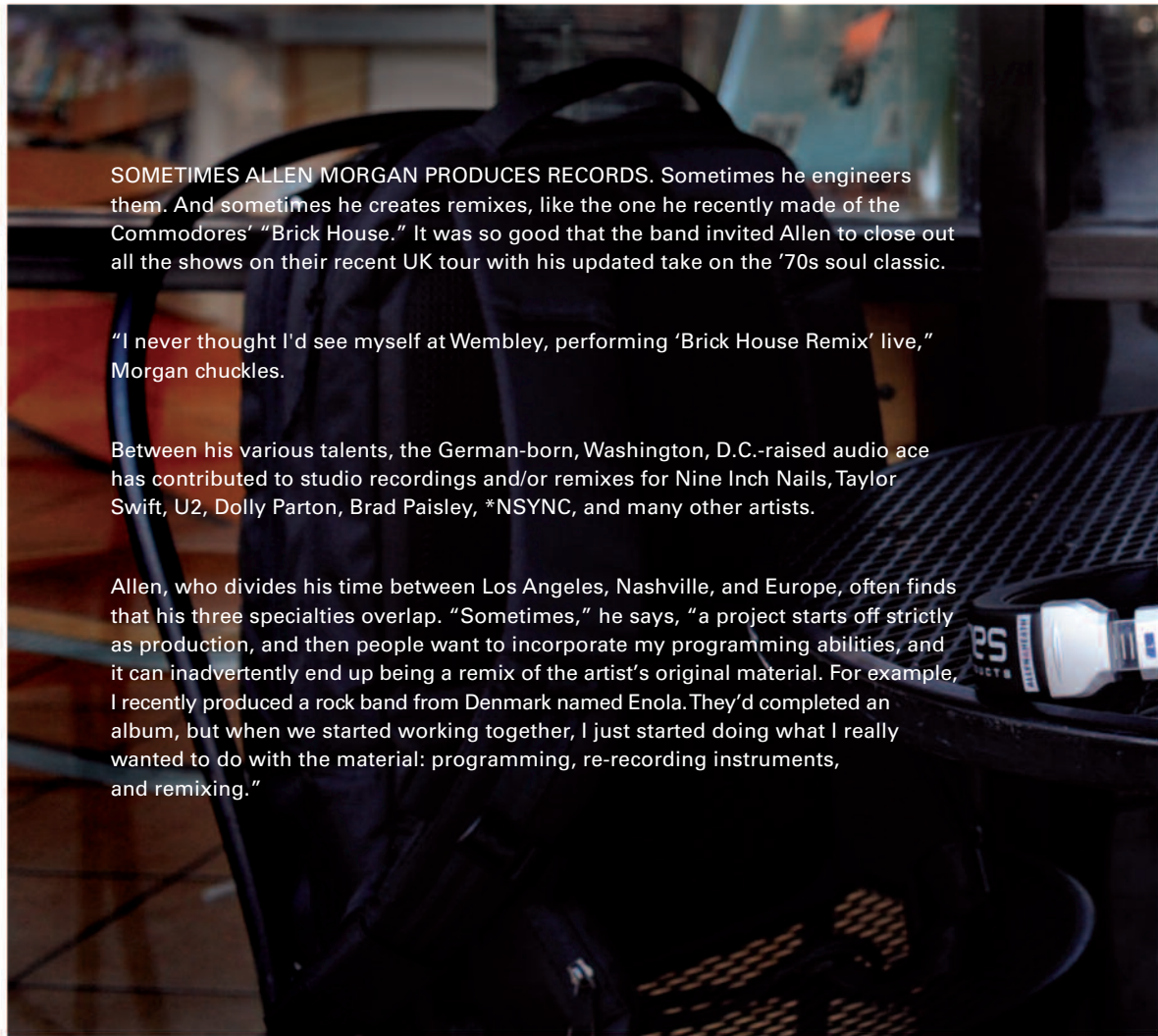




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TRIPLE-THREAT STUDIO SKILLS



SOMETIMES ALLEN MORGAN PRODUCES RECORDS. Sometimes he engineers them. And sometimes he creates remixes, like the one he recently made of the Commodores' "Brick House." It was so good that the band invited Allen to close out all the shows on their recent UK tour with his updated take on the '70s soul classic.

"I never thought I'd see myself at Wembley, performing 'Brick House Remix' live," Morgan chuckles.

Between his various talents, the German-born, Washington, D.C.-raised audio ace has contributed to studio recordings and/or remixes for Nine Inch Nails, Taylor Swift, U2, Dolly Parton, Brad Paisley, *NSYNC, and many other artists.

Allen, who divides his time between Los Angeles, Nashville, and Europe, often finds that his three specialties overlap. "Sometimes," he says, "a project starts off strictly as production, and then people want to incorporate my programming abilities, and it can inadvertently end up being a remix of the artist's original material. For example, I recently produced a rock band from Denmark named Enola. They'd completed an album, but when we started working together, I just started doing what I really wanted to do with the material: programming, re-recording instruments, and remixing."





Morgan partly credits his success to an unusual career path. After playing drums in various bands and earning an audio engineering degree from Florida's Full Sail University, he wound up working in various L.A. mastering/recording studios. Mastering—the painstaking process of preparing studio recordings for final release via precise level and EQ adjustments—tends to be practiced by audio veterans, not newcomers. Yet Allen had a chance to work with such legendary figures as mastering engineer Doug Sax and recording/mixing engineer Bill Schnee.

“Doug Sax did Pink Floyd’s *The Wall*,” notes Morgan. “Bill Schnee did a lot of Steely Dan, and we all know how great those records sound. I was just lucky enough to be around these great engineers right from the get-go, and I got a great education in the way things should sound. Of course, I use the word ‘should’ loosely, because obviously there’s no instruction book on any of this stuff. But I learned how to be consistent in levels, EQ, and frequencies, and understand the general balance that well-mixed recordings should have.”

That “big picture” sensibility may have something to do with Morgan’s success in so many genres, from rock to pop to R&B to country. “I never start recording or mixing a project by thinking, ‘This is a country record, so we have to roll off the bass at 400 Hertz,’” he says. “I don’t approach *anything* like that. I just go after whatever will make a particular song, track, or vocal sound the best it possibly can.”

For close to a decade, Morgan’s chief audio tools have been Steinberg’s Cubase and Nuendo. “I have used literally every type of recording software, but Cubase 5 just gets everything right. I used to think Cubase was a consumer-level version of Nuendo, but it’s so much more than that, and now it’s my main tool. What draws me to both programs is their sound quality. I’ve had engineers literally banging their heads, wondering why Cubase sounds bigger, rawer, and more analog-like than the sounds they were getting from the recording rigs they’d poured so much money into. I’m convinced a lot of it has to do with the Cubase software.”

Morgan relies on many third-party VST instruments for his production and remix work, but he singles out Cubase’s The Grand, a virtual grand piano, as a favorite. “I love it,” he says. “It sounds absolutely phenomenal.” Between Cubase and various plug-ins, Allen can now create world-class mixes on his laptop in hotel rooms, as he recently did with a dance remix of Reba McEntire’s “I Want a Cowboy.” “Technology has really facilitated my work,” he says. “Now there are no boundaries. I can do what I do from anywhere.”

Given the ubiquity of laptop recording studios, how can aspiring producers distinguish their work? Allen has two suggestions: vision and originality.

“It helps to know what you’re going after from the beginning of a project,” he advises. “I understand that creative accidents happen, and sometimes they work out. But you need an overall picture in your mind, something you can pursue relentlessly. Also, you need to find your own sound. Originality is so lacking these days. You can see it in the charts, where so many things sound so similar. Obviously, many of us get into music because we love a particular style or a particular artist. But you need to find your own direction, even if it’s a spin-off of something you really like.”