

know, for about four months I didn't go out. I stayed in every day with the headphones on learning how the thing worked. Man, I just had to learn that keyboard inside and out."

The W-30s still play a huge part in The Prodigy sound, both in the studio and on stage. Liam explains how he transfers the music from the studio into a stage setting. "You know, I don't like talking about this, because it gives the secrets away... but here's what we do. Say we've got ten tracks in the set. Right, we hold the samples in bulk on the Akai which holds 32 megs and then use the W-30 to sequence the songs. Take *Poison*, off our *Music for a Jilted Generation* album. The opening bars are stored in eight bar sections which I can call up using the W-30. It usually takes Simon my keyboard tech about five minutes to load each one up before the show."

So rather than using a sequencer like Cubase, Liam prefers to use the W-30 to control the triggering of all the samples. "Exactly. Everything's triggered from the W-30s. My set up at the moment is two W-30s and a spare one for the road, disks, and disks of sounds for the samplers. It's for stuff played between the tracks, you know, the links: one of the W-30's really good features is the 'loop-back' facility where the sound can go forward and loop back on itself. I dunno why but Akai have never done that. It's such a useful feature for getting smooth string sounds."

Liam also plays live loops on stage: risky perhaps, but it certainly gives him scope to improvise and be spontaneous. "Yeah, on some tracks, the loops are played live. Instead of sequencing them I've got two or four bars of the track all on different keys and I actually play them in. It's really primitive, but it's also cool because you can swap it around and mess it about. Of course you have to be precise with what you play, but I always have a safety drum roll either side of the key so if my finger slips off the key, which happens all the time, I can just roll it in and start it again. It's really spontaneous. It works and it's exciting."

Getting the Firestarter sound

And then of course, there's *Firestarter*... "Yeah, now that's a little more difficult to do because we wanted to use a live guitar on the track. So we stripped the track right down and ran the carcass of the track from ADAT. Then I play some of the sounds in from the sampler, like the guitar riffs that Giz (Butt - guitarist) doesn't play. Then he chugs along. The live *Firestarter* sounds quite different from the album. Talking of guitars, Giz goes on about the VG-8 all the time - he uses it on *Kill my Fire* to get the sound at the beginning. It's pretty cool."

The band also use the JP-8000. "I really like it. The analogue gear sometimes gets broken on the road; this new stuff is so much more robust. I do like the 8000, especially with the effects; you can just make it really big. I also use a Nord and a MIDI TB-303. A real TB-303. I use the JD-990 on every track I do. I used it on the opening of *Poison* and

everyone said 'Aw - where did you get that sound?' It was one of my own sounds that I modified. I used it on *Voodoo People* for the main riff."

Which led us onto the VK-7 which The Prodigy used recently on a cover version of *Ghost Town* by The Specials. "I love it - I think it's great! I'm really into the VK-7. I like the fact that it's got other sounds like strings, which I think are really good. The versatility of the organ and the distortion of the Leslie is great. It's really good."

I wondered if we were going to see *Ghost Town* out as a single and if so when. "Well, we'll test the song in South America, and give it its first 'rehearsed' airing at Reading. It might be on the new album. One thing with *Ghost Town* is it's really different from all the other stuff I've ever done. I start like the original, really slow and 'dubby'. The idea is that after *Smack my Bitch up*, which is the song before the encore, the crowd are so manic it'll be really strange to play something the opposite to what they expect. But towards the end it morphs into this punk monster! It rocks. I'll be using the VK-7 live. It just has the right sounds with the

distortion to get that kind of old warbling kind of sound."

Liam's running to a pretty tight schedule, and although he has the SP-808 he hasn't had a chance to try it out. He's also the kind of musician who gets to know a new instrument gradually, by spending time with it. "I'm dying to check out the SP-808 and the MC-505. You know, we've just been so busy. Plus it takes ages for me to get to grips with new gear. I'm not one of these people who read the manual. I'll muck around with a piece of gear till I find something I get on with."

"I am so not a tech head. I'm scared of technology. Even my studio is basic. It's mainly analogue. The other day I managed to pick up the Roland VP-330 Vocoder, which was a good find. I'm

using that on *Ghost Town*. I don't surround myself with loads of gear. I'm better with limited stuff and getting the most out of it. You know, I love retro gear. I really want a Space Echo. So if you hear of any going let me know! And I'd love a System 100."

So what's next for The Prodigy? "Well I think we've hit as high as we can go in the UK. We've had two number one singles and two number one albums... It will be interesting to see where it goes in America now. I think we can sell more records there. It's all about keeping fresh and writing new songs. We won't overplay the UK now. Once we've done Reading that will be the end of *Fat of the Land*, it's like a goodbye to the album."

"The next time we come back there will be a lot of new material. We'll still play the old tracks because people want to hear them, but it's a case of getting the balance right. We want to be fresh. We need to get back in the studio and vibe out. We hope to release a single before the end of the year and an album next year."

And with that I left Liam to his packing for South America but not before asking him whether he'd play at the Roland Christmas Party. Well, you never know...



Fat of the Land & Tomb Raider

So that's why it was delayed so many times...

"Well, *Firestarter* was on a Playstation game called *Wipeout 2097* so Sony kept sending me new games every week and the reason the album was delayed was down to me playing *Tomb Raider*. I couldn't stop. I was ringing everyone up saying 'how do you get through there?' I was addicted to it. I totally lost interest in the studio. It was when we were recording *Serial Thriller* which is one of my least favourite tracks. The track took me about two months!"

See p24 for an interview with Nathan McFee, the man behind the music for *Tomb Raider*.

Liam's Kit List

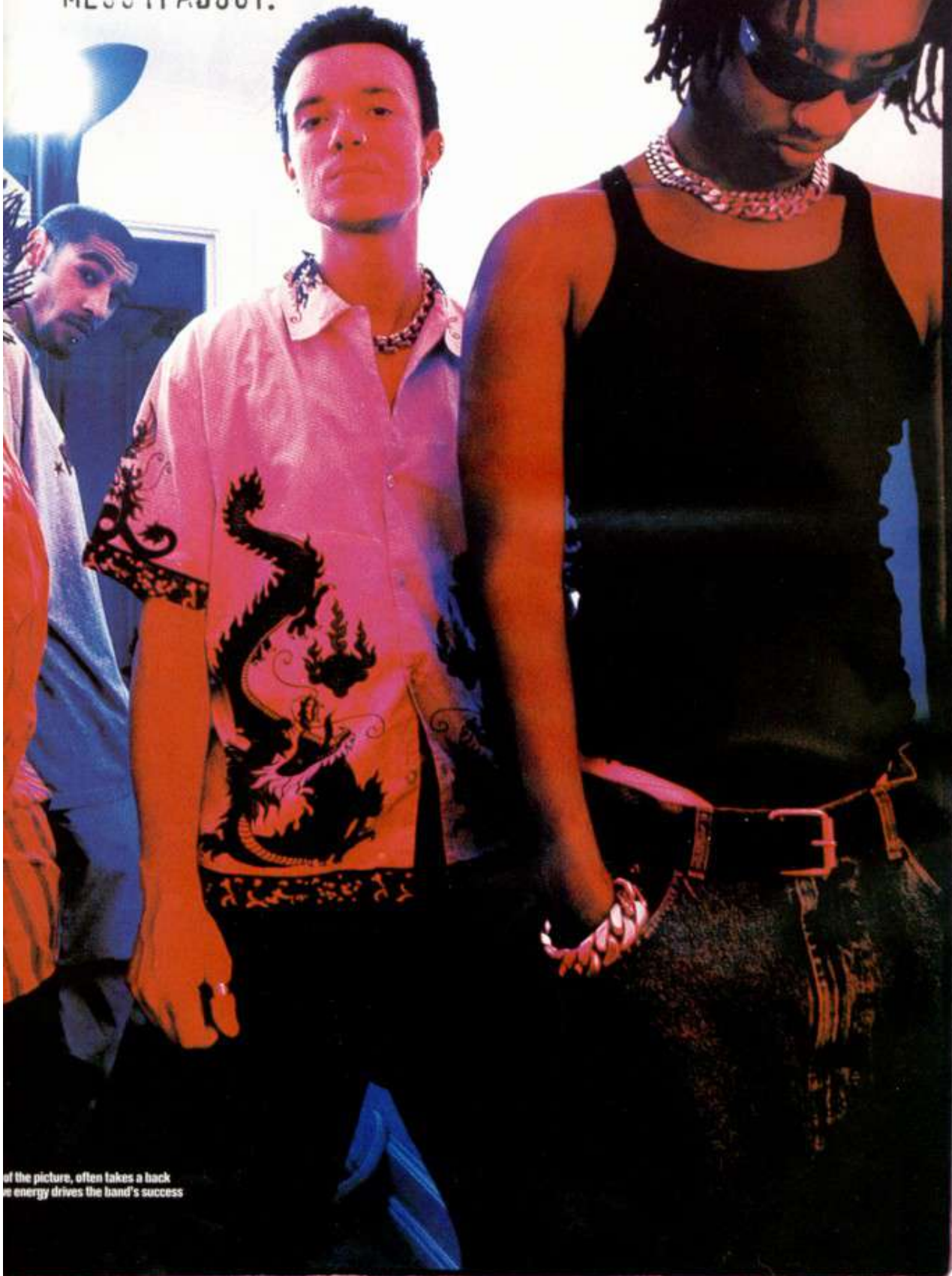
W-30 x 5
U-220
JD-990 with
Orchestral Board
Juno-106
SH-101
TB-303 x 2
TR-808
TR-909
VP-330 Vocoder
Boss SE-70 x 4
SH-09
Jupiter-6
Jupiter-8
JP-8000
VK-7



"THEN I GOT THE W-30 AND FOR ABOUT FOUR MONTHS I DIDN'T GO OUT. I STAYED IN EVERY DAY WITH THE HEADPHONES ON LEARNING HOW THE THING WORKED. MAN, I JUST HAD TO LEARN THAT KEYBOARD INSIDE AND OUT."

Want to know more?
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"ON SOME TRACKS, THE LOOPS ARE PLAYED LIVE. I ACTUALLY PLAY THEM IN. IT'S REALLY PRIMITIVE, BUT IT'S ALSO COOL BECAUSE YOU CAN SWAP IT AROUND AND MESS IT ABOUT."



of the picture, often takes a back
energy drives the band's success

So why The Prodigy?

"There have been lots of people writing about where the name came from, but they're all wrong. One of them said that I'd named the band after the Moog Prodigy. It wasn't that at all. At the time I was really into Hip-Hop and that was all about larging yourself up and saying 'I'm the best'. I guess a little bit of that rubbed off on me, that's why I called myself The Prodigy. It's like a gifted child, that's me."

Catching The Prodigy up with

Mention The Prodigy and most people think of frontman Keith Flint. He's the one with the inverse Mohican in the video to *Firestarter*. But it's Liam Howlett who writes most of the music. So while Keith, Leeroy, and Maxim front the band, he's the one who drives it. PowerOn's Aubrey Parsons reports...

It's just after nine thirty in the morning and here I am talking to Liam Howlett, a man with two UK number one albums and singles under his belt. I didn't think music legends would even be up at this time. But Liam was certainly awake.

We started by talking about Liam's early influences. From an early age, he has been fascinated with creating music and experimenting with sounds. "The first record I ever bought was *Dance Craze* which was like a ska compilation with the Specials, Madness, Selector, and the Beat. Then I got into the Hip-Hop thing. One of my friends was a mobile DJ and he made himself a scratching deck. I used to go round to his house and learn to scratch on his turntable. After that I worked all through my summer holiday on a building site to save up and buy these turntables.

"Of course, back then I couldn't really afford anything. A multi-tracker was about £200 and samplers were so basic, so I just borrowed my friend's Fostex and put beats together with that. I'd use track one to scratch a couple of bars of a loop in, transfer that to track four and just bounce record it to create a four minute loop, and mix things over the top. It was really minimal, without any keyboards or sequencers."

Despite that it wasn't long before Liam began to see success. "Yeah, the first successful thing I did was enter two mixes into this competition on Capital Radio under different names. I came first and third! Then I started this Hip-Hip band with some guys from Chelmsford. I was working in London at the time and my boss decided to put £4,000 into recording an album. We called ourselves Cut to Kill."

Along the way Liam was learning fast about what worked and what didn't. In fact, he's surprisingly

frank about that first venture. "Yeah, we were crap. I mean, the music was good but the image was all wrong. But it was about then I started to hear the beginning of the Acid scene and the rave cult was starting to take off on pirate radio. Suddenly these tracks were coming out and I was still really into Rap but, because of the moodiness of Rap gigs and the clubs, I was hearing this other music which kinda had certain beats from Hip-Hop but was faster. It had a lot of energy and I thought, 'Man this stuff really sounds fresh, I wanna just go and check it out.' So I started going to this club and it just took off from there really. That was when The Prodigy started."

Not that Liam imagined The Prodigy becoming one of the world's most famous bands. It began because of his desire to write his own music, be in control of it and enjoy it. "Yeah, when I left Cut To Kill to start my own thing, you know, it was like I've always written music myself and now I'm not writing Rap anymore, I'm gonna write instrumental music. Before then, I'd write an instrumental and I'd have to rely on the MC to come up with good lyrics, and he always mucked it up! So I thought, 'Nah, this music's all instrumental, I can just be on my own and do this and enjoy it.'"

It was about then that Liam invested in his first keyboard: a Roland W-30 Sampling Workstation. And he loved it. So much in fact he now has five: three in the live rig and two at home.

"Yeah," he laughs, "I remember going down to the music shop in Chelmsford and saying 'What do I need?' I was going to buy a Roland S-10 Sampler and a little sequencer but the guy in the shop said, 'Wait a couple of months, there's this new thing coming out. It's like a workstation in one keyboard.' It was like, 'Man that sounds good.' I got the W-30 and, you



Liam, in the center, but his crew

Revealed! Hottest new products...
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Power On

Exclusive:

Liam Howlett interview

"I don't like talking about this because it gives our secrets away..."

How Roland helps The Prodigy get their sound from studio to stage page 6

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Alan Parsons & Dan McGrath show you how to get more from hard disk recording

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Sasha * Reeves Gabrels * Phat-Boy * Tomb Raider * Expert advice

Win! The MC-505 and SP-808
in the national groove championships, page 18