

TAPE OP

The Creative Music Recording Magazine

ELLIOT MAZER

Neil Young, Linda Ronstadt, Janis Joplin

TWO FROM GLASGOW:

TONY DOOGAN

Belle & Sebastian, Mogwai, Teenage Fanclub

PAUL SAVAGE

The Delgados, Franz Ferdinand and Chem 19

TIM SPENCER

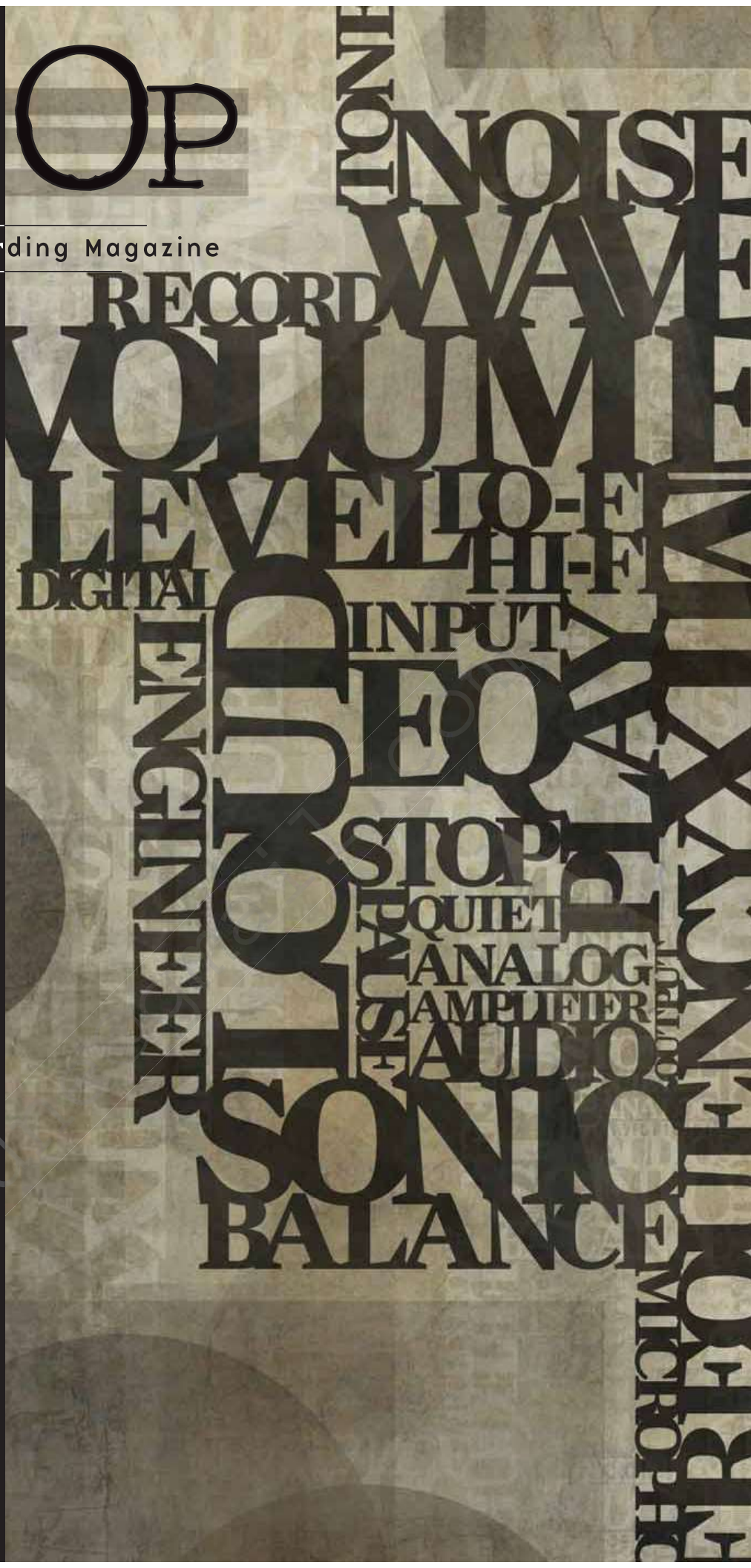
In Behind The Gear

GEAR REVIEWS

CD REVIEWS

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LIKE LEONARDO DA VINCI, a person whom he has spent years researching as a personal passion, Elliot Mazer himself is also truly a Renaissance Man. With a career in music production and audio technology spanning four decades, Mr. Mazer has tried his hand — and succeeded — at just about all facets of the music industry. From retail salesperson, to A&R, to producer, to engineer, to studio owner and manager, to studio and room designer, to sound equipment designer and consultant, to record label exec, to audio technology developer, to surround remixer — Mr. Mazer's has been a career which elicits the question, "What have you NOT done?" Oh, and lest I forget, along the way he has recorded iconic albums for the likes of Linda Ronstadt, Janis Joplin and of course, Neil Young. I sat down with Elliot at the end of last year in his new Red Room mixing suite at Steve Rosenthal's Magic Shop Studios in New York City [issue #66]. While photographer Brian T. did his thing, Mr. Mazer shared with me a career-spanning montage of memories, opinions and a lot of smiles. And why not? When you advise Pete Townshend on the surround mix of *Tommy* or you have an appointment scheduled for later that day to chat on the phone with Neil Young about emerging technology, what's not to be happy about?

One of your earliest jobs was working for Bob Weinstock at Prestige Records. I know you visited various studios back then, including Rudy Van Gelder's place in Englewood, NJ.

Rudy Van Gelder was the first engineer I had the privilege of watching in a studio. He was amazing and the sounds he put on tape were beautiful. I worked with Frank Latico, Fred Catero, Larry Keyes, Don Pulluse and others at Columbia. Bob Fine and George Prins at Fine Recording were amazing too - same with Bob Auger in London. All of these people knew their studios and knew how to get great sounds. The guys in Nashville were terrific too. They were brilliant at getting basic guitar and rhythm section sounds. There was a lot of stuff that they were doing that was very foreign to what I had grown to like in New York and London. In the early days, Nashville, Philadelphia and Detroit recordings often had a tremendous amount of compression and massive amounts of echo. Sometimes the levels on tape were either too low or too high - I love distinctive records and am not worried about how other people make records. I started engineering my own records at Cinderella Sound in Madison, Tennessee, partly because Wayne Moss, who owned the studio, was playing guitar on those records. In other studios it was easier for me to move a mic or change something on the console than to explain it to the engineer on the session. I do not want the process to get in the way of the music. That is a big part of my producing effort. New York players worked three-hour sessions, but they were jazz and classical players playing pop and rock. It was so easy for them to do

that. In Nashville, many were country players doing folk rock or rock. Often it was a stretch. We cut a famous Beatles tune and one of the soloists told me after the take that he had never heard the Beatles' version. On the other hand, the Nashville players loved learning new stuff. Some of them came from an R&B background. Kenny Buttery, Charlie McCoy, Wayne Moss, Mac Gayden, David Briggs and Norbert Putnam all had played R&B and rock. Charlie McCoy and the Escorts were an amazing rock/R&B band. I spent most of my time in the studio - *not in the control room*. I do not like being in the control room during recording sessions. I like being with the band. It gives me a sense of who they are, a sense of what they need in order to get a great performance.

From an artistic and musical standpoint as opposed to a technological standpoint?

There's a sign over Neil Young's studio that says, "Be great or be gone." I think Tim Mulligan put that up years ago. Tim's been with Neil for many, many years doing wonderful work for him. Getting a great take of a cool song is most important. But my goal is to record as much stuff as possible live in the studio. We often fix and replace stuff, but to me one has to capture the essence of the song in the best way possible. The easiest way of doing this is to make the original session as complete sounding as possible. Neil Young records everything live in the studio. If the engineer distorts his voice and the take is great otherwise, the song could be released with the distorted voice. People like "serial recording," and there are wonderful records made that way as well. For me, rule number one is that there are no rules.

Was Cinderella Sound your first session in Nashville?

I had done a record in Nashville in '63 at the Quonset Hut [Columbia Studio A, originally owned by Owen and Harold Bradley]. I was helping produce Trio Los Panchos for Columbia. That is where I first met the Nashville guys. I worked with the "A-Team" at that time. A lot of my evolution to engineering happened at Cinderella Sound. I produced Linda Ronstadt, Jake Holmes, Ken Lauber and we did Area Code 615 there. Wayne Moss, a phenomenal guitar picker, built Cinderella Sound, which was a two car garage in Madison, Tennessee - right around the corner from Colonel Parker's house [Elvis' Manager]. Cinderella came equipped with an Aunt Lucy, who made great iced tea and food. That was my second introduction to Bill Putnam's [Universal Audio] gear which I still use today. The 610 mic preamps have been on almost every record that I've ever done - as mic preamps and to color mixes. Wayne had a 12x3 Bill Putnam console feeding an 8-track. The control room was about the size of a couch with tiny speakers, and the rest of the garage was the "live room." Wayne and Kenny Buttery built the drum area. I don't know what kind of mics they used on the drums, but the sound was amazing!

Quadrasonic Studios, from what I read, was a two-story Victorian house.

My partners bought the house for a small amount of money and then gutted it. The ceiling was the regular ceiling. The control room was the old porch. The living room and the dining room became the two live rooms, and the kitchen became a drum area.

Sometimes old houses are wonderful-sounding just the way they are.

It was magical. I don't recall when the house that became Quadrasonic Sound Studios was built, but it was in the early 1900s. We used a carpenter who had worked with Owen Bradley and had built the Quonset Hut and Bradley's Barn. The drum area at Bradley's Barn was like a gazebo in the middle of the studio with a little roof on top of it - it was a fantastic sounding studio. The Who worked there. Pete's amps were so loud that they had to put him outside. Quadrasonic had a similar drum area - we were lucky to have had such an experienced carpenter build our studio. Troy Seals, an amazing singer/writer, helped to build Quad as well.

You've been very fortunate to have produced and engineered some true rock legends.

Producing is mostly about knowing what you want to achieve and being able to achieve it. The good news is that it takes no technical skill or experience to produce a hit record. With a vision, a song and the musicians, one can find an engineer who can do the technical stuff. I too learn from magazines like *Tape Op* and from listening to recorded and live music, but when it comes to making a record I try to find the best engineer for the project.

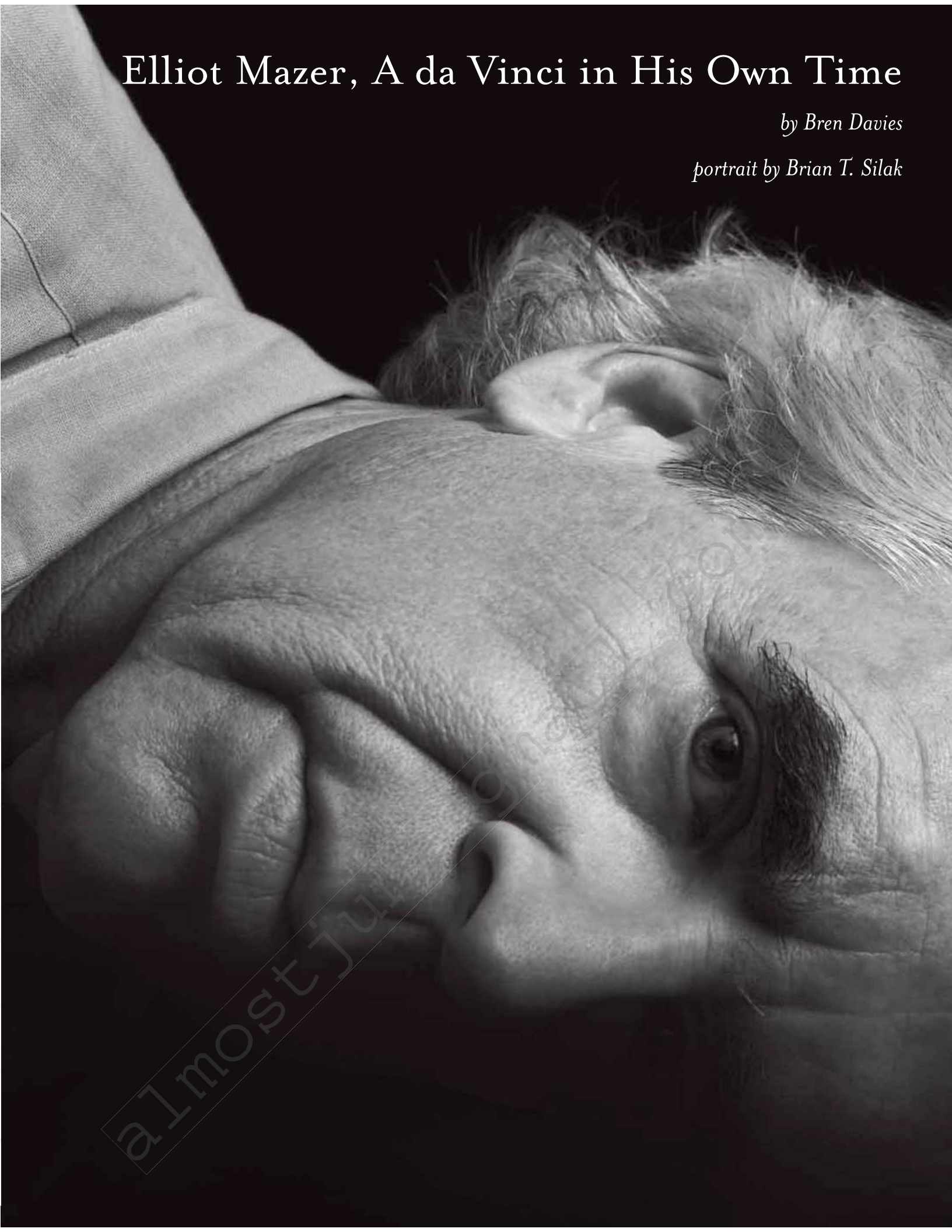
Tell me more about your work with Neil Young.

It's incredibly thrilling to work with someone like Neil Young. He and I have been friends since 1971. I have a call with him scheduled for later today to talk about Blue-Ray. Neil's developed a platform for his archive called "The Shaky Platform". It affords him something he's always wanted - to give the consumer the ability to look at his archive in a linear way and click chronologically to hear great versions of songs - hear how "Down By the River" sounded in 1967, or hear how it sounded in 1974 or hear how it sounded when he played it with Booker T. & the MGs in 1981. Neil and I love technology and history, so we're always thinking about these kinds of things. What's interesting about my relationship with Neil is not how I see it or how Neil sees it, but how the outside world sees it. I don't control that, of course. I used to say I had five names - "Elliot Neil Young's Producer/ Mazer" - which was incredibly flattering, but also limiting. I have a whole world of other stuff that I'm interested in and love doing, and Neil's made many wonderful

Elliot Mazer, A da Vinci in His Own Time

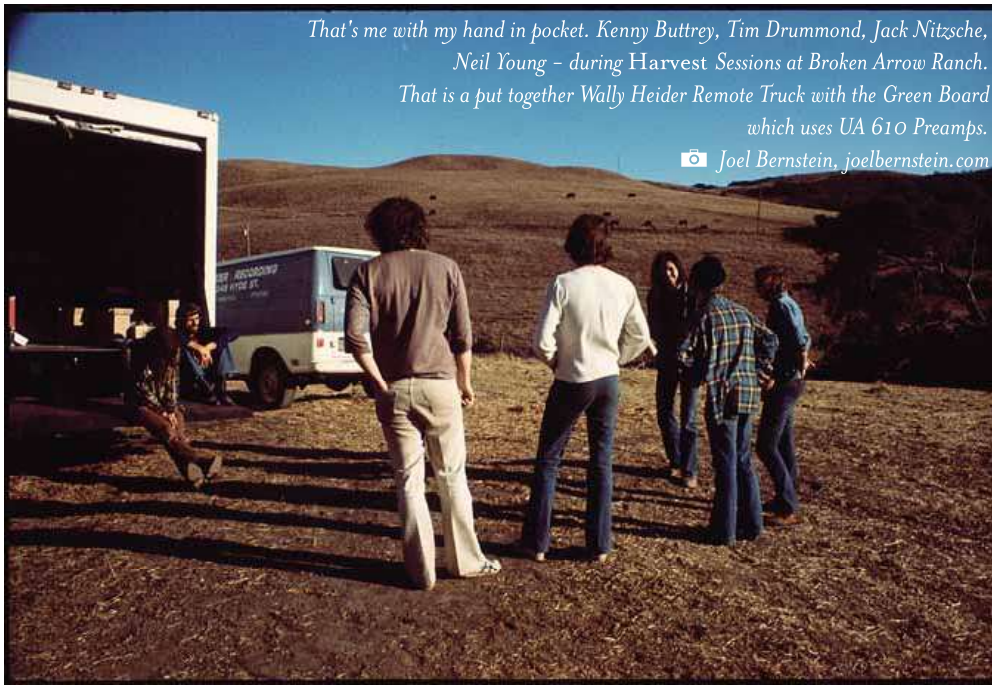
by Bren Davies

portrait by Brian T. Silak



That's me with my hand in pocket. Kenny Buttrey, Tim Drummond, Jack Nitzsche, Neil Young – during Harvest Sessions at Broken Arrow Ranch. That is a put together Wally Heider Remote Truck with the Green Board which uses UA 610 Preamps.

 Joel Bernstein, joelbernstein.com



records with other people. If you go to England, there's a lot of other stuff that people there know me for, more than they know my work with Neil. They love the Janis Joplin work I did. I still work on her catalog.

In the early '70s you did a bunch of freelancing in the U.K.

I like England because of the unique way things sound over there. Studios are different. Engineers are different. Eventually it all melded and created what I don't like, which is "McRecord" - but back then you'd go into a studio in London and they would use different mics and different techniques. They sounded like British records. If you were working on a record over there and here, you'd have to tweak it a little bit to make the finished product sound cohesive. In America people were used to placing mics in the right place, but at British studios they had a lot of the same mics and if they didn't sound right they just put a tremendous amount of EQ on the track - which is one of the reasons that Trident EQs or Neve EQs always had plus or minus fifteen dB. American EQs had plus or minus eight. That's why SSL consoles became so popular. They had many, many channels of EQ. It was more of a non-literal way of making records in Britain - at least then. In a lot of British studios you would see about 25 U67s and maybe one Shure mic or one Beyerdynamic. If you listen to an Elton John album, it's a really wonderful sounding record, but it's not a literal recording of his voice and piano. It's highly processed stuff, and it sounds amazing! Beatles records - the same thing.

I read that Harvest had no compression of any kind?

That is correct - no compression on the original recordings or in the mix. At least one of the songs on Harvest is from a live 2-track we ran during the sessions.

It sounds very real. It's not processed or changed in any way.

It's an in-your-face kind of recording. It's honest and it doesn't hide behind anything. And it creates a sonic mood. The incredible dynamics of that band with Kenny Buttrey were absolute magic. Kenny was a very

talented drummer and a wonderful person - he passed away a few years ago. He defined a lot of how I think about music and how I think about drums and rhythm sections. He played on a huge number of my records and we were friends for years. His playing with Neil is amazing. Neil was very specific about what he wanted. When Neil Young plays a song, his body language dictates everything about the arrangement. Neil sat in the control room of Quadrafonic and played "Heart of Gold". Kenny and I looked at each other, and we both knew it was a number one record. He and I talked about it years ago. We heard the song and all we had to do was move Neil into the studio and get the band out there, start the machine and make it sound good. It was incredible! At one point on another song, Neil said to Kenny that his hi-hat was too busy, so Kenny said, "Fine. I'll sit on my right hand." He played the whole take sitting on his right hand.

From Quad you moved to San Francisco and opened a studio called His Master's Wheels.

Neil gave me that name. The His Master's Wheels truck landed at Neil's ranch years ago. It houses Neil's tape restoration system, which is engineered by John Nowland, who worked for HMW as well. The San Francisco studio was in Pacific High Studios. The Dead had worked there and Alembic's guitar store was in front. The live room was 50 feet wide by 38 feet deep. The ceiling was 14 to 16 feet. The acoustics were amazing! We had skylights in the studio. Crosby and Nash recorded their "[To the Last]Whale" song there, but had trouble with low frequency noise from a train track a half mile away. We did a lot of great records there with CSNY, The Grateful Dead, The Tubes, Frankie Miller and Sheryl Milnes.

You also became involved around that time in The Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA), where they developed the technologies that led to Sonic Solutions, FM Synthesis and the Yamaha DX7.

That experience tremendously changed my understanding of technology. There's a guy there named Max Matthews who, when he was at Princeton, figured out the use of the Nyquist formula for digital audio.

You also were also instrumental in developing a technology called AirCheck.

My first attempt at making a label was in the early '80s. I had a distribution deal with Columbia and I was sitting in an office one day in New York when I heard an argument between a guy and a label person on the phone. They were saying, "Your song wasn't on the radio and therefore we shouldn't ship any records to St. Louis (or wherever it was)." He hung up and I said, "You mean nobody knows what's on the radio?" He said, "No." I said, "You're kidding. All this money is spent and all these marketing efforts are put out and nobody knows if there's any demand?" He said, "No." I developed a system called AirCheck with some friends. We sold it to a company in New York called RCS that I was also part of for many years. Clear Channel now owns it. That technology is still in use. It monitors radio and television using a sonic signature - fingerprint technology.

In the mid-eighties you were an audio consultant for Apple Computer. What did you do there?

Here's a funny story. They said they had a problem because the audio coming out of the Macs themselves was terrible - you know, just the speaker. I went to Ed Long, a speaker designer who did all the time align stuff, and we looked at the situation and figured out what it would cost them to make the best sound, considering the size of the available space and what Apple could build amplifier- and speaker-wise. They asked me for my presentation, so I stood up and faced the wall. I said quietly, "Put the speaker in the front of the computer." Nobody heard me. I said it again. Finally, the VP of engineering stood up and turned around and said, "The son of a bitch said, 'Put the speaker in the front of the computer!'" Dave Nagel, who was then the senior tech guy at Apple said, "What does that mean?" I said, "Well, if the speaker is facing the ear, the intelligibility will be a lot better. The speaker will be away from the fan and the power supply - less noise." Half the people were thrilled and half of the people were pissed off. The next question was, "Where to put the microphone?" I said, "That's simple. Put it on the mouse." That would be the closest thing to the mouth, and if the person wanted it to sound better they could just lift up the mouse. The first Mac with the speaker in the front was the Macintosh IIfx. But they didn't go for the mic on the mouse.

You moved on from being a studio owner at some point?

I know what happened. About four years after we started His Master's Wheels, I enjoyed the studio, but it was too much business responsibility for me. I didn't like that I was spending a lot of time taking care of business. I liked that bands such as The Tubes and The Grateful Dead would book the studio for six or eight months at a time, and I'd be off making my records in London or somewhere else.

Double the bang for your buck!

Yeah, and at that point I felt that the most important thing I did as a professional was to produce records. Having studios was a means to that end - not an end in and of itself. Around that time I was involved with the Bay Area Music Archives, and I was on various committees and groups. I was also involved with the film industry - I had a lot of friends at Lucasfilm and Dolby. I also watched Silicon Valley invent itself and grow up. Friends from CCRMA became very successful in business, while I had completely let that go by - which is fine, because I still don't necessarily see myself sitting in a high rise building in Santa Clara running a technology company. What happened was I had a chance to think about things. I decided I was going to do other things in addition to making records.

You made a conscious decision to branch out.

Yeah. The '80s was a weird time for the music business - not as weird as it is now, but there was the major push of the CD as a new technology, which meant rehashing and putting out reissues of mediocre versions of great records that didn't sound as good as the originals.

Does the audiophile still exist today, or is this a dying breed?

The audiophile breed is disappearing. They mostly don't listen to music anyway - they listen to *sound*. There are a few record labels that specialize in that market. They produce "high fidelity" recordings of music that sells equipment.

What is the correlation between recording quality and listener enjoyment?

Any improvement in the original recording process is obvious - even on that little twenty-dollar Samsung phone that you hear on the subway. I think that the better you make your recording, the better you are. The recording medium itself - be it a computer hard drive, be it a piece of tape - shouldn't influence the way the thing sounds. The message is the message, not the medium. It's my job to create media using whatever tools I have that will translate down to the lowest common listening experience and still be cool.

That's well put.

I'm happy that I will never, ever have to record onto another analog multitrack tape again. They are not neutral and have a flavor and change their character. Magnetic tape deteriorates with time and use and the top end goes away. There are all kinds of problems. The speed by which you can record, mix and process is much slower with analog. It's the same with film vs. digital photography. You take some pictures. You take the roll out of the camera, mark what the roll is, send it to a lab, have a lab send it back, look at the negatives and make prints. There's a built-in delay due to the technology of the process itself. It's much more immediate with something like Pro Tools or Logic. It's possible in our world, as it is in the world of photography, to make bigger files, which will look and sound better - and to make bigger files using a better analog/digital converter or a better lens or whatever. I see great similarities between those worlds. I think

convenience trumps quality, which is why the iPod is such a huge success. iTunes software is very helpful to me. It's helpful if I'm doing files at 24/96 or AAC files at 128 kbps. The software doesn't care. The organization tools are really nice and Apple does a nice job supporting that software and those devices. I love big files and high sample rates and all that, but I have a lot of iPods for various projects that I am working on. The big files don't go on the iPod, obviously. The iPod will only play 44.1 or lower, but my computers at home have really good converters and are going into really good-sounding systems. So I use the technology of the iPod as a tool to organize my audio. Most of what I do today is at 24/96. I use the Universal Audio 2192 converters - they're the best converters. I use a lot of tube preamps and tube processing on the input and the output to create the color that I prefer, and I'm happy with the results. It makes it possible to make records quicker. It makes it possible to have a studio like this, where the amount of time I spend mixing a record could be hundreds of hours. With an analog record, hundreds of hours of tape would deteriorate - and you would need people to clean and align the machine everyday. There's a big difference in workflow with digital. That's why the \$500 Logic package is a great thing. I have a little system at home using Logic 8 and an inexpensive FireWire audio interface. It's wonderful. The musician or the wannabe producer or engineer who goes down to Guitar Center and buys Logic for \$500 and buys a computer for a thousand dollars can learn a lot! The M-Audio Pro Tools systems are also great. I have one of those as well - the ProjectMix I/O. I can prep sessions and consolidate and do editing at home before I come down here. I'm thrilled with the technology and the companies that help us by making such wonderful technology available. My favorite mixing system today is a portable computer with Logic 8 and a Universal Audio UAD-2 laptop card [UAD-Xpander] that slips into the Express Port on my MacBook. I'm mixing a project with 30 tracks at 24/192 on a plane! I get to use the same processors I have been using for years - Neve, Pultec, Roland, EMT, Universal. This is amazing! I'm also considering getting a Lexicon PCM 96, which is a reverberator that would give me more options. For many years, I used a [Lexicon] 224 on all my records. That box is bigger than my entire portable system.

You've also spoken about the downside of digital.

I read many of the magazines - *Tape Op*, *Sound on Sound*, *Remix*, etc. Often you see an article - so and so has made a record, and the producer/engineer guy shows a Pro Tools session with hundreds and hundreds of tracks. It's pages and pages of tracks and he talks about going in and out of Pro Tools because he always uses this or that or whatever. You hear the record and you go, "This is a cool song and all, but where is all that technology? What am I *hearing*? Why did it take all that stuff to do *this*? It sounds like the thing was recorded on a cassette machine to begin with - so what difference did all that technology make?!" To answer your question, I think what happens is people



Me and Joan Baez in Control Room at Quad, recording voice for *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down* (Joan Baez sleeping on floor). 📷 Marshall Falwell

feel they have to do all that stuff because the original recording doesn't capture all the harmonics that they want to hear - because of bad conversion, bad microphone choice, bad mic preamps or because they read in a magazine that everybody uses a Waves EQ and a Waves compressor or the Jack Joseph Puig plugins set "this way" to get the guitar sound. They do that and they wind up with a little, tiny sound and they say, "Well that doesn't help the song, so let's do another one and another one." My fantasy is that a lot of this could be solved with one high-end A/D converter - if they have recorded the guitar properly and nicely, of course. They could have one or two guitars and they could use less technology. They would get a lot more with a lot less.

Less technology, but better quality components in the signal chain.

If you go into the normal Pro Tools converters that come in those HD boxes just once, you get an okay sound and you can work from there. But if you go out of that into your favorite Pultec or your favorite pedal and then you go back in, you've killed your sound. You kill your sound just by going in and out of the thing without a good converter. It is no better than making an analog tape copy. Any time you go in and out of Pro Tools through either the Digidesign or the Apogee converters, you're losing a lot of sound. Whatever you think you make up by using your favorite equalizer or compressor or stomp box or whatever, you actually *lose* - because the conversion process is killing your sound. Good clocking is extremely important. I see people not doing that. Take my M-Audio ProjectMix I/O that I have at home. I can play a file on it using the internal clock, and then I can clock the same file off a UA converter, which has a very good clock. The difference is huge in the way the thing sounds! There is a lot of digital audio technology that people don't



understand. They're not told that by the salesman at their local music store. That salesman is not apt to tell the guy who just bought a \$10,000 Pro Tools system that it would sound much better with another \$3000 worth of converters.

You've said that your number one rule is that there are no rules. Do you think that maybe there should be at least a few "guidelines" that people should be encouraged to follow?

Growing up hearing live symphony orchestras, live opera, actual musicians and instruments moving the air - these things shaped the way that I listen. I've listened to a lot of jazz. I've been to a lot of rock clubs and a lot of festivals all around the world. I'm tremendously excited about live music. I'm a producer who likes to make live-sounding records that sound clear and vibrant and real. People don't hire me to make non-literal sounding records. I'm not saying I necessarily want to record an artist in a club in front of people, but I want the effect when the listener hears it to be that they feel like they're actually there. I don't have a clue how any artist I've ever worked with actually hears when they listen. I'm working with a band now and I'll play stuff back and ask them what they think, and someone will say, "I like the cymbal hit on the second measure of the second verse." I'll say, "I was kind of curious to hear what you felt about the overall vibe of the song - or the vocal, or the edits that I did." It always amuses me.

When and how did your interest in surround mixing start?

Same two words that have started a lot of things in my life - Neil Young. Neil called up and said, "We want to do a new mix of *Harvest*." I said, "Are you out of your mind? You're going to take a record that everybody knows and you're going to do a new version of it?!" I hadn't heard of DVD-Audio at the time, so Neil explained to me what it was. He made a copy of the

analog 16-track masters of *Harvest*. We put it up in his studio through his big Neve console and started mixing, trying to figure it out. We used clones of the tapes so that we wouldn't wear out the originals. Once we finally got a mix automated, we put up the master and worked with that. We spent a lot of time trying to learn that mix. What it came down to was immersion - putting the listener in the room, in the studio with the band. The positioning of the instruments in the surround mix is just as it was in the studio during the original tracking sessions. If you listen in the center of the room, which is where Neil was, the positioning of everyone is around you.

So the surround mix of *Harvest* is Neil Young's personal perspective while he was recording that album?

Yeah, that's exactly it. It took a lot of technology because we had to recreate ambience - we had to recreate a room. It was a huge effort. It took a tremendous amount of technology to do that - aside from trying to make mixes and going back all those years.

Does creating a surround remix of an album as iconic as *Harvest* foster a set of expectations that you feel you have to live up to, or perhaps even exceed?

Most of the records I've remixed were iconic records. You're saying to a consumer that they're going to hear this song basically the way it's always sounded, but hear it surrounding them in the room. It takes a lot of tricks to do that. The surround remix of *The Last Waltz*, which I did not do, was built on my concept of creating an audio stage that was pretty deep and putting the listener in maybe row five, center. I showed Dan Gellert that idea, and Robbie Robertson loved it. They built a template for that and they spent a huge amount of time doing it. It took a year and a half to do the surround mix.

I know that Steve Rosenthal derives a lot of personal fulfillment from doing stereo and surround remixing. Do you find that remixing classic albums fulfills you in a different way than producing new music?

It's a totally stressful thing that I don't really enjoy.

Remixing?

Remixing other people's records has been interesting. I did a bunch of Santana records and some Sinatra stuff and an amazing Switchfoot album. That was thrilling, because it was music I really liked. Remixing my own stuff from years ago was stressful as all hell, because I felt a special responsibility to myself - producer/mixer becomes producer/remixer.

What was it like working with Pete Townsend on the surround mix of *Tommy*?

It was very similar. Pete loved the *Harvest* DVD-A. I gave Pete some of my ideas - I was over at his Oceanic Studios. He built a Pro Tools system with good converters and everything at 192. They transferred all of *Tommy* from the original 8-track masters.

I didn't realize it was 8-track. That's crazy!

Oh yeah. There would be ten different things on each track - tambourine here, Moon yelling here, a horn there. They had done a live mix for the 2-track master - nothing was automated. But in Pro Tools, eight tracks become thirty tracks, once you separate everything. I showed Pete some ideas, but Pete did the entire mix himself. He's quite a capable recordist. Have you heard his demos?

I have the demos from *Who's Next*. They're as good as the album!

Yeah - that's him at home playing every instrument and recording it. There are bonus tracks of demos on the DVD-A of *Tommy* - stereo mixes.

I found your website for Reid Productions, which is devoted to work that you and your wife do together.

Diana Haig, my wife, has phenomenal audio recall. You can play her a new mix of an old record and she'll say, "It doesn't sound the same because..." - and then she'll articulate why and she'll sit down and fix it! She's also a phenomenal editor. There's a song we have out now with a band I'm working with called Moonalice. The full version was seventeen minutes long - all live in the studio. We needed an eight-minute version for Clear Channel. I just sent her the file. She was at our North Carolina home at the time. Everybody in the band thought it would be impossible, because the song sped up and slowed down in different sections. She sent back an eight-minute version and people were astounded!

Let's talk a bit about The Red Room - where we are right now - and your collaboration with Steve Rosenthal in putting this room together. It is a digital surround mixing suite for sound and video.

Steve and I have been friends for years. I had used Magic Shop previously for the transfers of *Sinatra at the Sands*, which we did next door in the Blue Room with all of that fabulous vintage analog gear. He had the space back here, and it just seemed logical. Some of my gear is from Rooms 309 and 311 at Sony's former studio on West 54th Street, where I used to work a lot. Steve and I built this room - it's a great sounding room. We mixed the film, *Chelsea on the Rocks*, here. I did a big music mix on that and it turned out great and translated nicely into the theater and into the mix room. I have mixed a few of my albums here too. A bunch of student films were also mixed here and a bunch of low budget indie films. We'll be doing more of that stuff soon.

What do you think have been your greatest production or engineering achievements to date?

I don't know how to answer that because I always think that the thing I'm working on now is the best thing I've ever done.

What are you working on right now?

That band Moonalice - a West Coast band. A [self-titled] album came out in early 2009 that T Bone Burnett produced. I'm doing another album and there will be a big difference between the two records. The T Bone

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album will sound like a T Bone album and my album will sound more like what I do. It's a wonderful band. The people are good and I get to work with [guitarist] G.E. Smith, who is a member of that band. I just finished another project with an amazing singer, Loni Rose. We cut it in a cool studio in Seattle called Elliott Bay Recording Company. Scott Ross is the engineer there and he is terrific. We mixed it in The Red Room. I'm also working with a band from England, The Whybirds - recording in England and mixing on my portable Logic system.

What do you think has been your greatest career achievement to date?

I don't know how to answer that. I'm doing a lot of work to try to help invent "the music business 3.0" - whatever that will be. I really believe that the connection between music and fans isn't broken. We don't need to fix that! Steve Rosenthal has a live venue called The Living Room. We go over there and see people having a great time listening to live music. There's got to be a way to monetize that, to make it work with a new model of the industry. I spend a lot of time thinking about that, and working with some very smart people who agree. The formal record companies don't have a clue how to fix what's going wrong in the industry. The most obvious way to fix the music business is to make the connection between the fan and the artist as direct as possible.

What is the wackiest studio moment, or perhaps the biggest goof or snafu on a session that you're allowed to talk about?

A lot of crazy stuff has happened. I was working with a British band in San Francisco and the song required that after the first verse, the guitarist would walk over and play the organ or something like that. In the first take the guy put his guitar down and then tripped over the earphones of the bass player, who fell down and hit somebody else, and then they started screaming at each other - there was a fistfight in the studio! I have that on tape somewhere.

Any final thoughts?

There's a lot of room to simplify.

Simplify the recording process?

My joke is that with this band Moonalice, I'm recording the drums with two mics. Engineers hear the drum sound and they say, "Wow - what mic setup did you use?" I say I used an M49 up there and a bass drum mic. I don't really remember what kind of bass drum mic. People get annoyed when you don't know what kind of mic you used. The point is that I remember that the bass drum didn't sound right in the room. We spent hours tuning it and changing the pillow and moving this and moving that around until it sounded right. I spent a lot more time trying to get the bass drum to sound right in the studio than I did in the control room.

That's a great approach compared to throwing eighteen processors on to make it sound good.

It doesn't matter that you could go and make it sound non-literal and run it through Drumagog or Sound Replacer and use the Aerosmith snare instead of the one that you recorded. I do stuff like that all the time. But I start with a really good, emotionally fulfilling and dynamic recording of something that feels like music. Then it's a lot easier to craft your sound.

Most people wouldn't think in terms of something sounding "literal" or something sounding "real". They would just think in terms of something sounding "cool".

That's fine too. ☺

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