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B R I T I S H P R O D U C E R

# Rupert Hine

IT'S NOT HOW SYNTHESIZED YOU MAKE IT.  
IT'S HOW YOU MAKE IT SYNTHESIZED

**A**nyone who has spent more than two decades laboring in ill-lit studios with ill-tempered artists to produce 80-odd albums can be forgiven for looking a bit haggard. Yet Rupert Hine shows not the least sign of wear. What's most striking about him, as he sits on a noisy terrace in central London's Bayswater area, is the infectious enthusiasm with which he discusses his trade. At times he seems like the proverbial kid in a toy shop. It's an analogy he himself likes using, but with a rather different meaning.

"It's fantastic what you can do with modern keyboards and studio technology," he says. "I don't want to sound negative about it. It *is* brilliant. The technology is stunning and exciting, and it makes it possible for you to achieve anything you want on a very moderate budget. The problem is that character and individuality are disappearing from music. We're all like five-year-old kids locked in this dream toy shop, in huge danger of not seeing the wood for the trees anymore."

Mixed metaphors aside, here speaks a man who has used computer technology and keyboards to such effect that Mick Jagger once asked him who was in the rhythm section on Tina Turner's "Better Be Good to Me." Little did Mick realize that Hine had not only produced that track, but had played and programmed the lot, barring the guitars. If you can fool a roots-oriented rocker like Mick Jagger, you must have something going for you.

As a producer, songwriter, keyboard player, and singer, Hine has been extraordinarily prolific since he was first captured on vinyl in the late '60s. He recorded two solo albums on Purple Records

BY PAUL TINGEN

ILLUSTRATION: SALIM YAQUAB



## Rupert Hine

in the early '70s, then went on to produce the likes of Kevin Ayers, Yvonne Elliman, and Camel. He returned to singing and producing his own music in the late '70s with the band Quantum Jump. In the early '80s, he released three solo albums, followed later by two records with his band Thinkman.

It was also during the '80s that Hine's producing career took off when he worked with such artists as Tina Turner, Howard Jones, Bob Geldof, Saga, and more recently Stevie Nicks and Rush. Now there's a new

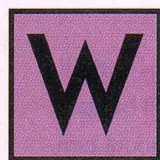
Hine-produced Rush album, *Roll the Bones*, and soon to be released is his first solo album since 1983, tentatively scheduled for late this year or early in '92 and titled *The Deep End*.

Enthusiastic and youthful as he appears, this English rock survivor has been tempered a bit by time. Gone is the dark, brooding, almost *angst*-ridden image he used to portray. Today his hair is a curious mixture of white and gray, with some touches of beige. His face is as long and angular as ever, but the eyes have mellowed and the smile broadened.

In conversation, he keeps steering back to what matters most to him today—which is exactly what mattered most in years past. The technology of music, the sounds, the

studios, the computers and keyboards, they're all very interesting, but he is quick to remind his listeners that they're only tools. "What has to be the primary point of music is to alter someone's emotional and mental state," he insists. "If people are in exactly the same state at the end of your piece of music as they were at the beginning, then the whole thing has been meaningless. You have to think about what it is that you want to communicate, even before you start recording. In my opinion, that's not often done. Ninety-five percent of the people simply press buttons in trial and error, rather than stop to think about what they really want to achieve. Computer and keyboard technology too often leads the way, because it's so enticing. It's so easy to get sidetracked

## ONE WORLD



Without doubt, the most extraordinary project on Rupert Hine's resumé is *One World One Voice*.

Though not yet available in the States, it's a milestone in recording history, packed with enough statistical power to warrant inclusion in the *Guinness*

*Book of Records*: 292 musicians from 16 countries contributed to its making. The team that put the project together travelled 44,964 air miles in 62 days, filling 36,000 feet of 2" multitrack tape, 48,000 feet of 1" multitrack tape, 110 DAT cassettes, and 100 audio cassettes.

But more important than numbers is the spirit of *One World One Voice*. It emerged from an idea by Kevin Godley (formerly of 10cc and now one of the world's foremost video directors) to create a "chain tape" with musicians from all over the world contributing. The chain ended last year with an international week of television programs devoted to tackling the environmental and poverty crises threatening the survival of many species on the planet, including ours.

The overriding theme of the week was to show that we are all in this world together, that we have a choice between one world and no world at all. Peter Gabriel, one of the contributors, put it this way: "Pollution doesn't respect national and political boundaries. We can be certain that what we do in one country will have lasting and dramatic effects on people in other countries. The only thing I know that spreads as fast as pollution is music. So in the same way that the musicians in the *One World One Voice* project have come together in a spirit of good faith with absolutely no idea in advance of how we would work together, governments must come together if they are really going to meet the challenge of

righting environmental wrongs head-on."

Godley's idea of a chain tape was adopted by the BBC, the producers of the program, who employed Rupert Hine as musical director and Godley as video director for this "world symphony." *One World One Voice* was broadcast to an audience of one billion people in 20 nations in late May 1990. Contributing artists included Suzanne Vega, David Gilmour, Robbie Robertson, Howard Jones, Laurie Anderson, Eddy Grant, Bob Geldof, Chrissie Hynde, and a host of performers from around the globe—Milton Nascimento, Ray Lema, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Geoffrey Oryema, Remmy Ongala, and others.

It all began with a backing track that Sting prepared with Afrika Bambaataa. "We started in New York on February 28," Hine remembers, "doing overdubs to the piece with several rap artists, Steve Stevens [guitarist with Michael Jackson], and others. Although Kevin Godley's original idea was for all artists to overdub to Sting's backing tape, we quickly realized that would severely limit people's musical expressions. So I suggested that we allow people to contribute in a horizontal, as well as in a linear, way—horizontal meaning overdubbing to what's already on tape, and linear meaning an extension to the piece either at the front or the back."

The team worked under immense time pressure to get the music and visuals ready for the May broadcast. There wasn't enough notice to prepare or schedule any sessions in advance, so the process was improvised, with artists sometimes approached the day before they recorded. "There was no *modus operandi*," Hine says. "Planning was a word that simply didn't exist. Things changed all the time."

To add to their hectic schedule, Hine and Godley decided to travel to the artists rather than have the artists come to them. This proved necessary in acquiring contributions from world music artists hidden in places as far away as Tanzania or Rio de Janeiro, and also helped Western artists, who only had to take off a few hours from their recording schedules to add something to the chain tape. Several artists invested more than their share of time and energy: Lou Reed,



## Rupert Hine

tually work well in context. He spends a lot of his time, both while producing other people's albums and working on his own, stripping chorus and reverb from sounds because "they're too tarty, too dressed to kill. They take up too much audio space." He slightly modified the DX7II Super Bass patch to make it "alive to velocity and pressure. It doesn't sound like a continuous keyboard sound. It has a lot of the flexibility and variance that you get from a real bass. It's violent and hyperactive, and if you want that, it's great." Other bass sounds he uses include samples in the E-mu Emulator II and variations on the Round Wound sound in the Wavestation, usually layered together.

Hine's move away from extreme experimentation has turned him into a more conservative keyboard player. On the two Rush albums that he has produced, *Presto* and the new *Roll the Bones*, his playing fits into conventional melodic and harmonic molds. "I do quite a bit of keyboard playing on the Rush albums. Geddy Lee [the group's bassist, vocalist, and main composer] writes with keyboards but doesn't claim to be a player. He sequences the keyboard parts on their demos. I wrote a lot of new keyboard parts, but we also kept some of Geddy's parts, which I then replayed live because everything on a Rush album is played live; you don't want some sequenced keyboard parts sticking out like a sore thumb.

"We worked on this album by passing the band's demos straight onto the multi-track because we'd done all the arrangements during pre-production. Next, we replaced things one by one—first Neil Peart's drums, then Geddy's bass, and in the end the keyboards and Alex Lifeson's guitar parts. So when I played the keyboard overdubs, I could lock in with the feel of the live rhythm section."

Hine explains that his Rush sessions differed in crucial ways from his work with Tina Turner and Stevie Nicks. With the latter two, he arranged, wrote, and played a lot of the music. With Rush, his main function as a producer is to give them feedback on their demos. "They want me to criticize all aspects—the songwriting, the arrangements, anything. But an amazing amount of what they put on their demos is absolutely fine; we keep a lot of it. I'm not changing near enough of their stuff to warrant the idea of being called their producer. In fact, I told them after the first album

we did that they were under-using me as a producer. But they answered, and rightly so, 'It's what we need, not what you can do, that's important to us. And our needs were fulfilled by what you did.'"

For Hine, the attraction of working with Rush is that "they've been going for almost twenty years now. *Roll the Bones* is their 18th album, and they're still writing their own kind of music. They reach a very large audience without the aid of singles, without all those aspects of radio and marketing. That's very unusual. It's a pleasure to work with a group that doesn't have those kinds of pressures and restrictions. Also, they're so idiosyncratically themselves. Their arrangements, Geddy's voice, Neil's drums, Alex's guitar playing are all very recognizable. They're like stamps, or logos."

These observations take Hine back to his favorite gripe of how so little modern music has an instantly recognizable sound. The blandness of so much of today's high-tech music, he muses, is exemplified in the fact that there are really no keyboard players today who are musically recognizable in the way that many guitar players are. "Part of the reason for that is that keyboard players have so many sounds at their disposal. I did a session for Bob Geldof's album with Eric Clapton. Clapton turned up with one guitar, plugged it in, and that was it. Yet keyboard players arrive at sessions with stacks and stacks of equipment, and use hundreds of sounds. One way of being recognizable as a keyboard player is to consciously limit yourself to using only a few sounds as your main sounds—perhaps only one or two. When you think of Stevie Wonder in the '70s, you hear his Clavinet playing and a very particular Rhodes sound that he had. But all I hear today is a jungle of Japanese presets."

So what's a keyboard player to do? Hine sighs. "Well, one sign of light is an album recently released on Virgin by a U.K. rap group called Massive. It's essentially drum machines and keyboards, but their stuff is so minimal, so bare, that it comes across as very identifiable and therefore communicative. They haven't been seduced by all those glamorous sounds and boxes. They've stopped at exactly the right point.

"So, apart from this idea of using only a few sounds, which might not be feasible for everybody, I think it's very much a matter of continuously going back to your starting point. Keep asking yourself, 'What is it that I want to communicate?' Stay aware of the basic song, the basic structure, the real essence and rudiments of what you're trying to do. And remember that less tends to be better than more." ■