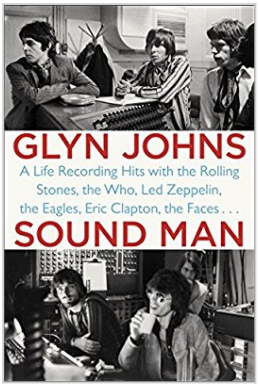

Sound Man: A Life Recording Hits with The Rolling Stones, The Who, Led Zeppelin, The Eagles , Eric Clapton, The Faces . . .

By Glyn Johns

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Born just outside London in 1942, Glyn Johns was sixteen years old at the dawn of rock and roll. His big break as a producer came on the Steve Miller Band's debut album, *Children of the Future*, and he went on to engineer or produce iconic albums for the best in the business: *Abbey Road* with the Beatles, Led Zeppelin's and the Eagles' debuts, *Who's Next* by the Who, and many others. Even more impressive, Johns was perhaps the only person on a given day in the studio who was entirely sober, and so he is one of the most reliable and clear-eyed insiders to tell these stories today.

In this entertaining and observant memoir, Johns takes us on a tour of his world during the heady years of the sixties, with beguiling stories that will delight music fans the world over: he remembers helping to get the Steve Miller Band released from jail shortly after their arrival in London, he recalls his impressions of John and Yoko during the *Let It Be* sessions, and he recounts running into Bob Dylan at JFK and being asked to work on a collaborative album with him, the Stones, and the Beatles, which never came to pass. Johns was there during some of the most iconic moments in rock history, including the Stones' first European tour, Jimi Hendrix's appearance at Albert Hall in London, and the Beatles' final performance on the roof of their Savile Row recording studio.

Johns's career has been long and prolific, and he's still at it—over the last two decades he has worked with Crosby, Stills & Nash; Emmylou Harris; Linda Ronstadt; Band of Horses; and, most recently, Ryan Adams. *Sound Man* provides a firsthand glimpse into the art of making music and reveals how the industry—like musicians themselves—has changed since those freewheeling first years of rock and roll.

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Editorial Review

Review
“One of the most fascinating behind-the-scenes careers in the history of popular music….a winding but wonderfully detailed account from the control room, recalling all the highs and lows of one of rock’s most fabled eras… Johns has turned his day job into a memoir colored with warmth, humor, and intimate detail.”
—AV Club

“Glyn Johns was there. He was there at some of the most important recording sessions in Rock and Roll. Reading his book, you are standing beside him as he sets up the studio in readiness for the arrival of groups like Led Zeppelin, The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. For me it is a fantastic romp through the pages of Rock and Roll history.”
—Sir Paul McCartney

“Glyn Johns has been a very important person in my recording life (and also his brother Andy). Glyn was the first recording engineer who helped me to understand recording and through that he was very supportive in introducing me to a lot of sessions with important people such as Ben Sidren, Leon Russell, Ronnie Lane, Pete Townshend and Howling Wolf. This together, of course, with many of the great recordings he did with us. He is one of the best.”
—Charlie Watts

“*Sound Man* will make readers aware of the many sides of Glyn Johns, a giant of a man and one of my best friends from the moment we met in 1963 to present day. Apart from his genius behind the faders and success as the producer of myriad hits, his humor comes through here, together with his unfailing desire to do the very best work he could in the face of some frighteningly egotistical artists.”—Bill Wyman

“If you remember the sixties then you probably weren't there, unless of course your name is Glyn Johns. *Sound Man* is an intimate, humorous journey through the corridors of the music industry, as told by one of the greatest record producers of all time. I'm proud to be mentioned here and there, and to have worked with Johns on so many memorable occasions. A great read!”
—Eric Clapton

“Glyn Johns was the most sought after sound engineer at the time when the recording industry was just exploding in the early 60s in London. He soon became the first choice of the artists who wrote their own songs and wanted a producer who could create for them a great sound for their recordings. He was always a strong and direct influence on the talent he worked with, and his records sounded brilliant! He soon became one of the very few truly great record producers and remained so over the last fifty years. Reading *Sound Man* reminded me of just how many incredible people he worked with and how many great iconic records he made. It's fantastic reading.”
—Chris Blackwell, founder of Island Records

“*Sound Man* opens with a declaration: A record producer has to have an opinion and the ego to express it more convincingly than anyone else. So Glyn Johns has stood his ground with a few big-headed rock stars? I must be the exception. I've only had transcendental moments in the studio with Johns. Returning to the control room after a studio take I often felt like running: the joy of hearing what Johns had created out of the glue-and-string that was The Who was like a drug. He is an artist himself of supreme talent and experience.”

—Pete Townshend

“*Sound Man* is filled with remarkable stories that only Johns can tell: vouching for the Steve Miller band in London after a hash-filled fruitcake was found in their luggage; nervously going through customs with the Rolling Stones knowing Brian Jones was carrying Mick Jagger’s stash… the detail with which he recounts his life’s work is incredible.”
—*Los Angeles* Magazine

“Johns' account of a long and productive career is an entertaining slice of rock history.” —*Booklist*

“An engaging and immensely enjoyable chronicle of the life of a person who was repeatedly at ground zero of many classic moments in rock 'n' roll history.” —*Nashville Scene*
“Glyn Johns is a walking rebuttal to the maxim that if you remember the 1960s, you weren't there. He was there - overseeing the Rolling Stones' first recording session, arranging the Beatles' rooftop concert, reeling from the first blast of Led Zeppelin - and he remembers everything.” —*The Associated Press*

“Johns is content to let his achievements speak for themselves, from creating rich sonic space on *Who’s Next* to rescuing the Clash’s *Combat Rock* from double-album bloat. Perhaps the most revealing part of *Sound Man* isn’t the stories that Johns tells, but how he tells them.” —*Rebeat Magazine*

“There are many more stories like these in *Sound Man* that fans of the Stones, The Who, The Beatles, Joan Armatrading, the Eagles, Georgie Fame, Johnny Cash, Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Gram Parsons, even Laurence Olivier will find fascinating. If you’re still hankering for a nifty Christmas gift, either for yourself or a music lover in your circle, picking up this book would be the best thing you did all year.” —*Glide Magazine*

“There have been a bevy of autobiographies from many of the great legacy artists: Keith Richards, Pete Townshend, Ian McLagan, Neil Young, Ray Davies, Eric Clapton, Graham Nash and Bob Dylan….Glyn Johns worked with all these artists, and his book can stand tall among them.” —*Entertainment Today*

About the Author
GLYN JOHNS was the producer or engineer of a number of rock’s classic albums, including those by the Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, the Eagles, the Who, the Beatles, the Clash, and such singular artists as Joan Armatrading and Ryan Adams. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2012.

PREFACE

Someone asked me the other day: What exactly does a record producer do? My answer was: “You just have to have an opinion and the ego to express it more convincingly than anyone else.” Every time I start another project I wonder if I am going to get found out.

So much of what any of us achieve in life has a massive element of good fortune attached. In my case, you can start with being born in 1942, which tipped me out into the workplace just as things were getting interesting in the music business, along with a whole host of artists who were to change the face of popular music. They were to drag me with them on the crest of a wave through an extraordinary period of change, not only in the music they were writing and performing but in the structure of the industry itself. Every now and then, when the opportunity presented itself, I would try to “express my opinion more convincingly than anyone else,” and there were a few who took notice.

I started working as a recording engineer in 1959, just before the demise of the 78. It was the beginning of the vinyl age. Mono was the thing and stereo was only for hi-fi freaks.

Bill Haley and His Comets had started the American rock and roll invasion in Britain in the mid-fifties, and it had been rammed home by Elvis, Fats Domino, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Chuck Berry, to name but a few. They dominated the charts in the UK, along with ballad singers like Doris Day, Tony Bennett, and Perry Como. British artists were just copying whatever was arriving from across the pond, even singing with an American accent. There had not as yet been a homegrown response. Music was still extremely safe and somewhat insipid in comparison to what was to follow.

The record industry as we know it now was in its infancy. In England they were grappling with the trickle before the floodgate opened to the changes that were about to take place. Those in charge had no concept of what was about to happen and most certainly did not lead the way. As a result, some of them fell by the wayside, others were led by the nose, and some were clever enough to sit back, keep quiet, and allow themselves to be carried through the next few years by the explosion of youth that was to take over.

The ensuing years were full of excitement, much adrenaline, many dawn choruses, and extremes of every emotion you can imagine. I was blasted through my youth into middle age with an extraordinary combination of creative people, sounds, rhythm, and lyrics in a period of time that I believe is unlikely to ever be repeated. I have been extremely fortunate in witnessing firsthand some wonderful moments with some truly fantastic, innovative artists while making records as an engineer and producer over the last fifty years, and watching the creative process change into something almost unrecognizable from where I started. All this while plowing my way through the minefield of “the business” and the incredible cast of characters it threw up—managers, lawyers, entrepreneurs, promoters, publishers, and so-called executives, large and small.

AT IBC STUDIOS IN THE SIXTIES.

Early Years

Ihave no idea why my mother took me as an eight-year-old to join the parish church choir. My father was an atheist, and she drifted in and out of Christianity throughout her life, never attending church on anything like a regular basis until my father retired many years later. Perhaps it was because I had shown an interest in it at school, although my only memory of singing in the choir at my primary school was, when I was five, being pulled out of line and slapped on the calf by an extremely rotund Miss Butterworth for talking when I should have been listening. I remember this incident clearly and have often wondered why, as I can recall very little else from those early years. Maybe it was the vicious expression on her fat face. I remember she bit her bottom lip as she applied her hand to my bare leg with as much force as she could muster. I was embarrassed and cried and could not understand the satisfaction she seemed to get from the experience.

There I was, committed to two choir practices a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, three services on Sunday, and as many weddings on a Saturday that required the services of the boy sopranos. Weddings were the best because we got paid for them. At first, I got nine pence for each one, which increased to one shilling and sixpence when I eventually became head chorister. So if we did three or four weddings on a Saturday the proceeds would go a long way in Lowman’s store, with a lot left over for the odd puncture kit for the bike or a visit to the local indoor swimming pool. Four Old English pennies to get in and three to buy a bag of hot chips from the fish and chip shop on the way home.

My life very quickly began to revolve around the church and the two-and-a-half-mile walk to and from it. It would take me past Lowman’s and on to the churchyard with its narrow, winding asphalt path that threaded

its way through tilting ancient gravestones leading straight past the vestry to the west door of the church. The path was faintly lit with sparsely placed lampposts, which on a foggy night in midwinter threw a mysterious damp haze on the gravestones and the gathering of young boys waiting impatiently for the arrival of our great leader, Mr. Felton Rapley, the choirmaster and extremely accomplished organist of St. Martin's Parish Church in Epsom.

Mr. Rapley was a very large man who always seemed to be in a hurry. He had a serious, all-knowing face like an owl. He had thick horn-rim glasses, thinning gray hair, and a gray walrus mustache. He was intimidating to an eight-year-old. However, he was to become my mentor during the next few years. Perhaps he was my first hero.

Sometimes I would arrive early for choir practice, and as I approached the church, I could hear him rehearsing his next recital. I would sit outside on the wall by the vestry door in the dark, transfixed by the sheer size of the organ's sound penetrating the dimly lit stained-glass windows. The whole sensation was magnified by the fact that it was taking place in the middle of a graveyard that dated back to the fifteenth century.

There is nothing quite like the experience of singing with a large group of people, your senses being bombarded by all those harmonics and actually contributing some of your own. Felton Rapley spotted my enthusiasm quite early on and quietly took me under his wing. As I grew older he encouraged me more and more, giving me the odd solo and slowly boosting my confidence until he made me head chorister at the age of eleven.

He was considered to be one of the finest pipe organists in the country, performing regularly on BBC radio. He would give a recital every fourth Sunday after Evensong, and one such Sunday he asked if I would stay after the service and turn pages for him. I naturally jumped at the chance to see the great man perform. We could never see him when he played during a service. The organ loft was way up above us some thirty or forty feet, surrounded by this massive array of pipes, rather like a giant Gulliver's panpipes. Although this was opposite where I stood in the choir stalls, I could only ever see his balding head and his shoulders swaying, physically accenting what he played. He had a long mirror up above his head so he could keep his eye on the transgressors eating boiled sweets or reading the Beano or Eagle comic during one of those interminably boring sermons.

Evensong finished and I followed Mr. Rapley as he propelled himself up the steep narrow stone spiral staircase that led from the vestry up to the organ loft. His enormous frame brushing the walls on either side, with his long black gown flowing behind him. He always seemed short of breath on the flat, as a result of him smoking large numbers of Senior Service cigarettes when outside the confines of the church, so by the time he made it to the top he seemed to be completely knackered. He sat down heavily on one end of the organ bench, bent over, and with some difficulty changed his shoes for a pair of patent leather slippers. I remember being terribly impressed, having never seen anything quite so opulent. He swung round, squeezing himself between the bench and the three keyboards that fanned out in front of him, set the music on its stand, and pressed a couple of preset buttons, which caused the two vertical banks of porcelain knobs on either side of the keyboard to jump in and out with great speed and a resounding thump. As he began to play, he was transformed before my very eyes. His energy level seemed to quadruple. The cumbersome movement of his somewhat overweight body disappeared and became fluid, his fingers flying across the keyboard with extraordinary speed and accuracy. His shiny feet dancing over the pedals with the dexterity of a ballet dancer.

I found this transformation, and the sound that was belting out of the organ pipes, completely enthralling. The sheer energy and emotion of it had a profound impact on me, as I realized that the performance of a

piece of music could have such a dramatic effect not only on the listener but also on the performer.

Most years when we were children, my mother would take my two older sisters, my younger brother, and me to stay with her brother Robert, known as Chum, on his farm in Devon for our summer holidays. It was an idyllic, magical place for me. Beautiful rolling countryside, woodland, and streams to explore. All new experiences to interest and excite the senses of a small child from just outside the suburbs of London.

My uncle Chum quickly became one of my favorite people. He was an extremely handsome man with a kind, somewhat weathered face and a wonderful twinkle in his eye. He would sit and tell stories of his life before the Second World War. How he would race his Bugatti at Brooklands motor racing track in the thirties. My mother had newspaper clippings of him and his older brother George, who raced for the Bentley team and had won the European Grand Prix in the thirties.

It was in that farmhouse kitchen that I became totally infatuated by a completely different form of music than that of the church choir. In the evening, after dinner, he would play Django Reinhardt records and then take out this old acoustic guitar and sing these wonderful American folk songs. My uncle was a fine player and had the most encapsulating voice, but more than anything it was his personality and the manner in which he performed the songs that made such an enormous impression on me, as he turned into the character that each song's story required with consummate ease. It was a similar experience to that of watching Felton Rapley play the organ, the performer being transformed into someone else as the music took over.

When I was twelve or thirteen, the local operatic society performed Handel's Messiah at the church and I was asked to be a soloist. Being the only child, and I am sure for dramatic effect, I sang my solo from the sanctity of the organ loft with the comfort of being close to Mr. Rapley. This was much better, as I was looking down at the scene from on high and felt secure from the massed singers and audience of several hundred people below. Shortly after this, Mr. Rapley suggested that I audition for a weekly religious program on BBC radio that featured a boy soprano. The lad who had the job was getting on in years and his voice was about to break. I passed the audition and excitedly waited for my big opportunity, that is, until my voice broke, and that was the end of that. The first of many disappointments in the music business.

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Icalled into Mr. Lowman's store on the way back from church one Sunday and we got chatting. I told him how my next-door neighbor had lent me a four-string tenor guitar and how I was trying to teach myself to play it. He asked me to wait a minute and reappeared with a pristine, lime-green Guild electric guitar. "Borrow this," he said. "I'm looking after it for my brother." I had never seen anything like it. I took it home and just looked at it in the case for several days, petrified that some harm would come to it if I took it out. I eventually plucked up the courage and as I had no idea how to play it, sat around posing with it in my bedroom, periodically checking myself in the mirror. I soon returned it to Mr. Lowman with much gratitude. I was hooked.

I stayed on at the church as a server and started going to the church youth club on Wednesday nights. Among other delights, we would have discussion nights and play table tennis and were taught ballroom dancing, which didn't appeal to me at all, but at least you got to put your arm around a girl legitimately. One evening we had a talent night. I remember a boy in his early teens no one had seen before, who sat with his legs swinging over the front edge of the stage and played an acoustic guitar. He was pretty good, he may have even won, but I don't think anyone in the hall that night had any idea that he was to become such an innovative force in modern music. This was to be my first meeting with Jimmy Page.

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By the time I was fifteen, in 1957, my head was being turned by traditional jazz. There was a band that had been formed by some of the seniors at school, but when I showed interest, I was rejected on sight, with a cuff round the ear for impertinence, as I was considered to be nothing but a “snotty” youngster from the middle school. The clarinet player in the band was Dick Morrissey, who went on to become one of the all-time great English modern jazz saxophonists. Many years later, I booked him as a soloist on a couple of sessions at Olympic Studios. When I reminded him of the incident at school, he was kind enough to say he remembered it but I’m pretty sure he didn’t.

So, not to be put off, I made myself a tea chest bass and started playing with the Terry Emptage Band at my older sister Sue’s college’s student union Thursday-night do. I was several years younger than the rest of the band so there was not a great deal of communication between us but I didn’t care. I was playing and having a ball.

It is the simplest of instruments to make and to play. Having acquired from the local grocer a large square plywood crate, originally used for shipping loose tea, you turn it upside down (as the top has been removed to get at the tea), and nail a long pole to the middle of one side. Then attach one end of a piece of picture-hanging cord to the top of the pole and the other through a hole in the middle of the top of the chest. To play it, you just put one foot on the box and vigorously attack the cord with your right hand in some sort of rhythm while altering the pitch by pulling back and releasing the pole with your left.

My biggest problem was getting around. I managed to devise a way of carrying the bass on my bicycle. I would put it over my shoulder and stuff the pole under the handlebars and pedal for miles in a most precarious manner. Everything would be fine if it was not a windy evening. It’s a wonder I ever made it anywhere unscathed, or unarrested for that matter, for being a danger to others on the road.

Soon there were more gigs around the area. I couldn’t travel much more than ten miles if I was to be fit enough to play on arrival. This included a regular Wednesday-night gig at the Organ Inn, a local jazz pub, where I was used only if the real bass player couldn’t make it, but I didn’t care, this was the big time.

My sister Sue had a portable record player and, being three years older than me, found me to be nothing more than an annoyance throughout our youth. Therefore the record player was strictly off-limits, with very rare exceptions. I remember she bought a 78 of “Little Rock Getaway” by Les Paul and Mary Ford. It was a completely new sound. Les Paul was the first artist to use multitracking. He would record a guitar part on a mono machine, then play it back and record it onto another machine while adding a second guitar, repeating the process until he had the arrangement he wanted. Then he would do the same with Mary Ford’s voice, adding her three or four times in harmony with herself. This was some years before the advent of multitrack recording as we know it today. Along with every other punter, I knew nothing of this and just thought it was a great sound. His innovative approach to recording led to the formation of the Ampex company, who produced the first multitrack tape machines with Les being given the second one off the line.

Les Paul’s records almost paled into insignificance when I heard “Rock Island Line” by Lonnie Donegan for the first time on the radio. I had heard nothing like it and rushed out and bought it the next day. This was the first record I ever owned, and it and the 10-inch album Donegan released shortly thereafter became my staple diet for the next few months. He started the skiffle craze, which led to a fairly short-lived dominance of the charts by several other bands that copied him, and led me to American folk music and on to the blues.

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In the summer, I took a job on a farm to earn the money for my first guitar. Having slaved and sneezed (from hay fever) my way through eight weeks of milling and shoveling feed and the foulest-smelling pig shit at three pounds ten shillings a week, I finally had the twenty-seven quid required. I rode home on my bike from

my last day's work only to find my pay packet for the previous two weeks had fallen out of my pocket. Fortunately my eldest sister, Dilys, bless her heart, learned of my predicament, came to my rescue, and gave me the balance.

Peter Sandford, a man who lived a few houses up the road from my parents, heard that I had bought the guitar and encouraged my interest by showing me his incredible collection of books and records on folk and blues. He was extremely kind to me, lending me anything I wanted to absorb in my own time. He introduced me to Snooks Eaglin, Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry, Woody Guthrie, and Burl Ives. I would take records and songbooks home to my room and learn them, playing them over and over again in the dark so that I could not cheat and look where my fingers were going on the neck of the guitar.

I started to meet a few friends in a park on the way home from our respective schools. We would chat about the latest Elvis or Fats Domino records and soon began to meet at each other's houses, parents permitting, to play music and dance. I was not that comfortable dancing, which I am sure, on reflection, was one of my main motivations to get involved with helping to provide the music to dance to. The crowd of kids got bigger and bigger, and we started to meet in the park at weekends. The great thing about "The Gang," as it quickly became known, was that it seemed completely classless. Pretty soon there were thirty or forty of us, sons and daughters from all walks of life, meeting as frequently as possible. There was nothing territorial or aggressive about it and could not be likened in any way to the modern gangs of today.

The boys would turn up on their track bikes, the girls on their horses or on foot, and the usual teenage exchange would take place. Girls preening, boys showing off to the girls and each other. Sometimes I would take my guitar, and pretty soon my friend Rob Mayhew brought his. He was far more accomplished than I and helped me onto the bottom rung as a musician, from which, I might add, I never ascended. We started singing together, mostly Buddy Holly and Everly Brothers stuff.

One day, my next-door neighbor Hugh Oliver, who was at least fifteen years older than me, called me from over the fence between our two properties and handed me the most wonderful, satirical lyrics he had written, and asked if I would be interested in putting them to music. The results of which Rob and I would try out on this motley bunch of teenagers with varying degrees of success.

Sometimes smaller groups of us would meet in the Harlequin coffee bar in Cheam, making a round of toast and a cup of tea last until we were asked to leave by the owner, Mrs. Hughes. Little did I know then that twenty years later she would become my mother-in-law.

It was through the window of the Harlequin that I was to catch my first sight of Ian Stewart. He would ride by on his racing bike, cutting a very athletic figure in his leather cycling shorts, his exaggerated chin thrust forward from the exertion of pedaling up the hill in Cheam High Street. He was three or four years older than me and we were not to meet until I was seventeen or eighteen, and boy did that change my life.

The bicycles gave way to motorbikes, the girls' waists seemed to get smaller as their skirts got fuller. Then along came Pat. The first American I ever met. He had a new 650cc Norton and wore white T-shirts and jeans. A regular bloody James Dean. Much cooler than any of us. Enough to make you puke. All the girls thought he was great looking and swooned all over him, but for me he had one saving grace: Jimmy Reed records. This was yet another new sound that completely blew me away. To be fair, Pat turned out to be a really nice guy. Fortunately for the rest of the boys, he was around for only one summer.

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Ileft school in July of 1959, at the age of seventeen, not knowing what to do. I only knew that I didn't want to work in an office or in any nine-to-five job. Agriculture interested me, but without substantial capital it

seemed pointless to pursue as a career. It was about this time that two of my best pals, Rob Mayhew and Colin Golding, and I decided to form a group that I managed and was the sometime singer with, called The Presidents. Well, it wasn't exactly a group, more a random collection of guys playing things. It evolved out of the Gang and its insatiable need for cheap entertainment. We started out playing for our own amusement at each other's parties. In its final configuration, without me singing, it became a really good cover band. We would rehearse each week, and I realize now that the experience of listening to and dissecting the popular records of the day in order to replicate them accurately with the band was excellent subliminal training for my future as an engineer and producer.

As the band became more popular, we decided to find a regular venue to play. We took a room at the back of the Red Lion pub in Sutton every other Friday. It was an instant success, and after paying the rent we would make £30 or £40 a night. Which in those days was a fortune.

I had been working in a department store on Saturdays for the previous year, so I took a full-time job there until my exam results came through and I could decide what to do. The results proved to be even worse than expected. I had taken eight subjects and passed only two, history and English literature. This came as a great disappointment to my parents, and gloom set in as they wondered what would become of me without the required academic qualifications for further education and therefore entry into any of the more recognized professions.

Out of the blue, my sister Sue came home from work one day and asked me if I would be interested in the idea of working at a recording studio. Her boss had a girlfriend, and while she was waiting in the outer office for him, Sue mentioned to her that she had a brother whose main interest in life was music. She responded by telling Sue that she owned a small record label that specialized in Welsh music and would try to get me an interview at the recording studio she used—that is, if I was interested. Needless to say, it had never entered my mind to work in the music business. I knew absolutely nothing about recording and had never thought about or known anyone working anywhere but in the usual and more mundane professions. So this opportunity came about only as a result of a polite conversation between two women who did not even know each other. I have often thought what an extraordinary turn of fate this was.

It was with great apprehension that I went for the interview a few days later. The studio turned out to be IBC in Portland Place, which was without a doubt the finest independent recording studio in Europe at that time. The manager, a seemingly pleasant Welshman named Alan Stagg, asked me a bunch of technical questions about recording, none of which I could answer. He said there was nothing available right then but the next time there was a vacancy he would certainly consider me for a job. The only thing that seemed to be in my favor, as I pondered the experience on the train back to Epsom, was the fact that I had a Welsh grandfather, a Welsh name, and that I'd had some formal training in a choir. God bless the Red Dragon!

I returned to my job at the store thinking I would probably never hear from the studio again. This would almost certainly be true if I had been left to my own devices. About six weeks had passed since the interview when my mother suggested to me that, as I had heard nothing, I should call Mr. Stagg and jog his memory. I argued, saying that, after all, the man had said that he would consider me at the next opportunity. Fortunately my mother insisted on my making the call, pointing out that I had nothing to lose. So I rang Alan Stagg, and having reminded him who I was, he said that one of the senior engineers at the studio had handed in his notice that day and that this would create a vacancy at the bottom of the ladder for a trainee, so when could I start? I am convinced that if I had not called that day I would never have heard from IBC again and would probably have not got involved in music as a career at all.

I started work at IBC the very next day, as a lowly assistant engineer. This meant setting up the studio before each session to the engineer's requirements, keeping continuity, and taking the blame for anything that did

not work, while receiving varying amounts of verbal abuse from my superiors before, during, and after the session, and then stripping the studio afterward, with a great deal of tea making and equipment polishing thrown in.

The first session I was assigned was for Lonnie Donegan. This was too good to be true. He was still my favorite recording artist. I even discovered that the picture on the front cover of my much-coveted 10-inch album was taken in studio B at IBC. It was all too much for a young boy.

IBC had no affiliation with any one label, being privately owned. In those days, RCA, Decca, Pye, and EMI all had their own studios, leaving the rest for the independents. As a result we had an incredible variety of artists, musicians, and clients passing through. The music ranged from the most idiotic jingles to big bands—from Julian Bream to Alma Cogan, the music for the CBS TV series Wagon Train to a modern jazz quintet, and the odd excursion out to record a symphony orchestra or pop concert in far-flung venues.

As my feet touched the ground again after the initial shock of getting the job, I realized that my primary objective at IBC should be that it would give me the opportunity to get my foot in the door and explore the music business with the view of being discovered as a singer. Although fascinated by the recording process, I was far more interested in music and those who made it. I quickly realized that the best thing to do was to work as efficiently as possible while keeping my head down, observing as much as I could to establish who did what, when, where, why, and to whom.

In those days, record producers were called A&R men, meaning “artists and repertoire.” They all worked for a label and were responsible for the artists they were assigned or they brought to the label and for the repertoire of music those artists recorded. Very few singers wrote their own material, so the A&R men would select songs from the vast array that was pitched to them by the music publishers. This made them extremely powerful, with the potential to manipulate the situation to their own benefit. For example, they might have their own publishing company and increase their earning capacity by doing deals with other publishers to split the publishing of a song, or perhaps take the publishing of a B-side or album track in exchange for agreeing to record a song with a successful artist.

The A&R man would pick the song and, having routined it with the artist and chosen the correct key to perform it in, would decide on the arranger, who in turn would use a fixer to book the musicians. This would invariably be an older musician who acted as an agent and union representative for session musicians he booked. Sometimes the A&R man would be involved in the details of the arrangement and of the choice of musicians, sometimes not. Most A&R men had a favorite recording engineer they worked with and would very often choose a studio based on who worked there, as there were no freelance engineers then. All of this would be done within the restrictions of a budget, which the A&R man would draw up and have approved by his superior in the company and thereafter be responsible for. He would then supervise the session, making sure that the engineer, arranger, musicians, and artist performed to his satisfaction. Hopefully making the song sound as he had envisaged. So it became apparent fairly quickly how important the engineer was to the success of a studio, both in personality and variety of musical taste as well as the more obvious technical and creative abilities.

IBC was not only the best-equipped independent studio in Europe but it was also blessed with a great assortment of engineering talent, starting with Eric Tomlinson, who was the senior engineer on the staff when I began and, in my opinion, was one of the finest in the world. I remember that he had this habit of standing with one foot on top of the other while he worked, his hands flying around the console, never needing more than one run-through of the most complex of orchestral pieces before having it memorized, balanced, and ready to record. He was extremely kind to me, and I learned a great deal from watching the master at work.

Then there was the very aptly named Ray Prickett. Although he suffered from little or no sense of humor and treated me like an unpleasant smell, he was still a great engineer. Among many others, he engineered most of the records that Alan Freeman produced for Pye Records. Petula Clark, Lonnie Donegan, and Kenny Ball being a few of the many successes he had.

John Timperley, who was a little older than me, was another who developed his own approach to recording with great success and went on to have his own studio in London.

Alan Stagg was also an engineer, specializing in classical recording. IBC being the only independent studio in Europe that had its own mobile recording unit meant we could go to any of the bigger venues required for recording large orchestras and choirs. Alan did very little recording, which turned out to be a good thing, as it quickly became apparent to me that he was not much of a specialist. However, he made sure the studio was always the first with the latest equipment, and the fact that it had such a great variety of talented engineers must have, to a large extent, been down to him.

Some of the classical sessions were engineered by David Price, an unpleasant little shit of a man, as I remember. He had a client, a BBC radio producer in real life moonlighting as a classical record producer. He bordered on certifiable, and like so many producers was an egomaniac. Most of the classical stuff was done on location, in large halls in London that could accommodate a symphony orchestra, like Wandsworth, Hammersmith, or Walthamstow town hall.

Today, mobile recording units are purpose-built trucks. Back then, the equipment was loose in boxes. We would hire a furniture-removal van, load it up, then unload at the venue, where we would be allocated a room to use as a control room. This invariably would be a dressing room, chosen by some faceless individual who clearly didn't want you there, based on the fact that the room was up several flights of stairs and as far away from the auditorium as possible. Having assembled the equipment in the control room, the engineer and his assistant would leave the tech to make sure that it worked and was aligned properly, while they ran the miles of cable to the auditorium, put up the microphones, and arranged the setup of the orchestra in the space available to them in the hall. All this to say that, by the time people started to arrive at the session for a ten-o'clock start, you had already done a full day's work and were completely knackered.

This producer would arrive in the nick of time, throw down his briefcase containing the score, walk over to the loudspeakers, demand that they be turned flat out, and stick his ear right inside them. If he could detect the slightest hum or buzz, all hell would break loose.

I remember one such occasion: fourteen strings and a harpsichord at Red Lion Square in London. Not the most scintillating session I had ever been assigned to. The producer had thrown his usual wobbly, and David Price had blamed the poor unsuspecting tech. I had worked late the night before and, having had only two or three hours' sleep, made the mistake of nodding off during a take, only to be awakened by a swift belt round the ear from David Price, with the producer doubtless applauding in the corner. Looking back, it is extraordinary what people got away with in those days. However, I never fell asleep during a session again.

The other major difference in the early days was that the maintenance department would be much larger and play a key role in the development of the studio, designing and building the consoles that we used in-house. This becoming a most important part of a studio's reputation for being up-to-date with the latest technology. Nowadays it is equally important to stay abreast of the times; however, this is not achieved with the individuality that existed in the sixties, as nearly all recording equipment is now mass-produced and name-branded.

The late great Joe Meek used IBC on occasion. He had his own studio at home, where he developed his extraordinary sound, but he would often bring his tapes in to run them through one of our homebuilt

equalizers to cheer them up a bit. I think he was frowned on by the powers that be, and as I was the most junior in the place I would be given the job of looking after him. What a great opportunity for me. He was a great and innovative engineer and a quiet, kind, and seemingly egoless man.

Last but not least was Terry Johnson. He left school illegally at fifteen and lied about his age to get the job at IBC. By the time I arrived he was already doing sessions as an engineer at sixteen. To say he was a natural is something of an understatement. He was an extraordinary talent. For eighteen months or so we were pretty much inseparable. We soon discovered that we shared the same taste in music and sound and became close friends, closing ranks against the somewhat disapproving attitude of the senior engineers at IBC.

As that first year progressed, music began to change and the demand increased for English records to sound more and more like what was going on in America. Most of the older engineers didn't get it and were entirely dismissive. This meant that Terry, being as young as he was and having a natural enthusiasm for trying new ideas, was in great demand, and he pulled me along with him.

AT IBC IN THE EARLY SIXTIES, OBVIOUSLY EXTREMELY PISSED OFF ABOUT SOMETHING.

We were constantly being challenged on how to re-create sounds that were coming from America. This proved particularly difficult because American musicians were creating a very different sound and feel to the English guys, something I was to have illustrated in triplicate when we had the privilege of prerecording the music for a TV show with Dusty Springfield called The Sounds of Motown. They flew the band in from Motown and set up straight off the plane. We turned the mics on and instantly there it was. Just like the records we had been listening to. I remember Terry and me looking at each other with great relief, as we had imagined that we were in for a struggle, not knowing how the hell that sound was achieved.

We had to figure out new methods of recording to capture and do justice to the new, louder rock and roll as it took over. Previously, the loudest sound anyone had recorded was the cannon in the 1812 Overture.

The studio was a constant buzz of activity. In a normal day, both studios A and B would have three sessions, very often each having a different client, musicians, and artist. The whole approach to recording was so different then. Even the dress code: a jacket, collar, and tie for all engineers and assistants. White coats, collars, and ties for the technical department. Sessions lasted three hours when as many as four songs would be cut. So albums were very often cut in a day. The volume and variety of work was fantastic, the building being constantly flooded and drained of an extraordinary assortment of people, from the most colorful, extrovert artist to the most bland suburban string player, hurrying off to his next seven pounds ten shillings, wondering what was going to win the 2:30 at Sandown Park.

In the late fifties and early sixties almost everything was recorded in mono, as very few people had the facility to play stereo. The exception was the odd classical recording. Unlike today, it was all recorded at once, so when the three-hour session was finished, the tape could go straight to a cutting room to transfer the sound to disc and then on to the factory to be processed and pressed onto vinyl. If it was a single, and therefore did not require a sleeve with artwork, it could be in the shops in a few days. In fact, very few artists got to make an album in those days, as you had to have a few hits under your belt before it was justified. Then you were allowed to make an EP, finally graduating to ten or twelve cuts on an LP.

Jack Good

The first real extrovert I met was Jack Good. He was the complete antithesis of what you would expect a rock and roll producer to be. Immaculate in Savile Row suits, with an Oxford accent and a chubby, somewhat impish face rounded off with large horn-rim glasses. His only concession to nonconformity in his dress being Cuban-heeled Beatle boots. In fact, he was the first person I ever saw wearing them. He was

charming, hysterically funny, and without ego. He was a breath of fresh air for Terry Johnson and me when we were given him as a client, as most of the other producers we were required to work with were far too full of their own self-importance.

Jack started rock and roll TV in England, producing a weekly show for the BBC called Six-Five Special that very quickly became an absolute must for most teenagers in the UK. He went on to have the same success for ITV with Oh Boy!, which is where Terry and I came in. IBC was booked to prerecord the music every Thursday of the show's run and we were given the job.

It was mayhem. Although they only booked one studio, the entire building would be taken over for the day by the English rock and roll elite of the day: Joe Brown, Marty Wilde, Billy Fury, Wee Willie Harris, to name but a few. They were accompanied by a staff band, which in turn were supplemented by the Vernons Girls, an all-glamour group of young girls who sang and danced on the show. There was a narrow staircase running up the center of the building, which became the place for the artists to hang out while waiting for their call. This soon became known as "Chat-Up Alley." God knows what went on out there while we were working. I do know that Joe and Marty eventually married two of the girls.

All of this was controlled perfectly by Jack, who came from another planet to this unruly lot of state school dropouts. They all loved him, not only for his personality but because they shared his great passion for American rock and roll.

Jack started to produce records, with great success. He did most of his recording with Terry and me at IBC. Then he was asked to do a special with The Beatles for Granada TV called Around The Beatles. He brought P. J. Proby to England from America to appear on the show and made him a star. Proby's only claim to fame at that time was that he could imitate pretty much anyone. He would get calls from publishers to cut demos of songs they were trying to pitch to Elvis or Roy Orbison. I remember him telling me that he had spent so much time imitating other singers that he no longer knew which was his real voice.

This was my first experience of The Beatles. I say "experience" as I did not really meet them, being only the second engineer on the session. We cut instrumental tracks with them to sing live to on the show. TV sound was pretty awful in those days and no one in their right mind would play live. Apart from the fact that recording technology has changed so much since then, none of the TV sound engineers or set designers had a clue about this new loud music. The sets were created for visual effect and not acoustically designed to cope.

The one thing that struck me about this session was how relatively ordinary they sounded without the vocals. They could have been any competent group of the day, but as soon as the voices were added the magic was there. It has always amazed me how they progressed as writers, musicians, and producers from this already exalted position.

Sunday Sessions

Weekends were almost never booked in those first two years I was at IBC. So we were allowed to use the studio on Sundays to record our own projects. It all started with me and my friend Rob Mayhew recording a few demos, with John Timperley or Terry Johnson engineering. It was with one of these recordings that I attempted to be "discovered" as a vocalist, with a song I had written with my neighbor Hugh Oliver, called "Sioux Indian."

I set a trap for Jack Good. I waited until I heard him coming up the stairs to go into studio A's control room for the start of a session and having left the door wide open, started to play my tape in the dubbing room next door. It worked. He stuck his head in and said, "Who's that? It sounds really good." Within a few weeks he had convinced Dick Rowe, then head of A&R at Decca Records, to sign me to my first recording contract,

and Jack had produced my first single. He used the hot rhythm section of the day: Andy White, drums; Big Jim Sullivan, guitar; Andy Whale, bass; and Reg Guest, piano. My mate Terry engineered. The whole experience was surreal, as I knew everyone so well and previously they had only known me as an engineer on the other side of the glass. The record did not make much of a dent, so my singing career was put on hold for a while, but it did mean that The Presidents could put “Featuring Decca Recording Star Glyn Johns” on their posters.

Soon I realized that I could use the time to experiment and get some experience at the console, and I put the word out that you could get free studio time at my Sunday sessions. This attracted a crowd of exciting young musicians. Among them was Jimmy Page, who my pal Colin Golding had told me about. They were both at Kingston Art School—not far from where we all lived—along with Eric Clapton.

I suggested that I might be able to get Jimmy some paying sessions, but initially he declined, saying he would lose his grant at school if it became known that he had an income. It was not long before he changed his mind, and in a short space of time he had replaced Big Jim Sullivan as the number-one session guitarist in London.

Cyril Davies turned up one Sunday, a wonderful harmonica player and vocalist who was one of the founders of the rhythm and blues movement in Britain along with Ian Stewart, Alexis Korner, and Brian Jones. He brought Nicky Hopkins with him to play. I went to set up the mics on the piano and was greeted by a softly spoken, extremely gaunt young man with a gray pallor and clothes that were several sizes too big. His whole demeanor was devoid of energy. However, when the session started, his playing was the most fluid, melodic, and technically perfect that I had ever heard. All achieved with a minimum of movement and an unchanging facial expression. I asked him at the end of the day why I had not come across him before and if he would allow me to recommend him for sessions in the future.

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