



Clint Murphy

He's the right hand man of an established producer and still has time for his own projects. **GEORGE SHILLING** gets some tips on technique.

Clint Murphy is a New Zealander who has spent much of the last decade working as a recording and mixing engineer alongside producer Greg Haver (*Resolution* V4.2.) The two have collaborated on projects in the UK and New Zealand and a couple of years ago both decided that they liked working with each other at Modern World Studios so much that they both moved lock, stock and barrel to rural Gloucestershire — Greg from his native Wales and Clint from New Zealand. Clint started playing drums at the age of 10, trying to follow in his father's footsteps — Murphy Snr had had success in a rock band. He had re-formed the band in his 40s at which point Clint pounced on the new drum kit, and quickly decided that music was his career.

Taking drum lessons at school he realised that he wasn't going to earn much as a drummer, and the high school studio had a Tascam 8-track, a 24-channel desk, Sennheiser mics ('I was putting 421s up and singing into the side of them because I thought that's what you did — terrible recordings — but it was the starting ground.') He went to Auckland's SAE and became a lecturer but after a couple of years he wanted some real-world experience and knocked on the door of York Street in Auckland, a NZ top recording studio. Murphy was employed 'for a measly wage', and was soon assisting Gil Norton (*Resolution* V1.4) who was producing The Feelers with Danton Supple (*Resolution* V2.8) engineering. Shortly after that, Greg Haver booked in and the two quickly developed a working relationship that endures.

Last Christmas Murphy returned to NZ to work with The Earlybirds and returned to Modern World to mix their new album *Favourite Fears*. Before that he also recorded and mixed hugely successful NZ band Opshop's third album at Modern World, which went straight into the NZ charts at Number One in August. More recently he also mixed NZ artist Annabel Fay's forthcoming album at Modern World. (photos www.recordproduction.com)



How did you get on with Gil?

Great, but some pretty long hours, which was a shock to me. Everyone said, he's pretty hard work, but to me it was all I knew, and that's where I got a lot of my work ethic from. Very good grounding. And from Danton too — I learnt not to mess up too much!

What was your first engineering break?

Probably the biggest one was recording Melanie C, working with Greg Haver. Greg and I started quite a big working relationship and work together 80% of the time. In 2004 I moved to London.

Did you have work planned?

I had already worked with Greg for three years, and I outgrew New Zealand a bit. NZ is amazing, and there's a lot of great bands, but only a small amount, not a lot getting signed, so that's why I wanted to move over. The first week I got here I ended up doing Melanie C, which was pretty scary. My whole career I'd been working on vintage Neves and the first studio I was thrown into was Metropolis on a J Series SSL and what seemed like a million faders, ex-Spice Girl standing there, it was all very overwhelming. Up until moving to the UK I'd never worked on an SSL...

And that's probably the most complex one!

I think so, and I never want to go there again! Compared to the Duality, I love mixing on this thing.

What's your typical chain of recording vocals?

Most of the time I put up two or three microphones, I've got a Sony C800G...

That must have been quite an investment?

The wife still doesn't know!

They're quite bright...

Really bright, so I usually stick up that, which is super bright, American pop, then I stick up a 67 or 87, or a Telefunken 251 if I can. Here they've got a Soundelux 251 which is a rip-off of the Telefunken and I really like that mic a lot. So if I stick those two mics up, generally I'll put them into some different mic pres, usually Neves or APIs. With the Sony it's usually the Neve because it's quite bright and it warms it up a little bit. I've recently been getting into the pres on the Duality, especially with the VHD. I've been a little bit wary because I'm a Neve guy, but I've been more and more going to those. And most of the time going around to the third harmonic distortion, just because I've been more transistor as opposed to valve. Compressor-wise I'll usually go through a black face 1176. There's none here, they've got one of the Purples which I'll use, I usually slam that quite a lot — a good 10dB.

What do you hear different between the black face and the silver 1176?

It's a bit more mid-rangey, and it seems like there's a faster release time or something. I just find the way they react is different. They're all different, depending how old they are. But probably the big part of my vocal sound would be that I'm a massive fan of the TG limiters. I'll absolutely slam it through that thing — always the same settings; Limit mode, Recovery on One, they should really just solder them on those settings! I really love it! It gets a point where it gets a bit too hissy, but at York Street they had four of the original ones so I used them a lot on drums and vocals. Then when I moved to the UK I really missed them so I bought a pair for myself of the new ones. The new ones are brighter than the old ones.

Do you EQ on the way in at all?

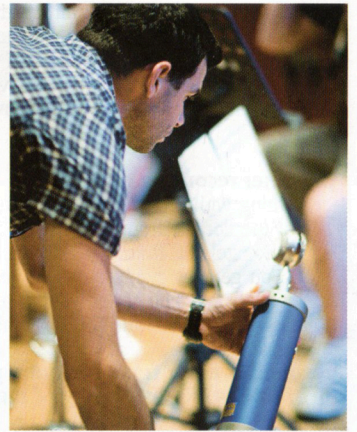
Actually no I don't. I'm a massive fan of high pass filters, so I'll roll off anything I don't need. But with vocal, I'm struggling to think of the last session I did where I EQed vocal, even at mix time. That's why I make sure I pick the mic I like, and that's why I like the Sony because it's bright enough, and full bodied; the same with the Telefunken. If I want a little bit of extra midrange or something I'll put it through something like a Teletronix, using compressors and limiters to actually add those EQs.

When mixing, do you run TV backing tracks or instrumentals?

I'll always do an instrumental and vocal [only]. Most of the time what I'm adjusting at the final stage is that the vocal might not be loud enough, so it's easy enough to put the vocal track and instrumental together rather than doing a full recall.

How much do you process the main mix bus?

I always use the SSL compressor. I'm a massive fan of fast releases, so for most compressors it's the fastest release you can go for, that's why I like the TG and the 1176. So for the SSL it's fast release and 4:1 compression, just knocking off



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the kicks and snares as it's coming through. But I don't put any EQ on the mix bus; usually I try and get it right before it gets to that stage. I don't want to rely on needing heaps of top end. Leave that for the mastering engineer — he's got to have something to do!

Any other recording tips?

I do a thing with ambient mics pointing a couple of 414s at the floor in front of the kit... I stole it from Greg who stole it from Dave Eringa (*Resolution* V8.6). You get less cymbals, it's darker, it gives the kit a bit of life and a bit of grit. You get a trashy sound without picking up so much of the cymbals.

Presumably as a drummer you're pretty on top of things like the tuning of the kit?

I definitely comment on it but I'm really crap at tuning

to be honest, so I usually get someone in. For me it's making sure you've got new drum skins, you've got the tuning right, and you don't need to rely on samples to actually sound good. I don't like a lot of bright room mics, I like them dull — well, not dull, but screwed up, so to speak. Loads of compression, lots of the TG going on. I like to keep my overheads tight so that it's just cymbals more than anything. Really tight kick and snare, toms, and then try and get the grittiness from bizarre microphone placements. I'm a big one for changing microphones out before I jump for the EQ. But once I've got the right mic I'm really happy to go for the EQ, whether it's getting a Pultec and a hundred percent of 60Hz or that kind of thing.

Any other drum recording tips?

I have got a bit of a sneaky secret... I always sample the drums when recording; I get individual hits,

and I will 90% of the time replace the kick with that kick drum sample for the whole song. I have a loud velocity and a medium velocity — I just like the consistency of a tight, solid bottom end. You can do it with compression, but if it's a bad drummer you get a better sound that way.

How do you trigger it?

I cut and paste it through and line it up with the original one. I prefer to do that than rely on using a different sample. I like the sound that I get from the drums, so rather than just throwing other samples on I'll use my own samples. And that's just to get the evenness — for rock. When you record the sample, you can fade it, so you can tailor the length so that there's just enough bottom end without it being too rumble for the song. You can have a large kick drum that fades off, you can shorten it. If the verses are quieter I might put in a medium hit sample then for the choruses have a harder sample. Or if there's points in the song where it's not quite working I just won't have the sample at those points — say if the kick drum's building up. It started from drummers who'd be hitting the kick drum, then in-between the beats they'd be tapping, and it annoyed the shit out of me, because you'd get all this low end rumbling.

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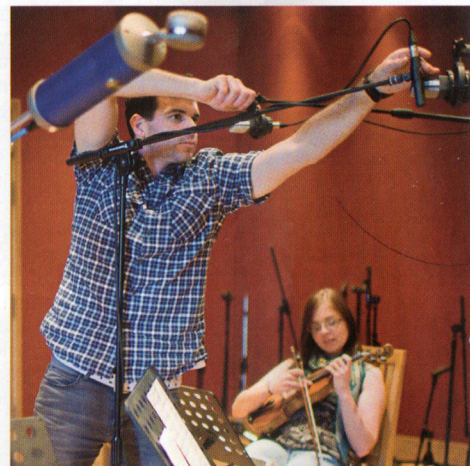
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I gather you're also co-producing with Greg, how does that work?

I had a project I was producing and wanted him to get involved. We met five or six years back and I stepped in and did engineering for him, and he started to take more of a back seat. He had a few tricks he taught me. I was always very meticulous about moving microphones and making sure it was the right microphone and spending a lot of time getting it right. Which is probably something I got from Danton and Gil. But Greg came in and was like, that doesn't sound very good, a bit of EQ, a bit of this, just do what you can to make it sound good — it doesn't matter if it's poor technique or not. He's a bit more reckless; that took me out of the zone of my engineering being nice sounding recordings to having more interesting and cool sounds. Greg's more of a vibe person who'll just go with what sounds great. Most of the time I'm his engineer, but it's a very free style of engineering. He'll let me get up the guitar sounds, and he'll give me an indication of what he wants for a drum sound and let me do what I do. If it's not right, he'll jump in and say so. But when we're doing backing vocals I'm pretty much solely in charge of coming up with the harmonies. Working with other producers, you really are just the guy tweaking the knobs, but the way Greg works it's different. ■

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