Macs to the Max

With the rise and rise of the iPod as the Western World's preferred portable music player, we decided to highlight all the other Mac connections there are with music. John Gray asked some of New Zealand's most successful, innovative and interesting musicians across a fairly broad spectrum of genres to talk about the Macs in their lives

The Questions

We standardised the questions and asked all the musicians the same 12 things:

1/ When did you first use a Mac to make music?

2/ Tool kit: what system hardware and software are you currently using?

3/ How did you decide on the equipment you use?

4/ Have you been influenced by any other artists, NZ or otherwise, and the way they do things?

5/ Have you opted to change your style of music, or replace a traditional musical instrument that you're already familiar with, by using some of the virtual tools you now have at your disposal?

6/ How would you say modern home studio capabilities have affected you?

7/ What is one piece of equipment you could simply not do without? (And don't just say your Mac, because that would be cheating!)

8/ Given the chance to start again, what would you change?

9/ What would your dream system be?

10/ What's next in the pipeline?

11/ Any tips for aspiring 'organic' musos, computer-based musos and cross-breeds thereof?

Top left: Awanui, Junior. David. Down: Heath & Donald

Nesian Mystik

Nesian Mystik formed in the music room of Western Springs College and rose to prominence in 2002, captivating New Zealand with their uplifting, Polynesian/urban sound. Their first single rose to number 8 in the NZ charts and went gold, and their second single reached #2. First album Polysaturated was very well received, topping the NZ charts in December 2002: the band has taken several awards and toured widely. [www.nesianmystik.com]

1. We used a Mac to make music for the first time ever in 2000 and we've been using it since.

2. Well I'm not sure 'bout what system hardware and software we're using, because we just recently got our new studio gear and we're all currently learning, but music-wise we use ProTools.

3. We asked people who we trusted just because it's a lot of money to spend so you gotta spend it right. But with the advice of peeps like Che Fu, who writes and produces his own music and top NZ producer Simon Holloway from Beaver Music, we knew it would be what we needed.

4. NZ artists are always influencing us, if not in terms of recording then inspired by performance.

5. Well, we're still kinda experimenting with that [underwraps].

6. I've never used a home studio. I suppose the closest I've been to a home studio is the PlayStation (Music2000).

7. Nah that's not fair because that's what I was going to say. So I don't care: yep, my Mac!

8. Donald's hair maybe, nah ... nothing!

9. If u ask me this in a year or two, I'll have an answer but I'm still learn'n this system.

10. Up next for Nesian Mystik. A new single out within tha next

Rockers Hi-Fi, Fat Freddy's Drop, King Kapisi, Ché Fu and Salmonella Dub and has played all over New Zealand and in Europe.

1. I first became introduced to Mac while studying jazz at the Conservatorium of Music [Massey] in the early '90s. It was running the first versions of Encore for composition classes. I think we had about four PowerMacs in the class, but we were able to compose scores for our end-of-year Big Band arrangements, so they were great!

3. We had actually run out of finance for our album, and it was only half finished, so we decided to borrow some money off friends and family and buy our own G4 with a ProTools package that Protel in Wellington was offering at the time, Best move we ever made!

4. I remember reading in New Zealand Musician magazine that Ché Fu had a little ProTools/Mac set-up in a shed out in his back yard, and he seemed to get pretty fat beats out of it; also DJ Mu from Fat Freddy's Drop uses a G5, with ProTools 6.2 as well as Apogee A/D converters –awesome!

5. For me the ideal would be to combine the two different schools, maintaining human characteristics and feel. I still haven't found a decent sax sampler, but I know there are some pretty good drums, bass keyboard samplers out there, so a blend of both I think.

6. I don't think that TrinityRoots would be where we are right now without it. The user–friendly format of both Mac and ProTools made it possible at a very affordable price, comparatively speaking, to finish our own album in our own time, giving us greater freedom to do justice to

the music instead of watching the clock to see when your time is up! It's fantastic.

7. The wayward part of my brain and my acoustic guitar.

8. I would've started my music career earlier. It's the best lifestyle if you can hack it, and the rewards are medicinal. Otherwise I wouldn't change a thing.

9. A 2GHz G5; a pair of Quested near field monitors; Apogee A/D Converters, eight ins and eight buts, Buzz Stereo Preamp/Compressor and two Doug Jane Valve EQs with maybe a dozen or so Neumann U87s and - wakey, wakey ...

10. Start mixing the TrinityRoots album over the next three weeks, then Fat Freddy's is off for a six-week tour of Europe, back in June to mix the Freddy's album and a five-week national tour for TrinityRoots, then back to Europe for Freddy's once the album is mixed to promote back in Europe. Trinity will also follow up to Europe later in September ... quite a busy year.

11. Go hard! Not to give in when the bills are piling up, and make your own trends. But Kiwi musos are getting a bit of a name for that anyway – the ol' Number 8 wire. Kia kaha!

Thorn Cochrane

Thorn Cochrane is an eLearning and Learning Technologies coordinator at Unitec – MacGuide caught up with Thorn last year when he worked at Music and Audio Institute NZ (Auckland campus).

From 1997-2004 he was a tutor of audio engineering and music production at MAINZ; while there he developed the eLearning environment and did a whole lot more. Thorn's interests include using IT to create rich/exciting collaborative student environments. He plays acoustic guitar and keyboards and records music digitally and using MIDI.

> ### Some of Thom's favourite websites:
> http://www.powerpage.org
> http://www.soundonsound.com
> http://www.osxaudio.com

1. 1995 – I bought a Centris 660AV (included a built-in DSP chip – cool!], Yamaha CBXD3 [SCSI 16-bit 2xA/D, 4xD/A], Logic Platinum 2.5, Opcode Studio3 MIDI interface, 1GB external SCSI drive, 1GB Iomega Jaz drive (for back-ups], Musicshop, Alchemy, Korg T3 keyboard, Digitech processor, Zoom processor, Roland M12E rack-mount mixer, Takamine acoustic guitar, and a Spirit Folio4 analogue mixing desk. This formed the core of a small hard disk recording system. I also used a PowerBook 520 as a mobile system.

I recorded an entire album using this set-up (Logic] by building a temporary studio in a church, hiring a set of microphones. I set up a control room in a side room, set up drums, guitar and bass in separate rooms and ran a cable snake' between them – it was great fun!

3. Value for money firstly, while keeping pro quality, and Mac compatibility. I like ProTools for audio as its toolset is quick and simple to use. The downside is

ttie cost of a ProTools' system, and the prerequisite Digidesign hardware, and the cost of additional software plug-ins. ProTools LE can be extended to include timecode and OMF support by adding the DV Toolkit option which then allows exporting PTs sessions and importing them into Cubase or Logic, or FCP. Logic Pro gives you a lot of power for the price; I like using it in score editing mode, from a musical perspective.

4. I always keep an eye on what's new, but I like doing my own thing.

5. I prefer using hardware sound modules and keyboards as they are more reliable in a live situations. Virtual synths take a lot of computing power, and virtual sample libraries take up a large amount of hard drive space!

6. High quality audio is definitely within the reach of most people now. It's very empowering, and allows the freedom to be creative under your own direction.

7. Apart from my Mac laptop, I've been using a 2.5-inch FireWire backup drive that allows me to transport files easily, and boot from it. I'd love an iPod!

8. Aim for as high-end a computer/recording system as you can afford, as this will give you better upgrade ability, lifespan and performance. Don't cheap out!

9. I like mobility, scaleability and flexibility, so I'd go for a Yamaha DM2000 with mLAN card for direct connection to a PowerBook running Logic Pro, plus ADAT cards for running into a ProTools ADAT bridge into a TDM system on a desktop G5. Also a mobile system – rack with Digi002R, TC Electronic FireWire Powercore, Twin Track Pro mic pre/compressor, Korg Triton Rack, Yamaha Motif rack, running into a PowerBook via FireWire.

10. I really want to write some new material – I need to take some time to get some inspiration.

11. Get a Mac!

2. Warryn Maxwell's toolkit

G4, 800MHz, 128MB RAM: "It's still going strong, even though we have recorded a number of bands on it. What a workhorse. I've also got a little home studio running an M-Box and a G4."

2. Thom Cochrane's tool kit

PowerMac G5 (1.6GHz, 768MB RAM, 80GBHD), Logic Pro, SampleTank2, Cubase SX2, ProTools LE with M-Box, GarageBand, SoundTrack, Final Cut Pro4.