



SIMON GOGERLY

THE MUSIC (MIXING) MAN

A decade-long dream has finally become reality for Grammy award-winning mix engineer Simon Gogerly, escaping London's hubbub for the (working) good life in rural Essex, where technology, talent, energy, and investment have conspired to create a personalised mix studio par excellence. JONATHAN MILLER leaves his wellies at the (soundproof) door.

As one of the UK's leading mix engineers, Simon Gogerly needs little in the way of introduction. Fans of Irish rockers U2's last bucket load-selling long-player, *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb*, might well have heard of the man with the golden mixing touch, whose talents graced its February 2005 UK number one *Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own* – vocalist Bono's moving lyrical tribute to his father, Bob Hewson, who died in 2001. That single won its two nominations (Best Rock Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal, and Song of the Year) at the 48th Grammy Awards held at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, California on February 8, 2006. *City Of Blinding Lights*, the fourth single to be lifted from the album, reaching number two in the UK in June 2005, also scored a Grammy ('Best Rock Song') at the same ceremony. Certainly someone, somewhere, noteworthy within the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences was all ears as Gogerly himself was duly rewarded with a Grammy for his sterling work on the aforesaid album that bagged 2006's 'Album of the Year – 2005'. According to his supportive wife, a self-effacing Gogerly had to be cajoled into boarding an LA-bound flight for the red carpet treatment.

Here's an individual at the top of his game, yet the success is not without its attendant downside, as is so often the case. "When I was mixing, usually I was having to go into London – often in the mornings, so it could be anything up to a two-hour drive, just to go 40 miles or so," says Gogerly. "Then, because you're working in a studio in London that costs 'X' amount per day, I'd have to do a mix in one day – often involving editing, so I could easily be there until the middle of the night, and then there's another hour's drive home."

Add a family into an already demanding mix, and daily life could commonly turn out to be very draining indeed. One could credibly argue that the solution for someone in Gogerly's privileged position is obvious: build a studio closer to home – or even in his home. One is easier said than done, the other option not necessarily ideal.

Initially, Gogerly opted for the latter, albeit a halfway house of sorts – Hub, about which his website still states: "Hub is Simon's own studio, which he uses primarily for pre-production work and mix preparation. If time allows, he likes to get hold of the files for a mix project in advance and spend some time familiarising himself with the track, doing any preparation work that may be necessary, such as cleaning up edits and organising tracks. This approach means that the mixing process can progress smoothly once he takes a track to its final stage at a full mix studio."

Today, the proud owner of Hub II looks back on its predecessor through decidedly non-rose-tinted glasses: "I had a little studio set up at home, which I did mix in when it was smaller projects with lower budgets. I could do finished mixes in there, but it was very hard work, because you were struggling with the limitations of the equipment, really."

To The Manor Barn

On the other hand, Hub II is Gogerly's newly-opened full mix studio, sited conveniently a stone's throw from High Barn's multi-tasking live venue, recording studio, and video production operations (profiled in *Audio Media* May 2007). High Barn's recently-instigated High Barn Records offshoot pooled resources with Hub II to jointly celebrate their respective launches on December 6, 2007.

"On a practical level, the main reason for setting up this place was that it was going to be close by," Gogerly reasons. "I can work the hours that I want to work, instead of 'standard' studio hours... I have kids, and I'm up at seven o'clock in the morning, so coming in here, after having taken the kids to school, and working through from nine o'clock until six or seven in the evening, is much more conducive for a happy life than having to go to London for 14 hours and spending three hours on the road."

"The other thing is just to have a room that I can tailor to the way that I want it to be, and have the equipment

Photography by Mike Banks at www.recordproduction.com



Simon Gogerly at work.

▶ that I want to use – not being stuck with something that a particular studio might have... Then you go to another studio, and it's different stuff."

On the face of it, a converted rural business park rental unit might not sound like an ideal setting for a highly-capable mix studio. As highlighted in the tasteful accompanying photography by RecordProduction.com's Mike Banks, Hub II is unquestionably smaller than those established London-based facilities favourably frequented by Gogerly on a reasonably regular basis – AIR Studios, Mark Angelo Studios, and Strongroom, et al, yet its justifiably proud owner should be congratulated on making such good use of its footprint... with a little help from some fellow audio industry professionals.

First, though, Gogerly had to settle on The Bardfield Centre itself: "It wasn't perfect; the perfect thing would have been to have found a completely separate building – probably with some sort of acoustic qualities to it, but I could have been searching for years and could have ended up spending a fortune on rent – property prices round here are just as crazy as in London! Originally, I was looking all around the area. I found a barn that I thought about possibly converting for about two minutes until I found out how much it was going to cost – a hundred-grand or something, then all the conversion costs on top put it completely out of reach, so this is a good alternative because it was just a very simple, empty space, so I could do what I wanted. It could have been a bit bigger, but then the rent's not too expensive, so I could put a bit more into equipment and acoustic treatment."

Architecture And Morality

Enter consultant acoustician Nick Whitaker (ex-Recording Architecture co-founder). "He came up and umm'd and aah'd a little bit about the size of the space," states Gogerly. "It was all open, but we found that – partially due to cost effectiveness, but also from a practical level – it was best to only have to put in two new walls, as opposed to splitting it up and building new walls along the sides, and stuff like that. The only walls we put in are the ones separating the control room from the vocal booth, and the vocal booth from the kitchen, which is at an angle, so that the vocal booth is not a regular shape. We got away with making the control room

less regular by putting in angled corner sections. The only thing we had to do that was quite labour intensive was take the ceiling down, then put in a new suspended one."

The reason? "If it's just a regular ceiling then it'll vibrate and make the roof space above it into a kind of big sound box, amplifying the sound to the outside, plus you'll get resonance coming through from up there as well."

The previously alluded architectural limitations of the building housing Hub II together with its tenant's level-headed budgetary constraints prevented Gogerly going as far as commissioning a full floating 'room within a room' design: "The floor is just concrete with wood veneer on top, so that's fairly dead, because it's not floorboards over an empty space. We've done a lot of treatment, so it does sound fairly dead, but, with a mix room, you do want a little bit of reflection off a few surfaces here and there, just so that it's got a little bit of life to it, and doesn't sound completely clinical; but you want it to be dead enough so that you're not getting bass frequencies bouncing around in corners, so the heaviest treatment we did was in the corners, and on the ceiling, where there are suspended panels."

All of those were custom-designed specifically for Hub II's tastefully-finished control room, of course: "Nick designed all the panels and the method for attaching them, then we got Acoustic GRG to make them up. We also bought a couple of Modex Broadband panels off the shelf."

Those North American (RPG Diffusor Systems)-designed off-the-shelf Modex Broadband panels – of which Kent-based Acoustic GRG Products also happens to be Europe's only authorised manufacturer – are suspended between the Hub II control room's two left-hand-sided daylight-welcoming windows – in front of which is positioned Gogerly's Apple PowerMac G5-driven Logic rig, including "...a little Mackie [SR24-4] mixer,

a MOTU [828] interface, and [Akai S1000] samplers, and so on," all of which date back to the original Hub (home) studio – and in its adjacent vocal booth. According to its creator, the Broadband solves low-frequency modal problems while taming mid- to high-frequency reflections by offering significant absorption between 50Hz and 5kHz. "They're four inches thick, made of heavily absorbent foam stuff encased in a kind of metal case with lots of holes to soak up the frequencies," Gogerly explains, evidently satisfied with the results.

Three-Letter Drive

When the time came to fill that new mix room with some choice new kit, Gogerly's mind was pretty much made up from the outset when it came to choosing the main tool of his trade: "I trained on an SSL when I first started – for the vast majority of the time I've mixed on SSLs, so it wasn't really too much of a hard choice. The SSL AWS 900+ was a contender – at the upper end of what I could afford; SSLs are obviously a classic mixing desk – consequently, they have that kind of price tag, so I was thinking, 'Shall I go the other route of just getting a good-sounding summing type of mixer and do most of the work in Pro Tools?' But I wanted to be able to do some old-fashioned mixing – plugging in outboard compressors and things, so really the SSL was the only desk that gave me the opportunity to do both things, because you can automate from both sides. Directly from the desk you can automate the

analogue faders, and also you can do some of your Pro Tools automation from it, although for some functions it's still easier and quicker to just draw a line with a mouse, but it's good to have the choice."

Not-so-close contenders included Rupert Neve's new 5088 analogue Mixer – "...if you start stacking it up with EQ modules then, before long, it would be more expensive than an SSL [AWS 900+]..." – and various Paul Wolff-designed modular console configurations from Tonelux – "...you can control the desk automation from within Pro Tools – something that the SSL doesn't do, so I was tempted,

but restricted to a degree by the size."

So Solid State Logic came up trumps on a number of counts, comfortably accommodating Hub II's tight two-month build schedule while not ignoring the weight that those three little letters alone are often perceived to carry. "As soon as you say you have an SSL studio then people take it an awful lot more seriously than if you said you had something else," declares Gogerly, before putting that apparently sweeping statement into its rightful context: "In some ways it's ridiculous, because once you get up to a certain level of quality – things like the Neve and Tonelux – then they're all going to sound really good, albeit with different qualities and ways of working."

Compress To Impress

One potential AWS 900+ Analogue Workstation System stumbling block had to be overcome ▶



Gogerly's Grammy.

▶ before taking the purchasing plunge, however: "For me, compressors are one of the major mixing tools, and one thing that I've always loved about SSL desks are the good-sounding compressors on all the channels, but because the AWS has only got two compressors you haven't got any more after you've assigned them to specific channels, so one of the things they persuaded me to get with the desk was one of their [XLogic] X-Racks loaded up with compressors, so I've now got 10 compressors, which is probably going to be okay."

Gogerly's also got a couple more rack-mounted beauties up his mixing sleeve: "There's a technician at Mark Angelo Studios, who also works for Mutronics, and he's been making me some stereo compressors, which are fantastic."

Then there's always his trusty Digidesign Pro Tools rig (running on an Apple Mac Pro) by way of compression back-up: "It's loaded up with plenty of good plug-in compressors, but there's no real



Gogerly prefers 'real world' outboard.

substitute for the real thing."

More notable rack-mounting additions to the Hub II outboard processing arsenal include

the long-time-coming Bricasti Design M7 Stereo Reverb Processor, sourced from Stirling Trading, which is proving to be a big hit with Gogerly: "I think it's the best-sounding reverb that I've heard – as good, if not better than 480Ls, PCMs – all those Lexicons, and the TC [Electronic] System 6000. It wouldn't necessarily be so good for some of the more dense, dark reverbs that you might get out of some of the cheaper boxes, but for really realistic-sounding reverbs it sounds amazing. As a matter of fact, it's a shame that I couldn't afford to have three or four of them, because I can see that I would want to be using more than one sound from it in a mix, but because it's really quiet as well – whereas some of the Lexicons always had a bit of a problem with being a bit noisy – you could feasibly just record the sound that you want into Pro Tools, then set it up for something else in the mix; I fully intend to do that."

Other outboard old(er) faithfuls that journeyed from the original Hub to Hub II for an occasional look-in include a Joemeek VC1 Studio Channel, SPL Classic Vitalizer, Focusrite ISA 430 MKII, two TC Electronic M300 Dual Engine Processors, Yamaha SPX50D, and Roland SDD320 Dimension D.

Do You Hear What I Hear?

Which brings us neatly to the final stage of the critical listening chain. "Monitoring was a big thing, though I'd already been through that process maybe a year-and-a-half ago when I was looking for some midfield speakers that I could take around with me," Gogerly reveals. "I tried out loads – pretty much everything with plenty of active power so that I wouldn't have to carry an amp around. In the end, I found the Focal [Twin6 Be], which, to me, just sounded the most natural – like I would have expected speakers of their size to sound. I've added a sub – just specifically for here, and when Nick came to tweak the room he helped set it up so that it's at a good compatible level, and had some special [Something Solid XF] stands made by a company called Noteworthy; the concept with these is that they're just a frame made from very heavyweight, solid-steel poles but the bulk of the space within the speaker stands, as it were, is just empty space, and because the tubes have such a small cross section and are very rigidly welded they don't really resonate. The speaker just sits on four tiny bits of graphite, I think, with a bit of Blu Tack on top. Basically, it's almost like having them suspended, so they sound really good."

When it comes to mixing, it helps to have some not-so-good-sounding speakers as well. "I just got some regular stands for the [Yamaha] NS10s; they're slightly obscured by the computer screens, but I thought, 'Well, you don't really listen to NS10s for the sound quality – more just to check that your mix has got some punch to it and the tight level of top.'"

A solitary vintage Auratone 5C sits atop Gogerly's AWS 900+ also for checking purposes: "I listen in mono – usually quite near the end of the mix, just when I'm fine tuning the balance to make sure that I can hear all of the vocals, and that sort of thing; also sticking something into mono means that you're making sure it's going to sound okay on a radio or old-style TV, though these days most people have got their TVs plugged into surround systems, so goodness knows what your stuff's

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▶ going to sound like coming out of those, because they're in all kinds of rooms!"

But that's not all: "I've got these other monitors – NHT M-00s, which are just small powered speakers, but they've got a surprisingly big sound – the right kind of character to give you an impression of what something would sound like on computer speakers and modern hi-fis, really. I'm using the NHTs for monitoring the Logic rig, but also I've got it set up so I can play the mix through them, which gives you an extra option if you're not quite sure if you've got the right kind of top end balance, for example. They're very good for that, though, having said that, the Focals have got great top end, because they use these Beryllium tweeters that go up to 40kHz – not that you can hear that, but it does make a difference, because all those harmonics that are up there kind of interact with lower frequencies, so you can hear the effect."

Simon Says

So why the need for Hub II's dual-rig set-up? Let us return to Gogerly's website: "Simon says, 'Pro Tools is great for mixing. It's the ultimate multi-track tape machine! The audio editing is superb, the sync options are great, and it's pretty solid; I need to know that I can rely on it during a mix. Logic's a different kind of animal – the perfect tool for production. The MIDI editing is comprehensive, it's intuitive; you can configure it your own way, and it's packed with highly usable instruments and plugs. I'd say that Pro Tools is for engineers and Logic's for producers; I do both, so I use both!'"

So there you have it. Hub II might not be in a barn, but its proximity to a very nice one could come in handy: "I specifically came up here, thinking, 'If I can find something near to High Barn then that could be quite advantageous, because the one thing I'm not going to have room to do is any large-scale recording.' 95% of the time I'm

mixing, but there's always going to be those occasions where you might need to record drums or some strings, or whatever. I've built a small booth here for doing vocals and guitars, but for anything bigger, I thought, 'Well, I can go over there, take some work in for them, and the upshot of it is that they've got their bands and label, so I may be able to do a bit of mixing for them.'"

For Gogerly, the key to a mix is "...knowing what you're listening to, and if you're in a space that you know really well then it's one thing that's constant – the most important thing, really, because what you're hearing is going to colour how you mix something, irrespective of equipment."

It's About Time

Equipment (and practicalities) apart, Hub II also affords Gogerly an opportunity to explore other mixing opportunities close to his heart (and home); here's a thoughtful individual dedicated to performing a delicate balancing act of mixing with his ears and thinking with his head. "As well as doing my regular mix work and keeping the place running, the rest of the time – if there is any – can be spent using this place to do development work for some of those projects that I've come across or bands that I've met – to try and bring some of those people's careers along by just getting involved at the grassroots level."

Demand though will surely dictate that London still comes calling for Gogerly's proven skills on those luxurious bigger boards? "I'll still be going and working in some of the bigger studios in London, because not everybody that I work with is going to want to come and camp out in Essex for a couple of weeks while we mix their album."

The future is far from set in stone, however, and could well end up being a less luxurious place for high-profile artists and mixers alike. With Hub II, Gogerly can comfortably accommodate a changing clientele; donning his thinking cap, he concludes, "I think the music business is changing quite a lot; with the whole download situation and CD sales coming down, there's going to be quite a lot of changes in the way that it's run. I think there's going to be a lot more Internet-only releases – people releasing things on a more staggered basis; consequently, I think there's going to be a lot more situations where you're going to be working on stuff one song at a time, rather than mixing whole albums. I think having a more stripped-down studio that I can run in my own way is going to help with those kinds of projects where there are smaller budgets, because I can take something like that on for a fixed amount, then I can spend as long as I need without worrying, 'I've got to mix this in one day at that particular studio.' I can do it here over the course of however long is necessary."

And that's got to be a good thing for all concerned. **T&E**

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