

1 **Andrew Scheps on Serving the Song | Waves**

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4 **SETTING THE STAGE**

5 Tell us a bit about how you got started.

6 I grew up on Long Island and I was a trumpet player; my brother played sax and we were in jazz ensembles. I realized that I loved rock bands, but I wasn't going to be in a rock band playing trumpet.

7 I then discovered a bit about what was involved in making records and I was hooked. I went to the Recording Engineering Program at the University of Miami music school. One summer while I was at college I worked as an assistant in San Francisco at Music Annex, and another summer at a studio called Planet in New York. After college I got a job working for New England Digital who made the Synclavier. I was doing field service in LA and also in London, covering most of Europe. It was amazing just going all over the place but after a couple years, I realized that I wasn't making records. So I quit that job, came back to L.A. because there were so many people I went to school with from Miami out here, and it just seemed like the place to be. From there, it was just trying to get freelance work.

8 Did you work at a specific studio?

9 No, other than those two summers, I never actually worked at a studio. I did a lot of work for people who had rooms at studios. For a few years, I did a lot of work for John Barnes, a keyboardist who played on a lot of Motown and other R&B records.

10 So how does a young engineer get started?

11 Whatever gets you in the room! Assisting is sort of the traditional way if you want to be an engineer, but back then a session might have a Synclavier operator or a programmer. Then a few years after that you'd have a Pro Tools guy, so I became a Pro Tools guy. I did a lot of Pro Tools on sessions which then allowed me to engineer, but I always got in the room based on something other than engineering to begin with.

12 Were you working digital at that time?

13 No, not at all. I was in Miami from '84 to '88, so it was kind of the very beginning of digital, certainly the beginning of digital tape. There was no



disc recording at that point. Synclavier had mono disc recording, but it was more like sampling than recording. While I was working for Synclavier, that's when they came out with the direct-to-disc, which was a 16 track recorder. Pro Tools TDM didn't come out until around '92, so I cut a lot of analog tape. I am really glad that I spent the first five years pretty much working exclusively analog, with some digital things in the room.

14 What records blew you away when you were getting started?

15 I would buy any record with Brian Eno's name on it. I discovered Talking Heads from *Fear of Music*, which is just a black album cover that says "Talking Heads Fear of Music" on the front, and on the back all it says is "Produced by Brian Eno". I thought, well alright, I'm going to check this out, because I really like Eno from all the ambient records and the stuff he'd done with Robert Fripp. And then from there was the obvious progression into Daniel Lanois.

16 You're associated with a lot of hard-hitting rock and pop rock stuff.

17 I'm fortunate in that I'm able to work on music I like. There are some people whose second or third record they work on is huge and makes their career, but quite often, it's not necessarily in the genre they want to be in. It makes a huge impression on everybody else in terms of what it is that they think you do. I had such a slow steady climb that I was able to spend a couple of years tuning vocals because that was really well paid work, but I didn't get pigeon-holed. It wasn't a big deal for me to stop taking that work and start transitioning myself a little more into the music I like. So, I've been really lucky that way, getting to work with bands I love. I love the Chili Peppers records. I loved working on the Metallica record and obviously U2; they're definitely some of my favorite bands.

18 What is your approach like?

19 I always remember that the session is a dynamic human interaction. To me, that's the most important part; engineering is almost secondary. Obviously, you have to be really good at it, but if people don't like you, you're not going to work. So I show up and try to create some sort of rapport. It's always very organic, and you get pretty quick at reading people, what they like and what they don't, who you can joke around with and who you can't.

20 CATCHING THE WAVES

21 How does Waves fit into your workflow?

22 I've been using Waves for years. I think probably the L1 was one of the first things that I knew. I knew of the [Q10](#) because it was the most flexible equalizer plugin that there was at that point, but I think it was the [L1](#) where I really decided that I need to own the stuff and I needed to use it.



23 DeEsser might be the plugin I use the most; it's so quick to pop it on and fix the problem. I use it on vocals all the time, but I also use it on overheads if

there's cymbal that's really harsh, and on guitars ALL the time when they're too noisy.

24 When I first started, we had the dbx 902s, and they had the switch to go between high frequencies only to full bandwidth, and I was like, "Hold on! What's actually going on to split the audio up?" Once you get your brain around how it's working, it doesn't seem odd to put it on a guitar.

25 The first time I tried it I was mixing something, and there was sort of a high end fizz all over this guitar and I thought, "The DeEsser will get rid of that." I wanted it to be dynamic and not just be there all the time, so it just seemed really obvious. People usually don't think of it that way, so that's a huge thing, to really think about how the stuff you use works.

26 Have you checked out the new H-Comp Hybrid Compressor?

27 I do tons of parallel compression—that's ALL I do — and [H-Comp](#) does a really good job of it. I love the release time tied to the tempo and the punch control is very cool.

28 What do you think of its Sync Release feature?

29 It's pretty cool, especially if you're going to start really crushing drums in order to get the cymbals to release in time and things like that. I also love the wet/dry mix. You need to have it just because of the nature of the effect, but also to be able to really hear the compression you're going to use, even though you're only going to use a tiny bit of it. In the end, it's brilliant and it's just like being able to solo the sidechain on the [DeEsser](#) or the noise on the [Z-Noise](#). It only really matters what it sounds like after it's been processed, but while you're trying to hone in on what you're doing, it's great to be able to solo the process.

30 How about H-Comp's Analog character types?

31 I used it on a stereo piano that was a little lifeless, and I wanted to make it a little more aggressive without changing the attack. The attack was really good, but there wasn't a whole lot of sustain or tone to it, so I was pretty aggressive with the compression side of it but mixing in only a little of it. That's why I use parallel compression in the first place; I always hate losing the uncompressed character of the sound in order to be able to mix in a really crushed version. I used it on acoustic guitar for the same type of thing, to really bring out some sustain and on an overhead as well.

32 SERVING THE SONG

33 Do you have any general mix tips you feel like sharing?

34 Well, the first thing is, try a high pass filter on everything, even on your kick drum and your bass. As much as you might think you don't want to do that, it will clean up your mix 1000%. If you have 20Hz information rattling around on a vocal, it'll kill your kick drum, so that's probably the very first

thing for somebody just starting to mix. Pick one of the EQs, Renaissance EQ or Q10, and get a high pass filter. Start with it somewhere around 40 – 70 Hz and put it on every single track and just see how that helps you out. Remember that the filter doesn't completely remove audio below the cutoff frequency. Make sure to play with the slope as well.

35 The other thing is, don't do more than you have to. A lot of people will start with putting an [SSL E-Channel](#) on every track and engaging everything on it. I don't directly compress very much at all. There's a lot of parallel compression going on, but the uncompressed signal for every instrument is the louder element of what's in the mix.

36 Also, a lot of times you might solo something and you want it to sound as good as possible solo'd. But that has nothing to do with what it should sound like once it's in the mix. The only way to get good at that is practice. After you've mixed a hundred drum kits on rock tracks, when you solo a kick drum, what sounds good to you is what works in a mix. That's because you're used to going after that particular kind of kick drum.

37 The more you do it, the more you start listening for different things?

38 Yes. You need to do as much as possible. If you're trying to EQ an acoustic guitar so that it doesn't fight with the cymbals and the vocals, leave it in the mix, don't solo it up, and start EQing going for a great acoustic guitar sound, because it won't necessarily work. When you put it back in the mix, you may think it's okay, because the top end is good; but all of a sudden, the low mids are really fighting with the vocal, but it's hard to hear, because your ears go to the higher frequency. But if you leave it in the mix and start EQing, you might have a hard time hearing it. Just turn it up a bit, make it too loud for a minute, but not crazy loud, and start EQing. You'll have much better luck finding a sound for the acoustic guitar that actually works with everything, so when you turn it back down, you're still good.

39 The other thing is, if you're mixing stuff with vocals, don't put the vocal in last. A lot of people tend to build their mixes from the kick drum up, so they go to the drums, get the bass going, get the guitars going, and THEN they put the vocal in. That way, you may not have left any room for the vocal, especially if you're working with distorted guitars and things like that. So, you need to get the vocal in early.

40 How do you see the function of the engineer and a mixer?

41 It's the core question of what we do. I think for me, the role of the engineer is to get out of the way. I think the biggest thing for an engineer is to just present the music so people can hear it and give the music a sonic place where it can exist and be exciting. It is much more about the music and the performance than it is about your engineering skills. And that's not to say that you can't be very stylized and come up with really cool sounds along the way. But if somebody gets done listening to a song you've worked on and they say, "What a great snare sound," as much as you might be excited

about that, then you're probably not doing your job. Their first impression needs to be either, "What a great singer!" or "What a great song!" And if they don't come away with that, then all the rest of the stuff is meaningless. It should sound amazing, but it always has to be in service to the song.