

Ross Hogarth

“Delivering that Analog Sound in a Digital World”

by Mr. Bonzai

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I've seen Ross Hogarth at work many times and he is not only smart, he's got a lot of heart. He creates a roomful of comfort, with special considerations for each of the musicians. It's a pleasure you can feel in the music he's recorded with artists such as REM, Ziggy Marley, Keb Mo, Jewel, Melissa Etheridge, John Mellencamp, John Fogerty, and Motley Crüe.

Hogarth continues to work at the finest studios around, but as a result of the massive changes in our recording industry, he has created a personal workspace in his LA rancho which he calls BoogieMotel. He has a wealth of vintage outboard gear, mic-pre's and microphones, plus a powerful computer supplied with an impressive arsenal of plug-ins. He selects the gear depending on the project.

Hogarth is a master of old school analog recording and he has utilized that knowledge in creating digital product that has an uncanny analog touch. Let's talk recording with him and delve into the technology and philosophy.

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BONZAI: What is your philosophy of mixing?

HOGARTH: I have always believed in the song and the muse. My philosophy of mixing is found in the same place of certainty as in recording, but even more so. Honor the song. The mix is the last stop before mastering. I have complete control by then on the direction of the song. Sonically the picture I paint has to be aligned with the intention of the song. This is where I can't let any technology or misuse or abuse of it get in the way.

I need to make sure that the song shines through when I close my eyes. We get caught up looking at the computer screen and hearing music through our eyes. Instead of what does it sound like, it becomes what does it look like? We get fooled by watching the screen. You gotta turn off the screen, and listen. I ask myself, Did I help the song come across?

I have a lot of plug-ins and I am a fan of all the good ones, but this can get deep. I could get caught up in wondering if I am doing the right processing. I have to admit that I have at times caught myself trying one to many plug-ins but that is part of my exploration and the only thing here at BoogieMotel that it costs is my time, so its my time. That's my choice. I like it that way. I like working basically at my own pace in my own space. I am very comfortable now in this digital realm and I am still excited by the music.

With the record business model so difficult and tenuous these days, the thing that still gets me is the music. I love finishing a mix or a record and knowing that I have aligned my vision with my ability to manipulate the tools to realize that vision. I guess I continue to strive to make records that will hold up on repeated listens and not be disposable like a lot of popular culture these days. I know that goal sounds lofty but it really isn't even as far as I carry it.

Music has a lot of power and we are in a time where well written, well played, well recorded and produced music has a place of its own. I want to continue to be a part of that. I look forward in 2009 to making and finishing records with Keb Mo, The Doobie Brothers and a new artist named Ryanhood from Tucson.

I like to mix up time tested classic artists and new artists. Music either works as an emotional delivery medium or not. It's either good or bad and the speakers don't lie. I wanna close my eye's and know that my job is done or get jolted out of my seat and know that I am not done and that I must go find the problems. That is where it's at. I'm either finished because I know I am or I gotta keep massaging the song because I know I am not. No amount of technology or analog or digital discussion helps a bad song but I can help in the delivery of it. I let my love of music and my love of my job in music be the place of certainty that will allows for the constant change in technology.

BONZAI: Do you record vocals here?

HOGARTH: Yes, I do vocals, acoustic guitars, keyboards. But in general, I am using my studio as a one room facility, and mainly as a mix room.

BONZAI: As a mixer, how have things changed for you over the last couple of years?

HOGARTH: It's become an "all-in" pricing world. In the past, someone would approach you to make a record with a fee, and the studio budget would be completely separate. We concerned ourselves with budgets and how much we spent, but now they might say, "We've got \$10,000 to mix this record." And that is the total budget. If I had to go somewhere and pay studio fees, I would be limited to only a few days to get the job done, and not even pay myself. All of us have had to rethink the business, because we have become a cottage industry.

BONZAI: And you don't need a traditional console?

HOGARTH: Not really. A nice Neve console in this space would be overkill. By the way, I call this place BoogieMotel.

BONZAI: What medium are you recording to?

HOGARTH: I have ProTools HD3 Accel. I run a Magma chassis that has my ProTools cards in it. I have a Universal Audio UAD two-card in the computer that houses the UA plug-ins. My Waves TDM plug-ins, my McDSP plug-ins, URS and ProTools plug-ins are in the Magma chassis. The UAD format, which is a PCIE card that goes in the computer has the Universal Audio plug-ins. All the UA plug-ins run off their PCIE card.

I kept my PCI ProTools cards from pre-Intel and moved up with the computer, but kept the cards. My mix format is inside the box. I am mixing inside the box, but I have figured out a way that allows me to make a mix that sounds like tape. I can take a mix to Lurssen Mastering, give it to Gavin Lurssen, and his response is that it really sounds like tape. I figured out a way to fool the listener.

I also have outboard gear that I run in conjunction with the box. And I also have some interesting conversion gear that I use. I use Crane Song for my converter, and that allows me to put their Pentode and their Tape Process on my mixes. It's a way of making my mixes sound more analog.

BONZAI: OK, let's take a look at your left hand rack and you tell me what you have, starting at the bottom and moving up.



HOGARTH: Here are my Digidesign 192s, my interfaces. I have an Antelope Audio Isochrone OCX, which is my Word Clock for the system. Word Clock is extremely important for the sonics in digital, and stabilizes the system.

Then I monitor my mixes through a Crane Song Avocet. The beauty of the Avocet is that it allows me to bypass the analog-out of the Digidesign 192s. I

am actually monitoring digital into the Avocet and the Avocet is the conversion to my speakers, which is the controller. It allows me to hear my three different sets of speakers, and also get a much more clinical listening on the mix than is in the box. The Digidesign 192s are very smeared in their coloration and so when people listen to the stereo out of the actual 192s, it puts a color on the mix that's not even really your mix. You make decisions on EQ and balances, and it's as if you were using PhotoShop and wearing sunglasses. You would end up making color correction based on your sunglasses. It's insane. The Avocet is one of the most crucial elements here, because it is my headphone amp and my monitor controller.

Next up is my Teletronix LA-2A, an old standard, beautiful tube compressor. Above that is an Allen Smart C-1 stereo compressor, that will either go across my mix, or maybe a drum buss. The Crane Song HEDD 192 is processing my stereo mix. My mix comes digital out of ProTools into the HEDD 192 and I can put a Pentode and some tape and tube coloration on my mix. This is an actual mastering box that you might find being used by Gavin Lurssen or Dave Collins in their mastering. When they get digital mixes, they use this to detoxify the digital mixes. So, I am doing that ahead of time. And on top I have my Peterson Auto Strobe 490 Tuner, for guitars.

BONZAI: OK, let's move on to the right hand rack, bottom to top...



HOGARTH: Bear in mind, the gear comes and goes in my studio. That is the concept of the Boogie Motel. I have a lot of gear that is not here right now, that I will pull in and out, depending on what kind of work I am doing. But there is some gear that is always here. At the bottom is a Mutator, a stereo analog filter. I have a certain sound that I have created with a pair of PCM 42 delays, which are above it. They are always chained through the Mutator, something I came up

with years ago when I was working with Pat Leonard, to create a Pink Floyd type delay that morphs and mutates and regenerates like their old records.

I have an Eventide 2016 reverb, a pair of four SPL Transient Designer for kick and snare and toms. I have a pair of Vac Rac TSL-3 compressor limiters that are always on vocals. Above that I have Palmer ADIG-LB speaker simulators. I can bring amps in here, like Fender heads and Marshalls, and do actual guitar parts with the amp, but without the speaker. It's a speaker load box, but it also adds coloration. A lot of bands tour with this, like Def Leppard. They don't even have speakers on stage, because the Palmer is very real sounding.

And next is the classic AMS dmx 15-80 stereo harmonizer delay, which gives a classic vocal sound that I couldn't live without. It used to be used for samples, too. You would trigger your kick and your snares off of that in the old days. Then I have a Retro instruments STA-LEVEL, which is their new Gates STA-LEVEL re-creation. Unbelievable on bass. Next up is Wade Chandler's Abbey Road EMI stereo compressor, which gives a good Beatles-era squeeze to things. Next up is a pair of EL8 Distressors, which I can't live without. Then a MC76 Purple Audio 1176 copy compressor. I usually use this for tracking, but I have it here now because I was in need of the sound of this compressor for a vocal I was mixing.

And last, the newest piece of gear is the RETRO 176, a re-creation of the Universal 176. Phil Moore of RETRO has a really great engineering mind. He keeps the integral parts of the Gates, or the UA, and then adds some features that were never on the originals that make it modern in the sense of having more control and flexibility.

So, this is what is here at BoogieMotel today. I do have API lunchboxes that are not plugged in right now. When I am doing guitars, they are set aside. And there is quite a bit of other gear that comes and goes.

BONZAI: How do you integrate your analog outboard gear with your in the box approach? You have to come out of the digital and go through them, and then convert and go back into digital. Is there any degradation?

HOGARTH: In a clinical way, you could say there is. One of the reasons I don't use an analog summing box, is I don't want my entire mix degraded. The elements that I choose to go out to analog gear requires a very careful decision about the sonic that I am going to get out of that "degradation" compared with the plus that I get from that outboard piece of gear. Aside from the effects there are only ten or twelve pieces of gear that are going to be used in my mix. That process, compared with the plusses those boxes give me, far outweigh any degradation issues. I am using this analog gear as an insert in ProTools. It's basically plugged in, going digital to analog out, then analog to digital back in.

BONZAI: Can you tell me about your monitors?

HOGARTH: I have Hothouse 165s, Quested H 108, and ProAc Studio 100s. I have three sets because they all have a different frequency response and a different picture that they give me. The Hothouse speakers are very analytical, super-clinical, but they don't go way down. But they give me a real accurate image and an accurate mix. The Questeds are actually hooked up to a Genelec Sub that is against the wall, because it is tuned for this room and you don't need to see it. They give me the super low end, like if a guy kicks the mic, I will feel that. I am allowing myself to hear the bottom end that is almost below what is usable, and I get rid of that on the Questeds. The ProAcs I have used forever and ever. When I got the Hothouse speakers, the ProAc use kind of receded, and they are not that much in play anymore.

BONZAI: So these are the reference points that you know because it is your room.

HOGARTH: Exactly, which is a conversation in itself. Why am I here? I know my room, I am comfortable here. I have a good handle on what I can do here.

BONZAI: When you are working on a mix, does your client come by?

HOGARTH: Oh, yeah. One of the reasons I like working here, is that it is in my house, it's home and it's comfortable. For instance, Ziggy Marley. We won a

Best Reggae Grammy and I mixed that album here. He'd come over, hang out, we'd have dinner. We were able to stop and not have the studio clock ticking. Recently, I had Edgar Winter here for his mix, and he walked into the other room and sat down at the piano. I have video of him playing songs off his White Trash album.

I'm starting a Keb Mo album, and he wants to come over first and listen to some of the stuff he's been working on – he wants to listen here, outside of his home studio.

In the past, you might be working on a mix, and then you wait around for the client to come in, and you get tired. To get a mix down and then back up on an analog console – you never get it back exactly the same.

With my gear, I have the ability to call things up quickly. And now I can work non-linearly. Last night I was working on eight songs at the same time. 15 minutes on one song, stop, work on another one.

BONZAI: When I have three or four writing projects in progress, I have to keep them all spinning, so I have to move back and forth, but it works well, because when I come back to one project I notice things from a freshened viewpoint.

HOGARTH: You couldn't have said it better for my situation. By stepping away and changing your focus, you come back and you can be amazed at what you didn't notice.

BONZAI: What kind of microphones do you have in your personal collection?

HOGARTH: I have a really sweet U67 that David Bock recently worked on, to bring it back to its original beauty. I am using it for the new Doobie Brothers record, on Tom Johnston's vocals. Ted Templeman is producing. I have an AKG C12, AKG C12A, Telefunken 250, David Bock 250, a Tracy Korby U47 type mic, a pair of C-37A's that I am really proud of. I love Royer, and have all of their mics. I have a really great collection of microphones, most of them in storage.

BONZAI: What about mic-pre's?

HOGARTH: Well, when I started making records we didn't use mic-pre's, because we had consoles. You plugged into the wall, you went into the control room and pushed up your faders. You probably had a Neve, an API, a Trident, whatever.

Now, people are coming up in a different world. There are a lot of great mic-pre's out there. I tend to have some new, and some classics. I have original Neves, original APIs, original Telefunken: the classic three. You've got German tubes, British Class A, and American op-amps.

But I also have Great River, which is a new one out of Minnesota, run by Dan Kennedy, and they're great for ribbon mics. Wade Chandler make the Abbey Road EMI mic pre's that are astounding. Brent Averill mic-pre's are tops. I am also using Grace mic-pre's out of Boulder, Colorado. I am one of those guys who has a rack of mic-pre's, so that when I go out and cut in a studio, a lot of the times I am not even using the console.

One of the downside of the shift in the traditional studio scene is that maintenance has become a problem, and some studios don't have onsite maintenance. You run into consoles that aren't quite kept top notch. It can slow you down.

So, I have all these great mics and with my own mic-pre's I know I've got the tool belt that really works.

BONZAI: When you pick a particular mic for the job, how do you pick the mic-pre?

HOGARTH: When I choose a mic, I don't always know which one will work best. I may put up five mics and do a quick short test with the singer, and I will use the same mic-pre. I will pick my most neutral, straight wire mic-pre, like a George Massenburg GML, or one from Grace, because they add almost no color. I am trying to get the clearest sound of the mics. Once I pick the mic, I then choose the mic-pre. One may make the sound thicker, so I pick a tube mic-pre. Or if I want it a little brighter, or crunchier, I might pick an API. Or I might make it denser, which is the sound of a Neve. Once you have the mic you like, you can

choose a mic-pre, and it has a certain sound that puts a color filter on your microphone.

BONZAI: Looking back and thinking about today, what is your philosophy of recording?

HOGARTH: I think the technology keeps changing and my philosophy about what I do is in a place of certainty that allows for constant change.

I have always believed in the song and the muse. I believe there is no fooling what comes out of the speakers. It either sounds like music or it doesn't. I try to capture sounds and performances so they hold up over the test of time. In recording I try and use the right mic and the right placement for the application without needing to add gobs of EQ or manipulation.

I try and move swiftly so as to not complicate the process with my own self-importance in the recording process. If I move faster and I am one step ahead, then the artist gets to follow his muse and it helps let the music flow. In the end I want to record quality mixable sounds that have attitude or at least the initial integrity of the sound. I have had to re-learn some of the technology in terms of analog versus digital, but I am still the same recording engineer I always was as far as making sure that the speakers don't lie.

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