



A FASCINATION WITH SOUND

BY JON WOLFE

STEVE NEWTON AND HIS ENREC STUDIOS HAVE A FORMIDABLE REPUTATION AS ONE OF THE BEST PLACES TO GO TO RECORD MUSIC AND IT IS LITTLE WONDER, AS MUSIC, AND PARTICULARLY COUNTRY MUSIC, IS IN HIS BLOOD.

As the son of Slim 'Redback' Newton, music was always in his young life, as background or up front and centre as he went on the road with Slim and later with some of Australian country music's touring road warriors.

"As a little kid I had to tag along to various shows that dad did," Steve said. "That's when I first saw Rick and Thel Carey, and ultimately we ended up in Tamworth from WA when he came here to work at Hadley Records with Eric Scott."

Steve's fascination with the recording process came about while he was involved with Slim in recording demo tapes to send to Hadley.

"It was during the recording of the demo tapes that I was introduced to tape recorders," he said. "I just found it fascinating – and I used to play with the equipment, the machinery, and even pulled them to bits, which I'm sure impressed Slim!"

It seemed inevitable that Steve would become a recording engineer and producer.

"For me it's the love of music and the fascination of being able to capture live sound," Steve said.

He can play just about every stringed instrument going, as well as piano and other instruments – and it's a skill that has come in handy as the owner of ENREC and a well-respected producer.

"The process of learning to play an instrument has been valuable to me as a recording person," he said, "because it gives me a good idea of the mechanics of the instrument - what it sounds like, what it can do. It gives me a heads up, I guess, when I approach an instrument, or a musician with an instrument, to record it."

Another skill of the producer is being able to turn an artist's dreams or ideas into a product.

"The most important tool a producer needs is to understand psychology, to be able to get the best performance from a musician or artist," Steve said, "and to do that, you often have to talk them into it."

"To capture the performance technically is important too, but that's really an engineer's job. As a producer you have to encourage people, manage them to give you the very best performance they can do."

Steve often has to be both producer and engineer but says he would rather do one or the other.

"It drives me insane sometimes," he said. "Producing a record is very complex and being distracted by engineering is a bit of a pain, but it also has the same effect the other way, too."

As a gifted musician, Steve also finds himself on the other side of the studio glass as a player and his list of recorded credits is immense. He has also excelled himself as a live player on many concerts and shows over the years.

"I don't get to play live as much as I like these days," he said. "I get to do some festivals and a little bit here and there. The problem is if you're running a studio it is a full time job and if you do live gigs on the weekend you don't get a lot of time off."

"I'm sort of happy to not do too many gigs, but at the same time, you've got to keep your chops up. It is finding that balance. I'd like to play more and, in time, I think I'd play more and record less."

Over many decades Steve has worked with almost every big name in Australian country music, as well as guiding and recording many up-and-coming artists in their careers and he has produced (pardon the pun) a body of work to be very proud of.