

*In conversation with*

## Joel Plaskett



Canada has produced some of the world's most enduring songwriters and Joel Plaskett is hailed as one of the best. With countless awards, thousands of tour dates and numerous recording and producing projects under his belt, Plaskett remains one of the most innovative and prolific artists on the scene today.

Inspired by a high demand for his ears as a producer, Joel rang in 2013 with the completion and launch of his new recording studio, **New Scotland Yard**. Since the opening, Joel has put his mark on the recordings of Sarah Slean, Al Tuck, David Myles, Steve Poltz, and most recently, buzz act Mo Kenney. In 2014, he continues to amass production credits with several projects already on the schedule – including a new record of his own.

***Congrats on your recent ECMA nomination for Producer of the Year!! Are you excited about being nominated?***

Thanks! Yeah, I'm super excited. I've been doing more and more producing and it's nice to get a nod in that arena. Although I still feel like I have a lot to learn.

***You are not only a producer but also celebrated live artist as well. Is it hard to find a balance between being on the road and in the studio?***

They are two different worlds. I built New Scotland Yard so I could have place to work from that is close to home when I'm not touring. Going elsewhere to make records involved me being away for too long. My family is really important to me and although I'm a workaholic. I'm trying to strike a balance. I love touring and love recording so I go back and forth. Last year was a big touring year; this year is more about the studio.

***Are you completely self produced, or do you bring in people to produce or co-produce your records?***

I co-produced a few of my earlier records with my old band mate Ian McGettigan. After that Gordie Johnson from Big Sugar produced an EP and the Ashtray Rock album for Joel Plaskett and the Emergency. Those recordings did really well and helped build my profile. Gordie's ears had a lot to do with that!



*(PHOTO) New Scotland Yard recording studio in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia*

***Are there any producers in particular you enjoy working with?***

I've learned a lot from Ian McGettingan and Gordie Johnson as well as a friend in Arizona named Bob Hoag. I made my "Ladeda" record with Bob and Ian at a studio called Flying Blanket, a recording studio in Mesa, Arizona. All three of them have really taught me a lot about sound.

***What do you feel are the benefits/pitfalls in taking on the role of producer on your own recordings?***

Well, I'm cheaper! But I don't always have the perspective I need. Having said that, the more I work on other peoples' records, the more knowledge I bring back to my own. I'm also enjoying being closer to home and taking my time with recording at my own studio where it would be difficult to have another producer on deck for a long stretch. I'm also a bit of a control freak!!

***Are you producing other bands/musicians?***

The first thing tracked at the New Scotland Yard was Sean McCann's "Help Your Self" album, which just came out. Sean had just left Great Big Sea and was embarking on a solo career. That is a really strong record and I had a great time making it.

Before that was a collaboration with ukulele virtuoso James Hill. All original tunes and some are really rocking with amped electric ukuleles. I think there might be only one or two actual guitars on the recording.

Some other stand out projects would be the three songs produced for Colleen Brown from Edmonton and four tracks for a great Cape Breton rock band called Mardeen. These tracks are acoustic and based on their experiences growing up in Cape Breton. Wicked tunes! I just mixed some tunes for Halifax rock band, Rolly and the Navy Brats. Lastly, I'm really excited about Mo Kenney's next record that we have been working on for a few months. Her first recording was done at my old studio and I'm super happy that she came back to me to make another record.

Next up - I gotta make my own record!

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***What is your software DAW of choice?***

ProTools

***Do you mix to tape?***

Yeah, 1/4" tape on a Studer A-810 at 30ips. We usually use the Ampex 456 for mixing and ATR for tracking on the 2".

***Do you commonly work in a hybrid studio environment - Analog/Digital?***

Yeah. The tape machine is almost always in use. I love the sound of tape, so if I'm there, the tape is rolling.

***Is there a balance between vintage and modern equipment in your studio?***

Mostly vintage on the guitar, amp and the drums side of things - the tape machines are old too. The desk is newer as are most of the compressors, pre amps and microphones.

***You are currently using two Apollo 16's in your system. How well did Universal Audio integrate with your existing system?***

The integration was pretty seamless. We run Pro Tools and the CLASP system to run a 2" 16 track Studer a-80. Everything hits tape before it goes through the converters into Pro Tools. The transfer is uncoloured. To my ears, it sounds like what was on tape. They work really well.

***What is your typical instrument chain during tracking and mixing?***

Electrics, most often, are my Fender bandmaster or vibrochamp miked with the Royer 122 or -Cloud Ribbon mic, through the UA 6176 or RND portico pres. When mixing, I'll often re-compress through the Summit, DCL 200, particularly for acoustics which are often miked with KM 184's or 57s. Bass is often my 76 Fender P-bass into an Electrodyne pre and EQ, compressed with the LA 610 or the Anamod 660(sometimes amped as well). Drums are often miked through portico board pres with no compression on close mics but the room compressed though the 6176. Overheads are often in the Summits. I run a drum back buss through the API 2500 sometimes in the mix. Vocals are singer dependent but often miked with Neumann m-150 or Shure Sm7 into a board pre, the 6176, the LA610 or the Shadow Hills mono optograph.

***Was there a specific reason you chose to bring in Universal Audio for your converters and plugins?***

I like the Universal Audio gear a lot. It's reliable and sounds great. Simple to use as well which is important for me cause I'm untrained. I just turn knobs till I hear what I like. I want things to be as plug and play as possible. To be honest, I tried other converters, but they didn't work for me. Once I installed the Apollo 16's, I never looked back!