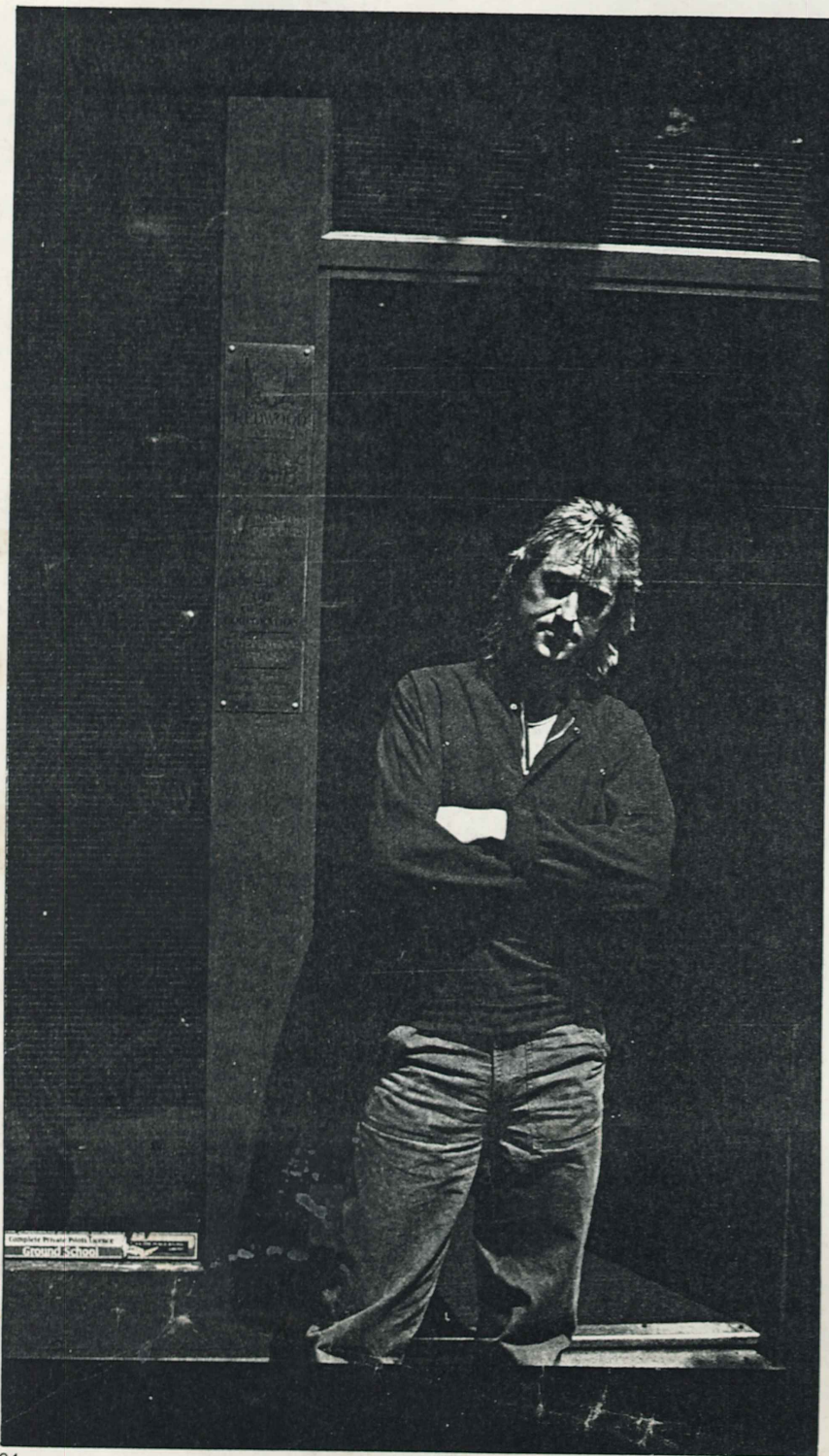


The Gentle Art of Bouncing

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André Jacquemin produced an album for the HM group Powerhouse in three weeks at an 8-track studio. Unlikely? Jacquemin lets us into some tricks of the trade...



Imagine this; you're listening to an 80-voice choir, which is then joined by an orchestra. Suddenly, the largest rock drums you have ever heard power in, followed by thunder crashes and a subterranean voice which asks 'Is this heaven or is this hell?' As the Gibsons riff away with the church organ, you start to imagine that the whole thing was produced by the Phantom of the Opera in his 72-track digital dugout.

It was actually produced by the quietly spoken André Jacquemin, at his 8-track Redwood studio. Normally used for broadcast and voice-over work, it seems an unlikely location for a mega-rock production.

Greenhouse to Powerhouse

Mind you, Jacquemin has a history of unlikely projects. His first studio appeared in the pages of H&SR long ago (April 85): the interesting tale of a man who decided to build a recording facility in a greenhouse! Despite the location and the rudimentary 4-track equipment, many of the Monty Python albums were recorded there. Later, the Redwood 8-track was used to record 'Every Sperm is Sacred' for the Python film 'The Meaning of Life.' This involved over 50 tracks of female choir, male choir and 'just about-every instrument in the orchestra'.

Although Jacquemin was happy to detail the recording of the Powerhouse album, he believes that your initial attitude is the key to a project's success.

When you first get a project, the whys and wherefores don't enter into it. I don't actually worry about how many tracks are needed. The important thing is to get the product and form a picture in your mind as to how you would like to hear it. Irrespective of how you get the result, you have to hear the track as a finished product. At least you have a goal to work to, whether you have a 2-track or a 24-track. You have to rely on your own judgement.

So a strong idea of where you are going is important before you switch on the multitrack. To realise the sound Jacquemin envisaged, he used a multitude of tricks. Firstly, the drums were never on the multitrack, except in guide form. Instead the drummer helped to program a Linn II and this triggered samples held in a combination of Bel and AMS delays. This involved the use of

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time code and here Jacquemin had a number of hints.

In this case we used a Linn timecode but I normally use a Roland SBX-80 now because SMPTE is a bit more reliable. You can also drive many other things from it.

The code itself is best put on track 8, as this means there can only be crosstalk with track 7. It is also important not to put anything on track 7 that will interfere with the code.

Track 7 would be one of my last tracks to fill and generally, I wouldn't put anything too abrasive on that track. Of course you don't want the code bleeding onto a very delicate sound either.

Despite his best efforts he did have a problem with the Linn code on one track. The drums started to go out of time and further investigation revealed that it was always at the same point.

I had to mark the tape where it went out, de-latch the Linn so that it was playing to the internal clock and drop it back in, right on the beat, two bars later.

The moral here is, make sure you write down the tempo. Matching the tempos afterwards would have wasted a lot of time.

Once the programs had been completed, Jacquemin laid a mono Linn track as a guide. Although this was going to be erased later, he took the trouble to trigger the sounds that would actually be used and to approximate the effects treatment as well. This helped in getting the feel of the track and was psychologically important to the band.

Their first reaction was 'We've been here for a week and we haven't done anything yet'. I had to tell them that it wasn't quite true and in a couple of days they would have almost all of their backing tracks recorded, which turned out to be true.

In fact, the drummer went home once the Linn programs were finished. Didn't that leave him feeling a little divorced from the proceedings?

He helped to program it, so he wasn't uninvolved. We used the Linn to emulate what he would play. At the end of the day, it's still a human being telling the computer what to play so I would maintain that the drummer did play on the album. It was also the drummer's kit that was used for the sampled sounds.

Miking by Feel

Jacquemin also has an individual technique for mic placement useful for both drums and instrument amplifiers.

If you put the back of your hand against a speaker or bass drum and then pull away, there's a point where the hairs on your hand start to tingle. This, I guess, is where the sound first hits the air barrier. (It's also the first sign of madness—Ed). I normally start by miking at this point. It's a neat trick and quite logical if you think about it. If you go too far forward with a bass mic, all you're getting is the beater hitting the skin. You're not getting the drum.

But this is no more than the starting point for his mic technique, not the H&SR JANUARY 1987



invariable solution. For instance, the guitar amps were placed in the disused basement rather than the fairly dead-sounding studio. Here Jacquemin used one Neumann U87 up close and another further away for ambience. He also used a DI signal and blended all three. There are some very fat sounds on the album and that brings us to another piece of advice.

Take advantage of your bounces. You may realise that there's a guitar part on two tracks that could be bounced together. The guitarist can put a third part on at the same time, to thicken it up. A practical example is track 3 on the song Heaven or Hell. The rhythm guitar was on track 2 and was bounced onto track 3, while another guitar was added live.

A Mega-Concept on Eight Tracks

The Linn drum and astute track bouncing accounts for the guitar, bass and drums, but what about all those choir and orchestra sounds? Enter Val Publizowski, one time Moog employee and a dab hand at programming the memory Moog. Yes, the 'choir' is actually a brilliant bit of programming. The Moog's internal sequencer was used, driven off the Linn code. For other synth parts, a UMI sequencer was sometimes deployed and many of the orchestral textures came via a Fairlight.

Despite the sequencing, the track space was fairly tight and there are points where an orchestral intro leaps from one track to another, simply to avoid some of the other parts. In fact, the first two songs are linked by an orchestral section. Rather than dub both tracks onto another machine and incur a generation loss, Jacquemin managed to perform some clever editing.

Songs 1 and 2 were loaded onto 2-track recorders. This allowed the end section from song 1, shortly followed by the start of song 2 to be dubbed onto a third 2-track machine. Rain and other atmospheric effects were introduced to this mix via a Bel with a loop of

background noises. As a further refinement, a few keyboard riffs were mixed in from song 3 on the multitrack, as a kind of prelude. When the task was completed, Jacquemin found natural break points in both songs and spliced the mid section in. Here he had some advice based on his own mistakes in the past.

A lot of people forget to save the bits they cut out. You never know when you might want to revert to a pre-mix. Three or four days later it might not sound so good any more. What do you do? The man with the synthesisers has gone away, you've already done the mix and you've thrown the bits away!

I did make that mistake very early on in my career and it took me three days to find an irreplaceable bit of tape. I never made that mistake again!

Now Jacquemin keeps all his 'off cuts' on a single spool, so that he can find them in a hurry.

As well as choir effects, there are a lot of real harmonies on the songs. On choruses, Jacquemin sampled the vocals and tracked them adding harmoniser and ADT. A noise gate kept the whole thing tight, and the completed harmony was bounced down onto 1/4" tape. That was loaded into the Bel and spun onto each chorus.

You can use the Linn to trigger the Bel by putting the cowbell at the right beat in the bar, but I decided to feed it in live. I pulled the singer in and got him to trigger the sample where he would normally sing, so he put a bit of 'feel' into it. It also kept the guys interested in what was going on.

The Bel was also used to drop a looped high note into the lead vocal, which sustains for an impossible time over the orchestral parts. On mixdown, the desk had to cope with a lot more than the 8-track. There was the Linn and the samples it was triggering, as well as some further keyboard parts. Jacquemin has a 20-channel desk but supplemented the regular inputs by using the monitor return channels. He kept tabs on things with a track sheet that doubles as a movable fader strip. Although many of



the tracks had some sort of effect added, there were plenty of outboard units to be accommodated.

One of the good pieces of gear things I got hold of for a while was the Klark Teknik DN780. You can hear that on the snare of 'Feels like a breakdown'. If you listen it's very different from any other kind of unit. I think there have been some software updates now to make it even better but this particular patch had a metallic sound that was right for the track. Mind you, all reverbs have their own sound and I think the top Lexicon models have the best sound overall. I'd tend to use those on brass. You can also

use the small room on the PCM60 in a great many applications, such as bass drum, and I would sometimes gate the snare return just a bit. It gives the bass drum a unique sound.

All the bass drum sounds on the Powerhouse album went through the Aphex Aural Exciter, so that you get some of the drum sound back. Otherwise it sounds too 'clicky' by the time you've put it into a room.

Sound Stealing

Sometimes, Jacquemin will play a record during a mixdown, if he thinks it

has the sort of sound he would like on his track. He's emphatic about sampling off records though, regarding it as an insult to the original producer.

It's all very well people sampling Phil Collins' snare sound but that's not really original. You want people to copy your sounds and you'll never get to that stage if you nick sounds off other records.

For that reason, as it were, Redwood studios has a 12" 8-track recorder and Jacquemin runs it at 15ips without noise reduction. That may seem surprising, in view of the amount of bounces he does but, when he played an American engineer a disco mix he wouldn't believe it wasn't done on digital!

So what's his secret?

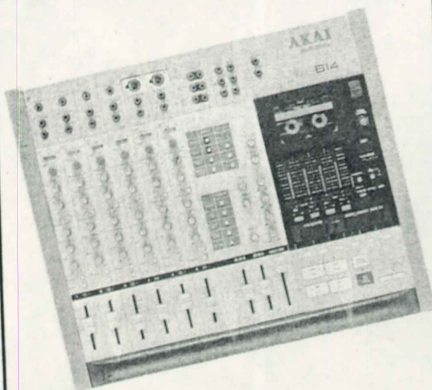
Think what parts are playing the same or doing the same job. There's no point in having them on separate tracks if they are for filling the same role; they can be bounced together.

If editing's not your speciality, work round the other way and use bouncing to put the parts where they should be. Use good planning, make use of your tracks. Don't stop until you're satisfied. Don't be restricted by your format.

Jacquemin is obviously somebody who is not afraid to 'do it his way', and he's proved that it works. He didn't relax until he was completely satisfied with the Powerhouse album. It is released on the Mausoleum label and is well worth a listen, even if HM is not your particular speciality!

Simon Croft

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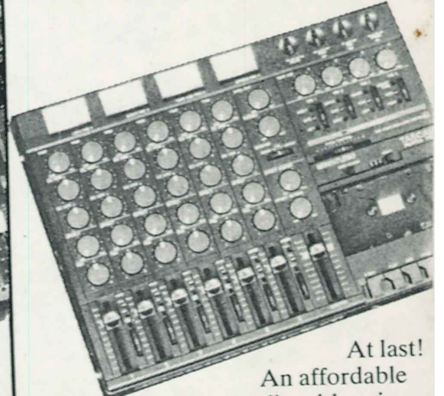


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