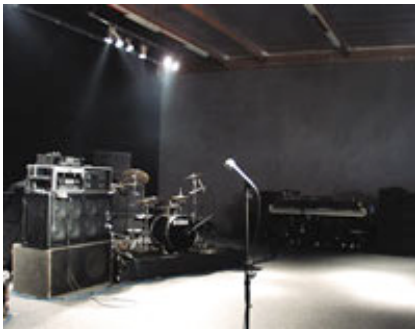


Stage Ready: Powerin' Up at The Plant

A rehearsal hall in tune with getting ready to hit the road

By Mike Kerr



Monitor and drum world from the lead vocal position.

Viewed from the outside, The Power Plant blends anonymously with its surrounding North Hollywood industrial landscape. Inside this rehearsal facility, however, it's a very different story. For musicians ranging from Mick Jagger to Sugar Ray, Korn to Courtney Love, Toto to Bonnie Raitt, The Power Plant is aptly named. Energy from deep within its walls and doors permeates every inch of space.

When Ed Simeone and fellow audio engineer Dirk Schubert collaborated to create the facility in 1987, there weren't many rehearsal spaces available in the Los Angeles area. The few in existence were often plagued by poor acoustics, bad lighting and inadequate power. Not a good situation for bands looking to get their "acts" together in advance of hitting the road.

"We wanted to create a place with a genuine acoustic character, like some of the best recording studios, to establish a sonic benchmark among rehearsal studios," explains Simeone, now managing director of TC Electronic U.S. "We also wanted The Power Plant to be a rehearsal space where not only the artists felt comfortable, but the band techs, tour managers and engineers did too." The North Hollywood location was chosen for its easy access to the many musicians living in the Los Angeles metroplex, especially the San Fernando Valley, Burbank and Hollywood.



The insulation of the walls in both studios.

The conversion of an existing building into a quality rehearsal space proved costly, yet it was the only option if acoustics, gear, lighting and infrastructure were to be addressed to meet the expectation of a first-class facility. An architectural acoustics consultant and the building contractors were in lock-step regarding appropriate materials and room geometry.

Even before the studio doors were installed and the air conditioning was operational, the band Boingo booked The Power Plant to rehearse for one of their annual Halloween shows. Performers such as Rod Stewart, Don Henley, New Edition and Bruce Hornsby, soon followed.

BIG WALLS, HEAVY DOORS

The walls of The Power Plant are all floating, which provides added isolation, and each has six layers of overlapping drywall and soundboard to achieve the appropriate rigidity and mass. Room doors are made of four-inch thick Baltic birch plywood, with soundboard over a foam inner core. Each door weighs more than 300 pounds.

Both primary rehearsal rooms can switch lighting environments between white fluorescent lighting for set-up, and incandescent PAR lighting with color-corrected fill for performance. Lighting techs have plenty to work with, while artists get more of a realistic feel, rather than the impression they're rehearsing in a supermarket.

Power distribution is built into walls, fueled by 30-amp Hubbell outlets with 60 amps of power at each drop. The larger room also has a 100-amp twin-phase disconnect with Camloc outputs for touring companies wishing to connect their own power distribution.



The monitor and drum position from

The smaller room (called Room 1) offers 1,000 square feet, measuring 25 feet by 40 feet. It offers a stage replicating that of a theater or a large club, and the room's acoustical signature is "springy," like that found on a club stage. The front wall is treated with two inches of Owens Corning 703 high-density sound absorptive panels covered with Kodel blanketing which is then quilted with acoustic fabric and vertical strips of stained oak.

Two walls have polyester sound blanketing and double-layered Duvetyne drapes flown 10 inches in front of the blanket.

overhead.

The remaining wall is covered in gray short pile carpet to control the reverb contour at high frequencies. To the point, this room is short, fat, clear and efficient - particularly well suited for hard rock acts.

The larger room (Room 2) closely emulates the performance area of an arena-scale stage, offering a total of 2,000 square feet, measuring 40 feet by 50 feet. Acoustics are intended to create a warm, ambient sonic signature, with intelligibility. The front wall is live but also includes two unique bass traps flown in the ceiling corners.

The two side walls are paneled with four inches of Owens Corning 703 panels and covered with Kodel blanketing. Double-layered Duvetyne drapes are flown 12 inches in front of the blanketing to control 200 to 400 Hz reverberation. The remaining wall is covered in the same gray carpet as the other room, to reduce reverb contour at higher frequencies.

Schubert notes that the challenge for the bass traps was coming up with a design large enough to do the job while not taking up floor space. Through an extensive prototype process, he developed inverted, irregular tetrahedrons that hang 18 inches from the walls and ceiling at the corners of the live wall.



The larger Room 2 at The Power Plant.

In theory, sound enters the corner from any angle and is absorbed by the baffles within the traps. Their super-structure is built of redwood 2-foot by 6-foot lumber, on edge, covered with several layers of heavyweight felt. The two triangles (the bases of the tetrahedrons) facing into the room conceal hundreds of square feet of baffle, as much surface area as twelve 4-foot by 8-foot sheets of plywood.

The trademark bass traps have proven so effective that engineers, like Paul Middleton (Bonnie Raitt, Julio Iglesias), have established the in-house tradition of setting up their house consoles and processing right under one of them. "It's amazing," said Middleton. "Under the trap, I can hear the mix on a pair of NS10s, even while the band is playing with 18 wedges and side fills blazing."

GETTING DOWN TO GEAR

The rehearsal studio sparked manufacturer interest, with Harman Audio Group companies like JBL, Soundcraft, UREI, as well as Shure, realizing The Power Plant's potential as a showcase. Soon, dozens of Shure microphones arrived, and Room 1 had a complete system with JBL monitor wedges, UREI power amplifiers and equalizers and a Soundcraft console.

With the resources of Schubert Systems Group (Dirk Schubert's touring sound company), The Power Plant offers system options such as Yamaha PM4000M, Midas Heritage and XL4 consoles, 12AM wedges, Shure mics and in-ear systems, and many major brands of outboard processing. In addition, The Power Plant complements Schubert Systems' business of gearing up for a tour - the band's stage sound is able to move seamlessly from the rehearsal studio to the road.

"Every sound company should have a studio like this," said Mike Gonzales, FOH and production manager for Cypress Hill. "That's a whole lot better than working out the kinks on the fly. When you're here, the gear is here and the technicians are here. I can get guitar strings anywhere, but if I need an extra speaker cable or an EQ, it's here in the Schubert shop. There's no shipping, no time wasted."



The tetrahedrons bass traps in Room 2.

Many artists now use The Power Plant as a pre-production studio for album projects, recording mixes right from the monitor console or demos multitracked from a separate console and splitter, all of which are provided in-house. Managers will book a studio to showcase talent to record companies, and record companies to their promotions staff. Manufacturers have used The Power Plant to showcase products to artists and sales staff before product hits the market.

The Power Plant's initial success inspired the building of other rehearsal studios. Within five years, more than 20 new rehearsal rooms opened within a mile, but most did not last.

"Artists really like our privacy," says Schubert, who continues as The Power Plant's owner. "There are no distractions or interruptions, because we don't have 10 rooms or other businesses renting space in our building."

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