

**"Digidesire" for Grafton TAFE**

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By Stephen Bruel

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Music has just got a little more technical for recent North Coast Institute of TAFE Grafton campus (NCIT) music graduate Kristina Edwards. As winner of the institute's inaugural 'Digidesign Award of Excellence' for her outstanding music technology efforts in the Advanced Diploma in Contemporary Music course, Kristina received an Mbox, and as a single mother of three teenage musicians, she hopes that they will let her use it sometime - after she teaches them how!

"Back in the old days I could write on paper a few chords and record songs with a 'bomby' cassette player with the most embarrassing result," says Kristina. "Now I can put heaps of the arrangement together and get great results."

Kristina has been working as a music teacher, concert band conductor with the Clarence Valley Conservatorium, musician and arranger for over 20 years. An accomplished player of clarinet, saxophone, piano and guitar, Kristina decided to "skill up" in the area of music technology and enrolled in the two-year course.

"I have always had access to computers and the internet but never had the confidence to experiment or use the music programs available," says Kristina.

Now equipped with her award and qualification, Kristina aims to master using her Mbox at home, and then teach her students so they can explore more sound possibilities.

"I was surprised how much I enjoyed actually using the mixers and effects when I knew what all the buttons and dials meant," says Kristina.

Kristina appreciates that although a concert band is a fantastic vehicle to put together a large number of students, it doesn't necessarily cater for their creative needs.

"I hope to incorporate the 'digidesire' into my students," says Kristina. "That essence of excitement that all musicians find when introduced to the creative world of Digidesign recording technology."

**NCIT Head Teacher of Music, Arts & Media Bruce Vickery hands 'Digidesign Award of Excellence' student winner Kristina Edwards her Mbox prize**

NCIT Head Teacher of Music, Arts & Media Bruce Vickery can appreciate Kristina's 'digidesire', with a personal history of using Digidesign products spanning back to 1992 with the "Session 8" digital audio workstation. Bruce is trained in musical composition and has been involved in the music industry for over 25 years as a writer, performer, and engineer in both studio and live environments. He currently has a home studio set up for 5.1 surround sound featuring a Digidesign HD1 system with a 96 I/O, Control 24 work surface and running Pro Tools 6.4 software.

"I have engineered & produced 100s of CDs using Pro Tools", says Bruce.

Since joining the NCIT in 1996, Bruce has noticed a growth in demand for contemporary music courses and has seen the NCIT positively respond to this increased demand.

"The investment in a fully equipped purpose built facility for contemporary music is a testament to the NCIT's commitment

to deliver quality contemporary music programs," says Bruce.

Due to be completed in 2005, this new facility will consist of seven new rooms and a full interior acoustic treatment. Bruce is hopeful that upon completion of the complex NCIT will be in a position to offer students a greater range of courses, including Digidesign specific courses.

"Official Digidesign courses are currently not available," says Bruce. "On completion of the new facility we intend on running Pro Tools 101 initially, and then move onto higher level Digidesign Pro Tools courses soon after."

The new rooms will include a computer laboratory, surround sound suite, control room, vocal booth, video suite, large rehearsal room and small band rehearsal room. All rooms will be patched for audio and video work, linked by a computer network and equipped for an integrated audio and video solution. The main control room features a Pro Tools HD3 Accel system with six 96 I/Os hooked up to Apple G5 computers, and Genelec & Blue Sky monitor speakers.

The surround sound suite features a HD2 system with a Control 24 work surface and two 192 I/O audio interfaces. The computer lab features 16 Digidesign 002 integrated control surface and work stations running Pro Tools 6.7 audio software on Apple G5 computers. Audio-video integration software, DV Toolkit, is also used.

"Digidesign products are industry standard," says Bruce. "We need to deliver courses that deal with industry standards."

For assistance, Bruce turned to Brisbane-based professional audio specialists Musiclab Pty Ltd Managing Director Doug Watt, and Pro Audio Sales Supervisor Russell Stork.

"Bruce Vickery was looking to develop the NCIT Grafton campus into a world class music education facility," says Russell. "I believe when the building work is completed this will be achieved."

From its inception in 1986, Musiclab has grown from an audio and keyboard repair service into one of Australia's major professional audio retailers. Doug attributes this success to "always striving to provide excellent service to customers and forming strong relationships with clients".

"In the case of the project at NCIT, Russell regularly visited the site (a five-hour drive one-way) for discussions with the academic staff, designers and consultants," says Doug. "Like most projects, this one went through many phases of conception, design, re-design, quotes, funding changes, re-quotes and concept changes."

Nestled on the banks of the Clarence River, with easy access to nearby pristine beaches and rainforests, and a proposed purpose built facility featuring the latest industry standard digital recording hardware and software from Digidesign, NCIT Grafton campus is an ideal place to study contemporary music and music technology.

Kristina enrolled in this course for these reasons as well as the opportunity to make more friends in the music industry, and to finally earn a qualification and keep her employed in the industry she loves.

"I finished the Advanced Diploma of Music which is my first music qualification after a rather long apprenticeship," says Kristina. "Using Pro Tools has opened up for me a whole new area of personal creativity and excitement."