



Hot Soap Studios

A blend of new and old is the key to putting Cyprus' newest commercial studio on the map, writes **Simon Luckhurst**

FROM PRODUCTION TO CONSUMPTION, THE RECORDING industry is almost unrecognisable from just a decade ago. Whether this is down to new technology changing the way people work or the rising popularity of different buying platforms like Apple Music and Spotify skewing the old economic model is not for this article to answer. But the fact remains that opening a large-scale commercial recording facility requires more due diligence now than ever before.

In contrast to its European neighbours, Cyprus is currently enjoying a growing recording industry, with more and more international artists and producers making the realisation they can now achieve great quality results there at a fraction of the cost. This is somewhat of a new phenomenon. Historically, artists tended to go to neighbouring Greece to forge a career, but the recent economic situation has turned everything on its head.

What can be done to ensure success in an uncertain market? Being situated in the heart of a city with good travel connections and widespread accommodation is perhaps one tactic. Providing potential clients with a unique atmosphere conducive to their creative work, might be another. However, most ultimately end up letting the equipment and technology do the talking. Hot Soap Studios is fortunate enough to champion all three. Located in the heart of the Cypriot city of Larnaca, the business has just opened its doors after a lengthy renovation project to transform it from an old 1970s abandoned house into an everyday place of work. This is the vision of Jordanian owner, Kais Khoury.

The renovation work started back in September 2017 with the appropriate specifications for the building to function as a



Studio manager **Andreas Matheou**

recording studio. 'The original look and feel of the house was left intact due to its 70s design, as it was felt that provides a nice and unique vibe for the studio, but the interior and inner layout of the house was changed completely,' recalls studio manager, Andreas Matheou. 'Hot Soap is the only commercial recording studio in Larnaca and it's located right in the heart of the city. Furthermore, the architecture of the building is also very unique, and the high wooden roof of the live room gives a really nice vibe as well as some lively reverberation to our recordings.'

Enlisted to help transform the space into a studio environment capable of catering for any type of audio production, from music, to advertising and voiceovers, Technosound got involved right from the start of the start

of the project and supplied all of the equipment. Acoustics were taken care of by Pacoustics, which did a complete study of the area in general and made recommendations for the Technosound technicians, Philippos Nicolaides and Matheos Matheou. This resulted in the use of moving acoustic panels that allow the space to be tailored according to the specific project being worked on.

'Andreas Matheou who is actively involved in the project and also a very good friend, came and asked us to get involved,' recalls Technosound managing director, Gregory Gregoriou. 'I believe we had a very good understanding of what the project was about and we also provided our input. The priorities for us are not only to meet the customer's needs and specifications, but to deliver the best possible results at the best possible value. The equipment selection is key to this, and of course, we suggested some equipment based on the needs of the project and they also proposed some specific equipment they needed to have. It was a mix of ideas from both sides.'

Tucked away at the back of the building and taking pride of place in the 30m2 Hot Soap control room is a Solid State Logic AWS 924 Delta console, selected for its ability to provide the classic analogue sound SSL is known for while still retaining good DAW integration.

'It provides a big advantage to the workflow of the studio,' explains Gregoriou. 'Initially they were actually planning to have some outboard mic pres and a DAW controller, but the AWS was a much better solution for the kind of workflow they wanted and even adds a different kind of pedigree to the studios.'

The AWS is typically fed from a pair of Universal Apollo 16

interfaces, while projects at Hot Soap are normally worked on in Avid Pro Tools (Stenberg's Cubase 9 is also used). 'The Apollos provide great AD/DA conversion for a very good price – they're really great value,' says Gregoriou. 'They also provide first-class DSP and plug-ins that are unlike anything else available in terms of DSP/DAW processing and effects.'

Coincidentally, a special offer running from the audio interface manufacturer meant two free UAD-2 satellites to support the two Apollo 16s and maximise their DSP capabilities. 'They now have a massive amount of DSP and all of the UA plug-ins to work with on their projects,' he furthers.

As the studio would largely be working in the box, Gregoriou also recommend the Komplete Ultimate library of sound from Native Instruments. 'This is always a suggestion from me, and people are never disappointed. If you work in the box a lot, this package can cover a large percentage of your requirements, with nearly every kind of sound needed during productions. It's good for any studio to start with and then they can add other bits for specific uses on top.'

Tying up the analogue and digital realms is a Switchcraft 9625 patchbay that comes highly recommended by the Technosound MD. 'It's a brand we use for all our main studio projects in Cyprus. Their products always work flawlessly and the 9625 patchbay, in particular, provides very easy installation, it's very easy to use and gives you a lot of flexibility to have your normal, half-normal and full normal operation.'

Completing the hardware setup in the control room is a dual monitoring solution featuring Dynaudio Lyd 7s functioning as the main monitors, with Genelec 8050BPs to provide a second 'flavour'.

Flanking the control room is the large, 66m2 main live room that boasts a 6m-high wooden ceiling and has been equipped with movable panels to adjust the reverberation of the room. A selection of popular mics from Sennheiser, Shure, AKG Electro-Voice, Neumann and Royer are on hand for recording alongside beyerdynamic DT770 and DT100, AKG K271 and



The SSL AWS 924 conected to an iMac running Avid Pro Tools



Dual Apollo 16s serve as the audio interface



The main live room

Koss Qz-99 headphone for monitoring, fed from a Presonus HP-60 headphone amplifier. 'They needed a selection of microphones capable of covering all of the different types of audio recordings they make,' says Gregoriou. 'We provided a variety of all of the main microphones out there.' Connected to the main live room is a smaller space of around 10m2 that can function as a silent room, vocal booth or amp room.

While the wheels were set in motion at Hot Soap Studios well over a year ago now, thorough planning from the outset meant that installation itself was relatively straightforward. 'It was helped by the fact that the building was renovated with these plans and intentions in mind, everything was new and had been taken care of,' notes Gregoriou. 'In terms of equipment, everything worked well from the first time we turned it on. As Pro Tools and Cubase would both be used, we did some set up work to allow the desk to function as smoothly as possible with both programs. This was a bit tricky but we managed to complete as planned.'

As the only serious commercial studio in Larnaca, it would have been easy for the Hot Soap to take the easy approach and rely on tried and tested traditional workflows, but as the studio manager notes: 'The AWS 924 is a very big selling point for us and definitely adds an edge to the workflow here. It will take an adjustment period to see exactly how the functionality and workflow of the space works out, but so far we're very happy we went for this option.'

In contrast to just a few years ago, the Cyprus now boasts some well-equipped studios and good engineers. The industry's continued success is in the hands Cyprus' new breed of studio owners like Khoury. 'This has definitely been one of our largest recording studio projects and the feedback has been very good,' concludes Gregoriou. 'The work doesn't end here though, and as with all our customers, we will always be here to help out Hot Soap in the future if they have any issues or need to expand their system further.'

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