



Making Records : with The Walkmen
Interview with Matt Barrick by Hillary Johnson
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Do you have your own monthly practice space or do you do the hourly thing?

We have two monthly spaces, one in New York and one in Philadelphia, though the one in Philly is so cheap it's basically free. Both have their issues but it's nice to practice with our own equipment.

If you record your rehearsals, what do you use to record them and is there one person in the band that handles all of that?

Down in Philly, Paul and I use a Yamaha MT8X eight-track cassette recorder. We've been using these for years, as well as the four-track version, and they sound amazing. We often try to replicate their sound in the studio, but it never quite works out. There's just something about them. Paul is generally in charge of that. He has two, one at the practice space and one at his house for overdubs and mixing. In NY, the other guys experimented with using a Digi002 through Ham's computer but it just sounds terrible so they want back to the Yamaha eight-track.

How do you get copies of the rehearsal recordings to everyone in the band (ex. web server, cd-rs, etc)?

We email them around as mp3s.

Do you consider making demos to be an important part of making an album? Have you found it helps the writing process?

We don't really make proper demos of our songs before recording, but we do a lot of 8-tracking of the songs as they develop. I can't imagine writing sounds without doing that. We'll record parts of songs so that Ham can work on the singing at home, then when he comes up with good singing for a part, we'll focus on making that into a song and will play it endlessly with different parts until it eventually becomes a song.

Where and how do you record demos?

Well, I guess we don't do proper demos, but Paul is generally in charge of the Philly recordings on the 8-track and Ham is in charge of the NY ones.

Who gets to hear the demos? Are they just for your own learning process or have they helped get you shows/record deals/etc in the past?

We are the only ones who hear our demos. They are very rough and definitely wouldn't be getting us any deals.

How much and what kind of pre-production do you do before going in to record a record?

We don't do any pre-production and I'm not even sure what that term means. We have tons of 8-track tapes of songs in various forms, but even in the studio we are still finalizing certain aspects of the songs.

Is there one person in the band that is more recording-saavy than the rest? Does this person do any recording outside of the band?

Walt, Paul and I ran our own studio for years [Marcata] so we know a little more than the other two but since the studio closed none of us have done any recording outside of the band. We even had someone take over for most of the engineering the last few years we had the studio because we wanted to spend all of our time on our own music.

Do you record your own records or do you hire an outside person? And why?

We have done both and have found that working with an engineer yet being very hands on is the best way for us to work. We aren't the most technically experienced engineers but we do know how we like things to sound, so having a more professional engineer helps a lot. When we are left to our own devices, things can end up messy. It's also nice not to have to focus so intently on the engineering so we can focus more on the song.

Do you think your approach to making records suits you or is it only what you can afford or what business-people expect from you?

I think we have finally developed an approach to recording that suits us. It also happens to be fairly affordable but that is just how it turned out. It seems that "business people" would actually prefer for us to spend more on making our records, but we tend to spend what we need.

What was the recording budget for your last record and how was that money divided up?

I don't remember the exact amount of our last budget but about half went to the studio and half to the engineer, then some for mastering. I know that's vague, but I tried to stay out of it. We obviously saved a lot by using our own studio.

Can you describe the process of recording the last record? How was everything recorded?

Most of the tracks we recorded with Don Zientara at Inner Ear Studios in Arlington Virginia. Everything went to tape and stayed there. We used Pro Tools on only one song, but everything was recorded to tape first regardless. A few of the songs were recorded at our own studio, Marcata, by ourselves and for one track we brought in engineer Kevin

McMahon (he used Pro Tools). Our set up at Marcata was an MCI JH-416 console with an Otari MTX-90II 24-track tape machine. We had a few Urei 1176 compressors, but not too much else in the way of outboard gear. We also had a spring reverb box, an AKG BX-10, which sounds great. It was one of the few things we kept from that studio. We used all sorts of great mics, but one relatively cheap one we always have luck with is the AKG 451.

Did you record together live with amp bleed or with isolation or was everything pieced together? How much editing was done? What about sound replacing?

We generally record live in a room together with a fair amount of bleed because our amps tend to sound better loud. We isolate a little but we generally redo a song until everyone gets it right. We usually don't edit it later, just overdub. The format of the song is how it is when we record it. Hamilton sometimes sings with us, isolated obviously, and a few times we have even kept his original singing track. I'm not sure what sound replacing is but I don't think we've ever done that.

Are you generally happy with the end result?

At the time, yes, though later there are always things that I'd like to redo or change.

What's something you learned from making the last record (technical or philosophical)?

Go easy with compression on the drums. Make sure you've got everything sounding close to how you want it when you are tracking because if you don't you'll have a hell of a time when mixing.