



Recording Savage Garden

David Gleeson is a Grammy award winning engineer whose list of credits includes Celine Dion and Mariah Carey. Richard Buskin discusses dream studios and working on Savage Garden's forthcoming album, *Affirmation*.

An Englishman who relocated to Northern California by way of Sydney during the early 1990s, David Gleeson is a Grammy Award-winning engineer whose reputation behind the board has been assisted by some highly successful professional partnerships. The first of these, with producer Walter Afanasieff, has involved Gleeson in projects with the likes of Mariah Carey, Celine Dion and, most recently, Savage Garden. Another partnership, with fellow engineers Ren Klyce and Malcolm Fife, has manifested itself in their joint ownership of Tyrell Studios.

Engineering positions at Trident Studios and Abbey Road in London, a stint at Alberts Studios in Sydney, and time at The Plant and Skywalker Sound in the US, preceded the launch of Tyrell Studios in 1997. Tyrell presently caters to several different pro areas, ranging from feature films and commercials to music projects and design work. The facility is based around Fairlight and ProTools systems along with surround sound capability and a Sony MXP3056 analogue console. The Sony board has been refitted with API EQ and mic preamps in addition to GML automation. Most recently the Tyrell team of Ren Klyce, Malcolm Fife and David Gleeson have worked on the soundtrack of the new David Fincher action movie, *The Fight Club*, which stars Ed Norton, Helena Bonham-Carter and Brad Pitt. Gleeson took care of some of the pre-mixes, temp mixes and sound design for the film. Yet his rock and pop assignments are what he is best known for – his work on Celine Dion's *Titanic* hit, *My Heart Will Go On*, earned him a Grammy – and so during post production of *The Fight Club* he was already involved with the latest batch of recordings by Savage Garden.

Garden Variety

RB: When did you first work with Savage Garden?

DG: Towards the end of last year, when they recorded

The Animal Song for the Disney film *The Other Sister*.

Walter has strong connections with Disney, so they asked him to produce it.

RB: He is also producing all of the new album, *Affirmation*, while you're engineering some of the tracks.

Why is he using different engineers?

DG: Availability for one thing. Dave Reitzas did some early work on the record, meanwhile I was involved with *The Fight Club*, and so he skipped around and used various people. Also, the two guys in the band, Darren and Daniel, wanted to spend a lot of time on pre-production and programming, and for much of that work an engineer really wasn't necessary, so Walter worked with an assistant. It's all sequenced stuff, and then, as more elaborate tracking came up further down the line, they involved engineers in the project.

RB: Which tracks did you work on?

DG: Three in all. I remember one is called *Two Beds And A Coffee Machine*, while another is called *Free*.

RB: With just Darren Hayes as the singer/songwriter and Daniel Jones as the programmer/guitarist, what approach did you take towards the tracking in the studio?

DG: Well, for *Two Beds And A Coffee Machine* we started off doing various run-throughs with Walter playing a Bösendorfer in the live area, miked with a couple of B&K 4003s and recorded on the Fairlight, while Darren was singing in the control room into a Neumann TLM160. We got the basic feel for the piano and the song, did one or two edits to the piano part and tried out different endings. After reviewing different takes, we ended up with mainly one take containing a couple of little edits. Then Darren went into the live room, where we set up a little vocal booth for him, and we recorded him with the TLM160 again. After a number of takes we did a vocal comp on the Fairlight, and then the piano was flown in via the sequencer, using Digidesign

hardware and Logic Audio. Walter added various keyboard overdubs, and that's pretty much how that song was put together. It was very straightforward, and it turned out to be a very simple and elegant sounding track.

With *Free*, on the other hand, a session drummer came in and a vocal had already been cut by the time I got involved. They had ideas for some more elaborate drum sounds and so I spent half a day on the drum setup – a custom-made kit was brought in and it sounded magnificent, which made life very easy. Again we were using the Fairlight, and three different ideas were laid down for the drums. Originally there was a loop, which had certain timing quirks that they [Hayes and Jones] were thinking of keeping; then there was a sequenced drum part laid down to another version; and the third idea consisted of a light part which they were experimenting with. On top of that there were hybrid versions, where they tried to incorporate elements of all three takes, along with some of the new playing ideas, while also referencing the sequenced drums that had been laid down.

RB: How did you mic the kit?

DG: B&K 4003s for the room, B&K 4011s as overheads, a Shure Beta 57 for the snare, a Neumann KM184 on the hi-hat and some tiny Shure LM Series mics which had been left in the studio. They clip onto the rim of the toms. I tried those against the standard Sennheiser 421s and they sounded great, so I stuck with them.

RB: Do Darren and Daniel work quickly or are there a lot of takes?

DG: There are a lot of takes and we did a fair amount of comp'ing. Walter is a real perfectionist as a producer – he won't just put something up, say, 'that's great. Next.' He'll work until everything is really the way that he wants it, the way that he visualised it from the outset. He'll work relentlessly until he gets that, and sometimes many different takes will be involved and he'll experiment with many different ideas, but I think that the ends certainly justify the means.

Mariah Dion or Celine Carey?

RB: It was back in 1993 that you worked on Mariah Carey's Music Box. How was that album brought together?

DG: Generally the way that Walter

Afanasieff, Mariah, and Dana Jon Chapelle [her main vocal engineer] work is to sit down at the piano, knock out some ideas and put them down very loosely onto tape – probably just a cassette, which each of them will take home and work on. Usually, Walter will put the cassette up and, together with a programmer, start working on a basic sequence for it. He'll send various drafts of that to Mariah, she'll work on the lyrics and they'll bounce ideas back and forth. Once the programming mix is ready to put down – with all of the various different synths, samplers, drum machines and everything else balanced correctly – a 48-track reel is created to cut vocals to. At that point Dana and Mariah will work alone on the vocals for as long it takes, and then those reels will get sent back for additional guitar and keyboard overdubs at Walter's studio (Wallyworld) the Record Plant in L.A. or somewhere like that.



RB: *So has your work with Walter often comprised tracking everything but the vocals?*

DG: Yeah, that's where most of my credits come from on projects with Mariah and Celine. They already have their engineers for the vocals, and they don't really get involved in the tracking sessions, which are Walter's forté. Although in some cases I will record Mariah's guide vocals when Dana's not around. For instance, with the track *Butterfly*, I remember Mariah came into the studio to write the song – maybe some writing had already been done beforehand – and we put a microphone up for her in the control room. She sang along while Walter played the piano for her and we recorded that to the 48-track. She would then re-track the vocals later on, but nevertheless, the real feel of the song was worked out when she and Walter routined it in the studio on that day.

RB: *So when Walter's production assignment for three of the songs on Celine Dion's breakthrough album [Let's Talk About Love] led to your own involvement, was the method of working largely the same as with Mariah?*

DG: Yes, it's pretty much Walter's style to work out the track on a one-to-one basis with a cassette recorder sitting on the piano. To a large extent he'll then take that basic recording and combine it with the elaborate ideas that he has in his head to create the song as he visualises it. He'll get a performance on tape, largely featuring himself as well as some session musicians, and after a great amount of production has gone on in the studio, the artist will come back and do the vocal. It's at that point the preferred vocal engineer will step in, and in Celine's case that means Humberto Gatica.

RB: *What is the setup at Walter's studio, Wallyworld?*

DG: It's a really magnificent facility. Currently he's got a 9000 Series SSL inside a very large control room

that's centred around a credenza with three stations on it – basically a central area for the producer with an array of keyboard controllers, another station on the left-hand side for a programmer operating a sequencer, and then another keyboard area on the right-hand side which was originally set up for a second programmer to work on samples and provide colour to the sound. From any of the three positions at the credenza you can swing around and access the equipment on these racks – the one in the back left-hand corner contains a massive collection of gear: everything from Tascam DA88s to Korg Wavestations and M1Rs – basically the whole gamut, from analogue to digital. Then, on the other side, the rack is pretty much dedicated to samplers, and it also runs all the way from the vintage to the very latest: Akais, Rolands, Fairlights... you name it, it's there.

RB: *What keyboards does Walter Afanasieff use at Wallyworld?*

DG: As his controller he often uses the Roland A80 and then there's a Korg Trinity and a bunch of other items.

RB: *How about tape machines?*

DG: The tape machine is a Sony 3348, although more recently he's got in a 24-track Fairlight MFX3 Plus, and that's been fantastic for the overdubs. Mainly, everything as it's tracked will go to the 3348, which for the kind of recordings that we do is pretty much the industry standard. However, while it's a robust and reliable performer, we're also venturing into areas such as the MFX3 Plus, which I like because it is a hard disk recorder that is set up like a tape machine in terms of its whole format, its layout and its behaviour. Not by any means is its editing secondary, but this also doesn't overshadow or encroach upon its behaviour as a 'tape machine', which is something that other hard disk recorders do tend to suffer from.

RB: *Working with Walter Afanasieff, it appears that you do a lot of piecemeal recordings, with different song sections recorded at different times and even in different places. Do you like that approach or would you prefer to work with a complete band live in the studio?*

DG: Those are both different situations with their own particular challenges. It's obviously great when you have a really together band clicking on a hot take, but there again, it's also good to be able to put something down for a while and then come back to it later with more objectivity. The technology that we have enables that, it's not difficult to do and often it can really help creatively.



David Gleeson cuddles his Mackie HUI at Tyrell Studios

