Do you have a systematic working procedure when you mix?
It’s never the same twice. But I’m a firm believer in computerized mixing. What I’ve done in the last few years in my work with Michael, Quincy, and a lot of people when I start a project is store the balance levels of the tracking session in the computer—for emotional reasons, not a technical reason.

The reason is that’s the first time I react instinctively to the music and I want that not to be thought out at all– I want it to be purely instinctive. It’s amazing as a recording progresses and you begin to improve it, how that so-called improvement can be a problem. I always store that first tracking date. It’s very important.

How often might you refer back to it?
Almost always. On Michael’s new album, the live sessions that we did in New York with the orchestra, I stored all those things and that’s almost verbatim what went on the final mix.

How did you record the orchestra?
I have 14 ASC Tube Traps that I use in a variety of situations. On Michael’s new album, I used them recording the two big orchestral pieces (actually there are more than just two, but the two that feature the orchestra), I used all 14 spaced around the studio mainly for dispersion, not for absorption. There was a slight edginess that I heard in the room, and I wanted a very wide open and very smooth, silky string sound.

I went back to a set-up I used recording the Chicago Symphony with a lot of Mahler stuff that I did. It was a pretty large string section; the whole orchestra must have been at least 60 or 70 pieces. So I used my two Neumann M-50s above the conductor and then the first and second violins are set up to his left and right. This is a bit of a departure from a normal orchestra. Some composers specify that set-up; it seems to fit the music so well with a big string orchestra.

There are two songs on the new album. One is ‘Have you seen my childhood’ and the other is ‘Smile,’ the Charlie Chaplin piece of music. They’re set up in that manner, a very classical set-up, a straight-ahead session; Michael even sang with the orchestra. Of course we went back and patched up some of the vocal lines, but a lot of what we used was sung live with the orchestra.

And I used the tube traps spaced kind of indiscriminately around the room at different places. The orchestra rehearsed and I walked around and listened for live spots—hot spots—with the string section. I think when you hear these two recordings, anybody reading this would get the idea of what I was looking for. It’s a very big, very smooth, silky orchestral sound.

Do you bring the Tube Traps with you when you mix?
I have. Actually in my own studio that I had in California, there was a door that went outside, parallel to the wall to my right, and it produced a sharp reflection. So I put three or four Tube Traps in a little semi-circle in front of the door, and it just knocked it totally out of there. Very dramatic. And sometimes those reflections can be very distracting. They’re kind of midrangey.

What about the claims that you can create a room to record in pretty much anywhere?
That’s pretty fair to say; I’ve not used them for that application; what I’ve used them for is to improve an already good acoustical situation or to mould that acoustical situation to my liking. On Michael’s new album, all his vocals are recorded with seven tube traps around him; every vocal sound on there is done in
I've made hit records in some pretty ratty-ass studios that would not qualify as high-tech; I've been in some very high-tech beautiful studios that weren't very inspiring; I've been in some bedroom studios that are just wonderful.

Why ¼” analog over ½” analog?
It sounds very very different—1/4” is warmer. And I'll very often select a different recording speed to suit the music. The low end is so much fatter at 15 ips. Very dramatic.

What's the difference between what you can do in a “professional” studio and what musicians can do in their own studios?
To be honest with you, I've made hit records in some pretty ratty-ass studios that would not