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Andrew Scheps is well known in the music industry. He has worked for bands and artists such as **Red Hot Chili Peppers**, **Metallica**, **Black Sabbath**, **Adele** and many, many others. Making him one of the top mixing engineers out there today.

Andrew Scheps also has some awesome plugins available on Waves. For example, the **Scheps Omni Channel Strip** and the **Scheps 73**. Do check them out!

In this interview, **Andrew** talks about early struggles about breaking into the industry. How he prepares for sessions. Working fully in the box. Character vs clarity. Favourite failures. Mixing on headphones. Dealing with the quiet times and much much more.

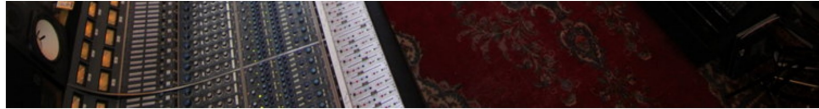
In this interview you will find many things you can take away and apply to your own career, I know I will, so without further ado, here is Andrew Scheps!

(Check out the latest video on What I Learned From Andrew Scheps's Mixing On Headphone Technique (<https://www.youraudiosolutions.com/blog/what-i-learned-from-andrew-schepss-mixing-on-headphones-technique>))



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Seite 2 von 20



Andrew in his now old studio, Punkerpad West

IN YOUR EARLY YEARS YOU GOT TO WORK FOR SYNCLAVIER AS THEIR REPAIR TECH. YOU ENDED UP IN SOME PRETTY BIG SESSIONS AS WELL AS GOING ON TOUR. FOR EXAMPLE, WITH MICHAEL JACKSON AND STEVIE WONDER. BEING FAIRLY NEW TO THE INDUSTRY AT THAT POINT, HOW DID YOU HANDLE WORKING FOR SUCH BIG CLIENTS? WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Since the job was something I knew I could do, I knew I could handle it. It was a pretty specialised job taking care of the **Synclavier's** but I made sure that I knew what I had to. However, I had no idea what it meant being on tour and dealing with a road crew, loading trucks, planes, et cetera. But if I knew my part of the gig well, the rest of it would be ok.

And you know, pure luck.

COULD YOU EXPAND?

Coming out of college I thought I was going to work in a studio but then I got the opportunity to work for **New England Digital** (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synclavier>) who made the **Synclavier**. That's what lead to everything else. The Synclavier was such a big and expensive thing and on Michael Jackson tour, it was a big part of the show.

Now, everyone has a playback system on their iPhone, but back then we were taking a huge amount of equipment. If it didn't work it was a nightmare, but since I was trained by the company I couldn't have been better prepared.

I was really lucky that those kinds of jobs existed back then and that I was able to do them so early in my career. Because working on something more creative takes time to get good at. For example, if you get thrown in a producer's chair right away you may or may not be ready for it. But if you get thrown in a technical job you either know the technical stuff or you don't. And it doesn't necessarily take years and years to get better at it.

HOW WERE THOSE YEARS AFTER HAVING FINISHED UNIVERSITY AND TRYING TO BREAK INTO THE INDUSTRY? WHAT DID YOU FIND HARD THEN AND HOW DID YOU SOLVE IT?

That job at Synclavier came up when I was still in college. A friend of mine who had graduated a year or so before me was working for them and knew there was an opening. And he recommended me for it.

However, in the previous two summers, I had spent my time interning at different recording studios. I spent the summer of 1986 at a studio called **Planet Recording** in New York and in 1987 I spent the summer at **Music Annex** in Menlo Park.

To get the job at Planet Recording I looked in the phone book and got the addresses of every single recording studio in New York City and started handing out resumes. I didn't hear anything back for weeks. It was very relentless and I must have handed out over a 100 resumes. I would call and call but nothing. Then one day, Planet Recording needed someone to answer the phones at night. I got lucky because Planet was a smaller studio with very cool projects coming in and they also had rehearsal rooms for bands to use.

HOW WAS IT TO WORK AT PLANET RECORDING?

It was amazing, at one point **Ramones** rehearsed there and there were a lot of Hip-hop sessions going on in the studio. **Doug E. Fresh** was doing La di da Di and The Show (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icBflcYZhpo>), which I think was the first platinum 7" single. A sort of underground hop hip thing that turned into a huge hit. When there were no calls to answer they would let me sit on sessions.

**YOU HAVE WORKED IN MANY SESSIONS WITH MANY OF THE
WORLD'S BIGGEST MUSICIANS AND ARTISTS, HOW DO YOU
PREPARE FOR THOSE SESSIONS? DO YOU HAVE A SPECIFIC
ROUTINE YOU LIKE TO FOLLOW?**

Preparation.

You can never do enough preparation.

You need to have everything in your head and written down. For example, which microphones to use, placements, which preamps to use and where to put them all so you can get to the vocals really easily.

Where to put the musicians and one of the most important things, their headphones. How are they going to hear and see each other because that is the biggest thing to get a good recording - making the band feel comfortable. If they can't hear what's going on they can't play. Every single aspect of that has to be right.

Show up early, be completely ready to go, so if someone walks in and sits down by the drum kit you are ready to hit record.

You can't decide everything in advance because the session goes how the session goes. But it's good to have planned out as much as possible beforehand so you can react to the chaos and still be able to record. No matter what changes. For example, if they decide to record the drums in the control room, you can do that and make it work because you have everything under control.

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Seite 5 von 20



Andrew with a bit less beard and a smaller setup

YOUR CHOICE OF GOING FULLY IN-THE-BOX WAS A BIG TALKING POINT WITHIN THE INDUSTRY. SOME PEOPLE SAID YOU GOT SUCH GREAT RECORDED MATERIAL THAT YOU DON'T NEED TO GO OUT OF THE BOX. HOW DO YOU HANDLE THAT SITUATION? DID IT EVER AFFECT THE AMOUNT OF WORK YOU GOT OR WAS IT MAINLY A TALKING POINT WITHIN THE ENGINEERING WORLD?

It was really weird. The fact that anybody cared was amazing to me and that anybody bothered to talk about what I used to mix on was incredible.

Right when I was making the transition there were a couple of projects and they wanted me to do it on the console. But I said no because that's not how I was mixing anymore. Those projects went away because it was more important to them what kind of equipment I used than anything else.

If you are hiring me only because of the gear and you want to use a console you should rent a studio. But if you want me to mix, you should want me to do it no matter what I use. Luckily, there were only a couple of projects that happened on.

In regards to the idea that everything I mix is so well recorded and that's why I can mix in the box. I don't even know what that means. It seems like such a bizarre thing to say to me. Obviously, not everything I mix is well recorded, some stuff is but some stuff isn't. But what does that have to do with whether or not you need equipment vs plugins? That's trying to make the argument that there is something magic about equipment that you will never have if you are not using analogue gear. That to me is a ridiculous argument.

..von Auftraggebern erwartetes Equ

..Mythologisierung (allgemein)

Some of the best sounding records, ever, were made in the 1950's and 1960's. For example, the **Rudy Van Gelder, Blue Note**, records (**check this playlist by Blue Note of some classic Rudy Van Gelder recordings** (<http://smarturl.it/BN-hits>)). Therefore, using that same argument would imply that we shouldn't use anything made after 1958.

Of course, the better the recording is the easier it is to mix it. But I rephrase that, because "*better*" doesn't mean better in audiophile term. It's about the musicians that made it and how they made it sound more like the finished product. For example, it can be a very well recorded album but if it's suppose to be a really trashy sounding punk record, better/audiophile-quality isn't really appropriate.

Also, getting cleanly recorded drums to sound really aggressive and dirty is really difficult because you end up distorting the hell out of them. And you got reverbs and extra compressors going. It's a nightmare. I would much rather have a "*bad*" recording but exciting if that's what it's supposed to sound like.

MORE INTERVIEWS



J.J. BLAIR - TAKING RISKS, FAVOURITE MOMENTS, JOE BONAMASSA & MORE (/BLOG/JJ-BLAIR-TAKING-RISKS-FAVOURITE-MOMENTS-JOE-BONAMASSA-AMP-MORE)



SEAN GIOVANNI - AN ENTREPRENEUR IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS (/BLOG/SEAN-GIOVANNI-AN-ENTREPRENEUR-IN-THE-MUSIC-BUSINESS)



PHIL NAISH, DAVE MARTIN AND BOBBY DELLAROCCO FROM SWEETWATER STUDIOS (/BLOG/PHIL-NAISH-DAVE-MARTIN-AND-BOBBY-DELLAROCCO-FROM-SWEETWATER-STUDIOS)

SO, WOULD YOU PREFER, IN A RECORDING SESSION, TO GO FOR CHARACTER RATHER THAN "CLARITY" SO TO SPEAK?

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Seite 7 von 20

Yes, if you had to choose one, character. If you have the character of what's there then you don't have to do anything to it, just balancing and panning. Whereas if you have all this clarity but the character is missing, you have to create the character. This is much more difficult than creating sonics. I can take a very muddy recording and create space and make them sound bigger. But if you have a very boring, clean recording of something, that to me is much more difficult.

For example, you have to do a lot of work to bring character to it. There is no knob for "*character*" so you have to find other ways to achieve that. They are plenty of knobs for EQ, so if you have to EQ something to make some space it's an easy thing to do. Although knowing how to EQ it is the trick and it's something you learn with experience.

Also, if a song is supposed to have a certain character but none of the tracks have it, then everything is built on a foundation that is wrong. All the overdubs, the vocals, everything has been done to something that isn't what it's supposed to be. If the drums change, what's to say that all the overdubs are going to make sense any more? You probably going get to the point where the vocals are not aggressive enough and you might have to go and record them again.

I would rather have the final character of a sound to be part of the recording rather than the other way around.



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Seite 8 von 20



DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE FAILURE? AS IN A FAILURE THAT SET YOU UP FOR LATER SUCCESS?

It's something that happened really early on in my career. It was the summer when I was working at The Music Annex in Menlo Park. I had gotten a chance to assist in a session, it was a really cool band and a great producer. It was my first real session as an assistant but I ended up talking too much. I had ideas about the guitar parts and I thought I was helping. The producer very nicely, during the session, managed to get me to realise that I had to shut up. During dinner later that night he explained to me about the hierarchy of a studio. Just because you think that you have the best idea ever doesn't mean it's an idea you should talk about. I got to learn about studio etiquette and it's something that as soon as you are told about it's obvious.

If you have an idea that's great, tell the producer during the break. It's not because you don't have the right to have a good idea. It just makes things confusing and messy. It's not something that makes people perform well. Which happened to the guitarist I was throwing out ideas for, it just got him confused.

Being a total screw up in my very first assistant session, and having the producer being that cool about it really helped. From that day on I have never done that in a session since. It was a very important lesson.

LOOKING BACK ON YOUR CAREER ARE THERE ANY, OR SEVERAL MOMENTS, THAT YOU THOUGHT: "THIS IS HEAVEN, CAN'T BELIEVE I'M WORKING WITH THIS ARTIST/PROJECT."?

Tons. If you look at my discography, if I hadn't had them there would be something horribly wrong with me.

The obvious one is working with **Red Hot Chili Peppers**, I had been a fan of theirs since the very beginning. I saw them live in 1986 when they were playing in small clubs, so being able to work with them was absolutely amazing. Every

single day in the studio with them is incredible.

Then there is a band called **Motorpsycho** (check them on **Apple Music** (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/artist/motorpsycho/27340023>), or **Spotify** (<https://open.spotify.com/artist/2bNIAjyL3hFCuQBQqhPN4T>)), from Norway, who I have been a fan of for years. I could never get in touch with them. Although I tried a couple of times but it didn't work out since I didn't know any people who knew them. However, in the last year, I got to mix two live records for them which was absolutely incredible. When I finally met them all I wanted to do was to talk about their old records and ask how they did this and that. So just being able to have a conversation with them was amazing.

Not only artists but also being in the room with **Al Schmitt** when he was recording an orchestra was amazing.

I'M A HUGE FAN OF RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS MYSELF. THEY ARE THE REASON I STARTED PLAYING BASS AND EVENTUALLY GETTING INTO PRODUCTION AND MIXING. SO IT'S QUITE SPECIAL FOR ME TO TALK TO YOU AS WELL BECAUSE AS YOU, THEY WERE A BIG PART OF MY LIFE.

Yes, it's amazing. I just listened to **Stadium Arcadium** for the first time in a while and one of the songs that I didn't even mix, **Animal Bar** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIPy0IAirzQ>), just absolutely blew me away. **Ryan Hewitt's** work on that is just so good and it's such a great song.

Also, you can get just as blown away by someone you haven't heard of before. They don't have to be famous but it's amazing when you do get to work with people you admire and it turns out to be even better than you hope. This can happen in any session which is part of the magic of working with music.





SPEAKING OF RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS, WHO RICK RUBIN PRODUCED FROM BLOOD SUGAR SEX MAGIK AND ONWARDS. HOW DID YOU END UP WORKING WITH RICK INITIALLY?

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Seite 11 von 20

I had a couple of friends who were working for **Rick**. Especially **Dave Schiffman**, who recorded a lot of records for Rick. He would recommend me when they needed stuff. Just like with the Synclavier, I had moved on to become a **Pro Tools** guy in Los Angeles. I not only knew Pro Tools but also how to transfer back and forth from analogue tape and keep things locked up.

The first thing I got to work on with Rick was **Saul Williams - Amethyst Rock Star (Listen On Spotify**

([https://open.spotify.com/album/16iHaqzAXTv2iYjch5A8ID?](https://open.spotify.com/album/16iHaqzAXTv2iYjch5A8ID?autoplay=true&v=L)

[autoplay=true&v=L](https://open.spotify.com/album/16iHaqzAXTv2iYjch5A8ID?autoplay=true&v=L))), where they had done a lot of the record with an **MPC60** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akai_MPC60). They had dumped the stereo drum programming to tape but when they started mixing they wanted to split some of the drums up. But they couldn't lock the MPC60 back up to get the stuff out separately. It was drifting all over the place and I came in as the tech/audio janitor to fix it.

At the same time, Rick was working on a remix album of **Wu-Tang Clan** songs. Where **System of a Down** had done one and **Tom Morello** was going to do another one. Rick asked me to set up for that recording so I ended up recording Tom, **Chad Smith** and **Serj Tankian**. It was a crazy week of recording everything that came up and that's what got me starting working for Rick.

The next project that I was really involved in was the first **Audioslave** record (Listen here on **Apple Music**

(<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/album/audioslave/163301708>) or **Spotify**

(<https://open.spotify.com/album/78guAsers0kIWl6RwzgDLd>)). I came in while they were finishing up basic tracks to put all the takes together and get ready for overdubs. I also did a lot of vocals with **Chris Cornell** and bass with **Tim Commerford**.

ARE YOU STILL WORKING WITH RICK AS OFTEN AS YOU USED TO?

Not nearly as much, I did a ton with him on and off for 12 years and then it tapered off, but that's just how it goes.

LOOKING AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN, HAS THERE BEEN ANY MOMENTS WHEN YOU HAVE THOUGHT THAT YOU CAN'T DO THIS ANYMORE?

There have been sessions where it has been stressful and moments. For example, in the car on the way to the studio where I have doubted if this is really what I wanted to do. But that's more about me than anything that has to do with the session. I stress myself out, I'm not super secure about things and always feel stuff will go wrong. But that's part of the preparation. You rehearse the session in your head. But sometimes the rehearsing in your head will also go horribly wrong and you think this or that can happen.

I have had month-long periods with no work coming in and that's after huge projects. For example, after the **Adele** record I had over three months with absolutely no work. You start thinking that maybe you are done and have to start doing something else.

However, the good thing is that I have made those periods be the start of something else.

For example, the first time it happened I started working with a friend of mine who did home theatre installation. I learned a ton about that. I also decided that I wanted to teach so I taught a class at **UCLA**. Which was great because it turned out I'm pretty good at speaking and teaching. That turned into doing more workshops which turned into **Mix With The Masters**. Doing videos and stuff like that.

It made me diversify which is really good because the music business is really horrible for money. Even if you are working all the time. Being diversified is really important so you can have other things you can do. So for me, that's what those periods gave me, a chance to try other stuff out.

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THIS LEADS ME TO MY NEXT QUESTION - HOW YOU DO HANDLE THE QUIET TIMES WHERE NOT MUCH WORK IS COMING IN?

It's terrifying.

It's not just your career, I also had two kids in school and a mortgage to pay for. It goes beyond the possible failure as an engineer, instead, you are looking at the possibility of failure as a human. You just have to deal with it and figure out other things to do.

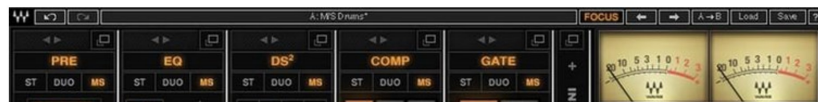
I SAW A POST FROM GREG WELLS AND HE WAS SPEAKING ABOUT A SIMILAR TIME IN HIS LIFE WHERE THE PHONE STOPPED RINGING. IT SEEMS THESE THINGS HAPPEN TO ALMOST ANYONE IN THIS INDUSTRY AND IT ALL DEPENDS HOW YOU DEAL WITH IT.

Yes and it could be as simple as scheduling. You might have three records all at once and then nothing, or the thing you do is a bit out of style. There could be a hot/in-style kid who does the same sort of thing you do and now he is getting all the work because he is on peoples' minds.

The good thing is when you realise these situations are a part of the norm and start looking at them as opportunities to learn something new.

COULD YOU RECOMMEND ANY PIECE OF GEAR/SOFTWARE UNDER \$200 THAT HAS IMPROVED YOUR WORK AS A MIXING ENGINEER?

Shure SM7 (<https://www.shure.co.uk/products/microphones/sm7b>), although that's a bit more than \$200. It's an amazing microphone. It's the best snare microphone you will ever use. It's also the vocal microphone for almost all of Red Hot Chili Peppers songs ever recorded. And Thriller.



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Seite 14 von 20



Andrew Scheps Omni Channel. Available on Waves.

YOU SAID YOU MIX A LOT ON HEADPHONES TODAY, HOW ARE YOU ABLE TO JUDGE YOUR DECISIONS PROPERLY?

You get used to it. I was travelling and somebody asked me for a mix so I tried it. It went much better than I thought and over the last 5 years, I just had many more situations where it was difficult to get to my speakers.

I still check (unless I absolutely can't) every single mix I do on speakers. There are certain times where I think the kick and snare work fine on headphones. But when I listen back on speakers I can tell that they might be a little too mushy. Or that they need to punch more or something like that. But once I hear the problems on speakers, I can then easily hear it on headphones. For me, it's things like the impact of a mix I won't necessarily know unless I check on speakers. Because you actually don't get the air moving on headphones.

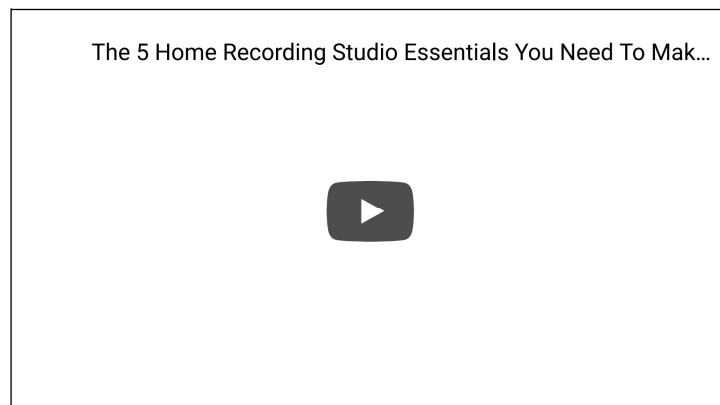
Headphones are also really good because you don't have to worry about the acoustics of the room you're in. You are wearing the studio on your head and it always sounds exactly the same wherever you are.

The important thing with mixing on headphones is that it translates. It doesn't matter exactly what it sounds like in the headphones, you just have to adapt and know how to make it sound good. No matter where you listen.

I use the Sony 7506 (**£119 on Amazon** (<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Sony-MDR-7506-Professional-Headphone-Black/dp/B000AJIF4E>)) they are cheap, so worth trying. For me, they work. I can actually feel the low end in them which is something I can't do on other headphones.

If you mix on headphones and then go to your speakers and notice there are a lot of problems. Go back to your headphones and make sure you can still hear those problems. If you can't you should try a different pair of headphones.

(Andrew's tip also features in the video below)



This next section Andrew answered some of the fan questions that came in from the Your Audio Solutions community.

..Standpunkte zur Diskussion um Eq

OLLY COBB: HOW DO YOU APPROACH ACHIEVING ANALOGUE SATURATION AND COLOUR NOW THAT YOU'RE WORKING ITB? DO YOU THINK THE DIGITAL EMULATIONS STAND UP TO THEIR HARDWARE COUNTERPARTS?

The short answer is yes, it's better because you have so much control over it.

Analogue saturation is just one type of saturation and the things that mimic it, like the **Waves J37** (<https://www.waves.com/plugins/j37-tape>) and **Phoenix** (<http://www.cranesong.com/phoenix.html>) (by Crane Song) which are awesome. Although, I don't think of it as being analogue saturation.

Harmonic distortion is something that really helps shape sounds and glues things together. It used to be something you couldn't get rid of if you were using analogue gear because it distorts unless you barely touch it. It was something we hated as engineers because we didn't have a choice but now everyone is missing it and wants it. They are a million tools that saturate, for example, there is a saturation knob on Echo Boy so use that instead of the delay, it's incredible. There are a million different ways to distort things and they are all really good. That's why on the channel strip I did we put three flavours of it. There are so many ways you can achieve it and they all sound great in different situations.

As to whether an emulation of a piece of a gear sounds exactly like the piece of gear, probably not, but it doesn't matter. It's the idea of it. You are not trying to mimic the piece of gear, you are trying to get the same feeling of that distortion but with much more control.

WILLIAM BOWSER: WHAT'S YOUR PREFERRED INTERFACE, CONVERTERS AND CLOCK FOR YOUR IN-THE-BOX MIXES?

When I'm listening through speakers, I use the Avid HD I/O and before that, I used the Avid 192 and I always used it with its internal clock. I don't use external clocks.

I think the internal clock is really good and I think most gear sound best on their own internal clock because it's built to work with that clock as opposed to when you are switching it to an external clock mode. When you do that it also has a much more serious phase lock loop, to catch up to whatever clock that is going on outside. But it's just a personal preference.

I also do quite a lot of mixing with headphones and for that, I'm usually using a UAD Twin (<https://www.uaudio.com/audio-interfaces/apollo-twin-mkii.html>). I like the headphone amp and again it's running on its internal clock. The idea is, if you are mixing 100% in the box the clock, unless it's a terrible clock, doesn't matter except for your own monitoring. Because you are printing digitally, it's only for the D/A while you are listening.

Let me know in the comments below if you enjoyed this interview and if you have any more questions. Could perhaps lead to another interview with Andrew where he could answer yours.

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Eddie 9 months ago · 0 Likes

This is a great interview. Thanks.



William shenck (<http://thebsidestudio.com>)

(<http://thebsidestudio.com>)

Fun interview. Lots of good insights in the conversation. Thanks for sharing



NYC ME 2 years ago · 1 Like

Andrew is a great producer and teacher. And apparently a Welsh farmer now too.

Newer Post

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