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Taking It to The Next Level

by Shirin Shaikh, On July 22, 2011 00:00 EDT

Jim Pavett of Tucson, Arizona's Allusion Studios has been cultivating his commercial studio operation for over 20 years. Ideally situated in a quiet area about one mile from downtown Tucson and the University of Arizona, where Pavett received his engineering degree, the facility has undergone recent renovations and upgrades as a result of Allusion's continued success and loyal clientele.

Pavett considers customer service to be at the heart of winning repeat customers. "Having repeat business has always been the most important thing, and you need to make sure that your customer service is always superior when compared to other places," he observes. His customers appreciate that he can speak to them on many different levels: "I have a scientific approach to my audiophile side, which comes from my engineering background. But I can also speak to my clients as a musician, or even as a business owner who can help guide them in their own careers."

Jim Pavett with some of the gear in his Tucson, AZ-based Allusion Studios

One of the pivotal decisions in Pavett's own career was to broaden his network and become more involved with the audio community by sharing his own knowledge. He did this initially by becoming a panelist at recording conferences such as Tape Op Con as well as spearheading an educational tutorial project, *The Studio Edge Pro Audio Recording Series*, the first of which came out last summer. He says that his involvement in these projects has not only been good for his own career development, but also good for Allusion's business by increasing his profile as a respected voice in the audio community.

Allusion's growth can partially be attributed to the diversity of clients it serves. These clients include bands and musicians of many different musical genres, as well as a range of voiceover customers. On the music side, one of Allusion's clients is Jack Gladstone, a Native-American from Montana whose pop music has crossed over with Native-American chants. Allusion recorded his album, which was released about six months ago. "It was a huge project that took several months," recalls Pavett. "One song was 10 minutes long and used about 130 individual tracks."

A few things make Allusion stand out from most other studios. For one thing, you will not find a recording console anywhere in the control room. "I am using a Sterling modular desk, which is really low-profile, so there is no resonance," comments Pavett. "I have a mixer-less system with a full complement of both highend and solid-state and tube preamplifiers." For Pavett, the evolution to a console-less system was a relatively easy decision to process. "Once I got into upgrading my signal path and getting into high-end A-to-D conversion, I realized that it made a lot more sense to have a great collection of high-end mic pres going straight into the converters rather than going through the mic pres inside a console." As a dedicated Nuendo user, Pavett also mixes completely in the box, and minus a control surface.

Pavett's equipment rack includes a range of tube and solid-state preamplifiers and compressors from companies like PreSonus, Millennia, SPL, Universal Audio, Amek and others. He is particularly fond of his PreSonsus ADL 600 series preamplifiers: "This is phenomenal," he exclaims. "It's a great tube pre, but when you hit it, it warms up and doesn't get thin and dirtysounding." Among the other sonic flavors he prefers is the Universal Audio 6176, which he says takes him right back to the '70s. "It is so 'old school'-sounding, and is especially flexible because it has the 1176s limiting circuits in it as well," says Pavett.

Before going into Nuendo, A-to- D conversion is handled by a Lynx Aurora (16 channels) and a new Universal Audio 4-710 (8 channels), which also does double duty as a solid-state/tube preamplifier.

Encompassing 2,800 square feet of recording and mixing rooms, as well as multimedia and conference room areas, Allusion Studios features a 20x20-foot control room, a 22x18-foot main live/drum room, a 16x10-foot bass room, a 10x10-foot guitar room and a 9x7-foot vocal booth. The rooms feature state-ofthe- art acoustic treatment from Auralex, as well as recently installed LED lighting that enables customers to adjust the color of the lighting to their mood.

The studio layout at Allusion, with its two large rooms and iso booths, are perfectly suited for most of its recording projects. "I never really needed a huge live room, and I realized that I would typically be working with 4- or 5-piece bands that had amplifiers," says Pavett. "So I decided to have my live room accommodate not only the drums, but all the other musicians as well." The iso rooms, he adds, are just for the amplifiers, and the live room is optimally used when a band is performing in close proximity with the drummer, with everyone wearing headphones. "This approach allows me to record live and still have that band get the right feel and jam like they normally would, but with 100 percent isolation among all the microphones, Pavett explains. "If they make a mistake or want to do overdubs, it is not a problem. It is a great system."

Recently, Allusion has made some very significant equipment investments. "We are installing a Yamaha grand piano, and we've bought some of the top guitar amplifiers so people can get any sound they want," Pavett says. "We are making this a place that will be fun for clients to come and explore and tear it up." For Pavett and Allusion Studios, it is not only important to get the room and the gear right, but also to help bring the client to the next level: "If I can take a 16-year-old punk band and help make them sound like they are 25 years old and have been in the business for several years, then I've done my job."

Allusion Studios
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