



In conversation with... **David Bottrill**



What do artists *Peter Gabriel, Godsmack, Daniel Lanois, Kid Rock, Mudvayne, Smashing Pumpkins, the Tea Party, Silverchair, Staind and Tool* all have in common? Each has had their hit music produced or mixed by David Bottrill. His ability to work within a variety of genres has given him insight into how to get the most out of the artists he works with,

regardless of their genre. And he has done it all with a tremendous amount of success - Bottrill's recordings have won three Grammy's and sold over 15 million copies worldwide.

David's successful career has him working in studios worldwide and he travels for much of the year. HHB Communication Canada caught up with him at his home studio in Toronto to talk about his career, his criteria for getting involved in artist's music and his approach to mixing, tracking and producing music.

David, we thank you for taking the time from your incredibly busy schedule to chat with us today. Let's start from the beginning. You came up through studios in a fairly traditional way. How has that affected the producer you've become?

I started at what was a somewhat conventional studio called Grant Avenue Studios - however what was happening there at the time was anything but conventional. The first sounds I heard coming from the control room was Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois' collaborations with the ambient series of recordings, *On Land, Music For Airports, the Apollo* soundtrack. The artists that came to Grant Avenue in those days was Jon Hassell, Harold Budd and Michael Brook, people who were pushing the boundaries of what recorded music could sound like. There were conventional recordings being done as well and I cut my teeth on many a jingle session, but at night it was pure experimentation instilling in me the realization that the studio is a creative tool as much as it is a documentation process.

You wear many hats in the studio - engineer, producer and mixing. Which role do you most prefer and why?

I don't engineer alone much these days. I prefer being able to focus on the music and performance rather than input level or compression settings. Not that those aren't worthwhile, just that there are two ways of thinking when recording and although I can switch back and forth relatively easily, I'd prefer to just be able to focus on performance and have a great engineer worry about the technical side.



What do you think is unique about your approach to producing an recording?

I think what I learned from the early days of working with Daniel Lanois and Peter Gabriel is the need to create a situation where the artist feels both comfortable and inspired. It's my goal to help create an environment where the artist feels like they are doing their best work as well as to get the best possible recordings. I tend to push musicians these days in an age of editing and auto-tune. I feel its a success if the musicians feel as if they are better players after working with me.

How do you decide which projects/artists you will work with?

I have criteria when I choose artists to work with and it goes two ways. The musicianship has to be good and the songs have to be of a certain quality of composition. But I also have to feel like i have something to contribute to the music. If I listen to the demos and have no ideas, then I'm probably not the right producer for the job.

When producing, how do you balance the artist's vision with your own? Do you strive to make albums more commercial?

My criteria is always the quality of the song. I strive to make each song the best it can be. If this makes it more commercial, then that is the way the song was leading us. I want to

help artists reach as big an audience as possible, so often we will select songs that I call door openers. They serve to invite the audience into the world of the band and hopefully listen to all the music they create, not just the singles. Eventually though, the band has to get up and perform these songs every night, so they have to like where they have ended up and feel confident playing them.

There is a distinct sound to your productions - thick but focused with moments of interesting “ear candy”. Why do you think that is? Is this a conscious goal?

When I work on a project, I am always thinking in more than just the stereo field. I want the listener to be enticed into the music and have the sound envelop them, rather than push them back into their seat.

When tracking, how do you gauge whether you’ve reached an artist’s potential?

It is usually obvious in the room. I do take things home and listen and then repeat a performance occasionally. Singers mostly, but all musicians, have a cutoff point where the performance just isn't going to get any better. I write with the band and spend a lot of time in pre production honing the songs and making sure each song is to it's potential.

Do you have any “go to” gear when tracking?

Many pieces. I have a Neve series of mic pre's for tracking drums and bass, but there are many other inputs that are good as well. I made what I considered one of my favourite sounding records completely on an SSL 4000 series console. Peter Gabriel's Passion, the soundtrack to the Last Temptation of Christ film.

When mixing, how do you deal with the increased expectation of recalls?

Nowadays, people expect instant recalls and modifications. Mixing all in Protools with the Apollo and UAD plugs means I can give my clients that without any difficulty. This does mean that some artists will take advantage and tweak endlessly, but there are scheduling ways to bring projects to a collusion.

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When mixing, how much do you rely on fader rides? Do they tend to be pre or post compression?

I have a bank of 8 faders. I'm still old school that way. I need to feel the mix. My faders are always post compression except for the final stage of the mix.

How have you refined your mixing workflow over the years?

I am now mixing totally in the box. I resisted for many years, but when I heard the Apollo and the UAD plugins, I finally felt that I could do that kind of work without any quality loss. I spent years on big consoles, and its still fun to do that, but there are so many advantages to my studio system now.

What are the UAD plugins that you couldn't live without?

There aren't many I could live without. I love all the UREI compressors, and they seem to keep releasing new ones that are even better each time. The Neve series of eq's are great for bass and guitars and the SSL channels are also great for guitars. It makes me feel like I'm back on the console as they have replicated the sound and response very accurately.

How do you treat your mix bus when mixing?

I have a few options. My buss compression is always the Shadow Hills stereo buss compressor. I will tweak the overall eq with the Brainworx, which has a great feature of Mono-ing the bottom end and is really subtle but effective for an overall eq and then I have a few limiters I will put on the back end. I try not to do too much limiting though, I do not want the mastering engineer to be restricted by the mix level.

How do you balance work and the rest of life?

That's a difficult one. My studio is in my house, so it is my life at the moment. But I refuse to order food in, so it does make me get out to shop for food. I've been learning to cook recently and although I'm still a bit of a novice, I do a mean seared tuna.

So, when you are not being David Bottrill, the mega producer, who are you?

I'm David Bottrill, the guy doing maintenance work on my family cottage.

Who are you currently playing on your Ipod?

Demos mostly. As usual.

What is next for you?

A lot. I just returned from producing an album for Las Vegas based band Otherwise. I'm mixing a new album for The Tea Party, and a band called Soen from Sweden. I leave in a few days for Los Angeles to work with a band called The Dear Hunter.

What do you consider to be your greatest achievement?

I've been very fortunate professionally to get a few breaks and capitalize on them. I've had the enormous privilege to work with some of the greatest artist of my time and I've helped make some music that has touched some people. I feel my greatest professional achievement when musicians and writers improve their skills and create better music as a result of my influence.

For more information on David Bottrill, visit www.davidbottrill.com

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