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PORTLAND, ORE. — Nothing irks Larry Crane more than a magazine on recording run by folks who don't make records. Talk to him, and he quickly makes two things clear. First and foremost, Crane — who's worked with Elliott Smith, Sleater-Kinney and Quasi at his own Jackpot! Recording Studio in Portland, Ore. — is a record-maker. Second, he is the founder and editor of the D.I.Y.-inspired Tape Op magazine.

"There's other magazines where there's people that write for them that don't make records — well, what the fuck do they know then?" Crane asked during an interview at a dive-y punk-rock Portland, Ore., bar. "I feel cheated by those kinds of publications.

"I hate that. I guess it's my punk-rock roots," Crane, a hefty fellow with curly brown hair, continued, laughing. "It bugs me that there's people getting paid to be the editors at a magazine — making a nice salary — and they don't even have to go into a studio that often [if at all]. I just find that really appalling."

Founded by Crane in 1996, Tape Op began as a stapled D.I.Y. zine and has since grown to a professional bi-monthly. Still rooted in indie ethos, Tape Op is esteemed in the music community. Its readers range from living legends including The Who's Pete Townshend (who wrote in a letter to the editor, "Just wanted you to know — from someone who had a complete home demo studio in early 1964 — you have a publication I would describe as 'necessary.'") to modern indie rockers like J Mascis and Low singer/guitarist/writer Alan Sparhawk.

Many musicians, producers and engineers appreciate Tape Op because it's one of the few out there run by someone immersed in recording music rather than trying to sell the latest high-tech trend. "As a home recording enthusiast, I find Tape Op imperative," Sleater-Kinney/Quasi member Janet Weiss said. Sleater-Kinney's latest album, One Beat, was recorded at Jackpot!

"Have you ever flipped through the other studio/recording magazines?" Weiss continued. "It's a bleak market filled with stories about the 'dude' hierarchy of the commercial studio system. Larry filled a huge niche, catering to folks who search for unique ways to communicate through recorded music. He opened up the dialogue to anybody, to people we know, to musicians to whom I can relate."

Over the years, the magazine has included interviews with such lo-fi masters as Guided by Voices, Pavement and Apples in Stereo. Crane's hands-on reporters have talked the talk with Tortoise's John McEntire, hung out at Spoon's home studio, chatted up Elliott Smith and grilled such

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Sharron Kraus: A New Kind Of Folk Music

The Fiery Furnaces' Psychedelic Theater

master producers as Steve Albini, Don Dixon, Steve Fisk, the team of Rob Schnapf and Tom Rothrock, and many others.

"When I first saw TapeOp — one of it's first issues — I knew it was a great idea," said Sonic Youth singer/guitarist Lee Ranaldo. "There are plenty of us out here in the music business — or indie rock culture — who have a great interest in studio practice and recording technology. Some of us grew up messing with tape recorders and couldn't wait to experience a 'real' studio. The crop of magazines out there relating to recording practice seemed to exist for high-paid slick-studio cats who existed in some 300 bucks-an-hour other dimension, far from the punk rock/tape collage/acid freakout/bedroom confessional type stuff that was where we were at. Tape Op offered an outlet for those interested in the recording side of things that was no bullshitt and to the point — a combination of lo-fi and hi-fi w/o any judgement calls between — studios working with a 4 track cassette machine given equal time to state of the art stuff (and who wants digital anyway when you've got tube gear, yo).

"What the first rounds of fanzine culture were to Rolling Stone, TapeOp was to EM [Electronic Musician] or whatever," Lee continued. "The voice of youth. Tape Op seemed to come out just in the wake of the 'lo-fi' trend in music, and fit the bill as THE cool forum where everyone from indie-rock pig fuckers to the Andy Wallaces' of the world could gather and trade ideas related to microphone placement, studio techniques, etc. Although some look down their noses at TapeOp's seat-of-the-pants style, they are plain wrong — which is why so many 'industry types' now seek it out in favor of the other recording rags. It's a good read. "How to build yr own plate reverb for 500 bux or less"? I'm all over that.... We're building one for Echo Canyon [Sonic Youth's studio] right now..."

The magazine's "Letters to Tape Op" pages often feature lengthy commentaries by working producers, engineers and musicians about the equipment and technique covered in previous issues. Where else can you find Sparhawk enthusing on the letters page about something called the "Crane Song HEDD 192," as he did in an issue earlier this year? A book collecting some of the best of the first four years, titled "Tape Op: The Book About Creative Music Recording," was published by Feral House in 2000.

"Tape Op was the first of its kind that I know of: an independent mag geared to indie musicians at all stages of recording budgets, from four-trackers to bands with cash," said recording artist/producer John Vanderslice, owner of the highly regarded San Francisco studio Tiny Telephone, where such artists as Beulah and the Red House Painters' Mark Kozelek have recorded. "It also retains a sympathy and sentimentality towards analog recording, which is hard to find in its competitors, which I see as basically trade rags for the digital lobby with all the editorial teeth of a kitten laid out on the couch after plundering the leftover turkey."

Crane, whose unassuming demeanor and kick-back personality brought an easygoing vibe to our conversation, is the kind of guy who'll tell it like it is. It's this sort of frank honesty that has earned him respect as both a producer and editor. "I just call things as I see it," said Crane matter-of-factly, with one hand fitted around the base of a wineglass filled with Merlot. "I guess people like that, and they like that no matter who they are working with. I'll say 'You're flat, you're sharp,' those kind of things. I'm not gonna pussyfoot around someone and make an inferior record if I can help it.

"I guess people respect that and [me] being the force

Harder, Heavier Burning Brides

Sonic Youth's Ongoing Experiment

The Dt's Do It Their Way

Poster Children Cover Political Rock

Rare Thelonious Monk Recordings Due

Uneasy Pop From dios

Beck, Lips, Waits Cover Daniel Johnston

Understanding Franz Ferdinand

The Truly Amazing Joanna Newsom

Mylab's Boundary-Crossing Experiments In Sound

Have You Heard Jolie Holland Whistle?

The 'Magical Realism' Of Vetiver

The Restless, Rootsy Songs Of Eszter Balint

The Sun Sets On The Blasters

Devendra Banhart To Tour U.S.

The East/West Fusion Sounds Of Macha

Destroyer Gets Mellow For Your Blues

TV On The Radio Get Political

Sonic Youth, Modest Mouse To Play Lollapalooza 2004

New Music From The Fall

Apocalyptic Sound From The Intelligence

Fast And Rude With The Casual Dots

'Rejoicing' With Devendra Banhart

New Album, Tour From The Polyphonic Spree

Shearwater Take Wing

Sleater-Kinney To Tour East/West Coasts

Resurrecting Rocket From The Tombs

behind Tape Op — it's more opinionated than the other recording magazines. It's more homegrown, D.I.Y., grassroots kind of thing. So, I think people respect that, and they know we're not just corporate skills collecting our paycheck."

Crane pushes musicians to overcome fear in the studio and strives wholeheartedly against making what he calls "boring" copycat records. "I think it all comes back to fear, and that's what bores me; it doesn't inspire me," Crane said, shrugging his shoulders. "I've made records that are kind of safe or tepid. I try not to. It's just a matter of time and experience. It's like being an artist; you can paint in the style of somebody and mimic, or you can let yourself go into that painting and do it your own way. And it's only good if you do it your own way and let yourself go into it, 'cause otherwise you're just looking and trying something — you're crafting, not creating."

Musicians like the vibe of Jackpot! and find Crane easy to work with. "The studio is comfortable and convenient, and Larry's got lots of great mics and gear," Weiss said. "Jackpot is an unintimidating space. Reaching an unintimidated state of mind is important during any recording session, and here, it's easy."

As for Crane himself, Weiss says he's "mellow and a bit of a smart-ass.... He's not going to tell you what to do, or impose his ideas all over your music. He's a facilitator, allowing a band to develop their own tastes at their own speed. But don't make him stay up past midnight."

Crane was born in Berkeley, Calif., and raised in Grass Valley, a two-hour drive northeast of Berkeley. He earned a filmmaking degree from Chico State College — though he said, between laughs, that he's not sure why. As a hobby, Crane started out recording his friends' bands. He also recorded his own "weird music" inspired by Brian Eno and Pink Floyd, still his all-time favorite band.

"I bought little mics at Radio Shack and I'd just record all sorts of shit," said Crane, dressed casually in a comfortable off-white button-up short-sleeved shirt. "People would come over and mess around. I'd go to friends' houses with a bunch of gear and we'd try to record, and it sounded terrible. We were like, 'Why doesn't this sound like real records?'"

From 1985 to 1992, Crane played bass in a melodic indie-rock band — influenced by The Fall and Joy Division — called Vomit Launch. They recorded four albums. Two were recorded by Pell Mell's Greg Freeman and released on their own Rat Box label. Two more, produced by John Bassigaluppi (now co-publisher of Tape-Op), were released by Teenbeat. "It was a fun band," said Crane, who exudes a sense of joy and delight, regardless of the topic. "But then one day we decided it's been too long. [I thought,] I'm tired of it."

Vomit Launch tours brought Crane to Portland on various occasions, leading to the making of local friendships. In '93 Crane decided to make Portland his home — but hoped to avoid band life. "I tried to stay out of music. I was so burned," Crane said, shaking his head slightly. "I spent so much money on vans and gear and I had been living for peanuts. I was like, 'I want to get a day job and have money and pay off my credit card.'"

He held a job working in electronics and another waiting tables at a local microbrewery pub. But he couldn't stay away from music. He set up a studio in the basement of his home for a band he says he only formed so he could record its music. The band, Flaming Box of Ants, would eventually

Visqueen Want To Get A Riot
Goin' On

Lloyd Cole Makes A Commotion

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Sultans Survive 'Shipwreck'

Sebadoh Reunite For Spring Tour

Xiu Xiu's 'Reality' Rock

Meet The Patients

Beth Orton, M. Ward Make
Sadness Taste Sweet

Oneida's Pathway To Ecstasy

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To Play Coachella

Young People Tour Behind War
Prayers

Pixies Tour Dates Announced

Ani DiFranco Tells It Like It Is

Deerhoof Back For 2004 With
Milkman

McLusky Set To 'Bring On The
Big Guitars' Again

Pixies Reunite For U.S., European
Tours

American Music Club,
Decemberists To Play NoisePop
2004

Damien Rice Set To Tour U.S.

The Frames Accept Your Love

"mutate into Elephant Factory," his last experience as a bandmember, Crane says.

It was while recording Flaming Box of Ants that he decided to pursue record-making full-time. "We started recording on four-track reel-to-reel, nice ones," said Crane, frequently dancing his fingertips on the sparkling black tabletop as we sat in one of the bar's vinyl booths. "Then I get bored with four-tracks; I wanted to be able to do more things, so I bought an eight-track."

Crane named his basement studio Laundry Rules because a previous tenant of his home had scribbled "laundry rules" next to the basement washing machine. Then he experienced some bad luck that turned out to be good luck. While riding his bike to work he sustained minor injuries when someone opened their car door. The settlement enabled Crane to furnish his new studio with the equipment he needed.

It didn't take long for word to spread about Crane's underground studio. "I started recording a lot of things — I did The Maroons' first album, and then Cat Power [Chan Marshall] came by one time, and Stephen Malkmus did a bunch of demos. Versus came by on tour and did a song for a compilation, [and] Junior High did a single."

Just like that? "Sort of word-of-mouth like, OK, 10 bucks an hour, start recording, people learning how to do it," Crane explained. "I did an album for Two Foot Flame, which was Jean [Smith] from Mecca Normal. It was like a side band. I did a lot of things like that and it was getting really busy, so I moved out."

It was time to set up a more professional studio. "I found a space [Jackpot! Recording Studio's current location in a low-key, blue-collar Portland neighborhood in the laid-back Eastside section of town], and then Elliott Smith and I moved in together on that," he continued. "He was gonna use it part-time as his place to record and then I'd use it part-time as my place to record. It wasn't like partners; he just had his gear there."

Crane and Smith had met when a mixing board at the studio where Smith was working broke, and he ended up finishing up Either/Or at Laundry Rules. "So, he came over and tracked a vocal for one song and then gave me nice credit on the record for really doing nothing," Crane said. "Then we were both talking [separately] about opening studios when Rebecca [Gates] from The Spinanes was like, 'You guys need to talk,' and he said something to her and she was like, 'We don't need two studios.'

"We just pooled our resources and the first thing that we did, we tried recording him to see how the stuff sounded, and that ended up being 'Miss Misery' [which appeared on the soundtrack to 'Good Will Hunting'] — 'Oh, OK, you're nominated for an Oscar.' It was the weirdest year," Crane said, laughing in disbelief.

Likely one of the most popular musicians Crane has worked with, Smith is so talented he needed little aid in the studio. "He is like the consummate musician," Crane said. "He can play everything, pretty much, and he has songs written out in his head really well.

"He would come in and play drums or guitar and start building the song from there," he continued. "Or piano and build the song up. They were all different in how they started. And then he'd play all the parts and it would work or not. You might have to go back and start over, but he's so good that you don't really have to worry about it. And he's a very good singer, obviously."

Punk Rock's A-Frames To Re-Record Third Album

Finally! Mission Of Burma Record New Album

A Solo Detour For Ladybug Transistor's Sasha Bell

Return Of The Old 97's

Spending The Night With Damien Rice

Tindersticks Reissues Due This Spring

The Evolution Of 'A Silver Mt. Zion'

Neil Young Rocks Australia With 'Greendale'

Poster Children Back In Action

'The Great Cat Power Disaster Of 2003'

Chicks On Speed's Subversive Strategies

Oranger At A Crossroad

Peaches On Tour And In Control

Jawbreaker's Complete Dear You Sessions To Be Released

Belle & Sebastian + Trevor Horn = Sunny Pop Nirvana

Von Bondies' Pawn Shoppe Heart

Descendents Are Back!

Modest Mouse Touring; Album Due in 2004

London Suede Take A (Permanent?) Break

Saul Williams Wants You To Think For Yourself

The 'Zen' Sound Of Calexico

Elliott Smith Dead AT 34

Debut Due From Mark Kozelek's Sun Kil Moon

The Hunches: Music That'll 'Fucking Live Forever'

Vic Chesnutt Speaks His Mind

90 Day Men Cancel Tour

Keith Jarrett, Cecil Taylor

Following Smith's success, Crane's workload at Jackpot! quickly grew. Vanderslice says that "so many good records" have been recorded at the studio that he considers it "a historical landmark." "It hit a point a couple of years after the studio started that I had to put [my] band on hold 'cause I was so busy," Crane explained. "I started recording all the time, 'cause I needed to make money.

"Looking back, I don't think I've ever been the most inspired musician. I'm competent, I can string ideas together and call it a song," Crane said. "But when you work with people like Elliott or [Quasi's] Sam Coomes, Sleater-Kinney or The Go-Betweens — they're amazing songwriters and I'm not. I shouldn't be singing. I don't have that good a voice and I'm just not driven to do it."

Pausing to arrive at a conclusion, he continued, "I feel more comfortable just helping people make songs, make recordings. And I can take all the stuff I've learned being a musician and work with that, and help them make better records. But I think that's a good thing, so you learn what you're good at as you go on."

Crane has found that working hard and dealing honestly with his clients have reaped him big rewards. "I'm super happy," he said with a wide smile. "It's taken a long time to get happy, but I mean it's totally nice that people respect my opinions and ask me about things and consult me about things. It's really fun, it's great to have this respect from people you absolutely admire.

"Like I can contact all these people and become a peer with like Tony Visconti [who wrote an intro to the Tape Op book] or somebody — he was talking about recording David Bowie and I'm talking about Sleater-Kinney and I'm like, 'Ah, this is weird,'" he said, sounding a little overwhelmed.

Reflecting on his good fortune, Crane said, "I'm amazed I get to sit there, I'm at the best audience seat in the house. I'm sitting there and Quasi is on the other side of the glass playing this amazing song for me and I need to capture it and tailor it to my taste. Is there anything better than that?"

Note: Subscriptions to Tape Op are free to those living in the U.S. To subscribe, go to www.tapeop.com. — Jenny Tatone [Friday, August 2, 2002]

Highlight SF Jazz Festival

For My Morning Jacket, It's The
Music That Matters

EP Due From The Polyphonic
Spree

Bright Eyes, Neva Dinova
Collaborate On EP

The Rise & Fall & Rise Of Ben Lee

Catching Up With Cheerfully
Defiant Tricky

Hanging Around With The
Polyphonic Spree

Sophomore Album Due From The
Shins

Noise Rock From Iceland's
Singapore Sling

Death Cab To Tour U.S.

Rufus Wainwright's Want One Is
'Family Affair'

Death Cab's Transatlanticism On
The Way

Heartfelt Rock From Sweden's
Last Days Of April

The Minus 5 Get Down With
Wilco

Tywanna Jo Baskette's Southern-
Gothic Rock

Xiu Xiu's Stewart Takes On 'Gay-
bashing'

Portishead Producer Resurfaces
Behind New Diva

Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Wire, Primal
Scream On Buddyhead Comp

Yeah Yeah Yeahs To Tour West
Coast

Sonic Youth, Erase Errata Kick
Off 'Buddy Series'

The Locust Are One Scary Band

Damien Rice In The 'Here And
Now'

Remembering Karp's Scott
Jernigan

ATP-NY Postponed 'Til At Least
2004

The Soul Of Chris Lee

Gits' Frenching The Bully To See
Re-Release

Stephen Malkmus Is In Control

Superchunk To Release Rarities
Set; Teenage Girls To Swoon As
A Result

Summer Touring For The Gossip

Babbling On About Deerhoof

Irish Song Poet Damien Rice's O
Released In U.S.

Chatting With ATP's Barry Hogan

Former Digable Planets Frontman
Surfaces With Cherrywine

ATP L.A. Festival Rescheduled
For Fall

Freakwater's Janet Bean Takes A
Solo Turn

Lee's 'Cool Rock'

Strokes, Yeah Yeah Yeahs
Highlight YES NEW YORK

Mark Romanek's 'Hurt' Revives
Johnny Cash's Career

The Rapture's Post-Punk, Post-
Dance Sound

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Deprivation Sound

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