

# Frankfurt Goes Commercial

BY STEVE HARVEY

WOODLAND HILLS, CA—Classic analog recording workflows mesh seamlessly with digital production technology at Scott Frankfurt Studio, located in the Los Angeles community of Woodland Hills. Previously available only to friends and by word of mouth, the home-based studio has now been opened as a commercial venture.

After starting out in retail selling drums, Frankfurt followed the newly introduced drum machines into the synth department. There, he hooked up with Ensoniq, where he spent 10 years as chief sound developer, during which time he met musicians such as George Duke, Mervyn Warren and Peter Wolf, the latter becoming a mentor.

After Ensoniq was sold in 1998, Frankfurt leveraged those connections to get into production, also recording with artists such as Whitney Houston, Chaka Khan and Barbra Streisand. Industry connections also paid off when it came to construction of the studio, which extended the 1950s ranch house to include a control room, iso booth and lounge area. Designed by Greg Thompson, the studio was constructed by Ron Balmer and Frank LaTouf (renowned for building Westlake, Record Plant and other facilities, and recommended by another mentor, Dennis Lambert)



Scott Frankfurt, with the loves of his life, wife and studio co-founder Sharon, and Harley-Davidson "The Betty," is making his in-home facility more widely available.

and tuned by George Augspurger.

The studio works both as a production facility and an audio lab for Frankfurt's sound design work—he has been VP of design at Spectrasonics since 2003, contributing to Stylus RMX, Omnisphere and Trilian. In addition to his own projects, he has also attracted outside business from friends such as Sergio Mendes and engineers Darius Fong and Doug Rider. With input from regular visitors such as Rider (who engineered the first Boston album), Frankfurt has put together a hybrid signal flow in the control room. "Darius brought a lot of great thinking and connected me to Josh Florian and the JCF Au-

dio crowd," adds Frankfurt.

Avid Pro Tools outputs pass through a Folcrom passive summing box, then gain is made up using a JCF unit. The mix can optionally go straight to a 2-track digital recorder or via various flavors of converters. A Dangerous Music Monitor ST/SR system allows the mix to be auditioned after the sum, after being re-amped, and before and after the 2-track.

The signal chain also includes an analog patchbay. "In this Pro Tools era, in my mind, it tends to be a little more creative to have a patchbay at the critical point of your output," he

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## Lending A Critical Ear

PASADENA, CA—Avid hosted an invitation-only event at Firehouse Recording Studios in Pasadena, CA in May to highlight the sonic differences between the new Pro Tools|HDX system and the older Pro Tools|HD. Although not exactly a scientific experiment, as company representatives noted from the outset, the demonstration drew compliments for HDX from many of the Los Angeles area recording engineers and mixers in attendance.

According to Tom Graham, Avid marketing manager, post audio, the idea for the comparison listening test came about after record producer, engineer and mixer Frank Filippetti noted an improvement in audio quality after opening a session mixed in Pro Tools|HD on an HD Native system using the new Pro Tools software engine that features floating-point DSP. By chance, Graham and Gil Gowing, Avid manager, applications specialist, pro audio, were preparing a track for an upcoming demonstration. "We did our own rough mix test. We were blown away; we thought something had to be wrong," said Graham.

The pair then had Grammy-winning engineer Mike Shipley mix the same track. "That adds a little more credibility; it's not just us," said Graham.

There were so many variables that this was far from scientific, admitted Graham. "But ultimately we were just trying to see what other people were saying, and if there was something to it—what they were hearing, making a transition from HD to HD Native or HDX, since HD Native and HDX share the same engine, so to speak, of the floating-point processing," he said.

Shipley noted in Avid's webinar on the event, his HD6 system did not have sufficient power to handle the mix, which was 60-plus tracks at 96 kHz.

Indeed, as the listening test demonstrated, the HD6 mix running on a MacPro practically maxed-out all of the cards. In comparison, the same mix running on HDX2 on a MacBook Pro required less than half a card.

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## Commercial

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says. "I can patch in the analog domain and not affect anything that's going on in Pro Tools."

Ultimately, he says, "It's a tone-color thing, because on final print, you have options. The other workflow thing is, when you're working in the

box, you're always leveling things to keep that bus in check. When you're in this warm, fuzzy analog world, you can print a little hotter. And I don't worry what sample rate the client's session is in. This rig has changed everything for me."

The iso booth, housing his beloved vintage Gretsch drum kit (maintained by Drum Doctor Ross Garfield), is compact but flexible. "We've had nine pieces of strings

in here, a 12-piece choir, Sergio's brass guys," he reports. For larger tracking and overdub dates, a wood-paneled den, ideal for acoustic guitar; and spacious living room, housing a Steinway baby grand, Hammond B3 and Leslie 122 cabinet and 54-key Fender Rhodes piano, are also available.

The living room also accommodates rehearsals on Frankfurt's own productions. "My personal produc-

tion style is to get it right before I hit 'record,'" he elaborates, something that he learned from composer/string arranger Jeremy Lubbock, whose catchphrase was "there's no substitute for right." Frankfurt continues, "It's critical to work tirelessly on the arrangement, the headphone cue, every aspect of a session, so that the artist can simply come in and hit a home run, every time."

Frankfurt's production work these days involves younger, alternative bands not yet ready for the budget outlay necessary for a larger facility. "But they're competing with that sound, so I'm a great fit for them. There's also a tremendous market in the gospel and Contemporary Christian music scene; my late wife and I were artists in the '90s, and we have a lot of connections into that part of the industry."

L.A.'s multi-room studios are great, of course, he says, "But this is far more private. For a client looking for a hideaway yet close to town, we're a good fit."

Scott Frankfurt Studio  
scottfrankfurtstudio.com

## Critical Ear

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Shiple related a story that further highlights the differences in power between the systems, Graham reported. "He said that Mutt Lange called him to do this new artist in Europe. Mutt had to work on the song at 88.2 in pieces in two different HD systems because he couldn't open it all on one. He sent Mike the mix; Mike got an extra HDX card and has been mixing this track, 160 tracks at 88.2, all in the box with his HDX2."

An assortment of variables were in play at the listening test, said Graham. "I certainly think, aesthetically, you're also judging the guy's mix. You can try and separate yourself from that, but if you mix rock and it's a rock song, you're going to have your own opinions."

Indeed, not everyone present preferred HDX over HD. But amongst the majority who did, HDX's wider stereo image, extended high frequencies and deeper bass frequencies were observed as notable differences.

"So it wasn't a blind comparison," Graham concluded. "For me, the test was a little bit about the sound-quality difference but also just real-world comparison of what a mixer could see if he opened up a session on both systems, and how it would affect his workflow."

—Steve Harvey

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