

## FARRELL JACKSON

Resident: Oakdale CA.

Musician: Guitar player/singer/songwriter

Studio: Jaxonville Studio - Home Studio

**Background** : It must have been about 1962 when I first got the bug to play guitar. My cousin lived next door to a guy that plunked around with one and he talked him out of a few free lessons. I just happened to be there one day when he went for a lesson so I tagged along. I found it very intriguing and with that one contact, the guitar had it's hooks into me. My cousin gave up after his finger tips became sore and that was the end of his guitar playing career but I still had the bug, all I needed was a guitar. I remembered that my uncle had an old beat up acoustic guitar laying around his house and he was more than willing to give it to me. I think he also had sore finger tips. The only problem was that it only had the lower four strings on it, the B and E had been over tightened long ago and disappeared in the big snap. The good thing, it came with a small "learn how to play guitar without getting sore finger tips and all the girls will love you" pamphlet or at least that's what I read. It explained things like tuning, what notes the open strings are supposed to be, showed the finger positions to the basic open chords, and also the dreaded F major bar chord. There were a few songs scored out like Oh Susanna and such, which I attempted but never mastered. In fact, I still don't know how to play that frickin' song! To heck with it, I was going right for Louie Louie and Gloria but with just four strings and no real idea how to tune them, I just got sore finger tips and a chord never sounded like a chord. I did remain persistent and spent the summer figuring out you could actually play things with just the single notes. So, I was beginning to pick out simple melodies, gaining dexterity, toughening the finger tips, and conquered the two string chords to Louie Louie and a few others. I just knew when I got back to school, the girls would fall all over me. It never happened. I continued to pick up bits and pieces from whoever would show me anything, purchased a St. George electric guitar and a Melody amp from the local pawn shop. I still own the working Melody amp but the St. George electric went to guitar heaven ala one too many times thrown in the air and missed. By the time I hit High School, I could actually play some songs using all six strings. I was in my first band at the age of sixteen and have played in many more since that time. Musicians come and go but it seems that I have been involved with the same circle of guy's since 1976, in various forms and genres but mostly four piece top forty R&R. Prior to getting into the home studio digital

recording thing, I didn't have much recording/studio experience at all. A couple of bands I had been in spent a few sessions at local studios to cut band promo demos back in the late seventies and mid eighties, but it was all analog. This digital stuff was and is still new to me and I learn something cool with each session. I began to set up my home studio about 1998 with the purchase of a Fostex FD-8 to just fool around with some solo stuff. I've since graduated to a Fostex VF160, have a selection of mics, and many outboard goodies. I've finished a couple of solo cd's with this system and also have recorded a few small vocal groups and solo artists. I figure I've been at this for forty three years and you know, there are times when my finger tips still get sore, but it's a good hurt.

### What made you choose these two songs you recorded for this comp?

I wanted to pick a song that had the "classic sixties sound" which I thought I could pull off as far as performance and capturing that sound. The Animals had always been a favorite of mine with the way they blended Farfisa / Vox Continental organ with the American blues sound to create pop songs. Since I'm keyboard challenged, their song "Help Me Girl" seemed to be the one I could do a decent job on. It also has a bridge, that to me, just exudes that sixties sound. It involves dropping from a major to a minor chord without changing the chord, heavily effected reverb vocals, tremelo guitar, and a chunky bass line.

I wanted to represent an American group so I chose another favorite of mine, the innovative Spirit. I had recently been listening to a best of cd by them when this comp idea came about. Their song "So Little Time To Fly" was one that I had been hitting the replay button on a lot so I thought it would make a good second song for the comp. I felt the original song, as great as it is, started off strong but seemed to let down toward the end. So, I used my artistic license to let it build a bit more toward the end.

### Can you describe the instrumentation used on your recordings?

On The Animals song, I used a Yamaha keyboard, an OLP electric guitar into an Epiphone Galaxie 10 mic'ed for the lead solos, Takamine and Ibanez acoustics direct, Fender Teleoustic into a T.C. Electronic M300 for the tremelo guitar, Roland guitar synth for the sax (MP3 from Mac Edwards), 1970 Vox violin bass into a Behringer Ultramizer direct, Roland E-Drums (MP3 from Frank Northcutt).

On the Spirit song, I used an OLP electric guitar into a SansAmp Tech 21 for the lead solos, Ibanez acoustic rhythms direct, 1974 Gibson L.P. into a Laney 30 watt tube amp mic'ed for the slide work, 1972 Gibson EBO bass through a Behringer Ultramizer direct, and a basic drum track from a Zoom MRT3 machine.

#### How about the recording network used?

I recorded both of these songs using the Fostex VF160. Although it's a stand alone all digital DAW, I also used outboard pieces that are patched in when needed.

- \* Preamps - Behringer ADA8000 and VF160 onboard. ( Vocals and guitars)
- \* Mics - Behringer B2 (all vocals on Help Me Girl) and an Audix i5 (amp mic on Help Me Girl and all vocals and amp mic on So Little Time To Fly).
- \* Compression - FMR Really Nice Comp., Behringer Ultramizer, Nady limiter, Behringer DPS9024.
- \* Effects - T.C. Elect. M300 (tremelo) and VF160 onboard ( reverbs, doubling).

#### How did you go about recording these songs?

I typically rehearse a part until I have it down and avoid the record button until that point. I try to avoid punch ins and strive for a clean take. I also try to get the sound I'm after before recording a part. This usually requires some short takes with EQ adjustment of amps, onboard tone controls of A/E guitars, and mic placements. Initially, I'll try to find a basic beat at the correct bpm using the Zoom MRT3 drum machine as a scratch track. At times, I do use a click track but the drum scratch track seems to be a bit more natural for timing. I'll go back later and work on the final drum programming (drum programming is my weakness) as the song develops or as in the case of Help Me Girl, I'll seek help from a real drummer like Frank Northcutt from the Saxonsound group who graciously contributed the two drum tracks on his Roland E-drums via MP3.

My recording order is as follows: First the scratch drum track, then rhythm guitar which could be two tracks of mic'ed and direct, next the bass guitar track, then the lead vocal, next all the harmony and background vocal tracks. This happens in one session. At this point I take a breather, do a quick fader mix, listen to what I have, and may redo some if needed. On the next sessions, which are usually different days, I begin to add the ear candy. This includes guitar

solos, any keys, and additional backup vocals. Also, most of my tracks have some sort of compression or limiting on them going in.

#### Any unique recording techniques used?

I'm sure these are not unique techniques and they have most likely been done in the past but it might be of interest anyway.

**Help Me Girl**: On the bass track, in order to get a similar sound of that era, I taped a piece of cloth across the strings, at the bridge of my Vox violin bass. This muted the strings and gave them a dead chunky, short sustained thump sound, without any muddiness. Also, I had just purchased an Epiphone Galaxie 10 Class A 10 watt tube amp for the studio. I used it on the lead solos and it did a great job but later that evening while rehearsing, it blew up and that was the end of the Galaxie 10. I returned the amp and replaced it with a Fender Blues Jr. So, this is the only recording of mine that the Galaxie 10 will ever be on.

For ease of guitar playing I had dropped the songs original key of C minor to B minor. This was great for the guitar but when it came time to add the keys, I realized I wasn't very efficient at using many of those black keys and this key change required using a lot of them. I thought a moment and figured I had a couple of easy choices. I could re-tune the keys to B minor or I could use the VF160's vari-pitch function and move the whole song to C minor. I chose to move the song to C minor and it worked like a charm. It would have been easier to just shift the keys tuning but I felt the tempo was a bit slow and I could fix two things at the same time. The sax solo was done by **Mac Edwards** on his Roland guitar synth (Virginia) and the drums were done by **Frank Northcutt** (Massachusetts) on his Roland E-drums. Both of these were sent to me via email, in MP3 form, and I just aligned them to the existing tracks.

**So Little Time To Fly**: Probably the most unusual thing here is that I used the Audix i5 dynamic mic for all the vocals and instruments. This is typically an instrument mic, similar to an SM57. I had just gotten it as an option for my SM57 and during the testing phase I decided to try it on vocals. This song happened to be the one called up on the VF160 at the moment so I set it up and did a quick lead vocal sample. The result was a bit surprising, I expected it to be a bit midrange heavy but it had an overall warm, full sound to it. So, I pulled out the lyric sheet and began to lay down all the vocal tracks. This particular Spirit song has a very basic drum track so I was able to find one in the MRT3 that worked. I did use two drum tracks

with the second track offset from the first by one half frame, to give it depth and space, with each track panned hard right and left. Also, to add some sparkle and twinkle to the acoustic guitar rhythms, I capo'd up on one of guitar tracks so I could play some open style chords at a higher register. This did add some twinkle and presence.

### **How did you approach the mix?**

My goal on both of these songs was to mix them so they had that sixties style yet sounded modern. I did things like physically double tracking the lead vocal on Help Me Girl and panning the dominate vocal slightly to the left side, poured on an old plate reverb effect, muted the bass strings, used heavy tremelo on a guitar.

On So little Time To Fly, my specific goal was to let the song build in a hypnotic fashion as it went along . I wanted each part to enter in a subtle way. I also wanted to create a sort of depth of field with the background guitar solo that plays throughout and behind everything else after it enters.

This is my general mix procedure. I use a hand written tracking sheet that I've created for the VF160's 16 tracks. This allows to me to keep each track's information compiled and to make recording notes so things don't get lost. I jot things down in pencil because as the song moves along, settings change and the eraser does get a work out. I also save settings using the map scene save function of the VF160.

Once I get all the keeper tracks, I go through the clean up process of each individual track. I'll edit out (erase) the unwanted noise in the silent sections. Things like big breaths or lip smacks on vocal tracks, the string noise on guitars as your waiting for the solo, and make sure the beginning and ending areas of the song are silent. I'm careful not to remove it all, especially on the vocals, because that would tend to make it sound un-natural.

After the cleaning process, I do the fix process. If something needs fixing, I fix it with editing and very seldom redo tracks at this point. I might have to remove some vocal plosives or work on some sibilance at a few spots or copy and paste to cover a bad part with a good part that repeats somewhere else on that track. I do this with all the tracks.

Next, I eq all the individual tracks to my liking . This is just a starting point because it all changes slightly as the tracks are combined. I then begin setting the levels of the tracks and deciding on the effects I'll be using. I typically use my favorites: old plate reverb with a

very short decay, a doubling effect , and a chorus. Once I get it all sounding decent, I then begin to spread things out with panning and re-adjust the eq as necessary for presence. When I'm satisfied with the sound, I route the song's mixed two tracks through the Behringer DPS9024 (six band compressor) , set for a mild compression pre-set, direct to a Teac CDRW recorder. I'll re-adjust fader levels at this point, if necessary, and get the mix and level I want .

### **How were these songs mastered?**

We've decided as a group to have one of the members of Saxonsound, Jim Skinner, balance the overall levels from song to song and set times between for consistency. We just needed to send him the songs as ready to go as possible.

I guess you could say I did sort of a combination of mixing and mastering these myself. Once I got the songs initially mixed to a cdrw, I then ran them through the Behringer DPS9024 (six band compression /exciter/enhancer) and adjusted the levels to about -3db as they burned again to a cdrw. At this stage, I move the disc to my PC and copy a .wav file to a program called HarBal that lets you view and hear the overall eq curve. If I hear or see anything that is spiking or lacking in the eq curve, I can just drag it up or down and hear the results in real time. Depending on whether I boosted or took away some frequencies will dictate if I raise or lower the songs overall level, which is typically not more than 1db either way. The cool thing about Harbal is that it lets you overlay a reference song of your choice and compare it's eq curve to your song's curve. A very handy tool.

Any tips for other home recording enthusiast ?

I suppose it would be to really sit back and listen to your mixes and listen on different systems. Listen to the overall sound as well as the individual parts and try to get a mix that sounds like your favorite songs. If you play a specific instrument, be careful not to get caught up in the "I need to hear more of me" syndrome when mixing. There are a lot of parts that make a great mix so don't over look the other instruments. As far as equipment, you don't necessarily need the best or most expensive piece of gear but do buy the best that fits your budget. Also research and audition before you buy. In a home studio environment , with usually less than pro gear and un-tuned rooms, it's important to get the sound right before hitting the record button. Things like, find the best spot in the room to record at, move the mic's around for the best sound, and try different mic's. The settings you use for live performances will probably be different in the studio, so tweak those

amps until they sound good on the recording. Don't think that a condenser is the best mic for all situations. Experiment with that old dynamic that you picked up at a yard sale or the one that got left behind from one of your previous bands. I guess the point I'm trying to make is to not get caught up in recording a certain way or using certain equipment just because you read it was the right way to do it. Have some fun and try new techniques because nobody is going to fire you. After all, it's your place and you're the boss.