

THE
ROCK
 REPORT

SONIC BOOM

Now that many of Scotland's big names are choosing to record north of the border, the studios are doing a booming trade. John Williamson finds out more.

As well as seeing several Scottish bands enjoying chart success, the late 1980s has seen a corresponding boom period for Scottish recording studios. At the top end of the market this has meant Top 20 albums and singles being recorded at studios like CaVa, Park Lane and Castlesound—a direct result of the Scottish bands placing their faith in the studios where they started their careers.

While Deacon Blue and Hue and Cry have recorded at CaVa, Gun, Texas and Slide have all worked at Park Lane, with The Blue Nile and The Indian Givers staying loyal to Castlesound and Palladium Studios respectively. Wet Wet Wet and The Trashcan Sinatras are among the signed Scottish bands who have invested advances and royalties in setting up their own recording studios, while, at the other end of the market, more and more people seem to be combining computer technology with small eight-track studios to produce acceptable demo results at a cheap price.

Brian Young of CaVa Studios in Glasgow has clear thoughts as to why Scottish studios are becoming a more attractive option, both generally and to Scottish bands, who in the past may have jumped at the opportunity to record in London, or even America.

'One of the reasons has a lot to do with the current situation in London,' he says. 'It can cost up to a million pounds to open a studio that is up to mastering standard, and because of the competition between studios you can get in for as little as £600 a day. What this means though is that the staff are totally stretched and overworked, and that the studio is not maintained the way it should be.'

Scottish studios, he argues, are, in general, used because they are of a high quality rather than because they are cheap. This would seem to be vindicated by the comments of some of the leading producers that have used the studios—although complaints that Scottish studios do not have the backup services that are on offer in London (gear and session



players) are refuted by Brian, who claims, 'I can't think of anything we haven't been able to get within 24 hours.'

'CaVa has really developed along with the artists that have used the studio,' Brian continues, 'and there is now a level of interest in Scotland, and a level of success, whereby bands have got the clout within record companies to say that they want to work here.'

Another positive trend that Brian observes is that more and more English bands are seriously considering working outwith London, and coming to Scotland instead. CaVa have recently worked with The River City People and Terraplane, as well as doing 12in remixes for FM.

CaVa was also involved in this year's Tennents Live demo competition, one of the sponsors' first moves outwith the routine sponsorship of live shows—so how does Brian see the role of sponsorship with regard to studios?

'I think that any commercial sponsorship is good—I mean, what is a record contract if it is not

commercial sponsorship? I like what Tennents were trying to do with the competition, and the standard of tapes was incredibly high. Also, sponsorship generally has helped the venue scene in Scotland, which can only be good news for studios, as more bands are getting a chance to get to the stage where they want to make good demos.'

Overall, studios in Scotland are making advances at a rapid rate, and have already begun to form an integral part of a more devolved Scottish music industry.

One important venture is in the process of being put together by producer Clark Sorley, who ran Sirocco Studios for 12 years, and has now turned his attention to a Glasgow-based facility comprising studios, a performance area with cafe and bar, a section which will effectively be a small training school, and office space for whoever wants to use it, be they management companies or consultancies. It would also have a core company responsible for administration and renting space, among its other duties, so that the whole weight of

responsibility would not fall on one company.

Sorley's intention is to prevent the 'brain drain' of talented people elsewhere, and first became involved after the SDA, spurred by a group called Glasgow Action, made a study into the Scottish music business. He contributed his experience in the field to later studies, and the planned facility grew out of the investigations. It's an unusual venture for the SDA to take on, and they have needed occasional reassurance that this is public money well spent. 'They take their consultancy hats off and then put on their investment hats,' he says. 'They're now looking at it in the same way that a merchant banker would.'

In Sorley's opinion, the only way to create and maintain wealth is to have control over the ownership of the rights of the music—in other words a deal that gives you a percentage of the publishing, production or whatever. That tends not to be the case in Scotland at the moment. The only people who have an input in terms of royalties and rights are in fact the artists and writers, and the situation is so heavily weighted against them that they can't maintain a hold on any wealth for any length of time. Therefore, they don't get any power within the industry to make significant change. So what we identified was a need for a company of companies, to set up a production company that would be responsible for maintaining a hold on the ownership of the rights.'

He scoffs at the idea, which has been so prevalent for so long, that a hit single can't be made in a Scottish studio. 'If you're involved in the music industry in any sense at all, you know there's much more rubbish spoken than common sense. It's like people who say a record's a hit as soon as they've heard the finished master. It's not a hit until it's sold. Anything is potentially sellable. There's a hell of a lot of people within the industry who have a great interest in saying that you can only record in a studio that's got £2 million worth of equipment in it, but we all know that it's complete rubbish.'

'The idea here is that we create so many different things working within the same building, certainly some will be competing with others, but if we get the right degree of co-operation and competition then it should be a very good development.'