



CARO EMERALD

David Schreurs & Jan Van Wieringen:
Recording *The Shocking Miss Emerald*

TOM FLINT

Caro Emerald's debut album, *Deleted Scenes From The Cutting Room Floor*, was released in the Netherlands at the start of 2010, and soon hit the number one spot in the domestic chart, helped by the hit single 'Back It Up'. There it stayed for a record-breaking length of time, making Caroline Esmeralda van der Leeuw a huge star in her homeland. The album also proved a hit in much of the rest of Europe, achieving platinum sales in Germany, Poland and the UK, and vindication for the small but extremely determined team of songwriters, musicians and producers who worked on the project.

"We're a bunch of lucky guys!" laughs David Schreurs, reflecting on the success he and co-producer Jan Van Wieringen have enjoyed with Caro Emerald. "Jan and

Tired of trying to make money, Caro Emerald's production team chose to make music they loved. The result was a worldwide hit album...

I had been frustrated producers working at home for many years. Nobody wants to be a producer who is approaching 40 and has never had a hit. You are better off sticking to making music that you love, and accepting that you are never going to make money off of it. The whole scene is so crowded with people who desperately want to have a hit, and we broke away from that by doing exactly what we wanted.

"We didn't care about making money. Everybody around us thought we'd gone crazy because there was nothing there — there wasn't a big artist, budget or record label — and we worked as if it was the new James Bond soundtrack. That's how serious and fanatical we were."

David and Jan were, as they readily admit, lucky that the music they wanted to make turned out to have mass appeal. In terms of production, however, they left very little to chance, spending years perfecting their particular blend of modern hip-hop-influenced pop and retro dance music.

"We really like old records and film scores," continues David. "They sound so rich, but we wanted to stay away from the copycat stuff. Even with our limited resources, we wanted to make sure that our production had a sound of its own. It was like a couple of alchemists looking for gold. Not necessarily to become rich, but to make something that we really liked."



Following their success with Caro Emerald's *Deleted Scenes From The Cutting Room Floor*, David Schreurs (left) and Jan Van Wieringen both rented production rooms at Amsterdam's Electric Monkey Studios.

"To break out of the routine of making music and then waiting for something to happen, we decided to really go for it, so we worked 20 hours a day and kept going. We would sleep for a couple of hours, then come back to a track and change this or that. Sometimes tracks would come back from mastering and we'd decide that the hi-hat was too loud, and adjust the mix again. So that's the kind of detail that we got into. We were convinced that we were making a great demo and maybe even a great record. That's how we approached the first album."

"Caro was my demo singer," adds Jan. "She did guide vocals, choruses and harmonies for all kinds of projects. The first track that Dave and I did with Caro was 'Back It Up', which we also wrote with Robin Veldman, who I've done lots of hip-hop with. Originally Dave wanted another vocalist, but she couldn't or wouldn't do it, so I suggested we try Caro and it was a match made in heaven, because she just sounded right."

The Follow Up

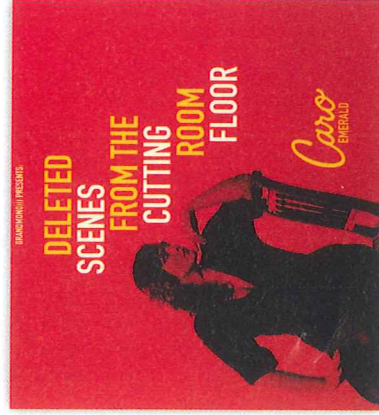
Despite the success of *Deleted Scenes From The Cutting Room Floor*, Jan and David were in no rush to finish the follow-up album. David had used his background in law to help him set up the Grandmono record label, through which the Caro Emerald album and singles were released, so there was no label pressure to produce anything quickly. What's more, their royalties gave the team the funds to rent and equip new studios, and realise some of their production ambitions.

"We did so much groundwork on the first album, and we wanted to keep developing," says David. "We weren't nervous that we couldn't do it again. It was just like, 'Let's just keep going, we'll get better at it, and this time we can work with a big orchestra instead of overdubbing one instrument 20 times!' The album's

success gave us the opportunity to buy compressors, microphones and get a bigger studio, so it enabled us to grow. Everybody in the writing team — Jan, Me, Caro and lyricist Vincent Degiorgio — saw it as a platform to develop ourselves and our music, and make stuff that we really liked regardless of what anybody else thought. The nice thing about this team is that we give each other room. There's no pressure, no egos, no agendas: it's just making music."

One of the first things David did in preparation for making *The Shocking Miss Emerald* was to relocate his studio to a production room at Electric Monkey Studios in Amsterdam. Electric Monkey was of particular interest because of its Cadac G320 desk and collection of vintage microphones and analogue processors, all of which seemed like excellent tools for creating the Caro Emerald retro sound.

"Electric Monkey was built by this crazy guy from Amsterdam," says David. "It has one big live room and five production rooms. I needed a place to work on the arrangements, so we rented a room and got a second for Jan when it became vacant. And it is really easy for us to walk into the big live room when we need it. One thing we wanted to achieve with this album was a warmer sound that was closer



» to European dance orchestra stuff like Bert Kaempfert, and the great thing is that Electric Monkey has a lot of vintage gear. At the time, we were buying lots of gear, so Jan made sure that we didn't double stuff that was already there, so we kind of merged our setups. Before that, Jan was really adamant that he didn't want to work with outboard because it wasn't versatile enough. Now he's all outboard!"

"I didn't have the budget for it, so I did everything in the box," say Jan in his defence. "Now I have loads of outboard, but I don't want to think about whether something is hardware or a plug-in, so I have all my hardware on inserts and make changes with a patchbay. I have two Lynx Aurora 16s and a Crane Song HEDD connected to my patchbay, and I use a Weiss AD2 for recording the

mixes. Sometimes I use two plug-ins, then some hardware, then more plug-ins, then another piece of hardware again. So the signal goes in and out in between."

Sketches Of Holland

David and Jan's production process usually begins with a short writing session to establish a workable base rhythm and a rough vocal melody, as David explains.

The Road To Abbey Road

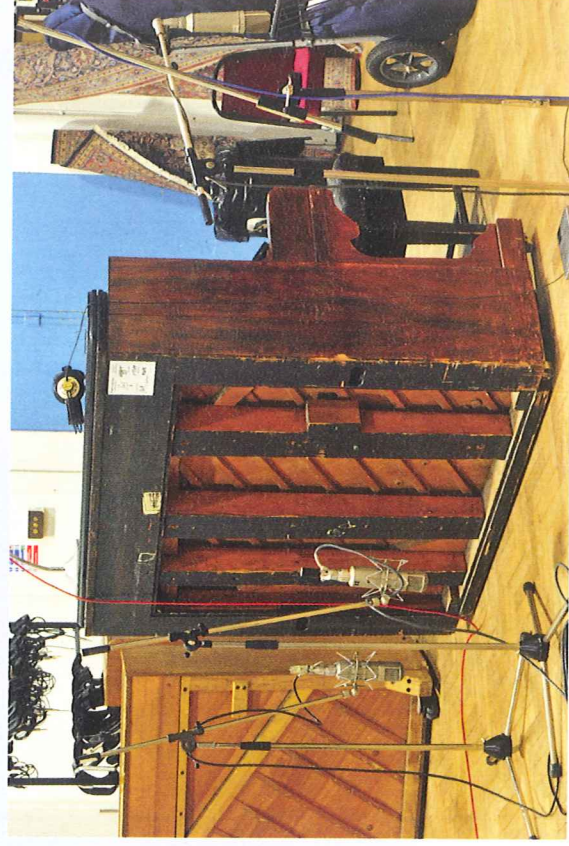
Keen to push their production further, David Schreurs and Jan Van Wieringen decided to spend some of the royalties they'd earned on the first Caro Emerald album recording orchestral sessions at London's Abbey Road Studios, hiring Jules Buckley to do the string and big-band brass and woodwind arrangements. In preparation, David mocked up some of the arrangements using Mellotron Strings, while other tracks were built around strings parts sampled from records, and Buckley also created his own basic demo templates using Finale and its sound libraries.

"We never overdo the demos," says David, "but before we went to Abbey Road we thought hard about how the tracks should sound, so everyone knew what they were doing."

In particular, David and Jan were adamant that they did not want the strings and big-band overdubs to sound the same across all the songs. Their goal was to be able to make the recordings sound as if they were samples taken from various records, and to ensure they could do that later on in the mix, they set up lots of different microphone configurations.

"We went there the day before the session and explained to the engineers that we wanted a coloured sound," say Jan. "They are used to recording orchestras for movie soundtracks and stuff that has to be really clean, so we pushed them to use the Fairchild processors, REDD.17 desk and the EMI limiters, and they got more and more enthusiastic. Then, at the soundcheck, we asked if they could push it a little more and crank up the preamps, to the point where they started asking us if we were sure it wasn't too coloured!"

"We had the Decca Tree with Neumann M50s going to Neve 1081s and Fairchild compressors, but at the same time there were left and right RCA 44 overheads going into the REDD.17, [Neumann] KM53s into a Neve 88RS, and for ambience, a stereo pair of M50s into a [Telefunken] V72 amplifier and EMI limiter. To mic the various sections we used [AKG] C12s, [Neumann] U67s, U47s, KM56s and KM84s. When it came to the mix, on some tracks we used the Decca Tree and made it really wide, and for others we used the RCA 44s and even some of the individual mics in mono. The same goes for the big-band brass. We recorded them in different combos and doubled a lot with brass we recorded in Electric Monkey, and even with MIDI brass for a couple of tracks.



We wanted the brass to sound like it came from a different recording session, like a production where samples are used.

"Also, for some tracks we added a big plate reverb, because Abbey Road Studio 2 sounds really dead. Most of it was Altiverb, but I also used a real EMT 140 plate. On 'Come Back As A Man' for example, we added a plate, then rendered it to a stereo track and cut it up, so when the playing stops there is no reverb going on and it sounds artificial, like a sample. Stuff like this makes it more interesting to listen to. Even though most people don't consciously notice, their brain is still telling them that something unnatural is going on, which helps

The team took full advantage of Abbey Road's extensive collection of mics and other vintage gear.

grab their attention. The same goes for a lot of the synth and dub effects. You have to listen intently on headphones to pick them out, but they add interest by tickling the ears!"

Whereas most orchestral sessions at Abbey Road Studio 2 employ its new Neve desk for transparency, David and Jan were keen to get as much colour into their recordings as possible, and insisted on using the vintage REDD.17 valve mixer.



"The demos are really sketchy, capturing the basic musical idea with some chords and a beat. Sometimes it's just a sample and a beat, and we lay down the vocal on top of that and record it with an iPhone or, if I have a mic set up, something a little more fancy, but it's just for the idea. I make a lot of the beat tracks, but so do Jan, guitar player Wieger Hoogendorp and Robin Veldman. Robin created the original beat for 'Back It Up' and has a really cool studio with old synths.

"Vince DeGiorgio and I, and sometimes Caro, sit together and write the top line and lyric. Vince definitely does 90 percent of the lyrics. Caro has some lyrical ideas as well, but I don't really write lyrics. Vince always lays down guide vocals. He doesn't control his voice like a singer, but his timing is amazing, so although it's not loud, it gets across the vibe of the song.

"That initial writing process is really fast. Whether Caro's there or not, Vince and I usually take less than an hour to finish a demo, but later I sometimes goof around with the structure. Then we give the demo to Caro so she can play around with it. Most of the time I help her, because the melody isn't clear or still needs fine-tuning. Simultaneously, I start working on top of the beat in a very careful way. I don't try to produce a track in two or three days. Sometimes it takes a month before I decide where it's going. I just play around, putting in samples and laying down instruments to see what happens. I try to leave it open as long as possible so that the tracks can grow.

"I think we did two tracks with a band setup, but usually we track instrument-by-instrument. For some songs, we recorded four different pianists, so for those, for example, I'd start experimenting with the piano tracks, treating the material like it was samples. When you listen to a record, for example, you are looking for the best bit to sample, and that's how I treat all the different parts that we record. Even if we record a drum kit, we'll chop it into samples and start working with it. It's not always the most effective or efficient way of working, but it is fun, and you discover a lot in the process. You end up with sounds that you wouldn't otherwise find straight away. The arrangements take forever, and a lot of stuff never gets used, but for Jan and me it works really well."

Stacks of Tracks

All of the songs on *The Shocking Miss Emerald* are underpinned by a danceable rhythm section, characterised by a strong, pulsing bass sound. Unsurprisingly, David and Jan spent a lot of their time and effort on perfecting the driving rhythm. The bass ideas were usually laid down by David, using an appropriate synth sound, followed by recording sessions at Electric Monkey featuring an electric bassist and, in some cases, an upright bassist too. Once again, the bass tracks were cut up afterwards and used like samples. "On 'Tangled Up', for example," says David, "I took a lick here, a lick there, pushed notes around and made sure that there was repetition as well as variation. Most bassists wouldn't play it that way, because repetition can become boring, but repetition is what I like about samples. And we often doubled the bass to give it some extra body, so on some tracks you'll hear a live bass and a synth. But we made sure that everything was really aligned, otherwise it becomes messy.

MODULAR SOLO MIDI TO CV CONVERTER

Make your Eurorack modular system sing! An attractively finished 10HP module with built-in LFO, portamento, four continuously variable auxiliary outputs, two independent clock outs and much more.

For more info go to kenton.co.uk/modsolo

MIDI to CV Converters



The widely acclaimed **Pro Solo** and **Pro 2000** converters give you versatile control over your synths and modular systems.

The **USB Solo** controls your analogue synths via your computer's USB port.



PRO SOLO MKII - USB Solo
PRO 2000 MKII

Choose the right converter for you at kenton.co.uk/converters

MIDI USB Host

Use USB devices with a MIDI USB Host instead of your computer. MIDI In & Out are provided for USB MIDI keyboards and controllers. MIDI data received at the MIDI In is sent to the USB device. MIDI data received from the USB device is sent to the MIDI Out.

Includes a multi-region power supply for use in most countries.

For more info see kenton.co.uk/usbhost



LNDr ~ the MIDI line driver

LNDr is a master and slave pair that allows MIDI to be sent accurately in both directions across distances of over 500 metres (1640 feet) using standard CAT5 cable. This is at least 33 times the distance achievable using standard MIDI cables. Master unit is mains powered using included PSU. CAT5 cable not included.

More info at kenton.co.uk/lnldr

Sold as a pair



THRU-5 ~ 5 way MIDI thru box

1 in to 5 out. Tough metal case, mains powered, fit and forget.

More info at kenton.co.uk/thru



Kenton Merge 4 ~ MIDI Merge Box

4 opto-isolated MIDI In's and 2 MIDI Out's.

Tough metal case, mains powered, fit and forget.

More info at kenton.co.uk/merge

MIDI retrofits

Add MIDI to your vintage synths. Recently redesigned MIDI retrofits are now available again for many synthesiser models.

New! A Linn LM-1 drum machine retrofit is now available.

See kenton.co.uk/retrofits

Socket kits

Socket kits are available for synths and drum machines enabling them to be used with one of our MIDI converters.

New! A Korg 800DV socket kit is now available.

See kenton.co.uk/socketkits

KENTON

kenton.co.uk

Tel: 020-8544-9200 (Intl: +44-20-8544-9200)

Brookfarm House, 1 Station Rd, London SW19 2LP, UK

(trademarks & tradenames acknowledged)





A major advantage of renting rooms at Electric Monkey is that Jan (left) and David can use the large live area.

» “We also used an old arranger’s trick from the 1950s. A double bass often lacks attack and high frequencies, so they used to double it with a cello. On ‘Pack Up The Louis’, for example, we were fighting with the upright bass sound, which was drowning underneath the drums, so we put in four

or five basses from the Vienna Library and then added two cellos in the chorus — a pizzicato and a normally played bass. We’d also recorded a DI, two or three room mics and sometimes we re-amped it and recorded that at the same time, so most of the time it’s a mixture of sounds.”

“The bass parts were recorded with eight mics at the same time!” confirms Jan. “We wanted every song to have its own sound, so we had a couple of different mics close, a couple a bit further away, and recorded all of them in one pass, so when mixing I could choose which combination

Team Work

Before teaming up, both David Schreurs and Jan Van Wieringen were deeply involved in music production, but, as it turned out, they needed each other’s expertise to become the creative force they are today. Although David had studio experience, he saw himself more of a musician, composer and producer than a recording engineer. Jan, on the other hand, was interested in rhythms, beats and sound production, and was on the lookout for collaborators who could add melodies and lyrics.

“I was working as a freelance producer, engineer and composer, and did loads of different projects,” says Jan. “A lot of it was hip-hop, because I’d had some commercial success with that, but I really wanted to do pop songs. I don’t write melodies or lyrics myself and found it hard finding the right top liners. I tried working with lots of people but never got the result that I was looking for, until my publisher sent a hip-hop beat I’d made to David. It was meant for a rapper but David wrote a pop melody on it and recorded it with a singer.

“For me, that changed everything, because I’d found someone I could make pop records

with: records with a great catchy melody which still had a coolness to them, like Ms. Dynamite, and still with the hip-hop attitude and the sample sound that I love. It turned out we had the same taste in music, especially English stuff from Ninja Tunes and ‘90s hip-hop.”

Jan had started out learning to play the trumpet as a child, but when he got a Roland MC303 groovebox for his 16th birthday, and later an Akai S2000 sampler, he moved away from being a musician and towards engineering and sound design. David’s path into music started in a similar way, except that he was not satisfied with playing one instrument and became proficient on the piano, drums and saxophone. As a teenager he attended a music conservatoire, only to find that many of his contemporaries were scraping a living playing in wedding bands and teaching — a far cry from the enticing world of music production he’d imagined. Disillusioned, David went to law school, gaining skills he would later put to use when setting up the Grandmono label.

“For me, it was quite easy to study law, so I had a lot of free time,” he explains. “Basically I was making music full time and doing some

exams every now and then. I organised a lot of sessions and had a couple of bands, so I had a musician’s life, and law school was like a hobby. It was really a way to buy myself time so I could focus on cool productions. I wasn’t particularly interested in the engineering side of things; more the sound, and working out how old records were made.

“After graduating, I started music full time. I had a really cheap flat in the North of Holland and just started producing and making a lot of tracks. That’s what I did for 10 years. I started working in a commercial studio in 2004 and used the down time to record my own things, but I found myself doing bullshit things like music for TV, and I really didn’t want that. I only wanted to do cool stuff! When you are a producer in Holland and you don’t like the Eurovision contest, Idols and TV music, it’s a bit like wanting to sail a boat when you are living in a desert. You need to break out and this project was a chance for us to do that. So I quit that and found a job as a legal adviser for four hours a week. That paid the bills, so I had the rest of the week to work on my production.”

of mics I wanted for each track.

"The same goes for everything we recorded. For example, if you look at the drum track for most of the songs, there are three live sessions, loads of layers, cut-up breakbeats and extra percussion, both sampled and recorded during different sessions. One track has eight different kick-drum layers! We did things differently during different sessions, so the mic positions depended on the session, but we always had multiple overheads and multiple room arrays, and we record all the mics. The special weapons were the RCA 44BX and AEA 44 ribbon mics, and we used them a lot. The RCA gives everything a really old-school vibe and doesn't have the high highs, which we didn't really want."

When asked if having so many audio track layers makes mixing a complicated task, Jan insists that his and David's method of selecting only what they want to use from multiple sample layers actually makes the process of mixing easier, rather than harder. "Because sounds such as the drums are layered samples, instead of mixing the drums until they fit, we just choose the

layers that sound right. If, for example, a hip-hop beat doesn't have the right vibe, we'll layer more ambient drum samples on top and all of a sudden it sounds right!"

"A beat might be cool," adds David, "but if we decide that it needs more of a live sound, we'll audition the muted tracks to see if that sound is there. If it isn't, we re-record something. If, for example, a brush loop needs more bite, I'll lay down a drum track on top, maybe in my own room or in the big room. When you record all the drums for an album in one room, it can sound boring, so we did a lot of experiments, recording in different rooms, different places in the room, and different groupings. Or, if we had a setup where we were recording the bass that day, but I wanted to do some extra percussion on the track, I'd just play the percussion into that bass setup! We did a lot of stuff like that."

Caro's Vocals

As with the instrument recordings, Caro's vocals were simultaneously recorded with a number of different microphones and

preamps, all of which varied from session to session. "There were two main chains that we used most of the time," Jan recalls.

"The first had a Josephson C700A going into either the Cranesong Flamingo or BAE 1073. Josephson is a small American company that makes great mics that sound larger than life. Next to it was a Telefunken CMV3 going into the preamp of the Cadac G320 desk in the live room at Electric Monkey. There was no compression at all during recording, because it's nice to have the uncompressed option for certain *ad libs*, but afterwards both channels went into the UA 2-1176 with the fastest attack and release time. That just seemed to work, and it still left a lot of dynamic. The magic is in how hard you drive it. It saturates the mids in a way that's just right, and I've never heard that magic from a plug-in emulation.

"On most of the mixes, I used two of the following compressors in series on Caro's voice: Analogue Tube AT101, which is a Fairchild remake, Thermion Culture Phoenix, UBK Fatsò, Rupert Neve 5043 and Slate Pro Audio Dragon. I like to link hardware together until I get a vibe and

»



ATH-M50

More Colour In Your Mix

Audio-Technica's acclaimed **ATH-M50** studio monitor headphones deliver natural response throughout the entire frequency range, without hyping or diminishing sounds along the way. Wherever your passion for music leads you, listen for more.

www.audio-technica.com

 **audio-technica.**
always listening



A typical three-mic setup for recording Caro Emerald's vocals, with an RCA 44BX ribbon mic (left), a Telefunken CMV3 'bottle' tube mic (centre) and Josephson C700A (right).

» colour that suits the song. If I need more compression later on, I use a software compressor like the [Reaper-bundled plug-in] ReaComp. So it is hardware for the colour and software for extra control.

"We also used a third mic setup, but it depended on what suited the song. It could be a Coles 4038, a Shure SM57, or whatever. And for every song we made a monitoring balance out of those three and fed it to Caro so she got the right vibe. That third mic recording was often used for *ad libs*. Also, if we wanted the bridge to have a different vibe, we'd use a different mic. Or, if we wanted to double the vocal in the chorus and had different takes available, we'd use a different mic recording on the doubles.

"On almost all my productions, I use the Altiverb preset 'Just A Bit of Air' to give it a bit of space. After that, it depends. I use lots of different delays, choruses and reverbs, but all really mildly. That's how I like to use my effects. I don't want them to stand out, except for specific bits. I like to add subtle combinations so they fit the mix, but you don't actually hear them. I don't like to hear a chorus, but if you use it really mildly to push something back, it works."

In terms of backing-vocal layers, Jan's recollection is that 'Tangled Up' has got the most, with about eight, but most songs only feature one or two extra layers per harmony part. When it came to editing takes together, however, Dave and Jan did not hold back. "It's a lot of work EQ'ing everything so it has the same sound to it, but sometimes there were three different

takes in one word, literally!" says Jan. "We'd be time-stretching syllables and stuff like that. We go that extra mile so the whole production is really tight. We found that if you have too much of a live feel to the vocal, it doesn't sound right, so we like to tidy everything up."

Monkeying About

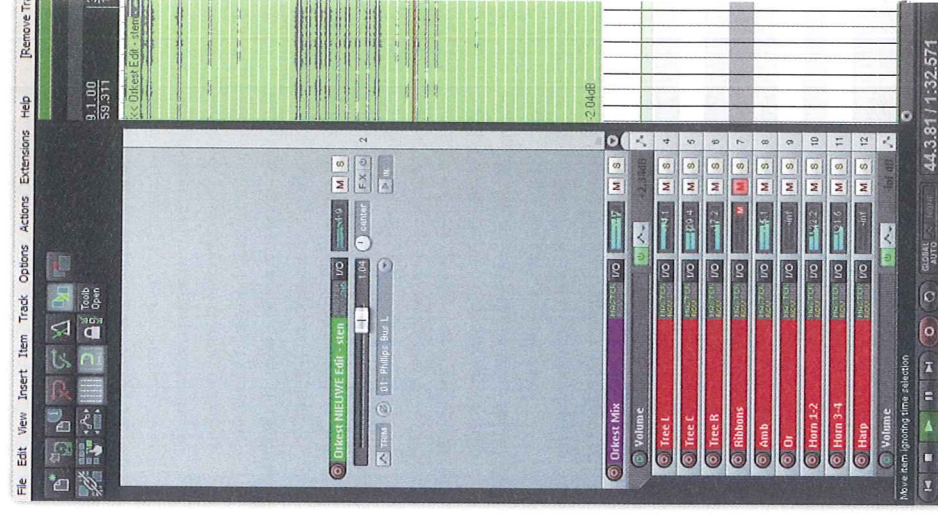
The final mixes were made by Jan in his production room at Electric Monkey. Although many hardware processors were used to shape the individual sounds during production, Jan kept the mix in the digital domain, so that he retained control over automation and recall. He also used a gaming mouse rather than a control surface, which enabled him to work very quickly. Jan's DAW of choice is Cockos Reaper, which allows him to manage his multi-layered mixes in a way he believes is not possible with any equivalent DAW.

For the Abbey Road sessions, for example, Jan rendered all of the microphone tracks into one 48-track WAV file, enabling them to be edited as one region, while Reaper's architecture still allowed him to specify whether or not the output of each embedded track went to the mix!

"In stereo, channel one is left and channel two is right," explains Jan, "but in Reaper you can add a third, fourth, fifth and so on. So if, for example, I want to use the mic that I put on the third channel, I make a send from channel three. So on top you have one audio file where you do all the editing — reversing it, cutting it up — just like a normal mono or stereo file, but underneath it is like a submix with only the mics that I want to use. So it doesn't process all the files, only those that I send out."

When asked what aspects of the recording process were critical in giving *The Shocking Miss Emerald* its warm, vintage sound, Jan cites recording with ribbon mics, not adding much high end, and using lots of software plug-ins and analogue hardware to saturate the lower mid frequencies. "We experimented with lots of onboard processing," says Jan. "I have two Anamod AT51s [tape emulators] in my mixing rig, which I used on separate instruments and buses. I think I used it on Caro's vocal on every song. Most of the time, I used the Ampex 351 Machine Type setting in combination with the 456 Tape Formulation setting.

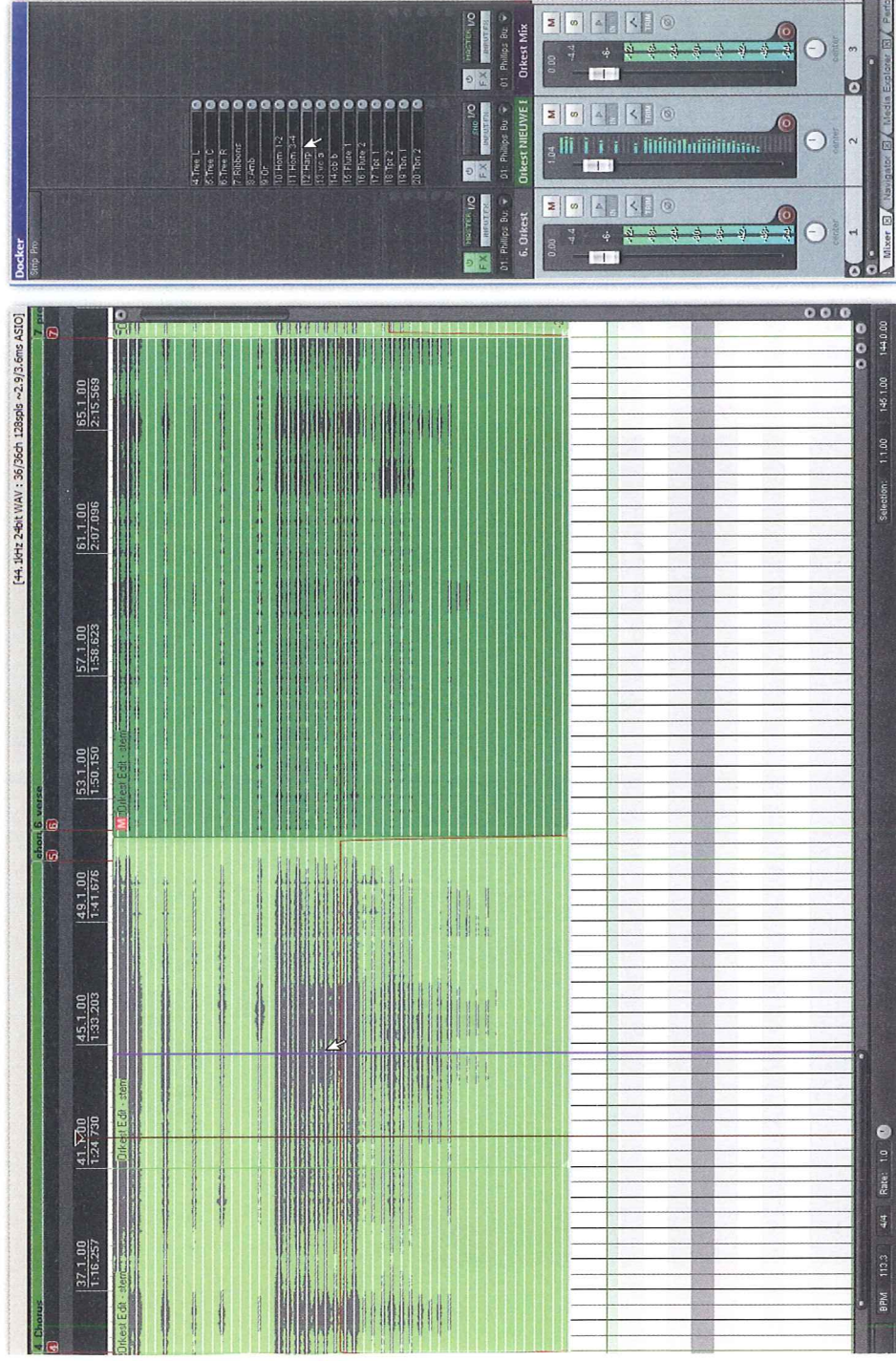
"I used the Thermionic Culture Fat Busted to sum stems together in the analogue domain and to add tube coloration, but when we tried running



Jan Van Wieringen employs a working approach in Reaper that he believes would not be possible in other DAWs. In these two screens, you can see an entire multi-miked orchestral recording treated as a single track for editing purposes; the mics that are actually used in the mix have individual sends from this track, as shown in the mixer screen shot.

things through the Cadac in the live room, it performed a miracle. It glued the production together, the voice stayed up front and it gave the whole production a focus. So I rendered the mix to 10 stereo stems and summed these together on the Cadac desk. Not a lot of them were made, but what makes this one unique is that it has input transformers on the line inputs, not just on the preamps. That could be the reason it works so well for summing. The summed mix from the Cadac was sent to the Studer A80 to process the whole mix. It adds depth, breathes extra life into the low end and softens the mids, which worked great for tracks like 'Coming Back As A Man', 'Black Valentine', 'I Belong To You', 'The Maestro' and 'Paris'.

"But it is also in the mastering," he adds. "We tried out some of the big-name American mastering houses, but Darius van



Helfteren from Amsterdam Mastering, who I've worked with for years, was the only one who kept it sounding natural. No high highs, sharp mids or extreme limiting. Modern pop records are so bright, and we didn't want that. We want people to listen to the whole album without their ears getting tired, so they can crank it as loud as they want and it still sounds good."

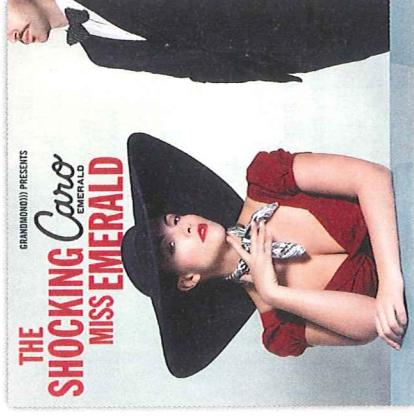
Fresh Approach

In sum, David and Jan's productions are a strange mixture of old and new styles. On the one hand, their songs are quite traditional, but the methods they use to put them together are closer to those used by hip-hop producers working with samples. Involving the 48-piece orchestra and big-band musicians simply gave the pair a bigger library of samples to play with.

"The great thing about samples is that you have so many different rooms, desks and ways of recording and mastering," insists David. "Even the way the audio has been printed on vinyl makes a difference. Sample productions, like the Fatboy Slim stuff, the Avalanches and all the early '90s acid jazz and Native Tongues hip-hop

stuff, are so fresh because they're a blend of completely different worlds: all these old-school samples, with really loud drums.

We want to do stuff like Bloodshy and Avant, who are making music that's fresh, cool and successful at the same time. It's always hard to judge if our productions have the same effect on people, but I want that freshness to be there. With the retro '50s thing going on, we have to be careful that it doesn't become like lounge music, or background down-tempo stuff where you have the hip-hop beat, the '50s sample,



a bit of percussion and a song structure that never ends. We wanted to stay away from that and make a pop record.

"There were a lot of people involved this time with the orchestra, but we also tried to get in some people from the live band, so we had two DJs — DJ Kypski and DJ Git Hyper — four piano players, two bassists and three or four drummers. So you have these different elements, and it's like a big kitchen with lots of ingredients. It's like how the Avalanches make records, but instead of searching records, we search our own recordings. I had a lot of tracks on mute and I just listened to stuff, finding out if it worked. For example, Carel Kraayenhof, who is one of the best bandoneon players in the world and played on 'Tangled Up', also laid down a track for 'Black Valentine'. We were really honoured, but at some point we decided it sounded better without him, so we pressed the mute button! Those kinds of decisions are made all the time. I don't know if you have to be a brilliant arranger but you have to take the time and experiment a lot — that's the secret. We always allow ourselves the time to experiment." ■■■