

# Al Riley

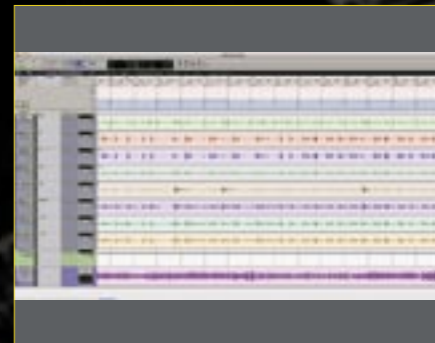
Al Riley has used Pro Tools for a huge variety of tasks while working with bands and musicians including U2, Coldcut, Jazzie B and Tricky. He tells MTF what it takes to become a Pro Tools all-rounder.

MusicTech  
INTERVIEW

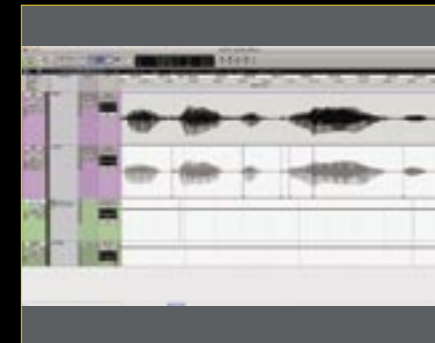
## TECHNIQUE Al's top three Pro Tools tips



**1 DRUMS AND PARALLEL COMPRESSION**  
Al's way of creating a fat parallel-compressed drum sound is to combine the direct dry drums with a heavily compressed copy of the drum mix to create a thick and punchy sound. "I'm using the Smack plug-in set to a high limiting ratio on an auxiliary input track. If you're using M-Powered or LE you'll need the Time Adjuster plug-in to compensate for delay introduced by the plug-ins to avoid weird, phasey sounds."



**2 TEMPO MAPPING WITH IDENTIFY BEAT COMMAND**  
"If you want a punk band to sound like a punk band they probably won't want a click, but it may help to have a tempo grid for moving parts later. To set up a tempo map, ensure the Conductor icon is illuminated (in blue) in the transport bar. Use the Identify Beat command ((Cmd)+[I]) to determine where each beat falls. Hit [Cmd]+[I] to place a beat marker and specify the location of the beat. Do this for the whole song to create a tempo map."



**3 TIGHTENING BACKING VOCALS WITH ELASTIC TIME**  
"Elastic Time is perfect for precisely lining up backing vocals or doubled-up vocal tracks. Just add warp markers on transients in the Analysis View and move them around in the Warp View. You can shift things quite a lot this way before you start hearing the artifacts on backing vocals."

Al Riley is a leading engineer who fully utilises the power and flexibility of Pro Tools both live and in the studio. He started his career in music after undertaking a music technology degree and landing a work experience placement at Ninja Tune Records: "Before long I became studio assistant to Jonathan More (one half of Coldcut and Ninja Tune co-founder)," says Al. "I spent most of my time there editing together the audio material for Coldcut's ambitious audiovisual live show and then I worked as a technician and monitor engineer for their year-long world tour."

### Tooled up

Al next turned his attention to studio work, landing a job at The Dairy Studios in Brixton, where he worked alongside Tricky on several remix sessions and helped to record tracks for the trip hop legend's Brown Punk label in Los Angeles.

Al's other credits include work on Jazzie B's *Masterpiece*, programming for The Cinematic Orchestra's *Live At The Royal Albert Hall* album and recording gigs by artists including the mighty U2. Each of these very different projects has been accomplished with different

setups, from Pro Tools M-Powered running on a laptop to working with vintage gear in one of Dairy's three Pro Tools IHD studio suites.

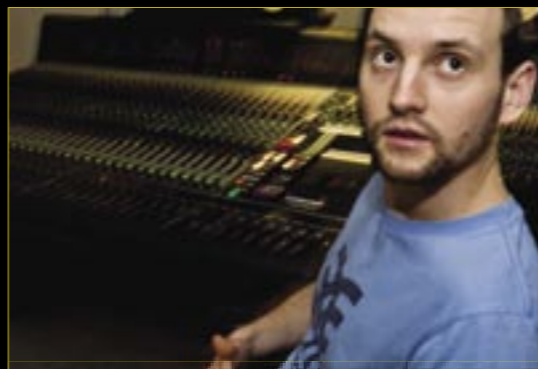
Al started to learn Pro Tools using Pro Tools LE and M-Powered: "They are a great way in before you get stuck into the HD version," he states. "Pro Tools is the standard if you want to get into serious studio work. Of course, it helps to have a working knowledge of other programs, but the majority of sessions are in Pro Tools format."

**"I will always base my sessions in Pro Tools even if I end up dropping in bits from Ableton." AL RILEY**

"I will always base my sessions in Pro Tools even if I end up dropping in bits from Ableton, be that as a ReWire plug-in or standalone. It's vastly powerful and so many of its features seem designed with organisation in mind. That's so important when sessions have to be moved between studios and worked on by different engineers. And paying clients have little patience if they have to wait for you to find that missing hi-hat mic part."

Unlike some engineers, Al is just as confident using Pro Tools live as he is in the studio and has made several high-profile live recordings: "I recorded a series of gigs at the Union Chapel with a Digi002 and Pro Tools LE," he recalls. "This was a 16-input system using an 8-way preamp Lightpiped into the Digi002. The setup was totally reliable and we used it to record Biffy Clyro, We Are Scientists, Adele and, one night, surprise guests U2!"

"When it comes to recording I try to think of each sound as it's going to appear in the final mix," he continues. "Then it's a question of keeping it simple: the right mic in the best-sounding position in a good-sounding space. It's a mistake to approach the recording phase with a 'fix it later' attitude. For example, if there's a nasty ringing on the snare drum, go back and tune the drum until it sounds good. You'll save yourself a lot of hassle messing around notching frequencies later on. If ▶



Following a course in music technology, Al Riley landed a work placement opportunity and subsequently a studio job...

### SELECTED KIT LIST

- SL G-series mixing desk
- Neve 1073 mic preamps
- UREI 1176
- UREI LA-4
- Tubetech LCA-2B
- Little Labs Red Eye preamp/DI
- SPL Transient Designer
- GML 8200 parametric EQ
- Bricasti M7
- Roland Dimension-D
- M-Audio ProFire 2626 (for mobile recording)