

BOB NICHOLSON

Black Bear Recording , Stockholm, NJ 07460
973-697-4580, e-mail: hydemusic@yahoo.com
website: www.bobnicholson.com

Singer/songwriter/musician/engineer/producer Bob Nicholson has been residing and performing for over 30 years in what I describe as "American Acoustic" music in the northern New Jersey area. Wearing many hats, I get to be many people doing a variety of entertainment business functions. It didn't always be that way. It all started the usual way one begins their musical entry, a sneak viewing of the ED Sullivan show. My first memory was watching Elvis, at least part of him. With his twisting and shaking his pelvis, censors thought it better not to subject the public to an immoral view, ha!, "This is cool" I thought to myself. But it wasn't until again on the Ed Sullivan Show when I saw Beatles and Rolling Stones perform, that I wanted to be a musician for a career.

My first experience into the Biz came when I appeared on the original "Ted Mack's Amateur Hour". After that day, it started an uncontrollable feeling in my mindset that has endured throughout with me to this day. Yeah, my band got bounced from the show, but it didn't matter. Seized by the spell of rock n' roll that was implanted in my soul, I have continued to write, record and perform in front of audiences.

How did you first get involved in recording?

In a way, I guess you can say I always was involved in recording from my first gift of a reel to reel my grandmother bought for me when I was in my first band. I would record us and started writing songs. I remember going to our first professional studio, Sim-O- Rama Sound in Totowa back in 1965 with my first band "Bach Inc" to record a single for a small record label in Paterson. I recall seeing the engineer wearing his lab coat recording us live. I thought it was cool and I wanted to do that as well. I continued trying to record our rehearsals first in my parent's basement and finally to my grandparent's basement where they had this huge sounding live room.

Around the time of disco, rock music was basically dead so I kind of hung up my guitar and concentrated on recording. I first started working in professional studios namely House of Music and Bell Studios learning all I could while there. With a family, it was easier to work locally in studios here. But my real passion to be a musician was greater than just being an engineer especially after listening to bands like Nirvana, so I went back to my musical roots while having the studio knowledge behind me. I concentrated on the singer/songwriter format with the local artists using my studio. I've formed my own publishing company (Hyde Music) record label (Black Bear Records) and recording studio (Black Bear Recording).

What made you choose to record these 2 songs?

I guess since this was a 60's theme, I started thinking of bands that I saw back when I was starting out on the East

Coast. I always liked the **LOVIN' SPOONFUL** and thought they were heavier live than on record. Their records always sounded wimpy and too tame for what the band really sounded like. "Summer in the City" was the perfect song to beef up and sort of to make it right in my view. The **BLUES MAGOOS**, what I say about this psychedelic bunch of guys. "We Ain't Got Nothing Yet" just says it all. It was humorous to watch Ralph, their keyboardist have the numbers written on the keys for him to play and Peppy screaming out a solo on the guitar. It was a simple song about youth, real garage band, which I love.

Also, both songs were on a CD I had from a 60's comp.(ha,ha,ha)

Can you describe the instrumentation used on your recordings?

I used my Telecaster for the main solo in WAGN and a Ibanez AR50 (a 70's Les Paul copy) for the main riff. The rhythm guitars were a Epiphone Rivera and the Telecaster on both WAGN and Summer in the City. For bass I played my Fender Precision for both tracks. On the keyboards I used a Roland U20 as a controller into a PC computer using Reason 3.0 with the virtual sounds of a 60's Wurlitzer and Vox Continental organ on both tunes. I wanted to try and keep the original sounds of the 60's era. The drums were played by Chris McHugh from the Discrete Drums Series Two Collection. For amplification I used a combination of POD XT alone and with a Fender Blues Jr and Fender Pro Jr amps micked using a Sennheiser MD 409 through an ART MP2 pre-amp and ART VLA limiter. The bass was recorded direct into the ART mic pre and limiter. On vocals, I used a Marshall V69 tube mic and and Audio Technica AT4050 with the ART pre-amp and limiter.

How about the recording network used?

Most of the project was recorded using the Roland VS2480CD while the keyboards were transferred digitally from the computer after recording and processed in Reason 3.0. They were then outputted through an M-Audio 410 sound card synced to the Roland VS2480CD. With the exception of that and the use of the ART external pre-amp and limiter, all processing, mixing and mastering were done entirely in the Roland VS2480CD using it's own on board effects and processing.

How did you go about recording the songs?

I first copied the original recording to 2 tracks on the VS2480 to use as a guide track for working with the drums making sure the parts were recorded in the proper sequence. I then would play along with the track to see if the tempo was right. After I was satisfied with the rhythm to both songs, (I worked on both drum tracks first in case I got bogged down on one song I could go to the other and work on it), I just played along on guitar to get the feel of the song as if it was my own while trying to retain the content of the original.

Word travels fast among musicians, especially about bad recording studios and engineers!

How do you approach the mix?

Since these were AM radio hits, only the vocals stuck out and not much of anything else. I wanted to strike a balance between the vocals keeping them still up front but also inject the intensity and energy of the instruments to make the listener experience it as if they're watching the band perform live but sounding contemporary while using the technology of today. After all, these were great songs to begin with. I wanted to make them sound as if they were just written today.

How were the songs mastered?

Nothing real fancy here Very little compression, I'll leave that for the radio stations to do. The majority of it had to do with the intros and outro fades making them consistent. I might have added a little air to the mix, but that's about it. I recorded the songs in such a manner that they sounded what I heard and the mix just brought it all out. I used the Roland VS2480CD in the mastering mode and then recorded them to the internal cd and sent them off for assembly into the comp cd.

Any "tips" for other home recordists'?

Read as much as you can and try to get hold of as many recording magazines as you can get, especially the free ones. Tapeop, EQ, Electronic Musician, Remix are some of the top leading magazines for home recordists. Internet user groups like Home Recording and Saxonsound have a wealth of information from home recordists and professionals from the recording industry. Try and see if you can get some sort of assistant job at your local recording studio. They may be small studios like you but owners will usually welcome someone helping them out on a large tracking session. Learn how to record a band live...that is everyone playing at once. You'd be surprised on how few people do it. It's fast becoming a lost art. Also learn your microphones. Study the polar patterns of all the standard favorite mics.. Break them down by style, i.e. dynamic, condensers, ribbon, then subdivide and study their graphs on frequency response and pickup patterns of the cardioids, Omnis, and figure 8's.

If you know your mics, you'll be able to predict the sound usually without even putting it up. Some have a slight increase or decrease at certain frequencies to accent the sound making some sound darker (warmer) for a certain vocal. Another example would be a basic live recording. By choosing a mic with good off-axis rejection, you can cut down on the leakage caused by the other instruments.

The best thing is to just record. Record everything, your band rehearsal, your friend's band but first make sure you tell them you want to experiment on some mic technique and not for their next demo for Sony or their CD release. You must be careful on how you approach it because once you record a band for no charge, there is very little chance you'll be able to charge them again. It's best to find young bands just starting out. Usually they'll break up before too long. Don't search out the hottest local bands in the area until you're pretty damn good at it. If you try to bite off more than you chew, your reputation for bad recordings will follow you fast;