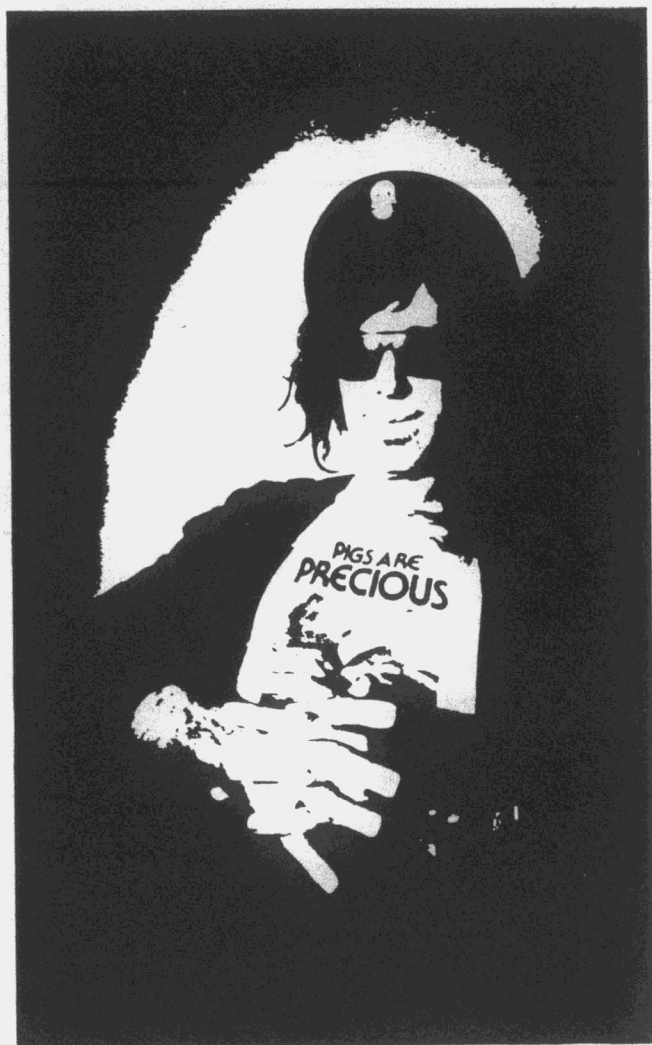


THE GOD-FATHER OF GRUNGE

BY
ROBERT
ALLEN

STUDIO WHIZ JACK ENDINO
TWISTS THE DIALS OF OUR SOUND



Jack Endino is unquestionably one of the hottest studio wizards in Seattle. Pick any marginally heavy local record from your collection, and Endino's name is liable to be on it. From groundbreaking releases such as Soundgarden's **Screaming Life** and Green River's **Dry as a Bone** to Tad's **God's Balls** and Nirvana's **Bleach**, Endino has been the foremost architect of what has come to be known as the "Seattle Sound." Other area producers, notably metal maven Terry Date, have built enviable reputations. But Endino's ability to mix crunch with clarity, and the sheer volume of his work (pun fully intended) set Endino in a class by himself. By his own reckoning, Endino has had 63 of his productions released in the past couple of years, with another dozen already in the can. "I've had at least two records reviewed in every issue of **The Rocket** for the past year," notes Endino. "In the December issue I had seven. I was beginning to wonder if anyone had noticed."

There are as many ways of producing a record as there are records. Clinically perfect technicians such as Trevor Horn are likely to remake a band in their own image, often sending out for session musicians. Others like Joe Boyd are more likely to send out for curry, making themselves as inconspicuous as possible until their advice is solicited.

Endino sees his role differently. If big-time producers can be seen as landscape painters, putting their own visions on canvas, Endino is more of a portrait photographer, trying to show reality in the most positive light. "I'm a producer/engineer, probably better known as an engineer. In the real world of big budgets and big labels, a producer can be someone who tells you how to arrange your songs, or who will hire musicians to play parts you maybe don't play as well as you should. Mutt Lange gets credited with co-writing a lot of Def Leppard's songs; he's almost part of the band. That's not something I do. I don't tell bands how the

songs are supposed to go. If I think of something that could be useful, I'll suggest it, but I don't force it."

Endino's non-dictatorial approach has enabled him to mesh with acts other than Sub Pop staples, including metal band Suicide Squad,

and atmospheric rockers Weather Theatre. Endino's greatest strength is getting to the root of an act's essence and transferring that to tape. Says Endino, "I try to find the emotional intent of a band and emphasize it."

A major factor in Endino's success is that he's respected for more than knob twiddling. Endino is currently in two bands, Skin Yard and Crypt Kicker 5, and is planning to release a solo LP drawn largely from last year's tape **Angle of Attack**. Endino was formerly part of the Ones, with Terry Lee Hale. That Endino has played in three notable bands isn't unique. That he's played different instruments in all three bands (guitar in Skin Yard, drums in Crypt Kicker 5, and bass in the Ones) is. Endino's familiarity with virtually everything that may be happening on the other side of the glass gives the bands he works with an added dose of confidence.

"When someone walks into the studio with a drumset, I can run over there and get in their face with the drum key and go 'hey, let me do this,' and they usually will," explains Endino. "Likewise, I'm familiar with amps and guitars and bass strings, all of that stuff has been part of my life for many years. It's not like I'm just some guy running the tape deck — this is my peer group I'm recording."

"I can picture in my head what they would like to sound like because I listen to the same records they do. Being a musician in the same scene gives me a certain additional credibility, because there are a lot of engineers, probably the majority of engineers, who are not musicians. Some of them are wanna-be musicians, maybe."

Unlike many musicians, Endino's decision to quit his day job and move into music full-time didn't involve leaving a record store or a restaurant. He came to engineering records after earning an Electrical Engineering degree from the UW. Endino then worked

at the Navy Shipyards in Bremerton for two-and-a-half years, designing electrical power systems for aircraft carriers and pulling down almost 30 grand a year. It's hard to imagine a job further removed from the world of rock 'n' roll, but Endino doesn't seem to be suffering from schizophrenia. "I stayed at the shipyard as long as I could without suffering complete psychological death," he recalls. "Finally, at a certain point, I said 'I've saved enough, I've aged enough, I may as well blow this off and see what else I can do.' I still have my degree. I could still go back if I wanted to, but my main goal in life is not to go back to that kind of job."

After secluding himself in Bremerton for a while, Endino moved to Seattle and practically walked backwards into his current job. "I started out with a basement four-track, and became known for making good basement four-tracks," he says. "People began coming to my house three or four nights a week. I had to move out of that house right at the time when Chris Hanzsek and I discovered that the Triangle Studios building was vacant. Within a month, we had the keys, and were in there with Chris' eight-track."

Renamed Reciprocal Studios, the unassuming building in Ballard (whose control room had graced the cover of the very first **Rocket**) reopened in June 1986. The studio's rates, coupled with Endino's built-in clientele from friends and acquaintances, made it the hangout for what would become Seattle's grunge scene.

If anything has been responsible for creating a cohesive sound that has stirred interest across international borders, it's Endino's production. He treads carefully when asked for his thoughts on the "Seattle Sound." "The sound that I hear coming from bands that are walking in my door comes from fuzzy guitars, bashing drums, screaming vocals, no keyboards, and a general loud intent. There's a scrupulous avoidance of any mainstream musical trends, and an avoidance of MIDI or anything remotely hi-tech. I don't get people with thousand-dollar effects racks coming in."

"There was another Seattle sound back in 1983, which was an entirely different, artistic sort of thing with the Blackouts and Student Nurse. You do hear a bit of the artistic side of Seattle still in Mudhoney, whose arrangements are kind of clever, and Soundgarden, who can get arty. I don't know how long this grunge thing is going to last before it burns itself out, but it's got a lot of life in it yet."

One thing that unites many of Endino's productions is a preference for recording live in the studio as much as possible. "I'm not a perfectionist," he emphasizes. "I'd rather see something with a few mistakes but a lot of feeling behind it than a perfect performance. There's nothing as boring as a perfect performance. A band that's been on the road a while, who's really in tune with themselves and their material, has a certain dynamic, an interaction that happens. It's like an organism. It exists simultaneously — you can't really take it apart. Technically it's more of a challenge because you have guitar amps leaking into drum mikes, but I just deal with it."

Endino's reputation is expanding outside Seattle, due both to the burgeoning success of Sub Pop, and the first rate job he did on the Screaming Trees' new **Buzz Factory**. Endino also produced one half of the upcoming Screaming Trees seven-inch on Sub Pop, the other record being done by Steve Fisk. A recent Skin Yard trip to the East Coast also brought dividends. Endino met several bands who were familiar with his work. Philadelphia's Dead Spot was impressed enough to fly Endino to Philly in early September to produce their album.

Upcoming local projects are headed by the Mudhoney LP, already recorded and due out in October. Endino confidently predicts that "It'll be Sub Pop's biggest seller. No question."

Endino is also remixing Soundgarden's **Ultra Mega OK** album (which he didn't originally produce), due out on CD. **Ultra Mega** will also have a slightly different track list. He also has kind words for Sub Pop's upcoming **Journey to the Center of Cat Butt EP**, which he describes as "surprisingly coherent."

Not surprisingly, he's most excited about his own projects, the third Skin Yard LP, a Crypt Kicker 5 LP, and his solo **Angle of Attack**, all due out shortly. One local band he'd like to work with may raise some eyebrows. "I'd love to record the Posies," he admits. "Tell Jon to give me a call."