



Greg Haver

Drummer turned engineer, producer and mixer, Greg Haver combines an organic approach with an adaptive approach. He talks to GEORGE SHILLING about drum miking, unbalanced stereo, the iPod, organisation and organisation.

HAILING FROM CARDIFF and still based there, Greg Haver started his musical apprenticeship as a drummer, playing in bands, doing sessions and having some success, most notably with the band Waterfront, who had a few US hits in the late 1980s. Greg had earlier set up a production company and experimented with a Fostex E16 and an Allen and Heath mixer, so when Waterfront returned from touring and set up a studio, it was Greg who showed the most interest in its workings, and he saw it as a career opportunity.

He recorded demos and started writing his own material, mainly dance tracks. As well as his hard-earned percussive skills he taught himself keyboards and programming and acquired an EMI publishing deal. However, his main love was the recording and mixing process. Haver's break came when he was offered the chance (in partnership with the studio assistant) to buy Soundspace, where the Manic Street Preachers had recorded their Holy Bible album. They spruced the place up and the Manics returned, along with Catatonia, the Superfurry Animals and the 60 Foot Dolls during the mid-90s Welsh music boom. Having engineered most of these sessions, Haver co-produced some of the Manics' Know Your Enemy album and acquired top-flight producer management with Stephen Budd in London. He spent 2004 producing much of the Manics' most recent album, Lifeblood, followed by six months producing Melanie C's forthcoming album. He is currently enjoying a well-earned rest touring New Zealand in a camper van while considering offers flooding in to his management office. (Photography: www.recordproduction.com)

Do you see production as a managerial role as much as a technical one?

It really varies from session to session. When I did the Melanie C record recently, I realised there was going to be a lot of admin work and a lot of organisational work, because we had big string sections, we had a lot of different studios, a lot of different musicians, so I didn't want to be engineering that record too because it would just have been too much to take on. Whereas, with the Manics, I engineered that record, but there was less organisation outside of it because they're quite a small unit and they know what they want to do. I tend not to like to stare at computer screens, I like to be able to listen, so I'll always have someone working with me just to do Pro Tools.

How do you motivate artists who've been in the game for a long time?

I think when an artist gets to that level, I think I've been lucky, they've always been very motivated themselves. The Manics are very intense, I think one reason they work with people they know is because they are so intense in the studio, and there's a lot of abuse being thrown around, a lot of piss-taking and a lot of pain, but you know at the end of the day when you walk away you'll all get on. But with Melanie, she's the most focused artist I've ever worked with. Before she came in to do vocals, she'd been to a vocal coach, acupuncturist, physiotherapist, everybody. It was just a whole different world for me. But she always came in and it was brilliant, I don't think we spent more than three hours on a vocal, even with loads of BVs and everything. I've done two very different albums over the year, Melanie's and the Manics', with two very different approaches to them.

There must be things in common like drum miking, how technical do you get with that?

I've got a basic technique when miking drums, but it varies — the room is really critical. I went through a period of really low-tech miking on kits, especially during the late 90s where I was working with a lot of experimental Welsh artists like Superfurry, you'd often put just one mic on the kit. But I usually close-mic everything, spot-mic cymbals and everything, but then the room mics vary. I tend not to use a lot of stereo miking, I use a lot of mono room miking, like a Coles right down the centre. But with Melanie's record I'd started getting experimental, so we'd have the Coles, then we'd have some stereo mics as well, then we'd have some kidney mics behind the kit. So we did all these different techniques which actually gave us a lot of different drum sounds without having to do a lot of different drum tracks. There were a multitude of different ways we could do it, and we did a lot of sampling stuff as well. But there are no great secrets, we all use 57s on the snare, the latest thing I swear by is the NS-10 kick drum thing...

They have an official one here, the Yamaha Sub-Kick...

Corr, really! I used to use Moogerfoogers to create that sub-kick thing, I like the fact you can do it organically... I didn't know there was an official one, excellent!

I'm not frightened to use tons of EQ on drums, that's one thing when I started working with [engineer] Clint Murphy, he was very much the purist, he was using the beautiful old EMI Neve in York Street, bakelite knobs and everything, and he's very much into 'pure', and I'm like, no, just screw the sound up! Crank up the EQ, it doesn't matter if it's distorting a bit, I like to see the clip lights coming on on the channels, you know they're working then, the mic amps are getting hot!

But I'm very much an analogue desk man, much as I do love Pro Tools, I use it really extensively now. I even mix back into Pro Tools, I've completely foregone any analogue tape path anywhere on the session, which some producers would be horrified by, but I find I like to have that flexibility right up to the final part of the mix. I rejected Pro Tools for a very long time, and now I couldn't live without it really, especially HDs with the chance to load up plug-ins. Mel's was the first album where we did all our EQing and compression within Pro Tools, the dynamic range of her voice was so great, we could have different compressors with different ratios in different parts of the song, we'd get the whole thing sitting right in the song without having to move any faders. There was no desk automation with that record, all the automation was done in Pro Tools, but we did mix on a Neve.

When you mixed did you use any analogue outboard?

Yes, we had some Pultec EQs and Neve outboard EQs for real high-end air on cymbals and stuff, but we did a lot of EQing down into Pro Tools. I like to have a record sounding good from the start, that's why I'm not frightened to EQ things. I think it's important for the artist to hear the record coming together, rather than the classic, 'It'll be fine when we mix it...' And I like to hear that, it gives me ideas when I start hearing things sitting together.

Is the temptation not then to change everything again when you mix?

Yeah, but I've lost the fear. If something's not right, just do it again. I work really quickly, so I found that was my other way of compensating. If I work quick



enough, and I just go with what I feel, then if it's wrong we can go and change it. If I spent ages getting to that point, then you feel you haven't got the ability to change things because it's: 'Oh God, I just spent two days doing this bit, and if I scrap it now...' I'd rather just wang through stuff and get it down.

Do you use Pro Tools rather than Logic or anything else?

Yes I've always run Pro Tools, because my MIDI programming days were very much hardware sequencer based — MC500s and Yamahas. When I started doing a lot of bands in the mid-90s with the classic instrumentation of guitar, bass, drums, vocals, I skipped that whole thing of everyone starting to use Logic. And now, I don't use MIDI extensively, my background comes from tape rather than from programming. The guys who started with Logic are comfortable with it as a front end; Tony Visconti uses Logic, I did some work with him on the Manics record — because I play percussion for the Manics as well, I played percussion on these tracks. I flew from Auckland to New York just so I could spend a day with Tony Visconti. It was brilliant, I could find out all the things I wanted to know about how many things were live on Live And Dangerous [Thin Lizzy].

Not many!

Yeah, just the drums, apparently! Apart from all the stories I picked up a few things — a few little panning

things, and the honest way he records things, like why use three mics when you can use one. They lodge in the back of your brain.

What were the panning things?

Really extreme panning on percussion. I always used to keep things fairly loop-like and fairly central, it's like hanging tambourines way off on one ear, and guitar on the other one, not frightened to be really extreme with things. You're always trying to find that stereo balance, and every time somebody does something that's really unbalanced it always impresses me.

Like Vertigo, that U2 single, I was listening to it on the train the other day, and the guitar's just hanging off one ear for nearly the whole song. And you're waiting for the double-track to come in, the chorus is coming and they're going to track it now, and it just keeps carrying on in one ear. But in the middle eight, when the second guitar comes in, the whole thing completely flies, just by adding one extra dub. I thought, why couldn't I do that?

So at the moment, that's my thinking, let's not put so much on things and make everything count a bit more. I like it when I listen to a record and it gives me ideas. This is my first year of the iPod, just to have that library with you, you're never stuck for an idea, you've always got all your music with you, I must have listened to ten times more music than I did in the last few years, just because I'll always have it with me, rather than: 'I wish I hadn't left

that CD at home'. And it's a really good working tool, everything's catalogued with your mix dates and so on. I've been using iTunes in the studio for a while to keep everything catalogued, I'm a bit of an organisational freak.

It's an important skill to have...

I think it's vital for a record producer, if you're trying to control a budget of three, four, five hundred thousand pounds, if you're not organised you're going to completely lose track of everything. So right down to receipts — it drives me nuts, obsessive-compulsive gone mad! At least when I get to the end of the record I know everything that's been spent, how many days we've had and who has played on what. I think that's a really big part of production that people forget.

How do you monitor?

I'm not that picky with monitoring, I still like to shred my ears on NS-10s every now and again. I like KRKs, all their sizes of monitors are great, I just bought their little tiny ones, and they're just fantastic speakers, with the big Eight's for a lot of mixing, but as long as I've got NS-10s and something that's got a bit of bottom end around I'm pretty happy really. I'm not too fussy with gear as long as you've got the essentials there. And sometimes I like it when places haven't got certain things, because I find if I can do something else, that's what keeps it interesting. ■

