

Eskimo Joe on Pro Tools

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Black Fingernails, Red Wine; the new album from Eskimo Joe self produced on Pro Tools

Stephen Bruel

Perth-based three-piece band Eskimo Joe will release their latest album *Black Fingernails, Red Wine* through the Warners label on June 10. The first single and title track depicts a major shift in sound from their previous ARIA award winning double platinum album *A Song Is A City*. Self-produced within the Digidesign Pro Tools environment, the band has gone for a 'stadium rock' feel for this album.

Eskimo Joe member Joel Quartermain describes how Pro Tools was used during all stages of the album's production.

"One of the great things about Pro Tools is that we used it all the way through," Joel says. "We used the Mbox for 'scratch demos' and initial song creation and structure, then another Pro Tools rig for more elaborate demos during pre-production, and then finally a HD rig in the studio for the final recording."

Formed in 1998, Eskimo Joe has used Pro Tools from day one, since Kav Temperley bought a 001 system, and first worked with the band's other member Stu MacLeod.

"My first recording session with Stu was on Pro Tools," Kav says.

Kav explains the important role Pro Tools plays not only in the pre-production process, but in the composition of songs as well.

"I start with a raw version of a song and record it with my Mbox (these days), usually with a microphone set up for guitar and vocals," Kav says. "I'll then take it to the guys and we will workshop it through jamming and write a bridge together."

The intuitive editing functions within Pro Tools allow the band to quickly explore new ideas for the song and to work out structures during this early demoing process.

"The demoing part is where we use the editing functions of Pro Tools to layer stuff up, cut and paste, change arrangements and work on the structure of a song," Kav says. "It helps keep the process moving, not getting bogged down with technical or operational issues, being able to work quickly on the creativity side."

Stu explains how Kav's initial recordings of vocal and guitar are quickly arranged into a fuller sound.

"The music behind the song gets written during the demo process," Stu says. "We experiment with all sorts of sounds at this stage, writing key parts and character sounds that we take into the bigger studio later on."

It's also this transferability of Pro Tools that the band uses well, allowing them the option of using either original sounds recorded during the demo process, or attempting to create similar or more suitable sounds in the bigger studios.

"We take Pro Tools LE sessions into the bigger studios and open them up on Pro Tools HD systems," Kav says. "In our song Forever Young, we lifted the keyboard sound from our LE session as we could not replicate it in studio."

This feature also worked for the band in reverse on albums preceding *Black Fingernails Red Wine*.

"With previous albums we took the final recordings home and did a lot of post-production," Kav says. "We incorporated and introduced 'psychedelic sounds' and re-mixed them using Pro Tools."

In a departure from previous albums, Eskimo Joe self-produced *Black Fingernails, Red Wine*. This allowed the band the freedom to achieve the sounds they wanted 'first time round' and the result was a minimal amount of post-production, and a lot of time spent in pre-production.

The decision to make a 'stadium rock' album also help guided the production process to a greater reliance on pre-production.

"We knew the type of sounds we were after, so we spent a lot of time on pre-production capturing the sounds, notes and rhythms we wanted so that when we went into the studio it was basically to capture performance, with little reliance on post-production," Kav says.

Budget wise, it also made sense for the band to spend the majority of time in pre-production on their own Pro Tools system.

"When you are paying so many dollars a day for a larger studio, you don't want to be sitting around working out what you want to play," Joel says. "We don't pay for the demoing process, so we can afford to experiment and work out the parts and sounds there and then."

Black Fingernails, Red Wine was recorded and engineered by Matt Lovell at The Grove studios on the Central Coast of New South Wales. Matt's credits include Silverchair, Midnight Oil, Grinspoon and Something For Kate.

When capturing performance, particularly vocal takes, speed is essential so the artist can concentrate on just one thing; performance. The band was impressed with Matt's skills using Pro Tools.

"Matt is a Pro Tools gun," Joel says. "His work, particularly on vocal comping was very good and helped capture the best performance quickly."

The guys were also impressed with Matt's microphone technique in helping the band achieve the sounds they were after.

"We pretty much put everything through amplifiers and recorded them in the main room on microphones and into Pro Tools," Kav says. "This made it sound like we were playing through a PA system, which was what we were after."

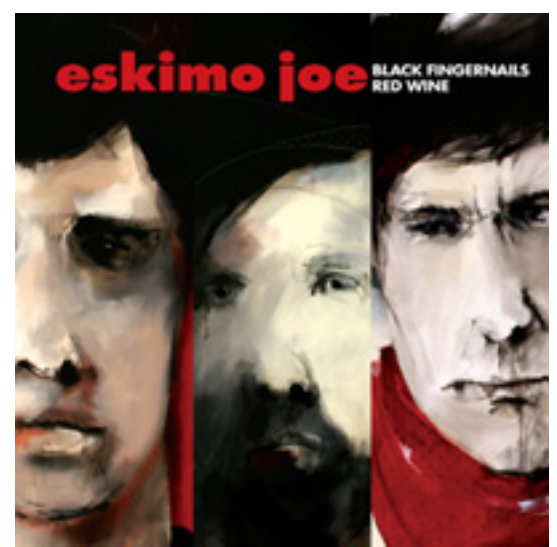
"We had about 15 microphones on the kick drum for the intro to *Black Fingernails, Red Wine*," Joel says. "This included a ribbon microphone, which we sampled to help achieve that 'thumping' kick track."

Another technique the band used was a combination of "live strings" and sampled strings running through an amplifier and recorded with a microphone. They hired a five-part string section to play the string lines Stu had written, the band playing all other parts on the album.

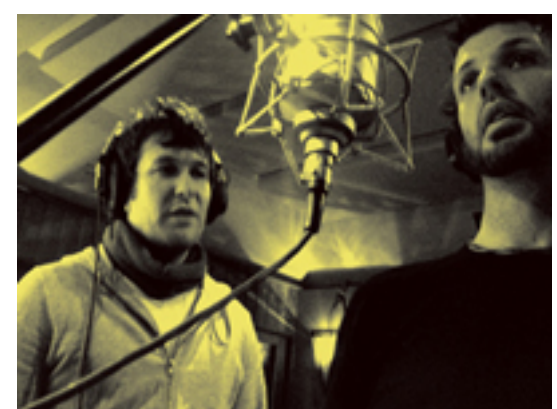
"I really like the 'dynamics' a live string section can produce," Stu says. "I added a sampled string sound underneath the live tracks, and rode the volume levels up and down to create a 'swirling' effect."

The band will support the upcoming release of *Black Fingernails, Red Wine* with an Australian tour starting in July, but the role of Pro Tools doesn't end there. Each band member has an Mbox and PowerBook, which they take on the road with them.

"On the road I like to sometimes escape into 'studio land'," Kav says. "Even if I am not recording anything, I can still muck around and mix, come up with ideas and create something."



Eskimo Joe album released June 10



Kav and Stu singing on the album