

Concert Recording

(continued from page 1)

to give the people exactly what they want. In recent years, everyone from Ringo Starr to Pearl Jam to Crowded House has recorded shows and made them immediately available as “official bootlegs” in a variety of formats, from individual and subscription downloads, to CDs and USB thumb drives picked up at show’s end. That artists would embrace the concept isn’t too surprising—it’s an untapped revenue stream—but the real key to the rising trend is that the cost of production has dropped as professional recording has increasingly grown smaller.

“A lot of times when I advance these shows, people say, ‘Oh, we need to find a place to put your recording truck—we have nowhere to put it!’ said Chris Harrington, road manager for Abbey Road Live, a division of EMI Music that specializes in creating instant concert recordings. “I have to tell them we don’t have one.”

Harrington and audio engineer Brendan Connors recently finished up a year-long, 111-date world tour with an artist whose legacy is largely pinned to live recordings—Peter Dinklage. At each stop, they turned the evening’s three-and-a-half-hour performance into a limited edition, 3-CD set that could be purchased onsite or preordered with an option to pick up at the show or get it via the mail afterwards.

“A truck just isn’t always the way to go, especially on certain kinds of tours like this one,” explained Harrington. “Instead, we’re in fly packs; we have it all in seven cases and we’ll go basically anywhere and set up. Sometimes we’re in a great room backstage; sometimes we’re in a closet. It depends on the lay of the land.”

Jon Altschiller would be able to relate to that, as the recording engineer who captures every Phish show for posterity. The group has long embraced the concept of releasing concerts, making all its performances since 2002 available as MP3 and FLAC downloads, and via streaming on an iPhone app. The purchase costs are automatically built into ticket prices, so each duet comes with a redeemable code to download the evening’s show.

While Altschiller has his own recording facility, Chiller Sound, in New York City, his control room on the road is any place he can set up his Avid Pro Tools HD rig and adjacent racks of outboard gear. “Every night, it’s a totally different space for me, unlike FOH where you know you’ll be 100 to 125 feet from the stage...A lot of times, I’m in trailers;



Pausing with the Yamaha DM2000 used to record Peter Frampton’s recent tour are (l-r): Chris Harrington, road manager, Abbey Road Live; Ben Chandler, president, Metronome Media Group; and Brandon Connors, recording engineer, Metronome Media Group.

my last show, I was in the back of a semi on the dock.”

All this is not to say that fully equipped recording trucks are on the way out; far from it. In fact, the Frampton tour was recorded for Abbey Road Live by Metronome Media Group (Brookline, NH), which has its own sizable investment in audio and video production trucks. Nonetheless, said Metronome president Ben Chandler, there’s a time and place for everything: “Trucks are great for festival work, but for something like the Peter Frampton tour, fly packs allow us to get in and out very quickly. We do everything with MADI snakes, so gone are the days of the 400-lb. snake and ground problems. You can sneak it under a door, through a window, up a stairwell, and that helps with logistics, plus you get 96 channels in 2 lbs. of cable.”

Going small across the board isn’t the right move, however, he cautioned. “We have a laptop system with us which can record, sure, but we choose to go with hardware-based systems that can keep going night after night and be rock-solid reliable. You can’t have the spinning ball of death in this kind of situation.”

Concerns about reliability—and audio quality in general—do give pause for thought, particularly with the artists. Zach Bair, CEO of Abbey Road Live, recalled, “When we



When recording a recent Phish show, Jon Altschiller’s temporary mix space was the referees’ dressing room at Madison Square Garden.

first approached Peter about this, he was very apprehensive about doing anything live. He’s one of the most particular artists we’ve worked with in terms of sound and audio quality, because his live show is what he’s all about—look at *Frampton Comes Alive*. We did a test show in 2010 with him in London, where we recorded him and did not do any CDs. He was completely blown away by the result and 100 percent turned around by what he heard. That’s more or less how we were able to overcome his skepticism about the model.”

Phish, on the other hand, knows all too well the power that recorded

shows have when it comes to building and maintaining a fanbase, having emerged from the jamband scene where audience recording is considered not just a ritual but a right.

“Everybody has taped since time immemorial—and people still do, which is amazing to me,” said Altschiller. “I like the art of taping, but there were probably a ton of tapers at last night’s show and yet their tickets get them my mix. I guess some people hate it because it’s kind of a ‘boardy’ thing, but the band likes it because it’s more like a record, so it’s one of those situations where they say, ‘Hey, let everybody tape it.’”

Look for in-depth coverage of recording Frampton and Phish live in upcoming issues of Pro Sound News.

Metronome Media Group
studiometronome.com

Abbey Road Live
emimusic.com/tag/abbey-road-live

LivePhish
livephish.com

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