free of charge* to all Argents SQ purchasers old and new. Existing owners can claim their free copy by showing their original Argents Invoice/receipt, while new customers will automatically receive their copy with the instrument.

For more information, contact Argents on Tel: 071-379 6690 or Fax: 071-240 7696.

DAT'S *a Bargain*

Thanks to a special bulk purchase, pro audio dealers HHB can now offer a limited number of Sony DTC1000ES DAT recorders at a new low price. The standard machine costs £749 + VAT, while a Pro version, modified by HHB to include balanced analogue inputs/ outputs and a 19" rack-mounting kit, costs £849 + VAT.

The recorder features HHB's own 44.1/48kHz switchable record modification along with twin 16-bit 2x oversampling D/A conversion, a single 16-bit 4 x oversampling A/D, digital inputs and outputs in S/PDIF format, manual and remote control operation, and a full array of sub-code indexing routines including Start ID and Skip ID. Supplied officially to HHB by Sony, the DTC1000ES is backed by full spare parts availability and HHB's own 12-month guarantee.

For more information contact HHB on Tel: 081-960 2144 Fax: 081-960 1160.

Analogue Activity

The first two products from dBm, a new company set up to provide MIDI interfaces for analogue monosynths and market a range of innovative MIDI-based products, are the MIDI Mono internal MIDI retrofit and the EXCV single channel MIDI-to-CV converter.

Described as being suitable for most 1V/octave monosynths, MIDI Mono can respond over a five-octave range on a selectable MIDI channel (1-16). Features will vary according to the synth and fitting price will depend on the number of features you decide to have. As an example: a retrofit for a Sequential Circuits Pro One provides +/- one octave of pitchbend, portamento control over MIDI, LFO control from the mod wheel, an independent LFO for the VCF, routing of aftertouch, mod wheel and velocity to the VCF/VCA, and MIDI control of up to four continuous and four switched parameters.

The EXCV, a compact unit powered from an external 12V psu (supplied), also responds over a five-octave range on a selectable MIDI channel (1-16) and provides a pitchbend range of +/- one octave. Other features include two Level outputs for controlling the VCF/VCA, each with selectable MIDI sources; pitch slide control from MIDI portamento and patch changes; an LFO which can run free between 0.1Hz and 20Hz or be locked to MIDI clock or note on data; LFO control from the mod wheel; and the ability to gate the Gate output using the arpeggiator clock or MIDI note on data. The EXCV will also convert MIDI clocks to Sync 24, allowing old Roland gear to be synced to MIDI.

The price of the MIDI Mono ranges from £120-200 including fitting, while the EXCV costs £139.

For more information, contact dBm on (0256) 53953.

THE LEADERS FOR DANCE

THE CULT CDs

Zero-G DATAFILES

A collection of over 3000 samples carefully selected from the personal library of one of the UK's leading dance music pioneers - **Ed Stratton**, alias **MAN MACHINE** (Rhythm King), a.k.a. **JACK'N'CHILL** (Virgin).

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Any two ZERO-G CDs: £89 All three: £129

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The **X-STATIC GOLDMINE** - an incredible double-CD of over 3000 ultra-cred and EFFECTIVE dance samples from POLESTAR MAGNETICS in Sweden. Now EXCLUSIVELY available from Time+Space. This double CD package doesn't just contain the same number of samples as all the Datafile CDs put together (over 3000) - they are mostly as good as the Zero-G samples AND 99.9% of them are totally different and fresh. You only need a quick browse of the 30-page index and a cursory listen to realise that, like the creator of Zero-G, the guys who produced this priceless production weapon **really understand** dance sampling production techniques and have a deep passion for all things house+techno. Check out the contents below and you'll know what we mean. Anyone can fill two CDs with samples but to compile over 3000 **of this quality** is a one hell of an achievement! And fantastic value - the price is ridiculously low for what you're getting:

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ALL HANDS ON DECK

MIDI Song File specialists Hands On MIDI Software are expanding their range of products in a variety of areas.

Onstage, the MIDI file player for the Atari ST, has already undergone its first major upgrade in the form of version 1.1, which now supports global parameter changes, programmable time delays between auto-play songs, and the ability to access up to 32 MIDI channels for playback. Price is £99.95.

The company are also providing an extremely cheap way of adding a further 16 MIDI channels to the existing 16 available via the ST's own MIDI Out port. The £29.95 '16+ Cartridge', which plugs directly into the ST's modem port, works not only with Onstage but also Creator, Notator, Cubase, Cubeat (utilising the Export driver through MROS), Trackman 2, Virtuoso and Sequencer One Plus.

Hands On are now supporting Roland's Sound Canvas GS and Yamaha's TG100 General MIDI sound modules with two new editor packages, modestly priced at £39.95 each. As well as allowing you to edit parameters for each multitimbral part, they each provide a full drum editor; edited parameters can be saved as a Standard MIDI File and imported into any sequencer which supports the SMF format. Both programs work within MROS and Softlink, allowing you to switch quickly between sequencer and editor. Plans are in the pipeline to support Korg's 03R/W module, which has a General MIDI mode.

Through a tie-in with New York-based MIDI sequence data company Tran Tracks, the American company's library of 500 titles is available through Hands On and all customers will be entitled to use the Hands On helpline. Tran Tracks sequences use a polyphony base of 64 notes, offering the user full and complete arrangements which all have arranged endings; comprehensive track sheets and a wide variety of sequencer formats are supported.

Creative Sounds' Improviser software for the ST, also available from Hands On, has recently been upgraded to V1.3. Written by jazz saxophonist Paul Hodgson, the software sets out to help musicians explore improvisation in a variety of styles. Standard MIDI Files can be loaded into the program, which will produce melodies from the music which can then be resaved in SMF format and imported into any SMF-compatible sequencer package. Price is £99.95.

Hands On are also expanding into the educational market with the introduction of 'Masterclass' sequences, which have been designed as an aid to studying examination pieces set by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. Each disk retails at £9.95, while if you just want to listen to recorded versions of the pieces you can buy audio playback versions of the disk data on cassette tape for £4.95; DAT versions similar in content to the cassette tapes are also available at £12.50 each.

Song file programmers take note that Hands On are still recruiting freelance programmers to help keep pace with their UK and international demands.

The relevant phone numbers for further information are Hands On MIDI Software: (0705) 221162, Hands On Audio: (0243) 670099, and Hands On Education: (0733) 223403.

Overseas readers might like to know that Hands On products are now also available in America from Tran Tracks Inc (201 383 6691), in Germany from MCS (0231 75 92 83), in Australia from Bava's Music Scene (02 727 4999) and in Scandinavia from G Major Music AB (08 612 7066).

PSYCHO *killer*

MIDI songfile purveyors, Heavenly Music have descended into the depths of madness with their latest project, the complete filmscore to Alfred Hitchcock's horror classic *psycho* programmed in MIDI songfile form to a copy of the original film cue sheet. Priced at £24.95 including p&p, the soundtrack gives you over 40 minutes of music available in a variety of formats, including ST, PC, Sound Brush, Datadisk and MDF2; cassette and DAT versions will be available soon.

For more information, contact the angels at Heavenly Music on Tel: (0255) 434217 or Fax: (0255) 430699.

ethnic sounds

With so many sample CDs emanating from and focusing on the dance market at present, a new CD from The Music Suite comes as a pleasant change. The Ethnic Percussion Sound Collection CD contains more than 400 original samples, all digitally edited, representing the culmination of over three years' work with percussionist Dave Starkie. Sounds include gazelle, singhalese, thunder, talking and barrel drums, djembe, dumbek, tablas, congas, batter-phones, rattles, bones, spoons, shakers, bowls, anvils, gongs, cuica, berimbau and didgeridoo.

The Ethnic Percussion Sound Collection CD is available for £39.95 including VAT and p&p directly from The Music Suite on (0239) 710594.

MULTIMEDIA AT HOME?

The Multimedia '92 show at London's Olympia provided the platform for Commodore to launch their new Amiga CDTV-based Multimedia Home Computer Pack. This new bundle adds a 96-key QWERTY keyboard, a two-button mouse and a 3.5" floppy disk drive to the CDTV, allowing it to run the extensive range of Amiga games and home productivity software, as well as nearly 90 other software titles. The Pack is available for £599 including VAT.

For further information contact Commodore Business Machines on Tel: (0628) 770088 or Fax: (0628) 71456.

REVVING the Engine

Effective from July 1st, E-mu Systems' Pro series of sound modules has undergone across-the-board price reductions of 20-34%, apparently a move which signals a new company focus on the 'hobbyist' musician market. The reductions have been made possible by E-mu's adoption of G1.5 SoundEngine technology, a proprietary method of sound generation which is far more cost-effective than its predecessor, the G1.0 SoundEngine, without compromising on functionality or audio quality. For details of your nearest dealer contact 031-653 6556.

MODULAR ANGELS

LA Analogue, a Los Angeles-based company which specialises in sourcing old analogue modular systems, boldly claim that they can find anything (almost) within a few weeks. Systems currently in stock include the Buchla 200 series, Buchla 400, ARP 2500 and 2600, Serge modular system, EMS Putney, and Roland 100 and 100M, together with various Moog modules.

Anyone wanting to find out more can contact LA Analogue on: 01 01 213 850 5216.

merging MIDI

New from Hinton Instruments are two 1U 19" rack-mounting MIDI merger units built for professional use. MIDIY1 provides three MIDI Inputs merged to one MIDI Output, while MIDIY2 provides dual two MIDI Inputs merged to separate MIDI Outputs. Features include individual filtering of every MIDI status type on each Input, LED indication of status, user-definable Clear Event and Panic Sequence functions activated by pressing large front-panel pushbuttons or a remote footswitch, and an RS232 port for setting up, computer control and configuration dumps.

MIDIY1 is available at £575, MIDIY2 at £650; both prices exclude VAT and delivery.

Incidentally, MIDIY is only part of a range of professional MIDI management devices from Hinton Instruments which includes high density routing matrices, long-haul converters and analogue and digital interfaces.

For further information on products and custom services, contact Graham Hinton on (0373) 451927 or Fax: (0373) 830679.

Atari's New Bird Of Prey

After a series of not entirely successful attempts to produce a follow up machine to the ST, Atari finally seem to have come up with the goods. Indeed, the new Falcon 030 looks set to break as much new ground for the company in the 90s as the ST did in the 80s.

In appearance, little has changed: the Falcon looks like a 1040 STE - though a darker coloured casing is being considered. Internally, however, things could hardly be more different. The CPU is a 68030 running at 16 MHz, in keeping with the current low end range of Macs (Classic II and LC-20 II) with a 68882 floating maths co-processor (FPU) as an optional extra. FPUs are normally used for operations which involve hefty number-crunching such as the editing of graphics.

The machine's RAM comes in three configurations - 1, 4, or 14 megabytes - and there appears to be 512 Kilobytes of ROM and a 128 Kilobyte cartridge port. Monitors for the Falcon can conform to the Super VGA standard; 640 x 480 pixels with 256 colours on-screen chosen from a palette of 65,536 colours (16-bit).

Other details on the visual side are still a little sketchy, but a 15-bit overlay mode for video titling has been mentioned, as has programmable overscan and hardware assisted horizontal fine scrolling. And the sound? Well there appears to be eight channels of 16-bit digital audio DMA record and playback with a sampling rate of up to 50 KHz. In practice, this is likely to allow four stereo channels of CD-quality audio and it appears that 1-bit technology with 80 times oversampling is being used.

Also incorporated is MultiTOS, a professional version of MiNT which has been available for the ST for some time as shareware. How effective the multi-tasking facility will be remains to be seen (it is doubtful whether it will be useable on the MIDI side), but it is a welcome addition nonetheless.

As regards ports, the news is that the onboard 56001 Digital Signal Processor (DSP) running at 32 MHz will allow direct-to-disk recording systems to be built without the need for any extra hardware. With an SCSI 2 port, hard drives can be connected directly without the need for SCSI-DMA host adaptors (a DMA port is also included for current Atari hardware). Such a port should also allow the use of CD-ROM players and the like.

Obvious connectors such as MIDI In and Out, stereo output, two joystick ports and an RS-232C serial port are included - as is a stereo microphone input, two 15-pin enhanced digital/analogue controller connectors and a high speed Localtalk compatible LAN (Local Area Network) port.

The disk drive is high density (1.44 Megabytes) and there is an optional internal hard drive (apparently 2.5") and an internal direct processor slot for 386 SX emulation or other processors. The price? To be successful, the bottom of the range model must come in at around £500 – though "under £1000" is the figure that is being bandied around. If this is correct, then the Falcon 030 looks set to do serious damage to Amiga sales. Having said that, the success of the machine is likely to depend on the compatibility of ST software, its reliability, how available it will be and how well supported it will be by the software writers. Though that last point is probably something of a foregone conclusion.

When? It is expected that the Falcon will be launched at the Dusseldorf Show in August and available in Germany in late Autumn. As far as the UK is concerned, who knows? If Atari UK do, they are certainly not letting on.

Though you have every right to expect up to the minute, accurate news on these pages of the magazine, I have to say I would have preferred to have waited another month before writing this - if only to confirm all the facts. But notwithstanding the non-disclosure form which is currently awaiting my signature, this is the most accurate information I could come up with at the time of writing - 4th July 1992. Until it actually arrives the only thing that seems certain is that the machine will be surrounded by a considerable amount of speculation - not least of which will be that Atari themselves regard this as the 'low end' model of a new family of Atari computers...

performance PLUS

New from E-mu Systems is a Plus version of the company's Proteus Master Performance System keyboard (reviewed MT March '92) which adds 4Mb of orchestral sounds to the standard 4Mb of pop/rock sounds and increases the onboard preset capacity to an amazing 500 locations (300 ROM, 100 RAM, 100 card). Existing MPS owners will be able to upgrade their keyboard to the full Plus spec.

grooving with AMG

The number of sample CDs on the market just keeps on growing, due in no small part to the efforts of AMG. Latest disc in the company's Producer Series is the first offering from Beats International's Norman Cook, engagingly titled *Skip To My Loops* and featuring over 70 minutes of breaks and hooks; price is £49. Also new are two CDs from Masterbits: Orchestra Library is the second disc in the Special Edition Series, while Grooves is the fourth Climax Collection disc.

The *Orchestra Library's* collection of samples, which was originally recorded for the Synclavier, provides not only orchestral multisamples at different velocities but also hits, runs and swells that are impossible to recreate accurately using standard string samples. Due to the expense of actually having to hire musicians in order to get the sounds, the *Orchestra Library* disc is more expensive than many sample CDs currently on the market, costing £65.

As its name suggests, the *Grooves* CD is fairly and squarely in the dance category. A total of 280 new drum machine grooves in house, dance, rap, funk and techno styles are provided. Every groove is BPMed, and a few include basslines, while in virtually all cases several versions of the same groove have been provided. *Grooves* by itself costs £45, or alternatively you can buy all four Climax Collection CDs (Vocals, Classic, Guitar and Grooves) as a set for £160.

AMG have also taken the compilation album concept into the realm of sample CDs with a compilation cheekily titled *Now That's What I Call Sampling!*. This features samples from all the Producer Series artists, including the Art of Noise's JJ Jeczalik, Pascal Gabriel, Coldcut, Ian Curnow and Pete Gleadall – and it's yours for absolutely nothing if you buy any sample CD from AMG. Now that's what we call a bargain!

Finally, the company have recently completed a new catalogue, 'SoundCheck', which is available on request and covers their full range of sample CDs, sound cards, software and expansions. For a copy and any further information, contact AMG on Tel: (0730) 88383 or Fax: (0730) 88390.

Star Players

Okay, so our tennis players get trashed at Wimbledon each year, our national cricket team has a habit of failing abysmally – but recently, our electro-acoustic composers have met with considerable success at the 1992 International Electroacoustic Music Competition of Bourges.

To celebrate 20 years of the Bourges Competition, a special jury gathered to select 20 of the 124 compositions which have won prizes in recent years. Britain, which has always had a large share of prize-winners, took a quarter of the prizes awarded – a reflection of the significant role which British composers have played in electro-acoustic music for some years. Winning composers were Javier Alvarez, Jonty Harrison, Denis Smalley, Alejandro Vinao and Trevor Wishart, all of whom have been or are closely associated with the Sonic Arts Network.

As in previous years, Bourges ran a competition for young composers in which Britain was again represented amongst the prize-winners by Andrew Lovett with *Lyre Of The West Wind*.

The awards reflect the fact that Britain has played an important and influential role in electro-acoustic music for some years.

Anyone wanting further information can contact Jonathan Cooper on 071-794 5638. ■

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Electronic Musician
May 1992 Issue

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EQ Magazine
February 1992 Issue

The DPM® SX Sampling Xpander module allows you to digitally record your own 16-bit samples and send them over SCSI to the SP or in the standard SDS format to your DPM 3 or other compatible instrument.

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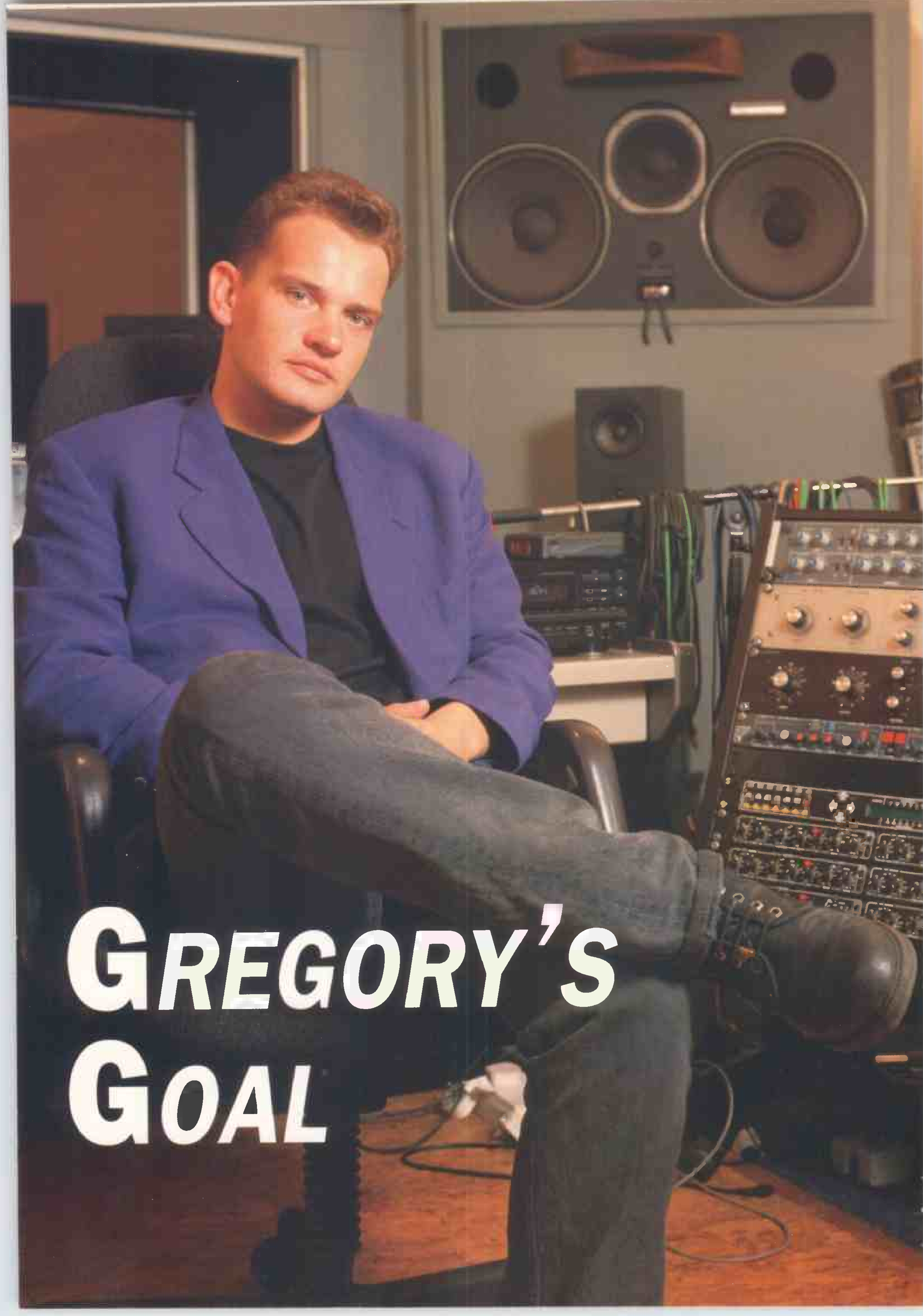

GREGORY'S GOAL

Interview by Phil Ward

Glasgow has a reputation. Well, several, actually, but many of them strangely at odds with each other. One for football, one for art. One for drinking, one for the driest humour to be found anywhere. One for hospitality, another for violence. You may get your bag stolen, say, from a parked car, but then the taxi driver that takes you back to your hotel will turn out to be someone who knows your best mate.

One reputation which defies contradiction, however, is the one Glasgow shares with that other renegade port, Liverpool: some of the finest pop music of the last decade. Spurred on by deep stirrings within the Celtic soul, or perhaps by the sight of Andy Stewart singing 'Donald Where's Your Troosers' on STV, a generation has grown up and redrawn the boundaries between soul and pop, imbuing the former with local fizz and the latter with a steady supply of freshness and quality.

The crest of the most recent wave of this kind threw up Hue & Cry, a.k.a. brothers Pat and Gregory Kane, who in 1986 were snapped up by a fledgling label called Circa on the strength of simple piano/vocal demos and a bucketful of youthful optimism. On delivery of their first-born – the album *Seduced And Abandoned* in 1987 – both label and artists were doing well, sitting up and taking fluids.

Hit singles came; 'Labour Of Love' shadowed '87 Election fever (but didn't help), and cleared the way for 'Strength To Strength', 'I Refuse' (a re-recorded version of their lost first single), and, from a second album, 'Ordinary Angel', 'Looking For Linda' and 'Violently'. By then, as is the way of these things, Circa were doing so well that supportive deals with majors became full-scale embroilment, and once safely within the Virgin fold, the label, however successful, was prey to the kind of major-league machinations that either abandon artists (having first seduced them), or frighten them away. Including Hue & Cry.

Enter Fidelity Records, an independent Glasgow label set up by studio/rehearsal complex St.Clair, under the auspices of Mark Wilson and Hue & Cry's manager Allan MacNeill, and now sporting a new album by the Kane brothers, *Truth And Love*, recorded in-house and produced by one Gregory Phillip Kane.

All along, Greg Kane (keyboards and sax) has written the music whilst brother Pat, never short of a few words on the right occasion – or any occasion, come to that – supplied lyrics. So it seems natural that Greg should have graduated to the producer's chair for last year's *Stars Crash Down*, and continued the role for the latest offering. But there have been a few changes. Now, technology at the ready, musical control at his fingertips, it's time for Gregory Kane to be heard...

"The test will be if I listen to it in a year's time and it doesn't sound stiff." He says discussing the introduction of sequencing technology into the Hue & Cry sound. "The paranoia about using sequencers is whether it's going to sound stiff. Once the initial excitement goes, once you've got used to the album, does it sound rigid? The demos for the first album we did, *Seduced And Abandoned*, were like a primitive version of this one. I played everything, because we didn't have anyone else. It was all MC-500 back then, and all those parts that I'd written were played by the band once we'd got the deal – and that was the album. It was produced by two American guys (Harvey Jay Goldberg and James Biondolillo) and I watched them closely. So when we demo'd this album we tried to use a live band, but, basically, I don't know how to produce a live band yet."

Such honesty is a breath of fresh Caledonian air, and aerates every topic into which the conversation leads. Perhaps this is why the album itself rings so true; gone are the trips to New York in the search for surrogate soul. Replacing it is a strong homegrown flavour (Pat Kane's nickname for Fidelity Records is 'MacMotown'). Evidence of this is neatly provided by the figure of Calum Malcolm – East Lothian's producer extraordinaire and keeper of The Blue Nile's quiet secret of success – who mixed the album at his own Castle Sound studio near Edinburgh.

"Most recording studios are struggling right now," Greg continues, "but not Castle Sound. Because, I would say, it's got the best mixing environment in Britain. Calum's very friendly with Rupert Neve, so any updates go straight into his desk. And to me he's like the friendly Maths teacher you had at school, you learn so much from him. I said, 'what's your schedule?' and he said he had ten days off, he was going away for the weekend, so he'd give me seven days. I said, 'can you mix this in seven days!?' and he said he'd just have a go. His attitude is if it's not happening within three hours, just scrap it! He knows his studio so well, he just brings it up on the faders and if it's happening in three hours, brilliant, print it, that's it, done. So he can do two or three mixes a day. And he did do our album in seven days.

"The paranoia about using sequencers is whether it's going to sound stiff. Once the initial excitement goes, once you've got used to the album, does it sound rigid?"

"I tried to make it as easy as possible; everything was arranged on tape, it was just the positioning of the vocals and so on. I haven't yet concentrated on mixing. This is only my second full production job; I've been concentrating on the rhythms and sounds working together, and I let Calum position everything. It's brilliant because he understands what everything does and I don't have to worry about it."

Sequencing was the solution that put an end to the other worries about producing a live band. "It was just the Atari, upgraded to 3Mb so it wouldn't crash on me, and Cubase, version 2.0. I didn't use version 3.0; most people say that with previous versions you're into your mode of working, and it's become second nature, but with version 3.0 it's kind of turned upside down, with lots of annoying little

things that you've got to get used to, so it takes you about a week or two of constant use to get rid of your old habits. It's like driving a left-hand drive car after a right-hand drive car – the same procedure but all a bit upside-down. Anyway, version 2.0 does me fine, as long as the computer's powerful enough to handle everything.

"The sound modules were just two D50s and one M1, and all the drums were programmed on an Alesis module. I know people who use loops, but I find myself saying, hand on my heart, 'That sounds out of time, man, I'm sorry'. You never get a loop bang on. The grooves that it gives you kind of restrict you. People kind of bury it; they'll do the 8-bar loop and on top of it they'll put everything else, all the original stuff, and bury it until you wonder, 'why is it there?' this hissy noise in the background. You've got your percussion and stuff that you've programmed on top of it, so there doesn't seem any point to me. I've always tried to use the computer to create, rather than using existing performances, using samplers. There's no samplers on the album, it's all from these keyboards.

"Once I'd got the tempo and keys right for Pat, I just printed the sequences onto eight tracks. That left me with 24 tracks to muck about with, so I did all the vocal takes and bounced them onto one track, and then did the same with the guitars. Once I'd got all the parts, I reprinted all the sequences individually, taking ten tracks for the drums this time. I didn't want the problems of slaving up and so on, and the joy of using the computer is that you only need eight tracks to print all your music. The rest can be for your live work, which tends to be three or four tracks for different takes, the final track being a composite of those. So, if you've printed all your stuff without a computer you'll run into problems. You end up saying to the guitarist, 'We've only got one track left, so don't fuck up', which is useless because live stuff is all about little impulses and spontaneity that will never happen under that kind of pressure. So with the computer you don't have to print those sequences till the very last minute, which is great."

Discography:

'I Refuse' (single, 1986)
with *The Shuggie And Shout Tape*, free cassette inc. 'I Refuse' (extended version), 'Tempted', 'Dangerous Wreck', 'Shipbuilding'.

Seduced And Abandoned (1987)
inc. 'Labour Of Love', 'Strength To Strength', 'I Refuse'.

Remote (1988)
inc. 'Ordinary Angel', 'Looking For Linda', 'Violently'.

Violently (EP 1988)
inc. 'Violently', 'The Man With The Child In His Eyes', 'Calamity John'.

The Bitter Suite (1989)
free album with re-issue of *Remote*

Stars Crash Down (1991)
inc. 'My Salt Heart', 'Long Term Lovers Of Pain', 'She Makes A Sound'.

Truth And Love (1992)
released 17th August
inc. 'Profoundly Yours'.

All very well, but this is assuming you've got songs all set to put down. How has the new working method impinged upon the Hue & Cry songwriting partnership?

"Some of the songs were developed on Cubase, but mainly Pat and I still write with just piano and vocal. Once we've got the melody and chords straight he buggers off for four days and I bring it to a certain level where there's a groove, a mood, a positive direction for the song; he comes back and it's either thumbs up or thumbs down. If it's thumbs down, we spend two days re-arranging it together on Cubase. But 80% of the time it's thumbs up, and the other 20% I put down to me working too hard and losing track. He might see it as a ballad, and I see it as a real funk epic, and it's hey, wait a minute... That happens, but fortunately not too often. So we don't use the sequencer for actually conceiving a song, just for realizing it. We could do the whole album just piano and vocal, the songs don't change that much.

"Maybe one song did, 'Because You're Nothing', which is kind of a funk thing. There's a bass line which runs all the way through. I did that on Cubase and just played it to him, trying to find chords over the top of it and a melody that worked. He came up with a melody from that bass line. And it was a sequence over two octaves, quite difficult to play with one hand, so I just let the computer run and worked on the chords.

"The horn parts were written on Cubase too – from the M1 – but it's a sound without any spits or breaths, and the dynamics are difficult, so we got Cubase to print out the music. And we went in and played along with the M1. We locked into that because I knew that worked. I don't think Calum used the M1 horns in the final mix, but I like to hear a blend of the two. Cubase is certainly good for writing horns – for me, anyway. You get 75% of what it's going to sound like – not the same 'spread', but you hear where it's going to fit, and where not. Plus it's so much easier.

"When we were in New York recording *Remote* we had to hire music students to transcribe all the parts! I'd have a part, and this poor wee guy had to sit and write it all out – beautifully done, really nice – so when the session men came in, we just gave them the chart. But with Cubase, you press a key and it all comes out. It's pretty accurate, too; some timing things may be a bit funny, because it's not quantized, but it's pretty close and it lets the player know what's going on."

Apart from the scandalous deprivation of summer income for American music students, advancing technology has raised other, more abstract, concerns. For example, take the case of the guitarist and the Mitsubishi X-850...

"Our guitarist (Brian McPhee, ex-Big Dish) is very deep and meaningful about this. He says 'Why should my performance be turned into numbers? I give all my emotions and it becomes a binary sequence'. So he doesn't like it, and I say, 'But for fidelity reasons digital is better' and he says 'Yeah, but at least on analogue the performance is still there, still intact, it doesn't have to be decoded.' So I have to say 'No y'all right, Brian, don't worry'. You'd be surprised how many people react like that."

At least Mr McPhee has not yet been replaced by a sample. Surprisingly, having embraced sequencing so fully, and having run the gauntlet of digitally multitracking anxious guitarists, Greg is circumspect about the other Great Advance in contemporary recording.

"I really am a bit suspicious about samplers. They always sound noisy, really brittle. I was going to use, what's that thing, ProTools, y'know with the four tracks of sampling... crashes all the time! Anybody that buys it right now must be off their head, because in five years' time they'll have solved all

the problems and you'll be able to pick it up in Dixons for £750. So samplers, well... no. Obviously when you're spinning in backing vocals and that kind of stuff, you have to use them. When the singers come in you want them doing the best they can, and you only need one chorus that you can fly in throughout the song. Samplers are good for that, but not for drum sounds, or string sounds; it always sounds too brittle for me.

"I use the computer as a musician that doesn't complain, doesn't come in with a hangover, doesn't ask for more money. I give it the information. I very rarely quantize stuff; hi-hats, snares, bass drum, yeah... but with the music I try not to. It's easy enough to do, but it doesn't swing – or rock'n'roll – for want of a better phrase. When you hear something that's slightly out of time you go 'What's that?' and Pat will hear it and compensate by pushing or pulling slightly, and I think that's exciting. If it's all regimented and bang on, you get bored. I mean, can you listen to Michael Jackson's 'Bad'? I can't listen to it any more – those horrible snares, everything bang in time. So I only use the computer to basically chuck back out what I gave it. I'll use it as a recorder, put in drums and bass, then do a piano take top-to-bottom, mute it and do another take top-to-bottom, maybe three takes and then listen to them, same way you do on tape. It's a tape machine with MIDI."

For now, MIDI seems to have done its thing and solved a few immediate problems for Greg Kane. But don't expect any excursions into ambient techno-territory just yet. The future looks distinctly lively.

"I love Don Was, what he did with Bonnie Raitt (*Luck Of The Draw*), and half that B-52's album (*Good Stuff*) – that album really shows you the difference between programming and live. You can hear, on the live stuff, how Don Was is so bloody good at it. So I listened, and tried it with a band for this new album, set up a few mikes and a good atmosphere, hoping the tape would catch something. But it didn't, so there's a knack for producing live bands, and I'm just going to keep working away at it. Maybe if I was doing it for a different band, rather than me worrying about my arrangements, my chords... we'll see. If somebody offers me some work next year, we'll see what the schedule's like, and maybe I'll take it."

"I use the computer as a musician that doesn't complain, doesn't come in with a hangover, doesn't ask for more money"

This is a jazz-lover, a sax player, and a young producer with feet closer to the ground than a glance at his prized Porsche would suggest. And the tower inhabited by brother Pat – now a Rector of Glasgow University, no less – seems a little less ivory with Greg's car parked outside. There may have been a Hue & Cry album called *Remote*, but the word could never be used to describe Greg Kane. This is the sort of Pop Star who will buy a starving journalist a Chinese takeaway at three in the morning, having spent the evening being approachable beyond the call of duty in a local bar. But that's Glasgow, that's showbiz, and in a Porsche'n'Prawn Crackers kind of way, that's Gregory Kane. ■

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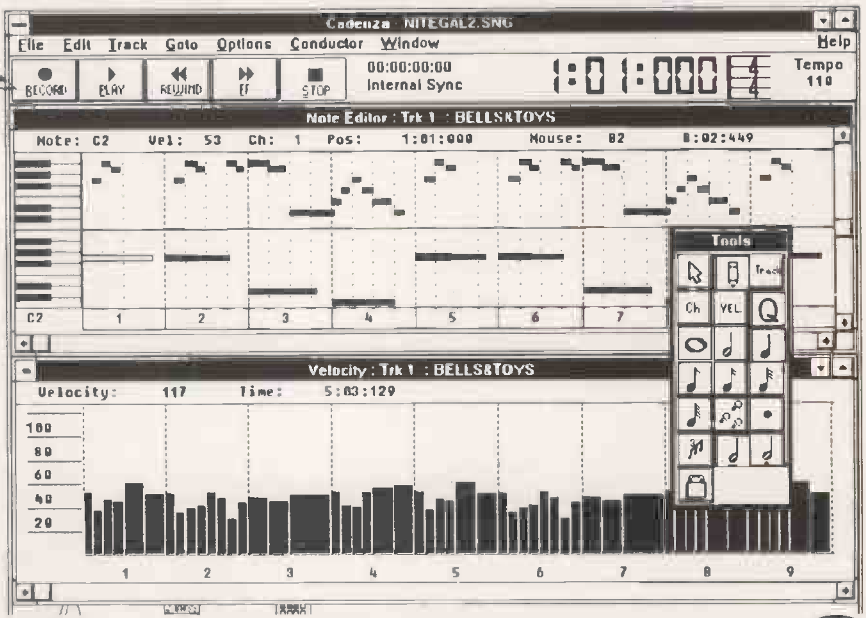

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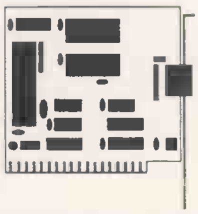

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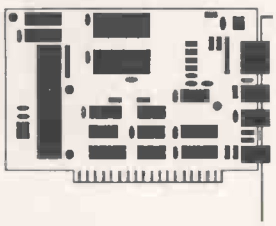

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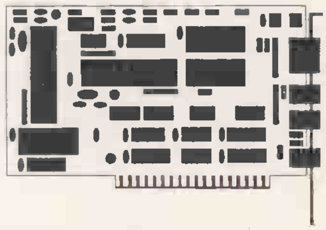

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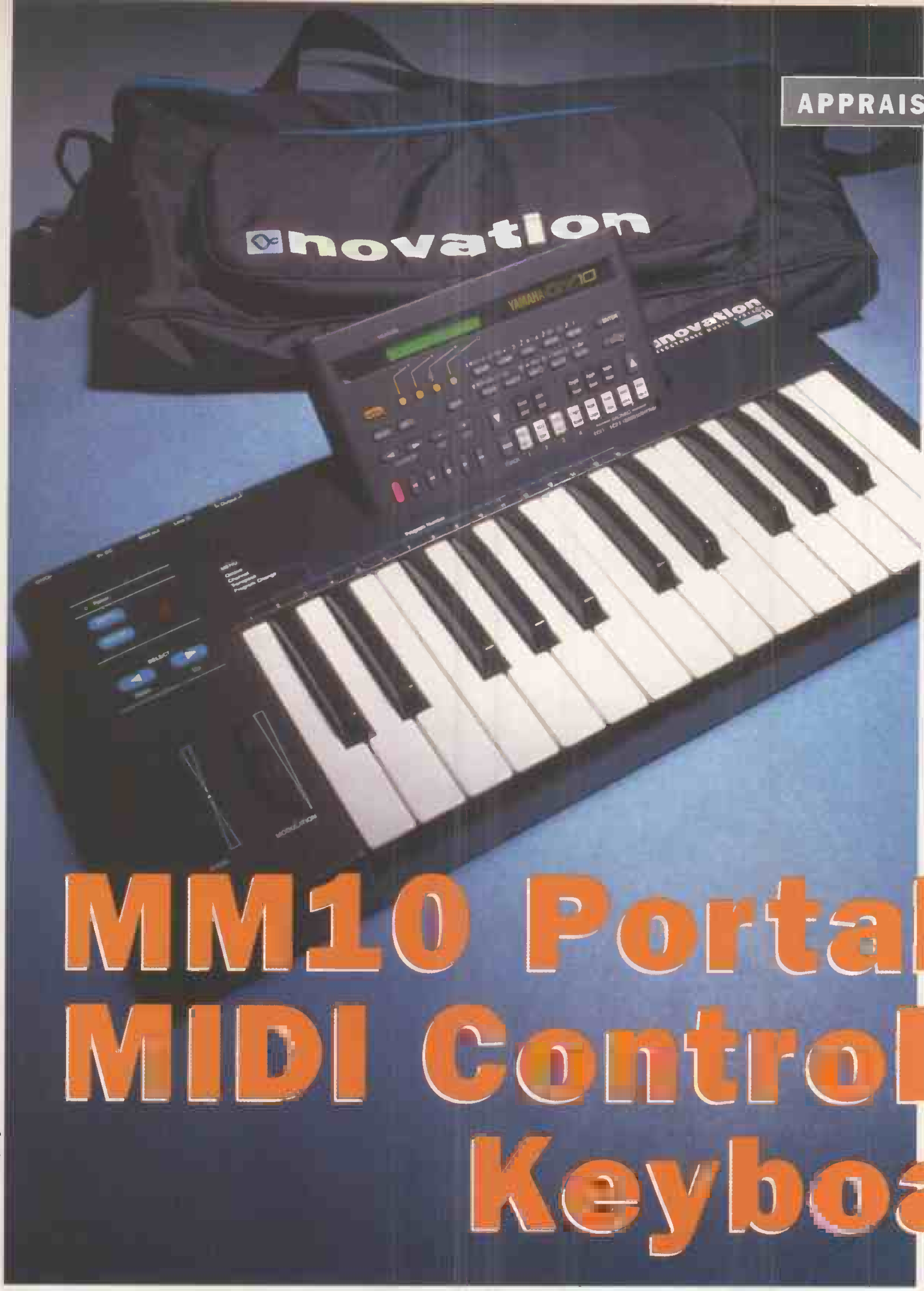

Photos: James Cumpsty

MM10 Portable MIDI Controller Keyboard

Although aimed at Yamaha QY10 users, Novation's two-octave MIDI keyboard should suit any musician who needs a cheap, lightweight MIDI controller – to go.

Review by Simon Trask

'PORTABLE' would normally be the last word you'd use to describe a MIDI controller keyboard (*No... I think it would be 'interesting' – Ed*). Ever since Roland and Yamaha introduced musicians to the concept of the silent keyboard instrument with their MKB1000 and KX88 88-note weighted keyboard controllers back in the mid-eighties, the MIDI controller keyboard has primarily been seen as an instrument for professional keyboard players to use both live and in the studio. Hence the emphasis on high-class keyboard actions and 'solid' build quality.

Yet increasingly there has been a need for a small, lightweight MIDI controller keyboard to go with the new generation of er, small, lightweight sound-generating modules coming onto the market. Yamaha's best-selling

QY10 'walkstation' is a case in point. Here you have an instrument which provides an eight-track sequencer, a multitimbral sound source and a drum machine in a cabinet roughly the size of a VHS video cassette.

Owners of this neat little box of tricks, after gaping in wonderment at the triumph of miniaturisation, then have to get used to recording music into it by tapping away on a small monophonic 'keyboard' consisting of 12 rubber buttons. Not a lot of fun. Fortunately, you can also record into the QY10 from an external MIDI source, which is where Novation and their two-octave MM10 MIDI controller keyboard come in.

First of all, some vital statistics: the MM10 measures 18" x 8" x 2" and weighs just 3.5lbs with batteries fitted – so it easily qualifies as portable. The batteries required, incidentally, are six AA types, which give some 40 hours out-in-a-field-in-the-middle-of-nowhere playing time. When there are around five hours of battery time left, the power on/off LED will start blinking at you fairly rapidly, and as the power gets lower, the rate of blinking will get slower – a helpfully constant reminder that you need to think about buying some more batteries.

If you happen to be near a mains supply, you can power the MM10 via an external adaptor (not supplied with the machine). This should be a 9V regulated, centre positive psu rated at 300mA. Novation market their own PSU1 unit at £16.95, which may seem like a lot of money, but with cheaper unregulated adaptors you get a loud hum on the MM10's audio output which you just won't want to live with.

But hey, hang on a minute, why on earth would a silent controller keyboard need an audio output? Well, here we come to the QY10 connection – or rather, one of the QY10 connections. Turning to the MM10's rear panel for the moment, we find in addition to the expected power on/off switch, 9v DC power input and MIDI Out socket a second power connection, a mini-jack line in and two mini-jack audio outputs. Using three leads which come supplied with the MM10 (sheathed together for convenience), you can make audio, MIDI and power connections between the keyboard and a QY10. The audio lead allows you to feed the QY's audio output into the MM10, where it's boosted by two 1 watt stereo amplifiers before being transmitted via the two audio outs, into which you can plug a couple of pairs of headphones, a pair of powered speakers, or audio leads to a mixer.

The value of this is that output level via the MM10 is much improved over that from the QY10's own headphone amplifier – an important consideration if you're using your QY in noisy surroundings. On the down side, the amplified output is noisier because, of course, background noise in the QY10's signal gets amplified along with everything else. However, as you only need to use the MM10's output when surrounding noise levels require a louder signal than the QY can deliver, you probably won't notice the increase in noise.

The MIDI connection allows you to play the QY10's sounds, and to record parts into its sequencer memory in both real- and step-time, from the MM10's two-octave, velocity-sensitive keyboard. This has full-size keys and a comfortable synth-style action, and, of course, allows you to play polyphonically. Using a MIDI keyboard (as opposed to the QY10's rubber buttons) really helps you to get the most out of the little marvel. Using the MM10's MIDI keyboard ensures that you don't lose the 'walk' in 'walkstation' as a result.

The third connection between MM10 and QY10 allows you to take a power feed from the keyboard into the QY10, though this will only function if you're powering the MM10 from the mains. If you're running the keyboard off batteries, the QY10 must be battery-powered as well, which means you need a total of 12 AA batteries for portable use.

In further pursuit of QY-friendliness, Novation have provided a slot on the MM10's front panel into which the QY10 sits quite comfortably, facing towards you at about a 45-degree angle. However, you can't lock the QY into the slot, and it does tend to move around a bit when you're jabbing away at its buttons. Some Blu-Tack will hold it firmly in place, but doesn't have the adhesive power to guarantee that it will stay there should you turn the MM10 on its side or upside down.

So, you have your MM10, your QY10, the necessary connecting leads and a pair of headphones and you're ready to head out into the countryside for a spot of musical communing with nature. But how are you going to carry the gear around with you? Well, Novation are marketing a soft carry case for the MM10 which comes complete with a shoulder strap and a zipped pouch for the QY10, headphones and leads. A worthwhile investment if you want to protect your assets.

Let's get one thing clear: the MM10 is not going to give you anything close to the MIDI control sophistication found on expensive 88-note MIDI controller keyboards. But then, with a two-octave keyboard and a price tag of £149.99, you'd hardly expect it to. Besides, the MM10's very simplicity is one of its greatest virtues. You can do just four things: change the keyboard octave, change the MIDI channel, transpose the MIDI note output and send a patch change via MIDI.

At the left end of the MM10's front panel are four buttons – Menu, Enter, Select Down and Select Up – and a single-digit LED display. You select the four modes cyclically with successive presses of the Menu button, and use the Select buttons to alter each mode's programmed value. The Enter button is used to confirm a keyboard transposition or return

Prices:
MM10 £149.99;
CC1 carrying case £16.95,
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to the default mode (octave shift) immediately after selecting a patch change.

Once you've selected a mode, the LED alternates between showing a letter which indicates what the mode is ('o', 'c', 't' or 'p') and showing the programmed value for that mode. However, if five or six seconds pass by without a button being pressed, the display goes out to conserve battery power, and the MM10 reverts to octave shift mode. This can be a bit annoying at times, not to mention confusing to begin with. However, treating octave shift as the default mode makes sense, because while you're playing you can quickly change the keyboard octave without having to bother about using the Menu button to select the right mode. And turning off the LED display so that less power is consumed also makes sense, because there's simply no need to leave it on all the time.

With the octave shift mode, the MM10's two-octave physical keyboard becomes a 'window' onto a ten-octave virtual keyboard, allowing you to play across the entire MIDI note range. On power-up, the middle C key on the keyboard triggers MIDI note 60 – ie, C3 or middle C; using the Select buttons you can then shift the keyboard up or down four octaves. One neat feature of octave shifting on the MM10 is that if you are holding any notes when you shift the keyboard octave they are unaffected, so you could, for instance, hold a drone note in a low octave, then switch to a higher octave and play another part.

The MM10 defaults to C=C on power-up, but with the transposition mode selected you can use the lower octave of keys to transpose the MIDI output. For instance, if you press the F key, all notes will be transposed up a perfect fourth – so if you're playing in the key of C on the keyboard, your MIDI module will actually be playing notes in the key of F. Once again, held notes are unaffected by any changes.

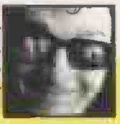
Novation have got around the problem of selecting three-digit patch numbers from a single-digit LED by confining LED selection to eight banks of 16 patches each, and putting individual patch selection on the bottom 16 keys of the keyboard. This leaves you the top nine keys to play the selected sound from as you're selecting different patches. Helpfully, Novation have printed the numbers 1-16 on the front panel above the relevant keys, but you still have to indulge in a quick spot of arithmetic if you want to select a specific patch number – eg, patch 94 is bank 6, key 14.

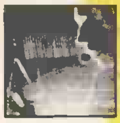
Novation's keyboard makes an ideal companion for the QY10, allowing you to get the most out of Yamaha's 'walkstation' without having to sacrifice the practical advantages of a portable, use-anywhere musical setup. At the same time, there's no reason why its use should be limited to controlling the QY10 – after all, the whole idea of a MIDI controller keyboard is that it should allow you to access any MIDI sound source. Plus points, in terms of general performance purposes, are the keyboard's velocity sensitivity and the inclusion of pitchbend and mod wheels. I do feel it's a shame though that no sustain pedal input or volume slider were included.

The MM10's straightforward design and (relative) inexpensiveness also make it a good choice for anyone starting out in MIDI-based music making with a limited budget – depending, obviously, on whether or not its two-octave keyboard span is acceptable. If you do need a wider keyboard, another inexpensive velocity-sensitive, mains or battery powered MIDI controller keyboard worth considering would be Roland's 49-key PC200GS at £205.

For their part, Novation have come up with a fine example of affordable and accessible technology which fulfills a very useful role in the new world of portable hi-tech music making. The MM10 deserves to sell like the proverbial hot cakes. ■

Pascal Gabriel's Dance Samples
Pascal Gabriel is one of the leading lights on the current dance scene. He has worked with such well-known names as **Bomb The Bass**, **S-Express**, **Coldcut**, **Jimmy Somerville**, **Erasure**, **EMF**, and many more. This CD is different to any other available. It is NOT A COMPILATION of sounds from last year's records, but a resource of new sounds to help you make the HIT RECORDS OF NEXT YEAR. People are describing it as 'fabulous', 'fresh', and 'superb value'. In the past a library like this would take years to build-up and a huge amount of work and skill to achieve. Now it can be yours in days for only £49! - Why wait! ■ *"...house gold dust...breaks new ground..." - MT, Dec '91.* ■ *"...off-beat, quite distinctive, and highly usable. Better still you almost certainly won't have heard them before...useful and memorable...a revelation...uniformly excellent...the basis for many a hit. - SOS, Jan, '91.* ■ Used by **Pet Shop Boys, Propaganda, and Technotronic** ■ Loads of Drum & Percussion Loops & Breaks ■ Guitar Hooks and FX ■ Vocal Riffs & Effects ■ Hits, Scratches & Drop-Ins ■ Countless Snares and Kicks ■ Synth FX &Basses ■ Brass & String Hits, FX and Runs! ■ Film & Media Snatches ■ Orchestral Effects ■ And Much, Much, Much More! ■ Over 1000 Samples, 72:23 minutes





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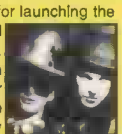

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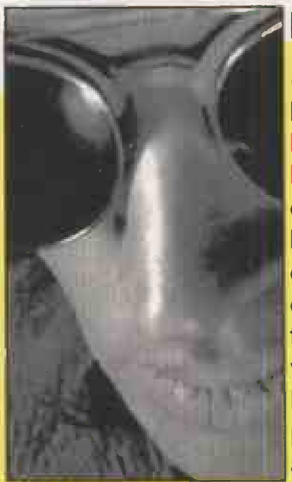

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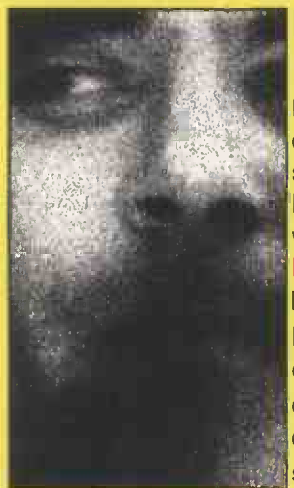

Hit*Sound Producer Series Volume 7 - Neil Conti's Funky Drums from Hell*

Neil Conti may be familar to you as **Prefab Sprout**'s drummer but he is also one of the UK's most respected session drummers and a main mover behind London's Backstage jam sessions at the Borderline. He has worked with the likes of **David Bowie**, **Robert Palmer**, **Annie Lennox**, **Primal Scream**, **Thomas Dolby**, and many more. ■ This CD was specially recorded by Daniel Lazarus at London's famous **Metropolis Studios** and features some of the most serious breakbeats ever recorded. ■ These drums breaks have **real attitude** and are sure to become **classics**. ■ The CD also features **specially extracted single hits** that you can use in perfect context to customise breaks for yourself plus a selection of much sought after **hi-hat patterns** to inject a human touch into any production. ■ Funky Drums from Hell should be available by the time you read this for just £49 fully inclusive.

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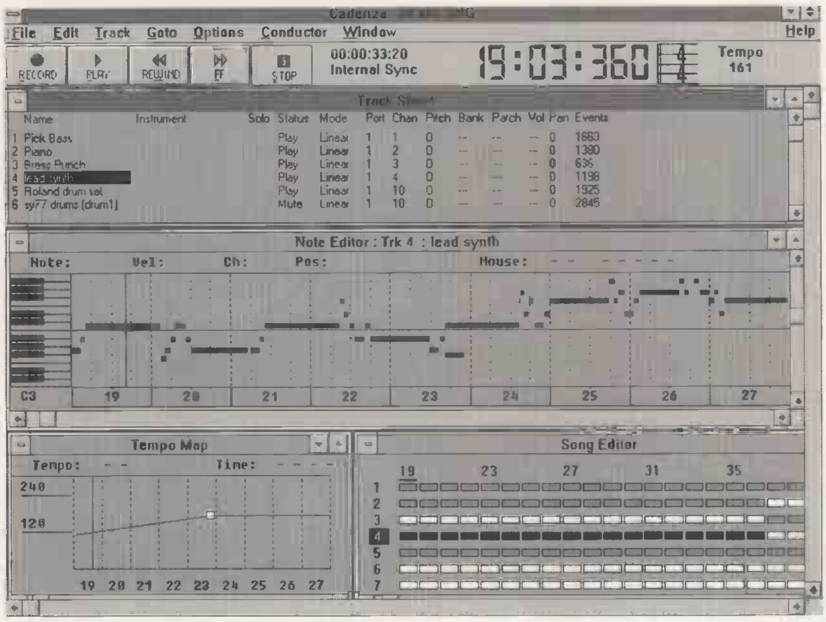
Cadenza For Windows



Review by Bob Walder

Despite a delay of several years, professional PC music software is finally with us and demands our attention. But can programs like Cadenza ever make up the ground lost to the ST and Mac? Bob Walder opens his Windows...

People new to the world of music technology could be forgiven for thinking that, Macintosh aside, there is only one computer worth looking at. And indeed, for a long time the Atari ST was the only viable proposition. It's popularity was based largely on the fact that it was, and still is, the only machine to include those all-important MIDI ports on its side panel (thus encouraging software writers to write for it). It also had a workable user interface (thus encouraging software writers to write for it), and it was cheap (also encouraging software writers to write for it). Result – plenty of good quality music software to choose from. By comparison, the IBM PC and all its clones were much more expensive and were regarded as business machines – most definitely *not* for writing music on.

Recently, however, all this has changed. The explosion in the use of PCs for business has forced down the price to the extent that they are now being sold as home computers. These days it is possible to purchase a good quality 80386-based PC with a high resolution colour screen and a 40Mb hard disk drive for less than the price of an equivalent specification Atari.

The availability of high specification machines at a reasonable price has also spawned an increase in the use of Microsoft Windows Graphical User Interface (GUI). This has led to more attractive software being developed, and, with the advent of Multimedia machines bringing an air of respectability to the idea of sound on PCs, we are finally beginning to see music software appearing which rivals that on the Atari. One such package is Cadenza for Windows from Big Noise Software...

Anyone who has looked at PC music software before and thought that it was pretty awful (...and most of it is) is in for a big surprise when they see Cadenza. On firing up the program you are briefly presented with a screen announcing the MIDI Director before Cadenza itself is loaded. The Director is a MIDI management system for Windows which allows several MIDI programs to multitask and share multiple MIDI ports without any unhealthy competition.

Unlike the approach taken by some other manufacturers where all the timing functions are built into the sequencer, the MIDI Director provides a consistent way of synchronising several MIDI programs using internal sync, MIDI Time Code, or Song Position Pointer based methods. This would allow you to run, for instance, a copy of Cadenza with a copy of a drum sequencer and ensure that both are kept perfectly in sync. You can even run multiple copies of Cadenza itself – ever fancied working on three songs at once?

Since Cadenza is fully compatible with Windows Multimedia Extensions and Windows V3.1, it will use the supplied Windows timer (where available) to add a further level of consistency. The Director provides all metronome functions too, allowing you to select either a MIDI sound source or the PC's internal speaker. Note that apart from the synchronisation methods mentioned above, Cadenza also supports SMPTE with 24, 25 and 30 (drop and non-drop) frames per second – providing a suitable MIDI interface, such as the Music Quest MQX-16S or MQX-32M, is installed.

The basic structure of Cadenza is that of a 64 track linear sequencer. The opening screen contains the basic track sheet, which contains as many tracks as can be accommodated by your screen resolution (you get 38 on an 800 x 600 screen) and holds track name, instrument name, status (mute or play), mode, port, MIDI channel, pitch transposition, bank, patch, volume, pan and number of events in that track. Given the right hardware (such as the Music Quest MQX-32M) Cadenza supports up to 32 MIDI channels.

You can add additional ports using the MIDI manager, and it is possible to mix and match hardware within the same machine – drivers are included for several well-known MIDI cards. If you have a 32-channel card installed (or more than one 16 channel card), the 'port' parameter of the track sheet allows you to specify which MIDI port is to be used. The instrument name is a nice feature which allows you to set up instrument specific patches. For instance, if you have a Roland U220, you can create a U220 file which contains the necessary patch information for all the instruments.

From then on, you simply say that you want to use 'Jupiter Strings', for example, and Cadenza takes care of the patch changes automatically. Of course if you prefer, you can simply specify the bank and/or patch numbers within each track instead. The only other parameter which requires explanation is Mode. "Linear" is the normal state, playing the track from beginning to end. Loop allows you to record a short pattern which is then looped for the duration of the song – fine for drum or repetitive bass patterns.

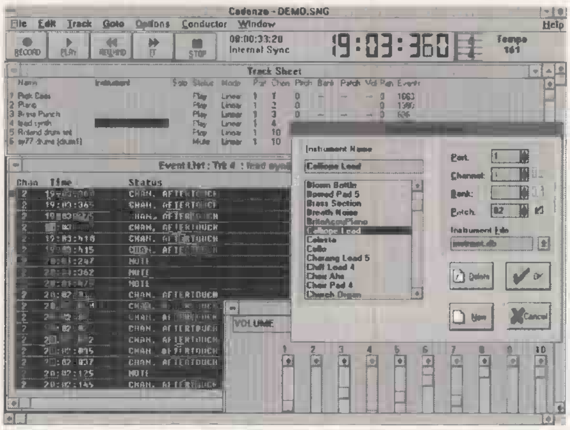
Link is Cadenza's attempt to emulate pattern-based sequencers such as Prism. It allows you to record your patterns in different tracks and use a link track to specify the order in which they should be played. It is not a particularly useful feature, and I didn't make use of it at all, but it's there if you need it. Other parameters such as status, pitch, volume and pan are also included, but these are (I assume) self-explanatory.

Above the track window are the transport controls, which are much the same as for any other sequencer. To the right of these is the status window, containing the current song position (measure:beat:tick and SMPTE time), the meter and tempo. An aspect of Cadenza I particularly liked was the ease with which any of these could be changed using the mouse. Want to go to measure 4, or change from 4/4 to 6/8? Simply place the cursor over the appropriate section of the status window and click the mouse buttons until you're there. This is much better than using menus, although the menu approach is also available for the more conventionally minded.

Up to this point, you may be thinking Cadenza is not significantly different from any other sequencer on the market, and that's probably true. Where it really scores is in its graphic editing capabilities. The song editor provides a graphic representation of all the measures in a song, with an indication of which ones contain MIDI data. Cutting and pasting measures is a simple operation using the mouse, and patterns can be repeated any number of times when pasting back.

The note editor is the familiar 'piano roll' type, with the keyboard displayed vertically at the left of the screen, and the notes shown as horizontal bars (the length representing the duration) to the right of the appropriate keys. Editing using this window is simplicity itself. You can access the appropriate measure by altering the current song position display, using the horizontal scroll bar underneath the window, or just by playing the song until you reach the point at which you want to stop.

A single click on any note displays that note's parameters (time, pitch, velocity, duration and channel), whilst a double



click brings up an editing window to change them. Notes can be moved or their duration altered by clicking and dragging, and new notes can be inserted by clicking at the appropriate point. Pressing the right mouse button summons forth a tool bar from which you can set options such as quantise and default note duration.

There are also screen editing tools for pitchbend, modulation, aftertouch, tempo and one for all other MIDI control events. These take the form of a 'graph' type display which can be edited or drawn from scratch using the mouse – that silky smooth crescendo is now within your grasp!

The Faders window allows you to select and control a parameter (such as volume or pan) on screen – with one fader per MIDI channel. The values can be altered in real time and the resulting events recorded as part of the song. Multiple windows can be opened simultaneously, each controlling a different parameter, and clever use of volume and pan on your workstation with it's built-in effects means you can mix down to stereo without even using a mixing desk!

Other editing windows worth a mention are Meter and Event List. The Meter Map simply allows you to change the time signature on a bar-by-bar basis throughout the song, whilst the Event List provides a precise way of editing individual events. An event filter is also available and this offers a powerful means of isolating a specific group of events for editing operations. A particularly nice feature, and one that really does help simplify the editing process, is that all these windows will follow the song position pointer whilst the song is playing.

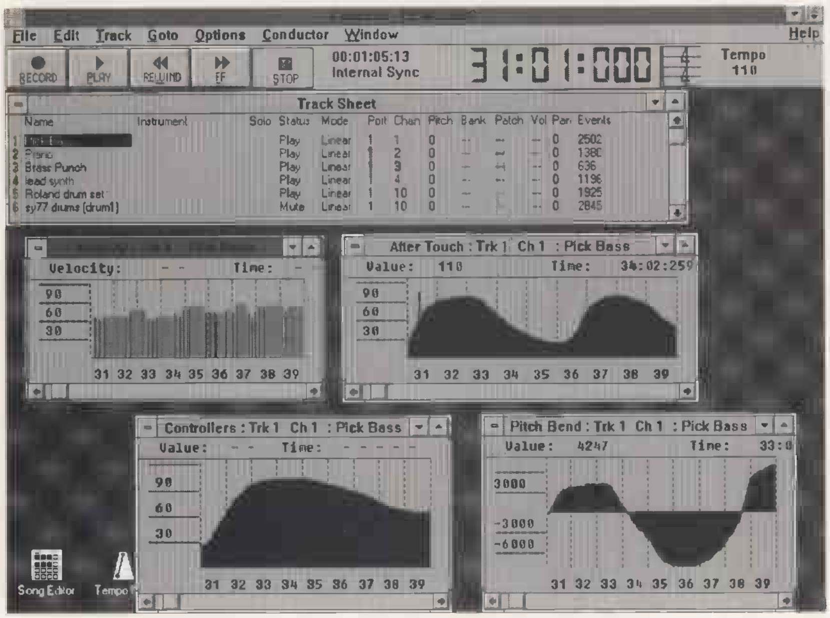
Since we're on the subject of editing, it is probably worth looking at some of the commands within the editing menu in a

The Windows Dilemma

OK you've decided that you like Windows as a front end – what sort of machine should you buy? The official minimum specification for a Windows machine is an 80286 processor with 1Mb of RAM. However, although it is technically possible to run Windows and its' applications on this type of machine, things run so slowly as to be virtually unusable. (Now I suppose I'll have to prepare myself for the flood of letters from masochists who insist on running five word processors and three databases under Windows on an old 8088 machine). If you want a useable system, the minimum specification you should consider is an 80386SX based processor with 2Mb of RAM. If you want a system that's a little nippier you will have to go for an 80386 with 4Mb of RAM. It should also be noted that Cadenza for Windows actually requires a minimum of 2Mb of RAM, an EGA screen or higher (no CGA), and 1.5Mb of free disk space.

little more detail. This, after all, is the heart of the system – and let's face it, there are not many of us who can play everything perfectly first time. I have already mentioned the more graphically orientated operations such as using the mouse in the note editor or drawing pitchbend curves, but the edit menu refines some of these functions even further and adds some which are simply not possible using a mouse alone.

Besides the usual cut, copy and paste commands and the event filter, which we have already mentioned, there is the ubiquitous Quantise option. Quantising is not applied by default during recording but must be introduced subsequently.



Resolution is down to 32nd notes, and there are triplet options as well. If you prefer, the quantisation can be set in MIDI ticks – the maximum resolution being 192ppqn, though this is increased to 240ppqn with the Music Quest MQX-32M MIDI card.

If you don't want too mechanical a sound, you can leave the timing slightly "off" – the amount being determined by a percentage indicator. 'Humanise' is basically quantisation in reverse. It allows you to inject a random element of mistiming into a track which has been too heavily quantised or entered in step time. The Slide command shifts a marked block of events by a specified number of measures:beats:ticks, whilst Length allows you to expand or compress the duration of events within a marked block.

One related function which should prove a godsend for some is not to be found in the Edit menu, but in the Tempo window. 'Fit To Time' will adjust the tempo of a marked region so that it takes exactly the specified amount of time to play – a dream come true for all you writers of jingles or advertising music.

Good as all these features are, what's most impressive about Cadenza is the fact that it doesn't attempt to force you into a particular way of working, but leaves you free to develop your own. Within the program it is possible to define a number of preferences which can be saved to a file and recalled at any time. In addition it's possible to construct various window layouts (perhaps one with the track sheet and note editor, and another with the track sheet, modulation, pitchbend and aftertouch windows) which can again be saved as individual files and recalled at any time.

As you might imagine this allows you to personalise your working environment to a considerable degree, and because the settings are saved to named files it would be possible for two people with quite different working practices to use one copy of Cadenza (alternately, of course) without upsetting each other.

Future enhancements of the program include staff editing and score writing, and Digital Music are currently bundling a copy of ShowTune with the package. This program reads standard MIDI files (type 1 files can be created within Cadenza) and produces a printed score from them. It's competent enough, but has an extremely dull and not particularly intuitive user interface which does not run under Windows – although it will run in a DOS window alongside Cadenza if you have enough memory.

Extensive editing can be performed once the file has been read in, including changing the staff layout, splitting tracks across multiple staffs (to separate left- and right-hand parts of a piano piece, for instance), altering margins, and adding text, beams and slurs. Beaming can be automatic or manual and notes can be added, removed or quantised before the work is saved and printed. With a little care, the printed output can look very professional, especially when using a laser printer.

That said, I wasn't particularly impressed with the way pages are saved as separate files on disk. It has the effect of making the directory look unnecessarily untidy and actually gives away the US origins of the program (the only paper options it offers under HP LaserJet are Legal and Letter – no A4). As a package in its own right, it would be hard to get excited about ShowTune, but as a freebie it serves as a worthwhile stop-gap until the Cadenza score writing module is completed. It should certainly win Digital Music some friends.

Working with Cadenza is a dream. Recording involves nothing more demanding than pressing the Record button and playing on the keyboard. Step time recording is also supported, for those tricky lead lines or drum patterns, and so too is overdubbing. Once you have your basic patterns down, you can cut and paste to your heart's content with your mouse in the song editor in order to build up the bones of a song. Correcting minor mistakes and making subtle additions such as pitch bends or crescendos is quickly accomplished using the various graphic editing tools.

Many of Cadenza's features are not unique, but they are particularly well implemented. Overall, the package puts everything at your fingertips and has a way of appearing to be working *for* you rather than against you – making constant recourse to the manual unnecessary. I would be quite happy using Cadenza as my main sequencer and look forward to future releases with relish. ■

Price: £279 – including Music Quest MIDI card, Showtune, postage & packing and VAT!

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Much has been said about the speed of MIDI – or lack of it – but there's sometimes more to a late snare beat than a five-pin din plug.

Text by Vic Lennard

COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE timing characteristics of MIDI aren't exactly hot news. Most critics claim that the transfer rate of MIDI data is too slow for certain musical applications. And in fairness, there's no doubt that the serial nature of MIDI can lead to delays, as MIDI data has to be queued up to await transmission. Gloves off, let's look at the situation more closely. At MIDI's transmission rate of 31.25Kbits per second, 3125 bytes of MIDI data can be transmitted in one second. Now consider that a MIDI Note On requires three bytes to transmit and takes 1ms. (The use of running status can reduce further Notes On with the same MIDI channel to just two bytes.) In fact, apart from System Exclusive messages, a standard MIDI event requires a maximum of three bytes – so is it fair to blame audible delays in the playback of a sequence (for example) on MIDI?

For the time being, let's not attempt to answer that question. Let's consider the delays caused by the reaction time of the voice generation of MIDI synthesisers. Some time ago, I used a digital oscilloscope to overlay the MIDI signal at the MIDI Out ports of a variety of synths with the audio signal at their audio outs. It was an extremely laborious exercise – what was needed was a computer program, preferably one which could carry out the same experiment and repeat measurements many times to even out any fluctuations.

At the Frankfurt Music Messe in March 1992, I met up with Florian Richter who had written a program for the Atari ST which could output MIDI events and measure the gap between the transmissions of a specific MIDI Note On and the audio reception from the tone generation of the connected MIDI synth. This is achieved by using the ST's cartridge port to connect a piece of hardware with an audio input. It's name is Timetool.

TIMETOOL OFFERS YOU many features, only a few of which are relevant to this article. In Single mode, it allows you to define up to 20 MIDI events to be transmitted; notes, Pitch Bend, Program Changes, Channel/Polyphonic Aftertouch and any MIDI Controllers, each event being on any MIDI channel of your choosing. Repeat mode allows up to 200 repeats of any experiment – the idea is that by stacking up MIDI events on transmission, an instrument's processor is put under greater strain than it is by a single event. Also, as MIDI channels can be set per event, this allows you to send data to different MIDI channels on a multitimbral device and to view the overall effect on the channel under consideration. In either of these modes, one of the events needs to be a MIDI Note which will result in the triggering of the cartridge.

The above test is rather static; it shows the delay due to the time taken to process data, but only for a fixed number of MIDI events. For instance, if you stack up ten MIDI Note Ons with the first nine being on MIDI Channel 1 and the tenth on MIDI Channel 2, it's possible to pan the sound generated by the last Note On to, say, the left output and the first nine to the right. However, this only shows the delay for nine notes – what about five notes, or 15 notes?

To this end, Timetool has two tests built in. Automatic 1 allows you to specify two events, for example a C3 Note On on MIDI Channel 1 and a D3 Note On on MIDI Channel 2. By routing the sounds generated to left and right outputs on the synth, you can time the audio delay of the second MIDI event. Timetool runs through the number of tests that you have set (up to 200) and then adds another Note On before the one you're timing. This continues until ten notes have been created, with the one under consideration moving one place down the list each time. A graph is drawn by the software to show the gradual build-up of delay; this graph also indicates the proportion of the delay due to MIDI, and the maximum and minimum delays for each series of repeats. By looking at a graph, you can identify the MIDI delay, the average audio delay, minimum and maximum variation and the calculated Mean Deviation, a measure of how spread out the data is within the number of repeats.

The Automatic 2 test is fixed at ten notes, but the one under consideration is moved down the list as each series of repeats finishes. This should keep the synth's processor under the same load throughout the test. Timetool also has a built-in database where results can be stored and recalled, which is useful for making comparisons.

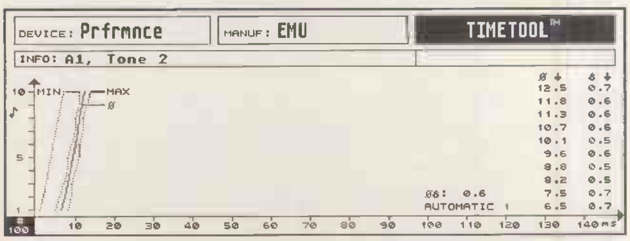
To ensure that the audio input on the cartridge is not falsely triggered, the Calibration mode checks the level of quiescent noise and sets the threshold of the input just above this value. You also have the option of manually setting the threshold, something which has to be done if the pre - amps in the synth produce a variable level of background noise (some synths use noise gates on the output stage to mask this).

When carrying out a test, it's important that the sound you select has a reasonably fast attack and release. Effects such as reverb or delay have to be turned off as well. To ensure the accuracy of the tests I made, MIDI connections were made directly to synths, not via MIDI patchbays or Thru boxes. All tests were also carried out under Running Status.

The testing capability of Timetool isn't limited purely to audio delays – it can also measure MIDI delays by using the ST's MIDI In and MIDI Out ports. A particularly interesting test shows the delay attributable to the ST's own hardware. This appears to be negligible, but Timetool can only measure to the nearest 0.3ms.

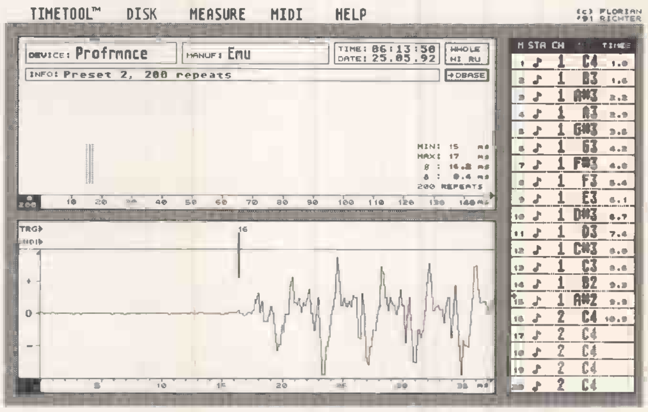
THE E-MU PRO/FORMANCE is essentially a monotimbral piano playback module. While it can work in a split mode for the generation of two simultaneous sounds, the tests I ran used a single sound.

For the first test, 16 notes were transmitted to Pro/formance, the time delay for the 16th note being measured. The graph shows that the average delay time was 16.2ms but 10.9ms of this is attributable to the MIDI delay. Consequently, Pro/formance is only responsible for a further 4.3ms. More to the point, the variation around this average delay is very small (as shown by the minimum and maximum broken lines) and the mean deviation of 0.4ms.



The problem here is that the sound generation circuitry of Pro/formance is not being used for the first 15 notes; these are simply being ignored as they're on MIDI Channel 1. All that can be ascertained from this result is that the processor takes about 4ms to accept the MIDI Note On, create and output a note. In fact, if the test is repeated with only a single Note On on MIDI Channel 2, a similar result is obtained (5.2ms delay).

The second test used Timetool's Automatic 1 test which builds up the number of notes appearing at the MIDI In and times the delay of the last note.



The broken line on the far left shows the delay attributable to MIDI; this increases as the number of notes increases. The other three lines show the minimum, average and maximum respectively (from left to right) while the figures on the right of the screen show the delays building up and the mean deviation at each step. The delay by the tenth note is 12.5ms of which 7ms is due to MIDI. Consequently, the audio delay of 5.5ms is in keeping with the above results. More importantly, the lines showing average delay and MIDI delay are parallel, meaning that the audio delay does not increase as the number of notes increase – an important consideration. If in the course of working with Pro/formance in a sequencer track a delay was perceived, one could confidently set a negative track delay without concern that the delay would get worse according to the number of notes playing.

Does the sound selected on Pro/formance affect the delays? Yes, but this is to be expected with a sample replay module. Presets 1 and 3 have similar characteristics, with slightly less delay than above, while Presets 2 and 4 also share similar figures. This tends to infer that the samples for these pairs are the same and that some internal filtering of the samples changes the actual sound.

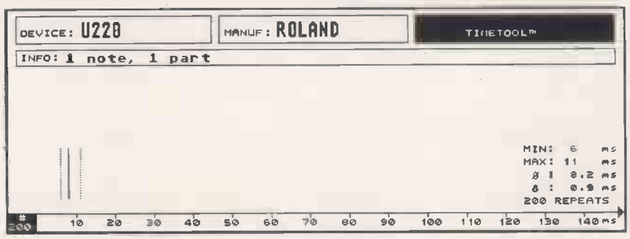
THE AKAI S950 is an eight-note polyphonic sampler whose voices can be set to different MIDI channels – in other words, it's multitimbral.

The first test simply sent a single Note On 200 times. The resulting delay was 3ms, of which 1ms can be attributed to MIDI – a good result, but what's more impressive is the fact that the minimum and maximum times were also 3ms. There was absolutely no variation.

The second test transmitted eight Note Ons, with the delay for the eighth being measured. The seven notes on MIDI Channel 1 were distributed to audio outputs one to seven, while the note under measurement went to output eight. In this way, the S950 was under full load. The resulting delay for the last note was 10ms, of which 5.8ms is due to MIDI. The delay of about 4ms again displayed no variation. This test is particularly relevant to the S950 when used as a drum module; I've used one for many years specifically for this task and have always found the timing to be very tight. The results of this test concur with my experience.

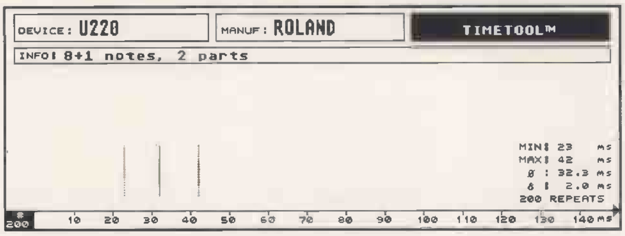
THE ROLAND U220 has a total polyphony of 30 notes which can be spread over seven parts; six instruments and a rhythm section. All of the following tests used 200 repeats, and the instrument being monitored was Acoustic Piano 1.

The first test turned off all parts except for one, which then received a single Note On. The idea here is to see how the U220 runs in monotimbral mode.



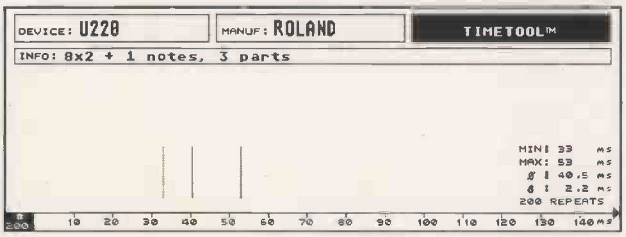
The result shows a delay of 8.2ms, of which MIDI is responsible for 1ms. The results are a little spread but, from an audible context, not significantly so.

The second test sent eight notes to one part and a single note to a second part. This simulates the U220 being used for, say, a piano and a lead line instrument.



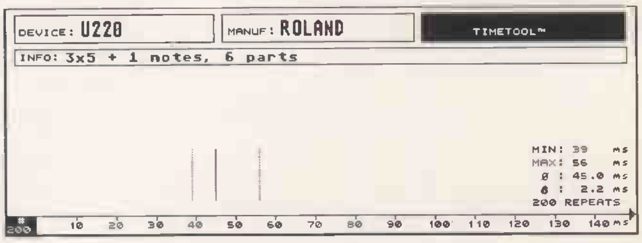
The resulting average delay is 32.3ms, with MIDI contributing 6.4ms of this. The net audio delay of about 26ms is disturbing, as the U220 is only being used for nine notes out of a total polyphonic capacity of 30 notes. Also of concern is the spread of data. As the average delay is about midway between the minimum and maximum delays, it would appear that the 200 results are equally spread between the two limits; the mean deviation of 2.0ms also bears this out.

The third test transmitted the same notes as in Test 2 but with two eight-note parts on the U220 doubled up to simulate the overlaying of two parts; for instance, a string pad underneath a piano part.



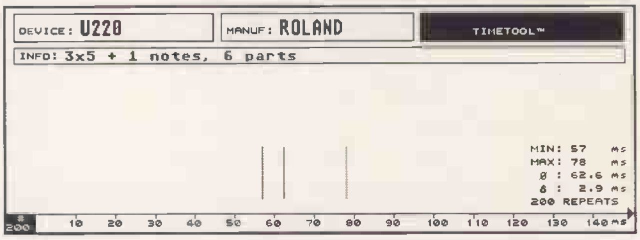
The MIDI delay is again only 6.4ms, but this time the audio delay is 40.5ms, a net audio delay of about 34ms. This is most certainly audible, and yet only just over half of the synth's polyphony is being used.

The fourth test transmitted three notes to each of five parts and a single note to the sixth part, a total of 16 notes. This is a not unreasonable scenario for a multitimbral synth.



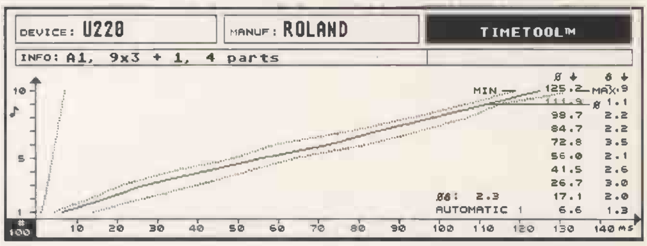
The MIDI delay for this test is 12.2ms and the resultant average delay is 45ms, a net audio delay of about 33ms. This is closely allied to the previous result which would tend to infer that it is not the processing of the incoming MIDI data which causes the delay, but the creation and output of the audio signal.

The fifth test pushes the U220 to its capacity; an eight-note chord duplicated by two parts, a five note chord duplicated by two parts, a three note chord and a single note which is under test, a total of 30 notes with a MIDI delay of 12.2ms.



The average delay here is 62.6ms, giving a net audio delay of just over 50ms. Is this audible? Well, 50ms is approximately a 32nd note at 140bpm.

How bad can timing delays get? By running an Automatic 1 test and ensuring that data is being continuously thrown at a synth, the processor will be seen under the worst possible conditions. The final test aims for this. Three parts are duplicating nine notes each and the delay of a single note after this is being measured; the MIDI delay of this note is 7ms.



The average delay here is 125.2ms giving a net audio delay of 118ms. This is practically a 16th note at 120 beats per minute and is painfully audible.

OVER A PERIOD of two months or so I put quite a few synths through their paces. The general trend of the results is that monotimbral synths have small, constant audio delays (typically 2ms-14ms). This is true also of multitimbral synths when used in a monotimbral manner. Using similar tests to the above: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Synth	Audio Delay (ms)	Mean Deviation
Oberheim Matrix 1000	6.2	1.3
Yamaha TX7	3.2	0.6
Korg 03R/W	4.2	0.4
Roland D550 with MEX board	8.8	1.8
Roland JV30	3.0	0.1
Roland JV80	5.6	0.2
Korg M1	4.6	0.7
Roland MKS20	4.0	0.5
Roland MKS70	13.2	0.8
E-mu Proteus	6.1	0.3
Yamaha SY22	4.0	0.1
Casio VZ10M	7.1	0.9
Korg Wavestation EX	2.0	0.1

This list is by no means exhaustive but gives a pretty good cross section. As these delays are constant and have a small degree of variation, they are likely to be either inaudible if below 7ms or otherwise resolvable by the use of a negative track delay on a sequencer.

Multitimbral synths are, however, a totally different kettle of fish. While the U220 was the worst that was measured, audio delays of 40ms upwards were common when running the processor under a substantial load. Using the same Automatic 1 test as was used in the final U220 test:

Synth	Audio Delay (ms)	Mean Deviation
Korg 03R/W	44.2	0.9
Roland JV30	22.2	3.9
Roland JV80	14.2	0.2
Korg M1	32.8	0.9
E-mu Proteus	93.1	0.4
Yamaha SY22	50.0	0.2
Casio VZ10M	44.0	1.0
Wavestation EX	24.9	0.2

These figures were obtained against a MIDI delay of 7ms and would appear to say that the audible delays obtained when using a multitimbral synth are primarily down to the processing time taken to create and output audio signal. Mean deviations are also higher; this means that there is a higher degree of variability in the delays. Put bluntly, you are more likely to hear delays when a song is at its busiest. The figures for Roland's JV80 are commendable, but must be taken in the tested context of being a pure sound module; the figures do not show how any synth reacts when being played from its own keyboard. The scan time, or how long the synth takes to recognise the fact that you are pressing a key down, is an inherent factor here.

IT APPEARS THAT the processors being used in many current multitimbral synths are simply not up to the job of creating and transmitting a large number of notes which is, of course, the primary reason why people buy them.

Is the MIDI delay inherent to its serial nature to blame? The answer would appear to be no. Do delays of the magnitude noted above matter? A far more pertinent question – there is little doubt that delays and variation of delay from a multitimbral synth will, at best, "smear" or thicken up the playback of music and, at worst, will be primarily responsible for audible inaccuracies.

And what of the advent of the 64-note polyphonic synth which is about to make its entry into the market place – are the delays going to be in keeping with the above results? If so, such synths will be unusable beyond half of their polyphony and no talk of a faster MIDI or "MIDI 2" will help in any way at all. ■

Many thanks to Florian Richter for Timetool and his advice and help with this article.

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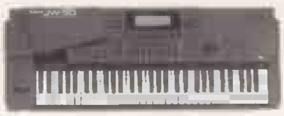

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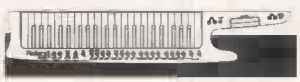

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the gatekeepers

Text by Marc Nohr

Illustration: Andrew Kingham

Picture this: I'm sitting in the plush office of a record company A&R Director. He swings in his executive leather chair, fingering the keys to his new BMW. On his desk, a portable phone and an A4 Filo-fax; to his right a hi-fi system resembling a Richard Rogers building; to his left, a waste disposal unit... for demo tapes.

His secretary calls on an internal phone. A young artist is waiting in reception, claiming he has an appointment. "Tell him to come back this afternoon, or tomorrow – or next week... or *something*. I'm busy being interviewed by a journalist," the A&R man snorts dismissively. He resumes his inventory of all the hit acts he's signed and the propositions he's declined from budding Madonnas wanting to sleep their way to the top. I bring up the subject of music. "Music?" his eyes glitter with delight. "Fuck music, let's make money." He falls off his chair in paroxysms of laughter, pointing to the gallery of gold discs that adorn his office wall.

Fact or fiction? Probably a bit of both. But it's a fitting caricature of the way A&R departments are perceived by most aspiring musicians. Indeed, from the outside there can be few aspects of the music business surrounded by such an aura of myth. It's not difficult to see why. The A&R man is the point of entry to a world of fame and riches. Once the ink has dried on the contract, the whole music business machinery moves into gear, thrusting the artist into the public eye. Consequently, the world inhabited by these gate-keepers abounds with stories of promises made and broken, dreams fulfilled and shattered.

Once inside this world, past the corporate façade and the CIA-trained secretaries, A&R looks a little different. As a profession it's as precarious as politics, with reputations lost just as quickly as they're won. As a business it's as circumscribed as any other, with A&R departments answerable to what Jeff Young describes as, 'men in grey suits' shouting, "Bottom line! bottom line!"

Young is the recently appointed A&R Director of MCA Records. It's an unmentionably early hour of the morning and we're sitting in his Soho office, feasting on take-away toast and cappuccino. Dressed in American-style sweatshirt and jeans, Young chomps and chats with great enthusiasm. His days as a Radio 1 DJ are now firmly behind him, but he still likes to trade in extravagant language. "Coalminers, wives get paid danger money," he explains, "I get paid grief money." What kind of money are we talking about? "Well that depends on who you are," he generalises, "Scouts can earn between ten or 15 grand, with a company car thrown in. A good A&R Manager can earn 60 or 70 grand, whilst successful A&R Directors can earn upwards of 100 grand and considerably more if they've been doing it for a while."

Young continues his 'Beginners' Guide to A&R... "the normal structure of an A&R department is Director, Manager, Scout. The Scouts scout, the Managers each have their own bunch of artists and the Director runs the team. At MCA, like elsewhere, there's a weekly A&R meeting where we discuss the progress of acts we've signed, we play new tapes and also screen what other companies are looking at." 'Screen?' – sounds like industrial espionage. "There's nothing underhand about it; it's just a question of having the chance to say no. There's nothing worse than learning that an act has been signed somewhere else and you never even got a chance to hear them. That's when the fur really flies," he explains, his hands mimicking flying fur.

Annie Roseberry claims not to worry about what other companies are up to. She's Vice-President of A&R at the American company, Elektra, and heads their A&R operations in this country. "I'm pretty laid back," she explains, slumbering in her chair. Her angular face evinces an occasional smile. "A lot of people get really worried about what other people are doing. I don't care. They can do whatever they want." It takes a while to decide whether this is hubris on her part or simply self-assurance. Probably the latter. After all, hubris doesn't pay the bills.

She runs a smaller outfit than Jeff Young, with a modest roster of artists, so the system is a little different to that of the bigger record companies. She works closely with a single A&R Manager and writes weekly reports on everything she sees and hears – which includes the few dozen tapes arriving at Elektra's offices every week. "They all get listened to," she insists. "They're logged into a book just in case someone calls up."

At CBS, where she worked for eight years, she remembers up to 100 tapes pouring into the office each week. "In most record companies, it's the junior members of staff who listen to the tapes and then refer them upwards. It's the same here, but they do all get listened to and they get a reply. One or two are followed up, but 99% are just not good enough."

Jeff Young agrees. "I've never signed a band on the basis of an unsolicited tape." And EMI's senior A&R Manager, Dave Ambrose, adds his voice to the chorus. His department receives "loads of unsolicited tapes, but they are generally very poor. You know, the kid who's played it to his best friend who tells him it's great". Norman Jay, at Phonogram's Talkin' Loud, is adamant that sending tapes willy-nilly is a loser's game. "Sometimes, I might follow up a tape with a phone call. But in the end, it's usually not what I'm looking for."

This, of course, is little comfort to the many thousands of aspiring musicians for whom sending in tapes seems like the only way to alert record companies to their music. But Jay has some pearls of wisdom to offer. "If some mad rock 'n' roll kid sends me a tape, he's got it all wrong." 'Rock 'n' roll', in case you had any doubts, is not Jay's bag. "I tell kids to do some research, find the label that's doing the stuff you to do, a label that's sympathetic. Don't just come to us because we can put your record out. That's what knobs off the A&R man and makes him say, 'I don't want to know'." He pauses, screws up his face and scratches his chin. "You know, I really think the direct approach is just wrong. You need to engineer a situation where the A&R man comes to you. Create a noise, and they'll come to you, they'll want to give you money." Jay returns to the 'knob' theme... "If you go cap in hand, they'll want to knob you off."

Garrulous and expansive, Mick Clarke is firmly ensconced in a modest terraced house in West London where he is A&R Director of Virgin's 10 Records. "I remember the days," he says with an air of maturity which seems strangely at odds with his T-shirt and shorts, "I remember the days at Virgin when we had to see three people in the morning and three people in the afternoon, straight off the street. They'd bring their tapes or their guitars and every day I'd have to sit and listen to music I didn't understand, music I hated, which is crazy. I found myself in the ludicrous position of having to judge music I wasn't in a position to judge. So I'd tell people that I shouldn't really be listening to them, and they'd get quite upset... I was abused and almost attacked once."

So we can take it that Mick is none too keen on an open door policy at 10 Records? "It's not that," he replies in descending tones. "I understand that people have high hopes for their tapes and I do try to see people who really believe in their stuff and who try to convince me it's something I will want to hear. But A&R is not just about sitting round listening to tapes. Signing a band is just the start of it; you then have to develop the artists, decide on studios, producers, what track to release and what strategy to pursue."

You might expect Ashley Newton to agree with Clarke. After all, they are both on the same side. Newton is head of A&R and joint MD at Circa Records which has recently assumed responsibility for all of Virgin's subsidiary labels. Newton's office looks like something straight out of the Conran shop. And Newton himself exudes the confidence of someone who has just had a shave and put on a fresh shirt. "When I was at Island we had open days consisting of a succession of 40 minute meetings. It's important to make your company accessible. But an open door policy is simply not cost-effective – to have two or three staff spending all their time in meetings with bands, most of whom will not be appropriate."

Like the rest of his peers, Newton's signings have come through his own personal network. "You simply can't ignore people you know who are tuned into what you want. It's a pre-existing filtering process."

So where does that leave the up and coming artist? Dave Ambrose waxes philosophical. "There is no easy way. It's a bitch, but that's the way it is. Even so, if a band is good they will be signed." Do you you really think so? "Yes, if they play the right clubs, they will be heard. A&R people are sharper and more aggressive than they used to be. They are out there."

Jeff Young is also confident that not too many acts slip through the net cast by his department. "What tends to happen," he explains, "is that bands which are good have also got a bit more wit and charm than the regular outfit. Sometimes you may miss one but anyone who writes good songs will eventually come across someone who can help them – like a lawyer, a DJ or a producer. Alternatively, they create a stir at a local level. It's not easy to keep secrets. We have a network of contacts across the country, and if we don't find the bands, we'll follow up on someone who has."

A&R departments habitually shadow each other according to John Giacobbi, former BMG lawyer and now head of Entertaiment Law Associates. "A&R departments are very narrow-minded," he opines. "They're more worried about job security than anything else, so they won't take risks. They follow each other with a lemming-like fervour. But those who do take the risks often reap the rewards." He cites the example of The Gipsy Kings. "Nobody would take their first album. Nobody wanted to stick their neck out."

Other artists, like Terence Trent D'arby, also come to mind. Giacobbi's observations certainly apply to the bigger record companies where corporate paranoia is rife and it can be difficult to get something new or different through the system. Smaller companies, however, often succeed because they are novel or distinctive. Their reflexes also tend to be quicker, with decision-making resting in the hands of one person. So it's the smaller independent companies who are now the crown jewels in many a major label's portfolio. The majors have swept up the independents in licensing deals, or in Norman Jay's case, have started to employ a new breed of A&R man... DJs with their ears to the ground.

"The majors were like lumbering giants," Jay explains. "They wanted a part of the thriving cottage industry. That's why I was head-hunted – in the hope I could do the same for them." This cottage industry, according to Jay, originated because kids (as he calls them) were alienated from the corporations. "Now you can't say that talent is being suffocated any more. Many of the kids who are out there making music don't necessarily want a record deal. They can press up their own records and sell them through local shops and radio. They have less overheads, more knowledge of their local market and can achieve sales in the thousands."

Nevertheless, these kids still approach the major record companies in search of greater fame and fortune than they could ever hope to achieve by themselves. And it's the same kids who are complaining that the A&R system is not working for them; that A&R men don't understand." Jay concedes the point. "I know. I viewed A&R men the same way and when I met them I realised that they knew even less than I thought they knew. But..." Jay teeters on the brink of a revelation, "the A&R man doesn't have to know about your music, he has to know how the system works, how to get your material through the system. You don't know that – he does. He knows what budget he has got, when the record will be released and how... It's got little to do with art."

Jay comes from a different end of the spectrum to Dave Ambrose, but the two both like to talk nuts and bolts. "A good A&R man," Ambrose argues, "should not be a 'muso' because that leads to musical snobbery. A musical snob can miss the fact that people may actually want to buy a certain kind of thing." You mean miss out on the money? "Yes, that too."

"An open door policy is simply not cost-effective – to have two or three staff spending all their time in meetings with bands, most of whom will not be appropriate"

Thus speaks a man who has made his reputation in the pop genre. But many of the A&R moguls interviewed here would be quick to disagree. Mick Clarke, for instance, identifies two types of A&R. "The first," he explains, "sign acts that other people will like. And the second, which includes me, sign acts they like. I was, and still am, a musical snob." There is almost a temptation to accept Clarke's distinction. But life is not that simple. Sure, there are some A&R departments who seem to look at the money making potential first and last, and others with more artistic temperaments. But A&R people do not stay A&R people for very long if they don't have an eye on both money and art simultaneously. With the characteristic shrewdness of a former student of Chris Blackwell at Island, Ashley Newton finds a maxim to resolve the dilemma: "There is no necessary contradiction between commercialism and quality."

Norman Jay is looking to discover "the fine line between putting out records I like and hoping they're what the public want". Even so, Jeff Young's men in grey suits screaming, "bottom line!" are never far from view. "That's why I talk straight to aspiring artists," Jay reveals "I can explain what resources I've got and what I can do with those resources – which includes looking after the bands I already have on board." If that does not suffice, he offers some unconventional advice... "I say to kids, go down to the high street bank, see the bank manager and find out whether he'll lend you the fifty grand you need to make this record. If he won't, then why the hell should we? We only have so much money."

According to Paul Morgan, "that happens more with the smaller labels. Within reason," he explains, "I can sign as I please. Decisions obviously have to go through the A&R Director, but I don't have accountants breathing down my neck."

Accountants aside, what criteria does Ambrose apply when considering whether to sign an artist? His response is really quite scientific. Or is it? "The first criteria I look for is whether they can sing. Though it doesn't matter so much here, it's important in the USA because they take their music much more seriously. The second is songwriting – although sometimes the odd band are not natural songwriters (...like U2), but they still sound fantastic. Thirdly, attitude. I like a bit of subversion – something that makes waves – although artists always smooth out in the end."

Whilst I can readily see the subversion in a band like the Sex Pistols (whom Ambrose signed to EMI Publishing), but Sigue Sigue Sputnik? There was a fast buck if ever I saw one... Ambrose replies in their defence. "They promised change, something new. They were also one of the first bands to sample."

Faced with the same question, Jay offers a physical analogy – or three. "If someone approaches me with a song, it's gotta hit me

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Akai S1000 61 Note Sampling Keyboard	£2990	£2890
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Ensoniq SQ32 Plus, 32 Voice	£1299	£1150
Ensoniq SQR	£799	POA
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Yamaha SY77	£1429	£1199
Yamaha SY35	£599	£549
Yamaha SY85	£1399	£1325
Yamaha TG77	£1250	£1095
Yamaha TG100 Sound Module	£349	£339
Yamaha TG55	£449	POA
Yamaha TG33	£349	POA
Roland DJ70 Sampling Workstation	£1750	POA
Roland JW50 Workstation	£1349	POA
Roland AX1 Remote Keyboard	£449	POA
Roland AX Mother Keyboard 76 Note	£499	POA
Roland SC155 Sound Canvas	£599	POA
Roland SC55 Sound Canvas, Sound Module	£485	£475
Roland PC150 Keyboard	£128	£128
Roland PC200 II	£215	£215
Roland JV80 Synth	£1245	£1225
Roland JV30	£759	POA
Roland S750 Sampler	£2500	POA
Roland JD 800 Programmable Synth	£1550	POA
Roland JX1 Performance Synth	£350	£299
Roland Studio MV30	£1195	£1150
Roland D70 Super LA Synth	£1359	£1349
Roland PC200 Mother Keyboard	£235	£199
Roland E70	£1299	POA
Roland E15	£499	POA
Roland E5	£390	POA
Korg 01/FD	£1795	POA
Korg 01	£1695	POA
Korg WS1 Wavestation	£1299	£1275
Korg M1 Workstation	£999	£985

KEYBOARD STANDS

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Zoom 9000 Power Supply	£20	£18
Zoom 9002 Multi Effects	£299	£289
Zoom 9030 Multi Effects	£499	£489
Yamaha FX500	£299	£289
Yamaha FX900	£595	POA
Yamaha EMP 700 effects	£440	POA
Yamaha EMP100	£225	£215
Yamaha R100 Reverb	£179	£169
Alesis Quadraverb +	£315	£305
Alesis Midiverb 3	£239	POA
Alesis D4 Drum module	£399	POA
Alesis Quadraverb GT	£459	POA
Alesis Microverb III	£159	£149
Art Multiverb LT	£179	£149
Boss DRP II Drumpad	£55	£45
Boss SE50 Multi FX unit	£349	£339
Boss AW2 Autowah	£55	£53
Boss BF2 Flanger	£96	£94
Boss CE5 Chorus	£55	£53
Boss CH1 Super Chorus	£69	£67
Boss CS3 Compressor	£79	£77
Boss DD3 Digital Delay	£108	£106
Boss DS2 Distortion	£47	£45
Boss DS2 Turbo Distortion	£63	£61
Boss FW3 Foot Wah	£63	£61
Boss GE7 Graphic EQ	£79	£77
Boss HM2 Heavy Metal	£55	£53
Boss MT2 Metal Zone	£63	£61
Boss MZ2 Metalizer	£96	£94
Boss DD2 Turbo Overdrive	£79	£77
Boss OS2 Overdrive Distortion	£55	£50
Boss PS2 Pitch Shifter	£127	£125
Boss PH2 Super Phaser	£79	£77
Boss SD1 Super Overdrive	£47	£45
Boss FC50 Midi foot controller	£125	£123
Digitech "The Vocalist" VHM5	£899	£879
Digitech GSP21 pro (S/H)	£495	£495
Digitech DSP128P	£299	£279
Digitech DSP16	£275	£249
Digitech GSP7	£395	£370
DOD 7 band EQ	£65	£63
DOD overdrive +	£39	£37
DOD Classic tube	£35	£33
DOD American Metal	£45	£43
DOD Metal Maniac	£46	£44
DOD Stereo Chorus	£59	£57
DOD Stereo Flanger	£59	£57
DOD Compressor/Sustainer	£45	£43
OOD Analogue Delay	£99	£57
DOD Wah Vol	£79	£77

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Boss DR550 II	£199	POA
Boss DR660	£299	POA
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Roland CR80 Human Rhythm player	£375	POA
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Tascam 488 8 Track portastudio	£995	£985
Tascam 424	£459	£449
Tascam 688 8 Track Midi Studio	£1899	£1850
Tascam Porta 2 Hi Speed Porta Studio	£499	£489
Tascam Porta 05 Hi Speed Porta Studio	£299	£295
Tascam Porta 03 4 Track	£225	POA
Tascam MM1 Mixer	£699	£685
Fostex R8	£1500	POA
Fostex X18 (new model)	£250	£240
Fostex X28 Multitracker	£329	£339
Fostex X26 Multi Tracker + compressor	£299	POA
Fostex 280 Porta Studio 8 Ch 4 Track	£550	£539
Yamaha MT 120 4 Track Recorder	£389	£369
Yamaha MT3X 4 Track Recorder	£549	£499
Yamaha DTR2 DAT (new product)	£950	£929
Tascam DA30 DAT	£1195	POA
Teac DAP20 DAT (new product)	£586	POA
Casio OA100	£549	£499
Casio DA7	£359	POA
Alesis 1622 Mixer	£699	£650
Yamaha NS10M Speakers	£129 each	£115 each

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Marshall 6100 100w Anniversary amp head	£767	£767
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Marshall 6960 A/B 4 x 12 cab	£351	£351
Marshall Valvestate		
Marshall 8100 100w amp head	£280	£280
Marshall 8412 4 x 12 x 12 cab	£245	£245
Marshall 8240 stereo chorus 2 x 2	£439	£439
Marshall 8080 80w combo	£320	£320
Marshall 8040 40w combo	£259	£259
Marshall 8020 20w combo	£185	£185
Marshall 8010 10w combo	£94	£94
Marshall 8001 10w micro stack	£180	£180
Marshall 8004 40 + 40 stereo power amp	£182	£182
Marshall 8008 80 + 80 stereo power amp	£229	£229
Marshall JCM900 hi-Gain Master Volume		
Marshall 2100 100w valve amp head	£466	£466
Marshall 2101 100w valve 1 x 12 combo	£520	£520
Marshall 2500 50w valve amp head	£387	£387
Marshall 2501 50w valve 1 x 12 combo	£446	£446
Marshall 2502 50w valve 2 x 12 combo	£502	£502
Marshall JCM900 Hi-Gain Dual Reverb		
Marshall 4100 100w valve amp head	£498	£498
Marshall 4101 100w valve 1 x 12	£564	£564
Marshall 4102 100w valve 2 x 12 combo	£618	£618
Marshall 4500 50w valve amp head	£451	£451
Marshall 4501 50w valve 1 x 12 combo	£507	£507
Marshall 4502 50w valve 2 x 12 combo	£566	£566
Marshall 1960A/B 4 x 12 300w cabs	£351	£351
Marshall SE100 speaker emulator	£305	£305
Marshall 9001 valve pre amp	£404	£404
Marshall 9004 solid state pre amp	£159	£159
Marshall 9005 50 + 50 valve pre amp	£537	£537
Marshall 1962 bluesbreaker combo	£579	£579
Marshall 5205 12w reverb combo	£118	£118
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Marshall 5301 12w keyboard combo	£112	£112
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Crate TD70 70w 1x12+Rev. (Valve)	£339	£319
Crate G20 Chorus 20w 2x6	£229	£209
Crate G40 Chorus 40w 2x8	£359	£339
Crate G130 Chorus 130w 2x12	£499	£479
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Hartke 410 Transporter 4x10 Cab	£521	£511
Hartke 115 XL 1x15 Cab	£535	£525
Hartke 410 XL 4x10 Cab	£694	£684
Hartke 350w Bass Amp	£480	£470
Trace Elliot 1215 combo	£775	£777
Trace Elliot 1210 combo	£850	£845
Trace Elliot Twin combo	£850	£845
Trace Elliot AH300 head	£850	£845
Trace Elliot AH200 head	£525	£520
Trace Elliot GP12x graphic pre amp	£375	£370
Trace Elliot RA300 Power amp	£425	£420
Trace Elliot 1048 4 x 10 cab	£499	£494
Trace Elliot 1518 1 x 15 cab	£475	£470
Fender Twin	£699	£690
Fender Princeton Chorus	£359	£350
Fender Studio 85	£289	£285
Fender Deluxe 85	£319	£309
Fender Super 60	£449	£425
Fender Pro 185	£449	£439
Fender Stage 185	£395	£370
Fender M80 Heavy Metal Combo	£245	£225
Fender Champ 12	£229	£219
Squier 15 Combo	£69	£59
Carlsboro Cobra 100 Keyboard Combo	£322	£299
Carlsboro Colt 65W Keyboard Combo	£217	£207
Carlsboro Viper 100 Bass Comb	£307	£297
Carlsboro Colt 65 Bass Combo	£217	£207
Carlsboro Colt 65 Lead Combo	£239	£229

P.A

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Marshall 1 x 12 plus Horn Cabs	£147	£147
Marshall 1 x 15 plus Horn Cabs	£147	£147
Hughes & Kettner Stagehand 240w PA Mixer Amp	£699	POA
Hughes & Kettner 1x12 Cabs (pair)	£399	POA
Carlsbro GRX7 Mixer Amp	£469	£449
Carlsbro Cobra 100 P.A	£217	£207
Carlsbro Marlin 150 P.A	£289	£280
Carlsbro Marlin 300 P.A	£429	£400
Carlsbro PMX 8/2 300W Stereo P.A	£711	£695
Carlsbro A110 Cabs (Pair)	£211	£200
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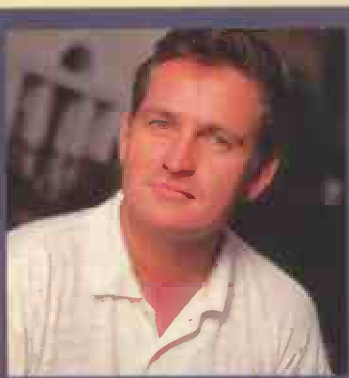

NAME: Mick Clark
POSITION: A&R Director, 10 Records.
PREVIOUS SIGNINGS: Soul II Soul, Maxi Priest, Loose Ends.
FIRST CONTACT: Soul II Soul via friend who later became their manager. Maxi Priest through a smaller label to which they were already signed. Loose Ends on a Walkman in a West End pub.
RECENT SIGNINGS: Temper Temper, Bass Cut.
FIRST CONTACT: Unsolicited call from Temper Temper's manager. Bass Cut through Virgin in New York.

NAME: Ashley Newton
POSITION: Joint Deputy MD of Virgin Records (with responsibility for A&R).
PREVIOUS SIGNINGS: Massive Attack, Neneh Cherry, Julia Fordham, Hue & Cry, Sydney Youngblood.
FIRST CONTACT: Massive Attack demo played on a car stereo in a Scottish Airport. Neneh was a friend. Julia Fordham through a publisher. Hue & Cry through a release on a Scottish independent label. Youngblood via an A&R manager who had just lost his job at MCA.
RECENT SIGNINGS: Fluke, Gary Clark (Vocalist with Danny Wilson), Ronin.
FIRST CONTACT: Read about Fluke after the release of a mini-album on Creation. Gary Clark from his work with Danny Wilson. Ronin via Neneh Cherry.

NAME: Annie Roseberry
POSITION: Senior Vice-President of A&R, Elektra Records.
PREVIOUS SIGNINGS: Sade, Beverly Craven, Matt Johnson and 'partly' responsible for U2.
FIRST CONTACT: Sade through her work as a backing singer. Beverly Craven through a studio engineer. Matt Johnson 'grabbed' mid-way through concluding a deal with another company. U2, though already signed to CBS in Ireland, were recommended by the press office at Island.
RECENT SIGNINGS: Ola, Ephraim Lewis, Doves (formerly the Thrashing Doves).
FIRST CONTACT: An Elektra Scout heard Ola in a club ('Singers' in Tottenham Court Road) and a demo had also been sent. Ephraim through a contact with his producer. The Doves were already signed to another label.

NAME: Dave Ambrose
POSITION: Senior A&R Manager, EMI Records.
PREVIOUS SIGNINGS: Sex Pistols (Publishing Only), Dexys Midnight Runners, Sigue Sigue Sputnik, Pet Shop Boys, Duran Duran.
FIRST CONTACT: Sex Pistols at the 100 Club. Dexys via an agent and after seeing them live. Sigue Sigue via a journalist friend and through the video they released. Pet Shop Boys via Manager Tom Watkins. Duran via their Manager who called unsolicited, though they also had a deal with A&M on the table, so it was a fight to sign them.
RECENT SIGNINGS: Groove Technology
FIRST CONTACT: Through a friend who had their video.

NAME: Norman Jay
POSITION: A&R Manager, Phonogram (Talkin' Loud and Global Village).
PREVIOUS SIGNINGS: "Relatively new to the game" but signed Omar and had a hand in pairing Jocelyn Brown with Incognito for the hit, 'Always There'.
RECENT SIGNINGS: Brian Powell
FIRST CONTACT: Heard him on a remix, but didn't find out who he was until a friend got hold of a tape.

NAME: Jeff Young
POSITION: A&R Director, MCA Records.
PREVIOUS SIGNINGS: Lance Ellington, Hipsway, Texas.
FIRST CONTACT: Ellington through publisher (but his co-writer had been pestering for a couple of years). Hipsway through a management company. Texas as a spin-off from Hipsway.
RECENT SIGNINGS: GMT (God Made Trouble), Beijing Spring, Oui 3, Power of 3.
FIRST CONTACT: GMT through a publisher. Beijing Spring and Power of 3 via their management. Qui 3 through a combination of contacts with their publisher and management.

in the face. It's gotta make me jump up and down and make me want to knock walls down to secure a deal." Jay, however, is less forthcoming when it comes to defining exactly what it is he and his collegues at Talkin' Loud are looking for. "We know it when we see it." Mick Clarke's criteria are quite straightforward... "I sign stuff that *I* think is great and I don't give a shit what anybody else thinks." Even so, Clarke concedes that every A&R man would probably give that image of himself.

Songs are the starting point for Jeff Young. "A good song means something with a good hook and a good melody that you can remember. Like it or not, 'I Should Be So Lucky' was a fucking great song. Even seven-year-olds remembered it. And if you like the songs, you may go see the band, unless it's a club thing or a one-off single. Sometimes you might sign someone off a vibe – like Thousand Yard Stare. They were a ball of energy, no tunes but a great vibey little turn." Vibey little turn? You can tell he used to be a Radio 1 DJ. He continues... "Occasionally, however, you have to do your job, which is to provide the company with hits. And that may sometimes involve signing someone you don't necessarily like. But that's part of A&R – recognising that a group are going to be huge, biting the bullet and saying, 'Hey-ho... this is hits!'"

In the main, however, Young sees his job as finding "good" acts. Roughly translated, this means acts which have good attributes for their area of the market. "Take Marc Almond, for example. He was never going to be Pavarotti, but there was something about him that made him great." Young has other criteria too. "Money isn't everything," he suggests. "Sometimes you might want to sign an act for chart profile or just credibility."

Annie Roseberry lists her criteria with characteristic conviction. "I look for artists of exceptional talent, artists who are totally unique, irrespective of genre – and that's always been my A&R policy. It's also important that you get on with people – that they're like-minded. Basically, the things I've been involved in have always been different and I've been lucky. But I think I have an ear for talent." Roseberry's musical background might go some way to explaining her 'good ear' as well as her sympathy for musicians trying to catch the attention of A&R departments. "I feel very sorry for musicians," she pauses, "depending on my mood. You have to have tact. It's hard to tell people not to give up their day jobs – but a lot of the time that's exactly what you mean."

Mick Clarke is not a musician... "I'm the world's worst pub singer," he concedes, but he shares Roseberry's compassion. "A&R men get a lot of stick and quite rightly. It's the entertainment business and they have a lot of power which they can, and do, abuse."

Clarke's harsh words will no doubt have resonance for many aspiring musicians to whom A&R is a common term of abuse, synonymous with unanswered telephone calls, unkept appointments and broken promises. There surely are some people in A&R who wouldn't recognise talent if it hit them squarely between the eyes and others inebriated on their own power. Equally, there are those who conduct their affairs with imagination and equanimity. As Ashley Newton suggests, "You just can't generalise about A&R men. There are all sorts of individuals with different styles and temperaments."

All the same, it remains a business shrouded in misconceptions. From the musicians point of view, the misconception often derives from an over-idealised vision. A vision that A&R exists simply to recognise and reward talent. In reality, few art forms are immune from the twin forces of politics and finance, and music certainly is not one of them. In Norman Jay's words, "The record business is like any other business, it's there to sell product and make money..." ■

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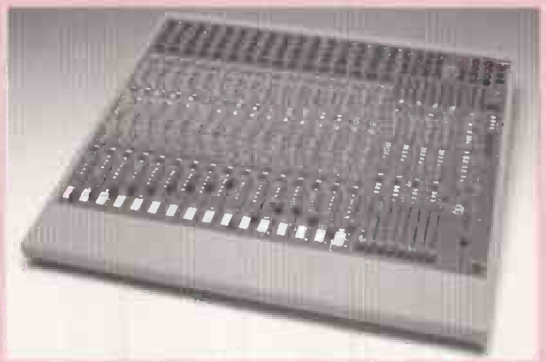

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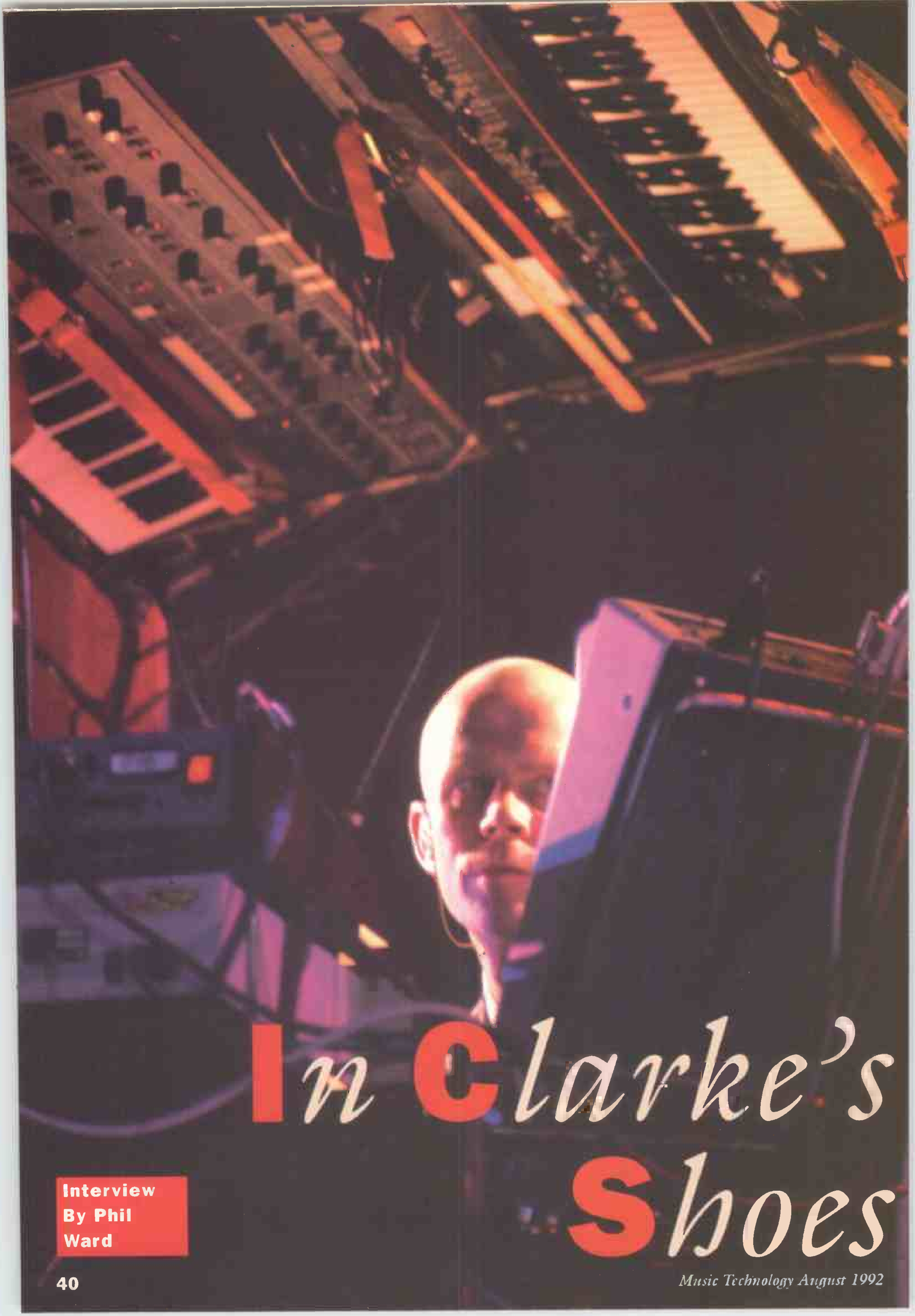


In Clarke's Shoes

Interview By Phil Ward

From Depeche Mode to Erasure by way of Yazoo and The Assembly – the bands may have changed, but apparently not the equipment. Vince Clarke speaks from the tank...

'Outing' is a controversial subject. Let's face it, having someone come up to you in the street, point, and say, "He likes Abba – he thought 'SOS' sounded pretty good in 1975" must be a pretty challenging experience. But there's nothing particularly new about such revelations. In 1982, on Radio 1's *My Top Twelve*, a certain Philip Oakey was the first to break the silence by declaring that, yes, Abba had been very important for The Human League, and did Andy Peebles want to make something of it? A couple of years later, a cover version of 'The Day Before You Came' hit the charts and it was official: Blancmange liked Abba, too.

And so, of course, did Vince Clarke. Of that same generation of English synth-pop pioneers who have often quoted Sweden's Eurovision darlings as a seminal influence, he has finally paid the tribute of tributes: four Abba covers on an EP that has sat defiantly at the top of the charts for several weeks – a perfect union of pop roots, video wit and revivalist camp. But that same generation soaked up other, less frothy, influences too. And, sure enough, when I encounter Vince backstage at the Hammersmith Odeon, in the middle of a solid three-weeks of Erasure's 'Phantasmagorical Entertainments', he's watching a video of Kraftwerk...

"It's a pirate from a secret gig in Leicester a few weeks ago," he explains, in response to my surprise at the poor quality. Kraftwerk in Leicester? A few weeks ago? That's what I call a secret gig. However, Vince is happy to deny any general identification with Continental electronic music, despite having relocated across the Channel, and gives the impression instead that what interests him these days is how Kraftwerk, for example, might tackle the age-old problem of performing synthesizer music live on stage. His own solution, on this tour, is certainly unique.

In the makeshift living room somewhere round the back of the Odeon, Vince has a few home comforts. TV, video, fridge full of cold drinks, and something which says more about his musical standpoint than anything else I can think of. Whereas a guitarist might have a trusty old acoustic propped up against the sofa, Vince has got a small workstation consisting of Mini-Moog, Akai Linn MPC-60 and Roland MC-4 sequencer, handy for those moments of inspiration and last-minute adjustments to the live set. He points enthusiastically to the Akai Linn.

"This is really good. We use this for all the drum sounds live. All the drum sounds on the last album were generated from synths, so I had to regenerate them for the tour. Obviously I couldn't take an ARP 2600 on the road and start messing about with bass drum sounds for every song, and there's lots and lots of percussion sounds, so they were regenerated and sampled into that thing. I must admit it was a real life-saver, it's so simple. You just hit Record, press the pad and it's down. Only 16-bit recording inside, but the resolution's quite high. Eight outs, 32 drum sounds. So it's in my tank!"

Ah, yes, the famous tank which trundles around the stage throughout the show, complete with Vince and synths. Basically a bigger, vehicular version of what's backstage, it looks a bit like those things that help the stricken aeroplane land in the first episode of *Thunderbirds*. Hydraulically manoeuvred on caterpillar tracks, it contains everything that creates the Erasure live sound apart from the vocals. And Vince is only too happy to show it off – as he would a new car.

"This is the main sequencer" he explains, clambering aboard (it's another MC-4). "...and this is the spare. Channel 1 is going to the Moog, which creates the bass, so for every song I'm adjusting the sounds – that's my job." He seems very pleased with this minimal, utilitarian role. "Channel 2 is going to the Juno 60," (it's above our heads, seatbelted to the roof of the tank) "...channel 3 goes to this box here, which we had built. It's a splitter box, and the signal either goes to the Prophet 5" (also above our heads) "...or to the Jupiter 8" (over my left shoulder). "That's determined by the MC-4 program.

"Basically, you've got CV1, which is your pitch; CV2, which can be filter or amplitude depending on the synth; Gate/Trigger; and MPX which is the switcher, set to 1 or 0, which tells the box to direct the signal to either the Pro 5 or the JP8. Channel 4 is the same thing again, but using the Oberheim Expander" (rear-view mirror) "...as two keyboards, directing the signal to either the left- or right-hand side. So effectively we've got two synths there. We can only have four synths playing at once, but we've got six sound sources. And sync'd to the MC-4 is the MPC-60, creating all the drum sounds."

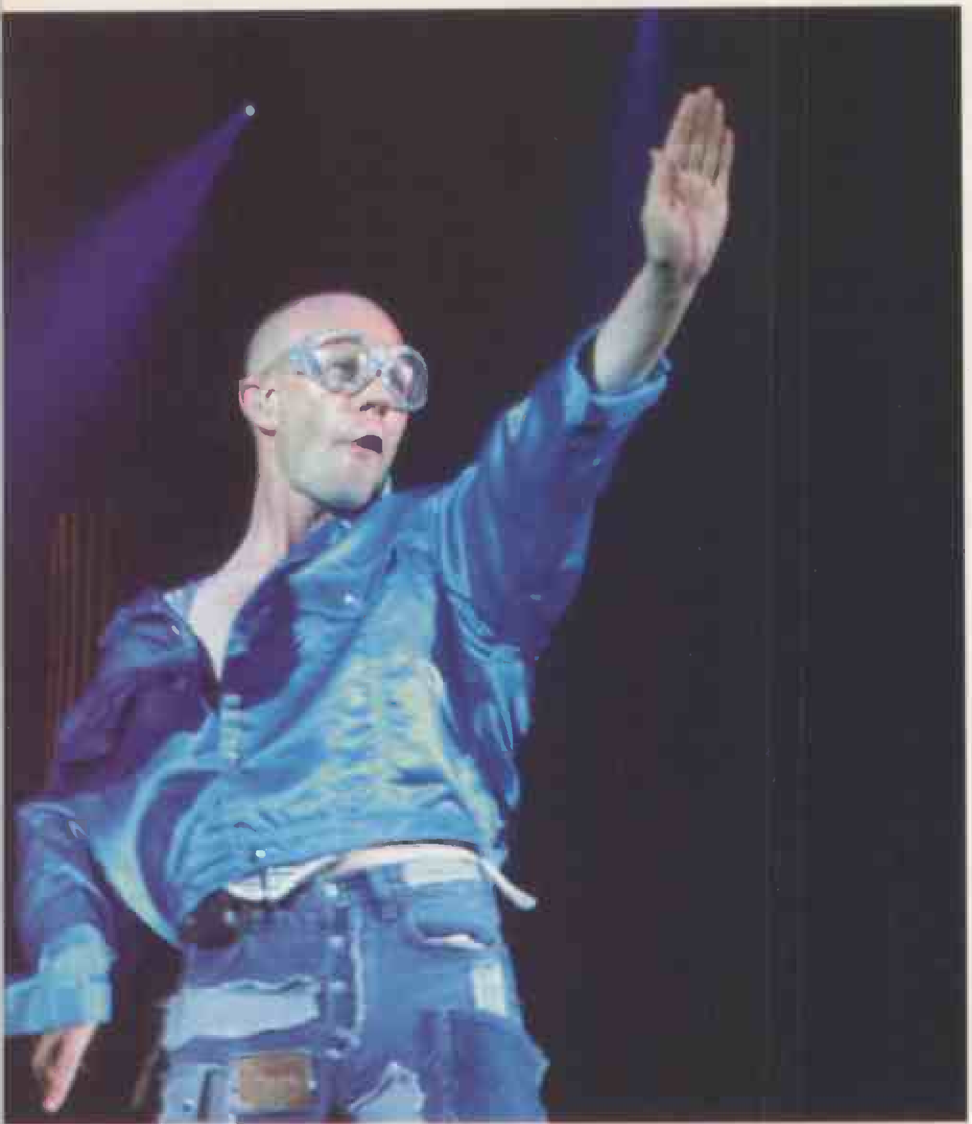
Make no mistake, it's a ceiling of classic analogue synths. With obvious relish, he further outlines the archaism of the system. "Now, there's no disc or anything for this, it's all tape recorders." He produces a Maxell cassette. It's the specialized variety marketed by Roland 12 years ago as a data storage medium. "We get a quarter of the set on each side. So I have to go into Tape mode on the MC-4, load – normally the information is cued up – then I have to quickly load the MPC-60 sounds from the DAC hard disk system over here..." The combination of the MPC-60 and the DAC is the one concession to recent technological advance. Of course, there are no MIDI patch changes involved, so Vince has to reach up and physically press the buttons on each synth between numbers. Naturally, this adds to the general 'flying by the seat of his pants' effect that you suspect he enjoys. "My Mum was wondering what all this reaching up was for. I told her it was my new dance routine."

There is also an ashtray, and a Roland SH-1... "That's a spare. We haven't had to use it yet, but I thought if one of the keyboards goes down I can just plug the CV and Gate in there and adjust the sounds as we're going along."

All the synths are used monophonically, constituting six monophonic sound sources. "You can form chords of a sort," explains Vince, "and on the Oberheim you can get 5ths, but it's nicely limited. So that's it, really. We've got spares of everything, but we've been very lucky so far. We've got DAT backup, as well, but I've never had to use it – ever, not on any tour." This last remark is made with some pride. "The system last year was all MIDI'd, with a master keyboard and everything, and we haven't had a 100th of the problems we had then. The only thing that goes down is this thing..." he taps the DAC. "All the analogue side is fine, even though the MC-4s used to be really unreliable when they first came out. We have eight of them, anyway, as backups! But we haven't needed them."

Now bear in mind this guy could, if he wanted, use any system you can dream of. The fact that he should choose to place these restrictions on himself at all is a testimony to the principles he brings to bear on his music.

"On the last tour I was playing stuff on the master keyboard. But it just ▶▶



analogue now. For the last album, *Chorus*, we decided to give ourselves some definite ground rules to make it sound different to the previous albums. So we used only analogue synthesizers, no drum machines, and no MIDI, as far as we could. We used MC-4s instead, and ARP sequencers – analogue sequencing. It's very difficult, really, when you're trying to keep up with all the new gear, not to just get into the habit of using preset sounds. It's not that it's too difficult to program the new synths, it's just that the programming on them is so good already. You change the sound and maybe individualize it, but in the end you're making it worse than it was. At least with analogue synthesizers you don't have that problem, because you're starting from scratch."

"Getting rid of", it emerges, is metaphorical, and to do with working methods rather than recycling. "Oh yeah, I keep everything," he admits, "I never throw anything away. I just collect analogue synths now. I'm really into collecting, as well. I've got a couple of contacts in America, and they've been getting me some really interesting gear. Things like the ARP 2600; a Serge modular system; you know, the rarer the better, the bigger the better. It's mostly that they're interesting to use – the technique. Also on the last album we were working with Martin Phillips, who's my technical assistant on this tour, and he's really up on analogue synthesizers, he knows how they work. My work with them up until then had always been guess work, really, but now I finally know how to patch..."

You almost miss the irony of this last remark, such is the deadpan delivery. But it corresponds to the self-effacement that's been consistently in evidence since the first moment that Basildon realized it had something more to shout about than notepaper. "There are no musicians on stage" is, for example, how he describes the live show. But traditional songwriting values are still in evidence.

"Andy and I write with just a piano. Piano and vocal, working on a traditional song structure. We usually work out the melodies and stuff, and we have a rough idea of lyrics, then I'll go in the studio and find the lines. Bass lines, putting the rhythms together. On the album Martin helped a lot with the drum programming. It was much more interesting to do, though, because as I said we didn't use any drum machines; we tried to generate all the percussion sounds from synths. We got about 99% of them. The only sound we couldn't get was a crash. We couldn't synthesize a crash. So that was the one sample we used."

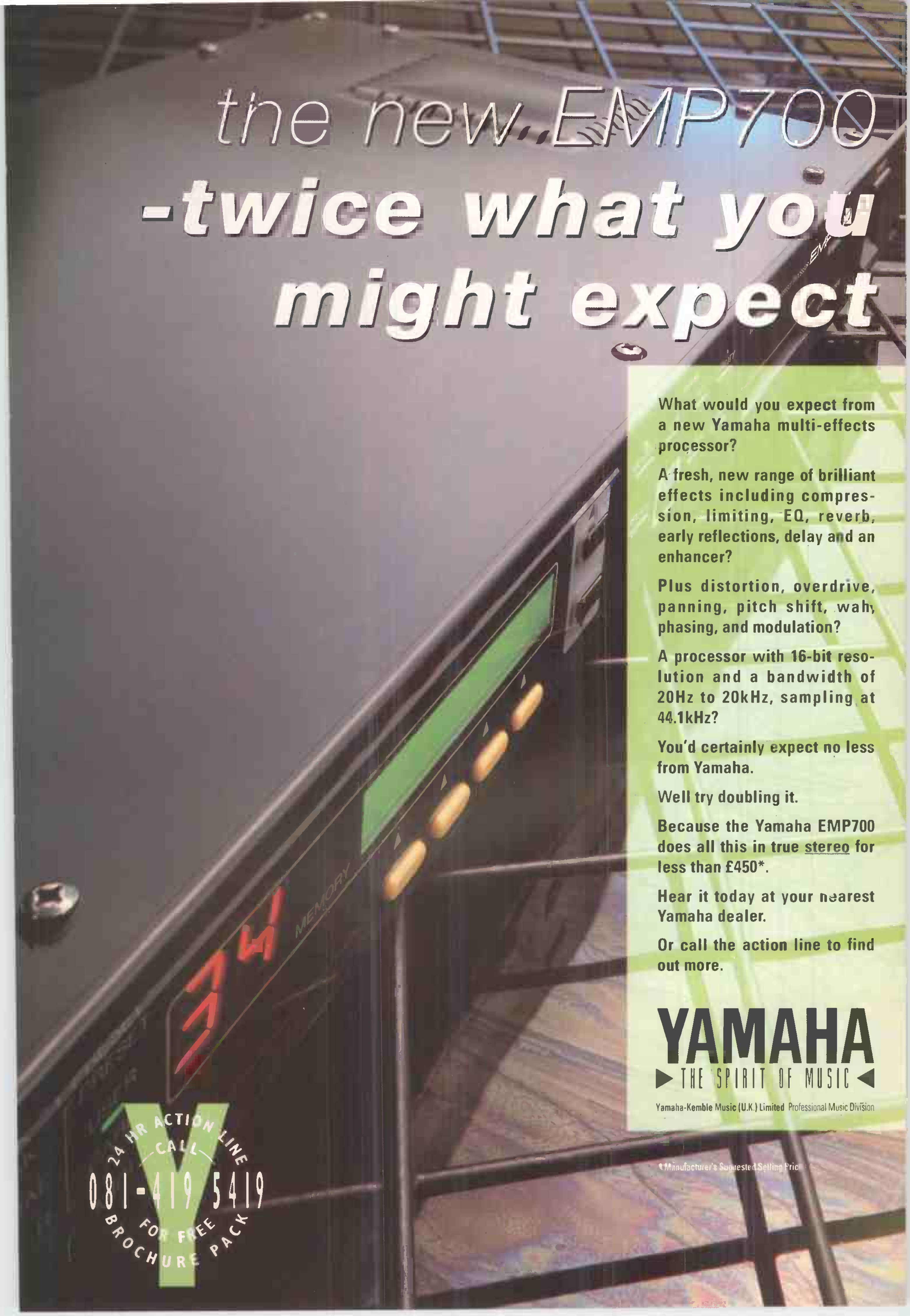
A measure of Vince's scale of values – as far as sampling is concerned – may be gleaned from his response to the suggestion that some aspects of new technology may, on occasion, sidetrack songwriters from the business of songwriting... "I think any gadget or gimmick does. Not that the Akai Linn is a gimmick, but, it's like when the fuzz pedal appeared, everybody used a fuzz pedal. I'm just not really interested in sampling. Again, if you had the ability, and even the interest, to start changing a sample, you could make it worse. I've got Akai samplers and so on, but you haven't really got that facility to change the sounds much. It's not as ▸▸

▸▸ didn't ring true, really. It's not what I normally do; I'd never dream of playing keyboards in the studio, I'll always program. So we're just doing what we do in the studio. But all the versions are different; the arrangements have changed, and I had to find new drum sounds for all the old stuff, again from analogue synth sources. The older material had all these chords and pads which I can't do on this system, either. And although it's simpler, I think it sounds really full. It's just like the difference between having a jazz big-band and a quartet. In a way, the quartet can sound tighter, sharper and harder. Any lack of musical padding is made up for by the variety of drum sounds, and one-off effects that we sampled as well.

"All the original programs were on a MIDI sequencer. What you have to do is send that information to an MPU-101, or similar MIDI to CV convertor, and load that into the MC-4 in real-time. But if it's a chord, all you get is the top note, you know, the one that changes a bit! But I don't think you really notice that; in fact I think it really helps, in a live situation."

The point is that Vince Clarke regards ageing analogue technology in the same way as a guitarist might cherish, say, a 1952 Les Paul. He has become, in his own fashion, an antiques collector.

"The main difference between the studio I had in London and the new one is that, basically, I'm getting rid of all the digital stuff. It's 90%



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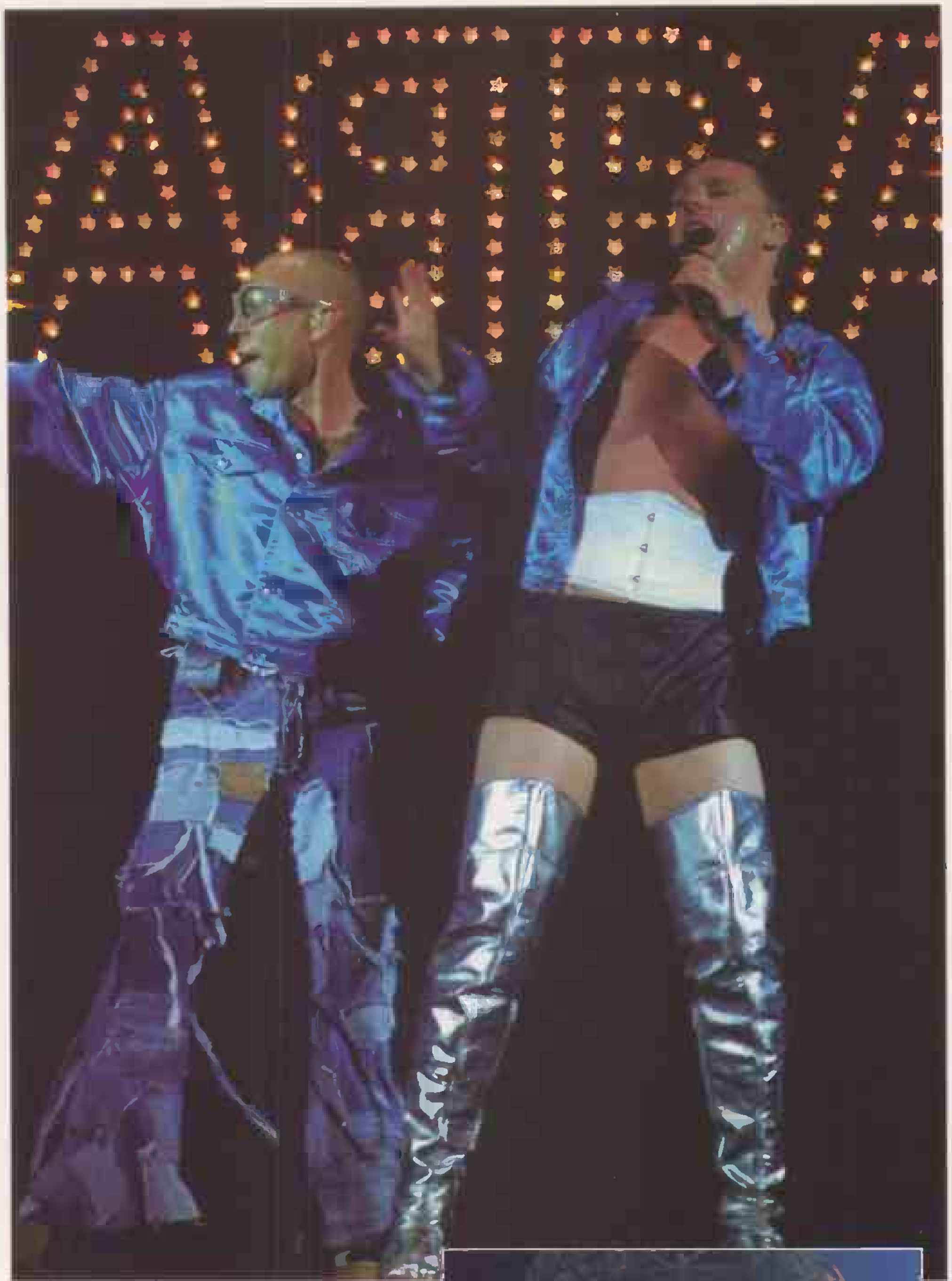
"It's not that it's too difficult to program the new synths, it's just that the programming on them is so good already. You change the sound and maybe individualize it, but in the end you're making it worse than it was"



Discography

Albums

With Depeche Mode:
Speak And Spell (1981)

With Alison Moyet (Yazoo):
Upstairs At Eric's (1982)
You And Me Both (1983)

With Andy Bell (Erasure):
Wonderland (1986)
The Circus (1987)
The Two-Ring Circus (remixes and live-cuts, 1987)
The Innocents (1988)
Wild! (1989)
Chorus (1991)

Singles

With Depeche Mode:
Dreaming Of Me (1981)
New Life (1981)
Just Can't Get Enough (1981)
See You (1982)

With Alison Moyet (Yazoo):
Only You (1982)
Don't Go (1982)
The Other Side Of Love (1982)
Nobody's Diary (1983)
Situation (re-released B-side of Only You, 1990)

With Eric Radcliffe/Feargal Sharkey (The Assembly):
Never Never (1983)

With Eric Radcliffe/Paul Quinn (The Assembly):
One Day (1985)

With Andy Bell (Erasure):
Who Needs Love Like That (1985)
Sometimes (1986)
It Doesn't Have To Be (1987)
Victim Of Love (1987)
The Circus (1987)
Ship Of Fools (1988)
Chains Of Love (1988)
A Little Respect (1988)
Crackers International (EP, 1988) inc. Stop/The Hardest Part/Knocking On Your Door/She Won't Be Home
Drama! (1989)
You Surround Me (1989)
Blue Savannah (1990)
Star (1990)
Chorus (1991)
Love To Hate You (1991)
Am I Right? (1991)
Abba-esque (EP, 1992) inc. Take A Chance On Me/SOS/Voulez-Vous?/Lay All Your Love On Me

creative, for me. Actually generating sounds is more interesting to do – more satisfying.

"Martyn was really into looping, but we didn't do it. A couple of times we copied loops, using synthesizers, which was quite funny. We'd find out what the elements of the loop were, the timings, and we'd re-create it. Not copying the sounds; we'd create our own sounds, but creating those rhythms from the loop. We also decided we wouldn't have any chords on the album, either – nothing like that! This.." he points to the Mini-Moog... "plays monophonically, so it was a matter of using monophonic lines to create chords, using different sounds for every note, if we wanted a chord. But we didn't even want the sound of a chord. It was just melodies; you build things up, starting from the bass, and work up the scale.

"It was recorded on Sony digital 48-track, but that was a bit of a compromise, really. Because we were using analogue equipment, we felt that we'd start losing some frequencies if we were to play stuff over and over again onto analogue tape. It seemed like a good mix, the analogue synths and the digital tape recorder: perfect reproduction. We didn't record anything with any effects; we tried to set the songs up with rhythmic things first, all the lines, the whole caboodle playing the sounds. Obviously, you can't save the sounds, so we'd get all the arrangements right and then convert the information to CV Gate, and then record."

Only Vince Clarke could describe 48 tracks as a compromise, but there was one other underlying motivation for this remarkable use of a digital multitrack as a kind of read-only storage medium for analogue sequences... "The reason I wanted to do this was actually the timing discrepancies you get with MIDI, which are really bad. I came to the conclusion that there hasn't been an album recorded in five years that's been in time. Although you can get it quite close with MIDI, as you build up tracks everything becomes a tiny bit out, and you get a mush. We even started using an oscilloscope to compare timings, and with the MC-4 the timimg was so close that, with the bass drum on one track, and a snare on the same beat, the snare would disappear behind it; it would not be visible on the 'scope."

Of course, the sequencing procedures all had to be recreated when the time came to hit the road. "I've never got into the habit of using the same sequences over and over again. Like with this tour, I always like to use different sounds, different methods. It took me a long time to program for the tour, longer than I've ever spent; in fact it took longer to do than the album! I do enjoy working up sounds, though; more when we're recording than for tours, because for tours you've done the work already.

"But in the studio, me and Martyn will have competitions to see who can do the most complicated patch. What I've found, using this limited amount of gear, is that it's amazing how much you can do with the stuff; the effects that you can get, without necessarily having... well, put it this way, I've only got six synthesizers to play it with, so you have to get the most out of them. For instance, you can do real good tricks with the Oberheim Expander; you can make one sound become like four sounds really easily. And you can modulate anything, so I can start one line with a hard attack, and it's a bass sound, and then it goes into a shrill sound with a slow attack for the next section. All sorts of tricks. And using velocity really helps as well... helps the groove of the music we're doing.

"You get to know each synth really well, and discover not its limitations but its lack of limitations. Two years ago I read your magazine and bought everything that was new, but I just don't buy new stuff now. I'm really getting into this old stuff. It's real antiques for me, now."

This is not, necessarily, a sign of any waning of the influence of the hi-tec powers that be, as Vince readily admits. "The hi-tech bubble will never burst, not unless Roland or someone decides they want to make less money, and they're not going to do that, are they? Take these special tapes, right?" He picks up one of the cassettes on which the night's sequences are stored. "These are about twelve years old – not very hi-tech, with this groove carved into them which tells if you're on the A-side or the B-side – so we call up Roland and say we need 60 of these tapes. Now, they haven't sold any for 12 years which meant they had to dig around the warehouse, and then they said 'we can't supply these, they're twelve years old'. So we said 'look, twelve years ago we bought an MC-4 in good faith; where's the after-sales-service?!' So they had to find some in the warehouse, and they did!"

Which just goes to show, even if you adopt a low-tech stance you're still at the mercy of hi-tech manufacturers. But the laws of supply and demand seemed to work in Erasure's favour later that evening, as Vince, his tank, Andy Bell, two backing singers and a troupe of dancers supplied the kind of Carry-On Pop entertainment that a packed Hammersmith Odeon clearly demands of a Friday night. The last thing Vince says as I leave, in fact, is a simple "enjoy the show." And I did. Especially the Abba bits. ■

The 1992 Music Technology *Readership Survey* and Yamaha Competition

Notice anything about this issue of MT? It looks a little different, n'est ce pas? It also feels quite a bit thicker – that's down to the extra pages we've added and the better quality paper. Over the coming months you're likely to find a series of changes being introduced to the magazine – changes which affect its editorial content, as well as its layout.

To make those changes (without altering those aspects of the magazine best left alone) we need your help. With a few pointers from you, we can far more accurately guage reaction to the magazine and from this determine its direction in the months to come. Of course, Readership Surveys are traditionally pretty tedious things to have to complete, so to make life that bit more bearable we decided to offer a little incentive – the chance to win a superb new synth from Yamaha – worth £1400.

The SY85, is literally just off the production line and promising to make a name for itself as one of Yamaha's new generation of AWM synths with improved punch and power in performance.

In addition to enhanced sound quality, the SY85 features 'Quick Edit' modes that provide fast, easy access to the most important voice and performance editing jobs, so you can customise your sound without having to worry too much about the details. Of course, you still have full programming power when you want to do some serious voicing, and for on-stage expression the SY85 also features a sophisticated real-time control system that lets you modify up to eight different parameters as you play.

In addition to six megabytes of onboard ROM to store the SY85's array of high-quality samples, there's an additional 512 Kbytes of waveform RAM that can be used to load samples from external sources. And there's space for an additional 3 Mbytes of RAM for increased sample capacity – should you need it. There's also a built-in 3.5" disk drive and a full-featured sequencer that allows the SY85 to function as a complete music workstation.

All in all, a monster synth – and a highly desirable prize. Your task, should you decide to accept it, is to complete the questionaire over the next couple of pages, answer three dead easy questions, fill in your name and address – and that's it. For the cost of a stamp and few minutes of your time you get chance to win this superb machine.

Our thanks must, of course, go to the kind people at Yamaha UK for their donation of this prize – it must rank as one of the most desirable prizes we've ever given away at Music Technology. Claim your chance to win it now!

1) What do the initials AWM stand for?

....

2) Which Yamaha instrument slots into Novation's MM10 keyboard?

....

3) How many songs are there on the RY10?

....

»

Occupation: ....

Age: ....

Sex: M ....☐ F ....☐

1) Net disposable income at present. (Absolute confidentiality guaranteed)

- £6000 or less ....☐
- £6000-10,000..................☐
- £10,000 - £20,000..................☐
- £20,000 or over ....☐

2) How many issues of MT do you buy per year?

- 12 ....☐
- 10-11..................☐
- 7-9..................☐
- 4-6..................☐
- 1-3..................☐

3) How do you obtain MT?

- Subscription ....☐
- From newsagent ....☐
- Read someone else's copy ....☐

4) On those occasions when you decide not to buy MT, what is your reason?

....

....

....

5) How many other people will read your copy of MT?

- None..................☐
- One ....☐
- Two..................☐
- Three ....☐
- Four or more..................☐

6) Which other magazines do you read, and how often?

- Home & Studio Recording..................☐
- Sound On Sound..................☐
- Making Music ....☐
- Mix ....☐
- Guitarist..................☐
- Music Mart..................☐
- Rhythm ....☐
- Melody Maker..................☐
- Studio Sound..................☐
- Audio Media ....☐
- Pro Sound News ....☐
- Keyboard Review..................☐

Other(s) (please list)

....

....

7) What is your status within the music business?

- Professional ....☐
- Semi-professional ....☐
- Amateur ....☐

8) What equipment do you currently own? (State which)

None..................☐

Piano ....☐

....

Keyboard synth(s) ....☐

....

Synth modules(s)..................☐

....

Controller keyboard ....☐

....

Sampler ....☐

....

Drum machine ....☐

....

Hardware sequencer ....☐

....

Computer ....☐

....

Software sequencer ....☐

....

Other software ....☐

....

Effects processor(s)..................☐

....

Reel-to-reel multitrack recorder..................☐

....

Cassette multitrack recorder ....☐

....

DAT machine ....☐

....

8) How much are your equipment purchases influenced by the adverts in MT?

- Very much ....☐
- Partially..................☐
- Not at all..................☐

9) How much are your equipment purchases influenced by the reviews in MT?

Very much .... ☐
Partially .... ☐
Not at all .... ☐

10) How much money did you spend on equipment in the past year?

Less that £500 .... ☐
£500 – £1000 .... ☐
£1000 – £2000 .... ☐
£2000 – £3000 .... ☐
£3000 – £4000 .... ☐
More than £4000 .... ☐

11) How much do you anticipate spending in the next year?

Less that £500 .... ☐
£500 – £1000 .... ☐
£1000 – £3000 .... ☐
£3000 – £5000 .... ☐
£5000 – £10,000 .... ☐
More than £10,000 .... ☐

12) What is the next item of equipment you plan to buy?

....

....

13) Where do you normally purchase your audio and musical equipment?

From a music store (local) .... ☐
From a music store (non-local) .... ☐
Via mail order .... ☐

14) If you are a musician, please state what is your principal instrument

....

What are your secondary instruments?

....

....

15) Do you regularly attend music and audio shows? Please state which.

....

16) How do you rate the following items in MT?

	Good	Average	Poor
Reviews	☐	☐	☐
Interviews	☐	☐	☐
Techniques & Features	☐	☐	☐
Demotakes	☐	☐	☐
Communique	☐	☐	☐
Newsdesk	☐	☐	☐
Editorial	☐	☐	☐

17) What do you like best about MT?

....

....

....

18) What would you like to see more of in MT?

....

....

....

19) What would you like to see less of in MT?

....

....

....

20) In no more than thirty words, please give your overall assessment of the magazine.

....

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If you wish to be entered into the competition draw, please fill in your name and address below:

....

....

....

....

Postcode .... Tel ....

And that's it. Anyone who has filled in their name and address and answered the competition questions will automatically be entered into the draw. All information included will be treated in the strictest confidence, and names and addresses will not be passed on to any third party.

The competition winner will be announced on 1st September 1992 – the Editor's decision (as usual) is final.

A

READERSHIP SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS:

Fold at 1 and 2, tuck A into B so that our address appears on the front and your address at the back and post. Don't forget to complete the form first.

Fold 1

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Music Technology Magazine,
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Alexander House,
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Ely,
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Fold 2

From ....

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....

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Postcode ....Age.........................

Phone Number ....

B

Peavey SP Sample Playback Synthesiser

Looking for your first sampler or aiming to expand an existing sampling setup? Simon Trask gives you the latest SP from Peavey...

The sample replay unit isn't a new concept. Back in 1987, Oberheim introduced the DPX1, a rack-mount unit which could read the samples and program data from Ensoniq Mirage, Prophet 2000 and Emulator II disks, as well as samples in via MIDI in Sample Dump Standard format. More recently, SDS has become the standard means of transferring samples into the small but growing number of synths which include onboard sample RAM alongside the inevitable sample ROM.

Easily the most affordable of these synths at £1499 is Peavey's DPM3 SE Plus, which comes fitted with 512K of battery-backed sample RAM upgradeable to 1Mb. Samples loaded into the DPM3's RAM can be looped, trimmed and combined into multisamples, which can, in turn, be assigned to the synth's oscillators. In a commendable move last year, the company introduced an inexpensive mono 16-bit sampling module, the SX (reviewed in MT August '91), to act as a sampling 'front end' for the DPM3's sample playback capabilities.

At a little over £300, the SX represents a convenient and affordable way of getting your own samples into the DPM3, the DPM V3 rack-mount, or any instrument which can read samples in SDS format. It's also extremely easy to use – in fact, you could hardly wish for a friendlier, more straightforward introduction to sampling.

But of course, no-one would argue that the SX/DPM combination seriously rivals the power and flexibility of a dedicated sampler. So, having established the concept of separating sampling and sample playback into two discrete units, Peavey have produced another partner for the SX, one which puts the company into serious contention in the sampler market – despite the fact that they've chosen to call it a Sample Playback Synthesiser.

The 'synthesiser' tag is intended to highlight the SP's ability to offer more than simple replay of samples – it can, in fact, process them through its own integral, full-function synthesis section. However, the SP's approach to combining samples and synthesis in this way is very different to that of the DPM3 – as we shall see...

The combination of SX and SP makes for a powerful, flexible and very competitively priced self-contained sampling setup at £1228. At the same time, as a playback-only unit the SP is potentially a useful addition to an existing sampler – again very attractively priced at £899.

The SP's onboard sample RAM (2Mb as standard, upgradeable to 32Mb) can hold up to 200 Waves, 200 Tones, 128 Maps, 128 Presets and 16 Multis – collectively known as a Bank. You can store one Bank per floppy disk, and multiple Banks on a mass storage device such as a hard disk; loading in a new Bank can completely change the configuration of the SP.

So what do all the above terms mean? Well, Waves comprise the raw sample data, Tones are Waves routed through the SP's various synthesis functions, Maps are Tones mapped across the MIDI note range in multiple Zones, Presets allow you to layer and crossfade between two Maps and are assignable to individual MIDI channels, and Multis are MIDI multitimbral assignments of Presets to up to 16 MIDI channels.

The SP is 16-voice polyphonic and dynamically allocates its voices across the active Parts when in Multi mode. In addition, it can make use of up to eight Groups to define voice allocation priorities for different musical parts. Each Zone within a Map can be assigned to one of these Groups, while within a Preset you can assign each Group to one of four priority levels: low, medium, high or absolute. If you wanted to guarantee that certain parts would always sound, you could assign their Zones to a particular Group and set that Group to 'absolute' priority.

At the Zone level you can set either 'normal' or 'exclusive' for each Group. 'Exclusive' is an extension of the feature commonly found on drum machines which allows one sound to cut short another. On the SP, two different sounds assigned to the same Group will cut one another short, but repeated notes will use different voices providing the Group's polyphony is set to more than one voice. So, for instance, you could have repeated open hi-hat notes overlapping one another, but cut the open hi-hat short with a closed hi-hat. It's a subtle feature which typifies the kind of thought that has gone into the SP.

Although the SP has been fitted with a high density (1.44Mb) 3.5" floppy disk drive, you'll soon find yourself having to save samples across two disks with just the standard memory. You'll probably find that after upgrading the memory it'll be time to think about adding a fixed or a removable hard disk or even a magneto-optical drive for mass storage. This can be hooked up to the SP via one of the SCSI ports on its rear panel; alternatively, DAC sell an 80Mb hard drive which can actually fit inside the SP's 1U 19" casing.

One potential disadvantage of splitting sampling and sample playback across different units is the time needed to transfer samples between them. Sample transfer via MIDI is a notoriously slow business, and simply impractical once you start talking megabytes. Peavey needed a fast medium for data transfer between SX and SP, and they found it in the SCSI buss. SCSI is a parallel buss which is specifically intended for transferring large amounts of data as quickly as possible. Typically, it is used to link up computers, hard disks, CD ROM drives and the like.

"Having established the concept of separating sampling and sample playback into two discrete units, Peavey have produced another partner for the SX, one which puts the company into serious contention in the sampler market"

The SP comes with two SCSI ports fitted as standard on its rear panel, while the SX can be upgraded with an SCSI port for £40; an SCSI lead (25-pin male to male) to link up the two units will set you back in the region of £20. However, it's well worth the extra; for example, a MIDI SDS dump of the full default SX memory (128kword) takes two minutes 25 seconds with handshaking (MIDI cables connected in both directions), but a mere four seconds via SCSI! And you wouldn't even want to think about SDS transfer without handshaking (...would you believe five and a half minutes?).

Clearly, MIDI transfer just isn't viable when you're routinely passing samples between the SX and the SP. As it is, MIDI SDS sample transfer into the SP has been implemented, but you can't transmit samples from the SP via MIDI, only via SMDI. SCSI transfer of samples isn't unique to Peavey, but the protocol they've used is. Basically, the company have developed their own protocol called SMDI, or SCSI Musical Data Interchange, which allows sample data to be transferred via SCSI in MIDI SDS format.

So far, apart from Peavey themselves only Kurzweil have adopted SMDI, on the K2000, though it's rumoured that Ensoniq are considering implementing it. However, as a 'standard' it has (so far) got precisely nowhere – with no proposal having been put before the MMA for consideration as of writing. But one thing's for sure: rapid sample transfer between instruments and between software and instruments is highly desirable, and MIDI's modest baud rate is never going to deliver it.

The SP's Util mode allows you to set up SMDI communication between SP and SX by setting an appropriate SMDI Slave Device SCSI ID. You can then call up screens which tell you the current SX firmware version and the amount of memory installed in the sampling module, and set the sample rate (continuously variable from 12-48kHz) and sample length to be used by the SX. Other screens let you see a bargraph representation of the signal level appearing at the SX's audio input, read a sample clip count once you've taken a sample, select a destination Wave number and remotely initiate sample transfer from SX to SP. You can also send a Wave out via SCSI to the SX (or whichever SCSI device you've defined as the slave).

The process of sampling on the SX and getting the samples into the SP's Wave locations is incredibly easy, so long as you've got your SCSI connections right. In fact, you ▶▶

Memory Options

As far as memory is concerned, there's good and there's bad news. The good news is that SP, like the SX, uses inexpensive SIMM chips for its onboard sample RAM. The bad news is that you lose the contents of memory each time you switch the machine off. The SP has eight memory slots, so if you want to take advantage of the full 32Mb memory you'll have to fit eight 4Mb SIMMS. Unlike the SX, which lets you mix 1Mb and 4Mb chips, the SP must be fitted with one or the other. Consequently, if you want more than 8Mb you'll have to upgrade in 4Mb steps, and start by removing the standard 2Mb – which you can move across to an SX if you're using one, so it needn't go to waste.

The SP and SX both use readily available Mac SIMMS (the type used in the older Macs, apparently). Peavey UK deal with Mr SIMMs and Memory Direct, apparently. SIMM chips have been getting steadily cheaper and cheaper, and with 1MB SIMMs costing around £30 and 4Mb SIMMs around £120 including VAT. In fact this is actually a good time to be upgrading memory – even if upgrading the SP to 32Mb will actually cost you more than the instrument itself.

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could almost believe that the SX and SP are one instrument.

The name SCSI Musical Data Interchange hints at a wider application than just sample transfer, but it's unlikely that it will become a kind of 'fast MIDI' beyond specific applications like this. It's too expensive, too confusing, too inflexible and just not rugged enough for general musical use.

One way of avoiding MIDI and SCSI altogether is to read samples directly off floppy disk. Peavey have been a bit slow off the mark here – they're still in the process of implementing S1000 and EPS16 Plus disk reading. Ironically, DPM3 owners are doubly disadvantaged – not only are they unable to enjoy the benefits of SMDI (because the DPM has no SCSI option), but also, the SP can't read DPM disks, owing to the fact that it uses high density floppies while the DPM only uses double density.

The SP's clear front-panel layout and the logical and consistent organisation of its LCD software pages make comprehension and operation very easy. Wave, Tone, Map and Preset buttons reflect the SP's architecture, the Disk button provides ready access to all disk operations, while Global allows you to program at the Multi level, and Util governs SMDI communication.

Operationally, you use the left/right arrow buttons to move the cursor around the LCD window, and the Inc/Dec buttons and infinite rotary Data knob to select LCD pages and parameters and to edit parameter values – depending on the location of the cursor. Additionally, the 2 x 20-character backlit LCD sometimes prompts you to press the Exec button in order to drop down to another level of LCD pages or to initiate a command such as Create Tone.

In addition to the pair of SCSI sockets mentioned earlier, the SP's rear panel provides MIDI In, Out and Thru ports, a small screw (which you can turn with your thumbnail) to adjust LCD contrast, and main and sub pairs of audio outs.

Once you have a sample in a Wave location, you can dial up 16 different kinds of information about it, including type (mono or stereo), loop (forward or off), size and length, start and end locations, loop start and end locations, and sample rate. As well as providing functions for deleting, copying and naming Waves, the SP allows you to alter the sample start and end points, define loop start and end points and a loop length fraction (basically a 'fine-tuning' control for loop length), trim excess samples, set an original key for the Wave, and fine-tune it.

You can also audition any pair of Waves as a stereo sample, and get the SP to perform a stereo merge operation on them if you like what you hear. If a stereo sample has been imported into the SP as two mono samples rather than an interleaved stereo sample (as generated by generic sample editing software like Sound Designer and Alchemy), the stereo merge function provides the means of reuniting the two halves.

The SP can be set to select only zero crossing points as you scroll through a sample looking for loop points, but there are no other aids such as crossfade looping. Also, samples can only be looped in the forward direction – though apparently forward/reverse looping will be provided in the next software upgrade. One helpful feature is Wavepoint Audition, which sustains a note at original pitch while you're searching for that perfect loop.

Photos: James Cumpsty

Once you've got your sample as you want it, you can assign it to a Tone as a DCO sound source and route it through a DCF (cutoff point but no resonance) and DCA. In addition to the DCA envelope there are two freely-assignable ADSR envelopes which can be routed to the DCO, DCA and the panning module, as well as LFO modulation of DCO, DCF, DCA and panning. You can choose from eight LFO

"The combination of SX and SP is almost a marriage made in heaven – given the SP's ability to play stereo samples, it would be nice to have a stereo sampling front end as well"

waveshapes, including Grunge (!) – a noise-like waveform which can be effective at adding a touch of roughness to a sound when assigned to the DCO.

Each synthesis component can also be modulated by velocity and by an auxiliary modulation source selected from mod wheel, channel and polyphonic aftertouch, and three user-selectable MIDI continuous controllers. Always a welcome inclusion is a Wave startpoint modulation parameter, which allows the amount of attack transient on a sound to be varied in response to a modulation source – velocity is the most commonly used (eg, you could vary the amount of attack on a snare drum by how hard you hit a key), but keyboard position can also be useful.

A more unusual parameter is Wave Start Modulation Quantisation, which allows you to play different sections of a sample depending on the value of a selected control source. For instance, you could switch between different drum sounds in response to velocity strength, or play different sections of a performance loop in response to velocity or to mod wheel position.

When you have a group of Tones that you're happy with, you can progress to the Map level and assign them across the keyboard in multiple, non-overlapping Zones. This is where you set up a multi-sampled instrument or create a drumkit. Each Zone can be given its own transposition amount, volume level, pan position and output routing, and, as discussed earlier, assigned to one of eight Groups and set to either normal or exclusive mode.

The next level up, the Preset level, allows you to progress one stage further in that you can layer two Maps if you wish, and optionally switch or crossfade between them in response to one of nine control sources (keyboard position, velocity, random, modwheel, channel or polyphonic aftertouch, or one of three MIDI continuous controllers). Additionally, you can set a switch/crossfade pivot point and a crossfade region width. Beyond this you can assign up to four Maps to each of the two Layers, and switch between them using, for instance, velocity or keyboard position – so in effect you can switch between up to eight different samples.

Other Layer-specific parameters include Transposition, Detune Amount, Pitchbend Range, Output Assignment, Pan Position, Volume Offset, Filter Cutoff Offset, DCF and DCA Velocity Sensitivity, DCF Envelope Amount Offset and DCO Mod Range. And you don't need me to tell you that's a lot of parameters and a lot of flexibility.

Finally, you can assign Presets to MIDI channels at the Multi level. The SP can be set to Omni, Poly or Multi response. When in Multi mode, Presets can be assigned to all 16 MIDI channels; also, if there are certain channels you don't want to use because other instruments are assigned to them, you can disable the SP's response on those channels. As mentioned earlier, you can assign a priority voice allocation level to each one of eight Groups as a means of ensuring that some musical parts have voices stolen from them before others – while others never have voices stolen from them at all.

Don't be fooled by its sample playback role, it's modest dimensions or its modest asking price – the SP is an impressively powerful and versatile instrument with plenty of depth and detail. You're unlikely to exhaust its potential in a hurry. This is an instrument to be explored and absorbed gradually. At the same time, I found I was able to get into the basic structuring, from Waves through to Multis, with great ease.

I would like to see more help provided for sample looping, and the addition of timestretching (...apparently this feature is already planned), though if programs like Sound Designer and Alchemy adopt SMDI there's always the option of graphically-based sampled editing away from the SP.

The combination of SX and SP with SMDI communication via SCSI is almost a marriage made in heaven – given the SP's ability to play stereo samples, it would be nice to have a stereo sampling 'front end' as well. As for the viability of the SP as a stand-alone sample playback instrument complementing an existing sampler such as an Akai S1000 and drawing on an existing sample library, a lot depends on SMDI's broader acceptance – plus, of course, the SP's ability or otherwise to read samples directly off disk.

Peavey have placed themselves firmly on the hi-tech map once again. ■

Prices:
Peavey SP £899
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novation

Voice Crystal Merger Plus MIDI Merge Box

Photo: James Cumpsty

Review by Vic Lennard

FACT: MIDI data comprises various commands, most of which require more than a single byte.
PROBLEM: Mixing together two streams of MIDI data cannot be achieved by simply interlacing the bytes involved.
RESULT: All bytes for a particular message must be kept together.
SOLUTION: A MIDI merger must be an intelligent device with an internal processor capable of preserving the independance of data streams – hence the price tag.

There are various scenarios which call for the use of a MIDI merger. In the case of live performance, for example, you may wish to use two keyboards or a keyboard and a sequencer which are sharing common sound modules. In the studio, you might find it necessary to edit tones on a sound module while also playing it from a keyboard. Alternatively, you may wish to merge sync data with other MIDI data when using SMPTE to MIDI Time Code or FSK to MIDI Clock converters which do not have a merge option built in. In fact, the more you think about it the more indispensible a MIDI merge box seems to become.

A few years ago, a Canadian company called Anatek bought out a range of MIDI gadgets called 'Pocket' products. Amongst them was a small two-into-one merger which, like the other devices in the range, derived its power from the voltage carried in the MIDI line. Taking their lead from this earlier product, Eye & I Productions of the USA have just brought out a similar device, called the Voice Crystal Merger Plus which feeds two inputs (IN1 & IN2) into a single output. It's a compact little unit measuring approximately, 8 x 6 x 3cm, and has a Reset button and an LED which is usually on but turns off when MIDI data is being processed.

Reflecting its simple design, the Merger Plus is quite straightforward in use and will happily merge two streams of MIDI note information without any audible delays. Indeed, on testing, the delay between a MIDI note at the input and its arrival at the output was found to be in the 15-30 micro-second range – which is quite inaudible. The Merger Plus transmits all data under Running Status which, for the uninitiated, is an effective data compression system included in the MIDI Specification.

Tests with System Exclusive (SysEx) data also went well – at least to begin with. 200kbyte samples from an Akai S900 were passed through the Merger without problem as were Bulk Dumps to a Roland D-550 and U-220. However, the data from some devices was corrupted during transmission and it appears that this may be down to the speed of transfer. The MIDI Specification allows for a +/- 1% error on transmission speed and it seems that Merger Plus may have problems dealing with the upper limit of this.

SysEx does not allow for the merging of any MIDI information with the exception of System Real Time data such as MIDI Clock, Start, Stop Active Sensing – and so on. Consequently, it is imperative that a MIDI merger should prevent such data mixing from occurring. Interestingly, when faced with this test, the Merger Plus presented no problems providing the SysEx was sent to IN1 and any other data to IN2. Under these conditions the SysEx passed through while the other data was effectively locked out. However, when the SysEx data was sent to IN2 and other data to IN1, the data at IN1 interfered with the SysEx causing the message to be aborted. This occurred with a variety of different MIDI devices.

Being a sealed unit, it was impossible to look inside the Merger Plus, but by using a meter I was able to discover that IN1 and IN2 are electrically different. It would appear that IN1 uses a hardware Universal Asynchronous Receiver Transmitter (UART), standard to most MIDI interfaces, while IN2 is software-based. As such, IN2 appears inherently 'weaker' than IN1 and this may be responsible for the corruption of SysEx data when presented to IN2.

On a more positive note, the Reset button is a most welcome addition. The Anatek unit definitely suffered in this respect; to reset it you had to disconnect the MIDI lead to input 1. On the Merger Plus, pressing Reset causes the transmission of All Notes Off and Sustain Pedal Off messages followed by Individual Notes Off on all 16 MIDI channels – a total of 4,192 bytes.

Not nearly so welcome is the fact that the Merger Plus merges *everything* which arrives at the two MIDI inputs – including Active Sensing and MIDI Clock. Merging two streams of Active Sensing is nonsensical – it simply clogs the MIDI output stream (filtering at input would have been better), while merging MIDI Clocks would lead to an approximate addition of the tempos of the two transmitting devices. Many drum machines continuously output MIDI Clock and depending on the positioning of such a drum machine and a sequencer relative to the merger, problems could occur. I feel that the system used by Philip Rees on the 2M merger is far better. Here, whichever MIDI input receives MIDI Clock first locks out such data from the other input.

In other aspects too, the 2M comes out as the better unit – in fact it's virtually transparent in use. That said, at £79.95 it is even more expensive than the Merger Plus, and it does rely on an internal psu – and hence, a mains cable and the inconvenience of yet another plug to find a socket for. In this respect, Merger Plus is far easier to live with, particularly for live musicians who simply want a small box to connect into their system. For the studio, I have some reservations but these are unlikely to pose a problem in normal use. It's really up to you to decide what you need from a MIDI merger. ■

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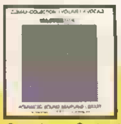

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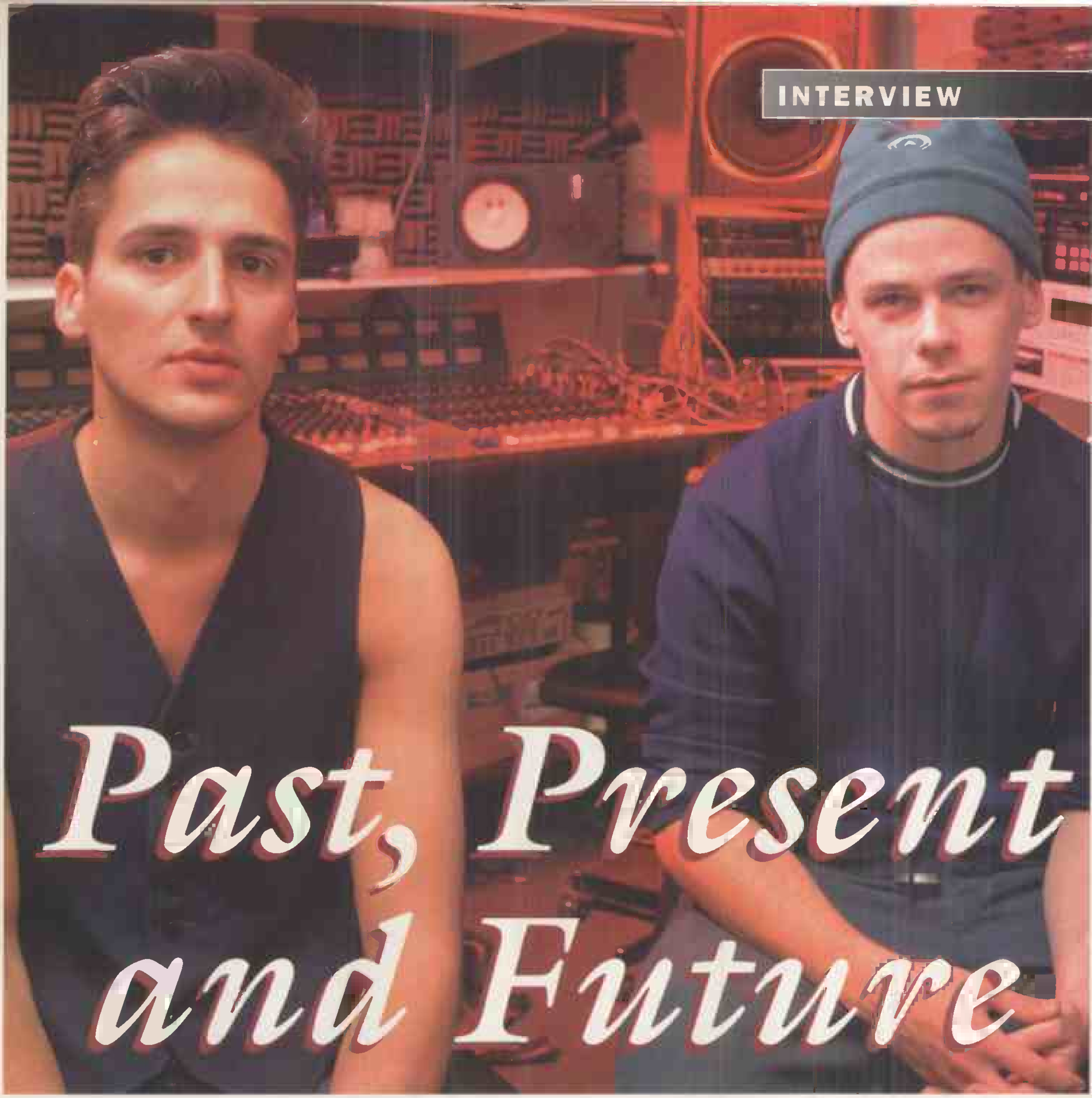


Photos: James Cumpsty

Past, Present and Future

We say: *The Future Sound of London are making some of the most creative dance music currently around.*

They say: *Just don't call it dance...*

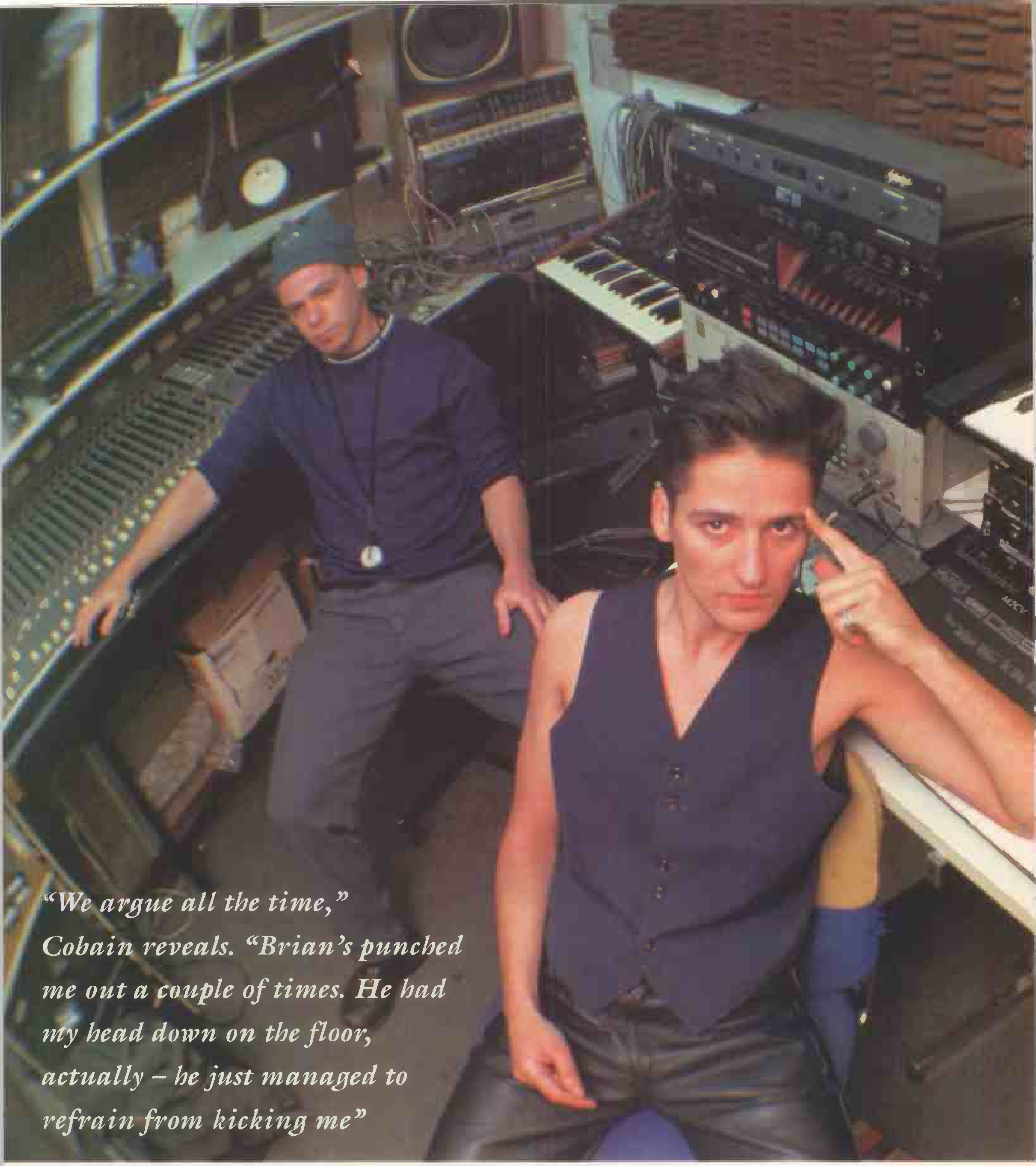
Text by Simon Trask

Somewhere along the line it all went horribly wrong. Dance music went commercial and a lot of people discovered that, just like any other type of music, they could make big bucks out of it by playing safe and sticking to a formula. Listening to the national charts, you could be forgiven for thinking there was nothing of interest going on in dance music (*or any other kind of music for that matter – Ed*); that the experimental cutting edge had been terminally blunted by the allure of commercial success.

But of course, the coalface work can only ever be done in its natural habitat: underground. Only after it's been filtered and sieved and generally watered down for commercial consumption does it see the light of day in the mainstream charts – usually on records made by imitators rather than originators.

Occasionally, however, a message from the underground surfaces and finds its way into the national charts, becoming one of those periodic 'unlikely' hits. Such a record was the recent Future Sound of London's single 'Papua New Guinea', a spacey and strangely organic wash of ambient atmospherics, haunting wordless vocals, shuffling dance beats and almost subliminal dubwise bass which reached the number 22 chart slot.

Following its success, came The Future Sound of London's debut album *Accelerator*, a diverse and equally experimental melange of instrumental ▶▶



"We argue all the time," Cobain reveals. "Brian's punched me out a couple of times. He had my head down on the floor, actually – he just managed to refrain from kicking me"

tracks that went straight into the album charts at number 75 on its first week of release. So who the hell are The Future Sound of London? You'd be none the wiser for having seen their Top Of The Pops appearance – unless you really thought that the two vocalists had come up with the music.

The real Future Sound are in fact Gary Cobain and Brian Dougans, a production duo who work out of their own small studio, Earthbeat, situated incongruously in a quiet, leafy north London suburb as part of an 'artistic enclave' which includes a second, even smaller recording studio, a rehearsal studio and – significantly, it turns out – a pool room.

Settling down to chat in their studio, Cobain and Dougans explain that using vocalists for the Top Of The Pops appearance wasn't their idea.

"We couldn't use the vocal samples in the track, because all vocals on the show have to be live," recalls Cobain. "So, we had to get in a male singer and a female singer to sing the sample parts, but then the engineer saw two front people, took it as a band and mixed the vocals far too loud – even though we asked him not to. Also, the cameras were on the front people all the time – we didn't even get our faces on TV!"

Using singers to provide a visual focus is one thing, but making them the aural focus as well represents a misconception of what Cobain and Dougans set out to achieve in their music.

"The way we work, our vocal parts are in the backing rather than soaring

becoming attuned to listening to small bits of music that you like," opines Cobain. "I learnt to work in that way when I was using my first sampler, an Akai S612, because it didn't have much memory and you could only play one sample at a time. The problem with conventional songwriting is that a lot of lyricists, because they're so hooked on the verse-chorus format of writing a song, actually miss the finer points of what they're writing, there are perhaps some beautiful bits which if they're accentuated could be used far more effectively. Just by taking bits of vocals into the sampler, they take on a new meaning, a new life. The whole sound of the sample world is different. I love it."

Cobain and Dougans have been working together since the mid-eighties, having met through working in the same nightclub in Manchester. Their first commercial work together was composing some jingles and idents for MTV – a commission which came about through their involvement with the Manchester-based Stakker video production team. This work led to a commission to provide the soundtrack to Stakker's visuals for a 30-minute audio-visual program.

Their mix of music and visuals took a different turn at the tail end of 1988, in the form of a pioneering hardcore dance single and accompanying video, 'Humanoid', released under the name Stakker, which reached number 18 in the national charts. At this point Dougans was working alone on the music, but he and Cobain teamed up again during the recording of the follow-up *Stakker* album in London, and they've remained together ever since.

"Brian tends to be quite quiet if people are forcing ideas on him, he withdraws into himself," says Cobain of his partner, "and when he was recording the Stakker album there were a lot of forceful people around him who were basically talentless. Because we'd worked together well before, he dragged me onboard to sign a partnership deal. I tied up the last three tracks or so with him, and then we got the hell out of that deal, because it wasn't right."

Today the duo record for the small independent label, Jumpin' and Pumpin' Records, releasing tracks under a variety of guises. In addition to their Future Sound of London work, they are also responsible for singles by Smart Systems, Mental Cube and Intelligent Communication – obscure, but essential to their experimental way of working.

Cobain: "It's kind of like we're two guys here, it's really not that interesting, but with these different names we can pretend there's a bit of a scene down here! But also, the fact that we work under different names

above it. We go for vocals that are part of the texture, as an effect in the mix, not as someone being a spokesperson for a generation. I'm a bit tired of that front-person type of thing, really. I find that messages written in a conventional song structure tend to be quite trite after a while, whereas a voice which isn't actually saying anything but just conveys emotion has more of a longstanding effect for me."

What's more, the MU-instigated ruling on vocals for Top Of The Pops becomes harder to justify in Future Sounds' case, because they often pay session vocalists to improvise over backing tracks, then sample the bits they like and often use them in completely different tracks.

"I think the beauty about the sampling world is that you're basically allows us to assimilate styles from other people. We're not closed to learning from people, we don't think that we're better or worse than anybody. We learn from everybody, within the dance field, outside the dance field – anywhere. Basically, those other names enable us to research the way that other people are putting tracks together. Then eventually we come up with this glorious mix of all our research."

Of course, in order to release tracks under so many names they had to make sure that they had the contractual freedom to do so in the first place.

"We never sign anything long-term, or anything that doesn't allow us total freedom over what we put out," says Cobain, "because in order to get these innovative tracks we have to have the freedom to put out experimental stuff which will probably only sell 3000 copies. Actually, in today's musical context it's almost bizarrely commercial to do something completely way out, because then it stands a chance above all the muck coming out that's formularising dance music and preventing it from going forward. There is amazing stuff within dance that's advancing the music, but it's released on 500 copies or whatever."

"Just by taking bits of vocals into the sampler, they take on a new meaning, a new life. The whole sound of the sample world is different. I love it"

Cobain and Dougans set up Earthbeat two years ago in order to have a 'proper' place to work. Before that, they were working at Dougans' house – a not altogether ideal arrangement, as it turned out.

"During the day we'd start on a track, then I'd go home and Brian would carry on working on it," recalls Cobain."So I'd come back the next morning wanting to work on the track where we'd left off, and find that he'd finished it and moved on to another!"

"The other reason was that you get out of your bed in the morning and there's no desire to do anything, 'cos the studio's in your house," adds Dougans. "This is a good place to travel to. It feels more realistic, more responsible or something. I prefer it."

"But still we only work when we feel invigorated to work, and when we don't we go and shoot pool or do something else," adds Cobain. "When we first set this place up and we combined our gear, it was almost like stripping in front of a lover for the first time. We'd each invite the other person to perform on the keyboard, and we got to this awful stage where we were both just sitting back and doing nothing, like we were frightened of the keyboard. That's completely gone, we've broken down so many barriers. It is a bit like a relationship, working this close."

"Sometimes it gets a bit tense," says Dougans. "Yesterday was a bit tense. I did a bit of work on an Inner City remix, and Gaz was sitting there saying 'I don't like this direction.' Then he went off to play some pool, so I just switched everything off. It was like 'fuck you!'"

"We argue all the time," Cobain reveals. "Brian's punched me out a couple of times. He had my head down on the floor, actually – he just managed to refrain from kicking me!"

"That's what happens," admits Dougans. "Sometimes it goes well, other times it's quite heated!"

Cobain elaborates on the less violent aspects of the duo's working methods:

"One of us has got some key source sounds that we're interested in, and the other person backs off and works around them to the best of their ability – but generally takes the piss and tries to undermine the other person's confidence in what they're doing, make them question it. Obviously at a certain point each of us comes to the edge of our ability and it's become a Brian track or a Gary track. At that point the other person comes in and adds their bit."

"Or goes up to the pool room instead in order to make a statement!" adds Dougans.

Cobain: "Yeah, going upstairs to play pool by yourself is our subtle way of saying 'this really isn't happening.'"

More subtle than punching someone out, anyway...

"The good thing is we always question what we do," says Cobain. "We don't think that because we've had some success whatever we do is automatically great. We question everything. And although we pretend every other day that the other person's opinion is becoming increasingly less important, in reality it's the reverse. We're very tuned in, it's like Siamese heads where music's concerned."

Although they've moved out of the home studio environment, Cobain and Dougans don't necessarily agree with the oft-made criticism that home studios encourage musicians to work in isolation.

"It depends what level someone's at," Dougans says. "We each had to go through a certain amount of apprenticeship with sound and so on."

"Yeah, you need to do that by yourself, there's nobody else you can do that with," agrees Cobain. "You have to get your own equipment into your own house and just do your apprenticeship completely isolated. We've both done that, and now we've transcended that stage, but still we each need to work alone sometimes – our individual discovery sessions are really important to us. The best tracks have elements of both of us, though. I'm fairly melodic in the way that I work, and Brian is prepared to spend that extra time on the desk getting the sound right."

"I'll tell you what it boils down to," adds Dougans. "Gaz is good at writing tunes but he doesn't choose his sounds properly, and I think that's what I'm good at, choosing sounds that work together."

"Every time we write a track we try and approach it from a new angle, like we use different drum sounds," says Cobain. "There's a beauty in using the same drum kit and researching it thoroughly, but for me I prefer to use different sounds every time I write a track, try to push the boundaries of what we do."

EQUIPMENT LIST

Instruments

Akai S612 Sampler + MD280 Disk Drive
Akai S900 Sampler
Akai S1000 Sampler w/8Mb memory
E-mu Proteus/1 w/Protologic board
Jen SX1000 Synth
Roland D110 Synth Module
Roland JX3P Synth
Roland MC202 Monosynth
Roland MKS50 Synth Module + PG300 Programmer
Roland TB303 Bass Synth
Roland TR606 Drum Machine
Yamaha DS55 Synth
Yamaha TX81Z

Effects

Alesis Quadraverb (x2)
Alesis MIDIverb II
BBE 422A Sonic Maximiser
Bel Electronics BD80 Digital Delay
Drawmer DS201 Dual Gate
Fostex 3070 Compressor/Limiter
Ibanez DM1100 Digital Delay
Korg DRV1000 Digital Reverb
Yamaha SPX90 Multi-effects Processor

Recording

Aiwa HDX1 DAT Recorder
Atari 1040ST Computer w/C-Lab Creator software
Fostex B16 Multitrack
Groove MC2V MIDI/CV Converter
Korg KMS30 Sync Unit
Nakamichi 480Z Cassette Deck
Sony DTC1000ES DAT Recorder
Soundtracs CM4400 Mixing Desk
Technics SL1200 Mk2 Turntable
Yamaha NS10M Monitors

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In accordance with their willingness to constantly experiment with different sounds, Cobain and Dougans have built up a large library of samples on DAT – more than 30 tapes' worth, in fact. They have an informal agreement with five DJs which, in exchange for studio time, ensures that they have a continuous supply of latest record releases to sample from. They've also built up a large library of sounds and effects sampled off TV and video.

"Some of the best moments in music at the moment are coming from soundtracks for documentaries, wildlife programs, that sort of thing," opines Cobain. "'Papua New Guinea' is moving in a soundtrack direction – samples, but flowing."

Part of the boundary-pushing which the duo are so interested in is about changing the way in which they work with the technology. Cobain explains that rather than simply work in short, rigid sequences on Creator they prefer to mix that approach with a much looser feel which he describes intriguingly as "freestyle 768 without a loop" – in other words, playing live continuously through a track, using no quantisation. "Playing" in this context doesn't necessarily mean playing traditional musical parts (although the frenetic staccato electric piano chording on the album track 'Stolen Documents' exemplifies this approach). Dropping in samples live is also an important way of loosening up a track's feel and getting away from the repeating, looped approach.

"We've moved away from just having that raw, clinical programming technique that ostracises thousands of people because they don't want to hear machines"

"Our sound has become more than machines, now," opines Cobain. "It's groundbreaking in the way that we're working with machines but retaining that human feel. We've moved away from just having that raw, clinical programming technique that ostracises thousands of people because they don't want to hear machines. We have a definite feel to what we do, and that comes down to having loosened up our whole computer technique. I developed a stage where I intentionally became really messy in the way that I recorded into the computer, and some really good stuff came out of it – though occasionally it just became so messy I couldn't work with it.

"We've also been going into a live mute situation on Creator, and recording all the mutes, 'cos that can give you a really weird structure. It can get quite messy, but it has something to offer. You might have written a hi-hat pattern which is quite continuous, and you can just drop-mute it at weird points, which gives it quite a scatty feel, so things are always different through the track."

Being different is a key belief for Cobain and Dougans – and they feel the dance music would be better off if more people had their attitude.

Cobain: "What's killing dance at the moment is people sampling their own market, like nicking last month's great drum break and putting a new topping over it. I don't really criticise it that much, it's just not adventurous enough for us.

"Actually, I think dance music has peaked in the way that record companies can deal with it on the existing level. It was an alternative scene that built up and now there's a tried and tested formula for breaking dance records through the clubs, and it's become tired. In a way, the whole confines of dance need to be broken down. With what we're doing, the word dance needs to go, because we're beyond dance, really. I don't mean that in a pompous way, I just don't think that what we do needs to be confined to being dance. There's possibly millions of people that would like the listening entity that we're putting together for the next album, but just by calling it 'dance' you can alienate a lot of people."

And what does the future hold for The Future Sound of London?

Cobain: "Yesterday we were talking to this very big publisher who was saying we could become this novelty production company that gives big name artists the odd weird track over which they can vocalise. I never really saw us in that kind of dimension, but in a way I could imagine giving one of our tracks to somebody and having them do vocals over it."

Allied with their interest in soundtrack music, Cobain and Dougans are also keen to get back into working in the audio-visual area.

"With Stakker we were active in both audio and video concurrently, but now we've let the video side go too much, really," says Cobain. "We'd like to be developing that side at the same rate that we're developing our sound. So I think what we're going to be doing here is knocking through the wall when the guy next door goes and setting up a U-matic edit suite. Our images should be as sophisticated as our music. ■

Steinberg Masterscore II

Review by Vic Lennard and Chris Sansom

Though forming a virtual duopoly when it comes to sequencing on the ST, even the most ardent supporters of Cubase and Notator wouldn't make any great claims about the scorewriting capabilities of either of these programs. As musical desktop publishing packages they simply don't have the necessary facilities to allow you to be able to score a piece of music of any real complexity. Such a program would allow you to place anything you wish onto a score - even in 'illegal' situations such as using five crotchets in a 4/4 bar - and dictate exactly what will be shown on the printout.

The Apple Macintosh and PC under the Windows environment both have such programs in the form of Encore and Finale from Coda - and Mark Of The Unicorn have just released Mosaic for the Mac. But on the ST front there has only really been Music DTP (which has undergone many changes over the last few years). Steinberg have previously released Masterscore, but for various reasons, it was never fully realised and they have now replaced it with a new program – Masterscore II – designed to allow you to produce a finished, professionally laid-out score.

Input for Masterscore II may be derived from Cubase/Cubeat files, MIDI Files, MIDI input or Quickstep and ASCII inputs from the ST's keyboard. A graphic toolbox, similar to that used in Cubase, gives you access to various implements and musical symbols which can then be directly placed on the score. Edit mode is used for altering musical details while Layout mode is used for the general graphic enhancement of the score. Printing to 9- and 24-pin - as well as HP Laser-compatible – printers is supported.

The program comes complete with the mandatory Steinberg dongle and three disks which include various printer drivers and fonts. Incidentally, it should be pointed out now that you'll be hard pushed to run Masterscore II on a standard 1 Meg ST. It will load, but you'll get that all-too-familiar 'Out of Memory' message the first time you try to load a file of any real size. This might be a good time to opt for that memory upgrade you've been promising yourself...

One immediate black mark against the program is the lack of any examples of scores on the disks. This certainly isn't due to lack of space – disk 3 only has a folder of fonts (...and this must have been an afterthought as only two disks are mentioned in the manual). The inclusion of a finished score would have made it possible for the newcomer to see exactly what could be achieved with the program.

On screen, Masterscore II looks much like any other GEM-based program – menu options along the top, the area beneath available as workspace. The right-hand mouse button is used to access the toolbox, in which is contained most of the incidentals for positioning on page. Also, there are graphic tools for inverting the tails of notes, changing key signatures and clef symbols – and the instantly recognisable (for Cubase/beat users) glue and eraser symbols.

As mentioned earlier, Masterscore II will accept input from the various Steinberg sequencing programs as well as MIDI Files. The setting-up procedure is the same: select the leads to the Configuration page where the tracks from the file are shown. Steinberg refer to these as 'voices' which seems rather misleading, but anyway... If a track has been derived from a Steinberg sequencer, the data can be viewed 'per part' and a split point and note on and off quantise set.

You have to remember that this is not a sequencer; all parts for a track have to be used and tracks cannot be merged – such things have to be done on the sequencer and saved as an arrangement. Before exiting the configuration, Edit Grand Staff is used. From here you can hide tracks which you do not wish to score – though you have the option of recalling them later.

Two files were used for testing MIDI File input; a set of five Guitar Quartet pieces, and a movement from a major (...and extremely complex) work-in-progress referred to as Mirrors 3. In both cases the results were on a par with any other notation program and in some aspects better. Even Finale (for the Mac) got the time signatures ▶▶

wrong in the guitar quartet. One particularly impressive feature is the absence of any stipulations about setting a number of bars per line beforehand – Masterscore works that out for itself. It also allots different amounts of space to each bar depending on the time signature and how 'busy' the music is.

There are a couple of omissions. If the music is fairly simple, 'Guess Durations' (much like Encore for the Mac) can be used to good effect and save some time. If, however, the piece is very complex with plenty of short duration notes, having a 'No Quantize' option would have been useful. With Finale, if the notes are too short to be given a time value, they are automatically turned into grace-notes rather than piling them together into chords. Masterscore does have a Micromove tool which lets you move notes sideways to separate them out, but if they've been placed simultaneously you need to know which way to move them, and you don't get a stem on the note you've moved.

The beauty of using the ASCII keyboard for inputting characters (see side-bar) is that you can type in really complex music that would be very hard to produce in any other way – such as nested tuplets. No-one really expects a notation program to interpret things like quintuplets correctly – most sequencers create tuplets (beyond triplets) by approximation. Inevitably, the scoring software reads some combination of quavers and semiquavers, with or without rests.

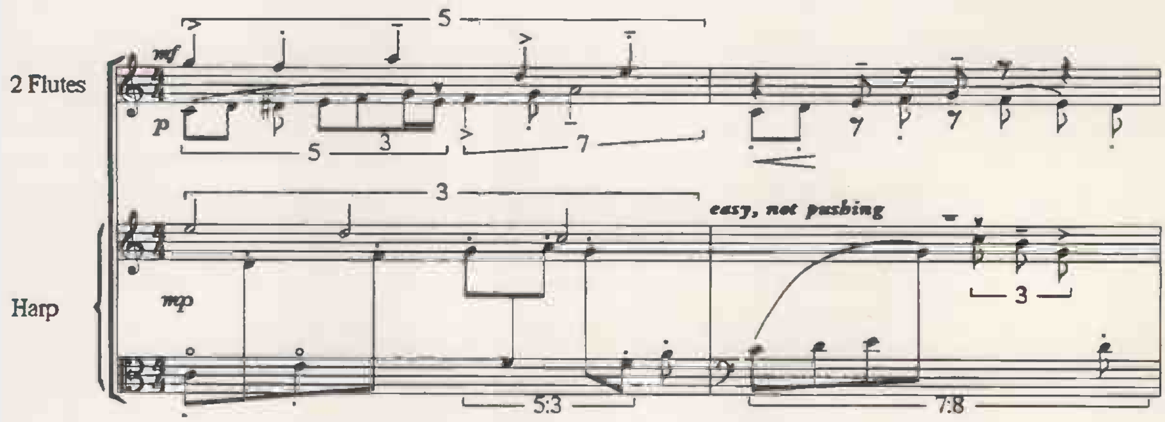
This is fair enough, and ASCII input is a beautiful way to replace these with the correct notation: you press **Control-K** to get into the ASCII window, select Replace mode, position the cursor and retype your quintuplet by putting **R5:S** before the five quavers (or whatever), and an **R-S** after. And if you want two of those five notes to be replaced by a triplet (or septuplet, for example) inside the quintuplet – you can. There is an example of this printed in the manual, and I managed to reproduce it almost perfectly.

There are two ways you can type in the notes: the European way, by using upper and lower case and tick marks or numbers; or the US way, using octave numbers with C4 as middle C. This is my only real quibble about this system: many people using it will be MIDI users who are used to middle C being C3 (with the notable exception of Roland users). Perhaps this should have been included as an option.

The other direct input mode on offer is known as Quickstep and is used in conjunction with either the MIDI keyboard or using the Atari itself as a quasi-music keyboard. In reality, 'Slowstep' would be a better name for it as it seemed to take about three times as long as ASCII. That said, it might suit some users, especially those whose lives revolve around a MIDI keyboard. It should be pointed out that use of Quickstep did result in a crash when something illogical was performed with the arrow keys. However, this prompts one of Steinberg's 'Internal Error' alerts to appear and this seems to prevent a full program crash – the files can be saved to disk and reloaded without problem.

Having entered the raw data in one form or another, on-screen manipulation can then begin. Many of the articulations and ornaments have 'hot-points' at their start and an end which you can grab and move by using the micromove tool; some also have a hot-point in the middle – such as the slur – with which you can change the height and slant.

The toolbox is pretty comprehensive, though it does lack a glissando tool (a straight line). You can more or less get away with using a slur and carefully straightening it out with the micromove tool, but it's not exactly ideal. The 'Hairpin' tool (for crescendi and diminuendi) is nice, and you can vary the angle of 'openness' to give some impression of molto or poco. Unfortunately, hairpins can only be put in horizontally: in some circumstances it can save a lot of space if you can squeeze these in at an angle between staves. Another set of tools that might have been usefully included are independent note values



Entering Notes

One of the best things about Masterscore II is its use of the ST's keyboard – you might almost call it counter-revolutionary. You quite literally type your music in: hitting **g4 8**, for example, gives you G above middle C (G4) in the form of a quaver. If you want to add a note to a chord, just leave out the time value and the note will be placed with the preceding one (you always press Return after each note or rest). Add # or b after the note letter to raise or lower it a semitone; or, for a dotted note, simply place a dot after the time value. (**16.**, for example, would form a dotted semiquaver) – with two dots used for a double dotted note. For a triplet note you'd need to add a **t**.

More complex time values can be produced, such as **4+16** which will give you a crotchet tied to a semiquaver. However, some combinations don't work, such as **4+8t**, **16+4.**, **4..+8**, and this should be made clear in the manual, but isn't. As you type in each note, or scroll up and down over what you've already written, the program, helpfully, plays the music via MIDI, through the monitor's loudspeaker – or both. After your input, click on Exit and the music duly appears in the correct place.

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(crotchets, quavers, etc) for metronome marks. Still, perhaps on the next upgrade...

In Layout mode, three kinds of frames (or boxes), can be placed on-screen via the Page Edit tool. Score frames contain the various Grand Staffs, Blank frames hide parts of the screen and Text boxes allow for free-flowing text. Clicking on a box makes it active, and box sizes can be easily altered. If lyrics need to be included with the score, these can be entered in either mode and various facilities are on offer, including, for instance, the ability to split beams to allow each syllable of a word to have its own note – and the syllables themselves to be split up and spread across several notes.

"You have to remember that this is not a sequencer; all parts for a track have to be used and tracks cannot be merged – such things have to be done on the sequencer and saved as an arrangement"

Several tool functions, including beaming and unbeaming of groups and changing stem direction, can be used either by the point-and-click method for a single change, or by dragging a box round contiguous events (like a rubber band) – even across several parts. Enharmonic changes could have been included in this so that, for example, every sharp found in the box is changed and all other notes left alone. As it is, a lot of fiddly shift-clicking is required. This is also true of the beaming tool where you have to select 'Force' or 'Split' every time – why not have a toggle facility?

Also lacking is an Undo function and this is rather more difficult to live without in a program of this nature. The alternative is to save to disk after every change, which is clearly unacceptable. It may be that such a facility would depend on the ST's RAM – but even so it really has to be considered essential.

Editing can take place in one of three ways; globally, block or individual notes; the only global parameters available are for the input of rehearsal marks and bar numbers which are both part of the Edit Grand Staff configuration.

When the Grand Staff is set up, you can choose how many staves are used for a particular part; in the case of the piano this would usually be two, but other possibilities also exist. Steinberg refer to this as a polyphonic system and any area can be marked as a block and edited in various ways: copied, moved, deleted, saved and imported. Parts can also be extracted; a block (ie, the part you wish to extract) is marked in the score and then saved re-opened as a separate item. The trouble is that if you have done a thorough job on the score, putting in all the dynamics, staccato dots, accents etc, many of these do not get transferred, thus necessitating a lot of extra work. The alternative is to keep the whole file and 'hide' all but the part you want which is highly impractical in a large score.

The Masterpage option lets you set up elements of the score which are the same throughout – but it is rather quirky. There is an option to define a left Masterpage and copy it (optionally mirrored) to the right Masterpage. Similarly, you can select whether the music starts on the left or right page, (with left as the default).

There are two ways to view the score within Edit and Layout modes – the latter having various resolutions which effectively allow you to zoom in and out. However, there is no full-page view and so no way to get a general overview of the appearance of the page. The so-called Mini-Resolution (rather quaint terminology this) is not really particularly 'mini' at all; it shows the same amount horizontally and a little more vertically, but it is faster to redraw.

Generally, you have to restrict the use of Edit mode to only the rawest musical data (such as that initially imported from a sequencer file) and do everything else in Layout mode. The reason for this is that marks and symbols added in Edit mode tend to be either out of position or missing altogether when you transfer to Layout, so they all have to be moved or re-inserted. The use of the arrow keys has been well thought out. Each of the four scrolls half a screen's worth in the direction of the arrow. To get to the next or previous page in Layout mode, you click on the left or right arrow in the horizontal scroll bar; to get to a more remote page there's the usual Find page command.

The manual offers some very sensible advice about sequencer files for use in a notation program. It points out that you should make two different files: one to be played by the sequencer (for the ears) and one for the scoring program (for the eyes). It's a matter of re-quantising to the values you want notated. For example, staccato quavers are much easier to read than semiquavers with semiquaver rests between. It's also worth deleting any extraneous (non-note) data which the notation program will ignore anyway. This makes for a more compact file and so speeds things up considerably – particularly with a good sequencer.

When it comes to printing, two qualities of printout are available; Test and Maximum – the former being quicker than the latter, but of a lower resolution. There is a choice of three different drivers for each printer supported, giving different sizes of staves suitable for various kinds of scores or parts. However, the driver and page layout must be selected before going into Layout mode, otherwise all score boxes, masterpages, etc, have to be redone. Page size, margins and direction (portrait or landscape) can be selected, and you also have the option of mirror image pages (for left and right).

Icon Module

Also included with the Masterscore package is a user Icon module, which can be run separately as a '.PRG' or installed as a Desk Accessory. It is used for designing your own symbols and marks – though only of the point-and-click variety (ie, not glissandi). Crotchet symbols for metronome marks, for instance, were easily constructed. While the manual states that you can copy an existing icon for modification, that option does not appear to exist in reality which means that a complete note for the crotchet had to be designed (and all the pixels for the various resolutions smoothed out), rather than just taking the black notehead and adding a stem.

Text Macros are very useful. Often-used phrases can be saved to function keys; and in conjunction with the Control, Alternate and left & right Shift keys, that gives you up to 50 of to work with.

Steinberg have not provided a driver for the HP DeskJet 500, but there is one for the HP LaserJet series, with which the DeskJet is on the whole compatible. A page containing three systems of the guitar quartet piece, with wide spaces between systems, came out looking reasonably acceptable, but took about ten minutes to print. That said, anyone using a desktop publishing program on the ST will be used to such slowness. Printouts on an HP LaserJet III were very good and faster than a standard page of graphics with very smooth sloping beams but slightly jagged larger letters. Masterscore does not currently support PostScript or professional printers such as a Linotronics – which must be considered essential if optimum quality is to be achieved.

"Masterscore II will accept input from the various Steinberg sequencing programs as well as MIDI Files"

One nice feature is Batch Print which lets you break large scores (which cannot be loaded into the ST's memory) into segments, and then print the entire score by selecting the files that it is spread across.

The tone of this review has been intentionally practical; to gain full knowledge of all facilities offered in the program would take months of work. While Steinberg products have generally been very intuitive in nature, this cannot really be said of Masterscore II. However, despite its quirks, it is undoubtedly very powerful.

The main competitor to Masterscore II on the ST is Take Control's Music DTP which though not as comprehensive is rather easier to use and covers some of the shortcomings such as graphics tools etc. If it has one particular advantage over Steinberg's product it's that the data on the screen is not so inextricably locked into the logic of music theory, thus giving the user a greater degree of freedom in the way unorthodox scores are presented. However, for 95% of people working on scores, Masterscore II will provide excellent results in the minimum of time.

It is impossible to examine Masterscore II without considering Encore and Finale for the Mac, but really such comparisons are unfair. The restrictions of programming on the ST play a great part in the relative lack of user-friendliness. The functionality of the program shows up in the way it handles a basic layout direct from a MIDI File or Steinberg Arrangement which, on the whole, is very good. Masterscore is not cheap but it should certainly be given your careful consideration in what is a very limited market. ■

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Yamaha RY10 Drum Machine

Review by Simon Trask

Once the sole preserve of so-called 'electronic' musicians – and detested by just about every one else – the humble beatbox has suddenly become the friendly face of technology for technophobic musicians everywhere. Leaving the more technologically-inclined to turn to MIDI sequencers and samplers or drum modules for their rhythm programming, Yamaha appear to be aiming their new budget drum machine at that most notorious of technophobes – the guitarist.

With the emphasis on ease of use, transportability and affordability, the RY10 should certainly appeal to the novice. The fully-fledged techno-freak, on the other hand, will doubtless be interested in the machine's 211 drum and percussion Voices, 30 sound effects Voices and nine bass Voices (...yes, you can program basslines to go with the beats), 28-voice polyphony, 16 preset and 16 user-programmable Pad Banks, 50 preset and 50 user-programmable patterns (each of which has an associated fill pattern), and 36 user-programmable songs with real-time song programming *à la* Alesis' SR16 – all for £249.

What makes Yamaha's budget machine especially enticing, however, is its ability to run off six AA batteries – the Duracells I used for this review gave around 14 hours running time – so that, as with the company's QY10 'walkstation', it really can be used any place, any time. And, seeing as it weighs a mere 1lb 12oz (with batteries fitted) and measures just 7.5" square and 1.5" deep, you shouldn't have much difficulty carrying it around.

The RY10 is one of the easiest pieces of gear to use that I've come across. All its functions are listed on the front panel in a 3 x 16 matrix layout, and selected by pressing and holding one of three buttons – Pattern, Song or Util – to the left of the list and then pressing one of 16 buttons in the row below it. You then scroll through any LCD pages and change parameter values using the 1-16 buttons and/or the +/- buttons. Operation can be a bit fiddly owing to the small size and close proximity of the buttons, but you can't really expect anything else on an instrument as compact as the RY10.

Unfortunately, LCD backlighting has been omitted; presumably this was a cost-saving measure, but its omission does at least mean there's less power drain on the batteries. Programming in low lighting conditions is made more difficult but not impossible, because the RY10 doesn't place all the burden of operation on the LCD. On a practical note, there are always some pinpoint LEDs lit while the machine is working, making it easier for you to spot when you've left it turned on – a useful feature given that the RY10 has no 'auto power off' function to prevent accidental battery rundown. Of course, if you're within a cable's length of a mains supply, the RY10 can be powered via an external adaptor (not supplied with the machine), so you don't always need to be at the mercy of battery power.

The 12 fingertip-size rubber playing pads are laid out like a C-C octave on a keyboard (hence the gap above the E and F pads where there could have been another pad) in order to facilitate the playing of basslines. The RY10's size and the positioning of its pads allow you to hold the drum machine in both hands and play the pads with your thumbs, Gameboy-style. The Accent/Octave buttons to each side of the pads allow you to switch the 'keyboard' between three octaves for bass playing, and to add accents to individual Patterns steps for the drum and percussion Voices. The RY10's pads aren't velocity-sensitive, nor will the drum machine record the velocity data of incoming MIDI notes, so the Accent function is the only way of getting some dynamics into your Patterns.

The RY10's stereo headphones output is louder and punchier than that of the QY10, and consequently it's more effective at masking out surrounding noise. Output is via a mini-jack socket on the right-hand side of the machine's casing, where there's also a volume slider which controls the output level to an internal speaker, the standard Left/Mono and Right quarter-inch jack sockets and also the headphones.

The speaker can be useful in certain circumstances, but it's no substitute for an external amp – we're not talking ghettoblasters here. There's also a rear-panel on/off switch for the speaker, but you can't embarrass yourself in public by accidentally knocking the switch to the 'on' position while you're working on headphones, because the speaker output is disabled while you have headphones plugged in.

If you're going to get funky while travelling second-class to suburbia, be prepared for some curious stares from your

The Sounds

The RY10'S 211 drum and percussion sounds consist of 47 bass drums, 47 snares, nine closed hi-hats, seven open hi-hats, nine crash cymbals, six rides, one gong, 31 acoustic toms, 16 synth toms, surdo drum, fajero, two high and two low agogo bells, analog clap, high and low bongos, congas (high, low, muted and slapped versions, with two of each type), two talking drums, claves, cowbells (three acoustic and four 808, with the latter providing two differently-pitched versions and two chorded versions), two tambourines, open and muted triangles, whistle, cabasa, shaker, finger snap and two timbales.

The 30 sound effects give a more off-the-wall dimension to the RY10's sonic world by providing various industrial and ambient noises, Kraftwerk-style frequency 'blips', record scratches and human beatbox sounds. Finally, the RY10's bass section provides slapped and fingered basses and a variety of synth-bass sounds which, though not all that great in isolation, work well in conjunction with the other sounds.

fellow passengers as they try to figure out what you're doing and whether it should be allowed in public. Still, the playing pads are virtually silent in operation, and don't have to be bashed, so it's possible to play them without irritating those around you – but you'll probably find yourself bashing them anyway!

Rear-panel connections include footswitch and audio inputs on quarter-inch jacks, a tape in/out mini-jack socket (for cassette storage of user Pattern, Song and Pad Bank data) and a MIDI In socket. The audio input has two uses: it allows you to plug in a guitar and take advantage of the RY10's in-built guitar tuner function, and it allows any external signal to be fed into the RY10 and mixed into the machine's output signal along with the drums and bass. A footswitch connected to the RY10 can be used to start and stop the selected Pattern or Song, trigger the Fill Pattern for the currently-selected Main Pattern, or select the next Pattern or Song.

All the RY10's sounds have character and plenty of grit to them – especially the kicks and snares, which very ably reflect the nature and diversity of these instruments in today's music – I can certainly see the RY10 appealing to the dance fraternity. In fact, all things considered, the RY10 would be at home in most contemporary music environments.

With today's drum machines including ever more onboard sounds, some means of making them all readily accessible across a limited number of playing pads is, clearly, essential. In answer to this, manufacturers have adopted the concept of the 'virtual drumkit' – or Pad Bank to use the term commonly employed. Pad Banks are multiple sets of sound-to-pad assignments which are stored in memory, from where they can be assigned to the physical pads one set at a time.

The RY10's 16 preset Pad Banks group sounds according to various musical categories: ambient, dry, analog, sound effects, dance, heavy rock, light rock, reggae, jazz, rap, funk, ballad, latin, eurobeat, techno and r'n'b. In practice, these are best looked on as convenient generalisations. Each Pad Bank in fact consists of three sets of sound assignments –

Photos: James Cumpsty

namely Drum, Percussion and Bass – giving you 25 sounds per Pad Bank. Successive presses of the Pad button cycle around the three sets within each Pad Bank, so one moment you can be programming a kick and snare pattern, the next moment a conga pattern, and the next a bassline.

Each Pattern can be assigned one of the 32 Pad Banks, and triggers only the sounds assigned to it. In some ways this can be seen as more restricting than the approach used by Cheetah's MD16, Roland's R70 and Yamaha's own RY30, which allows any sound from any Pad Bank to be used within each Pattern, but it does have a couple of advantages. For one, you can instantly try out a rhythm with a completely different set of sounds simply by changing the Pad Bank assigned to the Pattern, and for another it makes deleting an instrument part from a Pattern much easier.

Yamaha have standardised the drum set's Voice assignments across all the preset Pad Banks, with, for example, pad A always triggering a bass drum, pad C a snare drum, and pad I an open hi-hat. This has allowed them to label each pad with the type of instrument it triggers, so you don't have to remember what pad triggers what; also, if you change a Pattern's Pad Bank assignment you get each instrument part triggering the same type of instrument. Of course, when you create your own user Pad Banks you can assign sounds in whatever way you want to the Drum and Percussion sets – but there are advantages to consistency.

As well as a Voice assignment, each pad within a Pad Bank can be given its own level, pan position, tuning and accent amount settings. Like Alesis' SR16, the RY10 provides only a narrow tuning range, the reason, presumably, being that some Voices share the same sample but replay it at different pitches, so the programmable tuning is restricted to operating between these different pitches. Other Voices are created by layering different samples, using different envelope settings and adding reverb to samples; effectively there are 250 different sounds or instruments on the RY10, created from a smaller collection of samples (but still a great deal more than drum machines used to provide).

Both real-time and step-time pattern recording are implemented on the RY10. As with the preset patterns, each user pattern (Main or Fill) can be at most one 4/4 bar long, and you're limited to no more than 16 steps per Pattern, with a maximum record resolution of a 1/32nd note. You can select from 34 time signature and resolution combinations, with plenty of scope for using odd time signatures within the limits I've just described. The limit of 16 steps per pattern means that 4/4 time can't go above 16th-note resolution, though there is a rather inflexible playback-only Swing function which can be used to advance all odd-numbered 8th or 16th notes in a Pattern by, respectively, 1-8 and 1-5 1/96th notes.

So, there are a fair number of restrictions, but also one neat new feature which it has in common with Roland's more expensive R70 drum machine – namely pattern-specific tempo settings. And there's also an advantage to having only 16 steps per Pattern, namely that the RY10 can give you a visual representation of the pad hits recorded for each pad within the selected Pattern. When you select Pattern Record mode, each one of the numbered buttons (1-16) represents one step in the Pattern, and its associated LED lights if there's a pad hit recorded at that step for the selected pad/Voice. To look at the rhythm for a different pad, all you have to do is hit that pad. To either add or delete a pad hit, you just press the relevant numbered button.

To record in real-time, simply press the Start/Go button and the RY10 loops round the Pattern, allowing you to build up parts on successive passes in familiar fashion. You can also delete individual pad hits in real-time by selecting the Delete function and holding down the relevant pad as the notes play. Accents can be programmed into a Pattern in both real- and step-time. Unfortunately, they apply to all the pad hits on a step, so you have to use the pad-specific Accent Amount parameter to determine how each Voice is affected. For this you can set no change, or a positive or negative value (+ 7 to – 7) which is added to or subtracted from the programmed level.

Fill Pattern memories can be selected for recording by pressing the Fill button while in Pattern Record mode. You can also copy Patterns between the Main and Fill memories, and then add or remove parts. The RY10 lets you treat Fill Patterns as Patterns in their own right, rather than just extensions of the Main Pattern. This is because if you press the Fill button immediately before the end of the main pattern the RY10 will play the fill pattern in its entirety; similarly, if you press the Fill button immediately before the end of the fill pattern, the drum machine will play the fill again.

You can create up to 36 Songs on the RY10 – which should be enough for any set. Each Song can consist of up to 199 parts, with each part comprising an individual preset or user pattern. Bearing in mind that each pattern is only one bar long, 199 is not as excessive a number of parts as it might at first seem. If you need more parts, you can chain consecutive songs together, using a blank song to signal the end of your actual song.

If you simply want the RY10 to loop round a series of patterns rather than the single pattern of Pattern mode, all you have to do is program that series of patterns into a song, engage the Song Repeat function for that song, and hit Start/Go. In this way you could create, say, an eight-bar pattern by programming eight one-bar patterns separately in Pattern mode and then chaining them together in Song mode; in fact, given the one-bar limitation on patterns, it's a shame that you can't program across a series of consecutive patterns.

Dividing different sections of a song across several RY10 songs can be a more flexible way of working than programming them all as one song. For instance, because

The Patterns

Mindful that not everyone who wants to use a drum machine also wants to get into rhythm programming, Yamaha have provided 50 factory-programmed patterns, complete with associated fill patterns, permanently stored in ROM. Here you'll find patterns covering funk, fusion, techno, rap, house, eurobeat, r'n'b zydeco, rock 'n' roll, pop rock, metal, reggae, bossa nova, samba, latin funk, jazz swing and waltz, and 3/4 and 4/4 ballad styles. All in all, a very usable collection, and it might be enough to satisfy some people, though you should be aware that each pattern is only one bar long, so there's not much scope for variety. That said, being able to drop in a fill pattern does help. Each preset pattern includes a bassline which plays in the key of C, though if you only want the rhythm you can activate the global Bass Mute function to silence the bass part. Preset Patterns can be copied across to the user pattern memory, so you can create your own variations on Yamaha's rhythms if you want to.

you can give each song its own tempo, you can program different tempi for each of its different sections. Also, if you have one section of a song where you want to stretch out with a solo, you can effectively make it open-ended in length by setting it to repeat and using the RY10's footswitch Next function to move onto the next song in the chain, when you feel the time is right. If you programmed, say, an eight-bar song for this section, your solo could last for multiples of eight bars.

In addition to the traditional step-time method of song creation, where you scroll through the part numbers in the LCD window and select a pattern number for each part, the RY10 allows you to make your pattern selections in real-time while listening to the patterns playing. In this mode, as soon as you tap in a pattern number, the RY10 starts playing the pattern, and continues until you select a different pattern – and so on.

So, for instance, if you let user-pattern 32 play eight times, the RY10 records this pattern as your choice for eight consecutive song parts. While the pattern is playing for the eighth time, you tap in the number of the next pattern you want, and at the end of the pass the RY10 moves on to this pattern and records it as your choice for the next part in the song.

Fills can be programmed into a song in step-time by specifying which 16th-note step you want the main pattern's fill to come in on. In real-time this is accomplished by pressing the Fill button at the appropriate points as the song plays in record mode. Remember that a fill pattern can play in its entirety if you press the Fill button immediately before its Main Pattern finishes playing.

Each Song part can be given a transpose value (+12 to -12 semitones) for the selected Pattern's bassline, so you can get the RY10 to follow chord changes even though it's playing the same Pattern. However, as the drum machine has no way of knowing what key you're playing in, it can't adjust the bassline's notes accordingly when it transposes them, so this function is of limited usefulness in practice.

Another way of getting more flexibility from the combination of rhythm and bassline without taking up any more memory is through the use of the Replace function, which allows you to replace the bassline of any part with that from any user or preset pattern.

The RY10's MIDI input allows you to slave the drum machine to an external sequencer, select its songs remotely, and trigger the drum, percussion and bass sounds of the currently-selected Pad Bank from a MIDI controller. You can globally program a MIDI receive channel and note assignments for the drum and percussion sounds and also for the bass sound. RY10 patterns can be recorded from a MIDI source, but minus velocity data – although the sounds respond dynamically via MIDI, so the RY10 is also worth considering purely as a sound source for live work or for use with a sequencer. Pad Banks can be called up independently of the patterns by sending patch changes 1-32 on a third programmable MIDI receive channel, so you can call up a different set of 24 drum and percussion sounds and a different bass sound at any time.

The omission of a MIDI Out on the RY10 is a bit of a blow, and surely a missed marketing opportunity for Yamaha. With no MIDI Out, you can't play your RY10 patterns into a sequencer, nor can you save them as a SysEx dump into a remote storage device such as Yamaha's own MDF2 MIDI Data Filer. Maybe the company reasoned that a cassette was more guitarist-friendly than a floppy disk, but MIDI storage – especially with a dedicated unit like the MDF2 rather than a computer and software – is a whole lot friendlier than tape storage, and a damn sight more convenient.

"The RY10 is one of the easiest pieces of gear to use that I've come across. All its functions are listed on the front panel and selected by pressing and holding one of three buttons"

In the RY10, Yamaha have come up with a drum machine which is user-friendly, inexpensive and provides a sizeable and versatile collection of sounds well suited to contemporary usage. It also has the considerable advantage of battery-powered portable use. With its single-bar, 16-step Pattern limit and inability to record dynamics, the RY10 isn't perhaps the most flexible or responsive of machines for pattern programming and it won't satisfy anyone who likes to get their rhythms sounding as if they're being played by a real drummer.

On the other hand, its 250 sounds and velocity responsiveness via MIDI make it a very good value drum module for live and sequenced use, while its use-anywhere portability also makes it a great rhythm 'notepad' for programming ideas whenever inspiration strikes – though its lack of a MIDI Out socket means you won't be able to transfer your rhythms across to a MIDI sequencer at a later time.

The RY10 compares well with Roland's DR550 and new DR550 MkII drum machines, though both of these are cheaper. Alesis' SR16 (reviewed MT February '91) is somewhat more flexible yet it has the same sort of operational and conceptual straightforwardness as the RY10 and is just as portable, though it can't be used away from a mains supply and it costs £100 more. Cheetah's MD16 (reviewed MT March '91) costs around £50 more than the RY10 and is a great deal more sophisticated and versatile, but not as straightforward and immediate in use, and it's not battery-powered.

The lower end of the drum machine market is a crowded place at the moment, but Yamaha have done a good job of providing the RY10 with its own identity, and more than a degree of desirability. Not least, it represents a worthwhile furthering of Yamaha's mission to equip the musician on the move. ■

Price:
RY10 £249;
YKBA2 carrying case £10.99.
Both prices include VAT.

More from: Yamaha-Kemble Music (UK) Ltd, Sherbourne Drive, Tilbrook, Milton Keynes MK7 8BL.
Tel: (0908) 366700.
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East-West Dance/Industrial Sample CD

Review by Nigel Lord

If you think about (...and I don't suppose you ever do), it's very difficult knowing where to pitch a review of a CD sample collection. On the one hand, you're dealing with a tool – a creative tool perhaps, but a tool nonetheless – and are therefore obliged to maintain a high degree of objectivity. On the other hand, you have to keep in mind that you're listening to what is, essentially, a collection of musical ideas – and music can only ever be judged subjectively. You see the problem?

Take the fifth and latest in the range of ProSamples CDs – Dance/Industrial, for example. One is tempted to view it as simply another collection of dance orientated breaks based around some pretty straightforward programming ideas. Being conceived specifically for this collection (as opposed to having been 'lifted' from other sources), the recording quality is uniformly good – though no better than most – while the documentation, though a little dry, is quite thorough and includes track indexing, bpm figures and a detailed description of every sample – including the individual drum, percussion and effects sounds. Dead objective eh?

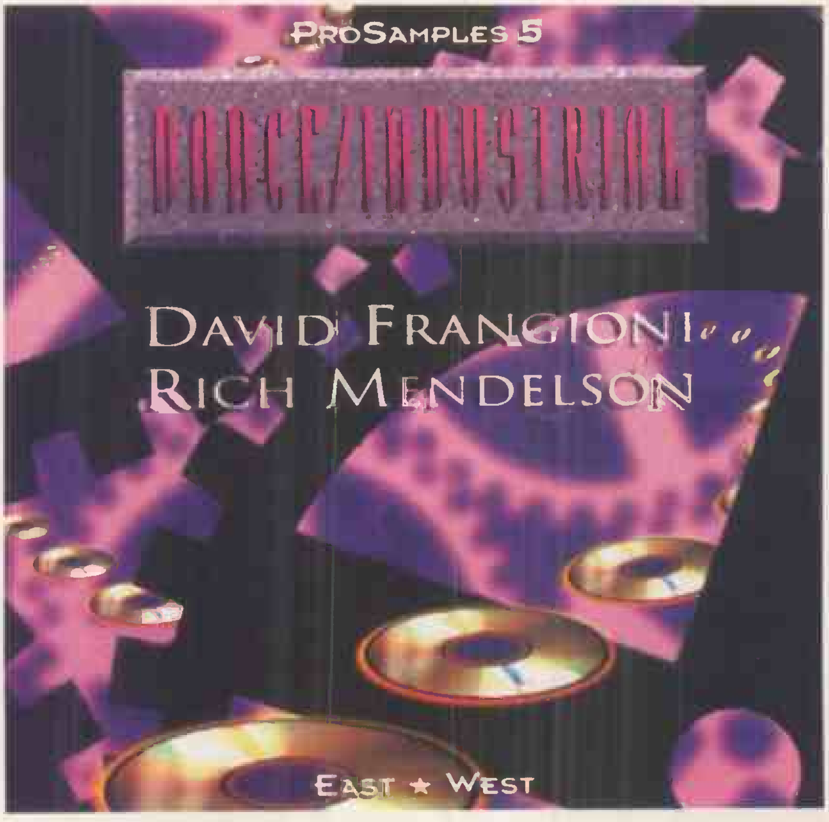
By contrast, my *subjective*, opinion is a little shorter and to the point: this is one mother of a sample CD, go out and buy it now!

This rather spirited endorsement is based on my belief that the average person with an average drum machine (or perhaps an infinite number of monkeys with an infinite number of drum machines) could come up with the kind of breaks which have become the staple ingredient of most sample CDs. What's special about this collection is that the combination of interesting rhythmic ideas and a fascinating choice of instruments and sounds combine to produce rhythm tracks which you would be hard pressed to equal even with many hours programming time and an armoury of sampled and synthesised sound sources.

Though sacrificing the convenience of single pass breaks which may be quickly looped in your machine, ProSamples have, I believe, correctly opted for including two or more repeats of each. This gives you a far better feel for the patterns – which of course have to be repeated if we are to recognise their rhythmic potential.

The breaks are divided, rather arbitrarily, methinks, between 'rhythm' and 'industrial' loops and unlike those in most sample collections occupy a very broad range of tempi. There's no standard 120 bpm programming here. In fact, this collection is proof, if proof were needed that you can quite happily put together dance tracks anywhere betweem 80 and 140 bpm – providing you get the feel right.

Helping to create that feel on this CD is an array of incredibly heavy/ambient drum and percussion voices and a stunning selection of sounds whose source one can but ▶▶



speculate on. Suffice it to say this is aurally one of the most exciting sample CDs I've yet to hear – and that has nothing to do with the rather liberal sprinkling of "sex moans" (their words) featured on a number of the breaks. In fact, I could well have lived without these; apart from anything else, they could end up quite out of context in certain songs.

To accompany the CD, a floppy disk is available which contains MIDI files of the programs used in some 34 of the breaks – the idea being that instead of sampling the whole rhythm, you sample the individual sounds of which they are comprised and trigger these as you would a normal rhythm track. This means that you can, if you wish, alter the programs and customise them to your specific requirements. And of course, you can also change the tempo of the breaks without altering their overall pitch.

It's an excellent idea, and one I can see catching on – if only to entice those who still have a problem with the idea of sampling 'other people's' loops. I only wish files could have been included for all the breaks in this collection. Incidentally, two versions are produced – one for Atari ST-based sequencers, the other for those associated with the Mac.

Also available is a CD-ROM version of the whole collection for direct loading into Akai S1000/S1100, Emulator III and Digidesign Samplecell machines. At £199 it's by no means cheap, but those who value quality above all else might just be tempted.

Beside the difficulty of maintaining one's objectivity whilst relating to these samples on a subjective level, I have another problem. I don't think I've heard a sample CD that I haven't liked – in part, at least.

Okay, I know that's a pretty questionable attitude to have as a reviewer. But really, the damned things are such good value for money. Work it out: even if you only use them as a source of inspiration (rather than a source of sampling) and even if you only use something like ten or fifteen breaks from each CD, that still works out at less than about three quid each. Now I don't know how long it takes you to conceive and program a good rhythm track, but I could easily spend two or three hours doing it – not to mention the investment in equipment, which to produce the range of sounds available here would be vast.

Convinced? If you're not, I can only recommend that you get hold of this CD. If rhythm for you is more than simply an exercise in time-keeping and your music will stand up to the kind of weight these breaks will bring to it, you really do owe it to yourself. ■

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THE B-52'S: *GOOD STUFF* (Reprise)

Once again the B-52's divide the production credits between Don Was and Nile Rodgers. It worked for *Cosmic Thing* three years ago, and it works again here. Recruiting this complimentary pair of dancefloor doyens in 1989 certainly rescued The B-52's from cult obscurity where, apart from 'Rock Lobster's, surprise entry into Top-Twentydom in 1986, the band seemed destined to remain. Founder member Ricky Wilson's death was a great loss, but by the Spring of 1990 'Love Shack', produced by Was, hit No2 in the UK, and the bouffant beat was back again a decade down the line.

Ricky's sister Cindy hung up her beehive after the Cosmic Thing tour, leaving the trio of Kate Pierson, Fred Schneider and Keith Strickland to fly the flag. And fly it they do, with unfading panache, on *Good Stuff*. As one of those acts whose choice of producer has always been more important than the innate sound of the band, alterations in line-up seem not to affect their identity at all. The grooves groove, the whacky words bounce along and the little guitar and keyboard phrases bring life and soul to the party.

Nile Rodgers may favour a more 'programmed' approach, notably on the sample-warbling eco-funk of 'The World's Green Laughter', while Mr Was goes for the live-band-in-real-instrument-shock tactic – but the homogeneity achieved is remarkable. And any band with Kate Pierson in it cannot lose. This woman has one of the most exquisite, sexy, pop voices in the whole Universe. There are angels throwing themselves off clouds because they can't sing like Kate Pierson. Nothing else, in all this talk of production and personalities, seems to matter.

KHALED: *KHALED* (Barclay/London)

My word, Don Was gets around. Here he is again producing five of the 11 songs on this latest album by the unchallenged King of Algerian Rai music, Khaled. This time it's Was who opts for the more programmed approach, while the producer of the other six tracks, 4AD's very own guitar hero Michael Brook, concentrates more on capturing the ethnic timbres of Khaled's assorted North African musicians. Engineer Steve Deutsch is, in fact, credited with 'Macintosh Programming' on the Was tracks, and the metaphorical sound you can clearly hear is that of musical barriers coming crashing down.

Rai already owes much of its reputation in the West to the hi-tech sensibilities of Rachid Baba Ahmed, who produced the young Cheb Khaled's UK release *Hada Raykoum* in the mid-80s. And the new offering will do that reputation no harm at all. The percussive loops, synth lines and distinctly hip-hopping grooves form a perfect backdrop for the swooping, passionate vocals, as the Paris-based rebel continues to define his music's all-out assault on the repressive fundamentalism of the homeland.

You don't understand what he's on about, but you sure get the impression he means it. And when it's explained to you that he's on about sex, drinking and generally staying up late, you know he means it. Like Ofra Haza's *Im-Nin Alu* hit of 1988, Khaled is living proof of the strange compatibility of hi-tech grooves and Middle Eastern melody.

NB: The second track, 'El Arbi', sounds uncannily like an early Orchestral Manoeuvres number. Any reader who can identify which OMD song I mean gets the next three issues of *Music Technology* free.

SWALLOW: *BLOW* (4AD)

There's a stratum in the aesthetic topsoil that dates back to the first album by The Cure, characterized by the simple 4/4 guitar strumming, layered howling and beatbox thud of 4AD stalwarts like The Cocteau Twins. They share a fascination with the naive and the primitive, extending from the nervous we-can't-really-play shoegazing of live performances to the doodling, toddler-with-a-four-track abandon of much of the studio work. Add to this a post-Eno concern with monotony.

Many of these bands, pursuing this aesthetic, would be quite happy to play one chord for two minutes, then another for three, simply as a means of emphasizing the chord change in the middle. The best of them achieve the 4AD house goal of 'naive charm', taking us back into childhood like therapy with feedback. Enter Swallow, a girl-boy duo from south London with all of these predilections readily to hand.

This debut album is pattern-book 4AD material. Flimsy, dreamy female vocals carry barely audible but often quite lovely tunes over a plodding guitar/beatbox framework, the whole underpinned by obnoxious, soaring guitar drones like a furry carpet underlay with bits of twig and coarse wool. With the choruses and flangers on overdrive, the aim is to crank the guitars into squeal mode and let the noise speak for itself – providing curtains of messy colour with which to drape the sound.

If you played the songs on an acoustic guitar it would sound like *Play Away*, but somehow the distortion draws a threatening, druggy veil across it all and tweeness is miraculously avoided. Robin Guthrie 1, Brian Cant 0.

YOUSSOU N'DOUR Live at the Town & Country Club, London

The spirit of Senegal descends on Kentish Town, bringing with it sweltering temperatures, unabashed jiving and a bush-whacked audience featuring babes-in-arms, fifty-somethings and VSO workers reliving past experiences. No shortage of sweat, and the illusion of a local African gig transplanted to London owes much to the rawness of the sound.

Despite N'Dour's fruitful forays into hi-tech recording with Peter Gabriel, yielding the summer hit, 'Shaking The Tree' in 1989, the gigs clearly retain the no-nonsense, back-to-basics live values that remind you where it all came from in the first place. Like Hugh Masakela, whose techno-bush ambitions largely began this redefinition of African music in the studio, N'Dour can't be bothered with it on stage. It's a party, and the sequencer is not invited.

That's not to say there isn't a bank of twinkling keyboards in amongst the percussion, horns and talking drums. There is. There's a Roland A-80, a DX7 and an analogue synth mining deep excavations of dark, funking bass, gleefully played by a bass guitarist all too happy to abandon his Fender Precision and leave it propped up against a redundant amp. And the piano/marimba hybrids emanating from the A-80 certainly do thrust the ethnic mèlée into the '90s.

But it's an eleven-piece band, beavering away to provide a network of supportive rhythms and chops for the young singer, and above all else it's a performance. But for the bouncers they'd be dancing in the street. ■

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Text By Phil Ward and Simon Trask

Artist: Century's End
Venue: Home
Equipment: Unspecified analogue synths; Roland GS6; "Absolutely no computers or sequencing"; plus some way of recording/triggering Dr Who's TARDIS noise.

Century's End is a guy called Greg, with an 'album' of instrumental material and a generous list of damn silly titles. However, he does like standing in ruined cathedrals, and twiddling with analogue synths when he gets back home. Although presenting himself here on an album, I feel Greg's forte would be audio-visual soundtrack 'stings', presented in shorter bursts. Much shorter bursts.

It's all very well deciding to release your own 'album' on cassette to avoid it being lumped together with other demo tapes, but I'm afraid you have to do more than fill it with a series of sketchy ideas. Start your own AV library, for example - preferably on CDs.

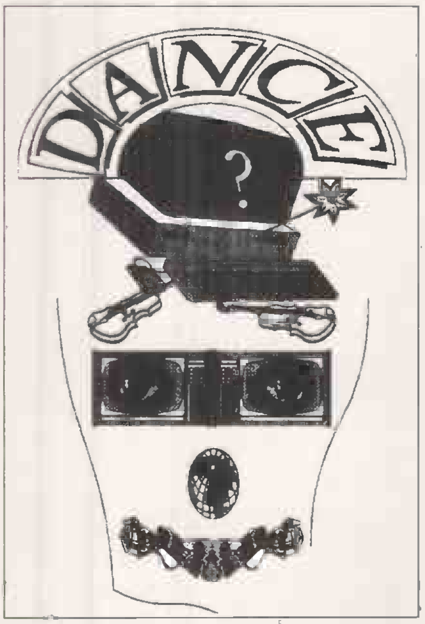
In his defence, Greg has a good ear for dramatic analogue effects; the stabs, throbs, swells and modulations of yesteryear. And the TARDIS spin is particularly well used - swelling with the music and prompting a smile. I wonder why Greg insists on there being no sequences? The fact is, his playing is not adept enough to highlight their absence. Indeed, musically the tape is very unimaginative, monotonous even, which is why, bearing in mind the adroitness and the impact of the sounds, the AV market suggests itself so readily. It's also rather too simple for the grander, compositional implications that come with the concept of an album.

If extended analogue soundscapes are your chosen muse, then at least remember this: Jean-Michel Jarre uses sequencers, like it or not.

Copies of the cassette - *Gemini Dawn* - are available for £5.00 including P&P, as are *Millenium* (#2.00), *Dreamland* and *Soundscape* (£1.50); from Greg, 92 Alexander Road, Limavady, Co.Londonderry, BT49 0BP, Northern Ireland.

Artist: Digital Entity
Venue: Home
Equipment: Amiga 1000 with Dr.T; Korg M1; Roland D-50; Roland S-330 sampler; Roland 110; Yamaha FX500; Desc-Tech 8-channel mixer; Tascam 244 Portastudio; Sony DTC-750 DAT; Denon DRM-800 cassette deck.

Four dance instrumentals, sequenced straight to DAT, and two Portastudio songs from Digital Entity - a.k.a David J Hoskins from Cheltenham. What David does right is to provide clean, bright recordings, informative but brief details of his inspirations and methods for each track, and generally give the impression that he enjoys what he does. And the dance excursions are very promising



indeed. An energetic blend of drum loops, fat analogue bass riffs, spins, stabs and well-placed sampled FX and voice bites, the music owes much to recent house developments - without sounding too derivative.

The arrangements are strong, too, characterized by some unexpected pauses and sudden, arresting endings. That said, one track, 'Control', suffers from a naff hyper-flange on the vocal hook, and throughout, the vocals are rather weak. Team up with a female soul singer and make chart singles - why not. The ideas are certainly there. The heartbeat on the next track, 'Shaman Song', sounds a touch out of time, but otherwise the percussion tracks are excellent, with subtle cowbell/tom sounds panned hard left and right and sitting well back in the mix. David's comment that, "although it is not a dance track it makes a bit of a change" sounds almost apologetic, as though only dance music is worthy of attention. This is clearly untrue, and no apologies are necessary for deviating from this course.

The mixes are good and dry, and show awareness of the dangers of overdoing reverb and the like. It really helps the grooves to keep things uncluttered in this way. If a sound needs too much added effect, try changing the sound. Never swamp in order to disguise.

'Strobe' continues David's demo and could be a potential rave classic. The formula may be a bit tried and tested, but this is as good an example as you'll hear anywhere. Urgent, positive and happening. By contrast, 'Twisting' sounds rather like an example of earlier material thrown on the end of the tape. A bit risky, this, because it doesn't stand up to the other tracks. It's an odd mix of naive vocals and programmed sounds - rather like a meeting of Viv Stanshall and Neil Tennant at the bottom of Stephen 'Tin-Tin' Duffy's back garden.

On the cover, there's a graphic image of flowers seemingly emanating from a disk drive which matches the style of this last song. But on the whole David shows more promise as a dance merchant than a songwriter, and on two or three of these songs that promise is not inconsiderable.

Contact: David Hoskins, 5 Moorend Road, Leckhampton, Cheltenham. GL53 0EP.

Artist: Pete Jones
Venue: Red Tape Studios and at home.
Equipment: Roland R8; Jupiter 8; Roland S10 sampling keyboard; Yamaha MT100; Yamaha DX100; Realistic 12-channel EQ; Hondo II bass guitar; Carlsbro amp.

Pete doesn't do himself any favours by neglecting packaging and saddling himself with a very poor recording that desperately needs brightening up. I have the distinct impression this is a copy of a copy, which is a shame, because most of the material is very nicely judged. 'Pygmy In The House' is exactly that: a pygmy sample over R8 drums, JP8 strings and real bass, culminating in an amusing, slightly disturbing jaunt into rather strange territory. But surely it's unnecessary in this day and age to be using the spring line reverb from a guitar amp? Get your hands on an old Yamaha R1000, at least.

'Dead Men's Suits' is the best offering - a dreamy, drifting number with the feel of The Beloved's 'Sun Rising', without the vocal. A bit more attention to the timbres might have avoided the slight tuning clashes between the DX steel drum sound and the soft bell tone; those FM overtones can be a bit iffy at times. But the tune is very strong, and a definite mood is established.

Alas, 'On The Beat' is a clumsy attempt at weirdness for weirdness' sake. Combining samples of In Deep's 'Last Night A DJ Saved My Life' with George Formby's 'Ask A Policeman' would be a difficult trick for anyone to pull off. In the end, the repetition of the same few samples simply becomes irritating. Beneath, the musical meanderings lack skill in execution, and the timbres are somehow lazily thrown together - the whole lot from the S10, with, seemingly, little input from Pete. Disappointing, after the quality of ideas shown in the first two tracks. I guess the moral is, try to learn to judge whether your doodling is just doodling, or whether it forms the basis of more constructive departures.

Contact: Pete Jones, 8 Park Walk, Sheffield.

Artist: Rob Norman
Equipment: Roland Alpha Juno 2 synth, Roland D110 synth module, Korg Mono/Poly synth, Fender Strat guitar, Kawai Q80 sequencer, Boss DD1 and HM2 effects pedals, Yamaha R100 and EMP100 rack-mount effects, Casio DA2 DAT machine.

Rob has received a couple of good Demotakes reviews in the past, and the experience seems to have made him track-happy. Sixteen bloody tracks happy, to be precise. Four or five tracks should be enough any talent showcase - and that, after all, is what a demo tape is supposed to be.

Rob describes his tape as, "a mixture of pieces done for theatre/dance and others with no particular function." - suggesting that at least some of the music has been written to accompany visuals. Not surprisingly, then, it is the evocative atmospheric tracks like 'Coda' and 'Coral Fauna' which are among the most successful – someone should sign this man up to write the music for a wildlife documentary.

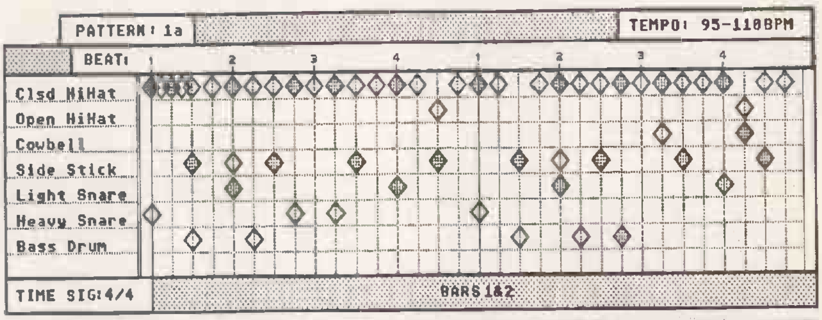
Much of Rob's music, however, is an engagingly offbeat and frantically rhythmic mixture of jazz, ethnic, ambient and dance elements which, while clearly the product of a fertile and original musical mind, often lacks focus and discipline. The rhythms are too fractured, the overall musical texture too fussy. To an extent this is down to cleverness for cleverness' sake, but many of the tracks would also benefit from better mixes. More attention needs to be paid to how sounds sit together, and thought given to getting the balance of the mix right – often, parts which should be prominent end up fighting for space with those which should be secondary. Specifically, too many incidental percussion parts are given unwarranted prominence. A more measured use of reverb wouldn't go amiss, either.

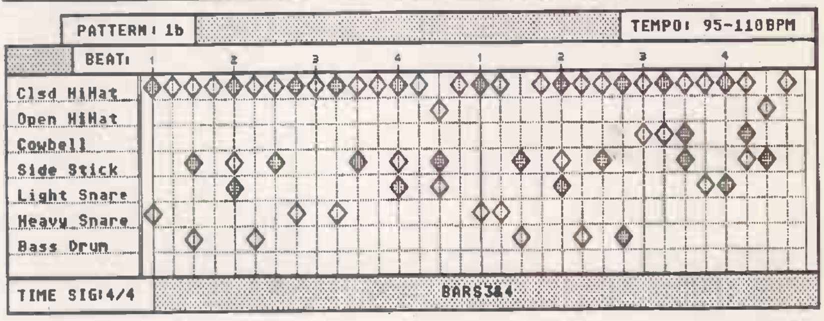
On a more positive note, Rob deserves to be complemented on the full, warm sound and the diverse palette of timbres he's achieved with a fairly limited equipment setup. In fact, don't be discouraged, Rob. I actually like your music a lot, but I do think you're falling short of your potential at the moment. Be more critical of your music, be a lot harder on yourself – I think the results will be worth the effort. ■

On The Beat... *(slight return)*

Okay, okay... I'll keep it going for a few more months – if only to stop the howls of protest. God, you people will do anything for a few free drum patterns. You have to realise, however, that as Editor my work load has just increased by a factor of at least ten, and the opportunity for me to get creative behind a beat box these days is decidedly limited. But I shall endeavour to slip in the odd pattern or two each month... anything for a quiet life.

This one's a dance pattern with illusions of grandeur. It's designed to work in a time-keeping role, but also provide a little more interest than is commonly associated with rhythms of its type. It's actually a 'standard kit' version of a pattern I wrote using much more exotic voices but, of course, without access to the same voices, you would be unlikely to achieve the right effect. As it stands it still is a pattern with plenty going for it – though if you do feel like experimenting, I think you could almost certainly improve it, sonically at least.





Finally, for all those readers who missed the early articles on the *On The Beat* series who keep calling to ask what the different shading of the diamonds represents – the answer is dynamic level. Here's the Key:

■ *Text and Example by Nigel Lord*

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