

TAPE OP MAGAZINE

Nashville

by Larry Crane

{copyright 2001 Larry Crane}

In early October I visited Nashville to be part of 2NMC, otherwise known as the Nashville New Music Conference. It was interesting to see this event on it's first annual run through, and also interesting to see Nashville and try to understand the music and recording scene there. I flew into town Wednesday night, and found myself wandering the streets of downtown Nashville when I couldn't get a hold of the event coordinators who would let me into my hotel room (it wasn't in my name). I passed a number of hokey-looking country bars along Broadway that had country artists playing for tips. And I kept passing them. Eventually I found David Hooper, one of the guys in charge of 2NMC, and got to my room. It was full of bags that were to be given away to registrants, I couldn't even reach the window and had to hop over them to get to my bed. Crazy. I had seen in a local paper that Neko Case and Her Boyfriends were playing that night so I walked over there. When I popped in the door I stood around for a split second before Neko recognized me, and was rather surprised to see me there. After a great set we went back to their

After checking out Sound Stage Studios in the back lot, where they were turning mono sound from old Saturday Night Live episodes into 5:1 (through some box!) we hopped on the bus. Now, a few months before an enterprising engineer named Chris Mara had sent me a videotape of a rough cut of a documentary he had made about recording a band in the studio. I watched it and tried to email him but didn't have the right address. So we walk into Love Shack Recording Studios and there he is, recording a band. I sneak over to him and tell him who I am, we laugh and he tells me to come back later and hang out. We ride around on the bus and check out more places, like Quad (which has a great little room in the front where Neil Young did Harvest), Seventeen Grand (which had a Tape Op sitting on the counter!), and Recording Arts, which is built into an old house and really had a great vibe with amazing monitoring. But the scariest was called Starstruck. It is part of an entertainment castle that cost Reba McEntire \$25 million to build. The "Gallery Studio" is the big room, were even the diffusers are custom-made and expensive.

motel and drank whiskey while members of her band and the opening act, Jim, Jenny and the Pinetops, played bluegrass music till 5 AM. As I wandered back to my hotel room I worried that this wasn't the best way to meet my new roommate, but luckily no one was there besides the bags.

Thursday I woke up too early, worrying that people would come in looking for bags. I went downstairs and registered and checked out the small but friendly trade show. Shit, the shipment of Tape Op mags hadn't gotten there yet either.... I walked around downtown some more, checking out the beautiful new library (you can do free internet work this way). I went back to the room and worked on editing stuff for the mag until 6 PM, when I hitched a ride over to Warner Brothers for a 2NMC party with free food and drinks. Now usually, when I get a lift from somebody it's not in a mobile recording truck. But luckily my new roommate (and musician/engineer/producer) Peter Hernandez was friends with John Falzarano, owner of Studio On Wheels. He has a truck in Nashville and two in Southern California. It was funny to ride in a truck loaded with an Otari MTR-90, but with it John gets great work with everyone from Marilyn Manson to full-on gospel choirs. So we got to the party and the food was almost gone and the beer's run out. I bailed and walked to a liquor store to buy a bottle of gin before heading back to the room. I proceeded to miss all the bands and get very drunk

The place is crazy, too much for me to handle, and by the time we made it to the machine room I was feeling ill. The there was a whole other studio, the "Pond Studio", plus a video and broadcast suite, and a conference room. The place was over-the-top. It interested me that their rates had dropped recently to nearly the same as much smaller studios. With places like this, similar to Bryan Adam's Warehouse in Vancouver, the studio doesn't really make money so the artist supports it. Hmmm. After the tour was over I grabbed a bite and went over to Love Shack to hang with Chris Mara and the Dan Adams Band. They were tracking a Christmas song for a WTC benefit Christmas record coming out this year. Love Shack had donated the weekend to do two bands for this, a super nice gesture. The studio was comfortable, and I really liked the layout of the control room and the Trident 80C console. It was refreshing to see an engineer and band pushing to track and mix a song in one day after touring Starstruck's excess. While he was working, Chris told me about Nashville studio life. It seems a lot of studio work only happens during the weekdays, musicians working 3 hour shifts. Chris gets some work doing publishing demos, where they expect you to track 4 songs in those three hour blocks. Meanwhile the big-name clients are holed up working on three-line choruses for days on end. I headed out after enjoying time with Chris and the band (nice guys) and ran into Gary

while editing the letters section. I pass out late. Friday I woke up a little groggy. The current issue of Tape Op had arrived so I placed little piles all over and handed some to the tradeshow booth people, making a few friends along the way and signing up for a studio tour the following day. I went back to the library for a while and returned later to moderate the panel I was on, "Producer: Director or Dictator?". I was pleased to be in the company of Roger Moutenot (see his recent Tape Op article), Gary Burnette (who's produced John Wesley Harding and played guitar with Nancy Wilson [not of Heart] in the past, Lawrence Gelburd (a cool producer out of Philly) and Count Bass D (a Nashville-based hip-hop artist who's on the rise). The panel was lively and fun, everyone contributing great insights, and the audience asking good questions and paying attention. I could tell this was actually a conference where people were coming to learn from others and get shit done for themselves. After the panel Gary, Roger and I hung out and agreed to hook up later. I went and saw Lost Patrol, a trippy band from New York whose Steve Masucci wires studios and restores vintage synths, sometimes hiring my pal Gail to help out. Later I met up with Gary and witnessed Pope Factory, a Canadian band whose combination of early Pink Floyd, Granddaddy, and jamming without jamming excited me enough to chase them out into the back lot, trying to get them to hire me as a producer. Of course they have no

Burnette as I walked into a club. "Get in there and see this band. They're amazing," he yelled over the din. I walked in (earplugs in) and was seriously blown away. One of the best bands I've ever seen. After their set I tried to sell my engineering/production services on them but found out they were breaking up, not because of problems with each other, but because they had signed a "production deal" with some people that were just dragging them down. By breaking up they would get out of the contract. Totally fucking wrong and sad. Gary and I went to another club and saw a band who's production deal must be working out. Boring, 2 years late, tepid and dull are my best descriptions of this band. We busted out of there and had some beers. "Why would that band need a production deal?" I asked. Gary patiently described how Nashville worked to me, how that's a usual route for bands, even if they're obviously not gonna be on a major label. He figured the production company was complaining 'cause the band "didn't have any songs" which made me laugh. He also told me stories of his studio work, how so many albums never even come out, how many Christian music projects he'd done and how he enjoyed some of the freedom those gave him, and how if you had a great idea as a session guitarist you had to produce the goods fast. Soon we were joined by Jeff Fellars, who also was running the 2NMC conference (and was slated to be an ad

money and recorded their last record on a VS-880, so I'm out of luck! We met up with Roger at a rocking show by Joe, Marc's Brother. Roger got up and played guitar with them during a long fucked up jam. Pretty fucking cool - look for Roger's solo record soon! I also met Daniel Tashian, who's father is the great Barry Tashian of the Remains, but I didn't bug him about it. I think I wandered home after this show was over.... Saturday I woke up pretty late and busted ass to make it over to the start of the NAPRS (Nashville Association of Professional Recording Services) studio tour. We met at the SAE recording school, where we got some snacks and a tour of their cool facilities. "Almost makes me wish I'd gone to school," I said after seeing the Neve room.

salesman for Tape Op before realizing how much work he had in front of him with 2NMC and other commitments!). We got a good laugh out of Jeff's general exhaustion before going back to the hotel. Jeff and I stayed up even later chatting about the festival. It had done well, many people had learned about the music business and met others like themselves. Only a few had complaints, which is pretty damn good. Some of the shows were packed, some weren't - but that's how any night is. It was just cool to see a lot of musicians trying to get their shit happening instead of waiting around for some magic angel to help them out. It's a good thing, and I hope to be in Nashville again next year too.