

SCAGGS

DIGGING INTO DIGITAL

BOZ

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When Boz Scaggs says his eclectic new album, *Dig*, is “all over the map,” he’s talking about its stylistic breadth. But the words refer just as handily to the city-hopping manner in which Scaggs and his co-producers, Toto keyboardist David Paich and guitarist/studio ace Danny “Kootch” Kortchmar, created the disc. The trio commenced work in Paich’s Los Angeles studio, moved on to Kortchmar’s home base in New York, and finished the tracks at Scaggs’s place in San Francisco.

FROM THE COOL, JAZZ-TINGED GROOVE OF “MISS RIDDLE” to the edgy, in-your-face street funk of “You’re Not,” *Dig* conveys its creators’ vast range of experiences. As always, the music bears the stamp of the pop and R&B that first shaped Scaggs’ style back in the early ’60s, when he was a teenager in Plano, Texas. Yet *Dig* dares modern moves as well, such as the use of hip-hop-influenced rhythm loops. “Hip-hop is the modern R&B,” says Scaggs. “The sounds and grooves are all around us. They’re just something that you pick out of the air around you, and working in the hard disk domain lets you use them in a contemporary way.” Working with loops and synths, Scaggs, Paich, and Kortchmar performed the lion’s share of *Dig*’s tracks themselves.

The marriage of vintage and modern has been a Scaggs specialty for decades. He perfected the approach on the 1975 megahit *Silk Degrees*, which featured Paich’s arrangements and keyboard work. In fact, Toto initially coalesced around those very Scaggs sessions. On the other hand, Scaggs and Kortchmar hadn’t collaborated prior to *Dig*. Tellingly, it wasn’t only Kootch’s impressive track record that attracted Scaggs. “I was aware of a project he was doing called Slo Leak,” says Boz. “He used contemporary techniques combined with the traditional elements of basic blues. It was modern and original.”

While some feel that digitally recorded pop can sound rigid, Scaggs says that digital recording can afford more flexibility than analog. “Anything that we might create today in the way of arrangements, sounds and performances, we could have created in analog, but it would have taken longer. There’s more

freedom here, in the sense that you can attempt things that used to take so much more time. And sonically, digital is catching up. It’s getting closer to what we’re used to hearing in the analog domain.”

One of Boz’s indispensable devices is a hard-disk recorder. “I use it in my studio, at home, and on the road,” he says. “It’s become an invaluable tool for me.” A recent convert to the Yamaha AW4416 digital audio workstation, Scaggs says he was swayed by the unit’s 16-track capacity, 24-bit resolution, and the fact that it interacts smoothly with his Yamaha O2R digital recording console. “The more I become aware of the capabilities of this machine,” says Scaggs, “the more I grow into it.” He is currently using his AW4416 for pre-production of an upcoming release by Applejack.

“Hard-disk recording isn’t necessarily the best approach for everyone or every project,” says Scaggs. “But because Paich and Kootch had so much experience as session players and arrangers, they had an incredible facility with the medium. We were able to move through ideas and arrangements in a way we couldn’t have in the past, while retaining the spontaneity that is an essential component of our work. Maybe it has to do with the generation we came from, or the fact that we loved that spontaneity in the music of the artists we followed. We don’t mind telling the engineers to cool it, to not try to make everything perfectly uniform. Sometimes it’s the unevenness in the elements that gives them resonance. Remember, however well the machines may perform, they are only here to serve the music.”

