

There are people who know all about music, and nothing about computers. There are people who know all about computers, and nothing about music.

So, meet Billy Fields, who knows all about music and computers. He's played music nearly all his life. His album, *Bad Habits*, was a triple platinum record. He and his band are in such demand that Eileen Bond sent

"This isn't really a studio," explains Billy. "It's a little song-writing studio, sort of pre-production. I use the Macintosh and a program called Performer."

"It's a sequencer program . . . really it is like a multitrack recorder for synthesisers. It just plays the synthesiser, and it is quite remarkable how good it is.

melody. Or, if you want to change the key of the music from, say, B flat to F sharp, you hit the button called "transpose". It does give you fantastic control.

"We are just moving into a lovely new era in music whereby, thanks to the Macintosh and Performer, we can

BILLY FIELDS and his MUSICAL MACINTOSH

By Robin Robertson

her Lear jet to Sydney, to take them to her place for a performance.

For the past eight years he has managed a recording studio called Paradise Studios, at Woolloomooloo in Sydney. They have engineered the recording of over 40 gold and platinum albums and, on the day I called, there was a 37-piece orchestra in the studio.

In quieter moments, Billy writes songs.

I talked to him at the studio. His office is furnished with a solid wooden 1920s desk with a 1980s Macintosh on top. That's the business computer. "I use Excel," says Billy, "That's actually what got me into the Macintosh. I had an IBM for various office jobs, and I fell in love with Multiplan, so I bought a Macintosh to run it. Then Excel came along, and that was the bee's knees. I still think so. The guy who wrote Excel should be knighted."

The rest of the office is landscaped with a piano, a synthesiser, a mixer, a drum box, a sync box and a second Macintosh. This one sits on a flat box, 3 cm high and exactly matching Mac's footprint and complexion. It is the MIDI interface — unobtrusive, but right where you can find it.

"I use it with Composer and Switcher. With these two programs I can literally sit down at the keyboard and play with ten fingers hell for leather, push a button, and in a few seconds see the printed music. I can then edit the music with the mouse. I can print the music if I want and give that to a professional musician to play. Or it will drive the synthesiser and play the music with any instrument you choose: a harp or a violin or mandolin."

Billy picked up his bass guitar. "This is one instrument the Macintosh has not yet solved. It must be played. Ultimately, there will be some instruments which will never be computerised. The strings are very good, the woodwinds, percussions. Percussions are great!"

"But not the trumpet. Nor harmonies, guitars, drums. The important thing is to have the flexibility to link music completely with many synthesisers in realtime. Then you can just edit out three whole bars here, and re-paste it there, or you can correct rough timing with quantisation, or you can invert the

produce the quality of music which would have cost, 12 months ago, around \$A100,000 in equipment.

"Admittedly, to have a reasonable setup, you need a few synthesisers, a Macintosh, the software and the audio equipment. Maybe you're looking at between \$A10,000 and \$A20,000.

"The big progress has been made with touch sensitivity. In the old days, the synthesisers and sequencers weren't touch-sensitive, and it's not natural to play a saxophone with perfect intensity. There's the normal expression, with some notes a bit louder, or you hit on the beat behind it. It is now possible to computerise all these natural things cheaply."

"Do you use the Mac for other work?" I asked.

"Yes. I use it for lyric writing, with a thesaurus, which is really handy. I'm hoping someone will bring out a rhyming dictionary program. I could cross reference the thesaurus and the rhyming dictionary."

Another question: "Are you spending much time performing, or is it mostly studio work?"

Billy replied: "I spend a bit of time performing. I'm going to record an album using the Macintosh. That's my next project."

"Will you acknowledge the Macintosh on the back of the album?"

"Absolutely not."

MAC

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GREG SMITH

Thanks for coming, boys.
I bought your record.
It's great.

Oh, it was
you.

FAST BUCK
RECORD
COMPANY

Okay, boys, here's
the plan. We all want
to be rich, right?

Yep.

No question
there.

Filthy.

Well our agency wants
to pay you \$1000 an hour
to compose a song.

Mister, for that kind of
money we'll rescore
Jingle Bells in heavy
metal. What's the go?

We want you to program
a computer to write
the next hit single.

Easy.
Simple.
Piece
of piss.

TWO WEEKS LATER

We've finished. That
computer knows every
riff ever used on the
Top 40.

And every lyric
since Johnnie B.
Goode.

THE NEXT AFTERNOON

Boys, we have
made a
killing!

Let's hear the
song the
computer
wrote.

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RECORD
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down each and every by way but more
much more than this
I DID IT MY WAY

Brilliant, boys,
brilliant!

Look, we might just
take the cash and
be on our way.

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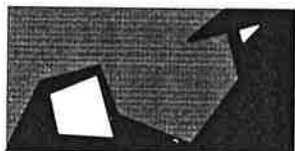
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