

INTERVIEW WITH ANDY BRADLEY -- NOVEMBER 1994

Born in 1951 in Kobe, Japan, Andy Bradley has lived in the Phillipines, Hong Kong, Australia and the United States. He moved to Houston in 1980. As chief engineer and studio manager of Sugar Hill Recording Studios, Andy recorded all of Dave's records for Justice.

My specialty is acoustic recording, as in classical music, jazz, rock ... The synthesizer/drum machine stuff is not my specialty at all. I love to record classical ensembles, jazz ensembles and big band ensembles and stuff like that.

I actually met Dave Catney in like '82 or '83. He was playing with a singer by the name of Holly Denei at a club called Cody's here in Houston. He was playing with her in a jazz/pop quartet. We actually cut a demo of a couple of songs for her. One of the record companies that was using the studio was interested in her, and I remember cutting a demo on Holly, and that's how I met Dave. And then I would see him briefly at clubs and things. The first long contact beyond the demo session I'd done ten years earlier was the Kellye Gray album; that's how I first met Dave again. Then we did the three albums, the two trio albums and the solo piano album. I also did some demos that David did with another Justice artist, Nancy King; they did a bunch of demos that are still sitting around somewhere. And then I did the second Kellye Gray album--which is as yet unreleased--which Kellye has in her possession, which David played on. The last two serious recording projects he was involved with were Kellye Gray's second album and of course his solo piano album, which was very difficult for him to record.

Over the serious recording projects I was involved with with Dave over the last three or four years, I found him to be one of the most intense people I've ever met. He was very strong and very direct about what he was doing and at the same time he was an exceptionally nice person. But you could tell when you walked into a room and met David that he was very intense. He was one of those people that you just know "OK, this guy's serious." In conversation he overwhelmed you. And nothing negative about that in the slightest; it was very positive overwhelming. It made you feel like he was really talking to you. It was a real pleasure to engage Dave in conversation because you knew that he would understand everything you said, and you would understand everything he said, because he was very direct and very forceful about it. That was very enjoyable. If you asked Dave a straight question, you got a straight answer back. And that's a real pleasure when you're working in a recording studio because so many times you get all these things like, "Oh, could you make my guitar sound like glass?" "What do you mean? What does that mean?" Dave would say, "Look, I don't like the pedal noise I'm hearing. Is there a way to move the microphones to get away from pedal noise?" "OK, let's try it." That's the kind of directness that's a real pleasure to work with, when a musician knows what he's looking for and asks you point blank if you can do it. Basically Dave was just a real pleasure to work with.

There were kind of two phases in working with Dave. One was Dave before he got on the--he told me--twenty drugs that he was taking to combat his illness. The Dave that I worked with four years ago was tireless, just absolutely tireless, and he would stay at the piano for as long as you wanted him to stay, as long as he had a break to go get a Coke or something. The last two episodes with Kellye Gray and with his solo album, the guy was just beaten into the ground. The disease had obviously gotten a serious hold on him, and he did not have the ability to do and re-do and just hammer, doing things over and over and over again. We had to very careful to pace him to be able to get the best out of Dave, as long as he was able to physically. But even then the same amount of intensity was always there. Even when I went to see

him play probably about a week or two before he passed away, the same Dave was at the piano, intensely playing his instrument and trying to convey his message to you. That never seemed to diminish in him at all.

I loved his beautiful sonorities, the extremely well crafted tunes. When he would solo it was very well crafted. Even when he went outside it was just really well prepared. A lot of thought process went into what he was playing and how he was playing. I always got the impression that he never brought in his own compositions to record them until he was ready. He didn't want to take any half-baked ideas and attempt to flesh them out using up studio time.

On the *Jade Visions* sessions, when you have musicians like Peter Erskine and Marc Johnson ... I think the idea with those guys was to maybe sketch the head out; let them hear the head of the tune. I think that's what they basically did. And they'd work over the head and get the harmonic structure down the way Dave wanted it. Then they'd say, "Turn it loose!", and we'd go do a couple of takes. That would be it, and then we'd move on to the next tune. With guys like that you did not need to worry about there being any mistakes. It was just a case of whether you liked a take at that tempo better than the take in that tempo, and whether anyone complained about their solo not being as good as what they would have wanted. But there were never many takes. There was just more of a variety of tunes to choose from. The sessions never took very long; I think they were like two or three day sessions and it was over. It was a real pleasure to work on those.

The first album had Ed Soph on drums instead of Peter. It was a different kind of energy, because Ed's a very much different drummer from Peter Erskine, and I guess Marc and Dave reacted to what type of drummer they had. Peter was a lot more orchestral sounding to me on *Jade Visions* than Ed Soph was on *First Flight*. Peter's playing is more open and more colorful, less straight ahead jazz drumming, I guess. That was really interesting to meet him and work with him. I've done like three or four projects that Marc Johnson's been in so I always expect the best, and he always delivers! He has one of the nicest sounding acoustic basses I've ever recorded. So does Rufus Reed and Ray Brown; those are the two other guys of that caliber that I've worked with. It's been a real treat working for all the Justice jazz projects because I've met some great musicians. There are about twenty to twenty five CD's that I've done for Randall and Justice over the last four years.

We've got a 7-foot Yamaha at Sugar Hill which tends to cover the jazz/pop/rock idiom. But Randall would call the local Steinway dealer and bring in a 9 foot Steinway. Actually there's a small anecdote to that in that the piano we used on both of Dave's trio albums was numbered 007, the "James Bond piano". The reason it was called 007 was it was an original instrument that had gone to San Antonio and had gotten drowned in a flood. Steinway washed their hands of the instrument and said, "Take the serial number off of it. If you want to try and rebuild it, it's no longer one of our serial-numbered Steinways." So the Steinway dealer here in town decided to rebuild the instrument and gave it the number 007, since it was not supposed to be a real Steinway anymore. It's a great piano though. They still use it for rentals. Dave's trio albums and Kellye Gray's were all done on 007.

The Steinway that was used at Rice University for Dave's solo album was an incredible instrument that's been played by all kinds of masters of classical piano. It's a wonderful, loud, brash instrument that worked really well in a concert hall where you're doing an ambient recording. It's bright enough to cut through without having to add any high end to it. That was also the first jazz recording ever done in Stude Hall, which is a gorgeous concert hall. The stage is big enough to hold a full symphony orchestra, and the piano's right in the middle of it.

Obviously I knew that Dave was dying, and of course Randall knew too. We both said to each other, "You know, it would be a fitting tribute if Dave wanted to do a solo piano album. And would he not be insulted by us suggesting it, that it might be a great final statement." So I guess Randall must have found a way to communicate that to Dave, and Dave thought, "OK, sounds like a good idea. Let's do a solo piano album." We almost didn't do the record because each time we tried to set it up, he just wasn't in good shape. He just physically wasn't in good shape to do it. And then I think it was the third time that we set it up, he summoned up the energy to do it.

Randall had purchased some gorgeous reissued tube microphones made by Neumann, U-67's. They had reissued a certain number of them when they discovered enough parts in East Germany to make some, and Randall had bought some of them. We used two of those onstage. And then we used a couple of very old AKG C-12's, famous old AKG tube microphones. Well unbeknownst to us, one of them had developed a hiss due to some component within the mike collapsing. During recording we had been listening to Dave play all day and we were not listening at loud levels. We had been sitting in a booth two hundred feet away from the stage and hadn't noticed this microphone begin to hiss, one of the AKG's. It was the ambient mike we were using to catch the room reverb.

One of my young assistants walked in and was listening and said, "You know, I hear something funny in the left speaker." I said, "You're right." We listened to it, and I said, "What is it?" So we checked each microphone individually and discovered it was that one AKG that was hissing. So we talked to Dave about it, and Dave said, "No problem. I can go ahead and re-cut the tunes that you think are a problem." We ended up re-cutting the quieter songs where the hiss would be noticeable. On some of the louder, brash tunes the hiss was not noticeable because there was not enough rest between notes. So we decided, "OK, let's not worry about those. Let's not re-cut those, because they're fine; we don't hear the hiss if it's within the natural room ambience." So Dave went back and re-cut and magically, the takes that he actually did after we discovered the problem were better than the original ones anyway. It was almost a blessing in disguise in some ways. We got even better performances despite the difficulty.

It was very tiring for him. That album was cut in two four-hour sessions. That was it. Some serious playing was done immediately. There weren't a lot of people present for it. Basically there was myself and Randall Jamail in the booth. Dave's manager Linda stopped by for a little while. Scott Greathouse came by for a little while. My assistant engineer, Harry Bartholemew was backstage in case Dave needed something or I had to ask him to move a microphone or do something. Actually Harry videotaped the whole thing, which Randall has a copy of.

There was one very interesting anecdote. Just after Christmas of 1994 a very close friend of ours, a drummer by the name of Robby Parrish and I were talking about Dave's album, and he said, "You know, I've played with Dave when Dave was probably in his late teens, in Edgar Winter's band." Robby seemed to remember Edgar Winter constantly, jokingly telling Dave, "Look Dave, go play jazz. You just don't cut it as a rock pianist!" That's a third hand anecdote, but it's pretty interesting.

I never hung out with Dave or partied with Dave or anything like that. All of my relationship with Dave was purely either in a recording studio or once in a blue moon bumping into him at a club and saying hi. So I never really got a chance to know the personal Dave beyond his relationship with me in the studio, which I'm sure was the personal Dave anyway! You never really get a chance to talk to someone in the studio. Usually when you're on a break in a session everyone's sitting around

talking about politics or football or basketball. That kind of stuff. So I never really got the chance to know that side of him which saddens me a bit. But what I knew of Dave was great.

He told me he had AIDS. I'd heard rumors from some of the other musical community and I don't take stock in rumors. I think it was when we were actually working on Kellye's second album that he said something like, "Do you know that I've got a problem?" And I said, "Yeah I do Dave. I've heard rumors." He said, "Well I just want to confirm that it's true. I'm very private about it and I don't want people to find out about it. Just keep it under your hat." And I said, "Fine." That was the total conversation about it. This was around February or March of '93. The people who played on that album were Sebastian Whittaker, Warren Sneed, David Craig, a wonderful guitar player named Eric Avenger, Dave, Kellye and Dennis Dotson on trumpet. I know that Randall offered to put out her second album if she wanted to. He gave her that option, and I guess she didn't take him up on it and I believe she's still shopping it around.

I was talking to Linda the other day and I mentioned to her that there is probably enough unreleased Dave material to put out another album; stuff like duets that he did with Nancy King. At the same time we were doing the Nancy King stuff he did a few solo pieces in the studio here. So there's enough stuff hanging around. There are probably a few leftovers from the first two albums too, but I'm not sure what's left over. Someone would have to go through all that stuff and decide.

Dave should have been a household name. He played great piano. My wife is a big Dave Catney fan. She's in the music business herself; she's an artist manager. We used to go out whenever possible in our spare time and see David playing at Cezanne. It's a strange club. Unfortunately the cash register is so loud that it can drown out a piano solo. The place holds about eighty people crammed in like sardines, and the bar is like ten feet from the piano, so it would be hard to do a good live recording in there during business hours. But you can still overlook noises like that in the background when you've got a good performance going.

From what I know of David he almost single-handedly kept the jazz scene alive here in Houston by running Cezanne and getting people in there, because the jazz scene had just about expired in town from lack of any clubs. And for someone who had enough problems in his life dealing with a disease like he had to, to tirelessly work so hard at keeping the jazz scene alive showed a lot of character I think. Basically he said, "Well I've got this problem and I'm going to deal with it and I'm going to just keep right on going." To not deal with self pity and all that stuff and just deal with life as reality in those circumstances shows a lot of moral fiber and strength of character. None of us ever sat around worrying about what Dave's problem was. Everyone just enjoyed Dave's music too much. And I think that's probably the way he wanted it. The other pianists in town also hold him in very high regard.

Dave was probably the best accompanist I've ever heard for singers. He seemed to be just amazingly in tune with accompanying people, either singers or saxophone players or whatever, just providing this gorgeous bed for them to solo over without intruding at all. He seemed to just really understand what the singer or instrumentalist was trying to do. It's very hard to explain. I see it sometimes in the classical world and think, "That pianist is doing an incredible job of providing a solid foundation for a violinist, filling up all the holes beautifully without ever intruding." That's probably the best way I can explain that.

Of course he played and sang himself on *Lost in the Stars* on *Jade Visions*. From what I remember David said to Randall, "Can I try a vocal tune?", and Randall said, "Go ahead." That was done multi-track, where Dave laid the piano part down

first and got it exactly where he wanted it and then overdubbed the vocal. More like a pop record where you go back and get the vocal just the way you want it.

Gloria--my wife--and I had known that Dave was fighting AIDS and we were always thinking, "Geez, how long can he go on? How long will this last? There are so many unknowns regarding this disease ... " And the number of times over the last couple of years that everybody thought we'd lose Dave, he'd come back stronger than ever or seem to come back stronger than ever and we'd go, "God, what a resolve. What an inner strength." So when it finally happened all of us kind of went, "Well, I guess we knew it had to happen." But it's still a sad thing, although I think he's probably in a better place.