



HOME GROWN

When it comes to the world of dance music, 'fickle' and 'fleeting' are words that often spring to mind. Clubbers are savvy, and the world is shrinking fast. So how do you stay on the cutting edge? Ivan Gough of TV Rock shows us how.

Text: Brad Watts

Ivan Gough's name is synonymous with Australian dance music. Since 1984 he's been DJ'ing, tweaking and remixing dance floor tracks for as many electronic dance genres as there are... well, electronic music genres. It's a fickle and flighty scene, where what's cool today is quickly forgotten tomorrow. Some tunes, however, stick to the dance music framework like 130BPM glue and go on to become classics. It's a world where developing your own 'sound' is continually tempered by what the dance floor will devour. I recently met Ivan Gough for the *second* time, the first time was at a mixing session in Melbourne's Vicious Vinyl studios. This time around Ivan showed me through his new studio, and pointed out a few of the methods behind the insatiable madness of dance floor music.

Brad Watts: So Ivan, show me your new room. Who organised the design side of things here?

Ivan Gough: Glenn Stanton is the guy responsible for the design; I actually met him through a forum on the web. He's based in The States and does studio design work as an adjunct to his home theatre design business, *Running Brook Design*. All the corrugated metal material here in the studio was originally on the ceiling and Glenn decided we could use it and save on material costs. We ended up fitting out the entire room for around 20 grand. I already had the Argosy bench and the equipment of

course, but the refit has made an incredible difference to how quickly I can get a mix together.

BW: What finally forced the decision to go hammer and tongs on a refit?

IG: Well, I was really struggling to get a decent sound happening in here. It was basically a rectangular room with plasterboard walls, and admittedly it had always been an uphill battle mixing in here. So far the rebuild has been worth every penny – the results are just amazing! We're still yet to convert the storage room into a vocal booth, so for now it's just full of the stuff we don't use. [I notice the pair of Auratones sitting idly amongst the refuse equipment in the storage area and ponder how much redundant stuff is lurking in people's 'vocal-booths-to-be'.]

BW: So tell me about your act, TV Rock... the last time we met you were mixing electronica and moving toward more of a live sound.

IG: Well TV Rock is Grant Smille and myself, along with whomever we get involved as guests. Grant's primarily a DJ and was heavily involved with the house music scene, for want of a better description. I was doing underground progressive house and trancy style stuff – with a pretty dark and scary vibe to it. Dance music can be a fickle business and at the time that 'progressive' style was coming to an end. Back in

around 2004 when I was looking for someone to work with, I was introduced to Grant one night at a club. We hit it off immediately and started working together, initially just half a day a week. We did a couple of remixes and the partnership grew from there. Now we're working together full time. Putting out the record *Flaunt It* early on, which proved to be a big hit, really laid the groundwork for us. [The track spent five weeks at No.1 on the ARIA club charts]. We promoted it ourselves as well as through a company called Global PR and the track just took off.

We didn't have a deal for it at that point but Grant works on-air at Radio Nova doing a show with John Course called *Overdrive*. The station gave it a couple of spot plays and every time they played it the phone lines just lit up! Soon after, Simon Cahill at Sony said he could help out, so they then got behind it at the time and made the track a hit. *Flaunt It* ended up snowballing into sales of about 160,000 copies. Unusual really, because it's always been hard to make money off singles in Australia, especially with the download culture we have these days. Records like that tend to become more of a business card to promote your DJ'ing. Suddenly you can raise your DJ fee from \$500 to three grand, and that's a lot of dosh when you're playing two or three times a week. You end up making more out of the touring side of things than the actual record sales. We then got quite a few sales with a remix for a Melbourne outfit called The Dukes of Windsor, which helped them attract more of a national following and certainly lent us some extra credibility.

DYNAMIC RANGE

BW: So what's the dynamic between you and Grant when you're putting tracks together?

IG: Well, generally speaking, I do all the actual studio production, Grant does a little bit of the studio work but he primarily looks after the business end of things, which at the moment is pretty full-on. He'll deal with the emails and the overseas labels; all that stuff that keeps you up till two in the morning. He comes here every day and does all that from the couch, but we still manage to put in around seven to nine hours work a day on the music.

BW: So Grant is still presumably having an input into the actual music...

IG: Oh absolutely, he sure does. We both like the same types of music so he'll always be injecting his opinion. Our initial direction was more of an indie/electro sound – the 'Sydney sound' as a lot of people call it down this way.

BW: No way! There's actually a 'Sydney Sound'?

IG: Oh yeah, a lot of that sound has come out of Sydney. The Presets, P'nau, Cut/Copy (even though they're from Melbourne) and DJs like Ajax, are all indicative of that electro sound. I love that stuff – it's a great scene, but we've inevitably looked overseas for our influences too. We're always in contact with the overseas DJs we work with and have good relationships with them. Keeping our 'research' up is vital

because with dance music you just *have* to know the market. Kids are remarkably savvy these days – they're on the internet listening to a show by Pete Tong in the U.K. while it's still actually happening. So they're right up with the latest tunes, including the stuff that hasn't even been released yet!

When I was a kid you'd be off to see a DJ just because they'd have some records that nobody else has – that just doesn't happen anymore. Grant does a lot of this research, and often in the morning we'll be checking out whatever new tunes he's got his hands on. We'll have a listen and then dissect everything, and at the same time, absorb some of those influences. It's a good working dynamic for us. It's so much better than those situations where you've got two people crawling over the top of each other to get to the computer. This way I'm the guy mostly at the helm. Being a fast Logic user, we can get things done quickly, and Grant's there to bounce ideas around with. It's really important for us to keep that speed up to keep the workflow going.

THE HOOK & THE SLICE

BW: So what about the actual flow of ideas? How do you kick off a track?

IG: When it comes to the actual track construction we usually start with the main hook – something that's going to be the 'pull' of a track. Once that's decided, I'll set about building a drum track to the hook, then I'll build the track up to where I think it's going to peak – where it's going to climax and deliver the most punch. From that point I'll start arranging it backwards, toward the intro. I find that's the fastest way of working.

But it's also very important to us both that we don't live like cave dwellers. I love the studio, but I also love the golf course. You've got to get out in the sun occasionally. Working this way we can usually get a track sorted out in a couple of days. The first day we'll get most of it together, then the second day we'll listen to the track and write notes as to where we think the holes are, and cross off the issues as we fix them up. As for mixing, I vaguely mix as I go just to keep the energy happening, but always do a lot of tweaking at the end. If you take too long on a track you can end up fussing over things too much and the creative process just dies.

LOGICAL PROGRESSION

BW: Have you leapt to Logic 8 yet?

IG: Nope, I'm still using version 7. I've had a couple of sessions with other people's computers in here using v8, and to be honest, there's been so much change from v7 that I just don't like the new workflow. I don't really like being bullied by a computer company into completely changing the way I work either. It seems the software and computer companies these days are happy to completely alter your working methods all in the name of progress. So for the moment I'll be sticking with v7.

There are so many applications coming out

these days that just aren't up to scratch! The software manufacturers put stuff out that doesn't work properly, and then try to assure you that the bugs will be ironed out in the next version, but this really isn't good enough. For example, I know a lot of people fell into a hole with Vista, and the new OSX hasn't really done it for audio people either.

BW: So you're still running 10.4 on your Macs?

IG: Yes, and I won't be upgrading any time soon. I am very, very careful about getting my system working and then leaving it well alone. I'm completely anal about it, in fact. Once it's up and running smoothly I don't touch it. This approach has kept my systems rock solid for years.

Then once a week I do a full backup of everything. I've got two backup drives that are the same size as the drives in the MacPro, and once a week I use a program called Super Duper to do a complete mirror copy of each drive. So if I lose a drive I just replace it with the backup.

BW: So, with Logic 7, you're happy staying a step behind the 'bleeding edge', but what about virtual instruments? I notice you've got a horde of USB protection keys plugged into your computer.

IG: I love the Korg virtual stuff. Both packs from the Legacy Collection are just incredible. I use the Izotope iDrum a lot, along with the Arturia Jupiter 8-V, but you need a really fast

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processor to use the Arturia plugs painlessly. Consequently, I've upgraded to a 2.66GHz quad core MacPro with 5GB of RAM and that does a pretty good job. I'm a big believer in loads of RAM for audio stuff. I'm also a great believer in plug-ins and try to keep up-to-date with what's available. The URS Channel Strip Pro is awesome and has a lot of colour to it. Plus they make a low-CPU-usage version, which is handy. I also use the SoundToys bundle. All of those are great plugs, especially the EchoBoy and the FilterFreak – just amazing. Then there are the TriTone Digital plug-ins: the AngelTone, PulTone and ColorTone. Again, they're great for adding colour to a signal. Plus there are so many great freeware plug-ins available as well. The Yohng W1, which is a knock-off of the Waves L1, and the Bitter Sweet II from Flux plug-ins, which is a 'transient designer' of sorts – great for restoring life back into over-compressed sampled drums.

THE LOUD LIBRARY

BW: How are you putting your drums together? Are you into piecing together percussion from individual hits or using loops?

IG: No, I program it all up with individual hits, and usually use step sequencing, either with Ultrabeat in Logic or the Izotope iDrum. That's great for trying out a bunch of different patterns really quickly, and it's really simple to use. I use Kontakt 2 for sampling, as opposed to the EXS24 in Logic, simply because I prefer the sound of it – the EXS just doesn't do it for me.

Regardless of what you use though, you've got to have a handle on your sample library, and I spend heaps of time making sure my library is catalogued and ready to roll at a moment's notice. Usually I just buy straight-out sample libraries on CD or DVD – there are thousands of sounds out there; you've just got to make sure you spend time cataloguing them properly. This is the thing about dance music: you've got to keep on top of what's current and make sure you've got the sounds to cater to those trends. For instance, I've kept all the sample CDs I bought in the '90s and now that sound is coming back into the clubs. So it's great to

have that old library of sounds still available and rarin' to go.

BW: There's not a lot of actual hardware in your system here. What outboard can't you do without?

IG: Well, as you can see, I like to keep things simple, but obviously you need a decent signal path for vocals. I use a Great River mic pre for any live stuff. It's a Neve 1073 clone called the ME1NV, which to my ear sounds better than an actual 1073 – the bottom end is more together. That goes through the Purple Audio MC77 compressor, which is an 1176 clone. That, I simply couldn't do without. Particularly for vocalists who have that tendency to really jump onto the mic. So my vocal chain is these two units, with a Soundelux U195 mic – a Neumann U47FET copy. I usually use that with the 'Fat' switch on – straight into the Great River preamp, into the MC77 compressor and finally into the computer.

BW: So why go for the 1176 clone rather than say an LA-2A or similar?

IG: Well the 1176 is such a versatile compressor, plus there were a number of people using them whose work I really respected. A few people told me the Purple Audio model was a touch better than the Universal Audio reissues, so in the end I went for the Purple. But I also have a UAD card and I use that for the LA-2A on bass and vocals – they actually sound like hardware to me – so there's two of those cards in the MacPro. Like a lot of people, I'm waiting for their new cards to surface. The UAD cards have been sitting at the same power level for about 10 years now – so there has to be a new one soon. I'll probably jump on a Smart C2 for output compression pretty soon as well, to glue everything together a bit better. I've used it on a number of sessions in other studios and it really gives the music that up-front sound. Then of course there's the Moog Voyager. It's a one-note machine but boy what a note! I love the noise generator in it – it allows you to get those noisy sweeps that a lot of the electro guys use.

BW: You're still using the Roland SH101 too, I see?

IG: Oh yeah, that gets plugged in all the time but the Moog Voyager gets the biggest workout. We bought one of the autographed models about three months before Bob Moog passed away. I use the SH101 because I love that self-oscillating filter and the way it squeals when you push it. That's triggered from the Waldorf Pulse Plus, which is a great little unit if you can ever find one. But a lot of the time I'll record the SH101 straight into Logic.

BW: What audio interfaces are you using?

IG: Again, it's very simple. I use an M-Audio Audiophile, but that's about to be swapped for a Metric Halo 2882. I'm pretty keen to get the DSP-assisted version so I can run the Metric Halo channel strip software – it's a pretty serious box and should kick things along. Having said that, I won't need the amount of I/O on the Metric Halo as I'm never recording more than one thing at a time anyway.

On the MIDI side of things I use the Novation Remote 25SL just for putting in drums and simple bass lines, and for more complex stuff I use the Roland HP147E digital piano, which is one of the best investments I've ever made. When it comes to doing anything complex with keyboard lines, a friend of mine, Colin Snape, comes in to play keys for me. Putting him in front of a two-octave synth keyboard is just too limiting. A good keyboard player deserves a weighted keyboard and the full complement of 88 notes. I can get the main chord patterns down, sure, but when it comes to adding some colour to an arrangement it's much nicer to have a skilled keyboard player.

BW: So working with other people is an important aspect to your writing process?

IG: Definitely. I like working with people that have a better musical knowledge base than I do. They come up with so many more options than I ever could, and again, it gets the job done faster than I ever could. I'd rather do that than push myself for hours just to come up with a tenth of what someone like Colin does in 20 minutes! ■