



CITY STUDIOS
AUDIO VISUAL

Island Treat

City Studios, Cyprus

City Studios is a rich mixture of audio services and creation. The baby of Andreas Geogallis, this complex is showing many how it should be done.

PAUL MAC reports.

ANDREAS GEOGALLIS is a classically trained pianist who, after doing his two years national service in the Cypriot army, spent more education time in the UK at SAE and Gateway (for the music tech and recording), Trinity College (for more piano and contemporary music arrangement and orchestration), and the London College Of Furniture (Piano Tuning). After that, he moved back to Cyprus to start a PA company and worked as a live sound engineer while at the same time working on several studio productions. In 1996 Cyprus created its own reliable laws regarding mechanical copyright, so Geogallis started a record label. It had considerable success with six albums (one included the 1996 Cyprus entry to the Eurovision Song Contest, which Geogallis wrote and produced, and one was a solo album that he recorded with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra) until the economic woes of 2000.

Geogallis went back to live sound, studio production, and a growing reputation in theatre as Musical Direction, Orchestrator, Choir Master, Sound Designer, and Engineer. At one memorable stage he actually managed to conduct the orchestra from the FOH position. He also spent quite a busy period writing music for TV and talk shows, and engineering on live operatic and ballet productions.

All told, Geogallis has been 'in the music business' for 25 years. Before building the current City Studios facility, he had expanded his old music studio by adding a dubbing room and, in doing so, created a monster. The dubbing business grew, and he had to split the live room into a dubbing room plus booth, then move more dubbing into the main control room. "Music was dead,"

he says. "You couldn't fit a band, you couldn't fit a choir, nothing."

In 2008, aged 42, with a healthy dubbing facility where relatively low overheads and a good income could continue into the foreseeable future, Geogallis took the only honourable option for a music man –

he sold that, bought another plot, and built a new facility that could accommodate both the dubbing services and a top-flight music studio.

Enter City Studios

City Studios' dubbing arm (upstairs) consists of five studios that do about 600 hours of dubbing in a year, providing casting, translation and scripting, recording, editing, and so on under one roof. The dual target is quality and speed – one studio can produce around 18 TV episodes per month. This is turn means a high volume of foot traffic (the studio has 42 actors on its books), and a large team of translators (12 regular, freelance translators). With the in-house team of around ten people, the five-room dubbing operation employs about 65 people through the year. Content includes cartoons, documentaries, and soap operas for the three main TV stations for the area, plus an ongoing pile of work with LTV, which represents Nickelodeon in Greece.

The business as a whole, including dubbing, music, location services, and a few other things besides, now has a turnover around the 800,000 mark, with the music studio contributing just over a tenth. Still, Geogallis says that the music side could sustain itself if it was the sole activity, which these days is a pretty good state to be in. "The dream now for me and Simon is to make it work for outside Cyprus, to get work from outside Cyprus."

That Simon is a relatively recent import from the UK – Simon Allen is the in-house engineer for the facility, as well as a regular contributor to the *Audio Media* review canon.

Build It Up

The actual City Studios building was a frame when Geogallis built it. There were no walls, so there was an opportunity to design the place almost from scratch. Andreas had help from Whitemark Acoustics in the initial planning phase. After that, it was up to local labour and expertise, including some adjustments to the basic isolation requirements – the local audioscape is not blighted by the noise of underground trains, heavy industry, or aircraft.

The build wasn't without its problems, especially



went it came to getting builders, used to house building, to implement the very special requirements (and angles) involved in creative audio production spaces. At one stage, the monitor wall had to be brought down and re-made – a difference of opinion yielded a flat, straight wall with large soffit-mounted Genelecs almost behind the console rather than further up the wall. The wall was demolished and re-built in three days.

Given some of the restrictions imposed by the frame that they started with, Geogallis has done an impressive job, employing some inventive material and building solutions to get the studio to an exceptional standard where the dubbing studios and the music studio could all operate and compete with the best that's around. The external look of the studio owes its 'concrete chic' to, well, lots of concrete, and upstairs restrictions meant sourcing some slightly more exotic materials to balance isolation, absorption, and weight.

Geogallis credits David Bell of Whitemark for some of his more informed decisions: "We spent two days with him," he said. "And it was like being in a college for 20 years. He was so open... my first idea was for a room concrete wall, and then I said to the architect, 'look, I want mass'. And then we came to 30cm.

Allen comments: "It's like a bomb shelter."

It's also unique on the island. Andreas and Allen note that there is no comparable facility on Cyprus, and that the studio is probably the "fourth or fifth biggest in Greece."

The main live room in the music studio is an impressive space, with lots of places and spaces to use and abuse. The basics of the control room gear includes an SSL AWS 900 SE console; Genelec 1025 main monitors with additional Adam S3X-Hs and Yamaha NS-10s; Pro tools HD 3; two Lexicon 480Ls; microphones from Telefunken (a lovely U47 M), AKG, Neumann, DPA (seven pairs, various), Sennheiser, beyerdynamic, and Audix; Focusrite preamps, and lots more besides. The plug-in list is mighty, and there's a variety of percussion and guitars available, as well as a very special Steinway & Sons D Grand, which in itself is quite an attraction for many clients.

All the dubbing rooms are Pro Tools-based with dedicated voice-over booths and Genelec monitoring.

This is all supported by UPS and a large back-up generator, to keep the studio running when the outside world falls over.

Work Related

There is a developing working relationship and mutual respect between Simon Allen and Andreas

Geogallis, which is something that is already benefitting the studio and making the whole business more scaleable. In Simon, Geogallis found someone that he is willing to trust with his brand, his reputation, and his investment. The back-scratching starts when I ask what they consider are the most important draws for clients to City Studios. "Andreas," says Allen.

And Geogallis' reputation, while impressive, is one of the things that could have prevented the business from scaling. Geogallis explains that customers who book the studio came to expect he would be there all the time, but it's a little like expecting a celebrity chef to always be the one who cooks your food at a restaurant they own. And now for the return: "And that's when Simon comes in," continues Geogallis. "Because after working with Simon nobody wants me. That's a good thing, because I'm relieved – I can go and do other things."

Another big sell is that City Studios is not an expensive place to work, but offers the potent combination of Geogallis and Allen in-house, which Geogallis believes is a sure route to productivity. It is also sunny and not too far from the beach.

What We Do

I asked Allen about a typical week's work at the music facility, which is notable for the variety of work it has in. For example, the day before I looked around, the studio had to deal with six contestants and their backing tracks for a Cypriot equivalent of X Factor called *Get On Stage*. The facility currently has two talent show clients, and as well as the bookings, it also brings some welcome public exposure. The cameras have spent a lot of time in the studio, and for one of the series', Performance, Andreas was a contestant mentor. "For the studio and for Andreas, it was a lot of coverage," explains Allen. "It was a two or three hour programme once a week, and we were all over it."

"Last week," he continues "We were working on a new musical production that's happening in January and February – *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. We've been given the job of producing all of the playbacks, because there'll be no band. We've also spent hours and hours with the singers, helping them – with the vocal coach – getting their songs up to the level they should be. We're also releasing a CD of that, so it's been one very serious project that's taken up a lot of the time in the last month or so."

That week, the studio also worked with several local artists, hosted a school visit, finished the mix work on an album of traditional Cypriot music, did a choir recording ready for a mix session the week after, and continued some ongoing production work with an artist known

as Sniper.

"There's a new record label called 357 that's starting in Cyprus," says Allen. "And its main act is called Sniper – from the So Solid crew. He's currently producing his debut solo album, which we are doing all the work for here. It's a big project that's been going on all year, and so far we've done half the album. There's a lot to talk about with 357, because it includes a gentleman called Jack Stevens. He was an A&R chap who apparently discovered the likes of Eurythmics, U2, and many others. He is heading up the 357 label with Sniper.

"They're in the process of putting not just this album together, but a series of new acts and a whole infrastructure of a record label, distribution, publishing, artist management, live shows across Cyprus, and they're spreading out to London and America."

There's an interesting link here that goes from Sniper to the BBC. Sniper's real name is Anthony Melas, and the Melas family owns, among other things, the Ayia Napa waterpark, Waterworld. That association brought with it a collaboration with BBC One Extra during a special programme centred on Ayia Napa. The idea was to create a new dance anthem for the hot spot during a three hour show, with around ten guest rap artists taking a verse each. The show linked to City Studios between tracks and played the finished work at the end.

Add to this a steady stream of Jazz, small classical ensembles, and so on, and it's clear that life in the music studio at City Studios is never dull.

Onward

And the ambitions of the studio are never done. Recently Geogallis has equipped and staffed three location set-ups for Cypriot TV production. It has been an uphill battle, apparently, educating the local broadcasters on audio quality and the potential advantages or recording separate audio with timecode, then considering things like Foley and post production work as valuable production stages.

Whatever happens, it's clear that even though the reputation of Geogallis has been the making of City Studios, it cannot be the only sustenance. The facility and its business interests have grown, and the large team that work there must live up to the high expectations created for it. So far, so good. **AM**

.....
INFORMATION

www.citystudios.com

