

Junkie XL - Expanding Limits with Cubase

Tom Holkenborg, better known as Junkie XL, is a very busy man. Besides his successful progressive dance project Junkie XL, Tom is a renowned remixer for top-acts like Britney Spears or Depeche Mode. He is doing scores for Hollywood blockbusters, music for computer games and commercials for international top brands.

The name Junkie XL stands for quality electronic music that cross over between different genres. Known as a real junkie when it comes to work, Tom always tried to expand musical limits. From the



Pro 24 on Atari about 20 years ago to Cubase SX3 nowadays, Steinberg software always helped him with that.

Steinberg: Hi Tom, nice you finally found the time to talk to us. It's quite hard to reach you. Seems you've been very busy.

Tom Holkenborg: That's true. I recently moved from Amsterdam to L.A. to do more substantial work for movies. I did 30-40% of the Catwoman score. I also did new commercial campaigns here like a Cadillac campaign, a worldwide campaign for Heineken and a campaign for the German car brand Opel. Furthermore there have been collaborations with artists, I did one single with Sarah McLaughlin, one single with Britney Spears and a remix for Depeche Mode. So it's been very busy.

Steinberg: So you decided to move to L.A. mainly to be closer to the film industry in Hollywood?

Tom Holkenborg: Yes, not only for films, also for commercials and video games. I just did a full on score for a video game of Microsoft which is called Forza and will be released very soon. It's the next generation of racing games and it will be a real big thing. I did a full on score on that which is about 2 hours of music. At the moment it seems that video games and commercials are the new "radio" for electronic music. On the normal radio you barely hear any cool electronic music anymore. You have to go to clubs or find an internet radio station. But in films, commercials and video games there is enough room for electronic music.

Steinberg: That's lots of different projects with different demands. Do you have a main production tool? Or does it depend on the project?

Tom Holkenborg: I work with everything that I can get my hands on. I was definitely one of the first guys who started working with Cubase. I remember in 1985/86 when Pro 24 came out, the first program Steinberg ever released, I started to work with that. And I've been working with Cubase ever since. 2000/2001 I got a Pro Tools set next to my Cubase set. And next to that set I got a Logic set as well. But preferably I work in Cubase. Cubase is my main production tool for making sounds.

Steinberg: What do you like about Cubase?

Tom Holkenborg: If you look at the last 15 years it was always Cubase that was the most innovative program. It always came up with new things. It came up with the audio sequencer; it came up with ASIO driver and with VST technology. Basically other programs followed that. Programs like Logic or Pro Tools took the graphic design Cubase developed in the early 90s. For me, making music in Cubase is great with all the plug-ins that comes with it and all the instruments that are especially made for it. The MIDI programming in Cubase is really great for me.

Steinberg: What is your working method today? Do you still use a lot of hardware?

Tom Holkenborg: In Amsterdam I used to have a big studio with 24-track analog and a lot of outboard gear. All the old synths you can imagine, I had them all. Today I basically sample this stuff and throw them in any of the plug-ins. It really depends on my mood and how I want to work.

Steinberg: How does your live setup look like?

Tom Holkenborg: My live-setup today is mainly software based. I used to play live with different gear like the MPC 2000 and racks of hardware samplers but today it's just a laptop and a Yamaha AW4416 digital desk. The desk has 44 channels and the flexibility it gives you is just amazing. I bring all my files with me on the laptop so that I can react flexible to the vibe of the crowd. I play nearly every weekend now, mostly within the US and in South America. It is really cool like that because you can try stuff out and it's all so easy with the new software.

Steinberg: When do you play in Europe again?

Tom Holkenborg: I don't know. I might do some festivals in August. But my work is here and it's very difficult when you are in the middle of big production to leave for a couple of months to do a tour. I definitely tour less than I used to do because my priority shifted a little bit more towards film work.

Steinberg: Are there any plans for a new Junkie XL album?

Tom Holkenborg: We're planning to get that release later this year. I'm quite happy that this album will just be normal album with music what I feel like making and no concept album like my last one. Broadcast from the Computer Hell Cabin was such a huge amount of work. The collaboration with all the vocalists was quite difficult and took a lot of time. Plus, it was not only this CD, there was another double album I released online. So it was about 240 minutes of music altogether. This is so much music that it takes forever before it's done.

Steinberg: Are you also planning to release more new stuff as MP3 on your page? Do you think this is the future of music distribution?

Tom Holkenborg: Absolutely, here in the US iTunes is so big. They sell so much stuff on iTunes. I recently purchased the whole U2 collection for \$140. All albums U2 ever released, that is a really good deal. But CDs are cheaper here in the US too, so people still buy quite a lot of CDs too. In Holland CDs are so ridiculously expensive. I'm not going to pay 25 Euros for 10 songs! That was also my take on how I released that album. It was supposed to be a normal priced CD but you got a double CD and then online for only 7 \$ you got another 120 minute music online! This is how it should be because life is expensive and especially in Europe with the Euro people don't have that amount of money anymore to spend on music. So it's important that artists in general think about what they contribute to that whole system. I think it's very important that as an artist you deliver a lot of good stuff through your website or through other websites and the CD you can buy in the shops has to be a bulk of material people can be satisfied with.

Steinberg: Do you have any tips and advices for upcoming producers and songwriters?

Tom Holkenborg: Well, there are a couple of things I would like to tell them. First of all you should become aware of the amazing possibilities you have today. When you set up Cubase on your computer you basically have a very powerful studio. It's just one dongle and a laptop that make a whole studio today! When I started making music with the Atari and the first Pro 24, the situation was completely different. Today there is no limitation anymore; the only limitation is your fantasy! Like 15

years ago it was impossible to think like that or to record some guitars on a laptop, move it around, do bounces. it's insane! In that aspect it's good to realize that you actually have a whole studio on your computer at home. You can explore everything in your own, safe environment.

Then the next step is to keep on trying and keep on making your own stuff. Especially try to find your own sound, your own way of working. I think it's very important that when you're working with a program like Cubase that at least once you spend the time to read the manual from the beginning to the end. You will discover so many tips and tricks in the manual which really helping you to develop your own style of programming and working with the program. This is the beauty of it; you can make Cubase work for you in many different ways. A friend of mine, one of the biggest composers here in L.A., is also working with Cubase and he has a completely different way of working with the same program than I do. And it's very funny when we sit together it's like, 'Ah, you doing it like this? I do it like that..' And the last thing is again keep on trying, keep on going and eventually you'll get something great and get other people interesting in what you're making.



Steinberg: By the way, how did you start to make music?

Tom Holkenborg: I have a very traditional background. I come from a family where everybody played instruments. My mother was a violin teacher, my sister played piano and guitar and my father was actually one of the first DJs in Holland. In the 50ies he was traveling around and playing records at parties. So music was the main issue in our family. I started playing drums when I was 7 or 8 and I played guitar, I played bass, I played everything.

By the time I was 16, I started working in a music shop selling instruments and that was where I came in contact with the Atari and the Pro 24. This was very fascinating for me and from that point electronic music played an important role in my musical career.

Steinberg: So you are still a "studio junkie"?

Tom Holkenborg: Well, I got a little bit better. I definitely spend more time with my friends and I spend more time on my girlfriend than I used to do. But I still work an insane amount of hours compared to what normal people do. I'm still running days of between 10 and 14 hours in the studio but I don't take my laptop to bed anymore because it makes me sleep not really well. When I was 22 I skipped two nights a week easily. But today I'm 37 and I can't do that anymore, I definitely have to sleep every night, though 4-6 hours is enough for me.

Steinberg: This seems like good development. Keep on going and all the best for your next productions.

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