

# Tim Powles

Tim Powles, engineer, producer and the drumming force behind Australian rock institution, The Church, speaks from his Sydney-based Spacejunk Studio.

**AT:** *There's an interesting collection of kit here Tim. What's the selection criteria.*

**Tim Powles:** The boxes I've ended up with are here because they do one or two things really well and I play to their strengths. Chris Lord-Alge in your last issue had some interesting things to say that I could relate to on this topic. Even though I don't necessarily like a lot of his work or understand why he needs 51 compressors, I totally relate to his principle of needing to be able to look at a compressor or a mic or a console and be able to hear in your head what it'll sound like and where it'll suit.

**AT:** *Like a painter using colours?*

**TP:** Exactly the same way. For instance being a drummer and an engineer I can now look at a mic, push the mic around the drum kit and, depending on where I put it, I can hear exactly what the sound will be like in my head. I don't have to go and listen to check it, I know what it's going to be like. I can put a certain amount of damping on or I can take it off, or I can tune it this way and that, or I can get this drum or put this head on it, and I just know.

That same approach carries over into working in Logic Audio and ProTools. And I think this is important because these programs offer so many possibilities that

you could be lost for days auditioning plug-ins and effects. But you can't afford to do that, especially not when you've got a young band with a three minute attention span paying good money to watch you. I've started getting really committal and

brave with Logic. Logic is always asking whether you want to audition a process, 'Do you want to make it permanent?' – yes, yes, yes, just get on with it. And you come up with really good stuff because you go down a road looking for something definite, and you can't go back.

**AT:** *But if as a producer/engineer you have your technical chops, and consequently your trademark*

*sound, isn't there a danger in missing the individuality that each band bring when they walk through the door?*

**TP:** I think that it's unavoidable for a producer to have a sound. But when I take on a project I don't go into that project thinking I'm going to use 'x' technique from my last project, or 'y' sound I heard on the radio yesterday. You need to look at each new project as a blank canvas.

**AT:** *Talk us through how that approach applied to a band like Skulker, who recorded here recently?*

**TP:** I felt that Skulker thought of themselves as a kind of heavy rock group. Everyone thinks they're a rival to a band like Nitocris, but that's not what I heard. They themselves might even argue against this, but their strength is their melody and their sense of pop music. They've got a very light drummer, who's into hip hop music, and, okay, she doesn't necessarily play with the consistency of a hip hop drummer, but her composition is really good. I'm not going to give her a Motley Crue/Veruca Salt drum sound, instead I'm going to let her use her old drum kit, and make it sound really garagey and high school – that's what they are, and that's what people love about them, and if they continue to be that then they'll really appeal. So that was an individual approach for that band. That's not a technical decision, it's instinctive. I actually worked really hard on Skulker to not do all the things I would normally do. For example, normally I aim for an unpretentious dry vocal sound, but for Skulker I went for loads of ambience on the vocals. When I was tracking I had multiple echoes and delays just going everywhere. But it worked. There's no rules, it's just got to feel right. In fact, somewhere down the track some other band might think, "we like those Skulker echoes, we're going to do it that way". Don't be nervous about committing to a different road.

**AT:** *You've been part of the Australian rock scene for some time. Has Aussie rock had its day?*

**TP:** I think Australian music is fantastic. I think there was a bit of a slump a few years ago, but Spiderbait's record is brilliant. Whether it receives any international interest or not, it's brilliantly produced, with a great angle. Powderfinger know how to package themselves, Regurgitor are really smart guys... there are some great bands around. Actually, I feel totally inspired and excited about today's music.

*Fans of The Church will be pleased to hear that Tim is currently working on the overdubs for a new album, slated for a 2001 release.*

