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David Cole Helps Make *Promise*

By

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By Janice Brown

Los Angeles, CA (May 2, 2007)--Producer/engineer David Cole likens producing to being an Olympic coach. "You know the artist's abilities and talents, and it's your job to push them to realize their full potential," he explains, "and to get the best out of them, you need to challenge them, always raising that bar." This approach, paired with engineering chops he's been sharpening since his early days as a staff engineer at Capitol Records, has been well received, and Cole has proven a great creative partner to some real legacy artists like Bob Seger, Steve Miller and Melissa Etheridge. "I know what they're trying to do, and I try to make that as painless and fun as possible," Cole notes. "And, as an engineer, I've tried to keep up, technically, with the best solutions for being creative in the studio."



Pictured at Ocean Way Nashville are (l-r): Kid Rock, David Cole and Bob Seger.

Consider the album a creative journey for an artist, and Cole a seasoned guide. Recently, he recorded and mixed Seger's first studio album in 11 years, a project that, at almost eight years in the making, certainly qualifies as a journey. "He'd been on 'hiatus,' spending time with his family for awhile, but he never stopped writing," says Cole. "In the time since I signed on seven-and-a-half years ago, Bob wrote and recorded about 35 songs--some we recorded three or four times, with different rhythm sections, in different keys and tempos. And, after we'd record them, Seger would spend more time reworking the songs, rearranging, trimming the excess. He's a very thorough songwriter."

Seeger and Cole chose Ocean Way Nashville to record the majority of the--ultimately 12-song--album, *Face the Promise*, working with some of Music City's finest musicians. "Everybody rose to the occasion, and it was a real treat to track a band full of guys in a great big live room just like the good 'ol days," Cole adds. On the flip side, Cole also set Seger up with a Pro Tools system for his Michigan writing studio, and the two got a lot done there, in this cabin in the middle of the woods.

"We set up the computer and speakers right there in the middle of the living room and got to work," says Cole. "We did a lot of his vocals and background vocals, guitars and mixing there. Since I mix all in the box, I'm sort of always working on the mix, and getting feedback on the different versions along the way." Actually, mixing in the box was essential in the production of this particular album. "I have been mixing in the box for awhile now, because I really like the flexibility of jumping from song to song, and having all my settings in the computer," Cole notes, "But especially with an artist like Seger, who comps everything he possibly can, and with this project spanning several years, we were able to assemble the best of every take--putting parts of 'mix #27' with 'mix #31' and so on. Being able to mix it this way was extremely productive, a great way of keeping track of everything we'd done."

Keeping track of all the material recorded and mixed, well over 12 songs worth, was a big part of Cole's work on this gig. "As an engineer, your job is no longer just about getting good sounds and working with the musicians in the studio, a big part of it is data management," Cole asserts. "These session files need to be impeccably organized, and all the hard drives backed up, so that in 5-10 years, someone can open up those songs again, and remix or re-purpose them in a new format." Not to mention all the as-yet-unreleased material. According to Cole, there's about an album-and-a-half's worth of new Seger songs that did not ultimately fit onto *Face the Promise*.

As for the released material, however, Cole feels this rather unconstrained production process helped Seger deliver a great album to fans that had been waiting a decade. "We had the luxury of a broad musical palette available to us in Nashville, and in Michigan, the isolation of being in the middle of the woods, with coyotes howling, was also quite important," says Cole. "I think a lot of the flavor of the record comes from Seger recording this material so close to the source of his songs." Seger even tapped local pal, Kid Rock, to sing and play on a rockabilly version of Vince Gill's "Real Mean Bottle." Rock tracked his vocal in Ocean Way, and later rolled up to the cabin on his motorcycle to lay down some slide guitar.



While Cole is a skilled engineer, he's also often called on to be an all-around creative force in the studio. Such was the case when Melissa Etheridge received a call from Al Gore to write a song for his film, *An Inconvenient Truth*. "Melissa called and asked if



I'd come to her place and look at the rough cut of this documentary with her and her band so that she could write and record a song for the end," says Cole, who co-produced/engineered Etheridge's last two studio albums, 2001's *Skin* and 2004's *Lucky*. "She wrote the song very much in response to the movie, and wrestled a bit with it, not wanting to make it a finger-pointing assault on the causes of global warming, but more a mobilizing message. It was a real thrill to be spending our time and talents over those few days to put this song together for such a great purpose."

On this and other projects he's co-producing, Cole's "coaching" may involve the instrumentation and arranging aspects of production, as well as capturing and blending every element, but he's modest when he speculates on his successes: "I try to have fun when I'm making records, and I think that shows up louder on tape than anything else--when people are having a good time in the studio. They're at ease, creative juices are flowing, and we're not tripping over our technological shoestrings."

David Cole

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Melissa Etheridge and producer David Cole take time out from recording her new album for her to be awarded the highest honor ASCAP has to offer: the Founders Award. The award recognizes songwriters for their "pioneering contribution to music."

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