

# 1 **Andrew Scheps on Engineering Red Hot Chili Peppers, Mixing Adele, and Letting Songs 'Mix Themselves' | Universal Audio**

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2 *Andrew Scheps' engineering and mixing credits read like a who's who of popular music. He mixed four tracks on Adele's Grammy-winning album, 21, and engineered and mixed 11 songs on the latest Red Hot Chili Peppers album, I'm with You. The latter was one of his many collaborations with production legend Rick Rubin. Scheps has also worked with Jay-Z, U2, Justin Timberlake, Green Day, Metallica, and many others. As a producer, Scheps' credits include bands such as Favez, The Duke Spirit, and Audrye Sessions.*

3 Scheps owns a [UAD-2](#) card, and uses a range of [UAD-2 Powered Plug-Ins](#). He also owns a Satellite Quad for his laptop, which he takes on the road and occasionally utilizes to supplement the card in his studio computer. "Universal Audio's stuff is definitely a big part of everything I do," he says.

4 **What percentage of your work is producing as opposed to just tracking or mixing?**

5 Probably a little less than half of my work is producing. But whenever I'm producing, I'm also recording and mixing. For the kinds of records I produce, nobody ever has the budget to hire separate people, which is fine with me. I enjoy doing it, but would be great at some point to be able to have someone else to take the pressure off. When I produce bands like The Duke Spirit, Favez, and acts like that, I do everything. Otherwise I either record and mix, or just mix. For example, I just mixed the Hives record that they produced themselves, which was a lot of fun; a really good record!

6 **You've worked with the Chili Peppers a lot. What are they like in the studio?**

7 They are some of the best players I've ever worked with, and they track as a band. They will do plenty of overdubs, and things like that, but when they're tracking, everybody's playing and Anthony [Keidis] is singing. And it's great, because that way you know what you've got — they're not just going for drums. And they may replace stuff, or they may not, but they absolutely play. And they're one of the best-playing bands around, they're amazing.

8 **"I'm constantly trying to find the balance where the arrangement and the performance start to pop out of the mix by themselves, instead of me trying to make them pop out."**

9 **Do the vocals done during those live passes ever get kept, at least in part?**

10 The lyrics aren't necessarily finished [when they're tracking], and the

melodies are sort of in place. But there are definitely times where some of Anthony's ad libs will stay all the way through and make it onto the record. Because he's such a creative singer, and in the moment, stuff just comes out. So a lot of the wordless ad libs that are so great about his vocals can come from live takes, absolutely.

11 **Is there a particular mic that you like to use on his voice?**

12 We use a Shure SM7. We've tried lots and lots of different microphones. He sounds really good on a lot of them, but an SM7 just sounds like the Chili Peppers.

13 **Talk about the mixing you did on Adele's 21.**

14 I originally mixed seven tracks, but only four of them made it onto the record, I think they've used a couple more for B-sides or for when different territories get extra songs. On that project, I probably had to do the least amount of processing I've ever done—and this includes the band tracks, not just her vocals. There was one mix where I think I only had five EQs in, total, a little bit of spring reverb, and a compressor across the bus, and that was it. It was just the sound of the tracks—it was very well recorded. Greg Fidelman recorded it, and did a great job. And the band was great, and it was all live. I don't know how much of the live vocal they kept. But she's so good that huge portions of the vocals on the album could have been live.

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16 Engineer and Producer Andrew Scheps in his studio with his UAD-2 Powered Plug-Ins.

17 **Do you generally work on a console?**

18 Yes, a double Neve 8068 with flying faders. I usually don't turn the automation on until very late in the game, so I'm always looking at the faders. And also I try to generally always mix live stuff; my favorite thing is to mix bands. So I'm constantly trying to find the balance where the arrangement and the performance start to pop out of the mix by themselves, instead of me trying to make them pop out. Because at some point, the band decided that this was the take that they were going to keep. So I try to keep that feel but make it sound like a record.

19 **Why do you wait to put the automation on?**

20 What I generally do is refine the sounds while I'm trying to find that balance where it will play itself.

21 **Explain.**

22 Usually you can find a balance, where all of a sudden everything falls into place and it's super exciting. If I have the automation on, it's very difficult for me to rebalance. So the faders all come up as I'm working on the tones, and I get a balance. And if it's not working, I pull all the faders down and then start rebalancing. I may start with a different instrument or whatever, now that I know the tracks a little bit better. And that will usually happen four or five times, where the faders all come down, and then I start balancing from scratch again. Of course, each time I do it, I'm starting with the tones much closer to how they're going to end up because I'm working on that the whole time.

23 **Let's talk about the Universal Audio products you use. You're mixing on a console, but do you use a lot of plug-ins, as well?**

24 It's interesting how it's evolved. I use tons of outboard gear, but I also use quite a few plug-ins. It sort of breaks itself into two parts, where half of the plug-ins I use are for repair purposes, like surgical EQing and things like that. The other half are for very specific sonic things that they do, that you just can't get elsewhere. One of the plug-ins I've been using a lot lately from UAD is the [EMT® 250 Classic Electronic Reverb](#) Plug-In. I use that reverb, because it's such a specific sound, and that plug-in really does capture it. And so if you want a 250, then there you go.

25 **“UAD stuff is very much based on hardware that I'm familiar with. I've got a huge palette of stuff that's always available.”**

26 **How about the [EMT® 140 Classic Plate Reverberator](#) Plug-In, have you used that, as well?**

27 I have. I've used that quite a bit lately, too. And not so much because it sounds exactly like a plate, but just because it definitely has its own character. And I don't use a lot of reverb, but when I use it, it's either a

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spring, or a reverb like the 140—even though it's not based on an impulse response, which you would say would be the most natural reverb. For the style of records that I love, which is the older rock stuff, the reverb that you hear most often is a plate or a 250.

28 **Since you came out of the tape era, do you like using the [Studer® A800 Multichannel Tape Recorder](#) Plug-In and the [Ampex® ATR-102 Mastering Tape Recorder](#) Plug-In?**

29 Well, I've used the Studer a little bit, but the Ampex, yes, to the point where I overused it. [Laughs] I actually had to ween myself off of it. Because, you can do so much with that plug-in, and I was doing way too much. And it was so much fun. But unfortunately, I was doing that instead of mixing.

30 **Describe how it enhanced the tracks.**

31 It allowed me to rebalance the frequency spectrum on a track. I could totally change the top end to where it really sounded like I went through, track by track, and re-EQed things, and added compressors, and did all sorts of stuff—but all I did was slap a plug-in on it.

32 **Does the source sound more like tape after you've put that plug-in on it?**

33 It's hard to say, because for me, at the moment, I have a real love-hate relationship with tape machines. Tape itself is so inconsistent, and tape machines are so badly maintained, that I'm almost a little wary of tape. I love working on tape, and I love tracking a band on 2-inch tape, because you make decisions, and you move on. There's something great about that, aside from the whole analog/digital debate—and everybody's on both sides of that all of the time. But due to the realities of physically getting the tape machine to work, it's gotten to where sometimes it doesn't sound better.

34 **How do you usually set the ATR plug-in?**

35 I tend to use the ATR in much more extreme settings than I would a tape machine. Like with the 1-inch head, but at 15ips. And then I'll start to get the crosstalk up a little bit, and then realign the machine. When I actually use a tape machine, I tend to align it properly, and use it properly, and keep all the levels within range, because once you go out of range, every tape machine reacts differently. Some are forgiving, and some are absolutely not. With a plug-in you can do crazy stuff.

36 **You can certainly change the alignment a lot faster on a plug-in than on a real tape machine.**

37 I've ended up saving a bunch of crazy alignments, and I'll cycle through them. I'll probably go back to trying it on individual elements, more as a tonal tool. And that's one of the things I like about plug-ins in general now.

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There's a real attention being paid to their sonic character.

38 **What other UAD-2 plug-ins do you use?**

39 The [1176 Limiter Collection](#), because I own five original 1176s, but that's not enough. They are my favorite compressors.

40 **How are the new UAD 1176 plug-ins different from the previous one?**

41 I'd say they're just more accurate. And they're more accurate in the extreme settings, which is where I use 1176s quite often — with attack and release all the way down, or with multiple ratio buttons in. And 1176s do very particular things in those situations, which nothing else does. And it can be quite subtle, but it's something that you grow to expect from the hardware. And these plug-ins just do all that stuff, they really do react quite a bit like the hardware. And they have different flavors of 1176s. They've got the Bluestripe, the AE, and the Blackface LN.

42 **What other UAD-2 plugs do you use?**

43 A lot of times I'm trying to mimic what I do with hardware, because I don't own enough of the hardware. For instance, I use the [dbx® 160 Compressor / Limiter Plug-In](#) a lot, because it emulates a very specific compressor that nothing else sounds like. I only own four of the hardware units, and sometimes that's not enough.

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45 **Since you use both the plug-in and hardware versions of the 160, how do they compare?**

46 It's interesting. They are very close, but they're also different. They're different because they're getting hit from a different spot in the audio flow. If I'm using a plug-in, the processing takes place before it gets to the console. But when I'm using the hardware on an insert, it's post EQ and after the line amp and stuff like that. So it's not totally fair to compare them that way, because they're not actually getting the same signal. There are certain times when I'm laying out a mix, where I will pre-allocate in my mind, "Okay, here's where the hardware is going, and if I need it, I'll make up these spots with the software."

47 **So at the very least they'll give you the flavor of the original.**

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Yes, because they definitely do take on the attitude and the color of the hardware that they're emulating. It's not that they react differently, there's just something different about them. So much of this stuff is psychological, too, and that might be all it is.

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### Are there any other UAD-2 plugs you like to use?

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I like the SSL Channels: The [SSL E Series Channel Strip](#) Plug-In and the [SSL G Series Bus Compressor](#) Plug-In. I used to mix more on SSLs before I bought the Neve console, so it's nice to have that available. The [Lexicon® 224 Digital Reverb](#) Plug-In is very cool, also.

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### How do you think that stacks up against the original?

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It's been a while since I've used the original, but it seems familiar. It definitely feels like the right thing. I also like the [Cooper® Time Cube Mk II Delay](#) quite a bit, and the [MXR Flanger Doubler](#). A lot of this is because I've used the hardware, and it's just not always available. So something that you can reach for that's familiar is really good. Because you know there are other plug-in companies that make all the crazy stuff. And when I don't know what I want to do, I can just go to their stuff and flip through presets and see what happens. Whereas UAD stuff is very much based on hardware that I'm familiar with. I've got a huge palette of stuff that's always available. Also, the [Moog® Multimode Filter](#) is cool. The [Studio D Chorus](#) Plug-In is always a good one—especially with all the buttons in.

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Scheps and his analog recording gear, including five 1176 compressors.

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55 **You also own a [UAD-2 Satellite QUAD FireWire DSP Accelerator](#). Talk about how you use it.**

56 There have been a couple of times when I hooked it up to the main rig to supplement the cards. But the reason I got the Satellite, is that for the last two records with the Chili Peppers, I've gone out with them to do their initial promo tours, where they're playing lots of TV shows and concerts that have to be broadcast the next day. They'll play an hour-and-a-half concert, and I'll need to get a mix of that out the next morning. So what I've done is built a template for mixing, that's trying to recreate, as closely as possible, how I would mix that show if I were at home at the console with all the outboard gear. And the Satellite was awesome for that, because it gave me access to plug-ins like the UAD-2 dbx 160 emulation. The original hardware sounds like nothing else. It has this weird attack followed by a bunch of mush when you compress drums with it, and the plug-in captures the essence of that sound. So rather than trying to find something that kind of sounds like it, I know that I can throw that plug-in on the kick and snare, and I've got the drums the way that I like them. I don't have time to experiment; I want to reach for something that I already know, so that I can get an exiting mix going really fast. I end up mixing these promo appearances almost like I'm the front of house guy. It's really all about riding the vocal and the guitar, and trying to make it as exciting as possible. We're not going for a pristine mix with the perfect thing here and there. The quicker I can have the sound of the mix up, the better. And so, that's what the Satellite was a big part of.

57 **Back to the general subject of mixing: Is it a lot different to mix a project in which you also engineered the recording, as opposed to one where you just come in for the mix?**

58 Well, yeah, and it works both ways. Like, in some cases, just doing the mix is great because you have the fresh perspective on the project. The band has been inside of it and living every detail, whereas you just get a very broad look at it. And you pull it up and go, "Oh this is awesome, this is about this," and the band will sometimes say, "Oh yeah, we haven't really thought about it like that." And it's great, it is really a fresh perspective. The problem is when the songs aren't necessarily recorded as well as I would like.

59 **When you start a mix, do you have a vision for how it's going to end up, or do just go with the flow and see how it develops?**

60 It's hard to say. Also now, people usually have very intricate rough mixes that they've done. People work in the box. They have roughs that often sound quite a bit like records. And it's not like, "Oh yeah, we had to do a bunch of roughs on the last day of tracking, so we don't even know what they sound like." They're usually very specific. So unless they tell me otherwise, I always try and figure out what's great about the rough. But, of

course, the drag about that is usually, what's really great about the rough is unsustainable when you correct the stuff that they hate about the rough. They say, "Oh man, the drums are just great on this!" And I tell them, "Well, yeah, that's because they're way too loud and you can't hear the guitars." And when you turn up the guitars, the drums can't be that big. So there's always that. But if there's no real direction given that way, I let the songs kind of mix themselves.

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Photos by: David Goggin

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— *Mike Levine*