

# REHEARSAL SPACE RECORDING RIGS

by Brian Stephens

IT SEEMS CLICHÉ TO SAY THAT TECHNOLOGY HAS ADVANCED to a point where it is possible to record anything – anywhere – with little or no effort. Computers, audio recording hardware, and recording software have all made significant leaps forward in recent years making it possible for anyone to record their music in countless numbers of formats with great ease. Most recently, it seems that computer speed and recording tools have progressed to the point of making live full band recording both easy and affordable. In this article, we will look at two types of recording systems that bands can set up on their existing desktop or laptop computers that provide the ability to capture full band performances right from their own practice room.

There are at least two paths that you can take in putting together a practice room recording setup. The first system revolves around a stand-alone mixer and separate Firewire-based audio interface. The second, and newest, option for DIY recording is the new line of Firewire-equipped mixers. Either of these systems will work with your existing desktop or laptop computers, but for maximum benefit, both in flexibility and actual physical space, a laptop computer is probably best. The choice of a laptop as your primary recording computer brings with it an incredible ease of portability. This alternative makes it possible to use the same rig to either capture your live rehearsals as well as record overdubs in different locations.

The first scenario involves the use of a Firewire-based audio interface and stand-alone mixing console. For my own studio's mobile recording needs, I recently put together a laptop recording system, using the Digidesign Digi-002R rack mountable audio interface, the Alesis AI-3 analog-optical interface, and the Allen & Heath MixMaster3 mixing console. The 002R interface allows one to use a variety of recording formats including Pro Tools, Nuendo, and Sonar. Matched with the AI-3 unit and Allen & Heath mixer, it is possible to record up to 16 instrument sources at once. With 16 inputs, you can record a full band and several vocals with ease. The choice of the Allen & Heath mixer was due to its 16 direct recording outputs, quiet preamps, and musical, 'British-style' EQ section. This entire setup fits into 3 cases, making the rig incredibly portable.



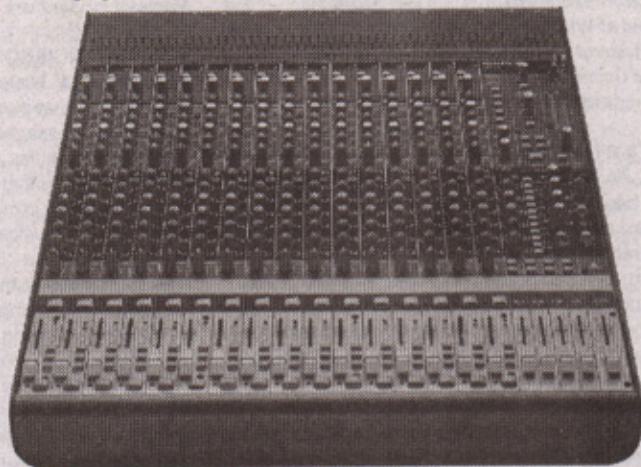
» Digidesign Digi-002R (front and back)



The choices of stand-alone mixer and separate audio interface allow the user to customize a recording setup to his or her specific needs. Mixer choices from manufacturers like Mackie, Allen & Heath, Behringer, and Yamaha allow the user to tailor the overall sound of the final recording. At the same time, there are mixers in a variety of price ranges to fit your specific budget. With the number of Firewire-based audio interfaces from manufacturers like Digidesign, MOTU, M-Audio, and RME, you have plenty of choices to match your particular recording format. My exact choice of the Digidesign hardware was specifically for

the option of using Pro Tools for some of my recording projects. The addition of ASIO drivers for the Digidesign hardware makes it possible to use this interface with the many other recording platforms I work with. Your particular needs may not be so broad.

The second path that you can take in setting up a rehearsal space recording rig is the new generation of Firewire-equipped mixing consoles.



» Mackie Onyx mixer

These mixers are designed to include built-in analog-to-digital converters inside the mixer, thus relieving you of the need for a separate audio interface. The newest addition to this market is the Mackie Onyx series of mixers. These mixers simply plug into your computer with a single Firewire cable making it possible to transfer up to 16 separate channels of high-quality audio directly in to your computer. In addition, the mixer also receives a stereo output of any recorded audio back from your computer without the need for any additional connections. Match this mixer with Mackie's Traktion recording software, and you have a complete recording system at your fingertips.

This type of setup is great for those who like the sound of Mackie's new Onyx mixers and are looking for an incredibly simple setup. If this is your first time using computers and software for recording, the Traktion software is very easy to use and fairly intuitive. For those who already have a different, preferred software platform, the Onyx's optional Firewire card has ASIO and WDM drivers for PC as well as Core Audio drivers for Mac. The inclusion of these audio drivers make it possible to interface the Onyx mixers with most of today's popular recording software packages.

Using good microphones and proper engineering techniques, it is possible to use either of these types of recording rigs to get studio quality audio tracks right in your own practice room. However, for most people, these rehearsal room setups will not replace the sound quality and vibe of an actual recording studio. Instead, these recording rigs make it possible to capture your music at every stage of its evolution. They make it possible to instantly capture that magic guitar riff or inspired practice session. No good idea will be lost and every brilliant performance can be saved for future reference. In the end, the investment you make in a practice rehearsal room rig can save you vast amounts of time, money, and headache in the pursuit of your new CD masterpiece.