



**/ Staff & Students:** George Shilling, Jack Hancock, Will Mason, Ben Allim, Ross Gallacher, Matthew O'Hara, Jack Arrowsmith, Tom Paddon, Sean Hicks, Andrew Henshaw, Phil Harding, Andrew "Gwill" Gwilliam.  
**Band:** (at front) Ben Hussey (bass), James Cockerell (guitar), Rom Griffiths (drums), James Passey (vocals)

## J.A.M.E.S. SUMMER COURSE 2019

# The Gus Dudgeon Foundation

**GEORGE SHILLING** ran the recent course for elite music technology graduates at University of South Wales. He explains what he and the students learned

Following the sad and untimely demise of Elton John's renowned producer Gus Dudgeon in a car crash in 2002, some of his recording equipment was bequeathed for educational use. After a false start elsewhere, his magnificent early 1970s MCI console has now been installed in a suite at the University of South Wales' Cardiff base. The desk has been partially restored — it still has a few foibles — but is now in a useable state. The room also contains his MCI 24 track and quarter inch tape machines, but these are still in need of restoration. And there are awards, gold discs, photos and other paraphernalia of Dudgeon's around the room, making it feel like something of a time-capsule.

The foundation (GDF) has been sponsoring J.A.M.E.S.-organised courses since 2012, but for the last few years these were held at other venues like Leeds Beckett and Anglia Ruskin — as the MCI desk was not quite in a useable state. J.A.M.E.S. (Joint Audio Media Education Support) is the industry accreditation body originally established by the MPG and APRS whose main function is visiting UK universities to establish and support them in teaching



**/ Miking the drums: 'Should this switch labelled HPF be on?'**

relevant content, using appropriate equipment for careers in the music business. Their overall aim is to promote supportive links between industry and education.

'Real-world' recording session for students

It was a huge honour to be asked to run this year's event; several were run previously by Ken Scott and others have been run by Phil Harding (interview *Resolution* V9.1), Greg Haver (*Resolution* V13.5), Romesh Dodangoda (*Resolution* V12.2), and Simon Gogerly (*Resolution* V10.2).

The idea of the course is to spend five days with students in something more akin to a 'real-world' recording session, involving them in the production and engineering process as much as possible.

Nine graduate students participated, hand-picked by institutions from as far afield as Glasgow, Huddersfield, Liverpool, Leeds, Cambridge, West Suffolk, Lancashire, Portsmouth and South Wales.

I brought along talented singer-songwriter James Passey as the artist, along with his band (Montpellier). I had worked with Passey previously and knew he would be a demanding yet good humoured client. We recorded three tracks but mainly focused on an anthemic, building song with plenty of scope for a big arrangement, with drums, bass, guitars, keyboards, percussion and backing vocals.

Setting up for drums on day one, the students were fairly reticent. I egged them on to find solutions for problems, and also to keep things moving forward in the manner expected by any client. During the week, things improved as everyone made friends, and from the outset I tried to delegate tasks. The students initially shied away from using the MCI desk, so it was down to me to wrestle with its foibles. Andrew Gwilliam from the faculty was on hand to ably



/ George enjoys using Gus Dudgeon's MCI console — give the students a turn!

guide me around the set-up. We had Pro Tools 2019.6 with 24 inputs and outputs normalised to buses and monitor inputs 1-24, making routing and monitoring fairly straightforward.

### People Skills

Although all the courses attended by these graduates include studio recording, I detected a

few gaps in their abilities to run studio sessions in the commercial world.

There was initially a general lack of urgency and effectiveness in problem solving — the studio was not set up and used for commercial sessions, so there were a few facilities lacking which required creative solutions, e.g. connecting instruments from the control room



/ Get those diaphragms close, then you can blend the mics...

to amplification in the recording room whilst also taking a DI, and providing multiple headphone mixes of a standard required by the musicians with a slightly below-par headphone system.

Some miking was delegated to students who stepped up to the task, but mistakes crept in — a stereo pair of 414s with differing pad settings on piano, and a bass drum mic with the high pass filter switched on! The students were braver using the adjacent SSL Duality when I sent off a team to record synths and percussion. And during the week, many of the knowledge gaps were filled, as the students became more aware of the professionalism expected.

When I was manning the desk and DAW I tried to explain some of the rationale for decisions and settings, imparting some hints

and tips, whilst trying to keep things moving forward so as not to frustrate expectant musicians! People skills were certainly brought into focus during the week — a valuable aspect of the course that universities cannot easily replicate.


### Session skills

We later employed some of the students' excellent musicianship for a few overdubs, and they were sometimes surprised at the discipline required when following a producer's specific instructions, for example to keep chord voicings and rhythms simple, to match the arrangement already recorded. It is all very



/ Guitar overdubs in the control room

well indulging in jazz theory, but that's not always what is required!

Although not absolutely pristine, the MCI JH500 proved to be wonderful sounding and very usable. Apart from the SSL Duality overdubs, all recording went through the desk with no external processing. The rough mix made on the desk faders at the end of the week sounded remarkably wholesome; somehow more grounded and in-focus than DAW mixes tend to be. The monitors kindly loaned by PMC helped us get the best out of the desk, and thanks must also go to Steinberg, Sonnox and SSL who generously donated prizes to the students. 

[www.jamesonline.org.uk](http://www.jamesonline.org.uk)

[www.gusdudgeon.org](http://www.gusdudgeon.org)

## J.A.M.E.S. Accreditation

I trained as a J.A.M.E.S. assessor 10 years ago and have been part of the accreditation team since then. Visits to universities usually take place over one or two days, factoring in their location and how many courses are being accredited. Assessors travel to the campus in pairs or threes; (the third member of the team is likely a new recruit learning the ropes). However, work on the accreditation starts long before the actual site visit.

The initial application for accreditation is dealt with by the J.A.M.E.S. admin team who will accrue information about the courses and setup. As an assessor I will be contacted when potential visit dates are put in the diary, and all being well I will receive a mountain of information ahead of the visit, including External Examiners' reports for the last couple of years, staff CVs, module descriptors for the courses, examples of student work and so on.

It is a time consuming job to sift through all this but much information can be gleaned. I will also research the university's website and see how the course is described, and look at

student satisfaction statistics. The assessors usually meet the evening before the visit to discuss particular points to raise or any concerns — often these will have been pointed up by J.A.M.E.S. executive director Dave Ward beforehand.

On the day of the visit, assessors will initially meet the department course leader and team, and sometimes the admin and quality assurance staff, sometimes the head of department or the Dean. An important part of the day is a meeting with a representative group of students from different years, held behind closed doors and 'in confidence', so that they can frankly tell us their experience of the university, staff and course. We will see the recording facilities and teaching rooms (e.g. computer workstation labs), have a look at the library, and meet and chat with as many of the course team as possible. Often there will be further listening to examples of student work.

Following the visit each assessor will write a report in a long pre-formatted form, following which the information will be combined into a

single report for the university. The report will include recommendations and suggestions for improvement where necessary.

Each assessor will of course have different industry experience, so we will each focus on our areas of expertise to see whether we think the courses are relevant and suitable. Areas of concern might be the possibility for student placements, whether career advice is suitable, whether music business topics such as royalty collection and self employment are covered, hearing protection, suitability of installed DAW and plug-in software, mic collection, and things as mundane as whether students are trained to coil a cable correctly!

Accreditation lasts for three years, following which re-assessment is deemed necessary. Accreditation helps students choose suitable courses, and students who have graduated benefit from a J.A.M.E.S. graduate database available to potential employers. The process is also helpful for the staff running the courses; in some instances it can help their case when they need support and resources from the university.