

WOODWORM STUDIOS

by Paul Brett



Woodworm Studio and The String Section. A complete Package.

In the last issue of Music Maker we featured a new member to the Association, Woodworm Studios. To put my money where my mouth is, I recorded my latest CD there recently and I was extremely pleased with the results. Like many of you, I have a good home set up for my usual solo acoustic recordings, together with a great little video production set up. In fact, up to a point, I am totally self contained to record and film what I like, when I like. I am also currently experimenting with a green screen format. Whilst you can't beat the outside locations where I live on the Lleyn Peninsula, North Wales, there are occasions where you want certain backgrounds behind a piece of music. but either can't access them or they are miles away. Green Screen allows you to film against a green cloth and then edit out the green background and insert one of your choice, whether it be a still photo or a video. With the right lighting and video editing programme, you can achieve this effect from home. Anyway, back to Woodworm Studios.

As this particular project required the use of a string quartet and wind players, I needed to find a larger studio to record such in. Having trawled the internet and exploring quite a few options. I settled on Woodworm Studios, formerly owned by members of Fairport Convention. The other consideration I had to take on board was distance for the session musicians to travel. I drew a blank trying to find such players in North Wales. Even the Arts Council only had one string player to offer me and he lived...wait for it...in London. I also wanted a studio who had experience of recording live acoustic instruments. Many studios these days do not have the experience of how this should be done because lots of them spe-



Steve Hill Woodworm Owner and Engineer

cialise in computer generated sounds, not the real thing. I was also impressed with Woodworm's on-line presentation, especially listing the fees charged per day. Again, lots of studios do not list their fees on line which certainly puts me off and I would assume quite a few others from enquiring further. Woodworm is about a four hour drive for me and was an hour for the session players, who lived in or around London. A major benefit for me was the beautiful and clean, on site accommodation, charged at a very reasonable extra including continental breakfast. I was most happy with this arrangement as it meant I could park outside for free, do my work, eat, sleep, shower and start again the next day. Thus not wasting any time travelling and trying to find somewhere to park. The Studio is now owned and run by Steve Hill and his wife, who have refurbished and upgraded the whole shebang to provide a great all round and complete package to acoustic artistes and bands alike. Steve does say he specialises in Acoustic Music but he also records lots of other styles of music there as well. I'm not going into the technical or equipment offerings at the studio in this article, you can find everything you need listed at www.woodwormmusic.com. I am more interested in providing our readers with my experience at working there and of the benefits it offers.

For a start, it's nestled in the heart of the North Cotswolds in the little village of Barford St. Michael and I found the journey from North Wales to be an easy one, with motorway most of the way, once I got onto the M56. For the session players, it was about an hours trip by car from where they lived. Let's face it, you can spend over an hour trying to park sometimes in Major Cities and pay through the nose for the privilege, so this worked out well for all of us. The only time I went off site was to eat after the sessions ended. I found a great little restaurant about a 10 minute drive in Deddindton. This place was called Otters and it is in the main square. A very friendly atmosphere and run by a husband and wife team. I would highly recommend their food and service if you happen to be in the area.

From a recording standpoint, I would also mention I trawled the internet for string players who had studio experience. This was important to me because you can run into major problems with good players who haven't recorded a lot. Again, quite a few were either reluctant or inexperienced to quote prices. In the end, I happened to come across a site called The String Section (www.stringsection.co.uk) operated by violinist Vaughan Jones. From the outset, you can smell a professional approach. The site is brilliantly clear in it's explanation of services offered and it specialises in Studio Session players. Bingo, I had hit the final link in what I needed. I had set a tight schedule for the recordings which I had hoped would bring my songs to a conclusion within the time I had allotted. In fact, it went so well, that I finished a day earlier than expected. I have always planned my sessions meticulously, which is of paramount importance when you are paying for them. I had pre-recorded my guitar parts on an eighteen string acoustic (6 & 12 string double

neck) at my place and sent them to Steve (who also engineered the sessions) to transfer to his multi track prior to going down. My arranger, Carla Zappala had already completed all the string and wind parts, so from day one, I



was able to start overdubbing the strings with **Vaughan**, who recorded the 1st and 2nd Violin parts and the Viola part and **Rebecca Leyton**,

who played the cello parts. We actually laid down the Cello and Viola parts first and Vaughan overdubbed the rest. Steve had set the studio spacing to represent a live line up so as to record all the musicians involved in the places they would have been sitting if we were recording a live concert. This was a great idea as it meant we just had a stereo pair of microphones set up for the whole procedure through-



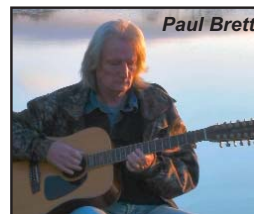
out and just sat the musicians in various chairs where they would have been had it been a live recording. It also gave a very natural sound. We recorded 12 tracks during that day. The following day we recorded **Janna Huneke** (flute and piccolo) in the morning and **Sarah Donaldson** (oboe) in the afternoon. I then laid down a few vocals till the end of



the session on the second day. These musicians were absolutely brilliant to work with and I would definitely recommend their services to anyone. Total professionals and great readers and players. It did help to have Carla Zappala's excellent and clear arrangements to work from. The next day we spent laying down the rest of the vocals and the final day was spent mixing. All in all, I was thrilled at the way in which it all came together, especially as I personally, hadn't worked with other players for years, opting instead, to work on solo projects.

To summarise, the whole team, from studio to musicians were fantastic. As the artiste and producer, I was over the moon with the results as it was a tricky project I had set myself in a genre I hadn't worked in before.

The recordings are currently being mastered in preparation for transfer to CD and I will write again as to it's progress and final launch. It is a very interesting project I had set myself and one which may follow our theme of identifying



areas that haven't been tapped by current music trends. It may even be another way forward to the future promotion of music, who knows.