

Name: Paul Simpson

Studio Premises: Home Studio

Main Equipment: Yamaha PSR8000 keyboard, Casio CTK601 keyboard, Yamaha QY70 sequencer, Yamaha MD4 Minidisc 4-track, Roland VS1680 hard disk recorder, Roland VS CDRW CD writer (as backup for VS1680), Boss DR5 drum machine, Boss DR550 drum machine, Roland SC88 Sound Canvas module, Pioneer D05 DAT recorder, Shure SM58 microphone, Hootersound B1 mic preamp, Pioneer A405 amplifier, Yamaha NS10M monitors, Pioneer CTW806DR twin cassette.



Photo: Ross Anderson

physically able to do it. I'd have to relate to a sound engineer to explain what I want to do. When offers come to record in someone's studio then they have to understand that I come as a package with my carer, although a residential studio would not be a problem. If I'm successful then I'm going to set up a charity to send around a van with a quality engineer to give everyone a chance to record."

Sights On America

But there is a much more pressing reason for Paul to clinch a deal. "In the USA they are breaking new ground in spinal rejuvenation and robotics. My aim is to get an assessment at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami to see if they could maybe get me walking again. This is the reason for me trying to make a commercial success of my music. It's what I call the Horizontal Paul Music Project."

Paul's injuries began as the result of a 'chance in a million' accident while playing with his children. "The accident came as a real shock. Suddenly I couldn't get up in front of the mic and

HORIZONTAL PAUL readerzone

Paul Simpson writes and records his own music, publishes a string of web sites, is a recognised authority in many areas of technology and has recently been offered a recording/publishing contract on the basis of music he had made available through the Internet. Remarkably, all this has been achieved from his bed, where spinal injuries keep him with a special set of difficulties to overcome. "I've been 'horizontal' for around 14 years", grins Paul, disarmingly. "I would like to break new ground in my circumstances, and I want the chance to be on my feet to give my daughter away when she decides to marry."

"I am recognised by the *Guinness Book of Records* as the world's first bed-bound paraplegic to be offered a 5-year publishing/recording contract. The contract offer came from Norwegian label RTT. They became interested in me from my presence on the Internet and I then sent them a demo CD. They liked it and offered me a deal. I had music lawyers take a look at the contract and unfortunately it was just too much in their favour. I learned a lot in a very short time."

Paul is clearly not about to let that be the end of it, and is keen to open up negotiations with any other record label that is prepared to take him on. "I'd love to get into a proper studio, but I'm just not

sing. That was the start of a long downhill slide. I had a 50/50 operation that didn't go well for me. I actually didn't return to making music until 1997. After the accident I avoided music totally as I got so upset at what I was missing.

"I went into electronics and computers, and for eight years I ran an electronics repair shop. My bed was in the shop. I learned to take control of a situation when I first met people. It gives them time to gather their wits and puts them more at ease. Disability isn't the most important part of my life. It only really hit me when I recently saw a film of myself moving from room to room and I realised that I'm a disabled person. That came as a real shock to me.

"At one point I fell out of my wheelchair and damaged my right hand so badly that I had to close the business down overnight. This is now also the reason why my recordings have to be done in stages.

"The music came about when a friend of my son was thrown out of a band and asked me to write something for them. Once I opened up again, it was like opening a floodgate, and the music poured out. I wanted to throw myself into the music — to improve myself as much as I could."

And improve himself Paul has certainly done. His thirst for knowledge and the spreading and

report by: paul
ward

► utilisation of that knowledge is something that surfaces time and again as we talk. Paul has several web sites on the go and he keeps these updated on a regular basis. "In addition to the Music Project I have web sites that reflect my other interests, including amateur radio, the millennium bug and *PKZip*."

In fact, Paul has become so much of an authority on *PKZip* that his documentation has actually been licensed for use by the writers of the software themselves!

Wide World

Over the last two years Paul has worked on some recordings of original material. Encouraged by those around him he decided to see if his songs would stand up to a wider audience. "I sent some of my music to Radio Derby and they loved it. John Holmes contacted me; he was the one who nicknamed me 'Horizontal Paul'! They put on a 20-minute show of my music. The switchboard was jammed! Things just blossomed from there. I also went onto Talk Radio and the same thing happened. The BBC made a program about me and other sponsorship started flooding in from the likes of Pioneer, Roland and Yamaha. I consider myself to be extremely lucky. The BBC documentary came over well in many respects. I appreciate these opportunities. Producer Fiona McGuinness, who made *Face In The Crowd* for the BBC, was really put on the spot when editing the documentary. Fiona felt I had so much to offer in

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inspiring other disabled people, that the direction of the documentary changed. It made a great positive programme for the disabled, but unfortunately, did little to cover the Music Project as I had intended."

It is clear that Paul feels humbled by the support he has received from his sponsors, even if he feels they sometimes misunderstand what he is about: "I've sponsorship from many different places — I have to keep a running diary. I'm also keeping a diary of everything that happens. My life's story will be called either 'I told you I could do it', or 'It wasn't for want of trying'. I never want to be accused of not doing anything with my life. If you sit down and say 'I wish I'd done that' then you've made a



mistake — disability has nothing to do with it.

"I'm constantly working and thinking of ways to get my ideas across. I have concepts for the videos to my tracks that I run through in my mind. I have to be patient because sometimes I'm just not well enough to work. That can be frustrating."

Make Mine A Triple

"My main inspiration usually comes from rhythm. I get these from my Sound Canvas, QY70, or even my keyboards' built-in rhythms. From there I like to build tracks up that ramp into a crescendo. For vocals I double- or even triple-track myself for a thicker sound. I avoid bouncing or cutting and pasting. I'd rather work on the fly than learn to manipulate audio in that way. The manuals for Roland's VS multitrackers are awful — if you get one, buy the video! But the machines themselves are fabulous. The virtual tracks ensure that I can keep having a go until it sounds right. I try to keep everything in stereo. I've just swapped from a Roland VS880 to the 16-track VS1680, and I'm transferring some of my newest tracks across."

I mentioned to Paul that I had heard some quite complex rhythmic elements in much of his work. "The bass on some songs is made up of six separate tracks each playing in a different frequency range. I do it all by feel and I just go with what works. I'm very critical of my own work. On the latest mix of one of my songs, I have a lead underneath the main vocal that my ear picks up as being harsh, although everyone else seems not to hear."

So much for the music, but how does Paul approach his lyrics? "I can't write something that doesn't have a story to it. The music comes first, but the lyrics have to form a complete story. 'Empty School-Yard' is a protest song against the closure of schools. I have an idea for a track where a guy meets a transvestite in a bar and runs away, but keeps meeting back up with him wherever he goes. I want to do a comedy track for Christmas where Santa visits a dance hall. The scene is all clear in my mind, even down to Santa's accent!" ►

Paul's studio equipment resides in specially made units which provide access from the bed. The white cabinet contains his Pioneer D05 DAT recorder, A405 amplifier and CTW806DR twin cassette, Yamaha MD4 Minidisc multitracker and patchbay; to the right are Paul's Yamaha QY70 sequencer, Boss DR5 and DR550 drum machines, and Roland SC88 Sound Canvas module; in front of them is his Yamaha PSR8000 keyboard.

Glamorous Assistance

"I have been helped considerably after being contacted by Jyoti Mishra [the Sheffield-based artist who, in the guise of White Town, had a debut *Number 1* with 'Your Woman'], who has offered me some vocal effects equipment he no longer requires. Jyoti reckons I should produce my own material, but I am unable to do that without help. I have a dream that some major artist might give me the opportunity to record in a residential surrounding. I wonder if honesty could prevail, and that I could break new ground by building a following, even knowing that I am not going to be able to tour."

► We move from Paul's computer room to his studio, where his gear is ingeniously laid out to enable him to work comfortably from a centrally placed bed. Thanks to a combination of sliding panels and angle-mounts, all of the most oft-used devices are at Paul's fingertips. "I could not even have used the sponsored equipment if REMAP (a charity specialising in building bespoke aids where none are commercially available) had not built the bedside units for me," he acknowledges. To the side of his head is mounted a mic stand for the Shure SM58. Paul is happy with this microphone, but needed help to get a decent level from it into his recorder. "A Hootersound B1 preamp has now cured the level matching problems: it's a good, clean amp. At the same time I also bought a pop-shield so I'm no longer having to avoid plosives while singing. That made a huge difference to the quality and feel of my vocals."

Loop-Free Zone

Whilst he's keen to embrace technology where he feels it has something to offer him, Paul is something of a traditionalist in certain aspects of his music. "I don't want to use loops. I want to keep everything raw and played live. Something inside me says that someone will listen and say 'that's manufactured'. Against that I think I can be excused for one duff note in a five-minute track. People keep asking me where I got this and that sample, but I'm too busy making my own end results to mess around with sampling!"

Given the depth of Paul's knowledge of PCs, I was initially surprised to discover that he does not use one in the studio. I also wondered if he had been tempted into trying any of the new virtual instruments. "I don't want to do everything in a computer. I like to manipulate real instruments. I do use the computer to create my Internet samples, and RealNetworks sponsored the software to allow me to do that. But if I had the money I'd get a Macintosh tomorrow. They are much better machines than PCs. PCs are essentially just cheap Macs — that is the way that Windows is going. Every time you buy a Mac it will do what you want it to do — forget backward compatibility, just move on!"

Paul is constantly keeping himself busy with new work. "I have just finished recording 'I'm So Blue', which is a country song. I've also written a couple of dance/pop songs called 'I'll Be There To Catch You' and 'Gotta Move On', the latter of which features my wife on backing vocals. I plan to enter a revamped recording of one of my older songs, 'Cruel World', for entry into the Song For Europe 2000 contest."

I asked Paul what plans he has for new music. "The next thing I want to do is a dance track based on a marching rhythm. It will start as a march, but I promise that within two minutes it will transform from a march into a dance track. I want to break all the barriers and ideas that everyone has about marching bands." Somehow I find myself believing him and I'm keen to hear the results!

"I recently I wrote a song called 'Jordan's Lullaby' for my six-year-old nephew. It apparently



Paul demonstrates his singing technique, with the Roland VS1680 which is his main multitrack recorder in the foreground.

had to have fireballs, presents and Christmas trees in it! I did do it and I got everything into it that he wanted. I will record it one day, but it is for him. I start yawning every time I play it! Maybe it's psychosomatic. The first time I started work on a dance track I felt my legs begin to move!"

Do-Main Man

And what of Paul's Internet work? "I have a whole new Internet domain, www.horizontal-paul.com, designed completely around children. I believe that if we sort things out at an early age then the communication between able and disabled people can be so much better. My site encourages kids to set up pages. There's a part of the net called Eduweb (www.eduweb.co.uk) with a section called At School. It's a focal point of the Internet in the classroom. My project has just been vetted and accepted for inclusion there. They see the value of what I'm doing despite my not being a teacher. I'd like it to be a way for schools to make contact with each other. I will make it a point to respond to all the messages I get. Many organisations are good at getting web sites set up but they never respond to email. I would like a sponsor for ISDN to support this project, but I haven't managed to get one yet. I wouldn't have been able to do what I have without my sponsors."

As if all of this wasn't enough Paul also has plans to make his own documentary and write a book! If anyone can move mountains then I'd place a lot of faith in this man — and it's clear that Paul has to believe in himself too. "I have so much faith that I'll make it to America for the operation and I know I'll have done it myself. If they can't do anything for me then fair enough. But what I am not prepared for is not to have the chance. I'll get to America for a complete assessment of the latest options available to me."

And that is what drives him. He is a man who it seems to me has never been happy to take 'no' for an answer. If anyone is foolish enough to put a barrier in his way then be prepared, because Horizontal Paul is unlikely to take it lying down... SOS

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