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# The Church



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# Much More Besides

With a new B-sides/rarities compilation out, an acoustic album out next week, a new album well underway, *and* an Australian tour that sees them playing the Zoo on Saturday, you could say **THE CHURCH** have been busy. Drummer and producer **TIM POWLES** talks tech with **BRETT COLLINGWOOD**.



Few bands last for 25 years, and of those, there's very, very few that could be considered anywhere close to the peak of their powers. I mean – the Stones? Exactly. So when you consider that The Church have indeed been in the game for a quarter-century, and have quietly amassed one of the most distinctive and consistent bodies of work in popular music, and have done so despite line-up changes and shifting commercial fortunes, *and* their current album is not just passable but one of their very best, *and* said album is 'merely' a collection of B-sides and rarities left over from their previous 'official' release, you might just need to sit down for a moment. Yep, The Church is one of those rare beasts: a long-running band that never became shit.

In fact, the band seem to be on something of creative spree at the moment: not only have they

just released *Beside Yourself* (for that is the title of the aforementioned B-sides/rarities album), but they've been squirreled away in the studio working on not one but *three* album projects. Tim Powles, the band's producer and drummer of ten years, explains: "We just tracked an acoustic album from whoa to go – mixed and mastered in five days – including five new songs and nine older tracks. We dropped that in the middle of sessions for The Church's new record which is going to be released mid next year. So that's what we're doing at the moment, we're actually in the middle of that electric record. Also I've just been in LA last week supervising the 5.1 mix of *Forget Yourself* [i.e. the band's last 'proper' album]."

The acoustic album Tim speaks of is *El Momento Descuidado*, which, as he says, completely reinterprets such Church classics as *The Unguarded Moment* and *Metropolis* while throwing a few new tracks into the mix. Tim says some of these songs are likely to get an airing at the band's gig at the Zoo on Saturday, along with a couple of tunes from *Beside Yourself*, an album that holds together incredibly well for a supposed 'odds and sods' collection.

"That tends to happen with us," Tim admits. "There was an extra disc with the last album [*After Everything Now This*] as well, and that was a good disc too. We have a high output and usually when we record an album we end up with about two albums worth of material. I'm just glad that we have record companies that are understanding enough that we can actually get the music out there."

But one release that Tim is particularly excited about is the upcoming 5.1 surround sound version of *Forget Yourself*, which is due to be released in March next year – unfortunately only in the US at first. Tim was invited to LA to oversee the mixing, and was blown away by the results.

"I think it's a better record in 5.1, much better. Much more listenable and really strong, and I feel a bit bad now that I probably bagged out [the original *Forget Yourself*] here and there because I realise now what a great record it is."

Even though Tim has a wealth of experience in record production, it was his first experience

with mixing in 5.1.

"I mix in stereo here obviously [at Spacejunk, his recording studio] and make a lot of records for a lot of other people, and it's funny, it's not that I've dumbly ignored [5.1], I just haven't had time to go there. I just lucked out – the company that had licensed our record is one of the main movers in that kind of medium in the States. So I dropped in for five days in Los Angeles into this environment and learnt so much. I guess I'm starting to form my own opinions now about how things should be mixed in that way. There are a lot of people at the moment who just quite simply, in a fake way, just enhance the stereo mix they've got to make it slightly more surround, but on this record we've gone for things quite clearly in other speakers and quite clearly at the back or at the front and really tried to use it. I just thought it was a wonderful thing for this band with the layers that we have and the guitar players in particular."

Tim's interest in production was initially sparked in high school in his native New Zealand. "I always took an interest in fixing sound systems, wanting my drums to sound good to the audience – and the girls in the audience too! – and wanting the bands I was in to sound good," he recalls. "Being in covers bands at school I was keen to emulate not just songs but sounds too."

Tim says he was lucky when he first started working in studios to work with several experience local and overseas producers: "This became the basis from which I draw everything today in terms of approach and the quality of the end result." Eventually, Tim started up his own recording facility, Spacejunk, in Glebe – Skulker's debut album *Too Fat For Tahiti* was the first product of the studio. Now Spacejunk is temporarily situated under a house in Ryde "of all places", and it's here that Tim completed *Iron Skies*, the debut EP for George Byrne. Read on as Tim gets very excited about his what's in his studio...

Give us an overview of your set-up at Spacejunk.

It's now minus the MCI 2" [tape] machine, and I'm resolving the desk/what desk/no desk/internal/external mixing issue, but essentially [the studio has] a TDM Protools rig with a Mac and the usual

stuff; some Apogee Converters too, and I use Logic Pro 6 as the front end. I love this program for its musicality and global arranging ability.

Do you have a favourite piece of equipment (mics, outboard gear etc) that

**you always come back to? Why do you like it?**

My most overall useful faves are a triple tie: A matched pair of distressors – brilliant for everything, including program compression with the stereo image link function; an SPL Transient Designer – the ultimate drum shaper, absolutely length and attack control in a second – what we used to do with chains of fluttering gates etc.; a rack-mount Sansamp – my best friend and enemy of the commercial estate! Anything can be warmed, enlarged, scrunched, enhanced, reduced or plainly destroyed with analogue precision! Often a side-chain on a mix.

**What do you look for in your drum sound? List the components of your kit.**

For the Church, a musical and song-suitable sound is all we need. This ranges from a dead and low-tuned sound to semi-open and [traditionally tuned]. I am a Mapex player – I love the kit they custom made me a while back now – actually it must be almost eight years ago, wow! It's a huge pile o' drums that I sort through and pick what's right on the day – often the sound can write the part too. [I use] 24-inch and 22-inch kick drums – not too deep; 18, 15, 13, and 10-inch toms – all standard, not the power tom variety; and six or seven snare drums including two 12-inch snares, one 5-inch-deep brass and one 7-inch-deep wood. All get used somewhere, sometime. The biggest surprise was the old chrome 6 1/2-inch-deep steel shell that I stuck a Renaissance head on (tuned very low just under a middle D) and a big Dead Ringer-style hoop I made. It rattles, buzzes, thumps, and punches – very cool. I used it on the last few sessions, the whole of *Forget Yourself* and the tour too – so much for the heady '80s and a new head every gig! I also use little 7A sticks, lots of mallets, [Pro-Mark] Hot Rods, brushes, Blastix, etc and handheld percussion.

**The Church play the Zoo on Saturday. *El Momento Descuidado* is released on Monday November 29**

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