

Fairlight People

It will probably seem like not much to write about, but after eighteen years, I have sold my Fairlight CMI Series III. I just thought I would wrap up some memories of the people who came along with the Fairlight, that I needs thank for making my life rich in fun and adventure, wherever they are now.

The early eighties found me busy being a guitarist-songwriter-record producer. I was a pretty early adopter of drum machines and synthesizers to help demo my songs at home. This brought on a certain amount of work in the studios as a programmer and equipment renter.

These were fun days, when young guys like me could hear a new record on the radio and instantly know which machines and patches were being used. And when we were stumped, it was even better. Some records started coming from England, by the likes of Peter Gabriel, with sounds that kept me wandering around the NAMM show looking for from whence they came! This word “Fairlight” started being noticed on the credits. Rumours they were made by gnomes in Australia. Very strange!

A producer I had worked for several times, named **Zeo** (née Jerry, I will leave off his last name as he has a certain strong sense of privacy), bought a Series II. He was a wild fellow, he even had the outer panels chromed to make his Fairlight look cool, the first of what I came to think of as Fairlight cowboys. Strange, intelligently independent with a hunger for an eclectic world, Jerry scored some films and made some records with his machine. I spent a day at his apartment with my jaw on the ground. It might have just been the light pen, but I wanted one. I rented his for a couple of things I produced, but I could tell it was going to take some time to be able to cost effectively wrangle the device.

At NAMM of '86, Fairlight announced the Series III, and I decided I had to take the plunge. At the time, from a new office on Westwood Blvd., the people at Fairlight USA included the likes of;

Geordie Hormel: Although I did not get very friendly with him, Geordie (the builder and owner of Village Recording and a famous heir to SPAM), with his long hair old hippie look combined with a self assurance, was a great atmospheric, spiritual presence as owner and bankroller of Fairlight USA. A kind of loner cowboy sort himself.

David Bross: A gentle but somewhat strange representative of the machines antipodal home, Dave was the main salesman. of the sort who would promise almost anything to make a sale. In retrospect, I see that stuck between customers like myself, and an ambitiously enthusiastic (if not always so realistic) group in Sydney manufacturing the machines, he would not have much room but to promise. On my original invoice it states the CMI would be equipped with music printing software (which was given up on and never came to be). I seem to remember, in the days of the long knives when Fairlight Australia and Geordie Hormel parted ways, that Dave became new president of Fairlight USA for a short spell.

Will Alexander: Along with one other fellow, whose name I have now forgotten, Will held down the repair shop in the early days. Some tech guys are geeks, and some are cool, Will came more from the school of cool. He made the shop a fun place to hang around and pick up tips from. I think he may have been a bit caught between the forces as ownership was shifting, in any case he moved on to, what I hear, a long career as Keith Emersen's keyboard wizard.

Kevin Crossly: Another independent, I never knew who he may or may not have worked for. A beach boy blonde, twinkly eyed gnome from. I think, New Zealand. He was associated with Geordie Hormel. Always traveling from here to there, sleeping on couches, betwixt one deal or another. A real, typical Fairlight cowboy.

Paul Broucek: Brought in to run Fairlight USA, I would have to say Australia made a good choice. Having, as a very young man, been part of the engineering/sound editing crew on "Apocalypse Now", he came from the Bay area with a rep as an engineer. But his tall stature and boyishly disarming, warm smile made him not only a good salesman, but a good manager of what was a really disparate group of typically bedeviled creative people. Although, at first, he didn't look much more comfortable in suit and tie than any recording studio rat, he quickly changed

Fairlight face from a charming bunch of screwballs to a business like solidity. Although I was among those who were somewhat uncomfortable with this change (from a long line of hippiedom, I am), I would say that Paul made the most business that possibly could have been made from the extraordinarily expensive sampler. Without this period of formal business strength, I do not think the later incarnation of the Fairlight post-production period, could ever have happened.

Paul was very generous and kind to me. As most machines were bought by specific artists, composers and facilities, there were only a few of us “rough and readies” out there to rent and program for anyone. Paul sent all kinds of business my way including the underwriting by Fairlight of my inclusion at the Sundance Film Institute for two years. He also, to help promote the machines, set me up with a second machine on a stage at Paramount. Although this was of a mixed success business wise, it was a wonderful adventure for me, and where I met many, many people who I was to work with, be friends with and respect to this day.

Among those Los Angeles “rough and readies”, besides myself, there was **Michael Weatherwax**, and later on **Hein Hoven**, In the midwest originally, out of the Gand Music dealership was **Todd Herreman** (mostly associated with Prince and the like). **Stephen Dewey**, coming out of the Thompson Twins, was mostly associated with keyboard guru Michael Boddicker and later with his own great success in sound design and music for commercials. People who never made the shift from Series II to III were ol’ **Zeo** and **Champ Davenport**, they became more involved with their own music, which is what eventually started to happen to me.

Dan DeSouza: Dan was “product specialist” for at least a few years at Fairlight USA. He was then, what can be rare today, someone who knew his stuff. And he was a great guy (wherever he is, I am sure he still is). As software upgrades came fast and furiously, he was as excited and involved as us owners. I must say this for Fairlight in general, maybe because of its small base of owners, but there did feel like there was a feedback connection between us and the gnomes in Sydney. One felt that if one made an offhand suggestion, it could well pop up in an upgrade a month or two down the line. This was, also, largely due to the all important next guy.

Andrew “Dr. Bombay” Brent (the Brenster): Fairlight needed to rent back my CMI for a week, in order to demonstrate it’s abilities to a customer (the US Army I think in this case).

They would send over the new tech, fresh from Australia, to pick it up. Andrew, with full on accent, appeared at my door. In what I thought was some insolence, he spurned the use of the road case (it was too big to get in the back of his Honda anyhow), tossed the 200 odd pound CPU into the air and onto his back, and off he went! Why I.....! Although not particularly tall, Andrew had a breadth that might make a tree think of moving if Andrew thought it was a good idea. Personally I babied my machine. I had read the descriptions of how hard disk worked, and had taken the warnings to heart. With my very brave girlfriend's help, we would slowly, slowly carry that CPU up the stairs. I treated it as if it was nitroglycerine. It was "The Wages Of Fear" (with Yves Montand, great movie) in my house every night! Now here comes this young Aussie upstart and he tossed my baby around. He must not know what and with whom he was dealing with! I was going to check that machine closely on it's return.

Of course, it turns out, that Andrew knew a Series III better than anyone else I have ever met. Like a surgeon who thinks nothing of opening a human body and mucking around with the parts, all Series' IIIs were alike to Andrew, and whatever was wrong, he could fix'em. Although maybe not as cool as Will Alexander, Andrew was just as much fun. He had the serious background and study, but he also liked to laugh. Over the years, the times I have prayed for "Dr. Bombay's" appearance, and the great relief and sense of "things are all right now" when he appeared makes him very special, like a pediatrician who comes on a house call when you think your baby is dying in the middle of the night. There were a few other guys who had also worked on the assembly line in Sydney giving them deep knowledge, they include **Peter Wielk** in London (or is he now Sydney, again?).

But it was Andrew, when Fairlight Australia went belly up in the late eighties/early nineties, who had the wherewithal to put together a company to buy spare parts off of the bankrupt carcass and set up shop in Hollywood. His Digital Support Group kept us all working at a time when our machines were in their prime earning years.

As the new Fairlight came along with a strong move away from CMI and towards post-production (the only workable business plan), and as the world became crowded with cheap Akai samplers and the like, the Fairlight CMI family slowly dissolved. There have been many others whos' names escape me now, and whole other families of Fairlight people in other locals (this

one being L.A.) and I apologize for the creaky memory.

For the last five years, my machine has been in storage. A year or two ago, with an eye to selling her, I bought one last update from Horizontal Productions. But I have become an academic, and I have many other devices to do the same work. Although nothing will ever sound as good (again) as a Fairlight, and the elegant solution of combined software that Kim and Peter (our fathers who art somewhere now) created (with a tip of the hat to Steve Vance) will always make the modern hodge-podge look somehow kludged, I have sent my dear machine to live with a bright, younger, computer engineer (David Wilson). Someone with the appreciation, energy and know-how to keep her running. Like Neve eqs, Fairchild compressors, 1176, LA2s, C12s, Elam 251s U67, 47s etc, I will always think of the Fairlight as one of those small miracles that arise out of the chaos that are human dreams and works. I will be forever grateful I got to be a small part of it.

Peter Kaye

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