



## Cenzo Townshend

You'll more than likely be seeing his output applauded at the season's succession of music awards yet his approach remains firmly based on traditional values and gear. **NIGEL JOPSON** gets him to spill the beans on ribbon mics, obscure outboard and that EMI desk.

**C**ENZO TOWNSHEND'S RECENT credits read like a sampler for the current wave of ultra-hip UK bands. When *Resolution* caught up with him at his Audient/Pro Tools/Radar-equipped suite he shares with producer Stephen Street at Olympic Studios, he'd just put the finishing touches to The Kaiser Chiefs Mercury Awards-nominated album *Employment*. Cenzo co-produced Hothouse Flowers, The Wedding Present, Echo & The Bunnymen, The Editors and The Departure, and has turned the knobs for artists including Blur, LLOYD Cole, Travis, The Ordinary Boys, Idlewild, The Rakes and U2. He has recently recorded and mixed (with Stephen Street) four tracks on New Order's CD *Waiting for the Siren's Call*, and is mixing the latest Graham Coxon album.

### Did you manage to fit all the Kaisers in your production room without a riot?

The Kaiser Chiefs song *I Predict A Riot* we did entirely in here, we recorded it and mixed it in two days because they didn't have the budget to go elsewhere. We were in the middle of making The Ordinary Boys album, they discovered the Kaiser Chiefs and took them to their label B-Unique, who asked us to record it. We ended up recording just six songs with them; unfortunately we didn't have time to do more as we were recording New Order. After doing two tracks down here we went next door to Olympic Studio 2 and recorded the backing tracks through the EMI [an EMI TG12345 mixer, of the type installed at Abbey Road circa 1968, now restored on a wheeled chassis

for use at Olympic], we also recorded another tracking session at The Townhouse, and finished the rest here. This was meant to be our little 'office' to do vocals and guitars; we've kind of outgrown it in some ways, but everybody loves it!

### Tell us about the EMI desk, it's a Mk III with 16 outs, as supplied to the overseas studios, with the presence EQ control on each channel...

The EQ is perfect for anything you want to do. I've recorded the Cranberries, The Ordinary Boys, Kaiser Chiefs and Graham Coxon through it, it's been in Olympic for a year now. It has instant character — for drums especially. It just has a character that's

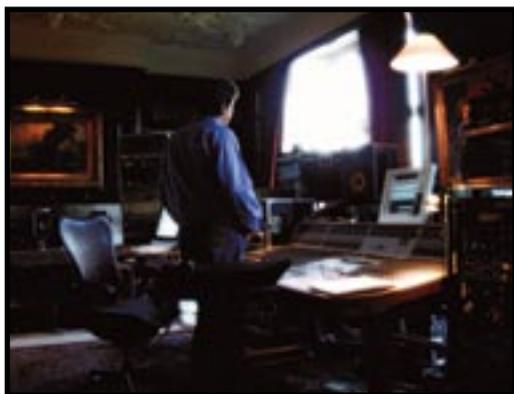
fantastic, especially going into Pro Tools. I don't think it's a particularly 'fast' desk, it does lop off the transients a bit, so you can get an awful lot more level into Pro Tools than you could going through a normal mic amp. The presence EQ is my favourite, the bass is a little bit woofy ... but I do tend to drive it quite hard.

**You achieved a very punchy drum sound for the Kaiser's in your own overdub suite.**

The recording room here was not designed to do drums, it was intended only for vocals and guitar. We had to put the kit in there... as soon as I pushed the faders up on the Coles overhead microphones, which were running through a couple of 1073s, that was the sound. I had an NS10 and a 47 on the bass drum — plus a few fill-in mics — and that's basically the sound. The Coles are my favourite mics, I try and get away with using them on everything, but sometimes they complain a bit! I also like Royers, I've tried the Oktavas, but the Coles are the ones I always come back to. I generally record everything through my Neve 1073 modules, or my 1272 preamps, which are modified with a gain control and pad, phase switch and phantom power; they sound fantastic.

**I've heard that you are something of a connoisseur and collector of vintage recording equipment ... which are your favourite classics and how do you use them?**

I often use Telefunken V72 mic preamps on overheads, fed from my Coles. What I'd like to do with the V72 is have a modification so I can drive the input more and attenuate the output; otherwise I risk overdriving the input on the desk. Lately I've been using Olympic's vintage PYE compressors on vocals, but you can't look at the meters, it's better to cover them up! I've just bought some old BBC limiters, which were apparently the forerunners to the classic PYE units. I've also acquired a German Vacuvox compressor [based on the Rohde & Schwartz UL23]. It's supposed to sound a bit like a Fairchild — I took the lid off, it's amazing — there must be about 20 valves inside. I also love guitarist's reverb pedals, I have some Boss and Carlsboro delay pedals. They are totally amazing on vocals for slapback, there's an earthy sound to them. I have some STC 4021 Ball and Biscuit microphones; I use them as room mics or overheads — or in a dustbin — anywhere! You can EQ them to such an extent without the sound getting horrible. I sometimes split the mic over three channels and EQ for bass, mid and top, and then compress them. For vocals it's amazing, Bernard from New Order sung with it and I've also used it on Graham Coxon's vocals.



**Working with Graham must have been quite a change from the young bands you've been recording; he plays all the instruments himself, doesn't he?**

He's the most unusual person I've ever worked with, in the most fantastic way. He'll come in with a song in his head: we'll put a click track down with him playing an acoustic or electric guitar, then he'll run in and play drums to it, maybe in two takes. Then he'll do another guitar or a bass, there's never a fixed way of working with Graham, he has all the sounds and parts organised in his head before he starts. On the first album we did with him, he'd sometimes do the drums and then the guitar solo — without even a guide vocal — it was quite disturbing at first! He

and Stephen will talk about the song, maybe we'll change the arrangement a bit. He'll spend quite a long time finding the guitar sound he hears in his head — I think we had eight or twelve amps at one point — with my Little Labs box it's easy for me to just switch between them.

**What microphones do you use for recording electric guitars?**

It's usually a Shure SM57 and a Neumann U47, sometimes I put the U47 off-axis, sometimes I'll have them on different cones. Alternatively I'll just use two 57s, one pointing at the centre and the other at the cone edge. I treat them as one, and I always have a room mic, my Coles or maybe my Telefunken Elam

251. I use the Little Lab boxes, I couldn't do without them, and they're fantastic for splitting guitars or basses into different amps. There's one input and three outputs, all with individual gains, phase and earth-lift. It's incredible the difference in phase between amplifiers, something I'd never really noticed before. There are three individual line inputs on the back of the Little Lab, so I can also 're-amp' recorded tracks back through amps and change the sound.

Even in the best recording studios in the world — like Olympic — you tend to get jaded and do things the same way every time, because you know it's fast and it works, so I actually like recording bands in houses. There's scope to get different sounds and colours that you can't achieve in conventional

studios because there aren't the variety of acoustic spaces to use.

#### **Have you recorded a band on location recently?**

We set up my portable studio in Jane Seymour's house near Bath for New Order. We recorded eight songs, four of them are on this album and four have been kept back, possibly for the next. We set the band up in the ballroom, and the control room in the library — a beautiful book-lined room with lots of natural light. There's a corridor that runs the length of the ballroom with a stairwell at each end. If you record drums in there, or record a tambourine in the corridor, it sounds like nothing on earth. We recorded to Radar mainly, which is networked to our Pro Tools system.

#### **Is that because you prefer the sound of the Radar system?**

Yes, there's something about the sound of Radar that is fantastic. Radar is very quick and easy, especially if you are recording a whole band, you can just arm the tracks, hit record and go. It doesn't throw up strange error messages, it doesn't crash, and for the type of work that Stephen and I do — mainly bands 'to tape' — it seems to be a quicker way of recording. That's the essential ethos of band work to me: to record quickly and not make musicians wait around for ages while I sort out why output 3 isn't going to track 7, or input 17 isn't going to multitrack return 4 with several plug-ins.

When musicians are eager to play and fresh, that's when it's exciting. We'll record five or six takes and do rough comps of the takes in Radar. If they need to be fiddled with any further we'll transfer to Pro Tools, which is a very simple process because they can be networked together with an Ethernet cable, you can just open the song up as a Pro Tools session. I really love Pro Tools for mixing, but there are certain things that I maintain just take much longer with PT — however good you are at working it!

#### **Do you mix within Pro Tools or on an analogue desk?**

If I'm mixing in my own room, I have D to A outputs 1-24 from the Radar converters and the rest selected from the Pro Tools 192. I use the 48 inputs on the Audient, I'll put all the faders at 0 or -5, I'm using the desk to enable me to insert analogue equipment — sometimes I'll chain two or three compressors together — I'll have a fast compressor followed by a slower one and then a limiter, for example. I just can't get the same result with plug-ins. If you've got PYE limiters and Distressors and vintage EQ ... I have done projects where I will do a sub-mix in Pro Tools — I might have the drums coming out of just two outputs



— and I've thought it sounds great. Then I've checked it with the tracks coming out of individual outs and there is a big difference, to me. I still do mix moves in Pro Tools, although if I have a vocal heavily compressed I would work on the fader, because obviously the automation is before the desk and would affect thresholds and so on. I'll do little moves on the analogue faders, if I make a mistake I'll just rewind the song and drop in on the mix. Pro Tools is brilliant for that.

#### **Do you use group compressors for drums, vocals and so forth?**

I'll have the Audio & Design Complex limiter on bus 23 and 24, the SSL compressor will be on another pair for drums and bass. Then I'll add those to the mix, as well as the original signal. I'll compress the master bus as well. In my room I tend to use the Tube Tech multiband as a master compressor. I do rough mixes in here, and I'll always take them upstairs [to Olympic] to reference them when I'm finally mixing. It's very hard work to make them sound better ... which is good, because it pushes me! The bottom end on the Audient is phenomenal, compared to an SSL G series. There's very little in line to change the sound, the Audient also has a very nice sounding EQ that I can't seem to replicate with anything else, I'd love to have a rack of these to take around with me when I'm mixing. Our desk used to belong to Ian Broudie, I went with him to look at a fully automated digital desk from another manufacturer. While we were supposed to be looking at this very expensive console, we kept gravitating to a prototype Audient that happened to be there. In the end he ordered a 48 input Audient, the first they made.

#### **Do you enjoy that change in the two mixing environments, do you find you work in different ways?**

Working in my own room, the audio coming from Pro Tools will be going straight into a compressor, so I have to get the levels fairly well adjusted in Pro Tools in advance, otherwise obviously the compression will be changing all the time if I do big moves. There are two insert points on each channel on the Audient desk, which is interesting. I can have a bass drum without any compression on the main fader, then I can have a compressor slamming on the same bass drum on the small fader, and just feed a small amount into the mix. I still have another insert available for an external EQ on the main fader, without changing the compressor sound. On an SSL I'd have to come out of the multitrack return and use another line input. I do use all the buses on the SSL when I'm mixing, I'll have a Neve 33609 or an EMI TG for drums, a 33609 for brass, then I'll feed them back into the mix.

#### **Who or what inspires you technically and creatively?**

I grew up assisting people like Flood and Alan Moulder in the studio, and the techniques they used for recording and mixing I took to be quite normal, I had no idea that it was completely barking! Together with Mark 'Spike' Stent, whose assistant I was at Trident, they are my favourite ever producer-mixers. ■



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