

Thoughts & Info On My Recording Process

Recently a few kind people have been asking me about how I make my music and the equipment that I use to record.

I thought it might be interesting and potentially useful if I outlined my setup and approach to music making in a little more detail and publish it here on the blog as a resource for others.

So, as Dylan Thomas famously declared - 'to begin at the beginning'!!

My first experience of home recording began with a small cassette player that my dad bought in the early 80's to load games on to our home computer. It's important to emphasise what an amazing discovery it was and how it felt to be able to hear your own voice on tape for the first time. - "What! - you mean I can record myself on this thing AND play it back??"

It dawned on me that the complexities of sound were something of wonder and beauty and that like any of our senses, our hearing and our recognition of sound is a unique, subjective and personal thing.

I also recognised straight away that the hiss, grot and background ambience that found its way on to my recording was equally as interesting as the songs I was writing. The two worked hand in hand. Especially in the context of the environment in which the sound was captured. Recordings became a document of my life and the home that I lived in as opposed to being created in the confines of a recording studio where the objective would be to remove as much background noise as possible.

That part of recording in studios always disappointed me a little, as if it was an opportunity missed somehow. I hate losing sound!

So this was how my musical journey continued in to my teens. I began to understand the technicalities of what I was doing and as such my ambition grew as well as my appetite for experimentation. I just got excited by what I could make out of sound.

I think that I acquired my first cassette 4 track when I was 14 in 1986?

I understood immediately how the thing worked as it was so intuitive. That was the beauty of porta studios. You plugged in a mic, got a level and pressed record. It was all I needed to

know about the science of recording and it still is to this very day.

I worked my Tascam to death - literally!! We used to use it to play backing tracks when I was in Derrero and eventually too many bits in it got worn and it lost the will to live.

By this time too we were busy recording as a band in a regular recording studio and contrary to my earlier remark I was enjoying the experience of discovering how studios worked and the possibilities of what we could achieve so at least for while I didn't replace the Tascam and home recording stopped.

It wasn't long however before I felt the need to work at home again

Over the years I've used Cubase a little bit, although I was never particularly comfortable using a PC, and I did have digital 8 track machine for a time as well. I've used minidisc and a hand held recorder but nothing came close to the ease of using a 4-track. I wanted a recording device that would be my friend and companion as I worked my way through my musical ideas. I didn't need the hassle of fighting leads, sound cards, memory cards and plugins!!! arrr

Back in 2012 my wife bought me an iPad for my 40th birthday and I knew that there were likely to be apps on there that would allow me to record and get access to keyboards and drum machines etc.

I was excited by the possibilities of the device as I knew it was so easy to use

I tried a number of different apps but eventually discovered Multitrack DAW

<http://www.harmonicdog.com/>

The app costs about £7 and gives you 24 tracks of recording, basic eq, compression & reverb etc. All you need to do is get a level and hit record!! mmmmm hang on, that sounds familiar !!

I don't even have to plug in a mic as the iPads internal mic works just fine for me although I did try a mic by a company called iRig which was quite good. The company also make interfaces for connecting instruments etc

<http://www.ikmultimedia.com/products/irig2/>

As a rule of thumb I put the iPad about 10 cm away from the sound source that I'm recording and I just adjust the input level to make sure that it doesn't peak too much.

An app I also use a lot is Everyday Looper

<http://www.mancingdolecules.com/everyday-looper/>

This app is great for creating rhythm loops and has six tracks available so you can build up a complete drum kit or grab everyday sounds to build beats with.

Audiobus is another useful app that I have. It allows me to internally connect other apps to the recorder so that you can add keyboards etc. without needing leads!! Yeah

If you wanted to take this setup further there is an iPad dock available that would allow you to use pro mics and plug in instruments etc. and it could be a way I might go in the future??

<http://www.alesis.com/io-dock-ii>

For now though there is no so much more to say about how I record. I have a few cheap guitars, a little Fender practice amp, a drum kit and myself. The important thing for me is that the iPad is something I can pop in a bag and take with me anywhere. I can work in the car while the kids are at gym class or I can go up the mountain and record the stream after a storm. That is priceless to me and far out weights any limitations of the setup in terms of quality. I try and make a feature out of the limitations and I hope that is what makes my music unique to me.