

Artists like Chaka Kahn or Jon Bon Jovi might not be experienced singing in Spanish. I break down every syllable to make sure the performances are perfect. That's hard work. Sometimes I feel like my job is being producer, engineer, translator, vocal language and vocal coach. I have to do everything! There are different types of producers. Some are hands-off; I'm definitely hands-on.

You've worked with some artists who have enjoyed long careers, particularly Carlos Santana. How can artists keep from repeating themselves while still maintain the signature elements of their sound?

Let's consider Santana. He was at the point in his career where he'd done a lot of albums. He was hoping that this album would crack open the wider market for him. Carlos knows himself, he knows that who he is and what his music is all about will never be lost. And so he was open to letting himself be produced on Supernatural. He trusted the people around him. For example, I was so flattered when I'd ask him what he wanted to play and he'd turn the question back to me.

What did you bring to Santana on that project?

I produced four tracks and sang on one, "Primavera," which I wrote. I was hoping to get him music that was in sync with his spiritual side. "Primavera" ended up being one more color in the picture Carlos was trying to paint. He's very color-conscious and likes to think of music like a painting. He'd say, "It sounds 2-D rather than 3-D!" So how do you achieve that next dimension? More reverb, less compression? I was often trying to translate his images into engineering terms.

What do you do best?

I'm a restive soul, and I like to do a lot of things. It may spread me too thin at times, but if I can write a song today, produce a song in a week and do some programming in between, I'm happy!

Right now, I'm executive producer on an album for Laura Pausini, who's Italy's Number One female artist and one of the top Latin artists in the world.

How involved do you get with the recording process itself?

Very. Microphones intrigue me the most. I adhere to the principle that says if you can record things right, you don't have to fix them later. Every time I open a copy of Mix, I study who's using what mics! I like to be as pure as possible in this area.

I recently worked with Allan Sides at Capitol Studios. I was complementing him on how great his sound is and was asking him about equalization. I noticed that he was using a pair of Neumann M50s on the orchestra. He also had some other mics set up for closer work, but I noticed that when he soloed the M50s, the orchestra sounded great; his balance was impeccable.

I rely on my [Neumann] U47s a lot. I'll stick one on a nylon string guitar. Even though I may have to add a little high end in the mix, I know that the U47 will give me the body I need. I also use [Neumann] KM84s on guitars, as well.

One story you might find interesting involves the guitarist Raymond Stagnaro. We were doing an instrumental version of the song "Casi Un Bolero" on Ricky Martin's *Vuelve* album. We set Raymond up with a 47 and let him rehearse the song all the way through while recording him. Benny Faccone, who mixed this album, and I were listening and realized his performance was perfect. The song wasn't even listed on the album, but it's there! Again, most people wouldn't ever think of using a 47 on a guitar because it doesn't bring out the high end, but the size it gives is great.

Can you describe your home studio setup?

We have a 96-input Euphonix CS2000 console with their 3000 software. I felt that this board would be a good, real-world interface. Pro Control might work better with Pro Tools, but we do lots of mixes that aren't Pro Tools related. With Santana, for example, we tried to make sure everything was analog, complemented with Pro Tools. We relied heavily on our Studer 827. I've resisted being fully Pro Tools-based. Space is also a consideration for us. If we had more room, we'd probably have a big [SSL] 9000 in here.

We have a lot of vintage gear, including racks of Neve stuff. We did everything on *Supernatural* using a Neve 8038. I really liked the sound of that board, but it only had 32 inputs, so I tore it apart and kept as many of its modules as I could. We've also got tons of API stuff. I'd really love to find an amazing hardware reverb unit. All of the great old stuff is hard to get serviced.

How do you interface your studio with the outside world?

With Santana, I take 2-inch tape reels around. Most of what I do these days is done in my studio here in the mountains near Malibu, where I live with my wife and daughter. If I'm doing overdubs in another city, I might try to get swappable drives for Pro Tools.

What engineers do you like to work with?

Jeff Poe worked with us on a lot of Santana's stuff. He's a phenomenal engineer who's got a natural sense of how to go about things. Jim Scott did a lot of tracking for Santana. Jim Gaines worked on the album in the Bay Area. He did all the Huey Lewis records that sound so good! We also have a full-time in-house engineer, Luis Quine.

Has your work method changed as you've taken on production assignments for more visible clients?

I've been a programmer and keyboard player for so long that it got to the point where I was sitting down all the time. I'd go into the studio and work, then eat, then come back into the studio and sit some more. I had to stop sitting so much!

Seriously, the role of executive producer requires some distance and objectivity. By hiring the best programmers and players, I can see the whole project, not just a part of it. The good thing is that I know every little thing that's going on. If an engineer plugs in the wrong compressor for a

vocal, I'll ask for the [dbx] 160 rather than the 160X. It's like being a contractor who knows everything about putting together a house, but oversees other people. I do want to get back to some more hands-on work, though. For a while I was working so hard that I had to stop. I didn't know what happened for the first four years of my daughter's life! We've recently adopted another daughter, and I want to be there for her.

Gary Eskow invites readers to check out his Website, www.garyeskow.com.

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