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JOEL PLASKETT Talks Music & Musicianship

Where The Music Begins.

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GUITARS

Clarence "Leo" Fender

THE LIFE OF A LEGEND

Seldom can a global cultural shift be attributed to a single individual, but such is the case with Leo Fender.

Clarence Leonidas "Leo" Fender, born Aug. 10, 1909, in a barn on his parents' ranch straddling the border between Fullerton and Anaheim, California, founded the Fender Electric Instrument Company in 1946 in Fullerton. By 1950 he was leading what has become the most potent creative surge in the history of electrical instrument design and manufacturing.

Among his many monumental accomplishments, he designed the first commercially successful solid-body guitar, the Telecaster; invented the solid body electric bass guitar, which transformed popular music; and introduced the most influential of all electric guitars—the Stratocaster. His amplifiers set the gold standard for tone and reliability against which virtually all amps are still judged more than half a century later.

Leo Fender's ideas have had an incalculable effect on popular music of all styles and on the much broader fabric of popular culture. His instruments and amplifiers helped change the way musicians work with their tools, facilitated new sounds and techniques, and helped revolutionize the way the entire industry designs and builds instruments. Most significantly, they helped ignite entirely new and tremendously exciting styles of music. More than fine musical instruments, Fender guitars and amps are powerful cultural icons recognized in every corner of the world.

Leo's enormous effect on popular music worldwide leads, in fact, to the realization that music simply would not sound the way it does today without his inventions. As elegantly enduring and revered design classics, the Telecaster, Stratocaster, Precision Bass and Jazz Bass guitars transformed the way that music was performed, recorded and perceived by the entire world such that their very existence fueled not only musical revolutions, but also cultural revolutions.

Ironically, the shy, somewhat introverted inventor wasn't a guitar player. But Leo Fender was hard working, driven, creative, tenacious, methodical and meticulous, with a talent for electronics, research and development, problem solving, product design and manufacturing. He was a perfectionist. He was destined to make something; it happened to turn out to be electric guitars, basses and amps. His first steel guitars and amplifiers started appearing in 1945, and his first solid-body electric guitars appeared in 1950.

Notably, the innovative Fender Telecaster, Stratocaster and Precision Bass guitars predated the form for which they are most famous—rock 'n' roll—by several years. Leo Fender was building and selling first amps and then guitars for a decade by the time rock 'n' roll artists discovered that these instruments could do much more than their creators could have envisioned.

So Fender was already there when rock 'n' roll came along, and what a ride the world was in for. Remarkably, and in great testament to their original essential rightness, Leo Fender's instruments have now existed largely unchanged for more than half a century, yet time and time again exciting new life is found in them and comes from them thanks to the boundless creativity of all those who pick them up and play them.

In view of his phenomenal accomplishments, it's tempting to mythologize Leo Fender as being somehow more towering than in real life, in which he was in fact exceedingly modest. August 10, 2009, marks his 100th birthday, and were he here to celebrate it, Leo would undoubtedly dismiss any fuss in favour of getting back to work in his shop. The company that still bears his name, the Fender Musical Instruments Corporation, is 63 years old at the time of his centenary birthday. Leo himself helmed it for about a third of that span—during the first of more than one golden age—but he continues to loom large over the company, the industry and worldwide pop culture in general.

The music he powered continues into a very bright future. Somewhere, right now, Eric Clapton is getting ready for a show. Somewhere, right now, someone is listening to The Dark Side of the Moon. Somewhere, right now, a country band is rehearsing a Buck Owens cover for a gig at a honky tonk. Somewhere, right now, a musician is using a Precision Bass on a recording session for a TV commercial. Somewhere right now, a guitarist is using his Telecaster to give voice to the original tune in his head that could turn out to be a hit. And somewhere, right now, a kid is thrilled because he just got his first Stratocaster and is learning his first chord.

Thanks to Leo Fender, we'll all be hearing more from that kid in a few years.



Image courtesy of Fender Musical Instruments Corp.

Computer Recording for the Guitarist

For years, guitar players have felt left out of the world of computer-based recording. Past solutions have been tailored towards keyboard rather than guitar players and some even required engineering experience to understand the process. Thankfully computer-based solutions have become increasingly user-friendly and many are now geared towards guitar-based recording.

The first thing a guitar player needs to start computer-based recording is an audio interface or soundcard. Most computers today have a 1/8" stereo audio input and output which cannot handle a regular guitar cable. Additionally, the sound quality and performance of these soundcards is not good enough for decent recording applications.

It is advisable to purchase a better-performing soundcard for your computer before you attempt recording. There are many soundcards and audio interfaces on the market at many different price ranges, so you will need to do some research to find the one that will suit your needs.

Usually the price range of a soundcard reflects its sound quality, the number of inputs and outputs, the types of inputs and outputs (whether they are microphone inputs or just 1/4" inputs, for instance) and interface options such as built-in effects and keyboard access.

When doing research into soundcards, make sure to look for one with a dedicated guitar input – sometimes these are called Hi-Z inputs. This type of input will handle the correct impedance of your guitar so that you will never lose any of your tone. Also look for low recording latency – the time it takes for the sound to go into your computer and back out to where you are monitoring the sound. When recording into the computer you want the lowest possible latency. "ASIO" compliant audio interfaces have good low latency drivers and will make the recording process a lot less frustrating.

Once you have decided on an audio interface, it will be time to choose recording software. There are many recording software options. Again, you will need to do some research to determine your exact needs as software prices can range wildly too.



For instance, the recording needs of a singer-songwriter, a heavy metal band, or a guitar player are all very different. Pricing in the software is typically set by the features available in the package. Virtual effects, virtual instruments and more recording tracks all cost more.

Although there are many options and prices for recording software, almost any new package should easily do the trick for guitar recording. Software packages today can start for as little as \$150-\$200 and will actually be able to do a lot for the money spent. If you can't make a record with one of these packages, you probably won't be able to do it with a more expensive package either. It all boils down to features and options that you are specifically looking for.

A big selling point for a lot of software packages, especially for a guitar player, is the included virtual effects and instruments. Some packages will actually have software guitar amplifiers and guitar

pedals built into the application, so you can record right into your audio interface without the hassle of mic'ing an amp. Most people are quite surprised to discover how realistic the computer-generated tones are and how easy it is to swap out different pedals, amps and speakers. The included instruments can be just as powerful – things like virtual drummers, virtual pianos and synthesizer sounds are quite typical in computer recording packages. This is great news for guitar players who would like to compose whole songs even when they don't have access to a band or a full studio.

Guitar players today have a lot of options for computer-based audio recording, if you're aware of your needs and do a little research before you buy, it has never been easier to take a song idea on guitar to a completely finished arrangement. For more information on guitar recording solutions, ask your local Long and McQuade recording specialist.

Lyle Crilly is a former Long & McQuade employee who now works for Roland Canada as its PC Music Specialist, with a focus on Cakewalk and Edirol products.

by Lyle Crilly

Home-Recording FROM THE SONGWRITER'S PERSPECTIVE

Montreal based singer-songwriter Jess Hart describes her approach to home recording.

As a product of the eighties, I have always enjoyed the luxury of unlimited multi-track recording. My days of tape-to-tape overdubbing and four-track recording were short lived due to rapid changes in the industry. In this fast-paced technological environment, equipment is constantly changing, improving and being made obsolete. As a singer-songwriter, there are countless tools at your disposal to aid with the creative process. Here are some basic tips and tricks to get you up and running quickly with a project studio that can yield surprisingly professional results at an affordable rate.



Today anyone with a computer and headphones has access to a recording suite. Programs such as Ableton Live 8, Cubase and other digital audio workstations have made recording easily accessible and uncomplicated to learn. With a selection of built-in instruments, samples and a host of included plug-ins, you are all set-up out of the box to begin laying the groundwork for your compositions. Although features such as punch-ins and limitless takes may raise debate regarding the adverse effects of multi-track recording on musicianship, there is no doubt that it provides an invaluable tool for the songwriter, enabling experimentation with instrumentation, song structure and style. It now becomes

possible to get the sound you are looking for but may not have been able to actually obtain yourself in the past. Having a digital audio workstation or software that you are comfortable using is the stepping stone you will require to build your home-studio.

To get the best sound out of your system, you should start off with some quality mics and recording hardware. Although this can become quite costly, there are several ways to maximize your money. Choosing versatile microphones is essential, as they can then be used for multiple applications and functions. A large diaphragm condenser microphone can be used for vocals, instruments and even to record samples. Pairing two large diaphragm condensers will enable you to record drum overheads and piano while providing more options for different recording techniques. My go-to microphone is the Audio-Technica AT2035 from the 20 Series line of studio mics. At a reasonable price, I picked up two of these mics to record the bulk of guitar, drums and piano from my self-produced album. Audio-Technica also provides studio microphone packs which come complete with a pair of recording mics.

An important thing to note when dealing with the majority of condenser microphones is that they operate on 48 volt phantom power. This means that they will need to be run through a mic pre-amp with this feature if you want to get any sound out of them. If you are looking for a more economic option, you can pick up a USB mic which will plug directly into your computer, allowing you to bypass the need for any hardware. Another cost efficient alternative would be to patch a regular dynamic vocal mic through any little inexpensive mixer, which will enable you to put down your ideas and give you a little more control than your built in sound-card.

A good recording interface will make a world of difference to the quality you can achieve on your recordings. What you are recording will determine the type of interface you need, in terms of how many channels you will require. A two-channel interface would be ideal for a singer-songwriter with an acoustic/vocal set-up, whereas a metal band looking to record a full drum set-up may be better served with an 8 to 24 channel recording system. Generally, I would lean towards an 8 channel system as this is more conducive to recording drums and live-off-the floor recordings from jazz to rock and anything in between.

Whether you are simply looking to lay down your ideas or create multi-track studio sounding demos, this flexible and versatile recording set-up will certainly allow you to explore and develop your songwriting techniques.

Visit www.jesshart.com to listen to sample recordings.

by Jess Hart, Erikson Audio



by Christopher Ward

songwriting

“For me, one of the most important elements in lasting songs is the killer opening line...”

Anyone can write a song, make up a melody, knock out a few lyrics, rhyme ‘baby’ and ‘maybe’, right? But to make it original and compelling enough that people want to hear it and maybe even pay to have it on their iPods, well that’s another story.

Professional songwriters grapple with many challenges – like pleasing your co-writers, the artist, the publisher and the label long before the song gets out the door; but the first challenge is to please yourself. To come up with an idea that makes the hairs on your arm stand up must precede the adoring throng at the arena, lighters aloft, singing along.

So, where to find that flash of inspiration? Leonard Cohen says he’s like a starling flying over the dump looking for the shiny bits. Steven Spielberg drives the freeways of southern California looking for ideas, the theory being that by occupying his left brain fully in avoiding close encounters of the fender bender kind he frees up his right brain to dream up E.T. Paul Simon bounces a ball off the wall of the studio until “Me & Julio Down By The Schoolyard” emerges.

I think inspiration, like success, has many fathers. The trigger for the “big idea” can be opportunity, competition, boredom or lust. (“Oh, did you write that song for me?”, swooning. “Why, yes.”) Perhaps even more potent is the “uh oh” factor: deadline, desperation, and dollars.

So, now that we’ve solved the motivation issue, how to get down to the business of making something new? I start with a riff or a couple of chords and play them trance-like ‘til a melody arrives. Either that or start with some bit of lyric that’s in one of the notebooks I ALWAYS carry with me. You have to give yourself license to daydream and free associate, with only one rule: write it down! I interviewed Neil Young on songwriting for MuchMusic and in typical blunt fashion, his advice was “Use it or lose it.” I also believe you should tell the editor in your head to go for a walk. It’s too soon to critique anything you’re coming up with. Just scribble or jam into a tape recorder and make sense of it later. I love ritual: the treasured guitar, a favourite candle, the lucky underwear, whatever works.

For me, one of the most important elements in lasting songs is the killer opening line:

“It was the third of June another sleepy dusty delta day...” –
Ode To Billie Joe, Bobbie Gentry.

“I’ve got another confession to make...” –
Best Of You, Foo Fighters

“You’ve got a lot of nerve to say you are my friend...” –
Positively Fourth Street, Bob Dylan.

The Bobbie Gentry song was a model for me in writing *Black Velvet*. I wanted to evoke a sense of place and time to set up the song.

“Mississippi in the middle of a dry spell...”

It didn’t matter that I’d never experienced it. Songwriters should be good liars.

“As you may have guessed, I don’t buy into the theory that ‘the best songs are written in twenty minutes’.”

From here on, it’s hard work – experimenting and moving ideas around on the page and in the air until it feels right. There’s such a powerful element of chance involved that it’s worth not being easily satisfied. My favourite line in the song *Beautiful Goodbye*, co-written with David Tyson and recorded by Amanda Marshall is:

“And all the things we never said I can save for someone else”. It took me a while to figure out what I was talking about but now it makes perfect sense, at least to me. And speaking of work, I probably wrote a short novel’s worth of pages over a period of 3 months to get that song done. As you may have guessed, I don’t buy into the theory that “the best songs are written in twenty minutes.”

If there’s one single suggestion for developing songwriters, it’s this: Collaborate! Try to find someone who has complementary skills. If you’re a lyricist, find a melody writer; if you’re a guitarist, look for a piano player. That other person, if you trust them, will often respond to your ideas, taking the song in a whole different direction. Let it go there – try jamming the song in various keys, tempos and grooves until everyone agrees that genius has been achieved or more coffee is required. Too often young writers are afraid to expose their ideas to change. If you don’t like where it ends up, go back to where you started. Once, I had to rewrite a song that Hilary Duff was recording the next day. She was fifteen at the time and I had to make the lyric less sexy in a hurry. My question wasn’t “What, change my art?” but rather “When do you need it by?”

I work with artists frequently and as a getting acquainted technique before the writing begins, talking about what’s going on in their lives opens a lot of doors to themes for the song. The guiding principle is to make sure they think that all the good ideas were theirs.

Other than that, write all the time; don’t wait for inspiration to hit you. And get out into the community. Writers’ nights are great for meeting fellow creators and possibly finding a collaborator. By all means, join the Songwriters Association of Canada! Songwriting can be a lonely business, but there’s a lot to share and the SAC is a great place to do it. Do send your songs to publishers, managers and A&R people, but don’t expect miracles. Follow up and maintain your contacts – trust me that good things come from the least likely sources. If you don’t perform your own songs, try to find singers who do. I found one named Alannah Myles and seven years and many songs later I wrote *Black Velvet* for her.

“I love ritual: the treasured guitar, a favourite candle, the lucky underwear, whatever works.”

Finally, do it for love. Be professional, but follow your muse and trust that a great song will see the light of day.

Christopher Ward

Christopher Ward has written songs for Diana Ross, Hilary Duff, Wynonna Judd, The Backstreet Boys, Meredith Brooks, Tina Arena, Amanda Marshall, Peter Dinklage, Peter Cetera, Colin James, Roch Voisine and many others. His best-known song is the worldwide # 1 hit for Alannah Myles, “Black Velvet.” Previously, Ward was a member of the Second City Touring Company, based in Toronto. In 1984, as Canada’s first “VJ,” he helped launch MuchMusic, where he interviewed artists as diverse as Paul McCartney, Neil Young, Peter Gabriel and Tina Turner. In 2002, Ward was featured in Austin Powers – Goldmember in the group Ming Tea, alongside Susanna Hoffs, Matthew Sweet and Mike Myers. Ward contributed more than 20 songs over four seasons to the soundtrack of the Epitome Pictures/CTV hit series, *Instant Star*. His songs have been performed on *Idol* shows around the world. Recently, he’s been writing for the forthcoming *Degrassi Next Generation* feature. Ward can be seen as a judge on the Tricon Pictures hit show *The Next Star*, in its second season on YTV. He is currently on the Board of the Songwriters Association of Canada.
www.myspace.com/christopherwardmusic

The S.A.C.

The Songwriters Association of Canada is the only national non-profit organization that is run by, and represents, Canadian songwriters. Its mission is to protect and develop the creative and business environments for songwriters in Canada and around the world.
www.songwriters.ca

JOEL PLASKETT

Talks Music & Musicianship

by Greg Long

With shoulders bopping and voices pitchy and cracking trying to hit the poppy, tongue in cheek falsetto of *Fashionable People*, a riled up audience at the Cineplex was seriously grooving to Joel Plaskett as the song played before the previews. The first time I heard his music, I was the ringleader of this unlikely scenario. You may instead experience Plaskett at folk festivals as the good ol' Halifax Rocker who brings his dad on stage to pick.

Either way, intelligent and playful musicianship make him the perfect guy to sit down with and talk music. As well, it becomes impossible not to contemplate the journey of the travelling musician that runs through his latest album, *Three*, as his own relationship with music unravels in parallel.

He begins by rooting it at home. "I was around 13 when I started playing guitar. My father, Bill, taught me the basics and then I started taking lessons when I was 14 or 15. I had taken a few drum lessons when I was 10 and saxophone when I was 11, but I didn't commit to anything until I picked up a guitar."

That first guitar was a Hondo acoustic, then his first electric a year later: a black Japanese Les Paul copy. Of course, neither came before "learning the basics on Dad's 1959 Gibson J-45." Some of Joel's first times on stage were also with his father. As a longtime musician himself, Bill would invite his son onstage to sing or play a song together.

"I like recording on tape because I have to commit performances. I'm limited to 16 tracks."

In Plaskett's new triple album, *Three*, this connection between music and home becomes contradictory as the pursuit of the travelling musician inevitably means separation from the home. It becomes part of a difficult but relatable journey that is told in three movements: pursuit, separation, and return – disc one, two, and three.

This decision to pursue, to become a professional musician, occurred for Plaskett at 17. "The band I was in, Thrush Hermit, was playing a lot locally, and by the time we graduated high school we signed a publishing deal and were going on tour," he explains. "We made a pact not to attend university for that first year so we could hit the road."

With his family "supportive and a huge influence on this decision," the image of a foot loose and fancy free young Plaskett run, run, running in pursuit in the first movement of his three disc journey is easy to imagine.

The optimistic departure from home in "run, run, run" and other songs on the first disc alternates fancy free pursuit with a creeping weariness as the musician's journey leaves him experiencing feelings of loneliness. It transitions into a darkly blue 2nd movement that struggles with the feelings that are an inevitable part of "shadows growing longer" in pursuit.

In picturing Plaskett's long, lean, shadow stretching behind him as he experiences the loneliness of separation in *Sailor's Eyes* from the second disc, it felt like a perfect time to ask the type of non human company he keeps on the road. What would he be carrying into the sunset?

"My main acoustic instrument is a late 1800's Bruno Parlor Guitar that was braced for steel strings by Tom Dorward himself," the founder of the Halifax Folklore Centre. He goes on to list a "30's Gibson tenor acoustic, 1967 Gibson 12 string acoustic, 80's Japanese Fender strat, 70's Gibson Rd Custom, 2007 Munroe electric tenor (made in Halifax), 1979 Gretsch Country Club, and 1965 Fender electric 12 string" amongst his favourites.

"Also, a hand held recorder. I write a lot into a recorder and often get ideas when driving," he says of his songwriting on the road. "There is no one approach though, some start with words, some melodies, sometimes a rhythmic idea or riff."

Joel's answers bleed into the imagery found in his latest album as he describes himself driving down the road with four white knuckles on the steering wheel, and a recorder spinning along with the tires of a touring van in the other hand – getting ideas while driving.

Perhaps he is staring down the "highway white lines" in *Wishful Thinking* and "Wondering what you're doin', are you out and about?" aloud into the recorder about someone he leaves behind.

The song is as compelling musically as it is lyrically, with the steady mechanical sounds of the drum beat keeping a steady pace, as if to say keep going, "keep on thinking wishful thoughts, thinking wishful thoughts" plugging along, again and again, for seven minutes. That sounds like a real old school drum machine on *Wishful Thinking*, I commented. What kind is it?

"That track was recorded in Memphis at Doug Easley's studio. It's a drum machine from an old Hammond organ he had there. I also have an old Roland drum machine that I use on the record. It sounds really cool, kinda like the one Lee Scratch Perry used on *The Congos* record," he enthused.

In contrast, the pace is less steady on the second disc. It grows tired, blue, and aching as emotional strings slow into a really

stripped down and vulnerable place. The lyrics drip with melancholy loneliness and so does his voice, becoming more delicate, soft and sad. He's "coming apart in the dark" in *Heartless, Heartless, Heartless*, he "can't defeat this loneliness" in *Down, Down, Down*, and he sings "I'm sinking like a stone," "don't want to be alone" in *Demons*.

It follows Joel's journey through a dark place that strips his soul like the "peeling paint" in *Demons*, but it would be cruel to make him do that for us today. This dark place exists as a sombre rut in the context of a three part narrative journey, and you'll have to fill in the emotional gap by listening to Plaskett's three disc wonder by yourself.

The final movement brings Joel back around to that classic folk theme of home, and getting back to where you once belonged. When he heads home, with a heavy heart, "headlights covered in mosquito grime" and recorder full of material, I'd imagine that the retrospective nature of recording would conjure the same feelings of unravelling and reflection that resound in *Rewind, Rewind, Rewind*, the first song on the third disc.

I wondered if there would be a home recording studio waiting for him at home, where he could rewind.

"I don't record at home," he says. "I rent a small project studio where I have a Studer 16 track 2" tape machine, a few outdoor preamps, compressors and mics, as well as a Toft ATB console." While he does not record in his house, recording this album certainly involved "a coming home" since it came off of two straight years of harder touring than he had ever experienced.

The final movement of return in the album is perfectly paralleled by Joel's choice to record much of the darkest second disc emotional ditch with his Dad accompanying on guitar, or four-string tenor guitar throughout the loneliness parts. As well, recording meant meeting up with old friends from his home in Nova Scotia, like singer-songwriters Rose Cousins, and Ana Egge from Brooklyn. It is their wailing voices that sing along in the background with him at the rawest point in the journey, my absolute favourite chorus on the traveler's triple album:

"Sailor's eyes, sailor's eyes, gone before the next sunrise
Goddamn your sailor's eyes..."

To capture the genuine and authentic feeling low-fi sound throughout *Three*, Plaskett credits his "ramshackle engineering techniques." He says, "I like recording on tape because I have to commit performances, I'm limited to 16 tracks. "Distortion sounds cool!" he adds with conviction.

Of course, he called another old friend in Doug Easley, who had recorded for Thrush Hermit earlier in the journey to get the sound on *Wishful Thinking* and provide that old Hammond organ drum machine for the track. Then, they recorded it with the whole gang – Rose, Ana, Doug, and Joel. It started as a 3 ½ minute song, but swelled to a juicy 7 minutes with the creative chemistry that surged between them in Easley's new studio.

When he completed his perfect folk tale by coming back around to where "Granny Kay" was "baking cookies," and he was back playing music with his old friends, you can bet he began preparing to tour again after recharging.

With the final movement of *Three* ending Joel's Journey with "My past is checkered, and my future's polka dots," it's no shock that he is on the road again, or rather, "On and On and On" the road again.

**"Sailor's eyes, sailor's eyes,
gone before the next sunrise
Goddamn your sailor's eyes..."**

Check out www.joelplaskett.com to find out where you can catch him on stage. See him plain and tall, with that disarming charisma and awkward, but unselfconscious confidence that will make anyone happy to let their voice get pitchy and crack, trying to sing along... This time in concert, all the way across Canada, and into Brooklyn, New York, from August to December 2009.

Computer Recording 101

If you're reading this catalogue, there's a good chance that you're a musician, and you probably have a computer. If you're curious about how to create and record music with it, here are a few pointers to help you get started.

I. Read the system requirements.

Creating music on your computer will require some specialized hardware and software, such as Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) software, and a dedicated sound card (also called an audio interface). Any such tools will have technical requirements. These could include internet access, specific ports such as USB or firewire, CPU speed, memory, hard drive space, or a supported operating system. It is vitally important that you make sure your computer meets these requirements.

Pay particular attention to supported operating systems. There are several common operating systems, including 32 and 64 bit versions of Windows XP and Vista for PC, and OS X Tiger and Leopard for Mac. By the time you read this, Windows 7 and Snow Leopard may also be available.

If your computer doesn't meet the minimum requirements or run a supported operating system, you have only two choices: either don't buy that product, or upgrade your system. Before you buy, be absolutely certain that a product will work with what you have.

II. Buy a proper sound card.

The average consumer sound card (like the one that probably came with your computer) is ideal for listening to mp3s, playing games, surfing the web, or watching DVDs. For recording, you should consider a professional interface for three reasons: connectivity, latency, and fidelity.

An interface designed specifically for recording may offer a number of connectors so that you can directly connect a microphone, synthesizer, or guitar, as well as professional speakers.

The latency in a system without a proper interface could mean that it takes a second or longer to hear a note through the system once you play it, making performance effectively impossible. A professional interface will have a specialized driver (software that tells the computer how to talk to the hardware) that allows sound to be processed and played back in just milliseconds.

Professional interfaces will use high-quality converters, which convert an audio signal into numbers your computer can understand and back again. The better the converters, the higher the fidelity will be. Depending on the features, you can probably find professional audio interfaces ranging from prices between one hundred through several thousand dollars.

It's important to remember that a professional sound card will be a completely discrete audio path from your computer's existing sound card, so you can't just plug a microphone into it and hear the playback through your current speakers as they are currently wired. You may want to invest in a new set of speakers specifically for recording.

III. Read the full manual.

I'm constantly amazed at how user-friendly the average DAW is, especially when compared to my days slicing tape with a razor blade. However, new users need to remember that a DAW is an extremely sophisticated piece of software running on an extremely sophisticated piece of hardware.

To get your digital studio up and running, you have to invest the time to understand how to get your computer, your software, and your audio interface all talking to one another, and how to get sound into and out of your system.

It's not hard, but it's not trivial. You need a bit of tech savvy and are in for a learning curve. And yes, you are going to need to read some manuals. Fortunately, there are many resources to help you, including the professionals at your favourite store, communities of your fellow users, and the fine people in Technical Support. ALWAYS be nice to Tech Support.

IV. Talk to an expert.

There are a wealth of options available for a computer-based recording rig. I decided to use Cubase as my DAW because it felt most musical to me, in exactly the same way that my favourite guitar just feels right. It's a personal decision that depends on many factors, so a good guide is essential to help you find the best solution for your workflow.

A great way to get started is to talk with one of the experts at Long & McQuade. They will help you design a system that is as comfortable and inspiring as your favourite instrument, and help you find the right tools to make your music your way, with more power and flexibility than you may have ever thought possible.

Dave Miner is the Steinberg Product Specialist with Yamaha Canada Music, and the host of Club Cubase Toronto. Toronto customers may remember him from his days working in the Keyboard department of Long & McQuade's Bloor Street store.

by Dave Miner

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MAXIMIZING THE PERFORMANCE OF YOUR WIRELESS TO ENSURE TROUBLE-FREE OPERATION

In recent years, wireless microphone technology has made great progress and can now offer previously unimagined levels of performance, reliability, new features and simplicity of operation. The most helpful and convenient of these improvements can be enjoyed even in some so called "entry-level" systems. Still, to take full advantage of these new benefits and realize truly trouble-free operation, a few precautions and a little extra knowledge can do much to enhance your wireless experience.

After many years of doing wireless training and troubleshooting, I have consistently observed a variety of recurring wireless issues that can affect both new and experienced users. These can include momentary dropouts and reduced operating range, unwanted noise bursts and distortion, strange sounds caused by unidentified interference and a variety of lesser problems that can often defy description.

As wireless systems have always used frequencies within unused broadcast television channels, one the most valuable of the new features to be found in a modern wireless receiver is the ability to scan that portion of the spectrum about to be used by the system. An on-air TV station is typically the strongest interference that can be encountered and must be avoided. In a permanent installation, the scan may need to be done only once and will allow you to know that a frequency is truly clear of a broadcaster and any other random interference including other wireless systems. However, if your wireless system is "on the road", be sure to do the scan at least once at each new location.

Once a clear frequency is set, the next great feature to be found in a modern system is IR Transmitter Synchronization. At the press of a single button, the receiver sends an infra-red signal to the transmitter, much as a remote control changes channels on your TV, and sets it on the same frequency. This new and convenient feature eliminates errors and saves time, especially when setting up multiple systems.

While this next feature is not new, for those using multiple systems it is probably the most important. I am referring to the manufacturer's channel grouping plan. This gives the user the ability to easily select compatible frequencies for multiple systems that will be used close to each other in the same location. As it is widely but incorrectly believed that large numbers of wireless channels can be used together as long as they are separated by the minimum required frequency spacing as specified by the manufacturer, the grouping feature is often ignored. Another reason of course could be failure to read the instruction manual, something important to do for all wireless equipment. Unfortunately, any multi-channel system that does initially appear to work satisfactorily without observing grouping is flying on pure luck.

The culprit here is the phenomenon of intermodulation, simply the unavoidable production of multiple unwanted frequencies by transmitters that are in close proximity to each other or sometimes too close to a receiver. When one of these IM products falls on or too close to an operating frequency of another wireless system at the same location, built-in interference results and a variety of unpleasant symptoms can occur. These can include the above mentioned dropouts, short range, noise bursts and mysterious audible artifacts. IM product generation is not related to the quality of the equipment and the only possible method for avoiding these problems is to make sure that you do not try to use an IM product frequency as an operating frequency. To make this

avoidance easy, the manufacturer has performed the large number of mathematical calculations required, and presented the results to the user in a practical way in the form of the group & channel plan. Simply, always use only multiple channels in a single group and intermod products will never fall on or too close to an operating frequency. Although the word "group" sounds like the individual frequencies are crowded close to each other, they are in fact spread out over the entire frequency range of the wireless system, and observing the group & channel system is the key to the successful operation of any system with more than two individual wireless mics in the same location.

Finally, a few words about antennas. Entry level receivers typically have permanently attached antennas, or they could be internal and not visible at all. It is recommended that this type of receiver be located in a position that offers a line of sight path from the transmitter. Height is not the goal here unless to clear specific obstacles. Often the receiver can be on the floor in a corner but the system will perform most reliably without intervening obstructions including multiple human bodies as can be found in a theatre or house of worship. Angle the antennas out at 45° to maximize separation for best diversity reception.

Upscale rack-mountable receivers will usually have detachable antennas that can be remotely located or, with the right kit, moved to the front of the rack. In addition, a variety of "gain" or directional antennas is available. These include the log periodic design offering improved range, rejection of interference and a wide bandwidth, meaning that a single model can easily perform well over the entire frequency range(s) of multiple systems sharing the same pair. The ultimate in antenna performance is delivered by the "helical." A relatively recent addition, one of these can cost as much as a medium level wireless system but the range increase and possible interference rejection is unmatched.

At this point I must offer a word of caution. These antennas are powerful new tools which must be used with care and only as required. Too much signal strength can sometimes cause more severe problems than too little.

A new era in wireless technology is here for us to enjoy with superb features and benefits unavailable less than half a decade ago. The application of that little extra knowledge will make for a truly satisfactory experience.

Chris Brooks is a technical trainer, trouble shooter, problem solver and consultant for Shure Canada. He has also developed and currently teaches a two-part wireless course entitled RF Technology for the Entertainment Industry.

by Chris Brooks, Shure Canada

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The Lowdown on **SOCAN**

by Rick MacMillan, Corporate Editor, Words & Music, SOCAN

SOCAN is a collective for the performing rights of its members – the creators and publishers of music – and its mandate is to make sure they get paid for the public performance and communication to the public of their music. SOCAN does that by collecting licence fees, as set by the Copyright Board of Canada, from anyone playing or broadcasting live or recorded music in this country.

SOCAN also plays an international role. It pays royalties to members of its affiliated international Performing Rights Organizations (PROs) around the world, for the public performances in Canada of their copyright-protected works. Similarly, SOCAN pays royalties to Canadian music creators and publishers when their music is performed in other countries, by virtue of reciprocal agreements with these PROs. Because of these agreements, SOCAN's repertoire includes musical works written by the members of those international organizations as well as the works by SOCAN's own Canadian members.

Copyright owners still have to protect their own copyright, but the advantage of joining SOCAN is that the organization collects licence fees from thousands of venues that play music, a task that would be difficult and time-consuming for copyright owners to do on their own.

SOCAN also makes the process simple and efficient for its customers, or music users. The organization administers performing rights in a simple way so that everyone who authorizes, or wants to play or broadcast music – broadcasters, promoters, venue operators, and others – can obtain the right quickly and easily.

But SOCAN's mandate goes far beyond simply collecting and distributing royalties. The organization's proactive Membership department, for instance, boasts a three-person education team that is continually expanding its scope. The group's original aim was to increase awareness of SOCAN's role in the wider context of the Canadian music business, but that goal has morphed to include much more.

The team consists of two education and outreach managers – Rodney Murphy (based in the Toronto office) and Terry O'Brien (based in Vancouver), as well as an education and outreach specialist working from the Montreal office – Stéphanie Falco.

During 2008, the team members made more than 120 stops across the country to deliver "SOCAN 101" presentations and seminars at colleges, universities, high schools and other venues. As well, they took part in numerous panels at industry conferences and events such as North by Northeast in Toronto, the Ontario Council of Folk Festivals conference in Ottawa, Pop Montreal, Toronto's Canadian Music Week, the Western Canadian Music Awards and conference in Edmonton and the East Coast Music Awards event in Fredericton. A very successful Anglophone seminar was also held in Montreal last October, featuring panelists Michael McCarty (then of EMI Music Publishing Canada, now president of ole), Bob Hunka and Patrick Watson.

The team launched three successful webcasts in the past year: an English-language interview-based production on the intricacies of touring, titled "Get in the Van", featuring Neville Quinlan of Peer Music and Paul Goullie of the Agency Group; a French-language webcast on "How to Produce Indie Albums," with tips from three important members of Quebec's music industry, Jean-Robert Bisailon, Martine Groulx and Éric Goulet; and an international case study on the Japanese market, featuring industry veteran Kevin Canning, titled "Big in Japan," also in English. (All can be viewed at www.socan.ca; select "information webcasts" on the left navigation bar.) The group also initiated an e-mail program aimed at new members: "Tips of the Month" to provide new SOCAN members with valuable information on a number of industry topics.

Watch for increased presence from team members at industry events and conferences nationwide, including informative panels on essential and relevant topics such as rights management, disintermediation, marketing and promotion, new media and exploration of other international case studies.

SOCAN's education team will continue to build on its outreach program to educational institutions across Canada, providing information on SOCAN and its role in the industry to potential future members. Also, be sure to visit the resource and education section of the SOCAN website later this year for more informative webcasts, an updated industry glossary, expanded FAQ's and fact sheets on a number of useful topics.

SELF-MARKETING FOR Musicians

Regardless of which point you're at in your musical career, you will have to take responsibility for marketing yourself or your group.

The Marketing Mix is comprised of the four Ps – Product, Price, Place, and Promotion.

Product

This is the most important of the 4 Ps. Without a superior product, the other 3 Ps are irrelevant. You may not like it – being an "artist" and all – but you are the product. Certainly, you may produce CDs, DVDs, downloads, live appearances, T-shirts, and more, but in the end, your fans are buying a representation of you. Put most of your marketing efforts into developing a product that will attract an ever-growing number of fans (customers). Write great songs, attract competent musicians, practice and rehearse like crazy, play live gigs as often as you can, work on your live show and make amazing recordings.

Remember that if you want to earn money making music, the person or company paying you has to make a profit from your efforts. As their profits increase, so does the value of your product.

One key element of marketing is branding. Also known in the music industry as image, it is the impression of you that consumers form in their minds. Make sure that your image is in keeping with your music and that it is consistent in all of your communications.

Price

How much you can charge is largely based on trial and error. In the early stages of your career, it may be zero or less than zero. If you are playing bars, it will be based on the number of people you attract times the amount of liquor they consume. If you are playing concerts, it will be a percentage of attendance multiplied by average ticket prices. CDs, downloads, merchandise and everything else is related to the demand you have created for your music.

Place

Place refers to location and distribution. The demand for your music may not come from where you live – it could be the US, England, Germany or elsewhere. The Internet makes it easier to evaluate and satisfy this demand, but if your music takes off in Australia, are you prepared to tour there and have your CDs distributed in that market?

Promotion

Only when the first three Ps are in place are you ready to promote yourself. First, develop a killer list of fans that you can e-mail or send text messages to. You should gather fan info at live gigs, on your website and all of your social marketing pages. On a regular basis, send them news on live appearances, new releases, merchandise available, TV appearances, etc. Build a well-designed and functional website that includes photos, news, tour dates, a



mailing list sign-up page, and information on where to buy CDs, downloads, and merchandise. Put your URL on everything – CDs, posters, flyers, ads, press releases, business cards, DVDs and merchandise. Get as many sites linking to your website as possible and make sure that all of your social networking pages (Facebook, MySpace, YouTube) are designed to funnel traffic to your website. As the story develops, make sure that you institute a publicity campaign using all relevant media to get the word out.

In the beginning, you will be severely stretched trying to do everything yourself. As you develop a team – manager, publisher, publicist, business manager and record company – they will take over and expand many of these marketing activities and bring their expertise and resources to the table. In the end, though, your team is responsible to you for your ultimate success, so the more you know about marketing your music, the better job they will do.

At that point, you can spend the bulk of your time on your music. After all, that is the most important part of your career. Without a great product that fans love, all the rest of your marketing efforts mean very little.

Jim Norris is the President of Norris-Whitney Communications (www.nor.com). Norris-Whitney publishes Canadian Musician magazine (www.canadianmusician.com) and Music Directory Canada (www.musicdirectorycanada.com), both available at Long & McQuade stores. Jim also teaches Entertainment Marketing at Metalworks Institute. He can be reached at jnorris@nor.com.

IT'S ABOUT TIME: Working on Your Meter

Whether you play professionally, rock the occasional bar on weekends or just hook up with friends for a garage session, the fundamental nature of our job as drummers stays the same - to play with solid and consistent time. You can work on all the chops you want but if you can't lay in the pocket for at least four and a half minutes, as a sideman you might be waiting a long time between phone calls and as a band member you'll probably drive your bandmates nuts. Working on our technical skills is important but developing our meter is vital. We've all read the articles and have heard all of the pros say to always work with a metronome when we practice, which is true. But how we use it really depends on the objective. There are two main reasons why we use a metronome while we practice. One is to help develop a technical skill, like a rudiment. The other is to help develop our 'meter'. Our 'meter' is our ability to play steady and consistent time. Contrary to popular belief, simply playing along with a metronome while we play grooves won't really develop our meter. It actually just develops our ability to play along with a metronome. It's just a time reference. In that sense it's really no different than playing along with CDs or your iPod. So you might as well just do that. It's more fun anyways. Don't get me wrong - It's important that we're comfortable using a metronome on the stage because sometimes that's what the gig requires. So when we're asked to use one, being able to just shrug your shoulders and say "OK, cool" is a confidence we should all have.

Time Travel - Movement is OK!

We have to understand that we're not machines and it's pretty close to impossible for us to have perfect timing in the sense that we play every song in the set at a precise BPM from start to finish with absolutely no movement in tempo. However, we can work on controlling what I call our "plus/minus travel." There's a natural and slight fluctuation in tempo than can happen in live music and that, in my opinion, is OK! It's the amount of fluctuation that we need to control. And that takes work. But we can use our metronomes to work on that. Here are some of my own ideas on how.

Get in the Zone!

Record yourself playing some grooves when you practice. This is for self analysis. Here's a way that you can find out where your plus/minus travel is. You'll need a metronome with a good 'tap tempo' feature for this. Try the **Tama RW105 Rhythm Watch**. After playing a groove for a few minutes, listen back to your recording. Tap along with the tap tempo button to find the approximate BPMs that you started playing at, then on any downbeat - hit Start. You'll need to be a little accurate with this. From here, use the + and - or up and down buttons to keep the click on track with your playing. Now you can see how much you've sped up or slowed down. In doing this with some of my own performances I've noticed that a gradual fluctuation of +2 to -2 from the determined BPM is virtually undetectable to an audience. If you can work on staying in that zone, you'll be cool. Tempo can sometimes move depending on where the song is dynamically. It can fluctuate with the energy.

Working on staying in the 'zone' means using your metronome in a different way. We want to get to the point where we don't need to rely on it as much, so that we're as comfortable playing time when it's NOT there. For this, you'll need a metronome, preferably with two flashing lights on it, one green and one red to indicate the 'one'. Pick yourself a tempo, starting maybe in the 95 to 120 range. Now, unplug the headphones and turn that volume on the unit right off! Yes. That's right. Time to use the force! Now - start groovin'. Keep your metronome beside the kit so that it's not in your line of sight. As you're playing the kit, glance over every few seconds and look at the lights to see where you're sitting. Are you speeding up or slowing down much? If so, adjust and relax! The goal with this exercise is to be able to play normally, for longer stretches between glances while still staying in the pocket. Slower tempos are even more challenging! Doing this on a regular basis will build your confidence and help straighten out your meter. I promise. This works. Have fun with it!

Rob Brown is a session drummer and clinician from East Toronto and has been playing for over 20 years. Currently working at Long & McQuade in Oshawa, Rob is also quite active in Toronto's growing Christian & Gospel music scene and continues to play and perform clinics in and outside of the GTA.

by Rob Brown



Your Most Valuable Asset

I recently joined several friends for an evening of live music in a local club. We arrived early and found excellent seats. The club's décor, spacious stage, and professional sound system suggested we would enjoy a great night of live music. We certainly did not anticipate what happened next.

The sound pressure level (ie volume) of the 1st set was uncomfortably loud where we were seated. The mix lacked clarity, definition and balance. The 2nd set SPL was unfortunately louder and sounded worse. After the 2nd set I bid my friends goodnight and left the venue, concerned that I'd suffer permanent hearing damage if I stayed any longer.

What should have been an enjoyable evening was compromised by excessive sound pressure level. Worse, we were exposed to the real threat of permanent hearing loss. Let me elaborate further.

I decided several months ago to have my hearing tested for the first time. My physician made the appropriate referral to a local Audiology Clinic. In Ontario this testing is covered by OHIP. The test results were provided to me upon completion.

The tests confirmed that my hearing health is excellent with no significant peaks, dips, or measurable deterioration up to the 12kHz upper limit of the tests. High frequency deterioration is a natural part of the aging process.

I have friends and colleagues who have significant hearing health issues so I'm fortunate. I've managed to perform live and mix live sound for over thirty years with no significant hearing damage for three reasons.

First, protect your hearing by working at safe sound pressure levels. Your hearing can be permanently damaged by prolonged exposure to sound pressure levels above 85 dB. Exposure to levels above 100 dB can result in permanent hearing damage in 15 minutes. Be aware that damage to your hearing from loud noise is both cumulative and irreversible. Also note that exposure to high sound pressure levels is one of the main causes of tinnitus. Tinnitus is a ringing, buzzing, hissing or whistling sound in the ears usually most noticeable when background noise is low.

Knowing the exact sound pressure level and wearing appropriate hearing protection is the proactive way to protect against hearing loss. Experts recommend wearing hearing protection when the sound pressure level is above 85 dB, and to avoid unprotected exposure to volumes above 100 dB.

I measure sound pressure levels with a Galaxy Audio CM-130 SPL Meter when working with or listening to music. I mix live performances at sound pressure levels averaging 90 dB A weighted. This practice ensures I can avoid permanent hearing loss by knowing when I'm at risk.

Second, anyone who attends live music performances should always have hearing protection on hand. Your local Long & McQuade sells hearing protection starting at \$1.99 per set. Available choices include Planet Waves Comfort Fit Earplugs, Norton Sonic-2 Noise Filter Earplugs, and Vater SAFE'N SOUND Ear Protection.

Alternatively, whether you're a music professional or a hardcore fan, if you attend or work on live music events on a regular basis, consider purchasing custom fit earplugs. This more expensive option provides better hearing protection for anyone experiencing regular exposure. Some health insurance plans pay part of the cost so explore this option where available.

Don't jeopardize your hearing health under any circumstances. When excessive volume puts your hearing health at risk, leaving is always an option.

Find out more about how to protect your hearing at the following websites;

www.earbud.org
www.musicianclinics.com
www.uwo.ca/nca/index.html

Blair Francey is a full time staff member of the PA Rental Department at Long & McQuade in Toronto. He still enjoys performing, mixing, and recording live in his spare time.

