

Tucked away off Cannonsburg Road, looking down on Bear Creek, in a setting that looks more like Norman Rockwell than Rock n' Roll, lies one of the areas most esteemed recording studios. Built into an old structure that has been completely refurbished and refinished, the 900 sq.ft. studio blends in with its surroundings quite nicely, and if you weren't a musician ready to lay down some tracks, you'd never know it was there at all. Just don't let the appearance fool you. Many area musicians can readily testify to the ability of this "hideaway" studio to deliver a large professional sound that often eclipses that of other local studios. I sat down with the owner and head sound engineer, Andy Mitchell, one afternoon to find out a little more about the goings-on at Audio Bay Studios. As it turns out, Andy's a pretty decent guy to hang with, a family man, kinda tall, and pretty damn knowledgeable in the field of audio recording.

MR: How long have you been in the music business?

AM: I got my Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Denver in '96 and I've been in the recording business ever since. I did some recording work in Denver for a couple years before getting an internship with a studio back here in Michigan.

MR: And when did you start up your own studio?

AM: I built Audio Bay in '99. Business was slow at first, but word-of-mouth and repeat clients have allowed the studio to grow and improve over the years.

MR: Have you received any recognition for your work in the music industry?

AM: Yeah actually, I have received three Silver Microphone Awards, One in 2002 and two in 2003, and the Audio Bay itself had a write-up by David Torrey, from Mix Magazine. Like any other business would tell you, any kind of national recognition, great or small, is always a good thing.

MR: What style of music do you typically record in the studio?

AM: Boy, if you can do it – we can record it. Audio Bay has had just about every genre you can think of in here ... from Gospel to R&B to Indy Rock and Heavy Metal.

MR: I'll bet you've probably had a lot of different levels of musicianship in the studio?

AM: You'd be surprised, some are beginner musicians who just want to know what its like to record their own song and others I work with are very accomplished musicians, including members of the Grand Rapids Orchestra and professional recording artists. I'm more than happy to record anyone who wants their recording to be as good as it can, regardless of his or her experience.

MR: What kind of sound equipment do you use?

AM: That's such a hard question to answer. I have so much sound equipment ... suffice it to say, The Audio Bay is a Pro Tools based studio with a lot of great vintage tube gear.

MR: So what does that mean?

AM: Well, to a musician, it can mean a lot of different things. The addition of literally thousands of possible effects, or maybe the complete lack there of. Some musicians are just looking for an untainted natural sound while others are looking for a big production. Regardless of the personal preferences of each musician, this studio has the equipment to give its artists a warm, clean sound that can compete in any radio market.

MR: What kind of hours are you putting in? Is Audio Bay, quote on quote, "open late?"

AM: Musicians often have odd work schedules and I do what I can to accommodate their needs. I always reserve a couple nights a week to work late ... on occasion, even into the wee hours of the morning – but I'd rather avoid that. Between sessions and

early mornings I spend a lot of time researching new equipment, trying to stay on top of "what's new" in the audio engineering industry.

MR: Do you ever record anything for commercial advertising?

AM: Absolutely. We've recorded various radio commercials for automotive sales, as well as carpet retailers, nightclubs, and the like.

MR: So you write jingles and what not?

AM: Yep, we write them write here with professional musicians. I contribute with the lyrics and some of the guitar work myself.

MR: You're a musician then?

AM: I studied classical guitar at UD and really enjoy tracking guitar for artists when they request it.

MR: How does your pricing compare to other local studios?

AM: I've been told that we beat the rates of many other local studios by a long shot, and I can say for sure, that Audio Bay is very competitive with its pricing.

MR: What about CD duplication? Is that something you do?

AM: Yep. I figured why should someone have to go to three different places to finish their CD. We can do everything from tracking, mixing, CD duplication and then some.

MR: Then some?

AM: Well, because of the rising popularity of home recording and the improvements in home sound equipment, musicians do more home recording and sometimes find that they want to make those homemade tracks sound more professional. We can't make brand new tracks out of old ones, but through mastering, we can often make them sound better, and sometimes improve them a lot more than one might expect.

So what's in store for the future of Audio Bay Recording Studios?

AM: Staying busy. The smartest thing I ever did was to build the studio in West Michigan. The Grand Rapids area, per capita, has the most talented and dedicated musicians I've ever seen. I've lived near LA and in Denver and it amazes me how many great bands and solo artists there are in this area. The truth is, I just want to stay involved in the coming years and have an active part in getting the area's music scene the recognition it deserves.

It was about 2:30 in the afternoon when I finally asked my last question, and Andy still had two more recording sessions to complete before he could call it a day. I don't know how late he was going to be up that night, but you definitely get the feeling that he works hard at his business and cares about the quality of the product his studio puts out. One of the walls in his studio is covered with CDs that have been recorded by local musicians and bands. I asked him if I could mention some of the more "well known" bands in this article and he simply said, "I wouldn't want anyone to feel left out." Yeah, I admit it, he's hard not to like. At any rate, I can definitely vouch for the years of recording work he's done, and I can say with little doubt, that if you like local music, you've probably listened to a recording made at Audio Bay Studios.

Audio Bay Studios is located in Cannonsburg, Michigan.
For more information visit www.audiobay1.com.