

Pete Cobbin & Kirsty Whalley

THE DEFINITION OF TEAMWORK

Pete Cobbin and Kirsty Whalley are a hell of a team. This dynamic musical duo have been working together for over 20 years, and have collaborated on a multitude of huge projects. To give you some idea of the scale of their work, they've mixed the soundtrack for several Harry Potter movies, Shrek, and Ridley Scott's Prometheus, and they're in the process of finalising Disney's amazing looking (and sounding, we're sure) Dumbo movie. We chat to the affable pair from their London studio, which has recently received somewhat of an audio overhaul. But, as Cobbin says with a smile, no studio will ever really be finished.

Cobbin and Whalley first met at Abbey Road Studios. They got on very well, and knew they were in the same zone music-wise, production-wise, and, as Whalley describes it, 'obsessive kind of detail-wise'.

"Over the years, it became that we were doing everything together, which led to us setting up our own company, and our own room," Whalley explains.

And the nature of the projects - largely movies - lent itself to teamwork.

"It's almost impossible to get through those projects on your own; it's very collaborative," says Cobbin. "Forming teams is something you'll see in working relationships in this industry, and Kirsty and I have developed a sort of shorthand that gives our work a certain degree of efficiency."

Their studio is located in Barnsbury - the Kings Cross side of Islington.

"Kings Cross is the new creative hub of London," says Cobbin. Agreed. "It's an exciting place to be today; and we're in a lovely old Georgian townhouse,

which was once owned by Dido and her brother, Rollo. Kirsty had a production room at Abbey Road, and I was senior engineer there at a time when we were thinking of going independent, and doing our own thing. We heard about the space, and we knew straight away that it would work. Then we gutted the whole thing. A project like that evolves, so it never *really* finishes!"

Production Values

The pair recently deployed a Merging Technologies Horus system, which is set up to run Audio over IP.

"Any serious mix room, production room, or recording studio that calls itself professional audio at some stage in the process will have to have a good converter, and depending on the need of that facility, will then depend on how many converters and how many channels are required," Cobbin explains. "For Kirsty and I, our entire professional life has been in some of the best facilities in the world; and we have

always kept ourselves up to date with good equipment. For many years we've known that Merging has some fantastic products, some of which we've become familiar with on our travels, so in setting up our own room, we're making a significant statement that we want the best. And in our opinion, that's exactly what we've bought. At a very basic level, just from the conversion point of view, that was the starting point."

"Yes, that was our entry into using these products, and obviously we interface it with Pro Tools, which is something we hadn't seen anybody else do," adds Whalley. "In these other facilities, they'd be running it with Pyramix, but being in the film and more popular music world, Pro Tools is most definitely where we need to be. With film, it's a mainly digital workflow; you have to provide many, many tracks with lots of stems, but we're really committed to providing the best of analogue with that setup, so we wanted something transparent that sounds really good, and





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that’s why we bought our first Horus.”

According to the pair, the Merging kit is rock solid, and from an audio perspective, the quality was clear.

“Some of the things it’s allowed us to do has opened our minds to more and more things,” Cobbin explains. “For instance, we spread our stereo mix coming out of Horus into summing mixers, and it’s made such a difference to the way that sounds. Our eyes were opened quite a lot when we went to do a recording in Glasgow for a composer we work with a lot - Danny Elfman - a really famous film composer, but a lot of people don’t know that he’s been working on a lot of classical work.

“We were working on his violin concertos in a facility in Glasgow with a very classical set up using Pyramix. We knew we needed to work in a slightly different way, which would mean taking some of our own equipment, and running Pro Tools for Danny, which is what he’s used to. So we took our Horus and our Pro Tools rig, and couldn’t believe how easy it was to connect into the infrastructure, where they had stage boxes with [Merging Technologies] Hapi units, and a control room where monitoring was based on another

Horus. We literally just plugged in an Ethernet cable, and were able to access everything using our own computer.”

Digital has clearly revolutionised the way Cobbin and Whalley work. But analogue is still a big part of the process.

“Along the way, you also do think ‘we really should incorporate more of the ultra high end analogue equipment that we’ve got’. And one of the hurdles every time you go in and back out, is that you’re doing *another* conversion process. But since having the Horus units, that hurdle no longer exists; we feel a lot more liberated about saying ‘let’s put it through some of our wonderful analogue gear’, and we’re not worried about the conversion stage, as the conversion is just so stonkingly good!”

“The idea of having remote stations where we can pull all our gear into our sessions, and pull all these in over the network so easily is fantastic,” Whalley says. “We don’t need patch bays, we don’t need analogue cable, and it’s really such a treat. We might send the mix we’re working on downstairs into another room in our building, and listen on different monitors, knowing we’re listening to super high quality, so we can take advantage of sending stuff all over

the place! We were so excited when we took delivery of our Horus boxes.”

At the time of writing, Cobbin and Whalley are finalising the soundtrack for Tim Burton’s *Dumbo* movie, which was also scored by Danny Elfman.

“We started this project in October, did some in November, a little in December... Some more in January [laughs],” says Cobbin. “And last week was crunch period: Kirsty was mixing at our studio, Sweet Thunder, while I was up at Air Studios recording, and then we were dropping the final mixes into Los Angeles.”

Serious deadline pressure, right there! But there must have also been some magic musical moments along the way?

“Honestly, the last few years I feel like I’ve been living the dream,” admits Cobbin. “This is probably the third phase of my career, and I’m just totally loving it.”

“I’m not sure I could point to a single one thing,” adds Whalley. “But when somebody sends us a beautiful soundtrack we’ve worked on, and I take my kids to the cinema and watch a film we’ve mixed, it’s really lovely.”

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