



Bus Powered – Blair Joscelyne at GASinc Studios with an item from his toy piano collection.

HOME GROWN

If you want proof of the dictum: 'it's not what you have but how you use it', then look no further than Blair Joscelyne. He started out writing tunes for 'phone me now' late night SMS ads with next to no gear... and now things are very different.

Text: Gavin Hammond

► Blair Joscelyne is a producer and composer who knows how to sell himself and make a living in an industry littered with people who 'didn't make it'. Such are his powers of self-promotion, I thought I'd let him take care of the introductions: "Hi, I'm a composer and studio manager at GASinc in Sydney. I'm 28 and have a fluffy untrendy hairstyle. I write music for a living, and run the studio sessions as engineer in between music jobs.

"I don't believe in luck – I believe that luck is the intersection of opportunity and talent. You have to make luck yourself and always be aware of the opportunities out there, even if it means doing a phone-on-hold piece and building up from there. There is so much work out there for musicians. You just have to find it in unlikely places.

"I've written music for companies such as Optus, Telstra, Discovery Channel, L'Oreal, Village, Loveable, and Subaru, for their ad campaigns.

"I also spend some of my time producing artists, one of which, Katia Fuscaldò, has just signed a deal with Sony/BMG. And I recently did a film for director Lee Rogers – the music was done by myself and Richard Pleasance who was featured in AT a couple of issues ago.

"I compose with a variety of toy pianos, ukeleles and other weird objects and, shhh... I still use a Yamaha QS300 as my main sequencer!"

BLAIR – WHICH PROJECTS?

Gavin Hammond: So Blair, can you tell us about your first big break?

Blair Joscelyne: I remember putting together a CD demo of all my work when I was 21 and instead of contacting studios, I pulled out the Yellow Pages and emailed every film and TV post-production house with a proposition: I would set up my studio in their space at no cost to them. They could pay me per job as needed and have someone there everyday for free. One facility took me up on the offer, so I set up my gear, which was a G4 with a Digi 001, a Yamaha QS300 workstation, a Korg Prophecy, Lexicon Alex and a Behringer Autocom compressor.

They already had a Rode mic and a Yamaha O3D mixer and some decent monitors. I wrote

music and produced audio for dodgy late-night SMS ads, dog food supplements, and final warehouse clearances, etc. It wasn't glamorous work but I learnt how to work quickly and how to make the most out of the limited time and gear I had.

After six months I proposed the same arrangement to a production company in the city where I set up the same gear with a Behringer mixer, and I worked there for four years composing music for games, TV and docos.

Through a friend I met Rodney and Jason who run GASinc in Melbourne and I started running GASinc in Sydney about 18 months ago.

GH: Tell us about your work there.

BJ: GASinc occupies an old converted chocolate factory and it's a beautiful bright space to work in. I have about 50 different instruments here, from toys through to my growing collection of late '70s gear. All instruments are within easy reach and easily accessed via the patchbay. Lots of recording is done in the control room – even though we have an amazing space – which upsets some engineer friends.

GH: What gear is in your studio now?

BJ: I run a dual 1.8GHz G5 with ProTools/Digi 002 and all the Waves plugs. I don't use any other software. I prefer hardware, which is why there are so many toys in the studio.

Everything runs through a Mackie d8b console and everything is wired up to patchbays to make routing super fast. I've got a bunch of external effects and compressors, and my trusty Lexicon Alex, which I use most of the time when I need 'verb on a line-level instrument. GASinc also runs Fairlight systems in all of the studios.

I have a few different mics, but I end up using just two of them for just about everything: A Rode NT2000 and a BLUE Baby Bottle, which

is amazing for vocals. The Rode is always patched into the d8b and the BLUE Baby Bottle is always patched into an Avalon 737SP.

Monitors are Genelec 8040A and Yamaha MSP5. We also have a variety of TV speakers and monitors.

I still use my Yamaha QS300 for sequencing and an Akai S3000XL for sampling. I also run a Korg Prophecy, Novation K-Station, Roland MC307, MicroKorg, Korg MS20 semi-modular analogue synth, 1979 Fender Rhodes, Moog MG1 analogue synth, 1978 Roland MP600 Electric Piano, Roland TR606, Theremin, 1880s pump organ, turntables, and a variety of electric and acoustic guitars and bass.

I have a bunch of pedals and a Behringer V-Amp, which I use on guitars and synths. The V-Amp is always digitally patched into the back of 'Tools so I can record guitars instantly. I need to be able to track something as soon as I think of it. I don't care for trying to find the right leads to get started. If I have an idea, I want to be recording it within 20 seconds, max. Sometimes it means recording in the control room.

There is a big rack with over 60 other instruments on it, from travels overseas and trawling markets – a collection of toy pianos, antique mandolin, ukuleles, vibraphone, thumb pianos, djembes, homemade didge, zithers, etc – great for me or a client to grab and have a play with.

GH: Sounds like you aren't averse to thinking outside the square. Any unusual effects setups that you can tell us about?

BJ: Well, I use voicemail quite a bit. It doesn't cost anything and it sounds really good on drums and vocals. Just ring yourself, hold the phone up near the speaker, hit Play on your machine and leave yourself a message. Then call back voicemail, turn up your phone's speaker and record it back into 'Tools. It's crunchy and distorted. I recently did a remix,

which had 'Voicemail Vocals' (as I call it) for the first verse and chorus. It also sounds amazing over the whole mix for one bar just before a big chorus – better than any plug-in I've heard.

GH: If you were stuck on a desert island with just a few toys to do your thing, what would you take?

BJ: I'd take my Yamaha QS300 workstation and a ukulele. The QS300 is an all-round workhorse, while I'm really getting into ukulele at the moment – it would make sense to take it with me to play under a palm tree if I were stuck on a desert island.

GH: How do you approach creating a track. What gets your creative juices flowing?

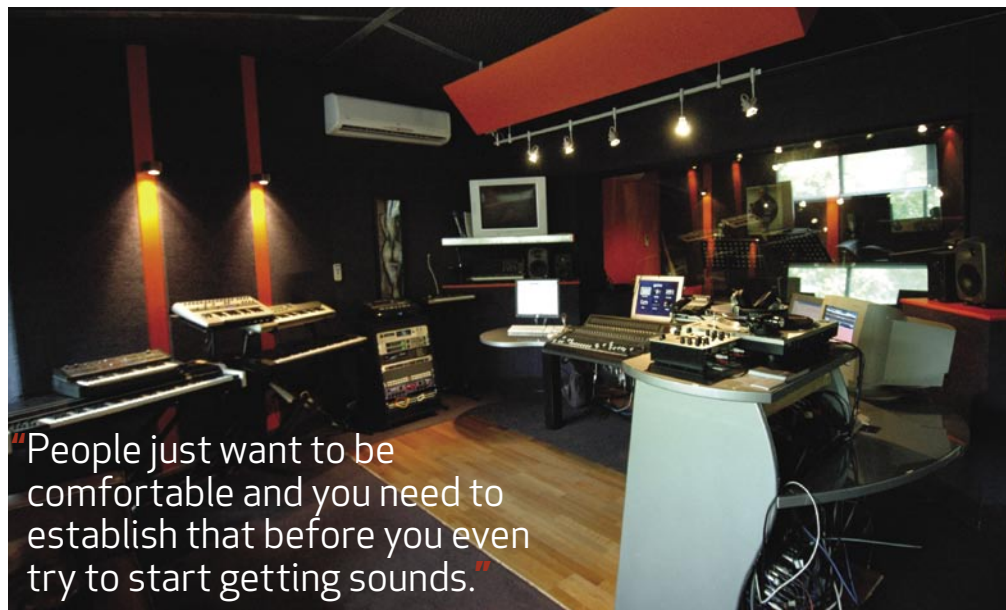
BJ: I trust my initial instincts and go for it. I don't second-guess or intellectualise it. I think it's important to be open to the inspiration that is all around us every day. That's why I don't use an iPod when I'm out. I want to hear the clank of cars, the sounds of voices. There is music that occurs everywhere, naturally in our day-to-day lives. Everywhere you go there are beautiful and ugly sounds, and if you open up to it you'll never be stuck for an idea.

MIX TIPS

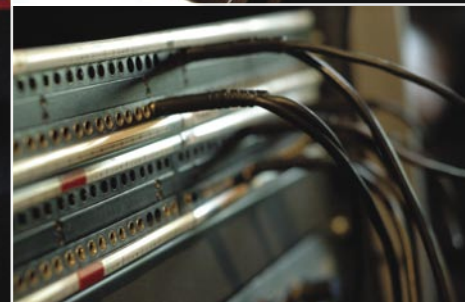
GH: What are some of your mixing methods?

BJ: I start my mix a bit like an impressionist painter; splashes of colour here and there – some darkness here, some light over there. I don't work on one sound and get it perfect and then move onto the next. I listen to the whole mix and adjust it as needed, working on the big picture and then close in on singular sounds from there.

I used to mix out through a 24-channel analogue console using on-board EQ, a limiter on the inserts of the stereo bus, and a rack of external effects units. I do everything



"People just want to be comfortable and you need to establish that before you even try to start getting sounds."





in 'Tools now. I need instant recall, and often my sessions are linked to vision.

I sequence externally and any Midi is recorded in as audio, often with effects printed on it from outboard gear, and EQ from the desk. That way, half the job is done by the time I get to the mix. It's a good idea to use outboard gear for as much as you can. It's nice to know the signal has been through some physical circuits and I also believe in committing to the sound. Too much time fiddling with a plug-in is not something that I find conducive to creativity. For keys, I believe in getting the sound, adding whatever is needed, printing it and moving on.

I'll often just hover my mouse button over the 'Process' button of an AudioSuite plug-in and hit it over and over again. For example, on a vocal line, I may get a four-band EQ, take out everything under 100Hz, everything over 6kHz, then find a frequency between 2k and 4k that feels right for the piece and boost it right up. Then I'll just hit the Process button over and over again, checking the levels and adjusting as needed. You end up with a really thin, amazing sound that works really well as a delay or a call and response.

In 'Tools, I often use D-Verb. People either love it or hate it but I find it really versatile. You need to give it a tweak, but you can get a nice sound out of it quickly. Otherwise I'll go out via an auxiliary to the Lexicon.

The master bus always has a Waves L1 or an L2 on it just keeping things in check. Some channels may be slammed but I rarely slam the whole mix.

GH: How do you work as a producer of other artists? What do you try to capture and how?

BJ: The one decision we make at the start of a project is whether my role will be to capture their songs as honestly as possible, or if they want me to take over and direct every harmony, every take and note of music. Sometimes they just want me to capture what they already have. Other times I'm writing songs that suit their register, performing all the parts, or hiring session players, and working out all

of the harmonies to create something that is marketable and people-friendly.

I will also organise their whole package all the way through to finding a director for a film clip, website, make-up, accessories, etc. I usually take on one or two artists a year to go through the whole process – I don't have time to do more than that with my TV work and film scores.

The best success comes out of getting the artists a fantastic headphone mix, asking them about what type of lighting they like and what temperature they're comfortable with in the room. People just want to be comfortable and you need to establish that before you even try to start getting sounds. I often send the singer to a vocal coach six weeks before recording to get them into shape.

Most of the artists I've worked with this year have been teenage girls, so it's about being caring and patient, while also pushing them to get the best out of their voices. *Australian Idol* has created a false expectation of being able to be famous overnight. A lot of these young girls can't believe the process they must go through to do a whole album.

GH: Any parting advice for people trying to make the most of their gear with limited resources?

BJ: People are always looking for a different or 'new' sound and I don't believe that they're going to find it by looking in their plug-ins folder. Setting yourself some limitations can be amazing for creativity because you then don't have to worry about the technicalities. Do a whole track using only cassette tape; record the drum kit with only one mic; record the vocals through your phone. Vinnies and local markets always have an abundance of old amps, tape decks and toys for next to nothing. Remember, all those toys are there to serve you, so take control of your machines and show them what you're made of! ■

Blair Joscelyne is currently working on his own album... tentatively titled '1978'.