

# TAPE OP

The Creative Music Recording Magazine

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*Neil Young, Linda Ronstadt, Janis Joplin*

## TWO FROM GLASGOW:

## TONY DOOGAN

*Belle & Sebastian, Mcgway, Teenage Fanclub*

## PAUL SAVAGE

*The Delgados, Franz Ferdinand and Chem 19*

## TIM SPENCER

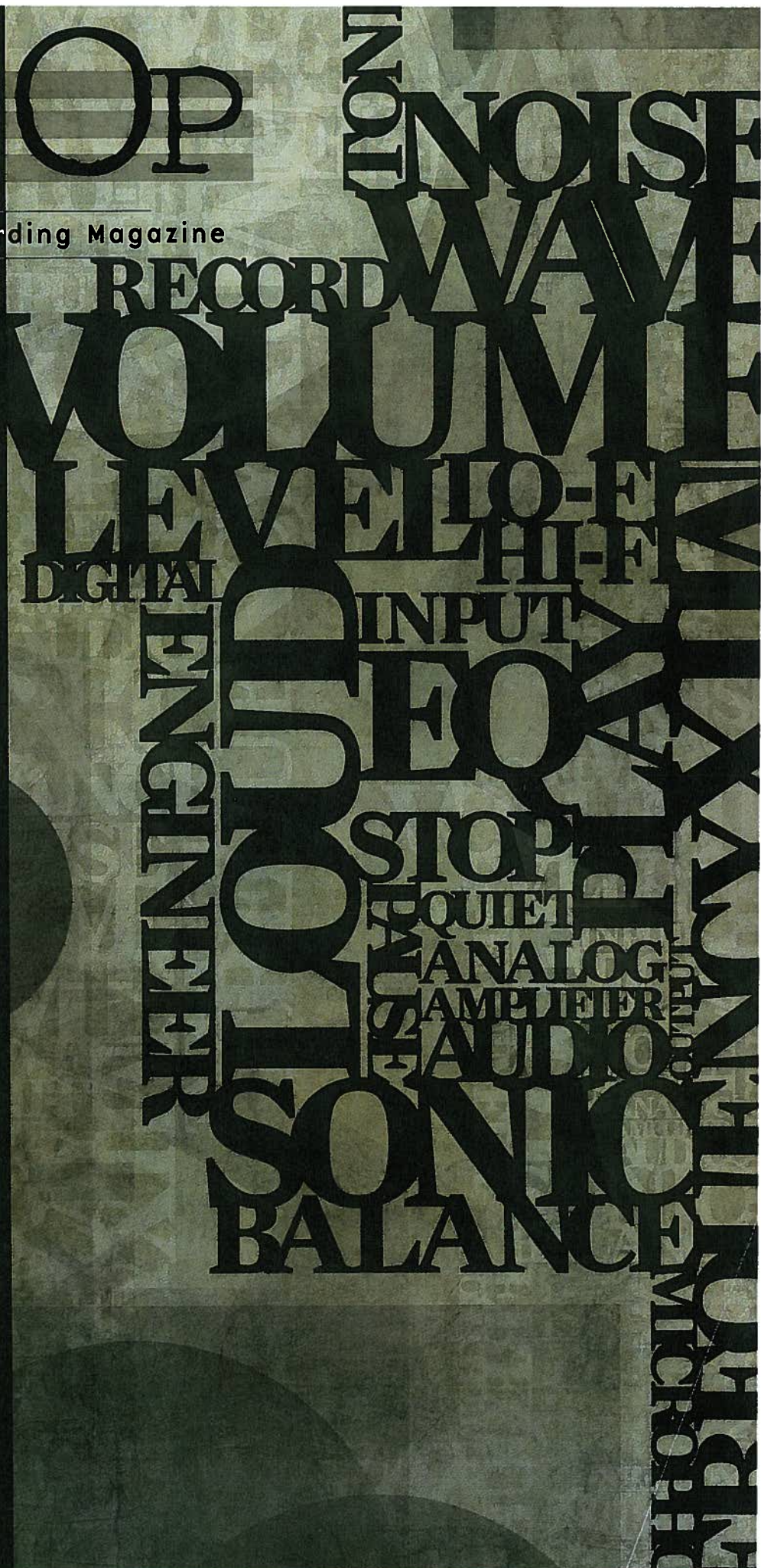
*In Behind The Gear*

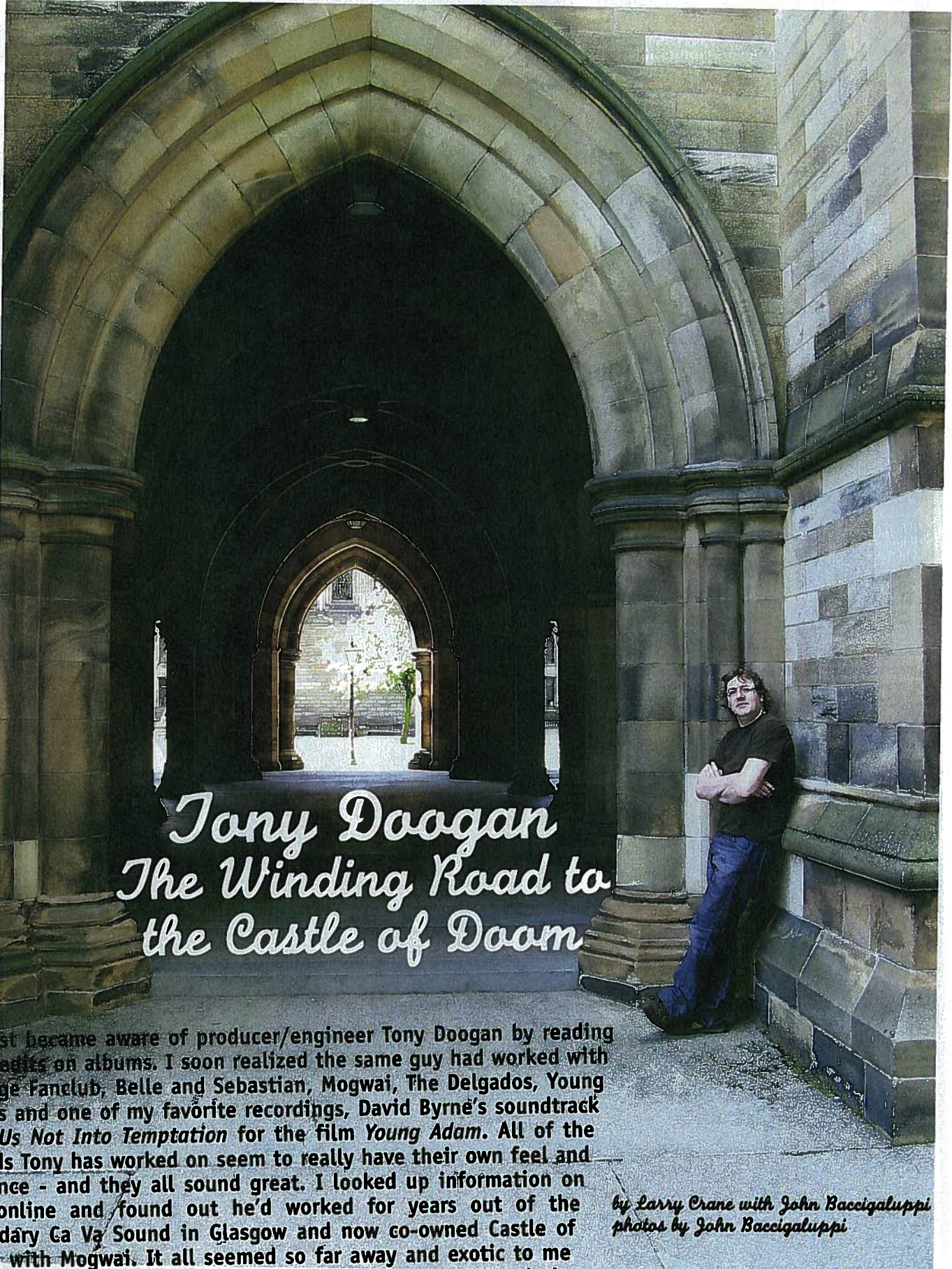
## GEAR REVIEWS

## CD REVIEWS

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*Tony Doogan  
The Winding Road to  
the Castle of Doom*

I first became aware of producer/engineer Tony Doogan by reading the credits on albums. I soon realized the same guy had worked with Teenage Fanclub, Belle and Sebastian, Mogwai, The Delgados, Young Knives and one of my favorite recordings, David Byrne's soundtrack *Lead Us Not Into Temptation* for the film *Young Adam*. All of the records Tony has worked on seem to really have their own feel and presence - and they all sound great. I looked up information on him online and found out he'd worked for years out of the legendary Ca Va Sound in Glasgow and now co-owned Castle of Doom with Mogwai. It all seemed so far away and exotic to me until one trip to the UK, when I suggested to John, "Hey, let's go interview some folks in Glasgow." Tony's had some recent acclaim with albums by Canadian groups Wintersleep and Young Galaxy, and is in the planning stages for a new studio space.

*by Larry Crane with John Baccigaluppi  
photos by John Baccigaluppi*

**How did you get your start in studios?**

I was quite fortunate. The studio where I learned to become an engineer was Ca Va Sound, in Glasgow. It had a couple of rooms, one of which ended up a Neve room - an Eastlake-designed room. That was a good studio and a great place to start. I went to college for a year after school and then I got a job there as a runner making tea. That was the biggest studio in Scotland with the best equipment - a proper place. You got all the bands, producers and engineers coming in.

**Do you feel that was a good way to learn?**

Much better way to learn than, I imagine, going to college for four years. I think the college route is good, but I think you still come out needing to do a few years of the bare bones. We used to call them "Saturday bands". You know, they'd come in on a Saturday, do four songs and then you'd mix them and they'd be gone by eight o'clock at night. [laughter] They'd always be drunk by the time they finished. There'd be the guy at the back, the friend of the band who "knew about sound." Many days of that!

**That was your graduation into recording?**

That's what teaches you to work quickly and efficiently. I suppose the bad side of that is you have a whole set of "go to" sounds. "Here's the kick drum sound. Here's the snare sound." But that's what you have to do if you have two bands coming in one after the other. You've got to be quick.

**Did you ever leave the mics set up for the drum kit between clients?**

No. [laughter]

**I was always wondering if that was a faux pas.**

I don't think so. I always thought it would be a great idea. Have everything set up and have triggers for the drummers - those kinds of drummers can never play consistently! I've worked with plenty of bands that have needed help and made them better. But great bands - you turn on all the lights and off you go.

**When did you graduate from the "Saturday bands" then?**

You never really quite graduate from them! One minute you're doing an orchestra in the big room and then Saturday afternoon you've got to go do a band in the rear room. I was doing bands like Teenage Fanclub and Belle and Sebastian, working on those records for months. But then you still have to go back to "Saturday bands". I think it's slightly unfortunate in the way I work now - I don't really get to do that. I only get to do sessions that are going to be commercially released, which is fine. I'm not mourning about it. But you don't have that, "I've got to get everything done in a day" kind of thing. I don't think I've done anything in one day in a long time. You should be able to go in, record a song and it's done. But then there's mixing, and then there's recalling the mix...

**Punching in the vocal.**

Yeah, with a different microphone! Then you've got to match it. Nothing really ever seems to get finished until you get it back from the mastering.

**You moved up from assistant engineer and you started getting co-production credits with some of the bands. Who were you learning production from?**

Ca Va was a large studio and Scotland had a lot of big bands like Wet Wet Wet, Hue and Cry and Deacon Blue. All those bands used to come record at Ca Va. You were fortunate that there were lots of good producers like Jon Kelly. Mick Glossop came through one time for a month and scared the living daylights out of me. In retrospect, he was just being kind of the way I am. If something doesn't work I'll go, "That's not the way it should be!" I want it to work while I'm here. If you plug a mic in and the jack's hanging out of the wall, that drives me nuts. There were a couple of in-house guys that were really cool too. Robert Rankin was good. In the latter days there were people like Calum Malcolm, a Scottish producer. I thought it was a bit of a mystery as to what a producer did. Even now I think the guys that go in and sit there while the engineer makes the record and they bark orders - I don't get that. That's for somebody else to do. That's not what I do. I'm an engineer - I record and I produce records. But a lot of those guys were great. I think for a long time you're an engineer, then you're comping all the vocals for them without any input and then you're comping all the drums. Then you're telling them to do it again. I was always doing that - probably to my detriment - I couldn't keep my mouth shut.

**You'd be a producer's nightmare! [laughter]**

Oh, I probably was. But that's what you do. Suddenly somebody says, "We're going to call you co-producer on this record." And then, because you've been doing it so long anyway, that's what it is. Then you get known as somebody who produces *and* records. It's quite a handy thing for people to have, because it can be just one guy to do the whole thing.

**With Belle and Sebastian, even though you haven't done all their recordings it seems you still work with them a bit. Even on the last record, you mixed a few songs.**

I still keep in touch. All those guys are really good friends. That's the one thing that the Glasgow scene is, a whole bunch of folks who know each other really well. I recorded a lot of music that came out of here. Even though Belle and Sebastian were working with Trevor Horn, on the first record they did when they went to work with Trevor I ended up mixing some of those songs. It's just a different ear, and I quite like doing that. It's interesting to me to see how somebody else has approached recording a band that you've worked with for years.

**How did you end up working with Belle and Sebastian, Mogwai and Teenage Fanclub?**

It's because I was at Ca Va. I was one of two in-house guys that were young engineers at the time - I had just graduated from tea boy to intern engineer. Teenage Fanclub had a producer working with them from Manchester called Andy MacPherson - he was great. He let me run the console and basically do all the engineering. You get really good skills like punching in, which is a slightly lost art.

**If the technical thing is getting pretty easy for you, people notice.**

That's definitely what happened with me - very quickly, working at the studio. My whole family are engineers - I've got mechanical engineers, electrical engineers...

**Well, you should build a studio then! [laughter]**

Well, from a very early age that's what I was into. I was the assistant, but I started doing all the maintenance in the studio as well - recapping consoles and sorting out all the tape machine transports. When computers came along I did all the diagnostics. That was a parallel career for me in the studio and that's still something I like to do. It's almost as interesting to me as making records. "Oh great, it's not working! Let's spend two hours doing that."

**You're perverse! [laughter]**

Well, exactly!

**Your records have a real natural sound to them. It sounds like you're staying out of the way.**

Well, occasionally I'll get into crazy amounts of editing in Pro Tools, but I suppose I always record backing tracks as a band playing live, if they can do it. Although, in saying that, I'll get in there and edit the hell out of it. If it's out of time, it's out of time. There's no way that's going to sound good.

**What's the most unnatural thing you've done to something where it's ended up being not that apparent, besides editing?**

Probably things like changing speeds of songs and cutting them up. Expanding the whole waveform. If you've got a backing track and you think it's a bit slow, just go in and "snip".

**Is that when you tell everyone to go home, sit in here all night and...**

Well, not all night! [laughter] I try and work a ten-hour day - I don't really want to work much more than that. In the old days I tended to work morning, noon and night. I just can't do it anymore - I don't want to do it. I want to go home and watch TV.

**Do you set parameters with bands before you start a record?**

I try to say, "Let's get in at ten in the morning and finish at eight at night. Enjoy your stay while you're here in Glasgow!" Somehow we still end up finishing at 10 p.m., but I really don't like going any later than that. If I'm mixing I'm fed up by 6 p.m. Mixing is probably the least enjoyable thing for me. I find I end up having to mix things on my own. You get left to your own devices. For a lot of people that is great, but I like having some input. You get to a stage where you're like, "Is this good? Is this bad?"

**You did many albums for Belle and Sebastian.**

I did five albums with them.

**Was that enough? [laughter]**

We spent months and months and months on some of those albums. We spent a long time doing *The Boy with the Arab Strap*. They didn't go on tour for the album before - they just started recording another record. It wasn't because we didn't know what we were doing. We recorded a lot of songs and they ended up with a

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lot of EPs and tracks. It was a lot of experimentation with where to record. We would record songs in the studio. That takes up time. We would record the same songs at Stuart Murdoch's home. He lived in a church hall - all wide with the big reverb. We would do a live vocal. You had to be very careful with compression and not using very much of it at all. I remember recording things with no EQs, no compression, and no nothing until I got into the studio to mix. Then it was very, very minimal. A lot of those Belle and Sebastian records don't have that "in your face" sound that most things do now, but most of them don't have any compression whatsoever. That was several years of them. By that point, they needed to work with other people. You can't just work with the same guy, day in and day out. I think I was on my fourth record with Mogwai. I recorded with them last year and they actually finished off recording at Chem19 Studio. They mixed it in here with Gareth Jones. I think it was time for them to do something else as well.

**You and Mogwai were the co-owners of Castle of Doom.**

Yes. We still are. This is what's left of Castle of Doom. **This is the Room of Doom. [laughter]**

There's gonna be another stage, however that works out. I've been doing some mixing projects, things that I can do in here. But most of this year's been spent trying to find a building. I don't want to move again after that - I want this to be my ideal studio until I give up. I have a place in the cards, an old church hall. It would be a nice, big room. I need somewhere that I can do strings and choirs. The big studios in Glasgow disappeared. Ca Va Sound was the only place with a big room.

**Did they partially shut down?**

The big room is closed. They still kept a decent-sized studio. They've got all the gear from studio one in it - a forty-channel [Neve] VR, multitrack machines, racks and racks of outboard.

**Why did they close down the large room? Are they still in the same building?**

Well, it was a big church and they sold the church part of it to property developers. It's too much upkeep. It was a great place - I miss it a lot. What can you do? You can't keep studios like that.

**It's hard these days.**

Unless you can find a way of making it work. If you go out and lease a building like that, forget it. If you go out and buy a building like that, especially in the U.K. with mortgage rates, you're going to go downhill. But if you can find a way of making it work where it's not got a huge overhead - I think it's got a lot to do with who's working there. I don't think people can have lots of staff anymore. I think it's something you need to do on a freelance basis. Don't hire professionals to do things like wire up the patchbay, you know? You've got to find ways of doing it yourself to make it cheaper. If I work as a producer for seven or eight months of the year, the studio is pretty much covered. The rest of the time can be "Saturday bands"! No one should have any illusions about making huge amounts of money in the music industry anymore, because it isn't going to happen. Work with what you've got, as much as possible. Don't spend loads of money on an SSL Duality - unless things are going great. Work with what you have. Keep it simple. That's going to be the future, if there is a future. [laughter]

**Does a band like Mogwai give you a lot of freedom to play with some of your wackier ideas in the studio?**

It certainly does, because - I mean you've got to. It's hard to make a song carry itself from beginning to end without the attention vocals bring because as soon as the vocals start in a song, nobody cares what's happening underneath it. They're listening to the vocal. Or at least that's the way I've always thought of it. But when it's purely instrumental,

mixing seems to have a lot involved in it. Those guys are very creative. They love coming up with wacky drum parts and they're very into the electronics.

**Is that pretty fun arrangement-wise for you to see what's going to build, change or shift?**

It can be fun and it can be quite difficult. *Mr. Beast* was a bit of an experiment. We built the studio and we had the luxury of time. I mixed half the record and I think people were reasonably happy with it, but I wasn't really all that happy. I didn't like the way the dynamics worked on it - it wasn't loud enough, quiet enough or there was too much bass. There were a lot of new things I was getting used to at the time. But we went back to all those tracks and mixed them again and they turned out pretty good, I think. They have many layers to what they do - the two predominant ones are really beautiful, cinematic music, and really, really aggressive, over-the-top, in-your-face distortion. That gets mixed up in the record. Songs start off quiet and by the end it's loud and the toms are distorted. It's just a racket. That's what's good about it. I think they have a good balance.

**That's the thing about their shows too - they're good at building things up.**

They are one of the best live bands.

**You've worked with producer/engineer Dave Fridmann. How was that?**

I really like what Dave does. He's been a good friend and certainly someone I can call on in a time of need. Mixing for Dave is when it all happens. He can record a whole session and then you can leave him to do his thing. He's good at it and he's got a good ear for the big, boisterous kind of thing. I have sent him mixes of what I've been working on and I'm going, "I think this sounds like shit. What do you think?" And he's always good with words of encouragement. It's good having somebody like that - he's definitely helped what I do quite a lot. Dave mixed the first Delgados record, *The Great Eastern*. That was the first time I met him. I suppose that opened my eyes. We went over to Tarbox [Road Studios, Cassadaga, NY]. It's a great place. Dave, he's family - you become friends with the people there. I've been over and back there a lot recording, some with Dave, some with other friends. There's a while when he was taking July off for a couple of years, and I would go and record at Tarbox. It's such a beautiful place at that time of year.

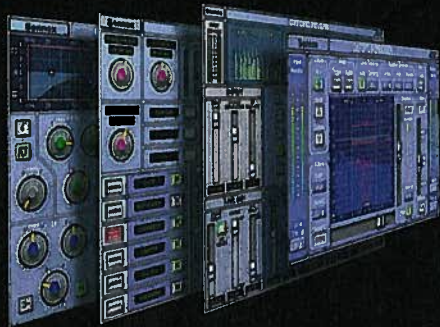
**How much travel do you do to different studios?**

Not much, anymore. I used to a lot. When I first had Peter Shershin as a manager, I didn't have any grounding here - that was going by the wayside. I wasn't working a lot with Scottish and British bands, actually. I was at Dave's a lot, or I was in Australia and Thailand making records.

**Thailand! What are studios like in Thailand?**

A bit like this, actually! Thailand is the reason I have this Euphonix CS-2000 console. I started working with it there. I hated it at first, but then I thought, "This is the best idea I've ever seen!" Once I got to know it.

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### How many channels is it?

This is 56 - 28 on the bottom and 28 on the top. They can be mono or stereo. Each channel has six inputs, so if you're doing a vocal you can bring a compressor in alongside the original vocal channel on the same track fader.

### Parallel? On the same fader?

Every channel has lots of inputs. It's an all-analog signal path as well. If you turn up a mic and things start to distort - it's good. It's massively powerful for such a size. I would like to have 48 channels along the bottom rather than having to use the top row.

### How did Mojave 3's *Out of Tune* record come about for you?

That one was a bit of a weird one. I don't really know much about that record. [laughter]

### Did you just show up at your studio one day?

I think they liked the Belle and Sebastian records. They thought, "Oh, that guy seems to be okay." I recorded most of that record. I didn't mix it. They mixed it with one of their friends. We were down in Cornwall to do the preproduction at their house. They took me surfing. It was recorded at Ca Va as a live, ensemble thing.

### Put the people in the room and track it.

That's very much what we used to do with Belle and Sebastian, so that's what I did. I think you go through phases in your career as far as *style* of recording. At that time it was kind of a natural thing. I was really into "it has to sound like the band." Then I went to more of an "it needs to sound super-sized. It needs to sound like 'to the max.'" I was saying to someone the other day that I want to try something really hi-fi, at least once in my life. [laughter] When I was assistant, that's what people did - they made hi-fi sounding records.

### You're saying your records don't sound great?

Oh, they do! [laughter] Well, I'm not going to say they sound great - but you're right. I want to do something else. I want to do something clean and clear. But that will change next week! It depends what music you get to work on.

### JB: How much of your work comes from Scotland now?

Most of it is from other countries. Last year when we were still in the former studio space, I mixed a record from America by De Novo Dahl on Roadrunner Records. I went to Canada to work with a band called Wintersleep, and they came back and mixed with us. Then I worked with a band called the Young Knives, who are English. Then I worked with a band called The Paddingtons. None of those guys were Scottish. I don't know why that is. I have done five Belle and Sebastian records, four Mogwai records and all The Delgados records. There is a new set of bands from Scotland - The Fratellis, Franz Ferdinand. There's an even newer set now. Due to the dollar

exchange rate, people are going to New York to record. There are new bands from Glasgow that have recently gone to work with Rich Costey in New York. Obviously Rich Costey is a great guy, but the draw is to go there because it's cost effective. It's like half the price versus here. This country's gotten so stupidly expensive.

### JB: So most of your projects are coming to visit here, despite the high exchange rate. Why is that?

I don't know. Maybe it's my reluctance to go anywhere else! [laughter] I think it's good for bands to get away from their home setting when they record. Maybe that's one of the reasons why I don't work as much with Scottish bands as I used to. If a band comes to a different setting and they work with someone new they're going to make a half decent record. But if you're in your comfort zone - you've got your own bed, you have to go to the post office - all that kind of stuff you do when you're home - you're not in the same frame of mind. You're not just there to make a record - you're also there to live your life. That's the great thing about residential studios. For a while, when we knew the former studio was being sold, that was my plan. Get a farm - we'll build a studio in it. I'm kind of glad I didn't do that because had we gotten a mortgage on a farmhouse, right now we'd be stuffed. The rates have gone through the roof. People like coming to Glasgow. It's got the draw, the reputation of being a bit mad. There's always a lot of good music here. I don't know what it is about Glasgow. Perhaps it's the whole working class thing, but the music's been great for years.

### How are projects coming your way now?

Peter Shershin's been a godsend. He's been my manager for a number of years. He's Dave Fridmann's manager as well. I sought him out through Dave. He's been good for me, for getting jobs that haven't been my regular bands to do.

### Working at Ca Va must have been one of the best experiences for you.

So many experiences and scenarios. Brilliant. You can't replace that and I don't know where anyone would get that kind of experience these days. I don't think it exists. Unfortunately most places seem to be shutting down. Small studios are the future and you're just not going to get that depth of experience. I was making records day in and day out. I miss the more technical engineer aspect. Recording bands is difficult, don't get me wrong, but it's certainly not as challenging as getting an orchestra right. I do miss that aspect.

### Have you had people approach you to intern, to learn?

Yeah. When I get the new place running I would like to run a little internship program. Not that I have any great wisdom to impart on anybody, but I think the skills are going to get lost. You only learn by experiencing on some of these things. They don't teach that at college and they never will. It's a whole new level that people aren't going to get.

### You're the last of a dying breed. [laughter]

Well, I'm not the last of the dying breeds! All the people that are *really* great at recording are the last. I'm just making it up as I go along. ☺

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