



TAPE OP

Nº 1
\$2

A Journal of Sound Recording for the Creative, Independently Minded Musician, Engineer and Producer

**An interview
with producer/
musician
GREG FREEMAN**

**How to record
Pop Masterpieces
in your apartment
with
EAST RIVER PIPE**

PZM!
**The microphone
that does it all?**

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The page you're reading, dork.

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LEADER TAPE



Hello and welcome to the first issue of **TAPE OP**, the magazine that will, hopefully, fill a void for many. If you're a musician or small studio owner (or both) who actually does record and release albums in what might, loosely, be termed the *independent* end of the music business, you've no doubt noticed the lack of magazines or books that are of any relevance to your experience.

I've been talking with lots of different musicians lately and we kept coming back to the recording process as critical in the creation of great music. Many people have expressed irritation with having to work in recording studios with domineering, tunnel-visioned engineers or producers, and some have had horror stories from these experiences.

I don't want to say that no great music can be created in a *real* recording studio; I run a small 8 track studio myself! I just think, especially at this point in time, a lot of musicians have either taken the recording process back into their own hands, with small studio and 4 track setups, or they have found sympathetic engineers and new ways of working in studios.

In these realms, I think we'll find an interesting mix of artistic freedom, technical innovation, creativity overcoming a tight budget...and some great music. I also think quite a few people are involved in all this and their stories and ideas are of interest to others. Hopefully, that's true!

Please feel free to write. There should be a "letters" section in issue #2, and we will try to answer any questions brought up. The possibility of an issue or handbook devoted to first timers in the studio is being tossed around, and anyone with ideas for that is more than welcome to contact **TAPE OP**.

Thanks very much and enjoy!

Lawrence Crane

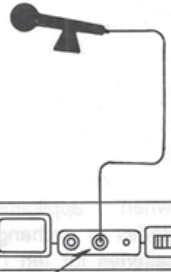
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All interviews and articles by **Lawrence Crane** unless credited to someone else...no duh!

Cover Art & Layout by **Toni Lee Smith**.

Many graphics were stolen from **Sean Tejaratchi's** big books of clippings and he also provided some amazingly valuable advice and direction before this all got rolling...Check out his magazine, *Craphound*, which contains wild collections of clipped-art.

Marila Alvares did a lot of proofreading and I thank her again. Thanks!

Thanks to: Greg Freeman, F.M. Cornog, Barbara Manning, Rebecca Gates, Hugh Swarts, Mark Robinson, John Baccigaluppi, Rich Hardesty (thanks for getting the PZM stuff!), Barbara Powers, Toni Lee Smith, Richard Martin, John Moen (and the Maroons), Sean Tejaratchi, Chloe Eudaly, the Snowmen and of course Marila Alvares.

GREG FREEMAN

Mr. Greg Freeman may be best known to you as a member of Pell Mell, the fine instrumental band with 3 lives...or maybe as a former bass player for the Call, check out the first 2 LPs to embarrass him...but one would hope he is best referred to as a fine producer. From his scratch-built Lowdown Recording Studios in San Francisco, Greg has worked on albums for Barbara Manning, Thinking Fellers Union Local 282, Faust, Gate, X-Tal, Donner Party, Frightwig, the Dwarves, Royal Trux, Ovarian Trolley, um...Vomit Launch and many others. He's a talented, creative person to work with, and as Barbara says, "I can tell him a song is a color and he knows what I mean." And as if he needs any other acclaim, his studio once featured a mixing board previously used for sound on the Gumby claymation show. Now that's cool!

How did you get into production, studio work, etc.?

My friend Dave Spaulding and I were goofin' around, doing music together after Pell Mell broke up in '84 and he sort of, on a whim, bought a 1/2" 8-track, he saw one for sale and went and bought it, and then it just kind of sat there at his house and we looked at it and went, "Wow, 1/2" 8-track!" He had a mixing board left over from his band, from their live set up, so he had a board, some mics, some mic stands and I had a 4-track reel to reel. So we thought, "Hey, let's put together a studio." This space came along, Dave was in a band with this woman who was also in this other band, Typhoon. We split the space, they rehearsed there and we would, the rest of the time, set it up for recording. It was really shoestring, we didn't have anything. Then he bought a real board, a Tascam board...it was pretty much all his stuff when we started. I would buy stuff as time went on.

When you were in the Call, I remember stories about them spending a week doing the kick drum sound...

Right!



When you were recording with other bands and seeing how it went, did that kinda turn you on to the recording side of it?

Oh yeah, definitely. I was always kind of into it, though at the time I didn't know as much or I wasn't really that involved. The most valuable stuff I retained was the procedure, like what you do first, setting up to record, getting sounds, getting the headphone mix. The logistics I picked up 'cause we did it so many times. Basic concepts, like EQ and compression and how that stuff works I picked up. I wish I'd known more about what kinds of mics and exactly what the boards were doing. In a way, if you know the basic stuff, you don't really need to know that right away. The more important thing is knowing how things go together, just trying to get things to sound good.

Having ears.

Right. That's the thing.

It's true. Maybe you'll come across things that maybe you wouldn't have picked up anywhere else.

I just comes down to what sounds good...There's other things I just learned 'cause I spent so much time in all these different studios and a lot of them are pretty big-deal studios but even so, they had problems or they would deceive you into thinking you had really good sound when you didn't, because of various things. It teaches you that you've got to compare what you're listening to against other things that you know or listen to on different systems. It was also before every studio had Yamaha NS-10's...you'd just have these huge custom monitors or you had Auratones.



There wasn't some sort of reference you could use everywhere.

Yeah, I remember at the Record Plant [big L.A. studio] we would do stuff and we would listen on these huge monitors and the engineer would just crank it and it was like, "Yeah, it sounds great!" But then later you'd listen to it and say, "Jeez, it doesn't sound so great." It's like anything; if you're used to it I guess you could use it.

What's some of the latest stuff you've done?

I did an album for this band, Granfaloon Bus, they're great, I like them a lot. I think a small label in Texas or someplace is gonna put it out. They're a lot of fun. There's just been a ton of stuff.

What's the latest thing that's been released that you've done?

There's the Ovarian Trolley album which is pretty recent. I did this band called Couch from Eureka, an EP for Lookout Records. They're more Thinking Fellers-ish than punk rock...that's not out yet, that'll be out in a little while. This guy, Ian Brennan, did his solo album. I just did something for Pony Ride. Do you know them?

I think I've heard the name.

Do you still do a lot of stuff that ends up like "demo-tape" type stuff?

Yeah, a fair amount of stuff. It's been more like stuff that's planned for a single or a record. I still do a fair amount of demos.

Do you feel better when you're doing stuff that's going to be released?

Yeah! (laughs) Oh no! I try to do the same job. Actually, my new scheme, which I'm just now beginning to enact is, I'm trying to only do projects where I've got a creative hand in, where I'm either producing or co-producing. In the past I've pretty much taken on everybody, which has been fine, but it's at the point now where I've done it for so long I have just too many people wanting to record. Besides, I would rather do stuff I'm into or people I've done before that I know I would have a good time with. Stuff that I would enjoy rather than getting calls from some band I've never heard and they come in and it's some god-awful fusion/prog band and I'm miserable. So that's my new thing and I think it's starting to work out. It's not fair for a band to come in and I'm not really into it. I try to do as good a job for everyone, but still, if someone's doing some...if they want to sound like Helmet or something, I'm not gonna care.



Do you feel kinda happy to be in the position you're in?

Well, if it works I'll be happy. If I end up with no business then I guess I'll have to change back!

What's some of your favorite things you've recorded over the last 10 years?

Oh god, I guess the stuff that's come out the best, like some of the later Thinking Fellers stuff, was probably some of my favorite stuff. The very last song we recorded is probably one of my all time favorites. It ended up on a single on Amarillo Records, it's called "Every Day". Have you heard that?

No.

Well, the single doesn't sound so great 'cause it got mastered shitty or something but the original mix is, I thought, really good and I was pretty happy with it.

What about that last Barbara Manning album?

Some of that came out pretty good, I thought. That was kind of a handful 'cause Barbara got really into inviting all these people to add stuff to it and it was sort of my job to go, "Holy Cow, take something away!" It was too much and she had the whole band doing their band version and on top of that would be strings and piano.

It's pretty layered but it's also mixed sparingly, it's got a lot of stuff going on but it's not all mush.

That's good. Thanks, that's the idea. It was tough. Some of the stuff, I thought, came out real good. There's this band called Package, they have a single out. They're more Minutemen, popish, hard rock...very cool songs, interesting lyrics, they're real nice guys, too. We're working on a bunch of stuff, I don't know what's gonna happen to it. I guess they're gonna do an EP. That stuff I thought sounded really good.

What kind of gear are you using now? Do you still have the Gumby mixing board?

It's for sale...cheap! Now I've got a Mackie, 24 channel, 8 buss. It's good. In general I like it, and I have my 2" 16-track Ampex.

Where was that from?

I bought it from a guy who got it from Fantasy [Studios]. Yeah the Mackie is decent. The worse thing about it, I think, is the EQ, but the virtue of it is that it's really clean, the routing's really good...for people recording, their headphones sound so much better, it's really phenomenal. I got one of those TL Audio 2 channel tube EQs to make up for the lousy EQ on the Mackie. There's four switchable frequency ranges for each channel, it's basically a really good mid-range, the Mackie's got a decent low-end but the mid range is awful. If you try to make a snare sound good it's just awful. The next thing I'm gonna get is some kind of Neve mic pre-amp. I tried one out and I was just blown away,

it really sounded so good. It'll cost me another \$1500 but it'll be worth it. So that's the way I get around the board.

With the 2" tape on the 16-track do you find you can really crank the sound onto the tape?

Oh, Yeah!

Do you use any noise reduction?

No, with the new, higher output tape, like Ampex 499 or 3M 996, it's pretty darn quiet. Because the tape is so huge, you get a lot more "juice" per track, a lot more magnetic "ju ju" going on so it's really quiet and the bottom end is really amazing.

Does anyone ever complain about the tape cost? (\$150 if you're getting a deal!)

No. I present myself as, this is what I have, this is what it's gonna cost. I've had a lot of people who've come in and said, "God, Greg, we did our last band on ADAT in the studio...it sucks. We like analog." I'll notice that after I mix to the 1/4" reel-to-reel it gets even more bottom end.



Do you do a lot of your mixing to that?

Yeah, I usually tell people to do both, to run 1/4" and a DAT and use the 1/4" for the master and the DAT as a backup.

Do you have any old, cool gear or strange stuff you use?

Well, most of my studio's old and strange! Nothing too weird...I've got an AKG BX-10 spring reverb, which is more of a hi-fi, older spring reverb, it's pretty cool. I have this Mutron delay that's broken and sounds really weird.

Do you still use the Yamaha SPX 90?

Yeah, not very often. I've got an LXP 5 (Lexicon) and a Roland SRV 2000 which is pretty nice. I have this weird ribbon mic, it's called a Mercury, and it looks like a taxi dispatcher's mic. It's got a grill. I tried it out, putting it behind the drummer's seat, facing the corner, a cement corner, and it sounds real weird.

There's the old SansAmp trick, too. That's sort of the hip thing to do, use the SansAmp on an effects send, I use it on snare drums a lot, and it comes back all messed up and you mix a little of that back in for your extra chaos factor. Flood, he does that. I picked it up from Tchad Blake, he works with Mitchell Froom and the Latin Playboys.

What kind of books or magazines were you able to find good info from when you were starting your studio?

I would read *Mix* magazine. There's a couple of recording books that I think are really good. There's *Practical Techniques for the Recording Engineer* by Sherman Keene. I highly recommend it. It's the best one I've found. It's more like a procedural thing, how to record stuff. It doesn't talk so much about gear and how microphones work, although it does cover some of that. It has some physics in there and stuff, like Ohm's law, the dB scale and stuff. It is, like it says, practical. It talks about how to edit tape, which is a dying art. It's really good. There's also John Woram's book, *The Sound Recording Handbook*, it's got a microphone section, he has different examples of mics and explains how they work. He's got a really good bit on mid-side stereo which is neat. It's got a bunch of math, too, if you really want to get into it you can read the math. He's really good, it's very well written. Those two books I think are the best ones. Other than that, I just read the magazines every month and try to pick up info here and there.

What kind of stuff have you been listening to lately?

There's a couple of things. There's this band called Remy Zero, a new Geffen Records band. Have you heard it?

Y'know, I listened to it on a Walkman in Mexico...I thought it was pretty heavy-handed shit.

Oh yeah, it's a little heavy-handed but I really like it, I thought it was really great. I love the bass lines, maybe you couldn't hear the bass lines on the Walkman! The bass player's great and I thought it was pretty darn cool. There's that band Possum Dixon, I bought one of their CDs. It's really cool,

it's very new wave.

Really?

But in a good way. It kinda reminded me of the Feelies and Big Dipper mixed in. The last Clean record is really great, *Modern Rock*. It's really good. The new Tortoise is good, there's that band, Friends of Dean Martinez. It's instrumental, it's really cool. I've been listening to a bunch of reggae stuff, a bunch of dub, like King Tubby...Lee Perry. Have you seen that *Grand Royal* magazine? It's interviews with people who've talked with him...pretty comprehensive and I recommend it.

Like how he burned his studio down?

It's got all about exactly how that happened.



This pretty much wraps it up, are there any plans for Pell Mell?

We're trying to get this tour together for Europe, don't know when that'll happen. We're hopin' to get this next record going, too. We gotta make plans still about it but if all goes well, we'll record it this Summer and it'll be out next year. In the meantime, we've got a couple of little song-snippets in this new Kid's in the Hall movie [*Brain Candy*]. We did some music for it. And we've been poppin' up on MTV on Road Rules, y'know that show?

I've never seen it.

They used a bunch of *Interstate*. Also NPR, All Things Considered. We just got this last BMI check but radio doesn't pay anything. We had a couple of network TV broadcasts and those pay a lot. Well, relatively a lot, not a whole lot. It's cool.



Greg Freeman can be reached c/o Lowdown, 860 2nd St. #5, San Francisco, CA 94107 or (415) 543-1628. Be sure to check out the last Pell Mell CD, *Interstate*, a way-cool, rockin' instrumental release.

STUDIO NIGHTMARES!

HORROR STORIES FROM ENGINEERS AND MUSICIANS LOCKED IN TINY ROOMS TOGETHER

GREG FREEMAN

(see interview, this issue)



What about Royal Trux?

That would be one of them. That was probably one of the worst ones. Usually when there's drugs involved that's bad because it just makes for a bad scene.

What about the Dwarves when you thought they slipped you some acid?

That's right! I forgot about that! Yeah, they were doing a different drug every week. "Okay Greg, we want to book 3 hours every Thursday for 7 weeks." One week they'd be really drunk on wine and then next week they'd come in and they'd be on downers and the 3rd week they'd be tripping, the 4th week they'd be on speed.

Did you notice much difference in the way they played?

No, it all sounded the same. I remember they brought me back that cinnamon roll and I hadn't eaten so I ate the cinnamon roll and I started to feel really weird and I was like, "Oh fuck, did they put acid in the cinnamon roll?"

That's a new way to take it, I guess.

But actually, the Dwarves, at first they were intense but we became friends. It was hard but it was enjoyable, they were kind of funny, they liked me. Greg Semen was my name on the record. They would say a bunch of things and make fun of me all the time.



BARBARA MANNING

(of SF Seals, 28thDay, World of Pooh, solo, etc.)



When I was 19 years old I was pushed around a little easier...now that I'm an older person, I certainly wouldn't allow this kind of thing to happen. I think the most aggravating moment in the studio I've ever had was when I felt stripped of my right to decide how my song was going to be performed, including my own little bass line which I had come up with and was very proud of.



What kind of stuff happened while you were in the studio?

We'll, it was when we were working on the 28th Day album [1985], on the song "Burnsite" and I had come up with what I felt was a very powerful, strong, muddy bass chord and he really didn't like it. He didn't like discordant things in general. He wanted it to sound clean and I recorded it the way I wanted to and he said, no, we had to do it again and told me I had to stick to a 2 note progression, which I was very frustrated with but I was talked into doing because he told me he kept both tracks and we could decide later. Being open to compromising and open to constructive criticism I thought, "Why not?" and we can decide from then on. However, he didn't keep the other track and he had no intention of ever using it so he just recorded right over it. When I realized that, when it came time to do the vocals, I sorta took it out on him. Noticing he had his headphone set on, near the end of "Burnsite" I let out an enormous scream of all my anger and I got a big thrill seeing him throw the headphone set off his ears. I stayed in the studio for a minute before I went in 'cause I was afraid. I was very surprised by the fact that he kept the scream in there, considering that it was certainly directed at him. Not all my recording experiences have been pleasant, but I would say that was the one that was the most aggravating because I felt it had a lot to do with the creative process, not just something going wrong or somebody getting in a fight with somebody else. If you're the writer of the song then you have the ultimate say, in my opinion.

STUDIO NIGHTMARES!

TRUE TALES FROM REAL PEOPLE WHO'VE LIVED TO TELL, REALLY, I SWEAR...

HUGH SWARTS

(Thinking Fellers Union Local 282)

There's getting down to the end of it when you're mixing and having trouble, like with some of the songs that we do, with the density of things... frequency domain, things cancel each other out. Problems like that. Or finishing something and listening back and wondering what we were thinking when we mixed that. A lot of times, this is after going over it very meticulously, phrase by phrase in some cases.

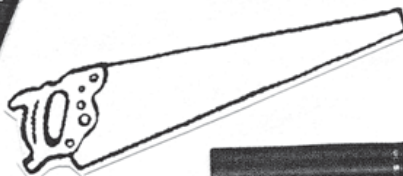
I really like Fly Ashtray a lot. They did one record, *Tone Sensations of the Wondermen*, that came out that Kramer did at Noise New York that's the only one I *don't* like. You know how all that stuff that Kramer does has that lofty sort of sheen to it? It has that on it. I don't know what kind of signal processing he used on it, different kinds of reverb, I'm sure, maybe a very slight delay. We'd played with them and I'd heard all those songs live before I'd heard the record and then I heard that and I was, "Oh my god!" They're great songs and it's passable but compared to their own production it's not as good. As a matter of fact they were telling me they were deliberately distracting him and moving knobs behind his back. He seems to be pretty arrogant, "Oh, this has to have the *Kramer Sound*." That's a prime example of somebody making decisions that shouldn't have been his. Everything else I've heard by them, they've done themselves...they had a recording studio for a while. A couple of the guys are engineers, James and Chris, and they pretty much did everything themselves.

MARK ROBINSON

(Teen Beat Recs/re-mix king)

There's definitely times, more than once, where I've showed up at a studio without tape. Some studios have tape and some don't. Usually, it's Sunday or Saturday and you don't have that much money to spend and you're already there in the studio and you're running out to buy tape.

A lot of time's I'll go into studios just 'cause they were cheap and not really talking to the producer person much more than 5 minutes on the phone. When we did the Unrest "Skinhead Girl" single, we just went in to this guy...I called him up in the classifieds and I was, "Yeah, can we come over and record?" That was at the time when we were working really fast...we were only doing one song. We did the recording part, it couldn't have been more than three hours, and then we were, "So, can we mix now?" and the guy's like, "What? We can't mix today! My ears are getting tired. This is loud stuff, I don't think my ears can take this stuff!" He spent all of his time talking about his "connections" at Columbia Records and stuff like that.



East River Pipe

East River Pipe is one man, Fred M. Cornog. He makes beautiful, dreamy pop records in a small apartment in New York, which he shares with Barbara Powers, who's not only his girlfriend but has played a large part in getting his music released. His music is so well crafted and recorded that many listeners never realize that what they are hearing is not a "full" band or even that there's no drummer, only an older model drum machine. Check out his CDs, *Shining Hours in a Can*, a collection of singles (on Ajax records), and *Poor Fricky*, the most recent album (on Merge records).

I remember reading that you were into Tom Verlaine and Television.

When I finally moved to the city, I was looking at this Television bin...one was *Marquee Moon* and one was *Adventure*. I was looking at the *Marquee Moon* and it was too scary to pick that up, 'cause that's a Mapplethorpe photo on the cover of that and it looks like their veins are sticking out, every hideous blemish on their face is amplified. I only picked up *Adventure* because it just looked less scary to me, more accessible. I started out listening to "Glory" and "Days" and "Foxhole" and stuff like that, rather than "Marquee Moon" and "See No Evil."

I think I actually heard Tom Verlaine's solo stuff before I heard Television.

There's kind of this drug element to everything Tom Verlaine does that I really like, although I don't take any drugs anymore! There's still this residual, leftover thing of acid in my head that will never go away. Television and Tom Verlaine stuff always seemed like really good drug music to me.

How did you start recording your own music?

When I was a kid, 15 years old or so, I had two little cassette players and I'd record a piano part and then I'd rewind it and play that back and play another piano part over that [previous] piano part with the other one on record. I'd essentially be bouncing off these cheap things. As soon as those mini-studios things came on the market, I knew I wanted one of



photo by Steve Satterwhite

those things. The first one I got was a Tascam Porta-One 4 track. I guess how I got into it is a fascination with song writing and tape machines at the same time. I put in a lot of time listening to records, and I still do. If you listen to late period Beatles records, put the headphones on and listen to "Strawberry Fields Forever" and one thing will be coming out of the left earphone, one thing will be coming out of the right, one thing will be going down the center...I didn't know how they did that, and I still don't, but that it could be done seemed really interesting to me, that it wasn't all just coming down the center of your head...it seemed like another world, an inner world. Listening to late period Beatles records and also wanting to write songs on my own, that's what's led to this disaster known as East River Pipe.

So when you realized there were these 4 track things you automatically understood what they were capable of?

Oh yeah! I was like, "Boy, I'm gonna get one of those!"

How old were you when you got your first 4 track?

About 23 or something. I've been messing around with it for about ten years.

What are you using now? Is it an 8 track?

I have a Tascam 388. It's an 8 track reel to reel but it lays flat and it's on 1/4" tape. It's incompatible with anything. You can't bring that tape into a *real* recording studio.

It won't play on a Fostex 8 track?

It won't play on anything. It doesn't sync up with it. What you'd have to do, if you were gonna bring that into a *real* studio, would be to bring the whole machine in. One person *could* carry it but it's pretty huge. I love this machine. For me, it's miles ahead of the cassette decks. You get a better fidelity. I'm not trying to get a bad fidelity recording. Why not try to make it as good as it can be? At the same time, I'm not a tech-head. I don't know anything about recording, I've never read the manual for this Tascam 388 because, quite frankly, I don't like to use things the way everybody else uses things. I never read the manuals for anything I get. I just turn the thing on and pluck the guitar and that's it. I just learned over time how to use it more efficiently or in a way that suited my music the best.

It seems like you've experimented with a lot of the sounds over time and have all this you can draw from to put things together.

Barbara and I got it [the 8 track] used in 1989. I'd say the first two years of stuff that I did sounded very shrill, kinda harsh and claustrophobic, but over time, it's just like everything else...you do it enough, you get better at it. I just kept doing it, day in and day out, and here we are 6 years later, with the same machine and it's still working, and I use it a lot. It's a really good, durable machine that sounds good.

I thought it was an 8 track cassette recorder.

I know that some people like to use these ADAT machines, those digital things. I don't like digital and I couldn't afford one to begin with. There's this kind of war going on between people that believe in digital or analog, and I'm not at war with anybody but I really believe in the analog sound. I don't care if the fidelity isn't as crisp or something. It just sounds natural, the way it comes over the speakers. Digital

kinda reminds me of a cheap Formica table and analog reminds me of a nice, wood-grained table. There's something about digital things that I don't like.

What do you mix down to?

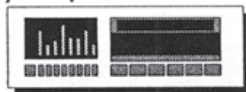
Well, I have a whole bunch of things. I have a cassette player. "Happytown" and "Times Square Go Go Boy"...that's where the masters for those came from. I have a reel to reel, which is a 2 track thing, and I have a DAT machine. I've been using the DAT machine more, recently, just because it's fast. It works fast...it's like a fancy cassette machine...it's growing on me--but not the sound of it.

Have you gotten a chance to do any digital editing for your albums?

I'm not up to that level of sophistication.

You just rent some studio time and you patch it all together on a computer.

There's a guy, his name's Danny Caccavo and he works at a place called This Way Productions in Manhattan and he masters my stuff. What we do, Barbara and I, is we give Danny a whole bunch of DATs or cassettes or reels and just go, "Okay, it's mix number three on this tape" and he'll sequence it, trim the ends, slightly EQ it and slightly compress it.



So that's being done, you're just not there.

I don't have a clue about that stuff. I'm so naive about the whole expertise of that. I just plug in the guitar and go. People wonder, "How'd you do that?" or, "That's amazing." It's really not amazing at all. All it is, is plugging in a guitar and then playing a part over that and then maybe adding a keyboard or playing bass. I think the hard part about this whole thing is writing a good song and getting a decent performance of that song. Writing a good song, that's the important part. It's the most simple thing but it's sometimes lost. Once you have a good song, how can you fuck up a good song, production wise? I was playing "Chicken Blows" by Guided By Voices and Barbara was going, "Oh my God, listen to that!" But it's such a great song, it doesn't even matter if all of a sudden this background vocal comes flying out at you. It works. It's very simple to me why that works, because it's a very good song.

Have you been working on any stuff lately?

I have a new album finished up, it's called *Mel* and it'll be out on Merge records in early September.

It probably facilitates what you want to do, having the little home set up and doing it all at your own speed as opposed to trying to take it into a pay-by-the-hour studio.

Yeah, I couldn't even imagine, aside from the money part. Even if it was 25 dollars an hour, I think it would cost a fortune to record an East River Pipe album in the studio because I like to use the recording process as the creative process. In order to do that in a *real* recording studio, I guess you have to either have a friend that owns the studio that's gonna give you a real cut rate, or no rate, or you're gonna have to have a lot of money to blow.



Like the Rolling Stones, or something.

Yeah, look at the Beatles! They could fuck around with "A Day in the Life" or "Strawberry Fields..." 'cause by that time they were millionaires. I think they owned Abbey Road! You can just sit there and camp out. Christ! Elton John used to rent out a studio in France for three months and just sit there. I never liked the clock ticking over my head when I'm trying to do something creative. It's the antithesis of the creative mindset. "I'm paying \$50 an hour for this..." I can't imagine the spontaneity level either, because of what I try to do...usually I'm just kinda diddling around on the guitar in front of the TV and I'll go, "This sounds like a half-decent song." So I'll just go over to the mini-studio and flip it on, play something, and it captures the moment. It captures the moment when you're actually really excited about the thing. With most bands, I guess the guy who writes the songs will do a little demo for his friends and then they'll practice it. By the time you get around to booking time or deciding you're gonna go over to the studio and record the song, I don't know if the idea's there any more. Or, you have to manufacture a spontaneity. Like, "Okay, let's try to play this like the first time we played it." Now, don't you wish you had a decent studio that you could capture that first time you play that song with your band? That's what I try to do. "Wow, I feel excited about this now, I'm gonna go in and I'm just gonna do it, right now."

Are a lot of songs written that way? Do you find that sometimes you sketch something out and never finish it?

Yeah, that happens a lot. I would say that about 10 percent of my stuff gets out. 90 percent gets trashed or recycled. Most of it gets trashed. I would think that those numbers would be pretty representative of just about everybody.

I hope so. Let's get technical. When you're using a drum machine. Do you print the effects on that?

Yeah. Whatever effects you hear on my records...I never add effects later, assuming that's what print means.

Yeah, sorry.

Okay, I learned a new term tonight! So I always print with effects, I add nothing afterwards.

A lot of times people don't have the balls to do that.

I'm just having a little fun here. If you like the way your guitar sounds, or your bass, your vocal. I like to sing with effects on 'cause I think it makes you more adventurous. If you just want to fuck around and experiment then fuck around and experiment. The thing I hate about all these tech people that are into the technical side of recording is they always tell you, "Naw, you can't do that, nobody does that." or, "I really don't want you to sing with the reverb on 'cause that'll be down on tape and we can't get rid of it." I'm like, "Why not?" I don't care. I'm just having fun here. That's one of the reasons I record by myself. Then I don't have some technical engineer guy telling me I can't do that. Not that anything I do is all that strange or weird, but for me, the technical process of this thing is just not that important, really. You should control the technology instead of the technology controlling you. Some of these engineers, they're kinda in this rut of the way they do things and they can only see it that way. "Why would you want to record two guitars doing the same thing when I can run your one guitar through this stereo flanger thing and we can get the same effect." That's a different thing. That's an artificial way of getting what I want and it's not the same thing. Don't tell me that that's the same thing--it's not. I'm very hard headed about that stuff. I just really enjoy dicking around by myself. All I'm

doing is just dicking around. I'm not trying to make some great technological recording or something. I'm just trying to have fun. I don't have any rack mounted gear or anything. If I got a bunch of rack mounted stuff, I would spend so much time fucking around with dials I wouldn't get a song done. Or the songs would go in a different direction, and I think it would be an unhealthy direction. You would focus more on the technology of the thing, like, "Oh, maybe if I used this gated, reverse reverb instead of the room #2 reverb it would sound that much better." My philosophy is, "Fuck man! Just get it done." I'm just doing a home recording here. It's not like I'm the Beatles or Pink Floyd or something. I've always kept this set up really simple. I have about four guitar stomp boxes, and that's it. I've got a reverb - a stupid, little guitar reverb thing. I also bought a compressor thing which I very impressed with. And a distortion pedal—just a cheap little \$40 distortion pedal.

That's the extent of your effects?

That's the whole thing.

What kind of reverb is that?

Let's see. It says, Boss RV-2 digital reverb. It's just a guitar stomp pedal and it's got six different reverbs on it and I don't even use half of them.

Do you run your guitar direct into your mini studio and listen to it through your stereo while recording?

I play everything back and I mix through the stereo.

Do the neighbors like you?

Well, when I do a mix I [might] do 10 mixes. One guy upstairs was going, "Boy, you were listening to the same song today for 6 hours!" He doesn't even know I'm a musician, he thinks I'm some obsessive/compulsive person. The neighbors have never complained about anything, and I always play and sing and carry on pretty loud.

Does Barbara mind it?

She always likes it, because when I'm messing around with a song I'm not bothering her.

What kind of mics do you use?

One's a Shure PE15H. I've had this thing since I had my little Tascam Porta-One. This engineer guy said, "You gotta get a Shure SM 58." So I bought one but I don't like it; it's too sensitive. This PE15 thing, I'm so

used to it vocal technique-wise. I have another mic I use when I do acoustic guitar. It's a Beyer Dynamic M69N.

Is that a ribbon mic?



I don't know anything about that! The only ribbon I know is for wrapping presents. I used to be really militant about having cheap stuff but I'll tell you, I got a cheap compressor 2 years ago, it was an Arion compressor, and the thing would pop. You'd hit a louder note and, "crack!" You could hear the compressor grab onto it. Recently I got this Boss compressor/sustainer and what a difference, it's amazing. I'm kind of getting rid of my bullshit bias for really cheap gear.

There's certain limits.

I got a little impatient with *really* cheap, low end stuff.

Is there any inspiration for your recording style?

Two years ago I was sitting around listening to all this *hip alternative bullshit* and after two hours, I put on Lou Reed's *Magic and Loss*. I put that on and it's just guitars—electric guitars, just really thickly done, no heavy-duty effects; recorded nicely. Clean guitars. And a voice, bass and drums. It was just so simple that it reduced those other albums to a pile of shit. It was just so obvious that that was the way to go. Wow, a simple song with simple chords, recorded simply (don't get too fancy) and try to communicate with people. Try to do something beautiful, but don't get complicated; keep it simple. That's been my mantra for a long time. When I picked up Lou Reed's *The Blue Mask* in 1983, that showed me how little it takes to really create a great album. That album just blew my mind. Listening to Lou Reed albums, I think the way those albums are recorded, that's what spoke to me, the directness of *The Blue Mask* or *Magic and Loss* seemed to speak to me in a way that was very direct and I said, "That's the ticket. The rest of this stuff is bullshit." Now, I love albums like Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*, the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*. Those are also beautiful albums, but they're more ornate, perhaps. Late period Beatles records. I love *Sister*, by Sonic Youth. These are all different records that are all great records that create their own space. Production wise, what spoke to me were Lou Reed solo records. That's in your face, no bullshit.

Continued on page 18



PZM!

The inexpensive mic that can do a lot!

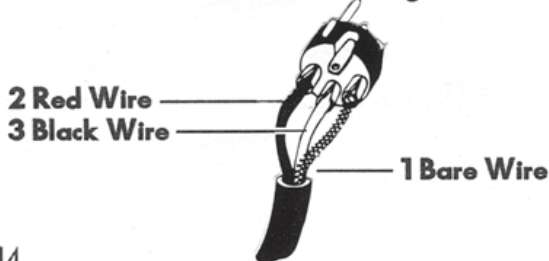
The PZM microphone is weird. It's a 5 by 5.5 inch piece of black flat metal that somehow picks up sound in a really different way. All the sound around it is received in a large hemispherical pattern and it pretty much hears everything equally. And it sounds decent. And you can get it cheap at Radio Shack!

The first time I had to seriously consider the PZM microphone, I was recording with a band at my friend John Baccigaluppi's Enharmonik studios in Sacramento, CA. He had a couple of PZMs mounted up in the air above the drums for left and right overhead mics. I had previously seen these odd looking gizmos at Radio Shack and had assumed they were as useless as most Radio Shack junk. Instead, the sound these mics picked up on the cymbals was crisp and clear and a nice complement to the overall drum sound. Not long later, I saw a band place a pair of these mics on each side of a stage, flat on the floor, and plug them into a recording walkman. I asked them how these tapes sounded and they were very positive about the results. I was curious, to say the least.

Radio Shack, under the imprint *Realistic*, sells the Pressure Zone Microphone (PZM) at all their weird, little stores for \$59.95. I believe they are actually manufactured by Crown, as they own the name PZM. Don't bother looking for the higher priced Crown versions though, there's a lot you can do with these little buggers!

First, if you have XLR inputs, you'll want to snip off the molded 1/4" plugs and wire up a male XLR

Illustration 1-XLR Wiring



plug. Amazingly, there's a three conductor wire in these thin cables and the rewiring for low impedance makes a big difference in sound clarity. See illustration 1 for wiring information.

The next change I made to the PZMs was to do away with the need for batteries. I opened up the battery compartments and soldered the two units together, parallel (+ to + and - to -), and then hooked up a 6 volt wall wart power supply to them. This seemed to give a higher output level as well as eliminating my fear of batteries running down during a session!

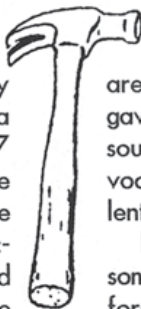
Illustration 2-Overhead Mic Placement



The little manual that comes with the PZM recommends mounting the mics "on a hard, flat surface at least four foot square." I mounted them on some pieces of 1/2" particle board that are 2 by 3 foot (4 by 4 foot seems a bit too large to move around!) and then nailed the boards up above the drums, as in illustration 2. These work great as overhead mics, and I build the sound up from these when setting up a drum mix.

Luckily, I set up one of the mics so I could easily pull it down and try it on other instruments. I tried a PZM (on the 2 by 3 particle board) and a Shure 57 on a guitar amp set to a loud, but clean setting. The PZM had a warmer, more defined low-midrange sound than the 57 and both had the same characteristics in the mid's to hi's. (Although at super loud volumes the PZMs do distort much earlier than the 57's.) When I tried the same mics on a moderately loud bass amp there was a much better overall sound from the PZM than the 57. It's probably the same effect that you get when using a large diaphragm mic, where the larger surface area picks up the lower pitched sounds with more clarity. What's amazing, though, is that all the treble is still intact, giving you a nice, sharp sound.

Another trick I tried before was leaving one of the mic setups on the wall and placing a vocal mic in front of it so that while doing vocal overdubs, both the mics

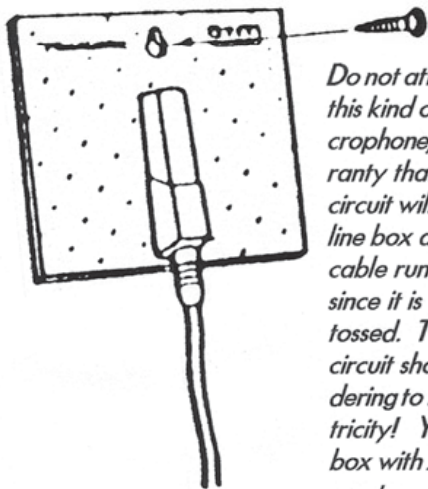
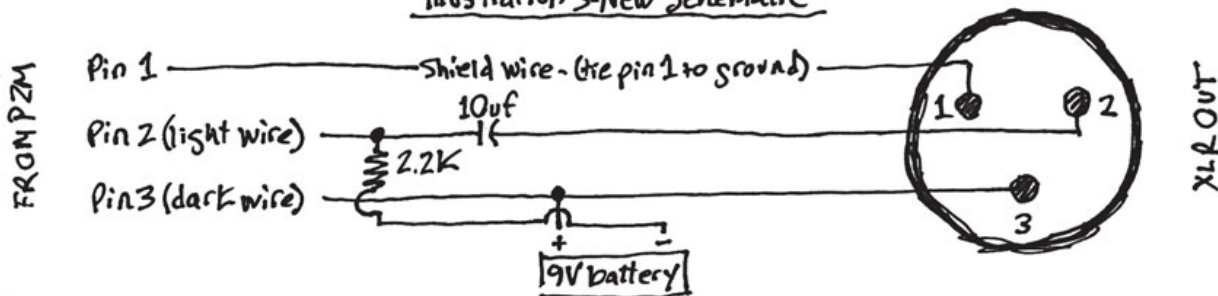


are picking up the singer. The mix of the two mics gave a really interesting effect, partially due to the sound reflecting off the backing board and into the vocal mic, but also a slight phase cancellation that lent an eerie sound to the vocals.

Recently, John, who I mentioned earlier, sent me some schematics for upgrading the preamp and transformer stages for the PZM. You will need a bit of electronic knowledge and experience, but apparently the sound is even better and cleaner with these new circuits. See illustration 3 for the schematic diagram.

Hopefully, this article will encourage everyone, from a band trying to tape their practices to cassette, four-trackers, and full on studio set ups, to pick up one or two of these unique little mics, save some money and try them out. I'm sure there's tons of room for experimentation with these ideas and please write and tell me of any you come up with.

Illustration 3-New Schematic



Do not attempt this modification if you've never done this kind of work before, since you could ruin the microphone, okay? This work will void any kind of warranty that Radio shack offers on this mic. Using this circuit will do away with the battery/transformer inline box and most of the cable. You can salvage the cable running from the box to the molded 1/4" plug since it is 3 conductor. The rest of the parts can be tossed. The power can be from a wall wart and the circuit should clean it up a bit. Be careful when soldering to the mic element as it is sensitive to static electricity! You can install this setup in a small project box with XLR connectors on it for adaptability if you want.





GOOD PRODUCER

ALBUMS THAT HAVE SHINED OR

REBECCA GATES

(Spinanes)

She likes:

Bobbi Gentry-*Mississippi Delta*
Ben Webster meets Oscar Peterson
John Spencer Blues Explosion-*Orange*
Rolling Stones-*Between the Buttons*
TLC-*Crazy, Sexy, Cool*

Do you want to explain what makes these records sound right?

No. If you blend these all together you might get the sound of our new Spinanes album [*Strand!*]

Any records you don't like the sound of?

I hate Jeff Lynne, as a producer, not a person.



BARBARA MANNING

(Glands of External Secretion, Original Artist)



This first thing that I thought of is a Red Krayola [Mayo Thompson's past and present combo] album, *Parable of Arable*, that's one of my ultimate favorite albums in the world. There's an incredible mixture of absolute haphazard production mixed with infinite, thought out, production. It all blends in together, there's no stopping, there's no track listing on the CD, on the vinyl there's no grooves. It was a giant influence on my album, *Nowhere*. I admit it, completely, that I was very influenced by that album for my record. I'm amazed how the album blends together, but I can tell when the tape deck is rolling and nobody is paying attention to it and other times when somebody's being very careful about how they're bringing along the song or the way the vocals are really tinny in one spot and real full in another. I think that's a piece of genius but I can't stand the production of this one Chills album.

Brave Words?

Yeah, I think it's absolutely horrible, I think it ruined the songs. I've always thought I would love to go

back and remix the album.

Did you know Martin Phillips [the Chills' leader] was talking about doing that?

No!

I read in an interview, years ago, where he lamented the production and he thought it was in the mix, also.

That's weird, because when *Brave Words* was first out the Chills came to San Francisco and they stayed at my house. I was talking to Martin and I said, "You know, I really can't stand the production on this album." And he was like, "That's Mayo Thompson who you're talking about." I didn't really know Mayo's significance until I looked at all my Fall albums and then I started to discover Red Krayola on my own, so at that point, Mayo Thompson was just a name to me, I didn't understand that I was putting down this great man. I thought they had just gotten some shitty producer who did a really terrible job on it and Martin *really* defended it.

They were talking about remixing it and calling it Braver Words, he was serious about that.

Yeah, I think people shouldn't be afraid of reissuing and adapting or improving songs that have already been recorded. There seems to be a taboo with that where something's been done, don't mess with it. Sometimes it's messed up, like remastering the Led Zeppelin and they fuck it up. As long as you're the artist, you're in charge and you know how it should sound and it's your vision anyway. I think Martin was really star-struck with Mayo and he let Mayo go ahead and take away all the beautiful chimeyness of it. That album is so flat and the songs aren't. It's so trebly it makes me on edge rather than making the songs dynamic. There's a really good example, Mayo Thompson the good side and Mayo Thompson the bad side!



BAD PRODUCER

SUFFERED FROM THE RECORDING PROCESS

Did you have any other examples?

Let's take another New Zealand example. I think *Hey Spinner* by Able Tasmans is just a perfect album. It's all the way through, so beautifully done, well produced, the songs are in the right order, and that's a really big important thing, too. Every album should be like you're opening up the gate and you're letting your friends in and they're floating in and they're going down the corridor and are looking in each room as a song. They should feel the atmosphere of the record first, like they're encompassed in the record.



HUGH SWARTS

(Thinking Fellers Union Local 282)

A band called the Apples, they're from Denver. It's called *Fun Trick Noise Maker*.

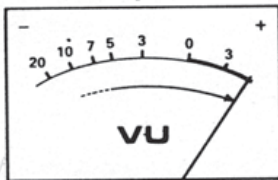
They did that at home on 8-track.

They did? Yeah, I think it's a great record. The songs, the parts, everything about it is amazing.

GREG FREEMAN

(Satan's Tool, Virginia Dare)

There's the Folk Implosion [John Davis/Lou Barlow] on the *Kids* soundtrack, some of that stuff sounds really good, I think. That was our buddies Tim O'Heir and Wally Gagel at Fort Apache who did that. They worked on the Pell Mell record, too.



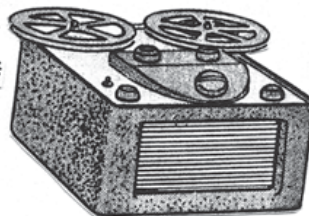
MARK ROBINSON

(Teen Beat Recs/Air Miami)



10 CC, they have this album called *How Dare Ya* which is produced pretty amazingly. That was Godley and Creme and two other guys...this was the last album with all of them, together. At the time they were known for their super-production techniques and stuff like that. The drums are really, really bassy, it sounds real interesting; it doesn't sound like the normal stuff. The drums are really dead...if you start to listen to it you're like, "The drums sound like cardboard!" but with everything together it just sounds really amazing. It has this guy crank calling this airline stewardess on the front. It's one of those split covers with a diagonal line down the middle. It's pretty hilarious. That's why I got into it 'cause I thought the cover was hilarious, then I bought it and I was, "Wow, that's actually a pretty good record" and then I got really into them.

The first Velocity Girl album, *Copacetic*, the songs were pretty good...their new album I just heard and I don't think anything could help that record...but the first album, I guess it was recorded in Memphis by Bob Weston, who I think was early in his engineering career. I think it was a 24 track recording and it sounds worse than a cassette 4 track. In a bad way. It just sounds totally horrible. It seems that to make up for it, on the next record they did it totally slick. It's like they've never done a really good record...never found a good producer.



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EAST RIVER PIPE

Continued from page 13

It's funny, 'cause I'm trying to get you to get technical about how you record and we keep discussing songs. That's part of the reason for **TAPE OP** though, different perspectives on recording.

A friend of mine, who's much more technical than I am, was recording an album in a studio that cost about \$40 an hour. He invited me down, just to sit there. I'd never been in a real recording studio. His singer in the band is singing this thing and it sounds really good to me. He's singing it through some Shure mic, like a 57. Afterwards, we're driving home and he's playing the tape for me and he goes, "You know, this is gonna be really good when he sings this with the Neumann mic." And I'm thinking to myself, "This guy's fuckin' insane." The performance was there, a great performance, and now they're gonna go back, it's not gonna be spontaneous, they're gonna have this mic, it's not gonna be the same. He just doesn't understand what it's about. The recording using the 57 mic was great. Leave it. It has an intensity to it. Why go back and spoil a perfectly good recording just to get a slightly better sound?

I think that points out problems in the whole recording process.

And it also points out priorities that don't necessarily revolve around the performance, which is the important thing. Christ, let the music live. Let the band be the band. Keep that spontaneity there at all costs. A vast majority of these engineer types have always seemed rigid to me. Technical. They impede the creative process.

Contact Mr. Cornog c/o:

Hell Gate, PO Box 6053, Astoria, NY 11106

East River Pipe records can be ordered from:

Ajax, PO Box 805293, Chicago, IL 60680

Merge, PO Box 1235, Chapel Hill, NC 27514

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ODDS AND END PAGE

MARK ROBINSON

(Unrest/re-mix dork)

I'm doing this project for Merge records, it's gonna be remixes, one song from every band [on the label]. All that stuff is on all these different formats. My original idea was to dump it all to ADAT but I didn't really know anybody that had an ADAT. Some of the stuff's on 2 inch 24 track, some of it's on 1 inch 16 track, and Merge can't really afford to have me in a studio, remixing this stuff in a 24 track studio, so we're gonna go into Inner Ear studio. They have a 1/2" 16 track, a format a lot of the home studios use around here, so we're gonna go in there and dump everything onto 1/2" 16 track and then I'm gonna mix it off of that. It's all Merge stuff, like Butterglory, Magnetic Fields, Superchunk, Lambchop.



"Written in three separate parts, 'Good Vibrations' required seventeen sessions and six weeks-not six months as has always been reported-spread over three months, to record, costing a sum somewhere between \$50,000 and \$75,000, then an unheard amount for one song."

From *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, Brian Wilson's autobiography.



RECORDS THAT GOT A LOT OF PLAY DURING THE MAKING OF TAPE OP #1

Pink Floyd *Meddle* (Mobile Fidelity Ultradisc)

Pell Mell *Interstate* (Geffen Recs)

Various Artists *Plus From Us* (People who played on Peter Gabriel's last record doing solo stuff)

The Beach Boys *Pet Sounds & Box Set*

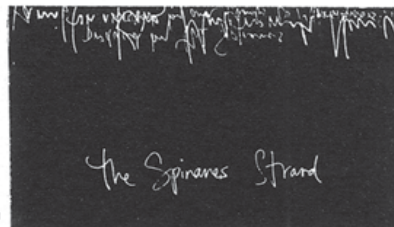
Colin Newman *A - Z* (vocalist for Wire)

Guided By Voices *Bee Thousand* (Scat Recs)

The Walkabouts *Devil's Road* (Virgin Recs Germany)

RECORDS TO CHECK OUT!

The Spinanes *Strand* (Sub Pop recs)



Here we have a fine example of hopping from one hip studio to the next and doing it right. Basic tracks were recorded at Easley Recording in Memphis, where the Amps, Pavement, Sonic Youth, the Grifters and others have been the last few years. Some of the wild, atmospheric sounds on the CD were created with Easley's old plate reverbs, and sound nothing like all the newfangled digital stuff. Additional recordings, as in some vocals, percussion, etc., were done with John Goodmanson, Barrett Jones (at Bad Animals, Heart's studio!), and at Idful Music. At Idful, the album was finally mixed by Brad Wood (Liz Phair, Seam, etc.) and the Spinanes. Despite all this jumping around you get the feeling every stop had a purpose and was well planned out. Plus it's damn fine ear candy!

Varnaline *Man of Sin* (Zero Hour)



Varnaline is one of those rare one-man recording deals that doesn't sound like a self-indulgent wanker. This is all the work of Anders Parker, a former Portlander and current member of Space Needle in New York. It was recorded on an 8 track cassette in his apartment and everything has a wonderful, gritty texture that totally reinforces the well-written songs. I would hold this up as a good example of why one should avoid recording too cleanly, as this material would come across weaker with any sort of *sheen* to it. *Look for a feature on Anders and Space Needle next issue.*

