

The Record Producer as Nexus: Creative Inspiration, Technology and the Recording Industry

**A submission presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Glamorgan/Prifysgol Morgannwg
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

by Michael John Gilmour Howlett

April 2009

I certify that the work presented in this dissertation is my own, and has not been presented, or is currently submitted, in candidature for any degree at any other University:

Michael Howlett

The Record Producer as Nexus: Creative Inspiration, Technology and the Recording Industry

Abstract

What is a record producer? There is a degree of mystery and uncertainty about just what goes on behind the studio door. Some producers are seen as Svengali-like figures manipulating artists into mass consumer product. Producers are sometimes seen as mere technicians whose job is simply to set up a few microphones and press the record button. Close examination of the recording process will show how far this is from a complete picture. Artists are special—they come with an inspiration, and a talent, but also with a variety of complications, and in many ways a recording studio can seem the least likely place for creative expression and for an affective performance to happen. The task of the record producer is to engage with these artists and their songs and turn these potentials into form through the technology of the recording studio. The purpose of the exercise is to disseminate this fixed form to an imagined audience—generally in the hope that this audience will prove to be real. Finding an audience is the role of the record company. A record producer must also engage with the commercial expectations of the interests that underwrite a recording.

This dissertation considers three fields of interest in the recording process: the performer and the song; the technology of the recording context; and the commercial ambitions of the record company—and positions the record producer as a nexus at the interface of all three. The author reports his structured recollection of five recordings, with three different artists, that all achieved substantial commercial success. The processes are considered from the author's perspective as the record producer, and from inception of the project to completion of the recorded work. What were the processes of engagement? Do the actions reported conform to the template of nexus? This dissertation proposes that in all recordings the function of producer/nexus is present and necessary—it exists in the interaction of the artistry and the technology.

The art of record production is to engage with these artists and the songs they bring and turn these potentials into form.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1.....	12
1.1 The role of the record producer.....	12
1.2 Interfacing with the business	19
1.3 Interfacing with the artist (and the song)	29
1.4 Interfacing with the engineer	34
Chapter 2 <i>Echo Beach</i> —Martha and the Muffins	40
Chapter 3 <i>Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark</i> —Three recordings	57
3.1 <i>Messages</i>	58
3.2 <i>Enola Gay</i>	67
3.3 <i>Souvenir</i>	72
Chapter 4 <i>I Ran</i> —A Flock of Seagulls	79
Conclusions	86
Bibliography	93
Appendix I—Lyrics.....	99
Appendix II—Content Listing and Description of the Portfolio	103
Appendix III—Author’s biography.....	104
Appendix IV—National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences	107

Introduction

0.1 Close encounters

Walking into a room full of strangers for the first time can be a daunting experience. When the strangers are a group of musicians, and you are a record producer who has come to work with them, a range of additional tensions are set up. For the musicians there is often the unspoken insecurity that their performing competence will be questioned. Will this producer want to replace them with session musicians? For the creative driving force in the group—usually the leader—the questions will include: how will this producer make my music sound? Will he take my work somewhere I do not want it to go? For the producer (at least, for this producer) primary questions are: what are these people like? Who are the key players, and how will they respond to my ideas, my personality, and my way of working? This moment is the beginning of a complex process of interactions which will determine the outcome: the realisation of a musical idea in a recorded form. Record producers perform this act of realisation in a number of different ways: some are primarily arrangers of the music; others mainly direct the performance of the artists; many are principally audio engineers. There are producers who only organise, selecting arrangers and engineers to perform those functions under their direction. All producers are charged with the responsibility for delivering an outcome that will satisfy not just the aspirations of the artist, but also the expectations of the commercial interests that finance the process—usually a record company¹. The aim of this work is to posit the role of the record producer as a nexus between the creative inspiration of the artist, the technology of the recording studio, and the commercial aspirations of the record company.

The term *nexus* is used here in accordance with the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1983) definition: a bond or link; a means of connection; and, as a *causal noun*, the necessary connection between cause and effect. The record producer acts as a means of connection between the artist, the technology and the commercial interest. However, the connection is not a transparent one—the personality and skills of the producer will shape and tone the outcome, as a colour transparency affects the light

¹ Sometimes the artists themselves, or their management, also finance the project.

passing through it. Whether by directing the timbres and textural qualities of the recording through engineering processes; by structuring and arranging these qualities through musical direction; or simply by inspiring, enthusing, facilitating, the producer is engaged to direct the process and shapes the outcome by his or her presence. It can be argued that a producer is not necessary in this process, but the act of recording is not a passive *fait accompli*. Choices are made at many stages in the process: what studio to record in, which engineer, which microphone and where to place it? All of these decisions affect the character of the outcome. Critical to the outcome is the selection of performance. From the backing track to instrumental solos and embellishments, to particular lines of the vocal, each detail requires a process of critical evaluation. Whenever this function of critical arbiter is performed the role of the producer is inherent. Sometimes it is the engineer or the artists themselves who take on this role. In a sense the record producer can be understood as simply a function, a hat of office, but the role also requires engaging with the commercial interests. As well as linking the musical idea and the recording technology, a producer must address the expectations of the record company—the third factor in this process. The record company underwrites the enterprise and, more significantly, delivers the outcome to market. The reason the processes described above are even taking place is because someone in the record company (usually the A&R person²) thinks that the idea—the song performed by that artist—has qualities that can appeal to a wider audience. The producer is also addressing those aspirations, whose expectations impinge on choices made in the creative process. The role is specific, and palpable. By positioning this role as a nexus, this work aims to provide a clarification of the record producer's function.

0.2 The objects or phenomena of analysis

As practice-based research, this dissertation will review the recording process of five tracks I produced involving three different groups during the period from March 1979 to August 1982. All five recordings were commercial successes, both in the UK and internationally. The recordings are arranged in chronological sequence, although other productions (and the rest of the albums in some cases) took place in the intervening periods. These tracks have been chosen primarily for their commercial

² Artist and Repertoire is the title in a record company of the person who finds and signs an artist, and then works directly with the artist to decide which producer to work with and what songs are to be recorded.

success, though at the time they were also generally regarded as not typical of popular records. I will revisit the subject of originality in Chapter 1 and with specific relevance in my reflections on each recording project in Chapters 2-4.

Each review will consider not only the phenomena that were the recording processes, the circumstances that brought them about, and the outcomes, both creative and commercial, but also the meanings that can be derived to inform the study of record production, and address some of the larger questions associated with the musicology of popular music. How this producer treated with the specific conditions of each project is the subject of discovery, but how can such an analysis be made objectively when the analyst is also the subject?

0.3 Autoethnography - reflective practice

“The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk” (Hegel 1967).

Hegel’s famous aphorism refers to the value of philosophical reflection—understanding can only come after the act, but generally too late to be of much help: “By philosophy’s gray in gray it cannot be rejuvenated but only understood”(ibid). However, I find it informs my methodology well: it is only “with the falling of the dusk”—after the day’s action is done—that reflection and analysis can take place. In the heat of the action philosophy is far from the participants consciousness. To look back now—29 years later—and try to understand the reasons for my actions and choices has the benefit of hindsight. But the challenge remains: how to approach critical reflection with a modicum of evidential warrant or trustworthiness?

As Ellis and Bochner (2000), discussing qualitative research, explain, autoethnography is a form of writing that makes the researcher’s own experience a topic of investigation in its own right rather than seeming as if it is written from nowhere by nobody. Autoethnography is an autobiographical or narrative genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. It asks readers (and author) to feel the truthfulness or worthwhileness of its accounts and to become co-participants, engaging with the storyline and its phenomena morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually.

Writing of popular musicology, Richard Middleton (2001: 217) argues that “the challenge is to show that analysis can produce an account of responses grounded both in intuition and scientific knowledge”. Robert Walser (2003: 37-38) advises that “we ought to be in the business of music history, not music appreciation. That doesn't mean abandoning questions of value in pursuit of some kind of neutral objectivity...but rather embracing values as crucial aspects of analysis and rehabilitating the concept of objectivity as the principled consideration of subjectivity”. Walser (2003: 38) quotes Lawrence Levine: “Objectivity does not necessitate detachment...It means, above all, the desire to understand”, and argues for “a more anthropological conception of culture in popular music studies...a conception of analysis that is self-reflexive about methods and goals...less interested in describing or legitimating than in understanding how music works and why people care about it...Ultimately, judgements of music are judgements of people”. The advice I take here is to be multimodal: “scientific” or meticulous in the sense of accurate reportage of the processes engaged, whilst remembering that much of the creative part of these processes involved a high degree of intuition and are to some extent ineffable. “Judgements of music” constitute a large part of the choices a producer makes (and is paid to make), and those judgements are informed by cultural and historical contexts, both of the artists performing, and of the producer. I will consider in more detail the question of the influences that inform the producer’s evaluations and the struggle to maintain some degree of rigour in Chapter 1. Here I will examine how I put my aesthetic experiences into claims that propositions can carry. There is value also in the anthropological approach: the practices I discuss were undertaken in a cultural context—the culture of recording as it had evolved in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s.

Much of recent writing on pop music culture seems to be predicated on the writings of critical theorists such as Adorno, Barthes, Bakhtin, Attali and Baudrillard (certainly, writers such as Chanan (1995: 116-121), Middleton (2001: 216-218) and 220), Théberge (1997: 189-191), Gracyk (1996: 150-161) and many others feel the need to defend popular music against such criticism). What underwrites much of this commentary is a belief in what is essentially Marxist economic and political theory. As Thomas Porcello (2005: 277) argues:

In foregrounding the link between popular music and ‘massness’, and in casting massness in essentially negative terms, for instance, early Frankfurt

school theorists (notably Adorno 1994; Horkheimer and Adorno 1991) effectively problematized the relationship between the technologies used in the creation and dissemination of popular music and the purported negative effects of the music itself.

It is the essentially moralistic nature of such criticism with its emphasis on the “negative effects of the music” that undermines the whole premise of such analysis: “massness” is equated with “Bad”. The mass-proliferation of music is an “avalanche of fetishism” asserts Adorno (2002: 252), revealing an underlying Puritanism. Richard Middleton (2001: 216) notes that Adorno has been criticised as an “elitist snob...Adorno’s message, at its most sweeping, would reduce popular music studies to nothing more than affirmations of the music’s status as commodity-fetish”. Middleton (ibid) adds that Adorno “over-reads monopoly, to a point which empirical studies of both industry and consumption show to be unjustified...he aligns music history to a uni-linear Marxist-Hegelian project of human emancipation which reduces the species anthropology ‘upwards’ into the perspective of a declining (Middle-European, bourgeois) class. Yet who could deny that the tendential strategies of the entertainment conglomerates and their ‘gatekeepers’ often approximate to the Adornian nightmare”. Whatever “nightmares” Adorno may have about the mass dissemination of music, they are clearly prejudiced by a political position. My view is more pragmatic: that economic structures are relevant only in as much as they restrict or enable access to music—for the believer in the positive, transformative power of music, whatever the arguments about systems, mass distribution works for the benefit of artists and consumers. In Chapter 1 I report on my personal and professional engagement with four successful entrepreneurs in the recording industry and argue that their primary motivation was driven by a love of the music, and further, that such skills are essential to the wider dissemination of the creative output of musical artists.

Walter Benjamin’s essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1968), an equally ubiquitous reference in the compendium of popular musicology, defines the “aura” attaching to high art as “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction...the quality of its presence is always depreciated” (1968: 221). However, when Benjamin identifies the historical roots of high art in religious ritual, he then finds ideological redemption in the idea that “for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an

ever increasing degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility” (1968: 224). Benjamin is prescient here, providing an accurate description of the recording designed for popular mass dissemination. In arguing that such work is “art” I am returning the term “art” to its older usage of “art as skillful fashioning of useful artifacts” (Clifford 1984: 86). I posit art as the outcome of the work of the producer as art-isan.

I find much to agree with in Charles Fairchild’s (2008) critique of approaches to popular musicology and its multi-form character:

Popular music studies has rarely exhibited the kinds of disciplinary coherence found in closely related disciplines mostly due to the field’s adoption and adaptation of methodological and theoretical innovations from a variety of disciplines, notably sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, media studies and musicology. However, many commentators continue to seek disciplinary coherence without making any critical aesthetic distinctions between the medium and materials of popular music. Distinctions and interrelationships between the literal or material aspects of popular music and the social or cultural processes of making meaning from popular music are central to the definition of a particular but not exclusive field of analysis. Through such distinctions, the very category ‘popular music’ can be understood as a more flexible and supple distinction based on an understanding of methods of construction, production and mediation in specific relation to the technical, contextual and sociological aspects of music.

Time and again pop reinvents itself—it is “flexible and supple”. As Michael Chanan (1995: 152) argues: “Music continually shows its resilience by defying the prognostications of cultural pessimists like Adorno”. This “resilience” of music is the same characteristic that has continued to surprise me in my time as a producer in the culture industry that is popular music. Robert Walser (1993: 27) notes that “[popular] musicians are ceaselessly creating new fusions and extensions of popular genres”. In this sense Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogic can be argued to describe the process well, as new groups of musicians respond to what has gone before and produce a new synthesis (in the Hegelian sense). A similar dialogic could also apply to the technological change that, as Paul Théberge (2001: 24) sees it, is “both an enabling and a constraining factor that acts in complex and contradictory ways in music production, distribution and consumption”. Théberge describes the “feedback” process that occurs when users of the technologies find unintended ways to “abuse” equipment that then inform the manufacturers who design new technology to incorporate such practices. As Timothy

Taylor (2001: 38) puts it: “Any music technology, then, both acts on its users and is continually acted on by them...”. A producer of popular music must engage with the constantly evolving surface of popular music, both of the artist, the technology and in the work of other producers. The accounts in this dissertation will also, hopefully, feed back into the future practice of record production.

0.4 Analysis of record production

The field of academic analysis of record production is a relatively new one. Much of the commentary on the specific subject is found in works about the history of recording, (see Chanan 1995 and Gillett 1983) and on cultural theory and the sociological impact of the advent of recording technology (Frith 1996, Gracyk 1996 and 2001, and others), but usually it is marginalised as an incidental, or peripheral, observation. As noted above, a producer also inhabits a social context. Accordingly, there is undoubtedly much relevance in the study of recordings as a cultural phenomenon to the producer as an agent of influence in popular music creation. The focus of this work, however, is specific to the producer’s function as an interface in the creative process of realising an artistic inspiration as a recording. Wider sociological considerations will only be applied in their relevance to the recordings that are the subject of this analysis.

So the question is raised: what am I analysing? The nature of a production is not simply the placement of the various sound components in the “sound box” or in the textural qualities—one approach suggested by Allan Moore (2001)—though it includes these factors. In an illuminating later paper presented at the Art of Record Production Conference³ Moore (2005) asks: “Is pinpointing the effects, and labelling their meanings, perhaps less important than the opportunity for greater self-awareness presented to an audience by the rich textures of recent popular music?” Moore is referring to the meanings communicated by popular music recordings, and rightly argues

³ The first academic conference focused solely on the subject was the Art of Record Production Conference, held at the University of Westminster, London in 2005 and was largely directed and designed by Simon Zagorski-Thomas, of Thames Valley University. This conference was attended by a number of significant scholars and writers in the field: Nicholas Cook, Evan Eisenberg, Simon Frith, Allan Moore, Paul Théberge and Albin Zak, amongst others, all of whom have informed this work. The conference has been held subsequently at Edinburgh University in 2006, hosted by Simon Frith, at the Queensland University of Technology in 2007, and the University of Massachusetts Lowell in 2008.

that “our own musical experiences at least, before we try to verbalise them, are precisely what we try to identify as ‘unmediated’”. Some of the meanings communicated by music cannot be verbalised. Moore (ibid) proposes that analysis of record production should really be considered a branch of musicology: “Production details, then, are vital to an interpretation of [a] track, but only in conjunction with the results of the other musical decisions which were made in its realisation...we can’t afford a musicology of production any more than we can afford a separately-located musicology of the voice, or a ‘verbology’ (or whatever)”. Zagorski-Thomas (2007: 33-34) agrees: “[T]here are obviously many areas related to the production and consumption of recorded music that blur into other sectors of musicology. Performance practice, ontology, orchestration and arranging, compositional methodology, music perception and cognition, ethnography and cultural theory are all inextricably related to the study of the way in which recordings are produced (or perhaps vice versa), and it is essential to remember that, as Allan Moore has suggested, the study of record production is a single component in the general study of music and has little independent meaning without reference to the whole”. Nevertheless, as this dissertation proposes, the work of record production is intrinsically musical, from the organisation of sonic effect to direction and critique of performance. This present work will treat with questions of orchestration and arrangement and performance, however, the overarching perspective will be on how this record producer engaged and treated with the unique circumstances (and challenges) presented by the personalities and abilities of the artists in each recording.

In a parallel process the AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM) was established on 1 April 2004 under the auspices of leading musicologist, Nicholas Cook. As stated on the CHARM website⁴: “CHARM’s aim is to promote the study of music as performance through a specific focus on recordings”. At the CHARM inaugural event Cook made a presentation focusing on a short extract from Chopin’s *Mazurka in A minor Op. 67 No. 4*. Playing five recordings of the piece ranging from the 1920’s through to the 1990’s, Cook demonstrated that each recording had a different tempo with different emphases and expression. None of them adhered to the indicators on the accepted ‘official’ manuscript, highlighting the need for an understanding of recordings beyond the manuscript-based orthodoxy of traditional

⁴ (<http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/> [Accessed 14/7/08]).

musicology. Cook also played the same extract programmed into a MIDI sequencer and conforming strictly to the annotations of the manuscript. The lifeless result made a convincing argument for the recognition of performance—a score is just a sketch, a skeleton, until flesh is breathed onto the bones by creative interpretation and performance.

The “study of music as performance through a specific focus on recordings” leads, inevitably, to a consideration of the recording process itself, and the methodology of this process. As Alban Zak III (2001: xvii) explains: “Stepping into a recording studio means entering a world where the challenge is not simply to play music well, but to use musical performance as a vehicle for the creation of an aesthetic object”. In his editorial in the *Journal on the Art of Record Production* (2007) Zak argues for an aesthetic of record production:

Among the problems inherent in establishing an academic discipline aimed at illuminating record production, then, is the need for a fundamental aesthetic reorientation as well as new modes of analytic description. We must resist reducing musical meaning to matters of musical syntax, which stipulates a de facto hierarchy of aesthetic value... [T]urning musical utterance into electrical current requires, by the project’s very nature, an intervening aesthetic sensibility which may, in turn, impinge on the final result. Recording does not simply capture sound, it transforms it and in the transformation lies an array of decisions informed by artistic intuition as well as experienced technique.

It is this “intervening aesthetic sensibility” that lies at the heart of the producer’s function. Zak develops his argument for “new modes of analytic description”, following Susan Sontag’s counsel (originally in relation to film criticism) for “a really accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art⁵”. Zak notes that, “as sound, rather than writing, has become the focus of musical identity, much more of the musical surface has been reified in an interwoven complex of musical syntax, performative utterance, and sonic gesture”. Critical analysis of recordings requires a consideration of these different elements that interact to create the overall sonic impact—the sound of the music. Zak continues his essay to lament the “poverty of sources” to provide historical

⁵ From “Against Interpretation,” in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1990

context in the study of record production, and welcomes the “oral accounts of practitioners”:

[T]he oral accounts of practitioners, though problematic, are among our most useful resources. If, for example, we are to engage the entire musical surface, it is helpful to know what kinds of concerns were paramount for those who made it. What criteria were deemed worth spending time and money on? And what kinds of techniques and equipment were useful in accomplishing a given task or producing an expressive effect? From such testimony we begin to assemble a framework for historical work.

Some of Zak’s ideas above have been developed from his earlier work, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (2001), a book full of fine insight into the processes that take place in the studio, displaying the understanding that a practitioner can bring to the inquiry. To an extent this dissertation aims to be such a contribution to the pool of “oral accounts”.

In Chapter 1 I consider the role of the record producer, beginning with a general review of attempts at definition, and my own analysis of the role as a nexus. I consider the areas of interface: with the record company, which usually underwrites and initiates the process by finding an artist who they believe has the potential to be commercially successful; then interfacing with the artist, who I will consider as the source of creative inspiration, as the writer and performer of the song; and with the engineer, through whom the interface with the technology—the recording medium and the microphones—is enabled. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are the accounts of the recordings. Each of these accounts reports first the circumstances that led to my engagement with the recording projects, then the preparatory stages, the pre-production and arrangement processes, followed by the recording processes and mixdown. Chapter 2 considers the making of *Echo Beach*. Chapter 3 recounts the three singles I produced with Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD). I have treated these three recordings as one chapter because there is a progression evident from the first encounter to the final recording which raises questions of the complexity of close engagement with the artist. Chapter 4 reports the making of *I Ran* with A Flock of Seagulls. Each of these accounts concludes with a reflection on the events, noting the signifying parts and how they support my proposition of the role of the producer as a nexus. The final Chapter is a reflection on the processes and patterns

that can be extracted from these reports, and a consideration of possibilities of further research that are raised.

Notes on language and terminology

It has become apparent in the course of this enquiry that there is no fixed terminology in the field of recording. As I will discuss in Chapter 1, communication is a core ability for a record producer, and “speaking the language” is a helpful tool, but there are many terms in use in the context and no agreed lexicon⁶. In this dissertation I sometimes use the word “producer” when I mean “record producer”. In strictly legal terms a “record producer” is a record company in accordance with the Treaty of Rome (1955), however, I feel the vernacular is more appropriate in this context: here a producer or record producer is always the person involved in the creative act of recording.

I use the terms Intro and Outro for the introduction and for the ending of song structures, because these are terms used in the common parlance of studio discourse. Similarly, I call a variation often found in the middle of a pop song—usually after two verses and choruses—the Middle 8, though the American usage is Bridge.

I use several terms, such as “mike”, “miking”, or “miked-up” when referring to microphones. These terms are also in common usage in studios, although there does not seem to be a standard spelling. When referring to a mixing console I use several variations, such as “desk”, “board”, and “mixer”, all of which refer to a mixing console.

I use “reverb” for reverberation, which usually refers to the electronically generated simulation of large space resonance, the exception here being the mix of *Souvenir*, where I used the physical reverb chambers at Whitfield St Studios.

⁶ For further analysis of language and recording see also Emmerson, S. (1986) *The Language of Electro-acoustic Music*. London: Macmillan; and Porcello, T. (2004) Speaking of Sound: Language and the Professionalization of Sound-Recording Engineers. *Social Studies of Science* 34, pp. 733-758.

Chapter 1

1.1 The role of the record producer

Introduction

In this chapter I delineate the role of the record producer and the three fields of interface that encompass that role: the business, usually the record company, as financial facilitator, encompassing contractual arrangements and the extent to which marketing and promotional concerns impinge on function; the artist, including the song as creative object and its performance; and the engineer, as agent of technological mediation in the realisation of the creative object as sonic artifact. This dissertation was first proposed as a consideration of the producer's role as nexus between the artist and the studio technology. However, on close investigation it became apparent that the commercial interests underwriting the processes had a significant affect, both in the instigation of the recordings, and on the nature of the outcome. Record companies place financial constraints that are a major influence on the choice of studio and other budgetary considerations, such as travel, accommodation and time. There is also a clear and explicit expectation that the producer will present an outcome that will satisfy commercial aspirations, and this constitutes a form of pressure that affects some of the creative decisions a producer makes.

In my review of the literature on the role of record producers it also became apparent that there is a need for a clear and all-encompassing definition of a producer. As a working definition I propose the following: *the record producer is the ingredient in the process of recording a musical idea that interfaces between all the factors necessary for the production of a satisfactory outcome.* In the world of popular music the necessary factors are a good song (the musical idea), an appropriate arrangement, an expressive performance, and capable technology (a recording studio). The definition of a satisfactory outcome varies considerably according to the aims and aspirations of all the involved parties. These aims can be simply to achieve a commercially viable result, or, at the other end of the spectrum, an artistically satisfactory finished article. The ideal outcome will satisfy both aspirations:

commercial *and* critical success. This definition is intentionally reductionist because the ways these outcomes are achieved vary widely from producer to producer. For this reason a consideration of the role as nexus is the most universally satisfactory approach.

Perhaps the best known attempt at explaining the role of producer is found in Richard Burgess' informative and entertaining book, *The Art of Music Production* (2002)⁷. Burgess presents four different categories of producer: The All-Singing -All-Dancing-King-of-the-Heap; The Faithful Sidekick; The Collaborator; and Merlin the Magician. Although whimsical, these descriptions go some way towards an understanding of the varied and, at times, wildly different *modus operandi* of record producers. The limitations of Burgess' categories are that they both overlap and under-represent: where does the engineer, for example, fit in this scenario? Collaborator, perhaps? Or Faithful Sidekick, as Burgess proposes? That would depend on the particular individual and the relationship. Perhaps his most satisfying definition occurs in the introduction: "I've always considered the record producer's role to be like that of a blank square in Scrabble...the producer needs to become (or be able to supply) whatever is necessary to make a successful record" (2002:v).

Other attempts at definition tend to consist of quotes from various producers explaining their approach. Burgess (2002: 81-82) quotes Bruce Fairbairn⁸: "I like to be perceived as someone who facilitates the creative process"; and Andy Jackson⁹, who describes the producer as "acting as a therapist in some way...helping the artist to zero in on what they really want to do, rather than what they imagine they want to do" (ibid: 52). The roles described here—facilitator and therapist—can certainly be required sometimes, though not in all cases. George Martin is quoted by Burgess (ibid: v) saying: "A record producer is responsible for the sound 'shape' of what comes out...he's the designer... he stages the show and presents it to the world. It's his taste that makes it what it is—good or bad". This role can best be described as creative director and sound designer. Martin elsewhere (1979: 76) talks of the producer's "palette of musical colours", and "painting pictures in sound" (Larry 1999: 60), though his principle skill was in arrangement. Geoff Emerick (in Massey 2000: 84), George Martin's engineer and

⁷ Previously called *The Art of Record Production* (1997).

⁸ Producer of Bon Jovi, Aerosmith and others.

⁹ Producer/engineer with Pink Floyd, Dave Gilmour and Bob Geldof.

later a producer in his own right, uses the visual metaphor too, saying, “I’ve always described the job as painting a picture with sound; I think of microphones as lenses”. Arif Mardin¹⁰ also adopts the film metaphor, saying, “For me, a record is almost like a minifilm—you have to evoke imagery” (ibid: 39). The use of visual imagery to describe sound occurs in many accounts by producers, which may seem to be an oxymoron, but I too have found it helpful to form a mental image of the finished work before the production is completed. By this process ideas for the sound character of a particular instrument arise and can inform choices. Visualisation is a well known method in many areas of creative endeavour and is clearly a common device in record production, supporting the case for record production as an art.

Another theme found in many producers’ accounts is that of an almost mystical or spiritual mediator. Sam Phillips¹¹ believed his “greatest contribution...was to open up an area of freedom within the artist himself, to help him to express what *he* believed his message to be” (in Guralnick 1989: 330). Jim Dickinson¹² speaks of the music’s “soul...that’s what you’re trying to capture” (in Clark: 1992).

From these observations, and my own experience, the various roles a producer undertakes can be listed as follows:

- Arranger/Interpreter/Visualiser.
- Engineer.
- Creative Director/Performance Director.
- Practical/Logistical Facilitator/Project Manager.
- Psychologist/Counsellor/Priest.
- Mediator—between the objectives and aspirations of the record company and the artist.

¹⁰ Arif Mardin has produced Aretha Franklin, Barbara Streisand, and The Bee Gees amongst many other very successful artists.

¹¹ Phillips discovered and recorded the first hits of Elvis Presley, though preferred his work with Howling Wolf.

¹² A member of the Dixie Flyers, Memphis session musician Dickinson became a producer in the 1970’s, producing hits for Big Star, Willie de Ville and Screamin’ Jay Hawkins amongst others.

Of course, some or all of these roles may be undertaken in any given production—each production has a unique set of circumstances. While helpful in understanding the individual producers’ subjective understanding of their methodology, the observations quoted above do not satisfy my enquiry, though each of the roles I have listed can be seen to fulfill some aspect of the nexus’ requirements. One role, the Project Manager, is probably the most universal, and the one that defines the difference when, for example, an engineer becomes the producer. To be appointed producer of a recording means all the decisions about process—where to record, what to record and in which order, whether a given performance is right, and when the project is completed—are your responsibility. It may be more relevant to the purpose of role definition to consider, as I will, the specific roles at various stages of a production.

Composition—arrangement—performance—engineering

“Go into the studio with a hit song.” – Billy Sherrill¹³ (in Lydon 1998: 349).

The stages of most productions can be considered in these four areas: composition, arrangement, performance, and engineering (Zagorski-Thomas 2007 and Moore 2005). The composition—the song—is almost always the beginning of the process and, as I have noted above, the reason most commercial recordings in the world of popular music are taking place at all. As Moore (2005) argues, the composition, the arrangement and the performance are also the subjects of musicology *per se*. Nevertheless, they are also key components in record production, and each affects the others. For example, an arrangement can be considered in terms of the *assembly of frequencies*: the bass guitar and bass drum occupy the low frequency range, guitars the mid-range, cymbals and string pads the upper mid and high frequency ranges—when a composition is well structured in these terms the engineering process is greatly simplified. The engineer does not have to struggle to achieve clarity and separation, for example, to make the vocal audible when the guitars are flooding the same frequency band. As Zak (2001: 32) puts it, “in many cases a track’s arrangement develops according to criteria that are specific to recorded sound”, and quotes Mitchell Froom, who believes it is a mistake “to separate sonics from the overall arrangement” (ibid).

¹³ Sherrill is best known as producer and co-writer for Tammy Wynette and worked with many country music stars including Johnny Cash and, more recently, Elvis Costello.

Trevor Horn (2008) says: “The way you arrange a song and the key that you put it in will have far more effect on the end result than the desk or where you put the microphone”.

The best time to sort out the arrangement is usually before entering the studio, in *pre-production*, which is why I have found it very constructive to spend time with the artist and musicians in a rehearsal room. Changes to an arrangement can cause a range of problems—musicians can be very protective and sensitive about their parts. Trying to change a drum pattern or a bass riff in the heat of recording, with the clock running and ‘red light’ terrors looming, is not usually a very productive way to operate—young and inexperienced musicians often panic and play progressively worse. In the more relaxed environment of a rehearsal room, ideas can be suggested, tried out and accepted or rejected without studio pressures. It is also a good time to get to understand the group dynamic, the personalities, and also potential weaknesses (see the report on *Echo Beach* for an example of this). This engagement with the artists offers a further opportunity to understand the aims and creative concepts—the vision—at the core of their musical inspiration.

Performance in the studio is a major factor in a successful production, but the inadequacies of studios as performance spaces are well documented (see Zak 2001: 105-107 and Zagorski-Thomas 2007: 24). Screening off the drums and amplifiers leaves the musicians reliant on the headphone mix to communicate, both musically and verbally. Experienced studio musicians learn to adapt and function in these conditions, but for a young band lack of familiarity with studio processes is often the cause of disappointment and frustration. Record producers devise many different schemes to overcome an artist’s discomfort. I learned several techniques from engineers who had worked with other producers, for example, building a sort of room out of studio screens and covering the whole structure with blankets so the artist has a private space to perform, unseen by the control room. One producer friend¹⁴ told me that he found certain artists liked to decorate the studio with cloth hangings and use low lighting and candles to create an atmosphere of mystery. Below I describe a method I developed to create a “familiar place” in the studio, which can become a comfortable environment with repeated visits.

¹⁴ Steve Power, co-producer and writer, with Guy Chambers, of Robbie Williams.

Evaluation

The aim in all recordings is the creation of a *definitive version* of the musical idea. At the core of the process of establishing a definitive rendition is the constant application of evaluation. To choose which particular line, or even word, is the right one to use is the producer's job, but what directs that choice? Some of these choices are largely functional—a word or phrase may drift in pitch, or sit uncomfortably in the rhythm of the track—but often it is simply that one particular rendition moves you, an emotional response is experienced. There is an assumption made that, if it moves you, it can move other listeners. For the producer, trusting this emotional response is a quintessential function. The confidence to say, "I like this one", is at the heart of a producer's role. The same critical function is applied at virtually every stage of the recording process. From the decision that a particular backing track performance has the right feeling and energy, to the approval of a guitar solo, and the sound of the various instruments coming through the monitors, all come back to the producer, who must make that judgement. Of course, many producers will involve the artist in this process, and many artists are notoriously difficult—the more talented artists are usually especially so—and here conflict can arise. Here the producer's powers of persuasion are tested, the commitment to one's instinctive judgement, and a sensibility for the most productive outcome, because sometimes it is more productive to defer to the artists own critical functions. This process of interaction can determine the successful completion of the entire project. Ultimately, this function of critical arbiter applies to the whole production.

Authority

Determining the authenticity, or appropriateness, of a performance, a sound, and the balance of the instruments raises the question: against what template or cultural understanding, by what authority, are these judgements made? In numerous accounts by producers imprecise explanations are found. Tony Visconti calls it "gut feeling" (Molenda 2007: 2). Butch Vig, speaking about Garbage's *Stupid Girl* says, "[W]e thought, 'This sounds cool'" (La Cerra, quoted in Zak 2001: 192). Simon Frith's excellent, and now standard, work, *Performing Rites* (1996), grapples heroically with this question, challenging the sociological argument that our preferences, our emotional

responses, to music are conditioned by class and culture, though there is no doubt some evidence to support this view. Frith makes the case that “[p]op tastes do not just derive from our socially constructed identities; they also help to shape them” (1996: 276). Frith quotes a fan of 80’s rapper Spoonie Gee: “Listening to Spoonie is like hearing my own feelings” (1996: 271), and Evan Eisenberg, in *The Recording Angel* (1987), quotes his friend Nina (pseudonym) explaining, “When I play a record...it’s as though someone else were expressing my feelings” (1987: 132). The producer, too, is shaped by his or her cultural and social context, and is also a shaping, creative agent. The producer as interpreter, as critical arbiter, is relying on the commonality of his sensibilities, his or her “feelings”, the reliability of which will be tested in the cultural marketplace: if enough listeners agree with these choices the recording becomes a hit.

A group, or an artist usually chooses a producer by reputation, and is generally content to accept his or her authority on that basis. The question of authority in the recording context is thus answered to some extent in the case of a producer with ‘form’, a track record of hits—by the simple fact of proven results. There are typically two routes by which one attains the role of producer: by being an engineer, and by experience as a recording artist. In my case, I had been a recording artist in a group with critical credibility, though minimal commercial success—Gong¹⁵. After leaving the group my close relations with the executives of the label—Virgin Records—led to my being asked, first, to supervise demo recordings, and later, to produce commercially released recordings. Certainly, my long career as a musician—playing in groups from the age of 12—gave me a language and syntax of practice with which to engage the artist. Being able to ‘speak the language’ is a hugely advantageous tool. Thomas Porcello presented a paper at the Art of Record Production Conference (ARP) at Edinburgh University in 2006 called: “So what kind of sound are you after here? Speech-about-sound in the recording studio context”, in which he reported on his year “hanging out” in studios recording the terminology and discourses used by producers, engineers and artists to articulate the kinds of sounds and musical parts desired. Common expressions tended to be of the referential kind: “I want the snare to sound like that record by The

¹⁵ A psychedelic progressive rock band formed from a loose collective of musicians by Daevid Allen, founder of Soft Machine, in Paris in 1968. I joined in 1973, just as the band was signed to the nascent Virgin Records. The band has completed a new studio album and will be touring again in 2009. See <http://www.planetgong.co.uk>.

Cure.” One band I worked with early on in my production career asked for the snare to sound “fat but snappy”. This language of common “resonances” is considered in fine detail by Albin Zak III (2001: 184-197). For the producer this shared terminology is a significant part of the process of establishing respect, of acquiring authority. Though, in the end, it comes down to the personal relationship a producer develops with the artist—like an evangelist, a producer must make the artist believe that he, or she, has the ability to make that volatile concept, a song, into a fixed (recorded) reality.

The contributing factors in the recording process can be reduced to the following:

1. The musical inspiration: the song or compositional idea, including the arrangement;
2. The performers and the performance;
3. The recording context: the studio environment and the technologies applied (including microphones, dynamic treatments, equalization, the media or recording format);
4. The mixdown and finalising processes.

At each stage of the process it is the producer’s engagement with these factors that determines the outcome. Whether that interaction is contributory—arrangement suggestions, choice of microphones, direction of a performance, decisions regarding the relative balance of instruments and voices in the mixdown—or critical, in the sense of negative evaluation of a particular factor, or, (as is usually the case) a combination of both, the producer is the final arbiter.

1.2 Interfacing with the business

“One way of describing the music industry is as a business in which both the supply side (the musicians) and the demand side (the consumers) are irrational; record companies, which make their money from bringing supply and demand into line, are thus organised around the bureaucratic organisation of chaos...the vast majority of the music industry’s products are, in economic terms, failures...more than 90 percent of product is loss-making...failure is the norm” (Frith 2001: 33).

Introduction—an argument for the redeeming nature of popular music

Simon Frith's perceptive comment accords closely with my own experience. Criticisms of the record business as a ruthless, monolithic destroyer of creativity apply, at best, only to a small proportion of the vast number of releases. On the whole, the industry is populated and run by individuals who, above all, are fans of music. The A&R person in particular (at least, the successful ones), whose job it is to discover new talent to sign, has a unique skill in understanding the potential of a given artist to appeal to a larger audience. Often the first music heard is in the form a 'demo'¹⁶. The usual trigger of interest will be a song that sounds as though it could be a hit. Typically the next step will be to ask about gigs and arrange to see the band perform live. The decision to sign the band (or solo artist) depends on the seniority of the A&R person—some are given free reign to sign whomever they like because their track record is so successful; junior A&R executives have to bring the material to meetings with the more senior executives, including marketing and promotional personnel. At this point a justification needs to be made of these individuals, whose job (and skill) it is to promote and market the act, of the commercial potential of the band. Marketing in the music business is mostly quite the obverse of traditional marketing, where research and surveys look for gaps in the market and product is designed to fill these gaps. In the music business the product is usually already formed and marketing means deciding which area of the market should be targetted for a particular act, and is based on the genre and image the act itself comes with. The most commercial songs are played and discussed to find the way the band can best be marketed and promoted—their “unique selling point”, their image, and their target market. There is a high level of “hit or miss” about the process—as Frith notes above, “more than 90 percent of product is loss-making”.

This quality of randomness, the “organisation of chaos”, is evident throughout the history of the music industry. Charlie Gillett (1983) has shown eloquently the way the industry has been “wrong-footed” time and again by the remarkable capacity that popular music has to re-invent itself. Sam Phillips' Sun Studios label was so overwhelmed by the demand for Elvis Presley's *Hound Dog* that it couldn't meet manufacturing costs fast enough and so licensed him on to

¹⁶ Demos are artist recordings, usually quite basic, that are sent to record companies by artists, or their managers, looking for a record contract.

RCA. Every decade since the birth of rock 'n' roll has seen a new construct erupting from the sub-culture that is youth music. From the Liverpool Beat scene and the Rolling Stones to punk and rave, to grunge and Brit Pop, the cavalcade spans at least five decades. Each time a new “scene” evolves the industry plays catch-up and scurries around trying to sign the latest flavour. This is their business: to chase the market. Even apparently cynical pop constructs like the Spice Girls demonstrate the market-driven quality of this industry. Anyone involved in the A&R end of this business will confirm that every year hundreds of similar acts approach major labels looking for the marketing power and expertise they provide. Every now and then some entrepreneur gets lucky. I say lucky because there is a randomness in the way these acts are put together: the back pages of music magazines advertise for attractive girls or boys who can dance and sing as well as look good. Whoever answers these ads, and whether, most importantly, that combination of individual talents has the right ingredients for the times, the successful impresarios aspiring to such ambitions must have the understanding that the essential ingredients, as well as a special “chemistry”, are the right songs and the right production. The song and the production are the key that unlocks the door to fame and fortune. Then the timing must be right—they must resonate with the *zeitgeist*. My point is that there is a redeeming quality about popular music: it is *content* driven—if the market is not moved there is no argument. Music is its own argument.

In the structure of the music industry, the usual practice for an A&R person, having signed up their potential next big thing, is to find the right producer. Very few people really know what happens in the studio, so the tendency is to go by track record: whoever produced the latest hits in the genre is first on the list. It is in the nature of a record producer's career that having a hit record creates a demand for the services of that producer from other record companies. A sort of “Catch 22” phenomenon affects producers greatly in that employment follows success, but success can only follow commercial release of a producer's work. Once a hit is achieved, the calls multiply exponentially, and the opportunity to work with more established artists increases the potential for more hits—and around it goes!

From the producer's perspective, the process is as follows: a call comes from the A&R person, either directly or through the producer's manager—for most successful producers have a manager to negotiate terms, and also to field offers. A demo is sent to the producer who then listens and decides whether they like it, or feel they can make a successful recording of the songs. A meeting takes place with the band or artist. Negotiations begin, usually between the producer's manager and the record company. Key components of the contract will include the producer's royalty—typically (at the time of the recordings discussed in this dissertation) 3-4% of the recommended retail price—and the advance. This is a payment on account of anticipated royalty income, and is almost always non-recoupable. “Non-recoupable” means that even if the sales of the recordings do not generate enough royalties to cover the advance, no money needs to be refunded to the record company. This arrangement works very well in favour of the record producer, because, even if the producer produces another recording for the same artist, or even another artist on the same label, none of the earlier advances is attached to the later recordings. Hence it is entirely possible—and certainly was the case with Martha and the Muffins, for example—that one recording release can lose money for the label, and another recording of the same artist by the same producer can earn a lot of money, but the producer is paid royalties on the successful release, whilst having no obligation to repay any residual unrecouped advance on the unsuccessful release. Other terms of the contract will define the territory—usually “the World”; accounting periods, which will usually be every six months; and, if it is with a US-based record company, a budget, with penalty clauses for over-shooting, in which case deductions can be made from the advance.

Once the terms have been agreed the producer is, effectively, charged with managing the project. Decisions about which studio to use, a timetable for pre-production, recording and mixing, and which engineer to use are left to the producer, within the agreed budgetary constraints. From this point forward all decisions relating to the recording process are in the producer's hands. Artists will ask what to do next: which part to record, what will be happening the next day, whether a part is satisfactory—every stage until the recording is mixed and completed. The engineer too will be waiting for instruction, as he or she needs to

know how to set up the studio—which instrument is to be recorded, and so which microphones to use and how the producer plans to approach the part. Some degree of negotiation, both with the artists and with the engineer, can take place, but it is the producer's responsibility, according to his or her judgement, to bring the recording to a successful outcome.

At this point, when the recording is mixed and finished, the results are handed over to the A&R person to consider. Quite often there will be requests for a different mix, or some additional parts added to a track, with some discussion about possible alternative mixes—it is quite usual to make mixes with higher vocal levels for a potential single, or club mixes, where the track is deconstructed and played with by adding breakdowns to just the drums, vocals treated with delays, parts isolated for dramatic effect—a whole range of possibilities are possible. The final involvement for the producer is usually the mastering, where the finished mixes are taken to an engineer whose speciality is adjusting the frequency content of a mix—adding bass, for example, and high frequencies, to compensate for idiosyncrasies of a particular studio. Overall compression is often added at this stage to even out the dynamic range, especially if the track is to be released as a single, because radio adds its own compression and can drastically alter the sound of a recording if it is not compressed first. Mastering is a specialised art in itself and producers often develop a professional relationship with a mastering engineer who is familiar with their style and preferences.

Once a satisfactory master of the recording has been made the contract is considered completed. The balance of the advance is paid (most record companies will pay half up front and the balance on completion) and the producer's involvement ends.

It was only years later, when I started my own record label, that I understood what happened next. A producer's role stops at the studio door in most cases. What happens next is crucial to the commercial success of the project. The record company's role here is to bring the recordings to the market—to the audience.

Without the skills of competent marketeers no more will be heard of these efforts, no matter how well the producer has worked. Below I consider several individuals with whom I have had close experience whose particular talent is marketing and promoting music, and who, I argue, can justifiably be considered to be creative producers as well.

The entrepreneurial producer

There is a category of producer often neglected in the study of record production and popular music, which is the *entrepreneurial producer*. Although more generally considered business executives, I use the term “producer” here in the sense that they initiated, facilitated and inspired the production of a large amount of music and without whose talents the *corpus* of popular music would be the poorer. Prime examples would include Chris Blackwell (Island Records), Richard Branson (Virgin Records), Clive Calder (Zomba/Jive) and Dave Robinson (Stiff Records). I have worked with all of these in some capacity and make the case that there is a highly creative function they serve. There is a visionary quality in creative business people, whose understanding of an artist’s potential to reach a mass market deserves more than dismissal as “clever” capitalists. Such perspectives miss the point. Consider, for example, Chris Blackwell, who brought the music of Bob Marley to the world. The impact of Marley’s music was immense and felt in many cultures across the world. Social and cultural studies have treated with some of these effects. More significantly, to me, is the power of his music to succour, to comfort, to inspire millions of individuals. Island Records was also a vehicle for U2, Steve Winwood and Traffic, Grace Jones and many more great artists. Blackwell’s particular talent was to be able to treat not only with the complexities and challenges of music marketing and mass distribution, but, simultaneously, to enter into the creative world of the artist and enthuse, inspire and affirm, and especially, facilitate. I worked only briefly with Chris Blackwell, using his Compass Point studios in Nassau, where I caught a glimpse of those skills in play.

I worked more closely with Richard Branson, who I first met in 1972, before there was a Virgin Records. Branson was not a “music man” in the idiom of the industry—someone whose understanding and love of music informed their choices

of artist to sign. For Branson this role was performed by his cousin Simon Draper, who persuaded Branson to sign Mike Oldfield—*Tubular Bells* was Virgin's and Oldfield's first release and sold over 6 million records, setting Virgin in a financially secure position from the outset. Draper was an A&R man, but Branson's great ability was marketing: to recognise the additional qualities that a musical talent also needs to become a public figure. Branson respected outrage, "chutzpah", eccentric behaviour, recognising these qualities as essential to stand out in the crowded marketplace. Who else could have coped with the Sex Pistols and their manager, Malcolm McLaren, whose offensive behaviour had already caused EMI and A&M Records to forgo the substantial advances they had paid out, and to drop them without a release?¹⁷

Whatever else may be thought about Branson's creative capacities, one of the consequences of his commercial skills was that several unusual and innovative groups were signed to Virgin. Groups such as Hatfield and the North, Henry Cow and Gong, all unlikely prospects for commercial success, were marketed with the same energetic and imaginative approach. The idea to release an album for the price of a single was first tested with the group Gong—I was a member at the time—which was formed by Australian guitarist and Beat poet, Daevid Allen, who had previously had some success with Soft Machine, another experimental and innovative jazz-rock group, also formed by Allen. The effect was to launch the album into the charts—it reached number 10—and the group was able to fill town halls across the UK. The criteria for sales charts were changed to set a minimum retail price as a consequence of this inventive manipulation of a vulnerability in the system.

¹⁷

An amusing and revealing story told to me by Carol Wilson—at the time head of Virgin Music Publishing—concerns a group called Faust. Virgin had released an album by Faust as a promotional device for the price of a single—49p. Although this had sold very well and given the band a prominence in the public arena, the follow up album had flopped. A meeting was arranged with Branson to discuss whether to continue the relationship with the band. In preparation for this meeting the band met up in a pub near to the Virgin offices and developed a strategy that involved consuming a large quantity of beer. As the meeting progressed Branson indicated that he saw no good commercial reason to keep the band on the label. On a pre-agreed signal the band enacted their strategy: they all stood up, unzipped their flies and urinated on Branson's desk. Branson gave them a new contract, reasoning that such a display of audacity was an indication of marketability.

Inspired by Chris Blackwell's Island Records, in 1976 Dave Robinson and Andrew Jakeman (known as Jake Riviera) formed Stiff Records. Robinson had managed "pub rock" act Brinsley Schwarz during the early 70's and had previously worked with Jimi Hendrix in the 60's. Jake Riviera had managed successful pub rock band Dr Feelgood. The first single they released was by Nick Lowe, former bass guitarist with Brinsley Schwarz and later very successful producer of Elvis Costello. Though not a great success, they followed with a moderately successful single, *Between the Lines* by The Pink Fairies. This generated enough revenue to fund the recording and release of *New Rose* by The Damned, generally regarded as the first "punk" single in the UK. Subsequent releases by Ian Dury and the Blockheads and Elvis Costello set the label in the foreground of the UK music scene and brought a renewed sense of vibrancy to the youth culture of the period with an ethos reviving the rebellious spirit of rock'n'roll. A series of madcap bus tours featuring Stiff acts spread the message across the UK and later Europe. These tours were inspired by the Motown and Stax package tours of the 1960's with half a dozen acts on the same bill—Robinson also cites UK tours "with Hendrix, the Move and Pink Floyd on the same bill in 1968. I always liked package tours, and so did the public"¹⁸. These tours were primarily a promotional device that used the fame of newly successful artists like Elvis Costello and Ian Dury to introduce newer unknown acts such as Jona Lewie and Lene Lovich, whose careers were launched in this way. Jake Riviera left in 1978, taking artists Elvis Costello and Nick Lowe with him and complaining about the profligacy of Robinson—the tours lost large amounts of money, though their promotional value was arguably justified. Robinson persevered, however, and developed artists such as Devo, Madness, Richard Hell, Motorhead, the Pogues, and Graham Parker, who all launched their careers through Stiff Records and Robinson's gift for marketing.

Although not a producer in the sense of a hands-on involvement in the recording process, Robinson was known for his appearances in the studio. I worked on two acts for Stiff—Any Trouble and Louise Goffin—neither of whom had any

¹⁸ From the BBC documentary "If It Ain't Stiff..." broadcast on BBC4 in September 2006.

great commercial success, but Robinson turned up in the studio on both occasions, when he would immediately generate an atmosphere of fun, and the sense that what we were doing was valuable and important. He was also known to take finished masters of recordings and speed them up to “add energy”. Robinson also decided to direct the videos of some of his artists—he had been a photographer at some point—and carried the same sense of fun into promotional videos by Tracy Ullman and Madness. Robinson told journalist Pierre Perrone: "I did have a bit of a masterplan and a list of people we wanted to sign: Ian Dury, Elvis Costello, or rather Declan McManus as he was then, Mickey Jupp, who we eventually signed, and Nick Lowe kind of came with Jake. We were putting together what I consider to be the best songwriters of the period¹⁹."

The most financially successful of these four was Clive Calder, who, in 2002, sold Zomba Music, incorporating Jive Records and Zomba Music Publishing as well as a number of other music-related companies, to Bertelsmann Group for US\$2.7 billion²⁰. By this time Calder had bought out his partners and was the sole owner. Born in Johannesburg and having started in music as a bass guitarist in a local band, Calder founded Clive Calder Productions, through which vehicle he produced and developed “coloured” artists during the height of the apartheid era. Selling the company to EMI, Calder moved to the UK in 1977, bringing with him former pop artist Robert John “Mutt” Lange. In the UK Calder established Zomba Music Publishing and managed Lange as a producer. By the time he became my manager, in 1980, the company owned a large studio complex in North-West London and had launched his own label, Jive Records. Early releases included Whodini, whose hit *Haunted House of Rock* was one of the first hip-hop successes in the UK. Other early successes came from Tight Fit, Billy Ocean, and A Flock of Seagulls, which I produced and will consider in more depth in Chapter 4. I also produced Comsat Angels album *Land*, which, though having slight commercial success, is still highly regarded. Perhaps less creditable, but indicative of Calder’s commercial instincts, in 1986 Jive also signed Samantha Fox. Fox was a pin-up

¹⁹ From <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/stiff-records-if-it-aint-stiff-it-aint-worth-a-debt-415988.html> [Accessed 10/11/08].

²⁰ http://www.forbes.com/lists/2007/10/07billionaires_Clive-Calder_D594.html [Accessed 11/11/08].

model at the time and Calder told me that he was sitting in the bath one Sunday morning reading the papers and wondered why, with such a high public profile—she had become a minor celebrity—she hadn't released a record since promotion was the most difficult part of establishing an artist. As it happened, she had released a poorly made single that had flopped. Calder, by now managing a large roster of producers, with a host of songwriters signed to the publishing company, and a first class studio complex, put Fox with various writers and producers and came up with an album which contained her first Top Ten hit *Touch Me (I Want Your Body)* (1986). Calder explained his vision to me at the time, which was inspired by the Motown Records method of having a string of writers, producers and musicians that turned the studio into a "hit factory". He was not shy of blatant pop commerciality. At the same time Calder was aware of the value of hip credibility and started a subsidiary label called Silvertone. First signing to the label was a Manchester group called The Stone Roses. Produced by John Leckie, *Fool's Gold* (1989) reached number 8 in the UK charts. The Stone Roses are still cited by bands such as The Happy Mondays and many others as being the inspiration for the so-called "Madchester" scene of the 1990's. Maintaining an eclectic catalogue that included South African artists Ruby Turner and Dudu Pukwana—again credible though commercially unlikely—Jive returned to hip-hop in the 90's with R Kelly, A Tribe Called Quest and Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince. By the late 90's the label's roster contained pop acts Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears and N-Sync, who included Justin Timberlake in the line up. By now Jive was dominating the R'n'B global pop market, which enabled Calder to enforce a clause in a deal he had struck several years earlier with BMG, resulting in the multi-billion dollar sale.

Calder retired from the music business and now lives in the Cayman Islands with his family and keeps a very low profile, though he is believed to be behind a charity called Reach Music, which funds poverty relief, education and health care programs in Southern Africa. This accords with a remarkable story that was confirmed to me by Stephen Howard, a former executive with Zomba. When the sale to BMG was finalised Calder instructed London City accountants to create a structure that gave a value to all Zomba/Jive employees based on their length of employment and position. Lowly secretaries who had been with the company for

five years were given £100,000 each. Middle-ranking management received £500,000 and upper echelon executives several millions. Clive looked after his own. But he was not just a businessman—on a number of occasions Clive would enter a session I was running, listen to what we were doing, and enthuse with sincerity about the music and the possibilities he saw for bringing it to the market. When he left everyone in the studio would be fired by his enthusiasm and set about the work with renewed vigour.

These entrepreneurial producers serve the vital function of bringing musical ideas from a concept to world-reaching musical experience. Without their combination of a love of music and an understanding of the market processes, the music we realise in the studio would remain there. The record producer also engages and interacts with their commercial aspirations.

1.3 Interfacing with the artist (and the song)

Artists are strange. I say strange because my observation over my years of producing is that every successful artist I worked with was, to some extent, dysfunctional. I have come to understand that one major reason is that to get very good at an activity requires an obsessive attention on that action: musicians get very good at their instrument by daily and diligent practice. To become excellent at music, the musician must be obsessively focused—often to the exclusion of other, more ‘normal’, aspects of life. As Sting puts it in his autobiography, *Broken Music* (2003: 60-61): “I’ve often thought that playing a musical instrument is an obsessive compulsive disorder or a symptom of being socially inept, but I can’t decide whether playing an instrument makes you socially inept, or you’re a sociopath to begin with and you play an instrument as some sort of consolation”. This “obsessive compulsive” behaviour is a common characteristic of artists—the same is probably true of people in any field who get very good at something, be it painting, football or even stockbroking (or producing records?). And often they too will have difficulties with social skills. These can range from shyness to exhibitionist behaviour—which at least is appropriate for a rock performer. The arts are renowned for tales of irrational, obsessive, even abusive and neurotic behaviour. My observation is that it is almost integral to the function. It seems that artistic inspiration is

often a product of socially dysfunctional personalities. It is a useful (if somewhat Romantic) construct, at least, to consider the artist as a flawed *vehicle* of music. Nevertheless, for the producer the artist can be seen as the means by which the song is articulated. The producer's function in this context is to encourage, cajole, inspire, but most of all, to *understand what the artist needs* in order to deliver a fine performance. There are no all-purpose templates for this process, but the ability to empathise—to understand that the artist is not comfortable, or is not performing to their best—is a fundamental skill required. To an extent this can be learned, like most skills, but having an innate sensitivity is an advantage. The actions considered above are also acts of *collaboration*—although the artist is generally the source of the first inspiration a clear process of creative collaboration can be seen in all the recordings reviewed in this thesis, from the interaction of the producer with the artist, and from further interaction with the musicians in the group, to the ideas contributed by the engineer. A further discussion of the collaborative processes in recordings can be seen at the end of this chapter.

One question that is raised by any analysis of music is: what does it mean? What is the affect of music that gives it special significance? “All known cultures engage in some form of musical behavior, suggesting that it is a basic part of human life, such as eating, drinking, and communicating” (Thompson 2009: 3). Writing from the perspective of the psychology of music, Thompson continues by considering theories of music based on reproductive benefits, beginning with Darwin's view that music “has its origins in the evolutionary process of sexual selection” (quoted in 2009: 23). Although Darwin noted that enjoying and producing music are not useful to survival, he also observed that “love is a common theme in songs”, and that “sounds tend to evolve for reproductive purposes” (ibid). Thompson (2009: 30) has proposed a theory in which music is also conceived as “an instance of a more general capacity for affective engagement—the ability and motivation to attune to and influence the affective states of other humans”. Other theories of the origins of music suggest the possibility that it is a development of “auditory scene analysis”—the ability to detect environmental information from sound—a useful survival function (ibid: 34, citing Pinker 1997). Some theories propose music as an adaptation of vocal patterns, emotional calls and sounds drawn from the natural environment (ibid 2009: 35, citing Mâché 2001). Thompson (2009: 37) notes that “music conveys emotional information, can be analyzed into sections, and performs social functions”. Developments in neurobiology in recent years

have provided evidence of the mechanics of neural arrangements in the brain that respond to specific frequency and temporal triggers and send messages, such as to our feet to start tapping (see Large and Jones 1999). Other recent research suggests that areas of the brain release dopamines as pleasure rewards for predicting musical events. Music “invokes some of the same neural regions that language does, but far more than language, music taps into primitive brain structures involved with motivation, reward, and emotion” (Levitin 2006: 187). Such investigations certainly inform us of the biomechanics that provoke emotional responses from music, though how much this will impact on the methods of performers and composers remains to be seen. What seems evident is that music has the ability to create for the listener not just a description, or report, of a condition, but a direct and palpable experience that communicates understanding—knowledge—of that condition. The composer’s intention is to articulate through music his or her own feelings, or condition. The unspoken hope is that others will relate, will find that this music articulates, or informs, their condition too. Rock artist Paul Weller puts it like this: “When you’re writing a song you’re trying to communicate. You’re saying, ‘Listen, do you ever feel like this?’” (Perry 2009). Some individuals are compelled, for complex reasons, to stand before their peers and make such a statement of their condition. Often the personality, or character, of the artist is a contradiction of their artistic statement. For the producer the aim is to engage with and extract musical output from such personalities.

A producer is confronted with a musical concept—usually a song—that represents an aspiration to communicate a condition. That condition may take many forms. Often, in pop music, it is related to the confusion engendered by the conflict of the genetic imperative to breed with cultural restraints that have another agenda: to direct the impulse to breed into a socially useful structure—family and order—that is helpful in furthering the continuance of society ²¹. The producer’s role is to make that aspiration a reality.

²¹ “Pop music is all about getting girls to dance!” (Laurene Laverne, commentator on BBC2 ‘Glastonbury 2008’)

Vocalists—familiarity breeds success

I noticed quite early on in my recording career that the best backing track is worth little if the vocal does not work. What makes a vocal work is one of the mysteries of modern popular music—it does not necessarily have to be in tune, in time, or even well recorded—it just has to *work*. It has to be believable and it has to evoke an emotional response in the listener. The conditions that produce a great vocal performance are as varied as the number of singers—each one has different needs. A key part of the producer’s role is to find what a particular singer needs to produce such a performance. Sometimes it is a simple matter of altering the mix in the headphones to the right balance; sometimes the wrong reverb can be off-putting. One singer I worked with could only describe the problem as being a “metallic” sound—this was solved by changing the device producing the reverb. Many producers use techniques such as applying specific equalization to the headphone mix, and adding reverb and delays to create an aural atmosphere the singer feels comfortable with—Humberto Gatico describes such a practice when recording Celine Dion (Massey 2000: 64). A method I have long employed with some success is what I call the “familiar place”. This works on the observation that most singers perform better if the sound of their voice they hear when they sing is familiar—such as when singing in the shower. The often cold and clinical atmosphere of a modern recording studio can be alienating and intimidating. To overcome this strangeness one effective method is to have the singer’s microphone set up in a comfortable place—sometimes, depending on the singer, to arrange a sort of room from large screens covered with blankets where they are not observable. This singing space is kept always ready to use—even from the first recordings, when the vocal is usually treated as a “guide” to help the musicians and usually not to be kept. The other part of this process is to ask the singer to sing in this place every day—sometimes just for twenty minutes, and if it’s a good day as much as possible. These attempts are usually kept relatively short, but can happen whenever the moment seems appropriate. In this way the vocalist returns often to what becomes a familiar environment—the sound in the headphones, the position in the studio, and the relationship with the producer through the glass—through repetition all becomes a comfortable place. By removing the imperative to deliver a definitive take the artist will feel less pressured and able to test ideas and different ways of treating the song. The process of returning repeatedly to the familiar

place accustoms the singer to that acoustic environment—to the sound of their voice in that studio, with those headphones, and that reverb sound. Problems such as instrumental balance, distracting parts, or the wrong reverb can be identified as they become accustomed to that place. This approach also allows for the ephemeral nature of the untrained voice. The human voice is an inconstant thing—some days the actual tone and timbre is better than other days. This could be the consequence of a heavy night's drinking, or the onset of a cold, the weather, any number of subtle factors can combine to produce a quality that is not usually present. Most singers have good days and bad days and sometimes remarkable days, when their voice acquires qualities of timbre and tone rarely repeated. By keeping the vocal setup always ready, such performances can be captured with a minimum of delay, and with it that elusive thing, magic.

Another discovery I made about vocals, which I discuss in the story of *Echo Beach*, is also to do with familiarity. This is an effect of the process of compiling a vocal from a number of takes. The vocal compilation process involves listening through each take and noting the good lines and phrases. To do this in a structured way requires a complete lyric sheet, including repeated choruses and phrases, so that every attempt is noted. I use a system of columns on the right-hand side of the page and mark each line with the take number—from 1 to 5—with a larger number for the better takes, and a smaller number for weaker takes. Having listened through all five takes, I can then switch from take to take according to the larger numbers in my columns. When the singer is competent this process is more a matter of selecting the outstanding lines and compiling a complete performance that is the best of all the performances recorded. This compiled take, another form of interfacing, is then bounced to a new track with adjustments for level differences. Even with very able singers the resulting complete vocal can end up stronger than any single performance they might have made. With less able singers this can produce a complete and enjoyable recorded performance that they might never otherwise have achieved. But what surprised me, and at first was rather annoying, was that, having spent as much as six or eight hours assembling a complete and relatively flawless performance, often the singer would plead, or insist, on another attempt. Even more surprising was that these subsequent performances would surpass the painstakingly assembled compilation. What I came to understand was that the assembled performance had

shown the artist a way of treating the song that existed previously only in fragments. A new song that has not been performed very much is in some ways undefined: there are subtleties and nuances of expression that come about in a sort of haphazard way—each attempt can be an experiment with delivery. The melody and the structure will have been loosely sketched, but all those subtle details—the particular phrasing of a line, an emotional emphasis on a word, all the minute details that go to make a powerful rendition—these things are the stuff of great recordings. This new assemblage was, in effect, a crystallization of many potentials. The vocal performance was being defined and reified. My explanation for this is again to do with familiarity: many quite mediocre amateur singers can produce a credible rendition of a well-known song because the song has been defined by that recorded version, and the singer has a clear mental image of where to direct the voice. With new un-recorded material the *definitive* version has not been formed. The process of repeated listening to several takes can last for hours, while the singer sits in the control room hearing the same song over and over, with subtle variations, stylistic inflections and performing nuances. On hearing the compilation a clearer direction becomes apparent to the singer—sometimes the realisation that certain phrases can be interpreted differently or with more emotional intensity. Though it can be exasperating after many hours of painstaking effort, I always allow a singer one more shot.

1.4 Interfacing with the engineer

The producer not only has to treat and engage with the creative inspiration and personality of the artist, but, also, and similarly, with the engineer. In the recording context the engineer is the creative agent of the textural totality of the outcome. The dialogue between a producer who is not an engineer (or, as many engineers do, choosing to use an engineer when wearing the producer hat²²) and the engineer can determine the successful outcome of the project. It is one thing to know that a particular sound, a tonal texture, is right or is not right—it is another thing to know how to *achieve* a “right” sound. The evaluation that a sound is the right one for a specific

²² Many engineer/producers like to use another engineer so that they can focus on the other aspects of the production – performance, arrangement and structure.

production is the producer's task, but when the judgement is that a sound is not right, then some indication of what you are imagining needs to be communicated to the engineer. The quality of this communication is a part of the producer's repertoire of skills. It is no less a part of the creative act of record production than the dialogue with the artist. The relationship between producer and engineer could be likened to that between film director and cameraman—the director usually has the creative vision of the outcome, but is heavily dependent on the cameraman to realise that vision, literally. Similarly, a producer needs to communicate his or her vision to the engineer in order for the engineer to understand how to approach the task. Again, having a common language or syntax, as discussed above, is a most useful tool.

In my career I have been fortunate to have worked with a number of very good engineers. The engineers involved in the five recordings discussed in this dissertation went on to enjoy successful careers in their own right. Richard Manwaring, who engineered and mixed *Echo Beach*, as well as the rest of the album *Metro Music* on which it appeared, later produced *Architecture and Morality* (1981), the album by Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD) on which *Souvenir* appeared, and the album *Red Skies Over Paradise* (1980) by Fischer Z, a huge hit in Germany. I had produced the first two albums with Fischer Z, but although he might have seemed to have 'taken' these groups from me, I had no personal issue with Richard about this, and he remains a good friend. Richard also went on to produce Scottish folk-rock group Capercaillie. Max Norman, recording engineer on *Enola Gay*, later worked with Ozzy Osbourne and Megadeth and built a very successful career as a producer in the USA. Mike Shipley, who recorded and mixed *I Ran* and the eponymous album *A Flock of Seagulls* (1982), later engineered the album *Love Life* (1984) by Berlin that I produced and is still one of the most sought after engineers in the USA²³. With each of these engineers the relationship was a creative partnership. In the heat of recording a performance a producer's concentration is on the musical qualities of that performance: the tuning, the timing, the emotional affect, and the development of the song as it progresses through

²³ Shipley has engineered, mixed or produced albums for such diverse artists as Queen, AC/DC, Joni Mitchell, The Cars, Meat Loaf, Def Leppard, A Flock of Seagulls, Winger, The Corrs, Anberlin, Kim Carnes, Kelly Clarkson, Shania Twain, Blondie, Aerosmith, Tom Petty, Foreigner, Devo, Cheap Trick, Jimmy Barnes, Enrique Iglesias, Tim McGraw, Ashley Tesoro, Maroon 5, Barenaked Ladies, Berlin, Faith Hill, Nickelback, Michael Bolton, Ronan Keating, Thomas Dolby, Ric Ocasek, Jefferson Airplane, Green Day, and The Black Crowes.

the arrangement. Geoff Emerick (quoted in Massey 2000: 94) says, on producing and engineering: "I let the second engineer...look after the recording of the vocals, for the simple reason that if you're worried about levels and pops and esses and [the singer] asks you, 'Was it in tune?' you wouldn't know." Sir George Martin (in Massey 2000: 79) agrees "it's useful for an engineer to concentrate on the technical aspect, and for a producer to concentrate on the musical aspect." In practice I have found that many engineers also have musical skills and often a keen sense of pitch. The relationship that develops becomes collaborative, with a degree of trust that any unnoticed aberrations—both musical and technical—will be pointed out.

During the mixdown stage of the recording my usual practice is to discuss the general approach and specific effects with the engineer, and then leave the studio while the sounds and the balance are set up. This is because sitting in the control room and hearing each detail repeatedly can cause not only ear-fatigue, but objectivity also suffers. One of the hardest parts of mixing is to listen with fresh ears and be able to evaluate the overall impact of the production. Details such as the level of the hi-hat, or the reverb on a snare drum can acquire a perceived importance out of proportion to their musical role. Even with this approach—leaving the room during the setup stage—long periods will still be spent listening intently and repeatedly before a mix is judged to be right. In an ideal situation, after a mix has been made that seems perfect, I leave the mix set up and take away a copy to listen to at home, in the car or any other alternative monitoring environment, then return the next morning with fresh ears and make any final adjustments that appear necessary. Very often what seemed right the night before becomes obviously wrong in the cold light of morning.

Producers often develop longstanding working partnerships with engineers. With OMD I returned to Advision in order to use Lawrence Diana as mix engineer on *Enola Gay* because the group and I agreed that we liked the atmosphere and the sound quality we had attained with *Messages*. As I noted above, I later engaged the services of Mike Shipley to mix the album *Love Life*. Sometimes a producer and an engineer will form a professional relationship as a production "team". Alan Winstanley and Clive Langer (Madness, Dexy's Midnight Runners, The Smiths) are one example where Winstanley was the engineer and Langer worked with the arrangements and performance, although there is a large area of crossover where the roles are shared.

Stock, Aitken and Waterman (Kylie Minogue, Bananarama and many more) are another highly successful partnership. In their case Aitken was the engineer, while Stock supervised the performance and arrangement, and Waterman was an overseer, or executive producer and in this particular instance ran the label and signed artists—the A&R person, in effect²⁴.

An engineer's particular skill is in understanding microphones and their placement. Not all microphones are the same, in fact, it is true to say that each type and make of microphone will bring a different quality to the recorded sound. There is a commonly held idea that simply putting a good microphone in front of a performer will capture the authentic sound of the performance (see O'Hare 2007). My observation is that this is far from the truth, and can be tested by placing three different makes of microphone in front of a vocalist and comparing the results. There is also the question of placement: different distances will produce different timbres. The art of recording is in creating a recorded sound that represents the creative concept. In the recording process the aim is not the accurate replication of the sound source in the studio, but rather, the creation of the illusion of a performance experience. An engineer's expertise is the production of sonic qualities. The producer's role is in deciding that a given sonic quality is appropriate for the musical idea.

Creative Collaboration

From the above review of three fields of interface—the artist, the engineer, and the industry—it is also clear that a high degree of creative collaboration takes place in record productions. The artist usually brings the song idea, but this is rarely fully formed. In the following accounts of different productions, numerous occasions occur where ideas emerge from the interaction of the participants in the recording process. For example, in Chapter 2 (see p. 51) I recount the difficulties with the saxophone solo in *Echo Beach*, where the saxophonist resisted my request to play a melodic solo similar to the solo he had played on the first abortive recording. As the result of several days of sometimes heated, and certainly intense dialogue he eventually produced a solo that satisfied both my and his requirements and was not a simple replication of the original. In Chapter 3.1 I report the processes in the

²⁴ The individual roles of Stock, Aitken and Waterman were confirmed to me in conversation with Phil Harding, who worked closely with all three for several years in the 1980's as a programmer and remixer.

recording of *Messages*, where an idea arose spontaneously for a second bass part. This idea emerged from the creative “flow” of the session as mutual confidence grew because the recording was going well. The concept of “flow” is discussed in R. Keith Sawyer’s *Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration* (2003). First used by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), the term “refers to a state of heightened consciousness that occurs in individuals during peak experience” (Sawyer 2003: 39). Sawyer uses examples taken from his own interviews with performers of both improvisational jazz, and theatre, that describe such moments of heightened consciousness during performance, often associated with conditions of anxiety or stress (2003: 40-41). Live improvisational performance is often a condition of tension—at any moment the emergent creation can collapse through misunderstandings or even technical failures of equipment. Similarly, the recording environment produces stressful conditions through the imperative to attain a satisfactory outcome, but this tension can also be a stimulant for creative invention. Sawyer uses Csikszentmihalyi’s model of the state of “flow”—a balance between comfortable competence within one’s skill level and the anxiety produced by challenges to one’s capabilities—and extends it to describe the processes of group creativity. Sawyer’s model posits “group flow” as a balance between “specific extrinsic goals” and “shared structures”, with an excessively structured, predictable framework being too restrictive, and the lack of clear goals being “chaotic and ineffective” (ibid: 168). In the recording process the specific goal is clear: to produce a recording that satisfies the aspirations and ambitions of the participants. The method is also usually fairly well understood: to record a prepared arrangement with satisfactory performances and textural qualities. However, such ordered structured processes must allow for spontaneity, for improvisation, for magic. Sawyer’s concept of group flow describes well the extra quality that makes a recording more than the functional sum of its parts. A certain amount of chaos, of anarchy, can be allowed because that is where the magic is found—as long as the producer knows when to pull in the reins to keep the project on track.

Such creative collaborative outcomes are also evident in the interaction with the engineer; for example, in Chapter 2 (see p. 51) the sound of the guitar riff in *Echo Beach* was the result of the engineer and I discovering that the amplifier delivered different characteristics to each speaker. There is interaction and consultation—collaboration—with the record company that impinges on the recorded outcomes. Recording is almost always teamwork, even in the case of Burgess’ All-Singing-All-Dancing-King-of-the-Heap, who at some stage must rely on a record company to reach his imagined audience.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have reviewed the three fields of interface with which a record producer must engage in the work of commercial record production, with particular focus on the people: the artist, the engineer, and the record company personnel. I have based my observations on personal experience and supported them where possible on available source material. By focussing on the personal my intention is to demonstrate that the nature of record production is one of direct and personal engagement. Just as every artist, engineer and record industry person is an individual, and not a generalisation, so each producer has a different balance of the qualities described above—musical, technical, social and commercial understanding, and personal authority—and acts according to their individual nature. I have also acknowledged the creative collaborative processes that occur in recordings. I contend that by positioning the role of the record producer as a nexus a clearer understanding of the nature of this role can be achieved—a generalisation based on the particular. In the following three chapters I recount in close narrative the recording of five songs I produced, and examine the proposition of the role as nexus in these contexts.

Chapter 2

Echo Beach—Martha and the Muffins

Introduction

This chapter describes the process and sequence of events that resulted in the single *Echo Beach* by the Canadian group Martha and the Muffins. It begins with the background events that started the process: the commercial interest aroused by the demo of the song, and my involvement with Carol Wilson, an executive with Virgin Music Publishing Company, in forming a new record company. I then recount my initial attempt to record *Echo Beach* in Toronto, the problems encountered, and solutions to these problems, leading on to pre-production, the recording sessions in the UK and issues arising during this process, resulting in the completed track and the album *Metro Music* on which it featured. Whilst this account, as with the other recordings in this work, is largely from memory, it has been reviewed by Martha Ladley, former member of Martha and the Muffins, who confirmed the accuracy of the events, at least according to her own memory. From these events a template can be extracted that defines the pattern of most commercial recordings, and particularly, the role of the record producer as the interface between the creative inspiration of an artist, the technical processes of realising that inspiration as a recorded performance, and the commercial interests that both enable, by providing funding, and constrain, by commercial expectation, the outcome of these ingredients.

The album 'Metro Music' represents a defining period in my career as a record producer. The hit single from it was my first widely successful production. Released in the UK in February 1980, it reached number 10 in the UK pop charts, and, consequently, was released in all the major markets in the world. In Canada, the group's home territory, it received the 1980 Juno Award as single of the year, and achieved chart success in Canada (no.3) in Australia (no.1), Germany (no.12) and New Zealand (no. 2)²⁵.

²⁵

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=U1ARTU0002181>

Background

The circumstances that resulted in my producing Martha and the Muffins came about through a series of events that were not the usual way a producer is chosen. In 1979 I had been involved in establishing a record company called DinDisc with Carol Wilson, then Manager of Virgin Music Publishing Company, a division of Virgin Records. The original plan had been to set up this record company as an independent label, wholly owned by Carol and myself. Carol had been very successful when running Virgin Music by signing, as songwriters, artists including Sting, who was now having great global success with the group The Police. The earnings from this signing had produced millions of pounds of profit for the Virgin group. Upon hearing that Carol was intending to leave to start the DinDisc label, Richard Branson, principal owner and chief executive of Virgin, offered to fund the label and keep it within the corporate embrace of the Virgin structure. The appeal of this arrangement was considerable. The initial funding, including staff wages, office overheads, recording costs, promotional and distribution mechanisms for a new record company can be daunting. In the end, Carol became the chief executive of the company and I was engaged as an independent producer on an ad hoc basis. The advantage for me was that I could continue to work for other record companies as well, thereby expanding my employment potential, and still receive royalty payments for my production work with DinDisc.

The group Martha and the Muffins were based in Toronto, but had sent a demo to several UK-based record companies and their tape had come to the attention of Carol²⁶. We both liked the song *Echo Beach* and thought it had the potential to be a hit. I arranged to go to Toronto to meet the band and record the song on a speculative basis—no contract had been signed, but negotiations were well under way.

²⁶ Martha Ladly, the keyboard player with Martha and the Muffins, sent me this comment on reading the first draft: “I recall that we met Dave Fudger [A&R for Virgin Music Publishing] at a gig we played at Hurrah in NYC, along with Robert Fripp, who I think had invited him to see us play. This was after we had sent a demo to Glenn O’Brien, who had reviewed it in *Interview* magazine, which got a little buzz going. Anyway, I am pretty sure that you heard the demo because Dave brought it back to Carol from the gig in NYC, which resulted in us being offered a Virgin Publishing contract, by Carol.”

This first attempt was unsatisfactory, as it became apparent during the recording that the drummer was not technically skilled enough to produce a solid rhythm—in particular, the sound of his bass drum was too soft. Although this problem can be overcome in a number of ways, such as the use of compression and equalisation, I made the judgement that the overall dynamic and the musical integrity of the recording would be compromised beyond my standard of acceptability. Nevertheless, the recording was completed and mixed in the two days booked for the session, without much attention being drawn to this problem, and despite my belief that the recording would not be usable. Some elements of the recording were pleasing and confirmed the potential of the song, but it was my judgement that more preparation would be needed to attain a satisfactory realisation of the track. I returned to the UK with this exploratory recording, and explained to Carol Wilson my belief that, in order to achieve a satisfactory recording, it would be necessary to engage in several weeks of rehearsal with the band (and especially the drummer) on the arrangements of all the songs planned for an album. We agreed on this approach and arranged that I would return to Toronto and put this plan into action.

Pre-production—the group dynamic

Although the practice of pre-production is not unusual in this field, a more usual response to finding an inadequate level of musicianship in a group would be to engage a professional session musician—a very skilled performer experienced in studio recording, and capable of providing a competent musical part to the specification of the producer. In this case it was my belief that the drummer would be capable of producing a satisfactory performance if I could train him and simplify his parts. The context of the group politics was also complicated by the fact that he was the brother of the guitarist, who was the *de facto* leader and composer of the most commercial of their songs. I also felt that the personalities of the members of the group could result in resistance to perceived interference by an outsider, and especially a producer imposed on the group by the record company—and, if I was not exactly “imposed”, certainly no alternatives were offered. It is often the case with young, inexperienced groups that the circumstances that produce such combinations of individuals have come about through the convenience of local availability. Nonetheless, it is also often the haphazard nature of such combinations that results in

a unique synergy and charm that forms the very reason their creative output is attractive. A producer should always be sensitive to the vulnerability of such groups, and endeavour to retain those unique qualities.

As I noted in Chapter 1, before becoming a record producer I had spent many years, from the age of 12, playing in rock groups with many different musicians of varying levels of competence. It is this background that enabled me to adopt this production strategy to achieve the end of a satisfactory recording outcome. Because of my experience as a musician I am able to talk to rock musicians in terms familiar to the genre, and suggest alternative treatments and parts for a particular arrangement. If necessary I can play the suggested part, at least well enough to demonstrate the idea. This ability is not a requirement for a record producer, but is a useful aid in gaining the trust and confidence of a musician when suggesting changes in his or her performance. A level of sensitivity, diplomacy and compassion is helpful too. It is quite easy to destroy the self-belief of a performer by challenging their ability and musical judgement. This is particularly so when the dynamic of the situation represents the potential realisation of their creative ambitions—this is certainly the case when a substantial recording contract frames the situation.

So I returned to Toronto and spent three weeks in a rehearsal room choosing and working through the songs for the album. Choosing the material is a key part of the process. Groups usually have accumulated more songs than required for an album, and the decision to drop songs can also cause friction. Musicians sometimes feel attached to certain songs for reasons that are not always based on commercial appraisal, or even artistic appraisal from the producer's perspective. I have found that the process of engaging with artists in the relatively relaxed context of a rehearsal room is a productive way to achieve my desired outcome. Refining the arrangement and tightening the performance will make it easier to engineer and produce clarity and strength in the production. It is also an opportunity to become acquainted with the artists and to develop a healthy communication. This can prove most helpful at a later stage, in the heat of the studio recording process, where sensibilities are most challenged.

Another invaluable function of spending this time in close association with the artist is the opportunity to understand the creative inspiration—the artist’s vision of the musical composition. A clear understanding of what the artist has in mind is an aid to achieving a successful realisation when interfacing with the technological constraints of the recording process.

The arrangement—the song

Often recording sessions are based on the hope that some magic will turn up to transform a mediocre song into a hit. In this case I was confident that *Echo Beach* was the hit, but it needed some adjustments to the structure. The basic structure worked quite well, but lacked what I call dynamic. The song’s linear arrangement was structured as follows:

|| Intro | Verse | Bridge | Instrumental Chorus | Verse | Bridge |
Instrumental Chorus | Sax Solo | Sung Chorus | repeat Chorus to fade ||

The Intro—a very catchy two-bar guitar riff—occurred only once in the song. Apart from the Intro, this structure can be expressed simply as A-B-C-A-B-C-D-C-C. This is not an unusual structure for a pop tune, although it is more usual to have a sung chorus every time, instead of just at the end. My problem with the song was that it maintained a similar level of intensity without much variation. The group had arranged the song so that the riff played four times on its own, and then four more times when the rest of the band joined in, after which it never appeared again. I suggested breaking the arrangement after the first instrumental chorus and repeating the Intro guitar riff. By returning to the guitar riff after the first instrumental chorus, this *key affective component* would be highlighted in the listener’s perception. The use of repetition is a well-researched technique in pop music analysis²⁷. At the time I was not aware of such analyses, and this suggestion was purely intuitive on my part, most likely the influence of having played many “cover versions” of popular hits in the early years of my performing career. In recent years I have conducted an exercise as part of a course I teach on record production in which I ask students to bring in any recording that has been a hit any time in the last fifty years. This random selection is

²⁷ See Levarie and Levy 1983: 237 and Warner 2003: 9.

then subjected to a structural analysis. It still surprises me to find that 95% of all these songs conform to this template:

Verse | Bridge | Chorus | Verse | Bridge | Chorus | Middle Variation
(or Middle 8) | Chorus repeated to fade.

Sometimes simpler variations are found, such as leaving out the Bridge between Verse and Chorus, but clearly using this model, repeating the Verse and Chorus before a third element is introduced as a kind of aural relief, with a final restatement of the key theme, usually the Chorus. I do not believe this is a conscious compositional strategy, but rather, the way most songwriters instinctively develop their musical ideas. Why this should be so is outside the brief of this work and more appropriate to the field of cognitive psychology, nevertheless, this is my empirical observation as a practitioner.

This idea to bring back the Intro guitar riff after the first chorus was tried and the band agreed it made musical sense. The repeated Intro was shortened. Whereas, in the Intro, the guitar riff is played eight times and lasts for sixteen bars, when it reappears it is played twice, lasting four bars, with the drums joining after two bars playing an eighth-note repetitive dynamic build from pianissimo to mezzo forte by the end, leading into the second verse.

Further changes to the arrangement were the answering sung echo of the chorus after two cycles (8 bars), and the reprise of the saxophone after a further two cycles—this time improvising over the sung chorus. These changes form part of the resolution, or finale, of the song. In pop song structure this final development is also a consistent feature²⁸, ideally containing key components of the preceding song with the addition of new and evolving ingredients.

Over the three weeks of pre-production all the songs chosen for the album recording were rehearsed and refined, with my principal aim being to ensure that the parts played were both effective and within the ability of the individual musicians.

²⁸ See Warner 2003: 9, 68, 87

Generally the performance level was adequate, but much attention was paid to the drummer, who, as mentioned above, had been found to have insufficient force when playing the bass drum. At the time of the earlier first recording attempt I had told him of an exercise used by drummers to strengthen their ankles. This involved resting the foot that plays the bass drum on a household brick and raising it by pressing down on the heel, thereby raising the front of the brick. He had been using this exercise and by the start of rehearsals had improved significantly. By further simplifying his parts I was confident he would prove adequate for the task. In my opinion this was the preferable solution, as he played with a naivety and enthusiasm that uniquely suited the style and sound of the band.

The recording

Rehearsals were completed by the end of May 1979, which left the band two months to organise travel arrangements and transport their equipment to England. As the record company was now part of the Virgin Group, both funding and a suitable discount were made available to us at The Manor Studios in Kidlington, near Oxford. This was a very pleasant studio, being a converted manor house, with parts of the building dating back to the 14th century, appointed in a luxurious style, and with the barn converted to the highest current technical standards into a 24 track recording facility. It is worth noting that the mixing desk was a newly installed Solid State Logic—one of the first made at the time, and for the next twenty years regarded as one of the two finest consoles in the world. (The other being the Neve console.) I was very familiar with this studio, having recorded several albums both as an artist and as a producer. The house engineer, Richard Manwaring, had also worked with me on several of these projects and we had developed a comfortable relationship. Richard has a fine sense of humour and engages well with artists—as well as being a fine engineer—which can be very helpful when difficulties arise.

The backing tracks

The recordings began, as is the case for most rock sessions, with setting up the instruments and microphones, starting with the drums, followed by the bass guitar, electric guitar, keyboards and guide vocal. The group being young and relatively inexperienced, I had already decided to record the basic tracks with all musicians

playing together. It may surprise those unfamiliar with recording techniques of the late 20th century that musical parts will often be recorded separately. Although this provides greater separation of sound—there will be no spill from adjacent instruments—there is often a trade-off in performance quality. In this case there was a strong performance factor that I wished to capture. In practice, what often happens is that the first recordings of a song are focussed on the rhythm section, sometimes only the drum part, but often the drummer will only perform at his best when the whole band is playing. Arrangement elements such as the dynamic flow and rhythmic feel are more easily felt in this way.

I had identified the guitar riff as a key affective component of the song—a hook—but to make this more affective the tone, or timbre, of the guitar was an integral component. The guitarist was using a relatively new amplifier—the Roland JC 120—that had a new and distinctive feature, which was a “chorusing” effect: the signal is fed by a side chain to several very short delays from 1-15 milliseconds duration which are independently modulated by a low frequency oscillating voltage and then recombined with the original signal. The effect has some similarities to multiple guitars playing the same part with slightly different tunings. Although this effect had been available as a freestanding effect pedal, the difference with the JC 120 was that the different delays are fed to two separate speakers, housed in the same cabinet, thereby creating a stereophonic sound. This was first noticed by the engineer, Richard, when setting up the microphone to record the guitar—a different signal tonality was coming from each speaker. Richard suggested placing a microphone directly in front of each speaker at a distance of only 2-3 inches. This worked well when the two signals were combined and recorded onto one track of the multitrack recorder, but it then occurred to me that if we kept the signals separate and panned them left and right a more pleasing sound with stereo width would be produced. This approach was applied to the guitar recordings for the whole album as it gave the group a unique defining characteristic previously not heard in recordings of the day.

The other instruments were recorded using the preferred method of the engineer. The drum kit was miked up using a close-miking technique: a Shure SM57 two inches or so above and to the side of the snare drum, pointing towards the centre of the drum head; a Neumann U47 inside the bass drum; Sennheiser 421 dynamics on

the mounted tom and floor tom; a pair of Neumann U87s to either side and a foot or so above the cymbals, providing a stereo image of the whole kit; and another Sennheiser 421 on the hi-hat.

The bass guitar was fed through a DI box, capturing the signal from the pickup, and then on to the amplifier, which was miked up with a Neumann U47. These two signals were recorded to individual tracks to give more options at the mix stage—the two capture methods give different harmonic characteristics, the amplifier will have its own distorting qualities, and the direct signal usually a cleaner sound, and the best combination is often not apparent until the track is complete.

The keyboard was a vintage 60's Acetone electronic keyboard. This was another distinctive feature of the group's sound as, by this time, this keyboard had fallen out of popular usage. The group had found one in a junk shop and made extensive use of its slightly 'cheesy' and quirky characteristic. It was recorded through a DI box as its sound was not improved by amplification.

The vocals were recorded with a Neumann U47—a microphone I have found to be well-suited to female vocal characteristics. Common practise at the time was to use a less sophisticated microphone for the guide vocal, which was regarded as a throwaway, to be replaced at a later stage, because the main objective was to get a good backing track. However, I had noticed that singers often put more energy into their performance during the backing track recordings in an effort to inspire the musicians. I had been frustrated in previous recording sessions that the singers sometimes found it hard to repeat the sense of urgency and excitement of performing with the band. For this reason I had made a practice of using the best microphone that is available, just in case I get that magic performance.

The saxophone was recorded with an AKG 414, a high quality large diaphragm condenser microphone well-suited to the character of the sax. Here again, I was not expecting the final performance, but keeping the possibility open. As it turned out, a lot more needed to happen before the saxophonist came up with the performance I was after, but I will return to this below. The sax player also played the flute part, which was a variation on the guitar riff melody, picking out the key notes.

This part was overdubbed later using the same AKG 414, partly because it was a suitable microphone, but also because it remained set up in the familiar place he had been in during the backing track recording.

The sounds all set up and ready to record, the band were then able to play through the various songs, with the purpose both of sorting their individual headphone mixes and to settle in to the environment. This process is a useful way to relax a band and help them to overcome the initial nervousness most inexperienced musicians feel in a large professional recording studio. Even quite experienced musicians and singers feel this “red-light” phobia, similar to the nervousness stage performers often experience before a show. There are several techniques I have developed over the years to help overcome this tension. Perhaps the simplest is to allow the artists to just play without the recorder turned on and let them work out their own way to relate to the sounds in their headphones—to develop a familiarity with the acoustic environment that only comes with repetition. I have found it good practice to spend as much time as necessary on the sound the group are hearing in their headphones—the ‘foldback’. Understandably, musicians will perform better when they are able to hear each other well. In the case of an album recording, where several weeks, and sometimes months, will be spent in this environment, time spent ensuring a comfortable and satisfactory acoustic environment is well worth the effort. Often a whole day will be spent on this setting up and acclimatisation process, but this is time well spent if the result is a confident and inspired performance. The aim is not to remove all tension completely—a certain level seems to be necessary for creative energy—but to minimise the alienation that can result from such an artificial environment.

The recording proceeded with the aim of getting all the backing tracks—drums, bass and rhythm guitar parts—recorded so we could then move to the second stage, the overdubs. With this group the usual result was that if the drum track was good then the bass guitar and electric guitar parts would also have been played well, as those musicians had a high level of competence. Sometimes the bass guitar needed a note or phrase dropped in to correct a minor error, but I found it generally preferable to keep the bulk of the group performance for the energy and musical coherence. When a backing track is recorded my attention focuses on the quality of

performance, particularly of the drummer, but also watching for that indefinable quality—the “tingle” factor—which tells the producer that this take has some special quality worth keeping. It is my observation that this quality will pervade the song throughout the following overdub process to the final mixdown stage, and is one of the most important ingredients. While the producer is engaged in this way the value of a good engineer is to keep an ear on the technical issues—recording levels, distortion, crackles, the hit of a drumstick on a microphone. As I have noted in Chapter 1, even producers who come from an engineering background will often use the services of an engineer because there are two processes taking place during any recording—the technical recording process, and performance evaluation—and it can be difficult to concentrate on one without losing focus on the other.

This stage of the production is where the unique role and skills of a record producer are tested to their limits. Here the producer is at once a guide steering the group through the process, with one eye on the group psyche, aware of tensions and issues which may interfere with a successful outcome, at the same time keeping the final vision in view.

Overdubs

The recording of *Echo Beach* took place as part of a whole album, so all the backing tracks were recorded before moving on to the overdubs. When recording an album there are good practical reasons for recording the backing tracks in one continuous process. Principally because, having attained a consistent sound for the drums, bass and guitar, it is more time-efficient to carry on and record all the songs, and then proceed to the vocals, instrumental solos and embellishments. During this overdub process special attention can be paid to particular sounds that might require unique microphone setups, for example, distant, or ambient miking of guitar solos, additional processing, compression, echo effects and so on. In the case of solos, this recording produced one situation requiring more than the usual skills.

Chaos management—the sax solo

The first speculative recording in Toronto, though unsatisfactory, had produced a fine evocative and flowing sax solo that lifted the track and carried it to a

fitting climax. When the time came to re-record the solo on *Echo Beach* the saxophonist was set up in the studio, the track rolled, but at the point where the solo was to take place the sax player emitted a cacophony of atonal squawks and bleeps in the style of free jazz musician Albert Ayler. At first I thought he was making a joke and using this first pass as a warm up. I rolled the tape again and again he played a similar discordant solo. I called him into the control room and asked why he was playing in this way and not along the lines of the earlier recording. To my surprise he informed me that, having had time to reflect on the earlier recording, he had decided that the earlier solo was “too sweet”, and that what he was now playing he felt to be more appropriate. A discussion then ensued on the relative merits of conventional harmony and the perception of melody. His point being that the atonal approach was equally valid and no less appropriate for this song than his earlier melodious solo. My view was that the atmosphere of the song, the style of the band and especially the commercial potential of this track was being seriously compromised. At this point we agreed to differ and rather than try to force the situation, I decided to leave the solo and come back to it another day. Every day, over the next ten days or so, I asked him to have another try at the solo. We would roll the tape, the solo would come up and out would come the Ayler-esque screeches. This would be followed by a long philosophical discussion on the nature of melody, popular conventions and the boundaries of conventional taste. We would then move on to another overdub—keyboards, guitar or vocals. After a week of this he surprised me one day by playing the original solo note-for-note. This might have been the end of the matter, but my judgement was that, although identical in the sequence and notation, this solo was lacking in emotion—he was deliberately playing the notes to make the point that simply being melodically correct did not make it good music ²⁹. I explained that what I was after was not necessarily that particular sequence of notes, but the emotion, the musical spark that moves the heart and is ultimately the best validation for any music. Another day or two and he finally produced the result that is on the record—an exhausting process testing my patience to the limit, but eventually worth it!

²⁹ Martha Ladly sent me this further observation: “This solo, or a version of it, was the one that was usually played by the sax player when the band performed. Interestingly, no difficulty with repetition of the solo in performance had ever come up!”

The vocals

With Martha Johnson, the lead singer, her requirements were simple. The headphone sound or the studio atmosphere did not trouble her, and being able to return day after day to that familiar place was enough for her to produce satisfying vocal performances for the whole album. I used the fairly standard technique of keeping several complete takes on each song, and then selecting and compiling a final vocal track from the best parts. It was during this recording that I learned another trick of vocal recording. Upon hearing back the final “comp-ed” vocal she would ask to go and record one more, certain she could do better. More often than not an entire new performance would result that became the final version. This method worked well on many subsequent productions with different artists.

The guitar riff

In the situation where a whole album is being recorded, there is a duty on the producer to ensure that the most likely singles are as well realised as possible. An advantage of having the greater time span an album requires is being able to leave these key tracks for a time, and move on to other tracks. Returning to a track in these circumstances brings a fresh perspective—parts that are not working become more easily noticed. Problem areas—such as the sax solo—can be revisited with tensions defused. The sax solo was a key component in the song. But the other key ingredient on the single was the guitar riff. I have already described the recording technique used, but it is worth mentioning that this riff required a more than usual effort to get right.

After recording the backing track it was my practice to double-track the guitar part on most of the songs immediately. This is a time-effective approach because the sound is usually fine, having been worked on during the setting up process, the guitarist will have been playing the part several times over and so it can be laid down quickly. However, in the case of *Echo Beach*, I felt dissatisfied with the part. One reason was a result of the chorus effect, which was creating a slight de-tuning by the modulation of the short delays. This de-tuning seemed to be excessive to my ears, and although the band found no problem with it, I was not happy, and asked the guitarist to re-record the part with extra attention to tuning. This happened several times over

the three weeks of recording as I came back to the song after a break of a day or so and still found the tuning uncomfortable. Eventually I was satisfied and now, years later, find no problem with the tuning—I recall at the time still having nagging doubts. This was probably a consequence of excessive concentration on detail, to the point where very small imperfections seem larger than they are. The recording studio can be likened to a microscope of sound, where every tiny flaw is exposed in intimate detail—sometimes it is advisable to step back and see the complete piece for its true worth.

Mixdown

The mixdown stage of any recording is where the efforts of the recorded performances are combined to create the definitive work. Subtle variations in relative levels of the instruments, effects such as echo, reverb, compression, equalisation, all contribute to the final impact. The details of a given mix can be analysed with respect to the ingredients, but the principal purpose of the exercise is simply to create a totality, a unity of sound that achieves a musical effect. A common condition of mixing is the frequent replaying, again and again, of the musical piece, which has the unavoidable effect of fatigue, both on the ears, where higher frequencies tend to fade, and on the emotional response of the listener. Objectivity is hard to maintain. The ideal approach I later developed was to leave the finished mix set up and come back the next day to check again with fresh ears. Often glaring imbalances become clearly evident that were not noticed at the end of the previous days repeated listening. In the case of this recording such a luxury was not available for budgetary reasons. The album of ten songs was mixed in three days. To maximise efficiency and also retain an overall consistency of sound, once the drums, bass, guitars and keyboards had been balanced and equalised they were largely left in their set up, only adjusting relative levels where the performance had changed. Vocals, on the other hand, usually require constant adjustment to raise or lower words and phrases. This is done because a consistent level of voice creates an impression of strength—when the odd word drops in level the backing track can obscure the meaning and the listener loses focus. Some of this function can be achieved by using a compressor, which will level out the sound, lowering peaks and raising softer passages, but used excessively can bring up unwanted mouth noises and intakes of breath, while suppressing more powerful

notes, making them sound thin and unnatural. A combination of moderate compression and manually riding the vocal level is my preferred method and the one I used on this occasion.

In some ways, there is a performance element in the mixdown. A good mix has more than just a good balance of ingredients, there is an indefinable quality—an ‘it’ factor based on experience and sensibility—that makes one mix of the same recording more exciting, more emotional, more effective than another. Sometimes such a mix will have an obvious error—a mistake left in, an instrument a bit too loud or soft—and yet, it has a certain something and I would always choose that one. The mix of *Echo Beach* was a relatively straightforward process. The arrangement had been worked out in pre-production so that all the parts played worked together, and each part had been recorded with close attention to the sound characteristics. All aspects of the individual performances had been carefully scrutinised, so the principle focus was on the right balance and placement of instruments and vocals, and on spatial effects. A small amount of reverb was used on the lead vocal to keep a perception of closeness and intimacy. Martha’s voice has a wry, dead-pan quality reminiscent of Mae West in some ways, and I felt it worked well to keep that quality relatively unaffected. On this track my engineer, Richard Manwaring, suggested, when the first satisfactory mix was completed, to make another mix with the voice raised 2dB, without changing the balance of the other instruments. This was tried but I felt that the vocal level was too loud and would unbalance the production. Richard’s argument was that, in his experience, record companies were always coming back with a request for a higher vocal and it was easy to do it right there and then, whereas returning to remix later would be time-consuming and possibly frustrating because subtle combinations of equalisation, effects and balance were not easy to reproduce—this was before automated mixing was reliable. The present day technology of digital computerised recording has removed this limitation. As it turned out, Richard’s advice was apposite—the record company did ask for a mix with a higher vocal level, and were especially pleased when I was able to produce one with no further expense³⁰.

³⁰ Martha Ladly’s comment: “I think it would be good to acknowledge the participation of the band members at this stage, and in fact throughout the recording process. As I remember, it was difficult, and pretty intense, and there were many decisions that had to be made through lengthy

Key affective components

Listening back to the finished mix, I identify the key affective components as being the guitar riff, the sax solo, and the tone and expressive attitude of the lead vocals which all combine to sustain interest and hold the attention of the listener.

Reflections

In this analysis I have described the processes that took place and resulted in the finished recording. These processes show, firstly, the circumstances that brought about the event: the commercial ambitions of the record company and their belief in the commercial potential of the key song. Next, a first meeting and exploratory recording took place to ascertain the viability of the project and compatibility of the producer with the artists. Several problems were revealed, specifically the ability of the drummer, but I remained confident in the viability of the project.

Pre-production took place involving three weeks of rehearsal with the group. Songs for a whole album were analysed and re-arranged where appropriate, optimising the presence of the key affective components. Performance elements were refined, with particular focus on the parts played by the drummer. Personal rapport with the artists was established and a better understanding of the group internal dynamics and creative aspirations.

Recording began with setting up of sounds and foldback. Musically satisfactory rhythm tracks were recorded for all songs. Overdubs of vocals, guitar, saxophone, keyboard and flute embellishments, and solos were completed. Some difficulties encountered included the sax solo, resolved by persistent persuasion, and the guitar riff tuning, resolved by repeated attention to tuning during re-recording.

Finally, the tracks were mixed down to stereo masters ready for mastering and delivery to the record company.

listening and processes of discussion within the band and with you, reflecting both your willingness to be open to our concerns, whilst keeping your own creative and commercial hat firmly on your head. This process very much reflected the collaborative nature of the whole enterprise”.

At every stage the role of the producer can be seen to be central: at first engaging with and understanding the commercial aspirations of the record company; entering into the artists' creative environment; and finally accompanying the artists into the studio and directing both the performance and the technical means of capture.

Postscript

In an interview in 2005 posted on the band's current website Mark Gane made some informative comments on the inspiration behind the song *Echo Beach*:

While I was a student at the Ontario College of Art, I got a job one summer at a paint and wallpaper factory. Whenever the huge wallpaper presses made errors in the printing run, it was my job to separate the good wallpaper from the stuff that had been damaged or misprinted. It was the kind of job where your head didn't have to know what your hands were doing, which allowed me to think and daydream for hours at a time. I often thought of places I had been or would like to be - anywhere but there! It was there that the germ of the song was born. Since the idea of a wallpaper quality control checker was too obscure for the lyrics, I used an office clerk which seemed more universal.

Most of the second verse was inspired by a summer's evening spent at Sunnyside Beach on the shoreline of Lake Ontario in Toronto. The lake and beach could have been in the middle of nowhere while the city behind became a "surrealistic sight".

While Echo Beach did not exist for me as a real location, I used it as a symbol of the place everyone wants to escape to when they're not where they want to be. (http://www.marthaandthemuffins.com/home_set.htm. [Accessed 21/8/07])

Musicians: Mark Gane - Guitar

Martha Johnson - Lead vocals

Martha Ladly - Keyboards and backing vocals

Andy Haas - Saxophone and flute

Carl Finkel - Bass guitar

Tim Gane - Drums

Chapter 3

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark—Three recordings

Introduction

The story of my engagement with Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD) covers the making of three recordings, each of which became hits, progressively selling more with each release. The recordings took place between March 1980 and June 1981. I have treated them in one chapter because they represent a progression from the initial encounter and commercial success to a stabilised relationship with a relatively balanced creative collaboration, to personal difficulties and finally separation. In this journey a number of events unfold that display the complex nature of the producer/artist relationship: the distrust and wariness many artists exhibit when an outsider enters their creative inner world; the positive atmosphere engendered by acceptance of the producer into the fold; and the underlying currents of personal ambition and the desire to be in a position of dominance and control that can be seen at the heart of some individual creative action.

The three recordings also demonstrate a technical recording method that is specific to synthesizer-based music creation of that time: each instrument was recorded separately, and independently. This approach had been pioneered by Les Paul in the late 1940's (Cunningham 1998:25-27). Paul would record each instrumental part directly to disk, then the disk was played back whilst another part was played and both parts recorded to another disk. By "bouncing" back and forth and adding another part each time the complete arrangement was achieved, with the lead vocal being last, as the quality deteriorated with each bounce³¹. By 1980 the multitrack tape recorder had become well-established and, with 24 separate tracks, it was not necessary to bounce down; rather, each part could be recorded on its own track and only combined in the final stereo mixdown.

³¹ Les Paul had made an earlier "layered" recording by bouncing from one acetate to another in 1930, but record companies "could only see the novelty value" (Cunningham 1998: 25).

As with the account of *Echo Beach*, the three narratives were sent to one of the artists for comment, in this case Paul Humphreys, keyboard player, co-writer and founding member, whose response confirming their general accuracy and advising about certain keyboards is at the end of this chapter.

3.1 *Messages* – **Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD)**

First encounters

The first contact and engagement with an artist often determines the subsequent relationship with the producer, and my relationship with OMD was always a bit tense because they felt I had been imposed upon them³². The record company did apply some pressure to persuade them to use a producer. They had already released their own self-titled and self-produced album (with then-manager Paul Collister), which had been recorded in their own studio. It had reached 23 in the UK album charts, but the record company knew the album could do a lot better if there was a hit on it. The song *Messages* was agreed by the record company and me to be the best choice, but only if it was re-recorded with a fuller-sounding production. The record company in this instance was, again, DinDisc with Carol Wilson at the head.

A meeting was arranged in the offices of DinDisc in Portobello Road, Notting Hill Gate, London, where I managed to persuade the group that I could improve on the previous recording. I say ‘managed’ because there was a degree of resistance to the idea that someone outside the group circle could come in and change their work. Groups often feel that their art will be compromised, their integrity jeopardised, for the sake of commercial success. I had produced a hit with Martha and the Muffins’ song *Echo Beach*, so I had some previous form and therefore credibility. I had overcome the “Catch 22” problem all producers encounter at the beginning of their careers. Part of a producer’s role is to reassure the group that changes can be made which will improve the commercial potential of the track whilst retaining authenticity³³. In this instance, I

³² This resistance to external influence was confirmed in recent conversations with OMD keyboard player and co-writer Paul Humphreys—see Postscript

³³ A helpful discussion of perceived “authenticity” in popular music can be found in Zak III (2001:17-21).

initiated a discussion of how the group felt the production could be improved. One idea we all agreed on was that the first version of the song sounded rather thin because they had used a Roland Compurhythm—one of the first drum synthesizers, using analogue subtractive synthesis—and a new recording would be improved by using a real drum kit and drummer.

A session was arranged in Advision Studios in Central London. The engineer was Lawrence Diana, house engineer. No rehearsals or further pre-production meetings took place because the conclusion of the first meeting was that the structure of the song was appropriate and all that was needed was a better drum sound and overall engineering. I also felt that the group would resist more detailed changes—they had conceded to using a producer and for the time being I did not want to push them harder. So the recording session began by following the group's established method to record the existing arrangement.

Song structure

The song *Messages* has a simple, essentially two-part structure which I outline as follows:

|| Intro | Verse 1 | Instrumental Chorus | Verse 2 | Instrumental Chorus |
Instrumental Verse | Verse 3 (breakdown) | Instrumental Chorus | Outro ||

Running throughout the entire song is a synthesizer riff with eight consecutive quavers per bar as follows: A₁ A₁ A₁ AA¹ A¹ AA.



Fig. 3.1 *Messages* synthesizer riff.

This riff continues without changing, even when the chords change, creating complex harmonies against the instruments playing simple triads.

The chord sequence is as follows:

Intro	A x 12 E x 4
Verse 1	A x 4 E x 4 A x 4 E x 4
Instrumental Chorus	F/// ///E F/// ///F# F/// /// A x 2 E x 2
Verse 2	A x 4 E x 4 A x 4 E x 4
Instrumental Chorus	F/// ///E F/// ///F# F/// /// A x 4 E x 4
Instrumental Coda	A x 4 E x 4
Verse 3 (breakdown)	A x 4 E x 4 A x 4 E x 4
Instrumental Chorus	F/// ///E F/// ///F# F/// ///
Outro	A x ∞ (to fade)

A consistent feature of the three OMD songs in this analysis is that the chorus is almost always instrumental. In the two hit singles that followed this one—*Enola Gay* and *Souvenir*—instrumental melodies also serve as choruses, or more accurately, responses to the verse theme.

The recording

The first track recorded was the synthesizer riff shown above (Fig.3.1). The synthesizer used was the Korg M500 MicroPreset, a monophonic analogue synthesizer with limited control over the envelope and filter. This line was triggered automatically by an internal clock, which made the line metronomically precise. Having no external control inputs and no internal sequencer, the riff was played by holding the middle A and manually switching an octave control which could shift the overall keyboard pitch up or down one octave. The advantage of being clock-triggered is that it becomes much easier to overdub later parts—if the tempo of the track is not consistent a player is constantly trying to adjust to fluctuations in the tempo. The track was built up from this skeleton riff by adding a string synthesizer playing sustained chords.

The bass guitar was added next—a fairly simple part consisting of quavers playing the root note of each chord, except on the Outro where it changes to arpeggio runs across the notes of the chord. The part was effective in that it drove the song along at a pace. However, it became apparent to me that because the part stayed mostly in the

middle register of the instrument this contributed to the perception of “thinness” discussed in our first meeting. A deeper bass part would add width and dimension to the arrangement. I did not voice my observation as yet—I had no alternative to suggest at that point so it was judicious to wait.

The remaining parts used on the album arrangement were recorded without change: a string pad (played on a Vox Jaguar organ), the chorus melodies, and percussive keyboard “stabs” following the chords (both on the Vox Jaguar), with a stereo echo in time with the track bouncing from side to side in the stereo picture, playing the following syncopated pattern:

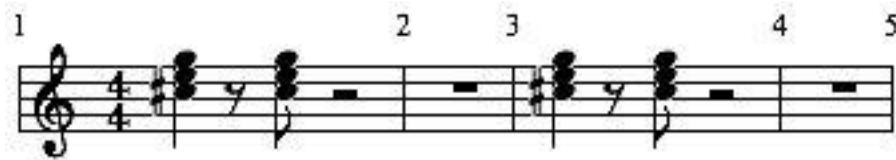


Fig. 3.2 Keyboard stabs in *Messages*.

Finally the live drum part was recorded, played by Malcolm Holmes, a friend of the band but at this point not a full member, sitting in as a session musician. Malcolm possessed a relatively rare attribute for the time: he could play in time with a metronomically sequenced riff. Drummers who have grown up in the last twenty-five years have had much more experience of keeping such precise time and are more comfortable with the demands, which suggests that technology has indeed affected performance (see Théberge 1997: 168).

The intro

With the basic instrumental arrangement completed, we then added the vocals. After trying several microphones available in the studio I settled on an antique Neumann M49, a relatively rare valve microphone first produced in the 1930’s and reputed to be the model used by Adolf Hitler at his infamous mass rallies, and probably part of the impression of power achieved by this early use of amplified public address systems. Nevertheless, this particular microphone was well-suited to Andy McCluskey’s voice. I always try out different microphones when I first record a singer because every voice

has different qualities that suit certain microphones better than others and the only way to find out the best one is by trying them out.

The song was now recorded with all the parts from the original arrangement with the addition of real drums. Listening back I felt the introduction needed something more—when the drums and bass kicked in after the initial synth riff with stabs, the change seemed to be too abrupt. I suggested recording a reversed cymbal crash. This required turning the multitrack tape around so it was running backwards. By noting the aural cue of the drum track—now in reverse as well—a point was identified at which the drummer hit the crash cymbal once and let it fade away naturally. Turning the tape back the right way, the cymbal now began quietly under the introduction, rising in intensity to a sudden climax right at the point where the drums and bass entered. This was very effective and the band were very pleased with this addition. However, I had another idea to make the introduction even more interesting. Turning the tape over again, I asked the keyboard player to play a sustained chord in the key of the first bar of the verse, again starting (in reverse) where the main song started. However, to achieve my imagined effect, as soon as the keyboard was played the engineer flicked the Varispeed control on the tape machine, which was set to maximum. The tape recorder then ran progressively faster, adjusting its speed to the setting on the Varispeed control. Turning the tape over again produced the sound of the keyboard rising in pitch under the other instruments, arriving at the pitch of the verse just at the point where the backwards cymbal peaked and the full band came in. This gradual rise in pitch created unusual harmonies against the constant pitch of the other instruments—intriguing and again well-received by the band. Now one more variation came to mind: using the same process, I recorded the keyboard again, sustaining the same verse chord, but with the Varispeed setting at the other extreme, so that the tape progressively slowed down when Varispeed was switched on. This chord descended in pitch to arrive with the reverse cymbal and the rising chord at the start of the verse. The combination of the rising chord and the descending chord with the reverse cymbal created a wonderful and unsettling musical effect that seemed to suck the listener into the song—the perfect opening for a radio track³⁴.

³⁴ From the OMD Official Website: “Howlett introduced the idea for a new intro featuring a speeded organ chord going from low to high, overlaying one playing high to low. Then they recorded a cymbal, reversed it and added it to the mix. With the addition of a new bass line by Howlett the song was radically different from the original album version.” (http://www.ombd.uk.com/discography/singles/html/s_6.html#notes [Accessed 14/7/08].)

The first 20 or 30 seconds of a record aiming for popular radio play are especially important because radio producers are inundated with dozens of new records every day and tend to listen only to the first few bars before making snap judgements and moving on to the next song. For a new artist with no previous success these first few seconds must grab and sustain the attention of listeners to have any chance that they will hear the rest of the song.

The added bass part

Emboldened by the success of these experiments, I felt confident to make one more suggestion. During the repeated playback of the recording, a deeper bass part had crystallised in my mind that I felt would complete the arrangement and add that extra width to the sound we had originally discussed. The part was simple—three quavers on the low root note of the chord beginning each bar, with a semi-tone slide up into every second bar. The effect was immediate and better than I had hoped—Andy leapt around the room ecstatically!



Fig. 3.3 The additional bass riff in *Messages*.

Adding this deeper bass part also created the opportunity to give the arrangement another important ingredient. As it stood, the song lacked an element of dynamic contrast. As noted with *Echo Beach*, the song lacked a Middle 8, a feature of so many contemporary pop songs. During the mix I tried dropping the bass drum, first bass part and string pad at the start of the third verse. This had the effect of a dramatic suspension of the flow—a sort of catch in the continuity of the song. Bringing back the bass drum for the second line added impetus, and then dropping it again for the third line again created the same dramatic effect of interruption. Finally the bass drum was brought back in for the last line as well as fading up a low string note to lead into the Instrumental Chorus for the full arrangement. I now had a new element in the arrangement. This kind of unexpected change in the overall texture surprises the listener, and creates a break from the intensity of the overall sound, and so allows for added impact when the full

arrangement comes back in. Interestingly, recent psychological and neurological research into the emotional qualities of music suggest that psychophysical cues and expectancy mechanisms combine to great effect: “Expectancies are associated with music for a simple reason: It is biologically advantageous to be able to predict events in the world. Thus, the experience of ‘surprise’ following an unanticipated event...is the brain’s way of drawing attention to a breakdown in prediction” (Thompson 2009: 149-150). Such information helps to explain the impact of the musical decision, though in no way lessens the musical affect, rather, confirms the value of trusting musical instinct.

The mix

One more significant factor added the final touch to this production. During the mixdown I had applied quite a lot of reverb to much of the mix—the drums and vocals in particular. The band liked the way this added a wider dimension to the sound and kept asking for more. I added more, but did not want to drown the whole track. After several modest increments Andy came up to the desk and asked which faders controlled the amount of reverb. On being shown the relevant controls he pushed them much louder (about 10 dBs). To my surprise this worked beautifully and gave the track a sense of immense space. It also gave the band a feeling of involvement—that they were not merely passive subjects of my production techniques.

Analysing the final production, the key affective components as the mix progresses are the constant synthesizer riff in octaves of A, the rising and descending keyboard strings with the reverse cymbal, the keyboard melody as instrumental chorus, the surprise breakdown and the high vocal improvisation on the Outro.

A few weeks later, when the record was climbing high in the charts—it reached number 14—I was called in to supervise a “dummy” session to fake a re-recording of the song. This rather absurd situation was standard practice at the time: the Musicians Union had negotiated an arrangement with the BBC that required a new recording to be made of any song played on Top of the Pops—and any other TV music programme—on the well-intentioned grounds that the musicians should be paid again when a work was broadcast, thereby increasing income for their client body. In practice, a three-hour session would be set up where artists would hurriedly record the basic parts of a record,

only to switch the finished mix with a copy of the original mix. This usually took place with the tacit complicity of the MU representative, but due process was seen to be done and everyone was happy. (I am sure the studios were pleased with the extra bookings as well!) As an illustration of the complex personalities of many artists (see the sax solo on *Echo Beach*) it is relevant to recount an incident that took place during this dummy session. Andy McCluskey said to me that, although my version of the song was now a hit, he thought the original album version was better. Oh well, I thought, I guess I will not be working with this lot again. Two months later he called me out of the blue and said he had changed his mind—he now thought it was the best thing they had ever recorded and would I like to produce the next album.

Reflections

The circumstances that brought about this recording were, as with *Echo Beach*, the result of personal connections in the recording industry. The group was persuaded by record company influence to meet and consider working with me. Whether they might have decided to use a producer at all, and if so, some other producer, without such influence is not knowable. Nevertheless, the decision to use a producer was taken relatively freely by the group after meeting me and hearing my suggestions. This process of personal engagement with the artist is a consistent feature of all the productions examined in this dissertation, and would seem to be a common practice in the industry from conversations with many other producers. It is usual for a meeting to take place before the choice is made to work with a producer, and this choice is made by both sides—the producer too must feel comfortable with the artist. The role of the A&R person in recommending a producer is also common practice and, although in my case the relationship was personal, relationships often develop between producers and record company personnel that build on successful outcomes and amenable interaction. There is also an element of self-promotion in a producer's career development and the element of interface with individuals in a position to make choices is a significant factor, particularly at the early stages of a career.

During this recording several events occurred that raise interesting questions about inspiration and the creativity of record producers. For example, the idea to create a sound feature for the introduction of the song arose spontaneously and without

premeditation. Where do such ideas come from? As with all inspiration there is no certain answer, but it is relevant to observe that an understanding of the technology—that slowing down a tape recorder whilst recording a sustained chord will have the effect of raising the pitch when played back at a constant speed, and vice versa—was a necessary precondition for such an idea to arise. The additional low bass figure can be understood to be conceived from my long experience as a bass guitarist. The idea to increase the overall reverberation, which situated the whole recording in a larger ambient space, was the result of collaboration—I had initiated the process, but Andy McCluskey took it to a further degree. This process of feedback, of proposing an idea that is then taken up and developed further, is a feature of group creative activity.

The effect of the added reverberation can be understood as heightening the sense of distance and loneliness—the song is about messages sent to the subject by a former lover after the relationship has ended:

Every day you send me more
 What makes it worse is this plan of yours
 To ensure I don't forget...

...memories are uncertain friends
 When recalled by messages

Coded messages always hurt
 Letters... Messages... Poison...

The pain is evident in the lyric and by placing the entire production in a remote space the intention is to situate the experience at a distance and hence also detach the emotion. The interpretation of reverb as connoting distance is supported by William Moylan (1992: 212) who describes the effect of reverberation as creating “the illusion of a distance of the sound source from the listener, within the perceived performance environment”. Serge Lacasse (2000: 179) in an analysis of Alanis Morissette’s recording *Your House* (1995) suggests that the use of reverberation “could be interpreted as representing both the actual physical emptiness of the [former lover’s] apartment and the character’s emotional ‘emptiness’”. Although no discussion took place at the time about McCluskey’s intentions in adding the reverberation, the lyric supports the interpretation that he was most likely responding unconsciously to this detaching effect.

3.2 *Enola Gay* – Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD)

Introduction

Having had a successful result with my production of *Messages*, the atmosphere and my relationship with the group was on a much more positive footing than the first recording session. Pre-production was a more relaxed affair. I went up to Liverpool to work through the rough material in the band's home studio, now equipped with a 16-track Studer 2" tape recorder. As with all the hits I produced, the potential single was clear from the outset: an almost traditional pop song called *Enola Gay*. The song was "traditional" in the sense that the chord structure followed a familiar pattern often used in the 50's and 60's in songs such as *Stand By Me* by Ben E. King and *Please Mr Postman* by The Marvelettes. The chords move from the tonic to the relative minor to the sub-dominant to the dominant—in *Enola Gay* the sequence repeats without change throughout, apart from the Intro and the Outro:

||: F x 2 | Dm x 2 | Bb x 2 | C x 2 :||

In conversations, the group explained to me that, by using standard pop structures with synthesizer voicings, they hoped to express the idea that technology could be "humanised" and communicate emotions. This intent was a response to the prevailing perception that electronic music was mechanical and "soulless". The group was inspired by the German synthesizer group Kraftwerk, who made a point of exaggerating the robotic and mechanical qualities of electronic music, though with a heavy dose of irony, as can be heard in their first hit song *Autobahn* (1973)—a paean to that singular experience of modern life, the simple pleasure of driving on a motorway: the car as a mechanical extension of human potentiality. OMD were not alone in citing Kraftwerk as an inspiration—synthesizer-based groups including Human League, Depeche Mode and Tears for Fears also reference Kraftwerk.

Enola Gay was the name of the US Airforce B-52 bomber that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. In *Enola Gay* the irony is expressed by the juxtaposition of the lyrical subject with phrases that are more redolent of a love song:

These games you play - they're going to end in more than tears some day...
This kiss you give is never ever going to fade away.

My understanding of my role as a producer in this context was to give the recording strength and authenticity. Whatever the literal intent of the lyrics, it will succeed in its aim only if the music works. What makes the music work is a combination of the right arrangement, appropriate engineering of the sounds, a focused and meaningful performance, and a balance of ingredients in the mix that create a wholeness of the piece. This process is not a precise science, more of a feeling, or instinct, that tells you whether the production is working, or not. Nevertheless, the stages towards this end are clear enough and begin during pre-production, when changes to the details of song structure and arrangement, choices of instrumentation and sound styles, can be made that will help to facilitate the recording process. Happily, with *Enola Gay* the group had arranged the song well, and apart from a breakdown section near the end where the instrumentation drops to just the drums—a window of space before the final resolution—I had no further changes to suggest.

Pre-production

Pre-production involved a visit to Liverpool, where the group had installed their various synthesizers and a 16 track Studer tape machine in their own studio space—not a fully treated acoustic environment, but a good working space for composition. The keyboard collection had expanded from the basic Korg MicroPreset and Vox Jaguar organ to include a Prophet 5 and a Roland CompuRhythm drum synth—now a classic, but then the first attempt at a drum synthesizer that could be programmed to play relatively sophisticated patterns. Also, especially helpful for our purposes, it could be “clocked” by an external trigger that could be synchronised to a timecode recorded on one track of the multitrack recorder. This possibility gave me the idea to record the introduction of electronic congas in two separate takes—first the low conga notes, and then the high notes—so that in the mix I could pan them left and right in the stereo spectrum. The rapid alteration of these sounds draws the listener’s attention—a small thing but such embellishments can increase the affective qualities of a production.

Song Structure

As I said above, the overall arrangement the band had presented seemed fine and I had no major structural changes to suggest. With *Enola Gay* OMD had developed further the compositional technique of alternating a verse with an instrumental counter theme in place of the more traditional chorus. The underlying chord structure does not deviate from the eight-bar cycle: Tonic, Relative Minor, Sub-dominant, Dominant.

The basic song structure is as follows:

|| Intro A | IntroB | Synth Melody 1 | Verse 1 | Verse 2 | Synth Melody 1 | Verse 3 | Synth Melody 2 | Verse 4 | Breakdown | Synth Melody 1 | Verse 5 | Verse 6 (lyric as Verse 3) | Verse 7 (lyric as Verse 4) | Outro (as Intro A) ||

Although this is not a typical pop song structure, it satisfies by providing melodic variation and relief from the verse melody, and allows dynamic tension and contrast. Drum fills can punctuate and announce the following sections. The different melodic responses provide timbral variety. In this way a sense of drama, of imminent crisis, and ultimately of resolution is generated.

The recording

One consequence of having had a hit with *Messages* was that the record company had confidence that the band were worth their further investment, and so we booked into a very comfortable residential studio in the Surrey countryside called Ridge Farm. Set in several acres of manicured lawn, the studio comprised of a large farmhouse with accommodation for up to ten, and the recording studio, which was built around the remains of a mediaeval barn, incorporating weathered and twisting oak beams over 400 years old. Notwithstanding the rustic context, the electronic hardware included a state-of-the-art Solid State Logic console and Studer A80 multitrack tape recorder.

The recording process followed much the same pattern as *Messages*. Something I realised about recording with synthesizers was that the order of recording was turned inside out. Instead of recording a rhythm track and adding embellishments and vocals, it was necessary to record the programmed rhythms and keyboards first, because the

technology had not been developed to synchronise such instruments later in the process. This meant that the live drums—which we were in agreement gave the group a more powerful sound—would be added near the end of the process. Not all drummers are comfortable working this way because it requires playing in time with a mechanical, and therefore precise, rhythm track. To his credit, Malcolm Holmes, the group’s drummer, coped magnificently with these restraints and was able to play with a relaxed feel and provide fills and a “human” touch that gave the tracks a richer dimension.

The remix

The whole album *Organisation* was recorded and mixed at Ridge Farm, but when we listened to the mixes back in London the key track—*Enola Gay*—did not sound right. It is often difficult to pin down precisely why a track does not sound right. On the face of it everything was fine: the vocals were in tune; the drum sound was big; all the parts were musically coherent. Nevertheless, it was decided that we should go back to Advision, where we had recorded and mixed *Messages*, and try for a better mix.

Listening to the track at Advision the vocal performance sounded as though it could be more convincing. We had used a valve Neumann U47—similar to the Neumann M49 in Advision we had used on *Message*, but old valve microphones are known to acquire distinctive attributes due to subtle attrition in the components. The M49 was set up and the vocals re-recorded. Whether the timbre of that microphone enhanced certain tonalities in Andy’s voice, or whether the atmosphere in Advision was better suited to his temperament is not really knowable. What is certain is that his vocal performance was better there and that is the version used. It is also true that the mixes we made in that studio sounded “fatter”—more powerful—than the Ridge Farm mixes. I had used the resident engineer—Max Norman—at Ridge Farm, and now I was using the resident engineer at Advision—Lawrence Diana. Both engineers had very good track records and were capable professionals, but Lawrence had mixed *Messages* and also knew the vagaries and sound of Advision’s monitoring, and his mix sounded best so that was the mix that became the hit release.

Reflections

This period of my relationship with OMD was the most enjoyable. The mood within the creative circle was relaxed and positive—no doubt helped by the sanguine environment. Throughout the recording of the rest of the album the atmosphere retained a collaborative spirit. It felt as though we were all working together to achieve a common goal, which was to explore the possibilities of synthesizers and make interesting and enjoyable music. There was no pressure from the record company to find another single. To her credit, Carol Wilson understood that we had a fairly surefire hit with *Enola Gay*, and was content to allow us free rein with the other tracks.

Looking back at this sequence of events the pattern is consistent: the meeting with the artists to understand and analyse their intent; the engagement with the studio and the technological complications that needed to be negotiated; at all times the role of the producer is to be the interface between the artist and the recording process.

3.3 *Souvenir*—Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD)

“Despite the fine job Mike Howlett did in producing the song [*Souvenir*], the band were still not happy and consequently recorded another version from scratch in Advision Studios. But when they compared both versions, they were forced to agree that Mike Howlett's version yielded more depth and atmosphere than their version.” (From the Official OMD Website³⁵)

Last encounter

Souvenir was the last track I recorded with OMD, and was their highest charting single release, reaching number 3 in the UK charts, and number 1 in France, Spain, Portugal and Italy. By the time this recording took place the band had become well-established, with two substantial hits under their belt. *Organisation*, the album containing *Enola Gay*, had been a top ten hit in the UK and in more than 20 countries around the world. The record company wanted a new single release to sustain the momentum and prepare for a new album release. The song had been identified by Carol Wilson, of DinDisc Records, from a very basic demo the band had sent her. Containing little more than the keyboard melody, there was not a lot to go on, so I travelled up to Liverpool to meet the band and look at the song idea.

Pre- Production

The band had used some of the money from their success to build a studio of their own. Set in a fairly large warehouse space, they had constructed a control room in one corner of the space, where they spent most of the time writing with synthesizers and drum machines. They had also installed a Studer A80 16-track 2” tape machine. To help fund the rent on the facility they would sometimes let other musicians use the performing area, and one regular client was a local choir who needed a rehearsal place. The choir would warm up by singing long notes, gradually moving up the scale. A friend using the studio control room had set up a microphone and recorded the various notes sung by the choir onto different tracks of the Studer, eventually building up about an

³⁵ <http://www.ombd.uk.com/html/biography.html>. [Accessed 14/7/08]

octave and a half spread of sustained notes on parallel tracks. By raising various faders on the mixing desk they were able to make chords from these notes. This made a glorious and atmospheric sound, a little like a Mellotron³⁶, except that the notes lasted a lot longer - on average over a minute. A new section for the song structure had been made using this technique that became the Middle 8 (see song structure below). I asked the band to bring this tape to London for the recording session.

The other main instrumental sound featured on the demo was played from the Korg Micro Preset we had used on *Messages*. The sound on the demo was distinctive and original—somewhere between a treated piano and a glockenspiel, but clearly neither. I asked Paul to play that sound to check the source, but it sounded nothing like the demo, just a ‘plinky’ analogue synthesized percussive sound. I pointed this out and Paul said that all they had added was a reverb provided by a cheap spring reverb device lying around in their studio, but that we would undoubtedly get a better sound from an expensive reverb plate in the big studio. I insisted on hearing this cheap effects unit and immediately the sound from the demo was restored. This was clearly a key ingredient and, of course, had to come to London. During the subsequent sessions the expensive EMT plate reverb proved incapable of creating the key sound and the spring reverb did the trick!

The demo also had no drums or bass and Andy told me he was unable to find a suitable rhythm track and bass part. I suggested a very simple drum pattern and a bass part following the chord changes. The song was driven by the melody and I felt anything more complex would detract from the simple lilting rhythm implied in the melody. Andy accepted this as a temporary solution, but said he would try to find something more “interesting”. This later became a point of contention during the recording.

³⁶ The Mellotron was a polyphonic keyboard developed in Birmingham (UK) in the early 60's that played banks of pre-recorded instruments—typically orchestral—from magnetic tape. Notes only lasted 8 seconds before having to rewind on release of the key. See Brice, R. (2000) *Music Engineering: The Electronics of Playing and Recording*. Oxford: Newnes. First published 1998: pages 88-90

Structure

|| Intro A | Intro B | Melody 1 | Verse 1a | Link Melody | Verse 1b | Melody 1 |
Middle 8 | Melody 1 | Verse 2 a & b | Melody 1 | Melody 1 | Fade ||



Fig. 3.4 *Souvenir* melody 1

The recording

We met up a couple of weeks later at Wessex Studios, an old converted church between Islington and Stoke Newington, famous at the time for being the studio where Queen’s *Bohemian Rhapsody* and the Sex Pistols *Never Mind the Bollocks* had been recorded, amongst many other hit records. We proceeded to lay down the various parts of the song, starting with a guide drum pattern played by the Roland CompuRhythm CR78 electronic drum machine as we had on all our previous recordings. The distinctive keyboard melody was added using the cheap spring reverb, and the choir sections. These were ‘played in’ using a separate multitrack tape machine that would be started just before the sections where it was to be used, with Paul raising appropriate faders on the mixing desk to produce the choral harmonies—a true instance of the studio used as an instrument (see Eno 1996, Martin 1983, Zak 2001 and others).

At this point ‘live’ drums were played by Malcolm Holmes, drummer on *Messages* and *Enola Gay*, who later became a permanent member of the group. After the drums were recorded Andy played the bass guitar part. He admitted that he had not been able to find a better part, though he was still not convinced that the part I had suggested was right. My approach to his discomfort was to promise that if he came up with another part he thought improved the song I would make time to re-record the bass. We had booked five days for the recording so this was easy enough to do. On each day of these

sessions, always at around four o'clock in the afternoon, Andy would become agitated about the bass part. As promised, I would stop whatever we were doing and let him try to find a better part. Each day he would try a range of possible alternative patterns, then admit that the track worked best with my original simple line. His discomfort, it transpired, was largely driven by the fact that this song was the first single that he had not played any part in writing, and he was not singing it either. For now he seemed content to let it pass, though later, during the mix session, his agitation came to a head.

Recording the vocal parts proved to be more difficult: although Paul was able to sing the song in tune and with good phrasing, his voice was slight, with a certain fragility. When I listened back with his voice in balance with the instrumentation, it seemed too insubstantial to me, so I tried using one of several takes we had recorded as a double track of the main vocal. This helped but still did not seem enough, so I added a second double track, then a third, and finally a fourth. Each of these takes was very close to the main take we had chosen—the phrasing and pitch were more or less exact. By placing these four vocals about 7dBs lower in the mix they had the effect, not of a chorus, but of strengthening the lead without sounding obviously double-tracked. (This technique—of underlaying a main vocal with several almost identical takes set behind—I later used with *A Flock of Seagulls*.) The key is to keep the level low enough to not be obvious to the listener, whilst allowing the character of the main vocal to be heard. It worked particularly well with Paul's voice, creating a kind of mystical aura around it, and satisfied me that the vocal was, above all, believable, convincing and expressive.

During the pre-production it had been agreed that a third verse would be added after the Middle 8 section, but when the time came to record the vocals no further lyrics had been written, so I suggested using both the first and second verses again. This is what was used—by doubling its length the third verse became a recap of the lyrical statement, and created a heightened sense of dynamic and drama.

The mix

I had chosen to mix the track at CBS Whitfield Street Studios in Central London, mainly because the engineer who had mixed *Messages* and *Enola Gay*, Lawrence Diana, worked there now. The studio also featured an MCI/Harrison mixing desk with basic

automation—the faders were VCAs³⁷—and the levels of each fader could be stored as data on a track of the multitrack. I was becoming a fan of automated mixing and was interested in trying the system at CBS. The studios were built in the early 60's and featured echo chambers in the basement—actual cubic rooms about 3-4 metres on each side, that were freestanding, and covered in soundproofing materials, with the interior lined with a smooth plaster finish. In each of these chambers a speaker was placed in one corner, with two microphones, one in the centre and one in the far corner. Each control room in the building had a link to these chambers and could feed a signal from any channel on the desk to the speaker, and bring back the signal picked up by the microphones. The smooth reflective surfaces of the chambers produced a clean even reverberation that still surpasses that produced by the most modern digital reverbs. This reverb was used on the vocals, the snare drum, and also on the keyboard melody, even though it already had the spring reverb, to help spread the stereo image of the melody.

As the mixing session progressed, I noticed that Andy was becoming increasingly irritated: he would come up to the desk and complain about the bass part, or about its level. As a result of his discomfort I kept the bass lower in the mix than I would have otherwise. His irritation finally boiled over with an outburst about his irrelevance to the recording. He had not written the song or the bass part, nor was he singing on it, so he felt he might as well leave, which he did. This proved to be the last time I would work with OMD. On reflection I can see that Andy wanted to be in charge of the project. Recalling the experience of my first outing with the band on *Messages*, when he also expressed displeasure at the quality of my work, only to change his opinion later, it would seem that he was troubled in some way by the involvement of 'outsiders' in his work. Subsequently the band would use several different producers, which would suggest that the issue was more about the appearance of reliance on one producer—by using several producers, and having successes with them, no-one could say their success was dependent on just one producer.

³⁷ Voltage Controlled Attenuators—the audio signal was attenuated by an internal amplifier on each channel, which was controlled by voltage that was in turn controlled by the fader.

Reflections

This production recounts a high degree of creative involvement and collaboration by the producer with the artists: the song idea was in a rather incomplete state with just a keyboard melody, one verse and the choir tapes, and during the pre-production stage the song was developed to give it a full song structure. A bass line was suggested and ultimately retained on the finished production. Although the arrangement worked out in pre-production required extra verse lyrics to be written, when these failed to manifest an alternative solution was found to repeat the first two verses. Despite these high level interventions my relationship with one of the two key artists broke down and we never worked together again. From the correspondence below it could be argued that this failure in the relationship was actually caused by my interventions, though a more accurate interpretation is that the problem was the personality of Andy McCluskey: it was his reaction to his low degree of involvement as he only performed the bass part. In conversation Andy had told me about his father, a Pentecostalist lay preacher, who would force him to take frequent cold showers outdoors from a very young age, presumably in some sort of perverse interpretation of the act of baptism. My unqualified psychological interpretation is that this experience possibly produced a problematical attitude to figures of authority, such as a record producer.

As I noted in Chapter 1.3, *Interfacing with the artist*, it is part of a producer's role to recognise personality complications and find ways to achieve a successful outcome. In retrospect, and in revisiting these productions, I do not see how else I could have managed the problem Andy presented. Every effort was made to accommodate his unease with the bass part. Certainly, he was determined to be in charge of his own creative output and subsequently enjoyed a very successful career, both with OMD, and later writing and producing a hit record for British pop group Atomic Kittens (*Whole Again*, No 1 in the UK charts on 3/2/01).

Postscript

Paul Humphreys sent this email in response to my request that he read my analyses and check for errors:

“I found your analysis totally accurate and it was exactly as I remembered. I found it a really great read to be honest. The only technical thing that was slightly inaccurate was that the String synth pad in *Messages* was actually a Vox Jaguar organ and an extra detail is that the Spring Reverb which was key to our big synth sound in those days was made by a company called Sound Workshop. It is also interesting to read your analysis of how Andy behaved around the recording of *Souvenir*. It’s a slight character flaw he has always had as he always needed to be the centre of attention and *Souvenir* meant that for the first time in OMD, he wouldn’t be that. It was interesting when we were recording *Architecture and Morality* in Mayfair studios and we got a lunchtime call from Carol saying *Souvenir* had gone to no 3 in UK charts, I leapt for joy and went out to buy champagne and when I got back Andy had left the studio and stayed away for the rest of the day!! He’s mellowed a bit with age and over the years I found ways to deal with this. He said to me in a weak (I think drunken) moment once a few years ago that he cannot understand what his problem was with *Souvenir* and said he actually thinks the song was genius and the production was perfect!! Artists and ego’s hey!!” (E-mail communication received August 22, 2008.)

Chapter 4

*I Ran*³⁸—A Flock of Seagulls

Background

I Ran by A Flock of Seagulls was released in 1982 and became the biggest seller of all the singles I produced. As with all the productions considered in this inquiry, that song was identified as the song with the most potential to be a popular hit, and so it was the subject of extra attention during the recording of the album. However, the circumstances that led to my producing this album were complex and fraught with incident.

I first heard about the band through my associate Carol Wilson. Once again she had brought a potential hit to my door, but before she could sign the band to her Dindisc label the band had been signed by Jive Records. Jive was owned and run by South African entrepreneur and music publisher Clive Calder (see Chapter 1.2, *Interfacing with the business*). Clive also managed record producers and had become my manager the previous year, so either way it seemed inevitable that I would be producing the band.

Partly because of this double connection, but also because the band's management were keen on gigging, I was able to hear the band play live at least six or seven times before going into the studio with them. At this time they were an excellent and exciting live act and I deliberately went down to the front of the stage each night so I could feel what the musicians were feeling. From my experience as a touring musician I am very aware that the sound out front at a show is often very removed from the experience of the band on stage, and although the front of house sound was not bad, there was another atmosphere and intense energy I could feel coming from the stage. That was the quality I was determined to capture on record.

³⁸This was the UK title – the US release was titled “I Ran (So Far Away)” because the US record company felt it sounded too much like the country Iran.

Pre-production

They were a competent live act, so I was looking forward to working with the band in rehearsal—I wanted to understand what they were doing in greater detail. As I discussed above (Chapter 1.3, *Interfacing with the artist*) it has been my practice and belief that sitting in a relatively cheap rehearsal room presents an ideal opportunity to get to know the musicians in a more relaxed way than would be possible with the clock ticking in an expensive studio. I could also try out ideas—arrangement modifications—without that pressure.

The arrangement I proposed for *I Ran* differed very little in its linear development from the way the band had structured the song. As can be seen in the structural map below, it conformed to the archetypical pop song structure—Intro A and B, Verse, Chorus, Verse, Chorus, Middle 8, Verse, double Chorus and Outro. The only significant alteration was that, for the single version, I edited out the long Intro A, which cut about a minute off the running time. This was felt advisable for radio because the rhythmic elements and the vocal would arrive sooner—something radio programmers prefer because it is believed that listeners will switch to another station if an intro is too long. The only difficulty was that this decision was taken after the album was mixed, and cutting into the mix with the overspill of the intro sounded unnatural. Anticipating this possibility I had recorded a single open hi-hat crash during the mix that I edited to the front of the track just before the drums and bass entered. The effect distracted the listener and masked the sudden jump into the second intro. This edit was done at the mastering stage.

Song structure

|| Intro A | Intro B | Verse 1 | Chorus 1 | Intro B | Verse 2 | Chorus 2 |
Guitar Solo | Verse 3 | Chorus 3 extended | Instrumental Outro ||

Perhaps it was because of the friendly relationship I had developed during preproduction that I was able to turn a very unpleasant situation that developed between the band's main manager and me to my advantage. As I said earlier, the managers liked to keep the band gigging—it helped the cashflow and gave them focus—and the three managers had previous experience as roadcrew and a live sound mixer. So every night

during the week before we started recording the album there was a gig, which meant that pre-production had to stop around 4pm so they could pack up and head out to the next gig. This was all tolerable, and had the added benefit that any changes I had suggested could be tested in front of a live audience. I also thought this would be a good opportunity for the studio engineer I would be using, an Australian called Mike Shipley³⁹, to hear the band play live—not something that happens very often for logistical reasons. However, when I arrived at the venue to find my engineer stuck outside because his name was not on the guest list I was furious. The same situation had happened to me on the previous five nights, but I was more used to the gig world and had always managed to talk my way in. I had made a special point for this gig to ask the main manager to make sure the engineer’s name was on the door. Surely he could understand that this was in the band’s—and his—best interest? So when I found the manager in the club I expressed my annoyance. To my astonishment, he rounded on me, threatened to break my legs, and told me I was “off the album”. He was evidently in an unstable state of mind so I walked away, went straight to the dressing room and told the band what had happened. I then told them I would be in the studio the next morning and I hoped I would see them there too! “Don’t worry,” they replied, “we’ll be there!”

The most successful projects I have been involved with always seemed to be the most tense, and perhaps this conflict with the managers taking place outside the studio enabled us to concentrate more closely on the music. The managers did not dare to turn up in the studio for six weeks!

The recording

I Ran was recorded in the context of a whole album of songs. Being so well rehearsed and fully trim and fit for live gigging was a great advantage for the recordings. There is a kind of “match-fitness” that is hard to replicate with some bands—especially young and inexperienced ones—so the recording of the backing tracks went very smoothly. One or two takes was all it took for most of the tracks, with all the band playing together. After we had each basic track down I would get the guitarist to

³⁹ See Ch 1.4, *Interfacing with the engineer*.

“double” his part immediately, without changing his settings—just a straight repeat. This gave a richer texture to the sound and, because he was still in the mindset of playing that track, he would usually play an almost perfect replica. This was certainly the case with *I Ran* and I believe is part of the reason the memorable guitar riff worked so well. This riff was built on the use of a tape delay provided by the Roland Chorus Echo effects unit. The delay was set up to be a triplet crochet across the straight 4/4 drum beat of the song. By double-tracking the part straight away there was little possibility of the delay shifting in both time and sound—these were relatively unstable electronics—and thereby disturb that guitar riff and sound I regarded as crucial to the entire arrangement. One significant addition to the arrangement occurred to me as we double-tracked the guitar part, which was to have Paul, the guitarist, play the triplet riff over the vocal in the first half of the third verse. The riff was a key affective component and I had been looking for some way to add more of it to the arrangement. This also added an extra ingredient that gave this verse added interest and energy—a variation which created a sense of climactic development to the song. One more touch was added with the guitar: at the entry to the guitar solo I had the idea to use a reverse guitar chord under the tom tom build up. The same technique was applied as I had used on the Intro to *Messages*. The tape was turned over and a powerful sustained chord played at the point where the guitar solo began (or, in fact, ended in reverse). Subtle touches such as this add to the impact of a musical event and are part of the producer’s art.

A distinctive musical feature in many of the band’s arrangements was to use a synthesizer playing a low drone sustaining the root note of each chord. Although not dominant this drone adds a subtle electronic quality to the sound, and allows the higher sustained keyboard chords to add dramatic emphasis when they enter in the choruses. From conversations with record company executives in the USA I understand that the combination of this essentially “new age” electronic sound with a more traditional rock guitar was a major reason the song was so successful—it reached No. 5 in the Billboard 100 chart. The song was a sort of bridge that could enable American youth to feel a way into the new, darker sounding British electro bands.

It is worth noting that a part of the electronic sound of the band was a result of the drummer’s technique. He had developed his own style to compensate for a personal inability to play the hi-hat and the snare at the same time. I chose not to try to change

this as it gave a quirkiness to the rhythm—an almost mechanical, robotic feel that was not obvious but added to their unique character. His timing, however, was excellent and this recording was made without the use of a click track or metronome.

The vocals

The real challenge with this track was the vocal. Having identified the song as the most likely hit, the vocal took on more importance than usual. Although I always regard the vocal as especially important to a production, if the song is regarded as an album track then the vocal needs to work, but a degree of idiosyncrasy can be tolerated. When the song is being produced with a mass media audience in mind, then the vocal must be right. This “rightness” does not necessarily mean perfectly in tune and well-phrased, rather, it is a question of credibility or authenticity. The creative decisions applied to a performance in this context are amongst the most significant a producer makes. What exactly defines the right performance is largely a subjective choice—terms such as instinct, gut-feeling or intuition are often applied to describe this function⁴⁰. In the case of *I Ran* this quest became Herculean.

I began as I usually did by recording the singer in complete takes of the song, keeping the ones I regarded as having usable parts—sometimes a verse or a chorus, and sometimes because just one line sounded good. (This process is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.3, *Interfacing with the artist*.) I limited the number to four or five complete takes because any more would create too great a workload. The complete takes had been further developed by dropping in for just a verse or, sometimes, a few lines, but then the work began. I worked through each line of each take, selecting the best versions and compiling them into a new complete vocal track. I then followed my usual practice of taking home a rough mix of the compiled performance so I could hear it fresh in the morning before coming back to the studio. However, on listening back the next morning, I found the performance unconvincing. It had to be right and it clearly was not. So the next day I asked the singer to try again. This required a certain amount of diplomacy, because a significant factor in achieving a credible performance is confidence—self-belief is fundamental to a convincing performance. From previous experience I had seen quite capable artists—not just singers, but musicians of any instrument—lose their

⁴⁰ See Zak 2001: 192, Molenda 2007: 2 and Massey 2000: 23 amongst others.

ability and become progressively worse, entirely because the wrong word of criticism was used. One useful approach is to suggest that, although much of the performance was excellent, I believe that an even better one was possible. Using this method I recorded another five complete takes, and went through the process again of carefully analysing each line, and where it was an improvement incorporating a line or a phrase into my master compilation. Again, I made a rough mix and took it home. On listening back the next morning I was still not happy with the result. This process was repeated over several weeks, interspersed with the various overdubs and embroidering of other tracks on the album. In all I estimate that the final vocal was the product of as many as 80 or 90 complete performances. Even then the vocal heard on the finished production was developed by using the main compiled vocal with three other compiled vocals balanced about five dBs lower in the mix—truly a construct of the technology.

Mixdown

The mix of *I Ran* was relatively easy, in part because of the professionalism of Mike Shipley, the engineer, but also because of the simplicity of the arrangement. The principle problem was due to the constant winding and rewinding of the tape when we were compiling the many vocal takes. Recording tape is made from an iron oxide compound bonded to a plastic tape. This iron oxide is gradually scraped away by repeated use and with it some of the higher frequency components of the audio. By the time we came to mix the track a small but significant amount had been lost, which required more equalization than usual. Quite how much more only became apparent when the last track on the album was mixed. This was called *DNA* and had been saved until last because it was an instrumental with only the barest instrumentation and would be an easy mix. At the time of recording the backing track we had double-tracked the guitar and left the tape untouched until the mix. Playing the tape now, all the sounds sparkled with a crispness and brightness we had struggled to achieve on the rest of the album. Not only was this the easiest mix on the album, it was the track that received a Grammy award—for Best Instrumental!

Reflections

The processes noted with this production conform to the pattern of the previous recordings in this analysis in as much as the contact with the band came through

personal relations with the record company (the label was owned by my manager, Clive Calder), the key track was identified before recording, the engagement with the artists involved pre-production, arrangement and performance direction, and the engagement with the technology was mediated through the engineer. What was less usual was the relationship with the managers of the band, which is where tension arose, though artist relations were sanguine throughout the recording.

The difficulty recording the vocal was also the hardest I have ever had to struggle to achieve a satisfactory outcome. As an afterthought it is worth noting that a year or so later I went with the band to Compass Point Studios in Nassau to record a single for the next album. Having grown up in tropical climates I introduced the band—Liverpudlians all—to the delights of snorkelling in the clear warm salty waters. When it came to recording the vocals Mike Score's voice was clear and strong and in tune. I can only attribute this to the beneficial effect of the salt waters of Nassau, but failed to persuade the managers that this was reason enough to record the remainder of the album there...

Musicians:

Mike Score—Vocals and Korg MS20 Synthesizer

Ali Score—drums

Frank Maudsley—bass guitar

Paul Reynolds—guitar

Conclusions

This enquiry has sought to identify a unifying principle that defines the role of the record producer. I have identified three fields of engagement that are consistent in the five recordings recounted here: first, the inspiration that is the object of attention—the song and the performing artists who were the means of expression; second, the technology and processes of the recording studio, through which this inspiration was made manifest; third, the commercial interest in the form of the record company that initiated, influenced and enabled these actions, and ultimately was responsible for bringing the outcome to an audience. I have situated my work as record producer at the interface of these three worlds. In each of these case studies it is also clear that my own skills—musical, technical and interpersonal—have played a significant part in shaping and directing the outcome. Of course, these accounts represent only one producer's empirical observations, so I have reviewed much of the literature in the field, and, through my experience as Chairman of the Music Producers' Guild in the UK, I have had many discussions with other record producers about their experiences. Since not all producers share the same balance of these skills and qualities, I have posited the constant role as that of a *nexus*. Every time a music recording takes place the role of a nexus is present. It is present in the act of choosing the arrangement, of choosing the microphones and their placement, of choosing the performances, the balance of instruments in the mix, and the sonic effects and treatments. It is present in the negotiations with the record company about choices of songs and studios. Whether the specific ideas come from the designated producer or another individual present, choices are made and those choices determine the nature of the outcome. Sometimes the decision for a particular choice is made by the engineer, sometimes by the artist (and often enough the decision is a collective agreement), but in every case the act of choosing is definitive—it has a specific and identifiable effect on the recorded work—and in that act is the role of the producer as nexus.

Such choices are best informed by musical understanding. In Chapter 1 I discussed the function of critical arbiter and the authority that validates such evaluations. The value of prior experience, both musical and recording, is evidenced in

these narratives. Having played in various bands from the age of thirteen, I had acquired the language of popular musical discourse. This is especially valuable during the pre-production and arrangement process when explaining a particular rhythmic feel, or groove, has added weight if it is articulated in language—expressions—a musician understands. The experience of working in different groups, and especially, the group Gong⁴¹, gave close exposure to the eccentricities and personal foibles of some musicians. Lengthy touring with such intensely dedicated musicians, often in uncomfortable transportation with basic accommodation, gave an insight into the effects of stress and fatigue on some of the more fragile personalities. For this reason it came as no surprise to find artists I later produced displaying irrational and exaggerated emotional behaviour. Such prior experience is a great asset to a record producer. I was also a recording artist and worked with several producers. This experience helped me to understand the strangely isolated and vulnerable feeling of being alone in the recording studio with only the producer's voice coming through the headphones. A warm friendly and reassuring tone giving positive encouragement and direction is greatly appreciated at such times. Working with experienced engineers and producers and observing their practices gave me an understanding of the possibilities of the technology too. I realised that good recording and production is a musical act—more than just capturing performance with a microphone.

Each of the recordings discussed in this dissertation presented different challenges and solutions:

In *Echo Beach*—The limitations of performance technique displayed in the drummer's weak bass drum were solved by practical advice of exercises to strengthen his technique, and by simplifying the drum parts; the saxophonist's perception that being asked to make his solo more conventionally melodic was compromising his artistic integrity required patience and persistence, and calm persuasive discourse. Good communication with the record company meant that the project was able to overcome the failure of the first recording attempt.

In *Messages* musical understanding and experience enabled the creation of an additional bass line; musical and technological understanding were required to create

⁴¹ See <http://www.planetgong.co.uk> for further information.

the new Intro; collaborative sensibilities were needed to allow the extra reverb during the mix.

In *Enola Gay* objective analysis of the first vocal recording and the sound of the mix led to the conclusion that the outcome was unsatisfactory. Discussion with the artists led to recording the vocal again and remixing at another studio.

In *Souvenir* the song was presented as a largely unformed sketch requiring arrangement skills to create a complete structure, but the bass line I suggested raised difficulties with one of the artists' sense of autonomy, and ultimately led to a breakdown of the relationship.

In *I Ran* the limitations of the vocalist required patience and persistent focus to attain a credible vocal; establishing strong personal rapport with the band during pre-production allowed me to overcome friction with the group's managers.

As well as musical and technical sensibilities, a common thread evident in the above is personal engagement with the artists, and personal engagement requires communication. Indeed, the overriding conclusion I draw from the review of my narratives in this dissertation is the importance of communication. In every aspect of the producer's work, the ability to communicate—with the artist, the engineer and the record company—is paramount. In the example of *Echo Beach* the project—or at least my continued involvement—would have foundered without close interaction with the record company to allow the recording to be re-started with appropriate pre-production. Communication is a discourse that engenders understanding, and from understanding comes a course of action to resolve difficulties—to achieve a satisfactory outcome. Personal attributes such as patience, and musical ability play a significant part too, but having the ability to speak the language of popular music-making is a key asset.

Every recording presents a new set of conditions and challenges. The temperament of different artists and the dynamic of different groups is never the same. This is also true of different studios, and of record companies: the only constant is change⁴². So the producer must respond rapidly to new circumstances and find solutions to problems that are unique to the moment. Even when, as with the three productions

⁴² After writing this observation I came across the same statement—"the only constant is change"—as the last words in Burgess' book, "The Art of Music Production" (2002). A confirmation at least of concurrence.

with OMD, the artists remained constant, the circumstances were different with each recording and the attitude of the artists changing with their own experience of success. Fame is a powerful and life-changing force. A further study suggested by this enquiry is of the ways personalities are affected by public recognition. As a producer I have seen a number of individuals move from anonymity to celebrity—usually in a very short time, and often with a marked impact on their sense of self and social relations. As I have noted in this enquiry, artists are often troubled in some way, and this seems to be a common condition that accompanies talent. Celebrity seems to be capable of aggravating existing personality disorders—when every new person you meet responds from a given position of recognition this is understandable. What is surprising is how few record companies and managers provide for this common effect. One exception, perhaps, was Berry Gordy, who established a school in the Motown Records organisation to “groom” artists in social skills and presentation. A sense of family, or community, also acted as a support structure. The film industry made some efforts to assist and prepare their stars for fame (see Bordwell et al, 1985), though this tended to focus on grooming and the manufacture of image, with little in the way of counselling to cope with fame. The best that can be said of the music business is that when an artist or group achieves a level of celebrity a sort of firewall is built around them so that only those with an agenda and close friends and family get through. This only strengthens the isolation from contact with “ordinary” people. For the producer, at least, anonymity is usually available, though some have actively sought attention—Phil Spector is one example. Nevertheless, most producers can go about their daily lives relatively unnoticed.

I do not intend to claim that I am the author of all the production concepts and values in these recordings, for example, the reverb in *Messages* was the idea of Andy McCluskey, and see also Martha Ladley’s belief (expressed in her email) in the degree of group collaboration in the production of *Echo Beach*. At the time I was consciously trying to involve the band in the process as a strategy to overcome my perception of some resistance to being “produced”—turned into insipid commercial fare. This strategy was also adopted with many of my productions, possibly because the artists I worked with were considered “left-field”—that is, not typical of currently mainstream pop artists. Simon Draper, of Virgin Records, told me in 1983 that I had acquired a reputation for making commercially successful records from unlikely artists. There is a

price to pay for adopting such an inclusive approach, as a number of the bands I worked with later told colleagues at their record companies that they felt *they* had produced the records with me. As I discussed in Chapter 1, creative collaboration is at the heart of most productions, nevertheless, perhaps some advice to new producers should be to make it clear to the artist just where their input has been made.

Training record producers

A further outcome of this study is in ways to inform the methodology and structures of training in record production. All of the recordings in this account (with the exception of *Messages* for reasons of expediency) displayed the value of pre-production, both in organising the structure and arrangement of a song, in establishing good relations with the artist, and in understanding the creative vision. This is a process that can be taught. The function a producer serves as Project Manager can also be taught: forethought and planning clear the path for a recording session by minimising obstacles to the prime aim in the studio, which is to record the best performances and sonic qualities possible. Awareness of the duties and responsibilities of being the producer, such as organising the sequence of events in the recording, meeting deadlines and budgetary requirements, and understanding the expectations and aspirations of both the artist and the record company, can inform the aspiring producer. What cannot be taught is inspiration, or the qualities of character that enable a person to engage with and understand the needs of the moment, of an artist attempting to express his or her vision.

For the last seven years I have led a course in record production at the University of Glamorgan. I have constructed the course to consider, first, the structures and arrangements of commercially successful records. By analysis some patterns can be seen to be surprisingly consistent. I have discussed in Chapter 1 some of the structural commonalities in many popular recordings. The recordings considered in this dissertation also conform to the pattern, albeit with less typical components—all except *I Ran* have instrumental themes instead of sung choruses (in *Echo Beach* the sung chorus happens as the Outro, but the chorus chords are played after each Bridge with saxophone leading). Understanding the effect of the structure of a song is an important part of the producer's work. The arrangement of each part of that structure is also critical to the musical affect of a production. As I discussed in Chapter 1.4, the

arrangement and the engineering are two ends of the same audio spectrum. Engineering techniques can also be taught, but will be more effective when the understanding is based in musical awareness. The concept of the sound of a recording has been the subject of much of the commentary on record production. My view is that the sound of a recording is the sum of the arrangement and the engineering. For example, Phil Spector's "wall of sound" was achieved by doubling and trebling instrumentation—sometimes four basses, including three electric bass guitars and a double bass, all playing the same notes, with two drummers and four guitars—combined with unprecedented use of reverb chambers on the whole mix and the unique acoustic qualities of the Gold Star Studio (see Gillett 1983: 197-199, Chanan 1995: 146-147, Cunningham 1998: 64, and others).

A successful recording is the outcome of composition, arrangement, performance and engineering. These actions take place in the context of the record company's ambition to disseminate the outcome to a wider audience. This affects the process in practical ways by financing the enterprise, but also by the clear expectation that the result will be marketable. At the heart of this process is the producer, a nexus that enables these factors to engage—the connection that links the idea to the means of realisation. This understanding can also be taught: the model of the nexus is a useful device for engendering awareness of the totality of the producer's art. By understanding that the role requires many skills the aspiring producer can recognise his or her own abilities and deficiencies and find ways to compensate by collaboration with others who have the necessary skills. Not every musician and artist wishes to operate the machinery of recording, for example, but some instruction in the technology will convey at least the process and the terminology—the means to communicate with an engineer. Equally, those with engineering sensibilities can benefit from exposure to musical training, and by the understanding that the timbre and sound of a recording is closely interwoven with the arrangement. The commercially inclined, too, can profit by awareness of the processes that combine to produce a successful outcome.

The field of academic analysis of record production can benefit too by understanding the concept of the nexus. I propose that the first question to ask when analysing the work of a record producer is: what is the balance of skills displayed in his or her production? Are those skills primarily technical, musical or social? From such

analysis the nature and the degree of creative input can be better understood. The art of record production can also be recognised as a complex interaction of processes with the producer at the centre, directing, engaging, arranging, collaborating and inspiring—and, ultimately, giving form to an idea.

At the core of the record producer's role is the understanding that the aim is the realisation of music in a form that can communicate to others. In the end it is the music that makes the process meaningful. Music can energise the weary, calm the agitated, soothe a broken heart, inspire, cajole and comfort. It can be cheap and cheerful, profound and mystical. Recorded music is by far the most common way music is now experienced. Brian Eno's (1979) ubiquitous description of the recording studio as a musical instrument situates the record producer as an artist performing that instrument. As the nexus of all the components that enable the studio to be such an instrument the record producer can be seen as a true recording artist.

Bibliography

- Altman, R. 1992. The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound. In: Rick Altman ed. *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*. New York: Routledge, pp.15-31.
- Adorno, T.W., Leppert R.D. and Gillespie, S.H. 2002. *Essays on music*. Trans. By Susan H. Gillespie. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin and London: University of Texas Press.
- Baudrillard, J. and Glaser, S.F. 1994. *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Benjamin, W. 1968. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In: Hannah Arendt ed. trans. Harry Zohn. *Walter Benjamin: Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, pp.217–251.
- Bordwell, D., Staiger, J. and Thompson, K. 1985. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Brice, R. 2000. *Music Engineering: The Electronics of Playing and Recording*. Oxford: Newnes. First published 1998: pages 88-90
- Burgess, R.J. 2002. *The Art of Music Production*. London: Omnibus Press.
- Clark, R. 1992. Jim Dickinson: Memphis Maverick”. In *Mix*, October pp. 186-7.
- Chanan, M. 1995. *Repeated Takes: a Short History of Recording and Its Effects on Music*. London: Verso.
- Clifford, J. 1984. Introduction: Partial truths. In J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus eds. *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 1-26.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1990. *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper Collins
- Cunningham, M. 1998. *Good Vibrations – A History of Record Production*. 2nd ed. London: Sanctuary Publishing Ltd.
- Dellaira, M.R. 1995. Some Recorded Thoughts on Recorded Objects. *Perspectives of New Music* 33, pp. 192-207.

- Dogantan-Dack, M. 2008. *Recorded music: Philosophical and Critical Reflections*. Middlesex University Press, London.
- Durant, A. 1990. A New Day for Music? Digital Technologies in Contemporary Music Making. In: Philip Hayward ed. *Culture, Technology and Creativity in the Late Twentieth Century*. London: John Libbey, pp. 175-196.
- Eisenberg, E. 1988. *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*. London: Pan Books.
- Ellis, C. and Bochner, A.P. 2000. Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher As Subject. In: N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln eds. *The Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd edition)*. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage, pp. 733-768.
- Eno, B. 1996. *A Year With Swollen Appendices*. London: Faber and Faber.
- 1979. "PRO SESSION - The Studio As Compositional Tool." Available at: http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/downbeat79.htm. [Accessed 16/9/08].
- Fairchild, C. 2008. The medium and materials of popular music: 'Hound Dog', turntablism and muzak as situated musical practices. *Popular Music*, Vol. 27, pp. 99-116. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Frith, S. 1983. Popular Music 1950 – 1980. In: G. Martin (ed.) *Making Music*. London: Pan Books.
- 1996. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2001. Pop Music. In: Frith, S., Straw, W. and Street, J. eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gillett, C. 1983. *The Sound of the City - The Rise of Rock & Roll*. 2nd ed. London: Souvenir Press.
- 1980. The Producer as Artist. In: H.W. Hitchcock ed. *The Phonograph and Our Musical Life: Proceedings of a Centennial Conference 710, December 1977*. New York: Institute for Studies in American Music, Department of Music, School of Performing Arts, Brooklyn College of Music, Brooklyn College of the University of New York.
- Gracyk, T. 1996. *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Spring 1997. Listening to Music: Performances and Recordings. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, pp. 39-45.

- 2001. *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Guralnick, P. 1989. *Lost Highways: Journeys and Arrivals of American Musicians*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Hebdige, D. 1979. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge.
- 1987. *Cut 'n' Mix*. New York: Methuen.
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1967. *Philosophy of Right*. Original version 1820. Translated by T.M.Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Horn, T. 2008. Interview on *RecordProduction.com*. Available at: <http://www.recordproduction.com/trevor-horn-record-producer.html>. [Accessed 15 October 2008]
- Jones, S. 1992. *Rock Formation: Music Technology and Mass Communications*. Newbury, CA: Sage Publications.
- La Cerra, 'Butch Vig', p.109. Quoted in: Zak III, A.J. 2001. *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Records, Making Tracks*. London: University of California Press.
- Lacasse, S. 2000. 'Listen to My Voice': *The Evocative Power of Vocal Staging in Recorded Rock Music and Other Forms of Vocal Expression*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Liverpool. Available at: <http://www.mus.ulaval.ca/lacasse/> [Accessed 2/8/2008].
- Large, E.W., & Jones, M.R. 1999. The dynamics of attending: How we track time-varying events. *Psychological Review*, 106, 119-159.
- Larry the O. 1999. To Sir with Love: Conversations with and about Sir George Martin. *Electronic Musician*, February.
- Levine, L. 1993. *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Levitin, D.J. 1996. *This is Your Brain on Music: the Science of a Human Obsession*. New York: Dutton
- Levarie, S. and Levy, E. 1983. *Musical Morphology a Discourse and a Dictionary*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press.
- Livingston, S.R. & Thompson, W.F. 2006. The emergence of music from the theory of mind. *Music Scientiae*.
- Lydon, M. 1998. *Ray Charles, Man and Music*. Edinburgh: Payback Press.
- Martin, G. 1979. *All You Need is Ears*. London: Macmillan.
- 1983. Ed. *Making Music*. London: Pan Books.

- Massey, H. 2000. *Behind the Glass - Top Record Producers Tell How They Craft the Hits*. San Francisco: Backbeat Books.
- Middleton, R. 1990. Over the Rainbow? Technology, Politics and Popular Music in an Era Beyond Mass Culture. In: *Studying Popular Music* (Ch.3). New York: Open University Press.
- 2000. *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2001. Pop, Rock and Interpretation. In: Frith, S., Straw, W. and Street, J. eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Molenda, M. 2007. *Tony Visconti: Audio Visionary*. Interview transcription available at http://emusician.com/em_spotlight/tony_visconti_interview/index1.html [Accessed 19 September 2008].
- Moore, A. F. 2001. The textures of rock. *Proceedings of the Secondo Convegno Europeo di Analisi Musicale*. R. Dalmonte, M. Baroni, eds. Università degli Studi di Trento 1992 edition), Ashgate (originally 1992).
- 2005. Beyond a Musicology of Production. *Proceedings of the Art of Record Production Conference*. London College of Music. Available at: <http://www.artofrecordproduction.com/content/view/26/52/>. [Accessed 26 October 2007].
- Mowatt, J. 1987. The Sound of Music in an Era of Electronic Reproducibility. In: Leppert, R & McClary, S. eds. *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.173-197.
- Moylan, W. 2002. *The Art of Recording: Understanding and Crafting the Mix*. Amsterdam and London: Focal Press.
- O'Hare, P. 2007. Steve Albini - "In Utero's" Ultra-sound Guy. *Proceedings of the 3rd Art of Record Production Conference, December 10-11 2007, Brisbane, Australia*. Queensland University of Technology
- Perry, A. 2009. Weller: Time for a wake-up call. *London Lite*, 18 March, p.15.
- Pinker, S. 1997. *How the mind works*. New York: Norton.
- Porcello, T. 2005. Afterword. In Greene, P.D. and Porcello T. eds. *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technology in Sonic Cultures*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

- 2004. Speaking of Sound: Language and the Professionalization of Sound-Recording Engineers. *Social Studies of Science* 34, pp.733-758.
- Ramone, P. and Granata, C.L. 2007. *Making Music: The Scenes Behind the Music*. New York: Hyperion.
- Read, O. & Welch, W.L. 1976. *From Tin Foil to Stereo*. 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Howard Sams.
- Rothenbuhler, E.W. and Peters, J.D. 1997. Defining Phonography: An Experiment in Theory. *Musical Quarterly*, 81, Summer, pp.242-264.
- Sawyer, R.K. 2003. *Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Shepherd, J 1977. Media, Social Progress and Music. In: Shepherd, J., Virden, P., Vulliamy, G. & Wishart, T. *Whose Music? A Sociology of Musical Languages*. London: Latimer New Dimensions, pp.7-51. (Reprinted: New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1980).
- Siefert, M. 1995. Aesthetics, Technology and the Capitalization of Culture: How the Talking Machine Became a Musical Instrument. *Science in Context*, 8, pp. 417-449.
- Sting 2003. *Broken Music*. London: Simon and Schuster UK Ltd.
- Struthers, S. 1987. Recording Music: Technology in the Art of Recording. In: White, A.L. Ed. *Lost in Music: Culture, Style and the Musical Event*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp.241-258.
- The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. 1983. Vol. 2, 3rd ed. London: Book Club Associates.
- Théberge, P. 1997. *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.
- Thompson, W.F. 2009. *Music, Thought and Feeling: Understanding the Psychology of Music*. New York: Oxford University.
- Walser, R. 2003. Pop Music Analysis: ten apothegms and four instances. In: Moore, A.F. ed. *Analyzing Popular Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walters, J.L. 1996. On Phonography: How Recording Techniques Change Music and Musicians. *Times Literary Supplement*. No. 4856, 26 April, p.10.
- Warner, T. 2003. *Pop Music - Technology and Creativity: Trevor Horn and the Digital Revolution*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

- Zagorski-Thomas, S. 2007. The Musicology of Record Production. *twentieth-century music*, 4, 4:189-207, Cambridge University Press. Available at:
<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstractfromPage=online&aid=1742460&fulltextType=RA&fileId=S1478572208000509>. [Accessed 11 July 2008].
- Zak III, A.J. 2001. *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Records, Making Tracks*. London: University of California Press.
- 2007. Editorial. In: *Journal of the Art of Record Production*. Available at:
<http://www.artofrecordproduction.com/content/view/64/107/>. [Accessed 11 July 2008].

Appendix I—Lyrics

Echo Beach (M.Gane)

I know it's out of fashion
And a trifle uncool
But I can't help it
I'm a romantic fool
It's a habit of mine
To watch the sun go down
On Echo beach, I watch the sun go down

From nine till five I have to spend my time at work
The job is very boring, I'm an office clerk
The only thing that helps pass the time away
Is knowing I'll be back at Echo Beach some day

On a silent summer evening
The sky's alive with light
Building in the distance
Surrealistic sight
On Echo Beach
Waves make the only sound
On Echo Beach
There's not a soul around

From nine till five I have to spend my time at work
The job is very boring, I'm an office clerk
The only thing that helps pass the time away
Is knowing I'll be back at Echo Beach some day

Echo Beach
Far away in time
Echo Beach
Far away in time

REPEAT AND FADE

© DinSong Ltd 1979

Messages (A. McCluskey/P. Humphreys)

It worries me this kind of thing
 How you hope to live alone
 And occupy your waking hours
 We're taking sides again
 I just wept I couldn't understand
 Why you started this again

Every day you send me more
 What makes it worse is this plan of yours
 To ensure I don't forget
 I'd write and tell you that I've burnt them all
 But you never send me your address
 And I've kept them anyway

So don't ask me if I think it's true
 That communication can bring hope to those
 Who have gone their separate ways
 It hardly touched me when it should have then
 And memories are uncertain friends
 When recalled by messages

Coded messages always hurt
 Letters...

Messages... Poison...

© DinSong Ltd 1980

Enola Gay (A. McCluskey)

Enola Gay, you should have stayed at home yesterday
 Ah-ha words can't describe the feeling and the way you lied

These games you play they're going to end in more than tears some day
 Ah-ha Enola Gay it shouldn't ever have to end this way

It's eight fifteen
 and that's the time that it's always been
 We got your message on the radio
 Conditions normal and you're coming home

Enola Gay, is mother proud of little boy today
 Ah-ha this kiss you give, it's never going to fade away

Enola Gay, it shouldn't ever have to end this way

Ah-ha Enola Gay, it shouldn't fade in our dreams away

It's eight fifteen and that's the time that it's always been
We got your message on the radio
Conditions normal and you're coming home

Enola Gay, is mother proud of little boy today
Ah-ha this kiss you give, it's never ever going to fade away

© DinSong Ltd 1980

Souvenir (P. Humphreys/M. Cooper)

It's my direction, it's my proposal, it's so hard, it's leading me astray
My obsession, it's my creation, you'll understand, it's not important now

All I need is coordination, I can't imagine my destination
My intention, ask my opinion, with no excuse, my feelings still remain

My feelings still remain...

© DinSong Ltd 1981

I Ran (M. Score et al)

I walked along the avenue.
I never thought I'd meet a girl like you;
Meet a girl like you.
With auburn hair and tawny eyes,
The kind of eyes that hypnotize me through,
Hypnotize me through.

And I ran, I ran so far away.
I just ran, I ran all night and day.
I couldn't get away.

A cloud appears above your head,
A beam of light comes shining down on you,
Shining down on you.
The cloud is moving nearer still.
Aurora borealis comes in view;
Aurora comes in view.

And I ran...

Reached out a hand to touch your face;
You're slowly disappearing from my view;
Disappearing from my view.
Reached out a hand to try again;
I'm floating in a beam of light with you;
A beam of light with you.

And I ran...

© Zomba Music Publishers Ltd 1982

Appendix II—Content Listing and Description of the Portfolio

1. CD 1 Martha and the Muffins—*Metro Music*: Album containing *Echo Beach*
2. CD 2 Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark—*The OMD Singles*: Album containing *Messages*, *Enola Gay*, and *Souvenir*
3. CD 3 A Flock of Seagulls—*The Best of A Flock of Seagulls*: Album containing *I Ran*
4. CD 4 Listening CDR containing the five recordings above and the version of *Messages* recorded by the band before I recorded the commercially released single version.

Running order:

1. *Echo Beach*
2. *Messages*
3. *Enola Gay*
4. *Souvenir*
5. *I Ran*
6. *Messages (OMD Production)*

Appendix III—Author's biography

Born: 27/4/50, Lautoka, Fiji.

During the 70's Mike Howlett played bass and wrote with esoteric space-funk group Gong, who were only the second signing to the nascent Virgin Records. After leaving Gong Mike put together his own group, Strontium-90, with musicians Sting, Andy Summers and Stuart Copeland, who went on to enormous success as The Police. In 1997 the recordings of this group were released on Sting's own record label Pangaea.

Mike began producing records in the 1980's and had a string of Top 10 UK Hits including:

MARTHA AND THE MUFFINS	- <i>Echo Beach</i>
OMD	- <i>Enola Gay</i>
	- <i>Souvenir</i>
	- <i>Messages</i>
BLANCMANGE	- <i>Living on the Ceiling</i>
A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS	- <i>I Ran</i>
	- <i>Wishing (If I Had a Photograph...)</i>
CHINA CRISIS	- <i>Wishful Thinking</i>

and other internationally top-selling albums by:

JOAN ARMATRADING
 BERLIN (U.S. Platinum)
 THE ALARM (US Gold)
 GANG OF FOUR
 JULIEN CLERC (France Platinum)
 LA UNION (Spain Platinum)
 FISCHER-Z (Germany)
 GOWAN (Canada Gold)

These albums each achieved sales in excess of 500,000.

- In 1982 Mike received a Grammy award from the U.S. National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences for his work on the Flock of Seagulls track *DNA*.
- In 1987 Mike became a founding member of the British Record Producers Guild (now known as the Music Producers Guild) and is currently Chairman.
- As international co-ordinator, Mike was instrumental in organising the first ever rock concert in Red Square, Moscow in 1992.
- From 1995-1998 MPG representative on the Steering Committee working with the Musicians, Union, Equity and the Music Managers Forum on the setting up of PAMRA—the performers rights organisation.

- From 1993-95 Mike ran his own record label, Mauve Records, specialising in singer/songwriters.
- In 1996 Mike began playing bass again with Gong, completing 4 world tours including the USA, Europe and Japan, and has been working with the Gong-owned GAS label on special projects, including executive production of an album of early Gong material re-mixed by contemporary dance artists including The Orb, 808 State, The Shamen, Ken Ishi and System 7. The year 2000 saw the release of a new studio album with Gong, produced by Mike and tours of the US, Japan, Europe and the UK, including Glastonbury Festival where Gong headlined the Avalon stage. In 2002 Mike mixed “Live to Infinita”—Gong live in 5.1 surround sound for DVD. Gong will be releasing a new studio album and touring in 2009.
- Mike formed his own improvisational group called House of Thandoy, with guitarist Steve Higgins (Karmakanics) and drummer Steve Cassady playing jazz/funk. The group has performed at Glastonbury Festival and the Royal Festival Hall.

Industry Experience—Summary

<u>Recording artist</u>	Performed as musician (bass guitar) on 22 commercially released albums; 4 world tours; 10 European tours; TV and radio; press interviews. Formed and recorded the first line-up of musicians who became The Police—called Strontium 90.
<u>Record producer</u>	Producer on over 50 albums – US “Grammy” award - 2 US Platinum Disc awards; 6 Gold Disc awards, including 2 US gold discs; and 6 Silver Disc awards. 10 Top Ten singles – number one hits in France, Italy, Australia and Canada. Worked in the world’s finest studios in London, New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Paris, Berlin, Toronto, Sydney. Recorded the world’s first-ever digital hard disk album on the Synclavier Music Computer System in New York and Los Angeles in 1988.
<u>Audio Engineer</u>	Experienced with SSL and Neve computerised consoles; Digidesign, MOTU and Akai digital audio hardware; ProTools, Logic Pro, and Cubase digital audio software.
<u>Record and publishing company executive</u>	- Managing Director, Mauve Records – negotiated artist contracts, distribution and licensing agreements, CD design, layout, mastering and production (manufacturing). Presentations to distribution sales force; tour buy-ins; national advertising campaigns. Consultant Creative Director for GAS Records—co-ordinated dance re-mix of Gong album “You Remixed”.
<u>Composer</u>	TV soundtracks: Oprah Winfrey Show—incidental music; HTV Wales “The Really Useful Programme”—theme tune. Two

library albums for Bruton Music—used extensively for sport programmes and light corporate industrial presentations. Numerous songs on Gong albums, Strontium 90 (with Sting) and other releases.

Publications

Articles published: Audio Media magazine, “Superharmonics” (2008); The Guardian newspaper (UK) (2006); Sound On Sound magazine, “Indie Labels versus Major Labels” (1995);

TV and Radio

Guest interviewee on TV programme “The Word” (Tyne Tees); guest record producer on Charlie Gillett’s “Producer’s Top Ten” (Capitol London); panellist on review programme “The Creative Review” (Resonance FM); MTV Europe live performance; numerous local radio and TV interviews and performances in US, Canada, France, Italy and Australia.

Miscellaneous

Founding member, and Chairman (2005-2009) of the British Record Producers Guild (now known as the Music Producers Guild) and currently board member of the APRS/MPG Course Accreditation Scheme called JAMES.

MPG representative on the Steering Committee working with the Musicians Union, Equity and the Music Managers Forum on the setting up of PAMRA – the Performing Artists Media Rights Association.

International co-ordinator organising the first ever rock concert in Red Square, Moscow in 1992.

Education

1968—Graduated from Balgowlah Boys High School with Level 1 passes (A-level equivalent) in English, French, German and Ancient History.

1977—Completed 1-year course in electronic engineering at Kensington Adult Education Institute. Built high spec Formant VCO analogue synthesiser - project chosen as prize exhibit in college annual exhibition.

Lecturer

2002—2009 Lecturer in Audio Technology at the University of Glamorgan

2003—2009 Lecturer in Music (Technology) at Thames Valley University.

1999—2001 Visiting Lecturer in Audio Technology at the University of Luton teaching 2nd and 3rd Year BSc (Hons) students.

Appendix IV—National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (Grammy) Certificate

