

In Profile:

JERRY HARVEY IEM PIONEER & MIX ENGINEER

Creating quality tools for his peers. *by Kevin Young*

»»» SINCE JERRY HARVEY'S CAREER as the "go to" guy for innovative in-ear monitoring solutions first took off in 1995, it's fair to say his schedule has often demanded that he cover a lot of ground in a very, short time. To do it efficiently, he made the decision to take off himself – literally – returning to one of his first loves, flying, in 2004.

"I started flying as a teenager, but I scared myself when I was 17," he notes. "I was landing my first solo when a squall came up and a gust of wind blew me off the runway. I tore the nose wheel off the plane, did a prop strike and almost flipped the plane. That was my last attempt for 30 years."

Like his flight training, Harvey's career as one of the driving forces in the research, development and implementation of IEM technology was also interrupted, though far more briefly. But his ability to get back in the air after a potentially fatal accident – and back in business after being ousted from Ultimate Ears in 2007 – says a great deal about the reserves of discipline that have enabled the 50-year-old engineer and entrepreneur to make his latest venture, JH Audio, such a resounding success.

Then again, his approach to business and life, informed by his motto – "go for it - you either rock or you suck" – is far from timid. "That's pretty much how I live. I want to compete. I want to do my job the best that I can; to have the best mix, to be on top of my technology mixing live, and to be the first to market with new in-ear technology."

So far, so good. With some 50,000-plus hours behind the desk as a monitor engineer and a passion for continuously pushing in ear technology forward, it's fair to say Harvey's life's work has been leading the market in making music sound better for the people making the music in the first place.

A COUPLE OF THINGS

Born and raised in St. Louis, Harvey first started mixing at age 16. "I don't know if I would have called myself an engineer," he says, laughing. "I was making sound come out of PA boxes, but I was pretty atrocious." In fact, that was what drew the attention of Harvey's first mentor, Ed Bigger, whose advice later became Harvey's motto. "Ed was one of Bob Heil's guys back in the day, and he came up to me and said, 'kid, I come in here every Wednesday and you're killing me. Can I show you a couple of things?'"

Bigger's tutoring paid off, and local demand for Harvey's services increased, but he still wasn't making a great living. In fact, he was considering changing careers when a chance meeting prompted him to put his motto to the test. "I sat down at this little bar on Laclede's Landing after a Van Halen's '1984' show and in comes Dave Roth with his entourage, and he sits down on the barstool next to me. We never said a word about



FAST FACTS

Job Title: Co-founder/product designer/artist relations for JH Audio
Location: Apopka, FL
Years in the Business: 34
Favorite Tools: My Smart rig and the JH16 Pro
Worked With: King Kobra, The Cult, Engelbert Humperdinck, Louis Miguel, David Lee Roth, Van Halen, k.d. lang, KISS, Linkin Park, Glee, TASC0, Ultimate Ears, Shure, JH Audio

music, but I thought that was a sign, so I decided to move to LA."

Two years later, after cutting his teeth with King Kobra and others, Harvey attracted the attention of Roth's production manager. "We were moving Dave's office, I was young, and wanted a job, so I busted my butt. And he said, 'hey, what do you do?' I said I'm a sound guy, and he said, 'I don't need a sound guy; can you tune a bass guitar?' I said absolutely, so there I was, working for David Lee Roth."

On Roth's 1987 "Skyscraper" tour, Harvey was unofficially adopted by the TASC0 crew, and that association led to a gig as monitor engineer for one of the openers on The Cult's "Sonic Temple" tour. Soon enough he was mixing monitors full time; first for Roth and a variety of TASC0's other rock clients, including KISS. Later, after A1 Audio bought



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It's Showtime.

Andrew "Fletch" Fletcher

Well respected sound engineer Andrew Fletcher, better known as Fletch, has mixed his share of high-profile shows. When it's "go-time", Fletch relies on Yamaha's PM5D Digital Mixing Console to get the job done and get it done right. We asked Fletch why he favored the PM5D. Here's what he had to say.

"I have been using the PM5D since its release. From concerts and TV shows to major award shows, the PM5D is well designed, flexible and configurable for anything producers throw at me. Mixing multiple bands during an award show is a breeze and I can change configurations without interrupting audio. The internal effects and dynamics have everything I need and the user define keys get me around the console and software pages in an instant. And did I mention that the console is **Rock Solid**? I have never had a problem with the PM5D in all of the years that I've mixed on it!

– Andrew "Fletch" Fletcher

A recent list of shows Fletch has mixed on a PM5D —

- Latin Grammy Awards
- MTV Video Music Awards
- The Voice
- BET Awards
- BET Hip Hop Awards
- Miss Universe Pageant
- Miss USA Pageant
- Miss America Pageant
- Jimmy Kimmel Live!



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:: In Profile ::

TASCO, he continued to work with A1 clients such as k.d. lang, Engelbert Humperdinck, Louis Miguel and others.

“Front of house was the glamour gig, but once they put me on monitors I never left. If you were good, you could work as much as you wanted to.” Clearly, he wanted to work a lot, and between 1985 and 2003, averaged 300 days a year behind the desk.

THING TO MAINTAIN

For a monitor engineer, Harvey says, a good bedside manner is key to being able to deal one on one with artists and meet their needs. Sometimes, however – either because of technological limitations or a lack of communication – it’s a difficult thing to maintain. Such was the case with Gene Simmons during an early 1990s KISS tour.

“In Gene’s defense, the gear couldn’t do what he was expecting, and I couldn’t make it, so I caught a lot of grief.” To cope, he found himself a “sub” – a life-size cardboard cutout of drag car racer Big Daddy Don Garlits he’d liberated from a service station, disguised with a baseball hat, KISS tour shirt, and a “sharpied” beard like his own. “When Gene would come over and yell at me, I’d set the cutout up beside the desk, walk off and cool down. The rest of the band knew but because of a black scrim in front of the desk and the way the light was set, Gene didn’t.”

Eventually, their working relationship smoothed out and Big Daddy could be retired. “Gene came over to me one day and said, ‘Jerry, why don’t you take the information that I’m giving you and do something with it? And I said, ‘Gene, you’re not giving me information, you’re giving me grief, and not once will you tell me what the problem is.

“That night he came stomping across

the stage and I thought, ‘here we go’, but he leaned down and said, ‘Jerry, my vocal is muffled, can you brighten it up? And I was like, ‘I can do that.’ He walked back, smiled at me, and from then on we had communication.”

A BIG CHANGE

In 1995, on his first tour with Van Halen, Harvey found himself challenged again, this time by a purely technological problem that would alter his career dramatically. “They wanted to put Alex on in-cars, to prevent any

Acoustics, found a fix in the company’s “balanced armature graveyard.”

“It was actually for a pacemaker,” Harvey says, “designed to emit a 140 dB tone to tell you the pacemaker was about to give you a zap, so have a seat. I built a high-pass circuit and a little crossover network and that became the first two-way in ear monitor, and the first to make Alex happy.”

After making a sale to Van Halen opens Skid Row – six earpieces at \$500 apiece – it didn’t take long for the light bulb to go on and for Harvey to launch his first company, Ultimate Ears, later that year. Looking to find additional outlets for his talent and product, he cold-called Shure during a stopover in Chicago on a k.d. lang tour, kicking off a relationship that led to the design of the Shure E3 and E5 while also lending credibility to his own fledgling company.

PUSHING FORWARD

For more than a decade, Harvey continuously improved his original product, designing over a dozen successful consumer earpieces and all of UE’s pro offerings. Ultimately, he also released the company’s first 3-way earpiece, the UE-11, shortly before being forced out in 2007 by co-owner/ex-wife Mindy and a third party investor.

When his relationship with UE began to go south, Harvey and his current wife, Brittany, retreated to a lake-front property in Lake of the Ozarks to regroup. While there, they discovered their newborn daughter, Katie, had a rare genetic disease and relocated again; first to Harvey’s hometown to be close to the local children’s hospital, and then, in 2008, to Orlando, a hub for hearing aid manufacturers, where Harvey could find trained technicians to aid in the manufacture of new products he’d



Jerry as a fledgling mix engineer in 1981.

potential hearing loss, but at that time there were really two companies that did in ears and the earpieces were an afterthought. Neither cut it, and Alex looked at me and said, ‘you want to keep mixing this thing? Make the earpieces sound presentable, or find a better earpiece.’ He wasn’t rude, but he was curt. They were the highest profile client I’d worked for and I needed that gig, so I started researching.”

Six months later, he had a working prototype. “I’d sit at my console with a Klark Teknik DN6000 analyzer, an Earthworks mic and modeling clay, testing components. We found the high frequency driver, but I couldn’t find anything for lows that wouldn’t crap out when you put a kick drum through it.” Eventually, Rick Zanardo, Harvey’s contact at Knowles

designed for the aviation market.

Prevented from getting back into the pro audio business immediately by a non-compete clause, he took time to plot a path for the future. “I knew I couldn’t live on my old products, I had to come out and push the technology forward.” Since launching the JH Audio music line in 2009 with the innovative JH13 Pro, featuring dual lows, mids, highs joined by an integrated 3-way crossover, that’s exactly what he’s done.

Previously, the dilemma was that anything he built could be reverse engineered by competitors, but no longer. “They can mimic them, but they can’t get the components. We’re the only ones who have access to them. There were only 12 components in the JH13, but I called it the ‘13’ because I thought it would be lucky,” he laughs.

It was. Prior to attending a 2-day Head.fi meet in LA in May 2009 to demo the JH13, very few people knew Harvey was back in business. But just 10 days later JH Audio found itself with over \$250,000 worth of orders from all over the globe.

STAYING ENGAGED

Since then JH Audio has grown exponentially, adding products like the JH16 and a line of 3-way DSP hardwired belt packs; attracting A-list artists including Kenny Chesney, Disturbed, Keith Urban, and T-Pain, along with major theatrical companies like Blue Man and Cirque Du Soleil, as well as consumer audiophiles in droves.

Still, JH Audio remains a small, service-oriented company. “We have an 800-square-foot office and a 1,200-square-foot lab.” It’s very much a family affair,” he adds, with his wife and co-owner Brittany serving as CFO/artist relations, and his eldest daughter Jaime in the role of COO. Members of the UE team are also coming back, attracted by both JH Audio’s products and the culture of the company. In saying that, Harvey

stresses, he’s not gloating, and nor is he bitter about his departure from UE, just immensely proud of JH Audio.

Now, more than ever, Harvey’s business philosophy is based on his long-standing motto. “It’s true rock and roll. We run this place like a touring crew – we don’t micro manage. We want to build the best fitting and best sounding product. Our lab people want them to

look like jewelry when they go out the door. I’m an engineer. I build tools for my peers and I still mix about eight to 12 weeks a year, because if I haven’t been out and been one of the beta testers, I can’t sell it.” ■

Based in Toronto, KEVIN YOUNG is a freelance music and tech writer, professional musician and composer.

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