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THE SOLUTION TO MUSIC POLLUTION
ISSUE 05



BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB

SUPER FURRY ANIMALS	GRANDDADDY	BROADCAST
THE DANDY WARHOLS	STEREOLAB	THE SHINS
CLEARLAKE	BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE	QUASI
THE SLEEPY JACKSON	MOGWAI	ELECTRELANE
		BRITISH SEA POWER
		BRITTA PHILLIPS & DEAN WAREHAM

Tony Doogan

Words by Zach Raiston

If you're a band in Glasgow, Scotland, chances are pretty good that you'll want to tap Tony Doogan as your producer. At the forefront of music engineering in Scotland for nearly a decade, Doogan has worked consistently with bands like The Delgados, Belle & Sebastian, and Mogwai, not to mention nearby Brits Mojave 3, building a career of layered and subtle albums marked not by their similarities in sound, but by their warmth and earnestness, the one true stamp of a Tony Doogan record.

Doogan's genial, humorous attitude comes across on the phone (where he's speaking from his mother's house, looking after her following minor surgery), and it must be what musicians respond to in the studio. For Doogan, relationships are more important than jobs when it comes to his music. "Most of these bands that I work with are friends," he says. "The Delgados are some of my best friends, Belle & Sebastian are some of my best friends, Mogwai are some of my best friends. And it's a different thing going into a studio with your friends rather than going in with some complete stranger. They also know when they work with me it's going to sound all right whether or not the music's brilliant, because they know I'm not incompetent... And everybody's really on the same wavelengths."

This also speaks to why Doogan continues working with bands over several albums rather than just for one project. "I never see the point—unless you want to try something very different—in changing who you work with," Doogan states. "I think friendship goes a long way. Being a good guy as much as possible."

After Belle & Sebastian recorded their debut LP *Tigermilk* in 1995 during a school project, they lucked into Doogan—and Doogan lucked into them. "It was a fluke," the producer says about beginning his long-standing relationship with the band. "My friend Gregor Reed did *Tigermilk* and he was doing an album with another band over the next summer when they wanted to do *If You're Feeling Sinister*. Gregor couldn't do it, so I got the gig, and ended up with them ever since. Quite lucky in a lot of ways... I had no idea what they were gonna become. It's quite unexpected; at the time everybody was into Oasis and Blur and all this kind of nonsense. And they were just so different. It certainly works. They're a great band; they write some of the best songs I've ever heard."

Belle & Sebastian did step away from Doogan briefly when recording their fall release *Dear Catastrophe Waitress*, for which the group sought out Trevor Horn. "He's an engineer but he was acting as a producer," says Belle & Sebastian frontman Stuart

Murdoch of Doogan. "We wanted somebody to suddenly step into a more authoritative role, a more of a catalyst to keep the whole thing moving. It's difficult to expect Tony to suddenly do that—become a different person—so we just wanted to have a change."

But Doogan has since returned and done "a few odd tracks in the studio" and will likely produce future projects for his close friends.

For The Delgados, whom he has recorded ever since their second album *Peloton*, Doogan got to first meet and work with one of the music business's most popular names behind the mix board. "Dave Fridmann had quite a big influence over me," Doogan reports. "Just the kind of attitude towards how he did things and mixed things, and that certainly changed my point of view quite a lot. And I wasn't really as big a fan of Mercury Rev and Flaming Lips as everybody else."

While Fridmann gets most of the media acclaim for producing The Delgados' last two albums, he mainly receives the tapes to mix after Doogan has recorded the base tracks. "I hand him the tapes and go, 'Mix it up, Dave. Distort it a bit more.' It only took me five minutes to find out what he does; it's pretty straightforward," jokes Doogan. "But you can look around and see what he's doing, and you're like, 'okay right, that makes sense.' It's more the attitude I got from Dave. It doesn't all need to be nice and pristine."

Nice and pristine can actually be a downfall to many albums, in Doogan's opinion. Take, for example, Britain's premier uber-producer Nigel Godrich. "I don't like bands like Radiohead. Well, it's not that I don't like them, I just think they're whatever. [Godrich] does lots of things that are famous and big acts and they all sound great and they're all great pop records, but I'm not so sure they're so unique. Which is fine—if that's what you're hired to do, it's what you're hired to do."

But Doogan would rather have some personality and a lo-fi aesthetic. "Sometimes it's good to leave in a few little mistakes," he admits, "as you can probably hear on most of the albums I've recorded. But if we left them in, they're not mistakes. They are carefully planned mistakes."

Doogan's philosophy in recording also extends to the entire album as a fluid piece, rather than a collection of songs. One listen to *Hate* or *The Boy With the Arab Strap* will reveal his remarkable ear for flow and design.

"You've got to approach recording as an album rather than a song and another song and another song. People forget the fact that you're making a book, not a chapter. They all have to fit in correctly and in sequence before you even start recording. It's about having a vision, really."

Sometimes that vision means Doogan has to be a bit of a perfectionist when it comes to doing takes. Almost like a Weegie Phil Spector, Doogan is known for hardcore repetition in the studio. "Generally we'll record a lot of takes. There's no point in doing something that isn't good, in doing a take that's not good. Do it again until it's right... If somebody gets it in one take, great. But sometimes I've done things where there's an edit every half a



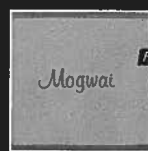
Belle & Sebastian
Legal Man
(2000)



Belle & Sebastian
Told You So
(2002)



The Delgados
Hate
(2002)



Mogwai
Happy Songs for Happy People
(2003)



bar, in a live take, or every beat."

Understandably, this can annoy the musicians. "It makes me mad when we have to play any song twice," says Mogwai's Stuart Braithwaite. "Tony made us play the same song like ten fuckin' times or something, and I could have fuckin' killed him. I was so mad. I was like, 'We fuckin' played it! You can fix it!' See, Dave lets you just dump it all into Pro Tools and then he'll fix it. Tony just saves himself the hassle and says, 'Play it until you play it right.'"

On his own time, however, Doogan likes to listen to music that isn't overly produced. He prefers the simple pleasures of something like "Tom Waits and a piano. That to me is production. Why ruin it with crap synthesizers?" Doogan asks. "An album I really love, and it's very simple, is *Harvest* by Neil Young. That dead, dry drum sound. Really, I just love the way everything fits in that record. I'm not a big Beatles fan or anything like that. Some of it's a bit quirky for my liking. Everybody goes, 'Oh great, *Sgt. Pepper*, that's the big one for production.' Ehh...mmm.. nah."