



François Lamoureux

He's a musician turned mixer who until three years ago hadn't moved a serious fader in anger. ZENON SCHOEPE talks to a self-made multichannel recordist and mixer who has created a name for himself with live recording for DVD.

CANADIAN FRANÇOIS LAMOUREUX had a good run of success in a band with his brother Pierre enjoying commercial favour in a number of European countries before his brother left to work for an Internet company. Bass playing Pierre kept his hand in with music and landed a job to handle the show and the filming of a Willie Nelson concert in Amsterdam. During a scheduled get together with his brother to write some songs, François ended up demoing one of his own compositions for Nelson. While the song was declined Nelson liked the recording and balance and

invited him to mix some of the songs from the Amsterdam gig. He ended up mixing the entire project that his brother had filmed.

The producer credit with Nelson got the phone ringing and only three years later he has worked on the Farm Aid 2001 DVD, Alanis Morissette Feast on Scraps DVD, Slipknot Disasterpieces DVD, Branford Marsalis A Love Supreme DVD, Pete Townshend Lifehouse DVD, and Counting Crows live DVD, among others. He specialises in multichannel and stereo mixes to picture and offers end-to-end production for DVD. He works in an unusual studio

in Montreal with a heady combination of Pro Tools, Pro Control, Genelec 1030s and sub, and a stack of analogue outboard.

His brother continues to shoot and François supervises the video editing and mixes the audio. Increasingly he is now also involved with initial recording of the live events for DVD release.

'The reason I'm working is not because I do anything special, I spend a lot of time doing things well, I don't cut corners, but I handle the video to make the audio king,' he says.

'Now I go to the shoot and record the show myself. I go to great lengths to make sure I have all the crowd ambience and I mix the best I can because that goes to the video tapes and the editor has a pretty decent mix to start cutting to. I have the line cut from the truck and I mix to picture right away because if you don't you make mistakes. Townshend unplugs his guitar without caring what noise it makes and when you see it it's so cool but if you don't hear a thump it's stupid.

'I then do a better mix to picture while the editor is cutting and I send him that. I take the songs he's done and make my mixes better and that helps him to make a better cut, and on it goes getting better.'

Tell me about your multichannel set up.

I've been in a lot of studios, and the ones that I thought were quite good I measured up roughly. I have an understanding of physics and I understood from talking to people like Tom Holman to get the room ratios right. I got my room construction found [see panel] and had to decide on my monitoring.

I started out on Meyer HD1s, then I switched to Dynaudio BM15s for a Hanson project and they all sounded great. I ended up trying Genelec 1030s and I didn't like the sound of them at all — they weren't pleasing — but I started to mix on them, made a CD and it sounded really good on my home stereo. The problem was that the speakers I was using before made everything sound good. I started listening to other things on the Genelecs and I could really hear the compression and pumping. They were letting me hear things that I'd missed before. When mastering engineers started asking me what I had done differently to my mixes, because they were sounding really good, I had to admit I had only changed my speakers. They make me work and make me do good things.

How did you become a Pro Tools user?

By accident, I'm an analogue guy. For the Willie Nelson project I wanted to automate everything quickly because I was a little insecure and it was a big responsibility — what if he wanted to change something? I didn't know anything about Pro Tools but got to like the automation really fast.

A typical process involves you making the live recording but what do you record to?

My favourite machine is a 3348 HR, it's the ultimate and I try to record to that when I can. I transfer into Pro Tools and then bring it here. I've also recorded to Tascam MX2424 at 96k, DA98HR or Pro Tools but I'd rather go with the tape first. I have Pro Tools as a back up because it's hard disk based.

People don't realise how important clock issues

are. People don't reference things at video houses, even at the authoring, the consequences of your actions at the start are so far reaching with the DVD thing. Even when it leaves your hands and has been mastered and goes to authoring it can still be messed up. If they take the video from the DigiBeta and transfer it into the computer for the authoring, take the DA98 tape that they always want and put that into the authoring, if it's not referenced to the same clock it will drift.

How do you record?

I try to use active splitters where we can and some people have issues with them. The old Manor Mobile 1 truck, I believe, has the remote API preamps and they're amazing. The Dutchview truck that I also like to use has an SSL 4000, which is not that known for its preamps but all the projects I've done on it have always turned out well. I like to get a mic to a track as much as possible, without weird summing, for a total of 48 tracks. I put up ten ambient mics because it's surround and you need it but it's a pain in the ass to do especially in a stadium.

How do you set up for the mix?

It goes out of the 192 I-Os, I plug in all my analogue gear on the inserts and I start getting my tones. I know the songs already and I try to approach live mixing like a film. Once I get my tones I block off the level at around 79dB and I don't touch it again. There's two of us on the board and we can mix fast because I handle the guitars, keyboards and voices and my assistant [Denis Mormandeau] does the drums and bass balance and we mix off each other live. We start at the beginning of the show and mix sequentially though the whole thing.

People might be shocked to know that my Pro Tools sessions, Townshend was a four-hour session, are in one giant session. They tell me that I can't do that cos it's going to die, well it doesn't and I want a consistent sound for each song. It's live and it won't work like a studio album.

It was played linearly and it's mixed linearly. I go through the whole thing once, getting a balance and snapshotting it for each song, then I trim everything. I ride the vocal like a madman because you can't compress live so much cos you're picking up so much noise. I de-pop every P by hand, every S is de-essed by hand.

The reason I work like this is because of the Willie Nelson project where I had to mix 48 songs — Willie plays forever live — in a couple of weeks. I was dying and I went to my assistant and asked him to handle the bass and drums and he's good. We've developed a method and we're very consistent, song to song.

That's fine for stereo but what about the 5.1?

On my first project I did my stereo first and then I did my surround mix — I don't believe in upmixing and downmixing, I do two separate mixes. Others started with the surround first and then wanted the stereo — don't try that folks! The problem is that with surround it's so big because it's not going through two speakers and the masking effect isn't there. Do the stereo and you have to put the lot through two speakers and make it all smaller, I can't go back to stereo. I do the stereo first, get my bearings, do the best I can and then do the surround after.

When you're in stereo you can leave the vocal in there and move it a little and it'll sit but if you open it up in surround and you're all over the place it shows. I take my stereo mix as my starting point and turn it into surround. I have my tones done in stereo, Save As and open up a 5.1 session. I save time that way.

Do you mix the multichannel in the same linear fashion?

Absolutely. I try to get locked picture before I start my surround because if I have to do changes later on in the surround I have to do them in the stereo too. I get my stereo the best I can and I know it works with the video. A lot of times you do a mix and you see the

The studio

François' studio in South West Montreal is an unusual prefabricated unit installed within his space at an old factory. He went the personal studio route because he couldn't get into the rooms he wanted to use. He opted for a modular construction built by Canadian prefabricated enclosure manufacturer Mecarte that does the majority of its business in making noise isolated 'rooms' for the mining and heavy industry fields.

François speced it and they built and installed it. 'The concept was not to lose any investment if I had to leave, which happens a lot when you build rooms for your work.'

Sitting on 88 insulating rubber feet the cabin has a large control room and separate machine room complete with air con and filtering and has been designed so that once it is assembled with all the equipment inside it needs only a 16A cable to fire the lot up.

The unit can be ordered in a number of different isolation 'strengths' — François' is an STC45 that offers 45dB of isolation with 4-inch walls but they'll go to 80dB.

François' absolute performance is helped because the box is effectively a room within a much larger room that is itself extremely quiet. 'Bass goes through walls and the outside room is in effect the bass trap! I don't get any of those bass accumulation problems in the studio.'

It's a dedicated mixing facility and was designed with surround in mind from the start and he can work in PAL, NTSC, SECAM.

François worked hard on defining the room ratios and has arrived at a fine sounding



room that belies the fact that the walls are metal, albeit with integrated acoustic treatment. 'The best thing is that it can also go outside. It's galvanised metal and I could put it in my back yard, it's weatherproof.'



video and hear it doesn't work and you have to push the back vocals a little louder here, whereas if I shut my eyes it's fine. We do touch ups to video because the little things are planned by me and the video editor and I know they're going to come up. You get an amazing shot of the guitarist so you push his part up a little more.

Another thing is you mix the vocal to a certain spot, you shut your eyes and you know it's sitting very well. Open your eyes and see the video and it adds 3dB-ish and you have to bring the vocal down a bit. This causes problems when artists and management want to hear a mix — without the video the voice is a little low.

You must be encountering latency problems by using so much analogue gear.

There's the latency of the A-D and D-A. Some people choose to ignore it but we deal with it. We know how many samples are incurred and once we take all our analogue sound and record it back into Pro Tools we nudge it.

The reason I record back in to Pro Tools is because if anyone wants changes and the analogue gear has disappeared for some reason, I need that source to be here. And I print everything and I've got tons of tracks. The Counting Crows, for instance, on one line I had a banjo, mandolin, a Tele, a Strat, an acoustic all on the same track and I split them out so 48 tracks can become 70 fairly quickly and if I'm using analogue gear on most of the stuff it becomes even more.

I record the lot then mute the original tracks and deal with the processed tracks. That's for recall.

What do you use for your masters?

I print to DA98. I'd like to go to 1/2-inch for the stereo but if I did that then I wouldn't be able to put my 5.1 to 1/2-inch and I like them to sound the same.

How do you pan your multichannel and your room mics?

I match the panning on the stage to what you see from the crowd. I put the mics across the room for depth because for me surround is all about depth of field as opposed to tricks. That causes problems because you have latency in the room so I time correct them. I aim to get a wrap around the listener of the crowd as I try to get away from the front image and back image effect.

What are your views on centre front speaker versus phantom image?

I actually think that 'quad' sounds better than 5.1 because when it's done well it is stunning. Part of the reason we have 5.1 for music is because audio has jumped on the video bandwagon. When you look at typical home theatre systems the centre speakers are always the ones that are difficult to position and you've got to ask if you want your vocal coming out of just that thing. I use the centre speaker to anchor things but if you put too much in it it kills the phantom image and in a live setting you end up with a singer who doesn't fit in with the band. I try not to use 5.1 reverbs too much and have a drier vocal in the centre with a bit of snare because I don't want a discrete effect in the centre. I try to get it to the point where if you take the centre out you feel something has changed but it's not too dramatic. I find that transfers well to the home. ■