

2nd Day Crush—a great recording on a shoestring budget

# RECORDING

The magazine for the recording m

How To

## Hook Up Your Studio

Understanding Cables, Connections, and the Signal Path



The beauty of Neve in your computer

Universal Audio  
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## 21 NEW PRODUCTS REVIEWED

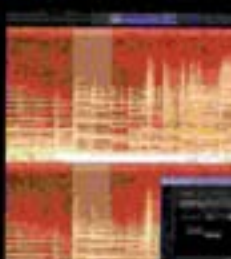
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—Editing Drums in Pro Tools

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## Fade In

### Connections

You can't do without them, in or out of your studio. There is a delicious double meaning attached to all these terms: connections, networks, interfaces, hook-ups—you need to make the most of them, in all of their meanings.

You can do great work in the confines of your studio, but not without the right connections, from the inception of a project to its completion and beyond. In the studio they enable you to create, and beyond the studio they provide you with an audience for your creations.

It's a case of what you know (you can't do without functional connections in your studio), and who you know (if nobody in the industry gets to hear your work, fame and fortune will remain elusive). You need to be well connected, at home, and in the world at large.

This month we take a good look at the kinds of connections you need in your studio, primarily between the sound source and the DAW. Pedestrian and trivial, you say? I'll grant you that there are more titillating topics—until your workflow gets hindered by a persistent buzz ("What was that again I should know about balanced and shielded?") or a gain mismatch ("Why do I have to crank this just to hear a faint signal through the noise?").

In the spirit of an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure, read Part I of Mike Rivers' article *Signals From Source to DAW*. It's a good start—there is enough to talk about for a second article for another day, and not just for newbies! This information is rounded out by reviews of a number of boxes that will enable or enhance your signal flow.

Speaking of workflow—would you ever track all keeper vocals before drums and bass? Rick Barrio Dill did just that when he recorded his band 2nd Day Crush, and it worked out just fine; the entirely self-produced CD *From The Nights You Lost Your Voice* sounds great! He tells us how they went about it, and why—his is a story of a firm artistic vision pursued with relentless passion and consummate skills, all done on a shoestring budget. The interview starts on page 12.

Your responses to our recent Readers' Survey are in and have been tabulated. The number of returns was overwhelming, no doubt helped by the chance to win some valuable prizes, and by the ease of online submission when compared to pen-and-paper exercises of past years. The winners of the drawings are being notified as we go to press at the end of April—if you receive our email to that effect, then you know who you are...

Recording techniques is by far the topic that draws the most readers to our magazine—96.5 percent! Product reviews (80%) and product comparisons (60%) also came in strong, while interviews with producer/engineers at 70% trumped artist interviews (40%). That line often gets crossed, of course, when artists do their own engineering and producers also play on the project—this month's interview being a case in point. But your responses confirm what we already knew—you want to learn from somebody who knows how to do it, and when in doubt, you'd rather trust an engineer/producer to come up with the goods.

More of you plan on buying a mic than anything else—software comes next, followed by preamps. What hangs you up the most? Gear and room acoustics, followed closely by mixing skills or—presumably—lack thereof.

It helps to know what's on your minds. We'll keep on bringing you the information that will make your life easier in the studio, help you alleviate problems, and altogether make for successful and—

Happy Recording.



Recording

## 2nd DAY CRUSH

Rick Barrio Dill explains how an album was recorded—vocals first

Interview by Lorenz Rychner

*The CD is called From The Nights You Lost Your Voice. It sounds as good as or better than most anything out there, but you'll look in vain for big-name studios or famous producers. It is mostly a home-studio product, and was done in a very methodical but—in some regards—rather unorthodox manner. Read below about the "vocals-before-drums" production method, and listen at [www.myspace.com/2nddaycrush](http://www.myspace.com/2nddaycrush).*

*2nd Day Crush is made up of Christopher Drizen (lead vocals and guitars), Jeremy Weinberg (guitars and vocals), Rami Jrade (guitars), George Lind (drums), and—last but not least—our interviewee whom we caught on a tour stop in Denver, CO: Rick Barrio Dill.*

### The driving force

Your credits read "Produced by, engineered by, songwriting, bass, vocals, additional guitars, percussion, synth, organ, piano, strings, loops, samples, and programming". Were you busy?

Rick Barrio Dill: [laughs] Somebody had to do it...

You were a recording musician long before this project.

Right, I learned engineering in Florida, for a little while I did preliminary classes at Full Sail, then I worked at Audio Labs in Tampa. I suddenly was swamped with work and I owe a lot to Greg Marchak, who was my mentor. Then I started my own place, Shark Eating Dog.

You learned on the job?

Yes, in all styles, Trans-Siberian Orchestra, heavy metal, European death metal, southern hip hop, gospel... Then I had a band, Starbaby, I produced their CD *Welcome To The Planet*. When we hit a ceiling in Florida, I took the band to LA and ran into Chris [Drizen]. He was doing his own singer/songwriter project and I was his hired gun for a while, while Starbaby was no longer keeping me busy; then Chris pitched me the idea for a band.

The rest is history?

Not so fast [laughs]—we spent a year and a half trying out musical directions and looking for the right players. We hooked up with producer Jim Wirt (Fiona Apple, Incubus, etc.) and cut three tracks, independently; he was great to work with. Then we hooked up with the Fuzz label and cut tracks with two name producers, in one case we connected through a SXSW show. The recorded results were not what we needed, so—long story short—we used an escape clause in the agreement, parted company, and started producing ourselves.

Was that scary, being on your own again?

Yeah, I thought that was going to kill me; but I was going to start doing it all myself, 'cause nobody else in the band had any sort of engineering chops.

Was the group complete when you began producing on your own?

Only the four of us. Jeremy was leaving another group just as we had begun. We heard about it and he signed on with us—the timing was perfect, we had a lot of harmonies planned and a strong singer and guitarist was just what we needed.

### The madness in the method

So what is the deal with this "vocals-before-drums" method in the way you are tracking basics?

It's an idea we got from Jim (Wirt). With him we would lay down drums first, but then he would mute the drums when recording the vocals. We went one step further and started with the vocals.

So this is really about the vocals?

There are two things you want to make sure you're getting right so they don't clutter up the process: You want a vocal that is in tune, and you want a vocal that has the



vibe, strongly enough to stand on its own, even if you strip everything else away.

So Chris and I discussed this idea of Jim's, and we decided to track all the lead and background vocals before the drums. This keeps the focus strongly on the vocals. When there are toms and cymbal noises and the rest of it going on, it's easy to get distracted, to lose intensity, and it's harder to hear when things are not exactly in tune. Like this, the vocal is as naked as naked gets.

Another thing is in-tune guitars. You give the guitarist maybe only a kick drum and the vocal—the kick is better than a click, it's at least a living instrument, but it doesn't fill up space and it's not pitched.

#### So what did the vocalists hear?

We tracked all vocals, leads and backgrounds, to either an acoustic guitar with a click or acoustic guitar and dance loops.

#### What about the loops you used—yours is not a loop-based band sound, how did they fit in?

We have lots of our songs up in the 160–170 BPM range. That lends itself to that sort-of-European techno-loop tempo range. The challenge for me was to envision how those loops would live together with the real drum parts once we would track them. It became a balancing act—in certain places the drummer had to play a certain way to get along with the loops, at other times I had to get rid of them, in some places the loops had to take over so the drummer had to accommodate them, by simplifying.

That was yet another reason why we wanted to start with the vocals, so those loops-and-drummer considerations would come later. The vocal tells me what to do when it comes to those things—the vocal is king. Lots of our songs are very melodic, so we can't ever let something else get in the way. Chris has a distinctive enough voice to be

unique even at fast tempos if nothing else is allowed to get in the way. That lets us thread in some of that European and Asian loop style, but not scare American rock listeners away. That was the balancing act, the tough part.

#### Before I let you tell us the nitty-gritty secrets about the entire project, give our readers a sense of the money involved here.

Totally indie—we financed it all ourselves. We spent money on 4th Street, on Mike Creswell, on Threshold [see sidebar] and on the actual manufacturing of the CDs. We had some friends at a company called DesignWorks here in LA who did us a huge solid with the artwork design, and Chris cashed in some favors with a relative at Drizen Dohs Corporate Communication who printed the CD artwork for us as a favor (all green recycled paper by the way... no plastic used, except for the evil needed shrinkwrap) and we literally as a band glued together and put together each and every CD box and folded and placed every insert into the CD sleeves. That was a nightmare of a band assembly-line, a long process, but we of course saved money doing it that way.

We did it all for under 10K and a ton (can't stress that word enough) of labor, hard work and calling in favors all over the place... haha. Talk about shoestring! We sold shares to family and friends, with the promise of a return once the CD would sell. The CD came out in December (2007), it's on iTunes and on CD Baby, and we're on a self-financed tour where we sell CDs at the gigs, and also through our Myspace site.

#### Good luck, and thanks for sharing!

*Rick is at [www.myspace.com/alilmyspacegimmick](http://www.myspace.com/alilmyspacegimmick)  
The band is at [www.myspace.com/2nddaycrush](http://www.myspace.com/2nddaycrush)  
Rick's bass amp and cab are from [www.aguilaramp.com](http://www.aguilaramp.com)  
Photos by Joey James and Rick Barrio Dill.*

**"You want a vocal that is in tune, and you want a vocal that has the vibe."  
—Rick Barrio Dill**

## Project Chronology and Specifics— by Rick Barrio Dill

### Tracking

1. Lead vocals (to scratch acoustic guitar and click)
2. Background and harmony vocals (to scratch acoustic guitar and click).

Most of the signal chain for lead vocals was a Neumann TLM103 through a UA 6176 pre with light compression, then to my Apogee Mini-Me converter (S/PDIF) into Pro Tools.

Background vocals were all done one at a time, with either the 103 or my Shure KSM32, with the same 6176 path. I would say 60% of the backgrounds/harmony vocals were Chris (Drizen) and then Jeremy and myself would be responsible for the rest. On three songs, "Put Down Your Guns", "Something Now" and "I Want to Be There Again", a good friend of ours, Nick Foxer, came in and did backgrounds as

well. Same signal path. The only other x-factor for BVs was Seth Trotter from The Higher (Epitaph), he is a good friend of ours as well and he came in and did backgrounds and some shared leads on "I Always". Same signal path.

Once we had great clean-sounding vocals from the 6176 through the Apogee in Pro Tools, we always knew we could then copy away and destroy the daylights out of it with some of Creswell's outboard eqs and compression for effect at mixing. The key from our end, pre-mixing, was getting them sounding clean and the best we could first.

We worked on getting those vocals to be really solid before moving on, probably off and on for 2 months. The vocals are always the most important thing for me and Chris and again, we were writing and constantly messing with the melodies and arrangements of everything from leads to backgrounds.

3. Then I would weave in atmospheric loops and samples from Reason/Stylus/Ableton Live, added while thinking ahead of the real drum parts.





alternated between a Fender Twin and a Marshall JC900 slant-4 cab. We made a tunnel with a blue U-Haul packing blanket (only the blue will do!).

The guitars were Les Paul '57, Les Paul Goldtop, a variety of Telecasters, a couple of Strats, and the proportions were about 50% Tele, 35% Les Paul, 15% Strat.

7. Back at my studio I added keys: Roland JP-8000, Native Instruments' B4 for Hammond sounds, and their soft-synth Akoustik Piano. I swear by that company and the people behind it!

I also added percussion, shaker and other sounds, some miked with a TLM 103 to a 1" tape then into Pro Tools, others from samples.

After each step, right from the beginning, I took time to edit. It probably took about 4 months for the entire process before we went to Cress. Part of it was because we were still writing a few tunes as we were recording, as well as really trying to find the right vibes as far as the dance loops and blending with a real band.

The "wiggle" process of getting everything to live together and marinate properly just takes time sometimes. Since we were really trying to make an artistic statement to ourselves and we weren't under time

constraints, the end result better be good to us. However long that takes... it is what it is.

### Mixing

I wanted an independent party to come in on the mix. During our Fuzz episode we got to know Mike Creswell as a Bad-Ass Mixer. He has this cave in Echo Park that he uses only for mixing. He has completely adjusted his mixing style, he mixes to the lowest common denominator, ear buds and laptop speakers! Mike totally gets it, and he gets us—we had to work around his schedule but managed to get the 12 tracks done during maybe 20 very long days over a period of about 2 months.

### Mastering

I had done some mastering back in Florida and could have done this, but I wanted fresh ears, and somebody from whom I could learn something while maintaining some input and control. I went to Gil Tamazyran at Threshold in Santa Monica, sat with him, and we got it done. Gil did a really good job.—RBD ☺

4. Keeper acoustic guitar tracks, done in my 8' x 8' room that is nice and dead. At these tempos there is no need for room sound, no time to wait for the room. Mostly I consider these tracks to be a tambourine with strings. I used a Neumann TLM 103 at the 12th fret, about 5-6" away, angled slightly towards the hole. On the UA6176 I rolled off a dB or two at 100 Hz going in.

All the above were done at my home studio in LA.

5. We recorded the drums (with engineer Neal Couser) and—for all but two songs—the bass simultaneously, at a great drum room at 4th Street Studio in Santa Monica. Took about 3 days. A kinda simple setup because many of the tunes are so fast, and the drums had to live with dance loops and distorted bass and guitar, then vocals on top. So I was going for a tight close-miked drum sound, leaving the ambience for the loops most of the time.

We used 421s on rack and floor toms, DI112 in kick and U87 outside of the kick about 6" away from the hole. The snare had a Shure SM57 on top and bottom. I think we used a pair of AKG C1000s in XY configuration on the overheads, and then another U87 was about 12 feet away (the room is long and narrow at 4th st.) for a mono room mic.

The bass was a combo of DI and a miked amp, an Aguilar DB750 with an Aguilar DB 4 x 10 cab. We overdrove the cab to get distortion and miked it with a Neumann U87 a foot away, and we also had an AKG 414, about 3" off the cone, off axis, but most of what was used was the direct input blended with the overdriven cab miked by the 87.

I switched around, I had a Fender Jazz '77, an '82 P-Bass, and a Marcus Miller reissue Fender Jazz bass.

6. We did all the guitars at a rehearsal studio in downtown LA. I brought a remote rig, a Powerbook with Pro Tools 7.3, a Neve 1272, and all Apogee converters.

I combined two mics, a Sennheiser 421 and a Shure SM57. The 421 was backed off a bit, the 57 was right in. We

