

A Young Person's Guide to Ecological Studios

A round-the-houses primer on the nuts and bolts of possible fusions between Ecodesign, Green Architectures and the sound studio. Featuring Real World's Box studios, self-build timber frame DIY, and Greenpeace's mobile solar powered recording studio

1 Introduction: cousin paths

Maybe it is naive to dream of an alternative to conspicuous consumption, but if everything is to be remade sustainable and even vaguely eco-friendly, this includes the music business – a notorious agent of profligate energy use and eco complacency. And if so, any possible eco-music sphere will need to face a remaking of music activity which constitutes a revolution in the myriad processes of its livelihood. Given that the business of music is premised on consumption, the notion that much will need to change, rather than business as usual, seems self-evident.

In the space between the music world and the green world there are various divergent strands which represent the beginnings of a dialogue between the two worlds. A first point to get straight is related to the technologisation (indeed some would say industrialisation) of the practice of music. One consequence of this technologisation has been, of course, a considerable increase in energy required. Electricity is used for the running of studios, recording music for almost every Western household's listening pleasure. It extends further: the making of equipment for performance and concert, and the complex interlinked world servicing the music industry – from CD factories, printers of record sleeves – to the makers of recording equipment. Energy, although only one of a series of points the green world is concerned with, is the one primarily concentrated on here.

For the thorough-going and traditional wing of ecologists, nature conservationists and culturally hued greens, it is contemporary avant-art activity as well as the multitude of species of popular entertainment which engenders the problem, and which such green cultural conservatives hope to remedy. It is as if in their art-statements the media of modern Art won't exist in the eco-utopian futures they see somewhere over the

vista. Magazines such as *Resurgence*, and in the USA, *Orion*, whilst not directly engaging with the issue, seem to imply an aesthetic future without electric or electronically mediated entertainment.

A rejection of the industrialisation of music (as in this instance) is a kind of watertight approach: you don't engage the possible problems that ensue as consequences of that industrialisation. The traditional greens would argue, you could imagine, for the continuation of wooden music, be it classical, or folk in form. They would shy away from electrical amplification, and privilege live music over electronic reproduction through hi-fis and other mediums, (witness years gone by, the man who shouted 'Judas' at the Albert Hall when Bob Dylan went electric). Wooden music, perhaps with some very basic elaboration from electric amplification may be viewed as an 'ideal' future. The energy use would be completely sustainable, the complex of interlinked supporting services non-existent. A radical conclusion from this scenario is a music world without a music business.

It is a scenario that most people today would find dauntingly unrealistic in Western cultures. The facts are that mainstream Western society, and the vast majority of ecological supporters, have accepted or bought into a culture which takes for granted a significant degree of technologisation of music. Eco-adherents are often as equally involved in the music sphere through the mediation of records, CDs, hi-fi, and the circus of concert going, as any other segment of the community. A most poignant rejoinder to 'nuclear power? no thanks' is: 'so, would you abandon your energy eating CD player?'. To disinvest this technology, which presently brings music to so many, so that a future world feels no need for such technology, appears to be an extremely tall order.

