

OCEAN WAY RECORDING BEGAN IN A GARAGE IN SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA, IN 1968, AS A PLACE TO SHOWCASE OWNER ALLEN Sides'S CUSTOM MONITORS. FROM THESE HUMBLE BEGINNINGS THE EMPIRE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE PARTNERING WITH BILL PUTNAM AND ACQUIRING HIS UNITED RECORDING STUDIO IN HOLLYWOOD, AND BUILDING STATE OF THE ART RECORDING FACILITIES IN NASHVILLE, ST. BARTHS, AND NEARBY SHERMAN OAKS. THE OCEAN WAY "BRAND" ALSO INCLUDES ALLEN'S HIGH-END (AND EXCELLENT SOUNDING) MONITORS, A UNIQUE AND AFFORDABLE MICROPHONE, EXCELLENT UAD PLUG-INS, DRUM SAMPLES, AND EVEN AN IPAD/IPHONE APP. ALLEN IS ALSO WELL KNOWN FOR BEING A METICULOUS ENGINEER/PRODUCER, HAVING WORKED WITH SUCH ARTISTS AS PHIL COLLINS, GREEN DAY, ERIC CLAPTON, FAITH HILL, WYNONNA JUDD, BECK, MARY J. BLIGE, RY COODER, JONI MITCHELL, FRANK SINATRA, RAY CHARLES, JOHN WILLIAMS, JERRY GOLDSMITH, ANDRÉ PREVIN, MICHAEL JACKSON, AND FRANK ZAPPA. HE'S ALSO WELL KNOWN FOR LEADING THE CHARGE ON RECLAIMING CLASSIC TUBE MICS AND GEAR THAT WAS BEING ABANDONED IN THE '80S; HE HAS PROBABLY LISTENED TO, AND EVALUATED, MORE MICROPHONES THAN MOST OF US EVER WILL. NOT LONG AGO ALLEN SOLD OCEAN WAY RECORDING IN HOLLYWOOD, WHERE WE MET FOR THIS INTERVIEW, AND IT HAS NOW REVERTED BACK TO THE ORIGINAL UNITED RECORDING NAME.

### **How many studios did you own a few years back?**

At the peak of it, I had a lot of studios. I had what was Cello Studios and is now EastWest. I had the United and Western studios as one complex; we had nine rooms there. Then we had Record One, which had two rooms. We also had Ocean Way in Nashville, which had three rooms, and then Ocean Way St. Barths in the Carribean, which is one very nice room. That was the peak.

### **What years were those?**

I sold off the Western building maybe 12 years ago. I wanted to keep my A and B – Bill Putnam's original classic rooms – intact. That was most important to me, so I kept all the United rooms, Record One, and St. Barths, of course. Ocean Way Nashville was a pretty fabulous place. It's three rooms, about 22,000 square feet. It was an 1850s, pre-Civil War, gray stone church



# ALLEN SIDES

## A QUEST FOR QUALITY

INTERVIEW AND CURRENT PHOTOS BY LARRY CRANE

and rectory building. We tied the buildings together with glass corridors and made a big tracking room, which has four huge isos with skylights and windows. You can track an 80-piece orchestra in that room. The other room is a big tracking room, and there's another big room downstairs. On the third floor there's a fantastic roof garden with a nice lounge. It was very successful, and then Mike Curb, one of our good clients, was about to do a big donation to Belmont University to build a new recording center. We were two blocks from the campus. There's never been a studio attached to a university like that, especially with that kind of equipment. We ended up making a deal with them. My staff stayed in place and stayed involved. It was a partnership between the university and myself to continue Ocean Way the same way that it was when I was there. I work there fairly regularly, and my speakers are still there.

### **So it still runs as a commercial studio, but there are also students working there?**

Yeah. Occasionally it's more of a commercial studio, and if there's dead air time, the students can use the place. Because it's so gorgeous, there are a lot of musical events done there. With Ocean Way in Hollywood, I made the decision about a year and a half ago to get rid of the main room there. Our focus is manufacturing high-end speakers and selling them all over the world. We do microphones and sample libraries. We're involved with the UAD Ocean Way Studios [room modeling] plug-ins. We still do studios "to go." For years we've done studios in houses for Rick Rubin. We'd set up a house in Laurel Canyon with discrete Neve consoles. We'd acoustically treat each room so that it sounded good. We still do that. We've done these in Switzerland, and all over the world.

### **Do you have a huge warehouse or something?**

We have a big warehouse. I still have probably one of the largest mic collections in the world. I only collect things if I love the way they sound. I don't collect things because they're rare or esoteric. If they don't do something for me sonically, I'm really not interested.

### **You started all this by building speakers in your garage?**

The music business as we know it has changed. I probably recorded 30 to 50 albums out of my garage studio. The music business then was just ripping. We built the original studio as a demo room for my loudspeakers – I didn't really build it with the premise of being a studio to record music. I needed impressive sounding material to play on my speakers. I needed music that sounded dramatic. Only a handful of recordings sounded like that. At that point, I had been doing recording for five or six years. My first studio was under [Santa Monica's] Pacific Ocean Park amusement park, and I opened that up in 1968. Then I started building the garage around '71 and opened it up in '72.

### **How big was this garage?**

It was a three and a half car garage with beam ceilings. It was a very nice garage. That was out in Santa Monica, on a street called Ocean Way.

### **Hence the name!**

It was a very happening place, but finally the neighbors reached the point where it was too much. We were working into the night. Bill Putnam and I had become close friends, and when [his United Recording's] Studio B here became available I ended up renting that from him. We rebuilt that, and it became our Studio B. It wasn't long before I took over Studio A and Studio D.

### **This was a period where Bill was starting to focus on building recording equipment as well.**

Exactly. Sonically, he and I came from the same place. Bill would come down to my garage, and he loved my speakers.

### **What was the impetus for making speakers? Were you looking for something that would give you what you wanted to hear?**

I was a musician, but I always loved great-sounding speakers. I'd even build my own bass amps, and I had all kinds of various speakers I'd built. I used to buy a tremendous amount of old theater speakers. I started experimenting with tri-amping, building my own crossovers, and different amplifier/driver combinations. I built up some fairly nice sounding speakers. I think my speakers in the garage were pretty shocking-sounding at the time.

### **People forget how limited the options were back then.**

There weren't very many options – a couple of [Altec] 604s? I was running a tri-amplified system that went down to 20 Hz and up to 25 kHz. It wasn't harsh; it was big, open, and airy sounding. Musicians would walk in for playback, guys like [drummer] Harvey Mason, and they'd be shocked. For me, as an engineer, the best part was after I recorded the track and they walked in for the playback. I don't think there's such a thing as a rough mix. It should sound like a finished record from the time that people walk in the door. The 'verbs, effects, delays, and whatever you're going to do; I have it all prepped up while I'm tracking. By the time they walk in, I've got the mix where I think it's in the range.

### **It feels happening.**

With Bruce Swedien [*Tape Op* #91], when we were doing all of the Michael Jackson records, that's always the way it was. Of course, there were unlimited budgets. When Bruce was at Record One, he'd have both rooms going, and sometimes a room here too. He'd put up a mix. It might have been a triple 24-track mix with all the effects, delays, and everything set up. You'd come in, and they'd overdub on it. Then he'd go to the other room and have the song set up the same way. He'd have them take the one song down and put the next one up. Everything was recalled, and every note was taken. Every time they walked in, it was a finished record that needed one more percussion overdub, or one other little thing. Michael would stand there and tell Bruce what he wanted to add. He was extremely hands-on on delivering content. When we built Record One's Room A; that was really for Michael. I think they were doing *Dangerous*. They wanted some really interesting speakers that would be very fun to listen to loud, so I built this big system. When they were doing *Thriller*, they had started at Westlake [Recording Studios]; then they started doing drums, strings, and choirs over at Ocean Way. Once they came over here, they pretty much moved in. Quincy did *Back on the Block* at Record One, and they started doing all the records there from that point on. So I built this big system for Bruce. I think he won three consecutive Grammys for Best Album of the Year in that room.

### **Where is Record One located?**

It's in Sherman Oaks. After Michael finished, Dr. Dre moved in. 50 Cent, Eminem, and all of those records were done there. That A room is Dr. Dre's. Basically, Record One is his home.

### **You don't see that much in the industry anymore, where there's that solid, blocked-out booking.**



Well, he celebrated his billionaire status on TMZ in the living room of Record One. Record One has two beautiful studios, but there are also big living rooms with fireplaces, kitchens, and office suites. It's more like staying at a lovely private home. Dre's been there for a while.

### **So you're still the owner?**

Yeah. What happened with the studios in Hollywood was Sunset Gower Studios, who owned about \$400 million in Hollywood real estate, really wanted my parcel because it sits on the front door of their lot. I'm very good friends with the owner of the lot, and Ocean Way brings a certain thing to the lot that they value. It was a perfect situation for me, where once again I ended up making a deal where I sold them the assets and we have a licensing agreement to maintain Ocean Way. Basically it's an agreement where they pay me so much to still be involved with it. My staff is in place, and really everything stays the same. From my standpoint, I'm cashed out rather comfortably.

### **At some point you have to think about retiring.**

Yeah. I'm still working constantly! I own this building, and the one next door where Canon Film is. I ended up selling the building to Sunset Gower to put Canon in there. I also sold this building to them. My friend, Rickey Minor, was about to build a studio over at the Paramount lot, but I told him that he should take a look at this. He had just finished up the [*The Tonight Show with*] Jay Leno, and was going back to *American Idol*. He had done the show during the peak, when it was immensely successful, and then he left to go to ...*Leno*. On *Idol*, we'd typically work three 14-hour days where we'd cut 11 songs in one day. We'd do all the overdubs and everything else. Then we'd set up three vocal [tracking] setups at the hotel where the kids stay so that they can do vocals simultaneously – there are three vocal coaches.. We cut tracks, and then when we get really good rough mixes, we send them over, and then they send them back over here [for us] to do backgrounds. We have a room at Ocean Way where we're usually doing backgrounds and strings. We mix it all on Monday, it's mastered at Bernie's on Tuesday, and it's up on iTunes at noon.

### **That's crazy. I never thought about this end of the process for *American Idol*.**

What we do is the finished album version. They do a live minute and a half version at the show, but the arrangements are worked out here. The tough part is that obviously our versions are pretty slick. Some of these guys are pretty good singers, but they're not necessarily ready to do it 100% live.

### **I told someone the other day that if they'd been out on the road for two months, the vocal takes would go a lot easier.**

Right. How many times have we done the album where we do the album first, and then you hear them out on the road, and it's ten times better than the song that we recorded? They figured out how to make it work.

### **It's part of the game.**

So now our main manufacturing plant is in Burbank, where we manufacture all of our loudspeakers and have a warehouse for all of our equipment. I actually live out in Santa Barbara. Rickey and I work constantly. We had Stevie Wonder in here last week. This album I did with Dave Koz [*The 25th of December*] is all duets with vocalists. I got a lot of great artists on there.

### **I assume that many years ago you started picking which things you'd like to work on as an engineer.**

Yeah. Of course I've worked on some projects that were like, "Oh, my god. This is as painful as it gets."

### **We've all been there.**

Exactly. I've definitely paid my dues. I've worked two lifetimes worth of hours. Sleep wasn't an issue. But I've worked with some amazing artists and had some real highs, musically.

### **I looked through your AllMusic credits, and it's ridiculous.**

That's probably not even a quarter of it. I think of all those amazing records we did. We never took any pictures.

### **We're always focused on the music. We're not documenting with photos.**

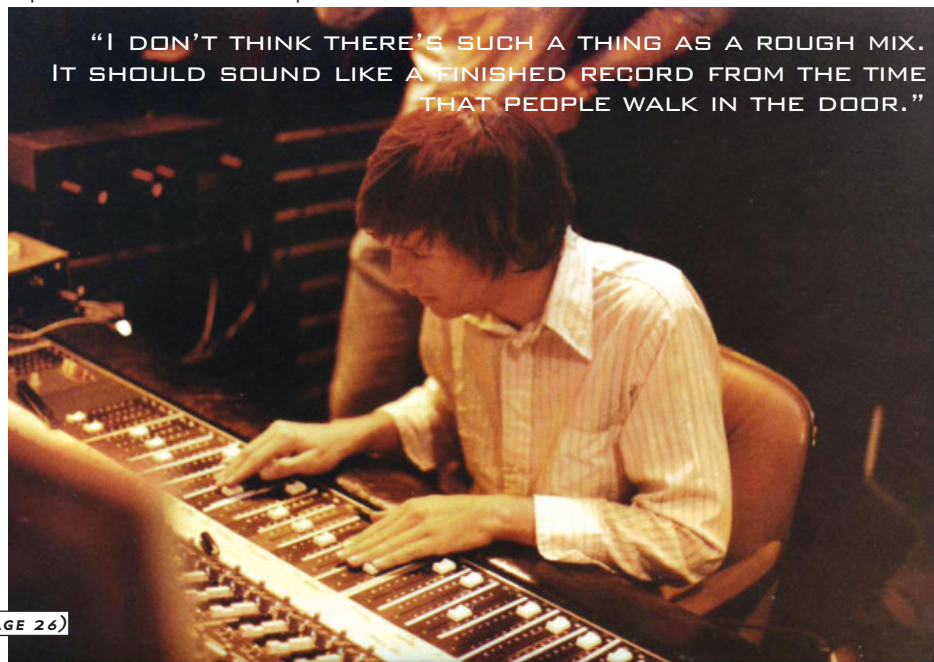
We didn't actually start taking pictures until some years later. I think that we figured there was in excess of a billion albums sold out of those studios. Ocean Way has been here in Hollywood since 1958. Capitol Studios is the same thing. They opened at almost the same time this place did.

### **There's an insane amount of history.**

One time I was walking down the hallway here and Don Was was standing there. I think he was with George Harrison and Ringo, because Ringo was doing his record in B. It was like, "Oh, hi!" It's crazy. We had a couple of Rolling Stones' records, and on one of them I think they went through a thousand reels of 2-inch tape. There were endless slaves so that each [band member] could go off and do their own work on different areas, and then they'd comp it together. 3M used to fly me in this lovely private jet out to their hunting lodge. I think I was the biggest buyer of 3M tape in the United States at one point.

### **You've seen the arc of this business. We hear all these horror stories of studios closing.**

If you look at what the studio scene was in the '80s, in a typical studio, say that the rate was \$1,800 or \$2,000 a day for the studio. The rate today is about the same as it was then, sometimes less. But with the rooms we have, as well as the mics, we tend to get a better rate because you can't do it anywhere else. There are a finite number of places that can do what we do. Generally they're more than happy to pay the rate, because they're only going to be there for a day or two of tracking, mixes, or strings, or whatever else they're planning to do there. Sometimes we get some long projects that come in. But, back then, we'd have a waiting list. Sometimes there would be four or five holds on a room. It wasn't really a question of being booked. It was only a question of being able to fit everybody in. You'd have certain producers who were your best friends, as well as clients, and they'd be like, "Of course you can get me in, right?" It was a tough thing. I had all these great clients who came through; an endless list. Typically, every session was dual 24-track. It was \$500 a day for a 24-track machine [rental]. If they were doing Dolby A or SR, or something, it was another \$250 or \$500 a day. Before you knew it, including the tape and everything else, it would be \$2,000 a day, plus another \$2,000 for the studio, so people were paying \$4,000 a day. It was a 12-hour lockout, but a lot of time they'd go into overtime, so I'd end up going into two, three, four, five or six hours of overtime. Now you're talking \$5,000, or \$6,000, a day for one room. Also, if you look at that period of time, the records were making so much money. They were mainly concerned with getting things done right and as quickly as possible. The record companies were kicking ass. Then all that disappeared. Pro Tools came in and the rates started dropping because there was a lot of competition. Budgets got much tighter, and the cost of operating went up exponentially. For instance, say my electrical bills here in 1981 were \$1,800 a month. Now they're



"I DON'T THINK THERE'S SUCH A THING AS A ROUGH MIX. IT SHOULD SOUND LIKE A FINISHED RECORD FROM THE TIME THAT PEOPLE WALK IN THE DOOR."

\$8,000 a month. Our insurance, like workers comp and medical, went from \$8,000 a year to \$55,000 a year. At one point we had a hundred employees. The cost of doing business has quadrupled, but the actual rate is no different than it was in 1981. At a place like Ocean Way, we have huge rooms and important Hollywood real estate. We had six full-time technicians, incredibly well trained seconds [second engineers], two runners for every room, and a fantastic secretarial staff. Our clients expected a very high level of service. It was like staying at the Four Seasons – everything was immaculate. Every mic was perfect. Because we tended to specialize in the more esoteric gear, you'd come into our place and the Fairchilds [limiters], the [Teletronix] LA-2As, or the Pultecs were in perfect condition. Every EMT [plate reverb] was tweezed the right way. It was a different level of performance. The engineers and producers were very demanding. Now people are infinitely less demanding, because most of us don't even have technicians on staff. If something breaks, you just apologize. Because we still do orchestras, we have to have a high level of maintenance.

### **One part of your story is the gear acquisition.**

Even at the time, when Western United was at its peak, they were updating along with everybody else in getting rid of the old gear. People wanted [AKG] 414s, not [AKG] C 12s or [Telefunken] 251s. They wanted U 87s, not 67s. So I bought all of the tube mics from Western. They wanted phantom power. They didn't want tubes.

### **It's the rush forward of technology. You've had to deal with it at your studios over the years as well.**

Years ago, I was very good friends with the people at Todd-AO. They used to score their films on the old Chaplin stage, which is now A&M, with portable equipment. They'd bring in all of their microphones and equipment, do the recording, and then they'd leave. All that was sitting in storage. I ended up buying a bunch of Stanley Church mics (a modified U 47). Basically it's a little more like a [Telefunken ELA M] 251 electronically, but it's a phenomenal microphone. Shockingly good. Imagine the best U 47 you've ever heard, and then add 40%. I bought eight of those from Todd-AO in 1968. I had 67s, I had Telefunken CM61s, which is basically a Schoeps, and I had Schoeps M 221 cardioids. I'd go do live recordings with a bunch of great custom mics, plus a discrete console that I'd built. Those were the recordings that I'd use for demo purposes. Once I'd heard those mics, I'd start comparing them to newer 87s and 414s, and it was like, "What are you talking about?"

### **You're using and trusting your ears.**

In the end, that's all it is. Some people on the technical level get too caught up in the process. In the end, the process is irrelevant. All that matters is the result. You may do some unorthodox things to get to this place, but if you get to this place, in sound, it's all about what's in your head. If you hear a certain thing in your head, then you're going to do whatever you have to do to make that happen. That's why speakers are

always so important to me. If I can hear well, I can make a good judgment. I need to record something, play it in my car, and have it punchy as shit. I've got the right amount of 30 Hz in my kick drum, I've got the air, and nothing's harsh. I can turn it up, it doesn't hurt my ears, and it's fun to listen to.

## **Analog**

People talk about the glory days of analog. I don't think it was so glorious. I'd be recording with these amazing players, and when I'd listen to input, it sounded great. When I played it back I was losing about 15% of what I'd heard. This is at 30 ips, and watching my levels very carefully. I had the [Ampex] ATR-124, which goes a half octave lower than a regular machine at 30 ips. I had an ITI equalizer adding 33 Hz on the bass and the kick to compensate for 30 ips, so that when it played back it had the low bass. I worked really hard to get the levels working and tracks pre-EQed, so that it would have the resolution. It sounded good, but it certainly didn't sound like the input! Scotch 250 was my favorite tape. The self-noise was much lower than [Ampex] 456, but you couldn't record quite as loud. However, it had no modulation noise, so basses were totally pure. It was a very natural sounding tape. With that tape, what I'd do is cut my basics on 16-track and print the kick on two tracks, the snare on two tracks, and then play them mono. It cut the noise in half and allowed me to record at a lower level so that I wouldn't be capping the transients. If I set it for +4, I was recording the snares and kicks at -3. There are ways to circumvent it. With analog tape, understanding the ratios of how loud you can be, and where it's perfect... that was a whole art in itself.

### **Harshness is a really good thing to bring up. It's something that's become more prevalent with digital recordings.**

Exactly. You have to work really hard when you get certain singers who have something in their voice. I'm in love with Pro Tools because I can take a little 5 or 2 kHz out when there's a harsh syllable, and I can turn every "s" down manually until it's the perfect level. Clip gain! Now if I'm working with a vocalist, I might spend an hour. I don't even compress vocals anymore. That's not fair to say – there are certain singers. I did an album with Katharine McPhee, and she can sing out. Because she has so much presence in her voice, I like using the original dbx 160 [compressor]. It's pretty fast. I can see it go down to -12 or -13 dB, but on her it sounds great. There are other singers where if I did that it would destroy their voice, and there would be nothing left. With Josh Groban I use no compression, because it takes the life out of his voice. I do every ride manually. I remember watching Shania Twain's ex-husband ["Mutt" Lange] mixing in Record One. He would work with an automated fader, sitting there for a day on a vocal getting every breath and everything right. When you think of what we do in Pro Tools now, how hard that would be to do with a fader?

### **The proof is in the pudding there. His records sound very controlled.**

Very precise. The end of a phrase could be everything emotionally, to hear the tail of that phrase. You can do things with the vocals that are pretty fabulous. I'm beginning to track at 192 [kHz sampling rate],

because it's not really an issue anymore and it sounds so much better. This was the biggest problem we had when Pro Tools first came along. The original was 16-bit Pro Tools, at 44.1 or 48 kHz. You're recording drums, so you've got [AKG] C 12s over the drums and wherever else. Maybe the drums aren't super bright. They're a little on the dark side, so you record it flat. Now I put two original API 550A EQs over the left and right overheads, and I go plus 4 dB with a 12 kHz shelf. What it sounds like once it's been recorded is utterly different than the way that it sounds if I put those EQs across the mics.

### **Before tracking, yeah.**

With the EQs across the mics, you have all this resolution that you're bringing up. Once you record it at 16-bit, 44.1 kHz, it's gone. With drums, because of the peak information, you have to record the overall level way lower than you would other instruments. All that information, the harmonics, the 16 kHz is sitting down in the low bit range. Technically, if you patch your [API] 550A EQs across the mic when you record it, you're bringing all those frequencies into a much higher resolution point as you're recording it, so it makes Pro Tools sound twice as good. That's been a problem with Pro Control, as a system. It's harder to get an analog equalizer before it hits Pro Tools. There are more and more work surfaces and, especially with the mic pres, they don't have the cabling so that you can do it.

### **There are a lot of impediments to good sound out there.**

When you get up to 192 kHz and then patch in the EQ and start EQing, you start hearing frequencies coming back. Even between 96 and 192, I hear that even more.

### **Ocean Way Audio still builds monitor systems.**

We've always done systems for our clients, but now we're more into the commercial audiophile realm. I was sitting with Rick Rubin in Munich, Germany, listening to audiophile speakers. He's totally into that whole thing. We've been selling a lot of systems all over the country. We still do studio systems, but we do a lot of home hi-fi.

### **With your original speakers, back in the day, were they aimed at both markets?**

It really was. It was more of a home hi-fi thing, originally. When I helped Bill make the original Urei Time Align speaker, that was all based on him hearing my speakers and saying that he knew we could make it better. He knew that there was a market. There was. He sold thousands of these things. I don't mean to say that it's the greatest speaker in the world, but it's significantly better than what was there before. It was within a price range that was acceptable. Most big speakers in studios are fairly unlistenable – all they do is go loud.

### **They're client impressers.**

They're not even impressive! They're just loud. There's nothing high-fidelity about it. My concept is that I like big speakers to sound natural. I hate harshness. I like things to sound real.

### **You've got three different speaker ranges?**



More than that. Our biggest system, like the one that Dr. Dre has, you can get up to a million dollar speaker system. Each speaker is nine-feet high and five-feet wide. We do the complete installations. We did one in Singapore like that. We have smaller speakers that are actually relatively normal in size. You can actually set it right in front of the console. We're going to do a version that's a self-amplified speaker that sits on the console but goes down to 20 Hz flat. It'll go loud as hell and also go really low. Once again, I need to hear that octave, and I need to hear it with clear definition. I need to know exactly where that bass will sit, how much 33 or 40 Hz is going to sit in the kick. I love my low bass. As Bruce Swedien says, "You can have as much low bass as you want, as long as it's clear."

**It's hard to get the energy to project clearly, and in phase.**

I think with Dr. Dre, one of his successes was that it all sounded really good. It's punchy as hell, with good, low bass, and a lot of rap didn't sound comparable. He set a standard; he's a really sonic guy. That makes a big difference.

**You also collaborated on a microphone.**

The Ocean Way microphone [Sterling Audio ST6050] became very successful for us. Sterling approached me about doing a mic. Guitar Center is our exclusive rep for all of our loudspeakers, and we have a great relationship with them. They have 262 stores across the country, and whenever they get a client looking for a high-end system, it generally comes to me. It's been a great relationship with them. We do the installations, as well as helping with the acoustics and the spaces. We've done a lot of rooms through them. With the microphone, it was the average guy, sitting at his house with a little mini Pro Tools rig, needs at least one or two good mics. The vocals have to sound good, and the guitars have to sound good. I figured that I could come up with a mic in the \$1,000 range that sounded good. I used the U 47 fet as a reference point. When Neumann made their first transistor mics, they didn't sound as good [as the tube ones]; but it's a nice sounding mic. The first mics they made, particularly the U 47 fet, is a superb microphone. It doesn't sound like a 47, but it has superb characteristics. It's an excellent vocal microphone. Those on the used market are going for about \$3800, because they've become a classic on their own. The U 47 fet, the KM 88, and the KM 86 are my three favorite transistor microphones. I wanted a microphone that sounded as good as the best 47 fet; perhaps with a little different character, but something along that line. I started to listen to everything they had. I didn't quite see anything that was exactly what I had in mind, so we started experimenting. It took me almost two years to come up with what the finished version became. It really is along the lines of sounding like a great 47 fet, but we didn't need two patterns. Basically, it's a great vocal mic, and also a great mic for acoustic guitars, acoustic bass, or drum overheads. I wanted to keep the price down so it could retail at \$1,000 and not more. That's the niche we took, and I think

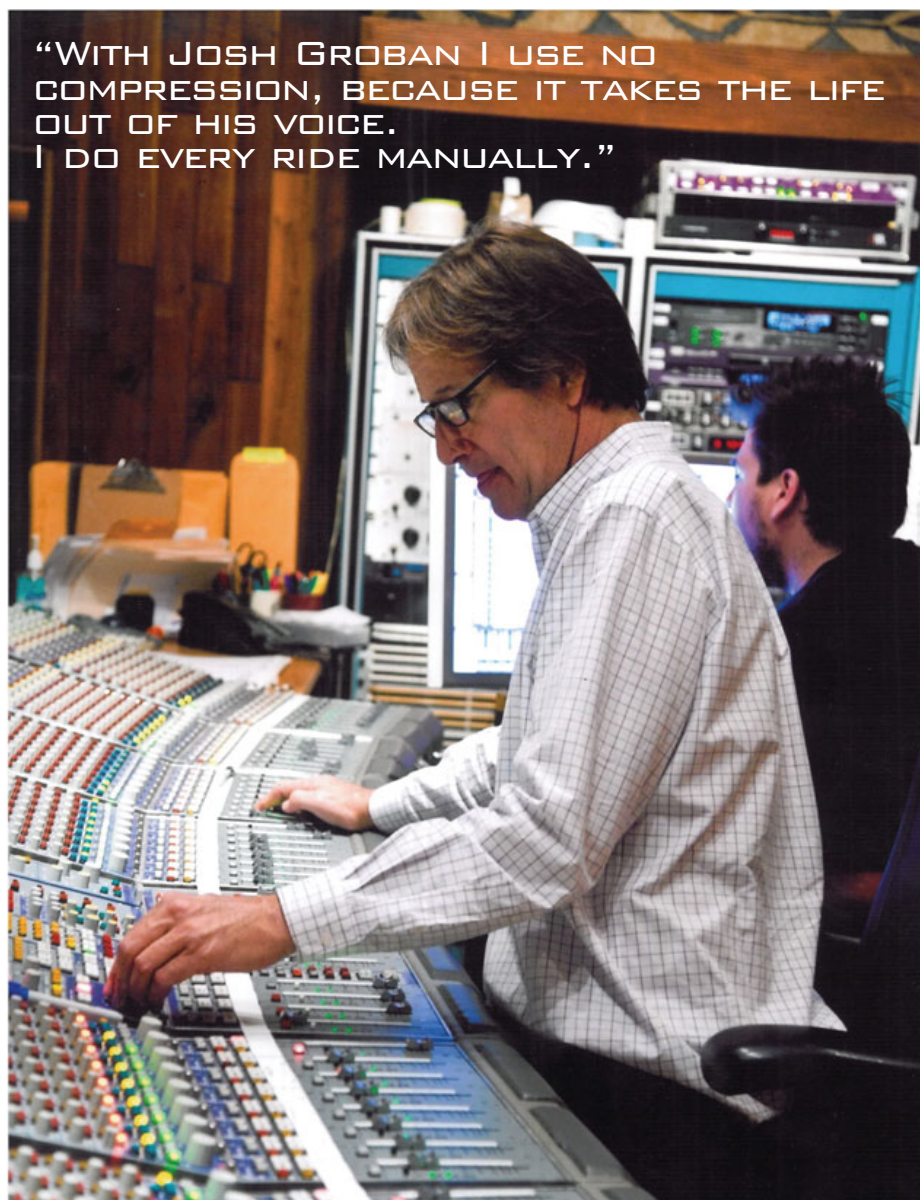
they sound really great. The other thing I found interesting is that I'd try different configurations for the top. When I was buying all these U 47s from Europe (and I probably had 400 U 47s, conservatively), I had a pair of electrostatic headphones and I sat and listened to every single mic. I'd compare every one. I noticed that the chrome tops seemed to have a little more air than the rest of the mics, but I could never quite figure it out. I started comparing. I'd go through and find the best capsules. There were three versions of the 47s. There were even other versions, depending on the capsules, but three main versions. I started changing tops, changing bodies, comparing capsules, and comparing electronics. What I found was that the chrome-plated top had more openness than the nickel-plated. It might be because of the fact that at the wavelengths of 16 or 18 kHz, it makes a difference. We built that as one of the things that incorporated this design. You had to sit and listen to it all. Also, it's impervious to overload. It won't distort. As far as a pair of microphones, I don't know anything that will touch it.

**You mentioned the UAD Ocean Way Studios dynamic room modeling plug-in.**

When Bill Putnam, Jr. [Tape Op #24] came to me, we talked for quite some time about getting the sound of his father's two most famous rooms. There really hadn't been a way to capture that the way we wanted to do it. We came up with a new way of measuring.

**You must have. I've used other convolution reverbs but this is different.**

This is way beyond that. It requires you to measure with speakers that go down to 18 Hz, up to 20 kHz, and have super wide dispersion. You can't just put up a mic and a bookshelf speaker in the room. It doesn't hit the room. We take many measurements, not just one. We have a program to coalesce the measurements that allows us to have infinite variabilities in the way that we do it. There are certain things that I can't talk about because it's proprietary, but the amount of resolution that we get is on a different planet than what you'd normally get with that kind of thing. The other thing was that I



**"WITH JOSH GROBAN I USE NO COMPRESSION, BECAUSE IT TAKES THE LIFE OUT OF HIS VOICE. I DO EVERY RIDE MANUALLY."**



really wanted not only the sound of the rooms, but rather the sound of the rooms as I would actually record it. I want the sound of *those* mics. We had eight sets of stereo pairs of mics, in three positions in the room, in front of each source. I could never put up that many microphones and balance them on a session. It would take me a day, and it did, to set them up! It was eight hours just to set the microphones in place. I find myself calling up the program instead. It's so much easier than actually *doing* it. When we assembled the finished version, we were listening to every single pair of microphones. We had an infinite amount of variables in each one to adjust that you don't see, but there are ways that we can do it based on our measurements. We'd listen to each pair of microphones; if we didn't think it was dramatic enough, we'd change the setting around so that it sounded more interesting. I wanted each to be unique and have its own thing. We spent weeks listening to them to come up with the presets that you hear.

**I try to teach to people that there's left and right panning, as well as high and low frequencies. But front to back depth is a very important part of recording.**

If you have the wherewithal, you can create a field, even if you have two acoustic guitars that were close mic'd. You put them left and right, and print a stem for each one that puts them in a space where it sounds like they're standing in the room right there.

**It's like the old trick to set up a stereo pair and record two passes of acoustic guitar.**

Absolutely. I still record everything in stereo. I don't use pan pots if I can avoid it. It makes things sound more exciting. Sometimes it's fun to go into really difficult environments where you don't have any good mics; nothing's really good, but you still make it work. If you have a concept, there are things you can do. More of it is the engineering and musical chops. Equipment's important, but it's not the most important thing.

**Absolutely. I always tell people that knowing what to do is way more important.**

When I track in here with Rickey, I'm not using anything super special. These [SSL console] J-Series preamps are unbelievable; and if you do the insert out straight to Pro Tools, they're ridiculously good. They're one of the best mic pres I've ever heard. There aren't any capacitors in them. When in mix and tracking mode, it bypasses five amps in every channel. I'd say that it sounds as good as my Neve 88R in tracking mode, and I'm a snob! I don't need any mic pres. The EQ in this console sounds much better than the Neve EQ in my 88R. On the drums, I'm using a couple of Schoeps mics overhead, which sound amazing. They're a major part of my drum sound. Put two Schoeps in cardioid with a couple of API 550A EQs across them, and insert out into Pro Tools. I've got [Sennheiser] 421s across the toms.

## Fidelity and Compression

I never, ever use a bus compressor. I may use mults of the bus to get certain sustains and such. When I master, I'll do maybe a little peak limiting to get the level up to where I need it to be, but it's not enough to really affect things sonically. I still want all the impact. Now, when you listen to most alternative rock, it basically sounds like one thing. The choruses don't sound any bigger than the verses, and the bridges don't differ. Drums don't even sound like drums; they sound like hash. When it sounds that bad, once it gets to an MP3 it's even more distorted. Information that's completely pulverized doesn't transfer well. Music that's really clear and punchy will sound infinitely better on a set of earbuds. It's so rare that something comes along that blows you away these days. There are some good things, but the compressors have killed it. When Hugh Padgham [*Tape Op* #55] did all the Phil Collins records, he didn't use bus compressors. He'd compress individual items if it needed it. I was remixing Phil Collins in 5.1, and he wanted an uncompressed version. I have Hugh's original mixes, and they're punchy as hell. He's an excellent engineer.

I've got a [Shure SM]57 on top of the snare, a [AKG] 451 underneath, an Ocean Way mic on kick, and a [AKG] D 112 inside. It's pretty standard fare, but it sounds great. Nothing unusual. We make it sound great. I have a custom direct box, with a special transformer we had wound, that I use for basses. We use a passive bass, and it all sounds really fun.

**Also, it helps to have great players and good arrangements.**

**"I STILL RECORD EVERYTHING IN STEREO. I DON'T USE PAN POTS IF I CAN AVOID IT. IT MAKES THINGS SOUND MORE EXCITING."**





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When the arrangement's great, everything fits. We, as engineers, are called upon to clear the space.

**I find myself doing so much cutting of frequencies when someone sends me tracks to mix.**

Sometimes you have guitar tracks, and you take a little 300 or 400 out, or a little 120 out; all of a sudden you've cleared the space for something else, rather than trying to turn up all the highs. It depends on whether or not something's taking up space and not adding anything. In the same respect, I love my low bass. One of my favorite things about the [Neve] 1073 is the 33 Hz boost. I love that. The 1073 has a 12.5 kHz shelf. It's very natural. You don't boost too much, but it's got a lot of air. You put it in and all of a sudden, it's clear. Neve 1073s on kicks and basses are pretty amazing. But for an overhead, my discrete API mic preamps blow them away. The API 550A is one of my favorite EQs in the world. I like this Avalon stereo EQ [AD2055]; I think it sounds fucking great. I like it much better than the GML EQ. I loved George's [Massenburg, *Tape Op* #54 & #64] old EQ, the ITI [MEP-230]. George is one of my closest friends, and we used to go back and forth about this shit. I'm like, "George, you're just being a grouch!"

**I got him pretty mad once.**

George and I had a company called AG Digital; Allen George Digital rentals. When he had The Complex Studios and I had Ocean Way, we had Sony 48 tracks. If you owned the machines, they were always trying to get you to throw them in. George and I had a separate company with all of our digital machines. Anytime we need to rent something out, we'd call AG.

**Protect yourself.**

We did, and it was very successful for George and I for many years. We've had great times. We've been to Japan a lot. We worked on the development of the Sony 48-track together, as well as the Sony C800G mic. We worked on a lot together and had so much fun over the years. There was a little group of us that always used to get together. Bruce Swedien, me, George, Bernie Grundman, and Al Schmitt. We used to have a lot of fun. I do so many other things besides recording records that I didn't put in as much studio time as someone like AL. I was running around, installing, building studios, rooms, microphones, and doing all these things. It takes up a fair bit of time.

**What's the next lucrative business in entertainment?**

We're all looking. Like working with Rickey Minor, this guy is so talented, and we have so much fun together. I think if there's a new music business, maybe he's going to be the man. I'm enjoying doing various records. We'll see what's next on the agenda. ☺

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