

# SCULPTING STUDIO SOUND WITH **ANDY BARLOW**

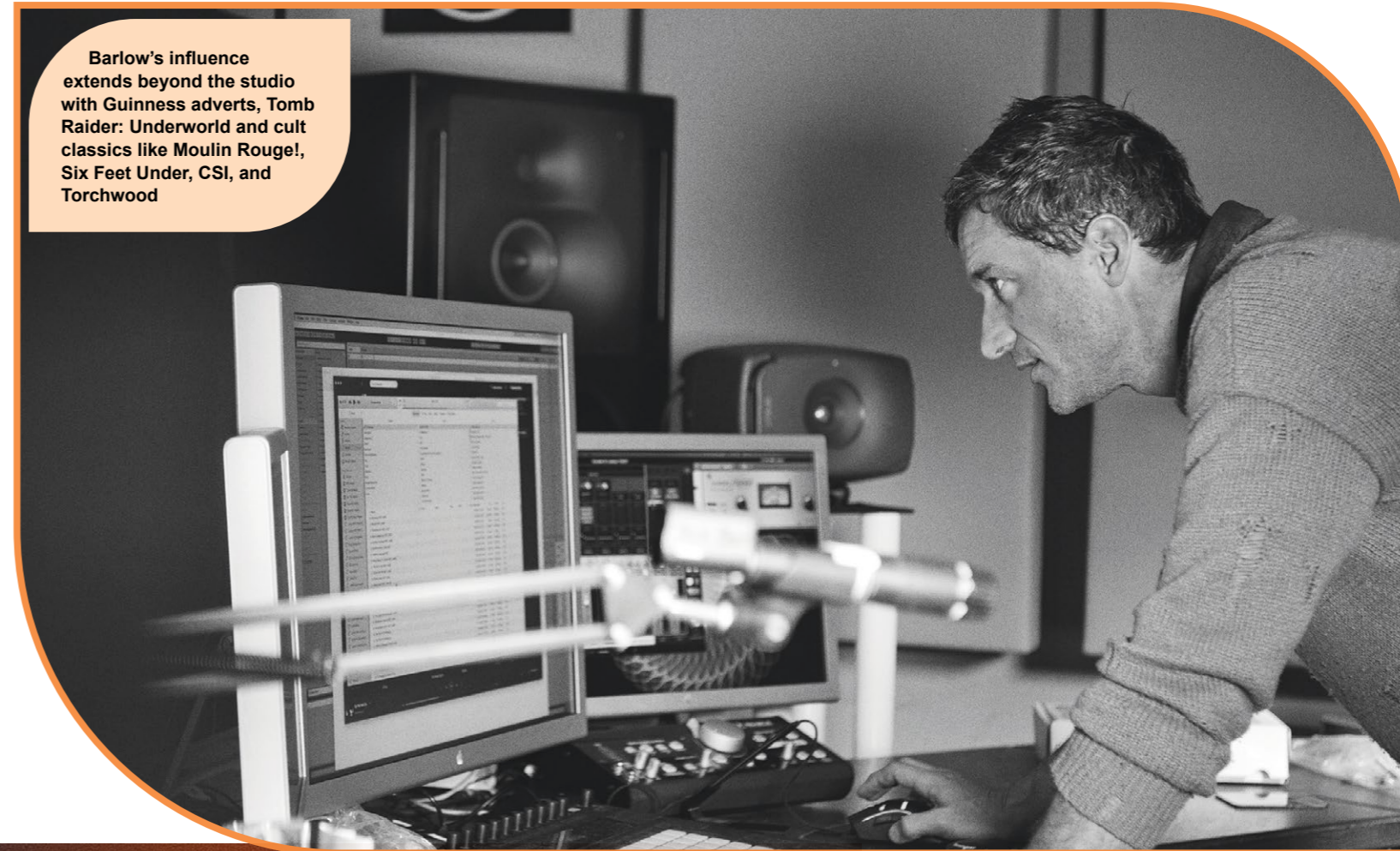
**Can you tell us about your early days as a musician and what inspired you to become a record producer?**

I've been fascinated by sound for as long as I can remember. My mum loves to tell this story about me as a toddler, pulling out all the saucepans and wooden spoons, setting up my own little percussion section in the kitchen. Apparently, I even urinated in one of the pans while drumming on it—which,

while not my proudest musical moment, does show a certain commitment to the performance!

I always knew I wanted to do something with music, but I wasn't the typical "I play guitar" kind of kid. I was more drawn to technology—keyboards, drum machines, anything that made sounds and did interesting things. That's kind of been the ongoing joke with Lamb: that I've always loved "things that do

Barlow's influence extends beyond the studio with Guinness adverts, Tomb Raider: Underworld and cult classics like Moulin Rouge!, Six Feet Under, CSI, and Torchwood

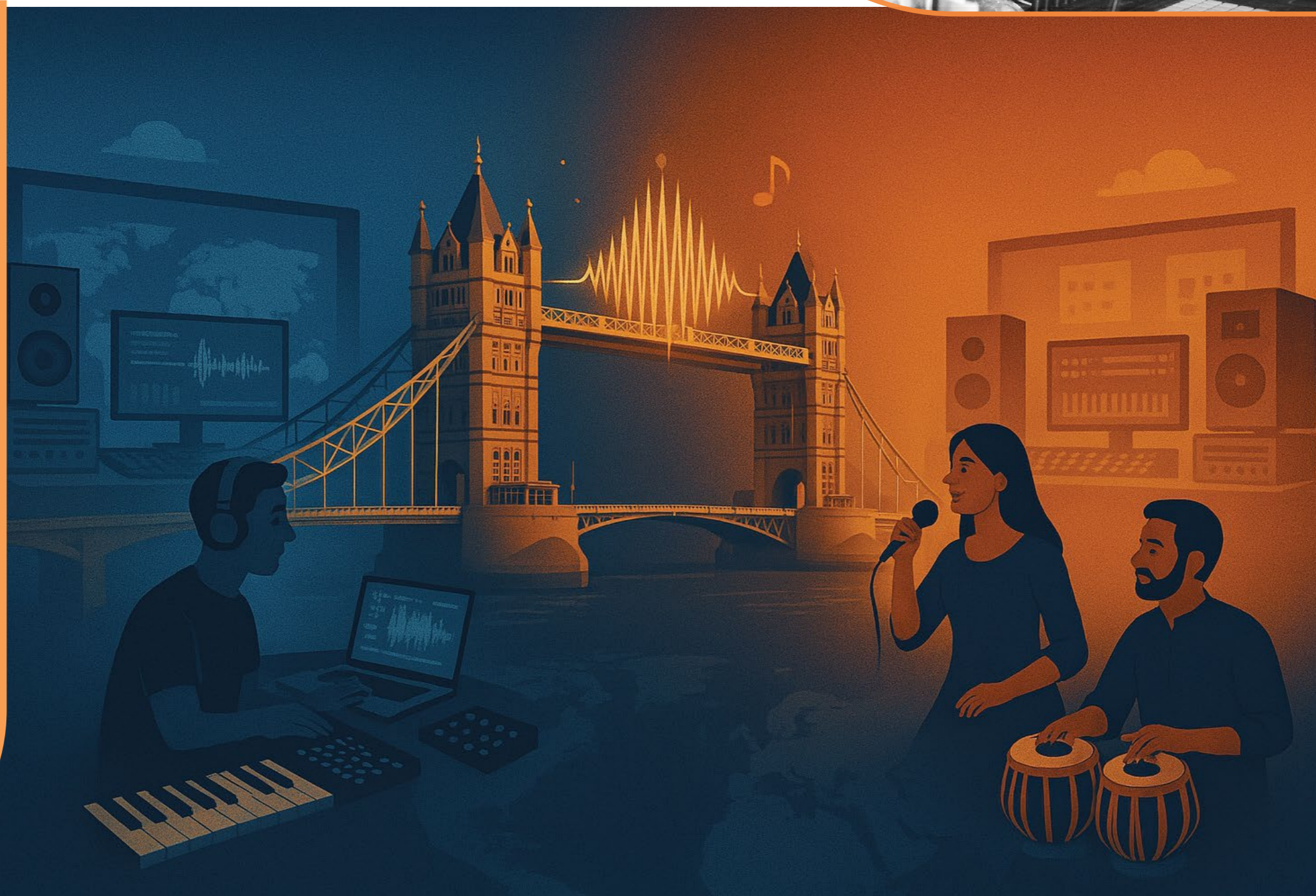


*Few artists straddle the line between innovation and emotional depth quite like **Andy Barlow**.*

*Best known as one half of the genre-defying duo **Lamb**, Barlow has built a reputation for crafting intricate textures laced with hypnotic rhythms, music that moves both heart and head.*

*In a rare tête-à-tête with **Anil Chopra**, Editor-in-Chief of **PALM Expo Magazine**, Barlow elucidates a path to realise Chopra's dream of building a vibrant bridge between the Mumbai and London music scenes.*

*Along the way, he opens up about his creative process, and shares insights from his journey as both artist and producer.*



things."

In my teens, I spent some time living in the States, went to high school there, and started going to a lot of live gigs. That's when I really caught the bug for live music. But even then, I didn't have a clear picture of what a record producer actually did. Looking back, though, I realise I'd been producing records for years without even knowing it.

It all became official when my friend Fin—who you might know as **Fink**—rang me up. His producer had pulled out at the last minute, and he asked if I'd give it a go. We did a couple of tracks, and both he and the label loved it. That turned into a full album together—**Distance and Time**—which I'm still really proud of.

From that point on, I stepped fully into the role. Over the years, I started taking on more and more of the process myself. These days, unless we're doing something like a string arrangement, I'm usually mixing and engineering my own productions too.

**How do you think your musical background influences your approach to record production?**

Honestly, I think the biggest influence is the fact that I'm completely self-taught. I gave the traditional route a go—had a few guitar lessons, tried piano lessons too—but none of it really stuck. So I just decided to figure it out myself. And this was all before the internet, which made it a bit like trying to assemble IKEA furniture without the instructions... or the Allen key.

Back then, all my mates wanted to be drummers, guitarists, or singers. Being into keyboards wasn't exactly cool—how times have changed! But I stuck with it because I genuinely loved sound, and I loved messing around with machines and gear until something magical happened.

Not having a formal musical education has actually been a blessing. I'm not limited by theory or rules—I just go with what feels right. I think it's helped me stay open-minded and curious. I can usually find the beauty in things that might not be "technically correct," but they feel honest and real. That's where the magic is for me.

## Can you walk us through your typical production process from initial ideas to final mixing and mastering?

It really changes from track to track—there's no one-size-fits-all formula. But if I had a golden rule, it's this: whatever bugs me the most, I work on first.

If the chorus isn't sitting right, it doesn't matter how great everything else sounds—it'll keep buzzing around in my head until I fix it. That said, I don't usually go hunting for choruses straight away. Sometimes it's better to let them reveal themselves naturally.

Often, I'll focus on shaping the other parts of the track and give it some space to breathe. Usually, in the middle of that process—maybe through a happy accident, or just catching a wave of momentum—the chorus shows up, and you just know it's right.

And when it comes to mixing and mastering, I try not to separate those stages too much from the creative flow. I've found over the years that the more I can stay in that same headspace—from the first idea through to the final mix—the more cohesive and emotionally resonant the track becomes.

## Tell us about your sound engineering work that makes you happy—and some that's had an impact or created change.

The sound engineering work that makes me happiest is when I'm in a room I trust, with monitors I love, and I'm not juggling too many hats at once. When I can just focus fully on the artist and the music, and they're feeling seen, supported, and excited—that's the sweet spot. There's nothing better than that moment when the talent hears a playback and gets goosebumps... and you can see it in their eyes that you've nailed it. That's when I'm happiest.

As for sound engineering that's impacted change... I'm not sure how to answer that, to be honest. I don't know if my work has changed the world, but I do hope it's moved people. Whether it's helped someone through a tough time, made them dance, cry, or just feel something—that, in its own quiet way, is a kind of change.

## Tell us about your work as a musician that won you recognition.

Recognition is a funny thing. I produced a **U2** album that went to number one in over 30 countries... but no one's ever stopped me in the street to say, "Well done for that!"

I suppose if I had to choose something that really resonated with people, it would be **Lamb's** first album. At the time, it was pretty groundbreaking—we were blending electronic music, jazz, and drum and bass, all within proper song structures. That kind of fusion just wasn't happening in many places back then.

What's meant the most to me over the years is hearing from other musicians—people I deeply admire—saying that our work inspired them, or acted like a kind of lighthouse for their own creative journeys. That's incredibly motivating, and honestly, it's one of the most rewarding parts of making music.

## Tell us about your ideas in unconventional sound engineering.

I've always been a big fan of putting mics in weird places—corners of the room, under the piano, wherever feels interesting in the moment. There's something magic about capturing sound from a space where it's not supposed to be recorded.

One little trick I love is using a pair of ribbon mics that usually live above my piano. When we're doing backing vocals, I'll get the singer to stand about two metres back and angle the mics up toward their face. Then we track harmonies onto those piano mics. What you get is this beautiful blend—the resonance of the piano subtly bleeding in, and the vocals sitting in the room in a really natural, uncompressed way. It gives you this textured, atmospheric sound that's full of character.

I'm also not precious about things being too clean. Sometimes, just overdriving the input on a sampler a little can make a sample come alive. It might not be technically perfect—but perfect isn't really the goal. Interesting is better.

## What's your go-to equipment and software for recording and producing music?

I do pretty much everything—whether it's mixing to picture, producing other artists, or working on my own music—in **Ableton**. It just feels so intuitive. I don't even really think about it anymore—I just watch my hands move and suddenly everything's in focus. It's like muscle memory meets flow state.

I can use **Cubase** and **Pro Tools**, but honestly, opening them now feels a bit like visiting an old girlfriend—nostalgic, but not where I live anymore.

The latest **Macs** with the **Apple Silicon** chips are incredible. Especially in warmer climates, where older machines used to kick out fan noise that would sneak into your mics—super annoying and hard to get rid of. These new machines are silent, fast, and just brilliant for creative work.

I'm a huge fan of **Universal Audio**—both their hardware and plugins. Their stuff just sounds amazing. My speakers of choice are **Genelec**. I've got five or six pairs scattered across different spaces, and the **1237a** in the main room of my Brighton studio sound as good as any high-end room I've worked in.

Mic-wise, I've got a **Neumann M 149**, which just seems to work beautifully on anything you put in front of it. And I've got a soft spot for ribbon mics—Coles are a big part of my sound palette.

I use the **Push** as my Ableton controller—it's so tactile and intuitive. **Native Instruments** gear is also a staple in my setup, especially the **Komplete Kontrol S88 MkII** with the weighted keys—it's a stunning bit of kit.

Universal Audio's **Apollo** interfaces? I've got a few—some **Twins**, and a few of the bigger ones. Rock solid.

As for plugins, I love **Soundtoys**, **Omnisphere**, **Spectrasonics** stuff, and **Spitfire Audio's** samples. Oh—and I much prefer using **Melodyne** for pitch correction. It just sounds more natural to me. Auto-Tune has its place, but it tends to wear me out after a while.

Here's a tightened-up and engaging version of your answer, in the same relaxed and warm tone as the rest of the interview:

## Tell us about your studio in Goa.

I've got a really simple but wonderfully creative setup out here in Goa. It's centred around an M1 MacBook, my Ableton Push controller, and the S88 MkII from Native Instruments. Basically, all my favourite pieces from my main studio—just fewer of them. I also travel with a small collection of microphones, and I've got a pair of **Genelec Ones** here (**8331a**), which are absolutely incredible. They don't have quite the same heft or SPL as the big studio monitors back in the UK, but everything I work on here translates beautifully when I get home to mix. That's the real test, and these little guys pass with flying colours. In a way, having less gear actually opens things up creatively. There's something about being limited that can make writing and arranging feel more focused—and often, more inspired.

## We have a vision of building a creative bridge for music between London and Mumbai. Tell us how this bridge can be built.

I think it's a beautiful vision—and totally possible. Both London and Mumbai are steeped in musical history, each with their own rich, diverse scenes. There's so much potential when artists from these two cities connect and share their unique influences.

One way to build that bridge could be through workshops and creative residencies—bringing musicians from the UK to India and vice versa. It would be amazing to create spaces where people can collaborate, learn from each other, and find that spark that happens when different cultures and styles collide.

I've got a beautiful studio back in the UK, and I'm currently running a new series of retreats called **Inflow Retreats**. They're all about exploring the connection between music and wellness—but in a playful, open, and creatively nourishing way.

I'd absolutely love to bring participants from India over to the UK for retreats, and equally to host retreats here in Goa, inviting UK musicians to experience the incredible creative energy of India. I think that kind of cultural exchange is where real inspiration lives.

## Thank you for sharing your journey with us. Any final thoughts for our readers?

Just that music is still, for me, one of the most powerful ways we can connect—across cultures, across generations, and across any personal differences. Whether you're making it, listening to it, or using it to heal or grow, it has this amazing ability to bring people into the present moment and remind us we're not alone.

If you're reading this and you're a musician, a producer, or even just someone curious about creativity—keep exploring, keep playing, and most importantly, stay open. That's where the magic is.