Bedsitter Sunday Blues

*The Influence of the Demonstration Recording on British Music Culture*

**Episode 1: Producing a Demo 1960 – 2000** *(see supporting material of the technological development of home recording technology)*

*Identify an up and coming band and require them to produce an album of material using technology and techniques from the three/four distinct eras in home recording aesthetics/pragmatics.*

1. Open-Reel and Crystal Mics
2. Cassette Recorders and Crystal Mics.
3. Better Mics – Shure SM58s, Shure 545s etc
4. Cheap mic mixers (4 in 1 out) – battery operated ‘Realistic’ brand
5. Sound on Sound Dubbing – The Revox A77 *(cheaper 2nd hand models available after the release of the B77 – see front cover of supporting material)*
6. Four Channel Multi-track & Mixer – the ‘demo studio’ – the band will need to record and mix three tracks in four hours – typical at that time. *(Black Ark Studios, Kingston, Jamaica –Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry)*
7. Setting Up Drums and Amps (1 hour).
8. Recording the backline of Drums, Bass, Keys & Rhythm Guitar.
9. Recording the vocal and the guitar solo.
10. Mixing and mastering onto ¼” tape.
11. The Porta-studio – the band must record two songs. One in a bedroom and one in a rehearsal space.
12. The Hybrid System – Fostex R8 recording acoustic sources like vocals, guitars and drums, synced to a MIDI system – possibly using pre-prepared arrangements and recording to a click-track – perhaps exploring the pop/rock fusion with sampled dance beats of the late 1980s *(Happy Mondays, Primal Scream, The Stone Roses)*
13. The Digital Audio Workstation – ProTools LE/ Logic Pro 7/Cubase Audio etc. This would probably be shot in the bands own space with kit they use today.

This can be intercut with members of both signed and unsigned bands from the different eras *(see supporting material)* discussing the demos they made, how they made them and the reasons why they took the time and effort. These old demos will be used quite sparingly in the programme itself, but would make excellent web-based extras – the band sits down – probably in a multi-camera studio, on a sofa – wide shot and some close-up work on the fly, whilst their demo is played. We can look at their reactions etc. In terms of budget – it would probably be cheaper to book a studio and pay for travel expenses for the subjects, rather than location single camera shoots around the country. (We can use the TV Studio at Royal Holloway – digital with uncompressed capture facilities.)

**Episode 2: A Demonstrable Effect:** *How home recording influenced music and popular culture in the 1980s & 90s*

In the late 1970s and early 1980s independent labels emerged from a variety sources ranging from small recording studios setup to produce demos for local unsigned bands, to independent record shops like Rough Trade, who would record artists to sell in their shop and through mail order.

The Punk Rock Movement – a reaction against the ‘progressive-rock aristocracy’ and musical virtuosity, where the technical limitations of a small four or eight track demo-studio no longer needed to be disguised or overcome. Essentially, this was a return to the DIY sensibilities of the 1950s skiffle craze.

The distancing of rich, established stadium bands like Yes, Jethro Tull, Procul Harem, Caravan, Pink Floyd\* who would record in 24 track studios, using high end equipment – both in terms of the recording technology and the performance technology, particularly synthesisers and amplifiers, along with highly sophisticated stage shows. Aspiring musicians could not compete with these huge band franchises and sought a different route. In addition, the social climate of Britain was to radically alter – something not addressed by these acts, who typically explored grandiose, often pastoral or pre-industrial themes in musical ‘movements’. These bands quickly became culturally irrelevant.

*\* Pink Floyd actually managed to avoid this – interesting. I think because they didn’t trawl pastoral Tolkienesque themes, but explored the notion of The Human Condition. Also, whether you were a Punk, Hippy, Mod, Rocker, Rude Boy – the pleasure of putting Dark Side of The Moon on the turntable, fitting bulky headphones and smoking a spliff whilst listening to the punctuated emptiness set within the lush tones of Am/C progressions; and the fragile thematic dissonance of the narrative was too precious to discard.*

Where previously, these bands attempted to recreate their sophisticated studio recordings within the live event, Punk, Pub Rock and New Wave acts returned to the 1960s approach (see supporting material) of the *recorded* track recreating the *performed* event as the stadium rock dominance of the 1970s gave way to the regional local ‘live’ events in pubs and small venues.

**Punk:** The Sound of the Suburbs *(mainly London based, usually Bromley)*

**New Wave:** The development of the Punk aesthetic, with perhaps greater attention to production and arrangement as successful ‘Punk’ bands moved into New Wave. *(Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Cure)*

**Indie\*:** The Return of The Regions - The emergence of regional movements supported and promoted by local entrepreneurs – separate and distinct from London based major label rostas. A great many of these new labels were founded by bands who had acquired a significant local following, but were unsuccessful in getting signed to a major label because:

1. They were deemed too ‘niche’.
2. Major label A&R representatives never travelled beyond London, so regional bands had to play London gigs, where they had no indigenous following.
3. Also, let’s not forget that A&R departments rarely listened to unsolicited demo tapes.
4. Major commercial labels tended to be reactive rather than proactive. Additionally, they often distributed the Indie label releases and got their cut in that way, with no risk to themselves. If an Indie band broke through to the mainstream, they would sign that band. Eventually, they just bought out the Indie labels, which became ‘boutique’ labels for mainstream bands – *(Blur on the Food label, set up by David Balfe in 1984 and became part of EMI in 1988. Balfe had also formed Zoo records in 1978, before it folded in 1982)*

**Manchester:**

Factory Records: Began as a club in 1974 and became a label in 1979 when it released an EP ‘The Factory Sampler’, featuring acts that played in the club. Developed throughout the 1980s, working on a contract-less basis, offering complete creative control to the bands and splitting the profits 50:50% .

*Joy Division, New Order, Happy Mondays, A Certain Ratio, The Durutti Column.*

**Liverpool:**

Zoo Records formed in 1978 and based in Liverpool. It folded in 1982 – probably because it was initially formed by Big in Japan band members Bill Drummond and David Balfe, which itself folded in 1979. The bands listed below, all released singles on Zoo, but they had signed to other labels before they achieved any commercial success.

*Big In Japan, The Teardrop Explodes, Echo and the Bunnymen.*

**North of England/Sheffield:**

Fast Product Records/ Industrial Records/Rough Trade Records

*The Human League, Heaven 17, Cabaret Voltaire, Comsat Angels, Throbbing Gristle.*

**Birmingham/The Midlands:**

2 Tone Records (Ska)

*The Specials, Madness (briefly), Bad Manners, The Beat, The Selector, Elvis Costello & The Attractions (before they signed to Stiff records)*

The Singer/Songwriter

The ability to record good quality demos using a portastudio in the 80s created a new form of popular music – the introspective singer/songwriter. Less of an impact on the singles charts, nevertheless, these artists and bands sold plenty of albums. I include bands here because a singer/songwriter would form a band in order to play their material live. These introspective artists tended to also have a socio-political manifesto, almost invariably left wing and reactive to the huge societal changes, particularly in the North of England during the Thatcher era, as Britain was transformed from its manufacturing base to the service industries.

*\*The term ‘Indie’ is derived from an NME cassette released in 1986 entitled CD86, featuring, most significantly, Primal Scream. I disagree that the Indie scene was born in 1986 – I would argue that this marked the beginning of the end of the Indie scene as small labels were taken over by major labels and became almost like a boutique label for their headlining acts.*

**Episode 3: The Egalitarianisation of the Processes of Production and Distribution.**

Much of this is covered in the supporting material. This programme would be a more social history orientated output.

The Digital Revolution:

1. The ability to record and produce high quality studio recordings with relatively little financial investment, meaning that bands no longer needed outside investment to produce a commercial product.
2. Niche marketing. More money is made touring than in record sales and bands can now enjoy a successful career without ever signing to a label of any kind. The sale of band merchandise at gigs, which as been happening for decades has been augmented by the rise of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Bands will either have a Facebook page, or their own dedicated website, where fans buy music and other products.
3. iTunes. Bands can release their material on iTunes and promote it in gigs and on social networking sites.

I know everything is a bit wide-ranging and we need to spend some time in developing a structure – this is really an overview of the potential subject area. Our approach will be dictated by how this is broadcast – radio/digital TV etc. However, if we are prepared, we can cover much of this material at the same time, by identifying interview subjects and developing an effective question-set. However, it will also require significant research in development.

Have a look and see if you think there is potential here. There have been quite a few music documentaries in recent years that could guide us:

If It Ain’t Stiff BBC4 (2007)

Do It Yourself – The Story of Rough Trade (2009)

Chasing Sound – The Les Paul Story (2008)

Factory – Manchester from Joy Division to The Happy Mondays (2008)

Sergeant Peppers 40th Anniversary (2007) – *contemporary bands attempt to re-create Sgt Pepper tracks at Abbey Road Studio 2, using the same equipment that The Beatles used – and the same engineer (Geoff Emerick)*

Synth Britannia (2009)

Prog Rock Britannia (2007)

The 70s/80s/90s House (2009)

Demo Britannia!!!?

Extra:

As in episode 2, an artist creates demos based on available and affordable technology of the period. In this case, it could be a DJ/Producer, creating dance/rhythm based music…..

1. Musique Concrete techniques (1950 – 1980)

Pierre Schaeffer, John Cage, Delia Derbyshire (Dr Who Theme) – the use of tape loops creating rhythmic patterns.

1. Electronica (1950 - ) Stockhausen – use of acoustmatic sound sources.
2. Fairlight Music Computer (1980-1987)

Kick started modern dance music. Very limited 4 bit sampling (na na na na nineteen)

1. Akai S900/950 sampler

The first affordable rack mounted sampler. 12 bit, with about eight seconds of sampling. Disc loaded sounds, multi-timbral polyphonic. Still popular in the 1990s. Fatboy Slim used it for his multi-platinum album “You Come A Long Way Baby”