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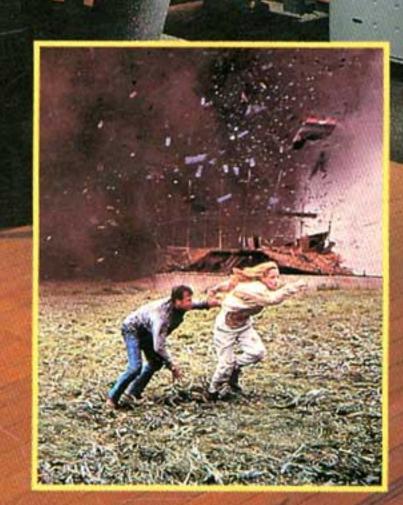
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## RUSSELL AND NATHANIEL KUNKEL

#### **FAMILY HARMONY**

In this Lunching, we are going to investigate two success stories linked by blood. The father, Russell Kunkel, is a renowned drummer, songwriter and producer with a brilliant career spanning more than a quarter of a century. The son, Nathaniel Kunkel, has already proven himself at an early age as a top engineer.

Born in Pittsburgh, Russell started as a professional musician in the heyday of '60s California music. Early triumphs as a session and touring drummer with James Taylor, Carole King and Jackson Browne led to songwriting and eventual success as a producer with Aaron Neville, Carly Simon, David Crosby, Dan Fogelberg and Jimmy Buffett, capped off this year with Buffett's *Banana Wind*.

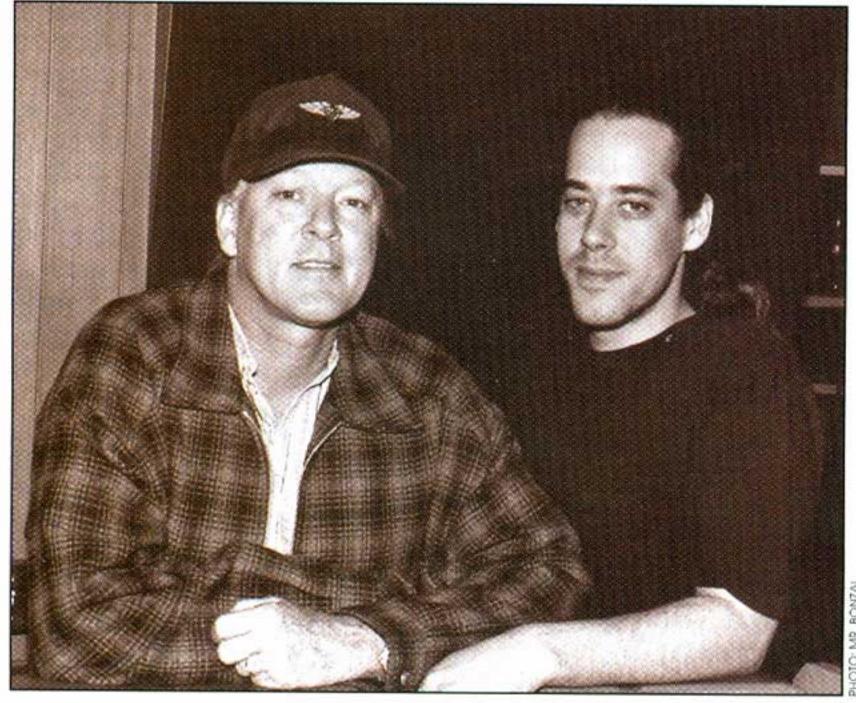
Join us now for a cappuccino in the enchanting gardens of L.A.'s Conway Recording Studios. Nathaniel has just finished the Lovett project, and Russell has just returned from Nassau and Key West and work on the Buffett album.

**Bonzai**: Russ, when did you first come to California—the '60s?

**Russ**: I actually came earlier than that, around 1958. But I pretty much grew up, junior and senior high, in Long Beach and Southern California.

**Bonzai**: How was that a formative time for you?

Russ: There was a prevailing feeling in the '60s, along with all the music and the great things going on, that you could accomplish just about anything you set out to do, if you meant it and cared enough. The Beatles were an influence on me in that direction—their music was so good and so different that I was suddenly aware that a human being could achieve those kinds of musical heights. It was inspiring. I would actually sit down and think I could almost



Russell and Nathaniel Kunkel

play as good as Ringo if I really tried.

**Bonzai**: And you were a drummer at this time?

Russ: Yes, I was, and my brother played drums. His bands always rehearsed around the house while I was growing up. When I was about four years old, he sat me down at a snare drum and put the sticks in my hands. Whenever I was interested in learning, he would show me something new. When I got to elementary school, I joined the band.

Bonzai: Why do you think you were drawn to the drums?

Russ: I guess it was because I had a jump on it, and I had a brother who was a drummer, and there were drums around. My first summer job was at a gas station, and after that experience I made a decision that I would never work a normal job again. I decided to become a musician. Getting that first \$50 for playing one night—that was for me.

BY MR. BONZAI

Bonzai: When did you first feel that it was becoming a reality?

Russ: I played in a lot of bands in high school, and one of them made it to Hollywood. We played the Whisky-a-Go-Go for a few weeks in a row. That was a pretty big deal. The band was called Things To Come, about 1967, and we opened up for Cream. Beyond that, the biggest thing that happened to launch my career was being hired by Peter Asher to play on James Taylor's first album, Sweet Baby James. There was a domino effect after that.

**Bonzai**: Interesting Beatles connection. Wasn't James Taylor the first artist signed to Apple?

**Russ**: Yes, he was, and Peter was on the A&R staff.

**Bonzai**: James Taylor's *In the Pocket* album has this great photo of about 30 people—the bell-bottoms are so outrageous.

**Russ**: Big lapels, collar out. It was a Tom Jones kind of time.

Nate: [Laughter]

Russ: Are you laughing with me or at me?

#### LUNCHING WITH BONZAL

Nate: With you, with you.

Bonzai: From that period, what work

are you most proud of?

Russ: Early '70s? Well, the first album with James. When I listen to that, I still like it for its rawness, and acoustics. And Carol King's *Tapestry*, which I played on a good portion of. And Jackson Browne's first album, *Saturate Before Using*. Those albums stick out for me—pinnacle albums for those artists, and I was fortunate enough to play on them.

**Bonzai**: Were you writing at that time? **Russ**: Very little. I wrote some songs for

the band I was in, but I was really concentrating on being a drummer.

**Bonzai**: Did you have any heroes in the drum world?

Russ: Ringo for sure. What I heard on those records was great, groundbreaking stuff. And, of course, I think every drummer has respect for the jazz greats: Elvin Jones, Buddy Rich, Roy Haines and down the line. At that time, I was in awe of the session drummers in Los Angeles: Hal Blaine, Jim Gordon. I met Jim Keltner at that time when we were both just getting started.

Bonzai: How did you move on to become a songwriter?

Russ: Well, I was working for people

who were great songwriters and I started to learn about the business. It's great to be a musician, great to make records and go on the road, but if you write the songs, it opens up a whole new world, financially and also creatively. I knew I didn't want to become a singer, so I felt that writing was for me. I was inspired by the people I was working with, and the more I was around them I began to feel strong enough to go ahead. None of it was very good, but I was started.

Bonzai: Have you had any big hits?

**Russ**: One song that got some notoriety was written with Jackson Browne and Danny Korchmar: "Tender Is the Night" from *Lawyers in Love*.

**Bonzai**: Do you write music, words? **Russ**: Mostly lyrics. I feel comfortable

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- Russ Kunkel

with that, and I love cowriting and working with people who have the music covered.

**Bonzai**: You just finished working with Jimmy Buffett, someone who brings literary credibility to the wasteland of rock 'n' roll...

**Russ**: He is definitely a writer. He works on it all day long. He's on his computer more than anybody I know. Writing books, Broadway plays, songs for the next album, keeping a diary. He's writing all the time, and he's very good.

**Bonzai**: He's also a pilot—didn't his plane recently get shot up?

**Russ**: And he writes about that. There's a song on the new album called "Jamaica Mistaica."

Bonzai: Well, we've covered drumming





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and writing. How about your career as a producer?

Russ: I'm 47, and somewhere along the way I realized that I didn't want to be 50 and have to go on the road to earn a living. I've been in the studio with some of the best producers around and seen how they work. I've learned what is needed. Not to put anybody down, but I've been in situations where I felt my ideas were equally as good, and I might have been able to get them accomplished faster. I decided that being a producer was a logical extension for me.

**Bonzai**: When did you first feel you had succeeded as a producer?

Russ: Before I started to work with Jimmy Buffett, I had co-produced a few projects. Two or three film scores with George Massenburg and Bill Payne, an album for Carly Simon, an album with Jimmy Buffett and Mike Utley called *Hot Water*, a song with Bonnie Raitt, and I co-produced *Exiles* with Dan Fogelberg.

I don't think it was until I produced Jimmy's *Fruitcakes* that I really felt like I knew what I was doing. He hadn't had an album out in six years, and that one went straight to Platinum. It was a turning of the corner for him, and he let me know that I was part of the reason why. That was the moment for me.

**Bonzai**: Could you tell us about this recent adventure with Jimmy in the Bahamas and Key West?

Russ: It's called Banana Wind, which is a wind strong enough to blow the bananas off the trees, but it isn't quite a hurricane. We did this album much like the last one, Barometer Soup. When it was time to start that album, Jimmy was in the middle of writing the music for the Broadway show, Don't Stop the Carnival, which is brilliant. It was taking up a lot of his time, and he and I had the idea to put together a little core writing group consisting of the players in his band, myself and him. We set ourselves up in Key West, and the writing group would write Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Jimmy would come down for the rest of the week to edit everything we had done. When he came down, he really worked. We'd be thinking we had something great, and he'd come down and make it all better. He'd say, "We gotta Buffettize this," and it would often become more humorous, and we'd all end up liking it better. We

tended to take it too seriously and he'd come down and lighten things up.

I learned so much about song writing from watching the way he does it. For *Banana Wind* we worked in a similar way, with a core writing group, but Jimmy had a lot more time to devote to the writing of this album. It really shows—his fingerprints are all over it. All we did was create an atmosphere, come up with some music, and play.

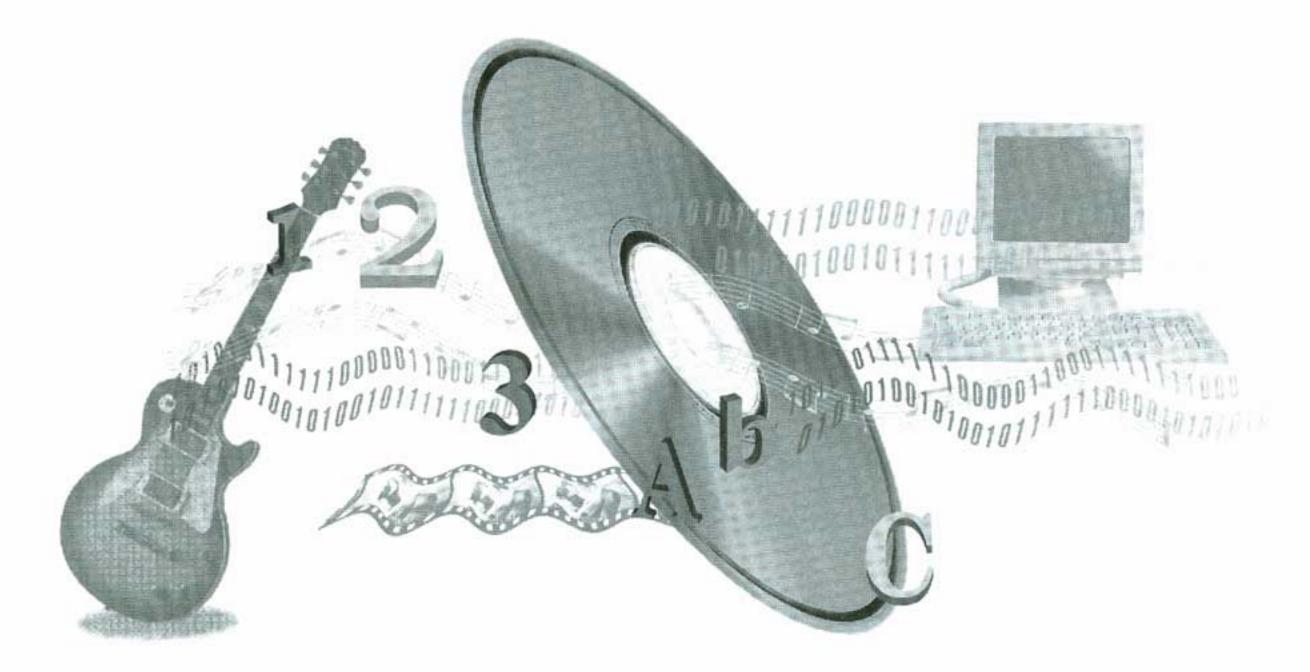
I watched him sit at his computer while we were vamping on some changes, and in eight minutes he wrote all the lyrics to "Cultural Infidel." And while he's typing, he's laughing hysterically. "Wait'll you guys hear this," and we'd stop. He'd say, "Keep playing, keep playing—turn the tape on." He'd turn around and sing it. In fifteen minutes, the song was done. That's how the album was made.

**Bonzai**: Are you drumming on this album?

**Russ**: No, just producing. The drummer in his band, Roger Guth, is a fabulous drummer. His whole band is wonderful.

**Bonzai**: Let's move on to Nathaniel. I guess you started out in California?

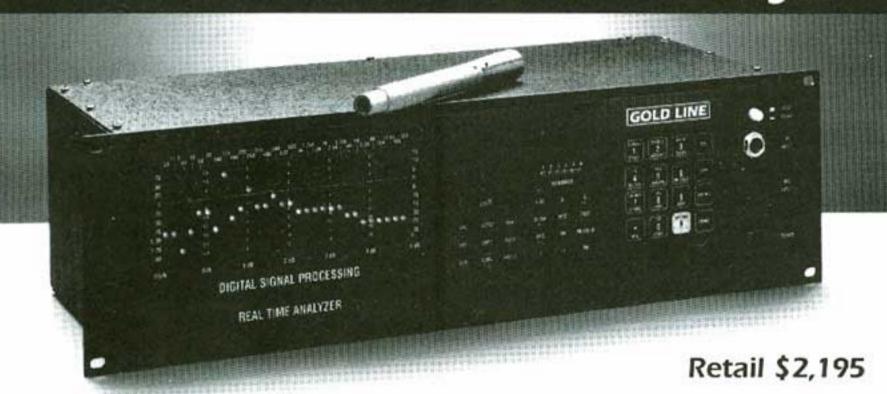
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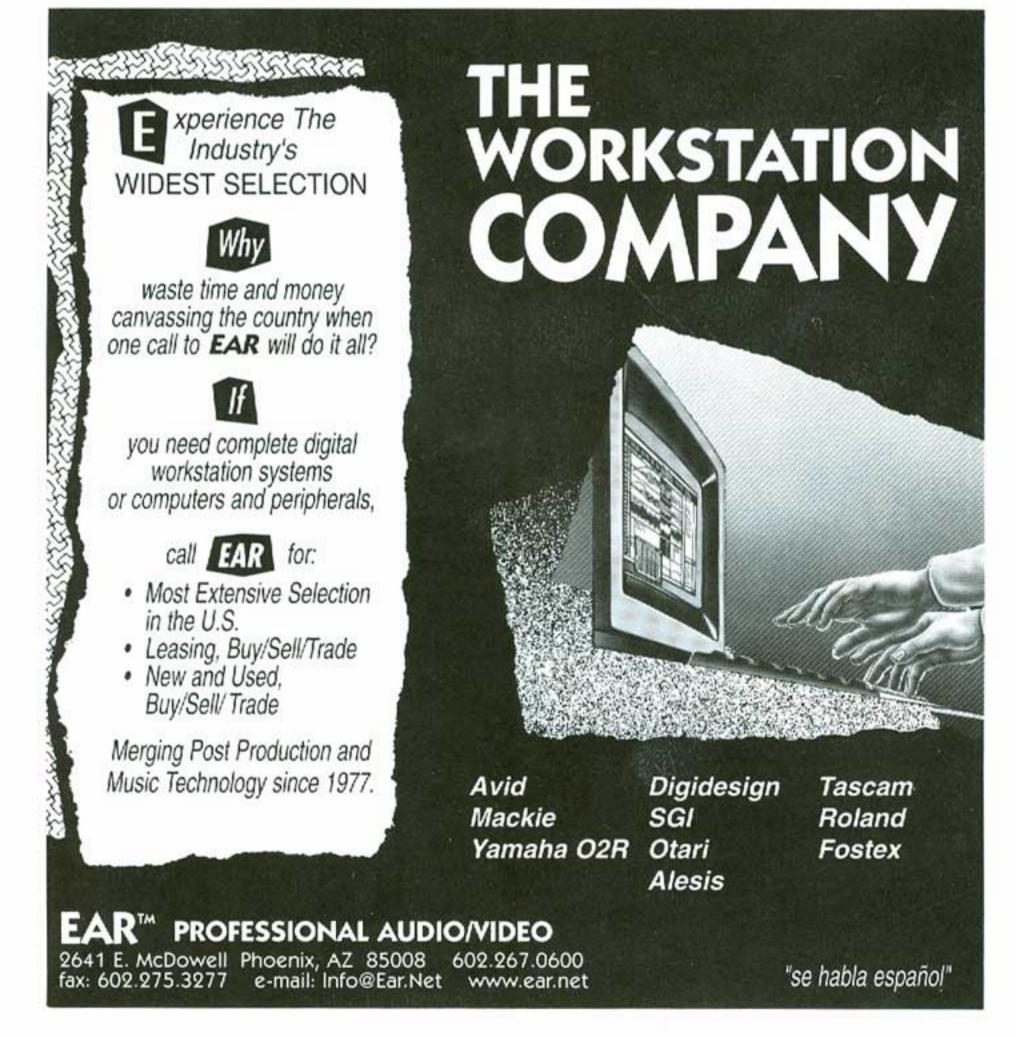
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#### LUNCHING WITH BONZAL

Nate: Yes, I was born in North Hollywood.

**Russ**: And he was driven home in a 1957 Chevy station wagon that he now owns.

**Nate**: For my 24th birthday, Russ gave me that car, a '57 210 with a 10-foot Stewart longboard in it, wrapped with red ribbon.

Bonzai: And how old are you now?

Nate: 25.

**Bonzai**: The car is older than you, and I bet some of the microphones you use are older than you...

Nate: Almost all of them.

**Bonzai**: What was life like around the Kunkel household as a kid? What's your first musical memory?

Nate: I remember being in the basement of our house when Russ had a 4-track studio set up. He and Danny Korchmar were working there. I also remember crawling underneath the console in the main room at Record One and sleeping. These are some of my first memories.

**Russ**: There were people a lot older than you who fell asleep under that console, for different reasons though.

**Nate**: Maybe they were looking for something and they just fell asleep.

**Bonzai**: Did you feel that you had a musical calling as a kid?

Nate: Musical, yes. I play drums as well and have since I was about four. It wasn't until around 1985 that I got really into audio though. In grade school I was very interested in technology and lighting, and when I would go on the road with my dad, I was really interested in the lighting board. It wasn't until I met George Massenburg at the Complex when Russ was working with Bill Payne on some films that I really got into it.

I remember George typing SMPTE numbers into an Eeco Synchronizer—seemed big as a washing machine. I liked that. I thought to myself, this is cool, this is hip stuff.

Nate: The summer of 1985, I was just out of 8th grade when I met George. The very next summer, just before I got out of school for the year, I was speaking with Greg Ladanyi on the phone. At that time, Greg and George owned the Complex. Greg offered me a job—running basically, but I didn't have a driver's license. I was just there and would do things like clean the snakes when they came in off the road, clean the connectors, solder patchbays. There

was a great technical staff, and I learned how to wire and all that.

After vacation, I would go back to Massachusetts where my mom lived and go to school, and then come out here for the summers. I did that until my senior year, and two days after I graduated, I was on a plane and working at the Complex. That was a great time. The second year that I worked there was when I really started to learn. I was living at George's house, and Russ was on the road. I got my learner's permit, and George taught me how to drive.

What was cool was that he was doing so much R&D for GML. At the end of the day he would go, "Great,

My secret is
not so much a secret.
When anyone asks me
how I did something,
I just tell them
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George Massenburg
taught me to do.

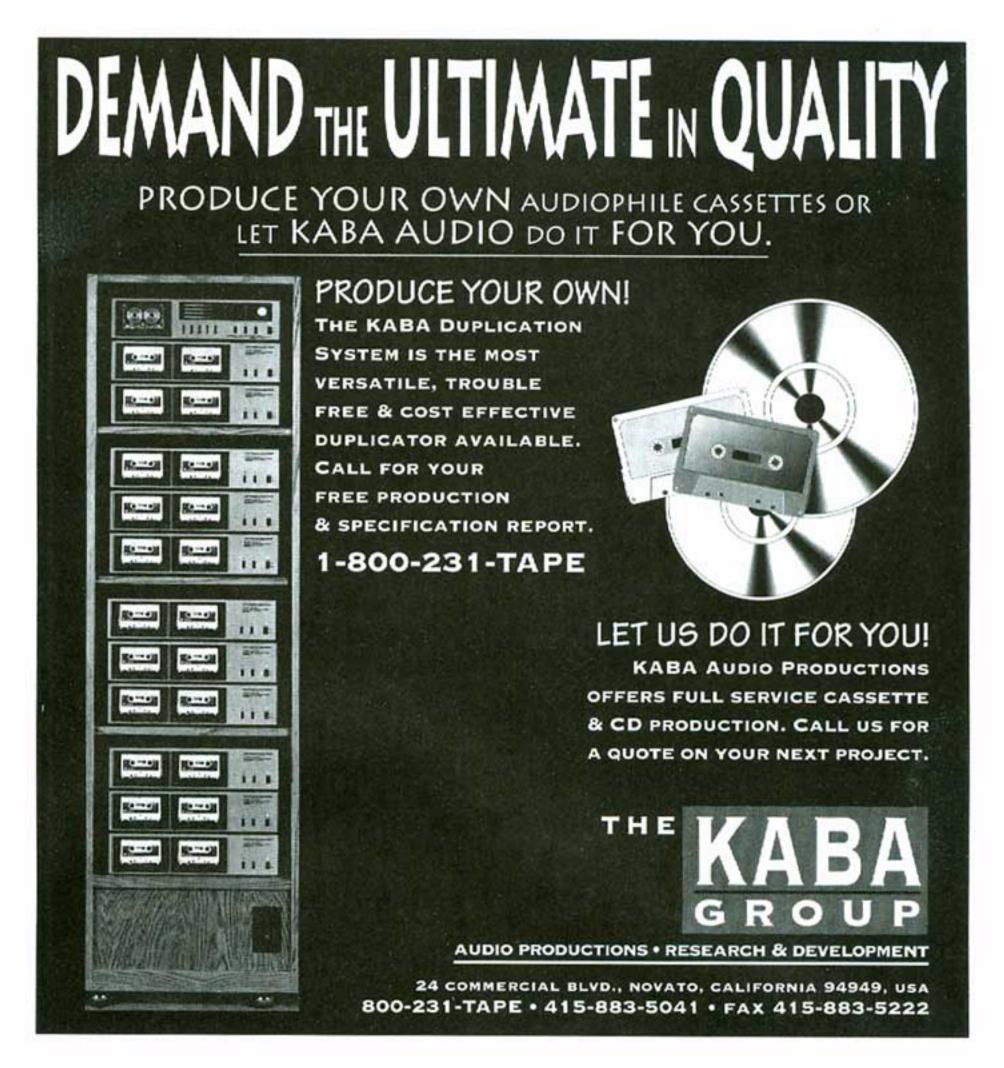
- Nate Kunkel

you go in there and mix because I have to watch the logic analyzer hooked up to the automation computer while it's working." He'd put a mix up and say, "Don't touch any of the EQ—go for it." I would mix and mix and mix.

**Bonzai**: So George was your mentor? **Nate**: Unquestionably. I spent a lot of time with George, and I was close with him until that fourth summer, when he ended up leaving the Complex. Greg stayed, and Art Kelm was running the studio, and in his mind I was not quite ready to be put in a room as an assistant because I was young. He told me I was capable, but I was just too young to put me in the room.

Two days after I had that conversation, Ed Wong from Jackson Browne's studio called me and offered me a job. I worked there for a year or so, and then George offered me a gig assisting him on the new Little Feat record at Skywalker Ranch. From that point on we worked together.

Bonzai: What was your first solo gig?



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#### LUNCHING WITH BONZAL

**Nate**: The first record I did solo was Lyle Lovett's *I Love Everybody*.

**Bonzai**: I just heard some cuts from his follow-up, the new album, *The Road to Ensenada*. "Long Tall Texan" with Randy Newman has such a great guitar sound. What was your secret to get that ol' guitar sound?

Nate: Actually, my secret is not so much a secret. When anyone asks me how I did something, I just tell them that I do what George taught me to do. It was a C-24 on Lyle's guitar. I run the C-24 up the neck, not up and down, so your left-right is the top and the bottom of the guitar. It's as if your head was kinda sideways. His vocal mic is a large part of that sound, too. He plays and sings at the same time, and all of his vocals are keepers. I use a U67 on his vocal. Because there is so much leakage, I don't really try to isolate the vocal and guitar. I just try to get a good blend going. I use the C-24 in M-S and fudge that around, making the guitar and the vocal sit right in an image.

Russ: So how do you punch in vocal parts?

Nate: You punch the guitar and the

vocal, which is really difficult because Lyle moves so much, and a large part of it is just being on top of things. Move closer, lift the head of the guitar a little, or to the side, lift your head up.

Bonzai: Sounds very athletic...

**Nate**: Very athletic for both of us. But we've done some great fixes and Lyle is an incredible professional at that. He is able to put himself right back where he was.

**Bonzai**: So that's two of his albums in a row for you...

**Nate**: We get along well. By the end of this record we had our dynamic really worked out. He knew what to expect from me, and I knew what to expect from him.

Bonzai: Did you also mix the TV special?

**Nate**: Yes, we're just posting the Disney special today.

**Bonzai**: What's the challenge of taking what's great on a record and making it fit the TV medium?

**Nate**: Mixing for TV is just different. I've mixed a couple of *Austin City Limits*, and that taught me a lot about mixing for television. You have to mix with a more limited dynamic range, and it has to be a little edgier. I like natural-sound-

ing recordings. When I was coming up as an engineer, I used to listen and go, "It's so bright. When I mix records it's not going to be that bright." After mixing for a few years and getting things to compete on television and on the radio, I realized you have to push the envelope in that way. For TV, you have to get things right up there on the edge, getting your levels real hot and getting things bright. Weird answer, I guess. The most difficult thing is to get it to cut through a speaker and sound like music.

**Bonzai**: Won't that change with increased dynamic ranges, 24-bit recording, fiber-optic cable and new deliveries like DVD? Are you anticipating that?

Nate: Yes, eagerly. Technically, there isn't such a bottleneck in getting quality audio delivered on a video medium in terms of the equipment they use. The problem is that it all goes through an infinity-to-one dbx 166 stereo limiter as soon as it leaves the VTR at the television station. And it doesn't matter if they digitize it at 16-bit or at 24-bit before they send it to the dish. What they do at the post house or that station to make it match levels with that commercial right before is the larger part of

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what influences the sound. It can end up very different—I've mixed things and I hear them on one station and they sound completely different on another station.

**Bonzai**: For you as an engineer what is the most difficult—piano, voice, violin?

Russ: My kick drum?

**Nate**: I'd say that of all the techniques that I have, the one for piano is the one that I am most willing to change. There is no instrument where I go, "Oh God, I have to record..."

**Bonzai**: Well, how do you record a piano?

**Nate**: With a C-24 M-S. I open up the piano lid, and I have the piano player play and I move my head around inside the piano until it sounds good. I mark where the center of my eyes are and put the center of the front capsule there.

**Bonzai**: Have you recorded your dad? **Nate**: Yes, a bunch.

**Bonzai**: Is his kick drum a problem? [Both laugh]

Bonzai: This must get into some interesting family dynamics...

**Nate**: Actually, on Lyle's last record, I was looking for more of a pillowy kick drum sound. Russ played on Lyle's last two records, so we worked together on both of them. It was a great help for me on *I Love Everybody*, because it was my first album, and I was so nervous. Having my dad on the session was great—I could stall for time.

**Bonzai**: Could you point out a few engineers who inspire you?

**Nate**: I am consistently in awe of mixes by Ed Cherney and George Massenburg. I hear things that George does that just blow my mind, and the same with Ed. There's a warmth and a texture that Ed gets.

**Russ**: His mixes are just like he is, warm and friendly.

**Bonzai**: Your discography, Nate, has one unusual artist: Lynni Teekrem...

Nate: She's a Norwegian mariachi singer, and she sings in Norwegian. Lynni heard Linda Ronstadt's mariachi records that George recorded, and she came here to record with that band. They called me because I had worked on the records, and it turned out to be one of the most amazing things I've worked on.

**Bonzai**: Russ, in looking at your child growing up, and seeing where he is now, could you pinpoint something you provided for your son? What was most valuable?

Russ: First of all, I think Nathaniel has done a phenomenal job coming from a

"broken home," which is true of many kids. I didn't come from a broken home, but I lost my father when I was very young, and it's a hard thing to bear in either case. When you have children, you need to take that seriously and be there for them. Nathaniel has done a wonderful job on his own. He learned at an early age the value of having a job. If I gave him anything, it was that. I really wanted him to know the value of earning a living.

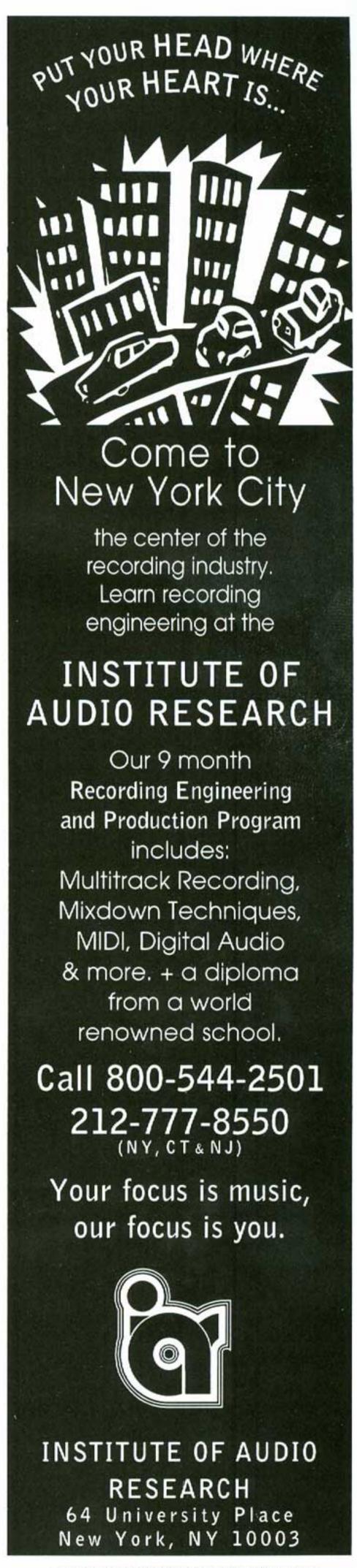
He was bussing tables at a restaurant in Martha's Vineyard when he was technically too young to work. We snuck him in, and that first summer he made \$300 per week. I told him he could do anything he wanted with the money. You can put it in a bank, which is what you should do, for school. But it's yours and you can do anything you want. Well, he bought all of his friends presents. He went out to dinner, bought himself some clothes. He was generous with that money. He loved having money in his pocket and being able to buy his girlfriend a sweater and not have to ask anybody for the money. He learned the value of being responsible and that having a job equals freedom.

**Bonzai**: Let's look at the flip side of the coin. What was the most valuable thing your dad gave you? What makes you stand tall today?

Nate: To find that I would look back at the conversations I've had with my dad, the ones that stick in my mind as being important. It has to do with diligence, staying with something, committing yourself and following through until the end. It means completing what you said you would do, in terms of records. When it's done, all that will be remembered is how the record sounds.

My dad taught me to follow through, stay consistent, and to always do your best. When I think of Russell's reputation in town-so many people have worked with him and everybody asks me about him, pretty much everybody feels the same—he always gives 100 percent when he shows up at a session, and it doesn't matter if the song sucks or the producer doesn't know what he's doing. He's right there and gives them the best ideas that he can. That ethic is the one that has done me the most good in engineering, because people know that it doesn't matter what the budget is-I'm always gonna give them everything I can.

Roving editor Mr. Bonzai learned everything be knows from his dad, the well-known taxidermist.



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