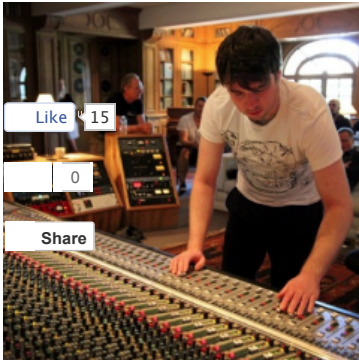


INTERVIEW: Al Groves, The Motor Museum



by [Adam Savage](#)

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Now head of iconic studio [The Motor Museum](#) at just 26, Al Groves recently took time out of his busy schedule to tell *API* his audio story so far...

Located on Liverpool's Lark Lane – notorious for its nightlife and popularity with the city's student population – and part of the Miloco Group, The Motor Museum has assembled an impressive list of clients over the past 20-plus years, who were no doubt intrigued by the studio's distinctive style as much as its equipment offering, which is why you can imagine Groves' surprise when he was asked to take over at what is considered by many to be one of the North of England's leading recording facilities – an impressive achievement for a 26-year-old.

So how did Groves' career in the industry begin?

"I started off recording bands in my bedroom. I had this flat in the suburbs of Liverpool and tried really hard to record bands in the basement, but that lasted about two weeks as I couldn't really cut it for very long," Groves says. "Me and my current business partner (Mark Bartley) set up Sandhills studio from scratch – a really DIY approach, small beginnings – and grew it over about six years into what sort of became the renegade studio in Liverpool. Our building wasn't particularly flashy or anything, but we put the effort in, it sounded great, had a good vibe and a lot of bands liked it."

The success Groves enjoyed at Sandhills was clearly key to his development, but it wasn't until he started working with a certain four-piece Midlands-based band that he began to realise what his own unique style of music production would be.

"It was about two and a half years ago now, when I was with a tiny band that has since broken up called Pandas and People. For me that was a real milestone in my career because it was the first record I did where everybody in the band understood the concept of it and that was the first time I really managed to deliver what the band intended," Groves recalls. "You can listen to that record now and get a complete story off of it and I had never felt I had been able to master that before."

"As that record happened it was like a light bulb switched on. Ever since then I've always tried to keep this sense of emotional attachment to what I'm working on because if something moves me, I'm hoping it's going to move other people. That, for me, is the ultimate mission. It's got nothing to do with how you make things sound or how you capture something, it's how you elicit a response from somebody else."

Groves took over at The Motor Museum from award-winning producer and engineer Mike Crossey in January, who had noticed Groves progress and saw him as his ideal replacement.

"I know Mike really well. He gave me the bug for that building and that space, and when Mike decided to leave for London, our current landlord Andy McCluskey – singer with Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD) – got in touch with me on Mike's recommendation, who had been persuading me to take this building on for months and months," Groves reveals. "I was thinking 'I really want to', but it was a big step up – a lot more intensive than what Sandhills was. I took a leap of faith and said yes, because if I didn't do it then it might not have remained a studio."

And it's not just a "step up" in terms of the studio's equipment and reputation; Groves' new role has seen his list of responsibilities grow considerably.

"Challenge is definitely the word; it's been a steep learning curve," he says. "At Sandhills I just ran the studio, whereas now I'm responsible for the whole business at The Motor Museum, and that's the hard bit. The support I've had from all the bands from around here, though – previous clients and the local scene – has been monumental. The diary's been full from the middle of December all the way through to the middle of April at the moment, so we're off to a really good start."

A studio can gain a great rep in a number of different ways – it could be due to its heritage, the equipment it offers or its past users – but what is it that makes The Motor Museum so special?

"It's the uniqueness of the building itself," Groves continues. "Everybody has the same gear now; we have some cool pieces but we haven't got anything that other studios can't have. When you walk through the door you get a sense that something special has happened and is happening here. It might be a bit corny to say it has a vibe, but it certainly does."

"Monitoring at The Motor Museum is just so good and transparent too. A couple of weeks of sessions here and my confidence was elevated ten times through understanding what I was hearing and not having to second guess it. Suddenly everything became creative and relevant rather than before, when I was not being quite sure of how things were going to pan out sonically."

The facility was frequented by many big name bands in the early stages of their careers, such as Oasis, Arctic Monkeys and The Coral, and continues to serve the same purpose today. Others in his position would feel under pressure to repeat what his predecessor achieved, but Groves sees the studio's past glories as a further source of motivation instead.

"The bar was set so high from before that you go in knowing what's come out of here and there's no reason why we can't achieve the same and go beyond," he explains. "I want to make it into a studio that bands aspire to come into. Last year alone it had two Number One records mixed out of there ...

from Jake Bugg and Ben Howard – and at the same time The Courteeners' record got to Number Two. It's got a real lucky aspect to it in terms of launching careers and it's constantly putting out good stuff, which is why it's been around for so long."

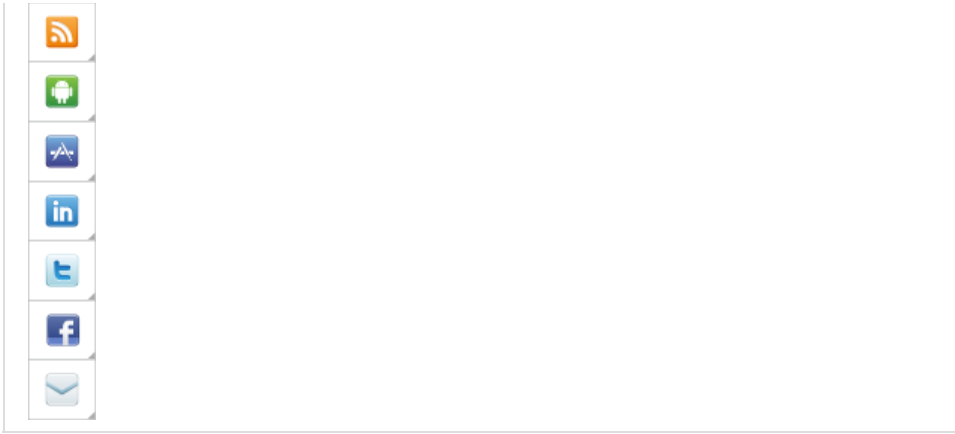
As he still has so much of his career left to go it's probably a bit early to ask, but what has been Groves' greatest achievement so far?

"Just being here! I never went through education to do it and didn't do any courses and just sort of did it all myself," he says. "Every now and then you think 'have I taken the right path here?' but I'm making a living out of it, making a career, working on amazing music and doing what I want to do so I'm very happy."

For more information on The Motor Museum, click [here](#).

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