



Phil Joly

RUSSELL COTTIER talks to the Grammy-winning Electric Lady man

Phil Joly has recently broken out as a producer/mixer, but he has a wealth of experience and more major label artist credits than you could shake a stick at. The Strokes, Lana Del Rey, Daft Punk, John Legend and The Rolling Stones to name a few. With nine years under his belt at the world-famous Electric Lady Studios, working his way up to Chief Engineer, Joly certainly has the chops and a fresh take on how larger studios fit into the modern workflow.

In 2017, Phil won both a Latin Grammy and a Grammy for recording Residente's self-titled album in the Best Urban Album category and in the Best Latin Rock, Alternative or Urban Album respectively. Most recently, Joly has been engineering with August Greene (a 'supergroup' composed of rapper Common, jazz pianist Robert Glasper and drummer Karriem Riggins). He also mixed Gabriel Garzón-Montano *Golden Wings*, mixed five songs on Coyle Girelli's *Love Kills*; recorded Paul McCartney for the Charlotte Gainsbourg album

Rest; recorded Florence Welch for Florence and The Machine's 'Wish That You Were Here' song for the Tim Burton film *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* and recorded The Kills' *Ash & Ice* release. *Resolution Magazine* caught up with Joly in amongst the hustle and bustle of SXSW Austin, Texas to talk studios, mics and management.



/ 'If I sit under this Chic album cover, one day I'll get to record Nile Rogers...'



/ If you work at a studio built by Jimi Hendrix...

What was your first studio experience?

My uncle Pete is a musician, when I was about eight years old he brought me into his friend's studio to record a duet that he and I had been working on. I was playing clarinet, he was playing guitar. At the end of the session they handed us a cassette. To have recorded something a half hour earlier and to be listening back in a car, the way I would listen to the radio, that totally blew my mind!

I focused on guitar, but when it came time to apply to college I had this realisation that maybe what I am really passionate about is recording. I applied to SUNY Purchase College. They have a great studio production programme, Regina Spector and Mitski both graduated from there.

What was the first studio you worked at?

I worked in a very small hip hop studio in Whitestone, Queens for about two weeks, before quickly realising that this was not going to get me where I needed to be. So I quit and that is about the time I applied to Electric Lady Studios.

Electric Lady Studios is so well-known, how did you make that happen?

I overheard a couple of my fellow students talking in class that they had been working there over the summer. I asked how to get an interview, they had been interning with Joe D'Ambrosio, a producer manager, who had made the connection.

Who was working at the studio at the time?

There were a couple of resident mix engineers, in Studio C we had Rich Costey, then about a month after I started Michael Brauer joined the building in Studio B. Studio A was a revolving door for recording sessions, some amazing names were coming through the studios.

I worked for Electric Lady for nine years total, I was chief engineer for five. Studio manager Lee Foster decided to give me that title, which was an incredible honour because that position hadn't been held for nearly a decade. It then became a journey of 'what does it mean to be Chief Engineer at Electric lady?'

After five years, I knew that I wanted to be mixing and producing more and that it was time for me to find the right teammate as a manager, begin to travel and get my name out there. To continue moving forward and evolving so I could become a little bit more creative in my role.

You had built up a good credits list by this point though hadn't you?

Yes, Lana Del Rey — I had recorded all Nile Rogers' guitar parts for the Daft Punk record — Paul McCartney, Stevie Nicks for a Lana Del Rey project and Common, who I have been working with more recently as well. A lot of my heroes!

There's a limit to the length of time you can spend, doing 20-hour days as an engineer, of course...

Yes, and as chief engineer I would be on call 24/7. It came to a point where I needed to find a manager who could run the business so that I

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/ Joly working at the Neve console in Electric Lady Studios

could focus on the creative. After a few interviews, I met Joe D'Ambrosio, and felt that this was going to work. Effectively I was able to comfortably move into my role as a producer, mixer, engineer on Joe's roster. It felt like the

right move, after recording such incredible artists, looking at Joe's team it seemed like where I should be as a young producer... with other producers who had come up through a similar large studio background.

Do you do many old school tape and large format console sessions?

When I started at Electric Lady, I was hungry to get my tape chops up. If I was in the room with Eddie Kramer I needed to be on-point with tape, so even when I was leaving college I was asking: how do I get my hands on a real tape machine in a real studio? At the time I joined, the transition to Pro Tools had already been made. But there would be rock sessions where they would track to tape and then transfer to digital.

Actually I did have the opportunity of assisting Eddie Kramer on some live Jimi Hendrix mixes for *Freedom: Atlanta Pop Festival*. A year or two after that, I recorded Patti Smith who came back to Electric Lady to give a 40 year anniversary performance of *Horses*. We recorded straight to 24-track analogue with a live audience. If I'm not recording to tape I'll often record through a tape machine. You get the transformers, you get part of that sound just by running through the electronics.

Through the sync head?

Yeah! In other situations, say I'm mixing from my place for example, I have a Space Echo and a Tascam 388 so I have ways to get to tape and back if that is important for a project.

You worked With the Kills for instance and The Strokes, what approach did you take with them?

It's interesting you ask about those bands because we did use 24 track for both of them. For the Kills, John O'Mahony was the producer, he had us lock the tape to Pro Tools via the Lynx units. We were recording on both simultaneously, direct into Pro Tools and live off the repro head.

I would have to punch in with my left and right hands, on Pro Tools and on tape so it was kind of a trip. It was an awesome way to

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capture the Kills' stuff because Jamie [Hince] is absolutely the loudest guitar player I have ever heard, he plays on 11 through old Selmer amps. With the Strokes we were also recording to tape and dumping to Pro Tools.

How do you handle the iconic acoustic of a studio like Electric Lady?

I really got into the history of the building, I did a lot of research to find these albums that were not directly credited. Electric lady Studio A has a dark wooden floor, you're so far underground that you're almost in a psychedelic cave or 'living room' vibe. In a very literal way, I think you can hear the stone walls, the concrete of the walls, and the John Storyk design on the ceiling.

How did you get to work with Nile Rogers on the Daft Punk album?

This is one of these classic stories. I'd been assisting Julian Casablancas for his vocals on the record. At night when the vocal engineer would leave, I would take over engineering.

So for that session Nile came in after Julian was done. As an assistant at a big studio I prepared the session because I'd not heard from the engineer, I didn't want to rock the boat and ask who is engineering. I put up an SM57, a Beyerdynamic 160 and a U87 on the Fender Deluxe that Nile brought in. I just wanted the engineer to have an option so I had them all on their own channels... then I ended up recording Nile Rogers for Daft Punk that day!

You also worked with Lana Del Rey?



I've worked on three records, *Ultraviolence* was by far the most work I did on her records. We did use the tape machine a bit for that. Luckily enough, she had me mix a track with her in the room where she basically oversaw the mix. In an



incredible kind of lucky move she decided to use my mix of 'Guns And Roses'. On *Ultraviolence* a lot of the vocal was a handheld mic.

An engineering decision like that is more about the artist's comfort level than anything else. Of course nowadays when I'm producing I will perhaps find something alternative, to explore a character further. I just produced a rock album out in California for Green River Blues. The singer wanted that feel so I ended up buying a D19 for handheld vocals.

How do you select projects as a freelance?

I'm doing a lot more mixing and producing recently. I got to go out to Hawaii at the top of last year with an independent artist out of LA called Suzy & The Lifeguard. I was producer and co-songwriter, we worked eight days and tracked six songs. There are also jobs that come through the management connection, but the bands that come in this way will still only work

with you if they like you! I've recently been mixing for Tank and the Bangas, Gabriel Garzón-Montano, Foreign Air and Coyle Girelli.

I think the future for me includes more location recordings. There will always be a need for the large format console and commercial studio, but if the band wants to record something in a more obscure location, the ideal producer today is mobile. I can bring my own rig. Even if you're off campus after the session with an idea you can pull up the gear and track that. I think that's a mindset that young people have. I think my selling point is the ability to be very efficient with budgets and never compromise.

I just do my best to be honest with people. I go out to shows as often as I can. When I like the show I make a point of meeting the band and letting them know. I have missed out on live music a bit over the past 10 years, so I'm having a blast going to see shows now. 

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