

On the Cover

By Tom Kenny

CAPITOL REFRESH

The Studios, the Building, the Brand



Photo: Carl and Desiree Afable

The combined Studios A and B, which holds the orchestra for the Academy Awards live broadcast a half-mile from the Dolby Theatre. Inset: The Neve 88R and PMC QBI-A main monitors in Control Room A.

It all started with a console. The famed Neve VR in Capitol Studio A, installed in 1990, was getting long in the tooth. Channels would need to be fixed more often, some weren't working at all. It had seen, according to one engineer, more sessions than any board in the world. An amazing pedigree. But it was more than 20 years old, and the staff had been lobbying then-parent-company EMI for a few years to upgrade the studios. They started with Studio A, and in December 2011, work began on installation of a new Neve 88R, along with a full-blown acoustic remake of the control room.

At the time, the sale of EMI to Universal Music Group had been announced but not yet approved. After the deal became final in September 2012, and especially after Steve Barnett was brought in as

chairman and CEO of Capitol Music Group two months later, that kernel of revitalization in Studio A spread like a vine from the basement through the 13 floors of the iconic Capitol Tower in Hollywood.

New monitoring, new Pro Tools rigs, new floors, walls and ceilings. New carpeting, new artwork, new offices. New lounges, new wiring, new bathrooms. New Production Suites on the second floor. All-glass offices with natural light throughout. New labels in-house. New outside deals with T Bone Burnett and others. New faces. Everything was redone. It was a complete design change to help kick-start a culture change. And it happened really fast.

"The investment didn't end with the purchase of the company," Barnett says. "This building had to be made great. When I walked in here

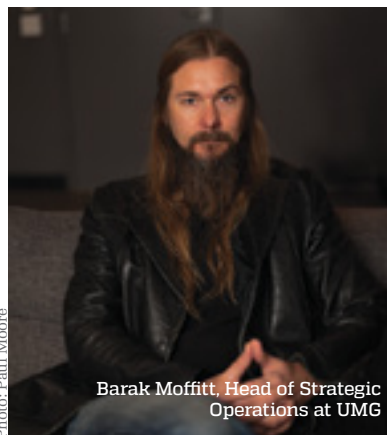
[in late 2012] and saw the way it looked, the building and the studios, I was just appalled. I was utterly depressed that weekend. They had suffered from a decade of underfunding and technical problems. It's one of the greatest office buildings in the world, probably the greatest studio in America, with an incredible history. I wanted it to look great. So we went down this road and invested in the studios, the building and the music company. I'm proud of what the team has accomplished, and it was definitely the right thing to do. You walk in here now and say, 'Wow.'"

There are three Capitol entities involved in this story: Capitol Records, founded in 1942, the first big label on the West Coast and a brand forever associated with hi-fidelity and quality artists; Capitol Studios, which the *Mix* audience knows and loves as the home of Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, the Beach Boys, Paul McCartney, the Beastie Boys and, lately, John Mayer and Alex da Kid. And there's Capitol Music Group, formed in 2007 when EMI merged Capitol Records and Virgin Records under one umbrella, later expanded greatly to include Blue Note, Motown, Astralwerks, Harvest, Priority, 2101 Records, Atom Factory, Electromagnetic Recordings and others following the sale to UMG.

It's no coincidence that the rejuvenation of Capitol inside the music business, and its subsequent recognition in a broad sweep at the 2015 Grammy Awards, occurred in parallel with the move of the three entities into the Tower, establishing a worldwide headquarters. While Barnett provided the vision in relocating the CMG offices from New York, remaking the Tower and reviving the stature of the label group, Barak Moffitt began implementing the vision on the ground in Hollywood, overseeing both the refresh of the physical facilities and the overall strategic plan.

Moffitt, who came to the Tower from EMI Publishing in Santa Monica, has held many job titles in his decade-plus in the music business, both on the technical and artist side. While he would never be mistaken for a "suit" if seen on the street, today he is Head of Strategic Operations for UMG, and his role within the company is wide-ranging. He is equally conversant in the reconditioned Neumann disc-cutting lathe as he is in new hi-res delivery formats and metadata. He is an evangelist for quality in all its forms, within Capitol Studios, UMG and in the industry at large. He very much would like fans to experience music as he hears it in the studio.

"If we see ourselves, as a label, as the heart of the connection between the music and the fan, that puts the music-making process at the center of it—in the studios," Moffitt says. "We stand on the foundation that our predecessors paved, so practicing the artisan craft that's part of that legendary history is a commitment we make every day. We're the only historic recording studio in the U.S. still owned and operated by a label.



Barak Moffitt, Head of Strategic Operations at UMG

Photo: Paul Moore



Paula Salvatore, VP/Studios

Photo: Paul Moore



Art Kelm, VP/General Manager/Chief Engineer

Photo: Paul Moore

So we have to balance that legacy with being state of the art. Distribution formats will change, consumption habits will change. But the mission is the same: Capture the artist's vision and make the most of what the current technologies and distribution channels have to offer to translate that vision. Thanks to the direction and investment from leaders like Steve, Boyd and Lucian, we are in a better position than ever to do just that."

It would seem on the surface that a near-60-year legacy at the studios and 70-plus years as a record company would be a huge benefit, and it is, for sure. But it can also hinder a company that is trying to promote a new approach and new energy if the infrastructure and processes are dated.

"It's an exciting challenge to balance legacy and state-of-the-art," says the ever-present and ever-warm Paula Salvatore, a local legend in the L.A. recording scene who has managed the rooms these past 25 years and was recently promoted to VP/Studios. "Over the years, we've done our best to stay at the cutting edge, and that legacy has always been a gift. But now we are fortunate to have the support and leadership of Capitol and UMG to stay fresh and maintain that excellence."

THE STUDIOS

While Salvatore has long been the face of Capitol Studios, Art Kelm is the relatively new man behind the scenes, charged with the technical side of the refresh. Kelm, an international authority on power, design and interconnection, and a chief engineer at various L.A. studios over the years, was brought on in late-December 2011 to consult on the proposed remodel of Studio A. In April 2012 he was hired part-time as Director of Engineering, and today he is a full-time VP/General Manager/Chief Engineer, overseeing a 24/7 technical staff.

"The 88R is slightly bigger than the VR, and it has an in-wall patchbay that was twice the size of the in-console patchbay on the VR," he says. "So we put all new wiring, Canare cable, in the walls, and

we put in power isolation transformers, UPS and all the things I do with power. We then changed the credenza and some of the seating area to make it more client-friendly.

"Since the room was going to be down for a while, it was decided to go into the walls and fix some of the problems that we knew about acoustically," he continues. "We ripped out the back and front walls and added absorption, and we redid the soffits up front, reinforcing the structure so it would be an easy retrofit once we put in the new speaker system. The first date in the room was Al Schmitt mixing Paul McCartney live for iTunes, the *Live Kisses* performance, with Diana Krall. You can't beat that." (Salvatore recalls that date clearly: "I was in the front row praying that everything worked!" she laughs.)



Studio C, Al Schmitt's favorite mix room.

Photo: Carl and Desiree Afable

The new speakers turned out to be a big deal, and would be installed a year later, to replace the Augspersgers that had been there since the 1990s. The staff polled their main clients in both film and rock 'n' roll to find out preferences. After shootouts and proposals and offers, they went with the all-new PMC QB1-A system, working with the company on its development and installation into Studios A and B in January 2014.

"They're wonderful, and they work in that control room. The imaging is great in there now," says longtime client and producer Don Was, who was named president of Blue Note in January 2011 and has developed a particular fondness for Studio B over the past 20 years. (See sidebar.)

"I really like the way A is now, the way it sounds, and I love the console," adds Al Schmitt, a regular denizen of the classic room, with ses-

sions going back to Sinatra and Nat King Cole, on through recent work with McCartney and Bob Dylan, where everything was live in the studio, no headphones. "They changed the desk in the middle and the seating, and everyone just seems to fit better. And then Studio C is great. I love to mix on the VR in there, and it's so much more open now. We just did Bob Dylan's *Shadows In The Night* in there. Man, that was fun. The band was all in the room, with Bob in the middle, and his voice sounded great."

Because the rooms were already some of the finest in the world and booked pretty solidly, the timeline for the facility-wide studio upgrades was very detailed and mapped out as a two-year plan coinciding with the overhaul of the Tower.

In June 2013, diffusion was removed from the back wall of Studio B and a new credenza and wiring were put in. The following month, mastering engineer Robert Vosgien's room was redone (see sidebar) to update it for hi-res formats. In January 2014, the PMC QB1-As were installed in A and B, followed by the remodel of Control Room C, with a new 5.1 PMC speaker system, new wiring and a reconditioning of the Neve VR72, all done in-house. Finally, last summer, the offices and scheduling software and management systems were overhauled. And there was still more.

"The biggest upgrade of 2014 was the Pro Tools HDX systems running 11," Kelm says. "They're all identical—studios A, B and C, and we have a fourth that is a floater. Each has 72 inputs and 80 outputs, the same plug-

WHERE VINYL MEETS HI-RES

A long and storied label legacy means a deep and rich catalog. Capitol Music Group—and parent UMG—has quite a few labels. Each time a new consumer format comes out, so does the catalog. Recorded works provide an enormous, almost incalculable asset to a label, a gift that keeps on giving. They're also an incalculable cultural asset, and are treated as such at Capitol. Nowhere do the old and new worlds meet more noticeably than in the Mastering department, where vinyl and hi-res delivery formats share nearly equal time and attention.

Mastering engineers Ron McMaster and Robert Vosgien joined Capitol at about the same time in the mid-1980s, right when the label was playing catch-up on CD reissues. Both started in production; both quickly advanced to mastering to help ease the load. From there, their paths diverged. Vosgien left after a couple years to master in the JVC Cutting Room, then at CMS Digital, returning in 1998 to Wally Traugott's former room. McMaster kept mastering the whole time, catalog and new releases.

Today they work next door to each other, with McMaster almost exclusively cutting vinyl to serve the resurgence in consumer demand, while Vosgien focuses almost entirely on hi-res audio, in multiple delivery formats. Both are very busy, as are fellow engineers Evan Goknar, Ian Sefchick

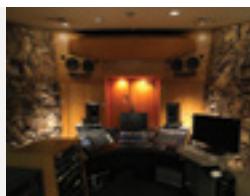
and Kevin Bartley.

"I feel like I've come full-circle," McMaster says. "Back to vinyl once again to finish my career. It was the last thing I was expecting, but the market has been growing in leaps and bounds. If I were to master a project today, there would be a three-month wait from the plant. Now there are fewer plants, sure, but they are all very busy.

"The process hasn't really changed," he adds. "I've been doing the same thing on the same great gear forever. But I've really enjoyed teaching people about it, passing on the knowledge to clients and to the staff. I trained Ian Sefchick how to cut vinyl, and he's been doing great. He pulled Wally's old lathe out of storage and reconditioned it, hooked it up, got it running. You can see that spark in his eye."

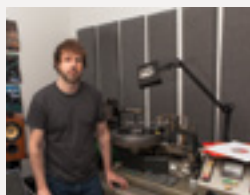
When the makeover comes to McMaster's room in a few months, it will mostly involve cleaning up his wiring and upgrading his patchbay. He's updating his analog console, keeping its A and B side, hooked up directly to the lathe.

Vosgien's room was updated last year, and besides



Mastering engineer Robert Vosgien's room, where he masters primarily for hi-res delivery.

Photo: Carl and Desiree Afable



Mastering engineer Ian Sefchick in front of Wally Traugott's old Neumann lathe, which he pulled out of storage and reconditioned to cut vinyl.

Photo: Paul Moore

cleaning up the "two miles of cable" that was in the walls and console, he installed a new Dangerous Music Mastering Suite. "I decided it was the best way to interface my analog EQs and compressors into the system" he explains. "There are very short cables interconnected into the Liaison, a device insert router where I can select any EQ or compressor in any order and A/B all my processing in the time it takes me to push a button. It makes my job so much easier. Then there's a very clean Monitor section, and a Master section for cutting and boosting level.

"If possible I want to use the original analog tape," he says of the catalog reissues. "This Judy Garland project I just worked on was from 1955, on 1/4-inch at 15 ips, the old acetate tape, and it was in surprisingly good condition. Then we're capturing through PCM converters at 192k, 24-bit. For a typical HD project, we would do a version at 192k, a version at 96k, a Mastered for iTunes version at 96k, and then for about 75 percent of the titles we also do DSD.

"After I came back, when 5.1 was starting up, I made a decision to remove the lathe and prepare to do 5.1 mastering," he adds. "Who would have thought that LPs would come back strong and 5.1 would be hanging by a thread?"



Capitol engineers Chandler Harrod, left, and Steve Genewick at the Neve 88R in Studio A during Oscars rehearsals. Mixer Tommy Vicari is taking a break on the couch.

ins, same software, same track configurations. Ninety percent of what we do is at 192k, and HDX really is superior. This way you can move from room to room very easily.”

At the end of 2014, the two writer rooms on the second floor were updated acoustically and made to resemble a living room-style production. Avid S6 consoles, 16-fader and 5-knob, replaced the Neve Genesys boards, to better service the way singer-songwriter-producers create. In February, red-hot producer Alex da Kid, pictured on this month's cover, booked out nearly the entire second floor, including the two production suites and offices, for a year.

“The whole point was to have a floor where I can start expanding my empire!” da Kid laughs. “I love the vibe, the studio, the history. The other day I went downstairs, and there's Rod Stewart. You feel like you're in the middle of everything, which is good for a creative person. I feel like I want to start creating my own atmosphere. My label is in the Universal family, so that works, and it's close to my house. Plus, I've already blown a couple of speakers and they fixed them or brought me new ones!”

With all those aesthetic, acoustic and equipment changes, it's the new infrastructure—the wiring and interconnectivity, the unseen improvements—that might just prove to have the biggest impact. Every room can be accessed from any room, including the famous Echo chambers. All-new Antelope clocking was installed throughout, and a new Focusrite RedNet system has opened up new opportunities in both recording rooftop performances 13 floors up and in accessing the famed echo chambers 300 feet away, providing a digital carrier alternative to the entrenched analog lines. Two flavors, old and new. The Capitol legacy.

NEW BUSINESS

One of the main goals of the studio refresh was to provide the most flexible means of production to accommodate the incredible range of projects that come through the building. Few recording facilities in the States can do all that Capitol does. Film and TV scoring sessions; string and horn dates; rock, pop and R&B albums; big bands; live radio, TV and Internet broadcasts; rooftop performances; corporate co-branding campaigns; a line of reference ear monitors through Ultimate Ears. For a label group looking to promote artists across all forms of media—creating new revenue streams built on raw, behind-the-scenes content—the studio support has proven invaluable.

“Our goal has to be about meeting the fans where they consume music, whether that is wide in scope or deeper down certain channels,” says Moffitt. “In today's world that has a lot to do with what happens in



Photo: Gabi Porter

DON WAS AT BLUE NOTE

Producer/artist Don Was was named president of Blue Note (“My first job!” he laughs) in January 2011, before the sale to UMG had been announced, and immediately pumped new energy into the legendary label. He's signed new artists, kickstarted a massive vinyl/hi-res reissue series and celebrated the 75th anniversary with a series of releases, performances and events, including a lavish

launch party with Sonos to introduce that company's new wireless speaker. They bathed the Tower in blue light for a week leading up to the debut. By all accounts it was a good night.

Following the sale to UMG and the remake of the facilities, Was was enthusiastically retained as a “senior” member of Barnett's executive team and an important face of CMG. He sees many parallels between Capitol and Blue Note, both in their legacies and their missions.

“Blue Note started out by signing a couple of stride pianists,” he says of the founding 76 years ago. “Then they decide to get into bebop and they sign Thelonious Monk, maybe the most radical guy out there in his playing and voicing chords. Perhaps the most influential jazz composer of all time. Then a couple years later they form the Jazz Messengers with Art Blakey and Horace Silver, which was a radical change in bebop, the birth of hard bop. Jump ahead to Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter doing these modal experiments. Cecil Taylor, Eric Dolphy. These guys were changing music. So the way you honor the legacy is to continue moving it forward. I think they are inextricably linked together.”

Although Was had made many records at Capitol over the previous 20 years, establishing a fondness for Studio B in particular, having an office inside the Tower has provided him with a new perspective.

“The first time I got in the elevator from my office here and rode down and walked in the studio, that's when it all made sense,” he recalls. “Oh, of course they put studios in with the offices. It's the last of the label-owned studios. It's amazing. It makes so much sense, and it's a great tool to have for the whole Capitol Group. I have to give a lot of credit to Steve Barnett, who not only has backed us to the hilt on the music side and furthered the Blue Note ethos, but also saw the value of the studio and put a big investment into it. Steve is a true record man, in the most positive sense of that term.”

the recording studio—the robust metadata about the who, what, where, when and why of a record. For instance instrumentals and stems are more meaningful than they ever have been. Same for alternate mixes and alternate takes. Consumer and studio technologies are converging arguably for the first time in history, and we have the ability to distribute the very same files and formats that we listen to in the studio every day to the fan, whether it's for a record or live from the rooftop or for a brand partnership.”

The job of juggling the needs of such a variety of projects falls largely on Salvatore and Kelm. Inside the studios, however, Capitol engineer Steve Genewick is a man of many hats. Joining the team in 1994 after a stint at Cherokee, Genewick has assisted or engineered on such a wide range of projects that at this point in his career, he says, “I don't think there's a session in the world that would scare me. A hundred-piece orchestra, rock 'n'

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roll drums, a live TV broadcast? There's such a huge depth of knowledge here." It doesn't hurt that for many years Genewick has been joined at the hip with Schmitt, and he's the right hand for Tommy Vicari when he brings in the Oscar orchestra for 10 days every February.

"My role kind of evolves with the business of the studio," Genewick says. "As we started to diversify more, we found that we never had to say no—we would always find out how to do it. That's the attitude here. Capitol has always been about the people. Our clients know they can count on us. The Academy Awards didn't come here because we were close to the Dolby Theatre, although that's a benefit. They came here because they knew we could pull off the show."

Oh, yes, the Academy Awards. Composer/conductor Bill Conti approached Salvatore in the late 1990s about bringing the orchestra in for a week of rehearsals and pre-records leading up to the broadcast. The doors were opened between Studios A and B, and 60-plus pieces were spread out in a rather nontraditional arrangement, with strings in B, the others in A, and singers upstairs. Rolling carts held the CRT monitors. It was tight, but it worked.

Tommy Vicari, whose first job was in the Capitol mailroom in the 1970s, has mixed the Academy Awards orchestra for the past 16 years. Three years ago, the process changed considerably when the show's producers wanted to make use of the orchestra pit for TV props and a song and dance number.

"So what do I do with the orchestra?" Vicari asks. "Put them upstairs at the theater or keep them at Capitol? It wasn't really a decision. Rather than working a week on a mix and then moving into the Remote Recording truck while the orchestra would go into the pit, now I get to record and mix the entire show on the same console, same setup. All my EQs and compressors are on playback, so I can tweak up until the show and get a pretty tight mix. Plus, there's all the resources and support of Capitol right here.

"The problem is that we're now half a mile away," he continues. "We have to get signal there and back, with the conductor at Capitol and a video monitor showing him back on the Dolby stage for the artists. In the past three years we've got it down to a 5.5-millisecond delay, so, for instance,



Photo: Carl and Desiree Afbale

Even the lounges were redone.

Lady Gaga can sing *Sound of Music* live with the orchestra. People like Steve Genewick and Chandler Harrod are here with me to assist. On Pro Tools is Larry Mah. We can do whatever we have to do. It works."

It was a huge technical effort, with AT&T stepping in and installing 48 dedicated fiber lines between the Dolby Theatre and the Tower. The video monitoring throughout the facility was upgraded to full SDI/HD. Cameras were brought in and shots went live to air. ABC provided its own generator. That's not an easy job to sync. They've now done it for the past three years.

The reason that the many and varied jobs get done, and that clients trust they will get done well, is the Capitol staff. Everyone interviewed for this story said the same thing, raving about the professionalism and attitude of engineers and the staff like Charlie Paakkari, Chandler Harrod, Travis Ference, Joe Napolitano, Jeff Fitzpatrick, Nick Rives, Dave Martinez, Ira Grylack and Diego Ruelas. On the maintenance side there is Dave Clark, Peter Gonzales, Niall Murphy and James Goforth. In transfers and preservation there is Dave McEowen and Perry Cunningham. Holding the line in administration are Mark Moreno, Jenny Sloatman, and Ryan Simpson, as well as Ursula Kneller in Marketing and Special Projects.

"The building, the studio, the brand, the people, they all say one thing: authenticity," Barnett, CMG head, sums up. "That's what we want to stand for. Excellence in music. Of everything we've done, the project I'm most proud of is probably the New Basement Tapes. It has everything we stand for. Bob Dylan's lyrics, fantastic musicians, T Bone Burnett producing, incredible studio, great filmmaker, an amazing record, and an incredible documentary. That project says it all in how we feel about our people and our studios." ■