RICK PUSHINSKY

New York- and London-based singer, songwriter, and keyboardist Julian Velard guests this month, with a primer on being half of a keyboard-and-drums duo. His new album *The Planeteer*, a collection of keyboard-driven pop, is available at iTunes. Jon Regen

Julian Velard

ON THE ART AND TECHNOLOGY OF THE TWO-MAN BAND

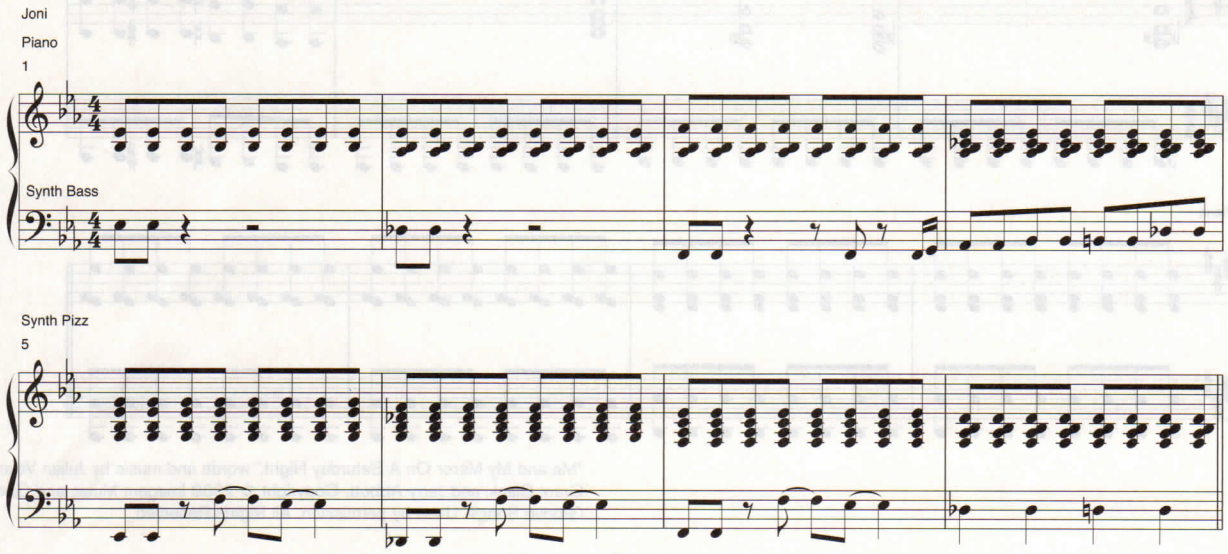
When I set out to create my two-man band, it wasn't out of synth-driven inspiration—it was purely based on economics. Most gigs leave me with just enough money for one man, and that man is me! However, after years of playing solo shows, I started getting bored being up there all by my lonesome. So I asked myself, "How can I get the biggest sound out of the smallest amount of people?" Fifty feet of MIDI cable later, my two-headed beast was born. As my music is piano-based, and nearly all the sounds on my album *The Planeteer* were made by keyboards, I figured I'd be able to replicate most of the parts, including the bass, myself. The only other musician I'd need was a drummer. Between the two of us and some key pieces of gear, we were able to bring to life the sounds I worked so hard to create on record.

My keyboard sound consists of three parts: a piano bed, a bass part, and a layer. My main instrument is a Yamaha CP33, which I use for my base piano sound and as a MIDI controller. The CP33 has 14 programmable presets, which I configure for my two external synths: a Nord Electro 2 Rack and Nord Rack 2X—the rack version of the Nord Lead 2X. I use the Electro mainly for Rhodes and Clav sounds, leaving the Rack 2X with the heavy synth lifting. Each one of the 2X's four outputs (I only use three) can be assigned its own sound and MIDI channel. By splitting the CP33 into two zones, I have the bass zone routed on MIDI channel 1 to output A of the Rack 2X, which holds my bass sounds. I combine the remaining two outputs with the Electro to create my layer sound. I route the three signals through a Morley ABC switch, then into a Boss Chromatic Tuner I use for its bypass feature. I set up the Morley pedal before each song and use the Tuner to pop the layer in and out of song sections.

All the other necessary parts and loops are trigged by my drummer, Adam Christgau, from a Roland SPD-S. The SPD-S acts as the third member of our band, filling out our sound. As you'll see in the following examples, all this gear is an essential part of making this two-man band rock. k

Ex. 1. "Joni"

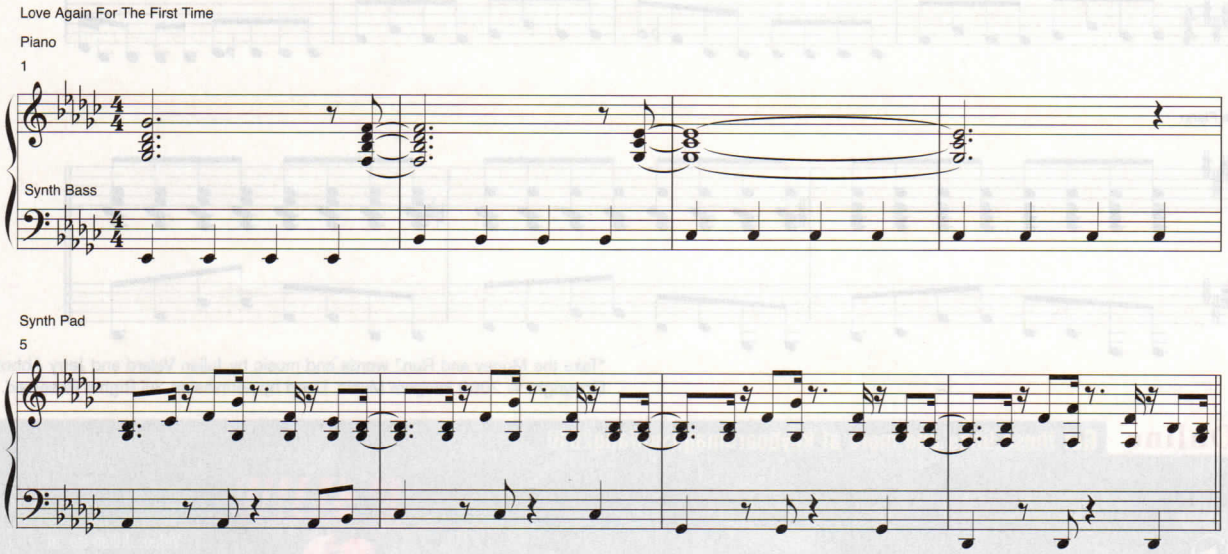
This is a good illustration of how I use my setup for a full spectrum from bass to high end. I start the verse with just the piano and my bass sound: a blend of the Nord Rack 2X and an auto-wah Clav on the Electro. I have to change the Electro's MIDI receive channel to 1, as it's normally set to channel 2 for the right hand of the piano. For the chorus, I add the layer, a synth pizzicato string, by tapping the B button on the Morley pedal–the Boss tuner bypass stays off for this whole song. This is an example of a verse leading into a chorus.



"Joni," words and music by Julian Velard. Copyright © 2008 Imagem Music. Used by permission. All Rights Reserved.

Ex. 2. "Love Again For The First Time"

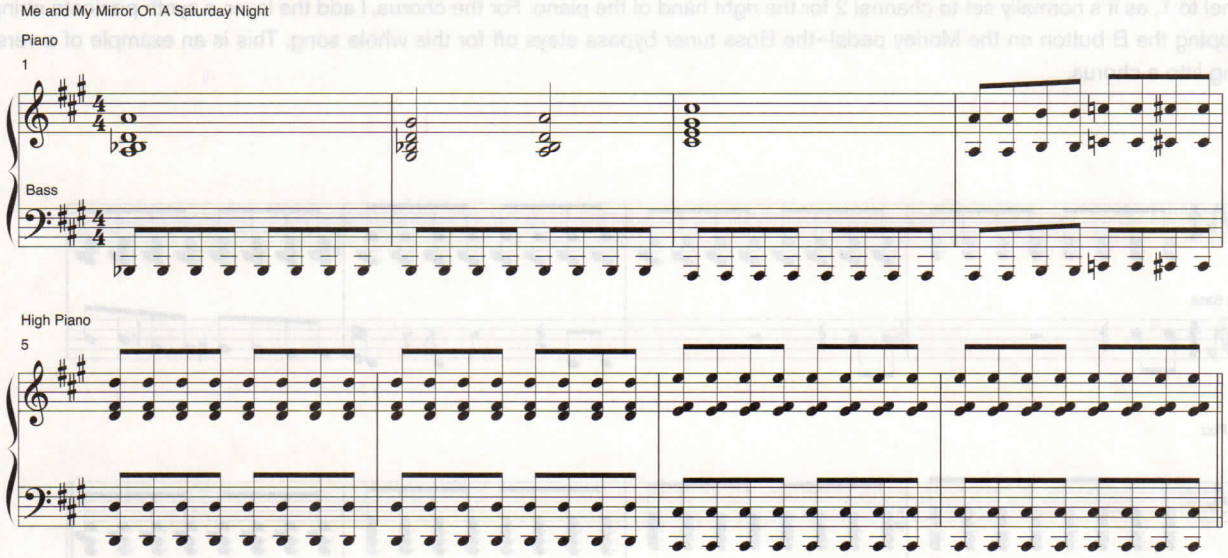
This uses the same principle as "Joni," but this time, the layer in the chorus consists of two parts: a bell-like Rhodes from the Electro (now switched back to MIDI channel 2) and a swelling synth pad from the Nord Rack 2X. It really gives the track an uplifting effect.



"Love Again For The First Time," words and music by Julian Velard and Martin Brammer. Copyright © 2008 Imagem Music. Used by permission. All Rights Reserved.

Ex. 3. "Me and My Mirror On A Saturday Night"

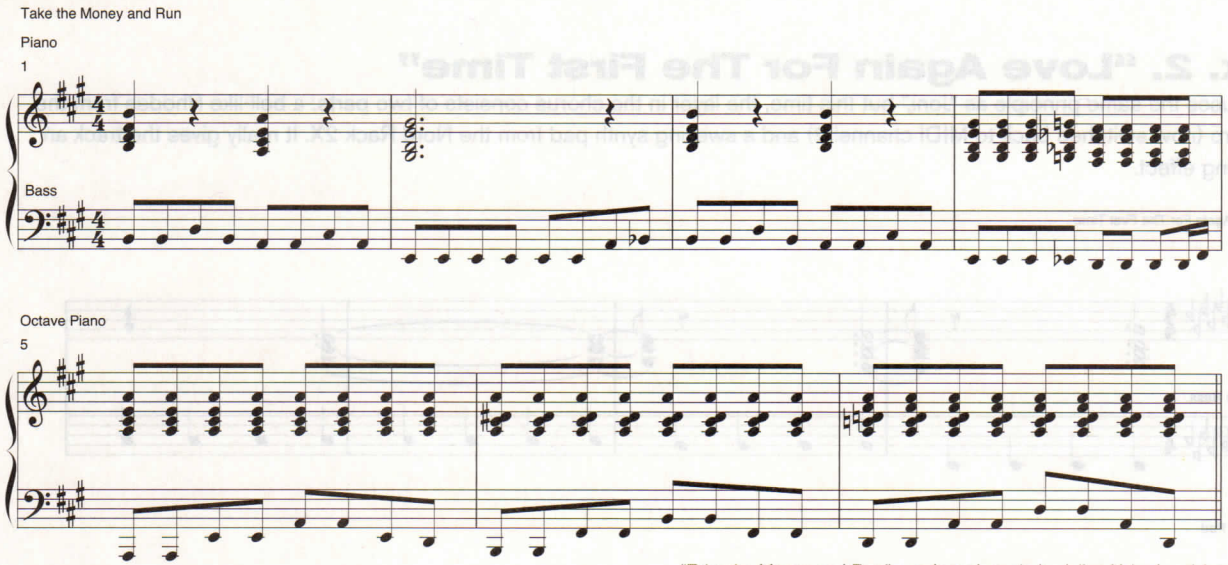
Here's an example of what my keyboard rig sounds like with tracks from the Roland SPD-S. In each section, I'm popping in more and more sounds. Some of the synth sounds are coming off the SPD-S, but the main lead is my right hand doubled by a high piano sound. Along with a fat bass sound from the Nord Rack 2X, I'm able to recreate the track live.



"Me and My Mirror On A Saturday Night," words and music by Julian Velard, Grant Black, and Jerry Abbott. Copyright © 2009 Imagem Music and Good Groove Songs. Used by permission. All Rights Reserved.

Ex. 4. "Take the Money and Run"

On my record, this song has an old-school brass arrangement *à la* Bugsy Malone. I really wanted to get the silliness in there, so I went for the most tuba-like synth bass I could find. I pair this with funky upright piano sounds, tweaked with a bit of a synthesized edge.



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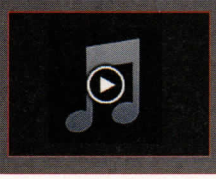
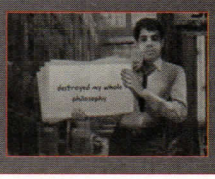


Audio examples recorded by Julian Velard.



Interactive adventure game at Julian's site.

Video: Julian live at Berklee College of Music.