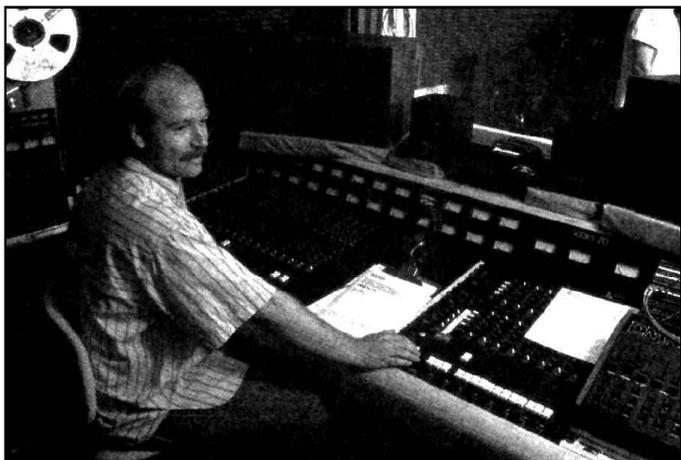




A SMALL STUDIO

WITH A BIG HISTORY

A profile of Producer – Engineer Clarke Rigsby and his studio Tempest Recording



Clarke Rigsby at the helm in Tempest Recording.

In a quiet neighborhood of tree-lined streets in **Tempe, Arizona**, not far from *Arizona State University*, is a small recording facility with a big history. Tempest Recording was started by *musician – producer – engineer*, **Clarke Rigsby** in 1983.

Rigsby's current projects include producing and engineering a new album from one of Motown's most endearing bands, **THE FOUR TOPS**. This project will mark their *40th anniversary* and they're celebrating it with the release of a cd boxed-set featuring re-records of their greatest hits. Rigsby is currently in pre-production for **THE FOUR TOPS'** Christmas album and he recently recorded the '**TOPS**' in concert at the *MGM Grand in Las Vegas* for an upcoming television special and **PBS** documentary. He's also in the midst of recording an album with **ERIC BURDON** featuring many of his hits.

Rigsby and his partner **Kevin Stoller** just completed an album for **Fahrenheit Records** recording artist **KHANI COLE**, which is currently racing up the Jazz charts and he recently put the finishing touches on tracks he was recording with **EMILIO CASTILLO** from **Tower of Power** for a project he's producing.

Another project worthy of mention is an album he just completed for Arizona's most popular country band **Mogollon**, a band who is receiving serious label interest at this time. Rigsby also produced the demo

that recently got country artist **Kris Tyler** signed to **RISING TIDE RECORDS** in Nashville. This summer will find him in his studio again cutting a new record with **CONCORD** recording artist **Frank Vignola**.

In its brief fourteen year history, Tempest has hosted an impressive roster of artists. Most notably, Rigsby has done projects for, and with musicians such as **Paul McCartney**, **Glen Campbell**, **David Grisman**, **Academy Award** winner **Bill Conte**, **Jody Reynolds**, **Gerry Riopelle**, **Lee Oscar** of 'War' fame, **Paul Rodriguez**, **Phoenix Symphony Orchestra**, **Mike Miller**, **R. Carlos Nakai**, **Frank Gambale**, **Gary Foster**, **Peter Erskine**, **Freda Payne**, **Pete Jolly**, **Chuck Demonico**, **Harvey Mason**, **Tommy Tedesco**, **Hal Blaine**, **Al Casey**, **Dr. Billy Taylor**, **Anthony Braxton**, **Ira Sullivan**, **Sonny Curtis**, **Jimmy Getzoff**, **Ralph Humphries**, **Vickie Lawrence**, and **Joey DeFrancesco**.

Rigsby's love of music is obvious when he speaks of the variety of artists he's recorded. He has recorded blues greats **Jimmy Rogers**, **Henry Grey**, **RL Burnside**, **Li'l Ed**, **Pintetop Perkins**, **Brownie McGee**, **Louisiana Red**, and **Robert Lockwood Jr.** for various labels. As well he's worked with Western music greats **Roy Rogers**, **Rex Allen**, and **Bob Nolan**, who's last album he's currently remixing.



Levi Stubbs from the Four Tops with Clarke Rigsby during a session.

Clarke Rigsby is a **Southern California** boy who got his feet wet in the recording studios of **Hollywood**. He was fifteen and playing guitar on songwriter's demos. Rigsby says,

*"The first pro studio I ever recorded at was **Criteria** on Selma St. in Hollywood. I later found out that Producer **Lee Hazlewood's** publishing company was there, and famed producer **Snuff Garret** also did demos there for the songwriters he was working with. It all kind of ties together for me because producers I eventually worked with had all worked there."*

Clarke's first experience as a touring guitarist was in the early 70's in LA. At age fifteen his playing skills were noticed by legendary guitarist **Chet Atkins** who selected Rigsby as a finalist in the first annual "**Chet Atkins Guitar Competition**". He toured with **Tex Williams, Smokey Rogers, Billy Armstrong** (Sons of the Pioneers), **Rose Maddox, Tommy Collins, Freddie Hart, Skeets Macdonald, Eddie Dean, Hal Sothern**, and others from the LA Western Swing era. Of those early days Rigsby comments,

"My personal outlook was to never repeat myself. . So the bands and styles changed a lot for me over this period of time. I wanted every experience to be a learning one."

At the same time he was touring, Clarke worked weekends doing live radio shows. He explains,

*"I'd gotten my first class **FCC license** and was working at a number of high desert **California** radio stations."*

Rigsby toured non-stop throughout the US and Canada for 8 years. Even though his love of music was a strong motivating factor, Rigsby found that most of the venues he was playing were not conducive to creative energy. And the massive amount of energy

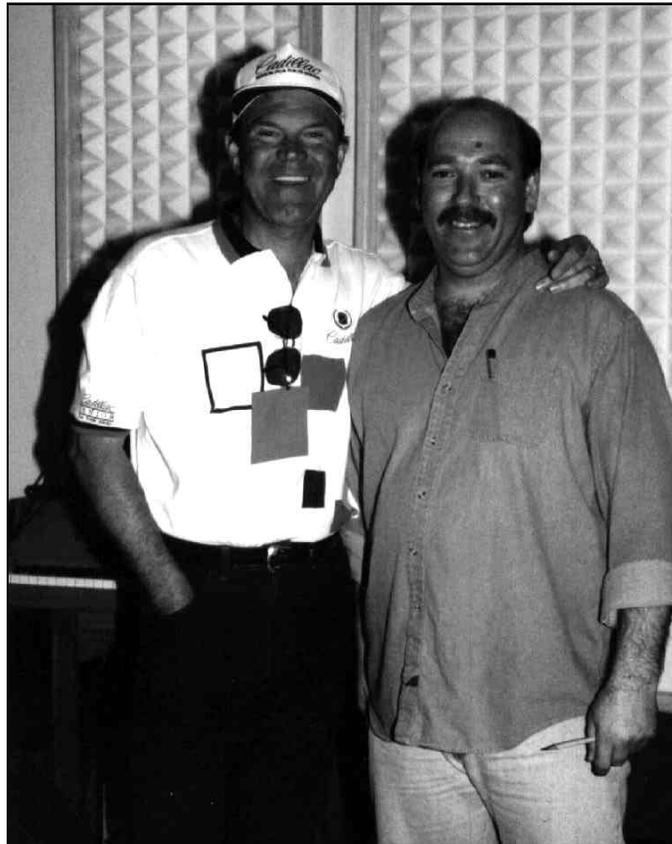
expended for long stretches of touring began to corrode his creative perspective. Of his journey from musician to engineer & producer, Rigsby says,

"I learned early on in my career how to make a living as a musician. But I was always more interested in the music itself than the actual gig. This became a great source of frustration for me as my career progressed. Live entertainment venues-to this day-are set up for the purpose of selling alcohol. No thought is put into acoustics, ambience, convenience for the artist, or creating a conducive environment for the patrons who have come to experience live entertainment. " Rigsby continues "I always wanted to be involved in a studio. It occurred to me even when I was a fifteen year old guitar player that the studio was an instrument and the power was on the other side of the glass. I realized then that I'd like to have my own instrument. "

In **1976** Clarke decided to depart from the road to attend college at **Southwestern Oklahoma State**. "*I changed my major from music to Liberal Arts after they insisted that I be in Marching Band!*"

He stayed in **Oklahoma** for a year.

After leaving Oklahoma he moved to **Tempe** to attend **ASU**. While majoring in music and political science, Rigsby gigged solo 6 nights a week to finance the equipment he'd need to make his studio a reality. The evolutionary process of trial and error had commenced for Rigsby as he began building a facility that could accommodate his musical goals and compete in a cluttered market. He built **Tempest Recording** literally one brick at a time. The earliest incarnation of the studio was a converted garage with a modest array of



Glen Campbell and Clarke Rigsby at Tempest Recording.

recording equipment. While honing his engineering skills, Rigsby and his father Wade were diligently designing and constructing the rooms that would become **Tempest** as it stands today. Rigsby comments,

"One of the advantages of building a room from the bottom up and accumulating equipment gradually, is that you learn how to use every piece of equipment to it's fullest potential. I've learned that it's fairly easy to make a great sounding record if you're at a state of the art facility. But I think a key element in my development as a producer and engineer is that I was forced to make recordings that would sound great under the diverse elements that existed for me at that time."



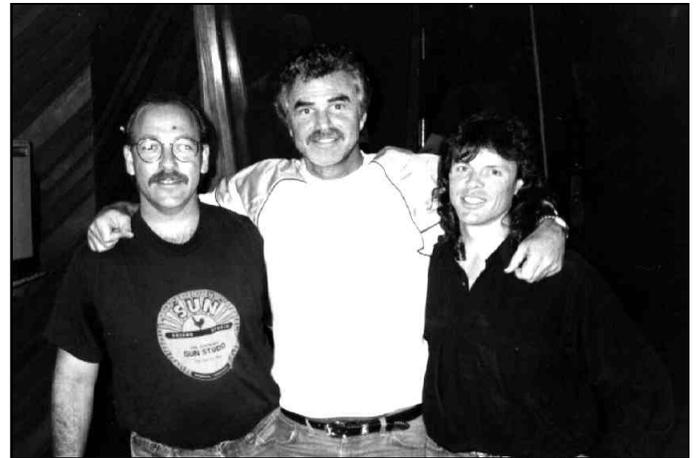
David Grisman, Clarke Rigsby and Al Casey.

Gradually **TEMPEST RECORDING** and Clarke Rigsby developed a reputation for turning out great sounding projects.

Rigsby has also acquired a reputation amongst his peers for being *"militantly musical"*. This characteristic manifests itself in his choice of projects and the intense, undivided attention he gives to each of them. He tends to shy away from projects that aren't musically oriented and has never wavered in his commitment to the music. This attitude seems to have rewarded Rigsby by paring him with legendary producers like **PHIL RAMONE**, & **SNUFF GARRETT**, who was quoted as saying

"Rigsby's one of the best engineers I've ever worked with. I wish I'd met him a lot sooner."

Rigsby even occasionally finds himself "producing the producer", as is the case with Producer – Singer –



Clarke Rigsby, Burt Reynolds and Kevin Stoller.

Songwriter **Lee Hazlewood**, who asked Rigsby to produce and engineer his latest album. This project, consisting of standards, features **Hazlewood**, on vocals & legendary session player **Al Casey** on guitar.

One look at Rigsby's discography reveals a man of diverse talents and tastes. His recordings reflect a man who has taken advantage of every opportunity to refine his skills. And he isn't shy about sharing his experience with others. He has been teaching *"recording for musicians"* at **ASU** for the past three years, he taught at the **Southwest Institute of Recording Arts** in **1990-92**, and has done numerous guest speaker stints at area colleges.

A close look at Clarke Rigsby's career reveals numerous high-profile projects that he's been involved in. These include **BMI** Award winning music for Burt Reynolds' series **EVENING SHADE**, an Emmy Award winning soundtrack for **PBS**, and other projects for **HBO, CBS, PBS, and NBC**.



Clarke Rigsby, Kevin Stoller Snuff Garrett and Sonny Curtis at the BMI Awards.

Despite his commercial successes, Rigsby says he's most proud of the projects he's produced and recorded with excellent musicians such as **Harvey Mason, Hal Blaine, Al Casey, Sonny Curtis, Joey DeFrancesco, Dr. Billy Taylor, Ralph Humphries, R. Carlos Nakai, Jimmy Getzoff, Pete Jolly, Tommy Tedesco, Chuck Demonico, Lenny Pickett, Jerry Marotta, Marc Russo, and Frank Vignola.**

A common thread that has woven its way through Rigsby's career is an unwavering commitment to the local music scene. This manifests itself in the endless collection of albums that he's recorded with Phoenix-based musicians. He also produced and recorded the acclaimed radio show "Studio Z" for KZON 101.5. It features performances recorded live by local artists interspersed with in-depth interviews. Aside from exposing radio listeners to a variety of local music that



Snuff Garret, Clarke Rigsby, and Kevin Stoller at Tempest Recording.

isn't easily accessible to them, it provides the artists with a high quality demo that they otherwise couldn't have afforded to make. Commenting on his local endeavors Rigsby says,

"These projects tend not to have the budgets that major labels provide for their artists. The challenge is in creating a product that can compete in today's market at a fraction of the price."

A case in point is Phoenix country artist **Kris Tyler** who was recently signed to **MCA** offshoot **RISING TIDE RECORDS** in Nashville, on the strength of her Rigsby-produced demo.

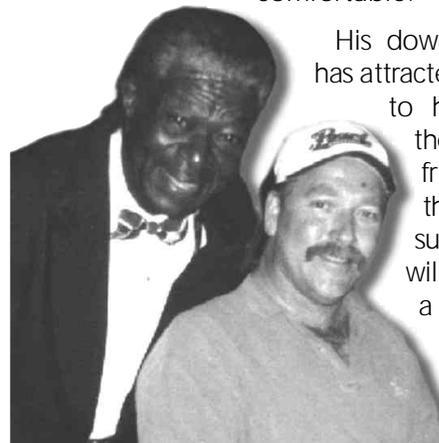
When asked about his influences, Rigsby says "they are too numerous to mention". However, when pushed, he offers these studio icons off the top of his head; **George Martin, George Massenburg, Rudy Van Gelder, Tommy Dowd, Phil Spector, Larry Levine, Geoff Emerick, Brian Wilson, Norman Smith, Bernie Kirsch, Owen Bradley, Roger Nichols, Bob Clearmountain, Fred Catero, David Rubinson, Al Schmitt, Bruce Swedien, and Creed Taylor.**

He readily acknowledges the impact these producers and engineers have had on him. But Rigsby remains faithful to the music and the musician. Despite the vast technological gains that he's benefitted from since the inception of **TEMPEST RECORDING**, Rigsby's loyalties lie steadfast with the art, not the medium. Even though he's achieved an excellent reputation in commercial circles, Rigsby keeps himself accessible to musicians at all stages of their careers. My recent visit to Tempest was punctuated by a steady stream of musicians flowing through the studio and Rigsby's home, whether or not they were currently involved in projects with him. Although he spends most of his time behind the console, he's never far from his guitar playing roots. Clarke is currently an artist on the **Taylor Guitar** roster.



Paul McCartney & Clarke Rigsby, during a session.

"You'll most often find me in the company of musicians." he says. "That's where I feel comfortable."



Ike Cole and Clarke Rigsby, during session.

His down to earth mentality has attracted a variety of musicians to his studio, some of them becoming close friends. Rigsby likes it that way. In light of the successes he's had, and will continue to have, as a producer and engineer, **Clarke Rigsby** sees himself as a musician first.

