



## André Jacquemin

**Swept along by the success and historical significance of the work he did with Monty Python, André has collected an amazing credits list and reckons he's worked on more than 50,000 commercials. He talks to ROB JAMES about keeping it small, gear decisions and why he and Michael Palin could have been Starbucks.**

**A**NDRÉ JACQUEMIN HAD his baptism of fire aged just 17 when he agreed to do the second Monty Python album. His career never looked back and he has amassed an almost unbelievable body of work composing, recording, editing and mixing everything from commercials to music and feature films.

At a time when VCRs had yet to appear, the only way Monty Python fans could get their fix was to wait for the repeats or buy the records. The first album, mostly a rehash of the first TV series, was recorded live at Camden Town Hall and didn't work very well. In 1971 André was working in a little commercials studio in Wardour Street, Studio G, under the tutelage of Radio Luxembourg recording legend Alan Bailey. Michael Palin wandered in one day, looking for a studio to record a voice-over demo tape. Bailey was already booked so André got the gig and more than 30 years later he is still inextricably linked with the Python franchise. Since 1975 Jacquemin has had his own studio, Redwood. Over the past 30 years Redwood has been through many incarnations and changes of address. Currently located in Great Chapel Street, at the heart of London's Soho creative hothouse, Redwood is once again ahead of the curve.

The latest project, just completed, involved remastering new versions of eight Monty Python albums with a load of new material, sketches and

interviews. With Spamalot playing to packed houses in London after its phenomenal success in New York the rerelease seems ideally timed to catch the Christmas rush.

### How did you get on with Michael Palin?

I thought the sketches were really funny but I didn't know who Mike was because I was always working, not watching TV. Mike would pop in between filming to record bits. Meanwhile I'd edit the voices, put sound effects and music behind it and every time he was terribly impressed because outside the BBC nobody was really doing this kind of material. Eventually, when we finished, Mike said, 'Look, I'm making an album, would you like to help us put it together.' I said, 'yeah', and off he toddles. About six months later Mike phoned, 'Could you come down for a meeting?' They were all there, messing about. The doorbell rang and in walks John Cleese and that's when the penny dropped. I was terribly young and I thought, I hope I can handle this. There was this two-foot high pile of scripts and I worked out a schedule for them. I thought my best bet would be to book Alan Bailey, who by this time had returned to Radio Luxembourg. It was a kind of security blanket for me. I had a fantastic teacher in Alan. He's one of those people with the knack of putting a mic up in a room and it just sounds wonderful.

### How did you work?

We would book some studio time, they'd turn up, do all their sketches and you had to be really on the ball because invariably we'd do three or four sketches, have a break, have a cup of tea, come back and think, 'OK lets just go back and pick up on that.' So your documentation had to be spot-on. Then I'd put a rough assembly together, throw some sound effects in and then whoever was assigned to oversee it would come in and we would work out any changes.

Python was involved in theatre and film and, obviously, we did our own commercials when we had product out. Then there's DVD. For example in 2001 we remastered Holy Grail which had only ever been out in mono. We managed to get hold of a triple track split with dialogue, effects and music and just rebuilt the whole thing over a period of months, then did a final mix with Robin O'Donoghue at Shepperton. Holy Grail was the biggest of films they made, especially in America. It's rumoured that even Elvis had it on his shelf.

### Were they well behaved?

They were very good. In the 'Embarrassment' sketch for instance, a lot of the effects were done live as we recorded the voices. They would hold things to drop, paper rustles or whatever. Anything that was physically possible we did at the time.

Sometimes things just develop, like the 'audition' sketch, put together and made up on the spot. We used bits of that in various other sketches. It will be one 15-minute sketch on the out-takes album.

There were moments of crack up time. Once Terry said, 'Do you know, it's just not very funny this. Maybe if I took my trousers down it would be funnier.' So he undid his trousers and did it again and of course it was hilariously funny.

### How did you approach the remastering?

We have this thing called the Python Bible. Around 15 years ago we archived onto CDs and DA-88s and we took the opportunity to document and catalogue everything. I've got the short version here. There is a bigger version...

### Are the DA-88s OK after all that time?

Well, so far they've pulled back fine. I've had to dip into them for some of the song remixes and I've had no problem with them or any of the CDs although I have heard that other people are having trouble.

Python paid for the archiving and, as you can imagine, there is a lot of material. We had 4-track, 8-track, 24-track and tons and tons of ¼-inch. We had it all baked and John Du Prez has them all stored somewhere, just in case. Not so much for us really, but for future generations.

### How did Redwood begin?

I was talking to a friend while we were cutting the first album at Abbey Road and Mike overheard me suggesting building a studio. He said, 'I couldn't help overhearing but it would be really nice if you came over for dinner and a chat. I wouldn't mind getting involved with you in the studio idea.' I went over for dinner and Mike made a proposition about lending me some money to set up a studio and that's how the Redwood came about. I did try to talk him into a themed caff' instead but Mike wasn't having any of it. He said, 'I know what you're good at and the studio is a good investment.' Looking back, we could have been the new Starbucks.

### Did you build it?

I converted my dad's greenhouse. He'd only finished it a month before but gracefully said we could have it.



Because it had loads of glass we had to pad it and do all the work ourselves.

I had enough money saved to buy some equipment. We had two EMI TR52s, I bought a brand new Chilton broadcast desk, some AKG D202s and one Neumann U87. We also had a Grampian spring reverb and later on we invested in a 4-track Teac. Out in the garden, effects weren't too much of a problem. You want outdoor atmos? Just stick a mic out of the window.

We stayed there a few years then we had an offer from a record company to move into the West End. We were in Wardour Street, then later Neals Yard. We moved from Covent Garden to Camden Town then back into the West End to Fauconberg Court for a while and from there to where we are now.

I don't have much left from the early days apart from mics. I still have my 1-inch 8-track which is in Ray Cooper's lock-up at the moment. It's a low hours Studer A80 I bought from Joe Brown. When we moved to Covent Garden, Harry Day and Rob Haggas built a console for me which they called Reading Wood. That worked for a number of years then for Camden Town I bought an Amek with MasterMix, which was great. By that time I'd bought a PCM 60, a PCM 70 a PCM 80 and a Rev 7 and latterly a Rev 5. All of which I still have.

#### How about workstations?

My first was a Doremi Dawn. We were soon using digital for most things apart from feeding in sound effects and certain special effects that I couldn't do with either outboard gear or the Dawn. Things like varispeeding and reversing things, tapes slowing and grinding to a halt and so on that were much more efficiently done in analogue and in any case difficult or impossible to do in digital at the time.

I looked at Sound Designer and just thought it was very complicated and the dedicated things from Roland and Korg. Although the Dawn was much more expensive it was much easier to use so we stayed with it until we finally made the move to Pro Tools at version 4 or 5.

#### Why the Mackie D8B?

It's just a knock-on effect of being old-fashioned really. It's more organic to actually mix with faders. It was invaluable on Tony Hadley's new swing album, which I've just finished producing. When I wanted to dip something very quickly for one bit and bring it back up again, rather than fiddle about in Pro Tools I

just did it manually on the desk. Or if I wanted to add a bit of compression I could just knock it on and turn a knob to get the effect I wanted without messing about loading up a plug-in.

#### How about sound effects?

We're up to 400 Gigs and as of last week it's backed up. We have two hard drives, a master and a back-up. We use Workspace in Pro Tools to access the effects. We've generated a lot ourselves and there's the usual library stuff. But often, when you hear an effect in a commercial, you know exactly where it's come from, so especially where Pythons are concerned, I try to create new stuff.

#### And Foley?

We have our own small Foley stage and a great Foley artist called Jerry Richards who, for all of his sins, used to be a guitar player with Hawkwind, so his timing's very good. He's worked on 15 or 20 projects with us now. We have various surfaces and our own Foley door. I'm now getting actors to sign it.

#### Do you still use analogue?

When I did Tony Hadley's album at Konk Studios I initially wanted to record the bass and the kit using analogue and the band straight into Pro Tools. But, we couldn't get hold of any tape! So in the end the whole thing was recorded onto Pro Tools. I was debating whether to get an analogue machine in and dump the whole lot across and back, but it was all down to speed so I just stuck with Pro Tools. People use digital for its purity and then look for plug-ins to make it sound analogue, very odd!

#### What else does Redwood do?

Not long ago I was trying to look back and sum up exactly what I'd been through and what I'd been doing and it sounds absolutely impossible but I've worked on more than 50,000 commercials would you believe? I used to do all the Our Price, Barret's Liquormart and Houndsditch Warehouse commercials and we were doing something like 20 or 30 a day. It adds up very quickly.

These days we do mostly movie soundtracks and sound design. Take Wind in The Willows. With my writing partner Dave Howman, I wrote and scored the music. We didn't do the floor recording but we did Foley, sound effects, atmospheres, dialogue editing, everything apart from the final mix. Technology has

changed everything. So much work is now done before you hit the dubbing theatre and this is why they are getting worried and so many have come and gone. Dubbing time gets cut to a bare minimum. That's a shame because it means you're rushing that element of the process.

We also do a lot of cartoon work. Dave and I did a series last year and the year before, called Boo, for the BBC.

#### Do you do the music inside the computer?

We use mostly virtual instruments and occasionally grab hold of a 'real' one, a pedal steel guitar or whatever we need. If there's percussion involved sometimes I'll give Ray Cooper a ring and ask him to bring his tambourine over. We enjoy it tremendously, but the composing isn't the key factor in doing it as a career. You've got to pay the rent so we still have to do all the other bits of recording around that. We're not big, we're very, very small. We have one control room and studio. All these people who'd been expanding their facilities with 5, 6 or 7 rooms just made me terribly nervous. So from Camden, where we had a glorious, fantastic studio, which we'd ploughed hundreds of thousands of pounds into, I went completely the opposite way. Small is good. Our expenses are minimal now. Most of the staff are freelance and I just pull them in when I need them. For instance Jerry Richards has his own Pro Tools so once we've recorded a Foley session he can go home and put the thing together. Redwood now is like an agency. For a lot of the bigger facilities it's almost too late.

#### Any ambitions left?

I'm still trying to get my own stuff together but it's been 30 years working on that one. I'm quite happy doing what I'm doing. One of the great joys is earning a living out of your hobby. I'd like to do a lot more project work on documentaries, but people look at what you've done and think you are just too experienced and are going to be too expensive. The composing thing is very important to me because it's the only thing that will earn your retirement. As an engineer you can only go on so long while your brain's intact! ■

